eISSN 3141-6152
GLOBAL ACADEMIC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (GAIJLIS) VOL: 2.1 (2026) PP 148-158

Received: 24.07.2026| Accepted: 30.08.2026 |Published: Sept.2026 Edition
Citations: Arikawe, S. A., & Akadri, R. B. (2026.). **Media and information literacy for campus misinformation: A library and mass communication model for Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo.** GAIJLIS, 2(1), **148-158.** https://globreshub.org/index.php/gaijlis/article
DOI: https://doi.org/ 10.5281/zenodo.24186962

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY FOR CAMPUS MISINFORMATION: A LIBRARY AND MASS COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR RUFUS GIWA POLYTECHNIC OWO

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Abstract

Misleading campus messages can circulate in group chats before students can determine who issued them or whether the information is current. This article proposes a collaboration between academic librarians, Mass Communication educators and campus information officers. Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, provides the documentary application setting. A focused narrative synthesis draws on media and information literacy guidance, lateral reading research, misinformation intervention studies and reporting on the Nigerian news environment. It translates these sources into a model with two connected functions. An instructional component develops the ability to trace a claim, check independent evidence and explain uncertainty. A communication component establishes a route for responsible referral and public correction of campus claims. A worked scenario and an assessment guide illustrate the model. The article contributes a division of responsibilities that joins library instruction to institutional communication while protecting the privacy of students and preserving an explicit route for unresolved claims.

Keywords: media and information literacy, misinformation, mass communication, academic libraries, lateral reading, Nigeria

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Introduction

A screenshot bearing an institutional logo can look like an official notice even after it has been cropped, edited or removed from its original context. A student who receives a message announcing a change in an examination date must decide whether to rearrange plans and whether to forward it. The image may have no visible author, date or source link. The decision is practical and

often time-sensitive. It depends both on the student's ability to locate evidence and on the institution's ability to publish a timely, verifiable account.

The Nigerian news environment includes established broadcasters and newspapers, digital-native publishers, social platforms and individual creators. Adeyemo (2026) describes the increasing role of social and mobile media and the coexistence of legacy and digital sources among respondents to the Reuters Institute's study. This national picture gives context for an educational intervention. Its respondents are not a sample of students at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, and the report does not establish how frequently misinformation circulates on that campus. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation's 2025 announcement concerning the designation of a UNESCO Category 2 media and information literacy institute in Abuja also shows national policy attention to the field (Anyanwu, 2025).

The NBTE register and public library directory establish Rufus Giwa Polytechnic in Owo as the institutional setting (National Board for Technical Education [NBTE], n.d.; Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, n.d.). The proposal assigns roles to a polytechnic library, communication educators and the offices authorised to issue campus notices. It assumes that the institution would nominate participating personnel and confirm its communication channels before implementation. It makes no claim about current collaboration or response practices.

The article asks what students should do when they receive an uncertain campus claim, how communication educators and librarians can teach that process jointly and how campus information officers can respond without collecting private conversations. Its main argument is that verification instruction and access to a traceable institutional source address different parts of the same problem.

Method and Scope

The article uses a focused narrative synthesis (Snyder, 2019). Targeted web searches covered media and information literacy curricula, lateral reading, misinformation interventions, the Nigerian media environment and public records for the polytechnic. The literature was selected purposively for its relevance to source verification, practical instructional design and communication governance. It includes a UNESCO curriculum, research on evaluating online sources, an experimental study of technique-based inoculation and

recent reporting on Nigerian news and policy. The public register and library directory were consulted to identify the institutional context.

The synthesis considered what each source establishes, the conditions under which its findings apply and the responsibilities it suggests for campus practice. Evidence from educational studies informed the student tasks. Media context and public institutional records informed the conditions for referral and correction. The worked case is fictional. No messages were collected from students and no campus social media accounts or private groups were monitored. The method supports a conceptual model and practical examples.

Literature and Conceptual Framework

UNESCO (2021) presents media and information literacy as an integrated set of competencies covering access, critical evaluation, creation and participation. The participation dimension is important for campus messages. A student makes an information decision when choosing to forward a warning, post a correction or ask a question. The consequences extend beyond the individual's understanding, because forwarding can expand the audience and give the original claim apparent legitimacy.

Lateral reading is one way to teach evaluation as observable action. Wineburg and McGrew (2019) examine how expert fact-checkers investigate unfamiliar sites by consulting independent sources. Breakstone et al. (2021) examine instruction in lateral reading in a college course. The transferable instructional practice is to leave the original artefact, identify the source and seek evidence beyond the place where the claim was encountered. In the campus setting this can involve searching for a dated notice, finding a named office's contact details from an official page and checking whether other sources derive from the same original message.

Lateral reading should account for the kind of claim under investigation. An institutional timetable is best checked through the office responsible for issuing it. A claim about an external event may require evidence from independent reporting and relevant organisations. A repost by two accounts provides little independent corroboration if both accounts copied the same message. Conversely, the lack of a published notice may indicate that the matter is unresolved or that the institution's channels are incomplete. Students should be able to justify a provisional conclusion.

Roozenbeek et al. (2022) examine short interventions that teach people to recognise manipulation techniques. This literature supports including examples of tactics such as emotional language or false dilemmas in instructional activities. Recognition of a tactic can prompt closer scrutiny, but it cannot establish whether a claim is accurate. A real campus warning can be urgent, and an inaccurate notice can be written calmly. The proposed model treats manipulation cues as prompts for checking while making the final judgement depend on evidence.

Misinformation can be described for instructional purposes as materially false or misleading information. A sender's intention may be unknown. Training should therefore concentrate on what can be established about the claim and the context of its circulation. A student who unknowingly forwards an old notice may need an update and a verification routine. Accusing that student of deliberate deception without evidence can discourage future referrals and shift attention away from the original problem.

The Proposed Collaboration

Teaching Claim Verification

A short class exercise can ask students to transcribe the checkable claim, identify the action the message seeks to prompt and separate what the message shows from what it implies. A screenshot might show that a notice once existed, while the person forwarding it implies that it applies to the current semester. Students should record the programme, date and event affected. This prevents them from confirming the wrong version of a claim.

The next stage is to trace the message to an original or accountable source. Students can search for distinctive phrases, look for the issuing office and check the page date or publication record. If they locate several posts, they should establish whether the posts reproduce the same source or provide independent evidence. They can compare the notice date, programme name and venue with what appears in the original artefact. Where evidence is incomplete, the appropriate response can be to withhold circulation and refer the claim.

The final stage is to communicate a proportionate decision. A response might confirm the information for a defined group, explain that an old notice was recirculated or state that confirmation is pending. Students should explain their confidence and cite the relevant source. A short update

should prioritise the action required. If the claim affects an examination schedule, the correction should specify the current date and venue where those details have been verified.

Roles and Referral

Library staff can prepare activities on source discovery, document provenance and version checking. Mass Communication educators can teach the preparation of corrections, audience analysis and editorial judgement. The campus information function can designate the office that receives referrals and identify other offices authorised to confirm specific claims. A joint exercise can help students see why a librarian who identifies a candidate document may still need the issuing office to confirm its current status.

A reporting route can accept a brief description, relevant public link and the deadline by which the claim matters. Any request for supporting material should explain how to remove unnecessary names, phone numbers and unrelated conversation. Personal disputes, threats and other matters requiring separate campus processes can be referred under existing arrangements. For instructional purposes, fictional or cleared examples are sufficient. The model requires no monitoring of student group chats.

Campus information officers should classify requests according to the decision they affect. A false notice affecting fees, examinations or immediate safety may require rapid clarification through established institutional channels. A question about an old photograph might be answered by referring the student to a date and source. The institution should document who decides whether a public correction is warranted and who can approve wording. This is especially important when an apparently false claim may reflect a genuine change that has yet to be announced.

Publication and Correction

A correction should include a date, an accountable issuer, the affected audience and the action readers should take. An authoritative page can provide a stable link for sharing, while a brief version can circulate through the channels in which students usually receive notices. A clear correction should be understandable when read on a mobile device and should use a textual format that can be searched and shared. Where an update replaces an earlier notice, the link and wording should make the change clear.

The reach of a correction depends in part on distribution. A response published only on an official website may be difficult to discover for students who first saw the claim in a messaging group. An authorised institutional message can direct those readers to the public notice. That message can refer to the relevant topic without reproducing misleading details unnecessarily. A shared template can help ensure that the date, issuer, scope and source link survive when the clarification is forwarded.

Worked Scenario and Assessment

In a fictional case, a class receives a screenshot saying that all examinations scheduled for Monday have moved to another venue. The image carries a familiar logo and contains no date. The instructor asks students to identify the claim and decide what would establish its validity. One student finds a public notice for a previous semester with nearly identical wording. Another finds a recent timetable identifying the original venue. Both items are relevant. The earlier notice explains a possible source for the screenshot, and the recent timetable shows the published plan. Neither resolves whether a newer change is pending.

Students prepare a concise referral to the office designated to confirm examination arrangements. They include the date, programme and conflicting records while omitting the identities of people who forwarded the screenshot. In the exercise, the instructor supplies a fictional response stating that the timetable remains in force for the affected programme. The students then draft a short correction with a source link, a date and the intended audience. In a variant, the office is unable to confirm the schedule immediately. Students draft an update that communicates the uncertainty and identifies the next official source to check.

An assessment can score four behaviours on a three-level scale. Claim definition evaluates whether the student states the precise proposition, date and population affected. Source tracing evaluates whether the student locates a relevant original or accountable source and distinguishes independent evidence from copies. Judgement evaluates whether the conclusion fits the evidence and acknowledges unresolved information. Communication evaluates whether the response conveys the right action and protects unnecessary personal information. The rubric should allow a high score for a

justified provisional conclusion where the available evidence remains incomplete.

Teaching can begin with a print or low-bandwidth exercise containing a screenshot and a packet of dated documents. A second exercise can require independent searching on an accessible website. The first helps students practise reading dates, titles and issuer information under consistent conditions. The second reveals whether students can locate relevant evidence in a less structured environment. A student can complete both tasks without sharing private messages or opening a social media account.

Adapting Communication to Different Audiences

A correction can reach several audiences with different information needs. Students directly affected by a timetable change need the current arrangements and the source that confirms them. Lecturers and class representatives may need an approved message they can share consistently. The general campus audience may need only a short pointer to the affected programme and official notice. A communication exercise can require students to prepare a short message for one audience and explain why additional details should appear on the authoritative page. This gives students practice in preserving accuracy while adapting the message to the channel.

A practical exercise can use two versions of a notice that are both genuine. One applies to a particular programme, and the other concerns the whole institution. Students identify which details determine the correct interpretation and explain how a cropped screenshot removed those details. This teaches a category of error that can be missed when exercises rely on obviously fabricated material. An apparently misleading message can originate in an authentic document whose audience, date or purpose was lost during forwarding.

The model also has implications for language and accessibility. Clear wording, readable dates and a text version of any image notice make the correction easier to search, share and read on a phone. Where the institution uses more than one language for outreach, translated messages should preserve the scope, timetable and next action stated in the official notice. An instructor can ask students to compare a short oral announcement with its written source and explain how they ensured that both convey the same information.

Handling Unresolved Claims and Repeated Errors

The communication office can maintain a record of high-consequence queries using the claim category, responsible office, time received and resolution status. This operational record can omit personal identifiers that are unnecessary to resolving the issue. If repeated referrals concern the same notice, staff can examine whether the authoritative version is difficult to locate or whether dates and audiences are ambiguous. This shifts attention to changes the institution can make without attempting to infer the behaviour of students from private messages.

When information changes after an initial clarification, the issuing office should date the update and connect it to the earlier notice. A stable page can carry the current instruction and indicate when it was revised. A clearly identified replacement helps students who received the first clarification in a forwarded message. The instructional exercise can include both updates and ask students to reconstruct which instruction applied at each point. This connects information literacy to routine editorial practices of attribution, versioning and correction.

A second fictional scenario could concern a purported new payment deadline circulated as an image with a shortened link. The exercise can ask learners to record the specific amount, date and audience stated in the message, then consult the institution's approved public channel without following the forwarded link. Students compare the official notice with the message and draft a referral when the two do not agree. An instructor can assess whether they selected an appropriate source, avoided reproducing unnecessary details and gave readers a clear next action. The same exercise gives information officers an opportunity to test whether the approved route is sufficiently easy to discover.

Discussion

The proposed collaboration connects two institutional capacities. The first is the ability to teach students to make a justified decision about a claim. The second is the ability of an institution to maintain records and communication channels that make those decisions possible. Strong verification instruction has limited value when official notices lack dates, identifiable issuers or stable links. Equally, a well-maintained notice archive cannot guarantee that a student will compare dates and check

whether a notice applies to their programme.

A useful design choice is to teach how to communicate uncertainty. If students are rewarded only for classifying messages as true or false, they may guess when evidence is incomplete. A justified “pending confirmation” decision shows that they can distinguish current evidence from the decision still required. The role of the institutional office is to resolve claims within its authority and tell students when a further update can be expected. The role of the student is to avoid extending the reach of an unresolved claim and to use the appropriate route for confirmation.

If adopted, the model could be piloted in a library orientation session or a Mass Communication class. A later evaluation could use unfamiliar cases to assess whether students transfer source-tracing practices beyond the examples used in instruction. Separate operational measures could include whether corrections are dated, whether links remain accessible and how long it takes for a referred question to reach the responsible office. These measures address communication quality and response capacity. They cannot show a change in misinformation prevalence without an appropriate research design.

The literature includes studies from educational settings outside Nigeria and a national report on a specific survey sample. Their findings cannot establish local behaviour. The institutional documents identify the setting and library but do not describe student networks, existing policies or response times. Questions of preferred language, accessibility, staffing and trusted communication channels remain for local confirmation. These limits are particularly important where a recommendation depends on the institution having a current and accessible notice archive.

Conclusion

A polytechnic can teach students to define a claim, trace it to an accountable source, seek corroboration and communicate a conclusion proportionate to the evidence. A collaboration between librarians, Mass Communication educators and authorised information officers would give those practices a workable route from classroom exercise to campus use. At Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, a pilot could begin with fictional notices and a small set of public verification sources. The model’s contribution is to connect the student’s responsibility for checking a message with the institution’s responsibility for making

accurate notices easy to verify.

Declarations

Data availability. The sources for the documentary and literature synthesis are listed in the references. No participant dataset was generated.

Ethics. The article uses public sources and hypothetical scenarios. It involved no recruitment or collection of messages or personal information.

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