Truth, Lies, and Algorithms: Interdisciplinary Pedagogical Strategies for Media Literacy

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Abstract: The spread of misinformation on social media presents a critical challenge for students across disciplines. Despite its far-reaching impact on diverse fields, media literacy is often relegated to specialized courses rather than integrated across curricula. This paper offers actionable pedagogical strategies—grounded in the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and transactional reading theory—to help postsecondary students navigate and resist misinformation in varied disciplinary contexts by emphasizing critical media literacy. The proposed activities encourage students to critically analyze social media content, evaluate its credibility, and reflect on its societal impacts. By bridging theory and practice, this paper contributes to the growing body of research on interdisciplinary media literacy; it also underscores the transformative potential of experiential learning in preparing students for ethical, informed, and cross-disciplinary digital engagement.

Keywords: Misinformation, Media Literacy, Higher Education, Teaching Methods

1. Introduction

In *What the Fact?!: Finding the Truth in All the Noise* (2022), Seema Yasmin highlights the pervasive influence of cognitive biases and emotional appeals in the spread of misinformation. These psychological drivers not only make falsehoods more appealing than facts but also erode public trust in institutions, hinder collective action, and amplify societal divisions. In an era during which misinformation can spread through algorithmically curated social media feeds, the need for robust media literacy education is urgent. However, media literacy is too often treated as an isolated skill set, confined to journalism, communication, or digital media courses, when in reality, the ability to critically evaluate information is fundamental.

Media literacy should be a shared responsibility across curricula. Misinformation affects every field—from public health and political science to business ethics and STEM—yet many students do not receive systematic training in how to critically engage with information within their disciplines. If media literacy education remains siloed, students may learn fact-checking techniques in one course but fail in the transfer of those skills to other courses and contexts.

This paper contributes to the growing body of research on misinformation education by exploring pedagogical strategies that empower students in varied disciplinary contexts. Building on established theories of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and experiential learning (Dewey, 1933), we examine how fact-checking projects and creative assignments can serve as tools for fostering critical media literacy. These approaches are not only designed to help students analyze the rhetorical and contextual factors underpinning misinformation but also to develop ethical reasoning, interdisciplinary critical thinking, and rhetorical analysis skills that extend beyond media courses.

By situating these pedagogical innovations within broader scholarly discussions and practical classroom applications, this paper aims to provide educators with actionable strategies. It seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical interventions and contributes to a larger conversation about the role of education in countering misinformation. We argue that media literacy should not be relegated to particular departments or courses but must be reinforced across the curriculum, helping students recognize its relevance across contexts, stakeholders, and modes of engagement.

2. Theoretical Frame

As misinformation studies have expanded, many contemporary media literacy efforts have prioritized quick digital heuristics, such as fact-checking and algorithmic analysis. While these strategies are valuable, they often overlook deeper interpretive traditions rooted in the humanities. Foundational theories from Dewey, Freire, and Rosenblatt emphasize that meaning-making is an active, relational process—one that requires slow, deliberate

engagement with texts and their rhetorical construction. Critical pedagogy, transactional reading theory, and experiential learning together suggest that literacy education must move beyond the identification of misinformation toward a deep, reflective engagement with media.

A return to these interpretive traditions is urgent in today's digital climate, where students encounter fragmented, high-speed media consumption habits. Recent reporting (Horowitch, 2024) indicates that many students struggle with sustained attention and critical engagement, preferring surface-level interactions over in-depth analysis. By reintegrating humanities-based reading strategies, educators can equip students with the patience and analytical depth necessary to navigate complex information that has been reduced to bite-sized social media content. This approach treats media literacy not as a checklist of detection skills but as a lifelong, evolving practice of critical inquiry and reflection.

The pedagogical strategies proposed in this paper are grounded in critical pedagogy, transactional reading theory, and experiential learning. Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire (1970), seeks to empower learners to question dominant narratives and critically reflect on their social realities. Freire's concept of praxis—combining reflection and action—is particularly relevant in addressing misinformation, as it equips students with the tools to both analyze and counter false narratives.

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading (1978) adds another dimension by positioning reading as a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, which is influenced by the reader's experiences, emotions, and social context. This perspective underscores the role of interpretation in media literacy. Rosenblatt's work presages the advent of "social" media with her emphasis on texts as only one part of the diagram of author-text-reader; this dynamic diagram opens up the door for educating readers, across disciplines, to take responsibility for their own media literacy.

Experiential learning, as proposed by John Dewey (1933), emphasizes the importance of participatory, real-world learning. Characterized by hands-on activities that reflect the complexity of misinformation circulation, experiential learning encourages critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and a deeper understanding of societal challenges.

These theoretical perspectives offer a historically grounded yet forward-looking framework for misinformation pedagogy that also addresses different dimensions of critical media literacy.

Table 1: Justification of Selected Theoretical and Empirical Findings

Source	Key Contribution	Relevance to This Study
Dewey (1933)	Experiential learning: Education should be inquiry-driven and rooted in real-world application.	Supports fact-checking projects as active learning tools, where students investigate claims rather than passively consume information.
Freire (1970)	Critical pedagogy: Literacy should empower students to challenge dominant narratives and ideological control.	Justifies treating misinformation as a rhetorical and ideological construct, aligning with critical engagement strategies in the classroom.
Rosenblatt (1978)	Transactional reading theory: Meaning is co-constructed between reader and text, shaped by context, experience, and interaction.	Reinforces the importance of slow, rhetorical reading in media literacy, arguing against overly simplistic detection-based approaches.
Yasmin (2022)	Cognitive and emotional psychology of misinformation: False information spreads due to bias, engagement-driven platforms, and emotional resonance.	Provides an empirical foundation for why students need more than just digital literacy—they must recognize the emotional and psychological forces that shape misinformation consumption.

This theoretical integration ensures that the study is not only rooted in established educational theories but also responsive to the evolving landscape of misinformation research. Rather than treating media literacy as a fixed skill set, this approach situates it within a dynamic, student-centered process that blends historical pedagogical insights with contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, the inclusion of both time-tested and contemporary perspectives ensures that the pedagogical strategies proposed in this study remain adaptable across different contexts. While Dewey's and Freire's theories remain widely influential in critical education, Yasmin's work highlights how modern digital ecosystems and psychological drivers complicate traditional literacy models. Together, these perspectives bridge

educational philosophy, rhetorical analysis, and cognitive science, offering a robust and broadly appealing foundation for misinformation pedagogy.

By drawing on these interdisciplinary perspectives, this paper builds upon existing media literacy research while expanding the conversation to include deeper interpretive strategies. The following literature review examines contemporary approaches to misinformation education, highlighting both their strengths and limitations in fostering sustained critical engagement.

3. Literature Review

Media literacy education often emphasizes digital literacy, fact-checking, and source evaluation as key strategies for combating misinformation. These approaches offer students valuable tools, particularly in an era of algorithmic content curation. However, they often prioritize efficiency over deep engagement, training students to recognize misinformation patterns rather than interrogating the rhetorical and structural mechanisms that sustain them.

Decades of pedagogical research from the humanities highlight the importance of close reading and rhetorical awareness as tools for fostering critical thinking. Yet, these practices are underutilized in media literacy curricula. Tekoniemi et al. (2022) highlight the effectiveness of experiential learning strategies, such as fact-checking exercises, in fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning among students. These activities enable learners to dissect the origins and rhetorical strategies of misinformation, enhancing their ability to identify and counteract it in real-world contexts. Moreover, creative assignments, such as constructing and deconstructing fake news, provide students with a deeper understanding of how misinformation appeals to emotions and biases, a key theme in Yasmin's (2022) work. Bronstein et al (2019) suggest that given the demonstrated correlation between reduced engagement in analytical thinking and a belief in fake news, educators should help students by designing interventions which increase analytic thinking and/or actively open-minded thinking.

Yang and Li (2024) advocate for integrating media literacy into civic and political education to equip students with the skills necessary to critically analyze information and engage responsibly in democratic processes. Similarly, Cheung and Xu (2014) underscore the importance of teaching students to evaluate the credibility of information sources as part of a broader effort to promote informed citizenship. These scholars emphasize that rhetorical literacy—not just digital literacy—is crucial in helping students develop an enduring capacity to engage critically with misinformation.

The spread of misinformation through social media has become a major area of concern for educators, policymakers, and researchers alike. Studies have shown that the architecture of social media platforms, particularly their reliance on engagement-driven algorithms, contributes significantly to the amplification of false narratives. Chalke and Mishra (2023) emphasize that these algorithms prioritize sensationalist content and create echo chambers that reinforce cognitive biases and limit exposure to diverse perspectives. This dynamic has profound societal implications, particularly during moments of public crisis, such as election cycles or health emergencies (Sachdev and Ashfaq, 2023).

TikTok, one of the fastest-growing social media platforms, exemplifies how algorithmic prioritization shapes information dissemination. Adelhardt and Eberle (2024) explore the platform's potential for education but caution against its susceptibility to misinformation due to the platform's prioritization of engagement over credibility. Li's (2022) analysis of Zhihu (China's largest question-and-answer platform, similar to Quora but with growing content capabilities) similarly underscores how algorithms that maximize user engagement can exacerbate echo chambers, intensify the spread of misinformation, and limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Adaji (2023) further examines generational differences in misinformation susceptibility and finds that younger users are particularly vulnerable to spreading false narratives due to peer influence and digital habits.

Beyond the classroom, studies point to the societal implications of misinformation education. Sachdev and Ashfaq (2023) argue that misinformation undermines trust in public institutions, while Chalke and Mishra (2023) highlight its role in exacerbating polarization and public health crises. Addressing these challenges requires a multipronged approach that includes not only educational interventions but also algorithmic transparency and platform accountability. Such an approach equips students to critically engage with digital content while empowering them to advocate for systemic changes that prioritize truth and credibility.

4. Methodology: Humanities-Based Pedagogical Strategies for Critical Media Literacy

This study proposes a humanities-based pedagogical approach to critical media literacy, emphasizing slow, close, and rhetorical reading over quick digital heuristics such as source verification and fact-checking. This methodology prioritizes interpretive strategies drawn from rhetoric, composition, and literary studies. These strategies equip students to analyze not just the credibility of information but also the mechanisms that shape meaning and influence audiences.

A central concern driving this methodology is that many students, despite their digital fluency, struggle with the reading and interpretive skills necessary for critical media literacy. Three key challenges inform this approach. First, students' reading habits are often shaped by algorithmically curated, short-form content that encourages surface-level interactions rather than sustained analytical reading. Many students report that they do not engage in reading for comprehension or leisure (Horowitch, 2024), which hinders their ability to critically evaluate media texts. Second, a lack of familiarity with rhetorical frameworks prevents students from fully interrogating bias, argument structures, and persuasion tactics, leading to oversimplified evaluations of misinformation. Finally, the pace of online discourse discourages slow, reflective reading, making it harder for students to detect subtle rhetorical manipulations that contribute to misinformation's persuasive power.

This methodology addresses these challenges with three pedagogical strategies: (1) fact-checking as rhetorical inquiry, (2) crafting and analyzing misinformation, and (3) collaborative discussion-based learning. These strategies align with critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), transactional reading theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), and experiential learning (Dewey, 1933), ensuring that media literacy is treated as an active, relational process rather than a mechanical set of detection skills. By embedding slow, close, and rhetorical reading practices into media literacy education, this methodology challenges dominant approaches that treat misinformation as a problem of fact-checking alone, instead positioning it as a complex rhetorical phenomenon that demands deeper engagement. Each pedagogical strategy addresses a key aspect of students' challenges in media interpretation and is designed to be adaptable across higher education contexts.

The first strategy, fact-checking as rhetorical inquiry, reframes fact-checking as an interpretive and analytical process rather than a simple act of verification. Students engage in a multi-step analysis of how misinformation is rhetorically constructed, circulated, and received. Rather than treating misinformation as a deceptive mistake, students learn to recognize it as a persuasive phenomenon shaped by digital affordances, platform incentives, and ideological biases.

The second strategy, crafting and analyzing misinformation, immerses students in experiential learning by placing them in the role of content creators who deliberately design misinformation. Students also analyze their own work, reflecting on how their rhetorical choices influenced persuasiveness, how digital platforms amplify misinformation, and what ethical boundaries exist between persuasion and manipulation. This approach aligns with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, which emphasizes that meaning is co-constructed between creator and audience. Students move beyond passively evaluating misinformation and instead actively engage with its persuasive mechanisms, making them more adept at resisting its influence in real-world contexts.

The third pedagogical strategy, collaborative and discussion-based work combined with experiential activities, extends these individual exercises into a peer-driven, knowledge-building process. Students analyze misinformation trends, apply rhetorical reading strategies across different digital platforms, and discuss broader societal implications of misinformation's spread. Discussions and experiential follow-up activities foster critical synthesis, as students integrate personal experiences with misinformation, peer insights, and academic research.

While this study does not employ quantitative experimental methods, the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies is assessed through qualitative measures that emphasize student reflection, interpretive engagement, and classroom discourse. Three primary evaluation methods guide this assessment: 1) student reflection essays, in which students articulate how their understanding of misinformation evolved through these activities. These reveal how students engage with their own biases, apply rhetorical literacy skills, and critically evaluate persuasive digital content, 2) classroom discussions and peer feedback, serving as informal assessments of students' ability to articulate the rhetorical mechanisms behind misinformation in a collaborative environment, and 3) comparative analysis assignments, which evaluate how well students apply rhetorical and critical reading techniques across different media forms, ensuring that their learning is transferable beyond the classroom.

5. Classroom Applications

5.1 Assignment: Fact-Checking as Rhetorical Inquiry

This assignment reframes fact-checking as a rhetorical and interpretive practice rather than a simple act of verification. Traditional approaches to media literacy often emphasize heuristics such as lateral reading and source triangulation; these strategies, while essential, can obscure the deeper rhetorical mechanisms that allow misinformation to take hold. Rather than positioning fact-checking as a true-false binary, this assignment invites students to critically examine how and why misinformation circulates, how digital platforms influence its reception, and how rhetorical framing shapes audience interpretation.

To begin, students engage in a structured close reading exercise of a selected misinformation text, annotating for key rhetorical features such as emotional appeals, argument structures, and credibility markers. Rather than immediately fact-checking the claim, they first analyze its construction: What specific language choices lend it authority? How does it frame its central claim to appeal to audience biases or preexisting beliefs? Which rhetorical appeals—such as ethos, pathos, or logos—are most prominent? This deliberate, slow reading approach disrupts the common impulse to treat misinformation as an obvious fallacy to be debunked and instead encourages students to consider why certain narratives are compelling, persistent, and difficult to refute. Once they have analyzed the misinformation on its own terms, students then compare it to fact-based reporting on the same topic, mapping out the rhetorical and structural differences between misleading and reputable sources. This comparative analysis reinforces the idea that credibility is not merely a function of accuracy but of how information is framed, contextualized, and presented to different audiences.

Beyond analyzing individual texts, students also investigate the role of digital platforms and algorithms in shaping the spread and visibility of misinformation. Rather than treating social media as a neutral channel for content distribution, they examine the ways in which platform affordances and engagement-driven incentives amplify misinformation's reach. Students research how specific features—such as TikTok's For You Page, Twitter's trending topics, or Facebook's engagement-based ranking system—contribute to the virality of misleading claims. Additionally, they explore how format influences rhetorical effectiveness: Does the misinformation appear as a headline, meme, short video, or long-form article? How do the genre and medium shape its persuasive impact? By critically engaging with the rhetorical ecology of digital misinformation, students develop an understanding of how infrastructure and ideology intersect in online spaces.

As a final step, students reverse-engineer the misinformation they analyzed by engaging in a reflective writing exercise that prompts them to consider not just how misinformation spreads, but why it resonates and persists. They reflect on questions such as: *Who benefits from the circulation of this misinformation? Who is harmed? Why might certain audiences find this claim persuasive despite counter-evidence?* They also analyze how reputable sources attempt to refute misinformation and assess whether these strategies are rhetorically effective or limited in their reach. To deepen the metacognitive dimension of this assignment, students track their own media consumption for a week, identifying moments where they encountered rhetorical manipulation in real time. In a short reflective analysis, they examine how their own biases shaped their initial interpretations and consider which strategies—such as deliberate reading, cross-referencing, or skepticism toward emotionally charged content—helped them resist misinformation.

By integrating rhetorical inquiry, platform analysis, and reflexive engagement, this assignment challenges students to see fact-checking not as a mechanical process of verification but as a form of critical literacy. Rather than simply identifying falsehoods, students develop the interpretive and analytical skills necessary to assess how and why misinformation operates as a persuasive force in today's digital landscape. This reorientation toward fact-checking as a rhetorical act ensures that students do not just consume and reject information but actively engage with the ideological, emotional, and technological conditions that make misinformation so powerful.

5.2 Assignment: Crafting & Analyzing Fake News

Building on experiential learning principles, this assignment immerses students in the mechanics of misinformation production to deepen their rhetorical awareness, interpretive skills, and metacognitive reflection. This assignment challenges students to construct and deconstruct deceptive content, helping them engage more critically with the persuasive strategies that fuel misinformation's effectiveness. By stepping into the role of content creators, students gain firsthand experience in the deliberate choices that shape misleading

narratives—reinforcing the idea that misinformation is not simply consumed but constructed. This perspective aligns with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, which emphasizes that meaning is actively created through an interaction between the text and the reader.

The assignment unfolds in three interrelated stages, designed to move students from active rhetorical production to reflective critical analysis.

In the first phase—Creating Misinformation as Rhetorical Experimentation—students fabricate a news post, meme, or short-form social media message that mirrors the rhetorical and visual strategies commonly found in misinformation. This process requires them to employ key persuasive techniques to craft a seemingly convincing but false narrative. They also consider the role of visual rhetoric: How do provocative imagery, clickbait-style headlines, and strategic formatting amplify persuasion? What makes misinformation engaging and shareable within specific digital environments? By deliberately constructing misleading content, students move beyond passive critique and begin to recognize the subtle mechanics that contribute to misinformation's success in digital spaces.

At this stage, students also consider the platform affordances that shape the spread of misinformation. Rather than treating all digital content as functionally equivalent, they analyze how the format and genre of their misinformation influence its potential reach. Would their deceptive message work best as a meme on Instagram, a short-form TikTok video, or a long-form Facebook post? How do algorithmic incentives—such as virality triggers, engagement loops, and personalized feeds—contribute to the spread of misleading content? This component of the assignment builds platform literacy, ensuring that students recognize misinformation not just as a textual phenomenon but as one deeply shaped by digital infrastructure and audience behavior.

After creating their misinformation, in the second phase— Reverse-Engineering Persuasion Through Critical Annotation—students deconstruct their own rhetorical strategies by annotating and reflecting on their persuasive choices. This stage requires them to engage in structured analysis, responding to questions such as:

- **Intent & Framing:** What initial rhetorical decisions shaped their misinformation? How did they structure their message to appeal to a specific audience?
- **Language & Visual Cues:** How did specific word choices, imagery, and design elements enhance persuasion?
- **Cognitive Biases & Emotional Triggers:** What psychological and emotional appeals did they exploit, and why might they be effective?
- **Platform Strategy:** How did their chosen format (e.g., meme, TikTok video, headline) shape the rhetorical effectiveness of their misinformation? What aspects of platform design and algorithmic incentives made it more likely to be shared?
- **Ethical Reflection:** What responsibilities do content creators bear when constructing persuasive media? How do these same rhetorical strategies operate in legitimate persuasion, and where do ethical boundaries emerge?

This reverse-engineering process shifts students from the role of persuader to analyst, reinforcing that misinformation thrives not only because it is false, but because it is persuasive.

The third and final phase of this assignment— Metacognitive & Ethical Considerations (i.e., beyond just misinformation detection)—pushes students to reflect on the broader ethical and cognitive dimensions of misinformation. Rather than positioning misinformation production as an isolated academic exercise, they consider its real-world consequences: Who benefits from the spread of misinformation? How do economic, political, and ideological forces shape its circulation? What are the ethical implications of using persuasion techniques that are also common in legitimate advertising, advocacy, and journalism?

To extend this reflection, students also conduct a self-analysis of their own media habits, tracking their engagement with persuasive digital content for one week. They analyze moments when they felt drawn in by emotionally charged, misleading, or rhetorically manipulative media and identify strategies that helped them resist or question deceptive content. This step reinforces metacognitive literacy and skills transfer, encouraging students to recognize not just how misinformation works, but how they personally engage with and interpret persuasive media.

By integrating rhetorical production, platform analysis, and ethical reflection, this assignment moves beyond surface-level fact-checking or media skepticism. Instead, it positions students as rhetorically informed participants in digital culture. Dewey's model of participatory learning suggests that deep understanding

emerges through hands-on engagement, and this assignment operationalizes that principle by making students active experimenters in the persuasive dynamics of misinformation.

5.3 Activity: Create, Collaborate, Discuss, Experience, and Reflect

Students who learn about and create social media posts are well-positioned to work with peers to analyze their own and others' work, to produce content together, and to reflect and discuss the process and product of their efforts. Such collaboration adds the voices and experiences of participants as context, allowing for a more complex synthesis (Rosenblatt 1978). Finally, collaborative and discussion-based activities bring private work into the public realm; this is the goal of academic knowledge-building.

Bronstein et al (2019) suggest that given the demonstrated correlation between reduced engagement in analytical thinking and a belief in fake news, educators should help students by designing interventions which increase analytic thinking and/or actively open-minded thinking. Experiential learning modes, such as role plays, real-time negotiations, or active construction of materials in a laboratory, qualify as such interventions. A pedagogy that combines collaboration, discussion, and experiential learning modes offers students an enriched playground for analysis and synthesis in higher education environments and enhances their media literacy.

In this classroom activity that combines these learning modes, students learn about a particular social media trend from 2018 that spread across platforms and cultures: the "Flaunt Your Wealth" challenge. This trend has been studied as a response to state-sponsored censorship and information control (Victor & Hui, 2018) and can be characterized as misinformation. The activity unfolds in three interrelated stages.

In Stage One, prior to convening in the classroom, students read selections from social class theorists; they are performing close readings through annotation and other reading practices. Students in this course have also been developing characters that they use in classroom role play scenarios, through continuously adding to the biographies they are writing after performing close readings.

In Stage Two, in the classroom, students do the following:

- Read about the trend in contemporaneous news articles;
- Work in pairs and quads to find archived posts and describe the arc of the trend online;
- Discuss the trend with peers; and
- Apply what they have learned by inventing and publicly explaining a social media trend that relates to the character whose biography they have been developing over the term. Students in this activity must apply knowledge of one culture's trend to their own character's culture and context.

In this public, discursive process, building on each other's experiences as enhancements to what they can find through research, students are compelled to recognize that no country or culture is immune from forms of misinformation, disinformation, and censorship. They are compelled in discussion to ask and answer questions such as 'what cultural values are implied by the virality of these posts in certain contexts?'

In Stage Three, beyond the classroom, students write reflective analytical essays. Much as Dewey (1933) suggests, reflection is a metacognitive act that lays bare a student's process and, in this particular exercise, demands that a student make the connection between self and character, self and other characters, and self and context. This rich analytical armature lasts; the skills transfer. Students are leaning away from simple forensic analysis of a social media trend and into analytical engagement. This process is neither passive nor reactive, but instead slow, deep, active reading combined with meaning-making and contextualizing. It is proactive engagement.

Grounding this set of activities in the foundational theories of literature and rhetoric helps students recognize that 'Flaunt Your Wealth' is more than just a trend that misinforms and glamorizes vapid consumerism. Slow, controlled reading of social media posts, supplemented with theoretical reading and collaborative classroom discussion helps students go beyond facile analyses. This pedagogy can be a platform for understanding cultural attitudes, self, economics, ethics, and more. In the case of 'Flaunt Your Wealth', its origins in Russian and Chinese social media also prompt questions about sourcing, language and linguistics, translation, cultural norms, assumptions, and critiques of capitalism. Finally, as Rosenblatt (1978) suggests, experiencing this social media trend through the lens of a character and then one's self demands that the student play—and understand—all the parts essential to a reading event: author, text, and reader.

Students in any academic discipline who are given the luxury of attending to the production of meaning through close reading, collaborative discussion, and experiential learning will enhance the media literacy skills necessary to combat misinformation and disinformation.

6. Implications, Challenges, and Future Directions

This study has proposed a humanities-based pedagogical approach to critical media literacy, emphasizing slow, close, and rhetorical reading over quick digital heuristics. By drawing from critical pedagogy, transactional reading theory, experiential learning, and contemporary misinformation research, it argues for a fundamentally interpretive, inquiry-driven approach to misinformation education. The findings highlight the importance of deep rhetorical analysis, participatory learning, and student engagement in misinformation pedagogy. However, the practical application of these strategies raises several important implications, challenges, and opportunities for further research.

6.1 Implications for Media Literacy Education

For educators, this study suggests that traditional media literacy curricula, which often emphasize fact-checking and source verification, may be insufficient on their own. While digital heuristics remain valuable tools, they do not account for the rhetorical, psychological, and ideological dimensions of misinformation (Yasmin, 2022). Educators should consider incorporating interpretive humanities-based approaches, such as rhetorical analysis, experiential misinformation exercises, and slow-reading techniques, to equip students with deeper critical thinking skills. These strategies help students not just detect misinformation but also understand why it is persuasive, how it circulates, and how they engage with it.

For higher education institutions, the study highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration in media literacy education. Critical media literacy should not be relegated to journalism, communication studies, or digital humanities courses alone. Instead, institutions should explore cross-disciplinary partnerships, integrating media literacy principles into business ethics, political science, public health, and STEM disciplines, where misinformation has tangible real-world consequences. Institutional support for centers of teaching and learning, faculty training, and curriculum development will be crucial in expanding the reach and effectiveness of these pedagogical approaches.

For policymakers and digital platform regulators, these findings suggest that misinformation education should extend beyond classroom settings to broader public literacy efforts. The rapid proliferation of AI-generated content, deepfakes, and emotionally charged misinformation campaigns presents new challenges that require more than individual critical thinking skills. Policymakers should consider investing in media literacy programs that emphasize interpretive reading skills, ideological critique, and awareness of digital platform algorithms.

6.2 Challenges and Limitations

While this study presents a compelling case for humanities-based approaches to media literacy, several challenges and limitations should be acknowledged.

One major limitation is scalability. The close reading, rhetorical analysis, and experiential misinformation exercises described in this study require time-intensive engagement, which may be difficult to implement in large-enrollment courses or settings where standardized assessments and curriculum constraints limit flexibility. Future research should explore how these approaches can be adapted for different instructional contexts—for example, by leveraging digital annotation tools, discussion-based online forums, or AI-assisted rhetorical analysis exercises.

Another challenge is student resistance to slow, deliberate reading practices. Many students, accustomed to fast-paced digital content consumption, may initially struggle with the intellectual patience required for deep textual engagement (Rosenblatt, 1978; Horowitch, 2024). Educators must consider how to scaffold these practices effectively, integrating both digital heuristics and interpretive strategies to ease the transition from surface-level to deep reading.

Additionally, this study is theoretically grounded but does not include empirical assessment of its pedagogical effectiveness. While the strategies presented have been classroom-tested and refined through iterative practice, future studies could build on this work by incorporating empirical assessment methods.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Given these limitations, there are several important avenues for future research.

1. Empirical Assessment of Humanities-Based Media Literacy – While existing studies have explored the effectiveness of fact-checking and lateral reading strategies (Wineburg & McGrew, 2019), there is limited empirical research on the impact of slow reading, rhetorical analysis, and interpretive media literacy approaches. Future studies should investigate how these strategies influence students' ability to analyze misinformation, resist cognitive biases, and engage in ethical digital discourse.
2. Interdisciplinary Applications – Future work could explore how rhetorical media literacy strategies apply beyond humanities courses. In business ethics, for example, misinformation related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and marketing practices could be analyzed through a rhetorical and ethical lens. In public health, researchers could examine how misinformation about vaccines and medical treatments is framed and circulated. Expanding this research into STEM and policy studies would help bridge the gap between humanities-based critical inquiry and practical, industry-specific misinformation challenges.
3. AI, Algorithmic Literacy, and the Future of Misinformation Pedagogy – With the rise of AI-generated misinformation and synthetic media, future research should explore how humanities-based strategies can be adapted to address these emerging challenges. For example, how can rhetorical analysis be applied to deepfake detection? Future work should also examine how educators can integrate AI-assisted tools in a way that enhances, rather than replaces, critical reading and writing skills.
4. The Role of Emotion and Bias in Misinformation Engagement – While this study has highlighted Seema Yasmin's (2022) work on the psychological dimensions of misinformation, future research should further explore how emotional triggers influence students' media consumption habits.

7. Conclusion

By foregrounding slow, close, and rhetorical reading as the cornerstone of critical media literacy, this study challenges the traditional focus on digital heuristics and rapid misinformation detection. While fact-checking and source verification remain valuable, they do not sufficiently equip students to understand the rhetorical and ideological mechanisms driving misinformation's persuasiveness. The pedagogical strategies outlined in this paper demonstrate the potential of humanities-based approaches to foster deeper critical engagement.

Crucially, if we frame media literacy and misinformation education as "someone else's job," students will likely never receive sustained, systematic training in it. Instead, critical media literacy must be a shared responsibility across disciplines, integrated into writing instruction, business ethics, STEM coursework, public policy, and beyond. Misinformation impacts every sector, and therefore, its pedagogical interventions should be woven throughout curricula rather than siloed into electives.

By further developing empirical research on humanities-based misinformation pedagogy, expanding interdisciplinary collaborations, and addressing emerging digital literacy challenges, we can build a more robust, reflective, and critically engaged media landscape for future generations.

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