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Information Literacy can be a Panacea for the Fake News Menace

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Abstract

This study talks about fake news, how technology manipulates and distributes fake news, and how common people share them in social media. Facebook, twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Linked, WhatsApp are the major players of social media. Propaganda and revenue generation are the main reasons for spreading fake news. In the world of fake news, mostly false content is intentionally sent from sender to receiver. Fake news has many associated names like misinformation, disinformation, information disorder etc. Fake news is the information that is of interest to some cross-section of population used for promotion of a product or service, propaganda of a political party, person, and belief, here data is denigrated and influenced with latest technology and finally social networks amplify the information without confirmation. As a result, false and misleading information is in public domain which is disseminated as fake news. Various actions taken by different countries and technology companies have been discussed. Legal actions and technology cannot alone solve the problem of fake news as fake news as is much a personal and social problem than a technological problem. Information literacy programmes conducted by LIS professionals can be a long-term solution to control the problem of fake news. We can inform our users about information need, critical thinking, selection of information resources, evaluate information, understand the various legal, social, ethical issues of information to the further sharing of information. Websites of newspapers, social media sites, health agency, fact-checking agency and reports are studied and analyzed in a descriptive manner.

Keywords: Fake news, social media, Facebook, internet shutdown, information literacy

'News', most of us, know is the acronym of the cardinal directions: north, east, west and south. News is the most up-to-date information on current events as it answers the "Five Ws" (who, what, when, where, why and also how) of an event which is presented to the end user through the combination of print, broadcasting, electronic and the social media. While reporting news it is imperative that news should be objective and any personal, commercial and political motives or agendas should not be reflected there. News is essential for democracy, development, science, health and for the all-round progress of mankind. But recently another term added with news as 'Fake news' and it becomes a challenging task to control the flow of 'Fake news'.

Cambridge Dictionary defines fake news as “False stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke.” Fake news was there since ancient times. History tells us how fake news helped Octavian to defeat Mark Anthony and become the emperor of Rome for a long period of time. Sensational material having less facts that can shake the faith or belief always had an upper hand. In due course of time, sensation had added rumors to its basket and ‘yellow journalism’ emerged. Yellow journalism that started in 18th century is very similar to fake news of 21st century, like having catchy sensational headlines and the publisher uses sensation for promoting advertisement. Fake news comes into public with the US elections in 2016, (Turk, 2018) mentioned in his report how the term fake news was used for the first time in a BuzzFeed article, which reported on websites that were publishing false pro-Trump articles shared a lot on social media, Donald Trump used the term ‘fake-news’ to label reporting. Fake news has many associated names like misinformation, disinformation, information disorder etc. Misinformation is information that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true. (Turk, 2018) defined disinformation as “all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit. This includes some forms of automated accounts used for networks of fake followers, fabricated or manipulated videos, targeted advertising, organized trolling, visual memes, and much more. It can also involve a whole array of digital behavior that is more about circulation of disinformation than about production of disinformation, spanning from posting, commenting, sharing, tweeting and re-tweeting etc. The group was aware that in the near future disinformation will increasingly involve communication via private messaging applications, chat bots, and voice-operated systems, as well as augmented reality and virtual reality and content generated or manipulated by AI”.

Fake news is the information that is of interest to some cross-section of population used for promotion of a product or service, propaganda of a political party, person, and belief, here data is denigrated and influenced with latest technology and finally social networks amplify the information without confirmation. As a result, false and misleading information is in public domain which is disseminated as fake news. Fake news has changed the process of sending and receiving information which we call communication. (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2002 in their book mentioned about communication as defined by McQuaid as the “process which increases commonality, but also requires elements of commonality for it to occur at all.” Communication is to establish commonness between the sender and receiver. In the process of communication true content in the form of sender’s words, messages, symbols oral or written must mean same to the receiver. But in the world of fake news, mostly false content is intentionally sent from sender to receiver.

Dissemination of Fake News:

Earlier when news was communicated through radio, TV and print media, information delivery was in one-to-one mode but in this phase of social media, at present times news is communicated in many to many modes. The last decade witnessed the significant development of app-enabled smart phones, mobile data plans and lastly the proliferation of social networks where anyone can publish and make audience. At present a generation of bloggers, Facebook and twitter users, Instagram influencers, YouTube and Vimeo stars are uploading their content on web, as Facebook alone has more than 3 billion users that is

about quarter of earth's population, YouTube has 1.5 billion users. Social networks want to be catchy and for advertisement it wants to hold users, they suggest videos and advertisement of users' interest, and smartphone technology connects to the history of users' sites visited. A section of bloggers, Facebook and twitter users, Instagram influencers, YouTube stars seep into social networks, for amplifying fake news, AI generated contents added fire to the fury.

(Turk, 2018) discussed how Facebook algorithm encourages users to display their feed not in chronological order but by priority, post's visibility, the post's performance, past page (or friend) performance, type of content and how latest it is. Facebook algorithm decides what people see and what they do not see, as it constantly works to improve user experience, to be more interesting and attractive, to keep users using the site, the goal is also to maximize the relevance and number of advertisements. (Bouygues, 2019) estimated that 9 to 15 percent of Twitter users are bots, bots play a key role in amplifying fake news. "Elections across the world have been rocked by disinformation campaigns. Western countries have accused Russia, for instance, of using fake news to disrupt elections, and political actors have used fake news to further their agendas in several countries, including in Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia".

Technological Aids for spreading Fake News:

Technology has turned the fancies and fiction of science into a reality. We are witnessing the 4th Industrial revolution better known as "Information Revolution". (Musil, 2020) mentioned gadgets and technologies that have changed our lives and livelihood and some of them are Apple iPhone, Wi-Fi, Internet of Things, Voice Assistants, Bitcoin, Biometric, Artificial intelligence (AI) and social networking. AI is the simulation of human intelligence in machines which is used to solve real life problems like traffic control, surgeries etc. AI models have made exponential developments for creation and amplification of fake news with botnets, target keywords, automated content farms under SEO (search engine optimization), encrypted messaging like (WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal). Facebook has more than 3 billion users- about one third of world's population and earns \$40 billion as ad revenue.

Agencies for Controlling Fake News:

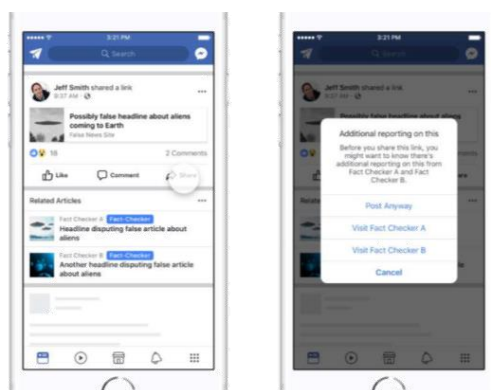
1. To safeguard the democratic process, various governments are strictly enforcing legislation to control spread fake news in mass and social media. (Law library of Congress, 2019) mentioned in detail about the impact of fake news on elections, and the legislative measures undertaken to counteract the dissemination of false information in the 15 countries. In China spreading fake news and disturbing public order are considered as a Crime under China's Criminal Law, if any person/organization is found do so, have to spent seven years in prison. The 2016 Cybersecurity Law requires all the service providers to ask the users to register their real names. *Wechat* is the largest social media platform of China, released a report in January 2019 on its fight against rumors, had intercepted over 84,000 rumors in 2018. In 2019 Russian Federation enacted Anti-defamation and anti-libel provisions for spreading libelous news. Germany has a number of civil and criminal law provisions to safeguard the public from fake news in social networks. In 2017, the Network Enforcement Act fines social networks that do not remove clearly illegal content upto €50 million (about US\$57.8 million). Many other countries like Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Sweden, Argentina etc., are having strict laws to control the flow of fake news.

(UNESCO,2018) mentioned how many undertakings like Project Trust, *The Guardian's* use of Instagram Stories to counter the spread of disinformation, Election land in US, the global investigative coverage of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, *The New York Times* are some endeavors by news organizations and individuals to counter disinformation.

2. Tech Companies

All the information disorder owes to unedited circulation of fake news, algorithms of social network, personal motives of political parties/individuals, polarization and find new avenues for advertisement. New challenges of journalists in the age of social media are-to verify accuracy, avoid sensationalism, responsible reporting, support social empathy, identify and be cautious with visuals and videos uploaded every second.

(Anderson, 2020) in her page mentioned about Pew Research in July 2020, "72% of U.S. adults say social media companies have too much power and influence in politics." She discussed how the tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple were sued by the Federal Trade Commission and 50 states of United States for using unfair means of business by buying the rivals to squash competition. Technology can beat technology, as the self-acclaimed author can easily publish content into the web with the aid of technology, so for the control of fake news we have to rely on technology. Some of the techniques discussed by (UNESCO) 2018 are Facebook account analysis using an online tool from Intel Techniques, Twitter account analysis by analyzing the social history and identify whether it is a bot tweeting. Reverse Image Search **by** using either Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye or RevEye, we can check to see if an image is being recycled to support a new claim or event. YouTube Data Viewer tools - like Amnesty's YouTube Data Viewer, InVID, and News Check can detect video thumbnails for YouTube videos, and a reverse image search on those thumbnails can reveal if earlier versions of the video have been uploaded. EXIF Viewer is a metadata attached to visual content that includes data points created by digital cameras and phone cameras at the point of capture. These can include exact time and date, location metadata, device data, and light setting information. EXIF metadata is thus extremely helpful in the verification process, but a major limitation is that social networks strip the metadata from visual content. Geolocation, Weather corroboration, Shadow analysis, Image forensics and Izitru are some of the other advanced techniques used for detection of fake news. A very elegant technique to reduce the propagation of fake news is labelling. In this case, Facebook (or some other platform) adds information about the credibility of a story and warns before a user wants to share a fake story.



The social networks should enforce real identity of persons so as to trace the spread of bots in the web. Among Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit and TikTok Facebook has a strict policy. Crowd Tangle a Facebook-owned tool follows, analyses and reports on what's happening on social media. It tracks the influential personalities, accounts of celebrities, sport stars, politicians, big shots, public, business tycoons etc. It covers Facebook pages that have more than 1 lakh likes, Instagram accounts with more than 75 thousand followers and 20 thousand sub-reddits. WhatsApp included labeling forwarded messages, changed the number of times a user to forward a message as measure to stop sharing of fake news.

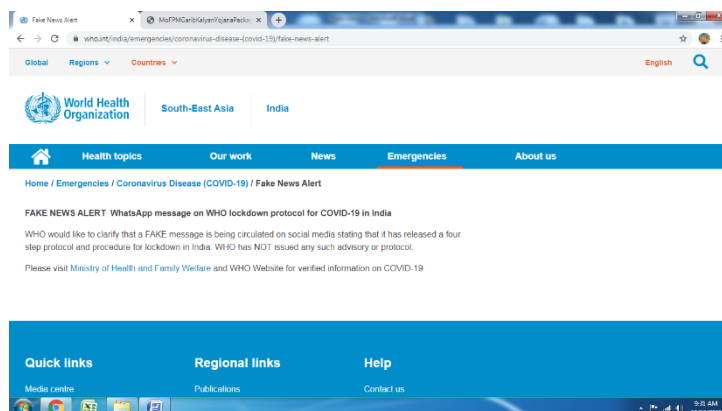
Indian Scenario:

India is also transforming into 'Digital India,' that aims to transform India into a society where no citizen is deprived of their privileges and in fact can utilize the digital platform for sustainable and inclusive growth for all. (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2019) mentioned that "India has the 2nd largest internet market in the world. India has 1.2 billion mobile subscriptions, Indian internet users logged 12.3 billion app downloads in 2018, behind only China. India now has 294 million active users in social media. On an average an Indian user spends 17 hours per week in internet and that exceeds the figure for both the United States and China. India has 2nd largest instant messaging users in the world only after China. India's monthly mobile data consumption per user is 8.3 gigabytes (GB) per month, comparable to digital leaders like South Korea that have a usage of 8-8.5 GB per user". In India fake news permeates easily into the social media, in void of responsible and informed citizens. According to (National Crime Records Bureau) 2019, total police disposal of cybercrimes under the crime head 'Fake news on Social Media' number of fake news incidents, numbers of persons arrested and the total number of persons charge sheeted related to the spread of fake news in the year 2017, 2018 and 2019 are given in the table below:

Table 1. Number of fake news, persons arrested and charge sheeted from 2017-2019			
Year	No. of fake news	No. of persons arrested	No. of persons charge sheeted
2017	117	115	85
2018	97	61	48
2019	190	170	94

Information Disorder:

(Chaturvedi, 2019) mentioned that Economic times termed 2019 as the year of fake news, and fake news crossed new heights at the outbreak of COVID-19 illness, and its associated myths about symptoms, transmission, mortality and prevention embark. United Nations identified these rumors as global enemy. With an information overload from everywhere WHO came up with a term 'Infodemic' - an over-abundance of information - some accurate and some not - that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it. One instance about lockdown is that WHO had to cum up with an announcement to inform general public of India that it has not issued any announcement regarding lockdown in India.



False stories of eating bat soup, non-vegetarian are prone to corona virus, 5G towers spreading virus, particular religion are spreading the virus, avoid spicy food, keep throat moist by drinking warm water or tea, garlic cloves and vitamin C injections, self-diagnose coronavirus by holding breath for more than 10 seconds, rumors about period of lockdown followed by panic about the buying of essential commodities, breaking news about the vaccine of corona, click baits in social media about the medicine hydroxychloroquine that can be a cure for the deadly virus, viral videos claims that wearing of masks leads to low oxygen levels, claims about immunity boosting and rumored care treatments like mixtures of cow urine with alcohol, sodium chlorite, bleach etc. 'Chinese virus' and 'Wuhan viruses' were in the air, violent stories about medical professionals bullied mentally and physically were shared in the web during Corona Outbreak.

(Islam,2020) in their study monitored the social media, television networks, online newspapers and fact-checking websites at national as well as international level, from 31st December 2019 to 5th April 2020 and found that rumors, stigma, and conspiracy theories have been very common during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study identified 2,313 reports related to COVID-19 from 87 countries, after analysis it was found that 2,049 (89%) of the reports were rumors, 182 (7.8%) were conspiracy theories and 82 (3.5%) were stigma. Rumor is unverified information that can be found as true, fabricated, or entirely false after verification. Stigma is a socially constructed process through which a person with stigma can experience discrimination and devaluation in society. Conspiracy theory is defined as explanatory beliefs about an individual or group of people working in secret to reach malicious goals.

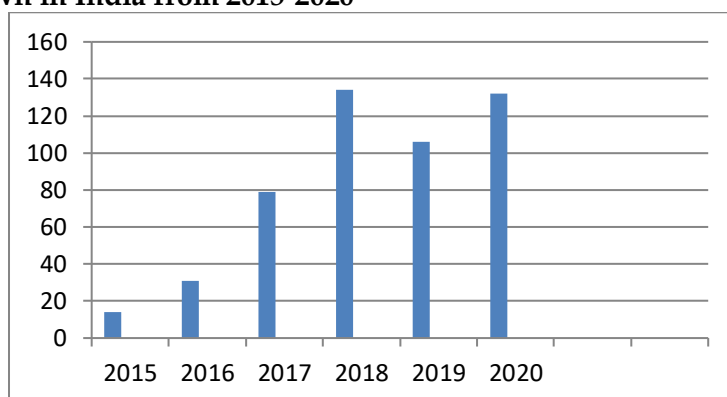
4. Information Literacy and the Role of Library and Information Science Professionals in Controlling Fake News:

Infodemic is a global problem, hoaxes, fake news and misinformation contribute to information disorder is rampant, many fact-checking websites regularly debunk misinformation. But it's about the mindset, people believe what they see and left critical thinking far behind in this digital age. People count speed over accuracy, sharing over reading, commenting over understanding, criticizing over appreciation. Technology alone cannot be blamed for the spread of fake news, as humans use technology at most for spreading fake news, nor can technology solve all the problems of fake news. (Leetaru, 2019) in his work mentioned "algorithmic tweaks, lines of code, fact checkers, content blacklist and other quick fixes are trying to turn the tide of believing fake news and

mentioned to verify and validate information before we share, further added that “Schools no longer teach source triangulation, conflict arbitration, separating fact from opinion, citation chaining, conducting research or even the basic concept of verification and validation. In short, we’ve stopped teaching society how to think about information, leaving our citizenry adrift in the digital wilderness increasingly saturated with falsehoods without so much as a compass or map to help them find their way to safety. The solution is to teach the world’s citizenry the basics of information literacy.”

In such an unpredictable situation of information overload we cannot wait and watch our privacy at stake, government alone to decide the legal actions against digital stalwart, technology companies to delete/deactivate accounts or stories etc. Neither technology alone cannot be blamed for the spread of fake news, nor can technology alone can solve all the problems of fake news. As it is the humans who use twitter handle, promote partisan viewership, create website to fuel conspiracy, use toolkit for defamation campaign, create hashtags for spreading hatred, face book posts that leads to anarchy in the country, breed tweet storms like technology boosters for spreading fake news. Internet is full of information and misinformation, as a precautionary measure of a law-and-order situation that may go out of hand, India witnessed regular internet shutdown during the last decade, the number of shutdowns in last six years (2015-2020) is given below, in the first two months of 2021, 11 times internet shutdown has been ordered by authorities.

Internet shutdown in India from 2015-2020



According to (Kathuria,2018) which studied the impact of internet shutdown on economies found that “16,315 hours of mobile and fixed line Internet shutdown in India cost the economy approximately \$3.04 billion during the period 2012 to 2017.” Some of the badly affected sectors of economy are Tourism, Information Technology Companies, E-commerce, Press and News Media, Professionals and Freelancers, Education, Digital Payments. Such shutdowns damage the Digital India campaign and online status of a country when our country tries to fulfill the dream of trillion-dollar economy. The report suggested “Promoting educative campaigns on curbing hate speech, and inflammatory messages: Educative campaigns can address some of the primary concerns of provocative messaging and rumour-mongering that is often the basis of decisions to shut down the Internet.”

Now as a LIS professional, it is our time to be the torchbearer and the panacea can be the ‘Information Literacy’ as pioneered by Paul Zurkowski and stated as “educated people with the purpose of applying information resources in their work place”. Information is

the processing of data in a meaningful order for eg when we find the digits 9,0,1,3,4,0,0,1,1 we do not get any meaning but when the digits are ordered as 139, we know it stand for railway enquiry, 100 is for police enquiry and 101 is for fire enquiry. Literacy is the ability to read and write and sometimes extended to simple arithmetic. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021) added that literacy is the “Knowledge of a particular subject, or a particular type of knowledge”. Two updated definitions collected by (Landoy, 2020) are 1) American Library Association defines information literacy “as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information”. 2) CILIP Information Literacy group stated “Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society”.

From the above definitions we can conclude that information literacy in the contemporary society consist of – Information need, critical thinking, relevant and careful selection of information resources, evaluation and interpretation of data and information into new knowledge, understand the various legal, social, ethical issues related to the further use or sharing of information. We librarians can add information literacy classes along with the existing orientation classes and inform all the stakeholders/users of libraries about the menace of fake news in present times. Let’s inform all about the A, B, C, D, ... of fake news Literacy of ABC... in Fake news

F
A
K
E

N
E
W
S

A- **Awareness** of surroundings,
 B- Don't **believe** everything that you see,
 C- Use **common** sense before sharing
 D- If in **dilemma** search other authentic/ relevant source
 E- Carefully observe **events**,
 F- find the **fugitive** false,
 G- figure out **gabble** around,
 H- know the **hatred** of peoples/parties,
 I- anyone can spread fake news on **Internet**,
 J- self-**judge** the relevance of news,
 K- know the intentional **kindle**,
 L- think critically before sharing **live stories**,
 M- content of news, video, feed, audio, post can be **manipulated**
 N- **Noise** in the form of riots, anarchy, violence
 O- **Organize** yourself,
 P- **Partisan publicity**,
 Q- **Quality** of content
 R- **Responsibility** of informed citizens,
 S- **Search** other relevant sources
 T- search the **truth**,
 U- be an **Umpire**,
 V- **Vacuous** leads to **vandalism**,
 W- don't write **waffle** on internet,
 X- fake news **Expatiate** very fast,
 Y- aware of **yammers**
 Z- know the **zealots**

Conclusion:

It is well accepted that social media has lots of benefits as such more than 5 billion people are using social media, one among the benefits is the revolution in communication. Along with instant connectivity, social media brought a deluge of cyberbullying, sleep deprivation, social media addiction, unhealthy relation in family and office, social status defined by likes and comments, FOMO (Fear of Missing out) syndrome, fake identities, privacy issues, legal issues, time consuming etc. The life and property loss due to riots as an after effect of fake news is alarming, economic loss due to internet shutdown in very painful. Internet is a bittersweet discovery for mankind. To combat the spread of fake news, all the major stakeholders such as social media platforms, government, media houses, civil society and public at large should come together to deal with fake news as it is much a personal and social problem then a technological problem.

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