

## From Screens to Streets: Reassessing Twenge's iGen through Morocco's Gen Z212 Movement

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### ABSTRACT

In her 2017 book *iGen*, Jean Twenge portrays the post-1995 generation as 'super-connected,' 'less rebellious,' 'less happy,' 'irreligious,' and politically skeptical, with mental distress and social disconnection that leave them 'completely unprepared for adulthood.' Drawing on Twenge's findings, this article investigates how Morocco's Gen Z212 movement uses digital platforms to advocate for political reform and improved social services. By applying Twenge's framework to Morocco, the article demonstrates that the generational traits often viewed as signs of passivity and disengagement in the U.S. can, in fact, become drivers of civic engagement when grounded in collective action and local culture. The discussion points out how growing up with technology, ethical reasoning, and getting involved in communal issues all work together, suggesting that digital immersion can both facilitate and impede youth capacity for action, depending on the situation. The article stresses the need to rethink assumptions about iGen's detachment across different global settings and calls for more research on the conditions under which Gen Z becomes more resilient, responsible, and engaged in community life.

**Keywords:** iGen; Gen Z; Gen Z212 Movement; Twenge's Framework; Generational Traits.

### INTRODUCTION

Jean Twenge's *iGen* (2017) examines how digital immersion and social media have affected the behavior, mindset, and life paths of those born between 1995 and 2012. Twenge asserts that iGen individuals have an extended adolescence, exhibiting heightened caution and psychological sensitivity, alongside diminished engagement in conventional religious practices and communal involvement (Nichols, 2018; Twenge et al., 2019). Though based predominantly on U.S. data, Twenge's work calls for examination beyond the American setting (Livingstone, 2018; Rodrigues, 2018).

Gen Z212 is a decentralized, leaderless movement of young activists that started in September 2025. They mostly coordinate on Discord, X/Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, showing how digital platforms provide young people with the power to become involved in politics and push for change (Laouni, 2020). The term "Gen Z212" derives from Morocco's calling code (+212) and Generation Z, reflecting the movement's local and generational identity. The protests began after six women died while giving birth at a public hospital in Agadir, which brought attention to the need for healthcare reform. This incident, along with frustration over joblessness, corruption, and the government's focus on World Cup infrastructure at the expense of vital services, galvanized the youth, by their testimony, to mobilize.

This study expands Twenge's analysis beyond the United States by investigating the applicability of her notion of iGen (or Generation Z) in non-Western contexts, particularly through the lens of the Moroccan Gen Z212 movement. Therefore, this paper investigates whether the qualities Twenge associates with iGen can be reframed as assets rather than weaknesses within the context of the Gen Z212 movement. In particular, the discussion addresses Twenge's findings concerning social isolation, mental health issues, political skepticism, and irreligiosity, examined through two lenses: (i) the Gen Z212 civic activism and (ii) the global scholarly perspectives on Generation Z. Being so, this comparative study centers around two significant inquiries, reflecting a bifocal reading of Twenge's iGen and Moroccan Gen Z212:

- **A Local Lens:** How do Twenge's five iGen dimensions, namely social isolation, depression, private empathy, political skepticism, and irreligiosity, manifest and transform within the Gen Z212 movement?
- **A Global Lens:** How do the reinterpretations of Twenge's five iGen dimensions in the Gen Z212 movement relate to global scholarly perspectives on Generation Z across different cultural and sociopolitical contexts?

## Literature Review

### Twenge's Gen Z

In *iGen*, Twenge asserts that social media significantly impacts Generation Z, resulting in increased psychological distress and physical susceptibility (Twenge, 2023). Twenge draws on data from four large-scale longitudinal surveys, namely Monitoring the Future, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, The American Freshman Survey, and the General Social Survey, to underscore significant generational shifts across diverse aspects of life. Various common themes underpin her analysis, including individualism, delayed adolescence, mental health challenges, digital immersion, social isolation, and pragmatic economic attitudes (Kring, 2018; Rodrigues, 2018; Tešmanović, 2024).

In this case, iGen's 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, *'Independent: Politics,'* is especially pertinent. According to Twenge, iGeners tend to be politically independent yet civically detached, expressing mistrust toward political structures, along with low voter participation (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016; Kring, 2018). At the same time, they display a strong ethical sensitivity, aligning with social issues rather than with political parties (Kring, 2018; Twenge, 2023). According to Twenge, social media has evolved into a platform for political activity as well as a filter, facilitating rapid mobilization while promoting shallow engagement (Kring, 2018; Loader et al., 2014). She concludes that iGen is *'informed but indifferent,'* shunning traditional political institutions while moralizing its discourse (Hodge, 2025).

### Moroccan Gen Z

In Morocco, the Gen Z212 movement represents a significant instance of youth-led initiative that uses competently digital networks to advance a wide-ranging reform agenda addressing healthcare, education, employment, anti-corruption, and political accountability. This movement demonstrates how iGen's defining traits, like super-connectedness and individualism, can be redirected from personal detachment toward collective action and social change (Gohn, 2018; Shah & Khan, 2023). By transforming online platforms into arenas of civic participation, Moroccan youth have reframed digital engagement as a moral and social duty (Amsidder et al., 2012). As with the majority of today's social movements, Gen Z212 merges online engagement—through messages, videos, and social media posts—with offline activism via protests and demonstrations.

The movement signals a new awareness among Moroccan youth of their relationship to power, responsibility, and activism. Gen Z212's discourse emphasizes equality, fairness, and accountability, echoing the same virtues that Twenge attributes to iGen. Nonetheless, the movement's digital form reflects a unique Moroccan flavor, blending humor, creativity, and cultural cues that allow young people to protest peacefully and within societal boundaries (Amsidder et al., 2012; Diouane & Amrani, 2023). This new wave of activism underscores the way digital-native youth in oriental societies in general, and Morocco in particular, reshape occidental generational patterns to their local contexts (Brouwer & Bartels, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Drawing on Twenge's *iGen* findings as an interpretive model, this research adopts a comparative thematic approach to explore Moroccan Generation Z (Gen Z212) (Twenge, 2017). The study evaluates the way Twenge's five identified characteristics, including social isolation, depression, private empathy, political skepticism, and irreligiosity, take shape and adapt within Morocco's cultural and political setting. This design prioritizes thematic

interpretation over cause-and-effect analysis, examining how shared generational patterns manifest and transform across cultures.

### Data Sources

This study employs a tripartite design that draws on digital, empirical, and theoretical data sources. Digitally speaking, this research reviews Twenge's (2017) *iGen* book, providing survey and interview data on U.S. youth as the primary comparative model (the American context). At the empirical level, the study utilizes publicly available media content from social networks—Discord, X/Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok—and Moroccan media such as *Hespress*, *Le360*, *Al-Mash'had*, and national television, reporting on youth campaigns, protests, and demonstrations (the local context). Theoretically speaking, this research leverages pertinent academic literature to contextualize Twenge's findings and Morocco's Gen Z212 experience within international generational patterns (the global context).

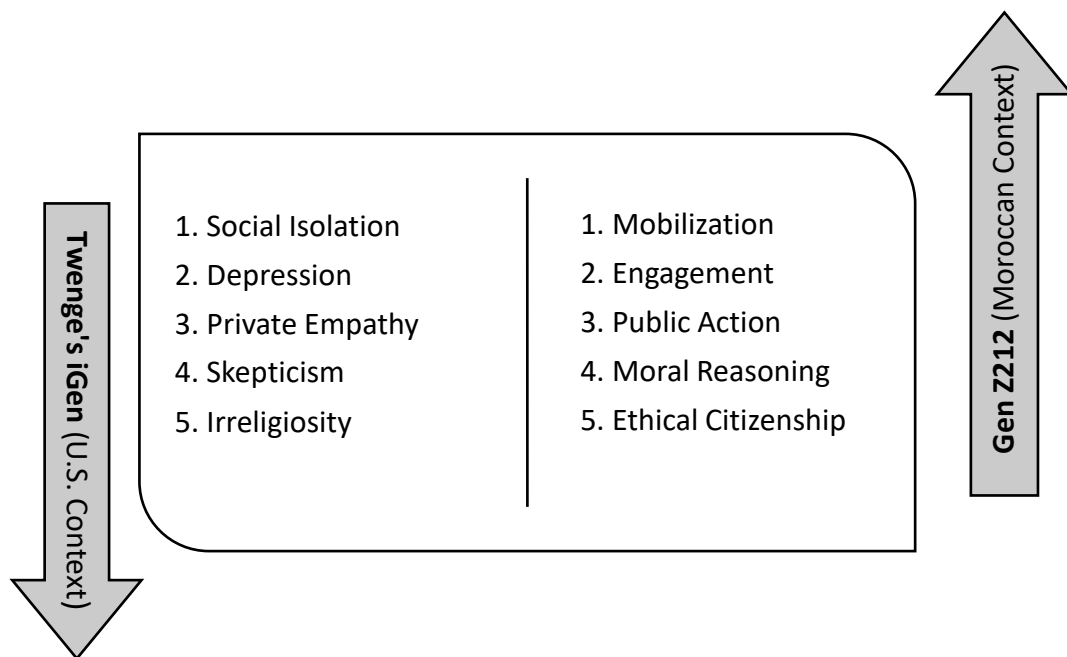
### Cross-Cultural Interpretation

Rather than establishing causality analysis, the study prioritizes thematic interpretation to examine the way Twenge's findings are shaped within the Moroccan sociopolitical context. Focus is placed on how attributes often linked to fragility, including social withdrawal, depression, or skepticism, are redefined as sources of mobilization, engagement, and moral reasoning, particularly when combined with civic awareness and collective action (Napriadi & Emiyati, 2024). This approach allows for identifying how global generational patterns are reshaped in local contexts, as well as context-specific youth traits and behaviors.

### Reliability and Validity

Multiple data sources were used to confirm that the results were reliable, and emerging themes were iteratively cross-checked against Twenge's established categories. The results were also continuously reviewed to minimize bias. To preserve ethical integrity and transparency, the collecting of data was limited to freely accessible digital content and to credible media sources. The credibility of interpretations was further strengthened by cross-referencing social media accounts with multiple news reports and scholarly sources to confirm authenticity and contextual consistency.

### Visual Representation



**Figure 1.** Comparative Thematic Framework: Twenge's Gen Z (iGen) vs. Moroccan Gen Z (Gen Z212)

Figure 1 applies Twenge's iGen model to investigate Moroccan Gen Z traits and behaviors. The figure reveals points of convergence and divergence between the two generational contexts. Specifically, it illustrates how Twenge's categories—social isolation, depression, private empathy, skepticism, and irreligiosity—are thematically reinterpreted in the Moroccan socio-political context. The arrows indicate the comparative analytical process, emphasizing thematic resonance rather than direct causality. Building on this comparative thematic framework, the following section analyzes how Twenge's iGen dimensions manifest, transform, or diverge within Morocco's Gen Z212.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### From Isolation to Mobilization

Twenge contends that extensive digital engagement, particularly with smartphones and social media, has replaced in-person interactions, resulting in increased loneliness and diminished social connections among iGeners (Twenge et al., 2019). As a result, Twenge's iGen is characterized by excessive smartphone use, often linked to social isolation. On the other hand, Gen Z212 shows how these same tools may be used to mobilize for social and political change. Young people in Morocco used Discord, X, TikTok, and Facebook to coordinate nationwide leaderless campaigns and protests. Digital platforms, which Twenge associates with passivity, are now being leveraged for mobilization. This disparity between Twenge's iGen and Moroccan Gen Z212 suggests that online individualism, rather than leading to mental problems, may evolve into collective networked activism (Rosmita, 2025).

### From Depression to Engagement

Numerous researchers, including Twenge, associate increased screen time and the culture of online comparison with growing rates of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress, all of which lead to the deterioration of mental health (Tiezzi & Tiezzi, 2025; Twenge et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2024). While Twenge emphasizes iGen's heightened vulnerability to loneliness, anxiety, and despair, Gen Z212 argues that these traits may be converted into socially conscious agency. Digital access and an understanding of social injustice enable Moroccan youth to identify problems, articulate solutions, and sustain collective initiatives. Psychological sensitivity corroborates Twenge's discovery of iGen's moral awareness while demonstrating its relevance to civic action. **Rather than being a hindrance, psychological sensitivity guides moral decision-making and civic engagement.**

### From Private Empathy to Public Action

Twenge's iGen asserts that Generation Z exhibits diminished empathy, heightened caution, and a reduced tendency for risk-taking; they prioritize safety over social interaction (Muthmainnah & Khasanah, 2025). She attributes their emotional fragility to the incessant stress of digital existence and excessive protection. Moroccan Gen Z212, on the other hand, manifests this sensitivity in alternative ways. What Twenge labels as private empathy was translated into moral action in response to the national outcry over the Agadir maternal tragedy. Through affectively compelling digital storytelling, Moroccan youth channeled their inward empathy (=feelings) into outward activism (=behavior), showing that Twenge's observed sensitivity can, in another setting, be turned into collective action (Rosmita, 2025).

### From Skepticism to Moral Reasoning

iGen, Twenge points out, exhibits minimal partisanship while remaining committed to social issues, favoring community-driven movements over traditional political institutions (Battocchio et al., 2023). Their political disposition, she explains, is characterized by individualism, libertarian reasoning, distrust of authority, and emphasis on social causes. Gen Z212 convert their skepticism into moral judgment by prioritizing decentralized activism and emphasizing moral accountability in political assessments. Their references to former parliamentary member Balafrej as a figure of moral and transparent leadership illustrate this perspective. Gen Z212 serves as the evolution of iGen's skepticism, as portrayed by Twenge, from questioning politicians and leaders to morally evaluating their decisions and actions.

### From Irreligiosity to Ethical Citizenship

Twenge reports a significant decline in religiosity among U.S. youth, explaining that iGen's disengagement from institutional faith stems from the rise of individualistic and egalitarian values (Baart, 2018). This pattern, however, unfolds differently among Moroccan Gen Z212. While they question religious authority, particularly in the aftermath of the PJD (Justice and Development Party) era, Gen Z212 still uphold Islamic values as a moral compass. Nevertheless, their faith manifests through social justice, community betterment, and concern for humanistic causes (Soleh & Kuncoro, 2023). In this sense, spirituality is not abandoned but reshaped, in that religious belief transforms to ethical citizenship. Accordingly, Twenge's account of iGen's declining religiosity is mirrored by Gen Z212's redefined spirituality—one that fuses personal ethics and active citizenship.

**Table 1.** Thematic Comparison Between iGen (U.S.) And Gen Z212 (Morocco)

| Theme                                    | Twenge's iGen (U.S.)                                         | Gen Z212 (Morocco)                                                             | Interpretive Insight                     |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. From Isolation to Mobilization</b> | Digital immersion leads to social withdrawal and loneliness. | Digital platforms become tools for coordination, visibility, and civic agency. | Digital immersion's negative connotation |

|                                                     |                                                                                          |                                                                                         |                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                     |                                                                                          |                                                                                         | transforms into networked mobilization.                                     |
| <b>2. From Depression to Engagement</b>             | Rising depression and anxiety are linked to excessive screen time and online comparison. | Psychological sensitivity enhances moral awareness and social participation.            | Emotional fragility becomes moral consciousness and civic motivation.       |
| <b>3. From Private Empathy to Public Action</b>     | Public concern is enabled; however, risk-taking mode disabled.                           | Empathy and outrage trigger public action (Agadir's hospital incident).                 | Private empathy is translated to public action and activism.                |
| <b>4. From Skepticism to Moral Reasoning</b>        | Political skepticism and individualism weaken traditional collective politics.           | Political independence fosters issue-based, decentralized, and morally-driven activism. | Political skepticism channels into moral reasoning and principled judgment. |
| <b>5. From Irreligiosity to Ethical Citizenship</b> | Decline in religion weakens shared ethical frameworks and social cohesion.               | Personal faith persists; redirected toward civic and digital ethics.                    | Spirituality is not abandoned; simply reshaped into ethical citizenship.    |

This comparative synthesis indicates how the generational characteristics Twenge establishes manifest differently when interpreted in the Moroccan context. Attributes that in the West often suggest retreat or vulnerability, such as isolation, depression, or irreligiosity, become engines of social cohesion and moral activism within the Gen Z212 initiative. The data suggests that cultural settings and local experiences dynamically shape and reinterpret so-called global generational traits. The following section elucidates the theoretical and societal implications of these cross-cultural reinterpretations.

## THEMATIC DISCUSSION

The Gen Z212 phenomenon in Morocco diverges from Twenge's primarily U.S.-centric vision of iGen. In iGen, Twenge argues that continuous exposure to digital media exacerbates social isolation, reduces face-to-face relationships, and compromises mental health (Cahyono & Adiawaty, 2025; Ejaz & Khaliq, 2025; Twenge, 2017). Gen Z212 proves that mindful digital engagement can convert connectivity into a tool for mobilization and social change. While digital tools and media outlets are increasingly replacing in-person communication, they also facilitate coordination, public awareness, and message dissemination. This finding implies that digital immersion is not bound to a single outcome; its impact hinges on the surrounding cultural and political conditions (Tamrakar et al., 2023).

The mental health issues Twenge associates with iGen—including isolation, depression, and stress from digital overexposure and social comparison—are echoed in Morocco, where youth encounter similar digital and academic pressures. However, Gen Z212 illustrates how heightened emotional sensitivity can catalyze empathy-driven and ethically motivated activism. According to Tamrakar et al. (2023), understanding of societal inequities, paired with digital engagement, allows youth to transform their anxiety into constructive civic participation. This trend aligns with Twenge's observation that, despite their psychological vulnerabilities, iGen youth exhibit significant ethical awareness (Liang, 2024). Within this framework, mental health struggles and effective social involvement coexist, especially when avenues for collective participation are available (Twenge, 2017; Twenge et al., 2018).

According to Twenge, overprotective parenting and digital saturation contribute to restricting empathy to the personal sphere (Mares & Kong, 2023). By contrast, Gen Z212 illustrates how emotional sensitivity can become a driver of public action when mediated through communal digital platforms. The national outrage over the maternal fatalities in Agadir demonstrates how private empathy, magnified via social media, can trigger collective ethical pressure and coordinated public activism. In this case, digital immersion does not weaken compassion but reshapes it, turning individual concern into collective action (Markham, 2025). This finding indicates that the emotional restraint Twenge identifies, instead of leading to disengagement, can nurture socially responsible behavior that transforms private/inner empathy into public/outward action (Anderson, 2022).

Twenge views youth's distrust of authority as an indicator of detachment from political and institutional life. The Moroccan Gen Z212, however, reinterprets this same attitude as moral reasoning. Rather than fostering disconnection, skeptics embrace distrust as a form of moral reasoning that prompts them to critically evaluate

political systems and figures, and advocate for transparency and responsibility. Their inclination toward decentralized activism and ethical leadership models such as Balafrej signals a redefinition of engagement (Robert-Mazaye et al., 2017). They do not reject politicians and institutions; instead, they evaluate them critically, guided by moral reasoning in their attitudes and behavior (Cherribi & Pesce, 2023). Their behavior indicates that, in a context framed by moral accountability, skepticism can mature into ethical and socially responsible leadership (Hartono, 2025).

Twenge interprets iGen's declining religiosity as a moral void, while, in the case of Gen Z212, it manifests as a commitment to justice and civic integrity. Digital spaces reframe their spirituality, grounding it in ethics and social activism (Ahmadvand, 2025). Gen Z212 also demonstrates an inner moral sensibility through which spirituality informs ethical behavior (Herzog & Beadle, 2018). Conversely, some critics warn that this transformation may result in a diluted form of spirituality, where practices reflect social trends rather than sincere convictions (Vukojević, 2020). This finding points to the possible dangers of a *'fragmented spirituality,'* aligning with Twenge's (2017) account of diminishing iGen religiosity. Ultimately, while digital spaces offer profound opportunities for ethical expression and community building, they also necessitate a vigilant approach to ensure that spirituality remains rooted in genuine values rather than mere trends.

Taken together, these findings emphasize the need to consider context when interpreting Twenge's framework. While characteristics like digital immersion, political skepticism, and irreligiosity are considered vulnerabilities in iGen, the Moroccan case illustrates how, in supportive contexts, the same traits can cultivate resilience, leadership, and ethical citizenship (Riard & Wallet, 2007). The Gen Z212 case demonstrates how available structures, moral principles, and communal engagement shape generational behaviors. Digital technologies, aligned with common societal goals, can support active, ethical participation rather than encouraging disengagement (Ahmadvand, 2025; Masripah et al., 2024; Twenge et al., 2018). In the end, characteristics observed in one country cannot be assumed to manifest identically elsewhere. Twenge's observations remain useful as a descriptive lens, yet fully understanding adolescent behavior requires integrating cultural and political factors.

## IMPLICATIONS

These findings suggest significant directions for educational, social, and academic institutions. To start, educational institutions should teach students how to critically evaluate and use media, including social media, online news, and digital platforms, so they can be responsible and active citizens in the digital world (Hauge et al., 2013). Furthermore, social institutions, especially families, play an important role in helping youth use media moderately and ethically (Nisa et al., 2024). They should also encourage adolescents to be independent and to engage in face-to-face communication to build mental resilience and social skills. In addition, the academic community should recognize that iGen traits—such as digital immersion, political independence, and ethical awareness—interact dynamically with sociopolitical contexts, producing distinct outcomes across cultures (Sampaio et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study portrays a generation intricately shaped by smartphones, constant connectivity, and shifting cultural values, as outlined in Twenge's iGen (2017). In the American setting, such attributes are typically considered reflections of psychological vulnerabilities, political skepticism, and declining religiosity. However, within the Moroccan context, Gen Z212 illustrates that the same traits can be drivers for social and political change. Digital immersion supports mobilization and storytelling, moral reasoning refines institutional involvement, and ethical citizenship anchors actions that blend ethics with social activism (Ahmadvand, 2025; Ophir et al., 2020). By linking Twenge's model to Moroccan youth activism, this study reveals how iGen traits are contextually framed rather than universally fixed (Herrera, 2012). In summary, adolescence presents both challenges and opportunities, requiring parents, educators, and academics to guide psychologically vulnerable, politically skeptical, and irreligious youth toward using digital tools moderately, responsibly, and strategically.

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## Authors' Contributions

Dr. Latifa Belfakir and Mr. Mohamed Essafi contributed equally to the design of the study, data collection, analysis, interpretation, as well as the drafting and revising of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest concerning this article.

## Informed Consent

N/A

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