

Towards a Mobile Information Literacy Framework: Rethinking Information Literacy in a Mobile Era

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Abstract

For billions of people coming online, the mobile phone (increasingly smartphones) is their point of entry to the internet, in both developed and developing countries. However, the user experience on a smartphone is very different from that on a PC. The different affordances and limitations of each device shape how people interact with information, and even one's conceptualization of the internet itself. Yet existing digital and information literacy work has largely failed to account for these differences. Reviewed literacy frameworks, for instance, adopt a PC-centric orientation. Research reveals that lack of digital and information literacy skills is a significant barrier to internet adoption. Constructing a new digital and information literacy framework will allow for more relevant curricula and training, thus encouraging more adoption, use, and uptake of the mobile internet, which will allow for those newly online to experience the same benefits of the internet that PC-first users know.

Keywords: information literacy; digital literacy; mobile phones; smartphones; digital inclusion

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1 Description

For billions of people coming online around the world, the mobile phone (and increasingly a smartphone) is their point of entry to the internet. This is true in both developed and developing countries. However, the user experience on a smartphone is very different from that on a PC. The different affordances and limitations of each device shape how people interact with information, and even one's conceptualization of the internet itself. Mobile-specific tendencies include: interacting through apps versus a browser, coming online through a handful of "walled garden" applications, information consumption over production, and social activities over more "serious" uses. Yet the thinking around digital literacy has largely failed to account for these differences. Reviewed information and digital literacy frameworks, for instance, adopt a PC-centric orientation. One consequence is a dearth of digital literacy courses and other learning programs developed for smartphone-centric users. This has important implications for how people get online, how they access and experience the internet, how much they produce in addition to consume information, and more.

At the same time, research tells us that lack of digital and information literacy skills is a significant barrier to internet adoption and uses which ultimately leads to further digital divides (e.g., Armbrrecht, 2016; Arese Lucini, 2016a & 2016b; Ranger, Chandler, & Arscott, 2015; Van Biljon, et. al., 2015; Van Dijk & Van Deursen, 2014). As the next billion comes online via different devices than those currently online, it is critical to examine their experience of the internet and the multitude of benefits it offers. Without the proper digital and information literacy skills, they are once again left behind, even if they are technically connected.

Constructing a new digital and information literacy framework for mobile-first and mobile-centric users will allow for more relevant curricula and training, thus encouraging more adoption, use, and uptake of the mobile internet, which will allow for opportunities for those newly online to experience the same benefits of the internet that PC-first users have come to know.

2 Purpose and Intended Audience

The purpose of this interactive session is to critique what is known about digital and information literacy on mobile phones, and to construct a new information literacy framework that is reflective of the evolving digital mobile environment we live in. We envision the interactive session as an introductory venue to create a living, working document - the mobile digital and information literacy framework. The outputs of this session will be openly published under a Creative Commons license that encourages future work and adaptation of the new digital and information literacy framework.

The intended audience of this interactive session include iConference 2017 attendees that are interested in digital and information literacy, connecting the next billion users to the internet, building the literacy and skills of mobile-first and mobile-centric populations, and enhancing the experience of those coming online via a mobile phone. We welcome and encourage participants of all backgrounds and expertise to create an information literacy framework for mobile-first and mobile-centric users.

3 Proposed Activities

- Experience what it is like to *first* experience the internet on a mobile phone (rather than a PC) through persona-based scenarios and activities.
- Identify and discuss what digital and information literacy frameworks currently exist and the information behavior differences between PCs and mobile phones.
- Design thinking exercise: Break out into small groups for rapid prototyping of a mobile digital and information literacy framework.
- Report back to session plenary group.
- Discuss the session output of the first iteration of mobile digital and information literacy framework and next steps.
- Draft and propose recommendations for next steps for the framework and work going forward.

4 Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

This session fits nicely with the iConference 2017 theme of effecting, expanding, and evolving and collaboration across the global information community. The session will stimulate new contributions to the digital and information literacy literature, as well as curricula, teaching, and training of academics, professionals, and users. This expands the ultimate number of digital and information literate people and advances new knowledge around information literacy to keep pace with technological change.

5 Length

90 minutes

6 References

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