THE IMPORTANCE OF MILLENNIALS RECEIVING ACCURATE INFORMATION REGARDING SOCIAL ISSUES: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Goldman Sachs (in Hamilton 2015, p. 35) refers to Generation-Y as "digital natives", as they are the first generation to have grown up with technology. However, with the growth of social media, any individual is now able to voice their opinion online and it could be passed off as fact. This makes it more difficult to discern between fact and opinion, accurate and inaccurate information. Millennials are the next generation in line to lead the world. The researcher, who is a Millennial herself, observed the dire consequences to friends, family and acquaintances of acting on untrue social media posts during the #BlackLivesMatter campaign of 2020. Since Generation-Y will not only be political leaders, but leaders of their communities, leaders in their work environments (Sutcliffe & Virassamy, 2021) and role models to the younger generation, the researcher's purpose was to investigate the importance of Millennials being exposed to accurate information regarding social issues in the media. As her unit of study, she selected a cluster sample of 13 South African Millennials, between the ages of 23 and 31 who regularly use social media, and who each participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview. After thematic analysis of the results, the researcher concluded that more than half of the participants had taken part in social activism. While only 38% of them had faced negative consequences themselves due to the lack of factual information, 100% of them knew someone else who had. Thus, it was concluded that a lack of factual information may have negative consequences on Millennials' decision-making on social issues. According to Akpan (2016) and (McGonacle 2017), these consequences could be as serious as reputations being ruined or even violence. This study is significant since it highlights how the integrity of the information Millennials receive via social media regarding social issues can affect their approach to addressing those issues. The importance of media literacy as a means of guarding against fake news, is strongly emphasised. The study is relevant since it highlights the critical importance of leveraging social media in line with the truth. This will influence how Millennials go about bringing change as the future leaders of this world. The study therefore calls on social media site developers to leverage communication technology to improve the safety and security of vulnerable users.

Key words: Millennials, social media, social activism, media literacy, leveraging communication technology

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where information is just a click of a button away. With each minute passing, we are getting closer to the era of a Generation-Y-ruled world. However, being a part of this generation herself, the researcher has seen and experienced first-hand the different ways in which the information which we receive can affect us, both positively and negatively.

We now not only receive news and information from major media conglomerates, but from social media as well (McNair, 2019). The emergence of social media means that we receive news and information as it happens (Evans, 2016). There is no waiting, which can sometimes mean that there is no waiting for the correct information. Unfortunately, social media have also made it exponentially easy to give one's opinion on anything and easily pass that opinion off as fact. This results in incorrect information being posted on public platforms which have thousands or even millions of users. Fake news is rife and has become a serious issue with the spread of social media sites today. We are all humans who sometimes cannot control how we react to certain information and events, especially if they are emotionally charged.

With the potential rise of inaccurate information, reacting to everything we read, hear or see may have negative consequences. The same information may not be interpreted in the same way by everyone (O'Keefe, 2016). Thus, the researcher has investigated the pertinent issue of how Millennials feel about the importance of accurate information, why they feel that way and their response to fake news. To do this, a semi-structured interview was utilized. The findings of each interview were later analysed via thematic analysis of five recurring themes.

Even though not many of the participants faced any negative consequences due to the lack of factual information, each of them knew someone who had. Thus, it would appear that the accuracy of information that is spread via the internet, television and other major news outlets which Millennials make use of, needs to improve.

Assuming this to be the case, the following research question was addressed by the researcher: Why is it important for Millennials to have access to accurate information regarding social issues?

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SUB-PROBLEMS

The problem may be stated thus: The importance of Millennials receiving accurate information regarding social issues.

This problem has been broken down into the following sub-problems:

- What motivates Millennials, specifically the group known as the Y-generation?
- Can Millennials tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information?
- To what extent have a selected group of Millennials taken part in social activism or movements?
- To what extent have a selected group of Millennials experienced negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information?
- To what degree have a sample of Millennials witnessed another person facing negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information?

The above sub-problems were formulated based on the recurring themes which emerged from the literature review.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

- To establish what motivates Millennials, specifically the group known as the Y-generation
- To discover to what extent Millennials can tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information
- To explore to what extent a selected group of Millennials have taken part in social activism or movements
- To examine to what extent a selected group of Millennials have experienced negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information
- To find out to what degree a sample of Millennials have witnessed another person facing negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information
- To address the above questions with a view to investigating the importance of Millennials receiving accurate information on social issues

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review has been organised under questions which cast light on the main problem and sub-problems. The usefulness of each research study in addressing the problem has been explained.

What motivates Millennials?

Hamilton (2015) cites a study by Nicole Borges which shows that Millennials are more motivated by a desire to improve themselves, build positive relationships and work with others towards the goal of improving society. The study also shows that Millennials feel the need to belong to social groups and share with others, they work well in teams and have tighter peer bonds. They have a great need to achieve and succeed. Millennials are not as cynical or money-focused as their predecessors are. They see the world differently because the world that they grew up in is different - in all respects.

The author also discusses how Millennials grew up with technology and mentions that it was Goldman Sachs who first referred to them as "digital natives" (Hamilton 2015, p. 35). Growing up with technology made it easy for them to discover their identity and find people with common interests, as well as reach out to these people. They do not feel the need to work with people who have higher social status. Because they are "hyper-connected", it has become increasingly difficult to ignore issues which technology has brought to the surface. Millennials are inheriting a world seen as dysfunctional, making them eager to come up with solutions and more inclined to demand action against the issues that contribute to this world's dysfunctionality. They are faced with these pressing issues daily due to technology. Thus, they are more eager to find purpose in everything that they do. It is also the reason why they try to stay true to their values, embrace diversity and demand fairness and respect for their environment.

This study is useful addressing the sub-problem of what motivates Millennials, because it takes a look at some of the characteristics and driving forces of the population being researched. According to Borges (in Hamilton, 2015), Millennials are more inclined to stick to their values and principles. This means that they are more likely to stand up against people and situations that they don't agree with or that they view as wrong. They not only wish to improve themselves, but society as well. Hamilton (2015) points out that because Millennials are faced with social issues daily via social media, it is easy to share pressing matters via the same means. The causes promoted on these platforms makes their natural need to bring about change even more urgent to them. However, Borges does not state how they go about bringing this change, which is what the researcher has focused on in this study, in order to discover why it is important for them to have access to accurate information. There is a focus on how Millennials positively try and bring about change, for example, buying from companies that produce more sustainable products. However, because of their urgent need to change the world and society they live in, their approaches to bringing about change are not always that peaceful. Borges' study (in Hamilton, 2015) is a good source for taking a deeper look at what Millennials stand for and what they expect from the world they live in, as they are the next generation to lead it.

In "The Millennials" by Erickson (2012), we explore some characteristics which are specific to Generation-Y, and how these characteristics influence them, particularly in the workplace.
Due to shared experiences, Millennials have three common perspectives. The first perspective is the sense of immediacy. They focus on making the most out of the moment and enjoying every moment to the full. There is no longer emphasis on long-term

strategy in the workplace. Long-term planning is not as equipped to deal with the fast paced and ever-changing world we live in today. There needs to be a sense of immediacy when dealing with issues and coming up with new ideas.

The second perspective is the way Millennials use technology to approach work. Millennials use technology in everything they do, including work. Technology has made sharing information much easier. Thus, Generation-Y relies heavily of collaborative work and effort. They network with peers to make sure that the information which they are receiving or using is accurate. They also believe that information should be easily accessible.

The last perspective that Generation-Y has in common is tolerance and understanding. They are willing to listen to multiple versions of the truth since there are so many now with the growth of technology. Everyone is able to share their version of the truth, many more people than in previous generations. They know that everyone comes from different walks of life, so we will not all view everything the same way. There are other influences that play a role in how you view certain experiences and issues. This is why not everyone's 'truth' will be the same (Erickson, 2012). This perspective aligns well with Social Judgement Theory which suggests that everybody has a different social perspective. Sherif, Sherif and Nebergall (1965) point out that the degree to which individuals are involved is critical in the problem of attitude change.

Although Erickson (2012) does mention certain characteristics of Millennials, these are characteristics which are a result of growing up with technology. We are not shown who Millennials are at their core, without the influence of technology. However, as we can gather from the study, technology plays a big role in their lives, and it is not going anywhere any time soon. Thus, it is important to know how they have been shaped by it. Erickson (2012) also mentions how Millennials share a perspective of immediacy. This is useful to the current research as it confirms that Millennials do not always think things through thoroughly before they act or say something, which is important to do when one is presented with so many opinions and factual information in the media and in social media, as they might not always be able to discern between the two. We once again are faced with the sense that Millennials are more inclined to work together and rely on collaborative work. This suggests that they will work together to bring about the change they want to see. This can have both pros and cons since Millennials might not always think their approach to certain issues through thoroughly. Thus, if they all fail to think it through, the outcome might be negative.

How do Millennials discern between accurate and inaccurate information?

Sample (2019) explores how to determine whether news or information which you are receiving is fake or inaccurate. Trust needs to be verified. However, earlier methods of placing trust in reporters and news organizations are no longer reliable. This is due to the rise of social media as another source of information and news. Fake news, deceptive data and propaganda have been a part of our lives for a very long time. People use it to play on the audiences'/readers' emotions.

We take a closer look at what propaganda is in Sample's (2019) study. Propaganda is spread when a group aims to influence another group or person's opinion by omitting facts or emphasizing only one narrative of the facts. By doing this, they do not give the audience the full story and therefore, they have to rely on cognitive biases to complete the story. In order for propaganda to be successful, the source needs to really understand their targets values. They need to be able to play on their values, as well as their morals, needs or fears. Propagandists used spoken word, as well as imagery to accomplish their goal. Music was also an effective transmitter of propaganda, as well as movies. When a moviegoer watches a movie, they become vulnerable to the suggestions presented to them in the film. We see that fake news spreads much easier than the truth. This is because the truth you still need to research to make sure what the facts are. The rise of social media has turned these sites into a trustworthy source for the target market. Since social media allow for information to be spread quickly and reach the target audience quickly as well, it has made it easy for propagandists to spread false news. They can time the release of this false information so that there is not a lot of time to research the truth. Thus, the audience will rely on their cognitive bias to discern whether the information is true or not (Sample, 2019).

Sample (2019) gives valuable advice on how to counter propaganda. One way to counter propaganda is to do research on the information which is presented to one, but that is time consuming, and we live in a time intensive world. This leads to the target not being able to do enough research to counter what is being said. Therefore, people need to rely on mental shortcuts and the reputation of the publisher. There are two ways in which one can debunk the reliance on reputation. The first is by using social media applications. These platforms are known to spread fake news because the content on these platforms is seen as accurate or true news stories. Therefore, one now needs to research the information found on social media as well - making it less reliable. The second way is by discrediting reporters. Recent reports show that people can have journalists discredited, as well as have a news event staged if they want to. This once again makes it difficult to rely on them.

Continuing on the question of how Millennials might discern between accurate and inaccurate information, Waldrop (2017) explains why and how fake news reaches us, as well as suggesting a few measures to stop it. Fake news and the spread of fake news has grown over the past few years. People are making money from sharing fake news and clickbait on social media sites. Today's technology has made the spread of misinformation that much easier, making it more difficult to spread or share any type of truth. Waldrop (2017) believes that even if today's artificial intelligence algorithms were good enough to filter out all the lies, falsehoods are still in the eye of the beholder. It is not easy for platforms to decide what is and is not acceptable because everyone is entitled to free speech. Platforms are now experimenting with different ways to filter out false news and with making sure that only reputable information appears on everyone's timelines. A team has developed a system called Truthy which looks at information that has went viral and tries to distinguish whether it was spread by humans or by bots, in an effort to fight the problem of spreading false information.

Waldrop (2017) informs that people like to consume information which agrees with or reinforces beliefs that they already have and tend to forget about the information which does not fit the narrative that they prefer. This is known as confirmation bias.

It is quite difficult for platforms to get rid of all the fake information because spreading, sharing and receiving information is exactly what has made the platforms so popular. They are also reluctant to put the responsibility of determining what is true and what is not on themselves, as this could open the door to severe political backlash. However, if a lot of misinformation continues to be published on these platforms, people might not deem them as credible anymore. Therefore, there is a lot of pressure on them to do something about the problem. They have already put certain measures in place to help with it, such as minimizing rewards for profiles and pages that promote false information, as well as lowering the rank of newsfeeds that have low-quality information (Waldrop, 2017).

Another measure which these platforms could take is educating users on how to evaluate the information they are taking in. The Trust Project, with funding from Google, have developed a series of things that publishers could do to enhance trust. The goal of the series is to merge the factors included in it into a trust ranking. However, a study shows that this could backfire because when presented with information that is 'disputed', users tend to think that any other information without that label is true, even information that clearly is not (Waldrop, 2017).

Directly confronting confirmation bias is another measure that could be taken. This can be done by filling users' newsfeeds with stories which does not necessarily agree with their views and biases that they may have. This will lead to users having to become more savvy media users, and having to really become media literate, in order for them to confront the contradictory news which is presented to them. Users need to learn be able to slow down and check things before sharing them. Teaching people to become more media literate is becoming a huge priority to these platforms. If people are taught how to think more carefully, they will be able to tell the difference between fake news and accurate information (Waldrop, 2017).

Waldrops' (2017) research is useful because it suggests ways that people, including Millennials, can discern between accurate and inaccurate information. It indicates that just because one receives information that supports a certain argument does not necessarily mean that it is true, especially if it supports views that were already held. Waldrop (2017) implies that Millennials really need to do thorough research on a topic before they share it with anyone else, which essentially could lessen the need to discern whether information they receive is false or not. The author does not only explore ways in which individuals can combat the spread of fake news and discern between accurate and inaccurate information, but explains how technological companies are doing this as well. Waldrop (2017) shows us how we can work together with these companies and platforms to lessen the spread of fake news and inaccurate information.

Vasu (2018) helps to answer the question of how Millennials can make themselves less susceptible to receiving inaccurate or manipulative information, by explaining how different countries have different mechanisms to help them combat fake news and stop the spread of it. We are informed that strategic communications efforts have progressed in order to counter fake news that constitutes disinformation, such as Europe's EastStrat Com Task Force. The task force runs a website that releases a weekly disinformation review. Think tanks work in unison with Europe's strategic communication efforts. They work together to publicly challenge supporters of Russian-sponsored false information, expose disinformation vehicles and build a social resilience (Vasu, 2018).

Technological companies have introduced some user-based and algorithmic-based initiatives for self-regulation, following pressures from several governments, since social media majorly contribute to the spread of fake news. Facebook has enabled users to 'flag' false reports or fake news. Similarly, WeChat has enabled users to report individuals and groups spreading fake news (Vasu, 2018).

Facebook has since decided to delete thousands of fake accounts, and by doing this, they created an algorithm that targets fake accounts, and "bots". Another method employed by social media companies in order to reduce fake news, is targeting and reviewing political advertisement purchases. The aim is to reduce the spread of fake news via advertisements, by no longer providing financing for their creation (Vasu, 2018).

Governments are also making an effort to decrease the spread of fake news by implementing new laws, as existing laws are inadequate. Vasu (2018) elucidates that there are many different laws in place that hold social media companies accountable for the spread of fake and harmful news. Similar laws hold social media users accountable as well.

However, countries attempting to criminalize the distribution of fake news and information will face many challenges. There is a minefield of legal issues, political constraints, and, while legislation can hold technological companies and users accountable, there can be nothing done about 'bots', meaning that the spread of fake news and information will never be fully dealt with or erased. These types of laws still have a long way to go before we can consider them efficient in the long run, according to Vasu (2018).

Perhaps the most important measure taken to curb the spread of fake news is teaching social media uses to become critical thinkers, as well as teach them to become more media literate, and to discern between fake and real news (McGonacle, 2017). People need to become more inclined to fact-check news before sharing it. Children are being taught critical thinking in schools, and there are even apps to help people recognize their associated biases and preferences, Vasu (2018) continues.

In addressing the question, how can Millennials discern between genuine and fake information, Vasu (2018) has provided valuable ways in which certain countries have made themselves less susceptible to receiving inaccurate information, as well as how we can

make ourselves less susceptible. It also offers us ways in which we can work with social media companies to lessen the spread of false and inaccurate information. The best long-term solution which is offered is that we should teach ourselves to become more media literate and fact-check our source before sharing certain news or information.

Seidenberg (2017) enlightens us that the majority of fake news is found on social media, which is where the majority of the population get their news from. This gives social media the power to change one's perception of someone or something, because of the fake news that one might read about them or it.
One of the effects of spreading fake news is to harm people's knowledge on important matters. It also confuses people about what they should believe and who they should deem trustworthy. Lastly, it has the ability to widen a nation's partisan divide, as we have recently seen with the #BlackLivesMatter campaign (2020). If people mainly read and believe news which supports their views, this in turn widens the divide even more (Seidenberg, 2017).

A reason why it is better not to sue someone for false accusations or false information spread about you is because by doing so, you might attract even more attention, and this may be harmful to your reputation, according to Seidenberg (2017).

Other routes taken to prevent the spread of fake news include no longer paying sites that promote fake news, which is what Google has started doing. They have also started revising their software so that sites which are less reliable appear further down the list when one searches for information on Google. Facebook has started banning fake news sites from promoting ads on the site. It now also labels stories that are found to be false as 'disputed', Users will be warned that the story might be inaccurate before they share it (Seidenberg, 2017).

Lastly, Seidenberg (2017) agrees with Sample (2019) and Vasu (2018) that the best way to make sure the spread of fake news decreases in by making sure people are more media literate and they need to become more active in their support of the truth.

How important is accurate information to Millennials in terms of social change?

McNair (2019) takes a look at how black expression has changed significantly with the growth of social media. Twitter in particular is used as a platform to spread information about social movements to black people everywhere. Social media can actually be used as a political tool. By using certain hashtags, users can attract attention to movements or incidents to gain the support of people around the world (for example the recent #BlackLivesMatter movement). In many incidents where someone was killed or died in police custody in the United States of America, there was little to no evidence of what had happened. Now, with social media, people can post about it, especially people who were close to the victims. They can share the real story about what happened, as opposed to the sometimes-misleading mainstream news.

McNair (2019) goes on to explain that social media can be used to communicate with black people (or people in general) from different countries and backgrounds, who all have a common goal. It has the power to unite many different people through a movement by communicating about certain incidents that have happened, organising marches or movements, increasing visibility, etc. If this kind of information was not disseminated via social media, the movements would not have had as many followers and supporters as they do.

Being able to share certain things online has increased black political participation, since mainstream media does not always publish the truth about these types of movements or incidents. They might omit truth, tell lies, and sometimes, not publish anything about it at all. Now, with Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms, black people are able to share their own truths. This encourages them to participate in politics and raise awareness on social issues, as they see now that they can make a difference (McNair, 2019).

McNair (2019) effectively brings to light how social media can be used efficiently to connect people with similar interests and goals. We are able to see how social media, and media in general, can bring about change. This supports the current research because it illustrates the importance of having factual information about situations and movements like these, before taking action. McNair (2019) explains that black people (and other people) are able to share their truths on social media which is different to what is published in mainstream media. However, this might not always be as useful as one would think. Not everyone experiences things the same way, so how one incident is viewed or experienced, might not be how another person views or experiences the same incident. This could cause some of the 'truths' published on social media to be strongly biased. Once again, the responsibility rests upon the receivers of the information to go and do thorough research on the incident or movement before sharing the news. McNair (2019) has usefully shared both negative and positive results of having access to fast information and having social media as a tool that allows us to spread our own truths.

In which ways do social media play a role in Millennials' participation/lack of participation in social activism?

Brennan (2018) considers how mass protests, social mobilization and civic engagement are influenced by social media. The author explores how social media have influenced individuals to do certain things such as show support for a certain cause and how interactions take place between different individuals who discuss politics on social media.

Brennan's (2018) study is useful in explaining how the information exchanged on social media can cause people to take action, or take a stand against things that they may disagree with, as well as things or movements that they may support. Thus, it is important for users to have correct facts before doing so. Brennan (2018) provides a view on what information on social media can influence

individuals to take a stand. This is valuable information for the research being conducted in terms of the social causes which the participants are naturally attracted to.

Petray (2015) enlightens us as to how we can use social media as a tool to help with activism. Social media, if used correctly, can encourage people to take part in certain movements or encourage them to take part in political, or social activism. In her research, the author found that activism on social media tend to be more successful if the cause has a clear target, clear and easy actions that people can take, as well as being able to move beyond single-issue campaigns, on to longer-term social movements.

The information shared by Petray (2015) is useful as it tells us exactly how social media can influence people to bring about social change. We are also provided with some insight into different techniques people can use to bring about this change.

How has the fact that information can now so easily be spread and obtained, had an effect on the type of information Millennials are receiving?

To address the above sub-problem, Evans (2016) looks at how new media - mainly social media, influence the way people receive their news, as well as how receiving their news from these platforms could influence their opinion on certain issues. Consumers of news prefer to use new media when receiving their news, as these platforms are less likely to have gatekeepers as with traditional media. They also view new media as likely to alter their information due to certain individuals having a say in what is published. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the three main platforms discussed. Individuals appreciate the fact that the content on YouTube is not pre-recorded or altered by anyone. They feel as if they are experiencing an event in real-time. The research showed that the videos on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, reflected the methods used to frame the events in the video and also reflected the narratives of the uploader. The findings also show that uploaders of the videos would not necessarily be people who solely focus on this topic or are solely invested in this topic. The videos of either pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli nature, did not only reach an audience that agreed with either side.

Evans' (2016) study is useful to the current research because it speaks about how social media users can receive news in real time or moments after an event has happened. We see that users enjoy this and do not want the information which they receive changed or have to deal with gatekeepers of information. They want to receive all the facts so that they may make their own conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL JUDGEMENT THEORY

The Social Judgement Theory was created by Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif, and Carl Hovland (O'Keefe, 2016), and has been used as the conceptual framework of this study. Social Judgement Theory helps one understand how to persuade a certain target, whether it is one person, or a group of people. The Social Judgement Theory can help one understand why certain people react differently to the same issue or topic. This is especially important to the current research since how Millennials receive or perceive certain information makes a difference in the way they will react to that information. This understanding can help determine if the information received will persuade them to do good or bad. Not everyone is going to react the same to certain issues, and with the Social Judgement theory, this crucial fact is explained. It is important for Millennials to know how they can be persuaded so that if they react negatively towards an issue, they will be able to take a step back and look at why they feel that way. If they react to the information in a positive way, they will be able to persuade others (who might not have an opinion on the issue, or those for whom the issue falls under their latitude of rejection) to change their viewpoint on the issue.

SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS

The study focussed on the Generation-Y category of Millennials, since they are most active on social media. Thus, 13 participants who were born between the year 1980 and the year 2000 were used to gather information for this research project, using a purposive approach, using her judgement to select participants who complied with the selection criteria (du Plooy, 2017; Cawthra, et al, 2020). The subjects of this study live in many different places and come from all walks of life, but were selected on the basis of their frequent use of social media and their South African nationality. Thus, the standards of living for each individual participating differed. Some core values that can be used to define the participants are; They value family, as well as personal connection (Fromm 2021). They honour loyalty. They do not like anything or anyone that is phony. They value genuineness. Change is something that they always strive for, as their generation is optimistic. They protect the environment and support social justice. The majority of the participants receive their news from social media, in agreement with Fromm (2021).

CREDIBILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND REFLEXIVITY OF THE DATA COLLECTION

The credibility and validity of the study is bolstered by a mixture of quantitative and qualitative primary data, as well as by the quality of the secondary data which was collected in the literature review. Triangulation of the data was accomplished by the use of closed-ended and open ended questions in the semi-structured interviews, as well as the agreement of the body of literature with the findings which emerged from the in-depth interviews. The researcher was completely transparent with the interviewees about the purpose of the study, assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses and getting them to sign an ethical clearance form. She took a reflexive stance throughout the study, and did all in her power not to bias the results from her own stance as a Millennial. Furthermore, the research report is under the careful review of the Research Coordinating Committee from Helderberg College of Higher Education.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In order to collect the primary data for this study, an environment which the interviewee as well as the researcher were both comfortable with, was chosen. As not everyone was able to, or willing to do an interview in person during the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher opted to conduct the interviews over a video call as opposed to meeting up in person. The researcher started by introducing herself and what the reason for the semi-structured interview was. It was then explained to the participant that their identity would remain confidential and that they would be able to withdraw from the interview at any time. Permission was asked to record the interview. The final step was to ask them to sign a consent form. Once the interviewee felt comfortable and had agreed to recording the interview and signed the consent form, the researcher started with a few basic and background questions. Thereafter, factual questions which relate more closely to the study were asked.

The responses of all 13 participants were transcribed, carefully recorded and tabulated according to the following categories:

Age, main source of information; changes noticed in the dissemination of information; encountering of false information; ability to tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information; participation in social movements/activism; role social media played in participation/lack of participation; personally faced negative consequences owing to participation; witnessing of others facing negative consequences due to participation; reasons for these negative consequences.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The findings of the 13 semi-structured interviews held with 13 participants aged between 21 and 31, are as follows:

- The main source of information for 100% of the respondents was social media or digital news platforms
- In terms of changes noticed in the dissemination of information, the respondents were in complete agreement that much more information is available as a result of 21st century digital transformation; it is more accessible and instantly available; opinion and own knowledge can be passed off as factual information; information is spread much faster and is less accurate today; there is "less credibility because of pay-per-click advertising"; more platforms spread information which reaches more people; "hurtful information may be published" and "experiences can be shared in real time"
- 76.9% (10) of the respondents had encountered false information often as opposed to not often
- Only 53% (7) were able to tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information
- 76,9% (10) had taken part in social activism themselves
- Some of ways in which social media played a role in participation/lack of participation in social activism were: social media was the main source of information; "played a role in growing the movement and making it bigger than what it was"; "played a role in voicing my opinion"; "social media helps the cause spread like wildfire"; makes it "possible to be flooded with alerts and notifications, even from people that you don't know"; creates "social pressure to take a stand"; social media "made me aware of the movements in the first place"; "made sure that the movement was seen and spoken about constantly"
- 38% had personally faced negative consequences due to the lack of factual information
- 100% of the participants reported having witnessed another person/people face negative consequences due to having taken part in social activism or movements
- The main reasons given for these negative consequences were the following: "lack of general knowledge, information is filtered"; news caters to your prejudices; "not fact checking or getting information from reliable sources"; hidden agendas (political alignments in news); "spread of fake information can create a panic"; no media literacy; "because of the fast-paced information… not a lot of thought goes into what information is being spread"; "inaccurate information spread (WhatsApp chain messages)"; "pay-per-click or click baiting"; "people can be naïve; misinterpretation of what was said; not making educated statements"; "people are crucified if others do not like or agree with their opinions"

    The bar graph below represents the findings from the 13 interviews in graphic format, according to the four main themes which emerged:

Figure 1: Bar graph with key reasons as to why it is important for Millennials to have access to accurate information
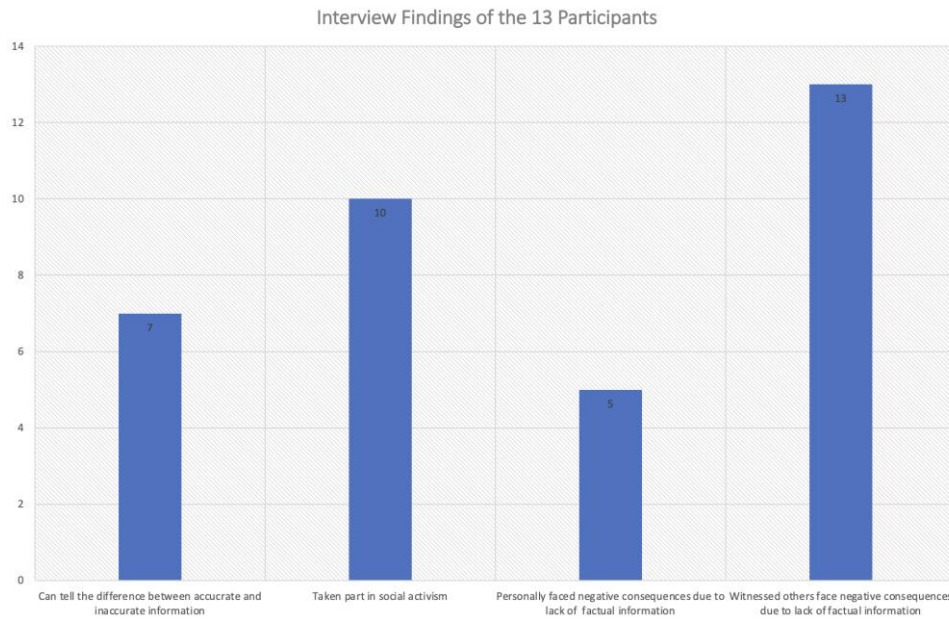
DISCUSSION

The four main themes that have guided the study are: Whether the participants can tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information; whether the participants have taken part in social activism or movements; whether they have negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information, and whether they have witnessed another person face negative consequences owing to a lack of factual information. These themes help us answer the research question: Why is it important for Millennials to have access to accurate information regarding social issues?

The fact that all of the participants receive their information either from social media or digital news platforms (which 76.9% agree is often false), strongly suggests that Millennials receive false or inaccurate news regularly. This finding is in agreement with Evans' (2016) explanation that young people prefer receiving their news from social media, since this occurs in real time, with no gatekeepers to monitor its accuracy.

It is apparent that just more than 50% of the participants can tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information. Being able to tell the difference between the two determines how the participant will react to the information which they are hearing or seeing. In other words, if Millennials believe false information about a social cause, this could encourage them to become involved and face negative consequences. This would occur as a result of poor judgement (according to the Social Judgement Theory, O'Keefe, 2016). If the Millennial sees the false information for what it is and practises good judgement, they would not become involved in social activism with its resultant negative consequences. McGonacle (2017) warns against seeing news as fake when it is not. This calls for discernment on the part of Millennials.

We see that a relatively small percentage of this group has gotten into trouble for reacting to false or inaccurate information (38%). However, every single participant has witnessed someone else face negative consequences due to reacting to false or inaccurate information. This indicates that there is a significantly higher percentage of people who do face negative consequences than people who do not.

Within the sample population that was chosen to participate, very few people experienced negative consequences from the lack of accurate information (even with just over 50 percent of them being able to tell the difference between accurate and inaccurate information). However, it is significant that each of the participants had witnessed someone else face negative consequences owing to a lack of accurate information. This suggests that the number of Millennials who face negative consequences owing to having received inaccurate information could prove to be higher if a random probability sample were to be used.

Since this is a qualitative study, using a non-probability cluster sample based on the judgement of the researcher, the results are not generalizable to all Millennials. Although this study affords excellent context, additional quantitative research is advisable. Nonetheless, the objectives of this study have been achieved, namely to highlight the importance of Millennials receiving accurate information on social issues, as well as to alert media writers and users to the importance of posting accurate information on social media especially, and of the responsibility of educators to teach young people to be media literate. The findings of this study are in complete agreement with the literature in terms of how social media play a role in Millennials' decisions to participate in activism (Brennan, 2018); how the immediacy of information affects the accuracy of information Millennials are receiving (Evans, 2016),

and the critical importance of media literacy and learning to identify fake news correctly (McGonagle, 2017; Sample, 2019; Vasu, 2018; Waldrop, 2017).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the results of this study provide good context for the importance of accurate news for Millennials on social issues, since the non-probability sample used for this study was small, the results of this investigation are not generalizable. Future researchers could perform a quantitative study to address the topic, using a larger probability sample. Researchers could also investigate how social media platforms can better manage and track the accuracy of social media posts. Research could be done in the area of how best to educate learners and students in media literacy. Further research is needed in how Millennials react to certain social issues and what the effects thereof are, using a randomly selected sample. A quantitative study could be performed on how many people react negatively when standing up for social issues which they believe in, as opposed to issues which they do not believe in. Furthermore, it would be interesting to gain light on the ways in which Millennials go about bringing social change, as a result of exposure to social media posts.

CONCLUSION

It is important for more accurate information to be at Millennials' disposal, since so many of them are motivated to take part in movements or activism which they stand for and believe in, via social media (Brennan, 2018). Manipulation of facts is a mark of social media (Sample, 2019). Millennials find it easy to share social causes because of their hyper-connectivity (Hamilton, 2015). The real-time spreading of information (without gatekeepers), could influence their opinions negatively (Evans, 2016). If Millennials do not receive accurate information about causes, they might well spread the false information further, or choose a side. This could cause them to fight for or believe in something which might not align with their fundamental morals, values and beliefs. They might also bear negative consequences for themselves, such as losing friends, their reputation or their jobs or being subjected to violence (Akpan, 2016; McGonagle, 2017). Perhaps worse, their spreading of the false information they have received, could do damage to many other vulnerable, illiterate or naïve social media users. This is especially serious, since Millennials are increasingly taking over the workforce (Sutcliffe & Virassamy, 2021) and as our future leaders will have massive influence in all walks of life

A significant percentage (76.9%) of the sample group had taken part in social activism. Young people should therefore be taught that when having an opinion or standing up for a cause which one believes in, there will always be people or entities that oppose one's views (in accordance with the Social Judgement Theory). Just because one believes in a cause or stands strongly for one's personal views, does not always mean that they or the cause they espouse, is correct.

It would be profitable if social media platforms could continue finding innovative ways to control and monitor the posting of information to ensure that more accurate information is spread. Facebook and WeChat have already done great work in this respect (Vasu, 218). Media users should continue to put pressure on social media sites and work with them to ensure the accuracy of information, according to Waldrop (2017). Then fewer people would face negative consequences through being exposed to inaccurate information. Teaching social media literacy and critical thinking at school and university level is a must. It is hoped that the call to action will be heard by the developers of social media platforms to better monitor the accuracy of the content being posted on their sites, and that users will work with and put pressure on them to protect the public from fake news. Finally, this paper is significant in this age of unprecedented communication technology development, since is a call for the innovative leveraging of technology and social media platforms in particular, to promote truth and the spread of accurate information. In this way, young people can be protected from the awful social consequences which the author has witnessed first-hand.

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