

Detecting and Debunking Disinformation: The Role of University Libraries in Promoting Information Literacy

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Abstract

This research delves into strategies for detecting and debunking disinformation, placing significant emphasis on fortifying information literacy within university libraries. It explores the surge of disinformation in the digital era, its societal impacts, and the imperative of equipping individuals with adeptness to navigate today's information landscape. The paper lists existing methodologies and tools for identifying disinformation, explores debunking strategies, and underscores the pivotal role of university libraries in fostering information literacy. It also pinpoints challenges and proposes future research directions and practical interventions in this domain.

Keywords: information literacy promotion, university libraries, disinformation awareness, information verification, disinformation detection, debunking strategies.

Introduction / Uvod

In the digital age, the detection and debunking of disinformation have become paramount, threatening information integrity and the bedrock of democracy (Barrett, 2020; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). The dissemination of false or misleading information across various online platforms has led to public bewilderment, eroded trust in traditional media, and influenced public opinion and decision-making processes (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018). Addressing this issue requires effective strategies for detecting and debunking disinformation.

Detecting and debunking disinformation are critical due to their potential to inflict social, political, and economic harm (Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Disinformation can manipulate public discourse, distort perceptions, and sow discord among communities (Tandoc, Lim, and Ling, 2018). Its ramifications extend to impacting election outcomes, public health responses, and inciting violence, undermining the very fabric of society.

This research paper has dual objectives. Firstly, it underscores the importance of integrating disinformation detection and debunking education into university

library programs. University libraries, as centers of knowledge and information, serve as ideal platforms for promoting information literacy. By incorporating disinformation detection and debunking education, universities can empower students and faculty with critical thinking skills necessary to navigate the intricate information landscape (Barrett, 2020; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Secondly, it delves into various methodologies employed in detecting disinformation. By examining methods such as fact-checking, source verification, and content analysis, comprehensive strategies can be developed to counter disinformation effectively.

The digital age's proliferation of disinformation heightens concerns regarding its impact on public opinion, institutional trust, and democratic processes. Detecting and debunking false narratives have become indispensable skills.

History of Disinformation / Povijest dezinformacija

A better understanding of disinformation's historical context is vital in comprehending its contemporary significance. Throughout history, disinformation has been wielded to manipulate public perception and sway pivotal events. Understanding its historical context provides invaluable insights into current challenges and societal implications.

Disinformation, the deliberate spread of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive, boasts a long and intricate history intertwined with communication evolution and technology.

The roots of disinformation trace back to ancient times when rulers and governments leveraged propaganda to sway public perception. For example, in ancient Egypt, pharaohs commissioned propaganda inscriptions on monuments to legitimize their rule (Sunstein, 2017). Similarly, the Roman Empire employed disinformation to control the masses, disseminating false information about military victories and the empire's prosperity (Rid, 2011).

Religious institutions during the Middle Ages used disinformation to maintain authority, with the Catholic Church spreading false narratives to suppress heretical ideas and control the populace. The inquisition's dissemination of disinformation about alleged witches and heretics led to widespread persecution (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

In Russia, Ivan the Terrible organized a campaign against Novgorod in 1570, which resulted in a brutal massacre. Propaganda depicted Novgorod citizens as traitors, justifying the violence. Exaggerated reports of dissent and treason legitimized Ivan's actions (Perrie, 2012).

The 20th century saw the industrialization of disinformation, notably during World Wars I and II. Governments and military forces heavily relied on propaganda to boost morale, recruit soldiers, and vilify the enemy. Atrocity propaganda was prevalent during World War I, and Nazi Germany disseminated false information during World War II (Pomerantsev, 2014).

In Eastern Europe and Russia during World War II, both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union engaged in extensive propaganda. The Soviet Union used propaganda to inspire patriotism, while Nazi Germany spread disinformation to demonize the Soviet forces (Menning, 1997).

The Cold War era witnessed covert disinformation campaigns by intelligence agencies from the United States and the Soviet Union, employing fake news and espionage to discredit adversaries (Cull, 2017).

The digital age heralded a new era of disinformation, facilitated by social media platforms. Instances like the 2016 U.S. presidential election, where disinformation played a significant role, underscore the challenges posed by fake news (Sunstein, 2017).

State-sponsored disinformation has surged, with nations using it as political warfare. Examples include Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election, the Brexit campaign in the UK, and ongoing disinformation targeting various nations (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Motivations for disinformation have evolved, encompassing political, economic, and social factors. Governments use disinformation for propaganda and power consolidation. In the digital age, individuals and groups exploit disinformation for financial or ideological gain.

The consequences of disinformation are multifaceted, eroding institutional trust, polarizing societies, and posing national security threats (Sunstein, 2017). The spread of false health information, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in tangible harm (Caceres, 2022).

The history of disinformation unveils a complex evolution from ancient propaganda to contemporary digital challenges. Understanding its techniques, motivations, and consequences is imperative. Combating disinformation necessitates interdisciplinary efforts involving academia, media, technology companies, and governments. As disinformation continues shaping public opinion and events, concerted efforts to counter it become increasingly vital.

Students' Evaluation and Sharing of Disinformation / Studentska evaluacija i dijeljenje dezinformacija

In the realm of detecting and debunking disinformation, understanding how students assess and share such content is pivotal for effective educational interventions. Students may struggle to gauge their proficiency in navigating complex information landscapes and identifying disinformation accurately (Leeder, 2019).

Students frequently encounter challenges distinguishing between accurate and misleading information. Recognizing the signs of disinformation, such as biased sources or manipulative language, often proves difficult (Mills, 2013). Moreover, personal beliefs and biases can sway their assessment, making them susceptible to confirmation bias and selective exposure (Lipka and Piotrowski, 2019). This underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking and objectivity in disinformation detection.

The dissemination of disinformation extends beyond consumption; it heavily relies on active sharing. Students, often unknowingly, contribute to spreading disinformation via social media or other communication channels. Factors influencing this sharing include cognitive biases, emotional responses, lack of source verification, and the need for social validation (Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Understanding these

factors is pivotal for educational interventions promoting responsible information sharing and combating disinformation propagation.

Is there a link between accurately identifying disinformation and adopting specific critical behaviors and strategies? Most students who adopt critical thinking—skepticism, information verification, source evaluation, and cross-referencing—are more likely to identify and reject disinformation (Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Effective critical behaviors involve questioning information, seeking diverse perspectives, and rigorous fact-checking. Additionally, students demonstrating media literacy—analyzing source credibility, recognizing propaganda, understanding socio-political contexts—are better equipped to navigate disinformation's complexities (Leder, 2019).

Challenges in Self-Assessment / Izazovi u samoprocjeni

Students often struggle to accurately assess their disinformation detection and critical evaluation skills, commonly overestimating their competence (McCartin et al., 2019). Bridging this perception gap necessitates objective assessments, guided reflections, and feedback opportunities. Incorporating self-assessment tools, reflective tasks, and constructive feedback can foster metacognitive awareness and enhance information literacy. Students' evaluation and sharing of disinformation are influenced by critical behaviors, media literacy competencies, and cognitive biases (Jones-Jang, 2021). While accurate identification of disinformation aligns with critical strategies, challenges persist in self-assessment, emphasizing the need for objective evaluation and metacognitive awareness (Leeder, 2019).

The Role of Libraries in Combatting Disinformation / Uloga knjižnica u borbi protiv dezinformacija

University libraries serve as crucial bastions in equipping students and faculty with essential skills to counter disinformation. Integrating disinformation detection and debunking education into library programs is vital (Young, 2021). Information literacy, a core aspect of academic success and lifelong learning, empowers individuals to ethically engage in knowledge creation and discovery (ALA, 2015).

Libraries offer extensive scholarly resources, databases, and expert guidance fostering evidence-based research and critical thinking. Collaborative workshops aligning with disciplinary needs, online resource guides for detecting and debunking disinformation, and embedded instructional modules within course curricula all serve as effective tools in this endeavor (Rubin, V. L., 2019; Butler, A. T., 2020). For instance, the UCLA Library Toolkit aids educators in developing critical evaluation skills and exploring the impact of misinformation (Solodkaya, 2022).

Libraries also play a pivotal role in assisting faculty to integrate disinformation education into their courses. Through consultations, workshops, and access to resources, libraries facilitate the infusion of information literacy skills into curricula, empowering students to navigate complex information landscapes effectively (Oberlies and Mattson, 2020). UNESCO's handbook provides educators and journalists with guidance in addressing disinformation through media and information literacy education (UNESCO, n.d.).

University libraries globally have proactively integrated disinformation detection and debunking education into their programs. These initiatives highlight libraries' commitment to equipping their communities with skills to identify and debunk disinformation. For instance, the MIT Libraries' "Evaluating News Sources" research guide equips students with strategies for critically evaluating news, detecting disinformation, and assessing source credibility (MIT Libraries, n.d.).

Such examples, alongside various other resources and initiatives, underscore the diverse approaches taken to educate students on detecting and debunking disinformation. By incorporating these resources into information literacy programs, university libraries empower students with vital skills to critically evaluate sources and effectively combat disinformation (Journell, 2019).

Libraries as Custodians of Contested Narratives: Navigating Disinformation and Ethical Challenges in Collection Curation / Knjižnice kao čuvari osporavanih narativa: Svladavanje dezinformacija i etički izazovi u vođenju zbirke

In the realm of collection development, librarians encounter ethical considerations when acquiring books or materials containing disinformation, particularly those originating from sources like Russia. One paramount ethical concern revolves around the tension between intellectual freedom and the potential harm posed by disseminating misleading or harmful information. Libraries uphold the principle of intellectual freedom, advocating for access to diverse viewpoints, yet they face the challenge of ensuring that such access does not perpetuate harm through the dissemination of discredited or deceptive content.

The role of libraries in curating diverse and sometimes contentious material, particularly amidst the dissemination of disinformation, is a topic explored by Ksenya Kiebusinski in a republished article from *The Conversation* (Kiebusinski, 2023). Within this exploration, Kiebusinski, as a Slavic resources coordinator at the University of Toronto Libraries, delves into the multifaceted nature of library collections, reflecting societal changes and encompassing propagandist literature, notably related to the Russian annexation of Crimea and Ukraine's censorship initiatives. Emphasizing the ethical stance of libraries on intellectual freedom and equitable access, the article discusses the ethical dilemmas associated with housing discredited content alongside legitimate scholarly resources. It underscores the pivotal role of information literacy in discerning valid information from harmful disinformation, highlighting the responsibility of librarians in nurturing critical thinking skills among library users while navigating complex information landscapes.

Maintaining equitable access to information is another ethical cornerstone for libraries. Regardless of the content's origins, libraries aim to offer comprehensive access to various perspectives. However, they must ensure that materials featuring disinformation do not overshadow accurate and substantiated sources, striving to maintain a balanced collection that reflects diverse viewpoints while safeguarding against the undue influence of misleading information.

Central to addressing this ethical quandary is the promotion of information literacy and critical thinking skills among library users. Librarians play a pivotal role in providing educational resources and programs that cultivate critical thinking, enabling individuals to discern between credible, verified information and disinformation. Such initiatives empower users to engage critically with contentious or propagandistic material and make informed judgments about the information they encounter.

Libraries can also adopt strategies that emphasize transparency and contextualization. Providing supplementary materials or annotations alongside contentious works allows users to understand the limitations or biases inherent in the content, facilitating a more nuanced and informed engagement with potentially misleading information.

Collaboration and advocacy efforts are essential components of ethical collection development practices. Librarians collaborate with educators and researchers to develop educational initiatives, workshops, or seminars that address disinformation. They advocate for information literacy programs that extend beyond the library space, fostering responsible information consumption among users and promoting a critical understanding of complex and contentious information landscapes.

Moreover, librarians adhere to professional standards and integrity when curating collections. While avoiding the endorsement of discredited content, they may acquire such materials for research or historical purposes, clearly articulating the reasons for their inclusion in the collection and ensuring they align with the institution's ethical standards and values.

Guiding Effective Research / Vođenje učinkovitog istraživanja

Example: Supporting Student Inquiry on Debunking Disinformation Surrounding Russia's Annexation of Crimea and the Persecution of Crimean Tatars

In recent years, the discourse surrounding Russia's annexation of Crimea and the concurrent persecution of Crimean Tatars has been marred by disinformation and conflicting narratives. As students delve into researching this complex geopolitical issue, navigating through the maze of misinformation becomes a paramount challenge. This section seeks to illuminate the pathway for students aiming to debunk disinformation related to Russia's actions in Crimea and the persecution of the Crimean Tatars. By outlining strategies, suggesting credible sources, and emphasizing critical thinking, this example aims to highlight the tools necessary to navigate this intricate landscape and uncover factual, reliable information in their pursuit of academic inquiry and truth-seeking.

In addressing a student's research query on debunking disinformation regarding Russia's persecution of Crimean Tatars to legitimize the annexation of Crimea, a librarian would initiate the assistance process by engaging in a comprehensive understanding of the student's specific research objectives. This involves clarifying the aspects of disinformation they aim to confront and whether their focus leans toward historical, legal, or human rights perspectives.

Central to this assistance would be the identification and recommendation of credible sources. The librarian would suggest reputable databases, scholarly

articles, and journals that cater to various dimensions of the topic. This could include historical accounts shedding light on the persecution of Crimean Tatars and the context surrounding Russia's annexation of Crimea, as well as human rights reports from esteemed international organizations or NGOs documenting the violations against this community.

Furthermore, the librarian would emphasize the importance of accessing legal analyses, providing academic papers or legal reviews that discuss the international legal framework, violations, and the legitimacy of the annexation. In tandem, resources offering geopolitical perspectives would be proposed, such as books or articles that analyze Russia's strategic interests in the region.

Guidance on how to effectively navigate library resources forms an integral part of the librarian's assistance. They would direct the student toward specialized databases, catalogs, and academic search engines focusing on geopolitical studies, human rights, and historical narratives. Additionally, the librarian would recommend fact-checking resources or platforms dedicated to verifying information and debunking disinformation pertinent to the persecution of Crimean Tatars and Russia's actions in Crimea.

An essential aspect of this assistance involves advising the student on research methodologies and strategies. This includes critical analysis of sources, comparison of information, and verification of data credibility. Moreover, suggestions for tools or software that aid in citation management, note-taking, and organization of research materials would be offered to enhance the student's research efficiency.

Personalized guidance in the form of library workshops or one-on-one sessions would be extended to the student, providing in-depth insights into research methodologies, information evaluation, and resource utilization. Throughout this process, the librarian would underscore the significance of critical thinking. Emphasizing the need to assess sources, recognize biases, and interpret complex geopolitical information is crucial in equipping the student with the necessary skills to effectively address their research query.

Types and Impact of Disinformation / Vrste i utjecaj dezinformacija

Disinformation encompasses various deceptive tactics, including fabricated news, manipulated visuals, conspiracy theories, and viral hoaxes. These exploit cognitive biases and emotions, making individuals more susceptible to manipulation (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Fabricated news articles, posing as credible sources disseminated through websites and social media platforms, perpetuate false information, aiming to mislead unsuspecting readers with stories presented as factual. Manipulated visuals, including altered images or videos, are utilized to distort events, individuals, or contexts, reinforcing false narratives, or creating deceptive impressions. Concurrently, the prevalence of conspiracy theories attributes significant events or phenomena to secretive plots or hidden agendas, often capitalizing on mistrust towards established institutions or authorities, fostering an environment of suspicion

and skepticism. Moreover, viral hoaxes rapidly disseminate false information across social media or messaging platforms, exploiting human curiosity or fear. These hoaxes, spreading unchecked and often without verification, capitalize on emotional responses, perpetuating widespread misinformation within society.

Disinformation's impact spans shaping public opinion, undermining trust in institutions, disrupting democratic processes, and influencing significant events, including elections and public health crises (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). It fuels social unrest by amplifying divisions within societies (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook, 2017).

Approaches to Detecting Disinformation / Pristupi otkrivanju dezinformacija

Effectively combating disinformation necessitates a multifaceted approach employing fact-checking, source verification, and content analysis (Bakir and McStay, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook, 2017; Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang, and Liu, 2017).

In today's digital ecosystem, combating the pervasive issue of disinformation requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach that draws from a rich array of methodologies and tools. At the heart of this endeavor lies the meticulous process of fact-checking, wherein claims, statements, or news articles undergo rigorous scrutiny to determine their accuracy. This process involves an intricate dance of thorough research, cross-referencing with credible sources, and a persistent quest for verifiable evidence to debunk false or misleading information.

Simultaneously, the verification of sources emerges as a crucial pillar in the fight against misinformation. It is not just about assessing the information provided but delving deeper into the credibility, authenticity, and reliability of the sources themselves. This involves a holistic evaluation of their reputation, expertise, and historical trustworthiness. It is not merely taking information at face value; it is about understanding the background, context, and track record of the sources to ascertain the credibility of the information they provide.

Content analysis, using sophisticated linguistic and statistical techniques, plays an equally pivotal role. This method involves scrutinizing text, images, or videos to identify irregularities or patterns that might indicate the presence of disinformation. Linguistic analysis dives deep into the language used, detecting inconsistencies, biased language, or peculiar patterns that raise red flags. Statistical methods, on the other hand, employ data trends or anomalies to flag potentially misleading information.

While each of these approaches brings unique strengths to the table, they also exhibit limitations. Hence, a comprehensive strategy necessitates a fusion of these methodologies. The toolkit to counter disinformation encompasses an array of indispensable resources and cutting-edge tools. Fact-checking organizations, including renowned names such as Snopes (Snopes, n.d.) and PolitiFact (PolitiFact, n.d.), work tirelessly to debunk misinformation. Initiatives like the Duke Reporters' Lab (Duke Reporters' Lab, n.d.) stand at the forefront, advancing fact-checking methodologies through collaboration and innovation. The Duke Reporters' Lab is a notable initiative focused on fact-checking and journalism. It serves as a hub

for research, tools, and resources related to fact-checking in journalism. The Lab collaborates with various organizations and scholars to advance the understanding and practice of fact-checking in the media landscape.

It provides a comprehensive database of fact-checkers worldwide, offering insights into their methodologies, areas of focus, and the impact of their work. The Duke Reporters' Lab also develops innovative tools and technologies that aid journalists and the public in verifying claims, assessing the accuracy of news, and combating misinformation.

This initiative has contributed significantly to the field of journalism by promoting transparency, credibility, and accountability in reporting. Its database and resources serve as valuable assets for individuals, journalists, researchers, and organizations striving to uphold integrity and accuracy in the dissemination of information. The Duke Reporters' Lab plays a crucial role in enhancing media literacy and fostering a more informed public discourse by empowering individuals to critically evaluate news and information.

Reverse image search engines like Google Reverse Image Search and TinEye (TinEye, n.d.) emerge as essential allies, aiding in the verification of visual content. Meanwhile, social media analysis tools such as Hoaxy (Hoaxy, n.d.) provide insights into the dissemination of claims on platforms like Twitter, while Botometer (Botometer, n.d.) specializes in identifying automated accounts, crucial in detecting orchestrated misinformation campaigns.

In the realm of text analysis, Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques like sentiment analysis and topic modeling unravel layers of textual data, deciphering emotions, and prevalent themes within information. Network analysis visually maps relationships between various sources, offering a panoramic view of information flow and revealing potential attempts to manipulate or spread disinformation.

Empowering individuals, particularly students, in navigating this complex terrain involves leveraging an arsenal of resources. These include turning to reputable news outlets, consulting peer-reviewed journals for scientific claims, verifying government-related information through official channels like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or World Health Organization (WHO), and utilizing online libraries and encyclopedias for fact-checking and gathering background information.

However, it is not solely about access to resources; it is about cultivating critical thinking skills and media literacy. These skills enable individuals to evaluate sources based on author expertise and publication reputation, enabling them to make informed judgments about information accuracy. Additionally, engagement with community journalism, participation in fact-checking groups, and advocating for transparency from media outlets and social platforms form crucial aspects of this multifaceted approach.

Ultimately, effective mitigation of disinformation demands continual research, technological advancements, and an unwavering commitment to media literacy education. It is about fostering a society equipped with the tools and knowledge to discern fact from fiction, thereby cultivating an informed and discerning populace capable of challenging misinformation in all its forms.

Each approach has strengths and limitations. Fact-checking provides evidence-based debunking but can be time-consuming. Source verification offers insights into credibility but faces challenges in the digital era. Content analysis identifies patterns but may miss subtle disinformation cues (Ruokolainen, Widén, Eskola, 2023).

Challenges and Future Actions / Izazovi i buduće aktivnosti

The ever-evolving nature of digital platforms forms a foremost challenge, necessitating constant adaptation to combat diverse disinformation tactics. Moreover, a dearth of critical thinking skills hampers students' ability to appraise information sources judiciously. The rapid dissemination of misinformation compounds the challenge, demanding swift and effective debunking mechanisms.

Future research must delve into assessing the impact of diverse media literacy programs within academic settings. Understanding cognitive biases and their role in perpetuating misinformation is pivotal, urging the development of strategies to mitigate their influence. Exploring the impact of social media platforms in disseminating and countering misinformation among student cohorts is imperative. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the enduring effects of media literacy interventions on students' information evaluation acumen.

Pragmatic interventions are crucial in addressing these challenges. Regular workshops conducted within academic libraries can significantly enhance students' critical thinking and information evaluation skills. The development of curated online repositories and guides can aid students in discerning credible information sources amidst the influx of data. Collaboration with educators to embed media literacy within the curriculum ensures a comprehensive approach to combating misinformation. Creating engaging online modules or gamified platforms can immerse students in identifying and debunking spurious news and misinformation.

Conclusion / Zaključak

Disinformation campaigns, spanning diverse platforms and media, underscore the need for in-depth research to unveil their intricate networks, strategies, and orchestrators. Uncovering these nuances is pivotal for crafting comprehensive countermeasures that tackle the systemic nature of this pervasive issue.

Future research avenues might pivot towards leveraging AI-driven solutions—melding natural language processing, machine learning, and network analysis—to automate the debunking process. These innovative tools could swiftly discern disinformation patterns, trace their origins, and generate factual counter-narratives in real-time. Such advancements promise to significantly bolster the speed, scalability, and accuracy of debunking efforts in the battle against disinformation.

In summarizing, students' interaction with disinformation hinges on multifaceted factors, encompassing their aptitude for critical information evaluation, media literacy, and awareness of cognitive biases. Effective identification of disinformation aligns with the adoption of critical behaviors—such as skepticism and source verification—crucial in navigating today's information landscape. Yet, students

may encounter challenges in accurately gauging their own abilities, necessitating targeted support fostering objective self-assessment and metacognitive awareness.

The pivotal role of educational institutions, particularly university libraries, in addressing these challenges cannot be overstated. By championing critical thinking, media literacy, and reflective practices, libraries play a pivotal role in equipping students with the indispensable skills to combat disinformation and navigate the complex terrain of information.

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Otkrivanje i razotkrivanje dezinformacija: uloga sveučilišnih knjižnica u promicanju informacijske pismenosti

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Sažetak

Ovaj članak bavi se strategijama za otkrivanje i razotkrivanje dezinformacija, stavljajući poseban naglasak na jačanje informacijske pismenosti unutar sveučilišnih knjižnica. Istražuje porast dezinformacija u digitalnoj eri, njihov društveni utjecaj te nužnost osposobljavanja pojedinaca za snalaženje u suvremenom informacijskom okruženju. Rad navodi postojeće metodologije i alate za identificiranje dezinformacija, istražuje strategije njihova razotkrivanja te ističe ključnu ulogu sveučilišnih knjižnica u promicanju informacijske pismenosti. Također identificira izazove te predlaže smjernice za buduća istraživanja i praktične intervencije u ovom području.

Ključne riječi: promicanje informacijske pismenosti, sveučilišne knjižnice, svijest o dezinformacijama, provjera informacija, otkrivanje dezinformacija, strategije razotkrivanja.