

Correspondence

Addressing infodemic through the comprehensive competency framework of media and information literacy

ABSTRACT

As the world experiments with multiplex approaches to achieve a free pandemic society, infodemic pillages the online and offline realms, which exacerbates the spectrum of media fragilities, especially for particular age groups. Misinformation and disinformation related to health, political, and social issues, among others, deter the thin line that demarcates official reports from fake news. As a response to the COVID-19 infodemic, a curriculum and competency framework for media and information literacy can help promote a critical understanding of communications content for people to become media literate citizens. Incorporating the framework in the political and educational spheres enables the people, especially the dominant media users, to reinforce reliable information through responsible content-sharing on media platforms, which is essential for public health safety.

Keywords covid-19, educational settings, public health

Due to COVID-19, the United Nations has drawn attention to an infodemic that is accelerating as a global crisis through the portals of social media. The UN Secretary General quoted that, ‘as COVID-19 spreads, a tsunami of misinformation, hate, scapegoating, and scare-mongering has been unleashed’.¹ Social media platforms have been advantageous for expediting news and health information in society during the pandemic. However, these social technologies exacerbate the current infodemic, putting global response and pandemic-control measures in jeopardy.²

Infodemic is an impediment to health response measures, so determining the predictors for the spread of misinformation and disinformation is crucial. Though the political spectrum has vastly contributed to the spread of false news, a study in the USA has reported that the strongest predictor of whether someone will distribute misleading content is anchored on age rather than political affiliation.³ Authors reported that the elderly are seven times more likely to disseminate fake news to their friends on social media than individuals between the ages of 18 and 29. In the case of the Philippines, no empirical data exist with regard to prediction models on the spread of false news among different age groups. However, in February 2021, Facebook users in the Philippines skyrocketed to 88 400 000, accounting for 78.3%

of the population, and with 28 000 000 users belonging to the age group between 18 and 24.⁴ Logically, it is likely that this age group is also vulnerable to fake news, as a study from the Philippines reported that more than half of the student-respondents were deceived by fake news.⁵ The collegiate age bracket has the tendency to share COVID-19-related information on social media, which is not fact-checked and may exacerbate health-related issues.

To address the vulnerability of the said age groups, it is indispensable that they receive media and information literacy (MIL). UNESCO offered a set of MIL competencies to capacitate people to think critically in dealing with communications content regardless of their age and background.⁶ The MIL curriculum and competency framework unify the notions of media literacy, information literacy and digital literacy, which are integral to promoting and empowering media literate citizens in a complex and uncertain offline and online world. Based on the said curriculum framework, MIL is a public good that can build people’s critical understanding of the media. The authors also stated that responsible media use can promote ‘critical public health literacy’.⁷

Since sustainable MIL remains a wide-scale issue the world over, the promotion of the comprehensive competency framework of MIL can enable people to increase awareness

for citizens to contribute to the prevention of misinformation and disinformation. Thus, organizations should incorporate MIL into the curriculum because access to truthful and reliable information is critical to life-saving and health decision-making.

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