

**How students find, use, and share news:**

**Implications for information literacy instruction**

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# Institutional Setting

The University of Michigan

- © Large, public, research university
- © Ann Arbor campus - one of three campuses
- © 45,000 students (30,000 undergrad, 15,000 grad)
- © 97% first year retention rate
- © 25,000 faculty and staff
- © Health system (additional staff)

# 2018 Project Information Literacy (PIL) Study

PIL surveyed students in U.S. colleges, universities, and high schools (N = 6,047).

© 656 U-M students participated

© About a dozen broad categories of questions (roughly 100 items in total) about things like:

- News sources used
- Sharing of news
- Trust in news and journalism
- News fact-checking practices
- Opinions on the role of news in their lives

## Next Phase: Our Study Questions

1. Do students who use more conservative news sources or more liberal news sources feel news is more biased?
2. Do students who mistrust news also feel that it is difficult to tell real news from fake news?
3. For students who mistrust news, where do they get news information for academic work?
4. Do students who fact-check news feel more able to discern real from fake news?
5. Is there any correlation between students' views on democracy and their ability to discern real from fake news?

# Methodology

- © Obtained raw survey data on all 656 U-M undergraduates in PIL News Study\*\*
- © All data is self-reported, including demographic data
  - See PIL website for more info on methods  
*([https://www.projectinfolit.org/news\\_study.html](https://www.projectinfolit.org/news_study.html))*
- © Explored the PIL data to further develop our own additional research questions
  - Used analyses such as descriptive statistics, t-tests, correlations, and regressions

\*\*Credit: Alison J. Head

# PII Data on U-M Students

656 U-M undergraduates participated

## Student Level\*

First-year student = 29%

Second-year student = 25%

Third-year student = 26%

Fourth-year student = 21%

## Gender

Male = 38%

Female = 59%

Prefer not to state = 1%

Fill in the blank = 0.5%

*\*percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding (here and elsewhere)*

# PII Data on U-M Students

## Political Orientation

Very conservative: 1%

Conservative: 9%

Moderate: 25%

Liberal: 43%

Very liberal: 17%

*Prefer not to state: 3%*

*Other: 2%*

## Broad Disciplinary Area

Natural Sciences/STEM: 29%

Social Sciences: 23%

Architecture/Engineering: 17%

Mix (e.g., dual majors): 14%

Arts/Humanities: 12%

Other (e.g., Gen. Ed.): 6%

# Findings: News Sources

**Question:** Do students who use more conservative news sources or more liberal news sources feel news is more biased?

◎ 6% of students indicated that they would use Fox news if that had to pick one source.

◎ Students who preferred Fox News over other sources were more likely to agree that journalists deliberately insert their own bias into news stories

◎ Agreement scale: 1-5

- Students choosing Fox →  $M = 4.16$  ( $SD = 0.8$ )
- Students choosing other sources →  $M = 3.18$  ( $SD = 1.07$ )
- $t = -7.49$ ,  $p < .001$
- Effect size rather large (Cohen's  $d$ ): 1.04

## Findings: Trust and Mistrust

**Question:** Do students who mistrust news also feel that it is difficult to tell real news from fake news?

A small regression model shows that trusting news less is associated with the tendency:

© to agree that journalists insert bias into reporting

- standardized regression coefficient = .25 ( $p < .001$ )

**and**

© to be more conservative

- standardized regression coefficient = -.22 ( $p < .001$ )

...but which of these comes first?

## Findings: Trust and Mistrust

**Question:** Do students who mistrust news also feel that it is difficult to tell real news from fake news?

Those who agree that fake news has made them mistrust the credibility of any news, are also more likely to agree that it is difficult to tell real news from fake news

© Correlation indicates a moderate association

©  $r = .41, p < .001$

Students demonstrate both mistrust and confusion about being able to discern real from fake news.

# Findings: Trust and Mistrust

**Question:** For students who mistrust news, where do they get news information for academic work?

We created a mistrust of journalism scale for a regression model

- ◎ Students scoring higher on this scale, also tended to...
  - use BuzzFeed... (standardized regression coefficient = .09,  $p = .01$ )
  - use Social media... (standardized regression coefficient = .08,  $p = .04$ )
  - not use news... (standardized regression coefficient = .15,  $p < .001$ )
  
- ◎ **...for academic work**
  - Relative to students who indicated greater trust in journalism (After controlling for gender, class standing, politics.)

## Findings: Trust and Mistrust

Mistrust and gravitation towards non-traditional and social media sources are connected, albeit modestly.

Perhaps mistrust even gets reinforced. So, it may be that news in social media or non-traditional sources resonates with them but it does not necessarily lead to greater trust in any sources.

## Findings: Behaviors

**Question:** Do students who fact-check news feel more able to discern real from fake news?

Students who indicated that they fact check news also tended to feel more confident in recognizing fake news

© Correlation indicates a moderate association

©  $r = .37, p < .001$ .

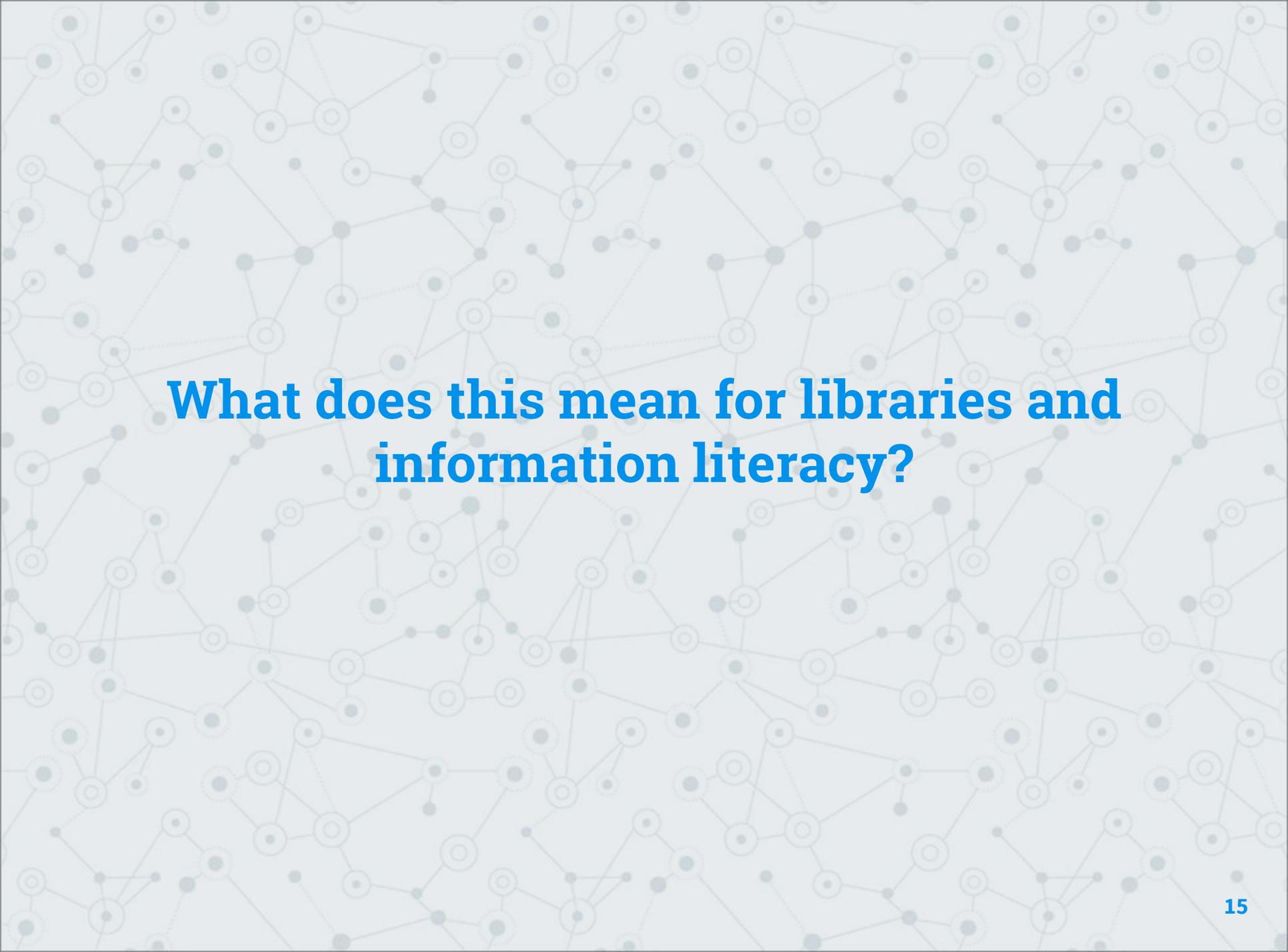
## Findings: Beliefs

**Question:** Is there any correlation between students' views on democracy and their ability to discern real from fake news?

Students who feel more confident in recognizing fake news also tend to agree more strongly that news is necessary in a democracy

© Correlation indicates a modest association

©  $r = .25, p < .001$ .



**What does this mean for libraries and information literacy?**

# Changes in Pedagogy

Librarians need to address the issues of trust with news sources/journalists, not just using checklists

- explore how people develop trust, and engage students in this conversation
- help students create their own strategies for evaluating news sources in order to build that trust
- integrate critical pedagogy and reflective practice

# Improving Library Credit Courses

ALA 105: Digital Research: Concepts and Strategies

ALA 270: Fake News: Fake News, Lies, and

Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction

SOC 295: Sociology of Fake News

# Example 1: Trying Others' Strategies

Try 2 of the following news evaluation strategies for 1 week:

1. Education Week's [Why Students Can't Google Their Way to the Truth](#). The bolded sections are strategies to apply in your own engagement with junk news.
2. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) [How To Spot Fake News infographic](#). Try the items in the infographic as strategies for engaging with junk news.
3. Install the [Chrome extension Newscheck](#) and use that to engage with junk news.
4. Analyze the advantages & disadvantages of each strategy

## Example 2: My News Media Diet

Students keep a log tracking their diet of social media, news, and entertainment related information.

Do this at a few points throughout the semester and note how you are evaluating any of this information.

At the end of the semester, write a summary of whether your “diet” has changed over time.

## Example 3: Creating Your Strategy

Create an evaluation strategy and explain how you will:

- evaluate the reporter and publication
- determine how the medium (website/social media/etc) affects the message
- address news in visual forms such as images and videos
- investigate the facts presented, How will you know if something is a non-biased fact?
- address bias -- both identifying bias in the news article and recognizing your own bias
- write an essay explaining how all of the components of your strategy work together in a summative statement

# Improving Course-integrated Sessions

- Incorporate social media examples along side scholarly sources and mainstream news sources in evaluation examples
- Ask questions around beliefs and emotions
  - How do you emotionally respond when you read this?
  - How might someone who thinks differently respond?



Image: [Ibrahim.ID](#) on Wikimedia

# Example 1: Blue Feed, Red Feed Activity

- Wall Street Journal tool provides the experience of looking at typical liberal- and conservative-focused Facebook feeds.
- Through discussion, students come to the conclusion that both sides of the political spectrum are using the same tactics to get their messages across (ex. the images in both feeds are inflammatory)
- Students then write about how both sides view the topic at hand and why they might feel that way

## Example 2: Social Media Influencers

Activity to evaluate posts by instagram influencers. What is an “influencer?” Why should you believe them?

- Celery Juice claims of health benefits evaluated
- Source 1: ["Why I'm drinking Celery Juice in the Morning" from nutritionwithchelsea.com](#)
- Source 2: ["Actually, You Can Just Drink Some Water" by Amanda Mull \(The Atlantic\)](#)

# Suggested Readings

1. Bluemle, Stephanie. (2018). Post-Facts: Information Literacy and Authority after the 2016 Election. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 18(2):265–282.
2. Kavanagh, Jennifer and Michael D. Rich. (2018). *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
3. Mitchell, Amy et al. (2017). *How Americans Encounter, Recall, and Act Upon Digital News*. Pew Research Center.

# Closing Observations

- We need to build trust in student's own ability to evaluate information - Not necessarily that they need to trust the news.
- Revised our teaching materials using critical pedagogy to emphasize issues of trust and building a strategy that works for the student
- Even small changes in evaluation behavior are a measure of success

**Thank you**

**Questions and follow-up**

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