

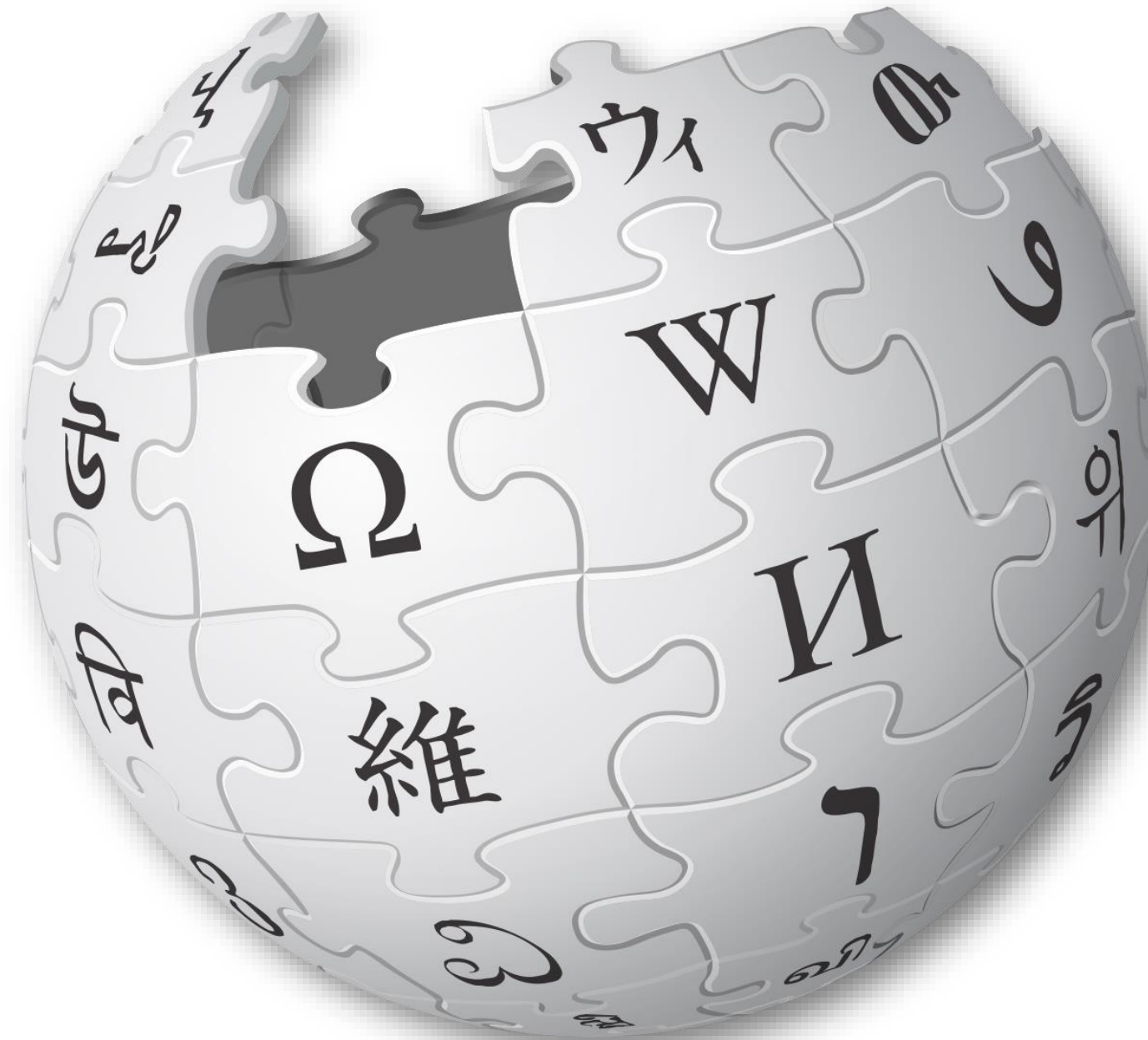
# “YOU CAN JUST GET IT FROM WIKIPEDIA”

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS, AND  
USE OF WIKIPEDIA AS A SOURCE OF HEALTH INFORMATION BY MIDDLE-  
AGED AND OLDER ADULTS

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# HEALTH AND MEDICAL INFORMATION ON WIKIPEDIA

- Wikipedia has become a key component of our **online information infrastructure**.
- **Popular source of information**, including health and medical affairs (*Shafee et al., 2017*). Average of 170 million page views per month.
- Surprisingly little is known about Internet users' **attitudes towards and perceptions** of the online encyclopaedia as well as how and why they use Wikipedia.



A large body of research examines Wikipedia's **factual accuracy and completeness**

Heilman et al., 2011; Mesgari et al., 2015; Okoli et al., 2014; Shafee et al., 2017.

Studies taking a **user-centric perspective to Wikipedia are sparse**. The overwhelming majority examines the **perceptions and use of Wikipedia by students**

Blikstad-Balas, 2016; Colón-Aguirre & Fleming-May, 2012; Head & Eisenberg, 2010; Lim, 2009; Macias, Lee, & Cunningham, 2018; Menchen-Trevino & Hargittai, 2011; Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010; Rowley & Johnson, 2013; Selwyn & Gorard, 2016; Yaari, Baruchson-Arbib, & Bar-Ilan, 2011.

# THE PRESENT STUDY



- Investigates the **attitudes, perceptions, and use** of Wikipedia as a source of health and medical information by **middle-aged and older adults (50-80)** in the Belgian Flanders region.

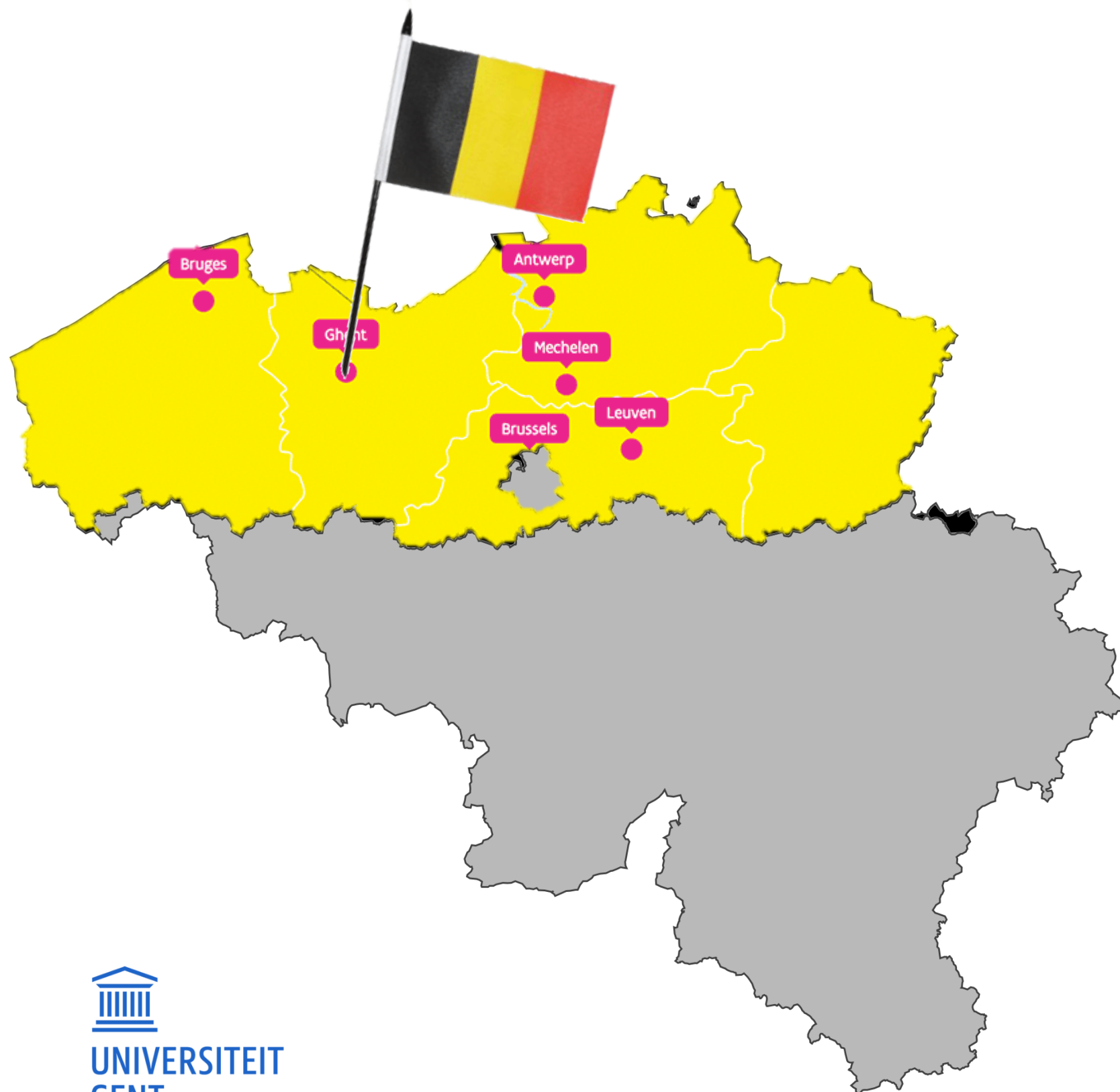


Literature: older Internet users might be **more hesitant to use Wikipedia** than younger generations; **more worried about the open character** of the encyclopedia and the **credibility of its information**.



Literature: **self-perceived lack of skills, literacy, and confidence** as Internet users, **difficult to assess the credibility** of OHI, anxious about **upsetting their relationship with the doctor**.

# DATA & METHOD



- 40 in-depth **qualitative interviews** (Ghent)
- Young older adults (50-64) & old older adults (65-80).
- Heterogeneous group in terms of age, gender, and education.
- Diagnosed health conditions as well as healthy individuals.
  
- 18 men / 22 women
- Youngest participant 51 y.o., oldest 80 y.o. (group average 64.98).
- 31 respondents used the Internet to find health information.

# POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS, BUT LIMITED KNOWLEDGE



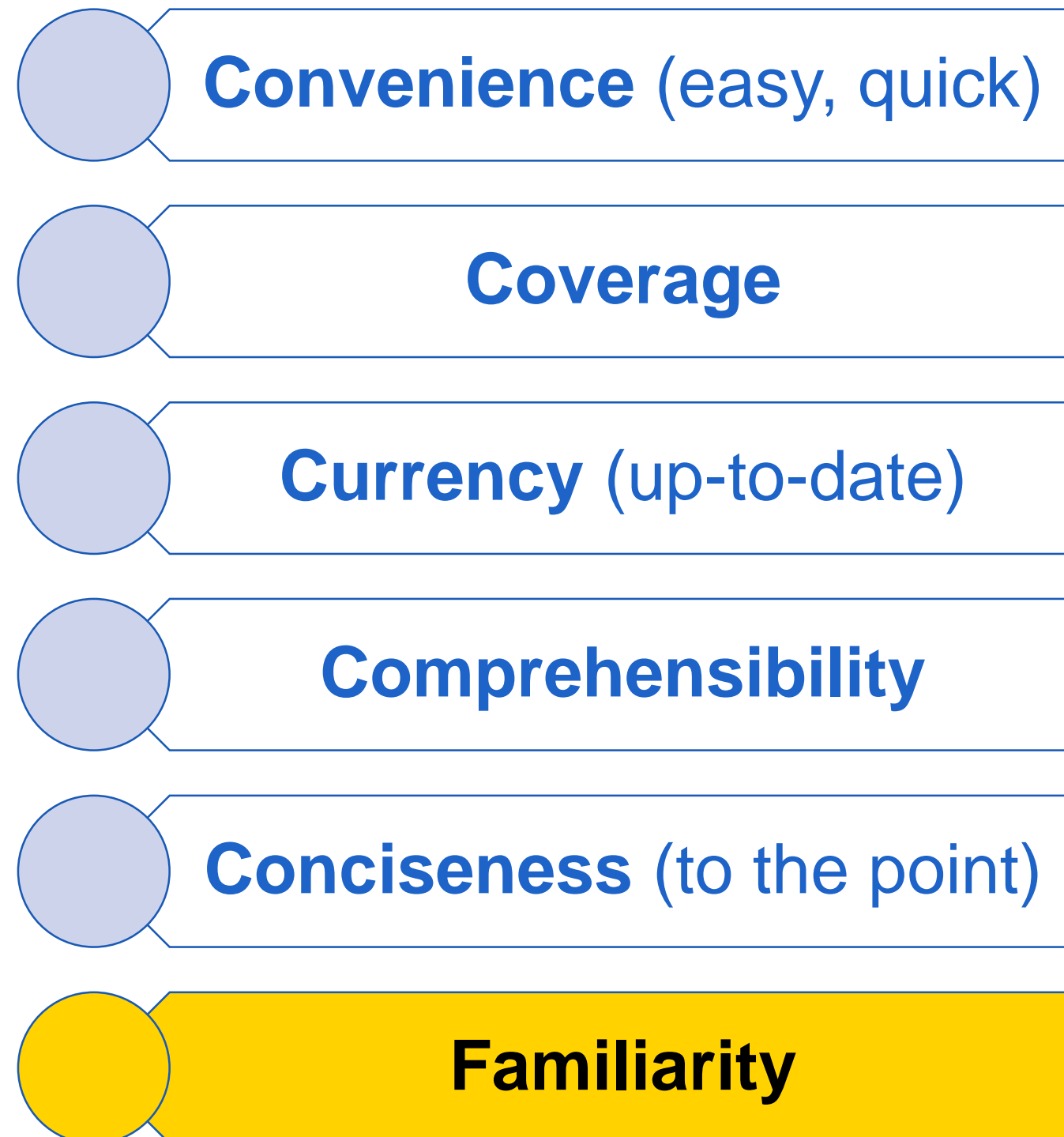
- Some respondents critical, but the **majority expressed positive attitudes** towards Wikipedia.
- However, both critical and uncritical views rooted in **limited factual knowledge of how the Wikipedia works.**
- Respondents knew little about how information on Wikipedia is **created, curated, and edited**, and few respondents were aware of Wikipedia's **editorial policies, protocols, and other quality control measures.**



# SIX KEY QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS



- **Six key qualities and characteristics** which make Wikipedia an attractive source of health and medical information.
- Reported in previous studies, but for the **first time demonstrates that these factors together** contribute to the attractiveness of Wikipedia as a source of health and medical information for older generations of Internet users.



# WIKIPEDIA ULTIMATELY PLAYS A LIMITED ROLE



## BASIC FACTS

Respondents use Wikipedia mostly to only **obtain basic facts and general or background health and medical information.**



## LIMITED TRUST

Most participants stated that they **did not consider Wikipedia as 'gospel' or necessarily 100 percent true:** they do not blindly trust and use Wikipedia and appeared **aware of credibility issues.**



## DOCTOR #1

Respondents would **never diagnose or treat themselves** based on online health and medical information, including information obtained from Wikipedia. **Specific or personal information, serious health issues, clarification of information found on the Internet → visit the doctor.**

# CONCLUSIONS



1

While Wikipedia is a popular source of health and medical information, it appears to play a **limited role in the health management and decision-making practices** of respondents.

2

Given the limited and **rudimentary knowledge of Wikipedia's workings**, and the fact that Wikipedia wants to be a “key public health information tool” (*Shafee et al., 2017*), **Wikipedia might attempt to better explain how it operates** and how health and medical entries are created and edited.

3

Novel because of its qualitative approach and exploration of an understudied target audience, this study contributes **original insights** as well as **nuances to prior Wikipedia user-centric studies**.



**THANK YOU**

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