

DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE INFORMATION AGE: TACKLING FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

In a digital age saturated with information, digital literacy is key to combating fake news and misinformation. This article examines the challenges individuals face in navigating the sea of information, especially on social media platforms where misinformation can spread rapidly. Digital literacy is defined as the ability to critically evaluate and interact with media, allowing individuals to distinguish between credible and uncredible information. The authors emphasize the importance of educational initiatives to improve critical thinking and media evaluation skills across demographics. Proposed strategies include identifying misinformation, evaluating sources, understanding context, using verification tools, and respecting online privacy. While social media can improve digital literacy among adolescents by improving technological skills and information evaluation abilities, the spread of misinformation remains a major challenge. The article concludes that developing digital literacy is critical to creating a more informed and responsible society in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital literacy, Combatting, Fake News, Fostering, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, individuals are inundated with vast amounts of information daily, leading to a phenomenon known as information overload. This situation is exacerbated by the rapid proliferation of social media platforms, where user-generated content is abundant and often unchecked. The ease of sharing information has made it increasingly difficult for users to discern credible sources from misleading ones, resulting in the widespread circulation of fake news. Media literacy, defined as the ability to critically analyze and evaluate media messages, has become essential for navigating this complex environment. It empowers individuals to engage with media content responsibly and effectively, fostering informed citizenship in a digital age characterized by misinformation and manipulation. The challenges posed by information overload include cognitive overload, emotional distress, and impaired decision-making capabilities. As users struggle to process excessive information, they may fall victim to misinformation, leading to skewed perceptions of reality and potentially harmful consequences. Thus, understanding and enhancing digital literacy skills is crucial for individuals to combat fake news and engage meaningfully with the information they encounter. Buckingham (2021) emphasized the importance of critical thinking, media literacy education, and information literacy in combating fake news. Buckingham advocated for a deep understanding of the context of information, stressed the integration of media education into curricula, and highlighted the need for skills to evaluate sources and content. However, in practice, these theoretical approaches often fall short. Educational programs may lack depth or priority, and individuals frequently struggle to apply critical thinking skills consistently. The complexity and emotional appeal of fake news can undermine the effectiveness of these skills, revealing a gap between the proposed solutions and real-world application. So in this research authors wants to examine How can digital literacy help in combating hoaxes on social media?. The scope of this study will look into the role of digital literacy in combating fake news and misinformation on social media, focusing on the difficulties people face when determining the credibility of information, as well as the significance of educational initiatives to improve critical thinking skills and media evaluation. And the primary objective of this study is to explore the role of digital literacy in equipping individuals to navigate the challenges of information overload and combat fake news on social platforms. This study aims to evaluate the impact of information overload on media content analysis and decision-making, identify digital literacy skills essential for effective media consumption, and propose educational strategies to improve digital literacy among youth, particularly in combating misinformation.

This study is also based on some literature reviews, including the one conducted by Raffael Heiss, Andreas Nanz, and Jörg Matthes (2023). Research on social media information literacy: Conceptualization and correlations with information overload, news avoidance, and conspiracy mentality. The study presents a new scale to assess social media information literacy (SMIL), which includes six sub-dimensions: navigation, curation, assessment, comprehension, creation, and interaction. It investigates its causes, its relationship with information overload, and potential effects such as news avoidance and conspiracy thinking. The findings demonstrate that education and social media use have a favorable impact on SMIL, and SMIL can help to achieve positive civic outcomes by minimizing information overload. This study is in line with research conducted by Donna Revilia and Irwansyah (2020). The purpose of the study was to better understand the digital literacy circumstances around social media use among the millennial generation. According to research, individuals' degree of media literacy is unaffected by the length of time they have spent on social media. Users who have already encountered attacks tend to be more attentive, increasing the security level of their social media accounts and exercising caution before allowing access to personal devices. Individuals who are more knowledgeable of password

management tend to have a greater level of awareness, which is reflected in their intention to use social media responsibly.

DISCUSSION

The concept of digital literacy is rooted in the combination of two fundamental ideas: "literacy" and "digital." These terms come together to describe a critical skill set in the modern world, where the ability to navigate and utilize digital environments is essential. The term "literacy" has its origins in the English word "letter," which is closely related to the Latin term "literatura." Traditionally, literacy refers to the ability to read and write, encompassing a person's capacity to comprehend, articulate, and engage with spoken or written content. This foundational skill has been essential for communication, learning, and participation in society. On the other hand, the term "digital" is derived from the Greek word "digitus," meaning fingers, which historically referred to counting or manipulating with the fingers. In the context of the modern world, "digital" signifies the technological advancements in computing and information technology that are predominantly keyboard-oriented—essentially, the "pressing of buttons" to interact with digital devices. The digital aspect of literacy emphasizes the importance of being able to use these technologies effectively.

Therefore, digital literacy can be broadly defined as the skill to effectively use and comprehend information and communication technologies (ICT) for positive and constructive purposes. As Bahri and Saiful (2021) suggest, this modern literacy involves not just the technical ability to use digital tools, but also the cognitive skills to evaluate, analyze, and produce information in ways that are ethical and beneficial to society.

One of the essential forms of literacy that needs to be implemented in today's digital era is digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to the ability to wisely and effectively use digital technology to access, evaluate, and produce information. It encompasses the skills required to efficiently, effectively, and ethically access, analyze, and utilize information across various digital platforms. Here are some key importance of digital literacy in combating hoaxes on social media (Hobbs, 2020):



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1. Identifying false information, digital literacy plays a crucial role in detecting and analyzing the authenticity of information particularly in the face of the widespread dissemination of false information (hoaxes). It equips social media users with the tools to recognize signs of misinformation, such as attention-grabbing headlines, unreliable sources, or inconsistencies within the content itself.
2. Evaluating the authenticity of information sources a key component of digital literacy is the ability to assess the credibility of information sources. Verification processes are an essential aspect of evaluating the information encountered online, helping users to determine the reliability of what they read or see.
3. Understanding the context of information. Digital literacy also involves understanding the context behind the information encountered on social media. This requires critical thinking skills that enable users to process information from multiple perspectives, recognize potential biases, and seek additional information to form a more comprehensive

understanding of the topic.

4. Utilizing verification tools, being digitally literate means knowing how to use various tools, such as search engines, to verify information. Social media users must be adept at locating trustworthy sources and comparing information from multiple outlets before drawing conclusions.
5. Questioning information digital literacy encourages users to continuously question the information they encounter. By asking critical questions, users can identify weaknesses in arguments or discrepancies between the information provided and the facts.
6. Respecting privacy and security, another important aspect of digital literacy is understanding online privacy and security. Social media users must be capable of protecting themselves and their personal information from online scams and attacks.

In the battle against misinformation and hoaxes on social media, digital literacy is a vital tool that helps users become more intelligent, critical, and responsible in how they consume and share information. By enhancing digital literacy, we can foster a more informed and connected society in this digital age (Februari et al., 2024). Douglas A.J. Belshaw also highlights eight key factors in the development of digital literacy:

1. Cultural awareness by understanding the diverse contexts of users in the digital world.
2. Cognition with the ability to critically assess the content and quality of thought.
3. Constructive skills is the capability to create expert and practical solutions.
4. Communication skills by understanding and navigating digital communication networks.
5. Responsibility and confidence being accountable and self-assured in the digital environment.
6. Creativity innovating and doing new things in new ways.
7. Critical problem solving addressing and critically analyzing existing content.
8. Community responsibility in being accountable to the broader community.

These factors together outline a comprehensive framework for what it means to be digitally literate in today's complex information landscape. It also involves adhering to legal standards while engaging in social interactions within digital environments. In essence, digital literacy is a crucial life skill that demands individuals to think critically and act responsibly. It encompasses the capability to inspire others through digital competence while also demonstrating superior proficiency in using technology, information, and communication tools. Additionally, social-emotional literacy is essential for understanding the social and emotional aspects of online interactions, whether through social engagement, collaboration, or simply consuming content.

The fundamental principles for developing digital literacy have been outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture. These principles include understanding, interdependence, social factors, and curation. The first principle, understanding, emphasizes the need to recognize both the explicit and implicit messages within media information. This principle requires individuals to filter messages from various perspectives effectively. The second principle, interdependence, highlights the complementary nature of different media forms and how they interact with one another, considering the vast array of media available today. The third principle focuses on social factors, underscoring the importance of sharing information within society and recognizing that the success of one medium is influenced by the source of the information, the target audience, and the medium through which it is conveyed. The fourth principle, curation, involves the ability to access and store information for long-term use, allowing individuals to revisit it when necessary. Curation also involves helping others explore, find, and organize information that is deemed useful within the community.

The ultimate goal of digital literacy is to educate individuals on how to use technology and communication tools responsibly by leveraging digital technologies. This includes the ability to search for, assess, use, and create information in a responsible manner. Additionally,

digital literacy teaches people how to use digital media in a way that aligns with legal standards, particularly as outlined in Law No. 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions.

Several strategies can be employed to promote digital literacy within communities. One approach is to conduct awareness campaigns about the legal implications and ethical considerations of using digital media wisely and prudently. Another step involves utilizing official government web applications, such as those available on Google Play, to access accurate data and information. Furthermore, social media can be used to disseminate important information, although it is crucial to maintain a critical mindset when sharing the messages and knowledge obtained (Sutrisna, 2020).

To achieve its objectives, digital literacy faces two major challenges: the overwhelming influx of information and the negative content deliberately created by irresponsible individuals. The rapid flow of information, especially when encountered all at once, can be confusing. Digital literacy plays a crucial role in helping individuals sift through this information to distinguish between accurate data and falsehoods. Negative content is a significant issue in the digital age. Harmful material, such as pornography and content related to race, religion, and ethnicity, often pervades online spaces, particularly social media. This highlights the need for strong digital literacy skills to not only access the internet but also to evaluate and identify beneficial versus harmful content.

Research has shown that social media can help teenagers become more adept with digital technology. Studies, such as those by Falloon, reveal that teenagers who are active on social media tend to develop better technological skills compared to their less active peers. They learn to use devices and applications, which are key aspects of digital literacy. Additionally, social media can broaden teenagers' knowledge by exposing them to diverse sources of information and different viewpoints. In the era of Industry 4.0, technology has become increasingly integrated into daily life. The public's digital literacy is significantly advanced, and there is a growing dependence on technology. Alongside technological advancements, accessing information on the Internet has become easier. Today, people can quickly find a vast amount of news online. However, this ease of access does not always come with internet safety and security. Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news are still prevalent in online news sources. Fake news, or hoaxes, refers to false or misleading information presented as if it were true and verified. In other words, it involves twisting facts to mislead people.

The spread of hoaxes typically unfolds in three stages. Initially, fake news may originate as disinformation, deliberately crafted to deceive, or it may transition into misinformation when incorrect content is shared by people who believe it to be true. This can happen due to misinterpretation, incorrect quoting, financial motives, promotional agendas, or misunderstandings of satirical content. During the second stage, the spread of false information often begins within small, trusted networks, such as family chat groups or like-minded social media pages, before reaching a wider audience. Bots, which are automated accounts designed to disseminate information widely, and trolls, real accounts created to provoke or harass, can enhance this spread. Their actions aim to push false information into numerous social media feeds for various reasons, including financial gain, political influence, or entertainment.

In the third stage, false information can go viral when it is shared by high-profile accounts with large followings. Research by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University found that although only 20% of false news is produced or shared by prominent figures, these posts account for nearly 70% of social media engagement. These "super-spreaders" can greatly amplify false information, making it more likely to be accepted as fact by their followers. As the misinformation gains traction, it might be picked up by news sites eager to cover trending stories, sometimes without proper verification. Some of these sites may appear credible but

are actually operated by individuals or blogs.

To combat the spread of fake news, several strategies can be useful: being cautious of provocative headlines, verifying the source's address, fact-checking information, assessing the authenticity of photos, and participating in anti-hoax discussion groups. The consequences of fake news are significant and detrimental, leading to wasted time and money, diversion from important issues, public deception, and the incitement of public panic. In today's digital age, social media has become a potent force for communication and social interaction. It shapes and influences individual attitudes and societal behavior by facilitating online communication, sharing, and networking. As noted by Zarella, social media represents a significant advancement in internet technology, enabling people to connect across borders and form communities based on shared goals.

Social media comes in various forms around the world, with some of the most prevalent platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, particularly in Indonesia. Twitter is a social networking service that allows users to post and send messages up to 280 characters long. Its ease of use and rapid dissemination make it a popular choice for quickly sharing information on a large scale. As of January 25, 2021, Facebook boasts 2.7 billion active users, making it the leading social media platform globally due to its widespread utilization. Alongside Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp are notable contenders, with user bases of 2.3 billion and 2 billion, respectively. Additionally, Facebook Messenger and Instagram each have approximately 1.3 billion and 1.2 billion users worldwide. In China, there are five prominent social media platforms: WeChat, with 1.2 billion users; TikTok, with 689 million users; QQ, with 617 million users; Douyin, with 600 million users; and Sina Weibo, with 511 million users.

Didik Purwanto notes that one of the reasons for the widespread appeal of social media is its multiplatform design, which allows access and connectivity across various digital devices. Through the internet, users can chat, browse various websites, and download information. Social media offers several benefits, such as the ability to make new friends and the use of platforms for business purposes. It also provides entertainment, facilitates social interaction, and supports online gaming. The primary function of social media remains its ease of communication and the ability to comment and share messages (Pierre, 2022).

However, according to data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo), the proliferation of fake news on social media is influenced by several factors. One key issue is users' tendency to rapidly share information without verifying its accuracy or origins. This lack of scrutiny allows false messages to spread from one user to another, and without continuous correction, such misinformation can be mistaken for truth and widely accepted, ultimately impacting society at large.

CONCLUSION

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in navigating the modern digital landscape. The ability to effectively access, evaluate, and utilize information across digital platforms is essential in combating misinformation, particularly the widespread dissemination of hoaxes on social media. Digital literacy equips users with tools to recognize false information, assess the credibility of sources, and protect their privacy and security online. By fostering skills such as critical thinking, communication, and responsibility, individuals are better prepared to identify and mitigate the effects of fake news. Additionally, social media's influence on teenagers shows the potential to enhance digital literacy, although it requires careful and responsible use to ensure positive outcomes. As the digital age progresses, the importance of digital literacy will only grow, making it an essential skill set for ethical and informed participation in society.

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