INSPIRATION REPORT

FIGURING OUT YOUR FEED: AN *INFINITE LEARNING* PROGRAM

PRESENTED TO
Santa Clarita Public Library Management Team

PRESENTED BY
Praditya Fulumirani

OBJECTIVE

To highlight the value of media literacy and equip teens with the essential skills to assess information critically, navigate online spaces responsibly, and make informed decisions in a digital world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era of rapidly-evolving technology where teens are bombarded with an information overload and misinformation can spread unchecked, digital literacy is critical. Libraries have the unique opportunity to empower teens into being informed digital citizens. This report outlines a proposed workshop series, designed to teach participants to understand online algorithms, identify misinformation, fact-check sources, engage in ethical online behavior, and protect personal data. By combining training with online practical tools like FactCheck.org, Snopes, and Google Fact Check Tools, this Infinite Learning program fosters digital literacy and will be designed as flexible, with opportunities to expand it beyond the current proposal.

This workshop will incorporate existing research on media literacy to address the growing challenges of misinformation in the digital age. Our library system will be regarded as a leader in civic engagement and community engagement while strengthening its appeal to tech-savvy teens.

INTRODUCTION

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The digital age is not the future, it has arrived and it is staying. With every passing year, younger generations are interacting with digital technologies at younger ages; the digital age gap only widens because parents and surrounding adults might not be as up-to-date to the constantly-shifting digital world (Park, 2016). New challenges arise with every new technological development, and teens need the proper tools especially since they have an 8-hour screen time average (Rosenberg & Szura, 2023). It does not help that teens are bombarded with a rising wave of "conspiracy theories intertwined with politics, health and science…accompanied by the crumbling of the traditional journalism model" (Webster, 2024). While some may believe simply abstaining from smartphones and digital devices might be the solution, guiding teens into being responsible digital citizens is more sustainable.

As a trusted community hub, the Santa Clarita Public Library can help families and schools address these challenges by fostering digital literacy and allow teens to safely navigate the digital world. Adhering to the Creative Classroom model, program quality will be constantly monitored, combined with innovative timetables and room for flexibility (Stephens, 2016). This report will explore the significance of media literacy tools, offering actionable steps for implementation in library settings.

BACKGROUND

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The proposed program centers on using fact-checking tools and fostering digital citizenship to address critical issues like misinformation and algorithm bias. There are a wide array of fact-checking tools at our disposal that "help users authenticate news, videos, and images in just a few clicks" (Web Purify, 2024). These user-friendly tools include websites such as Snopes and FactCheck.org and resources such as Google Fact Check Explorer and NewsGuard.

The primary reason why fact-checking tools have become so pivotal as of late is due to social media algorithms, which can be "excellent at finding content that is similar to your previous interests and delivering more of that to you, but...don't have any capacity for real discernment and can't make subtle distinctions between sarcasm, innuendo, attitude, point of view" (Fournier, 2021). It becomes dangerously easy for teens to be influenced by bad actors online. In combination, fact-checking tools and privacy settings serve as essential building blocks for digital literacy.

DIGITAL LITERACY →

The trend of digital literacy programs originated to combat the rapid proliferation of online misinformation and unethical online behavior. Earlier this year, the Public Library Association (PLA) announced an expansion of digital literacy funding opportunities resources targeted at public libraries, funded by a $2.7 million contribution from AT&T (ALA, 2024).

An example of a recent success can be found in the Santa Barbara Public Library, which helped over 150 adults throughout a series of internet basics workshops. Programs like this highlight the impact of digital literacy tools and libraries have played a significant role in advancing this trend by providing accessible educational opportunities tailored to their communities.

IMPACT

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Teenagers, the primary target audience for this program, are among the most active users of social media and digital platforms. However, research indicates they are also particularly vulnerable to misinformation and biased content, with data pointing to them "significantly more likely to believe online conspiracy theories than older generations" (Paul, 2023). Coupled with the fact that Instagram and TikTok have overtaken Google as being the preferred search engine it becomes even more crucial to equip teens with the necessary tools (Koetsier, 2024).

Again, presenting this information outside of a school context will further reinforce digital literacy as a lifelong skill. Furthermore, adhering to the Infinite Learning concept, once this program is proven a success, it can be tailored to serve other demographics such as children, adults, and seniors.

CONSIDERATIONS

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The following points compares and contrasts the positives and potential negative aspects of the proposed workshop series for the Santa Clarita Public Library.

Affordances

- **Provides teens practical skills for evaluating online information**
- **Encourages informed decision-making and ethical digital behavior**
- **Strengthens the library's role as community educators**

Negatives

- **Requires constant updates to reflect changing technologies**
- **May encounter resistance from participants when discussing controversial topics like bias or privacy (both directly from teens or their families)**

IMPLEMENTATION

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Below is a tentative framework that can be utilized by the Santa Clarita Public Library to successfully implement this proposed workshop series.

Research & Design

- Research the American Library Association's (ALA) media literacy programming guide for inspiration
- Create a 5-part workshop series with interactive sessions
- Train library staff to assist in the programming

Partnerships & Resources

- Invite guest speakers, such as digital privacy specialists
- Provide take-home materials with tips and further resources

Promotion

- Use social media such as Instagram and TikTok to target teens with engaging content
- Leverage library events and newsletters for event promotion

CONCLUSION

The workshop series represents an opportunity for the Santa Clarita Public Library to empower teens with essential digital literacy skills. By addressing pressing issues like misinformation, privacy, and responsible online behavior, the library system can reinforce its role as a leader in community education. This initiative not only prepares teens for the digital age but also positions the Santa Clarita Public Library as a vital contributor to civic engagement and informed decision-making.

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