

Chapter 28

Digital Literacy in the World of Digital Natives

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ABSTRACT

Digital literacy includes use of technological communication devices and being conscious while using them and to benefit from accurate and useful information and to produce accurate and useful information in the digital world. This study is an attempt to understand the digital literacy of the digital natives who are currently undergraduate students. The objective is to try to understand how they add new media communication devices to their education and to their daily lives. A qualitative field research was conducted with 28 undergraduate students at Baskent University, Ankara. With this aim, the concept of digital literacy was examined first, and the concept of digital natives was examined second. Finally, results of the field research were analyzed. According to the results of the study, it was seen that participants of the study have digital literacy in the context of using new communication technologies. But they need guidance on which digital resources they can use in the fields in which they take education.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a digital world where there is a continuous development of technology. Social media networks and technological devices shape the world we live. Old habits and ways of living are changing with the effect of these developments. On the other hand, children who were born into this world where social media and technological devices started to cover every aspect of our lives, are now young adults. All these facts bring along important concepts to our lives. One of these concepts is digital literacy. Digital literacy is an important concept in today's world where the generation of digital natives is young adults now.

The aim of this study is to understand the concept of digital literacy and to examine the competence of digital natives in digital literacy. For this purpose, a field research was conducted with undergraduate students studying in the field of social sciences. In the study, firstly, the concept of digital literacy, and; secondly, the concept of digital natives was examined. Finally, the results of the field research were analyzed.

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DIGITAL LITERACY

The concept of digital literacy was first used by Paul Gilster (1997) in his book. The terminology of the concept is wide-ranging, and it was studied by various authors such as Bawden and Robinson (2002), Martin (2006) and Kope (2006). With the development of technology, the concept of digital literacy has gained importance¹. Digital literacy might be defined as:

the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital devices and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesise digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process (DigEuLit Project in Martin, 2006, p.19)

The “literacy” term is used as “competence” or “skill” in the relevant literature (Buckingham, 2008, p. 75). Besides, the literacy term carries a social status such as “having essential skills for understanding/using/operationalize something”. There are different literacies, which were discussed in the literature such as visual literacy (Messaris and Moriarty, 2005, p. 482), cine-literacy (British Film Institute, 2000 in Buckingham, 2008, p. 74), information literacy (Bruce, 1997, Bawden, 2008) and media literacy. Many literacy types which were discussed throughout the development of digital technologies are called as “new literacies”. “New literacies’ is a relatively new concept in the literature. According to Australia’s newliteracies.com.au website, new literacies are digital literacies characterized by SMS (short message service), MMS (multimedia messaging service), social networking activities and mobile technologies such as mobile phones, smartphones and tablets” (Ng, 2012, p. 1066).

On the other hand, “digital literacy” is a broader term. According to Bawden (2008) origins of digital literacy are information literacy and computer literacy. The reasons why the fundamentals of digital literacy come from information literacy and computer literacy can be linked to technological development. “Computer literacy” was an effective and used concept in the 1980s; “information literacy” was used in 1990s (Bawden, 2008, p.21). It is not surprising that these concepts have been in the literature since the 1980s, the period when we started having information by using computers during the transition to an information society. Information literacy has expanded to become the evaluation of information and an appreciation of the nature of information resources (Bawden, 2008, p.21). According to this, someone who has information literacy “engages in independent self-directed learning, implements information processes, uses a variety of information technologies and systems, has internalized values that promote information use, has a sound knowledge of the world of information, approaches information critically and has a personal information style which facilitates his or her interaction with the world of information” (Bruce, 1994).

Shapiro and Hughes (1996, pp.4-5) extend information literacy concept to computer literacy. According to this, information (and computer) literacy includes the following:

- *Tool literacy*, or the ability to understand and use the practical and conceptual tools of current information technology, including software, hardware and multimedia
- *Resource literacy*, or the ability to understand the form, format, location and access methods of information resources
- *Social-structural literacy*, or knowing that and how information is socially situated and produced

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