

# Libraries and Digital Citizenship

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The world has seen how the Internet and the emergence of social media, social networking, and evolving information and communication technologies prominently impact our society. One of the effects is the increase in the number and participation of digital citizens. Digital citizens are those who have the ability to “use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfill their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain” (Mossberger et al., 2007, p. 2). Every day, we see individuals actively consume and disseminate information, as well as express their personal, social and political standpoints in various online conversations and platforms. As the use of Internet and social media is directly linked to civic engagement and political participation, Skoric et al. (2016) maintain that knowledge, discussion, and interest generate civic engagement, which in turn increases political participation such as voting. As digital citizens, they have the responsibility to properly, and ethically use technologies and spaces for their own good—and also for the public good.

In the Philippines, about 68 percent of the population use the Internet (Kemp, 2022). Facebook remains as the top social media and messaging application used as source of news and other forms of information (Chua, 2022). While the Internet and social media have contributed to the growing number of digital citizens who can freely participate in online activities and discussions while attempting to bridge technological divide and other forms of inequalities, it is not always the case that the aforementioned benefits outweigh the detriments, especially if these are caused by irresponsible participation from the citizens and institutions. In the 2022 Philippine elections, social

media played a stronger and critical role in shaping the campaign landscape and voters’ consciousness and decisions (Arugay, 2022; Grounds & Koff, 2022). In democratic societies, people have to be well informed, discerning, engaged, and aware of their rights as well as responsibilities that come with the liberty and privileges that they are having. Henninger (2021) argues that information professionals have a crucial role in developing essential literacies such as media, digital, cultural and civic, that can help tackle these issues concerning trust, ethics, and responsible citizenry.

Therefore, where do governments, libraries, and librarians stand on these issues?

The Council of Europe, the continent’s leading human rights organization, spearheads their Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) programme to develop the necessary range of competencies required of an individual in the increasingly digitalized world (Council of Europe, n.d.). They list 10 digital domains subdivided into three groups: *Being Online*, *Well-being Online*, and *Rights Online*, which match all the dimensions considered in other digital citizenship frameworks and advocate for their curriculum inclusion via a holistic, cross-curricular approach. The National Library of New Zealand (n.d.) calls for a coordinated approach in developing digital citizenship—the involvement and full support of digital citizenship by the library collection, services, and staff. The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario (TALCO) provides an idea bank for teachers on their website via the TALCO Digital Citizenship Project (Digital Citizenship – TALCO, n.d.). TALCO’s digital citizenship facets include: *Digital Footprint*,

*Information Ethics, Responsible Use, Privacy, and Safety Online*. In the Philippines, The Philippine Association for Media and Information Literacy (PAMIL), a non-profit professional organization consisting of educators, practitioners and media and information literacy advocates, regularly holds seminars on digital citizenship (PAMIL, 2022). The De La Salle University Libraries continuously hold a #IamInfoSMART campaign for responsible digital citizenship and safer online communities (IamInfosmart DLSU, n.d.). SEAMEO INNOTECH, together with the Vibal Group, launched the Mobile Technology for Teachers or MT4T (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2022), a teacher resource kit that promotes the use of mobile technology in Southeast Asian educational settings. The available digital materials are valuable assets for those entrusted with the task of educating this generation's digital citizens.

These are just some of the various initiatives that libraries and other concerned institutions have been doing to ensure that our society would have and benefit from the actions and engagements of “responsible” digital citizens. In the current context of the Philippines, one may ask, “Are these enough? What else can we do?”

Henninger (2021) puts it plainly: not being literate in essential literacies such as media, digital, cultural and civic, that can help tackle these issues concerning trust, ethics, and responsible citizenry, has dire consequences for informed societies and responsible citizenry and information professionals, in all their roles, have a critical part to play in this endeavor. Thus, more effort and initiatives are in order. A collaborative effort from all sides: citizens, librarians, teachers, students, and media, will provide the holistic advocacy necessary for ethical and responsible digital citizenship.

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