

A to Z of 2024: Youth rewrite social norms

In 2024, Gen Zs and millennials continued to push the boundaries of social norms in Singapore and around the world.

Yamini Chinnuswamy

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SINGAPORE – It has always been the case that young people drive societal change.

Some of the most famous founding fathers of the American Revolution of the 18th century were in their 20s. Alexander Hamilton, the first US secretary of the treasury, was said to be 21 when he co-signed the US' Declaration of Independence.

In 2024, Gen Zs aged 12 to 27 and younger millennials aged 28 to 43 continued to question and push the boundaries of societal norms and concerns, in Singapore and around the world.

One trend that hit the spotlight, underconsumption, has seen young people reject the rampant consumerism and materialism that drive modern capitalist culture.

In this lifestyle, people focus less on buying, and more on decluttering and maximising the use of existing possessions.

As public servant Jasmine Chin, 25, told *The Straits Times*: “I wanted to break free from buying unnecessary things, to have a more decluttered home and feel better about contributing less to the climate crisis.”

It is arguably also fuelled by the cost-of-living crisis, which has seen everything from essentials to luxuries becoming significantly more expensive – so much so that fast-food chain McDonald's will be charging for additional condiments such as curry sauce.

These pressures have popularised the Fire (financial independence, retire early) movement among the young, who are now hustling to make their first million – to hopefully buy their own homes, support their ageing parents and reduce the financial stresses of living in Singapore.

Some, such as siblings Sara Wee and Aaron Wee, have gone online to chronicle their journey to their first million.

The duo, aged 31 and 28 respectively, have detailed everything from business earnings to investment returns from revenue streams on their TikTok account, @theweeblings0. The account has more than 37,000 followers.

Financial stress is also driving Gen Zs and millennials out of Singapore.

Enterprising youth like 25-year-old Evelyn Teo are landing their first jobs outside Singapore, in a bid to escape to a slower pace of life.

“We look up at the night sky and see the stars every night,” Ms Teo, 25, told ST about life in California, where she landed a job as a pastry chef.

But there were existential threats that emerged in 2024 which overshadowed these other concerns for youth: loneliness and social isolation.

In January, a poll by the Institute of Policy Studies found that young people – particularly those aged 21 to 34 – are more likely to report higher levels of social isolation and loneliness.

The concern is not limited to Singapore. In November 2023, the World Health Organisation declared loneliness a pressing global health threat.

Some in Singapore are taking things into their own hands, starting initiatives such as Friendzone, which looks to foster conversations and community among young adults living in the same neighbourhoods.

Others, meanwhile, are taking to the virtual world; seeking connection and camaraderie through forums like Reddit – which serves all kinds of niche and broad interests, from pop culture gossip to Pyrex cookware – or by interacting with artificial intelligence bots such as ChatGPT.