

# DEAR BRANDS: PLEASE STOP SELLING US YOUR ACTIVISM

By Tori West

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**Generation Z are being targeted with empty promises of peace, love and change. Tori West explains why it's time for brands to put their words into action.**



Reebok Opus 3D campaign by Builders Club

**‘ Generation Zers aren’t even thinking about buying fast fashion. They’re giving up the high street for Downing Street ’**

— *Tori West, editor, Bricks magazine*

Generation Z are too busy cleaning up your mess to pay attention to your brand's purpose mindset products and campaigns; in fact, Generation Zers see right through those. Growing up in an era of Brexit, Trump and climate change, young people have rightly lost faith in the decisions of their elders, so it comes as no surprise that the most important topic to Generation Z right now is ethics.

In Irregular Labs' 2018 Generation Z consumer report, 65% of young people interviewed agreed that authenticity was one of their top values, and what makes a person cool is staying true to their beliefs. And, of course, to avoid hypocrisy, these values dictate who they decide to give their money to. This is forcing brands to wake up, listen and take action when it comes to global politics. And it doesn't take much for politically charged, social-savvy Generation Z consumers to recognise when companies fall short or are tone deaf. Just think about the fashion sector.

'We're being sold peace and love as empty promises of change for brands to maximise profits,' says Rachelle Cox, a 22-year-old London-based creative. 'The fast fashion industry is one of the leading causes of global warming, landfill and ocean waste, so how can companies brand themselves with a purpose mindset when they unethically overproduce stock?'

The world's second-biggest fashion retailer, H&M, is ambitious to push for a sustainable future and announced that by 2030, it aims to use only recycled or other sustainably sourced materials. However, not everyone has faith in this promise. This year, after the fast-fashion retailer admitted to 'mistakes' in its strategy, H&M shares fell to their lowest level in a decade. 'Sustainability can't work under capitalism and fast fashion; they're opposites,' continues Cox. It begs the question: how do you persuade young people concerned about the environment to buy an item from a fast-fashion brand, when the industry is being outed as one of the dirtiest polluters in the world? The truth is, they're not even thinking about it; in the UK, Generation Z are giving up the high street for Downing Street.



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*'Without honesty and transparency, Generation Z will continue to put their trust in smaller, independent brands.'*

In February, thousands of **children skipped school** and gathered outside London's Houses of Parliament to protest against climate change. Shopping and wearing the latest high-street trends is becoming less of a priority for them, especially when it escalates the very issue they're fighting hard to change.

The **2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey** reports that 75% of young people believe that business leaders focus on their own agendas rather than considering wider society, and 62% think companies have no ambition beyond wanting to make money. Therefore, if a brand wants Generation Z customers, it must satisfy their expectations of honesty and transparency. Generation Z want to know what impact their consumer choices have on other people and the planet, from employees' experience in the supply chain to what happens to the clothes that aren't sold.

Without that transparency, Generation Z will continue to put their trust in smaller, independent brands. Why would Generation Zers buy a fast-fashion t-shirt bearing a slogan that reads 'Equality' when the company's practices contradict their values? The item could be made in a sweatshop by someone not on a living wage – what's so equal about that? On the flip side, they could buy that same slogan t-shirt from a smaller brand that makes to order, pays fair wages and is operated by people who share similar values and experiences to them.

Thomas Brunskill, the creator of queer, political slogan t-shirt brand **Mundane**, recognises this. 'By purchasing an activist-orientated product from an individual or small business, you are truly fuelling raw creativity and genuinely giving a voice to people in the community. My queer t-shirts share true, unfiltered messages from an individual in the queer community who isn't doing this to reach profit margins or impress investors.' One thing is clear: it's Generation Z's world and we're just living in it.

*Tori West is the editor of **Bricks magazine**, an independent, intersectional feminist publication exploring sociopolitical issues in fashion and art.*