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FROM INFORMATION RESILIENCE
TO INFORMATION WELL-BEING:
A CONCEPT FOR COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION STUDIES

Abstract. The crises we face underscore the urgent need for coping competences, leading us to strive for optimal well-being. This concept is about our personal state and the critical role of information in our lives. It prompts us to consider the importance of human well-being in the information space. This reasoning encourages us to explore the concept of information well-being and its relevance to information and communication studies. This conceptual analysis is based on an initial review of definitions of related and salient terms: information resilience and information literacy, well-being, and digital well-being. A preliminary interpretation of the definitions of these terms justifies the importance of introducing the concept of information well-being, which has significant implications for research and practice, such as defining educational goals, self-assessment, and informational self-care processes, thus stressing the urgency of the topic.

Keywords: communication studies; digital well-being; information literacy; information resilience; information space; information well-being

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have faced various crises that force them to develop coping competences. We must constantly learn how to live in difficult circumstances to maintain and improve our resilience. At the same time, we have thoughts about (future) times of peace and security, as well as achieving an optimal functional state, so-called well-being.

The current era of the information society draws our attention to the critical role of information in the lives of individuals and communities. Definitions of

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the information society change over time and vary according to the research perspective adopted. For this paper, Eugene Garfield's prognostic (for the time of its writing) interpretation was chosen, which is appropriate to information science research. He considers an information society to be one "in which we take for granted the role of information as it pervades and dominates the activities of government, business and everyday life" (Garfield, 1979, p. 209). It is close to the later definition proposed by Manuel Castells: "a social structure where the sources of economic productivity, cultural hegemony and political-military power depend, fundamentally, on the capacity to retrieve, store, process and generate information and knowledge" (Castells, 1994, p. 3). Both draw attention to the crucial role of information in various aspects of social life. Information is a decisive factor in shaping human well-being within the information space. In information science, the latter is defined as "a multidimensional, dynamic, open collection of content (data and information), its carriers and users" (Kisilowska, 2011, p. 49; translation mine).

Depending on individual life circumstances, the information space is more or less identical to the general environment in which we function daily. On the one hand, the expected availability of information resources makes life easier; on the other, the absence of competence causes overload and all its negative consequences. Today, people need to search for specific information that caters to their needs while consciously avoiding redundant and harmful content. Related issues are information safety, information competence, and information resilience, which will be briefly analysed in what follows.

Another question concerns human well-being in the information space, and such aspects as the need for a concept of information well-being, particularly in information and communication research.

CONCEPTS AND STUDIES

FUNDAMENTAL FOR INFORMATION WELL-BEING

The discourse of human information well-being can be located within the framework of information behaviour research, specifically information experience, the latter interpreted as "a holistic approach to explicitly examine the human experience of information interactions, including an individual's perceptual, cognitive and embodied experience" (Hoyte, 2019, p. 413; Bruce et al., 2014). It also refers to the works demanding a more in-depth reflection on diversified information behaviour and its consequences (e.g., Huvila, 2022).

The concept of information well-being needs to be developed better in the literature. Only one attempt to define the term was found. Jian Cui (2014) discussed the strengths and weaknesses of indices to measure the information society and proposed the concept of information well-being, which can also be used for these measurements. He says, “information well-being is the satisfaction of information needs. The next higher level of information needs becomes apparent and intense until being satisfied when a lower level information need is met” (Cui, 2014, p. 111). This study does not refer to the broader information and communication studies perspective and relates the interpretation of well-being to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. However, the fulfilment of needs alone does not ensure well-being.

Information safety is one of the aspects of potential information well-being. It attracts more and more attention nowadays, when humanity faces ever-increasing information threats (Ilvonen, 2011). Information safety is “a state in which the information user does not feel threatened by exposure to low-quality information and by the loss of all or part of the information resources stored. This is accompanied by a sense of calm, confidence, and satisfaction with the level of information security experienced, as well as a belief that they have the resources (including, for example, the knowledge and skills associated with assessing information quality) necessary to take appropriate action in the face of a crisis” (Pieczka and Motylińska, 2021, p. 34; translation mine). However, both terms, information safety and information security, are discussed in the literature. Information security is perceived as protection against external threats and/or risks (e.g., Karlsson, Åström, and Karlsson, 2015; Tejay and Mohammed, 2023), while information safety focuses on internal threats and the internal feeling of being safe (Ilvonen, 2011). Both information safety and security are fundamental for information well-being; however, the former seems to convey content closer to the concept of information well-being, as will be presented later in the text.

Indisputably, information safety depends on information resilience and information literacy. Thus, we again find justification for considering and analysing the interpretation of these two terms in the context of the potential concept of information well-being.

Recently, the concept of information resilience, or the role of information in building resilience in, e.g., local communities, has become increasingly researched (e.g., Lloyd, 2013; Vårheim, 2017, 2019). The need for such studies comes directly from technological development, leading to rapid information growth and information overload, as well as political and social events such

as wars, pandemics, and the effects of natural disasters. An in-depth review of information resilience research was offered by Tairine V. Ferraz and Diogo H. Helal (2024), and a systematic approach to this concept was presented by Petri Uusikylä et al. (2024). Recent threatening circumstances and events mobilise researchers to explore this topic more (e.g., Demyanchuk, 2024; Kallunki, 2024; Mäenpää, Faehnle and Grönlund, 2024). Although Ferraz and Helal (2024, p. 18), call for a clear and single definition of information resilience there are a few widely accepted in information science, presented in the following sections.

Information literacy is a well-known concept with quite a long history (Zurkowski, 1974), often utilised as part of essential training focused on competences related to information retrieval, selection, evaluation, and application (ALA, 1989). It has received a lot of attention from scholars and practitioners, so models of information literacy and its theory have been developed (Griesbaum et al., 2024); also, the status of information literacy as a discipline have been specified (Webber and Johnston, 2017).

Two other strongly related concepts are well-being (in general) and digital well-being.

However, building information resilience cannot be an end in itself, the ultimate goal of information literacy development. We acquire them for a purpose. Considering the analogy with health, this purpose is to maintain an optimal state of the subject's relationship with information – that is, to achieve information well-being. The analysis of these four concepts and their interpretations is developed further in the following section.

This work proposes a concept of information well-being as a term unique to information and communication studies. As a conceptual analysis, it was carried out by deductive reasoning, involving a semantic analysis of the meaning of the selected terms. Two assumptions were made:

1. The existing terms in the conceptual apparatus of the information and communication studies name specific skills and attitudes, but there is no indication of the ultimate goal of possessing and developing them.

2. Such a goal may be information well-being, which needs to be defined.

Given these assumptions, two sets of terms and their definitions were selected for a preliminary analysis:

1. Terms specific to information and communication studies, directly or indirectly related to information well-being: information resilience and information literacy.

2. An umbrella term for well-being and another term related to its specific aspect but closely linked to information and communication studies: digital well-being.

This preliminary set of related and essential concepts could be expanded, but this calls for further research.

SEMANTIC CONTEXT FOR INFORMATION WELL-BEING AND ITS DEFINITION

This section discusses the four concepts (information resilience, information literacy, well-being, and digital well-being) identified above as providing the semantic context for the new term. A definition of each and examples of current research trends are briefly presented. A critical or comparative analysis of the meaning of each of these terms falls beyond the scope of this text, as they have already been addressed by other authors (as indicated in the literature review). Therefore, this section's purpose is to outline the framework and the basis for the concept of information well-being.

Information resilience has been researched more often in the last decade. Among the most frequently cited definitions is the one of Annemaree Lloyd, who states that “information resilience therefore can be described as an outcome of IL [information literacy]. Workers who develop information resilience have the capacity to connect and engage with information in order to solve problems, adapt to change or novel situations, transform workplace practices and reduce possible sources of conflict or stress that arise when there is uncertainty about the type of information that is required, or where to locate it in the information landscape” (Lloyd, 2013, p. 225). On this approach, information resilience is an effect of having a particular set of competences. Lloyd also points out that these competences are used to cope with situations that are new, difficult, or challenging in some way, involving the destruction, loss, or reformulation of previously held knowledge and information (e.g., Lloyd, 2015; Lloyd, Pilerot, and Hultgren, 2017). Two other approaches to this concept should also be mentioned here. Sara Ahlryd and Fredrik Hanell, referring to library services in hospitals, define information resilience more actively, as “a process where adaptive information capacities are combined and utilised to enable functioning and adaptation following change and disruption” (2024, p. 268). In turn, Petri Uusikylä et al. see it as “an organization's ability to effectively respond and adapt to disruptions and challenges in their information environment” (2024, p. 3).

Information resilience was also discussed in information science by Andreas Vårheim (2017, 2019), Sabuj Kumar Chaudhuri (2021), Andrii E. Lebid, Mykola

S. Nazarov, and Natal'ya A. Shevchenko (2021). The contribution of Valeriia A. Kapustina, Elena A. Paltseva, and Nadejda O. Sreschikova (2023) is essential in analysing the concept from a psychological perspective. They considered "information resilience as an aspect of personal resilience in information interaction, i.e., on the one hand, it is a characteristic of the perception of information by the subject and its influence on the emotional and cognitive sphere of the personality, and on the other – the intensity and duration of information functioning in individual cognitive space.... Also, authors suppose that information resilience depends on many factors such as personal characteristics (anxiety, personal resilience, ways of coping, dependence on social networks, etc.) and environment (agents of socialisation, reference groups, and so on), which demands an empirical verification" (Kapustina et al., 2023, p. 1963). This contribution seems very useful as it tries to cover its multidimensionality: individual, personal, or group dimension, quantitative and qualitative nature, or technological (digital) aspect.

Considering these approaches, information resilience can be perceived as a specific ability directly resulting from information literacy and its effective application in demanding circumstances. The very emergence of this term (and this ability), directly and indirectly, demonstrates the existence of factors in the information space that disrupt a certain "information homeostasis", so actions are needed to restore the balance. Consequently, we can assume the existence of such a desirable state of equilibrium, which is part of information well-being. Information resilience can only be developed through information literacy. In contrast, information literacy has been perceived as an indispensable condition for information resilience (e.g., Lloyd, 2013). It refers to the competences to recognise information needs, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information – as defined by the American Library Association (1989), but also to the interpretation of information literacy offered by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals: "the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society" (CILIP, 2018, p. 3). The latter opens the perspective to handle problems, to adapt and exist in new, complex, and surprising information spaces, and to combine it with effective participation in social life. Colleen Addison and Eric Meyers (2013) offer three different perspectives on information literacy: skills specific to an information era, cultivation of habits of mind, and engagement in information-rich social practices. Information competence thus makes it possible, at

various levels, to meet information needs and cope with the challenges brought about by everyday life and extraordinary circumstances.

The term well-being describes a desirable, somewhat ideal state, the goal of many activities. The basic definition is “the state of feeling healthy and happy” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). We may associate the term with the WHO-promoted definition of health, according to which “health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2024b). WHO defines well-being as “quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose” (WHO, 2024a).

Over the years, successive attempts have been made in different disciplines to define specific approaches to well-being. Quite obviously, many of these were and are proposed by representatives of the health sciences. For example, Juliet Michaelson, Sorchá Mahony, and Jonathan Schifferes argue that “well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and social level and how they evaluate their lives as a whole” (Michaelson, Mahony, and Schifferes, 2012, p. 6). Gemma Simons and David S. Baldwin recognise that “wellbeing is a state of positive feelings and meeting full potential in the world. It can be measured subjectively and objectively, using a salutogenic approach” (Simons and Baldwin, 2021). However, researchers still claim that there needs to be a clear definition considering all its elements and characteristics. They also consider this an advantage due to the concept’s applicability to research in different disciplines with specific populations (Bautista et al., 2023; Jarden and Roache, 2023). This last statement confirms the need to introduce the concept of informational well-being in information and communication research. A few examples cited above for defining well-being show that it is not just about fulfilling human needs but about achieving and maintaining an optimal state in various spheres of life.

Digital well-being is a phenomenon that is often defined and studied. One can start with UNESCO’s definition of digital well-being as “the enhancement of the well-being of users through their usage of digital media” (UNESCO, n.d.). In line with the above suggestions, a definition showing digital well-being as a part/aspect of general well-being, linked explicitly to the use of technological solutions, is offered by Katja Rogers: “a subset of wellbeing insofar as it is influenced by digital technologies and human-computer interaction” (Rogers, 2019, p. 1). Christopher Burr and Luciano Floridi treat digital well-being as “the impact of digital technologies on what it means to live a life that is good for a human being in an information society” (Burr, Taddeo, and Floridi, 2020, p. 2313),

while Mariek Vanden Abeele considers it as “a subjective individual experience of optimal balance between the benefits and drawbacks obtained from mobile connectivity. This experiential state consists of affective and cognitive appraisals of integrating digital connectivity into ordinary life. People achieve digital wellbeing when experiencing maximal controlled pleasure and functional support, together with minimal loss of control and functional impairment” (Vanden Abeele, 2021, p. 938). Leyla Dewitz (2022) proved that this term had been applied primarily in research as a practice of health information behaviour, and health information practices influence digital well-being practices.

In light of the above considerations, how can information well-being be described? It constitutes one aspect of well-being in the general sense. Referring to the three basic dimensions of well-being interpreted as optimal health status, one could point to the informational character of mental well-being (such as freedom from information overload, elements of information resilience), social well-being (also referred to as information resilience) and physical well-being (if the compulsion to use information causes physical health problems). Information well-being is the goal of information practices related to training and updating information competences and activities undertaken in information resilience.

Thus, information well-being can be defined as the optimal state of accessibility and use of information resources, which improves the quality of life and enables full participation in society.

It assumes a high quality of information life, using information that satisfies a person or a population. It requires information literacy and behaviour, which protect against information overload and its consequences, negative information phenomena (fake news, disinformation), and pursue one’s goals and promote personal well-being in the three primary areas of life: mental, physiological, and social. Information well-being may be linked to digital well-being. This relationship is similar to the one between information literacy and digital literacy, i.e., they are complementary and partially overlapping but different in nature (Cordell, 2013). Information literacy focuses on recognising information needs, careful retrieval and selection of information, and evaluation of its quality and credibility. In contrast, digital literacy refers primarily to using digital formats of content, mainly on the Internet (Koltay, 2011). Information literacy also embraces information searching, evaluation, and usage available in non-digital media. Thus, the scale of the interdependence between information and digital literacy is determined by the specifics of the information environment in which an entity operates.

Information well-being is the effect of the synergy of information literacy and information resilience. It enables a healthy and satisfying participation in the information society. It is an optimal status of participation in an information space.

POTENTIAL OF THE “INFORMATION WELL-BEING” CONCEPT

The proposed definition is preliminary. It indicates that information well-being can only be achieved with information literacy and information resilience combined. The analysis confirmed the assumptions made at the outset, indicating the need for “closure,” that is, specifying the purpose of these competences and attitudes.

However, this definition does not specify their level or type. Defining unified, optimal levels of competence for all members of society is inconsistent with their needs and, therefore, misses the point (Kisilowska, Jasiewicz, and Mierzecka, 2016). While it is possible to identify the minimum level, without which it is not easy to function at a basic level as a fully-fledged citizen (use systems related to health care, civil rights, finance, etc.), the acquisition and improvement of skills at subsequent levels is related to individual needs. The point of reference here is the theory on the concept of relativity in cultural participation (Krajewski, 2013). The author draws attention to the need to individualise cultural competence training. It also applies to information competence and, consequently, information resilience.

The openness and generality of the definition of information well-being provide a forum for further questions and discussions. Given the doubts about the correctness of defining well-being, can we speak of information well-being as an attainable goal? Is the potential which people strive to attain every day possible? Is achieving optimal competence and resilience in all possible areas and aspects of life possible? What can be done so that the need for lifelong learning in this area can avoid frustration and discouragement?

Applying the subject’s criterion to achieve such informational well-being raises further questions about its scope/dimension. For we can, at least tentatively, point to individual well-being (and further, the personal perspective, one’s well-being, or the well-being of another participant in the information space), or collective well-being, including group or public well-being (according to the size of the analysed group).

The aforementioned “optimality” of participation in the information society is also subject to the principle of relationality due to the different situations and needs of users of the information space; however, as with other such goals to be achieved in individual and social life, attainment of one’s well-being must not come at the expense of the well-being of others.

Another issue is the factors affecting information well-being and the actions taken to achieve it. Considering their various aspects (external and internal, positive and negative factors), at least a few should be identified, providing this is not a closed list. Thus, factors influencing the shape and quality of an entity’s information well-being include:

- environment, participants in the information space;
- disinformation, misinformation;
- problematic use of the Internet;
- information overload;
- information competence;
- information resilience;
- attention to information space (in various roles).

Their connections and impact on information well-being have been discussed above.

Information well-being is also worth seeing and analysing as a three-element system (analogous to well-being *per se*) – including mental, physiological, and social spheres.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed definition of information well-being comes from the logical inference based on selected, semantically related terms. It is a consequence of the natural development of analytical thinking that has already been applied to information resilience and information competence (e.g., Lloyd, 2013; Lloyd, Pilerot, and Hultgren, 2017). The research section showed that information well-being can be a goal, complement, and effect of training information literacy and developing information resilience. The impact of these (and more) factors on information well-being can and should be viewed and studied from psychological, physiological, and social aspects (WHO, 2024a; Michaelson, Mahony, and Schifferes, 2012). The shape and direction of such research will depend on the interpretations adopted – for example, information literacy in an applied

perspective (ALA, 1989) seems to apply first to the study of psychological and physiological well-being, but to its social aspect in a civic perspective (CILIP, 2018).

This definition also corresponds to the perceived need in the literature for a differentiated view of well-being tailored to the discipline and population (Bautista et al., 2023; Jarden and Roache, 2023). As a term introduced within information and communication studies, it is based on the conceptual framework operating in the discipline. It also clearly includes digital well-being (e.g., Vanden Abeele, 2021).

Considering the above, the study's assumptions have been met, and the goal has been achieved. Nevertheless, the presented research is not without limitations, such as the definition's high generality, making it useful for other applications but requires elaboration each time. Understanding of information well-being will change following the dynamics of social life, which also involves observation and adaptation. The study proposes certain factors affecting the state of information well-being but without specifying the scale and consequences of their impact. The latter requires further in-depth research. The subjectivity of information well-being, related to the subject to be affected (individual, collective, and the following), was also mentioned, and this needs to be clarified in further research on specific samples.

Both further research and educational or practical applications of the concept of information well-being can be suggested. The former refers primarily to information and communication studies, focusing, among others, on the effectiveness of information literacy training or information resilience strategies. It can also be used as a determinant for information spaces or as a subject of study concerning different populations. It raises the question of whether information well-being is negotiable and whether we assume that objective or subjective interpretations are possible. Considering education and practical applications, one should mention information well-being as a purpose of educational activities or a point of reference in self-assessment and individual care.

This preliminary discussion of the concept is an introduction to further research. It requires a deeper grounding in information and communication theories, verification of research on specific populations, their needs and behaviour, and an understanding of information well-being.

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OD ODPORNOŚCI INFORMACYJNEJ DO DOBROSTANU INFORMACYJNEGO:
NOWE POJĘCIE W TERMINOLOGII BADAŃ
NAD KOMUNIKACJĄ I INFORMACJĄ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Sytuacje kryzysowe kształtują potrzebę rozwoju kompetencji potrzebnych do radzenia sobie w takich okolicznościach. Wywołują myśli dotyczące sytuacji optymalnych, określanych mianem dobrostanu, w tym także specyficznego dobrostanu człowieka w przestrzeni informacyjnej. To w konsekwencji prowadzi do pytania o zasadność zaproponowania koncepcji dobrostanu informacyjnego i jej potencjalne zastosowania w badaniach komunikologicznych i informatologicznych. Opisana w tekście praca koncepcyjna oparta jest na wstępnym przeglądzie definicji par terminów nadrzędnych i pokrewnych: odporność informacyjna i kompetencje informacyjne oraz dobrostan i dobrostan cyfrowy. Przedstawiona interpretacja tych terminów uzasadnia potrzebę wprowadzenia nowego pojęcia dobrostanu informacyjnego, zarówno dla celów badawczych, jak i praktycznych, m.in. jako punktu odniesienia przy definiowaniu celów edukacyjnych lub w procesach samooceny i samoopieki informacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrostan; dobrostan cyfrowy; dobrostan informacyjny; kompetencje informacyjne; nauki o komunikacji społecznej i mediach; odporność informacyjna; przestrzeń informacyjna