

The War On Knowledge: Being A Social Media Literate

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Abstract

With the widespread use of social media environments, the information pollution experienced at the global level has increased dramatically. The most important feature of these environments, which have user groups from different ages, professions, income and education groups, is that they allow users to produce content. At this point, a number of problems arise. The fact that all account owners produce content freely and unlimitedly, regardless of their age and educational levels, creates information confusion. The absence of any control mechanism as to who shares true or false information also requires individual responsibilities. Among these responsibilities of individuals, the awareness of being a media literate comes first. In addition, being citizens with high social sensitivity is an important part of this process. Having the ability to correctly read and interpret social media environments is as important as understanding and interpreting traditional media correctly. This is an educational process. This education will be possible with the initiatives of relevant institutions, especially schools. The main purpose of this study is to draw attention to the sensitivity of evaluating the information in social media environments and adding individual information to these environments.

Keywords: Disinformation; Information; Social Media; Media Literacy; New Media Literacy

1. Conceptual Framework

Digitalized culture has brought about the important problems of today. In the social life surrounded by developing and rapidly advancing internet technologies like a spiral, citizen participation in all fields from economy to education, from health to politics has increased considerably compared to the past. On the other hand, Media Literacy, as a concept that authorized institutions and organizations need to manage the process, has also come to the fore in terms of digital environments. Media literacy conceptually covers all of the content published through information and information technologies. Although the traditional media literacy concept has been included in educational processes for many years, social media literacy is still a new concept. The relevant literature offers many different definitions of this concept for traditional environments. As Kahne et al. (2012) cite, media literacy can be defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993: 7). The concept describes a set of capacities for media consumption and creation that a person can acquire. Digital media literacy, on the other hand, expands the traditional understanding of media literacy to include the new skills needed to navigate today's new media environment, and it also includes creative production and teaching on how to critically evaluate and use information (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006).

It has a more cognitive meaning beyond the literacy structure that occurs with the combination of reading and writing actions. It includes the ability to create correct texts while producing content as well as understanding what someone reads, watches or sees. As it is known, social media environments, unlike traditional ones, allow all users to freely produce content from their own accounts. Literacy becomes an important consciousness in terms of these environments, which make it possible for the content that is used and produced in an interactive way to reach the masses without any approval or control. In this context, media literacy, as a concept that serves a number of purposes such as accessing, analyzing, evaluating and transmitting messages (Schmidt, 2013; 295), is important in terms of correctly interpreting the media environment that has changed radically in the last few decades (Valtonen et al., 2019; 20). The fact that media literacy education holds great promise in terms of its ability to shape media knowledge, attitudes and behaviors and to encourage an active and critical stance towards media (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015) increases this importance. In today's mediaized society, media literacy education and awareness, which include basic concepts such as media advocacy, media actions and social change (Hobbs, 1998; 60), digital technologies and media play central roles in learning, well-being, daily life and participation throughout the individual's life (Rasi et al. ., 2019; 1), and become determinant in the level of exposure and influence of individuals to the media. As reported in the study by Fedorov, UNESCO has drawn the framework of the concept of media literacy. According to the definition by UNESCO, Media Education

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- deals with all communication media and includes the printed word and graphics, the sound, the still as well as the moving image, delivered on any kind of technology;
- enables people to gain understanding of the communication media used in their society and the way they operate and to acquire skills using these media to communicate with others;
- ensures that people learn how to:
 - * analyse, critically reflect upon and create media texts;
 - * identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and/or cultural interests, and their contexts;
 - * interpret the messages and values offered by the media;
 - * select appropriate media for communicating their own messages or stories and for reaching their intended audience;
 - * gain or demand access to media for both reception and production (Fedorov, 2015; 5).

These gains obtained thanks to media literacy education help forming a more conscious audience, and makes developing an awareness at the point of content production possible. The increasing and widespread use of the internet and developing social media networks in recent years have increased the participation of all demographic groups in the process. It is possible to talk about many dangers that adults, as well as children and young people, who are exposed to digital environments, face. For example, the prevalence of pornographic content that young people are exposed to in media is extremely striking. Crabbe and Flood (2021; 1) have stated that young people are widely accepted as an important part of their sexual socialization and media environments, and further the results have indicated that this acceptance has become an increasing problem with the ease of access to digital media. In addition, social environments have become an important guide for personal development and the formation of perspectives in a wide range from education to politics, from health to environmental awareness. Furthermore, the results of another study indicated that health professionals stated that the media has a significant impact on the health of young people in recent years (Bergsma & Carney, 2008). The study highlighted that public health professionals use many strategies to address the effects of media on health. Strategies such as regulating media content, limiting children's media use and social marketing have traditionally been used, but media literacy education has emerged as an important precautionary and supervisory mechanism in the last 20 years to regulate 'unhealthy' programs or limit media use (Heins & Cho, 2002). This enlargement and spread led to the formation of an "information crowd". It has become extremely difficult to distinguish between the real and the unreal content in the information. Considering both the global and national conditions we are currently in, individuals need to be literate in order to resist the large number of fake news and disinformation in traditional and new media environments.

Despite the importance of the concept of literacy, which is the main theme of this study, in modern social life and the necessity of including it in education at all levels, it still is a neglected situation.

Communication, which occurs very frequently in a digital environment, is among the most basic and indispensable elements of meeting the basic life expectations of an individual. Considering that communication is an important part of the socialization process in all areas, the figure below summarizes the formation of the self. The figure in which the self, which has an important role in the socialization of the individual, takes place in the main axis, also draws attention to the fact that the basic context of the factors affecting the development of intelligence and physical condition is communication. The figure below lists the elements of the socialization process of the individual. The effect of the social environment in which communication plays a leading role in the formation of the self is remarkable.

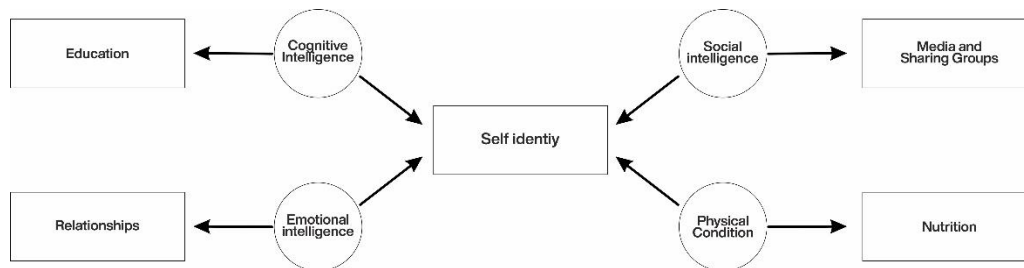


Figure 1. Elements of the individual's socialization process

There are a number of features that should be known about communication messages, which are important determinants of an individual's socialization process. In this sense, based on the conceptualization of media literacy, as Chen (2007; 90) cites, The Kellner and Share, (2005) and Center for Media Literacy (2005) propose the five basic concepts of media literacy as follows:

1. All media message are “constructed”.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

The same study also lists the questions to be answered in the contents of the media as follows: Who created this message?, What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?, How might different people understand this message differently than me?, What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? and Why is this message being sent?. The answers to these questions direct the individual to become media literate. In addition Bowen (2006, as cited in Chen 2007; 90) proposes the following basic features which increase the attractiveness and the possibility of being affected

by the contents of media education: media dominate our political and cultural lives, almost all information beyond direct experience is "mediated", media provide powerful models for values and behavior and media influence us without our being aware. In this vein, the suggested answers and the resulting literacy skills lay the groundwork for the desired result. Stein and Prewett state that media literacy education is related to social studies for various reasons. Among these reasons, they further state that the media provides compelling fiction and non-fiction narratives about people, places and events (2009; 132). In addition, the fact that media contents are completely related to vital processes from economy to politics, from education to weather, science, technology and even entertainment are among these reasons.

2. Reading Social Media Correctly

Since the new millennium is the age of information and technology, it is extremely easy to access all kinds of content, information, news and comments. It is just as difficult to understand what is right and what is wrong among such intense content. For this reason, the issue of social (new) media literacy is on the agenda of the whole world. As educators and media owners/gatekeepers explore new capacities and limits of the internet and social media, new visions of digital literacy are emerging (Cappello et al., 2011; 1), and challenges related to assessment have been largely ignored in the media literacy literature (Schilder et al., 2016; 1). These difficulties increase significantly when we evaluate them in terms of social media. While it is possible to supervise traditional media environments through supreme boards established in every country (The Supreme Board of Radio and Television in Turkey), this supervision is not common in digital platforms. In Turkey, an institution that will inspire other world countries is being established with the "social media presidency" proposal that came to the agenda as of 2021. In addition, many years ago in the United States, despite all the rhetoric, most school-based media literacy initiatives were based on the solo efforts of a single teacher in a school or district (Hobbs & Frost, 1998; 124), however; in the new millennium conditions, all the countries of the world have attached great importance to this issue. Education is essential for the correct perception and interpretation of not only media content, but also politics, economy and cultural developments and changes. The increase in the number of citizens with knowledge and awareness in these areas will also make it possible to filter information correctly. In this context, the module published by UNESCO (2021), which relates media and information literacy ecology with different concepts, summarizes these concepts as follows:

- Media literacy
- Information literacy
- Freedom of expression and information literacy
- Library literacy

- News literacy
- Computer literacy
- Internet literacy
- Digital literacy
- Cinema literacy
- Games literacy
- Television literacy, advertising literacy

The training and awareness-raising activities organized for each of the aforementioned concepts have made it possible to ensure the correct use and consumption of all kinds of media. Internet-based interactive platforms that allow user interaction continue to develop and change day by day. As stated by Cohen and Mihailidis (2013; 4), as the internet continues to evolve technologically, organizational tools for user experience evolve as well, and today users have accounts on numerous platforms where they organize information. All information and content produced, shared, disseminated and accessed in all of these accounts is devoid of control. Therefore, it is extremely prone to disinformation, fake news and misdirection. In order to better understand the importance of being literate regarding the above-mentioned concepts, the relationship between these concepts is visualized in the figure below (UNESCO, 2021):



Figure 2. Media Literacy and related concepts

Here, the figure includes an extremely wide spectrum, from news to games, from cinema to computer systems, and from advertising to media. This literacy ecology, which covers all

the content delivered to the masses by common and digital media, should be well understood to manage information correctly. Today, after several decades of widespread internet access and the emergence of social media and smartphones, a new media structure can be noticed. While the multitude of platforms and services available on the internet have created tremendous opportunities, particularly in the hopes of increasing citizens' democratic participation, they have also created dilemmas (Carlsson, 2019; 12) because in the participatory culture that is now emerging, there is a new media landscape in which average consumers can “archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (Hobbs & Jensen, 2013; 5). Considering this participatory culture, it is important for individuals to be aware of these concepts, as can be seen in the figure that includes the elements of both media literacy and information literacy recommended by UNESCO (2021), which gives importance to the subject with training activities that clarify the concept of media and information literacy since being literate in these concepts aims to provide the individual with competencies to make informed decisions, learn about the world around them, create a sense of community, maintain public discourse and participate in lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2021). The table below explains the expected outputs from the concept of literacy and the subject.

Information Literacy



Media Literacy²

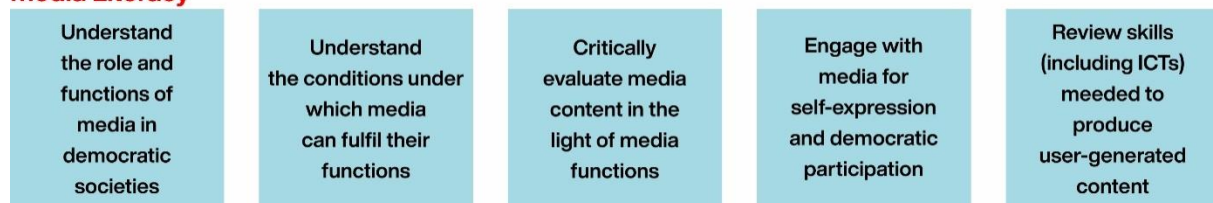


Figure 3. Expected outputs from Media and Information Literacy

In the process that starts with defining the information need, literacy skills are needed in many steps from organizing information to accessing the information sought, understanding, interpreting and comprehending the information. Gray (2005; 223) states that in the process of media consumption, media literacy is vital in terms of one's understanding of the medium, what one knows or expects about its structure, genres and expressions, and how one is trained to understand its messages, style and rhetoric, and further underlines the necessity of determining which interpretations to make from any text.

Although computer and internet technology was initially understood as an important key technology for economic growth, today, with the awareness of the cultural importance of computer-based information and communication (Tulodziecki & Grafe, 2012; 49), the impact direction of social environments has also changed. Since the digital world is full of both

possibilities and dangers with the rules of engagement emerging as we progress (Graber & Mendoza, 2012; 89), it has been inevitable for media educators to develop different approaches to media literacy education over the years (De Abreu vd., 2017; 1). Similarly, different approaches are needed for social media literacy because while it is possible to reach methods and information in many different sources in the literature for the analysis of information, texts and news in the traditional media, there is a serious shortcoming for social media environments in this sense. In this sense, the transformation of cultures from an industrial age to an information age is important in terms of the combination of a new literacy and a new learning style in the 21st century (Thoman & Jolls, 2005; 180). The researcher believes that there are some points that should be considered in order to distinguish between disinformation and correct information in a social media content or post. These points are:

- Taking care of the security of personal data
- Correct management of time spent on the internet
- Investigation of the source of the content
- Verification of content accuracy
- Showing sensitivity in sharing positive and negative contents
- Referring to different sources while interpreting the accessed information
- Developing critical thinking capacity
- Being conscious in the use and consumption of media

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Unlike numerous studies in the literature on media literacy, the current study puts emphasis on the increasing importance of social media literacy in recent years and the power of user awareness to play an active role in the new world order. Everyone knows that these platforms, which allow users to produce content and access all kinds of content freely, are becoming more and more dangerous. Although its correct and conscious use will provide numerous benefits, its unconscious and wrong use will be disastrous. Especially considering that individuals whose childhood and youth periods coincided with the digital age will become adults in the future, the situation becomes dire. Considering the fact that today's children and youth will be tomorrow's adults and elders, social media literacy has a much more critical importance for young people and children. It is obvious that the coming years will offer even more digital lives due to both mandatory and optional use of internet-enabled platforms, which have become basic necessities in every field from country management to environmental awareness, from nature protection to education and health.

Based on the knowledge that texts, news, visuals and content, which are expected to undergo structural transformation in the coming years, are designed with the aim of creating

serious effects on target audiences, and that the messages in all media channels are structured messages, "source" comes to the fore as an important communication element. Whether the fact that the source is reliable means that the content is precise and correct information is another topic of discussion today. Can we say that the more reliable and real the "source", which is the initiator of the communication process in both common (traditional) and social media environments, is, the higher the probability of the reliability of the communication content becomes? It becomes difficult to distinguish it due to the disadvantages of the new age has brought about, which we refer to as information crowding or information pollution. Media literacy training activities make it possible to acquire the skills needed to conduct research on and question process that needs to be done about whether an information is correct, logical or real.

For these reasons, all countries of the world, especially Turkey, need to prepare environments where traditional and social media environments are used consciously for a number of different purposes such as increasing the level of social welfare and peace and ensuring their national and global security. The inclusion of detailed lessons on the subject in schools at very young ages is a measure that will be beneficial in the long run. In addition, trainings and awareness-raising activities to be provided by organizations such as relevant institutions, non-governmental organizations and universities will also contribute positively to the process for adults.

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