

Report
Gen Z | Voice ON
ETERON

The Things We
Didn't Know
We Ignored
Regarding Gen Z

Oct. 2022

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Since its first publication in March 2022, Eteron's research on Generation Z has inspired commentary and has fueled a conversation on a topic that has recently begun to gradually emerge in the public sphere in Greece. As we often say at Eteron "the life of any research begins after its publication". This is why, in the second phase of the project "Gen Z | Voice On", we combined our initial research with multiple collaborations with Institutes, Universities and researchers, as well as initiatives of participation, interaction and co-production of knowledge and material together with young people.

Alexandros Minotakis is a member of the research working group and co-authored, with Anastasia Veneti and Stamatis Poulakidakos, the questionnaire and the initial report on the results of the research regarding Gen Z, which was carried out by Eteron in collaboration with aboutpeople. Having participated in all the design and discussions about the research during the second phase of the "Gen Z | Voice On" project, Alexandros Minotakis has prepared this paper on behalf of Eteron, summarising conclusions and delving into two of its main topics: the relationship between Gen Z and politics and that between Gen Z and the media.

Introduction

In recent years, interest regarding generations has increased both in Greece as well as internationally. Generations are used with increased frequency as an analytical tool in order to interpret political-cultural and other differentiations within the general population. At the same time, the reference to generation is in danger of becoming detached from historical and social determinants, thus turning it into a concept that explains everything but means nothing. With regards to Gen Z in particular, although there is no universal consensus, it includes everyone born between 1995/96 and 2010 - for the purposes of Eteron's Gen Z research, this resulted in a sample of people between 16 and 25 years old. This generation emerged at the spotlight of attention during the pandemic years. Although there is a strong interest in Gen Z, the fact is that media portrayals of Zoomers in particular rely mostly on stereotypes and/or an one-dimensional identification of the new generation as internet and social media users.

For our part, by launching the research project "Gen Z - Voice On", we sought to place the new generation in a historical context of significant changes and critical (economic, health, environmental and political) conditions. In this light, we examined Gen Z as the "generation of constant crisis" and profound distrust towards established institutions but also as the first "digitally native generation". The [research findings](#) provided valuable insights into Gen Zers' political stances (focusing on events that took place in the last two years), their political action both offline and online, their communication practices as well as their views on fake news. Of course, this data does not constitute a complete or conclusive picture of the new generation, but a necessary starting point for further research and critical reflection on the concept of generations.

In addition to the findings themselves, Eteron-Institute for Research and Social Change took the initiative to promote the research in many different ways, sparking a series of conversations and interventions that contribute significantly to exploring the characteristic traits of the new generation. Through discussions with academics from Greece and abroad, who have contributed significantly to the advancement of generation studies, as well as events at [universities](#), where Gen Zers are currently studying, and a series of workshops, we had the opportunity to present the research's findings, discuss and even challenge them.

More specifically, on 12/04, an [event](#) was organised with guests from research institutes, Greek and foreign universities, political youth organisations, the Press and other national media, in order to present and discuss the research's findings with collaborators

and institutions that are actively involved in topics regarding the new generation. Furthermore, on 19/05, a second original [event](#) called “Ok Zoomer” took place, in collaboration with [The Signal for Researching and Confronting the Far Right](#). The main findings of Eteron’s and the Signal’s researches were presented, Vyron Theodoropoulos and Irini Xygaki performed stand-up comedy and then a discussion followed among the panellists and young people. At the same time, presentations were made at universities, mainly at departments specialising in the study of communication and political participation, topics that are at the epicentre of the research in question. Thus, on 19/05 the research was [presented](#) at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies of the University of Athens, then, on 23/05, a lecture-discussion was organised at the [Department of Communication and Digital Media](#) of the University of Western Macedonia, followed by one at the [Department of Political Sciences](#) of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on 24/05.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding Eteron initiatives were the two workshops that were organised at the Eteron’s premises: the first one was on 15/05, in collaboration with [femicide.gr](#), the Greek section of the European Observatory on Femicide, and the second took place on 29/05 and focused on Gen Z’s relationship with the media and political participation. In collaboration with the team of [femicide](#), we examined the genealogy of the term femicide, the term’s inclusion in legislation and the media’s representation of gender violence. In the media workshop, we looked at issues around fake news, the use of social media and whether and how digital media could be part of progressive social change.

Both workshops had a dual character, being both educational as well as investigative. Following an open call on social media, there was a significant response from Gen Z members who were willing to discuss the topics in question. Each workshop contained 3 subtopics and at the beginning of each one, basic information on its focal point was presented, combining elements of research with definitions and concepts relevant to the respective field. Then, material, mainly videos and photos, from news reports and social media posts were presented. The videos were selected on the basis of their content (touching “grey” areas between politics/society/personal life or, for instance, containing hard-to-verify fake news) but also their aesthetics and presentation - i.e. following the codes and symbols used by the young generation through social media. Participants were invited to comment on the material and then discuss their own experiences, both with each other and with the organisers.

Having participated in all of the events presenting the findings, in my capacity as a member of the research working group, and also through my involvement in designing the workshops, this paper is an attempt to summarise the main elements and conclusions of this process, focusing on the research’s two central themes: Gen Z and politics and Gen Z’s relationship with the media.

A

Gen Z and Politics

A. Gen Z and Politics

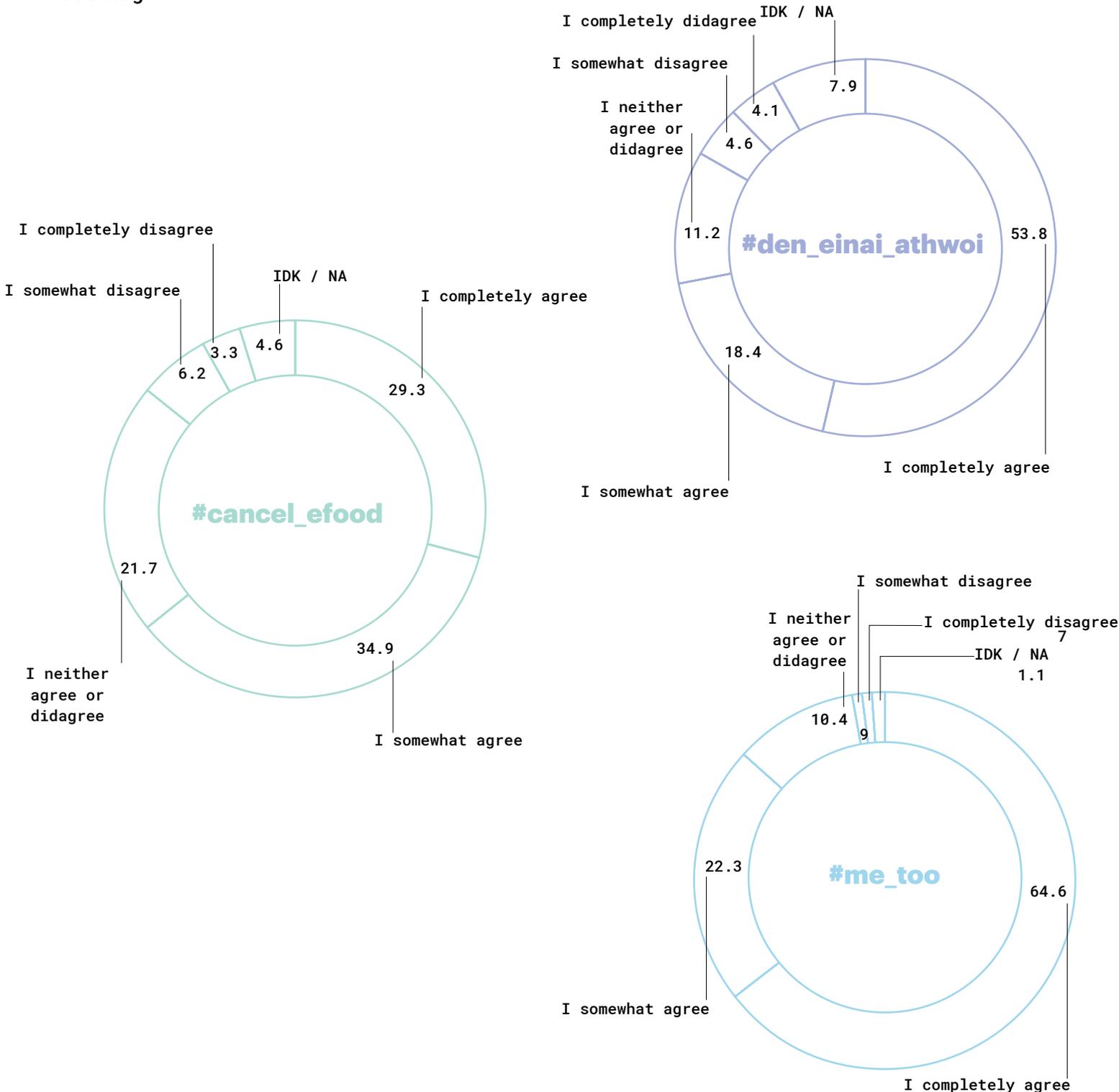
«The only constant in our case is that there's no constant at all - we live in the present»

**Workshop
Gen Z & Media
29.05.2022**

One of the main findings of the working group’s report regarding Eteron’s research [Gen Z - Voice On](#), is that it would be false to think of the new generation as “apolitical” or as being generally disinterested. This assessment is based, among other things, on the fact that the majority (55%) of young people who participated in the survey said they are a lot or very much interested in current affairs. At the same time, equally high are the rates of those who are interested (and concerned) in the issue of climate change (59.7% somewhat/a lot), the #MeToo movement (86.9% somewhat/ completely agree), the condemnation of Golden Dawn (72.2% believes that #they_are_not_innocent) but also more “traditional” issues of social inequality, such as the e-food workers’ mobilisations (64.2% somewhat/ completely agree with #cancel_efood).

Do you agree or disagree with this hashtag?

aboutpeople



On the other hand, there is a clear contradiction between a generally declared interest in politics and the limited (avowedly political) activity on social media (SoMe) - about 8 out of 10 say that they don't follow politicians, don't share political posts nor do they create their own political content. Our comparative examination of these findings raised legitimate concerns and interest for further research focusing on the question of "what Gen Z sees as politics".

What is important first of all is to think about the environment in which Gen Z develops political stances and practices and how it perceives it. We have already referred to this generation as the "generation of constant crises". Indeed, Gen Z grew up in a context of rupture with everything that was considered "normal" in the post-war context of Western societies, namely the ability of each generation to provide the next with better living conditions, greater stability and security in setting a life plan - in contrast, for Gen Z "the only constant is that there is no constant at all".

This condition defines an emerging radicalism with particular characteristics: it is oriented towards the present, opposes the established order on the basis of experience and emotion, and has an ambivalent attitude towards grand narratives.

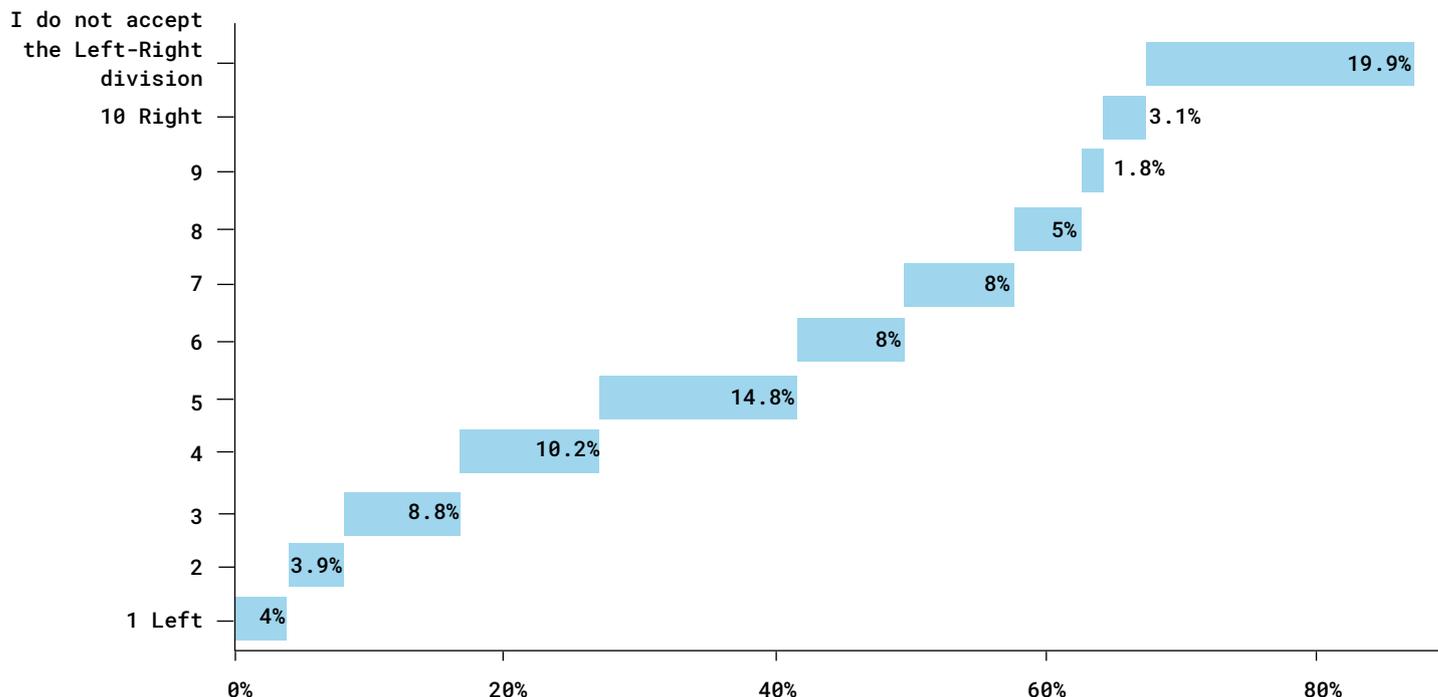
**"We know what
we oppose, but not
what we express"**

**"OK Zoomer" event
Institute Eteron
19.05.2022**

This phrase encapsulates the concerns of this radicalism that wants to express itself while avoiding symbols, terms and political identities of the past that it may feel burdened by. In the traditional Left-Right division, there seems to be a left-leaning tendency, as the relatively larger percentage (25%) placed themselves "to the left of the centre", while at the ends of the spectrum, the concentration is also greater on the Left (7.9% vs. 4.9%).

On a scale on 1 (Left) to 10 (Right), where would you place yourself politically?

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At this point, it is also interesting to compare the answers to the relevant questions given by people in the 17-24 age group who participated in [Eteron's first major research on the economy and social justice](#), which was published in February 2022. Notably, 35.7% said that the Left represents something good, compared to 21.6% positive responses about the Right - it should be noted, however, that in both cases, the majority trend was negative. Furthermore, in the same research and age group, 32.4% (compared to 38.2% who hold the opposite view) said that they associate the notion of neoliberalism with something good. This should be combined with the fact that about 1 in 5 (19.9%) refuse to place themselves on a left-right axis. In that sense, in his [article](#) published on Eteron's website, Antonis Galanopoulos reasonably invites us to reflect on what the relatively high rate of self-placement in the Centre signifies. Keeping all the above in mind, we'd rather speak of a left-inclined generation or a generation that is familiar with the themes of a left-progressive ideology but does not accept it in its entirety and, in any case, approaches it in an original way.

This is related to their distrust of ideology in general, as reflected in phrases such as the one quoted above (“we don't know what we express”). In a similar line, at the “OK Zoomer” event, the participants seemed to agree on the need for political action “on immediate issues”, without wasting much time discussing “ideology”, as we would put it in a more traditional approach. This can perhaps be interpreted as an influence of postmodernism and the conviction that we are experiencing the “end of grand narratives”. However, this is one side of the coin. Donatella della Porta, commenting on the findings from her own research in an [interview](#) with Eteron, spoke of a generation that does not have the time/ability “to sit for two hours in a room to talk about, say, generic issues” - therefore this, combined with new technical possibilities, leads to a preference for directness and rapidity.

But if we observe the “Ok Zoomer” event more closely, it is significant that as the discussion went on, ideology tended to return to the conversation, even though in disguise. Commenting, for ex-

ample, on specific activisms concerning the environment and gender oppression, one participant stated his need for “something that would bring them together”; the rest agreed without naming that “something” as being ideology. In fact, one of the participants pointed out that terms already exist for what they were looking for, and then used three “anti-s”: “anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism”.

This tendency is probably best described as “rationalised anti-systemism” which, as Yannis Balabanidis [comments](#), builds on the radicalism of the previous generation, the millennials, while at the same time modifying it. In this sense, the discussion regarding Generation Left (a term introduced into the international debate by Keir Milburn) should be seen more as a possibility than as a reality describing Gen Z. In an [interview](#) for Eteron, Keir Milburn states that this radicalism is fuelled by inequality and the generation gap, but also stresses the fact that Generation Left is a goal (for the Left itself) rather than an entrenched reality.

Moreover, this “rationalised anti-systemism” seems to be both fuelled and fed into cultural trends, such as the new generation's renewed preference for hip hop, which brings along a new wave of politicisation and socially oriented perspectives. An indicative example was Lex's gig earlier this summer that “forced” all mainstream media outlets to discuss it, as well as the massive presence of the younger generation at the Nea Smyrni stadium. Predictably, in their attempt to discuss the “Lex phenomenon”, the media's stance had a ring of that uncle pretty much everyone has, who wants to “hang with the young ones” at family reunions, and offered the public several front covers and news story coverages that served more as memorials to moral panic. We'll try not to imitate them and just hazard a guess. The lyrics of this “socially sensitive” hip hop bring to the fore social inequalities, marginalised groups and even individual aspirations, but always in the light of the struggle for survival. Gen Z's radicalism that has no clear ideological identity is understandably expressed through new musical currents, which engage in collective causes without being militant in the traditional sense.

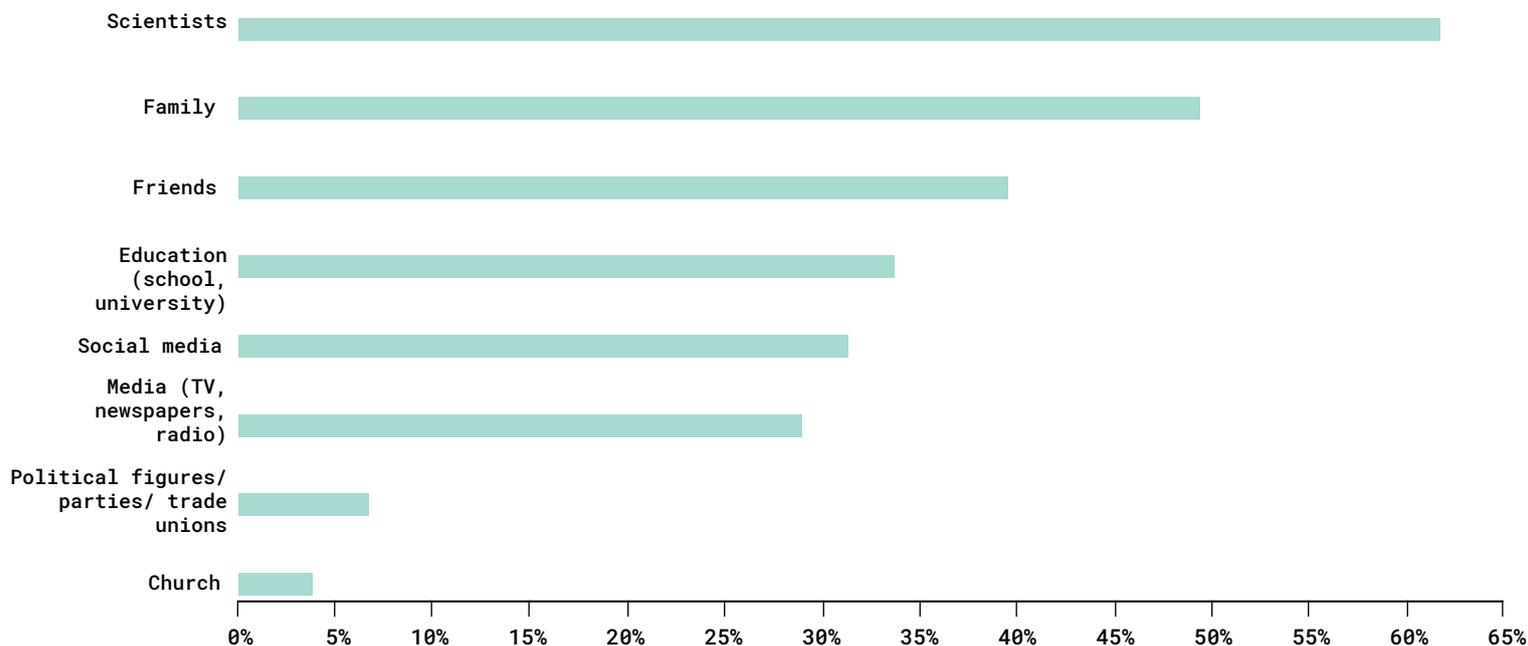
Attempting to detect the particular traits of Gen Z's political consciousness, it is important to examine how members of the new generation themselves view contemporary issues and social movements and whether and how they perceive them as fields of politicisation. Already from the examination of the research results, concerns had been raised concerning the finding that more than 3/4 of respondents stated that they do not share or create “political posts”. At the same time, however, as already mentioned, they are concerned about gender and climate inequality and agree with relevant hashtags shared online. In addition, 25% stated that they have participated in protests and rallies in the past year - a particularly high percentage for such a question especially considering the pandemic factor. After all, isn't that politics?

"How is the MeToo movement relevant with politics?"

During an Eteron event held at the [Department of Communication and Digital Media in Kastoria](#), the above question-objection was raised regarding Gen Z's new forms of political practices and in particular in relation to the #MeToo movement. Several female students agreed with this comment and (risking a misjudgement) it could be argued that they did not do so because they wanted to underestimate the importance of the movement but, on the contrary, because they considered the relevant complaints/ lawsuits, testimonials, and the movement to be particularly important and therefore, did not want to let them be “contaminated” by a correlation with mainstream political perceptions. Of course, this tendency to discredit politics has already been documented in the research findings where a very low percentage say they trust politicians and political parties (only 6.8 mentioned them among those

Pick the top 3 of the option below that you mostly trust regarding current events

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The distinction between social and political issues highlights yet another contradiction in how we discuss and research the young generation. Researchers often start from the position that in turning to movements and political concerns about gender, sexuality, cultural preferences¹, climate change and humanity's relationship with the natural environment, Gen Zers are acting politically, thus modifying the relationship between political and personal, private sphere and public life. In her [inter-view](#) for Eteron where she summarised her research on millennial and Gen Z movements, della Porta described a condition where the activism of the new generation “pays much more attention to the politicisation of the private sphere of life”.

This fuels the rise of the feminist movement which, as mentioned above, has a significant impact on Gen Z - this aspect was also highlighted in the femicide workshop where the participants' significant familiarity with the slogans and terminology of the feminist movement was evident. However, such an approach tends to be only partial and, influenced by the legacy of the new social movements, takes for granted that a feminist mobilisation is a political practice. Indeed it is - but it is not a given that this is how it is experienced by Gen Z. In practice, a more contradictory and complex condition emerges which, obviously, requires further investigation.

A case can be made here that could help us when considering this issue. Post-war societies had strictly established boundaries (public-private life, work-recreation, and so on) which made it easier to keep gendered (and other) oppression invisible. The new social movements of previous decades sought to render visible issues that were typically private (for example, gender inequality in domestic labour). This was a struggle to make private life an object of study and political contestation. However, these boundaries no longer exist or, rather, they are not as strictly or intensely set.

More so, for the new-media-savvy Gen Z, the relativisation of the boundaries between private and public life is technologically facilitated and, more importantly, culturally acceptable in many cases. Social media “train” users to develop a “transparent” self that shapes private time and space in a way

that can be made public². This difference is probably one of the reasons why publicising allegations of gender-based violence is not perceived as a political practice.

In any case, this distinction should not be seen as an unshakeable truth. Through discussions and workshops on the subject, it became clear that this is a contradictory and constantly changing position - just like the generation that expresses it. For example, while discussing the topic of online political participation, some social media posts (mainly from Instagram and TikTok) were presented in the workshop and participants were asked whether they fall into what they themselves consider “politics” to be. This initiated a discussion about what politics is for Gen Zers, how it is conducted online and, most importantly, how they view it. A [video](#) of a feminist protest against femicides or a [complaint of a sex worker](#) who was attacked was thus classified by the participants as “social issues”. However, when asked to comment on publications that related gender inequality to immediate demands (e.g. [legal recognition of same-sex marriage](#)), they were more easily classified as “political”. Coming back to the issues of the #MeToo movement or femicides (linked to the claim for legal recognition of femicide), with the above as a starting point, participants seemed more willing to acknowledge that these movements were “political”.

A particularly important aspect of the relationship between Gen Z and politics was highlighted by Assistant Professor, Eftychia Teperoglou, at Eteron's event at the School of Political Sciences of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on 24/2/2022. Prof. Teperoglou pointed out that each generation has particular characteristics of political participation, but can only be defined as a “political generation” to the extent that it manifests these characteristics in large-scale political events that change the terms of dialogue and political action. For Gen Z, this challenge is open; to the extent that the new generation acknowledges its actions (online and offline) as being “political”, its confidence and ability to leave its own mark on developments is reinforced.

A more specific aspect of the development of political consciousness is the stance towards issues concerning labour. Admittedly, the research and the subsequent events and workshops did not focus on the issues of Gen Z's work-related experiences. However, in light of the research findings regarding the #cancel_food hashtag, the participants showed interest in the issue and revealed some new areas for investigation.

When, during the workshop, they discussed a humorous video about the minimum wage and their preference for trap music, they unanimously considered the video to be political. This was somewhat unexpected because, up to that point, they had considered various videos and media posts that, in our opinion, had a clear political character, to be strictly “social”. When asked to interpret their stance, there was an initial awkwardness. One of the participants mentioned that “the government is the one that sets the minimum wage”, thus explaining why she thought that the video's topic was political. In any case, they seemed to identify with the video, as minimum wage was either a reality they've experienced at their jobs or something they thought they'd experience in the future.

According to the research findings, a high percentage (64.2%) somewhat or strongly agreed with the hashtag #cancel_food and as mentioned in the original report, “with youth unemployment at 39.1% in November 2021, the workers' strike demanding fixed contracts seems to have received significant support”. Sociologist of labour and labour movements Ruth Milkman, in an [interview](#) with Eteron, pointed out that Gen Z “shares” with the previous generation, the millennials, “a labour market in which precarious employment is increasingly the norm – made worse by the timing of their entry into the labour market during a major economic crisis.” At the same time the research was published, a strong current of unionisation emerged in the US in industries as well as in corporations (such as Amazon and Starbucks) where a significant proportion of the employees belong to Gen Z. There is already a discussion in the American public sphere about the relationship

between the new generation and trade unionism as well as about their increased interest in collective organisation in the workplace³. Even the very recent discussion concerning the “Great Resignation” has at its epicentre the young generation that refuses to work under appalling conditions, with low wages in the midst of a pandemic⁴. It is an open question whether Gen Z could be linked to a rebirth, in contemporary terms and expressions, of workers’ identity and demands.

However, the above should not lead to an underestimation of the impact that neoliberal ideology has on the new generation. In Eteron's research on the economy and social justice, when asked which social group mainly produces wealth (business owners or workers), Gen Z registered the highest percentage among all age groups (46%) in answering that business owners are the ones who mainly produce wealth. This generation is currently in the process of shaping consciousness and gaining their first work experiences and it is very likely that contradictory feelings of solidarity and collegiality coexist with the pursuit of individual advancement in positions of power/ownership.

In any case, the above could be the subject of a separate study. As Gen Z will move from schools and colleges into the workplace in an environment of precariousness and economic hardship, further research needs to be conducted on their attitudes towards work.

Gen Z & Politics

B

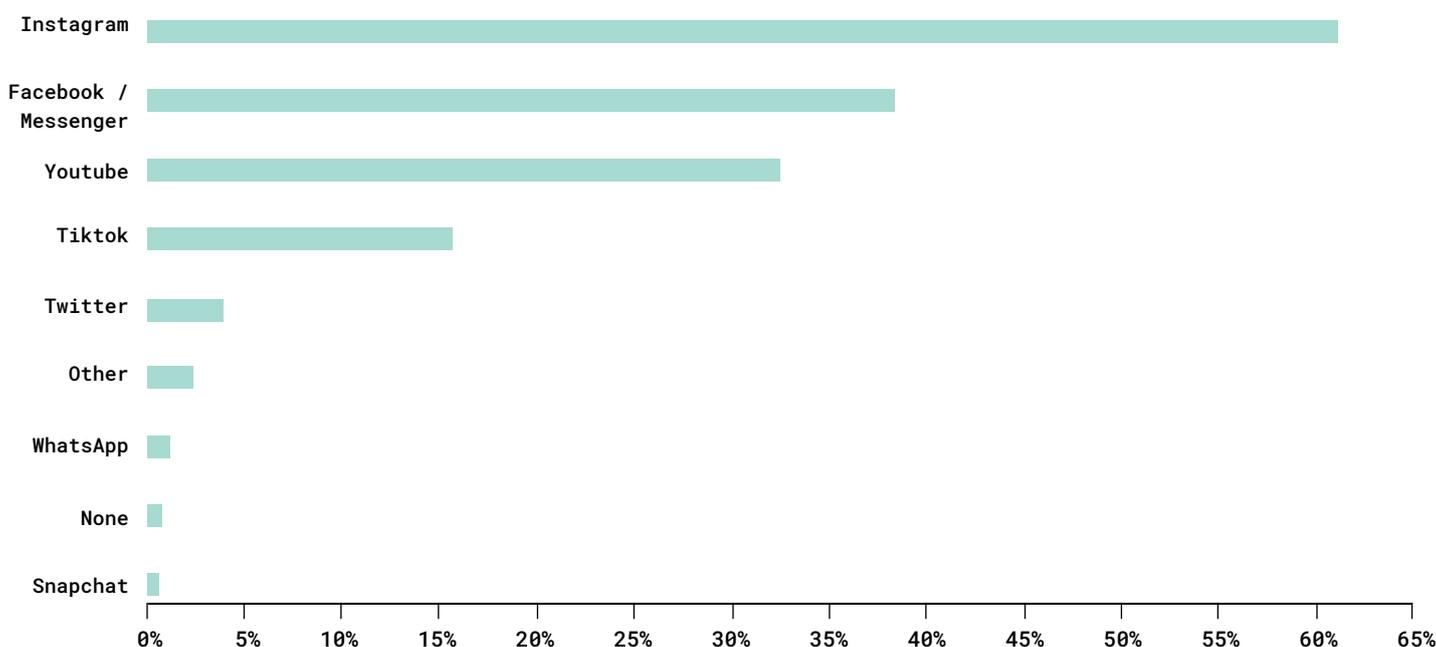
**An online
generation
rethinking
the internet**

B. An online generation rethinking the internet

One of the key assumptions about Gen Z that was disproved by the research findings was that it was solely associated with the use of the internet and especially social media. At the same time, we realised that this issue needs to be studied further, as Gen Z has indeed (also) been shaped by its special connection to new media, being the first generation to be indigenous to the internet and - more importantly - to social media and what is called Web 2.0.

Which social media platform do you use the most?
(Pick up to 2 options)

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At events and workshops organised after the results were published, Gen Z members showed particular interest in the part of the results that documented their communication practices, their preferred social media, etc. Some of the research findings were confirmed and developed through relevant discussions: several hours online every day, high diffusion of social media, a strong preference for image-based media with Instagram being the most dominant. The workshop discussion on Gen Z and media suggests that the survey findings (51.6% spend 5-10 hours a day online and 10.6% spend more than 10 hours) are likely an underestimation of the amount of time the new generation spends online. One participant asked the question “what does it mean to be offline?”, pointing out that, as he has his mobile phone constantly connected and never puts it away, the offline-online distinction may not be as clear as one might expect. This was aptly pointed out by Alexandros Papageorgiou in his [article](#) in Eteron, stating that “It would probably be better to think in terms of a continuum of digital-analogue presence, as if digital presence mediates and ‘colours’ all aspects of the young person’s experience”.

Social media is the preferred tool for almost every activity: It is a field in which work obligations, socialising, relaxation and a lot more are mixed. This relativisation of boundaries is experienced as a contradictory phenomenon: it becomes a source of pleasure but also one of constant stress and it seems that, for some, it is a goal to re-establish some boundaries. Talking to professionals belonging to Gen Z at the media workshop, they described how they try to manage this situation, for example by muting certain conversations or avoiding using certain apps at work. It is interesting to see this attempt to re-sep-

arate work from leisure and socialising. However, we must not forget that a key element of social media is precisely this relativisation of boundaries. In that respect, when Instagram or Facebook messenger is a key tool for work (as Zoomers claim), it seems quite difficult to set strict boundaries.

Moreover, there seems to be a certain dismissal of Facebook as a “1st generation” social networking medium, as it is now seen to have been “taken over” by older generations, whom they seek to avoid in the online environment. This is a first point of differentiation with other generations. In the same line, there appears to be a characteristic “pride” in their familiarisation levels with new media and, more importantly, with the particular codes and symbols that distinguish them - this is a cultural rather than a technical issue for them as well. Alexandros Papageorgiou, delving into Gen Z's preference for image-based media, states that their preference for Instagram and TikTok expresses a significantly different practice of “[curating the digital self](#)”. In this context, it is no surprise that Gen Z shows a great familiarity with “cinematic grammar” since:

“Individuals are not just directing themselves. Even more so, they render their iconoclastic gaze visible, making explicit the fact that they are organising the world through a new way of producing and re-producing images.”

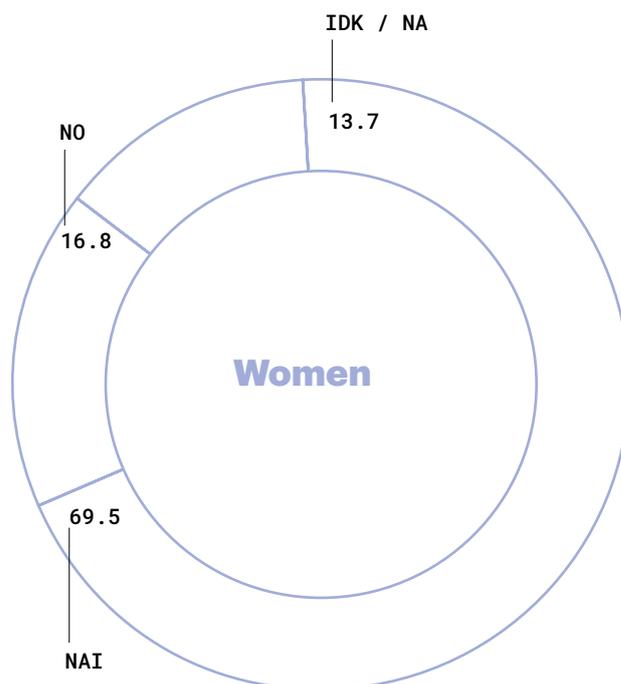
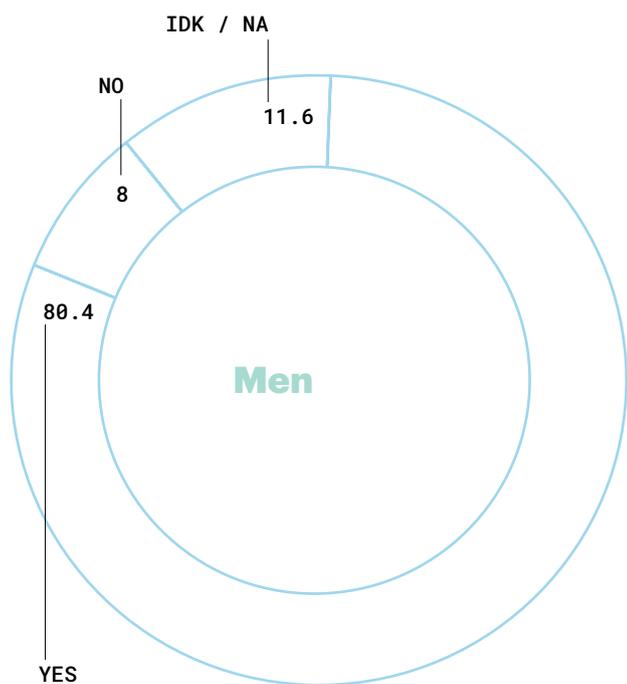
**Alexander Papageorgiou
(Alexander Platz)**

This familiarity, which is both technical as well as cultural, permeates what Zoomers understand as politics. In the media workshop, we showed participants an example of an Instagram post about the minimum wage, which was immediately labelled as “political”, since, as one participant commented, “It contains graphs. Who puts graphs on Instagram?”. According to that mindset, politics is non-cinematic, has an outdated aesthetic and, therefore, can be easily detected. If the new generation has an everyday engagement with the “filmmaker’s/editor’s perspective”, then further research is needed into how they produce politics that differ not only in terms of content but also in terms of form/aesthetic - which, at the end of the day, is also content.

In the same way, the unfamiliarity of previous generations with the particular cinematic codes of the new social media is an object of mockery and another reason to avoid Facebook. Extending this reasoning, they also seem to interpret the older generations' vulnerability against fake news by comparing it to their own ability to recognise sensationalist headlines, untrustworthy websites and altered photos. Of course, this logic also carries the risk of an arrogant attitude that fails to understand the various different types of fake news. This differentiation is gender-specific in the research findings, as 80.4% of men versus 69.5% of women believe they are able to identify fake news. However, when cases of news that are in a “grey area”⁵ were examined during the workshop, they appeared to grasp both their own limitations as well as the pervasiveness and complexity of the fake news phenomenon. After discussing these examples, fake news was seen as a blending of truth and reality that goes beyond each dubious item’s simple categorisation as “lies”.⁶

Do you think you can detect fake news or not?

aboutpeople



In the same context and given the lack of trust towards media, Gen Zers seem to take for granted that it is their responsibility to cross-check the news that they consume. Similarly, during the “Ok Zoomer” event, one speaker talked about the daily responsibility one has as a media user “to think about what they read, cross-check facts and check other websites regarding the same topic”. Thus she described a hybrid of user/consumer-journalist; this way of thinking is indicative of both the hybridity of new media and the low level of trust in professional journalists.

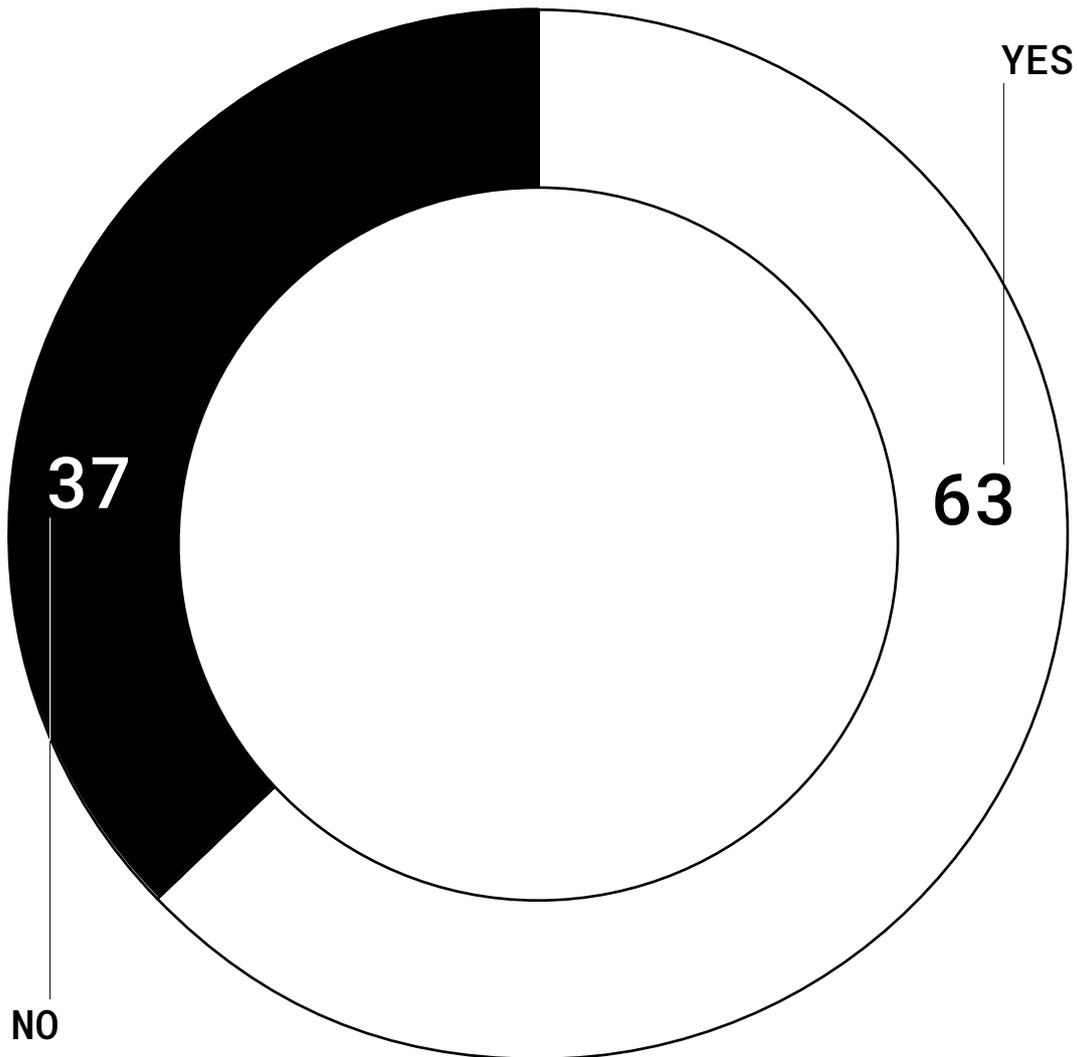
This dismissal emerges both as a finding of the research⁷ as well as in discussions with Gen Z members at relevant workshops and events. Although this trend is international⁸, the specific-national context is also relevant: Greece’s 108th position in the World Press Freedom Index, the contestation of large media corporations and outlets, the National Council for Radio and Television’s report for 2020⁹ are all elements that have permeated the public discourse and helped shape Gen Z’s distrust of the media. Especially the portrayal of Gen Zers during the pandemic using moral panic terminology, essentially blaming them for spreading COVID-19, has certainly had an [impact](#).

Overall, the most important consideration in relation to communication practices, seems to be a qualitative (and not just quantitative) change in media use. This is not a generation that is merely using media more, but Zoomers are essentially developing a reflective relationship with them. This is a point worth dwelling on a bit more. The reflective relationship with the media is seen as a characteristic trait of the “information society” and can be summarised in the transition “from observing the world through the media to observing the media themselves”¹⁰. In this sense, a traditional norm of journalism is gradually being abolished and we begin to consider the media themselves, their choices, the people who work there etc. as news. The first elements of a reflective use of the media by the television audience had already developed in the dominant field of commercial-private TV channels. This was becoming more evident in the reporting (and subsequent debate) on TV ratings, the treatment of journalists-presenters as if they were “stars”, who don’t just present the movements of public figures, but are themselves part of the “media elite”.

This trend is growing and evolving through the practices of Gen Z, which is becoming the predominant generation that reflects on the very media it uses. Obviously, the focus here is not on journalists but on a) new media micro-celebrities (influencers) and b) the media themselves, their technical characteristics and the way they operate. Already the research findings registered Gen Z’s great interest in influencers, with 63% stating that they follow influencers on social media. Furthermore, during the workshop it became evident that Zoomers have a clear understanding of the mechanism through which influencers and social media in general turn their audience into a commodity, i.e. they convert clicks and views into advertising revenue.

Do you follow any influencers on social media?
(In the last few years, the term "influencer" has been used broadly to describe people with strong social media presence and numerous followers in one or more platforms)

aboutpeople

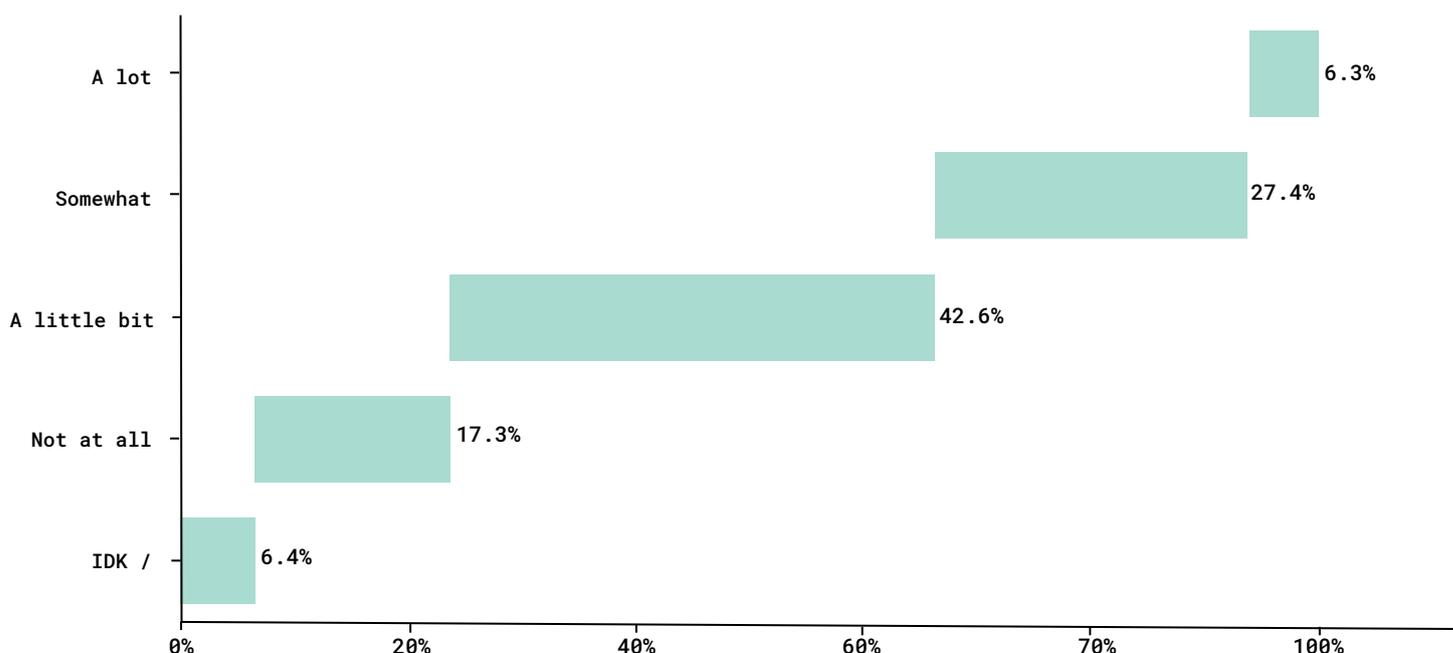


This understanding is related to the algorithm logic used by the new media, which operates in a cycle of self-validation, where, through constant metrics of users' behaviour, they end up seeing more and more posts with which they already agree. This leads to the echo chamber phenomenon, i.e. an advanced fragmentation of the public sphere where users increasingly interact only with people of similar views and interests. This cycle, as far as information is concerned, also acts as a filter bubble that determines which news people will come across and which they will not. These terms, a few years ago, would probably appear in discussions between experts in the field of new media. But members of Gen Z, who have a great understanding of how social media works, technically and economically, show a considerable ease in using these terms.

In this sense, Gen Z uses new media extensively and en masse, but at the same time critically questions its relationship with them. Through the discussions, a double dynamic emerged for Gen Z: on the one hand, an emerging cynicism and on the other, the need for democratisation/transparency in social media.

As one of the speakers at the “Ok Zoomer” event said, “everyone lives in bubbles - we should try to create our own”. Echoing her views, the other speakers described this process as an act of self-care: a conscious effort to distance oneself from views that outrage, offend and belittle oneself or someone in one's social environment. At the same time, this approach suggests an absence of patience to shift one's interlocutors's opinion or to get in touch with ideas and perspectives outside one's familiar online environment. This was most pronounced when members of Gen Z were asked to discuss how they handle disagreements that arise online. As another speaker at the same event put it, “we don't feel like arguing but as we get older, our tolerance decreases.” Others agreed with him and mainly spoke about racist, sexist or homophobic views that anger them and that they strongly associate with their older generations and their circle of relatives. However, this phenomenon is not limited to this circle, but it is rather linked to the general belief that in an environment of intense polarisation, individual “fish bowls” are firmly established and not open to challenges.

How much would you say you trust suggestions and opinions on political and social matters from influencers that you follow? aboutpeople



On the other hand, the above expresses a positive aspect regarding the potential of Gen Z. Reflection on the algorithm practice and the commercial use of data can potentially be linked to issues that have been raised in the public discourse and are related to oligopolistic media practices, the lack of transparency regarding algorithms and the dangerous use of the huge amounts of data that are collected every day. Moreover, a critical attitude towards the use of media emerges, something that was also recorded in the research findings, where 59.9% say they have little to no trust in influencers regarding social and political issues, and was also evident in the media workshop, where, regardless of whether they define what they do as “politics”, Gen Z members highlighted how they are using new media to create more inclusive communities.

Gen Z's capabilities also call for a rethinking of the concept of media/digital literacy. This is often understood as a sum of technical and cognitive skills related to the use of media and the processing and production of content in them. However, this definition of literacy as well as the corresponding government programmes that promote it, are incompatible with Gen Z. The new generation is certainly not lacking in technical knowledge on the use of digital media, nor should it be perceived as a “victim” of information overload. More importantly, Gen Z can potentially be a generation that not only reflects on new media but also acts to transform them by rendering algorithms more transparent and pushing for a democratisation of the public sphere. In this sense, any attempt to literate the new generation must be critical and, consciously, political.

D

Conclusions

D. Conclusions

It is obviously difficult to draw definite conclusions about a generation that is still in the process of forming itself, and some of the people belonging to it have not even come of age yet. What is for sure is that, in the coming years, there will be an increased research interest in Gen Z. Eteron's research findings as well as the reports and commentaries on them that followed, constitute a valuable foundation that can serve as raw material, which will hopefully influence similar future endeavours.

In relation to the two subject areas examined here (politics and media), there are a few points that stand out. First, it seems that Gen Z's relationship with new media is highly complex, contradictory and multilayered. It cannot be defined by quantitative criteria alone, but rather requires new and original research tools in order to be properly understood. This is a generation that is immersed in the logic and code of digital media, but at the same time distrusts them. This leads to an ambivalent relationship in which the media become, often at the same time, a source of stress and pleasure, an outlet for creativity, but also a field of polarisation and tension. With regard to political communication in particular, Gen Z seems to distance itself from what it sees as "politics", often identifying it with political parties and established institutions. Still, this has not led to a simplistic identification of politics with political communication, since Zoomers often seek online and offline modes of individual and collective expression - even if they do not consider them to be "political action". This is another indication that the younger generation should not be identified with the use of social media and the political spectacle through them.

Overall, Gen Z is looking for new words for institutions that already exist but do not satisfy it in the way that they are currently functioning - or in some cases young people may even be completely indifferent towards them. During the events and workshops organised lately, they seemed to be looking for new terms to talk about politics, ideology and journalism with a creative awkwardness. Of course, this is not some kind of obsession with "anything new" or neologisms, but rather a need to address in a contemporary manner their needs and concerns, which the world that they have inherited cannot satisfy.

Ref.

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1. The issue of political correctness in pop culture is particularly important for the new generation, and could be the focus of a future research/ project.
2. The concept of the “transparent self” is a critical perspective on the permeation of new media culture into everyday life and the essential elimination of any unseen aspects of privacy and subjectivity. This elimination, according to Han, is at the same time desirable by the subject and a constant source of anxiety, see Han Byung-Chul, *The Transparency Society*. Stanford UP, 2015.
3. See Ramishah Maruf, [Here’s why Gen Z is unionizing](#), CNN Business και Elizabeth Garone, [How Gen Z Baristas Are Spreading the Starbucks Unionization Effort](#), Time.
4. See Madison Hoff, [How Gen Z is winning the Great Resignation, from pay increases to better work-life balance](#), Insider.
5. Among others, participants were shown the doctored video from Alexis Grigoropoulos’ assassination as well as more recent news articles that falsely presented one of Eteron’s recent researches as being a poll. Ενδεικτικά: <https://www.news247.gr/politiki/diapseydei-o-sakellaridis-den-ypirche-erotisi-gia-prothesi-psifoy-stin-ereyna-toy-eteron.9538317.html>
6. In that sense, it's better to use the term “tampered” rather than “fake” news.
7. Even though they were instructed that they could choose up to 3 options, only 29% of the participants mentioned the media as the body/ institution that they trust the most.
8. In a relevant research in the UK, 85% of young people between 17-30 years old state they are distrustful towards traditional media. Banaji, S. & Cammaerts, B. (2015) Citizens of Nowhere Land, Youth and News Consumption in Europe. *Journalism Studies*, 16:1, 115-132
9. The report is available [here](#) (in Greek). According to the survey, the governing political party occupied the (disproportionately) high share of 61.7% of the total air time allocated for political parties’ presentation.
10. Pleios, G. (2011), *The Society of Pleasant Information. Modernity and the News 2011* - Athens: Kastaniotis (in Greek) p. 196-197 & 211-214.

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