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## SIFTING THROUGH FICTION

*Role of Indian Library in Combating Fake News Through Information Literacy Programme*

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**Abstract:** In the age of information overload, discerning fact from fiction has become a critical challenge. Sifting through fiction means critically evaluating information to distinguish fact from falsehood. This paper tries to explore the role Indian libraries can play in combating fake news. However, the study shows there is no national initiative; some libraries organize occasional information literacy events. Different Strategies taken in India for identifying fake news are also shown. But no initiatives run consistently, except fact-checking websites. Due to the digital divide in India, information literacy initiatives do not reach a wider population. Linguistic problems also play a significant bad effect in this regard. By analyzing the information landscape in India and outlining key aspects of information literacy, this paper proposes a framework for information literacy programs for what libraries can do to combat fake news.

**Index Terms:** Fake News, Information Literacy, Indian Library, Fact-Checking Websites, Digital Divide, Fiction

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Fake news, also sometimes referred to as information disorder, is a serious issue that irritates the digital age. It refers to false or misleading information presented as news, often deliberately created to deceive readers. Information literacy acts as a shield against fake news. It equips people with the skills to evaluate the sources of information, identify slanted information and misleading headlines, fact check, think critically etc. Sifting through fiction means critically evaluating information to distinguish fact from falsehood. Libraries can play an

important role in helping people sort through information and identify reliable sources from fake news. Librarians are like firefighters of the information age, battling fake news with the weapon of information literacy. They teach communities to be critical thinkers by evaluating sources, equipping people with fact-checking skills and reliable resources, building collections with trustworthy news sources and dismantling the foundation of fake news. Different countries have taken some initiatives to combat fake news through information literacy programs Germany:

Program: Media Literacy in Education

Description: Integrates media literacy education into the national curriculum, teaching students how to evaluate online information, identify bias, and recognize manipulative techniques.

United States:

Program: Information Literacy for the 21st Century" by the American Library Association (ALA)

Description: This program provides resources and training for librarians to develop information literacy programs for all ages. Libraries across the US can utilize these resources to create workshops focused on evaluating online sources, identifying bias, and navigating the digital information landscape.

In the case of India, the steps are:

- Individual Library Initiatives: Many libraries, recognizing the importance of information literacy in the digital age, develop their workshops and resources. These programs might focus on teaching source evaluation skills, identifying bias, and fact-checking techniques.
- Fact-Checking Websites and Initiatives: Independent fact-checking organizations like BOOM Live and Alt News India, India Today Fact Check play a crucial role. They debunk fake news and provide citizens with reliable sources of information.
- State-Level Initiatives: Kerala with its "Satyameva Jayate" (Truth Alone Triumphs) program, are taking independent steps. This program specifically targets digital media literacy to educate the public about fake news and how to be responsible consumers of online information.

But no initiatives run consistently, except fact-checking websites. Due to the digital divide in India, information literacy initiatives do not reach a wider population. Linguistic problems also play a significant bad effect in this regard.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Young, J. C ... [et al.] (2021) discuss the existing literature on information literacy and its various components relevant to combating misinformation. Dedicate a section to outlining the potential role of libraries in combating misinformation. This could include- public education programs on identifying and evaluating information

sources, collaborations with educators to integrate information literacy skills into curricula, providing resources and training for librarians on effective information literacy instruction related to misinformation, creating partnerships with fact-checking organizations etc.

**Lim, A., Dollah... [et al.] (2021)** explore how information literacy skills can be applied to evaluate information encountered on Social Networking Sites (SNS) and distinguish between real and fake news. Define information literacy competency and its various components relevant to identifying fake news. This could include- source evaluation (credibility, authority, bias), fact-checking skills, critical thinking and analysis, media literacy (recognizing manipulative techniques) etc.

**Das, A. K., & Tripathi, M. (2023)** discuss the strategies for combating misinformation in developing countries, which may have different challenges than developed nations and the methods to identify and address false information. The study also explores how library and information professionals and LIS educators, associations and institutions in India can create policies to tackle misinformation.

**Burkhardt, Joanna M. (2017)** identifies social media platforms as breeding grounds for fake news, amplified by algorithms and bots designed to manipulate information. The publication emphasizes the importance of information literacy, teaching people how to assess the credibility of online sources. And the librarians are seen as vital resources in this fight. The report also equips them with strategies to educate patrons of all ages on how to differentiate fact from fiction online.

**Haigh, M... [et al.] (2021)** acknowledges that "fake news" is a significant issue, but it delves deeper into the broader problem of disinformation and how information literacy can combat it. The authors explore information literacy programs developed in Ukraine after 2014, when Russia's annexation of Crimea was accompanied by a surge of disinformation and highlight a successful program established by IREX, a non-profit organization. This program trains instructors, librarians included, on teaching information literacy skills through workshops and curriculum materials.

**Kim, B., Xiong, A., Lee, D., & Han, K. (2021)** provide a comprehensive survey of fake news research, examining fake news creation and consumption through the lens of computer science and social science.

**Aïmeur, E., Amri, S., & Brassard, G. (2023)** establish a clear definition of fake news, differentiating it from misinformation and emphasizing deliberate deception. The authors propose a model that categorizes fake news research into three areas: Stimuli (factors that make people engage with fake news), Actions (processes involved in creating, spreading, and combating fake news), and Outcomes (consequences of fake news). The model identifies various actors involved in the fake news phenomenon, including creators, consumers, influencers, and those who fight against it. The cyclical nature of fake news highlights how it can lead to further creation and consumption.

### 3 OBJECTIVES:

- i. To know the strategies taken in India for identifying fake news.
- ii. To identify the potential impact of information literacy programs on reducing fake news use.
- iii. To investigate the potential of Indian libraries in combating the spread of fake news.

### 4 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by reviewing the existing literature, journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings. Data have been collected from different country Government websites, Library websites and Fact-checking websites to know the initiative taken by them in combating fake news.

### 5 FINDINGS

- i. There is no national initiative; some libraries organize occasional information literacy events.
- ii. The fight against fake news is an ongoing battle. Techniques are improving, but there's no silver bullet.
- iii. No initiatives run consistently, except fact-checking websites.
- iv. Due to the digital divide in India, information literacy initiatives do not reach a wider population.

### 6 SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Librarians can play a vital role in promoting information literacy. While there may not be a nationwide program, individual libraries can develop workshops and resources to teach information evaluation and critical thinking skills. Some educational institutions might integrate information literacy modules into their curriculum. The following services may be given by Librarians:

#### **i. Information Literacy Champions:**

- They can design and deliver workshops, classes, and online tutorials that teach information literacy skills. This can include:
  - Source Evaluation: Equipping users with the ability to assess the credibility and authority of websites, articles, and social media posts.
  - Fact-Checking Techniques: Teaching methods to verify information through reliable sources and fact-checking websites.
  - Critical Thinking: Developing skills to analyze information objectively, identify bias, and recognize logical fallacies.
  - Media Literacy: Empowering users to understand how online content can be manipulated and how to spot misleading headlines or visuals.

**ii. Curators of Trustworthy Resources:**

- Build and curate library collections that prioritize credible news outlets, academic journals, and reputable websites.
- Develop online guides and databases that point users towards reliable information sources on specific topics.
- Partner with educators to integrate information literacy skills and reliable resource identification into lesson plans.

**iii. Beacons of Truth in the Digital Age:** Host public forums and discussions about identifying fake news and its impact.

**iv. Reaching Diverse Audiences:**

Librarians understand the importance of reaching all community members. They can develop targeted programs for:

- **Students:** Tailoring information literacy instruction to different age groups, from elementary school children to college students.
- **Adults:** Offering workshops and resources specifically designed for working professionals and lifelong learners.
- **Underserved Communities:** Providing programs in multiple languages and ensuring equitable access to technology and information literacy resources.

By combining their expertise with community engagement, librarians can play a significant role in building a more informed and discerning citizenry.

Challenges and the Road Ahead:

- **Digital Divide:** Bridging the digital divide in India is crucial for information literacy initiatives to reach a wider population.
- **Multiple Languages:** India's diverse linguistic landscape necessitates creating resources and programs accessible in various languages.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** Building a media-literate citizenry requires sustained efforts and collaboration between the government, educational institutions, libraries, and fact-checking organizations.

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