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Knowing the news: How Gen Z and Millennials get information on essential topics

New Media Insight Project study reveals how Gen Z and Millennials follow and interact with topics fundamental to their lives and society.

CHICAGO, November 17, 2022 — A new in-depth study of 16- to 40-year-olds provides practical guidance to news organizations on how Gen Z and Millennials engage with important news topics. As the U.S. continues to learn more about public behavior during the recent midterm elections and enters a third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study reveals that members of the Gen Z and Millennial generations are intensely interested in the most salient issues of the times. Topics such as crime and public safety, information about COVID-19, health and mental health, and information on traffic, transportation and weather are closely followed among Gen Z and Millennials across age, gender, race and ethnicity, type of community, and education level, according to a new study from the [Media Insight Project](#), a collaboration between the [American Press Institute](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

This study dives more deeply into data released in the [Fatigue, traditionalism, and engagement: News habits and attitudes of the Gen Z and Millennial generations](#) report, based on a survey of 5,975 Americans ages 16 to 40, and builds upon a 2015 study of Millennials. It is one of a series of reports intended to illuminate challenges and opportunities for news organizations in serving these diverse generations and gaining their trust and support.

“Members of the Gen Z and Millennials generations will soon become the industry’s dominant news subscribers and supporters,” said Michael D. Bolden, CEO and executive director of the American Press Institute. “The detailed analysis into how they follow news offers opportunities for journalism organizations to reassess how they interact with them and to experiment in areas where new opportunities exist.”

The report focuses on six topics crucial to Gen Z and Millennials’ personal and civic lives: national politics and government; social issues; crime and public safety; traffic, transportation, and weather; COVID-19 information; and health or mental health. The report identifies which groups of Gen Z and Millennials follow each topic, what social media platforms they use, what types of social media accounts they use, and what traditional news sources they turn to for information on that topic.

“The study highlights who follows these key topics most often and what pathways they take to find the information,” said David Sterrett, senior research scientist with The AP-NORC Center. “Understanding how this age group interacts with news is critical for news organizations today given threats to democracy, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the evolving social media landscape, and the continued spread of misinformation.”

Key findings include:

- **The most popular topics are followed by a diverse mix of Gen Z and Millennials.** Topics such as crime and public safety, information about COVID-19, health and mental health, and information on traffic, transportation and weather are closely followed among Gen Z and Millennials across age, gender, race and ethnicity, type of community, and education level. The audience for these topics resembles the overall demographic makeup of those ages 16 to 40, suggesting that broad audiences are possible for many of the beats newsrooms traditionally prioritize.
- **However, there are generational differences in the makeup of the audience for both national politics and social issues.** The audience for national politics skews toward older Millennials, while the audience for news on social issues skews toward Gen Z. However, neither audience is dominated by one age group. Older Millennials account for 49% of those who follow national politics most often, with younger Millennials at 29% and Gen Z at 23%. In contrast, Gen Z account for 47% of those who most often follow social issues, with younger Millennials at 27% and older Millennials at 26%.
- **The frequency with which Millennials and Gen Z follow these topics does differ in some cases by factors such as educational attainment.** The difference is clearest when looking at those who most often follow crime and public safety. Eighty percent of those who say they follow crime and safety most often have no college degree, compared to the 67% of the overall population ages 16 to 40.
- **While Facebook remains the most-used social media platform for all six of the most-followed topics – three in the “news you can use” category and three in the “hard news” category – its predominance varies from topic to topic.** As an example, about half (54%) of the people who report that crime and public safety is their most-followed topic rely on Facebook as their primary social media platform to learn about it, followed by 17% who use YouTube. In contrast, when it comes to people who most often follow news about national politics, Facebook’s dominance shrinks. For national politics, Facebook (25%) is rivaled by YouTube (23%) and Twitter (20%). TikTok, often associated with these generations, comes most into play for the groups closely following social issues (where 19% of close followers use it) and health or mental health (12%), though Facebook and other platforms still rank higher.
- **Local news media — including local TV stations and local newspapers, their websites, apps, or news alerts — are key sources that Gen Z and Millennials use to get information about crime, COVID-19, and traffic and weather.** Nearly half of those who most often follow crime and public safety get this news from local TV stations, and about 1 in 10 get it from local newspapers, their websites, apps, or news alerts. Local TV is also the most-used traditional news source for those



who most often follow news about traffic and weather (36%) and information about COVID-19 (22%).

- **Gen Z and Millennials who prefer some topics, like national politics, are more likely to pay for news than those who prefer other topics.** Forty percent of Gen Z and Millennials who say national politics is the topic they follow most closely also pay for news, almost twice as many as those who most frequently follow social issues (22%) and crime and public safety (24%). Likewise, those who most often follow information on COVID-19 are more likely to pay for news than those who most often follow information on health or mental health and those who often follow traffic, transportation, and weather (40% vs. 27% and 24%, respectively).



About the report

This survey was conducted by the Media Insight Project, an initiative of the American Press Institute (API) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The survey was funded by API. Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and AP collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using both probability and non-probability sample sources. Interviews for this survey were conducted May 18 through June 8, 2022, with people ages 16 to 40 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The probability sample source is the AmeriSpeak® Panel, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The non-probability sample was provided by Cint based on quotas related to age, race and ethnicity, gender, and education.

The overall margin of error for the combined sample is +/- 1.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Complete questions and results are available at www.mediainsight.org. Details about the Media Insight Project can be found at: www.mediainsight.org.

A full description of the study methodology for the surveys can be found at the end of the report.

The proper description of the survey's authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [American Press Institute](http://www.pressinstitute.org) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](http://www.norc.uchicago.edu).

About the Media Insight Project

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration between the American Press Institute and The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with the objective of conducting high-quality, innovative research meant to inform the news industry and the public about various important issues facing journalism and the news business. The Media Insight Project brings together the expertise of both organizations and their respective partners, and involves collaborations among key staff at the American Press Institute, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press.

<http://www.mediainsight.org/>

About the American Press Institute

The American Press Institute advances an innovative and sustainable news industry by helping publishers understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organizational change. We believe that for democracies to thrive, people need accurate news and information about their communities, the problems of civil society and the debates over how to solve them. That requires an economically sustainable free press that reflects the diversity of American society and understands the needs of its communities. API is a national 501(c)3 nonprofit educational organization affiliated with the News Media Alliance.

<http://www.pressinstitute.org>



About the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day. www.ap.org
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more. Learn more at www.apnorc.org