

Generational Gaps in Media Consumption in Canada





Author

Giovanni Casale

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POLICY PROBLEM

In Canada, younger and older generations are consuming news differently. Younger Canadians rely increasingly on social media, while older generations appear more trusting of traditional forms of media. This gap is creating a disconnect in how people receive their information. Social media, with its algorithms, short videos, and user-driven content, is a very different experience in comparison to legacy media. Baby Boomers are becoming more skeptical of news on social media, while Gen Z often sees traditional media as outdated and biased (Lebouc, 2023; Byers, 2022). This divide risks making it increasingly difficult to build a national consensus on important issues.

BACKGROUND

The generational gap in how people consume news comes down to preference. Gen Z and Millennials enjoy social media for its engaging content, and because it personalizes itself to their interests. A Pew Research study found that nearly 40% of adults under 30 get their news from influencers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Levine & Counts, 2024). Furthermore, social media algorithms reinforce this trend by pushing content that aligns with users' interests while shaping their news experience.

Conversely, Baby Boomers and Gen X remain generally loyal to traditional media. According to an Ipsos survey, three-quarters of older Boomers subscribe to newspapers, either in print or online. About 80% of Gen Xers consume news from established outlets online (2022). These generations trust broadcasters like CBC, CTV News, and Global News because of their perceived credibility and journalistic standards (Pollara Strategic Insights, 2024, p. 10).

KEY ISSUES

1. Disparities in Information Quality

Social media's algorithm-driven environment can make it easier for misinformation to spread. False information circulates freely online, often without any fact-checking, which can mislead younger audiences. Meanwhile, legacy media, with its focus on in-depth journalism, struggles to attract younger people. Pollara Strategic Insights found that while seniors prefer TV, radio, and newspapers, younger Canadians turn to social media, missing out on investigative journalism (2024, p. 3).

2. Generational Mistrust

Older Canadians are increasingly distrustful of news on social media. A 2022 Ipsos survey found that 91% of Baby Boomers think social media spreads misinformation, deepening concerns about younger Canadians' news habits (Byers, 2022). In contrast, younger Canadians are starting to trust social media more than traditional news outlets. A study by Kaiser & Partners found that 26% of Gen Z trust news shared online over legacy media, seeing traditional outlets as outdated or biased (Lebouc, 2023).

This growing gap between generations is a serious problem. Younger Canadians are relying more on social media, which increases their exposure to potentially misleading content. Misinformation can spread quickly online, leading to confusion and bad decisions. Conversely, older Canadians are, in many cases, missing out on the diverse viewpoints that social media offers because they still largely depend on legacy media (Ipsos, 2022, p. 1). This divide can deepen polarization, making it harder for Canadians to agree on critical issues like public health or politics. If this issue is not addressed, it could further weaken national unity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **National Media Literacy Campaign:** Launch educational programs in schools and communities that teach Canadians how to think critically about the news. These programs should focus on how to spot misinformation, understand biases, and evaluate sources on both social media and traditional platforms.
2. **Encourage Diversity and Bias Reduction in Legacy Media:** Provide incentives for media organizations to make their reporting more balanced and include a wider range of perspectives. By addressing biases, legacy media can win back the trust of younger audiences while still maintaining their high standards.
3. **Increase Public Participation in Legacy Media:** Social media platforms could be encouraged to create more ways for young people to engage with the news. This could include giving them more opportunities to interact with content or even give opportunities to contribute to legacy media. This would help bridge the gap between older and younger generations.

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5165 Sherbrooke Street West,
Suite 107
Montréal, QC H4A 1T6



info@y4yquebec.org



514-612-2895



www.y4yquebec.org