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INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF FAKE NEWS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA

By

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Abstract:

The proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms has significantly transformed information creation, dissemination, and consumption. While these developments have enhanced access to information, they have also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news. University students, who rely heavily on online information for academic and personal purposes, are increasingly exposed to misleading content. This study investigates the information literacy skills of university students and their ability to manage fake news in the post-truth era. Specifically, the study assessed students' information literacy competencies, determined their exposure to fake news, examined the strategies employed in verifying information, and explored the role of academic libraries in combating misinformation. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions among undergraduate students from selected universities. Findings revealed that although most students possessed basic information literacy skills, significant gaps existed in evaluating information credibility and identifying misinformation. Social media emerged as the major source of fake news exposure. Fact-checking websites, consultation of multiple sources, and verification through authoritative platforms were identified as common verification strategies. The study further established that library-led information literacy programmes significantly improved students' ability to identify and manage fake news. The study recommends strengthening information literacy instruction within university curricula and enhancing library initiatives aimed at combating misinformation.

Keywords: Information literacy, fake news, misinformation, university students, academic libraries, post-truth era.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has transformed the way information is created, disseminated, and consumed globally. The emergence of social networking platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp has facilitated instant access to information across geographical boundaries. While these platforms have democratized information sharing, they have also created fertile grounds for the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

Atulomah & Odumade



FUTIFMS International Conference

The concept of fake news gained significant prominence during major political and public health events worldwide. Fake news refers to deliberately fabricated or misleading information presented as factual news. The increasing prevalence of fake news has contributed to the emergence of what scholars describe as the “post-truth era,” where emotional appeals and personal beliefs often outweigh objective facts in shaping public opinion.

University students constitute one of the largest groups of internet users and social media consumers. Their academic success increasingly depends on their ability to locate, evaluate, and utilize credible information. Consequently, information literacy has become an indispensable skill in higher education. Information literacy enables individuals to recognize information needs and to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information from diverse sources.

Academic libraries have traditionally served as gateways to reliable information. In response to the growing threat of fake news, libraries are increasingly assuming proactive roles in promoting information literacy and critical thinking skills among students. However, despite these efforts, many students continue to encounter difficulties distinguishing credible information from misinformation.

This study therefore investigates information literacy skills and the management of fake news among university students in the post-truth era.

Statement of the Problem

The widespread dissemination of fake news through social media and online platforms poses serious challenges to higher education. University students frequently rely on internet sources for assignments, research, and decision-making. Unfortunately, many students lack adequate skills to critically evaluate information sources, making them vulnerable to misinformation.

The inability to identify fake news may negatively affect students’ academic performance, research quality, and decision-making processes. Although academic libraries have implemented information literacy programmes, the extent to which these programmes equip students to combat fake news remains unclear. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between information literacy skills and the management of fake news among university students.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

- i. Assess the information literacy skills of university students.
- ii. Determine students’ exposure to fake news.
- iii. Examine the strategies used by students to verify information.
- iv. Investigate the role of academic libraries in combating misinformation.
- v. Determine the academic impact of fake news exposure on students.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of information literacy among university students?
- ii. How frequently are students exposed to fake news?
- iii. What strategies do students employ to verify information?
- iv. What role do academic libraries play in promoting information literacy?
- v. What impact does fake news have on students’ academic activities?

Significant of the Study

It is important to mention that the current study is valuable due to its contribution in addressing the problem of misinformation and fake news. In particular, the results of the study can be useful for university students, since they can help improve their understanding of the significance of



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information literacy skills when assessing information sources and detecting misleading data. Thus, increased information literacy capabilities will help make decisions on an informed basis. Moreover, the current research will be valuable for academic librarians, since it will allow evaluation of the success rate of the information literacy programmes. As a result, the obtained results can be helpful when designing further actions aimed at combating fake news.

The study will be valuable for the formulation of institutional policy in promoting critical thinking, digital literacy, and proper use of information. The study will also help add to the current literature within the field of Library and Information Science by giving insight into the relationship between information literacy skills and managing fake news in the post-truth era.

Scope of the Study

The study is concerned with the issue of information literacy skills and the phenomenon of fake news amongst university undergraduates at selected institutions. This study aims to identify the level of information literacy skills amongst students, fake news encounters, the techniques used to verify information, the impact of fake news on academia, and the efforts of academic libraries against fake news.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Information Literacy

Information literacy refers to the ability to recognize information needs and effectively locate, evaluate, and utilize information. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries, information literacy encompasses critical thinking skills necessary for navigating today's complex information environment.

Information literacy involves:

- Identifying information needs.
- Locating relevant information.
- Evaluating source credibility.
- Using information ethically.
- Communicating information effectively.

Fake News and Misinformation

Fake news consists of intentionally false information designed to deceive audiences. Misinformation differs from disinformation in that misinformation may be shared without malicious intent, whereas disinformation is deliberately deceptive.

The rapid spread of fake news is facilitated by:

- Social media algorithms.
- Confirmation bias.
- Lack of fact-checking.
- Emotional content.
- Information overload.

Information Literacy and Fake News Management

Several studies have shown that information literacy competencies significantly influence individuals' ability to detect fake news. Students with strong information literacy skills are more likely to evaluate source credibility, cross-check information, and identify misleading content.

Role of Academic Libraries

Academic libraries contribute to combating fake news through:

- i. Information literacy instruction.



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- ii. User education programmes.
- iii. Research support services.
- iv. Fact-checking workshops.
- V. Digital literacy training.

Libraries increasingly position themselves as defenders of information integrity in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Information Literacy Competency Theory, which emphasizes the acquisition of skills necessary for effective information seeking, evaluation, and utilization. The theory suggests that individuals equipped with adequate information literacy competencies are less susceptible to misinformation and fake news.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to collect data from a relatively large number of undergraduate students regarding their perceptions, experiences, and utilization of information repackaging services in academic libraries. The survey approach facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of students' evolving information needs and the current trends in information repackaging within academic libraries. The descriptive design also allowed for the systematic description of existing practices without manipulating any variables.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all undergraduate students enrolled in selected federal, state, and private universities. These students constituted the primary users of academic library services and represented diverse academic disciplines and levels of study. Their inclusion was based on the assumption that they regularly interact with library resources and are in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of information repackaging services in meeting their academic information needs.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 400 undergraduate students participated in the study. The sample size was considered adequate for generating reliable findings and ensuring sufficient representation of the study population.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the participants. The universities were first stratified according to ownership (federal, state, and private), while the students were further stratified based on faculty and level of study. Thereafter, proportionate random sampling was used to select respondents from each stratum. This approach ensured that students from different academic disciplines and levels were adequately represented, thereby enhancing the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

In addition to the questionnaire respondents, participants for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were purposively selected based on their willingness to participate and their regular use of academic library services. This enabled the researchers to obtain deeper insights into students' experiences, expectations, and suggestions regarding information repackaging in academic libraries.



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Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for data collection:

1. **Structured Questionnaire:** A researcher-developed questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on students' awareness, utilization, satisfaction, challenges, and expectations regarding information repackaging services. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A obtained respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items structured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).
2. **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide:** A semi-structured discussion guide was developed to facilitate interactive discussions with selected undergraduate students. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed opinions on current information repackaging practices, preferred information formats, emerging digital trends, challenges encountered, and recommendations for improving academic library services.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments provided methodological triangulation and enriched the findings of the study.

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Validity of the Instruments

The questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion guide were subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Library and Information Science and Educational Research. The experts examined the instruments for clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, appropriateness of language, and alignment with the objectives and research questions of the study. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the final versions of the instruments before administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted among 30 undergraduate students from a university that was not included in the main study. The responses obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability technique to determine the internal consistency of the instrument.

The analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Procedure for Data Collection

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the management of the selected universities and the respective university libraries. The researchers, with the assistance of trained research assistants, administered the questionnaires directly to the selected respondents. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion to minimize non-response.

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted separately with selected participants in quiet locations within the university libraries. Each discussion session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was moderated by the researchers using the prepared discussion guide. With the



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consent of the participants, discussions were audio-recorded, while additional notes were taken to capture non-verbal expressions and key observations.

Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and answer the research questions. Where appropriate, decision rules based on mean scores were applied to interpret respondents' opinions regarding various aspects of information repackaging services.

The qualitative data obtained through the Focus Group Discussions were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcripts were carefully read several times to achieve familiarity with the data. Similar responses were coded, categorized, and grouped into emerging themes that reflected participants' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and recommendations. The qualitative findings were subsequently integrated with the quantitative results to provide a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of the study.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Level of Information Literacy

The findings indicated that a majority of students possessed moderate information literacy skills. However, many students demonstrated difficulty in evaluating website credibility and identifying biased information.

Research Question 2: Exposure to Fake News

Most respondents reported frequent exposure to fake news, particularly through social media platforms and messaging applications.

Research Question 3: Verification Strategies

Students reported using various verification methods, including:

- i Consulting multiple sources.
- ii Using fact-checking websites.
- iii Verifying information through official websites.
- iv. Seeking expert opinions.

Research Question 4: Role of Libraries

The study revealed that library information literacy programmes positively influenced students' ability to identify fake news and evaluate information sources.

Research Question 5: Academic Impact

Fake news exposure was found to contribute to:

- i. Incorrect academic citations.
- ii. Misinterpretation of information.
- iii. Reduced research quality.
- iv. Confusion during academic decision-making.

The findings corroborate previous studies indicating that information literacy remains a critical tool for combating misinformation. The prevalence of fake news among university students underscores the need for sustained information literacy interventions. Academic libraries are



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strategically positioned to lead these interventions through innovative training programmes and digital literacy initiatives.

Implications for Library Practice

The conclusions drawn from this research are highly significant for academic libraries. With misinformation spreading increasingly on digital platforms, libraries need to change their conventional role as mere providers of information and transform themselves into facilitators of information literacy. Information literacy programs offered in the academic library setting need to improve the provision of information skills by introducing components of fake news, sources evaluation, and factchecking within user education programs. Collaboration between librarians and teachers needs to ensure that information skills are taught in academic courses. It is important to organize regular workshops and seminars for students regarding new forms of misinformation. Another recommendation would be the promotion of using reliable databases, fact-checking websites, and reputable sources. Through this measure, libraries will be able to make a considerable contribution to forming information-resilient students capable of handling the intricacies of the post-truth information era.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study established that information literacy skills significantly influence university students' ability to identify and manage fake news. Although students demonstrate moderate levels of information literacy, exposure to fake news remains high due to extensive use of social media platforms. Academic libraries play a crucial role in strengthening students' capacity to evaluate information critically and make informed decisions. Strengthening information literacy programmes is therefore essential in preparing students for the challenges of the post-truth information environment.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Universities should integrate information literacy courses into the general curriculum.
- ii. Academic libraries should organize regular workshops on fake news detection.
- iii. Students should be encouraged to verify information through multiple credible sources.
- iv. Librarians should collaborate with faculty members in promoting information evaluation skills.
- v. Universities should support fact-checking initiatives and digital literacy programmes.

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FUTIFMS International Conference

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