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Module : 01 Media and Information Literacy definition, need and purpose, Role of MIL in the society



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Description of Module	
Subject Name	Library and Information Science
Paper Name	20 Media and Information Literacy
Module Name/Title	Media and Information Literacy definition, need and purpose, Role of MIL in the society
Module Id	LIS/MIL-M/01
Pre-requisites	
Objectives	To understand the fundamentals of media and information literacy To understand the definitions of media and information literacy Recognize the need and purpose of media and information literacy in today's world To delineate the various role of media and information literacy in the society
Keywords	Media literacy, Information Literacy

1. Introduction to Media and Information Literacy

A young person in today's contemporary society is living in a media environment that is dynamic and changing rapidly. Young people use different forms of media and communication more than ever before. They are frequently engaged in more than one media activity at a time. For instance a person working on the computer may be using one of the social networking sites while s/he may also be listening to music and even simultaneously be chatting in Whatsapp in his mobile. This use of multiple media simultaneously is called media multitasking.

With the country's thrust towards '*a digital India*', the proliferation and convergence of media technologies is going to get a further critical push. Not only people will get newer and more dynamic media platforms, they will be able to access communication and media with greater ease and with heightened interactivity. The tradition approach of being a totally passive consumer of the media is paving way to more participatory and active communication. This will also lead to a situation where most of us will be overloaded with information from multiple sources. The role of information and knowledge in our daily routines will increase manifold.

This surfeit of information and exposure to media impacts our cultural norms and the socialization process. In many instances, this influences how we spend our leisure time, what kind of clothes we wear and how do we respond to different issues in our lives. We are bombarded daily with hundreds of images and symbols, slogans, mascots, jingles and music, wide arrays of views and opinion on single issues. Consciously or unconsciously all these influence our behavior. In fact this overwhelming dominance of media in our daily lives has been aptly summed up by Silverstone (2007) who said, "Media is now at the core of experience, at the heart of our capacity or incapacity to make sense of the world in which we live."

UNESCO (1999) points out, "Children and youth of schooling age are the groups that are most vulnerable to the forces of media influence, and regardless of their diversity in circumstance and surroundings, youth from all corners of the world identify with and share the models of conduct, aspirations and cultural consumption patterns that are evoked by the world media landscape."

Here it needs to be noted that in today's world of commercialization, the entire media industry is run by big corporate houses and their major advertisers who major goal is maximization of profit. Various big global media conglomerates have stake in major national media. These big corporate entities have a great influence on what messages are constructed and how they are packaged and delivered to the audience. In turn, it is often said that the big corporate houses run media determine what we read, hear and see.

In this backdrop, what could be the approaches to deal with this situation of enormous media influence and exposure to increasing bulk of information? It is not necessary that all of us have the capacity to understand the functioning of the media, the agenda behind different media messages, the capability to use the increasing interactive forms of media for the greater benefits of our society and delineate the information that we really need to address issues and concerns of our

daily lives and redundant information. We may not have the ability to give independent judgment on different media content. All these issues call for developing new skills, understanding and enhancement of critical thinking abilities. The new skills should involve developing critical skills in media multitasking, ability to navigate information across different media platforms, networking, developing understanding of how media messages are developed and abilities to negotiate and interact in the community. The development of these new skills is directly linked to becoming media and information literate.

The UNESCO Conference on Media Education organized in Vienna in 1999 delved on the importance of media and information literacy (MIL) as it stated, "Media education is a part of the fundamental right of each and every citizen of any country in the world of freedom of expression and the right to information, and is a tool for building and maintaining democracy."

2. Definitions of Media and Information Literacy

One of the often used definitions of media literacy was given by Aufderheide (1992) who described it as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. Silverblatt (2001) gives a more detailed definition which encompasses most of the issues discussed above. He talks about media literacy emphasizing on the following:

- A critical thinking skill that allows audiences to develop independent judgments about media content
- An understanding of the process of mass communication
- An awareness of the impact of media on the individual and society
- The development of strategies with which to discuss and analyze media messages
- An awareness of media content as a text that provides insight into our contemporary culture and ourselves
- The cultivation of an enhanced enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of media content
- In the case of media communicators, the ability to produce effective and responsible media messages

Media literacy should be seen as a composite concept which encompasses all forms of communication and media- not just the modern and new media but also the traditional media like graffiti arts, puppetry, and street plays etc.

A comprehensive definition of media literacy was given by Tornero (2004). He stated:

Media Literacy can be defined as the capacity to access, analyze and evaluate the power of the images, sounds and messages with which we are faced every day and which play an important role in contemporary culture. It includes the individual capacity to communicate using the media competently. Media literacy concerns all media, including television, film, radio and recorded music, the press, the Internet, any other digital communication technology, alternative and traditional media. The purpose of media literacy is to raise the level of awareness of the different guises taken on by the messages transmitted by the media that we find in our lives every day. This must help citizens to recognize how media filter their perceptions and convictions, mould popular culture and influence personal decisions. It should provide citizens with the capacity for critical analysis as well as creative problem-solving capacities, turning them into aware productive consumers of information themselves. Media education is part of the fundamental rights of each citizen in every country in the world, just like the freedom of expression and the right to information, and it is crucial to the attainment and consolidation of democracy. Today, media literacy is one of the key prerequisites for the exercise of full, active citizenship, and it is one of the spheres inside which intercultural dialogue should be promoted.

Next is the definition of Information Literacy. As discussed above, we may have surfeit of information in today's information society. But many of us may not possess the ability to identifying the right information, analyze it and use it in our daily lives. For instance let us assume you are a health worker who finds lot of cases of malnutrition in your area. There is no point criticizing all and sundry of the state of children's health. A strategic approach is needed for creating awareness and addressing the issue. For this you need to have detailed information about cases of malnutrition in your community. Here getting authentic data is important. So you need to identify and locate the right source from you can get this information. There are possibilities of multiple sources of information. Also you need to know on how to access the right information. Next, simply getting the information is not enough. You must know how to analyze it according to your needs. If you have got different types of data and information, after analyzing you must know how to organize it. The last step is the knowledge of using this information strategically so that it can benefit the cause in which you are working. All these encapsulate the essentiality of being information literate in today's contemporary society.

Tuominen and Kotilainen (2012) offer a definition of information literacy, "It is a set of competencies for obtaining, understanding, evaluating, adapting, generating, storing, and presenting information for problem analysis and decision-making. Information literate people possess basic skills: critical thinking, analyzing information and using it for self-expression, independent learning, producing, being informed citizens and professionals, and participating in the governance and democratic processes of their societies."

Tuominen and Kotilainen (2012) also lists different skills needed to be information literate:

- Identifying/recognizing information needs
- Identifying sources of information

- Locating or retrieving information
- Analyzing and assessing the quality of information
- Organizing, storing or archiving information
- Using information in an ethical, efficient, and effective way
- Creating and communicating new knowledge

Horton (2007) lists 11 stages of information literacy which gives an easy bird's eye view of the concept:

Stage One: Realize that a need or problem exists that requires information its satisfactory resolution

Stage Two: Know how to accurately identify and define the information needed to meet the need, solve the problem, or make the decision.

Stage Three: Know how to determine whether the needed information exists or not, and if it does not, know how to create, or cause to be created the unavailable information (also referred to as "creating new knowledge").

Stage Four: Know how to find the needed information if you have determined that it does, indeed, exist.

Stage Five: Know how to create, or cause to be created, unavailable information that you need; sometimes called "creating new knowledge."

Stage Six: Know how to fully understand found information, or know where to go for help if needed to understand it.

Stage Seven: Know how to organize, analyze, interpret and evaluate information, including source reliability.

Stage Eight: Know how to communicate and present the information to others in appropriate and usable formats and mediums.

Stage Nine: Know how to utilize the information to solve a problem, make a decision or meet a need.

Stage Ten: Know how to preserve, store, reuse, record and archive information for future use.

Stage Eleven: Know how to dispose of information no longer needed, and safeguard information that should be protected.

Before we conclude this section, based on the various definitions of media and information literacy, let us cull out their main elements:

- As pointed out by Silverblatt, media and information literate people will be able to make independent decisions without being unduly influenced by others on different media messages.
- Critical knowledge of the functioning and processes of the media will enable individuals understand more about how media influences and representations.
- By enhancing capacities of citizens to fulfill their role of being active citizens and facilitating dialogues amongst diverse population, media and information literacy can contribute towards the evolution of more informed communities which could work together.
- Media and information literate citizens can participate in the democratic process more actively.
- The different definitions of media and information literacy position it as an essential ingredient of life skill education.
- Media and information literacy encourages use of media and information in a more responsible and ethical way.
- Media and information literacy enables citizens to produce their own media messages creatively and purposefully.
- A media and information literate citizenry are able to address many contemporary challenges.

3. Need and Purpose of Media and Information Literacy

Let us examine two scenarios- one before being part of any media and information literacy training programme and one after. There could be a situation where a student is unaware of how a news media is promoting the interests of a particular company or a political party. The only goal is to gain wholesome entertainment for any exposure to media and not make any efforts to understand the process behind the construction of different media messages. However, being part of any media and information training programme, the same student will be able to understand the biases of the news media, would be able to do some research and acquire information on the policy of the news media and its owners, deconstruct the news and even end up giving her/his critical views in the web edition of the news media.

So notwithstanding the commercial orientation of today's media, there are new avenues for an active media and information literate citizen to respond to numerous cases of biases, sensationalization and trivialization. Media scholar Daya Thussu terms the new trends of news coverage by the media as 'news as entertainment'. It discusses how news increasingly covers trivia and entertainment and not the real lives of people. It also means without being media and

information literate a citizen will find it difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction in media coverage.

Again there can be two scenarios. One scenario can be of a young person who updates her/his Facebook profile page in different styles and clothes clearly influenced by the bombarding of advertisements of various companies. In this case this person can be said to have joined the bandwagon of media trivialization. The other scenario could be of a person using all available channels of communication and media and her/his research abilities to take up a cause. The use of the media for overall well-being of the society can be linked with the functionalist theory of mass media which stresses on the positive role the media can play for a coherent and conflict-free society. It talks of the importance of order, the continuity of culture, values and stability and takes us to the notion of social responsibility of the media. (McQuail, 2000) Media and information literacy can facilitate active citizenship amongst people and enable them to take up in public discourses and dialogue.

Let us consider another scenario of an emergency or conflict. Better knowledge of how to use the media and information will help address the issue in such cases. All new skills a media and information literate citizen must possess as discussed above- networking, navigating information across different media, ability to use one's communication skills to negotiate and interact in the community and ability to media multitasking will have to be used in such a situation. Not only with these abilities, a citizen can contribute to our public sphere but also take up in different democratic decision making processes.

In this context, Renee Hobbs (2008) talks on the importance of media literacy: "Media literacy practices help strengthen students' information access, analysis and communication skills and build an appreciation for why monitoring the world is important. Media literacy can inform students about how the press functions in a democracy, why it matters that citizens gain information and exposure to diverse opinions, and why people need to participate in policy decision-making at the community, state and federal levels. Secondly, media literacy can support and foster educational environments in which students can practice the skills of leadership, free and responsible self-expression, conflict resolution and consensus building, because without these skills, young people will not be able to effectively engage with others in the challenges of cooperative problem-solving that participation in a democratic society demands. Third, media literacy skills can inspire young people to become more interested in increasing their access to diverse sources of information."

Varis (2010) talks of the importance of media literacy education in contemporary environment from the point of view of active citizenship as he states, "It is a necessary part of active citizenship and is key to the full development of freedom of expression and the right to information. It is therefore an essential part of participative democracy and intercultural dialogue."

Another important need for introduction of media and information literacy amongst young people is how it can counter media violence. Violence in the media is long contested to have effects on young people. Several researches have shown how violent video games, cartoons, films etc influences young people as they try to imitate, get ideas on how to use violence, show aggressive

behavior and develop narrow misconceptions about violence in the society. Scharrer (2009) talks about how by encouraging children to think critically about the violence they see in television, movies, videogames, and other media, media literacy programmes have the potential to interfere with the potentially negative effects of media violence.

It would be apt to explore this aspect with an example of how media literacy can be used as tool for violence prevention. Elizabeth Thoman gives an example of what Scharrer was saying of encouraging young people to think critically about violence. Stressing on the need to explore alternatives to storytelling that highlights the importance of violence to end conflicts, she shares, "Through media literacy classes, parents can also learn to transform undesirable images from popular culture into opportunities for positive modeling. One father, for example, let his child watch *Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but only if the child would imagine a fifth turtle named "Gandhi." Afterwards they had a great discussion on how "Ninja Gandhi" might get the Turtles out of trouble without resorting to violence!" Now this is an example of how young people can be challenged to think of nonviolent solutions to conflicts and develop their own critical thinking abilities on alternative to violence.

(<http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/beyond-blame-media-literacy-violence-prevention>)

The need of media and information literacy for addressing issues of violence as delved by Thorman above can be taken forward as an essential component of trainings to media and information literate. "Students should be encouraged to analyze media messages in different media and communication platforms including those in their daily lives and look at any form of violence in these messages. Then they should be encouraged to look at how nonviolent communication could have been used in those circumstances. Finally, they should be encouraged to find out the gains like to strengthening of relationships, mutual respect and tolerance that could have resulted if those messages were nonviolent in nature. Such exercises and practical approach could promote greater use of nonviolent communication in every aspect of our daily lives."

(<https://vedabhyas.wordpress.com/2015/05/09/media-and-information-literacy-for-peace-and-nonviolence-some-thoughts/>)

As discussed, let us assume that you are a health worker working on the problem of malnutrition in your area. Generally in today's scenario, we may be able to get a lot of information related to malnutrition and its causes not only nationally but also for your area. Sometimes there could be situation of information overload. As outlined in the previous section, information literacy skills will not only help you to get and organize the right type of information, you will also be able to analyze and interpret it. Further, using your media literacy skills you might be able to use different channels of communication to take up the cause of malnutrition. Similarly, you can use these skills to contribute towards the social and economic development of the society. This succinctly sums up the need and purpose of media and information literacy in the 21st century.

4. Role of Media and Information Literacy in the Society

The last two sections gave us a broad understanding of media and information literacy and their need and purpose in contemporary society. In this section we will go further to understand the role of media and information literacy in our society.

- A) Tornero and Varis (2010) underline the new objectives of media literacy in the 21st century: These includes: a) capacity for listening, namely for understanding, for talking; b) tolerance; c) respect for diversity; and d) ethics. These objectives highlight the importance of media and information literacy for a culture of peace and nonviolence. These also are an important signpost on how we can encourage nonviolent communication in our daily actions. As mentioned in the previous section, using skills of media and information literacy individuals and groups can encourage and promote different communication for peace initiatives and contribute to conflict resolution.
- B) Taking the above role of MIL forward, it needs to be mentioned that a media and information literate citizenry can take up dialogues amongst diverse communities and groups in the society and contribute actively to the public sphere. In this context, UNESCO's (2011) Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers talks about MIL's role in 'facilitating debates among diverse social actors, and encouraging the resolution of disputes by democratic means'. MIL skills can be useful in addressing challenges of disinformation campaigns by vested and divisive groups in our society.
- C) MIL skills enable citizens to access information, analyze it and use for the benefit of individuals and communities. The UNESCO Curriculum looks at this role of MIL for 'correcting the asymmetry of information between governors and governed and competing private agents'.
- D) As MIL enhances skills of networking, navigating across different media platforms, negotiating, multitasking and promote interconnectedness, the UNESCO Curriculum explains this role as that of 'providing a means by which society learns about itself and builds a sense of community.' This also can be explained as MIL's role to 'provide a vehicle for cultural expression and cultural cohesion within and between nations'.
- E) MIL skills are expected to promote active citizenry. In this context, the UNESCO Curriculum explains this role to encourage citizens to 'act as a watchdog of government in all its forms, promoting transparency in public life and public scrutiny of those with power by exposing corruption and corporate wrong-doing'. This role can be linked to MIL's contribution to good governance.
- F) Think of the wide range of contributions you can make as being a media and information literate person. You could take up many social concerns, you can contribute to peaceful resolution of conflicts in your surrounding through your MIL skills, you can contribute to many livelihood issues as you will be in a better position to acquire information and use it strategically and overall you can make some genuine contribution to nation building. Kumar (2000) sums this up with the goals of MIL in a country like India, "The primary goals of media education are thus the conscientization, empowerment and liberation of the community and of society as a whole. Its concerns are the promotion of equality, social justice, democracy,

freedom, human dignity and a more humane society. The methods or strategies it employs are dialogue, reflection and action.”

- G) The UNESCO’s Curriculum also talks of MIL’s role for ‘serving the society’s collective memory e.g. libraries.’
- H) In the backdrop of increasing environmental degradation which includes rising levels of pollution, concerns of climate change etc, the role of MIL in promoting sustainable practices and development becomes crucial. For instance, MIL skills enables us to develop critical understanding of the causes of pollution in our city and how we can address it and create awareness on this.

5. Conclusion

The overload of information and media messages from multiple sources in today’s contemporary society poses a challenge on what to take and what to discard; it also makes it difficult to make a distinction between reality and fiction. In this backdrop, imbibing MIL skills becomes necessary. Different definitions of MIL highlight its importance as a significant component of life skill education and the enhanced participation of citizens in the democratic process. MIL skills enables people to be active consumers of media products and not passive. With greater interactivity in different platforms, individuals can take part in the public sphere more than ever before. The role of MIL in the society ranges from promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence to address challenges of misinformation and contribute to community and nation building. It plays an important role intercultural dialogue and promotion of a more humanistic society.

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