

## **LIBRARIES AS SPACES FOR DIGITAL HYGIENE: THEIR ROLE IN SHAPING CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIA LITERACY**

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**Abstract:** The article looks at how libraries can help people learn to think critically and be more aware of what they see on the internet, as society becomes more digital. The study looks at how libraries are communicating with people online and identifies new ways to get the public more interested in media. The research uses a variety of methods. These include looking at academic literature to study the theoretical foundations of digital hygiene and media literacy. The research also includes analysing content to examine programmes, activities and resources implemented by libraries. The research uses sociological surveys to assess the perception of libraries as spaces of digital security. The research also uses comparative and case study methods to investigate successful international and Ukrainian experiences.

The results show that libraries are changing. They used to be places where people went to find books and other materials. Now, they are becoming places where people can talk to each other, learn, and work together on projects. They teach people how to use digital technology and help them to use information safely. The article suggests a way of classifying new models of library communication, including interactive-educational, partnership-network, club-discussion, digital-interactive, and creative-participatory models. The study highlights the practical significance of Ukrainian libraries' experience in implementing media education programs, organizing trainings and workshops, and building partnerships with civil society organizations. The conclusions emphasize that libraries play a key role in the development of citizens' information culture, contribute to countering disinformation, and support the formation of a conscious and responsible information user in the digital environment.

**Keywords:** library, digital hygiene, media literacy, critical thinking, digital security, information culture, communication, digital transformation, fact-checking, media education

**JEL Classification:** D83; I21; L86; Z18

### **1 Introduction**

In the modern information society, media literacy is a key competence that ensures the ability to critically evaluate information flows, identify fakes, manipulation, and propaganda, as well as to consciously consume and create media content. In the context of hybrid threats, information oversaturation, and the rapid development of digital technologies, the need for skills in navigating the information space becomes particularly pressing.

Libraries, as traditional centers of knowledge and enlightenment, today play a new and extremely important role: they are becoming platforms for informal education in media literacy. The concept of the Library as a Laboratory of the Future (Library Futures Lab) reflects this evolution, emphasizing the role of libraries as platforms for experimentation, learning, and civic

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engagement (Horchynska, 2025). Through educational events, training sessions, and interactive activities for children, adolescents, youth, and older adults, libraries promote the development of critical thinking, fact-checking skills, the ability to recognize sources of disinformation, and resistance to informational pressure.

The purpose of this study is to analyze models of interaction between libraries and users in the context of digital socialization and the enhancement of media literacy among the population. The paper particularly focuses on practices related to organizing information security training, conducting media literacy lessons for schoolchildren and adolescents, and establishing partnership programs with non-governmental and educational institutions.

Special attention is devoted to libraries as institutions that ensure inclusive access to knowledge and contribute to the formation of responsible and informed information consumers, opening broad opportunities for reflection and analysis of modern library activities. Contemporary libraries are no longer limited to storing and lending books - they are transforming into centers of communication, learning, co-creation, and digital security.

A librarian today is not merely someone who “knows where each book is,” but an information navigator, a facilitator of learning processes, and a mentor of digital ethics (Novopskov, 2020). Libraries can do many different things to help people learn about information, culture and digital skills. These could include training for different age groups on how to understand media, and workshops where people can learn how to check if news stories are real, as well as clubs for critical reading of social media publications. These formats encourage people to think carefully about how they use information.

Libraries can also put on workshops on digital security. Visitors can learn how to protect their personal data and understand the idea of a “digital footprint”. Another good idea is to start fact-checking platforms in libraries together with local organisations. This would make the libraries more useful places for the community.

**Object of the study:** libraries as social and educational institutions in the context of digital transformation.

**Subject of the study:** functions and practices of libraries related to the formation of digital hygiene, critical thinking, and media literacy among users.

**Research methods:** analysis of scholarly literature - to study the theoretical foundations of digital hygiene, media literacy, and the role of libraries; content analysis - to examine programs, events, and resources offered by libraries; sociological surveys - to collect data on users’ perceptions of libraries as spaces of digital security; comparative analysis - to study the experience of libraries in various countries in the field of digital education; and the case study method - for an in-depth examination of successful library practices.

## 2 Digital Hygiene and Media Literacy

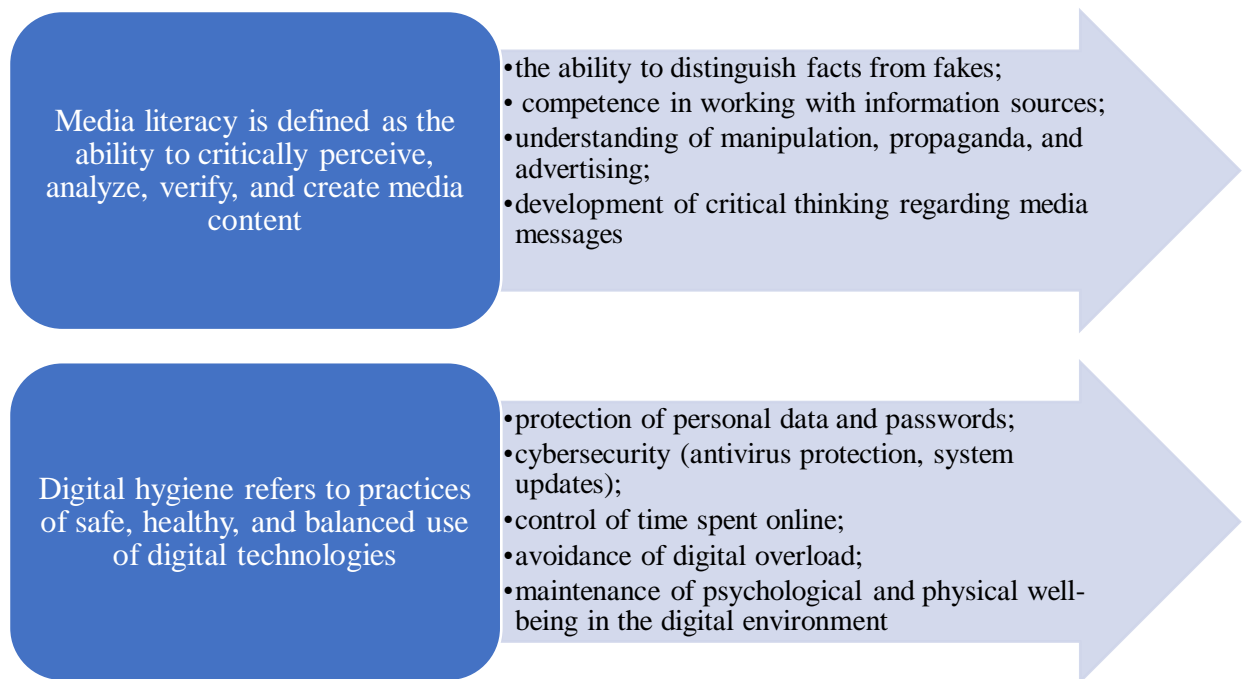
Digital hygiene is not merely about careful handling of passwords or antivirus software. It represents a culture of responsible, conscious, and safe use of information resources - a subdomain that concerns the secure and healthy use of digital tools, though it does not encompass all aspects of content analysis.

Media literacy, on the other hand, is a broader concept, as it includes skills of orientation within the entire informational and media landscape (social networks, news, advertising, blogs, etc.). In other words, someone who knows about the media is likely to follow the rules of digital hygiene, but not everyone who follows the rules of digital ethics is necessarily someone who knows about the media.

Let's explain what digital hygiene and media literacy mean. Digital hygiene is all about using digital technologies safely, healthily and in a balanced way. It includes: “protection of personal data and passwords; cybersecurity (antivirus protection, system updates); control of time spent

online; avoidance of digital overload; maintenance of psychological and physical well-being in the digital environment” (10 Rules of Digital Hygiene, 2023).

Media literacy means being able to understand, analyse, check and create media content. It includes: “the ability to distinguish facts from fakes; competence in working with information sources; understanding of manipulation, propaganda, and advertising; development of critical thinking regarding media messages” (Melnychuk, 2023), (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. The conceptual content of Media Literacy and Digital Hygiene**

Source: based on Demir *et al.* (Melnychuk, 2023)

Valentyna Horchynska gives a good example of how the library can be a laboratory of the future (Horchynska, 2025a). It is a joint project between the National Library of the Netherlands (de Koninklijke Bibliotheek) and researchers from the Faculty of Industrial Design at Delft University of Technology and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (EEMCS). The plan is to help libraries think again about what it means to look after books and other materials.

The project includes the creation of modern areas within libraries, where visitors can experiment with new technologies, participate in creative projects and communities, and gain access to resources for self-development. The main goal is to promote innovation, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

Key areas of implementation include:

Makerspaces and FabLabs: equipped environments for creativity and prototyping, where visitors can work with 3D printers, laser cutters, and other tools;

Digital art and VR/AR exhibitions: interactive displays and projects that use virtual and augmented reality to engage audiences and present new forms of art;

Foresight discussions and workshops: events aimed at discussing future trends, technological changes, and their social implications;

Testing of digital solutions: piloting new technologies and services, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and others, to assess their effectiveness and impact.

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Ukrainian libraries are taking their first steps along this path - makerspaces, educational laboratories, and digital hubs are beginning to emerge. The further development of this model may become not only a response to the challenges of modernity but also the foundation for a new vision of the cultural, educational, and social mission of libraries in Ukraine.

Valentyna Horchynska cites a noteworthy fact: there are more than 5,000 digital education hubs operating in Ukraine, most of them based in libraries (Horchynska, 2025b, 2025c). The introduction of innovative formats - from makerspaces to digital archives - demonstrates the growing role of libraries as essential elements of the educational, cultural, and technological infrastructure.

When examining global, European, and Ukrainian strategies for fostering critical thinking and civic values in the digital society, Nadiia Khymytsia and Olha Morushko emphasize the priority of such approaches for institutions in the United States, Europe, and Ukraine (Khymytsia, 2025). They note that in the U.S., the focus is placed on digital literacy and the integration of digital citizenship into education; in Europe - on transparency and source verification; and in Ukraine - on the implementation of national strategies for media literacy and reading.

Let us trace the activities of Ukrainian libraries in the field of media literacy through practical examples. For instance, the Urban Library in Lviv regularly holds events on media literacy for young people, combining lectures, film screenings, and discussions. The project “Library. Media. Literacy” (which is being run together with IREX) includes classes for teenagers, where participants learn to analyse sources through games.

Libraries in Vinnytsia are also actively promoting media literacy to different groups of people. At the Vinnytsia Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Valentyn Otamanskyi, there was a training session called “Media Literacy: Recognizing Fakes and Manipulations” was held. Participants explored the concepts of fake news, propaganda, disinformation, and “paid journalism”, while learning to distinguish between true and false information.

To do this, they used interactive exercises from the Fit in Fakten project. These included the puzzle “If You Know It – You Notice It”, the game “Information Labyrinth”, and the tasks “Draw Your Sign” and “Foolish but Not in the Media”. These methods helped school students to understand how to spot false information and think for themselves (Vinnytsia Regional Universal Scientific Library, 2024a).

A separate example worth highlighting is the training session “Media Literacy” held as part of the Fit in Fakten project for senior citizens. Participants learnt both theory and practical ways of finding information, which helped them to find what they were looking for. During the sessions, they looked at the differences between facts and opinions, learned to spot manipulation and propaganda, and took part in interactive games and exercises. We looked especially at situations involving older adults most frequently encounter informational risks, making the training as applied and beneficial as possible (Vinnytsia Regional Universal Scientific Library, 2024b).

Also, people taking part in the training worked with modern tools to check information. They tested the Fake Calculator, interactive games on the NotaYenota and Filtr platforms, and familiarized themselves with digital tools such as BotChecker and FakeBoom Bot.

These practical sessions helped people to think more critically and spot manipulative content. This means that the people taking part gained useful experience that will help them deal with information better in the future and know how to spot false information in their everyday lives.

Overall, libraries are capable of engaging various age groups in the topic of digital hygiene: Children – through interactive fairy tales, games, and creative workshops on topics such as “How Not to Get Lost on the Internet”; Teenagers: they are active participants who create content themselves, such as blogs, podcasts and videos; Older adults: they can access individual consultations, group lessons and digital support clubs.

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Making such a change takes a lot of effort and comes with several challenges. The main issues include limited resources, insufficient digital competence among staff, and low public awareness of the opportunities and potential of libraries. These things can make it harder to modernise and reduce the success of new plans.

At the same time, there are lots of opportunities for development. Libraries can get grant funding, work with media organisations, schools and research centres, and set up educational platforms and digital hubs on their premises. These initiatives can enhance the role of libraries in the social and educational life of local communities.

### 3 The Library as a Space for Digital Awareness

A library today is not merely a “place of silence”, but a space of enlightenment amid the information storm. This is where a new type of literacy, information literacy, is being created. You can't be a fully-fledged citizen of the modern world without it. In a time where it's easy to mislead people, we need to make sure that libraries become places where people can learn to understand, analyse and think critically, as well as just how to read.

There arises a need to study new models of library communication with audiences under conditions of digital interaction and changing forms of socialization.

**Table 7. Activities of Ukrainian Libraries in the Field of Media Literacy**

<b>Library Name</b>	<b>Forms of Media Literacy Activities</b>	<b>Acquired Skills</b>
National Library of Ukraine for Children	Section “Information Culture of Users”; online publications and resources on media literacy	Orientation in information flow, critical thinking, protection against manipulation
Lviv Regional Library for Youth named after Roman Ivanychuk	Project “Fake or Fact?”; interactive fact-checking trainings; work with fake news in mass media and social networks; use of fact-checking tools (StopFake, MediaWise); analysis of visual content (photo and video manipulation); youth quizzes, QR quests, infographics	Ability to verify information accuracy; identification of fakes and manipulation; critical thinking in media consumption; fact-checking and visual analysis skills
Kherson Regional Library for Youth named after Borys Lavreniov	Educational course “Media Literacy – Protection of Consciousness” for school students (grades 8–11); discussions on types of manipulation; analysis of media texts and language influence; creation of critical content (posters, storytelling)	Development of critical thinking; analysis and evaluation of media texts; recognition of linguistic manipulation; creative application of media literacy principles
Scientific Library of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy	Information-educational project “Media Literacy Lab”; workshops on digital security; seminars on media manipulation detection; sessions on creating information campaigns; mini-courses for teachers and students; use of online tools (Google Workspace, Canva, fact-checking tests)	Digital literacy and security; creation of media content and communication campaigns; recognition of media manipulation; use of online fact-checking tools
Central City Library named after Lesya Ukrainka (Solomianskyi District, Kyiv)	MediaMind Club: discussions on blogger ethics and influencers; analysis of disinformation on TikTok and Instagram; workshops on visual literacy (images, memes); debates on the role of media and social networks in society	Conscious social media consumption; analysis of visual messages and media influence; ethical content creation; argumentation in public discussions
Public Library named after Lesya Ukrainka (Kyiv)	Project “Fit in Fakten”; media literacy corner with games, quizzes, materials	Learning through gamified methods; development of analytical thinking

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Youth Library (Oleksandriia)	Section “Media Guide for Everyone”; information materials about safe internet use	Recognition of fake information; safe internet practices
Khmelnyskyi City Centralized Library System	School of Media Literacy; training sessions and practical workshops	Recognition of propaganda and information noise; development of critical thinking
Mykolaiv Regional Children's Library	Participation in the Fit in Fakten project; use of games and quizzes	Awareness of disinformation risks; development of fact-checking skills
Poltava Regional Youth Library named after Oles Honchar	XR exhibition “The Real Causes of War” within the anti-propaganda marathon	Understanding propaganda mechanisms; ability to debunk fakes
Kherson Regional Library for Children named after Dnirova Chaika	Media lesson “Cyberbullying: Aggression on the Internet”	Awareness of online communication risks; safe interaction skills
Public Library of Voronovtsia Settlement Council	Event “Media Literacy – The Key to Victory”; collaboration with the Diia.Osvita platform	Source verification, cyber hygiene, recognition of reliable information
Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Dmytro Chyzhevskiy (Kropyvnytskyi)	Campaign “How to Protect Personal Data?”; promotion of educational video series	Personal data protection; critical thinking; cyber hygiene awareness
Uzhhorod Public Library	Sessions with students on information security and manipulation	Recognition of manipulation; development of information culture
Sumy Public Library	Media literacy classes; project “Behind the Scenes of Reality” (AR technologies)	Fake identification; information analysis; use of AR in education
Vinnitsia Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Valentyn Otamanskyi	Course “Recognizing Fakes and Manipulations in the Media” for senior adults	Fact-checking; countering fakes; propaganda detection
Volyn Regional Library for Youth	Camp “Soft Skills School”; lectures and the game “The Country of Legends”	Information verification; understanding of propaganda mechanisms
Lviv Regional Children's Library	Project “The Fifth Element” for displaced children	Critical thinking; information literacy; psychological adaptation
Ternopil Regional Library for Youth	Interactive lesson “Fundamentals of Media Literacy”; Fit in Fakten educational games	Critical information perception; resistance to manipulation
Academy of Ukrainian Press (Library of Mass Communication and Media Literacy)	Publication of manuals for librarians on media literacy	Teaching methodologies; interactive educational approaches

Source: own work

The table 1 summarizes the experience of Ukrainian public libraries in implementing media education initiatives. It presents examples of various formats of work – from creating dedicated online sections to organizing interactive classes, trainings, and nationwide projects.

Libraries employ a variety of activity formats:

Informational and educational (sections, publications, campaigns, exhibitions);

Training-based (courses, schools, workshops);

Interactive and gamified (board, online, and AR games);

Partnership projects with international organizations (Fit in Fakten, Behind the Scenes of Reality, UNICEF, Goethe-Institut, IREX).

The main aim of all these projects is to help different groups of people, like children, teenagers, students and older people, to understand information and media better. This means that

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digital technologies have made it possible for new ways for people to interact with information to emerge. These new ways focus on more than just the transmission of information. They also focus on people working together and on developing critical thinking.

In today's digital age, libraries are changing. They are moving away from just storing books and becoming places where people can connect, learn, and work together.

Let's look at these new ways that libraries are talking to their users in the digital age and how social life is changing (Fig. 2).

#### 1.1. Interactive-Educational Model

- Essence: The library acts not only as an intermediary of information but as a trainer in media and digital literacy.
- Forms: Trainings, online courses, quizzes, quests, workshops.
- Purpose: To form an active, critically thinking user.

#### 1.2. Partnership-Network Model

- Essence: The library functions as a communication hub that unites educational, cultural, and media communities.
- Forms: Joint projects with universities, journalists, and non-governmental organizations; content exchange and collaborations.
- Purpose: To create an open knowledge ecosystem.

#### 1.3. Club-Discussion Model

- Essence: A transition from lecture-based to dialogical communication; the library becomes a platform for discussing social and media-related topics.
- Forms: Media literacy clubs, debates, discussions on blogger ethics, analytical meetings.
- Purpose: Development of critical thinking, communication culture, and media ethics.

#### 1.4. Digital-Interactive Model (Online Communication)

- Essence: Interaction with users in the digital environment—social networks, online platforms, multimedia services.
- Forms: Live streams, virtual exhibitions, online consultations, interactive resources.
- Purpose: Expansion of the audience, personalization of information services, and flexible learning formats.

#### 1.5. Creative-Participatory Model

- Essence: The user not only consumes information but also becomes its co-creator together with the library.
- Forms: Creation of user-generated content (posters, storytelling, podcasts), media projects, cultural flash mobs.
- Purpose: Development of creative initiative and co-creation of content as a form of modern literacy.

### **Figure 2. Models of Library Communication within the context of digital interaction and evolving forms of socialization**

Source: own work

## **4 Conclusions**

The modern library is becoming a space where people can communicate through different types of media. It is a place where people can find information, learn and enjoy different types of culture. The new ways of communicating online, such as interactive, educational partnerships, club-style discussions, digital interactions and creative participation, show a clear move away from the old way of sharing information, where information was sent from one person to many, to a new way of sharing information where people are working together to create meaning in digital culture.

Libraries are changing what they do. They used to be places where people went to find books and other materials. Now, they are places where people can learn for their whole lives. They also help people learn to use computers and the Internet. Libraries are very important in helping people to think in a critical way, understand the media, and stay safe online. These are all very important skills for living in a modern society where we have so much information at our fingertips.

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