

Chapter 85

Digital and Global Literacies in Networked Communities: Epistemic Shifts and Communication Practices in the Cloud Era

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how the concept of literacy, digital literacy, and global literacy is shifting; how technologies (YouTube, Facebook, Skype, blogs, vlogs, and Google Hangouts) and digital literacies facilitate cross-cultural and intercultural communication and global cultural understandings; how technologies engage global citizens to share, collaborate, cooperate, and create their narratives; and how people become able to address local and global socio-cultural and political issues through various global digital engagements. Finally, this chapter investigates how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed across global cultures in digital contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Technology, without doubt, has brought tremendous changes over the past 20+ years by affecting science, commerce, engineering, and education alike. These changes have revolutionized the twenty-first century cultures and dramatically cultivated the relationship between human, technology, and culture in multiple ways. The advent of digital technologies especially is responsible for this revolution that brought substantial shifts not only at the material levels, but also at the global literacy levels in this digital world. This could be one of the reasons why colleges/universities of the twenty-first century are adopting digital technologies as a practical way of preparing students for the local and global cultures. And educators at all levels are integrating computers into their literacy instructions and into their classrooms and professional lives across cultures. And the introduction of digital literacies and technologies complicated the way we traditionally conceived writing and communication across the social and academic institutions.

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Since the humanities aligned itself with technology, rhetoric and technology became no longer separate entities, and when technology was formally introduced into the curricula, classrooms, and workplaces, it benefitted students to become tech-savvy human-power for the twenty-first century digital village. Regarding digital literacies, Selfe (1999) contends that an education enriched by technology provided people an equal opportunity to obtain high-paying technology-rich jobs and economic prosperity (p. 135). This situation offers the students of our discipline—rhetoric and composition, English Studies, and professional communication—a profound opportunity to have the equal access for upward social mobility (p.137).

In today's society, people are becoming multi-literate in multiple ways such as culturally, linguistically, scientifically, technologically, and geopolitically literate. Such digital technologies (Web 2.0, cloud, and social media) explicitly or implicitly connect people with other people from diverse cultures, languages, and geographical locations. As Gillen and Barton (2010) state digitally literate people capture an arena of rapidly growing global practices as humans and computers interact in newer ways with innovative purposes (pp. 3-4). The digitally literate people share, collaborate, co-create, and disseminate contents via digital technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, micro-blogging, LinkedIn, and other cloud/Web 2.0 tools. Furthermore, whatever contents digitally literate people produce will become newer to many other global audiences. From this perspective, digitally literate people always create newer contents in one way or the other, for narratives and stories they create and share in the cloud spaces are culturally and geopolitically dissimilar. Based on the discussion, this chapter investigates how the concept of digital and global literacies is shifting; how technologies and digital literacies facilitate cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication and global cultural understandings; how technologies engage global citizens to share, collaborate, cooperate, and create their narratives; and how people become able to address glocal (local and global) socio-cultural and political issues through the global digital engagement. At the end, this chapter explores epistemic shifts such as how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed across global cultures in digital and physical contexts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The concept of literacy, in the past was limited; people who could read and write their names were considered literate, and many people still have the same opinion about literacy. So, the way people understand and interpret literacy to some extent is cultural, political, and situated. In this section, I examine the term literacy and technology, for which I will discuss my recent visit to Limbuwan, Nepal such as how different people understand and interpret literacy, and how they engage in digital communication with their local and global colleagues. Last summer (2013), I went to Sunnam and Solma (remote hilly villages of Limbuwan region), Limbuwan that are located in the eastern part of Nepal. During the trip, I got an opportunity to meet and talk to school and college teachers who had advanced college degrees. Likewise, I also met with political leaders, farmers, and students most of them had college degrees. We talked over many topics, among them was "literacy." We discussed what literacy is and what it meant to them. These people had their own understanding and philosophy of literacy and interpreted it in multiple ways. Many of them narrowed down the spheres of literacies. For instance, they considered that people who can read and write their names are literate; others argued that those who can read and can communicate via letters, emails, and social media are literate. One of the local political leaders contended

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