



Information Research – Vol. 31 No. ISIC (2026)

Supporting a new generation of informed voters: an interdisciplinary literature review pairing informed voting and current events information behaviours

Nancy Ross Dribin

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47989/ir31ISIC65261>

Abstract

Introduction. This interdisciplinary literature review pairs research on Generation Z current events information behaviour with informed voting behaviour research to identify areas of overlap, gaps, and appropriate theories to frame further study.

Method. Relevant journals and scholarly databases for information behaviour, information studies, political science, history, and sociology were searched for recent work on the identified topics. Studies were cross-checked for demographic relevance and applicability to the identified topics.

Analysis. Key characteristics for Generation Z current events information behaviour and voting behaviour were identified across articles. These behaviour characteristics were then compared between the two areas of focus to identify where one might be applied to support the other.

Results. The review of literature identifies strong potential for current events information behaviour research to support informed voting behaviour for emergent voters. Commonly occurring information behaviour theories are identified to frame future work.

Conclusions. Literature on current events information behaviour is gaining strength, and research related to the impact of informed voting is robust. Where those two areas meet, however, remains a largely untapped vein to explore. Based on current literature, further study in this direction would help information science practitioners better support young adult information needs related to civic engagement.

Introduction

In the United States, Generation Z will continue to be the youngest demographic of voters for the next five years, and their civic engagement, or lack thereof, has the potential to shape the future of American democracy. As youth voter participation drops, it may be time to change the political issues information environment to re-engage and support Generation Z in voting. To that end, this investigation reviews recent research on young adult current events information behaviour in conjunction with informed voting behaviour to identify areas of overlap, research gaps, and appropriate theories to frame further study. This literature review seeks to identify key characteristics of information behaviour in Generation Z that impact their understanding of current events. It also examines how information science practitioners can work within those constraints to support informed voting.

Background

Generation Z is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019) and is differentiated from prior generations of young adults largely due to the exponential growth of omnipresent internet access beginning in the 1990s (Katz et al., 2021). They are the most ethnically and racially diverse generation of voters and lean toward progressive values, although this is not uniform (Katz et al., 2021; Della Volpe, 2022). More universally, issues are key motivators for voting, and they hold diverse priorities (Medina et al., 2025). However, they are also disenfranchised and feel left out of discussions related to traditional politics (Medina et al., 2025). As youth voter participation drops, it may be time to change the political issues information environment to re-engage Generation Z in voting.

Impacts and benefits

Research has shown that increased participation in voting strengthens social cohesion, which in turn supports effective collective action, improves community health, and drives community-wide economic growth and resiliency (Castrucci et al., 2024; Lloyd & Lewis, 2024; Prewitt et al., 2014). Additionally, positive early voting experiences impact future voting participation (Dinas et al., 2024). Because informed voting supports increased civic engagement and a positive voting experience (Bernhard & Freeder, 2020; Lassen, 2004), understanding young adult information behaviour and supporting informed voting will have long-term positive societal impacts.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to identify areas of overlap, research gaps, and appropriate theories between Generation Z current events information behaviour and informed voting behaviour. Searches were conducted of relevant databases and journals, including the Association for Information Science and Technology journals database, ScienceDirect database, JSTOR, the Child Development and Adolescent Studies section of the EBSCO database, *Library & Information Science Research*, *The Library Quarterly*, *Political Behaviour*, and *Political Science Research and Methods*, for example. Key queries used in the search process included Generation Z, Gen Z, young adults, adolescents, teens, students, youth, information behaviour, current events, news, politics, elections, voting, and informed voting. Any articles not specifically referencing Generation Z were date-verified to ensure that the research subjects' ages fell within the 1997-2012 birth year range. As articles of interest were found, they were added to the artificial intelligence (AI) research tool ResearchRabbit to retrieve reference list information, citing articles, and their keywords and abstracts. The results were then reviewed to find further articles of interest. Pew Research was used to supplement demographic and quantitative information unavailable from other resources.

Over 100 articles from well-regarded journals and sources were identified during this search, and two primary criteria were used to determine which would be used for this review. As outlined above, the first criteria looked at generational parameters. While some articles on young adult behaviour provided interesting results in a different context, this review was specifically looking

at participants falling into the Generation Z birth years to ensure the current events and life impacts were similar. Additionally, work originating in the United States was prioritized, though not exclusively, as the goal is to support young adult American voters. Research related to Western democracies was included if the results were transferrable to common events in the United States, such as the act of moving out of parental household as studied by Bhatti and Hansen (2012). These two criteria narrowed the articles considerably. A final review for relevance to the question of how to work within young adult information behaviours to support informed voting completed the selection process.

Current events information behaviour

Generation Z information-seeking behaviour is typically centred on social and digital networks for all content areas, including current events (Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2024). Whether the research is centred on behaviours in a formal education setting or tracking general experience, the findings remain true. For example, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), like Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., found that people and social networks were teen participants' preferred information sources, with electronic sources as their preferred media. This is despite the shift from a university setting for Buzzetto-Hollywood et al. to an informal after-school setting for Agosto and Hughes-Hassell. With a broader range of information-seeking topics, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell concurred that participants used social networking sites to engage with differing points of view on current issues and to share their issue and cause-related support with others.

This trend follows the conclusions of research related to information beliefs driving information behaviour. In a 2018 study by Anderson and Jiang on behalf of the Pew Research Center, roughly two-thirds of teen respondents believed social media helps teens become more civically minded. Respondents also indicated that social media broadened their views by exposing them to different viewpoints and expanding diversity in their social interactions.

However, surveys with 63 undergraduate students conducted by Leeder (2019) showed that participants demonstrated mixed skills in identifying misinformation and an unfortunate lack of ability to evaluate their own skill level in this area. Additionally, there was no connection between the evaluation of trustworthiness and participants' willingness to share information; they were willing to share news items regardless of an inability to verify. Combined with a propensity for satisficing (Dahlen & Hanson, 2023), the unfortunate result is that Generation Z voters often enter the voting booth without accurate information on current events and issues needed to make informed decisions.

Study findings offer guidance on supporting information behaviour within existing Generation Z behaviour characteristics to enhance the accuracy of the information gathered. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) focus on building stronger relations with trustworthy information sources, primarily libraries. They suggest working with classroom educators, who are noted as a strong influence, and engaging directly with teen audiences to improve the image of libraries as a welcoming and viable resource. As they conclude, '[t]he impact of such research efforts on urban library practices could lead to a badly needed image boost for urban libraries and help to make everyday life information-seeking easier, more pleasant, and more meaningful for urban teens' (pp. 162-163). Likewise, Buzzetto-Hollywood et al. noted the importance of classroom educators building social connections with libraries and librarians to improve their visibility as a reliable source and a go-to option for obtaining information.

Leeder (2019) and Dahlen and Hanson (2023) offer information behaviour strategies and technological solutions that work together to improve the quality of information gathered. Leeder focuses on encouraging and enhancing observed behaviour to improve the effective evaluation of news stories. These behaviours include examining the whole page for a source of information, using multiple sources, allowing time to review sources, and looking deeper than the top search

results. Unfortunately, with satisficing being a challenging behaviour to break, that last strategy is difficult to implement with fidelity. Dahlen and Hanson suggest looking to technical solutions in addition to improving information literacy. They recommend ensuring that search algorithms are accurate and provide needed results at the top of the list.

Informed voting behaviour

Informed voting strives to ensure that each voter heads to the voting booth credibly informed on the issues and people for whom they vote. As young adults leave home, influences on voting participation are increasingly centred on social networks (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). As outlined above, this tracks with the centring of social networks in information-seeking behaviour related to current events (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2024). Unfortunately, poor information behaviour habits, such as relying on the top results of a single search results list and selecting information that reinforces preconceived opinions (Leeder, 2019), combine with social information sharing behaviour to move away from informed voting.

It is critical to work within pre-existing behaviours to shift voters to an informed state. For example, issues are key motivators for voting for Generation Z; however, there are diverse priorities instead of clear, leading issues (Medina et al., 2025). Providing accurate, easy-to-share information on an issue-by-issue basis for multiple issues is critical. Additionally, recognising that Generation Z voters feel left out of traditional political discussions (Medina et al., 2025) suggests that reaching out via alternative media avenues and formats would be more effective. Della Volpe (2022) notes that the historical events shaping collective experiences for Generation Z voters have been motivating factors in voting, particularly those impacting members of their generation most profoundly, such as school gun violence. He adds that politicians who address concerns directly and seriously are the most impactful in conveying information to Generation Z voters.

Politicians' information, however, is not always accurate. The miasma of misinformation and disinformation related to current events circulated and recirculated in Generation Z social networks negatively impacts informed voting. It requires looking at information in its current context and role and providing information systems that support effective access and exploration. As Kranich (2024) delves into the threats to American democracy related to citizen participation in this highly polarised era, each issue ties back to roadblocks in accessing and evaluating relevant information. She proposes a central role for libraries in addressing these roadblocks by fostering civic literacy, which significantly overlaps with information literacy. Likewise, Bigger (2024) ties literacy equity with civic fluency, a term he and colleagues coined to represent 'a person's ability to navigate the various components of adult life in community with competence' (p. 89) and is inclusive of, though not limited to, an individual's role as a citizen. Research and implementation projects by both Kranich and Bigger are at the forefront of integrating information behaviour with the needs of informed voting. Expanding the scope beyond libraries into the larger infosphere could build significant research knowledge and support improved implementation projects.

Applicable information behaviour theories for future research

Several theories offer examples of practical frameworks for studying and addressing Generation Z's information behaviour in specific contexts, including informed voting and civic engagement. Most prominently, these theories include satisficing, everyday life information seeking, social network analysis, and sense-making. Brief connections to noted contexts are outlined in Table 1.

Information Behaviour Theory	Connection
Satisficing	Centres on the behaviour of selecting the first acceptable answer instead of continuing to search for the best information (Zoellner, 2010)
Everyday life information seeking	Includes a more specific, contextualised form of satisficing that frames the behaviour as necessary to efficiently manage daily information needs and includes the relevancy of social environment and personal information seeking experience (Savolainen, 2017)
Social network analysis	Centres on the impact of social connections on the flow of information (Jeong et al., 2024)
Sense-making	Specifically, Dervin's ten information assumptions, provide a framework for examining misinformation and excessive information (Cole et al., 2015; Dervin, 1976)

Table 1. Theories relevant to information behaviour crossed with voting behaviour and civic literacy.

These theories rose to the top based on prior use, such as the work of Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) for everyday life information seeking, and specific relevance to behaviour. For example, social network analysis supports the examination of information flow through the social networks critical to Generation Z's information seeking and sharing. When used in conjunction with the other theories, it becomes a powerful tool to visualise and better understand the information flow over networks (Schultz-Jones, 2009). As Schultz-Jones states, '[b]y mapping the structure of interactions, a researcher can identify the channels through which information flows from one node to another and the potential for a corresponding influence of one over another.' Combined with Dervin's (1976) ten information assumptions, this framework is powerful for studying and addressing the flow of misinformation, as well as the sources and impacts of information overflow.

Similarly, given the relationship between satisficing and social information behaviour for Generation Z, the two together provide a powerful lens for research on and addressing concerns related to information quality and validity. Anderson & Jiang (2018) note the extensive participation of teens on social media networks, at almost two-thirds of teens. While this is a boon to diversifying viewpoints, it is also an efficient means to spread misinformation rapidly, especially when information seekers are following satisficing behaviour. Shultz-Jones's (2009) mapping of information flow through Generation Z's social networks highlights the potential for misinformation cascades, where misinformation spreads rapidly through a network, and echo chambers. Social influence on voting operates via these same networks, impacting informed voting (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). Use of everyday life information seeking's more nuanced view of satisficing to investigate the shape of young adult information behaviour, as demonstrated by Agosto & Hughes-Hassell (2005), can provide critical insight into current events information behaviours. Understanding the nuances of information behaviour in a field-specific theoretical framework supports identification of moments where interventions and resources related to informed voting can have the most impact.

Interventions and future directions

The extensive, practice-based work of Bigger (2024) and Kranich (2024) offer preliminary interventions and directions, centred in their background as information science professionals. The focal point of each is to ensure robust, inviting civic literacy and information literacy programmes and supports. Building on the concept of civic fluency offers an opening to young adults who care more about issues than they understand about how policy and government impact those issues. For these ideas to grow in implementation, however, it is also important to consider the importance of involving Generation Z directly in the work (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005). Moreover, research exploring current events information behaviour in

conjunction with informed voting could provide more rigorous scaffolding for these interventions.

Given the digital fluency and proclivities of Generation Z, it is also worth exploring technical tools and resources to support these same efforts in a similar framework. Dahlen & Hanson's (2023) work offers top-level suggestions; again, this includes improved search interfaces and instruction in best practices in digital information seeking and sharing. However, given the significant relationship between Generation Z and the digital world, further study of effective means to offer resources and supports directly in the digital realm is a rich vein to explore. Given that teens are seeking easier access to more reliable but also more informal sources of information (Blocksidge & Primeau, 2023), this holds promise as future area of investigation.

Conclusions

While gaps related to demographic divergence remain, research on Generation Z's information-seeking, technology use, and social behaviour related to current events has increased in recent years. Additionally, a robust body of research has looked at the impacts of informed voting on voting behaviour, civic engagement, and societal impacts. It is time to examine these two areas of interest in concert to help information science practitioners best support young adult information needs related to civic engagement, employing robust information behaviour theory frameworks.

Civic literacy research and implementation efforts by Kranich (2024) and Bigger (2024) are examples of work headed in this direction, but combining these areas of research remains largely unexplored. A gap exists in the research literature where young adult information and informed voting behaviours are crossed. Based on the current literature, studying these two areas of interest together has significant potential to help information science practitioners better support young adult information needs related to civic engagement. Furthermore, it supports the hypothesis that understanding young adult information behaviour and supporting informed voting will have long-term positive societal impacts and is a worthwhile direction to explore.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Dominican University School of Information Studies faculty and students, especially Dr. Faith Rice and Dr. Kara Malenfant, for their feedback and guidance on this paper.

About the author

Nancy Ross Dribin is a PhD student with the Dominican University School of Information Studies. She holds an MPS from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University and a BA from Wellesley College. She has extensive experience in museum and non-profit interactive media resource development and is currently serving as an elected school board member. She can be contacted at ndribin@my.dom.edu.

References

- Agosto, D. E., & Hughes-Hassell, S. (2005). People, places, and questions: An investigation of the everyday life information-seeking behaviors of urban young adults. *Library & Information Science Research*, 27(2), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2005.01.002>
- Anderson, M. & Jiang, J. (2018, November 28). Teens' social media habits and experiences. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/28/teens-social-media-habits-and-experiences/>

- Bernhard, R., & Freeder, S. (2020). The more you know: Voter heuristics and the information search. *Political Behavior*, 42(2), 603–623. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11109-018-9512-2>
- Bhatti, Y., & Hansen, K. M. (2012). Leaving the nest and the social act of voting: Turnout among first-time voters. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 22(4), 380–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2012.721375>
- Bigger, K. (2024). Reimagining literacy equity as civic fluency-building: Some hard-won lessons libraries can carry forward. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 94(1), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.1086/727811>
- Blocksidge, K., & Primeau, H. (2023). Adapting and evolving: Generation Z's information beliefs. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 49(3), 102686. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102686>
- Buzzetto-Hollywood, N. A., Banks, T. T., & Hill, A. J. (2024). Informing academia through understanding of the technology use, information gathering behaviors, and social concerns of Gen Z. *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, 27, 012. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5388>
- Castrucci, B. C., Ayers, J., & Mahs, G. R. G. (2024). Voter participation is a path to health equity: How health departments can promote a healthy, inclusive democracy. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 30(2), 306–307. <https://doi.org/10.1097/phh.0000000000001886>
- Cole, A., Napier, T. & Marcum, B. (2015). Generation Z: Facts and fictions. In T. Swanson and H. Jagman (Eds.), *Not Just Where to Click: Teaching Students How to Think About Information* (pp. 107–137). American Libraries Association. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/publications/booksanddigitalresources/digital/9780838987179_OA.pdf
- Dahlen, S. P. C., & Hanson, K. (2023). In their words: Student reflections on information-seeking behaviors. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 49(4), 102713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102713>
- Della Volpe, J. (2022). *Fight: How Gen Z is channeling their fear and passion to save America*. St. Martin's Press.
- Dervin, B. (1976) Strategies for dealing with human information needs: information or communication? *Journal of Broadcasting*, 20(3), 324–351.
- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
- Dinas, E., Valentim, V., Broberg, N., & Franklin, M.N. (2024). Early voting experiences and habit formation. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 12(1), 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2023.2>
- Jeong, D.-H., Lee, S.-K., Ahn, M.-E., Kim, S. M., Ryu, O.-H., Park, K. S., Shin, S. G., & Han, J. H. (2024). An empirical study on social network analysis for small residential communities in Gangwon State, South Korea. *Dental Science Reports*, 14, Article 11648. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-62371-x>

- Katz, R. R., Ogilvie, S., Shaw, J., & Woodhead, L. (2021). *Gen Z, explained: The art of living in a digital age*. The University of Chicago Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226814988.001.0001>
- Kranich, N. (2024). Civic literacy: Reimagining a role for libraries. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 94(1), 4–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/727809>
- Lassen, D. D. (2004). *The effect of information on voter turnout: Evidence from a natural experiment* (Working Paper No. 04-03). Social Science Research Network.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.475821>
- Leeder, C. (2019). How college students evaluate and share “fake news” stories. *Library & Information Science Research*, 41(3), 100967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2019.100967>
- Lloyd, N., & Lewis, P. R. (2024). A socio-technical perspective on fostering sustainable community development via social capital and social cohesion. 2024 IEEE International Conference on Autonomic Computing and Self-Organizing Systems Companion (ACSOS-C), pp. 61-66. Aarhus, Denmark. <https://doi.org/10.1109/acsos-c63493.2024.00032>
- Medina, A., Siegel-Stechler, K., & Suzuki, S. (2025, January 15). *Young people and the 2024 election: Struggling, disconnected, and dissatisfied*. Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/2024-poll-barriers-issues-economy>
- Prewitt, K., Mackie, C. D., & Habermann, H. (Eds.) (2014). *Civic engagement and social cohesion: Measuring dimensions of social capital to inform policy*. National Academies Press.
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/18831/chapter/1>
- Savolainen, R. (2017). Research in information science award: Everyday life information seeking. *Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 43(3), 53–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/BUL2.2017.1720430317>
- Schultz-Jones, B. (2009). Examining information behavior through social networks. *Journal of Documentation*, 65(4), 592–631. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410910970276>
- Zoellner, K. (2010). Gratification theory provides a useful framework for understanding the information seeking behaviours and needs of distinct populations. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 5(2), 107–110. <https://doi.org/10.18438/B8RG9T>

© [CC-BY-NC 4.0](#) The Author(s). For more information, see our [Open Access Policy](#).