INFLUENCE OF FAKE NEWS ON OLDER ADULTS

INFLUENCIA DE NOTICIAS FALSAS EN ADULTOS MAYORES

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ABSTRACT:

Motivated by researching the influence of voice messages with fake news, on the mental health of Manta's older adults in the context of COVID-19, the goal of this study was to determine that sharing fake news can alter people's thoughts. This means that the content of such messages can affect the mental health of this age group. The study was conducted with an exploratory-descriptive qualitative-quantitative approach. The selection of informants was fulfilled through the finite proportion formula with a margin of error of 0.5. A virtual survey of 281 older adults across the city was conducted and 3 journalism professionals were interviewed to calculate the risk to which this population group is exposed in the context of the pandemic. Fake news from voice messages was found to generate emotions of anguish and insecurity in 75.4% of respondents, but feelings of uncertainty, confusion, mistrust, and suspicion also emerge. Recommendations are proposed to avoid sharing news of dubious content and verifying in reliable sources.

Keywords: Voice messages, fake news, mental health, older adults.

RESUMEN:

Motivados por investigar sobre la influencia de los mensajes de voz con noticias falsas, en la salud mental de los adultos mayores de Manta en el contexto del COVID-19, el objetivo de este estudio fue determinar que compartir noticias falsas puede alterar los pensamientos de las personas. Esto quiere decir que el contenido de dichos mensajes puede afectar la salud mental de este grupo etario. El estudio fue realizado con un enfoque cualitativo-cuantitativo de tipo exploratorio-descriptivo. La selección de los informantes se cumplió a través de la fórmula de proporción finita con un margen de error del 0.5. Se realizó una encuesta virtual a 281 adultos mayores en toda la ciudad y fueron entrevistados 3 profesionales del periodismo, para calcular el riesgo al que está expuesto este grupo poblacional en el contexto de la pandemia. Se halló que las noticias falsas provenientes de los mensajes de voz generan emociones de angustia e inseguridad en el 75,4% de los encuestados, pero también emergen sentimientos de incertidumbre, confusión, desconfianza y recelo. Se proponen recomendaciones para evitar compartir noticias de dudoso contenido y verificar en fuentes confiables.

Palabras clave: Mensajes de voz, noticias falsas, salud mental, adultos mayores.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in november 2019, a wave of news messages began to be generated with various content that spread very easily in various countries as the situation progressed and the virus soon crossed the borders of China, the country of origin of COVID-19.

These messages with mostly false content alerted the population, forms of transmission, such as avoiding contagion, home remedies, among other topics were published by various means proliferating messages with false and alarming content.

One of the aspects that caused the greatest impact on the population was that older adults were the most vulnerable group with very little chance of overcoming the virus, which undoubtedly generated fear in this population segment. Measures taken to confine the entire population to prevent the spread of the virus facilitated this wave of misinformation.

The United Nations (2020) presented some figures highlighting: From 112 million public posts, in 64 languages on different social networks, on the COVID-19 pandemic, 40% of messages came from unreliable sources.

Ecuador was no stranger to this picture as fake news messages were spread very quickly causing fear in the people across the country.

Accessibility to social messaging networks facilitated the spread of high-impact news. Topics such as: spread of the virus, countries most affected, numbers of contagion and deaths, messages with heartbreaking and infected content, coupled with the psychological vulnerability of this age group and strict confinement measures, were factors that influenced to increase the mental health risks of this population group.

With this background this research analyzed How do false news voice messages influence the metal health of older adults in the canton Manta?

The purpose was to indegard the way these messages were recepted with non-truthful information in the context of the pandemic.

A literary review of the subject was first conducted, and it was raised as an argument that these messages had a negative impact on older adults who influenced by their beliefs and prejudices are likely to believe in these content.

From the perspective of the population group that participated in this research, the objective of this article was to determine the influence of voice messages with fake news on the mental health of Manta's older adults.

Recently, the media and various organizations have expressed concern about the rise of fake news that has been massed in the context of the pandemic, focusing mainly on the effects they cause on the population. This phenomenon has even been classified as "infodemics", emphasizing the negative effects that have occurred on the population, generating the alert to counteract this misinformation (WHO, 2020).

This massification of false news has been given through various media and with greater emphasis on social networks, causing a great impact on the adult population.

In spreading messages, voice plays a leading role, as it is through it that emotions and feelings, where the intonation and attitude of the speaker become aspects that are of great importance. (Berry, 2019).

Often when talking to a person can be identified by his voice and his responses his mood, since the sound coming from words can generate feelings of pleasure or displeasure, that happens constantly when we hear the voice of an announcer. There are voices that please and hook the receiver and others that we prefer never to listen to again. (Cardona, and others, 2018)

González (2006) refers: "Through a voice of hidden origin and emerging from a radio device we perceive messages that do not see our eyes, but our mind" (p. 141). With this he refers to the that these messages can remain in our thoughts and can generate various emotions.

Another aspect to highlight is that when we enter critical situations there is a noticeable increase in news production, which generates the spread of false messages through networks and generating informational disorders and chaos in the population. (Ruppert, 2019).

Today it is easy to access all the information that happens in the world at the same time that it happens and that is chosen according to our own tastes and needs, but that is not always truthful. Constantly circumstances

force us to rely on these means, relying on what is issued, as alternatives to keep us informed of what is happening.

For their part Figueira y Santos (2019) referring to false news mentions: "Despite not being a new phenomenon, its importance and the possible social and political consequences of its dissemination over the Internet have been widely discussed, especially in recent years" (p. 2).

With this statement they refer to the ease with which information is now propagated and the free access of the population to these contents, which has generated the analysis of this phenomenon in recent years, especially when it comes to false news.

In this sense people become victims of misinformation being used by those who seek to bring their own interests managing to have the attention of the listener and sometimes negatively affecting since a fragile mind is vulnerable to what it hears causing the acceptance of the message.

Technological advances and the masification of the use of social networks have increased the spread of false news, a phenomenon that is not new as it has been around for a long time (Morales, 2018).

Pauner (2018) "With the advent of the digital environment and the need for permanently up-to-date information, the accuracy required by news development, one of the basic conditions for providing quality and error-free information, has been broken "p. 299"). With this statement the author considers that the structure of news has been neglected by proliferating false messages in which its content is manipulated with intentions based on its own and non-collective interests causing in society an environment lacking peace and trust.

As a result of this lack of precision in the structure of some messages, the proper use of words, the use of appropriate tone of voice, harmony, and intonation, which are important for proper expressing themselves (Aguero, 2012) is set aside.

All these aspects relate when receiving a voice message that depending on its content can generate different attitudes and support the beliefs and prejudices that predominate in adults, through meanings that we learn over the years and that are impregnated in the mind influencing the way we perceive reality (Martínez, Mitchell, & Graciela, 2014).

Thus, beliefs are considered to be aspects that are already imbued in the family, symbols with which people are in their development and that are part of their daily life (Ten, 2017).

From this perspective it can be shown that emotional behavior of the human being and in this case older adults is based on the knowledge and experiences that can be assimilated throughout their life and that by not being interpreted properly they can cause negative effects on a vulnerable person.

From the position of other authors, it is proposed that thoughts can influence people's emotions since there is a connection between mind and body (Whetsell, Frederickson, Aguilera, & Moya, 2005).

According to this position they state that in difficult situations the mood and the way to assume these realities can influence thoughts and unconsciously generate fears in people that can affect their mental health.

Cardona, Segura, Muñoz, Jaramillo, Lizcano and Morales (2018) highlight: "It is difficult to understand and establish the factors that explain the reasons why some people,

communities and groups have greater capacity than others to face unfavorable situations. In old age, conditions that cause disadvantages or weaknesses appear" (p. 102).

According to these perceptions for older adults it is difficult to adapt to new realities since their behavior is influenced by external factors, which was evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, by the information disseminated through the media and social networks when considered the most vulnerable group in addition to the confinement measures that were decreed and with the circulation of messages that were mostly not encouraging.

In addition, one of the characteristics of older adults is their obvious willingness to think of negative situations that could occur to them creating confusion unnecessarily emotionally and getting carried away by imagination and fantasy (Barrientos, Barquero, & García, 2018).

The bewilderment that has been created in society has been widespread by the massive spread of fake news that has circulated as fast as the virus. This proliferation of lies has caused alarm in the population and have

managed to facilitate the path to infection (UNESCO, 2020).

As a result of this misinformation, the mental health of older adults is jeopardized, making it necessary to create living conditions and environments that can promote the well-being of this generational group and in general of the entire population that feels the effects of misinformation.

The analysis of this problem that most emphasizes older adults seeks to promote greater access to information detection tools of dubious provenance and that people can be aware of false content, being feasible this research, since it fulfills the purpose proposed and that allows to propose actions that can face this wave of misinformation that increases in emerging situations like the one, we are living.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is based on a mixed approach, whose characteristic is exploratory – descriptive, in which the analysis unit focuses primarily on quantitativeity to know the influence of false news voice messages on the mental health of Manta's older adults, obtaining results through an online questionnaire to investigate the perception of older adults around this topic.

The qualitative approach to having the professional judgment of Manta journalists, through interviews of open questions about their experiences around the subject studied.

For research, the need to take a sample through the proportion formula for finite populations was estimated, resulting in 281 older adults from Manta. The sample type is probabilistic based on a simple random process.

➢ **Research participants**

The research participant population is adults over 65 years of age or older, for data collection that allowed to know the level of affectation of older adults with respect to false news messages in the context of the pandemic, based on their beliefs and prejudices

➢ **Study area**

This study was conducted in the canton Manta, Manabí province, Ecuador.

➢ **Techniques employed**

The techniques used in this research are:

Survey, the applicability of which was conducted through a virtual questionnaire on the Google platform.

It also includes interviews with a focus group of 3 journalism professionals, chosen for their experience in this field.

- Mr. Cesar Piloso Mendoza, journalist working at Radio Son de Manta.

- Mr. Vivian Mariuxi Zambrano Macías, news announcer who worked the Newspaper El Telegrafo.

- Mr. Fernando Holguín Alvia, journalist of Televisión Manabita Canal 30.

For the development of research, the materials used were as follows:

Computer, internet server, personal email account, digital surveys through links with a closed question questionnaire.

Access to database/emails from the study population.

Statistical data

The SPSS programme was used for the analysis of the data collected in the surveys.

3. RESULTS

***Table 1.** Trust the tone of voice of messages*

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Cumulative percentage
Yes	212	75,4	75,4	75,4
No	56	19,9	19,9	95,4
He doesn't know.	13	4,6	4,6	100
Total	281	100	100	

***Source:** Seniors of the canton Manta 2020.*

Table 1 shows that 75.4% of respondents believe in voice messages that have spread over the pandemic, creating feelings of distress and insecurity.

***Table 2.** Influence of tone of voice on mood*

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Cumulative percentage
Uncertainty	65	23.1	23.1	23.1
Fear	17	6.0	6.0	29.2
Distrust	188	66.9	66.9	96.1
Other	11	3.9	3.9	100
Total	281	100	100	

***Source:** Seniors of the canton Manta 2020.*

As we can see there is no decay in your mood in the same proportion of the table above since only 48% says it affects you a lot compared to the 42% that affects you little and 10% that does not affect you.

Table 3. *Affectations from the use of uns appropriate words in a message.*

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Cumulative percentage
Uncertainty	65	23.1	23.1	23.1
Fear	17	6.0	6.0	29.2
Distrust	188	66.9	66.9	96.1
Other	11	3.9	3.9	100
Total	281	100	100	

Source: *Seniors of the canton Manta 2020.*

Table 3 shows that the use of untruthful words in a news story results in mistrust in 66.9% uncertainty at 23.1% and fear in 6% of older adults.

Table 4. *Emotions that generate a false message.*

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Cumulative percentage
Concern	120	42.7	42.7	42.7
Suspicion	37	13.2	13.2	55.9
Confusion	120	42.7	42.7	98.6
He's not answering.	4	1.4	1.4	100
Total	281	100	100	

Source: *Seniors of the canton Manta 2020.*

In Table 4 we can show that a false message generates 42.7% concern and confusion at a similar value.

Table 5. *Results because he decides to believe in false news*

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage valid	Cumulative percentage
Because it looks real	84	29.9	29.9	29.9
Custom	14	5.0	5.0	34.9
Option to inform yourself	84	29.9	29.9	64.8
Believe in everything	2	.7	.7	65.5
Trust the source	74	26.3	26.3	91.8
Other	23	8.2	8.2	100
Total	281	100	100	

Source: *Seniors of the canton Manta 2020.*

Table 5 shows that 29.9% of older adults decide to accept the negatives of a news story because it seems real, a similar

percentage consider it to be an option to inform the other, while 26.3% mention that they believe because they trust the source.

Individual interviews were conducted with a focus group of three communication experts working in local media on the impact of false news on the older adult population, concluding that it is clear that those over the age of 60 have more trouble recognizing false news and are therefore more vulnerable to falling into its effects.

Participants consider that older adults are usually unaware of how to check the veracity of information so they are more likely to believe in false content, since, by lacking skills in the management of social networks, the communication or information they access may be not truthful.

Journalists describe the existence of a general knowledge on the part of the public of how to access reliable sources of information, in addition to being a new topic in which most of the population is not an expert, which makes it easier for them to believe in what they hear, share it without analyzing it critically and without considering the official means, legally established and therefore reliable to truthful information.

Another highlight is the impact that speech tone has on the news, much more so when it comes to pandemic-related messages with testimonies that are very sensitive, because when a news story generates fear it is much easier to share.

4. DISCUSSION

According to the argument put forward, according to which false news messages in the context of the pandemic had a negative impact on older adults, it is noted that there is an impact on the mental health of older adults, which is expressed through emotions such as concern, distress, confusion and insecurity, aspects that together can aggravate and affect physical and mental health, which coincides with recent studies that have been published on the subject that reaffirm the outcome of this research and emphasize that in the context of the pandemic emotions become the most contagious human component,much morethan any virus. (Ramírez, Misol, Alonso, & Tizón, 2020). There is also other data that mention that while the use of social networks, may be beneficial in achieving a solution to this problem, the use of these can influence people's health by the negative

content that is disseminated. (Tala & Vasquez, 2020).

However, we should mention that research in this area is not very broad because it is an under-experienced situation that complements fundamental aspects on the one hand the pandemic, the strict confinement measures taken and the conditions of vulnerability of older adults.

Another aspect that is considered fundamental the tone of voice, which negatively influences older adults, results that are consistent with what is stated by Berry (2019) and González (2006) that refer to the importance of an adequate tone of voice in the way of communicating and even more in the dissemination of news.

Other emotions such as uncertainty, fear and mistrust are evident in the results obtained in aspects related to the use of exaggerated or unreel truthful words in a message, which shows the perception that can be given to these contents that added to other situations can also generate with less percentage feelings of anger or anger.

We can also review the existence of a certain degree of scepticism as to the structure of the news among 51% of the population who

prefer to ignore the message if the structure is not adequate, at their discretion.

Other perceptions show that false news creates mistrust and suspicion about the content that spreads.

Some aspects revealed by our study refer to the false message being assimilated for several reasons, with the highest percentage in the population surveyed the options related to: believing in the source, it seems real and because it is an option to inform yourself.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research determine the affectation in the mental health of Manta's older adults that manifests itself through concern, distress and insecurity, emotions that are influenced by voice messages of news not veraces disseminated in this health emergency.

Other effects caused by the use of us appropriate words on the spread of untruthful voice messages affecting older adults were identified creating mistrust, uncertainty, fear and suspicion.

It was established that older adults are likely to believe in these contents due to the

confinement measures to which they have been exposed. However, it should be noted that there is some degree of difficulty in defining emotions as they vary from one response to another.

In other words, while there is an impact on mental health, there is also a considerable degree of perception of the false contents that are disseminated, which represents a great social commitment not to viralize these contents.

The most important limitation is that the survey only covered older adults with access to technology media and social media, leaving a gap to be investigated in terms of other older adults without access to these technologies.

In addition, we might suggest covering this phenomenon from the psychological realm, as emotions have a very important subjective component. One aspect not included in this study is the economic and social aspect of older adults in the context of the pandemic.

It is also transcendental to generate an adequate information culture or in this case further strengthen the methods of

protecting the most vulnerable actors of COVID-19, such as older adults.

We must reaffirm the importance of keeping us informed, but also of verifying the content of messages that, because they are not truthful, can have negative impacts on society and especially older adults who have expressed the risks they pose in their mental health that are also related to their stance in the face of discernment of the truthful and the harmful.

It is further recommended that before sharing voice messages of dubious provenance we must first do an internet search of the facts or corroborate the information on reliable news sites to identify the source of the news.

There must also be a commitment by the media to contrast the false content disseminated by social networks. Compliance with national public control and sanction policies should be standard for those who produce and share fake news that includes not only the media but also social media. But the most important thing is a personal decision to raise awareness of how much damage we can do by sharing this kind of news.

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