

Curbing Misinformation /Fake News Through Media Literacy Education of Students in Nigeria

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Statement of the Problem: *Social media is a major source of information among both adults and young people. It is essential in the quick dissemination of information. Through social media people receive educational, health, social, economic, and political news which help them to make informed decisions. However, it is unfortunate to note that some information/news in social media are fake news and have caused fear, death, riot and disharmony among various ethnic groups. It is believed that because of the high level of confidence in information on social media, there is the likelihood of sharing the information without authentication. This lacuna/loophole has resulted in unfortunate situations. People have knowingly or unknowingly shared fake news that have created problems and making of wrong decisions that have disastrous consequences on the people. It has also caused lack of trust in government activities, hate speech, riots, and mayhem. It has also made the youths develop unwholesome habits like taking hard drugs, self-medication, joining cults, dropping out of school, depression, and suicide. It has become necessary to teach youths how to distinguish correct news from fake ones for their well-being and the development of the country.*

Literature Review

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Hobbs, 2001). Media literacy, therefore, teaches people the ability to make effective use of social media and other forms of digital information. Tugtekin and Koc (2019) see media literacy as a range of skills that allow users to deal with challenges and demands of living in the growing digital environment. Brown (2018) believes that the new generation should have a critical mindset instead of only technical skills. Obinna (2021) narrated the outcome of the media literacy seminar carried out by Rewired Network with the support of the United States Department of State for graduating students of Sango Secondary School, Agege, Lagos. The training focused on the need to know the sources, the facts, and opinion in order to reduce fake news. Identifying facts is the best way to know fake news.

Cunliffe-Jones (2021) said countries are putting the cart before the horse by promulgating laws against fake news instead of teaching media literacy to citizens, especially young people. He also suggested that the government should ensure people have easy access to information. Auberry (2018) emphasised the need to recognize correct information.

Findings

The data received so far is indicating that media literacy is not in the school curriculum. Most students do not have knowledge of media literacy which portends great danger in the use of social media in Nigeria.

Discussion

The results indicate that the students use and disseminate information without considering the implications of the actions.

There is danger as a result of the way social media is used in Nigeria. The government makes laws to punish offenders while they have not introduced measures to teach media literacy among young people and other members of society. Media literacy should be introduced in schools to prevent mayhem, riots, deaths, mental torture, etc which may arise as a result of inappropriate use of social media. This study suggests incorporating media literacy into the learning management system in order to increase students' ability to determine correct information, erroneous information, and fake news. West (2017) of Brooklyn Institute stated fake news can be curbed through media literacy. He further said that the government, technology companies, and individuals have roles to play in order to combat fake news and disinformation. He said the government should encourage independent and professional journalism and avoid clamping down on news media. Technology companies should identify fake news through algorithms and communicate such to users and that they should stop making money through fake news. Government should fund media literacy, especially for young people as they use third-party assessment while the public should follow diversity and perspective instead of accepting particular news.

Methodology

The research design used is descriptive research.

100 students were selected through random sampling from 10 public schools in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. The questionnaire was distributed to the students.

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Biography

Emmanuel Anyanwu is a Chief Lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri Imo Nigeria. He has many publications in local and international journals.