



TEACHING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP FOR EMPOWERING DIGITAL NATIVES IN THE INTERNET ERA

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Abstract:

"Digital citizenship" has been one of the most contentious topics over the past 20 years. The rapid advancements in digital technology and the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed people further into the digital realm. To ensure the welfare of the community, everyone who lives in society is required to abide by both written and unwritten rules. Similarly, one must be conscious of being a good digital citizen while seeing the digital world as a society. This paper offers a succinct note on the idea of "Digital Citizenship," The study emphasizes the necessity of educating the younger generation about digital citizenship.

Keywords: Digital citizenship, digital natives, internet era

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Introduction:

The 21st century is now being lived on our planet. The world of today is not the same as it was 20 years ago. A significant change has taken place which reflects in all the realms of human life. Digital technology is to be credited with everything. The question, "Didn't digital technology exist in the previous century?" may come up naturally. Digital technology was there. However, the rapid development of digital technology has essentially made this globe fit on the tip of a finger. It has now become an integral part of every sphere of life.

The older generation has acclimated to a culture that is increasingly reliant on technology, albeit not fully and is working to do so fully in the wake of the digital age's recent emergence. The younger generation, on the other hand, is completely immersed in this so-called digital world. We refer to them as "digital natives." A digital native is a person who grew up along with technological developments and is comfortable with using digital devices and is fluent in technology. It is not unanticipated that children under a year old handle digital devices, particularly smartphones, more easily and comfortably than their parents and elders. Because, in contrast to older generations, their culture and world are already influenced by digital technology and social media.

Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp can be taken as three trendsetters in the digital world. Many other apps and sites are there before and after. The trends are changing. The digital world offers many platforms for different activities. Connecting with people, photos and video capturing, editing, sharing, expressing thoughts, responding to something, marking opinions, teaching, learning, researching, commerce and business-related activities, arts and crafts, medical field, astrology, astronomy, etc. In other words, digital technology is incorporated into every aspect of human life. In many ways, the development of digital technology reduces the need for human labour. It serves as entertainment for people as well. Slowly, it has occupied an unavoidable space in our life.



It is a reality that the digital world gives humans access to a vast universe. Children are also exposed to the enormous digital world's contents. Are they capable of defending themselves against the hidden threats in the online world? Do they know the difference between good and bad content, genuine and fake news?? Are they capable of treating people with respect and maturity? These kinds of inquiries worry the older generation.

While residing on this planet, each person is required to abide by certain laws and rules. While residing in a country, each teaches its citizens some laws and rules. Being a social species, humans must consider those around them. He has no right to do something that may harm or disturb the peace of others. One should abide by social norms in the digital space as well since it is a digital representation of this society. Senior citizens should use their experiences to act logically on digital platforms. Children won't be conscious of how and when and the pros and cons of their activities. The older generation must raise the younger generation to be polite both in the real world and the digital world. Steps are to be taken to upraise the younger generation as responsible digital citizen.

Digital Citizenship:

Digital citizenship denotes one's ability to responsibly utilize the digital space by keeping oneself safe and at the same time actively participate in the digital space and contribute to it creatively and constructively to the digital space (Council of Europe, 2019)

A person who uses computers, the internet, smartphone and other digital devices and electronic gadgets in a responsible way to interact with society can be considered to be practising digital citizenship. (Tewari, 2020). Digital citizenship is not digital literacy. It denotes frequent, effective use of the Internet which incorporates civic engagement for the common good (Sadiku, Tembely, & Musa, 2018). Like, many researchers have given various explanations for digital citizenship. In a nutshell, digital citizenship may be explained as responsible behaviour in the online world, protecting oneself from the back holes of the internet and respecting others' feelings and privacy.

Ribble (2008) emphasized nine elements of digital citizenship, which should be considered while integrating digital citizenship into the curriculum (Figure 1)

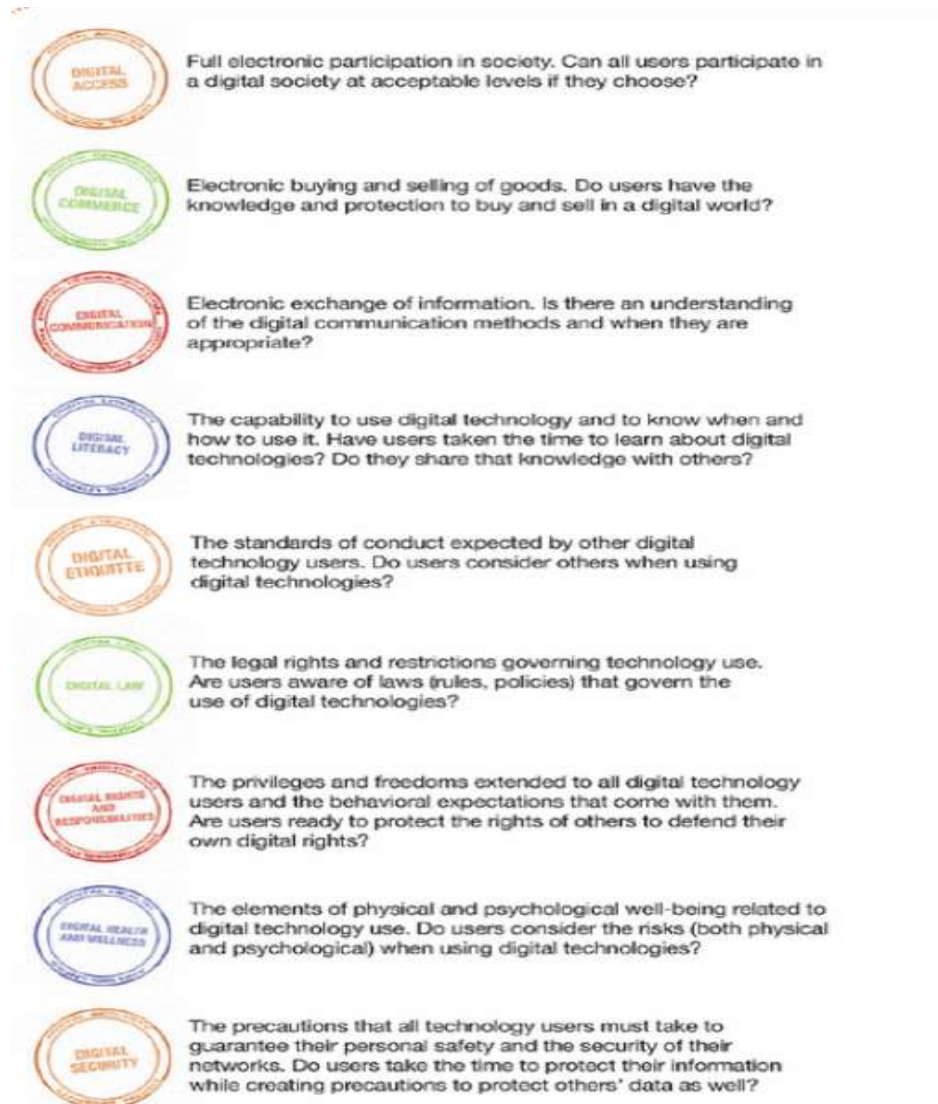


Figure 1. (Ribble, M (2008). Passport to Digital Citizenship)

Characteristics of a good digital citizen.

A good and responsible digital citizen,

- Promotes universal access to and equal rights in the digital space;
- Tries to think critically and analyse the digital content.
- upholds the rights of online users to their privacy, intellectual property, and other freedoms.
- Uses digital technology to support and develop personal and social goals.
- Take care of physical, emotional, and psychological well-being while using digital tools.
- Uses digital devices and technology to collaborate with other people in the digital environment.
- Realizes the permanence of the digital world



Digital citizenship entails:

- Skilful, creative and constructive use of technology
- Active engagement in the digital world by following an ethical code of conduct.
- Continual learning in various contexts whether it is formal, non-formal or informal (Burns, 2019).

Need for Digital Citizenship Training and Digital Citizenship Curriculum

It is essential to make our young generation good enough in the life skills needed to go along with the 21st century. The training for behaving in society ethically and morally is given to a child from the family and then from the school. Likewise, to act responsibly with ethics in the digital world should be trained by the parents and teachers.

Today's children are more exposed to the internet world. The digital world is also a replica of the real world. There are threats hidden in the virtual world too. After the outbreak of COVID-19, there occurred a vast increase in the use of digital platforms. The learning environment got completely digitalized. The teaching-learning process is now integrating technology and using digital platforms for the transaction of curriculum. The learners have more opportunities for themselves to be online for more time duration.

Different social media platforms expand the connection of the learners. They get many from every corner of the world as their friends and acquaintance. They got connected mainly when they get interested in each other through their social media identity. Beyond friendship and peer group dynamics, the outside world also has a significant impact on how young people live their digital lives. There are lots and lots of chances to collide with "fake people" and willingly or unwillingly got trapped. Once entered into social media platforms, the chance of being prey to cyber crime is always there in front of us.

Digital media is always dynamic. It can be a medium for anything, like activism, sexual harassment, racism, political issues, nationalism, spreading fake news, and at the same time for making healthy relations, standing united for a good cause, showing sympathy, care, respect and love, uniting of the nation/world, showering love, support and encouragement for the needy, etc.

Many traps are waiting for everyone in the digital world. One has to be alert and aware of these and should pay attention to keep them safe. The safety of the younger ones is always a great concern for the parents and teachers. Here arouse the need for giving training for digital citizenship. Digital citizenship training aims to empower the younger generation to navigate and engage safely in the digital world. The digital citizenship training should focus on equipping children with critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills and socio-emotional skills. It should aim at making individuals know how to involve responsibly in the online world keeping themselves safe and also giving due respect to others' rights.

Those who have no access to the online platform are meagre in today's world. Studies are being conducted on the usage of digital gadgets and the screen time of people, the activities they are engaged in, etc. Studies report an increase in the percentage of individuals having access to online, own smartphones and other digital gadgets, screen time, etc. The combination of online and offline modes of education has bought an increase in the screen time of children too. Teens are reported as spending more time on digital media.



These all underline the need for enhancing the digital citizenship skills of the learners/children to engage in the digital world safely and responsibly.

The focus of digital citizenship education should be on

- Helping children learn to respect their self and other people in the digital society.
- Helping children acquire necessary digital skills, knowledge and appropriate practices to participate in the digital world.
- Training children to protect their self and other people in the digital environment.
- Helping children to become aware of possible threats in cyberspace and the ways to overcome them.
- Equipping children to engage in digital society constructively, actively, positively and responsibly as a responsible ethical digital citizen.
- Fostering netiquette. Digital citizenship training should focus on teaching acceptable and positive behaviour in digital space.

A teacher can.

- Stress the value of good online conduct: Teach the kids that their written words have just as much of an impact as they would if they were uttered out loud.
- Tries to keep students' stay online safe. (Prodigy, 2020)
- Teach them why and how they need for protecting their private data
- Make them aware of the Virus attacks they would have to face
- Make the learners know the art of creating strong, safe passwords
- Try to develop the ability of the learners to understand and separate false information from true one.
- Give awareness of *copyright*
- Make the learners aware of the term *digital footprint*. They should give the idea that even if the images posted in the virtual world create an online persona and hence to be highly responsible while posting something.

As the online mode of learning has increased, teachers should be aware of the distractions the learners can have during online classes. Parents should supervise the learners while they are online. Proper awareness should be given to parents too on the need for keeping their children safe in the digital world. Parents and teachers together can do much to safeguard our younger generation in this digital world and bring up them as digital natives with good responsible digital citizenship training.

Digital Citizenship Training in India:

India is one of the most developing countries in the world. India stands on the top list in terms of internet usage. The rate of internet usage among children has also gone high with the pandemic situation arouse due to the coronavirus attack. Digital access has become a factor in the social divide in India, a developing country. It is the responsibility of elders to safeguard the younger generation from the trials waiting in the online world. Therefore measures are to be taken to educate the younger generation about the behaviour one has to follow in the digital world. The best method is to integrate it into the curriculum.



Teachers and parents should be made aware of digital behavior. Teachers, as well as parents, should become a role model for the learners showing them how to be a good responsible digital citizen. It has become a subject in the school. But how much importance we are giving to make the learners aware of the ethical usage of the digital space still arises as a question to think. We can't say that no attention is given to this area. Initiatives are taken towards making the younger generation grow up to be responsible digital citizens.

CBSE has launched a skill-based module intended for the 6th to 8th standard on digital citizenship. It's a three-level curriculum, which is activity oriented. Through case studies, reflections, and activities, students will apply concepts and theory to situations in the real world as part of this curriculum. A handbook has been provided for the teachers as a support for them to equip their learners to be ethical digital citizens. CBSE offers capacity-building programmes for teachers through which teachers will be given pieces of training on digital safety and digital wellness.

The National Policy on Education 2020 also focuses on digital citizenship training, if implemented effectively can bring up the new generation as good digital citizens.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has taken a step forward in terms of digital safety. Intending to make the students, teachers and parents aware of digital safety the ministry proposes to observe *Cyber Jaagrookta Diwas* on the first Wednesday of each month. The theme planned for the September 2022 session was *Being Safe and Responsible Digital Citizen*. (Central Institute of Educational Technology [CIET] (2022)). The Cyber wing of central and state force can give hands-on-aid to the education field to make them digital citizen who is responsible, following good conduct and ethics.

Conclusion:

Digital technology can't be left aside in this era as it has rooted in human life so deeply. The digital world has become a parallel world which has lessened the distance. The new generation is more digital citizens than the elder ones. Learning, entertainment, knowledge sharing, marking own opinion, and sharing feelings are all happening through digital media. So, one should have to be more responsible and follow the ethical and moral principles as they are in society. Many challenges are awaiting there for them. They should be equipped for facing those challenges and overcome the barriers there. They have to be responsible for themselves and others. They should give due respect to others' feelings, privacy, opinions, etc. These all come under the term *Digital Citizenship*. Education is the key means to making learners foster up as a good digital citizens. The curriculum should have to be made in such a way as to mould our younger generation come out a responsible good digital citizens. Efforts have to be taken from the field of education to give quality education on good digital citizenship and also to make them advocate that.

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