

Sitting in my eighth–grade classroom, I stealthily check my email, hoping for news updates from The New York Times or CNN about the heightened COVID–19 crisis in India, my country of origin. Before I can even read a word on the page, a boy in my class asks, "Why are you reading the news?" "Yeah," my friend adds. "Shreya's a boomer." The whole class erupts into laughter and my face heats as I slowly close my email tab. If you don't know what a boomer is, I'll keep it simple: I was called the equivalent of a grandma simply because I read the news. Although this memory feels distant during these summer months, I can't help but wonder what this simple statement says about Generation Z (people between the ages of 6 and 24). Much to my astonishment, only 5% of U.S. citizens aged 9–24 are regular consumers of news from newspapers or digital publications. Meanwhile, 54% of Generation Z members get their daily news from social media sites such as TikTok, Instagram and the like. For informed young readers, this means that it has become even harder to get our perspectives and opinions to be taken seriously. With the spike of social media usage, the average attention span has dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to eight seconds in 2013. This is a result of social media sites condensing and simplifying information into bite–sized videos that are usually less than three minutes. How can we be sure that teenagers are grasping what's going on in the news if their only news intake is a short video that can be made by anyone, not even a qualified reporter or journalist? Moreover, there have been numerous reported false rumors circulating on sites like TikTok in recent months, like those suggesting that certain celebrities are involved in sex–trafficking. This affects not just the reputation of the celebrities but also taints public perception on the credibility of all news shared and discussed on social media platforms. One of the bigger issues clouding this topic is whether Gen Z is getting a sufficient amount of knowledge about current events if the majority of them are scrolling through posts that can be biased or leave out certain information. This is especially important when it comes to the impact that young voters can have on election outcomes when they show up at the ballot box — and the repercussions that follow. As the journal Foreign Policy put it, "Donald Trump always enjoyed massive support from uneducated, low–information white people." The emphasis here should be on low–information, because without education and a factual understanding of current events, voters can elect unqualified candidates into office. Gen Z–ers must recognize that voting is a highly important right that many other nations don't have. We must take it seriously. Older members of Gen Z will have an opportunity to vote in upcoming elections, but with this freedom comes responsibility; they must ensure that they will make an informed choice by consistently reading the news from unbiased, factual sources. Although social media is a great tool in itself, when it becomes the primary vehicle of informing the general public, many of the stories circulating must be taken with a grain of salt. Reading the news on social media is not enough. So, please, pick up the paper