



TOP 11 GEN Z CAMPAIGNS 2020/2021

If there's one thing that we know about Gen Z, it's that it takes a lot to impress them. They have more choice, when it comes to content, than ever before - you have less than a second to win their attention before they scroll on.

They've taken on some of the biggest brands in the world and challenged them to be more authentic and support causes that are close to their values. And they're all content creators in their own rights - so they can often do it just as well, if not better, than some of the biggest brands.

So when something does impress Gen Z, it's worth taking notice.

Student Beans is proud to present the Top 11 Gen Z campaigns of 2021. Spanning social, display and physical advertising, these are the narratives that really resonated with Gen Z this past year - creating lifestyle-changing experiences and manifesting loyalty among young consumers. We hope you are as inspired by them as we are.



The Top 11 Gen Z Campaigns were calculated using a nationally-representative panel of Gen Zs in the US and UK. Panelists were presented with the campaign media and asked a series of questions to determine their engagement and sentiment.

We then calculated a unique performance score for each campaign based on the purchase intent and campaign relevancy. This in turn generated the ranking order of the campaigns as you see within this report.

To find out more about our Gen Z research, including student surveys and panel discussions, head to:

partner.studentbeans.com/brand-solutions/student-research/



We measured the success of the Top 11 Gen Z Campaigns across four main themes. These themes are the core characteristics of Gen Z; we feel they're the perfect benchmarks for a brand looking to align with this demographic. You'll be able to see which campaigns excelled in which theme throughout the report.

Digital natives

Being digitally native has a profound impact on how Gen Zs shop. They meet the brands they love on social media, browse them further across retail sites on desktop and smartphone, and complete purchases in-app. They exist in this world of hyper-connectivity - and the best Gen Z campaigns know exactly how to tap into that world.

Lifelong loyalty

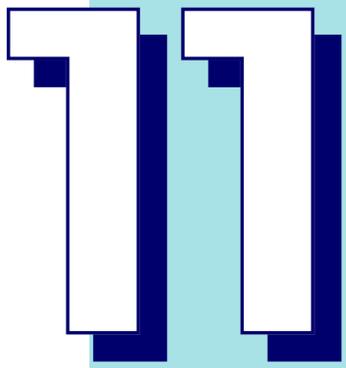
Gen Z students are significant not just because of who they are now, in 2021 - but also because of their potential. As a generation, they already make up 32% of the global population - more than millennials. As students, Gen Zs are making purchasing decisions and building brand loyalties that have the potential to last a lifetime. And the savviest brands are the ones investing in Gen Z for the long term.

Authenticity

Gen Zs are at the forefront of breaking down stereotypes and promoting transformative action. As the most diverse consumer demographic to date, the 16-24-year-old cohort is changing up the world as they know it. For brands, being authentic and genuine should be top of mind when building a rapport with this valuable consumer demographic.

Globally minded

With just a tap on their smartphones, Gen Z has the world at their fingertips - they are hyper-aware of global issues and are inspired by global trends when it comes to their shopping preferences. Tapping into the global Gen Z audience is essential for any brand looking to boost their Gen Z audience - and many of the winning campaigns within this guide speak to multiple territories and cultures.



Gymshark

#BigDealEnergy

Lifelong loyalty

Digital natives

Country: UK, US
Format: Video, Social

Watch now



The concept

Gymshark's Black Friday sale campaign started with teasers, building up plenty of anticipation ahead of the big sale event. The campaign video features YouTube stars KSI, Behzinga and Calfreezy and includes a futuristic gaming scene and cool editing to show off Gymshark workout gear.

"Pumped to get some workout gear and to the gym!"

"Love what they did with the gaming incorporation."

Why it's great

Packed with big names in Youtube and peppered with references to video gaming and meme references (big deal energy, anyone?), Gymshark's Black Friday sale was a digital native's dream. It came at just the right time, too - not just in the days before Black Friday, but at a time when the world was grappling with COVID-19 and really needed a fitness pick-me-up.

The response

Gen Zs are fairly familiar with Gymshark - but many will make their first purchases with the athleisure brand around Black Friday to take advantage of a rare sale. So with almost half (47%) saying this campaign would convince them to buy from the brand, it's clearly made waves among the target market. 36% describe Gymshark's campaign as "creative and fun", and 77% said that they found it relevant to their age group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Play on gamification - Gen Zs are big fans of anything that incorporates gaming, or interactivity.

Read the room - Gymshark created motivation and excitement at a time when many young people were in lockdown, during the winter months. Make sure you drop your campaign with awareness of what your audience needs - and when.



10 Ohne

#brbimbleeding

Lifelong loyalty

Authenticity

Country: UK
Format: Social

[Find out more](#)



The concept

This campaign encourages the world to see periods differently - not as a taboo subject, but as something natural and relatable to at least half of the world's population. Ohne utilizes multiple formats to spread the word - from social media to their actual physical products, the message is clear. #brbimbleeding diverts the focus away from gender - towards the act of bleeding itself.

"It is important for girls to normalize periods."

Why it's great

Generation Z has grown up in the height of inauthentic period product advertising - think blue liquid instead of blood, and a narrative of disguise and discretion around menstruation. So Ohne's shame-busting take on tampon and pad marketing is refreshing, to say the least. Their honest, unfiltered social posts are reminiscent of Gen Zs' own socials - and their gender-neutral language and educational stance shows that their commitment to young people goes beyond the superficial.

The response

For many Gen Zs, Ohne was something completely new. Just 19% had heard of the small brand before our panel - but 52% came away with a strong desire to check it out (among those who identified as female, this rose to 69%). Our Gen Z respondents dubbed this campaign “relatable”, “inclusive”, “forward-thinking” and “creative” - and 69% felt Ohne was relevant to their age group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Bid farewell to gendered marketing. Gen Z called time on this way back in our Youth Trends Report 2019.

Emulate Gen Z’s own social media. That means unfiltered, funny, and - if the mood takes you - a little bit chaotic.



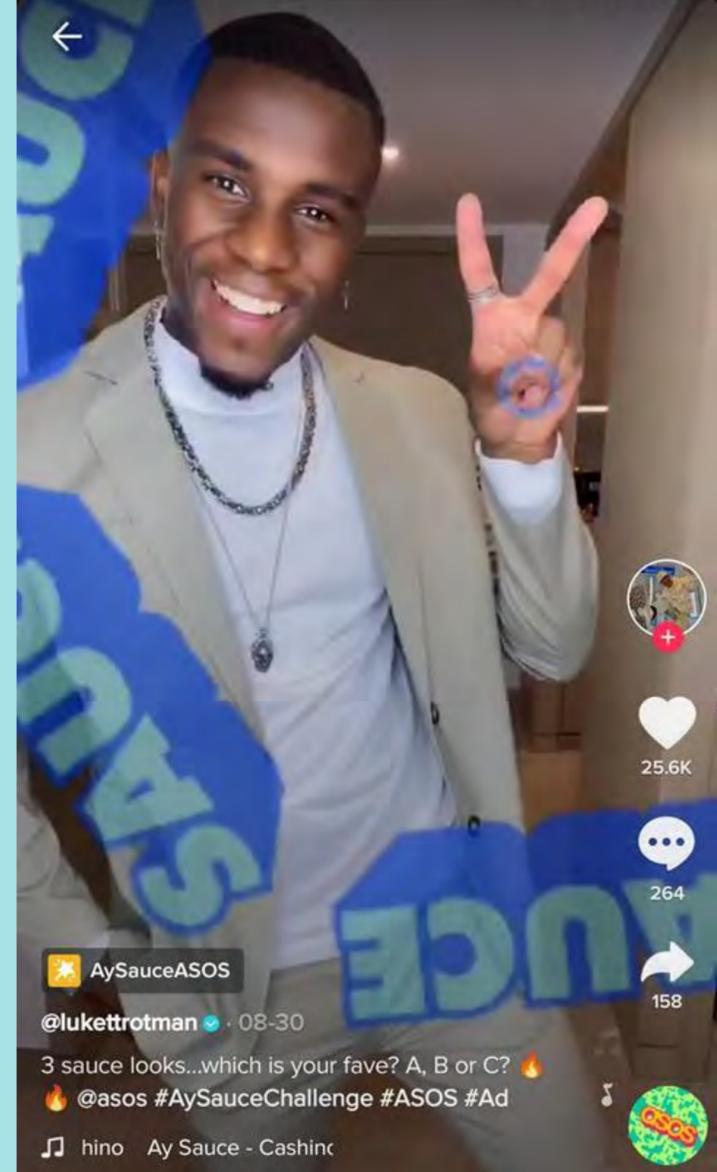
9

ASOS #AySauce

Digital natives

Country: UK, US
Format: TikTok campaign

Watch now



The concept

Asos launched a three-week-long campaign on TikTok using a dedicated #AySauce branded hashtag, in-feed ads, a bespoke music track and augmented reality. The #AySauce challenge asked TikTok users to showcase three outfits of their choice in 15 seconds, using their own creativity and personality to bring their looks to life. The campaign was spearheaded by 25 TikTok content creators, including Loren Gray, Michael Le and Jordan Fisher in the US, and influencers Holly H and Luke Trotman.

“It makes people of all sizes feel included.”

Why it's great

A combination of a branded hashtag, in-feed ads, music and AR filters shows how Gen Z and brands can co-exist on TikTok to great effect. The campaign made use of TikTok's Top View advertising solution to help boost engagement. The interactive #AySauce challenge puts user-generated content at the center of the campaign - encouraging creativity and fun among Gen Z TikTokers.

The response

75% of students in the US and UK said this campaign feels relevant to their age group. The top words and phrases they used to describe this campaign were 'creative and fun', 'authentic', 'relatable', and 'inclusive'. 68% of UK respondents said this campaign makes them want to buy from the ASOS brand.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Embrace TikTok. This social platform has a strong Gen Z user base and is a must for brands looking to increase their engagement with this consumer audience.

Be interactive with your audience. Gen Zs are a generation of content creators - a hashtag challenge is a great way to get them involved.



8

Starface World Vote Stars

Authenticity

Country: US
Format: Social media promotion

Watch now



The concept

The Vote Stars from Starface are limited-edition hydro stars that were created to help encourage and educate young US citizens to vote, with help from Alliance for Youth Action. The campaign was fueled by a strong social media presence, featuring video posts from young voters, and Instagram infographics containing useful stats and motivational text.

“It’s really cute graphic design and I love that it’s encouraging young people to vote”

“It makes me feel like I have the power to make a change in society - when we invite young adults to vote we get new ideas and our future is more reliable.”

Why it’s great

This campaign is very much targeted towards the older cohort of Gen Zs who are eligible to vote. It’s educational, creative, and empowering for young people entering the political arena.

The response

Of those who hadn't heard of the Starface brand before, 58% said this campaign alone made them want to check it out - showing just how effective the messaging and overall look of the campaign is. 74% said this campaign felt authentic (this increases to 81% when just looking at female-identifying Gen Zs), and 73% said it felt relevant to their age group. 'Good', 'happy' and 'interested' were the top three words our Gen Z panel used to describe the Vote Stars campaign.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Educate your audience. Instagram infographics are an effective way to promote awareness and to help educate around your campaign topic, especially if it relates to a social or economic issue.

Produce peer-driven content. Employing Gen Z peers to help promote your campaign will help boost its relatability and authenticity.



7

McDonald's BTS Meal

Globally minded

Country: Global
Format: Social media promotion,
TV commercial

Watch now



The concept

McDonald's BTS partnership involved the launch of the BTS McDonald's meal - featuring 10-piece nuggets, fries, a Coke, and sweet chilli and Cajun sauces inspired by products sold in McDonald's South Korea.

The launch was accompanied by an array of clothing and accessories, such as bags, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and PJs. The celebrity collaboration with K-Pop band BTS was advertised globally with a commercial and social media promotion.

"The bright colors make me feel happy... I'm usually a fan of McDonald's so I would try this."

Why it's great

This isn't the first time McDonald's has partnered with celebrities for an exclusive, limited-edition meal, but the BTS Meal campaign has made an even bigger splash by launching globally with a clothing line that aligns well with younger generations - especially fans of the band.

The response

72% of Gen Z students said they felt this campaign relates to their age group, and 57% said it makes them want to buy from McDonald's. The top phrase used to describe the campaign was 'creative and fun', which aligns well with the BTS band and their huge Gen Z fanbase.

Overall, 65% of students said they would be more likely to buy from a brand if they partnered with influencers, other brands or celebrities. Clearly, McDonald's choice of collaboration was a hit.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Form meaningful partnerships. Partnering with influencers, other brands or celebrities for a campaign is a good way to expand your horizon and appeal to a wider audience - just make sure you choose your partners wisely.

Bring a touch of exclusivity. Stepping outside of your usual product category for a campaign is a great way to entice Gen Z consumers who love limited-edition or exclusive products.



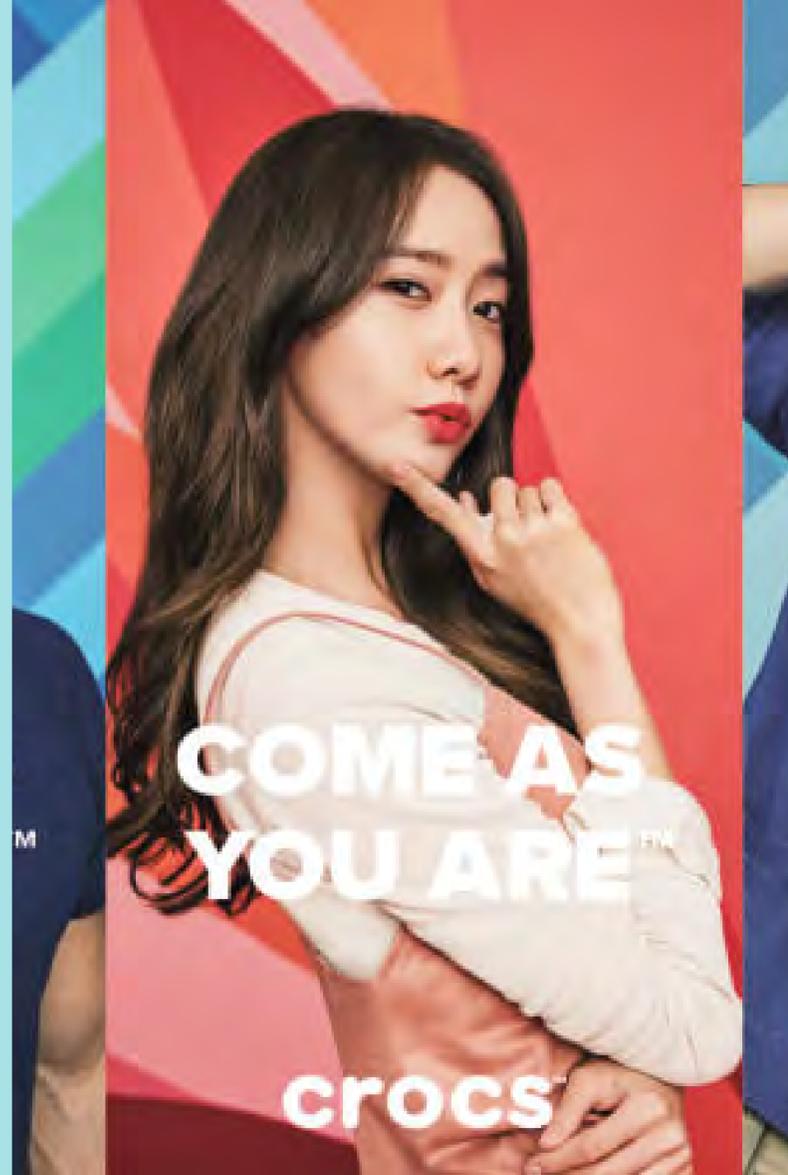
6

Crocs Come as You Are

Authenticity

Country: Global
Format: Social, Video

Watch now



The concept

For Pride Month, Crocs created their Come as You Are campaign. The brand teamed up with Diversity Standard Collective and Knaphouse, a queer creative consultancy to create a special Crocs collection to represent Pride and the LGBTQ+ community.

“I’m glad they are reaching out/accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community.”

“Happy to see queer things in the media.”

Why it’s great

Gen Zs the world over are calling for more representation across gender and sexuality spectrums - and it’s fair to say that Crocs rose to the challenge. Come as You Are is a great example of a brand following Gen Z’s lead as opposed to trying to determine what this audience might like to see.

The response

Our Gen Z panelists were no strangers to Crocs - 79% had heard of the infamous shoe brand already. But did the Come as You Are campaign convince them to pick up a pair? 57% said yes. Gen Z is often dubbed cynical, but the majority of our panel felt that Crocs got it right on this one - 74% described Come as You Are as authentic, and the same number said that the campaign felt relevant to their age group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For campaigns surrounding issues important to Gen Zs, **consult the community first** - and make sure they're at the heart of your campaign, not just visibly, but behind the scenes.

Select representatives that will resonate with Gen Z. Think outside of the box - and don't be afraid to collaborate with creators beyond the usual suspects.

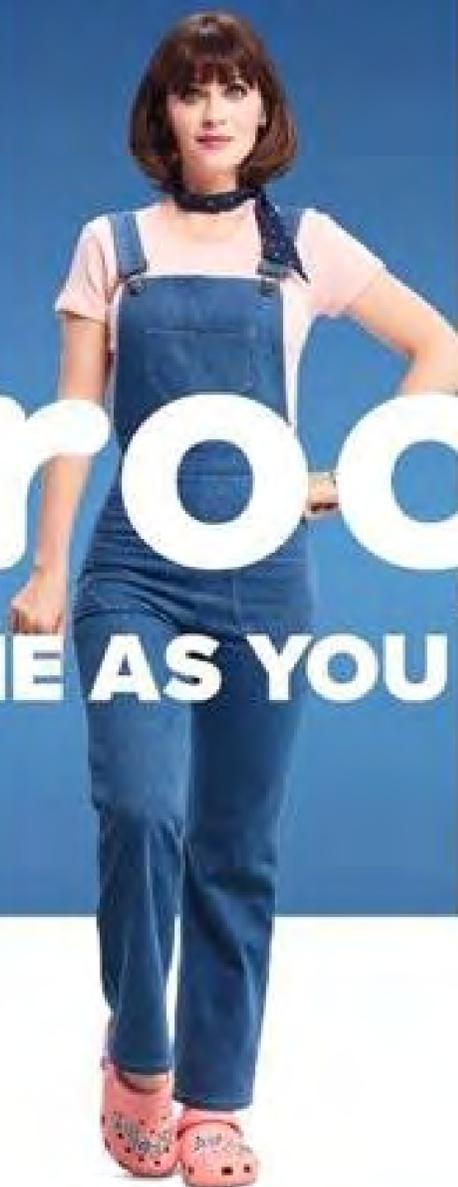
NATALIE



SEJEONG



ZOOEY



SUZU



GINA



crocs
COME AS YOU ARE™

5

Doritos Make your play

Digital natives

Country: UK

Format: TV commercial, social media advertising, posters with QR codes

Watch now



The concept

Dorito's summer 2021 campaign is centered around a slogan: 'life has been on pause, get ready to play'. In partnership with live music app Dice, posters were put up in major cities across the UK and on Dorito's online platforms, encouraging music fans to scan the featured QR code for a chance to win tickets to summer music festivals in the UK.

"I think it's creative and smart that Doritos included an incentive for customers if they just scanned the code."

Why it's great

The Make your play campaign was accompanied by a TV commercial and social media activity - both of which carried a fun, creative Gen Z vibe. The opening of the advert instantly draws Gen Z students in, since it centers around a young person creating their CV in a library. The cool graphics, the messaging, and the narrative all work together to form a positive image for young people getting back out into the world post-Covid.

The response

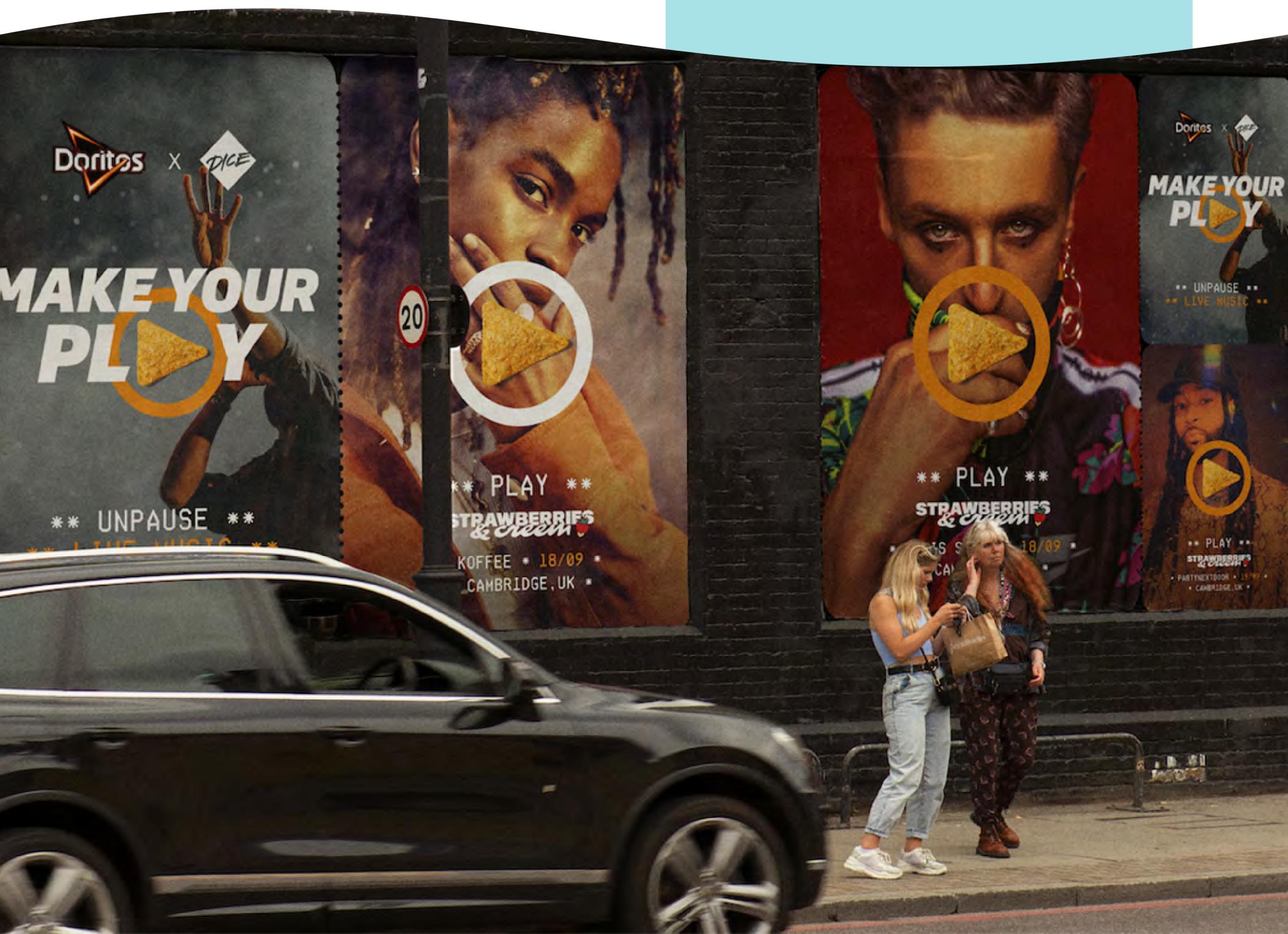
71% of the 16-24s we surveyed said this campaign felt relevant to their age group, with innovative, authentic, relatable, creative and fun being the top words and phrases used to describe it. Thanks to its relatable content and music-festival incentive, 62% of Gen Z students said this campaign makes them want to buy from Dorito's.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Incentivize. Campaigns with an incentive can help boost overall engagement.

Gen Zs love to blend URL with IRL, so be sure to explore multi-media campaigns - to help put your brand name front and center.

Get topical. Link your campaign to something topical and relatable to show young consumers that your brand supports the issues they care about the most.



4

YouTube

Because everything/
Let's not go back

Globally minded

Digital natives

Authenticity

Country: US / UK

Format: YouTube advert

Watch now



The concept

YouTube launched two campaigns - one for the US and one for the UK - to encourage people in both territories to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The videos feature heartfelt clips of graduation ceremonies, people dancing, embracing, and much more.

"I think the video feels nice it reminds us of the happy moments in our lives. the campaign feels nice and it doesn't feel like the message at the end is forced."

"A reminder that we are now able to get back to things we love doing and enjoy them once again."

Why it's great

This campaign pulled at the heartstrings of many generations - but by zooming in on the missed experiences of Gen Z, it makes a clear play for a younger audience. It carries an important message that particularly resonated with young people, who at the time of launch had only just become eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

The response

We've found that at least 96% of 16-24s use YouTube, so it's no surprise that this campaign performed so well - given the popularity of the platform coupled with the creativity behind the campaign itself. 42% even said it made them want to get vaccinated. 78% of students also said it also felt relevant to their age group, thanks to the relatable content used that wasn't just fixed on one age group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Be inclusive. If your campaign is designed for a wider audience, make sure Gen Zs feel seen - as our most diverse consumer group to date, unique content is key.

Get on socials. Social media campaigns are a great way to engage with Gen Z - especially on visual platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and of course YouTube.

Get back to
what you love.



3

Dove Reverse Selfie

Authenticity

Digital natives

Lifelong loyalty

Country: US / UK

Format: Video

Watch now



Let's stop retouching apps from blurring her confidence.

This is a representation of how far retouching apps can distort beauty. Harmful and readily available, 80% of girls are already using them by the age of 13. It's no wonder their perception of beauty and their self-esteem are so distorted. Help reverse the damage. Download our new Social Media Confidence Kit. [Dove.com/confidence](https://dove.com/confidence)

 Dove
Self-esteem project

Let's **Change** Beauty 

The concept

Skincare brand Dove's Reverse Selfie has been created in an attempt to combat decades of airbrushing and - more recently - filter culture on social media. The video shows a young girl doing her makeup, taking a selfie, editing the selfie, and uploading it to social media - except we see this process entirely in reverse.

"Making people feel confident is a great thing to do and this encourages good self-esteem."

Why it's great

It's not always a good thing to be a digital native. With so many brands tapping into the digital universe of Gen Z, it's refreshing to see Dove providing some commentary on the more damaging effects of being online. Reverse Selfie spans generations - it encourages parents to speak to their children about filters vs reality - but there is an awareness that Gen Zs themselves will see this ad, and hopefully benefit from it.

The response

With 91% of Gen Zs already knowing the Dove brand, the challenge is to encourage these new consumers to engage with a legacy brand. 63% of Gen Z said that Reverse Selfie made them want to buy from Dove. This rose to 74% among respondents that identified as female. Despite the ad consciously addressing parents of Gen Zs, 75% of respondents still felt it was relevant to their age group - and 67% said they'd remember Dove as a result of the ad.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Don't shy away from targeting multiple demographics at once - some concepts are strong enough to span generations.

Become an advocate - and make sure you advocate for something that's close to the hearts and experiences of Gen Z.



2

Adidas Beyond the Surface

Authenticity

Globally minded

Country: US / UK
Format: Physical billboard,
TV commercial

Watch now



The concept

Featuring the world's first "liquid billboard" on a beach in Dubai, as well as a short film called Beyond The Surface, the idea of this Adidas campaign is to get women of all religions, abilities and body types to swim.

"I love that they are encouraging women of all shapes, sizes, & colors to get out there & do something that majority of us feel so self-conscious about doing!"

"It feels nice to see brands cater to different cultures."

Why it's great

Gen Z loves experiential retail - and after months of lockdowns, this in-person billboard (and its wider encouragement to get out and experience the world) could not have come at a better time. And of course, with women of color taking center stage throughout the campaign, it's a fantastic testament to diversity as the main subject of advertising rather than relegated to a supporting role.

The response

70% of Gen Zs were inspired to purchase from Adidas after viewing Beyond the Surface. When asked what word best described the campaign, the most common response was “globally-minded” - closely followed by “forward-thinking”, “authentic” and “creative & fun”. 73% also felt that Beyond the Surface was relevant to the Gen Z demographic.

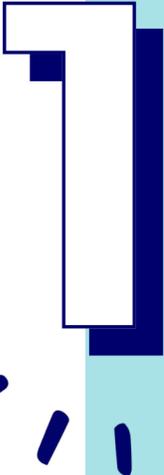
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Don't be afraid to transcend the digital. Gen Z responds best when they can really engage with your products, and in-person advertising can resonate if done innovatively.

Diversity should take center stage - avoid tokenistic inclusion.



BEYOND THE SURFACE



Levi's

Buy better. Wear longer

Lifelong loyalty

Globally minded

Country: US / UK
Format: TV commercial,
social media advertising

Watch now



The concept

Levi's Buy Better. Wear Longer commercial features young celebrities and change-makers - including Jaden Smith and Marcus Rashford MBE- and is aimed at spreading an important message around sustainability and the positive impact this has on climate change.

"Climate change is a growing factor in many people's lives and this campaign highlights the importance of it."

Why it's great

The campaign was advertised globally via a TV commercial, with boosted support on the brand's social media channels. The ad features an inspiring group of influential young people, including Jaden Smith, Xiye Bastida, Melati Wijsen, Xiuhtezcatl, Emma Chamberlain and Marcus Rashford MBE. The inclusion of global Gen Z stars talking about an issue close to this generation's hearts makes this campaign very poignant, informative and strong in its messaging.

The response

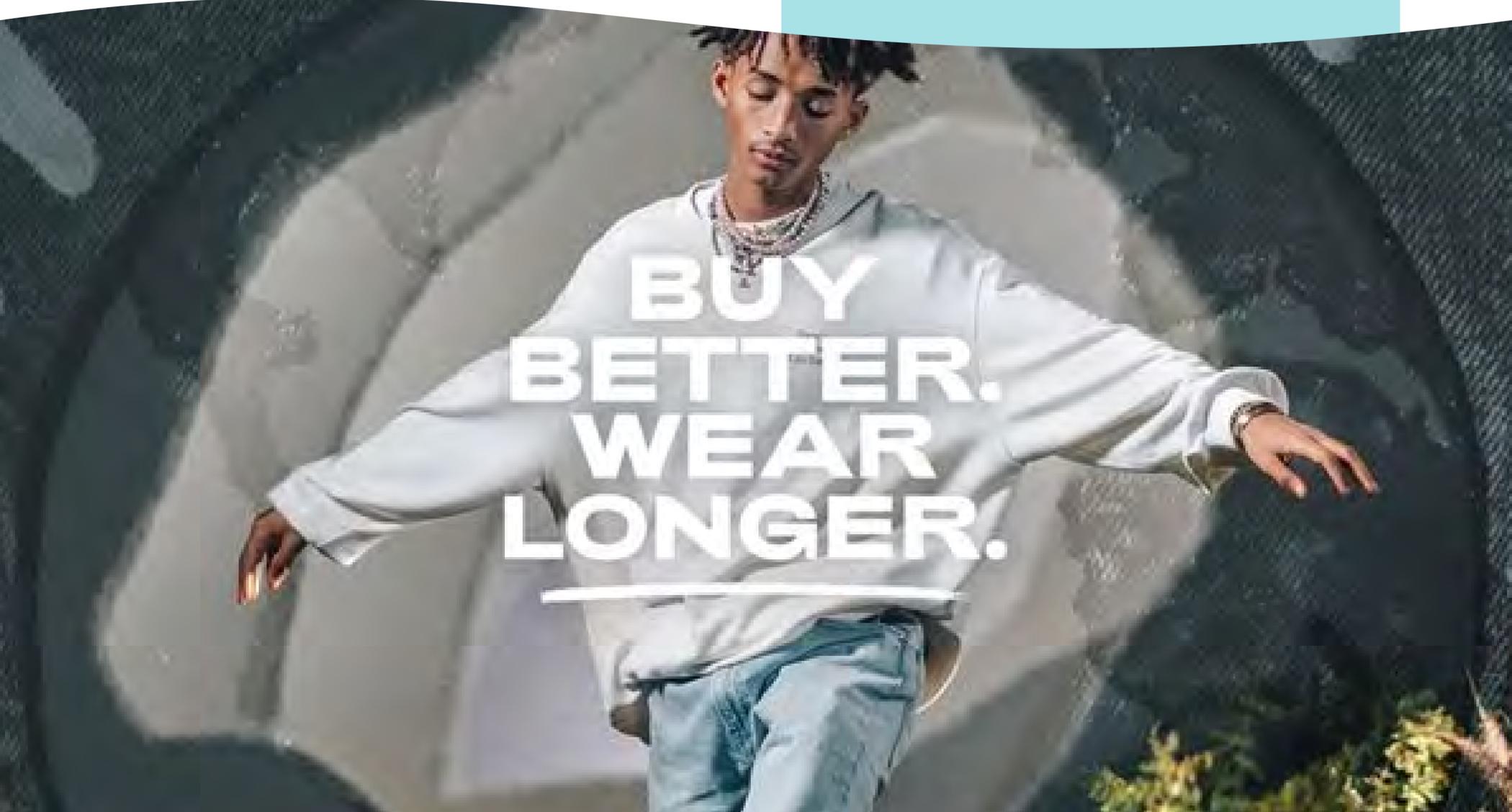
The combined result of Gen Z relevancy and purchase intent across the 16-24-year-old demographic makes Levi's campaign number one in our top 11 list. The majority of the student cohort - 80% - said it felt relevant to their age group, and a further 65% said it made them want to buy from the brand. Crucially, 67% said they will remember the brand as a result of this commercial. The majority of students described the campaign as 'globally minded', 'authentic', and 'forward-thinking', which shows that its main purpose to spread awareness and build on the conversation surrounding climate change has been fulfilled.

Great job, Levi's!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Be transparent. Don't beat around the bush when it comes to addressing topical issues - Gen Zs appreciate transparency.

Involve ambassadors. Getting Gen Z influencers that are relevant to your campaign involved is a great way to achieve that all-important authentic message.



**BUY
BETTER.
WEAR
LONGER.**

About Student Beans

Your gateway to success with Gen Z

 [Student Beans](#)

 [Student Beans](#)

Student Beans creates lasting relationships between Gen Z and brands. Our suite of solutions help brands to find, attract, engage and convert verified students. And that's just the start. Our extensive network of global media touchpoints, along with our conversion optimisation tools, drive repeat purchases, building the habits that turn Gen Z into your lifelong customers.

Our conversion optimisation tool

Reduce basket abandonment, and ensure that every discounted purchase comes from a fully verified student.

Our Gen Z database

Leverage our global Gen Z database to retarget more efficiently, earning loyalty that lasts way beyond their student years.

Our Gen Z media suite

Make use of our Gen Z-centric media suite to speak to them wherever and however they browse.

Our global publisher network

Once your student discount program is live, we'll place it in front of the audiences that work for you.



The story of Student Beans

Student Beans was founded in 2005 in Birmingham, UK, by James and Michael Eder, named after the British student staple: baked beans. As young university graduates themselves, the brothers saw a gap in the market for a digital student loyalty platform that would give students exclusive discounts on the brands they love, and connect retailers to this key consumer demographic.

Quickly becoming a part of everyday student life, Student Beans revolutionised the concept of the student ID for the digital age. We launched our award-winning verification technology, enabling brands to ensure their student discounts are only available to verified students. Today, we partner with thousands of the world's biggest brands across fashion, technology, food, entertainment and more, and power a global network of students in over 160 countries.

Find out more about our [conversion optimisation tool](#) and [Gen Z media suite](#) today.

StudentBeans