Media Consumption Trends:
Comparing Millennials and Generation Z

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ABSTRACT: This study compared and analyzed the preferences and practices of two generations of news and information seekers. The two generations are the millennials born between 1980 to 1999 (now 20-39 years old) and generation Z, born at the turn of the century 2000-date (19 years and below). With the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and fake news overshadowing professional media, the purpose is to identify consumption trends across these two generations as well as learning whether these generation of future leaders and decision makers are equipping themselves with reliable information from professional media sources in order to build a sound knowledge base. The respondents' media preference and use was therefore studied. Survey method was employed, to gather the necessary data retrieved from 300 questionnaires distributed. The results show the older generation, millennials, exhibit more confidence in their sources (Radio and Television being most popular) at 42% and only 9% getting some information off social media, versus generation Z with highest percentage using internet as news source at 54%, and 23.5% using social media. The study revealed an obvious trend among the generation Z for increasing use of new media and social media as news sources, even as they revealed that they cannot guarantee their sources' reliability.

KEYWORDS: new media, generation Z and millennials, media gratification

1. Introduction

In this age of the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and outright made up (fake) news (Parikh et al. 2019) and what other studies on its negative impact reveal (Singerman, Silver-Vine 2016; Lazer et al. 2018), should we care about what the public and most especially young upcoming leaders growing with the internet, now 39 years and below (born 1980 to date), are constantly exposed to. Studies into the communication habits, and consumption of contemporary and future leaders of any nation is essential. From the perspective of media scholars, it provides useful information for further studies, and to the advertiser, where to place his commercials. So also understanding the various variables that come into play in determining what content is available, how content is accessed, on what kind of medium or device, and for what purpose. The answer will help us to understand the past and present in order to adequately plan for positive future communication outcomes. It also contributes in enabling us to understand the complexities of the communication industry.

For the relevant age group, this study intends to pose questions that will help us unravel relevant categories of variables along the communication chain, from the media contents of interest to them, where they come from, to the preferred devices that serve them, including why these devices are preferred over others. An authority on media studies (Jenkins 2006) asserted the trend by corporate profiteers to target the youth with hand-held devices, then base future improvements or upgrades on the youth's 'likes' more than their needs. While other scholars (Neufeld & Mate 2006) from the developmental psychology standpoint explain the devices' inherent additive nature. More recently the scholar (Jenkins 2019), sharing popular ideas from two authors of related books, "by any media necessary" and "No is not enough" assessed the reasoning behind professional media distrust among youths, in addition to his agreement with finding alternative sources acceptable to the youth to enable them connect back to the mainstream and positively participate in the general scheme of things within their communities.

Records indicate that Nigeria had 92.3 million internet users in 2018 (Clement 2019). This figure is projected to grow to 187.8 million internet users in 2023. In Nigeria for example, it is common knowledge that laptop utilization by far exceeds desktop, as far as ownership and use, with the main reason being frequent power outages. But the more convenient device today are the tablets and smartphones. PEW Research conducted even in the U S found that smartphone owners by age, penetration is highest among Millennials aged 18-24, 98% of whom own smartphones. Millennials

aged 25-34 are right on their heels, with a 97% ownership rate, followed by Gen Xers aged 35-44 at 96%, making smartphones nearly ubiquitous among these generational segments (PEW 2019).

Nigerians regardless of age prefer mobile devices, from the onset of the digital revolution. Even in Nigerian offices, desktop computer use is mostly in situations where professional performance and security mandates that such devices remain fixed within the confines of the offices, such as in banks, hospitals and media houses, where processing of official data must be a teamwork effort and at times immediate. One of the most obvious reasons for laptop preference over desktop computers is unreliable power supply, for which laptop, in addition to its being compact, mobile, and its wireless capability, also has storage battery that provides hours of use without direct connection to electrical outlet. Smartphones, tablets and other handheld device are however more popularly used in Nigeria, and far exceed the laptop in terms of use to access information online.

As to contents, available sources for information in addition to the internet are radio, television, and the internet (Wada 2019). Internet use actually surpasses all other forms of media, to the extent that television stations and other entertainment sources in addition to operating blogs provide podcasts, video-on-demand and live streaming of news and information by title and date, etc. To sum it up, therefore we may say the internet, and to some degree satellite services for audio-visual news and programing, combine to provide unique digital experiences for Nigerian consumers. It is also important to note that, in Nigeria, data purchased for use on mobile devices from mobile phone companies far exceed data subscription for home and office use (Clement 2019).

2. Statement of the Problem

A number of recent studies have indicated the rate at which traditional or mainstream media have been losing out to new media. In her words "As the internet expands there has been a rise in non-traditional sources being used side by side with traditional sources produced by professionals. There have always been non-traditional sources around but they are now becoming more legitimized as sources for news" (Alfille 2017). PEW study released this year (PEW 2019) revealed "roughly nine-in-ten adults (93%) in the U S get at least some news online (either via mobile or desktop), and the online space has become a host for the digital homes of both legacy news outlets and new, "born on the web" news outlets." While PEW's (Anderson 2019) study states "75 percent of online news consumers say they get news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites while 52 percent say they share links to news with others via those means." The most obvious reason is, much like your average social scientist, traditional media has a culture of checking their facts before writing, and also of properly identifying their sources by name and professional affiliation (for cross-checking if one desires to do so). Not only that they proudly own their stories (often with logos), and they would sometimes charge other media outlets a fee for using news stories they gathered and wrote. The traditional journalists' work was valued as cardinal to the survival of democracy and guaranteed by the constitution (Press Freedom) in the U S and most other democracies globally, and much was expected from them in return. In a 2018 study of American adult population found "A majority (57%) say they expect the news they see on social media to be largely inaccurate" (Shearer & Matsa 2018),

Digital technology that gave birth to new media however has failed to moderate an invasion of bloggers and novice writers armed only with a cheap technology, most out just to express themselves and their 'opinions' without any supporting facts to back it up, or regard to the law and consequences of what they write. More disturbing are those who create non-existent news (fake news). The vulnerable generation are the youths, who may grow up ingesting any information out there, not being able to navigate the terrain for credible information. A recent PEW survey (Stocking, 2019) of 6,127 U.S. adults conducted between Feb. 19 and March 4, 2019 reveals; "more Americans view made-up news as a very big problem for the country than identify terrorism, illegal immigration, racism and sexism. Additionally, nearly seven-in-ten U.S. adults (68%) say made-up news and information greatly impacts Americans' confidence in government institutions, and roughly half (54%) say it is having a major impact on our confidence in each other. Reactions revealed by the study shows "roughly six-in-ten (63%) have stopped getting news from a particular outlet, about half (52%) have

changed the way they use social media and roughly four-in-ten (43%) have lessened their overall news intake."

This study, a comparative study, aims to find out the news sourcing habit of two generations; those 19 and under (Generation Z), and those between 20-39 (Millennials). More importantly it seeks to find out whether it even matters to those generations, to at the very least seek truthful information that educates them about the political, economic and social occurrences, talk less of getting involved in influencing important matters that affect their personal and community lives. As recognized in other studies above for its potential harm as one of the issues under study, "fake news" was not a term many people used four years ago, but it is now seen as one of the greatest threats to democracy, free debate and the Western order" (Carson 2019).

3. Scope of the Study

There are basically four generational groups today that together make up a greater proportion of working adult populations of various nations. A generational unit in any nation consist of a group with an average age range between one and twenty years – i.e. babies to adults capable of starting yet another generation of their own; adulthood being defined generally as 18-21 years old. The present four generational groups are between teenagers and 78 at the higher end of the 'baby boom' (US) generation. For baby boomers born between 1940-1960 about half of them have already gone into retirement. Next comes the generation X, who are between the age ranges of 39 and 59 (1960-1980), as of this year, 2019. These are the ones among the work force who are presently the most mature generation with greater energy and presumably greater work experience atop of educational qualifications. Then the 19-39 generally referred to as the millennials (1980-2000), because their age range are those who matured as the world enters the present 21 Century.

In the United States the generational divide is captured differently as per the table below

	Born	Age (in 2019)
Baby Boom Generation	1946 – 1964	55– 73
Generation X	1965 – 1979	54 – 40
Millennial Generation	1980 – 1999	20 – 39
Generation Z	2000 – Present	19 and under

For this study, the relevant age groups are the millennials and the generation Z, with the age range between 0 - 39 years.

4. Literature Review

A study into internet habits of teens and young adults (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, Zickuhr 2010) finds the declining utilization of blogs as information sources, as technological changes to devices continues to occur over time. Since 2006, blogging has dropped among teens and young adults while simultaneously rising among older adults. Within just four years, i.e. between 2006 and 2010, there was a whopping drop of 14% in utilization of blogs by the millennials. They also found that 81% of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 are wireless internet users. By comparison, 63% of 30-49 year-old and 34% of those ages 50 and up access the internet wirelessly.

Another study was conducted of young college students on their use of video streaming websites, famous among them being Netflix and Amazon Video providing on-demand content for viewers to enjoy at their convenience. Results show viewers watching multiple episodes of television shows in a compressed time frame – a phenomenon termed as 'binge watching.' A study (Panda & Pandey 2017) of College students engaged in binge watching, shows they do that because of the various gratifications that it promises, including social interaction, escape from reality, easy accessibility to TV content, and advertising. And that if students are negatively gratified after binge

watching, then they spend more time doing it. Results from another study (Kilian et al. 2012) concluded, "although participation in and identification with social media is generally high, Millennials are less homogeneous than the literature suggests;" and 'traditional media still represent integral parts of the overall media portfolio.'

As to the overwhelming media device use and peer influence among the youths of millennial and more especially generation Z, some scholars (Neufeld & Mate 2006) in their best seller titled 'Hold Onto Your Kinds' identified two major shifts responsible. The rapidly changing technology, as well as the slow speed or inability of culture to adjust quick enough to accommodate such changes. According to the two scholars, "culture today no longer provides the context for natural attachment of children to their nurturing adults" for proper guidance and emotional maturity needs, and that "social, economic and cultural trends in the past five to six decades have displaced the parents from their natural intended position as the orienting influence on the child, while the peer group has moved into this orienting void with deplorable results." The scholars, citing child psychology development theories assert that, not only are devices providing links to peers, they "are commercially oriented" using natural psychosocial development strategies (Erikson 1950). The results show "because of children's inherent and natural attachment needs, the content (electronic) is highly addictive, often becoming a major preoccupation" (Neufeld & Mate 2006).

5. Professional media waning

PEW Research has consistently indicated a rising shift to new media by a greater majority of the younger generation when it comes to seeking news, information and other day to day enlightenment materials. Others (Doumbia 2013) have argued that the right knowledge and information is necessary in developing the proper perspective on life. "It helps us build opinions and have points of view on things in life. People debate over the subject of whether education is the only thing that gives knowledge. Some say education is the process of gaining information about the surrounding world while knowledge is something very different. They are right. But then again, information cannot be converted into knowledge without education." In a study on social media and political engagement (Rainie et al, 2012), PEW survey of a nationally representative group of respondents found that "38% of those who use social networking sites (SNS) or Twitter use those social media to 'like' or promote material related to politics or social issues that others have posted." While 33% of the social media users have used the tools to repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else.' While one cannot be certain as to why they are not engaging in providing content, the very fact that they are just 'liking' and 'reposting' other peoples content by itself is disturbing enough.

Traditional media's role as the bridge between the citizens and those entrusted with leadership by votes, or politicians and their parties has always meant that media keep vigil on matters of importance, legislations concerning them, including finding and presenting experts from the industry and academia to further enlighten the public (McNair 2007). McNair adds "The public sphere is said to be in crisis. Dumbing down, tabloidization, infotainment and spin are alleged to contaminate it, adversely affecting the quality of political journalism and of democracy itself." The generation under study however have expressed rebellion against most professional (traditional) media, especially its gatekeeping role, and 'neglect' of some issues plaguing them and other minorities. Also cited by other popular social movements are tendencies of professional media outlets to blindly support the interests of their corporate owners. However, scholars of communication (McNair 2007) credit professional media with providing a host of services such as trustworthy and reliable information, creation of awareness on issues, causing change in attitude, stimulating discourse based on realities of facts, etc.

6. Research Questions

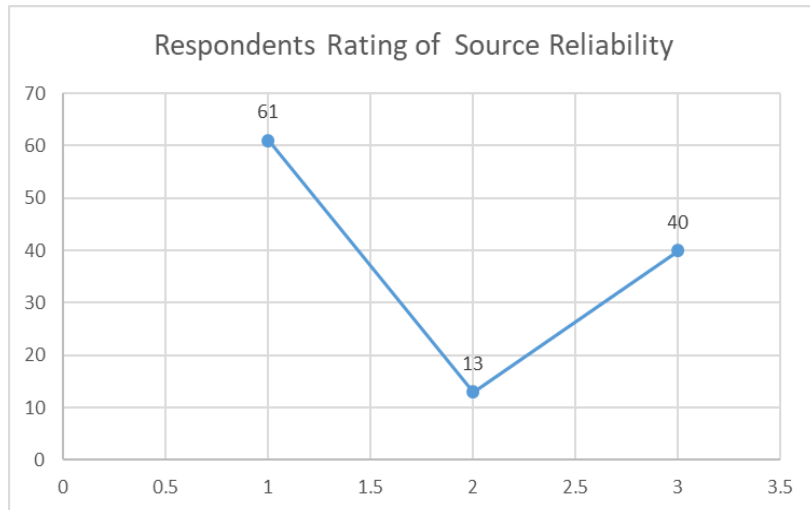The study seeks to find responses to the following questions among others,

1. Whether the respondents' primary news sources are those readily provided by their electronic devices, i.e. phone, laptop, internet provider.

2. Whether the respondents make efforts to seek alternative news and information from professional (traditional) media.
3. Whether they feel they have adequate knowledge to figure out what their political leaders are up to.

7. Data Presentation and Discussion

An equal number of questionnaires, 150 each, were distributed to respondents from both generations under study. For those 19 years and younger, (Generation Z), the results were quite interesting.
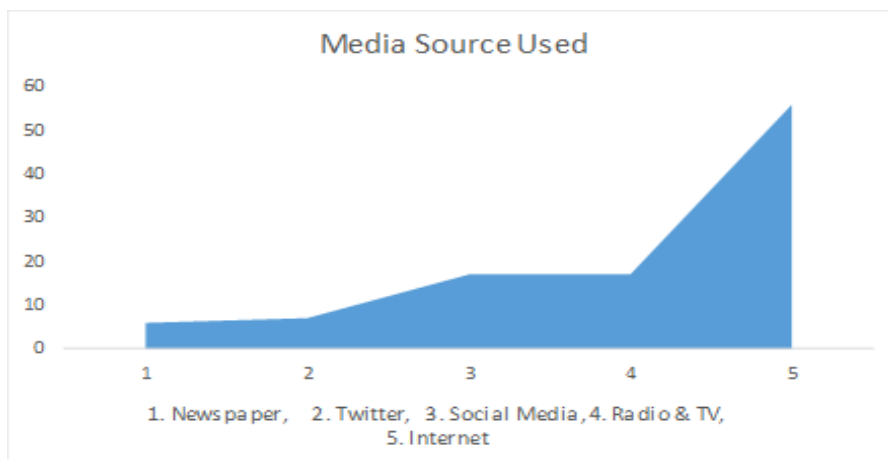
Chart 1. Respondents' rating of source reliability

With an overwhelming rating of their sources as reliable, 61 out of 114, one would assume their preferred sources of news and information should be professional media. Their sources however were not traditional media but the 'internet', meaning they trust their source of news as reliable even though it may not be. When asked to indicate that source, internet was the most chosen as most popular news source 56 out of 103, the two most listed sources being google (browser) news and opera mini (also a browser). It is interesting however that about 38% 40 out of 114 are not sure of the reliability of the regular news source.

Chart 2, precisely indicates their responses as to which media they use for getting news and information. As is readily seen Internet far surpasses all other sources followed by social media.

Chart 2. Choice of preferred media

One of the most important finding in this research is the indication that generation Z are starved of knowledge of their country's state of the economy and politics. When asked specifically "Do you think you know much about your country's present political and economic climate?" the highest number of respondents chose the option 'not as much as I want to,' followed by 'average knowledge' at 47 respondents and 'no knowledge' at 6 respondents. Only 22 respondents out of 123 think they know much about the country's economic and political climate.

Question nine asked "do you feel it's a good idea to know what the authorities (your government) that make laws affecting your life are up to at all times? An overwhelming majority at 110 said yes, 5 respondents said they do not know whether that's a good idea, while 4 said they do not care. Three respondents said no.

8. Comparative data between Generation Z and Millennials respondents

As far as comparative uses and trend between Generation Z, born at the turn of the century, and Millennials aged 20 to 39 years much discoveries were made. For example, in answer to question five which asked the respondents about their opinion regarding the reliability of their news sources, "is your news source reliable" out of 114 responses from Generation Z, only about half at 54% believe so, while that figure for Millennials was as high as 78% (Table 1). This is not surprising when one looks at what the predominant news source for the younger generation Z is, which is the internet at another 54%, compared to millennials choice of internet at 26%. The leading news source for the millennials is the broadcast media at 42%, a professionally processed source of news and information, (Table 2). The finding collaborates an earlier work (Killian 2012) in which he states that millennials are still using professional media significantly, contrary to common unverified assertions and beliefs.

Table 1. Is your news source reliable?

Choices Offered	Generation Z	Millennials
Yes	54%	78%
No	11%	7%
Not Sure	35%	15%
	100%	100%

What is equally interesting about the millennials is their utilization of (online) newspapers as sources of news and information. Question seven asks for specific news sources utilized, and as displayed on table 2, 23% of millennials use online newspapers as information source, and only 6% of generation Z do.

Table 2. What is your main news source?

Choices Offered	Generation Z	Millennials
Radio and Television	16.5%	42%
Social Media	16.5%	6%
Internet	54%	26%
Newspapers	6%	23%
Twitter	7%	3%
	100%	100%

As to the crave or urge for news and information in general probed as 'do you care for news and information about what is happening around you?" table 3 below exhibit the comparative responses from the two generations. It is obvious the older generation care more at 92% versus 79% for generation Z. Those who don't care under generation Z is as high as 21% compared to Millennials at 8%.

Table 3. Do you care for news and information happening around you?

Choices Offered	Generation Z	Millennials
Yes	79%	92%
No	21%	8%
	100%	100%

Coming to one of the main issues studied, i.e. the value of news and how much what authorities are up to matters, asked as question nine; "do you feel it's a good idea to know what the authorities (your government) that make laws affecting your life are up to at all times?" the comparative responses are displayed below.

Table 4. Interested in news on ongoing political and government affairs?

Choices Offered	Generation Z	Millennials
Yes	91%	96%
No	2%	4%
I don't Know	4%	0%
I Don't Care	3%	0%

The respondents' opinion about what they believe their level of knowledge about what is happening in the country was also sought. Question 15 asked "Do you think you know much about your country's present political and economic climate? The responses show much difference in only two categories; 'not as much as I want for generation Z was quite high, at 39% while it was 9% only for millennials. Millennials, however, seem to have more confidence as to their general knowledge of politics and the economy with a combined high to average knowledge peaking at 87%, compared to 56% for generation Z.

Table 5. Respondents own rating of their knowledge of national affairs

Choices Offered	Generation Z	Millennials
Yes a lot	18%	29%
Average Knowledge	38%	58%
Not as much as I want	39%	9%
No	5%	4%
	100	100

9. Recommendations and Conclusion

The study has, among other things, confirmed the fear that with the internet and its resultant proliferation of various unprofessionally processed news and information, professional media continue to see a decline in their customers as time goes on. Generation Z mostly born during the internet era, appear to embrace the internet and social media more than the millennials.

To win back the youth from the runaway train of non-credible, junk and fake news world, requires a good understanding of the factors and variables at play. One way is to find ways to wean them from the devices they have become addicted to. With insights from the world renowned development psychologist Erikson (1950), Neufeld and Mate (2006) suggest that technology be used to augment the relationship between parents and their children, and for parents to 'make relationship 'safe' before addressing behavior. "We do not compromise our *values* when we say the child is more

important than his conduct, we just affirm the obvious." "When things are roughest is when we hold onto our children the most" (Neufeld & Mate 2006, 197). The youth are battling with a cultural flaw, i.e. its inability to reign in rapid technological changes, and the society need to acknowledge that.

Citing the book "By Any Media Necessary" describing how dissenting young people felt about governance and its media coverage, i.e. the language of politics was broken, both by partisanship, prejudice and dogmatism, turning away first time voters" and also Naomi Klein's, "No is Not Enough" Jenkins makes the case that resistance to media and government is not enough to change what's wrong with global democracy. Jenkins agrees that concerned adults and the youths alike need to be willing to put efforts into identifying comfortable and acceptable value laden media or fora for the dissenting youths to remain within the mainstream (Jenkins 2019).

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