

Chapter 16

The Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Cyberchondria

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ABSTRACT

Cyberchondria refers to the state of performing repeated and excessive health-related searches on the internet leading to elevated levels of distress or health anxiety. It may have unpleasant consequences such as heightened anxiety, overwhelming information load, and troubled patient-physician relationship. To overcome the negative effects of cyberchondria, several strategies were suggested in the literature. In this chapter, enhancing digital and health literacy skills is presented as an important approach for tackling with undesirable effects of excessive health-related internet use. Basic dimensions of digital literacy are pointed out, as well as digital literacy skills. Health literacy is defined and reviewed in digital literacy framework. E-health literacy is associated with digital literacy. Searching the internet for medical information would deliver its true value through improved digital and health literacy skills. Individuals would accurately evaluate online health information, properly interpret the search results, and take the reasonable steps in applying the acquired knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media platforms provide users with the benefits of communicating quickly, following innovations closely, and easily accessing much information. Digital literacy, which expresses all the abilities covered in a wide range from searching to finding information in digital environments and from producing to sharing, today has become one of the most talked about and prominent concepts among various groups.

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In recent years, with the dominance of rapid technological developments in all areas of life, information is globalizing, people's communication styles, environments and means of communication are changing, and their scope is expanding. New media brings radical changes to communication field, and in Lev Manovich's (2001) words, analog media is turned into a digital representation. Digital representation means that all new media products are composed of digital codes, and it provides opportunities such as changing the content with certain algorithms. Modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding constitute the distinguishing principles of this new media. The way the computer models the world and allows it to operate on data also affect the formation and content of culture.

Manovich (2001) names everything and all products related to new media as new media objects. These new media objects are also cultural objects, and they refer to objects that physically appear in the real world to represent and construct them. The shift towards computer-mediated forms for the production and distribution of culture and for the communication is the new media revolution (Manovich, 2001). In parallel with the developments, the people of the age we live in have been called information society, network society (Webster, 2004, pp. 133-137; Castells, 2004, pp. 148-149) and technology society. Internet technology and digital media enable members of society to socialize effectively, through flexible and multiple networks, and, unlike traditional media, users can choose from a wide array of content and services and interact frequently with others. In other words, the latest technological developments have created a unique and new "digital world" environment. The rapid adaptation of societies to this environment, and their adoption of technology-based e-life order proves the pioneering role of technology in social change and development. In this context, people's ability to keep up with technological developments develops and changes in parallel. While some individuals and societies accept change, others tend to preserve their habits. For this reason, the philosophy, culture, and habits of each generation can differ. The levels of adaptation to digital world environment are also effective in classifications of generations such as digital generation, y and z generation, digital natives, digital immigrants, hybrids, etc. Individuals in this order are expected to have some skills to benefit from the blessings of this world in the best way. One of these abilities is digital literacy.

Digital literacy is a broad concept and has a direct relationship with some subfields. Technology literacy, computer literacy, information literacy, communication literacy, media literacy and visual literacy are among the prominent ones among these subfields. Information and communication technologies literacy is defined as equivalent to digital literacy (Aydemir et al., 2019, p. 639).

Digital media literacy basically means a form of literacy that includes individuals to be able to use new media environments effectively and to know how to read new media content, as well as to produce content specific to new media environments. In other words, digital media literacy can be expressed as understanding the characteristics of new communication, sharing technologies and environments, knowing their cultural characteristics, and mastering the new media language.

The concept of digital literacy first emerged with the book of the same name written by Paul Gilster (1997). In the book, digital literacy is expressed as the ability to understand and use the information presented in the digital environment in different ways. So, it is the ability to reach existing information using digital technologies and to produce information by using this information effectively. At the same time, it is necessary to know and be able to process, hold and transfer information. Skills in summarizing, synthesizing, compiling, and presenting information are required.

Besides critical thinking skills, digital literacy includes ethical norms and standards of behavior in online environments. Each online community has its own set of rules regarding knowledge creation and circulation (Aldemir & Aşar, 2020, pp. 149-150). Digital literacy is one of the nine core elements

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