HOW MISINFORMATION AFFECTS THE U.K'S OLDER POPULATIONS

Perspectives from Older Adults, Ageing-focused Volunteers and NewsGuard's Media Literacy Team
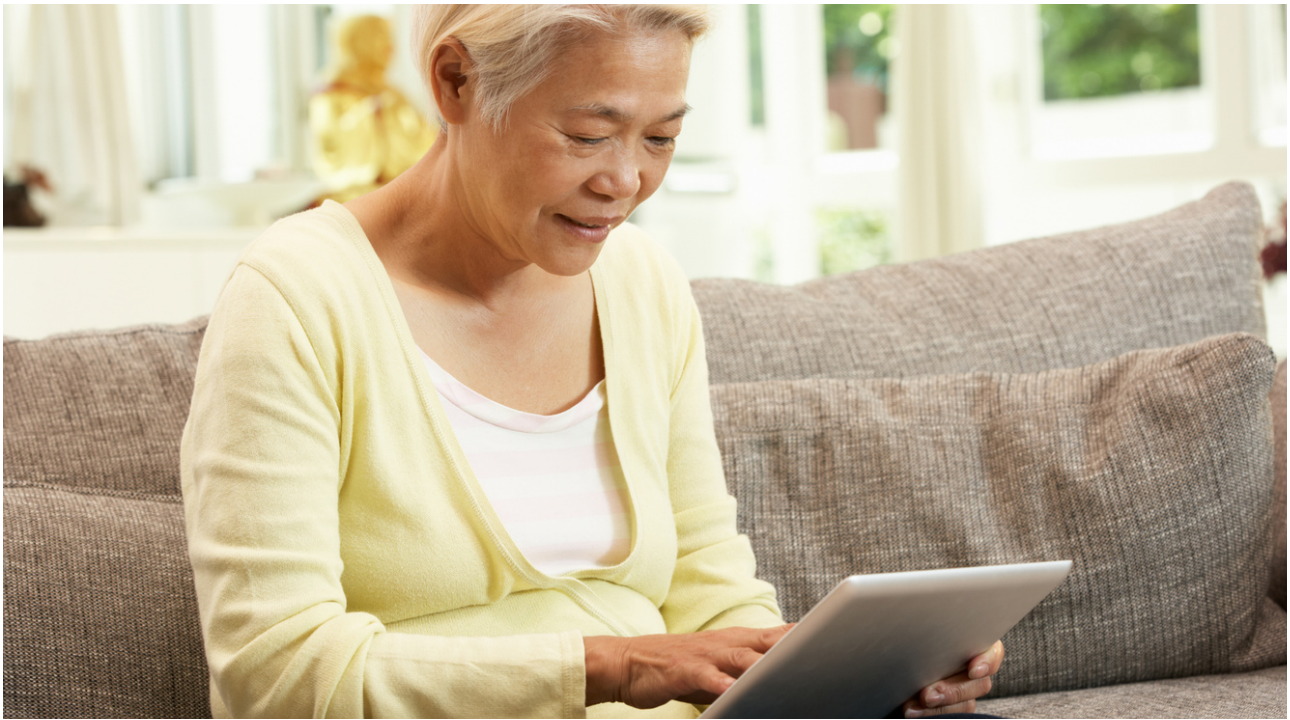
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NewsGuard

INTRODUCTION

NewsGuard has found that older people have been targeted by health misinformation, including false claims about dementia, cancer and COVID-19 vaccines. Click here to read the full myths and debunks, where we have made 10 false claims available to the public.

Threats to information integrity are increasing, with new capabilities in Artificial Intelligence and the continued weaponization of media by adversarial governments to push disinformation narratives. From hundreds of health hoaxes that surfaced online during the COVID-19 pandemic to 395 websites publishing Russia-Ukraine misinformation and counting, vulnerable internet users require support and skills to avoid being misled online.

To date, little has been published on the effect of misinformation on the U.K.'s older population relative to other demographics. The emphasis on digital skills training tends to be on basic skills such as getting online or specific risks such as combating financial fraud, meaning that the nuanced and ever-changing nature of misinformation remains a gray area that is largely omitted from training interventions for older people.

Organizations and individuals can improve their approach to helping older people navigate the internet by better understanding their attitudes towards misinformation, how old-age support groups and volunteers perceive the misinformation problem among their clients, and how existing training and educational interventions have been received.

This report seeks to:

- Explain how misinformation affects older audiences according to current literature
- Showcase existing interventions and best practices for equipping older populations and support staff/volunteers with resources to combat misinformation
- Highlight perspectives on misinformation from older populations in the U.K
- Outline NewsGuard's own media literacy training methods for older populations, and summarize key learnings from our own interventions
- Help raise awareness of misinformation within existing digital inclusion projects
- Strengthen the fight against misinformation
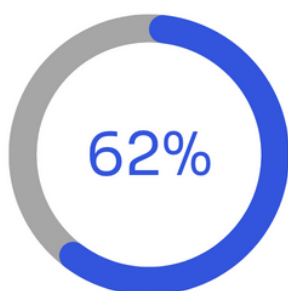
62%

of U.K. adults aged over 65 agreed that "access to information about the credibility of an online news source" would help them "to feel more confident navigating the internet."

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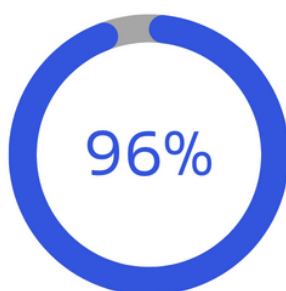
When trained to use NewsGuard, 96% of adults reported they felt better equipped to combat the threats of misinformation online.

81%
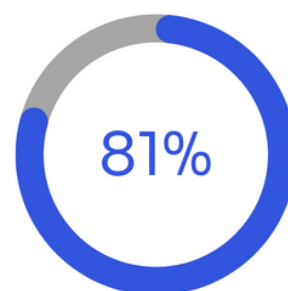
of U.K. adults aged over 55 reported that they were "concerned" with the problem of misinformation.

Among the key findings are:

- In a YouGov survey commissioned for this report, 62% of U.K. adults aged over 65 agreed that "access to information about the credibility of an online news source" would help them "to feel more confident navigating the internet."

- When trained to use NewsGuard ratings of news sources as an example of information about the credibility of news sources online, 96% of older adults reported they felt better equipped to combat the threats of misinformation online.

- Of these older adults, 70% felt more familiar with the topic of misinformation after learning about the different types of misinformation on the internet, and ways to identify and avoid it.

Background to the report

Since October 2022, NewsGuard has been working with the U.K. Government Department for Science, Innovation and Technology on delivering media literacy and anti-misinformation training to aging-focused charities and non-profit organizations, staff members, and communities of older populations.

NewsGuard's project is based on the observation that current digital inclusion strategies for older people often do not include an awareness of—or practical guidance on—mitigating the harmful effects of misinformation on older populations. While digital inclusion and media literacy programmes for older populations often introduce basic technology skills, few cover the issue of misinformation.

Yet, multiple studies around the world indicate that older populations are disproportionately affected by misinformation. Given that older people are more likely to suffer from health issues, health misinformation can result in more severe, and potentially life-threatening outcomes for this demographic. Health misinformation can hamper the uptake of vaccine programmes and encourage the use of unsafe health interventions and products.

Older people are also more likely to vote than younger people. Therefore, how they are informed—or misinformed—can directly impact their political beliefs and resulting votes, with wide societal impact. Finally, older people are more susceptible to social isolation, which can further compound the effects of being misinformed.

The changing media environment is likely to increase the risks that online misinformation poses to older adults. U.K. news consumption data from YouGov suggests that older people continue to rely more on TV news, and printed newspapers, than younger adults. However, nearly half (44%) of adults aged over 65 get their news from online news sites and social media, compared to 66% of U.K. adults of all ages.

The YouGov data suggests that as with other age groups, the news consumption habits of older adults are changing rapidly. Traditional formats such as TV, print newspapers, and radio are declining among adults aged over 65, while social media and news sites are seeing a slow, but steady rise.

NewsGuard's easy-to-use, intuitive browser extension—provided free of charge for a year to all partners in this programme — is a journalism-based approach to countering misinformation. The browser extension provides source credibility information for users browsing the internet, search engines and social media platforms, adding context to news sources and helping users discern which are trustworthy. Crucially, it empowers users to make better informed choices about the information they encounter online, develop critical thinking skills around news sources, and build resilience to misinformation.

Since late 2022, NewsGuard has reached hundreds of support staff, volunteers and older people across the U.K. through its interactive misinformation webinars. These skill-building sessions are provided to partner organizations including Age UK, Digital Communities Wales, Cyber Seniors, and the Leeds Older People's Forum, among others. These webinars cover essential skills including identifying misinformation online, evaluating source credibility, and other tactics that can be used to defend against misinformation, such as lateral reading, using NewsGuard's browser extension, and more.

To learn more about NewsGuard's media literacy work and request training sessions for your aging-focused organization, please contact us at partnerships@newsguardtech.com.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MISINFORMATION AND OLDER POPULATIONS

Concerns about misinformation in the U.K. are high, particularly among older adults

Studies suggest that older adults are more concerned about misinformation than younger people.

In May 2023, NewsGuard commissioned a poll by YouGov, looking at attitudes towards misinformation among adults in the U.K. The survey, which was completed by 2,118 people aged 18 and above, found that 79% of U.K. adults were "concerned" with the problem of misinformation. Concern was highest among respondents aged 55 and above, with 81% stating they were "concerned," compared to 73% of 18- to 25-year-olds.

Concern about misinformation is global, but the U.K. population appears to be particularly worried. A separate poll conducted by YouGov in March 2023 found that globally more than two thirds of adults said that they were worried about the coordinated spread of false information on social media, and that Great Britain had the third highest proportion of consumers who expressed concerns about misinformation, with 72% of consumers saying they were worried.

The most concerned countries of the 18 included in the study were Indonesia, India, and the U.K.

The March 2023 poll found that concern about misinformation correlated strongly with age around the world. Overall, 80% of the people aged above 55 expressed concern about this topic, compared to 52% of 18- to 24-year-olds.

Research on the topic is limited, and results are mixed

Despite older adults' concern about this topic, studies about the risks that misinformation poses to this demographic are limited, and the existing body of research can be contradictory. This may be due to the difficulty of conducting studies which accurately assess the impact of information on different groups. Many internet users appear to be unaware about whether they have shared, or been exposed to, misinformation, and social media companies are notoriously reluctant to share data about user behavior.

While some studies on the topic suggest that older adults are more susceptible to spreading misinformation, others indicate that they are not. Another factor limiting understanding of this issue in the U.K. is that most existing research has been conducted in the U.S.

Some studies suggest older adults are more susceptible to online misinformation

Multiple U.S. studies have found that older adults are more likely to be exposed to misinformation on social media, and are more likely to share it.

For example, a January 2019 study conducted during the 2016 U.S. election campaign by researchers at Princeton and New York Universities considered Facebook behavioral data showing users' propensity to share links to external websites known to traffic in false information. It found that while sharing misinformation on social media was "a rare activity" overall, age was a strong predictor of dissemination of online misinformation. Users aged over 65 shared nearly seven times as many articles from unreliable news sources than the youngest age group in the study. "No other demographic characteristic seems to have a consistent effect on sharing fake news," the study said.

Another January 2019 study by researchers at Northeastern University in Boston and the State University of New York at Buffalo focused on behavior on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. election campaign. It said that "age was positively and significantly associated with increased levels of exposure to fake news sources across all political groups." The study speculated that older adults' increased engagement with unreliable news sources "could result from cognitive decline, digital media literacy, stronger motivated reasoning [when evidence is supported or dismissed based on the person's emotions] or cohort effects."

Research focused on the U.K., though more limited, shows similar trends. For example, a 2022 report by Ofcom into U.K. adults' media use assessed adults' ability to identify credibility indicators in a social media post (such as a blue tick next to the profile name). The study found that 63% of adults were able to identify credibility indicators, but that 58% also identified elements not indicative of credibility (for example, the number of times a post has been 'liked').

The study noted that participants who did not identify any valid indicators, and selected only invalid indicators (17% overall,) were more likely to be aged over 65 (23%). The study also noted that seven out of the ten internet users said that they were comfortable assessing the credibility of online information, but that more than half (61%) lacked the skills to do so – particularly those aged 55 to 64 years old (70%).

Other studies suggest older people may be less at risk from online misinformation

Other studies suggest that older adults are in fact better equipped to identify false information, perhaps due to wider existing knowledge bases, more life experience, and greater news consumption than that of younger groups.

For example, a June 2021 India-focused study by researcher Sumitra Badrinathan at the University of Oxford found that "older age is associated with better discernment between true and false stories." The study stated that "older adults may strategically decide to share information despite their beliefs, and that their vast knowledge base might help information processing despite cognitive declines."

A March 2021 study about health misinformation, conducted by the Alan Turing Institute, the U.K.'s national institute for data science and artificial intelligence, found that "older people are slightly better at assessing health-related statements." The study looked at respondents' ability to assess the veracity of statements about COVID-19. It found that most "most sociodemographic, socioeconomic and political factors make little or no difference at all" in participants' ability to assess health-related information, but age had a "significant effect," as did having "higher digital literacy, numerical literacy, health literacy and cognitive skills."

Similarly, a study by researchers at the University of Florida in 2020, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that "overall news veracity detection was comparable between young and older adults," and that "age-related vulnerabilities to deceptive news are only apparent in very old age," which the study defined as over the age of 70.

The mixed findings of existing studies about the susceptibility of older populations to misinformation suggest that more research is needed to confirm or dispute any association between age and misinformation.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION AND OLDER PEOPLE IN THE U.K.

Perspectives of the general public

A May 2023 YouGov poll commissioned by NewsGuard found that 79% of U.K. adults are concerned with the problem of misinformation.

This poll found that, at the same time, most adults believe – rightly or wrongly – they have the requisite skills to protect themselves from being misled. Eighty one percent of U.K. adults agree that they have the "skills and knowledge" to "avoid being misled by misinformation online," compared to 10% who disagree. The results were similar across all age groups.
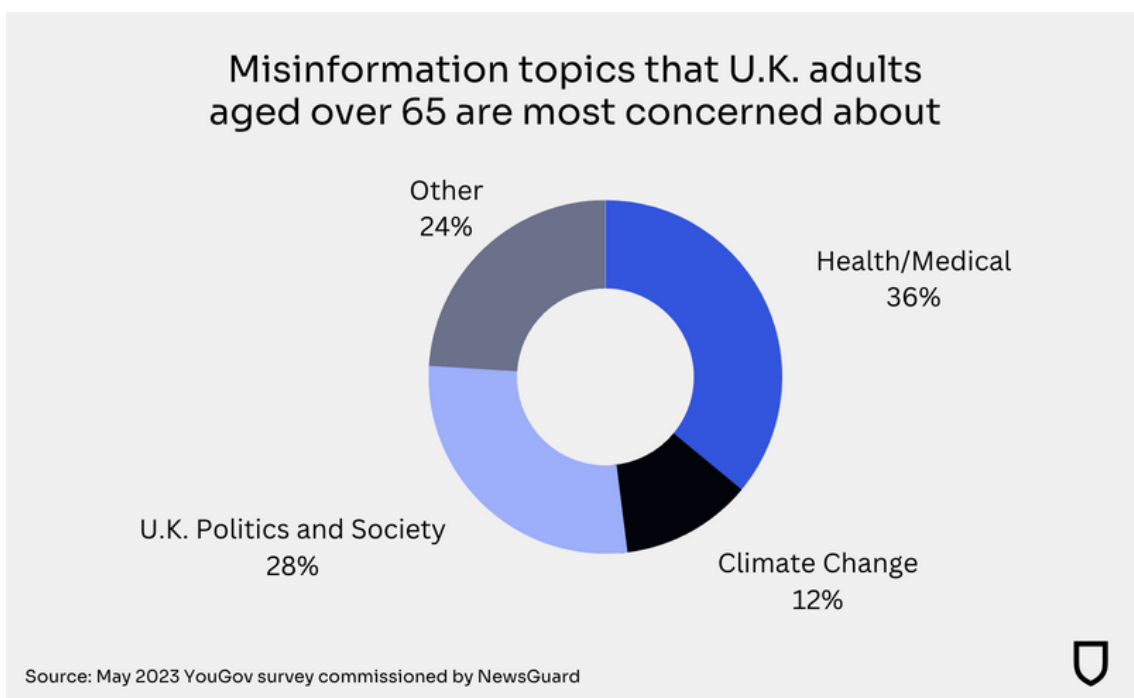
These findings are consistent with 2021 research published by The Pearson Institute and The Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which found that 95% of respondents agreed misinformation was a problem, but only 20% are worried that they have personally spread misinformation.

Perspectives of people aged over 65

In May 2023, NewsGuard commissioned a second poll from YouGov, specifically for adults over the age of 65 in the U.K., regarding their views about media literacy and the issue of misinformation. The poll, which was based on answers from 1,005 people, found that 66% of respondents have never suspected that they have shared false or misleading information online. Among the 37% respondents who suspected that they have shared misinformation online, the leading reason for sharing the false information was that it was published by a source or author they trusted (11%).

It is noteworthy that 62% of U.K. adults aged over 65 agree that "access to information about the credibility of an online news source" would help them "to feel more confident navigating the internet."

Finally, the YouGov poll found that the topic of misinformation that most U.K. adults aged above 65 were most concerned with was health and medical information (36%) followed by U.K. politics and society (28%) and climate change (12%).

Misinformation topics that U.K. adults aged over 65 are most concerned about

Other 24%

Health/Medical 36%

U.K. Politics and Society 28%

Climate Change 12%

Source: May 2023 YouGov survey commissioned by NewsGuard

Perspectives of those working in digital inclusion and/or aging-focused organizations

NewsGuard spoke with various digital inclusion and ageing-focused support groups and volunteers for their views on the issue of misinformation and older populations, based on their proximity to caring for older people and knowledge of their concerns and challenges. NewsGuard issued a survey to these groups, and conducted a focus group in July 2023. Our key findings were:

Some people think older people are particularly vulnerable to misinformation and need support

Nick Moylan, Training and Development Adviser at Digital Communities Wales, a Welsh government digital inclusion project, told NewsGuard during a July 2023 online focus group, "we know from statistics that there are more skills gaps in older people's engagement with online tools. This impacts their confidence levels when interacting with a news site or social media. There's the nervousness of dealing with these sites, plus all the tools and skills you need to navigate all the information on there. Because of that, it can be easy to get drawn into discussions, misinformation."

Conor Chipp, Digital Inclusion Advisor at Digital Communities Wales, said, "Anecdotally, older people do fall victim to misinformation. It comes down to lack of confidence or fear – they've spent most of their lives with trusted news sources, and they're being presented with news articles that could've come from anywhere. It can be scary when these polarizing things written as fact pop up, without the digital skills to verify them.

Alex, Community Digital Champion at U.K. digital inclusion charity Citizens Online, said: "I think that older people are especially vulnerable to misinformation... The emergence of AI platforms can also contribute to misinformation, and while certain software like ChatGPT can be a helpful and fun tool, it is prone to inaccuracies that a lot of older people may not realise. When it comes to making decisions, from online safety to elections, I believe it is crucial that older people know how to spot misinformation and are not being misled."

An anonymous respondent said, "[Older people] shouldn't be forgotten about or left behind as they didn't grow up with technology. They need to be taught how to spot misinformation in various settings, online and in person, podcasts, etc."

A Digital Champion Coordinator at Citizens Online who preferred not to be named, said: "It is difficult for older people to make informed decisions, as they do not know which information source to trust."

Others believe that older people are no more likely, or even less likely to be impacted by online misinformation

Angela Jones, Digital Inclusion Advisor at Digital Communities Wales, said that younger people are much more likely to use social media as a trusted news source than older people and are therefore "at just as much risk."

Some members of Digital Communities Wales said that older people are less at risk from misinformation because they may spend less time online and tend to be more cautious when they do. Ruari McLaren, Digital Inclusion and Skills Trainer at Digital Communities Wales, said, "given that older age groups are less likely to have all the digital skills, they're less likely to be affected by misinformation because they're being exposed to less of it, they're going to those spaces less than the 'TikTok generation.'"

Conor Chipp at Digital Communities Wales, agreed, saying "older people can be hyper cautious because of their [lower] confidence level, so they are less likely to go for clickbait or phishing scams."

Concerns about misinformation go beyond traditional social media

Anna Dolphin, Coordinator at Digital Brighton & Hove Project, a charity that provides help with basic digital skills or support getting online, said that "misinformation may also come from sources which can be perceived as 'safe'," by older people, such as print news. Older people may also fail to recognize that online platforms can contain misleading information, "where anyone can present something as fact," Dolphin said.

Indeed, NewsGuard analysts have found that health misinformation, such as about COVID-19 and vaccines, has not only gone viral on Twitter, Facebook and TikTok, but has also been repeated by some of the most widely read news publications in the U.K.

A respondent who chose not to be named said, "many older adults who do not use either email or social media sites do use WhatsApp […] Videos containing misinformation were spread widely with WhatsApp during the pandemic and spread fear, confusion and anti-vax messaging which may have encouraged some not to take up their vaccines."

Digital inclusion has been a key focus of digital education for older people

In a video call with NewsGuard in May 2023, Age UK's digital inclusion Programme Manager highlighted that a quarter of older people in the U.K. face digital exclusion. In other words, they are not online and are consequently excluded from the benefits that the online world can bring. Therefore, a key priority for Age UK is to help older people who are able and want to get online to learn to use the internet in the way that they need, whether that be staying in touch, finding out information or managing their money online. For those who can't get online, these services also need to remain available and accessible offline.

They told NewsGuard that as news and essential services such as health and banking services increasingly move online, older people are more likely to need to use technology to access information. "If less news is available offline, more older people may have to access news online … Many of these people will not be as skilled or confident navigating the internet, and the need for digital literacy and media literacy skills will become more important."

Media literacy skills training can pose unique challenges, and better resources are needed

In a video call with NewsGuard in July 2023, Ruari McLaren, Digital Inclusion and Skills Trainer at Digital Communities Wales, said that a media literacy skills session can become contentious, as people disagree about what constitutes a trustworthy source. Nick Moylan, Training and Development Adviser at Digital Communities Wales, said that teaching media literacy skills "can be quite polarizing."

Members of Digital Communities Wales agreed that while teaching these skills is vital, there are not enough resources available to those supporting older people. Nick Moylan noted, "it doesn't feel like there are any resources out there that are relevant and reliable for the U.K.."

The respondents said that using more examples of relatively inconsequential misinformation could help to remove the fear and possible contention around the subject of misinformation. They told NewsGuard that their existing resources included a fake video allegedly showing flying penguins, to highlight that false information can appear convincing, and does not always have serious consequences. "This video takes away the stigma from sharing misinformation. It shows it can be something as inconsequential as flying penguins," Conor Chipp, Digital Inclusion Advisor at Digital Communities Wales, said.

Kirsty Wallace, a Digital Inclusion and Skills Trainer at Digital Communities Wales highlighted the need to create judgment-free spaces, where people can ask any kind of question "no matter how silly", and tell stories about sharing misinformation "to show that it's not something to be embarrassed about, just something to be aware of."

Moylan suggested that groups supporting older people to stay safe online create interactive resources, such as a web page that would demonstrate how deceptively professional and credible misinformation can appear. The web page would provide a "safe learning environment" that presents "the issues around a misleading news article," Moylan said.

More accessible resources are needed to help users with NewsGuard's browser extension

Finally, various members of Digital Communities Wales suggested that NewsGuard develop more resources to help users use its browser extension, particularly to help digitally excluded people, who may struggle more to install and use the technology.

Asked about his experience introducing people to the NewsGuard browser extension, Moylan noted that some people expressed concern about the reliability of NewsGuard's assessments of news sites. "Some people ask, how can we trust it?" he said. (NewsGuard's full methodology for rating news sources is published on its website, along with an extensive frequently asked questions section for the public to review. NewsGuard also publishes feedback from publishers it receives—positive and negative—and always calls for comment when rating news sources).

Reflecting on Digital Communities Wales' comments, NewsGuard will produce resources to help users less accustomed to using technology to download and use the browser extension, and offer users the option of directly requesting specific Nutrition Labels from our team to review. These resources will be specifically designed to be used by more vulnerable populations with larger text and simpler instructions, and will also highlight NewsGuard's methodology and editorial independence, to help users to feel better able to trust the ratings. The resources will be provided at no charge to the ageing and digital inclusion companies that NewsGuard has partnered with over the course of this project.

Future challenges in fighting misinformation: AI

Members of Digital Communities Wales expressed concern that capabilities in Artificial Intelligence will pose a great challenge to protecting people from being misled online. "Misinformation now is going to be nothing compared with what we'll see in terms of, for example, the ability to clone voices. We're entering a whole new world of it. The ability to discern if an image is real or not, will be a battle in technology."

NEWSGUARD'S EXPERIENCE TRAINING OLDER POPULATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS ON MISINFORMATION

A key aspect of NewsGuard's media literacy project in partnership with the U.K. Government's Media Literacy Programme Fund is the tailored virtual training sessions offered to partner organisations that support older people in the U.K. and beyond.

NewsGuard's free training programmes, usually lasting between 45 mins to an hour each, have been held as:

- Standalone digital events for public registration and participation
- Guest visits and speaker slots during standing calls / monthly digital inclusion network meetings
- Closed-door, invite-only events designed for a specific volunteer training function within an organisation

Previous training sessions covered topics including:

- What is misinformation, and how misinformation can affect older people
- Common types of misinformation, and how the threat misinformation is changing
- What the risks of misinformation are, and how to spot them

- Tips and tools on how to support older populations in navigating the internet safely
- Why empowering older populations is key to their success and confidence online
- Interactive Q&A with participants

NewsGuard staff designed these programmes to incorporate real-world examples of misinformation identified by our analysts, generic media literacy principles, NewsGuard-specific interventions and methodologies for evaluating source credibility, and external research about the impact of misinformation on older people. As such, sessions are intended to be useful as standalone resources for older people —and volunteers supporting older people—with the option to download NewsGuard's browser extension for free thanks to funding from DSIT.

What NewsGuard learnt

- People tend to believe that misinformation is a big risk to other people, but that they already have the skills to protect themselves.

- For some, media literacy and misinformation can be a highly charged topic. Skills sessions should navigate this carefully by remaining apolitical where possible, and emphasizing factual evidence and information in a neutral manner.

- Teaching media literacy and anti-misinformation skills to groups that are digitally excluded poses unique challenges, as those groups' ability to do basic news verification activities online can be limited. Courses should be divided by a person's level of skills, from basic to advanced abilities, as defined by the organizations themselves.

- Interactive workshops that provide users with the opportunity to practice what they have learnt in a group environment may be an effective way to ensure learners adopt the new skills.

- People who do not have the digital skills to carry out basic news verification may not have the skills to download and use NewsGuard. Providing information by text or video on how to use the browser can help to facilitate full access to the technology.

- Resources are needed both for the users and those who support them to feel comfortable supporting people with what can be a complex and contentious issue.

- Those working with older people and digitally excluded groups need more resources to broach the issue of misinformation. Digital Communities Wales suggested an interactive website covering the basics of media literacy and misinformation, perhaps with video content and games. Some interventions are available online, and mostly free of charge. For example, the BBC created a news and media literacy game, BBC iReporter, that allows the user to become a reporter and make editorial decisions for the channel while maintaining BBC's standards for accuracy. Another gamified news literacy tool is Bad News. Created by the Cambridge University's Social Decision-Making Lab, Bad News allows the player to deliberately create and spread false information to showcase how easy it is to do so. Another game from Cambridge University's Social Decision-Making Lab is GoViral!, which teaches the player about how COVID-19 misinformation spreads online. Media literacy games tend to be more common than instructional videos and online courses. For example, Young Reporters for the Environment and Shout Out UK hosted a webinar on Fake News and Media Literacy, while The Good Things Foundation offers a media literacy course, Learn My Way.

- The resources available for older populations are scarce and largely inaccessible due to a lack of aggregation; instead scattered across multiple different websites. In addition, most resources are not designed with older people in mind and mostly target young people. People working with digitally excluded groups would greatly benefit from a centralized system of resources designed for older communities to help them explore the topic of media literacy, and acquire skills to navigate the landscape of online misinformation.

Feedback from NewsGuard training session participants

- Survey feedback following NewsGuard's training sessions, gathered in July 2023, suggests that interactive programming and education on misinformation is effective in arming attendees with the knowledge, skills, and resources required to combat misinformation.

- 96% of attendees said they felt better equipped to combat the threats of misinformation online after NewsGuard's session, and 97% found NewsGuard's presentation informative and relevant to the challenges of misinformation. 70% also felt more familiar with the topic of misinformation after learning about the different types of misinformation on the internet, and ways to identify and avoid it.

- "The growing amount of misinformation online has been a huge concern to the older adults that attend our programming. It is something that they mention time and time again as a reason for staying off of certain social platforms or avoiding engaging with online news," said Macaulee Cassaday, Program Director at Cyber-Seniors. "The presentation and access to the NewsGuard extension is something they were really excited about and I have received a lot of feedback since about how much they appreciated it. Tools like NewsGuard give newer internet users, like many of our Cyber-Seniors participants, the confidence to navigate online news independently."

- Kathleen O'Donnell, Digital Inclusion Learning Manager at Age UK, said: "Through their work with Age UK, NewsGuard have provided useful, relevant and practical advice and guidance around misinformation for older people and those supporting them. Their delivery style is clear, professional and succinct, making for very engaging resources and presentations. The free NewsGuard web browser tool offer has been greatly received by the Age UK network."

- Other session attendees who run digital skills programmes for older people are looking at incorporating NewsGuard into lesson plans, and supporting older people in downloading and using NewsGuard.

- Another, a former History and English teacher, said that the skills NewsGuard fosters are similar to what he would have taught. "The thing that really bothers me is that this is a really useful tool; the thing that needs to go hand in hand with this is some sort of education programme for older people which makes them think about the sources of news that they use."

Challenges faced during NewsGuard's project delivery

The main challenge NewsGuard faced in rolling out the media literacy project was reaching older populations directly, which NewsGuard believes is important for creating impactful anti-misinformation initiatives. The majority of our training sessions were attended by volunteers and staff members working closely with older populations, and were therefore designed to equip the volunteers and staff with the tools, skills and knowledge needed to best support their clients and field questions about information integrity.

This lack of direct exposure to the target population was largely due to the complex structure of our partner organisations, many of which operate at the national, regional and local levels. As such, external partners like NewsGuard have limited visibility and access to clients and smaller groups. While this is important for the safeguarding of older populations, it hampered NewsGuard's ability to identify the local, "grassroots" media literacy initiatives taking place across hundreds of charity outposts that would be receptive to its support.

NewsGuard would have preferred to take a bottom-up approach, so that it could make a direct impact on the target population. However, the reality of navigating several larger organisations during a project lasting only one year meant having to offer training programmes at the national level in the hopes of a trickle-down effect to on-the-ground volunteers. In the case of one charity, NewsGuard ran a training programme for the nationwide "digital inclusion network" of volunteers who were leading the charity's online safety efforts, and invited attendees to follow up with NewsGuard if they were interested in bringing the training to their local group.

Another reason NewsGuard did not directly train groups of older people is because many old-age focused charities take an individual, person-centred approach to providing support. Rather than encouraging clients to enroll in programmes or sign them up for specific training sessions, volunteers typically address each person's specific needs and concerns, and direct them to the relevant solutions and support. While older people expressed interest in learning about misinformation, they were supported one-to-one by their volunteers rather than connected to external specialists like NewsGuard, or invited to organised group learning settings, such as a virtual webinar.

As such, NewsGuard recommends that any future media literacy training programmes that aim to work directly with older populations should begin by identifying local groups, informal support programmes and networks with in-person participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on NewsGuard's conversations with stakeholders in the aging-focused charity sector, its work running media literacy training programmes for these organisations, and independent research including a qualitative survey of eleven respondents in the sector and commissioned YouGov polls, NewsGuard recommends the following actions to improve media literacy outcomes among the U.K. older population:

- Carrying out more research on the association between older populations and misinformation, particularly in the U.K.
- Requesting that social media companies share data about the exposure of different populations to potential online misinformation with organizations researching this issue, to better understand the impact of misinformation groups perceived as vulnerable
- Developing programmes for older people to help them protect themselves from misinformation, with a focus on identifying the trustworthiness of sources
- Conducting research on the effectiveness of these interventions to improve their delivery
- Developing digital and physical resources providing tips about avoiding online misinformation, that ageing-focused organizations can provide to their clients
- Centralizing anti-misinformation resources and media literacy materials for ease of access by volunteers and charity staff members

By taking these—and other—steps, governments, third sector organisations, and others will be best positioned to implement initiatives to increase information resilience and online safety of this vulnerable demographic.

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