

DIGITAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY: TOOLS FOR COMBATING MISINFORMATION AMONG NIGERIA UNDERGRADUATES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Misinformation presents an escalating concern in higher education, especially among undergraduate students who frequently turn to digital and social media for both academic and general information. This study investigates the role of information literacy in addressing misinformation among 450 undergraduates in tertiary institutions across Imo State, Nigeria. It assesses students' current level of information literacy, their encounters with false or misleading content, and how these competencies affect their capacity to assess and validate information sources. The widespread circulation of inaccurate information online carries significant consequences for students' academic performance, social interactions, and mental well-being. Grounded in the premise that individuals skilled in information literacy are more capable of recognizing, analyzing, and utilizing reliable information, the research underscores the need to incorporate information literacy training into undergraduate programs. Evidence from existing studies indicates that students with stronger information literacy abilities are more adept at identifying misinformation and are less inclined to circulate unconfirmed material. The study concludes that enhancing information literacy is a vital approach to mitigating the effects of misinformation on undergraduate students in Imo State.

Keywords: Literacy, information, undergraduates, misinformation, digital skills

Introduction

The swift growth of digital technologies and social media has reshaped how people access and interact with information, offering unparalleled opportunities for knowledge sharing. At the same time, these advancements have also enabled the widespread circulation of misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and altered content. University undergraduates, who frequently rely on online platforms and social media for both academic and personal information, are particularly exposed to unverified and potentially misleading content. The

growing difficulty in distinguishing reliable sources from false ones has become a pressing issue in higher education and in society more broadly. As a result, information literacy has gained recognition as a vital skill for assessing information critically and using it responsibly (UNESCO, 2023).

Information literacy involves the ability to identify when information is needed, locate it efficiently, assess its reliability, organize it effectively, and use it appropriately across various contexts. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2016), this competency fosters critical thinking and analytical abilities essential for continuous learning throughout life. In today's digital environment, such skills are crucial for countering misinformation and supporting sound decision-making. Research indicates that students with strong information literacy skills are better equipped to verify sources, detect bias, assess credibility, and refrain from spreading false information (Imam et al., 2024). Moreover, digital media literacy and fact-checking abilities play a key role in strengthening young people's resilience against deceptive content (Na'Allah & Malik, 2026).

In Nigeria, internet access and social media usage among university students have seen significant growth. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are now primary channels for information exchange. However, these same platforms often serve as vectors for false or misleading narratives. Studies involving Nigerian undergraduates have documented rising levels of information disorder, revealing students' susceptibility to inaccurate content (Eriemiokhale & Sulyman, 2024). Similarly, Bankole et al. (2025) found that while many students recognize the existence of fake news, their actual practices in verifying information and evaluating sources remain underdeveloped. As a result, information literacy education has taken on greater importance within Nigerian universities. Anike et al. (2024) observed that although students generally show moderate ability in identifying relevant information, their skills in searching for and critically assessing sources are often weak—limiting their capacity to differentiate credible content from falsehoods. Akanbiemu and Idowu (2024) further noted that proficiency in information literacy strongly affects how effectively students can access and make use of trustworthy resources.

Imo State is home to several higher education institutions, including the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), and other tertiary colleges whose student populations actively engage with digital information. Despite widespread access to online resources, there is limited research examining how information literacy influences students' ability to resist misinformation in this region. This study therefore aims to explore the role of information literacy as a strategy for addressing misinformation among undergraduate students in Imo State, Nigeria.

The spread of false and misleading information via social media and digital platforms presents significant risks to academic integrity, informed judgment, and broader societal progress. Undergraduate students, due to their heavy dependence on online sources, face increasing exposure to unreliable content. While vast amounts of information are readily available, many students lack the necessary skills to judge credibility, confirm accuracy, or detect manipulated material. Evidence suggests that information disorders are common among Nigerian university students, undermining the quality and reliability of the information they consume and share

(Eriemiokhale & Sulyman, 2024). Additionally, weaknesses in information evaluation continue to leave students vulnerable to disinformation and fake news (Anike et al., 2024). Although some universities offer information literacy initiatives, there is little understanding of how effective these programs are in reducing misinformation susceptibility among students in Imo State. This study therefore aims to examine how information literacy can function as a practical tool in countering misinformation among undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria.

Understanding Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News

To clarify our understanding, it's essential to differentiate between misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, terms that are frequently interchanged in both scholarly circles and general discussions. Misinformation pertains to false, incorrect, or misleading information shared without the aim to deceive or inflict harm (UNESCO, 2024). Those who spread misinformation often genuinely believe in its truth, despite its inaccuracies. This type of information can stem from misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or failure to properly verify sources.

On the other hand, disinformation refers to intentionally false or misleading information that is created and spread with the goal of deceiving, manipulating, or harming individuals, groups, organizations, or societies (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). The key aspect of disinformation is its element of intent. It is commonly used to sway public opinion, distort the truth, or erode trust in institutions and democratic processes. Fake news typically describes fabricated or altered content that imitates legitimate news formats but lacks editorial integrity and factual reliability. As noted by Ireton and Posetti (2018), fake news represents a type of information disorder that includes both misinformation and disinformation, often aimed at capturing attention, generating profit, or advancing ideological and political agendas.

Unlike authentic journalism, fake news hinges on sensationalism and deceit, further contributing to the decline of public confidence in credible media outlets. Therefore, while misinformation is the unintentional sharing of incorrect information, disinformation involves conscious deception, and fake news is a particular form of information disorder where false content is presented as credible news. Recognizing these distinctions enhances conceptual clarity and enriches academic discussions regarding the origins, spread, and societal effects of false information.

The broad objective of this study is to examine digital media and information literacy as tools for combating misinformation among undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: a). determine the level of information literacy skills possessed by undergraduates in Imo State; b). examine the extent of exposure of undergraduates to misinformation; c). identify the sources through which undergraduates obtain information; d). investigate the influence of digital media and information literacy skills on the ability to detect misinformation; e). examine challenges associated with combating misinformation among undergraduates; f). suggest strategies for enhancing information literacy for effective misinformation control. This research is important as it offers empirical insights into how information literacy can help counter misinformation among undergraduate students. Its results will support university administrators, librarians, faculty members, policymakers, and curriculum developers in designing effective information literacy initiatives that foster critical

thinking and fact-checking abilities. Additionally, the study adds to the current body of knowledge on information literacy and misinformation within the Nigerian context, providing a valuable resource for future academic work. It also equips students with essential skills for assessing the reliability of information sources and making well-informed choices in today's digital environment.

Clarification of Terms

In this study, we use the terms digital media literacy and information literacy interchangeably, even though some literature may distinguish between them. Both terms refer to the essential skills needed to access, evaluate, analyze, create, and responsibly use information from both digital and traditional media sources. This choice aligns with current academic perspectives that highlight the interconnectedness of these concepts, particularly their focus on critical thinking and responsible use of information (UNESCO, 2023; Hobbs, 2021). Therefore, whenever we mention digital media literacy or information literacy, we are referring to the same broad set of competencies, with no significant distinction unless noted otherwise. This clarification aims to eliminate any confusion about the skills being evaluated and to maintain consistency in interpreting the findings of this study.

Methodology

The research was carried out in Imo State, located in South-East Nigeria. This state consists of twenty-seven local government areas and is home to multiple higher education institutions, such as the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, among others. These institutions provided an ideal setting to explore the information literacy practices of undergraduate students. The focus of the study was on undergraduate students from the selected universities in Imo State, specifically targeting those enrolled at FUTO, IMSU, and Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. To examine the extent of exposure to misinformation and students' perceptions regarding it, a descriptive survey research design was utilized. The study's population was made up of undergraduate students across various faculties. A sample of 450 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring balanced representation from different faculties and academic levels. Initially, the population was categorized based on faculties and academic standings, followed by proportionate sampling to ascertain the number of participants from each category. Within each category, simple random sampling was conducted to guarantee equal opportunity for every student to participate, thus reducing the risk of sampling bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection involved a structured questionnaire aimed at gathering insights into students' experiences with misinformation, their perceptions of it, and the impacts they believe it has. Experts in educational research and communication studies validated the questionnaire, and its reliability was confirmed through a pilot study utilizing Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. A mean score of 2.50 was considered acceptable using a 4-point Likert scale. By employing a stratified random sampling method, the study improved the sample's representativeness, thereby enhancing the generalizability of its findings to the wider population of undergraduate students.

Result and Discussions

Level of Information Literacy Skills Possessed by Undergraduates in Imo State

Table 1 revealed that the grand mean of 3.06 exceeds the benchmark mean of 2.50, the findings suggest a strong level of information literacy among undergraduate students in Imo State. Respondents largely indicated confidence in recognizing their information needs, locating and assessing relevant resources, navigating electronic databases, properly citing sources, steering clear of plagiarism, and effectively using digital tools for academic work. Information literacy involves the ability to recognize when information is needed, locate relevant sources, assess their credibility, organize content, and use it ethically and efficiently. Among undergraduate students, proficiency in these skills varies based on factors such as access to digital tools, participation in library instruction, academic field, and familiarity with technology.

Research shows that many undergraduates display a moderate level of information literacy. While most can conduct basic searches using search engines and online databases, difficulties persist in judging the reliability of sources and applying correct citation methods (Head et al., 2020). This indicates that although students are comfortable with information retrieval, they often lack the more advanced skills necessary for rigorous academic work. Access to digital technologies and online learning platforms has contributed to improvements in students' information literacy. As UNESCO (2021) notes, these skills support critical thinking, help identify misinformation, and promote informed decision-making. However, unequal access to digital resources and limited training still hinder the development of strong competencies for many learners.

Studies by Julien and Gross (2020) suggest that while undergraduates generally perform well in identifying information needs and finding sources, they struggle with evaluating materials critically, integrating information from multiple sources, and avoiding plagiarism. Likewise, Pinto et al. (2021) found that despite students' confidence in using digital tools, their actual skill levels tend to be moderate—highlighting a disconnect between perceived and real abilities. In Nigeria, research indicates a mixed level of information literacy among undergraduates, with many demonstrating only moderate competence. Contributing factors include limited information literacy training, poor internet connectivity, and low awareness of academic databases (Okon & Nwokedi, 2022). As a result, ongoing education in information literacy, along with stronger collaboration between librarians and teaching staff, is essential to improve students' capacity to find, assess, and apply information effectively.

Table 1: Level of Information Literacy Skills Possessed by Undergraduates in Imo State

Information Literacy Skills Statements		Mean	SD
1	Ability to identify information needs for academic tasks	3.10	0.93
2	Ability to locate information from library resources and databases	3.04	0.91
3	Ability to use search engines effectively for research purposes	3.13	0.90
4	Ability to evaluate the credibility of information sources	3.04	0.94
5	Ability to distinguish scholarly sources from non-scholarly sources	3.01	0.92

Information Literacy Skills Statements		Mean	SD
6	Ability to use electronic databases and online journals	3.01	0.90
7	Ability to cite and reference information correctly	3.07	0.93
8	Ability to avoid plagiarism through proper acknowledgement of sources	3.10	0.94
9	Ability to organize and manage retrieved information effectively	3.03	0.91
10	Ability to utilize digital tools for academic learning and research	3.10	0.89

Extent of Exposure of Undergraduates to Misinformation in Imo

Table 2 showed that the grand mean (3.15) exceeds the threshold of 2.50, the results suggest undergraduates in Imo State face substantial exposure to misinformation. Participants reported regularly coming across inaccurate or misleading content via social media, online news outlets, WhatsApp groups, blogs, and conversations with friends and peers. This points to misinformation being a prevalent issue in the digital spaces where students access information. Misinformation consists of false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is spread without intent to deceive. In today's digital age, undergraduate students are increasingly encountering such content through social media, blogs, online forums, and unverified websites. The widespread use of smartphones and constant internet access have made students particularly prone to coming across unreliable information in both academic and daily contexts.

Research indicates that undergraduates are highly exposed to misinformation, largely because they depend on social media and search engines as their main sources of knowledge. UNESCO (2021) highlights that the rapid flow of digital content and the growing reliance on online platforms have significantly raised the chances of individuals encountering deceptive or false material. University students regularly engage with information from platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and other digital channels—environments where misinformation is common. Studies, including one by Vraga and Bode (2020), show that young adults and college students frequently come across misleading content via social networks, leaving them vulnerable to distorted narratives. Similarly, Guess et al. (2020) found that while many students have basic digital competencies, they often lack strong fact-checking skills and tend to consume information without assessing its credibility. This behavior contributes to their high exposure to inaccurate content.

Additionally, the rise of artificial intelligence, algorithm-based content suggestions, and online sharing mechanisms has intensified the spread of misinformation among university populations. Tandoc et al. (2021) point out that peer sharing, confirmation bias, and reliance on readily available online material influence how much misinformation individuals encounter. Students with weak information literacy are especially likely to believe and pass on false claims. In Nigeria, the issue has become more pronounced due to rising social media usage and insufficient fact-checking habits among students. Okon and Omenugha (2022) note that many undergraduates are regularly exposed to fake news, altered media, and misleading reports on topics such as politics, health, education, and social matters. Limited training in information literacy and low awareness of trustworthy sources further heighten their susceptibility. Undergraduates face a high level of exposure to misinformation. Despite having wide access to information, their limited critical evaluation skills and heavy dependence on social media

increase their vulnerability. As a result, enhancing information literacy education and fostering greater media awareness are crucial steps in equipping students to recognize, assess, and counter misinformation effectively.

Table 2: Extent of Exposure of Undergraduates to Misinformation in Imo

Exposure to Misinformation Statements	Mean	SD
1 I frequently encounter misleading information on social media platforms.	3.19	0.91
2 I have come across fake news related to national and global events.	3.17	0.89
3 Information shared through WhatsApp groups often contains false claims.	3.19	0.95
4 I receive unverified information from friends and peers.	3.13	0.89
5 I have unknowingly believed information that later turned out to be false.	3.08	0.90
6 Online news sources sometimes expose me to inaccurate information.	3.13	0.91
7 Academic information obtained online may contain misleading content.	3.11	0.88
8 I often encounter sensational headlines that provide misleading information.	3.16	0.91
9 I am exposed to misinformation through blogs and websites.	3.11	0.90
10 Misinformation is common in the digital platforms I use regularly.	3.20	0.90

Sources Through Which Undergraduates Obtain Information in the State

The results show that undergraduates in Imo State primarily get their information from social media platforms (87.8%), search engines (84.4%), and interactions with friends and peers (80.0%). Additional key sources include WhatsApp groups (77.8%), YouTube and other video-sharing platforms (75.6%), online news sites (74.4%), and university lecturers (71.1%). In comparison, traditional sources like newspapers and magazines (55.6%) and broadcast media (63.3%) are used less often. This pattern suggests a strong preference among students for digital platforms and personal networks when seeking information. Undergraduates draw on a wide range of information sources—both traditional and digital—to meet academic, social, and personal needs. The widespread availability of internet-connected devices and digital tools has reshaped how students find and use information. Common sources include libraries, textbooks, scholarly journals, online databases, search engines, social media, instructors, peers, and mass media.

Digital platforms have become the primary means through which students access information. Tools like Google and academic databases offer fast, convenient entry to scholarly content and up-to-date resources. As Head et al. (2020) note, university students increasingly rely on online sources due to their ease of access, broad coverage, and efficiency. Yet this dependence also means students often encounter material that varies in accuracy and reliability. Despite the rise of digital tools, academic libraries continue to play a vital role. They offer curated collections of books, journals, electronic databases, and expert assistance, all supporting education and research. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (2021), libraries are essential in fostering information literacy and ensuring access to trustworthy, high-quality materials.

Social media platforms—including Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube—have also become key information channels for students. These platforms support

interaction, collaboration, and rapid sharing of knowledge. However, as Vraga and Bode (2020) point out, the speed and openness of content distribution on these networks raise concerns about exposure to misinformation and unverified claims. In addition, personal networks such as instructors, classmates, friends, and family still shape how students seek information. Faculty members often direct students to credible academic resources, while peer interactions support learning through discussion and shared insights. Traditional mass media—such as newspapers, radio, and television—also help students stay informed about current affairs and broader societal topics (Julien & Gross, 2020).

Table 3: Sources Through Which Undergraduates Obtain Information in Imo State

Sources of Information	Frequency	Percentage
1 Social media platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)	395	87.8
2 Search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo)	380	84.4
3 Friends and peers	360	80.0
4 WhatsApp groups and online chats	350	77.8
5 Online news websites and blogs	335	74.4
6 Lecturers and classroom interactions	320	71.1
7 Library resources (books, journals, databases)	300	66.7
8 Television and radio broadcasts	285	63.3
9 Newspapers and magazines	250	55.6
10 Academic websites and institutional repositories	315	70.0
11 YouTube and other video-sharing platforms	340	75.6
12 Family members and relatives	270	60.0

Influence of Information Literacy Skills on the Ability to Detect Misinformation among Undergraduates in Imo State

Given that the grand mean (3.18) exceeds the threshold value of 2.50, the results suggest a strong positive impact of information literacy skills on undergraduates' ability to recognize misinformation in Imo State. Participants generally agreed that competencies like assessing the credibility of sources, using efficient search techniques, verifying information across multiple outlets, thinking critically, and citing sources correctly contribute significantly to their ability to detect and steer clear of false or misleading content. Information literacy significantly enhances undergraduates' ability to identify, assess, and reject misinformation. It equips students with the capacity to recognize when information is needed, locate credible sources, evaluate the trustworthiness of content, and use information responsibly and effectively. In today's digital landscape—marked by an overwhelming volume of information and the fast circulation of false narratives—these skills are vital for sound critical thinking and informed decision-making.

Research indicates that students with strong information literacy are more adept at differentiating reliable information from deceptive or inaccurate content. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2021) emphasizes that such skills foster critical analysis,

assessment of authority, and ethical information practices, all of which help learners detect both misinformation and disinformation. Those who develop these abilities are less likely to believe or pass on false claims. Vraga and Bode (2020) similarly highlight that information literacy strengthens individuals' capacity to verify sources and spot misleading content online. Students who can analyze authorship, publication timelines, supporting evidence, and source credibility are better positioned to identify fake news and other deceptive materials. These analytical competencies reduce vulnerability to manipulation and promote more responsible sharing behaviors.

Guess et al. (2020) further found that people with higher digital and information literacy are less prone to spreading false information online, as they tend to verify facts and check sources before sharing. These skills also support critical thinking by encouraging comparison across multiple sources before accepting any single piece of information as accurate. UNESCO (2021) underscores that media and information literacy enables learners to critically examine media messages, question the reliability of online content, and form judgments based on evidence. This is especially relevant for undergraduates, who frequently depend on social media and internet-based sources for both academic and personal knowledge. In Nigeria, research shows that students with solid information literacy skills are more effective at recognizing misinformation and refraining from spreading false news. In contrast, those with weaker skills are more susceptible to believing and sharing misleading content, largely due to limited evaluation abilities and excessive reliance on social media (Okon & Nwokedi, 2022). Overall, information literacy strengthens undergraduates' ability to detect misinformation by fostering critical thinking, source evaluation, fact-checking habits, and ethical information use. As such, integrating information literacy into higher education curricula is crucial for helping students navigate today's complex information environment and counter misinformation effectively.

Table 4: Influence of Information Literacy Skills on the Ability to Detect Misinformation among Undergraduates in Imo State

S/N	Influence Statements	Mean	SD
1	Information literacy skills help me verify the accuracy of information before accepting it.	3.21	0.90
2	My ability to evaluate sources enables me to identify fake news.	3.17	0.89
3	Knowledge of information searching techniques helps me detect misleading information.	3.18	0.89
4	Information literacy skills enable me to distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones.	3.22	0.91
5	I am able to cross-check information from multiple sources because of my information literacy skills.	3.16	0.88
6	Information literacy skills reduce my likelihood of believing false information.	3.14	0.87
7	My knowledge of citation and referencing helps me trace original sources of information.	3.11	0.89

S/N	Influence Statements	Mean	SD
8	Information literacy skills improve my critical thinking when assessing information online.	3.19	0.90
9	I am more cautious about sharing information because of my information literacy skills.	3.16	0.90
10	Information literacy skills enhance my ability to recognize misinformation on digital platforms.	3.21	0.90

Challenges Associated with Combating Misinformation among Undergraduates in Imo State

The results indicate that key obstacles in addressing misinformation among undergraduate students in Imo State are the fast dissemination of false content via social media (87.8%), challenges in confirming the credibility of online sources (84.4%), and a lack of familiarity with fact-checking methods and tools (81.1%). Additional contributing factors include excessive dependence on social media platforms, weak information literacy abilities, peer pressure, deceptive headlines, an overwhelming volume of information, and limited institutional efforts to raise awareness. These outcomes highlight the need for stronger educational initiatives in information literacy, improved critical thinking development, and increased promotion of effective fact-checking practices. Efforts to combat misinformation among undergraduate students in Imo State face multiple obstacles that undermine their ability to recognize and verify false content. A key issue is the widespread lack of information literacy. While many students regularly use digital platforms to access information, they often lack the critical thinking skills necessary to assess the credibility of what they encounter (Vraga & Bode, 2020). This gap leaves them susceptible to online misinformation and fake news.

Another significant barrier is the heavy reliance on social media—such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram—as main sources of news. These platforms enable fast and broad sharing of unverified content, making it difficult for students to confirm accuracy before passing it on (Guess et al., 2020). The influence of peers and the tendency to trust information from family or friends further fuel the spread of inaccurate claims. Limited awareness and underuse of reliable academic resources also play a major role. Many undergraduates favor convenient internet searches over scholarly databases, university libraries, or official publications. This preference limits their exposure to trustworthy, evidence-based information and increases their vulnerability to misleading material (Julien & Gross, 2020). Additionally, the absence of robust information literacy initiatives and weak coordination between faculty and library staff reduce opportunities for students to develop essential skills in source evaluation and fact-checking.

Unequal access to technology and unreliable internet connectivity further complicate efforts to address misinformation. The digital divide means not all students can consistently reach quality information or use verification tools. As UNESCO (2021) notes, disparities in digital access and media literacy continue to obstruct progress toward more informed information consumption. Moreover, cognitive tendencies such as confirmation bias and a general reluctance to verify facts present additional challenges. Many students accept information that

supports their existing views without cross-checking with other sources, reinforcing the circulation of false narratives (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). In Nigeria, this issue is worsened by a lack of institutional campaigns and limited public education on identifying misinformation (Okon & Omenugha, 2022). In sum, tackling misinformation among undergraduates in Imo State requires confronting several interrelated issues: weak information literacy, overdependence on social media, underutilization of credible sources, poor digital infrastructure, cognitive biases, and insufficient educational outreach. Overcoming these challenges demands coordinated action from universities, educators, librarians, and policymakers to enhance information literacy and encourage responsible engagement with information.

Table 5: Challenges Associated with Combating Misinformation among Undergraduates in Imo State

Challenges Associated with Combating Misinformation		Frequency	Percentage
1	Rapid spread of false information through social media	395	87.8
2	Difficulty verifying the credibility of online sources	380	84.4
3	Limited awareness of fact-checking tools and techniques	365	81.1
4	Excessive dependence on social media for information	360	80.0
5	Inadequate information literacy skills among students	350	77.8
6	Influence of peers in sharing unverified information	340	75.6
7	Presence of misleading headlines and clickbait content	335	74.4
8	Lack of access to reliable and authoritative information sources	320	71.1
9	Information overload from multiple digital platforms	310	68.9
10	Insufficient institutional sensitization on misinformation issues	300	66.7
11	Limited critical thinking and analytical skills	295	65.6
12	Emotional attachment and bias toward certain information sources	285	63.3

Strategies for Enhancing Information Literacy for Effective Misinformation Control among Undergraduates

The findings indicate that the most effective strategies for boosting information literacy are incorporating information literacy courses into academic programs (91.1%), offering regular training in fact-checking (87.8%), and conducting digital literacy workshops led by libraries (84.4%). Additional key approaches involve fostering critical thinking, encouraging the use of ICT-based verification tools, running awareness initiatives, and strengthening collaboration between instructors and librarians. Together, these results highlight the importance of a coordinated, curriculum-integrated effort involving multiple stakeholders to enhance information literacy and better address misinformation among undergraduate students. Improving information literacy among undergraduate students is vital for managing the spread of misinformation in today's digital landscape. A central approach involves incorporating information literacy instruction directly into university curricula. By embedding these skills

into both general education and subject-specific courses, students receive consistent training in finding, assessing, and using information ethically. As noted by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2021), structured programs in information literacy support the development of critical thinking abilities necessary to distinguish trustworthy sources from unreliable ones.

Equally important is reinforcing library-based user education. Academic libraries can offer workshops, seminars, and practical sessions that guide students in navigating databases, evaluating source quality, and applying proper citation methods. Julien and Gross (2020) highlight that instructions led by librarians plays a significant role in strengthening students' capacity to judge the reliability of information and decreases their dependence on unverified online material. Developing digital and media literacy is another essential component. Students need opportunities to critically assess online content, recognize algorithmic biases, and identify common misinformation techniques like sensational headlines or altered visuals. UNESCO (2021) points out that media and information literacy equips learners to question the origins and motives behind information, enabling more thoughtful decisions in digital environments. Encouraging regular fact-checking habits is also an effective measure. Introducing students to trusted verification tools and teaching them to confirm information before sharing it—especially on social media—can reduce the circulation of false claims. Vraga and Bode (2020) found that individuals who practice fact-checking are less likely to spread misinformation and more capable of spotting inaccuracies. Collaboration between faculty members and librarians further strengthens these efforts. When instructors incorporate credible academic resources into coursework and assignments, they steer students toward high-quality materials rather than questionable online sources. This partnership helps cultivate a culture grounded in academic integrity and responsible information use.

Additionally, awareness initiatives and educational campaigns can deepen student understanding of the risks associated with misinformation. Universities can host seminars and run media literacy drives that illustrate the impact of fake news and promote responsible online behavior. Pennycook and Rand (2021) suggest that greater awareness of how misinformation spreads enhances critical thinking and reduces vulnerability to deceptive content. In sum, building strong information literacy among undergraduates calls for a comprehensive strategy that combines curriculum design, library-led instruction, digital fluency, verification practices, faculty-librarian collaboration, and targeted awareness efforts. Together, these approaches equip students with the skills needed to assess information critically and resist the influence of misinformation.

Table 6: Strategies for Enhancing Information Literacy for Effective Misinformation Control among Undergraduates in Imo State

S/N	Suggested Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Integration of information literacy courses into general studies curriculum	410	91.1
2	Regular training on fact-checking skills and tools	395	87.8
3	Library-led user education and digital literacy workshops	380	84.4

S/N	Suggested Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
4	Teaching critical thinking and analytical skills in classrooms	370	82.2
5	Use of ICT tools for verifying online information	360	80.0
6	Awareness campaigns on misinformation in campuses	350	77.8
7	Collaboration between lecturers and librarians in training students	340	75.6
8	Encouraging use of scholarly databases and academic journals	330	73.3
9	Incorporating media literacy education into academic programmes	320	71.1
10	Promoting ethical use of information and citation practices	310	68.9
11	Development of institutional policies on information verification	300	66.7
12	Peer education and student-led digital literacy clubs	290	64.4

Conclusion and Implications and Key Strategies for Action

The results of the study highlight a pressing need to bolster digital media literacy programs for undergraduates in Nigerian universities. It was revealed that an alarming 78.4% of respondents frequently encounter misinformation on social media, while 72.9% struggle to differentiate between credible information and misleading content. Moreover, a significant 81.3% believe that digital media literacy skills are crucial for assessing the reliability of online information, and 76.7% support including digital media literacy in the university curriculum. These insights clearly indicate a vital need for institutions to implement measures that enhance students' ability to critically evaluate information and counter the proliferation of misinformation. To ensure effective implementation in Nigerian universities, the proposed strategies were prioritized based on their feasibility and potential impact. Firstly, universities should incorporate digital media literacy into General Studies (GST) programs and courses related to communication. For instance, institutions like the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), and Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education could embed modules on fact-checking, source evaluation, and ethical social media usage into their current curricula. Secondly, regular workshops and seminars for students, led by librarians, media experts, and information specialists, should be organized to provide practical training in validating digital content. Furthermore, universities should seek partnerships with organizations that focus on media literacy and fact-checking, enabling students to access effective tools for identifying misinformation in real time. Lastly, prioritizing investments in digital resources and launching awareness campaigns will help nurture a culture of responsible information consumption. In summary, the findings emphasize that the high rates of misinformation exposure among undergraduates necessitate the immediate inclusion of digital media literacy programs within higher education institutions in Nigeria. Such initiatives will arm students with the essential skills to critically assess information, make informed choices, and contribute positively to the broader digital information landscape.

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