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Sánchez-Valle, María

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Article

The Perception of Older Adults Regarding Socio-Political Issues Disseminated on Social Networks

María Sánchez-Valle

Department of Audio-visual Communication and Advertising, CEU San Pablo University, Spain; mvalle.fhum@ceu.es

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Abstract

Research on the relationship between seniors and social networks has focused mainly on the difficulties experienced by this group in accessing the internet. However, it has not examined other aspects such as participation by older adults in socio-political discourse. Although articles have been written on specific topics related to this issue, such studies are not enough. This research aims to analyse the perception of people over 60 years of age regarding the use of social networks as a channel for staying informed and participating in socio-political discourse that takes place on social media. To achieve this objective, four focus groups were conducted in July of 2022. In assessing the results, the transcripts were examined using qualitative-inductive content analysis and reinforced with topic analysis to identify shared perceptions. The co-occurrence evaluation reveals a strong relationship between negative perceptions and concepts such as tension and fake news. Positive perceptions are associated with the ease of interaction with other users and the potential for obtaining information. Differences have also been observed among social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp, which appear to be the networks of choice for sharing information and opinions on socio-political issues.

Keywords

digital divide; digital inclusion; fake news; seniors; social media; social networks

Issue

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1. Introduction

Citizen participation in matters of public interest is shifting to the digital sphere in which not all social groups are equally represented. In the field of socio-political affairs, which are defined as systems and problems involving a combination of social and political factors (Socio-political, n.d.), the study of how citizens are coping with the digitisation of the socio-political realm is of interest. Given that people over 60 years of age are the population who participate the least on social networks, understanding the factors that either encourage or discourage this age group from using social networks is useful. According to data from IAB Spain (2022), only 21% of Spanish social network users are between 56 and 70 years old. Nevertheless, there is growing interest in social media. This is indicated by the fact

that this segment has experienced the highest rate of growth on Facebook and Instagram (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021).

Yet academic studies related to the participation of older adults on social networks are so scarce that the issue is clearly not a priority. In analysing the literature, it has been possible to distinguish among studies that focus on the political participation of older adults, others that refer to their participation in social media, and those that focus on the relationship between seniors and social networks.

With regard to the former, isolated research can be found, most of which is confined to certain geographical areas and specific problems. The following are some of the barriers to political participation by this group that have been observed: the lack of communicative opportunities (Alves Martins et al., 2022), individual experiences,

political structures (Engelman et al., 2022), and educational levels as an outgrowth of schooling received in childhood (Burden et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the advantages of political involvement by seniors have attracted the attention of researchers as well. These studies have revealed that such involvement provides greater security (De Donder et al., 2012); improves social support, status, and recognition (Lühr et al., 2022); and helps shape the identity of older adults (Blanche-T. & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2022). Incentives for involvement in political organisations are linked to the potential for making changes in the community (Serrat & Villar, 2016) and to the opportunity to learn something new and stay active (Ramírez-Correa et al., 2021; Serrat et al., 2017). At the same time, restraints are linked to negative experiences in political involvement (Serrat et al., 2018, 2021) or to equating politics with conflict (Xie & Jaeger, 2008).

Nevertheless, research on seniors' political participation in social media is nearly non-existent. Some studies have revealed that social media offer this segment of the population the opportunity to exchange ideas in a virtual community (Xu, 2022). Furthermore, Miranda et al. (2020) have studied the relationship that Spanish and Portuguese seniors have with social networks, while Miranda-Bustamante (2018) has analysed the digital habits of retired Chileans on Twitter. Finally, Coelho (2022) has identified the factors that influence the use of technology, finding that some older adults explore areas of interest and share their talents, while others use it to express opinions. Regarding the integration of seniors and people with disabilities into the digital society, Llorente-Barroso, Anzanello-Carrascoza, and Ferreira (2023) state that the digital divide resulting from technological innovation and digitisation exacerbates inequality for these groups and further limits their socio-political participation. In this sense, Urbina et al. (2022) consider that social participation requires digital technology, which implies that seniors must have both the material means and the opportunity to use such technology, along with the need to develop a positive attitude toward its use. These same authors concur on the need to support seniors' digital skills in order to enhance their agency and cultural capital in society. On the issue of learning to use technology, especially for seniors and people with disabilities, Schlomann et al. (2022) consider that ICT training in old age should ideally be developed in a modular way so that self-learning formats can be embedded in guided learning units.

Waycott et al. (2019) explore the benefits of technology in building relationships, including personal bonds, community links, and societal engagement. Moreover, they describe how ICT can be designed and used to enrich the three different types of social connection by drawing on examples from the literature on human-computer interaction.

1.1. Motivations and Barriers to Using the Internet and Social Networks

Studies that focus on seniors' participation in social networks without specifying engagement with socio-political content are more prevalent. Research into the relationship between older adults and social networks has focused mainly on the difficulties this group has in accessing the internet (Delello & McWhorter, 2017; Tirado-Morueta et al., 2012). Regarding the benefits of social networks for older people, it appears that using these platforms allows them to improve or maintain social connections (Hsu et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2021; Ramírez-Correa et al., 2021; Yu, 2020; Yu et al., 2016, 2018). This has a positive impact on social capital and well-being at older ages (Simons et al., 2021), which helps seniors feel less lonely and isolated (Aarts et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2015; Llorente-Barroso et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Consequently, social media can contribute to positive ageing, especially in terms of compensating for a lack of in-person interaction (Sheldon et al., 2021). Moreover, engagement among various age groups often encourages seniors to participate in social networks by providing entertainment and collaborative learning (Carenzio et al., 2021; Casanova et al., 2021). Other incentives for using social networks include satisfying curiosity (Wieczorkowski et al., 2020), searching for information (Yu, 2020), and seeking pleasurable experiences (Ramírez-Correa et al., 2019).

In addition, Neves et al. (2018) present case studies of such research and challenge the simplistic notion of an age-based digital divide, by drawing on strong structuration theory to explore the interconnection between agency, structure, and context in the sociotechnical process of adopting technology, as well as in its use and non-use among older adults. Concurring with this approach, other authors indicate neither a consistent pattern in the specific ways seniors use the internet nor a homogeneous level of digital knowledge among this demographic group (Llorente-Barroso, Sánchez-Valle, & Viñarás-Abad, 2023; Sánchez Valle et al., 2022; Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022). In this regard, Loos and Ivan (2022) outline the differences between the three technological generations identified in this study: the "mechanical" generation (born in 1938 or before), the "household revolution" generation (born between 1939 and 1948), and the "technological spread" generation (born between 1949 and 1963). Regarding these groups, the authors refer to the use of email, chats, and social networking sites by older people, and they affirm that the expansion of both the availability and access to digital media does not necessarily lead to an increase in use, even among older adults who are further behind in adopting the new media.

Even though a consistent pattern of internet and social media use among older people cannot be established (Loos & Ivan, 2022), the literature on the subject highlights factors that either encourage or discourage

inclusion in the digital sphere. Seniors have reported that the main constraints limiting their use of the internet are a lack of interest (van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), a shortage of digital skills (Quan-Haase et al., 2018; van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), and mistrust (Mason & Pereira, 2011; Quan-Haase et al., 2018; Sánchez Valle et al., 2022; Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022). Other factors include a disdain for technology and a feeling that participation in the digital environment is a waste of time (Mason & Pereira, 2011). Added to these restraints are a zeal for protecting one's privacy and personal data (Elueze & Quan-Haase, 2018; Llorente-Barroso, Sánchez-Valle, & Viñarás-Abad, 2023; Sánchez Valle et al., 2022; Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022; Volkmann et al., 2020; Wieczorkowski et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2018), as well as the perception that websites request too much information when making online transactions (Sánchez Valle et al., 2022) or purchases (Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022). Other impediments include a preference for traditional over digital media (Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020; Llorente-Barroso et al., 2021; Vulpe & Crăciun, 2020), a fear of online risk (Elueze & Quan-Haase, 2018), and a lack of skills, which hinder diversified and advanced digital use (Coelho, 2022).

One incentive for using the internet is savings in time and money, yet the most important motivation is venturing into tasks that seniors consider to be safe, such as e-mail, search engines, online banking, and e-commerce, as well as participating in activities related to entertainment and social contact. The most intensive users consider the internet an integral part of their lives and intend to create their own digital footprint (Mason & Pereira, 2011).

Specifically, regarding social network use, some researchers have pointed out negative effects such as anxiety, the loss of in-person interaction, access to inappropriate content, false information (Barroso-Osuna & Aguilar-Gavira, 2015), and a negative portrayal of ageing (Makita et al., 2021). Seniors feel that social media is dull and not enjoyable. Moreover, they are afraid of being unable to protect their privacy, or of becoming addicted to such networks. Other concerns include a lack of time in keeping their profiles up-to-date, as well as not knowing how social networks work (GWI, 2021), especially due to the technical terminology and the uncertainty of using computers (Volkmann et al., 2020). However, a certain percentage of older people find social networks attractive and use them fervently (Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020).

2. Methodology

2.1. Objectives

The aim of this study is to discover the perception of people over 60 regarding the socio-political content developed on social media. The overall objective has been subdivided into the following specific objectives:

- SO1: Identify the positive and negative perceptions of internet users over 60 years of age (whether they use social networks or not), which either limit or promote their socio-political activity in the digital environment.
- SO2: Discover the ways that internet users in this age group use social networks with regard to the socio-political issues addressed.

2.2. Design of the Methodology

To achieve the objectives, we chose to carry out qualitative research through focus groups, which is considered the most appropriate method for gathering perceptions on an issue (Krueger, 1991), as it allows researchers to discover the opinions of a relatively large number of people in a short period of time (Vallés, 1997).

Four focus groups comprised of people over 60 were held during the month of July 2022. As shown in Table 1, 28 seniors took part (16 women and 12 men) between the ages of 61 and 72. The groups consisted of older adults with similar social network behaviour and an interest in socio-political content. Participants were selected by means of a questionnaire that included inquiries about their consumption of news in traditional and digital media, as well as their interest in the socio-political content disseminated in these media. Once the answers were obtained, a selection was made based on those who had stated that they consume news at least once a day in different media, especially on socio-political issues, and who showed an interest in this type of public affairs. Thus, the groups were comprised of the following seniors:

- Group 1: Social network users, three of whom are interested in socio-political content;
- Group 2: Social network users with an interest in socio-political content;
- Group 3: Seniors who do not use social networks;
- Group 4: Social network users with no interest in socio-political content (Table 1).

What differentiates Group 1 from Group 2 is that in the latter, all the participants are interested in the conversations and discussions that take place on social networks regarding socio-political issues. By contrast, only three of the respondents in Group 1 meet this criterion. The research team considered it useful to create a heterogeneous group in order to contrast the opinions of those who have an interest in public affairs on social networks with those who do not.

2.3. Development of the Focus Groups

Before the focus groups were carried out, a set of open-ended questions were developed to guide the conversation and enable uniformity of the questions and procedures in order to compare the results obtained in each

Table 1. Fact sheet of the focus groups.

Items	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Number of participants	Seven (four women and three men)	Seven (four women and three men)	Seven (four women and three men)	Seven (four women and three men)
Residence	Madrid	Madrid	Madrid	Madrid
Age	61–72 years	61–70 years	61–71 years	61–67 years
Social network users	Yes	Yes	No (except for WhatsApp)	Yes
Interest in socio-political issues on social networks	Three participants	All participants	N/A	None of the participants
Date conducted	20/07/2022	20/07/2022	21/07/2022	21/07/2022

group (Morgan, 1996). Special care was taken to ensure that the process was exhaustive in order to achieve the objectives of the research, while at the same time allowing the members of the groups to freely express their opinions. The questions were structured around four main topics: experiences and perceptions of seniors regarding the use of social networks in general; experiences, opinions, and perceptions about the participation of people over 60 in socio-political issues through social networks; advantages and disadvantages perceived by those over 60 with regard to socio-political participation in the digital environment; and motivations and restraints to cyber-participation by older adults in social and political issues.

The focus groups were moderated by two members of the research team and lasted about 90 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed to facilitate their analysis, which consisted of finding common points and discrepancies among the participants of the groups (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Vallés, 2002).

2.4. Data Analysis

The data was examined using topic analysis to identify, analyse, and communicate patterns in the data. Afterwards, a data set was organised and described in detail, according to the stages recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase consisted of reading the four transcripts to generate the initial codes with open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in order to systemise the analysis and avoid coding errors (Sabariego-Puig et al., 2014).

As explained by San Martín (2014), the procedure used for data analysis is based on the application of grounded theory. In this data coding process, there are three distinct stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The first aims to study the text in order to decipher the concepts, ideas, and meanings. The work is inductive. This coding is the result of a thorough analysis of the data in order to conceptualise the meanings contained in the text. The data are segmented, examined, and compared to find similarities and differences.

The result of this first coding is a list of codes from which a major or second-degree classification is obtained, which is a category. This process is called categorisation and refers to the summarisation of concepts into general concepts. Axial coding is the process of identifying relationships between the categories obtained in open coding and their subcategories and categories that need to be associated, bearing in mind that a category represents a phenomenon or, in other words, a problem, an event, an occurrence, an issue, or an incident that is defined as significant for the interviewee. The next step is selective coding, which is an extension of the previous step, but with a higher level of abstraction. The purpose is to obtain one main category that embodies the research phenomenon and integrates the categories and subcategories of open and axial coding.

Finally, theoretical or content saturation is one of the analytical procedures that ensure explanatory breadth and the identification of broad relationships between categories. In this article, we have managed to collect enough data to saturate all the categories in order to give consistency to the theory and finish the data-gathering process.

ATLAS.ti 9 software was used for this entire procedure, which allows large amounts of data to be processed. According to San Martín (2014), this programme was designed in the late 1980s by German researcher Thomas Murh, who using technology attempted to apply the methodological approaches of Glaser and Strauss. This software makes it possible to convey the circular nature of the qualitative analysis, as it offers the option of sequentially incorporating the data without the need to collect all the data at the same time. For this reason, it enables theoretical sampling, which is necessary for carrying out theory-building analyses. Similarly, ATLAS.ti also allows the identification of those codes that need to be saturated. This is possible thanks to the code-primary-documents-table function, which shows the number of citations that belong to each code. Therefore, this software function enables content saturation to be applied to each code and category, as proposed in grounded theory. Like most software, ATLAS.ti is a text retrieval

programme, yet it is focused on conceptual work in which each step of theoretical coding (open, axial, and selective coding) has a place in the programme. For example, open coding is carried out at the level of segment coding, and axial coding is used to create networks of conceptual relations. As for the selective coding proposed in grounded theory, ATLAS.ti has a “super code” function, which enables the creation of a main category that integrates the codes and categories developed during the open and axial coding phases.

The main topics were identified and converted into 33 codes. Next, a text analysis was carried out in which 478 comments were found. Each of these comments was assigned corresponding codes, which in some cases included more than one. A continuous analysis was carried out to refine the details of each topic and the overall narrative, thereby generating clear concepts. In the first analysis, a code-document table was created to compare the topics discussed in the focus groups. To establish associations between the codes, a co-occurrence analysis was carried out in order to determine relationships of greater intensity between the codes according to the co-occurrence coefficient (COO), which is a number between 0 and 1. This measures the intensity of co-occurrence according to frequency. The closer this coefficient is to 1, the stronger the relationship between the two codes. A semantic map was also created, which allowed the author to graphically observe the relationships between codes according to their level of intensity.

3. Results

3.1. Topics Discussed in the Focus Groups Based on the Code-Document Analysis

Table 2 shows the main topics of conversation in each of the groups. Those who talked most about the negative aspects of social networks were Group 4, comprised of social network users who are not interested in socio-political content, and Group 3, made up of internet navigators who do not use social networks (45 and 39 comments, respectively). Group 3 focused more on the risks of social networks than the other groups (32 comments). However, those who use social networks felt more mistrust toward these channels (15 comments in Group 1). Furthermore, the groups who use social net-

works displayed greater knowledge of the different social networks, as evidenced by the fact that Group 4 mentioned some of them 39 times, compared to 17 mentions by Group 3.

Logically, the groups who use social networks stated having more incentives for doing so (41 comments in Group 1, 43 in Group 2, and 50 in Group 4). At the same time, they talked about the positive aspects of social networks more than Group 3. Moreover, these positive comments were especially prevalent among Group 1 (33 mentions) and Group 4 (34 mentions).

3.2. Analysis of Co-Occurrence Between Codes

To analyse the associations between codes, a co-occurrence analysis was carried out involving all the codes. The main relations between the codes were gathered from this analysis. The most relevant findings are the associations with higher and lower levels of frequency, which were obtained by using the COO as a reference. Thus, associations above a coefficient of 0.50 are considered very high (marked in orange). High associations are those between 0.49 and 0.30 (marked in yellow). Moderate relations are between 0.29 and 0.10, marked in green. Finally, low relations are those with a coefficient of less than 0.9, marked in blue.

Figure 1 shows the connections between the concepts. To make it easier to observe the results, a semantic map was created, in which the codes and their relations are reflected. This preliminary analysis was used to focus on the content of the article, taking into account the strongest associations between the codes that would address the research objectives. Table 3 displays relations that are very high, high, and moderate.

3.2.1. Negative and Positive Perceptions of Social Networks

In Table 4, one can see the codes with which the negative and positive perception codes co-occur and the degree of frequency based on the COO. In addition, the degree of grounding of each of them has been provided as well. Analysis of the data shows that the strongest association with negative perception is the political tension on social networks (COO 0.37). Participants associate tension with a negative perception of social networks.

Table 2. Topics discussed regarding social network use.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Total
Mistrust	15	10	8	7	40
Negative perception of social networks	20	6	39	45	110
Motivation and use of social networks	41	43	14	50	148
Positive perception of social networks	33	17	2	34	86
Comments about social networks	31	38	17	39	125
Risk of social networks	20	9	32	14	75
Total	160	123	112	189	584

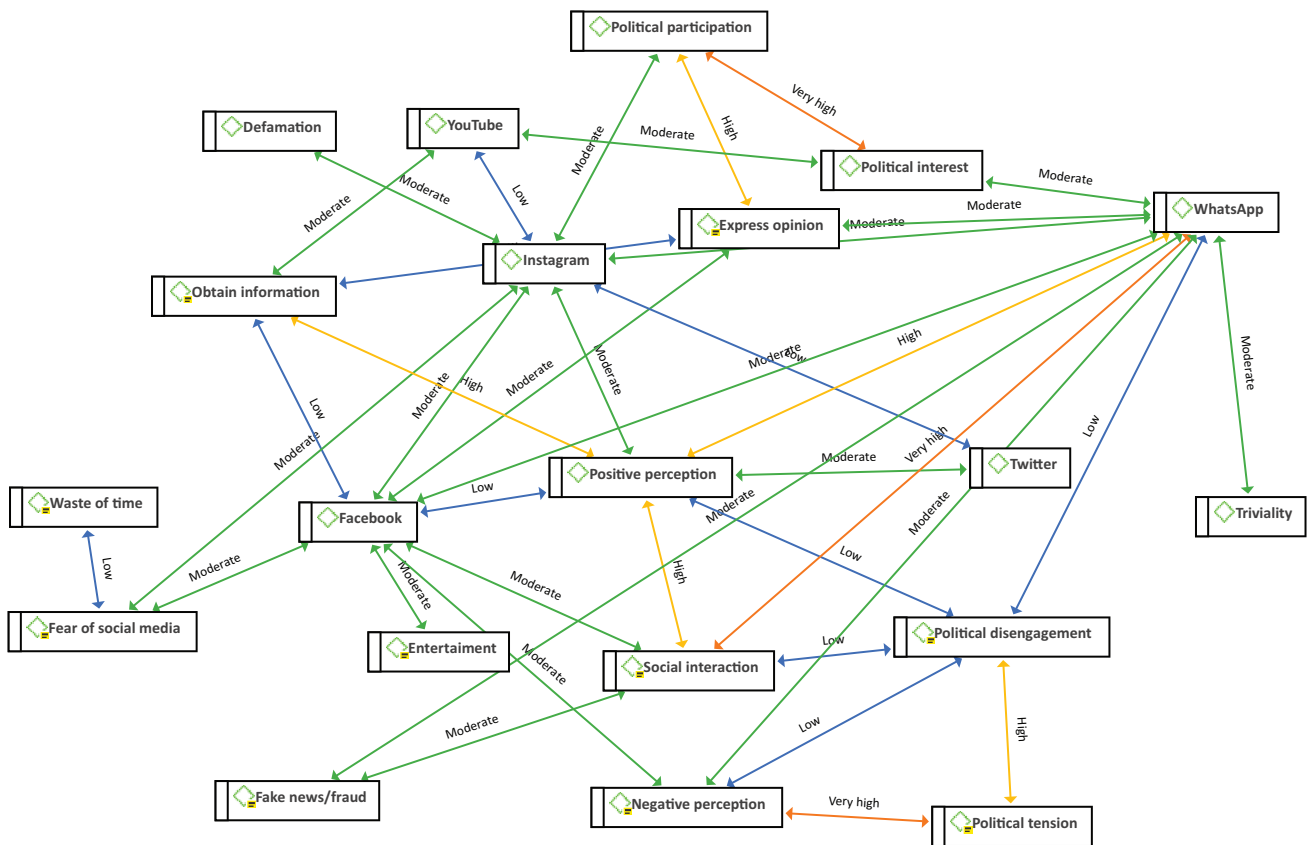


Figure 1. Semantic network of associations between codes.

The same is true for the existence of fake news and fraud on social networks, although the frequency, in this case, is lower (0.25).

The WhatsApp code (0.12) and that of Facebook (0.14) also co-occur when talking about negative perceptions, yet with less frequency than when participants express their opinion about social networks, as seen in Table 4.

This occurs primarily because participants identify fake news and fraud with these social networks. Other associations that are less intense are the feeling that social networks are a waste of time and the lack of interaction and physical contact provided by social networks.

Positive perceptions of social networks are strongly associated with the opportunity to obtain information

Table 3. Co-occurrences with very high, high, and moderate frequency.

Associated codes	COO	Frequency
Political participation and political interest	0.69	Very high
Political tension and negative perception	0.51	Very high
WhatsApp and social interaction	0.50	Very high
WhatsApp and a positive perception of social networks	0.47	High
Social interaction and a positive perception of social networks	0.42	High
Expressing opinion and political participation	0.41	High
Obtaining information and a positive perception of social networks	0.40	High
Political disengagement and political tension	0.40	High
Facebook and a positive perception of social networks	0.26	Moderate
Fake news and a negative perception	0.25	Moderate
Perceiving social networks as a waste of time, and a fear of social networks	0.23	Moderate
Facebook and obtaining information	0.23	Moderate
Instagram and YouTube	0.22	Moderate
Twitter and Instagram	0.21	Moderate
Obtaining information and expressing opinion	0.21	Moderate

Table 4. Co-occurrences between negative and positive perception codes, including the rest of the codes.

	Negative perception		Positive perception	
	Count	Coefficient	Count	Coefficient
Defamation	4	0.04	—	—
Entertainment	1	0.01	13	0.15
Expressing opinion	1	0.01	14	0.14
Facebook	20	0.14	1	0.01
Fake news/fraud	23	0.25	1	0.01
Fear of social media	13	0.12	2	0.02
Feeling that social networks are a waste of time	12	0.12	3	0.03
Instagram	5	0.05	6	0.06
Lack of interaction	10	0.10	1	0.01
LinkedIn	1	0.01	2	0.02
Low level of instruction in using social networks	4	0.04	—	—
Mistrust	10	0.08	1	0.01
Negative perception	—	—	7	0.04
Obtaining information	2	0.01	41	0.40
Pandemic	7	0.07	8	0.09
Political disengagement	4	0.04	1	0.01
Political interest	—	—	8	0.09
Political participation	—	—	14	0.16
Political tension	42	0.37	3	0.02
Positive perception	7	0.04	—	—
Social interaction	12	0.08	43	0.42
Triviality	7	0.07	—	—
Twitter	9	0.08	17	0.18
WhatsApp	18	0.12	49	0.47
YouTube	—	—	8	0.09

(0.40), social interaction (0.42), and the belief that WhatsApp is the most widely used application. This tool has been identified by participants as the one that provides the highest level of interaction and information for staying informed. Although with lower COOs, the following codes display a positive perception of social networks: entertainment (0.15), the opportunity to express one's opinion (0.14), and the option of participating in political conversation (0.16). Moreover, Facebook (0.26), Twitter (0.18), Instagram (0.06), and YouTube (0.09) also show positive associations.

3.2.2. Political Participation

Political tension on social media is the main reason for not actively engaging in political participation (0.40). In the focus groups, participants stated doing little or nothing on social networks regarding controversial issues in order to avoid conflict with people close to them as well as strangers.

On the other hand, political participation is strongly associated with expressing an opinion on socio-political issues (0.41). It also has a very strong relation with

seniors' interest in socio-political issues (0.69). Political participation is also associated with obtaining information for staying informed (0.16). The social networks most strongly associated with political participation are Facebook (0.14), WhatsApp (0.16), and to a lesser extent Instagram (0.11), YouTube (0.09), and Twitter (0.05; see Table 5).

3.2.3. The Use of Social Networks for Socio-Political Issues

During the data analysis, it seemed useful to reflect on the association between codes that describe the uses made of social networks. It has been observed that the strongest association exists between WhatsApp and social interaction (COO 0.53), whereas Facebook has moderate relations with the four codes describing the uses of social networks. It appears that the opportunity to obtain information through social networks interacts moderately with all social networks except Instagram, which does not seem to be related to the entertainment aspect. Moreover, Instagram has weak connections to the rest of the uses as well. As commented above, there

Table 5. Co-occurrences between political participation and political disengagement codes, including the rest of the codes.

	Political participation		Political disengagement	
	Count	Coefficient	Count	Coefficient
Expressing opinion	14	0.41	—	—
Facebook	10	0.14	—	—
Instagram	3	0.11	—	—
Negative perception	—	—	4	0.04
Obtaining information	10	0.16	—	—
Political interest	11	0.69	—	—
Political tension	—	—	23	0.40
Positive perception	14	0.16	1	0.01
Social interaction	10	0.15	1	0.01
Twitter	2	0.05	—	—
WhatsApp	12	0.16	1	0.01
YouTube	2	0.09	—	—

is a strong association between WhatsApp and social interaction (see Table 6).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Analysis of the focus groups reveals that a certain type of senior, namely one who is concerned with socio-political issues, has enough interest in order to participate in conversations on social media regarding such matters. At the same time, other seniors shy away from conversations on these issues in order to avoid conflict with social media users (Xie & Jaeger, 2008). It is clear that everyone is aware of the risks involved in being present on social media, especially those who are not social media users. On the other hand, the focus group participants clearly state the reasons why they feel encouraged to become involved in this digital environment, although they also reveal barriers and restraints that are more frequently mentioned among non-users of social networks.

In response to SO1, the discourse of participants shows that the perception of social networks is related to the personality and cognitive factors of seniors, according to Barranquero and Barbas (2022), and their level of interest in politics. Moreover, these cognitive factors are

related to the perception and knowledge that users have about social networks. The findings of this study coincide with those obtained by other researchers regarding the fact that social networks make it possible for older people to connect with both relatives and strangers (Hsu et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2021; Ramírez-Correa et al., 2021; Yu, 2020; Yu et al., 2016, 2018;), thereby reducing the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness (Chang et al., 2015; Llorente-Barroso et al., 2021). In addition to these findings, the main contribution of this study is that in the case of socio-political participation on social media, the perceived tension in discussing such issues, as well as the presence of fake news and fraud, become a source of discomfort that hinders the involvement of seniors. In terms of incentives, it has been shown that a positive aspect of social media is the opportunity it provides to express opinions on socio-political issues.

The restraints identified in other research have been confirmed in the present study, such as anxiety and the fear of risks associated with using the internet (Elueze & Quan-Haase, 2018), exposure to inappropriate content or fake news (Barroso-Osuna & Aguilar-Gavira, 2015), the fear of becoming addicted to social networks, and/or the lack of time to keep personal profiles updated (GWI,

Table 6. Co-occurrences between entertainment, obtaining information, expressing opinion, and social interaction, including the codes of social media.

	Entertainment coefficient	Expressing opinion coefficient	Obtaining information coefficient	Social interaction coefficient
Facebook	0.10	0.19	0.23	0.14
Instagram	—	0.05	0.09	0.03
LinkedIn	—	—	—	0.05
Twitter	0.00	0.07	0.21	0.01
WhatsApp	0.00	0.11	0.18	0.53
YouTube	0.00	0.08	0.14	0.02

2021; Mason & Pereira, 2011). Other reasons why older adults make scarce use of these digital spaces are a low level of digital skill (Coelho, 2022; Quan-Haase et al., 2018; van Deursen & Helsper, 2015) and the perceived risk of sharing their personal data (Elueze & Quan-Haase, 2018; Llorente-Barroso, Sánchez-Valle, & Viñarás-Abad, 2023; Sánchez Valle et al., 2022; Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022; Volkmann et al., 2020; Wiczorkowski et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2018). Other factors include a lack of interest (van Deursen & Helsper, 2015) and general mistrust (Mason & Pereira, 2011; Llorente-Barroso, Sánchez-Valle, & Viñarás-Abad, 2023; Quan-Haase et al., 2018; Sánchez Valle et al., 2022; Viñarás-Abad et al., 2022).

Regarding SO2, social networks are perceived positively, mainly because they allow seniors to obtain information, interact socially, and express their opinions on socio-political issues. Perceptions regarding the positive aspects of social media are strongly associated with the WhatsApp tool. Facebook has moderate links with the four main uses of social networks, compared to Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube, which only have links to obtaining information. There is no association between entertainment and social media, with the exception of Facebook, as mentioned above. It is striking that Instagram is not the most mentioned network when referring to the usefulness of social networks, especially for entertainment. These findings are probably due to the fact that seniors use Facebook and WhatsApp more than other social media (IAB Spain, 2022). The uses made of social networks coincide with the opportunities generally offered by the internet for obtaining information to stay informed, communicating, expressing opinions, and being entertained (Llorente-Barroso et al., 2015). The limitations experienced by seniors in participating in the digital environment have been mentioned above and reinforced by previous studies as well. Nevertheless, the main contribution of the present research is that it points out two restraints that limit the “cyber-participation” of seniors in socio-political issues: the prevailing tension in political discourse and the fear of being a victim of fraud or being misled by fake news. However, the ease of interaction among users is an incentive for continued engagement in the digital world (GWI, 2021; Miranda et al., 2020), despite the risk and mistrust involved. In this regard, it would be of interest to implement digital literacy strategies aimed at this group in order to promote their inclusion in the social realm (Abad Alcalá, 2017). In this way, they would not be left out of debates on issues that affect them directly or indirectly as members of society.

Despite the limitations of this study as a result of the methodology itself, this article offers additional knowledge regarding a crucial issue for modern societies, which is the fact that being part of the digital society is no longer an option. Instead, it is a requirement in order for people to be fully engaged in social, economic, and civic life (Allmann & Blank, 2021).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author



María Sánchez-Valle is a senior lecturer in the Advertising and Public Relations degree at CEU San Pablo University, Madrid. Her main line of research involves online communication of vulnerable audiences. She has been a member of 12 competitive research projects funded by public and private institutions. She is also a member of the consolidated research group entitled Brecha Digital y Mayores (Seniors and the Digital Divide). Her research has been disseminated through national and international conferences (European Communication Research and Education Association, IAMCR, Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación, etc.), as well as in articles published by indexed journals in Web of Science (Journal Citation Reports) and Scopus (Scientific Journal Rankings).