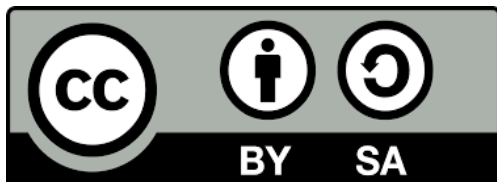DIMELI4AC

DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: A tool kit for promoting critical thinking and democratic values

MODULE 6: Managing Digital Identity

Topic 2: Digital Footprint

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Module Description

Nowadays, technology is a part of our everyday lives.

We are online perhaps more than we are offline, as we are almost constantly in front of a screen, whether on a smartphone, a computer monitor, a laptop or a tablet, and it is important to remember that the persona we have online has an impact on our offline lives, as well.

This module will teach you why you need to be careful with your online identity, how to paint yourself in a good light in online interactions, and how to manage your time and activities online.

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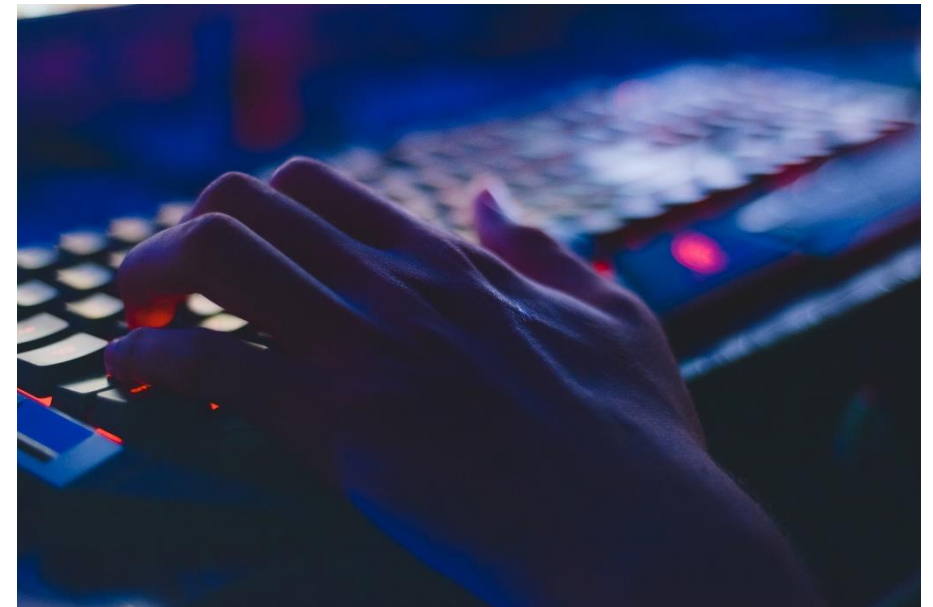
Topics

This module will cover the following topics:

- Topic 1: Netiquette

- Topic 2: Digital Footprint

- Topic 3: Screen Time

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Learning Outcomes

In this module, you will learn:

- what comprises our digital identity and why it is important to be conscious of it

- the skillset needed to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate online behaviours that form one's digital identity

- how to manage your online identity to avoid the pitfalls that may result from abusive or inappropriate behaviour and use of the internet

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Legend

	Keywords
	Scenarios
	Tips
	Questions
	Activities
	Resources

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Topic 2

Digital Footprint

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What is a digital footprint?
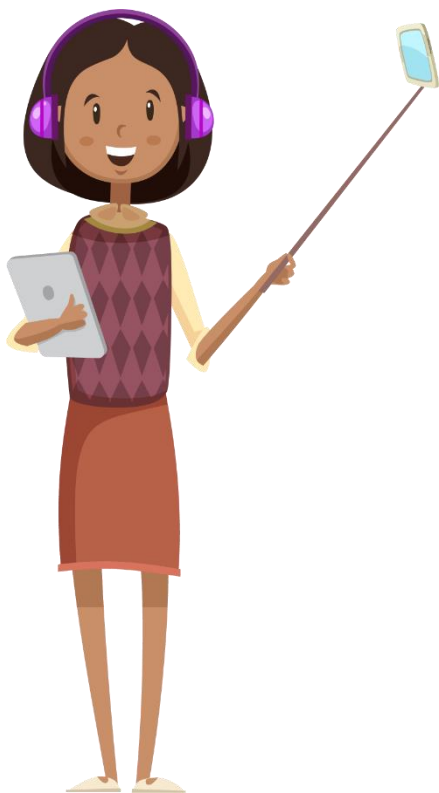
A **digital footprint** is the trail of data we leave behind us as we browse the internet. All the activities we do online, for example the pages we visit, the things we like on social media and our online transactions, leave behind traces.

Our digital footprint is our **entire internet history** (not our browser history!), and it is not as private as we think it is.

People can track our digital footprint, and they can easily learn many things about us, such as our interests, our age, where we live, and even who are our friends and family.

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How is our digital footprint formed?

Each page we visit and each transaction we carry out online leave traces on our computer.

In addition, our comments, likes, social media posts, even our private chats are part of our digital footprint.

We often use the same account to connect to our tablet device, mobile phone and computer, maybe even other devices.

This connects all the activities carried out across our devices to the account, forming our digital footprint.

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Passive Vs Active Digital Footprint

Our digital footprint is distinguished between Active and Passive.

A passive digital footprint is information we unintentionally leave online when browsing, sometimes without even knowing. This includes data left by others (e.g. posts where you are tagged in), or information gathered when we do various activities online, such as location and IP address.

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Active Vs Passive Digital Footprint

An active digital footprint is the traces we intentionally leave behind, when we make deliberate decisions on the internet.

Examples of an active digital footprint include:

- Blog posts
- Social media posts, comments, photos and likes (including deleted items)
- Signing up for newsletters

- Emails
- Image and video uploads
- Chats
- Accepting cookies on our browser

How our Digital Footprint is used - Cookies

Have you ever searched for something to buy online, and then had advertisements from other random websites show you **the very same thing**?

This is an example of what Internet Cookies do. Although the name reminds us of the tasty treats, Internet Cookies are something entirely different!

Cookies are small files that are created on our web browser when we first visit a site that wants to store information.

The data stored can include our IP address, what pages we visited while at the site, how many times we visited the site and more.

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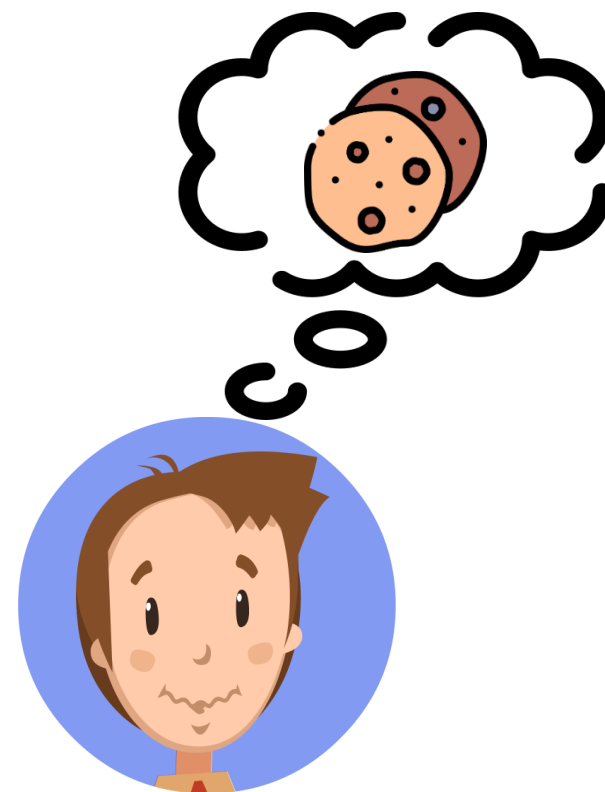
How our Digital Footprint is used - Cookies

So what is the purpose of Cookies?

Plainly, to **personalize** our web browsing, i.e. to show content more relevant to our preferences, to offer convenient logins and generally to keep our preferences stored for easier and faster browsing.

Some Cookies are deleted when we close our browser, but others can remain for a while, until they are manually deleted or until they expire.

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How our Digital Footprint is used - Cookies

Cookies also allow other sites to track us across the web, in a process called Cookie Profiling.

Cookie Profiling is the use of multiple cookies to compile your browsing activities for a period of time, and then using the data to create a profile for you. Advertisers then obtain this information from various sources and use it for targeted advertising.

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What type of information is gathered?

- IP address

- Hobbies and interests, based on the websites you visit

- What type of device you are using

- Applications you use

- Facebook and Instagram posts and chat history

- How you feel about specific individuals and subjects (e.g. if you like/dislike a singer, film)

- Your relationships with other people (e.g. family members, close friends)

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Why we should be mindful

"What goes on the internet, stays on the internet."

This saying shows the importance of our digital footprint. Once something is posted online, it is nearly impossible to delete.

This means that a negative digital footprint can one day harm your reputation. Potential employers and educational institutions who are considering you will probably look you up online. In some cases, extensive research is carried out, accessing posts and browsing habits from years before, even accounts that you do not use anymore.

It is possible to lose a job or university/college position if your online presence paints you in a negative light.

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Why we should be mindful

It is not only your professional life that may be affected. **Your family and friends** may also see things from your browsing habits that they find unflattering.

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Managing your Digital Footprint

⚠ It's clear that we need to be careful about our digital footprint. So how do we do that?

➡ Firstly, we manage our footprint so far, or "do a clean-up".

- Search for yourself on various search engines and Social Media platforms. Go beyond the first page.

    What did you find?

If you see here something you don't like being seen by other people, remove it, or ask the person who has posted it to remove your tag.

- Make a list of all your social media accounts so far. Delete the ones you don't use anymore.

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Managing your Digital Footprint

Secondly, take care how you behave online from now on (1/2):

- Be respectful in all your online interactions *(ref. Module 6, Topic 1: Netiquette for more information).* Ensure that the footprints you do leave behind paint you in a good light.

- Configure your social media privacy settings. Make sure to control as much as possible who has access to your data and posts.

- Be mindful of linking accounts, e.g. when you use your Google of Facebook account to sign up for new websites.

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Managing your Digital Footprint

Secondly, take care how you behave online (continued, 2/2):

- Read the Terms and Conditions. If it's too long, then at least skim the text for the basics.

- Remove any applications from your phone that you don't use anymore. A lot of apps gather information about you, such as email, location, and online activities.

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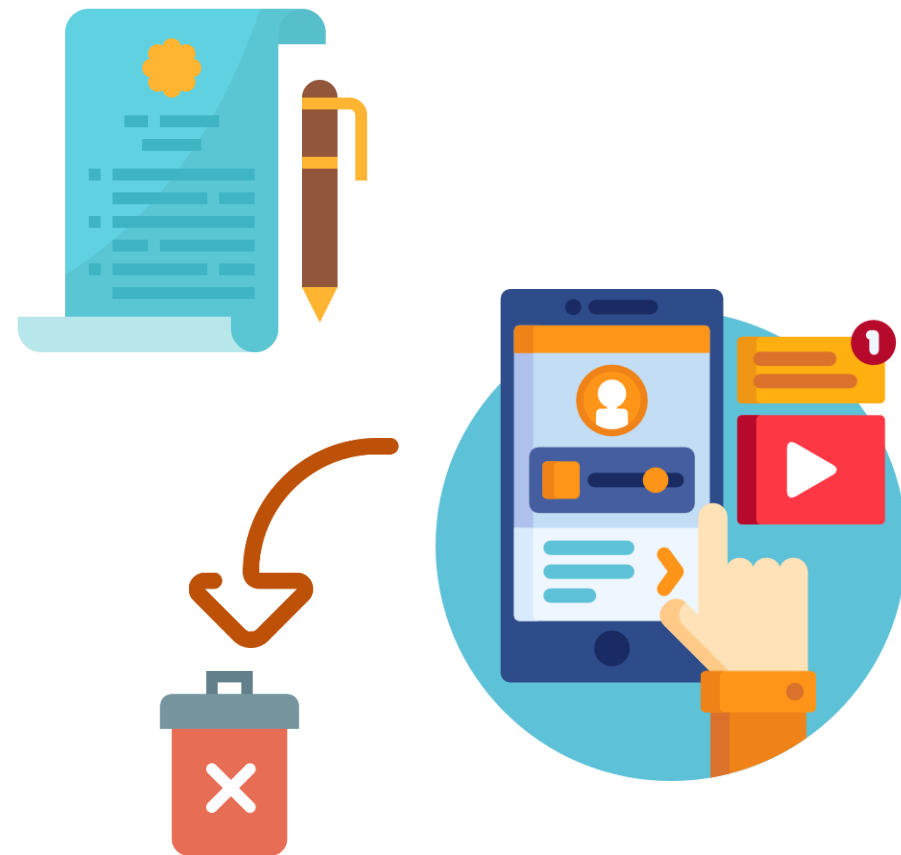
Managing your Digital Footprint

Considering how our online identity may affect our lives, we could consider using it to our advantage to build a good reputation, rather than just remain "off the grid". How do we do that?

- **DO** post more about your achievements, hobbies and interests. Start a blog or website about something you are passionate about.

- **DO** express yourself, but do so respectfully and articulately. Be genuine and mindful.

- **DO** check for spelling and grammar mistakes before you post.

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Managing your Digital Footprint

- **DON'T** get into online arguments, whether in public, like in a comment section, or privately, like in a chat. Keep in mind that even "private" conversations can be screenshotted and shared.

- **DON'T** keep photos or posts you are tagged in that are inappropriate or make you look bad.

- **DON'T** make critical comments on others' posts.

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In conclusion…

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Conclusion

Your digital footprint can affect your online reputation. Since so much of our lives is now spent online, it is important to keep our online reputation just as good as our offline reputation, to avoid consequences in the future.

A positive active digital footprint can put things under control, and help you promote a positive self-image. This way, not only you can avoid negative effects, but you can turn your online presence to your benefit if you manage it correctly.

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