

Chapter 18

New Media and Digital Paranoia: Extreme Skepticism in Digital Communication

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ABSTRACT

New media includes many spaces in the internet environment including social media, news media, shopping sites, official and private institution/organization applications. Users make their daily lives more manageable in terms of time and space while benefitting from the specified new media platforms/tools whereby they may also consciously or unconsciously get some conditions. Currently, there exists a contemporary condition called ‘digital paranoia’ that people can experience when using new media platforms and tools. Digital paranoia, which refers to a form of extreme skepticism regarding new media platforms and tools, is based on different concerns and anxieties such as being spied on, wired, and controlled. This study, which is written based on a literature review, focuses on defining the concept of digital paranoia. Additionally, new media and some conditions occurring due to new media are also analyzed in the study. This study aims to raise awareness of digital paranoia and offer some constructive suggestions to new media users.

INTRODUCTION

New media is a domain that can be used with internet technology, and any content can be converted into digital codes. Tools such as “mobile phone, computer, or tablet” are needed to use the internet technologies in new media. This type of media, which includes many areas from news organizations to

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social networking applications, has many features, including “interaction, asynchrony, spatialization, hyper-textuality, speed, storage, and archiving” (Kahn & Kellner, 2016, p. 254; Lievrouw, 2016, p. 20).

With its features, new media makes people’s lives easier. A person who wants to pay an invoice can make this payment through digital tools instead of physically going to the payment point of the relevant organization. Consumers can also compare the products they are interested in with different stores thanks to e-commerce and choose the most suitable one (Jenkins, 2018, pp. 34-38; Dedeoğlu, 2016, p. 35).

In new media, journalism is conducted with “internet newspapers and internet news sites,” and digital communication is provided with social media applications. Especially with Web 2.0 technology-based social media applications such as Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), and Twitter (2006), users now create content, share what they produce, and socialize (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 33). This order, made possible by the internet, can harm users as well as provide benefits for them. These damages are related to economic, social, cultural, and health elements. Internet use causes both physical and psychological health problems, especially in extraordinary times such as pandemics. Not using the computer or mobile devices while spending time on the internet with the right body movements brings along many physical diseases such as “posture disorders, vision-hearing problems, and joint pains” (Kaya & Ata, 2019, p. 113).

While these physical diseases can be noticed quickly since psychological conditions cannot be observed, both diagnosis and treatment might be delayed (Batu & Güler-İplikçi, 2018, p. 641). These conditions can only be noticed when people begin to live in such a way that some symptoms cannot be denied, ignored and hurt, or by the attention of their environment. Although different treatment methods depend on the type of conditions caused by the use of the internet in general and the use of new media in particular, “conscious and responsible use” is an important issue in preventing all new media conditions (Çömlekçi & Başol, 2019, p. 184).

In this study, the concept of digital paranoia both as a psychological internet condition and a result of internet conditions tending to become more widespread is discussed. The research also discusses “definition, possible causes, symptoms, and consequences of digital paranoia” used to express “extreme skepticism” in the digital environment. In the limitation of being a relatively new and up-to-date phenomenon, the theoretical information obtained through literature review was exemplified from daily life. Such questions of “Can someone spy on me through my computer camera? Is my phone listening to me? Is there a problem with my online order?” can be listed as some examples of digital paranoia. Besides, questions like “Did my e-mail reach the person I sent it to? Did I safely log out of the site I used? Did I enter the amount of money correctly in money transfer? Is my information in new media safe? Do other users dislike my social media post?” are just a few examples of digital paranoia that occupy users’ minds.

The study contributes to the literature and provides data to those who want to do research on the subject, raising awareness about digital paranoia and using it to develop suggestions for the solution of the problem, and presenting a holistic perspective. In line with the topics mentioned above, this study was carried out under two headings. Under the first title, “new media and digital conditions” were examined. Thus, information was given about both new media and new media conditions in the first heading, including digital paranoia. The concept of digital paranoia, which is the focus of this study, was discussed from different perspectives under the second heading. The study was completed with the conclusion chapter, which includes a general evaluation and suggestions.

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