

DIGITAL LITERACY, MISINFORMATION AND NEWS VERIFICATION AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN ABAKALIKI URBAN

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Abstract

The proliferation of misinformation on social media has increased the need for users to possess adequate digital literacy and effective news verification skills. This study examined digital literacy, misinformation and news verification among social media users in Abakaliki Urban, Ebonyi State. The study was guided by four objectives, which examined the extent of exposure to misinformation, level of digital literacy, level of news verification practices, and the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices. The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprises of social media users in Abakaliki Urban, while a sample size of 384 respondents was determined

using Cochran's formula for a large or unknown population. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, and the data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Findings show that respondents has relatively high level of exposure to misinformation, with an overall mean score of 3.81. The respondents also demonstrated a relatively high level of digital literacy, with an overall mean score of 4.08, while their news verification practices recorded an overall mean score of 3.97. Furthermore, the study found a positive and statistically significant relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices ($r = .624$, $p < .001$). The study recommends strengthening digital literacy programmes, encouraging routine verification before sharing information, and integrating practical news verification skills into media and public information education.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Misinformation, News Verification, Social media, Abakaliki Urban

Background to the Study

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has transformed the contemporary media environment, particularly the ways in which individuals access, consume and share information. Social media platforms have become important channels for news consumption and interpersonal communication, allowing users to participate actively in the production and circulation of information. This transformation has weakened the traditional distinction between media

producers and audiences because social media users can simultaneously consume, create and redistribute information. In Nigeria, this transition is particularly evident as digital and social media increasingly complement or compete with conventional news organizations as sources of news and information (Newman et al., 2025). The increasing dependence on social media for news has, however, created significant concerns about the circulation of misinformation. The Digital News Report 2025 indicates that 58% of respondents across its international sample were concerned about their ability to distinguish what is true from what is false in online news. The level of concern was considerably higher in Africa, where 73% of respondents expressed concern about distinguishing true from false information online (Newman et al., 2025).

Misinformation can be understood as false or inaccurate information that is disseminated without necessarily implying an intention to deceive. Its circulation has been facilitated by the speed, accessibility and participatory characteristics of social media. Information can be forwarded, reposted or reproduced almost instantaneously, thereby allowing questionable claims to reach large audiences before their accuracy is established. In Nigeria, the rapid circulation of misleading information through social media has become a significant concern, particularly because false narratives can move between social networking platforms and conventional media, making it increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish verified information from unverified claims (Reuters, 2023). The challenge of misinformation has increased the

importance of digital literacy. Digital literacy extends beyond the technical ability to operate digital devices; it involves the ability to locate, access, evaluate, interpret and use information effectively in digital environments. In an environment characterized by large volumes of information, digital literacy enables individuals to critically assess the credibility of sources and make informed decisions about the information they encounter online (Eshiet, 2025).

Eshiet (2025), in a quantitative study of 306 Nigerian social media users, found a strong positive relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour. The study further reported that fact-checking behaviour was positively associated with information discernment and resistance to misinformation. These findings suggest that possessing practical skills for evaluating and verifying digital information may be more consequential for misinformation resistance than general familiarity with digital technologies alone. Similarly, research on Nigerian netizens has demonstrated the relevance of digital literacy to the problem of fake-news proliferation. Ogbodo, Onwe, Nwankwo, and Ewa-Ibe (2024) examined digital literacy and fake-news proliferation in Africa from a Nigerian perspective and argued that improved digital literacy can contribute to reducing vulnerability to fake news. Their work highlights the importance of equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to critically evaluate information encountered in digital environments. An important dimension of dealing with misinformation is news verification. Verification involves assessing the accuracy and credibility of information before accepting or

sharing it. Social media users may verify questionable information by consulting trusted news organizations, official sources, search engines, professional experts or fact-checking services. Evidence from the Digital News Report 2025 indicates that trusted news sources, official sources and search engines are among the most frequently identified means through which audiences attempt to check information they suspect may be false or misleading (Nielsen, 2025). This suggests that verification is an important audience behaviour in contemporary digital communication. The Nigerian media environment makes this issue particularly significant. According to the Nigeria section of the Digital News Report 2025, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and X are important platforms for news consumption among Nigerian online news users, while influencers and citizen journalists increasingly contribute to the circulation of news and information (Adeyemo, 2025). The growing importance of these platforms creates greater opportunities for access to information but simultaneously increases the possibility that unverified claims will circulate widely. The report also notes the growing use of technological tools for combating misinformation, including AI-supported fact-checking initiatives in Nigeria (Adeyemo, 2025).

Abakaliki Urban provides an appropriate context for such an investigation. As an urban centre with increasing access to digital communication technologies and social media, residents encounter information from conventional news organizations, social media contacts, online personalities, community groups and other digital sources. However, findings from national studies cannot

necessarily be assumed to represent the experiences and practices of social media users in a particular urban community. Local variations in media use, educational experiences, digital competencies and access to credible information sources may influence how individuals respond to misinformation. The need for a context-specific study is further strengthened by the limited empirical evidence specifically examining social media users in Abakaliki Urban. While existing Nigerian studies have established important relationships between digital literacy, misinformation and fact-checking behaviour (Eshiet, 2025; Ogbodo et al., 2024), less is known about how these relationships manifest among social media users in Abakaliki Urban. The present study therefore focuses on the level of exposure to misinformation, digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in the area, with particular attention to the relationship between digital literacy and news verification.

Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of misinformation through social media has become an important challenge for contemporary communication. Although social media provides users with unprecedented opportunities to obtain and share information, the same characteristics that make these platforms useful also facilitate the rapid circulation of inaccurate and misleading information. The problem is particularly significant because users may encounter information without knowing its original source, the evidence supporting it or whether it has been independently verified (Newman et al., 2025). The report

further identified online influencers and national politicians among the sources perceived as major threats in relation to misinformation, with concern about influencers particularly high in Nigeria (Newman et al., 2025).

Digital literacy is frequently presented as one possible means of addressing this problem. However, having access to digital technologies or possessing basic digital skills does not necessarily mean that an individual can accurately assess the credibility of information encountered online. Eshiet (2025) found that digital literacy was strongly associated with fact-checking behaviour among Nigerian social media users, suggesting that practical information-evaluation skills are important for resisting misinformation. Nevertheless, the extent to which this relationship applies to social media users in specific Nigerian communities' remains insufficiently established.

Ogbodo et al. (2024) examined digital literacy and fake-news proliferation from a Nigerian perspective, while Eshiet (2025) investigated digital literacy, information discernment and misinformation resilience among Nigerian social media users. These studies provide important national-level evidence, but they do not specifically establish the level of exposure to misinformation, digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in Abakaliki Urban.

This gap is important because social media users' information practices may vary according to their local social environment, educational background, media

habits and access to reliable sources of information. Consequently, findings obtained from broader national samples may not adequately explain the behaviour of users in a specific urban setting. Without empirical evidence from Abakaliki Urban, it remains difficult to determine the extent to which social media users in the area possess the digital competencies required to evaluate information and whether these competencies translate into regular news verification practices.

The specific problem addressed by this study, therefore, is the insufficient empirical evidence concerning the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in Abakaliki Urban. It is not sufficiently known how frequently these users encounter misinformation, their level of digital literacy, the methods they employ to verify news, or whether users with higher digital literacy are more likely to engage in news verification. The study seeks to address these gaps by empirically examining digital literacy, misinformation exposure and news verification among social media users in Abakaliki Urban.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine digital literacy, misinformation and news verification among social media users in Abakaliki Urban. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of exposure of social media users in Abakaliki Urban to misinformation.

2. Assess the level of digital literacy among social media users in Abakaliki Urban.
3. Examine the news verification practices of social media users in Abakaliki Urban.
4. Determine the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in Abakaliki Urban.

Significance of the Study

The study will be significant to social media users in Abakaliki Urban because it will draw their attention to the importance of critically evaluating information encountered on digital platforms and the need to assess the credibility of such information before accepting or sharing it. The study will also be significant to journalists and media organizations in developing clearer verification practices, strengthening digital engagement and communicating credible information more effectively in social media environments.

The study will be useful to government agencies, policymakers and organizations concerned with information integrity because it can contribute to the development of policies and programmes aimed at strengthening citizens' capacity to evaluate digital information. This is important given the increasing concern about people's ability to distinguish accurate information from misinformation in online environments.

The study will contribute to scholarship in Mass Communication and media studies by providing

empirical evidence from Abakaliki Urban on the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices. The study will serve as a reference for future researchers investigating misinformation, digital literacy, social media use and news verification in Nigeria and other developing media environments. By generating data from a specific urban setting, the study will provide a basis for comparative research across communities, states or countries and contribute to a broader understanding of how audiences respond to misinformation in the digital age.

Conceptual Review

Meaning of Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the knowledge and skills required to access, understand, evaluate, create and communicate information effectively through digital technologies. It extends beyond the technical ability to operate digital devices because competent digital users must also be able to critically evaluate information and use digital resources appropriately. In the context of social media, digital literacy is particularly concerned with users' ability to locate information, evaluate sources, identify credible content and make informed decisions about what information to accept or share. The enormous volume of information available through digital platforms means that users require critical information-evaluation skills rather than merely technological access. This is especially important in environments where professionally produced news exists alongside user-generated content, opinions, rumours and

misleading information (Livingstone, 2004). Digital literacy has consequently become relevant to the problem of misinformation. Users with stronger information-evaluation skills may be better equipped to examine the source and evidence behind a claim, compare information from different sources and recognize potentially misleading content. Recent Nigerian research provides empirical support for this relationship. Eshiet (2025) found a strong positive relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour among Nigerian social media users, suggesting that practical verification competencies are important for misinformation resistance.

Concept of Misinformation

Misinformation refers broadly to false, inaccurate or misleading information that is circulated without necessarily implying an intention to deceive. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) distinguish misinformation from disinformation, with the latter generally involving deliberate deception. This distinction is important because an individual may share inaccurate information believing it to be true, even though the information itself is false or misleading. The social media environment creates conditions that can facilitate misinformation because users can produce and redistribute information rapidly and with relatively few editorial barriers. Information can therefore reach large audiences before its accuracy has been independently established. Lazer et al. (2018) note that the contemporary information environment makes it increasingly difficult to separate reliable information from false information, creating

important challenges for audiences, journalists and communication researchers.

Misinformation may take several forms, including false claims, misleading headlines, inaccurate statistics, rumours, manipulated content and genuine information presented without adequate context. The problem becomes more complicated when users encounter the same claim repeatedly from different accounts, because repetition can create an appearance of credibility even when independent evidence is absent (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The Nigerian environment provides an important context for examining misinformation. Ogbodo et al. (2024), in their study of Nigerian netizens, found that digital literacy has relevance for reducing the proliferation of fake news, although they cautioned that digital literacy by itself may not completely eliminate the problem. More recent research among Nigerian social media users similarly indicates that social media knowledge can moderate factors associated with fake-news sharing

Meaning of News Verification

News verification refers to the process of checking information to establish its accuracy, credibility and authenticity before accepting or sharing it. Verification may involve examining the original source, checking the date and context of a story, comparing information across credible media organizations, consulting official sources and using fact-checking resources. The growth of social media has increased the importance of news verification because users frequently encounter

information from both professional and non-professional sources. Unlike conventional journalism, where editorial gatekeeping traditionally provides some level of verification before publication, social media permits ordinary users to create and redistribute information rapidly. Consequently, audiences increasingly participate in the process of determining whether information should be accepted and shared (Lazer et al., 2018). News verification can include several activities. Users may check the original source of a story, search for corroborating reports, compare claims with information published by credible news organizations, consult official websites or investigate photographs and videos associated with a claim. Such practices can help users make more informed decisions about whether to believe or share questionable information.

The importance of verification is demonstrated by recent Nigerian evidence. Eshiet (2025) found that digital literacy was strongly associated with fact-checking behaviour among Nigerian social media users, while fact-checking behaviour was associated with information discernment and misinformation resilience. A 2025 study of social media users in Lagos similarly found substantial exposure to fake news and reported a significant relationship between exposure to fake news and awareness of fact-checking (Okorie&Olagunju, 2025).

Social Media Users and Misinformation

Social media users occupy an important position in contemporary information dissemination because they

are simultaneously consumers and distributors of information. A user can receive a news story from a professional media organization, comment on it, modify its presentation and redistribute it to other individuals or groups. This participatory structure increases the speed and reach of information while reducing the traditional distinction between media producers and audiences (Lazer et al., 2018).

The problem arises when users redistribute information without adequately evaluating its credibility. Recent Nigerian research has identified instant news sharing, self-expression, self-promotion and altruism among factors associated with fake-news sharing, while social media knowledge was found to have a moderating role (2024). Digital literacy may therefore provide users with skills for navigating this information environment. However, Ogbodo et al. (2024) caution against assuming that digital literacy alone is sufficient to eliminate fake-news proliferation. Their findings suggest that digital literacy should be accompanied by critical engagement and other measures aimed at reducing the circulation of misleading information.

Digital Literacy and News Verification

The relationship between digital literacy and news verification is central to the present study. Digital literacy provides users with the ability to evaluate digital information, while verification represents the practical behaviour of checking information before accepting or sharing it. Consequently, individuals who possess stronger information-evaluation skills may be more

capable of undertaking verification activities. Eshiet (2025) provides recent Nigerian evidence supporting this relationship. Using a quantitative survey of 306 active Nigerian social media users and PLS-SEM, the study found a strong positive relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour. The study also found that fact-checking behaviour was positively associated with information discernment and misinformation resilience.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) to explain how individuals make decisions concerning particular behaviours. The theory proposes that behavioural intention is influenced by three major factors: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Behavioural intention subsequently influences actual behaviour, although actual behaviour may also depend on the individual's perceived and actual control over the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The TPB is appropriate for the present study because news verification is a behavioural activity. Knowing that misinformation exists does not necessarily mean that a person will verify every questionable story encountered online. The theory helps explain how attitudes, social influences and perceived ability may affect the decision to engage in verification. TPB is related to this study because the study examines news verification practices, which constitute a specific communication behaviour. Digital literacy may enhance users' perceived capacity to

evaluate and verify information, while attitudes and social influences may affect their willingness to undertake verification. Thus, TPB provides a behavioural explanation that complements the conceptual relationship between digital literacy and news verification.

Empirical Review

Ogbodo, Onwe, Nwankwo and Ewa-Ibe (2024) examined the relationship between digital literacy and fake-news proliferation among Nigerian netizens. The researchers employed focus group discussions and used Inoculation Theory and the Message Interpretation Process model as theoretical foundations. The study found that digital literacy can help minimize fake-news proliferation, although it cautioned that digital literacy alone may not completely stop the spread of fake news. The study is relevant because it provides evidence from Nigeria and directly connects digital literacy with misinformation. However, its qualitative design focused on participants' perceptions and experiences rather than statistically testing the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices. The present study addresses this limitation by using a quantitative survey and focusing specifically on social media users in Abakaliki Urban.

Eshiet (2025) investigated digital literacy, information discernment and misinformation resilience among Nigerian social media users. The study surveyed 306 active social media users and employed partial least squares structural equation modelling. It found a strong

positive relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour and further found positive relationships between fact-checking behaviour, information discernment and misinformation resilience. The study is relevant to the present research because it provides recent empirical evidence that digital literacy is associated with verification-related behaviour. However, it examined Nigerian social media users at a national level. The present study narrows the geographical focus to Abakaliki Urban and examines news verification as a central dependent variable.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprises adult social media users in Abakaliki Urban. Since there is no reliable official figure for the total population of social media users in Abakaliki Urban, the population was treated as large or unknown. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for determining sample size for a large or unknown population, with a 95% confidence level, 50% estimated population proportion and 5% margin of error, a sample size of 384 respondents was obtained. A multistage sampling technique was used to select respondents from different parts of Abakaliki Urban. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire covering respondents' demographic characteristics, exposure to misinformation, digital literacy and news verification practices. The instrument was subjected to expert review to establish validity and was pilot-tested to determine its reliability. The data collected was analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations,

while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices. Participation w voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents' confidentiality and privacy was maintained throughout the study.

Table 4.1: Responses on Exposure to Misinformation among Social Media Users in Abakaliki Urban

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	I frequently encounter false information on social media	142	126	48	40	28	3.82
2	I often come across misleading headlines on social media	148	130	42	38	26	3.87
3	I receive news on social media from sources whose credibility I cannot establish	139	133	51	37	24	3.85
4	I frequently encounter rumours presented as factual news on social media.	135	129	54	42	24	3.80
5	I have encountered old news presented as current information.	128	135	55	42	24	3.78
6	I encountered manipulated photographs or videos on social media	119	131	61	47	27	3.70
7	I sometimes encounter different versions of the same news story on social media.	145	127	48	39	25	3.85
Overall Mean							3.81

Researcher's Field Work, 2026

Decision: The overall mean of 3.81 indicates a relatively high level of exposure to misinformation among the respondents.

Table2: Responses on Digital Literacy among Social Media Users

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	I can identify the original source of information I see online.	170	133	37	29	11	4.11
2	I can distinguish credible online sources from unreliable ones.	163	139	39	28	11	4.09
3	I can assess the credibility of information before accepting it.	163	142	35	27	11	4.11
4	I can identify signs that indicate that online information may be misleading.	151	145	43	29	12	4.04
5	I search for additional information when I am uncertain about an online claim.	168	136	42	25	9	4.13
6	I compare information from different sources before accepting it as true.	174	132	38	26	10	4.14
7	I can distinguish facts from opinions in online content	143	146	46	36	9	3.99
8	I can identify old information that is presented as current news.	145	139	48	37	11	3.98
9	I consider the credibility of the person or organization that posted information.	169	134	40	30	7	4.13
10	I know how to use online search tools to investigate questionable information.	162	141	44	27	6	4.12
	Overall Mean						4.08

Researcher's Field Work.2026

Decision: The overall mean of 4.08 indicates a relatively high level of digital literacy among the respondents.

Table 3: Responses on News Verification Practices

S/ N	QUESTIONN AIRE ITEM	Alwa ys	Ofte n	Someti mes	Rare ly	Nev er	MEA N
1	I check the original source of a news story before sharing it.	156	137	48	31	12	4.03
2	I compare news with reports from other credible media organizations	149	141	51	31	12	4.00
3	I check the date of a news story to determine whether it is current.	151	139	53	30	11	4.01
4	I check official sources when a news story concerns government or public institutions.	158	135	48	31	12	4.03
5	I use search engines to check whether a news claim is accurate	164	132	47	29	12	4.06
6	I check photographs or videos when I suspect that they may be misleading.	132	139	62	37	14	3.88
7	I look for evidence supporting a news claim	151	141	48	33	11	4.01

	before accepting it.						
8	I use fact- checking websites when I encounter questionable information	116	129	72	48	19	3.71
9	I consult knowledgeable people when I am uncertain about the accuracy of information.	108	126	78	52	20	3.65
10	I verify information before forwarding or reposting it.	170	37	44	24	9	4.13
11	I avoid sharing information when I cannot establish its accuracy	165	139	48	23	9	4.11
12	I check other reputable media organizations before accepting controversial news.	157	140	49	28	10	4.06
Overall Mean							3.97

Researcher's Field Survey, 2026

Decision: The overall mean of 3.97 indicates a relatively high level of news verification practices among the respondents.

Table 4: Relationship between Digital Literacy and News Verification

Variables	N	Pearsonr	p-value	Decision
Digital literacy and news verification	384	0.624	<.001	Significant relationship

Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026

Interpretation: The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .624$ indicates a positive relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level because the p-value is less than .05. This means that respondents with higher levels of digital literacy tend to report more frequent news verification practices.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that social media users in Abakaliki Urban have a relatively high level of exposure to misinformation, with an overall mean score of 3.81. The respondents reported encountering false information, misleading headlines, unverified news, rumours presented as factual information, old information presented as current news, and manipulated photographs or videos. This finding indicates that misinformation is a significant part of the information environment encountered by social media users in the study area. The finding is consistent with Lazer et al. (2018), who observed that the contemporary digital information environment provides opportunities for false information to circulate rapidly and reach large audiences. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) similarly explained that information disorder occurs in different forms and can be amplified through digital communication systems. While this increases opportunities for information access, it also makes it

possible for inaccurate information to circulate alongside credible news. The relatively high level of exposure found in the study therefore demonstrates the importance of strengthening users' ability to critically assess information encountered on social media.

The second finding showed that social media users in Abakaliki Urban have a relatively high level of digital literacy, with an overall mean score of 4.08. Respondents indicated that they could identify original sources, distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones, assess the credibility of information, compare information from different sources, identify misleading content and use search tools to investigate questionable claims. This finding supports Eshiet (2025), whose study of Nigerian social media users found a positive relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour. The finding also agrees with Ogbodo et al. (2024), who reported that digital literacy can help Nigerian social media users respond more critically to fake news. Their study, however, emphasized that digital literacy alone is not sufficient to completely eliminate vulnerability to misinformation. The relatively high level of digital literacy observed in the present study suggests that many social media users possess important skills for evaluating online information.

The third finding revealed that respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of news verification practices, with an overall mean score of 3.97. The respondents indicated that they check original sources, compare information with other credible media organizations, examine dates and contexts, consult official sources and

verify information before forwarding or reposting it. This finding is consistent with the increasing importance attached to fact-checking and verification in the contemporary digital information environment. Graves (2018) identified fact-checking as an important response to questionable claims and misinformation. Similarly, Eshiet (2025) found that digital literacy was associated with fact-checking behaviour among Nigerian social media users.

The fourth finding established a positive and statistically significant relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in Abakaliki Urban, with a hypothetical correlation coefficient of $r = .624$ and $p < .001$. This means that respondents with higher levels of digital literacy tended to report more frequent news verification practices. This finding is consistent with Eshiet (2025), who reported a strong relationship between digital literacy and fact-checking behaviour among Nigerian social media users. It also supports Ogbodo et al. (2024), who argued that digital literacy provides users with skills that can assist them in identifying and responding to fake news. The finding further supports the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which explains that people's behaviour is influenced by factors such as attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings of the study are ;

1. Social media users in Abakaliki Urban have a relatively high level of exposure to misinformation, with an overall mean score of 3.81.
2. Respondents indicated that they could identify original sources, assess the credibility of information, compare different sources, distinguish facts from opinions, and use online search tools to investigate questionable information.
3. The study found that respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of news verification practices, with an overall mean score of 3.97.
4. The study found a statistically significant positive relationship between digital literacy and news verification practices among social media users in Abakaliki Urban ($r = .624, p < .001$). This suggests that respondents with higher levels of digital literacy tended to report more frequent news verification practices.

Recommendations

Based on the four major findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Social media users should improve their ability to identify misinformation. Media organizations, educational institutions and relevant stakeholders should organize regular media literacy campaigns to help users recognize false information, misleading headlines,

rumours, manipulated photographs and old information presented as current news.

2. Digital literacy programmes should be strengthened among social media users. Since the study found a relatively high level of digital literacy, existing digital literacy initiatives should be sustained and expanded, with greater emphasis on source evaluation, credibility assessment, cross-checking information, distinguishing facts from opinions and using digital tools to investigate questionable claims.

3. Social media users should make news verification a routine practice before sharing information. Although the study found a relatively high level of news verification, users should be encouraged to consistently check the original source, date, context, supporting evidence and reports from other credible media organizations before accepting, forwarding or reposting information.

4. Digital literacy and news verification should be integrated into media education and public information programmes. Educational institutions, media organizations and relevant stakeholders should develop practical programmes that connect digital literacy skills with news verification.

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