

Gen Z: A First Look at the Next Generation of Graduate Business School Candidates

Move over, millennials—Gen Z is making its way into the candidate pipeline, and things will never be the same.

August 2018

Time marches on, and as it does a new generation comes of age. Believe it or not, Gen Z—defined here as the generation born between 1996 and 2012—is beginning to complete their undergraduate degrees and make their way into the business school candidate pipeline. Though perhaps not yet, the attitudes, preferences, and aspirations of this generation are destined to drive changes large and small to global graduate management education (GME).

For the first time here, GMAC Research is able to provide high-level survey findings related to Gen Z candidates' journey to business school. The data shared in this research brief is based on the survey responses of 1,317 Gen Z mba.com registrants, as well as 7,466 millennial mba.com registrants, shown here as a comparison group. Details about the sample can be found at the end of this brief.

This early look at the next generation of business school candidates examines their decision-making timeline, financing plans, program choices, influencers, post-GME professional plans, and media behaviors.

Decision-Making Timeline

Gen Z candidates currently in the pipeline first considered GME nearly two years before the completion of their undergraduate degree, on average. After this first consideration, Gen Z candidates tend to move through the pipeline at a slightly slower pace than their millennial counterparts. For instance, on average, Gen Z candidates take three more months than millennial candidates to generate a list of preferred programs after their first consideration of GME and take one more month on average to complete the final phase and enroll.

Median months spent at each phase of the decision-making timeline,* by generation

Phase of the decision-making timeline	Gen Z	Millennials
Precontemplation (Completion of bachelor's degree to first consideration of GME)	-22	8
Contemplation (First consideration of GME to list of preferred programs)	9	6
Preparation (List of preferred programs to first application submission)	4	4
Determination (First application submission to enrollment)	8	7

*Negative number indicates the second event occurred before the first event.
GMAC (2018). mba.com Prospective Students Survey. Data collected February-December 2017.

About This Research Brief

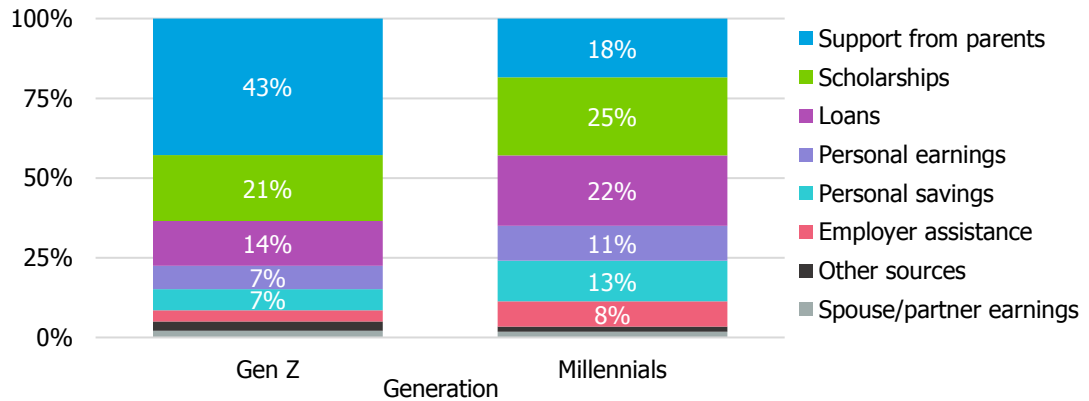
This brief shares data from the mba.com Prospective Students Survey collected between February and December 2017.

School professionals at institutions that accept the GMAT® exam can access an interactive data report at gmac.com/prospectivestudents that enables users to filter the data by a variety of characteristics, including generation, gender, citizenship, residence, program type considered, and study destination intentions. It is recommended that school professionals use the interactive report to drill deeper into the overall findings shared in this research brief to understand differences across candidate characteristics.

Financing Plans

Overall, a smaller proportion of Gen Z candidates report having reservations about debt (37%) than millennial candidates (48%). This may be because Gen Z’s parents are covering a significant amount of their education-related expenses—nearly 4 in 5 Gen Z candidates will receive financial support from their parents (77%), on average covering 43 percent of their total costs. On average, Gen Z candidates plan to fund less of their GME with loans and scholarships than millennial candidates.

Average financial resource distribution, by generation



GMAC (2018). mba.com Prospective Students Survey. Data collected February-December 2017.

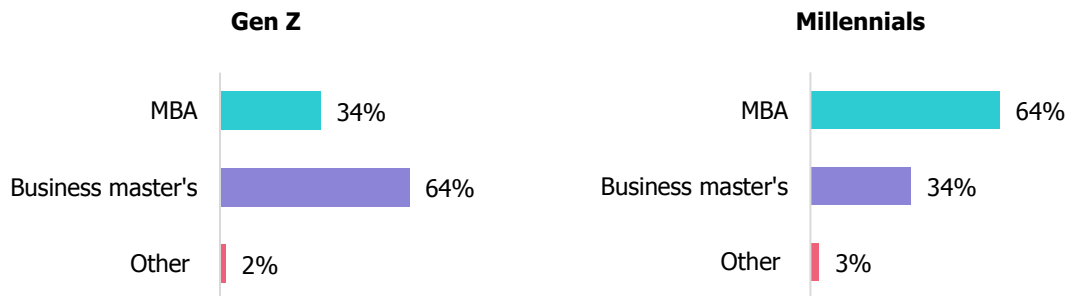
Program Choices

Like millennial candidates, the largest proportion of Gen Z candidates is considering both MBA and business master’s program options. However, more Gen Z candidates are exclusively considering business master’s programs (40%) than exclusively considering MBA programs (16%) and nearly 2 in 3 say they prefer a business master’s program type (64%).

Program types considered, by generation



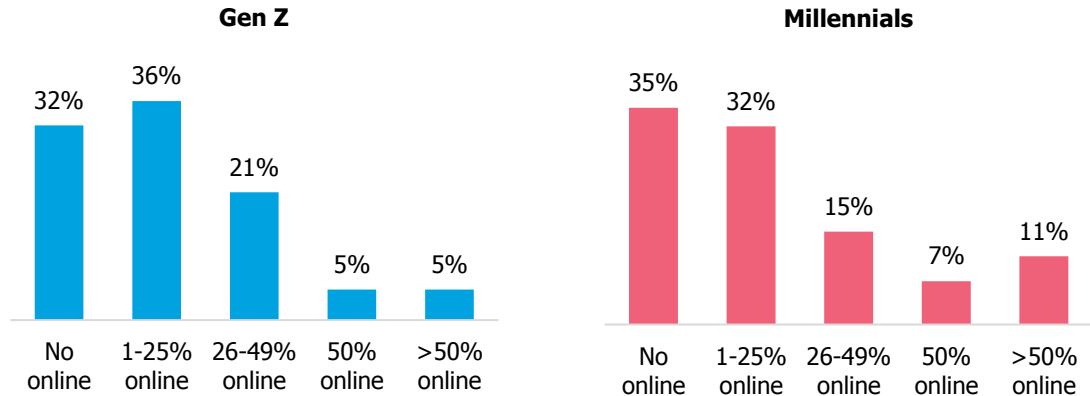
Program types preferred, by generation



GMAC (2018). mba.com Prospective Students Survey. Data collected February-December 2017.

Gen Z candidates overwhelmingly prefer full-time programs (91%). The largest proportion prefer programs 13-18 months in length (43%), though more than a quarter prefer shorter (30%) or longer (27%) program durations. Like millennial candidates, most Gen Z candidates want a limited amount of online coursework. On average, Gen Z candidates say they want 20 percent of their coursework delivered online, about the same as millennial candidates (23%). Around 1 in 3 Gen Z candidates say they want no online coursework (32%).

Desired proportion of coursework delivered online, by generation



GMAC (2018). mba.com Prospective Students Survey. Data collected February-December 2017.

While enrolled, a larger portion of Gen Z candidates than millennial candidates plan to pursue internships (79% vs. 65%), part-time employment (48% vs. 40%), study abroad (40% vs. 36%), and independent study (25% vs. 17%).

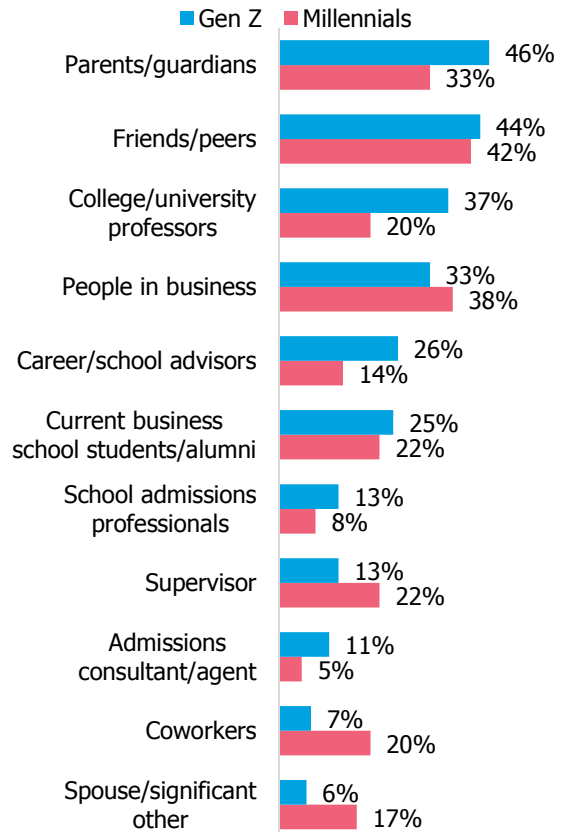
In evaluating alternatives to traditional GME programs, 53 percent of Gen Z candidates report that they are considering graduate certificate programs in business, a greater proportion than millennial candidates (41%). Half of Gen Z candidates are considering pursuing a new job instead of enrolling in business school (50%), a smaller proportion than millennial candidates (63%).

Influencers

More Gen Z candidates than millennial candidates report that their GME decision making is influenced by their parents (46% vs. 33%) and college or university professionals, such as professors (37% vs. 20%), career services staff (26% vs. 14%), and school admissions professionals (13% vs 8%).

Millennial candidates are more likely to be influenced by their supervisor (22% vs. 13%), coworkers (20% vs. 7%), and spouse (17% vs. 6%).

Influencers on GME decision making, by generation

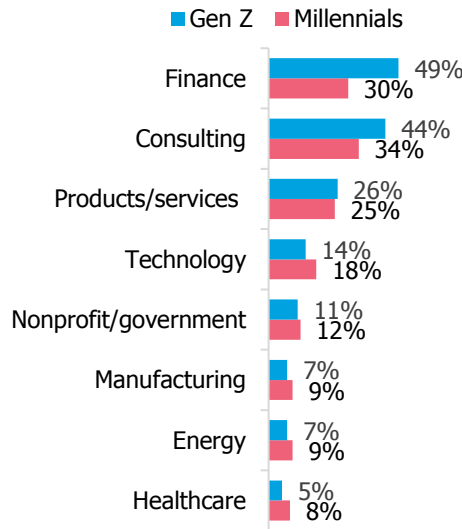


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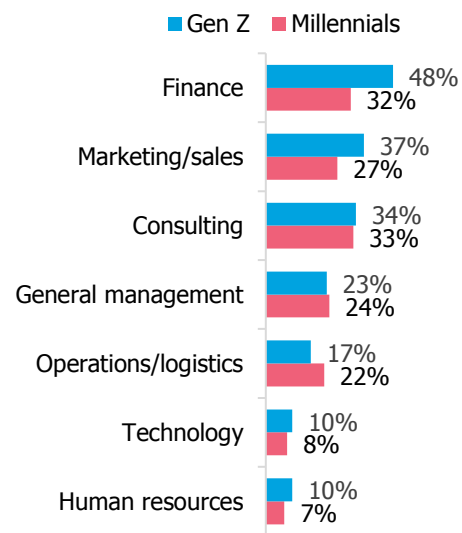
Post-GME Professional Plans

Nearly half of Gen Z candidates are interested in pursuing employment in the finance (49%) and consulting (44%) industries after completing their GME. Their top job functions of interest are finance (48%), marketing/sales (37%), and consulting (34%).

Industries of interest, by generation



Job functions of interest, by generation



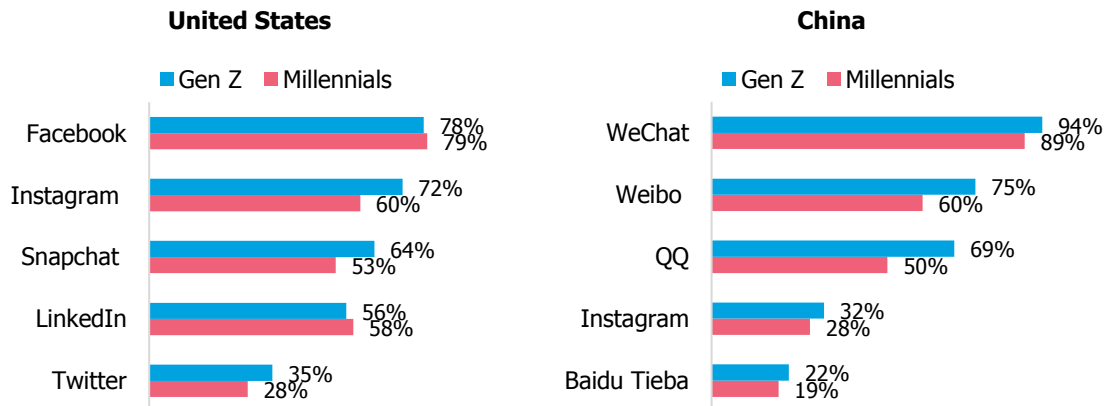
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Media Behaviors

Most Gen Z candidates regularly visit news sites online (67%), but fewer do than millennial candidates (74%). Gen Z candidate read magazine articles online (36%), print newspapers (28%), and print magazines (26%) about as frequently as millennial candidates. Most Gen Z candidates follow business and finance (60%) and international news (53%), and a greater proportion of Gen Z candidates than millennial candidates follow lifestyle (35%), fashion and style (34%), and entertainment and celebrity (32%) content.

As is true of millennial candidates, Gen Z’s social media use varies considerably by world region. To demonstrate differences across region and generation, shown below is the top five social media platforms Gen Z candidates use at least once a week among US and China residents. Details of other regions’ social media use can be found in the interactive report.

Social media platforms used at least once a week, by generation and residence



GMAC (2018). mba.com Prospective Students Survey. Data collected February-December 2017.

Sample Details

The survey responses of 1,317 Gen Z mba.com registrants (born between the years 1996 and 2012) and 7,466 millennial mba.com registrants (born between 1981 and 1995) are featured in this research brief. Additional details about the sample can be found in the table below.

Generation	World Region of Residence	N	Gender		
			Male	Female	Other
Gen Z	Africa	31	12	29	0
	Australia & Pacific Islands	5	3	2	0
	Canada	24	6	18	0
	Central & South Asia	270	169	100	1
	East & Southeast Asia	419	93	325	1
	Eastern Europe	33	12	21	0
	Latin America	4	1	3	0
	Middle East	12	7	5	0
	United States	327	116	210	1
	Western Europe	173	95	78	0
	Global	1,317	524	790	3
Millennials	Africa	465	310	155	0
	Australia & Pacific Islands	5	33	21	0
	Canada	24	155	149	0
	Central & South Asia	270	777	302	0
	East & Southeast Asia	1,079	472	605	2
	Eastern Europe	33	83	84	0
	Latin America	4	255	162	0
	Middle East	12	135	81	0
	United States	327	1,466	1,311	8
	Western Europe	173	496	320	3
	Global	7,466	4,219	3,234	13

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