

Module 5: Be Informed

Thematic Areas: *Digital Technologies; Freedom of Expression; Information Integrity; Critical Digital Literacy; Healthy Discourses.*

Introduction

How do young people get their information today?

Inter-American Democratic Charter Corner:

Article 4: Transparency in government activities, probity, responsible public administration on the part of governments, respect for social rights, and freedom of expression and of the press are essential components of the exercise of democracy.

21st-century young people mostly use digital technologies as their primary and easiest way to communicate with each other and with their surroundings, allowing them to receive and generate information almost instantly and on a large scale.

From the perspective of freedom of expression, one of the major challenges is analyzing how the advantages of new information and communication technologies are used to promote greater and better engagement of young people and to foster free expression in a respectful and collaborative way, creating open and flexible spaces and mechanisms for participation that enable active, responsible, and long-term involvement.

The 2023 Global Education Monitoring report¹ points out that over the last 40 years, the use of digital technology has been the element with the greatest potential to transform education. “An educational technology industry has emerged, focusing its efforts on developing and distributing educational content, learning management systems, language applications, augmented and virtual reality, personalized tutoring, and assessments” (GEM Report, 2023, p.9).

However, access to digital technology is uneven and is related to variables such as socioeconomic realities, teachers’ capabilities, and young people’s access to connectivity, among other factors. Moreover, the impacts of relationships among young people are not always positive if there are no clear objectives and principles to foster respectful environments.

Through technology, young people have access to an infinite amount of information, both formal—such as educational resources like e-books, educational videos, online courses, interactive simulations, and digital libraries that can significantly help in

¹The GEM 2023 Report addresses: Technology in education: a tool in whose terms?

understanding the world—and informal, with access to various sources, often without certainty about whether what they read or hear is accurate or true.

In some cases, “unregulated technology even poses a threat to democracy and human rights, for example, through invasions of privacy and the incitement of hatred” (GEM Report, 2023, p.9).

Cyberbullying², Social isolation and the need for data privacy and security require the development of protection and care strategies. The Organization of American States (OAS, 2020), through its cybersecurity education program, has proposed a methodology for creating a national plan that includes actions for primary and secondary levels, as well as for postsecondary education.

Additionally, the OAS, together with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), has developed a document proposing a systemic approach to understanding capacity at the national level in topics related to cybersecurity and education (ITU/OAS, 2024). This document highlights the key elements that could be considered for school curricula and programs, among which are:

- Integrate cybersecurity as part of the school curriculum.
- Develop applications for cybersecurity career pathways, including the introduction of games, competitions, information talks, and technology demonstrations.
- Identify stakeholders at the school level beyond students, including teachers, parents, administrators, and other relevant community members, to ensure their participation.
- Encourage schools to have teachers trained in cybersecurity issues.

On the other hand, promoting the use of modern technologies in educational settings fosters greater motivation and improves the effectiveness of learning and communication between young people and their surroundings, ensuring proper use and the ability to recognize information accuracy.

There are a set of strategies that help strengthen the proper use of technological tools, such as classroom lectures and debates, university fairs, online training and laboratories, and competitions and gamification (OAS, 2020). In formal education, having technological resources promotes more personalized learning that reflects the different

² The OAS has proposed a methodology to establish an action plan for cybersecurity education, which is intended to serve as a model for the formulation of effective public policies aimed at defining national cybersecurity strategies. See: <https://www.oas.org/es/sms/cicte/docs/20200925-ESP-White-Paper-Educacion-en-Ciberseguridad.pdf>

contexts of young people and helps them progress according to their own educational interests and learning needs.

The way technologies are used can promote collaboration among young people, and between them and their surroundings, generating fluid and ongoing interactions that overcome geographical or other barriers, while also facilitating teamwork and the exchange of ideas.

Thus, the use of technology has become an essential element in communication among young people and with the organizations they are part of, which can now engage and interact directly with their audiences in a continuous process of identity creation (Larrondo-Ureta, 2016, p. 8).

In current contexts, information integrity and the use of modern technologies becomes a central element in developing participatory strategies that help to strengthen democratic processes at both national and local levels.

a. Explore new forms of youth participation and freedom of expression through digital media and social networks.

Social networks and digital media have transformed the way young people participate and express their opinions. Multiple platforms offer them the ability to connect with others regardless of location, giving greater visibility to their proposals and interests, which in turn drives other forms of social, political, and creative expression. They also present challenges, such as concerns about maintaining the integrity of information and sources, and avoiding the potential for polarization—issues that are somewhat intensified by the limited development of the ability to select and critically analyze the vast amount of information they access.

Freedom of expression, in all its forms and manifestations, is a fundamental and inalienable right inherent to all individuals. Moreover, it is an essential requirement for the very existence of a democratic society (IACHR, 1985, para. 70).

The rise of social networks has given new meaning to the concept of freedom of expression and to the mechanisms that must be implemented to protect it. One of the greatest challenges they present is a certain degree of anonymity, which can contribute to debate by allowing ideas to be shared quickly and at low cost, without necessarily exposing oneself to direct personal criticism through the use of pseudonyms or generic usernames. However, anonymity can also be used to harass or spread unverified information, thereby causing harm to both individuals and society as a whole.

This ongoing tension between freedom and the limits of expression³ does not prevent social media and digital platforms from strengthening youth participation in various ways. For example, social media has become key tool for organizing and disseminating information about social causes and expressing opinions on political issues, which has facilitated youth mobilization and activism, as well as broader societal engagement. Additionally, these platforms serve as spaces for artistic creativity, leadership development, and connection among young people who share interests and values, creating online communities that can drive projects and social actions.

In today's postmodern society, young people have broad access to political, social, and cultural information and conversation that goes beyond the traditional family environment, including parents, teachers, and geographically close peers. Access to the "world of information" opened up by social media can increase young people's awareness of different perspectives in their surroundings and also generate new possibilities for participation.

It is within this context that the concept of TRICS is reinforced, describing the cultural and digital practices that young people experience in technological environments. It represents a form of cohesion with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Some experts propose adding the "R" for Relationship to the ICT acronym to analyze how these technologies are affecting the social sphere. In this way, TRICS enhance the relational factor through media literacy to support digital humanism.

This context highlights the importance of equipping young people with a set of competencies and skills that enable them to understand and use the benefits of the Internet and social networks in an integrated and holistic way. Young people are not only engaging with technical skills that allow them to access, use, and produce content but also with skills that enable them to reflect on and critically analyze media content (Theben *et al.*, 2021).

Social networks influence the development of participation and collective action by connecting, sharing information, and coordinating actions among groups and members around a movement through networks, forums, and emails; facilitating the dissemination of information, events, and news, which allows reaching a wide and varied audience and mobilizing different groups of people through calls to action, campaigns, or demonstrations.

³To explore further the relationship between freedom and the limits of expression, see: Ten Key Challenges for Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade. Joint Declaration by the UN, OSCE, OAS, and ACHPR (see especially points 9 and 10) at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=784&IID=2>

The discussion arising from these processes is linked to the responsibility of those using social networks, particularly regarding being accountable when expressing opinions or sharing comments.

Sánchez Madero (2019) points out that there are two main communicative patterns of information and participation in technological tools: top-down and bottom-up, and depending on which predominates, the communicative relationship will have distinctive characteristics. In the first, citizen knowledge is expanded through a vertical communication model in which information flows from the top down, that is, from the leadership to the citizens. In the second, it is a bidirectional, bottom-up communication model, which allows understanding the problems and demands of young people, granting them an active role in learning and social participation.

b. Respect freedom of expression and verify information.

Freedom of expression, in all its forms and manifestations, is a fundamental and inalienable right inherent to all individuals, and it is an essential requirement for the very existence of a democratic society, particularly regarding the formation of public opinion and ensuring that the community is sufficiently informed when exercising its choices.

The OAS Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression provides a legal framework regulating the effective protection of freedom of expression in the hemisphere and incorporates the main doctrines recognized in various international instruments. The OAS interprets and develops these principles through the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.⁴ Among its principles, it is highlighted that every person has the right to seek, receive and impart information and opinions freely under terms set forth in Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights and should be afforded equal opportunities to receive, seek and impart information by any means of communication without any discrimination. Likewise, the declaration emphasizes that any obstacle to the free discussion of ideas and opinions limits freedom of expression and the effective development of a democratic process.

A society that is not informed is not fully free. Freedom of expression is therefore not only a right of individuals but of society itself (OAS, n.d.). Achieving this objective requires appealing to the responsibility of all actors involved in the creation, dissemination, and consumption of information, as certain actions can harm freedom of expression. The existence of issues related to information integrity and freedom of expression affect a wide

⁴ IACHR (2000) Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression.
<https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/index.asp>

range of human rights, undermining responses to public policies or amplifying tensions in times of emergency or armed conflict.

Given the many different contexts in which concerns about information integrity may arise, including political demonstrations, electoral processes, public health, debates on public issues, armed conflicts, or climate change, among others, it is important to highlight its relevance in terms of the potential use to polarize public opinion, promote extreme positions and hate speech, and ultimately undermine participatory processes by reducing trust in democratic processes.

The “Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and ‘Fake News,’ Disinformation, and Propaganda,” states that “States have a positive obligation to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment, including media diversity, which is a key means of addressing disinformation and propaganda” and recognizes the transformative role played by the Internet and other digital technologies in supporting individuals’ ability to access and disseminate information and ideas (OAS, 2017).

Likewise, the declaration highlights that in order to have an enabling environment for Freedom of Expression, States should take measures to promote media and digital literacy, including by covering these topics as part of the regular school curriculum and by engaging with civil society and other stakeholders to raise awareness about these issues.

In this regard, it is essential for educational institutions to provide young people with a solid education in media and information literacy as part of their academic development and growth as active citizens. A significant role continues to rely on the ongoing training of teachers, in order to create spaces for democratic participation and to promote the development of the skills needed to critically analyze and evaluate information disseminated by all media outlets.

In general terms, some concepts associated to this reality often overlap. They are used to refer to many ways in which sharing information can cause harm, whether intentionally or unintentionally, usually in connection with promoting a specific moral or political cause or viewpoint⁵. Although none of these phenomena are new, their relevance has increased with the widespread availability of sophisticated information and

⁵ On this topic, see: Freedom to Speak, Safety to Learn: Democratic schools for all
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn>

communication technologies. Sharing texts, images, videos, or links online, for example, allows information to go viral within minutes.

For the exercise of freedom of expression to be fully realized, it is important to develop specific responses, fostering clear strategies regarding the context in which news is disseminated and identifying the key actors and obstacles. Presenting solutions developed from a comprehensive approach and adapted to each context promotes a healthy and well-informed conversation among the various social actors involved.

c. Develop critical digital literacy for informed citizenship

Critical digital literacy ⁶ Critical and reflective digital literacy is understood as the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills and attitudes to use, understand, and evaluate digital technologies independently. It is a foundational dimension because, on one hand, tools are required to use these technologies effectively and successfully, and on the other, one must be aware of sources, gaps, biases, and the consequences of digital technologies, reflecting from multiple perspectives (Innovation Center, MINEDUC-Chile, 2025).

The OAS (2025), through its Hemispheric Protocol on Education in Digital Environments, has referred to this concept of “critical literacy.”⁷, Framing it as the ability to analyze, question, and reflectively understand the messages, discourses, and power relations present in media and communicative environments. In the digital context, this involves critically reading content, recognizing biases, debunking disinformation, and participating with ethical awareness.

Critical digital literacy enables each young person to access information, understand it, and use it to make informed decisions and participate actively in democratic life. To this end, competencies such as digital care and responsibility, digital innovation and creativity, and the promotion of digital citizenship must be developed.

⁶ The OECD defines digital literacy as the ability to locate, evaluate, use and create information using digital tools and platforms. It includes several interconnected competencies essential for the effective use of technology in educational contexts and encompasses technical skills, critical thinking, ethical awareness and effective communication.

⁷ Critical literacy involves not only mastering linguistic and technical codes but also “understanding and questioning the power relations that structure the social and discursive practices in which digital technologies are embedded.” In other words, it is not enough to know how to use technology: it is essential to develop the ability to read the digital world critically, act ethically within it, and know how to use it to create content based on one’s own interests and realities.

Digital literacy is essential for both teachers and students. For teachers, it encompasses the ability to design, implement, and evaluate learning experiences enriched by technology. For students, it fosters independent learning, critical analysis of digital resources, and effective collaboration and communication in online environments. By prioritizing strong digital communication skills, students can work together to recognize and address risks that affect the integrity of information, encouraging reflective dialogue and the sharing of reliable content.

A key aspect of digital literacy is the ability to manage information effectively. This includes evaluating, organizing, and applying digital content in useful and relevant ways. Critical thinking plays a fundamental role by enabling individuals to judge the reliability, relevance, and accuracy of online information, supporting informed decision-making. Another equally important aspect is ethical awareness, which involves understanding and addressing the moral implications of using technology (Forsström, S. et al.2025). This includes:

- Evaluate and verify sources, biases, and the intent of the message.
- Understand the social, political, and economic implications of information.
- Create and share content responsibly, respecting intellectual property and privacy.
- Understand the risks associated with the digital environment, such as cybersecurity, integrity and data privacy.
- Include aspects such as ethics, responsibility, and active participation in the digital environment.

The concept of critical literacy adds the need to:

- Conduct in-depth analysis of content and its contexts.
- Recognize power structures in discourse.
- Promote active, rather than passive, interpretation.
- Integrate ethical, political, and social perspectives.
- Recognize it as a situated and contextual practice.

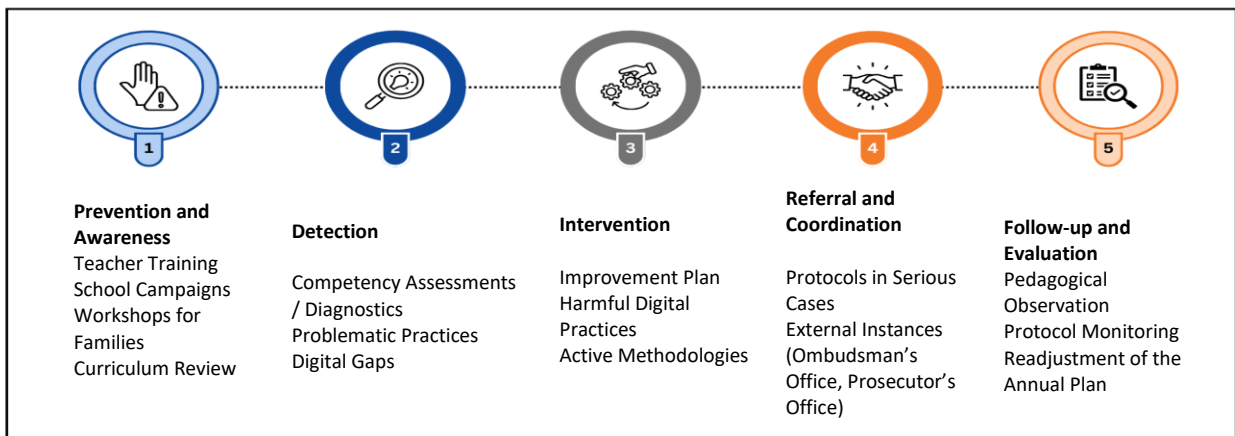
The benefits of digital literacy enable citizens to make informed decisions on relevant issues, participate actively in democratic life, and contribute to creating a fairer world. It helps citizens recognize and address challenges related to access, manipulation, and information sources, strengthening trust in both information and institutions.

Critical digital literacy not only involves consuming information but also creating and sharing content in innovative and creative ways, driving societal development. This social construction of the digital narrative allows individuals to develop their skills and competencies in the digital environment, opening up new opportunities for learning, employment, and social participation.

Therefore, this type of literacy should begin in the educational sphere, focusing on the development of skills that enable young people to discern among the vast amount of information they can access and to develop criteria that help them identify valuable and truthful content.

Critical digital literacy is essential for informed and active citizenship in the 21st century. Various international organizations promote its development through education, training, and awareness-raising, with the goal of empowering citizens to navigate the digital environment safely, responsibly, and critically. Among them, the Hemispheric Protocol on Education in Digital Environments (OAS, 2025) proposes a process, with stages and actions, summarized in the following diagram:

Source: OAS: LICED Protocol, May 2025.



d. Promote healthy discourse in digital media

The OAS (2023) highlights the importance of promoting and facilitating informed citizenship; strengthening transparency and accountability; fostering active citizenship; supporting digital literacy and encouraging healthy discourse on contemporary challenges. To foster healthy discourse in digital media, it is crucial to promote responsibility in the use of networks, education on technology use, and reflection before publishing content. This includes developing competencies and skills that encourage expressing oneself constructively, responding respectfully to others, and understanding the impact of posts on oneself and others, as summarized in the following table:

Education in the use of technology	
Media literacy	Learn to identify useful and harmful content and understand the impact of messages.
Online privacy	Understand the importance of privacy and how to protect it.
Respect for others	Learn to express oneself constructively and respond respectfully.
Reflection before posting	
Impact of posts	Reflect on how posts can affect oneself and others.
Awareness of responsibility	Understand that posts can have consequences.
Responsible use of social networks	
Avoid cyberbullying	Learn to identify and prevent cyberbullying.
Positive communication	Promote positive and constructive communication.
Constructive dialogue	Engage in healthy and respectful dialogue.
Preventive measures	
Limit time spent on social networks	Avoid excessive use of social networks that may affect mental health
Digital detox / disconnection	Set schedules and spaces to disconnect from social networks.
Professional support	Seek professional help if experiencing issues related to social network use

Source: Own elaboration

For its part, UNICEF (n.d.) proposes some tips and tools for conducting a critical analysis of news and information, for example:

- **Review the headline carefully and read the full article.** Pay attention. Headlines are often designed to provoke strong emotions like anger or sadness and may use exaggerated language—commonly referred to as “clickbait” or “cyberbait.” These tactics can be misleading, so it’s important to read the entire news piece to understand its full context and verify its content.
- **Check who authored the article.** Was it published by a well-known outlet? Who is the author? While not all articles are signed, this is a good point to consider when verifying whether the information is accurate.
- **Check the date and context.** Always check the publication date. Often, there are articles that do not display this information. However, sometimes a news story from previous years is shared in a different context, which can be misleading.

- **Does it include photos?** If the article includes photos, audio, or is itself audiovisual content, you can try verifying it online through an image search or by using relevant keywords.
- **Be skeptical of unfamiliar websites or accounts.** Many pieces of content are manipulated to appear as if they were published by well-known outlets or accounts. Therefore, check the URL to ensure it is official, paying attention to spelling and grammar errors, and verify that the logo is correct.

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Case for Discussion: BE INFORMED
How do young people get informed today?

In a small town, a group of young friends were connected through a virtual group where they shared and discussed all kinds of current events, trends, and social happenings occurring in their city and elsewhere with famous people.

Almost all young people got their news through social media. Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter were their main sources of information, and although they did not know the sources of information, they generally took it humorously and did not analyze deeply the content they sent and received.

One day, a sensational news story began circulating through their networks: it claimed that a famous influencer from their town had been arrested for illegal activities. Excited by the scoop, the young people started sharing the news among themselves and with their followers.

Alejandra, a fan of the influencer, felt upset about what was happening and decided to investigate further to find out what had really occurred.

To get more information, Alejandra turned to more formal news sources, such as digital newspapers and official organization websites, and began to realize that there was no news about the supposed arrest. She noticed that most of the posts came from unreliable, generic accounts and anonymous comments. Alarmed, she decided to talk to her friends and ask them not to share the post, as the sources were not trustworthy.

At first, some of her friends were skeptical and argued that “everyone was sharing it.” However, after listening to Alejandra’s arguments and reviewing the evidence she had gathered, they began to reflect on their everyday habits when consuming and sharing news. Before posting, they took the time to verify the information, recognizing how essential this step is to ensure accuracy, credibility, and reliability. As a result, they decided to share a post on their profiles emphasizing the importance of verifying the integrity of information before sharing it with others.

As a result of their actions, several of their followers began interacting with the post and shared the importance of cross-checking information. This led the group of friends to create a small community project: “Media Literacy Workshops,” where they taught other young people how to identify reliable sources and verify facts.

The success of the project grew to the point that the local school decided to integrate a section on media literacy. The young people learned to be critical and responsible with information, not only for themselves but for their entire community, becoming agents of change in promoting information integrity.

The project was thriving, and to Alejandra's surprise, the famous influencer she admired became a follower and began promoting the project among their thousands of followers.

Guiding questions:

1. Why do you think most young people get their news from social media rather than traditional media? Is it possible to be well-informed only through platforms like TikTok or Instagram? Why or why not?
2. What signs help you identify accuracy and integrity of information?
3. Do you believe that everyone has a responsibility to verify what they share on social media? Why?
4. How would you feel if you shared something that harmed another person?
5. What actions could you propose to help other young people learn to get better information?
6. Should schools teach students how to identify and analyze information circulating on social media? Why?