REDUCING THE DAMAGE OF CYBERSPACE ON YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH MEDIA LITERACY

Maryam Baratali[a]*, Zohreh Karimi[a], Hamed Ramezani Moghadam[b], Mohamad Dehghani[c]

[a] Department of Educational Sciences, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
[b] Department of Educational Sciences, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran
[c] Department of Civil Engineering , Islamic Azad University, Isfahan(Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan- Iran

Abstract

Nowadays, the development of information and communication technology has a significant role in human life. Fundamental changes due to the emergence of information and communications technologies are considerable in different spheres of individual and social life. Media messages in the era of globalization are the most important contemporary challenges. The aim of this study is to provide an effective approach in reducing damage to young people in virtual space. The research method involved a non-systematic review via a main keyword search in important and useful databases and an extensive literature review. The findings of the study have confirmed that media literacy is an effective approach in reducing the damage of virtual space on the younger generation. One of requirements of globalization is the need for education and training to prepare young people to face the unpredictable challenges of life. Media literacy skills should be included in the education system to deal with the negative effects of media in young people as they are active audiences who perceive messages, decrypt and evaluate them.

Keywords: Education of media literacy, cyberspace, critical thinking, damages of cyberspace

*Corresponding author.
E-mail address: baratali_540_1359@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

The world of communication and the radical changes associated with it has created a different world for the younger generation compared to the world of their elders. A group of thinkers and scholars in this field consider the changes in the world of communication to be the origin of the New Age referred to by

different names such as the McLuhan global village, global civil society, second modernity, networking community, world abandoned, communication community, and fluid modernity (Abasi & Mirali, 2012).

Today, with constant media bombardment and communication overload, communication technologies are so commonplace and plentiful that people can easily keep in touch with anyone, anywhere, at any time on the planet. Media is a useful and powerful means that allow for the instantaneous transfer of data around the world. Media used to transmit messages from the sender(s) of media to the audience or the audiences and these include newspapers, books, radio, TV, satellite, communications and information technologies, the Internet and so on. As such, the mass media, or public media, and its effects are of great interest to society (Kazno, 1995)

In recent years, children and adolescents have experienced significant changes in their lifestyle. One of the most important of these changes is the emergence of new media because of its characteristics such as affordability, availability and interactivity, which make this media much more effective than older ones (Aameli, 2009). Concern about children and adolescents' moral development and the negative influence of media was a concern in as early as ancient Greece when Plato in his book titled "Republic" argued that materials for children should be strictly censored for their own good. With the advent of electronic media, including motion pictures, radio and television, this concern of the influence of media on young people has become even more urgent. Electronic media, especially television in particular, provides much more information than what children already know or need to know (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie 2004).

Keshtiaray and Akbari (2011) posit that with the introduction of instantaneous communication, comprising simple and rapid entry and access to communicate with the world in different forms with no limitation of time and space, has facilitated access to and participation in economic, scientific, cultural, artistic, religious databases which can be counted among its unique features. Limitless latitude and flexibility may lead to fundamental changes in the principles of society because familiarity with other communities, willingly or unwillingly, brings in new standards to the extent that a society's norms and values may diminish. Among the measures that could be taken to deal with such challenges are social control where the principles of enjoining good and forbidding evil are taught to maintain a society's religious values and societal norms. The advent of the Internet and various aspects of its influence on human life despite all the advantages and benefits have raised concerns in all relevant communities and is not limited to a particular community or minority.

The media possesses the status to effect a change in culture, either in art or in terms of symbolic forms and fashions, creating moods, ways of life and norms. It has the power to become the dominant source of definitions and images of social reality that then become a collective norm among individuals, groups and communities. Normative judgments and values are expressed as an inseparable and mixed entity with news and entertainment programs (Maccuel, 2002).

Given the importance of this issue, the authors of this study wish to present an effective approach to reduce the damage of virtual space on young people.

1.1. Media literacy

Media literacy is not merely confined to a means of reading and writing as they are not recognized as the concept of news, interviews and reports and others. Media literacy seeks to identify the relationship

between knowledge and power and power relations and social justice. Media literacy means understanding how the media works on people (Shekarkhah, 2009).

The history of media literacy dates back to 1965. Marshall McLuhan in his book entitled "Understanding media dimensions of human existence", used the term for the first time when he wrote "When the global village is achieved, it is necessary for people to achieve media literacy as a new literacy" (Jahromy & Jahromy, 1989).

Since the mid-1970s, the issues of media literacy have been extensively studied in countries like Canada, Latin America and European countries like Italy and Spain. The main objective of media education in these countries was to overcome the inequalities between developed and underdeveloped countries (Spasgar, 2005). In Japan, the translation of media literacy texts in 1992 led to a new form of media studies in the country. In 1999, the National Association of Radio and TV organizations of Japan began media literacy education programmes for children. Now, media literacy as one of the most efficient means of monitoring the media has captured the attention of developed countries and have become courses offered in educational programmes in Canada, Japan, Germany, Britain, Australia and South Africa. In these countries, media literacy has become so important that it is offered as a subject in the school and tertiary curriculum and even in adult and higher education sectors. The aim of such courses is to educate the masses on what the media is and how it differs from the reality around us. Meanwhile, the students also learn about the various types of media such as advertisements, editorials, reports, news and various media platforms like visual, written and electronic. This knowledge would enable students to select media in terms of their taste and enable them to form an accurate perception of the content being offered.

Institutions and organizations that are active in the field of media literacy like UNESCO and the European Commission and the European Parliament have delineated four areas of skills that are required for media literacy. These include the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and produce media content creatively. All these skills strengthen and develop awareness, personal abilities, critical thinking and problem solving abilities. With these four skills, young people are able to access and use the media, analyse and evaluate, produce and communicate media messages using their critical thinking (Oxstrand, 2009). According to Robert Ennis (1996), mental skills are a component of media literacy that enable everyone to make wise decisions regarding values such as the pursuit of truth, justice, self-determination and personal criticism. Media literacy is a critical thinking skill, that provides a strong sense of how to deal with and meet the needs of the media. One reason for the rise of awareness in all sectors of society is dealing with the media's targeted audience. This can lead to mutual and cooperative relationships with the media and the strengthening of democratic structures in the subject of criticism for the media active participation of citizens. Skills training for thoughtful and informed communication with the media and at the same time to create a detailed, critical analysis of media messages (written, audiovisual) is a significant factor in media literacy. In the view of Elizabeth Thoman, the founder and president of the Centre for Media Literacy training in Los Angeles, media literacy is "the ability of interpreting private conceptions from hundreds and perhaps thousands of phonetic body every day through newspapers and commercial journals. Media literacy has the power to choose and select media, ability of challenges and questions as well as being aware of what is around us and not being vulnerable and passive."

Pat Kipping, a famous Canadian expert believes that "media literacy makes a better citizen of you." He later added that persons with media literacy skills consider the media to be a means to convey ideas, information and very delicate and complicated news. The techniques used for creating a message under the

influence of emotions are well-known and people who are media literate can identify such techniques and messages and discuss their views. Media literate individuals seek out different sources of information and entertainment based on the information they are interested in. They know how to react to the media and exercise the necessary discretion. The aim of media literacy is to empower youth and adults with the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and develop media.

Operational levels to achieve these goals include:

a) Schools: Improving the educational standards in the field of language teaching, social studies, health and other issues including skills to access, analyze and evaluate information in the media. Teachers should note that once students gain experience and talk about the media, media literacy can become an enthusiastic and engaging way to explore the wide range of issues and problems.

b) Society: in the view of researchers and thinkers, media education is an important tool to identify and deal with the problems of society, such as substance abuse, obesity and eating disorders, violence and harassment; understanding the opposite sex, racial discrimination and other species discrimination and oppression, as well as life skills training. Literacy skills can empower people and groups that are usually removed from the media and find out their stories and share their ideas for justice.

c) In public life: media literacy helps us to understand how the media "creates" culture and how "media monopoly" controls a group of large corporations involved in our media and politics that affect the community. Media literacy for youth and adults will encourage them to change the existing media system and the media networks so that they emerge fairer and more accessible.

Media literacy has evolved and today has been influenced by the interactive nature of media which facilitates media access, analysis and evaluation, production and media communication. The steps in Table 1 are proposed in the article entitled "Study on the current trends and perspectives of media literacy in Europe" published on the website of the European Commission.

Table 1. The most important stages of development in media literacy (Taghizadeh, 2010)

History	Communication space	New Skills	Social and cultural implications
Classical period	Verbal communication and gestures + invention and spread of alphabetic writing	Dominance of oral language and gestures	Organizing and supporting knowledge
First Industrial Revolution & Renaissance	The invention and spread of book printing and newspapers	Alphabetic skills	Creating the origins of philosophical and scientific explanations
The second industrial revolution	The rise of electronic media: phone, video, radio and television	Strengthening and expanding literacy	The progress of science and empirical philosophy
Information Society	Digital media and the Internet	Mainstream education	Media and consumer societies (Audience)

2. Research Method

The research method is a civilian review and a keyword browsing search of the study (media literacy, injury in cyberspace, education and media literacy, etc.) has revealed important and useful databases and

literature. Data collection involved taking extensive notes. After a review and discussion of the results of the studies, the researchers analyzed the results of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

After reviewing the literature in the field of media literacy in order to find an effective approach to reduce the social harm caused by it on young people, the results are presented according to sections below:

3.1. Cyberspace

Cyberspace refers to the world of Internet media and communications. Virtual or cyber space refers to a set of interconnections for humans via computer regardless of physical geography. The term was first mentioned by William Gibson, author of Canadian science fiction novels in 1984. In his view, cyberspace is indeed the imaginative space of computers that all connect people, machines and resources. Virtual space can be used to describe all types of information resources generated through computer networks. In fact, a different kind of virtual reality and cyberspace digitally linked by computer networks can be considered synonymous with the World Wide Web. Virtual reality is a computer generated reality, because the physical environment is absent as humans interact with the electronic interface. Most of the important changes of the contemporary world that are the foundation of the future changes seems to put the real world and the virtual world in competition. The emergence of the new world ie. the virtual world seems to influence many trends and attitudes and appears to have the capacity to influence the future of the world.

This world is dominated by parallels sometimes within even the real world and the real objects. The real world of physical characteristics such as geography has a special political system, confinement, natural and so is distinct from the virtual world in the face of lack of such characteristics such as location, temporality, plurality, time, and so on. Hence, individuals operating in the virtual world are relatively isolated from the real world. One of the most important changes that have been created in both spaces is the change in human relations; the replacement of traditional face-to-face with computer-mediated virtual relationships. This is perhaps the most important part of this change. Every interpretation and description of cyberspace is that it is a vast territory; exquisite and pristine for their residents, with limitless capabilities, freedoms, opportunities, with no anxiety, and damage or restrictions.

Cyberspace is a worldwide network of computer networks and even personal computers using different hardware and software and communication protocols to connect to each other. Telecommunication technologies form the basis of the virtual space. Although some of these technologies, such as the telegraph and telephone were invented in the early nineteenth century, but cheap technologies and increasing the technical capacity of the main conditions for the emergence of cyberspace have occurred in recent years (Jafari, 2011). Cyberspace as a feature of modern life is defined as any phenomenon in spite of the benefits and positive effects on human life, the negative aspects and its devastating consequences.

Features of cyberspace include:

3.1.1. Beyond time and place

Cyberspace is a place for social activities. The most important feature of this space is its independent identity of time and place. For example, the classroom is an example of a social activity in the real environment. Students and teachers should be in the same place at the same time for their scientific and

educational interaction. But in cyberspace, virtual classes can be held where although students from each class are in unknown locations, they still have the opportunity to learn.

3.1.2. Easy access to the latest information

If you want to access the latest articles, books, or new news that are published worldwide, the easiest and fastest way possible will be the use of cyberspace.

3.1.3. Charm and diversity

The feature of customer orientation will be greatly impacted with inclusion of videos, pictures, texts or any other attractive art. These tools are all readily available in cyberspace adding to the diversity and appeal of cyberspace.

3.1.4. Freedom of information and communication

The true meaning of freedom of information and communication has been achieved in cyberspace, so access to any information is possible without any limitation.

3.1.5. Being interactive

Virtual environment is a two-way media which both producer and consumer are associated with and accept each other. This feature gives the parties the opportunity to present their views and learn from the views of others.

3.2. Damage of cyberspace

Akbari and Akbari (2011) have classified the damage of cyberspace within the following categories:

3.2.1. Dissatisfaction with family

One area of family problems and grievances is related to the overuse of the media. Most people who are addicted to the internet negatively impact their family life as they would have less time for the family and consequently, feel lonely and depressed and lack self-esteem. These individuals will face cultural and financial losses and even physical damage. The interference of the virtual space into the relationship between parents and children can reduce the role of the parents as a socio-cultural, religious and emotional referent which will create a generation gap. The growth of technology seems to have resulted in the the loss of bonding between children and parents.

3.2.2. Internet addiction

Computer games and using the Internet are interesting and enjoyable for adolescents and even adults. Unfortunately, some due to excessive use of computers and the Internet become addicted to these devices and like any other addiction, their only goal in life becomes to use computers and the Internet abandoning all other social activities. If they barred from using the Internet or computer, they become highly stressed and upset and even aggressive. Web surfing is a habit that is also in the list of addictive behaviors in virtual space and negatively impacts physical, psychological, familial, and economic areas of life.

3.2.3. Identity crisis and disruption in the formation of character

In cyberspace, everyone is trying to express their own ideas and interests. Revealing personal identities and details on the Internet can lead the growth and strength of multiple personalities. Young people are more vulnerable in this environment, and especially at a time when their identity is being formed, the danger is greater. With many features and options that the public media including the Internet offer, young people will be affected, to constantly try new and different types of behavior. This can create an uncertain identity formation and continuous change, the "Internet is a social scene that people in different situations, roles and lifestyles, exploit its effects" (Akbari & Akbari, 2011).

3.2.4. Generation gap

Nowadays, technology has created a gap between generations (children and parents). Conversation between family members have fallen silent almost overnight and this can be traumatic. Although parents and children are living in a cultural atmosphere, several factors cause attitudes and behaviors to be different. This phenomenon is increasingly causing a generation gap. The speed of development and expansion of relations with the developed world focus more attention to youth programs, the globalization of culture, the media, associations and community expanding outside of the family to join and belong to the youth and others (Rahimi, 2011).

3.2.5. Conflict of values

The presence of the Internet in the family has led to changes in the family value system. An experimental study has shown that young people's use of the Internet leads to the loss of the values of the family (Zadeh, 2005).

3.2.6. Aggression and violence

Using aggressive phrases and words in online communities is virtual intimidation that leads to the psychological abuse of others. More virtual violence can be traced to the area of interactive games (Anderson & Dale, 2004).

3.2.7. Virtual friendship

Virtual friendships can develop alongside real friendships. One of the most important features of internet friendship is the deception. Teens and young adults have used abbreviations in chat rooms that parents are not able to decrypt (Aameli, 2011).

3.3. Necessity of media literacy education by Education Organization

In the turbulent era of information, where most people are bombarded with various audio, visual and textual located media, the importance of media literacy is undeniable as proper choices of media messages will be possible. Since youth are continuously faced with a flood of media messages, social institutions such as education, i.e. universities and training centers as custodians of human being behaviour and culture have a major role in this regard. In most cases, young people lack the skills to accurately identify a media message. Media literacy education will increase their ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media messages. Media literacy will also generate thinking skills for students to apply critical perspectives when

dealing with the media. Those with access to the skills of persuasion and orientation can identify the message as well as social and cultural values which are being transmitted through media messages. Moreover, media literacy will teach young people how to make and produce proper media messages and finally, to evaluate and analyze the messages.

The most important goal of education is to prepare children and adolescents to live in the community. Education is consistent and aligned and appropriate with social, political and economic needs at national and international levels. If education is not consistent with international approaches it will become obsolete and non-formal hence losing its advantage (Alvin, 2005). Audiences of the information age, especially young people need the literacy skills to actively interact with the content of media messages by developing the judgment and the ability to decode the content of media messages (Nasiri & Aghili, 2012).

Developed countries have already put in place programmes to increase media literacy in the community, especially for the younger generation. IN the UK, basic media literacy courses are taught in schools. The aim of these courses is to teach the correct use of the media. In countries such as Japan and Canada, the issue of media literacy became a focus of study nearly three decades ago.

The Canadian media literacy movement in emphasising the necessity of media literacy education cites these reasons:

1. The media dominates cultural and political life;

2. Almost all information, except those directly experienced comes from the media;

3. The media can create powerful, ethical and behavioral models;

4. Our media consumption should be converted from a passive to an active relationship.

In addition to these reasons, researchers in the field of media literacy has expressed the need for media literacy for the following reasons:

1. We live in a mediated environment;

2. Media literacy focuses on critical thinking;

3. Media literacy is part of the life of an educated and well-educated citizen;

4. Media literacy promotes active participation in a media saturated environment;

5. Media education helps us to understand communication technologies (Ghasemi, 2006)

3.4. Aim of media literacy education

Media literacy education leads to the habit of questioning, research and presentation skills in order to strengthen communication with the media and make informed and thoughtful decisions through the critical analysis of media messages. In this view such critically interactive communication and education can bring about make drastic changes. Media literacy education pursues different objectives among which the most important are:

1. The development of creative, critical and careful thinking in young people against media content and performance.

2. Visual forms of knowledge associated with using it in combination with other skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

4. Conclusion

The last century was the century of the atom and the symbol of the twenty-first century is the Internet and virtual space, with a shift from the industrial age to the post-industrial era. Now, the world is entering a new era with the transition from the economy of hardware to software. Growing communications, computers and the Internet in the new world are among the indications of the emergence of software, intangible and complex ideas. This is due to one of the important changes, which is changes in the way audiences use the media. Media literacy seeks to create the ability to use the media critically, so that the person can understand, analyze and evaluate different media messages and programs, creating positive, helpful and constructive messages. The media literate person can make informed media choices, with the ability to access their messages from a mass of messages, to critically analyze, evaluate and write messages in a variety of models. Thus, through media literacy, we can identify what a person has gained or lost through the time and cost spent on the use of the media. Media literacy provides audiences access to media messages through the ability to decrypt the message, map access to information and use new communication technologies such as computers and the Internet. The educational system plays a major role in the development of literacy.

In order to prevent and reduce social degeneration the following proposed solutions are given:

1 - Paying special attention to media literacy education in the formal education system and culture of the country in order to educate children and adolescents.

2 - Accompanying audiovisual media, newspapers, magazines, publications for the institutionalization of cyber culture.

3 - Family education in order to learn about cyberspace

4 - Forming and operating non-governmental organizations for the media literacy.

5 - Organizing training sessions in organizations and industries to familiarize and inform parents about the new technologies, especially the Internet and cyberspace.

6 - Communicating a sincere sympathy, compassion and understanding on the part of parents for their children.

7 - Provision of suitable and useful textbooks for media literacy prepared by the Ministry of Education.

Acknowledgements

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