

INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE CHANGING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: THE EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION LITERACY CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES AND ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN EDUCATION AND LIFE- LONG LEARNING

Idris Rashid Khan Surattee
Information Resource Centre
Singapore Press Holdings, Singapore
idris@sph.com.my

Abstract

The proliferation of digital news media and social media in the last 10 years is transforming the nature of news content. The emergence of participatory social media is redefining the relationship between newsroom and consumers of news and media information. Media literacy, which emerged out of the social critique of mass media with emphasis on deconstruction of media messages, is now focusing on competencies for participatory culture in the new media. Over the years information literacy, media literacy, and critical literacy have developed independently of each other, championed by different professions and focusing on different core competencies and learning outcome. Convergence of elements in the media industry, information services and educational practices, requires the convergence of various concepts of literacy in developing new competencies for life-long learning. This paper will briefly discuss the salient features, of the three literacy concepts and practices, namely information literacy, media literacy and critical literacy, which evolved out of different fields of practice. This paper will discuss how the convergence of industries and fields of practice requires libraries to reflect and evaluate its concept of literacy and how ideas from different traditions and practices can be reconciled to design literacy programs to cultivate competencies for the development of an information literate person and competent long life learner.

Keywords: Information literacy; Mass media; Social media; Competencies; Role of libraries and librarians

For more than 20 years the ALA's definition of information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" has dominated the intellectual and operational agendas of libraries and librarianship. The concept and scope of ALA's definition shaped the information literacy competency standards developed by ACRL and AASL and information literacy programmes in school and academic/research libraries. Only in the last five years, there is recognition by the leaders of the library profession of the complexity of the social learning environment and the fluidity of information creation in the new learning ecosystem. This has led to the re-examination of the theoretical framework and traditional standards and skill based approach to information literacy which are no longer sufficient for the revolutionary social technologies prevalent online.

Digital infrastructure is radically changing the skills, social practices and institutions that we develop to support the new technology and the exponential rate of information creation. At the heart of this radical change is the proliferation of digital social media over the last ten years, which is transforming the nature of information and knowledge and our social institutions. The emergence of participatory culture in social media is redefining the relationship between producers and consumers of media information. Media literacy, which emerged out of the social critique of mass media with emphasis on deconstruction of media messages, is now focusing on issues in participatory culture in the new media environment.

This is happening at the time when mainstream media companies are undergoing painful changes brought about by the pressures of dwindling revenue and diminishing profit. The evolving business model of media companies shapes the medium and the content and ultimately the meaning of the message itself.

Media is also beginning to play an important role in education and learning. The social media shapes the mode and behavior for learning and teaching. Media companies are fast developing information products and services using its content to tap on the growing production and consumption of education product and services to compensate for their dwindling revenue from traditional sources. The convergence of data, news, knowledge creation, advertisements and entertainment materials has merged the territorial boundaries of traditional gatekeepers that control the production, dissemination and consumption of media content.

Schools no longer have monopoly over education. Media is gradually producing content and developing applications to serve the information needs of students and teachers. New enterprises with creative business models are developing mass based online education. School curriculums and pedagogical practices are designed to capitalise on information resources and applications developed by the media. With rapid development in information and knowledge creation, schools are giving greater emphasis to the cultivation of critical thinking and competency in learning and handling of content from various information sources.

Libraries are not spared from this great transformation in the media industry. Media is emerging as the dominant source of information for reference and research. Libraries that are managing new media products and engaging users in the new social media environment must necessarily transform their roles and functions. Library information literacy must deal with key aspects of critical literacy and media literacy.

Traditionally, library and information literacy programmes have developed out of search and retrieval of print resources in a context of traditional research process. Although the search and retrieval now deal with a vast array of multimedia resources which are predominantly digital in nature, the process remains closely tied to traditional research process, which is often presented as a linear process.

The expansion of libraries in news areas like the development of new learning spaces, museums, exhibitions and media publications have been largely focused on the provision and management of physical facilities and learning spaces. The libraries new curatorial and communication services have little impact on the concept and practices of information literacy designed by libraries. Information literacy programmes are heavily focused on competencies dealing with information search and retrieval and evaluation of information sources. The cultivation of competencies in communications, content appraisal, curation and production, in the context of the cultural and social environment are relegated to other learning agencies.

Media literacy in schools on the other hand has been concerned with deconstruction of media messages and lately the focus has been on ensuring safe handling of the new media especially the social media. In the field of education, literacy in school curriculum has traditionally focused on reading and writing skills in terms of code learning (basic literacy), progressing to functional literacy.

Traditionally, information and media literacy programmes in schools are heavily focused on the use of information technology in finding information and evaluating sources and techniques in media production. The role of school libraries and media resource centres are often limited to providing resources and facilities. Information literacy instruction in schools are designed to deliver authoritative skill sets to retrieve and identify authoritative knowledge within a linear information search model instead of a conversational model that requires participation in an ever changing flow of knowledge.

In the field of education, critical literacy movement, heavily influenced by constructivist approach to education informed by the works John Dewey and Maria Montessori and revolutionary pedagogy of Paolo Freire, provide robust critiques of the "delivery model" in education which is based on the premise that the concept of teaching and learning texts (information objects) and language are neutral. Critical literacy shows ways of looking at

written, visual, spoken, multimedia and performance “text” and the agents of learning which project the power relations. It challenges the attitudes, values and belief that lie beneath the surface. Concepts such as “multimodality”, “multisemiotics” and “multiliteracies” are attempts that account for the diversity of communications and how these affect what we make of them. “Without educating young people to develop these understandings, according to this school of thought, they will be unable to constructively critique anything they have learned, unable to account for its cultural location, or creatively extend or apply it; they will only grow into unquestioning adults incapable of innovation”. Until fairly recently, the concept and practices of information literacy, media literacy, and critical literacy have developed independently of each other, championed by different professions and focusing on different core competencies and learning outcomes.

The ubiquitous information and communication technology and intuitive design of new devices have shifted the attention away from technical skills and competencies in using these devices to more salient concerns with gaps in cultural, intellectual and ethical competencies in dealing with consumption, production and dissemination of the information content. According to Seely (2015), “The technology is the easy part. The hard part is figuring the social and institutional structures around the technology”.

Recent developments in the fields of education, media studies and information services and the convergence of interests of these various fields in the provision of services for life-long learning create opportunities for libraries to review and evaluate our concept and information literacy. Recent works on education and pedagogy especially on critical and “multi-literacies” and works on the culture of digital social media in learning and production of media provide libraries with rich ideas and resources to develop new information literacy concepts and programs that will provide some of the core value propositions for library services.

The convergence of fields of practices requires new competencies in handling information. New information literacy competencies are not limited to skill sets required to perform tasks within a framework of a linear research process. The traditional competencies of “... knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner” has to be lodged as part of a dynamic nature of continuing conversation or dialogues.

In a conversation, it is quite normal to stop to look for information that help facilitate a discussion. “The information you pull in action is learned institution, made personal and contextualized”. In the world of new social media, information is often created on the fly, filtered on a fly, validated on the fly, disseminated and passed into action as part of the continuous conversation and learning. Emerging from this global network of conversation is the social network of learning and corroborative problem solving tools.

Such conversation requires socio cultural and intellectual competencies in the finding, appraising, synthesizing, constructing and articulating socially constructed content. Learners have to develop the capacity to understand the multi-semiotic nature of information and the ability to engage in multimodal learning and transmedia communication and use of information.

Mackey and Jacobson’s (2014) Metaliteracy attempts to enlarge the scope of information literacy. “Metaliteracy promotes critical thinking and collaboration in a digital age, providing a comprehensive framework to effectively participate in social media and online communities. It is a unified construct that supports the acquisition, production, and sharing of knowledge in collaborative on-line communities” “Metaliteracy challenges traditional skills-based approaches to information literacy by recognizing related literacy types and incorporating emerging technologies. Standard definitions of information literacy are insufficient for the revolutionary social technologies currently prevalent online”

In February 2015, ACRL posted a new information literacy framework which radically shifted the concept from skill based approach to the cultivation of a set of knowledge practices and dispositions within a framework organized into six aspects of information literacy.

These new competencies are not technical skills that libraries can teach. These competencies can be developed by cultivating the disposition for critical thinking and information handling behaviour in the new learning ecosystem. New social skills and cultural competencies in new media literacy and critical multi-literacies pedagogy such as those proposed by experts like Jenkins, Allan Luke and JSB should be incorporated into the competencies and skill set cultivated by libraries to help learners manage information in the new media environment. The new social skills and cultural competencies includes play, tinkering and imagination, simulation, performance, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgement, transmedia navigation networking negotiation, multi modal learning and critical analysis of information objects (text, image, audio and artifacts).

Libraries have to develop their capacity to create opportunities for self-driven learning through interest driven activities. It is important for libraries to assist our users to leverage on the new learning ecosystem. The level of library integration with the business of the parent organizations and its capacity to mobilize both internal and external resources through its social capital will determine its capacity to create such leaning environment for its users.

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