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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Designing a Desirable Model for the Enhancement of Legal Literacy among Iranian Users in Preventing Cybercrimes

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Over recent decades, the rapid proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has fundamentally reconfigured the traditional frameworks of social, political, economic, and cultural life, giving rise to a novel environment commonly referred to as cyberspace or the digital ecosystem. This milieu has not only furnished new arenas for human interaction but has also emerged as a cornerstone of twenty-first-century social organization. Consequently, the demarcation between

physical and virtual realities has become increasingly porous, with both individual and collective existence becoming deeply enmeshed within digital infrastructures.

The pervasive diffusion of digital technologies, the expansion of communication networks, the growing accessibility of the Internet, and the advent of cutting-edge innovations-including artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain-have further accelerated this transformation. In tandem with these developments, concepts such as e-government, the information society, digital citizenship, and cyber governance have permeated legal and policy discourses, reflecting the progressive institutionalization of cyberspace within broader societal structures.

Within this evolving context, legal literacy in cyberspace-understood as a specialized domain of digital law-plays an instrumental role in the prevention and deterrence of cybercrime. By enhancing users' comprehension of the legal frameworks governing online environments, legal literacy fosters heightened awareness of the civil and criminal repercussions associated with risky behaviors and encourages more prudent engagement in digital interactions. Individuals possessing such knowledge are better equipped to discern lawful from unlawful conduct and, as a result, are less prone to either inadvertently committing offenses or falling victim to cybercrime.

At present, cybercrime constitutes one of the most pressing challenges of the third millennium, posing substantial threats to legal systems and law enforcement capabilities worldwide. In response, numerous developed nations have taken proactive measures by instituting comprehensive and, in certain instances, internationally harmonized legal frameworks. These frameworks, frequently informed by transnational legal instruments, offer clear guidance for policymakers and facilitate the adoption of standardized and effective approaches at the global level.

Notwithstanding these advancements, considerable gaps persist in the level of legal literacy among users in various contexts, including Iran. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine the current state of legal literacy among Iranian users with respect to cybercrime and to propose a desirable model for its enhancement. More specifically, this research aims to identify the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions of legal literacy in cyberspace and to develop a strategic and applicable model grounded in empirical data. The central research question guiding this investigation is: What is the current status of legal literacy among Iranian users in dealing with cybercrime, and what components are required to design an optimal model for promoting legal literacy in this domain?

Method:

This study employed a qualitative research design. The analytical procedure was guided by the coding techniques articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1998), encompassing open, axial, and selective coding, to systematically analyze the collected data. The study population comprised experts and university professors in the fields of law and media who possessed pertinent knowledge or experience related to the research topic. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure the inclusion of well-informed individuals. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which no new concepts or insights emerged from the data. In total, 23 participants were interviewed, at which juncture data saturation was attained.

Findings:

Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently in accordance with qualitative research conventions. A total of 23 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with experts in law and media were carried out between October 2023 and June 2024, continuing until theoretical saturation was reached.

In the initial phase, the collected data were analyzed using the coding procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Through open coding, preliminary concepts were identified and extracted from the interview transcripts. These concepts were subsequently organized into subcategories and main categories during axial coding, based on conceptual similarities and interrelations. Finally, in the selective coding stage, the core category was identified, and the relationships among categories were synthesized to form a coherent conceptual framework.

The analysis yielded key dimensions of legal literacy in cyberspace, encompassing knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavioral components. Moreover, the interconnections between these dimensions and the factors influencing cybercrime prevention were conceptualized in the form of an initial analytical model. To augment the robustness of the analytical framework, relevant literature-including books, academic articles, and dissertations-was reviewed and utilized to support the interpretation of findings and the refinement of the conceptual model. Overall, the results offer a structured comprehension of the factors affecting the promotion of legal literacy among Iranian users in the context of cybercrime prevention.

Conclusion:

The findings indicate that the principal challenge of legal literacy in cyberspace is not merely a deficiency in knowledge, but rather users' inability to translate knowledge into effective action. This "knowing-acting gap" is shaped by the inherent complexity of the digital environment and the limitations of approaches that reduce legal literacy to knowledge acquisition alone.

Users' perceptions of legal provisions, trust in the legal system, and understanding of risk and responsibility significantly influence behavior. When legal norms are perceived as convoluted or ambiguous, access to information does not necessarily translate into responsible conduct. In addition, media environments and patterns of information consumption-such as the dissemination of misinformation and the prioritization of expediency over accuracy-play a pivotal role in shaping decision-making processes. The findings further underscore the limited efficacy of one-way educational approaches, emphasizing instead the value of interactive and context-sensitive learning modalities.

In conclusion, promoting legal literacy necessitates a multi-level strategy that addresses individual, structural, and media-related factors in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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