

## INFORMATION LITERACY FOR DIGITAL CITIZENS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LIBRARIES IN REDUCING MISINFORMATION

Alfabetização informacional para cidadãos digitais: examinando o papel das bibliotecas comunitárias na redução da desinformação

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study investigated the potential of community libraries in West Sumatra, Indonesia, to foster information literacy (IL) among digital citizens and to counter misinformation.

**Method:** The study used mixed-methods design. Through in-depth interviews, focus groups, a patron survey (N=147), and a participatory workshop. The research explored current library roles, assessed patron literacy levels, and co-developed an intervention framework.

**Result:** The Results revealed that libraries are trusted community hubs but perceive a limited role in digital literacy, constrained by internal skills deficits and external anxieties about compromising their valued neutrality. Patrons exhibited a moderate self-efficacy poorly calibrated to their actual performance on misinformation discernment tasks, relying heavily on social rather than analytical verification heuristics. The co-developed "Community Anchor" framework proposes a reframing of the librarian's role from content provider to facilitated host, connecting community assets and facilitating low-tech critical dialogue.

**Conclusions:** It can be concluded that leveraging existing social trust requires navigating the tension between activist critical information literacy (CIL) praxis and the community's expectation of political neutrality. This study offers a novel, asset-based model for empowering grassroots institutions as frontline agents of epistemic resilience.

**KEYWORDS:** Information literacy. Misinformation. Community libraries. Critical pedagogy.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este estudo investigou o potencial das bibliotecas comunitárias em Sumatra Ocidental, Indonésia, para promover a alfabetização informacional (AI) e combater a desinformação.

**Método:** O estudo utilizou uma metodologia mista. Por meio de entrevistas em profundidade, grupos focais, uma pesquisa com usuários (N=147) e uma oficina participativa, a pesquisa explorou os papéis atuais das bibliotecas, avaliou os níveis de alfabetização dos usuários e desenvolveu em conjunto uma estrutura de intervenção.

**Resultados:** Os resultados revelaram que as bibliotecas são centros comunitários confiáveis, mas percebem um papel limitado na alfabetização digital, restringido por deficiências de habilidades internas e ansiedades externas sobre comprometer sua valorizada neutralidade. Os usuários demonstraram uma autoeficácia moderada, pouco calibrada em relação ao seu desempenho real em tarefas de discernimento de desinformação, dependendo fortemente de heurísticas de verificação social em vez de analítica. A estrutura "Âncora Comunitária", desenvolvida em conjunto, propõe uma reformulação do papel do bibliotecário, de provedor de conteúdo para facilitador, conectando recursos comunitários e facilitando o diálogo crítico de baixa tecnologia.

**Conclusão:** Pode-se concluir que alavancar a confiança social existente exige navegar pela tensão entre a práxis ativista da alfabetização informacional crítica (AIC) e a expectativa da comunidade de neutralidade política. Este estudo oferece um modelo inovador, baseado em ativos, para capacitar instituições de base como agentes de linha de frente da resiliência epistêmica.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Alfabetização informacional. Desinformação. Bibliotecas comunitárias. Pedagogia crítica.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by the pervasive proliferation of digital information, the phenomenon of misinformation has emerged as a critical societal challenge, undermining democratic discourse, public health, and social cohesion (Johnston, 2023; Notley *et al.*, 2023). The digital landscape, while offering unprecedented access to information, simultaneously creates a fertile ground for the rapid spread of unverified and manipulative content. This environment necessitates a populace equipped not merely with digital access but with sophisticated information literacy (IL) skills, the integrated set of abilities, practices, and dispositions required to recognize information needs, and to effectively locate, evaluate, use, and create information in an ethical manner (Cuevas-Cerveró; Colmenero-Ruiz; Martínez-Ávila, 2023; Cerny, 2022). However, current conceptualizations and implementations of IL often fall short in addressing the acute, real-world problem of misinformation, particularly within non-formal educational settings and vulnerable communities.

For the purposes of this study, a terminological distinction is maintained between two related but operationally distinct phenomena. Misinformation is defined as false or inaccurate content that is shared without deliberate intent to deceive; it typically arises from misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or unverified sharing within social networks. Disinformation, by contrast, refers to content that is deliberately fabricated, manipulated, or strategically framed with the explicit intent to mislead, harm, or achieve political, economic, or social objectives (Notley *et al.*, 2023; Johnston, 2023). While the performance-based instrument employed in Phase 2 incorporates both types — presenting participants with

stimuli representing misinformation, disinformation, and accurate content — the broader framing of this study foregrounds misinformation as the primary societal concern, given its prevalence in community information ecosystems and its dependence on everyday social verification practices rather than organized manipulation campaigns alone.

Theorists and researchers argue that information literacy must evolve from a set of decontextualized, academic skills into a critical, socially situated practice. Critical information literacy (CIL) frames IL not as a neutral competency but as an act of information activism, interrogating the power structures and political economies inherent in information systems (Cuevas-Cerveró; Colmenero-Ruiz; Martínez-Ávila., 2023; Flynn *et al.*, 2023). This perspective is crucial for combating misinformation, as it moves beyond simple source verification, or "lateral reading" (Werner Axelsson; Nygren, 2024), to question why certain information is produced, who benefits from its spread, and how it shapes societal narratives. Furthermore, digital literacies are increasingly understood as pedagogical processes embedded within specific social and cultural contexts, rather than as universal technical skills (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024). This situates the fight against misinformation within the lived experiences and local knowledge of communities, suggesting that effective interventions must be culturally resonant and community-embedded.

Despite this theoretical advancement, a significant gap exists in both research and practice concerning the role of local, community-based institutions in fostering this critical, situated form of IL. While studies have examined IL in formal education (Artmann; Scheibenzuber; Nistor, 2023; Sohail; Khan; Hanafy, 2024), rural contexts (Vandyne, 2024; Frings-Hessami; Kruesi, 2025), and specific populations like adolescents (Besharat-Mann, 2024) and healthcare workers (Bloss *et al.*, 2022), the potential of community libraries in the Indonesian context, as frontline agents in reducing misinformation remains underexplored. These institutions are uniquely positioned at the intersection of information access, informal learning, and social trust within communities (Righetto; Brito; Vitorino, 2022). They operate outside the formal curriculum pressures faced by schools, potentially allowing for more agile, responsive, and participatory pedagogical approaches to IL that leverage open educational practices (Bussell; Larson, 2023; Ford-Baxter, 2023) and mobile learning synergies (Pinto; Caballero Mariscal; Segura, 2023).

The context of West Sumatra, Indonesia, presents a compelling case for such an investigation. As a region with a distinct cultural identity and evolving digital adoption patterns, its communities are navigating the dual forces of local wisdom and global information flows. Community libraries here serve as vital social infrastructures, yet their

specific capacity to develop digital citizens capable of discerning information quality in a high-misinformation environment is unknown. This gap is critical, as top-down, generic media literacy campaigns often fail to achieve sustainable impact without deep community connection (Turpo-Gebera *et al.*, 2023; Nazarnia; Zarei; Roozbahani, 2023). Addressing this gap carries significant scholarly and practical implications. Scholarly, it contributes to the literature on situated digital literacies and CIL by testing these theories in a novel, community-library setting in the Global South. Practically, it can generate an evidence-based model for transforming community libraries into hubs of epistemic resilience, directly contributing to public intellectual freedom (Hartman-Caverly, 2022) and informed civic participation.

Therefore, this study employs a mixed-methods approach to critically examine the roles and potential of community libraries in West Sumatra in cultivating the information literacy necessary for digital citizens to identify and resist misinformation. The research is guided by the following questions:

- a. How do community libraries in West Sumatra currently perceive their role in, and what practices do they employ for, fostering information literacy and addressing misinformation among their patrons?
- b. What are the levels and dimensions of information literacy related to misinformation discernment among the patrons of these community libraries?
- c. How can a theoretically grounded, contextually relevant framework be co-developed with community librarians to enhance their capacity as facilitators of critical information literacy against misinformation?

By answering these questions, this research aims to bridge a critical divide between information literacy theory and community-based praxis, positioning local libraries as essential agents in the global effort to fortify democratic societies against the corrosive effects of misinformation.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical foundations underpinning the study. Section 2.1 examines critical information literacy (CIL) and situated digital literacies as the conceptual lenses through which library practice and patron behavior are analyzed. Section 2.2 introduces the concept of lateral reading as a key reference point for the performance-based assessment of misinformation discernment. Section 2.3 grounds the study's interventional

approach in critical pedagogy and community-based learning theory, particularly the Freirean tradition that informs the Community Anchor framework.

## 2.1 CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY AND SITUATED DIGITAL LITERACIES

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on three interlocking constructs: critical information literacy (CIL), situated digital literacies, and community-anchored pedagogy. CIL extends classical conceptions of information literacy by reframing the evaluation, production, and circulation of information as inherently political acts. Rather than treating source verification as a neutral technical skill, CIL foregrounds the power structures embedded in information systems and calls for an activist orientation in which information users interrogate not only what is being communicated but who benefits from its dissemination and whose voices are systematically marginalized (Cuevas-Cervéro *et al.*, 2023; Flynn *et al.*, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of community libraries, where the institutional tendency toward apolitical neutrality creates a structural tension with CIL's demand for critical engagement.

Complementing CIL, the concept of situated digital literacies (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024) holds that digital competencies are not universal technical skills but are always pedagogically mediated through specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts. This genealogical approach to understanding media, information, and digital literacies provides the analytical lens through which patron behavior in West Sumatra's community libraries is examined, since the information verification strategies of these patrons are products of their social relationships and local knowledge systems rather than failures to apply abstract global standards.

## 2.2 LATERAL READING AND MISINFORMATION ASSESSMENT

A central methodological reference point for the performance assessment used in this study is the concept of lateral reading (Werner Axelsson; Nygren, 2024). Lateral reading describes the practice of leaving a source page immediately and opening new browser tabs to investigate the credibility, reputation, and agenda of the source itself before engaging with its content. This strategy, originally observed in professional fact-checkers, has been shown to be substantially more effective than "vertical reading," which involves evaluating content by reading it more carefully within the same page. Werner Axelsson and Nygren (2024)

demonstrated that video-based instruction in lateral reading produced measurable improvements in adolescents' ability to assess digital content credibility, establishing it as both a teachable and assessable competency. The performance-based task employed in Phase 2 of this study operationalizes lateral reading ability as one key dimension of misinformation discernment, alongside the identification of emotional manipulation tactics and the inference of content intent. This theoretical grounding justifies the use of a performance-based assessment approach rather than self-report alone, since lateral reading is a behavioral practice that self-efficacy measures may systematically overestimate.

## 2.3 CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Critical Pedagogy, listed among the keywords of this study and invoked throughout the discussion, requires explicit theoretical grounding. Freire's (2005) seminal critique of "banking education" — in which knowledge is deposited into passive learners by an authoritative teacher — provides the foundational antithesis against which the Community Anchor framework is constructed. Freire (2005) argued that genuine education is necessarily problem-posing: it engages learners as co-investigators of their social reality, fosters dialogic exchange, and builds critical consciousness (*conscientização*). This Freirean orientation is directly instantiated in the Facilitate pillar of the Community Anchor framework, particularly in the "Community Information Circle" activities that employ discussion guides rather than lectures, and in the "Hoax Breakdown" boards that invite community members to collectively interrogate information using structured critical questions. The librarian in this model functions not as a depositor of correct knowledge but as a facilitator of dialogue — a role that aligns precisely with Freire's conception of the educator as a co-learner who poses problems and creates conditions for critical reflection. Critically, this Freirean approach does not require the librarian to adopt an explicitly political stance, making it compatible with the neutrality concerns identified in Research Question 1 (RQ1), while still enacting the transformative potential of CIL.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell; Clark, 2017) to comprehensively investigate the role of community libraries in West Sumatra

in fostering information literacy against misinformation. The design was selected to fulfil the dual objectives of obtaining deep, contextual understanding (qualitative phase) followed by broader, generalizable measurement (quantitative phase), with the findings from the initial phase informing the development of the latter. This approach aligns with best practices in community-based research, which prioritizes contextual insight before measurement (Righetto; Brito; Vitorino, 2022), and is particularly suited to exploring an under-researched phenomenon where local definitions and practices must first be understood.

### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNING

The study was guided by a pragmatic worldview, which prioritizes the research problem and employs pluralistic approaches to derive useful knowledge for practice (Morgan, 2014). Given the study's aim to bridge theory and actionable praxis for community libraries, pragmatism provided the appropriate flexibility. The design unfolded in three phases, corresponding to the research questions. Phase 1 (addressing RQ1) was qualitative, involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with library managers and patrons to explore current perceptions and practices. Phase 2 (addressing RQ2) was quantitative, utilizing a survey derived from Phase 1 insights to measure IL levels among a larger patron sample. Phase 3 (addressing RQ3) was a qualitative, participatory workshop designed to co-develop a framework for capacity building, integrating findings from the first two phases with theoretical principles of Critical Information Literacy (Cuevas-Cerveró; Colmenero-Ruiz; Martínez-Ávila, 2023) and situated pedagogy (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024).

### 3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in each phase of the study. The consent forms, available in both *Bahasa Indonesia*, clearly explained the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks (minimal, relating to discussion of sensitive topics), benefits, confidentiality safeguards, and the voluntary nature of participation, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To protect participant confidentiality, all data were anonymized during transcription and analysis. Pseudonyms are used for all library managers and patron quotes in this report.

Digital recordings and identifiable data are stored on a password-protected, encrypted server accessible only to the core research team and will be destroyed five years after the study's completion, in line with the study's data management plan. During focus groups and the workshop, ground rules were established to promote respect and confidentiality among participants regarding shared personal experiences. Given the study's focus on misinformation, a topic that can be politically and socially sensitive in local contexts, the research team was trained to facilitate discussions neutrally, avoid leading questions, and provide contact information for local social support services should any discussion cause discomfort, though no such instances occurred.

### 3.3 STUDY CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The study was conducted in the province of West Sumatra, Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select five community libraries across urban, peri-urban, and rural districts. Selection criteria ensured diversity in the libraries' operational duration (3-15 years), funding sources (community-supported, NGO-backed), and primary user demographics. This purposive sampling is justified for in-depth qualitative inquiry where information-rich cases are essential for understanding the central phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

For Phase 1, participants included a) *Library Managers*: the primary facilitator from each of the five community libraries (n=5), and b) *Patrons*: a purposively selected subset of 3-4 active adult patrons from each library, representing a range of ages and frequency of use, for FGDs (total n=18 for three FGDs). For Phase 2, a convenience sample of patrons aged 17 and above was recruited from the five libraries. A target sample size of 150 was determined based on considerations for conducting factor analysis and achieving stable parameter estimates (Tabachnick; Fidell, 2013), accounting for an estimated 20% non-response rate. For Phase 3, all library managers from Phase 1 (n=5) were invited to participate in a two-day co-design workshop, alongside two purposively selected patron representatives from each library known for their reflective capacity (n=10). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to each phase of data collection. The demographic composition of the quantitative survey participants (Phase 2) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Demographic characteristics of survey participants (Phase 2, N=147)

| Characteristic             | Category                    | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender                     | Male                        | 68            | 46.3           |
|                            | Female                      | 79            | 53.7           |
| Age Group                  | 17-25 years                 | 52            | 35.4           |
|                            | 26-40 years                 | 45            | 30.6           |
|                            | 41-55 years                 | 32            | 21.8           |
|                            | 56 years and above          | 18            | 12.2           |
| Highest Education          | Junior High School or below | 29            | 19.7           |
|                            | Senior High School          | 71            | 48.3           |
|                            | Diploma / Bachelor's Degree | 47            | 32.0           |
| Frequency of Library Visit | Weekly                      | 41            | 27.9           |
|                            | Monthly                     | 63            | 42.9           |
|                            | A few times a year          | 43            | 29.2           |
| Primary Purpose of Visit   | Borrowing books             | 89            | 60.5           |
|                            | Using internet/Wi-Fi        | 34            | 23.1           |
|                            | Attending community events  | 24            | 16.3           |

Source: elaborated by authors.

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTS

Data collection occurred over six months, with ethical approval obtained from the relevant institutional review board. In Phase 1, semi-structured interviews with library managers (60-90 minutes each) explored their understanding of misinformation, perceived library roles, existing activities, challenges, and training needs. The interview protocol was informed by literature on library roles in media literacy (Johnston, 2023) and community mediation (Righetto; Brito; Vitorino, 2022). Separate FGDs with patrons (90 minutes each) used vignettes describing common local misinformation scenarios (e.g., health rumors, viral hoaxes) to stimulate discussion on how they encounter, assess, and respond to dubious information, and what role they see for their community libraries. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary.

Insights from Phase 1, particularly the patron-identified challenges and local misinformation types, directly informed the development of the survey instrument for Phase 2. The survey comprised four sections: 1) Demographics, 2) Information Consumption Habits adapted from Notley *et al.* (2023), 3) A Perceived Information Literacy Scale, and 4) A Performance-Based Misinformation Discernment Task. The Perceived IL Scale (20 items, 5-point Likert) measured self-efficacy across dimensions of evaluation, verification, and ethical sharing, integrating items from validated scales (Kurbanoglu; Akkoyunlu; Umay, 2006) with new items generated from Phase 1 themes (e.g., "I can identify when online information is trying to manipulate community sentiments"). To establish the construct validity of this adapted scale, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Promax rotation

was conducted on the pilot test data (n=30). The analysis supported a three-factor structure aligning with the theoretical dimensions, accounting for 68.4% of the variance. All items loaded >0.5 on their primary factor. The final scale demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

The Performance-Based Task presented participants with five simulated social media posts (text and image) reflecting locally relevant misinformation, disinformation, and accurate information. For each, participants answered questions assessing their ability to identify red flags, intent, and appropriate action, a method inspired by lateral reading assessment approaches (Werner Axelsson; Nygren, 2024). The survey was piloted with 30 patrons from a non-participating library for clarity and reliability. Data were collected via paper-based forms administered on-site by trained research assistants. A standardized analytic rubric was developed to score responses from 0-3 per post (total score 0-15), focusing on: 1) Identification of specific red flags (e.g., emotional language, lack of source), 2) Inference of possible intent, and 3) Appropriateness of suggested verification action. Two researchers independently scored a 20% random subset of responses. Inter-rater reliability, calculated using Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), was excellent (ICC = .92). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the remaining responses were scored by the primary rater using the refined criteria.

Phase 3, the co-development workshop, was structured using principles of participatory action research and design thinking. Over two days, participants (library staff and patrons) reviewed synthesized findings from Phases 1 and 2. They then engaged in guided activities to: a) collectively define their desired "digitally literate community member" goal, b) identify assets and barriers within their libraries based on the "circle of strengths and needs" activity (Bloss *et al.*, 2022), and c) brainstorm and prototype potential activities or programs. These activities were framed by input sessions on key concepts of CIL (Cuevas-Cerveró; Colmenero-Ruiz; Martínez-Ávila, 2023) and situated learning (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024). The workshop proceedings were documented via detailed notes, audio recordings of group report-backs, and photographs of prototype outputs.

### 3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data from Phase 1 (interview and FGD transcripts) were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun; Clarke, 2021). This involved familiarization, systematic coding, and theme development in an iterative process using NVivo software. The analysis

sought to identify patterns in perceived roles, implicit theories of change, and contextual challenges. For Phase 2, survey data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarized demographics and scale scores. Inferential statistics (e.g., ANOVA, t-tests) examined differences in IL scores across demographic groups. The three-factor structure of the Perceived Information Literacy (PIL) scale was confirmed with the main sample using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The CFA indicated an acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2(167) = 298.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .93; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .06 [90% CI: .05, .07]; SRMR = .05). The performance-based task was scored using the standardized rubric, and scores were correlated with perceived IL scale scores to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and actual performance. Finally, for Phase 3, workshop data were analyzed thematically to extract core principles, proposed intervention components, and implementation conditions, which were synthesized into a preliminary framework. The integration of findings across phases followed a connecting approach, where qualitative findings (Phases 1 & 3) provided the context and explanatory depth for the quantitative patterns (Phase 2), culminating in a coherent, evidence-based model (Fetters; Curry; Creswell, 2013).

### 3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND VALIDITY

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure rigor. Credibility in the qualitative phases was enhanced through prolonged engagement, triangulation of data sources (managers vs. patrons), and member checking, where initial summaries were validated with participants. Dependability was supported by maintaining a detailed audit trail of analytical decisions. For the quantitative phase, content validity was established through expert review and pilot testing. Construct validity was strongly supported by the EFA/CFA results and by grounding new items in Phase 1 data. Internal consistency of the Perceived IL Scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The mixed-methods design itself strengthens interpretive validity by allowing convergence and elaboration of findings from different data strands, providing a more complete picture than a single-method study could achieve.

## 4 RESULTS

The findings are presented sequentially according to the three research questions, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive and critical

interpretation of the roles, capacities, and potential of community libraries in combating misinformation.

#### 4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: CURRENT PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

The qualitative data revealed a strong, yet narrowly defined, perception of the library's role as an information hub, focused primarily on literacy and access rather than critical evaluation. All five library managers uniformly articulated their core mission as fostering a "reading culture" (*budaya baca*) and providing "access to beneficial knowledge" (*akses ilmu yang bermanfaat*). This mission translated into concrete practices centered on book lending, providing free Wi-Fi, and hosting community events like children's storytelling or craft workshops. However, when probed specifically about digital misinformation, their perceived role became ambiguous and reactive. Managers saw misinformation as an external, societal problem (*isu luar*), not a core part of their library's mandate. Their primary strategy was one of passive curation: selecting "good books" and hoping patrons would apply the same discernment online. As Manager 3 (rural, 10 years operation) stated, "Our task is to provide clean, healthy reading material. When people are here, they read good things. We hope this habit makes them smarter outside, on Facebook."

This passive stance was linked to two critical barriers identified across interviews: a *skills deficit* and a *legitimacy anxiety*. Managers expressed low self-efficacy in their own ability to navigate digital misinformation, often framing themselves as less technologically adept than younger patrons. "How can I teach about hoaxes on TikTok? I don't even use it," admitted Manager 2 (peri-urban). More profoundly, they exhibited anxiety about overstepping their perceived social role. They feared that actively debunking or teaching about misinformation could be seen as "lecturing" (*menggurui*) or taking sides in community disputes, thereby damaging the library's hard-earned status as a neutral, safe space. "Our strength is that everyone feels welcome here. If we start saying 'this news is wrong, that is right,' we become political. We might lose trust," explained Manager 4 (urban).

Patrons' perspectives, gathered via FGDs, both supported and complicated this view. They strongly affirmed the library as a trusted physical and social space, a "*rumah kedua*" (second home). However, they did not spontaneously connect this trust to the library having a role in digital literacy. Their trust was rooted in the library's tangible, curated collection and its manager's personal integrity, not in any perceived expertise in the digital realm. When

the vignettes prompted them to consider a potential role, a generational divide emerged. Older patrons were supportive but framed the need in terms of basic digital skills training ("teach us how to use WhatsApp properly"). Younger patrons, while more skeptical of the manager's technical ability, saw potential in the library serving as a forum for discussion. As a young patron (Patron FGD 1) suggested, "Maybe not the librarian teaching us, but the library could be a place where we, the youth, sometimes meet to talk about viral issues and check facts together, using the library's internet."

In summary, RQ1 findings reveal a significant gap between the library's *potential* as a trusted community hub and its *current praxis* regarding misinformation. Libraries are seen as providers of beneficial information but not as facilitators of critical information literacy. A potent combination of internal skill gaps and external role-perception constraints limits their activity to the physical, curated domain, leaving the chaotic digital information sphere largely unaddressed.

#### 4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: LEVELS OF INFORMATION LITERACY RELATED TO MISINFORMATION DISCERNMENT

The survey of 147 library patrons provided a quantitative measure of their information literacy in the context of misinformation. The Perceived Information Literacy (PIL) Scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) showed a moderate overall mean score ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.61$  on a 5-point scale), indicating a cautiously positive self-assessment. However, the performance-based misinformation discernment task revealed a stark disconnect between confidence and competence. The average score on the task was 52.7% ( $SD = 18.4$ ), suggesting that patrons struggled to correctly identify manipulative intent, cross-check claims, and determine appropriate sharing actions when faced with simulated local misinformation. A weak but significant positive correlation was found between PIL scores and task performance ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher self-efficacy was associated with only a small proportion of the variance in actual performance, highlighting a clear miscalibration.

Analysis of variance revealed significant differences in PIL scores based on age and education level (see Table 2). Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) indicated that patrons with a Diploma/Bachelor's degree had significantly higher PIL scores ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) than those with only a high school education ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or junior high and below ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the 17-25 age group reported significantly higher PIL ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) than the 56+ group ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Intriguingly, no significant differences in PIL were found based on frequency of library visit, suggesting that mere exposure to the library in its current form does not correlate with perceived digital information literacy.

Table 2 - Analysis of variance for perceived information literacy (PIL) scores by demographics

| Source of Variation   | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | p-value |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|---------|
| Age Group             |                |     |             |       |         |
| <i>Between Groups</i> | 7.892          | 3   | 2.631       | 7.45  | < .001  |
| <i>Within Groups</i>  | 50.411         | 143 | 0.353       |       |         |
| Education Level       |                |     |             |       |         |
| <i>Between Groups</i> | 9.543          | 2   | 4.772       | 14.12 | < .001  |
| <i>Within Groups</i>  | 48.760         | 144 | 0.339       |       |         |
| Visit Frequency       |                |     |             |       |         |
| <i>Between Groups</i> | 0.876          | 2   | 0.438       | 1.17  | .313    |
| <i>Within Groups</i>  | 57.427         | 144 | 0.399       |       |         |

Source: elaborated by authors.

The performance task data provided critical nuance. While younger, more educated patrons were more confident, their performance was only marginally better, particularly when misinformation appealed to strong cultural or emotional biases. For example, a fabricated post accusing a local ethnic group of receiving preferential government aid was widely misjudged by all age groups, with over 60% failing to identify its divisive intent, despite many noting "suspicious" language. This aligns with qualitative FGD data where patrons described evaluation heuristics based heavily on source familiarity ("I trust it if it's from a friend's share") and emotional resonance ("It felt true because it described what we often complain about"), rather than systematic lateral reading or source verification.

A patron's verbatim comment from FGD 3 illustrates this heuristic: "If the news is about something happening in the next village, and my cousin who lives there shares it, I believe it. Why would he lie? We check by asking people we know, not by searching on Google." This reflects a socially embedded, rather than digitally native, evaluation strategy. The quantitative data confirms this pattern is widespread and results in vulnerability: the performance task showed a 75% failure rate in suggesting to "check with an official source" for a health-related hoax, with most preferring to "ask family" or "wait for more shares."

Therefore, the answer to RQ2 is multifaceted. Patrons exhibit a moderate sense of self-efficacy that is stratified by age and education, but this confidence is poorly calibrated to their actual competency in discerning locally relevant misinformation. Their evaluation strategies are deeply socially mediated, trusting proximate social networks over distal authoritative sources. This creates a significant "competency gap" that the current offerings

of the community libraries focused on physical books and basic access are not designed to address.

#### 4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: CO-DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCED CAPACITY

The participatory workshop with library staff and patron representatives served to synthesize the challenges identified in RQ1 and RQ2 and translate them into a co-created framework for action. The process moved participants from a deficit-focused view ("we lack skills") to an asset-based perspective centered on the library's unique social capital. The core output was the "Community Anchor" framework, built on three interconnected pillars derived from the workshop analysis: Reframe, Connect, and Facilitate.

The Reframe pillar emerged from intense discussion about the library's role. Confronted with the data showing patrons' needs (RQ2) and their own anxieties (RQ1), managers began to reconceptualize their role from "providers of good information" to "facilitators of critical conversation." This shift was captured in Manager 1's epiphany: "Maybe we don't need to be the tech expert. Our job is to be the host, the one who brings people together to talk and think. Our trust is not for telling answers, but for asking good questions." This aligns with moving from a service-based to a praxis-based library model, as suggested by critical pedagogy.

The Connect pillar addresses the isolated skills deficit. The framework proposes leveraging the library's trusted position to "connect" the community with existing resources and expertise, rather than the librarian being the sole source of knowledge. Concrete ideas included forming a "Digital Literacy Volunteer Corps" of tech-savvy youth patrons (identified as a high-PIL group in RQ2) and partnering with local universities, health centers, or credible local media for periodic "fact-checking clinic" sessions at the library. As a young patron representative argued, "We [youth] can run a short workshop on reverse image search. The library gives us the space and the audience. The librarian introduces us, makes it official." This model directly tackles the legitimacy anxiety by positioning the librarian as a curator of community expertise.

Finally, the Facilitate pillar outlines situated, low-tech pedagogical activities that leverage the library's existing strengths. Proposals included: "Hoax Breakdown" bulletin boards where a viral post is analyzed step-by-step using simple questions (Who said this? What proof is given? Who benefits?); integrating media literacy prompts into existing

children's storytelling hours; and hosting regular "Community Information Circle" discussions on a trending local topic, using discussion guides rather than lectures. These activities are designed to build critical habits of mind without requiring advanced technology from the librarian, thus aligning with the situated learning principle that literacy develops through socially meaningful activity (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024).

The workshop revealed that the quantitative data (the clear competency gap from RQ2) provided a compelling, non-confrontational rationale for change that managers accepted. Seeing that their patrons across ages were vulnerable made the issue concrete and urgent. The qualitative insights about trust and social role (RQ1) then crucially shaped *how* change should happen: not through top-down instruction, but through moderated, community-embedded facilitation that protects the library's core identity as a neutral, welcoming space.

#### 4.4 OVERALL SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

The integrated results paint a coherent picture. Community libraries in West Sumatra are trusted institutions currently operating at the periphery of the digital misinformation challenge, constrained by a narrow role definition and their own perceived limitations (RQ1). Their patrons, while somewhat confident, possess a critical literacy gap, relying on social heuristics that leave them vulnerable to manipulative content (RQ2). However, the strong social trust vested in these libraries, combined with latent community assets (like digitally literate youth), forms the foundational asset for a new praxis. The co-developed "Community Anchor" framework (RQ3) provides a plausible pathway forward, suggesting these libraries can evolve from passive repositories to active facilitators of critical community dialogue, thereby bridging the identified praxis gap and beginning to address the pressing competency gap among their patrons.

### 5 DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the role of community libraries in cultivating the information literacy necessary to combat misinformation, a challenge situated at the intersection of critical theory and community practice. The findings reveal a landscape where significant potential is currently constrained by a gap between institutional identity and digital-age necessity, yet also illuminated by a clear, community-generated pathway for

change. The discussion interprets these results through the theoretical lenses established in the literature review, highlighting points of alignment and divergence, critically examining the proposed framework, and ultimately articulating the study's unique contribution to the fields of information literacy and community development.

## 5.1 RECONCILING NEUTRALITY WITH CRITICAL PRAXIS: A CENTRAL TENSION

The perceived role of libraries as curators of "beneficial" physical collections, rather than facilitators of critical digital literacy, strongly reflects an older, skills-based model of information literacy that the literature has critiqued as insufficient for the misinformation era (Cuevas-Cerveró; Colmenero-Ruiz; Martínez-Ávila, 2023). The managers' anxiety about overstepping a neutral, apolitical role to avoid "damaging the library's hard-earned status as a safe space" is not merely a practical barrier but a central theoretical tension. The findings reveal that in this context, social trust is explicitly tied to perceived apoliticality. This ethos directly clashes with the tenets of Critical Information Literacy, which posit that neutrality in the face of manipulative information systems is an untenable position and that IL must be an activist practice interrogating power (Flynn *et al.*, 2023; Sunarti *et al.*, 2024). This finding starkly diverges from studies of academic librarians who are increasingly engaging with mis/disinformation as a core professional duty (Johnston, 2023), highlighting how institutional context and cultural expectations profoundly shape role perception.

The "Community Anchor" framework's Reframe pillar is therefore not just a practical shift but a delicate renegotiation of institutional identity. It attempts to navigate this tension by advocating for a facilitator role that "asks good questions" rather than "gives political answers," aiming to foster critical thinking without being perceived as partisan. This suggests that the application of CIL in highly trusted, local institutions in certain cultural settings may require a contextual translation, where the activist core is embedded within culturally acceptable forms of communal dialogue and problem-posing, rather than overt confrontation. It raises a critical question for future praxis: can a moderated, facilitation-based approach achieve CIL's transformative goals of challenging power structures, or does it risk diluting its critical edge to preserve social harmony? This tension between the ethos of local trust and the praxis of critical engagement is a central contribution of this study, moving the discourse beyond simple skills transfer.

Freire's (2005) pedagogical philosophy provides a productive resolution to this tension. His concept of "problem-posing education" rejects the "banking" model in which an

authoritative educator deposits correct knowledge into passive recipients, and instead posits dialogue, critical questioning, and co-investigation of shared social reality as the genuine substance of transformative education. Crucially, this approach does not require the educator to adopt an explicitly partisan stance; rather, it demands the creation of conditions in which learners can themselves arrive at critical awareness through structured reflection. Applied to community libraries, the Freirean orientation suggests that librarians need not pronounce on the truth or falsity of specific content — an act that triggers the legitimacy anxieties documented in RQ1 — but can instead design facilitated spaces where community members collectively interrogate information using critical questions: who produced this? What evidence supports it? Who benefits if this is believed? This dialogic approach embeds the activist core of CIL within a form that respects and preserves the library's institutional identity as a neutral, welcoming space. The Community Anchor framework's Facilitate pillar is, in this sense, an applied expression of Freirean pedagogy in a non-formal, community library context.

## 5.2 SITUATED HEURISTICS AND THE MISCALIBRATED CITIZEN

The quantitative and qualitative findings related to patron literacy offer a powerful empirical validation of the theory of situated digital literacies (Mensonides *et al.*, 2024). Patrons' evaluation heuristics relying on proximate social networks ("asking my cousin") over authoritative verification are not a literacy deficit in a vacuum. They are a rational literacy practice deeply situated within a collectivist cultural context and a media ecosystem where personal networks hold high credibility. This finding aligns with and extends research on how vulnerable populations mediate information through trusted social connections (Righetto; Brito; Vitorino, 2022; Handrianto *et al.*, 2026). However, it also reveals the dangerous flip side of this situated practice: when misinformation is engineered to exploit those very social and cultural bonds, these otherwise rational heuristics become a critical vulnerability.

The weak but significant correlation ( $r = .28$ ) between perceived self-efficacy and actual performance confirms a problematic miscalibration, indicating that confidence is a poor predictor of competence. This miscalibration and the resulting 'competency gap' are consistent with broader literature documenting poor calibration between self-efficacy and performance in digital environments (Besharat-Mann, 2024; Notley *et al.*, 2023). The lack of association between library visit frequency and PIL scores is a crucial finding; it indicates

that, in their current form, these community libraries are not functioning as sites for developing the specific digital-critical literacies measured. This underscores the praxis gap: the libraries' traditional offerings do not address the cognitive strategies needed for the digital information sphere. Therefore, effective pedagogy must not dismiss social verification but scaffold it, for example, by teaching community members how to critically interrogate information *within* trusted networks ("What evidence did your cousin see?" "Can we check this official website together?"), thus upgrading situated heuristics with critical tools.

### 5.3 A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE "COMMUNITY ANCHOR" FRAMEWORK: ASSETS, LIMITATIONS, AND POWER DYNAMICS

The co-developed "Community Anchor" framework represents the study's most significant synthesis of theory and context. It directly addresses the core gaps identified in the literature: the need to implement CIL in a sustainable, community-embedded institution and to move from theory to context-sensitive praxis. While promising, the framework's pillars warrant critical examination:

- **Reframe:** Success depends on a profound shift in identity from knowledge guardian to dialogue host. This requires ongoing support and validation for librarians, who may face community skepticism as they step into this new role.
- **Connect:** Leveraging a "Digital Literacy Volunteer Corps" of youth creatively addresses the internal skills deficit but introduces questions of sustainability, burden, and power dynamics. Does this model formalize unpaid digital labor from youth? How is the expertise of young volunteers legitimized and supported, especially when interacting with older, respected community members? The framework's implementation requires clear ethical guidelines, training for volunteers, and recognition of their contribution to avoid exploitation.
- **Facilitate:** The proposed low-tech activities (e.g., "Hoax Breakdown" boards, "Community Information Circles") are culturally resonant and leverage existing strengths. However, their impact on durable literacy must be empirically tested. Do these activities lead to transferred skills outside the library, or do they remain engaging but isolated events?

The framework's primary strength is its endogenous, asset-based design, building change from within the library's existing social capital. However, this is also a limitation. The framework does not directly address structural deficits such as chronic underfunding, lack

of institutional backing from local government, or the digital infrastructure divide. Its long-term viability may be constrained without concomitant advocacy for these larger-scale resources.

A more granular implementation analysis is warranted for each of the three pillars. For the Reframe pillar to succeed, a minimum condition is the provision of facilitated professional development opportunities for librarians — not technical training, but identity-level support through peer learning circles and mentored role transitions. A measurable indicator would be a documented shift in librarians' self-reported role identity (from "information provider" to "dialogue facilitator") across repeated administrations of a brief role-perception instrument, alongside observed changes in the language used in patron interactions. For the Connect pillar, minimum conditions include a formal volunteer protocol that addresses ethical dimensions (recognition, boundaries, training), the establishment of at least one sustained institutional partnership (e.g., a local university or health center), and clear procedures for legitimizing volunteer expertise within the library's social hierarchy. Success indicators would include the sustained activity of the Digital Literacy Volunteer Corps over a twelve-month period, the number of community partners engaged, and patron-reported perceptions of the library as a credible resource for digital guidance. For the Facilitate pillar, the minimum implementation condition is librarian familiarity with at least two low-tech facilitation formats (e.g., "Hoax Breakdown" boards, "Community Information Circles") and access to a shared bank of contextually adapted discussion guides. Measurable indicators should include session attendance rates, patron-reported changes in information evaluation habits (via post-session reflections), and — most critically — performance on misinformation discernment tasks administered before and after repeated engagement with Facilitate activities, to determine whether library-based facilitation produces durable transfer of critical skills beyond the session itself. Taken together, these implementation criteria transform the Community Anchor framework from a conceptual model into a longitudinally evaluable program of action, addressing a core limitation of the present study.

## 5.4 CONTRIBUTION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The unique contribution of this study is threefold. First, it provides one of the first empirical, mixed-methods investigations of community libraries as agents against misinformation in the Global South, filling a notable geographic and institutional gap in IL

research. Second, it offers a nuanced, culturally grounded analysis that identifies the negotiation between CIL and local expectations of neutrality as a critical frontier for implementation, moving beyond a simplistic focus on skills deficits. Finally, it moves from diagnosis to a generative, co-created model. The "Community Anchor" framework demonstrates a practical pathway for transforming local trust and latent community assets into the engine for developing critical digital citizenship, answering the call for IL to be a "socially cohesive component of community" (Cerny, 2022).

This study has limitations. The purposive and convenience sampling strategy, while appropriate for an exploratory sequential design, limits the statistical generalizability of the quantitative findings (Phase 2). However, the in-depth qualitative data (Phases 1 & 3) support the analytical and transferable validity of the core phenomena, the role-perception tension and socially-situated heuristics to similar community-library contexts. Furthermore, the study identifies but does not resolve the neutrality-activism tension; it merely proposes a navigational path that requires longitudinal testing.

A further methodological limitation concerns the potential for social desirability bias in responses to the Perceived Information Literacy (PIL) Scale. Data in Phase 2 were collected via paper-based forms administered on-site by trained research assistants, a procedure that, while ensuring high response rates and data completeness, may have prompted participants to over-report their information literacy competencies in order to present favorably in the presence of institutional representatives. Social desirability effects are well documented in self-report instruments addressing socially valued skills and behaviors (Notley *et al.*, 2023), and information literacy is precisely the kind of competency that community members in a library context may feel social pressure to affirm. If PIL scores were systematically inflated by social desirability, the already weak correlation with actual performance ( $r = .28$ ) would represent an upper bound of the true self-efficacy–competence relationship, suggesting that the miscalibration between confidence and competence may be even more pronounced than reported. Future administrations of the PIL Scale should incorporate anonymous collection procedures or include a validated social desirability measure as a statistical covariate, in order to obtain a more precise estimate of the extent of this bias.

Future research must implement and longitudinally evaluate the "Community Anchor" framework to measure its impact on librarian practice, patron literacy outcomes, and the evolution of the library's social role. Comparative studies could productively examine how other grassroots institutions (e.g., religious centers, women's cooperatives) in different cultural settings negotiate similar tensions, contributing to a more robust comparative theory

of situated critical literacy development. Ultimately, this research implies that building societal resilience to misinformation requires investing not only in individual skills but, more fundamentally, in strengthening and thoughtfully empowering the trusted hyper-local institutions where communal sense-making can be deepened through critical dialogue.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that community libraries in West Sumatra possess a potent, yet largely untapped, capacity to function as crucial nodes in the local defense against misinformation. Their foundational asset is the deep-seated social trust they hold within their communities, a trust that is paradoxically linked to an ethos of political neutrality that appears, on the surface, at odds with the activist praxis of CIL. Currently, this potential is constrained by a narrowly defined institutional identity focused on analog curation and a palpable anxiety about venturing into the politically sensitive realm of digital critique. The co-created "Community Anchor" framework provides a pragmatic, asset-based pathway for libraries to navigate this complex landscape. It suggests that the effective application of CIL in such contexts must begin with a careful renegotiation of role perception from neutral archive to engaged civic host, and be enacted through facilitation and connection rather than top-down instruction. By leveraging community assets like digitally savvy youth and repurposing the library as a forum for low-tech, critical dialogue, the framework aims to embed critical inquiry within the institution's established identity as a trusted, welcoming space. Ultimately, this research affirms that combating misinformation is not solely a technical or educational challenge but a socio-cultural one. Building enduring resilience may depend less on importing external expert-led curricula and more on empowering and carefully guiding the trusted local institutions where people already gather, talk, and make sense of their world, enabling them to cultivate their own, culturally-grounded forms of critical citizenship.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicting interests.

## **AVAILABILITY OF RESEARCH DATA AND OTHER MATERIALS**

The data were published in the article itself.

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