Online Communication in the Digital Age
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Lecture – 27
Professional Communication, Digital Rhetoric and Digital Literacy (continued)

Good morning dear friends and welcome. In the previous module, we had introduced the concept of digital rhetoric and discussed its features. Keeping this context in mind, in today's module, we will be introducing two critics, Barbara Warnick and Elizabeth Losh. We would be primarily discussing their work, Rhetoric Online and Virtual Politik.

- In *Rhetoric Online* (2007), Barbara Warnick uses theories of intertextuality to examine how digital texts are used strategically to create persuasive arguments.

- Intertextuality is a concept that recognizes how texts are interconnected and influenced by other texts which can shape our understanding of language, meaning and public discourse.

- Warnick gives two examples:

  – The first example examines animated parodies created by a website 'jibjab.com' during the 2004 presidential election targeting George W. Bush (II) and John F. Kerry's campaigns and pharmaceutical industries.

  – The second example comes from the popular website of Adbusters, focusing on their use of static, visual spoof ads.

Adbuster's Spoof Ads
Source: Adbusters

In Rhetoric Online, which was published in 2007, Barbara Warnick has used theories of intertextuality to examine how digital texts are used strategically to create persuasive arguments. Intertextuality is a concept that recognizes how texts are interconnected, are influenced by other texts.

This can shape our understanding of language, meaning and public discourse. Warnick in her work has given two examples. The first example examines animated parodies created by your website, jibjab.com during the 2004 presidential election targeting John Bush and John F.Kerry's campaigns and pharmaceutical industries. The second example comes from the popular websites of Adbusters focusing on their use of static and visually spoof ads. Warnick analyzes the intertextual connections and messages conveyed by these parodies and discusses how they do exploit their textual and contextual environments to capture the attention of the users and how do they influence their thinking. The images which have been given show three spoof ads of popular commercial brands to draw awareness on ecological destruction, consumerism and alcoholism. These ads used intertextual references to recognizable advertising campaigns in order to subvert their messages and convey a political as well as a social message.

This shows how professional communication is evolving in the digital age and how it involves the creation as well as dissemination of messages within various contexts. The following video shows the parody of the song, The Drugs I Need by featuring a man who is frustrated with the high costs of prescription drugs in the United States and sings a humorous song about the drugs he needs. The lyrics of the songs parody the language and imagery often used in pharmaceutical advertisements while also highlighting the high costs and complex regulations of the country.

- The parody criticizes the pharmaceutical industry in the pursuit of media activism and tries to subvert advertising and consumerism in the mass media.
- The parody used intertextuality, by drawing on recognizable pharmaceutical advertisements and popular culture.
- The website employs various digital communication technologies, such as animation software and social media integration.
- It is an example of how digital communication technologies and rhetorical strategies are evolving in the digital age.

Source: consumer reports advocacy.com

Source: globalmedia.mit.edu, www.MITPress.com

Elizabeth Losh in VirtualPolitik which was published in 2009 mainly focuses on the conventions of new digital genres that are used for everyday discourse in the lives of average people, for example, wikis, blogs, PowerPoint presentations, publications, etc. She talks about learning appropriate rhetorical practices in these genres. This includes web design choices, suitable visual and auditory presentation and links to information, etc.

  Losh is concerned with the deployment of digital rhetoric as a means of power, ideology and control on the part of governments and bureaucracies. These messages become public rhetoric as they are represented and recorded through digital technology and disseminated via electronic networks. Losh gives various examples like the websites of the US House of Representatives, extensive use of PowerPoint as a communicative medium by government agencies, government sponsored digital library initiatives, etc. This gives us more reasons to learn and understand how the digital world works. Losh also talks about the digital divide between the people who know or are literate about digital technology and its uses and those who do not.

  To use digital technology for persuasive communication purposes, one needs to have a strong understanding of how to use digital tools effectively and critically as well as an

understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which digital communication takes place. That is one needs to have digital literacy. So the question which we should ask is what exactly is digital literacy?

Digital Literacy

- Gunther Kress's book *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003) explores the changing nature of literacy in the digital age.

- New media technologies have transformed the way we read, write, and communicate, and as a result, the definition of literacy has also evolved.

- He developed the concept of 'multiliteracies'.

  - It emphasizes the idea that in the Digital Age, we need to develop a range of literacy skills that include social diversity, cultural and communicative competence.

  - It takes into account multimodalities like visual, aural and spatial patterns as meaning-making as much as the linguistic mode.
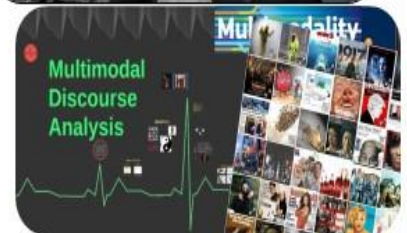
Gunther Kress and Multimodal Discourse Analysis
Source: hartmutskoekl.com, www.youtube.com

In his 2003 book, Literacy in the New Media Age, Gunther Kress has explored the changing nature of literacy in the digital age. New media technologies have transformed the ways in which we read, write and communicate and as a result, the definition of literacy has also evolved. Kress has developed the concept of multi-literacies.

It emphasizes the idea that in the digital age, we need to develop a range of literacy skills that include social diversity, cultural and communicative competence. Kress also thinks that the concept of multi-literacies takes into account multi-modalities like visual, aural and special patterns as meaning making as much as the linguistic mode. For example, a website may contain text, images, video and several other interactive features and we need to develop multi-literacies to read, understand and interpret these multiple modes of communication.

- Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher in their book *Literate Lives in the Information Age* (2004) use the word 'Literacies of Technology' that also links literacy with technology- digital and electronic.
- It encompasses the notions of hybridity and intertextuality.
  - Selfe argues that digital texts are interconnected and intertextual as they allow for hyperlinks, multimedia elements, and easy access to a vast network of information.
  - Digital texts enable hybrid literate practices, as people are able to blend different modes of communication to create new forms of expression.
- This also entails having knowledge of diverse meaning systems, the socio-cultural contexts and the power dynamics in which these technologies are produced and embedded in everyday life.
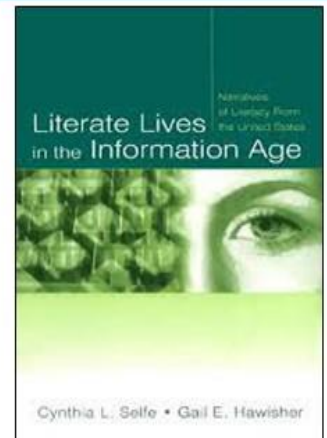
Cynthia Selfe's and Gail Hawisher's
*Literate Lives in the Information Age*
Source: www.Routledge.com

To elaborate this point further, I would also refer to a 2004 book titled, Literate Lives in the Information Age by Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher. They have used the word 'literacies of technology' that also links literacies with technology, digital and electronic.

It encompasses the notions of hybridity and intertextuality. Selfe argues that digital texts are interconnected and intertextual as they allow for hyperlinks, multimedia elements and easy access to a vast network of information. Digital texts enable hybrid literate practices as people are able to blend different modes of communication in order to create new forms of expression. This also entails having knowledge of diverse meaning systems, the socio-cultural contexts and the power dynamics in which these technologies are produced and embedded in everyday life.

This means an understanding of how and why various social groups have different and unequal access to digital technologies and how its access and distribution work in the interests of some groups and can also disadvantage others. We need to understand the political and material consequences of technological changes and divides. Now that we

have talked about the changing nature of literacy in the digital age, let us look more into the concept of digital literacy.

Paul Gilster in his book Digital Literacy published in 1997 defines the concept of digital literacy as the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources using different digital technologies. It goes beyond the textual and include the effective use of signs, symbols, visual representations, words and sounds whose combinations create different meanings.
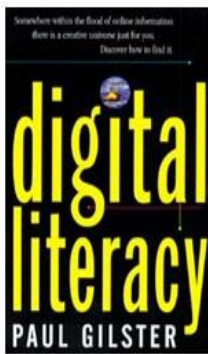
This is a concept that focuses on the digital but it is not limited to it. It also focuses simultaneously on central competencies like reading and understanding digital as well as non-digital formats, creating, communicating and evaluating information from different sources. If we look at the picture, we can see how digital literacy has combined multiliteracies that we have talked about earlier with the competence to use technology. This includes cultural as well as social understanding, collaboration, functional and communication skills and creativity, etc. We will also examine this in detail later on.

The emergence of digital literacy can be divided into three stages. The first stage is the public uptake of the computers in the 1980s. The second is the rise of hypermedia in the internet in the 1990s and lastly the more recent emergence of a networked information economy.

- The proliferation of personal computers in the 1980s, particularly for the purpose of word processing (creation, editing, formatting, and printing of electronic documents), marked the emergence of digital literacy.

- The rise of hypermedia extended the notions of textuality and literacy because it conveyed the idea that digital documents are networked with multiple pathways that linked their contents with each other.

- Digital Literacy evolved into a social practice that converges different cultural contexts in constructing, modifying and sharing digitized information.

- Digital literacy is a form of 'Information Literacy' that demands skilled navigation and making sense of relevant and reliable information.
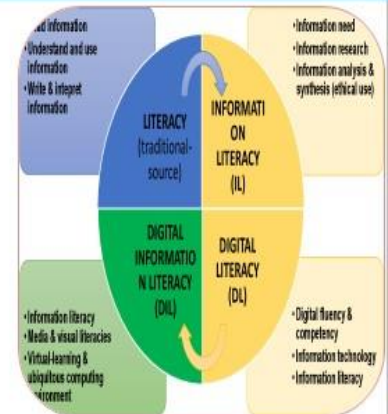
The Convergence of Different Forms of Literacy
Source: www.semantic scholar.org

The proliferation of personal computers in the 1980s particularly for the purpose of word processing marked the emergence of digital literacy. The rise of hypermedia extended the notions of textuality and literacy because it conveyed the idea that digital documents are networked with multiple pathways that link their contents with each other.

Digital literacy evolved into a social practice that converges different cultural contexts in constructing, modifying and sharing digitized information. Digital literacy is a form of information literacy that demands skilled navigation and making sense of relevant and reliable information. A digitally literate person should be able to access information from a variety of digital sources, evaluate the accuracy, relevance and credibility of digital information, use digital tools to organize, analyze and present information, communicate effectively using digital technologies and understand the ethical and the social

implications of digital technologies. Next we will look at a holistic model for digital literacy and its several thinking skills. These thinking skills have been termed as photo visual, reproduction, branching and information, real time digital skills, socio-emotional as well as skills related with and based on participation and collaboration.

- Yoram Eshat-Alkalai in his article "Digital Literacy: A Conceptual Framework for Survival Skills in the Digital Era" developed a holistic conceptual model for digital literacy while working in digital environments.
- This entails understanding the following components:
- Photo-visual digital skills
    - It emphasizes the importance of visual communication and graphic-based semantic environments.
    - It is relevant because digital texts often incorporate visual and symbolic elements, such as images, icons, and emojis, alongside written or spoken language.
    - Infographics are visual representations of data or information that combine text, graphics, and other design elements to convey complex information quickly and clearly like graphic user interfaces, video games, virtual reality etc

Infographics
Source: mymodernmet.com

To elaborate this point, I would refer to an article by Yoram Eshat-Alkalai. In this article titled 'Digital Literacy: A conceptual framework for Survival Skills in the Digital Era', he has developed a holistic conceptual model for digital literacy while working in digital environments. This entails understanding of several components which we have referred to. He mentions first of all the photo visual digital skills which emphasize the importance of visual communication and graphic based semantic environments. It is relevant because digital texts often incorporate visual and symbolic elements such as images, icons and emojis alongside written or spoken languages.

Infographics are visual representations of data or information which combine text, graphics and other design elements to convey a set of complex information in a quick

and clear way like graphic user interface, video games, virtual reality, et cetera. Understanding the semiotics of digital communication is necessary to read and interpret a wide range of visual and symbolic cues in order to effectively communicate and understand information. For example, when we see a logo or an icon, we should be able to understand what exactly it represents and what message is communicated by it. Similarly, design is also a key component of digital literacy because the way that information is presented, the layout of a webpage or document and the use of colors and fonts all play a role in how effectively we can communicate and navigate the content. The modern digital technologies provide us with new possibilities for creating art and academic work by reproducing and editing existing texts, visuals and audio pieces.

This is reproduction digital skills.

- **Reproduction Digital Skills**
  - These are cognitive skills to create new meanings or interpretations by combining pre-existing media (text, graphic or sound).
  - New text or art can be created by reorganizing, rearranging, manipulating or editing to create new meanings or artworks. Pop art is an example of this.
- **Branching Digital Skills**
  - Hypermedia technology led to the evolution of Branching Digital Skills or Hypermedia skills.
  - It requires the ability to stay oriented and avoid getting lost in the hyperspace while navigating through complex knowledge domains.
  - Successful 'branching-literate' users have the ability to create mental models and maps of web's structure that help to overcome disorientation.

Pop art as an example of Reproduction digital skills as it is a collage of pre-existing graphic elements.
Sources: pngwing.comart, republic.com

So reproduction digital skills are cognitive skills to create new meanings or interpretations by combining pre-existing media in the form of text or graphics or sound. New text or art can be created by reorganizing, rearranging, manipulating or editing to create new meanings or artworks. For an example, we can take the pop art. The

branching digital skills incorporate hypermedia technology which led to the evolution of branching digital skills or hypermedia skills.

  It requires the ability to stay oriented and avoid getting lost in the hyperspace while navigating through complex knowledge domains. Successful branching literate users have the ability to create mental models and maps of web's structure that help to overcome disorientation. The branching nature of the modern hypermedia technology provides users with a high degree of freedom in navigating through the internet and other knowledge domains. It has become difficult to construct independent information from the large number of hyperlinks found in certain popular websites, for example, like Wikipedia. The exponential growth in the amount of available information has led to the requirement of information digital skills.

Information Digital Skills to manage hyperlinks through 'Retweeting' in Twitter
Source: www.socialnationnow.com

  Information digital skills refer to the ability of information consumers to make educated and smart information assessment from false information. It has led to the phenomenon

of information decentralization in which the contribution of new information by the users becomes relevant. Users now have become consumers who are bombarded with large volumes of information, the authenticity of which is not always confirmed easily. Real-time digital skills refer to situations that require real-time and high-speed processing of simultaneous large fluxes of information, mainly in multimedia environments like digital games and virtual reality and need real-time digital skills. The user's successful performance is their ability to effectively process this fast-moving stimuli of different kinds like sound, text, and image.

While operating such environments, the users need to split their attention and simultaneously react and respond to different tasks on the screen. The expansion of platforms for digital communication and knowledge sharing has made the users to employ sociological and emotional skills in the cyberspace.

Socio-emotional Digital Skills to avoid digital deception in the Form of False Information
Source: www.mdpi.com

Socio-emotional digital skills involve primarily emotional and sociological aspects of working in the cyberspace. The challenges include not only the ability to share formal knowledge, but also to share emotion in digital communication, to identify deception in chat rooms, and to avoid internet traps as a hoax and malicious internet viruses. This can happen through social networks and other collaborative environments like Twitter or

Facebook, for example.

Participation and collaboration is also significant, as the digital age has enabled new forms of participation and collaboration, such as social media, online communities, and crowdsourcing. These forms of participation and collaboration become part of digital literacy skills, as they raise important questions about the nature of expertise, authority, and knowledge in the digital age. Developing the skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in these new forms of communication and collaboration is essential for success in the digital age. Unlike the print media, digital literacy emphasizes fluidity, hybridity, and intertextuality. Next, we shall discuss about digital literacy's media production and schooling, since the conception of digital competence has been important on a policy level to create more awareness of the impact of digital technologies on our education system.

Digital Literacy, Appropriation and Schooling

- Digital literacy is related to 'situational embedding', that is, the use of technology within life situations.
- This is important when relating to how children and young people use digital technology across contexts.
- Appropriation refers to selecting, cutting, pasting and combining semiotic resources into new digital and multimodal texts which is achieved by downloading and uploading files from different sources.
- This also raises the question of authoring. Multimodal practices could be said to give students a voice to express their positions and interests. This can be seen in digital storytelling and self-representations using digital tools.

Source: www.thenewyorktimes.com

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Digital literacy is related to situational embedding, which means the use of technology within life situations. This is important when relating to how children and young people

use digital technology across contexts. Appropriation refers to selecting, cutting, pasting, and combining semiotic resources into new digital and multimodal texts, which is achieved by downloading and uploading files from different sources. This also raises the question of authoring. Multimodal practices could be said to give students a voice to express their positions and interests.

  This can be seen in digital storytelling and self-representations using digital tools. The concept of appropriation raises some key issues of educational work and text production within digital media. In school-based activities, the question of copy and paste has been raised as a concern since students have been said to just take elements from other texts and copy them into their own texts without much reflection. However, research that has been done on these activities shows that if we look at this in longer trajectories of activities, we find both discussions and reflections on the selection, implementation, and expression of different media elements into new textual expressions by students. Let us take two case studies based on a Norwegian school and examine them closely.

- The first case study is the creation of a project website named 'Antarctica Project' based on an expedition to Antarctica.
  - The project started with creating webpages with information from the internet. They used digital map to plot the route of the explorers and used e-mail to stay in contact with them. They also used video-conferencing to collaborate with other schools.
- The second case study was to identify the prejudices between two schools situated on either part of the city of Oslo using digital technology.
  - Both the schools used a collaborative approach despite cultural and social differences.
  - They communicated in online platforms like MSN, edited videos to put on the web, they searched for statistical data from the internet and used visual effects for a creative output.

Source: technical.ly.com

The first case study is about the creation of a project website named Antarctica Project based on an expedition to Antarctica. The second case study was to identify the prejudices between two schools situated on either part of the city of Oslo using digital technology. The first case study finds that the project started with the creation of web pages with information from the internet. Students used digital map to plot the route of the explorers and used email to stay in connect with them. They also used video conferencing to collaborate with other schools.

In the second case study, it was found that both the schools used a collaborative approach despite cultural and social differences. They communicated in online platforms like MSN, edited videos to put on the web, they searched for statistical data from the internet, and used visual effects for a creative output. This not only shows the use and literacy of technologies in classrooms, but also the appropriation of different media elements to create different perspectives and meanings. It also shows how the collaborative and the creative process among the students through their dynamic use of digital media was integral to their respective projects. Next we shall discuss about digital literacy in online social networking spaces.

Understanding participation in social networking sites in terms of digital literacy involves considering on how people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings through it.

Digital Literacy and Online Social Networking Spaces

- Participating in a social networking site is a form of digital literacy.
- Knowledge displayed on these sites is 'encoded' as they are part of a person's identity and interests.
  - This means that texts can be freed from their immediate context and exist independently to be shared, interpreted and consumed by others. This includes status updates, feeds, images, videos etc.
- The social networking sites contain specific textual references and meanings like 'wall posts' which are public messages posted on someone's wall, 'status updates' which are short messages that describe what a person is currently doing or thinking or the 'Superpoke' application which allows users to send virtual gestures.

Wall posts and timelines as textual references on Facebook
Sources:www.Youtube.com

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It can be said that participation in a social networking site is a form of digital literacy. Knowledge displayed on these sites is encoded as they are part of a person's identity and interests. This means that texts can be freed from their immediate context and exist independently to be shared, interpreted, and consumed by others. This includes the status updates, feeds, images, videos, etc.

The social networking sites contain specific textual references and meanings like wall posts, which are public messages posted on someone's wall, status updates, which are short messages that describe what a person is currently doing or thinking, or the superpoke application which allows users to send virtual gestures. The range of modes of expression available to users and the ease with which they can be shared across profiles mean that participants can convey multiple meanings simultaneously using icons, layout features, audio, photos, and several other types of clips, etc.

Digital Literacy and Online Social Networking Spaces

- Having digital literacy entails understanding discourses which enables meanings to be made.
  - Discourses are systems of meaning that organize the way we think, act, and interact with the world.
- A person's profile on social media emphasizes his/her affiliation with a particular discourse like academic discourse, political discourse, media discourse etc.
- Meanings made from textual and symbolic elements in social media and its subsequent hyperlinks are relational, as they express solidarity, familiarity or some kind of relationship with other people.

Having digital literacy entails an understanding of discourses which enables meanings to be made. Discourses are systems of meaning that organize the way we think, act, and interact with the world. A person's profile on the social media emphasize one's affiliation with a particular discourse like academic, political, media, etc.

Meanings made from textual and symbolic elements in social media and its subsequent hyperlinks are relational as they express solidarity, familiarity, or some kind of relationship with other people. We will learn more about social media and its impact in detail in the coming modules. As technology is increasingly becoming an integral part of our everyday life, people must develop a critical digital literacy to become more aware of how power operates in digital spaces that shapes our way of thinking and doing.

Critical digital literacy examines how the operation of power within digital contexts shapes knowledge, identities, and social relations that privilege some and marginalize others. Critical literacy also examines how digital technologies provide means of representation that conceal ideology in newer ways.

This includes the default and preference settings, drop-down menus, etc., which create a semblance of freedom and autonomy. Technology can also limit the perception of the world and create biases by filtering knowledge through algorithms. Structural biases of search engines can prioritize commercial information providers and English language sites. The picture given shows how Facebook is in the business of selling data about users to advertisers.

The default categories users are made to fill out on their profiles, for example, favorite books, information about the movies they have liked, etc., encourage discourse of personal interests that serve Facebook's commercial motives. It shows the representation of meanings and identities.

Differential access to technology and digital literacies is an important concern of critical digital literacy. Socioeconomic background can shape the perception of what technologies are for and how they should be used.

Learners get socialized into specific digital practices that can either facilitate or disable upward social mobility. In her article, Reconceptualizing Critical Digital Democracy, Luci Pangrazio proposes critical digital design, political model of digital literacy which cannot be separated from discourse, ideology, and power. Hacker literacy is referred to how users can actually go beyond critiquing by actively resisting and reconfiguring networked public spaces. Stigmatizing literary practices in networking sites does not solve the problem. Critical digital literacy tries to analyze, critique, and transform the norms.

It dissects the assumed meanings of concepts like friend, link, like, and open in digital context and tries to resist it. We will look more into this in the coming modules.

Digital literacy involves an examination of the complex interplay of information process, software dynamics, linguistic processes, and cultural practices that are at work in the digital age. Literacy is also about knowing how to create a sense of distance from technology and reassessing our relationship with it. Digital technology and its practices have the power to privilege some and marginalize others.

  An approach of cosmopolitanism which treats all humans as a single community calls for an understanding of the ethics of communication in a digitally mediated world. In the next module, we will extend the concept of digital literacy to multimodality, hypertext, and links and new visualization techniques. We will be focusing on multimedia and hypermedia technologies in the context of digital communication. Thank you.