

Development of a German Instrument for Self-Rated Data Literacy

An Algorithm-based Approach to Scale Development

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Abstract

The increasing relevance of competent and critical handling of data in society not only makes it possible to record this competence, but also makes self-perception with regard to this competence increasingly clear. Previous approaches consider this competence primarily against the specific background of individual target groups, jobs or roles (Cui et al., 2023). In addition, only a few explicitly refer to the general population (Carmi et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2023). In view of the various theoretical approaches, there is a need for a uniform definition of data literacy in order to create comparability. Our aim is therefore to derive a holistic definition based on these approaches and to develop a questionnaire for self-perception of one's own data literacy. To this end, the decisive factors for the construct from previous definitions and operationalizations in various disciplines are brought together. Cognitive interviews are conducted iteratively to create and refine the items. The items are then selected using algorithm-based item selection. The facets of data literacy are comprehensively tested for factorial, discriminant, convergent and congruent incremental validity in order to promote a differentiated understanding of the construct. Construct and criterion validity are tested using correlations and hierarchical regression analyses, while cross-validation checks the robustness of the instrument. Based on a cross-sectional online questionnaire study, we found XXX The self-assessment questionnaire promotes a holistic assessment of competence and its perception for further research, for example by comparing self-assessment and actual performance. *Keywords: Data Literacy, Questionnaire Development, Algorithm-Based Item Selection, Genetic Algorithm*

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Background

In a world characterized by information overload and rapid technological advancements (Koltay, 2017; Leighton et al., 2021; Roetzel, 2019), the relevance of data literacy for today’s society becomes evident. Data literacy serves as a potent tool in navigating the complex data-driven environment (Carmi et al., 2020; e.g.: Cui et al., 2023; Leighton et al., 2021; Ridsdale et al., 2015) and individuals equipped with strong data literacy skills can discern patterns, critically evaluate information, and make informed decisions (e.g. Chen et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2023). The exploration of citizens’ interaction with media and the cultivation of their agency has traditionally started around concepts such as written literacy, media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy [QUELLE]. In more recent discussions, data literacy has been approaching relevance among discussed competencies regarding what is necessary for agency in the current society (Carmi et al., 2020; Leighton et al., 2021). Deficiency in data literacy not only exposes individuals to various risks and harms on personal, social, physical, and financial levels but also constrains their capacity to actively engage as informed citizens within an evolving, data-driven society (Carmi et al., 2020; Leighton et al., 2021). Thus, data literacy is a competency that is becoming increasingly important to everyone. Research has acknowledged this in recent years, as more and more research is being done in that direction (Chen et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2023). This study aims to complement the current research, with a self rating questionnaire for assessing data literacy among citizens.

Data literacy involves the ability to effectively collect, manage, evaluate, and apply data in a critical manner (Ridsdale et al., 2015). According to Wolff et al. (2016), it means being able to ask and answer everyday questions using both small and large datasets while considering ethical aspects. This includes skills such as selecting, cleaning, analyzing, visualizing, criticizing, and interpreting data, as well as communicating insights from data and using data for various purposes. Frank (2016) distinguishes between cognitive skills, like data collection and analysis, and social skills, which involve trusting data while maintaining skepticism. Calzada Prado & Marzal (2013) outline five dimensions of data literacy: understanding data, acquiring data, interpreting and evaluating data, managing data, and using data. Understanding data includes knowing their types, roles, and significance, while acquiring data involves evaluating and selecting sources. Interpreting and evaluating data encompass understanding different presentation methods and data interpretation. Managing data includes storage, management, and reuse. Us-

ing data involves preparation, analysis, communication, and ethical considerations (Calzada Prado & Marzal, 2013). This small comparison already highlights one prominent feature of data literacy - It is a heterogeneous concept (Chen et al., 2024). Every subject or profession seems to hold their own definition or framework of data literacy (Chen et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2023). While that most certainly is good for assessing specific skills (e.g. in an Recruitment test), it limits the generalisability and comparability of data literacy across individuals with different background. It furthermore limits the accuracy of communication about the topic as two people with different background might hold different definitions on data literacy. In the study from Cui et al. (2023) it also becomes apparent, that one group seems to be underrepresented in the research on data literacy: citizens. Despite being the largest demographic group, citizens are often overlooked in favor of specific professions such as researchers, librarians, students, or educators (Cui et al., 2023). Citizens in this case mean people of the general public, that hold no special role or profession, related to data handling or aspects related to data literacy (Wolff et al., 2016). This trend raises questions about the emphasis on certain aspects of data literacy, many of which tend to align more closely with professional roles than with the needs of laypeople (Schüller, 2020). In their Framework Schüller (2020) highlight the different roles in their data literacy framework: Some of the facets or skills regard “data-consumption”, whereas the most are skills “data-producers” would have. This is also reflected when taking a look into related concepts. The definition proposed by Wolff et al. (2016) suggests that data literacy shares some common competencies with statistical and information literacies.

Information literacy, often studied in library sciences, overlaps with data literacy in terms of accessing, critically evaluating, and using data sources (Calzada Prado & Marzal, 2013; Shields, 2005). Wolff et al. (2016) also emphasize the importance of the data inquiry process, starting from identifying problems, designing studies, acquiring data, conducting analysis, to drawing data-based conclusions. In comparison, Gould (2017) argued that data literacy is essentially the same as statistical literacy but with additional competencies needed due to the increasing importance of data. These added competencies include understanding who collects the data, how and why data is collected, and understanding data privacy and ownership (Gould, 2017).

Additionally, when discussing data literacy, it’s essential to understand the distinctions between the terms data and information and their relationship to one another. The concepts of data and information are foundational in various fields, yet their precise definitions and relationships are often sub-

ject to interpretation (e.g. Koltay, 2017; R. Schneider, 2013). While data can be viewed as the raw material (Shannon, 1948) from which information is derived (Bates, 2005), it's the reduction of entropy through organization and interpretation that gives rise to meaningful information (Brillouin, 1953; Jaynes, 1957). Thus, rather than viewing data as synonymous with entropy or information, it is more accurate to consider information as emerging from the structured representation of data.

It is structured representation of data, that also according to the framework of (Schüller, 2020), citizens are primarily concerned with: Citizens holding roles where they mainly consume data or information. Consequently, they may encounter difficulties with tasks or items related to producing facets such as providing or exploiting data. This imbalance could potentially undermine the fairness of tests and questionnaires designed to assess data literacy, particularly, if these assessments prioritize competencies closer to data and statistical literacy over those closer to information literacy.

Conceptual Integration and Delineation from other concepts

Because data literacy is such a heterogeneous construct, it is very prone to construct proliferation. This, for example, becomes evident, when looking into the literature review from Cui et al. (2023). In their study they found over fourteen different definitions of data literacy, incorporating different sets of 75 competencies. Furthermore very few of those definitions are targeted at citizens, and none of the questionnaires they report target citizens. Thus, our objective was to formulate a definition of data literacy, based on the current literature, that works for citizens. For the conceptual integration, I used the review of Cui et al. (2023) and assessed what competencies were incorporated in most of the definitions and would therefore be considered central to the construct. This included counting the same competencies as well as checking what competencies might be named differently, but are considered the same substantively. Furthermore, data literacy encompasses certain characteristics and behaviors from similar constructs. Examples for those convergent constructs are *critical thinking*, *media competency*, *technology competency*, *statistical literacy* as well as *information literacy* (Chen et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2023; Leighton et al., 2021). As those constructs share substantive parts, differing in size regarding the respective definition of the constructs, it is to be expected that all of them show moderate to strong positive correlations.

Table Concluding, data literacy can be defined as “the ability to collect, manage, evaluate, and apply data effectively. It involves asking and answering real-world questions from datasets while considering ethical use. Core skills include selecting, cleaning, analyzing, visualizing, presenting, critiquing, and interpreting data, information and their sources” (Cui et al., 2023; Ridsdale et al., 2015; Wolff et al., 2016).

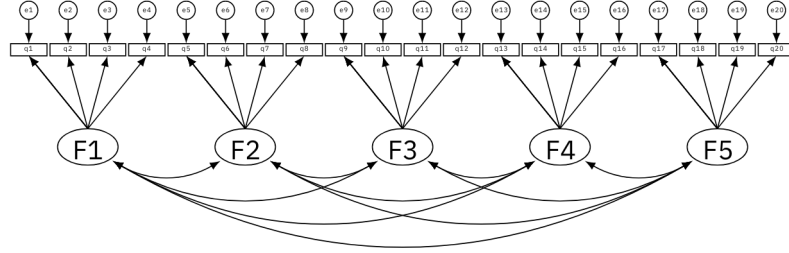


Figure 1: Illustration of the Model data literacy.

Condensing the incorporated constructs as describes, I arrived at a structure of five factors (Comprehension, Evaluation, Integration, Communication & Statistics)(vgl. figure 1), that are very prominent in most definitions in the literature (Cui et al., 2023). In line with Schüller (2020), I further divided them into “consumer” facets (Comprehension, Evaluation & Integration), which are relevant for nearly every person in society, from citizens up, as well as “producer” facets (Communication & Statistics), which are mainly relevant for people, actively working with data. The “consumer” factors are closely related to media literacy, focusing on skills related to critically analyzing and interpreting various media formats for understanding and engaging with media content (vgl. figure 2).

The factor “Comprehension” encompasses behaviors and skills associated with critical thinking (Payan Carreira et al., 2022; Rear, 2019), such as identifying weaknesses in one’s reasoning or actively shaping discourse and public dissemination of information. It involves the ability to comprehend various forms of data presentation, detect inconsistencies, interpret data comprehensively, and identify logical fallacies. Individuals with high scores on this factor demonstrate a strong aptitude for processing and making sense of information across different formats, enabling them to draw accurate conclusions and insights [QUELLE]. It includes elements of information literacy (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000) by focusing on evaluating the credibility of data sources, considering factors like reputation and biases, similar to assessing the quality of information sources (Evaluation & Integration)(Webber & Johnston, 2017). Both statistical and information literacy involve using

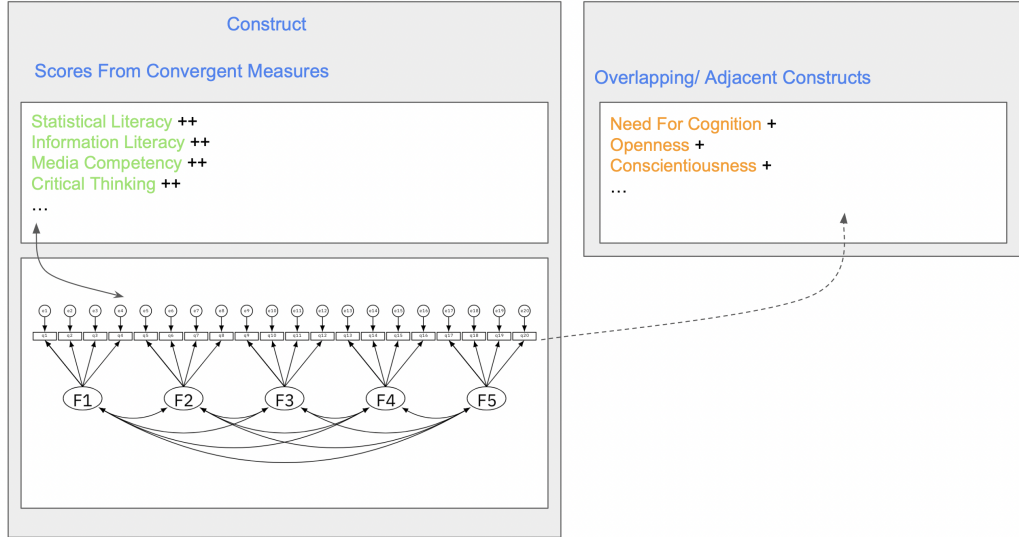


Figure 2: Illustration of the nomological net of data literacy.

data and information to make informed decisions (Gal, 2002; Webber & Johnston, 2017). Therefore, the “Evaluation” factor involves skills related to critically evaluating information sources and discerning between facts and opinions (Frank, 2016; e.g. Gould, 2017; ?). It encompasses the ability to assess the credibility and reliability of information, considering factors such as the reputation of the source and the context in which the information was presented. Individuals scoring high on this factor demonstrate awareness of potential biases or vested interests in information sources [QUELLE].

Data literacy often emphasizes integrating data-driven insights into one’s opinions and values, which influence decision-making processes, without focusing on the decision making (Wolff et al., 2016). Thereby it aligns with the goals of statistical and information literacy (vgl. figure 2). The “Integration” factor relates to the ability and motivation to integrate data-driven insights into one’s worldview and values [QUELLE]. It involves actively seeking comprehensive understanding of various topics, engaging with diverse perspectives, and consciously incorporating data-driven insights. Individuals scoring high in this factor adapt their opinions based on new data, prefer evidence-based information, and ensure their values align with reliable data. They engage with information and perspectives that challenge their existing views, showing a willingness to reassess their opinions and positions based on new data [QUELLE].

The “Communication” factor revolves around the often referenced skill to effectively communicate and present data through various means, including visual formats, verbal explanations, and written descriptions (e.g. Calzada

Prado & Marzal, 2013; Wolff et al., 2016; ?). It requires translating complex data into clear formats, ensuring comprehension by varied audiences. Individuals scoring high in this factor hold the ability to translate data into simple visualizations, present findings confidently, and articulate complex information effectively in written and visual as well as verbal formats (Calzada Prado & Marzal, 2013; Wolff et al., 2016; ?).

Our definition incorporates statistical literacy (Gal, 2002) by emphasizing data interpretation, analysis, and understanding different types of data representations, such as graphs and tables (Statistics). The “Statistics” factor covers skills related to managing and analyzing data effectively [QUELLE]. It involves proficiency in organizing and analyzing data using software tools, conducting statistical analyses, and understanding research methodologies [QUELLE]. Additionally, it includes conducting interviews or surveys for data collection, performing basic statistical analysis and recognizing trends in graphical representations. Individuals scoring high on this factor exhibit competence in statistical methods, enabling them to effectively analyze data and interpret findings [QUELLE]. In contrast to our definition of the “Statistics” factor, statistical literacy often focuses more narrowly on statistical concepts and methods, such as probability, sampling, and hypothesis testing (Gal, 2002). Our definition encompasses a broader range of skills beyond statistical concepts, such as data visualization, software usage, and understanding data collection methods. While information literacy involves assessing the quality of information sources, our definition places a particular emphasis on assessing data quality, considering factors like sample size, biases, and data context. This aspect extends beyond traditional information literacy (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000) and is more specific to data literacy.

The factors “Evaluation” and “Statistics” encompass behaviors and skills related to technology competency, including navigating and critically evaluating online sources and platforms, using information and communication technology, and utilizing statistical software. Data literacy involves proficiency in using technology, but specifically focuses on understanding and working with data. Technology competency encompasses a broader set of digital skills that extend beyond those relevant for data literacy.

Discriminant Constructs

The name data literacy suggests that one is talking of some form of capability, skill or ability. In fact, data literacy can be seen as more on the side of

competences or proficiencies. The distinction lies in the fact, that many behaviors, incorporated in data literacy go beyond the mere question of whether a person is “able to do it”. It includes the question of one’s motivation to do it. This stands in opposition to a former trend, where such literacies were understood cognitively [QUELLEN], thus concerning the mere cognitive predisposition of a person. When talking about data literacy as a competency, the emphasis lies on the possibility to do or not do something, assuming that one has the ability to do it. Thus data literacy incorporates several abilities but also certain personal predispositions or convictions [QUELLE].

Need for Cognition

The personality trait known as *Need for Cognition* (NFC) originated in social psychology during the 1940s and 1950s. The concept of NFC, representing an inclination for joyful thinking, is evident in the works of Maslow (1943), Murphy (1947), Asch (1952), and Sarnoff & Katz (1954). However, the conceptualization of NFC underwent refinement in the mid-1950s through experimental investigations (Cohen et al., 1955). They defined NFC as “a need to structure relevant situations in meaningful, integrated ways. It is a need to understand and make reasonable the experiential world” (Cohen et al., 1955, p. 291). The concept captures individual variations in the engagement and enjoyment of thinking tasks (Bless et al., 1994). As data literacy incorporates several cognitive aspects as well as the motivation to understand data and information one gets presented with, it is expected to correlate positively with one’s need for cognition. As need for cognition is more trait like and data literacy is more a competency and therefore less stable, it should not correlate too highly positive, i.e. correlation should be small (vgl. figure 2).

Openness to new experiences

Openness to new experiences reflects a broad appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unconventional ideas, imagination, curiosity, and diverse experiences. Individuals high in openness tend to be intellectually curious, receptive to emotions, appreciative of beauty, and eager to explore new possibilities (John et al., 2008). They are often more creative and emotionally attuned compared to those low in openness. However, they may also be perceived as unpredictable and prone to engaging in risky behaviors, including drug use (John et al., 2008). High openness is associated with seeking intense and euphoric experiences as a means of self-actualization. In contrast, individuals

low in openness tend to seek fulfillment through perseverance and are characterized as pragmatic and sometimes viewed as dogmatic or closed-minded. The interpretation and contextualization of the openness factor remain debated, partly due to a lack of biological evidence supporting this trait. Unlike other personality traits, openness has not shown consistent associations with specific brain regions in neuroimaging studies (DeYoung et al., 2010). As already mentioned, data literacy can be thought of as a competency, thus incorporating the individual motivation, leading to a certain behavior. Therefore, openness to new experiences is expected to correlate positively with data literacy. As openness to new experiences is more trait like and data literacy is not, the correlation is expected to be small (vgl. figure 2). ### Conscientiousness *Conscientiousness* refers to an individual's propensity for self-discipline, dutifulness, and striving for achievement in alignment with external standards or expectations. It encompasses levels of impulse control, regulation, and goal-directed behavior Toegel & Barsoux (2012). High conscientiousness is characterized by persistence and focus, often perceived as stubbornness, whereas low conscientiousness is linked to flexibility and spontaneity, potentially manifesting as carelessness and unreliability (Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). Individuals with high conscientiousness tend to prefer planned actions over spontaneous ones (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John et al., 2008). The cognitive aspects of data literacy as well as the motivation to understand data and information speaks to the conscientiousness of people as well. As being critical and at times detail oriented (e.g. in interpreting results, or spotting inconsistencies in presented information or while examining the credibility of sources) is also integral to data literacy, data literacy and conscientiousness are expected to correlate positively. As conscientiousness also trait opposing to data literacy, they should not correlate to highly positive, i.e. correlation should be small (vgl. figure 2).

Aim of the Study

The aim was to derive a comprehensive definition of data literacy based on existing approaches and to develop a questionnaire for self-rated data literacy with citizens being the target population. An emphasis lies on measuring the three consumer factors of the construct (Comprehension, Evaluation & Integration). Thus the research question of this study is:

“Does the proposed set of items effectively capture the latent factor structure of self-rated data literacy, and can the created scale be considered a reliable and valid measure of this construct?”

H1: The test-data will support the suggested latent factor structure and the proposed measurement model.

H2: The latent factor structure of the initial analysis will be supported by a different sample.

H3: A moderate to high positive correlation with the SWE-IV-16 (Behm, 2018) is expected.

H4: A moderate positive correlation with the the ICT-SC25 (Schauffel, 2021) is expected.

H5: A small positive correlation with the NFC-K (Beißert, 2015) is expected.

H6: A small positive correlation with the the BFI-10 (K. Rammstedt B., 2014) is expected.

Methods

Item Creation

Prior to the item creation a review of the literature was done. Since the idea was to create a self-report questionnaire, the indicators of the latent constructs were decided to be subjective indicators or Q-data[BÜHNER]. Furthermore it was set that the target group for the questionnaire are German speaking citizens. There were no clear restrictions regarding age or education, other than the participants being of legal age and that the questionnaire should not be directed at professionals in terms of data literacy, or highly educated people.

The item creation itself was oriented towards the Act-Frequency-Approach (Buss & Craik, 1983), thus the prototype approach. I started with thinking of frequent, relevant behaviors, convictions or believes reflecting the factors of data literacy, hence being prototypical of those latent factors. For the *Comprehension* factor that could be recognizing whether the interpretations of others fit the available data, or recognizing when one is presented with contradictory information or understand the information a graphic contains, when data is presented as a graphic. Regarding the *Evaluation* factor that could be for assessing the credibility of information, to consider the reputation of the source. As well as being aware that publishers' own interests can influence the published information or to check information by comparing several sources with each other. The *Integration* factor could be represented by dealing with information that challenges ones views or consciously incorporating data-based findings into ones opinion-forming process. Additionally

it could also manifest itself in changing ones mind if new data calls it into question. For the *Communication* factor, that could be represented by feeling confident in presenting data in visual formats in a way that is understandable for different target groups. But also to feel confident in expressing ones point of view in discussions or being able to summarize the most important information from data sets. As for the *Statistics* factor, this could be represented by knowing how to distinguish between causality and correlation or having analyzed data sets using simple statistical methods. It could also mean to know how to prevent systematic errors in data collection.

That way i created over 100 potential items, that were then refined in terms of wording, structure but content as well. I avoided inversely worded items, and decided to not ask for specific examples, because those might enhance the difficulty of the respective items, depending on the personal background of the person answering the question. Additionally, I made sure that items were only ever asking for one behavior, conviction or opinion at once. Overall I tried to formulate the items as easy and understandable as possible. Ten cognitive interviews were held to refine those potential items and to confirm the prototypicality of the behaviors etc. asked in the items. The cognitive interviews comprised the think-aloud-technique as well as probing, to get an understanding of how the items are understood, what comes to mind when reading the items and whether the items really ask for relevant behaviors (Fowler, 1995). Furthermore, that way unclear formulations or difficult wordings could be resolved. The interviews were administered iteratively to refine the items consecutively. In the interviews it became apparent, that especially the degree to which people can relate to the factors four and five differed heavily. This was expected, since those producer factors are also considered to play a lesser role in the every day live of citizens. It also turned out that some words like “data”, “source” or “information” are understood differently regarding the personal background sometimes. The age of the interviewed persons ranged from 21 to 66. Three of the interviewed persons were men, the other seven were women. The occupations included, for example, students, construction managers, and nurses working in intensive care units. After the cognitive interviews of the 118 potential items, 71 were left. A list of all 71 items can be seen in table X.

Sample

The participants are recruited through a combination of personal and professional networks, along with outreach on several online social media platforms

(e.g. Instagram, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, Telegram and via e-mail). Conducted in German, the participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with no external incentives provided. We conducted a-priori power analysis to determine the necessary sample size for the structural equation modelling. We used the ‘semPower’ package in R (Moshagen & Bader, 2024) and also took a look into studies with similar goals and methods. The power analysis gave an analytical estimate for $N=645$, and a simulated estimate $N=613$, for the respective measurement model. In the literature sample sizes of $N=500$ up to $N=1000$ could be found (Algner & Lorenz, 2022; Remmert et al., 2022; J. Schneider et al., 2024). So the optimal sample size, we are aiming at, lies somewhere between those numbers.

Participants had to be of legal age to be included in the study. Furthermore, attention check questions are included (three instructed response items and one seriousness check item at the end) within the survey to assess participants’ attentiveness. Participants who fail to correctly answer two out of the four attention check questions will be excluded from the analysis.

The following characteristics of this study’s sample will be made with referral to the respective statistics in the German population of 2022. The sample for this study comprised $N = 616$ participants. Within the sample, 48,3% identified as female(50,65%), 50,2% as male (49,35%), and 1,5% did not identify with binary gender categories (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024c). The average age was 40 years ($M = 44,6$)(Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024b), with an average age of 39 years ($M = 38.79$; $SD = 14.5$) amongst women ($M = 45,9$)(Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023a) and 42 years ($M = 41.96$; $SD = 14.23$) amongst men ($M = 43,2$)(Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023a). The average age of people not identifying with binary gender was 28 years ($M = 27.63$; $SD = 11.0$). Regarding education, participants exhibited a [insert educational level- specifying the range or types of educational levels observed in the sample]. Of those participants, who indicated they were in an employment, 64.88% had a full time employment (51,75% of the women indicated full time employment, 77,73% of the men indicated full time employment), at the time (65,15%; Men = 42,40%, Women = 22,75%)(Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2024; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023b), 35.12% indicated a part time employment (48,25% of women indicated part time and 22,27% of the men), at the time (28,22%; Men = 6,16%; Women = 22,06%)(Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2024; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023b) and 13.52% had no work at the time of the survey (6,63%)(Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2024). The study encompassed every sector within the occupational classification at least once (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2024). 25.2% of the participants indicated that

they were students at the time of the survey (3,39%)(Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024a).

Open Science Standards

This project uses the reproducibility workflow proposed by Peikert et al. (2021). ‘Docker’ and ‘renv’ work together to create a reproducible and portable environment. ‘Docker’ captures the complete software stack, while ‘renv’ focuses on managing R package dependencies and providing a clear documentation of the R package environment. This combination ensures that the analysis can be easily reproduced and shared with others in a reliable and transparent manner. It is to be mentioned, that the ‘repro’ package from Peikert et al. (2021) has slightly changed in its functionality, namely that it does not ensure any longer, that old versions of the used software get re installed. Furthermore we used the ‘reproducibleRchunks’ package from Brandmaier & Peikert (2024). This package enables the verification of computational results in R for reproducibility, ensuring that the same script with the same data produces identical results across different computers or at different times. When knitting the respective document, one can see the results for the respective chunks, as to whether they are reproducible or not. The study was preregistered at Zenodo (DOI:10.5281/zenodo.11196495).

Procedure

A cross-sectional online survey is used to examine a sample from the general population. Participants complete the Self-perceived Data Literacy Scale alongside demographic questions and additional validation measures. Survey questions of each measurement are randomized for each participant to minimize order effects and response biases. To shorten the overall length of the assessment the questions in each factor of the data literacy questionnaire are randomly selected for each participant. That way each participant only answers half of the possible items, the other half are planned missings. I treated the first 25 participants like a pilot, to check for potential problems in the survey (like length, spelling mistakes that have been overlooked etc.).

Instruments

Measuring Data Literacy

On Data Literacy the participants will be asked to answer 71 items. Each participant will answer 38 items of the 71 that are randomly selected. To answer the items, respondents indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 2 = “somewhat disagree”, 3 = “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 = “somewhat agree”, 5 = “strongly agree”) with a “don’t know” option.

Measuring Information Literacy

The SWE-IV-16 (Behm, 2018) (McDonalds $\omega = .91$; Cronbachs $\alpha = .91$) assesses the self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents and adults in their ability to engage in information behaviour. This questionnaire measures the process model of information-related problem-solving (Brand-Gruwel et al., 2009). In our study this construct is used as a proxy for information literacy. It consists of 16 statements addressing self-assessed abilities in searching for and evaluating information, as well as managing information searches effectively. Each statement begins with “When I search for information on a topic or a specific question...” and respondents indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 2 = “somewhat disagree”, 3 = “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 = “somewhat agree”, 5 = “strongly agree”). The total scale value is computed as the arithmetic mean of the items, which may be inverted if necessary. Calculation of the total value requires valid responses to at least 12 of the 16 items. The final questionnaire is expected to correlate moderately up to highly positive with the SWE-IV-16 (Behm, 2018), measuring peoples ability to engage in information behaviour.

Measuring Need for Cognition

The NFC-K (Beißert, 2015) (McDonalds $\omega = .62$; Cronbachs $\alpha = .60$) is a tool used to assess the NFC through four items, which represent two facets: “engagement” and “joy”. The NFC-K is measured with a seven-point response scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7), with a “neither” option in the middle. The German version of the scale is adapted from the original English scale by Cacioppo & Petty (1982) and translated by Bless et al. (1994). To determine an individual’s NFC score, a mean value (scale value) is computed from the four raw score points of the responses. The

resulting mean values range between 1 and 7. A small to moderate positive correlation with the NFC-K (Beißert, 2015) is expected, assessing the Need for Cognition (NFC).

Measuring Technology Competency

To assess self-perceived competence in using information and communication technology (ICT), the five general items of the ICT-SC25 (Schauffel, 2021) will be used (McDonalds $\omega = .93$; Cronbachs $\alpha = .93$). The ICT-SC25 is a scale consisting of 25 items designed to assess self-perceived competence in using information and communication technology. It is available in both German (ICT-SC25g) and English (ICT-SC25e). The scale measures general and domain-specific ICT competence, including communication, processing and storing, content generation, safe application, and problem-solving skills. Items are measured using a six-point fully-labeled Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Researchers can choose to utilise either the entire scale or individual subscales based on their specific research objectives. The ICT-SC25g/e is applicable for both manifest and latent analysis. Manifest scale scores for the ICT- SC25g/e are calculated separately for each subscale by computing the unweighted mean score of the items within each subscale (Schauffel, 2021). A moderate, positive correlation of the final scale with the five general items of the ICT-SC25 (Schauffel, 2021) is expected.

Measuring Openness and Conscientiousness

The BFI-10 (K. Rammstedt B., 2014) will be used to assess personality based on the five-factor model. Only the items on openness (McDonalds $\omega = .63$; Cronbachs $\alpha = .63$) and conscientiousness (McDonalds $\omega = .56$; Cronbachs $\alpha = .56$) were assessed. The items are answered on a five-point rating scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). To measure the respondent’s individual traits on the two personality dimensions, the responses to the two items for each dimension are averaged. First, the negatively worded item is recoded (items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7), then the mean value is calculated for each dimension from both the recoded and non-recoded items. The values for the five dimensions range from 1 to 5 (see B. Rammstedt & John (2007) for reference values). Small to moderate positive correlations with openness and conscientiousness of the BFI-10 (K. Rammstedt B., 2014) are expected.

Analysis

Data Quality

Careless or inattentive response patterns were analyzed by the ATC items. Furthermore, the data was checked for outliers. Because of the planned random missings in the data, those missings were imputed using full information maximum likelihood (FIML), via ‘stuart’s’ (Schultze, 2022) access to ‘lavaan’ (Rosseel, 2012). For model estimation, FIML was used as well to handle the missing data.

Main Analyses

Algorithm based item selection was done via the R package ‘stuart’(Schultze, 2022) and the CFA via the R package ‘lavaan’(Rosseel, 2012). Inference criteria: Model fit will be assessed using established criteria (e.g.: Hu & Bentler (1999)). Comprising of Chi square significance testing as well as a combination of several fit indices, i.e., $RMSEA < 0.05$, $SRMR < 0.07$, $CFI > 0.95$. Model-specific cutoff values will be considered as well, using the ‘ezCutoffs’ package(Schmalbach et al., 2019)

Rationale for Measurement Model

One decision that needs to be done by the researcher before the item selection with ‘stuart’, is the design of the measurement model, or how many items per factor the final scale should have. This scale will be created as parsimonious as possible, while ensuring that there is a real model fit to be estimated. So the decision in this case was of statistical nature, while with three items per factor, the model would have been just identified, four items per factor is the most parsimonious choice, where there is already a real model fit, that can be assessed in the end.

Meta-Heuristics

Algorithm-based item selection is used to choose the most relevant items, reducing the initial item pool. In classical approaches, items are evaluated within the overall item pool and are then often selected based on their individual properties (e.g. difficulty, discrimination, item-scale-correlations). Compared to classical approaches, algorithms are more objective and efficient in

finding a good or nearly perfect solution with regard to certain criteria (Leite et al., 2008; Olaru et al., 2015). Furthermore, some empirical studies suggest that the use of algorithms leads to similar or better results in scale construction than traditional approaches (Olaru & Danner, 2021; Sandy et al., 2014; Schroeders, 2016). The automated approach takes the opposite perspective to the classical approach, the one of meta heuristics, by repeatedly estimating CFAs for a multitude of possible item-combinations (Schultze, 2017). Thus, a pool of items with some constraints and the goal to find the one combination that best fits the suggested purpose (e.g. equation 1) of the final scale is estimated (Schultze, 2017). Thus, the selection of items and construction of a questionnaire can be viewed as a combinatorial problem, like the knapsack problem (“Choose a set of objects, each having a specific weight and monetary value, so that the value is maximized and the total weight does not exceed a predetermined limit”)(Kerber et al., 2022; Schroeders, 2016, p. 4; Schultze, 2017).

$$\Phi = F(\text{RMSEA}) + F(\text{CFI}) + F(\text{SRMR}) \quad (1)$$

‘Stuart’(Schultze, 2022) can construct subsets from a pool of items by using ant-colony-optimization, genetic algorithms, brute force, or random sampling (Schultze, 2017). Those meta-heuristics like are utilized to handle these combinatorial optimization problems. For this study, a set of 20 items from a set of 71 items is selected, to form a questionnaire. The data literacy self rating scale is optimized for model fit criteria (RMSEA, SRMR, CFI). Those criteria will be defined in the objective function (equations 1 & 2) in ‘stuart’Schultze (2017).

We use the genetic algorithm of ‘stuart’ for the item selection. Genetic algorithms are based on Darwinian evolution principles – selection, crossover, mutation and survival of the fittest [Holland (1992); Schroeders (2016)]. With the genetic algorithm, the initial set of 71 items is to be reduced based on the evolutionary process of selection, but opposing to evolution with a goal: A near-optimal “solution”. The survival of an item is determined by its quality (called “fitness”)(Galán et al., 2013). The algorithm is build on two processes: Variation (i.e. recombination and mutation) and selection. Variation rewards diversity and innovation of items, whereas selection rewards quality or fitness. The algorithm links “genes” (i.e. items), that represent a certain variable, to a “chromosome” (i.e. a set of items). A predefined number of chromosomes are randomly generated from the 1st generation (i.e. the original item pool). The algorithm tries to maximize the psychometric quality of the

“chromosomes”(i.e. item sets) by evaluating the “chromosomes”(i.e. item sets) against a “fitness”function. Based on this fitness function, the fittest “chromosomes”(i.e. item sets) of each generation are determined, which then form the basis for the next generation (forming the selection process). The process of variation establishes genetic diversity and mutation within the generations by spontaneously exchanging items within a scale or between two scales, which adds a degree of randomness to the selection process. This is done a predefined number of iterations. Thereby, the fittest “chromosome”(i.e. set of items), with the highest quality, is to be identified (Schroeders, 2016).

Validation

The provided sample is divided into two subsets (i.e. training data and test data) using the ‘holdout’ function in ‘stuart’. The specified item-selection procedure is applied to the training data. The training data is undergoing k-fold cross validation ($k=3$), using the ‘kfold’ function in ‘stuart’. Those k-folded selections are then again iterated three times, to enhance the stability of the solution even more. The other sample, the test data, is used for evaluation of the final models performance, as well as the latent correlations with the convergent measures. Validation with the test data is conducted (using an MG-CFA in ‘lavaan’) to assess the invariance of the measurement models between the training and testing datasets. Invariance levels are assessed using the criteria of F. F. Chen (2007). Invariance is necessary to claim that the scale validation has worked.

Exploratory Analyses

Because the complexity of the model, as well as the several objectives of the initially planned objective function, the genetic algorithm had problems converging into a stable solution, let alone a solution with sufficient model fit. Therefore some objectives were dropped (the composite reliability and the varying item intercepts per factor), in favor of model fit. Different solutions were systematically explored, dependent on the estimator (MLR or WLSMV) and the respective data structure (data treated as metric or ordinal data), as well as on the objective function, to lead to the best solution. Furthermore because of convergence issues the data was checked for multicollinearity.

Results

Model Fit and Measurement Invariance

Of all explored conditions and respective models, the following model is to be highlighted. An overview over all models and their model fit can be found in the supplementary material. With an objective function, only optimizing for model fit criteria (RMSEA, SRMR, CFI), the algorithm selected 20 of the 71 original items representing the five factors Comprehension, Evaluation, Integration, Communication and Statistics with four items each (Figure X). The solution exhibits good model fit (according to Hu & Bentler, 1999) with data treated as metric and ML as estimator: Satorra-Bentler- X^2 ($df = 414$, $N = 373$) = 582.582, $p < 0.001$, CFI = .96, TLI = .96, SRMR = .08, RMSEA = .05, 90%-CIRMSEA [.036; .054]. Standardized loadings of the factor Comprehension ranged from .09 to .65. For the factor Evaluation loadings ranged from .44 to .64. For the factor Integration loadings ranged from .35 to .72. For the factor Communication loadings ranged from .75 to .82. For the factor Statistics loadings ranged from .41 to .68. The complete model is also displayed in figure X. All factor loadings including standard errors can be found in the Supplementary Material. Cross-validation of the MG-CFA with the test-data indicated that the assumption of scalar invariance holds across the two subsamples: $X^2(df = 389, N = 373) = 659.746$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = .92, SRMR = .087, RMSEA = .038; $\Delta CFI = .00$, $\Delta SRMR = .00$, $\Delta RMSEA = .001$.

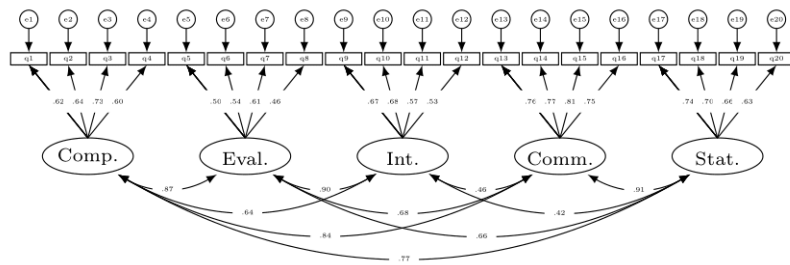


Figure 3: Measurement Model of Model 5.

While overall fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI) suggest a good fit, an analysis of correlated residual was done to reveal possible specification errors. The table X shows the correlated residuals from the training sample. The table X shows the correlated residuals from the testing sample. Both samples show several residuals to be correlated.

Latent Correlations

To furthermore investigate the model, the covariances of the latent factors were examined. The factor correlations for the training sample are displayed in table X. The correlation of .97 between *Communication* and *Statistics* is to be highlighted. The correlations for the test sample in table X. In the test sample the correlation of .84 between *Communication* and *Statistics* is to be highlighted as well, alongside the correlation of .92 between *Comprehension* and *Integration*, as well as the correlation of .87 between *Evaluation* and *Integration*.

For the latent correlations, Kendall's rank correlation coefficient - Kendalls tau was estimated, because the data was not normally distributed. The factors (Comprehension, Evaluation, Integration, Communication & Statistics) of the data literacy scale correlated moderately to highly with the SWE-IV-16 ($\tau = .47, \tau = .46, \tau = .40, \tau = .48, \tau = .39$; all $p < .01$). The factors of data literacy showed small to moderate correlations with the NFC-K ($\tau = .22, \tau = .24, \tau = .30, \tau = .37, \tau = .42$; all $p < .01$). The factors of the data literacy scale showed moderate correlations with the general items of the ICT-SC25 ($\tau = .31, \tau = .17, \tau = .23, \tau = .43, \tau = .32$; all $p < .01$). The factors Comprehension, Evaluation and Integration correlated slightly negative with the openness of the BFI-10 ($\tau = -.15, p < .05; \tau = -.18, p < .01; \tau = -.26, p < .01$). Openness did not correlate statistically significant with the other factors. The factors Comprehension, Evaluation, Communication and Statistics correlated slightly up to moderate with conscientiousness of the BFI-10 ($\tau = .13, p < .05; \tau = .25, p < .01; \tau = .16, p < .05; \tau = .17, p < .01$). The latent correlations with respective confidence intervals are also displayed in table 3.

Reliability

The model of the final set of items shows McDonald's ω total = .92. The composite values McDonald's ω total of the factors are Comprehension = .76, Evaluation = .65, Integration = .67, Communication = .81 and Statistics = .68.

Discussion

This study meant to examine whether a pool 20 items out of the initial item pool of 71 items, would reflect the suggested measurement model within the

current sample. Furthermore, the aim was to find a solution via ‘stuart’ that yields good model fit as well as reliability and that shows measurement invariance with a random split-sample. Additionally, latent correlations were to be examined to locate the construct in the nomological net.

The final model showed acceptable fit (XXX), according to the combinational rule for RMSEA and SRMR of Hu & Bentler (1999). But not according to the rules that are most commonly used not to the combinational rule, that resulted in the least sum of type 1 and type 2 error rates (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Comparison of the training sample and the test sample on the chosen model, measurement invariance analyses indicated

Summarising the results

Everything worked - what do I need to report? First, report on the three core decisions and how the solution was created, whether it is stable, and how it was validated. The final variant is then reported exactly like a CFA (e.g. Jackson et al., 2009). To have a clear structure, answer the following questions: How large was the original item pool and how was it created? What is the structure of the scale? Which algorithm was used? Which objective function was used? How stable is the final variant? How was the final variant further validated (e.g. crossvalidate, k-fold)?

The xxx correlations ($r = , p$) between the newly created scale and the SWE-IV-16, NFC-K, the general items of the ICT-SC25 and openness and conscientiousness of the BFI-10, respectively, indicate the data literacy scale measures #a similar, yet distinct concept#.

What does it all mean / “Why?”

- Start with the research question
 - Maybe then towards the hypotheses
- connecting findings to the related theories
- very related/ current literature first, than broader is possible
- When discussing the why - be careful, because you didnt test that

Limitations

- model fit

- ceiling effects
- melted answer categories
- content validity
- reliability!
- DIF?
- psych science - authors guide to generalizability
- attempts to control for limiting factors
- dont include to general/ broad critiques, but special one for my own study

The results of this study should be interpreted with several limitations in mind. The sample deviates from the general population in multiple demographic variables, potentially compromising its representativeness and generalizability. Occupational distribution among participants shows clustering in fields such as “*Gesundheit, Soziales, Lehre und Erziehung*”, “*Buchhaltung, Recht und Verwaltung*”, “*Kaufmännische Dienstleistungen, Vertrieb, Tourismus*” and especially “*Naturwissenschaft, Geografie und Informatik*”. This indicates a selection bias, likely due to recruitment methods (who is reached) and implicitly favoring individuals more interested in data literacy.

The item pool for the questionnaire was specifically trained on this non-representative sample, which may affect its validity. The heterogeneous nature of the construct complicates global instrument development and understanding across all participants. The measure was designed for citizens, potentially limiting discrimination at higher item difficulties or among more literate participants, a direction to be improved in future studies. Also, as data literacy is a heterogeneous construct, the questionnaire could incorporate more aspects to better reflect its full scope, thereby increasing content validity. Expanding the questionnaire with additional items could address this need, although it would deviate from the principle of parsimony.

Additionally, the training and testing data sets differed in size, which could influence measurement invariance testing (F. F. Chen, 2007). While the sample sizes were appropriate, they were at the lower threshold of the prior power analysis (Hu & Bentler, 1999; e.g., Kass & Tinsley, 1979), suggesting that larger samples might have been better. Lastly, although the questionnaire showed good model fit, it should be noted that algorithm-based item selection is a heuristic approach, rather than deterministic, and may not always yield the optimal solution (Blum & Roli, 2003; Schultze, 2017).

Future directions

Future research should explore adaptive testing using Item Response Theory (IRT). IRT provides a method to tailor item difficulty to respondents' ability levels in real-time, enhancing assessment efficiency and precision. This reduces the number of items required while maintaining high measurement accuracy. Implementing IRT is particularly advantageous for heterogeneous constructs like data literacy, as it ensures each participant is evaluated with items suited to their skill level. One of the significant challenges in applying IRT is the assumption of unidimensionality, where items are presumed to measure a single underlying trait. Data literacy, however, is a multi-faceted construct, and future studies should investigate the dimensionality of the scale rigorously. An alternative to IRT-based adaptive testing is the use of Classification and Regression Trees (CART). CART is a tree-based method that splits data into subsets based on binary decisions, optimizing for predictive accuracy. This approach could simplify adaptive testing by using binary splits to classify respondents into different levels of data literacy. The Gini index can be employed within CART to identify the optimal cutoff points for these splits, ensuring that each branch of the tree maximally distinguishes between different levels of data literacy competence.

Construct validity is evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using MLR as estimator, as well as correlation analyses with related constructs

- what to optimize the scale for?
- dynamic fit indices
- residuals correlates
- is NOT optimized for model fit criteria and composite reliability (RMSEA, SRMR, CFI & McDonalds ω) as well as variability in the difficulty of items.

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