Digital Literacy of the Generation Z University Students During Covid -19 Pandemic in The Postmodern Society

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Abstract

The very high speed of latest technological growth has made it difficult to predict tomorrow's life models. We are definitely sure that our future will be completely digital. We have to develop new digital approaches on every aspect of our lives. In fact, the world as we know transforming into what is referred by many scholars and academicians as the era of postmodernism. In order to profit by these dramatic changes, all digital services will be changed or altered. Due to these radical changes the Generation Z is going to be affected by growing demand of digital literacy.

In our age, technological developments affect all areas of life and the communication styles of individuals with each other are expanding in connection with this issue. It is the main subject of generation researches to observe what changes and transforms in the postmodern world in the context of social, economic and technological changes of the generation Z university youth. This is the focal point of the research.

Understanding the generation Z university students who have experienced this change and evaluating life from the window and perspective they look at or being judged will help us to understand the concept of the generation. Consumption frenzy and the abundance of games and activities attract Generation Z to digital media. In the meantime, the problems of digital literacy of university students are increasing in direct proportion during Covid -19 lockdown period.

Key Words: Digital Literacy, Generation Z, Postmodern Society, Covid-19 Pandemic

The Generation Z

Even though there is no precise boundary about the generation Z, in most literature, it is stated that they are the individuals born between 1997 and 2010. The ultimate characteristic is simply that they have no idea a world without the internet. Their lives are shaped by internet which is an indispensable part of them. Prensky considers they are more internet savvy than the other generations (Prensky,2010). In some research the Generation Z's brains are structurally different than previous generations. They are surrounded by complex visuals so their brain developed much more than the others. Since they are reactive to visual learning tools yet with shortened attention span (Cruz & Diaz ,2016).

Longo expressed the Z generation's peculiarities are as follows the members of this digital generation possesses the most sophisticated skills and knowledge with information technologies. As a consequence of their experiences the generation Z members have special learning preferences and styles that exactly differ from earlier generations (Comba,2011).

For Generation Z digital literacy needs increasing responsibility and pressure to achieve at early ages. These aspects can be defined as lack of face to face social relationships but on the other hand the high level of virtual relationships with the help of 24-7 access to social networks. Generation Z is increasingly motivated to find virtual friends in the postmodern society as they find the world like a parade or an amusement park as Fırat and Shultz mentioned (Fırat&Shultz,2001). The main structure of the postmodern world which makes uncertain and multiple choices possible, so it overlaps with the habits and features of university students belonging to the generation Z (Hamouda,2012).

As the spirit of the time changes and develops, generations differ and change the basic form. Generation Z, which constitutes almost 25% of the population of our country, has become a generation that needs to be examined in a special and detailed manner. As they are fed by technology and the speed of change.

Generation Z is one of the youngest generations who has elderly parents and had to receive training from older teachers. Facing competition at a very young age, reaching information digitally at the touch of a button in the online world created within a wireless network. For this reason, the social and communication preferences of Generation Z are also definitely digital (Buckingham, 2006).

The true owners of the new age must have a set of competencies in order to survive. The most important of it is cognitive flexibility. In this period success can be mentioned as the ability of a person to adapt to certain situations, the ability to quickly switch from one thought to another, or the capacity to produce solutions to different problems with different approaches (Kuran, 2020: 138).

Today 30 percent of the population of Turkey is a member of the generation Z, the demographic structure of the teachers on the other hand our country over 1 million must also be taken into consideration. 50 percent of the teachers who are in direct contact with Generation Z are from Generation Y, 40 percent from Generation X and the remaining 10 percent from Generation Baby Bombers(Kuran,2021).

Generation Z is a young generation already defined by greatness. They are a generation of the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner: Malala Yousafzai and the youngest ever billionaire: Kylie Jenner. Actually, this is a generation defined by firsts, and by extremes. Gen Z members are the most digitally connected furthermore most ethnically diverse generation in digital world. but they are also set to become the most valuable generation we've ever seen.

They are definitely Digital natives from birth. Gen Z members have never known the world without the internet. Both Facebook and the first iPhone launched when they were born. Generation Z is a hyper-connected generation pretty comfortable and talented with negotiating digital media.

Moreover, generation Z members are activists and advocates of climate change and gender equality. According to Retail Touchpoints research members of the generation Z uses their smart devices as research tool. The most important aspects are ; first speed, second interactiveness, third authenticity (Netzer,2019).

Even though Gen Z can be tech- savvy in some areas of digital world, they are lacking in the skills of digital literacy. (Cognizant.com) The most of Gen Z members are able to use virtual reality into their with games. It shows that these features truly match the aspects of the Postmodern Culture(Fırat & Vankatesh,1994).

According to the research done by Tapscott in 2009, it is mentioned that the generation Z has eight basic norms. These are;

- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Personalization
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Entertainment
- ✓ Cooperation
- ✓ Review
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Speed

Due to their libertarian nature, which is one of their most important features, they want to do what they want, instead of sticking to the rules. While they are bored with homework and written exams, they prefer presentation and conference-style participatory training and cooperate. Speed and innovation are indispensable features of their lives. They want to combine task and fun in school and business life (Tapscott, 2009).

The common characteristics of the researchers who were made to determine the characteristics of Generation Z can be listed as follows (Kuran, 2021).;

- ✓ Their visual perception is very high with the effect of the age they were born into.
- ✓ They want to do everything quickly and consume them instantly, they love speed.
- ✓ They tend to hide or restrict their identity in online environments.
- ✓ They prefer individuality and living alone.
- ✓ Digital tools have become a part of their daily lives.
- ✓ Their imaginary worlds are very developed and they have an entrepreneurial spirit.
- ✓ They have no materialist tendencies, they want to have a meaningful experience, not things.
- ✓ They prefer environmentally friendly and socially responsible brands.
- ✓ They have trouble complying with the authority and do not like to obey the rules.
- ✓ They can do multiple jobs at the same time and are compatible with digital technology.
- ✓ Learning styles are based on play, storytelling and acting, they do not like to memorize.
- ✓ They want the learning environment to be planned in accordance with them.
- ✓ They can express the lines comfortably without hesitation and are uncomplicated.

Young people of this generation display more sensitive and understanding attitude to people than the generations before them. This generation prefers to live in isolation in their individual

worlds, and although they are aware of social problems, they do not discuss ideological or political issues much (Gardner & Davis, 2013: 55).

Ipsos research firm in 2012 has conducted a research as "Youth media consumption and lifestyles in Turkey," according to this research results; Young people do not give much importance to privacy issues. They are very sensitive to the environment and give priority to the concept of justice. It is expected that many phenomena will change completely with the entry of this generation into the working life. It is assumed that they will stand against the rule maker and can change the organizational structure altogether (Kuran,2021).

According to the research conducted by Tonta, Generation Z, which uses social networks competently, is used to socialize and have fun by personalizing, adding content and at the same time for easy access and learning. Social networks with Web 2.0 features such as YouTube, Facebook, MySpace and Instagram are among the most visited websites by Generation Z (Tonta, 2009).

As a result of the other research, 97 percent of Generation Z members watch videos by subscribing to channels such as Tik Tok, and they visit YouTube, follow peers and celebrities and produce entertaining videos. The game is one of the topics that Generation Z speaks in online environments. It proves once again how important the game is in the daily life of Generation Z (Tonta, 2009).

Dijital Literacy

The concept of literacy in the 21st century is interpreted as demonstrating the ability of a networked society to join new communities in this network and with the ability to use it efficiently. Joining different communities, acting easily in these communities, using these tools as a source of information, exchanging information and social sharing can also be used to define the new literacy concept.

Digital literacy and literacy practices have become increasingly difficult to track the effects of these changes on digital technologies with the development of new technologies. The use of digital technology in homes and workplaces as a part of daily life can actually be considered as a new social revolution. With easy access to the Internet, many routines of daily life have completely changed, and as access to information accelerates, finding the opportunity

to have fun through social media has differentiated our lives beyond making it easier (NSW , 2010).

It is an indisputable fact that digital technology has an enormous impact on society. In the last few years, the way we work, socialize, communicate, entertain ourselves have changed due to technological developments. In this context, an issue that has also changed is the concept of literacy. Traditionally, the term literacy refers to the ability to read and write. However, the superiority of modern literacy skill is evaluated together with your digital literacy skills.

According to Gilster, digital literacy is defined and explained as the ability to use various information from their own sources in the digital environment (Gilster, 1997). The other definiton is: Digital literacy is the ability to understand and read texts in multimedia environments (Bawden, 2008).

It is emphasized that the concept of digital literacy is far beyond physically using electronic media. Visual, productive and creative literacy which is the ability to evaluate the information presented in the digital environment and to produce new information from these environments. The features needed for digital literacy and different types of literacy, these are among the first to come to mind (Jones&Flannigan, 2006).

The concept of literacy has become an indispensable part of personal development, as well as including the acquisition of functional knowledge about daily life and the development of basic skills and principles about basic literacy and arithmetic.

The process of transition to digital literacy is evaluated in different stages; Digital literacy has developed with the emergence of the use of computers in the public sphere in the first place in the early 1980s, the introduction of the internet into our daily lives in the 1990s, in the second stage, the significant increase in online networked information exchange in the 2000s (Dobson & Willinsky, 2009).

Television replaced cinema and newspapers in the mid-1950s, leaving its place to digital technologies in the new century. With the emergence of differences in our thinking ability with the help of new digital technology, interactive applications have emerged instead of traditional media tools. Web media, which serves information and entertainment in various ways, has led the individual to be pro-active thinkers. This pro-active individual, who emerged

with postmodernism, has the ability to decide quickly and in advance what he can do with the help of these new technologies (Gilster, 1997).

The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Gen Z members were deeply impacted both mentally and financially as they part-time workers of retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. In the meantime, their mental health has been affected negatively as they have no chance to socialize with their peers because of the continued lockdown period. During the unanticipated Covid-19 pandemic certain problems were exposured by Gen Z(Lin,2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid -19 as aglobal public health emergency as well as pandemic on 11th March 2020(Cucinotta & Vanelli,2020). In fact, Covid-19 had a severe impact on university students all around the world (Toquero,2020).

In Iowa State University the researchers stated " Young generation are exposed to various risks online as they are online more than ever". As Gen Z members have not had the formal training to know what to look out for, they are definitely subject to all risks. These risks can be defined as gaming disorder, violence, sexual abuse and cyberbullying(Jackman & Cho,2021) This is the problem of all the countries in the world and it needs a crucial global solution. They should be protected from the growing number of risks and misinformation online. As Gentile stated digital literacy will not eliminate all the risks online but it will develop better digital citizens who have the ability to understand the risks of the digital world. Furthermore, in the perspective of the educators of this generation need to train themselves about the digital tools and new digital teaching methods (Mizell,2010). Also, particular digital learning needs of the each learner have been comprehended by the experienced educators (Griffith, Kimmer and Biscoe,2010).

Supporting and training in digital applications feed critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. In this sense educators have to show their all abilities and creativity to attract their audience namely their students (Hunczicker,2011).

Conclusion

Since 1997 as Paul Gilster defined digital literacy, the concept has been developed and diversed traumatically due to the problems of lockdown period of Covid-19 Pandemic. This pandemic completely changed the daily life of Gen Z as they spend more and more time on digital fields and channels. In order to protect this generation from the violence, gaming disorder, cyberbullying and sexual abuse ; digital literacy notion should be taught from the very early ages of their lives (Lin,2020). With these aforementioned problems, digital literacy is the crucial solution to support generation Z in obtaining valid and useful information according to their needs and requirements. As a result of this fact, universities will have to rethink and reinvent new learning environments to attract and engage Generation Z students. Indispensable precautions and preparations are required on digital skills and competences of all educators of the Generation Z.

In the pandemic situation, as social networks and digital media are the main source of information, during social crises ,digital literacy is necessary for maintaining the normal course of daily events. More importantly, digital literacy is the basic prerequisite for the digital skills of individuals. The digital skills of generation Z have to be improved in coordination with developing technological and digital devices. Consequently, all organizations especially members of schools and universities have to adapt themselves into the new conditions in order survive in this digital world.