
NEWS CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR AMONG GENERATION Z IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital media has transformed the way people access, consume, and share news. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has grown up in a highly connected digital environment where smartphones, social media platforms, and online news portals serve as primary sources of information. This study examines the news consumption behavior of Generation Z in the digital era, focusing on their preferred news sources, frequency of news consumption, trust in digital news platforms, and engagement with news content. A survey was conducted among 300 respondents aged 18–27 years from various educational institutions. The findings reveal that social media platforms are the dominant source of news consumption among Generation Z, while traditional media such as newspapers and television are used less frequently. The study also highlights concerns regarding misinformation, declining trust in online news, and the increasing influence of algorithms on news exposure. The research contributes to understanding contemporary news consumption patterns and provides recommendations for media organizations seeking to engage younger audiences effectively.

KEYWORDS: Generation Z, Digital Media, News Consumption, Social Media, Journalism, Online News, Digital Journalism.

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has significantly altered the landscape of journalism and media consumption worldwide. The emergence of the internet, smartphones, and social networking platforms has changed how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Traditional forms

of media, including newspapers, radio, and television, are increasingly being challenged by digital platforms that provide instant access to information.

Generation Z represents the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age. Unlike previous generations, they have been exposed to digital technologies from an early age and are highly dependent on smartphones and social media for communication, entertainment, education, and information. Consequently, their news consumption habits differ significantly from those of older generations.

News consumption behavior refers to the ways individuals access, interpret, engage with, and share news content. Understanding the news consumption behavior of Generation Z is important because they represent the future audience of journalism. Their preferences influence how news organizations develop content strategies, distribute information, and maintain audience engagement.

Recent developments in digital communication have enabled users to receive news through multiple channels, including social media feeds, news websites, mobile applications, podcasts, and video-sharing platforms. While these technologies have improved accessibility, they have also introduced challenges such as information overload, misinformation, fake news, and declining trust in media institutions.

This study investigates how Generation Z consumes news in the digital era and identifies factors influencing their news preferences, engagement patterns, and perceptions of credibility.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the news consumption habits of Generation Z.
2. To identify the digital platforms preferred for accessing news.
3. To analyze the frequency of news consumption among Generation Z.
4. To evaluate the level of trust in different news sources.
5. To assess the influence of social media on news consumption behavior.
6. To explore challenges associated with digital news consumption.

Research Questions

1. Which platforms are most frequently used by Generation Z for news consumption?
2. How often does Generation Z consume news through digital media?
3. What factors influence their choice of news sources?
4. How much trust do they place in digital news platforms?

5. What role does social media play in shaping news consumption behavior?

Hypotheses

H1: Social media platforms are the primary source of news consumption among Generation Z.

H2: There is a significant relationship between digital media usage and frequency of news consumption.

H3: Trust in digital news sources significantly affects news consumption behavior.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it contributes to understanding changing audience behavior in the digital media environment. As media organizations seek to attract younger audiences, understanding the preferences and expectations of Generation Z becomes essential. The findings may assist journalists, media educators, policymakers, and communication researchers in developing strategies to improve news engagement, media literacy, and information credibility.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have explored the impact of digital media on news consumption patterns. According to Newman et al. (2024), younger audiences increasingly rely on social media platforms as their primary source of news. The study revealed that traditional news organizations face challenges in retaining younger audiences who prefer mobile-friendly and visually engaging content.

Pew Research Center studies have consistently shown that Generation Z prefers consuming news through smartphones rather than traditional media channels. Social networking platforms provide convenience, personalization, and immediate access to information, making them attractive sources of news.

Marchi (2012) argued that young audiences often encounter news incidentally while using social media rather than actively seeking it. This phenomenon has become more pronounced with algorithm-driven content recommendations that expose users to news based on their interests and online behavior.

Boczkowski et al. (2018) found that digital audiences value speed and accessibility but often question the credibility of online information. The abundance of information sources creates challenges in distinguishing reliable journalism from misinformation.

Fletcher and Nielsen (2018) observed that trust in news varies significantly among younger audiences. While social media offers convenience, concerns regarding fake news and biased reporting influence audience perceptions of credibility.

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of media literacy in helping young audiences critically evaluate digital news content. Media literacy programs can improve the ability of users to identify misinformation and make informed decisions regarding news consumption.

Despite extensive research on digital media usage, there remains a need for further investigation into the specific news consumption behaviors of Generation Z, particularly in developing countries where digital media adoption continues to expand rapidly.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine news consumption behavior among Generation Z.

Population

The target population consists of Generation Z individuals aged 18–27 years enrolled in colleges and universities.

Sample Size

A total of 300 respondents participated in the study.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was employed to collect responses from students and young professionals who regularly use digital media.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions. The questionnaire covered demographic information, news consumption habits, platform preferences, trust in news sources, and engagement behavior.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using percentage distribution and descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Frequency of News Consumption.

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Several times a day	135	45%
Once a day	90	30%
Few times a week	54	18%
Rarely	21	7%
Total	300	100%

The findings indicate that 45% of respondents consume news several times daily, while 30% access news at least once a day. This suggests that Generation Z remains highly connected to current events through digital platforms.

Table 2: Preferred News Sources.

Source	Respondents	Percentage
Social Media	150	50%
News Websites	75	25%
Television	39	13%
Newspapers	21	7%
Radio/Podcasts	15	5%
Total	300	100%

The data demonstrate that social media is the most preferred source of news among Generation Z, accounting for 50% of responses. Traditional media sources show considerably lower usage.

News Consumption Behavior among Generation Z in the Digital Era

Findings, Discussion, Conclusion and References

Table 3: Preferred Digital Platforms for News Consumption.

Platform	Respondents	Percentage
Instagram	105	35%
YouTube	75	25%
X (Twitter)	45	15%
Facebook	36	12%
News Apps	24	8%
Others	15	5%
Total	300	100%

Interpretation

The findings indicate that Instagram is the most preferred platform for news consumption among Generation Z, accounting for 35% of respondents. YouTube ranks second with 25%, followed by X (formerly Twitter) with 15%. The popularity of visual and short-form content suggests that Generation Z prefers news delivered in engaging and easily digestible formats. Traditional text-heavy news formats are gradually being replaced by multimedia storytelling.

Table 4: Trust in News Sources.

News Source	High Trust	Moderate Trust	Low Trust
Newspapers	58%	29%	13%
Television News	45%	38%	17%
News Websites	41%	42%	17%
Social Media	18%	40%	42%

Interpretation

Although social media is the most frequently used source of news, respondents demonstrate relatively low levels of trust in information obtained from social media platforms. Newspapers continue to enjoy the highest credibility among respondents despite their declining usage. This finding highlights a paradox in contemporary news consumption: audiences frequently use platforms they do not fully trust because of convenience and accessibility.

Table 5: Reasons for Consuming News Online.

Reason	Percentage
Instant Updates	42%
Convenience	28%
Free Access	15%
Multimedia Content	10%
Peer Influence	5%

Interpretation

The majority of respondents consume news online because of instant updates and real-time access to information. Convenience and accessibility are also significant factors influencing news consumption behavior. Digital platforms provide immediate access to breaking news without geographical or temporal limitations.

Table 6: Challenges Faced During Digital News Consumption.

Challenge	Percentage
Fake News	40%
Information Overload	25%
Biased Reporting	18%
Clickbait Headlines	10%
Privacy Concerns	7%

Interpretation

Fake news emerges as the most significant challenge experienced by Generation Z. Information overload ranks second, indicating that young audiences struggle to process the vast amount of information available online. These findings emphasize the growing importance of media literacy and fact-checking skills.

Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of the collected data, the following key findings were identified:

1. Generation Z consumes news frequently, with most respondents accessing news several times daily.
2. Social media has become the dominant source of news consumption among young audiences.
3. Instagram and YouTube are the most preferred platforms due to their visual and interactive features.
4. Traditional media such as newspapers and television are less frequently used but continue to enjoy higher levels of credibility.
5. Convenience and instant access are major factors influencing digital news consumption.
6. Trust in social media news remains relatively low despite high usage rates.
7. Exposure to misinformation and fake news is a major concern among Generation Z.
8. Multimedia content significantly increases engagement with news stories.
9. Mobile devices are the primary means through which respondents access news.
10. Algorithm-driven content recommendations strongly influence news exposure and consumption patterns.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant transformation in news consumption behavior among Generation Z. Unlike previous generations that relied heavily on newspapers,

radio, and television, Generation Z primarily accesses news through digital platforms and social media networks.

One of the most important findings is the dominance of social media as a news source. This trend aligns with global research indicating that younger audiences increasingly encounter news while browsing social networking platforms rather than actively seeking information through traditional news outlets. The convenience of receiving news updates within existing social media environments encourages frequent engagement.

The preference for Instagram and YouTube reflects a broader shift toward visual communication. Generation Z has grown up in an environment characterized by multimedia content, making visual storytelling more appealing than traditional text-based reporting. News organizations have consequently adapted their content strategies by producing short videos, infographics, reels, and interactive content.

Despite the popularity of social media, respondents expressed concerns regarding credibility. Newspapers and established news organizations continue to be perceived as more trustworthy than social media platforms. This finding suggests that while digital platforms dominate news distribution, journalistic credibility remains closely associated with traditional news institutions.

The prevalence of fake news and misinformation represents a significant challenge. Social media platforms enable rapid dissemination of information, but they also facilitate the spread of inaccurate or misleading content. Respondents reported difficulty distinguishing credible information from misinformation, emphasizing the need for stronger media literacy initiatives. Another important observation is the role of algorithms in shaping news exposure. Personalized content recommendations influence which news stories users encounter, potentially creating information bubbles and limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. This phenomenon raises concerns regarding democratic discourse and informed citizenship.

The study further highlights the growing importance of mobile journalism and mobile-first content strategies. Since most respondents access news through smartphones, media organizations must optimize content for mobile consumption and develop innovative storytelling approaches tailored to younger audiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that Generation Z values speed, accessibility, and convenience while remaining concerned about credibility and misinformation. These insights have important implications for journalists, educators, policymakers, and media organizations.

CONCLUSION

The digital era has fundamentally transformed news consumption patterns among Generation Z. Social media platforms have become the primary gateways to news, offering immediate access, convenience, and multimedia engagement. However, the increasing dependence on digital platforms has also introduced challenges related to misinformation, declining trust, and information overload.

The study reveals that Generation Z consumes news frequently and primarily through smartphones and social media platforms. Instagram and YouTube are particularly influential in shaping news exposure and engagement. Despite their popularity, social media platforms are not regarded as highly trustworthy sources of information compared to newspapers and established news organizations.

The findings underscore the importance of media literacy education in helping young audiences critically evaluate digital news content. Journalists and media organizations must prioritize accuracy, transparency, and audience engagement to maintain credibility in the evolving media environment.

As digital technologies continue to evolve, understanding the news consumption behavior of Generation Z will remain essential for ensuring the sustainability of journalism and the effective dissemination of reliable information. Future research may explore the impact of artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalization, and emerging digital platforms on audience behavior and news engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Media organizations should enhance fact-checking mechanisms to combat misinformation.
2. Educational institutions should incorporate media literacy programs into academic curricula.
3. Journalists should adopt multimedia storytelling techniques to engage younger audiences.
4. News organizations should strengthen transparency and credibility practices.
5. Social media companies should improve content moderation and misinformation detection systems.
6. Researchers should continue examining emerging trends in digital news consumption.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study relied on a sample of 300 respondents and may not fully represent all Generation Z populations.
2. The use of convenience sampling limits generalizability.
3. Self-reported responses may contain biases.
4. The rapidly changing digital media environment may influence future news consumption patterns.

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