

## Brands, stop relying on stereotypes to connect with Gen Z

Brands need to stop relying on tired stereotypes and start paying attention to the data if they want to connect with South African Gen Z, who view cash as king, with credit is hard to come by and side hustles often bringing in more than 9-to-5 jobs.



Source: © Student Village [Student Village](#) *The Gen Z Economy Report: Cash, Culture and Clout*, is a new research report on how young people in South Africa earn, spend, save and think about money

They are also not sitting back waiting for a break; they are making a plan and figuring things out for themselves.

So says *The Gen Z Economy Report: Cash, Culture and Clout*, a new research report that shows how young people in South Africa earn, spend, save and think about money.

The report shows a generation shaped by financial pressure and economic uncertainty, but full of grit

It reveals how Gen Z is rethinking what it means to earn, spend and save, and why brands need to start paying closer attention.

From youth specialists, Student Village, that released the report in partnership with futurist, economist and business trends analyst, Bronwyn Williams of Flux Trends, the report is based on responses from over 90 South Africans aged 18 to 30.

“This generation isn’t broke, they’re building,” says Ronen Aires, CEO of Student Village.

“Despite limited income, Gen Z is navigating the financial system on their terms. They’re side hustling, saving, skipping the debt trap and making intentional, values-led purchases. They’re redefining what it means to be a consumer, a customer and a contributor to the economy.”



BIZTRENDSTV

RAPT BizTrendsTV: Student Village's Ronen Aires - Gen Z's disruption of the world

Danette Breitenbach 27 May 2025

## Key findings

- **Underemployed, not idle**

Only 16.6% identify as unemployed, with many blending studies, gigs and side hustles to stay afloat. not a job shortage but a redefinition of work.

- **The cash conundrum**

Eighty percent (80%) still use cash regularly, not because they reject digital, but because fees, access and trust gaps persist. Debit cards dominate online transactions, while credit remains rare and feared

- **Personal brand over possessions**

Spend priorities skew towards clothing, food and cosmetics, not for vanity but for value and identity. Self-image translates to social capital, influence and even job opportunities. Gen Z spends as much on clothing as they do on rent — image is currency.

- **E-commerce**

Young South Africans receive one to three online shopping deliveries a month, while 27.37% shop online four times or more each month.

- **Loyal but only to value**

Ninety-nine percent (99%) are on loyalty programmes, yet true brand allegiance is low. Deals, not emotions, drive repeat business.

- **Community is currency**

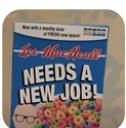
Income sources are shared from family and friends to NSFAS and romantic partners. Ubuntu isn't just cultural; it's financial.

- **Looking ahead with fear and hope**

A full 90.52% of respondents are saving regularly. The two biggest savings categories, savings for emergencies (25.75%) and savings for education (19.83%), hint at the fears and hopes of this generation.

- **Retirement? Not yet**

Just 5.5% are saving for their retirement. Retirement is simply not yet a priority for this generation.



BRANDING

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## A stark paradox

The report also reveals a stark paradox: most Gen Zs earn less than R5,000 a month, yet they are saving over a third of it. And nearly 30% are already dabbling in crypto, showing both caution and curiosity in their approach to money.

“Young South Africans are smart with their money.

“They’re saving, spending wisely and looking for real, direct relationships with businesses.

“What they want most is help figuring out how to earn more in a shrinking economy and how to grow what they do manage to save through smart investing,” says Aires.



RESEARCH

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## A wake up call

For sectors like banking, FMCG, retail and telecoms, The Gen Z Economy Report should be a wake-up call.

“This generation doesn’t want gimmicks. They want value, respect and relevance. They expect digital-first convenience, personalised service and ethical alignment.

“And if brands fail to deliver, Gen Z will scroll past, or worse, speak out.”

## A blueprint

Aires says this isn’t just a research drop. It’s a blueprint.

“If your brand wants to win Gen Z wallets, you need to understand the real lives behind them, rather than just stereotypes.”

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