Teaching Skepticism for Positive Change: An Information Assessment Roundtable on How to Address Lies, Deception, Inaccuracy, and Information Sloth

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Abstract

Advances in technology have changed students' ability to access information along with the speed at which discussions take place. While there are many positive and negative impacts from those advances, one significant change involves the speed at which communication takes place, impacting information accuracy and impeding student ability to assess information quality. This roundtable proposes to advance the discussion in an information literacy context to identify information quality issues and challenges, discuss possible solutions, and provide greater support for students to make truly informed decisions, to make better decisions, and make their world a better place.

Keywords: information literacy, information quality, critical thinking

Introduction

The aim of this proposed roundtable is to open a robust dialogue on the current state of student decision-making and, more specifically, an information literacy concern. The roundtable addresses these concerns for instructors teaching any course, regardless of discipline, but with cross-disciplinary participation offering the widest range of perspectives.

Participants are first asked to define what they see as the top challenges in the use of information in their classes and provide their own definitions of information literacy. This is followed by an overview of the current state of information literacy by reviewing definitions and current concerns. Participants are then asked to discuss current concerns based on their own experiences. The roundtable ends with a short reflection on observations and insights as well as recommendations for managing the challenges brought up in discussion.

At the conclusion of the roundtable, participants should have a better grasp of the various information literacy concerns, the challenges and successes their peers are facing related to those concerns, and how they might address these concerns in their respective classrooms.

A common challenge in today's business environment and in Colleges of Business is the rapid proliferation of information sources driven by persistent advances in technology. For our students, this includes communication and the dissemination of information via social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat along with more traditional communication channels including traditional face-to-face, email, text, and audio or video phone technologies. Changes in technology have made it possible to exchange information much more rapidly than in the past. Therefore, conversations that once may have played out over days, now occur instantaneously and rapid-fire. Given the proliferation of information-sharing channels, challenges with information accuracy, verification, and the ability for individuals to process that

information adequately abound. The headline-grabbing issues of the hour are quickly replaced from one moment to the next. Disputes about the accuracy of information within those conversations becomes largely irrelevant as interest wanes.

In the rare case when attention is paid to information inaccuracies in a given discussion, great doubt can be cast upon the value of information exchange itself. Additionally, people who wish to defend their particular beliefs as fact can often find ample information sources that confirm their beliefs and cast doubt on opposing or alternative viewpoints. As an example, this is evident to many in political discussions as well as media battles for how the public will come to view what is real and what is not, and what is right versus what is wrong. It is easy to believe we can be dismissive of what the politicians say and the media promotes, but these are essential societal organisms.

It can seem like the defense of individual realities has become the “new dialogue”. That is, dialogue in its truest sense, is unwanted, uncomfortable, and summarily dismissed. Exploration, investigation, verification, falsification, and other critical evaluations of information have greatly diminished. In business generally, and management specifically, informed decision-making drives more than profit. Managerial decision-making determines the success or failure of businesses. The consequences of bad decision-making can ruin lives, devastate local economies, permit worker and human rights violations, and drive the world in other places contrary to the best interests of societies. Our students, therefore, play significant role in how information is managed not just within organizations but how they, in positions of power and influence, help others make informed decisions. In line with the conference theme, it becomes imperative and urgent that we do what we can to influence and educate our students’ view and understand information itself. If we are to train this next generation of leaders and decision-makers to enact

positive change, then they must have the correct information to succeed. However, we cannot provide them with that information. It will be up to them to seek out, evaluate, and use information that can accurately and effectively achieve that positive future.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Information literacy as a topic has received the most practical and research attention within library and information science fields. Like many definitions, information literacy is conceptualized in a number of different ways and possesses its own controversies (D'Angelo & Maid, 2004; Owusu-Ansah, 2003). For the purposes of this proposal, we use the definition provided by the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries, which explains information literacy as the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." (American Library Association, 2008). As a concept, information literacy has been viewed as an essential component of critical thinking (Paul & Elder, 2006), a type of metaliteracy (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011), a specific grouping of skill sets (Eisenberg, 2008), or characterized as a sociotechnical practice (Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005). Two of its main concerns highly relevant to MOBTS attendees include: 1) how to practice or instruct students in attaining information literacy competencies (Elmborg, 2006) and 2) how to assess associated student learning (Cameron, Wise, & Lottridge, 2007; Walsh, 2009).

In business and management literature, information literacy has received considerably less attention. Some works have examined how information literacy topics have been introduced into business classes at both introductory to capstone levels (Gilinsky & Robison, 2008; Leigh & Gibbon, 2008; Price, Becker, Clark, & Collins, 2011). White and Sheehan's work found that

information literacy can affect how discussions are framed, how solutions are generated, and how to recognize frames and re-frame when necessary (White & Sheehan, 2016).

Work on the topic outside of business has examined how information literacy outcomes can be enhanced by providing individualized feedback (Peter, Leichner, Mayer, & Krampen, 2017), how greater information literacy actually influences content-based learning outcomes (Maybee, Bruce, Lupton, & Rebmann, 2017), and how literacy is influential to and important in course and learning design (Dewald, Scholz-Crane, Booth, & Levine, 2000). Because it is beyond this proposal, we refer to Johnston and Webber for a more extensive review of the topic in higher education (2003) and list a sampling of topics we expect may be important to roundtable participants.

For example, we expect that participants will find a listing of information literacy skills (Miller, 2018; Swanson, 2017) and unfamiliar terminology (Orgeron, 2018) useful to the discussion and useful post-conference. Other works focus on key information literacy concerns including identifying information providers (Dyer, 2003) and how scientific evidence supports or refutes various debates (Wright, Middleton, Greenfield, Williams, & Brazil, 2016). Finally, from an instructor/practitioner perspective, topics such as how information literacy is integrated into curricula (Brown, Murphy, & Nanny, 2003), how such learning is implemented (D'Angelo & Maid, 2004), and how design of instruction changes when class context changes - e.g., with distance learning (Dewald et al., 2000) – may offer participants guidance in designing or redesigning their courses to better support learning in information literacy.

Session Overview

As mentioned above, the goal of this session is to engage business and management instructors in a robust discussion on the topic of information literacy. That is, what experiences

with information quality are roundtable participants experiencing in their classrooms? How are they dealing with challenges, if at all, and what successes have they experienced? Finally, how might we collectively deal with those challenges?

This is accomplished via the following:

1. 10 min – Question to group: What is information literacy? Provide me with your understanding of the topic before I present you with some definitions.
2. 5 min – present common definitions and discuss.
3. 10 min – begin filling out short handout surrounding current challenges and discussions in classes. Handouts do not need to be completed prior to the discussion they inform later. Questions include:

- What do you teach?
- Where do you see these challenges?
- How do you currently deal with them?

4. 10 min – share handout results.
5. 10 min – ask for individual feedback so far including what, of the individual challenges and approaches to managing those surprised them, interested them, or provided them with useful insights.
6. 15 min - wrap-up small group discussion. What would you recommend to somebody who wants to help students become better information literate citizens? How might students to encouraged to activate positive change using information?

Expected Outcome/Conclusion

If knowledge is power, then access to information is its conduit. Students' ability to exercise agency and build their own power to enact positive change in their environments

depends upon their ability to critically evaluate the quality of information and make decisions with that evaluation in mind. The challenges, insights, solutions, and possible next steps generated in the roundtable discussion should be intriguing.

During Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's investigation of the Watergate Hotel break-in their informant offered them this advice, "Follow the money." While they are not top journalists, students have a similarly difficult task of sorting through an information oligarchy where not only is the content of information suspect, the filtering of what is discussed and how it is discussed – its selection and framing – has been manipulated. It may be that similar questions suffice in providing students with tools to sift through the purposefully distorted facts or outright lies about the conditions, situations, or details reported by government, media, working groups, consultants, and scientist. We ask students to keep the following questions in mind. 1) Who is writing the article (author/funder/sponsor/person/organization/publication)? 2) What do they have to gain? 3) How are they supporting their information and claims? 4) Where does the article or claims fit in the larger discussion? 5) How are you approaching the information?

Even this simplistic approach has yielded remarkable results during discussions, debates, and written assignments both solicited and unsolicited.

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