

Lesson 3 Contemporary Citizenship and Social Responsibility

Reading 1

Digital Media Literacy

Why Is Digital Media Literacy Important?

What is the first thing you do when you want to know about something new? Decades ago, you might have headed to a library to search for a book.

Today, however, you would likely grab your phone and use search engines to look up whatever you'd like to know. Alternatively, without lifting a finger, you might use your voice to get quick answers from an application assisted by AI. By utilizing digital technology, it seems to take very little effort to find the information you need. Various digital platforms—including social media, blogs, and news websites—readily offer a wide range of content in multiple forms, such as texts, images, and videos.

Digital media content, however, can do more harm than good if we do not examine its accuracy and reliability. For example, consider the flat-Earth theory. In the 21st century, there has been a growing number of people who believe that the Earth is flat.

How did this false theory—easily disproved by science—become so popular online? Psychologists point out that online platforms have played a huge role in spreading the flat-Earth theory. A platform's algorithms can function in a way that exposes naive viewers repeatedly to the theory, eventually convincing them that the theory is real.

When you obtain information online, you should be aware that a digital environment is often populated by misinformation. Nowadays, practically anyone can create and share digital content through various media channels, regardless of one's qualifications. In addition, anonymity in a digital world makes some people feel less afraid to spread false stories since they do not have to worry about being exposed for doing so. Hence, when you use digital media, you must try to distinguish credible information from misinformation. That is the area where digital media literacy comes into play. It is an ability that helps you to utilize digital media in a meaningful and constructive way.

Critical Thinking Helps You Become Digital Media Literate

If you want to become digital media literate, critical thinking is a must. Thinking critically in a digital environment starts with never taking for granted the reliability of digital media content. It also requires you to constantly engage in fact-checking. For example, the popularity of a piece of content, judging from its number of “likes,” does not guarantee its credibility. To determine the truth of an online story, check who wrote it and check if the content is supported by reliable sources. Additionally, if a story was published by a media outlet, assess whether the media outlet itself can be trusted.

A sensible digital media consumer should also consider the intentions or motives behind digital content. For instance, you may find yourself reading an online news article explaining the health benefits of vitamin C consumption. You might entertain the possibility that the article was sponsored by a company selling dietary supplements. Considering the underlying motive behind the production of digital content can help you better assess its credibility.

You can also improve your critical thinking skills by acknowledging that we all have confirmation bias. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to readily accept what we already believe while ignoring information contrary to our beliefs. Confirmation bias affects your ability to separate truth from lies, as it is tricky to identify false information when it matches your existing beliefs. To overcome confirmation bias, seek out diverse opinions from different perspectives, even ones you may not agree with. Just as a balanced diet is vital to your health, balanced consumption of media content is important for developing digital media literacy.

Your Digital Media Literacy Benefits Society

Often referred to as digital natives, young people of today have interacted with online media from a very young age. However, being a digital native does not always mean being digital media literate. Developing digital media literacy takes constant effort. Digital media literacy not only makes you a better reader of digital media content, but it also makes you a better citizen. This is because democracy is grounded in your ability to communicate with others via various media channels. By improving your digital media literacy, you can make more informed decisions and become a more responsible democratic citizen.

Reading 2

Better Together:**Universal Design for Everyone**

Have you ever considered how certain spaces and objects are purposefully designed? Imagine taking a bus to the nearest grocery store. When you get on the bus, you notice that the floor of the bus is conveniently close to the ground. At the grocery store, you look for a tuna can with an aluminum lid for your grandmother, who struggles with a can opener. As you walk toward the counter, you see an old lady approaching a kiosk. Surprisingly, it automatically adjusts to her height. These examples, including the low-floor bus, aluminum tuna can lid, and adjustable kiosk, have one thing in common—they are all typical examples of what is known as “universal design.”

“Universal design” refers to the concept of designing products and environments that are accessible to people regardless of their abilities, age, or any other factor. One of the most important figures in the field of universal design is Patricia Moore. She first had the idea that designs for older people were needed.

This idea arose when she saw her grandmother give up cooking because it became hard for her to open and close the refrigerator door. Moore proposed a project to design items specifically for older people to her design company, but her company rejected the project. That was the moment when Moore decided to take matters into her own hands.

In 1979, Moore undertook a massive project, disguising herself as an old lady in her 80s. Her goal was to experience the daily challenges that older people face. To achieve this, she intentionally impaired her sight by wearing foggy glasses and her hearing by placing cotton in her ears. She also bandaged her legs, making it difficult to move without a cane. For nearly three years, Moore lived as an 80-year-old woman, traveling to over 110 cities across the U.S. and Canada. This experience eventually led her to succeed in designing many products that can be conveniently used by older people and even children. Some of Moore’s designs include a potato peeler, a whistling kettle, two-handed scissors, and cooking tools with rubber handles.

A common misconception regarding universal design is that it benefits a limited number of the population, especially older people and people with disabilities. However, the essence of universal design is quite the contrary. It aims to benefit every member of the population by promoting products, services, and systems that are accessible to all.

Touchless sensor buttons for elevators can be one example. Instead of pressing buttons with their fingers, users can simply trigger these buttons by waving their hands or moving their feet near the sensor. It allows young children to use elevators easily. At the same time, adults whose hands are temporarily full can conveniently use the elevator.

As you can see, universal design is an empathetic design that improves the quality of life for everyone around us. Universal design is not rocket science; it merely begins with attempting to put ourselves in someone else's shoes.