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# THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN LIBRARIES IN DWINDLING FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE THINK AND PUBLISH MINDSET

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## Abstract

*The paper examined the role of Nigerian libraries in dwindling fake news on social media: the think and publish mindset. The paper pictured social media as the root source and lifeblood of fake news in the nation as users are allowed to publish and share news at little cost, highlighting that most social media users do not think of the effects of their content on the society before publishing and sharing. The paper presents bathing and drinking of saltwater as a preventive measure and cure for Ebola virus, claims of under-age voting in the northern part of the country during the 2015 presidential election, President Muhammadu Buhari's death in 2017, fake claims that drinking of alcohol cured Corona virus as instances of fake news on social media. The paper reviewed the effects of fake news as; destruction of lives and properties, political aggression, intensification of conflict and societal fright. The paper takes a position that, the "I want to share syndrome", poor reading culture amongst citizens, lack of information literacy skills, trust in network drive as reasons for the spread of fake news on social media. The paper therefore recommends that Nigerian libraries should increase the awareness of the effect of fake news in the society among social media users. The libraries should through sensitization programmes like; seminars, workshops, conferences and online videos educate social media users on how to spot fake news. Social media users should always think of the effect of their content on the society before publishing, and also read thoroughly, evaluate content and consult reliable sources before publishing or sharing any news.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian libraries, dwindling fake news, social media, think and publish mindset

## **Introduction**

Social media also known as web 2.0 has infused every sphere of life. It has become one of the most essential parts of our daily life as it enable libraries, organisations as well as government to interact with great number of clients or people. Social media is the quickest, fastest and easiest means of sharing information and receiving feedback from a large population in the 21st century as it provides an inexpensive two-way information sharing opportunity among users. It has become very popular amongst students, young and old people because of its lively benefit of content creation and communication. Remarkably, people from all walks of life use social media to share news, advertise their products and even reach their loved ones. Okoro et al. (2018) declared that news is very important because it keeps the public informed of happenings and occurrences around them and beyond their immediate environment.

Interestingly, Edwin and Yalmi (2019) are of the view that world news these days does not only hold its significance to news channels or traditional newspapers but has been spread extensively through the growing dominance of social media platforms like; Facebook, Twitter as well as WhatsApp. In reflection to the aforementioned, Naeem et al. (2020) admits that social media platforms emerged as an essential means of seeking and sharing information but the reverse is the case as the platforms now enable the explosion of fake news and the spread of misinformation. Fake news is a fictitious information intentionally created and disseminated with the intent to trick or mislead the general public. Undoubtedly, social media have played a key role in the proliferation of fake news in Nigeria and beyond. Social media users find it difficult to separate life realities from fake news as a result of this proliferation. In connection to the above stated, Mare et al. (2020) claims that social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp

and Twitter have flooded into our everyday lives, making it problematic for users and audiences to sift chaff from grain.

Notably, social media have been described by many as the root source of fake news and misinformation in the society. Upholding this, Apuke and Omar (2020) confirmed that the hotheaded growth of fake news, motivated by the social media requires investigation and intervention. Though fake news is not a new occurrence in the society, rather it has received an extraordinary attention in recent time as a result of the prominence of social media for collaboration and dissemination of news. Yet to Warner-Søderholm et al. (2018), social media is the “lifeblood” of fake news as it warrants anyone to publish fake information to people at a very low cost. It cannot be overemphasized at this point that social media users need to think of the effect of their content on the society before publishing or sharing. Social media with lots of positive potentials is now misused by many. As it is popularly stated “*when purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable*”. There is need for libraries to educate library users who in turn uses different social media sites on better ways of using these platforms other than publishing news that will misinform the general public and instigate fear and conflict among members of the society. If this is not gazed at with great devotion, the good of social media will undoubtedly vanish. It is in line with the above that the researchers wish to look at; the role of Nigerian libraries in dwindling fake news on social media: the think and publish mindset.

### **The Concept of Fake News**

Factually, the catchphrase “fake news” comprises two words; ‘fake’ which infers something not sincere or genuine but meant to be acknowledged as sincere or genuine; while ‘news’ surmises information about existing or current incidents. Hence, fake news is information that is not sincere or genuine but published and expected to be perceived as being sincere or genuine. It is a fictitious

content intentionally created and disseminated with the intent to trick or mislead the general public. Sadiku et al. (2018) professes that fake news is fabricated information deceptively presented as true. It consists of news designed to increase readership, internet click revenue and online sharing. It is published with the intent to misinform in order to harm an agency, rival or person. In agreement with the above, Madu et al. (2019) insist that fake news is a medium through which social vices like hate speech is circulated to fuel political tension, ethno-religious conflict, character assassination, tribal sentiment and corporate deformation. For Okoro et al. (2018) fake news entails fabricated news articles that are deliberately and verifiably false and could deceive readers. For better understanding of the catchphrase “fake news” it is essential to explore the idea of Claire Wardle cited in Ogbette et al. (2019), who identified the types of fake news, thus;

- Satire or Sarcasm - no intention to cause damage, but has the power to fool;
- Dishonest Connection - when headlines and illustrations presented do not support the content;
- Imposter Content - when sincere sources are impersonated with untrue and made-up sources;
- Manipulated Content - when sincere information or pictures are manipulated to deceive;
- Fabricated Content - when information content is 100% false, deliberately designed to deceive and cause harm.

From the abovementioned, it is interesting to note that fake news appears in various forms and could be seen as information that has been consciously fabricated, published and circulated with the aim to deceive and misinform others into trusting falsehoods or doubting confirmable facts.

## **The Concept of Social Media**

Social media entails the different internet-based technological tools that enable people connect, communicate and exchange information or resources in virtual form. It is a computer-based technology that aids the sharing of ideas, feelings, and information through the building of cybernetic networks. In simple but meaning terms, Edam-Agbor and Ogunjimi (2018) defined social media as platform designed to all multiple users to publish content, connect, interact, share the content with friends, mates among others. These platforms allow users to create personal pages filled with content like pictures, videos as well as music. For Boyd and Ellison (2007) cited in Warner-Søderholm et al. (2018) social media are networking sites that enable individuals or groups to create a public or semi-public profile within a confined system and articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection. Examples of these platforms include; Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Google +, Wiki, Instagram, LinkedIn, Blogs, YouTube, MySpace as well as Podcasts.

## **Instances of Fake News on Social Media and its Effects**

Instances of fake news on social media and its hostile effects are recorded below;

- **Fake claims that drinking of Cow urine and alcohol cured Corona virus:** The sudden outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic been accompanied by fake news emerging from different social media outlets led to the death of many. According to Naeem et al. (2020), as the virus spread around the world, there was a serious misinformation on social media about its transmission, treatment as well as prevention. It was published and shared by several social media users that Coronavirus can be transmitted via houseflies or mosquito bites. Also, drinking of cow urine, hot water, or alcohol was recommended as confirmed

cure for COVID-19. The rumour from social media sites that neat alcohol and cow urine cured COVID-19 resulted to hundreds of deaths (Trew, 2020, cited in Naeem, et al. 2020).

- **Bathing and drinking of saltwater as a preventive measure and cure for Ebola virus:**

During the Ebola outbreak in 2014, a fake information on social media claiming that people could avoid contacting the virus by bathing and drinking saltwater went viral. Below is the information According to Apuke and Omar (2020),

*“Please ensure that you and your family members and all your neighbors’ bath with saltwater before daybreak today because of Ebola virus which is spreading through the air”*

Friends and family members shared this unconfirmed message on different social media sites, this unverified information left many dead and hospitalised as many Nigerians suffer hypertension which could also be triggered by extreme intake of saltwater.

- **Claims of under-age voting in Northern part Nigeria:** After the 2015 presidential elections, insincere reports emerged that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had determined that under-age youth in the Northern part of the country had voted in the elections. Apuke and Omar (2020) are of the view that the claim caused a serious chaos among the opposition parties. Nevertheless, the Vanguard newspaper reported that INEC, which supervised the elections, produced realistic confirmation that deflated the claims. McGonagle (2017) cited in Apuke and Omar (2020) confirmed that elections in Nigeria are categorised with violence resulting to the destruction of lives and properties and this is often prompted by misinformation. This infers that some of the conflict, societal fright and political aggression experienced during Nigerian elections are triggered by fake news on social media.

- **President Muhammadu Buhari's death in 2017:** Madu et al. (2019), Stated that a major instance of fake news that conquered Nigeria's social media platform was the rumoured death of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2017 (See Figure 1). According to the scholars, rumours circulated that President Muhammadu Buhari had died during one of his long-lasting absences from Nigeria in 2017 on medical grounds and that he had been swapped by a clone called Jubril from Sudan. The fictional death of President Mohammadu blowout like wildfire on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, that he had to speak on the matter at a news conference (News Wires, 2019, cited in Madu et al. 2019).

### **Reasons for the spread of fake news on Social Media**

- **I want to share syndrome:** The “I want to share syndrome” is one of the major reasons most social media users publish and share fake news. This could be as a result of the craving by users to be acknowledged in the spread of every current news in town be it real or fake. Corroborating this, Chakrabarti et al. (2018) cited in Apuke and Omar (2020) averred that the desire to be “in the known,” stimulates fake news circulation, stressing that sharing fake news is a type of social currency among social media users.
- **Poor reading culture amongst citizens:** Observation has shown that there is decline in positive reading culture in the Nigerian society especially with the invasion of smart phones into the country. Amplifying the aforementioned position, Obi (2013) declared that it is very sad to note that the reading culture in Nigeria society has deteriorated. This deterioration makes it difficult for social media users to consult other relevant sources to confirm a news or piece of information before sharing.



- **Lack of information literacy skills:** Information literacy entails the ability to pinpoint when an information is needed, where to locate the needed information, how to evaluate and use the received information. Some social media users lack the knowledge required to consult and properly evaluate sources which hampers the ability to distinguish fake news from sincere information on social media.
- **Trust in Social Media drive:** WhatsApp is one of the leading social media site for sharing fake news as it is the most trusted communication platform for family members and friends. Hence, people tend to trust information shared by family members and friends more than strangers (Wasserman et al., 2019, cited in Apuke & Omar, 2020). A BBC research conducted in Nigeria and India as captured by Edwin and Yalmi (2019), attempted to examine the reasons for the spread of fake news, the study stressed that individuals partook in actively commenting on Facebook post and images as well as forwarded WhatsApp messages from family members and friends as a result of trust.

### **The role of the Library in Dwindling Fake news in Nigeria**

Distinguishing fake news from sincere information on social media is truly demanding, but getting the sincere information remains essential because of its value. The role of the library in dwindling fake news amongst social media users cannot be overemphasized. Librarians as information professionals ought to take serious steps to educate the general public on ways to identify and recognise fake news. According to Naeem et al. (2020), it is necessary for libraries to the train individuals, particularly the young, on how to identify fake news on social media sites and how to use it excellently and safely if we must win the war against fake news. The following are ways to detect fake news;

- **Consult information experts:** One may ask information experts such as librarians or consult fact-checking trusted websites like; FactCheck.org, PolitiFact.com, Snopes.com, as well as ProTruthPledge.org. Sadiku et al. (2018) stated that information professionals, including librarians and journalists, can play essential role in assisting the public to become informed consumers of reliable news or information.
- **Read outside the captions:** most captions are typically astonishing in order to entice readers' attention. Users are to read beyond the captions to get the specifics of the news.
- **Stay away from unverifiable information:** Social media users should as much as possible, stay away from any information that is not verified.
- **Evaluate information source:** Source evaluate is important as it helps one distinguish fake news from sincere information. Social media users should go on to check source credible, the author or writer as well as supporting sources.
- **Inspect the Proof:** Sincere new information usually include sufficient evidences and figures from dependable sources. Madu et al. (2019) averred that social media users should judgmentally inspect the evidence to determine that an event truly occurred, or if the realities have been twisted to back up a particular opinion.
- **Look out for Forged Pictures:** using modern editing sites and software, people now create false pictures that look real to back up their forged stories. Madu et al. (2019) mentioned that social media users can use the Google Reverse Image Search to check if a picture has been reformed or used in the wrong setting.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed social media has become an integral aspect of the world. Individuals, specifically young people cannot think of communication without thinking of online-networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Google +, Wiki, Instagram, LinkedIn, Blogs, YouTube, MySpace as well as Podcasts. Certainly, social media have played a key role in the proliferation of fake news in Nigeria and beyond. Social media users find it difficult to separate life realities from fake news as a result of this proliferation. Social media have been described by many as the root source of fake news and misinformation in our society. There is need for libraries to educate library users who in turn uses different social media platforms on better ways of using these platforms other than publishing news that will misinform the general public and instigate fear and conflict among members of the society.

## **Recommendation**

To dwindle fake news and improve the use of social media, the researchers therefore, recommend the following;

1. The libraries should through sensitization programmes like; seminars, workshops, conferences and online videos educate social media users on how to spot fake news.
2. Social media users should always think of the effect of their content on the society before publishing,
3. Social media users should read thoroughly and consult reliable sources before publishing or sharing any news.
4. Social media users should acquire pertinent information literacy skills to enable them evaluate news content and sources adequately.

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