

Postprint: Research on Library Participation in Misinformation Governance in the Context of the Nationwide Fight Against COVID-19

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation has proliferated catastrophically. This paper proposes that libraries should incorporate misinformation governance as a crucial component of library emergency services. [Method/Process] This study investigates and analyzes the participation of the domestic library sector in misinformation governance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and proposes strategies for how libraries should engage in misinformation governance. [Results/Conclusion] Libraries may attempt to participate in misinformation governance through the following five approaches: constructing a cross-industry collaborative misinformation governance system; implementing media literacy education; establishing an emergency service mechanism for misinformation governance in public emergencies; integrating misinformation governance with reading promotion for synergistic development; building a cross-platform one-stop misinformation retrieval system.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: Research on Library Participation in False Information Governance in the Context of “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic”

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] During the COVID-19 pandemic, false information flooded society. This paper proposes that libraries should incorporate false information governance as an important component of emergency

services. [Method/Process] This study investigates and analyzes the participation of domestic libraries in false information governance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and proposes ideas on how libraries should engage in this effort. [Result/Conclusion] Libraries can participate in false information governance through five approaches: building a cross-industry collaborative false information governance system; implementing media literacy education; constructing an emergency service mechanism for false information governance in public emergencies; integrating false information governance with reading promotion; and building a cross-platform one-stop false information retrieval system.

Keywords: public emergency; COVID-19 pandemic; library; false information

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1. Introduction

From late 2019 to early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across China, posing a serious threat to public health. On January 27, 2020, General Secretary Xi Jinping made important instructions [1] that “Party committees at all levels should examine and identify cadres in the practice of this severe struggle, inspire and guide Party members and cadres to step forward, fight bravely, and work solidly in times of crisis, withstand the test, and resolutely win the battle against the epidemic by relying closely on the people.” The Chinese nation entered a period of “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic,” in which the entire Party, military, and people of all ethnic groups united as one under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, fighting side by side to overcome difficulties and contributing to the decisive battle against the epidemic. Every Chinese citizen participated in and experienced this war, with all professions unhesitatingly joining the epidemic prevention and control efforts. To support epidemic prevention and control, libraries at all levels nationwide, including the National Library, took immediate action by closing as among the first public service departments to shut down, and activated emergency service mechanisms to provide services for readers “fighting the epidemic at home” through various means, meeting their reading and research needs during the pandemic. Some libraries even formulated systematic emergency service plans, demonstrating that resource provision became a vanguard in professional information services during this period.

This was the most serious major public health emergency in China since the founding of the People’s Republic, with the fastest spread, widest infection range, and greatest difficulty in prevention and control. The severe epidemic situation placed enormous pressure on all sectors. During the pandemic, the public’s strong attention to and urgent demand for epidemic-related reports, viewpoints, and stories highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of the information age. On one hand, rapid information flow and extraordinary dissemination power enabled the public to respond quickly to national calls,

voluntarily stay home, reduce infection risks, and effectively prevent large-scale spread. On the other hand, the massive and endless stream of false information caused great distress, leaving people in a complex environment where rumors and truths flew everywhere and information overload prevailed. When public attention became overly concentrated, false epidemic information spread wantonly online, constantly stimulating people's sensitive nerves and causing those in isolation to unconsciously disseminate it. As the pandemic persisted, false information triggered a series of social problems that attracted widespread concern. Through literature and online research, this paper investigates library participation in false information governance during the "Everyone's War Against the Epidemic" period, proposes incorporating false information governance as an important component of library emergency services in public emergencies, and explores how the library profession should participate from the perspective of modern library function expansion, aiming to provide reference for libraries' long-term participation in false information governance as educators, researchers, coordinators, and practitioners.

2. Literature Review

Library participation in false information governance is not a new topic. In 2016, IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) released eight tips for identifying fake news: consider the news source; read beyond the headline; check the author; examine supporting sources; check the publication date; investigate the publishing site and author; verify personal biases; and consult experts [3]. The *IFLA Trend Report 2017 New Developments* also mentioned that libraries should leverage their competitive advantages to help users cope with false information [4]. The *IFLA Trend Report 2018 Update* continued this discussion, arguing that in today's era of false information proliferation, "libraries need to help users improve digital skills and digital understanding to better distinguish false information" [5]. In recent years, IFLA has continuously called on libraries to help the public learn to identify fake news. Domestic researchers have also begun relevant studies and achieved certain results. For example, Wang Bo argued that libraries should actively respond to IFLA's call and carry out reading promotion activities for identifying fake news [6]. Zhang Yuxin proposed that libraries could combat false information by collaborating with media professionals, fully leveraging library advantages and committing to media information literacy education through developing relevant courses [7]. Jiang Jinyan summarized American libraries' experiences in combating online false information and detailed case studies of multiple U.S. university library projects [8]. Wang Zhanmei analyzed American libraries' main practices in helping teenagers deal with false information, hoping domestic libraries would recognize the necessity of participating in youth media information literacy education and design targeted programs [9]. Although current domestic research on library participation in false information governance remains limited, it has already provided inspiration and direction.

3. Investigation and Analysis of Library Participation in False Information Governance During the “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic”

3.1 Current Investigation and Main Practices

3.1.1 Providing Authentic and Reliable Information Resources After the COVID-19 outbreak, epidemic-related information spread through various channels, and this unverified information intensified public panic. Libraries at all levels leveraged their resource advantages by providing authentic, reliable, and high-quality professional information resources to block false information. Main measures included: opening access to various professional information resources for user convenience. During the pandemic, some database vendors offered free download access to registered users, and a considerable number of libraries implemented open access for their users. According to a survey by the Shaanxi Provincial Academic Library Consortium, 66% of university libraries in the province opened remote access services for digital resources [10]. Building COVID-19 epidemic columns and special databases. To meet special needs during the pandemic, libraries curated quality resources for users. For example, the National Library launched an “Anti-COVID-19 Resource Special” covering mobile books, open courses, and research databases; Peking University Medical Library launched a “COVID-19 Research Resource Column” providing reliable information for professionals and the public; East China Normal University Library mobilized professional librarians to collect, verify, and organize online academic resources; and Sun Yat-sen University Library staff collected and compiled COVID-19-related research information [11]. Promoting quality resource platforms. During the pandemic, some capable database suppliers quickly built comprehensive epidemic information platforms, such as CNKI’s “Public Health Network Information Monitoring Platform” and Superstar’s epidemic special. Many university libraries promoted these platforms through their homepages and WeChat official accounts, publishing access channels and usage methods to guide users toward reliable information.

3.1.2 Helping Identify False Information Helping identify false information represents an important sign of libraries’ active participation in false information governance. During the pandemic, WeChat official accounts became the main platform for libraries to provide related services. After investigating over 100 library-related WeChat official accounts, the author found that, according to incomplete statistics, as of March 15, 2020, 14 library and information science-related WeChat official accounts had published more than 20 articles on false information identification, teaching users identification skills (see Table 1). These 14 accounts fell into three categories: first, official library accounts, including public libraries, university libraries, and vocational college libraries; second, library and information science journal accounts, such as “Library and Information Publishing” and “Competitive Intelligence Magazine”; and third, personal accounts run by library professionals, such as “I Check Check” and

“Mobile Information Literacy.” Among them, on January 26, 2020, Wang Yuan, a librarian from Tsinghua University Library, published an original article titled “How to Quickly Identify True and False Information in Epidemic News” through her personal “I Check Check” account. From an information literacy professional’s perspective, she explained how to identify fake news using actual cases from the pandemic. The article received over 43,000 views (as of March 15, 2020) and was reposted by multiple accounts, attracting widespread attention. The “Mobile Information Literacy” account continuously published a “Fake News Identification Series” of original articles starting mid-December, teaching users how to identify fake news. These efforts reflect that during the “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic,” the library profession has begun exploring participation in false information governance and has formed certain industry consensus.

3.1.3 Participating in False Information Verification and Debunking

As professional information service institutions, libraries possess abundant, reliable information resources and professional talent with information retrieval capabilities. During the “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic,” some libraries participated in verifying and debunking false information, fully demonstrating their professional advantages in information collection and identification. For example, Guangzhou Library carefully edited a “Scientific Epidemic Prevention, Rumor Crushing” series, compiling widely circulated rumors during the pandemic to call on readers not to believe rumors and to overcome difficulties together. The Mobile Information Literacy WeChat account published an original article titled “CNKI, VIP, Wanfang Free? Real or Fake?” verifying the widely circulated message about “CNKI being free” in university reader WeChat groups and circles during Spring Festival. The article detailed the verification process, demonstrating librarians’ unique “teaching people to fish” approach to debunking. Shanghai Library conducted information verification on “epidemic prophecies,” showcasing library resource and professional advantages. In February 2020, a message about epidemic prophecies spread rapidly online, claiming that the book *Empirical Basic Theory and Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine* had predicted the COVID-19 outbreak ten years earlier. Shanghai Library staff verified through the Shanghai Library and National Library collections and related databases that this was false information and immediately debunked it. The case was reposted by multiple media platforms, earning widespread public recognition for librarians’ professional verification capabilities and the authority of Shanghai Library.

3.1.4 Strengthening Information Literacy Education

The proliferation of false information during the pandemic also drew greater attention to information literacy education. A large number of libraries, represented by many university libraries, increased their information literacy education efforts. Combining the special circumstances and needs during the pandemic, they helped users learn how to obtain authoritative and effective information through var-

ious online information literacy courses, guiding readers to accurately identify and scientifically verify information. For example, Wang Yuan from Tsinghua University Library used various documents from the pandemic as teaching cases for her information retrieval live-streaming course, which received unanimous praise from users. Many university library WeChat accounts promoted free university information literacy education databases, guiding users to improve their information literacy through micro-video courses. University libraries in Liaoning Province held unified online lectures on the theme “In the Information Age, We Don’ t Believe or Spread Rumors” under the provincial academic library consortium’ s call. The “Information Literacy Public Welfare Classroom” organized by Zhixin Shutu received collective participation from university libraries in Sichuan, Hunan, Henan, Jiangxi, and other provinces. These online courses, aimed at cultivating college students’ information retrieval, identification, and analysis abilities, strengthened users’ information awareness while expanding the audience for information literacy education.

3.2 Investigation Analysis and Existing Problems

3.2.1 Overall Weakness and Limited Social Impact Overall, library participation in false information governance appeared weak with limited social impact. The author believes that teaching the public false information identification skills and participating in verification represent important manifestations of active library participation. However, based on investigations of over 100 library-related WeChat official accounts (see Table 1), although some articles on identification skills were reposted by multiple library official accounts, the overall reposting volume remained low with limited social influence. The case of Shanghai Library staff participating in debunking as professional verifiers and triggering widespread social response offers many insights, demonstrating that libraries cannot independently undertake false information governance and need to seek cross-industry collaboration.

3.2.2 Information Literacy Education vs. Media Literacy Education

For a long time, many university libraries have undertaken the function of providing information literacy education courses for university readers. During the pandemic, major university libraries increased their information literacy education efforts, but these remained basically limited to university readers. Compared to information literacy, media literacy has received more social attention. The proliferation of false information has gradually made people realize the importance of improving public media literacy, and the topic of strengthening media literacy education has been widely mentioned across industries. Regarding the relationship between information literacy and media literacy, academia has not reached a consensus. Some scholars believe information literacy encompasses media literacy, while others believe information literacy is part of media literacy. The United Nations has merged media literacy and information literacy. The author believes that libraries can integrate media literacy education into information literacy education to expand the educational front and

audience range.

3.2.3 Lack of Systematic Planning and Scattered Participation During the COVID-19 pandemic, false information flooded society, seriously disrupting public order at one point, with “rumors” and “debunking” frequently appearing on major media platforms. In recent years, IFLA has continuously called on libraries to help the public learn to identify fake news. However, based on the author’s literature and online research, most libraries have not included participation in false information governance in their emergency service scope, and the participation methods of those that have acted are generally scattered and lack systematic planning.

3.2.4 Single Participation Form and Limited Service Depth During the “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic,” library participation in false information governance was still in the initial exploration stage, essentially an extension of basic services such as information resource guarantee and information literacy education. Conscious participation in false information governance was relatively rare, with limited service depth and breadth, and lacked user participation. For users, there was insufficient engagement opportunity.

4. Recommendations for Advancing Library Participation in False Information Governance After the “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic”

4.1 Building a Cross-Industry Collaborative False Information Governance System

False information governance is a long-term, complex, and systematic task. The arrival of the self-media era has greatly increased its difficulty. On December 15, 2019, the Cyberspace Administration of China issued Order No. 5, the *Regulations on the Governance of Online Information Content Ecology*, which was adopted and announced, taking effect on March 1, 2020. The regulations clearly state that “online information content service platforms shall fulfill their primary responsibility for information content management, strengthen ecological governance of online information content on their platforms, and cultivate positive, healthy, and uplifting online culture.” The regulations propose specific requirements for online information content management, system construction, personnel arrangements and training, regulatory coordination, information disclosure, minor protection, and mass prevention and control [11]. False information governance requires continuous improvement of laws and regulations, scientific supervision and strict law enforcement, and standardized media review systems. However, neither government functional departments, platform providers, nor news media can independently undertake this work. Therefore, relevant government agencies, news media, libraries, self-media platform providers, digital resource suppliers, and other industries must jointly participate in building a

cross-industry collaborative false information governance system, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

Libraries bear the responsibility of guiding readers to acquire knowledge normatively [12], and library science has accumulated experience in developing detailed review standards for various document resources. Libraries enjoy certain credibility in public perception, representing an inherent advantage. Libraries should cherish and leverage this advantage. This social trust advantage and social education function are sufficient to make libraries an irreplaceable force in the cross-industry collaborative false information governance system. In this system, the library profession assumes multiple roles as educators, researchers, coordinators, and practitioners: As educators, they should establish a library media literacy education system covering all age groups and reader types through courses, knowledge dissemination, legal education, and teaching identification skills. As researchers, they should study the integration of media literacy and information literacy education, with libraries at all levels strengthening research on media literacy education practices to build mature models.

As coordinators, they should play a linking role in building alliances, leveraging their public service advantages to unite government departments, news media, database suppliers, platform providers, primary and secondary schools, and communities to improve governance effectiveness. As practitioners, they should use their resource and professional advantages to actively participate in revealing false information and promoting the construction of false information identification system resource databases.

4.2 Implementing Media Literacy Education

What is media literacy? The American Media Literacy Research Center provided an authoritative definition in 1992: media literacy refers to people's ability to select, question, understand, evaluate, create, produce, and critically respond to information from various media [13]. Simply put, it refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to interpret media information. From a disciplinary background, media literacy originates from communication studies, while information literacy originates from library work [14]. Information literacy is generally considered to include eight capabilities: using information tools; acquiring information; processing information; generating information; creating information; utilizing information benefits; collaborative problem-solving; and information immunity. The two share commonalities in educational purpose and content. With the development of the information age, people increasingly read through mobile internet, and the trend of cross-fusion between media literacy education and information literacy education is strengthening.

The author believes it is difficult to completely separate the two, as media literacy education and information literacy education already have the internal foundation and complementary needs for integrated education. However, in implementation, their educational content necessarily differs, and this difference

requires educational providers to specially design and adjust according to audience needs. Libraries can implement media literacy education from the following aspects: Include media literacy education in library work scope. Libraries have the basic conditions to implement universal media literacy education for the public and should actively undertake this social responsibility, clearly incorporating media literacy education into their work scope as the foundation for participating in false information governance. Explore diversified media literacy education models. Different types of libraries have different audiences and should explore diversified models based on actual needs. For example, public libraries can mainly implement media literacy education through exhibitions, lectures, and knowledge competitions as social education; university libraries can focus on researching and practicing integrated media and information literacy courses, promoting them on campus; and children's libraries, school libraries, and community libraries can adopt more "participatory" approaches for science education tailored to their users. Strengthen internal industry exchange and cooperation. Professional associations should enhance guidance and support, formulate different educational goals according to different educational subjects and audiences, refine work scope, strengthen academic exchange and cooperation within the industry, reach consensus, and develop relevant educational standards and teaching norms.

4.3 Building an Emergency Service Mechanism for False Information Governance in Public Emergencies

During the COVID-19 pandemic, false information spread as fast as the virus, making governance needs particularly urgent. The information included both false news published and reposted on various self-media platforms and messages posted and forwarded by ordinary netizens through personal Weibo, Moments, WeChat groups, and QQ groups. The huge volume of "rumors" and "debunking" left the public confused. Major mainstream media such as People's Daily and CCTV began continuously publishing emergency debunking information. Information collection and organization are fundamental library functions. Compared with general media and other internet platforms, libraries as public service institutions undoubtedly have greater credibility. Therefore, in public emergencies, the library profession can include participation in false information governance as an important component of emergency services. Public libraries can collect, organize, and publish locally widespread debunking information and simple identification skills as important content in their emergency service plans, assigning professional librarians to collect, verify, and organize relevant information. Guangzhou Library's "Scientific Epidemic Prevention, Rumor Crushing" series during the pandemic fully demonstrated public libraries' positive actions in public emergencies and provided practical references for how libraries can participate in "Everyone's War Against the Epidemic" through false information governance. University libraries, facing more targeted and high-quality user groups, can address information awareness, capability, and ethics, and actively verify false information related to their readers, teaching,

and research to debunk for university readers.

4.4 Integrating Reading Promotion with False Information Governance

Reading promotion has increasingly become a fundamental business of the library profession, with more libraries establishing dedicated departments and positions for reading promotion work. Reading promotion is mostly presented in the form of activities with relatively broad content and flexible formats. In recent years, the extensive development of national reading activities has accumulated rich practical experience for libraries in reading promotion, with most libraries having relatively mature personnel, channel, resource, and project operation foundations. Many foreign libraries enhance readers' information identification abilities by planning false information identification activities and projects. Reading promotion work has continuously sought innovation, and embedding false information identification content into reading promotion activities—such as through themed lectures, exhibitions, and knowledge competitions to popularize false information identification knowledge, or through systematic and normalized project planning—can both enrich reading promotion forms and content and enhance the social impact of library reading promotion work, highlighting library professionalism with strong operability.

4.5 Building a Cross-Platform One-Stop False Information Retrieval System

In the network communication environment, third-party fact-checking platforms are particularly important for effectively governing false information. Many multimedia platforms at home and abroad have opened their own news verification platforms, such as Tencent's "WeChat Rumor Debunking" launched in June 2017, and the official Chinese government debunking platform "China Internet Joint Rumor Debunking Platform" launched in August 2018. Additionally, there are Tencent News's professional fact-checking platform "Quanmin Jiaozhen - Tencent News," Jiefang Daily's "Shanghai Rumor Debunking," Weibo's "National Rumor Debunking Platform" jointly launched with the Ministry of Public Security, and Baidu's "Baidu Rumor Debunking." These platforms mostly adopt AI plus human participation, combining artificial intelligence identification with professional verification personnel interviews and checks, allowing readers to easily identify false information. During the pandemic, these fact-checking platforms played a positive role in effectively combating false information. However, numerous verification platforms mostly operate independently, with problems such as similar positioning and functions, limited data resources on individual platforms, and no formation of a specialized and segmented verification platform system. The large number of platforms also causes confusion for the public in platform selection. Libraries undertake information organization functions and should actively promote the construction of false information identification platform resource databases, effectively integrating numerous platforms to build a

cross-platform one-stop false information retrieval system for readers, facilitating timely queries and guiding scientific verification.

5. Conclusion

In this public emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, library professionals actively sought ways for libraries to participate in “Everyone’s War Against the Epidemic.” Participating in false information governance provides a path and ideas for library involvement in the war and offers direction for how libraries in the new era can more extensively participate in public education and assume social responsibility. Domestic library research and practice on participating in false information governance are still in the initial exploration stage, and how libraries at all levels can regularly participate requires further exploration and research. Due to the rushed writing time and limited data available for literature research, the survey results have certain limitations, which the author hopes to improve in future research.

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Author Contributions

Zhou Yaqi: Responsible for topic selection, research framework, and paper writing;

Jing Qing: Responsible for paper revision and finalization;

Niu Yu: Responsible for data collection and organization.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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