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Scaffolding resilience: the influence of an iSchool's media and information literacy courses

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Abstract

Introduction. We investigated the influence of an iSchool's media and information literacy (MIL) courses on resilience to fake news. MIL interventions have been proposed to improve accuracy detection and reduce sharing intentions. This study sought to highlight attributes that facilitate resilience.

Method. This preliminary study employed purposive sampling to recruit students who had taken either of the two MIL courses offered (N = 34), and those who had not (N = 32). A total of sixty-six students (N = 66) were asked to identify fake news headlines and indicate their intentions to share them through a survey via Formbricks.

Analysis. This study utilised a mixed-method design. Quantitative analysis used One-Way ANOVAs to compare the accuracy and sharing scores between the two groups. Qualitative analysis was done to thematically analyse students' evaluative strategies.

Results. Findings show that MIL-educated students did not significantly differ in detecting accuracy or reducing sharing intentions compared to non-MIL students. However, MIL-educated students showed greater verification practices and more consistent standards of detection, which suggest the long-term resilience to fake news.

Conclusion. Integrating MIL across curricula not only builds technical competence but also nurtures evaluative habits and ethical orientations needed to navigate today's polarised digital publics.

Introduction

Any account of the information crisis must begin with its systemic conditions: platforms, institutions, and infrastructures shape what information becomes visible, credible, and shareable, often in ways that amplify fake news (Haider & Sundin, 2022). In the Philippines, disinformation has been organised through coordinated networks of trolls, influencers, and platform-dependent tactics that exploit these conditions (Ong & Cabañes, 2018). Facebook, in particular, plays a central role in structuring what people see and how they see it (Pei et al., 2021). While purveyors of disinformation and the infrastructures that enable them must be put to task, people still need practical resources to navigate these environments; Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is one such long-term strategy for building everyday resistance.

If purveyors and platforms must be held accountable, we also need to take seriously the kinds of capacities people require to navigate these environments without capitulating to them. MIL offers one long-term strategy for reflection and action in volatile, algorithm-shaped information environments. Prior studies show that MIL interventions may reduce belief in fake news (Roozenbeek et al., 2022), improve detection (Moore & Hancock, 2022; Scheibenzuber et al., 2021), and lessen sharing intentions (Apuke et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). However, these findings are less clear on whether resilience is explained by accuracy detection skills alone, or by other attributes that MIL may cultivate.

MIL initiatives have emerged in the Philippines in the form of seminars and workshops conducted by the media, library, and education sectors. Formal college-level courses have been introduced by iSchools, including LIS 10: information and society and the LIS 50: information literacy offered by the School of Library and Information Studies of the University of the Philippines (Santos, 2024). While such initiatives continue to be improved, studying its long-term impact on students' detection and intentions towards fake news remains underexplored.

Using a mixed-methods design, we first explored whether MIL education can improve accuracy detection skills and reduce fake news sharing on MIL students and non-MIL students. We found that a semester of MIL-focused course may not be enough to produce significant difference, but it can scaffold evaluative strategies to students for better accuracy detection and sharing behaviors in the future. Notably, we found, and we argue that what sets MIL students apart is the cultivation of conscientiousness and ethical sensitivity, which encourage verification and information-seeking.

This study thus highlights both the possibilities and the limits of formal MIL education within iSchool programs. While a single semester may not dramatically improve students' accuracy detection skills, it can instil evaluative habits and ethical orientations that strengthen resilience to misinformation over time. By clarifying where MIL education makes a difference—and where it falls short—our findings point to how such programs from iSchools might be reimagined to better prepare students for navigating today's information landscape.

Review of related literature

Conceptual foundations of media and information literacy (MIL)

Media and information literacy (MIL) involves a broad set of competencies needed to navigate today's complex information environments, including accessing, analysing, evaluating, and creating media across formats (Khan, 2019; Haider & Sundin, 2021; Ru et al., 2024). Central to MIL are skills to assess source credibility, understand media influence, and practice responsible content creation (Koltay, 2011; Semenova & Sotnikova, 2021). Globally, curricula emphasise integrating both traditional and digital literacies through learner-centered pedagogies that combine lectures, discussions, hands-on exercises, group work, and presentations, with

assessments ranging from exams to reflective essays and practical assignments (Cherner & Curry, 2019; Korona & Hutchison, 2023; Santos, 2024).

A prominent example can be observed in the Philippines where MIL has become an integral part of the curriculum that adheres to the policies established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Educators in the Philippines recognise the importance of MIL and believe that its integration across various subjects is crucial for promoting critical thinking and responsible media consumption (Santos, 2024). The University of the Philippines Diliman's School of Library and Information Studies offers, LIS 10: information and society (Dar Juan, 2023), and LIS 50: information literacy (Santos, 2024) to foster critical thinking, information evaluation, and effective communication among students (Yap & Manabat, 2018). But more than the technical skills learned in information evaluation, it also empowers citizens to participate actively in their communities (Steward, 2017). By fostering critical thinkers, creators, and communicators, MIL education supports the development of core skills essential for active participation in a democratic society (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

MIL interventions and information-seeking behaviors against fake news

Media and information literacy (MIL) is vital for fostering critical evaluation in today's misinformation-rich environment (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). Research shows that information literacy enhances the ability to detect fake news—defined as '*false and misleading information in the form of news content*' (Lazer et al., 2018)—with actual knowledge of evaluation strategies predicting engagement better than self-reported skills (Jang et al., 2019). These often teach students to spot linguistic cues, emotional framing, and inconsistencies, promoting active critique rather than passive acceptance (Zhou et al., 2023; Kondamudi et al., 2023; Narang et al., 2024). Still, sharing is shaped not only by detection skills but also by ideology, relevance, and value alignment, with studies showing its ties to identity reinforcement and community resonance (Amazeen et al., 2018; Saldaña & Santos, 2023).

MIL has been associated with fostering evaluative attitudes and verification behaviors that build long-term resilience to misinformation. Reflective learning encourages students to assess veracity before believing or sharing content (Parrott, 2018), while verification orientations translate into practices like source-checking and fact-checking that help curb misinformation. Fact-checking routines are increasingly central to information practices (Yousuf & Habib, 2023), with evidence showing that those with stronger verification habits are more likely to fact-check before sharing (Wu, 2023) and that exposure to fact-checked content reduces misinformation spread (Chung & Kim, 2021). Collectively, this highlights that resilience relies not only on technical detection skills but also on ethical dispositions and evaluative habits that guide participation in digital environments.

Methods

This research employs a mixed-method design which combines at least one qualitative and one quantitative method. It seeks to answer the question: How can MIL-focused courses influence students' assessment of and sharing behaviors around fake news?

Participants

Participants (N = 66) were recruited via the UP SLIS Facebook page and class email lists. Eligibility included: (a) LIS students who completed LIS 50 or non-MIL students in LIS 10, and (b) non-LIS students who had not taken LIS 10 or LIS 50 (control group). The sample comprised 34 students with MIL experience (22 in LIS 10, 12 in LIS 50) and 32 without. This sample is sufficient for preliminary findings, with potential for expansion in future studies to improve generalisability.

Materials

The experiment used 28 Facebook-style headlines (14 real, 14 fake). Real headlines came from major Philippine news outlets based on the 2025 Reuters Digital Report, while fake headlines were

sourced from Tsek.Ph, an IFCN-accredited fact-checking platform debunking election-related misinformation.

Survey items were adapted from Pennycook et al. (2021) using the same binary design, ensuring replicability. Their findings on accuracy judgments and sharing intentions aligned with actual sharing behaviors on a large-scale social media analysis.

Students' accuracy judgments and sharing intentions were measured using two binary items per headline: whether the claim was accurate (Yes/No) and whether they would consider sharing it on Facebook (Yes/No).

Procedure

Participants first completed demographic and social-media usage questions via Formbricks. Headlines were then presented one at a time in randomised order. After each headline, participants indicated an accuracy judgment and a sharing intention. Finally, open-ended questions captured rationales for their judgments and sharing decisions.

Data analysis

Quantitative analysis

Analyses were conducted in R (v4.x) (R Core Team, 2024) using readx (Wickham & Bryan, 2025) and dplyr (Wickham et al., 2023). Participants were classified as '*MIL*' if they had taken LIS 10 or LIS 50, and '*No MIL*' otherwise. For each of the 28 accuracy items, responses were compared against the answer key to generate binary flags (corr1...corr28). For each of the 28 sharing items, responses were coded into share1...share28 (Yes = 1; No = 0). A row-wise sum of corr* flags yielded an accuracy_score (0–28). A row-wise sum of share* flags yielded a sharing_score (0–28). One-way ANOVAs tested differences by MIL exposure at α = .05.

Qualitative analysis

Open-ended responses were thematically coded to identify the criteria used for accuracy judgments (e.g., source credibility, language cues, verification strategies) and motivations for sharing or withholding content.

Findings

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for accuracy and sharing scores by MIL exposure. Both groups performed nearly identically in identifying true versus false headlines (MIL: M = 9.91, SD = 1.63; No MIL: M = 9.90, SD = 1.92). Sharing intentions were also similar (MIL: M = 2.59 shares, SD = 2.33; No MIL: M = 2.43 shares, SD = 2.70). These data indicate that both MIL-educated and non-MIL students perform nearly the same in evaluating the accuracy of the headline and their intentions to share it.

MIL Exposure	Mean accuracy	SD accuracy	Mean sharing	SD sharing
MIL	9.91	1.63	2.59	2.33
No MIL	9.90	1.92	2.43	2.70

Table 1. Descriptive statistics by MIL exposure.

In Table 2, one-way ANOVAs tested whether MIL exposure explained variance in scores. The sum of squares attributable to MIL was virtually zero (SS = 0.001), producing F (1, 60) = 0.0006, p = 0.989, indicating no significant group difference. This suggests that students who had taken an MIL education show no measurable advantage when compared to those who did not take any in terms of their ability to identify fake news.

term	df	sumsq	meansq	statistic	p.value
MIL_exposure	1	0.001	0.001	0	0.989
Residuals	60	189.419	3.157	NA	NA

Table 2. ANOVA for Accuracy Score by MIL exposure.

Similarly, Table 3 presents the ANOVA for sharing intentions, with F (1, 60) = 0.063, p = 0.803, confirming no significant effect of MIL exposure. This data indicate that MIL education does not necessarily translate into a measurable advantage in reducing students' intentions to share a potentially fake news.

term	df	sumsq	meansq	statistic	p.value
MIL_exposure	1	0.398	0.398	0.063	0.803
Residuals	60	379.085	6.318	NA	NA

Table 3. ANOVA for Sharing Score by MIL exposure

These quantitative results establish the baseline: students with and without MIL coursework performed similarly on accuracy detection and reported similarly low sharing intentions. Building on this, the discussion then examines how students justified these judgments, revealing less quantifiable ways MIL may support resilience.

Careful about sharing, not spotting

No measurable advantage in accuracy detection. Contrary to a meta-analysis (Huang et al., 2024) demonstrating that targeted MIL interventions can boost fake news detection, our findings show that students who completed an MIL coursework (LIS 10 or LIS 50) scored low and nearly identical with students who did not take any in terms of their abilities to detect fake news headlines (F(1, 60) = 0.0006, p = 0.989) or decide to share it (F(1, 60) = 0.063, p = 0.803). This aligns with research (Guess et al., 2020; Hameleers, 2022; Moore & Hancock, 2022) which suggests that brief MIL-based interventions were found to only produce small ameliorative effects in fake news detection. If true, MIL students who took one semester of an MIL-focused course may only produce short-lived or subtle gains than deeper retention.

Low Sharing Intentions. Sharing intentions were low across both groups, and participants' explanations point to social relevance and anticipated interpersonal consequences as key determinants of what they would share. Drawing from cognitive and social psychology, a general effect of value-based virality is observed (Scholz et al., 2017). Under this account, sharing intentions are stronger when information is relevant to oneself or the people they know (Cosme et al., 2023), even in interpersonal networks they have on Facebook (Bakshy et al., 2015). According to a non-MIL student: '*I refrain from posting every political headline since they're almost always shared by people I already follow and would like to avoid pointless arguments with any family members I have as friends on my social media accounts*'.

Similarly, when considering what to share in Facebook, an MIL student enumerated: '*Personal and social relevance, … [and] alignment with personal interests and beliefs.*'

Patterns in information-seeking behaviors of MIL-educated students

Conscientiousness. While their MIL education did not necessarily improve their overall performance in identifying fake news accurately, they learned to be more conscientious and less likely to share misleading content in social media. According to one MIL student,

> I will make sure first that a headline is accurate and not misleading. After that, I assess if the information mentioned in the headline is something worth sharing or worth knowing for other people. If not, I will not share it even if it is accurate.

Similar sentiments from another MIL student shared that they were discouraged from sharing an information for the same reasons: '*It's inaccuracy. If I can see that it is made to spread misinformation and fool people, I will not share it.*'

This aligns with previous studies (Leeder, 2019) that MIL students are conditioned on checking the accuracy of an information before they share it, underscoring better verification attitudes than non-MIL students. However, the disconnect between students' perceived accuracy and their actual accuracy scores need further investigation. Studies in fake news detection (Early et al., 2024) suggests shifting one's attention to accuracy-focused reflection (e.g., accuracy prompts, nudges) may bridge this gap and improve their detection skills.

Ethical Sensitivity. Another notable practice found particularly in MIL students is the awareness of ethical concerns when sharing a potentially fake news. An MIL student expressed how their MIL education lessened their intentions to share fake news: '*It would be sharing fake news. As social media is a democratic platform, I would use my right and the lessons I've learned as a media practitioner and from LIS 10 to stop spreading false information*'.

This suggests that their MIL education helped imbibe consciousness for responsible sharing, and enable them to practice strategies (e.g., cross-checking from other sources; fact-checking with reputable third-party entities) they have learned from it.

MIL Education on resilience to fake news

Consistency. While these findings pose a challenge on the effectiveness of MIL education in improving students' ability to detect fake news and lessen intentions to share, this study takes advantage of a novel dataset that can signal resilience against misinformation in the long run. MIL-educated students show more consistency in their accuracy (MIL: M = 9.91, SD = 1.63; No MIL: M = 9.90, SD = 1.92) and sharing scores (MIL: M = 2.59, SD = 2.33; No MIL: M = 2.43, SD = 2.70), as seen in the narrower spread of their scores. While their overall performance does not significantly differ, this suggests that MIL-educated students were more consistent on what they deem accurate and what they will likely share. Having a shared MIL framework that they learned from their MIL-focused courses provide students with the same reference point when evaluating information (Santos, 2024). This lessens their tendency to rely on emotion, heuristics, and intuition which have been faulty at most times (Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

Scaffolding. More importantly, this consistency may signal resilience against misinformation in the long run. Their MIL education began to scaffold a systematic approach in information evaluation even if they do not always arrive with the correct answer at the present. Reinforcing their current evaluative habits through multiple training sessions (Huang et al., 2024) can further stabilise their accuracy detection and sharing behavior and may improve their overall performance in the long run.

Conclusion

This study examined how MIL education shapes students' ability to detect and respond to fake news. A single semester of coursework did not produce statistically significant gains in detection accuracy or alter sharing intentions, which remain tied to the personal and social relevance of content on digital platforms. Yet important differences emerged in how students approached these tasks. Those with MIL exposure showed greater conscientiousness and ethical sensitivity, translating into verification practices and more consistent standards of detection. These

dispositions, though not immediately reflected in quantitative measures, suggest the longer-term value of MIL in fostering resilience to misinformation.

For iSchools, these results highlight both the promise and the limits of current approaches. A standalone course may not suffice to build measurable detection skills, but it can nurture the evaluative habits and ethical orientations that underpin long-term resilience. iSchools are therefore well positioned to advance MIL from a peripheral elective to a sustained, cross-disciplinary commitment offered to all students. Embedding MIL across curricula strengthens technical competence while also advancing the iSchool mission: to cultivate information professionals who are critical, responsible, and civically engaged in an era where platforms, institutions, and infrastructures profoundly influence the spread of misinformation.

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