

Chapter 1

Citizen Journalism: Activating Students to Participate in Global Issues

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, globalization has become a significant factor in digital citizenship, yet students often lack systematic education in global awareness and civic education and have few venues to voice their perspectives. One solution to this problem is citizen journalism. Student engagement through citizen journalism provides a rich experience that can advance several competencies: communication, collaboration, information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, and cultural literacy. It fosters civic responsibility through the confluence of digital citizenship and global citizenship. It also develops awareness of, and access to, issues of public concern. Importantly, it gives students the tools to take positive action to address global issues. This chapter provides several strategies for students to gain the knowledge and skills, as well as access to media outlets, to participate in global issues via citizen journalism.

INTRODUCTION

Today's students are bombarded with information, ranging from school gossip to international terrorism. News may range in importance from an entertainer's new hair style to impending hurricanes in their area. Students' involvement with information also ranges: from little access or interest to nearly non-stop engagement, frequent sharing, and even information (or misinformation) production. While local information may be more obvious, global information surrounds students as well, especially with the recent pandemic and climate change. Whether they pay attention to global information or not, students are affected by it, be it updates on vaccinations, racist attacks, or politics.

This chapter explores the role of digital citizenship, civic engagement and the impact of technology on it, and the potential of citizen journalism as a mechanism for facilitating youth-centered pro-active global digital citizenship.

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BACKGROUND

Definitions

Digital citizenship may be defined as the ability to use technology safely, responsibly, critically, productively, and civically. Some stakeholders in digital citizenship focus more on personal protection, emphasizing defensive action against external threats. However, digital citizenship also has a pro-active side: leveraging technology to contribute to society. As globalization has impacted information access and exchange, both the protective and the pro-active aspects of digital citizenship have expanded potential. Global bots can manipulate social media, and hackers now have international reach to steal identities. On the other hand, students now have access to useful information from around the world and they can participate in international causes such as saving endangered species. The idea of positive global action counterbalances the attitude of fear and wrongdoing. Pro-active digital citizenship may be considered as the integration of digital citizenship and civic engagement: individuals use technology to improve their communities, whatever form that community assumes.

Globalization has become a significant factor in digital citizenship. As the Global Policy Forum states (2021, p. 1):

Human societies across the globe have established progressively closer contacts over many centuries, but recently the pace has dramatically increased. Jet airplanes, cheap telephone service, email, computers, huge oceangoing vessels, instant capital flows, all these have made the world more interdependent than ever. Multinational corporations manufacture products in many countries and sell to consumers around the world. Money, technology and raw materials move ever more swiftly across national borders. Along with products and finances, ideas and cultures circulate more freely. As a result, laws, economies, and social movements are forming at the international level. Many politicians, academics, and journalists treat these trends as both inevitable and (on the whole) welcome. But for billions of the world's people, business-driven globalization means uprooting old ways of life and threatening livelihoods and cultures. The global social justice movement, itself a product of globalization, proposes an alternative path, more responsive to public needs. Intense political disputes will continue over globalization's meaning and its future direction.

Civic engagement may be defined as individual and collective actions that address issues of public concern. The underlying goal is to improve the quality of life within a community through actions that may be political or non-political. In schools, civic engagement is often carried out through service learning. With this definition, consuming civic information, such as reading about the legislative system, does not constitute civic engagement. However, blogging about how laws are created could be considered a minimal level of civic engagement, and helping lobby for a specific bill shows more committed and significant engagement, and could involve technology such as creating a website about the bill's benefits.

Digital citizenship may be considered as a subset of generic citizenship; that is, the rights and responsibilities of a recognized community member. Citizenship may be considered on several levels. A personally responsive citizen obeys laws and acts responsibly; a digital citizen at that level avoids bullying and critically evaluates fake news. A participatory citizen interacts with others, from voting to working with others for a common good; a participatory digital citizen might create or share valuable valid information on social media. A third level of citizenship is social justice oriented: seeking ways

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