Research article

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Information ACTism in “Trumping” the Contemporary Fake News Phenomenon in Rural Libraries

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Abstract: Fabricated or fake news has become a phenomenon of unprecedented proportions in the 21st century. Donald J. Trump, the 45th and current President of the United States, has played a major role in its pervasive adoption and spread of misinformation and disinformation since his ascendancy on November 8, 2016. In today’s complex political landscape, this article introduces the gerund and present participle “trumping” in mock homage to the fake news legacy of President Trump. “Trumping” simultaneously symbolizes a seemingly contradictory act of subversive and patriotic resistance for libraries to counter his fake news rhetoric to further his political ends. It calls for rural libraries (amongst others) to embrace a multi-pronged approach of information ACTism that draws upon intersections in information literacy-fluency-advocacy in their “trumping” actions to resist the President’s unhealthy behaviors since rural communities (and others) continue to be especially susceptible to his negativity and use of fake news. This think piece is based on analysis of selected news media coverage and provides libraries out-of-the-box strategies to lead their communities towards critical and reflective analytical political decision-making in the face of fake news bombardment emerging from a person in the highest office of the land.

Keywords: information ACTism, rural libraries, “trumping”, fake news.

“Breaking news, fresh gossip, tiny scandals, trumped-up crises-every day we are distracted by a culture that rings our doorbell and runs away. Stories spread wildly and die out in mere days, to be replaced by still more stories with shorter life spans. The rise of the Internet has quickened the churn, because all of us can join the fray: anyone on a computer can spread a story almost as easily as The New York Times, CNN, or People.”

Bill Wasik (2009) in *And Then There’s This: How Stories Live and Die in Viral Culture*.

A decade later, fabricated or fake news has continued to become an everyday phenomenon of unprecedented proportions in the 21st century (Cooke, 2017). Donald J. Trump, the 45th and current President of the United States (POTUS), has played a major role in its pervasive adoption and the resulting spread of misinformation and disinformation since his ascendancy on November 8, 2016 (Irwin, 2017; Rosen, 2017). He has weaponized fake news as a tool to further his political capital, “turning its meaning on its head” to often ingeniously attack and even “discredit the non-fake news sources that might keep his power in check,” amongst other political agendas (Graves, 2018, par. 6). Scott Pelley of the *CBS News* (2017) reported in *60 Minutes* that President Trump assigned the term “fake news” to any news, whatsoever, which he disagrees with, irrespective of its information accuracy, authenticity, authority, or source.

From an information perspective, the POTUS’ recent wholehearted use of fake news and “alternative facts” in his direct communications with the public via social media and other outlets has many problematic implications since it accentuates (and relates to) deep cracks in the practice of American democracy (Cooke,

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2018). Foremost is the troublesome intertwining role of information and the news media in its production and delivery in what has today become a murky business of developing an informed citizenry to participate in the democratic decision-making process (Boczkowski and Papacharissi, 2018). Unfortunately, it represents a dirty nexus of American politics with the news media entertainment-information industry, embedded in our consumerist capitalist society gone berserk beyond precedent as governed, in its apparent transparency, by greed, power, lies, and deception at all levels (Mehra, 2017).

In this complex political landscape and its information legacy that has resulted in the furthest we are from fairness, truth, and authentic democracy, this article introduces the gerund and present participle “trumping” in mock homage to the fake news legacy of President Trump. “Trumping” simultaneously symbolizes a seemingly contradictory act of subversive and patriotic resistance for libraries to counter his fake news rhetoric that he has used to advance his political ends. It calls for library agencies (and others) to embrace a multi-pronged approach of information ACTism that draws upon intersections in information literacy-fluency-advocacy in their “trumping” actions to resist the President’s unhealthy behaviors.

Information ACTism in rural communities is most pertinent since they (as others) continue to be especially susceptible to the President’s negativity and use of fake news (Hessler, 2017). For every fake news, his tweets run rampant to cement his illegitimacy based on false information in rural communities (and elsewhere) among his base of white working-class voters on issues that distinguished them from non-Trump voters in their attitudes toward Hillary Clinton, evaluations of the economy, views about illegal immigration, and views about Muslim immigration (Ekins, 2017), to name a few. A later section in the article illustrates the connection to fake news as the reason Trump won with select evidence of news coverage about fake news related to these issues and topics that re-affirm the biased attitudes of Trump voters. The coverage serves as proof of indirect ties (if not direct) of fake news and rural communities that go beyond more than co-incidental. It calls for critical reflection of the POTUS’ victory in these parts of the country (as well as in other regions).

The focus of this research-based opinion narrative is towards identifying a strategic direction for all libraries (including those in rural areas) to adopt a more active role, beyond their historical and outdated stance as neutral passive information providers (Lewis, 2008). This think piece is based on analysis of selected news media coverage and provides rural libraries (and others) out-of-the-box strategies to lead their communities towards critical and reflective analytical political decision-making in the face of fake news bombardment emerging from a person in the highest office of the land.

Of course, the matter is more complex with layered nuances and ambiguities. The article’s focus on rural libraries and fake news is not exclusive to those settings and does not mean this critique is not related to other environments. Since the POTUS won in rural areas it is important to discuss how his victory could have been related to fake news (Leatherby, 2016). Even if the article is not about the coasts and non-rural communities where Trump may have lost, the insights are relevant to all kinds of libraries, everywhere. Maybe, people in all communities fell prey to fake news, as all of us might have owing to the ubiquitous nature of its delivery and the limited tools that were available to us to decipher its source/content/message as a result of blurred lines between the politics-entertainment-information business (Kavanaugh, 2018; Novella, Novella, Maria, Novella, and Bernstein, 2018). Ignorance is assigned to all communities and individuals who relied on fake news as legit and authoritative to inform and dictate their decisions, thereby, shaping emergence of misinformed voting patterns, across party lines. Maybe, this problematic contextual reality provides a potential opportunity for all libraries and information agencies (including those in rural areas) to re-examine their existing (and limited) roles and service responses, and, how they can (and should) consider to elevate themselves in considerate ways from providers to interpreters of accurate and authoritative information, beacons of knowledge, and shapers of informed decisions (Garcia and Nelson, 2007; Nelson, 2008). Having said that, the critique developed in this article and the relevance of information ACTism is to all libraries and information agencies involved in the processes of information creation-organization-management-dissemination activities even though the focus here is on rural libraries.

1 (The Need for) “Trumping” Fake News

As long as people consume news there is money to be made (and other benefits) for those who create, produce, deliver, and disseminate the contained message in a variety of “container” news packets and forms that are distributed in today’s day and age (Mumby and Spitzack, 1983; Zhongdang and Kosicki, 1993). What better way to further the consumption of news and gain political and/or financial clout by manipulating the public’s need to be entertained? This is not a novelty, news as a global “infotainment” business has recently been much written about (Anderson, 2004; Thussu, 2007).

In communist regimes like China and the dismantled Soviet Union the political messages contained in the news and its production and delivery for public consumption were controlled by repressive governments in power (Stan, 2009; Zhao, 2012). There was no question about it, so the Western news media has proclaimed for many decades. In the United States, however, for a long time the illusionary garb of a tainted democracy and its rhetoric has veiled from the public eye the reality nexus between the political actors, news industry as a business, and its entertainment commodification (Chomsky, 2011; Mennitti, 2017). Or maybe, recent analysis of the new lows in public confidence has really been ongoing and was part of the historical public overlooking of these corrupt connections, dysfunctional to the enactment of democratic processes, owing to a corrosive public cynicism (or public disillusionment) that implicated an unhealthy media framing of political news (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Stone and Kuznick, 2012).

The POTUS’s consistent perpetuation and use of fake news to further his political leverage, making millions of dollars for media conglomerates along the way, has made the need for “trumping” of fake news never as urgent and immediate as it is today (Klaas, 2017). This is also significantly tied to the emergence of fake news as core and center of practice in the political arena, becoming a “journalistic cliché” and rage in all mainstream media channels as documented in its almost complete history by the *BBC* (Wendling, 2018). For example, according to the Fact Checker at *The Washington Post*, on May 31, 2018, President Trump had made 3001 false or misleading claims in the 466 days since he took oath of office (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly, 2018).

Recently, an important consequence of the openness about the fake news phenomenon has made transparent some ugly truths about American consumerism, political lies, and news hypocrisy, in the process exposing the nakedness, warts and all. The *Collins Dictionary* dubbed “fake news” the 2017 “Word of the Year” with a 365 percent jump in use since the previous year (Meza, 2017). From the time of taking office, it is the most common attack term President Trump has used to smear journalists, distort truth, and “with the help of his 48 million Twitter followers and the most powerful political platform in the world...to disrupt and obfuscate the flow of truthful information than anything spread by some spurious websites on Facebook” (Flood, 2017; Graves, 2018).

President Trump is reliant on (and has even assisted) the very large media organizations he despises by using fake news strategies. For example, “feeding off the fumes of Trump’s whirling-dervish presidency,” in its first 100 days, and since, three major cable-news networks established high viewership records with *Fox News* recording the best quarter in cable news history, *MSNBC*’s growth of more than 50 percent in both daytime and primetime, and *CNN* achieving double-digit growth over its sensational 2016 ratings (Thompson, 2017). Similarly, *The New York Times* announced record growth in digital subscriptions, which more than doubled since early 2016, and other national newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, the *Financial Times*, and the *New Yorker*, have all reported huge increases in reader support, after years of sluggishness or wanes (Doctor, 2017). Many industries and businesses (even those the POTUS complained about spreading misinformation) have experienced boosts in their financial prospects, included in the top are *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Saturday Night Live*, immigration attorneys, for-profit prison companies, amongst others (Picchi, 2017). As President, many of the companies he criticized using both correct or incorrect information on social media have thrived after his negative tweets (Kim, 2018). His steady tweets led one forecaster to assess worth as much as \$2 billion to Twitter, writing “there is no better free advertising in the world than the president of the United States” in his notes (Castillo, 2018). Human rights activists and members of the media have seen the dangers of a global fake news backlash in what they call a post-truth environment from serving as “thin end of the censor’s wedge” to a smokescreen for

muzzling the press to government attempts in restraining journalists perceived to peddle falsehoods, and regimes pushing for libel laws punishable by prison and heavy fines, or worse (Financial Times, 2018). The Committee to Protect Journalists conducted a police census that documented imprisonment of at least 21 journalists in six different countries on charges related to “fake news” in 2017, a figure double from the previous year (Ibrahim, 2018). Even Pope Francis has warned against “fake news” comparing it to a “crafty serpent” in the Genesis saying that it is a “sign of intolerant and hypersensitive attitudes, and leads only to the spread of arrogance and hatred” (Flores, 2018).

So, a worthwhile question to consider is that what if despite such warnings, and/or, after an involvement in their fact-checking, people (in rural areas, or otherwise) still plan to vote for Trump, irrespective of the barrage of constant fake news emerging from the nation’s highest office? And, why should the library care, and what can it do that will make a difference? Arguments to explain trends of continued Trump-support are out there, including that the public does not care, its hypersensitivity to imagined/real threats, they believe in his “perceived authenticity” or that his lies are a mark of “symbolic protest” of establishment norms, his “terror management” skills and “high attentional engagement”, his base is unaware they are uninformed (i.e., The Dunning-Kruger Effect), public vote is dependent only on the specific issue that is important to them, they recognize that all politicians lie, facts are not in the nature of the political work, and many others (Azarian, 2016; 2018; Lieberman, 2017; Tanner, 2018; Woodward, 2018). The reason all kinds of libraries (including those in rural areas) should care is because it is their professional job to be in the service, business, and industry of delivery and effective use of the information they provide (Prentice, 2010). Inclusiveness in representing all perspectives pervades all the six Articles of the *Library Bill of Rights* that was initially adopted on June 19, 1939, and amended several times since by the American Library Association Council (1996). Historically, libraries are considered as forums for provision and use of accurate, authoritative, and current information that can assist in balanced decision-making (Downey, 2017; Wright, 2013). Resisting censorship, protecting intellectual freedom, facilitating free expression, and supporting democracy are cornerstones of the profession that are not based on acceptance of falsehood and lies to run amok (Alfino and Koltutsky, 2014; Pinnell-Stephens, 2012). Integrating information ACTism in their practices is one strategy that libraries can adopt to put a brake on the President’s non-presidential behavior.

2 Characteristics of Rural Communities

Most past federal and academic approaches to develop rural-urban classifications have been limited since they reflect a “threshold trap” that groups counties as entities with homogeneous characteristics rather than recognizing that they exist more along a continuum (Mehra, Bishop, and Partee II, 2017). For example, according to the United States Census Bureau, rural may be defined as areas with fewer than 2,500 people with low population density. Another intersecting consideration of rural area is anything that is not deemed an “urban area,” which is defined as a spatial entity with population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and for which the surrounding area units have population density of at least 500 people per square mile (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, and Fields, 2016). A recently adopted Index of Relative Rurality (IRR), developed for the Purdue Center for Regional Development by Dr Brigitte Waldorf (2007), based on a continuum scale instead of discrete categories, considers a combination of four factors (i.e. total population, population density, percentage of residents living in urban areas and distance to metropolitan areas) while defining rural versus urban. According to Director John H. Thompson of the United States Census Bureau (2016a), about sixty million people, or one in five, live in rural America representing “97 percent of the nation’s land area but contain 19.3 percent of the population.”

As the nation’s largest household survey, The *American Community Survey: 2011-2015* (United States Census Bureau, 2016b) presents an annual dataset for all of the country’s 3,142 counties and identifies relevant socio-economic characteristics of rural America. For example, of the approximate 47 million adults 18 years and older living in rural areas, a higher percentage compared to their urban counterparts were: veterans (10.4 percent compared with 7.8); older with a median age of 51 years as compared to 45 years; home-owners (81.1 percent compared with 59.8); more likely to live in single-family homes (78.3 percent

compared with 64.6); living in their state of birth (65.4 percent compared with 48.3); and, born in the USA (96 percent compared with 81); comparatively to urban residents, people in rural areas were also richer (11.7 percent rate of poverty compared with 14.0) and less likely with a bachelor’s degree or higher (19.5 percent compared with 29.0). Additionally, the new Census shows a more complex portrait of rural America contrary to public perception including aspects like (Misra, 2016): the group is not monolithic; they are not all farmers; most live in the East with 60 percent of the rural population east of the Mississippi and almost half in the South, not the West or Midwest; economically it is complicated with equivalent earning income but lower poverty levels as compared to urban areas. Mara Casey Tieken, a professor of education at Bates College, has warned of the following concerns in media discourse regarding American rural communities related to (Illing, 2017): the unfortunate euphemism of “rural America” standing for “white America” since roughly one-fifth of rural residents are people of color; a common thread of whiteness in both the overwhelming rural stereotypes of a romanticized or the backward; material gaps between rural white and rural communities of color and the latter’s marginalization; high racial segregation and consequential implications in rural communities; deep rural roots of racial divides; surrendering by progressives of rural America to Republicans; and, the media ignoring and marginalizing rural communities.

3 Fake News Susceptibility of Rural Communities

The following select examples illustrate the use of fake news on topics that distinguished the POTUS’ rural base of white working-class voters and provided him a political advantage in gathering their support during and since the 2016 presidential election campaign. First, is the topic of the President’s use of fake news to perpetuate bias and negative attitudes toward Hillary Clinton amongst his rural white support base. A recent study suggests the impact of at least two false news related to Hillary Clinton, namely, her poor health and her sanction of weapons sales to ISIS and other Islamic jihadists, might have contributed in winning Donald Trump the 2016 election (Blake, 2018). Researchers Richard Gunther, Paul A. Beck and Erik C. Nisbet (2018) from the Ohio State University concluded that these false news items slanting actualities about Hillary Clinton in the public eye substantially influenced the voting choices of a tactically significant group of voters, namely, those who supported Barack Obama in 2012 in the three crucial divisive frontline states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin where Clinton lost each by a margin of less than 1% point that denied her an Electoral College victory. In her attempt to mold public opinion, presidential daughter-in-law Lara Trump tweeted fake news about Clinton and Obama linking them to Saul Alinsky, a Chicago-based community organizer, via an hysterical article entitled “Beware the Useful Idiots” meant to terrorize Americans with tyranny and poverty that he never even wrote (Silva, 2017). President Trump has himself used fake news to perpetuate negative attitudes towards Hillary Clinton. For example, he accused her of lying but the FBI said she did not (Timm, 2017). Donald Trump’s continued fixation with Hillary Clinton in his spread of fake news about her in many more instances has now become recognized as symptomatic of a deeper problem with American politics “toward sideshow and shock value” as well as his unhealthy psychological affirmation and political gambit to perpetuate a “policy of ‘no policy’” that has “vanished beneath the surface-level distractions of identity and adversarial politicking” (Harveston, 2018).

Another area of the POTUS’ use of fake news to mobilize his rural vote-base is regarding the evaluations of the economy. President Trump has made half-baked, inflated, and premature assessments touting arms manufacturing as a sign of economic development (politicalforum.com, 2017): “I’ve just returned from a trip overseas where we concluded nearly \$350 billion of military and economic development for the United States, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.” According to a U. S. Department of Commerce report (2017) the country had a trade surplus with more than 100 countries though the President reported “We have trade deficits with almost every country because we had a lot of really bad negotiators making deals with other countries” (Dale, 2017). The role of social media in the destruction of the economy and loss of public values in the process of collecting public opinion has been in fact identified earlier, just not the active and persistent use by the President (Keen, 2008). Recently, the President has hyped claims on the economy and “twisted it out of proportion” contrary to facts, including falsely stating that we have “accomplished an

economic turnaround of historic proportions,” lowering of the trade deficit for a positive reason, current economy best in the history of the country, misinformation about the Canadian economy being “totally closed” and more (Yen, Boak, and Rugaber, 2018). In the *Learning from China – Blog*, author John Ross (2018) presents factual data as evidence to challenge several of President Trump’s “clearly fraudulent claims on US economic growth.”

Another topic that got President Trump’s white working-class rural voters emotionally fired up during the 2016 election campaign and since is related to illegal immigration, a response that he has manipulated no end in his use of fake news on the subject (Kaufmann, 2019). Press commentary and journalists have opined that illegal immigration and “the wall” won Trump the 2016 election and is helping him in the polls since (Root, 2018). Within twenty days after the 2016 Presidential Election results were declared, then President-elect Trump tweeted several false assertions (soon debunked) including winning the Electoral College in a “landslide” and his popular vote loss owing to the casting of 3 million votes by illegal aliens (Jacobson, 2016). A list of Trump’s deception on involvement of illegal immigrants in voter fraud has been compiled including his misrepresentation of a 2012 Pew Center’s report, falsely claiming it supported his assertion that millions of people voted illegally when actually it only documented 24 million instances of voter registration inaccuracies (Farley, 2017). Recently, President Trump blasted the “Fake News Media” (i.e., in his opinion those who disagree with him or challenge him) for intentionally not including the context of his comment referring specifically to MS-13 gang members as “animals”, instead of all illegal immigrants (Anapol, 2018). He made false claims that Nancy Pelosi “came out in favor of MS-13,” in his quest to cast Democrats as apathetic to battle crime and emphasize his government’s aim to imprison or expel illegal immigrants from the United States (Valverde, 2018).

Further, the Muslim immigrant’s experience in the United States has been fraught with obstacles and prejudice owing to divergent convictions and dogmas from White Christian Americans that have been intensified by President Trump’s policies, proclamations, and use of fake news to ferment hostilities towards them (Hwang and Pang, 2017). The POTUS proposed an executive order banning Muslim immigrants from entering the United States and made transparent his ultimate goal to have a Muslim ban from seven predominantly Muslim countries (Yuhas & Sidahmed, 2017). Donald Trump’s “blatant misogyny and anti-immigrant xenophobia” emerged center stage of his political campaign to “normalize Islamophobia as part of the current national Republican Party platform” (Iftikhar, 2016). President Trump’s regular distribution of bigoted misinformation spreading anti-Muslim sentiments with the intention of creating public associations between immigration and violent crime played an important role in determining the election outcome (Cavari and Powell, 2017). Blogger Nina Mast (2017) claims that the newly inaugurated President’s spread of xenophobic fake news that a terrorist attack had taken place in Sweden and the false story of a juvenile sex crime in heartland Idaho was incited by matching zealous anti-immigrant prejudice energized by exaggerated right-wing fake news ecosystem. *The New York Times* has provided a recent fact check correcting several of the president’s false and misleading claims about Germany’s crime and Muslim immigration (Schuetze and Wolgelenter, 2018).

These few select examples illustrate use of fake news, distributed via social media and other outlets, to manipulate public support and gain victory during the last presidential election on issues that were core to Trump-voters. They call for an increased authoritative presence, “a human intervention at social media companies” of sorts to “engage in warfare” against fake news (Gutsche, 2018). In this context, Rawlinson (2016) argued in the *Guardian* that “a critical eye is becoming more, not less crucial.” This argument is applicable to all libraries, whether rural or urban, to advocate and take-action against fake Trump news. Maybe next election, more urban voters will believe fake news and he will be re-elected again. And, so the focus on strategies for rural libraries in this article will obviously be applicable to/for all communities where he might win in the future because of spreading fake news and misinformation. Honesty should count for something after all for what the underlying principles in setting up the constitution meant (The Founding Fathers and Skousen, 2016).

4 Information ACTism in Rural Libraries

When such a “critical eye” beyond an editorial oversight is indeed needed even in the fake news birthplace womb of the corporate world of social media production and press newrooms, what about the mundane spaces where our everyday life experiences are more deeply embedded? The concept of information ACTism proposed in this article emerges in response to an urgent need in one such setting (not that it is irrelevant in other environments). The rural tracts in the United States with communities that form a large proportion of the total population are divided more culturally than economically from their urban counterparts and spread across nearly every state and region in the country (Delreal and Clement, 2017). The call for taking actions in challenging the whole business and politics of the fake news phenomenon in rural environments (and elsewhere) is more poignant with its deep roots at every level of American government, political media corporations, and cultural experience that we are seeing in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election (Barker, 2017). The article proposes that rural libraries (and others) play this role, swerving from their past and mainstream activities that have perpetuated a passive “neutral” stance in historical and contemporary practice (Carlton, 2018). The question is not about Democrat or Republican. Truth is truth, and fake news is fake news. It is about librarians putting a stop in justifying their position as flaccid bystanders in watching the rape of democracy of a sometimes-willing public at the hands of dirty politicians without actively attempting to stop it. “Dirty” here means that which is lying and deceitful, seeking only its own selfish gratification and narcissistic advancement of its own attention-hogging and/or imbalanced capitalist agendas.

As a potential tool for rural librarians (plus others), information ACTism links three concepts that is not entirely unfamiliar to them. However, the three constructs of information literacy, information fluency, and information advocacy remain disconnected in the library world, each with their strengths and shortcomings in theory and practice (Lloyd, 2010; Oakleaf, 2008). This section briefly introduces them and ties them together in information ACTism. For librarians and information professionals who cannot see beyond only acronyms where each letter is “standing for” something else that their world is commonly immersed in (especially academic librarians), there is no significance to the “A”, “C”, and the “T” separately in ACTism. The meaning emerges when the reader comprehends them together to act and take a proactive stance to put a stop to the POTUS’ dysfunctional politics we see today. The all caps plays the role as a signifier of assertively making the point. The author intentionally avoids the use of “activism” in the coinage for its incorrect usage in contemporary library land and misappropriate assignment in the same vein as “social justice” (Fiore, 2017). In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) Paulo Freire (1921–1997), the revolutionary Brazilian educational theorist, draws a distinction that “if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*” [italicize in the original], an “action for action’s sake” that “negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible” (p. 61). The author identifies with this not-so-subtle distinction that some librarians might chose to ignore, overlook, or not consider. In this article, ACTism represents a marriage of information literacy-fluency-advocacy as a tool for all librarians/information professionals (including rural librarians) to bridge their disconnections between these constructs in terms of the description and analysis in the following narrative.

For people, organizations, and nations to enjoy the benefits of the Information Age that emerged during the closing two decades of the last century, they need to become information literate and “be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989). Consequently, the “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” was approved by the Board of Directors of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ARCL) on January 18, 2000, at the Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association in San Antonio, Texas (Iannuzzi, 2000). The purpose of the ACRL standards was to shape the objectives, form, and practice of user instruction applying information literacy that the librarian could deliver to their patrons and user constituencies. Information literacy research and practice emerged from the academic library world and since has got integrated across different information settings in shaping significant international development of library programs and praxis as well (Bruce, 2011). It has been applied to inform and enhance learning of diverse communities across varied knowledge domains,

information constructs, user needs, and information environments. These include K-12 and higher education (Eisenberg, Lowe, and Spitzer, 2004); specific instructional practices, learning outcomes, and assessments (Burkhardt, 2016); reading instruction (Houck and Novak, 2016); media evaluation (Armstrong, 2008); digital resources (Perdew, 2016); fake news (2018); school media centers (Thomas, 2004); collaborations across disciplines (D'Angelo, Jamieson, Maid, and Walker, 2017); data management (Carlson and Johnston, 2015); basic computer and technology skills (List-Handley, Heller-Ross, O'Hara-Gonya, and Armstrong, 2013); science and engineering (O'Clair and Davidson, 2012); religious context and churches (Gunton, Bruce, and Stoodley, 2012); sexuality and composition studies (Alexander, 2008); amongst so many others areas.

In recent years, adopting perspectives shaped by critical literacy theories, scholars have recognized the problematic aspects of information literacy resulting in a confused practice of librarianship and library and information science (LIS) education owing to a limited (and/or outdated) understanding of complexities in the meanings of “literacy” (Elmborg, 2006; Pawley, 2004). Challenges have emerged in the professionals’ inability to “engage with critical literacies and with the larger epistemological questions raised by new technologies and postmodern reconstructions of discipline, knowledge and identity” (Luke and Kapitzke, 1999, p. 486). They failed to recognize the deeper rootedness of information literacy as a construct that is always in a “state-of-emerging” for their users, positioned as it is in the realities of cultural meaning and community belonging (Norgaard, Arp, and Woodard, 2003). Even today information literacy represents “system-centric” actions within a library’s point of view in what the institution (or people working there) can do to assist their users/patrons/customers in their information search, seeking, and use processes (Somerville, Mirijamdotter, and Collins, 2006).

Building on traditional digital literacies, the Global Digital Citizen Foundation defines a related concept of information fluency as the “skills you need to not only search for information, but to create useful knowledge that will help you effectively solve real-world problems” (Global Digital Citizen Foundation, n.d.) that is inclusive of the “5As”: Ask, Acquire, Analyze, Apply, and Assess (Wabisabi, n.d.). In “integrating technology with domain (discipline) specific knowledge, critical thinking, presentation, participation and communication skills” (iTeach2, n.d.), information fluency and its acknowledgement of “information use” moves closer to representing a “user-centric” perspective (Sharkey, 2013). It responds to a use-grounded definition of the user’s context, intentional commitment, and deliberate actions on the part of the information professional to respond to the user and their information-related realities, as well as the importance of collaboration between the library professional and the user to develop an effective interaction (Lombard, 2016). Information fluency builds on information literacy in terms of representing a “step-down” in the professional’s biased perspective from their high horse perceived position of power closer to ground-zero of the users’ experience and perception.

Both information literacy and information fluency are inward-looking in making their loci of what is happening within the library institution as a bastion of privilege in terms of what the librarians can do and/or what happens to the user respectively. What is missing, however, in both is a limited reference to community-level impact and socially relevant outcomes in what the librarians are doing (i.e., information literacy) and/or what the user is able to do (i.e., information fluency) as a result of becoming information literate or information fluent respectively. In this regard, information advocacy brings an externally-directed vision that focuses on community-level impacts of the librarian’s efforts in responding to, and addressing more head-on, the social, political, cultural, economic, and/or environmental realities in which their agencies are immersed. Advocacy with its roots in political science and community mobilization involves individuals or organizations taking actions and engaging in activities which aim to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions to change the status quo conditions (Mehra and Rioux, 2016). Even in its diverse forms such as social justice advocacy, budget advocacy, bureaucratic advocacy, express versus issue advocacy, health advocacy, ideological advocacy, interest-group advocacy, legislative advocacy, mass advocacy, media advocacy, special education advocacy, and many others, librarians have been slow in serving as advocates outside their networks, circles of power, and bastions of middle-class privilege (Hicks, 2016; Jaeger, et al., 2017). Information advocacy allows the librarian to take ownership of their quest to shape social/cultural values and resist dysfunctional practices such as

the political-news media nexus as part of the entertainment industry that the fake news phenomenon has recently represented. The term “dysfunctional” is used to highlight those aspects of the political behaviors that we are witnessing in the involvement of President Trump and other politicians in generating fake news that are counter to, and disruptive of, the enactment of democracy, in the spread and intentional use of misinformation and lies to shape public opinion and manipulate political clout.

A note to make about this form of reflective advocacy (ACTism) is also its distinction from the inward-looking definition propounded by the Public Library Association (n.d.), a division of the American Library Association, that considers it as “the process of acting on behalf of the public library to increase public funds and ensure that it has the resources need to be up to date ... critical to the success of libraries.” Such a limited conceptualization is narrow and solely library-centric on the website of a professional association that represents a public service agency and its historical rhetoric of engagement with communities to generate positive impact (de la McCook and Bossaller, 2017; Mehra, Rioux, and Albright, 2009). Unfortunate in this description is a conspicuous absence of venturing out to make a difference in external communities of which public libraries are a part of, and, that financially support them via the tax-payer’s contributions (Lankes, 2016). Within such a limited historical and contemporary legacy, it is not surprising the professions have encountered strong resistance from within to change from their passive role and “neutral” stance (Gregory and Higgins, 2013; Moreillon, 2018; Shirley and Baharark, 2017).

Information ACTism brings together the system-user-community centricities we have historically seen shifted in their adoption in information research and library practice. It recognizes the importance of all three, only in relation to each other, in response to the unhealthy 21st century trends such as the politician’s involvement (including the POTUS) in the widespread fake news phenomenon, use of social media technologies in their communications with the public, and the advent of digital information (Kegley and Blanton, 2014). Rural libraries can pursue the following select strategies of information ACTism to resist and challenge the contemporary fake news occurrences:

- Create LibGuides and resources on the topic of fake news that can include lists of resources that are archiving use of fake news by the president (e.g., Leonhardt and Thompson, 2017) and other politicians as well lies and abuses perpetuated by companies and businesses.
- Market and make available these resources via venturing outside their bastions of privilege (e.g., churches, schools, voting venues, grocery stores, banks, etc.) to make available these resources in multiple formats.
- Collaborate with external stakeholders to develop initiatives and alliances that cross various domains including those related to agriculture, diversity, economy, education, environment, government public policy, health, information technology, law and justice, manufacturing and industry, and social welfare, amongst others (Mehra, Singh, and Sikes, 2018).

Rural libraries, and all information agencies involved in the delivery and use of information, might also further their role in information ACTism to engage in information literacy-fluency-advocacy activities via their traditional and non-traditional practices (Dice, 2017). Every opportunity that the rural librarians (and others) can muster up should be directed towards exposing the untruths that the fake news phenomenon represents (Ross, 2016). This involves reflective advocacy on multiple levels, be it direct involvement on the part of the librarians and/or teaching citizens to be advocates. A future research initiative will identify best practices and case studies to compare what is applicable to rural libraries and what is relevant in urban libraries regarding how the environment shapes what reflective advocacy efforts they participate in. Further, what efforts have worked effectively or not in the two environments in terms of similarities and differences. When reflective advocacy (i.e., ACTism) is defined as taking a stand to change the status quo in the limited or hesitant role of librarians (whether rural or not) in confronting fake news and inaccurate political information, some practitioner librarians might argue that librarians are doing this. Maybe it is subtler or more subversive than this author prefers.

5 Conclusion

With their extended skills of information literacy-fluency-advocacy, the rural librarian can help question and resist partisan sources of fake news and biased influences that might shape news consumption and voting behaviors (Mara, 2018). Possibilities of partnerships and alliances with librarians, especially in rural settings, in the news creation and production processes is another not-so-obvious direction worth exploring (Luhtala and Whiting, 2018).

It is difficult to ignore the role of journalists and political players in the evolution of the “fake news” construct as a fancy term that was created initially from social media analysis to its ubiquitous occurrence and use in our everyday life and its representation today of the lies that further the profit margins and political agendas of a few (Schlesinger, 2018; Usdin, 2018). With the commonality of daily occurrences in the magnitude of lies (quantitatively and qualitatively) and fake news arising from all aspects of the American government and the resulting “coddling of the American mind,” a need for a proactive and refined term and/or newer constructs of taking action to overcome these conditions might emerge in the future (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2018). Information ACTism could be a precursor to these progressive directions of democratic growth, political culture, and nation development.

The role of information in this reality is really troublesome, for, however we sugar-coat the practice with the use of new terminologies and words and a sharper analytical lens, the bottom line is that lies are lies, and this seems to be quite acceptable today even when it is emerging from the office of the POTUS. Reflections in the article on the role of fake news in this political economy of communication brings sharp focus to a critical analysis of contemporary politics in the Trump era, the news industry business, and journalism from a Marxist perspective based on a fundamental refurbishment of the news production processes since an “ideological paradigm in which the Fourth Estate operates makes it part of the problem and complicit—even if unwittingly—in the growth and spread of fake news” (Hirst, 2011, 2017).

The purpose of this article of going beyond merely directing or requesting ACTism in all libraries *especially* in rural libraries is what might not appeal to those segments of professionals who are slow to adopt change whole-heartedly (Epstein, Smallwood, and Gubnitakala, 2019). The fear of upsetting, resistance from, and/or alienating a majority population from the library entirely, if they were more expressly advocates/political, has been the problem/limitation throughout public library history (Mehra, Rioux, and Albright, 2009). Transformations from segregated racialized libraries, imbalanced gender differentials in library work pay-scales between women and men, library services catering to only white middle-class constituencies, and more, would not have taken place if these notions of perceived “safe” library activities had persisted (Bergman, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Hochman, 2014; Jackson, Jefferson Jr., and Nosakhere, 2012; Simmons-Welburn and Welburn, 2009). The article is NOT proposing that libraries become like most news outlets as a partisan tool. The fear of driving Trump supporters out of/against rural libraries and further from facts and knowledge is outdated like an ostrich burying its head in the sand and not of realizing the changes happening around. In its integration of information literacy-fluency-advocacy, information ACTism provides a holistic strategy to all libraries (including rural agencies) of connecting the three dots (system-centric, user-centric, and community impact) to become more meaningful and relevant in the context of these dysfunctional trends that are counter to the enactment of authentic democracy. Efforts include playing a more active role in challenging the involvement of politicians, all, across party-lines who indulge in perpetuating fake news trends that we are immersed within the contemporary social, political, and cultural climate (Sweeney and Chrastka, 2017). With evidence from authoritative information from authentic sources as a tool to draw attention to the perpetuation of the lies and hypocrisy might assist rural libraries in removing the blindfolds of a consumerist public across the so-called conservative and liberal divides. No one will be more pleased than lady justice in this social justice mission and the peeling of the blindfolds leading to a less dysfunctional political climate than what we witness today.

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