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YAP J. M.

Eotvos Lorand University (Budapest, Hungary), University of Perpetual Help System (Laguna, Philippines), West Visayas State University (Iloilo, Philippines),
e-mail: jomyap@student.elte.hu, ORCID 0000-0002-7852-1047

HAJDU BARAT A.

Eotvos Lorand University (Budapest, Hungary), e-mail: hajdu.agnes@btk.elte.hu, ORCID 0000-0002-6774-5440

KISZL P.

Eotvos Lorand University (Budapest, Hungary), e-mail: kizsl.peter@btk.elte.hu,
ORCID 0000-0003-2992-295X

Librarians' Civic Roles and Responsibilities: Issues in Information Crises and Information Disorders

Objective. Public libraries can be powerful advocates for civic engagement. They have a responsibility to rekindle civil society and educate and inform the public. Libraries must expand their role beyond physical and virtual space to promote civic practices in fighting fake news. Libraries can use their influence to help students and librarians identify misinformation and caution others against sharing it. This paper aims to introduce how librarians can activate their civic roles and define information disorders. **Methods.** Public librarians were interviewed using discourse analysis to identify the profession's information challenges and understand their civic roles. **Results.** Public librarians identified a variety of ways to perform their civic roles, and several constructs emerged in the definition of information disorders. **Conclusions.** This pilot study offers a glimpse into how public librarians interact with information and filter misinformation circulating on social media. Civic librarianship is evident, but librarians face professional challenges. Although this study focuses on public librarians, the authors believe that many aspects can be accustomed by all types of librarians.

Keywords: civic engagement; information disorders; information crisis; public librarians; discourse analysis

Introduction

Information is essential to all of us. We start our day by checking our schedules, which are a form of information that helps us plan our day productively. As we consume information on a regular basis, we are exposed to different types of information, some of which may be credible and accurate while others may not. The information we encounter daily can be challenging in a number of ways. We are now in the era of information crises, where facts and opinions intertwine. We acknowledge the concept of infodiversity, which enables the convergence of multiple and complex information (Morales Campos, 2006; Yap, Barat, & Kizsl, 2023b), as well as the impending harmful effects of information disorders that deceive consumers (Wardle & Derakshan, 2018; Yap, Barat, & Kizsl, 2023a).

Public libraries can be powerful advocates of civic engagement. They have a responsibility to rekindle civil society and educate and inform the public. Libraries must expand their role beyond physical and virtual space to promote civic practices in fighting fake news, as highlighted by Coward C., McClay C., and Garrido M. (2018). Public libraries can use their influence to help their community identify misinformation and caution others against sharing it. By definition, civic engagement is the idea by which a set of knowledge, skills, values, motivation, and actions are developed to create change and make a better society (Singh, 2020; Coward et al., 2018; Ehrlich,

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2000). This paper aims to introduce how public librarians create change in the community and their understanding of information crises and information disorders.

Information Crises in Libraries

Rumors online can easily trigger crises. In the business sector, it can cause significant financial costs, both direct and indirect (Jin & Austin, 2017). Information crises are events that disrupt the flow of information and can have a negative impact on individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Information crises in libraries can be caused by natural disasters, cyberattacks, censorship, and misinformation campaigns.

Natural disasters such as floods, fires, and earthquakes can damage or destroy library collections and infrastructure, making it impossible for people to access the information and resources they need. Access to public libraries during emergency response is vital (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021). Cyberattacks such as ransomware attacks and data breaches can disrupt library services and compromise patron privacy, eroding trust in libraries. In the case of the University of Vermont Medical Center Library, they lost online access (Stokes, 2022). Censorship and other forms of government interference with the free flow of information can limit people's access to information and prevent libraries from fulfilling their role as bastions of knowledge and democracy. Censorship is a complex issue that affects all aspects of information, including access, policy, literacy, and politics. Policy and political decisions can lead to restrictions on access to information and literacy (Jaeger et al., 2023). Misinformation and disinformation campaigns can sow discord and undermine trust in libraries, making it difficult for libraries to serve their communities. Collectively known as information disorders, they are complex and deliberately crafted messages that aim to deceive the receiver of information or undermine the legitimacy of information in order to manipulate democratic societies (Yap, Barat, & Kiszl, 2023a).

Statement of the Problem

Kranich (2012) believes that public libraries have the potential to fully utilize their civic role by strengthening democratic movements. Looking at the current landscape in the context of Philippine public librarianship, do public libraries play an active role in citizenship by supporting democratic movements and helping to build a mature and informed civil society? The following research questions are asked:

- How do librarians activate their civic roles in facing information disorders?

In essence, the question is asking how librarians can be proactive in combating misinformation, disinformation, and information disorders as part of their broader civic engagement and responsibilities. This might involve activities that address these issues.

- How do Filipino librarians define or construct the information disorder phenomenon?

In summary, the question seeks insights into how librarians in the Philippines perceive and make sense of the concept of information disorder, which is crucial for understanding their role in addressing information-related challenges in their society and in their professional practice. Their definitions or constructs may help inform strategies and initiatives aimed at combating information disorders in the Filipino context.

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Civic Librarianship

The enormous challenge that librarians are facing is identifying accurate information. The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) in information delivery necessitates that librarians rapidly acquire knowledge of AI and its potential negative impacts. The dissemination of inaccurate information, regardless of intent, has negative consequences. Engaging with incorrect information can harm others who read the shared posts.

Information disorders, a collective term for inaccurate or misleading information that can harm democratic nations or societies, or harass individuals through hate speech, rumors, and unverified information, are characterized by three common problems: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.

The following definitions of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are adapted from Cooper (2021, p. 11):

- **Misinformation:** False information shared without the intent to deceive. Misinformation can also refer to an abundance of information that overwhelms users, making it difficult to discern the essence of the topic.
- **Disinformation:** False information shared knowingly with the intent to deceive.
- **Malinformation:** Verifiable information shared with the intent to cause harm.

Democratic nations thrive when citizens are actively engaged in the decision-making and public policy process. Libraries, which play a vital role in educating and informing society, have a responsibility to rekindle civic engagement and expand their role beyond physical and virtual spaces. Kranich (2012) identified the following civic initiatives that libraries can use to engage their citizens:

Category	Description
Library as Civic Space	Libraries provide safe and impartial spaces where citizens can seek help with personal and community challenges.
Library as Enabler of Civic Literacy	Civic literacy programs help citizens become savvy information seekers and effective content creators and producers.
Library as Public Forum and Conversation Catalyst	Libraries host programs that help users develop a deeper understanding of others' perspectives, connect citizens from all walks of life, and develop actionable solutions that reflect the collective wisdom of the community.
Library as Civic Information Center	Libraries provide access to e-government services and facilitate their use. They also offer a variety of local databases and websites on essential community services.

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The Library as Community-Wide Reading Club	Libraries promote reading by elevating it from a private activity to a public forum, where citizens from diverse backgrounds can discover or build common ground.
Library as Partner in Public Service	Partnering with educational institutions on collaborative projects to improve services for participating communities.
Library as Service Learning Center	Combining meaningful public service with curriculum- or program-based learning, service learning fosters civic responsibility.

While public libraries have the potential to be strong advocates of civic engagement, they also face a number of challenges.

- Librarians must develop the civic skills necessary to fulfill their civic duties and responsibilities. This includes incorporating civic engagement into the library and information science curriculum to prepare the next generation of librarians with these essential competencies.
- Librarians must be trained to understand and fulfill their civic roles. Some librarians may be uncomfortable with library work outside of its traditional scope.
- While libraries may appear neutral in some aspects of collection development, they should continue to provide outreach and advocacy. Libraries cannot remain neutral when members of the community are oppressed or prejudiced. Libraries should stand up for what is right and just, and librarians should not remain silent when matters of public welfare are at stake.
- Libraries are dynamic organizations that play a vital role in civic engagement. As role models, libraries can ignite activism among community members and promote social change.
- Libraries need to hire staff with the skills and knowledge to use technology and social media ethically. Not everyone is qualified to post online, and posts must align with the library's values.
- Difficulty measuring success. Effective marketing strategies and targeting the right audience are essential for program success.

Thus, the article aims to present how librarians can activate their civic role and detect information breaches.

Methods

This study explores the novel phenomenon of information disorders circulating in social media as experienced by Filipino librarians and its relationship to their professional identities. Using discourse analysis, the research elucidates the meanings and implications of librarians' attempts to assert their professional identities and civic responsibilities in the face of misinformation and disinformation.

Discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary method embraced in LIS because it allows researchers to analyze the "serious speech acts" of community experts in context to distinguish truth from falsity (Frohmann, 1994). Several studies in library and information science (LIS) have used discourse analysis, including Budd's (2006) work on applied discourse analysis. This type of analysis focuses on both the content of what is spoken and the way it is expressed, including the specific words and phrases used. Conversations in LIS practice, such as reference interviews, provide opportunities for discourse analysis.

Five public librarians from a multi-awarded public library in the Philippines were selected for a pilot study. The head librarian chose the participants, and the interview was conducted online. The interview questions were in English, but the respondents could reply in Filipino (Tagalog). The transcripts were translated into English and uploaded to Nvivo 1.7.1 for qualitative data analysis. The English translations are based on the transcriber-researcher's understanding of the Filipino (Tagalog) responses. All samples were anonymized, and the respondents agreed to have their voice recordings transcribed.

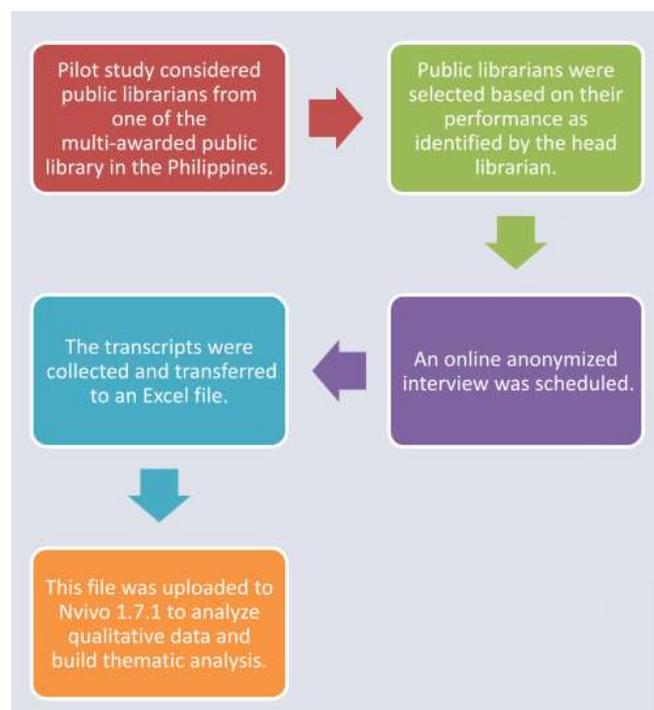


Fig.1. Data Collection Flow

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Results and Discussions

Table 1 summarizes the data of the respondents. The age range is between 25 - 55 with three females and two males. Two finished a master’s degree in LIS. Only one librarian has less than five years of experience and the rest have five or more.

Table 1

Profile of Respondents

ID	Age	Sex	Degree	Number of years in public library	When did you start your profession as librarian?
1	45	f	MLIS	10	2001
2	33	m	BLIS	4	2013
3	25	f	BLIS	5	
4	55	f	BLS	7	2000
5	47	m	MLIS	6	2000

Figure 2 visualizes the emerging themes from the interviews with public librarians. The data shows nine themes from research question one and twelve themes from research question two. This figure illustrates how public librarians actively address potential information disorders and their understanding of the phenomenon.

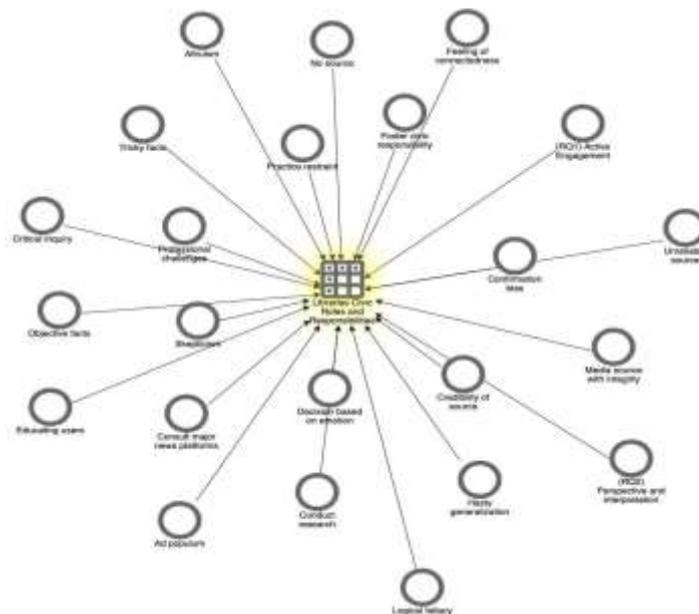


Fig. 2. Emerging Themes

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Table 2

Emerging Themes: Civic Role of Librarians

Name	Description
(RQ1) Active Role	How do librarians activate their civic roles in facing information disorders?
Altruism	The librarian establishes trust and provides friendly and helpful assistance to clients.
Consult major news platforms	The librarian verifies news sources
Critical inquiry	The librarian questions the status quo and challenges conventional wisdom.
Conduct research	The librarian Involves reading, researching, and making meaning through an iterative process of critical inquiry.
Educating users	The librarian performs their educational mission
Feeling of connectedness	The librarian shares information to gain social approval and feel valued by others
Foster civic responsibility	The librarian maintains a balance between advocacy and neutrality
Practice restraint	The librarian knows when to share content
Professional challenges	The librarian is trained and equipped to fulfill their civic roles

The most common themes that occurred were fostering civic responsibility, professional challenges, practicing restraint, and critical inquiry.

Table 3

Emerging Themes: Definition or Construct of Information Disorder Phenomenon

Name	Description
(RQ2) Definition and Construct	How do Filipino librarians define or construct the information disorder phenomenon?
Confirmation bias	People are more likely to accept messages that align with their own opinions.

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Credibility of source	Evaluating the credibility of information is a challenging task, as any given piece of information may be true or false. Ultimately, it is up to the receiver to decide whether they trust the information, and they do this by interpreting its credibility.
Decisions based on emotion	To avoid making wrong decisions, avoid making decisions when your emotions are strong.
Hasty generalization	This occurs when someone makes a hasty judgment based on biased or incomplete information.
Logical fallacy	Using flawed logic to argue certain points in order to persuade others to believe them.
Ad populum	This fallacy uses positive ideals like religion or negative emotions like xenophobia to divert attention from the issue at hand.
Media source with integrity	The extent to which information is truthful or accurate.
No source	Information with no attribution
Objective facts	Unbiased, balanced observation based on facts
Skepticism	Adding further steps before we accept or reject information
Tricky facts	The credibility of controversial information is always in question.
Unreliable source	Unreliable sources, including inaccurate, biased, and false sources.

The most common themes that occurred were skepticism, media sources with integrity, and logical fallacy.

Analysis and Discussion

Extracts from the following themes will be given as examples to analyze how librarians activate their civic roles as well as their construct and definition of information disorders. The most common themes will be highlighted in these analyses.

Civic responsibility

Original language: “More responsible tayo sa pagbibigay information sa clients. More responsible sa paggamit ng social media.” (R5)

Translated text: “We are more responsible in providing information to clients. More responsible in using social media.”

R5 believes that public librarians have a greater responsibility when they provide information to their clients. Is this their way of rekindling civic engagement with the community? Fostering civic responsibility means librarians need to balance their own personal views with their

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professional responsibility to provide information. Librarians are trained to be objective and unbiased in their work. They are also committed to providing access to information for all users, regardless of their own beliefs or values.

Professional challenge

Original language: “You still need to learn, add to your professional skills or capacities para at least, nag eevolve lahat. Pag hindi ka nag evolve, maiiwan ka, maapektuhan ang services.” (R5)

Translated text: “You still need to learn, and add to your professional skills or capacities so at least, everything evolves. If you don't evolve, you will be left behind, services will be affected.”

According to Walter (2008), librarians who can teach effectively are highly valued. While Walter's study focused on academic librarians, the same is likely true for public librarians, who can improve their professional skills by teaching library users. R5 confirms that failing to advance your skills and knowledge can lead to a loss of professional value, and teaching is an expected role for professional librarians. Professional challenges happen when librarians are not ready for their professional responsibilities. Librarians should prepare themselves to gain a deep understanding of information and how to find and evaluate it. This is essential for supporting informed citizenship and civic engagement.

Practicing restraint

Original language: “Bilang isang librarian, wag ka manguna sa pagkakatat ng fake news.” (R1)

Translated text: “As a librarian, don't lead the spread of fake news”

Civic librarianship can be practiced when **a librarian knows when to share accurate content relevant to current events and trends. As an example, a librarian might share a news article about a local election on the library's social media pages.** This is relevant to the library's audience, timely, and from a credible source. This is evidenced when R1 mentioned not to share any information that is unverified.

Critical inquiry

Original language: “Kasi personally, na challenge ako identifying it kahit librarians na po tayo.

May mga times na, I have to check the dates kailan siya pinost. If kailan ang year. How timely ang information na meron.” (R3)

Translated text: “Because personally, identifying it is a challenge for me even though we are librarians. There are times, I have to check the dates when it was posted. If when is the year. How timely is the information presented.”

Librarians are uniquely positioned to challenge the assumptions that are often taken for granted in social media information. For example, librarians might question the way that information is classified or the way that people are taught to use libraries. This critical inquiry behavior is essential for librarians' civic role in dealing with online content, as confirmed by R3.

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Skepticism

Original language: “Pag may nakikita akong post, nag appear sa isang platform di ko agad pinaniiwalaan, I check ko sa Google or website ng TV network or newspaper company kung totoong may ganon, yun talaga ang pinaka best to do to check reliability ng news.” (R1)

Translated text: “When I see a post that appears on a platform, I don't immediately believe it, I check on Google or the website of the TV network or newspaper company if it really exists, that's really the best thing to do to check the reliability of the news.”

Being skeptical means that a librarian has to evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of information. It is essential for making informed decisions about the information we consume and share. In the case of R1, adding further steps before accepting or rejecting information is the best thing to do. Critically evaluating information helps you and others avoid believing in false information.

Media source with integrity

Original language: “May basis siya. Nangyari sya at recorded sya objectively, historically. Hindi sya open sa interpretation.” (R2)

Translated text: “There is a basis. The event happened and it was recorded objectively, historically. It is not open to interpretation.”

The reliability of an information source depends on the context, including who shared it and their reputation. According to R2, if an event happened, is supported by evidence, has not been manipulated, and is presented in a fair and objective way, then the information has integrity, regardless of the source.

Logical fallacy

Original language: “Factual post is anything that contains Bible verses.” (R4)

This answer does not need a translated text. This is a controversial answer in a predominantly religious country. In this context, R4, a devout Catholic believes that any post about God is a factual post. In order not to judge the person, it is just fitting to argue that once a professional interprets a text based on religion, it should be reviewed objectively. When interpreting religious texts, one should always strive to do so in a fair manner, taking into account the full context of the text and the overall message of our religious tradition.

Conclusion

This pilot study provides a preliminary understanding of how public librarians engage with information and filter false information circulating on social media. While the study demonstrates librarians' commitment to civic engagement, it also highlights the professional challenges they face.

Public librarians practice restraint and critical inquiry when faced with information disorders. These can be attributed to their way of being active in civic librarianship. While these librarians think that they need to balance their own personal views to foster civic responsibility, numerous professional challenges arise that impact their professional identity.

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Public librarians rely on sources with integrity. They critically evaluate the source to ensure its credibility. It is important to point out that in the context of religious information, some may interpret it based on their religious belief. Although this study focuses on public librarians, the authors believe that many aspects can be accustomed by all types of librarians.

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YAP J. M.

Університет імені Лоранда Етвеша (Будапешт, Угорщина), Університет системи безперервної допомоги (Лагуна, Філіппіни), Державний університет Західних Вісайських островів (Ілоїло, Філіппіни), e-mail: jomyap@student.elte.hu, ORCID 0000-0002-7852-1047

HAJDU BARAT A.

Університет імені Лоранда Етвеша (Будапешт, Угорщина), e-mail: hajdu.agnes@btk.elte.hu, ORCID 0000-0002-6774-5440

KISZL P.

Університет імені Лоранда Етвеша (Будапешт, Угорщина), e-mail: kizsl.peter@btk.elte.hu, ORCID 0000-0003-2992-295X

Громадська роль і відповідальність бібліотек: проблеми в умовах інформаційних криз та інформаційних розладів

Мета. Публічні бібліотеки можуть бути сильними прихильниками громадянської активності. Вони несуть відповідальність за відродження громадянського суспільства, освіти та інформування населення. Бібліотеки повинні розширити свою роль за межі фізичного та віртуального простору, щоб сприяти громадянським практикам у боротьбі з фейковими новинами. Бібліотеки можуть використовувати свій вплив, щоб допомогти студентам і бібліотекарям виявляти дезінформацію та застерігати інших від її поширення. Ця стаття має на меті представити, як бібліотекарі можуть активізувати свою громадянську роль і визначити інформаційні порушення. **Методика.** Бібліотекарі публічних бібліотек були опитані за допомогою дискурс-аналізу, щоб визначити інформаційні виклики професії та зрозуміти їхню громадянську роль. **Результати.** Бібліотекарі публічних бібліотек визначили різні способи виконання своєї громадянської ролі, а також сформулювали кілька понять у визначенні інформаційних розладів. **Висновки.** Це пілотне дослідження дає уявлення про те, як бібліотекарі публічних бібліотек взаємодіють з інформацією та фільтрують дезінформацію, що циркулює в соціальних мережах. Суспільна бібліотечна справа очевидна, але бібліотекарі стикаються з професійними викликами. Хоча це дослідження зосереджене на бібліотекарях публічних бібліотек, автори вважають, що багато аспектів можуть застосовуватись до всіх типів бібліотекарів.

Ключові слова: громадянська активність; інформаційні порушення; інформаційна криза; бібліотекарі публічних бібліотек; дискурс-аналіз

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