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# An empirical study on media literacy from the viewpoint of media

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## Abstract

The most significant quality of the media in the way we use the word today that it has a very substantial influence area. As media is the indispensable part of the daily life, we need to question the new relationship structures which arise with media and the impact that media creates. The influence area that media creates could cause negative results as it could create new simulative realities to legitimize the dominant ideology, commercial mediation, alteration and conversion as much as positive results. To raise a conscious society against the negative influence of media, media literacy becomes crucial every passing day as a part of the education. In this context, as a result of the education which should be given for a society which researches, criticizes, questions and argue, we aim to raise individuals who are competent in media.

In the study, we focus on the negativities of media which are a part of media articles produced in corporate market structure, their producers, the negativities of the media which are a part of the individual's life and individual and its qualities which will work as filter against these negativities.

In this context the media literacy notion which is considered as the competency training of the media workers and their views on the training is being discussed. In the research, the views of the media managers and editorial structures of media with duties such as managing, producing and auditing media content are recorded with semi structured interview method and they are analyzed in the frame of titles created as they are discussed.

*Keywords:* Media, training, media literacy, dominant ideology

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## 1. Academic Background on Media Literacy

Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter (Potter, 2005: 22). As the way Aufderheide describes it, media literacy is the ability to reach messages in different forms, to analyze and forward these (cited in Hobbs 1993). To be able to analyze media literacy right, you need to read and understand media accurately.  But at this point, it is underlined that the media literacy is not only about reading the media messages of individuals, it is also an action in which they should take place in message creation and forwarding process by creating it (İnceoğlu, 2007:22).

Despite that the face to face communication is the most strong form of communication, the point that makes mass communication important is the wide range of effect area. A message which takes place in media is able to reach millions of people in a very short time. Frame of wide effect area provided scientists to focus on this subject and they come up with many different approaches. These approaches which are developed over source, message and recipient, take the hypodermic needle theory of Laswell as the basis. In this process which is named as the mainstream period, assessments were on the effects of the mass communication tools. Laswell remarks that the dominant ideology's power of molding public opinion by using mass communication tools. The causality principle lies behind the hypodermic needle.   The needle and the bullet notions represent quick effects in the context of the theory. The needle which shows its effects on the body much faster compared to medicines represents the media messages. And media messages are considered as the messages placed into the syringe and they show insant and direct effect on masses. In this model which is also known as propaganda model, individuals are considered as missing the critical mind to resist the propaganda (Yaylagül, 2010:53).  The governments were able to use mass communication tools very effectively in some periods. Radio was a very powerful propaganda device especially in World War II.

In researches between years 1960 and 1970, it became more important which purpose the individuals use the media for intead of what mass communication tools which are focused on target mass do to the people. The individuals use media to satisfy their primary and secondary needs. In this context, media messages are being preferred by the viewers willingly and according to needs. The media which satisfies the needs of individuals constitutes a source in the approach of use and satisfaction  (Yaylagül, 2010:71).

The studies in 1970s which focused on short term individuality and selectivity are considered as a rupture period from Maigret, Lazarfeld view. Media would have long term effects on masses, "it affects a limited preference total by neutralizing the selectivity" not by the way of syringe. Mc Combs and Shaw express that the most important power that sets the agenda is the media in their agenda setting theory. Media focuses the attention on certain subjects (Maigret, 2012: 254-255). According to Cohen, "the press is very successful at saying people what they would think." (cited in McCombs and Shaw, 2009:127)  The individuals stick with media to learn what's going on in the world. The media tells us what we will think on which subject; how, how much and when we should get information. This strengthens the mass media more and more. "Setting the agenda is the list of the subjects put in order with an increasing importance in the hierarchy of priorities" (Miagret, 2012:255).

The individuals show the tendency to know the things that media is into and accept its order of priority on different topics (McQuail and Windahl, 2010:132). Media provides information flow on the topics that it considers necessary to the agenda. In this context they give priority to ideological and commercial concerns. Why do some events take place in the first page and why some events take place in the later pages or don't at all? Media might give priority to some events in our names and it might ignore some events. So the agenda is being set by other in our names. Chief editors, editors, news directors, etc. which are named as gatekeepers make decisions in behalf of us and they shape the agenda by deciding which event would make the news and which will not. As some events stay on the headlines and subheadings for months, some events are presented as unimportant by not being published often  (Güngör, 2011:98-99).

In media literacy, active individuals take place instead of passive individuals in the transition from mainstream media concept which has a conservative side to critical approach. The masses which earned the media talents would analyze the messages with "a vigilant eye". Critical autonomy is among the main purposes of media literacy to analyze the media messages correctly. Livingstone remarks the criticism of dominant ideology and questioning the critical literacy sides (cited in İnal, 2009:89-90).

Critical media literacy coincides with critical pedagogy concept. "*Critical pedagogy regards lesson schedule as a form of cultural politics.*" (Mclaren, 2003:88 as cited in Binark & Bek, 2007: 40).  Williamson's studies which he carried out with students in Griffith University of Australia in 1998 are important to explain the meaning of critical

pedagogy frame. In the studies, after the schedule of the lesson and other activites are questioned, the students are actively involved in the lesson by using visual, audial and textual materials, discussion groups are created and it's supported with a website. Critical pedagogy which is being applied in the classes should explain the students the ideology, the stage behind its cultural capital and open it to discussion. (Binark &Bek, 2007:42-43) Critical media literacy also carries out studies to provide creating activism based on pedagogy, conscious actions, raising consciousness, sensibility and awareness on media.

As a part of media literacy studies, many scholars like Patrica Aufderheide, Len Masterman, Cyndy Scheibe and Faith Rogow are approaching fundamental principles of media education within the scope of specific topics. Aufderheide states that all the media consist of a world of fiction (cited in İnal, 2009:55). Media does not always present us the truth. As in the expression of Türkoğlu, *we only see the world from our homes. The events come to us. We are not able to go to events.* Türkoğlu focuses on the dream world the television creates. According to him, we are only looking at screen to collect the truth (Türkoğlu, 2007:156). Ünsal Oskay expresses that the culture products mostly transferred to other generations through television, newspapers, radio and magazines and remarks that media has large and very precious areas of use to create a web of meaning (Oskay, 1992:128). The industrialization and modernization brought urbanization and life in masses with it. This process created a new type of culture which is named as "culture industry" by Adorno and Horkheimer. Mass culture products are designed, viewed, printed and published in institutes out of our control. Our position across mass culture products is passive as atomized passive individuals. The real purpose is to avoid reality (Oskay, 1998: 152-153). The consumption society shows keeping the mass away from the worry as the primary purpose of the life. *"Mediatic Hedonism"* which shows every minute of the life as the pleasure area (Oktay, 1995), designs eviscerated products in which *"dominant culture which centers on objects organizes the free time, conceals the sovereignity relations and turns dissatisfaction into satisfaction"* as Illich expressed (cited in Oktay, 1995:195).

In the "Media fictionalizes the truth" theory of Aufderheide (İnal, 2009:55), media doesn't always present the truth to the masses. As in the phrase of Baudrillard, it creates a "so called world" and an artificial, simulated universe, pacifies the masses and make them believe that this world is real (Rigel et al, 2005:215).

"The media has commercial implication" (İnal, 2009:55) In the capitalist development phase, the profit effect became prominent in time. The media content which should include intensive information left its place to eviscerated, monotype, sensational messages which focus on sales. In the analysis of a media message, the first question that we need to answer is what is the economic structure that lies under the media product? Media products appeal to a market with a quite wide range. To meet the expectations, mass communication markets are formed and the individuals are modeled as consumers in this market. On the other hand, the other service sectors owned in the sense of monopolization and conglomerating in the scope of media ownership relations could make organizations more powerful and effective (İnal, 2009:56).

"Media involves ideological and value messages" (İnal, 2009:56). In capitalist production, the ruling financial power class also constitutes the ruling ideational power. In this situation, this region which lacks the intellectual production devices has to depend on the thoughts of this class. (Hall, 2005:199) Ideologies develop different ideology types and regions to legitimize their values. At this point, it uses the ideological devices of the government which are the police, education, union, mass communication tools. (Althusser, 2010:83). Media works under the authority of the ideology. The dominant ideology dominates the masses to foresee the system. According to Ozer, ideological government tools should be preferred instead of oppressive government tools. The effect scale of the media is not in forced wrong consciousness or altered attitudes but in the unconscious categories which provides the representation of the conditions and experience." (Curan 1991:246 as cited in Özer 2009:26-27). As in the expression of Althuesser, the ideological tools of the government teach many skills. (2010:159)

"But they do this including in dominant ideology in a way that it provides the dominancy of this ideology's practice. All the production, exploitation, oppression officers and ideology professionals (Marx) should also adopt the ideology at a certain level to manage their duties consciously. So they should be the exploiters (proletariat), the exploiters (capitalists) or the helpers of exploitation (managing staff) or the priests of the dominant ideology (government officers) etc."

At a simple communication process (source, message, receiver) the process between media and the society is perceived as a non problematic process. But the titles mentioned above clearly shows how complicated the structure is. In the frames of titles such as the fiction world that media creates, the messages that shape around the dominant ideology, media ownership structure, commercial mediation, etc, media literacy aims to raise individuals who master the substructure of media, think the media reality (able the discover qualities lie behind the current view),

research, read and criticize. Creating necessary awareness would require a systemized media literacy education. (Öncel, 2007:85-86). Media literacy has found as a educational tool to protect individuals and especially children against the negative effects of the media (Öncel, 2007:87). Baran states that individuals could gain the following skills with this education (cited in İnal, 2009:47-48).

1.  Ability to understand the power of the messages and analyze them.
2.  Ability to differentiate emotional reactions from rational reactions while reacting to the content.
3.  Improving the exaggerated expectations on media content.
4.  Ability to analyze the structure which shapes according to the publication types and analyze the relation between them.
5.  Ability to analyze the complicated inside language of the various media.

The media literacy studies which started in 1920s in Europe are starting to get prominent in our country too. Media literacy is included in the lessons starting from elementary school and alterations are being planned on the prepared curriculum. They focus on a curriculum that students could attend actively instead of a theory filled program, to make the lesson functional, to give students who are meshed with both traditional and social media the ability to analyze media messages correctly. One of the most criticized things in the process of education is the media literacy lesson is not being lectured by professionals. Of course it should be media experts or academicians who could lecture on media literacy and earn students media competency title.

Media literacy aims to raise individuals who could analyze the messages in media correctly and competent about the truth. In this context how should people in the media who are the source of these messages assess this subject? Is media literacy a threat in their perspective? The purpose of the study will be assessing of the media literacy and education from the eyes of the people in media.

## 2. The Purpose of the Research

Media literacy is a multidimentional concept with many interesting facets. There for we need to view it from many perspectives to appreciate all it has to offer (Potter, 2005:23). The purpose of the research; the media literacy lesson was included in curriculum starting from 2006-2007 education year for elementary school students intended for reading the media texts correctly, selectively and consciously. But an agreed system couldn't be determined and many alterations were made about the structure, content and lecture of the lesson. The study which Hobbs (2005:136), mentioned configured from the discussion about whether media literacy education is supported by media establishments or not is arranged towards to determine the views of the media professionals who create the content related to this education which is still being arranged and prepared for reading of the content produced by the communication tools.

### 2.1. The Model of the Research and The Collection of Data

This research which is prepared directed at determining the views of media workers on media literacy notion and media literacy education, is carried out by qualitative based researchers with semi structured interview method with open-ended questions. The advantages of structured interview technique is that the researcher can directly ask the question he/she wants to ask and reveal directly to the participants and he/she can simultaneously get the responses. (Ekiz, 2009: 127).

The questions which are prepared based on information gathered after a review of area literature are organized again after getting the views of 5 academicians who lectured on media literacy at least for an academic term.

The interviews which are based of semi structured interview form with selected chief editors, editors, directors and script writers, lasted 40 minutes in average and carried out by researches. The data is collected with audio recordings and deciphered later.

### 2.2. The Universe and The Sample

The universe of the research is formed by chief editors, editors, directors and script writers who have high level effect and control power on creating the content of national broadcasts in mass communication tools. When you consider the monopolization and conglomerating in the structure of media groups in our country, we see many media organs within the group. This is formed by a similar structure chain instead of bringing variety to publishing principles and concept. Therefore the interviews are carried out with people who could represent every determined media group. Hereunder the sample was based on carrying out interviews with workers who have all the
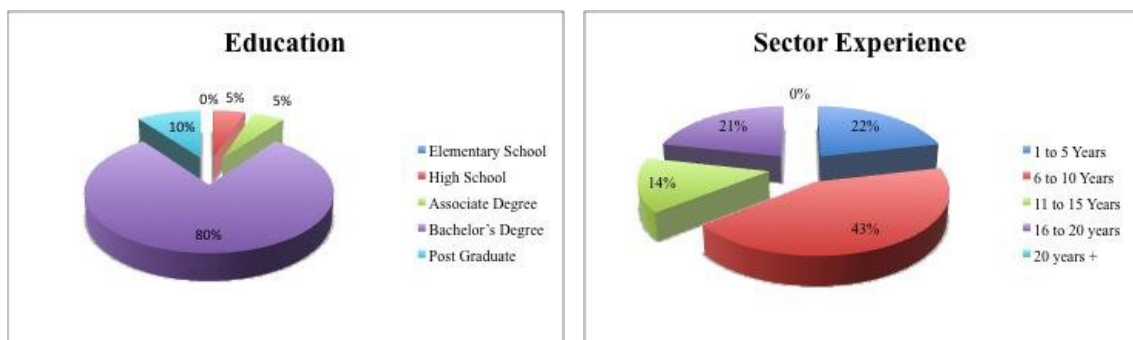
predetermined qualities with scale sampling method and 20 participants are interviewed in total.

### 2.3. Analysis of the Data

Open coding method is used in the analysis since gathering data was based on open ended structure and qualitative research method was used. The following questions were indicated in the interview form:

1.      What are the functions of the media? Could you assess the positive and negative sides of the media messages on the reader/audience?

2.      Do mass communication tools set the public agenda? What are the factors which affect mass communication in the process of shaping of the media messages?

3.      Could you comment on the reader/audience profile in Turkey? How do you assess the effect of the mass communication tools on the reader/audience?

4.      What does media literacy notion mean to you?

5.      There is not a clear, agreed study being applied about media literacy in Turkey. How should a successful media literacy education be in your opinion?

6.      How would media literacy education affect the role of mass communication on the readers/audience?

**Diagram 1. Education and the sector experience of the participants**



•      *Assessments on the positive / negative sides of the media functions and media messages on the readers/audience*

Many functions of media mentioned in communication literature. Laswell (1960) who pointed out the functions of the media for the first time, mentioned informing, convincing and socialization functions. Charles Wright (1961) added entertaining to these functions and Kenneth Boulding (1962) emphasized the product introduction function (Aziz, 1982:2) The general descriptions of the participants on the functions of the media coincides with this frame. According to the participants, informing the public about unknown, entertaining them, provide the right of getting intelligence, socialization, carrying out the duty of enlightening the public, presenting all kinds of information about life to attention of the public, delivering news to people objectively and truthfully are expressed as the functions of the media. A few participants described the applications of media (descriptions by using adjectives such as correct, independent, transparent) instead of functions. This indicates that they don't have clear and evident views on functions.

The participants couldn't make a clear differentiation between positive/negative sides of the media and media messages on the readers/audience in general. They discussed the differentiation based on some variables in media content. The participants emphasized on the application of the functions while assessing the negative sides of the media on the readers/audience. They emphasized the "abuse" side and mentioned that the news is manipulated to impose the ideologies and in some cases the transparency principle is being ignored. Also they expressed that media which has a power to create an effective public opinion, has a negative effect area on masses with falsified, twisted news. In addition, it could be seen that especially the news and content which incent violence with exaggerated expressions are increasing and this takes place in the expressions of the participants as a subject lies in the basis of negative effects. Three participants also mentioned the negative effects of an unreal world which is presented to viewers in the frame of government and advertiser as a result of commercial structuring of the media. They defined

this with words such as "fake world", "simulation", "virtual world".

The point which all the participants agreed was that we would be able to talk about the positive sides of the media in the condition that the negativities they mentioned are appeased and "media is used correctly"

- *The role of the mass communication tools to create public agenda and the facts that affect the communication tools in the process of shaping of media messages.*

The participants mentioned that the mass communication tools have an effective role in creating the public agenda. Many of the participants expressed that the role of mass communication tools in setting agenda is increasing as the area of usage of social media become widespread. The participants remarked that the agenda is being set in the basis of media-politics relation in general.

Two of the participants argued that an independent broadcast concept should be adopted not to direct the media messages and another participant remarks that the effectiveness of politic climate in setting the agenda.

One of the participants argues that as the most important element that affects the process of shaping of media messages, the mass communication tools are used by dominant ideology to legitimize the power and speech and to manipulate the society.

A participant mentions that the dominant power that sets the agenda is the media-politics relation but rarely some political parties and non-governmental organizations are able to set the agenda according to amount of place they take in mass communication tools. Another participant remarked the obstacles which are originated from not risking the conflict with political power and points out that the mass communication tools are not being used effectively in public opposition and public awareness.

- *The assessment of the reader/audience profile in Turkey and the effect of mass communication tools on the readers/audience*

The participants assessed the reader/audience profile in the frame of these notions: A participant expressed them as an audience with "low education level", "not questioning", "accepting given unconditionally", "lacking critical approach", "unaware", "conservative", "only follow the broadcasts that fit with their views", "not reading books", "don't have hobbies", "ignorant" and another participant didn't want to comment on them. Another one mentioned that it's not possible to generalize the profile. Distinctly, a participant talked positively about the new generation, he mentioned a young generation which reads and knows what they want. Two participants, an editor and a director who work in television, mentioned the ratios of program types the audience watch instead of assessing the profile openly. According to the ratios, the contents are as following: Entertainment, music and tabloid press programs 70%, news and programs 20%, documentaries 5%, science 3%, technology 2%.

- *Media literacy notion*

Media literacy notion is expressed by participants as in the form it's given in Table 1. 50% of the participants were able to describe media literacy correctly as a notion, 50% of them interpreted it differently.

**Table 1. Views on media literacy notion**

| Views of media literacy notion | Number |
| --- | --- |
| Watching/reading and analyzing the media consciously. | 10 |
| Understanding the reader/audience | 3 |
| A wide responsibility area | 1 |
| Opinion leadership | 1 |
| Truthful/independent content production | 5 |

The ones that were not able to describe the media literacy notion correctly in their assessments on the suggestion about successful media literacy and the effect of media literacy training and mass communication tools on the readers/audience are left out of evaluation.

- *Suggestions on a successful media literacy education*

The participants who described media literacy properly in general frame, had the following views which they agreed about the media literacy education: It should be given starting from young ages, should be applied practically, it should be given by media specialists which are not influenced by the political power, it should focus on the sub texts, it should include an education structure which aims to research different sources.

One of the participants added a different point of view about reaching media literacy goals with the expression

"…It would be optimism to think that people would not be poisoned when they drink water if the water source is poisoned. Therefore education should start from the media in my opinion and this way the mass would reach true news, as the education level and other factors improve, we could set up an effective and rightful system…"

- *How would media literacy education affect the role of mass communication tools on the readers/audience?*

The participants argued that as the readers/audience get informed about the contents and texts on media with media literacy, media will be free from being a tool for the dominant ideology and it will have to get back its actual ability to inform people completely and objectively.

## 3. Conclusion

Media literacy aims to raise individuals who think, research, read and criticize. In this context, a systematic media literacy education should be structured to raise necessary awareness. The education studies which are ongoing since 1920s in Europe became prominent in Turkey in recent years but they didn't get functionality at a sufficient level. The content of the lesson which is planned as the continuation of the traditional education system fell short in many areas with its theoretical structure. Therefore it could only be possible with an applied program to give students the ability to analyze media correctly.

According to the findings, we see that the participants who are in the sector for a long period defined the functions of the structure they are in correctly and opposing to these positive functions, they remarked the negative role of the media on the audience in functionality. The participants agree that the public agenda is being set by the media but they have different opinions on the formation basis of the agenda. Many of the participants express that agenda is being set in the circle of media and politics and it is being dictated on the public. Some of them suggest that with the agenda, the dominant ideology reaches to public through the media.

The participants' reader profile in Turkey was described with negative descriptions. Media professionals who described the media literacy notion correctly and made appropriate suggestions for a successful education, argue that a systematic education could get rid of ethical defects in media and negative roles on the audience with the virtual world which has been created for the audience. They express that instead of an audience who doesn't question, accepts everything preliminarily, who doesn't think about the truth and/or actual purpose and accepts the messages directly and shapes all his life, beliefs, politic views according to these messages; across an audience who is informed about media messages, the media would be more independent, more objective, more transparent and without the concerns about sales and ratings, the media which couldn't be structured around media ownership, the necessity of broadcasting notion would become important.

As a result, the media literacy education is not only important about raising the awareness of the audience, it's also important about fulfilling the requirements of broadcasting notion.

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