

9 Aptitudes and 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy for Public Good: A Purpose-Driven and Critical Reflection

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This paper argues for media and information literacy (MIL) as a public good. When nations and peoples are informed, media and information literate, engaged, and empowered, information as a public good becomes possible and sustainable. However, for people to be empowered with media and information literacy, media and information literacy itself must be a public good. In this paper, the author shares what was in his mind and heart when the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy were articulated and invites partners around the world to pour into this container intended to stimulate a melting pot of knowledge. For the first time, using the proposed 9 Aptitudes and 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy, this paper buttresses the argument that media and information literacy is a public good and must be deployed for the public good. It is a way for people to guard their minds and hearts. Emphasis is placed here on the importance society places on MIL and the values attached to it. As a way to stimulate further deliberations, the paper calls for reflections on the priority that should be accorded to the proposed MIL Aptitudes and Excellences in both individual and collective life. It calls for individual and collective roles with respect to people's growth path in becoming media and information literate by recognizing that some competencies are innately endowed (*Aptitudes*) and must be nurtured through the *Excellences* for the sustained *Manifestations* to be reached. By extension, actions should inform individual and collective take in the defense of media and information literacy as a public good.

Keywords: public good, public goods, UNESCO, media and information literacy, aptitudes.

It might be appropriate to say that this paper is not one of the traditional academic papers.¹ The readers are, therefore, advised to read this paper from the standpoint of a non-conventional academic perspective (like when you read one of your favorite novels, newspapers, blogs, or whatever you read for relaxation). The author makes this proposition not from the position of weakness or justification to compromise academic soundness. Rather, this approach is adopted to stimulate reading for introspection and self-reflection as well as reading for empathy, peace, and love. Yes love, not hate! By now you can detect the unorthodox approach to this paper. One gets inspiration from everywhere when writing. The author acknowledges the Associate American Corner Librarian, De La Salle University. The idea of corner libraries reminds us of corner shops and could be an excellent manifestation of MIL Cities (Grizzle et al., 2021). The development, sustainability, and access to libraries are important metrics of MIL Cities (Chibás Ortiz et al., 2020). We must construct cities from not only mortar, steel, and technology but also media and information literacy (MIL) as a public good. Cities are driven by information—information dissemination, collection, storage, and processing. We must design cities as big learning spaces for media and information literacy. In multimodal cities, MIL becomes the GPS to navigate the corridors, lanes, streets, main roads, and the information and digital superhighway. It is about reading the world and reading the words! (Yarbaşı & Aydin, 2022; Freire, 1985). Hence, this paper offers a social and existential context of media and information literacy for the public good in informed nations.

When everyone can say “IamInfoSmart,” we are gaining “MILeage: Towards Lifelong Learning and Sustainability,” which speaks volumes like the sounds of many waters. I invite readers to come and reason together. I invite you to come. Let us think together. If we agree on some, it is normal. If we disagree on some, that too is human. What is important is that we reason together with mutual respect. It is possible in societies and nations.

¹ The statements are written in part in my role as Programme Specialist in Media and Information Literacy UNESCO. These are not necessarily the opinion of UNESCO or in any way bind the organization.

Furthermore, this paper proffers several propositions. It posits that when nations and peoples are informed, media and information literate, engaged, and empowered, information as a public good becomes more possible and sustainable. However, for people to be empowered with media and information literacy, media and information literacy itself must be a public good. To appreciate the idea of MIL for the public good, we must first contemplate, receive, eat, and digest the WHY in the urgent reality of MIL for all, that is, MIL for everyone and by everyone. Obviously or obliviously, we live in a world where we must contemplate, reflect, reason, or deliberate (enabling and allowing our brain to receive information, process, critically assess, and assimilate information), which is what media and information literacy is about. It is imperative to comprehend what is meant by espousing “Media and Information Literacy for the Public Good”!

Perhaps, let us start with the public good as we know it. The public good refers to actions, interventions, tools, natural resources, products, or services that benefit all members of society (Parenteau, 2023; Kartal, 2010). For example, we consider clean air, clean water, healthcare services, affordable food, access to peace and security, and the airwaves as contributing to the public good. All human rights are related to the public good (Enderle, 2021). Many argue that media and the Internet or digital commons are also public goods (Wittel, 2016; Wylde, 2023). The Internet and media do possess attributes of social and economic benefits associated with the public good. This is why governments, civil societies, the private sector, and multilateral organizations, including the United Nations (UN), are invested in their governance (Haggart et al., 2021).

To buttress the point on the issue of public goods as related to MIL, an allegory to our daily experience appears suitable. For instance, we are all concerned as to whether the air we breathe is clean, whether the water we drink is polluted, and whether the food we eat is healthy. While one is not so sure about this, one is sure of the need for more media and information literacy to strengthen health literacy in that respect. Generally, we all want to eat food that will not harm us. In this respect, it is a matter of public health, meaningful human existence, or even life and death. Should that be the case, one can readily ask why are we or should we be less concerned about the information that we contemplate, receive, eat, and digest. In other words, why are we not conscious of the enabling information environment we live in and the kind of information we allow

our brain to receive, process, evaluate, and assimilate? This too is a matter of public health! Following this line of thought, it might be justified to say that depolluting the information ecology should be considered a public health issue (Dramé, 2020). It is tantamount to depolluting our brains, our minds, or even our hearts, some may add. Therefore, a conscious effort to critically and wisely use information for informed decision-making is a matter of public good. As a result, by becoming media and information literate, people can help to depollute information environments by using information, media, and digital technologies for informed decision-making and engagement in sustainable development. To understand how we can apply MIL for the public good, it is key to understand how public good generally should be treated.

How Is Public Good Normally Treated?

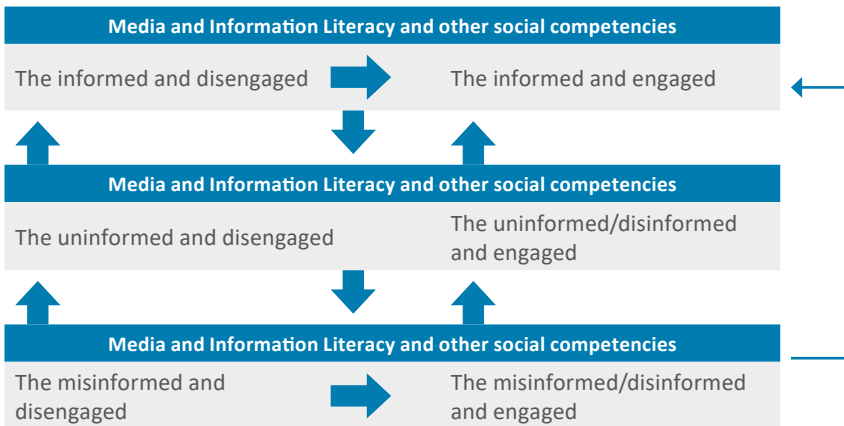
The two main criteria that distinguish public good are that it must be non-rivalrous and non-excludable (Kartal, 2010; Yew-Kwang Ng, 2023). Non-rivalrous means that the goods do not dwindle in supply as more people consume them; non-excludability means that the goods are available to all citizens. They are designed to be available to all and have qualities that ensure individuals or groups can access them. They also must be able to withstand use without them becoming unavailable to future users (Houser et al., 2002; Kotchen, 2012; Parenteau, 2023).

Governments are most successful in providing public goods when they have strong institutions. This relates to *SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions* (United Nations, 2023). Inclusive governments place high value on the welfare of all their citizens. Governments that are of such a disposition can realize the full societal benefit of public good and ensure sustainable availability for present and future citizens. Trust, transparency, freedom, peace, and equality can be advanced in the public sphere by recognizing that the public sphere revolves around individuals and groups with varying levels of information and engagement. Media and information literacy can help in that respect (Grizzle, 2020).

All citizens fall into one of the five following categories with respect to information and positive engagement in society (see Figure 1):

- i. The informed and engaged**
- ii. The informed and disengaged**, which gradually transitions to the group of informed and engaged
- iii. The uninformed and disengaged**, which progressively moves to be informed and disengaged and eventually arrive at being informed and engaged
- iv. The dis-mis-informed and engaged**, which follows the paths toward informed and engaged
- v. The misinformed/disinformed and disengaged** as well as the misinformed and disengaged, which progress to being informed and engaged

Figure 1. Matrix of Stages of Information and Engagement



Source: Own elaboration

Media and information literacy can serve as a “rebalancer” to ensure that all citizens in the other groups gradually transition to the informed and engaged group. This is, of course, within limits so that people’s rights are not violated in this quest to stir engagement (see Law 4 of the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy for principles in connection with media and information literacy and rights).

Ensuring that MIL for All Is a Matter of Public Good

Governments, civil societies, private sectors, and multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, should invest heavily and urgently in MIL for everyone. This is a public good investment. As proposed earlier, let us reason together and put this proposition that media and information literacy is a public good on trial. I offer the following additional pieces of evidence to the defense of this thesis.

These are summarized in three categories:

1. The 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy
2. The 9 Manifestations of Media and Information Literacy
3. The 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy

To ensure brevity, this paper focuses on:

1. The 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy
2. The 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy

However, for a better understanding of how the above-listed pieces of categorical evidence explain MIL as a public good, the author hereby discusses the interconnection between them using the 5 Laws of MIL.

Explaining the Linking Forerunner: The 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy

A few years ago, UNESCO and its partners articulated and promoted the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy (Grizzle & Singh, 2016). The 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy offer a principled framework for MIL as a public good (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy



Source: Grizzle & Singh (2016)

Examining the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy

As a consensus-building initiative among MIL stakeholders, the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy (Grizzle & Singh, 2016) summarized in Figure 2 was inspired by Ranganathan's (1931) 5 Laws of Library Science, which form the principles of library design, management, development, and library use. The 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy are intended as guiding principles for stakeholders in developing MIL policies, strategies, and operational programs.

It is not the author's intention here to do an in-depth analysis of the 5 Laws of MIL in the 21st-century information and communication landscape.

Nevertheless, it is worth presenting some insights and reflections on each of the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy, with emphasis placed on Law 1 and Law 4. Furthermore, these two laws might emerge as the most controversial. The author entreats readers not to get confused as the counting is numbered 1, 4, 2, 3, and 5. This is done on purpose. Some may argue that the placement of the numbering of each law is not intuitive like the design of Figure 2. However, such design techniques are employed to get people to pay attention and attract them to look and read with purpose. This is indeed MIL in action!

Ranganathan (1931) was very surgical in writing the 5 Laws of Library Science. In his characteristic manner, he used very few words. Contrarily, the 5 Laws of MIL contain many words. One should take them as real containers, 99.9% empty, waiting to be filled with more knowledge and truths or, preferably, verifiable information.

5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy: Law 1

For the first Law of Library Science—books are for use—Ranganathan writes, “The first law of Library Science, like the first law of any other science, embodies an elemental truth. In fact, it is so self-evident that one may be inclined to say that it is trivial. But, that is an invariable characteristic of all first laws. Take, for example, the first law of conduct (Satyam Vada – speak the truth), or the first law of motion” (ibid; p. 1; Navalani & Satija, 1993; Ranganathan, 1931).

Following Ranganathan’s assertion, I state the first law of MIL as: Information, communication, libraries, media, technology, and the Internet, as well as other forms of information providers, are for use in critical civic engagement and sustainable development. They are equal in stature, and none is more relevant than the other or should be ever treated as such.

The first part of Law 1 concerns the frequently disproportionate emphasis by MIL experts/practitioners on the business or commercial dimensions of information, media, and technology at the expense of governance, sustainable development, and the civic engagement remit. Law 1 suggests that business and commerce are part of civic engagement and sustainable development. MIL intervention should consider that balance and pursue, for example, MIL for entrepreneurship. Concerning the second part of Law 1, some scholars may argue that information, communication, libraries,

media, technology, and the Internet are not all equal. However, it should be noted that the suggestion is not to project equality of impact, reach, or the use of libraries, media, technology, and the Internet. It is more to suggest that stakeholders should reach a consensus in (i) building in the minds of users the equality of stature and relevance of libraries, media, technology, and the Internet to life and (ii) helping users, people, and citizens see the unity and oneness in these different modes to access and engage in information and communication. An example is the truth about how digital technologies have transformed every aspect of life and helped improve living standards. This does not mean books are no longer needed, and reading should be relegated to being the forgotten or lost pearl of great price. MIL stakeholders should enable all users/citizens to understand that the Internet is nothing but millions of books in digital format or a colossal digital library. Another example is the present trend among countries around the world to focus more on digital/technological competencies than the other competencies that MIL entails when developing education policies and programs. When these digital competencies are congruent with the other competencies of MIL (Grizzle & Singh, 2016), then it is a matter of naming, although form sometimes affects content and in turn policy priorities. However, when these digital competencies ignore people's critical competencies to access, search, evaluate, use, and produce information and media content for sustainable development, they would be in contravention of Law 1 and Law 5 of MIL.

The same argument extends to information versus communication. The perennial debate among scholars about certain facets of the epistemology of information and communication (Dousa, 2014; Abdallah Tani, 2019)—which comes first, which is the larger field, or which is more important—does not help empower users and citizens with competencies about access to information and their communication rights.

5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy: Law 4

Law 4 states that every citizen wants to gain and understand new information, knowledge, and messages as well as communicate, even if she/he is not aware or admits and expresses that he/she does. Her/his rights must, however, never be compromised. There are three main postulates based on the largely held view that human beings are communicative beings (Urlica et al., 2021). The first assumption is that people can freely make a choice that they do not want to gain and understand new information,

knowledge, and messages as well as communicate. Some researchers have investigated the case of “news resisters,” people who consciously and intentionally reduce or limit their consumption of and exposure to news (Woodstock, 2014; 2016). These groups of people may soon realize that they are missing valuable information that they need or could help them. There are more extreme cases of people choosing to live the life of a recluse over extended periods. Others may choose to isolate themselves for shorter periods in the Amazon of Latin America, the hinterlands of Guyana, the savannahs of Africa, or the desert of the Arab world (O’Balle. J., 2022). There may also be others who, for different reasons, choose to live off the grid, completely away from electronic and digital communications (Hager et al., 2023). The reality is that such persons still want to gain and understand new information, perhaps by reading the trees, the skies, the streams, the insects, or even the cycle of nature that changes from morning to night.

The second postulate is that people may be convinced by others or by systems that they do not need to gain or understand new information. MIL should be an avenue that enlightens such people that they are being oppressed rather than protected.

The third postulate is that people, who are starved of access to information, technology, and media due to economic factors, may be convinced by their life experiences that they can live without them. However, when given an opportunity to access them, they realize how disadvantaged they had been without the access and understanding. An example is a media literacy project that UNESCO implemented in 2006 in partnership with the National Authority for Library and Information Services in Trinidad and Tobago (Williams, 2007). The project was intended to impart information, media, and technological competencies to adult learners in the Tunapuna Public Library. A security officer at the library, invited to participate in one of the training sessions, was initially hesitant as he felt that the type of training would not be of use to him. However, at the end of the session, he was so enlightened that he declared that for some 20 years that he had been working at the library, it never once crossed his mind that he could develop the skills to do what many came to the library to do—that is, to search and find the information they needed.

5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy: Law 2

Law 2 states that every citizen is a creator of information/knowledge and has a message. People must be empowered to access new information/knowledge and express themselves. MIL is for all—women and men equally—and is a nexus of human rights. Law 2 highlights three points. By stating that everyone creates information and knowledge, Law 2 implies that even people who do not have access to media and technology create information and knowledge. They do this through their lived experiences. MIL should give them the know-how and the platform to access more information, connect with others, and communicate. The last part of Law 2 suggests that MIL is not only for those with privileged access to information, technology, and media. Those who do not have such access need MIL to help in reading product labels, books, images, signs, maps, and billboards as well as in investigating and advocating why they do not have that access. Espousing MIL for all peoples was inspired by (i) the UN’s “Education for All” program for which UNESCO is a lead implementing agency, (ii) UNESCO’s “Information for All” program (UNESCO, 2017), and (iii) Livingstone’s use of “media literacy for all” (Livingstone, 2011). The premise here is that education for all is not complete without MIL for all. The gender dimensions of MIL are fundamental. The final point to be made here is in relation to MIL as an antecedent to human rights. For people to enjoy the full benefit of their rights, they first need to have the knowledge, skills, and attitude to know how to search for and investigate their rights and from whom they can receive advice as and when needed.

5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy: Law 3

Law 3 states that information, knowledge, and messages are not always value-neutral or independent of biases. Any conceptualization, use, and application of MIL should make this truth transparent and understandable to all citizens. It points to the reality that we all have our biases, which may come through different actions, such as innocent preferences, choices of a particular stance or perspective over another, nepotism, malice, prejudices, racism, outright intention to deceive, hate, and intolerance. Even certain conceptualizations of MIL promote some values or beliefs over others and could also possess biases. Law 3 calls for MIL that enables people to understand the motivation behind certain values asserted; the potential lack of independence in all forms of information, news, research processes, and results; and the nature of biases (Ionescu & Licu, 2023).

5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy: Law 5

Law 5 states that MIL is not acquired at once. It is a lived and dynamic experience and process. It is complete when it includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes and when it covers access, evaluation/assessment, use, production, and communication of information, media, and technology content. It suggests that becoming media and information literate is about being taught, self-learning, and having one's own experiences. It is not sufficient to say that one is media and information literate after pursuing a five-day workshop in MIL. Becoming media and information literate is a process that happens over time. It should be noted that Law 5 does not suggest that one must master, know, or even possess all the competencies of MIL to be media and information literate. The second part of Law 5 reinforces Law 1, which states that MIL policies and programs should integrate information, media, and technological competencies. They should recognize that people can learn through creating. Finally, MIL policies and programs should address people's attitudes to information, technology, and media.

It embraces the vision of MIL being central to education, teaching, and learning as illustrated by the 5 Laws of MIL that reinforces MIL as a public good. If education is a public good, and it is (Daviet, 2016; Locatelli, 2018), then MIL becomes an indispensable public good to quality education and education for all.

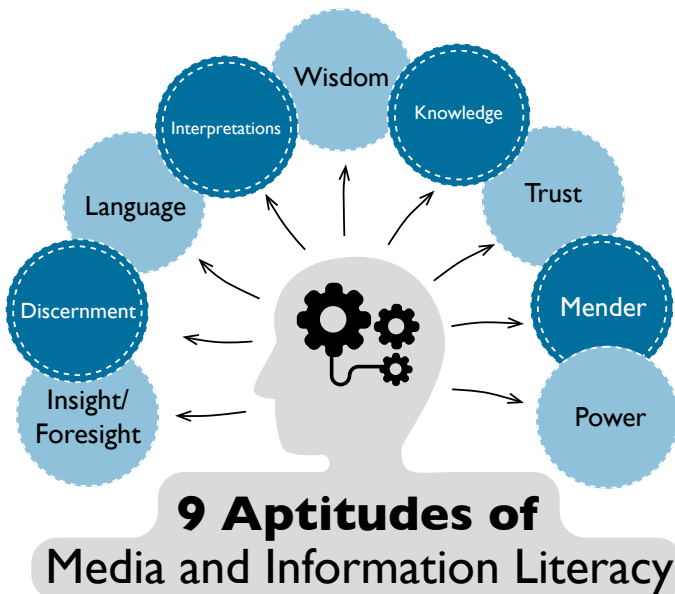
Having discussed the 5 Laws of MIL as an interlink in bidding the defense for MIL as a public good, let us now consider the previously listed categorical pieces of evidence.

9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy for Public Good

Using the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy as a basis, in this paper, I offer 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy. By this, I mean understanding the competencies people are endowed with or how they become more self-empowered through the acquisition of MIL. As human beings, we all possess certain innate levels of wisdom, knowledge, trust, mending skills, power, insight, discernment, language, and the ability to interpret—however basic these might be.

Figure 3 is illustrated using Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood....” The acquisition of media and information literacy competencies can stir this reason and conscience in all peoples (UN, 1948).

Figure 3. 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy



Source: Own elaboration.

The 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy are Wisdom, Knowledge, Trust, Mender, Power, Insight or Foresight, Discernment, Language, and Interpretations. They sustain values and social competencies proposed by Grizzle and Hamada (2015):

1. **Aptitude 1 is Wisdom.** Wisdom, as all would agree, is the epitome of becoming media and information literate. In its simplest form, wisdom is the application of knowledge or new information. It assumes that this knowledge to be applied is verified, wholesome, and beneficial to oneself, one’s family, or society. We all possess some level of wisdom. If one’s life is threatened, it is wisdom that tells us to take flight, run away, or fight. When babies are hungry or uncomfortable, they cry for attention. If each time one takes a

particular route to work the travel time doubles because of traffic congestion, then conventional wisdom would mean not taking that route anymore, unless new information comes that the circumstances have changed. In the era of information overload and rapidly changing information muddied by disinformation and misinformation, our innate wisdom, conventional wisdom, or simply common sense is still relevant. Edith Hall in her book *Aristotle's Way: How Ancient Wisdom Can Change Your Life* (Hall, 2020) suggests taking three steps before acting in any situation, as stressed by Aristotle:

- a. Deliberating carefully in making decisions is a key part of “living a good life.” However, we should never deliberate in haste. “Sleep on it,” we often say. Do not click, share, or speak too impulsively. Later in this manuscript, you will notice that Aptitude 1 appears again in the 7 Excellence of Media and Information Literacy.
 - b. Always verify the information.
 - c. Consult experts. If you are not an expert, find one or as many as possible. However, be careful of people who pose as experts.
2. **Aptitude 2 is Knowledge.** We all possess some level of knowledge, at the very least about ourselves and certain aspects of our surroundings or the world around us. Media and information literate people *know* how we come to *know* (Dutemple et al., 2023; Sartori et al., 2022)—why we believe what we believe—which often affects why we act the way we act.
3. **Aptitude 3 is Trust.** Trust is crucial in all aspects of life. When the stoplights are red, we trust that the cars will stop, so we walk across a bus thoroughfare. Children put their trust in their parents. We all put certain levels of trust in our family doctor. When we are media and information literate, we know what information to trust, who to trust, and why we should or should not trust. UNESCO and its partners organized Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2022 on the theme Nurturing Trust: A Media and Information Literacy Imperative. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2022 found that concerns about false information are at an all-time high (Edelman, 2022) and that the trust factor in media, government, and business has been on the decline for many years. In *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations, 2015), a report of the Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. António Guterres, 12 commitments were made by world leaders.

Among these commitments, Mr. Guterres highlighted the values of trust and solidarity as being the glue for social cohesion and social breakthroughs for the common good.

4. **Aptitude 4** is the ability to be a **Mender**. A Mender fixes, repairs, restores, or rebuilds things. It is not just the leaders that should help fix our broken information and digital ecologies, but every citizen must acquire media and information literacy so that he/she can fix the little parts within his/her reach and sphere of influence. Imagine the information ecologies like a huge fishing net covering the entire earth. Each of us represents a little square, circle, or diamond in the net. If many small diamonds/squares/circles are broken, the entire net will be compromised.
5. **Aptitude 5** is **Power**. Power is possessed not only by the great and mighty. Everyone has the power to think, feel, accept, reject, help someone, and even search for truth in his/her own simple way. We know the old adages or maxims—information is power, knowledge is power, wisdom is power. However, these are more than just sayings. The more information, knowledge, and wisdom we acquire progressively and over time, the more powerful we become. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2023), power is defined as “the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way.” When we are media and information literate, we do and act in particular ways toward information, media, and digital technologies. The billions of users on digital platforms have more power over social media and generative artificial intelligence than they are led or guided to believe. The Age of Enlightenment captures these arguments with its focus on ideas, values, the pursuit of knowledge, reason, evidence, and I argue, the search for truth.
6. **Aptitude 6** is **Insight or Foresight**. Every individual possesses basic insights. If we smell food, we can logically detect that someone is cooking or eating. If the sky is dark, one can deduce that it is likely to rain. The way we search, access, critically evaluate, produce, use, and share information, as well as how we engage with digital technologies and media, gives us perception, understanding, and awareness of the family, friends, communities, nation, and the world around us. We know that there is a subtle difference between insight and foresight. However, you would agree that they are inextricably linked. Therefore, it follows that the way we search, access, critically evaluate, produce, use, and share information, as well as how we

engage with digital technologies and media, gives us forethought, anticipation, and prudence about the future. For example, economists anticipate whether stock prices will increase or decrease based on the information concerning various factors or cardinals connected to companies or environments related to those stocks. Pollsters predict the outcomes of elections based on information they gather from the electorate.

7. **Aptitude 7 is Discernment.** Discernment is somewhat synonymous with critical thinking. Discernment is showing keen insight and good judgment, being able to grasp or comprehend the obscure, and the act of perceiving (Greek word *aisth sis*, meaning perception) (Pointon et al., 2022). Irrespective of our levels of education, we all possess some innate degrees of discernment or perception (Carruthers et al., 2008). We can discern danger, rejection, affection, and so forth. Media and information literate persons can objectively judge media, digital communication platforms, and other social actors based on verified information. When we become media and information literate, we are discriminatory about the type of and how we engage with information, media, and digital platforms.
8. **Aptitude 8 is Language.** In 1964, Marshall McLuhan said the “medium is the message” (1964). He was referring to the code and conventions of media and information text or how content is packaged and presented. This is called media languages. X’s (formerly Twitter) language, for example, uses emojis and a maximum of 280 characters in a tweet. Previously, it was 140 characters. I propose the question: In a digital world, is the medium the message? Or, as an Al Jazeera reporter stated some time ago, “The media are the message.” The crux of MIL as a public good is that the message is all citizens—as individuals and communities of people—form or can form and disseminate messages. Citizens have and can have greater control over the message than they think or admit they do. People all over the world are challenged to apply MIL to information and messages and to counter potentially fictitious messages, disinformation, and misinformation. Sir Edmund Hillary famously notes, “It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves” (2003). We all speak a language. Languages are also non-verbal. The arts, including music, are languages. MIL empowers people to assess what language they are speaking in their communities and online. Is the act of reading speaking languages of peace, human solidarity, respect, and love? In the context of the new information and digital

ecologies, coding, programming, or algorithms are the hidden, yet visible, languages of the Internet. Algorithms are the basis through which all human languages manage to survive on the Internet. The growing use of generative artificial intelligence online and in societies, in general, means MIL for the public good should help people not only understand how these languages are used but also have the agency, autonomy, and power to influence the development and spread of these languages.

9. **Aptitude 9 is Interpretation.** This aptitude is related to several of the others. In the previous point, I mentioned media and digital languages as an example of this aptitude. While the type of media or digital technologies affect how information or messages are formulated and articulated, our individual background also affects how we interpret information or messages. There are proven ways to ensure that we are interpreting information correctly. Being media and information literate helps in this process.

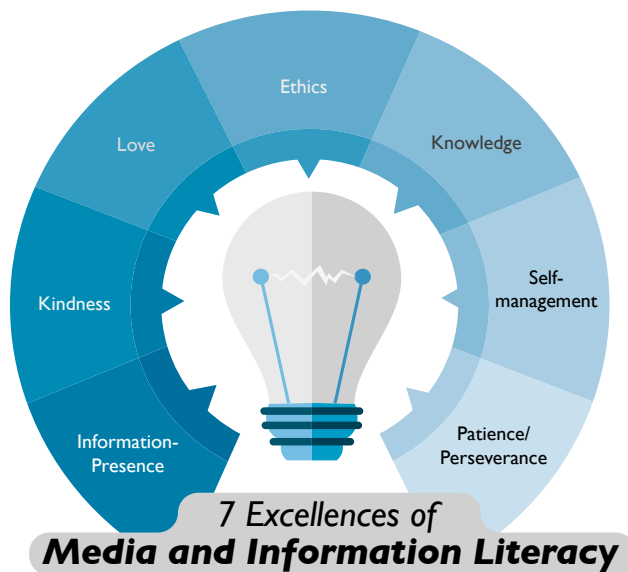
One can observe how the 9 Aptitudes advance MIL as a public good. Hence, we turn our attention to discussing the 7 Excellences of MIL for the public good and their relationship with the 9 Aptitudes of MIL.

7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy for Public Good

The 7 Excellences relate to the 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy. The 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy are ways through which we—as individuals, groups, institutions, or peoples (in the plural, with an “s”)—can ensure that we, others, and everyone can take hold of and grow the 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy and demonstrate the 9 Manifestations of Media and Information Literacy (see Figure 4). Recall the example of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights mentioned earlier (UN, 1948).

It is like a growth process. A man and a woman procreate, seeds meet an egg, and a baby is conceived. However, some urgent and critical things must happen if that embryo is to grow and be nurtured into a healthy person. The baby is born and grows to become a toddler, an infant, a pre-teenager, an adolescent, and an adult meaningfully contributing to healthy information, digital, and media environments.

Figure 4. 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy



Source: Own elaboration.

The following are the 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy:

1. **Excellency 1 is Ethics.** As societies, academicians, and individuals, we talk about media ethics, information ethics, transparent digital communications platforms, and so forth. Media and information literate people have at least a basic understanding of this. However, here, I focus on individual ethics or moral excellence that a person should pursue to be truly media and information literate. It relates to Paul Zurkowski (Chao-Hsi, 2021), the father of traditional information literacy, and what he calls Action Literacy. For him, Action Literacy means “the ability to transform good information into ethical actions. Being action literate means that one’s ethical actions are firmly rooted in good information.” The UN Secretary-General in his Our Common Agenda Report (UN, 2015) notes the importance of developing “a common, empirically backed consensus on the public good of facts, science and knowledge. We must make lying wrong again. Institutions can be a ‘reality check’ for societies, curbing disinformation and countering hate speech and online harassment, including of women and girls.” It is key that we grow and apply ethics in producing and disseminating reliable and verified information.

2. **Excellency 2 is Knowledge.** You would have noticed that knowledge is also Aptitude 2 of the 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy. This is done on purpose. Here, the focus is on peoples' gradual growth in knowledge of MIL. Excellency 1 recognizes that there are many different forms of knowledge. We should grow in awareness of the knowledge needed at given moments and in certain situations. It relates to Law 5 of the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy, which suggests that MIL is not acquired at once. It is a lived and dynamic experience and process. It is complete when it includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes and when it covers access, evaluation/assessment, use, production, and communication of information, media, and technology content. "Know yourself," suggests Aristotle (Hall, 2020).

3. **Excellency 3 is Self-Management.** Simply put, it is about self-discipline. We cannot reach excellence in being media and information literate without having what I call information discipline. It requires practice, values, habits, and the right attitude to always execute the previously mentioned three steps that Aristotle embodied. Divina Frau-Meigs (2013, p. 183), refers to "self-management as well as engagement" in discussing MIL in the context of "civic agency." Excellency 3 is about:
 - i. Pursuing the ethos of information, from within your circles as well as outside; this is the spirit or the character of information; the thinking of those who created or communicate certain information and messages.
 - ii. Through self-introspection and communal exchanges, learn to appreciate differences in how information and messages are perceived. This does not imply a necessity to accept or to choose to use all information. However, one should at least embrace pathos—to empathize with the differences. Stages 1 and 2 are a combination of reflexivity and what Leeds-Hurwitz (2013) calls "seeing from other perspectives/world views, both how [they] are similar and different."
 - iii. Then through true and open dialogue agree on the logos—a common word or understanding that can lead to healthy information and knowledge and exchange and cooperation.

4. **Excellency 4 is Patience or Perseverance.** The information highway is so huge that we can easily get lost. Even experts can get lost sometimes. MIL is a GPS to navigate the troubled waters of information and digital galaxies. We can give up or be weak when we hit a brick wall in our information search or the search for truth. Some of the world's greatest scientists, innovators, and investigative journalists following stories for several decades can attest to Excellency 4.
5. **Excellency 5 is Information-Presence.** I use this as a hyphenated word. This and the final two excellences of MIL unveil the brilliance of the light that shines on people who are media and information literate—each in his/her own way but collectively for the common good. Information-Presence, I suggest, is coming into the awareness that we are information and communicative beings. René Descartes said, “I think therefore I am” (Wikipedia, 2023). Divina Frau-Meigs (2013) calls it *Savior Devenir* (in English, *Knowing to Become*). I would suggest: Act in truth and on truth to become. Perhaps, Mahatma Gandhi said something similar.
6. **Excellency 6 is Kindness.** Jamil Zaki in his book *War on Kindness* (2019) suggests that we need a return to kindness, including in information and digital spaces. Abigail Marsh in her book *Fear Factor* (2017) presents evidence on how literacy—I extend this to media and information literacy—can help heighten empathy and peace. She cites the very high literacy rate in Myanmar, which has been connected to the peacefulness of its people. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights immortalizes this truth: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with **reason and conscience** and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood...” The acquisition of **media and information literacy competencies can stir this reason and conscience in all peoples.**
7. **Excellency 7 is, dare I write, Love.** This excellency transcends all Aptitudes and Manifestations of MIL. When a person is fully media and information literate, he/she is so transformed by verified information and the permanent and gradual search for truth that love and respect for others are found, appreciated, and bestowed on others. One who loves does not consciously manipulate, misuse, or abuse others with and through information.

Looking through the nexus of the Aptitudes and Excellencies of MIL and their interconnection through the 5 Laws of MIL, one cannot but appreciate the Manifestations of Media and Information Literacy as a public good. Follow the author for the key 9 Manifestations of Media and Information Literacy.

Conclusion

This paper states the fact that when people are well informed, media and information literate, engaged, and empowered, information as a public good becomes possible and sustainable. However, for people to be informed and media and information literate, MIL itself must be a public good and for the public good. Hence, for MIL to become a public good, individual and collective efforts are required to prioritize the 9 Aptitudes and the 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy as proposed in this paper. Moreover, for the MIL Aptitudes and Excellences to yield the expected impact as a means of achieving public good and its sustainability, they must be seen through the lenses of the 5 Laws of Media and Information Literacy.

This paper invites arguments for or against MIL for the public good. In its submission, it advances evidence and therefore generates debates using the 9 Aptitudes and 7 Excellences of MIL to buttress its argument that MIL is a public good that should be advanced for the public good. As a link, the paper employs the 5 Laws of MIL (adapted from Ranganathan's [1931] Five Laws of Library Science) to advance the relationship between the 9 Aptitudes and 7 Excellences of MIL.

To stimulate further deliberations, I would like to conclude with the argument that there is a need for reflections on the priority we accord to these 9 Aptitudes of Media and Information Literacy in individual and collective life. Moreover, there is a need to establish the individual and collective role with respect to the growth path of the 7 Excellences of Media and Information Literacy. It is key to determine what actions and inactions will inform individual and collective take in defense of MIL as a public good.

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