

Ownership

0. What, and how?
1. Why is our relationship with ownership in crisis?
2. What is community ownership? (And why is it relevant now?)
3. What's Web3 got to do with it?
4. What about organisations?

Exclusivity Influence Ownership

We want to look at keywords that dominate brand and media conversations. We think these are “DIRTY WORDS” whose original meaning has been modified by cultural shifts.

As the “DIRTY WORD” is used and its new meaning proliferates, it gathers cultural baggage and becomes increasingly narrow in definition. We want to take a step back and re-focus on the usage of these words. The intention is not to reach an objective definition of each “DIRTY WORD,” but to explore concept and context to build a foundation for discussion.

What this issue is about

We investigated a contemporary crisis of faith in dominant models of ownership - from branded products and creative work through to property and land - where younger generations in particular believe something has to change.

But they are optimistic that community models of ownership, especially those that include marginalised communities, can create a better future and address our biggest challenges.

We focused our exploration on this shift towards community ownership models, where governance and financial rights are making concrete the pervasive idea of community, as well as sharing some insights from the Protein Community's own experiments in Web3-enabled ownership models.

However, the younger generations we surveyed are also comparatively sceptical about the promise of Web3 - seeing it as an extension of older models. In this report we want to examine the movements and actors in community ownership today, investigate how Web3 tools and groups can truly extend community ownership, and avoid repeating the harmful impact of the technologies they were designed to replace.

Methodology

CULTURAL REVIEW

We held a hypotheses workshop with Protein's insights team. Here we explored our individual desk research findings, lessons from recent projects and our own observations.

GLOBAL SURVEY

We tested these hypotheses with people around the globe, spanning four generations.

CULTURAL INSTIGATOR CONVERSATIONS

We contextualised our findings by speaking to three experts who have established community ownership models.

PROTEIN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

We tested our findings with an invited selection of members from the Protein Community.



Deana Burke

Boys Club, US



Joshua Odamtten

Skate Nation Ghana, Ghana



Austin Robey

Ampld & Metalabel, US

The three cultural instigators we spoke to

Our survey respondents

550 people from
41 countries across
4 generations

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda, United States, United Arab Emirates, New Zealand

Parlia's Opinion DNA™

Not your average research survey

For this iteration of Dirty Words we wanted to switch up our community surveys. We collaborated with Parlia for an opinion-statement based survey related to "Ownership".

Opinion DNA™ is an innovative diagnostic for understanding the complete picture of your personality, values, and thinking, allowing for a correlated and unprecedented look across these elements, and how they express across various topics. Our respondents got to see how their own opinion mapped.



This report forms part of a fundamental cultural conversation and movement around community ownership.

BIAS DISCLOSURE*

The authors of this report acknowledge our cultural and economic biases and that therefore this report cannot be universally representative. For this reason we have been conscious to include sources, case studies, research respondents, interviews, and contributing perspectives from different genders, countries, sectors, and cultural backgrounds.

The majority (but not all) of the authors and quoted contributors speak English as a first or second language. There are non-binary, female, and male voices represented. Not all, but most contributors are considered to have higher income within their country of residence. Our survey results are skewed towards the US, UK and EU, which framed our data on how ownership is perceived.

Within the scope of this report we cannot be exhaustive in our representation, but we aim to continue building on this fundamental conversation with an invitation to [join the Protein Community](#) to continue the conversation, wherever and whenever you are.

*this bias disclosure was inspired by Futerra's reporting

Why is our relationship with ownership in crisis?

With living costs, inequality, and human rights violations rising, and irresponsible business practices being called out everyday, ideologies and systems of ownership are being questioned.

People are tired of institutions (including companies, brands, governments and financial markets) holding power without access, transparency and accountability to the people they serve. Many see these problems as bound up with prevailing systems of institutional ownership.

Ownership in crisis



13th century 21st century



POLITICS

Rising costs are making student life almost impossible



My parents in their 30s



Me in my 30s



I don't have a house but am going to buy the constitution online with my internet friends



Our research found five key drivers of the crisis of faith in current ownership models.

1 . UNMANAGEABLE COST OF LIVING

Simple needs are rapidly transforming into luxuries even in the world's richest cities, threatening people's sense of agency and security. For most young people globally, property ownership is but a distant dream

3 . ECO - ANXIETY

As the climate crisis intensifies, so does its impact on mental and physical wellbeing. The institutions meant to steward our shared environment are continually called out for their greenwashing and cynicism. Apathy and anxiety breeds when there's no sense of agency in a crisis.

2 . POLARISATION AND THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

Innovators and activists are resisting threats to democracy all over the world, highlighting that state and corporate ownership of media, the internet, public space and even body rights have been too easily weaponised to divide society.

4 . RECLAIMING CREATIVE CONTROL

With collaborations firmly part of the mainstream, the emergence of 'headless' brands and creators, and collectives protesting exploitative contracts, people are calling into question who really owns creative ideas. We're seeing an increasingly defiant push back on brands that have for too long capitalised on innovation coming from grassroots cultures.

5 . THE BIG TIRED

Alongside the demise of the #girlboss, hustle and grind culture is losing its halo. Terms like 'quiet quitting' and 'the great resignation' are coming to the fore, forcing us to reckon with our ideas around 'progress' and achievement.

1. Unmanageable cost of living

Simple needs are rapidly transforming into luxuries even in the world's richest cities, threatening people's sense of agency and security. For most young people globally, property ownership is but a distant dream



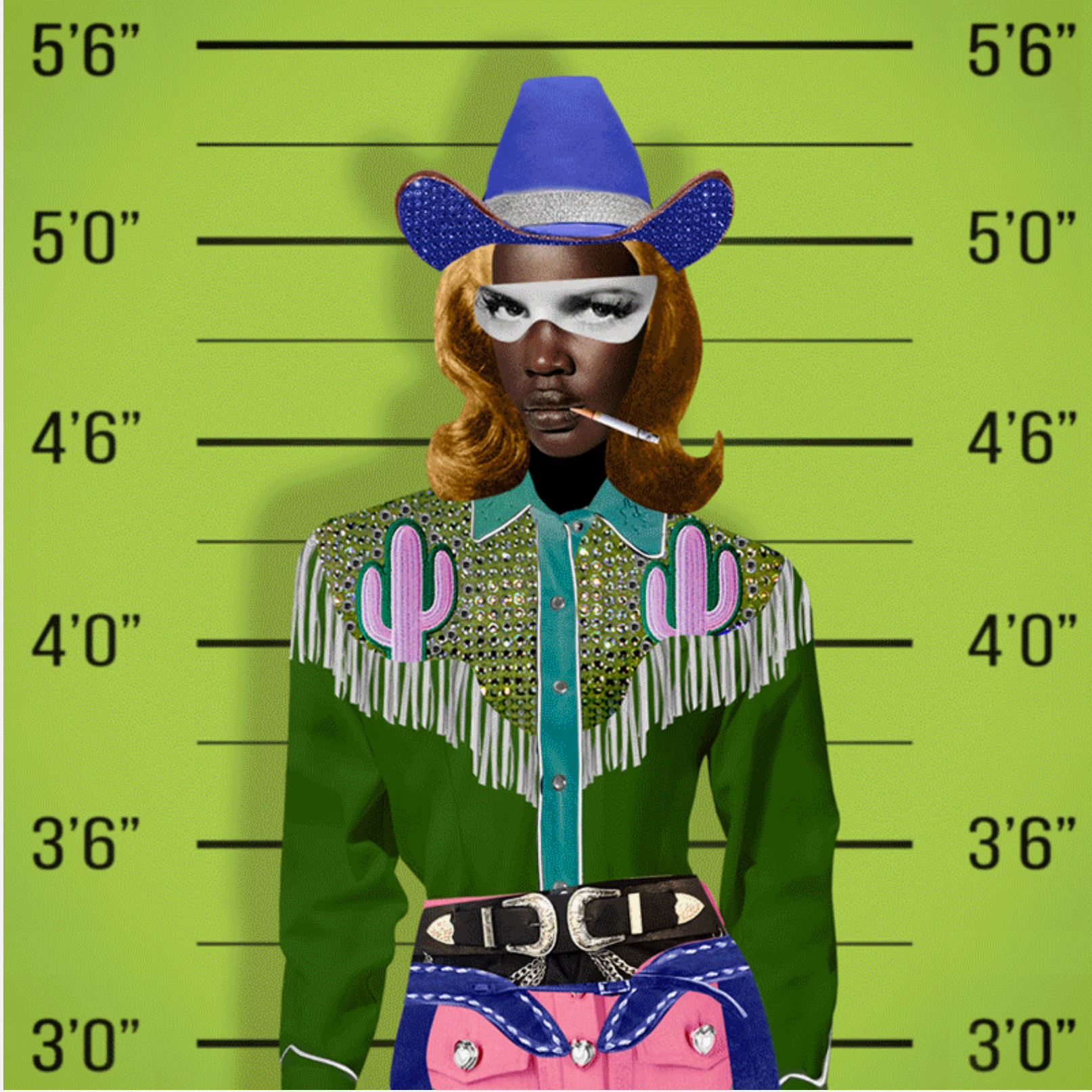
“It’ll be a lot of fun in the short term: cheap credit, digital media on demand, and the idea of ownership for things we don’t really own. But in the long term, we’ll willingly give up rights and privileges that would make the average American living in 1958 puke.”

Isaiah McCall, *Yard Couch*

Housing activist Kwajo Tweneboa is fighting for social housing rights, in his new programme ‘Untold: Help! my home is disgusting’ he takes on social housing tenants’ and private renters’ calls for help.

2. Polarisation and threats to democracy

Innovators and activists are resisting threats to democracy all over the world, highlighting that state and corporate ownership of media, the internet, public space and even body rights have been too easily weaponised to divide society.



COWGIRL DAO

A radical DAO with a highly political purpose, the Computer Cowgirls are loudly prodding the Texan state and supporters of oppressive reproductive policies through its dedicated decentralised format. Resistant NFTs have collected \$3million for organisations that provide abortion access and support to those affected by Roe vs Wade.

3. Eco-anxiety



As the climate crisis intensifies, so does its impact on mental and physical wellbeing. The institutions meant to steward our shared environment are continually called out for their greenwashing and cynicism. Apathy and anxiety breeds when there's no sense of agency in a crisis

“The only power we’ve got is to get together and act politically as a community, to rage and resist. Class consciousness and resisterhood, that’s what I’ll be singing about and I’m looking forward to hearing from everyone else at the festival.”

Louisa Roach, She Drew The Gun.

Extinction Rebellion hosted The Weekend of Resistance in October 2022 where thousands came together to harness the anger about the governmental lack of action regarding the climate crisis and intersecting cost of living crisis, felt by subverting rage into joyful empowerment.

4. Reclaiming creative control

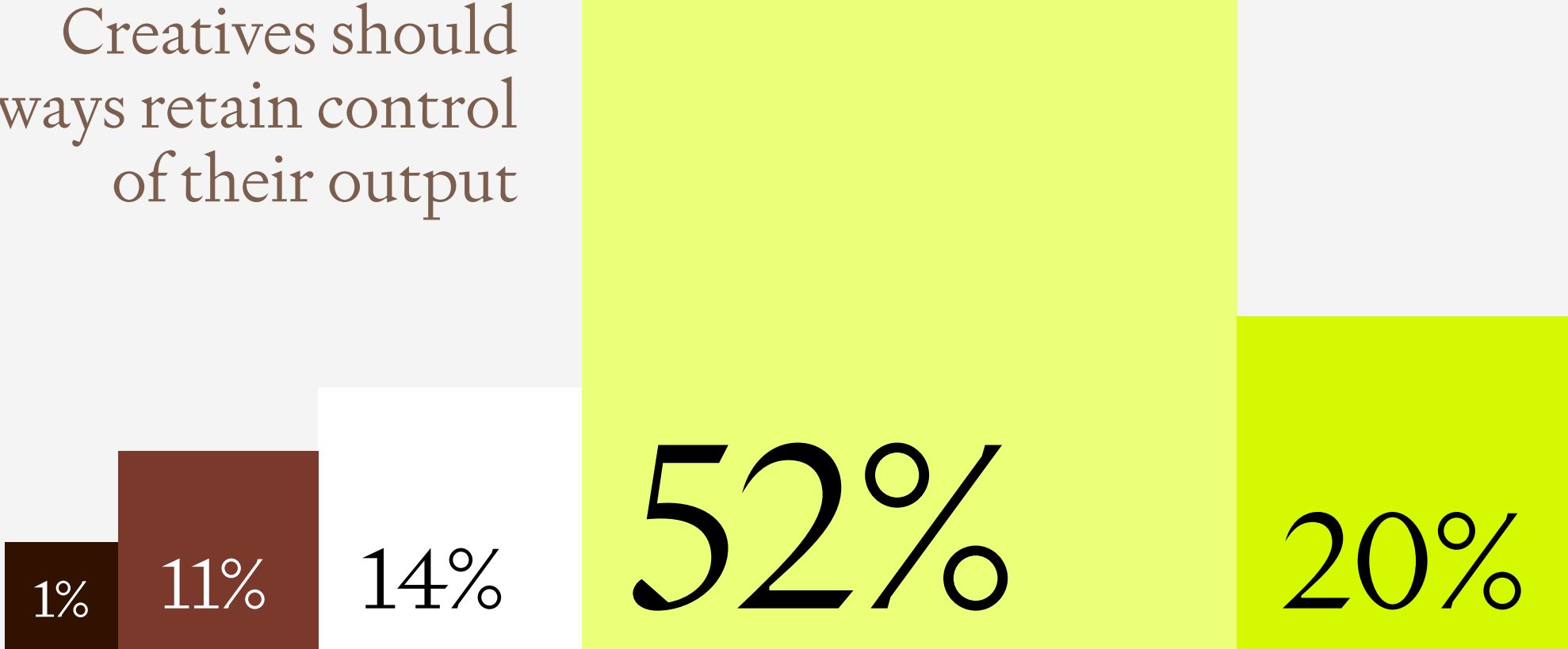
With collaborations firmly part of the mainstream, the emergence of 'headless' brands and creators, and collectives protesting exploitative contracts, people are calling into question who really owns creative ideas. We're seeing an increasingly defiant push back on brands that have for too long capitalised on innovation coming from grassroots cultures.



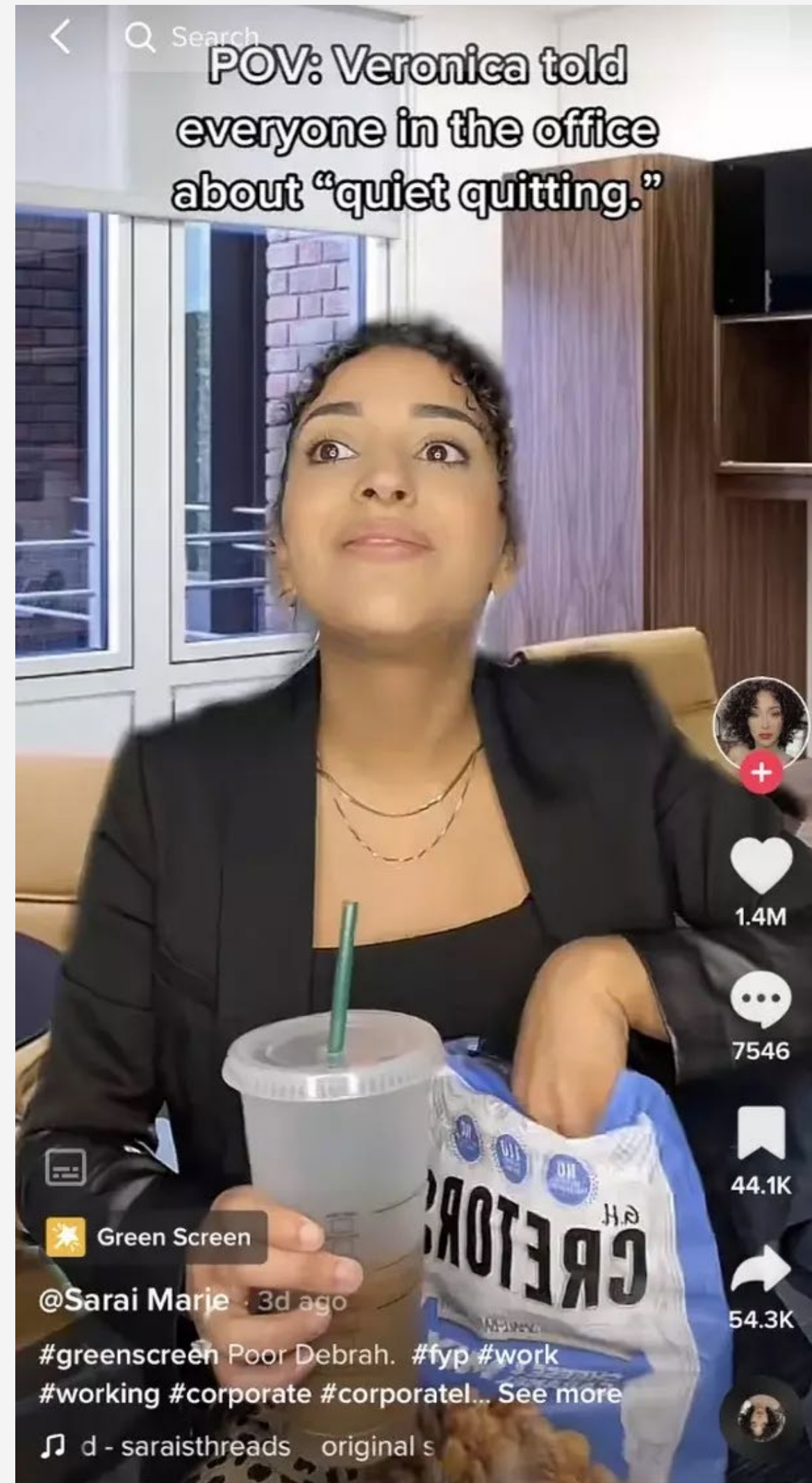
British streetwear brand Corteiz reacted to Boohoo stealing their designs by selling 'I love boohoes tees' until Boohoo pulled the dupes off the market.



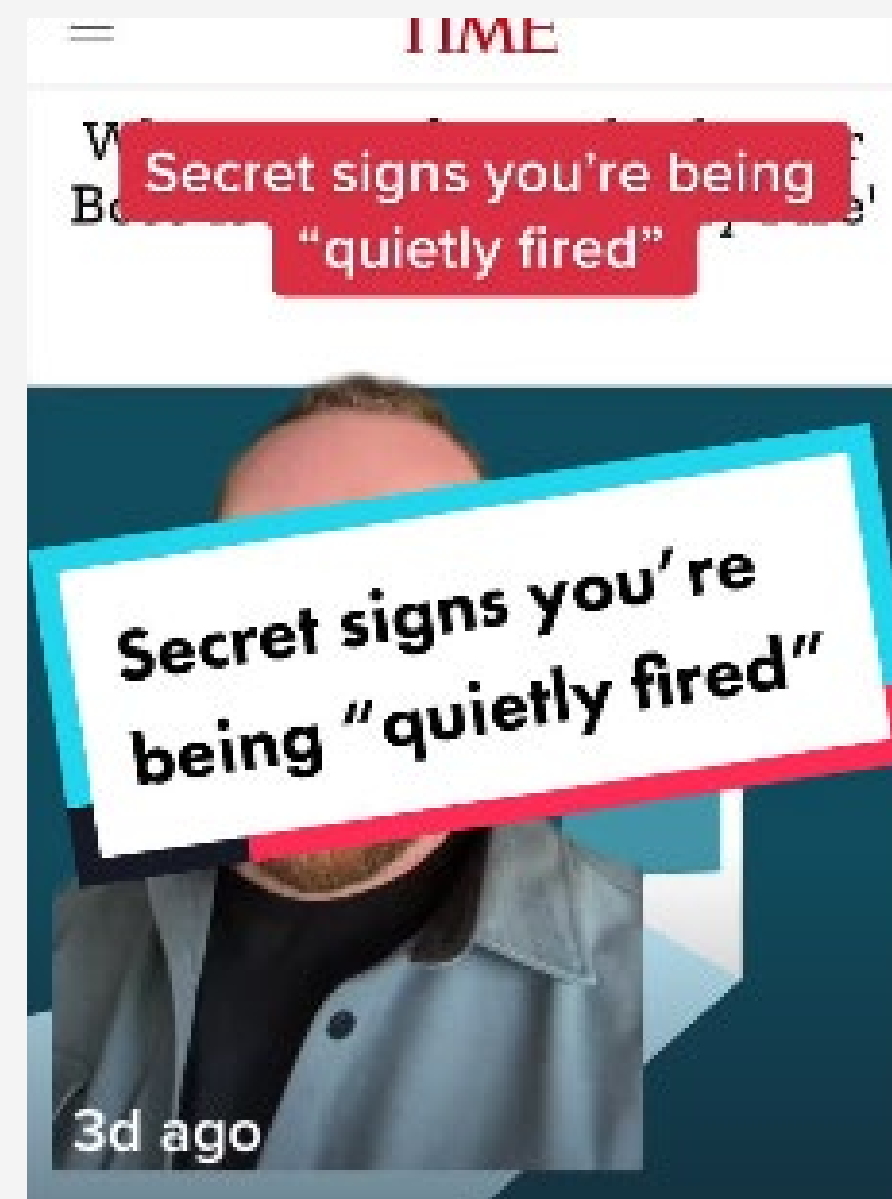
Creatives should always retain control of their output



5. The Big Tired



Alongside the demise of the #girlboss, hustle and grind culture is losing its halo. Terms like 'quiet quitting' and 'the great resignation' are coming to the fore, forcing us to reckon with our ideas around 'progress' and achievement.



TikToks related to quiet quitting have amassed over 350m views globally.

These drivers signal that the conversational buzz around ownership is a reaction to deeply-felt financial, emotional and ecological instability.

1 . UNMANAGEABLE COST OF LIVING



2 . POLARISATION AND THREATS TO DEMOCRACY



3 . ECO-ANXIETY



4 . RECLAIMING CREATIVE CONTROL



5 . THE BIG TIRED



Instability and uncertainty have increased the need for empowerment – and fueled the crisis of faith in institutions that withhold it.

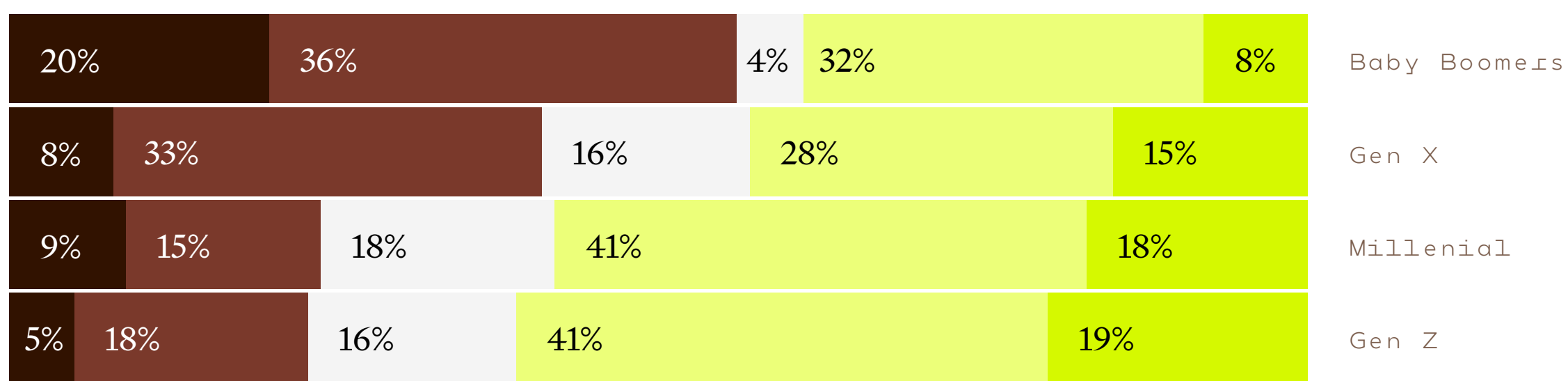
“Groups are reacting to the absurdity of the capitalist promise: a high-paying, easy job will one day be yours, granting property ownership, endless consumption and unlimited satisfaction. Yet no matter how close you get, the neoliberal asymptote tends out of reach. The popular view seems to be that close enough is no longer good enough”

Jack Self, The Real Review Issue for Spring 22

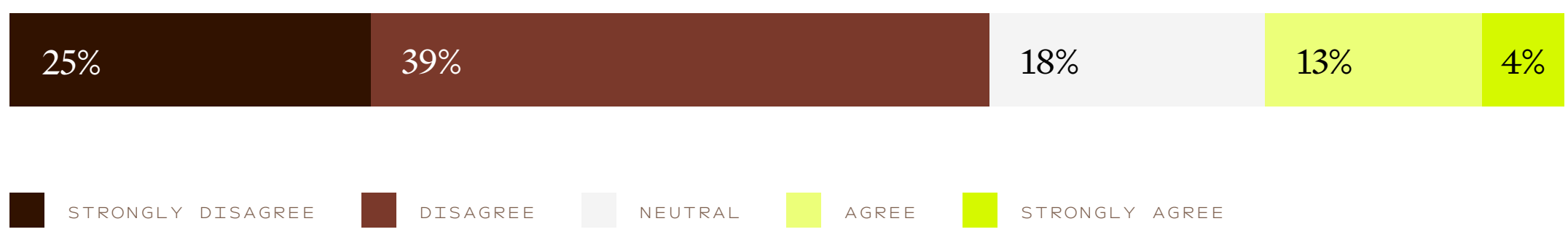
Social and economic inequalities are the root of our ownership crisis.

- The inequality of the distribution of financial wealth has a trickle down effect into ownership and is out of reach to many.
- 78% disagree that national wealth is fairly distributed, signalling a lack of trust in institutions across generations and genders.
- The majority of survey participants believe ownership is inaccessible to most people, this is particularly felt by younger generations, with 59% of Millennials and 60% of Gen Z, showing a generational difference in the possibility to be an owner.
- Despite the apparent inequalities within ownership systems, people do still want to be owners with only 17% of participants of felt renting was as good as buying. Maybe unsurprising in the context of a cost of living and housing crisis - ownership signals security and access.

Ownership is inaccessible to most people



Renting is as good as buying



Ownership is seen as both a cause and solution to inequality: current models contribute to marginalisation, but supporting minority-owned businesses will lead to fairer distributions.

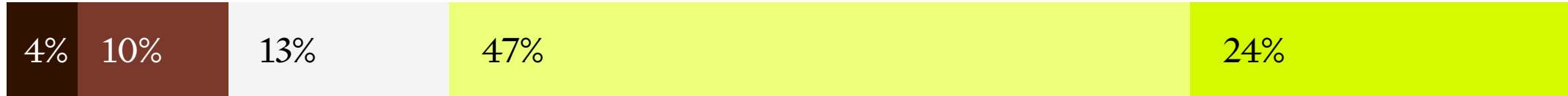
- Millennials and Gen Z demonstrate more radical tendencies than older generations in their position that governments should redistribute wealth.
- 76% (again skewed by age) agree that today's ownership models further marginalise some people.
- However, opinions were more aligned across generations when it came to seeing supporting minority ownership as a force for good.

“Just the concept of ownership is filled with some type of whiteness that probably needs to be further deconstructed.”
Tina Basi, Protein Community member, UK

Today's ownership models further marginalise some groups



Supporting businesses owned by people from marginalised groups will create positive change in the world



Legend: **STRONGLY DISAGREE** (dark brown), **DISAGREE** (medium brown), **NEUTRAL** (light grey), **AGREE** (light green), **STRONGLY AGREE** (bright green)

Ownership is more than a feeling...

“Ownership is an aggregate of a suite of rights and responsibilities that fall into either financial rights or decision making rights. That’s what ownership comes down to.”

Austin Robey, Ampled & Metalabel, Cultural Instigator, US

... so if ownership systems can be designed to be exploitative, they can be redesigned to empower.

“Just because our current notions of ownership were defined by powers we might not agree with, [that] doesn’t mean we should do away with the idea. We should fight for the very rights that today are only exercised by those in power.”

Bryan Wolff, *Decentralized Agency*, The Netherlands

What is community ownership and why is it relevant?

Community ownership is not new. It's one of the oldest and most successful ways that humans have lived together and survived complex challenges.

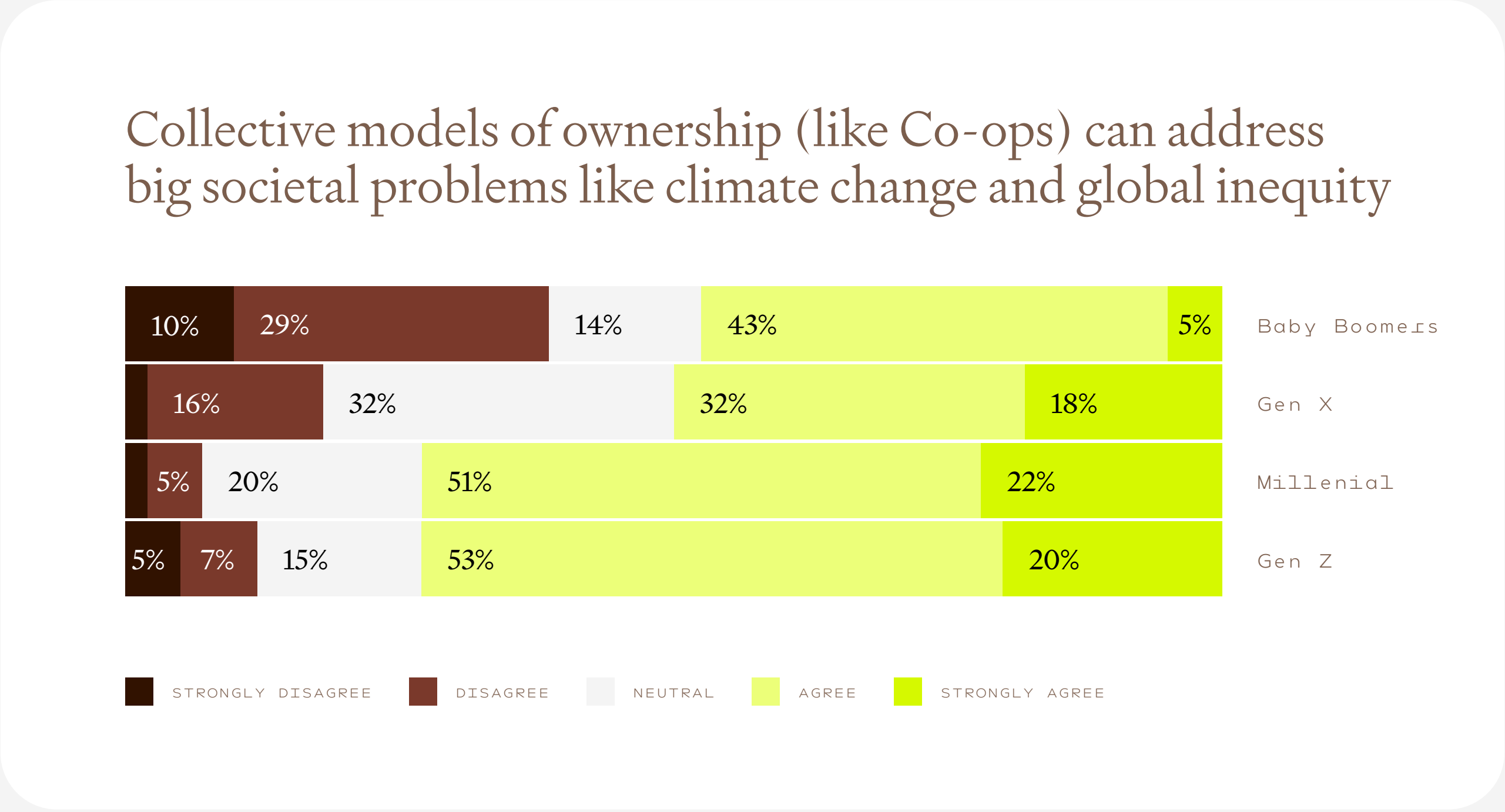
At a time when people feel failed by dominant systems and by isolated living, community ownership is seeing a resurgence as a means for co-operation and connection.

People still value community ownership models, which offer hope for finding solutions to our biggest collective challenges.

67% of survey respondents believe that co-ownership models can address global issues such as climate change and global inequities, a sentiment that is generally strong across all generations, but felt equally strongly by Millennials (73%) and Gen Z (73%).

“Over the past years, I think a lot of people became aware of the concept of mutual aid and the importance of their individual voices within a community. They became more aware of the parameters around what it means to have, but also actualise and impact community to actually make changes, especially seeing a lack of support from institutions.”

Ade Kassim, Protein Community member, US



“It’s time to have a share in your favourite venue; time to organise a group chat, open a bank account and start a co-op^{*}: the co-op will be the club and redistribute wealth, ownership and decision-making between its members, and run the club as a public good”

`‘Radical Spreadsheets’, a Sodaa zine`

`* (or a community benefit society, or both, or any other horizontal and/or non-for-profit form of organisation)`

If community ownership is the way forward, we also need to re-learn what it means to be in community with each other.

In economist Noreena Hertz's book *The Lonely Century: Coming Together in a World that's Pulling Apart*, she writes about how the loneliness 'epidemic' emerged from economic systems:

“40 years of neoliberal capitalism has, at best, marginalised values such as solidarity, community, togetherness and kindness. At worst, it has cast these values summarily aside. We need to embrace a new form of politics - one with care and compassion at its very heart.”

Noreena Hertz, *The Lonely Century: Coming Together in a World that's Pulling Apart*

“Skating made me change the way I think and the way I live because at first I always did things on my own. But now I have to look at doing this for other people”

Joshua Odamtten, SkateNation Ghana, Cultural Instigator, Ghana

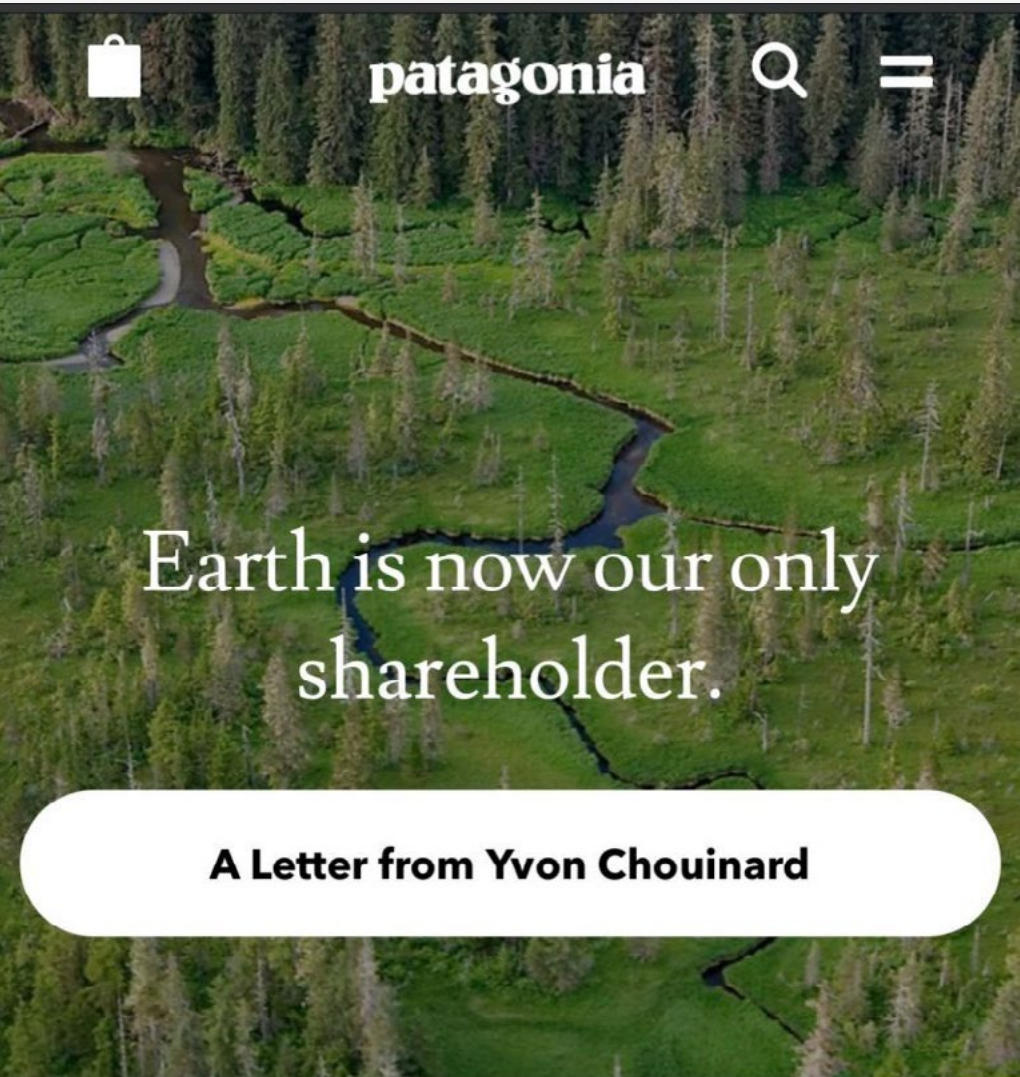
“There's tension between the terms *community* and *ownership*. Community is a social term; ownership brings to mind capital, finance, monetary exchange.

Tina Basi, Protein Community member, UK

There's an opportunity to resolve the tension between ownership and community focussed on care and connectivity.

Building an ownership system that makes care possible is not just a nice thing to have, it's fundamental to our collective futures.

Thinking beyond a purely human community, goes a step further in imagining what community ownership means for our futures if we also afforded nature, with both decision making and financial rights.



PATAGONIA

While not community owned, Patagonia's new business model is in effect held in trust to the global (interspecies) community. Financial and decision making rights are in service of a broad goal of serving and protecting the commons



FAITH IN NATURE

The personal care brand recently built on their sustainable products by affording nature voting rights in the company's management

“Nobody can be kin to everything, but our kin networks can be full of attachment sites. I feel like the need for care across generations is urgent, and it cannot be just a humanist affair”

Donna Haraway

Our investigation into emerging community models unearthed three (often overlapping) incentives:

Decolonising
space

Distributing
power and
agency

Creating
common
resources

Decolonising space

Community organisations that take decolonising space as their focus tackle one of the key drivers of social inequality - property ownership and rights. Many of these efforts are responding with new urgency to the climate crisis, food insecurity, and growing wealth inequality.



BLACK BEYOND

Extending art practice as community practice, black beyond subverts spaces allowing Black people and non-Black co-liberators to reallocate resources to underrepresented communities. The members engage in ongoing exercises of activation with planning and curation, with public Black exhibitions.



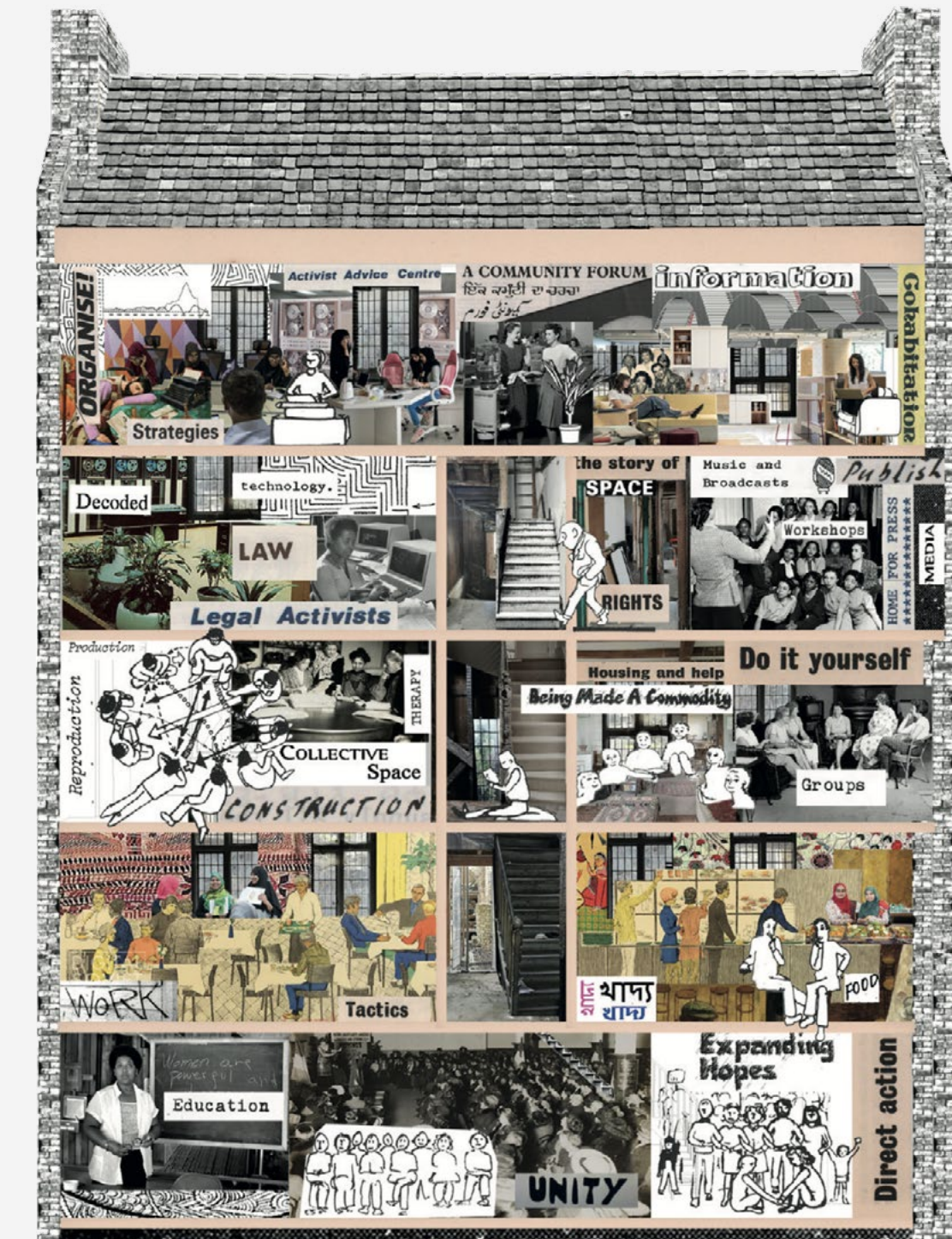
MAIA ORGANISATION

Based in Birmingham, artist-led Maia is an organisation that connects community-rooted artists with resources and design infrastructure.



OUTO

OUTO / Opening up the Outdoors is a not-for-profit initiative that focuses on the continued inclusion, education, and enjoyment of outdoor spaces by people of the global majority. A collective alliance between outdoor brands, agencies and community change makers.



HOUSE OF ANNETTA

Established in 2021, the House Of Annetta is a new social centre in London devoted to spatial justice and land reform. Run by the Edith Maryon Foundation, the organisation uses publishing, exhibitions, and workshops to promote architectural thought and community building.

Distributing power and agency

New ownership models offer mechanisms for more people to exercise agency and responsibility within the system. This is as much about owning the problem as it is about owning the solution.



AMPLED

Ampled is a Patreon-like platform for musicians, owned by its artists and workers. Ampled allows artists to be directly supported by their community without intermediaries or gatekeepers. The platform is founded on a simple idea: artists and workers who generate massive value for platforms should capture and own it, rather than having it extracted by investors.

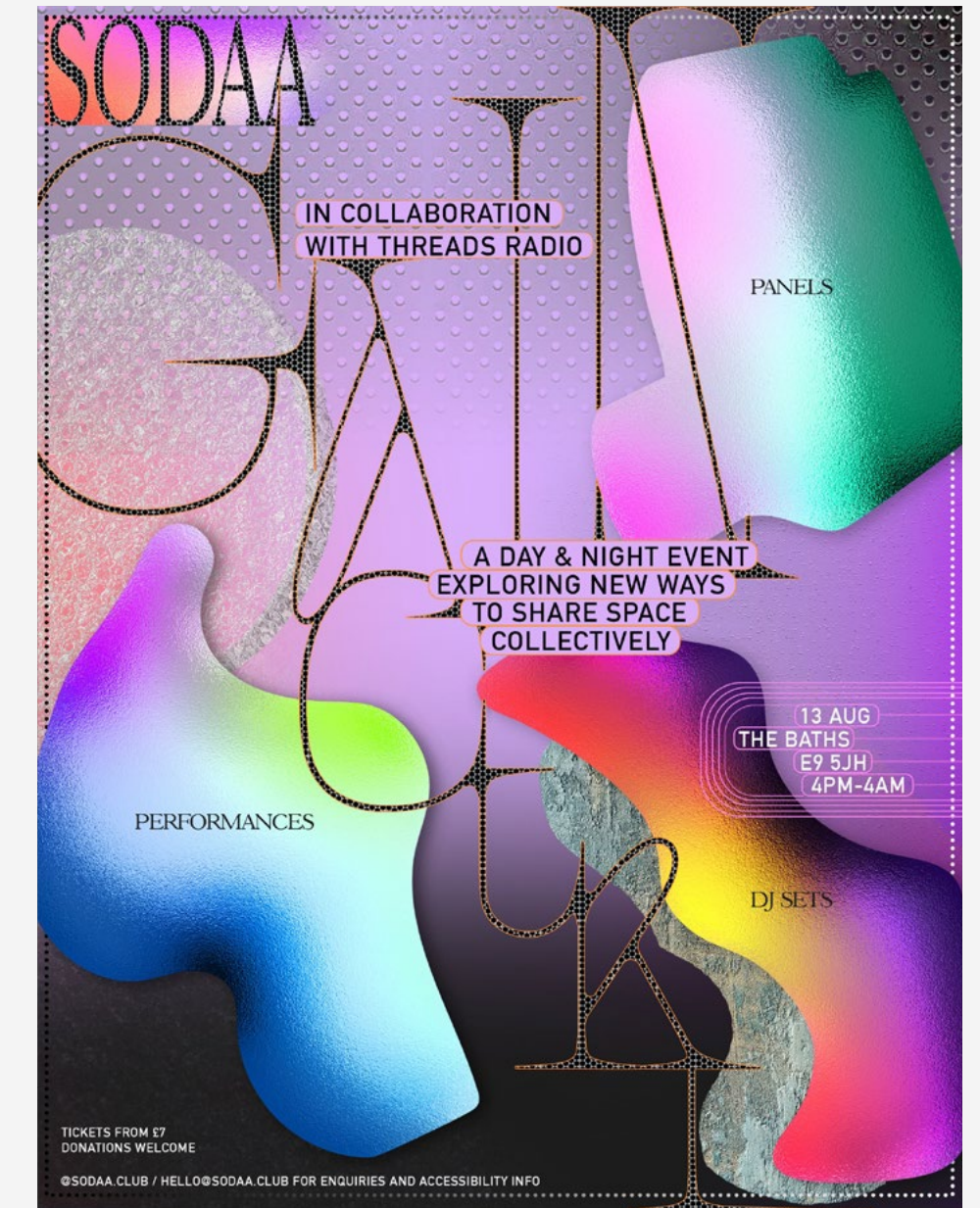


EARLY MAJORITY

Early Majority is a techwear brand that uses community production to create outerwear for all genders and circumstances. The founders combined their experience with a desire for women-led products and environmental sustainability, and work with young London women of colour to test their clothing.

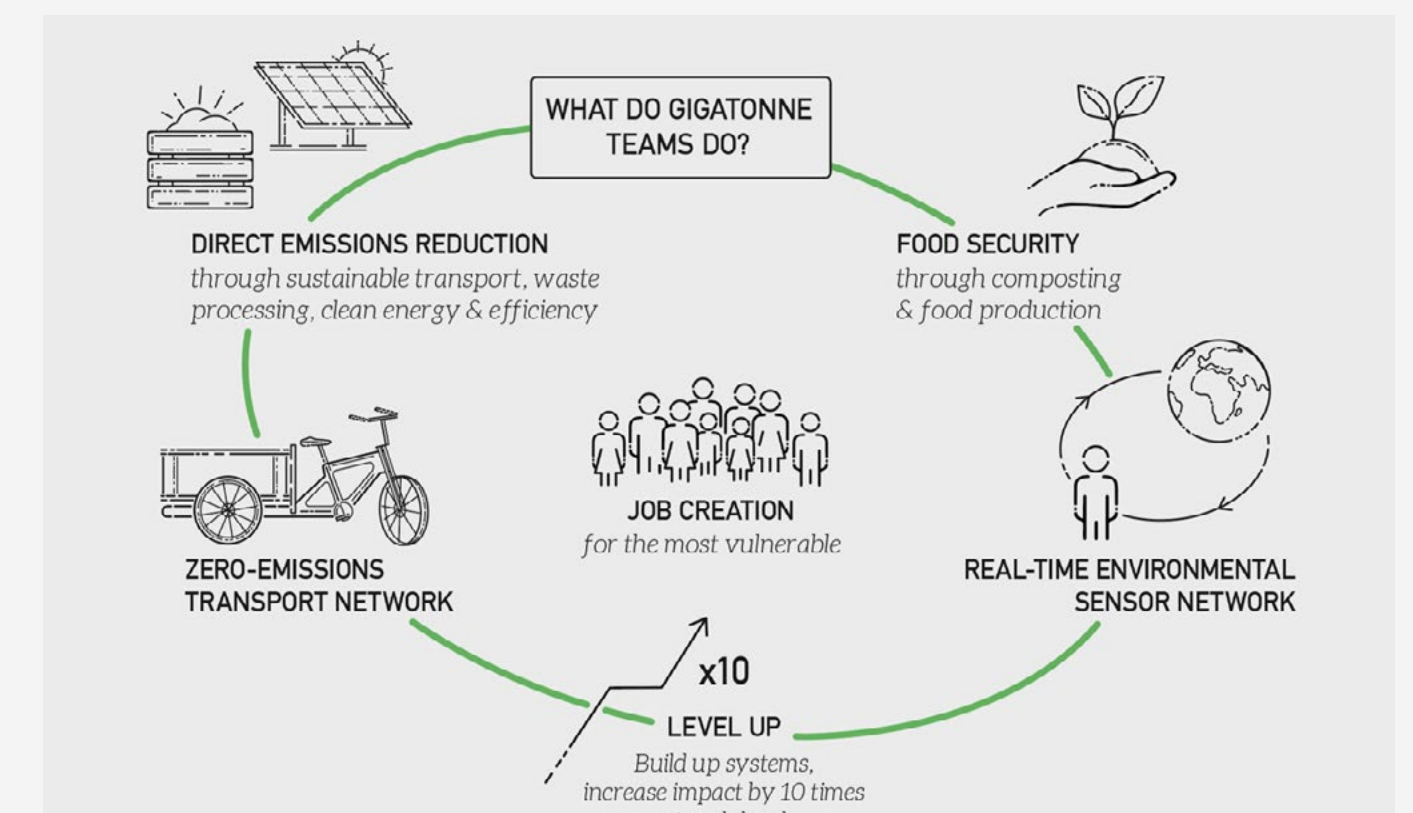
SODAA CLUB

Sodaa club are a community entrenched in the London cultural scene developing decentralised governance models for experimental music & arts venues. The collective are highly engaged in discussion and congregation, hosting meetings, panels, and parties to further inclusion and sustainability in music.



THE GIGATONNE CHALLENGE

Calling on working teams to take the Gigatonne challenge has equipped companies and individuals with the knowledge and tools to lower their emissions in just two weeks. Benchmarks increase with each level of the challenge, extending the limits of company accountability and transformation.



“Everything I do, I do it for the community. I don’t do it just for myself, or I would have been far gone by now. I’m moving with a crowd, I’m moving with an army. [...] I have to make sure I get the opinion of everybody so that the next step doesn’t affect the next person badly. We try for equality and understanding. We are moving as leaders in the same direction, but we are coming from different places.”

Joshua Odamtten, Skate Nation Ghana,
Cultural Instigator, Ghana



Creating commons

Ownership models that enable people to pool their resources and knowledge to protect what they care about, regenerates environments and the relationships they rely on.



SKATE NATION GHANA

A truly grassroots initiative using skateboarding to connect, educate and protect youth all over Ghana. Ownership of boards, shoes and space is intuitively shared - a reaction to scarcity and strong community unity.



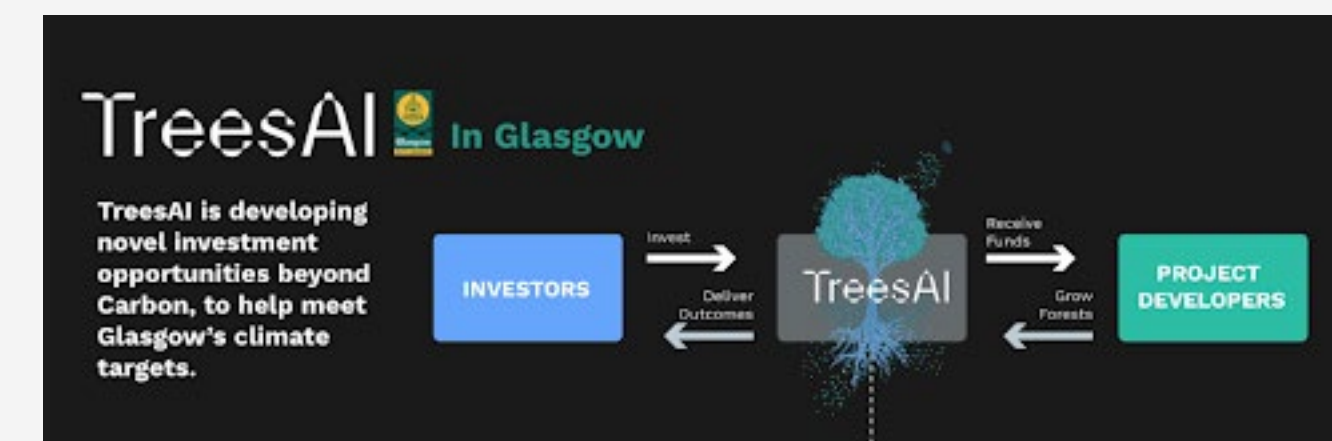
FRIENDS OF THE JOINERS ARMS

The Hackney Road bar was closed in 2015 to be turned into flats and offices, after the site in Shoreditch was sold. Friends of the Joiners Arms (FOTJA) said it was “ecstatic” it had raised more than £100,000 to open a new venue. FOTJA said it was now looking for a temporary venue in Hackney or Tower Hamlets to open a not-for-profit bar, which would host events such as cinema nights and drag shows. Once the business is established, the group said it would seek a permanent venue.



SEED SAVERS

A Growing Culture is a non-profit dedicated to working towards a future of food sovereignty for everyone, everywhere. The Seed Savers fund supports seed savers on their own terms. It’s designed to disrupt the status quo of philanthropy that often inadvertently harms communities. Instead, it creates a reciprocal system that redistributes power, building equity and community among seed savers.



TREESAI

This initiative is a platform to invest in and value nature beyond carbon. The project collaborates with stakeholders and local communities to design new technologies and build open source services that help establish nature as a part of urban infrastructure.

“Don’t wait for economic growth to reduce inequality – because it won’t. Instead, create an economy that is distributive by design”

Kate Raworth, Doughnut Economics

Shared ownership comes with shared responsibility. People enter into community ownership as active stakeholders, involved in decision making as well as financial ownership.

“If I own this, it’s for us, so we need to take good care of it, so everybody makes sure of it.”

Joshua Odamtten, Skate Nation Ghana, Community Instigator, Ghana

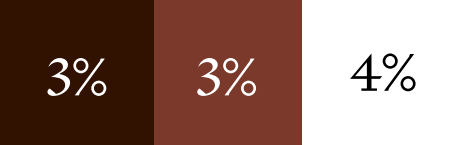
“It’s vital to give people access to tools, to teach them, to allow them to access resources, and empower them to form communities that are productive.”

Ade Kassim, Protein Community member, US

“If we’re talking about inclusion, community, and ownership, we need to open up the whole discussion and let those people we’re calling ‘the community’ decide whether they want to become an owner in this thing, and for that not to be determined for them.”

Mandima Qunta, Protein Community member, South Africa

Shared ownership means shared responsibility



54%

36%

This shift from *institutional* to *community* ownership ultimately means:

INSTITUTIONAL OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTING

Quantification and capital gains drive measures of return.

CONTROLLING

Owning something means you have ultimate control over the thing and its destined use.

KEEPING

Owning something means it sits in your world, it is attached to you in a physical or legal way.



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTABILITY

Transparency and accountability on how gains are used and distributed according to shared goals.

CONTRIBUTING

Owning something collectively means participating in deciding and governing how the thing is used.

ACCESSING

Community ownership centres accessibility in the ownership experience.

What's Web3 got to do with it?

The conversation around community ownership and Web3 continues to grow, as new tools for collective governance and access emerge.

But regardless of whether people are Web3 optimists, sceptics, or curious, we recognise that its nascent status comes with a set of operational, ethical, and commercial challenges that require critical curiosity and lots of patience. Our own Protein Community have been experimenting with these Web3 challenges for the past year.

“It takes seeing how Web3 technology is a step for change and how it can make a really meaningful impact on people’s lives. And less of people getting too creative with money.”

Deana Burke, Boys Club, Cultural Instigator, US



Web3 has significant overlaps with movements towards (or returns to) community ownership. But Web3 isn't de facto a space of fairer ownership.

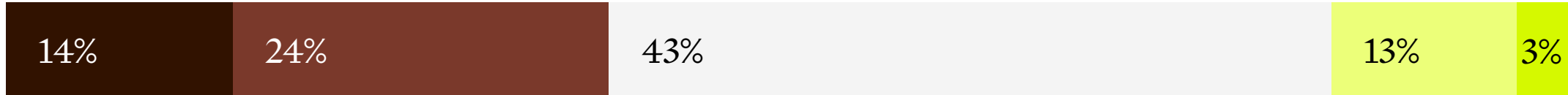
Our research showed that despite all the hype (or maybe because of it), there's a lot of ambivalence and scepticism around crypto, NFTs, and other Web3 ownership innovations, with 43% of survey respondents undecided whether it is a force for good in the world and the majority still seeing it as fundamentally elitist.

Commentators inside and outside of the Web3 community are clear that a lot of the most visible, hyped activities are merely new ways to talk the same old commercial story - this is generating healthy critique.

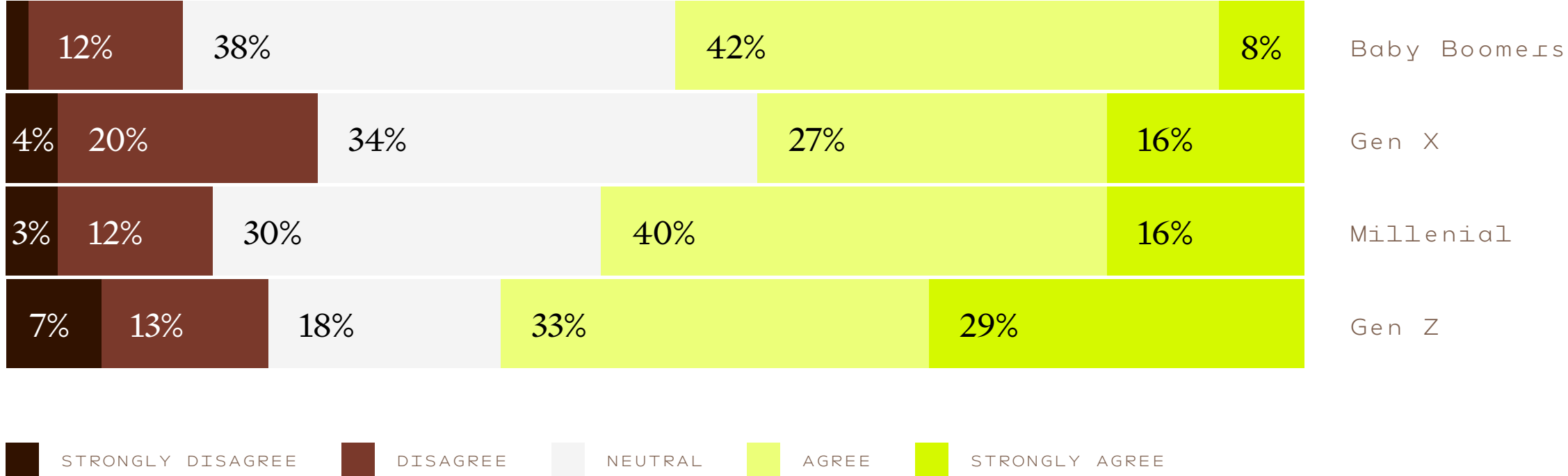
“The proof is in the pudding if brands are approaching this space authentically and with a real willingness to adhere to the values of Web3. Brands get called out for trying to cash in when people see what’s happening with NFTs; they’re not value-aligned with how the community feels.”

Deana Burke, Boys Club, Cultural Instigator, US

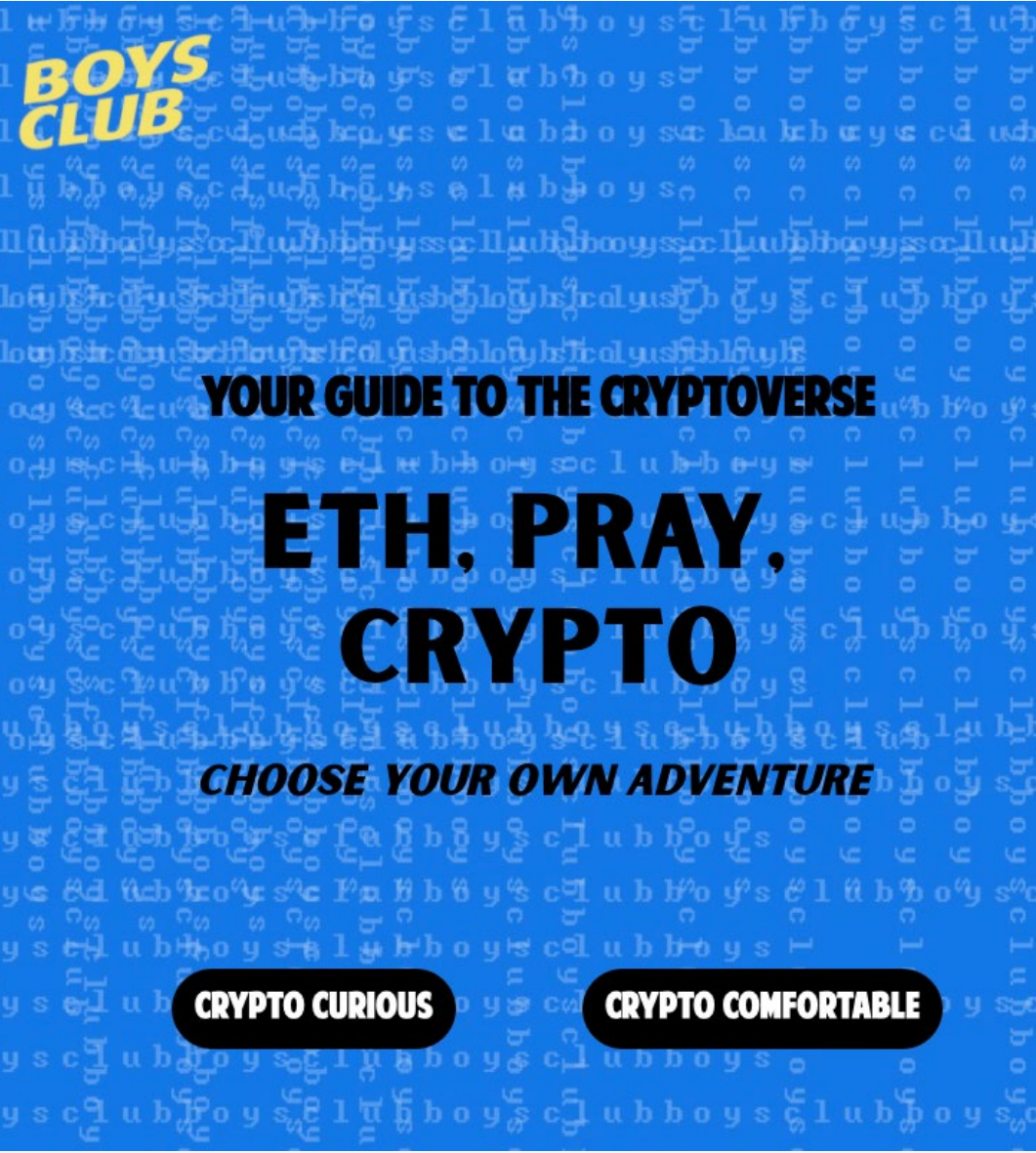
Web3 technologies (Blockchain, Crypto, NTFs, DAOs) are a force for good in the world



Web3 technologies (Blockchain, Crypto, NTFs, DAOs) are fundamentally elitist

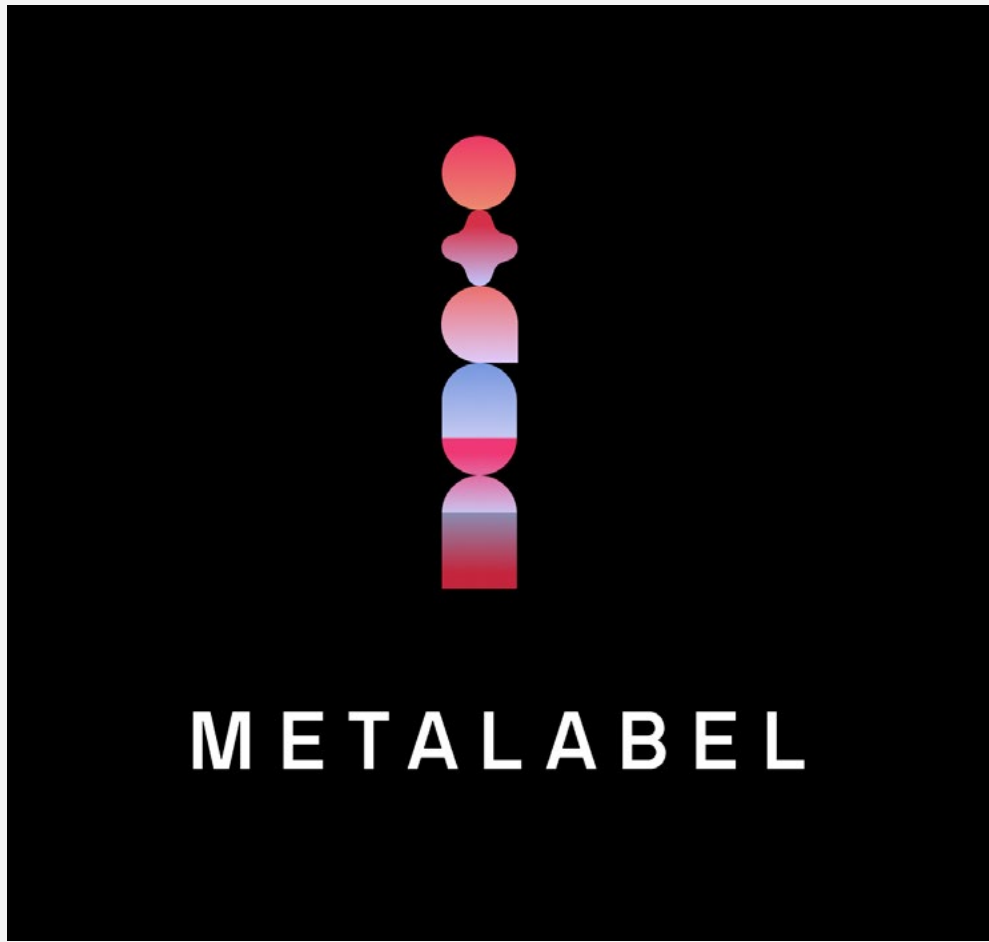


However, there are meaningful Web3 initiatives and concepts responding to the community ownership incentives of decolonising space, distributing power and agency, and creating common resources.



BOYS CLUB

Boys Club is a social club, a DAO, and a community centred on female and non-binary individuals in Web3. With house rules including Do Your Own Research and promoting independent financial safety, Boys Club meet in New York to discuss and educate each other on current crypto affairs in a 'crypto-bro' dominated arena.



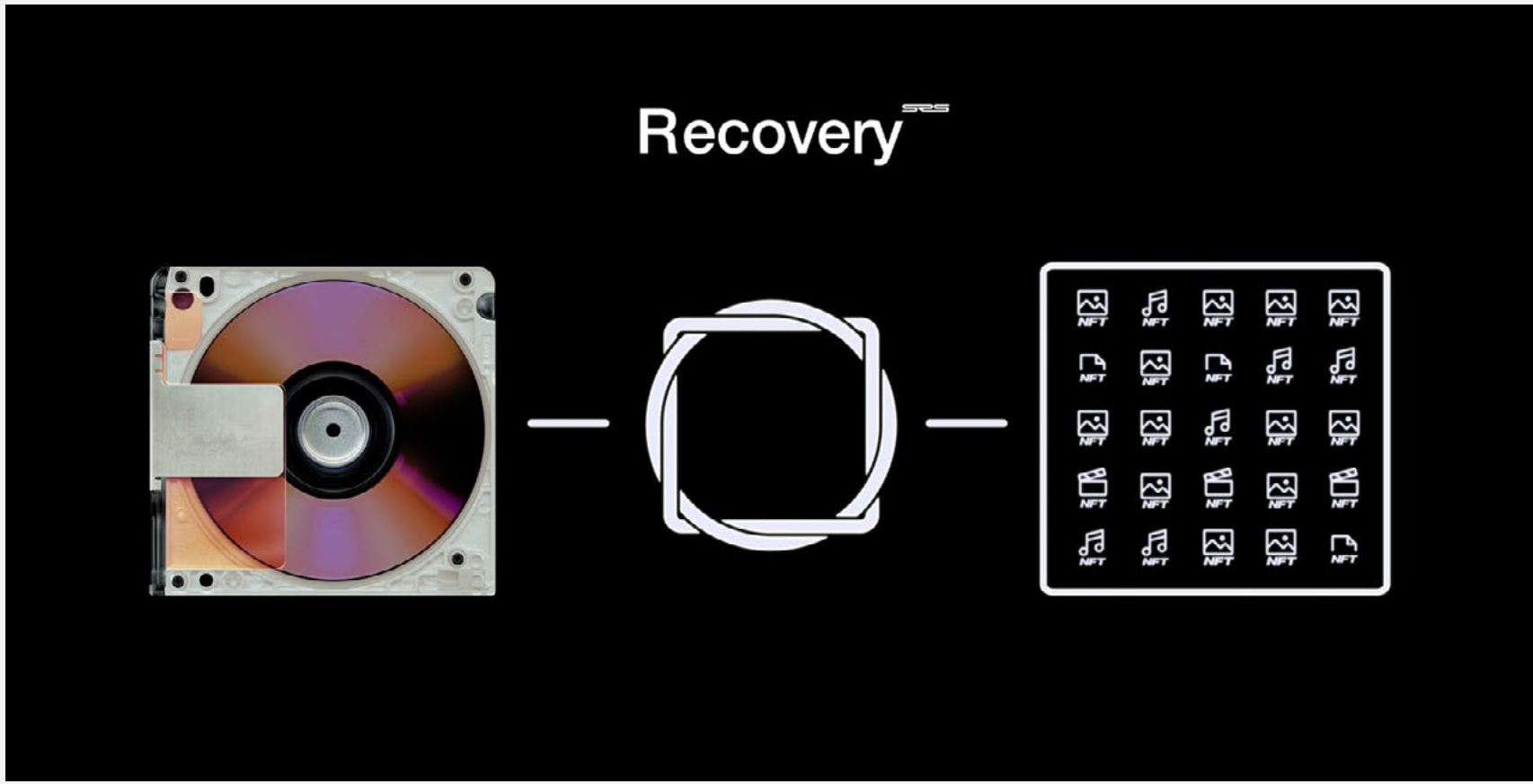
METALABEL

Is a new kind of label that is creator led and owned using emergent Web3 tools and systems to protect equity in the creative industries



KOLEKTIVO

Running on Celo's blockchain system, Kolektivo is a framework that allows local communities to run their own regenerative economies. The framework allows local changemakers to properly value and develop nature ecosystems intrinsically within the local economy.



RECOVERY x TOMB SERIES

Recovery is a fundamentally new mechanic that changes how NFT projects bridge ownership, creation and community. The creator team proposes that the link between the ownership of an NFT, access to any creative tools the NFT provides, and the content that can potentially be created with those tools should be neither the sole property of the owner, nor bound to puppet the original IP from which the NFT originates. The mechanic was first introduced via the art project Tomb Series, a collection of 36 NFTs.

“There’s a lot of experimentation happening within the DAO subculture of Web3, that thinks about collective governance, collective ownership. *I think this has led some people to look backwards to more analogue historical precedents.* I get the sense we’re zooming out beyond tech, even beyond business; there’s a cultural charge in the air.”

Austin Robey, Ampled & Metalabel, Cultural Instigator, US



Web3 offers the tools to decentralise ownership and facilitate community governance and financial transparency if applied in meaningful ways. Innovators in Web3 are figuring out how to scale and share these tools.

- Web3 enables the distribution of power and agency through DAOs (decentralised autonomous organisations), essentially a mechanism for community owned governance.
- While our survey respondents are undecided whether the decentralised ownership of Web3 represents a powerful shift in society, experts in the space argue that this scepticism is a reflection of Web3's frequent uses for profit rather than in support of human interests.

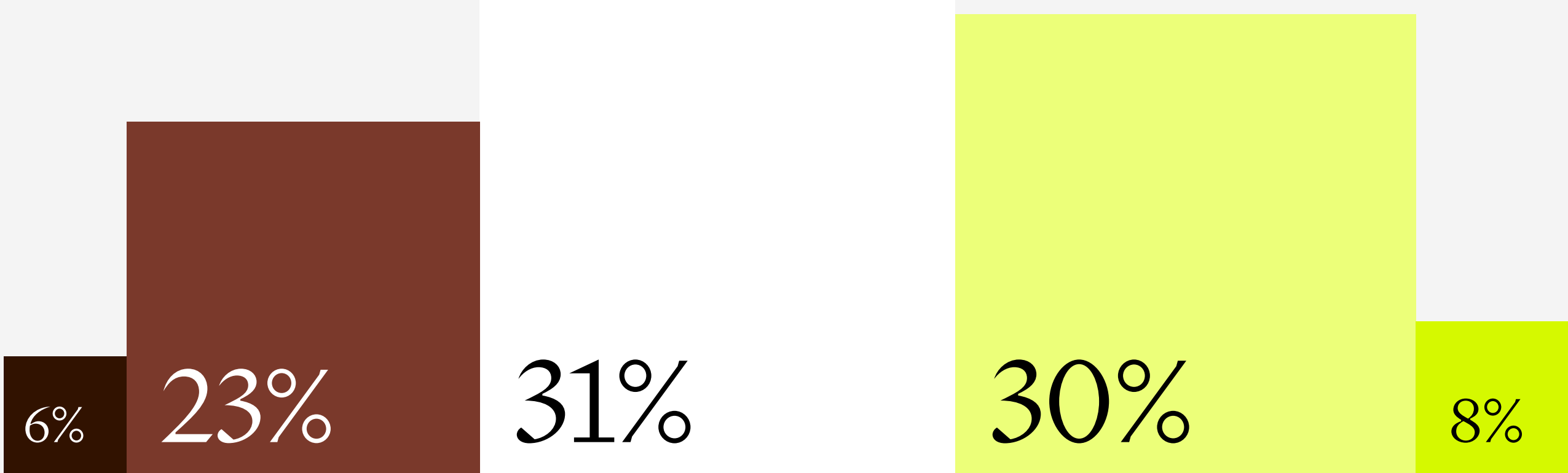
“In Web3, it’s not just the feeling you get from being in a community and everyone being treated equally, it’s also that your commitment and contribution can actually be measured by data, through tokens. That financial and economical feedback is a really important part of governance and people being involved in community owned projects.”

Ade Kassim, Protein Community member, US

“We’re in this of frustrating stage where the Web3 space has these incredibly powerful tools, but is is applying them to things that don’t actually affect people’s lives in meaningful ways.”

Austin Robey, Ampled & Metalabel, Cultural Instigator, US

The decentralised ownership of Web3 technologies (Blockchain, Crypto, NTFs, DAOs) represents a deep power shift in society



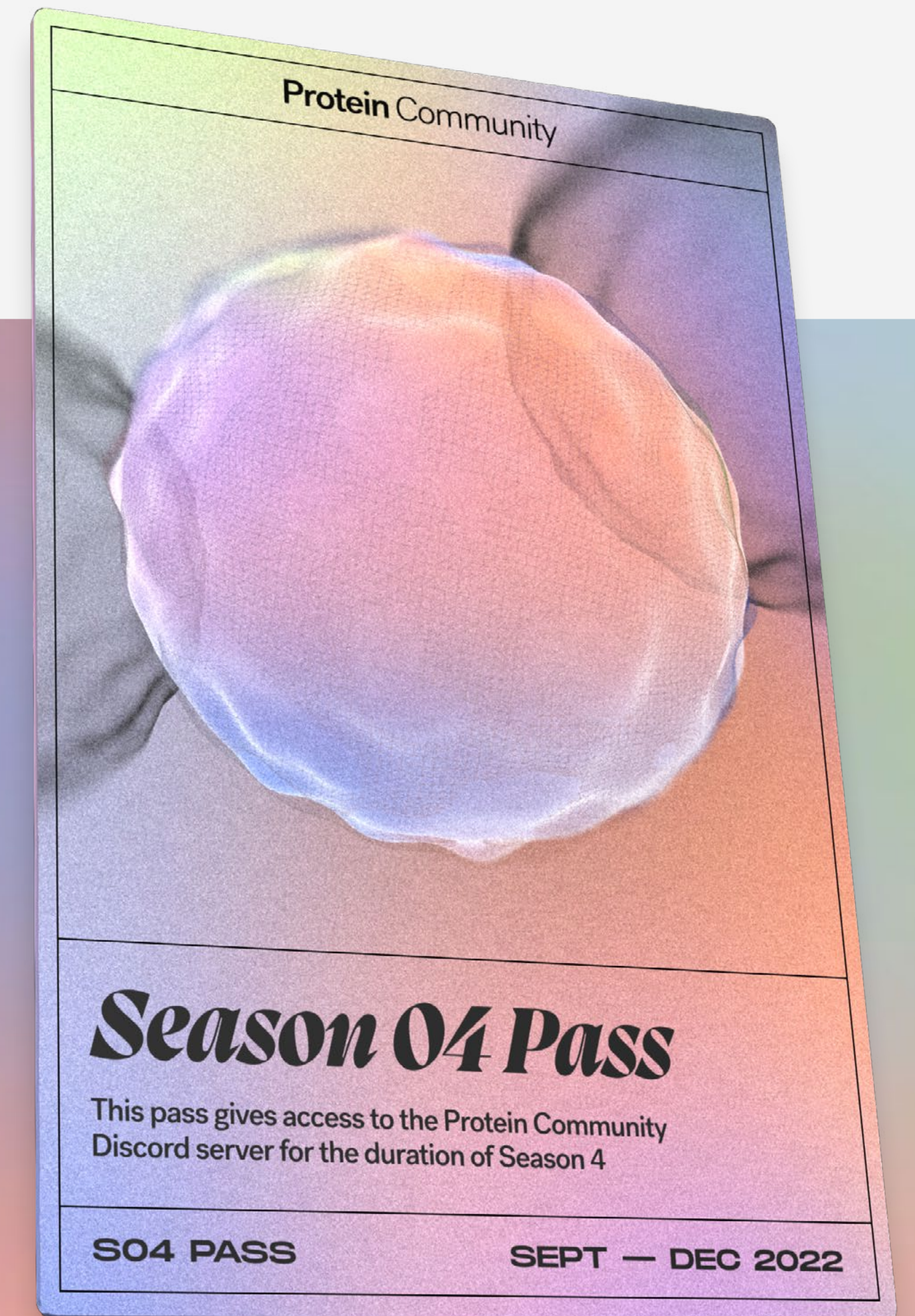
Last September we tokenised the Protein Community with our own \$PRTN token, allowing us to truly experiment with decentralised ownership.

Here we share some experiences and learnings about the radical potentials and pitfalls of these emergent models.

WHAT IS THE PROTEIN COMMUNITY?

Protein Community is a place where people and ideas grow. It's a nurturing network of 600+ culturally curious founders, strategists and creatives around the world on a collective mission reimagining new models of growth — something we call Good Growth.

To us, *community* means belonging, adventure, and ownership, so in September 2021 we minted our own \$PRTN token (ERC20) and Seasonal NFT passes that give our members access to our Discord, puts them in control of decision making and rewards them for the value of their contribution.



So what have we learned so far about building a community with decentralised ownership?

WORKING WELL

- People join Protein because they are motivated by our Good Growth goals
- Meeting like-minded people and making friends is one of the main benefits
- Members are learning and sharing knowledge – we built our WTF Bot to build on this need
- We're told the Protein Community feels like a safe place that feels different from others i.e. no "crypto-bros"
- For most members this was their first Web3 community

The main lessons revolve around the intricacy and complexity of growing a decentralised community pre-liquidity (our token cannot yet be bought or sold), during a bear market (a period of economic downturn), with a looming global recession and a limited treasury.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT . . .

- Recognising our \$PRTN token doesn't have liquidity means more requests for payment in USDC, which is a challenge considering our limited treasury
- A lot of members offboard after being overwhelmed by Discord and/or feeling lost about where to start and where they can meaningfully contribute, so we're focusing on our onboarding journey with consistent contact and help
- Ensuring decision making lives in a consistent channel as well as within biweekly Community calls

“With DAOs, vs start-ups, it’s more like *world building*. Yes it’s products, but it’s also culture-setting, the economics around a token, community. It’s very very wide, with a lot of growing pains. But people see it as an opportunity to *be part of something bigger than themselves*”

Deana Burke, Boys Club, Cultural Instigator, US



A world in progress: growing pains in Web3

1. IT'S MESSY, SO
GO WITH THE FLOW

Web3 is a departure from hierarchic corporate structures, towards new fluid organic systems. Resilience, humility, and patience are required.

2. IT'S STILL
EARLY, SO HOLD FAST
TO WHAT'S GOOD

The potential for decentralised community ownership is a fundamental tenet of Web3, but its realisation relies on integrity, transparency and authenticity.

3. IT'S ESOTERIC,
SO OPEN IT UP TO
OUTSIDERS

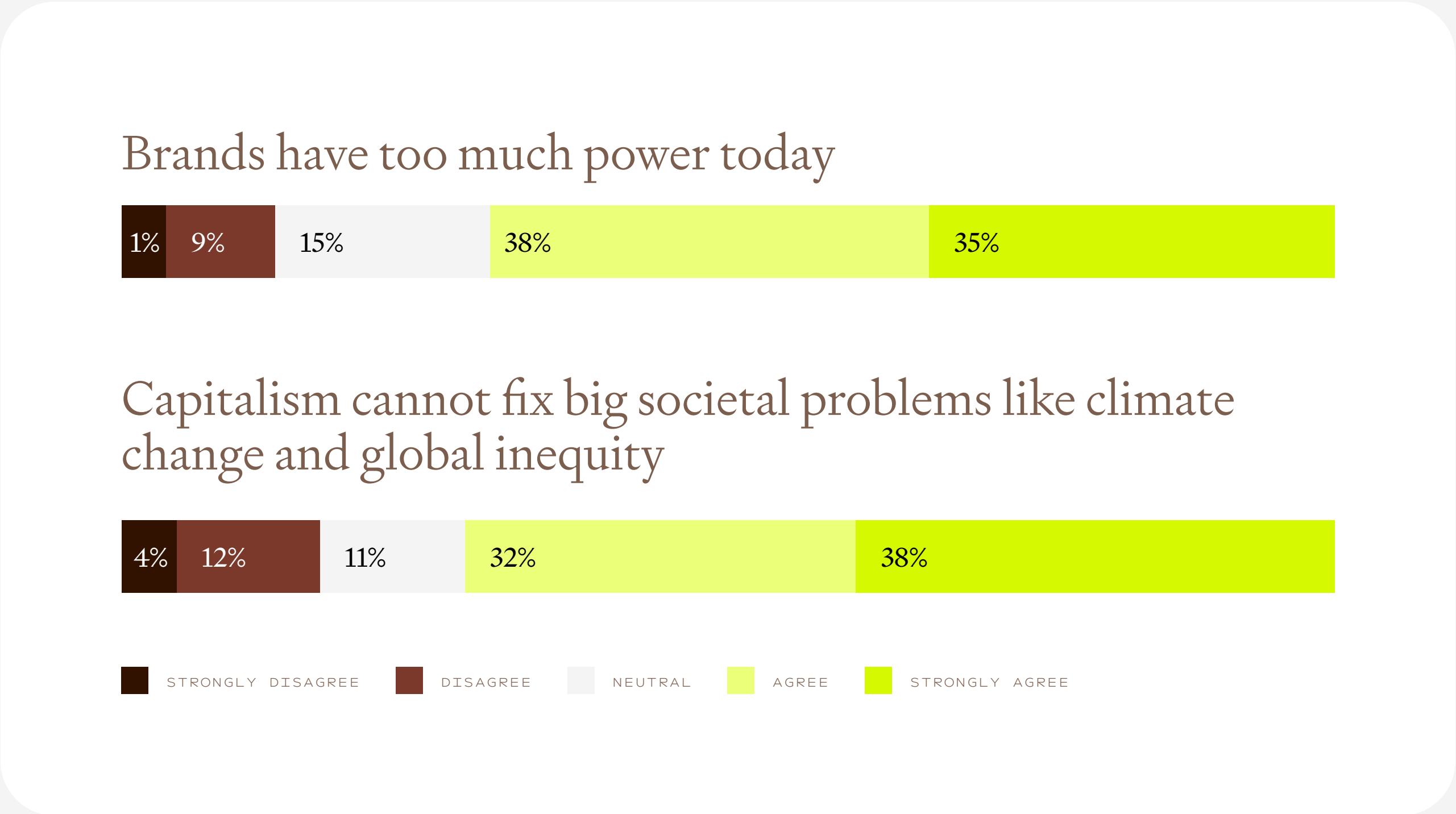
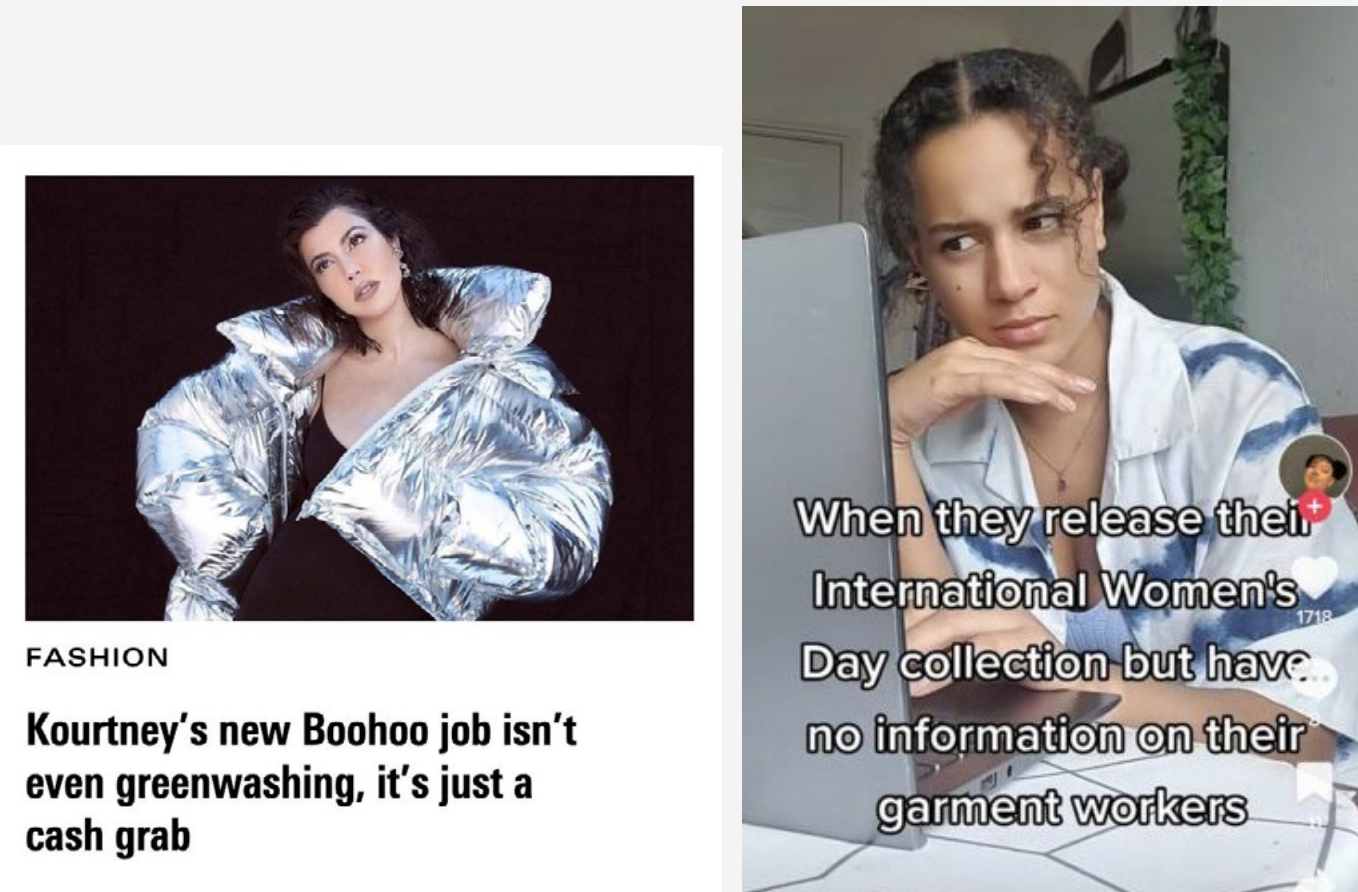
Web3 is a space currently occupied by the few. There's still a lot of work to be done to rebalance diversity, inclusivity, language, environments, and resources.

What does this mean for brands and organisations?

The scepticism that capitalism can solve our current ownership crisis, and the lack of trust in the intentions of brands who are continuously virtue signalling, show that organisations need to approach community ownership with humility and a willingness to really enact change.

Brands need to move from community aesthetics to community action.

As stated by 70% of survey respondents, there's high scepticism that capitalism can fix big problems. Confirming our previous reports, 73% see brands as holding too much power. This calls into question the overall faith in purpose-led branding in the mainstream today.



Echoing this lack of faith in companies and brands, people want to see fundamental changes in organisational ownership.

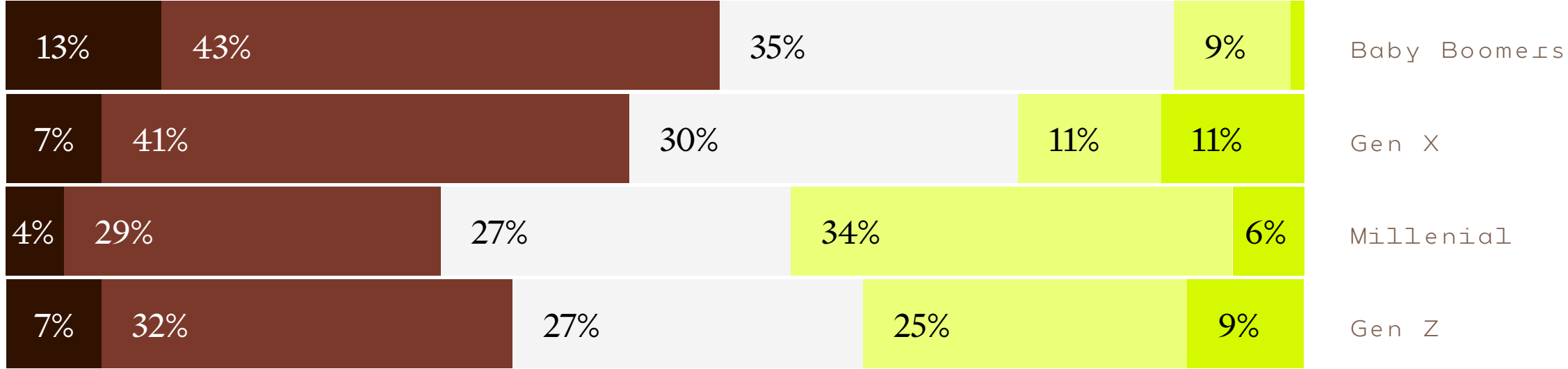
61% of our survey respondents want loyal consumers to have more say in how brands operate, and some believe businesses should move towards collective and worker ownership. This is particularly felt by Gen Z (34%) and Millennials (40%). It's clear that business structure can impact overall brand perception.

Web3 offers tools to facilitate this shift in ownership models, but as we've seen there are also many existing and emerging Web2 and non-digital tools that achieve the same ends.

Consumers should have more say in how the brands they love operate



In the future brands will be owned by collectives, not companies



Legend: STRONGLY DISAGREE (dark brown), DISAGREE (brown), NEUTRAL (light grey), AGREE (yellow-green), STRONGLY AGREE (yellow)

“You can’t think about ownership without thinking about systems. Decision making, transparency, access — those are the things that any company could do.”

Austin Robey, Ampled & Metalabel, Cultural Instigator, US

Organisations can sense how ready they are to start participating in the transition to Community Ownership with some fundamental questions...

INSTITUTIONAL OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTING

CONTROLLING

KEEPING



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTABILITY

- How transparent are you willing to be about where you are today and where you're heading?
- Who are you ultimately accountable to?
- Does your ownership community have a clearly shared responsibility?
- How much profit/resource are you willing to invest into community initiatives and missions?

CONTRIBUTING

ACCESSING

Organisations can sense how ready they are to start participating in the transition to Community Ownership with some fundamental questions...

INSTITUTIONAL OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTING

CONTROLLING

KEEPING



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTABILITY

CONTRIBUTING

- Where and when does your community come together?
- How far/where are you willing to share decision making with your community?
- Are these relationships and ventures a long-term commitment?

ACCESSING

Organisations can sense how ready they are to start participating in the transition to Community Ownership with some fundamental questions...

INSTITUTIONAL OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTING

CONTROLLING

KEEPING



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

ACCOUNTABILITY

CONTRIBUTING

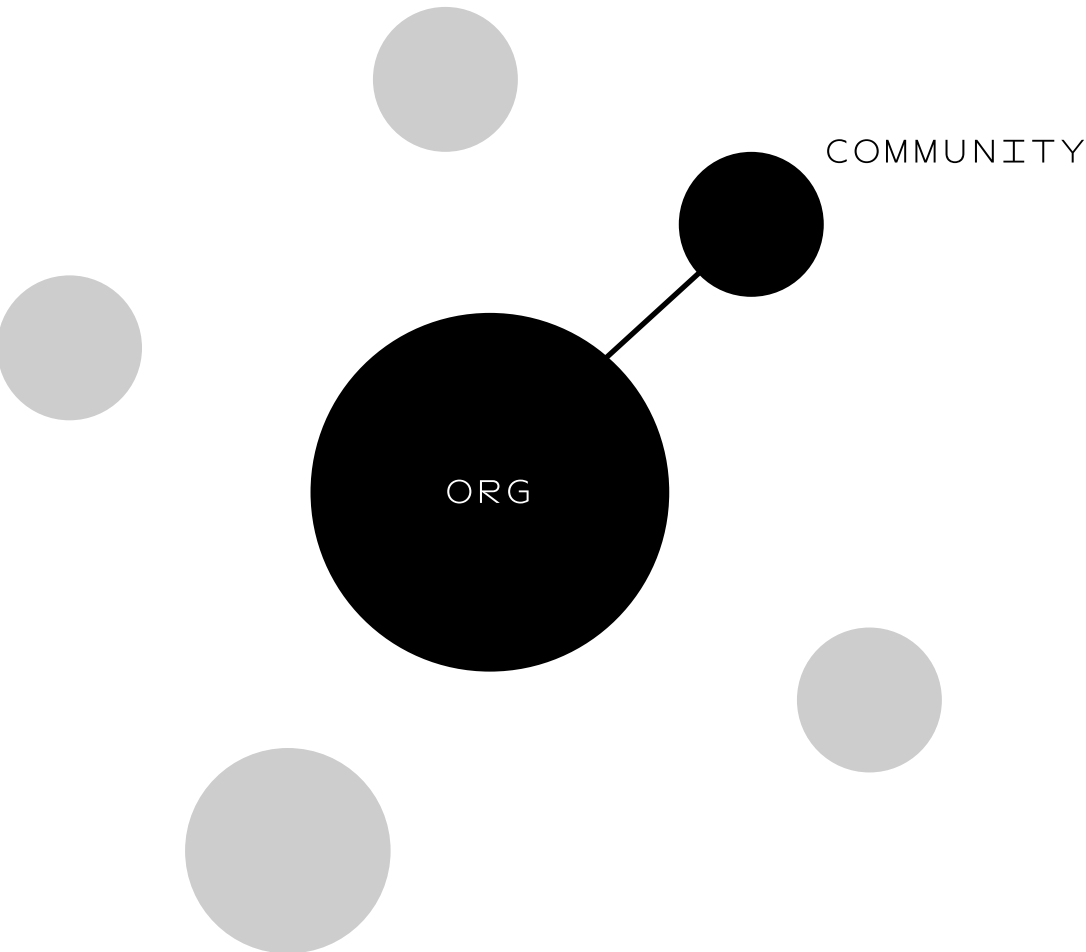
ACCESSING

- How can the spaces and resources you own throughout your organisation be opened up to more users and beneficiaries?
- Is what you create property, or a common resource?
- Where is it possible for you to facilitate more access for more people?
- Are you excited by NFT-as-product or Web3 as a new kind of network?

Not all organisations can (or should) be totally community owned...

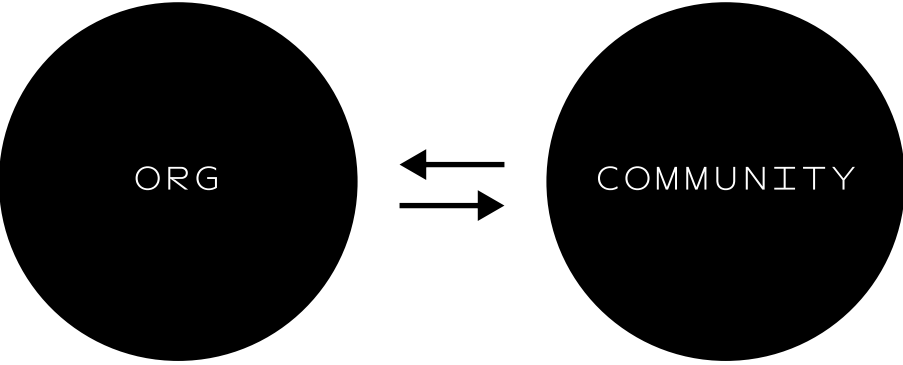
How those questions felt is a good indication of how far you're ready to go...

EXPERIMENTAL ACTIVATION



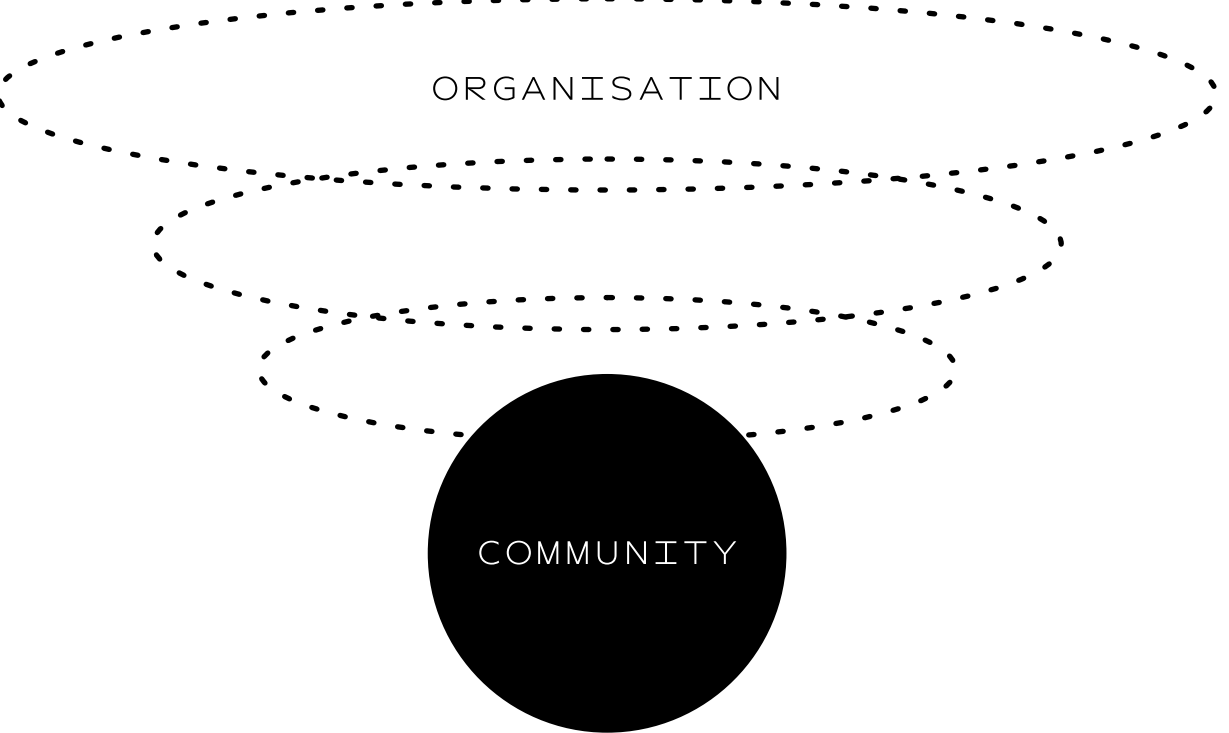
Community ownership happens as a satellite of the masterbrand - the lab effect with a limited time and scope for participation and action.

COMMUNITY - FIRST BRAND



Community ownership is structured around creating the feeling of ownership through sharing participation and access with members.

RADICAL RESTRUCTURING



Community ownership is fundamental to the whole organization through intrinsically connecting financial and governance rights with community gain.

← *Starting a journey to community ownership*

Centering community ownership →

OK, what do I need to remember?

Ownership is in crisis because dominant systems no longer manifest in the opportunities and securities they promise, faith in institutions is broken.

Community ownership is creating tangible ways to restore the balance of power, and engage in mutual care for our collective futures.

If brands and organisations want to participate in this meaningful cultural shift, they need to share ownership (by distributing financial and/or decision-making rights) with their community, to be of service to something bigger than themselves.

Web3 allows us to operationalise community ownership with transparent, scalable and decentralised systems. But these must be built on foundations of human commitments to *accountability*, *contribution* and *accessibility*.

In conversation with:

Deana Burke

Boys Club

PROTEIN: Tell us who you are, and also the story of how Boys Club came about.

DEANA BURKE: My name is Deana Burke. I'm the co-founder of Boys Club. I'm also head of marketing at Celo, which is a layer one blockchain. I got into crypto in 2017 - the last big bull run when prices were going crazy. There was a lot of movement, there were a lot of people that were making money and I thought, maybe I can make some of that money. That was my hook.

I fell in love with blockchain technology, with the potential of what I felt like crypto, now Web3, could do for the things that I cared about - in terms of financial inclusion and access, and also creating wealth generating opportunities for people, women in particular, who had been traditionally sidelined by the financial system. And I felt that this is a really radical tool that if wielded in the right ways could create a profound change that was long overdue. At the same time, I was going to crypto conferences and exploring the communities around what was happening with this technology. And I felt like these were really not my people, it's not my space. I also don't feel the communities that I'm interested in being in service of are represented here. And so I felt a call to try and address that. So I left my job and I raised money and built a startup that was essentially a Bitcoin wallet, but it was designed very intentionally for teenage girls. My goal with that startup was, how do we create a safe, well-lit low-stakes way for young women to have their first experience with crypto in a way that's social, that's fun, that has passive educational elements built into it?



My co-founder Natasha, she had always been like ‘no crypto, not my thing... I don’t understand it. I’m a fashion and art girl. It’s not my bag’. And then last summer when Web3, and crypto started to infiltrate culture in interesting ways, it started to rub up against culture and come into a zeitgeist when it had previously just been in this black box of finance. But then it was all of a sudden in art and sports and in fashion... and so we sat down together, and I took her through DAOs, decks, discords, and she started to see it. So at first we’re like, let’s do a dinner, then put out one tweet, and it just went crazy. It became a whole event with keynote speakers and panels.

P: So Web3 is one of the tools to allow more empowerment and distribution of power. Your project is doing this to empower women. I’d love to talk a little bit about how you’re doing that.

DB: We’re pretty careful not to use the word empowerment. We don’t love the connotations. For us, it’s about recognizing that we’re in this nascent phase for this new internet and this new economy, and we think the future will be a lot more interesting if folks from different backgrounds, experience and skillsets are involved in helping to design it.

With a startup, you’re really focused on the product, right? And it’s pretty streamlined in terms of what you’re building, and what you’re optimising for. It’s a little bit more linear. With the DAO, as we’ve experienced it, it’s more world building. Because it’s not just products, it’s also community. And the economics around a token, and culture setting in a community - this could be particular to our DAO, but it’s very wide. And we have people who are in the DAO for whom Boys Club is an opportunity to launch their thing, or to bring their idea to life, to find a home for something.

P: What has this experience taught you so far, in terms of potentials, maybe some pitfalls. Things that you’re learning and things we need to think about or still work out?

DB: There’s quite a lot of inefficiencies in DAO’s still, we continue to spend a lot of time in processes and in systems, voting and governance, and there’s people who love that.

Sometimes I feel really slowed down by that bureaucracy and structure of a DAO. But we’re continuing to be committed to the DAO because we see how much value it brings, despite how inefficient, how many human feelings you have to tend to and manage in this communal environment. It can be at times hugely frustrating and challenging in many, different ways, but there is the sense of community.

There’s a group of 40 odd people working in and around Boys Club. In previous startups, I had tried to recruit a team where I was paying people cash, and realised how hard that was and how stark a difference it is when you are able to find a group of people intrinsically motivated to help build. That is so powerful, and worth all the headache. And so I think that’s been a real shift for me, I’m always retraining my brain to be working in this type of environment.

P: This is really powerful. We’re entering territory of reprogramming. We found that particularly within younger generations, there was a lot of scepticism around Web3 and the potential to do good in the world. I’d love to hear from you on this, is that something that surprises you?

DB: I’m a really uncomfortable evangelist. That’s not the position that I like to be in and nor do we take at Boys Club. It’s more a culture of learning together and prodding the things that feel uncomfortable, that don’t actually sit right with us. Let’s look at the environmental pieces. Because I do see all of the negative aspects of it. Some of the NFT stuff that’s happened in the past year, has been kind of ugly, sort of greedy and dumb. And there’s just a lot about how that story has come to life, I think it’s the NFT stuff that has made the industry look silly.

I think that the environmental concerns are huge, and need to be continually looked at and evaluated. Now, in my day job at Celo, I’m seeing incredible regenerative finance projects and founders and builders who are actually reshaping what capitalism looks like using Web3 technologies. Thinking about how we use natural capital backed assets to build a new economy, backed by things that we value. But, I get that the headline is, Bitcoin uses the same energy as Finland. And then there’s

the scams and hacks, it sucks. The lack of security is very real, people have lost a lot of money. So I have a lot of compassion for people disenfranchised by the space.

P: It has the tools to accelerate change in the way that we need, right. But then there's also these people who are kind of just trying to capitalise on a new opportunity and do exactly the same damage. So what can be done about it? Or how do we move forward?

DB: The climate crisis is a coordination problem, and Web3 or crypto is this incredibly powerful coordination tool. So we actually have the opportunity to really drive impact on the climate side. And on the social impact side, there's a startup company called Impact Market, distributing UBI. They have the largest UBI experiment in the world right now. There's around 30,000 people who are getting UBI through Impact Market. And the reason that it's 10x better than how UBI exists right now is because it's more transparent. It's faster, and a lot more seamless. And so I think it really takes projects like that, seeing how the technology is a step change and how that makes a really meaningful and direct impact on people's lives. It's going to take some success stories of people who are showing actual impact on folks' lives.

P: I'm curious, when we're thinking about brands, businesses, organisations tapping into web3 and wanting to get involved... What do you think organisations should be thinking about if they want to get into that space?

DB: I welcome all innovation experiments with open arms. Sure, there's a lot of failures, but I think if there's a lot of failures, that means that people are trying. But you could ask the same question to a bunch of people in web3, who are talking to brands and you'll probably get a mixed response on that.

I have had a couple of conversations with brands where they're interested in setting up skunkworks, a DAO that - depending on their vertical or their products - has some aspect of community governance. One was a fashion brand, who wanted to

create a separate line that's shaped by the community under the umbrella of a parent brand - I think it's really interesting. I think the proof is in the pudding; if brands are approaching this space authentically and with a real willingness to adhere to the values of Web3. I think that's why brands get called out, when they are trying to cash in on what's happening with Web3 or NFT's and they're not value aligned with how the community thinks.

P: Cosmetically and structurally, it seems brands want to launch a set of entities that are going to sell out, what are your thoughts? Because of course on the other side there are people building structures that create more governance...

DB: I think Coke doing an NFT drop was okay, cool, whatever - I'm not interested. Coke launching a DAO to come up with a new line would be interesting for me to look at. I'll age myself here, but I come from an agency background, and when all the brands were like "we need to get on Twitter", it was sort of the same thing. Brands are seeing that people have found a voice in the Web3 space, and now they're all experts at it.

P: How have you seen the evolution of Boys Club in terms of how you operate and how you grow? How has that evolved with people joining?

DB: One way is, we have ambitions to be this headless brand, right? Where it's not this centralised thing that the core team has its grip on, that's directionally where we're headed. It's really hard when a brand is so young, to do that effectively, or to do that without diluting everything completely. You guys know this as well as anyone else. So I think there's some tension, not bad tension, but just sort of tension and growth around it. We want to be fully decentralised. But, as soon as someone takes your brand and takes even a five degree pivot on your tone, or graphic direction or your art direction, all of a sudden, in two months they're a mile away. Right now, I think the brand is too young for us to really push it out of the nest and say 'go, you're good, go fly on your own and go live on, elsewhere.'



Then, in terms of how the community has grown. it hasn't meaningfully slowed in terms of interest. I expected the game to be over when the market downturn happened, but that hasn't been the case. We get 100 plus applications a week from people wanting to learn. What we're getting a lot of right now is women and people looking for a career move, versus a couple of months ago, it was like, 'hey what's going on? I think this is impacting my industry in a really meaningful way. And, maybe I want to do this full time, but I want to hang out in this world first and see if it's for me.'

P: You've touched on your events. I think it's interesting to also think about Web3 as a community that doesn't just live online, but also comes together Away From Keyboard. I would love to hear a little bit about the importance of coming together during the events, and the building of community...

DB: I'm an ageing millennial, so it could be a generational thing. But I get excited when technology enriches my actual human connections.

Technology is a means to an end, the end is "How do I have more meaningful connections with people around me?" But there's ways that the screen can bring a network of people together, to work together and to build together in ways that are really interesting.

Having the real life piece, that was just always what we were going to do, because it's just more fun and interesting. It was much more fun than being in Discord. We're really interested in where that real world crosses over. So right now we're doing a project, that's a printed zine that you could touch and feel. That, for us, is a more fun expression of what this technology can do. We're optimising for fun a lot of the time, that's where the real life stuff comes in.

Joshua Odamtten

Skate Nation Ghana

PROTEIN: Can you tell us your story, and the story of you and how Skate Nation came about?

JOSHUA ODAMTTEN: Skating was something that I picked up when I was 13 years old. I first saw it on TV and I was like, this is cool. There was one guy who had a skateboard in our neighbourhood – that was the first skateboard I ever saw after seeing it on TV. I asked to try out his skateboard, and since then I've not been able to stop. Some friends of mine also joined in, so at some point there were three of us skating. So that's one part of the story. Somewhere along the line I was just on the bus and I looked outside the window and I saw skateboards on sale. Initially, I couldn't even afford them. But I think God did some magic for me to get my first two skateboards. I got them for \$15! It took me two hours to convince the guy that made the skateboards that I needed them and I wouldn't leave without them. And then he gave up! I found one of my friends who was close to me when I was learning skateboarding, and I gave him one. From there we started skating every day, and when we started getting better we took it to different places, travelling around the country finding people who skate, and teaching people how to skate, too. It was through him that we've been able to build Skate Nation Ghana, it's not really me alone; there was a friend who was there for me from day one. So it's been a 22 year journey in my skateboarding career.



P: What kinds of places were you skating in back in the early days? Were there skateparks, or were you just skating wherever?

JO: There was no skate park, but we have this open space, it's more like a community centre or a space where people mostly come to pray, that's where we'd always skate. You'd always go there to pass time, play basketball, play football.

P: That's really cool. Skate culture, historically, has been about occupying public space, or taking some kind of ownership in different spaces. Would you say that that's true also in Ghana as well?

JO: Yeah, but for us here when it comes to ownership, everything is owned by the government. And the government doesn't really pay attention to those little details. So the space is there, but the only time that governments will take it over is when they need it. If you go and talk to the security guys and they're nice they'll let you use their space. But aside from that you have to find your own space. The place we used to skate, we would tip the security guards, sometimes we would give them food, give them water. So at some point, they became our friends, and they were looking out for us. And they even loved what we did, they were bringing their kids to come and watch some times. It was like we were building a family without even knowing what we were doing back then.

P: That's so cool. So it sounds like Skate Nation grew very organically, then.

JO: Yeah, and Skate Nation now is even bigger than I can imagine. Because it's not only about skateboarders, it's about a whole group of people: musicians, artists, and even parents who just support what we do, they just love it, because their kids love it.

P: What happened to make it go from this kind of family to being featured in campaigns and having a presence? Or was it just very gradual?

JO: It was a gradual process. It started happening when I took it onto the internet. It started on Facebook, because I noticed there are people out there who are passionate about skateboarding, but there's nobody they know who does skateboarding. So I set up the Skate Nation Facebook page and people started following. I never knew that companies were watching and that they also loved the kind of conversation I had with people. So from there, companies started contacting me for campaigns. That gave me the wake up call to bring in as many people as I can to meet them face to face. So I set up a WhatsApp group, and it wasn't just for skateboarders, it was for people who were passionate about skateboarding, or people who love what we do and want to support it. That was when the business side of it started coming in.

P: Do you see yourself as a business owner in that sense? Or who does Skate Nation belong to?

JO: I started Skate Nation, and Skate Nation belongs to me. But it's not only me, it belongs to anybody who has been there for me, who has been supportive of my movement since day one. I wouldn't want to take full ownership because I couldn't have done it without my friends. There was also an NGO based in the US who also supported me very much, and I wouldn't have done it without them. So I started it, but it belongs to all of us. There were so many little things that have been put together, and I appreciate all of them: it's for us, it's not just for me.

P: You've been featured in Vogue and also in a Meta campaign - what do you think those brands found so interesting about your work at this point in time? What does that exposure mean or do for you?

JO: For me, it wasn't that big at first, but at some point, I was getting some positive feedback from the whole world congratulating me on being part of it, and that was what made me realise how big this thing is, But now I've come to realise it's even bigger than I can imagine, and it's made me happy because I was also portraying good values and sending a message to people who called me stupid. So this is just a way of surprising them, and surprising myself too, because most people are even better than me at skateboarding but they've not been able to get the kind



of exposure I had. It's a blessing, because it's been a long time coming. I've been working so hard to make it happen, I didn't know it was going to happen like this. And now it's not just me, it's the whole community, because everything I do, I do it for the community. I don't do it just for myself, or I would have been far gone by now. I'm moving with a crowd, I'm moving with an army, that process is slow. And it's gradually happening.

P: And how do you see that community progressing? What's exciting you at the moment in terms of what the community are bringing, and how things are changing?

JO: What excites me most is that now we're giving the community hope and assurance that if you put your time into something, and you accept who you are and believe in what you want to do, you're able to achieve it. Because most times, there are people who don't really have any option—they just do what their parents want them to. But now there is an option, and I have a lot of parents who've told me that ever since their kids brought themselves into our activities their academic performance has changed or increased. And that's exactly the outcome I want to hear. Skating made me change the way I think and the way I live because at first I always did things on my own. But now I have to look at doing this for other people. So for me it's a very big thing.

P: And just to go back to something you said there about if you're making a decision, you're getting people's opinions, can you give an example of how you do that?

JO: We have so many people who have different ideas, or they're into different aspects of life; I'm a skateboarder, I'm a photographer and a movie maker. Someone else could be a graphic designer, another person could be a lawyer. So I have to make sure I get the opinion of everybody so that the next step doesn't affect the next person badly. We always try to have that equality and sense of understanding. This is where gender equality comes in. In some societies, girls are not considered leaders. But in skating, we don't really do that. If I have a voice, the girl also has a voice.

And we are all equal and unique in our way. We are moving as leaders in the same direction, but we are coming from different places.

P: You said earlier, you kind of own Skate Nation, but you are very much working collaboratively and cooperatively with people in that community, what are your ambitions?

JO: Well, what I hope is that it's going to last for a long time. Right now we're planning to make it more like a business whereby we'll be able to employ people, because the unemployment rate here is very high and people are tired of going to school or looking for jobs; they want to do something different. So this is why I also have the idea of starting a Skateboarding University, because if I do that, it doesn't really matter your age, your gender, where you come from, you're welcome in our space. If you're a graphic designer, a basket weaver, a cyclist, even if you are a t-shirt printer or something, we'll find a place to fit you in. So it's not like you are just coming to play, you're coming to learn, to learn something to go teach elsewhere.

P: What does ownership as an idea mean to you? And why does it matter? Or why doesn't it matter?

JO: Ownership means a lot to me. It means you have control, or it limits you to what other people do with it. So owning something is one thing, and then what you use it for is another thing, and then the benefit that others get from it is another. So it's more about being able to utilise what you have. And that's the big thing that kind of pops into my mind whenever I hear about ownership. How there are so many people who own a lot, but they're not making good use of it. And many people need less than half of what they have to make the world a better place. So ownership for me is something that's there for you that you can be proud of. But also you need to let people come into that space to make good use of it, to benefit others or to help others in some way.

P: In terms of ownership in Ghana, what is it like in your home context? What are the issues or the good things about ownership in Ghana? How do people think about it?

JO: In Ghana, if you own something that means you have power, and if you have power everybody respects you. I want to change that. Yes, I would like to maintain that respect, but the goal is for everybody to feel loved and welcome. Like: if I own this, it's for us, you don't have to be jealous. When you make people understand this is for us so we need to take good care of it, everybody makes sure they are taking care of it. And this is where maintenance comes in. One thing I notice about Ghana is that many people are not really interested in owning anything, because they know they're not able to take care of it. But when you make [ownership] open for people, everybody puts in their effort to make sure they keep it running.

P: What do you think might change about ownership and community in the next few years? What are your hopes and fears?

JO: Right now there's different people who want to do the same thing but aren't starting from where we started. They're taking action because they have that money, they have the power already. So my fear is that in years to come, if we don't wake up and we don't defend [what we own], everything is going to be taken away from us by companies.

P: And if you were to think about your advice to other communities globally about how to think about community ownership, what would that be?

JO: My advice would always be to take care of each other, make good use of what you have, And always share opinions and share ideas: there's no community without the help of leaders or elders. You need to respect the people in their community and think about what you're doing and understand if they will be comfortable with it or not. You can't always account for what others don't see in you. Always make use of what you have in a way that is fair to others, see everyone as equal, take good care of your community, your society and the elders in your society. Because without them you are nobody.

Austin Robey

MetaLabel

Protein: Can you introduce yourself and tell us what you're involved in at the moment?

AUSTIN ROBEY: My name is Austin Robey and I'm part of the founding squad of Metalabel. I was a co-founder of Amped, I teach a class on music and platform cooperativism at New School University in New York. And I'm also to a lesser degree involved in several online communities, and a group called Unnamed Fund, which is a collective democratic grants making fund for the NEW INC community—NEW INC is the New Museum Incubator.

P: Wow, that's amazing! So I think we should start with a very broad question of what you think ownership is and what it means to you.

I think this question could be answered in a lot of ways. But I think the answer is more specific. Ownership is an aggregate of a suite of rights and responsibilities that fall into either financial rights or decision making rights. And I think at the end of the day, that's really what ownership comes down to. Those two categories can be broken down into a few different categories: financial power would include rights to profits or dividends or capturing the equity or book value of an organisation. And decision making could be a seat at the table for hiring, leadership, strategy, budgeting, all those things. So I think those things can all exist on a spectrum. I think some people would define ownership as a feeling, but I really think it's more a concrete set of rights and responsibilities, and also is a different set of expectations, as well. So I would tend not to define ownership loosely, like a feeling of ownership. I think it involves all those things of financial power and decision making power.



P: I really like that distinction between a feeling and a set of expectations, because expectations are still intangible, but they do amount to something real. I think there's something really interesting to be said about how some people see ownership as something that you embody or that you feel, but you can't ignore the reality of who is owning things and where you are in the ownership structure.

AR: I've used an analogy of, if you owned a bakery, what would you expect to have? You'd expect to have some kind of voice in who's hired to work there, you'd have some voice in the location, in how money is spent, in the general strategy. So I think that's important to think about as you expand to larger scale organisations. Maybe it's impossible for everyone to have direct say, but how can you have a voice in these types of decisions?

P: What kind of shifts they're seeing in the landscape of ownership right now?

AR: I had originally been thinking about these ideas of how to make tech platforms that operate as coops that are collectively owned. And what I've seen now is a lot more people thinking about these ideas coming from a Web3 space, particularly the DAO subculture of Web3, of thinking about collective governance, collective ownership and ways to do that, and a lot of rapid experimentation is happening right now. I think it's led some people to look backwards to more analogue or non-tech historical precedents. So, I sense that there's a cultural charge in the air of people wanting to work more collectively, or people sensing that traditional modes of working aren't necessarily making people happy or fulfilled. I think that whether or not people have realised how to [group together], many people want to. I would say that what's driving everything else is that there's a reaction to decades of neoliberalism, and a rejection of individualist, market driven culture, and that we could work together to have some ownership. I think the younger the generation gets, the more ownership is out of people's hands. And so I see what's happening now as very nascent explorations within an underdeveloped cultural demand for ownership, or an underdeveloped articulation of ownership.

P: I think it's definitely true that there's this desire for collective ownership, but the means are just not really within people's grasp. Like you say, there really is a huge push in Web3 spaces with this, do you think that that's going to be a really important connector or educational tool to help people who are striving for more control and more ownership? Do you see Web3 as the main bridge there?

AR: I see the most encouraging activity of really driving ownership at scale in the Web3 space. And although I love cooperatives and I would love to see more of them, there haven't been very many true success stories from the platform cooperative movement. So over time, through exploring Web3 conversations, I've become less of a co-op maximalist and more of just thinking: what are the ideas that co-ops are trying to carry? And what are the ways that we can, maybe in nuanced or differentiated—or, even ways that involve some compromise—how can we give these ideas some shot of real success in scale, so they have the largest effect possible?

P: I would love to hear how you think people can gradually go from this analogue approach and take that into the newer experimental phases: what do you feel are the key things that can be learned from these more established co-op models?

AR: I think in a lot of instances there's a culture in cooperatives of existing for people's survival. Of building things because no one's going to build it for them, of solidarity for groups that are marginalised or don't have access to other kinds of services or businesses, so they're creating them themselves. And I think as a result of that there's a really strong value set, and a clear set of principles. And I haven't seen that yet in the Web3 space. And I think that in the co-op space there's a very strong connection back towards material improvement of people's lives as a concrete angle. I've been personally frustrated by seeing some of the more flashy examples of Web3 crowdfunding going to things that I think don't make any sense, like trying to buy a version of the Constitution. What would that money be able to do if people had more developed politics or goals and, say, wanted to forgive people's medical

debt? With \$40 million dollars, how much of that could you leverage and buy out? It'd be worth a lot more than \$40 million to people. And so we're in this frustrating stage where the Web3 space has these incredibly powerful tools, but is applying them towards memes, or things that don't actually affect people. The thing that's encouraging about that in a way, is that it's really just a cultural difference. There's no fundamental incompatibility of using Web3 tools for these kinds of ends. So I think that is probably one of the stronger distinctions though, is just the culture, and that's because of the root of why co-ops have historically existed or the purpose that they've had.

P: Web3 is still in nascent and experimental phases - optimists would argue that its creation can be guided in such a way that rejects and reimagines the inequalities built into Web2. Pessimists might argue that if larger platforms drive the change, these will be replicated. Do you think this is inevitable, or avoidable?

AR: I think Web3 as a whole, will probably replicate the same existing systems. You can see that just in wallet design, how all of them are indistinguishable from stock markets. So I think there's still so many neoliberal reflexes or habits built into Web3. And yeah, maybe if you played out all the simulations it could be kind of a Black Mirror episode. But I think there also are chances to carve out our own spaces and use of tools within the space. I'm probably fundamentally an optimist, but I also think that people should build rather than critique. I like this Buckminster Fuller quote, I'm gonna paraphrase it as I don't remember it exactly, but it's that "We should be architects of the future, not subjects of it." We don't have to be cheerleaders. We don't have to be apologists, we can embrace nuance in very polarised conversations and try to build some kind of constructive solutions. Because if not, then what do we have to be up to look forward to or be optimistic about?

P: That's a very inspirational perspective to have. I think it can be hard for people to imagine better futures, but it's vital to do so.

AR: It's really important to note that wealth inequality is a direct byproduct of concentrated ownership. So efforts to distribute ownership is a very meaningful way to address wealth inequality. I think that just by distributing ownership to the people actually participating in these systems, I think that people using Web3 will become wealthier just because they'll have ownership in these valuable stakes and networks. Imagine what it would be like if every artist had shares in an alternate version of a creator economy, like Spotify or Patreon or YouTube? That's what I'm hopeful can be built.

P: I'm really interested to know what made you start exploring these alternatives to the current ownership models in music, and also now while you're moving outside of just that industry.

AR: Music introduced me to a few things. Playing in a band in college we participated in the very vibrant Brooklyn DIY scene at the time. A lot of people were creating venues in underused commercial spaces. It was like whack-a-mole—they'd pop up, they'd get shut down, they'd have a funny name, there'd be a new one. But there would always be places to play. That DIY spirit—people not asking permission, just building things for themselves—was so cool to see and be in proximity to. And then playing in a band also introduced me to the power and the scale of the internet; posting things back in the day on MySpace and actually finding some kind of audience. This was just like a mutual aid network of people doing things for the love of music. And those are still some of my best friends today. The power of community support and music, the power and the scale of the web, and then also just seeing people build things for themselves without any credentials or permission, I think those things together were very influential to me. The start of Ampled was just looking to build a less cringy version of Patreon. Like, what is something that doesn't give musicians nerd-chills to be on? That was the basic concept. We didn't have the kind of pedigree that would have VCs invest money in us, so, what can we do that's different? What can we do that we're proud of? That led to it basically starting as a research project on shared ownership. And I had never been in a co-op or participated in a co-op before trying to start one. So I think for everyone involved it was a learning experience and every step along the way, I think it convinced

everyone involved that distributing broad based ownership was maybe even more important than the actual platform that we were building.

P: That's really cool. I was wondering what you think are the most important things that you've learned in terms of governance and the difficulties of getting things to operate in both analogue and Web3 spaces?

AR: Building Ampled was basically like trying to punch a hole through a wall for years. It's significantly harder than building a VC funded company—doing it without the same kind of mentorship or ecosystem to support funding. Building something from scratch that is a functioning, working product that people want to use is, really, really, really hard. So what it did teach me was that funding is like a significant problem to be solved. We need to figure out ways to make [building something] a profitable thing to do, ways to make it a somewhat rational thing to do. And this is another instance where I think Web3 might have some of the best shots at answering these questions of being able to design our own incentive structures, being able to build new ways to allow for community financial participation. I think that one of the key problems, if not the key problem to solve, is how to make funding shared or public goods possible. Because we ask people to bootstrap, but it requires a certain level of privilege and security to even think about doing that. Just looking at [Ampled's] contributor base, they were all people that had cushy tech jobs. Why? Because it was just really hard to have anyone else with any kind of financial precarity or unpredictable schedule participate.

P: Do you feel that we can move towards collective ownership in more industries? And who would be sort of most instrumental in driving that change: would it be the people running the company? Or would it be the consumers who are demanding the change?

AR: It's all going to be consumers and workers driving this. There's a trend of more collective action that's happening in tech. Look at the trend of more unions happening: Kickstarter and Glitch I think were among the first in 2019. That was not

very long ago. And now these efforts are happening in Google, Apple, Amazon. I think that unions are like a gateway drug to thinking about ownership. But talking to some of the Kickstarter union organisers back when they were doing that, they realised quite far into the organisation of the union that they hadn't even asked the question or didn't know the answer of who owned the company. So even for activist practitioners, organisers, one huge barrier is that we don't have this fluency of ownership. It's not a reflex to even think about it, or ask the question: who owns it? It's not something that consumers are using to evaluate services that they use, maybe that will happen more, I hope it will happen more, and it'll probably come from the worker side.

P: I guess the other part of the question is how realistic is it to see this happening? I think it's ingrained in a lot of young people who are living in this rentier economy that they really do not own anything, but there's a sort of "benefit" to that, which is that you don't have to own a movie, you can watch hundreds of thousands on Netflix. You're essentially renting the art that you're getting on Spotify, for instance. So there's an interesting dichotomy of seeing this frustration of people who are like, **I'm never gonna own anything**, but at the same time being somewhat complacent in the sort of comforts of that.

AR: I mean, Spotify is a strong product. What alternatives do we have there? Is the model even worth salvaging? There were efforts by groups like Union of Musicians and Allied Workers that advocated for a penny per stream from Spotify. I had participated in that group for a short time. I disagreed with that approach, because I think that it sort of accepts the premise of streaming on other people's terms. I wrote an article for Musically on what could be demanded of Spotify in terms of ownership. Even a public company could create a trust or offer board seats. But there have to be the right kinds of demands, and that requires a different kind of fluency in what to ask for. If we're asking for a penny per play, yeah, we're gonna lose. If we ask for a board seat and show up, not at the Spotify offices, but at their investor offices, and print out their ESG requirements on their website and tell them how they're violating them—that's probably a way better pressure point to get meaningful change.



language, and I think that's going to be one of the biggest barriers, it will be a sign of a shift in priorities and perspectives. But there are ways that brands can take this step without bastardising it. You can't think about ownership without systems-thinking. It's a system of incentives that drive behaviours that are based on ownership. So for a company that's raised investment that is geared towards certain kinds of incentives, you just can't unwind it. I think the best thing to do is to focus on decision making, transparency, and access; those are the things that any company could do. For instance, co-determination of having workers on board representatives, that's normal. In Germany, for companies of a certain size, I think it's mandated by law. People in the US don't even know what that word means. I still think it can be meaningful to emphasise the decision making or transparency part of it, or even just ways to create a pool of funds that can be stewarded by community members. Those things are meaningful, and they don't necessarily require this crazy task of unwinding existing ownership structures.

P: That kind of faking it, using the word co-op in your company or your brand name, that's going back to the thought of ownership as a vibe and not a real system.

P: I think you touched on this at the beginning of this interview, but how do you think we're going to see shifts in ownership in the foreseeable future? What is the best case scenario, and what are the fears around changes in ownership models as well?

AR: Yeah, I mean, one of the first things I mentioned is basically just about how the word 'ownership' needs a more robust definition, and a shared definition. Or else it can just be redefined out of existence.

AR: Optimistically: every category has their own collectively owned option. Having stakeholders be shareholders allows for the formation of platforms or organisations that don't have to seek every addressable market, they can be more vertical than horizontal and help serve the needs of particular communities better than larger, monolith organisations. I think on the road to get there we'll see a lot of brands co-opting the language of solidarity and ownership and diluting it on the way, confusing the message, so that it becomes even harder to know what to ask for. Brands might just call themselves co-ops, it's already happened with a company called Co Op Commerce, which is not a co-op. I think there will be a lot of cynical borrowing of

Credits

Published by Protein Agency

Ideas and Words by Anna Lena Götzmann and Gemma Jones

Researched by Gursharan Panesar, Lan McArdle, Larana Hassani, Shadeh Kavousian, Sherjeel Haider

Managed and Supported by Emma Dietze and Hollie Beever

Designed by Son La Pham

Copy Edited by Daniel Beatty Garcia and My Rugema

Photography by Teddy Fitzhugh

Special thanks to Ade Kassim, Austin Robey, Bryan Wolff, Deana Burke, Deniz Yazicioğlu, Joshua Odamtten, Mandima Qunta, Natalie Crue, Tina Basi and the Protein Community

Protein AGENCY is a global brand consultancy specialising in consumer insight, cultural strategy, and community-led activation. Our research, strategic thinking, and reports help people and businesses make sense of the world around them, giving them knowledge and tools to make more culturally progressive decisions. We became a certified B Corporation in August 2022.

However, we've always been more than just an agency.

Since 1997 we've consistently been inspired by what is happening at the sharp edge of culture. This is reflected in the various projects we've launched over the years, from the Protein Journal, Protein Studios, Protein Supplement, or Protein Podcast, to more recently, our \$PRTN token and community who are using web3 to redefine the meaning of good growth.

Contact:
INFO@PROTEINAGENCY.COM



Thank you.