

Chapter 4

An Introduction to Media Literacy

Belgin Arslan-Cansever

Ege University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In today's information society, the media have important functions in the formation of certain perceptions by regulating the social lives of individuals. This occurs through messages that come in different formats (verbally, audibly, visually etc.) from the media. It is through the media literacy that enables reading messages from the media and interpreting them critically. The aim of this chapter is to provide some theoretical perspectives on media literacy. In this context, media literacy has been explained in detail. For this, primarily the differences between reading-writing and literacy are revealed. Besides conceptual media literacy, its necessity and some examples of practices in the world related to its education are mentioned. The chapter also addresses the basic paradigms in media literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Today, developments in science and technology have changed and reshaped nature as well as social structure. In this social structure, the concept of literacy (reading and writing) in traditional sense has also been changed. The concept of literacy is considered as a skill required by the contemporary era. Also literacy is addressed in different contexts such as media literacy, information literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy, digital literacy, electronic literacy, and so on. Among these types of literacy, media literacy is previously known by various names such as media education, media pedagogy and media teaching.

Although media literacy is seen as a new concept in the literature, its history as a field of study and discipline can be traced back to the early 20th century. During this period, media tools such as newspapers, telephone, radio and television have reached masses of people. This has led to the idea that the mass media can be used as an educational material in Europe and America since the 1920's. In this period, the nation-states supported the idea that the means of media would have a pedagogical influence. Thus, they began to include media literacy in their teaching curriculum. Parallel to all these developments, socio-cultural,

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economic and political media analyses have begun to be made. Critical approaches to media literacy are also based on these analyses. Critical approaches point out that it is inadequate to use media only as an educational tool. Likewise, the teaching of media only as a technique is also considered as incomplete. According to these approaches, what the most important is to educate the individual according to the democratic and participatory model of consciousness against the manipulative structure of the media.

Media literacy is a concept which exists in focus of interest of different disciplines such as education, communication, health and political science. Therefore, it is possible to find many definitions of media literacy in the literature. When they are evaluated together, it is seen that access to the messages, critical analysis of the messages and sharing them with others are emphasized. It is the purpose of media literacy is to turn the individual who is a passive receiver into a conscious consumer. In other words, in media literacy, it is significant to have critical thinking skills to “read” messages from the media. In media literacy, it is important for the individual to gain a critical awareness of the media. The use of media in all aspects of society, as well as in different forms, is increasingly getting bigger. It also plays an active role in helping individuals develop a certain perception about the events happened in society. At the same time, the media is also a resource for individuals to meet various social needs such as information, entertainment and communication. Therefore, the media does not only give information to individuals in all spheres of life, but also it shapes the values and perspective of the individual. The relationship and interaction of children and young people with the media are increasing day by day (Anderson, 2013; Arslan Cansever, 2010; Arslan & Arslan Cansever, 2012; Lindstrom & Sybold, 2013; Livingstone & Bovill, 1999; Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield, & Gross, 2001; TÜİK, 2013, Valkenburg & Vroone, 2004).

BACKGROUND

In today’s information society, ‘literacy’ has a more comprehensive and multidimensional meaning than the ‘basic reading-writing skills’ of the 1950s. This multidimensional structure of literacy can be seen as an extension of its cultural, sociological, psychological and linguistic foundations (Pearson & Stephens, 1994). It is possible to see different types of literacy in the related field. This is thought to be closely related to the United Nations’ declaration of 1990 as the ‘year of international literacy’. This importance given to literacy by the United Nations has increased the grip and has led to the identification of many areas of literacy (Kurt & Kürüm, 2008, p. 21). One of these types of literacy is media literacy, which is the main theme of this chapter.

Since media literacy has become the focus of attention in many different disciplines in recent years, different definitions have been found in the literature. It is known that the first description of media literacy was made in 1978 by Sirkka Minkinen. In this definition, Minkinen defined media literacy as *aiming to develop the skills in cognitive, ethical, philosophical and aesthetic subjects* (İnceoğlu, 2006). In another definition Silverblatt and Elceiri (1997, p. 48) described media literacy as a “*critical thinking skill*”. This skill gives the viewer / audience the opportunity to resolve the meaning of the information they receive and the ability to make independent decisions about the media content. Researches revealed that the first media with which children meet is television (Field, Muir, Piran, Sinclair, & Dodwell, 1980) and there is an increasing interest in media during childhood (Anderson, 2013; Arslan & Arslan Cansever, 2012; Lindstrom & Sybold, 2013, TÜİK, 2013, Valkenburg & Vroone, 2004) as well as adolescence (Arslan Cansever, 2010; Livingstone & Bovill, 1999, Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield, & Gross, 2001); and adulthood (Ransford, 2005). There are also studies in which the written and digital

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