

The Generation alphabet soup:

Gen Z, Gen X,
Millennials...everyone
knows what you're
talking about, right?
Not really...



Generations in the media

Do people have any idea what you're talking about?

- From time to time, probably most of us see articles in the media using the generation 'language' i.e. Gen Z, Gen X, Millennials, and so on. Typically it's a story revealing data about consumer attitudes or behaviours.
- We've often wondered: (i) has the average person reading these articles *heard of* the names Gen Z or Gen X, and (ii) if they have, do they know what they mean – do they know the age group associated with each generation?
- We decided to find out with a national online survey among 1,259 people aged 18 years and over, fielded over the period Nov 12-17, 2020. Results were post-weighted to reflect the population distribution for age, gender, area and highest level of schooling.

Why are millennials and Gen Z turning to Instagram as a news source?

Generation X is the forgotten generation

Baby Boomers ask for cash handouts as Millennials raid super funds

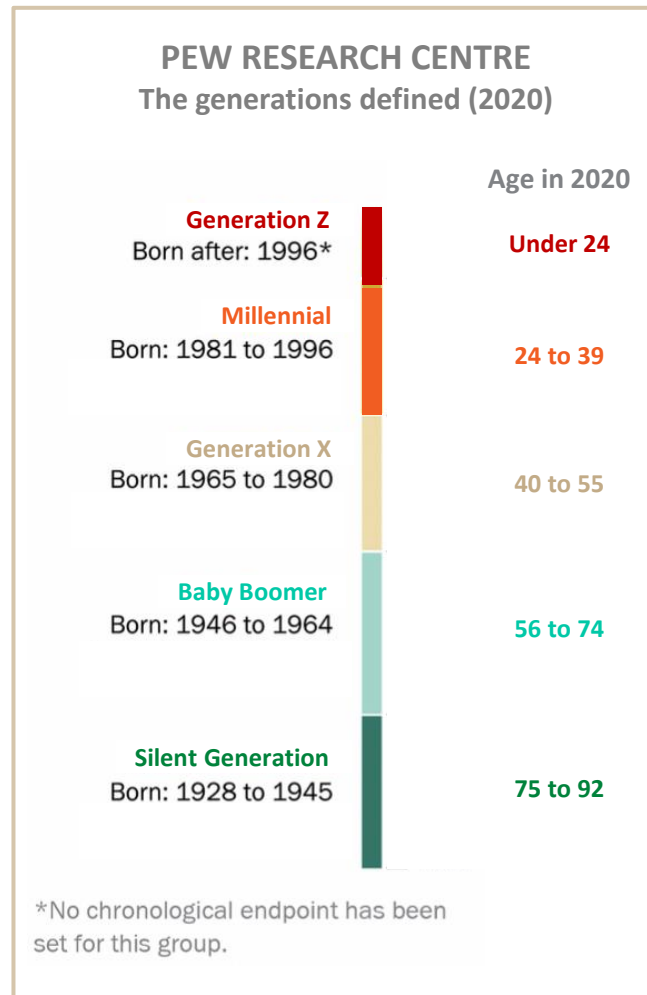
With Scott Morrison, Gen X are now in charge. But will this close the generational divide?

Millennials need more than a hug, starting with job security and wage justice

Defining the generations

Defining the generations

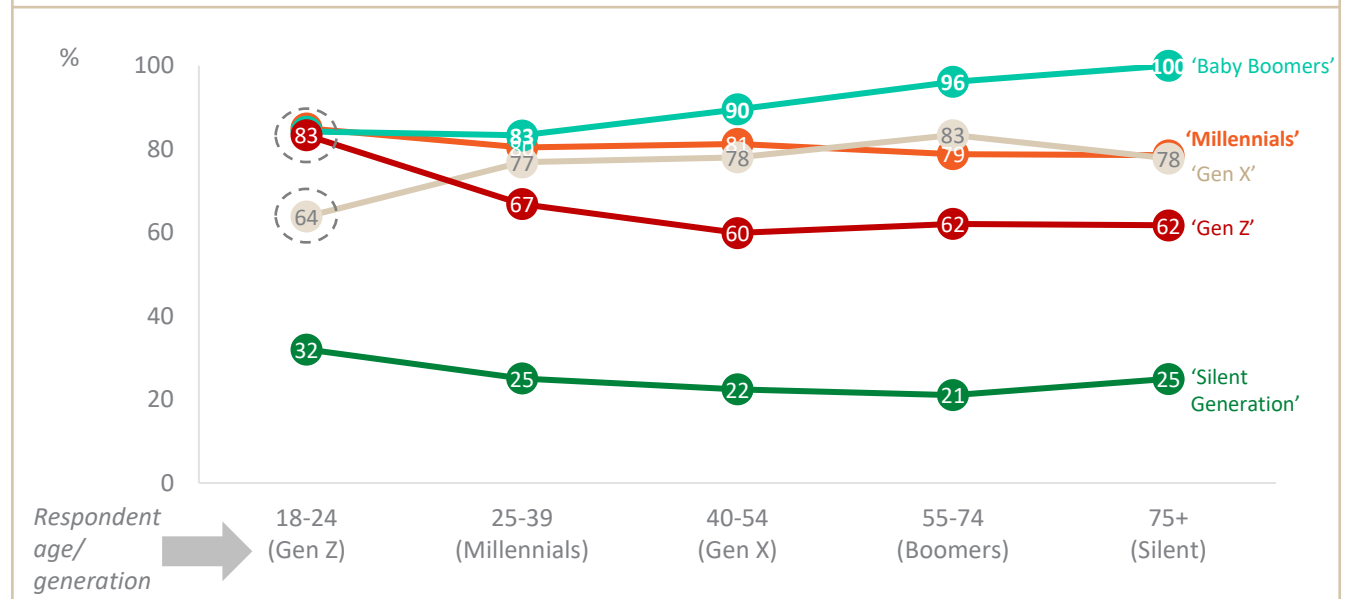
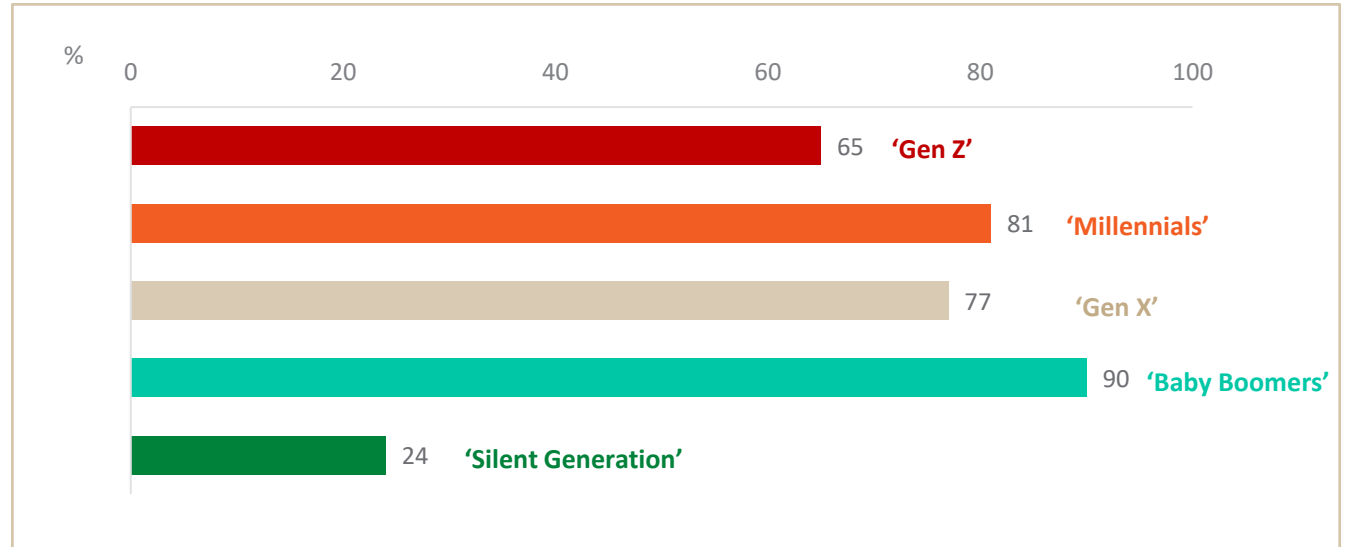
- When it comes to defining generations, there appear to be differences of opinion. So problem number one: if 'experts' using generation jargon can't agree on how they're defined, how is the average person reading an article in the media supposed to know?
- For the purposes of our survey, we adopted the definitions used by the US Pew Research Centre. For convenience and simplicity, the age ranges we used were *slightly* different, e.g. Millennials were defined as people currently aged 25 to 39 rather than 24 to 39.



Awareness of generation names

The Basics: awareness

- The good news is that most people (90%) have heard of Baby Boomers, and a significant majority (around 80%) have heard of Millennials and Gen X.
- However about a third are in the dark when it comes to the name 'Gen Z', and perhaps not surprisingly, relatively few have heard of the Silent Generation, 24%.
- Overall patterns in awareness (or lack of it) are broadly consistent among people of different ages/ generations – though 18-24 year olds (i.e. Gen Z) are:
 - more likely than others to have heard of the name 'Gen Z'; but,
 - less likely to have heard of the name 'Gen X'



The generation people believe they belong to*

Are you talking about me?

- Maybe not everyone's aware of all the generation names - but most people know which generation *they* belong to, don't they? *Not really.*
- On average, only about 40% of people in a given generation know (or correctly *guess* when they're asked) that they are members of that generation – though it varies a good deal by generation.
- For example, only 37% of Gen Z and 37% of Millennials know they belong to the Gen Z and Millennial generations respectively – whereas around 80% of Boomers know they are a Boomer.
- People aged 75+ (the Silent Generation) could be forgiven for thinking they're Boomers – after all, who's heard of the Silent Generation anyway?

	Respondent age/ generation				
	18-24 (Gen Z)	25-39 (Millennials)	40-54 (Gen X)	55-74 (Boomers)	75+ (Silent Gen)
<i>(Sample size)</i>	(146) %	(345) %	(278) %	(391) %	(99) %
Generation respondents think they belong to					
Gen Z	37	11	7	1	4
Millennials	39	37	3	0	4
Gen X	4	21	44	4	1
Baby Boomers	1	5	6	79	38
Silent generation	2	3	5	1	18
Can't say	17	23	35	15	35
Total	100	100	100	100	100

37% of Millennials think (or guess) they are a Millennial

79% of Boomers think (or guess) they are a Boomer

* Question: Sometimes you may see articles in the media using terms such as 'Generation Z' (or 'Gen Z'); 'Millennials', or 'Baby Boomers' for the names of different generations of people.

As far as you know, which one of these generational groups do you belong to?

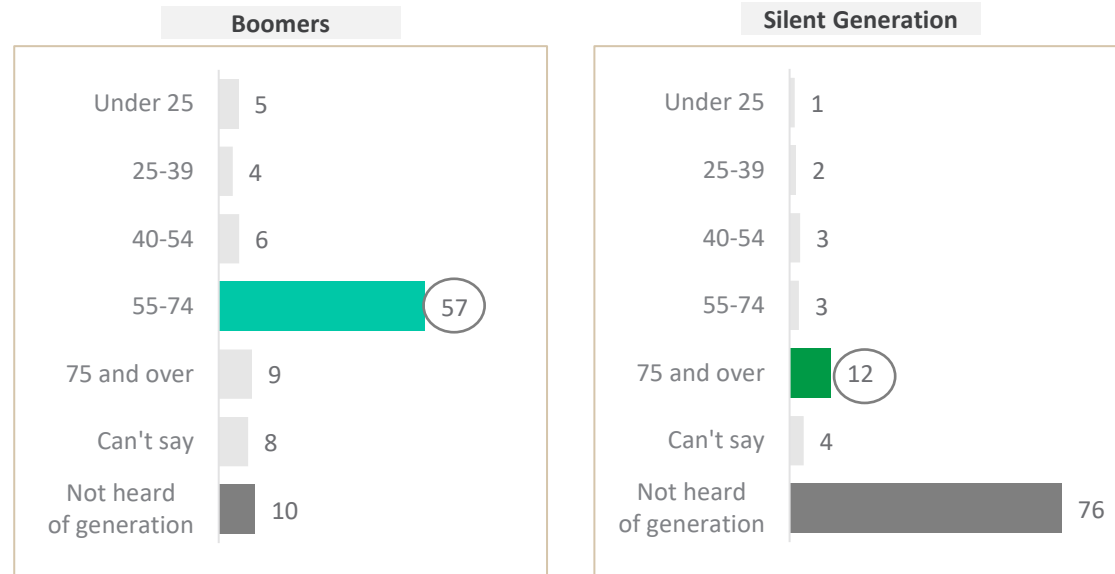
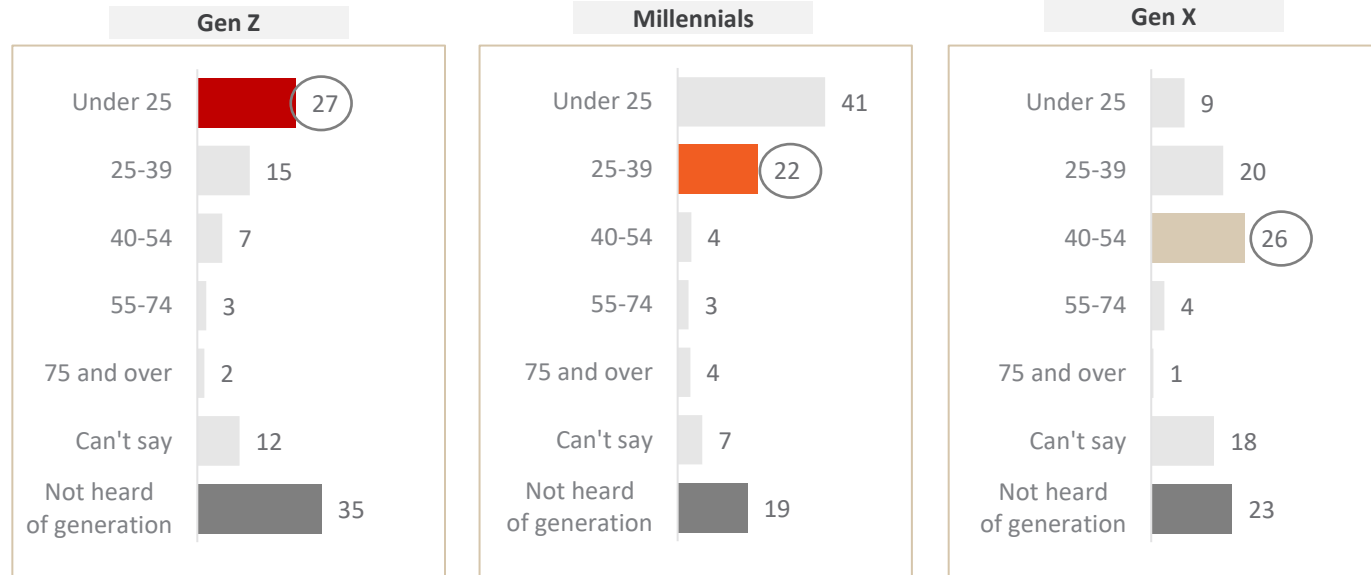
Perceptions about the age of generations*

Bottom line awareness and understanding

■ The last step is to find out how many people know the age group associated with a given generation – which we did with the aid of a prompted list of the five relevant age groups. When that information is combined with *awareness* of the respective generations, the complete picture can be pieced together.

■ The bottom line:

- Only around 25% of people have heard of Gen Z and can associate that generation with the correct age group, i.e. under 25.
- The situation is much the same for the Millennial and Gen X generations, at 22% and 26% respectively.
- The Boomer generation is by far the best known and understood (almost 60%) – but a long way from universally so.
- And the Silent Generation? It's almost a complete blank.



Questions:

(a) And just to check, **before today**, which of these names had you **heard of**?

(b) IF HEARD OF GENERATION: Now thinking about the current **age** of people in the group called **(name)**. As far as you know, which **one** of these age groups **best describes** how old people in the **(name)** group are?

So what?

- Let's finish by going back to where we started: articles in the media using the language of generation alphabet soup.
- If you're issuing a media release, you're doing it for a reason – to convey a message or make a point. It's an exercise in *communication*. So it's fundamentally important to communicate in a way that most people can immediately understand. In any other context, you wouldn't attempt speaking to someone in a language they don't understand.
- Of course you can define the generations in the body copy, and to be fair, many (though not all) articles do. But even so, why make it more difficult for the reader than it needs to be?
- And what about the headline? No room for definitions there. Our survey results show that, apart from Boomers, more than half the time people won't even know that the story is about *them* – the people of *their* generation.
- So what to do? If your story relates to a characteristic specifically connected with the *point in history* a particular cohort was born, then using 'generations' makes sense, though you'll still need to define the generations at some point for readers.
- However from what we see, in most cases generation names are simply being used as proxies for age groups, and nothing more. So if that is the case, why not just use age groups (or when relevant, life stage groups)? They may not be as sexy as Gen Z, Millennials or Gen X, but at least everyone understands them.