

Academic Librarians' Perceptions of Digital Media Literacy Skills and Fake News Awareness in Kwara State

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Abstract

The impact of fake news has been catastrophic for both developing and developed nations, including those in Africa. Digital literacy equips individuals with the ability to access accurate information and comprehend the ethical principles surrounding it. For centuries, academic librarians have served as intermediaries between users and the information they need, fulfilling the roles of gatekeepers and protectors of information. The study was guided to examine academic librarians' perception of digital media literacy skills, Find out the contributions of digital media literacy skills to academic librarians' exposure and Find out the correlation between digital media literacy skills and fake news awareness of academic librarian. Descriptive design was used to investigate the study with 80 academic librarians from selected academic libraries in Kwara State comprising the research group which were picked randomly. The opinions of librarians were gathered through a questionnaire and analysed using quantitative methods. The study revealed that academic librarians held positive views on digital literacy skills. Based on these findings, the study concludes DMLS influences academic librarians' perception. The study recommended that there is need for libraries and librarians to collaborate in teaching information and media literacy to their users, communities, and society as a whole.

Keywords: Academic Librarian and Library, Digital Media Literacy Skills, Fake News Awareness

1.0 Introduction

The current era is inundated with fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. This issue has become an acute problem that has infiltrated every aspect of society. It stems from the larger challenges faced by individuals in today's information-rich world. Fake news is a global concern that has existed since the time of the Roman Empire (Farmer, 2019). For instance,



during the meeting between Antony and Cleopatra, a propaganda campaign was orchestrated to tarnish Antony's reputation (Bulugu& Julius, 2022). Anwar (2021) observed that, while propaganda has been used for centuries, technologies to spread false information have never been so effective. According to Negi (2018) in the World Economic Forum, one of the major challenges confronting the world today is the spread of fake news via social media networks. The phenomenon of fake news (fake news) has had devastating consequences on developing and developed countries, including those in Africa. In their comparative study of Kenya and Nigeria, Chakrabarti et al. (2018) aimed to identify the underlying causes of the spread of Fake News without verification and assess the extent to which people are aware of its negative impact. The authors discovered that individuals in both countries are cognizant of the damaging consequences associated with sharing fake news. However, the study found no evidence of malicious intent behind the sharing of such false information. Instead, respondents relied on their social networks to verify the authenticity of news, instead of consulting legitimate news sources or online fact-checkers. Chakrabarti et al. further revealed that respondents often overestimated their ability to identify fake news and relied on mental shortcuts that were not always adequate in determining the accuracy of information. This can lead to misinterpretation and propagate false narratives.

On the other hand, those who were prompted or reminded about accuracy significantly increased their level of discernment, with their subsequent intentions to share being almost tripled. These findings indicate that media and information literacy play a crucial role in helping individuals become more conscious of the accuracy of information before sharing it. There has been extensive research attention focused on fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, especially in the political arena. However, there is a lack of literature on academic librarians' opinions on digital media literacy skills (DMLS) and fake news awareness. To address this gap, this study aims to examine the perceptions of academic librarians about digital media literacy skills and fake news awareness. This study contributes to scholarship on fake news and DMLS. It intends to bring academic librarian's perspectives to bear on debates over how best to be aware of and respond to misinformation, within the context of other harmful online content.

1.1 Research Questions

- i. What is academic librarians' perception of DMLS?
- ii. What are the contributions of DMLS to academic librarians' exposure?
- iii. Is there a correlation between DMLS and fake news awareness?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Meaning of Academic Librarian and Academic Library as Promoters of DMLS

According to Adebisi (2016) defined Academic Library as the Library attached to tertiary institutions for the purpose of teaching, learning and research. Academic Library must be effective in the provision of information resources and services to meet and satisfy information needs of users. Therefore, persons with an in-depth knowledge in library and information science can be regarded to as Librarians. Academic librarians played a crucial role in facilitating the connection between users and the information they seek. They have acted as gatekeepers and guardians of information, and their role has been highly valued for centuries. As knowledge workers, their professional lives and futures depend on DMLS. It has evolved over the years, with today's standards demanding the ability to find and share information effectively on both computers and mobile devices. It involves the capacity to locate, organize,



understand, evaluate, and analyse information using digital technology and a working knowledge of current technology and how it can be used.

According to Farmer (2019), librarians are natural allies for educators in helping students to become critical news consumers. Librarians with their inherent trait for carrying out in-depth research before concluding can add value to users to find out authentic information. Librarians are skilled in determining credible sources. They can help patrons to learn the skills to evaluate the information they encountered every day whether through print or online resources. They can provide various procedures to enable patrons to critically assess sources, facts, and context. Librarians can play a critical role in helping users of any background, irrespective of age, or educational status to become critical and authentic news consumers. To help patrons distinguish between real and fake news, librarians should conduct information literacy sessions, prepare research guides and provide links to resources for fact-checking. These will help patrons to recognize credible, reliable and trustworthy information using library resources and databases. The skills enable them to evaluate print or digital information resources in terms of reliability, validity, and accuracy, which is free from any type of bias.

2.2 Digital Media Literacy Skills (DMLS)

DMLS encompasses the ability to comprehend and utilize digitized information, including multimedia. It involves proficiency in media, information communicative literacy, and creative competence (Anwar, 2021). Unfortunately, many students today lack adequate information literacy skills, struggling to differentiate between credible and unreliable sources of information. To combat this issue, DMLS requires an awareness of the technological forces that impact culture and human behaviour, information and media literacy skill enables users to identify fake news and helps them to judge and evaluate which part of the information is factually correct. Academic librarians can collaborate with Lecturers to implement various methods of information literacy instruction. With the rise of digital technology, the traditional role of librarians as gatekeepers and guardians of information has been disrupted. According to Obinyan & Ugwuanyi (2022), librarians are now considered knowledge workers who need to hold a DMLS in order to find, obtain, share, and arrange various knowledge tools. The capacity to locate, comprehend, evaluate, and analyze information using digital technology is essential. School librarians can work together with teachers to tackle the problem of information literacy skills among students (Tekoniemi et al., 2022).

2.3 Concept of Fake News and Meaning of Fake News Awareness

Fake news is a type of misinformation that can be created for several reasons, such as to mislead, for fun, out of passion or strong belief, to gain power or influence, or to get richer. It can take the form of deliberate, publicly published disinformation, hoaxes, or lies presented as real news by established mass media or social media. EAVI, a European Commission for Media Literacy, identified several types of misleading news, including click bait, systematic information campaigns, sponsored content, partisan content, satire, pseudoscience, and conspiracy theories (Ebhonu & Onobrakpor, 2021). Misinformation can be weaponized into fake news, and it can include lies and yet be presented as legitimate news stories. Fake news is not new, but it has now expanded its reach through timely distribution via the Internet. It has been the catalyst for political manipulation, a rise in diseases, and killings. When people believe fake news, they are misinformed and may make poor decisions. This ultimately leads to frustration, polarisation, confusion, fear, distrust, cynicism, and withdrawal, which hinders society from making wise decisions and solving social issues (Theodora, 2022). Fake news is believed and shared for various reasons, including a lack of logical skills and the desire to confirm one's existing knowledge base. Cable television channels do not provide balanced



news coverage, leading to a "filter bubble" phenomenon where people only hear news that reinforces their beliefs (Anyanwu, 2022). Social media allows people to share news that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, often without fact-checking. To counter fake news, people should acknowledge and respect different viewpoints and reframe the news to find common ground. Be that as it may, fake news awareness is a process of advocating for the control of fake news, making people to know the danger of it to the society. Advocacy in essence simply connote awareness, promotion or encouragement of an issues or events. (Karpagaraj, & Sundararaman, 2023).

Menace of Fake News in Nigeria

The rapid spread of false information through instant messaging services has become a major source of misinformation. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram can quickly disseminate false information about jobs, scholarships, security, food, politics, health, and religion. These messages can be forwarded to thousands of people in a matter of seconds, making it difficult to verify their accuracy before they have already caused harm. For instance, a picture of a woman who is presently doing the rounds on WhatsApp erroneously claims that she is a child trafficker in Lagos. False claims are becoming more prevalent due in part to citizen journalism, where there is a fierce rivalry to disclose information first. Misinformation is becoming more prevalent and has a wider audience because of social media's introduction and users' capacity to create original material. According to Soleimani, (2022), false claims have the potential to spread quickly and appear genuine, emphasizing the need for timely verification. Sovemi & Inazu (2022), opines that the rise in polio cases in Nigeria between 2002 and 2006 was partly due to unfounded claims and rumors about the polio vaccine. Political and religious leaders in Kano, Zamfara, and Kaduna alleged that the vaccine contained harmful substances, such as carcinogens, HIV, and anti-fertility drugs, without providing any evidence.

False accusations are unfortunately all too common in Nigerian politics, and fake news only exacerbates the problem. One example of this is the claim of underage voting in the 2015 presidential election in northern Nigeria. After the polls closed, allegations emerged that the Independent National Electoral Commission had allowed minors to cast ballots, causing public outrage and opposition protests. According to a report in the Vanguard Daily (Anyanwu, 2022), the electoral commission maintains that these claims are unfounded. Similarly, in 2017, during military operations in southeast Nigeria, the Nigerian Army began providing free medical care, including polio vaccinations. However, rumors spread have it that the army was injecting students with the monkey pox virus in schools. This sparked widespread fear, prompting the closure of some schools and concerned parents rushing to pick up their children as students fled their classrooms (Anyanwu, 2022). Fake news story spread through social media about the image that inflamed tensions between farmers and herders. In Nigeria, false allegations based on manipulated photographs have aggravated the conflict between farmers and herders.

The BBC report "Fake News and Nigeria's Herder Crisis" (2018) states that a graphic image of a woman lying in a pool of blood went viral on Twitter during a violent altercation between herders and farmers that resulted in over 200 deaths. The image implied that the woman was one of the victims, and it was re-tweeted by hundreds of people, many of whom expressed outrage in response. A fact check revealed, however, that the photograph had previously been used in a 2011 article on domestic abuse in Nigeria. In addition, the BBC report identified another photograph of six alleged victims of the herder-farmer conflict. After some research, it was discovered that the photograph depicted a traffic collision in the Dominican Republic (Anyanwu, 2022).

2.4 Academic Librarians' Perceptions of Digital Media Literacy Skills and Fake News Awareness

Academic Librarians perception on DMLS is examination of thought of an issues or event depending on the expertise, professional experiences by which they work. Be that as it may, perception refers to the way individuals interpret and understand information. It involves the organization, identification and interpretation of sensory information to represent and understand the world around us. The subject matter here is how do academic librarian percept the digital literacy skills and fake news awareness in Kwara state that the respondents must give answers to in the study. Academic librarian's perception on digital media literacy skills on assumption may vary depending on their own expertise and professional experiences where they work. It is how academic librarian generally understands the importance of digital media literacy skills for students and researchers. Academic librarians perceive DMLS as crucial in today's information landscape. They recognized that DMLS involves the ability to find, evaluate and use digital information effectively and responsibly; that DMLS are essential for students to critically analyze and navigate the vast amount of digital resource available, including the scholarly articles, databases, online journals and digital archives that can disseminate authentic facts, current and informed information to the society. The librarian often focus on enabling students to develop skills, such as evaluating the reliability and credibility of online sources especially in Kwara State. However, the perception is to help the students to understand, copyright and intellectual properties issues, utilizing technology tools for research and data analysis. To this end, academic librarians play a key roles in promoting and teaching DMLS through institution sessions, workshop, online tutorial and individual consultations. However, this study will need to investigate the librarian perception of DMLS on fake news awareness in Kwara State at large.

Need for DMLS: The need for DMLS is to adjust ranking algorithms to promote more accurate information help in mitigating the impact of fake news. Librarians are natural allies for educators in helping students become critical news consumers. They can guide users to locate authentic information and play a crucial role in enabling users from different backgrounds to become critical and authentic news consumers. Librarians can provide various procedures for patrons to evaluate sources, facts and context critically. To help patrons distinguish between real and fake news, librarians should organize information literacy sessions, prepare research guides, and provide links to resources for fact-checking (Chukwueke& Idris, 2023).

3.0 Methodology

This study was designed using descriptive approach and included a total population of 80 librarians who work in academic libraries within Kwara State. The questionnaire used in the study titled "Academic Librarians' Perception of DMLS and Fake News Awareness (FAKE NEWS)," was designed by the researcher after a thorough review of the related literature. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, A and B, with Section A focusing on obtaining demographic data from the respondents, such as gender, marital status, educational qualifications, and years of experience. Section B consisted of items on academic librarians' perceptions towards DMLS and fake news awareness. The questions in Section C required the participants to indicate their level of disagreement or agreement with the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale format of Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Neutral-3, Agree-4, and Strongly Agree-5. To ensure that the instrument for data collection measures what it is intended to test, the questionnaire was validated by three experts from the University of Ilorin.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest approach was used. The instrument was administered to forty respondents, and after a three-week interval, the instrument was readministered to the same forty respondents. The two sets of scores were correlated using



Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formula, which revealed a coefficient of 0.76 and was deemed sufficient to carry out the study. The average point is 1+2+3+4+5=15/5=3.0. Hence, the mean for decision-making will be 3.0. Scores of 3.0 and above was considered positive, while scores below 3.0 was considered negative. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the demographic data of the respondents, while means score was used for the descriptive data. All the statistical methods were carried out through the use of Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 20.

4.0 Results

In the study, 80 academic librarians from various academic libraries in Kwara State participated. An equal number of questionnaires were sent out to the respondents, and all 80 were returned and well-answered, representing a response rate of 100%. Below is Table 1, which presents the demographic information of the participants (N = 80).

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants (N = 80)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender of the respondents		
Male	37	46.2
Female	43	53.8
Marital status		
Married	50	62.5
Single	30	37.5
Qualification of the respondents		
HND/BSC	42	52.5
PGD/MSC/PHD	38	47.5
Years of experience		
Less than 10	47	58.8
Above 10	33	41.2

According to the findings presented in Table 1, it was observed that over half of the participants, specifically 43 (53.8%), were female librarians, while the remaining 37 (46.2%) were male librarians. Additionally, it was noted that out of the total respondents, 50 (62.5%) were married, and the remaining 30 (37.5%) were unmarried at the time of the research. The data in Table 1 also indicated that 42 (52.5%) of the librarians held HND and BSc certificates in Library-related courses. However, the table further revealed that the majority of the librarians, specifically 47 (58.8%), had worked for less than 10 years, while the remaining 33 (41.2%) had worked for over a decade.



4.1 Section B: Descriptive analysis of the research questions

Question 1: What is your perception of DMLS?

Table 2: Mean Score showing the Academic librarian Perceptions of the Concept of DMLS (N = 80)

S/n	Concept of DMLS	X	Dec	
1	DMLS enables the effective use of technological tools.	3.45	Positive	
2	DMLS ensures compliance with ethical rules in the execution	3.75	Positive	
	of informatics processes.			
3	DMLS enables the effective use of social media.	3.53	Positive	
4	DMLS enables the acquisition, interpretation, evaluation, and	3.55	Positive	
	sharing of information.			
5	DMLS enables individuals to communicate quickly and	3.55	Positive	
	accurately.			
6	DMLS allows the analysis of cases, facts, and issues from	3.53	Positive	
	different perspectives.			
7	DMLS facilitates access to accurate information.	3.42	Positive	
8	DMLS makes it easier to generate new information.	3.46	Positive	
9	DMLS facilitates the holistic analysis of information.	3.36	Positive	
The grand mean = 3.51				

According to Table 2, the respondents provided positive feedback for all the items. The grand mean for all respondents on the ALPDLMFN statements was 3.51. This shows that the majority of respondents' perception of DMLS is positive. A higher score indicates a more positive attitude towards DMLS.

Question 2: What are the contributions of DMLS to academic librarians' exposure?

Table 3: Mean Score showing the academic librarians' perception of the contributions of DMLS to their exposure (N = 80)

S/n	Contribution of DMLS Skill to the Students	X	Decision		
1	DMLS increase my cognitive skills	3.45	Positive		
2	DMLS skill contributes to my critical thinking	3.75	Positive		
3	DMLS enable me to engage with technology.	3.53	Positive		
4	DMLS makes it easier for me to access reliable information.	3.55	Positive		
5	DMLS skill improves my effective virtual communication skills	3.55	Positive		
6	DMLS skill enables me to become a conscious internet users.	3.53	Positive		
7	DMLS skill enables me to use both traditional and social media effectively.	3.42	Positive		
8	DMLS skill provides me with the ability to interpret, analyse, and reproduce information.	3.46	Positive		
9	DMLS skill provides me the operational and technical knowledge and skills.	3.36	Positive		
10	DMLS skill enables me to use digital media for educational purposes.	3.30	Positive		
The grand mean = 3.49					

Based on the results in Table 3, it appears that all respondents provided positive feedback for the items surveyed. The grand mean for all statements in the ALPDLMFN was 3.49, which falls between response numbers 3 and 3.5. This shows that the majority of respondents' perception of the contributions of DMLS to their exposure is positive.



Question 3: Is there a correlation between DMLS and fake news awareness?

Table 4: Mean Score showing academic librarians' perception of the correlation between DMLS and fake news awareness (N = 80)

S/n	Items statement	X	Decision
1	I only accept information that aligns with my viewpoints	3.22	Agreed
2	I critically evaluate information based on facts, not on opinions and beliefs	3.10	Agreed
3	I tend to set aside my emotions when judging the credibility of information	3.08	Agreed
4	I tend to rely on my intuition when evaluating information	3.55	Agreed
5	I turn to mycolleagues and acquaintances in my social network to keep updated	3.53	Agreed
6	I connect with a community of like-minded people	3.55	Agreed
7	I approach viral news with some scepticism	3.53	Agreed
	Grand mean	3.37	

According to Table 4, the respondents provided a positive response to all items. The grand mean across all respondents for the ALPDLMFN statements was 3.37. This shows that the majority of respondents tend to accept information that aligns with their beliefs and viewpoints while only a minority critically evaluate information based on facts, set aside their emotions when judging the credibility of information, and approach viral news with some skepticism.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of academic librarians on the correlation between DMLS and fake news awareness. All of the school librarian respondents presently knew about fake news with about half of them articulating the full description of fake news. The remaining respondents identified partial aspects of fake news as being misleading or deceitful, missing verifying resources, or aiming to sell or otherwise influence. Through interviews, academic librarians expressed that DMLS is crucial for the effective use of technological tools, compliance with ethical rules in IT transactions, and access to accurate information. The librarians highlighted the importance of DMLS in social media use, information retrieval, interpretation, evaluation, and sharing. They also emphasised that DMLS enables fast and accurate communication. Previous research such as Negi (2018) has indicated that digitally literate individuals can actively access, analyse, interpret, and add to digital information to solve problems.

Furthermore, the study revealed that a significant proportion of academic librarians expressed attitudes towards information sharing that contributed to the proliferation of fake news. This is exacerbated by their proclivity to trust news on social media without verifying its veracity. According to Theodora (2022), many users do not take the time to investigate the facts before sharing information, which can further propagate unsubstantiated news. One strategy to identify fake news on social media is to consider the identity and background of the person posting the story. In addition, the study revealed that individuals surrounded by homogeneous information are more likely to rate fake news as true compared to those exposed to opposing viewpoints. Librarians, for example, may become isolated intellectually in their information bubble due to less exposure to conflicting viewpoints (Bulugu& Julius, 2022). This can reduce the heterogeneity of their perceived public debate, which limits their exposure to conflicting arguments. Therefore, it is important for librarians to remain open to diverse viewpoints and to encourage their users to question the accuracy of information found on social media.



6.0 Conclusion

The study investigated the perceptions of academic librarians towards digital media literacy skills (DMLS) and fake news awareness in Kwara State, Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from 80 academic librarians, several key findings emerged.

Firstly, the study revealed a positive perception of DMLS among librarians, who recognized its importance in facilitating effective information retrieval, evaluation, and communication. Academic librarians acknowledged the role of DMLS in promoting critical thinking skills and ethical information practices among library users.

Secondly, the research identified a significant correlation between DMLS and fake news awareness among librarians. Those with higher levels of digital media literacy tended to exhibit greater awareness of the prevalence and impact of fake news, as well as a more critical approach to evaluating information credibility.

Despite the positive perceptions and correlations observed, the study also highlighted certain challenges and areas for improvement. For instance, some librarians expressed a tendency to rely on social media for news consumption without verifying the credibility of sources, indicating a need for enhanced media literacy education within the profession.

7.0 Recommendations

In light of the detrimental impact that fake news has had on societies worldwide, researchers have put forth the following recommendations:

- 1. Libraries and librarians must collaborate to teach information and media literacy, not only to their users and communities but to society as a whole. This can be achieved through training, public webinars, and the creation and circulation of relevant info graphics and flyers on social media. These efforts will equip users and the general public with the necessary skills needed for effective information analysis.
- 2. Librarians should adopt the 3Ds approach, which involves not only detecting fake news but also documenting and debunking it immediately. The role of librarians in verifying information and fact-checking should be intensified without any bias, ensuring that the authenticity of information materials is ascertained before they are disseminated.
- 3. The federal government, through various information agencies, should make an effort to verify the credibility of authors and publishers of information before allowing the distribution of any materials.

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