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GENERATION 2 GENERATION

How do they surf?

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Generation 2 Generation: How do they surf?

Moderator:

Caspar Nieuwenhuis - LIKEMINDS

With:

Nicolas Bertrand - Image Aigue Cie
Christiane Vericel

Jaffer Ali Hussain - SLYNCS

Rosa van Kollem - LIKEMINDS, Nieuwe garde

The session provided the opportunity to discuss some popular assertions on Generation Y, on their habits, beliefs, aspirations.

Participants

Caspar Nieuwenhuis, the artistic director of [Likeminds](#) (the Netherlands) was moderating the session. Panelists were Nicolas Bertrand, managing director at [Image Aiguë](#) (France), Jaffer Ali Hussain, CEO of [SLYNCS](#) (UK) and Rosa van Kollem, student, [Likeminds](#) (the Netherlands).

All of them work with young people whom they encourage to participate and initiate artistic and social action projects. [SLYNCS](#) is a Blackburn (UK) based youth organization which supports youngsters to be active in their local communities and encourage them to explore all sorts of issues that are of interest, be it social exclusion, violence, drugs, art, transport or forced marriages through any kind of artistic expression like photography, dance, performance, poetry, rap music. (More information is available in the project section on their [webpage](#)).

[Image Aiguë Cie](#) [Christiane Vericel](#) is an independent theatre company based in Lyon, France. Their theatrical group comprises 4 generations of actors: children, adolescents, young people and adults. Their [projects](#) deal with topics like power relations, borders, conflicts, hunger. [Likeminds](#) is a platform to develop young talent and a professional theatrical ensemble. Their [work](#) tackles issues like social interaction, violence, diversity, sex and drugs.

Caspar Nieuwenhuis (Caspar_GenX) and Nicolas Bertrand (Nicolas_GenX) are from Generation X. Rosa van Kollem (Rosa_GenY) and Jaffer Ali Hussain (Jaffer_GenY) are members of Generation Y.

Other participants in the room defined themselves as Generation Y (1 person), Generation X (3 persons) and one participant defined himself as coming from the Prehistoric Dinosaurs' Generation.

Terms and conditions

Caspar_GenX introduced the discussion with a disclaimer from [Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation](#) by Neil Howe on the importance of understanding what a generation is; being a concept that is far from constricted only to the production and consumption of pop-culture. "... Those who disregard generational change have been surprised by the last several turns in the American mood. Those who continue to discard it will be surprised at the next time a new decade and a new generation alters our nation's course", claims Neil Howe in his book.

The second disclaimer was that generation and generational differences are a first-world concept and for the purposes of the discussion would be regarded only as such.

It was also agreed that Generation Y is stretching from the early 80s till the first years of the 21st century (1981/2–2000). Therefore the terms Generation Y and Millennials overlap. Generation X was accepted to encompass the decades between 1960 and 1980. Other terms for Generation Y which made their place in the discussion were: the Confetti generation (because they are ripped into too many choices and activities), generation "Maybe", the-generation-that-always-makes-two-things-at-the-same-time (a Japanese term). Other generations that were discussed were Generation W or the Baby Boomers (approximately between the years 1946 and 1964), Generation Z (born in the early 2000s to present day).

Reporter's disclaimer: Each opinion on topics of the generational domain are inevitably biased: it is always 'us' and 'them'. Generalisations are inevitable too. Therefore each opinion in the discussion below was explicitly marked by the appropriate generation its owner belongs to. The report keeps track of the generational remarks. The author of the report belongs to Generation X.

Some common claims on Generation Y: true or false?

1. They are used to multitask and cooperate (?)

This statement was generally accepted.

2. They are always connected (?)

This was considered mostly true; however some people from Generation Y are never connected. Some of them would say that when it comes to art, especially in performing arts field, they would definitely prefer the live form to the digital(ised) ones. They feel urge to make live art.

3. They are embracing diversity but have a strong longing to uniqueness (?)

Rosa_GenY agreed with this statement, noting it is a bit more complex. Jaffer_GenY defined the uniqueness of their generation as a result from the fact that they grew in the age of the digital revolution, with a lot of the new technologies evolving in that period. "Generation Z are born with the iPad in their hands and Generation X haven't seen an iPad until they were grown-ups. We are only generation that grew together with the evolvement of the new technology and realized the power of the technology. That makes us unique in some way."

Nicolas_GenX found some similarities between Generation Y and Generation W in regards of growing up and witnessing a revolution. The Ws (or the baby boomers) saw the society changing and wanted to enhance that change and spread their ideas. That resulted in the 1968 movements. Some observers say the 2010s Occupy movement shares at least formal resemblance with the 1968 ones.

4. They are thrifty (?)

Due to the financial crisis in 2008 and its continuing consequences they have become clever in using the small amount of money at their availability.

This claim happened to be false with Rosa_GenY and Jaffer_GenY personally but they asserted it is true for a lot of their peers.



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Jaffer_GenY noted that in current situation of constant cuts in funding he is particularly thrifty when it comes to the budget distribution in his organization.

5. They are extremely visually oriented (?)

In order to make this assertion clearer Caspar_GenX mentioned the Slovenian philosopher [Slavoj Žižek](#) who argues that there is no reality besides the image, meaning that the image is the media, the message and the reality at the same time.

Rosa_GenY insisted to refer to the image and the visual as to a specific style of communication. For example, when writing a message one uses a picture instead of words. There are whole message threads composed only of pictures or combining text with images thus forming a special kind of visual language.

Nicolas_GenX added the supporting example of the specific kind of communication the Generation Z (13 years old) share nowadays in their online conversations. They browse the internet for images that will reflect what they would like to express or [snapchat](#) themselves in. It is not a completely new trend; people used to communicate visually by sharing images back in the Middle ages, for example. Maybe the major difference is that now we have

the technology to produce and share them more quickly and in huge amounts. The visual content is a different type of content from the verbal one. It is probable that people want to share images and not to express things verbally.

Jaffer_GenY suggested many of his peers are still "into words" like him while the Generation Z are all about the pictures. The picture is saying a thousand words for them, contrary to some people from the Generation X who would do completely without pictures, just a text email. Generation Y are in the transition zone and they use both.

In order to elaborate further on the preference of images to words Rosa_GenY added the concept of time. The time we have to grasp a piece of information and respond to it has been drastically decreased. Therefore, Generation Y people who grow up in this informational overload find it easier to communicate visually. Indeed, it seems easier to grasp the whole meaning at a glance by looking at a picture than at a text.

>> Being visual and what it means to arts engagement

Paying preference to fast visual messages is valid to everyday life but it is manifested in relation to arts as well. “How can you ask 13 years olds to sit in the dark and watch a Shakespeare’s play for three hours when they are used to getting all their information while drinking coffee in 5 minutes?”, Rosa_GenY inquired. – “Why should we?”, a counter question arose.

This opened the big topic of how young people, the Generation Y and Generation Z, approach the theatre and the arts in general. A Generation X representative in the room, being a performing arts professional herself, assumed that if the piece of art – the content – finds the right aesthetic and the artistic form resonates with the youngest generations, hence their engagement should be greater.

Jaffer_GenY shared in this liaison his experience in working with Generation Z youngsters. There was a joint project of SLYNCS and a French performing arts professional. They worked with a group of young people that were “as disengaged from art as possible”, considering it was something for white higher classes’ enjoyment. The project aimed to explain them what art is and what connection it might have with them. So they asked the youngsters what art form they would want to engage with and create. At the end it turned out they want to work with photography, not to produce a play. The result was a kind of exhibition on issues concerning their neighborhood. They prepared photographs that resonated with them and paired them with a quote. The SLYNCS team facilitated an event in which the youngsters stood along the city canal with their photos in their hands for the passing members of the local community to see. Even though it might look like an analogue Instagram, as Rosa_GenY suggested, it was actually a lot more because the youngsters stood out of the comfortable anonymity of online sharing platforms and engaged in face-to-face communication with members of local community of various ages. That was the art form the youngsters had chosen for themselves and from that point on they felt that art had a connection with them and was something



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of value to them. “You have to start where the young people are. What they care for are engagement and active citizenship, their local communities and making them better places. It is more fruitful to start there rather than fetching them to watch some Shakespeare instead”, Jaffer_GenY concluded on arts engagement of Generation Z youngsters.

Art is much more than classical theatre and painting and may be the contemporary art forms are what will resonate better with the young people.

Nicolas_GenX added yet another aspect to visual diversity and dominance in regards to engagement with the theatre. When speaking of Shakespeare, it happens that TV series like *The House of Cards*, which are Shakespearian in a way, are superior to a genuine Shakespeare play in sharing the concepts of Shakespeare’s theatre. There are some Generation X’s directors in France who are changing their way of making theatre in order to bring it closer to the TV series format.

While in Nicolas_GenX’s opinion they have lost the battle because they run after something already invented, Caspar_GenX noted the big success theatre TV series adaptations like *Borgen* are marking.

A question was raised from the hall whether there is any research proving young people today are less engaged with live art forms. The evidence from some youth art

festivals suggests the contrary. For instance in Portugal, physical theatre and working with your body has become a huge trend among young people. In the meanwhile, they seem engaged in both the visual and the verbal since some young people strive for texts, for bigger narratives, for morality and ethics; so one might say that polyvocality is characteristic to this generation.

>> The younger generations and politics

Taking point from the TV series plot, Jaffer_GenY stated that Generation Z definitely drives away from anything connected with politics. While they are quite engaged with local communities they are completely disinterested in politics. Someone (a Generation X) from the hall argued this might be an age related attitude.

Caspar_GenX suggested that politics, being embodied by institutions, repel generations Y and Z because they strongly oppose to institutions; although they seem to comply with corporations like Facebook, Google, etc.,

Nicolas_GenX advanced the idea. He recalled a festival director referring to these generations as the EasyJet and AirBnb generations. Based on the experience he got from working with young volunteers who were in for the T-shirt and the hat he concluded they might dislike authorities but would cooperate with a brand.

Rosa_GenY contributed the disengagement with politics to the fact that her generation does not see politics as the place a change could come from. "Politics is about much older people running the country in a direction which is not into the direction that my generation feels it should be."

Caspar_GenX smelled a revolution coming up soon.

Another Generation X representative from the hall stressed out it is typical for all young people to revolt against the status quo and to desire to make a change. Contrary to the previous opinions, she thought the young people of today are engaged in politics: for example, in Scotland they have some of the youngest MPs in their parliament ever and young people were quite active in the recent independence poll.

6. They prefer to organize themselves horizontally (?)

The world is flat and without borders so they can go wherever they like and talk to anyone.

Rosa_GenY and Jaffer_GenY suggested that it is generally true, especially in regards to artistic production, except when they want to join an institution that is already hierarchical. Then they have to comply with it and be hierarchical too.

Nicolas_GenX accepted that the Generation Y people put more thought into organizing themselves into functional roles and not into solid hierarchic structures. One might say they prefer to form organisations in a fluid manner.

They tend to assume multiple roles: that of an actor, of a director, of a manager. This comes again from their aspiration towards horizontal fluid structures, their polyvocality.

It was agreed that although times have changed, the general mindset of young people is still the same: they need to be appreciated, considered, be empowered to express themselves artistically and as active citizens. This demand is mostly met by the way Generation X generally work



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with generations Y and Z. They function more as facilitators giving the younger generations the freedom to choose what to do and how to do it.

>> How they deal with the pressure to choose

Unfortunately, almost unlimited freedom and multitude of choices have their downside. In Netherlands, but also in Italy, France, Portugal, there is an alarming trend of young people in their 20s experiencing burnouts.

What could be the cause of these early burnouts? Could the previous generations be of help by giving them some working life schemes to deal with independence and freedom of choice?

Nicolas_GenX supposed it might be caused by the conflict between the Generation Y's fluidness and the stiff institutional structures of the previous generations that brings the stress in and results in burnouts; therefore the older generations could hardly be of help.

Rosa_GenY assumed that having a scheme in which one has to fit in is possibly causing the problem with burnouts; it does not give a solution how to manage to do all the things Generation Y wants to.

A Generation X representative wondered if the scheme could be kept open, fluid and horizontal, rather peer-to-peer than hierarchical. She underlined that this is especially important for a manager who wants to give freedom, independence and flexibility to the people in the team. Another Generation X representative suggested that early burnouts and stress are not some specific Generation Y problem but come out of the time we all live in. We all struggle organising ourselves in new ways. Maybe it is the share of Generation Y to be the pilot project of the new fluid and horizontal system that we have never experienced before.

It was agreed that indeed the multitude of choices and the pressure to act and to choose have reached unprecedented levels. This situation seems to make the younger generations, Y and Z, quite vulnerable. Rosa_GenY confirmed Generation Y do want to engage themselves in a lot of various activities and roles and do wish to operate horizontally.

On the other hand, they constantly feel the pressure to always be good in everything they do. She felt this pressure comes from older generations. Caspar_GenX (who actually works with Rosa_GenY) argued that pressure on supreme performance is mostly their anticipation, not an actual expectation.

Based on her recent experience with 20–25 years old interns, a Generation X representative concluded that multitude of choices and independence might be too overwhelming for the Generation Y. “It seems they want independence when they create and express themselves but otherwise prefer to be in a rather structured field. Obviously it was too much.”

Some of the older representatives of Generation X suggested all this bafflement when pressed to make choices is not a generational issue but an age related one. Obviously, one needs to gain experience in order to be able to tackle the responsibility of freedom and the consequences of choices. Remembering their youth, most of the Generation X members settled with this claim. But then a new notion sprung out: back in their 20s they were actually more free.

When Generation X started their careers they had to enter the world of the powerful and hierarchical Generation W who did not allow much freedom of choice if any. “We could only assist them and be their interns”. Being deprived from the opportunity to act independently, they were spared the pressure to make the right choices. That gave them time to mature and gain experience for the time they had to make decisions on their own. It is likely that this is the natural process to follow.

A more rebellious recollection was that back in their youth the Generation X members had to fight for the right to choose and it gave them confidence in their choices. Next generations, Y and Z, are exposed to so many opportunities that their revolt is to set back from choosing at all.

Stressing out when one has to make choices and take responsibilities is not concluded to youth solely. This pressure and anxiety occur at any age. They are part of being human, Jaffer_GenY stipulated. He also suggested that some major intergenerational misunderstandings (hence, wrong choices and pressure) come from not asking what the younger generations need. He pointed an unfortunate huge, 5 million euro youth community centre in Blackburn which the youngsters simply don't want to

use. Nobody ever asked them whether they need a new centre at all.

Caspar_GenX summarized that Generation Y do need their time to gain experience and surely they have to be asked what they would engage with. On the other hand, there is a constant push to produce, to make art which is funded with public money. How could this imbalance be overcome? It is a matter of how the programs are designed; bearing in mind the specific needs of the Generation Y in the design phase should eliminate this kind of tension when the projects are executed afterwards, a member of generation Y suggested.

Nicolas_GenX noted that generations do not come one after another. They constitute the society, they share common space, common resources. So, if the scheme is to be reset for Generation Y and Z, it would affect all the generations as well.

Rosa_GenY suggested a more horizontal conversation on policies and programs should be of help. Assuming a continuous state of learning was a proposition from a Generation X member. Reclaiming the conversation (as in *Reclaiming the Conversation* by Sherry Turkle, 2015) was envisaged as a solution to many current intergenerational issues.

Final remarks

Rosa_GenY insisted that the conversation should be **with** Generation Y not **about** Generation Y. It should be held in a horizontal and equally favoring format. It is not constructive to have such conversation within the institutions of the generations of power (Generation X or Generation W).

Nicolas_GenX argued that the conversation is not with or about Generation Y; they are part of the conversation (that is common). He shared the concern that the idea of transferring culture is lagging behind. For him, it is essential to transmit and share culture from one generation to the other because the generations have to share common languages. Otherwise we might miss some exciting and new art forms simply because we don't know their language.

One needs to transmit culture even for the sake of changing it.

There are so many things happening, so many choices to make. It is no wonder generations Y and Z are starting to recede into themselves. There is one constant thing in their lives and it is their mobile phone where they can get everything. “Recently someone asked me whether I want to be 16 years old again.” Jaffer_GenY recalled. Sure, he wanted. But when he thought it over, it cleared out he wanted to be 16 years old in the times he actually was, and not in present times.

Indeed, there is a lot of pressure over Generation Y to perform well, to multitask, and to make the right choices. Yet there is even more pressure put on the Generation Z especially with generations X and Y coming before them.