

The Role of the Public Library in Combating Misinformation and Disinformation: a Review and Action Plan

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“Deepening divides along political, cultural or identity lines within societies are being amplified by technological risks, such as misinformation and disinformation.”

World Economic Forum (2026, p.16)

“We live in a tidal wave of data. We don’t have the social and informational structures in place yet to manage it.”

Alderman (2025, p.9)

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Data availability statement

The data associated with this study (in csv, xlsx, and spss file formats) has been deposited in DataSTORRE, the University of Stirling Online Repository for research data (open access), and can be accessed here:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11667/272>

Executive Summary

Addressing the insidious and disruptive impact of mis/disinformation is an urgent societal challenge, but one not easily addressed due to complexity. There are issues of access and disposition to consider, the former concerning issues of technology and literacy (people's ability to access and evaluate information), the latter concerning issues of attitude and inclination (people's predispositions, beliefs and motivations influencing their information behaviours). Without attention to both, any steps to address mis/disinformation are at risk of being too reductionist and of limited effect.

Public libraries, as trusted community-based civic institutions supporting an informed society, are well positioned to play a key role in addressing mis/disinformation, but prior to this study we lacked insights into library responses and practices. This national study, the first of its kind in the UK, surveyed 372 public library staff in England to explore how staff understand, experience, and respond to mis/disinformation in their communities, and what support they need to fulfil their civic role. There are ten main findings:

1. Most of our participants are educated and experienced library staff, but most have not received any mis/disinformation specific training.
2. Most of our participants work in libraries that do not provide any mis/disinformation guidelines and/or educational materials and resources for their users/members.
3. Most of our participants are either not sure or confirmed that their library has no partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation.
4. Most of our participants are never or are rarely involved in specific practices to address mis/disinformation.
5. Most of our participants are faced with a broad range of challenges and concerns that limit their ability to effectively address mis/disinformation.
6. Most of our participants do not feel that they are successfully addressing mis/disinformation in their communities.
7. Some of our participants may have limited depth of understanding of the factors contributing to mis/disinformation.
8. Our participants have divergent views on remaining neutral when addressing mis/disinformation.
9. Most of our participants believe that libraries should have an active role in addressing mis/disinformation.
10. Most of our participants believe that their library is not doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation.

Our findings highlight that public libraries in England are staffed by an educated and motivated workforce well-positioned to address mis/disinformation, but that most staff are equipped with little more than intent due to various infrastructure limitations. Four main recommendations are made, to establish:

1. A national programme of library staff education and training to address mis/disinformation.
2. A national open access repository of library resources for addressing mis/disinformation.
3. A national partnership agreement for addressing mis/disinformation.
4. National library policy and operational guidance for addressing mis/disinformation.

The challenge of mis/disinformation is urgent and, in many respects, unaddressed at a national level. Public libraries are well placed to play a central role in addressing, but support is needed to reposition libraries on the frontline of national responses to the mis/disinformation challenge.

Professor Steven Buchanan

Professor David McMenemy

1 Project Overview

“I believe we should be more proactive about addressing mis/disinformation.”

(Survey respondent 214)

1. Project Overview

Aim

This project undertook a review of the role of public libraries in England in addressing the growing issue of misinformation and disinformation in UK society. Misinformation and disinformation are defined as follows:

- **Misinformation:** incorrect and/or incomplete information unintentionally disseminated (i.e., shared without intent to misinform)
- **Disinformation:** incorrect and/or incomplete information intentionally disseminated (i.e., shared with intent to misinform).

The sections below provide background context to this review (and for practical purposes, misinformation and disinformation are discussed collectively unless distinction is important to discussion and/or made by a cited author).

Background

Mis/disinformation now has a negative impact upon almost every aspect of people's lives (Di Domenico, 2023, Sanches et al., 2024), and in global terms, is ranked by the World Economic Forum (2025) as the top (short-term) risk to global peace and prosperity, and as a major long-term global risk. Emergent AI-technologies are rapidly compounding the issue with the growth of AI-generated content reported as "making divisive misinformation and disinformation more ubiquitous" across the globe (World Economic Forum, 2025, p.34). Within the UK, the Chief of the UK Secret Intelligence Service reports:

...the foundations of trust in our societies are eroding. Information, once a unifying force, is increasingly weaponised. Falsehood spreads faster than fact, dividing communities and distorting reality. We live in an age of hyper-connection yet profound isolation. The algorithms flatter our biases and fracture our public squares. And as trust collapses, so does our shared sense of truth – one of the greatest losses a society can suffer (Metreweli, 2025).

Public trust in government and media institutions is reported to be in decline worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2025) including some of the lowest levels ever recorded in the UK (YouGov, 2024; National Centre for Social Research, 2025). Mis/disinformation contributes to this decline, and in situations of low trust, prospers.

Addressing the disruptive and insidious impact of mis/disinformation is widely recognised as an urgent challenge, but one that also "presents conceptual, empirical, and practical difficulties" (Roozenbeek et al., 2023, p.189) and that is recognised as "notoriously difficult to combat" (Galante et al., 2023, p.1907). We discuss complexity below.

A complex challenge

It is important to recognise mis/disinformation as a complex challenge influenced by issues of both access and disposition, the former influenced by issues of practical access and media and information literacy (i.e., people's ability to access and critically evaluate information), the latter influenced by issues of attitude and inclination (i.e., people's predispositions, beliefs and motivations influencing their information behaviours). For example, a review of why people believe and share mis/disinformation on social media reports that:

People do care about accuracy more than about other content dimensions, but accuracy nonetheless often has little impact on sharing because the social media context focuses their attention on other factors such as desire to attract followers/friends, or to signal one's group membership (Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p.3).

Thus, without attention to both access and disposition, any steps to address mis/disinformation are at risk of being too reductionist and of limited effect. For example, generic media and information literacy education programs that do not address socioeconomic and sociocultural factors influencing people's information behaviours; or regulation (or liberal deregulation) of information provision that does not address media and information literacy skills deficits important for population independence, empowerment and growth.

Strategies and techniques variously employed to mis/disinform

A systematic review of past mis/disinformation studies by Peng et al. (2023) reports several common strategies and techniques used by organisations and individuals to mis/disinform:

- Fabricating vivid and detailed narratives;
- Using anecdotes and personal experiences as evidence;
- Discrediting the source;
- Politicizing the issue;
- Discrediting the evidence;
- Counter arguments based on manipulated or spurious evidence;
- Using rhetorical tricks to draw attention away from certain information and towards other information;
- Biased reasoning;
- Emotional appeals to trigger fear and anger and making misinformation less likely to be critically analysed;
- Linguistic intensifiers to emphasise and strengthen message;
- Establishing legitimacy (e.g., misuse/misquote of credible sources, made-up sources, use of 'technical' language and 'facts' that provide a veneer of surface credibility);
- Highlighting or suggesting uncertainty and risk.

Peng et al. (2023) note that several of the above strategies:

...exploit the nature that humans are cognitive misers and nudge the audience into information processing through the heuristic rather than systematic route, [often] making a snap judgment without engaging in elaborated and critical analysis (2023, p.2138).

Whilst limited cognitive processing and critical evaluation are undoubtedly key factors influencing peoples' susceptibility to mis/disinformation there are several other factors that are also at play, several of which are sociocultural in nature. For example, a review of mis/disinformation studies by Wilson and Maceviciute (2022) identifies the following factors variously influencing people's acceptance of mis/disinformation (several further evidencing the influence of attitude/disposition). In addition to reduced analytical thinking, the authors report: political partisanship, religious fundamentalism, dogmatism, increased emotionality, and/or delusional ideation. The authors also report several factors that motivate people to further disseminate mis/disinformation (again in addition to reduced analytical thinking): perceived importance; perceived ambiguity; self-promotion; altruism; distrust; entertainment; general inclination; social belonging; and/or political partisanship. New technologies can also influence our depth of attention to information. For example, Wilson and Maceviciute (2022) note:

Research shows that modern information technologies, especially social media, make the dissemination of news so easy that it often happens before the meaning of the message is grasped (2022, p.496).

Emergent AI technologies are now also influencing our relationship with information including our (cognitive) depth of information processing. For example, a Oxford University Press (2025) survey of 2000 UK students aged 13-18 reports young people's cognition to be ever more connected to and influenced by digital algorithms, and that whilst young people are "gaining fluency and speed in [information] processing", they are also "sometimes losing the depth that comes from pausing, questioning, and thinking independently, which brings metacognitive skills into focus" (2025, p.6). The authors note that "the true challenge ahead is not mastering technology but safeguarding the depth of human thought in an age of synthetic cognition and artificial intelligence" (Oxford University Press, 2025, p.6). In such situations (i.e., absence of analytical/critical thinking), mis/disinformation thrives.

Methods/forms of intervention

Roozenbeek et al. (2023) report four main types of countermeasure/intervention variously employed to address mis/disinformation:

- Boosting: interventions that develop people's competencies and agency to themselves identify misinformation and reduce individual susceptibility (prebunking/inoculation, critical literacy skills).
- Nudging: interventions to influence/direct peoples information behaviours (accuracy primes, social-norms nudges).
- Debunking: interventions to correct disseminated mis/disinformation.
- Labelling: human and/or machine classifications and information management.

Whilst the above countermeasures are variously employed dependent upon circumstances, Reuter et al. (2025, p.3356) report that “it is clear that effective responses to misinformation require a holistic approach that combines educational, technical, and ethical strategies”. In relation, Young et al. (2020, p.541) note that “if educational approaches do not account for the interaction between personal beliefs (and emotion) and misinformation, then they will be far less effective”. Careful consideration and application within the social context is also important (Saunders, 2025). This brings us to the embedded role of public libraries within local communities.

The role of public libraries

The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto states that public libraries have “key missions which relate to information, literacy, education, inclusivity, civic participation and culture [that] should be at the core of public library services” (IFLA/UNESCO, 2022, p.2). Several of these key missions relate specifically to the challenges presented by mis/disinformation in society. For instance, description of the public library role includes:

- Providing access to a broad range of information and ideas free from censorship, supporting formal and informal education at all levels as well as lifelong learning enabling the ongoing, voluntary and self-conducted pursuit of knowledge for people at all stages of life.
- Initiating, supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes to build reading and writing skills, and facilitating the development of media and information literacy and digital literacy skills for all people at all ages, in the spirit of equipping an informed, democratic society.
- Providing their communities with access to scientific knowledge, such as research results and health information that can impact the lives of their users, as well as enabling participation in scientific progress.
- Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups.

Given the above fundamental societal role, Willenborg and Detmering (2025, p.538) note that “there is a political and moral imperative for librarians to play a lead role in countering misinformation”; however, libraries are faced with what has been described as a “complex challenge” (as noted above) compounded by “serious gaps in understanding” of their role (Young et al, 2020, p.539). There are calls for libraries to better understand effective methods of population intervention and education including open questions regarding passive and/or active library role, and potential impact on library neutrality and public trust (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al, 2023). In relation, fundamental epistemological considerations of truth and knowledge are discussed with practical implications for what information is collected and made available in libraries, that in a time of challenge and counter-challenge (and post-truth blurring of fact and fiction), is not always straightforward. For example, Anderson (2017, p.4) argues that “in order to defend truth, we will have to agree that truth exists and can be known. This may seem like a trivial or even absurd concern. It is not”. In relation, Anderson cautions that libraries must avoid censorship and instead “do what we can to help them [patrons] read critically and come to valid, well-informed conclusions about what is true and good and what is

false and bad” (2017, p.8). However, such sentiment and goals that are deeply enshrined in long standing and important tenets and policies of public librarianship are not without tensions. As Sullivan (2019, p.1149) notes, “On one side, there is intellectual freedom and unrestricted access to information; on the other, the primary library service of selecting, verifying, and controlling collections on behalf of users. Often, this tension goes overlooked”. Challenges to collections from external parties can also be heavily politicised and can place significant pressure on librarians. Whilst we have limited insights into such challenges within UK libraries, Yeon and Dudak (2025, p.539) note that in the USA “Material challenges in public libraries are at an all-time high while also possessing a huge political and emotional weight” with the “potential for trauma from the library workplace... [now] higher and more charged”. Librarians must thus remain cognisant to such complexities and issues when seeking to correct mis/disinformation and positively influence people’s information behaviours.

Relevant previous empirical studies

Prior relevant empirical studies exploring the mis/disinformation perspectives and experiences of PL staff are discussed below. The key criteria to identify relevant prior research where: mis/disinformation research framed as library studies in title, abstract, keywords; original empirical research; English language; and year 2000-2025 (for currency and practical considerations). Searches were conducted in the *Library Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA)* research database (the main index for the subject area). Search terms were misinformation or disinformation or fake news AND library or libraries.

Young et al. (2020) undertook a series of interviews and workshops with PL staff (n.34) in Washington State USA to explore staff mis/disinformation roles, experiences and thoughts on effective mis/disinformation programs (e.g., services, events, support). The authors (2020, p.524) report that participants recognised their mis/disinformation role and “potential to be powerful actors” in addressing mis/disinformation, but “have not yet implemented much”, with three issues reported. Firstly, whilst PL staff recognised that mis/disinformation was a complex multifaceted challenge that traditional MIL education alone could not address, and that new PL approaches and partnerships were required; participants were unsure as to what would be effective and appropriate new forms of engagement and partnership. Secondly, PL staff did not feel that they had sufficient training and tools to address mis/disinformation, particularly on an everyday basis. Participants discussed feeling unsure as to how to approach mis/disinformation discussions in everyday situations, and in relation, navigate potential patron sensitivities to challenge and correction. They also discussed the practical challenges of dealing with a broad range of possible information topics and needs “not necessarily grounded in their own expertise” that “can quickly become overwhelming” (2020, p.545). Thirdly, PL staff were unsure of how to navigate sensitive topics (examples discussed were politics, gender, and vaccination) including how to maintain neutrality. Participants were also cognisant to divisive aspects of mis/disinformation that “cultivated an us-versus-them mentality that could easily lead the public to viewing librarians as an enemy” (2020, p.546). Many also discussed possible risks to funding and community partnerships upon which PLs rely. A key open question raised in this study was how PLs can

“engage with an increasingly divided public while sustaining necessary public support” (2020, p.547).

Paris et al. (2022) undertook a survey and interviews with PL staff (n.20) in New Jersey, USA to explore approaches to mis/disinformation. They explored forms of mis/disinformation engagement (i.e., active/passive) and focus (i.e., general MIL education or specific topics). They found passive literacy-focused engagements to be the most common (e.g., direction to MIL frameworks, library guides) followed to a lesser degree by passive topic-focused engagements (e.g., provision of factsheets, links to credible sources). Active engagements (e.g., patron interactions, education programs) were found to be much less common. They also report that PL staff “were uniformly dissatisfied with their library’s tactics to combat misinformation” (2022, p.5) with three issues reported: lack of staff training and resources; concerns that interventions might conflict with important principles of PL neutrality; and limited understanding of effective mis/disinformation approaches and programs. Much is attributed by the authors to declining investment in PLs, but there are also calls for further research and collaboration to advance understanding of PL role.

Tripodi et al. (2023) observed and interviewed PL staff (n.8) in Montana, USA to explore how staff promoted effective information literacy practices and addressed mis/disinformation issues. The majority of findings report observations of patron information search behaviours and discussion of librarian interactions and literacy support with limited specific attention to mis/disinformation interactions and issues. Relevant findings from the study report that librarians have confidence in their ability to teach effective information literacy practices but found it challenging to correct patrons on specific information topics, and “expressed a tension or uncertainty about the limits of their role in interfering with patrons’ searches” (2023, p.33). In relation, the authors report a general hesitance amongst librarians to “take on the frontline role when it came to confronting disinformation head-on” (2023, p.33).

Sanches et al. (2024) undertook a survey of PL staff (n.70) in Portugal to explore the mis/disinformation knowledge, resources, and actions of Portuguese public librarians. The authors (2024, p.150) report that their findings indicate a “consistent knowledge of librarians on the subject, but still incipient actions to combat disinformation”. Participants recognised their role in combating mis/disinformation with patron training, resources and guidance considered the main library actions to address, followed by collaborative activities with other institutions (no further details provided), technology control mechanisms (fact checking discussed), and legislation and regulation (no further details provided). However, the authors also report that when asked about current mis/disinformation initiatives and activities, most participants either had nothing to report or did not know if anything was occurring or was planned. Those participants who did report mis/disinformation activities indicated a focus on MIL training and/or guidance for patrons. Further insights are limited by questionnaire design. The main author recommendations are general calls for further librarian training and to “provide pedagogical resources and strategies to encourage learning among populations” (2024, p.157).

Other relevant empirical studies

Johnston (2023) surveyed and interviewed academic library staff (n.105) in Australia to explore approaches to mis/disinformation. The author reports that much staff attention is focused on MIL education and guidance to foster important critical thinking skills in students. The study also provides insights into staff perceptions of role, with academic librarians indicating that they see themselves as having an important active role to guide students and advocate critical thinking. Johnston reports (2023, p.258) that the biggest challenge for staff “was the constantly evolving ways that mis/disinformation is spread and a lack of time to investigate accuracy of content or authority of authors” compounded by limited time and resources for staff training and maintenance of collections and staff subject expertise. With regard to the latter, the volume of information to evaluate was described by librarians as “resource intensive” and “overwhelming” (2023, p.259). Most librarians also indicated a lack of policy or process guidelines, and training and tools to address. Limited coordinated attention to mis/disinformation within teaching practices is also discussed. The author also reports conflicting views amongst librarians regarding what should and what shouldn’t be in library collections, with concerns that removal would constitute censorship. In relation, a lack of overarching guidance is reported. The author recommends advocacy to highlight library role, and development of policy and/or guidelines to help academic librarians address mis/disinformation. Further staff training and resources are also called for.

Hari et al. (2024) undertook a survey of academic library staff (n.105) in Delhi, India to explore general perceptions of mis/disinformation and staff readiness to address. The authors report that whilst the majority of librarians recognised mis/disinformation as a significant problem, a significant number of respondents (46%) also indicated neither mis/disinformation familiarity or unfamiliarity (i.e., provided a neutral response to the question) that the authors suggest could be indicative of limited mis/disinformation knowledge and skills. Of the remainder, 40% of participants indicated familiarity with mis/disinformation, and 14% unfamiliarity (further insights are limited by questionnaire design). The main activities to address mis/disinformation are reported to be focused on library guides and education programs. The authors also report challenges faced by participants addressing mis/disinformation issues. In ranked order these are reported to be: limited access to verification resources; AI advancements; insufficient training; and lack of time. The authors recommend further staff training including overarching national guidelines and policy.

Willenborg and Detmering (2025) interviewed academic library staff (n.20) in the USA to explore how librarians address mis/disinformation issues in US academic institutions, and associated experiences and challenges. Most participants described addressing mis/disinformation issues as part of “one-shot” general library instruction sessions sometimes supplemented by additional support (2025, p.539). Librarians were aware of the limitations of one-shot generic instruction but “simply do not have time to teach about misinformation in a meaningful way” (2025, p.542). Beyond the challenge of time, librarians also discussed “a perceived lack of expertise on misinformation topics, and discomfort in addressing potentially charged topics with students and faculty” (2025, p.542) including instances of librarian self-censorship due to previous negative responses. Participants felt that mis/disinformation instruction and guidance needed to become more embedded in student everyday

needs and practices, and that beyond more time to provide such support, would require more substantial collaboration with external partners. The authors note that, "... the status quo appears to be untenable as a conducive environment for addressing the complex psychological, social, and political problems associated with misinformation on a broad scale" (2025, p.547) with the profession described by the authors as appearing to be "at a crossroads" (2025, p.549).

In summary, previous relevant empirical studies are limited but several common themes can nonetheless be identified:

- Librarian practices appear largely focused on population media and information literacy education (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al., 2023; Johnston, 2023; Sanches et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024) including some evidence of librarian awareness of the limitations of such approaches (Willenborg and Detmering, 2025).
- There appears to be limited librarian understanding of effective and appropriate forms of engagement with patrons to address mis/disinformation issues (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Hari et al., 2024; Willenborg and Detmering, 2025).
- There appears to be limited training and resources available to assist librarians in addressing mis/disinformation (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Sanches et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024).
- There appear to be unresolved librarian concerns over possible impact on library neutrality when addressing mis/disinformation (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al., 2023, Johnston, 2023).
- There appears to be a need for library collaboration to address mis/disinformation (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Willenborg and Detmering, 2025).

Prior studies provide some direction for this investigation but within the limitations of geographical range (limited to the USA, Australia, India, and Portugal with notably no prior UK studies) and small samples (8-105 library staff, avg. 44). Further, only one study (Johnston, 2023) includes librarian demographic information but limited to library position. None provide details concerning population groups interacted with. We thus also have limited insights into mis/disinformation perspectives and practices by library role and patrons interacted with that would provide valuable contextual insights.

This raised the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of UK librarians regarding current and future PL role in addressing mis/disinformation?
2. What are the mis/disinformation related practices, experiences, and challenges faced by UK librarians?
3. With consideration to future PL mis/disinformation roles, what is required to maximise PL role within UK communities?

Methodology

This research was conducted via a literature review of prior relevant research and a national survey of public library staff in England. The parameters of the literature review are discussed in section one (see: relevant previous empirical studies) with questionnaire design and data analysis discussed below.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire design was informed by study aims, research questions, and background research (see: Section One), and sought to provide contextual insights into the mis/disinformation perspectives, practices, and challenges of public librarians. This was unpacked into five sections in the questionnaire (see: Appendix One for full copy):

- A. Staff demographics (staff location, primary role, years working in PLs, education, professional membership, mis/disinformation training).
- B. Members of the public interacted with in their library role (user/member age, socioeconomic status, form of interaction, mis/disinformation guidance).
- C. Staff mis/disinformation practices (boosting, nudging, debunking, labelling/regulating).
- D. Staff mis/disinformation capacity and challenges (time, skills, resources, guidance, expertise, understanding, concerns).
- E. Staff mis/disinformation perspectives (conceptual and practical understanding and opinion).

34 of the 41 questions in sections A-E above were closed-ended (pre-coded) including use of two five-point Likert scales (a frequency scale for section C and an agreement/disagreement scale for sections D-E). Several of the pre-coded categories were drawn from common classifications. For example, UK *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional* (CILIP) membership classifications, UK *Office of National Statistics* age and socioeconomic classifications, and the main general forms of intervention (or practices) reported to be employed to address mis/disinformation (e.g., see Roozenbeek et al., 2023). Further questions were informed by the review of prior relevant research (see: Section One) providing direction for possible common themes and issues to explore. For example, questions on librarian: mis/disinformation understanding, focus and practices (Q17-21, 34-36)), provision of mis/disinformation training, resources and guidance (Q13-14, 23-25, 31), and possible neutrality and preservation of intellectual freedom concerns (Q27-30). This included several open-ended questions that encouraged participants to further explain their responses or to provide an additional response not felt to align to pre-coded categories. For, example to provide further details concerning types of mis/disinformation training and resources provided (Q8), or to include additional operational and/or personal challenges not listed (Q33). A final open question (Q41) sought to identify priority needs amongst librarians to effectively address mis/disinformation in UK communities. The design included pilot trial (to test usability and usefulness) discussed below.

Pilot trial

A pilot trial was conducted October 2025 with the voluntary participation of Stirling Council Public Libraries (Central Scotland). The pilot trial was successful (no incomplete or spoiled returns, no data collection/analysis issues) with one small change to the question exploring active/passive aspects of library role. Originally two questions this was simplified to one (see #38) to better identify general orientation (i.e., participant favours an active or passive role) and avoid selection of both. A non-leading “other” option was also included for other possible responses (depends on etc.). No other changes were made from the pilot test.

Distribution and recruitment

The survey (utilising JISC Online Survey platform) was open to all members of staff of adult age working within public libraries in England, including volunteers. Participants self-confirmed their eligibility to complete the survey via two initial checklist questions (confirmation of age and role) as part of informed consent (see: Appendix One).

The survey was open from Nov 3rd to Dec 5th, 2025, and was promoted and distributed via the *Chartered Institute of Library and Information professionals (CILIP) Public and Mobile Libraries Special Interest Group* (including for onward distribution), and via *Libraries Connected* (to reach all Heads of Public Library Services in England for onward distribution to staff). This included repeat cycles of promotion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis, including intercoder reliability checks, was conducted using MS Excel software and NVivo. Descriptive statistical analysis of nominal and ordinal categorical data included dataset sample/size, frequency distribution, percentage/proportion, and mean value for Likert type questions. Qualitative analysis of unstructured responses to open-ended questions involved iterative cycles of pattern coding and thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process of: data transcription and familiarisation; initial code generation; collating codes into themes; reviewing themes; refining themes; and producing themes. One team member coded with periodic code checking (multiple sample coding) conducted by the second team member independent to the first, with no notable disagreement in coding to report. Regular team discussion facilitated minor refinements to code structures, and identification of primary codes for data initially assigned multiple codes. Emergent themes were developed and refined iteratively (both team members) including crosschecking for coherence, consistence, and distinctiveness (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Qualitative analysis included identification of exemplar direct quotes (from coded data extracts) for inclusion in this paper to evidence identified themes.

Ethics

The ethical design of this project was approved by University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel (GUEP reference: 2025 23674 18020). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who all participated voluntarily.

2 Findings

“I personally take mis/disinformation very seriously, but I lack the skills/training to address it professionally, and fear for my safety when such issues arise.”

(Survey respondent 375)

2. Findings¹

Section A: library staff (participant) demographics

This section reports participant demographics (location, primary role, years working in public libraries, education, professional membership, mis/disinformation training).

Q2. Participant main public library role ²

Most of our participants are library assistants (58.1%), but all other operational roles and levels are also represented in the sample including senior management and heads of service levels (see Fig.1).

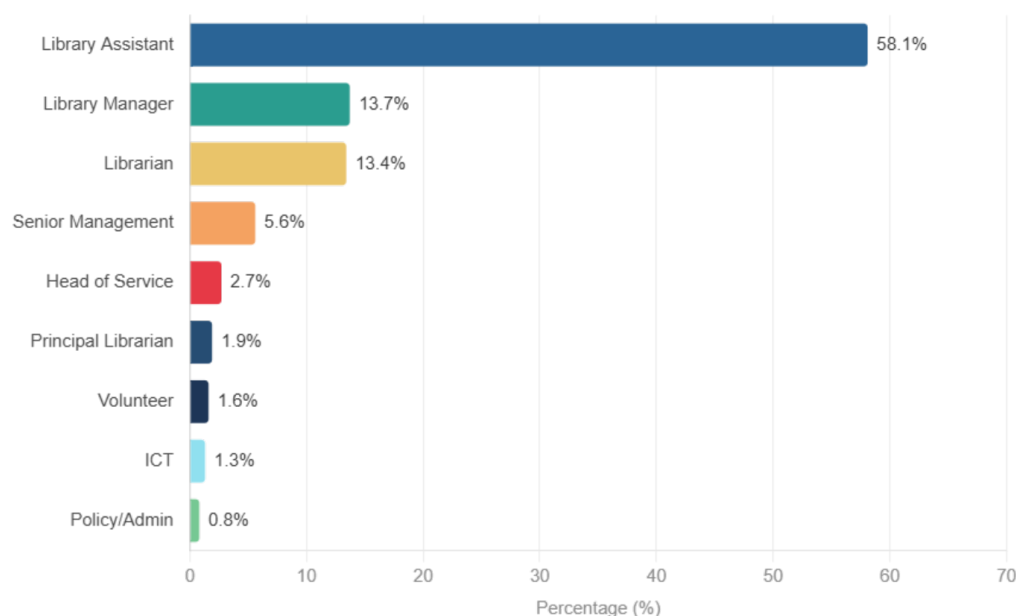


Figure 1 - Participant main public library role (n=371)

42 participants selected other for main role. 28 of the 42 responses could be coded to existing categories (library assistant, library manager, principal librarian, librarian) and are included in final counts reported above (see: Figure 1). The remaining 14 valid 'other' responses were categorised and included in the final counts as follows: volunteers (1.6%); ICT support (1.3%); policy/administration (0.8%).

Q3. Participant length of time working in public libraries

Just over four tenths of our participants (43.4%) have worked in public libraries for 11+ years, and almost two tenths (16.7%) for between 6-10 years. The remainder

¹ All percentages in this section have been rounded

² Begins at Q2 as Q1 was consent (see Appendix).

(39.9%) have worked in public libraries for 5 years or less. Most of our respondents thus have 6+ years' library experience.

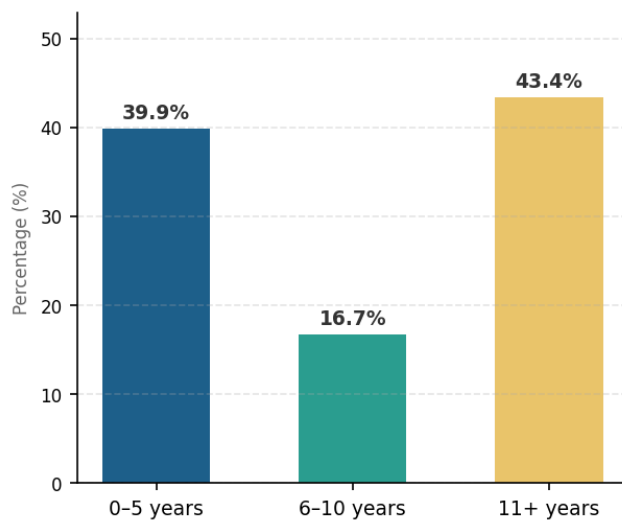


Figure 2 - Participant length of time working in public libraries (n=371)

Q4. Participant location (public library location/user catchment)

Most of our participants work in urban public library locations (81.1%), with a minority working in rural locations (17.8%) or mobile services (1%).

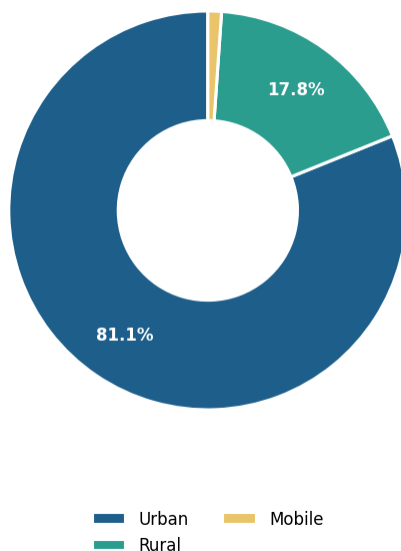


Figure 3 - Participant location (n=370)

Q5. Participant education (highest qualification)

Four tenths of our participants (40.3%) are educated to university postgraduate level, and just under a further four tenths (36%) to university undergraduate level. A minority are educated to FE college level (15.1%) or school level (8.6%). Most of our participants (76.3%) are thus university educated.

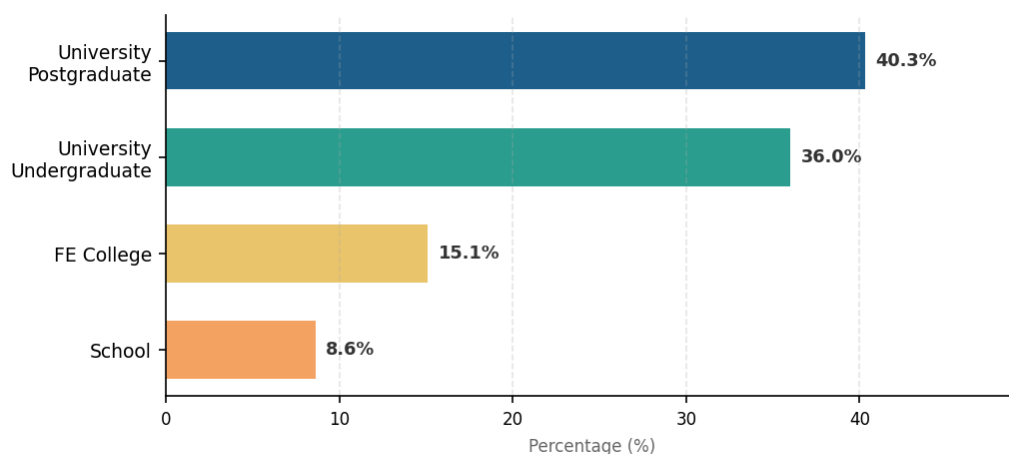


Figure 4 - Participant highest level of educational qualification (n=372)

Q6. Participant CILIP membership

Most of our participants (85.4%) are not members of the *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (the professional body for librarianship). A minority of our participants are Standard Members (8.4%), Chartered Members (4.3%), Student Members (1.6%), or Fellowship Member (<1%). No ACLIP Members appeared in the data.

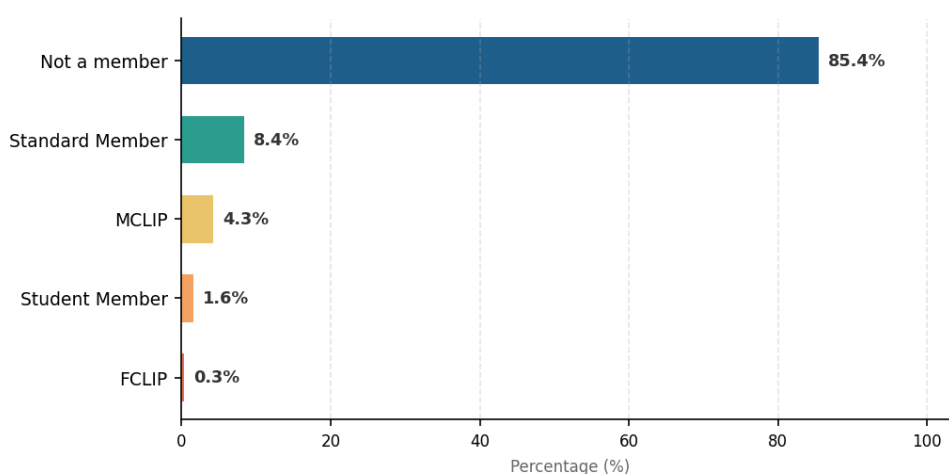


Figure 5 - Participant CILIP membership (n=371)

Q7. Participant mis/disinformation training

Most of our participants (74.7%) have not received any mis/disinformation specific training, and almost two tenths (18.3%) are not sure. A minority (7%) of participants have received mis/disinformation specific training.

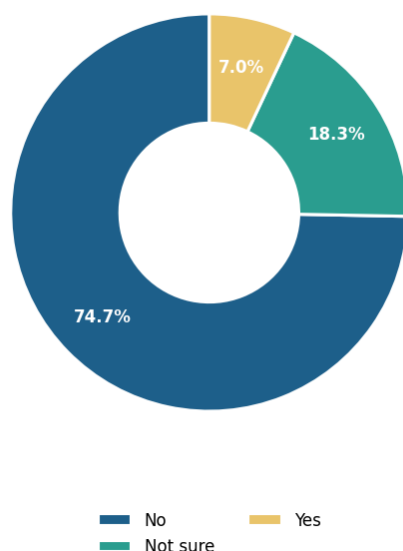


Figure 6 - Participant mis/disinformation training (n=372)

Q8. Types of mis/disinformation training undertaken by participants

The 26 participants who indicated in Q7 that they have had mis/disinformation specific training provided a total of 36 responses to this follow-up question requesting further details (i.e., some mentioning 2-3 types of training). In numerical descending order NHS Health Literacy Partnership resources were the most cited provider (20%), followed by CILIP e-learning resources (16%), Local Council online safety courses (16%), Libraries Connected e-learning course (11%), provided as part of university education (11%), the British Library (3%), Wikimedia (3%), the Guardian Foundation (3%), the Good Things Foundation Learn My Way course (3%), and the Google Super Searchers information literacy programme (3%). Some respondents (11%) could not recall training provider.

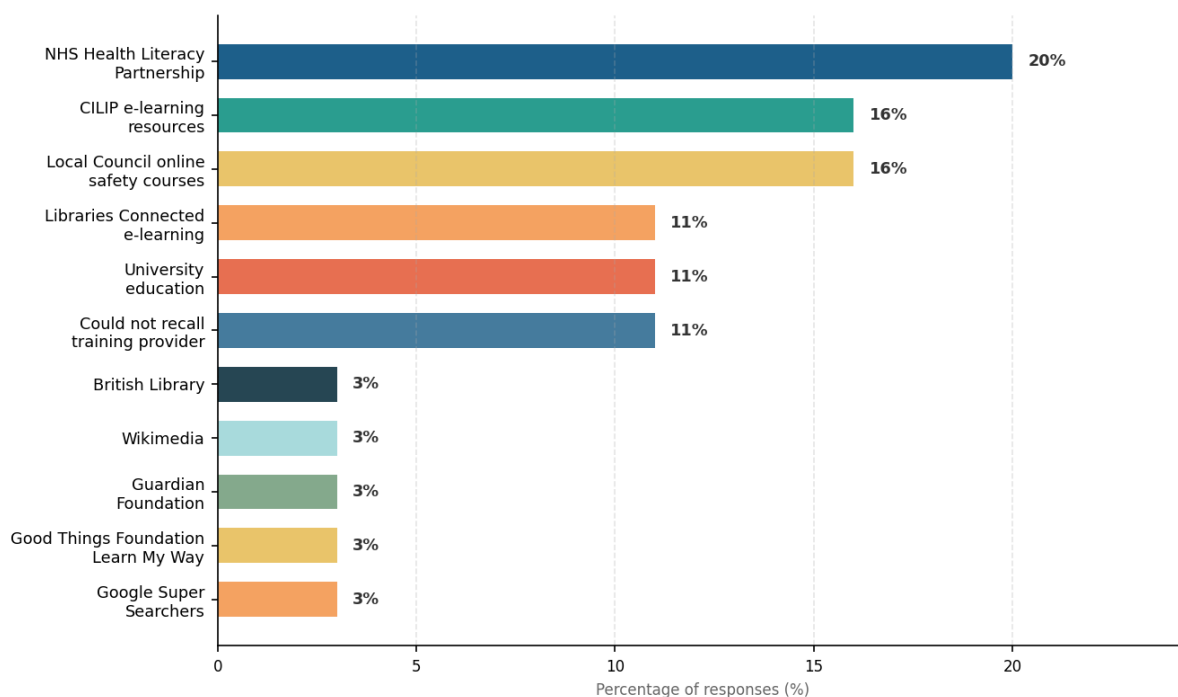


Figure 7 - Types of mis/disinformation training undertaken by participants (n=36)

From participant responses it appears that much of the training has been quite general in nature (i.e., focused on general literacy skills and/or not librarian specific). For example one respondent (ID103) commented, “[council name redacted] offers some training on scams and being aware that not all information you view or receive is accurate”, and another (ID135) that, “I think informal training a number of years ago, more focussing on trusted sources, verifying information rather than more recent developments such as AI, bots etc.”, and another (ID366) that they had obtained, “a couple of presentations from a libraries perspective” in addition to more general council wide training (no further details provided). A minority of responses (8%) indicated that they had received training to be able to in turn train library users/members.

Section B: library users/members participants interact with

This section reports the demographics (estimated age and socioeconomic status) of the library users/members that our participants interact with including form of interaction and whether mis/disinformation guidance and/or resources are provided for users/members.

Q9. Range of library users/members interacted with

Most of our respondents (80.9%) do not interact with any one specific group of library users/members (i.e., they work with a range of users/members). A minority (19.1%) indicated that they do interact with one specific group of users/members (Q10-11 below provides further details).

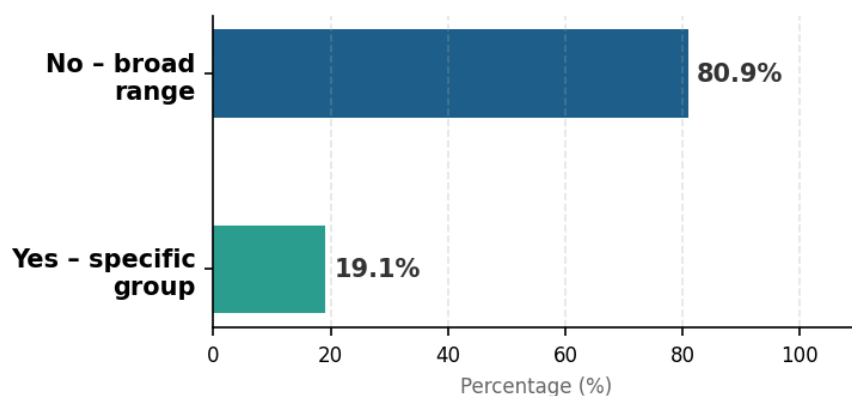


Figure 8 - Range of library users/members that participants interact with (n=371)

Q10. Age of specific library users/members interacted with (if answered yes to Q9)

Just over half of our respondents who interact with one specific user group (56.3% of 71 participants) are interacting with working-age adult users/members aged between 16-64 years. Of the remainder, approximately one quarter (23.9%) are working with young people aged 15 or under, and under one quarter (19.7%) are working with older adults aged 65 and over (see Fig.9).

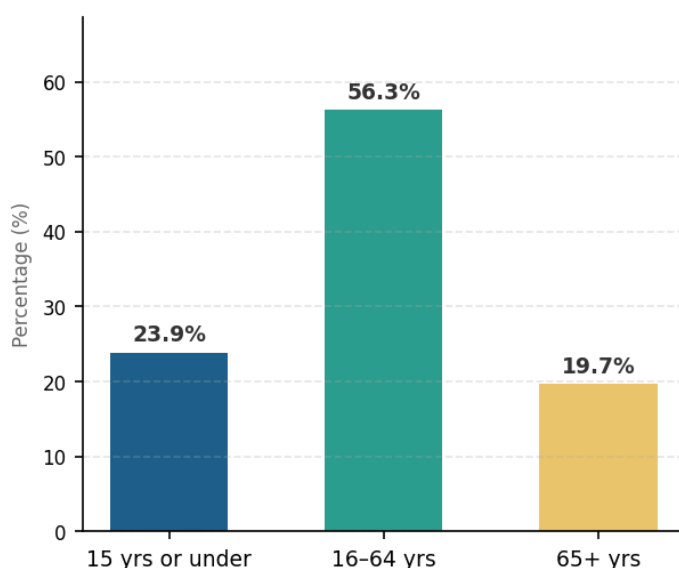


Figure 9 - Age of primary user group interacted with (n=71)

Q11. Household social classification of specific library users/members interacted with (if answered yes to Q9)

Just under half of our respondents who are interacting with one specific user group (43.7% of 71 participants) are interacting with users/members from low-income households. Of the remainder, just over one quarter (28.2%) are interacting with

users/members from middle-income households, and just over one quarter (28.2%) are not sure.

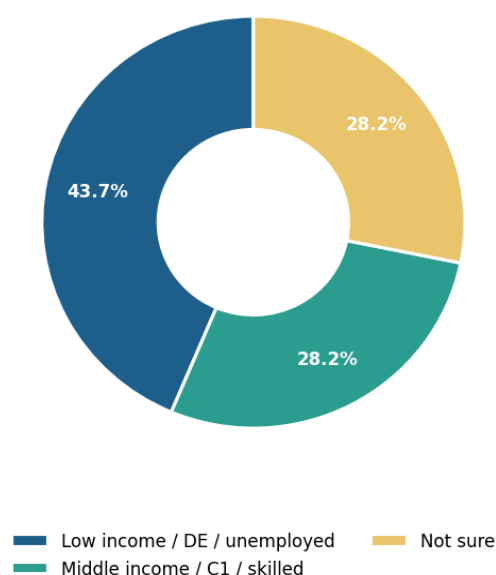


Figure 10 - Social classification of primary user group (n=71)

Q12. Main form of participant interaction with library users/members

This question allowed respondents to select from a pre-defined list or to select 'Other' if the pre-defined list did not represent their experience of dealing with users. 16 of the 89 responses to select the 'Other' option were invalid (e.g., stating no interaction with users/members). Of the remainder (n=73), 9 could be coded to existing categories and are included in the count of those categories in Figure 11. Other forms of user/member interaction specified by participants were coded as follows and are included as categories in Figure 11: mixed interactions spanning enquiries desk, issues desk, groups/activities, IT support; mediated (e.g., online, telephone) communication; managing complaints; events; general; and via community outreach.

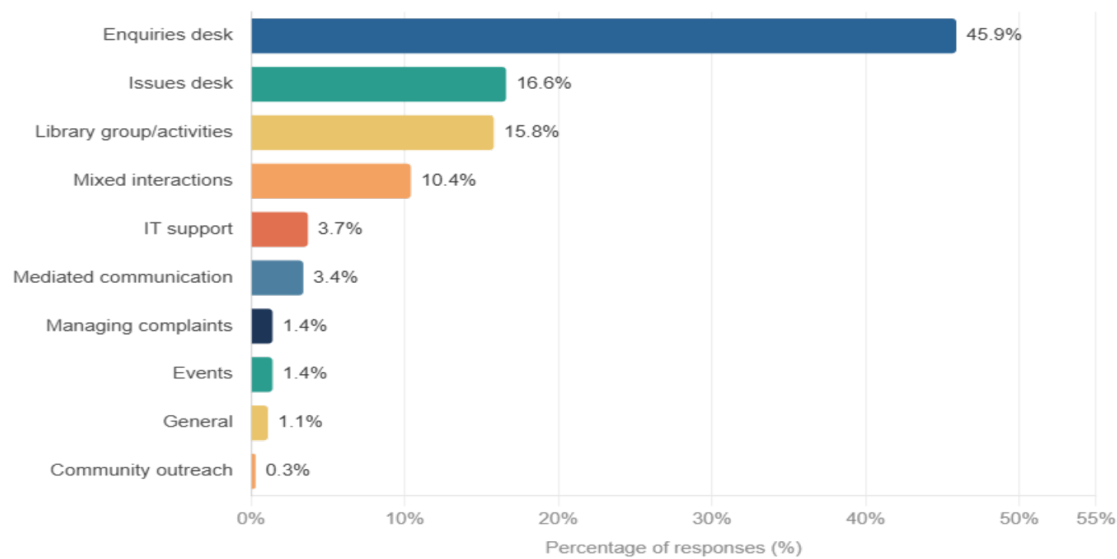


Figure 11 - Form of participant interaction with library users/members (n=371)

For over four tenths of our participants their main form of interaction with library user/members is via the enquiries desk (45.9%), followed by issues desk (16.6%), groups/activities (15.8%), mixed interactions (10.4%), and IT support (3.7%). Most of our participants thus interact with users/members via a mix of enquiries desk, issues desk, groups/activities, and IT support.

Q13. Provision of mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for library users/members

Most participants (56.1%) confirmed that their library does not provide mis/disinformation guidelines or resources for users/members, and just over one-third (35.3%) were unsure. A minority of participants (8.6%) confirmed that their library provides mis/disinformation guidelines and resources for users/members.

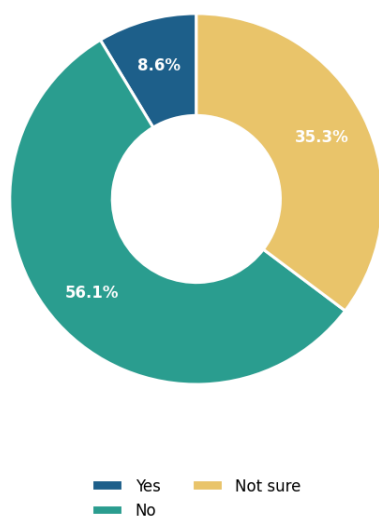


Figure 12 - Provision of mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for library users/members (n=371)

Q14: Types of mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources provided for library users/members (if answered yes to Q13)

The 32 participants who indicated that their library does provide mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for their users/members (see Fig.13) provided a total of 37 responses to this follow-up question requesting further details (i.e., some participants citing 2-3 types of guidelines/resources). 4 participant responses were invalid and removed (e.g., statements confirming no formal guidelines, general references to a curated library collections). For the remainder (n33 responses), participants variously indicated that they provide: signposting to external online guides, courses, and recommended websites (40%); leaflets (24%); posters (15%); media and information literacy courses and events (12%); and online safety guides (9%).

Much user/member provision appears to be part of everyday staff practices and promotion within the library, but some participants indicated limited or sporadic provision. For example, one respondent (ID292) commented, “Only for Safer Internet week – lots of info sheets on this subject”, and another (ID183) that their library provides “Occasional access to courses that assist people in identifying online misinformation”.

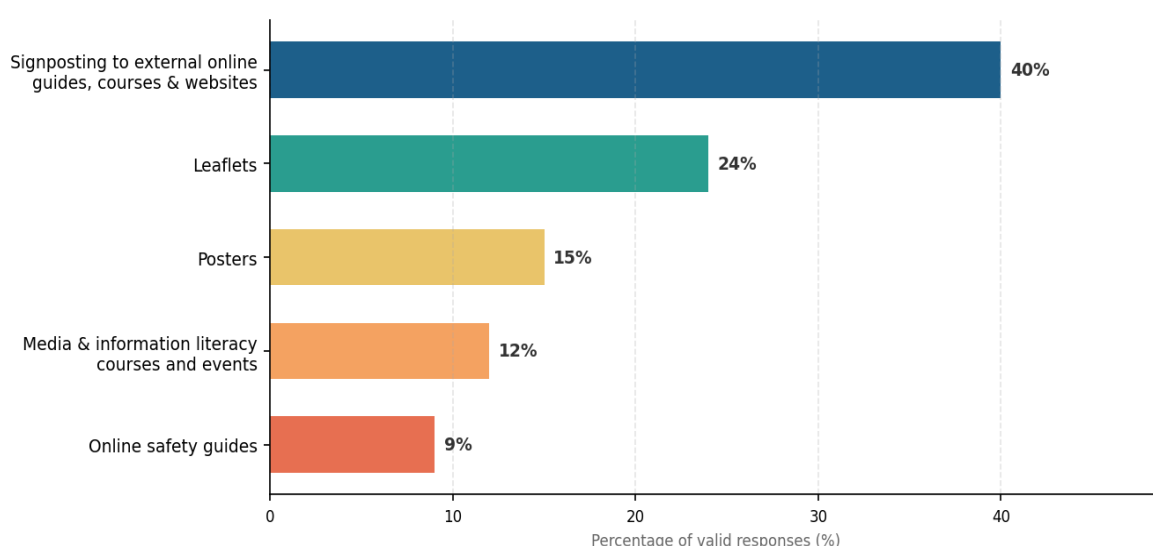


Figure 13 - Types of mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources provided for library users/members (n=37)

Q15. Library partnerships/collaborations to address mis/disinformation

Half of participants (50.4%) were unsure as to whether their library had any partnerships or collaborations with external organisations to address mis/disinformation. Approximately four tenths (40.7%) of participants stated no, and a minority (8.9%) stated yes (followed up in Q16).

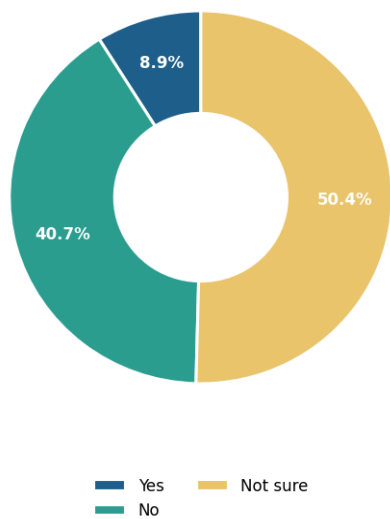


Figure 14 - Library partnerships/collaborations to address mis/disinformation (n=371)

Q16. Types of library partnerships/collaborations to address mis/disinformation (if answered yes to Q15)

32 of the 33 participants who indicated that their library has partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation provided further details in this follow-up question. 6 responses were invalid (e.g., respondent stating that they could not recall specific details) and were removed. The remainder (n26) variously named fourteen partner organisations as follows (some indicating collaborations with 2-3 organisations): the Good Things Foundation (16%), NHS Health Literacy Partnership (14%), Citizens Advice (14%), Local Authority (9%), Libraries Connected (7%), Police (7%), Banks (7%), Guardian Foundation (5%), Age UK (5%), Charities (5%), Further Education Colleges (5%), Trading Standards (2%), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2%), and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (2%).

Most library collaborations appear focused on offering user/member digital literacy courses and resources with several appearing specifically focused on online safety; however, some indicated that provision was sporadic. For example, one participant (ID47) commented that their library provides “Occasional drop-in sessions from Citizens Advice and local Police...”, and another (ID61) that “...we sometimes have the police/banks etc. come in to talk about online safety and scams”.

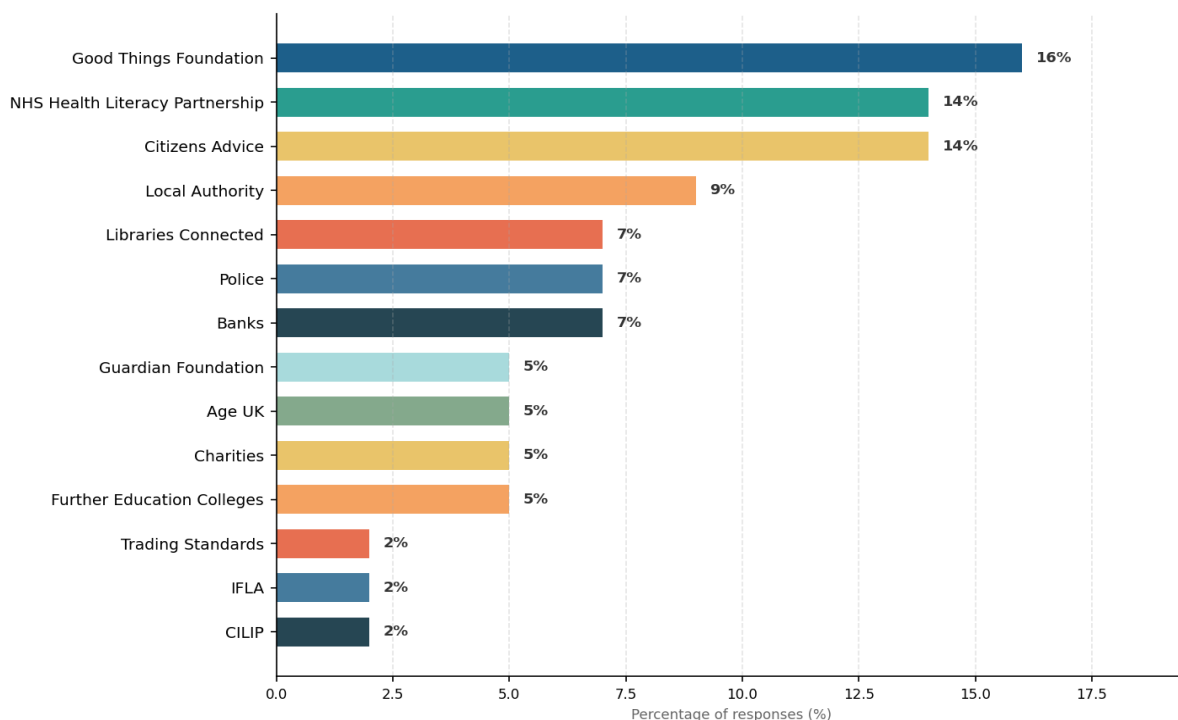


Figure 15 - Types of library partnerships/collaborations to address mis/disinformation (n=26)

A small number of participants (2%) indicated collaborations with external groups to develop the skills of library staff. For example, one participant commented, “We are in the early stages of an external project with the Guardian Foundation which will deliver training and support for staff to support customers with mis/disinformation” (ID262).

Section C: participant mis/disinformation practices

This section reports the practices employed by participants (library staff) to address mis/disinformation according to four common practices (i.e., boosting, nudging, debunking, labelling/regulating). A five-point frequency scale was used for each practice as follows: 1 never, 2 rarely (yearly), 3 sometimes (monthly), 4 quite often (weekly), 5 very often (daily).

Q17. Involvement in activities to develop general media and information literacy skills in users/members for them to be able to independently identify mis/disinformation and reduce their individual susceptibility (i.e., boosting type activities).

Most participants are never (54.2%) or rarely (27%) involved in *boosting* practices. A minority of participants are sometimes involved (14.8%), quite often involved (3%), or very often involved (1.8%). The mean value is 1.70, the standard deviation 0.90.

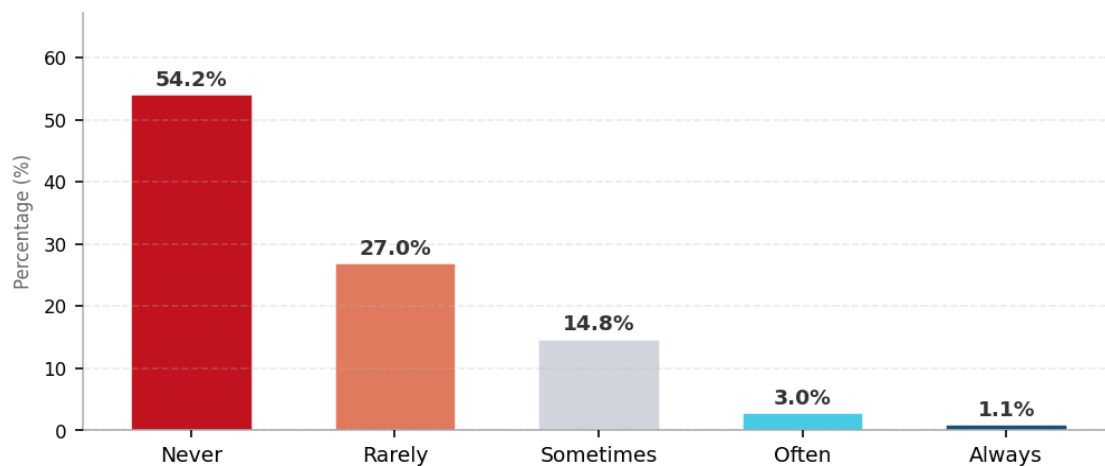


Figure 16 - Involvement in activities to develop general media and information literacy skills in users/members for them to be able to independently identify mis/disinformation and reduce their individual susceptibility (n=371)

Q18. Involvement in activities encouraging users/members to evaluate the accuracy of specific facts/information, and in relation, to behave responsibly with mis/disinformation (i.e., nudging type activities)

Most participants are never (48.2%) or rarely (33.2%) involved in *nudging* practices. A minority are sometimes involved (11.6%), quite often involved (5.7%), or very often involved (1.3%). The mean value is 1.79, the standard deviation 0.95.

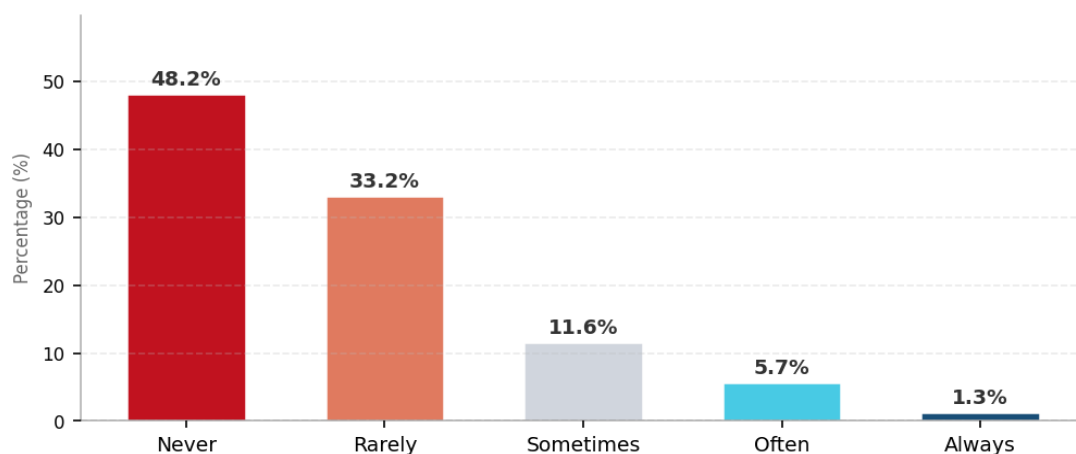


Figure 17 - Involvement in activities encouraging users/members to evaluate the accuracy of specific facts/information, and in relation, to behave responsibly with mis/disinformation (n=371)

Q19. Involvement in activities correcting specific mis/disinformation (i.e., debunking type activities)

Most participants are never (53%) or rarely (30.5%) involved in *debunking* practices. A minority are sometimes involved (12.4%), quite often involved (2.4%), or very often involved (1.6%). The mean value is 1.69, the standard deviation 0.90.

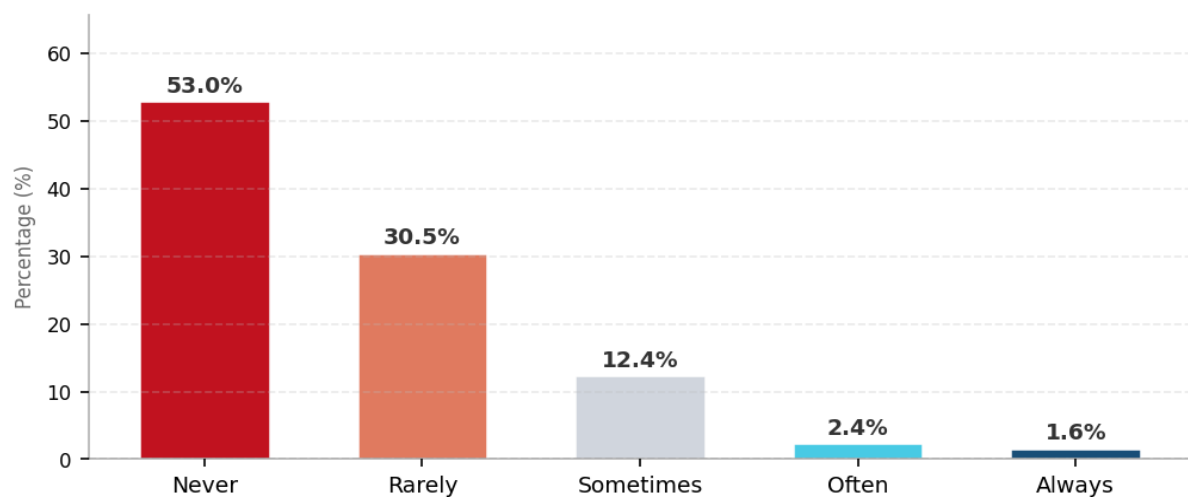


Figure 18 - Involvement in activities correcting specific mis/disinformation (n=371)

Q20. Involvement in activities restricting or removing access to mis/disinformation (i.e., regulatory and labelling activities)

Most participants are never (56.6%) or rarely (27.2%) involved in *regulatory* practices. A minority are sometimes involved (10.2%), quite often involved (4.6%), or very often involved (1.3%). The mean value is 1.67, the standard deviation 0.93.

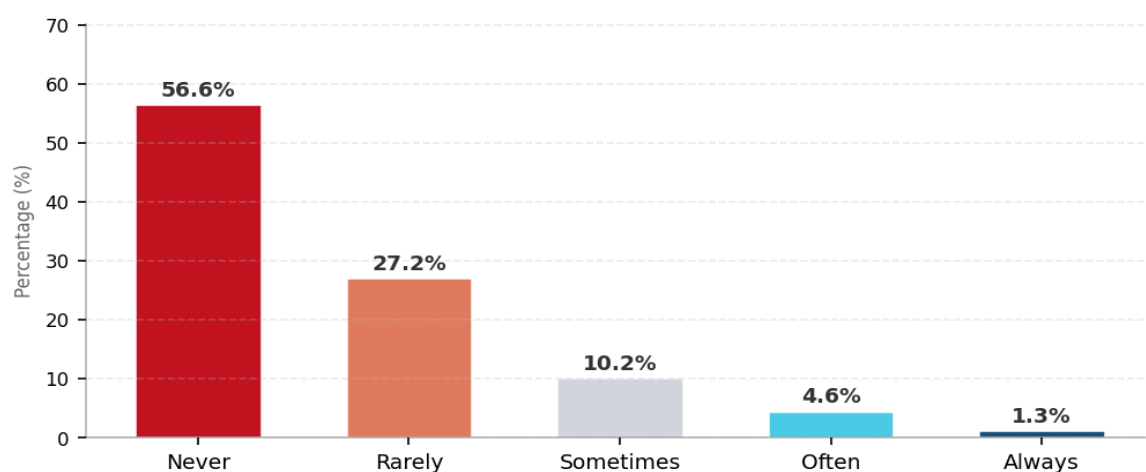


Figure 19 - Involvement in activities restricting or removing access to mis/disinformation (n=371)

Q21. Successful practices to address mis/disinformation

128 participants completed this question that asked if they could share details of any effective practices within their library to address mis/disinformation. 44 responses were invalid (e.g., not directly addressing question) including 37 stating that they could not recall any effective practices. For example, one librarian (ID86) commented, “I don’t think we have any in place and I think that is a massive issue!!”, and another (ID347) that:

We don't do anything at all. Occasionally staff members will try and have a discussion with a member of the public if we are particularly concerned, but we have no training, no formal procedure and no resources to give them.

Whilst almost all the respondents indicating a lack of attention to mis/disinformation highlighted this as an issue, one librarian (ID219) felt that it was not the role of librarians, commenting, “It is not the place of library staff to do this. It is an overreach. Libraries are to provide people with the resources they need to use”.

The remaining 84 participants who provided valid responses to this question provided 91 examples of effective library practices categorised as follows: librarian guidance provided to users/members during everyday interactions (33%); collection management (24%); user/member training (14%); public talks and events (12%); regulation (8%); guides (5%); and librarian training (4%).

Much practice appears to be informal and opportunistic as part of other activities. For example, one participant (ID23) commented, “Talking to members of the public, particularly when providing IT support” and another that:

Whilst my library service does not have anything organized/provided by the over-arching service, as an employee I will regularly discuss how to spot mis/disinformation alongside media literacy, primarily as a way of spotting scams that they may receive (ID32).

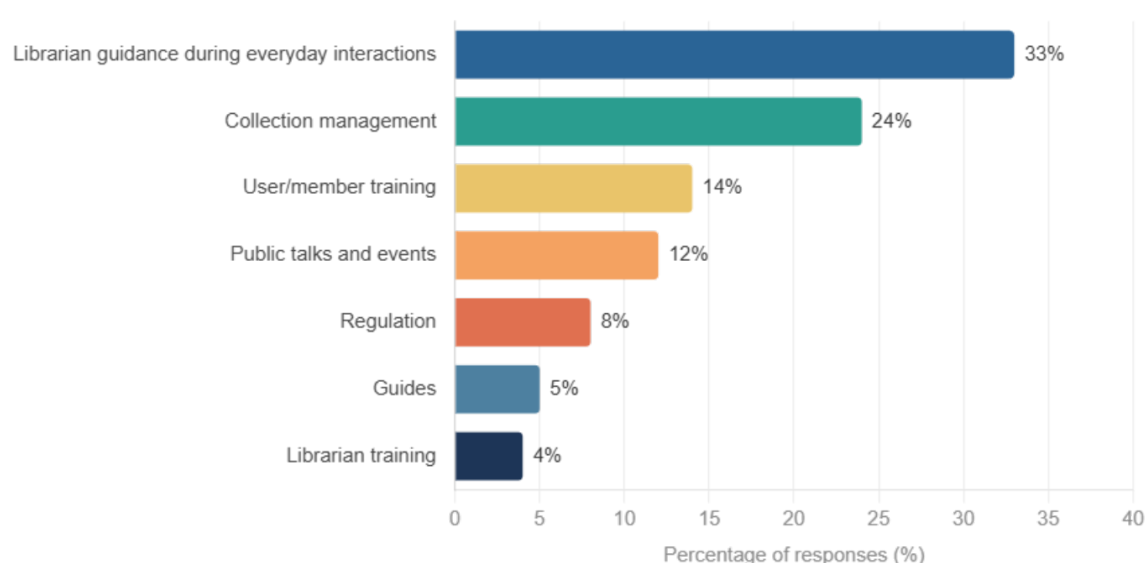


Figure 20 - Successful library practices for addressing mis/disinformation (n=84).

Several participants also discussed the importance of maintaining the quality of library resources through careful collection management, vetting and regulation. For example, one participant commented:

Procuring good quality book stock in line with stock policy, discarding old stock containing old information (e.g. old travel guides, legal books, medical books) and advising the frontline staff I train in stock procedures (ID43).

This includes staff attention to unvetted materials left by members of the public. For example, one participant (ID63) commented, “Sometimes anti-trans or racial propaganda is placed on our shelving. Staff are instructed to remove any material of this nature that has not been vetted by managers”.

Section D: participant mis/disinformation capacity and challenges

This section reports library staff capacity and challenges (i.e., time, skills, resources, guidance, expertise, understanding, and concerns). A five-point agree/disagree scale was used for each statement as follows: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree.

Q22. Time to address mis/disinformation

Approximately half of our participants (53%) do not feel that they have sufficient time to address mis/disinformation, and approximately one third neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (34.9%). A minority of participants (12.2%) felt that they do have sufficient time to address mis/disinformation. The mean value was 2.42, the standard deviation 1.00.

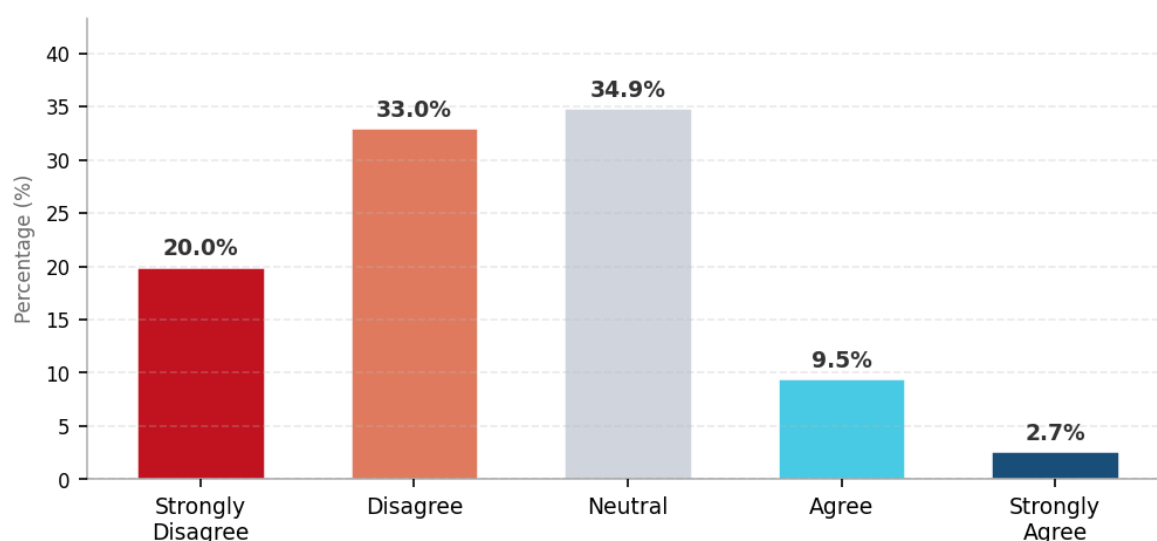


Figure 21 - I have sufficient time to address mis/disinformation (n=370)

Q23. Sufficient skills and training to address mis/disinformation

Most of our participants (60.5%) do not feel that they have sufficient skills and training to address mis/disinformation, and one quarter (24.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of respondents (14.6%) felt that they do have sufficient skills and training to address mis/disinformation. The mean value was 2.31, the standard deviation 1.06.

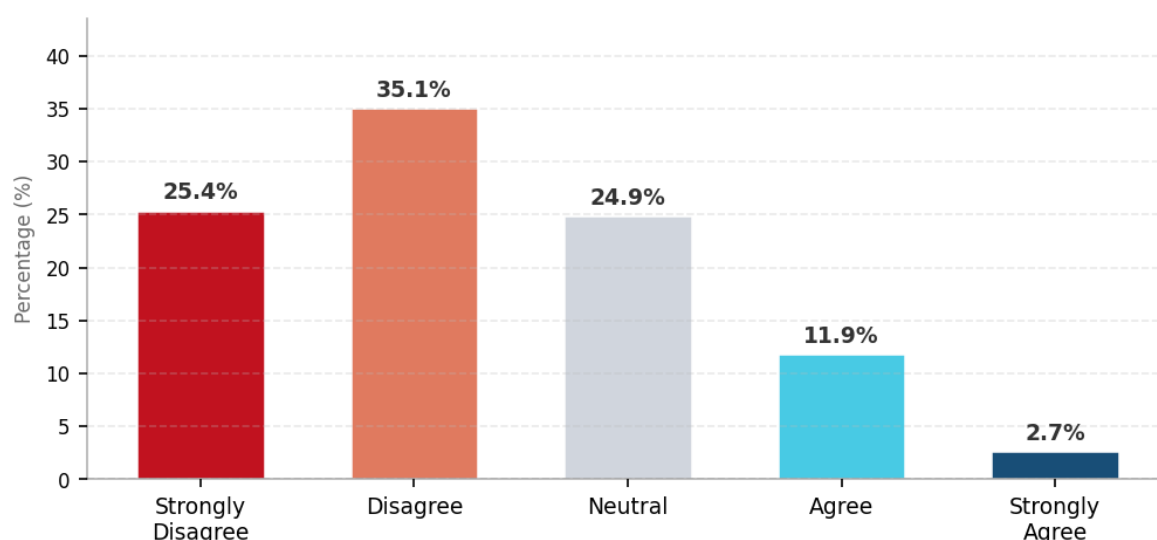


Figure 22 - I have sufficient skills and training to address mis/disinformation (n=370)

Q24. Sufficient resources to address mis/disinformation

Most of our participants (67.5%) do not feel that they have sufficient resources to address mis/disinformation, and approximately one fifth (20.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of participants (11.6%) felt that they do have sufficient resources to address mis/disinformation. The mean value was 2.17, the standard deviation 1.04.

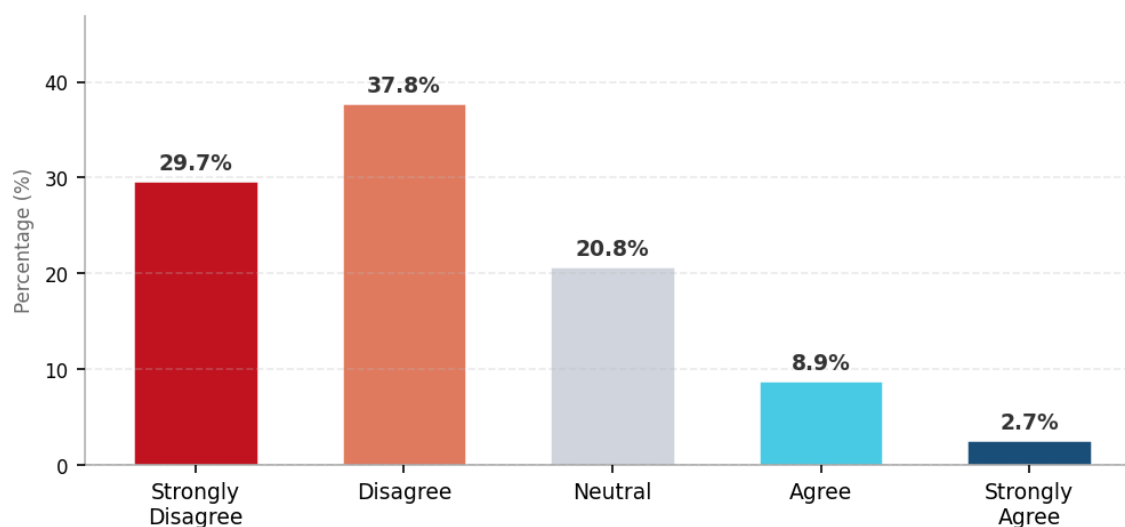


Figure 23 - I have sufficient resources to address mis/disinformation (n=370)

Q25. Sufficient expertise and/or general knowledge to address a broad range of mis/disinformation topics

Just under half of our participants (45.6%) do not feel that they have sufficient expertise and/or general knowledge to address a broad range of mis/disinformation topics, and just under one third (29.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. One quarter of participants (25.3%) felt that they have sufficient expertise and/or knowledge to address mis/disinformation. The mean value was 2.65, the standard deviation 1.17.

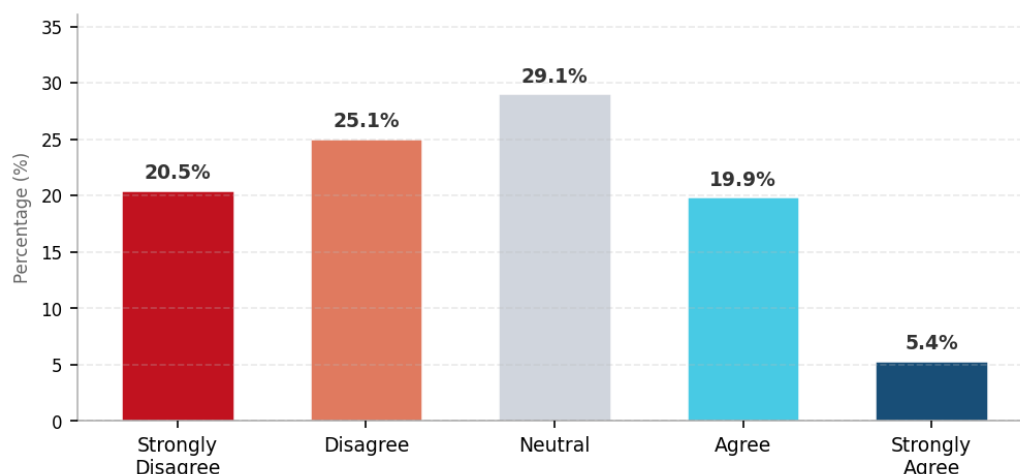


Figure 24 - I have sufficient expertise/general knowledge across a broad range of topics (n=371)

Q26. Sufficient understanding of appropriate and effective methods of user/member engagement to address mis/disinformation

Most of our participants (62.3%) do not feel that they have sufficient understanding of effective methods of user/member engagement to address mis/disinformation, and approximately one fifth (22.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of participants (15.2%) felt that they do have sufficient understanding to address mis/disinformation. The mean value was 2.32, the standard deviation 1.07.

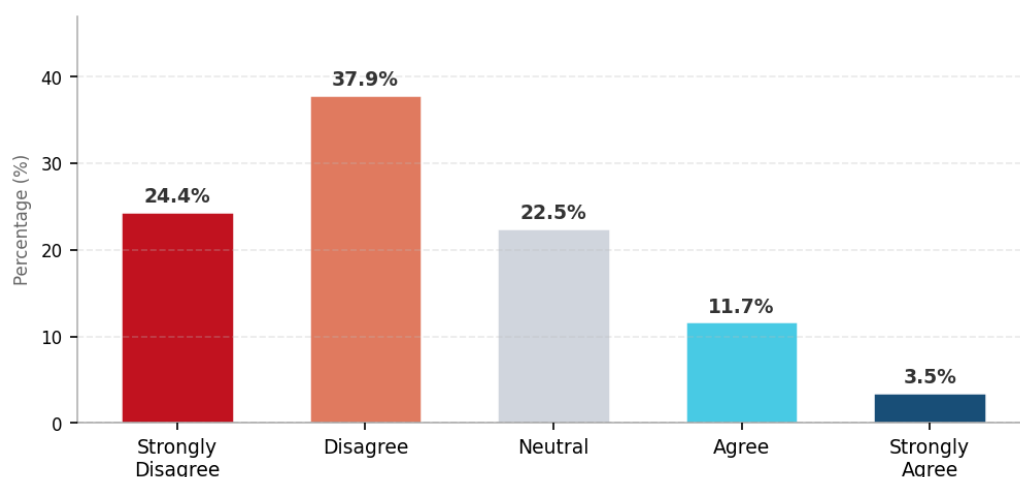


Figure 25 - Sufficient understanding of appropriate and effective methods of user/member engagement to address mis/disinformation (n=369)

Q27. Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by adverse response

Just over half of our participants (56.7%) indicated that they have concerns that their actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by adverse user/member response, and approximately one third (32.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of participants (11%) indicated no concerns. The mean value was 2.33, the standard deviation 1.03.

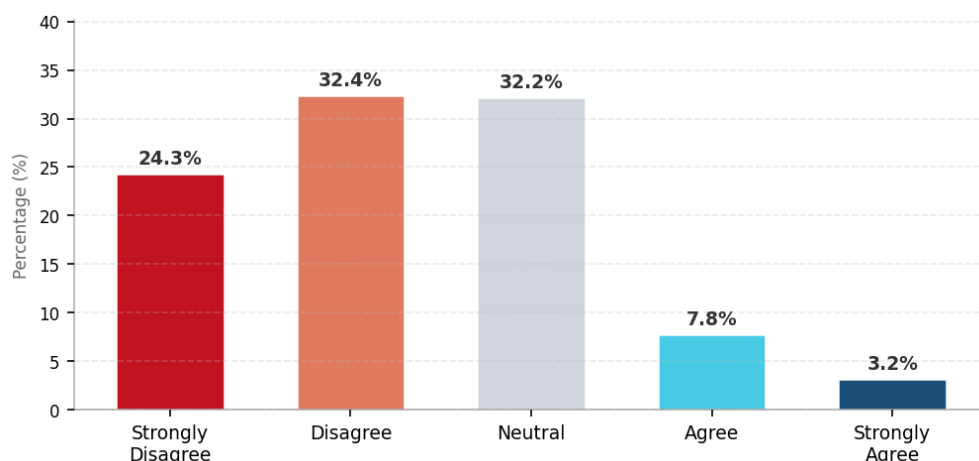


Figure 26 - Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by adverse response (n=370)

Q28. Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by accusations of bias

Just over half of our participants (52.3%) indicated that they have concerns that their actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by accusations of bias, and approximately one third (31.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of participants (16.2%) indicated no concerns. The mean value was 2.46, the standard deviation 1.07.

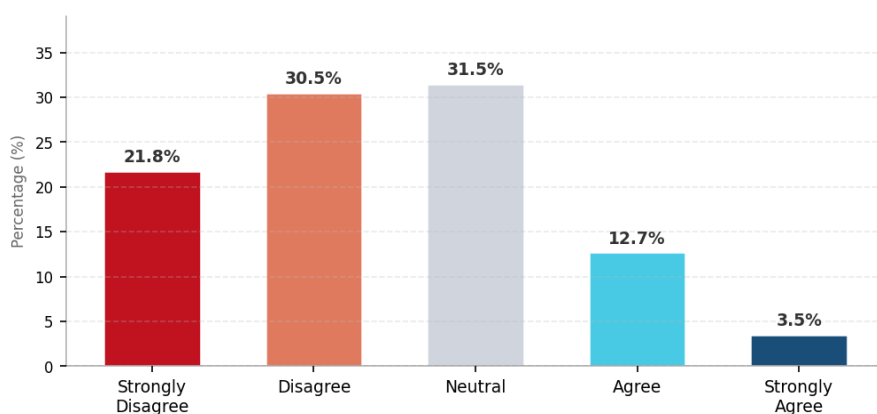


Figure 27 - Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be met by accusations of bias (n=371)

Q29. Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be considered censorship

Approximately half of our participants (50.1%) indicated that they have concerns that their actions to address mis/disinformation might be seen as censorship, and approximately one third (30.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of participants (19.1%) indicated no concerns. The mean value was 2.54, the standard deviation 1.07.

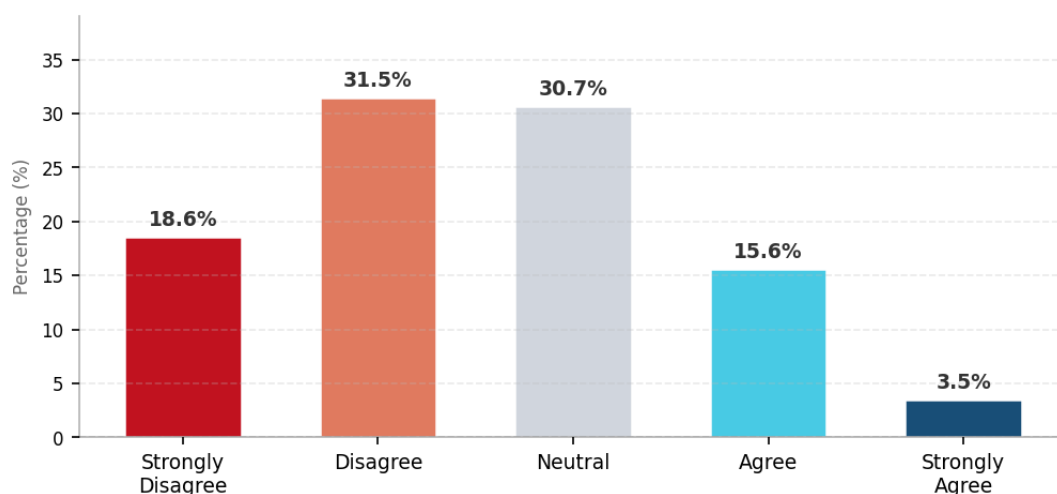


Figure 28 - Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might be considered censorship (n=371)

Q30. Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might contravene neutrality

Under one third of our participants (27.9%) indicated that they have concerns about neutrality when addressing mis/disinformation, and over one third neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (38.1%). Approximately one third (34%) of our participants indicated that they have no neutrality concerns. The mean value was 3.05, the standard deviation 1.12.

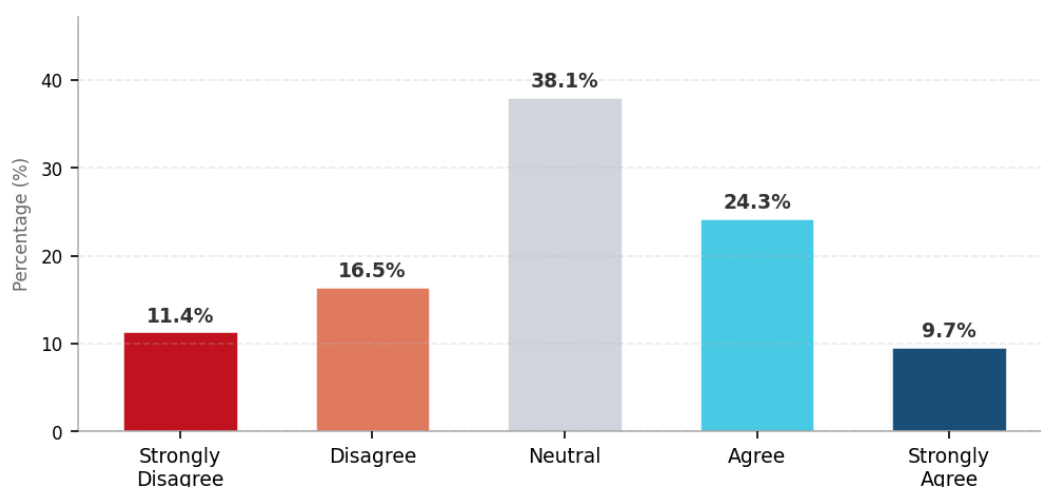


Figure 29 - Concerns that actions to address mis/disinformation might contravene neutrality (n=370)

Q31. Sufficient operational guidance

Most of our respondents (60.3%) indicated that they do not have sufficient operational guidance to guide their mis/disinformation decisions/actions, and one quarter (25.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority of our respondents (14.3%) indicated that they do have sufficient guidance. The mean value was 2.29, the standard deviation 1.07.

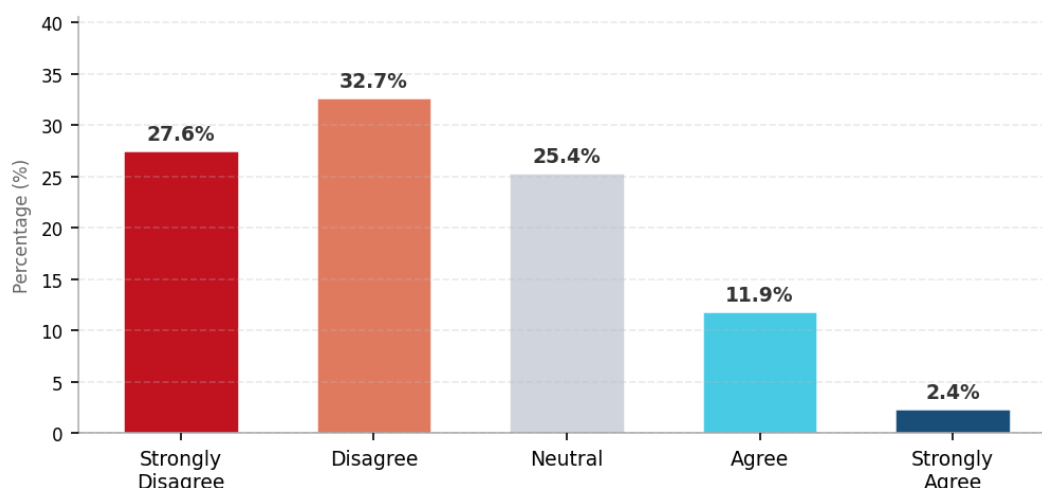


Figure 30 - Sufficient operational guidance to guide mis/disinformation actions/decisions (n=370)

Q32. Personal sense of success in addressing mis/disinformation

Most of our respondents (60%) do not feel that they are successfully addressing mis/disinformation, and under one third (28.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. A minority feel that they are successful (11.1%). The mean value was 2.26, the standard deviation 1.02.

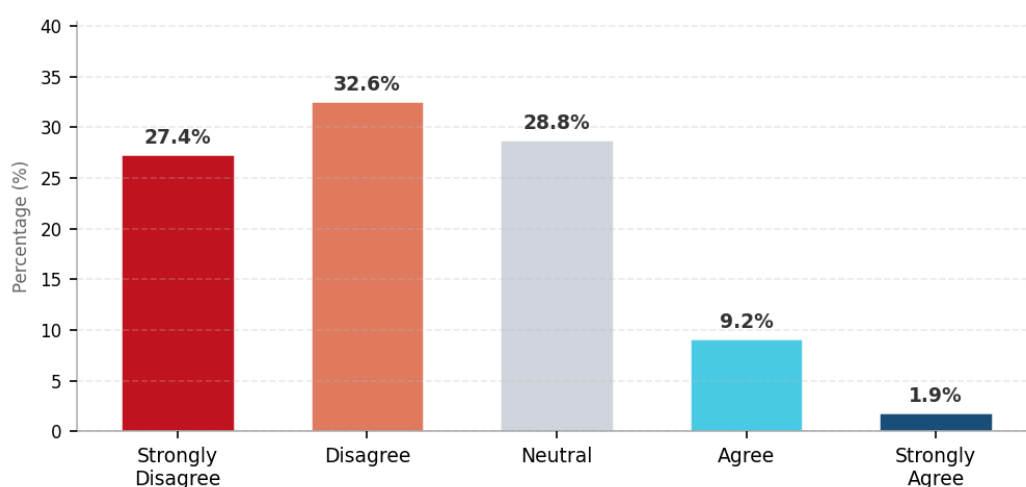


Figure 31 - Participant sense of success in addressing mis/disinformation (n=368)

Q33. Mis/disinformation challenges (other)

83 participants provided a total of 97 responses to this question (i.e., some stating multiple challenges). 21 were invalid responses (e.g., some stating no challenges, some too vague). Of the remaining responses (n76), several could be coded to existing categories as follows: adverse library user/member response (14%); limited skill/training (12%); insufficient operational guidance (10%); limited understanding of effective methods of user/member engagement (9%); limited resources (9%); neutrality concerns (7%); limited time (4%); and censorship concerns (1%). Additional challenges not falling within the pre-coded categories were coded as follows: stock (10%); AI (7%); staff resistance (7%); trust (3%); internal misinformation (1%); unapproved material placements on library premises (1%); and language/translation (1%). Several of these responses evidenced interrelationships.

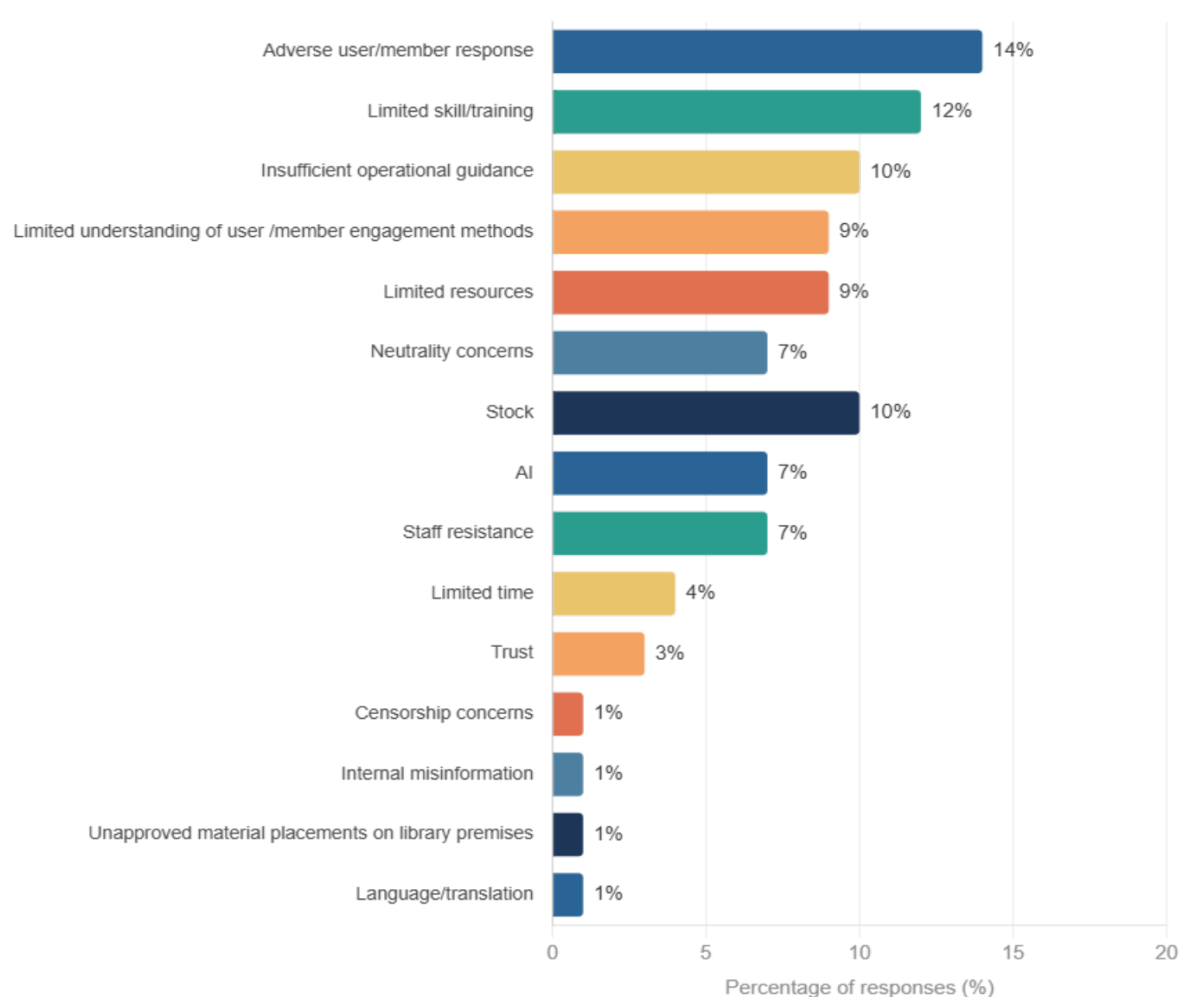


Figure 32 - Challenges to address mis/disinformation (n=76)

For example, one librarian stated adverse response concerns arising from lack of mis/disinformation training, commenting:

I've received no mis/disinformation training in my workplace. While such interactions are limited in my role & duties, this matter is still a major concern

for myself. I personally take mis/disinformation very seriously, but I lack the skills/training to address it professionally, and fear for my safety when such issues arise (ID 375).

And another provided insights into issues of capacity, resource, and priority, commenting:

We do not have the time, money, expertise, or resources to be focused on these types of [mis/disinformation] challenges. We have far too many other things we have to offer to be particularly strong in any area, in fact. Due to low funding and low prioritisation, we have been forced to take on a large amount of extracurricular services to keep us relevant, and we are at breaking point when it comes to where to focus (ID58)

Several librarians also provide insights into interrelated issues of operational policy/guidance, neutrality and censorship. For example, one librarian (ID130) commented, “The library service is reluctant to address MIDI issues as it is so often politicized”. Another commented:

I feel that I have good critical information literacy skills, and teaching skills, and would be comfortable teaching these skills to e.g. students in an environment where they were already there to learn. I am much less confident about how I would go about doing this with members of the public who might not be aware that they need critical information literacy skills (indeed, those who need it most might be most resistant to it). I also have questions about how it might or might not fit with the council's wider social media strategy. Generally, we tend to avoid getting into arguments on the socials (which is the main area where I interact with people) because of the risk of it getting out of control and making things worse (ID275).

And another:

I feel we are actively making the problem worse. We give people largely unrestricted internet access, meaning that people can access the biggest culprits when it comes to spreading misinformation (Facebook, reddit etc.). I have had PREVENT training, but we have never referred anyone, even when I can see that they are a concern. I frequently see people accessing far-right/Nazi extremist content and my concerns are brushed off. I have found racist ranting scrawled across paper left on public display, and nothing was done, despite the fact that we could track down who did it. The library has become a place where people can safely, and largely anonymously, access and spread misinformation to their hearts content (ID347).

Library stock concerns ranged from stock considered inappropriate to stock considered too narrow. All the responses regarding inappropriate stock concerned health topics. For example, one participant (ID110) commented, “One major thing I find questionable is the stocking of medically unsound books in our library”, and another that:

It is absolutely a challenge at the moment to find the line between what is information about homeopathy and what is medical misinformation and I do not feel like our stock development team are able to assist, if not are actively opposing it (ID109).

When seeking to address stock concerns, issues of policy were also raised. For example, one participant commented:

Our stock policy does not allow for the removal of books that we as library assistants believe provide misinformation. We have tried to remove medical books that go against established science but have been told by our stock team that our policy is if it's published under UK law we can have it available (ID158).

Participants also raised issues of stock concerning newspaper collections. For example, one participant (ID207) commented that, "These days community libraries only take one newspaper, presenting one sociopolitical view point and often misinformation. The on-line range is not particularly wide ranging either". Another that:

Libraries within our service do not have access to all physical newspapers. With the papers available at a certain library limited to those that have the most readers. This can lead to issues where the library I work in only have access to physical papers that have a known issue with printing mis/disinformation, so it is hard to discuss issues with borrowers especially if they've just seen it printed in a newspaper that we supply (ID32).

AI concerns discussed AI's general contribution to increased mis/disinformation. Some participants provided examples of AI generated library service misinformation. For example, one participant commented:

People doing research on Google/Bing and believing everything the AI summary says: the AI summary often shows events and activities that we don't have at all and users can get aggressive about that (ID202).

Some participants discussed staff resistance. For example, one participant (ID98) commented that, "Library assistants can be unresponsive/hostile to mis/disinformation training/engagement" and another (ID168) that, "Pressure from colleagues to promote certain political views which I believe would affect my neutrality".

Some participants also discussed trust and associated principles of neutrality. For example, one participant commented, "People do not trust information unless it's from a trusted figure, it's important to build up that relationship with the customer before challenging mis/disinformation". Another that:

We have a large ESOL community, including refugees and asylum seekers, and it is difficult to remain neutral when our government leaders, and other world leaders, are spreading misinformation that directly impacts our community (ID192).

Some participants also raised issue of internal misinformation, unapproved material placements on library premises, and language/translation issues. One commented (ID141), “Misinformation from Senior Managers in local authority”. Another (ID108) that, “Occasional political or personal opinion posters may be placed on the library events and library policy notice boards without library staff knowledge, these can display misinformation and are a challenge”. Another (ID74) that, “Language barriers, we serve a community where over 60 different languages are spoken and many of our residents speak in English as their second language”.

Section E: participant mis/disinformation perspectives

This section reports participant perspectives of mis/disinformation (conceptual and practical understanding and opinion).

Q34. Mis/disinformation is a problem of functional media and information literacy skills

Most of our participants (63%) agreed with the statement that mis/disinformation is a problem of functional media and information literacy, just over one quarter (28.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and a minority disagreed (8.9%). The mean value was 3.71, the standard deviation 0.93.

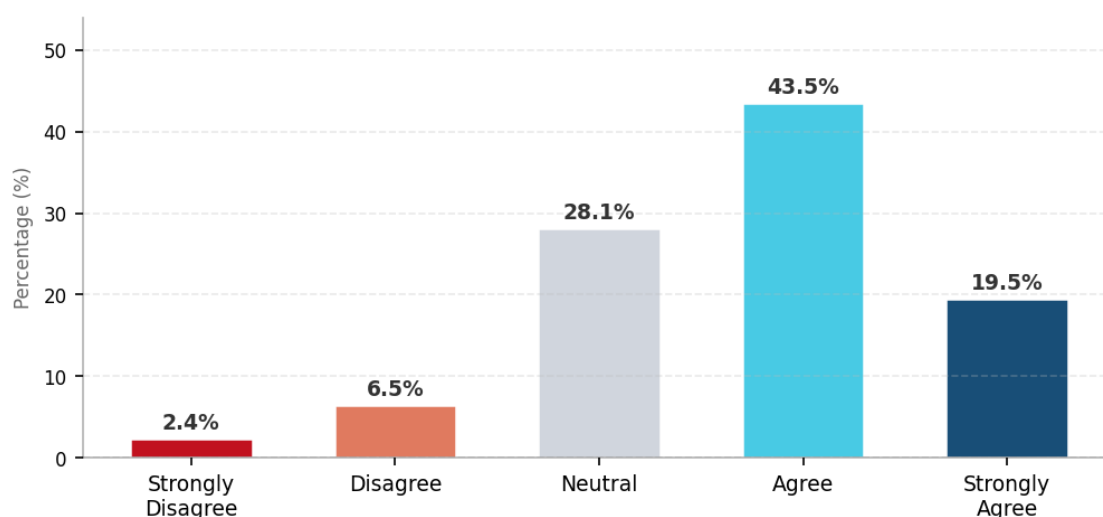


Figure 33 - *Mis/disinformation is a problem of functional media and information literacy skills* (n=370)

Q35. A problem of critical media and information literacy skills

Most of our participants (79.1%) agreed with the statement that mis/disinformation is a problem of critical media and information literacy, just under one fifth (16.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and a minority disagreed (4.4%). The mean value was 4.04, the standard deviation 0.84.

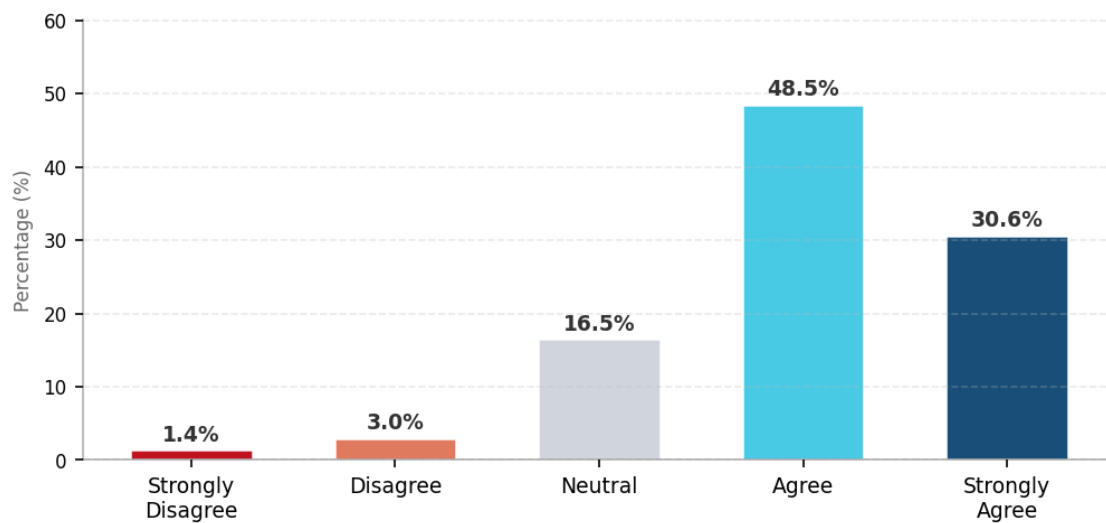


Figure 34 - Mis/disinformation is a problem of critical media and information literacy skills (n=369)

Q36. Mis/disinformation as a problem of attitude/disposition

Most of our participants (60.2%) agreed with the statement that mis/disinformation is a problem of attitude/disposition, just over one quarter (27.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and a minority disagreed (11.9%). The mean value was 3.65, the standard deviation 0.95.

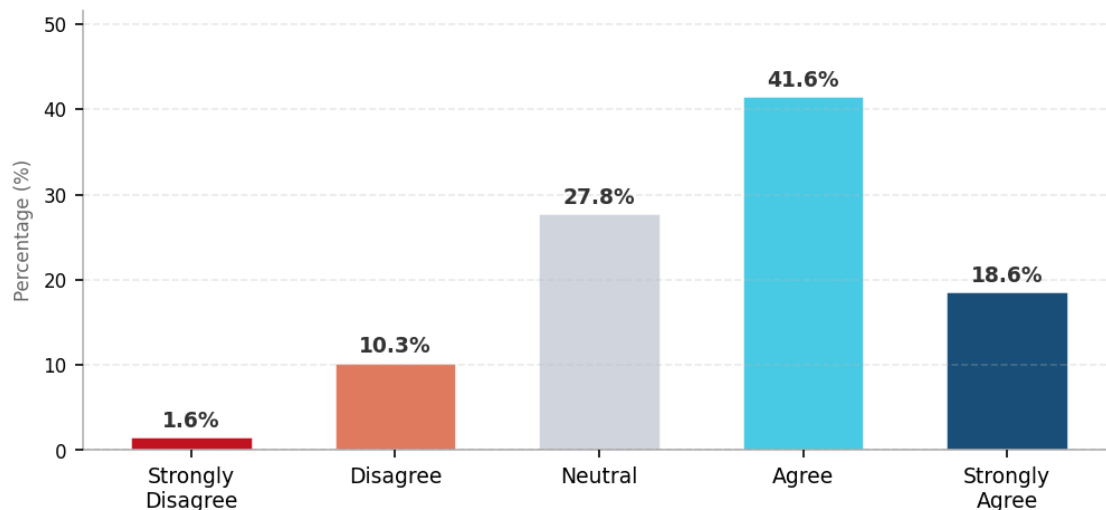


Figure 35 - Mis/disinformation is a problem of attitude/disposition (n=370)

Q37. Position on library neutrality

Approximately two fifths of our participants (38.6%) agreed with the statement that public libraries should remain neutral when addressing mis/disinformation, over one

fifth (25.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and under two fifths disagreed (36.3%). The mean value was 3.09, the standard deviation 1.36.

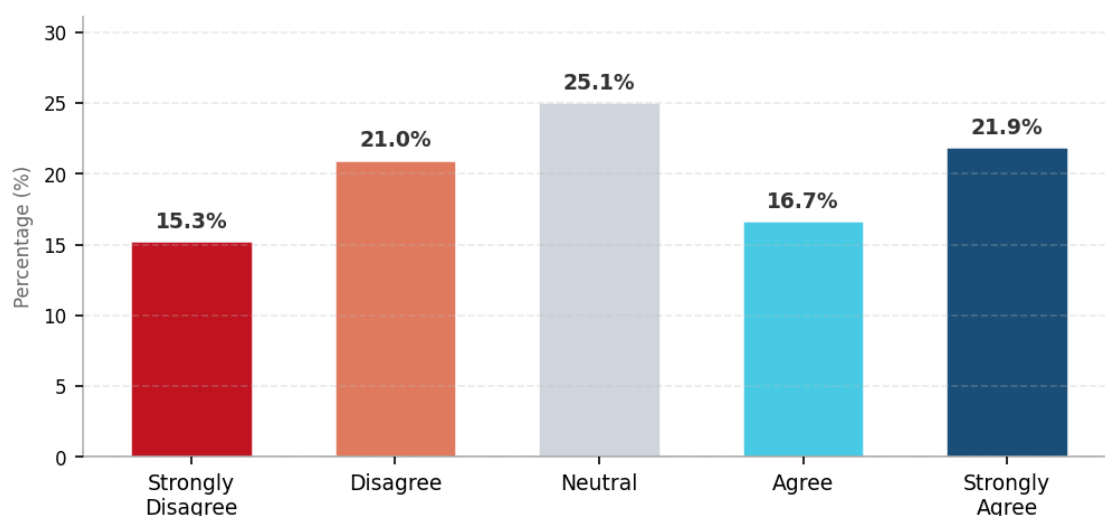


Figure 36 - Public libraries should remain neutral when addressing mis/disinformation (n=366)

Q38. Position on library role (passive or active) in addressing mis/disinformation

This question also included an 'Other' option in addition to the Active and Passive options. 37 participants selected the 'Other' option of which 9 were invalid responses (e.g., vague statements not directly addressing the question), while some responses were able to be coded to the two pre-existing categories. When all responses to question 38 are presented, the data showed the following.

Most of our participants (73%) believe that public libraries should have an active role in addressing mis/disinformation, one fifth (20.5%) believed that libraries should have a passive role, with 5.6% stating in the 'Other' option that they believed both a passive and active role was necessary depending on circumstances, while 0.6% were unsure, and 0.3% thought neither active or passive was appropriate.

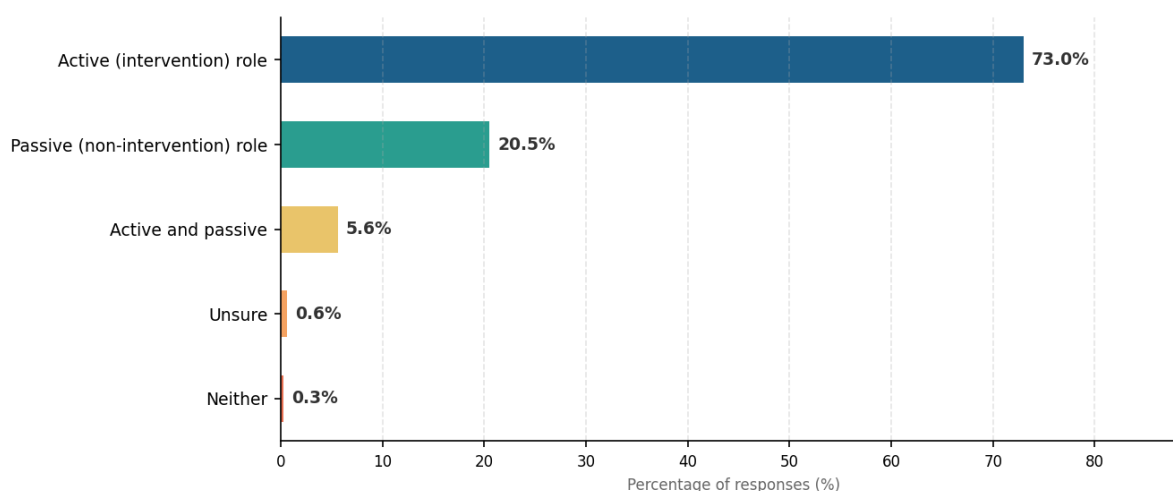


Figure 37 - Position on library role (passive or active) in addressing mis/disinformation (n=356)

Those stating that both active and passive approaches are required believed that the approach was dependent upon the circumstances. For example, one participant commented (ID121), “I feel it vastly depends on the circumstances”. Participants also felt that mixed approaches needed to be carefully balanced. For example, one participant (ID33) stated that “A combination without judgement and excellent practice of safeguarding is my professional and daily approach”, and another that (ID201), “... we shouldn’t be in people’s faces crusading against it, but we can be proactive, e.g. holding sessions about how to spot fake news. We should be a reliable source of trusted info that people can trust”. One librarian also noted that striking the right balance is not straightforward, commenting (ID257), “I think this is an incredibly difficult position. I think it is operationally easier for libraries to be neutral whilst also trying to softly challenge, but sometimes this feels like a missed opportunity.”

Some participants also felt that responsibility for addressing mis/disinformation should not fall on all library staff. For example, one participant (ID166) commented that “We should be active, but it should happen from a higher level than Library Assistants”, and another (ID204) that, “I think that specialists should be taking on this task”. Some also discussed library policy as an influencing factor. For example, one participant commented:

We need to be active in encouraging users to develop critical thinking skills that allow them to access and critique information from a range of sources. Library neutrality should not mean doing nothing, but when it comes to party politics or religion, we have a policy of non-engagement with such topics. The latter is probably why we haven't officially developed plans or official training to counter [mis/disinformation] - it's seen as too close to party politics or current affairs (ID75).

With regard to ‘unsure’ and ‘neither’ responses, one librarian (ID23) commented “I don’t know”, another (ID199) that “I have no idea!”, and one (ID306) that, “[I] Don't believe it is the job of the libraries to deal with this unless it directly affects our service”.

Q39. Belief that libraries are doing all that they can do to address mis/disinformation

Most of our participants (83.2%) do not believe that their library is doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation, and a minority (16.8%) thought that their library was doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation.

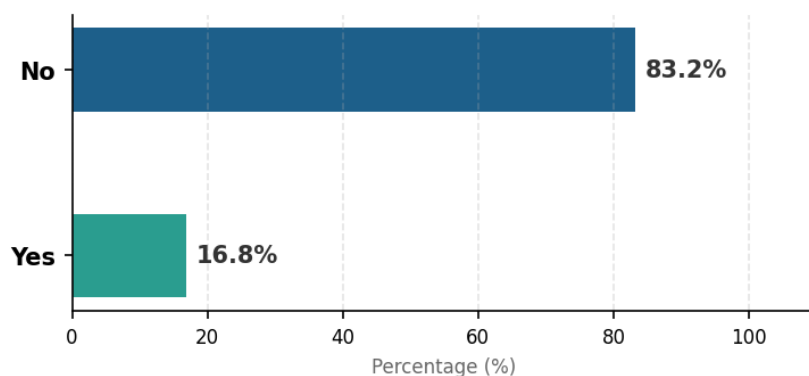


Figure 38 - Belief that libraries are doing all that they can do to address mis/disinformation (n=363)

Q40. Libraries doing all that they can do to address mis/disinformation (further details if answered yes to Q39)

Whilst this question was intended to only be answered by those respondents who had answered yes to Q39 (i.e., only to be completed by those who believed that their library was doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation), in practice responses came from both yes and no camps (both are reported below as both sets are insightful).

92 participants completed this question with 9 invalid responses removed. Of the remainder (n83), 50 participants (60%) had answered no to the previous question (I believe that my library is doing all that in can to address mis/disinformation in my community), and 33 participants (40%) had answered yes.

Responses were categorised as follows: everyday librarian interactions with users/members; collection and resource management; trained library staff; provision of a neutral inclusive public space; user/member information literacy promotion; library capacity; and not addressed. Each is discussed below (yes responses followed by no responses).

Addressed (or not) through everyday librarian interactions with users/members

Participants who felt that their library was doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation provided various examples of the role of everyday interactions of library staff with users/members. For example, “holding events to give users correct information and to make them aware (ID154)”, “Directing people to reputable sites such as the NHS rather than just googling (ID159)”, “Increasing library users' awareness of this issue, particularly those with poor literacy/digital skills (ID168), and “Assessing flagged web content that has caused concern over hate speak (ID354)”. Some participants discussed how the library provided an environment to establish relationships with users/members that helped when seeking to address mis/disinformation. For example, one participant commented:

Most children who use our library have access to social media. Most live their lives through it and believe everything they read or hear about. They're mostly aged between 9 and 13 and are very familiar with us. Because of this they will discuss things with us and can be very open and frank with us. This means that we can offer different opinions and challenge their views. Lively debate might ensue, but this really does help us to address misinformation and encourages the children to consider other reasons for things and different points of view (ID125).

Some also discussed working within the limits of what they felt was achievable. For example, one participant (ID112) commented, "We can't monitor everything that people read on the internet. We can suggest official sites, i.e. gov.uk for information, and caution people that not everything they read on social media is accurate, but we can't monitor everyone at all times".

Differing viewpoints on the effectiveness of everyday interactions with library users/members were provided by those participants who felt that their library was *not* doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation. Some believed that their actions could be more proactive. For example, one participant commented, "I believe we should be more proactive about addressing mis/disinformation (ID214)", and another that, "While we aim to provide accurate information to customers, I think more could be done proactively. Resources about common misconceptions or mis/disinformation should be easier to access and better distributed (ID64)". Limited guidance and resources to support attempts to address mis/disinformation were also cited. For example, one participant commented, "We have no formal procedure/guidance at the moment, as far as I'm aware (ID277)", and another commented that, "I believe there is more guidance we can provide to staff and residents on how to identify mis/disinformation. We have this planned but not yet created (ID103)".

Some responses also indicated a reluctance to address mis/disinformation due to risk. For example, one participant commented, "I do think the community would benefit from holding sessions about misinformation. I worry that this would become political though, even if we try to remain neutral (ID162)", and another that there was a "Perceived concern that politically-biased local authority funders will perceive attempts to address mis/disinformation as opposition to their political aims (ID200)". Such concerns could also extend to internal support (lack of). For example, one participant commented:

The service seems afraid to tackle MIDI issues as they are so politicised. We have no sort of official policy or approach to mis/disinformation issues and it seems to be down to each staff member's individual approach. I think if a service user accused me of bias after correcting misinformation then the service would not support me. There is also an increasing risk of violence and aggression from the sort of people who are most susceptible to certain types of misinformation which often leads staff to avoid addressing mis/disinformation (ID130).

Addressed (or not) through collection and resource management

Participants who felt that their library was doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation provided various examples of the role of collection and resource management. For example, one participant commented (ID31), “We offer a wide range of stock and eResources to help with information, but these are not always used by the public”, another that, “My library adheres to its statutory duty, nothing more it can do to tackle misinformation. We regularly withdraw out of date stock (IT, travel books) that would contain irrelevant information (ID246)”, and another that, “If information/materials that are exclusionary are being circulated they will be actively removed (ID63)”.

Differing viewpoints on the effectiveness of collections management were provided by those participants who felt that their library was *not* doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation. For example, one participant commented that, “... our service is not taking enough interest in the very least with the stock we buy and ensuring that we are not stocking things that could cause harm to our readers (ID108)”, and another that (ID163), “Books/newspapers should not be censored or banned, but having a sticker affixed to questionable materials could be effective”.

Addressed (or not) through trained library staff

Participants who felt that their library was doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation provided examples of the role of trained staff. For example, one participant commented, “We have talented and trained staff who care about the library users and have a passion for providing good quality information (ID43)” and another that, “Staff are knowledgeable and professional when answering [and] addressing mis/disinformation (ID131)”. However, one participant also indicated some limitations to current training:

I feel given our resources and training, we do our best to challenge misinformation - and I'm confident that my team wouldn't let any serious incidents slide without action. I wouldn't, however, say we are perfect as we don't have any specific training on the subject and we don't have any real guidance on what to do in these situations. Whilst a lot of our training and guidance does cover misinformation, I feel something more specific would be beneficial (ID250).

Differing viewpoints on trained staff were provided by those participants who felt that their library was *not* doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation. Several indicated having received no training whatsoever. For example, one participant commented, “I have had no specific training or advice on the subject so could not address the subject confidently. I feel I should (ID230)”, another that, “We have no resources or training for staff to address the issue of mis/disinformation in the community (ID369), and another that, “I do not know the procedures, if any, my library service has in addressing mis/disinformation and I have had no specific training in it (ID367). One respondent also highlighted issues of de-professionalisation, commenting:

We do provide resources that enable people to get well researched, authoritative information but staff giving out information on Enquiry Desks and in the library are no longer professionals and that aspect of critiquing, analysing information is now lost (ID122).

Addressed (or not) via provision of a neutral inclusive public space

Those participants who felt that their library was doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation described providing a neutral inclusive space. For example, one participant commented, "It's important to address mis/disinformation whilst keeping staff safe from harassment. Equally, customers have the right to their opinion even if it's wrong or misinformed (ID84)", and another that, "By remaining neutral, not implementing activities that could be seen as encouraging, and by engaging with the community as appropriate to the situation (ID283)".

Differing viewpoints on neutrality and inclusivity were provided by those participants who felt that their library was *not* doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation. For example, one participant commented, "Libraries have become campaigning organisations, and have lost all political neutrality. There is a distinct bias towards certain protected characteristics and away from others (ID16)". Others suggested that the preservation of neutrality limited actions. For example, one participant commented, "...the role of the library is to be lovely and inclusive which doesn't always mean addressing disinformation!" (ID365), and another that:

The need for political neutrality (and the precarious position many libraries find themselves in) limits the amount to which public libraries can 'risk' active intervention. Even during periods of local political support, the danger of being seen as even remotely political could jeopardise future support for the service locally and nationally. The current status of libraries as trusted institutions should remain at all costs but is an ongoing tight-rope walk for everyone in the profession (ID127).

Addressed (or not) through user/member information literacy promotion/development

One participant who felt that their library was not doing enough to address mis/disinformation felt that more could be done to promote information literacy and good information practices amongst users/members. They commented (ID47), "We could always do more to encourage information literacy and critical thinking! Encouraging people not to read the AI generated drivel that is proliferates online would be a good start...".

Addressed (or not) within library capacity

Some participants who felt that their library was doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation described working within capacity constraints including important considerations of public reach and role. For example, one participant commented (ID87):

We're here to offer guidance, with appropriate signposting, and we always aim to provide accurate information on request, which I believe we do to the best of our ability... But tackling misinformation at the broadest societal level is far beyond both our job description and our resources to address. Libraries are being asked to do more and more with less and less and it's getting to the point where this is reaching overload.

Another that (ID89):

We provide access to resources but cannot be responsible for every single resource or what people do with it. We are bombarded with questions regarding housing applications, HMRC issues, job applications, issues with accessing websites etc. We are unable to assist to support any of these queries due to a lack of resources, and education for the public (ie. what is a phishing scam) should be embedded elsewhere and not put upon by an already struggling service.

And another that (ID221):

The library does not have the expertise or the resources to tackle these issues. We address one-off queries by individuals who do not have the ability to evaluate whether certain digital information is genuine and accurate and this is usually indirectly whilst we are delivering basic training in digital skills. We primarily loan books and deliver events for adults and children relating to health and wellbeing, social clubs, digital learning. The library is potentially a good location for external organisations to deliver training and advice around mis/disinformation. Should there be a local or national incident involving dissemination of mis/disinformation the library staff would proactively speak with visitors to advise them about the situation. These issues would more likely be dealt with at a higher level within the local authority and the library might play a small role in addressing mis/disinformation. The library would be responsive but could not proactively tackle such a major issue.

Some participants who felt that their library was not doing all that it can to address mis/disinformation also described capacity constraints and considerations. For example, one participant commented (ID369), 'We have no resources or training for staff to address the issue of mis/disinformation in the community'. Another whilst describing capacity constraints also raised several questions concerning library role and responsibilities, commenting (ID112):

There is an element of lack of time and lack resources for the library to do this. More training is needed, more access to training and resources is needed. We all read the news, check our sources, but customers say "I saw online...". However, is it the role of the library to teach people? Is it the role of library assistants to tutor people on how to find reliable news? Do we have an unconscious bias ourselves due to the extreme nature of social media such as X?

Another participant was more categorical on the above considerations, commenting (ID85), "Not enough resources - time, staffing, money. Keeping libraries open is a

statutory priority, being responsible for ensuring the general public is aware of disinformation is not”.

Doing nothing

Whilst responses coded to this category do not answer the question, they are included here as they provide insights into degree of inattention. All responses were provided by participants who had answered no to the previous question (i.e., that believed that their library is not doing enough to address mis/disinformation), and indicate that in some public libraries there is no attention to mis/disinformation. For example, one participant commented (ID32), “My library is currently not doing anything”, another that (ID140), “There is almost no institutional activity to combat mis/disinformation: no events, no resources, and minimal vetting of resources.”, another that (ID191), “I don't think it's even thought about as part of the service we provide.”, another that (ID258), “As far as I'm aware there has been no attempt of addressing the issue even just raising awareness.”, and another that (ID264), “I have never seen it discussed or communicated at work”.

Q41. One thing that could help library staff to address mis/disinformation

216 participants answered this question with 18 deemed invalid and removed (some no/not sure answers, others vague statements not directly addressing the question). The remaining participants (n=198) provided 238 responses to this question (some participants providing more than one suggestion/requirement) coded as follows: staff training (41%); resources (28%); user/member training (8%); public awareness campaigns (5%); national policy (3%); collaboration (3%); freedom from political interference (3%); time (2%); professional support (2%); management support (2%); regulation (2%); and user outreach (1%). Each are reported below.

Staff training

Approximately four tenths (41%) of requests were for staff training. Some were general requests. For example, one participant requested (ID252), “Some general training to staff to raise awareness”, and another (ID86), “Training! We all need to be empowered and educated to know how to take steps in our libraries/roles to educate, inform, and empower our customers!”. Some also indicated having never had any mis/disinformation training to date. For example, one commented (ID227), “I have never been trained or even seen this addressed in any of the five libraries I work in”, and another that:

Currently as far as I'm aware there is nothing in place to inform or train staff in this as we are advised to be neutral. However, I feel it is important that staff are trained in this as a matter of routine to help us in our day to day living (ID123).

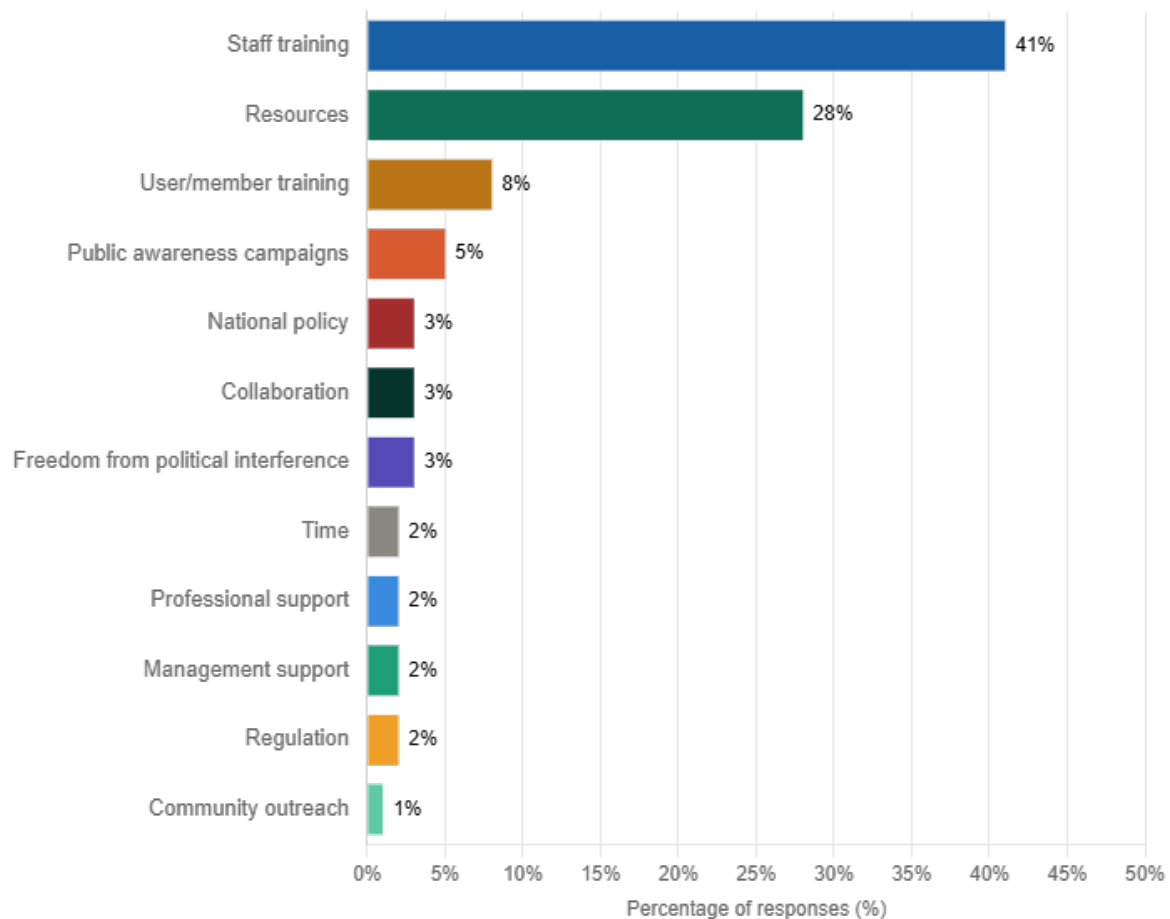


Figure 39 - One thing that would help libraries address mis/disinformation (n=198)

Several participants who provided more specific training requests described seeking guidance on how to effectively engage with users/members. For example, one participant requested (ID51), “If we could have some kind of training on how to tactfully help people that would be nice”, and another (ID216), “Equipping staff to know when and how they might intervene or raise the subject of misinformation with library users. There's a lot of nuance and judgement needed...”. A common theme was how to initially approach users/members. For example, one respondent commented (ID72), “Training on how to approach customers to let them know about possible ways of addressing mis/disinformation”, and another:

Specific training regarding how to approach customers regarding misinformation would be appreciated as well as training related to leading sessions with customers to help them to spot misinformation for themselves (ID185).

And another:

Training and understanding on how to approach someone with mis/disinformation. We know that we can't rationalise someone away from mis/disinformation ... so we need to understand a better way (ID137).

In relation, several participants sought guidance on how to intervene in an impartial manner. For example, one participant commented (ID211), "Training on how/when to approach topics and how to address them in a way that is neutral and also correct...", another that (ID34), "There needs to be training provided in order for us to be able to tackle these issues and know how to approach the public while maintaining library neutrality", and another (ID14), "Guidance and training for library staff/volunteers on how to combat mis/disinformation especially information on how important it is and where the boundaries of impartiality lay". One participant commented that with proper training library staff would "...then be confident to challenge information presented to them (often aggressively) and to encourage patrons to do the same (ID235)".

Several participants felt that the required mis/disinformation training and resources should be provided at the national level. For example, one participant commented (ID15), "National-led professional guidance and training", another that (ID268), "It would be good to have a national online forum where library staff could discuss this together and share useful resources". Some also suggested that mis/disinformation training should be considered essential and regularly provided for staff. For example, one participant commented (ID342), "...a mandatory training course for staff and volunteers", and another (ID52), "Ensure regular training and workshops - not a one off due to it being an ongoing issue within the media".

Resources

Approximately three tenths (28%) of requests were for additional resources and covered a broad range of materials. Some were general requests that suggested limited current resources. For example, one participant (ID168) requested a "Wider range of education materials" and another (ID156), "Free resources to support staff and library members". Some were more specific. For example, one participant (ID46) requested, "A resource bank to direct people to tackle this issue - e.g. Full Fact, and sessions that introduce people to fact checking/where to look for trustworthy information", another requested (ID37), "Printed resources, posters we can use (we have used some great CILIP ones in the past), book lists, transparent open data for library advocates to demonstrate in arguments", and another commented:

I believe a list of verifiably neutral websites pertaining to local, national and global news/current affairs should be available to libraries as an "active" guide should our customers require assistance in fact-checking events as they occur (ID60).

Some also requested labelling systems for library stock and content accessible from library ICT. For example, one participant commented (ID159), "Perhaps a warning on the public computers to use reliable sources such as NHS Direct gov and BBC and also a few digital literacy pointers". Another that:

If published under UK law, it is acceptable for us to have it according to our stock policy. If this is to continue perhaps an established label/message to be used on the covers of library edition books that specify that what is inside the book contradicts established scientific facts, or something similar to that effect (ID158).

And another:

Realistically, a distributable leaflet of stock 'trusted websites' and good questions to ask about information you've been told (such as 'who benefits', 'who funded it', 'how old is it' etc) might help guide people towards more considered attitudes and away from mis/disinformation (ID332).

Some also discussed the need for broader library stock collections with several discussing newspapers held. For example, one participant commented (ID223), "Having newspapers other than the Mail and the Telegraph available for the public", and another that:

It's probably an old-fashioned idea but having access to a variety of local, national and international press (actual paper copies) might be good - if you provide a variety of views from all sides that people can easily access / accidentally discover as they walk past - it might be useful in terms of widening their sources of information (ID228).

Similar to requests for staff training, some respondents suggested that resource provision could occur at a national level and include knowledge sharing. For example, one participant commented (ID54), "National guidance/resources/toolkit/training (free) for library staff" and another that (ID103), "It would be useful to know what others library services are doing in this area".

User/member training

A minority of responses (8%) were requests for more investment in user/member training. For example, one participant requested (ID298), "Information literacy events or posters by the computers. How to trust a source, media bias etc.", another requested (ID177), "Public library websites hosting online resources/webinars about media and information literacy", and another (ID134), "Courses on critical thinking for users of social media and other modern ways news and information is disseminated". Another commented:

I feel, very strongly, that public libraries could offer support to the public in good practices of information and media literacy. I don't think we can really compete with the attention people give to their phones, but we could create influential alternative spaces for community, learning and positive discussions (ID177).

The above participant (ID177) went on to comment that, "One of the challenges about tackling mis/disinformation is willingness to engage, and the time it takes to learn" and suggested that public libraries can offer "a more comfortable environment for learning to take place" and "Safe spaces to have discussion about different topics". In relation, another participant (ID286) suggested that training might include "...some sessions where people get to talk to others who have lived experience of different situations to show the real human side of things".

Some participants also discussed the need for training to be targeted and tailored. For example, one participant requested (ID194), "Training for staff and courses run

for vulnerable customers who are at high risk of mis/disinformation”, and another requested:

Having access to more specific resources such as mis/disinformation training modules designed for members of the public as we could then use these resources to run specific tailor-made drop-in sessions to address mis/disinformation (ID331).

Some also discussed suggested that mis/disinformation training could be effectively embedded in other activities. For example, one participant commented:

Funding for community workshops that help teach IT skills and web-browsing skills which also teach on misinformation. No-one is ever going to attend a workshop that's just on misinformation, unless it was mandatory, but combining it with something people would be doing anyway (learning IT skills) is a good way to feed info on spotting misinformation into. Could also see if schools - particularly secondary schools - would be interested in library workshops and such (ID110).

Public awareness campaigns

A minority of responses (5%) were requests for mis/disinformation public awareness campaigns. For example, one participant commented,

The spotlight on the issue can always be bigger. in all formats (and languages) for users. From local press in libraries to info banners on public PCs including info handed to all private users/streamers of Wi-Fi on library sites (ID149).

Several suggested that such campaigns should be national. For example, one participant commented:

We all need to know more about the challenges of Ai especially around photos etc as this will only become more important over the coming years. A national campaign might be worth considering (ID201).

And another:

Perhaps a national campaign? High profile person or people highlighting how misinformation can be spread and how to look out for it in everyday interactions online. Series of events nationally? (ID135)

Beyond mis/disinformation awareness such campaigns would also increase awareness of the role of public libraries in addressing. For example, one participant commented (ID299), “Making borrowers more aware they can come and ask us any queries they have”. One participant (ID96) suggested that if such campaigns were not possible other routes could be followed, commenting, “Even a series of public talks would do something towards the issue”.

National policy

A minority of responses (3%) were requests for national support and direction. For example, one participant (ID206) requested “More support from national organisations and an overall strategy for dealing with a growing problem”, and another (ID117), “A national direction, to help show that it's part of our remit as information professionals”. Another requested:

A set policy and protections that allow staff to address mis/disinformation without fear for their jobs or safety. The role of libraries in addressing mis/disinformation should be particularly protected, especially as political parties continue to threaten to politicise mis/disinformation issues (ID130).

For some this included the need for a clearer sense of library role within communities. For example, one participant requested:

Clear guidelines on the role of libraries, specifically where library staff's involvement with the public starts and ends... Libraries should be doing more to address mis/disinformation, particularly within vulnerable communities, but there doesn't seem to be institutional backing for this and could be considered an overstep if libraries do so (ID301).

One participant also felt that national support was important to promote and communicate relevance to the general public, commenting:

Public and government support for the work of libraries and librarians so that public confidence in us is high - as it should be. Increasingly libraries are sold off and unstaffed which contributes to the idea that libraries are obsolete... (ID315).

Collaboration

A minority of responses (3%) were requests for collaborations with experts/specialists to address mis/disinformation challenges. For example, one participant (ID292) suggested “visiting lecturers”, another (ID262) suggested, “Partnering with others who have more expertise e.g. customer conversations...”, and another (ID197) to “...perhaps consult library staff or outside agencies which specialise in library and information management”. One noted that such collaborations might help preserve library neutrality, commenting (ID162) “Instead of the library itself holding sessions about misinformation, maybe a third-party organization could hold a session, so that the library can remain neutral, but still address this issue”.

Political neutrality/independence

A minority of responses (3%) were requests for public libraries to have a greater degree of protection from partisan party politics and influence. For example, one respondent (ID16) requested a, “Return to political neutrality” and another commented that, “...perhaps the main target should be a further level of protection from (party) political interference (ID127)”.

Time

A minority of responses (2%) were requests for more time to address mis/disinformation. For example, one respondent (ID58) commented, “We just don't have the time or resources to dedicate to it alongside everything else we try to juggle”, and another (ID324) commented, “Making it a priority and having dedicated time and space for it...”.

Professional support

A minority of responses (2%) were requests for professional support. For example, one participant (ID7) requested, “Further support from professional bodies such as CILIP and probably more importantly Libraries Connected to support library services in getting the correct balance between combating mis/disinformation and political neutrality”. Another requested:

An advisory organisation within the library community that circulates updates and bulletins about current issues and topics of mis/disinformation that we should be aware of and which we might want to address as it directly effects the sphere of libraries, or which might be of relevance to the wider community or council (ID142).

Another participant requested (ID342), “More importance given to this role generally - so perhaps a directive from Libraries Connected”.

Management support

A minority of responses (2%) were requests for management support including time and space to address mis/disinformation. For example, one participant (ID140) requested, “Greater support from managers to give the team time to think of strategies”, and another (ID369) requested, “Support from management to provide resources and time for us to do this”. Another participant (ID190) requested support when facing poor user/member response when addressing mis/disinformation, commenting, “For the library service and the organisation behind it to support the staff in addressing mis/disinformation, including and especially when user/member reception is poor”.

Regulation

A minority of responses (2%) were requests for regulation from blocking access to labelling materials. For example, one participant (ID181) commented, “Block access to X/Twitter, and persuade the council to stop using it”, and another (ID208), “Checked and verified information status. e.g. or a mark or a certified standard to the core information we provide”.

Community outreach

A minority of responses (1%) were requests for outreach to the wider community. One participant (ID40) commented, “Specific training and reaching out to a larger sector of the community”, and another (ID363) suggested, “Talk to the community”.

3 Discussion

“I think this is an incredibly difficult position [for librarians]. I think it is operationally easier for libraries to be neutral whilst also trying to softly challenge, but sometimes this feels like a missed opportunity.”

(Survey Respondent 257)

3. Discussion

This national survey of public library staff in England is the first of its kind to be conducted in the UK (i.e., specifically exploring the role of public libraries in addressing mis/disinformation within UK communities), and with a total of 372 library staff participants, is also the largest study of its kind conducted to date within any nation (for a review of prior similar studies from other nations, see: Background).

Most of our participants are in operational library roles (i.e., customer facing) with most user/member interactions occurring via the library enquiries desk, and to a lesser degree, via the library issues desk and group-based activities. By staff position most participants are library assistants, but all other operational levels are also represented in the sample from volunteers to senior management and heads of service levels. Most of our participants have six or more year's public library experience including many with 11+ years. Most work in urban library locations and most work with a broad range of library users/members. A minority work specifically with adults in middle- and low-income households, and some with children. Most of our participants are university educated. A minority are members of the *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (CILIP), the professional body for librarians.

Most of our participants have received no mis/disinformation specific training, and for those who have, much training appears to have been general in nature (i.e., not librarian specific and focused on general digital literacy skills such as online safety). A very small number of participants have received training to be able to in turn train library users/members. Limited library staff training to address mis/disinformation has been reported in other similar studies from other nations (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Sanches et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024) and is now evidenced in England.

Most of our participants work in libraries that do not provide any mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for their users/members, and several participants are not sure. The minority of our participants who indicated that their library does provide mis/disinformation guidance and resources for users/members variously described doing so via distribution of leaflets and posters, signposting to resources, online safety guides, and provision of media and information literacy courses/events. Much provision appears to be part of everyday practices, but some participants indicated that such user/member support could be sporadic, particularly provision of formal scheduled events (e.g., training courses). Limited guidelines and resources for library users/members have been reported in other similar studies from other nations (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Sanches et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024) and is now evidenced in England.

Most of our participants are either not sure or confirmed that their library has no partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation. The minority of participants who indicated that their library does have partnerships/collaborations variously named a mix of public and private sector partners. Many partnerships/collaborations appear focused on providing courses and resources on digital literacy and online safety for library users/members; however, some participants indicated that such provision was sporadic. Limited library

partnerships or collaboration to address mis/disinformation have been reported in other similar studies from other nations (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Willenborg and Detmering, 2025) and is now evidenced in England.

Most of our participants are never or are rarely involved in the following common practices to address mis/disinformation (Roozenbeek et al., 2023): developing general media and information literacy skills in users/members (i.e., boosting type activities); encouraging users/members to evaluate the accuracy of specific facts/information and behave responsibly with mis/disinformation (i.e., nudging type activities); correcting specific mis/disinformation (i.e., debunking type activities); or restricting or removing access to mis/disinformation (i.e., labelling/regulation type activities). A follow-on question that sought to identify successful practices to address mis/disinformation provided some further insights from the minority of participants involved in such practices. Staff provision of guidance during everyday interactions with users/members was most often described (i.e., nudging and debunking practices), followed by collection management (i.e., labelling/regulation practices), and user/member and staff training (i.e., boosting practices). From respondent comments such practices appear informal and opportunistic occurring as part of other everyday staff activities such as when providing users/members with IT support (as opposed to more formal mis/disinformation events for users/members). Previous studies from other nations (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al., 2023; Johnston, 2023; Sanches et al., 2024; Hari et al., 2024) have reported most library practices, where evident, to be focused on media and information literacy education (i.e., boosting activities). Our findings suggest that within England, even this practice is limited (see Fig. 40).

Regarding participant capacity and challenges, responses for nine of the ten listed key considerations (identified from the literature review and discussed in section one) have mean values on the negative point of the scale indicating that each is an operational issue for our participants; and one has a mean value on the low end of the neutral point of the scale (see: Fig. 41). A follow-on question that asked if participants have experienced any further challenges not listed on the questionnaire also identified several further issues, that whilst reported in smaller numbers, are nonetheless important: limited range of library stock (e.g., small range of newspapers); increasing volume of AI generated mis/disinformation; library staff bias and resistance; public trust; internal misinformation; unapproved material placements; and limited resource translation for non-English speaking users/members. Our findings provide new insights into the extent of challenges faced by library staff when seeking to address mis/disinformation.

When we asked our participants how successful they feel in addressing mis/disinformation in their community, most feel unsuccessful, and several were neutral. Only a minority of our participants feel that they are successfully addressing mis/disinformation in their library communities. No prior studies provide similar insights.

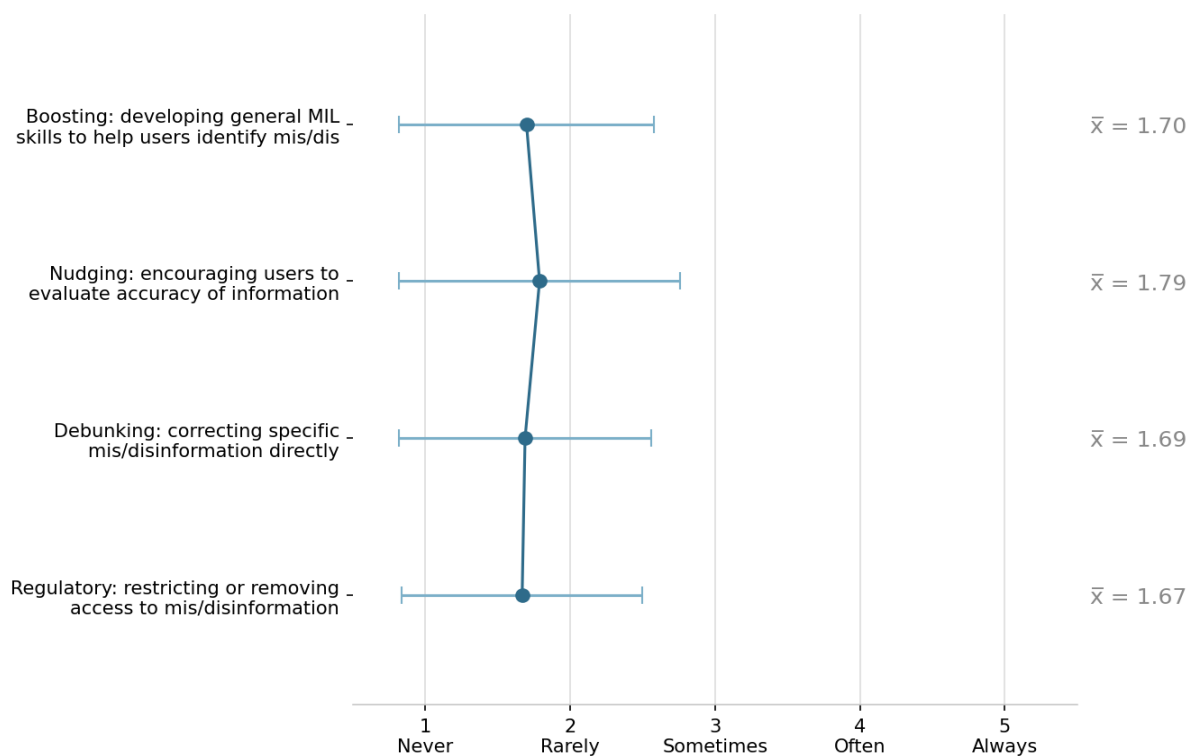


Figure 40 - Staff involvement in common practices to address mis/disinformation

Regarding participant perspectives of mis/disinformation (i.e., conceptual and practical understanding), most agreed with the statement that mis/disinformation is a problem of critical literacy (see: Fig. 42). The two further associated statements that mis/disinformation is also a problem of functional literacy, and a problem of attitude/disposition, received more distributed responses with the mean values for both within the neutral range (albeit at the upper positive end). Arguably all three of these statements should have been strongly agreed with as these are commonly reported factors when seeking to address mis/disinformation (see for example, Reuter et al., 2025; Saunders, 2025; Young et al., 2020), but a significant number of participants either disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with these statements (from one-fifth of respondents for critical literacy to two-fifths for attitude/disposition). It is possible that several of our participants neither agreeing nor disagreeing with these statements were adding an unrequired layer of complexity to the statements (i.e., that each is a variable factor dependent upon circumstances), or were simply unsure. However, even with this allowance there remains a significant proportion of our participants who disagreed with these statements ($\leq 12\%$). This suggests that some staff may have limited understanding of the key factors influencing peoples' susceptibility to mis/disinformation. Again, no prior studies provide similar insights.

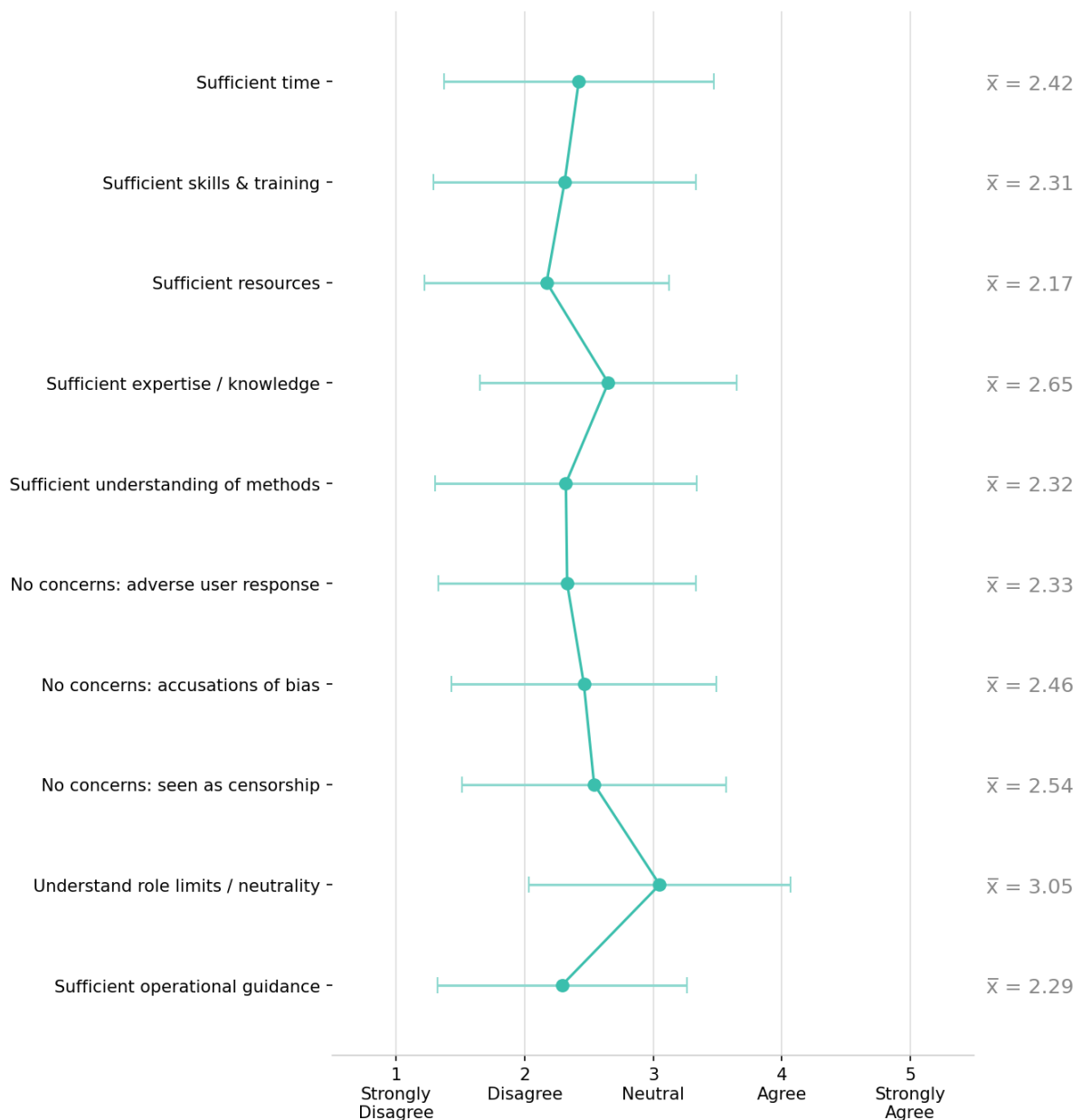


Figure 41 - Mis/disinformation capacity and challenges

Regarding whether public libraries should remain neutral when addressing mis/disinformation, participant responses were mixed with just over one-third believing that libraries should not be neutral, one quarter neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and just over one-third believing that libraries should be neutral. Again, it is possible that participants were adding an unrequired layer of complexity to this statement (e.g., some participants believing that it again depends upon the circumstances). It is also possible that neutrality is variously understood, or misunderstood, amongst participants (e.g., some participants believing that one cannot correct mis/disinformation and be impartial at the same time). In support, in responses to other survey questions some participants described neutrality as a constraint when seeking to address mis/disinformation (for example, see responses to Q40). Our findings draw further attention to an ongoing challenge for public libraries (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al, 2023) and are notable

here for evidencing a divergence of opinions and/or practical understanding amongst staff of an important, if contested, principle of public library service. Whilst neutrality is a foundational professional value of public librarianship (Macdonald & Birdi, 2020; CILIP, 2022), critics argue that in practice adopting a position of neutrality, whilst an important principle, can also reinforce pre-existing hierarchies and power structures, to the advantage of the already powerful and the detriment of those without (Oltmann et al., 2023). Such considerations pose significant ongoing challenges for public library practices.

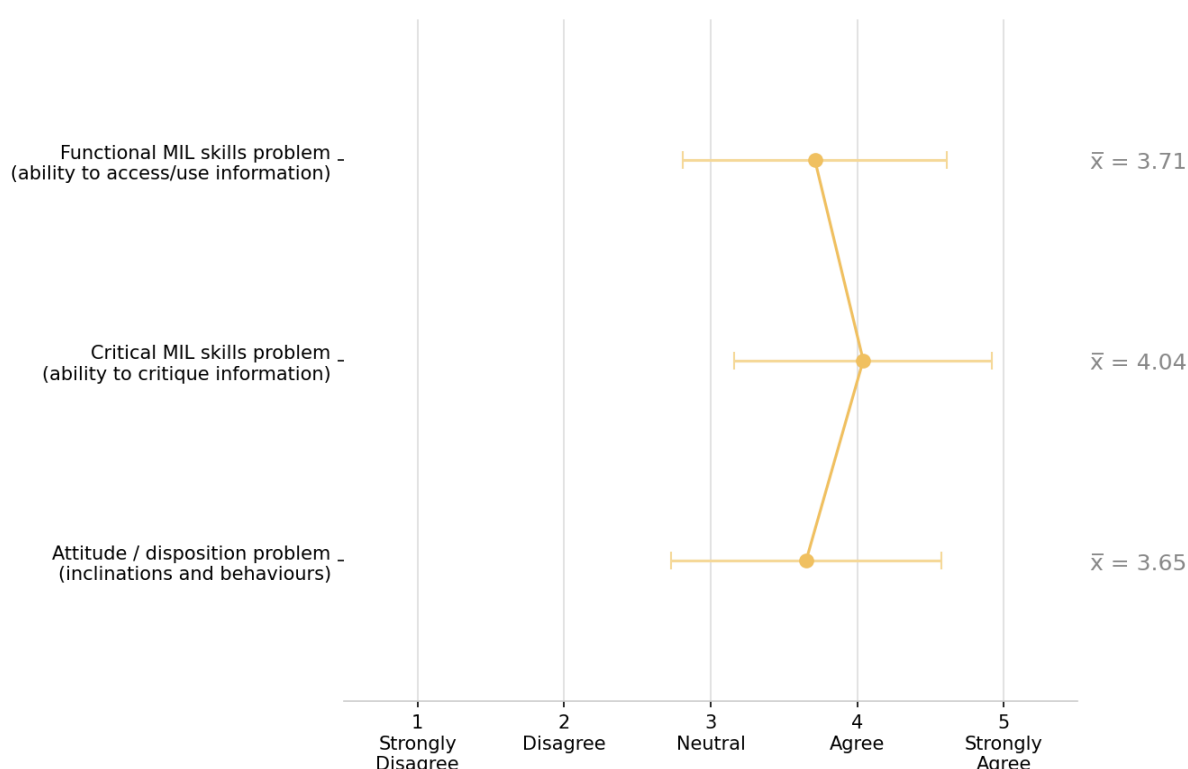


Figure 42 - Mis/disinformation perspectives

Regarding whether public libraries should have a passive (non-intervention) or active (intervention) role in addressing mis/disinformation, most participants believed that the library should have an active role, and a minority believed that the library should have a passive role. Some participants selected other (the third option for this question) with most then stating that public libraries should have both an active and/or passive role dependent upon circumstances. Our findings draw further attention to an ongoing open question for public libraries (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Tripodi et al, 2023) and provide new insights into the opinions of staff.

Regarding whether our participants feel that their library is doing all that it can do to address mis/disinformation, most participants answered no. A follow on question provided further insights. Those respondents who felt that their library was not doing enough to address mis/disinformation (the majority), attributed this to limited proactive staff practices, limited operational guidance, stock issues, untrained staff, and neutrality constraints. Some also indicated a reluctance to address mis/disinformation due to risk of conflict and perceived lack of internal support. The minority of respondents who felt that their library was doing all that it could do to

address mis/disinformation attributed this to provision of a neutral inclusive public space, trained staff, stock management, and the everyday interactions of staff with users/members. Some also stated that their library was doing all that it could do within the practical limits of library capacity and sphere of influence. No prior studies provide similar insights.

The final question asked our participants what one thing would help them to address mis/disinformation. Most participants requested staff training, and specifically, for training on how to approach and engage with users/members on potentially contentious topics. A significant number of requests were also made for additional resources to assist with addressing mis/disinformation amongst users/members including promotional materials, educational materials, approved directories (physical and digital), and stock/content labelling systems. Further requests were also made in smaller numbers for: user/member training; national public awareness campaigns; national policy; collaboration; freedom from political interference; time; professional support; management support; regulation; and user outreach. Our findings support prior studies from other nations reporting limited librarian understanding of effective and appropriate forms of engagement with patrons to address mis/disinformation issues, and associated calls for staff training and educational materials and resources (Young et al., 2020; Paris et al., 2022; Hari et al., 2024; Willenborg and Detmering, 2025). Our findings also provide insights into several further challenges and needs including calls for overarching national guidance and support.

In summary, there are ten main findings from this research:

1. Most of our participants are educated and experienced library staff, but most have not received any mis/disinformation specific training.
2. Most of our participants work in libraries that do not provide any mis/disinformation guidelines and/or educational materials and resources for their users/members.
3. Most of our participants are either not sure or confirmed that their library has no partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation.
4. Most of our participants are never or are rarely involved in specific practices to address mis/disinformation.
5. Most of our participants are faced with a broad range of challenges and concerns that limit their ability to effectively address mis/disinformation.
6. Most of our participants do not feel that they are successfully addressing mis/disinformation in their communities.
7. Some of our participants may have limited depth of understanding of the factors contributing to mis/disinformation.
8. Our participants have divergent views on remaining neutral when addressing mis/disinformation.
9. Most of our participants believe that libraries should have an active role in addressing mis/disinformation.
10. Most of our participants believe that their library is not doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation.

4 Study Limitations

“We have talented and trained staff who care about the library users and have a passion for providing good quality information.”

(Survey respondent 43)

4. Study Limitations

Our findings cannot be considered representative of all library staff in England as we provide insights into the specific perspectives and practices of our study participants. Our research design (i.e., questionnaire) also limited our assessment of depth of participant perspectives and practices, and associated knowledge and skills. We thus encourage further studies that might include more direct lines of enquiry and evaluation. This might include more structured assessments of library staff education and training needs.

Whilst most operational roles and levels are represented in our sample, our participants are majority from urban public libraries. We thus encourage further studies to gather more input from staff in rural and mobile library services.

Notwithstanding the above our 372 participants have provided valuable insights into the role of public libraries in England in addressing mis/disinformation, and the challenges experienced by library staff. The arising recommendations from our findings are discussed in the next section.

5 Recommendations

“We all need to be empowered and educated to know how to take steps in our libraries/roles to educate, inform, and empower our customers!”

(Survey respondent 86)

5. Recommendations

This study advances our understanding of the role of public libraries in addressing mis/disinformation with particular attention to current staff perspectives and practices. The work draws further attention to an important societal role, and importantly, shows that whilst library staff are motivated to address mis/disinformation, they face several challenges hindering progress that require urgent action.

There are four main recommendations that arise from this research. To establish:

1. A national programme of library staff education and training to address mis/disinformation.
2. A national open access repository of library resources for addressing mis/disinformation.
3. A national partnership agreement for addressing mis/disinformation.
4. National library policy and operational guidance for addressing mis/disinformation.

Each is discussed below.

Recommendation One: A national programme of library staff education and training to address mis/disinformation (addresses findings 1, 4-10)

Our findings suggest that most public library staff in England have not received any mis/disinformation specific training. We thus recommend that further work is undertaken to determine specific needs and to develop a national education and training programme. This should include formal education and training needs assessments across all operational levels and roles, with particular attention to the practical, pedagogical, and infrastructural considerations that will determine what is feasible and effective in practice. Such assessments will provide the evidence base necessary to design a programme that is genuinely responsive to practitioner realities rather than importing approaches developed for other sectors and contexts.

The recommended programme should be informed by and/or draw on existing open access literacy education frameworks, toolkits, and materials. For example, those developed by CILIP, Libraries Connected, the Media and Information Literacy Alliance, the NHS Health Literacy Partnership, the Good Things Foundation, and UNESCO's MIL programme. However, it is important to note that existing frameworks and toolkits, whilst valuable, will be insufficient on their own. Most have been developed with other sectors in mind, particularly for higher education and schools, and their direct applicability to the public library context, including the diverse and unmediated communities served, is untested. It is also important to note that such frameworks are largely focused on basic functional skills and do not address important dispositional considerations (McMenemy & Buchanan, 2019). A national programme must therefore go beyond simple referral to existing MIL frameworks and provide more in-depth professional direction and support. This should include to: build staff understanding of the broader conceptual landscape of mis/disinformation including the sociocultural and dispositional factors that influence people's susceptibility to and sharing of mis/disinformation; and to develop practical intervention skills, equipping staff to engage with library users and members on

potentially contentious topics with confidence and sensitivity in the everyday library context. This should include clear guidance on neutrality that goes beyond theoretical discussion to provide practical guidance.

The recommended programme should operate at both national and local levels. At the national level, a coordinated and regularly updated programme of training should be developed and made freely available to all public library staff in England, encompassing both MIL education and more advanced intervention and engagement methods. Delivery models should reflect the operational realities of public library work, including the time and resource pressures identified in this research, and should therefore include flexible, self-directed, and online options alongside any structured in-person provision where possible. At the local level, library services should be supported and encouraged to develop context-specific training that addresses specific communities, challenges, and partnerships relevant to their setting, with mechanisms to feed that learning and experience back into the national programme.

We recommend that the education and training programme be developed in partnership with academia and draw from a range of disciplines (beyond information and library schools, we would also recommend input from education and social sciences etc.). CILIP, the professional body for library and information professionals, could also have an important role to play in the recommended programme, including contribution to professional development resources, and the facilitation of communities of practice.

An education and training programme of this scale is not without precedent. In the late 1990s the UK Government invested in the Peoples Network, a nationwide programme that sought to equip every public library with the technology and trained staff to help UK citizens and communities prosper in the accelerating information age including to bridge digital divide issues (Library and Information Commission, 1997). The programme recommended here would build on such past programmes to not just develop basic functional MIL skills in the population, but to also foster responsible ethical use of technology. Without attention to both, mis/disinformation will continue to thrive.

Recommendation Two: A national open access repository of library resources for addressing mis/disinformation (addresses findings 2, 5-6, 9).

Our findings suggest that most public libraries in England do not provide any mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for their users/members. Where guidance is provided it appears to be ad hoc and informal as part of other everyday library practices.

We thus recommend the development of a national open access repository of mis/disinformation resources (e.g., guidelines, checklists, directories, short courses), freely available to all public library staff and users across England (with resource tailoring as appropriate). The primary rationale for a national approach is one of economies of scale: the development of high quality, contextually appropriate resources for addressing mis/disinformation is resource intensive, and it is neither efficient nor equitable to expect individual library services to develop such materials independently (although we would also encourage individual libraries to contribute

examples of best practice to the knowledge base). A shared national resource base would ensure that all library services, regardless of size, budget, or staffing numbers, have equal access to materials of consistent quality.

Similar to our recommendations for the staff training programme (see recommendation one), we recommend that the repository is developed in active collaboration with academia, professional bodies, and specialist organisations with relevant expertise. Academic partners can contribute evidence-based resources grounded in current research on mis/disinformation, MIL frameworks/tools, and methods of effective public engagement. Professional bodies, including CILIP and Libraries Connected, have existing relationships, infrastructure, and reach within the sector that would support both development and promotion of the repository. Specialist organisations including fact-checking organisations, media literacy charities, health literacy bodies, and digital inclusion organisations, could also bring complementary expertise and resources that could be drawn upon and, where appropriate, integrated into the repository rather than duplicated.

Finally, the repository should be understood as an ongoing programme of work. Mis/disinformation is a rapidly evolving challenge, and the resources needed to address it must evolve accordingly. A governance structure that ensures regular review, updating, and quality assurance of repository content, and that maintains the active involvement of the public library sector, academia, and specialist partners, will be essential to the repository's long-term utility and credibility.

Recommendation Three: A national partnership agreement for addressing mis/disinformation (addresses findings 1, 2-6, 9-10).

Our findings suggest that most public libraries in England do not have substantial partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation. Partnerships are important as mis/disinformation is a complex challenge (see background) that exceeds the capacity of any single institution or sector to address alone. For example, a national training programme (recommendation one) without specialist delivery partners will be limited in both depth and reach, and a national resource repository (recommendation two) without sustained expert contributions will date rapidly. We thus recommend a national partnership agreement be put in place with three key aims.

The first aim is collaboration to build staff capacity. Library services should be actively supported to develop partnerships with specialist organisations capable of delivering contextually appropriate mis/disinformation training. For example, the NHS Health Literacy Partnership, the Good Things Foundation, and the Guardian Foundation. Given the specific prevalence of health misinformation encountered in library settings, evidenced in the findings of this research and reported elsewhere (for example, see: Young et al., 2020; Hari et al., 2024), health literacy organisations represent a priority collaboration partner and will benefit from specific attention in programme design.

The second aim is collaboration to extend community reach. The survey findings indicate that several participants recognised the library as a venue through which external organisations could deliver mis/disinformation support to community members, even where library staff themselves lacked the capacity or confidence to lead such outreach. This is a practical and realistic model that should be developed

systematically. Libraries are well positioned to host and broker, providing trusted community space, established user relationships, and reach into populations that are digitally excluded or otherwise difficult to engage. External partners, including Citizens Advice, local NHS trusts, local authority trading standards services, digital inclusion charities, and media literacy organisations, bring complementary expertise and credibility that extends and deepens what libraries can offer independently. Developing this model at scale requires library services to be formally supported and recognised in a convening and facilitation role, rather than expected to absorb additional responsibilities without commensurate resource.

The third aim is collaboration to develop and sustain the national resource repository (see recommended two). The repository cannot be meaningfully maintained by the library sector alone. Academic partners can contribute evidence-based resources grounded in current research on mis/disinformation, effective public engagement, and media and information literacy. Specialist organisations including fact-checking bodies (e.g., BBC Verify), health literacy organisations, and digital inclusion charities bring established and regularly updated resources that should be integrated where appropriate rather than duplicated. Governance structures for the repository should therefore embed external partners formally, with clear responsibilities for contribution, review, and quality assurance.

An important overarching consideration is that effective collaboration must be understood as reciprocal relationships rather than a matter of libraries receiving support from better-resourced external partners. Public libraries bring assets that external organisations value and often cannot replicate: a trusted, non-partisan presence in local communities; physical access points in areas of high deprivation and digital exclusion; established relationships with diverse user populations including older adults, those with low digital confidence, and those from lower socioeconomic groups; and a statutory remit and public accountability that confers institutional legitimacy. Framing collaborations on this basis, as genuinely mutual partnerships rather than supplementary provision, is both more accurate and more strategically sustainable for the sector.

Finally, and as with the national training programme and resource repository, effective collaboration at scale requires coordination infrastructure that does not currently exist. Without a national convening body or lead organisation, collaborations will arguably remain local, inconsistent, and dependent on individual professional relationships that are vulnerable to staff turnover and funding change. Libraries Connected and CILIP are well placed to play a coordinating role, given their existing relationships across the sector and with relevant external partners. However, as with recommendation 4 on national policy (see below), this requires a formal mandate and dedicated resource. Coordination cannot be absorbed within libraries as an additional task within existing remits already operating under pressure.

Recommendation Four: National library policy and operational guidance for addressing mis/disinformation (addresses findings 1, 2-4, 8-10).

We recommend the development of national policy that formally recognises and supports the role of public libraries in England in addressing mis/disinformation, and that provides the overarching support and direction within which recommendations 1-3 in this report can be effectively implemented. This policy should operate at two interconnected levels: national strategic policy that sets direction, establishes

expectations, and secures resources for the sector as a whole; and local operational guidance that translates national direction into operational practices that can be applied. As a priority, this should include clear direction concerning neutrality as our research has shown that this is a concern for many staff. We recommend that national policy and guidance should:

- Clarify the distinction between political neutrality and factual accuracy. Libraries must remain politically impartial, but this does not preclude providing verified information, correcting demonstrably false claims, or directing users to authoritative sources. Guidance should explicitly state that supporting factual accuracy is not a breach of neutrality.
- Define the boundaries of acceptable staff intervention. Staff need confidence about when and how they can challenge mis/disinformation safely and appropriately. Guidance should outline proportionate, non-confrontational approaches that align with library values and user care.
- Provide a framework for handling contentious or sensitive topics. This should include principles for engaging with users who hold strong beliefs, strategies for de-escalation, and clear procedures for situations where staff feel unsafe or out of depth.
- Reaffirm the role of libraries as trusted, inclusive public spaces. Guidance should emphasise that neutrality does not require passivity. Libraries can uphold intellectual freedom while also promoting informed decision-making, critical literacy, and access to reliable information.
- Support consistent practice across the sector. National guidance should reduce the current variability between services by providing a shared set of expectations, definitions, and recommended practices. This will help ensure that users receive equitable support regardless of location.
- Address collection management in a mis/disinformation environment. Libraries need clarity on how neutrality applies to stock selection, retention, and the handling of outdated or harmful materials, particularly in areas such as health.
- Embed safeguarding and staff wellbeing considerations. A theme that emerged from the research was the emotional and sometimes confrontational nature of mis/disinformation interactions. Guidance should include support for staff in this area, including advice on when it is appropriate to disengage or refer users elsewhere.

By providing clear national guidance on how library services should interpret neutrality, government can give public libraries the confidence and legitimacy they need to act effectively. This should reduce staff hesitancy, strengthen public trust, and enable libraries to fulfil their civic role in supporting communities to navigate an increasingly complex information environment.

6 Conclusion

“We need to be active in encouraging users to develop critical thinking skills that allow them to access and critique information from a range of sources. Library neutrality should not mean doing nothing.”

(Survey respondent 75)

6. Conclusion

Addressing the insidious and disruptive impact of mis/disinformation is widely recognised as an urgent societal challenge, but one that is not easily addressed as it is a complex challenge influenced by issues of both access and disposition, the former influenced by factors of information access and literacy (i.e., people's ability to access and evaluate information), the latter influenced by factors of attitude and inclination (i.e., people's predispositions, beliefs and motivations influencing their information seeking behaviours). Without attention to both (access and disposition), any steps to address mis/disinformation are at risk of being too reductionist and of limited effect.

Public libraries are well positioned to play a key role in addressing mis/disinformation in UK society but prior to this study we lacked insights into current practices, and studies from other nations report various limitations within the sector. This study thus undertook a review of the role of public libraries in England in addressing mis/disinformation in UK society. This included a national survey of public library staff that is the first survey of its kind to be conducted in the UK (i.e., specifically exploring the role of public libraries in addressing mis/disinformation within UK communities), and with a total of 372 professional participants, is also the largest survey of its kind conducted to date within any nation.

There are ten main findings:

1. Most of our participants are educated and experienced library staff, but most have not received any mis/disinformation specific training.
2. Most of our participants work in libraries that do not provide any mis/disinformation guidelines and/or educational materials and resources for their users/members.
3. Most of our participants are either not sure or confirmed that their library has no partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation.
4. Most of our participants are never or are rarely involved in specific practices to address mis/disinformation.
5. Most of our participants are faced with a broad range of challenges and concerns that limit their ability to effectively address mis/disinformation.
6. Most of our participants do not feel that they are successfully addressing mis/disinformation in their communities.
7. Some of our participants may have limited depth of understanding of the factors contributing to mis/disinformation.
8. Our participants have divergent views on remaining neutral when addressing mis/disinformation.
9. Most of our participants believe that libraries should have an active role in addressing mis/disinformation.
10. Most of our participants believe that their library is not doing all that it could do to address mis/disinformation.

Our findings highlight that the public library service in England is staffed by an educated and motivated workforce well-positioned to address mis/disinformation, but that most staff are currently equipped with little more than intent due to the various conceptual and practical issues noted above. To address these issues, four main recommendations are made. To establish:

1. A national programme of library staff education and training to address mis/disinformation.
2. A national open access repository of library resources for addressing mis/disinformation.
3. A national partnership agreement for addressing mis/disinformation.
4. National library policy and operational guidance for addressing mis/disinformation.

It is important to note that the realisation of the above recommendations will have implications for current organisational structures, culture, and practices; setting three new directions for public libraries, moving from:

- individual to institutional: moving beyond dispersed localised responses to coordinated national programmes with clear national policy and operational guidance to address mis/disinformation.
- informal to intentional: moving beyond ad hoc opportunistic responses to structured programmes that embed mis/disinformation roles within standard everyday library practices.
- general to specialised: moving beyond basic functional support to provision of critical support that might include direct intervention to address negative information behaviours.

The challenge of mis/disinformation is urgent and, in many respects, unaddressed. Public libraries are well placed in UK communities to play a central role in addressing given their long-standing status as trusted civic institutions supporting democratic citizenship and an informed society; but support is needed to reposition public libraries on the frontline of national responses to the mis/disinformation challenge.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Information/Statement of Study Purpose

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being conducted and what participation will involve. Please carefully read the information on this page and contact the research team (see #2 below) if you have any further questions.

1. Research Project Title

The Role of the Public Library in Combating Misinformation and Disinformation: a Review.

2. Research team and contact details

Professor Steven Buchanan (University of Stirling): s.j.buchanan@stir.ac.uk

Professor David McMenemy (University of Glasgow): david.mcmenemy@glasgow.ac.uk

3. Background, aims of project

The University of Stirling, in partnership with the University of Glasgow and funded by Arts Council England, is undertaking a review of the role of public libraries (PLs) in England in addressing the growing issue of misinformation and disinformation (MIS/DISINFORMATION) in UK society. PLs have an important MIS/DISINFORMATION role but PL research is currently limited. This project seeks to address this gap and will help advance understanding of the role of PLs in addressing MIS/DISINFORMATION. The work will help evidence and draw further attention to an important societal role and contribute to our understanding of how PLs can be effectively utilised going forward to combat MIS/DISINFORMATION.

4. Time period

The project (in its entirety) is running from July 2025 to March 2026. This survey will run from November 3rd to December 5th, 2025.

5. Why have I been invited to take part?

We are interested in the everyday operational MIS/DISINFORMATION perspectives, experiences, and practices of PL staff. If you are aged 18+ and working in a PL in England (including in a voluntary role) you are eligible and invited to participate.

6. Do I have to take part?

No, participation is voluntary. You can also withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty. However, any data collected up to point of withdrawal may be kept and used in the data analysis.

7. What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked on the next page to consent to participate and then asked to complete a questionnaire that should take approximately 15 minutes. Questions will explore your MIS/DISINFORMATION perspectives, challenges, and practices. We will also ask some general demographic questions for background context, but we will not require any personal information that would directly identify you. All demographic questions are also entirely optional.

8. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks in taking part.

9. Are there any benefits in taking part?

In participating in this research you will provide an important contribution to our understanding of how PLs can be effectively utilised to address the growing issue of MIS/DISINFORMATION in UK society.

10. What happens to the data I provide?

During the project all research data will be securely stored on two institutional systems (University of Stirling and JISC Online Survey) with access restricted to research team (see #2). Post project (within three months of end date) all research data will be removed from JISC Online Survey, and all archive research data will be deposited on University of Stirling DataSTORRE open access repository for a minimum of 10 years (see #11).

11. Future uses of the data

It is possible that other researchers may find the data from this survey to be useful in answering other research questions. We will thus ask for your consent (on next page) for the anonymised data that you provide to be made publicly available (i.e., via open access data repository).

12. Will the research be published?

The research will be published as a public report and in one or more academic journals (in information and library studies). You will not be identifiable in any publication. The University of Stirling is committed to making the outputs of research publicly accessible and supports this commitment through our online open access repository (DataSTORRE). Unless funder/publisher requirements prevent us, this research will be publicly disseminated through our open access repository. We will announce publication of the public report that will also be available here in due course:

https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/1260986#panel_1_2.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is funded by Arts Council England and is being undertaken by the University of Stirling in partnership with the University of Glasgow.

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

The ethical approaches of this project have been approved via the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel and the University of Glasgow College of Arts & Humanities Ethics Committee.

15. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

You can contact the research team (see #2) at any time to discuss any concerns. Alternatively, if you have a concern or complaint that you would like to discuss with someone from outside of the team, please contact: Professor Richard Haynes (r.b.haynes@stir.ac.uk).

Your consent to take part in this research

Please read the following statements below and confirm that you agree to all of them before consenting to participate in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet/statement of purpose for this study including inclusion criteria and what will be expected of me.

I confirm that I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

I confirm that I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study without giving a reason, and without consequence. I understand that if I withdraw no more data will be collected from me. However, any data collected up until the point that I withdraw may be kept and used in the data analysis.

I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous and I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

I agree that my anonymised research data may be used by others for future research.

I understand that the anonymised research data that I provide will be published as a public report and possible academic publications.

1. I agree to the statements above and consent to take part in this study:

☐	I consent.
☐	I do not consent.

START

A. A little bit about you

Please could you tell us a little about yourself (some general demographic questions for background context with no personal information required that would identify you).

2. What is your main public library role (please select one)?

☐	Head of Service
☐	Senior Management
☐	Library Manager
☐	Principal Librarian
☐	Librarian
☐	Library Assistant
☐	Other (please specify):

3. How long have you worked in public libraries?

☐	0-5 years
☐	6-10 years
☐	11+ years

4. What is your geographical location (i.e., main work location/user catchment)?

☐	Urban
☐	Rural
☐	Mobile

5. What is your highest level of educational qualification?

☐	School
☐	FE College
☐	University Undergraduate
☐	University Postgraduate

6. Are you a member of the Chartered Institute of Information Professionals?

☐	No
☐	Student Member
☐	Standard Member
☐	ACLIP Member
☐	MCLIP Member
☐	FCLIP Member

7. Have you had any mis/disinformation specific training?

☐	No
☐	Not Sure
☐	Yes

8. Please (if answered yes to question 7) could you provide some details of the mis/disinformation training that you have had (provider, type/content):

B. A little bit about your library users/members

Please could you tell us a little about the library users/members that you interact with.

9. In your library role, is there any one group of users/members that you mostly interact with (e.g., children or adults)?

☐	No
☐	Yes

10. Please (if you answered yes to question 9) could you indicate the approximate age of the users/members that you mostly interact with.

☐	Aged 15 years or under
☐	Aged 16-64
☐	Aged 65 years and over
☐	Not Sure

11. Please (if you answered yes to question 9) could you indicate the approximate household social classification of the users/members that you mostly interact with (note. this is a general estimate for either the user/member or their household):

☐	High income household, senior professional (AB)
☐	Middle income household, professional (C1) or skilled manual occupations
☐	Low income household, unskilled (DE) manual occupations or unemployed
☐	Not Sure

12. What is your main form of interaction with library users/members?

☐	Enquiries desk
☐	Issues desk
☐	Library groups/activities
☐	IT support

	Other (please specify:
--	------------------------

13. Does your library provide mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources for the users/members that you interact with?

	No
	Not Sure
	Yes

14. Please (if answered yes to question 13) could you provide some details of the mis/disinformation guidelines and/or resources that are provided for your users/members:

15. Does your library have any partnerships or collaborations with other organisations to address mis/disinformation for your users/members?

	No
	Not Sure
	Yes

16. Please (if answered yes to question 15) could you provide some details (e.g., organisation, type of partnership/collaboration):

C. Your mis/disinformation practices

Please could you provide us with some details of the types of mis/disinformation practices that you are involved in (or not). Please use the following to further guide your frequency scale response: 1 never, 2 rarely (yearly), 3 sometimes (monthly), 4 quite often (weekly), 5 very often (daily).

17. In your library role, how often are you involved in activities to develop general media and information literacy skills in users/members for them to be able to independently identify mis/disinformation and reduce their individual susceptibility (i.e., boosting type activities)?

1	2	3	4	5
never				very often

18. In your library role, how often are you involved in activities encouraging users/members to evaluate the accuracy of specific facts/information, and in relation, to behave responsibly with mis/disinformation (i.e., nudging type activities)?

1	2	3	4	5
never				very often

19. In your library role, how often are you involved in activities correcting specific mis/disinformation (i.e., debunking type activities)?

1	2	3	4	5
never				very often

20. In your library role, how often are you involved in restricting or removing access to mis/disinformation (i.e., regulatory type activities such as setting filters and/or removing items/material)?

1	2	3	4	5
never				very often

21. Could you share details of any practices within your library that you think have been particularly successful in addressing mis/disinformation in your community?

D. Your mis/disinformation capacity and challenges

Please could you indicate your degree of disagreement/agreement with the following statements. Please use the following to further guide your response on the provided scale: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree.

22. In my library work, I have sufficient time to address mis/disinformation.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

23. In my library work, I have sufficient skills and training to address mis/disinformation.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

24. In my library work, I have sufficient resources to address mis/disinformation.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

25. In my library work, I have sufficient expertise and/or general knowledge to address a broad range of mis/disinformation topics.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

26. In my library work, I have sufficient understanding of appropriate and effective methods of user/member engagement to address mis/disinformation.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

27. In my library work, I have no concerns that my actions might be met with adverse user/member response when addressing mis/disinformation issues.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

28. In my library work, I have no concerns that false accusations (e.g., of bias) might be made against me by users/members or others when addressing mis/disinformation issues.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

29. In my library work, I have no concern that my actions might be considered censorship when addressing mis/disinformation issues.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

30. In my library work, I understand the limits of my role and have no concerns regarding library neutrality when addressing mis/disinformation issues.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

31. In my library work, I have sufficient operational guidance that I can draw on to guide my mis/disinformation actions/decisions.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

32. In my library work, I feel that I am successfully addressing mis/disinformation in my community.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

33. Are there any other mis/disinformation challenges that you encounter in your work not covered above (if so, please provide details)?

E. Your mis/disinformation perspectives

Please could you indicate your degree of disagreement/agreement with the following statements. Please use the following to further guide your response on the provided scale: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree.

34. Mis/disinformation is a problem of functional media and information literacy skills (people's ability to access and use information).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

35. Mis/disinformation is a problem of critical media and information literacy skills (people's ability to critique information).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

36. Mis/disinformation is a problem of attitude/disposition (people's inclinations and behaviours).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

37. Public libraries should remain neutral when addressing mis/disinformation.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree				strongly agree

38. In general, do you believe that public libraries should have a passive (non-intervention) or active (intervention) role in addressing mis/disinformation?

	Passive (non-intervention) role
	Active (intervention) role
	Other (please specify):

39. I believe that my library is doing all that it can do to address mis/disinformation in my community.

	Yes
	No

40. Please (if answered yes to question 39) could you explain your answer:

41. Finally (and thank you so much for reaching this point), if there was one thing that could help you in your library work to address mis/disinformation in your community, what would it be?

END

About the Authors

This study was undertaken by Professor Steven Buchanan and Professor David McMenemy. Summary bios for both authors are provided below.

Professor Steven Buchanan

Professor of Human Information Behaviour, University of Stirling.

Buchanan's research examines how and why people interact with information (or not) and influencing factors. He explores complex access and internalised behavioural factors, the former influenced by media and information literacy issues, the latter by sociocultural structures and norms. His work provides insights into what information to provide, to whom, and how.



His research has been variously funded by ESRC, AHRC, ACE, RSE, and SLIC and has been conducted in collaboration with various state and third sector partners including several past projects with public libraries. The practical impact of his work is attested to via input to various Government, NHS, and third sector reviews of public communication and information services past and present.

His work is published in the leading international journals for information and library studies. For further details see: <https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/1260986>

Professor David McMenemy

Professor of Information Ethics & Policy, University of Glasgow.

McMenemy's research interests encompass information law and ethics, including intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression, freedom of access to information, digital citizenship, privacy, and the philosophy of information. This includes a significant body of work on UK public library (PL) policy.

His research has been variously funded by CILIPS, RSE, AHRC, and SLIC. Indicative recent projects have examined ethics and values for effective advocacy for PLs; privacy, exclusion, and information behaviour in PL digital service use; and acceptable use policy development for PLs. He is a Chartered Fellow and previous Board Member of CILIP, and current President of CILIP Scotland. He is also a past trustee and board member of SLIC.

He is the author of several monographs on professional librarianship and is published in the leading international journals for information and library studies. For further details see: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/staff/davidmcmenemy/>



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