

'No, auntie, that's false': Challenges and resources of female baby boomers dealing with fake news on Facebook

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Abstract

The spread of fake news on social media networks is on the rise, prompting a special interest in identification and coping skills among news consumers so that they can filter out misleading information. Studies suggest seniors share more fake news on social media; despite this, there is little literature analysing how they behave when faced with fake news. This study examines how baby boomer women handle fake news on Facebook, and the role of family members in contributing to their digital literacy in dealing with this phenomenon. A qualitative thematic analysis study was conducted using information obtained from interviews; the findings revealed that participants recognised that they could identify fake news, but were not always able to do so because of a lack of supplemental information about the news' context or doubt about its source. Interviewees also revealed that they turned to trusted family members to assist them in developing fake news identification and filtering skills.

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Introduction

The spread of fake news has become a global concern for citizens, media, and governments (Talwar, *et al.*, 2019), as people adopt misperceptions and misconceptions and spread them to others (Buchanan and Benson, 2019). Even news media are susceptible to sharing false information (boyd, 2017). Authors argue that social media dissemination of fake news has contributed to poor health decisions (Hotez, 2016), changed the direction of the stock market (Ferrara, *et al.*, 2016), and even affected the credibility of branded

products and services (Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri, 2019). The reasons people share fake news have not been precisely established in the literature (Talwar, *et al.*, 2019), although some studies attribute it to low critical interpretation of information, difficulty in following the news flow and lack of skill with Internet tools (Yabrude, *et al.*, 2020).

Technology advances rapidly, introducing new communication tools that we gradually learn to use and adapt. We usually associate technology adoption with youth, an ability to understand the use of technological devices and applications better than senior users. Seniors are often defined as a cohort struggling with digital gadgets, media, and services, and are therefore at risk of social marginalization (Rivinen, *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, baby boomers grew up alongside technological advancements, and that this reality makes it easier for older adults to perceive digital instruments as less remote (Niemelä-Nyrhinen, 2007). However, an analysis of the spread of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential election found that the Facebook users most inclined to disseminate fake news were individuals over 65. Baby boomers shared seven times more fake news on Facebook than younger users (Guess, *et al.*, 2019). Facebook was identified as the main platform responsible for the distribution of fake news (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

The literature on how senior users cope with fake news is very limited (Loos and Nijenhuis, 2020); this study aims to analyse and shed light on how female baby boomers address fake news found on the social media network Facebook. Previous studies have shown that it is preferable for adult users to acquire digital literacy in social contexts where family or friends facilitate learning about and using digital resources (Friemel, 2016; Tsai, *et al.*, 2017; Schreurs, *et al.*, 2017; Barrie, *et al.*, 2021); however, these studies have not examined the extent to which family members play a role in learning how to deal with content like fake news. This study also aims to delve into the role of family and close acquaintances when adults are confronted with misleading content on Facebook.

This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge about the process of media literacy, enabling baby boomer women to cope with fake news on social media despite not consciously seeking to propagate false information. This phenomenon is worth investigating since accurate information improves the quality of life (Loos and Nijenhuis, 2020), and adds to the body of knowledge on the role of media in the well-being of society (Michailidou and Trenz, 2021).

Background literature

Using social media to deliver fake news has accelerated its dissemination, to the extent that more fake news are shared over social media than real news (Silverman, 2016). Pariser (2011) argued that fake news was just as likely to go viral as genuine news. However, the sheer volume of false news makes it difficult to separate truth from fiction. This effect is most noticeable among Facebook users, who have been more likely to discover and share this content with their friends (Guess, *et al.*, 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Popular posts are prioritized in the design of Facebook, making it more difficult to distinguish between legitimate and misleading content (Salganik, *et al.*, 2006; Hodas and Lerman, 2012; Ciampaglia, *et al.*, 2018).

Fake news can be identified by certain features. For example, it tends to include first-person and second-person pronouns (Rashkin, *et al.*, 2017; Ott and Rayson, 2011). It frequently displays the use of superlatives to stress deceptive content, to exaggerate or dramatise a statement — “Fresh water is the single most important natural resource” (Rashkin, *et al.*, 2017), or “The biggest piece of fake news in this entire election cycle is that Donald Trump couldn’t win” (Li and Su, 2020). Fake news is also characterised by a lack of comparison between data and facts, as well as the absence of quantitative data (Ott, *et al.*, 2011). Moravec, *et al.* (2019) as well as Guess (2015), Guess, *et al.*, (2018), Green, *et al.* (2002), Klofstad (2009), and Schäffer (2007) all observed that news consumption on networks can be reduced to specific topics and the

formation of communities around those issues. This information consumption behaviour reinforces specific beliefs, predisposing them to polarization and dismissing messages that contradict their viewpoints.

Osmundsen, *et al.* (2021) claimed that the sharing of fake news reflected an inability to discern whether information was true or false. The definition assumed that the act of sharing fake news was unintentional, as distinguished from the deliberate dissemination of fake news, which was categorised as disinformation. In this respect, Søe (2019) stated that information that was inaccurate and misleading was referred to as misinformation, while purposefully misleading information, or content intending to deceive, was referred to as disinformation. This observation was consistent with other studies, which concluded that besides the properties of a news source, receiver characteristics affected the likelihood of individuals spreading false information on social networks (Buchanan and Benson, 2019). While examining the dissemination of false information on Facebook about climate issues, it was noted that exercising critical thinking reduced the likelihood of trusting, liking, and sharing fake news, without affecting individual recognition of reliable information (Lutzke, *et al.*, 2019). Another study agreed with these findings, where people used a variety of strategies to filter out false information, such as personal judgements about the plausibility of a news story, and scepticism about sources and journalistic style (Flintham, *et al.*, 2018).

Some argued that there were different factors that favoured the distribution of fake news. These factors included poor journalism practice, parody to provoke, partisan posturing, seeking to exploit or acquire power, or political influence and propaganda (Wardle, 2017). Other research concluded that the exchange of fake news, like the exchange of actual news, reflected partisan objectives (Osmundsen, *et al.*, 2021). Resources such as artificial intelligence were also available to produce information of this nature. Bots programmed as users on social networks acted to generate content and interact with humans, or other bot users, increasing misleading news (Ferrara, *et al.*, 2016; Chu, *et al.*, 2012). These technologies have also been used to eradicate fake news (Della Vedova, *et al.*, 2018), as practised by fact-checking organisations (Ceron, *et al.*, 2021; Pavleska, *et al.*, 2018). Facebook and Google have also launched fact-checking projects. For example, when users search for topics related to fake news, they are alerted and provided with links to alternate sources (Tandoc, 2019).

Previous studies show that users perceive Facebook as a channel linked to fake news, particularly for political content (Müller and Schulz, 2019). With information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook has been the most widely used medium for sharing fake news (Atehortua and Patino, 2021; Lovari, Ducci and Righetti, 2021; Al-Zaman, 2021; Muzykant, *et al.*, 2021; Orso, *et al.*, 2020). Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) identified that users perceived Facebook as an alternative news channel, a platform responsible for the distribution of fake news.

Baby boomers and digital media

Baby boomers grew up with the development of technological advances in communication, such as television, and showed evidence of incorporating new digital technologies into daily routines (Venter, 2017). As a result, they are no strangers to technical resources as e-mail, the World Wide Web, social media networks, and other computer-mediated media. Prensky (2001) called this generation 'digital immigrants', since digital represents a second language, in contrast to more recent generations. Researchers have found that generational affiliation does not affect public trust in media (Adolfsson, *et al.*, 2017). Baby boomers are less confident in their ability to identify fake news compared to young millennials. Regardless of generational differences, fake news is a phenomenon that affects everyone (Hotez, 2016; Ferrara, *et al.*, 2016; Visentin, *et al.*, 2019).

However, there is little research on the media literacies of the elderly. Research is needed on the role of age in the consumption of fake news on social media (Loos and Nijenhuis, 2020; Moore and Hancock, 2022). Some studies that have examined the dissemination of fake news and media literacy has not included age as

one of the mediating factors, as most studies have focused on younger populations already familiar with digital technologies. Pennycook, *et al.* (2018) examined psychological variables underlying the consumption and dissemination of misleading information, regardless of age. Gaozhao (2021) found no differences in gender, age, race, education, and previous exposure to current affairs. However, non-digital natives and older adults were a vulnerable population for online risks. They are populations whose limited media literacy may explain this vulnerability (Lee, 2018). In addition, level of education was rarely considered in media literacy research with older people, especially with high-risk and vulnerable populations (Seo, *et al.*, 2021).

Limited analytical reasoning skills or scarce media literacy may explain challenges faced by adults when confronting fake news. Some research has reported that although dogmatic individuals and religious fundamentalists were more likely to believe fake news, these relationships were partially or wholly explained by lower levels of analytical reasoning (Pehlivanoglu, *et al.*, 2021). They found that higher analytical thinking was linked to increased accuracy in detecting fake news, while analytical reasoning was not associated with greater accuracy in detecting genuine news. However, this is in contradiction with another study. It could be argued that these individuals had more developed knowledge networks, which increased the likelihood that they would apply relevant knowledge (Newman and Zhang, 2020). A further factor that may influence an ability to recognize fake news was individual level of exposure to misleading information. Being confronted with a few fake news stories would not seem to be enough to acquire critical skills. However, some researchers found that even a single exposure to fake news on Facebook increased subsequent perceptions of accuracy (Pennycook, *et al.*, 2018).

Media literacy frameworks assert that the development of critical thinking skills in mediatised settings requires an ability to interact with media, in terms of using devices and understanding socio-cultural effects (Mateus, 2021). Indeed, in an increasingly digitalized and media-focused culture, media literacy has been treated as a civic skill, developed over time (Rivinen, *et al.*, 2021). However, most media literacy research and interventions targeting older people were less concerned with democracy, participation, and active citizenship. UNESCO (2021) and other institutions have been pushing media and information literacy education as an openly political issue stemming from a defence of basic human rights. A myriad of initiatives put forward third-generation rights through the formation of critical skills to participate in the public sphere, as well as being able to face technologies instead of depending on them. As a result, if media literacy is to be considered a foundation for citizenship in modern times, seniors must be seen as prospective content creators as well as socially, culturally, and societally active users, not just as a disadvantaged group with restricted online resources (Rivinen, *et al.*, 2021). Media literacy of older adults must be linked to a process of demographic change in contemporary societies (Moore and Hancock, 2022). Instead of focusing on competitive tasks, it should be related to an acquisition and learning of skills to reinforce a sense of self-fulfilment, linked to active aging (Alcalá, 2019).

Various studies have reported widespread use of Facebook and other social networks among older adults and their families (Makita, *et al.*, 2021; Ciboh, 2021; Trentham, *et al.*, 2015). For example, Facebook met grandmothers' emotional needs, a motivator for dedicating much time to connecting to the everyday lives of grandchildren (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016). These bonds between grandparents and grandchildren relied on the skills of grandchildren to develop media literacy. As individuals approached the end of their lives, there was more interest in meaningful social relationships (Carstensen, *et al.*, 2003).

Similarly, losing peripheral social ties can lead to misplaced trust. With fewer social network ties, many older adults assume that all content shared by friends and followers is truthful; *i.e.*, "my close friends and family would not spread fake news" (Brashier and Schacter, 2020). Facebook provides older adults with social support, allowing them to feel valued and socially considered through interactions and exchanges of information. One study showed that Facebook helped to consolidate older adults' family relationships, increasing networks of friends and facilitating interaction (Silva, *et al.*, 2018). Exchanges of news and information enhanced well-being, helping older adults maintain an active and stronger social support network.

Social context appears to influence Internet use. Encouragement from one's social network has been indicated to be a critical component determining seniors chances of using the Internet. For those seniors not using the Internet, learning it through friends and family would be most appealing (Friemel, 2016). These findings are consistent with other studies, finding that digital literacy among seniors is best acquired in contexts when family and close peers, with whom they feel comfortable, collaborate to create an environment that fosters media exploration (Schreurs, *et al.*, 2017).

Studies have found that older adults have been active users and producers of content on social networks, addressing topics relevant to them, presenting their views and concerns (Makita, *et al.*, 2021; Leist, 2013; Hutto, *et al.*, 2015). Besides promoting relationships with friends and family, adult activity is not unrelated to social issues. One study identified that a significant percentage of senior users increased their involvement in social activism through social networks by participating in online communities (Arazi, 2009). One study engaged a group of senior citizens in social media for their advocacy efforts (Trentham, *et al.*, 2015).



Methods

A qualitative study was conducted to analyse how baby boomer women confronted fake news that they encountered on Facebook. As noted earlier, Facebook has the highest consumption of fake news among adults. Our qualitative approach allowed us to explore perceptions and experiences of baby boomer women in interviews.

The research questions are:

RQ1: What are the experiences of baby boomer women encountering fake news on Facebook?

RQ2: In which ways, and using which resources, skills, or experiences, do female baby boomers cope with and respond to fake news?

Sample. Previous studies (Almenar, *et al.*, 2021; Gaozhao, 2021) found no differences concerning certain characteristics, such as gender or age, and an ability to detect fake news. However, Almenar and colleagues (2021) identified that women were more concerned about the negative effects of misinformation in society. While these findings do not mean that male participants were not concerned that misinformation was a problem, the findings found greater dismay among women. On this basis, this study focused on baby boomer women, with an aim of acquiring information to understand how they cope with fake news.

This study adopted a purposive sampling strategy in the selection of participants (Palinkas, *et al.*, 2015; Patton, 2002). Participants were identified among groups of acquaintances by each of the researchers. After initial contact via text messaging to ensure that they met inclusion criteria, a suitable date and time for interviews was arranged. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they could put the researchers in touch with other women who could be interviewed for the project. In cases where new participants were referred, the same contact and coordination procedure was followed. This snowball or referral technique — considered as a form of convenience sampling (Daymon and Holloway, 2010) — was suitable for identifying participants under the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in the study were women aged 65–75 years living in Lima, the capital city of Peru. Participants were selected according to the inclusion criteria established by the researchers: (a) have a personal Facebook account and consult it regularly; (b) in the habit of sharing content from their Facebook account (using Facebook tools and also by sharing that Facebook content through word of mouth or other means); (c) using Facebook to communicate with family and friends; (d) have a smartphone; (e) have 100 (or more) friends on Facebook; and, (f) no longer professionally active. The last two criteria were included to secure a degree of

technological familiarity and interaction with a broad group of contacts on Facebook. Data saturation is commonly followed in qualitative research to determine when an appropriate sample size has been reached (Gentles, *et al.*, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that saturation is reached when the researcher does not identify new data in sources. In this study, saturation was achieved with 16 interviewees.

Data collection and analysis. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews are employed in qualitative work to understand subjective experiences, feelings, or beliefs, and to understand phenomena as experienced by participants. An interview guide was developed on fake news and Facebook use (Table 1). It was open-ended and allowed for probing related topics during interviews. Interviews were preceded by an opening question about fake news on social media and relationships with acquaintances and family members. Three researchers conducted the interviews individually by telephone. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with an average length for each interview of 40 minutes.

For data analysis, *in vivo* coding (Saldaña, 2021) was used to first break down data into initial codes using the exact words as spoken by participants (Manning, 2017). Once preliminary codes were identified, a thematic analysis technique was used to further explore and structure data into themes. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification and reporting of phenomenon, by recognising patterns and consistencies in data, which in turn became categories for analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Nvivo 13 was used for data analysis.

Table 1. Interview inquiry guide

Topics	Questions
Sharing content on Facebook	For what purpose do you share a news item or post on Facebook; what type of content do you share (private or public mode); do you verify the authenticity of what you share?
Identifying fake news	Do you consider that the information published in a media outlet you recognise is a guarantee of the veracity of a news item; do you trust social networks as a means of information just as you trust traditional media; do you think that it is easier for young people to recognise false news on social networks?
Fake news on Facebook	Do you find it difficult to recognise a fake news story on Facebook; what features of the content help you recognise a fake news story on Facebook; what features could Facebook have to assist in better recognising a fake news story?

Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained by assigning participants a letter code. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to interviews. No incentives or compensation were offered to interviewees for their participation.

Results

Analysis identified four themes, capturing different ways in which participants experience and confront

fake news on Facebook. Each theme was labelled using interviewees' own words to represent the meaning of the theme.

Theme: "What I have learned with my family"

This theme described the influence of a close family environment had on a decision to open a Facebook account, including the relevance of opinions of family members regarding behaviour on Facebook. Learning occurred through interventions by family members or close friends, as well as learning through iterations or trial and error. One interviewee recounted her experience:

"My eldest niece introduced me to the world of the Internet and Facebook. She is also very interested in the topics, but I, little by little, have been searching, seeing, and getting to know a little more." — Participant L.

Participants expressed that their sons and daughters motivated them to secure Facebook accounts. One participant puts it directly: "My son is always my first source of consultation" (Participant K). Sometimes, it was so that they could reconnect with family members or old friends. One interviewee expressed the reasons that it was recommended to her:

"... from the time I separated [from my partner], I was very lonely (...) and as my son grew up, he saw me alone and wanted me to integrate with friends at school, at university, because I became completely isolated, that's why my friends found me." — Participant C.

Their sons guided them on how to deal with Facebook, including guidance on how to avoid posting news that might be false. They also encouraged the development of a critical mindset to make them question future postings. One interviewee commented: "I published that [news] and they told me 'Why did you publish that?'" (Participant C). Among interviewees, there was a learned lesson from sharing misleading information, a desire not to repeat mistakes, because opinions or approval of their friends on Facebook was important. They knew that there were diverse viewpoints and belief systems among family members which influenced how misinformation was recognised or interpreted:

"When you have a large family, there will be many different generations. There will also be discrepancies between young and old, each one defending their beliefs, what they believe to be true or correct." — Participant M.

Theme: "Sometimes I can't recognise it"

This theme framed the fact that participants were aware of their responsibility to filter and not distribute misleading information, and of the limitations that they may experience in identifying fake news. As one interviewee put it:

"I don't share news on Facebook that I can't give as real (...) Generally, I don't manage to share the news they give me because I don't know if it's real." — Participant G.

Another interviewee adds: "Recognizing it is complicated. There are people who write very well and are trained to make fakes. They put a lead, the who, where, when, and you believe it to be true, especially for souls who are not curious and passively receive the information." — Participant M.

Another participant recounted her experience of coming across fake news and the impact that it had on her trust in media and its sources:

“I don’t know if you saw a few weeks ago, while we were in the worst phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, a so-called Chinese medical doctor came out and talked about what he called COVID 20-21. Maybe you don’t remember that news, but in the end, it came out that this person was neither a scientist nor a physician.” — Participant D.

However, some found ways to handle information that did not seem reliable. One explained her way of moving forward:

“Sometimes, when I don’t understand, I don’t share. I don’t share things like that, that I don’t know.” — Participant H.
Another participant recounted her experience when information gave rise to certain doubts: “It’s not that I don’t trust it, but I read and there are some things that leave me in doubt. But I don’t find out if it’s the truth, because that would already inquire.” — Participant E.

Sometimes participants became aware that a news item was false when someone pointed it out (a scenario captured in the first theme), evidencing the limits of their ability to identify false information and an awareness that they were developing based on experience:

“There are times when I get it wrong and my nieces tell me: ‘No, auntie, that’s false’. Well, that’s how it happens to me sometimes, plus I may think it’s OK for me, but other people point out that it’s not.” — Participant H.

In some cases, family members intervened when they noticed that someone spread erroneous news: “Many times I do fall, eventually I pass them on to my children and they tell me: Mom, but that’s not true, don’t share it.” — Participant M. Making mistakes and then learning from those experiences enhanced their skills in dealing with informative content on social media. Participants also stated that sometimes their children had little patience to guide them.

Theme: “If I see it is real, I can share”

Participants stated that they have critical filters that they applied to information that they found in the media. One interviewee claimed:

“Even newspapers and news broadcasts are sometimes biased, and one wonders whether or not what they say is true. When I analyse it as a whole, I can sense if it is real or not, or whether they are introducing false information so that people, or I, trust what is being said; but if I attempt to analyse, I can point it out. I usually try to cross-check the information.” — Participant G.

Interviewees put a news item on trial when they were not sure of its veracity or objectivity. In some occasions, they tried to verify it on their own: “It happens to me I confirm the information to see if it is real, what is going on beyond the gossip.” — Participant M. Some cross-checked information from other media or used Google to get more data: “I look on Google, on some information site to see if it is true or not.” —

Participant B. Among participants, identifying and trusting a source was an important element in determining whether information was reliable. One participant stated: “If the news is verified, I look at the source, I always look at the source, because sometimes people share anything.” — Participant F. Another noted: “I would have to look at the origin of that news if [the origin of the information] is not reliable. Seek the source.” — Participant A. Among participants, none mentioned intentionally that they used fact checking reports or services.

Familiarity with social media made it easier for interviewees to recognise if a news item was fake. One interviewee shared her experience:

“Sure, I have read, so it seems to me that it can work, because it has logic. I have reviewed it and I have implemented it, and it really works, and it is favourable. So, I’m happy to share things that can be useful to others on my Facebook.” — Participant D.

How Facebook allowed content to be published gave interviewees a perception of authenticity in the information that they found, providing information not found in traditional media. It also gave participants in this study a sense of freedom in terms of content that they could share. One participant shared her experience: “[I trust] a little more [social networks], because the traditional media tends to favour some sector of the [Peruvian] government administration.” — Participant I.

This freedom certified to some that Facebook lacked filters, which is why, to some, individuals “post so much rubbish” (Participant C). Some argued that “you can’t prohibit [people] from expressing what they feel” (Participant I).

Theme: “They don’t analyse”

Some participants perceived that some young family members and acquaintances did not always have the right framework to identify fake news or biased information. They described that a lack of critical judgement among young individuals was not conducive to processing information objectively. One interviewee said: “Young people can be convinced if the right codes are used, if we have a good storytelling” (Participant M). This perception occurred even though family members were also trusted to help them address social media and as a resource for identifying fake news. The findings demonstrated that sometimes respondents did not trust the opinions of their younger family members, even if they were correct.

Participants noted the risks of weak knowledge not helping in recognising fake news. One interviewee summed up the problem: “They believe everything. It seems to me that some of them don’t analyse [the information they receive], don’t give it importance and post it” (Participant B). Another interviewee argued that:

“Young people generally read everything that is put to them, sometimes they answer, sometimes they don’t answer, according to what I see, but they don’t analyse and sometimes they say things and well, everyone knows the behaviour of each young person.” — Participant G.

In a similar vein, another interviewee stated: “They tend to be more sceptical, but that does not mean more incredulous. It is much easier to convince them because of their education (or lack of it), not so much because of their age.” — Participant M.

Another participant noted how some young people did not show an interest in current affairs, a negative characteristic. In contrast — also negative — they focused on news about entertainment personalities:

“I see that some young people watch the news about what happens in the country or internationally, but there are also young people who don't, they are not very aware, sometimes you talk to them and they say they don't know or haven't seen it. But they watch showbiz (...) on TV, that they are aware of.”
— Participant E.

Discussion and conclusion

This study analysed a media literacy process that some baby boomer women experienced when confronted with fake news on Facebook, and the role of close family members in contributing to their digital literacy and critical coping skills. The findings contribute to our understanding of how Peruvian senior women cope with fake news, as well as their perceived responsibility not to promote its spread as well as the involvement of family members in the entire process. The results highlighted the significance of critical thinking skills, shaped by the family. These results are consistent with those of Flintham, *et al.* (2018).

The theme ‘What I have learned with my family’ demonstrated that family members were a motivator for using Facebook. These results were consistent with other studies finding that children have had a significant influence on women using social media (Randall, *et al.*, 2015). Participants received help on the use of Facebook from younger family members. These family members assisted in the identification of fake news. This phenomenon is a reverse socialisation process, where older people learn from and are socialised by young people (McClain, 2011). Family members were agents of motivation and literacy, transferring their knowledge in general about Facebook as well as in identifying misleading information. These agents helped to dissect experiences of posting fallacious content on Facebook, fostering the development of critical thinking. Identifying sources was also part of the learning process. As Alcalá (2019) argued, media literacy for this group of citizens was linked to personal, social, and cultural enrichment to reinforce a sense of self-fulfillment, associated with the notion of active aging.

Respondents indicated they used Google or consulted with others close to them to check data and determine reliability. This processing is relevant because, as Scolari (2016) suggested, literacy cannot be limited to physical media. This literacy required by women over 65, experiencing technological changes and exposure to numerous media (Guess, *et al.*, 2019), allowed them to achieve a better quality of life (Scolari, 2016).

According to interviewees, learning is a constant endeavour. They turned to close family members when they were unsure about news. Participants were willing to learn, accepting feedback from their immediate family, visiting sources of news, and confirming the veracity of specific news items. The theme ‘Sometimes I can't recognise it’ reflected an awareness among participants that fake news was not only presented to them, but that their critical ability to recognize it was limited. This theme framed the reality that participants were aware of their responsibility to filter and not to distribute misleading information. There were constraints that they perceived for themselves in identifying fake news. In the words of one interviewee, “I read contents and there are some things that I'm kind of in doubt about” (Participant E). The theme ‘If I see it is real, I can share’ referred to a similar experience, when an individual recognized that they have the critical skills necessary to evaluate the veracity of information and act accordingly. Participants expressed their awareness of their capabilities to identify the trustworthiness of information. They believed that the identification of a given source, and their perceptions of the internal and external logic of it, were elements that make it possible to exercise critical judgement. Hence, media literacy is a learning opportunity for seniors, not only in terms of access to new technologies and inclusion in their use, but also to build critical competencies for identifying biased and misleading information, as noted by Rivinen, *et al.* (2021).

Throughout this study, researchers observed that senior women were accompanied on Facebook by their offspring and close relatives, guiding them in using this social network, identifying fake news and improving skills in detecting reliable sources. They learned from past experiences, which affected them emotionally when they shared fake news. They were distrustful of traditional national media and valued, above all, the freedom of expression that social networks allowed their users, even though this freedom was misused in the creation and distribution of inaccurate news. Future research could explore whether the involvement of family members leads to the development of critical skills, which enables proactive detection of fake news; or whether it leads to increased sensitivity to dubious information and subsequent passive immobility.


This research examined the consumption of digital content among seniors, as well as the influence of various parties on some seniors in the use of a social network and its resources. As political active members of society, it is significant that seniors develop practices to distinguish various kinds of information online, in order to make informed decisions in the polls on a variety of issues and policies. Future research should examine the significance of misinformation at all sorts of levels within the family, among friends, and with broader audiences.

Access to reliable information is related to individual well-being and improved quality of life. Information affects abilities to make better decisions shaping everyday life, from dealing with public services, to organising activities with family and friends, to planning and spending on groceries. Seniors diminish the role of misleading information among their family members and friends, with eventual benefits for all.

Interviewees perceived that some young family members did not have the correct critical skills to identify fake news or biased information. This dissonance across generations, framed as a reverse socialisation process (McClain, 2011), opens up prospects for further research into its causes, examining techniques that rectify this dissonance.

The findings of this research were limited to the self-reported experiences of a small group of interviewees. The results cannot rule out the existence of other elements that may have influenced the ways in which they processed information. Further research should examine variables in information processing behaviour, including the mediating effects of children and close relatives may have had in managing misleading information on social media.

Additionally, This research was conducted among women with a negative perception of sharing fake news and were not motivated to spread this information. Further studies could investigate the skills of those who knowingly distribute fake news and their decisions to do so.

This study was conducted among individuals in a Latin America country, a region characterised by its collective culture index. Members of collectivist cultures rely on their relatives or members of specific social groups to which they belong. In contrast, cultures categorised as individualistic live in a social context with few ties, in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves or, at the most, rely on immediate family members. Further research could examine the role of the family in developing media literacy skills and coping with fake news in more individualistic contexts. 

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'No, auntie, that's false': Challenges and resources of female baby boomers dealing with fake news on Facebook

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