INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ON DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 BY LIBRARIANS IN UNIVERSITIES IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study was carried out on influence of social media platforms on dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was used, the population of the study consist 25 library personnel, spread across the three university libraries in Nasarawa State Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was a researchers' designed questionnaire. Data generated was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses was tested using Linear Regression.*

Findings: *The results of the study revealed that: Facebook is the most used social media platforms to obtain information about COVID-19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. Information on death toll is the top most information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. The ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 includes setting up of filters by social media platforms; orientation and awareness of implications of fake information; enactment of unfavourable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19; and imprisonment and death sentence. The study further revealed that there is significant relationship between social media platforms and dissemination of information about COVID-19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.*

Originality/Value: *It was recommended that; information on death toll should be communicated only by World Health Organization (WHO) and Centre for Disease Control (CDC); Setting up filters by social media platforms, orientation and awareness of implications of fake information, enactment of unfavourable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19, imprisonment and death sentence should be put in place in combating fake information of COVID -19.*

Keywords: *COVID-19, Information, Influence, Librarians, Social media, and University.*

Paper type: *Empirical research*

Introduction

The 21st century is considered as an information explosion age. The emergence of the Internet and its associate's social media sites have been regarded as the latest technological explosion in the information world and further widened sources of information (Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur, 2018). Social media platforms are recent developments built on the connectivity provided by the internet. Yet, it has brought changes which are shaping and re – shaping the various fields of endeavour in which the spread of information pertaining COVID-19 is not an exemption.

According to Sauer (2020), COVID-19 is a contagious respiratory illness transmitted through the eyes, nose, and mouth, via droplets from coughs and sneezes, close contact with infected person and contaminated surfaces. It has an incubation period of approximately one to fourteen days. The symptoms include cough, fever and shortness of breath, and it is diagnosed through a laboratory test. The contagion could lead to severe respiratory problems or death, particularly among the elderly and

persons with underlying chronic illnesses. Some infected persons however, are carriers for the virus with no symptoms while others may experience only a mild illness and recover easily. As there is currently no cure or vaccine for the COVID-19; medical treatments are limited to supportive measures aimed at relieving symptoms, use of research drugs and therapeutics (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Ottu, and Iorfa, 2020).

Social media is derived from the social software movement. It is a collection of Internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing (Junco et al. 2010). Bryer etal in Kajo etal (2018), define social media as 'technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders'. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms, and virtual worlds (Bryer et al in Kajo et al, 2018). Nwakaji (2018) define social media as web-based services that allow individuals to construct, articulate, view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Social media platforms according to Chitumbo (2015) can also be called social networking sites or social media tools because they enhance interaction and collaboration among people who use the applications, platforms or tools. The platforms are specifically designed for people to send information and ideas on the internet through online magazine, micro blogging, internet forums, wikis, photographs or pictures, video, rating, podcasts, weblogs, social blogs and social book marking connected by the internet or social media networks. Examples of social media platforms according to Kumar (2012) and Aghadiuno (2017) includes Myspace, Facebook, Ning, Blog, Meebo, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, TeacherTube, Second Life, Wikipedia, PBwiki, Footnote, Community Walk, Slideshare, Digg, StumbleUpon, Daft Doggy, Knowledge Organization, aNobii, Del.icio.us, Netvibes, Connotea, LibraryThing, Lib.rario.us, among others.

The word information' is derived from a Latin word 'informatio' (to inform) in the sense of "to give form to the mind", "to the discipline", "instruct" or "teach" (Shapiro in Agbo, Tsegba & Anozie, 2019). There are a number of terms such as knowledge, facts, data, news, message etc used in common parlance as synonyms or near synonyms for information but none of these items or definition has been universally accepted. Scholars and author have tried to defined information from their various views and professional standpoints. For instance, Aguolu and Aguolu in Agbo et al., (2019) defined information as a message of human experience, what is transmitted, a signal or a stimulus. This message according to him can be made on any subject in any language and in any medium. Aina (2013) defined information as accumulation of knowledge by human beings in all areas of endeavour that is used to solve problems and reduce uncertainty. Information in other ways can be defined as a processed data or fact which is used in making decision.

A librarian according to Rubin (2010), is a "person who works professionally in a library, providing access to information and sometimes social or technical programming to users". A librarian can also be referred to as professionally trained personnel who is in charge of or assisting in a library. In addition, librarians provide instruction on information literacy. The role of a librarian is continually evolving to meet social and technological needs. A modern librarian may deal with provision and maintenance of information in many formats, including: books; electronic resources; magazines; newspapers; audio and video recordings; maps; manuscripts; photographs and other graphic material; bibliographic databases; and web-based and digital resources. A librarian may also provide other information services, including: information literacy instruction; computer provision and training; coordination with community groups to host public programs; assistive technology for people with disabilities; and assistance locating community resources.

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The university library also known as the academic library, is a library that is attached to a higher education institution most especially the university, and it serves two complimentary purposes: to support the university's curriculum and to support the research of the university's faculties, departments and students. According to Ogbonna and Okenyi (as cited in Ekere, 2010), Academic libraries refer to all the libraries that exist in institutions of higher learning ranging from universities, polytechnics, colleges of Education, and any other form of tertiary institution. Their major aim is to provide the curricular educational needs of the students and the entire academic community, example, supporting the teaching staff in the up – to – date materials required for their teaching jobs. An academic library was described in Oyedum (2006) as an integral part of a college or a university; it is usually regarded as an instrument of instruction. This means that teaching and learning in the university requires a well-stocked library with relevant instructional materials and information resources.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, people already relied on social media to gather information and news, and since the outbreak in December 2019, people in many countries have relied on social media to obtain information about the virus. Mian and Khan (2020) argue that there has been a worldwide increase in the spread of fake news and misinformation about COVID-19, with misinformation such as the lab theory on the origin of the virus allegedly "originating" on social media. Correspondingly, Petric (2020) and Shimizu (2020) believe that "media coverage has highlighted COVID-19 as a unique threat, rather than one of many, which has added to panic, stress. Depoux et al., (2020), and Saud et al., (2020) determined that social media has played three main roles in the COVID-19 outbreak in most countries. First, facts about the outbreak were published on social media. Second, misinformation, fake news, and inaccurate information about the outbreak was published on social media. Third, social media created fear and panic about the outbreak worldwide. It is on this premise that this research work is carried out on the influence of social media platforms on information about COVID-19 among university librarians in Nasarawa State.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of social media platforms on dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.
2. Determine the information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State.
3. Identify ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Questions

The following questions are raised to guide the study
1. What are the social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State?
2. What are the information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State?
3. What are the ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between social media platforms and dissemination of information about COVID-19 by Librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

Review of Literature

COVID-19, from the family of Coronavirus (others include SARS, H5N1, H1N1 and MERS), is a contagious respiratory illness transmitted through the eyes, nose, and mouth, via droplets from coughs and sneezes, close contact with infected person and contaminated surfaces. It has an incubation period of approximately one to fourteen days. The symptoms include cough,

fever and shortness of breath, and it is diagnosed through a laboratory test. The contagion could lead to severe respiratory problems or death, particularly among the elderly and persons with underlying chronic illnesses. Some infected persons however, are carriers for the virus with no symptoms while others may experience only a mild illness and recover easily (Sauer, 2020). As there is currently no cure or vaccine for the COVID-19; medical treatments are limited to supportive measures aimed at relieving symptoms, use of research drugs and therapeutics (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Ottu, & Iorfa (2020).

COVID-19 originated from the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats, snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold in December 2019 (Shereen et al., 2020) and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since its identification, the virus is said to have accounted for about 512,311 deaths globally out of a swooping statistic of 10,514,028 positive cases which sadly increases exponentially daily (WHO, 2020). The first victim of the virus in Nigeria was an Italian man who arrived in the country on the 25 February 2020. He was admitted to an Isolation Centre in Yaba Lagos after showing symptoms of the virus (NCDC, 2020).

Social media refers to the use of mobile and web – based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse and adjust user – generated content (Kietzmaan, Hermkens & McCarthy, 2011). Social media platforms according to Chitumbo (2015) can also be called social networking sites or social media tools because they enhance interaction and collaboration among people who use the applications, platforms or tools. The platforms are specifically designed for people to send information and ideas on the internet through online magazine, micro blogging, internet forums, wikis, photographs or pictures, video, rating, podcasts, weblogs, social blogs and social book marking connected by the internet or social media networks. Examples of social media platforms according to Kumar (2012) and Aghadiuno (2017) includes Myspace, Facebook, Ning, Blog, Meebo, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, TeacherTube.

Several empirical studies have been carried out in relation to COVID19 and social media platform. In a research carried out by Araz and Hersh (2020) on the impact of social media on panic during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraqi Kurdistan: Online Questionnaire Study.

Participants reported that social media has a significant impact on spreading fear and panic related to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraqi Kurdistan, with a potential negative influence on people's mental health and psychological well-being. Facebook was the most used social media network for spreading panic about the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq. The study shows significant positive statistical correlation between self-reported social media use and the spread of panic related to COVID-19 (R=.8701). Results showed that the majority of youths aged 18-35 years are facing psychological anxiety.

Both studies are similar since both focuses on social media and COVID-19 pandemic, but the previous study differs from the present study in terms of geographical location. The previous study was carried out in Iraqi while the present study is carried out in Nigeria and focuses on librarians in university libraries.

In a study carried out by Daniel (2020) on social media influence in the COVID-19 pandemic. it was observed that the responsible use of social media can help quickly disseminate important new information, relevant new scientific findings, share diagnostic, treatment, and follow-up protocols, as well as compare different approaches globally, removing geographic boundaries for the first time in history.

In a study carried out by Hamzat and Otulugbu (2020) on social media use and the challenges of information dissemination during emergencies: experience of library and information scientists on COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study found that varying social media were being used to disseminate information about COVID-19. It was reported that library and information scientists are playing active role in enlightening masses on the danger of COVID-19, and has established an enduring relationship with the National Centre

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for Disease Control (NCDC) on the importance of library use as change agents. The need for Library and Information Scientists to sustain the use of social media while rendering information services especially in the time of pandemic such as COVID-19.

Research Method

The study adopts the survey research design, because data on the influence of social media platforms on dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria was collected from a sample of Librarians in the university libraries in Nasarawa State The proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select the sample from the three universities to ensure that, appropriate and proportionate population of the library personnel were included in the sample. The total population of 25 librarians were used for the study which include Nasarawa State University Keffi (7); Federal University Lafia (8); Bingham University, Auta Balefe, (10). The research instrument for this study is a structured questionnaire titled "Influence of Social Media Platform on Information Relating to COVID-19 among Librarians in University Libraries in Nasarawa State Questionnaire" (ISMPIRCALQ) from literatures reviewed. It comprises of a 15 – item questionnaire divided into three clusters and each cluster contains relevant question items that addressed each of the three research questions. The instrument was validated through expert opinion and the completed questionnaires were analyzed for reliability using Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Eventually, the reliability statistic of 0.870 was established for the whole set of scores.

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and non-parametric inferential statistical tools with the aid of SPSS. Descriptive statistic such as mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. The instrument was scaled using Likert scale of Strongly Agree SA = 4, Agree =3, Disagree =2 and Strongly Disagree SD=1. Therefore, any item with a Mean value of 2.50 and above was considered 'Agreed while those below 2.50 were considered "Disagreed". Linear regression analysis was used to test the formulated hypotheses. The model used in ascertaining the relationship of the independent variables on the dependent variables of the study has been specified in this section as:

Functional Relationship

$Y = f(X)$

$y_1 = f(x_1)$

....1

Regression Models

$y_1 = B + B_1x_1$--Equtn 1

These are the expectations on the subject of the existing effect of the dependent variable on independent variable. This refers to spread of information relating to COVID-19 in line with the hypotheses formulated

S/N	Models	A Priori expectations	Sign
1	$y_1 = B + B_1x_1$	$\beta1 > 0$, $p<0.05$: HO1 will be rejected	Positive
2	$y_2 = B + B_2x_2$	$\beta2 < 0$, $p<0.05$: HO2 will be rejected	Negative

Results

This study has investigated the influence of social media platforms on dissemination of information about covid-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Research Question 1: What are the social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 among librarians in universities in Nasarawa State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Social Media Platforms Used to obtain Information about COVID-19 librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Decision
1	Facebook	23	2	0	0	3.92	0.27	Accepted
2	Instagram	18	1	5	1	3.44	0.94	Accepted
3	Whatsapp	16	2	5	2	3.28	1.04	Accepted
4	Youtube	14	4	6	1	3.24	0.95	Accepted
5	Twitter	8	12	3	2	3.04	0.87	Accepted
						3.38	0.81	Accepted

Source: Survey 2020

Bar-Chart Showing Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Social Media Platforms Used to get Information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.
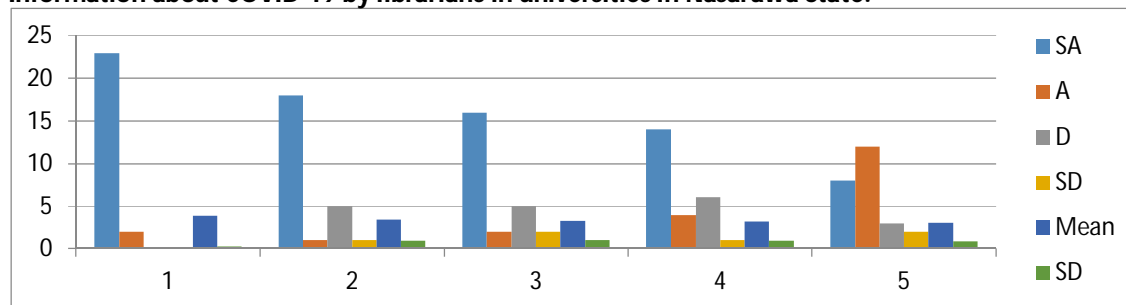

Table 1 shows the social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 by librarians universities in Nasarawa State. As shown in this table, respondents ranked Facebook as the most used social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 by librarians universities in Nasarawa State. The cluster mean and standard deviation are 3.38 and 0.81 respectively.

Research Question 2: What are the information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Information from Social Media Platforms about COVID-19 that has Caused Fears and Panic in Nasarawa State.

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Decision
1	Information of death toll	23	2	0	0	3.92	0.27	Accepted
2	Information of new cases	20	4	1	0	3.76	0.51	Accepted
3	Information of recovered cases	18	4	1	2	3.52	0.90	Accepted
4	Information of places affected with the virus.	16	6	0	3	3.40	0.98	Accepted
5	Information of the cure	18	1	0	6	3.24	1.27	Accepted
						3.57	**0.79**	Accepted

Source: Survey 2020

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Bar-Chart Showing Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Information from Social Media Platforms about COVID-19 that has Caused Fears and Panic in Nasarawa State.
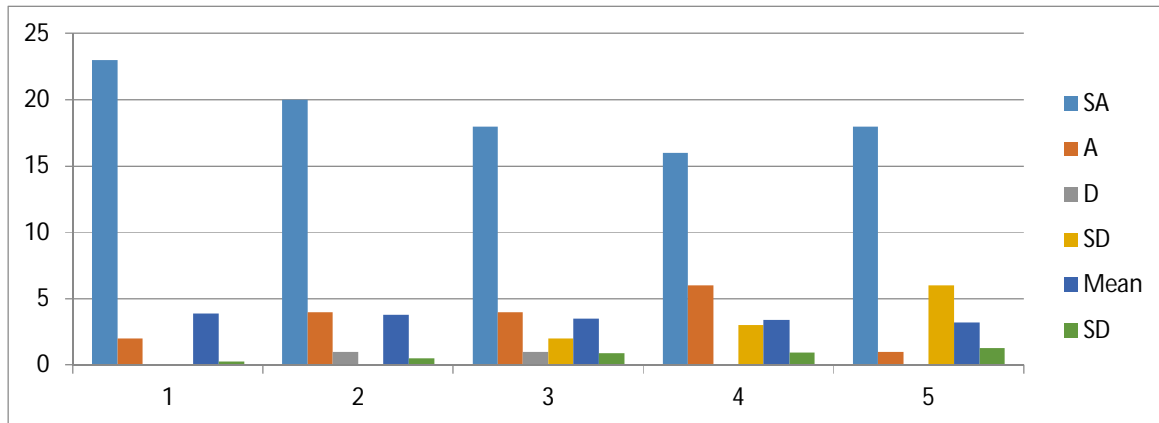

Table 2 shows information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State. As shown in this table, respondents ranked information of death toll as the most choice. The cluster mean and standard deviation are 3.57 and 0.79 respectively.

Research Question 3: What are the ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Ways of Combating Fake Information of COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Decision
1	Setting up of filters by social media platforms	28	2	0	0	3.93	0.25	Accepted
2	Orientation and awareness of implications of fake information.	25	2	1	2	3.67	0.83	Accepted
3	Enactment of unfavorable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19.	22	6	1	1	3.63	0.71	Accepted
4	Imprisonment	20	8	0	2	3.53	0.81	Accepted
5	Death sentence	17	3	4	6	3.03	1.22	Accepted
						3.56	**0.76**	Accepted

Source: Survey 2020

Bar-Chart Showing Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Ways of Combating Fake Information of COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.
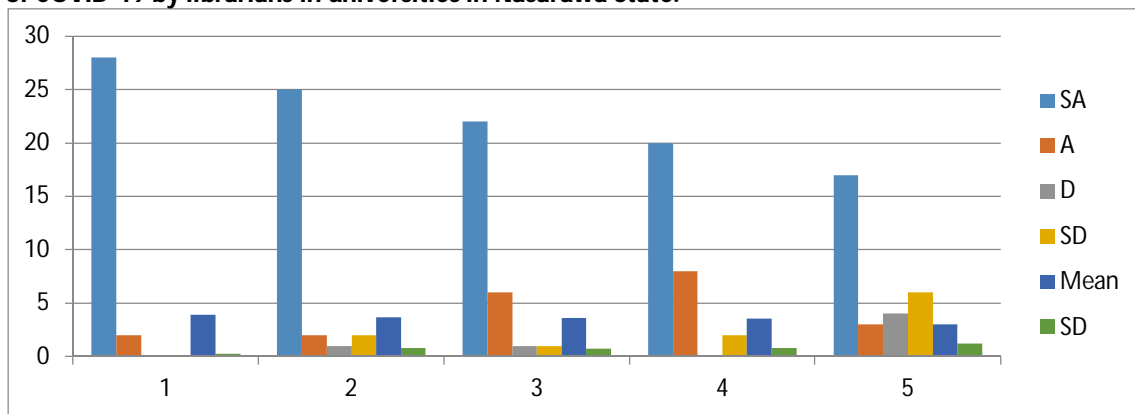
Table 3 shows ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. As shown in this table, respondents ranked setting up of filters by social media platform as the most choice. The cluster mean and standard deviation are 3.56 and 0.76 respectively.

Test of Hypothesis

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between social media platformson Information about COVID-19 among university Librarians in Nasarawa State.

Table 4: Simple Regression Analysis Results on Relationship between Social Media Platforms on Information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

| Model | Coefficients | | | | |
| | Un standardized Coefficients | | standardized Coefficients | T | Sig |
	B	Std Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.761	.208		13.284	.000
Awareness	.312	.055	.763	5.665	.000
R= .763; R^2 = .583; $F_1$25 = 32.09					

From the Table 4, the regression model equation using unstandardized coefficient is:

$Y = B + B_1x_1$

$Y = 0.2761 + 0.312x_1$ --------------------- Equation 1

Where: Y = Information about COVID-19

x_1 = Social media platform

The result on the Table reveals that social media platform have positive and significant influence on information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State β = .763, t statistic of 5.665 and computed p-value of 0.000 which is below the level of significance (0.05) adopted for this study. The Table shows that unit change in social media platform leads to an increase in information about COVID19 by librarians in universities by 0.763 units (β = .763). Moreover, the Table shows that awareness 58.3% (R_2 = 0.583) variance in information about COVID-19 by university librarians. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected which affirms that there is no significant relationship between social media platforms and dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State is hereby rejected.

Discussion of Findings

After the analysis, the first finding reveals that Facebook is the most used social media platforms to get information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. This finding is in agreement with that of Araz et al., (2020) whose study identified Facebook as the most used social media network for spreading panic about the COVID-19 outbreak.

The second findings of this study revealed information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State. The study reveals information of death toll as information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State.

The third finding of this study also reveals ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. Ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 among university librarians in Nasarawa State includes setting up of filters by social media platforms; orientation and awareness of implications of fake information; enactment of unfavourable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19; imprisonment and death sentence.

The fourth finding of this study also reveals that there is significant relationship between social media platforms and dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. This finding is in agreement with that of Azian et al., (2020) whose study revealed that there is a significant positive statistical correlation between self-reported

social media use and the spread of panic related to COVID-19.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have tremendous implications on the individuals, government, Centre for disease control (CDC), World Health Organisation (WHO), university managements and the librarians. The implications are discussed as follows:

1. Findings of the study show that Facebook is the most used social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19. Making use of Facebook and other social media platform by librarians in universities would help in disseminating information on COVID-19.
2. Findings of the study also show that information of death toll from social media platforms about COVID-19 has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State. Social media platforms must filter information on death toll.
3. Setting up filters by social media platforms; orientation and awareness of implications of fake information; enactment of unfavourable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19; imprisonment and death sentence as measures to be taken in combating fake information of COVID -19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State. When legislators put these in place, it will help in combating spread of fake information on COVID-19.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. World Health Organisation (WHO) and National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) with other organizations involved in COVID-19 should make use of social media platform in disseminating information relating to COVID-19;
2. Information on death toll should be communicated only by World Health Organisation (WHO) and National Centre for Disease Control (CDC);
3. Setting up filters by social media platforms, orientation and awareness of implications of fake information,
4. Enactment of laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19,
5. Imprisonment and death sentence should be put in place in combating fake information of COVID -19.

Conclusion

This study is carried out on the influence of social media platforms on dissemination of information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Based on the results of this study, it has been established that Facebook is the most used social media platforms used to get information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State; information of death toll is the top most information from social media platforms about COVID-19 that has caused fears and panic in Nasarawa State; ways of combating fake information of COVID -19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State includes setting up of filters by social media platforms; orientation and awareness of implications of fake information; enactment of unfavourable laws against publishers of fake information of COVID-19; imprisonment and death sentence; there is significant relationship between social media platforms on information about COVID-19 by librarians in universities in Nasarawa State.

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