

38% OF GENERATION Z HAVE STARTED A ROMANTIC OR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP ONLINE

These are the findings of “Osservatorio Generation Ship”, the sociocultural survey on new Italian generations conducted by Changes Unipol and developed by Kkienn

- **Gen Z, however, is less likely to rely on dating apps.** The greatest fears concern meeting people who are different from their online persona (46%) or with bad intentions (39%), and doubts about the superficiality of relationships based on physical appearance (39%).
- **Instead, the use of dating apps is more common among Millennials (37%).**
- **Gen Z tends towards a more exploratory and playful use of dating apps than previous generations:** the desire to meet new people (63%) and pass the time (42%) prevail. Use for sexual purposes, on the other hand, is more important for Millennials (41%) than Gen Z (38%), while Baby Boomers rely on dating apps to find a stable relationship (55%).
- **Much fewer women than men have used dating apps (15% vs. 25%). The women who used them did so more than men out of curiosity or to pass time (41% vs 30%) and less for having sex (19% vs. 46%).**
- **1 in 2 young people (51%) in Gen Z feel the pressure of beauty standards imposed by social networks.**
- **Young women are the most influenced by the “narrative” of perfection:** social networks and apps convey perfect images to measure up against, causing insecurity and discomfort (vote on a scale of 1-10: Gen Z 7.7, Millennials 7.6, Gen X 7.5, Baby Boomers 7.2).

Bologna, 6 October 2023

For new generations, social networks are the ideal channel for meeting a new partner: 38% of young people in Gen Z have started a romantic or sexual relationship with a person they met online.

These are the findings of “Osservatorio Generation Ship” the study¹ carried out by **Changes Unipol** and developed by **Kkienn**, aimed at offering an original point of view on work, family, socialness and

¹ The survey was carried out on a representative sample of 1,502 people of the national population aged 16-74 (over 44 million individuals)

wellbeing and, in particular, at exploring these issues through the analysis of Gen Z's preferences and the impact of technology on certain spheres of public and private life.

The results were presented at **Milano Digital Week** during the event "**Millennials e Gen Z oltre i loro limiti**" (*Millennials and Gen Z beyond their limits*), held at **IULM University 2** and attended by **Fernando Vacarini**, Media Relations, Corporate Reputation & Digital PR Manager at the Unipol Group and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Changes*, **Massimo Di Braccio**, Sociologist, Founder and CEO of Kkienn Connecting People and Companies, **Enrico Pitzianti**, author of the newsletter '*Non scaldiamoci*', **Andrea Nuzzo**, entrepreneur and digital communications expert, and **Valentina Pano**, philosophy student and author of monologues on social media.

Romantic relationships

Digital media has driven a true **metamorphosis of romantic relationships in the name of freedom**: talking freely about sex, social media and dating apps, adopting freer behaviours, gender fluidity, casual relationships and more choices; everything is in flux.

In this scenario, **young people in Gen Z are more sensitive to freedom, understood as full self-expression and attention to others**. Millennials, on the other hand, care more about the greater ease in choosing and finding partners.

Social media has therefore opened the doors to behaviours and practices that previously lacked space in everyday life: we talk more freely about sexuality (67% agree), **casual relationships have increased** (65% agree) and **a wider range of preferences has become acceptable** (64% agree).

For new generations, social networks have become the channel for starting new relationships: in fact, 39% of the senior segment of Gen Z (aged 23-27) have started a romantic or sexual relationship online (34% in the junior segment of Gen Z aged between 16 and 22).

Contrary to common belief, **Gen Z is less likely to rely on dating apps**. In fact, **Millennials are in first place** (37%), followed by the senior segment of Gen Z (33%), the junior segment of Gen Z (26%) and Gen X (23%).

Among the **fears surrounding the use of dating apps**, Gen Z are **worried about meeting people who are different to their online persona** (46%) or **with bad intentions** (39%) and have **doubts about the superficiality of relationships based on physical appearance** (39%). The **advantages**, on the other hand, include **greater opportunity to meet people with similar interests** (52%), the **ease of seeking and connecting with potential partners** (47%) and the **expansion of opportunities for meeting people outside their circle of friends** (42%).

Gen Z tends towards a more exploratory and playful use of dating apps than previous generations: the **desire to meet new people** (63%) and **pass the time** (42%) prevail. Use for sexual purposes, on the other hand, is **more important for Millennials** (41%) than Gen Z (38%), while Baby Boomers rely on dating apps to find a stable relationship (55%).

The Observatory found that, **across all generations, compared to men women mainly use apps to establish long-term relationships** (51% vs 38%). In particular, the gender gap increases in relation to Gen X (52% - 34%) and Millennials (52% - 38%) but is more limited with regards to Gen Z (49% - 41%).

Body image

Today a radical change is underway, which is breaking the single beauty standard: social media has made it possible to create different standards and fashion has supported and strengthened this change. The emergence of this new awareness encourages the recognition of unique features: **body positivity is one of the major themes of the present day.**

Despite this, **the "push" of social media towards beauty and alignment with specific aesthetic standards is prevalent.** The research data shows us that 68% of those interviewed believe that **social media increasingly bombards us with images of perfect people, leading them to notice their own defects more**, and that **1 in 2 young people (51) in Gen Z feel the pressure of beauty models imposed by social networks.** These experiences make body acceptance even harder, to the point of generating difficulties in relating to others and in the relationship with oneself.

More specifically, **young women are more influenced by the "narrative" of perfection: social networks and apps convey perfect images to measure up against, causing insecurity and discomfort** about their physical appearance. **This discomfort is inversely proportional to age**, 66% of Gen Z girls admit to having experienced insecurity and/or discomfort regarding their body. It is an experience that remains dominant even in adulthood, reported by 59% of Millennial women (28-35) and 55% of Gen X women (36-55 years). Only with maturity does this concern ease, without disappearing (Baby Boomers: 39%). In summary, **with age women gradually free themselves from the ideal and embrace the value of difference.**

On the contrary, **men are less influenced by aesthetic standards:** only 28% of Gen Z, 29% of Millennials, 24% of Gen X and just 19% of Baby Boomers.

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