

Ndeye Diagne: How Gen Z is building a better Africa



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Gen Z: Who are they, what are they doing and why are they so important for brands and the future?



Afro-centrist and data storyteller, Ndeye Diagne, managing director at Kantar Nigeria and Ghana, takes a look at how Gen Z is influencing societal and cultural trends.

To put it into context, Gen Z are those born between 1997 and 2012. Gen Z will be the consumers of tomorrow. So, for businesses that want to get ahead, building trust with the new kids on the block is crucial – and that means that businesses need to understand them, their environment and how their lived experiences will build a better future for us all.

“ Positive comes out of the most difficult experiences ”

What happened in Nigeria in October 2020 provides insights into the Nigerian youth, and more broadly, into African Gen Z: who they are, what they believe in and what they want. The #ENDSARS movement strongly signals that it's time to start paying closer attention to this 'great generation', to their needs, core values and ambitions.

In the midst of lots of anger and lots of injustice and violence, it was revealed that the youth are determined to build a better nation and are hungry for equality.

Diagne notes that in other African countries, perhaps less traumatising circumstances, we've seen them actualising a very

similar momentum for change and an equal drive for better futures.

The New North is a direction set by the young people and Gen Z in particular. These new narratives are the ones that they are actively writing now. It's the narratives of faith, of self belief, of change and hope and narratives of better and more for Africa.



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No silent revolution

"Are you up for the challenge?" asks Diagne. Whatever the business it is you operate in and if your goal is to grow sustainably in this high potential region, impacting positively the lives of the young Africans would be a prerequisite.

To do this, you need to understand where Gen Z is heading.

Diagne shares insight into what is happening on the continent and demonstrates how Africa's youth is the most valuable currency.

The reality is that Africa is the world's youngest continent with a population makeup of 60% of the entire continent below the age of 25. There really is no strategy that can win sustainably without directly involving them, or revolving around them.



If you're wondering why Gen Z is relevant, the reality is that everything has changed. In the last decade, the amount of change has dramatically impacted this generation - their lifestyles, their aspirations, and their power - putting Covid-19 aside.

The one dramatic change is that of the internet. With the internet, nothing is the same. Going from 1% internet usage 10 years ago, we now have up to 65% of young people in Kenya who use the internet daily. None of the movement that we see would have been possible if it wasn't for the internet. It opens new avenues for idea sharing, social connections and opportunities - ultimately an increase of self belief. Gen Z is seeing and experiencing the world differently.

Moving from dark to light

The African youth is determining a new zeitgeist. The usual epithet that we would use for Africa have changed as we move from the dark to the light.

Diagne states that #AfricaMatters is really the zeitgeist of the 21st Century and is defined by a generation that is fighting for the future we want and we will see more of this in 2021 and beyond.



An example of #AfricaMatters can be seen in the recent developments in the Ugandan elections that caught the attention of the international media. An [article](#) in the *Washington Post* reports that Uganda's election would be decided by the youth.

So the question is, why are they doing what they are doing?

Diagne suggests they are doing it for a true sense of purpose, drawing attention to freedom and a desire for better leadership as citizens of the world.

To see the real opportunity, it's essential to balance ambition with reality and aspirations with existing challenges.



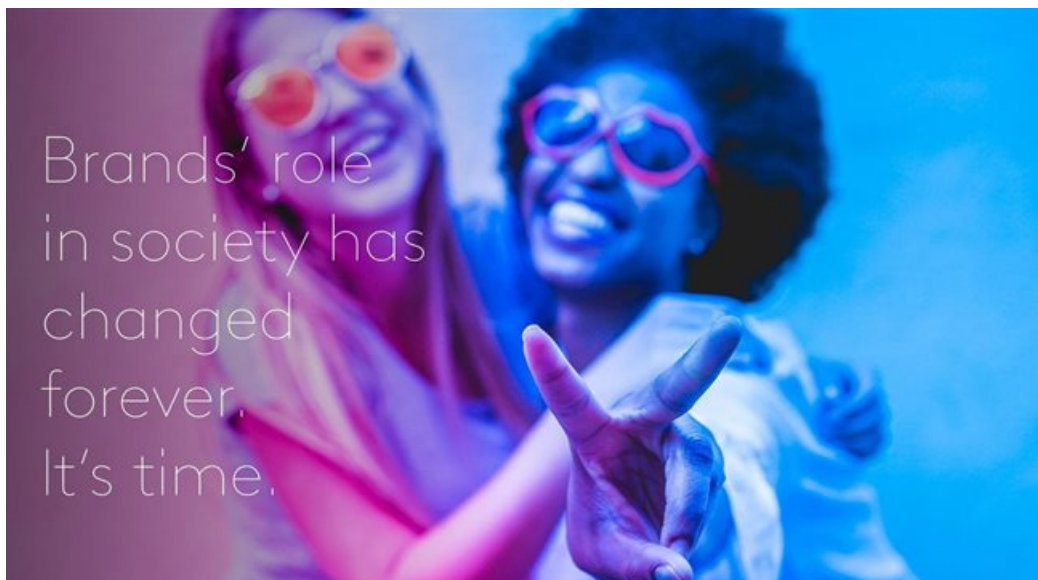
Diagne compares *The African Thunderstorm*, a poem by David Rubadiri, which balances the beauty of thunderstorms. Equally, Africa's youth is faced with massive challenges, which if not addressed may be a ticking timebomb - from political systems to unemployment and lack of access to healthcare. This is leading young people to embark on various journeys and even risking their lives.

With such a large population of young people, supportive policies and programmes are critical and should include youth development. Initiatives such as the Social Change Factory in West Africa are so important as it is empowering the youth.

3 trends that we will see as we face the New North

1. #YouToo

This trend comes from the fact that positive results are coming from actions taken by the youth in some parts of Africa will continue to have a positive ripple effect on the young Africans and inspiring them to do the same and to do more. It's really a positive peer pressure.



Diagne believes there is going to be a powerful response from institutions, organisations and brands as they understand the power and the potential of this target group and are committed to help them.

So, how will your brand bring this to life?

2. #AfroWhizz

While this is not Africa-specific, the push will be to see entrepreneurs become more daring and more visible by co-creating the world they want to see. We will see massive waves of entrepreneurship across all sectors in advertising, music, fashion and even digital.

In countries like Nigeria, the entrepreneurial mindset is already entrenched. Up to 80% of Nigerians are keen to start a

business following the Covid-19 pandemic. African entrepreneurship is therefore on the right track to make a global impact.

3. #BeTheChange

This comes from the fact that purpose is now everything. We've entered the "Why Era" and Covid-19 has pushed society to think about and show more about what they stand for. There will be this push for brands to show what they stand for and what the youth wants to see in Africa.

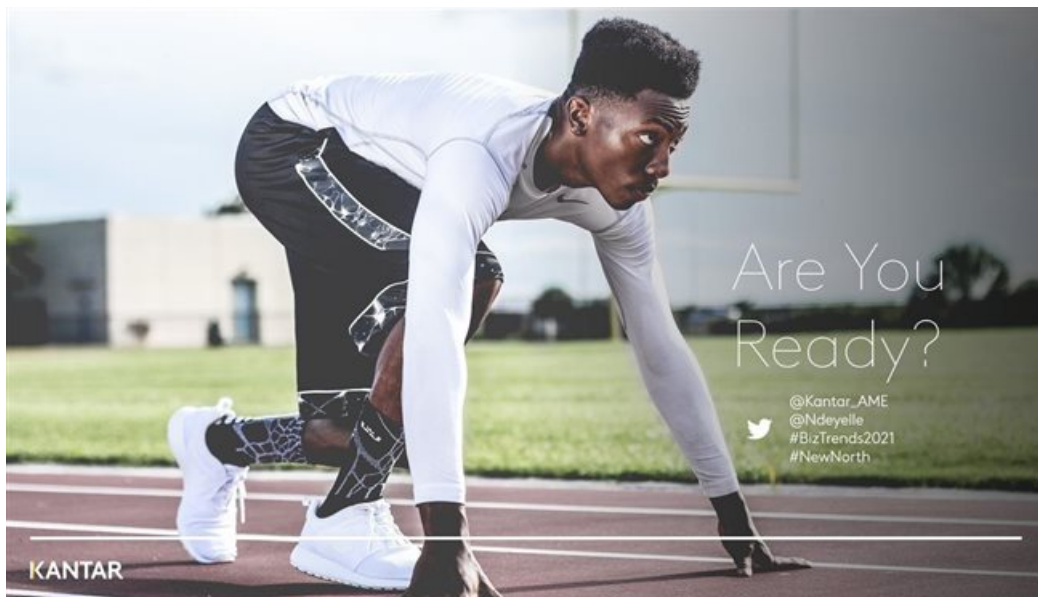
In the past, brands could get away with no clear indication of their "Why", but those days are gone. There's a limited chance for brands to survive longer if they do not show a strong standing on issues that are close to consumers hearts. Therefore, brands will always have a role to play in society.

In a world of Covid-19, when everything is constantly changing, Gen Z is hungry for change and so brands will need to model the change and be the change.

“ In the winds of change we find our greatest direction ”

The good news is that there is loads of evidence with the correlation between business success and a more purpose-led approach.

In the context that we find ourselves in 2021 and beyond, businesses need to ask themselves: *What do we stand for? What are we going to do?*



What will matter more than the questions, are the answers, and the challenge will be in the execution of those answers in authentic ways. In all fairness, this will be a challenge for all brands.

Generation Z is certainly changing the course of history and the future belongs to brands that understand them.

Are you ready to connect with Gen Z?

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