

## Combating Fake News (FN) in the Society: The Roles of Librarians

Sylvester Israel Ebhonu\*, Ufuoma D. Onobrakpor\*\*

### Author's Affiliation:

\* University Library Coordinator, Admiralty University of Nigeria, Delta State, Nigeria

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1006-453X>

E-mail: [ebhonu-lib@adun.edu.ng](mailto:ebhonu-lib@adun.edu.ng) or [didigitalibrarian@gmail.com](mailto:didigitalibrarian@gmail.com)

\*\* University Library, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8223-9661>

E-mail: [uonobrakpor@uniuyo.edu.ng](mailto:uonobrakpor@uniuyo.edu.ng)

**Corresponding Author: Sylvester Israel Ebhonu**, University Library Coordinator, Admiralty University of Nigeria, Delta State, Nigeria

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1006-453X>

E-mail: [ebhonu-lib@adun.edu.ng](mailto:ebhonu-lib@adun.edu.ng) or [didigitalibrarian@gmail.com](mailto:didigitalibrarian@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

*It is no longer a new phenomenon that Fake News (FN) has assumed a worrisome dimension in recent times. The emergence of Internet and the proliferation of social media have worsened the situation as information users now receive and communicate information without any restriction making total eradication of FN absolutely impossible. Librarians cannot stop the spread of FN. However, there are roles that librarians can play to help reduce or control the spread of FN. This paper therefore reviewed literature relating to FN and the roles of librarians in combating FN. Effort was made to understand the concept of FN, properties of FN, global and Nigerian scenarios, effects of FN on societal development and roles of librarians in combating FN. Consequently, the paper recommends the adoption of the 3Ds, librarians should intensify their information verification and fact checking roles as this will ensure the genuineness of information materials before they are circulated by librarians to the users among others.*

**KEYWORDS:** Fake News (FN), Social media, Internet

### INTRODUCTION

Today's information consumers are facing unprecedented challenges in their effort to access recent and timely information that satisfies their information needs. The digital age has dramatically broadened access to

communication, enabling more people to disseminate information and in some cases misinformation which is promoted by Fake News. Fake News (FN) has existed for as long as societies have, propagated through word-of-mouth, through pamphlets, newspapers and presently amplified in both speed and

spread through digital technology (Southwell et al., 2018). The problem of Fake News (FN) has become a pressing issue across the world. The problem, however, is not new. FN is attributed to human communication that can be traced back to the Roman times when Antony and Cleopatra met. A misinformation campaign was designed to besmirch Antony (Posetti & Matthews, 2018). As observed by Nougayrede, (2018), "the use of propaganda is ancient, but never before has there been the technology to so effectively disseminate it". Charlton (2019), reported in the World Economic Forum that the spread of FN through social networks in recent times is one of the key problems gripping the world today.

As is the case in developing and developed countries of the world, African countries have over the years experienced damaging consequences from the spread of FN. For example, recently in Nigeria, South Africa and some other African nations, there were rumors that the coronavirus only affected white people. This led some residents to ignore warnings of getting infected. The government of some African nations such as South Africa, in their bid to curb the spread of FN has criminalized the spread of misinformation about the virus (McKenzie, 2020). Governments have called on media houses, information disseminators, journalist and custodian of information such as libraries and librarians to verify the source of information at their disposal before making them available for public consumption.

It is pertinent to note that libraries and librarians alone cannot entirely eradicate FN; however, they have a great role in controlling the volume of FN in circulation by sensitizing their users on the dangers of FN. According to the Finnish Library law (2016), one of the main goals of public libraries is to promote a sense of community, pluralism and cultural diversity. This involves the idea of acting against FN and hate speech. In the same vein, Batchelor (2017) maintained that librarians have a professional responsibility to promote critical thinking skills, which is devoid of sentiments and falsehood among patrons. According to the Chair of the IFLA advisory committee on freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, Martyn Wade, "Freedom of access to information is a right of all, and the increase in activities intended to

deliberately mislead citizens through FN inevitably leads to damaging everyone's human rights". This explicates how important the roles of public libraries are understood in the work against FN (IFLA, 2018). Today, librarians in their efforts to fulfill the task of providing timely and reliable information to their users, bear in mind the need to reduce FN to the barest minimum, engage in information source and resources verification as well as fact checking.

Recognizing FN is not always easy, especially in the present age of communication technologies where there is plethora of digital platforms that enable users to keep up to date with information around the world. With a couple of software applications (apps), information users not only keep themselves updated about the key events and developments occurring around them, but they make their comments or response on social media networks. These responses draw further attention of people who are like-minded or with opposite viewpoint and ultimately become part of the social discourse. For librarians as information professionals to gauge the authenticity of the information that is being consumed and shared, information verification and fact finding becomes necessary. Librarian also have to apply the 3Ds (Detecting, Documenting and Debunking) of FN.

### Understanding Fake News (FN)

False information otherwise known as FN when shared can result in unwarranted confusion, manipulation and deception, even causing unrest in a society, and the world. Kuman and Shah (2018) argue that FN has a far-reaching impact on those who consume it, in both the short and long term. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) defined FN as "intentionally and verifiably false" news. Some researchers pay attention to a spectrum of FN. Also, Wardle & Derakhshan (2018) defined the term FN as a continuum of information disorder based on the two elements of falsity and intention to harm. The authors see FN as a blend of the notions of misinformation and disinformation. In the same vein, Mourao and Robertson (2019) defined FN as discursive integration blending elements of traditional news, misinformation, sensationalism, partisan bias, and click-bait. Their study shows that complete fabrications were not

common. Instead, FN stories commonly used the mixture of traditional news, misinformation, sensationalism, partisan bias, and click-bait.

Michailidis and Viotty (2017) describe FN as hoax-based stories that perpetuate hearsay, rumors, and misinformation. As they point out, the way journalists and news organizations report the truth in the digital age has been the subject of much debate. Questions about the contingency and precariousness of what is publicly circulated as the 'truth' have long been central to research across both the cultural studies and the more sociological strands of international media inquiry (Corner, 2017). However, the flow of misinformation around the 2016 US presidential election has put the problem of FN on the agenda all over the world (Nielsen & Graves, 2017). In the wake of this development, Wardle (2017) defines FN as fabricated news reports produced either for profit or for political purposes. Based on the various definitions described above, it is clear that the term of FN is in practice used broadly to cover any misleading and inaccurate information produced and delivered online as a news story with different motivations and purposes.

A simple but well-accurate definition about the term of FN has been provided by Leonhardt and Thompson (2017) in their article in the New York Times, where they describe FN as a type of propaganda or yellow and misleading journalism that consists of deliberate misinformation, spread via traditional media outlets (their print or online editions) or online social media. Tandoc et al (2018) in affirmation elaborated more on this by providing an overview of the various types of FN, which are: news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda. In summary, one could describe FN as simply stories that contain misleading and fake facts which aim at either spreading propaganda or influencing the audience's political views, or at producing a funny content and making a profit.

Misinformation is an integral part of FN. According to Karlova and Fisher (2013), misinformation is false or misleading information that may be false, as well as incomplete, ambiguous, or inaccurate.

"Disinformation" stands for fraudulent information. In some cases, actors may unknowingly perpetuate the spread of disinformation by sharing content they believe to be accurate among their networks. Misinformation spreads when a fake post's many likes and re-tweets make it appear credible. While the information is misleading, this perceived credibility ensures its continued distribution. In the same vein, Turcilo and Obrenovic (2020), defined misinformation as information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm. In the so-called information age, social networking sites have become a notable vector for the spread of misinformation and propaganda. Misinformation on social media spreads quickly in comparison to traditional media because of the lack of regulation and examination required before posting (Xinran, et al 2015). These sites provide users with the capability to spread information quickly to other users without requiring the permission of a gatekeeper such as an editor or librarian, who might otherwise require confirmation of its truth before allowing its publication and dissemination. Journalists today are criticized for helping to spread false information on these social platforms, but research such as that from Starbird et al (2018) and Arif et al (2017) showed they also play a role in curbing the spread of misinformation on social media through debunking and denying false rumors.

### **PROPERTIES OF FAKE NEWS (FN)**

Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) attributed certain properties and contents to FN. They are:

1. False Connection
2. Misleading Content
3. False Context
4. Imposter Content
5. Manipulated Content
6. Fabricated Content

#### **False Connection**

An example of false connection is when visuals or captions do not support the content. The most common example of this type of content is clickbait headlines. With the increased competition for audience attention, editors increasingly have to write headlines to attract clicks, even if when people read the article they feel that they have been deceived. This can also happen when visuals or captions

are used, particularly on sites like Facebook, to give a certain impression, which is not backed up by the text. But when people scroll through feeds on their social accounts without clicking through to articles (which often happens), misleading visuals and captions can be especially deceptive.

### **Misleading Content**

This type of content is when there is a misleading use of information to frame issues or individuals in certain ways by cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively. This is called Framing Theory (Entman et al., 2009). Some examples have been exposed on Rappler.com. Visuals are particularly powerful vehicles for disseminating misleading information, as people's brains are less likely to be critical of visuals. Native or paid advertising that mimics editorial content also falls into this category when it is insufficiently identified as sponsored.

### **False Context**

One of the reasons the term 'FN' is so unhelpful, is because genuine content is often seen being re-circulated out of its original context. For example, an image from Vietnam, captured in 2007, re-circulated seven years later, was shared under the guise that it was a photograph from Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2015 (Pham, 2018).

### **Imposter Content**

There are real issues with journalists having their bylines used alongside articles they did not write, or organization's logos used in videos or images that they did not create. For example, ahead of the Kenyan elections in 2017, BBC Africa found out that someone had created a video with a photo-shopped BBC logo and strap line, and it was circulating on WhatsApp (UNESCO, 2018). BBC therefore had to make a video that they shared on social media, warning people not to be fooled by the fabricated video.

### **Manipulated Content**

Manipulated content is when genuine content is manipulated to deceive. An example from South Africa shows manipulated images of Huff Post Editor-at-Large Ferial Haffajee in one case, sitting on the lap of a businessman, Johan Rupert to depict a personal relationship with him (Haffajee, 2017).

### **Fabricated Content**

This type of content can be text format, such as the completely fabricated 'news sites', like WTOE5 News, the self-proclaimed fantasy news site which published an article suggesting that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump for President. Lewandowsky et al., (2017) also noted that in the most general form, FN has three characteristics:

1. Factually inaccurate.
2. Optimized for sharing.
3. It is meant to obscure or distort with emotions; preying on prejudice or bias.

Information should be true, reliable and factual. Any information communicated by a public individual or organization helps shape a society and the world at large. False information can result in unwarranted confusion, manipulation and deception, even causing unrest in that society, and the world. Kumar and Shah (2018) argue that false information has a far reaching impact on those who consume it, in both the short and long term. False information has always existed, but new media has allowed it to evolve, to spread more widely and more quickly. False claims may now be perceived and defined differently, but they still do harm. The following are some examples of false claims that have entered the public space globally and in Nigeria.

### **GLOBAL SCENARIO OF FAKE NEWS (FN)**

In order to better understand what FN are, the motivations behind its generation and online circulation, as well as the impact it might have on the audiences, it is helpful to look at a few well-known examples of FN.

**Great Moon Hoax' of 1835** - One historical example of FN is 'Great Moon Hoax' of 1835, in which the New York Sun published a series of articles about the discovery of life on the moon. The discovery was falsely attributed by the newspaper to Sir John Herschel, one of the most famous astronomers of that time. The newspaper's circulation increased dramatically due to the fake story and after a while it was discovered that the story was nothing more than a hoax (Mavridis, 2019).

**Flemish Secession Hoax** - Another example of FN is the 2006 'Flemish Secession Hoax' in which a Belgian public television station

reported that the Flemish parliament had declared independence from Belgium. A report that a large number of viewers misunderstood as true (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). It is worth mentioning the fact that the report was produced as a hoax and, in order to make it more credible, interviews with prominent Belgian politicians some of whom had been informed about the hoax were conducted. However, the report was misunderstood as true and was responsible for a long public discussion and elevated concerns around the issue.

**Greek Media Economic Crisis-** Also, Poulakidakos and Armenakis (2014) studied the Greek media discourse in relation to the economic crisis of 2010 and they point out cases where media in Greece presented FN with misleading information in order either to promote a specific political propaganda or to gain money. By analyzing the discourse of the most prominent Greek media, they conclude that popular Greek online newspapers such as tanea.gr and enet.gr, made use of sentimental propagandistic methods and they generated misleading FN.

#### **NIGERIAN SCENARIO OF MISINFORMATION AND FN**

**Conspiracy Theories Cause Rise in Polio Cases:** Ghinai, et al (2013) maintained that rumors from 2002 to 2006 and false claims about the polio vaccine contributed to the increase in polio cases in Nigeria. Political and religious leaders in the northern Kano, Zamfara and Kaduna states claimed, without evidence, that the vaccine was laced with HIV, anti-fertility agents and carcinogens, so as to reduce the population of a mainly Muslim region. The claims ended vaccination campaigns, allowing the crippling disease to claim more victims (Amobi, 2019).

**Rumors Cause Panic in Schools:** In 2017, the Nigerian Army had just begun a free medical service of administering poliovaccination as part of its military operations in south-eastern Nigeria. Then rumors began to circulate that the army was going to schools to inject pupils with the monkey pox virus. The rumors caused massive panic that led to the closure of some schools. Students hurriedly left their schools, and worried parents came to pick up their wards (Amobi, 2019).

**Ebola 'Cure' Kills Two:** During the 2014 Ebola outbreak, a fake text message claiming people could avoid catching the disease by bathing in and drinking large quantities of salt water went viral. The consequence, reported by Vanguard News, was that two people died and 20 were hospitalized for excessive consumption of salt water (Okafor, 2018).

**Fake Facebook Post Stokes Regional Crisis:** In central Nigeria's Plateau State, false information on Facebook is said to have caused an inter-ethnic crisis (Adegoke, 2018). A graphic image of a mutilated baby, killed in Congo-Brazzaville in 2012, was shared with the claim that the act was perpetrated by the Fulanis against the Beroms in Jos, in 2018. The media reported that Berom youths took to the streets and systematically sought out Fulani men for reprisal attacks, with the authorities believing the Facebook post contributed to the attacks. The same image has been used to stoke deadly crises in other regions of Africa (Adegoke, 2018).

**Photos Inflamm Tensions between Herders and Farmers:** Another fake claim using repurposed photos fueled a conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria. The BBC article "FN and Nigeria's herder crisis" (2018) reveals that after one clash between herders and farmers left over 200 people dead, a gruesome photo of a woman lying in a pool of blood circulated on Twitter with the claim that she was a victim of the violence. The photo garnered hundreds of re-tweets, accompanied by inflammatory comments. But a fact-check showed that the image first appeared in a 2011 story on domestic violence in Nigeria. The BBC article identifies another photo of half a dozen people supposedly killed in the herder-farmer clash. Fact-checking revealed that the image was of a traffic accident in the Dominican Republic (Amobi, 2019).

**Claims of Under-age Voting in Elections:** Nigeria's political scene is also not free of fake claims. After the 2015 presidential elections, false reports emerged that the Independent National Electoral Commission had determined that under-age youth in northern Nigeria had voted in the elections. The claim caused a serious uproar among the public and opposition parties. However, the Vanguard newspaper reported that the electoral commission, which oversaw the elections,



produced factual evidence that debunked the claims (Amobi, 2019).

**False Claims Spread in an Instant:** Instant messaging platforms are among the greatest purveyors of misinformation and disinformation. False messages on religion, health, politics, security, food, and job and scholarship offers spread like wildfire on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Telegram. They are quickly shared among thousands of people and, before there is time to check them, they have already done harm. For example, a photo of a woman currently circulating on WhatsApp falsely accuses her of being a trafficker of children in Lagos. The post aggravated people and, in no time, became the trending topic. False claims are on the rise in Nigeria, partly because of citizen journalism, where there is stiff competition to be the first to publish information. The advent of social media and users' ability to generate their own content has further increased the presence and reach of misinformation. False claims can spread in less than a minute, taking on the garb of truth and making the need for swift verification more pressing.

#### EFFECT OF FN ON SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

Almost limitless freedom has made social media platforms vulnerable to misuse, misinformation, and thus, "FN" is no longer news that misinformation and FN is having a negative effect on societal development of nations across the world as the situation is not peculiar to a particular nation. Some notable negative effects of misinformation and FN across the world are:

**Jungle Justice:** security is a comprehensive protective system put in place to ensure that lives and properties of citizens are safe and secured. In recent times, the phenomena called jungle justice have been on the rise, resulting to the unnecessary loss of lives of citizens in very uncanny ways. It is a form of public extrajudicial killings, where an alleged criminal is publically humiliated, beaten or summarily executed by a crowd. The spread of FN is obviously one of the fueling factors contributing to the rising cases of jungle justice. Ogbette et al (2019) reported that a dozen people were killed in India just because

of FN of hoax messages. The victims were lynched after they were falsely accused of child abduction based on FN circulated via WhatsApp platforms. Such cases abound in Nigeria where people are victimized for unverified allegations by mischief makers spread through the social media.

**Electoral Violence:** election is an indispensable element of a genuine and meaningful democratic process. It promotes competitive politics, guarantees political participation and entrenches rule of law. However, over the years, elections in Nigeria have been marred by disruptions and violence leading to the loss of many lives and properties. The unfortunate thing about some of the violence is that they were instigated by news that was never real. McGonagle, (2017) believes that, unlike other types of information, news plays a particular role in democratic societies; it is a key source of accurate information about political and social affairs, which informs public opinion and deliberative processes. If news is 'fake', it misinforms the public and democratic debate is polluted at the very source thereby leading to unpopularity of electoral victories with the attendant potential of rejection and revolt by the people.

**Ethno/Religious Conflicts:** Ethno/religious conflicts are unarguably the greatest source of violence in Nigeria. There are about 250 ethnic groups speaking over 500 different languages across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Greater number of Nigerians owes their allegiance first to their tribe/ethnic group, followed by their religion with very little interest in the entity called Nigeria. The ethno/religious fabric of the Nigerian system is so delicate that it is at the centre of every wide spread violence in country. According to News Wires (2019) manufactured lies in the guise of news endangers the delicate ethno-religious fabric of Nigeria. Of particular concern is the fabrication of stories pitting the Country's mainly Muslim north against the predominantly Christian south, a traditional fault line often used by proponents of restructuring the current federal system and even breaking it up.

**Leadership/Public Mistrust:** FN is also used as instrument for gaining political advantage especially during electioneering. In this

circumstance, political actors and their supporters peddle all manners of propaganda and fake stories to smear and dint the public image of their opponents. In order words, they engage in carefully planned and systematic character assassination to diminish public perception of individuals perceived as obstacles.

### LIBRARIANS ROLE IN COMBATING FN

One of the main tasks of libraries is to provide timely and reliable information to users. It is not just fabricated stories and propaganda that is threatening to users. Also pseudoscience, hoaxes and biases are misinforming materials that need to recognize by knowledge professionals. According to Merriam-Webster (2021) "pseudoscience" is a system of theories, assumptions, and methods erroneously regarded as scientific. Hansson (2013) asserts that for a scientist making the difference between science and pseudoscience is like riding a bike. Knowing the difference is sometimes difficult to formulate. On the other hand, users in libraries are not scientists, researchers or information specialists. For users it may be much more difficult to make the distinction between science and pseudoscience, hence the significance of the role of librarians. Librarians should be able to direct their users to be able to distinguish reliable sources of information from unreliable ones. It is pertinent to state that librarians cannot entirely eradicate the origination and spread of FN, they can however play a pivotal role in reducing the dissemination of FN. Some major roles are; 3Ds. (Detection, Documentation and Debunking); Information Verification; Facts Checking; Media Literacy; and Counter Information.

#### 3Ds. (Detection, Documentation and Debunking)

- **Detection** - This work in itself is to help detect FN. The properties and characteristics of FN mentioned earlier in this work will enable libraries detect FN.
- **Documentation**– The process of documentation is not new to librarianship. FN detected should be properly documented for record keeping as well as for quick referral. Such documentation should be distributed through the library's various channels to ensure that users are

aware and eventually led to the third D – Debunking.

- **Debunking**–Librarians should declare such information as false. In so doing the credibility of the library and other information resources are assured and promoted.

### Information Verification

The proliferation of Internet and the rise of social media as a news distribution channel, in an era when the news distribution happens mostly online and everyone have access to tools traditionally reserved to the media; FN and disinformation have become a frightening issue in the society. It is imperative for librarians to verify the authenticity of the information resources made available for their users, so as to guide against feeding users with information resources that is carrying fake or misleading information. Librarians have to verify information that is circulated especially on the social media. Verification of the information is important. Ofili (2020) pointed out a good number of strategies in verifying the originality of information and they are:

- **Investigate the Source:** This is to guide against unusual URLs, site names or social media profiles that try to look like legitimate news or information sites but are not. This also ensures that the authors of information resources are real and credible. The credibility of a website needs to be confirmed before the information is made available to the users.
- **Checking Publication Dates:** This is done by the librarians to ascertain if the story is relevant and up to date and to confirm if the date of publication is in tandem with the date or period of the event being reported. This is very important when dealing with online resources.
- **Checking Grammatical Errors:** According to Ofili, (2020) credible authors make less repeated spelling and grammar mistakes. This helps librarians to automatically detect the credibility of the article or information resources as too many grammatical errors may likely portray the writer as mediocrity making it difficult for librarians to recommend such information bearing materials.

- **Watching out for Clickbaits:** Librarians are particularly very conscious of authors creating a hyperlink that directs readers automatically to another page just to attract traffic to that site or a captivating headline that has no correlation with the content of the information in the page. This justifies why librarians often scan through the information resources or website they recommend for their users, this is to reduce misinformation and FN.
- **Cross Reference:** Librarians often cross check the information they are disseminating to be sure its genuine and worth sharing. They sometimes utilize search engines to look up the title of an article to see all the information regarding the article; this is to ensure genuineness and credibility.

### Facts Checking

Fact-checking is the process of verifying information in non-fictional and fictional text in order to determine its veracity and correctness. Fact-checking could be internal fact-checking; that is checking done in-house by the publisher. When the text is analyzed by a third party, the process is called external fact-checking (Graves, & Amazeen, 2019). This can be conducted before the text is published or otherwise disseminated. It is pertinent to know that librarians have no way of checking the facts contained in a document before they are published, it is however in their jurisdiction to check the timeliness, currency and the authenticity of information bearing material before they are disseminated. Ofili (2020) suggested a good number of fact checking tools which can be used to verify the correctness of information contained in published articles especially those published online. They are:

- **APP Fact Check:** This helps to monitor online content in local languages, from Amharic to Hindi, Mandarin or Malaysian
- **Africa Check:** This tool exists to promote accuracy and honesty in public debate and the media in Africa.
- **Canada Fact Check:** This is an independent news platform dedicated to transparency, democratic reform, government accountability and corporate responsibility.

- **Domain Big Data:** This is a big database of domains and who is records as well as online investigation tool.
  - **EXIFdata.com:** Online application that lets you take a deeper look at images–size, dimension, file type, colour components, resolution, date and time original image was created, date of creation (edited), artist, etc.
  - **FackCheck.org:** This monitors that factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interview and news releases.
  - **FactsCan:** This tool educates and engages Canadians in critical thinking and evidence-based political decision-making, to hold politicians accountable for their words, and to encourage honesty in political debate.
  - **Google Reverse Image Search:** This tool's search returns similar images, the websites that contain these images and other sizes of the picture you searched with. It has android, iPhone and iPad apps.
  - **Hoaxy:** This is a tool that visualizes the spread of articles online. It shows how unverified stories and facts-checking efforts on those stories spread online.
  - **InVID:** A web-based integrated toolset for the verification of newsworthy user-generated videos and their context spread via social media
- Other fact checking tools include: OpenSecrets.org, Politifact, Snopes, TinEye Reverse Image Search, twXplorer, Urban Legends Online, WHOis.net and Wolfram/Alpha.

### Media Literacy

Media literacy is the ability to identify different types of media and the messages they are sending. Media encompasses print media, such as newspapers, magazines and posters, and theatrical presentations, tweets, radio broadcasts, etc. Being able to understand these various forms of information with an ability to make sense of what is presented is key (Moffat, 2020). Media Literacy (ML) focuses on educating different categories of public (children, young people and adults), in both formal and informal settings, to critically and consciously consume mediated messages. It encompasses various skills, such as critical



thinking, problem solving, autonomy, communication and participation (Ciurel, 2016). Media literacy provides tools for interpreting, analyzing, understanding, and challenging media discourses. All media messages are representations, and so they are inherently ideological and biased. Ciurel further noted that all media messages have financial and symbolic stakes. Based on the aforementioned, it is important that librarians educate the users of the library on the importance of media literacy skill acquisition, so as to be able to interpret and analyze information before utilization. This helps information users to distinguish FN from genuine ones.

Promotion of media literacy by librarians according to UNICEF (2020) helps individuals in the society to:

- Encourage people to think about accuracy and the sentiments triggered by what they see/read before sharing anything online. People share false claims online simply because they fail to think sufficiently about whether or not the content is accurate when deciding what to share. It is therefore important to teach people to second guess their instinctual reactions, asking them to take another look at messages that make them incredibly angry at a piece of content or feeling smug (because one's viewpoint has been reaffirmed).
- Encourage the report of misinformation and FN. Many social media platforms, including Facebook, have their mechanisms to address misinformation by encouraging users to report inaccurate information.
- Understand the local communication ecosystem. Understanding how, through which channels, and which sources of information are most trusted will help information consumers to access the right information anytime they are looking for information to satisfy their needs.
- Define mechanisms to track rumors, listen to the community and monitor the media. For example, understanding what is being discussed about your health topic will help you define communication and behavior interventions.
- Understand why people are sharing misinformation. Is it out of fear? Lack of

access to health care? Once you've identified the reason for misinformation spread, you are better able to avoid reading such news.

- Develop citizenship skills needed to promote a thriving democracy. Political campaigns and issues are primarily conveyed through 30-second television ads or, at best, half-hour news interviews on Sunday mornings. With so little attention paid to issues from our primary forms of media consumption, it is imperative for people to learn how to read the messages they are bombarded with and recognize the reasons and decisions behind what is being presented to them (Thoman & Jolls, 2005).
- Developing media analysis skill is a crucial part of media literacy education which helps to strengthen observation and interpretation. For example, students can examine and challenge the stereotypes, biases, and hidden motivation of the producers/publishers. (Thoman & Jolls, 2005).

**Counter-Information** – To counter is to oppose or contradict. Librarians are duty bound to provide their user with accurate information. They have the responsibility to ensure they counter-inform their users and the public of such FN. The truth, correct and factual information should be put in the open, in the same space as the FN. It will serve as an opposition and contradiction to such FN. In so doing, the true information will replace the false, the value of the library and authenticity of other information resources are upheld.

## CONCLUSION

If Nigeria and other nations of the world must match in the path of economic development and live on genuine information, then FN must be reduced to the barest minimum, if not totally cancelled. The menace of FN has contributed to the escalation of insecurity woes around the world and Nigeria is not exempted. Examples are the recent COVID-19 pandemic and #EndSars protest experience in Nigeria. FN has fueled hatred, ethno-religious conflicts, political violence, leadership mistrust, economic instability, inter-tribal anxiety, character assassination, and ultimately posing serious threats to national

development. The spread of FN has been given impetus by the emergence and dominance of ICT, especially social media within the present information environment of the 21st century. Undeniably, the growth of FN may be impossible to exterminate, but its negative repercussion can be reduced or managed if all stakeholders, especially librarians, take committed responsibility in ensuring all the roles that needs to be effective to combat the menace.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the wake of the effect of FN on nations across the world, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

1. Libraries and librarians must join hands in teaching information and media literacy not just to their users or user communities but to the society as a whole. By organizing trainings, public webinars, creation and circulation of relevant infographics and flyers on social media, as this will afford users and the general public the opportunity to acquire necessary skills needed for information analysis.
2. Librarians should adopt the 3Ds (not just stop at 'Detecting' FN but 'Documenting' them and 'Debunking' them immediately). Information verification and fact checking roles of librarians should be intensified without bias to ensure that the genuineness of information materials is ascertained before they are circulated.
3. The federal government through different information agencies should try as much as possible to ascertain the credibility of authors and publishers of information before the information materials are allowed to be distributed.
4. Media regulating agencies like the Nigerian Press Commission should insist on media professionalism from media houses and professionals in order to avoid using them as instruments for the spread of FN especially by the elite/political class.
5. Fake News should be counter and oppose in every space; social media, Print, poster, website, word -of -mouth etc. With the right information replacing it.

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