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Media and Visual Competencies for Information Professionals in the Arab World Challenges of the Digital Environment

Hesham Azmi

College of Media and Mass Communication, American University in the Emirates, Dubai,
UAE.

hesham.azmi@ae.ae



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Abstract:

Visual communication has become especially important within the context of today's digital society, where information and communication technologies pervade all corners of everyday life. The importance of images and visual media in contemporary culture is determining what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Today's society is highly visual, and visual imagery is no longer supplemental to other forms of information.

The pervasiveness of images and visual media means that individuals should be able to critically view, use, and produce visual content. Individuals must develop these essential skills in order to engage capably in a visually-oriented society. Visual literacy empowers individuals to participate fully in a visual culture. This has posed new challenges for users and information professionals alike.

This paper addresses the emergence of Media and Visual Literacy as integral component in today's culture and highlights its status in the Arab World. Revision of academic program in Library and Information Science LIS revealed a noticeable lack in the preparation of librarians and information professionals to develop media and visual competencies that would enable them to offer help to users especially in academic settings. A new curriculum to be adopted by Arab LIS schools has been proposed outlining in details its objectives and learning outcome.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Visual Literacy, LIS Education- Arab Counties.

Introduction

The proliferation of media production, the diversification of media channels together with the ever-growing media consumption is an undeniable fact in present-day society. The hours that members of all social segments spend in front of a screen take up a large part of their leisure and work time worldwide.

Koltay points out that there is a high rate of media consumption and that media saturates the society (Koltay, 2011). Moreover, this media consumption is changing by user generated communication and the availability of digital products (European Commission 2007)

The media deeply influences perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Media has affected lives of all citizens world wide, especially the younger generation. Bleed (2005), highlighting the tremendous impact media has, points out:

- In the United States, the average teenager spends 22,000 hours watching television by the time he or she graduates from high school.
- The vocabulary of average 14-years old dropped from 25,000 words in 1950 to only 10,000 words in 1999.
- Children ages zero to six spend as much time playing with TV, computers, and video games as outside. One in four children under age two ha a TV in the bedroom ,Video-game play ha now surpassed both newspaper and magazine reading among young males and is at parity with print media consumption among all Americans age 12 to 64.
- By age 21, the average student will have spent 10,000 hours on video-games; sent or received 200,000 e-mails; talked for 10,000 hours on a cell phone; and read for under 5,000 hours.

In academia, today's college students live in a visually rich, screen-based world. They regularly encounter and create meaning and knowledge through images and visual media. Yet this participation in a highly visual culture does not in itself prepare them to engage critically and effectively with images and media in an academic environment. Across disciplines, students are being asked to produce projects and intellectual work using visual media, and they must develop the skills needed to find, interpret, evaluate, use, and produce visual materials in a scholarly context.

It is very evident, hence, that the value and importance of visual communication and information are increasing. Visual communication becomes especially important within the context of today's digital society (society-network) where information and communication technologies pervade all corners of everyday life. The importance of images and visual media in contemporary culture is changing what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Today's society is highly visual, and visual imagery is no longer supplemental to other forms of information.

Therefore, Media and Visual literacy competencies are essential for 21st century learners and must be supported across the higher education curriculum. There is wide discrepancy, however, as how these competencies are acquired by different categories of users. It seems that Media and Visual literacies do not normally position themselves as a top priority when compared with other literacies.

As Livingstone indicates, It is consequently not an accident that there is a growing academic interest in questions of literacy, with emphasis on exploring it under the circumstances of the electronic (digital) era, displaying a multidisciplinary mix of specialists in literacy, culture, media education, human-computer interaction, and social studies of technology (Livingstone, 2004).

Literacies defined

It is very important – from the outset - to shed some light on the emergence of Media Literacy and Visual Literacy and their meaning. Also, it is equally important to illustrate how the terms are related to the existing and well-established “Literacies”.

Needless to say, there is a relationship or “common denominator” among these terms and that is Literacy. Therefore, it is worthy to explore what is meant by “Literacy” itself. For long, the term Literacy has lent itself with the ability to read and write. In 2005, UNESCO released a working definition of literacy: “Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying context. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential to participate fully in community and wider society” (UNESCO, 2005).

However, with the proliferation of recorded information, the emergence of the Internet, the diversity of information and media formats, and the complexity of the embedded messages, has dictated the elaboration and expansion of literacy to accommodate all these developments. At the present, the term encompasses competencies and skills required to deal with those media and the messages they carry. In addition to the basic skills as how to seek and access information pertinent to Information Literacy, it now includes the critical understanding, the ability to assess and to use these media.

Thus, the new concept of literacy includes visual, electronic, and digital forms of expression and communication. Modern literacy has broadened in scope, as it is tied to technology and culture, and the ability to become and remain literate requires a long-term commitment (Cordes, 2009).

It should be noted, however, that within the varying social contexts and under varying social conditions, there are many literacies that can be identified; the nature of which is changing within the conditions of textual work (Lankshear and Knobel 2004).

A thorough analysis of the literature reveals that there are various terminologies that are pertinent to Literacy. The following are some of these terminologies:

- Information Literacy
- Library Literacy
- Media Literacy
- Computer Literacy
- Digital Literacy
- Television Literacy
- News Literacy (UNESCO, 2013)
- Network literacy: synonyms – Internet literacy, hyper-literacy
- Digital information literacy (Badwen, 2001)

As such, today's citizens have to acquire a variety of competencies and skills to survive in the emerging knowledge societies. This has been well summarized by Richmond (2008) stating: "Literacy has never been more necessary for development; it is key to communication and learning of all kinds and a fundamental condition of access to today's knowledge societies. With socio-economic disparities increasing and global crises over food, water and energy, literacy is a survival tool in a fiercely competitive world. Literacy leads to empowerment, and the right to education includes the right to literacy – an essential requirement for lifelong learning and a vital means of human development and of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)".

It now includes critical understandings associated with the characteristics of particular information and media formats and systems as well as the cognitive processes, knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for engaging with media and other information providers such as libraries, archives and those on the Internet as well as particular knowledge domains. Examples of social literacies, which are commonly discussed, are scientific, global, political, family, financial and cultural literacies. Media and information literacy underpins all of these literacies.

Information Literacy VS Media Literacy

In particular, Media Literacy and Information Literacy are strongly present together in the professional literature. A closer look at the two terminologies, hence, would help clarifying the strong relations they have, the commonalities they share, and also shed some light on the specificity of each.

ALA has defined the Information Literates as an individual who is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally (ALA, 2000).

It could be said that information literacy focuses more on information accessibility, evaluation and usage. It focuses on the purposes of engaging with information and the process of becoming informed. It is strongly associated with the concepts of learning to learn and making decisions through its emphasis on defining needs and problems, relevant information and using it critically and responsibly/ethically. On the other hand, media literacy emphasizes “the ability to understand media functions, evaluate how those functions are performed and to rationally engage with media for self-expression” (UNESCO, 2013). Media literacy has a similar concern, but begins from a different vantage point. The media literate person understands the nature of the roles and functions of media and other information providers in society. Just as in information literacy, the individual is able to critically analyze the content or information he or she encounters.

More specifically, to be information literate is to have the thinking and practical skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable one to make ethical use of information through:

- Recognizing a need for information and articulating that need
- Locating and accessing relevant information
- Evaluating content critically in terms of authority, credibility and current purpose
- Extracting and organizing information
- Synthesizing or operating on the ideas abstracted from content
- Ethically and responsibly communicating one’s understanding or newly created knowledge to an audience in an appropriate form and medium
- Being able to use ICT in order to process information. (UNESCO, 2013)

On the other hand, Media Literacy is considered by some as an umbrella concept (Koltay, 2011). Hence, It is characterized by a diversity of perspectives and a multitude of definitions.

One of the earliest and best-known definitions of Media Literacy identifies it as a movement, which is designed to help to understand, to produce and negotiate meanings in a culture of images, words and sounds. “A media literate person – and everyone should have the opportunity to become one – can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy relationship to all media. Emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence”. (Aufderheide, 1992).

The definition, adopted by the European Commission also stresses critical, putting it in a more straightforward way. Besides of that it acknowledges both reception and production of media.

Media literacy is generally defined as the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts (European Commission, 2007).

In accordance with this definition, the various levels of media literacy include:

- Feeling comfortable with all existing media from newspapers to virtual □communities; actively using media, through, *inter alia*, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts);
- Having a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to assess information, dealing with advertising on various media, using search engines intelligently);
- Using media creatively, as the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel allow an ever growing number of Europeans to create and disseminate images, information and content;
- Understanding the economy of media and the difference between pluralism and media ownership;
- Being aware of copyright issues which are essential for a "culture of legality", especially for the younger generation in its double capacity of consumers and producers of content (European Commission, 2007).

Media literacy extends beyond the confines of information literacy to address, for example, representation of social and ethnic groups, and viewpoints and opinions expressed in media, including those that people engage with for entertainment. In other words, while the concept of information literacy focuses on the information user as an autonomous decision-maker, citizen and learner, media literacy examines the ways in which the media environment facilitates, shapes, enables and, in some cases, constrains engagement with information and the communication process, be it for intentional or indirect learning, social participation or simply for entertainment.

There are three crucial common denominators between media literacy and information literacy:

- 1) The cross-cutting role that ICTs play in both concepts, blurring the lines between the two,
- 2) Both concepts emphasize the need for the critical evaluation of information and media content, and
- 3) Both concepts underscore the need for ethical use of information. Other interrelationships between the two do exist, as will be discussed later on in this and subsequent sections.

While dealing with two distinct concepts, UNESCO has adopted a new approach in dealing with Information Literacy and Media Literacy. In its attempt to develop a curriculum for teachers who will be engaged in enhancing students information and media competencies. UNESCO has merged both concepts under one umbrella coined Media and Information Literacy MIL. The justification of such an approach was underscored “The value of the relationship between information and communication and being able to take informed decisions is particularly important considering UNESCO’s long-term commitment to the promotion of “empowerment and participation in the emerging knowledge society, democracy and good governance”. The value of the interrelationship between information and communication can be renewed and strengthened through the development of the competencies (knowledge, skills and

attitudes) represented in the overlapping concepts of ‘information literacy’ and ‘media literacy’”.

Figure 1: Key Outcomes/Elements of Media and Information Literacy

Information Literacy

Define and articulate information needs	Locate and access information	Assess information	Organize information	Make ethical use of information	Communicate information	Use ICT skills for information processing
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Media Literacy²

Understand the role and functions of media in democratic societies	Understand the conditions under which media can fulfil their functions	Critically evaluate media content in the light of media functions	Engage with media for self-expression and democratic participation	Review skills (including ICTs) needed to produce user-generated content
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Source: UNESCO. (2011). *Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers*. Paris: UNESCO

- Understand the role and functions of media and other information providers in democratic societies
- Understand the conditions under which those functions can be fulfilled
- Recognize and articulate a need for information
- Locate and access relevant information (UNESCO, 2013).

The UNESCO guidelines on media and information policies and strategies points made it clear that the MIL policy and strategy "needs to build upon a concept of media and information literacy that harmonizes and encapsulates the large number of related existing literacies that can be identified in the digital age, such as news literacy, television literacy, film literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy and digital literacy, as well as other emerging concepts like social media literacy" (UNESCO, 2012).

Furthermore, the guidelines did not attempt to define MIL. However, they emphasized the focus on the key learning outcomes of the MIL. MIL, hence, is to be understood as a composite concept that encompasses knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable citizens to:

- Understand the role and functions of media and other information providers in democratic societies
- Understand the conditions under which those functions can be fulfilled
- Recognize and articulate a need for information
- Locate and access relevant information

- Critically evaluate information and the content of media and other information providers, including those on the Internet in terms of authority, credibility and current purpose
- Extract and organize information and media content
- Synthesize or operate on the ideas abstracted from content
- Ethically and responsibly communicate one's understanding of created knowledge to an audience or readership in an appropriate form and medium
- Be able to apply ICT skills in order to process information and produce user-generated content
- Engage with media and other information providers, including those on the Internet, for self-expression, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue and democratic

Figure 2: UNESCO's Composite Media and Information Literacy MIL



Source: UNESCO. (2011). *Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers*. Paris: UNESCO

The Importance of Media Literacy

Although the exposure to the massive production of media is one good reason to justify the vital role that media literacy plays. As Koltay states” The vital role of information in the development of democracy, cultural participation and active citizenship also justifies it. We have to acknowledge that children and youth, where entertainment and popular culture messages serve as an agent of socialization, are exposed to large quantities of media messages.”

Similarly, the European Commission (2007) adopted a view of media literacy that is based on the fact that there is a need to build up better understanding of how the media work in the digital world and that that citizens better understand the economic and cultural dimension of media.

The role of Media and Information Literacy MIL in enhancing the capacity of people was emphasized by UNESCO: “Media and information literacy enhances the capacity of people to enjoy their fundamental human rights, in particular as expressed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’” (UNESCO, 2013).

MIL is a basis for freedom of expression, access to information and quality education for all. Without MIL competencies, citizens cannot be well informed because they do not have access to information and are not empowered to process and use it. This makes it difficult for citizens, including young people, to participate actively in their communities and societies or for there to be good and effective governance (Mendel, 2005).

Media and information literate citizens take a critical stance on one’s own informed decision making and learning process in general (Frau-Meigs and Torrent, 2009). MIL renews the importance of metacognition, learning how to learn and knowing how one knows with a focus on media, libraries and other information providers including those on the Internet.

In addition to its role in the awareness of ethical responsibilities for global citizenship, MIL has a major role in enabling diversity, dialogue and tolerance. MIL can be a powerful tool to enable intercultural dialogue, tolerance and cultural understanding. There are indications that greater engagement with society through MIL can generate cross-generational strategies and dialogue that result in civic cohesion and inclusiveness of different sectors and age groups (Frau-Meigs & Torrent, 2009).

Furthermore, UNESCO highlighted the benefits of MIL as follows:

- In the teaching and learning process it equips the teachers with enhanced knowledge to empower future citizens.
- Media and information literacy imparts crucial knowledge about the functions of media and information channels in democratic societies, reasonable understanding about the conditions needed to perform those functions effectively and basic skills necessary to evaluate the performance of media and information providers in light of the expected functions.

- A society that is media and information literate fosters the development of free, independent and pluralistic media and open information systems.

In order to enjoy the benefits of MIL, the following are required:

1. Media and information literacy should be considered as a whole and include a combination of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes).
2. Citizens should have knowledge about location and consumption of information as well as about the production of information.
3. Women, men and marginalized groups, such as people living with disability, indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities, should have equal access to information and knowledge.
4. MIL should be seen as an essential tool to facilitate intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and a cultural understanding of people.

Virtual Literacy

The remarkable increase in the use of image in higher education has dictated the emergence of a new literacy concept “Virtual Literacy”. Recent studies of student use of visual materials in higher education have provided important information about student image-related skills and behaviors. Study results show a need for student visual literacy development since students’ visual competencies are not always aligned with faculty expectations or academic demands. Student social media practices intersect with academic image use, and student visual literacy skills must span these spaces.

Copyright is often a consideration for students when selecting images, though it is unclear how this affects their image choices or use. In their dealings with digital materials generally, John Palfrey and others find that students are not well informed about either the rights or the restrictions of copyright law. (Hattwig et al., 2012).

Although it seems to compete with media literacy, it is rather a complementary to it. The International Visual Literacy Association IVLA attributes coining the term to John Debes in 1969, when he offered the following definition of the term:

“Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication.” (IVLA, 2012).

The literature offers similar definitions for the Virtual Literacy concept. Brill, Kim and Branch conducted a study to solicit a working definition of visual literacy. The consensus of the visual literacy scholarly community resulting from their research defines visual literacy as *‘A group of*

acquired competencies for interpreting and composing visible messages. A visually literate person is able to: (a) discriminate, and make sense of visible objects as part of a visual acuity, (b) create static and dynamic visible objects effectively in a defined space, (c) comprehend and appreciate the visual testaments of others, and (d) conjure objects in the mind's eye.' (Brill, 2000).

However, recent definitions of visual literacy typically refer to an individual's ability to both analyze and produce visual materials. As Brumberger states, "the richest definitions (of visual literacy) include both an interpretive and a productive component. In other words, they stipulate that the ability to analyze and interpret images and other visual material, although critical, is not by itself sufficient for full visual literacy; it must be accompanied by some ability to create visual material." (Brumberger, 2011).

Another characteristic of recent definitions is the intersection of visual literacy with digital technology and digital literacy. The 2003 *Visual Literacy White Paper*, commissioned by Adobe Systems, advocates for early experimentation with technologies such as image software and digital photography to develop technical skills associated with visual literacy (Bamford, 2011). Barbara Jones Kavalier and Suzanne L. Flannigan points out that digital and visual literacies are intertwined (Jones, 2006). This linkage is to be emphasized in visual literacy definitions, otherwise they will be "insufficient in contemporary digital culture" (Avgirnou, 2009).

The Role of Libraries in Visual Literacy

For libraries, visual literacy has generally been considered within the realm of information literacy, with a focus on locating images, evaluating and selecting image resources, and using and citing images. (Bridges, 2007). In this context, visual literacy has been described as "visual information literacy." (Abilock, 2008). Moreover, Rockenbach (2009) observes that librarians have noticed parallels between visual literacy skills and the critical thinking skills required of information literacy, and have shown how the same *Information Literacy Standards* can be applied to the tasks of researching and understanding visual materials.

In fact, the role of libraries and librarians towards virtual literacy has been debated. Nelson (2004) asserts that image interpretation and analysis fall outside the traditional domain of librarians and are skills more appropriately taught within discipline-specific contexts. Marcum (2002), however, argues that the interpretation of visual information falls solidly within the realm of information literacy and that hands-on skills such as image manipulation are needed in addition to critical thinking skills. He further states: "librarians must become multi-literate" and libraries must "recast the model of information literacy to embrace multiple literacies."

As Schroeder (2010) indicates, Information literacy should be viewed as an integrated literacy," including visual and other literacies, offers new opportunities for librarian collaboration with faculty and other academic professionals to advance student learning. Particularly in educational settings, librarians and information professionals have always a vital role in educating and training users all forms of Literacies. As more visual and media elements are incorporated into education, visual literacy will continue to play a role in education. Today's learning environments are rich with media and visual elements. Digital technology is also increasing

access to visual content. Through the ubiquitous nature of mobile devices students also have increased ability to create their own photos and post visual content online. Although students are engaging more and more with visual media, they may not have increased visual literacy skills.

At the present, librarians are increasingly incorporating the visual aspects of information into information literacy instruction. Teaching of “image literacy” is considered as a subset of information literacy, whereby students learn to recognize the need for images, locate images, evaluate available image options, and use images appropriately. (Stylianopoulos, 2005).

ACRL Virtual Literacy Standards for Higher Education

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has published the *Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* in response to this need for student visual literacy skill development. According to ACRL: Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials. A visually literate individual is both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture. (ACRL,2011)

According to the Standards, in an interdisciplinary, higher education environment, a visually literate individual is able to:

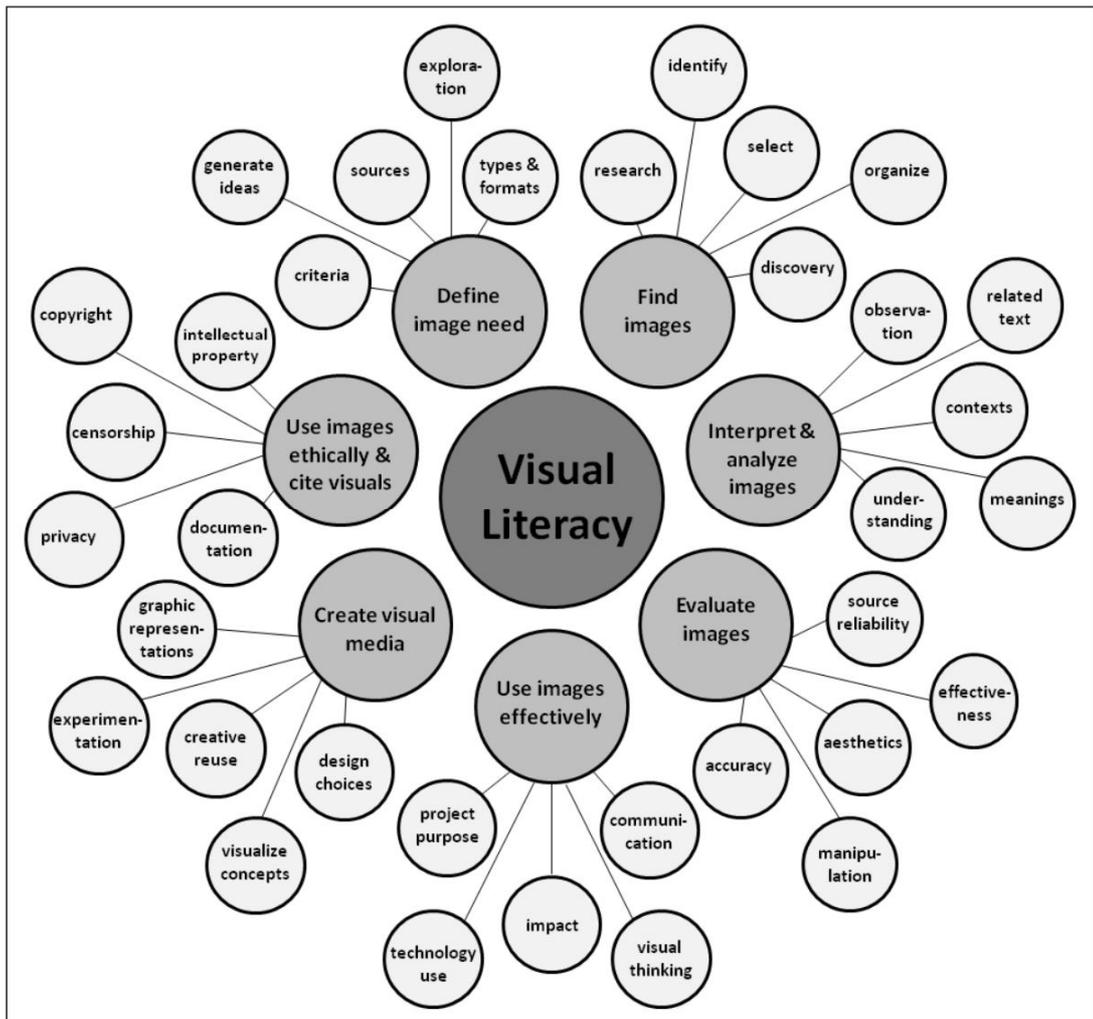
- Determine the nature and extent of the visual materials needed
- Find and access needed images and visual media effectively and efficiently
- Interpret and analyze the meanings of images and visual media
- Evaluate images and their sources
- Use images and visual media effectively
- Design and create meaningful images and visual media
- Understand many of the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding the creation and use of images and visual media, and access and use visual materials ethically

Hattwig (2012) points out that the *Visual Literacy Standards* are the first of their kind to describe interdisciplinary visual literacy performance indicators and learning outcomes. These learning outcomes provide a framework for student visual literacy learning and offer guidance for librarians, faculty, and other academic professionals in teaching and assessing visual literacy.

The *Visual Literacy Standards* approach visual literacy from an information literacy perspective but also address the unique characteristics of visual materials. The *Visual Literacy Standards* are informed by the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (henceforth referred to as the *Information Literacy Standards*) and are intended to complement them. Libraries will find an approach in the *Visual Literacy Standards* that is familiar in its information literacy foundations while new in the opportunities it presents for broader areas of instruction and for partnerships with other campus instructional units. Finding images, evaluating sources, and using images ethically are all skills aligned with traditional information

literacy goals. Interpreting, analyzing, and producing visual content are skills that librarians may be less accustomed to teaching, but they fit well with libraries' expanding role in supporting a broad spectrum of student literacies.

Figure 3: Array of ACRL Visual Literacy Standards



Source: Hattwig, Denise; Bussert, Kaila; Medaille, Ann; burges, Joanna. (2012). *Visual Literacy Standards in Higher Education: New Opportunities for libraries and Student Learning. Libraries and the academy. Vol.13, (2012).* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins university Press.

Media and Visual Literacy in the Arab World:

Contrary to the immense exposure and great consumption of visual media by the majority of people in various countries in the Arab world, especially by the youth, there is a noticeable lack

of the provision of Media and Visual competencies. For instance, In Egypt, being the leading Arab county in TV and movie production, one can easily notice the absence of serious endeavors in that direction.

Until recently, almost all Arab counties did not pay much attention to Media and Visual Literacies. As will be discussed in more details, there are no academic programs and/or courses to equip the students with the necessary and required knowledge, skills and attitudes to deal with media and image. Libraries, especially, academic that normally assumes the responsibility of training and instructing students to use various forms of information sources are no exception. The fact that Information Literacy programs themselves in the Arab world have emerged only the last 10-15 years might provide a good understanding of the late beginning of Media and Visual Literacy.

The following paragraphs, however, will briefly shed light on very recent developments and initiatives taking place in the region.

Media and Information Literacy Regional Conference in Qatar

The Doha Center for Media Freedom (DCMF) with the support of the UNAOC, UNESCO and other organizations, organized an expert meeting on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Doha, Qatar, on 11-13 June 2013. The meeting convened governmental representatives from Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco, in addition to participants from Europe and East Asia. The 3-day conference focused on best practices and the global framework on MIL, specifically identifying challenges and opportunities for the MENA and GCC regions. (DCMF, 2013).

DCMF has made MIL education one of its main priorities. The organization recognizes the need to teach the next generation about the significance of becoming media literate and absorb information as critical thinkers and informed participant citizens in their communities. The UNAOC supports these educational initiatives. The support of Qatar's Supreme Education Council, in partnership with, among others, ictQatar, has facilitated the DCMF to implement MIL workshops in over 45 Qatari schools, in addition to providing teachers' training with MIL relevant resources.

During the conference, representatives of the Arab League also expressed their support for the development of MIL education initiatives in the region, identifying MIL as a platform for the enhancement of cross-cultural understanding across individuals of diverse backgrounds.

At the meeting, challenges facing the introduction of MIL in the Middle East have been highlighted:

- **Awareness:** MIL education is a new concept in the region, and its novelty means there is a lack of understanding of what it is and what its benefits are. Furthermore the decreased role in schools' curricula of the "human sciences" in favour of "practical sciences" leads to an understanding of MIL as a "technical skill" as opposed to a "critical thinking skill." This lack of awareness on the part of educators and policy-makers results in a lack of policy commitment to applying MIL education on a wide scale.

- **Enabling environment:** For MIL education to be successful, an enabling environment is a necessity. MIL education cannot thrive in an environment where press freedom is restricted and civil liberties are not guaranteed.
- **Resources:** There is a lack of resources, manpower and expertise to implement MIL education in the region, as well as a lack of communication and cooperation between regional experts.

Participants concluded the conference by adopting the Doha Declaration on Supporting Media and Information Literacy Education in the Middle East.

Morocco

The first International Forum on MIL was organized in June 2011, in Morocco. The forum marked the official launch of UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers. Regional consultations on the MIL Curriculum for teachers for the Arab States were also organized in order to adapt UNESCO's curriculum to the specificities of the Arab world and lay down the foundations for constructive dialogue in the region and beyond. It was the first consultation of this kind to take place in the Middle East.

UNESCO's MIL Curriculum for Teachers was launched at the same time and reinforced for countries such as Morocco, Oman and Lebanon. The conference resulted in the creation of a working group between UNESCO and the Moroccan Ministry of Education.

A year later, UNESCO's MIL Curriculum was adapted to the Moroccan context and in 2013, the Ministry of Education announced that it would integrate a module of 20 hours on MIL education into the national teacher-training curriculum and facilitate trainings of teachers through a series of workshops in 15 national training centers and 35 associate centers in the country. Initiatives aimed at familiarising students with how the media operates have also been launched across the country with school visits to local radio and TV stations.

Kuwait

The implementation of MIL education started in Kuwait in 2006 thanks to efforts led by the Association of Kuwaiti Teachers. In 2007, the conference "Media Literacy: a necessity for the age of media openness" was launched to discuss how to best implement MIL education, featuring participation from academics, media literacy experts and teachers in Kuwait, and to raise funds. More than 1,000 people attended the forum including representatives from the Ministry of Education who showed interest in implementing MIL education into the national curriculum.

In 2013, the Kuwait Centre for Media Literacy was established. The centre cooperates with the US-based Temple University Media Education Lab to enable exchange and cooperation between American and Kuwaiti students through extra-curricular activities. The centre also enables students to broaden their cultural knowledge by teaching them how to access information.

Tunisia

Tunisia is probably the leading Arab country in the provision of academic programs dealing with Audio-Visual materials. It is the only country that offers a Masters stream dealing with Audio-Visual Archiving. In December 2013, Tunisia hosted the first international symposium on the conference under the title “ The Audio Visual Archives and Memory in the Digital Age”. However, there are no documented initiatives that are pertinent to the Media and/or visual literacy as such.

Lebanon

The American University of Beirut has inaugurated a new media and digital literacy academy that is tailored to the Arab world and aims to promote, vitalize, and advance digital media literacy education in the region. A joint initiative between the AUB Media Studies Program and the Regional External Programs, the three-week Media and Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut (MDLAB), is sponsored by the Open Society Foundations, a US-based grant-making operation that promotes democratic governance and social reform and was founded by philanthropist George Soros.

This inaugural year hosted 50 media professors and students from universities in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The three-week annual academy, conducted in Arabic, brings pioneering instructors and professionals to teach advanced digital and media literacy concepts and debate skills to young Arab university instructors and graduate students, who will eventually spread the knowledge to their institutions and countries. The academy will be held annually and will be mainly open to professors and students from the Arab world.

Media and Visual Literacies in Arab Library and Information Science Schools

In the Arab world, formal education of Library and Information Science LIS started in Egypt in 1952 with the establishment of the Institute of Library and Archives attached to Cairo University. Soon after, the Institute has been transformed to the Department of Library and Archives attached to the College of Arts at the same Universities. At the present time, almost all Arab countries have some sort of LIS education with very few exceptions (Qatar, Bahrain), with the highest number of Schools being located in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Most of the LIS academic programs in the Arab region are offered on the Bachelors level, typically 4 years program of study. However, most of the schools currently offer Masters and PhD degrees.

In an attempt to investigate the status of Media and/or Information Literacy in the curriculum of the Arab LIS schools, a thorough examination of study plans of 17 universities in some 10 countries was conducted.

The exercise attempted to answer the following questions

1. Is there any Media/Visual Literacy courses offered within the curriculum offered?
2. Is there any relevant courses offered?
3. What are the relevant courses, if any?

Table (1) summarizes the findings.

**Table (1) Media/Visual Literacy and/or Relevant Courses in Arabic Schools
Of Library and Information**

Country	University	Program/ Department/ School	College	Media/Visual Literacy Course		Relevant Course(s)		Course Title(s)	Degree	Level
				Yes	No	Yes	No			
Egypt	Cairo University	Department of Library, Archives and Intimation	College of Arts		√	√		Audio Visual Materials	BA	2 nd
	Alexandria University	Department of Library and Information	College of Arts		√	√		Audio Visual Materials	BA	3 rd
	Ain Shams University	Department of Library and Information	College of Arts		√		√			
	Menoufya University	Department of Library and Information	College of Arts		√	√		Audio Visual Materials	BA	3 rd
	Helwan University	Department of Library and Information			√		√			
	Mansoura University	Department of Library and Information	College of Arts		√	√		Audio Visual Materials	BA	3 rd
	King Abdul Aziz University	Department of Information Science	College of Arts and Humanities		√	√		Media Information Systems	BA	NA

Saudi Arabia	King Saud University	Department of Information Science	College of Arts and Humanities		√	√		Management of Non-Textual Archives Media Documentation	BA BA	NA
	Umm- Al-Qura	Department of Information Science	College of Arts and Humanities		√	√		School Media Center Services Multi Media Production	BA	NA
Tunisia	Supreme Institute of Documentation				√	√		Introduction to Audiovisual Documents	BA	1 st
								Management of Audio-Visual Documents		2 nd
								Digital Audi-Visual Documents		2 nd
								Audio-Visual Archives		3 rd
Digital Archiving of Audio-Visual Materials	Masters in Digital Information and Documents Management									

					√		√			
United Arab Emirates	The American University in the Emirates	MLIS Program	College of Information & Computer Technologies		√		√		MLIS	
Kuwait	Kuwait University	MLIS Program	College of Social Sciences		√		√		MLIS	
Qatar	Qatar University	Information Science Program	College of Arts and Sciences		√	√		Audio Visual Materials	BA	NA
Libya	Tripoli University	Department of Library and Information			√	√		Cataloging of Special Materials	BA	
Syria	University of Damascus	Department of Library and Information			√		√		BA	
Algeria	Constantine University	Library and Documentation Institute			√	√		Cataloging of Non-Print Materials Multimedia	BA	
Jordan	Jordan University	Department of Library and Information			√	√		Graphical Design of Non-Print Materials	BA	

As drawn from the table, the following could be established:

- It is evident that none of LIS Departments is offering Media/Visual Literacy courses.

- Almost half of these departments do offer relevant courses. These courses are mostly related to the management, organization and use of audiovisual materials as part of the library collection.
- Most of the schools are in short of the specialized faculty and staff to deliver courses on Visual Materials in general and Visual Literacy in particular.
- Very few courses – if at all - do offer content pertinent to the analysis, assessment and production of visual materials.
- Audio Visual Materials seems to be the most prevailing course, especially in Egyptian universities. Cairo University was the first one to introduce this course in the eighties. Other LIS have been following the same path being so much influenced by the curriculum model set by Cairo University until recently.
- It should be noted that most of the LIS schools do have a severe shortage in the Audio Visual labs with the necessary equipment for an effective delivery of the courses.

The proposed Curriculum:

It became evident that librarians have to play a vital role in delivering Media and Visual Literacy programs. It is strongly believed that librarians should consider this responsibility as an extension and expansion of their role in information access and provision. Unless librarians themselves are well equipped with the necessary skills pertinent to Media and Visual Literacy, they will not be capable in conducting this role efficiently.

Therefore, this paper is proposing a new curriculum under the title “Media and Visual Competencies ”to be adopted by Library & Information Schools in Arab universities. The proposed curriculum comprises four modules that cover the essential competencies for image use and evaluation:

1. Understanding the Role of Media in Society
2. Accessing Media and Image Information Effectively and Efficiently
3. Use and Assessment of Media and Image
4. Media/Image Production and Social, Legal and Ethical Aspects

Each module comes with its own units and learning outcomes. The Curriculum is based on both the Virtual Literacy Standards for Higher Education and the UNESCO MIL Curriculum for teachers. It should be noted, however, that the implementation of such a curriculum should take all the socioeconomic, cultural, and technical factors pertinent to each country into consideration.

The First Module: Understanding the Role of Media in Society :

This Module focuses on the importance and value of Media and the crucial role it plays in society. Learners will be exposed to the functions of media and other information providers and understand their importance to citizenship and informed decision-making. Furthermore, they will be familiarized with various ways people use media in their personal and public lives, the relationships among citizens and media content, as well as the use of media for a variety of purposes.

Units:

Under this Module, the following teaching units will be delivered:

- Citizenship, Freedom of Expression and Information, Access to Information,
- Democratic Discourse and Life-long Learning
- Understanding the News, Media and Information Ethics,
- Communication, MIL and Learning – Understanding the News
- Representation in Media and Information
- Languages in Media and Information
- Audience

Learning outcomes:

Outcomes of this Module should be the learners' ability to:

- Identify, describe and evaluate the public service functions of media and other information providers in democratic societies.
- Demonstrate understanding of key concepts such as freedom of expression, access to information and fundamental rights enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- Interpret and describe the relationship between media and information literacy, citizenship and democracy.
- Describe media pluralism, media and other information providers as platforms for intercultural dialogue and why these are important.
- Describe media and information ethics, and be able to identify when these have been breached.
- Interpret and make connections between media texts, context and values projected by media.
- Use strategies to analyze stereotypes in media (e.g., recognize stereotypes that serve the interests of some groups in society at the expense of others; identify techniques used in visual media that perpetuate stereotypes).
- Explore representations, misrepresentations and lack of representation in media and information texts.

The Second Module: Accessing Media and Image Information □ Effectively and Efficiently

In this Module, the learners will be able to determine the type of information needed for a particular task and access the information in an effective and efficient manner.

Units:

Under this Module, the following teaching units will be delivered:

- Familiarization with Information literacy and library skills.
- Determining, defining and articulating the need for media and/or image

- Identifying the scope and purpose of a project for which media/image will be employed
- Identification of the variety of image sources, materials, and types.
- Selection of the most appropriate sources and retrieval systems for finding and accessing needed images and visual media.
- Investigating the scope, content, and potential usefulness of a range of image sources and formats
- Organization of Media/image and source information.

Learning outcomes:

Outcomes of this Module should be the learners' ability to:

- Define the purpose of the image within the project (e.g., illustration, evidence, primary source, focus of analysis, critique, commentary)
- Define the scope (e.g., reach, audience) and environment (e.g., academic environment, open web) of the planned image use
- Articulate criteria that need to be met by the image (e.g., subject, pictorial content, color, resolution, specific item)
- Identify key concepts and terms that describe the needed image
- Investigates the scope, content, and potential usefulness of a range of image sources and formats e.g., digital, print, subscription databases, open web, books or articles, repositories, personal creations)
- Identify different image and visual media types and materials (e.g., paintings, prints, photographs, born-digital images, data models)
- Articulate the advantages and disadvantages of various types of image sources and retrieval systems
- Use specialized online or in-person services to select image sources (e.g., online research guides, image and reference librarians, curators, archivists, disciplinary experts)
- Develop a search strategy appropriate to the image need and aligned with available resources
- Recognize the role of textual information in providing access to image content, and identifies types of textual information and metadata typically associated with images (e.g., captions or other descriptions, personal or user-generated tags, creator information, repository names, title keywords, descriptions of visual content)
- Accesses physical objects as needed to support the image research objective (e.g., site visits to archives, repositories, museums, galleries, libraries)
- Organize images and the information that accompanies them for personal retrieval, reuse, and scholarly citation

<p>The Third Module: Use and Assessment of Media and Image</p>

The focus of this Module is the effective use and evaluation of media and image and how images are employed effectively for different purposes. Also, the Module highlights the interpretation and analysis of images and visual media.

Units:

Under this Module, the following teaching units will be delivered:

- Identification, interpretation, and analyzes of the meanings of images and visual media.
- Situating images in their cultural, social, and historical contexts.
- Identification of the physical, technical, and design components of an image.
- Validation, interpretation and analysis of images through discourse with others.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness and reliability of images as visual communications.
- Evaluation of the aesthetic and technical characteristics of images.
- Judging the reliability and accuracy of image sources.
- Use of images effectively for different purposes.
- Use of problem solving, creativity, and experimentation to incorporate images into scholarly projects.

Learning outcomes:

Outcomes of this Module should be the learners' ability to:

- Look carefully at an image and observes content and physical details
- Recognize when more information about an image is needed, develops questions for further research, and conducts additional research as appropriate
- Describes cultural and historical factors relevant to the production of an image (e.g., time period, geography, economic conditions, political structures, social practices)
- Examine the purposes and meanings of an image in its original context
- Explore choices made in the production of an image to construct meaning or influence interpretation (e.g., framing, composition, included or excluded elements, staging)
- Describes the intended audience for an image
- Explores representations of gender, ethnicity, and other cultural or social identifiers in images
- Investigate how the audience, context, and interpretation of an image may have changed over time
- Describe pictorial, graphic, and aesthetic elements of an image (e.g., color, composition, line, shape, contrast, repetition, style)
- Identify techniques, technologies, or materials used in the production of an image
- Examine an image for signs of editing, alteration, or manipulation (e.g., cropping, color correction, image enhancements)
- Seek expert and scholarly opinion about images, including information and analysis found in reference sources and scholarly publications
- Assesses the appropriateness and impact of the visual message for the intended audience
- Evaluate the use of visual signs, symbols, and conventions to convey meaning
- Determine the accuracy and reliability of graphical representations of data (e.g., charts, graphs, data models)
- Evaluate the technical characteristics of images (e.g., resolution, size, clarity, file format)

- Evaluate information that accompanies images for accuracy, reliability, currency, and completeness
- c. Verifies information that accompanies images by consulting multiple sources and conducting research as necessary
- Assesses reliability and accuracy of image sources based on evaluations of authority, and point of view or bias
- Plans for strategic use of images and visual media within a project
- Selects appropriate images and visual media aligned with a project's purpose
- Integrates images into projects purposefully, considering meaning, aesthetic criteria, visual impact, and audience
- Uses images for a variety of purposes (e.g., as illustrations, evidence, visual models, primary sources, focus of analysis)
- Use appropriate editing, presentation, communication, storage, and media tools and applications to prepare and work with images
- Use visual thinking skills to clarify and solve problems
- Write clearly about images for different purposes (e.g., description, analysis, evaluation)
- Discuss images critically with other individuals, expressing ideas, conveying meaning, and validating arguments
- Include textual information as needed to convey an image's meaning (e.g., using captions, referencing figures in a text, incorporating keys or legends)

The Fourth Module: Media/Image Production and Social, Legal and Ethical Aspects
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This Module focuses on equipping learners with knowledge and skills required to effectively produce media and particularly image in various projects and assignments. This will also include knowledge of media ethics and info-ethics based on international standards and including intercultural competencies.

Units:

Under this Module, the following teaching units will be delivered:

- The design and creation of meaningful images and visual media.
- Use of design strategies and creativity in image and visual media production.
- The employment of a variety of tools and technologies to produce images and visual media.
- The evaluation of personally created visual products.
- Understanding the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding images and visual media.
- Adherence to legal best practices when accessing, using, and creating images.
- The citation of images and visual media in papers, presentations, and projects.

Learning outcomes:

Outcomes of this Module should be the learners' ability to:

- Creates images and visual media to represent and communicate concepts, narratives, and arguments (e.g., concept maps, presentations, storyboards, posters)
- Constructs accurate and appropriate graphic representations of data and information (e.g., charts, maps, graphs, models)
- Produces images and visual media for a defined audience
- Aligns visual content with the overall purpose of project
- Plans visual style and design in relation to project goals
- Uses aesthetic and design choices deliberately to enhance effective communication and convey meaning
- Uses creativity to incorporate existing image content into new visual products
- Identifies the best tools and technologies for creating the visual product
- Develops proficiency with a range of tools and technologies for creating images and visual media
- Evaluates personally created visual products based on project goals
- Evaluates personally created visual products based on disciplinary criteria and conventions
- Reflects on the role of personally created visual products as a meaningful contribution to research, learning, or communication
- Develops familiarity with concepts and issues of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use as they apply to image content
- Identifies issues of privacy, ethics, and safety involved with creating, using, and sharing images
- Explores issues surrounding image censorship
- Identifies institutional (e.g., museums, educational institutions) policies on access to image resources, and follows legal and ethical best practices
- Tracks copyright and use restrictions when images are reproduced, altered, converted to different formats, or disseminated to new contexts
- Recognize how the image search process is affected by image rights and use restrictions
- States rights and attribution information when disseminating personally created images
- Gives attribution to image creators in citations and credit statements to acknowledge authorship and author rights
- Cites visual materials using an appropriate documentation style

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