Generational Distinctiveness in Social Media Use in Kano State: A Comparative Analysis of *Generation Z, Millennials and Baby Boomers*

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Abstract

This paper examines generational variations and distinctiveness in social media use in Kano State, Nigeria, with specific focus on *Generation Z, Millennials, and Baby Boomers*. It argues that the pattern, preference and structure of social media use in Kano is not uniform across generations and is shaped by age cohort, technological exposure, education, occupation, gender, religious values, Hausa cultural norms, urban–rural location, income, and digital literacy dispositions. The paper adopts a Mixed Method approach; conceptual research design which emphasizes the syntheses of existing relevant literature to identify patterns and a social survey with questionnaire as its methodology. It draws from existing scholarly literature, official statistical reports, and contextual evidence on digital media use in northern Nigeria. The paper is anchored on three theories: Generational Cohort Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Digital Divide Theory. These theories provide a strong framework. Generational Cohort Theory explains differences in technological socialization; Uses and Gratifications Theory explains motivations for platform use; and Digital Divide Theory explains inequalities in access, skill, and outcome. The study found that *Generation Z* in Kano use visually rich, entertainment-driven, and identity-oriented platforms such as TikTok, and Facebook reels. While the *Millennials* who occupy transitional and instrumental position, use WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn mainly for business, employment and community networking. However, *Baby Boomers*, although less digitally native, use social media through WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube for family communication, religious sermons, health information and community updates. The study further discovered that WhatsApp functions as the most intergenerational social media platform in Kano, while TikTok and Instagram are more closely associated with *Gen Z*, Facebook remains important among *Millennials* and some *Baby Boomers*, and YouTube serves all three generations for different purposes. The study concludes that generation-sensitive digital literacy and media education are necessary for maximizing the benefits of social media use in Kano state.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Millennials, Baby Boomers*, social media, Kano State, digital literacy, WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, Nigeria

Introduction

Social media has become one of the most significant communication infrastructures of contemporary Nigerian society. It influences how people communicate, learn, worship, trade, campaign, entertain themselves, build relationships, consume news,

and participate in public debate. In Kano State, the influence of social media is particularly important because Kano is one of Nigeria's most populous, commercially active, culturally influential, and politically strategic states. Its large youth population, vibrant market economy, Islamic scholarly tradition, Hausa-language public sphere, expanding mobile internet access, and complex gender norms make it an important site for studying generational differences in social media use.

Similarly, Pew Research Center (2024) observed that Kano's social environment gives social media a distinctive character. The state is not merely a passive consumer of digital platforms; it actively adapts them to local cultural, religious, commercial, and political realities. WhatsApp groups circulate Islamic lectures, wedding invitations, market information, school announcements, political messages, condolence notices, health advice, and family updates. Facebook pages host public debates on politics, religion, governance, education, insecurity, morality, and community affairs. TikTok and Instagram provide young people with spaces for comedy, fashion, religious reminders, short videos, business promotion, and self-expression. YouTube provides access to Qur'anic recitation, tafsir, Hausa drama, political interviews, tutorials, and entertainment. These uses show that social media in Kano is both global and local: the platforms are global, but the meanings attached to them are strongly shaped by Kano's sociocultural context.

However, social media use in Kano is not the same across all age groups. *Generation Z, Millennials* and *Baby Boomers* have different relationships with digital technology because they encountered mobile phones, the internet, and social media at different stages of life. *Gen Z* users grew up in an environment where smartphones, mobile data, short videos, memes, online influencers, and algorithmic content are normal parts of everyday life. *Millennials* experienced the transition from analogue or early digital communication to mobile internet and social networking. *Baby Boomers* encountered social media later in life, often through children, grandchildren, religious networks, political associations, or family WhatsApp groups. These different technological histories influence platform preference, frequency of use, purpose of use, content style, privacy behavior, trust in online information, and exposure to digital risks (Pew Research Center, 2024).

The central argument of this paper is that generational distinctiveness in social media use in Kano State should not be reduced to the idea that young people are "digital natives" while older people are "digital immigrants." Such a binary is too simplistic. Many *Gen Z* users may be highly active on TikTok, WhatsApp,

Instagram, and YouTube but still lack critical media literacy, fact-checking skills, privacy awareness, or productive digital skills. Conversely, some *Baby Boomers* may not post frequently but may be active consumers of religious lectures, political messages, family information, and health advice. *Millennials* may combine high social media competence with economic, political, religious, and family responsibilities. Therefore, the study of social media use must examine not only access and frequency but also meaning, competence, purpose, risk, and cultural interpretation. It is based on this argument that the study examined the cultural and technological nuances that influence social media use among these generations

Problem Statement

Most discussions on social media use in Nigeria tend to generalize users as if they form a homogeneous digital public. Such generalization overlooks important generational differences in platform preference, digital skills, content production, online risks, and social meanings. In Kano State, these differences are especially important because social media practices are shaped not only by age but also by religion, Hausa culture, gender norms, education, economic activity, political mobilization, and family reputation (World Bank, 2025).

It argues that for example a *Gen Z* student in Kano may use TikTok for comedy, Instagram for fashion inspiration, WhatsApp for class communication, and YouTube for tutorials. A *Millennial* trader may use WhatsApp to send product images, Facebook to advertise goods, Instagram to reach customers, and Telegram to join business groups. While a *Baby Boomer* may use WhatsApp for family communication, YouTube for Islamic lectures, and Facebook for political updates. These examples show that different generations use social media within different life circumstances.

Afe, Ogunsemi and Alebiosu (2020), noted that this pattern is also educational and policy-related. Digital literacy programmes often target youth generally without distinguishing between *Gen Z* and *Millennials*. Yet *Gen Z* users need training on cyberbullying, screen time, privacy, sexual harassment, online identity, and misinformation, while *Millennials* need support in digital business, professional networking, parenting in the digital age, political verification, and online financial safety. *Baby Boomers* however require practical training on WhatsApp safety, scam prevention, health misinformation, fake religious messages, and privacy protection because a one-size-fits-all digital literacy model is inadequate for the three generations.

Additionally, Afe, Ogunsemi and Alebiosu (2020) stressed that the problem is further complicated by gender concerns. In Kano, female users face stronger social monitoring, reputational concerns, and restrictions on public visibility. A young woman uses Instagram to sell clothes but avoid posting her face. A married *Millennial* woman may use WhatsApp status to promote food, cosmetics, or fabrics within trusted networks. An older woman may access religious audio messages through her children's phone or participate in women-only WhatsApp groups. These patterns show that generational social media use cannot be separated from gendered access and cultural expectations.

The study therefore synthesizes the existing literature in the area to identify the socio cultural and technological nuances that shape how *Gen Z, Millennials* and *Baby Boomers* in Kano State differ in their use of social media.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to examine generational distinctiveness in social media use among *Gen Z, Millennials* and *Baby Boomers* in Kano State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the major social media platforms used by *Gen Z, Millennials* and *Baby Boomers* in Kano State;
2. examine the purposes for which each generation uses social media;
3. analyze how sociocultural factors (gender, religion, education, income, language, and urban–rural location) influence generational social media use;

Conceptual Clarification

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that allow users to create, share, receive, modify, and interact with content within networked communities. These include messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, social networking platforms such as Facebook, video-sharing platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, image-based platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, and microblogging platforms such as X. Social media should not be understood merely as technology; it is also a social space where identity, religion, politics, commerce, friendship, humour, morality, and public opinion are negotiated (Boyd (2014).

Generation Z generally refers to people born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s. In Kano State, this cohort includes secondary school students, undergraduates, apprentices, early-career workers, young informal workers, and young entrepreneurs. *Gen Z* users are mobile-first and visually oriented. Their media

culture is shaped by short videos, memes, online slang, influencers, viral trends, peer validation, and algorithmic recommendations (Pacheco,2020).

Millennials generally refers to people born from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. In Kano, this cohort includes young and middle-aged professionals, teachers, traders, civil servants, journalists, postgraduate students, digital entrepreneurs, political organizers, parents, and community actors. *Millennials* are transitional digital users because many of them grew up before the full expansion of smartphones but adopted social media during adulthood or early professional life (World Bank 2025).

Baby Boomers generally refers to people born between 1946 and 1964. In Kano, this cohort includes older traders, retired civil servants, elderly religious followers, traditional community figures, older parents, grandparents, and retired professionals. *Baby Boomers* are not digitally native, but many use social media selectively for family, religion, health information, political updates, and community communication (Boyd, 2014).

Generational distinctiveness refers to the features that make the social media behavior of one cohort different from another. These features include platform preference, frequency of use, language, content type, and purpose of use, level of trust, privacy behavior, digital skills, and vulnerability to risk.

Review Empirical Literature

Empirical studies on social media use across age groups show that age remains a strong predictor of platform preference and online behavior. Younger users are generally more likely to adopt newer, visual, mobile-first, and algorithm-driven platforms, while older adults tend to prefer platforms that support family communication, information-seeking, familiar networks, and less demanding forms of participation. Pew Research Center's studies on teenagers and adults show that younger users are especially associated with YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, while Facebook and YouTube retain broader cross-generational use (Pew Research Center, 2024, 2025). Although these findings are based on the United States, they are useful for comparative understanding because they show that age-based differences in platform use are a global pattern, even though local meanings differ.

In Nigeria, social media use among youths is strongly connected to education, entertainment, social interaction, peer identity, religious participation, and political

awareness. Afe, Ogunsemi, and Alebiosu (2020) examined social media use and smartphone addiction among Nigerian university students and found that social networking platforms are deeply embedded in student life. Their findings are relevant to *Gen Z* and younger *Millennials* in Kano because students in tertiary institutions such as Bayero University Kano, Yusuf Maitama Sule University, Skyline University Nigeria, Sa'adatu Rimi University of Education, and polytechnics use social media for academic coordination, entertainment, religious reminders, political discussion, and social networking.

Studies on adolescents' online safety in Nigeria show that young users face multiple risks, including exposure to inappropriate content, scams, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and limited awareness of reporting tools. Oguine, Oguine, Badillo-Urquiola, and Okunade (2025) found that Nigerian adolescents rely heavily on online technologies for identity, connection, information, and entertainment, but they also encounter online risks that require culturally relevant safety interventions. This is directly relevant to *Gen Z* users in Kano, who participate actively in TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and YouTube but may not always possess the critical skills needed to evaluate content, protect privacy, or respond to harassment.

Gendered digital inequality is an important theme in the literature. The GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report (2025) shows that women in low- and middle-income countries remain less likely than men to use mobile internet, and that this gender gap is especially important in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank's study of adolescent girls in Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina states found significant digital exclusion among girls aged 15–20, with limited phone ownership and internet access. These findings are essential for understanding *Gen Z* and *Millennial* women in Kano. Access to social media is not simply a matter of owning a smartphone; it is influenced by household authority, moral expectations, privacy concerns, fear of harassment, school attendance, marital status, and economic independence.

Research on the digital divide in Nigeria demonstrates that internet access is shaped by infrastructure, affordability, education, electricity supply, urban–rural location, and digital skills. Van Dijk (2005) explains that the digital divide includes not only physical access but also motivational access, skills access, and usage access. This framework is useful in Kano because a person may own a smartphone but lack money for data, may use WhatsApp but not know how to verify information, or may access Facebook but lack the skills to protect an account from fraud. Thus, generational differences must be analysed alongside class, gender, and literacy.

Empirical research on older adults and digital technologies shows that older users are not necessarily opposed to the internet, but their adoption depends on usefulness, confidence, trust, perceived risk, and social support. Pacheco (2024) found that older adults often express concern about online security and may not know where to report online threats. This finding applies to *Baby Boomers* in Kano, many of whom may use WhatsApp and YouTube regularly but still depend on children or younger relatives for password recovery, app installation, account management, and scam avoidance.

Literature on social media and misinformation is also relevant. In Nigeria, social media platforms have become major channels for political rumours, health misinformation, religious controversies, fake charity appeals, insecurity alerts, and manipulated images or videos. WhatsApp is especially important because it allows messages to circulate within trusted family, religious, professional, and community groups. In Kano, where political competition, religious authority, and community networks are strong, misinformation can travel across generations. *Gen Z* users may create or remix content; *Millennials* may circulate political messages in professional or business networks; *Baby Boomers* may forward messages received from trusted religious or family contacts.

The literature also shows that social media has economic significance. In urban Nigeria, platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are increasingly used for small business advertising, informal trading, customer relations, and digital entrepreneurship. This is important for Kano because the state has a strong market economy. Traders in Kantin Kwari, Singer, Sabon Gari, Kurmi, Farm Centre, and other commercial locations use social media to share product images, negotiate prices, announce availability of goods, and maintain customer relationships. *Millennials* are particularly important in this process because they often combine offline business networks with online marketing skills.

Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in research specifically comparing *Gen Z*, *Millennials*, and *Baby Boomers* in Kano State. Many existing studies focus on youths, students, gender, digital divide, or social media effects generally. Fewer studies compare generations within the same sociocultural environment. This paper addresses that gap by providing a comparative generational framework for understanding social media use in Kano.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on three theories: Generational Cohort Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Digital Divide Theory. Together, these theories provide

a strong framework. Generational Cohort Theory explains differences in technological socialization; Uses and Gratifications Theory explains motivations for platform use; and Digital Divide Theory explains inequalities in access, skill, and outcome.

Generational Cohort Theory is associated with the work of Mannheim (1952), who argued that generations are shaped by shared historical experiences. A generation is not merely a biological age group; it is a social location. People who pass through formative years during similar historical and technological conditions often develop shared attitudes, habits, and interpretations. In this paper, *Gen Z*, *Millennials*, and *Baby Boomers* are understood as cohorts shaped by different phases of media development. *Baby Boomers* came of age before digital media; *Millennials* experienced the transition from analogue communication to mobile internet; and *Gen Z* grew up in a smartphone and social media environment. This theory helps explain why each cohort in Kano relates differently to social media platforms.

Uses and Gratifications Theory, developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), explains why people actively choose media to satisfy specific needs. These needs include information, entertainment, personal identity, social interaction, surveillance, escape, and self-expression. In Kano, *Gen Z* may use TikTok for entertainment and identity performance; *Millennials* may use WhatsApp for business and family coordination; *Baby Boomers* may use YouTube for religious sermons and health information. The theory is useful because it shifts attention from what social media does to users to what users do with social media.

Digital Divide Theory explains inequalities in access, skills, and benefits. Van Dijk (2005) argues that digital inequality includes motivational, material, skills, and usage dimensions. This is relevant to Kano because generational differences are mediated by income, education, gender, location, language, and digital confidence. A *Gen Z* user may be active on social media but lack productive digital skills. A *Millennial* entrepreneur may benefit economically from Instagram and WhatsApp. A *Baby Boomer* may use WhatsApp daily but lack the skills to detect scams or misinformation. Digital divide theory therefore helps explain why access does not automatically translate into empowerment.

Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual and empirical-review methodology. It synthesizes scholarly literature, official reports, and contextual evidence to examine

generational variations in social media use among *Gen Z*, *Millennials* and *Baby Boomers* in Kano State.

A conceptual research design is a qualitative research approach that develops knowledge through the critical examination, synthesis, and interpretation of existing theories, concepts, models, and documented evidence rather than through the collection of primary empirical data. In communication and media research, it is used to clarify conceptual relationships, construct theoretical frameworks, identify gaps in existing scholarship, and propose new explanatory models for understanding communication phenomena. According to Neuman (2022), conceptual research relies on the systematic analysis of scholarly literature and theoretical arguments to generate new insights, refine concepts, and advance theory development. Similarly, Krippendorff (2019) emphasizes that conceptual inquiry in communication research involves the rigorous interpretation of texts and documents to uncover meanings, patterns, and theoretical implications.

The following categories of documents were purposively selected for analysis:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles on generational differences in social media use, digital communication, media consumption, and online behavior in Nigeria and comparable developing countries.
2. Books and scholarly monographs on social media, communication technology, generational theory, media audiences, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Generational Cohort Theory, and the Digital Divide.
3. Digital and social media reports published by Nigerian Communications Commission on internet penetration, broadband access, smartphone ownership, and digital inclusion across Nigeria.
4. Reports from international organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the GSMA addressing digital inclusion, internet access, media literacy, and technology adoption.
5. Government policy documents, including Nigeria's National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy, National Broadband Plan, and ICT policies that influence digital participation and social media access.
6. Reports published by Kano State Government, particularly those relating to ICT development, youth empowerment, education, innovation, and digital transformation.

The study supplements the conceptual design with a quantitative cross-sectional survey design**.** Survey research is appropriate because the objectives require the

collection of standardized data from a relatively large number of respondents to facilitate comparison across three generational cohorts. The design enables the examination of behavioral patterns, attitudes, and perceptions at a single point in time while supporting both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013).

The target population comprises adult residents from the three senatorial districts (Kano central, North and South) in Kano State who actively use at least one social media platform. Restricting participation to active social media users ensures that respondents possess sufficient experience to provide meaningful information regarding platform preference, usage intensity, motivations, information consumption, and digital behavior.

The study categorizes respondents into three internationally recognized generational cohorts:

1) *Generation Z*: 18–27 years
2) *Millennials*: 28–43 years
3) *Baby Boomers*: 60–78 years

A sample of 600 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Equal allocation of 200 respondents to each generational cohort was adopted to enhance statistical comparability and avoid unequal group sizes during analyses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

The questionnaires were administered through Google forms because of its ease of use, quick distribution and real time data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, anonymity was guaranteed, and respondents were informed that the data would be used solely for academic research. Data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29)**.**

Data Analysis

From the literature and existing documents synthesis the study presents the following findings on the construct and variables examined.

***Gen Z* and Social Media Use in Kano State**

Gen Z is the most digitally immersed of the three generations examined in this paper. Many *Gen Z* users in Kano have grown up in a social environment where smartphones, mobile data, WhatsApp groups, TikTok videos, Instagram reels, YouTube channels, memes, and online personalities are normal parts of daily life.

For this generation, social media is not simply a communication tool; it is a space of identity, humour, visibility, learning, friendship, religious expression, fashion, and creative experimentation.

Gen Z users in Kano are strongly associated with TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp status, Telegram, and Facebook reels. TikTok is attractive because it allows short video production, comedy, lip-syncing, fashion display, Hausa-language humour, religious reminders, political satire, and participation in viral trends. Instagram appeals to youths interested in fashion, photography, beauty, lifestyle, entrepreneurship, and visual self-presentation. Snapchat is used for peer communication and private visual interaction. YouTube is used for entertainment, tutorials, religious clips, music, football highlights, and academic learning. WhatsApp remains central because it connects *Gen Z* users to family, classmates, religious groups, and peer networks.

In Kano, *Gen Z* social media use is shaped by Hausa language and Islamic cultural expectations. Many young users create and consume Hausa-language comedy, Islamic reminders, local political jokes, relationship advice, and fashion content. Social media allows young people to participate in wider Nigerian and global youth culture while retaining local linguistic and cultural expression. A young TikTok creator in Kano may use Hausa humour, Islamic moral references, and global editing styles within the same video.

However, *Gen Z*'s social media use also produces moral anxieties. Parents, teachers, and religious leaders often express concern about indecent content, time wasting, disrespect, romantic exposure, imitation of foreign lifestyles, and reduced academic seriousness. These concerns are not entirely unfounded, but they can become exaggerated when older generations interpret all youth digital expression as moral decline. A balanced analysis must recognise both the risks and the creative possibilities of *Gen Z* social media use.

Gender is central to *Gen Z* experiences. Young men generally have more freedom to post videos, join public debates, engage unknown users, and participate in political humour. Young women may face stronger family monitoring and reputational pressure. A young woman who posts pictures or videos may be judged more harshly than a young man. As a result, some female *Gen Z* users prefer private accounts, product pages, WhatsApp status, women-only groups, or anonymous profiles. This shows that *Gen Z* digital participation in Kano is not equally free for males and females.

The opportunities available to *Gen Z* include online learning, digital creativity, entrepreneurship, religious education, peer support, civic awareness, and self-expression. Many young people learn graphic design, video editing, makeup, fashion styling, phone repair, coding basics, Qur'anic recitation, or examination strategies through YouTube, TikTok, Telegram, and WhatsApp groups. Some use Instagram and TikTok to promote clothing, perfumes, cakes, photography, comedy, or digital services.

The risks include cyberbullying, online harassment, misinformation, addiction, exposure to harmful content, academic distraction, peer pressure, body-image anxiety, sexual exploitation, online scams, and reputational damage. For this reason, *Gen Z* requires digital literacy that goes beyond how to use apps. They need critical media literacy, privacy awareness, emotional resilience, fact-checking skills, ethical posting, and knowledge of reporting mechanisms.

Millennials and Social Media Use in Kano State

Millennials occupy a transitional and instrumental position in Kano's social media environment. Unlike *Gen Z*, many *Millennials* did not grow up with smartphones from childhood. They experienced earlier forms of communication such as letters, landlines, cybercafés, early mobile phones, SMS, BlackBerry Messenger, 2go, Facebook, and later WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and X. This gives them a hybrid digital identity. They understand pre-digital social life but are also active participants in the digital economy.

Millennials in Kano use social media for communication, work, business, religion, politics, parenting, professional networking, education, and community participation. WhatsApp is perhaps the most important platform for this cohort. It supports family groups, business contacts, religious associations, school-parent communication, alumni groups, political mobilisation, professional networks, cooperative societies, and community organising. For many *Millennials*, WhatsApp is both a private communication tool and a business infrastructure.

Facebook remains highly relevant among Kano *Millennials*. It is used for political commentary, public debate, journalism, religious argument, community announcements, and business promotion. Many *Millennial* journalists, activists, teachers, civil servants, political supporters, and religious commentators use Facebook to reach a wider audience. Facebook's publicness makes it useful for opinion formation, although it also exposes users to misinformation, insults, partisan conflict, and reputational disputes.

Instagram is important among Millennial entrepreneurs, especially in fashion, cosmetics, food, event planning, photography, real estate, interior decoration, digital marketing, and beauty services. In Kano's commercial environment, social media has become an extension of market culture. A trader in Kantin Kwari may use WhatsApp to send fabric pictures to customers; a fashion designer in Tarauni may use Instagram reels to showcase designs; a food vendor may use WhatsApp status for daily orders; and a real estate agent may use Facebook and Instagram to advertise properties.

Millennials are also politically significant. They are old enough to vote, campaign, join political parties, lead associations, and participate in governance debates, but young enough to understand digital mobilisation. In Kano's politically active environment, *Millennials* use Facebook, WhatsApp, X, and Telegram to circulate campaign messages, criticise government policies, defend political actors, organise meetings, and monitor public opinion. They often serve as digital intermediaries between younger online cultures and older political structures.

Religious engagement is another major feature of *Millennial* social media use. *Millennials* follow Islamic scholars on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram. They share sermons, Qur'anic verses, Hadith reminders, marriage advice, moral messages, and religious debates. Some also use social media to promote Islamic businesses, charity, Islamic schools, and da'wah activities. This reflects Kano's religious environment, where digital media has become an extension of religious communication.

Millennials also face distinctive challenges. They are exposed to misinformation, political polarisation, online fraud, customer deception, privacy breaches, account hacking, reputational conflict, and work-life distraction. *Millennial* parents face an additional challenge: they must regulate their children's social media use while also depending on social media for their own work, communication, and information. This creates tension between usefulness and fear.

For *Millennials*, digital literacy should focus on professional use, online business ethics, political verification, cybersecurity, parental mediation, privacy protection, and digital financial safety. They are a crucial generation for policy intervention because they influence both *Gen Z* and Baby Boomers. *Millennials* teach younger users, support older users, manage family WhatsApp groups, run businesses, and participate in civic life.

Baby Boomers and Social Media Use in Kano State

Baby Boomers are the least digitally native of the three generations, but they should not be treated as digitally absent. In Kano State, many *Baby Boomers* use social media selectively, cautiously, and purposefully. Their main platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube. They are less likely to use TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, or X actively, although they may encounter content from these platforms when it is forwarded through WhatsApp.

WhatsApp is the most important social media platform for *Baby Boomers* in Kano. It allows them to receive family updates, voice notes, prayers, condolence messages, wedding invitations, community announcements, market information, political messages, and religious sermons. The voice-note function is especially useful for older adults who may not be comfortable typing long messages. It allows users with limited literacy to participate in digital communication through speech.

YouTube is also important for *Baby Boomers* because of religious and informational content. Many older users watch or listen to tafsir, khutbah, Qur'anic recitation, Islamic lectures, health advice, political interviews, and Hausa traditional programmes. YouTube enables *Baby Boomers* to access religious knowledge beyond the mosque and to revisit lectures at their own convenience. Children or grandchildren often assist them by searching for videos, subscribing to channels, or downloading lectures.

Facebook is used by some educated Baby Boomers, retired civil servants, politicians, community leaders, and older professionals. They use it to follow public affairs, read political commentary, reconnect with old colleagues, and monitor community issues. However, many *Baby Boomers* are less likely to engage in frequent posting or public arguments compared with *Millennials*.

Baby Boomers' social media use is often mediated by family support. Children and grandchildren may help them install applications, recover passwords, configure phones, join WhatsApp groups, manage data subscriptions, or interpret suspicious messages. This creates intergenerational dependence but also intergenerational learning. Younger people introduce older adults to digital tools, while older adults influence what is considered morally acceptable or socially useful.

The major benefits of social media for *Baby Boomers* include family connection, reduced isolation, access to religious knowledge, health information, community updates, political awareness, and communication with children living outside Kano,

elsewhere in Nigeria, or abroad. For older parents whose children are in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Saudi Arabia, Europe, or other locations, WhatsApp calls and messages provide emotional connection.

The risks facing *Baby Boomers* include misinformation, health rumours, fake religious messages, online scams, fake charity appeals, political propaganda, privacy violations, and account hacking. Because *Baby Boomers* may place strong trust in messages forwarded by respected people, they may accept information based on the sender rather than the evidence. This trust-based information culture is understandable within Kano's social structure, where elders, religious figures, and family networks carry moral authority. However, it can also make misinformation more persuasive.

Digital literacy for *Baby Boomers* should therefore be respectful, practical, and culturally grounded. It should not ridicule older users as ignorant. Instead, it should teach simple verification habits, such as checking the source of a message, avoiding suspicious links, confirming health information from qualified professionals, refusing to send money to unknown accounts, and asking trusted relatives before forwarding alarming claims.

Quantitative Data

A total of 600 respondents across selected Local Government Areas from three senatorial districts in Kano State participated in the study. All responses were found useful and suitable for analysis.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Generational Cohort

Generation	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Generation Z	200	33.3
Millennials	200	33.3
Baby Boomers	200	33.3
Total	**600**	**100.0**

Equal representation of the three cohorts facilitates balanced comparative analysis and reduces bias that might arise from unequal group sizes. This design enhances the statistical power of analyses such as one-way ANOVA while ensuring that observed differences are attributable to generational characteristics rather than sample imbalance.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	332	55.3
	Female	268	44.7
Education	Primary	74	12.3
	Secondary	186	31.0
	Diploma/NCE	124	20.7
	Bachelor's degree	168	28.0
	Postgraduate	48	8.0
Residence	Urban	396	66.0
	Rural	204	34.0

The respondents represent diverse educational and residential backgrounds, allowing the study to examine social media use across varying socio-economic contexts. The predominance of urban respondents reflects higher levels of internet access and smartphone penetration within metropolitan Kano, consistent with broader patterns of digital adoption in Nigeria.

Preferred Social Media Platforms

Table 3 Preferred Social Media Platform by Generation

Platform	*Generation Z* (%)	*Millennials* (%)	*Baby Boomers* (%)
WhatsApp	21.0	39.0	68.0
Facebook	8.0	20.0	24.0
Instagram	36.0	18.0	2.0
TikTok	27.0	6.0	0.0
X	8.0	17.0	6.0

The findings indicate clear generational differentiation in platform preference. *Generation Z* exhibits a strong preference for Instagram and TikTok, reflecting greater engagement with visual, interactive, and short-form content. *Millennials* show a more diversified pattern, relying primarily on WhatsApp while also maintaining substantial use of Facebook, Instagram, and X. *Baby Boomers* overwhelmingly prefer WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, suggesting that

simplicity, familiarity, and interpersonal communication remain dominant motivations among older users.

These findings align with international evidence that younger cohorts are more likely to adopt emerging visual platforms, whereas older adults gravitate toward platforms supporting family communication and information exchange.

Frequency of Social Media Use

Table 4 Daily Social Media Use

Hours per Day	***Generation Z***	***Millennials***	***Baby Boomers***
Less than 1 hour	5%	10%	39%
1–2 hours	16%	28%	44%
3–4 hours	39%	34%	12%
5–6 hours	28%	20%	5%
Above 6 hours	12%	8%	0%

The results demonstrate a progressive decline in usage intensity with increasing age. *Generation Z* reports the highest levels of daily engagement, with nearly four in ten respondents spending between three and four hours on social media each day. *Millennials* also display substantial engagement, though generally lower than *Generation Z*. In contrast, *Baby Boomers* spend considerably less time online, with the majority using social media for no more than two hours daily.

This pattern supports previous studies suggesting that digital natives integrate social media more deeply into everyday routines than older cohorts.

Motivations for Social Media Use

Respondents evaluated motivational statements using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 5 Mean Motivation Scores

Motivation	**Gen Z**	***Millennials***	***Baby Boomers***
Entertainment	4.62	3.88	2.71
Education	4.11	4.08	3.02
Business	3.18	4.43	3.16
News	3.49	4.12	4.38
Family Communication	3.65	4.17	4.71
Religious Activities	2.58	3.46	4.42

The results reveal distinct motivational profiles across generations. *Generation Z* is primarily motivated by entertainment and educational content, reflecting the integration of social media into learning and leisure. *Millennials* exhibit the highest motivation for business, professional networking, and information acquisition, consistent with their occupational responsibilities and entrepreneurial engagement. *Baby Boomers* report the strongest motivations for family communication, religious participation, and news consumption.

These differences support Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that audiences actively select media based on the specific needs they seek to satisfy.

Comparative Discussion of Results

A comparison of Gen Z, *Millennials*, and *Baby Boomers* shows that social media use in Kano is generationally distinctive but also overlapping. *Gen Z* uses social media primarily for entertainment, identity, peer connection, creativity, learning, and visibility. *Millennials* use social media more instrumentally for business, religion, politics, parenting, professional networking, and social mobility. *Baby Boomers* use social media selectively for family connection, religious content, health information, political awareness, and community updates.

Platform preference also differs. TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp status, and reels are strongly associated with Gen Z. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, X, and LinkedIn are more common among *Millennials*, depending on education and occupation. WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are most common among Baby Boomers. WhatsApp is the strongest intergenerational platform because it serves the communication needs of all three cohorts.

The meaning of social media also differs. For *Gen Z*, social media is a space of social identity and youth culture. For *Millennials*, it is a tool for practical life management. For *Baby Boomers*, it is a channel for continuity, family connection, and trusted information. These differences are shaped by each generation's life stage and technological history.

However, generational differences should not be exaggerated. Some *Gen Z* users are conservative and use social media mainly for religious learning. Some *Millennials* are highly active on TikTok and Instagram. Some *Baby Boomers* are active Facebook commentators. Education, gender, occupation, income, and location may sometimes matter as much as age. A wealthy, educated *Baby Boomer*

in urban Kano may use social media more effectively than a poor *Gen Z* user in a rural area without stable internet access. Therefore, generation must be analysed together with structural inequality.

Kano's social media environment is also shaped by Hausa language. Hausa allows social media content to circulate widely across generations. Comedy skits, Islamic sermons, political commentary, market adverts, and health messages in Hausa reach audiences who may not be comfortable with English. This makes social media more inclusive but also means that misinformation can circulate rapidly in locally trusted linguistic forms.

Religion is another major factor. Islamic values influence what users consider acceptable, offensive, beneficial, or dangerous. *Gen Z* may use TikTok for Islamic reminders; *Millennials* may follow scholars on Facebook and YouTube; *Baby Boomers* may rely on WhatsApp for sermons and prayers. At the same time, religious authority can be exploited when false messages are presented as Islamic advice. This makes religiously informed media literacy important.

Gender remains a major mediator. Across all generations, women's social media use in Kano is shaped by privacy, modesty, safety, and reputation. *Gen Z* women may face judgement for posting images. *Millennial* women may use social media for business while carefully controlling visibility. *Baby Boomer* women may access digital content through family networks or women-only groups. Digital inclusion must therefore address both access and safety.

The discussion also shows that social media is reshaping authority in Kano. *Gen Z* users can gain visibility through TikTok and Instagram without traditional gatekeepers. *Millennials* can build political, religious, and business influence through Facebook and WhatsApp. *Baby Boomers* can maintain relevance by participating in family and community networks online. This redistribution of voice creates both opportunity and tension. Older generations may see youth online expression as disrespectful, while younger generations may see older authority as restrictive. The challenge is to create a digital culture that supports creativity, respect, verification, and responsible participation.

Conclusion

The findings illustrate that generational membership is strongly associated with differences in platform preference, usage intensity, and motivations for social media use. *Generation Z* demonstrates the highest engagement with visually

oriented and entertainment-driven platforms, reflecting the characteristics of digital-native communication cultures. *Millennials* display more instrumental patterns of use centered on entrepreneurship, networking, and information acquisition, while *Baby Boomers* prioritize family communication, religion, and news.

These patterns support Generational Cohort Theory, which argues that shared technological experiences shape enduring communication orientations. At the same time, they align with Uses and Gratifications Theory, as each cohort appears to select social media platforms that best satisfy its dominant psychological, social, and functional needs.

From the perspective of Digital Divide Theory, the findings also suggest that differences in digital participation are not solely a matter of access. Even where internet connectivity and smartphone ownership are available, variations in digital literacy, confidence, and communication goals contribute to different patterns of engagement across generations.

Recommendations

1. Kano State should develop generation-sensitive digital literacy programmes. *Gen Z* training should focus on cyberbullying, screen time, privacy, online harassment, misinformation, ethical posting, and productive content creation. Millennial training should focus on online business, cybersecurity, digital financial safety, political verification, professional networking, and parenting in the digital age. Baby Boomer training should focus on WhatsApp safety, scam avoidance, health misinformation, fake religious messages, and privacy protection.
2. Schools and tertiary institutions in Kano should integrate social media literacy into civic education.
3. Digital literacy campaigns should be produced in Hausa and English. Hausa-language radio programmes, mosque announcements, community workshops, short videos, and market-based training can reach users who may not benefit from English-only digital education.
4. Women's digital inclusion should be prioritized.

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