BIZCOMMUNITY

Gen X: From rebellious, slacker youth generation to trailblazers of profound social change (part 1)

By Jessica Tennant

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The VIMN Africa Thought Leadership Breakfast on Wednesday, 17 May featured a keynote address by Christian Kurz, senior vice president, global insights for Viacom International Media Networks. Unpacking the media company's latest global study, he uncovered some game-changing new trends amongst kids, youth and adults disrupting how you market to them.

The insights he shared on Generation X (Gen X) were particularly interesting, perhaps because not only is this generation not often talked about in the media, but when it is, it's usually misrepresented as what was "the rebellious, slacker youth generation" many years ago.



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Who are Gen Xers?

Gen X is the demographic cohort sandwiched between the baby boomers on the older end and millennials (or Gen Y) on the younger end. They were born somewhere between the early 60s and 80s, but for the purpose of this study, we're referring to 30-49 year olds, and the online population in particular.

As they were coming of age, the global landscape was in turmoil – with the fall of dictatorships, the rise of the middle class in Latin America, the Fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, the end of Apartheid, the financial crisis, boom-and-bust cycles, and the internet was just becoming a thing.

These happenings in the world at the time very much shaped who they are today, and as far as the internet goes, Gen X really led the way. "Gen Xers founded a lot of those media or tech or social companies; from Wikipedia, to Google, to Myspace, to Tesla, to Skype. They're now being used by everybody, but they were invented by Gen Xers to address very specific issues and solve problems they identified with, and so Gen Xers are very adept at using them."

The term 'Gen X'

What's interesting is that the term Gen X wasn't even coined until about 30 years after the generation was born. It was the first generational name, coined by Douglas Coupland in his book *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*.

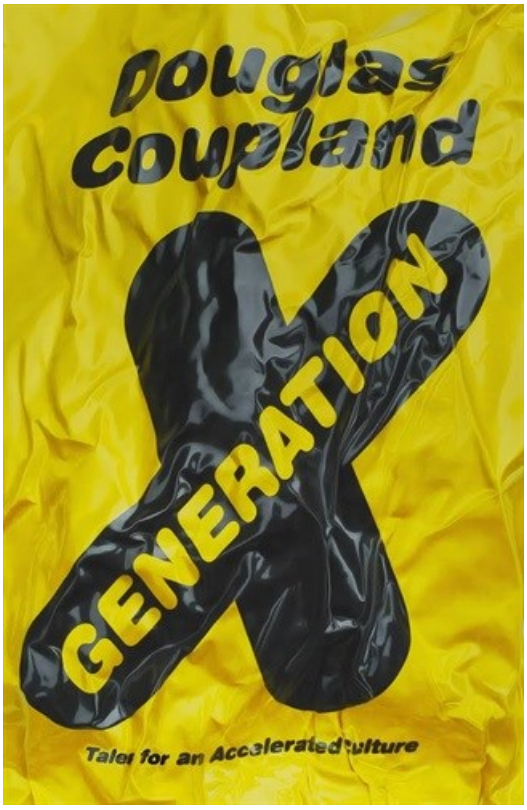
Kurz says the book focuses on three characters who are quitting their jobs in their search for meaning in life or to find a higher aspirational thing. "They want to mean something to the world and not just work at McDonald's. That's really where this whole thing is coming from, and this is really what formed that rebellious, slacker youth generation that it was perceived as."

What's interesting is that the rebellion that was inherent in Gen Xers has matured into independence – "fierce independence". They're very confident at making decisions, said Kurz, and 96% of South Africans representing the study describe themselves as confident, compared to 91% globally.

And it's this independence that allows them to be who they are. "This whole idea that 'I don't care what other people think, I need to be me, and I need you to be okay with that' is really coming from there."

It also allows them to have the social change they're driving and living for, really.

In part 2, we report the findings of the study for a refresher on this once misunderstood generation and the outdated perceptions from when they were last looked at many years ago.



Douglas Coupland's Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture



Gen X: Decluttering misconceptions about what it means to be an adult in 2017 (part 2)

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Here's a 10-minute documentary of what Gen Xers have to say about their lives – their relationships, careers and interests.

Gen X Today: My life. My way. (Short Documentary) from Viacom Global Insights on Vimeo.



Gen X: How to get the generation right (part 3)

Jessica Tennant 24 May 2017

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