

Guest Editorial: Digital Citizenship: Innovations in Education, Practice, and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

There are still disparities in technology-access despite economic pressures and widespread promises to overcome them. The induced digital gap defines the degree of digital citizenship for which, unified policies have yet to be drawn at various educational levels to reduce that gap. The quest for a broad participation to develop digital citizenship competencies needs further investigations into innovative educational approaches, pedagogical methods, and routine practices that foster digital literacy, and narrows the digital divide. This special issue accumulates original theoretical and empirical research contributions across contemporary digital citizenship perspectives. The final selection of the papers explores digital citizenship concepts such as ethics, digital literacy and participation, in various contexts to develop opportunities for a wider engagement in social actions. The international perspectives of contributing authors shed lights on digital citizenship prospects across unique contexts among different nations.

Keywords

Digital citizenship, Digital literacy, Ethics, Education, Pedagogy

Introduction

There is a lack of research defining digital citizenship despite the wide proliferation of Internet, and citizens' engagement in online communities. These technological spaces develop digital footprints as citizens explore online applications that foster civic awareness or influence social and political norms. These collective digital interactions are nurtured by an increasing immersion into cyberspace which entails knowledge and behavioural competencies. The resulting aptitudes cultivate digital literacy as well as ethical use of technology and social inclusion brought by an active participation and a further engagement into society actions (Parry, 2008). These defining dimensions of digital citizenship have been further analyzed to establish some basis for supplementary studies (Choi, 2016). Previous analysis suggested salient digital citizenship concepts, which can be used to gauge relevant knowledge and behavioural scales. These concepts include: Ethics, information literacy and participation/engagement of digital citizens into Internet-mediated societal actions (Choi, 2016). This special issue builds on these existing categories of digital citizenship concepts, with an educational-perspective at various levels, to promote best practices that cultivate these digital citizenship concepts. The proposed contributions could align efforts to support the digital transformation of school-children and advocate the corresponding educational changes (Sancho, 2010). Such educational practices are poised to develop a range of competences and shape new behaviours, which harness the benefits and opportunities of virtual spaces, while ensuring protection against potential harms.

Digital citizenship and ethics

The ethics dimension of digital citizenship denotes suitable and accountable conducts in cyberspace (Gereluk, 2017). Citizens inherit rights and associated responsibilities as members of online communities, whereby individuals manage their behaviour within the community context. However, there are some educational disparities in best practices which frame ethics as a salient feature of digital citizenship. This special issue discusses some of these disparities across various contexts, to reshape the role that education could play in enabling digital citizens who thrive online responsibly in a democratic society.

Information literacy

The scale of digital citizenship profile is levelled by information literacy as it provides access means to build the required knowledge. This includes conceptacles to evaluate information sources. Instructional practices could support the dissemination of credible information through integrating relevant practices across the curriculum and authentic tasks. Educational settings and hybrid educational models are discussed in this special issue where authors evaluate their contributions to elevate digital citizenship levels.

Participation and engagement

Participation and engagement are new digital citizenship norms in support of collective actions. Several approaches to mobilize citizens to get involved into politics have been advocated. Social networks had particularly played influential role in civic engagement through participation into political discussions (Parry, 2008; Vromen, 2017). The role of social media in engaging citizens across different participatory domains, including education, civic and political domains are discussed in this special issue. The proposed contributions highlight and evaluate the rising role and proper use of social media to engage in meaningful societal actions.

Special issue structure and brief overview of contributions

This special issue is categorized into three tracks that include investigations to rise digital citizenship scales, namely: information literacy, ethics and participation/engagement. This categorization designates a repertoire for meaningful and responsible participation in society. As technology permeates educational, business and civic sectors, digital literacy develops the required skills to navigate through the information pathways. Additionally, citizens need to develop the ethical attitude to consolidate a responsible internet-enabled engagement within society and government agenda.

Minjeong Kim and Dongyeon Choi's contribution falls within the information literacy category of digital citizenship, as they argue on the need for a comprehensive knowledge, as well as technological accessibility to digital spaces. For that endeavour, they highlight the transformational role of educators to lead digital citizens into develop relevant competencies. On the other hand, the broad range of digital citizenship scales reveal some challenges to identify competency gaps. Hence, the authors propose a study which identifies digital citizenship scales within an educational context. A five-factor digital citizenship model is revealed, to characterize the scale values that profile citizens in digital environment. Alex Young Pedersen et al.'s contribution fosters a hybrid education approach to develop patterns for inclusion in digital society. The authors of this paper describe a process on identifying and describing educational patterns as part of a hybrid education model that are mapped to digital citizenship components. The paper includes a scenario of actual participants intervening in the proposed hybrid educational model to evaluate its contribution to digital citizenship.

The participation and engagement dimension of digital citizenship has been investigated in Benjamin Gleason and Sam von Gillern paper where they explore social media use in secondary education contexts. The article proposes a conceptual analysis of civic engagement and examines digital media applications support to citizenship education in middle- and high-school levels. Their empirical study demonstrates the development of digital citizenship through the proposed integration of social media into education practices. Further, Nuri Kara develops a study in another contribution to this special issue to investigate university students' perception and practices about digital citizenship. Barriers for political engagement are explored among a population of students through online activities. Along the same lines, Damien M. Sánchez reports upon a case study of community participation in learning exchanges, within a blog on civic engagement. President Trump's election is used as a forum of discourse whereby people diagnose policies that impact their everyday lives. Similarly, Stefanie Panke et al also leverage blogs and other social media spaces to encourage a reflective and critical discourse about civic engagement that promote genuine learning exchanges.

The ethical factor of digital citizenship is first addressed by Xianhui Wang and Wanli Xing through a contribution to this special issue where parental involvement is solicited to instil the norms of appropriate and responsible behaviour with regard to technology use. This involvement is shown to reinforce ethical online conduct and dissuade risky behaviours. The authors proposed a research-based path model is proposed to explain causal relationships between the effects of parental involvement and teens' digital citizenship. Secondly, inappropriate use of social media can be detrimental to digital citizenship in K-12 schools, which is emphasized in Florence Martin et al.'s contribution to this special issue. An empirical study in this paper reveals a substantial population of middle-school students involved in the study who lack parental monitoring in their social media use. Subsequently, the authors justify the need for cyber-security education to prevent inappropriate postings, hacking incidents, or privacy infringements. The study increases educators' and parents' awareness on social media use by students to reduce cyber-bullying incidents and protect their digital identity in cyberspace.

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