

Study on information consumption of the millennial generation in universities of Loja, Ecuador

Estudio sobre consumo de información de la generación millennial en universidades de Loja, Ecuador

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Abstract

Information consumption habits of university millennials in Loja, Ecuador, were analyzed. It is based on previous studies on media consumption, population characteristics and media competencies. It was carried out through discussion groups with students from the Social Communication and Business Administration careers of the Universidad Nacional de Loja and the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja. The study establishes how the millennials of the sample prefer the use of digital tools such as social networks and web pages to consume information of interest, in comparison to the use and access to traditional media due to its immediacy, accessibility and comfort.

Keywords

Information, Consumption, News, Millennials, Loja, Digital culture.

Resumen

Se analizan los hábitos de consumo de información de *millennials* universitarios de Loja, Ecuador, tomando como base estudios previos sobre consumo mediático, características de la población y competencias mediáticas. A través de grupos de discusión con estudiantes de las carreras de Comunicación Social y Administración de Empresas de la Universidad Nacional de Loja y de la Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, se establece cómo los *millennial* de la muestra prefieren el uso de herramientas digitales como redes sociales y páginas web para consumir información de su interés, en detrimento del uso y acceso a medios de comunicación tradicionales, debido a su inmediatez, accesibilidad y comodidad.

Palabras clave

Información, Consumo, Noticias, *Millennials*, Loja, Cultura digital.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological disruption has provided new channels for the distribution of information and has modified consumption habits, so it is necessary to think about the new processes of socialization and communication. Jesús Martín-Barbero (2012) proposes to think about communication processes not from the disciplines but from the problems and operations of social exchange. This is due to the identity conflicts articulated by culture and analyzing the communication process through the culture of society.

Currently, the number of people who have access to the Internet and social networks is growing daily. According to data from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU,

2018), more than half of the world's population is currently connected to the Internet. This is why it is necessary to talk about *prosumers*, people who play the role of consumer and producer simultaneously. The term was defined by Toffler and Toffler (2006, p. 221) as: "those who create goods, services or experiences for their use or enjoyment rather than to sell or exchange them. When we produce and consume our own output as individuals or groups, we are *prosuming*".

Also, the importance of studying the habits of information consumption of the *millennial* generation. According to Howe and Strauss (2010), this is the generation of young people who have changed their vision of technology and experienced greater empathy, comfort and use of digital environments. Specifically, it

refers to those born between 1982 and 1991. However, this age range varies. Authors such as Jackson and Hogg (2010) specify that those born from the year 2000 should be considered *millennials*.

Millennials are the generation that has grown up with the Internet, the phenomena of the Information Society, the Network Society, media convergence and *hypermediation*; which have changed the way of consumption and information production of society.

The most notable change has occurred in the cognitive differences exhibited in the social behavior of those born in the digital age, in their ways of learning and communicating. Therefore, "they think and process information significantly differently from their predecessors" (Velásquez, 2017, p. 113). It is the first generation that uses the Internet in each and every one of its daily activities.

The research of Zenith Openmedia (2014) in Ecuador determined that traditional media such as television, radio and written press experience a detriment in their use and consumption by the millennial generation more frequently, compared to tools such as the Internet or mobile devices.

More than 6,000 cases analyzed by Zenith Openmedia show that Facebook and Twitter are the most used social networks by this segment of the population and that more than 50% could access the Internet from their own mobile devices.

The data provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC) (2017) show that 53% of the population has an activated cell phone and that 31.9% use social networks from their *smartphone*. This incidence occurs to a greater extent in the population aged 18 to 24 years, precisely the *millennial* generation,

which represents 29% of the total population nationwide (INEC, 2017).

The study "Millennials en Latinoamérica. Una perspectiva desde Ecuador" by Gutiérrez-Rubíe (2016), refers to the technological preference of this segment of the population. This has completely changed the way Ecuadorian youth access news. At least 85.6% receive information through digital media.

These investigations on the habits of use and consumption of different forms of communication by young Ecuadorians and the research developed by Velásquez and Paladines (2011), Velásquez, Yaguache and Carrión (2016) and Velásquez (2017); allowed to theoretically support this study aimed at determining the extent to which *millennials* are informed through social networks.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION AND THE MEDIA

Castells (2005) refers to a technological revolution that has influenced the change and diversification of the media. The prediction of McLuhan (1996) in saying that "the medium is the message" is materialized little by little in these times when the media must adapt their characteristics to reach a more critical and constantly evolving audience.

Martín Barbero (2010) speaks of a virtual city as opposed to the concept of the literate city of Ángel Rama as a way of explaining the relationship between two different cities, the one that has knowledge and the one that does not. Barbero (2010, p. 81) also mentions that "the transformations of the ways in which knowledge circulates constitute one of the deepest

transformations that a society can undergo" and it reflects on the world we live in that "does not require bodies gathered, but interconnected" in a communication space that uses "connections, flows and networks" (Martín Barbero, 2010, p. 50) instead of meetings and crowds.

Finally, he explains that today's young people seem to have a greater neuronal plasticity that gives them an enormous facility for the languages of technology and a "empathy that is evidenced by the enormous capacity of absorption of information via television or computerized video games, together with the ease of entering and managing the complexity of the networks facilitated by the conversation via chat" (Martín Barbero, 2010, p. 51).

This expresses how *millennials*, the generation that uses technology as a common element to communicate, find and produce information, have the ability to interact and live with increasingly complex and evolved tools that provide various uses within their conception of simpler ways.

Therefore, responses to the media "both in particular and in general, vary according to individuals and across social groups according to gender, age, class, ethnicity and nationality, and also throughout the time" (Silverstone, 2004, p. 26).

2.2 MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND HYPERMEDIATIONS

The investigations of McLuhan (1996) in relation to the ecology of the media lead to explain its evolution as a response to social transformations and as agents of transformation. "Every new means of communication introduces new media environments that transform the cultural ecology of societies." (Isas (2010, p. 45).

The concept of "Media Convergence" by Henry Jenkins (2008) explains the confluence of technology and multimedia in the devices we use. The relationship between use and medium was previously made. This convergence allows the use of different media (radio, written press, television and internet) in mobile devices with applications that perform their functions in single devices. This has eliminated the differences between them and has allowed the emergence of new genres, functionalities and uses.

Hypermediations are the characteristics of the new media according to Scolari (2008). Mediations (Martín Barbero, 1987) are the articulation between communication practices and social movements, *hypermediations* become "the social transformations that the developments of new forms of communication are generating" (Scolari, 2008, p. 116).

Hypermediations are characterized by the study of digital media, hypertextual structures, interaction, multimedia, convergence, confluence of languages and participation; elements given by the new technologies to today's media.

It is interpreted that the technological advance in communication and information has generated the development of new virtual environments in which new generations interact, consume and produce information. They combine different formats and media in unique devices, generating immediate and shared information throughout the community.

This reinforces the hypothesis that the pattern of information consumption of the generation of digital natives has been transformed, as well as the role of social networks to become a source of information.

2.3 THE MEANS BY WHICH MILLENNIALS CONSUME INFORMATION

Aguilar (2016) explains that networks “serve as a channel to reflect their identity, tastes, interests and positions. Thus, consulting, sharing and commenting on them is one of their favorite activities.” (Aguilar, 2016, p. 2). It states that the social networks Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube are the *millennial's* favorite platforms to find out what is happening today.

Research such as those of Chase (2017) or Aguilar (2017) determine that these young people use social networks to be informed by their main characteristics: immediacy, multimedia, specificity of information and adapted formats that fit their needs and satisfy them more efficiently.

The data consulted show an important trend in terms of the use of devices and information consumption over the Internet, especially through social networks, to the detriment of traditional media such as radio, newspapers or television. Several studies confirm that Latin America is the territory that has the greatest use of social networks. (Fernández, 2013). In Ecuador, 65% of millennials prefer Facebook as the main source for news, followed by online newspapers. (Gutiérrez-Rubí, 2016, p. 78).

The configuration of *prosumers* permanently connected to the network through mobile devices with increasingly complex and better developed applications justifies the need to study how this generation consumes information through these tools.

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study was carried out to deepen the analysis of consumption behaviors and ob-

tain information on this segment of the population.

It was carried out through focus group discussions with students from the Business Administration and Social Communication careers of the Universidad Nacional de Loja and the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja. They were developed in a calm and suitable environment for group dynamics in two discussion groups with ten participants each: 5 women and 5 men.

As Mella (2000, p. 4) explains, “Focus groups respond to the need for qualitative information that provides depth and context. Discussions within the focus group can give insights as to whether the plans are on track. They can also reduce the distance between expectations and current events around the project.”

The study was conducted for one hour, moderated by the authors. A digital camera was used to record the session.

- **General objective of the discussion groups:** Identify millennial information consumption habits and the use of digital tools and media such as social networks and web pages.
- **Limitations:** the presence of the moderators could inhibit some opinions of the participants.
- **Thematic Axes**
 - Access to ICT.
 - The new paradigm: how *millennials* are informed.
 - The credibility of the new media.
 - The analysis of the problem.

3.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The focus group study was applied to a sample of university *millennials* from the city of Loja. Male (50%) and female (50%) students of the Business Administration and Social Communication careers of the Universidad Nacional de Loja and the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, whose age range was between 18 to 27 years old. All were previously informed of the nature and objectives of the study and signed an informed consent form regarding their participation and acceptance of the recording of the two focus group sessions.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results are shown from four thematic axes that were applied to both focus groups of students of Social Communication and Business Administration.

These axes are:

1. Access to ICT.
2. The new paradigm: how *millennials* are informed.
3. The credibility of the new media.
4. The analysis of the problem.

Open questions were asked about topics related to these axes (*Do you have a smartphone? What content do you consume through the devices you connect to? Do you prefer to inform yourself through traditional media or new media? Do you believe everything that appears as information on social networks or new media? Do you check the information that appears on digital platforms?*). Both focus group sessions lasted 60 minutes each.

4.1 THE ACCESS TO ICT

At the beginning of the two focus group sessions, a survey was conducted regarding the latest news to which the participants had access.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
News	Media
The dismissal of Carlos Ochoa	Facebook
The death of Hittar Cuesta, guitarist from Loja	Social networks
FEF and television rights	TC televisión
Search for an older adult in Loja	Lo del Momento Loja (digital media)
Emilia Benavides case	Lo del Momento Loja (digital media)
Car accident	Facebook

Table 1. Latest news you have accessed. Focus group 1

FOCUS GROUP 2	
News	Media
Stephen Hawking's death	Facebook Instagram Twitter Ecuavisa (Television)

Table 2. Latest news you have accessed. Focus group 2

Most participants explained that they accessed the latest news through digital media portals or social networks. It is noted that the news they last accessed were related to the current situation or to events close to them.

The participants specified that they access news of their interest thanks to subscriptions to applications or news platforms about automobile sports or local football in the form of mailing lists with information related to the topic or notifications from the social networks of information portals of their interest. This shows

that the preferences in access to information are entirely digital platforms with different themes according to their own interests or tastes.

4.2 THE NEW PARADIGM: HOW MILLENNIALS ARE INFORMED

The data shown reflect the mechanics of the information process followed by the participants of the sample. The answers are related to the uses they give to social networks and their habits of search and consumption of information.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What do they use social networks for?	I look for news whenever I go to Facebook, I have predetermined notifications that tell me what is new. On Instagram I watch videos or photos and WhatsApp for messaging.
	I use Facebook to watch cooking tutorial videos and for information. I use Instagram to see publications related to jewelry or shoes shopping pages.
	I use Facebook to sell my products.
	I use Facebook for news and information.
	I use Facebook to find out what my friends do or see what politicians do. I use Instagram to upload photographs.
	I use Facebook to inform me about what happens in the class, also for homework.
	We use Facebook for academics because teachers and students use it to share information related to classes.

Table 3. Reasons for using social networks. Focus group 1

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What do they use social networks for?	Entertainment, see memes.
	See images of celebrities on Instagram
	I use Facebook to see memes, chat or review tasks. Instagram is to see stories and what celebrities publish.
	I look for information about youtubers
	I find out what the celebrities publish
I review information about technology or sports.	

Table 4. Reasons for using social networks. Focus group 2.

The tables above show the answers to the questions about the use of social networks. All participants of both focus groups had accounts or public profiles on social networks (Facebook and Instagram in all cases and Twitter or Snapchat in some), but the use of these social networks is wide. However, important preferences were determined on entertainment; what friends, acquaintances or celebrities are doing, but not to be informed.

It is important to note that the information that is sought tends to relate to personal interests such as cooking tutorials, memes, pages for buying and selling items or services. This shows a tendency to customize the use given to these platforms depending on the individual and what interests him at the moment, but not as a source of news.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
Where would you look for information if you didn't have access to social networks or digital media?	I would appeal to television
	I would go to the radio because it can go much further than television, radio is the first means of communication because everyone has access to it.
	I would look on television, because the newspaper bores me and television catches my attention more.
	We are more familiar with television.
	I get distracted on the radio. On the other hand, I find out the information when viewing the images on TV.

Table 5. Search for information in other media. Focus group 1

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
Where would you look for information if you didn't have access to social networks or digital media?	The radio, because the news in the morning always gives the information on what is happening.
	Television, because they also report on all events.
	Television is the main medium where I can see what happens.

Table 6. Search for information in other media. Focus group 2.

The results of this question determine which is the second source of preference when finding news about a specific case. Participants were given an example of an event that would arouse immediate interest in them (the hypothetical closure of the university career they are stud-

ying) and the responses set a tendency to look on television. This was due to the audiovisual component to which they are accustomed. It is more attractive because it is more related to the products presented in social networks or other digital media.

In addition to television, radio is in second place because of the level of trust it has acquired within the group of participants. However, in no case were newspapers mentioned.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What advantages do you find in digital media that are not present in traditional media?	Information spreads faster. The moment something happens, someone takes a picture and instantly you see it on digital media.
	We can find out what happens faster.
	You don't have to wait for it to appear on the TV news or the newspaper the next day.

Table 7. Advantages of digital media. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What advantages do you find in digital media that are not present in traditional media?	Easier to use.
	They have updated information.
	They upload information instantly
	The news appears instantly

Table 8. Advantages of digital media. Focus group 2.

As advantages of digital media over traditional media, there is a tendency to seek the immediacy of information and ease of use. There is a clear understanding of the operation mode of digital media for permanent updating their information and instant comments on the produ-

ced events, while the mechanics of traditional media follow other processes that contradict this current conception of immediacy.

The unanimous opinion of the participants in both focus groups determines an idea that is set around a total preference for the use of digital media to be informed by their inherent characteristics in the dissemination of information and the naturalization of the use of these platforms thanks to the access to mobile devices or the Internet.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What disadvantages do you find in digital media?	The problem with immediacy is that because so much information is presented, sometimes you get lost because you are in class or you are busy and you do not know what is happening.
	The information is uploaded immediately, in traditional media you know that you find the information at the time they broadcast the news.

Table 9. Disadvantages of digital media. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What disadvantages do you find in digital media?	Sometimes they upload false information or news, such as the deaths of celebrities.
	It depends on the page, there are some that always alter the information.
	The media focus the news in different ways. Some put the information as it is and others distort it.
	In traditional media there is more information than in digital media, there are more testimonials.

Table 10. Disadvantages of digital media. Focus group 2.

The previous answers show the appreciation of the limitations that can be found in the process of accessing information through digital media. The immediacy of the information could be a problem since it is not possible to be connected all the time, you cannot keep an eye on all the news of the day.

There are also references to the notion that the news could be more complete in traditional media. Although there is no mention of processes such as editorial review or contrasting sources, there is an idea that traditional media give better processing to information.

Similarly, references are made to a lack of credibility in the information presented in these media. Although these platforms are more consumed by the characteristics already mentioned, there is a clear tendency to distrust the veracity of what has been presented.

4.3 CREDIBILITY TOWARDS THE NEW COMMUNICATION MEDIA

In this block, the attendees of the focus groups were asked about their position regarding the veracity or falsity of the information presented in the media they accessed in order to determine if their credibility was the same or not in relation to information from traditional media.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
Do traditional media or digital media give you more credibility? Why?	It depends, traditional media are governed by certain processes and generate more credibility.
	There are times that Teleamazonas presents a story and in another channel they present the same story with different data and another approach. You would have to find several sources and draw your own conclusions.
	The ways in which traditional media report are very different from each other despite being traditional. No media tells the whole truth. That depends on us. No media is totally reliable.
	If you put it on a scale, what creates more credibility is the traditional media.

Table 11. Credibility towards digital media. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
Do traditional media or digital media give you more credibility? Why?	It depends on the page. For example, there are social media accounts of digital media that do have true information.
	You generally believe what you find on Facebook but it may not be true.

Table 12. Credibility towards digital media. Focus group 2.

These answers complement the previous question and allow the analysis around the credibility variable towards digital and traditional media. The participants were clear that they should follow a process of verifying the information that has been presented as a news event, without believing everything that is presented in one or other media but accepting that there is a greater susceptibility to distrust the information presented.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What would it take for digital media to have more credibility?	Since everyone has the possibility to upload information, it is very difficult for the information to be one hundred percent true.
	There are people who do not know how to transmit the information to other people.
	When doing citizen journalism, the news is always decontextualized because I publish it from my perspective.
	There are many people who publish many things that are wrong and nobody controls it.
	Social networks have no limits in terms of the information published, especially in photos and identities of people.
	It would be a good initiative for digital media to train people as to what and how to publish.
	In digital media, information is mixed with opinion.

Table 13. Proposals to improve credibility in digital media. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What would it take for digital media to have more credibility?	Sometimes the media cannot cover everything and people also give their opinion, that is a part of reality because people can make a person look bad or so.
	Sometimes the photos that are uploaded in digital media can affect the people involved in the events.

Table 14. Proposals to improve credibility in digital media. Focus group 2.

These responses clearly show how the participants determine that citizen participation in the generation of information in the new media could be a limitation to make this information reliable or relevant. The possibility of anyone issuing information from their personal accounts and generating discussion about news events is problematic. One of the interesting proposals is the management of digital media in the education of citizens prepared to generate information. Given the possibilities granted by the new media, limiting this possibility only to journalists or people prepared on the subject is anachronistic.

4.4 ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Finally, these data seek to obtain information from the participants' own reflection on the phenomenon under investigation. We sought to know their position on the new paradigm of information and content generation through new media and platforms to fully understand their perspective and support this study.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What would you propose to improve the way millennials are informed?	That the digital media segment the public according to my interests.
	That they present me information according to what is in vogue or the most important things.
	Notify me of information that interests me.

Table 15. Proposals to improve the information method. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What would you propose to improve the way millennials are informed?	That the information formats innovate, for example, giving all the information in sixty seconds or something.
	That videos or audios about the information are presented and not just text.

Table 16. Proposals to improve the information method. Focus group 2.

FOCUS GROUP 1	
Question	Answers
What do you think will happen in the future regarding this issue?	Digital media will be more accessible.
	It is becoming part of the culture to go digital.
	Digital platforms recognize what one consumes, so we don't see information that we don't want to see.
	It is easier to be aware of everything through digital media.

Table 17. The future of the information access paradigm. Focus group 1.

FOCUS GROUP 2	
Question	Answers
What do you think will happen in the future regarding this issue?	Digital media will continue to move forward and will eventually replace traditional media.
	There are people who are not yet interested in digital media.
	There may be ways for traditional media not to disappear, because there will always be people interested in getting informed in that way.

Table 18. The future of the information access paradigm. Focus group 1.

The answers to the last two questions are related to the present and the future of the consumption habits of the millennial participants of this study. On the one hand, we see the configuration of a consumer oriented to receive personalized content, which responds to the needs and interests of the individual instead of issuing information to the entire public. Increasingly, we see how this configuration is present through the notifications, recommendations and possibilities that social networks and digital media deliver to their users through algorithms that save user information. In this way, they can ensure the loyalty of a consumer who increasingly looks for personalized and own content.

On the other hand, the perception that the participants have about the trend that will mark the consumption of information is clear, the digital media will continue to gain ground to the traditional media by the characteristics already mentioned: immediacy, comfort, ease of use and accessibility. As one of the answers says, we live in a digital culture. Most of the things we do are influenced by technology or new media, which in turn mean new mechanics, different possibilities and more attractive features for the generation that concerns us.

5. DISCUSSION

Information and communication technologies are constantly changing the way people consume and produce information. Today's news is generated immediately and shared through the Internet by a society that is interconnected with each other through increasingly technologically advanced devices.

The results of this research show a correspondence with the characteristics of the population reviewed by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC, 2014) and the research

of Zenith Optimedia (2014) regarding Internet access and the availability of cell phones with Internet connection.

Likewise, the results correspond to those reported by studies such as those of Aguilar (2017), Aguilar (2016), Chase (2017), Velásquez and Paladines (2011) and Velásquez, Yaguache and Carrión (2016), regarding the configuration of a generation that seeks to consume information produced in digital media; more specifically through social networks. The characteristics of the Network Society of Castells (2005) and the conceptualization of a Global Village (McLuhan, 1996) as a society in which people are connected through their devices are applicable to these times. Young people have the possibility of being interconnected through the Internet and the mobile devices through which they interact and feed on diverse multimedia content as Jenkins (2008) explains through media convergence.

The results correspond to those of the research by Zomeño and Blay-Arráez (2017) and Rodríguez and Vega (2016) who conclude that millennials prefer the consumption of digital formats because of the mix of narratives, the use of different resources and characteristics of the networks. These issues are often far from the daily practice of journalism but must be adapted to meet the latent needs of this generation.

Traditional media have lost ground in this regard and a total reinvention would be necessary in order to try to recover the millennial audience and the next generations.

It is important to establish that these results are limited only to the participants of the sample of this study, therefore, it is limited to conclude based on the answers obtained by specific groups of university students with specific demographic characteristics. Even so, the results

allow us to know the position, opinion and reflections of this demographic group regarding the phenomenon of access to information today.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The elaboration of this investigation has allowed to conclude:

1. This work is supported by previous research on millennial consumption habits in Ecuador. The ideas that sustain that this generation supposes a change in the paradigm of access to information are reinforced.
2. The Millennials that participated in this study are completely familiar with the use of digital media to consume information. If necessary, the first option they use is social networks, where they find information about their interests.
3. The results show that the surveyed millennials prefer this type of media due to the immediacy with which they can find the information and the access facilities of social networks. The naturalization of the use and consumption of information through new media has been verified through the discussion groups.
4. There is a critical view on the information they consume. While there is no generalization regarding the credibility of the new media, participants explain that they tend to doubt whether or not information is true depending on the media in which they are presented.
5. The possibilities granted by social networks for the production and generation of content are seen as a disadvantage in the construction of information and the de-

velopment of a true criterion regarding its validity. Participants suggest training and public awareness events on the issue of management and dissemination of relevant information.

6. The notion of a user who searches for personalized content according to his own interests or needs is defined. A user who wants the information presented to meet the requirements that only he or she sets. Social networks are fulfilling that role through the systems of notifications, subscriptions and recommendations that are not yet applied to traditional journalism.

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