



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

School of Engineering

Sharing is caring?

**A qualitative study exploring how
Swedish Generation X-ers relate to
fake news on Facebook**

Main Subject area: *Informatics*

Author: *Kalle Branzell, Gabriella Hektor*

Supervisor: *Ida Serneberg*

JÖNKÖPING 2021-06-13

This final thesis has been carried out at the School of Engineering at Jönköping University within informatics. The authors are responsible for the presented opinions, conclusions and results.

Examiner: Erik Bergström

Supervisor: Ida Serneberg

Scope: 15 hp (first-cycle education)

Date: 2021-06-13

Abstract

Background

It is evident that fake news has become more common since the world transitioned into a more digital age. Previous research on the topic of fake news has usually been done on different generations and often by comparing them to one another in order to highlight differences between age groups. However, there are no studies to be found on Generation X alone in Sweden.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine Swedish Generation X-ers and their relation to news posts found on Facebook, in order to find out how they interact with it and what they would do to make sure a news post is valid before sharing it with their network of contacts. With a focus on exploring their experiences and finding patterns among the different answers we collected, the goal with this thesis was to present an overview of how Swedish Generation X-ers relate to news posts on Facebook.

Method

The research conducted in this paper was done by a set of semi-structured interviews. The transcriptions and data were analyzed by using a thematic approach, which allowed us to find themes and codes in the material, and in turn to be able to draw conclusions.

Findings

The results showed that Swedish Generation X-ers generally tend to avoid interacting with news posts on Facebook. This is because they worry about accidentally sharing fake news, think news is too private to share with others, and do not like the presence that comes with presenting themselves online. However, if they were to share a news post, even hypothetically, the majority of our participants would take measures to ensure validity beforehand. This thesis can be used as a groundwork for similar studies in other countries to get a comparative view.

Further research

Suggestions for further research include doing the same kind of research in a new and bigger context, in order to see if the results from this thesis are recurring throughout the population at large. Another suggestion would be to combine a larger qualitative study with an additional quantitative approach, in order to present a more mathematical overview. Lastly, further research could be done to see if Generation X-ers are as private with their political views in real life as they are on Facebook. This in order to see if the behavior is something they have brought from their disconnected life to Facebook, or if it is just an online behavior.

Keywords: Fake news, Generation X, Interaction, Validity, Characteristics, Qualitative Study

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1 Introduction

According to Martens et al. (2018), social media is the primary source of access to news for two-thirds of online users in the United States. Shu, et al. (2019) point out the same trend in social media intake; by comparing data from 2012 where 49 % of US adults were using social media for news, with data from 2016, they could see that the number had increased to 62 %. This suggests that digital news sources are the preferred source compared to traditional print media. With newer media phenomena such as Apple News, Facebook Instant Articles, and Snapchat Discover, the possibilities when it comes to finding news are endless (Newman et al. 2015).

Even though the internet is a great source of information, there is a downside to it as well. The concept of fake news, i.e. information that is phony or not entirely true (Quandt et al. 2019), have become more common since we transitioned into a more digital age (Lee, 2019). Fake news can be used in three different ways: as malinformation; hate speech and harassment, misinformation; false information and urban legends, and as disinformation; fake news and fabricated content (Shu et al. 2020). This makes it harder than ever for social media users to know what is completely true and viable, what is untrue but might be viewed as “real facts”, and what is shared to intentionally harm individuals or organizations (Shu et al. 2020, *see also*; Torres et al., 2018).

Fake news can lead to misinformation regarding important issues, for instance concerning the spread of Covid-19, global warming, or different kinds of politics. An example of the latter is the 2016 US presidential election. The most popular fake news stories were shared more often than the most popular mainstream news stories on Facebook, and the most discussed fake news also had a tendency to favor Donald Trump more than it did Hillary Clinton, which made a lot of people concerned about the effects of fake news on the election outcome (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This shows that it is more important than ever to be critical about the information we consume; otherwise it is easy to be deceived by the rumors floating around online (Tanaka, et al., 2013).

1.1 Problem statement

Thaler (2019) questioned users on the veracity of information sources for the main news stations in the United States. The study showed that the subject's personal polarized beliefs lead to further polarization and excess trust in fake news and misinformation. Studies like this and the ease of access to news sources online, combined with the automated accounts and bots intentionally spreading misinformation (Shao et al. 2017), have made the spread of false information more common and universal than ever (Paskin, 2018).

Vozab (2019) compared the attitudes towards news and news sources, within three different generations; Baby Boomers; 1946-1964, Generation X; 1965-1980, and Millennials; 1981-1996, in Croatia. She concluded that Millennials are likely to rely on online media channels over traditional print media, and that they had high concerns about fake news and the authenticity of both sources. Meanwhile, Generation X and Baby Boomers relied more on traditional media and had less knowledge of fake news and the liability of sources online.

Reuter et al. (2019), targeted people between the age of 18 and 65 about their opinions on fake news in Germany. They found that the large majority of the participants understand the risk of fake news posing a threat and manipulating people's opinions. They also found that there are significant differences between the generations and age groups. The cohorts between 25-34 were most undecided on the impact of fake news. However, the cohorts between 55-64 tended to disagree twice as often on the same questions about the potential harmful effects, but were less indecisive. Bolton et al. (2013) looked at the social media impact of Generation Z, and concluded similarly, that younger generations tend to rely on online media more often, both for entertainment and communications.

Geeng, et al. (2020) researched how users would react to fake news posts on Facebook and Twitter, if it looked like it was posted by someone they follow. They found various reasons that people on social media did not investigate posts. One of the reasons was that most people did not want to spend the extra time to investigate the credibility of the post, and a second reason was that a post with a trusted poster behind it was assumed to be true.

Facht (2021) writes that the media landscape in Sweden is largely characterized by digital media. She also points to a clear line between people younger and older than 45, where the older span uses both digital and traditional media and the younger span uses mostly digital media. She also mentions that users tend to use content that they can interact with.

Larsson's (2018) study looked into Swedish newspapers and their social media presence. It showed that more demanding forms of audience interaction with news are not very popular - while lower demanding forms of interaction are more common. The three main forms of interaction with posts on Facebook are sharing, liking, and commenting. Lower demanding forms of interaction could be the "like" function, which is arguably a very light version of participation, while more demanding forms of interaction could be commenting and sharing posts. Skepticism towards sharing and commenting on news posts is common and it has been suggested that it is connected to how it affects peoples' perceived visibility online (Larsson 2018).

The fact that anyone can post things on social media without any sources to support their opinions, and can manipulate the posts' intent in any way to be adopted maliciously, is a problem since it can influence people's opinions (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). Carrie James (2014), looked closer at how the intent of a post can change after it has been posted online. She described four unique properties that are good to keep in mind when browsing social media websites: persistence, replicability, searchability and scalability. The first three properties are focused on the concept of "what comes online, stays online". Content that is posted online is searchable, and can be copied and pasted out of its original context, sent from one person to another, it can be downloaded and reuploaded. The fourth property, scalability, can be a consequence of the first three, meaning the possibility of a post reaching unintended audiences due to the possibility of being shared with a large public. Even if a post is deleted it might have already been shared, copied, screenshot, etc. Once again, what comes online, stays online...

Previous studies such as Vozab (2019) and Reuter (2019), that are mentioned above have been made on the topic of fake news and the relationship different age groups have with the concept. They have been carried out in countries such as Croatia, Germany, and the United States of America. Studies that have been made in Sweden on the same topic have instead focused on interactions with news posts on Facebook rather than a specific age groups' relation to the subject.

For this study, Facebook is the chosen network to look further into; firstly, because it is the most popular social network worldwide as of January 2021 when looking into the number of active users (Tankovska, 2021). Secondly, because the platform has often been disparaged for boosting the spread of fake news (Talwar et al, 2019), and thirdly, Facebook is the social media channel of choice for Generation X-ers, compared to Millennials and Generation Z (Spradling III, 2017).

1.2 Purpose and research questions

The empirical domain has been chosen since this thesis aims to go deeper and explore how Swedish Generation X-ers relate to fake news on Facebook; if and in that case how they interact with news posts.

There is a lot of research to be found on the correlation between fake news and different generations. However, most articles describing previous research done on the topic of fake news almost extensively compare different generations (Vozab, 2019) different age groups (Reuter et al. 2019), or simply leave Generation X out (Adolfsson et al., 2017 *see also* Wada, 2019), since Millennials make a more convenient sample group to study when it comes to university-based studies, compared to Generation X (Spradling III, 2017).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine Swedish Generation X-ers and their relation to news posts found on Facebook. The focus will be on exploring their experiences with said topic, in order to gain new knowledge and insights into the participants' perspective. By finding similarities among the different participants' answers, we expect to be able to present an overview of the subject.

In order to fulfill the purpose, the study addresses two research questions:

RQ1: How do Swedish Generation X-ers interact with Facebook news posts in the light of possible fake news?

This in order to get an understanding of if the respondents interact in a certain way when coming across news posts on Facebook, provided that they do.

RQ2: What measures would Swedish Generation X-ers take to make sure a Facebook news post is valid before sharing it?

This to get an understanding of whether the respondents would do anything in particular before sharing something with other people online.

1.3 Scope, limitations and definitions

This section defines the scope of the study but also the limitations that have been made in order to make this study feasible.

1.3.1 Scope and limitation

For the scope of this paper, it has been decided to limit the coverage of subjects to people living in Sweden and the time period they were born; meaning people born between 1965-1980. It will not matter if a person was not born in Sweden; as long as they live here, they are valid participants in the study.

The study is limited to Sweden for several reasons; we think the study would be way too broad and scattered if performed worldwide, since that would require a very high number of participants in order to be able to find consistent similarities and conclusions. Previous studies (Vozab. 2019, *see also*; Reuter et al. 2019), are examples of how researchers often choose to target one country to look deeper into. Therefore we decided to do the same, in the hopes of contributing with research made on a country that has not been researched before in relation to the topic. Based on the number of interviews, we did not expect to be able to generalize our results, but rather expected to see patterns emerging in the material.

There is no consistent age span to be found online which determines who belongs to Generation X, since each writer is using a specific span and is adapting it for their research. Some examples of this are Olson (2008), who puts Generation X in the span of years to 1965-1978, and The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2012) who set the year span for the same generation at 1965-1979. For this thesis the generational span made by Dimock (2019) has been chosen, where the span for Generation X is 1965-1980. The paper is one of the latest papers written on the subject of generational spans and has been cited over six hundred times since publication, which can be interpreted as the age span being widely accepted.

Regarding the chosen topic, the plan is not to frame Generation X as a generation who has less knowledge than others, nor compare them to other generations.

1.3.2 Definitions

This section will define some recurrent concepts that will be mentioned throughout this thesis, in order to provide some basic knowledge. These concepts are limitations in themselves, since we limit the research to these descriptions.

“Fake News”

In general, fake news refers to a large range of misinformation and disinformation that circulates online and in the media (Kalsnes, 2018). Gelfert (2018) argues that, “*online social media have enabled purveyors of fake news to target specific audiences and exploit well-documented cognitive biases and heuristics in an attempt to mislead consumers into propagating fake news claims even further*” (p. 86).

Shu et al. (2020) are further classifying the term fake news into three separate categories: *misinformation*: i.e. false information and urban legends, that are not always meant to be malicious, *disinformation*: i.e. fake news and fabricated content, that are made with intent to deceive, and finally *malinformation*: i.e. hate speech and harassment with the intent to harm. They state that misinformation and disinformation can be converted between one another, depending on the person spreading and sharing it online, and the personal belief of that person and in what social circle they belong to. The first two categories are the two most common types of fake news. For the simplification throughout this paper, we will refer to all three categories as “fake news”.

Kalsnes (2018) describes three elements that are frequently mentioned regarding fake news: *the news format*: meaning false information that is dressed to look like actual news, *the degree of falsity*: meaning information that is either completely, or partly untrue, and finally the *intention behind it*: meaning if it is meant to mislead people for different purposes.

Generations Spans

While there is not much focus on other generations besides Generation X in this research paper, the other generations are mentioned to get a better overview. We have decided to go with the generational spans stated by Dimock (2019):

- Baby Boomers: born between 1946-1964
- Generation X: born between 1965-1980
- Millennials: born between 1981-1996
- Generation Z: born between 1997-onward

1.4 Disposition

The thesis starts with an introduction, where the underlying and current problem related to the topic is introduced combined with current research, followed by the problem statement where we present previous relevant research and studies that have been made within our topic, that will help clarify what we are trying to accomplish with our own. It will also be explained how said information is connected to our research. Following this is the purpose of the study and the research questions this thesis intends to answer. The scope and limitations of the study and a definitions section are presented at the end of the first chapter.

In the second chapter of the thesis, the method and process for collecting data for the study will be presented. This is followed by a presentation of how we will analyze the data, and ended by a section about the validity and reliability of the data and interviews.

The last parts of the thesis consist of our theoretical framework and our results chapter. In the latter, we will present our findings, and the collection of data and analysis of relevant data will be discussed. The conclusion of the thesis will be presented at the end of the paper, followed by a discussion of practical and scientific implications and suggestions for further research into the subject.

2 Method and implementation

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, meaning examining Swedish Generation X-ers and their relation to news posts found on Facebook, a qualitative study was performed. The chosen method was semi-structured interviews, and this method was decided on for a number of reasons; mostly because of the number of strengths: firstly, interviews are one of the most effective methods for qualitative research. When the desire is to get a better understanding of a problem, and when finding out peoples' opinions and experiences with said problem are sought-after (Virginia Tech, 2018), this is an ideal method. The chosen method also makes it possible to gather useful information and allow new topics to surface (Wilson, 2014), which in turn encourages deeper answers; the exact thing that was sought after.

In this chapter a description of how the interviews were performed and analyzed will also be presented. Thoughts regarding validity, reliability and ethical considerations will also be covered.

2.1 Data collection

This section will describe and justify the chosen method for the data collection that has been used in order to answer the research questions.

2.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Since the goal was to find out how Swedish Generation X-ers interact with Facebook news posts in the light of possible misinformation, and also what measures they would take to make sure a Facebook news post is valid before sharing it, a method that would encourage deeper answers were needed. In order to be able to answer the research questions, a series of semi-structured interviews were performed.

While there are previous studies comparing the different generations when it comes to their knowledge about fake news, the chosen topic for this study can be described as a bit of unknown ground; meaning that choosing a method where it is possible to discover issues that have previously been unknown in order to get deep, thoughtful answers, is exactly what was needed. Lastly, semi-structured interviews are a good method to use since it allows broad comparisons across the different interviews (Wilson, 2014).

Implementing the method stated above helped us find the material needed in order to answer the research questions, thanks to the conversational nature that allows for previously unknown topics to surface during the interviews.

Since semi-structured interviews mean interviews that are predetermined to some extent but still allow flexibility when it comes to how the participants want to address certain questions (Alsaawi, 2014), it helped us get an understanding of how Swedish Generation X-ers think and behave.

2.1.2 The participants

When it came to finding the participants for the study, the participants were not selected randomly (Creswell, 2014). Creswell discusses the importance of selecting; and whether to use self-selection or selection for convenience. Since participants had to give their permission to be interviewed, the easier use of the method was opted for; meaning that the participants were conveniently selected.

This means that in order to find participants to interview, we asked people close to us, who belong to Generation X, if they could recommend people to get in touch with within their network of contacts (Turner III, 2010, *see also*; Creswell, 2014). After that we used self-selection among the list of people that was provided, in order to find enough participants.

As all of the respondents in this study were native Swedish speakers, all interviews were held in Swedish in order to make the participants as comfortable as possible.

2.1.3 The interview planning

The process of planning for the interviews was inspired by Kvale's (2007) seven stages of building and interview inquiry. Three out of the seven stages were implemented in the data collection phase, since the last four are connected to the data analysis phase.

The first stage, *thematizing*, was the formulation of the purpose of the interviews. Here we decided on what we wanted to achieve with the method of choice. The second stage was the *planning and designing* of the interviews to obtain the intended knowledge necessary for the thesis. This meant deciding on how we wanted them to look and how they were going to be structured. The third, and in this case, final step was *conducting the interviews* themselves, before moving on to the final steps which included analysing, verifying and reporting our findings in the data analysis phase.

The aim was to perform 12-15 interviews. Hennink et al. (2017) argue that nine interviews are enough to capture a thorough range of data, though more data is preferable in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Hence the choice to go with 12-15 interviews. The interviews were conducted with one participant at a time,

with both of us present. One of us would hold the interview, while the other would sit at the side taking supporting notes.

2.1.4 The interviews

The interviews themselves were inspired by the first three steps in the “Six steps of analysis” (Kvale, 2007), since the last three steps in this guide do not belong to the data collection phase and are therefore unrelated. The first step was the interviews, where the participants were asked a series of questions in order to describe their experiences with our chosen topic. Some examples of the questions they were asked are “*Do you interact with news posts on Facebook?*” and “*What would make you share a news post on Facebook?*” (appendix 1). This meant that they got to explain how they feel about certain things in relation to the topic of the thesis. Here we did not interpret anything.

The second step was the participants' possibility of discovering new information and understanding said information, by connecting things themselves during the interviews. This was possible, partly because they would come up with new thoughts along the way while speaking, and partly because of the follow-up questions, which gave the participants the opportunity to think deeper. Thanks to the semi-structured method, which let them speak freely, they were free to make connections out loud during the interviews. During this step, we did not interpret anything either.

The third step gave us an opportunity to, in some cases, interpret what the participants were saying, by confirming that our understanding of them was correct, and that we had interpreted their sayings in the right way. Certain things that had been said were summed up and repeated back to them, which gave the participants an opportunity to confirm that we had understood what they were saying properly. If, by some chance, we had misunderstood their intentions, the opportunity to correct us was presented.

Some questions were prepared in advance in order to be sure that certain points are covered, without stopping the participants from bringing up things that they considered relevant. There was also a possibility to ask for more information if a certain turn is particularly interesting, and the option to revert the conversation back to the main points if the participant strays too far from the original topic.

After performing the two pilot interviews and timing them, 30 minutes was decided as a reasonable time for each meeting.

The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and then manually transcribed afterward. Due to the current situation with Covid-19 we performed all interviews online; either via Facebook Messenger video calls or FaceTime video calls. This in

order for everyone to feel as safe as possible. While this was not the original plan, it worked well.

We made sure to ask all participants if it was okay to use the video function as well in order to create a more meeting-like atmosphere. They had the opportunity to decline if that would make them feel uncomfortable. We also think it was satisfactory for the participants to be able to do the interviews online at their own preferred location, which might have led to them being more comfortable overall.

We did not experience any real downsides with the interviews being made online. We still thought it was easy to have a conversation and interpret things such as body language, etc. The only small issue was that video calls sometimes get disrupted. However, it was not something that could not be fixed by asking a participant to repeat themselves.

2.2 Data analysis

To be able to analyze the interviews and all the raw data, in order to show a result that concerned the phenomenon that is being researched in this study, rather than the subjects, a qualitative approach was chosen. Anderson (2007) suggests a clear path from interviews, with a multiple-stage coding process to be used to retrieve relevant data. Anderson advocates the use of a *Thematic content analysis*, which was used for this study. A thematic content analysis is a common way to analyze qualitative data, collected from interviews or other forms of qualitative data collections (Guest, et al. 2011).

All of the interviews were manually transcribed, and later the transcriptions were read through thoroughly, in combination with the audio files that were listened through once more. This to make sure that everything from the audio was entered properly, and that nothing was left out, before moving on to the textual analysis.

After the transcription of all of the interviews, a process of familiarization with all of the data began. The data was formed into shorter summaries for every interview, and then multiple initial codes were created in order to reduce the amount of data to manageable chunks. The codes were then paired together to create preliminary themes and, if necessary, sub-themes. The chosen themes were then put into a spreadsheet in order to be compared against the differences between the participants in order to find further similarities.

Since all the participants were Swedish, the transcriptions were translated into English, with as little modification as possible. Since similar words in both languages might have different meanings, and do not always have a good translated counterpart. We did

our best to ensure that the translated interview was as close as possible. However, minor differences might still have occurred.

2.2.1 Thematic Analysis

Evans (2017) describes thematic analysis as hugely popular. She continues to describe that its popularity partly reflects its independence from any particular theoretical approach. A thematic analysis is also useful because it enables researchers to examine from a methodological standpoint.

A thematic analysis is a process of which patterns and themes within qualitative data may be excavated (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). They continue to describe that one advantage of thematic analysis is that it is a method, rather than a methodology. This means that it is not tied up to a particular theoretical perspective, compared to its counterparts. This makes it a more flexible method in diversity.

The reasoning to use thematic analysis is as Guest, et al. (2011) describe it: “*the greatest strength of ATA [Applied Thematic Analysis] is its pragmatic focus on using whatever tools might be appropriate to get the analytic job done in a transparent, efficient, and ethical manner*” (Guest, et al, p.18, 2011), which is similar to Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

2.2.2 Codes & Themes

To be able to understand how the codes and themes were collected from the interviews in this study, Maguire & Delahunt’s (2017) six step analysis process was adopted.

The transcriptions of the interviews allowed us to read through them, make notes, annotations and comments regarding important data, and for said data to be found easier afterward. This in order to be analyzed further via the steps below:

Data familiarity

First and foremost the transcribed interviews were read through to get a better understanding of what data would be handled from that point forward. Annotations were made to identify each and every participant's general dataset, for us to get a general understanding and for us to get familiar with the data.

Initial codes

To find and define the initial codes, we used open coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). Open coding is the first step for researchers to initially create and identify data for qualitative studies and allow us to reduce the multiple pages of data, each and every interview, to segments. From the segments, the most important and relevant codes got

converted to chunks of manageable data and allowed us to change the codes during the process if needed. Not all segments of the text data were transformed into themes, since only the relevant or interesting data was captured.

Themes hunting

As Maguire and Delahunt (2019) mention, a theme can be seen as a pattern of sorts that illuminates interesting or significant data. There are no predefined rules on how to distinguish themes, since a theme is characterized by its significance. The codes got examined and those who fit together were paired together to make up broader themes.

Review themes

During this phase of the analysis process, we modified and developed preliminary themes. All data handled and marked up until this point was put into Google Sheets, equivalent to Microsoft Excel. This enabled us to more easily move around the data and ask ourselves if the data supports the theme or not. We aimed to make our themes coherent and distinct from each other, but in some instances, sub-themes were necessary.

Defining themes

As the final step, we refined our themes by looking at how they relate to each other.

2.3 Validity and reliability

Qualitative validity and reliability mean checking for the accuracy of your findings, and to state that the chosen approach is consistent (Creswell, 2014).

2.3.1 Validity

Validity means the extent to which the chosen method measures what it claims to measure. In order for the results to be valid, the conclusions made from the collection of data need to be “*appropriate, meaningful, and useful*” (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013, p.4).

The aim was to perform 12-15 interviews, however we ended up performing 18. This is enough to capture a thorough range of data (Hennink, 2017). However in order to gain a deeper understanding to represent Generation X as a whole, more interviews would be needed. Nevertheless, the aim with our thesis was to find patterns between the different interviews that can possibly be recurring throughout the population at large if continued further.

We did not present the participants with a definition of fake news prior to the interviews, since we wanted them to raise things they thought about when getting questions about the concept. However, the topic was discussed openly which gave us an understanding of their prior knowledge. If they did ask more about the concept itself we presented them with an objective description.

We wanted to present as objective results as possible, which is why we used peer debriefing as our main measure of validity. This meant finding a person who reviewed and asked questions about the qualitative research, in order to resonate with people other than ourselves (Creswell, 2014). This was in order to minimize our own bias towards the research.

2.3.2 Reliability

Reliability means that the chosen method should deliver reliable, consistent or reproducible results (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013), meaning that if another person were to conduct the same study as us they should reach the same results and conclusions. It is hard to apply reliability to qualitative research, since another interviewer would most likely not get the exact same results if they were to perform the same study. This may be due to the subjects presenting themselves or their opinions differently to different interviewers (Kvale, 2011).

However, in order to establish as much reliability as we could, we tried our very best to make the interview questions as simple as possible in order to minimize the chance of misunderstanding among the participants. This by making the questions short and concrete, without any unnecessary or difficult wordings. We also tried to make them as unbiased and neutral as possible, meaning not putting any personal beliefs into the questions in order to get a specific answer, in accordance with Kvale (2011). Since all participants' native language is Swedish, we also translated all interview questions to Swedish, in order to make everyone feel comfortable.

The questions were created with the research questions and the purpose in mind; in order to help us find out what relation Swedish Generation X-ers have with news posts found on Facebook, by exploring their knowledge about and experiences with said topic. We then performed two pilot interviews, testing out if the questions were phrased in a way that was easy to understand without any excessive information. After tweaking the questions slightly due to minor misunderstandings during the pilot interviews, we felt certain that the questions were as good as they could possibly be before moving onto the actual interviews.

The predetermined questions were then asked as similarly as possible, depending on who was holding the interview. When transcribing the interviews later on, we made sure to be as thorough as possible by familiarizing ourselves with our data, and reading it through multiple times, in accordance with Creswell, (2014).

Further, we made sure to have clear communication at all times. We also went over the transcripts multiple times in order to make sure that we did not leave out anything important or made any mistakes during the process. After this we transcribed relevant data into codes and themes, in order to be able to find connections and results in order to draw our final conclusions, and we constantly compared the data we collected with the codes. This was also in accordance with Creswell, (2014).

2.4 Ethical considerations

Since the research and the majority of collected data was obtained during conducted interviews, using participants, ethics was a major consideration in the design of this study. Inspired by Steffen (2016) the ethical considerations were decided upon:

Before each and every interview, the participants had to verbally confirm that we were allowed to record the interviews. By confirming, the participants agreed that the interview was allowed to be used, transcribed and further analyzed, together with a promise from us to let the interviewee to be anonymous throughout the analyzation process and in the final published results. Their rights were read out as well, and without consent from the participant, the interview was to be discontinued.

Other precautions were made such as a frequent reminder from the researchers for the participants that personal opinions and their personal knowledge of the subject was not to be judged, nor the interview to be used for anything else than statistics for the research.

To create a level of comfort for the interviewed participants, they were notified that they were allowed to break the interview at any time, and that the recorded audio up until that point was to be discarded and would not be used in the final process. If the participant for any reason, stated or not, would not like to answer a question asked during the interview process, they could decline.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter will cover previous relevant research and studies that have been made within our topic, which will help clarify what we are trying to accomplish with our own.

We will analyze our collected material from four perspectives:

3.1 Characteristics of Generation X on Facebook

Alemdar & Köker (2013) investigated the Facebook usage of Generation X and Y in Turkey. They found out that Generation X first and foremost value their relationships, and therefore use Facebook as a way to stay in touch with friends and relatives. This way they can carry on their relationships even if they do not live close. Generation X does not like when strangers try to befriend them online, but rather enjoy continuing relationships from the past. They have had a general worry about using Facebook wrong or being misunderstood, but have defeated this fear. Now they see it as a tool to express themselves, but do not want to use it as a status symbol and do not tend to share private information.

Hartijasti (2013) explored the motivation in using Facebook by comparing Generation X and Generation Y in Indonesia. Like Alemdar & Köker, she also argued that social connections were the biggest reason for Generation X to use Facebook, with examples such as maintaining relationships and staying in touch with friends. Similarly to Alemdar & Köker she also concluded that Generation X does not want to have relationships with strangers.

Spradling III (2017) asked participants from Generation X about their primary reasons for using Facebook. A large majority said that they used it to keep in touch with friends and family. When asking the participants of the study if they thought Facebook is a good place to talk about politics, Generation X disagreed.

3.2 Interaction with news

There are different reasons why people choose to not share news on Facebook. Costera Meijer and Kormelink (2015) asked 120 participants to reflect on their use of traditional news, meaning news as provided by professional news organizations.

First of all, it turned out that the participants experienced news on social media networks, Facebook included, as supplementary to traditional news, meaning news that are provided by professional news organizations. Secondly, almost half of the Facebook users do not want to see any news in their feed - a vast majority use Facebook mainly to interact with friends.

It turned out that the participants hardly share news. This was due to several different reasons. The presence and attention that comes with expressing oneself online is undesirable. Reasons such as thinking that Facebook is not the right place to share news, and news being something that is too private to post online for others to see were brought up.

Not wanting to present oneself too much and not knowing what other people will think of them if they do share a news post were other reasons. Not knowing what impression sharing something will give contributes as well. One can suggest that this means that their self-image is involved in the decision.

When it comes to actually sharing, this mainly involves funny or peculiar items. People also seem more interested in sharing something if it benefits them, meaning that they will get something out of it (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015).

Picone et al (2016) looked into who shares what and with whom and why, and concluded that motivators for sharing information online are staying in touch with others, swapping ideas and connecting with others. They also asked respondents from their study why they did not share articles online. Similarly to Costera & Kormelink (2015) the respondents gave answers such as not having a tendency to share much and, thinking it will not interest anyone else, being afraid of negative responses, not knowing how their friends will react, etc, with the first two examples being the most common answers (Picone et al, 2016).

3.3 Measures to ensure validity online

We aim to find out what measures Swedish Generation X-ers would take to make sure a Facebook news post is valid before sharing it. Validity is the degree to which something, in this case; online news, is justified and accurately written (Brians et al. 2011). It is determined by different factors, i.e. how trustworthy something is, and how authentic and how credible it seems (Creswell, 2014).

As previously stated, fake news is more common than ever before Paskin (2018). This means that users have to take certain measures in order to make sure something is authentic, if they want to be sure that the posts they share are accurate.

Looking closer at how one can ensure validity online, a good start is the use of face validity, meaning if something looks reasonable, representative and relevant (Bannigan & Watson 2009). Trust and authority, meaning a source that has consistently ensured validity, can also be contributing factors when it comes to believing online news (Lankes, 2008). However, there are still other measures one can take to make sure. One can continue measuring the validity by comparing different

sources of information, in order to be able to create a coherent picture (Creswell, 2014). This can be done by comparing information you have found on one website with other websites, or with i.e. newspapers, books or peer-reviewed articles (Metzger, 2007).

3.4 Different generations and fake news

As stated in the problem statement section in Chapter 1, Paskin (2018) concluded that the spreading of false information and fake news is more common and universal than it has ever been before. Looking at previous research made on the topic of fake news and what might cause it to spread, it is evident that a trust in fake information and fake news can be caused by one's own personal polarized beliefs (Thaler, 2019). While different age groups and generations have different concerns regarding fake news a majority seem to agree that fake news can pose a threat and manipulate peoples' opinions.

Another reason for the spread of fake news can be the fact that some people do not want to investigate the credibility of a news post found online, since it takes time they are not willing to spend on the matter. A lot of people also seem to believe that if a post has a trusted poster behind it the post must be true and therefore does not require further investigation (Geeng, et al. 2020).

Connecting this to different age groups, Vozab (2019) concluded that Croatian Millennials are likely to rely on online media channels over traditional print media and that they have high concerns about fake news. However, Generation X and Baby Boomers more often rely on traditional media and have less knowledge of fake news.

4 Results

In this chapter the answers to the research questions will be presented by looking at the collected data. A presentation of how Swedish Generation X-ers interact with Facebook news posts, and what measures they would take to make sure a news post is valid if they were to share it, will be presented in order to present an overview of the subject.

4.1 Presentation of collected data

The data that will be presented in this section was collected by performing 18 semi-structured interviews. The answers to the research questions are presented below:

How do Swedish Generation X-ers interact with Facebook news posts in the light of possible misinformation?

The participants in this study claimed that they rarely or do not at all interact with news posts in their Facebook feeds. Some claimed that they do, primarily, interact with posts of either personal related information supplied by personal connections, meaning friends and family, or information they deemed as important to them. Moreover, they pointed to the fact that they hesitate to share news or other information with potential impact.

The answers were derived by applying a thematic analysis, as described in chapter 2. Eight different themes were identified from the interviews. The first six themes helped answer research question 1 and why Swedish Generation X act in a certain way when it comes to interacting with Facebook news posts:

Theme - Toxicity & Fear

Multiple different arguments for why the participants did not share news posts in general included: only wanting to share personal related posts about spare time hobbies, and only sharing - in rare cases - 100 % truthful information from the government or undoubted facts.

A theme that appeared was the fear of continuing the spread of possible misinformation. Several participants pointed out that this was the major reason for the low level of interaction and usage of Facebook.

Theme - Family & Friends

Another theme that surfaced was only interacting with posts related to your family and friends. Participants claimed that they do not care for posts on Facebook at all if the posts were published from any other. They also said that they only share and primarily

interact with posts of either personal related information supplied by personal connections or with information they deemed as important to them.

Theme - No interactions

Some participants answered that they, under more or less no circumstances, would interact with posts in any way. It turns out that they lack commitment and do not care about news in general.

Theme - Anything except politics

When it comes to sharing posts and articles related to personal beliefs and commitment to various subjects, some do not hesitate to either comment or share important personal posts and media regarding personal beliefs. However, political standpoints are most often excluded from any type of interaction.

Theme - Crime & Personal interest

Other participants, who do not interact nor share posts, shared more or less the same conclusion. They stated that if they, hypothetically, were supposed to share any type of information or standpoint on Facebook, it needs to be connected to a personal interest or a passionate subject for the participant. Following the hypothetical track, participants stated that they would share posts with information regarding missing people, or posts related to any type of crime. These individuals expressed that except for crime-related posts, they would not share anything else.

Theme - Source evaluation

Other individuals concluded that if they were to share something, and this is a big if, they would have to be able to double check the information on various other platforms, by using different search engines, as well as the information having been cited on major established media platforms. Others said that provided that they would find anything interesting enough to share, that they would do a proper fact-check before sharing.

In relation to not wanting to spread fake news further, the discussion about the 2016 US election surfaced multiple times. Participants disclosed that they believe a higher amount of people are aware of the fact that fake news exists, since the 2016 US election. Similar responses claimed that Donald Trump is not the only factor contributing to fake news being more widespread, but that the current debate of how dangerous the Covid-19 pandemic actually is, and the debate about whether the vaccine is sufficient or not, contribute as well.

What measures would Swedish Generation X-ers take to make sure a Facebook news post is valid before sharing it?

When asked if they would have done anything to fact-check the feasibility of a post on Facebook before sharing, and, presuming that they would check the article, what measures would they take, the participants in this study gave various answers. Some of them would go the extra mile and make sure to be 100 % certain that the news post is valid before potentially sharing it. However, the majority would either look up the source behind the post, or not look up the source and go with their instinct instead.

The last two themes helped answer research question 2 and why Swedish Generation X act in a certain way when it comes to determining the validity of a Facebook news post before potentially sharing it:

Theme - Laziness & Assumption

Some participants claimed that they would not check the feasibility of posts on Facebook before sharing it themselves. Other participants claimed that they were too lazy and uncommitted to Facebook to care enough if the information is true or not. They claimed that they would rely on their instinct and gut feeling before sharing anything, but they would not do any investigation to actually verify the integrity of the information.

Theme - Fact check

Other participants said that provided that they would find anything interesting enough to share, that they would do a proper fact-check before sharing. Some participants said they would need a thorough background check via multiple search engines, established media sites and government sources before they would share it.

4.2 Data analysis

In the following section the collected data, that was presented in the section above, will be analysed. The data analysis below has been performed according to the principles stated in chapter 2.2 *Data analysis*. In order to derive the themes stated above, we started off by transcribing all of the performed interviews, in order to familiarize ourselves with all of the data. We then made shorter summaries of every interview, and then created multiple codes in order to reduce the amount of data.

The codes were then paired together to create preliminary themes and, if necessary, sub-themes. Lastly, the chosen themes were put into a spreadsheet in order for us to be able to compare the differences between the participants in order to find patterns.

The following sections will show examples of the themes that were found regarding research question 1:

Toxicity & Fear

The first theme was derived from a feeling of social media platforms being toxic environments. Participant 11, who is not sharing nor engaging by any means on Facebook, pointed to the atmospheric toxicity they sense exists on social media platforms in general.

“It happens sometimes, but not that often because I think people are so damn tiresome online, and get so aggressive and hide themselves behind the monitor when writing something. So there is so much directing. If you would have to meet that person on the street, they would never be so angry, that I am 200% sure of” (Participant 11).

Looking closer at the fear of spreading possible misinformation, Participant 4 and 10 pointed out that this was the major reason for the low level of interaction and usage of Facebook:

“I’ve become much more restrictive with commenting, and you might keep a bit more quiet about your own opinions [...] It’s better to be quiet than accidentally spreading fake news” (Participant 4).

“No, in fact, very rarely. On the other hand, I think it shows up a lot, but I usually do not interact with them. [...] Because I think if I start sharing there, it will come again. And then there will be lots more, I think” (Participant 10).

Family & Friends

The second theme pointed to an interest in posts by family and friends, but not in people the participants do not know. Examples of posts they would interact with were information related to one's work, or relevant and important information regarding the close proximity of the participants' home which, depending on the urgency, might get shared. Moreover, they pointed to the fact that they hesitate to share news or other information with potential impact:

“I usually do not like or comment. [...] But let’s speculate that there’s a news story saying that there is a large fire in my hometown and that you should stay inside, then I would probably share it. If it was anything related to my residence area - locally. But I am not a person who shares political messages” (Participant 17).

No interactions

The third theme showed that they not only lack commitment and do not care about news in general, but that they also feel a lack of trust and insecurity when it comes to interacting with potential fake news:

“No, I see no reason for that. It feels like some people share everything they see”
(Participant 18).

Anything except politics

The fourth theme showed that political standpoints are most often excluded from any type of interaction. Participant 11 said that the reasoning behind avoiding political standpoints are the long heated argumentative threads of comments that tend to rapidly pile up:

“I do not mean that I hesitate just for that, but if I share something and say “I think it is awful with violence against women”, then I know that it will be long threads and I can not stand it. I am not able to read it all, and there are so many people who disagree and so forth. And even if you do not have to answer all the comments, I think it takes energy when I know that a lot of people have had views on what I shared, so then I would rather ignore sharing it. I am very active on Facebook otherwise” (Participant 11).

Participant 6 and 9 told us:

“I do not share political messages [...] I’m probably just a bit anti-Facebook. I think it has gone a bit askew” (Participant 6).

“It often gets political, and when it comes to political things I want to keep it to myself. More like... I keep my faith and my opinions to myself” (Participant 9).

Crime & Personal interest

The fifth theme showed that in order for some participants to share any type of information on Facebook, it has to be connected to something they are passionate about. Participant 1 stated that they would hypothetically share posts regarding topics they find interesting and think other people would find interesting as well, and the things they do share today are funny posts that others might deem as amusing too:

“I mean if I share something I do it because I think it's funny. And then I hope that the people I share it with will find it funny as well” (Participant 1)

Following the hypothetical track, participants stated that they would share posts with information regarding missing people, or posts related to any type of crime. These

individuals told us that except for crime-related posts they would not share anything else.

“If it’s something I think I can affect. Sometimes the police might post something. I might consider sharing that.” (Participant 8).

“A missing person that I think is worth searching for” (Participant 3).

Source evaluation

The sixth and final theme regarding research question 1 was the need to be able to double check the information before possibly sharing it. Participant 12 stated:

“No, I would probably argue that. Well, I never send any news myself on Facebook, but sometimes I get notifications from others... And of course I log in and check it out, but for the most part I reject most of it. Always, I would say. At least to this point I have done it anyway” (Participant 12).

Participant 6 told us that the post would need a thorough background check via multiple search engines, established media sites and government sources before they would share it:

“I would check who the poster is, search for it on Google or the internet [...] I would search for the news story itself, for the content, and see if there are any related searches for that story [...] I would use the information that’s available, use different search engines and not just Google, to see if that would give me different results” (Participant 6).

Others said that provided that they would find anything interesting enough to share, that they would do a proper fact-check before sharing. Participant 2 and 5 said:

“I would have to be absolutely assured before sharing” (Participant 2).

“I would have to be 100 % sure” (Participant 5).

Participant 16 claimed that the former president of the United States is a contributing factor to the term fake news being used more often:

“A lot more people consider it more because of Trump and his statements. He made the word ‘fake news’ widespread” (Participant 16).

Participant 10 claimed that conspiracy theories and false information is seen on social media more often, and that this is not making it easier for users to see what is actually true or not.

“Yes I do believe that, and I believe with Trump... it became quite defined. Everything is circulating around him. And with Covid-19 as well. What is true and what is not? I have noticed in the debate around the vaccine and everything connected with conspiracy theories, that you are more often hesitant on what is fact and whatnot” (Participant 10).

The following sections will show examples of the themes that were found regarding research question 2:

Laziness & Assumption

The first theme regarding research question 2, showed that some participants would not check the feasibility of posts on Facebook at all before sharing it themselves:

“Some people share news where it says that it comes from a trusted source, and then you have to assume that it’s authentic, and verified by a journalist and that there are real sources, which would mean that it’s real” (Participant 4).

Others stated that they were too lazy and uncommitted to Facebook and that they do not care enough if the information is true or not. They stated that they would rather go with their instinct and gut feeling before sharing anything, and that they would not do any investigation to actually verify the integrity of the information. As Participant 17 stated:

“If I share something, it’s something I believe is true. I don’t properly fact check, but rather make my own judgement” (Participant 17).

Fact check

The second theme regarding research question 2, showed that provided that the participants would find anything interesting enough to share, they would do a proper fact-check before sharing. Participant 2 and 5 said:

“I would have to be absolutely assured before sharing” (Participant 2).

“I would have to be 100 % sure” (Participant 5).

Participant 6 told us that the post would need a thorough background check via multiple search engines, established media sites and government sources before they would share it:

“I would check who the poster is, search for it on Google or the internet [...] I would search for the news story itself, for the content, and see if there are any related searches for that story [...] I would use the information that’s available, use different search engines and not just Google, to see if that would give me different results” (Participant 6).

Others agreed and had a similar mindset:

“If it’s something that is current [...] I would only share things that verified authorities or scientists have published, and make sure that it’s published from their platforms” (Participant 5).

“It would have been either... Information that you, one, have done a fact check because you know that the information is consistent by keeping up with news or... And two, you use reliable information sources for information”, (Participant 7).

“When I look it up it might be on Google or a newspaper [...] I try to have a look outside Facebook to see if I can find it elsewhere”, (Participant 3).

5 Discussion

In this section we will discuss the results of our study in relation to previous studies and our theoretical framework. We will evaluate what we have found out and show how it relates to our purpose and research questions. Furthermore, we will also discuss the implications and limitations of the study.

5.1 Result discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine Swedish Generation X-ers and their relation to news posts found on Facebook, with a focus on exploring their experiences with the topic, in order to gain new knowledge and insights into the participants' perspectives.

The goal was to find similarities among the different participants' answers, and to be able to present an overview of the subject, in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Swedish Generation X-ers interact with Facebook news posts in the light of possible misinformation?
2. What measures would Swedish Generation X-ers take to make sure a Facebook news post is valid before sharing it?

As concluded in the results section, we discovered that a vast majority of our participants; 14 out of 18, actively choose not to share news posts on Facebook. Most of them primarily use Facebook as a means of staying in touch with family and friends, rather than sharing news. We can conclude that the participants of our study generally do not have a relation with news posts on Facebook.

When it comes to what measures they would take to make sure a news post is valid before sharing it; some of the participants would go the extra mile and be 100 % sure that the news post is valid before potentially sharing it. However, the majority would either look up the source behind the post, or not look up the source and go with their instinct instead.

Even though we received different answers from different participants, we still managed to find similarities and patterns among the answers in order to present an overview of the subject.

By connecting our results to the previous research that is presented in chapter 1, we can see a lot of similarities:

Thaler's study from 2019, concluded that personal polarized beliefs lead to excess trust in fake news and fake information. When asking our participants if they think

some people are better than others at noticing fake news, several of them mention having an all-around knowledge and interest in news would be factors that would make you better, and that reading the news continuously and keeping up to date helps as well. To have an unbiased standpoint and an ability to think critically were also mentioned as helping factors, while polarized beliefs would make you inferior.

Paskin (2018) said that the spreading of false information is more common and universal than ever, which might be why some of our participants expressed the fear of accidentally sharing fake news to be the biggest reason as to why they did not share news posts on Facebook at all, with comments such as it is better to be quiet than accidentally spreading fake news.

Vozab (2019) claimed that Generation X and Baby Boomers had less knowledge of fake news and the liability of sources online, which did not match our results. The participants in our study were very aware of fake news and the majority of the participants also mentioned that they are positive to have seen fake news in their own feeds. A vast majority stated the 2016 American election as a reason for why fake news is more talked about today than ever before. Several participants also said that fake news became more of a concept after the election.

Geeng, et al. (2020) stated different reasons as to why people do not spend the extra time investigating the credibility of the post, with one of them being that most people do not want to spend the extra time to investigate the credibility of the post. About half of the participants in our study confessed that they would not check the feasibility of posts if they were to share, or hypothetically share, it on Facebook, with reasons such as being too lazy, not caring enough, and not having the time to fact check. Some of our participants said that they would go with their gut feeling, instinct and logical thinking as a measure of validity, and ask themselves if something sounds reasonable or not.

Even though most participants of our study do not share posts on Facebook, the other half of the participants in our study told us that they would fact check if they were to hypothetically post something. Looking closer at what measures they would take to make sure something is valid before sharing, or hypothetically sharing something, differs a bit depending on the participant.

Similar to Geeng, et al. (2020), some of the participants in our study concluded that a post with a trusted poster behind it must be true, and do not bother to fact check further if that is the case. Other participants told us they would take other measures to make sure a post is valid before hypothetically sharing it with other people, such as comparing different sources in order to create a coherent picture.

Comparing our results to the theoretical framework, there is a clear link between them as well. Looking closer at our participants and how they interact with Facebook news posts, shows that a vast majority do not interact at all for different reasons. Similar to the participants in Alemdar and Köker's (2013), Hartijasti's (2013), and Spradling III's (2017) studies, the participants in our study primarily use Facebook to stay in touch with their friends and family above anything else. The social factor seems to be the biggest motivator for using Facebook - not news posts.

Our participants generally do not have any interest in sharing posts at all, especially not news posts or posts that might have potential impact, which is similar to the findings in Spradling III's study where his participants said that they did not think Facebook was the right place to talk about politics. Several of our participants also mentioned that news often tend to be political, which supports Spradling III (2017) even more. We can also connect the fact that some of our participants had a fear of accidentally spreading fake news to the respondents in Alemdar and Köker's (2013) study that were worried about using Facebook wrong or being misunderstood.

The few participants from our study that sometimes interact with posts in general on Facebook, primarily do so with posts written by someone they know. This can be connected to Alemdar and Köker's who concluded that Generation X does not want to have relationships with strangers. However, a few participants mentioned that they could imagine sharing either local news that other people close by would benefit from reading, or something that everyone knows and that is obvious but would show their support.

The participants of our study listed many different reasons as to why they choose to not share news posts on Facebook, several of which were similar to the reasons from Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink's study made in 2015. They concluded that news is something that is too private to post online for others to see, which several of our participants agreed with:

"It often gets political, and when it comes to political things I want to keep it to myself. More like... I keep my faith and my opinions to myself", (Participant 9).

"I do not share political messages [...] I'm probably just a bit anti-Facebook. I think it has gone a bit askew", (Participant 6).

Participants from Coster Meijer and Groot Kormelink's study also mention that the presence and attention that comes with presenting oneself online is undesirable. Not knowing what impression sharing something will give might be a contributing factor as well. One of our participants mentioned that they get overwhelmed with the response that usually follows when you share information about an important subject,

and when people have opinions about what you post, and therefore decides against sharing because of it.

However, several of our participants who actually do share posts in general, and not news, told us they tend to share funny items:

“I mean if I share something I do it because I think it's funny. And then I hope that the people I share it with will find it funny as well”, (Participant 1).

When it comes to actually sharing, this mainly involves funny or peculiar items. People also seem more interested in sharing something if it benefits them, meaning that they will get something out of it (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015).

Looking at the different kinds of measures Swedish Generation X-ers would take to make sure something is valid before sharing it, shows that several participants would go with face validity, equivalent to going with their gut feeling. Answers such as looking at who the poster behind a news post is and thinking it looks reasonable enough to share without fact-checking was a common answer, similar to how Bannigan and Watson (2009) described it.

“[...] I don't properly fact check, but rather make my own judgement” (Participant 17).

Lankes (2007) mentioned that trust and authority and trust in said poster, earned from having ensured validity before, can be a contributing factor to believing posts online. Similar to this, our participants mentioned that authoritative sources such as government agencies, neutral news sources, research institutes, etc.

“[...] I would only share things that verified authorities or scientists have published, and make sure that it's published from their platforms” (Participant 5).

However, some participants would take a more active role when it comes to ensuring validity. Creswell (2014) and Metzger (2007) mentioned steps such as comparing different sources of information to each other in order to create a coherent picture, which is something that some participants also mentioned during our interviews. Looking up different websites to see if the news story is available in multiple places, using different search engines to see if that would give them different results, doing multiple searches for the story itself as well as the content to see if any related searches are available, were all mentioned as measures some participants would be willing to take in order to ensure validity. Newspapers usually having some kind of political views were mentioned as a reason why they would check multiple sources in order to create a neutral and valid picture.

“I would check who the poster is, search for it on Google or the internet [...] I would search for the news story itself, for the content, and see if there are any related searches for that story [...] I would use the information that's available, use different search engines and not just Google, to see if that would give me different results”, (Participant 6)

5.2 Method discussion

For our study we needed a method that would help us explore what we were researching and present us with insights, rather than numbers and statistics. In order to get more explorative results we needed to get deeper answers from our participants, which is why we chose to go with semi-structured interviews as our method.

We knew beforehand that there are plenty of strengths with using semi-structured interviews as your method (Wilson, 2014), and after performing the interviews we were still positive that we had picked the right method for our study. The biggest strength was the fact that our method of choice allowed for new topics to surface. Since we had the possibility to ask more questions when the interviewees gave interesting answers, we could go deeper and in turn explore the topic even further.

This is why other methods, such as surveys, were ruled out. Surveys would not provide the deeper insight we sought, since qualitative answers were desired, rather than quantitative. Disadvantages such as having to make sure that a large number of samples are collected, and the fact that surveys have to stay unchanged throughout the entire process in order to be able to draw consistent conclusions was also a contributing factor (Wilson, 2013). Surveys are also often used in quantitative studies, which we are not doing.

However, while there are plenty of strengths with our chosen method, there were some disadvantages as well. The biggest one was the fact that it was very time consuming to do the amount of interviews that we did, which we were not really prepared for. Since semi-structured interviews are very conversational, we learned that they tend to take quite a long time to perform, with some of our longest interviews being three times longer than our shortest.

For the analysis part of the interviews, we learned that it is sometimes hard to know what is relevant or not due to the answers being quite deep. Since we wanted to find themes and codes in order to be able to present similarities and patterns among the interviews, this took us quite some time.

Overall, we would argue that everything regarding our chosen method worked very well. However, in retrospect there are a few minor things we would have done differently:

It took us some time to realize that the answers we received got longer the further we got into the interview. Since we were quite dependent on getting deeper answers from our participants, we would have created a few more “warm-up” questions to get the participants even more comfortable and in the right mindset.

Since the method itself was quite time-consuming, something else we would have done differently is to have contacted the interviewees sooner than we did in order to get more time to transcribe and analyse it all. Since we were not prepared for this, the process got quite stressful.

Regarding the validity and to what extent the chosen method actually measured what it claimed to measure, we would say that we succeeded to a high extent. The data we presented was appropriate and useful in relation to our research questions. Even though the size of the study was not the biggest, the sample size was enough to allow patterns to emerge throughout the empirical material.

We did perform a few more interviews than planned as a safety net, in case some interviews would turn out to be unusable or lacking vital parts for our research. This

means that we got a lot of extra data to draw conclusions from. The aim was to find patterns and similarities between the different interviews that can possibly be recurring throughout the population at large if continued further, and the amount of qualitative interviews we did added to the validity.

Looking at the reliability, meaning that the chosen method should deliver reliable, consistent or reproducible results, we would say that we accomplished this as well. While it is hard to provide reproducible results in a qualitative study, we would argue that the results are still reliable. This thanks to the fact that we tried to stay as neutral and unbiased as possible, and being very transparent with our collection of data and analysis process before writing our conclusions.

6 Conclusions and further research

In this chapter we will present the conclusions from our study, describe possible implications, and also give suggestions for further research.

6.1 Conclusions

One can find a lot of previous research regarding the correlation between fake news and different generations. However most research papers do comparative studies, and Generation X is often left out. The aim with this thesis was therefore to explore how Swedish Generation X-ers interact with news posts on Facebook.

As it turns out, Swedish Generation X-ers tend to avoid sharing news posts on Facebook and mainly interact with their friends and family. When it comes to what measures they would take before sharing a news post, it is evident that about half of the participants would take some kind of measure to ensure validity before sharing. The remaining participants would either do some sort of fact check before sharing, but not as thorough, or not fact check at all.

6.1.1 Practical implications

It is evident that the Swedish Generation X-ers are aware that fake news exists. However our results imply that they tend to avoid sharing news posts found on Facebook for various reasons. If our results match the population as a whole, this means that Swedish Generation X-ers generally not sharing news posts on Facebook, for reasons such as not wanting to accidentally spread fake news, also means that they do not share true material either. It would be of interest to continue looking into how Swedish Generation X-ers question and trust different news sources in general. Examples of practical implications could be fake news decreasing but also real authentic news not reaching as big of an audience. This is because people having to actively search for and look up news by themselves, instead of finding it in their social media feeds, takes more effort.

6.1.2 Scientific implications

This study was not made to generalize Swedish Generation X as a whole, but rather to present an overview of the subject. With our thesis we have contributed with an outline of how Swedish Generation X-ers relate to fake news on Facebook. This means that one could look further into our findings regarding why the majority of our participants actively choose to not share news posts on Facebook, in order to further explore why this seems to be the general pattern, and to see if our participants' thoughts are recurring throughout the population at large. One could also use this

research as a groundwork for similar studies in other countries to get a comparative view.

6.2 Further research

With our research we wanted to shine light on the patterns we found among the participants we interviewed, in order to answer how Swedish Generation X-ers relate to fake news on Facebook. As concluded, Swedish Generation X-ers tend to avoid sharing news posts on Facebook. However, if they were to share a news post on Facebook, a majority would take some kind of measure to ensure validity beforehand.

As the study means the results cannot be transferred from sample to population without some caution, a suggestion for further research would be to make a similar study but with a larger sample size. By doing the same kind of research in a new and bigger context, one would be able to see if our results are recurring throughout the population at large, in order to give more of a general and representative picture of Generation X in Sweden. In order to do this, our study could be used as groundwork and inspiration for further research.

Building on the previous suggestion, a combination between a larger qualitative study and an additional quantitative approach could be of value as well. While a quantitative approach and surveys were decided against in this thesis, surveys could be made in a bigger study in order to reach a bigger number of respondents. These answers would be collected in order to present more statistics and numbers, which would present a more mathematical overview of the topic in combination with the deeper qualitative answers.

Lastly, since it was concluded that Swedish Generation X-ers mainly use Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family, further research could be done to see if they are as private with their political views in real life as they are on Facebook. It would be of interest to see if Swedish Generation X-ers tend to share more if it is in a chosen setting, or if they still avoid talking about it in real life. This in order to see if the behavior is something they have brought from their disconnected life to Facebook, or if it is just an online behavior.

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Appendices

Here we will present the predetermined questions we prepared in advance and brought to every interview we performed during the collection of our data.

Appendix 1: interview questions in English

- Do you think it is possible to see if a news post/information on Facebook is false at first sight?
 - if yes: how? Can you always tell?
 - if no: why do you think that is?
- Do you interact with news posts on Facebook (like, comment, share)?
 - if yes: how?
 - if no: why not?
- What would make you share a news post on Facebook?
- If you were to share a news post, would you do something to fact check beforehand?
 - if yes: what would you do?
 - if no: why not?
- Do you think you have seen fake news in your Facebook feed?
 - if yes: why do you think it shows up in your feed?
 - if no: why do you think you have not seen any fake news in your feed?
- Do you think some people are better than others when it comes to noticing fake news?
 - if yes: why do you think that is?
 - if no: why not?
- Would you say there is a factor that makes you better at noticing fake news?
 - if yes: what factor do you think it is? Why do you think that?
 - if no: why not?
- Do you think people have started to think more about fake news lately?
 - if yes: why?
 - if no: why not?

Appendix 2: interview questions in Swedish

- Tror du att det är möjligt att se om en nyhetsartikel/info på Facebook är falsk?
 - Om ja: Hur? Kan man alltid avgöra det?
 - Om nej: Vad tror du det beror på?
- Brukar du interagera med nyheter på Facebook? (Like:a, kommentera, dela)
 - Om ja: Hur?
 - Om nej: Varför inte?
- Vad får dig att dela/skulle få dig att dela en nyhetsartikel på Facebook?
- Om du skulle dela en nyhet vidare (även hypotetiskt) - skulle du göra någonting för att faktakolla information innan?
 - Om ja: Vad skulle du göra?
 - Om nej: Varför inte?
- Tror du att du har sett fake news i ditt Facebook-flöde?
 - Om ja: Vad tror du gör att det dyker upp i din feed?
 - Om nej: Varför tror du att du inte sett/ser några fake news?
- Tror du att vissa människor är bättre än andra på att märka av fake news?
 - Om ja: Vad tror du det beror på?
 - Om nej: Varför inte?
- Skulle du säga att det finns någon faktor som gör att man blir bättre på att märka av fake news?
 - Om ja: Vad tror du det är för faktor? Varför tror du det?
 - Om nej: Varför inte?
- Tror du att man på senare tid börjat tänka mer på fake news?
 - Om ja: Varför?
 - Om nej: Varför inte?