Enhancing Information Literacy and Resilience in Singapore

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By Tan E-Reng

SYNOPSIS

Singapore has a robust foundation for inculcating information literacy and resilience in its citizens. However, there are blind spots that malicious actors could exploit to sow disinformation and distrust. This commentary suggests ways Singapore could evolve its information resilience pedagogies to help citizens navigate the global information landscape more effectively.

COMMENTARY

Governments around the world have increasingly implemented educational measures that provide members of the general public with resources and knowledge to bolster their information literacy and immunisation against dis/misinformation. While existing efforts play an important role in priming the average citizen to deal with mis/disinformation, current pedagogies may focus heavily on "fact" as paramount, de-emphasising "opinion" in the process. This may constitute a blind spot within the overall information literacy environment.

Such approaches in information literacy pedagogy may be limited, as they implicitly assume that there are indeed sources of information that can be considered completely objective. In journalistic reporting, it can be argued that pure objective truth is impossible to achieve. Given the highly complex, increasingly adversarial geopolitical landscape, finding sources that are completely unbiased and credible, without a hidden agenda, is virtually impossible.

Hence, the author proposes approaches to enhance and augment public education efforts in building information hygiene and literacy. Alongside educating the public on how to detect and identify objective facts from trusted sources, these approaches

also emphasise holistic skills in processing, parsing, and synthesising information from multiple, imperfect, opinion-laden, and/orbiased sources to form a fuller, richer understanding of reality.

Information Literacy Education Overseas

Singapore's [Source, Understand, Research, Evaluate (SURE)](#) framework provides resources to bolster information literacy among its citizens, with [bespoke resources](#) tailored to the needs of different demographics and age groups. Elsewhere, similar organisations and frameworks exist, such as Canada's [MediaSmarts](#), Australia's [eSafety Commissioner](#), the European Union's [DigComp](#), and UNESCO's [Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines](#).

Singapore's [SURE framework](#) understandably takes a markedly fact-centric approach to information literacy, encouraging people to ensure that information comes from credible and reliable sources and to "look for *facts* rather than opinions" (author's emphasis). While SURE encourages people to "[check and compare with multiple sources](#)" and to "look (at stories) from different angles", there appears to be less emphasis on opinions.

[Literature produced under the SURE banner](#) encourages fact-checking using only credible or verified sources, such as the websites of relevant public-sector agencies and mainstream media outlets. The general tenor of the existing literature is that objective facts should be paramount. In contrast, there is less focus on opinions.

From a national security standpoint, this could be a blind spot, as malicious actors can specifically target and manipulate opinions. To give an example of such manipulation, a recent article by [DFRLab](#) observed that there was a spike in opinion manipulation activity on Polish social media where negative sentiments and narratives surrounding Ukrainian refugees were spread online, in which the latter were framed as "freeloading" on Polish generosity during the course of the war.

Opinions should be an inextricable part of the overall information literacy environment. They should therefore occupy greater bandwidth in any pedagogy that seeks to develop truly robust information literacy and resilience in a citizenry.

Evolving Information Literacy

It is therefore recommended that Singapore further builds on this foundation to equip citizens with the skills to deal with all kinds of sources, including those that may not be of reputable origin, or are opinion or agenda-driven. Citizens should be taught to navigate and handle sources that carry biased and/or loaded insinuations and inflections, rather than avoid them.

One approach to achieving this is to instil a culture of holistic objectivity in society. In such an approach, the citizenry is taught to synthesise truth and understanding about the world from a wide range of sources, even those that are ostensibly unreliable,

rather than relying solely on siloed sources of ostensibly objective information for personal verification and fact-checking.

There is already a wide body of literature on approaches to educating people to detect and address bias in the media. Some of this literature focuses on bias education for children and youth, advocating honing their ability to detect bias in media and society and providing pedagogical frameworks for anti-bias education.

Finland is an example where, since 2014, this is put into practice at the national level for all age groups, with information literacy considered as a core "civic competence for democracy". Notably, Finland, through its FaktabaariEDU project, adapts professional fact-checking methodologies developed by fact-checking NGO Faktabaari to augment its education programme, training students in verifying sources, checking evidence, cross-checking information against secondary sources, and other relevant skills. Finnish students are also taught to read between the lines, to interpret media, and to detect influence efforts embedded in the content.

Singapore's own education system already incorporates similar elements within its pedagogy, particularly with its History and Social Studies syllabi. Students are trained and tested on their skills in evaluating and analysing sources of information from different perspectives, whether historical or contemporary, objective or biased, and how the origin of a source factors into the computation of its reliability, or lack thereof.

It would therefore be possible to adapt these pedagogies for targeted education of the general public on information literacy skills and issues. Citizens can be taught to question not only whether a source is objective, but also why it is so. Citizens can be taught that even a biased, unobjective source might help reveal something about its creator and/or proliferator, provided they ask the right questions of it. It is then from this nuanced, higher-level understanding of sources – even biased ones – that a more detailed understanding of reality can be achieved.

On the technological front, specialised news sites like Ground News aggregate and provide metrics on the political leanings and make-up of the reportage on specific topics. Such tools can be introduced to citizens so that they are aware that the same topic can be reported on in a variety of ways, often tied to the political inclinations of the reporting entities.

Having a citizenry well-versed in such media literacy skills could further inoculate against hostile information campaigns, scams, and other related harms. Such an approach could train citizens not only to identify imperfect sources but also to ask why these sources are imperfect. Citizens can then be trained to identify hidden inferences and takeaways from the biased nature of certain sources – honing a higher-level understanding of the sources that goes beyond their immediate content.

There would be ongoing challenges in implementing such educational efforts across Singapore's citizenry, as people from different demographics (e.g., age, educational background, and financial situation) would respond better to other instructional methods.

Nevertheless, in Singapore, the foundational basis for robust information literacy is already in place. What can be done now is to build on it so that citizens can better navigate the ever-changing global information environment.

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