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1. What is OpenCourseWare(OCW)?

OpenCourseWare (OCW) refers to the free and open publication of university-level course materials for anyone to access and use. It is defined as “...free and open digital publication of university-level educational materials. These materials are organized as courses, and often include course planning materials and evaluation tools as well as thematic content”. In essence, OCW is synonymous with Open Educational Resources (OER), meaning that syllabi, lecture notes, video lectures, quizzes, and assignments are shared openly as course content. A famous example is MIT OpenCourseWare, launched in 2001, which publishes virtually all MIT course materials online for free. MIT’s OCW alone offers over 2,400 courses and has attracted hundreds of millions of visitors, embodying the idea of “unlocking knowledge” for learners worldwide. Notably, accessing an OCW does not require enrollment and does not confer academic credit – it is a self-learning resource rather than a formal course offering.

2. What is a MOOC?

A MOOC is a “Massive Open Online Course,” a form of online course designed to support large-scale participation and open access via the internet. MOOCs utilize web technologies to create virtual classrooms that can host thousands (or even tens of thousands) of students in a single course. A typical MOOC delivers a series of weekly lessons to a massive learner group and incorporates interactive components such as quizzes, weekly auto-graded assignments, and discussion forums for participants. Unlike OCWs (which provide static self-paced content), MOOCs are usually time-bound courses that run for a set period (e.g. 4–10 weeks) and involve active student engagement, assessments, and sometimes a certificate of completion. The modern MOOC movement gained prominence around 2011 when a free online Artificial Intelligence course taught by Stanford professors attracted about 160,000 students worldwide (with only 28,000 completing the course). Since then, many top universities and organizations have offered MOOCs through platforms like Coursera and edX, with the goal of making high-quality education accessible to global audiences.

3. What is information literacy?

Information literacy is the ability to effectively find, evaluate, and use information to meet one’s needs. It is commonly defined as “the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information.” In other words, an information-literate person can recognize when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information efficiently. This concept encompasses a range of competencies from knowing how to identify an information need through to using information ethically and legally.

According to the American Library Association's framework, an information-literate individual should be able to do the following:

- Determine the extent of information needed.
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate information and its sources critically, and incorporate the information into one's knowledge base.
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and use information ethically and legally.

In summary, information literacy is not just about searching for information, but also about critically assessing information's quality, integrating credible information into one's knowledge, and applying information responsibly to solve problems or make decisions. It is considered a key 21st-century skill for students and professionals alike.

4. How can we evaluate and deconstruct media messages?

Evaluating and deconstructing media messages means critically analyzing how media content is constructed and understanding the messages (including hidden meanings) it conveys. Deconstructing a media message involves "taking apart" the message to see how it works and to reveal any underlying implications. This process includes examining who created the message, who the intended audience is, and how the message is put together using words, images, sounds, design, and other elements. By doing so, we can identify the media creator's point of view, values, and biases embedded in the message. A key part of evaluation is recognizing the techniques being used to influence the audience and questioning what may be omitted or slanted in the presentation. To systematically evaluate and deconstruct a media message, consider the following core aspects:

- Source : Identify whose message it is. Who created or paid for the message, and why? Knowing the creator helps assess intent.
- Audience: Consider who the intended target audience is. Media messages are often tailored to specific groups (by age, gender, interests, etc.), and understanding the target audience reveals how and why the message was designed.
- Text : Examine the explicit content of the message. The "text" of a media message is everything that is literally presented, the spoken or written words, visuals, sounds, and the arrangement of these elements that we actually perceive.
- Subtext : Look for the implicit, unstated meaning behind the message. The subtext is the interpretation that an individual may derive from the message, influenced by their own experiences and values. It's what the message suggests or implies, even if not directly stated.

- Persuasion Techniques : Identify the methods used to sway opinions or emotions. Media messages often employ persuasion techniques (e.g. emotional appeals, persuasive language, statistics, or endorsement by authority figures) to influence the audience's thinking or behavior. Recognizing these techniques helps us think critically rather than be passively persuaded.
- Point of View : Consider the perspective and what might be missing. Every media message is framed from someone's point of view, which means it includes certain information and excludes other aspects. Analyzing the point of view helps expose the values and biases of the creator and reveals what part of the story is not being told.

By asking questions about these aspects of a media message, we engage in critical thinking about the content. This approach to evaluation helps us determine the credibility of the information, detect misinformation or bias, and better understand the intended and unintended messages being conveyed. In an age of abundant information (and disinformation), such media literacy skills are essential for interpreting news, advertisements, and online content skeptically and insightfully.