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# **Disinformation, Fake News, and the Prolonged Academic Staff Union of Universities' (ASUU) Strike in Nigeria: The Role of Librarians**

**Abstract:** Information literacy skills are essential for everyone, especially in this age of information overload where it is often difficult to sieve the truth out of the numerous information dissemination channels available on the Internet. Librarians and libraries are at the forefront of ensuring that only accurate, timely, and reliable information is offered to their users, however, the scourge of disinformation and fake news has created a huge gap which libraries and librarians are expected to fill. This study examined the impact of disinformation and fake news on the prolonged Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike in Nigerian universities. Secondary data was gathered from the report by ASUU National executives and government officials from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour, while reactions from Nigerian students to some of the information on the Internet were mined from the Twitter (also known as X) platform. The findings of the study provided a framework that can be adapted by librarians to fill the information and communication gap between the university union, the government, and Nigerian students in order to limit the effect of disinformation and fake news on the public and the Nation at large. The study recommended that libraries should have official social media handles where current information can be disseminated regularly.

**Keywords:** ASUU, disinformation, fake news, Nigeria, labour strike, social media

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## Introduction

Disinformation episodes have been well documented before the invention of the Internet, with the term “fake news” being commonly used from the end of the nineteenth century. Even if these phenomena are nothing new, these issues have been recently taken into serious consideration at both scientific and political levels, such that many national and supranational institutions have considered the related technical and ethical problems. For example, the Council of Europe released a report in 2017 (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017) pointing out that information pollution (and its variants such as misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation) is seen as a serious risk for democracies, and its role in manipulating the public discourse is a problem worth investigating. We need to understand, among other things, that it can be linked to declining trust in evidence-based journalism, to the growing popularity of news outlets that promote low-quality information, and to a measurable impact of computer-assisted devices, such as bots, that contribute significantly to a self-feeding diffusion process that could amplify the virility of fabricated content. This has serious implications for public discussions regarding different topics, from the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) strikes to political party propaganda.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been on indefinite strike because Nigeria’s higher education system has been plagued by persistent unresolved issues. The problem includes a lack of funding and infrastructural facilities, poor and unfair remuneration, non-compliance to agreements by the government, a delay in reimbursements of university staff salaries, and political meddling in education. On February 14, 2022, ASUU initiated a nationwide strike at government-owned universities scheduled for one month to implement the 2009 deal with the government. People’s thoughts and feelings about the ongoing strikes have been flowing freely into social media platforms as a direct consequence of the proliferation of these events. Information is sent digitally from user to user in today’s fast-paced environment which might affect how other users interpret a specific occurrence (McGregor 2019).

The impact of disinformation and fake news on the prolonged ASUU strike cannot be over-emphasized as different media outlets and social media platforms have disseminated different information on the same subject matter which in turn has created confusion in the mind of the society. For instance, the Minister of Labour said the Federal Government had brought ASUU to the industrial court for proceedings, while the Federal Government said they did not do so. In the same vein, the Minister of Education had said that ASUU is not cooperating with the Federal Government in resolving the lingering issue, thereby painting the union as “selfish” to the public, whereas the 2009 agreement that contains improved salary structure and payment of backlog of allowances has yet to be implemented.

Our case study leans towards understanding the role of librarians in selecting and filtering disinformation, even though we are aware that applying a single label to such complex phenomena can be misleading. Fake news-related issues encompass the learning ecosystem, educational industrial action, and the participation of libraries in those processes (Rapti et al. 2022). Librarians cannot be neutral information doctors prescribing a mere method but rather be interventionists in the media ecology for democratic purposes. It is not a simple one-to-one correspondence of good information that equals better democracy; rather the signals we send with our spaces and services (physical and virtual) are important. Libraries will also need to revisit and re-evaluate their position of neutrality regarding information access and collection development to a position that reflects their strong opposition to fake news (De Paor and Heravi 2020). Libraries should help to counter fake news both through specific educative actions aimed at it and by being broadly educative institutions with a coherent notion of their role and relationship to informational discernment in a democratic society. Hence, the aim of the study was to examine misinformation, fake news, and the prolonged Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike in Nigeria, as well as the role of librarians in the management of information in media spaces.

## Conceptual Review

### ASUU: Historical Appraisal

The acronym “ASUU” stands for the Academic Staff Union of Universities, which was founded in 1978 and is a prominent trade union of Nigerian University Academic Staff which is affiliated with the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Historically, ASUU is born from the then “NAUT,” that is, the Nigerian Association of University Teachers, which was formed in 1965 including academic staff in all federal and state universities in the country. From its inception, ASUU has embarked on a number of industrial actions in an attempt to mitigate against unfair treatment occasioned by the government on its members. In actuality, its active struggle began in the 1980s during the time when the nation suffered intense pressure from the then-military regime. In 1988, the union organized a National Strike to obtain fair wages and university autonomy and, as a result, the ASUU was proscribed on August 7, 1988 with all its properties seized. It was allowed to resume in 1990, but after another strike was banned on August 23, 1992. However, an agreement was reached on September 3, 1992 that met several of the union’s demands including the right of workers to collective bargaining. The ASUU orga-

nized further strikes in 1994 and 1996, protesting against the dismissal of staff by the Sani Abacha military regime. This realistic provision stemming out of the nation's third republic is essentially the foundational basis of ASUU.

The new democratic dispensation that began in 1999 saw further protests against FGN's oppressiveness on some of the rights and privileges of university workers. As a result, from 1999 until today, the union has embarked on five major strikes; 2007, 2013, 2018, 2020, and 2022 respectively. In all these years, however, the union has recorded series of profitable results which are in effect beneficial to members of the union, university establishments all over the nation, the educational sector in general, and society at large.

## **Disinformation and Fake news**

The term “disinformation and fake news” has become a buzzword, with the concept going back a long time in history even before the time of the printing press. False and fictional stories have always been part of society, whether for the purpose of entertainment, politics, malice, or business, which has continued to the internet age (Burkhardt 2017). Further examples of “fake news” include satirical and fictional accounts produced by individuals to discredit one another or simply for the purpose of amusement. This may indicate that the concept around the phrase “fake news” has not changed in its function but has changed in its nature and how it is now circulated. The definition of “fake news” is complex, transitional, and often misconstrued. However, the term itself is often used to represent a broader landscape of false or warped information, which could be intentional (disinformation) or un-intentional (misinformation). Lim (2020) proposed a typography of definitions for the classification of terms under the broad umbrella of “fake news.” These definitions are divided into two categories for the purpose of this article: misinformation and disinformation.

Misinformation is positioned at one end of the scale and defined as the inadvertent sharing of false information, while disinformation sits at the opposing end and constitutes the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false (Lim 2020). Seven definitions of fake news exist within these categories, with this scale helping differentiate the various definitions of information that constitute this term: satire or parody, misleading content, false connection, false context, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content (Lim 2020). Rochlin (2017) argued that news is being upsold on the notion of opinion as opposed to fact. The author further discussed the emergence of “selected exposure” and “confirmation bias” which presents people as tending to search for information that reaffirms and compliments their pre-existing views. Therefore, if

fake news resembles an ideology or popular worldview, it will be shared and circulated without being verified.

## Social Media

The term “social media” has been defined in different ways by its users. For instance, Kaplan (2015, n.p.) defines social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” It includes web-based and mobile-based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Typical examples of social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and the interactive options on these websites, such as the “retweeting” option on Twitter. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information. However, unlike the traditional media like television and radio, most of the social media tools allow their users to interact through the likes of “re-tweeting” on Twitter and “comment” options on Facebook.

Spohr (2017) discussed the influence of social media on fake news by its facilitation of echo chambers and filter bubbles. This means online users are exposed to content based on algorithmic technology that allows individuals to customize their newsfeed so that they are exposed to news and content that they are in agreement with or content shared within their network of friends. This method of news circulation creates a “bubble” or “chamber” where content is filtered down by personal preference while thoughts, beliefs, and opinions are echoed within the user’s online environment. Not only does this method reinforce polarizing views but it eliminates entry barriers, allowing creators and producers of fake news to manipulate the algorithmic curation to attract users and spread misinformation and fake news stories for political and financial purposes (Spohr 2017). Further examples in Burkhardt’s (2017) paper showed the influence of technology on the circulation of fake news stories, and how its effects have magnified due to lack of regulation and restrictions in online technology. Burkhardt (2017) discussed how the dissemination of news had always been thoroughly regulated and reviewed before reaching the public, whether through newspapers, the radio or television. However, at present, the freedom and unregulated nature of the Internet has contributed to the large masses of fake news stories being created and circulated online, causing confusion among society. The author also discussed the financial component of fake news that has made it a profitable and effective tool for advertisers and businesses (Burkhardt 2017).

## Librarians and Information Literacy

Information literacy has traditionally been associated with the field of librarianship as it initially emerged from the concept of bibliographic instruction which assisted information consumers with locating and retrieving information. The concept received great attention when the American Library Association (ALA) officially defined the term in 1989, claiming that an information-literate individual should recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (Tewell, 2015). In 2004, one of the leading library and information associations in the United Kingdom, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), developed its own definition for information which centred on knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use, and communicate it in an ethical manner. However, in 2018, this definition was reviewed to promote the broader function of information literacy which was applicable to various contexts, from education and the workplace to everyday life. CILIP agreed upon the revised definition as “the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use” (Secker 2018). It thus empowers individuals as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society. The concept has gradually transformed and adapted providing criteria for individuals to assess information and to ensure credibility and reliability. On a broader scale, information literacy has also been identified as a vital component of proactive citizenship as it enables one to locate, access, retrieve, evaluate, interpret, and act on information, which allows one to participate in community affairs, develop community involvement, and to have an informed opinion about problems occurring locally, nationally, and internationally. Information literacy is therefore recognized as a tool of empowerment which provides individuals with the necessary skills and competencies to become informed citizens who actively contribute and engage in their communities and in society.

A multitude of information literacy frameworks and models have emerged within the field of librarianship that are based on a criterion of skills used to inform and educate information consumers. Many of the frameworks were created to educate and teach students of higher education how to locate, evaluate, and utilize information ethically. However, broader definitions have arisen due to issues emerging from the information age including fake news. An example is CILIP's Information Literacy Model which contains eight competencies that an information-literate individual should have an understanding of:

- (1) A need for information,
- (2) The resources available,
- (3) How to find information,

- (4) Need to evaluate results,
- (5) How to work with or exploit results,
- (6) Ethics and responsibility of use,
- (7) How to communicate or share your findings,
- (8) How to manage your findings (Secker 2018).

The CILIP model forms a one-size-fits-all approach requiring an information literate person to demonstrate each competency. While the model presents the basic skills associated with information literacy, it offers a more generalized overview that fails to elaborate on how these skills may be applied to different situations and contexts.

## **Fake News and Library Initiatives**

In light of the ASUU prolonged 2022 strike and the increasing exposure to fake news stories and misleading clickbait, information professionals and librarians have to be positioned at the front lines of the information war. As the literature on libraries and their efforts to combat fake news is at an embryonic stage, initiatives and strategies are gradually emerging within the field. Using methods of library guides, fact-checking websites, and information literacy programs and advocacy, librarians are using all resources available to inform and educate the public about fake news in the form of both misinformation and disinformation to help empower people on how to navigate successfully through the online world. A research study conducted in 2016 by The Stanford History Education Group illustrated how students' ability to evaluate information was extremely weak (De Paor and Heravi 2020). The students were required to distinguish between a news item and an advertisement which many failed to do (Fullerton and Kendrick 2022). In addition, academic librarians have been some of the first in the field to combat these issues through the implementation of instructional programs, workshops, and guidelines. Librarians at Indiana University East of Richmond also developed a library known as "LibGuide" which offers students criteria of questions to ask when investigating the reliability and credibility of a source or piece of information (Banks 2016). Fake News LibGuides have also been developed in other parts of the world, including Newcastle University in the United Kingdom and University College Dublin and Maynooth University in Ireland. In addition to library guides, some universities have included fact-checking resources and websites to help students verify information accurately (Eva and Shea 2018). Some of these would include websites such as FactCheck, Politifact, Snopes, and The Washington Post Factchecker which have been awarded on their usefulness and effectiveness (Batchelor 2017).

One of the roles of librarians is to provide instructions and to inform communities and the public about fake news. Using information and media literacy, Dallas Public Library held an eight-week training course in community journalism for high-school students (Banks 2016). Librarians collaborated with reporters from the Dallas Morning News as well as local journalists to inform students about good and bad journalism. As part of the project titled “Storytellers with Boarders,” journalists taught students how to ask focused questions while librarians described how to use databases to find reliable information (Banks 2016). Oakland Public Library currently hosts interactive workshops within and outside of the library, with their staff travelling to local schools and organizations to help students discern real news from fake news (Eva and Shea 2018). Other methods that have originally emerged from academic libraries is the CARS and CRAAP tests which present a criterion which people of all educational backgrounds can utilize to verify information. The CARS method stands for credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support and has been used not only in higher-level institutions but in schools (Jacobson 2017). The CRAAP test, developed at Miriam Library at Chico in 2010, is an invaluable resource for patrons looking to evaluate and identify credible and reliable information (Batchelor 2017). The literature also highlights how librarians recognize the epidemic of fake news as an opportunity for change as well as for effective action.

Librarians have to develop different guidelines, infographics, workshops and programs to help inform and educate their patrons while also promoting their professional role as the original fact-checkers and information experts (Eva and Shea 2018). The American Library Association (ALA) have currently capitalized on the librarian as an information shepherd brand in their libraries. Similarly, Finley, McGowan, and Kluever (2017) discussed fake news as an opportunity for “real librarianship,” listing how libraries can actively participate in the global effort to combat the phenomenon. The authors further stated that the role of librarians is to accurately inform the general public about fake news and equip them with tools to navigate information sources which focus on collection development, programming and instruction, and advocacy (Finley, McGowan, and Kluever 2017). Regarding collection development, there must be access to print resources for news and current events to ensure that patrons are informed appropriately. Therefore, a multitude of credible news sources should be made available at both ends of the political spectrum. While quality control is central, librarians must navigate the metaphorical line between selection and censorship following their traditional values.

## Theoretical Framework

### The Conflict Theory

This work is anchored on conflict theory as a basis for analysis. Conflict theory is premised on disorder, disagreement, and open hostility among individuals and groups and a lack of harmony in system parts. In the perspective of conflict theory, normal and harmonious cooperation is unusual. Social structure is temporary and often fragile combination of competing social forces. In conflict perspective, the task of the social scientist is to examine the sources of tension among people and groups with different amount of powers, techniques of conflict control, and the ways in which the powerful maintain and enlarge their influence on all aspects of the social structure. In the conflict view, the social order at any particular moment is the outcome of struggles among groups of unequal power. The conflict perspective is concerned with who benefits from any given social arrangement. Conflict within society is expressed through public protests and industrial conflicts (strikes and lockouts) as in the 2022 FGN/ASUU industrial conflicts.

This theory is pertinent and relevant to this work in that it focuses on open disagreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) based on unresolved issues contained in the terms of the 2009 FGN/ASUU agreement and the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). While ASUU maintained that the FGN had breached the terms of the agreement, the Federal Government saw nothing wrong with repudiating some of the terms of the agreement. The relevance of the theory to this work hinged on disharmony and disequilibrium created among the two factions and the suspension of academic programs in the Nigerian University system for over seven months. We shall further explore the relevant application of this theory to the study as we progress throughout this paper. Another theory that is relevant to this discourse is the authoritarian media theory.

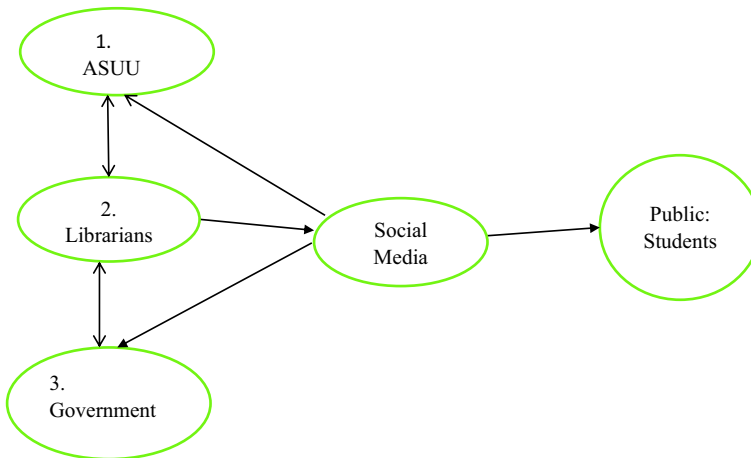
### The Authoritarian Media Theory

This theory, which was propounded in 1956 by Siebert Peterson and Schuman, postulates that the media should do nothing that would undermine established authority or disturb order; the media should always be subordinate to established authority; the media should avoid offending majority or dominating moral and political values; and censorship should be justified to enforce these principles; unacceptable attacks on authority, deviation from official policy or offences against moral codes should be criminal offences; and journalists or other media profes-

sionals should have no independence within their moral organization. In the authoritarian media theory, whether the ownership is public or private, the system exists to serve the interest of the government in power. Under this system, the government exercises control over the media in various ways.

In Nigeria, during the 2022 ASUU/FGN industrial conflict, the government used cruel and uncivilized methods to ensure that pro-ASUU protests in the country were suppressed and all such pro-ASUU protests were blacklisted from media coverage, especially government-owned media. In some cases, security personnel were drafted to the scheduled venues where ASUU members were to publicize their grievances to allow the Nigerian public to understand why its members were on strike. The theory is relevant to this discourse in that the government exercised control and curtailed ASUU activities that were designed to express their views to the public, and there was not only restriction to members by the use of instrumentality of the State, with freedom of speech and expression by ASUU members highly curtailed.

## Proposed Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework.

Figure 1 showed the conceptual framework for handling disinformation by the librarians. The librarians play a key role in filtering and mediating the sources of information before releasing it to the larger society. Put differently, fake news is generated for certain intent and purpose and thereafter is circulated on different

media platforms. The effect of disinformation on society if not managed by the information professionals may lead to crises such as protracted industrial strikes as in the case of ASUU in Nigeria. The librarians access current and accurate information directly from the government and ASUU and present it on the official social media handle of the library where the government officials, members of ASUU, and the students can access it. This framework will help to mitigate the spread of fake information regarding the dispute between the union and the government, thereby reducing recurrent protracted strike.

## Methodology

The study adopted the exploratory research design and secondary data was gathered using reports from ASUU executives and the government officials involved in the ASUU-related issues. Reactions from Nigerian students to some of the information on the Internet was also mined from the Twitter platform. Thematic analysis was done on the gathered data using the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis approach.

## Results and Discussion

### Information from Government Perspective

Ume-Ezeoke (August 18, 2022) reported that in the face of lingering industrial action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Minister of Education denied receiving a directive from the President to resolve the protracted strike in two weeks. During the weekly ministerial briefing on Thursday in Abuja, the Minister told State House Correspondents that the President had instead asked to resolve the issues within the shortest possible time, contrary to what the Minister of Labour and Employment told the media. The Minister insisted that they would not succumb to ASUU's demand for their members to be paid the backlog of salaries withheld within the period of six months that they were on strike, noting that it was the penalty for their action. The Minister also disclosed that five of the university-based unions would likely call off their strike within the next week while that of ASUU remained uncertain.

In an interview on Channels Television, Oluwafemi (September 7, 2022) reported that the Minister of Education said Nigerians did not have "good reasons" to be disappointed with the Federal Government over the lingering strike of the Aca-

ademic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). ASUU had been on strike since February 14 over improved funding for universities, review of salaries for lecturers and other issues. Several meetings between ASUU and the Federal Government had ended in deadlock, as the strike entered its two hundred and fifth day. On Tuesday, the federal government said it could only afford a 23.5 percent salary increase for lecturers of all categories, as well as a 35 percent increase for professors. Speaking on the effort of the federal government, the minister said the federal government had made the “best” offer to ASUU in order to resolve the ongoing strike: “The government has already made an offer. As the minister, I know that the offer the government made is probably the best it can make. You cannot do better than your best.” The Minister said it was not the fault of the federal government that ASUU had not suspended the strike: “If Nigerians are disappointed, I think they don’t have very good reasons to be disappointed with the government on this. Why should they be disappointed? Just tell me in your opinion. How is it the fault of the government and not that of the union? You can only blame the federal government if it refuses to do what it is supposed to do and make the offer to satisfy their demands. There is no demand that can be satisfied 100 percent by any government.”

Abdullah (August 18, 2022) reported that the ongoing industrial action by the Academic Union of Universities may linger. According to the Minister, ASUU had agreed with the government’s recent offer to them and also agreed to call off the strike if the Federal Government paid them for the period they had been on strike. The Minister, however, said the government would not pay them for those months, saying that it was simply applying the law relating to their action. He said that apart from ASUU, ASUP, NASU, and SSANU, other striking unions would be called off by next month.

Ukwu (May 13, 2022) reported that: “ASUU Strike: we have reached a reasonable agreement with lecturers. We have reached some agreements and we hope that by next week, those agreements will be maturing and the different unions will have something to tell their members so that they can call off the strike.” This was according to the Minister of Labour.

The Nation (September 19, 2022) reported that the ongoing strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) would have dragged on for two years because of a lack of progress in negotiations, with the Minister of Labour and Employment saying: “If I leave them in education they will stay there two years without progress.” The Minister addressed the audience at the public presentation of a book which chronicled the labour movement’s struggles over 40 years in the country on Monday. He said he referred the dispute to the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) after negotiations between the union and the Federal Ministry of Education had broken down and shared that the case of ASUU was referred to the NICN in line with section 17 of the Trade Dispute Act 2004 after

seven months of protracted discussions and negotiations with the union had failed. The Minister noted that the leadership of ASUU did not understand the importance of negotiation because they lacked the necessities of labour unionism: “We have to counsel our brothers on negotiation. No negotiation is forced. You cannot say it is either you give me 200 per cent or I will continue my strike. There are laws guiding strikes.” He said either of the parties involved, the Federal Ministry of Education and ASUU could approach the NICN for an out-of-court settlement and maintained that Nigeria must be guided by laws and nobody should use the dispute to harangue anybody. He recalled that ASUU was at the stage of collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiation with their employer, the Federal Ministry of Education, when they embarked on strike.

Olisah (April 4, 2022) reported that the Minister of Labour and Employment had accused the members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) of intimidation and bullying and threatened to withdraw the certificate of the Director-General of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and revoke the professorship of the Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, calling him a fake professor. This was made known when he was a guest on a Channels Television program, *Politics Today*, where he described such action as against labor negotiations. The Minister said that calling off of the strike depended on ASUU and urged them to come down from their high horse as well as to be considerate.

## ASUU’s Perspective

The ASUU NEC meeting in University of Lagos (2022) concluded from the meeting that the government had failed to fully implement the Memorandum of Action it signed with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on December 23, 2020, given that the draft report of the Renegotiated 2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement was submitted for finalization more than nine months previously, and noted that the forceful payment of ASUU members’ salaries and emoluments with the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) and non-adoption of the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) continued to short-change their members. NEC thus resolved to embark on a four-week roll-over total and comprehensive strike action beginning from Monday, February 14, 2022.

Similarly, ASUU strike bulletin (3) asserted that the pronouncement by government that N92 billion was paid to ASUU as earned allowance was misleading, aimed at deceiving the public and causing confusion. The truth was that there is a balance of two tranches amounting to N40 billion yet to be paid.

The ASUU strike bulletin (4) proved that members should completely disregard the press release by NITDA. The report was completely different from the report of its Technical Team that tested UTAS. The union asserted that UTAS was subjected to a series of tests in the presence of other observers from agencies of government as stakeholders. The NITDA Technical Team scored UTAS 99.3% before and after remediation, however, there was false information on the social media negating the actual score.

Finally, the ASUU strike bulletin (5) asserted that the agents of government were redoubling their efforts at misinforming, misleading, and twisting facts relating to the union struggle to the Nigerian public, particularly the concerned students and their parents. The union emphatically stressed that this was aimed at dividing the union and sowing the seed of hatred against the patriotic struggle.

Tolu-Kolawole (August 18, 2022) reported that the Academic Staff Union of Universities on Thursday said it “had no words” for the Minister of Education. The PUNCH reported that the education minister, during the forty-seventh Session of the State House Ministerial Briefing organized by the Presidential Communications Team at the Aso Rock Villa, Abuja, said that ASUU should compensate students for the period wasted. The Minister also said the government would not pay the university workers for the time lost.

Daily Trust (August 27, 2022) reported that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had called on Nigerians to hold the Minister of Education and the Federal Government responsible for the prolonged strike. The union said that the government was not sincere in dealing with them, and more so, what the Federal Government was telling the people about their negotiations was not the truth. It was further said that the Minister had also said that whatever was written about the ASUU was believable: “You may recall that when asked to make comments on ASUU’s submission to the President on Tuesday, the 9th of January, 2020, the Minister agreed with what ASUU presented upon which the President handed him ASUU’s document and directed him to come up with a proposal for an amicable solution. For the same Minister to now lead his colleagues and the other ministers to misrepresent facts and mislead the good people of Nigeria against ASUU is rather unfortunate. It is the highest level of unpatriotic disservice a minister would do particularly in a sector like education which is the backbone of the development of any country.”

Olisah (June 23, 2022) reported that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had maintained that they had not received any official invitation from the Federal Government for the earlier announced meeting with the government team aimed at resolving the areas of disagreements and calling off the strike.

## Students' Comments on ASUU Strike on Twitter

ASUU: "Speaker of the House of Representative Deceived Us to Call Off Strike."

Anonymous\_1: "This handsome man cannot deceive someone because he has human feelings and he understands it was affecting the students . . . Talk another story again 😊😊."

Anonymous\_2: "Lol look for another story, we all know y'all are trying to get engagement."

Anonymous\_3: "Let them go for indefinite strike. Because there is increment of school fees too much."

Anonymous\_4: "Be like say God won punish all you these ASUU people . . ."

Anonymous\_5: "So with this information are we meant to start crying? Ahbi you people want to start what won't be easily settled."

### #ASUU\_StrikeUpdate

Reps: "For the record, at no point did the Speaker of the House of Representatives commit to offset the arrears of salaries owed to union members for the time they were on strike."

Unnamed source\_1 (in response to another post): "I am sorry but this is shameless. Are you saying ASUU or number 4 man is going back on their words?"

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), of the Federal University Lokoja (FUL) Branch, has called for the sacking of the Minister of Labour and Employment as well as the Minister of Education over their incompetence (November 30, 2022).

Unnamed source\_2: "I swear, it's insane what our government has ruined our education to. I'm still learning the 1982 policy for some subjects in school and maybe it's grandchildren (not my own) that will use 2022's new scheme and policies, I want to rant more but make I just end it here."

Unnamed source\_3: "ASUU and government when will this strike stop, keep hearing of this since I was born, education doesn't make any sense in Nigeria again."

The National Executive Council (NEC) of the Academic Staff Union of Universities #ASUU will be meeting on the August 1 2022. They are considering an indefinite strike this time around, and not the usual roll-over warning strike.

July 2022 comment by unnamed source\_4: "But let the federal government also understand that if nothing happens to end the ASS STRIKE we the Nigeria student will also stand by our grounds and there will be no elections comes 2023."

Unnamed source\_5: "Inside strike another strike go [sic] dey."

Unnamed source\_6: "This is terrible huh indefinite strike? How about the five months of no studies? FG are not helping matters at all. Kept everyone at home. This is horrible, cruel and any word to define wickedness."

## Impact of Disinformation and Fake News on the ASUU Strike

ASUU is an organized trade union of intellectuals seeking the socio-political and economic welfare of its members and promoting the cause of university education in the country as well as the entire good of Nigeria and all Nigerians therein. Since its birth in 1978, ASUU has never halted in its struggle for the reforming of education in Nigeria which is in dire need of such benevolent and indispensable effort. ASUU's main efforts have been to secure adequate funding, improved salary packages, autonomy, and academic freedom to curb the brain drain and ensure the survival of the university system. Consistent failings have, however, been occasioned by the government's frustrating attitude towards the growth of the academic sector. Notwithstanding this barrier, ASUU has, however, had a social impact which has come to effect through its relentless efforts.

The impact of disinformation and fake news on the prolonged academic staff union strikes in Nigerian universities is a complex and multifaceted issue. Throughout the strike periods, disinformation and fake news have played a significant role in shaping public perception, exacerbating tensions, and hindering the resolution of disputes. One of the key consequences of disinformation and fake news is the distortion of facts and narratives surrounding the strikes. False or misleading information, often spread through social media platforms, can easily fuel misinformation and misinterpretations among the public. This can lead to a polarized environment where different stakeholders hold divergent views and are less willing to engage in constructive dialogue.

Furthermore, disinformation and fake news can create a sense of distrust and skepticism towards the academic staff union and the university administration. The spread of false information can undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the parties involved, making it even more challenging to find common ground and negotiate fair resolutions. It can also contribute to the erosion of public confidence in the higher education system as a whole. The use of disinformation and fake news as a tool for manipulation and influence is a concerning trend in the context of university strikes. Various actors, including external entities, political interests, or even internal factions, may exploit disinformation to advance their agendas, further complicating the resolution process and impeding the restoration of normalcy in Nigerian universities.

Addressing the issue of disinformation and fake news requires a multifaceted approach. It involves promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among the public to enable them to distinguish between reliable sources and misinformation by librarians. Educational campaigns and awareness programs can play a vital role in empowering individuals to become responsible consumers and sharers of information. Collaboration between stakeholders, including aca-

dem staff, university administrators, librarians, students, and the government, is crucial in countering the effects of disinformation. Open and transparent communication channels should be established, allowing for accurate information dissemination and proactive debunking of false narratives. Fact-checking organizations and independent media can also play a vital role in verifying information and providing accurate reporting.

The prolonged academic staff union strikes in Nigerian universities have been significantly impacted by the spread of disinformation and fake news. These phenomena have hindered the resolution of the strikes, perpetuated mistrust among stakeholders, and distorted public perception. Combating disinformation requires a concerted effort from various actors to promote media literacy, foster open communication, and ensure the availability of reliable information sources. By addressing the issue of disinformation with librarians playing their roles as expected, Nigerian universities can work towards more constructive dialogue, effective negotiation processes, and a stronger higher education system.

## Conclusion

The issue of disinformation, fake news, and the prolonged Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike in Nigeria highlights the critical role that librarians can play in promoting reliable information, combating misinformation, and fostering an informed society. Disinformation and fake news have become significant challenges in today's digital age, where information spreads rapidly and often without proper verification. The ASUU strike in Nigeria, which has caused significant disruptions in the educational system, has been subject to various forms of misinformation and propaganda. False narratives, distorted facts, and misleading content have contributed to the confusion surrounding the strike, exacerbating the negative impacts on students, parents, and the broader society.

Librarians, as information professionals, are uniquely positioned to address these challenges. They possess the expertise in information literacy, critical thinking, and research skills necessary to navigate the complex landscape of information. Librarians can serve as gatekeepers of reliable information by curating trustworthy resources, providing guidance on fact-checking and source evaluation, and promoting media literacy among students and the wider community.

Furthermore, librarians can actively engage in debunking false information and disseminating accurate information related to the ASUU strike. They can collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as educators, journalists, and policymakers, to counter disinformation campaigns and promote evidence-based discus-

sions. Librarians can leverage their skills in information organization and retrieval to create comprehensive databases, digital repositories, and online platforms that offer verified and up-to-date information about the strike, ensuring transparency and accountability.

In addition, librarians can play a vital role in educating individuals about the dangers of disinformation and fake news. They can conduct workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to teach students and the general public about the importance of critical thinking, media literacy, and responsible information consumption. By empowering individuals with the necessary skills to discern credible information from falsehoods, librarians contribute to the development of an informed citizenry that can actively participate in shaping public discourse and making well-informed decisions.

## Recommendations

1. There should be an increased information literacy campaign by libraries.
2. The libraries should endeavour to access information from government officials and ASUU documents and disseminate this information fairly and responsibly.
3. The libraries should provide official handles where government officials, ASUU members, and students can access reliable and accurate information resources.

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