

**GENERATION NEWS:  
CONSUMING, SHARING, AND PRODUCING NEWS  
ACROSS GENERATIONS IN FIVE JOHANNESBURG  
HOUSEHOLDS**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Master of  
Arts Degree in Journalism and Media Studies

**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

By Gus Silber

Student Number 16S8275

Supervisor: Professor Harry Dugmore

# GENERATION NEWS: CONSUMING, SHARING, AND PRODUCING NEWS ACROSS GENERATIONS IN FIVE JOHANNESBURG HOUSEHOLDS

## Abstract

This study sets out to explore the meaning, extent, and impact of the generational divide, between so-called Baby Boomers and their Millennial offspring, on the way news is accessed, consumed, shared, and produced in five purposively selected households in the Johannesburg area. Aside from these widely-used generational identifiers, Baby Boomers and Millennials are also commonly referred to as Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives, respectively. However, in a world where smartphones have become commonplace, and internet connectivity via fixed broadband and mobile data is ubiquitous, it can be argued that digital technologies now serve as a link, or perhaps even a bridge, between younger and older generations living in the same household. The study aims to put this proposition to the test, by interrogating the role of news as a conduit for storytelling and information-sharing in environments where each occupant will typically be using their own devices, with a wide variety of personally-curated news sources and platforms at their fingertips. This fragmentation or individualisation of access to news stands in sharp contrast to the communal traditions of the pre-Internet era, during which families would gather around the TV set to watch the evening newscast, or share sections of the Sunday newspaper according to their age and interest. This research, which seeks to address a gap in the literature of research into intra-generational news consumption in family households in the digital era, identifies points of intersection as well as diversion in media usage habits. An example of the former is the prevalence of WhatsApp as a centralised "meeting-point" for the sharing of useful, hyper-localised information within the family group, and beyond that, as a cross-generational news and discussion platform in its own right. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the study explores strict and seemingly counterintuitive divides between the generations, with some Millennial respondents rejecting social media platforms as "pointless"

and invasive, and some Baby Boomer parents embracing the platforms as forums for free expression and networking. In line with the key research question, which seeks to identify and analyse news usage and consumption across the generations in a selection of family households, the study considers the ways in which families in the digital era are creating a culture of shared interests and the active sharing of news, breaching the boundaries of their private spaces in a microcosm of the Habermasian public sphere of discourse and opinion.

## Declaration

I declare that the half thesis entitled, “GENERATION NEWS: CONSUMING, SHARING, AND PRODUCING NEWS ACROSS GENERATIONS IN FIVE JOHANNESBURG HOUSEHOLDS”, which I hereby submit for the degree, MASTER OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES at Rhodes University, is my own work.

I also declare that this thesis/dissertation has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

G R Silber

March 2021

## Acknowledgements and Gratitude

When a friend and colleague of long-standing alerted me to a new Master's programme being offered by the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, my initial reaction was one of scepticism.

What would I be able to learn, after almost four decades as a practicing journalist, from a sojourn in the halls of academia?

Little did I know then, how little I then knew.

My eyes have been opened, and more especially, so has my mind, to the fundamentals, philosophies, precepts, and pursuits of a discipline I had only professed to understand.

For all my familiarity with the formula of 5 Ws and an H, the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How that guides the journalist in journalling, I had rarely if ever paused to turn the lens of enquiry inward.

Through my part-time study at Rhodes, conducted remotely, with pleasant and inspiring lectures on campus in-between, I have learned that I do not and never will know all the answers.

But crucially, I have learned Who, What, When, Where, Why and How to question, and to keep on questioning at every turn.

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Harry Dugmore, for his patience, tutelage, and support, and for making me believe that even the most arcane concepts were within my grasp of understanding, if only I would keep reaching higher. Thank you sincerely, Prof Harry, for your guidance and inspiration.

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Finally, my sincere gratitude to my anonymous Baby Boomer and Millennial informants for this study, for so graciously allowing me into their homes and lives in search of the meaning and significance of news, across the generations.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Declaration</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgements and Gratitude</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Introduction &amp; Overview</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1 The Family of Man</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2 The Connective Tissue of Storytelling</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>1.3 The News as Modern Mythology</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>1.4 Storytelling as Myth in Madiba Magic and Kennedy's Camelot</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>1.4 All Aboard the Generation Train</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>1.5 Exploring the Generation Gap</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>1.6 Closing the Gap Between Digital Natives &amp; Digital Immigrants</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.1 The Boundary Between Public and Private Spheres</b> .....	<b>30</b>
2.1.2 Bringing Habermas into the Family Home.....	31
<b>2.2 The Media-Rich Bedroom</b> .....	<b>31</b>
2.2.1 Looking at Facebook by the Light of Habermas.....	31
2.2.2 Parents as Models of News Consumption Behaviours.....	32
<b>2.3 News-Seekers and News-Avoiders</b> .....	<b>33</b>
2.3.1 Digital Platforms and the Formation of Identity.....	33
<b>2.4 A Three-Stage News Consumption Model</b> .....	<b>34</b>
2.4.1 Nibbling Away at the News.....	34
2.4.2 News is What Happens When a Man Bites a Dog.....	35
2.4.3 A Contemporary Taxonomy of News Values.....	36
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction: A Pathway to Knowing</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>3.2 Research paradigm: An Interpretivist Approach to Understanding</b> .....	<b>40</b>
3.2.1 Considering the Three Worlds Framework.....	40
<b>3.3 Research design: Qualifying the Qualitative Model</b> .....	<b>41</b>

3.3.1 A Gleaning of Rich and Thick Insights .....	42
<b>3.4 Research methods: The Doing and the Knowing .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.4.1 Purposively selecting participants: The Criteria for Sampling.....	43
3.4.2 A Blurring of the Boundaries Between Generations .....	44
3.4.3 The Process of Purposive Selection.....	45
<b>3.5 Semi-structured interviews and questions: Finding Purpose Through Conversation ..</b>	<b>47</b>
3.5.1 Comparing the Realist and Idealist Approaches to Interviewing.....	47
<b>3.5.2 Narrowing Down the Interview Questions for Baby Boomers and Millennials.....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.5.2.1 Questions of Habit .....	48
3.5.2.2 Questions of Sources & Platforms.....	49
3.5.2.3 Questions of Influence .....	49
3.5.2.4 Questions of Trust .....	50
3.5.2.5 Questions of Sharing.....	50
<b>3.6 Thematic Content Analysis: Towards an Alchemy of Understanding.....</b>	<b>51</b>
3.6.1 Using a Flow Model to Code the Data .....	52
<b>3.7 Ethical considerations: Tensions and Protocols .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter 4 .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b><i>Findings and Observations .....</i></b>	<b><i>55</i></b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>4.2 Introducing the Families .....</b>	<b>56</b>
4.2.2 Family A: No Phones in the Kitchen .....	56
4.2.3 Family B: Filtering the News.....	57
4.2.4 Family C: Living with a Personal Google .....	58
4.2.5 Family D: Thoughts and Findings Around the Table.....	58
4.2.6 Family E: Debates and Disagreements in the Hub of the Home.....	59
<b>4.3 An Ornithological Taxonomy of News-Consumption Behaviours in Selected Family     Households .....</b>	<b>61</b>
4.3.1 Foraging: the Purposeful Pursuit of News.....	62
4.3.2 Perching: Settling on a Singular Gateway to News and Information .....	65
4.3.2.1 Flipping the news on Flipboard.....	66
4.3.2.2 Reading it all on Reddit .....	68
4.3.3 Drifting: Caught in the Crosswinds of News .....	70
4.3.4 Nesting: Reading and Sharing the News Together in the Family Home .....	72
<b>4.4 Growing Up With News: Comparing Baby Boomer and Millennial Stories .....</b>	<b>74</b>
4.4.1 Anita's Story: The Sweet Subdivision of the Sunday Paper.....	74
4.4.2 Esther's Story: The News as Physical and Social History.....	76
4.4.3 Ernest's Story: Learning to Speak Truth to Power.....	77
<b>4.5 Sharing and Blogging as Forms of Produsage .....</b>	<b>78</b>
4.5.1 Instagram as a Happy Place .....	79
4.5.2 Blogging as Opinionated Activism.....	80
<b>4.6 The Utility of WhatsApp as a Meeting-Point Between the Generations .....</b>	<b>81</b>
4.6.1 Bridging the Generation Gap by Sharing Jokes and Memes.....	81
4.6.2 WhatsApp as a Breaking-News Distribution Medium on Family Groups .....	83
4.6.3 Music and Music News as Social Bonding-Agents Between Baby Boomers and Millennials .....	85

<b>4.7 Preferred Sources of News Across the Generations.....</b>	<b>86</b>
4.7.1 Family A, Baby Boomer: Taking the Bait on Twitter .....	86
4.7.2 Family A, Millennial: Finding News in the Stars.....	87
4.7.3 Family B, Baby Boomers: Trusting News Sites and Regional Radio.....	87
4.7.4 Family B, Millennial: Following the Trends on YouTube .....	87
4.7.5 Family C, Baby Boomers: Dipping into Online Portals, and Tuning In to News on the Move .....	88
4.7.6 Family C, Millennials: Sticking to Reddit, and Hearing News from Friends.....	88
4.7.7 Family D, Baby Boomers: Favouring Facebook Communities, and Mixing Music with News.....	89
4.7.8 Family D, Millennials: Facebook as a Primary Source of Algorithmic News.....	89
4.7.9 Family E, Baby Boomer: A Preference for Print and Broadcast Channels .....	90
4.7.10 Family E, Millennials: Searching Topical Hashtags on Instagram, and Tapping in to Commercial News Apps .....	90
<b>4.8 Comparing Baby Boomer and Millennial Attitudes to Printed Newspapers in the Digital Era.....</b>	<b>92</b>
4.8.1 Getting News From the Trees.....	93
4.8.2 The Printed Newspaper as a Kindle of Family Memory .....	94
<b>4.9 Exploring Millennial Antipathy to Social Media Platforms .....</b>	<b>96</b>
4.9.1 "Facebook is for old people, and Instagram is Twitter for people who can't read" .....	96
4.9.2 The Impulse to Curate Beauty and Order Amidst the Chaos of Social Media.....	97
<b>4.10 Conclusion and Summary of Findings .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b><i>Chapter 5 .....</i></b>	<b><i>100</i></b>
<b><i>Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study .....</i></b>	<b><i>100</i></b>
<b>5.1 Acknowledging the Limitations of the Study.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>5.2 Pondering the Impact of the Pandemic on the Ways in Which Families Consume and Share News.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>5.3 Broadening the Horizons in an Unequal Society: Extending the Study from the Have-Nets to the Have-Nots .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>5.4 Delving Deeper Into WhatsApp as a Meeting-Place for Generations .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>5.5 Returning to the Research Question, With Further Questions in Mind .....</b>	<b>104</b>
5.5.1 Questions for Further Research Into News Consumption and Sharing across the Generations .....	105
<b><i>References .....</i></b>	<b><i>107</i></b>
<b><i>Works Cited.....</i></b>	<b><i>107</i></b>

# Chapter 1

## Introduction & Overview

### 1.1 The Family of Man

As a teenager growing up in the mining town of Roodepoort, in the era before television, the Internet, and mobile technologies worked their way into everyday family life, my world and my horizons were broadened by books. I was an avid and indiscriminating reader, as likely to be found with a Beano comic in my hands, as with a random volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, plucked from the shelves to give me something to flip through while I was eating my lunch. But there was one book in particular, brought home by my father, a schoolteacher and librarian, that held the power to stir my imagination and take me places for hours on end. It was a book of photographs, 503 in total, all of them black-and-white, the images sparsely woven through with lines from literature, ancient texts, and folklore from cultures across the globe.

*The Family of Man* (Museum of Modern Art, 1955), was published to accompany an exhibition described by its curator, the photographer Edward Steichen, as “the most ambitious and challenging project photography has ever attempted”. Following its initial showing at MoMA in 1955, *The Family of Man* toured the world for eight years, stopping in 37 countries on six continents, and attracting a total audience of more than 9-million people (MoMA, 2015). The photographs, by a body of professionals and amateurs, capture the gamut of human emotions, events, rituals, and activities, from birth to burial, from joy to sadness, from work to play, from making art to waging war.

As we wander through this humanist hall of mirrors, we see ourselves reflected in the personal and universal experiences of others. In Steichen’s words, “The people in the audience looked at

the pictures and the people in the pictures looked back at them. They recognized each other.” (Salleme, 2005). I, too, in my corner of the world, felt a sense of kinship and connection that lingers to this day, which is why, when I began laying the groundwork for this study into the consumption, sharing, and producing of news by South African families in the digital era, two long-remembered images from *The Family of Man* swam sharply into focus.

The first (fig 1), by Diane and Allan Arbus, for Vogue, shows a father and son reclining at opposite ends of a frilly-hemmed couch, in what appears to be a lavishly-decorated living-room somewhere in America. (The photographs in the book are un-captioned, so we are obliged to some extent to draw our own conclusions.) Each is engrossed in the act of reading a section of a newspaper, while other sections lie scattered on the floor, either discarded or waiting to be picked up. In this vignette of cosy domesticity in the pre-digital era, news consumption in the family household is portrayed as a process that is quiet and private, at the same time as it is shared and communal.



*Fig 1: Newspaper readers engrossed in a private yet communal activity, by Diane and Allan Arbus, from The Family of Man, 1955.*

While the image has a slightly stylised air about it — it was, after all, shot on assignment for a fashion magazine — it nonetheless stands as testimony to an age when the living-room was the heart of media consumption in the home, and when the primary medium, the daily or weekend newspaper, was a tangible and deconstructable product of ephemeral use and relevance. For now, we will hold on to this image as a marker of the way things used to be, a time when the different generations would commune in one central space to catch up and reflect on what was new and interesting in the world around and beyond the home.

The second photograph (fig 2), by Nat Farbman for Life magazine, propels us into an altogether different world, a circle of social gathering in what was then the British protectorate of Bechuanaland, now Botswana. It is night, and the photographer's flash dramatically highlights

the San elder at the centre of the circle, as he entralls his young audience with a wide-eyed expression that suggests either surprise or mock-horror. His hands are in the air, his fingers curled into claws: perhaps he is mimicking a lion in mid-pounce, or a hunter about to be charged by an elephant. Either way, here in this frozen moment, we see a clan in the spell of a medium that is as old as our species, and yet as new as the flash of a breaking news notification on the face of a smartphone. The medium of story, connecting us across the ages and the generations of the family of humankind.



*Fig 2: Illustrating the oral tradition of storytelling, a San elder holds his audience in thrall in what was then the protectorate of Bechuanaland, and is today Botswana. The photograph is by Nat Farbman, from *The Family of Man*, 1955.*

## 1.2 The Connective Tissue of Storytelling

Across the world, across cultures, societies, and communities, the tradition of storytelling has long served as a form of connective tissue, binding one generation to the next. Stories told and shared within the family unit affect and reflect family culture, states Kellas (2015: 366) by communicating the essence of a family's norms, values, goals, and identity. We find a telling example in *Grandmother to Granddaughter* (Wilson, 2005: 7 - 13), in which the Dakota historian and activist Angela Cavender Wilson, who later legally changed her name to Waziyatawin in honour of her elders, reflects on what she learned from her grandmother's tales of bearing witness to battle in the 19th Century American West.

Such stories, argues the author, can do more than simply illuminate our understanding of the broader picture of history. Rooted in a deep sense of kinship and belonging, they act also as "an essential component in the survival of culture". Beyond the long-standing oral tradition of in-family storytelling, Kellas further observes (2013: 9) that stories are coloured by the lens through which they are told, including such contemporary media as Skype, email, Facebook, blogs, and scrapbooks. Here we find a gateway from the old modes of storytelling to the new, and from storytelling as a platform for sharing particular family histories, to storytelling as a way of consuming and sharing the more general news of the day.

## 1.3 The News as Modern Mythology

In the stories of once upon a time and happily ever after that parents tell their children, in the hope of sending them drifting off to dreamland at bedtime, we evoke ancient and universal memories from the shadows of human consciousness. We recognise, as if by instinct, the hero and the villain, the dashing prince and the princess in the castle, the wolf in the forest, the ogre, the stray children drawn to the gingerbread house. These are the archetypes of myth and fairytale, identified by Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, as specific forms of expression that have been handed down through long periods of time (Jung, 1902: 3). While these archetypes are typically rooted in dreams and visions, they can have their origins in actual events, or "local sagas", as the Jungian psychotherapist Marie-Louise von Franz labels them (Von Frantz, 1995: 24). She uses the hypothetical example of a girl in a village, unhappy in love,

who commits suicide by jumping off a cliff; years later, this tragic real-life event might form the basis of a classical fairy tale with a suicide motif. Thus, the line begins to blur between the real, everyday world, and the world of dreams and waking hallucinations. As Von Frantz explains (1995: 19): "When something strange happens, it gets gossiped about and handed on, just as rumors are handed on; then under favorable conditions the account gets enriched with already existing archetypal representations and slowly becomes a story."

Let us return, then, to our archetypal family household, where children fall asleep to fairy tales, and in their later years will awaken to stories of a different kind, told on radio, television, or on the screens of their smartphones and computers. Can we be so bold as to draw a link, with this in mind, between ancient myths and the way we consume and share the news in modern times? I turn first of all once more to Jung, who introduces us to the archetype of the "sagacious and helpful old man" (Jung: 14 - 117) in an old Estonian fairy tale about a runaway orphan boy who is afraid to return home after letting a cow escape. Often in fairy tales, Jung explains, the purpose of such an old man is to ask the key questions — "Who? why? whence? and whither" — that will induce self-reflection and mobilise the moral forces necessary to ensure what we might call a fairy-tale ending. But the old man is a familiar figure for other reasons. In his curiosity, in his questioning, in his fortuitous presence at the right place and the right time, he brings to mind a modern-day storyteller, a journalist, who knows a good story when it crosses his path.

Stories are the base units of journalism, a discipline defined as "storytelling with a purpose" by Kovach & Rosenstiel (2001). That purpose, the authors continue, is to provide people with information they need to understand the world. In the real world, as opposed to the realm of fairy tales, it is a given that this information must be rooted in fact: "Journalism's first obligation," as Kovach and Rosenstiel remind us, "is to the truth". And yet, even as it strives to fulfill this obligation, it can be argued that the practice of producing the news is akin to the making of myth. News accounts are known as stories, which by definition are culturally constructed narratives, as Bird and Dardenne put it (1998: 67). They note that storytellers, when creating tales, do not tell of mundane, everyday events, but rather focus on the different, the particular, and that which can be presented as the universal. The same applies to news. Journalists draw a distinction between hard news, written in the so-called inverted pyramid style, in which the key facts — the who, when, what, where, why, and how — are incorporated in the opening paragraph, and the soft

news or human interest story, which makes use of narrative storytelling techniques. If readers prefer such stories, add Bird and Dardene (1988: 77), it is precisely because they are written in traditional story form.

But even leaving aside variations of style, news stories can be said to carry trace elements of ancient myths. In *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (Lule, 2001: 14), the author, a Professor of Journalism and a former journalist, tells of his realisation that news stories, for all their avowed grounding in truth, are often deeply rooted in the themes and tropes of folktales and mythology. "Each time I picked up the newspaper," Lule writes, "I recognised stories told long ago." In stories of sports stars and politicians, he found the Hero myth; in stories of tragedy and misfortune, he found the Victim myth; in stories of natural disaster, he found the Flood myth. While Lule predicts that journalists themselves will disown comparisons of classical texts to front-page stories that "end up wrapped around fish or placed at the bottom of bird cages", the literature abounds with examples of contemporary news stories that have entered the realm of mythological storytelling. In the following section, I will consider two such examples, one of South African origin, and one from the USA.

#### **1.4 Storytelling as Myth in Madiba Magic and Kennedy's Camelot**

Late in the afternoon of Saturday, June 24, 1995, at Ellis Park rugby stadium in Johannesburg, two men — one old, one young, both wearing the Number 6 green-and-gold jersey of the Springbok national squad — stood on the pitch and raised their arms in triumph, to roars and cheers from the 63,000-strong crowd. The Springboks had just beaten New Zealand's All Blacks, by 15 points to 12, to take the 1995 Rugby World Cup (Mostert, 2020). The young man was Francois Pienaar, captain of the Springboks; the old man was Nelson Mandela, first democratic President of the Republic of South Africa. As the author John Carlin writes in *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation* (2010: 327): "The gods at that moment were Mandela and Pienaar, the old man in green, crowned king of all South Africa, handing the cup to Pienaar, the young man in green, anointed that day as the spiritual head of born-again Afrikanerdom." This scene, later immortalised in the Hollywood movie, *Invictus* (2009), directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Morgan Freeman as Mandela and Matt Damon as Pienaar, was a foundational moment in establishing the myth of South Africa as a "Rainbow

Nation", a term inspired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's description of his fellow South Africans as "the rainbow people of God" (Allen & Tutu, 1994: v).

It was around this time, as Desai notes, citing Lodge (2015: 102) that the idea of "Madiba Magic" caught the public imagination in South Africa. Mandela, whose clan name was Madiba, was seen as a "magnanimous sorcerer" whose actions and statements acquired a "providential hue", adds Desai. Mandela's presence at a sporting event was seen to have an almost talismanic quality, not only for his supposed ability to inspire teams to victory against the greatest of odds, but for his status as national unifier and reconciler in a society torn asunder by deep cultural, social, and political divisions. Thus, at the Rugby World Cup final of 1995, as Steenveld & Strelitz note (2015: 116), South African spectators were not addressed as rugby supporters, but as witnesses to a "spiritual occasion, the coming into being of a nation, the return from isolation". This elevation of a sporting event to a quasi-religious ceremony, and a politician to a benevolent warrior-king with a healing touch, is reflected once again in this passage by Carlin (2010): "Mandela's coup de grace, the final submission of white South Africa to his charms, came minutes before the final itself when the old terrorist-in-chief went onto the pitch to shake hands with the players dressed in the colors of the ancient enemy, the green Springbok shirt." Inevitably, with the passing of time, such iconic moments, rich in symbolism, aglow with the aura of myth, will be subject to reappraisal.

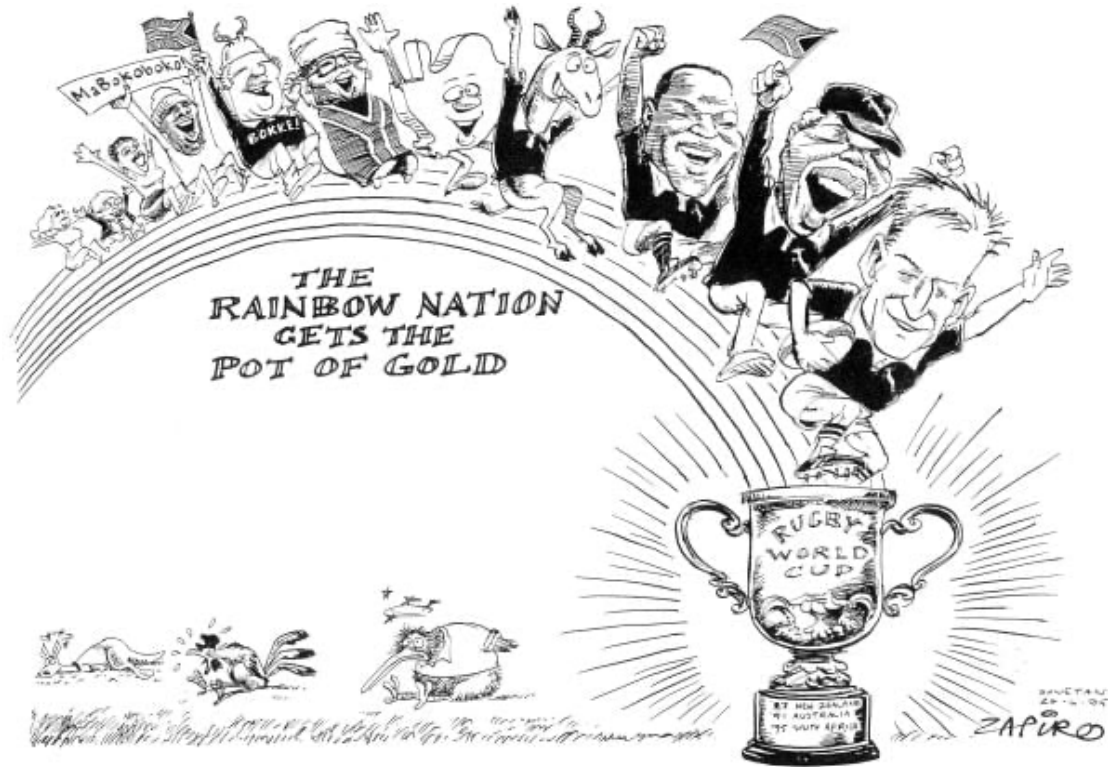


Fig 3: The cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, also known as Zapiro, captures the elation of the "Rainbow Nation" in the glow of the Springbok victory over the All Blacks in the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

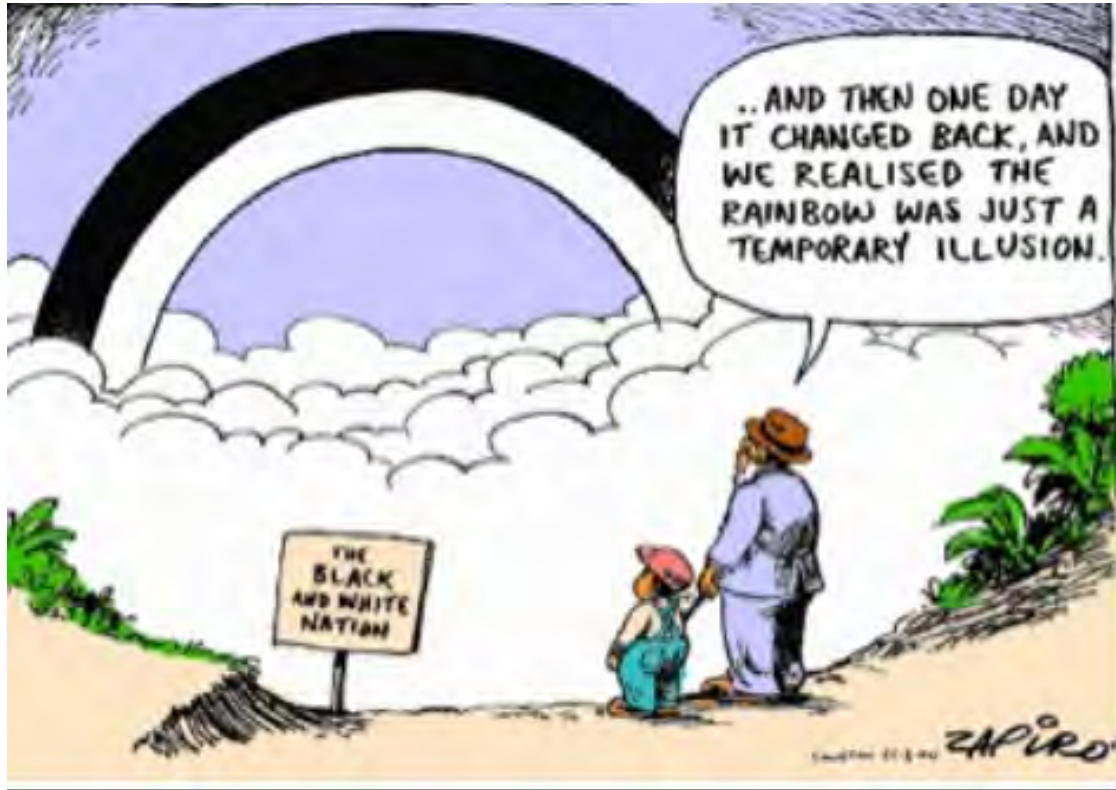


Fig 4: In this cartoon by Zapiro, the glow of the Rainbow Nation has faded with the realisation that national unity was just a fleeting illusion.

In a critique of *Invictus*, Haarhoff (2013: 20) states that while the integrative message of the Rugby World Cup was a necessity, it would be wrong to assume that the portrayal of unity was an everyday South African reality. "The historical class chasm created by racial oppression," Haarhoff writes, "cannot be glossed over through the showmanship of integration." And yet, like a rainbow appearing in the sky, these stories have the power to hold us in their thrall, even if only for one brief shining moment. That snippet of song lyric from the Broadway musical, *Camelot* (1960), by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, leads us into our second example of news as myth, through the links that have been drawn between Arthurian legend and the incumbency of the 35th President of the USA, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The youngest man elected to office at the time, Kennedy, popularly known as JFK, was a decorated war hero and Harvard graduate (Selverstone, 2016) who took office in 1961 and was assassinated while riding in a motorcade in downtown Dallas on November 22, 1963. In the foreword to a 2002 edition of

*A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (2002: xi), the Kennedy aide and memoirist Arthur M Schlesinger reflects on the President's legacy through the lens of myth: "He glittered when he lived, and the whole world grieved when he was killed. Grief nourishes myth. The slain hero, robbed of fulfillment by tragic fate, is the stuff of legend."

In the Hollywood Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) directed by John Ford and starring James Stewart and John Wayne, a US senator returns to his old hometown to attend the funeral of a local rancher. While there, the senator, played by Stewart, reveals the long-suppressed truth about a gunfight in which he was credited with shooting the notorious villain of the title. The town's newspaper editor, listening to this story, chooses not to publish it. "This is the West, sir," he tells Stewart. "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." In the case of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, as Wilder tells us (2012: 1), the historical facts reveal many personal and political secrets that lurk beneath his seemingly utopian leadership.

Among other flaws, the author adds, Kennedy was privately dishonest, unethical, linked to corruption and bribery on the campaign trail, and serially unfaithful in his marriage. The legend, however, suggests otherwise. In an essay entitled *For One Brief Shining Moment: Choosing to Remember Camelot* (2003: 1 - 12) Brigand recounts how the central myth of the Kennedy administration was born during an interview Jacqueline Kennedy gave to the journalist Theodore White, only 17 days after the assassination. "At night before we'd go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records; and the song he loved the most came at the end of this record. The lines he loved to hear were: 'Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot'".

Brigand reminds us that the story of Camelot, the musical based on the fable of King Arthur, is the story of a benevolent monarch who reigns over a utopian kingdom. He decrees perfect weather, bans warfare between knights, and strives to make life better for all of Camelot's citizens. In the end, the great social experiment fails. The last glimpse of Arthur, writes Brigand, is of a proud sovereign, certain of the inevitable end of his dream. Yet the myth of Camelot immediately struck a chord, as "distraught Americans searched for ways to make sense of the tragedy". The dark side of the myth, Brigand concludes, is that the kingdom existed only for that one brief shining moment, and for those who can still remember where they were and what they were doing when they first heard the news, memory lingers in the shout of a headline or the

urgent tattoo of a news bulletin. What can we learn, then, if news is a form of myth-making, from the way it is consumed and shared across the generations in family households?

#### 1.4 All Aboard the Generation Train

Having earlier discussed the link between Jungian archetypes and journalistic storytelling, I will now consider the relevance of two contemporary cultural archetypes to my study. These are the Baby Boomers and the Millennials, identified by the historians Strauss & Howe, in their book *Generations: The History of America's Future* (1991: 329) as among 18 generational cohorts, “their birthyear periods stretching in an unbroken series from 1584 to the present day”. On this timeline, the Baby Boomers, so-named for the baby boom and the period of economic growth and prosperity that followed the end of World War Two (Van Bavel & Reher, 2015), are the generation born between 1946 and 1964, while the Millennials, a term generally attributed to Strauss and Howe (Sharf, 2015), are the generation born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

These dates, which span broad epochs in history, are not cast in concrete, but as Strauss & Howe theorise (1991: 117), they serve as boundary markers for a set of collective behavioural traits and attitudes, known as a peer personality, in each generational cohort. The authors use the analogy of a train rolling along a track to illustrate their theory (1991: 101). Picture a track that stretches all the way from birth to the final destination, with "phase-of-life stations" along the way, marking the milestones from childhood to adulthood to elderhood. Now, along this track, come a series of generational trains, each stopping in sequence at the stations. As the Baby Boomer train leaves the station of early adulthood, for instance, the Millennial train, having just left the station of adolescence, comes rolling down the tracks to take its place. And so the procession continues, generation after generation, all on the same journey, but at different times and in different states of mind.

For purposes of this study, which is located in five different family households in suburban Johannesburg, Baby Boomers are identified as the parent generation, and Millennials are the youth, aged from 18 upwards and still staying at home. The key research question — “Within purposively selected South African family households with Internet connectivity, how do Baby

Boomers and Millennials consume and share news with each other?" — aims to interrogate commonalities as well as divergences in these inter-generational habits and behaviours. For now, it is a truism to state that there will be a gap between the way that younger and older generations see, perceive, understand, and react to each other and the world around them.

## 1.5 Exploring the Generation Gap

The phenomenon of the generation gap is as old as human nature — "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words," wrote the Greek poet, Hesiod, in the Eight Century BC — even if the term itself is of more modern vintage. We see it on the cover of the May 17, 1968 edition of *Life* magazine (*Life*, 1968), above a blue-tinted photograph of a young man wearing reflective sunglasses. Overlaid on each lens is a separate image: an older man on the left, and on the right, the young cover star himself. Two generations, engaged in conversation. The story is a dialogue (*Life*, Fladell & Lorber: 81 - 92) between an uncle, 42, and his 22-year-old nephew. At one point, the older man gazes into the generation gap and ponders: "Can it be? Can it be that Richie's generation invented sex, music, art, education, peace, understanding, dignity of man? Is it possible that my generation has produced only frustration, war, prejudice and greed?" (Fladell & Lorber, 82b). Here we have an insight into the way each generation's attitudes and values are shaped by the epochal trends and events of their time. In the case of the older man, that would mean global war and racial segregation; in the case of the younger, it would mean the Civil Rights struggle, the rise of pop music as a social and cultural force, and the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s, with its accompanying rallying-cry, "Make Love, Not War" (Allyn, 2001: 101).

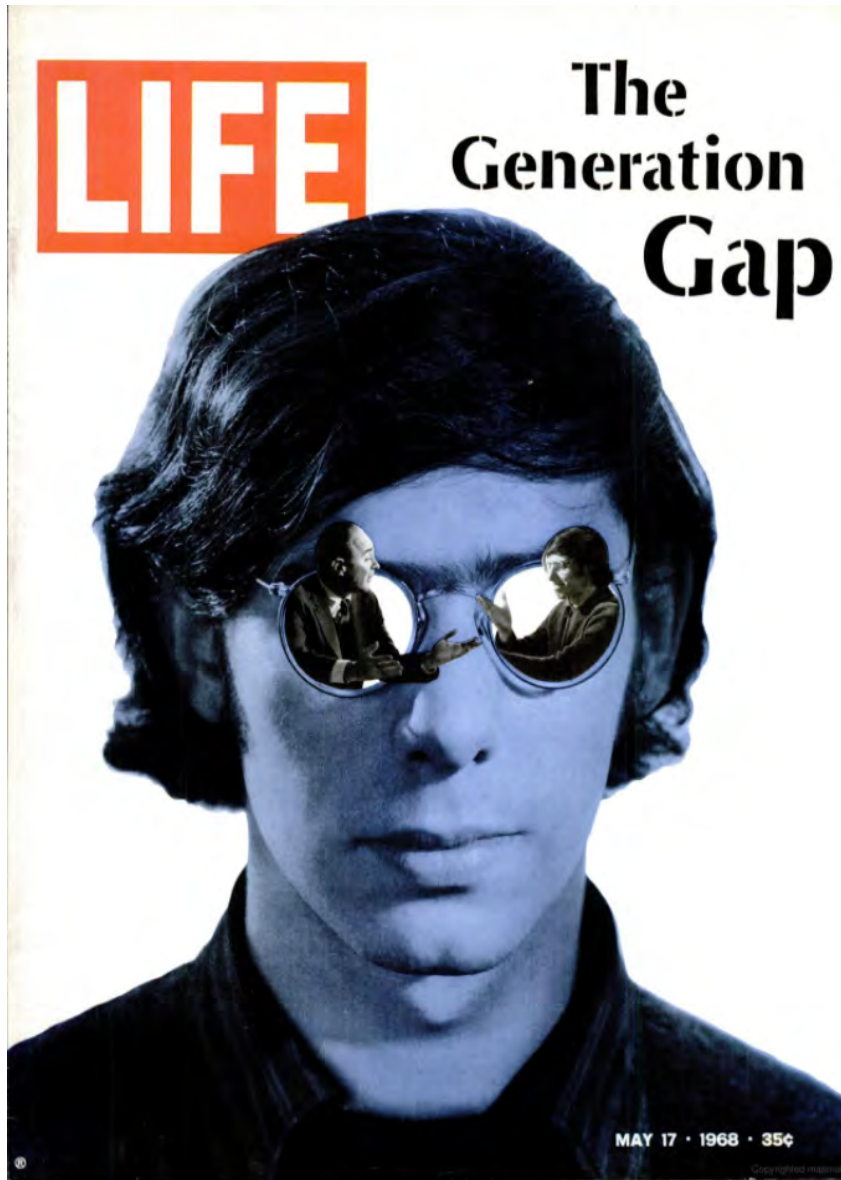


Fig 5: *The Generation Gap*, as reflected in the sunglasses of a member of the younger generation on the cover of the May 17, 1968 edition of *Life* magazine.

Strauss & Howe define these critical events as "social moments", alternating between "secular crises" and "spiritual awakenings" (1991: 128). When generations in different phases of life trigger these social moments, they help to shape and define history, and in turn, history itself shapes and defines new generations. But to return to our earlier analogy of generational trains, calling at phase-of-life stations, history teaches us, too, that our view of the world may be subject

to change as the train moves on. In our younger years, we cherish the poetic ideals of a new social order, as the generational theorist Ramma Prasad puts it (1992: 7); in middle-age, we conveniently forget these ideals as we gravitate more and more towards the ideology of the status quo.

Put another way, when Pete Townshend, of the English rock band, The Who, wrote the famous line, "I hope I die before I get old" in the song *My Generation* (1965), he wasn't simply expressing the death-wish of a disaffected 20-year-old. As Townshend later reflected, in an interview with National Public Radio (Douris et al., 2019), at which stage he was 73 years old: "I don't think it was about 'I would rather kill myself than get old', it was about 'I'd rather kill myself [than] get old and end up like you.' I mean the generation that was around at the time." Throughout history, the young generation has regarded the old as out-of-date, old-fashioned, conservative and lacking in understanding, notes Prasad (1992: 12). In turn, the older generation sees the young as lacking in respect and radical in outlook.

For a contemporary case study of this age-old dichotomy, we turn to an incident that took place in the New Zealand Parliament on November 5, 2019 (Mezzofiore, 2019). As reported by CNN, a 25-year-old lawmaker named Chlöe Swarbrick was giving a speech in support of the Zero Carbon Bill, which would set a target of zero carbon emissions for the country by 2050. Swarbrick made the point that she would turn 56 in that year, while the average age of her fellow Parliamentarians was already 49. At this point, she was heckled from across the House, and without breaking her stride, she put out her hand and said two words in response. "OK Boomer".

The etymology of this phrase, described by the New York Times as "the digital equivalent of an eye roll" (Lorenz, 2019) has been traced as far back as September 2009, when it was used in a comment thread on the social news aggregation site, Reddit (Hoffa, 2019). In this usage, Boomer may appear to have mutated from a generational identifier to a laconic pejorative, but in the end, as Lorenz tells us, it's all just a state of mind: "Anyone can be a boomer, with the right attitude". Lorenz quotes a young interviewee, Jonathan Williams, a musician: "You don't like change, you don't understand new things especially related to technology, you don't understand equality. Being a boomer is just having that attitude, it can apply to whoever is bitter toward change." Technology, then, is presented as the marker of a gap in understanding, but perhaps the evidence

will also show that it could be the flag that flies over common and neutral ground in the culture war between the generations.

GENERATION	BIRTH YEARS	EPOCHAL EVENTS
Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Korean War</li> <li>▪ Apartheid introduced in South Africa</li> <li>▪ Assassination of US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy</li> <li>▪ Civil Rights struggle in USA</li> <li>▪ Beatlemania</li> <li>▪ Sharpeville shootings</li> <li>▪ Rivonia treason trial</li> </ul>
Generation X	1965 to 1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vietnam War</li> <li>▪ Assassination of South African Prime Minister HF Verwoerd</li> <li>▪ Hippy era</li> <li>▪ Woodstock music festival</li> <li>▪ First moon landing</li> <li>▪ Soweto uprising</li> <li>▪ introduction of TV in South Africa</li> </ul>
Millennials	1981 to 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ States of Emergency in South Africa</li> <li>▪ Unbanning of political parties</li> <li>▪ First democratic elections and inauguration of President Nelson Mandela</li> <li>▪ Fall of Berlin Wall and breakup of USSR</li> <li>▪ Introduction of cellular phones and World Wide Web in South Africa</li> </ul>
Generation Z	1997 to 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ September 11, 2001, attacks on World Trade Centre and Pentagon</li> <li>▪ Global economic crisis of 2008</li> <li>▪ FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa</li> <li>▪ Launch of first iPod and iPhone</li> <li>▪ Introduction of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram</li> </ul>

Fig 6: This table shows a range of epochal events, or "social moments", as Strauss & Howe call them, that have shaped and defined successive modern generations, from Baby Boomers to

*Generation Z. The table has been compiled using major news events and trends in South Africa and internationally.*

## **1.6 Closing the Gap Between Digital Natives & Digital Immigrants**

On Wednesday, April 27, 1994, along with millions of other South Africans across the country, I stood in a long and winding queue outside a polling station, waiting to cast my vote in the nation's first democratic elections. My one hand held fast to the pram in which my first-born daughter, Sarah-Jane, then seven months old, was sitting, looking wide-eyed at the world; in my other hand I held a device, just a few days old, that was about to change the way I looked at, engaged with, and understood the world. It was a Nokia 1011 cellular phone, about the size of a brick, with a small rectangular screen, and a slim antenna jutting from the top. That ungainly device, along with my newly Internet-enabled Personal Computer at home, would be my passport to a wireless, digital realm in which I would be a stranger, and where my daughter and other members of her generation would come to feel instinctively at home.

In an influential essay published in 2001, the writer and educational consultant, Marc Prensky, coined the terms Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants to describe the citizens of this new world of technological possibility. (Prensky, 2001: 1 - 6). For our purposes, the former would be Millennials, who have grown up with a what appears on the surface to be a natural ability to integrate digital tools and technologies into their everyday lives, while the latter would be Baby Boomers, who have had to adapt to the shifting tides of life on the new digital shore. In Prensky's analogy, these groups, socialised and schooled in radically different eras, speak "a different language" in the way they perceive and use technology. A Digital Immigrant, for instance, might phone a colleague and ask, "did you get my email?", while a Digital Native might intuitively trust the technology to get the message across.

Because of their hands-on familiarity with digital technology from early childhood, Digital Natives process information in ways that are fundamentally different from their predecessors, adds Prensky. Digital Immigrants have had to learn and adapt to new technologies, which is why they will always retain, to some degree, their "accent". This can be seen, notes Prensky, in such ingrained habits as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading

the manual for a program, rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us how to use it. For younger users, technology is intuitive, with no artificial barriers between first acquaintance and everyday use. But this practice can have its drawbacks, as Asbury (2016: 58) notes in a journal article on *Closing the Digital Generation Gap*. In a YouTube video posted in 2011 and referenced by Asbury, a one-year-old child is seen playing happily with an iPad, swiping her fingers across the screen to make images appear and disappear. Then the parent secretly swaps the tablet with a non-digital magazine. The toddler now swipes her fingers across the glossy pages of the magazine, growing visibly frustrated as the images remain static. The title of the video: "A magazine is an iPad that does not work".

For all such differences in understanding and experience, however, it has been almost two decades since Prensky introduced us to the separate and opposing worlds of Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants, and suffice to say the gap appears to be closing, with both parties enjoying equal access to smartphones, apps, and ubiquitous Internet connectivity at home and on the move. In *Family Communication: Cohesion and Change* (2015), Galvin et al speak of the “patterned, meaningful messages” that exist within a network of “evolving interdependent relationships located within a multigenerational and cultural context”. As a practical, contemporary example of this, we have the phenomenon of the family WhatsApp group, which connects individual family members through a flow of useful, meaningful information, often diverted from other channels and sources. In part, this study is motivated by my own experience of how this cross-generational platform can facilitate and drive the spread of news.

One morning, while walking around my neighbourhood in northwestern Johannesburg, I was distracted by a notification alert on my smartphone. It was a message from a community WhatsApp group, covering a single street, and focusing strictly on security matters. “Urgent notice,” read the message. “Cresta shopping mall being evacuated. Reports of Armed Robbery and of a Fire.” Since the mall is located less than a kilometre from where we live, I forwarded this intelligence to our family WhatsApp group, sparking a spontaneous quest for verification and further news on our separate digital devices. The Millennials in the household consulted Facebook, Snapchat, and friends on WhatsApp; the Baby Boomers turned to Twitter and [News24.com](http://News24.com). Back and forth flowed the messages, in a microcosm of the way newsrooms operate, with reporters calling on their own trusted networks in the thick of a developing story.

As it turned out, confirmed by a personal visit to the scene, there had been a small and swiftly-extinguished blaze in the kitchen of one at the restaurants at the mall, but there had been no evacuation, and no armed robbery. And yet the smoke of the rumour sent a signal of its own, a reminder of the speed at which news travels and expands, and then contracts and retreats into the closed circle of the family.

This study will venture into that circle, to examine the role and influence of news media and social networks in a sub-set of families in greater Johannesburg. In so doing, I hope to be able to add to the body of research in the relatively under-explored domain of intra-family news consumption in South Africa, in an era when the age-old tradition of the “family newspaper” and the communal TV set in the living-room is giving way to the new custom of decentralised access on separate devices and separate networks. In the twenty-first century, write Galvin et al (2015: 100), family members rely heavily on mediated interaction to stay connected. These interactions occur in multiple ways, the authors add, including “intentional connections,” such as an e-mail to a family member; “assumed connections,” such as the belief that your family members will be interested in reading your Facebook posts; and “random connections”, such as when a distant family member responds unexpectedly to a social media post. A family is thus a discrete system for the processing of meaning from information, through the everyday interchanges and dialogues that make up discourse in a household and beyond. But in the era of digital technology, the elements that make up this information and communication system — the “patterned, meaningful messages” — are being atomised into individual fragments. What does this mean for news? What does this mean for families? What does this mean for the industries that provide news to families? With these questions in mind, I conclude this chapter and set off in search of the answers.



Fig 7: *A young user, accustomed to the touchscreen interface of an iPad, attempts to swipe the page of a print magazine in this still from a 2011 YouTube video entitled "A magazine is an iPad that does not work".*

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 The Boundary Between Public and Private Spheres

We learn from history that history doesn't repeat itself, as much as it revolves, and that in these revolutions, the gears grind to the impetus of one generation turning against the next. In his book, *The Laws of Human Nature*, the author Robert Greene credits the fourteenth-century Islamic scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332 - 1406), with the theory that history appears to move in four acts, corresponding to four generations (Greene, 2019: 596). The generation of revolutionaries gives way to a generation that craves order, in turn giving way to a generation of pragmatists, followed by a generation of cynics, followed once again by a generation of revolutionaries who seek to tear the old order down and start afresh. Strauss and Howe dub these cycles as "turnings" (1997: 12), with each cycle spanning up to a century, echoing history's seasonal rhythms of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction. Against this background, I set out in this chapter to examine the ways in which two generations, the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964 (Strauss and Howe, 1991: 219), and the Millennials, born between 1982 and 2002 (Strauss and Howe, 2019: 40) engage with and turn against each other in their understanding and use of media as sources of everyday news and information.

### **2.1.2 Bringing Habermas into the Family Home**

In part, this study is motivated by a perceived gap in the literature of intra-family news consumption, usage, and sharing, specifically in the South African context, but I will begin with a broader look at the contrast between what Habermas called the "public sphere", being the domain of society where individuals can come together to express their opinions, converse, and form a public (Habermas, 1991: 398) and the private space of the home environment.

Livingstone, considering the relationship between audiences and publics (2005: 20) argues that the common use of spatial metaphors to distinguish between public and private can lead to confusion. She raises the example of a family holding a discussion after watching the news on television, and ponders whether this would be an instance of public debate or audience reception, and whether it makes any difference if such a discussion occurs in the privacy of the living room or outside the home.

## **2.2 The Media-Rich Bedroom**

It was Habermas who proposed the "intimate sphere of the bourgeois family" (1991: 28) as the genesis of an economy of ideas and interpersonal relationships. When this tradition became more public and moved beyond the family to the salons and coffeehouses of 18th Century European life, a "public sphere", as theorised by Habermas, came into being. The Internet has added a virtual dimension to this realm of discourse, returning the sphere more firmly to the public and private space it once occupied (Papacharissi, 2002), where the "fuzzy boundary between the two" (Bruns and Highfield, 2016: 62) is being blurred all the more by the "publically private" nature of social media platforms. In an age when families are left to their own devices, with constant streaming of content to personal taste on smartphones, laptops, and tablets, there has been a shift to the sanctity of the private space, where, in the words of one young respondent, "you can switch your mind off from everything that's happening" (Gibson et al., 2013: 132).

### **2.2.1 Looking at Facebook by the Light of Habermas**

While Habermas conceived of the public sphere as a physical gathering space where civic deliberation could take place among educated property-owners, outside the influence of powerful

state and commercial interests (1991), he could not have foreseen the advent of a non-physical, “virtual” sphere, where public discourse could be enabled and facilitated by the wonder of networked communication technologies. And yet, argues Drake (2018: 5), in the public sphere of Habermas, where a “new public, comprised of middle and upper class individuals, was effectively reading and debating about itself, holding up a mirror to itself and society”, we find a foreshadowing of Facebook as a public space in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Drake notes Habermas’s observation that there are two politically relevant forms of communication. One consists of informal, everyday interactions that involve personal, non-public opinions, along with often-discussed topics that amount to “small talk” under the influence of mass media. The second form of communication, more formal and institutionalised, is normally generated through government or corporate bureaucracies. Although Facebook serves primarily as a platform for sharing small talk, Drake contends that it is well suited to meet Habermas’ three core requirements for a public sphere (7). These are: social interaction that disregards status; discussion that problematises areas previously unquestioned; and inclusivity in principle. We might thus conclude that in the private sphere of the family household, technology opens the portals to the public sphere of debate and discussion, as envisioned by Habermas.

### **2.2.2 Parents as Models of News Consumption Behaviours**

As Livingstone (2002: 39) notes, the traditional notion of the living-room as the epicentre of family communication is giving way to the “well-equipped, media-rich bedroom” in which children fashion their worlds of information. This is not to suggest that Millennial youth only ever engage with technology as a means of retreat and escape. The Media Insight Project (American Press Institute, 2015) reveals that American Millennials are avid, active consumers of “hard news, lifestyle news, and practical ‘news you can use’”. The study adds that Millennials are also influenced in their engagement with news by their peers, who might recommend and contextualise news on social networks, as well as on more private platforms such as group texts and instant-messaging applications. In the home environment, Edgerly et al. (2017: 1265) contend that parents can play a key role in modelling news-consumption behaviours to their children. In “news rich” environments, where parents explicitly communicate the value of news and reinforce that value through their own media-consumption behaviour, children are more

likely to develop a preference for news, the authors add. They further note the importance of "visibility" in modelling such behaviours (1267), stating that parents who consume news privately, on their desktop or mobile devices, may have less influence on the media habits of their children.

## 2.3 News-Seekers and News-Avoiders

At the same time, ubiquitous access to technology can be a source of conflict in families, which today exist within "multigenerational networks of great complexity" (Galvin et al., 2015: 228). The authors add that families now need to communicate not only with technology, but about technology, having to contend with such issues as who owns and has access to computers and mobile devices, and how much time they spend with technology, as opposed to spending time with family. Livingstone argues, however (2005: 9) that the "privatised media space" of the bedroom can offer positive opportunities for social interaction, saturated with multimedia images and sounds, despite adult concerns that children are isolating or wasting their time. Quoting the German sociologist Karl Mannheim, an early proponent of generational theory (*The Problem of Generations*, 1928), Bolin and Westlund (2009: 111) note the importance of "fresh contacts" made by youth when they are confronted by a novelty of some sort. Since young people by definition tend to be lacking in experience when compared to older people, these fresh contacts, such as those made with new technologies, will have a deeper impact on the young, particularly those aged between 16 and 22, the authors add.

### 2.3.1 Digital Platforms and the Formation of Identity

Several studies have noted that the advent of digital and mobile technologies has not necessarily led to a parallel rise in news consumption by young users, even if, as Valenza et al note (2019: 1097) the lives of teenagers in the 21st Century are deeply mediated, with digital platforms proving central to social relationships and the formation of identity. Young people do not necessarily develop an automatic interest in public affairs information as they move into adulthood, contend the authors. Rather, they develop the basic motives and skills needed for valuing and engaging with news media, including the abilities to understand and process

journalistic information. In a study into news habits among adolescents, Shehata (2016: 760) draws a distinction between "news-seekers", who follow news and current affairs extensively across multiple platforms, and "news-avoiders", who prefer to tune out altogether from news about politics and current affairs, in part because of the greater range of content choices in the contemporary media environment. In the quest to turn news avoiders into seekers of news, Shehata echoes previous scholars in noting that "parents' own new habits matter" (763). In homes where news consumption is a routine activity, younger members are more likely to add newspapers and broadcast news to their daily media diet, the author adds.

## **2.4 A Three-Stage News Consumption Model**

Turning specifically to the South African context, Ndlovu (2015: 2) observes that news consumption by young adults has been progressively declining since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. The author's chief concern regarding this phenomenon is the desertion, by young adults, of certain categories of content that play a key role in fostering informed citizenship. "It is because young adults are shying away from political and economic stories — events that fall within the categories of business, politics and government, public and international affairs — that they are being qualified as uninformed," the author contends (4). In exploring reasons for this shying away from news, Ndlovu observes a common refrain that young adults "don't have time" to consume news, a contention he dismisses on the grounds that they do seem to make time for other social activities (6). "It should be argued that young adults far more lack motivation to consume traditional news than they surely lack time," the author concludes.

### **2.4.1 Nibbling Away at the News**

In an American study into news-consumption habits among university students aged from 18 to 25, Antunovic et al (2016: 8) encountered a similar justification for not taking time to read or watch news, with respondents saying it was hard to stay "on top of everything that's going on", and their schedules were "too hectic" to "just sit". However, the authors also noted a variety of habits that allowed their young respondents to consume news with ease on the move. They

classify these habits as a three-stage model of news-consumption (4 - 5), consisting of the following discrete and sometimes overlapping patterns: 1) Routine surveillance, being the simple practise of routine news checking; 2) Incidental exposure, a process of serendipitously encountering news while looking for other information; and 3) Directed consumption, which is the act of seeking out additional information on a story. A further news-consumption practise, categorised and studied by Molyneux (2018: 2) is "snacking" the news on mobile devices. Citing Sauvageau (2012), the author notes that young adults in particular tend to "nibble away at the news, whenever and wherever they feel like it. They prefer frequent news snacks to regular full meals. They take the news, shape it, comment on it, and exchange it with their 'friends' on Facebook or via Twitter". Snacking the news in this way, contends Molyneux (4) can lead to such consumers being "less knowledgeable about public affairs and less engaged in public life".

Molyneux's study revealed that people spent an average of 12 minutes on mobile news, before moving on to another activity on their phones (18). One option for news companies to make the most of this time, the author suggests, is to cut down on the length of news offerings, even at the expense of detail and nuance. Be this as it may, a more fundamental question presents itself for consideration at this juncture, given the centrality of news consumption and sharing to the intent and meaning of this research project. And that is the question of how we define "news" itself, all the more so in an era when the "social flow of information", as Kovach & Rosenstiel put it (2001: 28) proceeds unimpeded around the clock on multiple platforms, channels, and devices.

#### **2.4.2 News is What Happens When a Man Bites a Dog**

For generations of journalists, the meaning of news has long been crystallised in an old newsroom aphorism about a supposed encounter between a man and a dog. The aphorism has been attributed to Charles Anderson Dana, editor of the New York Sun at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, who was once asked, "what constitutes news?" To which Dana replied (QuoteInvestigator.com, 2013): "If you should see a dog biting a man, don't write it up. But if you should see a man biting a dog, spare not money, men nor telegraph tolls to get the details to the Sun office."

By this definition, news is the extraordinary, the unexpected, the opposite of the commonplace and the mundane. In a paper entitled *What Is News?*, based on an address to the Royal Society of Arts in March 1982, the television broadcaster and later diplomat, Peter Jay, answered the age-old question as follows (Jay, 1982: 606): “The fact that a camellia bloomed in my garden this morning, though not predictable, is too trivial an occurrence to be included in the news.” He goes on to concede, however, that were he to publish a daily news sheet to his own household, then “this floral occurrence might assume quite adequate significance to be included therein”. From this we may infer that relevance to the interests of a specific audience is a key criterion of newsworthiness, especially in the context of a modern household, where a family might share such news on a digital platform such as WhatsApp.

### 2.4.3 A Contemporary Taxonomy of News Values

Indeed, in a re-assessment and contemporary updating of a landmark study on the taxonomy of news, *The Structure of Foreign News*, by Galtung & Ruge (1965: 64 – 90), Harcup & O’Neill identify Relevance — “Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience” — as one of a set of 10 news values that can be used to guide the process of selecting news. The other news values in the set are: The Power Elite (Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions); Celebrity (Stories concerning people who are already famous); Entertainment (Stories concerning sex, showbusiness, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines); Surprise (Stories which have an element of surprise and/or contrast); Bad news (Stories with negative overtones such as conflict or tragedy); Good news (Stories with positive overtones such as rescues and cures); Magnitude (Stories which are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact); Follow-ups (Stories about subjects already in the news); and Newspaper agenda (Stories which set or fit the news organisation’s own agenda). On this basis, as I will further explore in my findings chapter, “news” can be seen to encompass a fluid, dynamic, and broad range of items of hyperlocal, local, regional, national, and global interest, all the way from the passing of a major political figure, to a celebrity’s battle with addiction, to an announcement of a tour of South Africa by a Texan punk

rock band. News, therefore, can be broadly defined as anything that stirs your interest, takes you by surprise, and is worth sharing in and beyond the family household.

I conclude this chapter with a further observation from the South African researcher, Ndlovu (2015: 13) who states the case for parents to be "more conscious" in encouraging their children and young adults to consume news, and to continue the time-honoured practise of informal discussions about the news of the day, as a way of bonding across the generations and reinforcing the importance of news-consumption in shaping the informed citizens of the future.

## Chapter 3

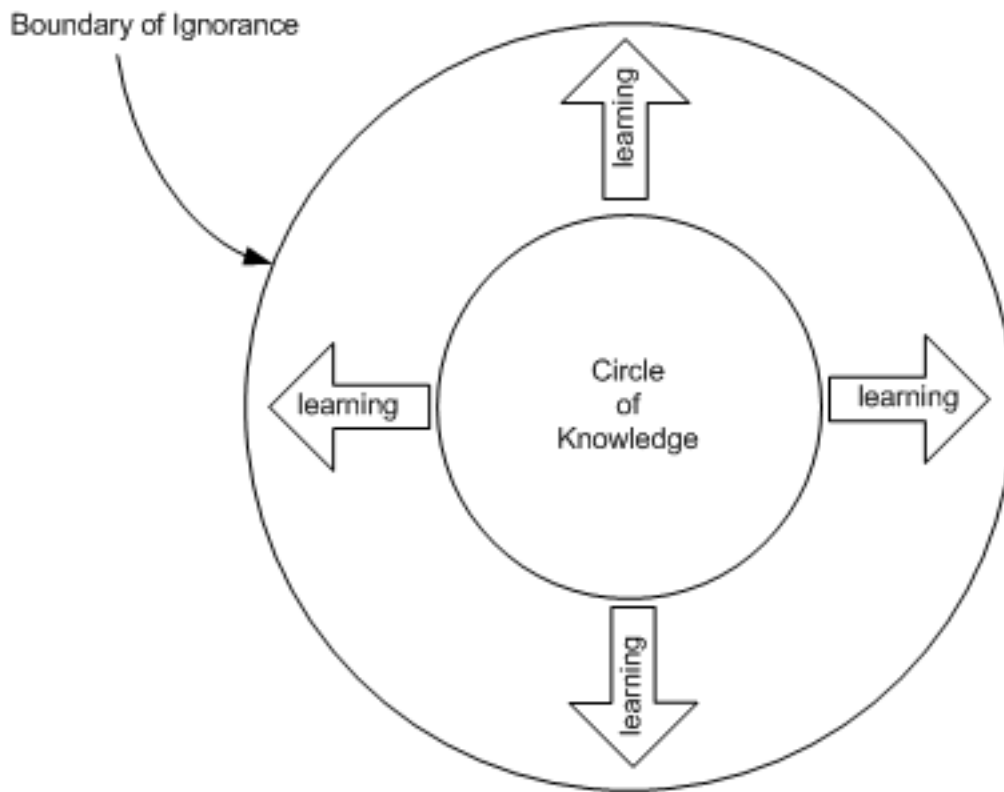
### Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction: A Pathway to Knowing

Research, in its most basic form, can be described as a journey from not knowing to knowing, from curiosity to enlightenment, from enquiry to revelation. But it is also, as Goddard and Melville (1996: 1-4) remind us, a process of “expanding the boundaries of our ignorance”. The more we learn about a given subject in a given field, therefore, the more we come to realise how much more we have to learn. This may come as a daunting insight to the researcher who is about to set off on a journey, the main purpose of which is to “find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet” (Patel & Patel, 2019).

Nonetheless, by following in the footsteps of scholars who have methodically marked out the trail of research theory over the years, we will be well-equipped to brave the first steps, on a pathway illuminated by the light of enquiry. In this chapter, I will map out the route I have chosen to put my central research question to the test: “Within purposively selected South African family households with Internet connectivity, how do Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news with each other?” I will begin by examining the paradigm and design that inform and underpin my research, before exploring the qualitative method that signposts the way on this journey to knowing.

I will explain the philosophy and process of the purposive selection of participants for this study, and the choice of semi-structured interviewing as my research strategy. I will then elaborate on the process of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) by which I seek to distil meaning from the raw data I have gathered. The chapter concludes with a focus on the ethical boundaries and guidelines that are of relevance to my study.



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Fig 8: *A concept of research as an ever-expanding, non-linear journey from what we know to what we don't know, and beyond. Diagram by Jim McGee, of the Quinlan School of Business, Loyola University, Chicago.*

## 3.2 Research paradigm: An Interpretivist Approach to Understanding

Working from the proposition that research is a way of finding stories from which we can draw meaning, I open this section with a story told by the social sciences researcher, Michael Quinn Patton (2002: 3). A scholar who lived in a country with no fruit trees journeys to a faraway land. He finds an orchard where the apple trees are in blossom. He plucks a blossom from a tree, and puts it in his mouth. He dislikes the texture and the taste. He samples another blossom, then another, and another. He returns to his home country, and reports to his fellow villagers that fruit is a much-overrated food. From this we learn the lesson that a researcher's journey may well prove fruitless, if they don't know what they are looking for from the outset.

In order to distinguish the spring blossom from the summer fruit, to extend the analogy, we need to tackle our research problem at its root. This is where we plant the seeds of the paradigm. Earl Babbie (2007: 32) defines paradigms as the fundamental frames of reference that underlie social theory and inquiry. While paradigms themselves don't explain anything, adds Babbie, they provide "ways of looking" that can help us to make sense of the world. Before we embark on this exercise, we will pause to consider Johann Mouton's theory (Mouton 2000: 137) that researchers operate not in one world, but in three.

### 3.2.1 Considering the Three Worlds Framework

This Three Worlds Framework posits World 1 as the world of everyday life and lay knowledge, where we live as "ordinary human beings in multiple contexts" (Mouton 2000: 139). World 2 is the world of science and scientific research, where phenomena from World 1 are transformed into objects of systematic and rigorous enquiry. Finally, there is World 3, the world of meta-science, where research decisions are submitted to critical reflection in order to ascertain truthful and valid results. In contemplating this framework, I note that my research question is anchored in World 1, in the context of everyday family behaviours and interactions, centred around the consumption and sharing of news.

In making the transition to World 2, where I enquire into these patterns of behaviour and interaction, I will adopt what is known as the interpretive paradigm of research, where the social world is seen as being the creative construction of human beings (Jackson 1982: 18). This stands

in contrast to the positivist paradigm, in which the natural scientist engages with observable reality in society, leading to the production of generalisations (Alharahsheh 2020: 41).

In studying the social world, adds Jackson (1982: 18), we cannot follow the method of the natural sciences; instead, we try subjectively to "understand the point of view and the intentions of the human actors who construct that social world". This process is often referred to in the social sciences by the German term, "Verstehen", as popularised by the sociologist Max Weber, in its meaning of the social scientist's attempt to understand both the intention and the context of human action (Elwell 1996). Against this background, my quest as a researcher is to explore and interrogate the ways in which a subset of human actors use news to make sense of the world in and around which they live their daily lives.

### **3.3 Research design: Qualifying the Qualitative Model**

If research is a journey to a place of knowing and understanding, then it follows that we need a map to get there. Design is the method we use to plan the route and draw the map. But the wayfarer will need a guide too, and here I turn first of all to Babbie (2007: 92 - 94) who triangulates the purposes of research as a point of origin for the journey. He sets out Exploration, in which the researcher starts to familiarise themselves with their topic of interest; Description, in which the researcher observes, and then describes what was observed; and Explanation, in which the researcher answers questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why. This quintet of questions, informally known as the 5Ws and 1H (Waisbord 2019: 351 - 358), are a matter of routine in journalistic practice, as tenets of the scope of information a story should contain, ideally in its opening paragraph or paragraphs.

But their origin can be traced much further back, at least as far as the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 - 322BC), who wrote in his Third Book of Ethics (Aristotle, trans. Ross 1966: 1372): "For in acts we must take note of who did it, by what aids or instruments he did it (with), what he did, where he did it, why he did it, how and when he did it." Applying this method to my own research question, I can deconstruct it as follows: Who (Baby Boomers and Millennials); Where (purposively selected South African family households); What (the consumption and sharing of news); When (the frequency of such consumption and sharing); How (the ways in which news is

consumed and shared in family households); and Why (the motives for choosing which news, from which platforms and channels, to consume and share).

### **3.3.1 A Gleaning of Rich and Thick Insights**

Of the three main approaches to research design, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods research, as outlined by Creswell (2009: 4), I have selected the qualitative model, which is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In the qualitative process, the researcher collects data in the participants' setting, analyses the data from particulars to general themes, and makes interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell).

As Babbie notes, individual human beings are the most typical "units of analysis" (Babbie 2007: 100) of social science research, although we learn from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 311) that there is more to this mode of enquiry than establishing rapport, selecting informants, mapping fields, and transcribing texts. Rather, borrowing a phrase from the English philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, Geertz defines the essence of the ethnographic enterprise as "thick description" (Geertz 1973: 312).

In his famous lecture on the subject, Ryle (1968) asks us to interrogate what someone is doing when they make such a seemingly commonplace statement as, "Today is the 3rd of February". In the thinnest possible description, they are simply saying something. But in thick description, among other possibilities, they might be telling us the date, they might be translating from another language, or they might be giving an enemy a piece of misinformation. By using qualitative research as our strategy of enquiry, we have the opportunity not only to get to our place of knowing and understanding, but to glean rich, thick insights into human behaviour and meaning along the way.

### **3.4 Research methods: The Doing and the Knowing**

Before knowledge can emerge from a process of qualitative research and analysis, it is a given that the researcher needs to know what they are doing. But more than that, as Miles & Huberman

(1984: 20) advise, "you need to know how your model of knowing affects what you are doing". In this section, I focus on my model of knowing, beginning with the purposive selection of participants, and moving into the motives and methods of semi-structured interviewing of informants, before taking a closer look at the Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) of the resulting data.

### **3.4.1 Purposively selecting participants: The Criteria for Sampling**

Shortly after my thesis research proposal was approved by the School of Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) at Rhodes University, I uploaded a short post on the subject of media consumption and usage habits to my Facebook wall (Silber, 2017). The purpose of this short post, 622 words in length, was twofold. Firstly, I was hoping to engage my Facebook friends and followers in an informal yet broad-ranging discussion of the means and methods we use to access, absorb, and share news in the digital era. While I identified myself as a researcher in the post, it did not form part of my formal interviewing process, and I did not use any of the Facebook responses in my findings. Secondly, I was hoping that among the discussants, there would be suitable candidates who I could approach to take part in my formal field research.

Purposive selection or sampling of this nature is virtually synonymous with qualitative research, as Ted Palys (2008: 697) notes, before adding that the process of deciding on a sampling strategy must begin with careful introspection on the part of the researcher. By asking themselves what they want to accomplish, and what they want to know, researchers will be able to choose the sampling strategy that best suits their needs. My answers to this self-interrogation were: 1) I want to test the proposition that the advent of digital technologies and media has significantly influenced the way families consume, use, and share news across the generational divide; and 2) I want to know what Baby Boomers and Millennials think about the role of news in their everyday lives, and what means they employ to find out and share what is happening in the world around and beyond them.

Since my research question specified certain criteria for the purposive selectivity of participants, I chose to apply a qualitative research strategy known as Criterion Sampling to my quest. This involves searching for cases or individuals who meet a certain criterion (Palys). The first

criterion I sought to fulfill was geographic, based on the principle, as Bernard (2002: 120) explains, that people act out their lives in more or less natural groups or clusters, such as geographic areas. By sampling from such clusters, the field of possibilities can be narrowed from "large, heterogeneous chunks to small, homogeneous ones that are relatively easy to find" (Bernard). I focussed my search on an area of Johannesburg that is close to where I stay, and that would eventually cover a radius of some 18 kilometres. Within this expanse, I was able to purposively select a total of five families, consisting of Baby Boomer parents in their late 40s or 50s, and Millennial offspring with a minimum age of 18, as per Rhodes University ethical policy guidelines on research involving minors.

### 3.4.2 A Blurring of the Boundaries Between Generations

Here I pause to note a certain blurring of the boundaries in defining the birth years of these generational cohorts. While it is generally accepted, for instance, that Millennials are the generation born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019), the generational theorists Strauss and Howe, in *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2009: 40) argue that 2002 should be regarded as the "final birth year" of this cohort. This would place the youngest informants for my study firmly in the Millennial camp at the time the interviews were conducted. As Dimock (2019) reminds us, "generational cutoff points aren't an exact science". This view is reinforced by Campbell et al (2017: 131) who make a case for "generational fuzziness", based on four psychological models — cultural, persuasion, personality, and social contagion — that shape the identity of generations, who in turn go on to shape culture in their own way. In this dimensional view of generational theory, the identity of individuals in a birth cohort is moulded by the gradual impact of historical shifts and cultural changes, rather than by the strictly defined boundaries of their birth years (131). Culture, rather than chronology, is thus the force that binds the generations. In this context, I note further that none of the participants for this study expressed any opposition to being identified as either Baby Boomers or Millennials, for purposes of the study.

A further criterion for my purposive selection was that the participating families should have access to Internet connectivity, whether via fixed broadband at home, or via mobile data on smartphones. This was in order to ensure that all participants in the research would have equal

and ubiquitous access to the widest possible range of news platforms, channels, and media options. In order for the data in a study to be reliable, notes Seidler (cited by Tongco 2007: 152), a purposive sample should consist of at least five informants. (I note here that the term "informants" has a special meaning in social sciences research. Bernard (2002: 149) draws a distinction between respondents, who respond to survey questions; subjects, who are the subject of some experiment; and informants, who tell you what they think you need to know.) My sample of five families consisted in total of 17 informants, made up of eight Baby Boomers, and nine Millennials.

### **3.4.3 The Process of Purposive Selection**

I was conscious throughout the purposive selection process of the need to find a diverse range of families, not only in terms of race, but in terms of family structure, including two-parent families, single-parent families, and so-called "blended" families, incorporating fostered or adopted children from other races. My final criterion for the sampling was that the younger and older members of each family needed to be living as far as possible in the same household, so that their news consumption and usage habits could be examined as communal as well as individual activities. With these criteria in mind, I began the process of purposive selection by combing through the responses to the abovementioned Facebook post. There were 112 comments on the post, and from these, I selected two commenters who appeared to suit my criteria. I approached them via Facebook Messenger, and they agreed to participate in my research.

I found a further three families via personal recommendation from within my own family, and from conversations with friends, neighbours, and members of our broader community. I contacted potential informants via WhatsApp, introducing myself as a researcher and explaining the nature of my research. I then followed up with emails in which I provided my research question as well as an outline of themes and topics for discussion. I also made it clear that participants in the research would not be identified by name, and that they would be able to withdraw from the interviews at any stage without needing to give reasons for doing so. My purposive selection of informants for the study consisted of the following:

**Family A:** A single mother in her 50s, working in the media and communications field, and her teenage daughter, a university student, aged 18.

**Family B:** A two-parent family, both in their 50s, mother working in the commercial property field, and father working in Information Technology. Two sons, one a university student aged 20, the other a matric student aged 18.

**Family C:** A two-parent family, both in their 50s, father running a digital communications consultancy, and mother involved in freelance work and community projects. One son, aged 19, in university, one daughter, aged 18, in matric (Grade 12), and one foster child, aged 18, also in Grade 12.

**Family D:** A two-parent family, both in their 50s, mother working in financial services, and father a high school teacher. One son, aged 19, a university student.

**Family E:** A two-parent family of West African origin, with the father living and working abroad, and the mother, in her 50s, working as a social and healthcare researcher. One daughter, aged 19, in university, and one son, aged 27, a university student.

I interviewed each family at a time convenient to them, in the early evening, in their home environment. Three of the families chose to be interviewed in the lounge/living-room of their home, and the other two families chose to be interviewed in the kitchen area. Each interview lasted between two to three hours. For purposes of clarity and soliciting further information, I subsequently re-interviewed some of the families by email, or in person. I recorded the interviews using the Just Press Record app on my iPhone, and simultaneously recorded them using the built-in Voice Memos app on my iPad, for purposes of redundancy. I informed all the participating families that I would be recording the interviews, for the sake of accuracy and subsequent analysis. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim, using an online transcription service.

### 3.5 Semi-structured interviews and questions: Finding Purpose Through Conversation

Humans are a curious species. As social animals, we seek to satisfy our curiosity using a tool, refined over millennia of evolution, that is in effect "a high-fidelity code for transmitting detailed information down the generations" (Pagel 2017: 64). This tool is language. In its spoken form, we employ it spontaneously and instinctively in our everyday interactions, even if, as Longhurst (2006: 104) points out, our free-flowing conversations are sometimes flawed by our tendencies to "talk too quickly, not listen carefully enough, and interrupt others". Hence, in the realm of the social sciences, there is a perceived need to impose some form of order and structure on the conversations we conduct as part of our research, without altogether impeding their natural freedom of flow. The British sociologist, Sir Robert Burgess, reminds us that interviews are "conversations with a purpose" (Burgess 1984: 102). To be precise, an unstructured interview resembles a conversation more than it does an interview, and is thought to be a "controlled conversation," which is skewed towards the interests of the interviewer.

With this in mind, Burgess notes that most field researchers favour the unstructured or semi-structured style of interviewing, which allows conversations to emerge organically from a series of set themes and topics. As opposed to more rigid question and answer sessions, such conversations can provide rich and detailed data, adds Burgess, who also pauses to contemplate the value of the informal interview as "an agreeable form of social intercourse" (Webb & Webb, cited in Burgess 1984: 102). At the same time, the semi-structured interview puts the interviewer in control of what they want from an interview (Bernard, 2011: 158), while leaving room for both parties in the process to follow new leads. Since face-to-face interviews are a form of "synchronous communication" (Opdenakker 2006), meaning that interviewer and subject are in the same place at the same time, they offer the researcher the further advantage of active insight into social cues, such as voice, intonation, and body language.

#### 3.5.1 Comparing the Realist and Idealist Approaches to Interviewing

Beyond these physical cues, the qualitative interviewer will also have access to the attitudes, values, and feelings of their subject (Byrne 2004: 211), allowing for the prospect of greater depth and complexity in the telling. Byrne draws a key distinction between the realist approach to

interviewing, which emphasises neutrality, generalisability, and statistical representability through survey-style data collection (Byrne 2004: 208), and the idealist approach, which tends to regard interview data as one of many possible representations of the world. In this model, the researcher is in effect seen as a co-producer of the data (Byrne), rather than a neutral party in the process. It is in the interaction between researcher and interviewee (Mason cited in Byrne 2004: 208) that the data are jointly produced, for later reflection, elucidation, and analysis.

While it is only in the academic context that I have come to acquaint myself with the formal taxonomy of qualitative research interviewing styles, I realise on reflection that the semi-structured interview has long been my default operating method as a journalist in the field. Armed with recording device, and notebook inscribed with a list of open-ended questions, subdivided into themes and topics, the researcher is like a driver who sets off on a journey with a full tank of petrol and a map.

The map is not the territory, as the scientist and philosopher Alfred Korzybski (1933) tells us, as a caution not to mistake an abstract representation of an object or process with the concrete reality of what it represents. Nonetheless, the map in this analogy offers us a way to reach our destination — the endpoint of "meaning" through qualitative inquiry, as Patton (2002: 1) describes it. Along the way, we will have ample opportunity to meander, linger, side-track, double-back, and follow the long and winding scenic route we have chosen to take us there. Here, in the form of a series of semi-structured interview questions, are the waypoints of my journey of face-to-face research for this thesis.

## **3.5.2 Narrowing Down the Interview Questions for Baby Boomers and Millennials**

### **3.5.2.1 Questions of Habit**

- 1) How often, on a typical day, do you actively seek out and consume news from any source or platform?
- 2) How important is it to you to begin or end your day by catching up on the news?

- 3) How often during the course of a typical day do you actively check news sites or social media platforms on your phone?
- 4) In your free time, how likely are you to consult a news source or social media platform to find out the latest news?
- 5) What role does news and the discussions of news play in your everyday interaction with the other family members in your household?

#### **3.5.2.2 Questions of Sources & Platforms**

- 1) What is the first news source you would turn to in order to find out what was happening in your community and beyond?
- 2) What is your preferred social network for finding out and commenting on the news of the day?
- 3) Do you watch broadcast news on television, and if so, what is your preferred news channel?
- 4) Do you read print newspapers or their online editions, and if so, which publication or publications do you prefer?
- 5) Do you listen to any radio stations to catch up on the news of the day, and if so, which channel or channels do you prefer?

#### **3.5.2.3 Questions of Influence**

- 1) To what extent do you rely on other members of your family household to keep you informed on the news of the day?
- 2) How important is it to you to share news with other members of your family household?
- 3) Can you recall a particular news item that you immediately shared with other members of your family when you read, saw, or heard about it?

- 4) Which member of your family would you say is most likely to inform the rest of the household about a news event or item of interest?
- 5) How would you rate the importance of keeping up with the latest news in your list of daily priorities and interests?

#### **3.5.2.4 Questions of Trust**

- 1) How much trust do you generally have in the news you read or watch?
- 2) To what extent do you find it necessary to verify the truth and accuracy of a news item before you share it?
- 3) What means would you use to verify a news item if you felt it was fake, inaccurate, or untrustworthy?
- 4) What news source or platform, if any, would you regard as inherently trustworthy and credible?
- 5) How much trust do you place in the news you hear from other family members?

#### **3.5.2.5 Questions of Sharing**

- 1) How often do you share or comment on news on social media?
- 2) What is your preferred social media platform, if any, for sharing or commenting on the news of the day?
- 3) What network or app would you use as a first choice to share news with other members of your family household?
- 4) What issues, aspects, or areas of news are important enough for you to consider sharing with other members of your family household?
- 5) Do you have any particular concerns about the sharing of news on social networks, and if so, what are your concerns?

### 3.6 Thematic Content Analysis: Towards an Alchemy of Understanding

The alchemists of the medieval era sought to transmute base metals into gold, a magical and elusive process called to mind by Patton (2002: 432) as an analogy for the challenges of qualitative analysis and interpretation. While modern alchemy aims merely to transform raw data into knowledge, the "coin of the information age", as Patton puts it, the analogy begs a question: what process must the modern alchemist follow to give the shine of insight to their stockpile of unsorted, unrefined gleanings from the field? Patton describes this as a sense-making process, involving the reduction of the volume of raw information, the sifting of trivia from significance, the identification of significant patterns, and the construction of a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton 2004: 432).

For the alchemists of old, the formula for a hoped-for transmutation of one substance into another was a mythical elixir called the Philosopher's Stone (Highfield 2011). For the modern-day alchemist of information, the formula is TCA, or Thematic Content Analysis. Here the researcher sets out to identify themes in textual or other material, using a method described by Anderson (2011: 1) as "low hovering" over the data. In practise, where the researcher is working with transcripts of qualitative interviews, such hovering leads naturally to highlighting, using coloured markers on hard copy, or electronic markers on a screen. From these highlights, grouped and distilled by theme, distinct units of meaning (Anderson 2011: 2) will begin to emerge, for further labelling, categorising, and analysis.

This is the process I followed in my Thematic Content Analysis of the more than 22,000 words of transcribed text, representing more than 12 hours of face-to-face semi-structured interviews, for my research into news consumption and sharing habits across generations in five family households. I combed through the data in search of commonalities and divergences in the way Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news, whether through print or digital publications, electronic broadcast media, social media platforms, messaging apps, or word of mouth. I sought to identify specific news consumption behaviours in each household and each generational grouping, and categorised and labelled these for analysis.

### 3.6.1 Using a Flow Model to Code the Data

An important element of Thematic Content Analysis is the coding of data, and here I used a series of alphanumeric identifiers to label the units of meaning. This is a process that can be facilitated through the use of computer software, but I chose rather to follow the advice of Bengtsson (2016: 12), who argues that computer programs are soulless software, and that the creativity of the human being is required. While this suggests some form of artistry in the process of qualitative analysis, we are reminded by Miles & Huberman (1984: 20) that the researcher is not so much an artist giving shape to inchoate material, as an intense observer scrupulously recording social interactions from which patterns may be inferred and interpreted.

For guidance in this process, I have used the "flow model" recommended by Miles & Huberman (1984: 23), which separates qualitative analysis into three concurrent flows of activity. These are as follows:

- 1) **Data reduction**, the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that appear in edited field notes;
- 2) **Data display**, which is the organised assembly of information that permits conclusion-drawing and action-taking; and
- 3) **Conclusion-drawing and verification**, through which meaning is drawn from the reduced and displayed data, which are then verified and tested for plausibility, robustness, sturdiness, and validity.

Thus, from the morass of highlighted words and codes on my screen, I attempt to derive meaning, and transmute it, through analysis, into the currency of knowledge.

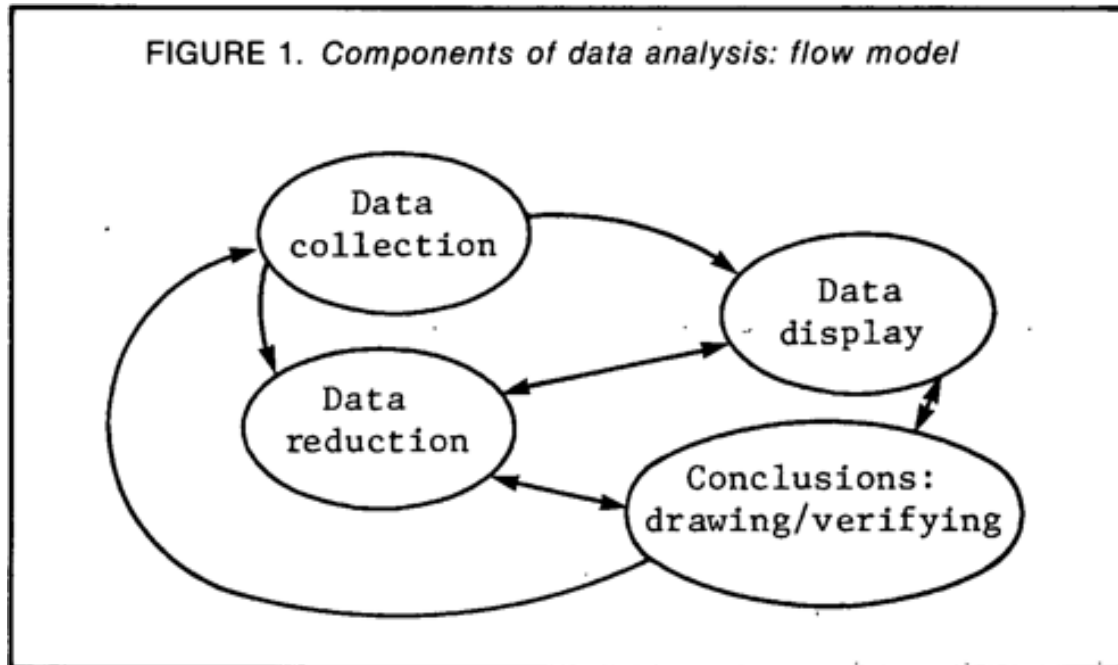


Fig 9: Miles & Huberman's "flow model" of qualitative analysis, in which data flows from collection to display to the drawing and verification of conclusions.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations: Tensions and Protocols

Any research involving human subjects will need to take cognisance of the prospect of human frailty, on the part of the subject as well as the researcher. Possible concerns, as identified in a study on ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews (Allmark et al., 2009: 48 - 53) include an imbalance of power between interviewer and interviewee, the worry that tape-recorded interviews may later be open to public scrutiny, and the need to balance transparency and open discussion with the privacy and anonymity of respondents.

Given that the research process "creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations for the good of others, and the rights of participants" (Orb et al., 2000: 93), it is imperative that researchers familiarise themselves with ethical principles of research in general, and in particular with the ethical protocols prescribed by the relevant academic institution. With this in mind, I have been guided in my research for this study by the Rhodes University Policy on Ethics (Rhodes University, 2014), specifically Section II, which concerns itself with Research on Human Participants (Rhodes University 2014: 21 - 26).

My research proposal, in which I confirmed that I would not be interviewing any minor persons under the age of 18 years, was granted ethical clearance by the Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) through the University's research ethics vetting processing, after which I was given permission to proceed with my research. In my initial contact, via WhatsApp text messages, with the purposively selected subjects for my study, I introduced myself as a Master's candidate in Journalism from Rhodes University.

In line with the abovementioned ethics policy, I explained the nature of my research, and its intended purpose and possible usefulness in the field of research into media consumption and sharing among different generations in the South African context. I outlined the process of interviewing, including the likely amount of time that would be required for the semi-structured interviews to be conducted in situ at the participants' homes. I further explained that participants in the study would not be identified by their real names or other details, and that they would be free to withdraw from the interview process at any time, without penalty or the need to give any reason for doing so.

After gaining verbal consent from the participants, 17 in total across five separate family groups in northern and northwestern Johannesburg, I arranged the interview sessions at a time convenient to them. A few days before conducting the interviews, I sent the participants, via email, a selection of questions for their consideration, along with my key research question, which I repeat here for ease of reference: "Within purposively selected South African family households with Internet connectivity, how do Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news with each other?"

On the evening of the interview sessions, I once again outlined the nature, purpose, and process of the research, and asked each participant if they would be prepared to grant informed consent for me to conduct the interviews. Each participant then read and signed a standard Academic Research Information and Consent Form, as supplied to me by Rhodes University. None of the 17 participants attached any conditions to their signed granting of permission, and none subsequently withdrew from the interviewing process.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and Observations

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the Baby Boomer and Millennial informants from the five families that were purposively selected to share their thoughts, views, and experiences on news-consumption and sharing across the generations in the digital era. Using thematic data analysis of the interview material, I analyse the way individuals and families use media to find news of interest in and beyond their communities. I use an avian analogy, based on the notion that birds are "nature's newsmongers", to identify and discuss certain news-consumption behaviours practised by my informants, and I further consider the attitudes each generation displays towards printed media and social media as platforms and sources for news and information.

I examine the phenomenon of WhatsApp as the single application used by all family members, across the generational divide, to communicate on a daily basis and to distribute news when a significant local, national, or global event occurs. I explore the theme of active antipathy to social media, or "social mediapathy", as I label it, on the part of Millennial informants who see no point in sharing their status updates, news, or views on the big social networks. Finally, I return to the key research question and conclude my findings with a general observation on the

divergences and commonalities of the ways in which Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news in family households.

## 4.2 Introducing the Families

Over the space of approximately eight months in 2018, I conducted in-depth interviews with five purposively selected families, consisting of Baby Boomer and Millennial members, for my study into news-consumption and sharing habits and behaviours across the generational divide. These semi-structured interviews took place in the home environments of each family, in an area of Johannesburg spanning some 18 kilometres in radius. As noted in my Methodology chapter, the families were provided with an outline of the scope and intentions of the study, along with a list of key questions to consider, in advance of the interviews. In this section, I introduce the five families in their individual household settings, as a precursor to examining and discussing the interview data and my concomitant observations. For ease of reference, I have assigned each family an alphabetical marker, from A to E, and have further assigned pseudonymous names to each individual family member, in order to guarantee their anonymity and preserve their privacy. Each name begins with the same letter as the chosen alphabetical marker of the family group. They are as follows:

### 4.2.2 Family A: No Phones in the Kitchen

Family A consists of Anita, a single mother in her 50s, who works in the field of media and communication, and her daughter, Andrea, 18, a university student in the Honours year of her astrophysics degree. Her younger sibling, a high school matric student, did not participate in the interview, as she was a minor, i.e. under 18, at the time and was thus excluded from the study on ethical grounds. The interview takes place in the early evening, in the kitchen of the family home in north-eastern Johannesburg. The centrepiece of the kitchen is an old oak table, purchased from an antique store. It is the heart of the home, explains Anita, who adds that the family always have sit-down meals around the table.

To encourage conversation and discussion — "We have different outlooks, so we have robust debates," says Anita — the rule in the household is that no phones are allowed in the kitchen at mealtimes. There is no TV or radio in the kitchen either, to avoid distraction. The television set is in the lounge, where the family convenes after the evening meal to watch Netflix, usually an episode per evening of their favourite series, the medical drama, *Grey's Anatomy*. The kitchen, decorated with colourful floor tiles on the wall, and small boards announcing "Love & Cook With Wild Abandon", and "On the Menu Tonight, Take It Or Leave It", serves also as the family's "news space", says Anita. That and her car, she adds, are where the liveliest discussions on the news and big issues of the day typically take place.

#### 4.2.3 Family B: Filtering the News

Family B is a two-parent family, with Barbara working in the financial services sector, and Brian employed as a teacher of isiZulu at a school in Johannesburg. Both parents are in their 50s. Their son, Brett, 19, is a university student, in the second year of his Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in English and Anthropology. The interview takes place in the living-room of the family's split-level home in northern Johannesburg, overlooking an expansive garden dominated by a towering pine tree. The living-room serves also as the TV viewing-room, where the family gathers occasionally to watch series on DStv or streaming channels, such as Showmax. As Barbara explains, "We've got specific shows that we watch together, and then we have our own shows."

BBC drama series are a shared interest, along with the dystopian science fiction series, *A Handmaid's Tale*, although Brett adds that he prefers Marvel superhero movies and fantasy dramas, which he watches on his own in his bedroom upstairs. Barbara adds that the family's TV-viewing habits have changed, to the extent that they no longer watch live broadcast TV, other than the occasional news bulletin. "Everything we watch is on CatchUp," says Barbara, referring to DStv's unscheduled video-on-demand service. "We watch about an hour or two of TV a night, and I generally fall asleep during that time." Brian adds that he watches broadcast news on TV with a sceptical eye: "You've got to filter the news," he says. "If you watch the news on TV, it's more like a social drama. You've got to cut everything by half to get to the actual news."

#### 4.2.4 Family C: Living with a Personal Google

Family C consists of Celia and Charles, both in their 50s, and two boys, Craig, 20, a university student in the Honours year of his Computer Science degree, and Callan, 18, a matric scholar. Celia works as an executive in the commercial property field, and Charles works as a developer for an Information Technology enterprise. The interview takes place in the evening at the family's home in northwestern Johannesburg, in the setting of the living-room, dominated by a centrally-positioned flat-screen TV set. A computer is hooked up to the TV set, allowing the family to access the American Comedy Central channel, which they watch together, the acerbic news and commentary show, *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, being a favourite.

On warmer evenings, the family will eat their meals on the patio, overlooking the garden, says Celia, "but in winter we become unsociable and we watch TV". The family rarely watches broadcast TV, which is why they cancelled their premium DStv subscription, later restoring it to a basic package which includes news channels. "The only reason we had DStv was for the news channels," says Celia, "and I missed those enormously. I missed Sky and BBC and Al Jazeera." Beyond the living-room is the family kitchen, where Celia and Charles leave their phones on charge at night, rather than taking them to bed, as the boys do.

The kitchen also features a Google Home Mini Smart Speaker, a puck-shaped personal assistant device that Celia bought after reading a glowing review on Facebook. The device, connected to the Internet, acts as a "personal Google", with an AI assistant answering questions and providing news, information, and weather on request. "You can ask it to play music, and you can play quiz games too," says Celia. "But we don't use it for news. We argue all the time, and we use it to settle arguments." She turns towards the kitchen, raises her voice, and calls out, "Hey Google, who's the stupidest person in the house?" "Sorry," responds the AI voice on the speaker. "I don't know how to help with that."

#### 4.2.5 Family D: Thoughts and Findings Around the Table

Family D is a two-parent family, with David, in his 50s, running an Information Technology services and strategy consultancy, and Denise, also in her 50s, involved in freelance

communication work and community projects. They have two children of their own, Darrell, 19, who is a Law student at university, and Donna, 18, a matric scholar, i.e. completing her final year of high school. They also have a foster son, Daniel, 18, who is also in matric. The interview takes place after dinner in the TV lounge of the family's home in northern Johannesburg. The large flat-screen TV brings the family together to watch series, music concerts, and sporting events, particularly rugby and motor-racing, but is rarely used for watching newscasts.

David prefers listening to the news on his clock-radio, favouring a music station called Mix 93.8 FM, which features news broadcasts on the hour. He used to listen avidly to 702, the Johannesburg-based talk radio station, but he now finds it too political in its focus, "and their sense of humour is no longer the same". David begins his day by listening to the 6am news, and if an item particularly catches his interest, he will look for further information and background online, using his phone or iPad. David will then share his thoughts and findings with the family around the kitchen table at breakfast, or around the dinner table in the evening. As Darrell says, "We hear a lot of our news from sitting around the table with dad. He goes and he researches, and we only see what's actually happening because he actively searches for it."

#### **4.2.6 Family E: Debates and Disagreements in the Hub of the Home**

The interview with Family E takes place at their two-storey home in northwestern Johannesburg, shortly before 8pm on a workday evening. The family consists of Esther, a social and healthcare researcher, in her 50s; her son, Ernest, 27, a social sciences and humanities scholar; and her daughter Eloise, 19, who is studying for a Bachelor of Philosophy degree, majoring in Political Science and International Studies. Their father is a legal expert and academic who is based abroad. The family have roots in West Africa, and the children were raised in the USA and South Africa. The interview takes place in what Esther calls "the hub of the home", a breakfast island in the kitchen, where they gather by family tradition to share and read the print edition of the Sunday Times every Sunday. Esther explained that there are TV and radio sets "all over the house", but she prefers to access the news online or by reading print newspapers.

Ernest describes himself as an avid consumer of news, regularly checking CNN, The Guardian, the BBC, and Al Jazeera for updates, using their news apps on his phone. Eloise, meanwhile,

turns to YouTube for news and news backgrounders. "I haven't watched TV in months," she says, "because I have my phone, my phone is my be-all and end-all. YouTube has become my television. If I want to watch something, I don't have to wait 30 minutes for it to come on." Whatever the medium of individual choice, the hub of the home, the breakfast island in the kitchen, remains the lively "public sphere", to use the phrase coined by Jürgen Habermas (1989), where Esther, Eloise, and Ernest gather to talk about the news of the day. "We will have debates, we will have disagreements, we will have arguments," says Ernest, "but at the end of the day, we'll still engage and interact on the common issues."

	BABY BOOMERS	MILLENNIALS
FAMILY A	Anita	Andrea
FAMILY B	Barbara Brian	Brett
FAMILY C	Celia Charles	Craig Callan
FAMILY D	Denise David	Darrell Daniel Donna
FAMILY E	Esther	Eloise Ernest

Fig 10: *This reference table shows the pseudonymous names of the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the five purposively selected families who were interviewed for this study.*

### 4.3 An Ornithological Taxonomy of News-Consumption Behaviours in Selected Family Households

While re-listening to recordings of the interviews conducted with my purposively selected informants for this study, in the settings of their family homes, I became aware of a recurring background sound that I hadn't taken note of at the time. The raucous, stabbing cry of the Hadedda Ibis (*Bostrychia hagedash*), a common resident of the garden suburbs of Johannesburg. Its signature refrain, typically issued as it takes to the air, punctuates dawn and dusk in the city, lending the bird an iconic status that is heralded as much in allegorical poetry, a notable example being *Hadedah* by Adam Schwartzman (1995: 18), who describes his subject as a "flower-bed predator" with a "picked beak like a piston", as in the panels of the popular Madam & Eve cartoon strip, where it appeared as the cover star of the *Hadedda La Land* annual compilation (Francis and Rico, 2017: 1). To me, in the context of my enquiries into the news consumption and sharing habits of Baby Boomers and Millennials, the Hadedda Ibis presented itself in a different light, as the symbolic harbinger of the day's tidings — a "town-crier" on the wing. This, combined with the bird's studious slow-walking-and-pecking routine, in its quest for food, forms the basis of my chosen analogy for this section.

Here, I draw parallels between certain typical avian behaviours, and the ways in which humans seek out, curate, and consume news. I state the case for birds as nature's news-mongers, garrulous in company, loquacious in song, surveying the landscape from afar or patrolling it on the ground, their bird's-eye vision acute in grand sweep or fine detail. In flight, birds are capable of covering vast distances from habitat to habitat, their senses finely attuned to the nuances of weather and the shifting of the seasons. In their calls and choruses, their back-and-forth dialogue with others of their ilk, they announce their presence, assert their territorial imperative, warn of danger, or mark the coming and going of the sun. In this sense, birds can be regarded as receivers and transmitters of useful information, what we would call "news" in the human social context. Based on thematic analysis of my interview data, I have thus identified, categorised, and accordingly labelled the following selection of news-consumption behaviours in the subset of family households chosen for my study. For accuracy in reference to avian behaviour, I have used the standard South African text for birdwatchers, the Second Edition of *Roberts Bird Guide* (Chittenden and Davies, 2016). I introduce the four selected news-consumption behaviours in overview here, and will then proceed to examine them in detail.

- 1) **Foraging:** *purposefully seeking and engaging with news, whether methodically, through gleaning, or through rapid skimming and scanning.*
- 2) **Perching:** *settling on a single platform or channel that serves as an all-in-one portal to news and information from a multitude of sources.*
- 3) **Drifting:** *unintentionally or serendipitously encountering or discovering news, while browsing the web, mis-swiping on a cellphone screen, or via an alert breaking through the background ambience of a radio or TV broadcast.*
- 4) **Nesting:** *gathering in a single location, as a family, to share and discuss news, typically while taking turns to read the multiple sections of the print edition of a weekend newspaper.*

#### **4.3.1 Foraging: the Purposeful Pursuit of News**

In the avian kingdom, foraging is an umbrella term for a range of sustenance-seeking impulses, behaviours, and activities, which take place in the air, on land, or on water, depending on the species. These include gleaning (meticulously picking food from a surface); scanning (eyeing an area for prey, while gliding or soaring in flight); dipping (retrieving food on the wing, through partial or complete submersion in water); and skimming (capturing prey on or just below the surface of a body of water). I note these behaviours in particular, since the latter three terms were used organically by some of the Baby Boomer and Millennial informants in my study, when describing their everyday news-consumption habits, as attested by the interview excerpts below.

##### *Skimming*

"There was a rule that my dad had to open the Sunday Times, but what I would do was open it myself, and I would look through it, skim through it, so my engagement with the news started at a young age." (Ernest, Millennial, Family E, interview 2018).

### *Dipping*

"I read News24, but I really just dip in and out of it." (Celia, Baby Boomer, Family C, interview 2018).

### *Scanning*

"I scanned a column tweeted by Max du Preez. I stopped reading when I saw 'criteria' used as a singular noun." (Anita, Baby Boomer, Family A, interview 2018).

Foraging, in the context of news consumption, can be described as a deliberate and intentional act of seeking and engaging with news, whether by reading a print newspaper, browsing a news site, or tuning in to a scheduled news broadcast on radio or TV. But as the above examples indicate, foraging for news can be a fleeting and cursory endeavour, at least as a means of making the first acquaintance. For Anita (Baby Boomer, interview, 2018) skimming is a means of gauging the interest-value of news items, using a set of three criteria that are reflexively-applied. Referring to her occasional habit of buying the print edition of the *Mail & Guardian*, the Johannesburg-based tabloid weekly, Anita describes her method: "I page through the newspaper. I never just read it. I read the headline, and if there's a blurb, I'll read that, and then I'll read the intro. If those things grab me, I'll read more, but those three things tell you everything you need to know. I don't really want to know the depth, I skim." While skimming is a practise that has become associated with computerised platforms and technologies — the author and literacy scholar, Maryanne Wolf, defines it as the "new normal" in digital reading (Wolf, 2014: 136) — usage of the term in academic literature predates the Internet era. In a series of experiments conducted at the University of Colorado in 1982, the human-cognition researcher Michael Masson (1982: 400) tested subjects on their ability to process, comprehend, and retain information read at various speeds.

The study found that recognition of "important and unimportant information" in narratives and newspaper stories declined by about the same amount as the reading rate increased from 225 to 600 words per minute. When skimming, Masson notes, readers find it difficult to perceptually

select information that is relevant to their reading goal. The process is more feasible, however, when newspaper stories are being read, since their time-honoured format, known as the Inverted Pyramid, positions the most newsworthy information at the top of the story, and the rest in diminishing order of importance below (Scanlan, 2003). Readers in Masson's study could therefore focus their reading time on the first few paragraphs of a newspaper story, and obtain most of the story's gist (Masson, 402). The American author, Nicolas Carr, who examines the effect of the Internet on human thinking in his book, *The Shallows* (2010: 299), argues that skimming has long been standard practise for engaging with text in newspapers, books, and magazines. "The ability to skim text is every bit as important as the ability to read deeply," he adds.

### *Gleaning*

Finally, although none of the informants in my study specifically mentioned "gleaning" as a way of consuming and engaging with news, the term lends itself to the practise of reading in greater depth, and retaining morsels of information for reference and later use. In avian feeding behaviour, gleaning refers to a variety of actions and manoeuvres, including hanging upside-down from branches to retrieve insects from the undersides of leaves, and "hover-gleaning" (Dun & Garrett, 1997: 551), in which the bird hovers in place while seeking its prey, for our purposes bringing to mind a mobile-phone user with finger poised to scroll on the screen. The focussed and methodical nature of gleaning as a news-consumption behaviour is borne out by the experience of Brian, a Baby Boomer from Family B (interview, 2018).

As a teacher of isiZulu at a high school in Johannesburg, Brian specifically seeks out celebrity news that he believes will be of relevance and interest to his teenage learners. "It's important for me to consume news," he says. "It's important because I don't think the kids do, so you've got to know what's going on and just throw it out at them now and then. You try to identify what they would be interested in, to try and get them to react to it. It's got to be something shocking, or something different. I hear news before they do, and that's the best part of it." He admits that this practice doesn't necessarily apply in reverse: "They often talk about artists I don't know, but they don't share with me, because I'm old."

In the family environment, Brian will routinely share his gleanings with his Millennial children, if he believes an item will be of interest to them. As an example, when he heard a "one-second mention", on the Johannesburg radio station, 947, regarding the hospitalisation of the pop singer Demi Lovato for an apparent drug overdose in 2018 (Blankstein & Arkin, 2018), he was the first in the household to share the news. His son, Brett, confirmed the news by checking his Instagram feed (Millennial, Family B, interview, 2018), suggesting that members of different generations will instinctively turn to their preferred platforms to verify news of common interest, rather than assume its accuracy on the basis of its in-house source.

#### 4.3.2 Perching: Settling on a Singular Gateway to News and Information

From wrens to ravens, from sunbirds to swallows, from babblers to warblers, more than 60 percent of birds on earth belong to the order *Passeriformes*, from the Latin for "sparrow-shaped". Passerines are more commonly known as perching birds (Ehrlich, 1988), an activity facilitated by the characteristic structure of their feet, with three toes pointing forward and one backward, all joining the foot at the same level. Along with this arrangement, tendons in the hind limb lock when flexed, allowing the bird to rest without expending energy to grasp (Birds of the World, 2015). Aside from resting after flight, birds perch in order to sleep, feed, escape predators, and preen themselves. Having established the meaning and purpose of perching in the avian kingdom, I will now explain the choice of this term as an analogy for a certain type of news-consumption behaviour practised by humans in the digital era.

In keeping with this avian analogy, if we were to describe the practise of visiting a multiplicity of individual websites and platforms to access news and social media content as "flitting", in the way that birds move swiftly and lightly from one location to the next, then perching would be its opposite. To "perch", as a news consumer, would be to settle on one site or platform that aggregates or curates content from a variety of sources, and thus serves as a singular point of vantage from which to view and traverse the teeming landscape. I will illustrate this practice with two examples from my study, the first focussing on a Baby Boomer informant, and the second on a Millennial.

#### 4.3.2.1 Flipping the news on Flipboard

When describing his daily news-reading habits, David (Baby Boomer, Family D, interview, 2018), stated his preference for an application he uses on his iPad and smartphone: "I use Flipboard a lot, which channels your interests. I use it on my iPad and my phone, but my eyes aren't the greatest for phones, they get tired on the small screen. I follow three or four music news sites, and you can just flip headlines, and then I follow business and tech quite a lot." Initially launched for the iPad only, and later ported to other devices and platforms, Flipboard is described by its founding company as "one place to find the stories for your day, bringing together your favorite news sources with social content" (Flipboard).

The app functions as a traditional news aggregator — a service that "pulls together, and allow you to assemble, news from a variety of sources in one place" (Skaggs, 2012) — in the guise of a highly visual digital magazine with a swipeable interface that mimics the turning of a paper page. Users choose and curate content according to their interests, a process known as "flipping", thereby producing personalised "smart magazines" (Flipboard, 2017) that can be shared by email or social media, as a means of engaging in conversation with other users (Hornik et al., 2016: 503). Reflecting on his father's habitual use of Flipboard, David's son, Darrell (Millennial, Family D, interview, 2018) described the impact the app has had on news consumption in the household environment. "What actually happened, when my dad got his iPad, he'd start looking at all his news on Flipboard, and then we'd just end up picking up the newspaper out of the driveway, look at the front page, see if there was anything cool, and throw it in the bin. No-one was reading it." In this way, Flipboard has become the perch from which a once-ardent newspaper reader now surveys the world.



Fig 11: *The modular, magazine style interface of the Flipboard application, as seen on an Apple iPad. Users choose and arrange sections according to their interests, and access the aggregated news items using a swiping gesture known as "flipping".*

#### 4.3.2.2 Reading it all on Reddit

We now turn to our Millennial example of a preference for single-site news-consumption, the site in question being the social news aggregator, Reddit, which styles itself as "The Front Page of the Internet" (Reddit, 2018). The site, now part of the Advance group of media and communications companies (Advance, 2018), which also includes Condé Nast, the Discovery Channel, and the Turnitin plagiarism-detection service, was founded in 2005 by two room-mates at the University of Virginia, Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian, as part of a startup initiative run by the programmer and venture capitalist, Paul Graham (Koetsier, 2012). In the business biography *We Are the Nerds* (Lagario-Chafkin, 2018: 76), the origin and founding philosophy of Reddit is encapsulated in the following anecdote: "Ohanian immediately considered his own personal use case: He spent a lot of time navigating to the New York Times, the Washington Post, and a host of blogs every morning. What if the best articles, the ones he'd naturally click on, were all right there for him in one place? That would be awesome. It was in that moment that Graham said, 'Yes. You guys need to build a front page of the Internet.'" That idea spawned a site that would claim more than 52-million daily users in 2020, sharing and engaging with a wide range of content on more than 100,000 active communities, known as subreddits (Redditinc, 2020).

These range in coverage from general interest, such as world news, sports, and business, to special interest, such as gaming, astronomy, and fashion, to niche interest, such as street art, home-brewing, and backyard poultry-raising. Subreddits are strictly moderated, to counter hate speech, abuse, and harassment, and posts from pseudonymous and anonymous users, known as "redditors", are ranked according to the number of "upvotes" and comments they receive from other users. The most popular posts, rated as Hot, New, Rising, Controversial, or Top (Reddit, 2015) are hosted on what is termed the front page, a constantly updated platform that aggregates submissions from across the site.

It is the "up-to-the-minutedness" of Reddit, as a source of news, information, entertainment, and discussion, along with its breadth of coverage and the granularity of its subreddits (for example, there are more than 200 subreddits dedicated to cats, alone), that makes it the default choice of a Millennial informant in my study, Craig, from Family C (Interview, 2018). Craig explains that he browses Reddit first thing in the morning, and checks the site routinely throughout the day — "I

look at it pretty much all the time, if I'm not doing something" — using an app called Boost on his Android smartphone. While he subscribes to special-interest subreddits, mostly related to science, space exploration, technology, robotics, and cats, he also turns to Reddit as a trusted source for news of the day.

"If there was a big news story, I would go to Reddit, because if it was really big then it would be on the front page, it would be live. I sort of have trust in Reddit as a news source, although sometimes I'll read a story and the comments will say, 'this isn't true'." Craig adds that he only reads the headlines of news stories posted on Reddit, along with comments from users, rather than following outbound links to get the full story. "I don't actually read the article, unless someone says, here's an interesting follow-up." He will also occasionally read an executive summary of the story, a short machine-generated paragraph known as a TL;DR, which stands for Too Long; Didn't Read. Nonetheless, Craig believes Reddit keeps him well-informed, and suspects he is "pretty much the target demographic" for the site, a supposition confirmed by Reddit's own statistics, which show that 45 per cent of users of its mobile app are between the ages of 18 to 29, with 59 per cent being male, and only 7 per cent aged 50 or older (Survey Monkey Intelligence, 2016). Craig's younger brother, Callan (Millennial, Family C, interview 2018), describes himself as a lapsed Reddit user: "I was just wasting too much time on Reddit," he says. "I deleted the app, and I used the extra time to do real stuff. I don't read the news. If it's important enough, someone will tell me."

In the boys' household, their mother, Celia (Baby Boomer, Family C, interview, 2018), while not herself a Reddit user, says she often hears news about "science or diseases" from Craig, sourced via Reddit. She has also come to realise that Reddit is often the point of origin for items of news and interest that she discovers through her own preferred channels and platforms. "I'll occasionally send a link on the family WhatsApp group," she says, referring to the two Millennials in her household, "and then they'll say, we saw that on Reddit months ago." In choosing to anchor his news-consumption habits to Reddit, then, Craig finds a perch for his own interests and information, as well as a base from which to dispatch items that might be of interest and value across the generational divide.



Fig 12: *This user-submitted cartoon, sourced from the r/memes subreddit or interest-group on Reddit, illustrates the notion of the site as an all-in-one alternative and gateway to multiple other social networks and platforms.*

### 4.3.3 Drifting: Caught in the Crosswinds of News

When birds in flight on an established migration route are steered off-course by crosswinds, the result is known as drift (Horton et al., 2016: 1). When this happens, the birds can either maintain their heading, allowing the crosswinds to influence their path, or they can counter the effect by heading in an offset position, a strategy known as compensation. Studies show that juvenile members of the flock are less capable of compensating in such conditions, and are subjected to "virtually full drift" by crosswinds (Thorup et al., 2003: S9). Drifting can thus have a disorienting effect on migrating birds, sapping their energy and calling for swift course-correction. In the context of news consumption in families, a "drift" might be said to occur when a user encounters a news item unexpectedly, as if by the whim of the winds. We find an example

in an experience related by a Millennial informant, Craig, of Family C (Interview, 2018).

"Sometimes I accidentally scroll to the side of my phone," he says, "and that brings up a list of articles that Google thinks I'll read. I don't usually read those. If I swipe and I see something interesting, then I might click it, but usually I don't like to scroll looking for interesting things."

The feature Craig is referring to is Google Discover (Corby, 2018), formerly known as Google Feed, which appears by default when a user swipes left on their Android smartphone. This action fills the screen with a card-based, scrollable flow of news stories deemed to be of interest to the user, based on their search queries on Google, and selected by machine-learning algorithm. For Craig, who consumes news almost exclusively on the social news aggregation site, Reddit (Interview, 2018), the drift into Google's curated space is seen as intrusive, rather than inviting. A Reuters Institute study on the news-consumption habits of younger users (Kalogeropoulos, 2019) notes that aggregator sites and services of this nature are favoured by "engaged" users as a way of curating the news they want, from a diversity of sources, and by "more passive news users" as an easy way to browse around a series of headlines.

A similar study into the news-consumption habits of Millennials, by the American Press Institute (*How Millennials Get News*, American Press Institute, 2015) found that this generation tends not to consume news in "discrete sessions", or by directly accessing news sites. Rather, Millennials tend to weave news and information into the "mindful way" they connect to the world in general, mixing news with social connection, and random discovery with intentional learning. Thus, it might be said that news in the modern era has become an omnipresent, ambient force that "tunes in" to users, rather than the other way round. Andrea, a Millennial informant from Family A (interview, 2018) describes such an experience, that occurred while she was exercising at her neighbourhood gym in Johannesburg. "I was on the treadmill at the gym," she recalls, "when I saw on Sky News that Winnie Mandela had died. That was big enough to make it onto the family WhatsApp group. I put it on the group pretty quickly, and then I went to verify, because I always verify."

For Baby Boomer informants in the study, a more common occurrence of news-consumption by "drifting" takes place while driving, when a newspaper poster, affixed to a lamp-post or tree, appears in view. Four Baby Boomers mentioned newspaper posters as an incidental source of the day's news, in fleeting, capsule summary form. As Anita, from Family A (Baby Boomer, Family

A, interview, 2018) puts it, "I tend to get most of my news from the poles, from the posters. If there's something that catches my eye, then I'll go and look it up and read about it, from a few sources, and then I'll make up my own mind." Anita adds that she doesn't actively consume or have a great interest in news, in part because of its recurring predictability. "I find that it's all very much the same," she says. "You know, the politicians are corrupt, people are shitty, it's like history repeating itself, over and over again." In this way, the news itself becomes a treadmill of the routine and the familiar, ever subject to random interruption by the drift of a sudden crosswind.

#### **4.3.4 Nesting: Reading and Sharing the News Together in the Family Home**

Of all the avian behaviours that evoke a human analogy, "nesting" is perhaps the one that comes closest to home. We talk about "feathering one's nest" (acquiring wealth by taking advantage of others); building a "nest egg" (setting aside money for retirement); and "empty nest" syndrome (when adult children leave the family home). Here, in the context of news-consumption and sharing, I use the term to describe the time-honoured practise of family members gathering in one location in the house to read, share, and discuss the news, typically in the physical form of a printed newspaper with multiple sections or supplements. Baby Boomer informants in my study recalled this as a familiar ritual, especially on a Sunday, when the newspaper would be unfolded and its distributed in hierarchical fashion. "My parents would divide it up amongst themselves, and we would fight over the comics," as Anita (Baby Boomer, Family A, interview, 2018) remembers it. But this family activity, traditionally taking place in the lounge or sitting-room, has long been under threat from competing media, most notably television, and more recently, individual mobile devices.

As far back as 1961, the supposed impact of television on newspaper circulation figures was being researched by the London School of Economics, in a study conducted by a former Senior Psychologist at the BBC, William A Belson. Weighing up the theory that a rise in television-set ownership in the United Kingdom was responsible for a decline in newspaper sales, Belson concedes that the argument has merit: "If people are spending their time watching television, they will have less time for reading papers, and if papers go unread for a long period, they will cease to be bought." (Belson, 1961: 368).

He notes, however, that the "viewing room" in the typical household happens also to be the family sitting-room, and that people do not go there just to view (Belson, 374). "Once there, with the set on," he argues, "there is a strict limit to the number of things people can do. Talking is quite likely to be silenced by the irritated viewers. Letter writing and, indeed, anything that calls for continuity of thought is likely to be interrupted. Under these conditions, some people snooze, some give up and view, others try to read. It is obvious that some kinds of reading are likely to fit this situation better than others." The study concludes that the effect of television on the buying and reading of publications tends to be small, and that television-viewing may actually increase people's inclination to read lighter items in a newspaper, such as comic strips, cartoons, crossword puzzles, and gossip columns.

In my own study of news-consumption and sharing habits in purposively selected family households in Johannesburg, only one out of the five families interviewed upheld the tradition of reading the print edition of a newspaper in the home. This was Family E, consisting of Esther (Baby Boomer) and her two Millennial children, Eloise, and Ernest. Esther explained that she prefers the "feel and the flipping" of a printed newspaper (Interview, 2018), and that the family continues to read the Sunday Times in its print edition, as a matter of habit. "It stays in the kitchen," Esther said. "The kitchen is the hub, and the breakfast island is the home of the Sunday Times on a Sunday. It gets dropped there, and it's just something that you know everyone will read."

Her daughter, Eloise (Interview, 2018) recalled that "newspapers were always a thing" when she was growing up, and that television was always secondary to print. Her parents used the newspaper-reading ritual as an opportunity to encourage debate, discussion, and critical thinking in the household, across the generational divide. "I always wanted to flip to the entertainment section when I was super-young, to see who's wearing what," said Eloise. "But it was like, no, we're reading the newspaper. It was always about asking your kids questions, even if they don't know what the topic is about, and breaking it down for you, in terms of your personal understanding, and wanting to engage with the news further on in life."

In this view, the communal act of reading a newspaper ventures beyond the simple sharing of sections, according to age and interest, and becomes a tool for raising children who will be equipped to think independently and critically when they leave the comfort of the nest.

## 4.4 Growing Up With News: Comparing Baby Boomer and Millennial Stories

### 4.4.1 Anita's Story: The Sweet Subdivision of the Sunday Paper

Looking back on her childhood in the Eastern Cape, Anita (Baby Boomer, Family A, Interview, 2018) remembers Sunday as a day of ritual in the household, and not just because it was the traditional day of worship and rest. The family would go to church for the morning service, and on the way back, Anita's father would stop to buy two items from the café on the corner. A copy of the Weekend Post, and a bar of Peppermint Crisp. "Then we would come home, and my parents would divide the paper up amongst themselves, and we would fight over the comics," Anita recalls. The Peppermint Crisp would be subdivided, too, just as the newspaper was, with Anita's father snapping off two blocks for himself, and the rest of the family, mother and three children, sharing the remaining four blocks. "It was always the newspaper and the Peppermint Crisp, those two things go together in my head," says Anita. When broadcast television arrived in South Africa on January 5, 1976 (Bevan, 2008: 17), Anita's father stood firm and refused to have "one of those things in his lounge".

The medium had long been resisted by the National Party government of the day, with Dr Albert Hertzog, then Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, dismissing it as a "miniature bioscope" (Bevan, 2008: 91) and warning of the likely destructive effect it would have on "children, the less developed, and other races" (Corrigan, 1974: 15). Nonetheless, within a couple of years, Anita's father had given in, and a television set became a central feature of the family home. Anita remembers watching the news on TV in the evenings, together with the rest of the family, "but it was still in the era of children being seen but not heard".

The most popular programme on South African television in its first year of broadcasting, among children as well as adults, notes Bevan (2008: 162), was in fact a news programme: *Haas Das se Nuuskas* (Haas Das's News Box), in which a bow-tied hare-puppet read the news from "Diereland" (Animal Land) with his mouse-puppet sidekick standing by to hand him incoming bulletins. In Anita's experience, the real news from the real world of humans seemed just as

much of a fantasy. "If people came around for a braai, then the grownups would discuss stuff, but there was no discussion with us," she says.

At school, Anita's guidance teacher suggested she should pursue a career in journalism, rather than her first choice, which was Chartered Accountancy. Picturing herself as an "intrepid reporter", she studied journalism at Rhodes University, where she came to realise how sheltered she had been from the political events and issues of the day. "I can remember not knowing who Bishop Tutu was, who Nelson Mandela was, all these people," she says. "I really was very, very white, and protected, with the government keeping information from us, and then my parents keeping it from us, even more so. I had a lot of learning to do." One day on campus, she recalls, she realised she wasn't cut out to be a hard-news reporter. She heard the sound of chanting and the stamping of feet on the street outside. She peered out of the window, thinking a political rally or protest was taking place. "I discovered it was a karate class, out for a route march," she says. "I realised at that point that news wasn't for me."



Fig 13: A still from *Haas Das Se Nuuskas* (*Haas Das's News Box*), the most popular programme on South African television, among children and adults, in the first year of broadcast in 1976.

#### 4.4.2 Esther's Story: The News as Physical and Social History

Esther (Baby Boomer, Family E, Interview, 2018) grew up in a West African country, as part of a large family whose patriarch was the strict and old-fashioned headmaster of a local school. He would bring the daily newspaper home with him, and would hand it to his children after he had finished reading. He expected them to read the newspaper just as thoroughly as he did, and he would put that expectation to the test with a round of general-knowledge questions, as if he was still standing in front of the class at school. "It was very important for us growing up," recalls Esther. "My father would pose questions, and would begin discussing the issues on the ground, and everyone would try to follow." It was the late 1970s, the peak years of apartheid in South Africa, an era Esther recalls because the topic came up so often in these household conversations. "When I was little, I'm sure that's how I knew about the struggles in South

Africa," she says. "When I came to South Africa as a grown-up, it was not a total surprise to me to see the reality of things."

She recalls her home being abustle with the sound of news, coming from the radio speakers, and the television set in the living-room. The news, she says, was a form of "physical history", and it became part of the household's social history too. Out of eight houses in the street, her family's house was the only one with TV, so neighbours would wander over just before sunset, to gather in the living-room and watch the 6.30pm newscast on the state channel. "The news would bring people together," says Esther. "Most of the people came with children, and the children participated in those discussions as well. Then they would stay to watch other programmes. It's not like here where we lock gates. It was open."

After the news, the family and their neighbours would talk about the big social and political issues of the day, and then there would be a debate about what to watch next. "It would depend on what the bigger people liked," recalls Esther. "Some people liked boxing. I never liked boxing. I think it's very violent." As she reflects on her childhood in a land far away, Esther looks quizzically at her daughter, Eloise, who is sitting opposite her at the breakfast island in the kitchen, where the interview takes place. "Why are you looking at me like this?" Esther asks, and Eloise replies, "I've never heard you speaking about your childhood. I love it."

#### **4.4.3 Ernest's Story: Learning to Speak Truth to Power**

Growing up in the USA, where his father was an academic, Ernest (Millennial, Family E, Interview, 2018) would rush home from junior school to watch *Spongebob Squarepants*, at his neighbour's house. The animated series about a sub-aquatic sponge and his gang of friends was a welcome antidote to Ernest's afternoon civics classes, where scholars would learn about the workings of government and society. One day, Ernest went back home to find his father watching TV, and saying to himself, over and over again, "This can't be happening." On the screen, on CNN, Ernest caught a glimpse of flames and explosions. "I thought that this was the coolest special effects movie," he recalls. "I'm a kid, we're in the era of explosions in movies, and I thought this was a movie." It was September 11, 2001, the day the twin towers of the World Trade Centre fell in a coordinated terror attack. Ernest was 10 years old.

It was only much later, he says, that he was able to "put together all the stuff that happened", and realise that what he had seen was on TV was real. "The news played a huge factor, a formative factor, in my understanding of the world, as well as my questioning of things that happened in the world," says Ernest. When the family moved to South Africa, he continued his childhood habit of watching cartoons on TV, followed by watching the news on a different channel. His favourite show was *Dragon Ball Z*, a Japanese anime series about a team of warriors who defend the earth from evil forces. But the news, he says, proved to be a bigger attraction, and he would switch from news channel to news channel, in-between reading the newspapers his dad brought home. He credits his parents for encouraging him not just to read and watch what was happening in the world, but to question and argue, to "speak truth to power".

In the family household, he says, "there is no, 'oh shuttup, you can't think this way'. There is a discussion, that's the most important thing. We will not all leave here, collectively, agreeing on many matters." Often, he says, the divisions of thought and opinion will be along generational lines. "We view the world differently," he says. "We've been raised in an environment where we can challenge and oppose ideas, and look for better ideas to support the ideas we have." And he has learned, above all, not to take everything he sees, reads, or hears at face value. He begins by disbelieving, by questioning the bias inherent in the way stories are told. "No news is innocent," he says, "because no human is innocent."

#### 4.5 Sharing and Blogging as Forms of Producersage

In 2008, Australian media scholar Axel Bruns coined a portmanteau word that swiftly embedded itself in the lexicon of digital culture. "Producersage", combining "producer" and "usage", was defined by Bruns to encapsulate the growing trend of shared content being created in networked, participatory environments (Bruns, 2008: 2). When this happens, the boundaries between consumers and producers are broken down, allowing all participants to be "users as well as producers of information and knowledge" (Producersage.org, 2007). Examples of producersage, highlighted in Bruns' book, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Producersage* (Bruns, 2008) include the crowdsourced encyclopaedia, Wikipedia; the photo-sharing site, Flickr; open-source software, and citizen journalism.

But as the title of his book suggests, Bruns also makes the case that ordinary citizens can "produce" hybrid content, or "random acts of journalism" (Bruns & Highfield, 2012: 25) on blogging and social media platforms, such as Twitter. Here, the authors argue, produsage is an "exceptionally easy" process, requiring only that the users posts a short message containing the information or opinion they intend to share, and perhaps to mark it with a hashtag to increase its visibility to a wider target audience. Referring to blogging as a form of produsage, Bruns notes that blogs have evolved considerably since their original form as "simple, online versions of traditional personal diaries" (Bruns, 2008: 228), and now occupy multiple separate genres, including news blogging, mobile blogging or "moblogging", and fictional blogging. In my cohort of informants, two Millennials and one Baby Boomer can be classified as producers of blogs, whether for private use or for sharing.

#### 4.5.1 Instagram as a Happy Place

Anita (Baby Boomer, Family A, Interview, 2018) writes two blogs, one containing short reflections on life, based on personal experience and observation, and the other a blog of advice and insights on aspects of communication and business, hosted on her own corporate website. As a "social producer", Anita posts mostly on Facebook, where her chief intention is "to amuse people, so it's usually poking fun at myself". She will also post news about her two daughters, "a little mommy bragging", but without mentioning their names, in order to respect their privacy. "If I'm going to post pictures of them, I'll always get their consent," Anita adds. She is also a regular poster on her Instagram account, specialising in sunrises as seen from her window, so much so, she says, that her daughters have threatened to create a separate account called Mom Taking Instagram Pictures for her. "Instagram for me is really just a place for getting away from Twitter, which can be horrible sometimes," Anita says. "For me, it's a happy place. I don't get news there at all."

She also posts routinely on Twitter, but with caution, having "got into big trouble" for certain tweets of a political nature. She will particularly hold back on matters involving race: "If you're a white person, it's actually better just to keep quiet and listen and watch, because otherwise you get yourself into all kinds of trouble," she says, "so I tend to take a step back in those situations and I just read what other people post." Anita is careful not to "cross-post" on her social

platforms, preferring to keep her content unique on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. "I keep everything separate and siloed," she says, because they are different media, within different uses. "Facebook is friends, whereas on Twitter I've got 4,500 followers, who don't know me from Adam, so I'm not going to bore them. I'd rather bore my friends. And Instagram for me is visual. I just use them very differently."

#### 4.5.2 Blogging as Opinionated Activism

For Ernest (Millennial, Family E, Interview, 2018), blogging is a form of "opinionated activism", allowing him to share his strong views on politics, sport, and society in general. But after his father, having read one of his pieces, warned him, "don't rock the boat too much", Ernest prefers to write under a variety of pseudonyms. Anonymity affords him the opportunity to "write in the most sarcastic, most sardonically witty and mocking manner on issues", without worrying, as his father fears, that the FBI or CIA might be watching. "I think where you see the generational gap really occurring," says Ernest, "is in the way individuals respond to media." On Facebook, Ernest would post under his own name, often getting into what he calls "heated, heated, heated arguments." This was particularly so when the issue under discussion was one that affects him personally. "If I viewed someone as having a position, and their position has some authority, and they were engaging in what I felt was an abuse of their authority, and the danger that has on future generations and young people, I will see this and I will take you to task for it, whether it's my issue or not," he says. His parents would tell Ernest in such cases that he engages too much on social media, but then again, as he points out, it was his parents who taught him how to engage.

Ernest's sister, Eloise (Millennial, Family E, Interview, 2018) is also a blog-producer, posting what she calls "not necessarily news-news" content, but rather her feelings about the world and her place in it. Rather than making her posts public, for all to see, she will leave links for people to find, "and whoever stumbles across it can read it". When she posts on social media, Eloise says she likes to be challenged, to engage with people who disagree with her. "I can handle myself in a situation," she says, "but it's always good to have someone in your corner, like, if I need to, I can say, listen, I need you to log onto Instagram and shut down this troll for me

because they've been going at me for like 30 minutes. My best friend will say, okay, but you're engaging this troll, and I'll say, this is where you're wrong. I'm always open to other discussions."

#### **4.6 The Utility of WhatsApp as a Meeting-Point Between the Generations**

The blue double-tick on a WhatsApp message, signalling to the sender that the dispatch has been received and opened by its intended recipient, has become a familiar symbol of the ease of instant-chat communication in the digital era. Founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, two former employees of the Internet search engine, Yahoo (Olson, 2014), WhatsApp is used as a mobile-phone messaging, chat, and voice-call service by more than 2-billion people across the globe (Statista, 2020). In South Africa, WhatsApp is the most popular mobile application, used by 58 per cent of mobile phone owners (Statista, 2020), compared to 30 per cent for Facebook Messenger, and 5 per cent for Telegram. Originally designed chiefly as a status-update application, allowing users to "ping" everyone in their network to let them know where they were or what they were doing — "Can't talk, I'm at the gym", for instance (Olsen, 2014) — WhatsApp evolved into a fully-fledged instant messenger, swiftly adapted by millions of users as an alternative or replacement for the outdated SMS (Short Messaging Service) on their phones. Olsen (2014) quotes Koum as telling a sceptical developer that SMS was a "dead technology, like a fax machine left over from the seventies". WhatsApp (the name is a play on "What's up", according to Koum) has since evolved beyond its elementary function as a messaging service, to become a widely-used medium for "social bonding via multiple modalities, such as small text messages, photos, and video clips", as Taipale and Faranosi note (2014: 4) in a study into the use of the application by extended families in Finland and Italy.

##### **4.6.1 Bridging the Generation Gap by Sharing Jokes and Memes**

Family WhatsApp groups, the authors add (2014: 6) can strengthen family ties, by providing synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication to assist with the juggling of individual agendas and timetables. A typical example of this usage among my cohort of informants comes from Anita (Baby Boomer, Family A, interview, 2018), who explains: "We use our WhatsApp group for family matters, such as I'm on my way, please go and cover up the bunny, it's

raining." In the case of Family C, "Family Matters" is the actual name chosen for the family WhatsApp group (Celia, Baby Boomer, Family C, interview, 2018), which is used for chatting and logistics and location sharing, but "mostly for jokes", as Celia puts it.

This use of WhatsApp is identified by Taipale and Faranosi (2014: 13) as part of the inherent "playfulness" of the medium, which facilitates the exchange of humorous videos, photographs, and memes, in a manner that allows for more easy-going and less reserved communication across generations. In a further study into the use of WhatsApp by a cross-section of individuals in Argentina, Matassi and Boczkowski note the differences in approach to this "taken-for-granted platform" (2019: 1) by young, middle, and older adults. Young adults, aged from 18 to 34, see WhatsApp as an always-on means of enacting sociability; middle adults, aged from 35 to 59, appropriate the platform to exercise their work and care responsibilities; and late adults, aged 60 and older, use WhatsApp to connect with younger generations as well as members of their own age group (1).

me showing my mom  
a funny meme  
my mom:

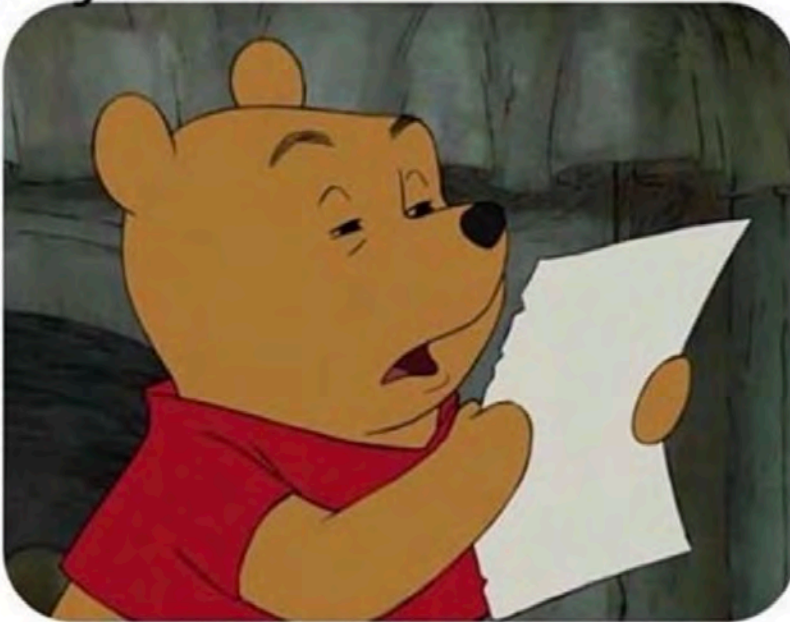


Fig 14: *This meme, sent to the family WhatsApp group of one of the families interviewed for this study, pokes fun at the older generation's supposed inability to parse the meaning of memes.*

#### **4.6.2 WhatsApp as a Breaking-News Distribution Medium on Family Groups**

In my study, WhatsApp was the only application mentioned by every informant (9 Baby Boomers and 8 Millennials) as a tool for staying in touch and sharing news and information with friends, colleagues, peers, and family members. Each of the five families also referred to their frequent use of private in-family WhatsApp groups, which allow members to chat by text, voicenote, or voice call, and to post multimedia snippets, updates, or items of news. In this sense, WhatsApp can serve as a virtual point of intersection, or "meeting-point", for cross-generational communication. In my observation, WhatsApp's ubiquitous and anachronistic logo, showing a white landline handset in a green speech bubble, brings to mind the green-and-white "assembly-

point" signs that show people where to rendezvous for convenience or gather for safety during an emergency. This makes the platform particularly useful as a mechanism for distributing news, whether of specific family interest, or of broader regional, national, or global significance. For example, Andrea (Millennial, Family A, interview, 2018), was exercising on a treadmill at a gym, when she saw a Sky News newsflash on the TV monitor built into the machine. The news was that Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the South African anti-apartheid icon and political leader, had just passed away in a hospital in Johannesburg (Sky News, 2018). Andrea's immediate impulse was to step off the treadmill and post the news on the family WhatsApp group. Her second impulse was to verify the news item, by searching reputable sources on her phone.

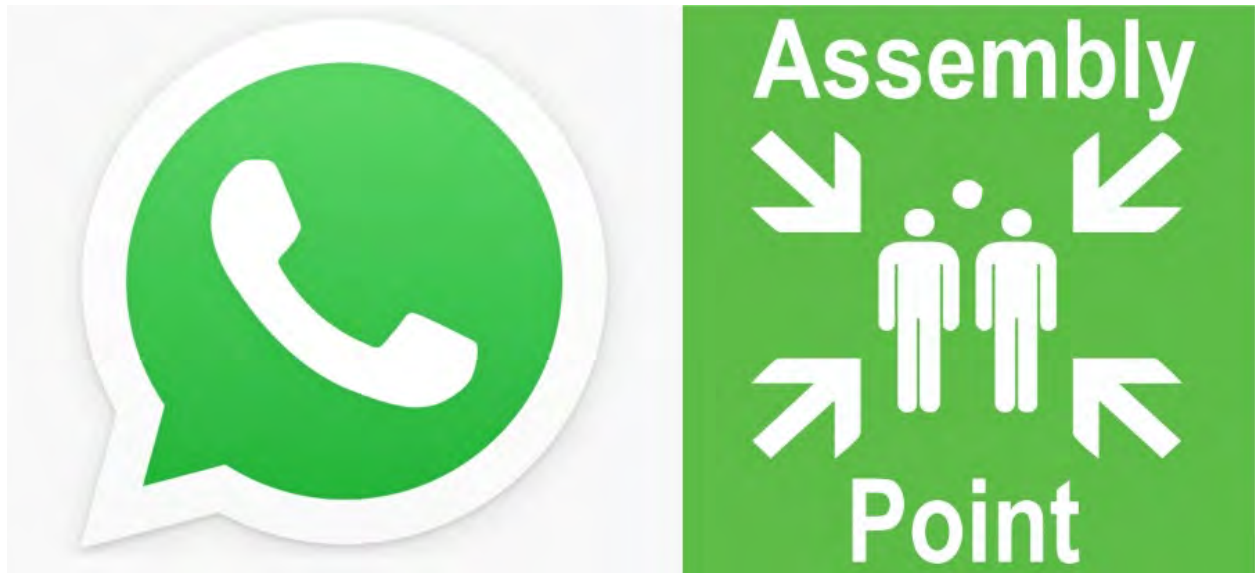


Fig 15: *The WhatsApp logo, with its anachronistic landline telephone symbol, finds an echo of tone and meaning in the assembly-point signs used to show people where to gather in public places.*

Likewise, when the popular Swedish electronic music artist, Avicii, died at the age of 28 in April 2018 (BBC, 2018), the news spread swiftly on news platforms and social networks, and from there on to the WhatsApp groups. Recalling the news, Denise (Baby Boomer, Family D,

interview, 2018) said she was the first in the family to hear about Avicii, via a Facebook notification while she and her husband, David, were dining at an Ocean Basket restaurant. "People were already on Facebook going Avicii, Avicii, rest in peace and that, and then it was on News24," Denise added. Knowing that her Millennial children were fans of Avicii, she posted the news to the family WhatsApp group, initially sowing scepticism among the younger users. "When I first saw my mom post that," recalls Donna (Millennial, Family D, interview, 2018), "I didn't think it was real. Then I went onto WhatsApp, and on everyone's status they were posting RIP. Avicii was our age group, and everyone loved him. If people hadn't been posting, I would have been like, no, this is fake, it's too much of a big deal for people not to comment on it."

#### **4.6.3 Music and Music News as Social Bonding-Agents Between Baby Boomers and Millennials**

This illustration of music as a "social bonding-agent" between Baby Boomers and Millennials is given further impetus by another "breaking-news" incident involving members of Family D. This time, it was Donna (Millennial, Family D, interview, 2018) who first saw the news, on Facebook, that the Texan punk rock band, Bowling for Soup, were going to be touring South Africa (Channel24, 2018). She posted a screenshot to the family WhatsApp group, sparking particular enthusiasm among the older members. "Bowling for Soup is the finest punk band in history," said David, a musician who played in his own pop band in his younger days (Baby Boomer, Family D, Interview, 2018). "We were terribly excited." Once news of the American band's visit had been confirmed by Donna, via a visit to their Facebook page, the family WhatsApp group turned its attention to the logistical arrangements for the excursion to the Free State town of Clarens, where Bowling for Soup were going to be playing. It is the flexibility of WhatsApp as a platform for sharing news, as well as engaging in "daily phatic communion", as Taipale and Faranosi put it (2014: 3), referring to the "seemingly meaningless and purposeless talk, greetings, and small talk" that play an important social function in the app, that make it a default choice for intra-family communication, even among those users who are otherwise strongly averse to social media, a phenomenon we will examine in the next section.

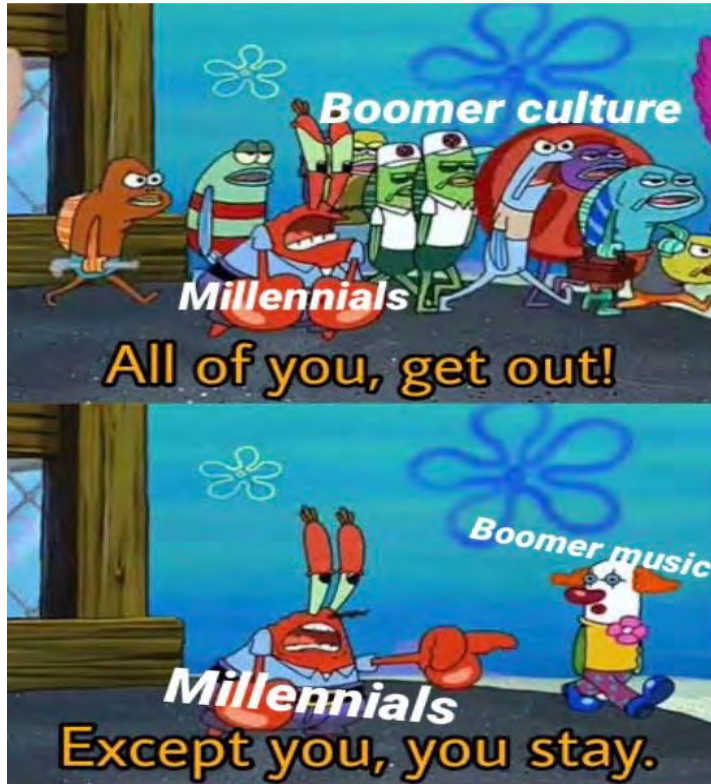


Fig 16: *This meme, sourced from Reddit and featuring characters from the Spongebob Squarepants cartoon series, plays on the notion that Millennials can find common ground with Baby Boomers in the mutual appreciation of Boomer-era music.*

#### 4.7 Preferred Sources of News Across the Generations

What are the sources most frequently turned to for news, information, and entertainment by Baby Boomers and Millennials in the five purposively selected households participating in this study? In this section, I collate the responses from my informants, based on their medium of first-choice, as well as other media sources and platforms that form part of their daily news diet.

##### 4.7.1 Family A, Baby Boomer: Taking the Bait on Twitter

Anita's medium of choice for accessing the news of the day is Twitter. She will scroll through her feed and look for items of interest, because Twitter is "the first place it's going to be. Facebook will catch up like 10 days later. "She checks Twitter on awakening, during the day

when she is at her desk, and at night before she goes to bed. She uses the network as a first source of news, but not necessarily as the most trusted source. "If there's something that interests me, I'll go and check it out, because I don't like to believe the headlines on Twitter. Often they're just designed to lure you in, they're clickbait. But I'll take the bait and then I'll go and read it and look for some other stories."

#### **4.7.2 Family A, Millennial: Finding News in the Stars**

Andrea uses Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as her primary sources of social connection, but she adds that she doesn't follow much in the way of news, apart from science news, which is a special interest to her as an astrophysics student. Her primary source of science news is a curation site called "I Fucking Love Science" (IFLS.com, 2018), which her science teacher at school preferred to call "I Really Like Science". Andrea says she is particularly interested in news on the planets, and on space exploration.

#### **4.7.3 Family B, Baby Boomers: Trusting News Sites and Regional Radio**

Barbara gets most of her news from Facebook, either from the "I Love" suburban pages, which carry community news and information, and from the online news sites that form part of her Facebook feed. Her most trusted sources for news are News24.com, and Eyewitness News. "I think the sources I follow are pretty reliable," she says. "There were some on Facebook where I read and I thought, this is rubbish, and I deleted it or blocked it."

Brian turns to radio as quick and trusted sources for news, either in the household, or while driving to the high school where he teaches isiZulu. His preferred station is the Johannesburg-based 947, which carries a mix of news, music, and talk. He finds its local bias more of interest and relevance, than the news carried by national radio stations.

#### **4.7.4 Family B, Millennial: Following the Trends on YouTube**

Brett gets most of his daily news from YouTube, on a channel called "What's Trending" (YouTube, 2018), which delivers a constantly-updated mix of celebrity and pop-culture news, as

well as "vial video" content." I like the fact that on YouTube, they take the news specifically in the context of the Internet," says Brett. He avoids social networking platforms, other than Instagram, which he uses to check celebrity accounts and occasionally post his own images.

If he has to follow news for academic purposes at university, he will turn to News24.com, rather than television channels. "I don't trust TV news as much as online articles" he says. "I would always go to News24, because there's so many writers. One topic will have at least three different views, as opposed to just one newspaper's outlook." When it comes to general news of the day, he accumulates news almost by a process of osmosis: "If it's political and social news, I collect enough information from all over to get a general picture of what's going on," he says. "I won't know specifics, but I'll know something's happening."

#### **4.7.5 Family C, Baby Boomers: Dipping into Online Portals, and Tuning In to News on the Move**

Celia starts her day by listening to the 6.30am newscast on the Johannesburg-based news and talk station, 702. If an item catches her interest, she'll turn for further information and background to her preferred "dip in and out" online news sites, which include News24, Daily Maverick, and Huffington Post. She also uses Facebook for news, following curation sites such as BuzzFeed, for its mix of hard news, celebrity news, and trivia.

Charles gets most of his daily news from 702, at home on the radio, and while driving to and from work. "It's typically local news that I want to find," he says. "I hear it on 702 and I try and find a source, and then I Google it later and find out what links there are."

#### **4.7.6 Family C, Millennials: Sticking to Reddit, and Hearing News from Friends**

Craig uses the social news aggregation site, Reddit, as his preferred source of South African and international news. As noted elsewhere in the chapter, the format of Reddit as a single portal to multiple sources of news and commentary eliminates the need for him to turn to any other single sources.

Callan turns to Instagram and the family WhatsApp group for news he feels he needs to know. "I don't read the news," he says. "If it's important enough, someone will tell me." This includes his friends at school, who share news they see on BuzzFeed and Twitter. "Sometimes we'll talk about it," he adds. "It's usually stuff that they find funny, rather than interesting."

#### **4.7.7 Family D, Baby Boomers: Favouring Facebook Communities, and Mixing Music with News**

Denise prefers Facebook as a source of news, much of which she finds via local community and suburban groups. She follows links to new sites if she wants more information on a story, and also to check its veracity. In the morning, she listens to Mix FM, a Johannesburg-based music, news, and talk station, on the household clock-radio. She reads the neighbourhood community newspaper once a week, focussing on stories about crime and sport.

David consumes news avidly, and begins his day by listening to the broadcasts on Mix FM. He turns to the Flipboard app on his iPad as his first choice for an overview of the news, and he also scrolls through Twitter in search of the big current affair and political news stories of the day. He puts little trust in the news he reads on commercial news sites, so he Googles deeply to find a balance of views and independent sources, particularly on "hot" issues such as American Presidential politics and the situation in the Middle East.

#### **4.7.8 Family D, Millennials: Facebook as a Primary Source of Algorithmic News**

Darrell starts his day, before getting out of bed, by browsing Facebook on his phone, reading a mix of posts from friends, sports stories, and links to articles about crime and legal matters, in keeping with his university studies. He finds that the Facebook algorithm broadens his knowledge of news, by recommending stories based on his likes and interests. He also uses WhatsApp as a news and information source throughout the day, clicking on links posted by other members of his family, and by friends and fellow students on his degree course.

Daniel is a committed Facebook user — "I'm on it, like, almost every minute," he says — seeking out and following news on his special interests, rugby, basketball, and sneakers. "I look to see who's wearing what, and what the styles and prices are like," he says. He belongs to a

rugby WhatsApp group, consisting of schoolfriends and fellow players and fans, but he never uses his phone while watching a match. Asked if he ever uses social media to seek out news of more general interest, Daniel recounts an incident that took place while he was in a bus, with friends, on his way home from a rugby match at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. In the traffic alongside, he saw a man walk up to a car and knock on the driver's window with his firearm.

The driver took fright and accelerated, slamming into the vehicle in front of her. As she did this, the man with the gun walked casually away. Daniel thought nothing more of it until the next day, when he saw a post on Facebook, his preferred news medium, from the driver of the car, trying to find the owner of the vehicle she had hit. Daniel realised that the poster, who had so narrowly escaped a hijacking, was a friend of the family. Thus does a newsworthy event, observed on the scene and in close-up, travel in a loop of social connection and synchronicity to find its way home.

Donna uses Facebook and News24 as her prime sources of news. She has a special interest in crime stories and court cases, and will listen to radio newscasts and visit YouTube news channels for further information and background. She gets most of her other daily news from WhatsApp groups.

#### **4.7.9 Family E, Baby Boomer: A Preference for Print and Broadcast Channels**

Esther is a traditionally-minded news consumer, who prefers to get her news from radio, TV, and printed editions of daily and weekly newspapers. She also visits online news sources for further background on the big stories of the day, but as far as social media is concerned, "the most I do is Facebook," she says.

#### **4.7.10 Family E, Millennials: Searching Topical Hashtags on Instagram, and Tapping in to Commercial News Apps**

Eloise gets most of her news directly from social media, favouring Instagram for news and entertainment, and then Twitter. "It all depends on what I'm looking for," she says. "If it's a current thing that I didn't know had happened, it will show up on my feed first, or in my search bar, because of how Instagram does things." If she is interested in learning more about a

particular event or story, she will search by hashtag, such as #MeToo or #GlobalCitizen. On YouTube, she watches clips from news shows on Comedy Central, such as the Daily Show with Trevor Noah. "That's how I found out about Brexit," she says. "When you mix comedy and news, rather than it being majorly depressing, it flips it on its head and it engages with your mindset." For general-interest news, Eloise turns to BuzzFeed, which she regards as a "news platform for Millennial intake. it's a media outlet, and it has a social media platform, because they know that makes it more accessible than newspapers."

Ernest prefers Twitter as a source for keeping up with news and engaging in conversations, but for deeper knowledge and enlightenment on issues of interest, he turns to the news apps on his phone, notably CNN, The Guardian, BBC, and Al Jazeera. He will often engage directly with journalists and columnists, either on social media, or on their YouTube channels. "In the era of fake news," he says, "it's become very important to not allow the news to become an echo-chamber." For this reason, he is wary of the news he discovers on neighbourhood and community WhatsApp groups, which he feels are "almost all homogenous", and which often propagate stories that turn out to be fake.

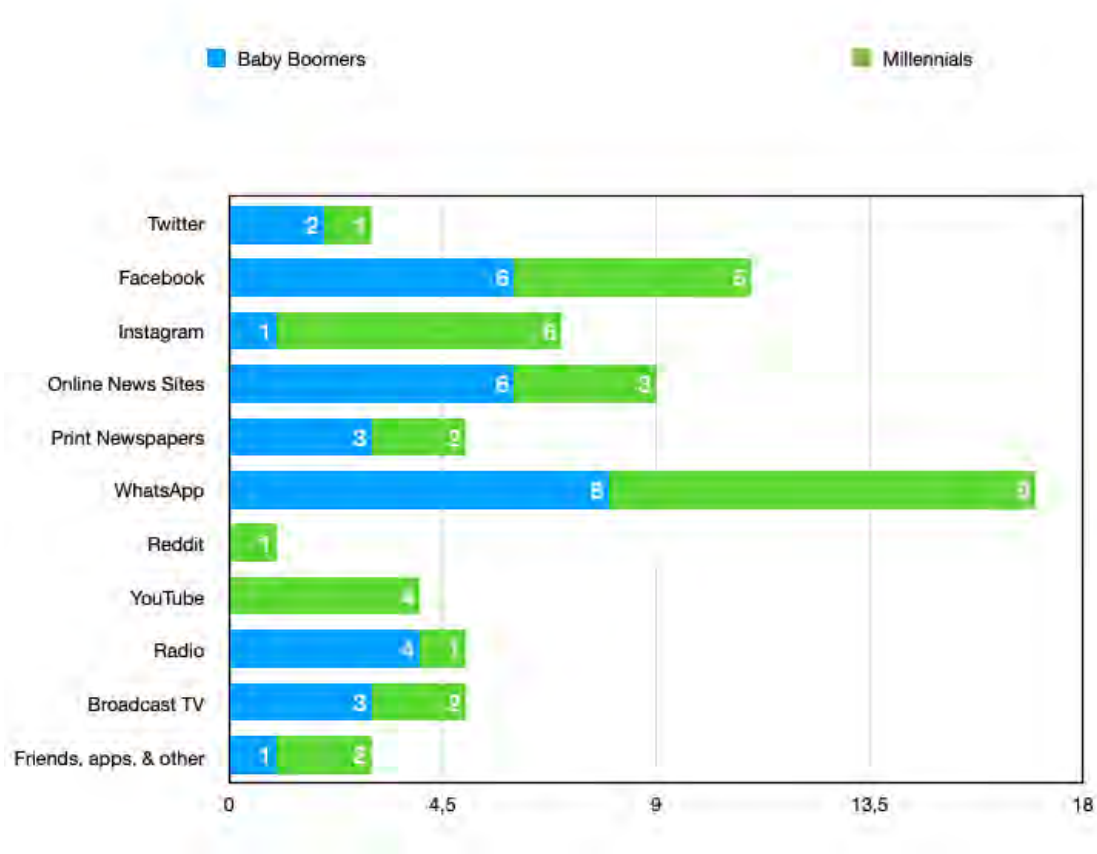


Fig 17: This chart shows the usage of the various online, social media, electronic, and print platforms for consuming news on a regular basis by the Baby Boomer and Millennial informants who took part in this study.

#### 4.8 Comparing Baby Boomer and Millennial Attitudes to Printed Newspapers in the Digital Era

In the early 1970s, before the advent of broadcast television in South Africa, newspapers dominated the media landscape. Their circulation was in robust health, as evidenced by a table of figures for January to June, 1972, highlighted in a paper entitled *The Press in South Africa*, by Frene Ginwala (1972: 31). Here we see the Sunday Times, the country's biggest-selling weekly newspaper, with a circulation of 492,000 copies, followed by the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper,

Rapport, at 476,000 copies per edition. The total number of copies in circulation for the 15 weekly newspapers mentioned in the table is just under 2.2-million.

On the daily newspaper side of the table, The Star, based in Johannesburg, leads with a circulation figure of 184,000, followed by the now-defunct Rand Daily Mail, selling 139,000 copies. The total number of copies in circulation for the 19 dailies in the table is just over 1.5-million. Almost half-a-century later, the circulation figures for South African newspapers paint a very different picture. In the first quarter of 2020, according to Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) statistics (Marklives.com, 2020), the number of total paid copies sold by the Sunday Times was 150,972, while Rapport sold 90,043 copies. Looking at the dailies, The Star sold 23,891 copies, well below the biggest-selling daily on the table, the Daily Sun, which sold 94,506 copies.

#### **4.8.1 Getting News From the Trees**

Looking beyond the numbers, my study set out to consider the role played by printed newspapers in the daily media diet of family households, consisting of Baby Boomers who grew up in the "golden era" of newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s, and Millennials who grew up in the digital era of mobile phones and ubiquitous access to the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s. Only one of the five families interviewed for my study, Family E, subscribed to and regularly perused printed newspapers, in particular the Sunday Times. As Esther (Baby Boomer, Family E, Interview, 2018) explained, the newspaper is placed on the table in the breakfast island of the kitchen, where it is subdivided and read by everyone in the family, leading to discussions and debate on the big issues of the day.

Esther described herself as "old-school", in the sense that she prefers the tactile feel of a newspaper: "I sometimes just read the newspaper online, but I don't really enjoy it as much as the one I can feel," she said. Esther added that on her walks around the neighbourhood, she would get "news from the trees" as well, and was on greeting-terms with "the guy who comes to put up the newspaper posters". Reading the newspaper in print form sharpens her critical mind and sense of judgment, she said: "I don't just believe, I have my own opinions about whatever is

written. I don't even care if they put it on the front page. Being on the front page doesn't buy my mind, or make me lose my mind, it just guides me on what is happening in my environment."

Esther's daughter, Eloise (Millennial, Family E, Interview, 2018) remembers growing up in a household where there was always a copy of a newspaper waiting to be read. She would be drawn to it as a way of understanding and participating in the lively family conversations on the big stories and issues of the day. But she admitted to being easily distracted by other stories in the mix. "Big flashy clickbait headlines is what attracted me towards the news, and known personas in media," she said. "So like, if say, Beyoncé was on the cover of the Times, then I would go, I want to read that, I don't know what it says, but I'd want to see it, because there is a known figure that piques my interest."

She now sees social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp as substitutes for printed newspapers, which are becoming "less and less of a norm" in her daily media diet. Aside from the Sunday Times, which she still reads as part of the household Sunday ritual, the only print edition she reads is the neighbourhood community newspaper, which is delivered for free once a week. "I'm really into community and serving, so I know when I come back from school, I'm going to see the paper on the table, and I'm going to read a couple of pages."

#### **4.8.2 The Printed Newspaper as a Kindle of Family Memory**

Eloise's brother, Ernest (Millennial, Family E, Interview, 2018) recalled the significance of newspapers in helping to develop his literacy as a young child, sometimes with unexpected consequences. "As I learned to read, I would pick up some of the little things in the newspaper," he said. "For example, I was very little when the Clinton scandal happened, it was part of the news, and we have this thing in school, there are two megaphones on either side of the field, and you would be connected. So I recited some of things I'd seen on the news, for instance Bill Clinton saying, 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman'. I got into trouble. I was six or seven at the time."

In the other families interviewed for my study, newspaper-reading is only an occasional habit, with Celia (Baby Boomer, Family C, Interview, 2018) saying that she will sometimes buy the Mail & Guardian "because I feel sorry for them". I note here that the Mail & Guardian, a

Johannesburg-based weekly newspaper, had a circulation of 13,830 in paid sales in the first quarter of 2020 (Marklives.com, 2020), a decline of 13.75 per cent from the previous year. Anita, from Family A (Interview, 2018) said she will occasionally buy the Mail & Guardian, but will less occasionally read it: "I'll bring it home and forget to read it, and then three days later I'll look at it and I'll be, that should be lining the budgie cage now. Because that's what we're taught, today's newspaper lines tomorrow's budgie cage."

Reading the free neighbourhood newspaper was still a habit in the Family B household, where Brian (Baby Boomer, Family B, Interview, 2018) said, "That's about the only newspaper we actually look at. I look for people I know in it." To which his son Brett (Millennial, Family B, Interview, 2018) quickly added: "Yes, in the obituaries section." Asked for his own views on printed newspapers, Brett added, "The last time I saw a newspaper was in the cupboard. I thought it was fire-kindling." For Andrea, of Family A (Interview, 2018) printed newspapers are primarily associated with schoolday projects and assignments. "There was an English project, and I asked my mom to go and buy me a paper, that was in Grade 9," she recalls. "It was tedious, because I knew that I could go onto the Internet and search for something, instead of having to read the whole thing."

Darrell, of Family D (Millennial, Interview, 2018) said he had never read a newspaper, but had read "a couple of magazines" devoted to sport and motorcycles. At university, his coursework includes readings of newspaper articles on court reports and case law, which he reads in digital form. "You don't realise how much news you take in, because it's so concise and compressed," he said. "I can learn about 50 headlines in 10 minutes. I don't think you could have done that in my dad's day, when you had to read the whole newspaper."

This sense of newspapers as relics of days gone by rekindled a memory for David (Baby Boomer, Family D, Interview, 2018), who recalled his parents discussing the first lunar landing in 1969, with the day's papers, carrying the momentous story, spread out in the lounge for ease of reading. "I've still got the folks' newspapers in the cupboard somewhere," he said. Denise, of Family D (Baby Boomer, Interview, 2018) also recalled a family habit of saving and collecting stories from newspapers: "There was a special thing with my gran, we lived in Durban, and she would cut out any article related to Princess Di. She had these little scrapbooks, and my brothers had scrapbooks related to wildlife."

Brian, of Family B (Baby Boomer, Interview, 2018) had a similar memory: "Every night, after the newspaper was finished, my gran used to cut up all the articles, and keep them for us, and we would use them for assignments," he said. "We threw it all away a few years ago." While the sharing of news as a family tradition lives on, in one form or another, the legacy of print, passing from one generation to the next, can thus be said to belong to the realm of distant history.

#### **4.9 Exploring Millennial Antipathy to Social Media Platforms**

When Celia, of Family C (Baby Boomer, Interview, 2018) saw her son Craig sitting pensively on a rock at the beach during a family holiday, she did what almost any mother would do in that situation. She snapped a candid pic with her smartphone, and posted it to her Facebook wall. The next day, she was surprised to receive a notification from a Facebook Community Support account, warning that the photograph had been reported by a user who had requested its removal. That user was Craig himself. "It was such a lovely photo," recalls Celia. "I was like, what have I done?" For Craig, the answer was simple. "I reported it and said, this is a picture of me that I don't want." (Millennial, Family C, Interview, 2018).

While the in-house impasse was amicably resolved, Craig's reaction runs deeper than the embarrassment of seeing himself in a bathing-suit on his mother's Facebook page. Rather, his aversion, as he explained in the interview, was to the platform itself, and to the sharing conventions of social media in general. Since his feelings regarding social media were not unique to the Millennial informants in my study, I have identified this as a theme in my thematic data analysis. I have labelled it as "social mediapathy", a portmanteau term combining social media with antipathy, in its meaning as a strong feeling of dislike or opposition.

##### **4.9.1 "Facebook is for old people, and Instagram is Twitter for people who can't read"**

Craig (Millennial, Family C) said he had initially used Facebook on a limited basis, posting approximately once a month, but he had since come to the realisation that "I don't like sharing pictures of my life, and I don't really care about other people and what they're doing." He added that he feels the same way about Instagram, summing up his views on social media and its users

in the following way: "Facebook is for old people, that's what it was designed for. I don't use Instagram, it's Twitter for people who can't read." In contrast to Craig's view on Facebook, a survey on the usage of social media platforms in South Africa (Budree et al., 2019: 327) found that Facebook was the preferred platform of 90 per cent of users aged from 18 to 35. Citing a study by World Wide Worx (2019: 318), the survey adds that users aged between 20 and 29 make up approximately 25 per cent of the 13-million South Africans who use Facebook, with users over the ages of 60 accounting for only 7 per cent of the total.

At the same time, there is an echo of Craig's feelings of social mediapathy in the South African findings of a Deloitte report on Millennials, described as a "generation disrupted" (Deloitte, 2019: 8). Here, under the heading "Social media: friend or foe?", the report notes that 55 per cent of Millennials surveyed agree with the statement, "On balance, social media does more harm than good". Along with this, 58 per cent said they agreed with the statement, "I'd be a happier person if I reduced the time I spend on social media". These sentiments are echoed by the findings of a survey of 5,000 schoolgoers in the United Kingdom, by Digital Awareness UK and the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (Guardian, 2017), in which 63 per cent of respondents agreed that they "would not care" if social media did not exist, while 71 per cent admitted that they had taken "temporary digital detoxes" to escape the pervasive effects of social media.

#### **4.9.2 The Impulse to Curate Beauty and Order Amidst the Chaos of Social Media**

In my study, Brett of Family C (Millennial, Interview, 2018) expressed strong feelings about what he regarded as the essential pointlessness of posting his views on social media. "As long as I have an opinion, and I have created an understanding within myself," he explained, "I don't need to share it or talk about it all the time." Asked whether he was a user of Twitter, he said he had an account, but had never actively used it. "I don't see the point. Like, why do you need to share your opinion, who cares? It's more a platform for influencers and news outlets, as opposed to the average person. I can get like maybe 100 followers, and then I post my opinion on something that thousands of people have already shared. I don't understand."

Brett's view of Facebook was almost identical to Craig's — "Facebook is for the old people, and not anyone I care about," he said — but he also objected to the platform on aesthetic grounds. "I don't like the way it looks, and I also don't like the miscellaneous information that kind of pops up. I have to care about information in order to be interested in it. I don't consume information that is miscellaneous."

While Brett sees the value of WhatsApp, "just to keep up with friends and make sure plans are happening", his preferred social media platform is Instagram, where he posts at least twice a month, taking care to create a visually pleasing feed. He describes his process as "basically making sure everything matches and making sure it all flows together. If it's ugly, I don't want it there. I want to go onto my Explore page and see very pretty pictures, I want to see it all looking very nice." Here Brett expresses the difference between sharing on social media, an activity that does not interest him, and curating, an activity that appeals to his aesthetic sensibilities and his need to create order amidst the chaos of too many opinions, too much information, and too much social media.

#### **4.10 Conclusion and Summary of Findings**

In this Findings chapter, I have set out to consider and analyse the data from my semi-structured interviews in order to answer the central research question of my study, which is: "Within purposively selected South African family households with Internet connectivity, how do Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news with each other?" The short and easy answer to this question might be: in very different ways, and in very similar ways. In the latter case, a key commonality between the younger and older generations was the "digital bridge" of mobile technology, coupled with ubiquitous Internet access.

This is seen at its most generationally binding in the universal use of WhatsApp as a messaging and news-distribution tool by every member of my cohort of nine baby Boomer and eight Millennial informants. On the contrary, there were strong differences in attitudes to social media among the generations, with some Millennials stressing their disinterest and even aversion to sharing news, whether personal or of general interest, on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. One clear observation is that digital and social media are the dominant channels for

discovering, consuming and sharing news, with only one out of five families still subscribing to a weekend newspaper. Overall, based on the semi-structured interviews and my observations, I conclude that the answer to the "how" in my research question can be summed up as follows: frequently, on multiple platforms, with vigour, ease, strong opinions, and the connecting power of technology.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study

#### 5.1 Acknowledging the Limitations of the Study

At the start of this concluding chapter, I ask the reader to picture a stone being pitched into a pond, the impact producing a series of concentric circles that ripple like the waves of a WiFi symbol seeking purchase in the ether. In this half thesis, likewise, I have sought to define signal from the chaos of data, by zeroing in on the news consumption habits and behaviours of a subset of purposively selected South African families, made up of members of the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations, who live in households with ubiquitous Internet connectivity in a limited radius of suburban Johannesburg.

Each locus of interest has accordingly narrowed the boundaries of my research, which has aimed to identify commonalities and disparities in the way each generation views, uses, values, trusts, and shares the news from a diversity of platforms and media choices. Acknowledging the limitations of this research report, in terms of both its scope and scale, I will revisit some of the key findings and consider how they may serve as prompts for further and deeper research by other students in the field of social sciences. Intra-family news consumption and sharing, across the generations, has been little explored in the literature, more specifically in the South African

context; now that the waters have been stirred, it is my hope that the ripples will resonate and expand in pursuit of new insights and knowledge.

## **5.2 Pondering the Impact of the Pandemic on the Ways in Which Families Consume and Share News**

I open on a note of topical reflection in this, year two of the COVID-19 pandemic that began spreading across the world in the first few months of 2020 (World Health Organisation 2020). My research for this study was conducted before the outbreak of the pandemic, which has had profound and far-reaching effects on the everyday lifestyles, habits, and behaviours of millions of global citizens. These effects include the wearing of surgical masks and the maintaining of recommended distances in public places, along with rigorous, habitual hand-washing and sanitisation as precautions against infection. But perhaps the most profound deviation from long-ingrained routine has been a turning inward, a retreat to the perceived safety and sanctuary of the home environment, during government-mandated states of isolation that came to be popularly known as "lockdown". During the initial so-called hard lockdown phase in South Africa, from March 27 to May 1, 2020 (The Presidency 2020), all movement outside places of residence, for anyone not officially deemed to be an essential worker, was prohibited by law (Makou 2020), the only exceptions being trips for emergency medical treatment and excursions to purchase provisions.

For families sequestered at home, this meant that contact with the outside world would effectively have been limited to landline and mobile telecommunication, and access to digital platforms and channels via the Internet. A familiar feature of South Africa's lockdowns, recalling the "fireside chats" broadcast on radio by US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the years of the Great Depression and the Second World War, from 1933 to 1944 (Roosevelt 1933), was the so-called "family meetings" (eNCA 2020), through which SA President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the nation on electronic broadcast media and YouTube. With reference to my findings chapter, I note this phenomenon as a contemporary echo of certain recollections by Baby Boomer informants in my study. For them, gathering around the TV set or radio during a major news event would have been as commonplace as the ritual of subdividing and sharing the newspaper, with its multiple supplements and sections, on a Sunday morning.

Returning to the present day, it is worth noting that ease of access to communications technologies, platforms, and channels would have been a key differentiator in public understandings and discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, when compared to the previous global event of such magnitude, the influenza pandemic of 1918 to 1919 (CDC 2018). The question then arises: how has ubiquitous access to information shaped and influenced the way South African families consumed and shared news during the lockdown phases of the COVID-19 pandemic? Given the dominance of the pandemic on the news agenda during 2020 and beyond, and its direct relevance to the individuals and families cloistered in their households at an extraordinary moment in history, this could be a topic of rich interest for further study, whether through interview-based research or textual analysis of social media and message-app postings by members of family groups during lockdowns.

### **5.3 Broadening the Horizons in an Unequal Society: Extending the Study from the Have-Nets to the Have-Nots**

Purposive selection, by its very definition, is a process of leaving out, as much as zeroing in. The researcher who chooses this strategy, in the quest to cast light on a question or put an hypothesis to the test, will hold fast to a set of criteria that will steer the ship of enquiry towards its destination. But what of the ports of call that will, inevitably, be bypassed and overlooked along the way? Here would be room for new research expeditions, and new routes to knowledge and understanding.

As detailed in my methodology chapter, one of the criteria for my purposive selection of interview subjects was that they lived in households with Internet connectivity in Johannesburg. This was in order to ensure that all members of the five participating families would have equal and unfettered access to the broadest possible range of platforms, channels, and media options, for the sake of comparative analysis. This was not a difficult criterion to fulfill, given the historically higher prevalence of Internet connectivity in Gauteng province, with the Johannesburg metropolitan region as its social and economic hub.

According to the 2018 edition of the General Household Survey, produced by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2018: 57 - 58), residents of metropolitan areas in Gauteng rank second

nationally for Internet access at home, at 16.7%. For residents of Limpopo province, the figure is 1.7%, the lowest nationwide. The figure for North West province is less than double that, at 3%. There is thus a clear disparity between what we might call the "have-nets" (mostly metropolitan residents) and the "have-nots" (mostly rural residents) when it comes to Internet connectivity in the South African context. With this in mind, there would be scope for a separate or extended study into the ways in which families in rural communities access, consume, use, and share news, in households where digital or mobile media would likely not be the first choice. Such a study could focus further on the perceived significance and value of news, whether received from more traditional media such as radio or print, and the extent to which attitudes towards news differ and coincide across the generations.

#### **5.4 Delving Deeper Into WhatsApp as a Meeting-Place for Generations**

Beyond its everyday utility as an instant-messaging application, widely used for casual chats, logistical arrangements, and brief status updates by text or voice, WhatsApp has emerged from my research as a tool of singular purpose and potential in the context of intra-family news distribution, conversation, and commentary. Identified by Deloitte, in a Global Mobile Consumer Survey, as the most popular application in South Africa across all measured age groups, from 16 to 45 (Deloitte, 2018: 28), WhatsApp was unsurprisingly the one social media platform used individually and communally by all 17 members of the five families who participated in my study. In my findings chapter, I thus draw an analogy between WhatsApp as a point of intersection for cross-generational communication, and the familiar practice of designating and signposting public "assembly points", where people can rendezvous for convenience or gather for safety during an emergency. In my interpretation, WhatsApp has become a virtual "micro-space", where people of varying views and age groups can gather to share and discuss items of mutual interest, in the privacy of a closed and internally-administered social network.

Dispatching a message on WhatsApp, to an individual or a group, thus becomes an act of reflex, whether the intention is to confirm arrival at a location, commission an errand, share a joke or meme, or report a just-heard news story, in the manner of a journalist on the scene. As one Millennial informant in my study put it: "I like WhatsApp because everybody uses it, and

everyone will see it if I send it, as opposed to email, which is, like, slow." (Craig, Millennial, Family C 2018).

While it would be inaccurate to portray WhatsApp as neutral territory in the culture wars between the Millennial and Baby Boomer generations — as one Baby Boomer informant stated, regarding in-house Millennial reactions to certain of her WhatsApp posts, "I'll occasionally send a link on the family WhatsApp group, and then they'll say, we saw that on Reddit months ago" (Celia, Baby Boomer, Family C 2018) — there would appear to be sufficient common ground in cross-generational usage of the platform to warrant further research in the field. A diary-based study on the use of WhatsApp as a household family news "channel", for the breaking and sharing of news ranging in ambit from hyperlocal to regional to national to global, could produce interesting and useful results, given the widespread and growing adoption of the application across devices, platforms, and generations.

## 5.5 Returning to the Research Question, With Further Questions in Mind

In the oft-quoted penultimate stanza of *Little Gidding*, the last of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (Eliot, 1942), the poet offers what amounts to sage advice for the researcher contemplating the final stretch of a journey of research. "We shall not cease from exploration," Eliot writes, "And the end of all our exploring, Will be to arrive where we started, And know the place for the first time." Research, then, is a journey to knowing, even if the real knowledge is that there are more questions yet to be asked, this time guided by what we have learned along the way. I conclude this chapter by returning to my research question for this study, which is: "Within purposively selected South African family households with Internet connectivity, how do Baby Boomers and Millennials consume and share news with each other?"

In interrogating the how, through a series of semi-structured interviews that brought to light the many and various ways in which news is consumed across the generational divide, whether by chance (accidentally swiping left on a cellphone screen to reveal the stories in a Google News feed) or by design (sharing and discussing the sections of a Sunday newspaper on the breakfast island in the family home), I have also explored the "why" that weaves around those ways. Why is news consumption a routine feature of family life? Why do members of different generations

in family households access news platforms and channels in such different ways? Why is news that is of great interest and importance to one generation in the household, of so little interest and importance to the other?

In the findings of my research, I have analysed news consumption behaviours that range from random "dipping" by Baby Boomer informants into a diverse array of sources, from radio bulletins to Facebook feeds to Comedy Central mock-newscasts, to the sharply-focussed curation, by Millennial informants, of multiple streams of news on a single platform, such as Reddit or YouTube. I have looked into the almost complete absence of traditional print newspapers in the family media diet, except in the case of one participating family, who still cling fast to their ritual of reading and discussing the print edition of the Sunday Times around the breakfast table. I have considered the prevalent attitude of resistance, in some cases even strong aversion, to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, on the part of Millennial informants, one of whom summed up his view as: "Facebook is for old people, that's what it was designed for. Kids don't use it anymore, they're all on Instagram. I don't use Instagram, it's Twitter for people who can't read." (Craig, Millennial, Family C, 2018)

I have further pondered the meaning and significance, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, of WhatsApp as a space of "gathering" and news sharing across the generations. If I have come to "know the place" at all, to quote the poet's words once again, it is in part because I myself live in a mixed Baby Boomer-Millennial household, where news of purely domestic interest and global consequence filters in and out, through chatter, through memes, through screenshots from news-sites, throughout the day. But mostly, I know that the journey of research does not end here, but begins anew, with questions that perhaps will be as much of interest to other researchers, as they are to me now. I venture some of them, as food for thought, and as recommendations for future rounds of ceaseless exploration.

### **5.5.1 Questions for Further Research Into News Consumption and Sharing across the Generations**

1) How do journalists of different generations view, consume, use, and share news in their newsroom environments?

- 2) In what ways are news consumption and news literacy being taught or factored into the curriculum at primary and secondary school level in South Africa?
- 3) How is the newspaper industry in South Africa working on ways to attract new generations of younger readers in a shrinking commercial news market?
- 4) How are digital platforms and mobile apps using news to attract younger consumers?
- 5) How do Baby Boomers and Millennials view specific news media, platforms, channels, and stories in a controlled focus group setting?
- 6) How are Millennials and younger users producing and sharing news content on video-based platforms such as TikTok?
- 7) How do journalism students at South Africa's tertiary learning institutions view, consume, use, and share news, and how are they in turn influencing the news behaviours and attitudes of their parents' generation?

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