

Why the Elderly Are More Susceptible to Social Media Misinformation | The Wire

By Mitali Mukherjee

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Dutta (name changed) is 75 years old and lives in a middle-class residential cluster in South Delhi. Throughout, his phone was flooded with WhatsApp messages on how to fight the COVID-19 pandemic: from the use of hydroxychloroquine – the anti-malarial drug – to drinking garlic in hot water to drinking cow urine. A former defence officer, he would sometimes try and counter the misinformation on his many WhatsApp groups but after a while, he gave up. In his words, “I don’t seem to know anymore, what is right and what is wrong.”

2021 will be remembered for a most brutal second wave of COVID-19 that struck India. Even as the pandemic wreaked havoc through the months of April and May, another dangerous wave was also spreading: misinformation. So, what is misinformation? Misinformation and disinformation both refer to fake or inaccurate information. The key difference lies in the intention – disinformation usually refers to intentional cases while misinformation the unintentional.

Does this misinformation schema specifically target a particular age group? Not really, contends Nirjhari Sinha, co-founder and director of *Alt News*, the Indian non-profit fact-checking website.

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