

THE POWER OF YOUTH CULTURE IN SHAPING BRANDS

Announcer 00:03

Please welcome the panel on The Power of Youth Culture in Shaping Brands, moderated by Michelle Stevenson, executive director, Marketing and Communications, Milken Institute.

Michelle Stevenson 00:36

Hi everyone. Thanks for spending your lunch with us today. It's estimated that Gen Z will control 12 trillion in purchasing power by 2030. Gen Z, Gen Alpha, even some millennials—youth are a revenue-driving force influencing pricing power, product development, brand community growth, and our future. Youth culture isn't a trend, it's the main stage for brand relevance. I've got a distinguished panel here today, and we will be diving into all aspects of brand and youth culture. By way of introduction, I'll give you a little bit of background. According to Golden Goose's business uniqueness data, approximately 70 percent of sales come from Gen Z and millennials. With cocreation a hallmark of the brand, Pacsun launched the Youth Report surveying more than 6,000 Gen Z and Gen Alpha respondents, 51 percent of whom say they themselves, not celebrities, not influencers, have the most influence on how they dress—way to go. Blank Street is a fast-growing coffee chain targeting younger consumers through social media and visual culture. Matcha drinks, which we all know are highly visual and social-media-friendly, account for about 50 percent of the business, with Gen Z and teenagers as strong adopters. In 2025, we saw the inaugural TIME 100 Creators Most Influential Digital Voices list, which is comprised of voices of youth from across the world, encompassing 15 countries, while TIME for Kids reaches more than 2 million kids in classrooms and homes around the world. And finally, RIVET provides start-up grants to young change-makers tackling social, environmental, and economic issues. More than 1,100 projects have been funded in more than 75 countries, and 80 percent of those are led by entrepreneurs younger than 25. Hayfa, as the youngest person on the panel, can you please define youth culture and tell us why it's so important?

Hayfa Sdiri 02:50

That's a very good question. I can't answer that question. We'll start there. I don't think youth are monoliths, and therefore talking about youth culture becomes really hard to define. I do think, at least in my personal opinion, that you can look at it from three different lenses, or maybe—if you're thinking about systems change—and you can look at it as a system using the iceberg model. So at the tip of the iceberg, you're looking at all what of us know, right? The aesthetics, the TikTok trends, everything that you see. And then at the second layer, you would see the patterns and the idea of belonging, of meaning, of politics, of economics that do shape youth cultures. And then at the bottom of the iceberg you would find all the currents that are deeper. And this is where we talk about economic instability. We talk about the climate crisis that young people are suffering from. And so I would say that there is no youth culture—that youth cultures, and this exercise of defining that needs to happen at the level of micro and niche cultures in different countries and different communities.

Michelle Stevenson 03:58

Well, I think it's an excellent summation, because I think everyone on the panel represents a different vision and viewpoint on youth culture. So that's a great place for us to start. Sandro, Golden Goose has built its brand around individuality and craftsmanship. How do you balance that authenticity with the drive to stay in the moment?

Sandro Baggiani 04:19

Yeah, first of all, just a little introduction, the average age of our company—now that counts about 2,800 people around the world—is mainly around—the average is—30 years old. I'm one of the most seniors. So I don't know if I were to present this kind of argument first of all, but second of all, I think that Golden was able to intercept the need of the young generation to be part of something, belonging to a community, to an idea, to a part of the creativity process. Regarding our business, of course, so we were—able to basically approach this kind of opportunity with three basically basic aspects. The first one is the cocreation. So basically, we leave the last mile of the creativity to our customers that we define as our lovers. They come to the store, they go online—[Stevenson: Very Italian of you.]—Thank you. I hope you guys also contribute to this cause. And basically they just—with the embellishment, the change of the color, the star—these kinds of things—many things—they're able to express themselves, this kind of self-expression. The majority of the customers that do this cocreation are actually the younger generation. The second aspect is that we don't only let them participate in the sort of creation activity, but also we want them to make sure that their shoe, their sneaker, their jacket, lasts forever. So we introduced the concept of repairing. So many stores around the world actually are able to repair the shoes. Also, in case of cocreation and repair, you need a huge investment, because many, many stores nowadays—we also have in our staffing the so-called cobblers, or dream dreamers. Basically what they do is they help consumers do this kind of activity in the store. Last but not least, we are going to talk about AI. Okay. I want to introduce another concept that in our business is very important, which is the artisanal intelligence. Because all of our products are made with hands. They're handcrafted. The craftsmanship for us is very important, and we notice that the

younger generation do like it. The fact that this kind of—let's say—artisanal process could be an ancient concept in our world is a cool concept.

Michelle Stevenson 07:05

No, that's great. Bri, Sandro talked about cocreation. Pacsun has always lived at the intersection of fashion, music, and digital culture. How do you treat that relationship of cocreation so that your customers feel part of a community and not just the transactional part of the relationship?

Brieane Olson 07:26

Yeah, Pacsun is really centered around our community, and cocreation is a key pillar in terms of how we continue to reach young audiences, both Gen Z and Gen Alpha. A few things that we did in 2025 that are different at Pacsun is we introduced a first-of-its-kind Youth Advisory Board, and that board is made up of a range of people who are age 13 through 24 who come in quarterly and advise us on what they think the brand should be doing differently. They participate in large seasonal campaigns. They try out and trial all of our new innovation, and they help advise our board. And so that's been one very instrumental change in terms of how we're actually giving youth a seat at the table. Second is what you mentioned at the beginning, the Youth Report that we brought to life through global data. And we did interview over 6,000 respondents, both in Gen Alpha and Gen Z—really at the reason to say, hey, there's not a lot of research out there that gets at the emotive why? So we need to understand customer behaviors and these shifts at a much more internal level. And so that report helped guide both ourselves and as a free resource, kind of irrespective and agnostic of industry, that can be used by all brands really moving forward, to help understand these future generations.

Michelle Stevenson 08:58

And the Youth Report and a couple of resources from TIME are in the app. So not only that, but we're making it easier for all of you to engage and review it as well. Jess, speaking of TIME, you have evolved the brand to engage a new generation through thought-provoking storytelling and purpose-driven initiatives. How are you building trust with younger audiences in an era of information overload—particularly when so much of that information can be unverified?

Jessica Sibley 09:28

Yeah, thank you for the opportunity to talk about TIME. I feel like I'm maybe the oldest one in the room—or certainly representing one of the oldest companies. With that said, we have the largest and youngest audience in our 100-year history, and so it starts with a youth mindset. Our editor-in-chief is the youngest editor in our 100-year history, the first millennial to run the newsroom, and it's really pretty easy for us. It's who we're writing about and who we're writing for. And media is a really young business, and consumers,

especially of the younger generations, expect us to deliver in formats and in form factors about how they want to experience information and experience content. It's not just reading it. So what we've been able to do—not just in the three years that I've been CEO, but for 100 years in our history—is to meet readers, meet consumers where they are, which is why we have the largest audience. So we're not just TIME magazine—we're on digital, TIME.com. We're on every social app you can imagine. We're on WhatsApp. We bring people together in person with our live journalism. And what is so exciting and unexpected are the individuals who are on our covers. And you've mentioned a few things that we've launched—TIME 100 Creators. Obviously, we've had TIME for Kids for 25 years, but we were the first to get MrBeast on our cover. Bad Bunny, Taylor Swift gave one interview in six years to TIME. We've had some of the youngest political leaders in the world sit down and talk to us exclusively. And only—we had the number one—Twitch. What do you call it—Twitch? Whatever they do on Twitch. Kai Cenat, 23. I've learned a lot from all of these young individuals across so many different areas. And when we focus on AI, or we focus on climate and health, you know, we have 16-year-olds, 15-year-olds that we're highlighting who are doing incredible things at very young ages. So we launched TIME 100 Next, and we're going to continue to—I see Jamie Salter here in the audience. Hi, Jamie. I love the article about you in TIME. We're going to continue to build for the future and become the very best versions of ourselves, which is not chasing trends, but is taking what TIME is so great and is so well known for, which is what you asked, which is trust. And so when I speak to young people—which I do every day around the world—the one thing that I hear is, we just don't know who to trust. How sad is that? So if we can have that as our number one core value—and what we have is like our red border—what's there is balanced, it's fair, it's factual, it's rigorously reported, and it's trusted. While we cover politics, we really aren't political, and I think we're doing a really good job.

Michelle Stevenson 12:41

So being that best version of yourself really gives you the authenticity to speak to that—the younger generation. Vinay, where do you see the intersection of aspiration and authenticity?

Vinay Menda 12:54

So I think Gen Z, just like every earlier generation, really cares about status, but I think what they care about more than anything is cultural relevance. In a world that's very digital, they want to show that they're relevant to the people around them, and I think that's the reason—a lot of, I guess, something else to note is the Gen Z consumer doesn't have the level of wealth that millennials have, so they're looking for brands that are attainable, little treats that they can afford to show status. So I think that's why a lot of luxury fashion brands today, from Ralph Lauren to Prada, are building coffee shops or cafés, which is a way to interact with this new consumer. They can't afford the brand yet. But these are long-term relationships. If you—if you start going to Ralph's coffee when you're young and buy a T-shirt that doesn't dilute the core brand, that eventually, as you get older, you could buy the core brand. And I think Golden Goose actually does a great job of that. In prep of this panel, I actually live next to a store, so I went to pick up some custom Blank Street-branded Golden Goose shoes. And when I walked in, I was like, do I really want to spend \$800 on sneakers? But after I went through the experience of how personalized it can be and

how much effort went into making the product, I'm actually like, did I spend enough? I think I should pay them more.

Sandro Baggiani 14:08

Should have taken another one.

Michelle Stevenson 14:10

Yeah, well, we'll talk about premium pricing. Hayfa, do you think that young people are expecting brands to lead on issues like sustainability and inclusion—or to kind of respond into or kind of react and reflect those values, and if so, I'd love to hear some examples of brands that you think either are absolutely hitting the mark or completely missed the opportunity.

Hayfa Sdiri 14:39

I'm going to be the devil's advocate here and say, I think it's a bit too late to lead on social causes at this point—but they can join the fight. There are millions and millions of soldiers all over trying to make a change on a daily basis. I do think that Gen Zers and young people and everyone is really, really tired by everything that is chaotic that we're living through right now, and that is very important to acknowledge. And so Gen Zers are on a million fronts—from climate change to, again, economic instability all over the world, from war zones, from everything that's going on in our community. And I do think brands such as policy brands and policymakers and governments and everyone that constitutes that community needs to join the fight. And so some brands are doing that very well. One example that I'd like to bring up is Crocs. For instance, Crocs and RIVET recently collaborated on Crocs Jibbits—for the ones who have Crocs, those are the little things that you put on your shoes for you and your kids. And the way we've done it is through bringing to the table the voices of changemakers from five different continents with a prompt of defining what changemaking looks like for you. And so the changemakers gave those prompts, Crocs' design team ended up designing the Jibbits, and those Jibbits have been sold all over the world right now, and they made a donation to go towards young people who are making change happen in their countries—again, in five continents. So that's a very virtuous feedback loop on how brands can contribute to fights that are already happening with them, with authenticity, with credibility, and with co-ownership, while leaving some agency to young people.

Michelle Stevenson 16:25

That's a great example. So you're all in this space because youth, that market, that audience, is positively impacting the bottom line. But Bri, I'd love to know—how do you make the business decision to jump on a trend versus when it's your time to stand on the sidelines.

Brieane Olson 16:45

Yeah, at Pacsun, we have four very clear pillars that we use to guide us as a mission and vision for the company. And so that is music, art, fashion, and sport. And so if it doesn't fall into something that's happening in those four pillars, we usually let it go, and we've noticed that—you know—the Gen Z and Gen Alpha cohorts are really building and creating the trends themselves, and they are the storytellers. And so really looking at the values and understanding these pillars and how meaningful music, for example, is to their identity, which is one of the things that came out in the Pacsun Youth Report, is that music for today's youth is the number-one way that they find identity and creativity. And so as we continue to scale globally—and we did announce this week our partnership with Majid Al Futtain—and PacSun will be entering the Middle East market with them as a strategic partner over the next five years, with our first store at Mall of the Emirates in Dubai, we'll really be looking at it from a much more global lens, and ensuring as we see these trends go globally—and we know that the four pillars that really guide Pacsun have global reach—what are those cultural differences? What are those intersecting moments that can make the brands unique in this market?

Michelle Stevenson 18:04

That's great. Vinay, you started to talk about this. But how do you make a convenience-driven product cool-worthy?

Vinay Menda 18:12

So when Blank Street was founded, we were founded with a very simple thesis. It was that we felt that incumbent chains and café brands were no longer speaking to the next [inaudible] of customers. A lot of these brands that we grew up knowing and loving ended up kind of fighting to grow same-store sales for 50 years and turned into supermarkets, became very transactional, and their brand started becoming sterile. So that's how we knew there was an opportunity to do something interesting in a space that seemed crowded but actually was—had a lot of monopolistic brands that were eroding when we started the company. We had a very simple, basic menu, but when things really took off for us was when we started treating our beverages like fashion accessories and cultural moments. By doing that—and that's kind of how we discovered matcha —and the significance of what matcha was going to bring to the next generation. When people post their brand online, whether it's their Blank Street coffee or their shoes, they're really trying to show what their personality is. So we just want to treat these drinks as personalities and give people a better, authentic experience. The second thing I would say is the rise of matcha came from this cultural shift, which is that Gen Z is no longer drinking alcohol, which is quite crazy. Alcohol consumption for Gen Z is down about 90 percent versus penanya, which is quite crazy. And the reason we think this is happening is because of the rise of longevity, with the rise of Oura Ring, WHOOP, Apple Health—people are understanding that the biggest cause of the biggest driver of longevity is sleep and the biggest cause of sleep that is alcohol. So with this change in behavior, consumers are looking for something else to do in the afternoons and evenings instead of drinking alcohol. So we felt that matcha would be a great conduit as a product that could replace a cocktail bar. So we actually think of Blank

Street more like a future cocktail bar or a future social hub for Gen Z, rather than a café which is tailored towards morning coffee.

Michelle Stevenson 20:10

Caffeine also has a negative impact on sleep. Sandro, I'd love to hear a little bit about—because you're on the other end of the spectrum from Vinay with Blank Street coffee here, right?—so where do you see the link between cultural credibility and pricing power?

Sandro Baggiani 20:30

Well, frankly speaking, I think that the younger generation, as he said, needs more than just a product given top-down by brands—but need to be in the loop. They want to be in the loop in any sense. Whether it's cocreation, it's personalization, it's taking a coffee in a coffee bar that we have in many stores around the world—and this is something that we took into consideration when opening new stores, especially country by country, because I think that youth culture is not just a matter of generation. It's just a matter of attitude. They want—really—to be anybody who has this kind of youth attitude. They want to be part of the process. They want—they want to feel—be included. They want to be heard. They want to be seen. That brands do something different than just give products to a shelf.

Michelle Stevenson 21:28

So it's actually that ability to foster the self-expression that has that positive impact on the bottom line—that's great. Hayfa, investing in youth culture also drives internal ROI. So brands that are attractive to youth consumers are also attractive to young talent. Is this one of the ways that young people might combat the job killing of AI? Do you think that they can look for opportunities in those brands that see them as an integral part of growing their business? Is that the opportunity we might offer to the future leaders out there?

Hayfa Sdiri 22:07

Yes, and it's an opportunity that we'll be offering to brands as well, for them to be in touch with young people who live in proximity to culture as it is being made. And so I think, again, it is—a feedback loop that moves in both directions. Some jobs will get eroded with AI. Some new jobs will be created in a way that feels more humane and more aligned with what young people can offer. And so I do see a future where brands are bringing to the front jobs, opening such as cultural strategists, cultural architects focused on different regions in the world, on more, you know, niche cultures, where young people can bring to the front their cultural fluency, emotional fluency, almost instinctive intuition, intuitive decision making that they have based on their lived experience. Brands benefit. Young people benefit. The only thing that I'll say—and I'll end with this—is that I hope those jobs are not only entry-level jobs or junior jobs, but that

we're offering them the opportunity to also apply their skills and talents to more higher levels of decision making.

Michelle Stevenson 23:17

Right, no, that's an excellent point. Jess, how does investing in youth culture positively impact the bottom line of a legacy media brand—and can you connect that with the TIME 100 Creators list?

Jessica Sibley 23:30

Yeah, well, our product is our journalism, and because of new technologies, we can deliver our product in any format now, and—you know—I'll never forget. I've been in the information business my whole career, 30 years, and I was always that person who was like, you need to know what's going on in the world. You need to be well read and globally minded. And I had this son who didn't want to read, and who didn't behave that way. And I remember I heard the news—I heard something that sounded like news coming from his phone—and he was young, and he was listening to news, and it was some sort of a video. And so that idea sounded so different so long ago, because he's 25 now. But again, instead of telling the younger generation you have to read and we're going to deliver our product in one format now, we've got video, we've got social, we've got summarization, we've got audio, we've got every version on any platform to get TIME's content. And as the CEO, I eliminated the paywall so that TIME is available for free to anyone in the world at any time. And so, again, a way to get a larger audience—the more eyeballs we have. The better eyeballs we have, the more we can monetize our audience with incredible brands that are global, blue-chip companies, the most respected in their categories. And I'll say with AI, we can scale that and accelerate that on such a level that we are now easily translated, so TIME is available now in nearly every single language—you can chat with TIME. So we worked with a hyper-scaling AI company called Scale AI based in Palo Alto, and we trained our—we trained —750,000 assets for databases and 100 years of our archives so that you can go and ask questions about TIME, about what's going on now and what's going on in the world, and get information, a report, a summary based on tariffs, based on a cultural moment that you want to get background on. So again, I think that AI allows us to do that. I will say, for every young person that I speak to, I encourage them to use AI. The CEO of Blackstone—they had a conference last week with 600 CEOs of their portfolio companies—and they said everybody should be using AI 20 times per day minimum. So just think about where you are in that. We know the younger generations always are the easiest, best ones—earliest adopters of technology. I don't know if that's happening right now with AI. I hear it's not allowed in schools. You shouldn't be using it. I'm a huge proponent of using it and making you smarter and better and more efficient. Hopefully that aligns with what you're seeing and what you're talking about. But I think it's really important.

Michelle Stevenson 26:54

All of us are online, living our lives online—young people in particular—which really gives brands a wealth of information to be able to guide their strategy. Vinay, are there particular platforms that you find more useful than others when trying to surface customer sentiment, or even just big-picture trends?

Vinay Menda 27:15

So I guess what I would say is—if you want to understand your brand sentiment, the best way to do it is through UGC, right? That's what most of what's posted about your brand. And through AI, there's a lot of interesting platforms today that not only track tagged UGC, but basically, you could scan videos to see who's talking about you even if you're untagged. So you could use these models to watch the videos and actually create sentiment scores on content that's untagged based on your brand—so if a cup is in the background, so we use a lot of these tools to understand sentiment, awareness and reach for the brand across different markets and different consumer segments.

Michelle Stevenson 27:51

Sandro, what's one big misconception that you think brands make about Gen Z, Gen Alpha?

Sandro Baggiani 28:00

Well, going back to the previous conversation, I think that the younger generation want to be part of a community, part of the—let's say—of the sentiment or the feeling. Brands, for many years, got this kind of message top down. In addition to that, I think the price increases throughout the past 36 months we had—I mean, suffered—was not a good signage. Was not a good signage, as well as some information about the—I mean—the problems with some laboratory, the underpaid labors in the many, many places in Italy, especially. Those are the kind of messages the youth doesn't like at all. They want to be really more transparent. They want to participate in a way. So this is the kind of feeling. In fact, we are having success with the Gen Z because we are very clear on that, very transparent. We do a lot of conversation with universities around the world when we speak about all these kinds of things, but it's just for grabbing new customer, because we want to listen to them. We want to understand—they want to learn. Because this is the story. And also the fact that the company, the average age of the companies, the 30 years, help a lot, because, as you said before, Golden Goose not only has a Gen Z representation quite big, but also has a lot of young talent that comes to work with us. We have an academy in Marghera, the former HQ, that basically every day receives a lot of requests to participate of courses that we do on a biannual basis, to become cobbler, to become dream maker, and also just to be part of our family. We do these kinds of things.

Michelle Stevenson 29:49

Yeah, I'm sensing a theme here—across all of you—of really going to the source, right? Like Bri, you've created your council. You know, Vinay, you're doing this social listening. Jess—obviously in your own house—as I think for many of us who have kids, you know, get that firsthand experience. Has that—is that—a different transition for some of you, for the brands, to be looking at it, to have that direct

connection with the customer, and be able to utilize those insights maybe faster than you would have if you had gone through a typical product marketing cycle?

Jessica Sibley 30:27

I think for us, it's more of an internal issue in making sure that we're not too far ahead, but ahead of kind of culture and experiences and how consumers are consuming information, which is constantly and only changing in media. And I think for me as the CEO, is to make sure that we are leading in these areas, that we are taking risks, and we're not focused on our legacy. We want to celebrate our legacy and celebrate the history, but not let us—not let it weigh us down. And it's so easy to say, Oh, we're going to innovate and innovate, and we can't just say that. We have to do it and just pushing the organization. I say you have to change the minds, and if you can't change the minds, you just have to change the people. And we're doing that. I think AI is a really great example of that. We are really leading in AI, in terms of internally, how we're leveraging it. Obviously, our journalism will always be human made, but there are so many ways that we can be more efficient as an organization and then deliver better experiences and better product with AI to build a future that no one else—we couldn't have even imagined. So I think it's the consumers are always ahead. They're always there. If you think about how many are on ChatGPT, how many are using Gemini, how many are using Copilot and not using maybe Safari and not using Google in the way that you've been using it all along? Like, how do we be part of that ecosystem? How do we be part of—instead of search, it's now answer. How do we be part of the answer ecosystem, as opposed to just either doing nothing or litigating or just saying we're going to hold on to something that just isn't going to exist much longer. And so we've really tried to do deals, have a seat at the table and embrace this technology and just get real with the way that the world is right now, and be part of it. And so I think for us, it's like less about—if we do that, the customers will be there.

Michelle Stevenson 32:59

So we're talking—Hayfa, with a lot of brands here that have global recognition. And I mentioned at the beginning that RIVET has funded about 1,100 entrepreneurs, 80 percent of whom are 25 or younger. Can you talk about the other end of the spectrum? What are the small businesses, small ideas that you see being really meaningful to young people who are coming through you for funding and partnership?

Hayfa Sdiri 33:29

So we fund across five issue areas, and I would say that those issue areas have been very interesting to young people, and they grow in interest primarily because they matter, because if you don't solve the problems that these issue areas provide, then we're probably all going to struggle—doom and gloom today. The first one is Climate Sustainability and Climate Change, as all of you are probably aware. Second is Education. The third is Inclusion—so for everyone to be included globally, but also within their communities. The fourth is Health and Wellness, and that includes mental health, but also actual health issues, physical health issues that the world struggles with. And the fifth, which is very important and underfunded, is Poverty Reduction. And I would assume most of you know that if you are in extreme

poverty as a young person, then your whole future generations are sort of stuck at the extreme poverty level. It's really hard for you to move beyond that unless you have a good push. So it's important for RIVET and for other financial institutions to provide that first push. So within these five issue areas, we find a lot of projects and businesses run by young people all over the world, starting from a \$250 grant. So our first access grant is actually under \$1,000—it's a first yes, it's a boost for these young people to fail, because everyone deserves to fail, to try something out, and to come back with as many learnings as they can. If they succeed, then they get a boost grant, and they get a scale grant, and then hopefully they'll be connected to come to all of you guys, and for you to be able to invest in them. And so to answer your question, those five issue areas are right now what matters most, and we really need to come together, brands included, to hopefully solve them.

Michelle Stevenson 35:24

So poverty reduction—what would be an example of a project that you funded to combat that issue?

Hayfa Sdiri 35:32

So I will talk about Stan Lee, who is a young guy from rural Nigeria, from slums in Nigeria, and we gave him initially \$250 grants. And the problem that he wanted to solve at the time was education, for people to get educated and do their homework. Then he realized that the issue was the fact that they didn't have lights, and so at night, they could not do their homework because they didn't have access to electricity. And so he came back to us—not with a solution, but with the learning, with an insight. Then we gave him a little bit further funds. So the second grant he received was \$1,000—and with that, he could start working on—I don't know if any of you know, the plastic bottle lights that they created. So he managed to start a business doing that, and he sold those products. And then he realized that he's facing another problem now, which was the fact that he cannot start a production line or a factory with a small grant that we gave him initially. So he came back to us, and then he got a scale grant. And then with that, he started putting together the science packs—you know the science packs that you get, but for young kids to create their own lights with those. And now he just raised \$500,000 actually, from the EU with an initial grant of \$250—which is solving not only the education problem, but also the poverty reduction problem.

Michelle Stevenson 36:59

That's amazing. I encourage everyone here to check out the RIVET website if you want to read some of these incredible stories, because there's some amazing innovation that's happening by young people right now. And right now, we are sitting in Abu Dhabi. About 47 percent of the population of MENA is 24 or younger. So let's specifically talk about youth in this market. Bri, you mentioned you'll be moving in from a retail perspective next spring, but Abu Dhabi this weekend—F1—can you talk a little bit about that?

Brieane Olson 37:27

Yeah, Pacsun has been partners with Formula One for the last four years, and this weekend marks our first entrance with MAF Group into activating trackside in an experiential way for consumers and bringing Pacsun through this very particular moment in time, which we don't consider necessarily just a race—it really goes far beyond it. It is a cultural moment. And so far, the reaction has been fantastic. I was looking at photos earlier of the lines lining up to purchase the Pacsun collection. So that's been very special. And we're just really so grateful to be able to be here to celebrate that amazing activation. Furthermore—I just wanted to add—I think that where we are with the youth market today, we are moving from a moment of social listening being a key tool to actually your customer being potentially your strongest salesperson, and we're seeing that across social commerce. And so we've seen that with our Formula One product. We've seen that with our denim, but certainly thinking about your consumer in a completely different way, and understanding the way that commerce can revolve around them as your best brand advocate in this new social commerce space is something really important to consider.

Michelle Stevenson 38:41

You've been very active and very successful in the social commerce space the past few years—right?

Brieane Olson 38:48

Yeah, we amassed almost 2 million followers by 2020 on TikTok and then evolved into TikTok Shop, where we will sell nearly a million pairs of jeans so far on the platform. So it certainly is a third arm of revenue, and an area that we really think, from an economic standpoint, is offering, you know, a lot of opportunities to young consumers to be able to story tell and also earn income based off of that—so.

Michelle Stevenson 39:21

That's great. Jess, you are coming into the market as well. I believe you have an event tomorrow. Can you talk a little bit about what TIME in this region looks like and why the time is right now?

Jessica Sibley 39:38

Yeah well, we, as I mentioned, we have our largest audience in our 100-year history, global, 30 percent is coming from outside of the US, and we have 45 percent are 35 and younger. So for me, it's like, it's very linear. We have the brand. It's about who we're writing about, and then who's reading us. And so we have a really exciting sort of focus area, which is on people. We get access to people to sit down with us, to tell us their stories. I use Taylor Swift is the example I'll use, Bad Bunny. He gave two interviews. He'll be the Super Bowl performer this year. He's one of the biggest artists. We did an all Spanish interview, an all Spanish cover. We had 500 million impressions and got picked up by CNN Español and Telemundo. So we want to very intentionally expand internationally. We are looking for a local language partner in this market to launch TIME Arabia. So we are having meetings on that topic while we're here, and we're really

excited to be recognizing again, calling out Jamie Salter, Zach Brown, Alexis Ohanian, in our TIME 100 Impact black tie gala tomorrow night. We're focused on those individuals who are leaders in their respective communities and are making a huge impact. And I think when you look at what you know, Jamie has done with Authentic Brands and really reinvigorating some of the most iconic, most incredible brands in the world and bringing them new life. It's really inspiring, building a company by himself, with a great team, with a great family. Those are the people. Those are the stories that we're looking to tell. And I think one of the big themes here is that we're all great at storytelling, and so when we're able to tell great stories, we inspire people, and the youngest generations are the ones that are looking for that now the most.

Michelle Stevenson 41:54

That's terrific. Is there a way that you're approaching this event tomorrow that's slightly different, because it's a big event here in Abu Dhabi versus some of the events you've held?

Jessica Sibley 42:06

This was a perfect opportunity for us to be here when so many of the most important influential people are here for Milken, and the opportunity for me to be on that stage, on this stage. So thank you very much for that to tell the TIME story, and then also F1, and then there's a really incredible new Conference Bridge, which is the intersection of technology, media, culture—I'm on that board. So to be able to have our event, kind of as the premier opportunity, and gala—gala to gather individuals who are here for these different reasons in Abu Dhabi is just, it's great for us. We've been in the region for many years. We partnered with the Museum of the Future and the entire team in the UAE, and particularly in Dubai, all around AI and artificial intelligence around the World Government Summit. So we just want to continue to expand and be in this region, including Saudi Arabia and many others.

Michelle Stevenson 43:11

So we've got about two minutes left here. I'd like to just go down the line. Everyone's got about 30 seconds. But I'd love to understand how investing in this community now—youth as an audience for you—you see growing that relationship over time.

Sandro Baggiani 43:29

Yes, that's very important, because clearly—and thanks for the question—investing into the Gen Z and Gen Alpha surely will grant, hopefully, the future of the company. Because we are lucky, because we can serve from 15 to more than 60. Okay, this brand is loved by many generations. So we have to keep investing in the younger generation to make sure that they continue to follow us and get some, no, funk with us.

Michelle Stevenson 44:01

Well, and it's interesting, because they feel like you're one of the—those brands that both young people and the parents can wear.

Sandro Baggiani 44:11

Parents and also grandparents.

Michelle Stevenson 44:21

[overlapping voices]

Sandro Baggiani 44:23

It's very democratic. We're not following the fashion. Our Superstar—I mean—was born in 2007, is now major age, 18 years old, and is still the same. So it's 40 percent of our business. So we're lucky. Thank you, everybody.

Vinay Menda 44:43

I think—to a point that was made earlier—Gen Z is really your brand amplifier. For brands like Blank Street or any brand that goes for youth culture, 99.9 percent of content of your brand is going to be not your own content. So what that means is the power of storytelling has left a brand and is in the hands of the consumer. And in this age of AI content taking over the world, I think human authentication and validation of what is real will be even more important and allow influencers to have even more of a say in what people are consuming.

Michelle Stevenson 45:14

Bri—I did have to stop wearing Pacsun, but I get to take my daughter there now.

Brieane Olson 45:20

Pacsun's core consumer is really 16 to 24, and so we've been very intimately close with Gen Z, and the real focus now for us is on Gen Alpha. I think one of the things that's really important is to not lump those two together. They are very different audiences. They are behaving very differently. Their motivations intrinsically are differently. And one was born digitally native, and the other adapted into it. And so I think the delineations are very interesting, and to have more research on Gen Alpha will help guide us further. And I would encourage everyone to check out the Pacsun Youth Report, which is in the app.

Hayfa Sdiri 46:00

This is all music to my ears. I love the fact that everyone is deciding to further invest in Gen Z and Gen Alpha. If you ever want to fund young innovators globally, you know who to go to, and hopefully together, we get to solve the world's most pressing challenges, because we don't have time anymore.

Michelle Stevenson 46:28

Absolutely. Thank you, all of you, for spending your lunch with us. We hope you all learned as much as we did up here. So thank you.

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