



Combating Disinformation and Misinformation Through Media Literacy the Strategic Role of Librarians: A Review

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Abstract

The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication is known as media literacy, and it is an essential skill for becoming an informed and involved citizen throughout one's life. The emergence of social networking sites has made it easier for people to spread false information that misleads others and causes problems in society. Librarians can offer a neutral space for media consumption and production that serves as an educational haven for media literacy. This paper discusses the roles that librarians can play in reducing the problems of misinformation and disinformation. Librarians should teach and provide to the users media literacy programs that will assist and convert them to media literates. They should also work with fact-checkers to assist users in identifying fake news that is published in media outlets. Librarians be proactive to ensure they satisfied information needs of their users. Librarians should actively identify rumours and misinformation circulating within the community and take proactive steps to mitigate their impact. They should also engage in awareness campaigns and foster strong relationships with community members to effectively combat the spread of false information

Keywords: Media literacy, misinformation, disinformation, librarians

1.1 Introduction

The advent of social networking and Internet in general facilitate creation and sharing information among people. People can easily create and share any form of information without considering its credibility and reliability. Disinformation has been identified as a threat to democracies, economy, and to individuals. Threats such as fake news or conspiracy theories grasp communication and democracy and infect them with suspicion. This alters the confidence of the general public of the media and tends to undermine the freedom of press and the freedom of expression. As highlighted in the report published by the High Level Expert Group set up by the European Commission (2018), tackling misleading information requires a multidimensional approach and strategy because of its technological, legal, political and educational implications. The global economic market which drives on efficiency, adaptability and being open for free mobility of ideas and people also urges people to think about information, truth, and empowerment in our teaching (Teichler, 2019). In this vain, librarians should be at the forefront in educating the general public about this phenomenon. Which are capable of causing grave harm when not properly managed and handled. This is because librarians are in the business of acquiring unique skills in other to help public by evaluating all kinds of information in whatever medium published. It is



also important to note that the study of news media has not been integrated well into traditional curricula, its impact on political and daily decision-making highlights its need to be part of both formal and informal education. Therefore, librarians should seek out opportunities across their community to provide media literacy tools that will equip their users to address the problem of disinformation and misinformation. Bundy (2004) stressed that, librarians can provide neutral space for consumption and production of media that serves as an educational haven for news literacy and related literacies. This paper will discuss the role of librarians in curtailing the problems of disinformation and misinformation.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

Misinformation involves the spread of untrue or false information whether intentionally or unintentionally. During period of national emergencies or in times of crisis people can unintentionally spread misinformation without even knowing that they did so. Misinformation happens often in our day to day lives, e.g. one can see or receive a particular information in social media that affects a particular facets of his live, because of emotions or how favorably or unfavorably such piece of information affects him, he shares the information without fact checking or cross checking such information only to find out later that it is false or wrong information. The big tech giants like Google, Facebook and Twitter have over the years made concerted efforts to curb misinformation because if it is not efficiently handled can be weaponized into disinformation (Fernandez, 2019). Disinformation is the sharing of incorrect information with the intention to harm and create havoc. Thereby, deliberately spreading false and inaccurate information for the sole purpose of misleading and to deceive people into believing stories that are not true about a particular situation. In this era of information explosion misinformation has obvious implication which can adversely affect individual's mental health. A simple search on the internet can lead to an exponential overflow of information which, at a

first glance can even confuse the searcher or threw him/her off balance. Moreover, in a pandemic scenario misinformation can negatively affect people health. False and misleading stories are concocted, shared or aired without any background check. A greater number of this misinformation are anchored on conspiracy theories, which introduces intriguing elements which if allowed into mainstream discourse should be strongly repudiated.

Misinformation can take many forms, including false or misleading claims, rumors, conspiracy theories, fabricated images or videos, and biased or selective reporting. It can also involve taking information out of context, misinterpreting data, or using unreliable sources. While fake news is often used colloquially in common language to capture all of the abovementioned aspects, there exist theoretical frameworks and definitions that distinguish different nuances of the misinformation conundrum.

The term misinformation describes the often-uninformed spread of false or misleading information, for example by people on social media. The term disinformation on the other hand describes an intentional and targeted generation and spread of information, for example by politically or ideologically motivated groups. The generation and spread of disinformation can have different motivations, such as personal gain, damaging the reputation of another person, causing confusion or separation in a population, or contributing to the erosion of public trust in a specific government or institution. The spread of disinformation and misinformation has adverse effect on public health, climate change, stability of peace, and more. The main distinction between the terms misinformation and disinformation is usually placed on the intention of the person or agent that is spreading the information, not necessarily addressing the source of the information and the intention behind its initial creation (Born & Edgington, 2017).

Misinformation occurs when sincere information is circulated to cause damaging consequences



either to individual or organization, usually by moving information intended for private consumption into the public domain. Information disorder can lead to fear, anxiety, nervousness and apprehension when it is manipulated to provide distrust or damage to individuals, organizations and governments (De Paor & Bahareh, 2020). Studies have also demonstrated the power of disinformation and misinformation to overwhelm accurate or verifiable information in social media due to its novelty and its ability to arouse strong emotions (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Combined with the increasing lack of trust in formerly respected sources of information, such as scientific expertise, academia, and traditional media, and the spread of online social networks that reinforce selective exposure to views and information that confirms pre-existing beliefs while reducing tolerance for alternative viewpoints and new information, fake news spreads faster, more broadly, and with greater impact than verifiable information (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018).

Unfortunately, many people do not yet have sufficient skills and tools to effectively navigate the flood of misinformation that they encounter in their everyday lives. Researches indicate that many people believe that misinformation leads to societal confusion and have (intentionally or unintentionally) spread misinformation themselves (Hodgins & Kahne, 2018).

The equalization of access to information through advancements in technology has made it easier than ever for people to discover, consume, and share knowledge. Yet, these same factors have contributed to the widespread dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, with far-reaching consequences for the credibility of authoritative sources, public discourse, and trust in democratic institutions (Cosentino, 2020). As centers of learning and information dissemination, libraries could potentially counteract the negative effects of misinformation by promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and informed decision-making. It is stated in the Swedish Library Act (2): The librarians in the public library shall promote the development of

democratic society by contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and free opinion formation (Swedish Library Association, 2015).

Media literacy focused on educating individuals about the technical aspects of media production and consumption. In the 1970s, scholars and educators expanded the definition of media literacy to include critical thinking skills, helping people analyze and evaluate media messages. The rise of digital technologies and the internet in the late 20th century further transformed media literacy, as individuals gained unprecedented access to information and became producers of media content themselves (Festl, 2020). Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages in various forms. It encompasses a set of skills and competencies that enable individuals to critically engage with media content, understand its influence, and navigate the complex landscape of information and communication (Boyd and Dobrow, 2011). Rebus Online Community (2023) defined media literacy as a term describing media consumers' understanding of how mass media work. It includes knowing where different types of information can be found, how best to evaluate information, who owns the major mass media platforms, how messages are produced, and how they are framed to suit various interests.

Media literacy has been conceptualized in diverse ways by scholars, educators, and policymakers, yet a common thread emphasizes it as a set of competencies that enable individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act upon messages across media platforms. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines it as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act” using all forms of communication, underscoring the development of habits of inquiry and skills of expression for critical citizenship (NAMLE, 2022). This multidimensional definition remains influential in guiding practice and policy.



From a sociocultural perspective, Buckingham (2022) argues that media literacy extends beyond functional skills to include knowledge and social practices that help learners understand how media are produced, how they represent reality, and how audiences interpret them. Similarly, Livingstone (2022) emphasizes that literacy encompasses not only access and usage but also critical evaluation and creative production, noting that competencies are shaped by inequalities in context and resources. Both perspectives highlight that media literacy is not just a cognitive skill but a socially situated practice.

Other scholars frame media literacy more critically. Kellner and Share (2019) advance the idea of “critical media literacy,” which interrogates ideology, representation, and power relations within media systems. This approach encourages learners to question dominant narratives and to produce counter-discourses. Jenkins (2020), on the other hand, introduces the concept of “new media literacies” as cultural competencies, such as networking, collaboration, and remixing, which are essential for active participation in digital culture. Together, these approaches broaden the scope of media literacy to include empowerment, creativity, and civic engagement.

At the global policy level, UNESCO (2021) promotes “Media and Information Literacy (MIL),” a holistic framework that integrates media, information, and digital literacies. MIL stresses the right of citizens to access, evaluate, and share information ethically and responsibly, particularly in the fight against misinformation and hate speech. Similarly, regulatory agencies like Ofcom (2024) in the United Kingdom define media literacy as the ability to use, understand, and create media across multiple platforms, embedding it in national strategies for online safety and disinformation management. These perspectives demonstrate that media literacy is now positioned as a fundamental civic right and a policy priority, not only an educational skill.

Taken together, these scholarly and institutional perspectives reveal that media literacy is a dynamic and evolving concept. It encompasses functional skills for navigating digital environments, critical capacities for evaluating information and representations, creative competencies for producing and sharing media, and ethical responsibilities for participating in civic life. Recent reviews further affirm that media literacy is essential in addressing contemporary challenges such as misinformation, algorithmic influence, and digital participation inequalities (Ofcom, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). Thus, rather than a narrow technical ability, media literacy is best understood as a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills, and values necessary for informed and responsible engagement in today’s media-saturated world.

1.3 Role of Librarians in Combating Disinformation and Misinformation

Librarians have a vital role in the war against disinformation and misinformation disasters on social media by inspiring users to upgrade their media literacy skills and they need to encourage users to question the authenticity of information received through digital media channels so that dangers of disinformation and misinformation may be avoided. Librarians can also provide media literacy programs to the users in order to curtail this problem. Librarians can combat against disinformation and misinformation through the following ways:

1. Media literacy: Lack of media literacy is thought to be the cause of disinformation and misinformation propagation. The field of librarianship has historically been linked to media literacy, which helped information consumers find and retrieve reliable information stored on different format. Media literate person should be able to analyze and evaluate different types of media and the messages (Biradar, 2022). He can also be able to ascertain the authenticity, usefulness and reliability of



the information, by applying some well-established and useful evaluative criteria. Therefore, librarians are in the forefront of teaching and guiding users through those criteria.

2. Provision of accurate information: Librarians should endeavour to provide accurate and fact-based information to the users that seek credible data. Where possible, provide peer-reviewed citations and offer credible and well-known sources to support and promote accuracy.
3. Increase the efficiency and transparency of fact-checking practices: Librarians and the independent fact checkers ought to work together and in harmony. Since libraries are repositories of recorded knowledge, they should make sure that fact checkers have the knowledge and information they need to do their jobs. (Naeem & Rubina, 2020).
4. Satisfying the information needs of the community users: librarians must look for ways to satisfy the information needs of their users, while maintaining a focus on readability and accessibility when screening information sources. Once librarians play their roles as information providers people will not listen to the fake information that will create problem in the society.
5. Focus on identifying rumors and listening to the general vibe of the community: It is relevant and essential for librarians to be aware of the most recent information and trends being discussed in their community. This will facilitate a deeper comprehension of the topics being addressed and the most recent trend in town. The librarians can assist in calming the situation if it is necessary. (Bangani, 2021).
6. Awareness campaigns: It is critical to for librarians to engage in the public awareness on the prevalence of disinformation and misinformation, as well as their possible consequences. Campaigns for awareness can promote

ethical sharing and participation and assist people in becoming wiser media consumers.

7. Conversation with the community users: Librarians should establish and maintain a relationship with the user community. They can conduct survey to find out what is happening in the community and proffer solutions to the problems. Even if librarians have never specifically address the issue of misinformation, they can still make a significant contribution if they can unite their community to solve issues before they become the focus of a disinformation campaign. Similar to this, a variety of other programming formats, like instruction in digital literacy, can influence the intricate web of information that propagates false information. Libraries ought to keep aiming for these advantages.
8. Collaboration with technology platforms: Social media platforms and technology companies play a significant role in disseminating media content. Collaborating with these platforms to develop tools, algorithms, and policies that prioritize accurate information and mitigate the spread of misinformation can greatly enhance media literacy.
9. Foster collaboration: Establish partnerships with social media platforms and fact-checking organisations to address and verify false claims. Join forces with fellow human rights experts, government agencies, and media outlets to pool resources, share verified information, and counteract the spread of disinformation. Use these networks and outlets to call out false and misleading information and make these available to the public.

1.4 Conclusion

Everyone in society has a part to play in media literacy, which is a shared responsibility. Teachers and librarians play a critical role in integrating media literacy instruction into curricula at all educational levels. Librarians



should guide users on the skills they need to successfully navigate the complicated media environment by teaching them media analysis, source evaluation, and critical thinking. Promoting media literacy is also a major responsibility of policymakers. A society that is better informed and more resilient can be achieved through policies that foster media accountability, transparency, and literacy instruction. It is also crucial to create complete media literacy programs, cooperation between media organizations, digital firms, and academic institutions. Additionally, media organizations and technology companies should strive to provide transparent information, promote media literacy initiatives, and develop tools to combat disinformation and misinformation. Librarians should select, organize and disseminate reliable information in right time to the community users. They should also be proactive in discharging their duties as media literacy providers.

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