FROM THE SILENT GENERATION TO GEN Z

A survey of media use, Covid-19 and current issues

Abstract

A national representative study on media platform use, media preferences for different kinds of news, trust in media and some current issues

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Introduction

We have been studying media developments and preferences for decades. No one would have believed that we should almost abandon the printed newspaper and carry the primary information tool around in our pockets. Media use and preferences have upended many industries and businesses. In many parts of the world, the role and confidence in the press have eroded. In the Nordics, however, the trust in media is still relatively high, and we are loyal to our media to a great extent.

This report shows media development and status on essential issues in June 2022.

YouGov surveyed a representative sample (N=1018) from their web omnibus. All analyses are performed with SPSS.

However, let us start with the overall picture as presented in official statistics. This shows the percentage that has used a given medium on an average day.

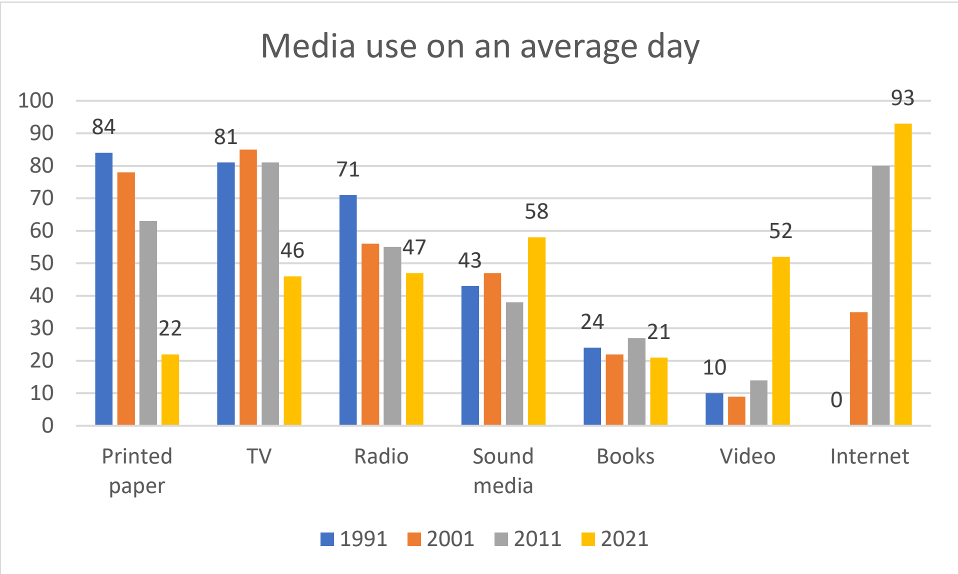

Figure 1: Media use on an average day (% of population); Source SSB

This chart shows per decade the enormous development of the media industry. In 1991, printed newspapers and TV were dominant, followed by radio. From 84% to 22%, newspapers tell the story of the digitalization of the press, which shows itself clearly in several other categories. Sound media has developed from cassette tapes to podcasts on the mobile, and video has moved from cassette hiring from shops on the corner to downloading and streaming. And behind it all – the internet development from zero to 93.

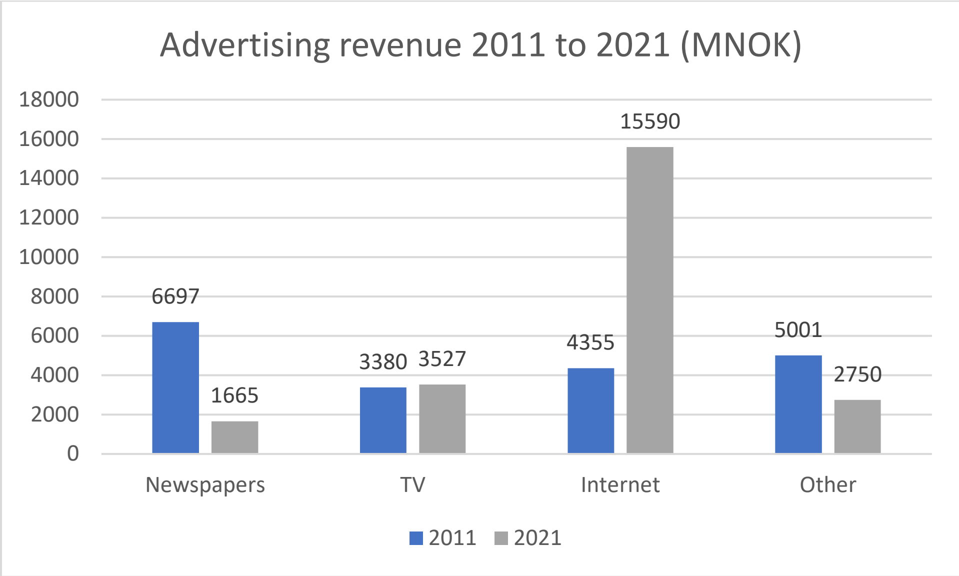

Figure 2: Advertising revenue - IRM/Medianorge.uib.no

There is a dramatic shift here, driven by the relentless digitalization in society. The big loser is newspapers (printed) with a reduction of 75%. TV is stable in current prices, which means a reduction in fixed prices. Moreover, the winner is the internet, combining a number of the former media platforms and developing advertising marketplaces on its own.

The generations

In popular writing, there has been a definition of the generations to group into cohorts with similar demographic and psychographic characteristics. These generations are:

- The silent generation – born before 1946
- The baby boomers – 1946 to 1964
- Generation X – born 1965 to 1980
- Millenials – born 1981 to 1996
- Generation Z – 1997 and later.

Generation					
The silent (until 1945)	Boomers (46-64)	Gen X (65-80)	Millennials (81-96)	Gen Z	Total
42	291	279	285	121	1018

Figure 3: Number of participants in survey

A word of caution on the results for the Silent Generation – the number surveyed are quite small and may cause some misinterpretations.

Digital media rules for general news

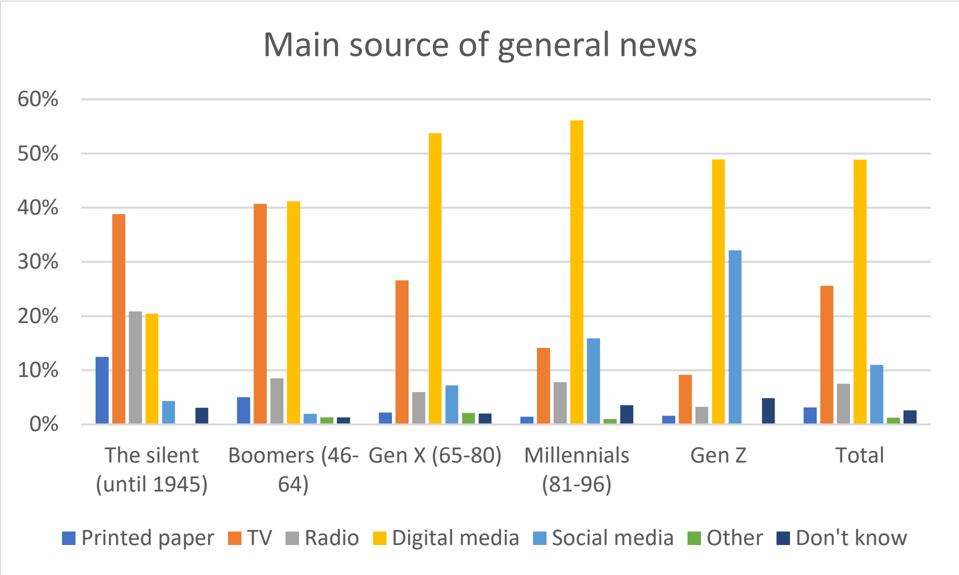

Figure 4: Main source of news

We see from this chart that there are big differences in the use of media platforms for general news. While the silent generation relies more heavily on TV, we can see that digital media and social media are winners for Generation Z. The printed paper is almost gone in all generations but lingers on a little among the oldest.

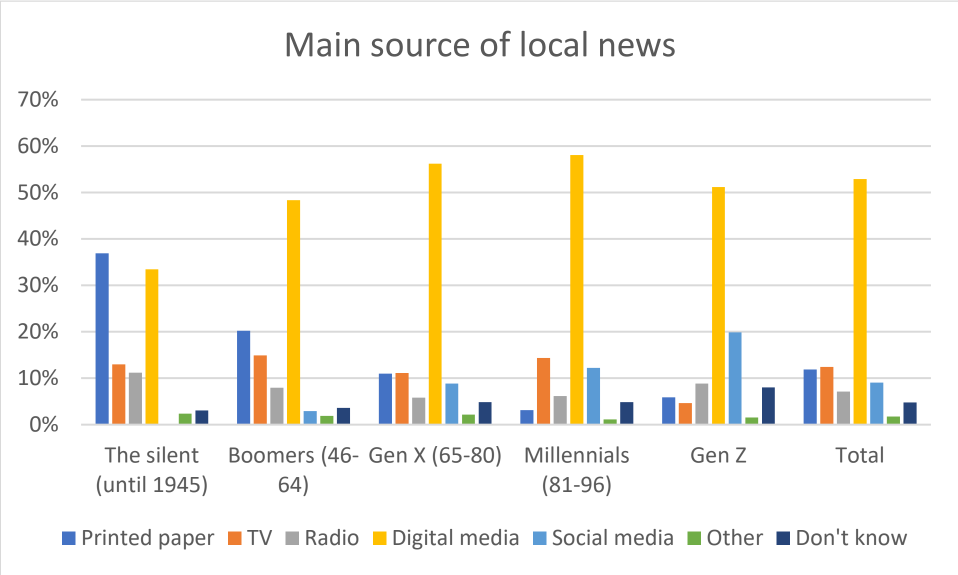

Figure 5: Main source of local news

The differences are more prominent when it comes to the local news. Printed paper plays a vital role for the older generation, while digital media dominates for all others. Furthermore, especially for Gen Z, we can see that social media also plays a role. In total, more than 50% of the population have digital media as their main source for local news.

When something big happens locally

Local news media are strong when something happens locally. Across all generations, the local newspaper plays the most important role, the highest score in the older generations. If you look at Gen Z their consumption of local news is more spread across more media platforms. Both VG.no and Social media have a big influence here.

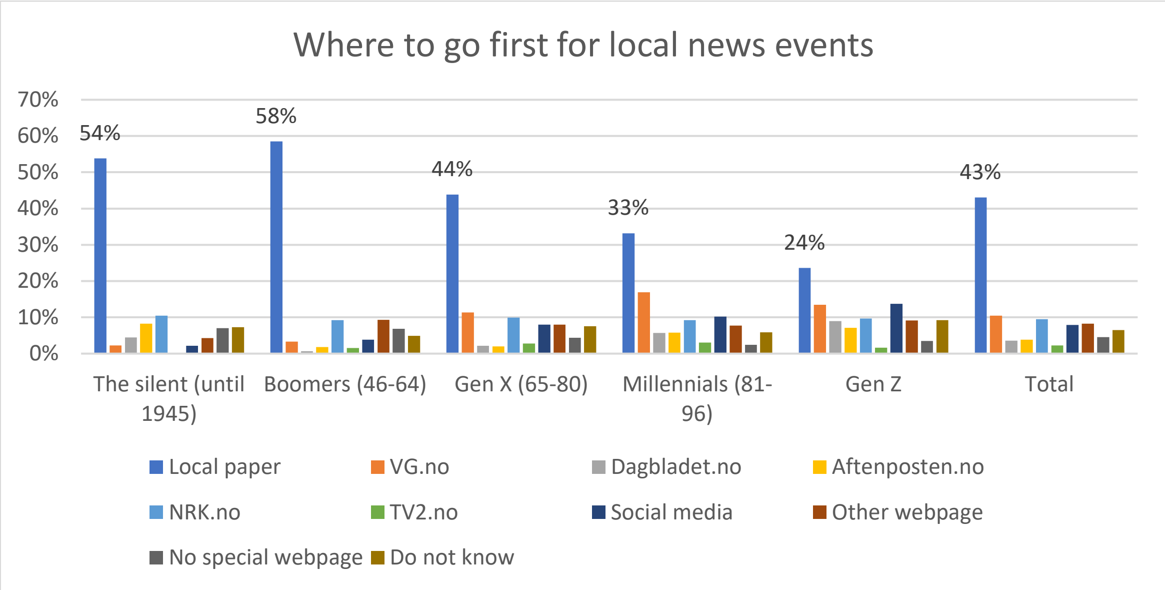

Figure 6: News preference for local news

National media for national news

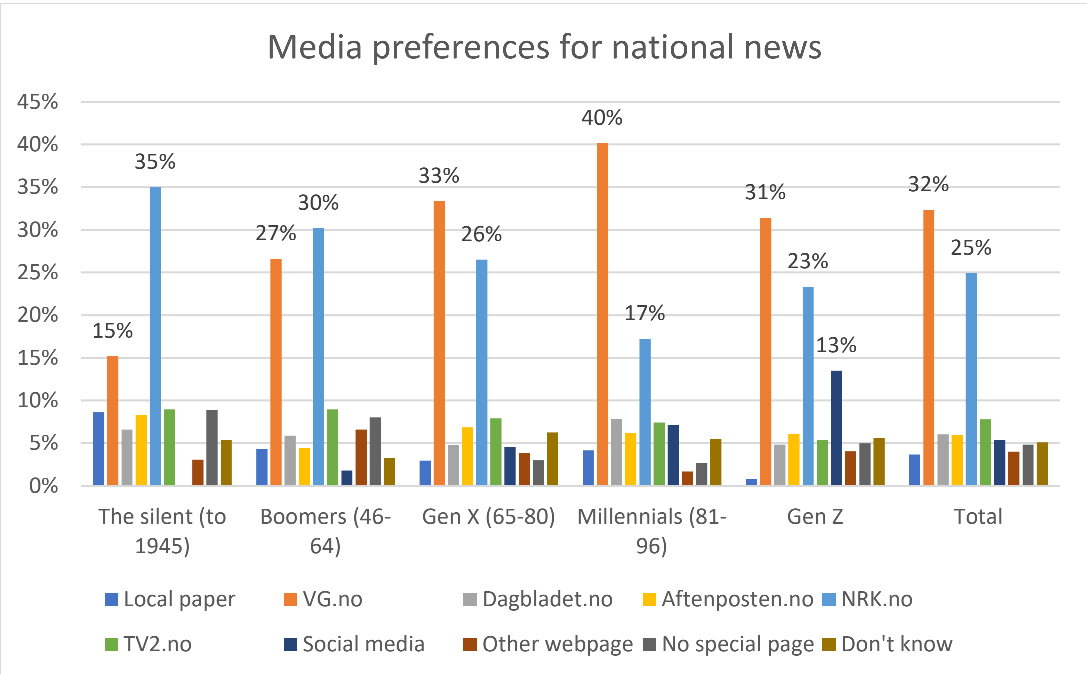

Figure 7: News preference for national news

Two news channels are essential for Norwegians to be informed on important national news: VG.no and NRK. VG is the largest Norwegian website for news, and NRK is our national public service broadcaster, with an important and growing web presence. All generations prefer these two, but in different strength. NRK is most important for the Silent, and the Boomers, and VG for the rest. We can also see that Social Media is relatively high for Gen Z with 13%.

Two important channels for international news

We see that VG.no and NRK is the most important channels for international news. There is one exception where the Gen Z has Social Media in second place – in front of NRK.

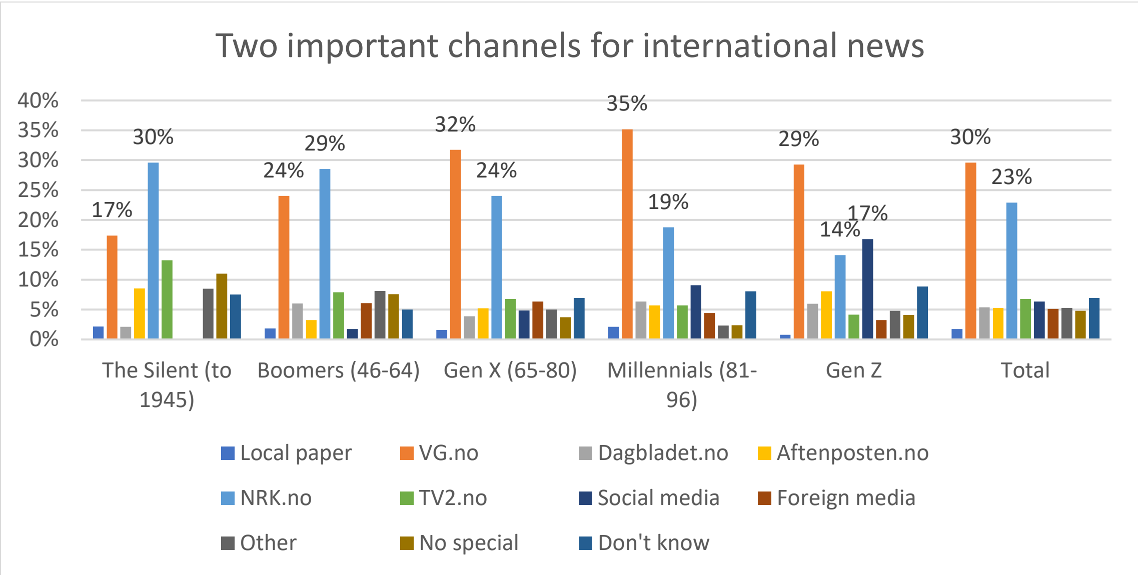

Figure 8: Preferences for international news

NRK is the most important for the two older generations, while VG is most important for the younger generations. Social media is at 17% for Gen Z, which says something about the breadth of sources for the youngest generation.

What are preferred channels for news on the war in Ukraine?

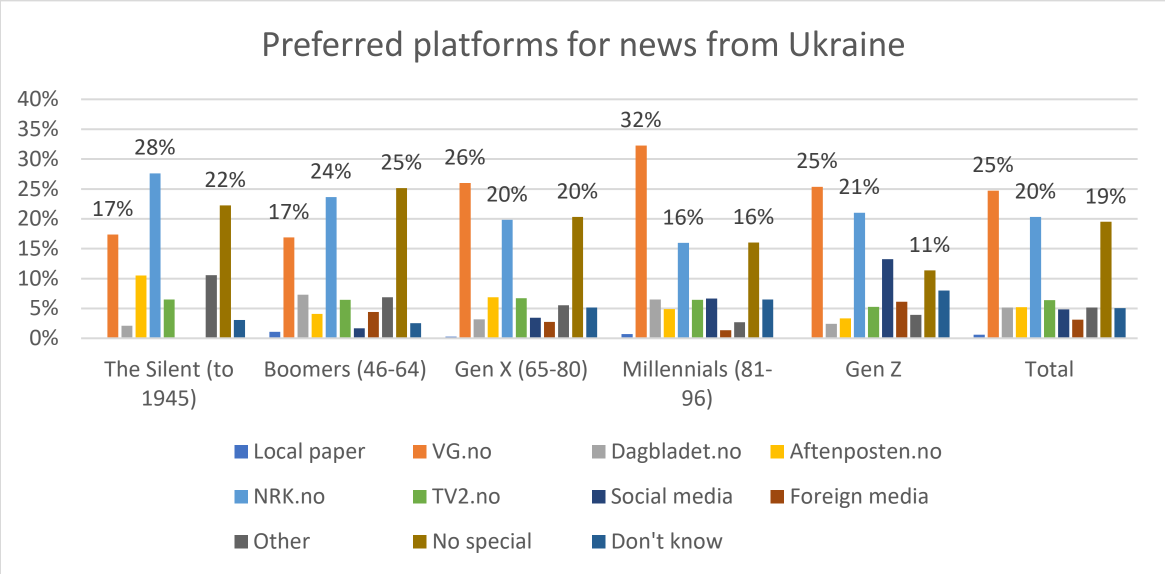

Figure 9¨: Preferences for news on the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine news generally follows foreign news preferences, but the category No Special scores much higher. This might be due to a mix of channels, news and oral discussions among friends and families. VG and NRK are the two most essential channels for this news. We can also see that Social Media is less important in this news context.

TV was essential for the news on Covid-19

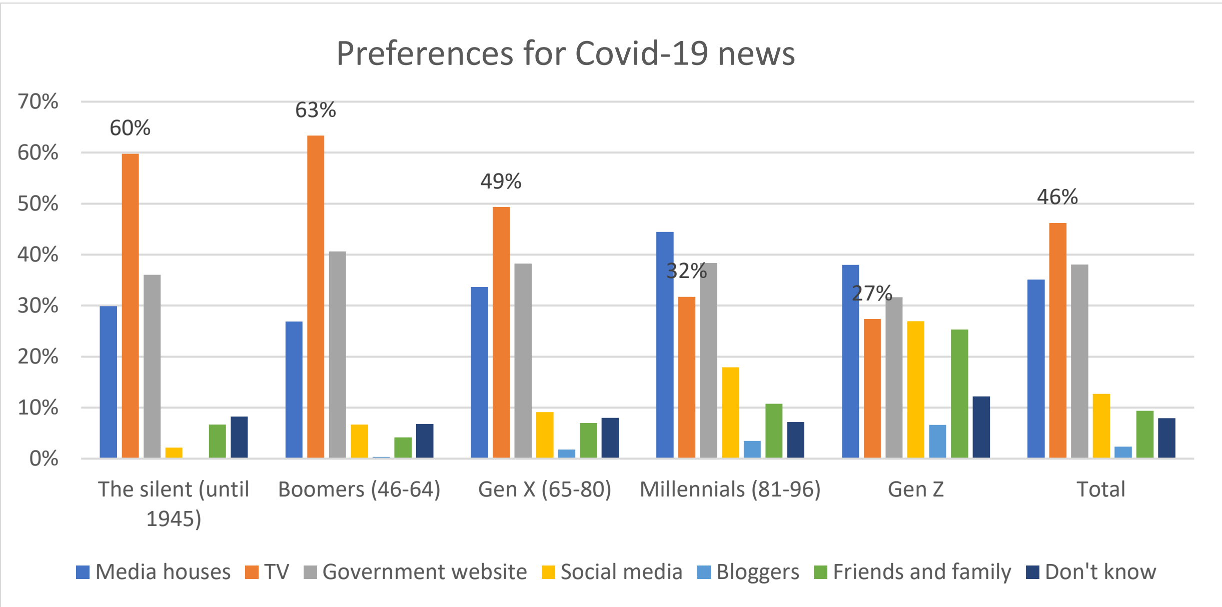

Figure 10: Main sources of news on Covid-19

TV was the essential channel for Covid-19 news. However, there are differences among the generations. While the oldest mixed between TV, media houses and government webpages, the youngest spread much broader. Media houses were the largest for Millenials and Gen Z – and probably this is VG once again, because they developed a very up-to-date and dynamic service. NRK played an essential role because of all the interviews among ministers and health officials, who became household names during the pandemic.

High levels of trust in media

Norwegian media have high levels of trust. Across all generations NRK have a high level of trust on a scale from 1= low trust to 5= high trust. TV2 (the commercial channel) and the media houses all benefit from high levels of trust, while social media and bloggers are lowest.

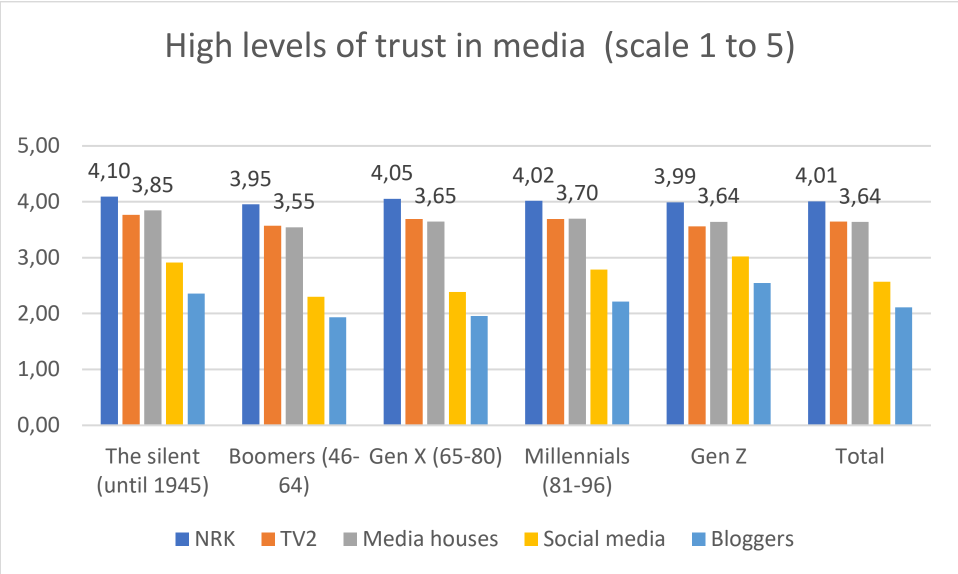

Figure 11: Level of trust in media

NRK is the channel with highest level of trust – regardless of generation. Also the commercial channel TV2 has high trust, closely followed by media houses with editorial legal responsibility. Even if social media has a trust level of approximately 3,00 for Gen Z, both social media and bloggers do not have a high trust level.

How life changed during the pandemic

Our analysis shows that it was Gen Z that suffered the most during the pandemic, as shown on the following chart.

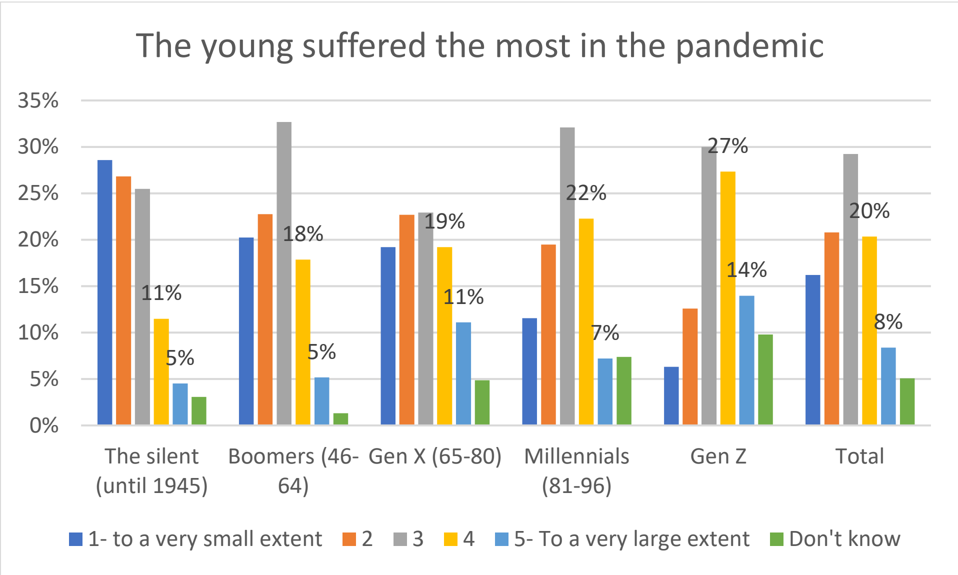

Figure 12: How life changed during the pandemic

41% of Gen Z said that their life had changed a lot during the pandemic (score 4 and 5 on the scale). The corresponding number for Boomers was 23%. For the whole population the number is 28%.

Gen Z has had many challenges. Many are students and in a life phase of establishment. The lack of social contact and restrictions on travel has had great impact. The older generations, however, have had less impact from the pandemic. Only 16% of the Silent generation reported high on the scale.

Freedom of the newsroom

In the survey we had a question on how important it is that newsrooms are free and independent. The result shows that the public think this is very important, but there are differences between the generations.

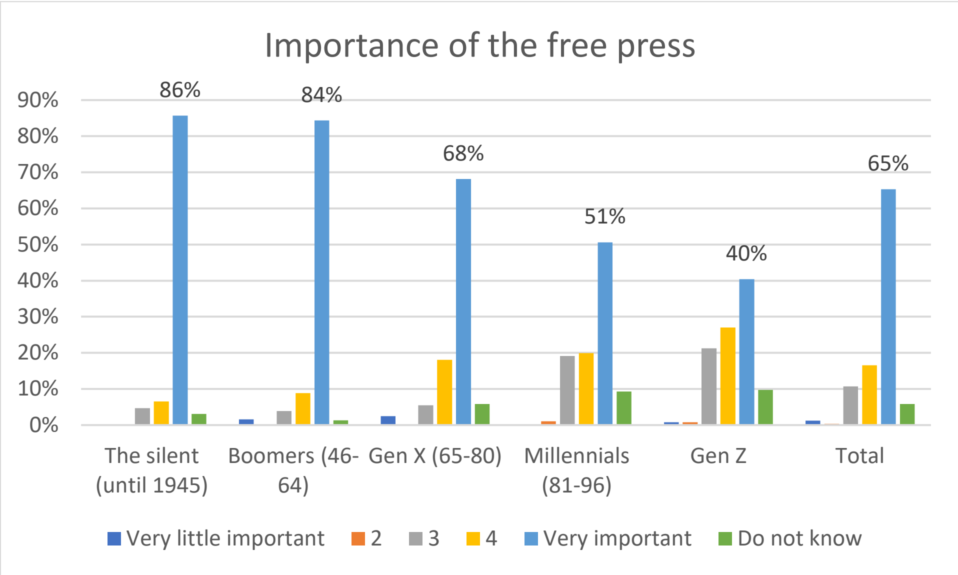

Figure 13: Importance of free press

65% of the populations think that a free press is very important. Among the older generations this number is above 80%. But surprisingly the score in Gen Z is as low as 40%. One can speculate why this is the case. Can it be that the sources are many and they feel able to distinguish between true and false sources? Or can it be that this generation has less interest in the news? There is a contrast here to earlier results where the trust in NRK was high. Or can it be that this is a signal for a change in the role of the newsmedia in society?

Is the press independent enough?

Building on the previous question we also had a question on how independent the newsmedia are perceived to be. The results here are also quite illuminating.

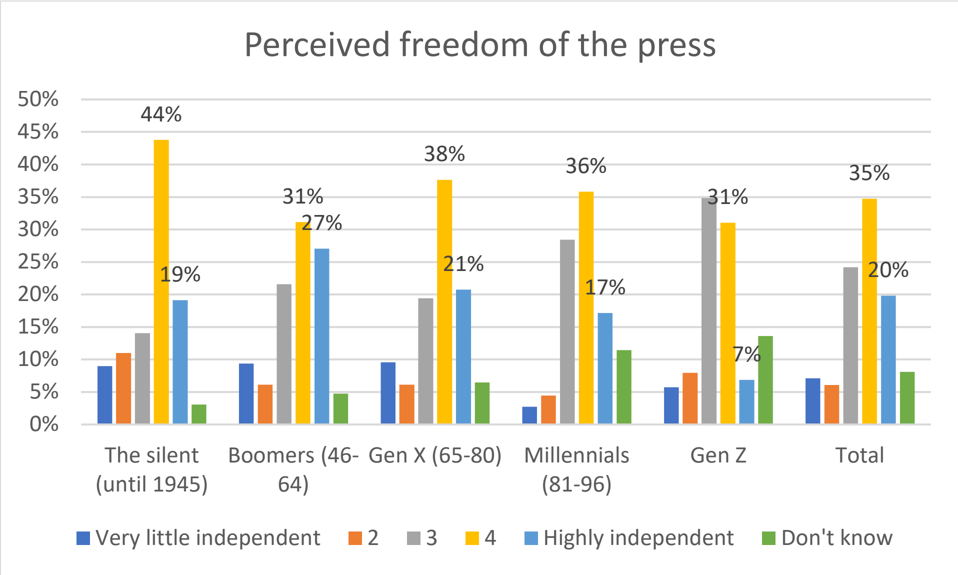

Figure 14: Perception of freedom of press

If we combine the scores 4 and 5 on the scale we find that 63% of the Silent generation feel that the press is independent. For Gen Z this scoe is only 38%. And it is 55% for the public in total. Does this signal a change in behaviour in the generations? Or is it simply that the young do not care as much as the older generations? There could be some unpleasant conclusions that could be drawn from this.

The morning ritual on the mobile differs

When we look into the morning ritual on the mobile we find great differences between the generations.

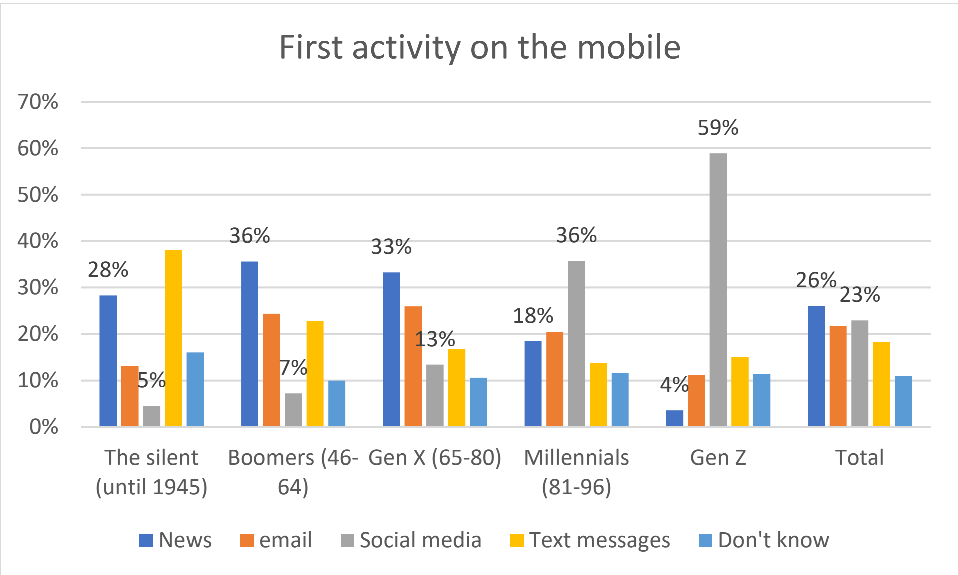

Figure 15: Mobile phone activity in the morning

While the Silent generation look at their text-messages first, and the Boomers look at the news, we find that Gen Z overwhelmingly enters the Social media landscape. 59% reports that they go to SoMe first. In the general public this share is 23%. The Social Media has a firm grip on this generation.

Media services subscriptions

There are great differences between the generations subscription patterns. We know that money is there for subscriptions, but there are great variations between the different groups.

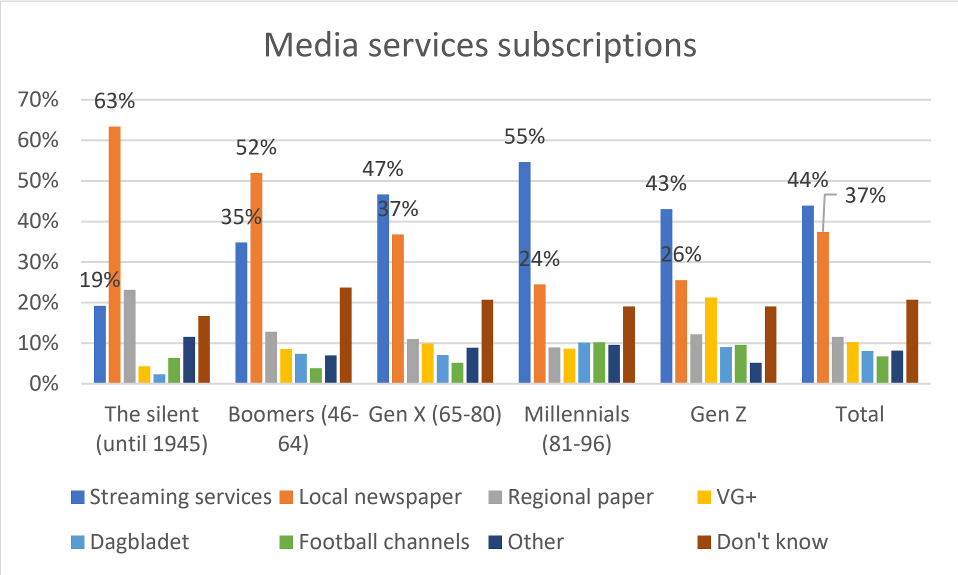

Figure 16: Level of media subscriptions

We find that streaming services like Netflix or HBO are subscribed by 44% of the public, but variations are great. Loyalty to the local newspaper is highest among the older generations, but from Gen X onwards we find that streaming services are the largest. We included football channels also, but they do not come through highly, partly because this is a male dominant category, and do not appeal to women in the same way.

What media platforms are used on a weekly basis?

We find that the public are in contact with many media platforms over a week, but there are differences in the use.

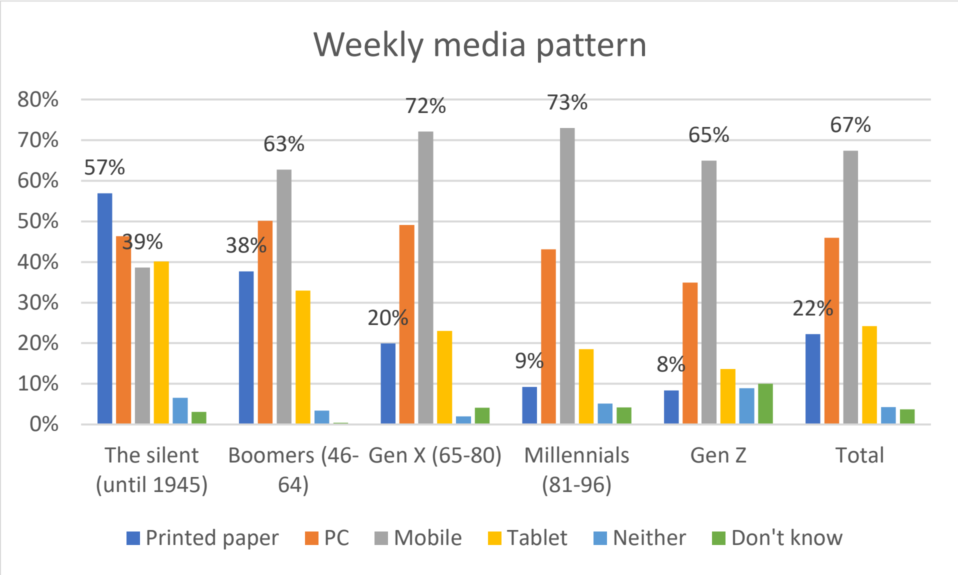

Figure 17: Weekly media platform use

The printed paper is the most frequent platform among the oldest, but is almost gone among Gen Z. The dominant pattern is that the mobile is the most frequently used media platform for all generations except the Silent Generation. But we can also note that the tablet is a popular platform among the older generations.

Social media platforms

Facebook has a remarkable grip in the social media market, with more than 80% on the average. But we can see the differences among the other platforms.

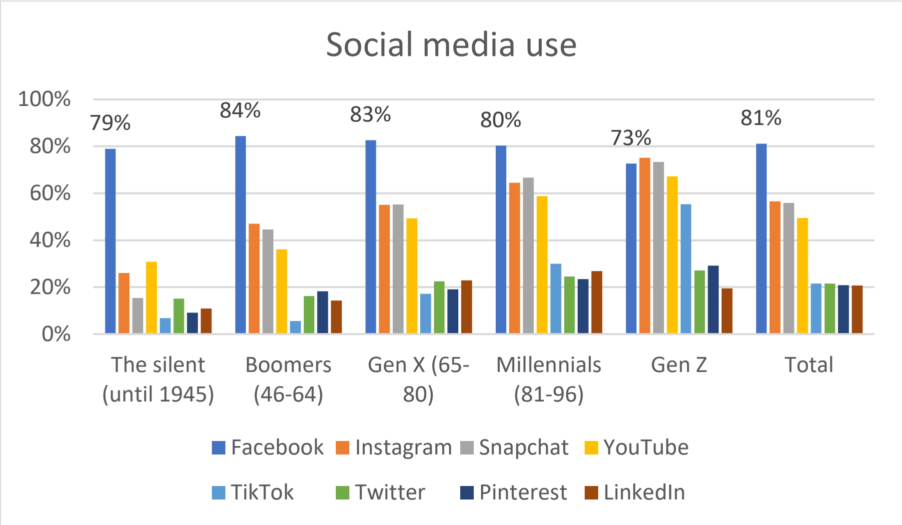

Figure 18: Use of social media platforms

The main pattern is the same for all categories except Gen Z, who are "leaving" Facebook and thrive on multiple channels. The latest kid on the block – TikTok, is at more than 50% for GenZ. We see that the dominant pattern is Facebook followed by the trio of Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. LinkedIn plays a role for those in a professional capacity. It is used for self-promotion and job search. It rates at 27% in the Millenials generation.

If we group the use of social media into low and high use and have 4 or more as high use – we get the following result:

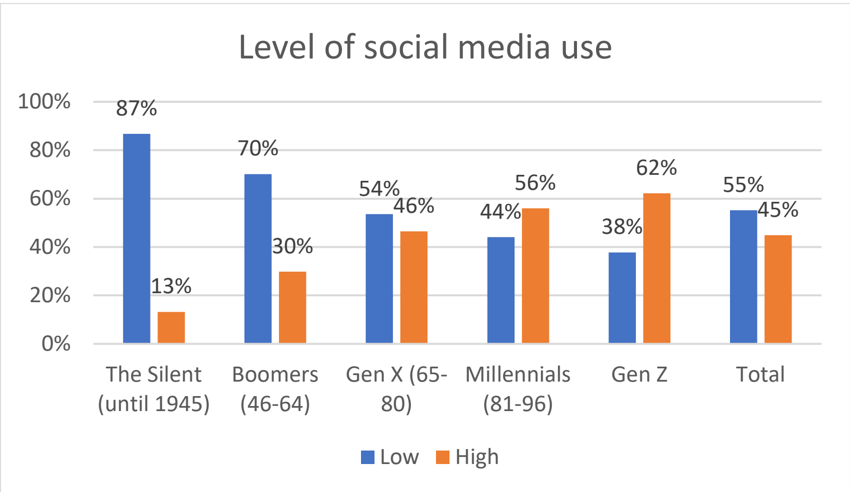

Figure 19: Level of social media use

We see that 55% of the population are high users of social media. There is no surprise that Millenials and Gen Z are the highest users. The silent generation is at the other end with 87% as low users of social media.

Norway and the EU

Given the current situation with the war in Ukraine, and questions on integration within Europe, we also asked about the relationship between Norway and the EU. Norway has turned down membership twice – in 1972 and in 1994. However, events have changed, and the economy of Norway is more international than ever before.

We, therefore, asked on a scale from 1 to 5 if Norway should be a member of the EU. We categorized 1 and 2 as No, 3 as undecided and 4 and 5 as yes.

The results show a clear NO, but there are some interesting differences between the generations:

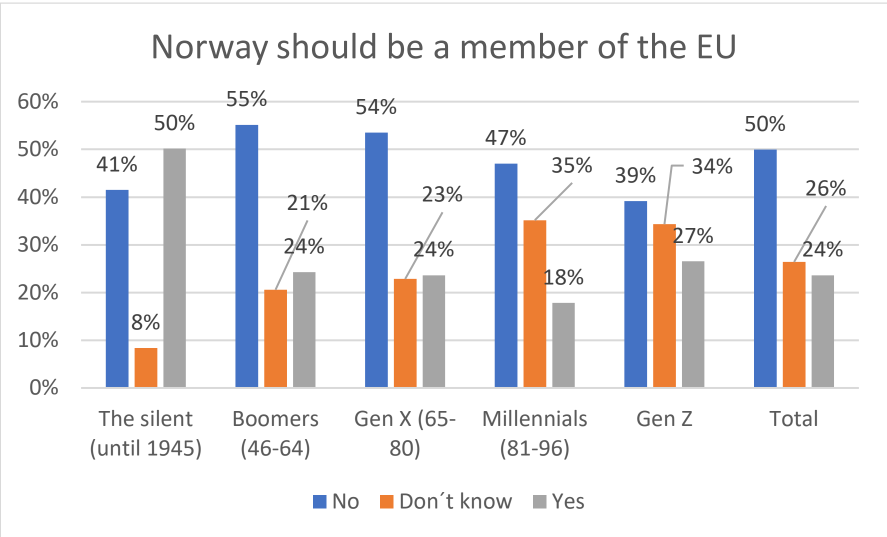

Figure 20: Norwegian membership in the EU

The Silent generation is the most EU-friendly, with 50% yes and a low undecided rate. Nevertheless, look at Gen Z. There, we have 39% no and 34% undecided. For the Millenials, the numbers are 47% no, 18% yes and 35% undecided. These generations have not voted in the referendums and there is a case for a renewed discussion on our relationship with the EU. The main slogan for the NO in 72 and 94 was "NO to the sale of Norway". Our sense of independence and self-rule is very high. After 400 years under Denmark and close to 100 years with Sweden and occupation in WW2, the sense of Norway as an independent nation is very high. But Norway is highly dependent on the developments within the EU.

Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO

We also had a question on the Finnish and Swedish membership propositions in the survey. We now know that both countries' applications have been sent and awaiting approval.

The Norwegian public was almost unanimous in welcoming the two neighbouring countries into NATO.

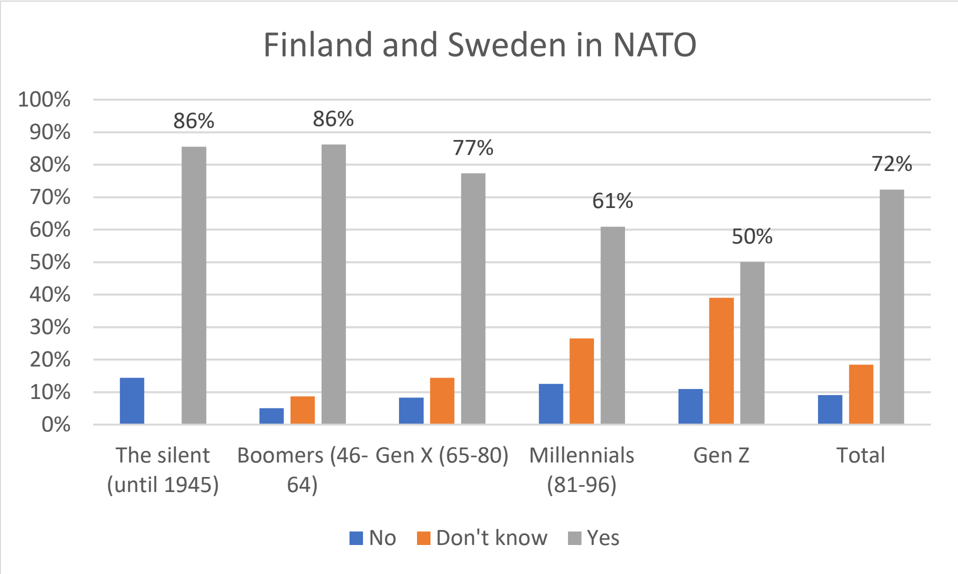

Figure 21: Support for Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO

72% welcomed Finland and Sweden into NATO, but we see differences in the generations. Gen Z has the lowest approval. At the same time, they have the highest rate of uncertainty.

Satisfaction with life

We are using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) that was developed by Pavot and Diener and that is used heavily in psychological research. It has shown to be a good measure of this related to different health issues.

The scale is divided in a 7-point scale with agreement to five questions. It is then for simplicity in this report divided into three groups – low medium and high.

For our generations there are som clear indications:

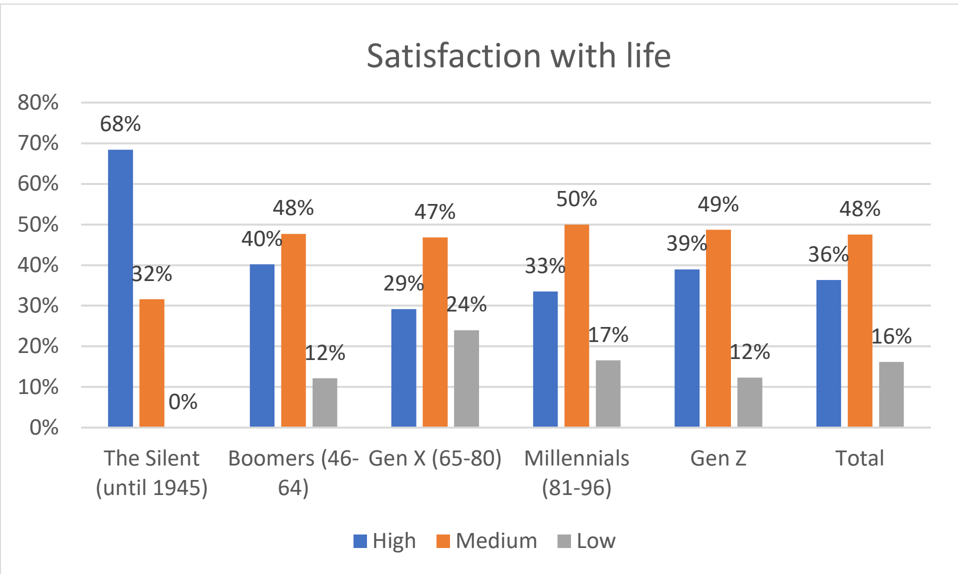

Figure 22: SWLS - Satisfaction with life

The silent generation scores high. These older people have kept their health and can lead a life free of big worries as long as their health keeps up. We see a different picture in the other generations. Boomers also have a pretty high level of satisfaction with life, but Gen X might have the lowest life quality rate. Many of these are middle-aged with a more expensive way of life: A mix of demanding teenagers and empty nests and maybe worries about their financial situation. We see that 24% of this generation say they have low satisfaction with life.

Worries about own finances

With higher prices on electricity, petrol and food, and rising interest rates we find that there are concerns out there on the private financial situation. We asked the question on the level of concern about own financial situation. We find some big differences.

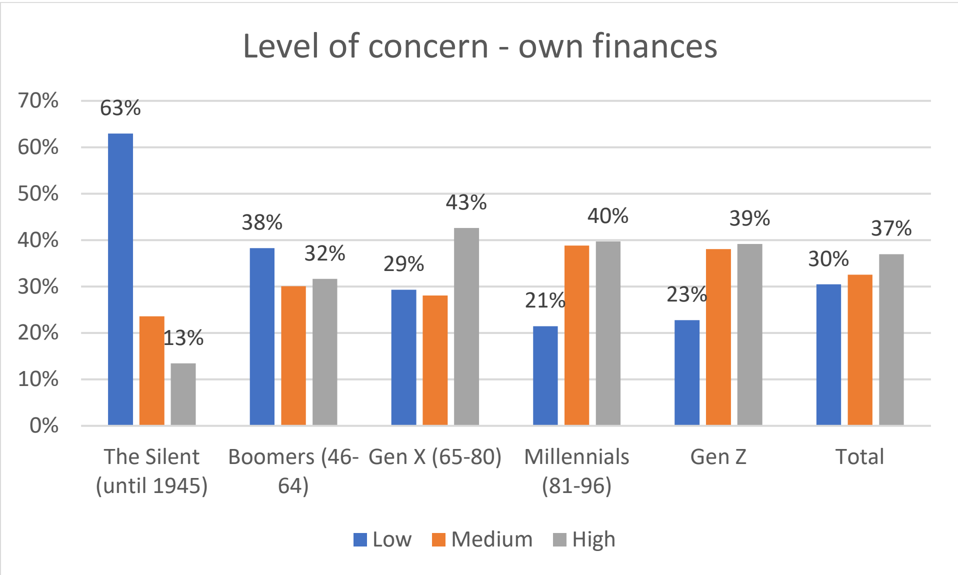

Figure 23: Concern about private finance

The Silent generation – dependent on their pensions and savings, seem little concerned about their private finances. But for Gen X the situation is quite different. More than 40% have a high level of concern about their finances, and for the total public, we find roughly a division into three groups. 37% of the public has financial concerns.   We have gotten used to low interest rates and increased private consumption over the last few years, and all uncertainties around us have changed this perception.

We find in our data a high correlation (0,92) between the satisfaction of life level and the level of concern on finances.

Conclusion

We have studied the media use of the population in Norway through the lenses of different pre-determined generations. We have seen the dominance of digital platforms. We have also witnessed high levels of trust in media and some channels. However, the views on the independence of the press are interesting, since it seems to be eroding among the younger generations. We have also seen that there are worries about the financial status in some generations.

The author

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