

Generational Differences in News Consumption Habits

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ABSTRACT

The ways in which people access their news has evolved significantly over time; research suggests that the ways in which people choose to engage with news differs significantly across age groups. The present study investigated generational differences in common routes to news, attitudes towards news, and levels of knowledge surrounding current events. 138 adults belonging to Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X, and Baby Boomer age categories completed a survey which assessed importance of specific modes of media related to news consumption, importance of specific social media platforms in relation to news consumption, and attitudes surrounding news-seeking. A twenty-question current events trivia also examined participants' level of knowledge about current events. It was found that routes to news, especially social media platforms, varied significantly across age groups. Next, dependence on Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok for news increased the younger the age group. Finally, Gen Z proved to be the most news avoidant age group and the least knowledgeable about current events.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital world, the ways in which people access their news continue to expand. People who used to rely on delivery of the daily paper for their news can now access information in seconds at the tap of a screen. Today, social media is the most used daily news platform among both Millennials and Gen Z (Watson, 2023). Though news consumption via social media and mobile devices has become commonplace, this shift is still relatively recent. After all, the invention of social media at the most basic level only happened in the late 1990s. If we think about differences in where people are currently sourcing their news on a generational level, it's important to recognize that news consumption routes are not solely dependent on technological accessibility. Each generation grew up with different societal norms as well as different available modes of media. So, what does this tell us about news consumption habits across age groups and knowledge of current events? This is the focus of the present study where news habits and knowledge of current events among 138 adults (between the ages of 18 and 77) are examined via survey data.

News Sources Across Age Groups

Research shows that news consumption habits vary significantly across age groups. According to Head et al. (2019), where people are sourcing their news varies across generations; younger adults are more likely to get their news online. A study of American adults conducted by Pew Research Center in 2022 backs this observation and dives into specifics. According to Forman-Katz and Matsa (2022), 81% of adults aged 18-29 prefer to get their news via digital devices, while only 25% of adults aged 65 and older prefer this route when given four categories (television, radio, print publications, and digital devices). These findings indicate a 56 percentage point decrease among older folks when it comes to digital devices as a news consumption

preference. It is also evident that older adults rely on television news and print publications at a far greater rate than younger adults. Nine percent of adults aged 18-29 prefer to get their news via television networks, while 56% of those aged 65 and older prefer this route (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022). When it comes to print publications, the same age groups differ with preference rates at 4% and 11% respectively (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022). This same study also tells us primary routes of news consumption in four age categories: 18-29, 30-49, 50-64, and 65+. Given previously described consumption categories, respondents were asked to identify the mode of media that they most preferred for getting news. Ages 18-29 as well as 30-49 most preferred digital devices, while ages 50-64 and 65+ most preferred television (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022).

Trust in Media Across Age Groups

Age also plays a significant role when it comes to levels of trust in the media: “Media distrust is also generational. Surveys show younger adults are less trusting than older news consumers” (Head et al., 2019). In 2018, only 33% of Americans under the age of 30 reported trust in the media, while 53% of Americans aged 65 and older reported trust in the media (Jones, 2018). For this survey, media trust was accounted for through those who agreed that they trusted the media “a great deal” or a “fair amount.” Recent research has also asked the question: Who is most likely to fall for ‘fake’ news? The results have remained consistent: Older generations are particularly vulnerable when it comes to consuming and believing false or misleading information. One study which analyzed a sample of American adults’ smartphone, desktop, and television consumption over 3 years concluded that individuals aged 55 and older consumed fake news at a significantly greater rate than individuals aged 18-24 (Allen et al., 2020). A separate study done during the 2016 presidential election indicated that adults aged 65 and older were seven times more likely to share fake news on Facebook than users aged 18-29 (Guess et al., 2019). But why is this

the case? Generational differences are key considerations. Jones (2018) explains, “Younger adults have come of age in an era marked by partisan media and fake news, while older Americans’ trust may have been established long ago in an era of widely read daily newspapers and trusted television news anchors.” Gen Zers have come of age at a time when trust in media hit an all-time low, while older adults came of age at a time when trust was much higher. A poll that spans from years 1972 to 2016 shows that trust in the media hit its highest point (72%) at the height of Gen X in 1976, and its lowest point (32%) at the height of Gen Z in 2016 (Swift, 2016). That being said, it would make sense that older age groups would have a different outlook on mass media than would younger ones.

Degrees of News Consumption

While it is important to have an understanding of where people are sourcing their news as well as their levels of trust, the degree to which people are consuming news is also a matter worthy of attention. Across all ages, non-news consumption heavily outweighs news consumption when evaluating daily media usage. Of the 460 minutes per person per day of total media consumption, 400 of those minutes are not related to news of any sort (Allen et al., 2020). When looking across age groups, older Americans consume the most media. Despite the fact that younger Americans (18-24) spend more time on their mobile devices than older Americans (55 and older), younger Americans spend less time consuming media than their older peers (Allen et al., 2020). Younger populations spend so much less time watching TV on a daily basis than older ones that their total media consumption is significantly lower.

Do people want to engage with the news?

Today's technological advancements have provided us with many routes to accessing information. While these advancements may keep us informed, research shows that having access

to such large amounts of information can have negative consequences. According to Park (2019) news overload can lead to stress, decreased motivation in processing news, and news avoidance. News overload is prevalent today: Over two-thirds of Americans reported feeling worn out by the amount of news they are exposed to as of 2019 (Gottfried, 2020). Case (2005) points out a key emotion behind news overload, fear. Mental discomfort and fear are noted to lead to purposeful rejection of information, which serves as a psychological defense mechanism (Case, 2005). With that said, those who feel anxious about the state of the world may find themselves trying to stay away from news headlines. Research suggests that news overload is dependent on the mode of media. Holton and Chyi (2012) report that social media is positively associated with news overload while traditional news sources, like television, are negatively associated. This could have striking implications for levels of news avoidance across different age groups, especially since younger people lean on social media more for news than older people (Mitchell et al., 2020).

There are other causes for news avoidance, however. According to Goyanes et al. (2021), motivations for news avoidance include: 1) News overload by which people seek news avoidance as a remedy, 2) Cognitions such as media distrust, and 3) Personal dispositions such as political interest. Levels of trust are particularly significant when it comes to looking at degrees of news avoidance. Given that younger folks are less trusting of the media than older folks (Head et al.; 2019), this might also say something about news avoidance across particular age groups. As an increasing portion of the population actively avoids the news Goyanes et al. (2021), news avoidance is a topic that is both significant and timely.

What do people actually know?

Recent research also suggests that political knowledge is impacted by the chosen mode of media by which people prefer to engage with news. According to Mitchell et al. (2020), those who

depend on social media for their news demonstrated lower political knowledge than most others. Participants were given seven categories for preferred news consumption routes: News websites or apps, radio, print, cable TV, network TV, social media, and local TV. When asked a series of 29 fact-based questions about current events, politics, and COVID-19, those who chose social media as their primary news consumption route had the lowest proportion of correct answers when compared to all other groups except local TV (Mitchell et al., 2020). The same study claimed that, of the sample provided, younger people (ages 18-29) are most reliant on social media for news (Mitchell et al., 2020). This supports previous data on consumption preferences across age groups. Perhaps the younger generation could benefit from leaning on traditional media more than they do now.

Generations Defined

According to Stahl and Literat (2022), the currently accepted sociological definition of a generation is a grouping of people born in the same period of approximately 20 years. Generations share a space in history and such context allows us to better understand behavioral patterns, values, and cultural shifts that occur during their lifetimes. For the purpose of the present study, it is important that age group specifics according to generations are provided. Though generational categories may vary across different sources, generations will be discussed according to the Beresford Research age chart: Gen Z (1997-2012), Gen Y (Millennials) (1981-1996), Gen X (1965-1980), and Baby Boomers (1946-1964) (Beresford Research, 2023).

Gen Z

Gen Zers, or those born between 1997 and 2012, are often referred to as ‘digital natives’. This group of individuals grew up with the internet already established and widely used. Most Gen Z kids also grew up with their parents owning a smartphone and using it daily. As PrakashYadav

and Rai (2020) put it, “Gen Z is the first to have Internet technology so readily available and they have been exposed to an unprecedented amount of technology in their upbringing... People of Gen Z are naturally thought of as being so comfortable with technology, that interacting on social media websites is a significant portion of their socializing behaviours” (p. 111). Gen Z kids were also educated at a point in time where technology was considered an integral part of classrooms. Whereas previous generations were more familiar with traditional chalkboard teaching, Gen Z, on occasion, could have been introduced class material in the form of a YouTube video. Educators of Gen Z not only recognized the value of online tools but they helped create a generation well-versed in the digital world. Such an upbringing would explain why young folks are more likely to get their news online and why they are among the most critical of online sources. Gen Z is so immersed in the digital world that they have developed a unique perspective on what can and cannot be trusted on certain platforms; the online world is much more familiar to them.

Gen Y (Millennials)

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, grew up in a time when personal computers were already established. Gen Y kids had access to the internet during their formative years; most of them first used a computer as young children (Erikson; 2012, p. 24). While they grew up with internet technology, Millennials were born pre-social media and pre-smartphone. Most witnessed the rise of social media between teen years and early adulthood, and perhaps most notably, the invention of Facebook. As early adopters, Gen Y embraced communications via social media and smartphones. According to Bannon et al. (2011), a majority of Millennials think that technology helps people use their time more efficiently, a higher percentage than their older counterparts (p. 62).

Gen X

Gen Xers, or those born between 1965 and 1980, were born prior to the introduction of personal computers; Most of Gen X didn't adopt computer technology until their high school years and began incorporating it into their daily lives as they entered the workforce (Kamber, 2017, p. 48). Gen Xers were young enough when personal computers were introduced that they could fully embrace their existence as tools, yet they were also old enough to understand a world without them. Gen X children experienced childhood in an entirely different way than did Gen Z. They didn't have the ability to pick up their smartphones and have the internet solve problems for them nor could they communicate with their friends via social media comments. Smartphones weren't even adopted by Gen Xers (and the general population) until around the late 2000s. Kamber explains, Gen X "...carries a vestigial memory of an age where we could simply 'pop the hood' and mess with something until we got it working" (2017). Gen X witnessed the birth of the digital age in their later years but still hold the memory of life before the age of smartphones and computers. Because of this, Gen X appreciates how technology has drastically improved their lives yet also harmed it: "Digital dual citizenship has infused Gen Xers with the distinctive ideas about the role technology plays in our world, what makes it possible, and what it destroys" (Kamber, 2017, p. 49). That being said, it makes sense that Gen X would be more wary of social media than the youngest generations.

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers, or those born between 1946 and 1964, were born just after World War II and experienced the television boom during their formative years. The first in-home television set was demonstrated to the public in 1927 and it wasn't until between 1948 and 1955 that television sets were installed in most households (Spigel, 1992, p. 1). Prior to the introduction of television sets into the home, most people relied on newspapers, magazines, film, and radio as mass mediums

of information (Spigel, 1992, p. 1). After the introduction of television came personal computers. Again, most Gen Xers did not adopt computer technology into their lives until their high school years. This means that Baby Boomers didn't adopt such technology until later in adulthood, and smartphone technology much later. Baby Boomers have experienced more technological advancements and change than any younger generation. As a result, much of their previous reliance on traditional media for news consumption has still stuck. Baby Boomers have a greater preference for both television and print publications than Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z age groups (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022). Perhaps this is because Baby Boomers came of age at a time when television was still new and exciting and newspaper sources were not considered a thing of the past. According to Moore and Hancock (2022), research suggests that Baby Boomers are significantly less digitally literate and more susceptible to false information online than their younger counterparts. This makes sense when recognizing that Baby Boomers had to adapt to social media and advanced technology so late in life.

The Present Study

Given the many routes we are offered when it comes to consuming information, research surrounding news habits is timely; generational contexts are significant. The study at hand asked the two main questions, specifically across provided generational age categories: Where are people sourcing their news? Does this influence what people actually know about current events? While studies have looked into these questions before, provided categories for new consumption routes have been limited and somewhat vague. In the present study, I provided a more in-depth analysis of where people are actually getting their news across age groups using the following categories: I) Conversations with friends, family, and peers, II) Social media platforms, III) The newspaper (both online and in print), IV) Television networks, and V) Radio stations. To answer the question

of what people actually know about current events, participants answered a set of 20 trivia questions related to politics and recent news headlines and received scores based on the proportion of answers that were correct. My study also asked the following secondary questions which could help explain particular consumption habits: What factors play into people trusting information (specifically across age groups)? Who is most news avoidant? The four generational age categories I looked at include Gen Z, Gen Y (Millennials), Gen X, and Baby Boomers as previously defined according to Beresford Research. I hypothesized that I) Gen Z will have greater preference for getting their news via social media than all other age categories, II) Preference for social media will be negatively associated with greater knowledge of current events, III) Preference for newspaper publications will be positively associated with greater knowledge of current events, and IV) Gen Z will be more news avoidant than the other generations.

METHODS

Participants

This study examines data collected from a 2023 survey (Appendix C) completed by individuals ages 18 and older. The survey was taken by participants who belong to Baby Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y (millennial), and Gen Z generations and was administered via Qualtrics. To gather a large sample and ensure that results could cover a very large age range, the survey was distributed personally and via posts on a variety of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Appendix A). The identities of participants were kept anonymous to improve research cooperation; random response IDs were assigned and no personal identifying information such as names or exact ages were recorded. The study was approved by the University of Portland's Institutional Review Board to ensure that research was conducted ethically.

Design

After giving consent to participate in the study (Appendix B), participants were first asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire where they provided information regarding their age category, gender identity, race, education level, political affiliation, and income level. Following the demographics section, participants were asked about their internet usage habits and had to identify their news routes that were important to them (personal relationships, social media platforms, newspaper publications, television programs, and radio). Additionally, they were asked to assess each mode of media on a scale of personal importance (very important, somewhat important, not important at all). In the same manner, participants were asked to assess the importance of specific social media platforms in getting their news (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Reddit). Next, they had to assess factors that play into trust in media via another importance scale. Statements such as “The source is unbiased” and “The source shares my values” were included. Following the personal importance scales, participants were provided with statements related to intentionality of news-seeking and were asked to agree or disagree with them using a likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). This category included sentiments like “Most of my news consumption is unintentional” and “I actively seek out news because it is important to stay updated on current events.” Finally, participants answered a set of twenty multiple choice trivia questions on current events (relevant to 2023) to assess levels of knowledge about the world today and news literacy.

Analysis

All statistical analyses were done in SPSS. In order to start analyzing the data, variables had to be cleaned. Participants who either participated more than once, did not provide any

demographic information, or did not participate in the trivia section of the study were removed. Only three participants reported being over the age of 78 (the Silent Generation), so the decision was made to exclude this age category. After cleaning the data, 138 responses remained. Gen Z (18-26 years old) made up the largest percentage of respondents (34.8%), while Gen Y (27-42 years old) accounted for 20.3 percent of the data, Gen X (43-58 years old) accounted for 21 percent, and Baby Boomers (59-77 years old) accounted for 23.9 percent. 36.2 percent of respondents were men and 62.3 percent were women; only 0.7 percent reported identifying as non-binary and another 0.7 percent as “other.” Of those who reported their race, 69.66 percent were White or Caucasian, 2.2 percent were Black or African American, 4.3 percent were Asian, 15.9 percent were Hispanic or Latino, 4.3 percent were biracial or multiracial, and 3.6 reported “other.” Table 1 can be referred to for full demographic descriptions.

RESULTS

Preferred Routes to News Across Generations

Crosstab tables were created in SPSS to examine preferred news routes (friends/family/peers, newspaper publications, social media, television, and radio) according to different age categories (refer to Table 2). Preferred news routes were measured according to reported levels of importance as a route to news (1=Not important at all, 2=Slightly important, 3=Moderately important, 4=Very important). For data simplification purposes, values 1 and 2 were combined to equal a value of 0 (not important) and values 3 and 4 were combined to equal a value of 1 (important). Chi-square tests helped determine if the relationship between age and mode of media was significant.

Almost all news route preferences appeared to have a significant dependence on age: Newspaper publications, social media, television, and radio. Friends/family/peers missed the mark for statistical significance, so these results will be left out of discussion here. Gen Z and Baby Boomers found newspaper publications to be an important news route at about the same rate, with Millennials and Gen X to a lesser extent. Social media as an important route to news had the greatest contrast in relation to age. While 51.7 percent of Gen Z reported social media as an important news route, only 5.2 of Baby Boomers did the same. Data revealed that news engagement via social media declines with age, which supports my hypothesis that stated Gen Z would have the greatest engagement with social media as a news route. Surprisingly, Gen Z reported television as an important news route at greater rate than Baby Boomers; this data contradicts results discussed from previous studies (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022). Finally, radio news consumption appeared to increase with age. Refer to Table 2 for full details on preferred news routes.

Next, chi-squared tests were run to determine if age played a significant role in use of particular social media platforms as gateways to news (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Reddit). Again, respondents were asked to identify platforms' level of importance (1=Not important at all, 2=Slightly important, 3=Moderately important, 4=Very important) and values were recoded to equal 0 (not important) and 1 (important). Age appeared to be statistically significant in relation to new engagement via Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Gen Z and Millennials reported Instagram as an important news route at about the same rate, while Gen X and Baby Boomers both reported little importance in its use. Gen Z reported TikTok as an important news route at the greatest rate, while no Baby Boomer participants reported Tiktok as an important news route. Millennials and Gen X reported TikTok importance at significantly

lower rates than Gen Z, but at higher rates than Baby Boomers. Finally, Twitter appeared to follow the same trend as TikTok in levels of importance. A majority of Gen Z reported Twitter as an important news platform (at the greatest rate) while no Baby Boomers reported importance. The older the age group, the less Twitter was reported as an important route to news. This data reveals striking differences in social media platforms as news routes, particularly between Gen Z and Baby Boomers. For a full picture of social media platform use by age, readers can refer to Table 3.

Trust Factors

Next, factors that play into trust in media were examined across age groups. Factors included “The source is unbiased,” “The source shares my values,” and “The source shares a similar background to me.” Participants were asked to evaluate these statements in the context of sources they trusted (1=Not important at all, 2=Slightly important, 3=Moderately important, 4=Very important). Again, values 1 and 2 were combined to equal a value of 0 (not important) and values 3 and 4 were combined to equal a value of 1 (important). Chi-square tests helped determine if the relationship between age and particular trust factors were significant. One factor held statistical significance in relation to age: Whether or not a source was unbiased ($X^2(3, N = 138) = 9.341, p=.025$). 33 percent of Gen Z reported unbiased sources as important factors playing into trust, revealing that they value unbiased sources to a greater extent than all other age categories. 22.4 percent of Millennials reported unbiased sources as important trust factors, only 18.4 percent of Gen X, and 25.6 percent of Baby Boomers.

News Avoidance/Intentionality

Participants were asked to agree or disagree with statements assessing news-seeking habits and attitudes towards news and the world. They were asked to do so using a likert scale

(1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree).

Values were recoded for simplification; values 1 and 2 were combined to equal 0 (disagree), value 3 was recoded as missing, and values 4 and 5 were combined to equal a value of 1 (agree).

When asked if participants avoid seeking out news because they are overwhelmed by information, Gen Z admitted to news avoidance at the highest rate (45.2%). News avoidance appeared to have a significant relationship with age ($X^2(3, N = 112) = 8.446, p = .038$): 32.3 percent of Millennials reported news avoidance, 9.7 percent of Gen X, and 12.9 percent of Baby Boomers. With this data, my hypothesis that Gen Z would be the most news avoidant age group is supported. Another observation was particularly striking: 63.6 percent Gen Z reported that most of their news consumption was unintentional, while no participants of the Baby Boomer generation reported unintentional news consumption (0%). Age appeared to play a significant role in unintentional news consumption; unintentional news consumption went down as age went up (refer to Table 4).

Knowledge of Current Events

Statistical analyses were run in SPSS to determine if age and preferred news routes were significant factors in knowledge of current events. Participants' knowledge of current events were determined by mean trivia scores; scores were out of twenty points. Again, preferred news routes were measured according to reported levels of importance which were recoded into values 0 (not important) and 1 (important).

Comparison of means tests were done to compare age and knowledge of current events. It appeared that the younger age groups produced lower scores. Out of the four age categories, Gen Z scored the lowest ($M=10.63$), Millennials scored the second lowest ($M=13.29$), Gen X scored slightly higher than Millennials ($M=13.66$), and Baby Boomers scored the highest ($M=14.9394$).

Given the score variations, age was deemed a statistically significant factor in score outcome via an ANOVA table [$F(3, 134) = 8.818, p = .000022$].

Next, comparison of means tests were run to see if the apparent importance of particular modes of media had any effect on knowledge of current events. Preference for newspaper publications proved to be the most impactful on scores in comparison to other modes of media (friends/family/peers, television, radio, and social media). Those who reported newspaper publications as unimportant scored significantly lower ($M=11.46$) than those who reported them as important news routes ($M=13.61$); association between newspapers and scores were deemed significant and were the only mode of media that proved to be statistically significant [$F(1, 139) = 9.157, p = .003$]. This data proves one of my hypotheses; engaging with newspaper publications is positively associated with greater knowledge of current events. Social media preference was not deemed statistically significant in relation to trivia scores, so the hypothesis that stated social media engagement would not be beneficial in knowledge of current events must be rejected. Results are still worth noting: Those who identified social media as an important news route scored lower ($M=13.21$) than those who identified social media as unimportant ($M=12.36$).

Finally, statistical analyses were run to determine whether or not news avoidance had a significant impact on knowledge of current events. Surely, it did. Participants who reported news avoidance scored lower ($M=10.13$) than those who reported that they did not ($M=13.93$). An ANOVA test determined that the association between news avoidance and trivia score was statistically significant [$F(1, 114) = 22.503, p = .000006$]. Given that Gen Z scored lowest on the current events quiz and were the most news avoidant, this association tracks.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this study highlight evolving patterns of news consumption across different age groups and their impact on knowledge of current events. Through the data that has been reviewed, it is clear that generational divides exist in not only routes to news, but also attitudes towards news consumption. Given the current pace of technological change and the fact that news overload and news avoidance is so prevalent today (Gottfried, 2020; Park, 2019), a snapshot of consumption trends is timely.

One of the most striking observations within the study involved social media news engagement across age groups. There appeared to be a huge gap between Gen Z and Baby Boomers specifically. Again, 51.7 percent of Gen Z reported social media as an important news route while only 5.2 percent of Baby Boomers did the same. Social media appeared to decline in importance the older the age group. So, why is this important? For one, studies show that social media is positively associated with news overload (which often leads to news avoidance), while other traditional sources are negatively associated (Holton & Chyi, 2012). Next, Gen Z has come of age in a time where social media is a primary mode of communication and socialization. Finally, studies have shown that those who depend on social media for their news demonstrated lower political knowledge than most others (Mitchell et.al, 2020). With that said, it is not surprising that Gen Z was the most news avoidant, that Gen Z scored the lowest on the current events quiz, and that this generation stressed the most importance for social media as a news route.

As with any study, there are limitations. Given the amount of time given to complete the study and the fact that most responses were collected via my personal pool of social media followers and messages to friends and family, I was not able to gather a very large sample size (N=138). Additionally, a majority of responses were those within my own age category (Gen Z).

The fact that much of my study was distributed via social media platforms is also somewhat problematic in itself; those who were able to access my survey via Instagram or Facebook might report Instagram and Facebook as important news routes because viewing my post implies that they are active on those platforms to some extent. For future research, I would like to utilize a platform like MTurk, where a larger random sample is collected. Alternatively, I could find a way to distribute my survey in a combination of different ways via several social media platforms, on paper, via email, via text, etc.

Limitations aside, my data provides striking implications for sociological investigation within the realm of information consumption. For future studies, I might be interested in looking at specific areas of news interests across age groups. For example, it might be worth looking at whether or not people gravitate toward politics, celebrity updates, or music, among other things. I would also be curious to see how certain platforms, such as TikTok, contribute to political polarization via curated “for-you” pages. Breaking down and examining how “for-you” algorithms work would make for a fun experimental study. Both of these ideas might build context surrounding peoples’ knowledge of current events.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Item	N	%
Age	(138)	
18-26	48	34.8
27-42	28	20.3
43-58	29	21.0
59-77	33	23.9
Gender	(138)	
Man	50	36.2
Woman	86	62.3
Nonbinary	1	0.7
Other	1	0.7
Race/Ethnicity	(138)	
White/Caucasian	96	69.6
Black or African American	3	2.2
Asian	6	4.3
Hispanic/Latino	22	15.9
Biracial/multiracial	6	4.3
Other	5	3.6
Highest Level of Education	(138)	
High school or less	11	8.0
Some college	46	33.3
Associate's degree	15	10.9
Bachelor's degree	39	28.3
Graduate degree+	27	19.6
Political Affiliation	(125)	
Republican	16	11.6
Democrat	66	47.8
Independent - leaning republican	13	9.4
Independent - leaning democrat	30	21.7
Missing	13	9.4
Yearly Income	(138)	
Less than \$30,000	42	30.4
\$30k-\$74,999	33	23.9
\$75k-\$149,999	39	28.3
Over \$150,000	24	17.4

Table 2. Important News Routes by Age Category

<u>How important would you say social media is in getting your information?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	<u>df</u>	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	23.4	51.7	32.086 ^a	3	.0000005***
Millennials	27	11.7	31.0			
Gen X	28	27.3	12.1			
Baby Boomers	32	37.7	5.2			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say newspaper publications are in getting your information?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	<u>df</u>	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	44.7	30.0	10.0148 ^a	3	.017*
Millennials	27	27.7	15.6			
Gen X	29	17.0	23.3			
Baby Boomers	33	10.6	31.1			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say TV is in getting your information?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	<u>df</u>	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	34.6	35.6	10.937 ^a	3	.012*
Millennials	27	26.9	10.2			
Gen X	29	12.8	32.2			
Baby Boomers	33	25.6	22.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say radio stations are in getting your information?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	<u>df</u>	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	43.8	15.0	13.259 ^a	3	.004**
Millennials	27	20.8	17.5			
Gen X	29	16.7	32.5			
Baby Boomers	32	18.8	35.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

How important would you say friends/family/peers are in getting your information?

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>χ^2</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	22.0	43.0	6.852 ^a	3	.077
Millennials	27	24.0	17.4			
Gen X	28	28.0	16.3			
Baby Boomers	33	26.0	23.3			

*Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.*

Table 3. Social Media Platforms as News Routes by Age Category

<u>How important would you say Instagram is in getting your news?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	30.8	47.1	23.143 ^a	3	.000038***
Millennials	28	13.5	41.2			
Gen X	29	25.0	8.8			
Baby Boomers	33	30.8	2.9			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say Twitter (or X) is in getting your news?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	28.3	66.7	16.217 ^a	3	.001**
Millennials	28	20.4	20.8			
Gen X	28	22.1	12.5			
Baby Boomers	33	29.2	0.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say TikTok is in getting your news?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	27.3	69.2	20.781 ^a	3	.000117***
Millennials	28	20.0	23.1			
Gen X	27	22.7	7.7			
Baby Boomers	33	30.0	0.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

<u>How important would you say Facebook is in getting your news?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	<u>P-value</u>
		<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>			
Gen Z	48	36.8	23.8	3.272 ^a	3	.352
Millennials	28	17.9	33.3			
Gen X	29	20.5	23.8			
Baby Boomers	33	24.8	19.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

How important would you say YouTube is in getting your news?

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	P-value
		%	%			
Gen Z	48	29.1	52.9	7.716 ^a	3	.052
Millennials	28	20.4	20.6			
Gen X	28	22.3	14.7			
Baby Boomers	33	28.2	11.8			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

How important would you say Snapchat is in getting your news?

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	P-value
		%	%			
Gen Z	48	34.4	44.4	5.690 ^a	3	.128
Millennials	28	18.8	44.4			
Gen X	28	21.1	11.1			
Baby Boomers	33	25.8	0.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

How important would you say Reddit is in getting your news?

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	χ^2	df	P-value
		%	%			
Gen Z	48	32.8	53.3	7.453 ^a	3	.059
Millennials	28	18.9	33.3			
Gen X	28	21.3	13.3			
Baby Boomers	33	27.0	0.0			


Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Unintentional News Consumption by Age Category


<u>Would you agree or disagree that most of your news consumption is unintentional?</u>						
<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	χ^2	df	P-value
		%	%			
Gen Z	37	20.3	63.6	26.476 ^a	3	.000008***
Millennials	24	20.3	24.2			
Gen X	25	26.6	12.1			
Baby Boomers	36	32.9	0.0			

Notes: Data converted to percentages for clarity. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Appendix A: Social Media Posts Requesting Participation




Madison Hess

Nov 2 · 

...


Hi everyone! I'm conducting research on generational differences in news consumption habits for my senior thesis. I'm asking those who are willing to participate in this short survey using the link below - I would really appreciate the responses!

 About this website

uportland.qualtrics.com

Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management

Hey y'all — I'm conducting research on generational differences in news consumption habits for my senior thesis. I'm asking those who are willing to participate in this quick survey using the link below. I would really appreciate the responses!!

 UPORTLAND.QUALTRICS.COM

Appendix B: Consent Forms

INFORMED CONSENT INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Madison Hess, from the University of Portland, under the supervision of Dr. Martin Monto, Ph.D. This study looks into news habits and knowledge of current events across age groups. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about your background (such as age and education level), your personal news habits, and your knowledge of contemporary issues. The study will take approximately 5-15 minutes and poses no more than minimal foreseeable risks to you. However, you are welcome to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may opt out of the study at any time. While you will not receive any personal benefit, you may feel more informed about your own news habits and knowledge upon completion of the survey. No personal identifying information (such as name, exact age, etc.) will be collected from you during the course of this study. Identities of respondents will remain confidential and will not be released by the researchers. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact the researcher at: hess25@up.edu or Dr. Martin Monto at montom@up.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB (IRB@up.edu). You may request a copy of this form for your records by contacting the researcher. By continuing with this survey you indicate that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you are at least 18 years of age, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

Appendix C: Survey Questions

DEMOGRAPHICS

What age group do you fit into?

- 18-26
- 27-42
- 43-58
- 59-77
- 78+

With what gender do you identify?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other

What is your race?

- White/Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Biracial/multiracial
- Other

Education (highest degree completed):

- High school or less
- Some college
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Degree+

What is your political affiliation?

- Republican
- Independent - leaning republican
- Independent - no leaning
- Independent - leaning democrat
- Democrat
- Don't know

What is your yearly income?

- Less than \$30,000
- \$30k-\$74,999
- \$75k-\$149,999
- Over \$150,000

NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS

How often would you say you use the internet?

- a) Almost constantly
- b) Several times a day
- c) Around once a day
- d) Several times a week or less

How important would you say each social media platform is in getting your news? Rate each on a scale of importance (1-Very important, 2- Moderately important, 3- Slightly important, 4- Not important at all).

- a) Twitter (now known as X)
- b) Facebook
- c) Instagram
- d) Snapchat
- e) TikTok
- f) Reddit

When it comes to your own news consumption, how important would you say conversations with friends, family, and/or peers are in getting your information?

- a) Not important at all
- b) Slightly important
- c) Moderately important
- d) Very important

When it comes to your own news consumption, how important would you say social media platforms are in getting your information (ex. Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Youtube)?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When it comes to your own news consumption, how important would you say the newspaper is in getting your information (either online or in print)?

- a) Very important

- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When it comes to your own news consumption, how important would you say television networks are in getting your information?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When it comes to your own news consumption, how important would you say radio stations are in getting your information?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When you think about sources you *trust*, how important is it to you that your sources share your values?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When you think about sources you *trust*, how important is it to you that your sources are unbiased?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

When you think about sources you *trust*, how important is it to you that information is coming from people who share a similar background to you?

- a) Very important
- b) Moderately important
- c) Slightly important
- d) Not important at all

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?

I often feel anxious about the state of the world.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

I actively seek out news because it is important to stay updated on current events.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

I avoid seeking out news because I am overwhelmed/surrounded by lots of information.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

Most of my news consumption is unintentional.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

TRIVIA

1. In June, a missing underwater submersible carrying five individuals captured global attention. Passengers were on a mission to visit the remains of which ship?

- a) RMS Titanic
- b) SS Andrea Doria
- c) USS Arizona
- d) RMS Lusitania

2. On June 29th, the Supreme Court struck down _____ at colleges and universities across the United States with a vote of 6-3, ending a policy intended to advance racial equity.

- a) Affirmative action

- b) Legacy admissions
- c) Critical Race Theory
- d) Athletic Scholarships

3. Donald Trump faces several trials this coming year. He has been indicted ____ times as of October 2023.

- a) Six
- b) Two
- c) Eight
- d) Four

4. Sen. Robert Menendez was charged with taking hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and has a trial set for May 2024. What state does he represent?

- a) California
- b) New York
- c) New Jersey
- d) Georgia

5. This September, President Joe Biden joined a picket line in Michigan among the ____.

- a) UAW (United Auto Workers)
- b) NEA (National Education Association)
- c) USW (United Steelworkers)
- d) APWU (American Postal Workers Union)

6. The Writers Guild of America ended its strike against major Hollywood studios in September. How long did this strike last?

- a) 10 days
- b) 37 days
- c) 148 days
- d) 86 days

7. On September 8, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8 devastated towns and villages near central _____.

- a) Togo
- b) Morocco
- c) Guinea
- d) Sierra Leone

8. Gov. Gavin Newsom of California named _____ to fill a seat in the Senate after the death of Dianne Feinstein.

- a) Barbara Lee
- b) Laphonza Butler
- c) Maxine Waters
- d) Katie Porter

9. For the first time in U.S. history, a speaker of the House has been voted out of office by a vote of 216-210 this October. Who was ousted?

- a) Kevin McCarthy
- b) Matt Gaetz
- c) George Santos
- d) Rick Allen

10. Hawaii experienced a devastating and deadly wildfire this August. Most of the damage occurred on the island of _____.

- a) Kauai
- b) Oahu
- c) Maui
- d) Lanai

11. Former California senator Dianne Feinstein died on September 29th at age ____.

- a) 67
- b) 55
- c) 71
- d) 90

12. Mercenary leader _____ led an insurrection against Putin in June. He died just two months later in a plane crash.

- a) Yevgeny Prigozhin
- b) Sergei Shoigu
- c) Valery Gerasimov
- d) Nikolai Patrushev

13. The first presidential debate of the Republican primary took place on August 23. Who of the following was *not* there?

- a) Vivek Ramaswamay
- b) Nikki Haley
- c) Ron DeSantis
- d) Donald Trump

14. A trial was opened against Google this September following DOJ accusations of _____.

- a) Illegal monopoly of online search engines
- b) A cryptocurrency scandal
- c) Privacy concerns surrounding collection of user data
- d) Inflating tax payments

15. Donald Trump started his New York civil trial this October and faces consequences that could bar him from doing business in New York. What is he accused of in this case?

- a) Trying to reverse the 2020 election results
- b) Net worth inflation and falsification of business records
- c) Posing a threat to national security after mishandling of official documents

16. At the end of September, a man was charged with the murder of hip-hop icon _____, who was fatally shot in 1996.

- a) Nipsey Hussle
- b) The Notorious B.I.G.
- c) Tupac Shakur
- d) Eazy-E

17. Russia demands that Ukraine refrains from signing on to what agreement?

- a) NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
- b) CENTO (Central Treaty Organization)
- c) NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)

18. Putin's decision to invade Ukraine is a direct violation of the _____, which upheld Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for its nuclear weapons in 1994.

- a) Budapest Memorandum
- b) Geneva Conventions
- c) Moscow Accords
- d) Copenhagen Agreement

19. At the beginning of this October, Hunter Biden pleaded _____ to three federal firearms charges.

- a) Guilty
- b) Not guilty

20. In September, thousands of people were killed and over 40,000 displaced after a storm caused dams to burst in _____.

- a) Libya
- b) Angola
- c) Nigeria
- d) Mali

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