FALL 2019-SPRING 2020

COMPASSION INTERNATIONAL CAPSTONE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bush School capstone consultants recommend Compassion International engage Generation Z (Gen Z), persons 18 to 25 years of age, via the creation of a Life Cycle Journey Map which places emphasis on engagement and relationship-building through enhanced use of social media that emphasizes storytelling. Gen Z has the potential to provide a broad range of support to Compassion International in a number of key areas – financially through sponsorships, volunteering at events, driving conversations on social media platforms, and through face-to-face engagement opportunities as they are available. Academic literature on the topic suggests Gen Z has different preferences for engagement with nonprofit organizations, and the proposed Life Cycle Journey Map is built to reflect those preferences. Specifically, members of this cohort are drawn to organizations who prioritize transparency. Different methods of transparency include detailed reporting on operations, how and where the organization spends money, proving accountability through reporting structures which show progress in delivered outcomes, and consistency in communicating how the organization is making an impact in the communities it serves. Gen Z is also passionate about and embraces new modes of communication that deviate from, and improve upon, older methods traditionally favored by organizations such as direct and electronic mail.

Though research focused on Generation Z is growing daily, there are currently many unknowns about this cohort. However, accessing the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics data provided an adequate understanding of this generation's economic influence within the nonprofit sector and in households. Other scholarly literature on the topic provided details which supported the key research areas of Gen Z, social media, and modelling a strategy for engaging and cultivating potential donors. Some limitations were identified, such as a lack of access to Compassion International's donor data and a lack of access to experts on the topic for face-to-face interviews. This could have been a complement for a heightened level of perspective in synthesizing findings. Compassion International has the opportunity to position itself for greater sustainability and growth in the coming years. Our research indicates that as members of Gen Z are positively engaged by Compassion International via a number of avenues, they can indeed become loyal financial donors and may also seek to engage in other meaningful ways beyond financial giving.

Meet the Team

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE RESEARCH
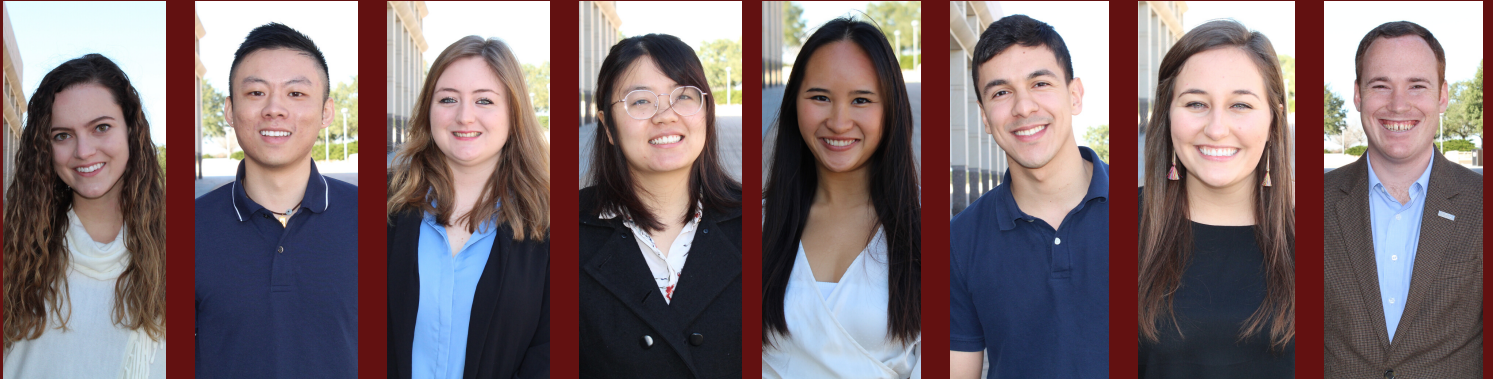
Katie Leach - Born in 1997, Generation Z
"I like nonprofits that have modern graphics and websites, and I support practical and faith-based work for deserving populations."

Congyi Dai - Born in 1995, Generation Z
"I am motivated to give to organizations that have transparent operations and share the same beliefs as I do."

Emily McGuckin - Born in 1997, Generation Z
"I aspire to work for an organization that protects our environment by advocating sustainable, equitable growth for future generations."

Jinhua Zhao - Born in 1994, Millennial
"I am willing to work in a harmonious team with passionate people and valuable goals to bring positive changes to people in need."

Emily Tucker - Born in 1995, Generation Z
"I have a passion for organizations that help and empower children, specifically in the area of foster care and adoption."

Jair Gonzalez - Born in 1997, Generation Z
"I like to have the impression an organization embraces modern and innovative ways of interacting with their donor base and employees."

Abby Trahan - Born in 1995, Generation Z
"I value nonprofit organizations that are intentional in communicating with donors in a transparent and personal way."

Will Horton - Born in 1994, Millennial
"I give because the responsibility is mine; I can't assume others will do the same."

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INTRODUCTION

The nonprofit landscape is evolving as Generation Z, a group of individuals in their late teens and early twenties, earns more disposable income and exercises greater influence on purchasing decisions in households (National Retail Federation, 2019). Bush School capstone consultants partnered with Compassion International to help them understand who Gen Z is, how they can engage this young generation through social media, and what effects these understandings have on the Life Cycle Journey Map of Gen Z. This concept stems from academic literature, where the map is referred to as the Donor Life Cycle Model: a continuous process of planning and asking for charitable gifts, practicing good stewardship, and establishing ongoing relationships with donors (Seiler, 2016). The steps of the Donor Life Cycle Model are identification, cultivation, solicitation, stewardship, and retention. These steps inform the map that Compassion International uses to engage potential donors with their organization through the first point of interaction to the final stage of retaining or attritioning donors.

As this younger generation begins to volunteer in, donate to, and partner with the nonprofit sector, they will be increasingly important to the sustainability of nonprofits' operations. The academic literature on Gen Z suggests that they are digital natives who want to give their time and skills to a greater extent than previous generations have with nonprofit organizations. Gen Z is suspected to seek engagement opportunities through existing digital platforms within charitable organizations. Nonprofits who respond to these preferences can achieve more by also looking at data from the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics that establishes Gen Z's market presence and purchasing power. The consultants find this data to be informative to the final report and believe it provides the most relevant strategies for Compassion International as they seek to better engage the next generation of volunteers and donors.

Who is Compassion International?

Compassion International is an evangelical, faith-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to release children from poverty in Jesus' name. They have been fulfilling this mission for over 65 years, and have grown to be a billion dollar organization (Compassion International, 2019). They are based out of Colorado Springs, Colorado, and operate in 25 countries worldwide. Nearly two million children are currently sponsored through Compassion International, which involves providing for the children's emotional, physical, educational, and spiritual needs. By partnering with local evangelical churches in countries around the world, Compassion International reduces the amount of poverty present among children and adolescents.

Defining the Problem

Compassion International faces a growing problem of an aging donor base who is fairly homogenous in racial and gender composition, and who engages with the organization through somewhat limited communication methods. Direct mail and restricted engagement opportunities in the form of child sponsorships have largely characterized this organization, and these characteristics are not aligned with the preferences of Generation Z. Questions arise about Compassion International's sustainability because growth could slow down or even stagnate. Additionally, the primary donor base continues to age, while the younger base of prospects sought by the organization brings new demands and challenges. The literature on younger generations and Gen Z suggests that these individuals prefer to be engaged in different ways and give through different methods, and accordingly this problem requires a solution that is unique to a new generation.

Methodology

The consultants use secondary data from scholarly, peer-reviewed literature to better understand Generation Z, the Donor Life Cycle Model, and social media use. This is supplemented with publications from research firms and trade organizations to further develop these topics. The Gen Z profile consists of the most relevant characteristics from Gen Z which forms a persona of this group in the nonprofit sector. The Donor Life Cycle Model includes outreach to college campuses to help attract Gen Z into the five steps of the Life Cycle Journey Map (LCJM) with particular emphasis on the Gen Z persona. The academic publications on social media are the basis of four recommendations for the client's social media use as an enhanced communication tool with Gen Z which is incorporated through the LCJM. In Appendix I, disposable income data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and population distribution by age data from the World Bank serves as supportive materials to help the client better understand the issue they are facing.

Relying on literature and income data fits the timeline the consultants are operating within, while also aligning more with the nature of the final product. Survey administration and primary data collection proved to be less viable options. This was determined given the timeframe of the capstone project, the cost of survey administration, and existing data collection undertaken by the client. In addition, the consultants did not analyze primary data from the client because of client concerns related to proprietary information. Also, Bush School capstone consultants did not sign non-disclosure agreements by virtue of conducting research on behalf of a public university in the state of Texas. For these reasons, analyzing secondary data in both qualitative and quantitative forms was determined adequate in providing recommendations to the client that still answer the proposed research questions.
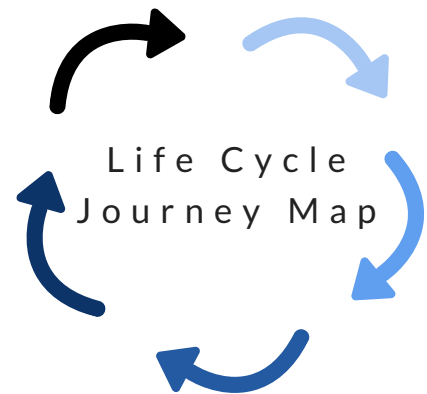
Findings

The Capstone consultants focused on three research question areas: Generation Z, social media, and the Life Cycle Journey Map. Bush School capstone consultants gathered academic literature to gain a deeper understanding of each area. These areas are the focus of our research questions.

Generation Z

Life Cycle Journey Map

Research Questions

01 What are the relevant characteristics of Generation Z that Compassion International should be aware of?

02 What factors are impacting Compassion International's social media interactions with Generation Z, and what strategies can be employed to enhance strong interactions and mitigate weak ones?

03 What modifications can be made to the Life Cycle Journey Map model for Generation Z that will better enable Compassion International to engage with this generation?

Generation Z

Research Question 1: What are the relevant characteristics of Generation Z that Compassion International should be aware of?

According to Pew Research Center (2019), Generation Z includes people who were born in and after 1997. Gen Z is the most diverse generation yet, with 48% being an ethnic or racial minority (Fry & Parker, 2018; Parker, Graf & Igielnik, 2019). They most likely exhibit lower levels of religiosity, as do younger Millennials (Pew Research Center, 2015a; 2015b). Gen Z has been shaped by a variety of factors. These include the economic hardships of the 2008 recession, terrorist attacks, financial scandals, and the dramatic shift in how the world communicates through the development of the smartphone and social media.

Generation Z is more financially conscious and realistic about the state of the world. The global financial crisis of 2008 may have had an effect on how Gen Z views spending and financial stability (Tulgan, 2012). This is relevant to nonprofit organizations who are interested in targeting this generation, as they will want to consider that Gen Z may be more frugal with their capital (TD Ameritrade, 2012). This may impact their charitable giving. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and wars that followed painted a dangerous and realistic picture of the world. These events compounded with the exposure to financial scandals have resulted in a greater need for trust and transparency (Schatteman, 2014). This need for trust and transparency will affect the philanthropic choices Gen Z makes when determining who to interact with and which organizations to give to.

Generation Z

Nonprofits who aim to attract Generation Z should consider the generation's philanthropic preferences. Gen Z values face-to-face interaction and appreciates genuine relationships and volunteer opportunities (Cho, Bonn & Han, 2018; Tulgan, 2012). In terms of specific philanthropic efforts, Gen Z prefers to support nonprofits that focus on youth and are less likely to donate to nonprofits that support the military and veterans (Blackbaud Institute, 2018). While Gen Z has grown up in an environment that facilitates non-personal interaction, particularly through technology such as social media, they still appreciate opportunities to build intimate, personal relationships.

Technology has been an important aspect of Generation Z's life and primarily influences how they communicate. Gen Z utilizes a smartphone for everyday activities, often using it for a variety of activities not related to communication such as entertainment and shopping (Palley, 2012). For nonprofit organizations, this relationship will be a critical factor in their strategy to engage and retain Gen Z.

BORN AFTER 1997

24% OF US POPULATION

Digital Natives

Generation Z is the 1st generation to never have lived without the internet.

MOST CULTURALLY DIVERSE GENERATION YET

TRANSIENT
ALTRUISTIC
CONFIDENT

2008 Financial Crisis

Financially Conscious

Born in the Aftermath of 911

Realists

Social Media

Research Question 2: What factors are impacting Compassion International's social media interactions with Generation Z, and what strategies can be employed to enhance strong interactions and mitigate weak ones?

Effective communication through social media is vital in developing a successful marketing strategy that targets the digital natives (Turner, 2015; Seemiller, 2017). Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and other emerging platforms present great potential for nonprofits. Not only do such mediums enhance engagement in their cause with Generation Z, but they also present greater fundraising potential, as online giving has increased significantly in recent years (Saxton & Wang, 2014; Waters et al., 2009). Below are four key recommendations, developed in relation to relevant literature sources on social media use for nonprofits.

1 Fundraising on Facebook can be optimized by promoting one time donations on nonprofits' Facebook homepages. Research suggests that unlike traditional donations methods, Facebook is likely to garner donations in smaller amounts, yet in greater volumes (Saxton & Wang, 2014).

2 Predominantly using short videos with on screen text could be an effective way to engage Gen Z and involve them in the cause of a nonprofit. Constructing a narrative through digital storytelling appeals to audiences' emotions and increases the likelihood of cause engagement (Hamilton, Rubin, Tarrant & Gleason, 2019; Robin, 2008).

3 By using the "Story" function on Facebook and Instagram, organizations enable audiences to engage with short videos or sequenced posts. Tracking audiences' reactions helps influence effective content creation and promotes an effective two-way communication style with social media users (Choy, 2017).

4 Have a cohesive, up-to-date and organization wide social media strategy that outlines target audience, posting guidelines, platform usage, and assigns clear departmental responsibilities (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2016; Mergel, 2012). This can assist in maintaining brand continuity and increase social media engagement (Effing, 2013).

Donor Life Cycle Model

Research Question 3: What modifications can be made to the Life Cycle Journey Map model for Generation Z that will better enable Compassion International to engage with this generation?

RETENTION

IDENTIFICATION

The Donor Life Cycle Model follows the journey of a donor through a continuous process. The cycle focuses on maintaining the financial support and commitment of an individual by using a holistic approach for the donor's journey and building a genuine relationship (Polivy, 2013). Identification is the process of researching prospective donors and understanding their potential willingness to offer financial support. Cultivation involves forming meaningful relationships with donors to turn casual supporters into lifetime donors (Bray, 2016; Sargeant, 2001b). After cultivating the donor, the organization makes a solicitation to secure a financial contribution. Once that donation is made, it is important to steward the donor through proper recognition and personal engagement (Metrick, 2005). Lastly, retention serves as a tool to help organizations retain donors, reduce costs, and build relationships. Through this model, relationships are built and the organization's fundraising capacity will strengthen. Bush School capstone consultants have created a Life Cycle Journey Map tailored to Generation Z based on the analysis of scholarly and informal literature. The modified Life Cycle Journey Map should be established around a college organization model. The college model allows Compassion International to utilize college campuses to strategically identify college students, build relationships with them, ask for financial support, thank them for their support, and ultimately retain college students to create loyal donors for the future.

CULTIVATION

STEWARDSHIP

SOLICITATION

Life Cycle Journey Map Tailored to Generation Z

IDENTIFICATION

Currently Compassion International has a summer internship program that employs students from around the world giving them meaningful experiences.

The Compassion International internship program will establish a new position for students at several universities called the New Generation Outreach Intern.

This new position will allow the student interns to focus their entire summer internships on building and creating a student organization tailored to their own university.

Universities and students can be identified through a strategic lens of universities that have thriving evangelical ministries or universities that offer classes that teach philanthropic values.

The Compassion International internship program can start with students from universities such as Baylor University and Texas A&M University, which are both universities that Compassion International is already involved with.

(Anderson & Kotler, 2008; Fry & Parker, 2018)

Life Cycle Journey Map Tailored to Generation Z

CULTIVATION

Once the student completes their internship as the New Generation Outreach Intern, they will return to their university and identify other students to serve as members of the executive team for the student organization.

The New Generation Outreach Intern and other executive members of the organization will leverage personal connections to grow their membership base.

A Compassion International employee who is similar in age to the students will assist the organization as needed throughout the year.

Compassion International will use an internal system, such as a Customer Relations Management tool for tracking the information of every member.

The student organization will build community through bible studies, cultural teachings, and by having Experience Compassion come annually (the student organization executive team will help manage the logistics of Experience Compassion at the university).

(Blackbaud Institute, 2018; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012)

SOLICITATION

The student organization members will participate in group solicitation through peer to peer fundraising.

The student organization will volunteer by raising money for a specific cause by engaging their peers in giving a one-time gift.

The student organization will collect all one-time gifts and present the larger gift for addressing a specific cause to Compassion International.

Additionally, if university students want to sponsor a child, there would be a college membership rate of $19 which would be matched by another donor, monthly.

Each student's information and donation should be recorded in the database. Having information about each student allows a pipeline of donors for Compassion International to make a solicitation for in the future.

(Cho, Bonn, & Han, 2018; Feng, 2014; Tulgan 2012; Mulder, Rapp, Hamby & Weaver, 2015)
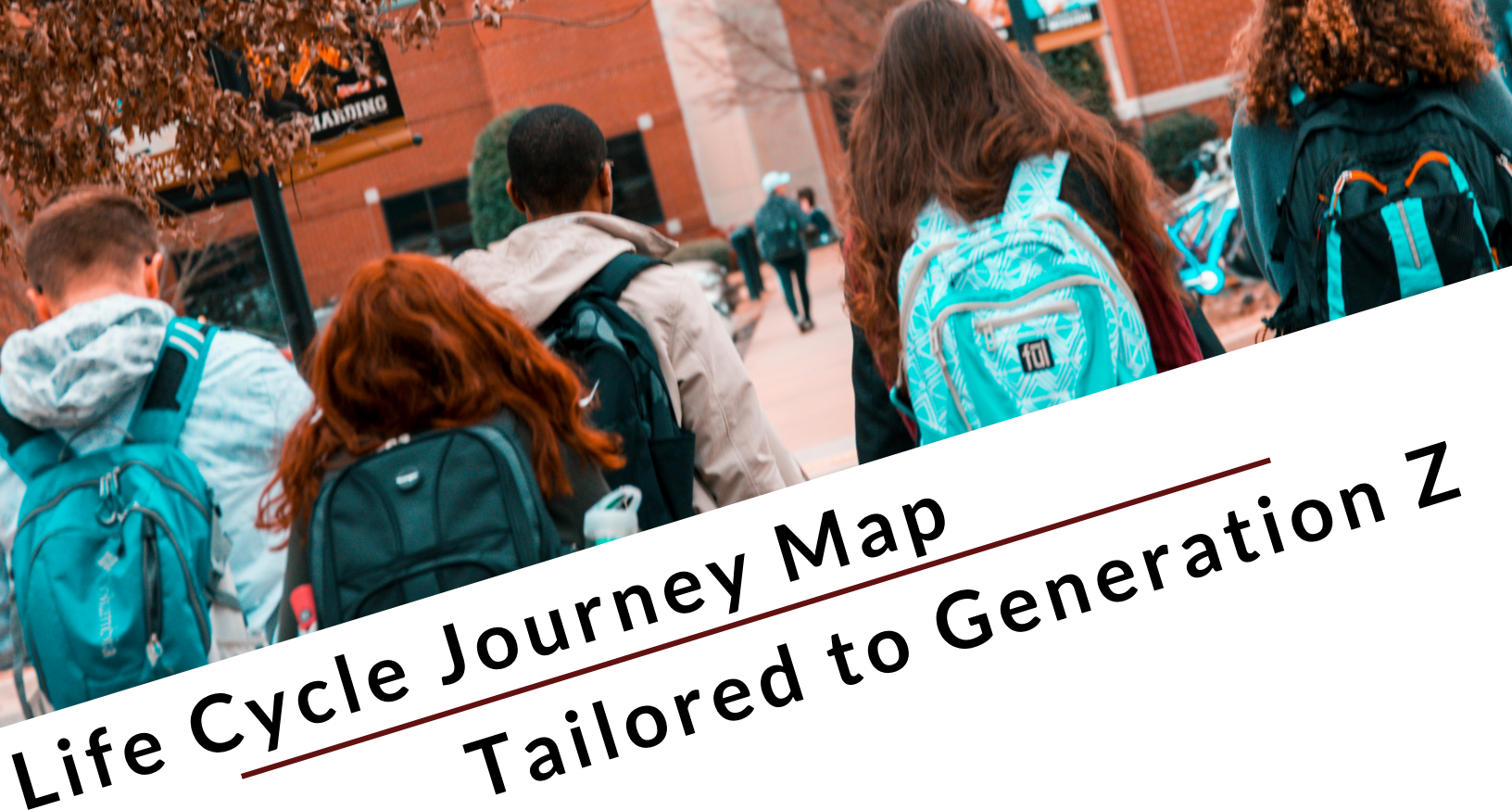
Life Cycle Journey Map
Tailored to Generation Z

STEWARDSHIP

The Compassion International employee that manages the student organization would communicate with the student organization by sharing a video with them that thanked the students at that particular university in a unique way.

All thank you notifications to the students in the student organization should be shareable on all social media platforms.

Tagging students in social media posts would lead to increased exposure of Compassion International.

(Blackbaud Institute, 2018; Choy, 2017; Feng, 2014; Merchant, Ford & Sargeant, 2010)

Life Cycle Journey Map Tailored to Generation Z

RETENTION

Provide impact statements for the students in the student organization to understand what their contribution did and how it changed the life of a youth served by Compassion International.

Continue to build community through the organization by hosting events and maintain communication between the New Generation Outreach Intern and Compassion International.

Maintain an accurate log of students who are members or who have donated to the student organization for solicitation post-graduation, allowing Compassion International to maintain relationships with these donors into the future.

(Seemiller, 2017; Waters, 2010; Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005)

Main Recommendation

The following section includes one main recommendation and two supporting recommendations that Bush School capstone consultants have created. These are based on academic publications and a greater knowledge of the client, Compassion International. These recommendations are designed to increase the longevity and sustainability of Compassion International, as they attract Generation Z into their donor base for increased financial stability in the future.

Main Recommendation: Implement the proposed Life Cycle Journey Map for Generation Z on college campuses.

L i f e   C y c l e
J o u r n e y   M a p
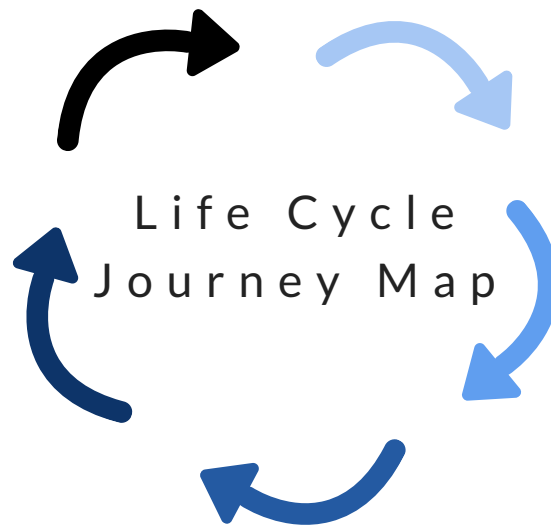
Based on the research gathered about Gen Z and social media, the consultants designed a Life Cycle Journey Map (LCJM) that is tailored to the interest and characteristics of Generation Z. This new design can help Compassion International accurately target Gen Z, form relationships with them, ask them to volunteer and increase fundraising efforts, while thanking Gen Z in a unique format. This entire engagement process will need to be recorded accurately in their Customer Relationship Management database to ensure the sustainability of Compassion International's future donor base. Using a college campus perspective in the LCJM will help people affiliated with Compassion International attract additional members to their organization.

Supporting Recommendations

Supporting Recommendation 1: Adapt the current practices of Compassion International to the Gen Z persona and their philanthropic preferences.

Tailoring practices of Compassion International to Generation Z will help Compassion International better address the issue of a homogeneous, aging donor base. The Gen Z target audience desires transparency and accountability, as shown in the Findings section. Accordingly, Compassion International can provide more detailed financial information in their annual report and on proposals and appeals to prospective Gen Z donors. These reports should be delivered in a way that makes sense to Gen Z. Communication will be more appealing if it's through texts, social media, or other channels. Traditional mailers are not as effective with this younger generation. As practices are modified for this younger generation, Compassion International will experience better responsiveness from Gen Z.

Generation Z

Supporting Recommendation 2: Apply enhanced social media practices that increases higher interaction with Generation Z.

Compassion International can enhance their use of social media tools and platforms and appeal to members of Generation Z. Increased use of digital storytelling and two way communication for increased interaction with prospective volunteers and donors will engage this target demographic. Being digital natives, Gen Z faces no shortage of competition for their attention. It is important for Compassion International to have a robust strategy. Posts that encourage interaction and feedback should be prioritized. Short stories that relate particular aspects of beneficiaries' lives to members of Gen Z can help get them more involved with Compassion International's mission. Testimonials from current donors and volunteers about what they find fulfilling in working with Compassion International can also be effective in persuading young people. Social media will also aid the New Generation Outreach Interns in engaging prospective members of their organizations.

Limitations

The unavailability of primary data from Compassion International encouraged Bush School capstone consultants to use other sources such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics. While a complete profile of Generation Z was formed, there are still unknowns about Gen Z's interactions with nonprofit organizations. Since college universities are where most of Gen Z resides, the consultants adopted a college model. However, limited research about university students' charity profile results in insufficient information about numbers of university students who contribute their time/money to charities. As more research is done on Gen Z and philanthropy, these limitations will be overcome.

Conclusion

The recommendations have created a pathway for Compassion International to deepen their engagement with Generation Z and build partnerships with this generation. Although some limitations in primary data and scholarly literature made information about Gen Z less accessible, Bush School capstone consultants still found relevant information that provided a more enhanced engagement strategy for younger people with Compassion International. Gen Z responds well to digital communications, and enhanced use of social media aimed at getting this generation more involved with Compassion International will be even more effective under the proposed Life Cycle Journey Map. Gen Z's influence within households and presence at college campuses makes them an attractive prospect pool for Compassion International. With appropriate methods that engage this generation at further levels than has been previously done, Compassion International can build a new generation of donors and volunteers that will bring greater sustainability to their organization for many years.

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Appendix

Supplementary Data

There are two factors that need to be taken into consideration when we try to diagnose the donor issue. It might appear that Generation Z is not as passionate as other generations when it comes to monetary donations, but what is keeping them from giving their money to charitable causes? Disposable income plays a role in this dynamic. In Figure 1 we see that the Millennials have significantly lower disposable income compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. This number might have also been dragged down by Gen Z. In Figure 2, the mean disposable income distributed by age, the age group under 25 where all Gen Z belongs has the least disposable income compared to all other age groups. There is certainly a correlation between age and disposable income. Hence, we can predict a growth in donations once Gen Z reaches a certain age.

The second factor related to issues in Compassion International's current donor base is aging. The human population in the United States in general is aging. With the advancement of technology in health care and better nutrition, life expectancy in the United States has been increasing. Figure 3 shows the percentage of the population age 65 and above from 1960 to 2019. In the past decade, the percentage has increased from 12.7% in 2009 to 15.8% in 2019, which is about a 24.5% increase in the total size of this particular demographic. This factor helps us understand the problem is not just about attracting younger generations but also recognizing that the population age 65 and older is expanding.
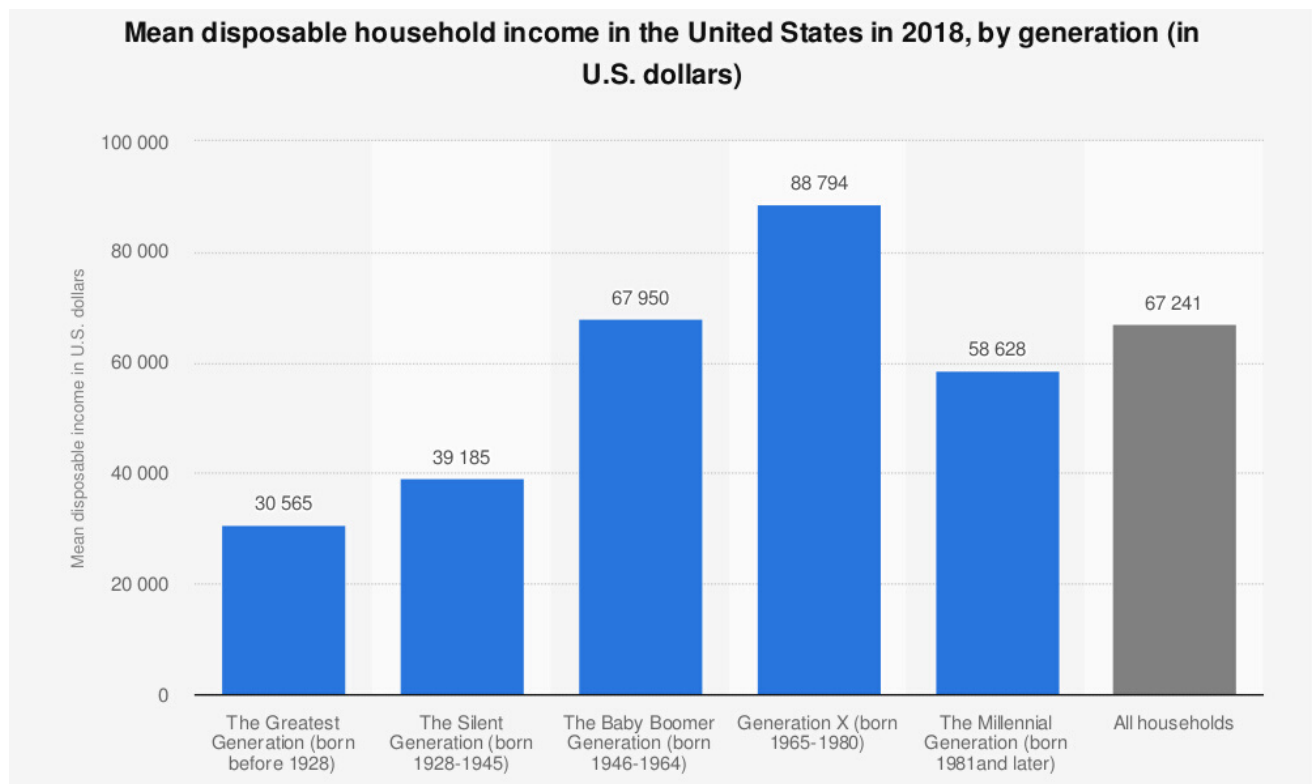

Figure 1. Mean Disposable income in the United States by generation in 2018.

Appendix

Mean disposable household income in the United States in 2018, by age (in U.S. dollars)
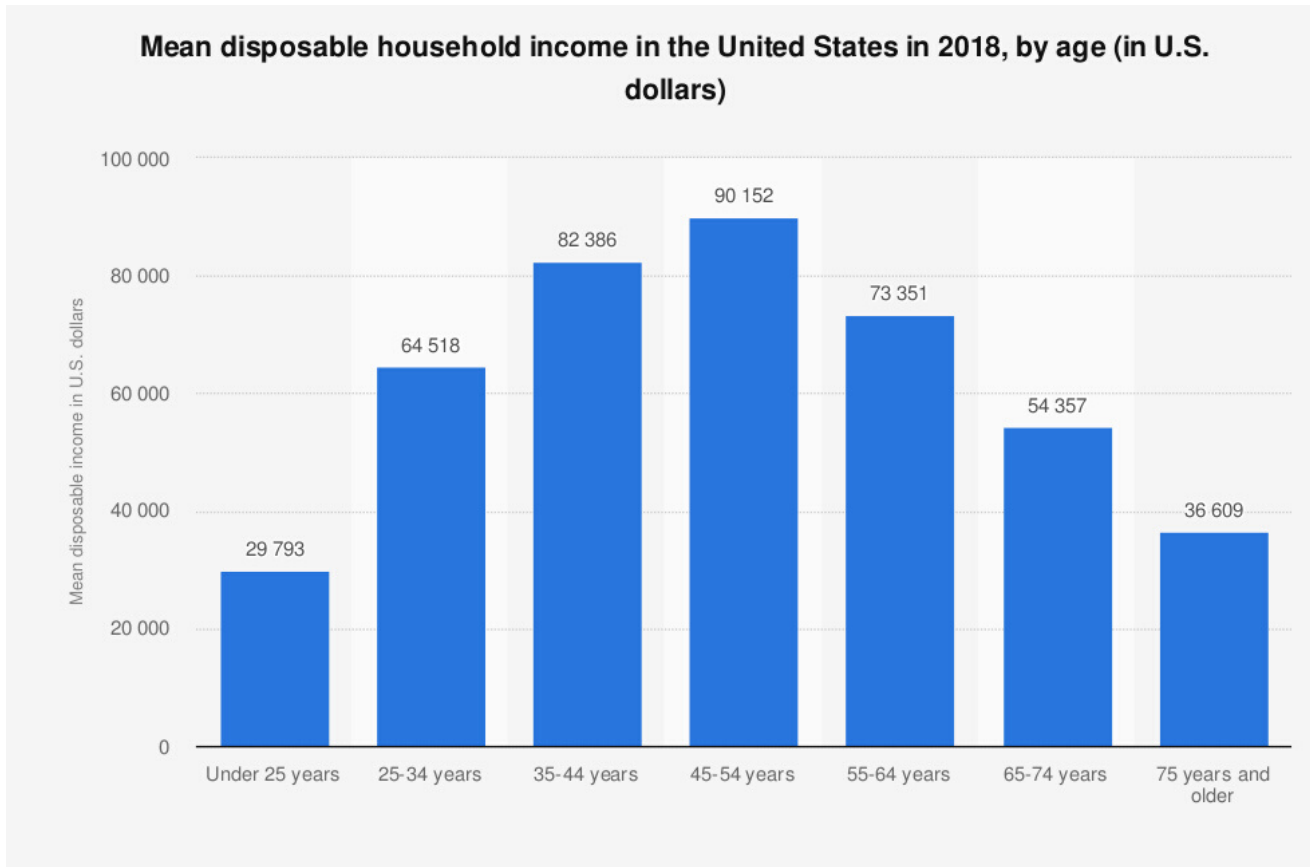
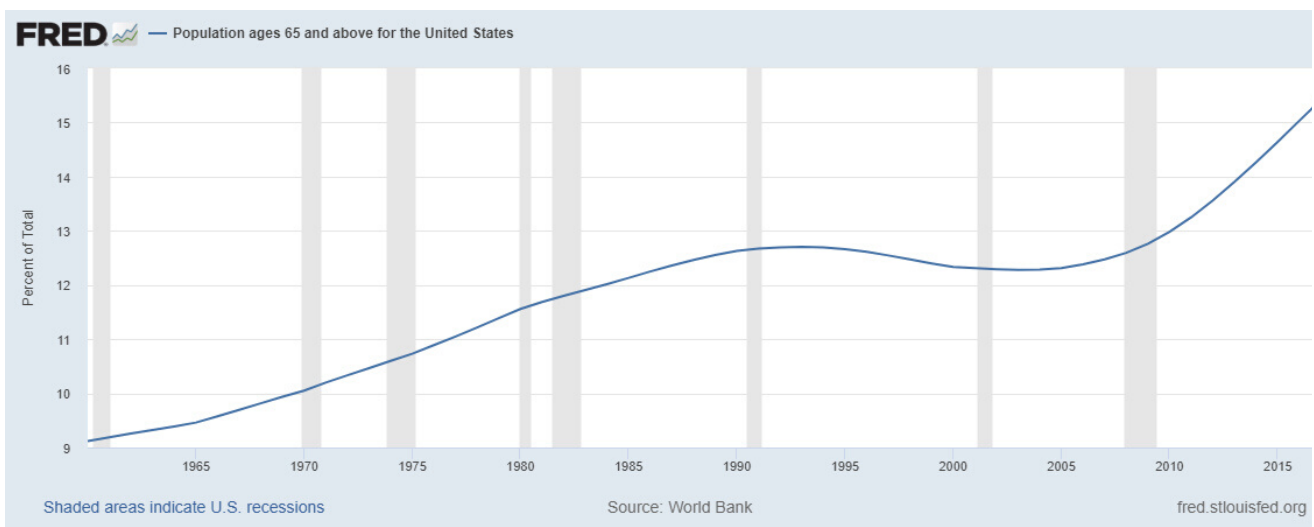Figure 2. Mean Disposable income in the United States by age in 2018.

Figure 3. The percentage of population age 65 and above in the United States from 1960 to 2019.