

**COMMUNICATION**

**THE ROLE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN SETTING MEDIA AWARENESS: A STUDY TOWARDS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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**Başak GEZMEN<sup>1</sup>** ORCID ID: 0000-0002\*9953-228X  
**İhsan EKEN<sup>2</sup>** ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0401-8545

**ABSTRACT**

Technology always develops and changes at a dizzying pace and causes mobile devices to evolve as well. Mobile devices that have grown to be extensions of individuals, became indispensable elements of daily life. So much so that the individual has become unable to live without smartphones, smartwatches, or tablets. In this sense, the individual who is consistently in a digital environment is also continuously exposed to digital content. Therefore, individuals are becoming increasingly vulnerable to media. The concept of media literacy is now being discussed through digital literacy. This concept serves as a protective armor especially for children and young people against negative messages coming from media. The present study aims to evaluate university students' awareness of media literacy with a focus on the learning outcomes of media literacy courses. Through focus group work, the differences between students who take and do not take a media literacy course will be discussed in terms of the correct analysis of media messages, fictionality, and digital literacy awareness.

**Keywords:** *Media Literacy, Digitalization, Awareness, Education*

**İLETİŞİM**

**MEDYA OKURYAZARLIĞININ MEDYA FARKINDALIĞI OLUŞUMUNDAKİ ROLÜ: ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNE YÖNELİK BİR ÇALIŞMA**

**ÖZET**

Teknolojinin gelişimi her daim baş döndürücü bir hızla değişerek ve dönüşerek mobil aygıtlarında evrimleşmesini sağlamaktadır. Bireylerin birer uzantısı olarak varlık gösteren mobil cihazlar, günlük yaşamın vazgeçilmez birer unsuru haline gelmiştir. Öyle ki birey, akıllı telefonsuz, akıllı saatsiz, tabletsiz yani dijitalsiz yaşamayaz durumdadır. Bu bağlamda sürekli dijital ortamda kalan birey sürekli de dijital içeriklere de maruz kalmaktadır. Bu durumda bireyler giderek medyaya karşı savunmasız hale gelmektedir. Medya okuryazarlığı kavramı günümüzde dijital okuryazarlık üzerinden tartışılmakta, medyadan gelen olumsuz iletilere karşı özellikle çocuk ve genç kitle üzerinde koruyucu bir zırh vazifesi görmektedir. Çalışmada, medya okuryazarlığı derslerinin kazanımları ve becerileri üzerinden üniversite öğrencileri özelinde genel bir farkındalık değerlendirmesi yapılacaktır. Yapılan fokus grup çalışmaları ekseninde öğrencilerin medya okuryazarlığı dersini alan ve almayan öğrenciler arasındaki medya iletilerini doğru çözümleme, kurgusallık, dijital okuryazarlık farkındalıkları tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler::** *Medya okuryazarlığı, Dijitalleşme, Farkındalık, Eğitim*

<sup>1</sup> Assist. Prof. Istanbul Medipol University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, Istanbul-Turkey, bgezmen@medipol.edu.tr

<sup>2</sup> Assist. Prof. Istanbul Medipol University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, Istanbul-Turkey, ieken@medipol.edu.tr

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Media literacy studies in the world and Turkey is becoming increasingly important. Although it has not been a long time since Potter and Thai (2016) 's search on Google and Google Scholar with the keyword media literacy, there is a big difference between current data and past work. The results that Google shows for the keyword 'media literacy' have increased from 17.4 million to 139 million while the results that Google Scholar shows for the same keywords have risen from 1.5 million to 2.4 million. This increase in numbers is valuable data that shows the importance of media literacy in our daily life and academic studies.

While media messages seem to express a straight meaning, they are shaped by many variables. Media messages shaped by factors such as ideological elements, commercial concerns, etc., do not always present the facts as they are. In other words, the media can overshadow the truth by presenting a simulated world. The media is the authority that determines for us what is more important or what is not. In our daily life, especially in print media, we can see that the headlines or subheadings shown in the first page of some newspapers are on the inner pages of other newspapers. This example is the main indicator of the power of media in agenda setting. In other words, the gatekeepers of media are the real authority in determining the daily agenda for us. When discussed in this context, the basic factors such as examining, understanding and interpreting the news in media become more important. Media literacy aims to raise individuals who criticize, investigate and discuss in spite of the negative features media. The ultimate purpose is creating individuals who analyze media correctly, produce media messages and content. A media literate person is someone who both observes and shares while producing at the same time. Media literacy education is very important in today's world. Subjects such as characteristics of media literacy, media literacy studies, representation and relationships of women and children on media, digital literacy, new communication technologies and social movements, media and ethics etc. are within the scope of education.

As part of the study, a focus group was conducted with the students. Although the focus group method is believed to have lost its importance due to technology whether it is neuroscience or the internet, the unpredictability and possible insights presented by face-to-face interviews and group dynamics in researches still retain their value. Not only do they remain valuable, but also the culture of consultancy rising out of focus groups is more vivid and more diverse than ever, and as consumers and citizens, it holds a much larger space in our daily lives. (Featherstone, 2019). Firstly, a focus group study according to certain criteria will be conducted with the students who do not take the media literacy course, and the general awareness of the participants towards digital literacy will be evaluated. After that, a different focus group study will be conducted on the participants of the same group after they've completed media literacy, in order to evaluate the role of the class in bringing about awareness. Furthermore, discussions will focus on the inclusion of the media literacy course in the future into the whole education life starting from primary school to university as

a compulsory course and the contributions of the course to individuals' ability to analyze, criticize and interpret various media contents.

## **2. MEDIA LITERACY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF AGENDA-SETTING POWER AND FICTIONALITY OF MEDIA**

Mainstream mass media studies focus on the effects of mass media. According to the hypodermic needle theory, one of these approaches based on the linear causality understanding, the messages sent from the mass media are instantly effective on individuals just like a needle into the skin, or a bullet into the head. In these approaches, the masses are seen as herds guided by the shepherds. Economic, political and intellectual elites can effectively direct individuals through the media. With the current tastes created by mass culture and popular culture products (Yaylagül, 2010, 53), the masses are stupified, and a constant need to consume is created. In the 1970s, Elihu Katz, Denis McQuail, and Lazarsfeld began to discuss the answers to the questions of 'what individuals do with the media' in the light of their work. This approach focuses on 'what individuals do with the media' rather than 'what the media does to individuals.' Individuals use the media to fulfill some of their needs. For example, individuals who want to meet their entertainment needs prefer to listen to music, and individuals who want to meet the news and information needs prefer to watch news from the television or to read the news in print media (Bourse & Yücel, 2012, 91).. While addressing the uses and gratifications theory over new media, Güngör emphasizes that the majority of the individuals meet their social relationship needs through the opportunities in a reciprocal relationship with the video and audio provided by the Internet environment. At this point, though indirectly, the media allows a combination of fiction and reality. So, there is passivity. The individual in front of the television watches the options he or she found most appropriate among the choices offered passively. In the Internet environment, on the other hand, the individual can efficiently meet his/her needs through mutual interaction, however, it should be taken into account that the whole of society is not accessible. (Güngör, 2011, 110-111). In this context, it should not be overlooked that the 'uses and gratifications theory' assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media but rather, they have an active role their relationships with media (Yaylagül, 2010, s. 71). The question of what individuals do with the media, i.e., what they use the media for, is in parallel with the media literacy approach. Media literacy is an approach that aims to protect children and young individuals from inappropriate media messages, which can be highly effective on them (İnceoğlu, 2007, 22). In other words, media literacy serves as a shield that protects against the bad effects of the media.

Media acts as an authority that sets the agenda on our behalf. Defining the media's agenda-setting function, Cohen emphasizes the incredible success of media in determining what people think and how much they think about it (McCombs & Shaw, 2009, 128). With the departure from the Lazerfeldian approaches focusing on short-term and only individual selectivity in the 1970s, the focus started to shift towards the long-term effects of the media on society. Agenda-setting theory is a "hierarchy of

priorities” (Maigret, 2012, 255). There is a sequence of what is more important and what is less important. Evidence of an agenda-setting approach that has been important in communication theories since the 1970s may not be conclusive, but there is supportive evidence to be taken seriously. The concept also brought forward some important issues related to responsibility. At this point, the topics or headlines that journalists highlight and ‘label’ when describing events may have an impact on what the public pays attention to with regard to the events. The media, especially during the election periods, can highlight the characteristics of some candidates and ignore other candidates and support the construction of a specific image for a candidate (Severin & Tankard, 1994, 399). Stating that journalists do not form a homogeneous whole, Ramonet argues that social class differences, ideological differences, and conflicts about professional ethics separate them. The existence of a general awareness can be underlined. However, in addition to the responsibility of the publisher, the individuals (as ‘the media is not reliable enough’ discourse is always stressed) should be sensitive to the issue. In other words, individuals should be active, not passive, in the search for news. Ignacio Ramonet, on the axis of the fictional structure of the media, argues not to be content with the news programs based only on entertainment and leisure time-filling (Ramonet, 2000, 65-66). Rigel argues that the media creates communicative inactivity instead of encouraging interpersonal communication with its function of agenda-setting and supports a kind of aphasic (inability to speak) structure. The subjects whose importance is determined by the media can be kept in the foreground and others can be ignored. Even if the media shows what it is presenting, the new presentation it represents follows its presentation. This is the loss of memory (Rigel, 2000, 41-42). The media actively creates an agenda for organizations. At this point, the public should be informed and encouraged on important issues such as education and health. An awareness of addiction, violence, etc. should be established in public and accurate information should be given. Together with the agenda, the mass media also give opinions to the public. Especially in some periods, media should not deviate from the objectivity, should not abuse the trust of public, and broadcast without being a party (Rigel, 2000, 26-27).

Today, the media is among the most influential institutions with its agenda-setting power and manipulation skill. Baudrillard emphasizes that all media are the fictional world. Everything we see in areas of life is a simulation. Communication is everywhere and in everything. In our world which Baudrillard calls “the world of objects,” there are capitalist system-oriented simulacra. Baudrillard focuses on social reading codes and gives importance to changing these codes. He underlines the elimination of the line between the signifier and the signified and the not submitting to the symbolic order. According to the theorist, the most significant disease of today’s society is the production of truth. He advocates the claim that material production has turned into a hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 2005, 199-202). In today’s world, the number of news has increased, but the rate of meaning has decreased. News does not produce meaning; instead, it disappears in the meaning production that it puts on the stage. It acts as a part of the simulation process. (Baudrillard, 2005, 240). In this context, the reality under what is seen must be correctly identified and analyzed successfully.

Another issue that needs to be emphasized in the process of the formation of media messages is the 'Political Economy Approach.' According to the liberal pluralist theory, the media acts on behalf of the public to supervise governments within the framework of public responsibility. However, as a result of the capitalist order, the media manifests itself only as institutions serving the interests of a capitalist group that justifies itself by controlling it (Yaylagül, 2010, s. 145). Globalization and the neo-liberal policies that have been shaped together create a new market understanding. In this system, it is seen that media organizations are also progressing in a monopolistic structure with a single request. Since media messages are naturally structured in such a system, the uniqueness, mediocrity, and monotony that the system presupposes are also present in these messages. Media broadcast with different views disappears in a way that leads to a monolithic structure. This point reveals the need to differentiate and analyze the ideological structure through different broadcast in analyzing media messages. Media literacy has emerged as a defense mechanism against the negative effects of the media today and guides the individual to correctly analyze the media messages that are shaped in the context of the issues discussed above.

Taking the word 'literacy' as a starting point when defining the concept of 'media literacy,' Baran defines it as the ability to understand and use written symbols effectively and efficiently. With the development of non-printed media, this definition needs to be expanded to include the ability to understand and use any form of communication effectively and efficiently. This ability is called media literacy especially when talking about participation in mass communication. Media literacy can mean slightly different things for different observers. Although media consumers must develop the ability and possibility to interpret media content better, this concept is in the best interest of everyone. Therefore, media literacy is the ability to understand and use mass media effectively and efficiently (Baran, 2006, 35). Potter interprets media literacy not as a category but as a continuum. It is a set of terms that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages that we encounter. We build our perspectives from knowledge structures. We need tools and raw materials to build our knowledge structures. These tools are our talents (Potter, 2005, 23). According to a generally accepted definition, media literacy is the ability to reach, analyze, and communicate messages in various forms (İnal, 2009, 39). Elizabeth Thoman emphasizes the importance of active participation, noting that students should not read what they see only as a media product, but also they should be active in the process of creating it (İnceoğlu, 2007, 21). Thoman, the president of the Center for Media Literacy, leads students to the production process of media messages. Mainstream studies in media literacy focused on critical media literacy after early conservationist approach, aiming at a society that criticizes and discusses media messages and not being content with a single source but looking for different sources. With liberating literacy skills, critical media literacy based on critical pedagogy studies will realize that gender, race, class, ethnicity and cultural definitions were reconstructed both on the historical and social level. It provides with the ability to read events all over the world, to see the construction of ideological meaning in

texts, and, moreover, to understand, distinguish and solve the political nature of boundaries and possibilities. (Binark & Bek, 2010, 33).

While the ability to be literate in print media is practically the ability to read and write texts, the concept of digital literacy has come up with the development of new communication technologies. A new digital society has emerged with new communication technologies and, along with that, digital culture has been formed. In this context, the concept of literacy has expanded: new media messages have emerged from print media to electronic and digital media. Digital literacy is essential in audio, video, virtual media, or even multimedia. Speed and instantaneity concepts function with features such as the elimination of boundaries between materials, interaction and hypertextuality (Bilici, 2017, 27). In this context, media education is becoming increasingly important.

### **3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA LITERACY**

The media literacy education campaign was launched in the 1920s in England and is currently being implemented in many European countries and America (Taşkıran, 2007). In 1982, international experts from 19 countries in Germany under the auspices of UNESCO issued a statement defending the necessity of media literacy education. This statement emphasized that families, teachers, media employees, and decision makers have specific responsibilities among those who use media texts (Binark & Bek, 2010 ). The 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy held in the United States was important in terms of enhancing cooperation between media educators and identifying key concepts of media literacy. Some basic precepts identified in the conference were as follows (Aufderheide, 1993);

- Media are constructed and construct reality.
- Media have commercial implications.
- Media have ideological and political implications.
- Form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes, and conventions.
- Receivers negotiate meaning in media.

With the summit held in Lisbon in 2000, media literacy came to the EU's agenda. At the summit, a strategy was shaped, and decisions were taken for creating the Europe of the future, in which information society and knowledge economy based on new information and communication technologies were shaped (Pekman, 2016). This summit draws attention to the need to improve the skills of information communication technologies in schools and many EU member states, the wide gap of skills in the field of information technology, and the critical role of teachers and trainers in the development of "information-based pedagogy" (Uysal, 2016). While these developments were taking place in the world, the first academic discussions about the subject started in 2005 in Turkey. One of the most important developments was the preparation of the media literacy curriculum and the teacher's manual in 2006

with the cooperation of RTUK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) and the Ministry of Education and introduction of this course as an elective course in the primary schools with the 2007-2008 academic year. Another work conducted by RTUK was smart signs (Uysal, 2016).

Potter defines media literacy as the ability of an individual to understand how he/she is exposed to the media and to interpret messages (2005). According to Potter, media literacy has two levels, low and high. The level differs according to the individual's choice of media messages and control over the interpretation of media texts. Potter also considers high media literacy to the benefit of the individual and emphasizes the need to develop a multi-dimensional media literacy to achieve this level. Potter sorts multidimensionality as follows: cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and emotional dimensions (Sari, 2015). According to Potter, media literacy has eight continuous stages. (2005).

- To learn basic elements
- To learn the language
- To learn the narrative
- Development of skepticism/criticism
- In-depth progress
- Experimental development or exploration
- Critical awareness
- Social responsibility

Sonia Livingstone posits that media literacy that is based solely on skill and talent ignores the mediating phenomenon of textuality and the use of new communication technologies. She further states that the media neglects the historical and cultural possibilities of social knowledge, noting that this definition ultimately emphasizes that society gives priority to individual abilities rather than knowledge-based arrangements (2004). Media literacy is not a personal trait and is not a skill that can be easily acquired by individuals; it is an ideologically and politically functioning process (Binark & Bek, 2010). The general objectives of the media literacy course are as follows (Uysal, 2016):

- To educate individuals who can interpret media messages correctly, who are sensitive to the environment they live in, who know the problems of their country, and who filter media messages.
- To provide the ability to analyze, evaluate and transmit messages in media such as television, video, cinema, advertisements, and the Internet.
- To provide with a critical view of written, visual, audio media.
- To make a change in people to ask questions about the creation and analysis of messages.
- To raise individuals who are aware of media messages.
- To raise students who participate more actively and constructively in social life.
- To contribute to the creation of sensitivity for public and private broadcasting to be more positive.

## **4. RESEARCH**

### **4.1. Purpose and Importance of the Research**

Today, the development of new communication technologies and the penetration of digitalism into all areas of life cause individuals to spend a large part of their daily lives in this environment. Technology always develops and changes at a dizzying pace and causes mobile devices to evolve as well. Mobile devices that have grown to be extensions of individuals, became indispensable elements of daily life. So much so that it's impossible for an individual to live without a mobile phone, a smartphone, a smart watch, a tablet, anything digital in short. In this sense, the individual who is consistently in a digital environment is also continuously exposed to digital content. The fictionality and ideological and economic shaping of media messages reveal the need to read the media correctly. The messages in the digital environment must be correctly identified, analyzed, criticized and discussed. The issue of content production and sharing in the media necessitates frequent inclusion of the concept of digital literacy. The present study aims to reveal the digital media literacy awareness of students who took and did not take the media literacy course.

### **4.2. Limitations of the Research**

The media literacy course is an elective or compulsory course in Turkey starting from primary education to doctoral education. Therefore, the universe of research is vast. For this reason, the participants of the research were selected by the purposive sampling method among the students who took and did not take the media literacy course at Istanbul Medipol University.

### **4.3. Method**

The focus group method, which is nowadays frequently used in many areas of marketing, advertising, and social sciences, is a method based on the counseling culture. The focus group technique is a qualitative research method used to collect data. It is a research method which is carried out with people with specific characteristics, who express their opinions about a particular subject (Anderson, 1990). Focus group studies involve a moderator and 6 to 12 participants (according to different sources, the number of participants can reach up to 16), who answer the questions freely and by interacting with the other participants. In focus group studies, the moderator aims to reveal the attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and opinions of the participants on a particular subject. Besides, focus group studies seek to identify diversity and to determine the existing situation. The study included Istanbul Medipol University students who took and did not take the Media Literacy course as an elective course. Twenty-four students who did not take the course were divided into three groups (Focus Groups 1 and 2, Focus Group 3- control group). Similarly, the other twenty-four students who took the course were divided into three groups (Focus Groups 1 and 2, Focus Group 3- control group). The participants are made up of 19-22 year-olds. Five male participants (participant 1, participant 3, participant 4, participant 6 and participant 8), and three female participants (participant 2,



participant 5 and participant 7) are in the first focus group. The second focus group is made up of four male (participant 2, participant 5, participant 7 and participant 8) and four female students (participant 1, participant 3, participant 4 and participant 6). Focus group three is the control group and it is made up of four male (participant 1, participant 4, participant 5 and participant 8) and four female students (participant 2, participant 3, participant 6 and participant 7). The study could be determined as homogeneous because of male-female student ratio

#### **4.4. Findings of the Research**

Focus group 1 participants who did not take the media literacy course; all the participants in Focus Group 1 can send and receive e-mails, watch movies and series, listen to music, and shop on the Internet. Some of the participants (participant 3 and participant 5) can also use applications about their courses. Considering whether the participants check the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, four (participant 1, participant 5, participant 7 and participant 8) of them stated that they checked different sources while the others did not check the accuracy of the messages. Considering how they protect themselves from harmful content in digital media, they stated that they use various antivirus programs, that they have firewalls on their computers, and that they only visit popular and reliable websites. It was observed that all participants created content in digital media and used Instagram while only some (participant 1, participant 4 and participant 5) participants stated that they used social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Considering whether the participants participated in online political discussions, six of them stated that they do not participate in online political discussions while two stated that they do and they write comments under posts with content that is in line with their political views. Participants also stated that they know about concepts such as firewall, cookies, torrent, profile, likes in digital media. Considering how the participants shared the content in digital media with their families and friends, three (participant 3, participant 4 and participant 5) of them stated that they do not share anything with their family in digital media, two (participant 1 and participant 2) stated that they share news and current issues, while the others stated that they shared photos, etc. It was observed that most of the participants shared content with their friends rather than their families. Besides, all of the participants stated that they spend at least a few hours a day in digital media on mostly Instagram, Twitter and news websites. When asked about what the last media message they remember was, most of them stated that the last media message they remember was related to celebrities while three (participant 4, participant 7 and participant 8) of them stated that they remember content about the increase in prices, elections, and autism. Considering how they compared digital media and traditional media, most of them stated that traditional media messages are more reliable but slower while digital media messages come in various forms. Considering the participants' opinions about literacy and reading the media correctly, three of them stated that they do not know anything about these concepts while the other participants gave different answers. The concepts that stand out among the participants' opinions are understanding what one sees, checking different sources, and doing a detailed examination. Considering the participants' opinions about media

and digital literacy concepts, six (participant 1, participant 2, participant 4, participant 5, participant 7 and participant 8) stated that they do not know anything about these concepts while two stated that these concepts encompass all media through the Internet and mass media and refer to knowing the accuracy of the information and interpreting the message correctly. Considering digital media literacy awareness of participants, seven participants stated different opinions while only one had no idea about the subject. Considering the participants' opinions about the realities of the messages of the media content, most of them stated that especially TV series are fictional, in other words, they are not real, and that the news is biased. They also stated that they found digital media more realistic. Considering the participants' opinions about the effect of the media ownership structure in the process of shaping a media message and in its presentation, five stated that they had no idea while three (participant 3, participant 7 and participant 8) stated that they believe that this is quite influential in the shaping and presentation of the messages. Considering the participants' opinions about how media literacy education should be, two (participant 1 and participant 2) stated that they had no idea, four stated that it should start from the primary school, while two (participant 4 and participant 5) stated that this education should equip the children with the ability to respect others' opinions and it should be practical.

Focus group 2 participants who did not take the media literacy course participants who did not take the media literacy course; all the participants in Focus Group 2 can watch movies and series, listen to music, read newspapers or magazines while two of the participants can also use professional applications and do projects. Considering whether the participants check the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, two (participant 3 and participant 5) of them stated that they do not know how to check the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, three (participant 2, participant 4 and participant 8) stated that they checked it through the Internet while three (participant 1, participant 6 and participant 7) stated that they use more than one sources. Considering how they protect themselves from harmful content in digital media, they stated that they use antivirus programs. It was observed that all participants created content on Instagram in digital media. Besides, some (participant 3, participant 4 and participant 7) participants stated that they used social media channels such as YouTube, Pinterest, and Twitter. Considering whether the participants participated in online political discussions, all of the participants stated that they do not participate in online political discussions while two (participant 3 and participant 5) stated that they write comments under Instagram posts. Participants also stated that they know about concepts such as firewall, widget, torrent, cookies in digital media. Considering how the participants shared the content in digital media with their families and friends, two (participant 4 and participant 7) of them stated that they do not share anything, five (participant 1, participant 3, participant 5, participant 6 and participant 8) stated that they share content with their family and friends via WhatsApp while one stated that he/she preferred face to face communication. Considering how often they used digital media, all of them stated that they spent at least 2-3 hours on digital media and they use Instagram the most. When asked about what the last media message they remember was, most of them

stated that they remembered the news about the elections and celebrities. Considering how the participants compared digital media and traditional media, they stated that most important differences were related to interaction, instantaneity, speed, ease, and RTUK bans. They also stated that traditional media attracts attention with uniform messages and formal language in its messages. Considering the participants' opinions about literacy and reading the media correctly, they mostly underlined two concepts as interpreting the messages correctly and following different channels. Considering the participants' opinions about media and digital literacy concepts, three stated that they do not know anything about these concepts, while others stated that media literacy is related to traditional media while digital literacy is related to the Internet. Considering digital media literacy awareness of the participants, three of them stated that they do not know anything about awareness while others underlined different points. Considering the participants' opinions about the realities of the messages of the media content, most of them stated that they found the TV series as instructive and realistic. Considering the participants' opinions about the effect of the media ownership structure in the process of shaping a media message and in its presentation, six (participant 2, participant 3, participant 4, participant 5, participant 6 and participant 8) stated that they had no idea while two defined it as the reshaping of the content. Considering the participants' opinions' about how media literacy education should be, three (participant 1, participant 4 and participant 7) stated that they had no idea while three stated that this education should be started from the childhood and be supported with seminars, course, and programs.

Focus group 1 participants who did not take the media literacy course; all the participants in Focus group 1 can send/receive e-mails, watch movies and series, listen to music, and shop on the Internet. Also, some (participant 2 and participant 3) participants stated that they could produce contents with occupational programs and share this content. Considering whether the participants check the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, three (participant 1, participant 4 and participant 7) participants stated that they did not crosscheck the news on other websites. Others stated that they checked more than one website to check accuracy and reliability of digital media messages. Considering how they protect themselves from harmful content in digital media, four stated that they use antivirus programs, one stated that he/she does not use any protection while three stated that they use Macintosh brand computers which exe-based viruses cannot harm. It was observed that all participants created content in digital media, three (participant 4, participant 5 and participant 6) participants created content in their own blogs, and all the other participants used Instagram actively. Considering whether the participants participated in online political discussions, two (participant 1 and participant 8) stated that they do not participate in online political discussions, one participant shares content without expressing his/her political views while the others shared content to express their political views. Also, it was observed that the participants mostly used Twitter. Participants stated that they know about concepts such as Torrent and Social Network in digital media. Considering how the participants shared the content in digital media with their families and friends, one of them stated that he/she does not share anything, one stated that he/she shares content only with their friends while six

stated that they shared content with their friends and families. Considering how often they used digital media and which media they usually preferred, all of them stated that they spent at least 3-4 hours on social media following current news and news about celebrities and politicians. When asked about what the last media message they remember was, seven (participant 1, participant 2, participant 4, participant 5, participant 6, participant 7 and participant 8) stated that they remembered the news about the elections world a news about the 'Fener ol' campaign. Considering how the participants compared digital media and traditional media, they stated that most important differences were related to instantaneity and speed. Considering the participants' opinions about literacy and reading the media correctly, all of them underlined themes such as 'correct reading of media messages', 'critical view', 'discussion', 'comparison', 'source control', 'interpretation', 'criticism', and 'not accepting everything as it is'. Considering the participants' opinions about media and digital literacy concepts, world em, the concept of media literacy is to analyze the traditional media correctly while the concept of digital literacy is to analyze the digital media correctly. Considering digital media literacy awareness of the participants, they underlined themes such as 'questioning,' critical perspective,' observing,' impartiality,' analyzing,' and 'to look beyond what is seen.' Considering the participants' opinions about the realities of the messages of the media content, all of the participants underlined themes such as 'manipulative media,' 'the orld of fictions,' and 'artificial reality created on behalf of us' and stated that the media messages usually are not real. Considering the participants' opinions about the effect of the media ownership structure in the process of shaping a media message and in its presentation, one stated that they had no idea while the others stated that the way media messages are presented vary depending on the owner of the media companies, highlighting concepts such as 'monopolization,' 'holding,' and 'not being open to different points of views.' Considering the participants' opinions' about how media literacy education should be, all of them stated that this education should start from a young age and should be practical appropriate for every age.

Focus group 2 participants who took the media literacy course participants who did not take the media literacy course; all the participants in Focus group 2 can send/receive e-mails, watch movies and series, listen to music, and shop on the Internet. Also, some (participant 1, participant 3 and participant 7) participants stated that they use the Internet to obtain information and collect material for their projects. Considering whether the participants check the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, one stated that he/she preferred to use popular websites, noting that he/she also reads the comments of other people posted under the news. The other participants underlined the importance of the source for the accuracy and reliability of the digital media messages, stating that they crosscheck the news on other websites. Considering how they protect themselves from harmful content in digital media, three (participant 3, participant 6 and participant 7) stated that they use antivirus programs. Also, two (participant 4 and participant 5) participants stated they use Wifi and Turk Telecom family protection, two (participant 1 and participant 2) participants stated they use Macintosh, and one participant stated that he/she does not click on suspicious links. It was observed that all participants created content in digital media, two

(participant 3 and participant 7) participants created content in their own blogs, and all the other participants used Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook actively. Considering whether the participants participated in online political discussions, two stated that they do not participate in online political discussions, three (participant 4, participant 5 and participant 6) stated that they participate in discussions about problems about universities and current issues, while others stated that they follow discussions about sports events and women and children movements and follow the Twitter posts of politicians actively. Participants stated that they know about concepts such as Phishing, Firewall, VPN, DNS, Torrent, Social network, Profile, Cookies, and Likes in digital media. Considering how the participants shared the content in digital media with their families and friends, three of them stated that they do not share anything political with their families. Also, the other participants stated that they usually share content on Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp with their families and friends. Considering how often they used digital media and which media they usually preferred, all of them stated that they spent at least 1, almost 8 hours on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, usually following current news and news about celebrities and politicians. When asked about what the last media message they remember was, five stated that they remembered the news about the elections, two news about the 'Fener ol' campaign, one news about a sports event. Considering how the participants compared digital media and traditional media, all of the participants underlined the features of digital media such as instantaneity, speed, interaction, and shareability. Though most of the participants stated that they find traditional media more reliable, they stated that they believe traditional media is less modern than digital media. Considering the participants' opinions about literacy and reading the media correctly, all of them underlined themes such as 'correct reading of media messages,' 'critical view,' 'discussion,' 'comparison,' 'interpretation,' 'criticism,' and 'not accepting everything as it is.' Considering the participants' opinions about media and digital literacy concepts, they usually defined both concepts with the same interpretations. All of the participants defined media literacy referring to themes such as 'correct analysis,' 'knowing well about media,' and 'reading media correctly' while they underlined themes such as 'digital content,' 'sharing,' and 'correct analysis and interpretation of messages' with regards to digital literacy. Considering digital media literacy awareness of the participants, only one participant mentioned about 'impartiality' while the others underlined themes such as 'to look beyond what is seen,' 'analyzing,' 'technology skills,' 'awareness,' 'criticism,' etc. Considering the participants' opinions about the realities of the messages of the media content, all of the participants underlined themes such as 'manipulative media,' 'the world of fictions,' and 'artificial reality created on behalf of us' and stated that the media messages usually are not real. Considering the participants' opinions about the effect of the media ownership structure in the process of shaping a media message and in its presentation, one stated that they had no idea while the others stated that the way media messages are presented vary depending on the owner of the media companies, highlighting concepts such as 'monopolization,' 'holding,' and 'not being open to different points of views.' Considering the participants' opinions' about how media literacy education should be, all of them stated that this education must be compulsory, skill-oriented, and given by expert academicians at every age.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Researches on the effects of the media, which started with mainstream theory studies, are still relevant today. The media has always been a tool that has the power to influence individuals. Early theories on media (hypodermic needle theory, etc.) advocated that the media immediately affected individuals. The protective approach, on the other side, argued that media could not be a good role model for, especially, children who are regarded to be vulnerable. Violent elements presented by the media and inappropriate behavior patterns can be taken as examples by children. Early studies on media literacy suggested within the framework of a protective approach that when a child who is watching TV see, for example, violent scenes, the TV must be turned off or the child must be guided away. However, later studies on critical media literacy underlined abilities such as to correctly analyze the media messages, ask questions, discuss, etc. Critical media literacy aims at individuals who produce and share media messages as well as individuals who can analyze and understand the media correctly. According to critical media literacy, media education requires the organization of relevant programs for the creation of a skill-based society who can analyze. Considering that we spend a large part of our daily life with media today, new communication technologies and the compatibility of smartphones with this technology requires the society to have more awareness of the media. Individuals are often faced with different media messages and must successfully analyze them in the digital environment. At this point, media literacy education is essential in terms of raising awareness. In the present study, the effectiveness of the education process in terms of creating this awareness is discussed with a focus on relevant courses. In our country, the media literacy course has been provided as an elective course in primary schools since 2007. Also, it is included in the curricula of the faculties of communication as a compulsory and elective course.

Using the focus group technique, the present study was conducted to investigate the media awareness of İstanbul Medipol University students who took and did not take the media literacy course. Majority of the participants are able to examine media's fictional aspect. At this point, the majority agrees that the media is able to construct a new and fictional world for us. The aim was to assess whether the students had some awareness of media and its effects. If we analyze the findings, we can see that the students who did not take the course used digital media tools frequently and successfully, could send and receive e-mails, watch TV, watch and download TV series and movies, shop, and sometimes collect information for their projects on the Internet. Also, most of the participants spend 2-3 hours every day sharing photos and stories on Instagram, writing comments under tweets or retweeting on Twitter, watching videos on YouTube, or sharing posts on Facebook. It was observed that the participants did not believe in the reality of media and media messages and that they failed to make a clear definition of the concept of media literacy. When asked questions about it, most failed to respond immediately, showing a lack of knowledge of the relevant concepts. It can be argued that the participants who cannot distinguish between traditional media literacy and digital literacy well enough used the Internet

and digital media for fun rather than producing and sharing messages. Moreover, almost neither of the participants provided sufficient answers to the question about the effect of the media ownership structure in the process of shaping a media message and in its presentation. Furthermore, the participants did not have sufficient knowledge of concepts such as ‘the agenda-setting role of media,’ ‘manipulation,’ and ‘fiction.’ At times, media is used as a tool for propaganda and manipulation. Majority of the participants, think that the real and fictional aspects are abundant in tv shows and films, and are able to realize that they create a fantasy world for us. Some of the participants are able discern the role of gatekeepers in agenda setting and simulation-focused news stories.

The participants who took the media literacy course underlined themes such as ‘correct analysis of media,’ ‘correct analysis of media messages,’ ‘discussion,’ and ‘criticism’ when defining the concept of media literacy. It was observed that the time the participants spent on the Internet varied from one hour to almost half of the day. They mostly used Instagram, Twitter, personal blogs, etc. They also used the Internet to collect information for their projects, to keep up with current events (especially the elections) and the breaking news. The participants were aware that there is a sharp distinction between traditional media and digital media, underlining the instantaneity, speed, and feedback features of the digital media. They also stated that media literacy aims at individuals who produce and share. When asked about the effects of media ownership on the messages, most of them highlighted themes such as ‘monopolization’ and ‘not being open to different points of view.’ They also stated that the media creates a fictional world of simulations and that we should look beyond what is presented to us by media to find out the reality. While both groups advocated that the media literacy course should become compulsory, most of them argued that this course should be given at a young age and that skills-oriented studies should be prioritized. It was also observed that the participants could keep up with new communication technologies and thus they could become more active in their relations with media. Besides, it was seen that the participants developed a critical point of view against the monopolization in media that has emerged especially with globalization. Therefore, we can conclude that the students who took the media literacy course had a broader knowledge about the definition and necessity of media literacy, the factors in the process of formation of media messages, digital media literacy, and digital media skills.

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### **Annexes**

This course aims to enable the individual to be active in his/her relationship with the mass media and to strengthen the critical view that provides the ability to oppose the privatized structure and traditions of commercial media culture and to develop new individual discourses. The main topics of this course are as follows: Traditional Literacy, 21st Century Literacy, Characteristics and Principles of Media Literacy and Visual Literacy, Scope and Basic Skills of Media Literacy, Basic Principles of Media Literacy - Image and Power of Image, Studies on Media Literacy in Europe - the USA and the world and Historical Process, Ability to Evaluate and Produce Visual and Written and Audio Media Outputs, Reviewing media texts - Sample media text analysis, Discussing the Key Contents in Media Literacy with Case Studies, Sample Media Text Analysis, Media Literacy, and Social Values Analysis in Media Texts, Media Literacy and News Analysis, Media Literacy and Film Analysis, Media Literacy and Internet, Media Literacy and Subliminal Message Transfer in Media Texts, Media Literacy and Ads Analysis. At the end of this course, the student will be able to: 1- become active in his/her relationship with mass media, 2- develop the ability to oppose the privatized structure and traditions of commercial media culture, 3- To think critically about media texts and to express their thoughts with their own sentences. (<https://mebis.medipol.edu.tr/programbilgi/program/10194>)