Position Paper: Media and Information Literacy: Policy and Strategy

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0. Preamble:

Media and information are two sides of a coin, if media is a channel, information is the content. Media without content has no substance and content always needs a medium to communicate, hence they are inseparables. Though content remains constant, the media for storage and delivery of content has kept changing since ancient times – from clay tablets to virtual reality. The content manifests in different formats, so the scope of information per se keeps widening. Knowledge societies still have to overcome the digital divide, as individuals are facing an inexplicable situation due to the growth and proliferation of electronic media in recent years. The condition of “paucity in plenty” is prevalent in all societies, as a vast majority of the information seekers are not able to access and use requisite, reliable, accurate information in an effective and timely manner.

The advent of the INTERNET and World Wide Web and its enormity of content have added to the woes of information seekers with overload and an overwhelming information deluge. The information of today is not in the form of simple content but comprises varieties of complex media. There are two distinct categories, the print and the digital, and the latter has created an impact on the social, cultural and even economic life of all human societies. Today, everyone, everywhere, yearns to freely express himself and actively participate in the communication processes. In this context, the growth of monetary transactions through ATMs and Core Banking is just one example of communication in daily life. The growth of mobile communication, spread across nations horizontally and vertically, is an attribute of another complexity. Hence, irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic or other disparities, “Media and Information Literacy” (MIL) has become an imperative to all citizens. It provides them with critical thinking competencies to survive and thrive in the 21st century knowledge economies and societies. It further enables them to deal with the complexities of media and information that they consume. To face these challenges, UNESCO has launched a major initiative, “Global Alliance for Partnership on Media and Information Literacy” (GAPMIL), following the paradigm created by the World Summits for Information Societies (WSIS). Now it is in the process of extending GAPMIL to the regional and national level. UNESCO assiduously plans to establish a regional committee for Asia-Pacific as a Chapter of GAPMIL. UNESCO is looking at development and positioning of MIL policies and strategies, as well as locally suitable MIL curriculum for trainers and
information seekers. Considering the growing variations of media and information, it is imperative to have a “National Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy for India”. This ‘Position Paper’ is foreseen as a preliminary step in that direction.

1. Prelude to Ebullient Media:

In the context of MIL, the term media, the plural of medium, has many connotations. It implies, to get awareness of its growth, extravagance and excessiveness. The media represents print and electronic as primary channels of communication. They have characteristics to reach the lowest denomination of the population. The perceptions and misconceptions among the public would vary from person to person, at micro and macro levels. The content of media are also “joyously unrestrained”, as the vocal and visual content is pleasing and delightful. The entire gamut of overtures of the media and their manifested diversities are an essay in itself. The main intention here is to present how society is driven by the media. In this context, an awareness through “Media and Information Literacy” (MIL) is conceived as an empowering corrective and remedial measure to channelise the public in the right direction of thinking and develop perceptions about truth behind content. In this context MIL is found to be essential. As UNESCO states about MIL: it is “Empowerment of people” and “is an important prerequisite for fostering equitable access to information and knowledge and promoting free, independent and pluralistic media and information systems”. The access to information has seen a shift from desktop to iPod/Tablets to mobile devices. The spread of telephony in India has also marked network and has been a key backbone for all Internet and WWW connectivity. In recent years, there is a vast proliferation of media in several types and categories. The other added dimension to this is a very strong impact on varieties of media and information overload – in terms of Internet, WWW, Television (in particular advertising and news channels), Mass Media (including electronic media), Radio (growth of FM) and the integration of information and entertainment – denoted as Infotainment.

2. Categories of Media and Information Literacy

Media and Information Literacy can be broadly categorised as below:

1. Literacy of 3 R’s (refers to the foundations of a basic skills-oriented education program within schools: reading, writing and arithmetic)

2. Advertisement Literacy

3. Computer Literacy

4. Digital Literacy

5. Freedom of expression and freedom to information

6. Information Literacy

7. Right to Information Literacy
8. Right to Education Literacy
7. Internet Literacy
8. Library Literacy
9. Media Literacy
10. News Literacy

Media has also become a public domain discussion platform, as the number of News Papers and TV Channels, particularly News Channels, are on the rise in India. It has several attributes and properties such as **composing, comprehending, interpreting, analyzing, and appreciating** of the electronic media. This indicates a dire public need for a course on Media & Information Literacy that should form part of education, professions and occupations. Even the home-bound housewives might be interested in media and would like to send their reactions on the several issues discussed on TV channels. Importantly, it is not only the literate, but the illiterates too who have an entitlement to equally react to the media.

4. International and National Perspectives of MIL:

The role of UNESCO and other inter-governmental agencies and associations like International Federation of Libraby Associations and Institutions (IFLA), American Library Association (ALA) and others in the promotion and deployment of MIL in different countries of the world need not be over-emphasised. Many key documents are also brought out by a number of countries. UNESCO has come up with a webpage on Media and Information Literacy on its “Communication and Information” section. (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/mil-as-composite-concept/). It has also released “Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines” in March 2014 and over 15 countries have already made efforts to have a policy on MIL in pursuance of the initiatives taken by UNESCO. (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/developing-mil-policy-and-strategy/)
IFLA has already come out with a document entitled “IFLA Media and Information Literacy Recommendations”. In this process, a country like India is among the forefront nations of the developing world to take up a key role in the development of a Media and Information Literacy Policy for India.

In India Punjabi University, Patiala, has been actively associated with IFLA and UNESCO since the year 2004. Subsequently, under a new initiative, Punjabi University, Uttarakhand Open University and FORMEDIA, a media NGO with Special Consultative Status at ECOSOC since 2013 came together to form the MIL university network of India (MILUNI). They have been further been joined by University of Calcutta and University of Pondicherry, who are on-board after the National Consultation in India.
5. **Background for MIL for India**

The UNESCO immediately plans to establish a regional committee for Asia-Pacific Chapter of GAPMIL. At the same time, UNESCO wants MIL policies and strategies, as well as, locally suitable MIL curriculum in place at the national level. India as mentioned above, has already taken steps to initiate MIL programmes in consonance with international developments. Enhancing MIL as a tool for an open and inclusive development fosters free, independent and pluralistic media and universal access to information and knowledge for good governance and people’s participation. This MIL initiative would be a part of the larger frame of the UNESCO-UNAOC MILID UNITWIN Network and the UNESCO-led GAPMIL.

Further to building global networks, UNESCO had initiated national consultations to build awareness on, and access to Media and Information Literacy (MIL) with the objective of enabling a global environment for national MIL policies.

As a follow-up to this initiation, MILUNI organised a UNESCO-led Indian National MIL Consultation in association with India International Centre, New Delhi from 11-13 November, 2014. In this consultation meeting, key cross-sectoral stakeholders participated in the deliberations. The meeting after its deliberations had decided to come out with a Position Paper recommending for a national MIL policy, an Assessment Framework plan and also a core curricula for MIL for face-to-face trainings and online courses.

Subsequently, Uttarakhand Open University, in co-operation with FORMEDIA, has pilot-tested a basic entry-level MIL curriculum with about 50 M. Ed scholars. The same co-operation is leading to a MIL TOT that includes stakeholders from key educational and development sectors.

A preliminary task of identifying the roadmap for an Assessment Framework has also been initiated by MILUNI in association with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication. A first list for a National Steering Committee has been drawn with details of what role each member could play.

6. **MIL Policy for India: Context and background:**

The need for MIL Policy for India should be based on several factors like its population, literacy, languages and the growth of media like television, radio and newspapers, libraries and the extensive diffusion of mobile communication. These are profiled in the next sections. It implies that a policy for such a vast country should represent its unique socio-cultural feature phrasing “Unity in Diversity”. It is also desirable to know the similar policies formulated in India, such as Science Policy 1958, Information Technology Policy, National Education Policy 1986 (redefined in 1992) and so on. India is basically a composite culture that now hinges on a large youth population.
that will make it one of the youngest nations of the world. It needs MIL policy and strategy immediately for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development in the coming future.

- **Population and Its Characteristics**

  - India with more than 1.2 billion people is the second most populous country in the world.

  - As per 2011 census, the literacy rate of the country is 74.04%, which means that one in every four persons is illiterate in India.

  - About 0.3 billion people, largest number of illiterates in the world, are in India.

  - It is necessary to address MIL, for both literate and illiterate population, as both have access to mobile phones (with Internet facility and broadcast media such as Radio and Television).

  - Indian population speaks several languages and have hundreds of dialects, which is another related issue for the language of information and media content. Though the use of English and Hindi is widespread, there are 22 officially recognized languages in the country and majority of the population use one or more of these 22 languages.

- **Growth of Television in India**

  - The experimental television telecast in India started in 1959 and its daily transmission began in 1965 as a solely government owned enterprise.

  - The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) with a first priority on education of rural people was launched in August 1975 and ran for one year. However it created a very good impact on the rural people.

  - For the Asian Games held in New Delhi in 1982, low power television transmission (LPT) was spread throughout the country and gradually became a commercial venture in 1990s.

  - Today, there are more than 820 channels, and 184 are pay channels. Doordarshan is the only channel owned by the Government and remaining are private channels that have spread in both entertainment and news.

  - Out of these 820+ channels, nearly 320 channels are News Channels and the amount of deliberations and critical thinking is of very high magnitude, especially during the elections and Annual Budget and post-budget discussions.

- **Newspapers in India**
• India has 70,000 Newspapers, and about 110 million copies are sold every day and the newspaper market in India is the biggest in the world.

• The newspapers in India are published in 14 languages and their readership covers 75 Million Population.

• Similar to Regional TV channels, most of them are published simultaneously from more than one place and also give importance to the local news.

  ○ **Other Communication Systems**

  • The spread of all kinds of communication and media in India can be attributed to the 76 communication satellites launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation since the indigenous satellite, ‘Aryabhata’, was launched in 1975

  • ISRO has also launched India’s first exclusive educational satellite called EDUSAT to facilitate educational instructions throughout the country.

  • Radio broadcasting has also grown with nearly 40 Frequency Modulated (FM) Radio Stations.

  • The communication of media and information through these has overshadowed all other channels of communication and is posing challenges even to scholarly scientific communication.

  • In recent years, the National Knowledge Commission has initiated several programmes through its recommendations and the National Knowledge Network is facilitating spread of knowledge through institutions.

  ○ **Mobile diffusion:**

    • The mobile phones in India will increase from 8.1 in 2005-06 to 36.5 in 2010-11 and 71 in 2015-16. As a result of this growth, the mobile subscriber base is projected to increase from 90 million in 2005-06 to 433 million in 2010-11 and nearly 900 million in 2015-16.

    • Besides this, there are as many as 100 million landline subscribers.

    • In spite of widespread diffusion of mobile phones across all income levels, there is a growing digital divide in India. This can be one of the rationales for building MIL competencies

  ○ **Census of Libraries and Information Literacy:**
The Working Group of Libraries, constituted by the National Knowledge Commission, has recommended a complete census of all libraries in India.

It however estimates the number of libraries in the country is around 55-60 thousand, comprising libraries attached to the 1000 Universities and 35-40 thousand colleges and nearly 20,000 public libraries.

In most of these libraries, at present Information Literacy courses are imparted optionally. The Assessment and Accreditation bodies like NAAC, AICTE, NBA are proposing imparting Information Literacy Courses to the stakeholders as mandatory.

Some sample areas in which MIL is necessary

- **Education and MIL**
  - MIL widens the objectives and purposes of education. It transcends the notion of ‘education for employability’, to ‘learning to learn’, social transformation, in fact, lifelong learning. Such objectives of education can be achieved only by having a teacher with MIL competencies. It will eventually have multiplier effects.
  - MIL allows sharing of ideas and provides opportunities to create common platform for Open Educational Resources, and as such it ensures social inclusion as well. Thus all media and information literate persons may access, analyze, evaluate, use and communicate information in a variety of formats and contribute in their public and social life. Hence MIL may be seen as an important tool for continuing and lifelong learning for developing good citizenry.
  - MIL offers opportunities to enhance competency, especially of those who never got a chance to undergo any formal training. It is critical for those working at regional and local level (i.e. rural India), who have not been able to bring to light the crucial social, cultural or development issues of the concerned area.
  - Most of the Web-based resources and services offered in the country are in English language.

- **Governance:**
  - MIL is envisioned to play an active role in enhancing competencies in local self governance in India. The spirit of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment and article 243 (A-Z) of Constitution of India may be made functional and effective at village level governance through MIL.
  - The perceived skill gaps in effective village administration (PRIs) such as knowledge of constitutional provisions and rights, development policies and schemes, social auditing, and fiscal management by the village panchayats and intervention of each stakeholder can be imparted.
It would empower people with the benefits that can be derived from several e-Governance programmes and projects

- Environment
  - MIL is also seen as an effective tool to enhance scientific aptitude and ecological consciousness among masses to move towards achieving a holistic and ecologically sustainable society, especially in the 12 Himalayan states, with characteristics such as marginality, fragility and shallowness.
  - Sanitation literacy is another issue that needs people’s empowerment, the ignorance of which continues to compound health hazards and environment problems.

➢ Rationale for developing MIL Policy / Strategy for India:
  - In the digital age, developing MIL policy is most relevant.
  - Without a MIL policy and strategy, disparities between info-rich and info-poor will exacerbate the already volatile society that is reflected in phenomena like farmer’s suicides, rape and honour killing.
  - To truly develop Indian society into an empowered knowledge-based society, and for it to compete with workforce at the global level, there is a need to develop a national MIL policy.
  - MIL policy is also needed to contain cultural hegemony by providing counterbalance to dominant cultures. India is a diverse and pluralistic society, therefore MIL policy/strategy is needed the most.
  - MIL as a composite concept to be used for post-literacy education of the literates including neo-literates. There is a symbiosis between media and information, and media is virtually setting the agenda and conducting extra-constitutional media trials. Hence, people must be equipped with the MIL skills to ascertain the motive of the media and quality of the content they provide.
  - Benefits of MIL policy/strategy are: active and democratic participation; enabling pluralism and diversity, dialogue and tolerance; and awareness of ethical responsibilities for global citizenship. Benefits for governments would be across economics, health, governance, and education sectors.

This would result in better media and information providers.

7. The Policies in vogue:
The aim of the Science Policy of India (1958) was “to foster, promote, and sustain, by all appropriate means, the cultivation of science and scientific research in all its aspects - pure, applied, and educational; and similarly several national policies like Science and Technology Policy.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) in particular is a policy formulated by the Government of India to promote education amongst India's people. The policy covers elementary education to colleges in both rural and urban India. The first NPE was promulgated in 1968, and the second in 1986. It emphasizes three aspects in relation to elementary education among which the “Universal Access to Education” to bring a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve. It was modified in 1992 with following developments, which also focused on several literacies. Several commissions and committees constituted by GOI have also emphasised the literacy programmes and spread of education from elementary to university.

- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)/Right to Education (RTE)
- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
- Inclusive Education for the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS)
- Saakshar Bharat or Adult Education
- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) for development of higher education, launched in 2013.

All these policies are in place and the media and information policy would be a distinct one to cover all these areas.

8. Media and Information Policy and Strategy:

A macro level structure on the MIL Policy and Strategy is presented here. The micro structure can be worked out in future taking into consideration the organisational system to which the proposed forum or the national agency is going to be affiliated. Normally such organisational system would be a registered body and would require a statutory sanction, hence the detailed policy document could be prepared in future and can be subjected to public scrutiny too.

i) Need and Objectives

The media is becoming effervescent due to a strong and visible impact of digital technology. People are attracted towards its scintillating and visual presentation. However, the knowledge of its merits and demerits are to be brought to the notice of the people for its beneficial use. The gap between the information rich and information poor still exists. MIL should therefore be part and parcel of education and social life of every individual. Media and Information Literacy empowers people with attitude of “critical thinking”, enables the public towards informed choices for right decision-making,
The need for MIL is therefore sought in this context.

- The key objectives of a MIL policy and strategy are:
  - To empower the citizens of all ages with the knowledge of MIL to enable them to use the media for their benefit in order to have better quality of life.
  - To eliminate gender difference on imparting MIL.
  - To bridge the disparities between info-rich and info-poor population.
  - To develop Indian society into knowledge-based society in order to compete with workforce at the global level.
  - To include cultural hegemony and linguistic diversities in MIL policy to provide counterbalance to dominant cultures.
  - To make MIL as a composite concept to be used for post-literacy education of the literates including neo-literates.
  - To empower citizens to benefit from the dissemination of public policy issues.
  - To design a suitable and a comprehensive MIL Curriculum that addresses the needs of all stakeholders.
  - To identify the role of relevant government ministries and departments and their agencies.
  - To identify existing policies that may have components related to MIL policy / strategy.

- Other points for consideration
  - MIL policy / strategy should be so designed that for neo-literates there should be a continuum for them from being literates to becoming media and information literate.
  - Linkages with National Literacy Mission, National Digital Literacy Mission, Sarv Sikhsha Abhiyan and other missions such as National Mission on Libraries need be developed.
MIL programmes be integrated within existing programmes and new MIL programmes for training-the-trainers need be started at various levels.

- Learning from other countries/regions where such policies are developed
- Developing MIL curriculum suited for Indian needs
- Developing MIL assessment framework suited for India based on UNESCO MIL Assessment Framework guidelines.

**ii) Mission Statement:**

The MIL mission is to impart information and knowledge about the versatilities of media and information and empower citizens with MIL competencies.

**iii) Vision**

To allow everyone derive the benefits from media and information literacy and thereby create a nation of empowered citizenry without digital divide and with equal access to information.

**iv) Policy Statement: Keep citizens Informed**

A nation’s future depends on its manpower, institutions and information. Information is an essential part that has been an endless and sustainable resource with extraordinary benefits as information or knowledge is considered as power, resource and economic power. To make citizens informed about this endless and sustainable resource: Government should take on the responsibility to develop a suitable mechanism for imparting MIL to expand the horizons of knowledge and to enable all citizens to be informed of all happenings in and around the country. The responsibility of the Government is vital in this context.

To fulfil these responsibilities for the future generations, it is important to ensure that our children can compete in the new knowledge economy, with its growing importance to society. It also means the government must provide physical infrastructure and in particular world-class information, communication and technological facilities.

**v) Operationalization of the Policy and Strategies:**

A national MIL Forum might be created under the Ministry of MHRD or Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at the Centre. The state governments should also create such state bodies and the concerned ministries be given to build infrastructure to deploy MIL programmes. The participation of Universities and Colleges for Education, the Zilla/Gram Panchayats (district & village-level elected bodies) and Agriculture Extension Agencies and others should be involved in coordinating activities at different levels. A detailed document on plan of action for this purpose be prepared at a later stage. A detailed document on Plan of Action, with management, finances and other
infrastructure required with details of participation and role of departments and ministries should be prepared.

vi) Related Government agencies, Ministries and Departments.

Developing a policy for MIL should be the central concern of the government. MIL policy is of concern to several ministries and their departments. The Ministry of HRD is central, and other concerned are: Information and Broadcasting, Telcom, Culture, Rural Development, Youth Development, Women and Child Development, Ministry of Agriculture. They and others might add inputs to the proposed policy. MIL is relevant to these ministries as these ministries and their departments focus on the development of various sections/sectors of the society through their programmes. The UGC, NCERT, AICTE, ICAR, National Literacy Mission, National Library of India, NCTE and similar other government and semi-government organisations should be involved to make it a national programme. In the context of Public Libraries, the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), Kolkata, established by the Department of Culture, has also to be marshalled to help in the spread of Media and Information Literacy through its extensive Rural Library Development initiatives and programmes.

vii) Areas of operation for MIL:

i. Education

ii. Health and Social Welfare

iii. Governance

iv. Agriculture and Rural Development

v. Disaster Management

vi. Information Technology

vii. Environment

viii. Intellectual Property

ix. Libraries

x. Television and Radio Broadcasting

xi. Newspaper publishers

xii. Media and Communication agencies and institutions

xiii. Advertising agencies