ABSTRACT

We live in a world inundated by digital information. Students are bombarded and constantly exposed to digital information. But despite this information overload, what remains to be seen is how skilled are students today to evaluate the information they are exposed to, and how proficient they are in putting it to use. Nevertheless, in a world overrun by digital technologies and information old divisions of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ persist. Digital Information, Technology and Knowledge has in many ways, only deepened old lines of disparity between sexes, the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, and other lines of division already existing in society. And yet, in a world where committed efforts have taken the benefits of ICTs to disadvantaged communities, it is important for scholars and activists to find new ways to understand and bridge the digital divide, and the knowledge divide.

This thesis is an effort to understand the digital information literacy skills of college students in rural areas. For that purpose, the investigator selected colleges in southern districts of Tamil Nadu. The aim of this researcher is to not only evaluate their skill sets and rank them accordingly, but find their strengths and unique native approaches to technology in order to identify new literacy practices for the digital age. This researcher has also created a rubric for evaluation of Digital Information Literacy, and emphasize on the need to impart DIL awareness and skills compulsorily at the school and college level by government and other aid organisations, as it is integral for social development. The research focuses on 139 students from 18 colleges across 9 districts of Tamil Nadu. They were chosen specifically for their lesser advantaged and rural backgrounds. By studying them in depth, using a careful mixed method, this researcher has developed an assessment tool for digital information literacy. In addition, several influencing factors for DIL have been studied carefully.

Key words: Digital Information Literacy, Tamil Nadu, College Students, Influencing Factors