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Citation: Thorpe, C. and Webber, S. (2020). Fake news: has it changed UK academic librarians' ideas about teaching Information Literacy?. Paper presented at the European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL) 2021, 20 -23 Sep 2021, Online.

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Fake news: has it changed UK academic librarians' ideas about teaching Information Literacy?

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Presentation overview

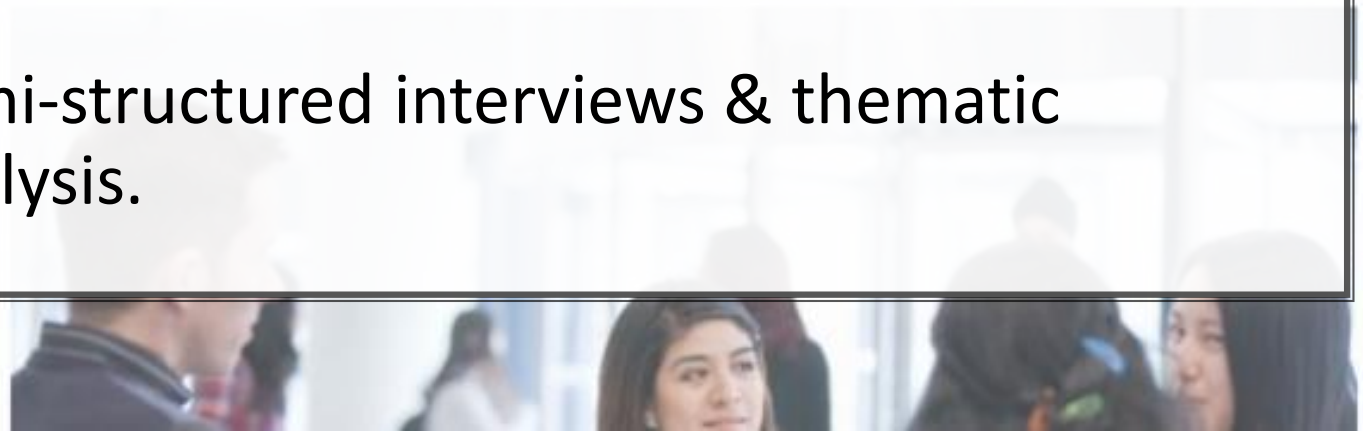
- Background and context of the research
- Results, key findings and themes
- Discussion and future thinking

Background and context

MA Library Information Services Management dissertation.

Impact of Fake News on UK HE Librarians' conceptions of IL and their pedagogic practice.

Semi-structured interviews & thematic analysis.



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"… it's up to governments, it's up to companies… social media platforms… it's up to society… if this is just up to librarians then we're in big trouble [laughs]."

"It seems to be… over-emphasising our skills in some way. That we're the guardians of truth… and I don't see how other people who have… competency in critical thinking are less well-placed to do it than we are. "

"… it's a really useful phrase… within the profession, but like a lot of people have probably already told you, I wouldn't use the phrase information literacy to students because then I'd have to define it… and we'd end up having this conversation instead of actually doing some information literacy."

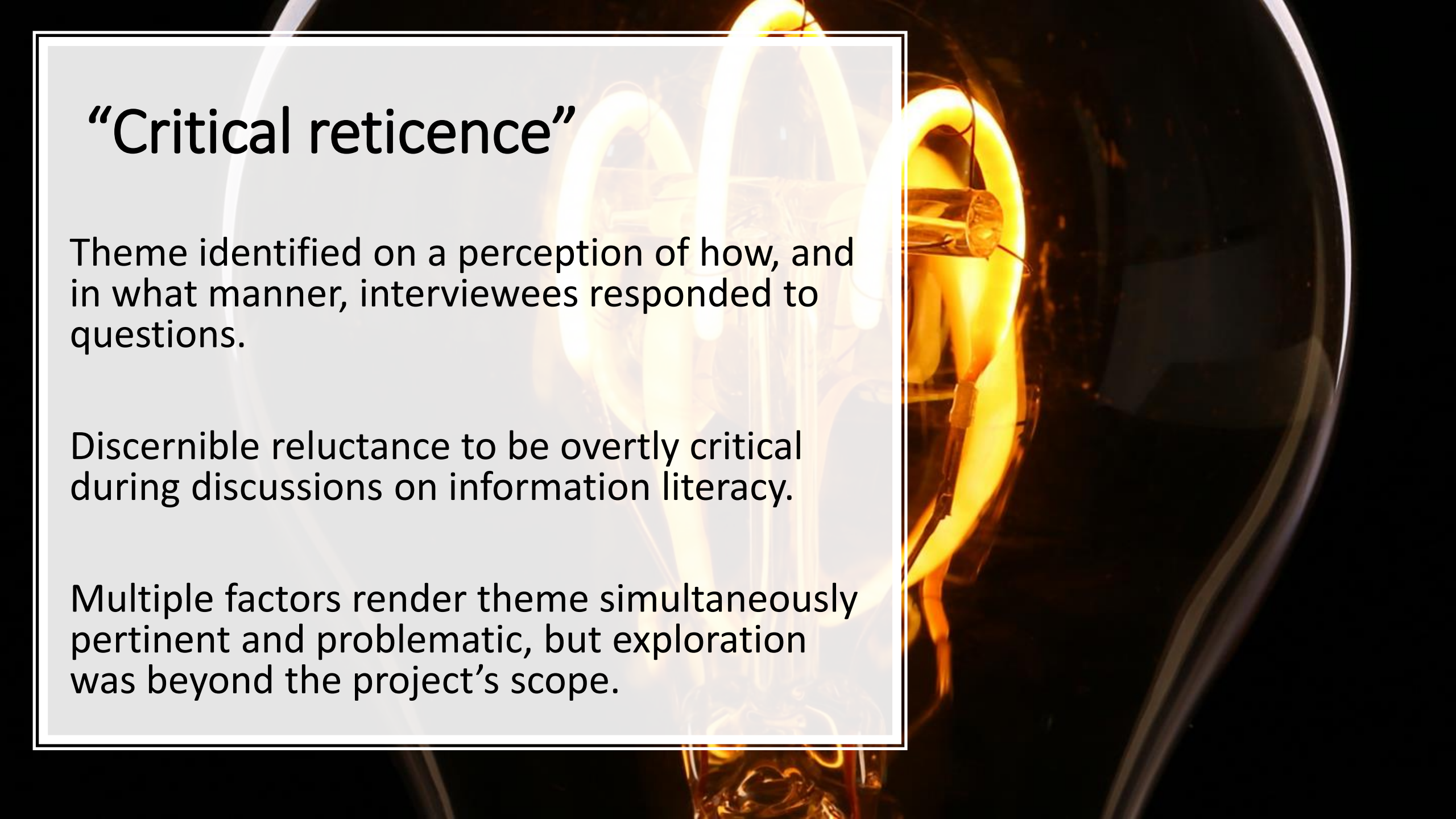
Results, key findings and themes

Fake News considered insubstantial for a standalone topic.

Librarians' role in tackling the issue was questioned.

Tensions surround IL terminology and professional applicability.

Challenges within HE librarianship surfaced.



“Critical reticence”

Theme identified on a perception of how, and in what manner, interviewees responded to questions.

Discernible reluctance to be overtly critical during discussions on information literacy.

Multiple factors render theme simultaneously pertinent and problematic, but exploration was beyond the project’s scope.

Study’s conclusion

The Fake News discourse didn’t emerge as having a major impact on participants’ conceptions of Information Literacy and IL teaching, but revealed pressures, ambiguities and tensions affecting their pedagogic practice.

Personal reflections - for discussion!

Is “critical reticence” still with us?

Are librarians the go-to people for COVID information & advice on combatting misinformation?

Librarians see a significant role, but are we playing catch-up?

Where could librarians have contributed in disseminating effective information?

Have we spent too much time teaching scepticism & not enough on establishing trustworthiness? (Fister, 2021)

Theory: treat misinformation as the symptom; the lack of robust information infrastructure is the disease (Neil Pakenham-Walsh)

Thank you – and let’s discuss this further!