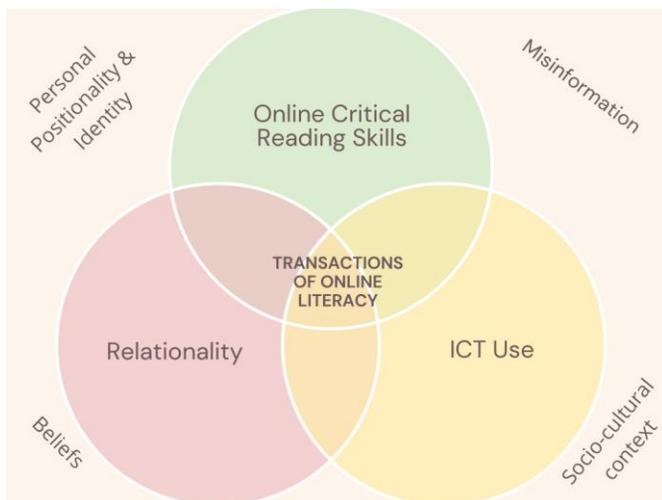


# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Relational transactions of online literacy

By Joe Stouffer, PhD, Matteo Di Muro, MEd, Zahra Kasamali, PhD, Michelle Lam, PhD, & Ellen Watson, PhD



*A framework for the transactions of online literacy.*

### Why this research is important

Bringing together relationality, online critical reading skills, ICT, and social media use is a unique approach, as fields of study tend to focus on one or two of these. However, the intersectional consideration of all three is important. Our relationships impact what we believe, how some social media algorithms deliver us information, and how we form allegiances. Thus, our focus needs to include knowledge about what constitutes misinformation, literacy skills to critically analyze what we (and our students) read, acknowledgment of relationality, and an understanding of

### What you need to know

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the deep and painful impacts of confrontational interactions because of living in the post-truth era, such as severed relationships and increasing distance between groups of people. To explore this connection between relationality and online literacy, we situate our discussion within a framework that views online critical reading skills, relational contexts, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and social media use as intersecting, transactional elements (see Figure). A backdrop of individual personal beliefs, social-cultural contexts, personal positionality and identities, and misinformation grounds our consideration of influences on readers' choices.

the social practices that form dynamically within and around these spheres of influence.

### How the research was conducted

We conducted a study with pre-and in-service teachers aimed at examining the relational impacts of misinformation. After a brief presentation of SIFT (Stop, Investigate, Find Resources, Trace Claims)—a lateral reading method used to evaluate online information—we used focus group conversations (N=18) and an anonymous

survey (N=16) to gather responses to questions about the intersections of digital misinformation and relational ties.

### What the researchers found

In our preliminary thematic analysis, we noted that students were carrying relational stress in their personal lives, where relationships and disagreements were viewed as a source of anxiety that they sought to avoid, instead of the relationships around them being a source of strength and encouragement during difficult times. Additionally, many students had already cut ties over differences of opinions.

In an age of misinformation, we argue that these online literacy transactions are becoming increasingly confrontational, emotionally driven, and complex to navigate and participate in while honouring care for self and others. There are many interrelated and compounding factors that dictate how someone may interact online. The way someone relates with others online is not only based on whether they think something is true but can be connected to their web of relations and the connections to those with whom they interact.

### How this research can be used

While we identify a need for critical literacy skills, ICT skills, and relational ethics, what does this mean in a classroom? Within this kind of ethos, we must be able to prepare students to engage with difficult knowledge and disagreements in ways that honour their relational contexts while at the same time building their ICT and online critical reading skills. Simply put, we must provide our students with the skills to navigate complexity with more options than routine avoidance or terminating relationships.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

Online literacy, ICT, digital literacy, relationality, education, critical reading, misinformation

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