



Connecting with Millennials

21st October 2016

Speakers: Maria Freitas (Policy Advisor at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, FEPS, Belgium), Irene Milleiro (European Campaigns Director at Change.org, Spain), Natalie Rastoin (President of Ogilvy France)

Moderator: Dominic Lyle (Director General of the European Association of Communication Agencies, Belgium)

As a new generation of millennials enters society, employment and the political system, communicators will need to respond to meet the expectations and behaviours of this growing and influential population. Are they ready? This workshop explored millennials in closer detail using behavioural insights and examined their views on Europe, politics, civic engagement and participatory democracy.

Dominic Lyle opened the session by highlighting that by 2020 millennials will make up 50% of the European workforce. Communicators must therefore respond to the needs and wants of this generation. He invited the speakers to share their insights and experience on how best to approach this challenge.

The first speaker was **Maria Freitas**, who began her presentation by asking how many people in the audience had heard positive or negative comments about millennials. The response was equivocal. She then went on to present the millennial research project she was working on with FEPS. The 'Millennial dialogue' is the most comprehensive study of millennials ever done, using a sample of 23,000 young people across the world. This global initiative sprang from the stereotype that millennials are apathetic and disengaged, and that their political participation is an issue. FEPS thus initiated research to find out to what extent this stereotype actually applies. Some of the initial findings are as follows:

- Millennials are not homogenous.
- Political engagement: Most millennials are not interested in politics as it is at the moment. Traditional policy agents are perceived as ignoring their views. The most disappointed were millennials in Romania, Bulgaria, and Italy. While interest in politics is low, they are very politically aware and are ready to vote.
- Partisan life does not appeal – millennials are more interested in other group and social activities. Film and music are placed above politics and religion.
- Research shows that most millennials are optimistic, contrary to common belief. Health, equality, education and job creation are all priorities, with health taking first place.

- Millennials are concerned about social justice and in favour of the welfare state. However, much more needs to be done to bridge the gap between millennials and politics – more than mere 'clicktivism'.
- In terms of how millennials perceive the EU, they are not keen on voting in European Parliament elections but they are a generation that believes in the EU and wants peace in the world. They believe that war and terror might affect their future quality of life. They are aware that the world is interconnected, they present internationalist attitudes, and they know that peace cannot be taken for granted.

How should we communicate to millennials? They like to see themselves as instigators of campaigns and use social media as springboards to campaign. They value transparency of communication and appreciate consistent messages endorsed by well-known personalities. Ms Freitas concluded her journey of 'mythbusting' with four points:

1. It's not lack of political awareness, but rather the idea that politics cannot deliver as it is.
2. Culture is the main interest of millennials. Politics should stick to culture.
3. Millennials are pro-European but the EU is not delivering policies that matter to them.
4. Millennials believe that politics is a value-space mission. The renewal process of politics should be transformative.

Irene Milleiro then proceeded to present her take on millennials, from the perspective of Change.org. She agreed that the question of 'What is wrong with millennials?' is a prevalent yet inaccurate one. The behaviour of millennials on Change.org is indicative of their different behaviours. She described a number of examples of campaigns started by millennials from around the world on Change.org that reached a level of saliency sufficient to effect change. She drew together the common ingredients of success from these stories in three key points:

- 1) A personal story – a general problem personified.
- 2) Ask for a 'little big thing' – small, achievable things that can get you on the right path.
- 3) Campaigns are powered by email and social media.

According to Change.org's data, millennials are mobile, visual and social. Ms Milleiro went on to explore examples of companies which are successfully communicating to millennials, for example Al Jazeera, and contrasted it with the social media strategy of the institutions, which proves lacking in this regard. Her advice for the institutions is to listen, but then also to act in response.

Finally, **Natalie Rastoin** presented her view on communicating with millennials from the perspective of the private sector and large corporations. She stated that everyone agrees that millennials are interested in politics and in many other aspects of life, and are very active within companies. She then offered some practical action points for companies, giving practical examples to illustrate each one.

- Communicate with millennials and not for millennials.
- Empower them to take action and build engagement.
- Use the internet to gather and act, not to debate.
- Be accessible, open and relevant on social media, even for complex issues.
- Be explicit about what you give and what you get.
- Promote efficient fact checking to fight post-truth politics.
- Provide answers to issues rather than comprehensive political programmes.
- Experiment, learn and improve, and keep in mind that impact matters more than status.

In conclusion, Ms Rastoin noted that even their biggest international clients may not yet have embarked on the road that needs to be taken for millennials to be won over.

A lively Q&A debate ensued before the session was wrapped up by **Mr Lyle**, who suggested points of conclusion of the session as a tool for companies and institutions in communicating with millennials:

1. Be available.
2. Be honest and trustworthy.
3. Be local.