

COVID-19: Measures of the Austrian government and the perception of the New Generations

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ABSTRACT: *The ongoing pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVI-19) brings different challenges for society. Through nationwide quarantines, countries are trying to counteract the virus SARS-CoV-2, which has the consequences of curfews, event postponements and cancellations, facility closures and travel restrictions. The aim of the measures are to protect human health and to slow down the spread of the virus. A quantitative survey with 375 people was conducted to examine the perception of the measures of the Austrian federal government on the New Generations in Austria.*

KEYWORDS: *Covid19, pandemic, new generations, government*

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I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is the name given to the disease associated with coronavirus, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In contrast to other coronaviruses, SARS-CoV-2 is a new strain which has not been identified in humans before. The first outbreak was identified in the city of Wuhan, Hubei, China in December 2019.

Since then, the virus spread rapidly around the globe, which is why the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized it as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020. [1] [2] As of March 20, more than 270.000 cases of COVID-19 have been reported worldwide, resulting in more than 10.000 deaths and nearly 88.000 recoveries. [3] [4] [5] The virus spreads from human to human via small respiratory droplets, although animals are believed to be the original source. These droplets are transmitted through sneezing, coughing or having less distance than one meter while interacting with someone. It is possible to inhale the virus as well as get infected by touching the mouth or else after being in contact with an infected surface since the virus is able to survive for hours or even days depending on the surface. The symptoms of COVID-19 can vary from being asymptomatic to having fever, cough, sore throat, loss of the sense of smell as well as taste. In some cases, the infected suffer from pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and septic shock, which is potentially leading to death. [1] Since there is no vaccine, preventive measures were introduced to keep the numbers of new infections as low as possible. Therefore, people are asked to wash their hands regularly, disinfect the surfaces, keep a distance from more than one meter and to cover their mouth. Additionally, globally travel restrictions, closed borders and national restrictions from closed shops and schools to complete lockdowns. [6] People do not only suffer from a lack of personal social contacts but experience widespread fears of supply shortages, resulting in panic buying. [7] Simultaneously misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 appear on the Internet. [8]

Six months after the first recorded cases in Wuhan, China, the World Health Organization confirms more than 6.200.000 infections and 379.000 deaths worldwide. [9]

Every country developed an individual strategy to deal with the pandemic, the numbers of infections and deaths as well as the economic and political impacts and consequences. There was no uniform procedure across Europe. This paper focuses on the impact of measures of the Austrian federal government on the New Generations in Austria.

II. REGULATIONS IN AUSTRIA

The first COVID-19 infections in Austria were confirmed on February 25th in Tyrol. One day later, an Austrian lawyer who has been in a Viennese hospital for ten days, also tested positive for the SARS-CoV-virus. The majority of the first cases in Austria can be traced back to visits to Italy, but from March 5th, illnesses in Austria as well as in European countries like Island or Norway are increasingly attributed to visits to the city of Ischgl, Tyrol, Austria. First, a bar in Ischgl was closed, two days later the entire ski area was shut down in order to avoid further distribution. [10]

According to the situation, the Austrian government announced the first massive interventions in public life on March 10th: indoor events with over a hundred people and outdoor events with over 500 people are

prohibited, universities are closed. Further, the Austrian population was asked to minimize social contacts and to comply with hygiene regulations. It soon became known that schools and kindergartens would also close with a few days' notice, which they did about six days later with a stage plan. As the Austrian population feared curfews like in Italy, hamster purchases – mostly pasta, canned dishes and toilet paper - are the result. [11]

The numbers in Austria increased from March 10th to March 13th from 157 to 428 people who tested positive for COVID-19. From 12th to 13th March alone, 208 new infections were registered. [12] This development leads to the so-called “lockdown” or exit restrictions. On March 15th, the legislative package announced by the government to curb the corona crisis was adopted in a rapid pace procedure: Austrians are only allowed to leave their homes when they go to work, shop for groceries, help other people or go for a walk - all with a minimum distance of one meter to other people. On the following day, all shops that do not serve basic services remain closed and Chancellor Sebastian Kurz asked the Austrians to work from home if this is possible. [11]

At the end of March, further measures were announced by the Austrian government. For example, supermarkets may only be entered with a mask and by a limited number of people. Additionally, supermarkets need floor markings, provide disinfectants at the entry and use glass panes at the checkouts to protect their employees. [11] On March 31st, Austria confirmed 10.019 infections which correspond to an increase of 571 infections from the previous day. [12] With April 2020, the domestic banks agreed to temporarily raise the amount for contactless payments with Austrian payment cards without entering a PIN from EUR 25 to EUR 50. This enabled customers more payments without physical contact, which means a lower risk of a COVID-19 transmission by touching the keyboard of POS terminals or touching money. [13]

In addition to the measures to reduce the spread of the virus, the Austrian government announced financial support and other help so that the Austrian economy could recover. The economic aid package is aimed to preserve jobs, secure liquidity, enable emergency aid for the self-employed and should cushion business losses. The range of aid measures ranges from the Corona short-time working model to nonrepayable grants and loan grants to guarantees. To this end, the Federal Government has created various types of support and funding. [14] Although the short-time working model secured jobs, the unemployment rate was estimated 12,2 % at the end of March (+ 4,7 % compared to March 2019). [15]

The existing exit restrictions expired on 30th April, but a new COVID-19 ordinance came into force. It prescribes a general obligation to wear a mask that covers mouth, nose and chin for example when entering a public place, outdoor market or in a taxi. Further, a distance of at least one meter must be kept from people who do not belong to the common household. In addition, all customer areas could be re-entered when there is a minimum area of 10 m² per customer and small events for up to 10 people were allowed. On May 15th, the restaurants opened again but also with measures like wearing a mask. Since then, the measures have been gradually reduced and, for example, the borders have been reopened although travel warnings still exist. [16]

An analysis of the records shows that especially the older generations, as well as people with previous illnesses are affected by this pandemic and belong to the risk group. However, for quick containment of the crisis, all people were equally affected. The new generations were required to abide by the regulations and to do their part to protect the risk groups.

The study is intended to show how Generation Y and Generation Z perceive government measures and how they react.

III. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative analyses were used for empirical research. The research focuses on the perception of the New Generations regarding the COVID-19 early defined measures of the Austrian government. The NG were defined with Generation Y and Generation Z, which were born between 1980 and 1995 and after 1995. Due to the technical possibility, the survey was shared on the social media platform Instagram to take advantage of the technical affinity of the Millennials and Z's.

The online survey took place between 14. March 2019 and 16. March 2019 with the title “New Generations in Austria: The influence of COVID-19”. It included ten questions where two questions are not part of this evaluation because they are not relevant. The survey took approximately 3 minutes to complete all the questions. Four hundred nineteen participants completed all questions, and about 98% belonging to Generation Y or Generation Z (n=375). Only five respondents (1.19%) were not part of the NG and born between 1965 and 1980. All age groups were designed analogue theoretical definitions in order not to exclude the older participants. However, these were not considered in the evaluation because the survey aims to analyze the needs of New Generations.

Age	Numberofrespondents
before 1945	0.00% (n=0)
between 1945 and 1965	0.00% (n=0)
between 1965 and 1980	1.19% (n=5)
between 1980 and 1995	69.93% (n=293)
after 1995	28.88% (n=121)

Table 1: Age groups of the survey participants

Furthermore, the respondents needed to come from Austria, since the questions related to the first measures of the Austrian federal government. Analogous to the age groups, the participants from all countries had the opportunity to participate. However, only Austrian citizens were taken into account in the evaluation because the survey aims to analyze the needs of New Generations in Austria.

Nationality	Numberofrespondents
Austria	89.98% (n=377)
Germany	7.64% (n=32)
Switzerland	0.72% (n=3)
Others	1.67% (n=7)

Table 2: Origin of the survey participants

Other social demographic data of respondents such as gender, or religion were not taken into account in the survey as this survey refers to the perception of Generation Y and Generation Z about the measures regarding COVID-19.

IV. FINDINGS

In the following paragraphs, the results of the survey are described and analyzed in detail.

How did you find out about the measures taken by the Austrian government regarding COVID-19?

Traditional information channels such as TV and radio have been around for many decades. In 1990 these channels were supplemented by the World Wide Web (Internet) and in the 2000s by social media platforms. The new generations, in particular, show a strong affinity for the last two.

TV and radio are regulated, and non-official news agencies can also publish articles on the Internet and social media. The survey showed that 69.97% of the subjects continued to use television as a source of information on COVID-19. Followed by social media platforms with 56.27% News agencies also operate their websites on the Internet and publish them analogously to TV amounts. The usage of the world wide web showed up at 46.40%. The radio use was 32.53%.

Even though knowledge and information are often spread via word of mouth, in the crisis, this was only possible by telephone (28%). Especially in an unprecedented scenario, the survey showed that primary information acquisition played an important role.

Newspapers as a traditional information channel were only mentioned by a few test subjects and are shown in the category "other" (4.80%). Print media do not allow a real-time query of current changes. Information and reports are published a day later. Especially in this crisis, it was important for the NG to be informed of the current status every hour.

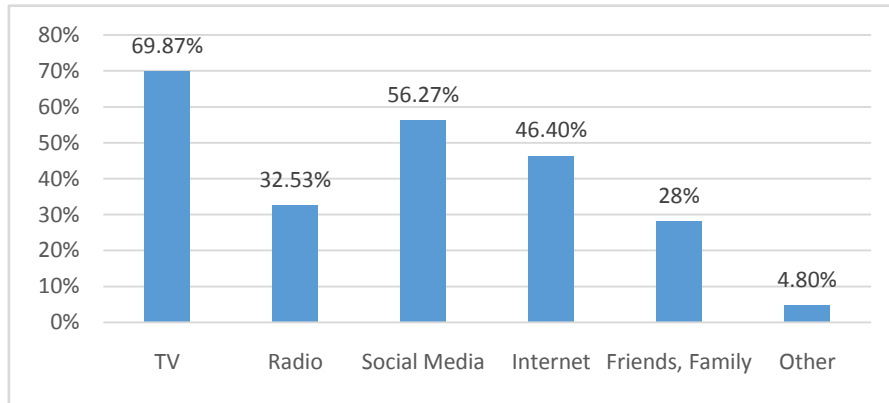


Figure 1: Usage of information medium

Do you think the measures taken by the Austrian government are appropriate because of the current situation?

The COVID-19 pandemic is an event never seen before in Austria in the 21st century. The government had to implement measures and laws to protect the population quickly. People and industries were equally affected.

The New Generations confirmed that the measures taken by the Austrian government are appropriate because of the current situation. The median of the evaluation is ten and the mean at 9.03. Standard deviation at 1.58.

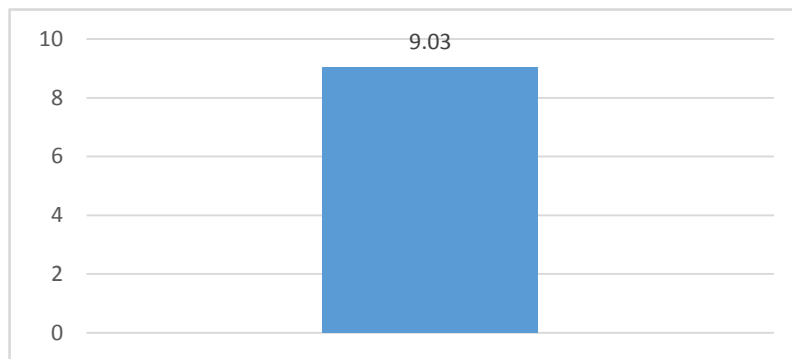


Figure 2: Impact assessment of the measures of the AG

Will you follow the recommendations of the Austrian government? (Avoidance of social contacts etc.)

It is essential to define and react to laws and regulations quickly. However, it is more important that these must also be implemented by the population so that the measures are successful. Strict recommendations were issued by the Austrian government, such as avoidance of social contacts.

The survey shows that Generation Y and Z will follow the recommendations, even if these mean cuts in privacy. The median is at nine and the mean at 8.74. The standard deviation is 1.72.

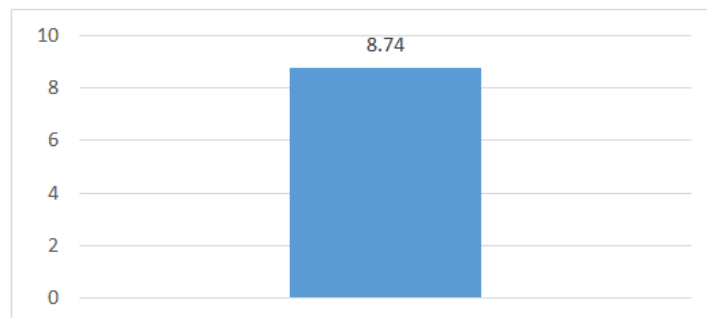


Figure 3: Acceptance of the recommendations of the AG

Fake News: Do you share information about the development of COVID 19 with your friends/acquaintances/family without knowing the source of information?

News, reports and information were the most crucial subject for society at the beginning of the pandemic. However, not only the facts were spread, but there were also many false reports, so-called fake news.

Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, are known for the increased use of digital possibilities and thus the possible rapid dissemination of information. Three hundred twenty-two denied the question of whether the information is shared about the development of COVID 19 without knowing the source of information (85.87%). Fifty-three people (14.13%) said they shared messages with friends/acquaintances/family.

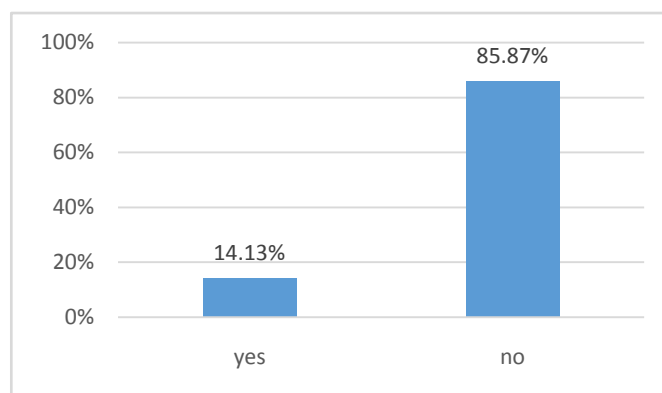


Figure 4: Sharing of information without a source of information

What are you missing about COVID-19?

Comprehensive measures were taken during the first week of the COVID-19 crisis. Even if these have been defined to protect the population, it can happen that they do not feel safe.

The following graphic shows that for 130 (34.67%) people from Generation Y and Z, everything about COVID-19 is OK. Sixty-two people (16.53%) would like to have more information from the government, and 129 people (34.40%) would like to have more transparency.

As a first step, the Austrian federal government decided to take preventive measures, with 34.13% of those surveyed (n = 128) wanting stricter regulations. Ninety-one people (24.27%) say they want to feel more secure.

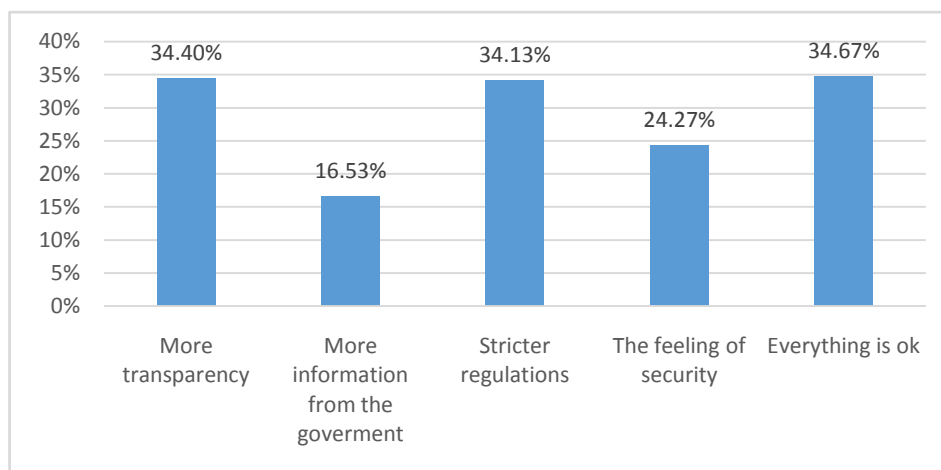


Figure 5: Future recommendations to the AG

V. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the almost daily changing measures of the Austrian government to counteract the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the perception of the new generations is a snapshot. Furthermore, the entire population of Austria should be included in the evaluation of the measures. Only through cohesion and compliance with the regulations is it possible to win the fight to contain the virus. Further studies should be conducted to analyse how the measures of the government have affected the population. Furthermore, an overview of the different measures of the EU countries over time would make a significant contribution to combating future pandemics.

VI. CONCLUSION

The pandemic COVID-19 posed major challenges for the states. The federal government of Austria had to define rapid measures to protect the population. While the older generations have been through different crises, much has been demanded of the new generations.

The paper shows that Gen Y and Z are in favour of the measures taken by the government and are actively involved in the implementation. While the radio was still the only source of information during the world wars, the survey showed that TV was used most frequently by young people. However, information acquisition via the Internet or social media is also very pronounced. At the beginning of the crisis, fake news was spread; however, Gen Y and Z reject this.

Even if the Austrian government announced massive interventions in public and private life, the respondents were satisfied with the New Generations and thought that the measures taken were appropriate because of the situation. The same applies to the acceptance of these actions, which means that the majority will adhere to the guidelines.

However, another part would like to have greater transparency and stricter rules, whereby a large part felt very safe, and the approach was accepted.

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