

Full Length Research

The Role of Library Staff in Combating Fake News through Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Study of Selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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The present study explored the role of library personnel in addressing the proliferation of fake news through the enhancement of information literacy within the context of the digital era, focusing specifically on selected polytechnic libraries in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region. The investigation was guided by three research questions and employed a descriptive research design. The study population consisted of 110 library staff members, all of whom were included in the study through a total enumeration sampling technique. Data collection was facilitated via a structured questionnaire titled "The Role of Library Staff in Combating Fake News through Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Study of Selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria Questionnaire (RLSCFNILDAQ)." Analytical procedures involved descriptive statistics including frequency counts, means, and standard deviations. The findings suggest that the dissemination of false information in this academic context is predominantly driven by attention-capturing headlines, substantial trust in social media, and a pervasive inclination to share content rapidly, often irrespective of its veracity. The study further identified that misinformation exacerbates political tensions, ethnic and religious conflicts, character assassination, tribal loyalties, and corporate manipulation by reinforcing social challenges such as hate speech. The study recommended substantial investments from both governmental and private sectors in library infrastructure, with an emphasis on digital resources and internet connectivity, as a strategic approach to effectively counteract misinformation and fake news.

Keywords: Library Staff, Fake News, Information Literacy, Digital Age, Polytechnic Libraries.

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INTRODUCTION

Misinformation or fake news is inaccurate information that has the potential to be harmful but was not intended to do so. False information intentionally produced to damage a nation, an organization, a person, or a group of people is known as disinformation. False and misleading information on the internet can include anything from fake facts and claims to harmful cures that are purposefully or inadvertently made public. Fake news has always been around, but as the internet and social media have developed, it has been more amplified and widely disseminated, instantly reaching a worldwide audience. Social media platforms in Nigeria have turned into uncontrolled platforms for the dissemination of untrue messages, phony images, phony sounds, altered movies, and outdated, irrelevant videos, all of which are

extensively shared and distributed within the numerous social media communities that exist there. This dissemination of inaccurate and deceptive information has turned into a social ill that leads to social discord, anxiety, stress, and dread (Anderson, 2019).

Libraries are conventional knowledge and information centers, and they are embracing their role in helping community members become more media and information literate. This involves instructing people on how to obtain, assess, and make effective use of information, including news and media. Information is a vital resource that is required to make well-informed decisions in all areas of human endeavor, including development, commerce, health, education, and finance. But in the era of digitalization, information quality and accuracy are major problems. However, in the digital age, information quality and accuracy are major concerns. Through social media and the Internet, fake news and misinformation are being amplified and disseminated at a rate never seen before. The emergence of fake news is concerning because, when contrasted with truth, it makes information access difficult and distorts citizens' perceptions of reliable information. This unchecked dissemination of inaccurate and misleading information has resulted in a present social ill that may have an impact on both societal harmony and individual well-being (Anyaoaku & Osuchukwu, 2022). False information masquerading as news with the intention of misleading people is known as "fake news," and it has become a major global issue.

The capacity to assess news content critically, comprehend news production procedures, and spot false information is known as news literacy. In line with this more expansive definition of news literacy, libraries are extending their mandate to include media education, community engagement, and training in digital literacy. This dissemination of inaccurate and deceptive information has turned into a social ill that leads to social discord, anxiety, stress, and dread (Anderson, 2019). According to UNDP (2021), selected, distorted, or manufactured content has contributed to the spread of fake news, which has severe consequences like influencing public opinion and altering awareness and knowledge. Ignorance of facts and truth may result from the fabrication of history, events, and reality. It directly affects societal stability and is crucial in disputes and altercations, which frequently result in escalating tensions. There are several types of information disorders. False information that has the potential to hurt the recipient or is given as an advertisement to generate income for the sender is known as fake news.

Statement of the Problem

Information is a vital resource that is required to make well-informed decisions in all areas of human endeavour, including development, commerce, health, education, and finance. However, in the digital age, information quality and accuracy are major concerns. The emergence of fake news is concerning because, when contrasted with truth, it makes information access difficult and distorts citizens' perceptions of reliable information. This unchecked dissemination of inaccurate and misleading information has resulted in a present social ill that may have an impact on both societal harmony and individual well-being. Libraries can give users access to reliable social media platforms, fact-checking websites, and other resources. Libraries may assist users in navigating the abundance of information available online by providing collections of books, articles, and databases that are reputable and trustworthy. These programmes instruct users on how to use fact-checking tools, recognize reliable sources, and comprehend media bias (Oluwafemi, 2023). Libraries have started to recognize this trend and trained their personnel in digital literacy to help patrons responsibly navigate online information (Mbam & Olayemi, 2023). Information literacy programmes are becoming more and more available in Nigerian libraries, particularly university and public libraries. It against this backdrop that this study attempts to examine the Role of Library Staff in Combating Fake News through Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Study of Selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

Research Objectives

1. To examine the causes of fake news in selected Polytechnic Libraries in Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria
2. To determine the role of libraries in combating fake news in the digital age in selected Polytechnic in Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria
3. To identify challenges facing Auchu Polytechnic library in combating fake news in the digital age

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of fake news among students of Auchu Polytechnic, Auchu?
2. What is the role of Auchu Polytechnic library in combating fake news in the digital age?
3. What are challenges facing Auchu Polytechnic library in combating fake news in the digital age?

Literature Review

The Concept of Fake News

The slogan "fake news" really consists of two words: "news" implies information about recent or ongoing events, while "fake" implies something that is not sincere or genuine but is intended to be recognized as such. Therefore, false material that is provided with the intention of being interpreted as authentic or honest yet is not is known as fake news. The purpose of the purposefully produced and distributed fake content is to deceive or mislead the public. According to Sadiku et al. (2018), fake news is information that has been produced and falsely presented as fact. It includes news that is intended to boost online sharing, internet click revenue, and readership. It is issued with the intention of misleading readers in order to hurt a competitor, agency, or individual. Fake news exacerbates political tension, ethnic-religious conflict, character assassination, tribal sentiment, and corporate deformation by spreading social vices including hate speech. Fake news comprises intentionally and verifiably misleading news stories that have the potential to mislead readers (Madu et al., 2019).

Examining Claire Wardle's theory, which was referenced in Ogbette et al. (2019), is crucial for a deeper comprehension of the term "fake news." Wardle distinguished the many kinds of fake news to include the following:

- Sarcasm or satire: it has the ability to deceive but has no malicious purpose;
- Dishonest Connection: when the information is not supported by the headlines and pictures used;
- Imposter content, which occurs when genuine sources are mimicked by false and fabricated ones;
- Manipulated Content: when real information or images are altered to give false impressions;
- Fabricated Content: information that is purposefully created to be misleading and harmful and is entirely untrue.

It is noteworthy to note from the aforementioned that fake news may take many different forms and can be defined as material that has been purposefully created, disseminated, and published in order to trick and mislead people into believing lies or casting doubt on verifiable truths. According to Anyaoku and Osuchukwu (2022), False information intentionally produced to damage a nation, an organization, a person, or a group of people is known as disinformation. False and misleading information on the internet can include anything from fake facts and claims to harmful cures that are purposefully or inadvertently made public.

The Role of Library in Combating Fake News in The Digital Age

There is almost universal agreement among librarians that they have a crucial role to play in combating false information. This is especially true for people who portray libraries as the exact opposite of false news or who include fake news as one of the numerous things that are incompatible with librarianship principles. Even while adopting false news as a primary issue is necessary, others characterize librarians as already on the front lines. The battle against fake news is portrayed as the librarian's ongoing information war. Librarians have the ability to combat fake news, but they are not currently leading the charge. A related issue is the degree to which librarians portray their work in an exaggerated manner because they are overconfident in their opposition to fake news. Some portray librarians as personally verifying all information, or libraries as having fully authenticated collections, as if there were no room for biased or pseudoscientific content (Sosulski & Tyckoson, 2018).

Libraries provide a range of information literacy programmes, including research skills workshops, library orientation, and digital literacy training, to counteract the dissemination of false information in society. Unintentionally disseminating inaccurate or misleading information, frequently via social media, is known as misinformation. It can negatively impact society by causing conflict and misunderstanding, harming people's reputations, and impeding journalists' ability to do their jobs. By giving people the ability to think critically, verify information, and recognize bias and objectivity, information literacy programs can help fight false information. Additionally, these programs encourage ethical considerations and responsible information sharing (Ajibili et al., 2024). Books, newspapers, periodicals, databases, and online services like Press Reader are just a few of the many resources that libraries provide, giving users' access to a range of viewpoints and reliable sources. Patrons can get assistance from librarians in assessing sources, spotting biases, and spotting false information. As information specialists, librarians should take significant action to teach the public how to spot and recognize false material. If we want to win the war against false news, libraries must teach people especially the younger generation how to spot it on social media platforms and how to use it safely and effectively. According to Sadiku et al. (2018), librarians and other information professionals can be crucial in helping the general people become knowledgeable consumers of trustworthy news and information.

Causes of Fake News

One of the main causes of fake news publication and dissemination on social media is the "I want to share mentality." This can be due to users' desire to be recognized in the dissemination of all local news, whether it is authentic or not. The urge to be "in the know," encourages the spread of fake news, highlighting the fact that spreading fake news is a form of social currency among social media users (Idoniboye-Obu & Oporum 2021). It has been noted that Nigerian society is becoming less supportive of reading, particularly since smartphones have become so prevalent. In support of the aforementioned viewpoint, Obi (2013) stated that it is regrettable to observe that Nigerian society's reading culture has declined. Because of this decline, social media users find it more challenging to verify news or information before sharing it by consulting other pertinent sources. Absence of information literacy skills: Information literacy comprises the capacity to determine when information is needed, where to find it, and how to assess and utilize it. It is difficult for some social media users to discern between genuine information and fake news because they lack the skills necessary to properly consult and assess sources.

WhatsApp is one of the most often used social media platforms for disseminating misleading information since it is the most dependable tool for friends and family to communicate. Therefore, information from friends and family is more likely to be believed than information from total strangers (Apuke & Omar, 2020). According to Edwin and Yalmi (2019), a BBC study conducted in Nigeria and India to look into the reasons behind the propagation of fake news highlighted that people actively commented on Facebook posts and photographs and sent WhatsApp messages from friends and family out of trust.

Challenges Facing Auchi Libraries in Combating Fake News in the Digital Age

In the digital age, libraries face a number of formidable obstacles in their fight against fake news. Among these are the overwhelming amount and speed of information, the difficulty of telling false information from false information, the necessity of modifying library values to play a more active role in information verification, and the difficulty of preserving user neutrality and trust while actively combating false information. Due to funding limitations, the majority of libraries are unable to regularly host literacy programmes or offer modern digital resources. Libraries might not have the resources and personnel needed to put in place thorough plans for identifying and dispelling false information (Aina, 2022). Libraries must adjust to the evolving world of digital resources and open access publication, which includes confirming the accuracy of digital documents.

Sufficient infrastructure and technology are essential for accurately disseminating information and detecting fake news. Poor internet access, outdated facilities, and lack of ICT tools inhibit the capacity of libraries to offer effective digital literacy services. Effective information literacy programmes must be created and promoted by libraries in order to enable patrons to navigate the digital world. Many library patrons lack the information literacy abilities needed to assess information sources critically and spot false information. Effective user guidance is hampered by the fact that many librarians lack professional training in digital media literacy and misinformation identification (Onuoha & Uche, 2022).

Research Method

This study will employ a descriptive design to examine Library Staff in Combating Fake News in the Digital Age in selected Polytechnic Libraries in Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria. The population for the study comprises of four polytechnics libraries in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The institutions are, Auchi Polytechnic, Delta state polytechnic Oghara, Akwa-Ibom state polytechnic and Port- Harcourt polytechnic Rumuola, River state. The population for the study will comprise of one hundred and ten (110) library staff. The entire population will be used for the study using total enumeration sampling technique. The questionnaire entitled "the Role of Library Staff in Combating Fake News through Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Study of Selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria Questionnaire (RLSCFNILDAQ)" will be chosen as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire will be made up of two parts. The first part consists of biographical data such as categories of library staff and gender. The second part will consist of structure statements or items that help to elicit information or data on the Role of Library Staff in Combating Fake News through Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Study of Selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The data obtained from the copies of the questionnaires retrieved from respondents will be analyzed using percentage and frequency count and mean. The criterion means of 3.00 will be used as decision rule in the study.

Research Results

Findings and discussion

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Sexes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	39	41.9
Female	54	58.1
Total	93	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by sex. Female 54(58.1%) and Male 39(41.9%). The finding simply revealed more female library staff in the study.

Table 2: causes of fake news in selected Polytechnic Libraries in Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria

Items	SA No	%	A No	%	D No	%	SD No	%	MEAN	SD
I want to share mentality	76	81.72	4	4.30	13	13.98	0	0.00	3.68	0.71
Trust in Social Media Drive	88	94.62	0	0.00	5	5.38	0	0.00	3.89	0.45
Poor reading culture	71	76.34	7	7.53	5	5.38	10	10.75	3.49	1.01
Misleading headlines designed to attract attention	84	90.32	9	9.68	0	0.00	0	0.00	3.90	0.30
Impersonation of legitimate news outlets	34	36.56	22	23.66	27	29.03	10	10.75	2.86	1.04
Deliberate misinformation	77	82.80	11	11.83	5	5.38	0	0.00	3.77	0.53
Grand Mean									3.60	

Table 2 presents an analysis of the factors contributing to the propagation of fake news within selected Polytechnic Libraries in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria. This quantitative data, derived from responses of 93 participants, elucidates perceptions related to information dissemination and the influence of social media platforms. The most prominent factor identified is Misleading Headlines, which received the highest mean score of 3.90, with over 90% of respondents strongly agreeing that sensationalized headlines significantly contribute to misinformation. This consensus is further supported by a low standard deviation of 0.30, indicating minimal variance in responses. The trust vested in social media ranks closely, with a mean of 3.89 and 94.62% of respondents strongly affirming the influential role social media exerts on information spread. The I want to share mentality, reflecting a personal or cultural compulsion to propagate content, garnered a mean score of 3.68 and strong agreement from 81.72% of participants. Deliberate Misinformation was also noted as a critical factor, with a mean of 3.77 and 82.80% of respondents acknowledging the intentional circulation of false information. The factor of Poor Reading Culture, though still recognized (mean of 3.49), exhibits greater variability (standard deviation of 1.01), indicating some divergence in participant opinions; notably, 10.75% strongly disagreed that superficial reading habits are a primary contributor. The least influential factor, Impersonation of News Outlets, recorded a mean of 2.86 and the highest proportions of disagreement (29.03%) and strong disagreement (10.75%), suggesting scepticism about the prevalence or impact of fake official news accounts relative to other factors. Overall, with a grand mean of 3.60, the findings suggest that the dissemination of false information in this academic context is predominantly driven by attention-capturing headlines, substantial trust in social media, and a pervasive inclination to share content rapidly, often irrespective of its veracity.

Table 3: role of Polytechnic library in combating fake news in the digital age

Items		SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{x})	Std.(σ)
Promoting Literacy	Info	77 (82.8%)	8 (8.6%)	8 (8.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3.74	0.61
Access to Sources	Credible	90 (96.8%)	3 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.97	0.18
Fact-Checking Services		87 (93.5%)	6 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.94	0.25
Awareness Programmes		72 (77.4%)	11 (11.8%)	10 (10.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.67	0.66
Curating Resources	Digital	66 (71.0%)	12 (12.9%)	10 (10.8%)	5 (5.4%)	3.49	0.88
GRAND MEAN						3.80	

Table 3 elucidates the perceived role of Polytechnic libraries in countering fake news amid the digital era. The findings reveal an overwhelmingly positive evaluation, with an overall grand mean of 3.80 on a 4-point scale. Providing Access to Credible Sources garners the highest mean score (3.97), implying that faculty and students regard libraries as essential repositories of verified information, a viewpoint supported by a very low standard deviation (0.18), indicating near-universal consensus. Offering Fact-Checking and Reference Services follows closely (mean: 3.94), reflecting strong trust in the libraries' professional competencies to authenticate information. Although Promoting Information Literacy is also rated favorably (mean: 3.74), Curating Reliable Digital Resources attains the lowest mean (3.49) with the greatest standard deviation (0.88), suggesting varied perceptions possibly due to less robust digital collections or limited awareness of digital offerings. Overall, Polytechnic libraries are regarded as pivotal institutions in combating misinformation, particularly through their traditional functions of supplying credible sources and expert reference support.

Table 4: challenges facing Polytechnic libraries in combating fake news in the digital age

Challenges	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Dev
Inadequate Funding	89 (95.7%)	4 (4.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.96	0.20
Lack of Modern Facilities	74 (79.6%)	19 (20.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.80	0.40
Rapid Spread on Social Media	91 (97.8%)	2 (2.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3.98	0.15
Low Info Literacy Among Users	65 (69.9%)	11 (11.8%)	11 (11.8%)	6 (6.5%)	3.45	0.94

Table 4: continuation

Users Resistance and Bias	79 (84.9%)	8 (8.6%)	6 (6.5%)	0 (0%)	3.78	0.55
Limited Awareness of Services	73 (78.5%)	8 (8.6%)	12 (12.9%)	0 (0%)	3.66	0.70
Grand Mean					3.77	

Table 4 shows the challenges facing Polytechnic libraries in combating fake news in the digital age. The Rapid Spread of Information on social media" recorded the highest mean score (3.98), followed closely by Inadequate Funding (3.96). This suggests these are the most critical hurdles for the Polytechnic libraries. The Standard Deviations are generally low (most below 1.0), indicating that the respondents' opinions are highly clustered and there is a strong consensus on these issues. With a Grand Mean of 3.77 which is well above the 2.50 mid-point, it is evident that all listed factors are perceived as significant challenges hindering the library's ability to combat fake news effectively.

Discussion of Findings

The study, situated within the field of information science and communication studies, reveals that the dissemination of information in the examined context is predominantly influenced by attention-grabbing headlines and a strong trust in social media platforms. This dynamic is largely propelled by individuals' desire to rapidly share content, even when such content is deliberately misleading. Misinformation exacerbates political conflicts, ethnic and religious tensions, character defamation, tribal loyalties, and corporate distortions by spreading social issues such as hate speech. Defined as news content intentionally designed to deceive, misinformation often engenders confusion among audiences (Madu et al., 2019). According to Idoniboye-Obu and Oporum (2021), factors facilitating the online spread of false information include individuals' propensity to share content, inadequate critical reading skills, and reliance on social media. WhatsApp, in particular, emerges as a frequently utilized platform for disseminating misleading content due to its role as a trusted communication channel among friends and family; information received from known contacts tends to be more readily accepted than that from unfamiliar sources (Apuke & Omar, 2020).

Further findings underscore the pivotal role libraries play in combating misinformation, especially through their traditional functions of providing authoritative resources and expert reference services. Libraries implement diverse information literacy programs such as research skills workshops, orientation sessions, and digital literacy training to curtail the spread of misinformation within communities. Misinformation, defined as the inadvertent dissemination of false or deceptive information, commonly via social media, negatively impacts society by fostering disputes, misconceptions, reputational harm, and impeding journalistic practices. By fostering critical thinking, information verification skills, and awareness of bias and neutrality, information literacy initiatives empower individuals to counteract misinformation. Moreover, these programs emphasize ethical responsibility and promote the conscientious sharing of information (Ajibili et al., 2024).

The research further indicates that, with an average rating of 3.77 significantly above the neutral midpoint of 2.50 the identified factors represent substantial barriers to libraries' effective engagement in addressing fake news. Within the contemporary digital environment, libraries face numerous formidable challenges in managing misinformation. These challenges include managing the overwhelming volume and rapid circulation of information, distinguishing between inaccurate and accurate content, adapting institutional policies to adopt a more proactive verification role, and preserving user trust and neutrality while confronting misinformation. Fiscal constraints often limit libraries' capacity to sustain consistent literacy programs or to acquire advanced digital technologies. Additionally, many libraries are under-resourced and understaffed, impeding their ability to execute comprehensive misinformation detection and refutation strategies (Aina, 2022). It is imperative for libraries to evolve in response to the shifting landscape of digital resources and open access publishing, which entails the verification of digital documents.

CONCLUSION

Libraries serve a crucial function in mitigating disinformation and fostering news literacy by facilitating access to reliable information, equipping users with critical analytical tools, and cultivating a culture of reading. Within the discipline of information and media studies, libraries are increasingly acknowledged as indispensable community resources for developing the essential skills required to navigate the complex and frequently deceptive digital information landscape. Whether situated within libraries or as independent entities, news literacy centers play a pivotal role in enabling individuals to critically assess news sources, detect misinformation, and engage with information ethically and responsibly. These centers contribute to the development of informed digital citizens and discerning news consumers. Media and information literacy is recognized as the foremost strategy in counteracting the challenges posed by fake news. Libraries are regarded as fundamental and highly effective institutions in the combat against misinformation, particularly by virtue of their traditional responsibilities of providing trustworthy resources and specialized reference support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the findings and analyses presented in this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Enhancing Librarian Competencies: Continuous professional development programs focusing on digital literacy, identification of false news, misinformation detection, and fact-checking methodologies should be mandatory for librarians.
2. Investment in Library Infrastructure: It is imperative that governmental bodies and the private sector collaborate to enhance library infrastructure, emphasizing digital resource availability and internet connectivity, to effectively counter misinformation and fake news.
3. Collaborative Efforts: Synergistic partnerships among libraries, media organizations, nonprofit entities, and technology companies should be fostered to amplify the impact of news and information literacy initiatives.
4. Awareness and Educational Programs: Libraries ought to organize seminars, workshops, conferences, and produce online multimedia content targeting social media users to improve their ability to recognize and respond to fake news.

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