

Librarians as Bridges between Ignorance, Misinformation and the Citizens

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ABSTRACT

The public domain is recently being filled with information of diverse forms due to the introduction of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) coupled with the various social media platforms. Individuals abuse and misuse of these social media platforms are giving rise to the spread of fake news and misinformation daily. The power of misinformation supplied through online sources now poses a threat to the life of innocent people in society. To ameliorate the situation, the library and its professionals have to play an important role because they are adequately equipped to filter information that is published into the public domain. The paper, therefore, examines the role of librarians as a bridge between Ignorance, Misinformation and the Citizens. It concludes by charging librarians to develop the skills necessary for quality information delivery in the era of information overflow.

Keywords: Libraries, Librarians, ICT, Social Media, Misinformation, Fake News, Ignorance.

INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines ignorance as a lack of knowledge, understanding, or information about something. Ignorance is an adjective word that describes a person in the state of being unaware or even cognitive dissonance and other cognitive relation. According to Nottelmann (2015) it describes individuals who deliberately ignore or disregard important information or facts. The author further categorized ignorance into three different types: factual ignorance (absence of knowledge of some fact), object ignorance (unacquaintance with some object), and technical ignorance (lack of understanding of how to do something). John (2012) mentioned that willful ignorance is "a paradoxical condition in which people are aware there is something they do not know but choose not to know it. Abbott (2010) added that amateur ignorance is mostly of skills, and professional ignorance mostly ignorance of collateral literature while expert ignorance reflects the use of theory as a mnemonic device and so is particularly insidious. Springer (2010) informed that the word ignorance is derived from the Latin (not) and gnarus (knowledgeable) acquainted with). This suggests that to be ignorance mean "lack of knowledge" the state of lacking in knowledge and information.

On the other hand, misinformation means when the information receiver is given incorrect information though not always deliberately. Musgrove et al. (2018) and Podge (2019) conversely opined that disinformation is a deliberate pushing of harmful information to receivers with the aim of damaging someone image or reputation. False or incorrect information is spread intentionally though sometimes unintentionally. Misinformation raises fear and suspicious among the general public.

Misinformation is in the same family as ignorance. The history of misinformation, along with that of disinformation and propaganda, is part of the history of mass communication itself (International Center for Journalists). Misinformation is false or inaccurate information (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2019). Woolley and Howard (2016) highlighted some examples of misinformation to include false rumours, or insults and pranks. Other examples of more deliberate disinformation include malicious content such as hoaxes, spear-phishing and computational propaganda the authors stressed. News parody or satire can become misinformation if it is taken as dangerous by the unwary and spread as if it were true. The terms "misinformation" and "disinformation" have often been associated with the term "fake news", defined by some

scholars as "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent" (Lazer, Baum, Benkler... Duncan, 2018). Misinformation is a deliberate attempt to confuse or manipulate people through the dissemination of misleading information to them.

The advent of the Global System of Communications (GSM) with the Internet and its active services such as social media has deepened the opportunities for information sharing and use in all societies. Individuals can create platforms such as websites and blogs to disseminate information, ideas, or to speak up their minds. Stawicki, Firstenberg, and Papadimos, (n.d.), lamented noting that the social networking sites have become a notable vector for the spread of misinformation, "fake news" and propaganda in the Information Age. Also, individuals have the freedom of expression to air their views. Wilson and Umar (2019) submitted that "the right to express and also to be heard helps in the implementation of democratic philosophies of participation and equality before the law in society". The inappropriate use of these has, however, led to dissemination and peddling of incorrect information, which portends dire consequences for the social fabric of societies.

The advent of information technology giving rise to the increase in social media, and with little or lack of regulations and examination required before posting (Chen, Xinran; Sin, 2015), makes the spread of misinformation to be on the increase. These social media provide users with the capability to spread information quickly to other users without requiring the permission of a gatekeeper such as an editor, who might otherwise require confirmation of its truth before allowing its publication. Though journalists are sometimes being blamed for helping people spread fake information on social media, Arif et al. (2017) however, argued that journalists play a significant role to curb the spread of misinformation and rumours.

LITERATURE REVIEW

March (1997) maintained that a person who has correct knowledge could avoid risks than those who lack knowledge on certain aspects. Yomere, (2010) stressed that knowledge is power, and it is an instrument for dealing with life situation as experienced by individuals and social group as they interact with their environment. Salman (2017) and et al. opined that information is an important resource which is essential for the progress of any individual and that of a nation.

So access to right or relevant, updated information to the citizen is required for any literate society. He further stressed that access to information is important because people need the information to develop their potential through education and training to succeed in business, to enrich their cultural experience and take control of their daily life. This helps to bridge the gap between misinformation, ignorance and informed society.

Opeke (2004) reaffirmed, the importance of information noting that information has received a wider spread acceptance as an essential feature of production, consumption and exchange in this era. IFLA (2003) assert that appropriate information to citizens can help them to start a business, learn about how to get involved in decision making towards the development of communities. Reading ability, in combination with access to correct information, provides people with possibilities to change their life.

ADVERSE EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE AND MISINFORMATION ON CITIZENS

The Oxford University Press (2012) affirmed that ignorance could open the opportunity to seek knowledge. When people have the correct information, they can make informed decisions on any matter. The spread of fake news, disinformation and misinformation, however, raises fear and negative impression among the general public (Chen, Sin, Theng, Lee, 2015). Individuals and societies can be affected negatively by misinformation. Ignorance has some negative effect on individuals and society. The author expressed that ignorance open opportunity to seek knowledge and make more discoveries and this can only take place if an individual possesses a curious mind. According to Alexandre (2020), there are two types of ignorance, one is the absence of knowledge, and the other is the choice to not to know or to ignore something. The lack of knowledge can have a good or bad effect on a person depending on whether that absence of knowledge is beneficiary to them or not, the choice to not know something, on the other hand, can be very useful in term of focus, but only on the condition that you focus on things that serve you well

LIBRARIANS AS BRIDGES BETWEEN IGNORANCE, MISINFORMATION AND THE CITIZENS

Zapata (1994) opined that access to information through libraries empowers citizens. Librarians and Libraries are active agents in societal change by bridging the gap between fake

information and citizens. Onoyeyan and Adeshina (2014) quoting Matoksi (2004) said librarians could provide information about all sort of issues and act as a focal point for citizens by hosting local forum where people can talk through problems. The author further expressed that information and communication technology (ICT) has great potential to help to bridge the gap of ignorance and misinformation in developed and developing countries. Echezona et al. (2010) cited in Harris and Bunden – Ellis (1991) acknowledged that people are ignorant because they are not aware of available resources and services in the library but also because they do not obtain adequate information on the services and resources available. Librarians play a fundamental role in closing the gap of ignorance and misinformation in the society by the services they offer, which help to create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) designed a model to critically scrutinize the information to detect misinformation. The model functions, as shown below:

- **Step 1:** Considered the source of information. Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission, and its contact information.
- **Step 2:** Read beyond. Headlines can be outrageous to get a click. Therefore, it is important to consider the whole story.
- **Step 3:** Check the author: It is essential to do a quick search for the author. Is the author credible and real?
- **Step 4:** Supporting source. The reader needs to click on all available links to determine if the information is given actually supports the story.
- **Step 5:** Check the date: Reporting old news and stories does not mean they are relevant to current events.
- **Step 6:** Verify if the news is a joke: If the news is too outlandish, it is important to ascertain that the news is not satire. Therefore, investigate the author and the site to be sure.
- **Step 7:** Check your biases: Considered if your own belief could affect your judgement.
- **Step 8:** Ask the expert: Ask a librarian and consult a fact-checking site.

Librarians are at the forefront in the fight against misinformation, ignorance, fake news, etc. According to white (2012), librarians help to ensure an authentic record of knowledge is

created. In order word, it would be not easy to advance in research and human knowledge without librarians. Gbaje, (2010) emphasized that knowledge is a vital component of every human endeavour (Yale law School of Information Society, 2008). Access to correct information is essential because it helps to bridge the gap between ignorance and misinformation and enhance creativity and productivity. Gbaje and Okojie (2010) also emphasized that the goal of access to knowledge is to improve access to the following component of the knowledge economy, 1) access to human knowledge; 2) access to information; 3) access to knowledge embedded well; 4) access to tools for producing knowledge – embedded well. Consequently, Onoyeyan and Adeshina (2014) suggested ways by which librarian can alleviate the challenge of misinformation and ignorance, which include:

- Raising awareness on the issue
- Provision of relevant information in appropriate language and formats
- Establishing strong library programmes
- Partnership with other agencies in promoting change agent
- Establishing libraries or information centres rooted in local communities.

Ogah (2009) posits that websites can also be used for services such as current awareness, acquisition, exchange of information and answering of users queries and that the availabilities of resources have necessitated librarian to provide current awareness activities in keeping users abreast of new sources and other development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The introduction of information communication technology (ICT) and utilization by individuals in societies has brought numerous changes in the way information is communicated. Again, the rights of expression give individuals the freedom to air their views and publish whatever they believe. Libraries and librarians play a crucial role in ensuring that the right information gets to the citizen to create an informed society. Therefore, government at all levels should ensure that libraries are well funded and equipped. Librarians, on the other hand, should develop the skills necessary for quality information delivery in the era of information overflow.

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