The Imperative of Information Literacy in the Digital Age: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the ability to critically evaluate, manage, and utilise information effectively including an understanding of the ethical issues related to information has become an essential skill. This paper,through the review of literature, discusses the growing importance of information literacy in the digital age, emphasising its role in enabling individuals to navigate the overwhelming abundance of online content effectively. The paper discusses several important issues, such as the critical role of information in fostering interaction due to the increased information flows between parties, both individuals and organisations, the abundant information choices, the direct correlation between a country's information wealth and its material prosperity and the long term effect of information on society and the economy.It discusses the growth of the digital platforms,its role in facilitating so many of our everyday tasks,the inability to guarantee the reliability, accuracy, or quality of information found online, its pervasive role in the transmission of false information and the inadequacy of AI systems.It discusses the concept of information literacy, its importance in preparing people for lifelong learning and a democratic society; its role in promoting economic growth, education, health, and human services, among other facets of modern societies, andits contribution to the competitive advantage of individuals, businesses, regions and countries. The paper also discusses the role of education in inculcating information literacy, the need for its inclusion in the curriculum, and for collaboration among the stakeholders. It discusses the challenges and the strategies for promoting information literacy,the need for institutions, government agencies and organisations to create policies that incorporate and encourage information literacy, offering support through provision of facilities and supportive environment, and stressing the value of information literacy while specifying methods to be employed in teaching and engaging students. By addressing these issues, the author hopes to promote digital fairness, strengthen the information society, and enable people and communities to make wise decisions. In order to guarantee ethical and sustainable use of the digital world, this paper emphasises how vital it is to incorporate information literacy into the educational systems.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Digital Information Platforms, Information Literacy Education, Information Literacy Policy, Information Literacy Strategies.

Introduction

Information is essential in today's information society as it has permeated our social behaviours.Interactions are now information-intensive due to the increased information flows between parties, both individuals and organisations. Information is an essential resource for all human pursuits and is vital to a country's progress. However, information is no longer limited to physical libraries. This is because the amount of information made available by digital platforms and technology has grown exponentially. We currently live in a world with a variety of information options, including print, electronic, picture, spatial, acoustic, visual, and numerical. Today, it can be accessed via social media, search engines, online databases, and other digital repositories (Soni, 2023). Not having enough information is no longer the problem; rather, it is having too much information in many formats, not all of which are of the same quality or value.

According to according to Chanchinmawia and Verma (2017), there is an almost direct correlation between a country's information wealth and its material prosperity. The development of a population of informed citizens is dependent upon the availability of information and its unrestricted flow via an efficient distribution network. If properly utilised for decision making, policy formulation, research and educational purposes, information can result in sustainable development.Long-term effects on society and the economy can be seen in the changes we have made to the way we live our personal lives, how we establish and preserve relationships with others, and how we carry out production and distribution operations. Information helps to anticipate circumstances as well as reduce uncertainty (Ojedokun, 2007). The fact that we can instantly interact with one another almost anywhere in the world, conduct banking, shopping, and work from the comfort of our homes, and have access to the greatest entertainment, education, and healthcare has undoubtedly improved our quality of life (Nath, 2017).

The growth of digital information platforms, their benefits and challenges

The current digital world has seen significant changes in the areas of information gathering, organisation, management, and distribution due to information communication technology. The internet has particularly developed into a vital resource for people looking for knowledge in a variety of fields, including daily decision-making, education, and healthcare. Users, according to Yu, Bekerian, and Osback (2024), may now obtain answers to nearly any issue in an unprecedented information environment due to the ease, speed, and accessibility provided by

digital platforms. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD (2019), digital platforms are online services that allow two or more different but interdependent groups of users (individuals or businesses) to communicate with each other. Examples of digital services that are accessible online aremarketplaces, search engines, social media, app stores, creative content outlets, communications services, payment systems, etc.

We have according to OECD (2019), grown reliant on digital platforms for both our personal and professional lives because they facilitate so many of our everyday tasks. They help us locate information, acquire and trade goods and services, and stay in contact with one another. In addition to locating employment and employees, we use them for entertainment, news, transportation, lodging, and finding applications, among many other things. Customers, companies, and governments according to OECD, have benefited greatly from this, for example, by being able to communicate more easily and effectively with a larger number of people, trading partners, and constituencies. They have given workers, artists, and businesses new options. Some of these are now essential to the operation of politicians and democracy in general. The success of certain digital platforms can be attributed to a variety of factors, including low-cost and quick transactions, network effects, economies of scale and scope, innovative ideas, and the broad market reach made possible by Internet openness.However, there is no guarantee that the information found online is reliable, accurate, or of high quality (Yu, Bekerian, & Osback, 2024), These, according to the authors, bring up significant issues regarding the difficulties people encounter when trying to use digital platforms as trustworthy resources. These difficulties include the pervasive transmission of false information, inequalities in digital literacy, unequal access to technology, and obstacles that deter people from looking for trustworthy information.

In the digital era, misinformation and disinformation are two connected but distinct phenomena, according to Yu, Bekerian, and Osback (2024). Both have an impact on how people use and interpret information found online. According to Bontridder and Poullet (2021), Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), Fallis (2015), and Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018, cited in Yu, Bekerian, & Osback, 2024), misinformation is defined as false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is disseminated without intending to deceive, whereas disinformation is defined as false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is disseminated with the intention of misleading the recipient. The authors assert that misinformation frequently results from misunderstandings or a

lack of verification. It frequently results from sincere attempts to exchange information. Because it is so simple to spread content on digital networks, often without fact-checking or source verification, errors are common. Whether for social, political, or commercial reasons, the obvious goal of disinformation is to deceive or influence the audience. Fake news and misleading information pose a serious threat to the digital information environment. According to Soni (2023), intentionally disseminating false or misleading information across a variety of internet platforms can have a substantial negative influence on users' access to trustworthy and accurate information. They are highly disruptive. They create uncertainty and disruptions in society, and in business operations. The problem of guaranteeing the accuracy of internet information is made more difficult by ethical considerations about content regulation and monitoring, particularly in light of artificial intelligence.

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) systems according to Yu, Bekerian, and Osback (2024), have become more and more involved in influencing the way information is shared, filtered, and accessed online. Nowadays, content is curated (i.e. selected, organised, and presented using professional or expert knowledge), false information is flagged, and user interactions are moderated by AI-driven algorithms, creating both opportunities and obstacles in the search for trustworthy online information.However, artificial intelligence (AI) systems are making the problem of disinformation worse by making it easier to spread misinformation to a specific audience and creating opportunities to produce increasingly realistic AI-generated fake content (Bontridder & Poullet, 2021). But in response, according to the authors, new AI systems are being created to identify and control internet misinformation.

Even though AI systems can help consumers navigate the vast digital information landscape and increase the effectiveness of content filtering, the ethical implications of AI-driven decision making, lack of transparency, and unfairness of the output generated (algorithmic biases) remain the issues, especially when it comes to freedom of expression and information. According to Wahgmare, Pawar, and Tuwar (2024), there are serious worries about issues such algorithmic prejudices, data privacy violations, and the potential for abuse of AI-powered technologies such as surveillance systems.

According to Aleessawi and Alzubi (2024), the performance of AI algorithms is significantly affected by the quality and comprehensiveness of the datasets used for training. If the datasets

contain biassed or erroneous information, the AI's output may also be biassed or wrong. Furthermore, AI-generated content can violate intellectual property rights. If the AI system generates content that is remarkably similar to previously published works, it could be charged with plagiarism or copyright violation. The issue of transparency and disclosure also raises concerns. Consumers must be aware that the material they are engaging with is produced by artificial intelligence. Although generative AI technologies have the potential to increase growth and production, they also according to the authors, increase the risk of inaccurate information, copyright infringement, moral dilemmas, and public mistrust.

Information literacy

Given the abundance of information, academic performance and individual self-directed learning depend heavily on one's capacity to act confidently without becoming overwhelmed by it. One major requirement for this, is the acquisition of information literacy (IL). Information literacy emerged to meet the demands of the knowledge economy for a workforce that is informed and responsive, the information society's need for knowledgeable information consumers, and the information overload brought on by rapid advances in digital technologies. It is particularly, essential for navigating the digital world, combating misinformation, and fostering informed decision-making.

Information literacy has evolved to include the skills and competencies needed to traverse the diverse digital environment (Soni, 2023). These abilities include the following, according to Ojedokun (2007): recognising the need for information, formulating questions based on information needs, understanding that accurate, relevant, and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making, identifying potential information sources, developing effective search strategies, accessing information sources from all media, evaluating information, organising information for practical application, integrating new information into an existing body of knowledge, and using information in critical thinking and problem solving. Soni adds that it also entails understanding privacy, security, and the ethical use of information. Anyone with these abilities is regarded as information literate. This will facilitate production and decision-making, both of which will be advantageous to society.

Information literacy is defined in literature (e.g. Soni, 2023; Chanchinmawia & Verma, 2017; Ojedokun, 2007; Ranaweera, 200? etc.) as a collection of skills that require people to be able to identify when information is needed and to find, assess, and use the information efficiently, as well as comprehend the ethical concerns associated with information in its various formats. Computer literacy, network literacy, web literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, critical thinking literacy, research literacy, information resource literacy, publishing literacy, emerging technology literacy, socio-structural literacy, and many other areas are among the many fields that are associated with it. They make up the information literacy media. Kamila (2011) asserts that without digital literacy, which is rapidly becoming a necessary condition for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship, people cannot fully participate in society or acquire the abilities and knowledge needed to survive in the twenty-first century.

The foundation of lifelong learning is also information literacy. By fostering a student-centered, inquiry-based, problem-solving, and constructive learning environment, it can develop deep learners in society (IFLA, 2018). For all citizens to succeed in education, the workplace, and daily communication, knowledge and skills are crucial (Putrandono, 2021). As a result, it enables people from all walks of life to find, assess, use, and produce information efficiently in order to fulfil their social, professional, academic, and personal goals. It encourages social inclusion of all countries and is a fundamental human right in the digital age. People who are information literate are prepared for lifelong learning because they can always find the information they need for any task or decision at hand. They know how to learn because they understand how knowledge is organised, how to find information, and how to use information so that others can learn from them (American Library Association Presidential Committee, 1989, cited in Ranaweera, 200?).

A democratic society is built on the foundation of information literacy. Therefore, it is necessary to develop students in the capabilities and abilities of learning to read, or learning how to learn, by sharpening their critical thinking and reasoning abilities. Information literacy thus provides the means to effectively access, use, and produce content to support economic growth, education, health, and human services, among other aspects of contemporary societies (Chanchinmawia & Verma, 2017). It boosts the competitiveness of individuals, businesses, regions, and nations. In addition to modern technology, information literacy strengthens

individuals and communities by combining learning, critical thinking, and interpretive skills beyond professional boundaries. It is especially crucial in the learning, education, and research process. Information literacy is common to all disciplines, environments, and educational levels, and it prepares people for effective use of information.

The role of education

The need to acquire and use information from a variety of sources has grown as a result of the information explosion. Merelybeing exposed to a lot of information will not make people informed citizens; they must learn how to find and use relevant information. According to scholars, society needs multiskilled learners who can think critically, pose and solve problems, and become independent and lifelong learners (Haberle, 2002, cited in El Hassasni, 2015).Information literacy is one of the most crucial abilities for students to thrive in the academic, political, economic, and social domains. The importance of information literacy must therefore be acknowledged, especially in the realm of education. In higher education, information literacy is crucial. Berutu, Delita, Astuti, Novira, and Wirda (2018) assert that it is also necessary for pupils/students in primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Information-literate pupils/students are better able to learn independently and keep learning.

Ranaweera (200?) asserts that critical thinking, lifelong learning, and the concept of learning to learn in the classroom are all intimately tied to information literacy. Thus, it ought to be incorporated into the curriculum for education. In the brief time that students must spend in school or college, it is obvious that they cannot learn everything that they need to know about their field of study. Information literacy must therefore be a part of the curriculum in order to provide students with the critical thinking skills necessary to become independent lifelong learners and to apply what they have learnt in the familiar to the unfamiliar.According to El Hassasni (2015), knowing how to use information is just as important as finding it. For this reason, it is equally important that students understand the technical context in which information resources are integrated and utilised. Regardless of discipline, any student should be able to learn, apply, and share knowledge in a creative way.

According to Derakhshan and Singh (2011) and Ojedokun (2007), effective curriculum integration of information literacy necessitates stakeholder (academics, librarians, instructional and graphic designers for online courses, and administration) collaboration. Because the subject

is so important, it is instructional for the stakeholders to work together to ensure that students can recognise and solve information problems and learn from information sources. Integration will be a struggle and frequently fail without cooperation. For the elementary and secondary school, effective collaboration is needed to ensure that both teachers and teacher librarians are aiming towards the same shared vision to equip pupils/students with information literacy skills. This calls for creating an information-literate culture within their own school setting, together with individual dedication, management support, and adjustments to working procedures to allow for time and curriculum flexibility (Williams & Wavell, 2006).

To assist students become information literate, librarians and academics can collaborate to develop educational resources for use in the classroom and online. There are practical ways of fostering such partnerships. These, include among others, helping academics to incorporate Open Educational Resources, OER from reputable sources into online courses, offering site-wide licenses to e-books that might replace textbooks, helping academics to publish their own affordable alternatives to textbooks (George, 2020), offering content/subject-based information literacy instruction, etc. George reported the success of such collaboration at Cleveland State University, Utah State University and the University of Central Florida in the U.S. The collaboration is particularly important because academics do not know exactly what they need to do or how to execute it. Most of them are not knowledgeable enough to teach students research methods and information literacy concepts. Understanding the role of a collaborative relationship will help academics and librarians to work together more effectively. In order to teach students to be information literate, academics also need to possess these skills. The programme must also have strong institutional and administrative support, both inside the library and at the highest levels of the organisation's management, in compliance with information literacy best practices (Ojedokun, 2007).

Information literacy development should be contextualised within unit content, as recommended by the UTAS TEIL Conceptual Framework(Klebansky & Fraser, 2013). By doing so, the cognitive/meta-cognitive and mechanical skills of information literacy are taught, applied, evaluated, and developed within curriculum content rather than as a stand-alone traditional library skills session.According to research, students learn more when information literacy is incorporated into a discipline (Bundy, 2004; Hooks et al., 2007; Lupton, 2002 cited in

Klebansky & Fraser, 2013). Students' learning would be improved by an educational model that incorporates information literacy into a course, giving them a model for learning how to learn within their discipline of study.The idea that building information literacy capabilities cannot be done in isolation is captured in information literacy models, standards, and frameworks (Bruce, 1995; Grafstein, 2002; Orr, Appleton & Wallin, 2001; SCONUL, 1999cited in Klebansky & Fraser, 2013).

Information literacy could be achieved by incorporating it into the general education course or by making it "course-specific and curriculum specific" when students need the information and instruction (Ojedokun, 2007). This could be done according to the author, in one of two ways: either it is a subject-oriented general education course, which means that after a student is admitted to a subject at the 100-, 200-, or 300-level, the general education course will concentrate on providing information literacy skills and resources using the student's major or discipline as a base to be taught by the lecturer within the discipline with assistance from librarians with subject expertise (i.e. with a background in a subject), or it is an addition to an existing course in a discipline, where the student will receive an extra credit hour for completing the information literacy component developed by the lecturer who taught the course after consulting with librarians.

Challenges of promoting information literacy

Information literacy affects social and educational development more broadly and is not solely the library's responsibility. It is essential for a society that is learning. There are obstacles, nevertheless (Andretta, 2006; Kamila, 2011). One of the obstacles is the recalcitrant faculty, or the academics' resistance to using an information literacy strategy. They misunderstand information literacy as something that is taught elsewhere and is therefore not their concern, or as something that focusses on the development of IT skills and thus fails to realise its potential as a catalyst for self-directed learning. The comfort of their established roles makes them hesitant to take on a more proactive role in learning facilitation. On the part of the students, it is the misconception in the believe that they already possess IL competencies.

Another barrier to advancing information literacy as a response to societal learning and, more specifically, as a basis for active citizenship is information overload (also known as information glut, information anxiety or information fatigue), a byproduct of the industrial revolution. When

a system receives more data than it can process, it is said to be experiencing information overload (Toffler, cited in Stanley, 2021). An excessive amount of information has a detrimental effect on consumers' ability to verify, choose, or focus. Kurelovic, Tomljanovic and Davidovic (2016), assert that it leads to shorter attention span, shallow thinking, memory difficulties and multitasking resulting in decreased productivity. Research reported by Mungly and Singh (cited in Kashada, Isnoun & Aldali, 2020) also found that information overload has a number of negative effects, such as decreased work quality, mental and psychological issues, increased stress in individuals due to the limit of information processing capacity, a negative impact on staff productivity, poor decision-making quality, and elevated stress levels, as well as additional time spent searching, sorting, and processing information.

Since the quality of information is becoming increasingly important (contributing to a person's political power), persons who lack information and IT literacy may be condemned to the periphery of the digital polity, denying them of both economic status and individual democratic rights. In order to foster attitudes towards lifelong learning rather than subject-specific knowledge, educators must employ innovative teaching strategies and ICT-based instruction. This calls for the development of more critical and reflective information literacy skills (bolstered by a self-directed learning approach) in addition to technical proficiency.

Other notable challenges according to Kamila (2011) include: a lack of collaboration among professional organisations and a lack of clearly stated and/or promoted information literacy policies and programmes, underdeveloped library and information systems and networks, costly telecommunication infrastructure services, a lack of qualified library and information professionals who would provide the necessary impetus for the promotion and implementation of information literacy, intimidated users who are not as familiar with the nature of information and its creation, and how information is published and disseminated (the pattern of flow of information within a discipline).

Strategies for promoting information literacy

International recognition has been given to information literacy (IL) as a necessary skill for engagement in society, work, and education. Strategies are therefore necessary for communities and organisations to guarantee that their members use information effectively and efficiently.

While information literacy is important in the workplace, the place to develop it is in formal education.In higher education,information literacy is promoted by libraries. There is however, the need for an institutional-level strategy or strategic plan for information literacy.The strategy document should include mission, vision, goals and outcomes.

Strategies that could be used include incorporating information literacy into the curriculum, utilising it in the educational process, enhancing facilities, and conducting, monitoring and evaluation (Berutu et al., 2018). These strategies require improvement of the content, structure, and sequence of the curriculum; concretely expressing information literacyin the teaching materials so that students are guided to use information literacy based on library and digital resources; consistency in applying the content of information literacy to each subject so that students will be trained by lecturers to improve their information literacy skills; improving supporting facilities, such as the library's collection of printed and non-printed materials, the convenience of offline and online library services, and the ease of internet access, such as wifi and campus hotspots, and that each completed information literacy programme be continuously monitored and assessed.

Other strategies include distributing written information literacy materials; offering one-on-one training; conducting demonstrations; introducing new users to information resources; using audio-visual materials such as videotapes, films, and audiocassettes specifically to demonstrate online searching; offering online courses and tutorials; and organising seminars, demonstrations, and workshops; creating pathfinders; using appropriate reference techniques; and offering user-friendly webpages (Galvin, 2005; Stellah, Namande & Wabwire, 2022; Kamila, 2011).

Case studies of some university library strategy practices in the U.K. also emphasise integrating information literacy with subject studies by embedding it in curricula and assessments; integrating information literacy with information technology skills and the need for library/information services to work closely with academic staff; advocacy/awareness raising associated with an effective marketing strategy at programme and institutional level, which gives the librarysenior management the task of promoting information literacy and the library's role in teaching at the mostsenior level in the University. The practices include adoption of recognised information literacy standards such as SCONUL, Godwin's (2003) information skills benchmarks, the ACRL(2000) standards; use of e-learning developments typically as online

materials in virtual environment customizing resources for different disciplinary context; and development of information professionals as teachers and learning facilitators; etc.(Corrall, 2008).

However, one strategy is insufficient to effectively foster information literacy. Since the choice of training methods depends on a variety of criteria, such as equipment, cost of use, and learning effects, it should be decided after the organisation's resources and methods have been assessed. The success of these various strategies however, requires collaboration of all stakeholders, the university, academics, librarians, administrators, instructional and graphic designers as may be necessary.

Policy and institutional support for IL

Global rivalry and the power of technology are changing society. This requires everyone to learn how to search, select, use, and synthesise a great deal of information in order to produce knowledge. If therefore, significant improvements in information literacy levels must be realised, it must be a priority in institutions of learning and organisations.This kind of coordinated approach according to Bradley (2013), is only possible when policies are in place that mandate and sufficiently support broad initiatives to raise information literacy levels.This is corroborated by Bruce (2002, cited in Aghauche et. al, 2019). Developing information literacy skills helps students both in school, and when they start working (Duncan & Varcoe, 2012 cited in Aghauche, Nkamnebe, & Nkamnebe, 2019).

It is imperative that higher education institutions, particularly those in developing countries, create policies pertaining to information literacy, integrate them into the curriculum, and offer the facilities and supportive environment needed for information literacy to flourish. A policy that incorporates and encourages information literacy throughout each student's academic path must be implemented in order to create this atmosphere. In order to guarantee that students, have the abilities necessary to attain academic success and join the workforce with strong information literacy skills, the policy should stress the value of information literacy (i.e. being the building block for life long learning; encouraging and informing problem solving and critical thinking) and specify the methods to be employed in teaching and engaging students.It shouldalso be guided by statements and standards set by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) for becoming effective learners (Lau, 2006). The IFLA information

literacy standards are based on these international experiences and contributions. The policy document should contain a clear policy statement, the purpose and scope, implementation, responsibility, and provision for revision.

Conclusion

The capacity to comprehend the ethical concerns surrounding information and to critically assess, manage, and use it effectively have become crucial skills in the rapidly changing digital landscape.

To become an informed citizen requires effective utilisation of information. This, in turn, requires that an individual becomes information literate, without which the individual cannot participate in the information intensive society. Information literacy is crucial to lifelong learning and a democratic society. It is capable of growing deep learners in the society by creating a student-centred, enquiry-based, problem-solving, and constructive learning environment.

Every individual should be able to find authentic, accurate and relevant information as per his/her needs, particularly in the online environment.In preparing citizens for this era therefore, educating the citizenry using effective strategies is key. Strategies are necessary for communities and organisations to guarantee their members' effective and efficient use of information. There is the need to build members' capacity so that they do not become overwhelmed by information overload.

Information literacy also requires an active participation of major stakeholders -the academics, librarians, instructional course and graphic designers, administrators including the agencies of government and organisations.Challenges such as faculty reluctance, students' misconception, information overload, and lack of information and IT literacy should also be addressed. Most importantly, it requires formulation of information literacy policy that facilitates learning by incorporating information literacy into the educational systems at all levels.This policy should stress the value of information literacy and specify the methods to be employed in teaching and engaging students. It should also be guided by statements and standards set by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) for becoming effective learners.

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