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Article

Media and Information Literacy as a Fundamental Human Right

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Abstract: In the last few decades, we have witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the way information is created, disseminated, and consumed. The advent of the digital age has revolutionized not only our access to information but also the very fabric of our social, political, and cultural lives. Digital media, a term encompassing everything from online news portals and social media platforms to streaming services and mobile applications, now forms an integral part of the daily lives of billions of individuals worldwide.

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Introduction

In the last few decades, we have witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the way information is created, disseminated, and consumed. The advent of the digital age has revolutionized not only our access to information but also the very fabric of our social, political, and cultural lives. Digital media, a term encompassing everything from online news portals and social media platforms to streaming services and mobile applications, now forms an integral part of the daily lives of billions of individuals worldwide.

Consider these staggering statistics: As of 2023, almost 2/3 (65.7%) of the global population has internet access, with a significant portion spending an average of 6.4 hours per day on social media platforms (Source: Statista (Number of internet and socialmedia users worldwide asof April2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>)). This digital immersion has far-reaching implications. It shapes public opinion, influences consumer behavior, and even redefines interpersonal relationships. The sheer volume of information available at our fingertips is both empowering and overwhelming. The digital landscape has become the primary arena for cultural exchange and the formation of public opinion. Social media platforms, in particular, play a pivotal role in this dynamic. They have democratized content creation, allowing anyone with an internet connection to share their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives with a global audience. This has led to a more diverse and pluralistic public sphere but has also introduced challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the polarization of societal discourse.

Moreover, the digital age has redefined concepts of identity and community. Online communities based on shared interests, beliefs, or experiences transcend geographical boundaries, creating new forms of social organization and interaction. This virtual connectivity, while fostering a sense of global community, also raises questions about the nature of identity and belonging in a digitally mediated world.

As we delve deeper into the 21st century, it's clear that the digital age has not just changed how we access information; it has transformed how we perceive and interact with the world around us. Understanding this transformation is crucial, not just for media and information literacy but for navigating the complexities of contemporary society. The following sections of this book will explore these transformations in greater depth, particularly in the context of the rise of AI and Generative AI, and their profound implications for media and information literacy.

The Rise of AI and Generative AI

In the tapestry of the digital age, one of the most significant threads is the development and advancement of artificial intelligence (AI). AI, once a subject of science fiction, has now become an integral part of our daily lives. From simple algorithms that recommend what we should watch next on streaming platforms to complex systems capable of performing tasks that were traditionally thought to require human intelligence, AI's presence is ubiquitous and growing.

A particularly noteworthy development in the realm of AI is the emergence of Generative AI. This subset of AI involves machines not just analyzing data but creating new content, be it text, images, or even music. The introduction of models like GPT-3 by OpenAI marks a significant milestone in this field. These models, powered by deep learning algorithms and vast amounts of data, can generate human-like text, answer questions, write poetry, or even generate computer code, blurring the lines between human and machine-generated content.

The implications of these advancements are profound and multifaceted. On one hand, they present incredible opportunities for efficiency, creativity, and technological progress. For instance, AI-driven personal assistants, predictive analytics in healthcare, and automated financial advisors have the potential to enhance productivity and decision-making.

On the other hand, the rapid advancement of AI, particularly Generative AI, raises critical questions and challenges. Issues such as the potential for deepfakes, the ethical considerations around AI-generated content, and the impact on job markets demand urgent attention and discourse. There is also the challenge of ensuring these technologies are developed and used in ways that are ethical, transparent, and beneficial for society as a whole.

In the context of media and information, the rise of AI and Generative AI has significant implications. These technologies are not only changing how content is created and disseminated but also how it is consumed and perceived. The ability of AI to generate convincing and coherent content raises questions about authenticity, trust, and the very nature of human creativity. As we continue to explore the vast potential of AI and Generative AI, it's crucial to consider both their transformative capabilities and the challenges they present. Understanding these technologies, their evolution, and their societal impact is essential for media and information literacy in the digital age. The next sections will delve into the specific challenges posed by the information era, emphasizing the importance of MIL in navigating these challenges.

Challenges Posed by the Information Era

In the digital age, one of the most daunting challenges is managing the sheer volume and velocity of information that flows through digital channels. The internet, social media, and 24-hour news cycles have created an environment where information is abundant and constantly available. This abundance, while beneficial in many ways, also makes it increasingly difficult to discern valuable and accurate information from misinformation and disinformation.

Misinformation (false or misleading information shared without harmful intent) and disinformation (deliberately deceptive information) have become pervasive in the digital landscape. The spread of false information can have serious consequences, from influencing public opinion and election outcomes to endangering public health, as seen in the misinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic. The ease with which such content can be created and disseminated, especially with the aid of AI and social media algorithms, exacerbates the problem.

Another significant challenge is the digital divide – the gap between those who have or do not have access to modern information and communication technology. This divide is not just technical but also involves disparities in the ability to critically evaluate and use information effectively. In a world increasingly reliant on digital technologies, those without adequate access or skills are at a significant disadvantage, further increasing social and economic inequalities.

The digital age has also heightened concerns around privacy and data security. With vast amounts of personal data being collected and processed by various entities, the risk of data breaches and misuse is a constant worry. Additionally, the use of this data by AI algorithms for profiling and targeted advertising raises ethical questions about surveillance and autonomy.

The integration of AI into various aspects of the information ecosystem presents its own set of ethical challenges. These include biases in AI algorithms, the potential misuse of AI for manipulative purposes, and the broader societal implications of increasingly autonomous AI systems. Ensuring that AI development and deployment are aligned with ethical standards and societal values is a complex but essential task.

The challenges of the information era – from the spread of misinformation to ethical concerns surrounding AI – highlight the critical need for robust media and information literacy. Understanding these challenges is the first step in equipping individuals with the skills necessary to navigate the complex digital landscape. The next sections will delve into the importance of MIL in contemporary society and its evolving role in the context of AI and Generative AI.

The Importance of MIL in Contemporary Society

In an era characterized by an unprecedented flow of information, the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has never been more vital. MIL encompasses a range of skills and competencies that enable individuals to effectively access, analyze, evaluate, and create information and media. It's not just about being able to read and write but about being literate in the language of images, sounds, and multimedia, and understanding the various contexts in which information is disseminated and consumed.

One of the core purposes of MIL is to foster critical thinking and analytical skills. In a world where information can be both empowering and misleading, the ability to scrutinize the source, understand the context, and assess the veracity of information is crucial. MIL helps individuals distinguish between fact and opinion, identify biases and propaganda, and develop a reflective understanding of the media they consume.

MIL plays a pivotal role in enabling informed and active citizenship. In democratic societies, the ability to engage with media critically is essential for participation in civic life. This includes understanding the role of media and information in shaping public opinion and political processes, recognizing the influence of media ownership and commercial interests, and contributing to societal discourse through informed dialogue and decision-making.

MIL also addresses the challenges posed by the digital divide. By equipping individuals with the skills to navigate the digital world, MIL contributes to bridging the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. It ensures that the benefits of the digital age are more equitably distributed, promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities.

The rapid evolution of media technologies, particularly with the advent of AI and digital platforms, requires an adaptive approach to MIL. Traditional notions of media literacy are being stretched as AI-generated content becomes more prevalent. MIL in the contemporary context must therefore encompass not only the critical analysis of content but also an understanding of the underlying technologies and their societal implications.

The importance of MIL in contemporary society cannot be overstated. It is a foundational skill for navigating the complexities of the modern information landscape, essential for critical thinking, informed citizenship, and social empowerment. As we delve further into the implications of AI and digital technologies on media and information, the evolving role of MIL becomes even more apparent. The subsequent sections will explore MIL in the context of AI and Generative AI, underscoring its significance in the face of these technological advancements.

MIL in the Context of AI and Generative AI

In an era where artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly prevalent, the traditional scope of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) needs to be expanded and adapted. AI and its subset, Generative AI, are not only changing how information is produced and disseminated but also challenging our understanding of authenticity and reliability. MIL, therefore, must evolve to equip individuals with the skills necessary to navigate this new landscape.

One of the most pressing challenges in the context of AI is discerning AI-generated content. With technologies like GPT-3 producing human-like text, the ability to distinguish between what is created

by humans and what is generated by machines becomes crucial. MIL in the age of AI must include an understanding of how these technologies work, their capabilities, and their limitations. This knowledge is essential not only for identifying AI-generated content but also for understanding the ethical implications and biases that may be inherent in such content.

MIL should also encompass a critical engagement with the use of AI in media production and consumption. This includes understanding the role of algorithms in shaping what information is presented to us on digital platforms, how these algorithms can create echo chambers, and the implications for diversity of perspectives and information. It's about questioning not just the content but the systems that curate and present this content.

The integration of AI in media and information spheres brings to the forefront several ethical considerations. MIL in the context of AI involves understanding these ethical dimensions, such as data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and the potential for manipulation. Furthermore, there is a growing need for AI literacy – an understanding of the principles of AI operation, the data it uses, and its broader societal impacts.

As AI continues to advance and become more integrated into our media and information ecosystems, MIL must prepare individuals for an AI-driven future. This involves not only being consumers of AI-generated content but also understanding how to interact with, respond to, and possibly even create such content. It's about fostering a sense of digital empowerment and responsibility in the face of rapidly evolving technologies.

Incorporating AI and Generative AI into the framework of MIL presents both challenges and opportunities. It requires a nuanced understanding of the intersection between technology, media, and society. As AI continues to reshape our information landscape, MIL becomes an essential tool for ensuring that individuals can navigate this landscape thoughtfully, critically, and ethically. The next sections will explore real-world case studies and examples that highlight the practical applications and implications of MIL in our increasingly AI-driven world.

Case Studies and Examples

In understanding the practical applications and implications of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in the digital age, particularly in the context of AI and Generative AI, real-world case studies and examples offer invaluable insights. These scenarios not only illustrate the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital and AI-driven media landscape but also showcase how MIL skills can be effectively applied and why they are crucial.

Case Study 1: Elections and Political Campaigns

One prominent example is the role of MIL in the context of elections and political campaigns (Karpouzis et al., 2022). The 2016 U.S. presidential election and subsequent elections around the world have shown how social media and AI-driven algorithms can significantly influence public opinion. In these scenarios, MIL skills help individuals critically assess political messages, differentiate between legitimate news and propaganda, and understand the role of AI in micro-targeting and spreading misinformation. Analyzing these cases helps highlight the importance of MIL in maintaining the integrity of democratic processes.

Case Study 2: Public Health Information during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic offers another critical case study in MIL. During the pandemic, the world witnessed an 'infodemic' – an overabundance of information, both accurate and false (Skarpelos et al., 2024). MIL skills were crucial in helping individuals navigate this flood of information, discern reliable sources, and make informed decisions about health and safety. This case also illustrates the role of AI in both spreading and combating misinformation, emphasizing the need for MIL in understanding and critically engaging with AI-generated content.

Case Study 3: The Rise of Deepfakes

The emergence of deepfakes – hyper-realistic AI-generated videos or audio – presents a new frontier in the discussion of MIL. Deepfakes pose significant challenges in terms of verifying the authenticity of media content. Understanding and identifying deepfakes require a sophisticated level of MIL, combining media literacy with an understanding of AI technologies. Examining case studies

where deepfakes have been used in various contexts, from politics to entertainment, underscores the need for heightened MIL in an era where seeing is no longer believing (Karpouzis, 2024).

These case studies demonstrate the real-world relevance and application of MIL. They show that MIL is not just an academic concept but a necessary skillset for navigating the complexities of the modern information landscape. The lessons drawn from these examples provide a foundation for further discussion on the importance of MIL in an increasingly digital and AI-influenced world. The final sections of the book will draw conclusions from these case studies and offer a forward-looking perspective on the future of MIL.

This Book

This book covers a wide range of applications and contexts illustrating the importance of MIL in the post-pandemic era.

Maria Leonida, in her chapter titled “A Suitcase of Images and Sounds”, describes the digital transformation of a media education organization, starting before and being accelerated by the pandemic. Their blended learning toolbox, Leonida claims, answers the need to include information, ideas, and feelings in the learning process in a playful and self-directed manner, while their experience from deploying the material reflects two current trends: the constantly increasing formation of distance learning content, and the widespread interest for a creative further education in audiovisual production.

Claudia Prioste et al. discuss how the pandemic increased the need for interdisciplinary and multicultural actions for Media and Information Literacy. Their chapter, titled “Digital hospitality lab: empowering educators through digital literacy - a case study from Guatemala”, also discusses the value of training the trainers using highly skilled instructors, especially when this is combined with practical activities.

The next chapter, titled “Building Civic Resilience through Digital Verification Skills: Media Literacy Evidence from a Small State” by Aukšė Balčytienė, discusses the timely and thorny issue of MIL in the context of democratic capacity and civic resilience. They focus on a pilot study on digital media usage strategies in diverse groups of population (adults, university students, and high schoolers) and their attitudes, perceptions, and assessments towards disinformation, professional journalism, and the quest to find trustful sources and verified information.

Daniela Costa, in the chapter titled “Promoting digital citizenship and social justice through the implementation of MIL in Basic Education schools”, discusses Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs assessing the impacts of platformisation, datafication, and automation of society. The focus of this chapter is on a nation-wide survey in Brazil and the results from data collected between 2020 and 2022 from principals and teachers from public and private basic education schools.

Katerina Chryssanthopoulou's chapter, titled “Media literacy pedagogies: the COVID-19 distance education disruption and the way ahead”, examines the positive effects of MIL interventions such as source and content evaluation, message comprehension, and media assessment on the students' ability to rationally judge information, leading to improved political discourse and youth community engagement. The chapter also discusses policies in the same context, focusing on EU-wide frameworks.

The chapter titled “Challenges in Media & Information Literacy in the Post-Pandemic Era: The role of Educational Radiotelevision”, authored by Sofia Papadimitriou, discusses how a traditional medium such as television can be enhanced with innovative and creative storytelling elements to enrich teaching and learning. Papadimitriou presents the Educational Television program developed by the Greek Public Broadcaster (ERT) and how it was utilized during the pandemic in the context of courses taught in school, but also with soft skills and MIL concepts.

Tsampika Karakiza et al., in their chapter titled “New challenges for media education: Towards an innovative programme of digital self-awareness and resilience”, elaborate on the need to link MIL-related practices inside the school curriculum with those students spontaneously engage with, e.g., when online, in programs across all education levels. Their analysis originates from the fact that

media have become extensions of the individual, hence a media education program should consider them as an integral element of modern life.

The chapter titled “Relocating media literacy through aural perception: The concept of digital “sound map” and its impact during the (post-)pandemic era” by Nick Poulakis and Zoi-Danai Tzamtzi considers theories of acoustic ecology and anthropology of sound to discuss a series of COVID-19 projects based on the concept of “sound maps”. The authors build on this experience to emphasize the importance of multisensory media awareness in the context of interpersonal communication in the post-pandemic era.

Dimitris Papacharalampous and Stamatia Papadimitriou’s chapter titled “Cine-inclusion in Class: Fostering Inclusive Film Literacy” discusses a study model developed by the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME); this model, among others, introduces accessible features for individuals with disabilities to integrate films into curricula, and employs standard pedagogy principles to increase the reach of Film Literacy activities. The authors discuss the different aspects of the model, highlighting its adoption and received from diverse educational partners.

Finally, Vasiliki Michailidou’s chapter on “UnTwining Cyberbullying” discusses an approach to raise active critical thinking and awareness regarding cyberbullying in teenagers. In her approach, Michailidou employs “Twine”, an online game authoring platform, to build and utilize digital narratives to assist students’ perceptions of related incidents and train them on how to respond to them.

A common “thread” across all chapters is the emergence of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) not just as a skill or competency, but as a fundamental human right. The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create information is intrinsic to the exercise of free expression, informed citizenship, and personal empowerment. In an era where information is as vital as any traditional resource, ensuring equitable access to and understanding of this information becomes a matter of social justice and human dignity. MIL, in its essence, equips individuals with the tools to engage critically with the media and information they encounter, fostering not only personal enlightenment but also the health of democratic societies. It underpins the ability to make informed decisions, participate in public life, and navigate the complexities of an increasingly digital world. This is particularly crucial in an age where AI-driven technologies can obscure the lines between fact and fiction, underscoring the need for critical media consumption and production skills.

Recognizing MIL as a human right emphasizes the obligation of governments, educational institutions, and society at large to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the opportunity to develop these essential skills. It calls for the integration of MIL into education systems, the promotion of public awareness campaigns, and the development of policies that support an informed and media-literate populace. In this light, MIL transcends its role as an educational objective and becomes a cornerstone of a fair, informed, and democratic society. It is a right that enables individuals to not only consume information but also to contribute to the information ecosystem, ensuring a diverse, pluralistic, and healthy public discourse. As the digital and AI realms continue to evolve, affirming MIL as a human right is crucial in safeguarding the principles of freedom, equality, and participation in the digital age.

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