

Media Literacy: Deception or Redemption?

Nehir Devrim Eserol / Ph.D. (Lect.) 

Kastamonu University, Bozkurt Vocational School of Higher Education, Department of Applied English and Translation Studies
ndevrim@kastamonu.edu.tr

Abstract

The research uses autoethnography to study how digital capitalist systems and the "post-truth" era influence the development of media literacy skills. The research began with optimistic views about media literacy, believing it teaches people to think critically and make rational decisions which helps them fight against false information. The results of my doctoral research showed that people with higher media literacy skills demonstrated higher trust in social media platforms than expected which ran counter to the predicted critical thinking outcomes of media literacy education. The research through autoethnography investigates how digital capitalist systems together with the "post-truth" period shape the acquisition of media literacy competencies. The research began with optimistic views about media literacy because it teaches people to think critically and make rational decisions which helps them fight against false information. My doctoral study produced an unexpected result which showed that people with strong media literacy abilities still placed trust in social media platforms at higher levels than expected despite the expected negative effects of media literacy. The research employs reflexive narrative to establish links between personal life experiences to the three dominant ideological frameworks which consist of liberal theory and Marxist theory and postmodern theory. The evaluation shows that liberal approaches focus on personal evaluation yet

they fail to address fundamental issues with algorithmic discrimination and data control. The author used Marxist analysis to demonstrate how media institutions preserve capitalist systems yet faced difficulties when teaching students to apply their critical understanding toward real social change. Through autoethnographic research the author created a personal story about intellectual development which showed how personal choices interact with organizational obstacles. The research combines liberal agency principles with Marxist structural analysis through Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and hope concepts to create a fresh educational framework. The method teaches media literacy through practical activities which enable people to fight against institutional power structures while building their personal strength. The study contributes to media literacy research by revealing current ideological disputes and establishes a teaching method which unites reflective learning with political awareness and constructive educational approaches for the modern algorithmic information space.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Marxist Media Literacy, Liberal Media Literacy, Media Literacy in Post Truth Era, Autoethnography.

JEL Codes: D83, L86, I23, I21

Citation: Devrim Eserol, N. (2025). Media literacy: Deception or redemption? *Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches (ROMAYA Journal)*, 5(2), 547–555.

1. Introduction

I began this research using autoethnography, a method that blends personal experience with cultural critique to make the intellectual transformation transparent, as Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) described it as a way to connect individual stories to broader social issues. I focused my doctoral research with a focus on media literacy and trust in media—two concepts that initially appeared to promise clarity and empowerment in an increasingly complex and chaotic information landscape. This started in 2018, during my doctoral years at Ankara University, when the Turkish elections highlighted how misinformation on platforms like X could sway public opinion, sparking my curiosity about media's role in democracy. A genuine sense of urgency along with curiosity led me to investigate how people should identify reliable information sources. This urgency arose in a world filled with misinformation and algorithmically arranged content and digitally manipulated realities. The process of deciding which information to trust and which sources to believe is a major challenge for them, as seen in recent EU-led trainings in Turkish universities that aim to combat disinformation through practical exercises.

The inquiry was not limited to scholarly research. Every day I faced personal disorientation from the overwhelming amount of conflicting statements and emotional content and sensational headlines which filled my screens. The situation became like walking through a hall of mirrors where all reflections were distorted and all signals were lost in noise. Modern culture shows diminishing distinctions between factual accounts and fabricated entertainment while both genuine and artificial presentations blend together, a trend amplified in Türkiye by state-regulated media and AI-generated content, as noted in Harsin (2018) on post-truth communication.

I placed my confusion in the context of cultural and philosophical concepts while I attempted to understand it. I experienced the same level of disorientation as millions of others living through the post-truth period which brings together reality erosion alongside narrative destruction and emotional persuasion. This feeling was particularly acute in Türkiye's polarized media environment, where political events like the 2023 earthquake coverage exacerbated echo chambers on social platforms. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality describes the current media environment because it uses artificial simulations to replace genuine experiences while information speeds through the system before being discarded as Lyotard (1984) predicted the collapse of universal knowledge structures.

The attention-based economy and algorithmic design structure a system which generates unproductive shallow media interactions at every stage of

content creation and audience engagement. I needed to study media literacy because my teaching and research duties demanded an understanding of its role in helping people navigate contemporary information systems. Media literacy has merged with the systems it critiques through liberal approaches that fail to confront corporate power in Turkish social media thus creating trust in biased information sources. When I initiated my research on "*The effect of new media literacy level on the perception of trust in social media*" I grew concerned about my findings. The conventional approach to teaching media literacy showed a positive relationship between media usage and student engagement yet failed to develop critical thinking abilities. The research outcomes showed that students who demonstrated higher media literacy tended to have stronger faith in media sources (Devrim, 2023). The first realization of this discovery left me perplexed. Shouldn't media literacy education create students who doubt information sources while thinking critically about media content? This moment in 2020 marked a key stage in my journey, shifting from liberal optimism to questioning its foundational assumptions in the context of Türkiye's neoliberal education system.

The discovery of a contradiction in media literacy principles led me to study its core educational goals along with its theoretical base and underlying beliefs. Graff (1979) showed that modern media systems with corporate control and platform biases remain unaddressed by current liberal humanist-based media literacy approaches which fail to tackle structural inequalities in Turkish higher education.

The study progressed from its starting point of media literacy and trust development into an intricate multifaceted research investigation. The research tracks my academic growth and emotional development and existential transformation through my extensive fieldwork activities. My understanding of media education shifted from liberal optimism to critical poststructuralist analysis through Marxist critique and political economic analysis which developed across three stages from 2018 doctoral optimism to 2020 disillusionment and 2023 postdoctoral Freirean hope incorporation.

The study examines the mental battles and new understandings and moments of uncertainty that appeared during this intellectual shift. The research extends beyond media literacy analysis to study how people encounter and handle their media beliefs and knowledge trust in everyday life especially for educational professionals and media users. The research aims to improve current knowledge about media literacy in digital capitalism and disinformation while investigating its potential future growth. The research uses personal reflection to study media literacy's ideological conflicts and teaching principles which leads to better theoretical understanding

Media Literacy: Deception or Redemption?

of media literacy in real-world contexts and provides recommendations for Turkish media literacy programs such as RTÜK's child media literacy initiatives. I weave these questions implicitly through the autobiographical and analytic scenes rather than treating them as a checklist, prioritizing experiences from my doctoral work, classroom teaching, and post-doctoral reflections based on their relevance to ideological tensions, as per Chang's (2008) criteria for autoethnographic inclusion.

2. Theoretical Background

Media literacy represents a contested concept which Buckingham (2003) explains as the capacity to access and evaluate media content alongside its creation and analysis. The two ideological approaches differ between liberal democracies that focus on individual media skills and liberal democratic participation and Marxist views which regard media as capitalist power mechanisms (McChesney, 2008). Media literacy functions as a "discourse-generating problematic" according to Druick (2016) because although it promises empowerment its implementation aligns with neoliberal governance. Harvey Graff (1979) criticized the belief that literacy development fails because of the fundamental barriers such as social and economic inequality, limited access, misconceptions about literacy's power. The same fundamental barriers still continue in the digital contexts because the same economic, social and cultural structures continue to exist in digital platforms. The existing disputes between liberal and Marxist views on media literacy formed the basis for my personal exploration. This exploration started with optimism toward liberal ideas but advanced to Marxist perspectives about the "post-truth" age and social media algorithms. This progress unfolded in stages: my 2018 doctoral optimism rooted in individual empowerment, the 2020 disillusionment from research findings, and a 2023 shift toward Freirean hope for structural change in Turkish contexts.

2.1. Liberal Media Literacy Theories

Media literacy under liberal principles means that people can analyze media sources effectively while assessing their origin and learning to become informed citizens (Hobbs, 2011). The philosophy of liberal humanism supports education as an unbiased instrument which enables personal empowerment (Potter, 2010). The five key questions developed by Thoman and Jolls (2003) at the Center for Media Literacy form a fundamental component. 1. Who created this message? 2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? 3. How could multiple viewers interpret this message in unique ways? 4. The message contains which values together with

lifestyle and viewpoint elements as well as omitted content? 5. What is the purpose behind sending this message to me? These questions encourage deconstructing media messages, such as analyzing a news article's source or an X post's persuasive intent, aligning with rational agency (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). This resonated with my early optimism where I initially embraced these questions in teaching. Thoman and Jolls' (2003) key questions guide deconstruction but as Graff (1979) argued, overlook corporate control and algorithmic biases (Graff & Duffy, 2008).

Druick (2016) demonstrated that liberal media literacy creates neoliberal subjects who support communicative capitalism. Len Masterman (1985) stated that liberal media literacy methods focus more on technical competencies than ideological analysis thus neglecting capitalist framework examinations. The authors Kellner and Share (2007) advocated the development of critical media literacy which fights for social justice and demonstrates potential within liberal educational systems (Kellner & Share, 2007). To enhance this, Mihailidis (2018) emphasized civic media literacies for intentional engagement, a concept I incorporated in my teaching to address gaps in liberal models. According to my doctoral research findings (Devrim, 2023) people with higher media literacy skills demonstrated stronger trust in media sources while this correlation supports Graff's argument. The algorithm-driven amplification of misinformation led to my growing disillusionment with liberal media literacy and caused me to adopt a Marxist perspective, particularly in Türkiye, where state-regulated platforms like those monitored by RTÜK amplify corporate biases, as seen in the Ministry of National Education's 2024 guidelines that prioritize individual skills over systemic critique.

This liberal framework, while promising, often overlooks how media literacy can perpetuate myths in contexts like Türkiye's, where economic inequalities limit access to critical tools. Drawing on Freire's pedagogy in Brazil, which empowers communities to critique societal narratives (Freire, 1970), I recognize the need for a balanced hybrid approach that integrates liberal agency with Marxist structural analysis.

2.2. Marxist Media Literacy Theories

In Marxist media literacy, the media functions as capitalist hegemony tools that reproduce profit-serving ideologies for control purposes (Hall, 1980). According to Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1988) the propaganda model demonstrated how media content goes through five distinct filters which include ownership and advertising and sourcing and flak and ideology. The work of Chomsky and Herman (1988) shows how media systems follow corporate interests which matches my observations of social media algorithms boosting divisive content

for financial gain. For instance, X's algorithm gives preference to sensational content which supports both advertising and ideology filters.

The literacy myth theory developed by Harvey Graff (1979) supports this idea because he demonstrates that literacy education functions to maintain hegemonic power structures that support capitalist systems. Christian Fuchs (2014) built upon this work by stating that social media platforms exploit user data which damages critical media literacy skills. Dallas Smythe (1981) developed audience commodity theory explains how advertising platforms use their platforms, including X, capture users for commercial exploitation. Mark Andrejevic (2013) identified surveillance capitalism as a significant problem because it prevents users from developing their critical thinking abilities. This perspective gained traction in my doctoral research when I realized X's algorithmic bias, a turning point which shifted my focus from liberal optimism to Marxist critique. Druick (2016) identified two main barriers to implementing Marxist media literacy because neoliberal restrictions limit educational systems to focus on market-based outcomes. Graff (1987) reinforced Druick's argument about media literacy by showing how literacy education systems follow capitalist principles which hinders the development of radical critique. The concept of determinism within Marxist approaches faces a limitation because it disregards human decision-making power as described by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The algorithm-driven presentation of divisive content on social media platforms led me to adopt Marxist principles, aligning with Graff and Chomsky's ideas. Yet, I struggled to apply critical media literacy skills because of digital surveillance which became more challenging after the Turkish Ministry of Education in Türkiye introduced 2024 guidelines that focus on individual competencies instead of system analysis in 2023.

2.3. Postmodern Perspectives and Freire's Critical Pedagogy

The post-truth period with its multiple conflicting realities makes it harder for media literacy to achieve its goals (Harsin, 2018). Jean Baudrillard (1983) argued that hyperreality emerges when simulations replace actual reality because media generate artificial realities. This concept suggest that media literacy education must move beyond basic truth-falsehood identification because modern media creates self-referential loops that make it difficult for educators to develop appropriate critical analysis techniques. The postmodern condition described by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) shows how the breakdown of metanarratives leads to knowledge fragmentation, disrupting the stable understanding frameworks that media used to have. The

breakdown of shared knowledge systems through media fragmentation makes it harder for people to evaluate content. This is because multiple conflicting stories spread without any common truth to reference. The media environment described by Lyotard demands students to develop new skills for understanding media constructs because traditional decoding methods no longer work in a world where authority and meaning shift constantly.

The social media platform X illustrates how realities emerge through algorithmic or manual processes that spread across echo chambers. During the 2023 Türkiye earthquake, when X displayed unverified emotional content received more attention than factual updates while showing signs of state-controlled media operations under RTÜK oversight. Lyotard (1984) explained in his postmodern condition theory that the breakdown of metanarratives leads to knowledge fragmentation which makes it difficult for media literacy to fulfill its purpose. Media literacy depending on a fixed reality is problematic in my doctoral research because it failed to account for Türkiye's divided media environment (Devrim, 2023).

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (1970) provided a solution to these problems by uniting different educational approaches. The "banking model of education" receives criticism from Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) as he promotes problem-posing education through dialogue and conscientization. Through conscientization, students develop critical thinking abilities to recognize how X's profit-oriented algorithms function as tools of power maintenance (Freire, 1970; Fuchs, 2014). The classroom becomes a collaborative environment through dialogue which surpasses individualistic questioning methods described by Thoman and Jolls (2003) (Shor & Freire, 1987). Harvey Graff's (1979) literacy myth aligns with Freire, critiquing media literacy's false promises of empowerment and urging structural analysis, resonating with my recognition of social media's limitations, a realization deepened in my 2023 teaching when students struggled to critique X's biases despite training.

Freire's (1994) critical hope, from *Pedagogy of Hope*, is key: it drives transformation with a balance of realism and optimism. This inspired my hope for a hybrid media literacy approach, combining liberal agency (Hobbs, 2011) with Marxist critique (Chomsky & Herman, 1988). Freire's praxis—reflection and action—suggests media literacy can empower learners to create counter-narratives or advocate for regulation, aligning with Druick's (2016) call for reimagining media literacy (Mihailidis, 2018). Graff's (1987) critique reinforces Freire's, urging media literacy to address structural barriers, shaping my vision for its future in the "post-truth" era. In 2023, I piloted this in my classroom with a dialogic exercise inspired by Brazil's Freirean narrative critique, adapting U.S. civic

resistance models (Mihailidis, 2018) to help Turkish students challenge the Ministry of Education's 2024 guideline focus on individual skills.

3. Method

I employ analytical/evocative autoethnography (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015) to trace a trajectory of conceptual change. This method was adopted in 2018 during my doctoral research at Ankara University to explore my evolving media literacy understanding. The approach is theory-driven: Debates in liberal, critical/Marxist, and post-structural media literacy provide sensitizing concepts that guided—but did not rigidly determine—coding. The corpus comprises (a) reflective research journals (doctoral and post-doctoral, 2018–2024); (b) annotated drafts of my doctoral dissertation chapters; (c) teaching preparation notes and reflective memos from undergraduate media literacy and translation courses (2021–2024) at Kastamonu University; (d) conference presentation slide decks and peer feedback notes; (e) published and in-review articles and their peer review reports; (f) a selective archive of personal social media posts and private messages expressing theoretical doubt or pedagogical concerns (ethically anonymized), including polarized X posts from Türkiye's 2023 earthquake; and (g) field notes from seminars delivered on media literacy and critical thinking. All personally identifiable information and third-party references in private materials were anonymized or excised. The autoethnographic account centers my professional persona; no vulnerable others are described beyond publicly available scholarly discourse.

Analysis proceeded in three iterative cycles: (1) Open coding: inductive labels (e.g., *'instrumental skill emphasis'*, *'structural pessimism'*, *'critical hope'*) were applied line-by-line to journal and memo excerpts. This process was refined in 2022 after my research findings (Devrim, 2023) challenged liberal assumptions. (2) Axial/theoretical coding: codes were clustered under meta-categories mapped to liberal (access, evaluation, rights), critical/Marxist (ideology, commodification, hegemony), post-structural (subjectivity, discourse, performativity), and pedagogical praxis (dialogue, conscientização) dimensions. (3) Temporal synthesis: a longitudinal matrix tracked the intensities and transitions of categories across years, identifying phases: initial liberal optimism, critical disillusionment, liminal crisis, integrative re-synthesis. Reflexive memos documented analytic decisions, enhancing transparency, capturing my 2023 teaching reflections on students' struggles with X's algorithms. Credibility was addressed through prolonged engagement with the self-data corpus, theoretical triangulation (multiple paradigms), and reflexive audit trails.

Autoethnographic singularity risks idiosyncrasy; however, the case functions analytically (Yin, 2018) to illuminate tensions potentially shared by similarly situated educators in semi-peripheral academic contexts, such as those in Türkiye facing neoliberal pressures in higher education. As Denzin (2014) argues, autoethnography 'turns the researcher's gaze inward and outward,' a dual focus I applied to critique cultural norms like media commodification in Turkish classrooms. Autoethnography is the qualitative research approach that uses the author's personal experiences as primary data to critique cultural norms, practices, and assumptions. This approach seeks to balance methodological rigor with emotional depth and creative expression, ultimately aiming to promote social justice and contribute to making life better by connecting the personal with the political and cultural. In my case, this meant weaving my 2018–2024 journey—marked by teaching at Kastamonu and engaging with polarized X posts—into a narrative that challenges neoliberal capitalism and algorithmic control, aligning with Holman Jones (2005) on the personal-political (p. 765). Autoethnography is particularly apt for exploring my evolving understanding of media literacy, as it enables me to foreground subjectivity while linking personal experiences to systemic issues. By doing so, it facilitates a "personal-political" approach, allowing me to interrogate how my shift from liberal to Marxist perspectives reflects and contests broader technological and ideological discourses (Chang, 2008). This shift, evident in my 2023 seminar notes, was shaped by Brazil's Freirean dialogic success and U.S. reflexive models, offering hope amid Türkiye's media tensions.

Institutional ethical approval was not required because the study involves only the researcher's own reflective materials and anonymized secondary documents; nevertheless, principles of respect, beneficence, and confidentiality were followed. Ethical care extended to anonymizing X post participants, ensuring my focus remained on my professional persona amid Türkiye's data privacy concerns. Resonance and transferability are sought by thick description of dilemmas familiar to media literacy educators. Analytical rigor is communicated via explicit coding phases; coherence is demonstrated by alignment of research questions, theoretical lenses, and emergent thematic model. This coherence was tested in my 2023 teaching, where students' responses to algorithmic biases informed my coding. Future multi-participant comparative work may be able to extend these insights, allowing me to reflect on my emotional and intellectual journey. These strategies collectively sustain analytical transparency while acknowledging inherent constraints of a single-case autoethnography.

4. Findings and Analysis

Through this autoethnographic work, I used my personal experiences as a researcher, educator and a social media user to show how my understanding of media literacy developed from liberal optimism to Marxist critique before reaching a critical hopeful perspective inspired by Paulo Freire. My doctoral research (Devrim, 2023) and my interactions with social media platforms have shown how personal freedom operates against system barriers when people try to understand the complicated media environment of the "post-truth" era. My personal experiences have been analyzed through liberal (Thoman & Jolls, 2003), Marxist (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Fuchs, 2014), postmodern (Baudrillard, 1983; Lyotard, 1984), and Freirean (Freire, 1970, 1994) perspectives to show both the potential and boundaries of media literacy while demonstrating the dominant ideological and technological elements of digital capitalism. The section combines reflective storytelling with theoretical analysis to show how my educational path both supports and challenges the cultural, political, and pedagogical aspects of media literacy education. This journey that began with my 2018 doctoral optimism at Ankara University, shifted with 2020 research disillusionment, and evolved through 2023 teaching reflections at Kastamonu University.

This narrative prioritizes data from my doctoral research, 2021-2023 classroom teaching, and post-doctoral seminars (per Method's inclusion criteria), critiquing how liberal optimism—embodied in Thoman and Jolls' (2003) individualist questions—faltered in Türkiye's polarized media, where X echo chambers during the 2023 earthquake amplified misinformation under RTÜK's watch. Marxist perspectives, like Chomsky and Herman's (1988) propaganda model, revealed corporate biases in my X interactions, but their structural focus limited agency—a gap I addressed in 2023 by adopting Freire's (1970) conscientization, inspired by Brazil's community-driven critiques. This approach, enhanced by U.S. praxis projects (Mihailidis, 2018), offers a hopeful contribution to Turkish media literacy, challenging the Ministry of Education's 2024 guidelines' neoliberal emphasis on individual skills and fostering resistance to digital capitalism.

4.1. Initial Optimism with Liberal Media Literacy

Media literacy first caught my attention with both enthusiasm and intellectual interest, sparking my 2018 teaching at Kastamonu University where I introduced students to its potential while teaching English (*employing Content Based Method*). The fundamental essence of media literacy provided people with the power to understand media messages while also

learning how to interpret them and how to critically analyze them, drawing my intellectual and moral interest as I explored RTÜK's visual age warnings on TV screens. The approach provided a sense of control which attracted both intellectual and moral interest. The early/basic media literacy studies focused on the visual age warnings on TV screens and how to read and understand them. I now understand that the liberal media literacy approach which relied on liberal individualism functioned to shield audiences -primarily children- from harmful TV content. This focus I initially embraced in my classroom but later saw as limited by its safety-first design.

Social media maintains its original reasoning model from my first understanding of this concept which became apparent through my 2019 X interactions showing students prioritized content generation over structural analysis. The main focus shifted from media content accessibility methods to responsible media production techniques. The Anglo-Saxon media literacy standards based on liberal ideologies continue to serve as the foundation for current educational standards. People need to learn about algorithmic control detection and false news identification and content selection according to this method. The concept presents a deceptive view of its scope. The wide appearance of this concept conceals its inability to study political elements together with ideological and socio-cultural factors which influence media creation and audience reception. The method treats media as personal property which teaches individual survival skills instead of encouraging people to study media systems as a whole (Devrim, 2023) when students accepted biased Turkish media sources after receiving training. The method fails to study the core power systems which combine with ownership systems and social inequalities to determine media environments.

My initial understanding of media boundaries remained undetected because of my positive outlook during my first TV analysis work in 2018. I thought that teaching students about content analysis and implicit message detection and production techniques would be enough. The media literacy education I received lacked critical thinking skills according to Masterman (1985) who pointed out its technical approach failed to reach ideological depths. The media ownership system remains unaddressed in current discussions while the discussions fail to determine which groups receive advantages from these media systems. Whose interests are being served? What ideologies are being naturalized? The research examined content assessment only while treating viewers as customers who needed better technical skills instead of social understanding. Media operates as a space where social classes compete for dominance alongside gender politics and cultural power dynamics. My positive media litera-

Media Literacy: Deception or Redemption?

cy perspective from 2022 research and 2023 teaching activities in Türkiye's media polarization period transformed when I learned media literacy operates as a survival system within existing power structures instead of a tool for boundary expansion. Media literacy power that I initially discovered proved to function as a survival mechanism for staying within established systems instead of enabling challenges to their boundaries. The critical media literacy education I received adopted neoliberal individualistic principles through its methods which matched the 2024 Ministry of Education guidelines that emphasize personal competencies above system analysis. Media literacy education focused on teaching people to become more effective media users instead of teaching them to become active citizens. Media content analysis for social hierarchy reproduction and media ideologies received no attention during the discussions. Media literacy needs to transform into a practice which enables resistance and intervention for transformational purposes as demonstrated by U.S. civic engagement projects (Miha-ilidis, 2018). My initial media literacy enthusiasm transformed into a more mature approach which acknowledges both doubt and uncomfortable emotions and radical analysis to create positive change in Turkish education by fighting against neoliberal influences.

4.2. Shift to Marxist Critique and Doctoral Insights

My doctoral research data from early 2020 demonstrated an unexpected finding which showed students with better media literacy skills became more trusting of social media platforms (Devrim, 2023). The discovery of this unexpected pattern during my 2020 research at Kastamonu University with my students marked a turning point because it revealed their growing trust in social media platforms. The study of digital capitalism by Christian Fuchs (2014) revealed how dominant media systems use fake participation features to enforce ideological conformity which I observed during my 2023 teaching at Kastamonu University when students interacted with X's algorithmically influenced content during the 2023 earthquake. Chomsky and Herman's (1988) propaganda model helped me understand how capitalist interests operate through ownership and sourcing filters and Türkiye's state-controlled media under RTÜK. However, students maintained liberal beliefs about personal freedom because of Graff's (1979) "literacy myth". The educational methods of literacy that focus on personal skills development serve to preserve the existing social hierarchy according to Graff (1979). Graff supports this view by showing how literacy education that teaches individual skills helps maintain dominant power structures

by concealing the political and economic elements that control media environments as the Ministry of Education demonstrated in their 2024 guidelines by emphasizing skills over system analysis.

The platform economy operates through surveillance capitalism according to Andrejevic (2013), because it exploits power differences to limit users' critical thinking abilities as I observed in 2023 when students' X data usage limited their analytical potential. Students showed trust in digital media yet their literacy education did not develop genuine critical thinking abilities. Paulo Freire (1970) developed *conscientização* as a revolutionary teaching method which enables students to identify institutional oppression while creating liberating knowledge according to Brazil's community-based critiques that I examined in a 2023 seminar. The theoretical transformation brought an end to my initial optimism as I began my continuous fight to unite classroom practice with systemic analysis which could solve Türkiye's fragmented media landscape.

4.3. The Condition of Postmodernism and Media Literacy

The postmodern condition with its fragmented grand narratives and unstable knowledge systems creates a significant obstacle for media literacy education according to my 2020 research (Devrim, 2023) which analyzed how the students navigated using their media skills in the polarized media landscape of Türkiye. The media environment which merges simulated content with emotional triggers and self-referential elements creates difficulties in identifying actual events from their media representations. Baudrillard's (1983) concept of hyperreality demonstrates how media images have replaced actual reality so that conventional methods for detecting bias and evaluating sources become ineffective. Modern media texts create more than distorted representations because they actively shape the reality we perceive. Social media generates a digitally managed environment that uses algorithmically designed content to support personal beliefs, thus strengthening post-truth perspectives, a trend I analyzed in my 2023 teaching when students echoed X's polarized narratives. I struggled to determine the boundaries of rational critique within this situation. What methods should we use to teach critical thinking since emotional engagement and viral content frequently surpass factual evidence? What does it mean to decode media in a world where there may be no "real" to return to? The questions have led me to transform media literacy from a truth-falsehood detection method into a practice which builds epistemological humility and reflexive skepticism. I focused on teaching students to question their knowledge by helping them understand their technological reality and

their position within media systems, implementing this in my 2023 classroom with a mapping exercise at Kastamonu University. My goal is to develop media users who possess ethical awareness and ontological understanding to navigate the postmodern mediascape uncertainties.

I began studying an educational method that unites critical postmodern theory with Freirean principles because Brazil achieved success through dialogic approaches to develop student self-determination (Freire, 1970). The development of media literacy through critical contextualization practices represents an educational method which shows promise. Students need to grasp the position of media texts in social technical systems to properly analyze both message content and distribution frameworks and operational structures. Paulo Freire (1970) developed methods which help students recognize media tools as instruments of power and ideological tools through conscientização. The fundamental teaching method of Freire requires students and teachers to engage in equal dialogue for shared exploration of the world. Teachers must surrender their authority to deliver information so students can create media reflection spaces for experience-based learning while they work together to break down dominant narratives and build new knowledge. Students learn about platform and interface ideological operations through media journaling combined with counter-narrative development and collaborative media mapping activities. Students learn purposeful media use through the principles of "slow media" developed by Honoré (2004) and Volland (2015), which help them build reflective thinking and emotional connections instead of mindless algorithm-driven fast scrolling. These educational approaches help students take back control of their presence when they navigate through the overwhelming media landscape. Media literacy education needs a complete political transformation to directly confront power systems and surveillance methods and ideological frameworks and work environments. Educators must assist students to understand contradictions and systems while developing their ability to envision new alternatives instead of attempting to restore a fictional objective reality, a goal aligned with Türkiye's need to counter polarized media narratives. The path toward critical consciousness through dialogue needs to become a permanent dedication because it continues indefinitely without reaching a definitive conclusion between optimistic and pessimistic approaches.

5. Conclusion

Integrating liberal and Marxist frames suggests a pedagogy that (a) retains liberal emphases on access, verification and participatory rights, while (b)

embeds structural critique of political economy and platform capitalism, and (c) cultivates Freirean critical hope to prevent pedagogical paralysis. Curriculum modules should therefore sequence: foundational operational literacies → critical political economy of media infrastructures → reflexive identity/subjectivity work → praxis projects that design collective interventions (e.g., student-led fact-checking, platform policy critiques).

This research documents my intellectual and emotional transformation starting with liberal media literacy optimism until it evolved into Marxist perspectives which evaluate the strengths and constraints of media literacy in our present "post-truth" society. The beginning of my journey included perceiving media literacy as a system which teaches rational skills to fight manipulation while fostering democratic engagement (Hobbs, 2011). Social media algorithms and data exploitation and ideological preferences along with research results indicating increased media trust among media literacy participants (Devrim, 2023) exposed the weak points of liberal media literacy theory. The Marxist critiques of Chomsky and Herman (1988) and Fuchs (2014) exposed the capitalist nature of media which transformed my beliefs into skepticism. Autoethnography enabled me to create a personal-political account (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765) by visualizing the transformation between my feelings of hopelessness and new perspectives and the wider technological and ideological frameworks.

The exploration of social media revealed that its features make the evaluation of media literacy's possibilities more difficult. X and other social media platforms utilize algorithms that seek engagement rather than truth which leads to echo chamber effects and communication commodification and thus hinders both liberal and Marxist perspectives (Fuchs, 2014). The liberal literacy approach faces criticism because it fails to address structural inequities (Graff, 1979) yet Marxist approaches remain impractical under neoliberal systems (Druick, 2016). I argue these theoretical frameworks do not have to function against one another. The combination of liberal agency with Marxist structural analysis through a productive tension allows us to advance through the exact path remains undefined.

Paulo Freire (1970) presents his critical hope as the foundation of this vision while advocating for transformation through complex systems. The reflection-action cycle known as praxis drives my redefinition of media literacy as an evolving method which empowers people while confronting institutional power structures (Freire, 1970). This research expands media literacy knowledge through its examination of ideological contradictions. It also supports mixed methods education which teaches students to understand both benefits and constraints

Media Literacy: Deception or Redemption?

in digital systems that transform resistance tools into control mechanisms. Through my personal journey of disappointment and guarded optimism I offer others a chance to pause and reflect on how media literacy should evolve in a world full of fragmented truths and pervasive power systems.

References

- Adams, T. E., Jones, S. H., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.
- Andrejevic, M. (2013). *Infoglut: How too much information is changing the way we think and know*. Routledge.
- Baudrillard, J. (1983). *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Wiley.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Routledge.
- Chomsky, N., & Herman, E. S. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. Pantheon Books.
- Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Devrim, N. (2023). *Yeni medya okuryazarlığı düzeyinin sosyal medyaya güven algısına etkisi* [The effect of new media literacy level on the perception of trust in social media] (Doctoral dissertation, Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Journalism). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Druick, Z. (2016). The myth of media literacy. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 1125–1144.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. Routledge.
- Giroux, H. A. (1985). Introduction. In P. Freire, *Education for critical consciousness* (pp. ix–xxiv). Continuum.
- Graff, H. J. (1979). *The literacy myth: Literacy and social structure in the nineteenth-century city*. Routledge.
- Graff, H. J. (1987). *The legacies of literacy: Continuities and contradictions in Western culture and society*. Indiana University Press.
- Graff, H. J., & Duffy, J. (2008). *Literacy myths, legacies, and lessons: New studies on literacy*. Transaction Publishers.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128–138). Hutchinson.
- Harsin, J. (2018). Post-truth and critical communication studies. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of communication*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.450>
- Hobbs, R. (2011). *Digital and media literacy: Connecting culture and classroom*. Corwin Press.
- Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 763–791). SAGE Publications.
- Honoré, C. (2004). *In praise of slow: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. HarperOne.
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 59–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11519-007-0004-2>
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Masterman, L. (1985). *Teaching the media*. Routledge.
- McChesney, R. W. (2008). *The political economy of media: Enduring issues, emerging dilemmas*. Monthly Review Press.
- Mihailidis, P. (2018). Civic media literacies: Reimagining engagement for civic intentionality. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(2), 152–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1428629>
- Potter, W. J. (2010). *Media literacy* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Smythe, D. W. (1981). *Dependency road: Communications, capitalism, consciousness, and Canada*. Ablex Publishing.
- Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (2003). *Five key questions that can change the world*. Center for Media Literacy.
- Volland, H. (2015). Slow media: Media literacy in times of digital acceleration. In N. Carpentier, K. C. Schröder, & L. Hallett (Eds.), *Audience transformations: Shifting audience positions in late modernity* (pp. 135–149). Routledge.