



TRANQUIL
CITY

Tokat

TRANQUIL CITY PROJECT - 2023-1-TR01-KA220-ADU-0160651



Conscious Use of the Internet and Social Media

EDUCATIONAL BOOKLET | TRAINING MODULE



Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction

This book provides information about the potential dangers of using the internet and social media, offering recommendations to help individuals use these platforms more consciously. It aims to raise awareness among both adults and children regarding the responsible use of the internet and social media.

One of the key aspects of society is the culture of coexisting, which imposes certain duties and responsibilities on each individual. Within this framework, a person who adheres to societal norms must also respect the fundamental rights of others. Therefore, living in a society means coexisting with mutual respect for dignity, security, peace, and the right to life.

Computers and the internet have become vital components of social life and individuals' daily routines. As one of the most significant technologies of our time, the internet has increasingly embedded itself in our everyday lives. Without a doubt, the internet contributes positively by helping people meet daily needs. While it facilitates access to news and information, research, entertainment, socialization, and banking, it also introduces various threats and ethical violations. In the internet environment, where every user can also be a publisher, ethical breaches such as misinformation, fraud, misuse of personal data, manipulation, provocation, violence, and privacy violations are common. Thus, along with its benefits, the internet also poses risks, potentially disrupting social peace.



Given this, it is essential for all internet users to approach media content with a critical eye and a conscious mindset. This study aims to raise awareness by encouraging users to critically evaluate content and minimize potential harms. It begins by exploring the historical development of the internet, followed by an overview of social media, and emphasizes the importance of a critical perspective toward online messages.

What is the Internet and How Did It Emerge?

Although not very old, the internet has become a significant part of social life, evolving considerably since its inception. Today, individuals can access news and information instantly via internet-connected phones, tablets, and laptops—from virtually anywhere. This has eliminated spatial and temporal limitations on access to information. Furthermore, individuals can respond to or share content through their personal social media accounts, thereby influencing the spread of information.

The internet is considered one of the most important inventions of the 20th century. It is defined as an open communication network where independent computers can connect (Ryan, 2019, p. 26), essentially forming a global communication system (Tokgöz, 2022, p. 97).

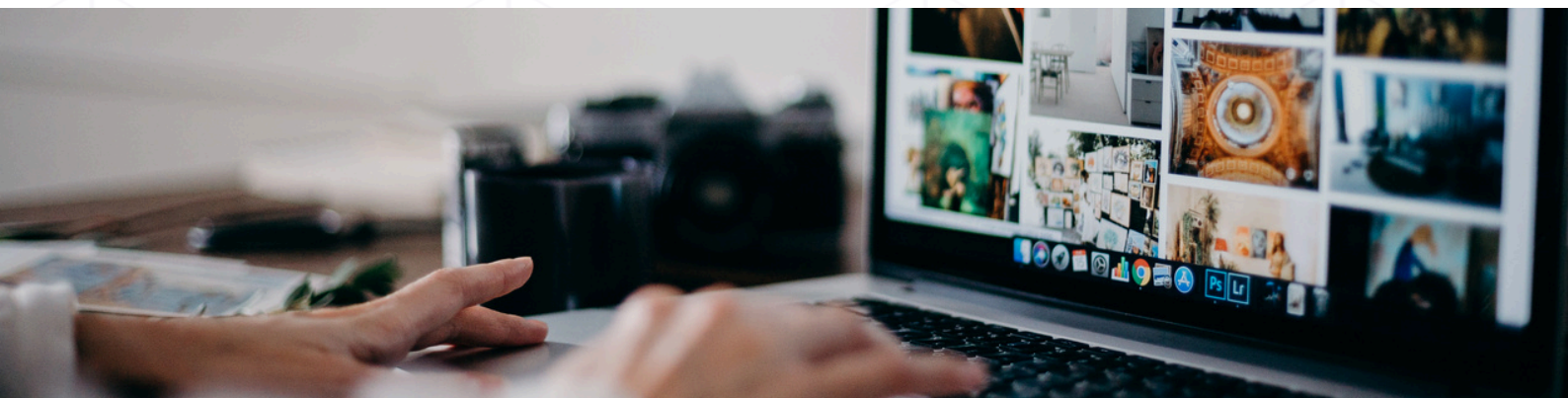
Historically, the internet was developed in the second half of the 20th century, specifically in 1969 in the United States by DARPA (Basım, 2002, p. 13). Computers also evolved during this period.



Computers also evolved during this period. Initially used in industrial and commercial fields, computers became accessible for personal use after 1977 (Geray, 1994, p. 29).

With the rise of computers and the internet, daily life has undergone significant transformation. Internet access has facilitated services ranging from banking and public administration to smart home devices and wearable technologies. It also revolutionized commerce and social interaction. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), 95.5% of households in Türkiye had internet access in 2023, showing widespread internet penetration.

The ease of access to information and the rise of online education and communication, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the growing importance of the internet. Video conferencing and remote learning became commonplace. One major turning point in internet development was the emergence of social media platforms, which have since become integral to social life.



Social Media Use and Key Considerations

Today, all mass media—newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations—also offer online broadcasts. With internet access, individuals can easily follow these media outlets. In addition, platforms like YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and messaging apps have entered everyday life. Through these, users can message, share videos, photos, texts, and even broadcast live. Social media usage is steadily increasing. TÜİK (2023) reported that WhatsApp was the most used app in Türkiye (84.9%), followed by YouTube (69%) and Instagram (61.4%). One of the driving factors behind this rise is the widespread use of smartphones. These mobile devices, equipped with advanced features such as cameras, allow users to create and share their own content easily.

Social media stands out by giving users an active role. Unlike traditional media, users on digital platforms can instantly comment on or respond to content, engage with others directly, and easily share content. However, with this power comes responsibility. Users must be ethically aware and mindful when creating or interacting with content. A critical perspective toward content is therefore vital.

The Importance of a Critical Perspective on Social Media

Content created by users can reach countless others, so it's crucial to critically evaluate all information encountered online. Not all content on the internet or social media is accurate, and users must verify the reliability of what they read or share.

While traditional media has editorial oversight to fact-check information, the internet lacks this mechanism, leading to widespread misinformation. Users now act as content creators and distributors. When unverified information is reshared, it spreads misinformation further. Verifying information, identifying reliable sources, and cross-checking from multiple trusted outlets is essential.

Children must also be educated on media literacy. Exposure to inappropriate, violent, or harassing content—and even cyberbullying—is common. Developing children may be influenced by such content or even engage in harmful behaviors themselves. Raising awareness in children about digital safety and privacy is crucial.



Children spend increasing time on digital games and social media. Some even manage their own social media accounts, while others follow various influencers. These platforms often expose them to content that may negatively impact their development. The open messaging systems in online games, for instance, raise concerns about who children are communicating with. Thus, parents, teachers, and caregivers must maintain active oversight, teach digital boundaries, and build media awareness.

The use of these applications is becoming more widespread every day. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), the most widely used application in Türkiye is WhatsApp with 84.9%, followed by YouTube with 69% and Instagram with 61.4%. In addition to the changes and transformations in internet technology, one of the main factors contributing to this widespread use is undoubtedly smart mobile phones. Today, almost everyone has a mobile phone. The fact that these devices, also referred to as mobile devices, are equipped with new technologies that are being developed day by day has increased their appeal. The cameras added to mobile phones have made it possible for every individual using these devices to also take photos and videos. Individuals who have begun to use the aforementioned social media applications more widely on mobile devices have started to share the videos or photos they have taken more easily on their personal social media accounts. Based on this information, individuals can make personal posts, access news and information more easily through internet-based smartphones, and communicate with each other through various social media applications in this newly formed environment.



Based on the above information, one of the main features of social media is undoubtedly that it gives users an active role. In traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio, individuals can also respond to incoming messages. Individuals can express their reactions to messages by calling the mass media, writing letters or sending e-mails. However, with the advent of online broadcasting, individuals can instantly comment on a news story or content and express their reactions more easily online. Similarly, on social media, individuals can instantly respond to messages and communicate directly with other users. In other words, it is easier to provide feedback via the internet or social media than through traditional media.

This opportunity provided by internet technology to individuals is, of course, welcomed. However, the messages that each user can create and quickly spread throughout society must also have certain characteristics. Therefore, individuals must be aware of ethical violations and create and read the content they produce and the messages they encounter with a certain level of awareness. For this reason, a critical perspective on messages is of great importance.

The Importance of Critical Thinking on Social Media

Each piece of content created by users is likely to reach an unknown number of users. Therefore, users will need to pay attention to many things and critically evaluate each message they encounter. Users should be aware that, particularly on social media but also on the internet in general, there is a possibility that any piece of information may not be accurate. Therefore, individuals should be sure of the accuracy of every piece of content they encounter on social media and evaluate messages with a critical eye.

One of the benefits of the internet is undoubtedly the ease of access to information. The fact that there is a specific editorial process in traditional media such as television, newspapers, or radio indicates that the information in these channels is mostly verified. However, it is quite difficult to apply this process on the internet. Therefore, the internet is also a medium where a lot of misinformation is found. Today, users can also create messages and publish them through social media channels.

In addition, they have the ability to repost messages they encounter on their own pages. Therefore, by reposting information that they have not verified, users will also be spreading misinformation. For this reason, it is vitally important for users to be sure of the accuracy of the messages they encounter. The circulation and spread of false or fake information on the internet can not only mislead individuals but also have a disruptive effect on society. Therefore, the accuracy and authenticity of every piece of information on the internet should be verified. If there is any doubt about the accuracy of the information, the source of the information should be checked and its accuracy should be researched from several reliable sources.

It is also very important to educate children about media messages. Today, it is possible to encounter many negative contents in the media, such as obscene content, violent events, harassment, insults and peer bullying. Children in their developmental years may be exposed to many contents that will negatively affect their future lives and may even be led into crime. At the same time, children may also share content that could negatively affect their lives. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness among children about media messages.

Children should correctly interpret the messages of mass media, including digital games, which are an important part of their daily routine. Today's children, who were born into the world of the internet, have started to spend more time playing digital games instead of playing games on the street. Furthermore, children who follow various accounts on social media platforms such as YouTube or TikTok access a wide range of content online. It is also known that there are children who have social media accounts and spend their daily lives creating content for social media. In addition, children watch various cartoons or series on television.



There is a lot of content on both the internet and traditional media that can have a negative impact on children's development. In addition, various privacy violations or violent situations can occur on these platforms, especially in digital games. In particular, having the message section open during gameplay raises questions about who children are communicating with. Therefore, parents, teachers and other relevant parties must exercise control in all these matters, communicate with children in a healthy manner, warn them about the harms of media, provide privacy education and establish a certain level of awareness in them regarding media.

It is also very important for young people and adults to interpret media messages correctly. The use of social media by young people and adults, who have a certain level of awareness about the media compared to children, is important. Every user on social media has the potential to influence a certain segment or majority of society. Today, we see that content on social media can reach millions of people instantly, and users can share this message again to spread it further. This message can express any positive or negative situation. However, what is important is to know how each piece of content created by users affects social peace. Every individual who makes up society has a certain dignity. Therefore, the dignity of individuals should not be harmed on social media, and content that disrupts social peace should not be created. In other words, it is necessary to ensure that every piece of content created in this medium is accurate and that the dignity of people of all beliefs, ethnicities and lifestyles is not harmed or targeted. Users must pay particular attention to important issues such as violence, hate speech, privacy violations and insults. Moreover, such content also has legal implications.

There are both well-intentioned and malicious users on the internet. With the widespread use of social media, criminal activities such as terrorism, fraud, harassment, and illegal gambling have also increased. In this sense, many criminal activities can be carried out via the internet or social media channels. Therefore, individuals may fall into the traps set by malicious users. At this point, users must be extremely cautious and shop or obtain information from reliable websites, while remaining vigilant against traps. It is crucial for all users to maintain the highest level of security when reviewing messages, avoid sharing personal information, and remain vigilant against criminal activities.

Sonuç ve Değerlendirme

In today's world and societal life, the internet holds a significant position. Individuals can access the news and information they need through the internet, carry out official transactions, conduct research, and find entertainment. Moreover, through the internet and social media, people have the opportunity to instantly learn about developments around them and events happening anywhere in the world. They can not only stay informed about those they follow on social media through their posts, but also share their own lives with their followers. Individuals are also able to react to social events and contribute to the formation of public opinion. Many features like these have entered social life along with the internet. Present in almost every aspect of daily life, the internet is becoming more deeply embedded in the social sphere day by day and is increasingly surrounding individuals' everyday lives. As people spend more time online, face-to-face communication decreases. While access to information and news has become easier thanks to the internet, information pollution is also growing.

Undoubtedly, the internet is a social reality and has many positive attributes. Opposing this technology due to its negative aspects would be contrary to the conditions of our time. Of course, every tool or technology has its downsides. However, it is crucial for individuals to be aware of these negative aspects. Therefore, understanding the potential harms of the internet and using this technology with a certain level of awareness will benefit individuals. In this context, conscious internet usage is of vital importance. As a result, evaluating media messages critically will help prevent some of the harmful effects of media in the social sphere. Similarly, educating children about media is of great importance. Accordingly, the following recommendations are made to users as a result of this study:

- *Internet users should ensure the accuracy of each message they encounter. To do this, users should investigate the source of the information and verify it through reliable channels.*
- *Internet users should be careful when creating content. Messages that violate personal rights, breach privacy, or contain expressions of violence, hate, or discrimination targeting specific segments of society should not be created.*
- *Individuals should be cautious about messages spread by accounts with fake identities.*
- *Parents should monitor what their children do online. At this point, each parent should communicate with their children on a healthy foundation, provide them with privacy education, and raise awareness about media usage.*

- *To prevent children with social media accounts from engaging in criminal behavior or being negatively affected in the future, parents and guardians must educate them.*
- *Users should be able to distinguish between product and promotional content online and remain cautious and skeptical to avoid potential scams.*
- *People should be aware of the existence of malicious users on the internet and stay alert to activities that may constitute criminal offenses.*
- *Users should be careful when sharing personal data.*
- *All users must understand that their online identities come with legal responsibilities, and they should act accordingly.*

Users who act with a certain level of media awareness will contribute to ensuring and preserving social peace by correctly interpreting messages and avoiding actions that may harm individuals' reputations.

Take the Survey, Test Yourself