Social Media Literacy Level of Students in Primary Schools: A Case of Baku City

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Abstract

This study aims to measure the social media literacy level of primary school students in Baku. 60 randomly selected primary school students were interviewed, and the data were analyzed by the use of the content analysis technique. The results revealed that participants use social media to attend online classes, to gather information for doing their homework, to communicate with their friends, and to play games by using mobile phones, tablets, PCs and smart TVs. 68% of students take precautions to ensure their safety, 57% are aware of the potential risks and harms of social media, and 93% of them do not communicate with people they do not know personally. It is highly suggested that social media literacy education can be given to the students at the schools and the universities can educate the parents about being social media literate as part of their social responsibility to their communities.

Keywords: Baku; primary schools; risks; social media literacy; students

Introduction

The world becomes more connected through Globalization that affects the teenagers directly while they are experiencing it through friendship groups and employment patterns, and they have very wide cultural influences on their life in social networking. It is the basis of global network communication, which includes horizontal communication networks that involve multi-modal exchange of interactive messages from many to many, both synchronous and asynchronous in the network society (Castells, 2012, 22). Today, when we leave digital traces on the Internet as a user, all the data we share is permanently stored and archived. Digital technologies have positively changed the education system. There have been significant developments in terms of distance education modules, computer-based

learning, resources, and applications. Access to information and circulation speed of information are at the highest level. Information and communication technologies inform even the most disadvantaged regions of the world, and information and opportunities are shared - although there are ethical problems regarding the accuracy and reality of fake news or information - the transformative potential of digital opportunities is undeniable. To transform digital opportunities into real benefits for children in the digital age (especially, to increase learning, participation, and social inclusion) is important. It is essential to understand the context of their experiences and to provide them with adequate guidance and support. This is also critical for children with disabilities (UNICEF 2017). The internet medium, which changes the definition and form of social relations between people through social media, also offers opportunities for entertainment, games, spending time, finding distant/old friends, or communication. The Internet, which provides new job and career opportunities, creates new employment areas suitable for the unique characteristics of the medium. It is among the requirements of the age that the potential of employees suitable for these fields should first develop their literacy and then digital skills. Individuals can create their own media and become active users and publishers today. New media, which provides opportunities for production and participation, especially young people, can make their voices heard through blogs (personal website), blogs (video narration) and social media accounts (Karaduman, 2017,126).

The global public-health emergency COVID-19 that was announced as a pandemic on 11th March 2020 by the World Health Organization caused all schools to close their campuses and temporarily replace face-to-face education with online education to minimize the spread of the virus among the people. This sudden outbreak also caused more teachers to use online platforms to deliver their lectures and more students to access these online platforms to attend the online lectures and use social media to gather information to do their homework (Senol, 2021). COVID-19 Pandemic impacted 98.6 % of students in the world and led to the closure of schools in 161 countries, disrupting face to face education. Isolation measures hindered the education process of children. Technologically developed countries quickly skipped to online education, but millions of students in underdeveloped countries could not access online education (Senol et al.,2021). In the pandemic process, the addition of school closures to the social isolation measures of 188 countries hindered the education processes of more than 1.5 billion children, especially in many countries with low schooling and literacy rates. Educational platforms provided a justification for children's increased media use. However, it is possible to say that there are significant increases in media accessibility rates of children, and that girls' access to digital technologies is most affected by these increases. In this increase, the importance of e-schooling is also very high. During the pandemic period, young people and children stayed in front of computer or television screens for very long

hours because they were isolated at home. In some homes, the time and manner in which children use social media has gotten out of control. It has become easier for children to develop bad digital habits. Children who stayed at home became increasingly fond of the media and spent more time with the media in order to understand and interpret what is happening around them (Pembecioğlu, 2020). A substantial number of teenagers use social media daily and their well-being is influenced by the effects of social media regarding safety issues, privacy concerns, and cyberbullying (Schreurs & Vandenbosch,2021). Young people, who are still in search of identity, have a natural curiosity towards all kinds of glut information and are prime targets of terrorist groups' recruitment via online social media. We are faced with a new medium that includes online risks as well as online opportunities. Extensive research from the European Union (Staksrud, Livingstone, Haddon, &Ólafsson, 2009) identifies three types of risk associated with the use of mass media, popular culture, and digital media: (Hobbs, 2010a,29)

Content risks: These risks include exposure to potentially offensive or harmful content, including violent, sexual, sexist, racist or hateful material.

Contact risks: These risks include harassment, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, communication with strangers, or privacy violations.

Behavioral risks: These risks include deliberately or intentionally misinforming people, providing personal information, illegal downloading, gambling and more.

Studies on the use of social media support that children who have access to opportunities face more risks. Livingstone and Brake (2009) argue that social networking sites, which are rapidly adopted by children, especially adolescents and young people around the world, allow oneself to present new things. They said that it allowed them to learn, establish relationships in the wide network, and manage their own subjectivity and privacy. There are concerns that social networking sites increase the likelihood of new risks as well as the opportunities they offer. Some of the risks of using social media have been identified as loss of private space, exposure to cyberbullying and establishing harmful relationships (Cited by Doğuş, 2014). Cyber traps such as deception, seduction, and exploitation require the ability to control, be aware, and actively use security settings, especially for children.

Being conscious of such risks and safe use are the prominent concepts of new media literacy. Media literacy becomes very important as it helps young people to interpret the meaning of mediated messages and gives clues about how to treat online social media. It has a potential to help teenagers avoid privacy risks and explore the opportunities of the online social media safely. In that case, delivering messages on social media should be filtered appropriately to preserve societal norms and values

and to ensure that all the information accessible by teenagers will be safe. Societies need to determine regulations of use of communication technology to prevent contamination of young people's mind from bad content of social media. In UNICEF's 2017 State of the World's Children report, six priorities were identified in order to harness the power of digitalization, enable disadvantaged children to benefit from digital opportunities, and prevent vulnerable children from being harmed:

1. Children should be provided with affordable internet access so that all children can enjoy quality internet content.

2. Children should be protected from all risks online – including abuse, exploitation, human trafficking, cyberbullying, and exposure to inappropriate materials.

3. Children's information should be kept confidential, and their online identities should be protected.

4. Digital literacy lessons should be given to ensure that children are informed, participatory and safe in the digital world.

5. Private sector should develop ethical standards and practices to protect and benefit children in the digital world.

6. Children should be placed at the center of digital policies (UNICEF, 2017,5).

The interest of the young generation in new technologies and mass media has become an important issue both in positive and negative terms. Nowadays, young people and children can access the Internet and social media through a great variety of devices such as smartphones or tablets, but also more and more through smart toys and connected household appliances. Such accessibility, unthinkable a few years ago, has brought up many benefits to daily life, but it has also led to concerns about privacy and online safety (Donoso 2019, 7). According to Gungor (2016), social media literacy is taught in different countries to protect the younger generation from the negative effects of social media.

The importance of social media literacy education for media users, especially youth and children, is recognized also in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan (officially the Republic of Azerbaijan) is a country in the Caucasus region of Eurasia (Azerbaijan 2020). The territory of Azerbaijan is 86,600 square kilometers, and the population is estimated at 10,127,874 in 2019 (Azerbaijan 2020). The processes taking place in the world, the constant development of the media, and the new needs it creates do not pass unnoticed in Azerbaijan. And certain steps are being taken in this direction, discussions are being held. According to UNICEF Azerbaijan materials (2019), 91.9% of children under the age of 15 in Azerbaijan are online (Mollazade, 2019).

Azerbaijan has one of the highest levels of internet access among peer countries like Georgia, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Kazakhstan (Yoon,Minges and Kwitowski 2019). The most common problems faced by social network users in Azerbaijan are the theft of their accounts by others, the creation of fake accounts in their name, the spread of spam and viruses on social networks, the spread of unpleasant images of users, and so on. This is due to the fact that users are not sufficiently informed about the security of their accounts (Rules for the safe use of Facebook 2014). The use of the Internet exposes children to different security threats, both personal and safety. According to Ojagverdiyeva (2018), children might face hazards like targeting from criminals; malicious information; internet dependency, and malware. An attempt to prepare a student for life in a new information society invariably leads us to actualize the problem of education in social networks based on the development of children's critical thinking. Literacy in social networks is aimed at assessing the media and messages from a conscious, selective, and effective audience point of view. The need for educating children, who are sensitive to social media, to be educated as conscious and critical media consumers, starting from primary education, has emerged.

The problem of the research is that social media literacy education in Azerbaijan does not keep pace with the dynamic development of the world in this direction, and primary school students in Azerbaijan need social media literacy education. This study aimed to measure the social media literacy level of primary school students in Baku by determining the type of the devices that students used to connect to social media, purposes, and skills of the students to use social media, their opinions about the safety, potential risk and possible harm issues related to use of the social media. To achieve this aim, the following questions have been addressed:

1: What are the social media access habits of students in primary schools in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

2: What are the social media usage habits of students in primary schools in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

3: What are the skills of students in primary schools in using social media technologies in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

4: What are the critical perspectives of students in primary schools in using social media technologies in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on media literacy, uses and gratification theory, social media literacy, and the risks in social media.

Media literacy

Media literacy is explained with such concepts as media access, analysis, evaluation, and media remodeling throughout the short past. Existing social and political factors are also being intensively assessed within the approaches of the field of media literacy while this approach continues. Currently, digital, social, and sharing media have a known impact on the entirety of our lives because of the development of technology.

Media literacy also becomes an important component of lifelong learning under the slogan of democratic societies, independence, responsible production, and use (Varis, Pérez, and José 2010). The fact is that the rapid changes in the information environment and the uncontrolled exponential growth of information volumes have an increasingly strong (and so far, little studied) influence on the consciousness and behavior of people, and on our entire lives. Possession of competencies that unite the new term media literacy opens new opportunities for improving the quality of life. Such literacy enhances social integration and reduces the gap between the information-poor and the information-rich communities and countries.

Media information literacy comprises a person's knowledge, attitudes, and skills used to access information, analyze, evaluate, use, create and disseminate information with maximum productivity under legislative and ethical standards and respect for human rights. This complex of modern competencies in media communications allows a person to master the media space effectively and in an environmentally friendly manner. If we determine that the primary emphasis of media literacy is on developing a critical approach to media messages and products, a critical approach should be demonstrated, regardless of the quality of the channel that prepares and transmits the message (Thoman and Jolls 2008).

Uses and Gratifications Theory

From the very beginning, the audience has been central to mass communication research. But there are several models that point to significant developments in thinking about the audience (McQuail and Windahl 1993). Eventually, the focus shifted away from the media and toward the audience, considering the idea that people actively seek content to gratify specific needs. This explains the emergence of the uses and gratifications theory. Uses and gratifications theory is an audience-

centered approach to understanding mass communication (Severin and Tankard 1997). Katz (1959) suggested that we should pay more attention to what "people do with the media?" than to what the "media does to people?", As McQuail and Windahl (1993) wrote, this is the underlying premise of the so-called uses and gratifications approach, which focuses on the uses of media content for fulfilling needs or providing gratifications. According to this theory, media users take an active role in the communication process and different media have different influences on them. People use the media for different reasons. Leung (2013) has studied the uses and gratifications in the relationship between gratifications and narcissism in posting social content and the effects of age on this relationship and these gratifications by searching personal and subject-based blogs, social networking services, and internet forums. Ozad and Uygarer (2014) discussed attachment needs and social networking sites concepts from the lens of the uses and gratifications theory and how these sites help meet that need. We can see the concept of Maslow's hierarchy brought into the theory in this article. Users can create, form, and maintain relationships with someone they have never met by using social networking sites, which in turn, strongly contributes to their sense of belonging. Park, Kee, and Valenzuala (2009) revealed that the four primary needs of people to participate in groups within Facebook are entertainment, information, socializing, and self-status seeking (p. 729). There are so many new forms of media introduced nowadays. It seems we will continue using the uses and gratifications theory as the basis for understanding how and why people use new media.

Social media literacy

For Fuchs (2014), social media is comprised of internet-based platforms such as blogs (e.g. Blogspot, Wordpress, Tumblr), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), user-generated content sharing sites (e.g. Vimeo, YouTube, Youku), micro blogs (e.g. Weibo, Twitter) and wikis (e.g. Wikipedia). As Fuchs (2016) wrote, these types of media are social because they enable communication, collaboration, and sharing.

Social media is a vehicle that carries implicit messages to our homes every day. These messages are so well hidden in the social networks we use that ordinary media followers do not notice these messages that they are nested every day. These messages are now part of our lives. Today, social media has become an important and indispensable part of human life (Fateeva 2015).

Published academic research into Facebook revealed many positive correlations between Facebook use and student life. The research results of Valenzuela et al. 2008, conducted at two public universities in Texas indicated a positive relationship

between the intensity of Facebook use and political engagement, social trust, civic participation, and students' life satisfaction. According to Vanwynsberghe et al. (2015), social media integrates broadcast media and interactivity in computing, visuals and text from print, audio-visual, and information systems. Media users need skills to manage audio-visual, print, broadcast media and computing. Media literacy is closely related to the concept of citizenship, which can look at, read, and guide the production process from a critical perspective on information in mass media (Akhmetova 2014). Today, many people learn, communicate, receive, and distribute information, entertain and improve the quality of life through social networks. Social media literacy is required to take advantage of these opportunities provided by social networks. The Internet and social media are increasingly being used in education and training.

However, social media is very difficult to control. It is conveyed in concepts and messages, which lead to the rapid and irregular transition of childhood towards adulthood. According to Postman (1995), the development of the concept of modern adulthood and the consequences it produces, it is expressed that the new information environment destroys childhood by lifting it away. Following these and similar processes, social media literacy is needed so that individuals can cope with media realities that influence their lives. As Bridges (2012) noticed, Facebook was launched in 2004. Young adults and teenagers use this site daily, but who is teaching them the skills they need to be literate consumers of social media? According to data sharing by The Center for Parenting Education, children and young people spend a lot of time on the Internet and are exposed to negative images and content (Clark 2014). As Staksrud et al. (2009) noticed, everyone who uses social media has a responsibility to educate children and young people.

Social media literacy is the ability to access and produce social media; (Larcom et al. 2015) the goal of social media literacy is to acquire the proficiency to communicate responsibly, and to evaluate conversations critically (Tillman 2010). The situation of children and youth, especially those who use the Internet and social media networks, creates media literacy ability needs for new media tools. In this context, media training and media literacy have become more and more popular in recent years as a result of technological advancements and their insights into our daily life practices, and the need for the subject has become even more apparent (Erstad 2010, 18-19; Gungor 2016).

Risks in Social Media

Social media and its applications, which are in our pocket, have increased their influence by surrounding us compared to the past. While the boundaries of the act of thinking decreased in this invasion, the doors to surveillance, exposition, and populism were opened wide. What emerges is that well-packaged forms of the massization process are repeatedly put into the service of capital (Oğuzhan 2015, 11). With the addition of the Internet to the list of media outlets such as newspapers, radio, television and cinema, a multifaceted abundance of information has emerged. The quality and low-cost nature of online communication networks ensure that the number of participants increases day by day (Miller et al. 2009, 305-322).

It is difficult to frame the risks in social media, as social media touches almost every moment of life and is with the user every moment. While part of this challenge is the rapid consumption of new communication technologies and excessive content production, another aspect is that these tools have a function that determines and directs the flow of life. The more time children spend online, the more opportunities they get, but they may also face more risks and potential harm.

(1) Disinformation

Disinformation means that wrong information deliberately misleads the target audience (Jowett 2008). Disinformation is deliberate deception, as opposed to accidental deception, ignorance, underestimation, or exaggeration. There is no correspondence to reality here, but it happens without malice. There is no malicious intent in literature and art, from which we also do not demand strict compliance with reality (Pochepsov 2019). False information (disinformation) is commonly spread by automated bot accounts controlled by software and social media users intending to create confusion, to sow division among people, and undermine confidence in the news of major events, such as COVID-19, the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and social justice movements (Help net security 2020). Today's world is built not only with the help of information, but also with disinformation. The more serious an event, the more disinformation appears around it, contrived with the intention of distorting reality. However, people are not born with the ability to distinguish information from misinformation. This should be learned (Pochepsov 2019, 2).

(2) Sexuality

Media content includes certain elements that stimulate emotions in order to attract the attention of the audience, reader, or user. Among these stimuli, the most striking and frequently used are sexuality and violence.

According to Sahin (2014), sexual elements are heavily featured in many media works, such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, the Internet, and music videos, in order to create an emotional effect. Sexuality, which takes place in written, visual or verbal forms, is also confronted sometimes. Content that includes sexuality attracts the attention of young people and children. These kinds of content not only change social norms but also affect the behavior of young people and children. It is very important for them to gain social media literacy in order to help protect themselves from such content and so that they can consume content with a critical perspective.

(3) Violence (Cyberbullying)

Another harm of social media is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is bullying – something that we have dealt with as a society for a long time. Of course, the cyber part of this new form of bulling changes things–before the Internet came along, if a child was being bullied, they could get some respite when they went home from school and closed their front door–the bullies were not able to get to them any longer (at least until the next day). Unfortunately, nowadays, many of our children are constantly connected – they keep devices with them in their bedrooms even when they sleep, so a bully can get to them at any time (Hopwood and Vorbau 2019).

Many elements of violence such as murder, suicide, traffic accidents or attacks are reflected in the media content and the effect of the content on the target audience is increased. Sometimes, various mounting and framing techniques are used in order to make this effect stronger. The dramatic scenes that take place on television or news on the Internet about traffic accidents are highlighted and even more dramatic with various montage techniques (Uluc cited in Şahin 2014, 196).

The dangers around internet safety, inappropriate content, and cyberbullying are far more predominant and tangible issues than media literacy education thinking about participatory culture, collaborative inquiry, and connected learning (Slonje et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2008). Cyberbullying is digital bullying. Cyberbullying can take place on social networks, instant messengers, gaming platforms, and mobile phones. This is a purposeful behavior model that aims to intimidate, anger, or embarrass the target. Examples include spreading false information or posting embarrassing photos of someone on social media, sending offensive messages or threats on instant messengers, impersonating someone else, and sending inappropriate messages to others on their behalf (UNICEF, 2020).

Online presence has so many benefits. However, like many things in life, it comes with risks that people must be protected from. As Donoso (2019), noted, thus more educational efforts are needed to ensure that all children develop the skills and

capacities needed to maximize their positive online experiences while limiting the risks. Social media literacy education may provide educational tools and guidance for children, parents, and teachers to better understand the risks involved and learn about ways to stay safe online.

Method

Participants

According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2020), an average of 165,000 students study in the first grade of primary schools every academic year in Azerbaijan. Of these, about 56,000 study in Baku every year. The universe of the study comprises children who are in the 1st and 2nd grades of three schools in Baku (the capital city of the Republic of Azerbaijan) and are social media users. The sample comprises 60 students in the 1st and 2nd grades of public primary schools in Baku (Azerbaijan). To maintain gender balance, 30 students (60 in total) were interviewed, including 15 boys and 15 girls in each grade. The Baku City Education Department approved participation of primary school students in this research. Demographic features of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic features of the participants

	Number of students	Frequency (%)
Gender		
Girl	30	50
Boy	30	50
Grade		
1	30	50
2	30	50
Age		
6	30	50
7	28	47
8	2	3

Data collection

The data were gathered through interviews, one of the most important data collection tools of qualitative research methods (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2008). The questions were organized in such a way that they are easily comprehensible and can transfer perceptions, opinions, and deductions towards the facts clearly (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2008). Before the data collection, the researcher took verbal permission from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Baku City Education Department to conduct this research. Also, the researcher explained the aim of the study to the parents of the participants and took their permission to interview their children. In addition, participants were informed about the aim of the research. Then they were informed that they could stop the interview by their will at any time and their names will not be used in the research papers. The interviews were held during 1–25 January 2021 during working hours (08.00-16.00), in Baku. Each interview lasted an average of 25 minutes. The researcher asked the interview questions to each participant with the same wording and emphasis. Note-taking techniques and a voice recorder device were used together in the interviews.

Data analysis

Records of the interviews were transcribed without any interpretation. Also, three experts in the media studies checked the transcriptions for clarity, and comprehensibility to ensure the reliability of the data (Uzuner and Çolak 2004: cited in Yılmaz and Altınkurt, 2011). The research data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques. A descriptive analysis technique is applied in three steps: reduction and presentation of data, inference, and verification (Türnüklü, 2000).

Data from interviewees were coded, and the codes were grouped under certain categories, and the themes which will form the outline of the research findings were created. Primary school students were coded as 'St' and each interviewee was coded as 'St1, St2, St3, St4...'. Interview notes were given in quotation marks, followed by the code of the interviewee in parentheses. An example of the coding system is given below: *Example*: '...............' (St-8, boy, 7), St: Student and 1, 2, 3....: number of the interviewee., Boy/ girl: gender, 6, 7, 8: grade

Results

Research question 1: What are the social media access habits of students in primary schools in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

During the interviews, the researcher asked students to learn about the devices that they used to access social media. Analysis of the data revealed that most of the students (57%) use mobile phones to access social media.

Table 2. The devices that students use to connect to social media:

Type of device	Number of students	Frequency (%)
Mobile phone	34	57
PC	22	37
Tablet	12	20
Smart TV	13	22

Only one student (St-17, boy, 6) said that his mobile phone belonged to him, and another (St-55, boy,6) said that he used his father's old mobile phone. All other students who use mobile phones said that they accessed social media from their parents' (mostly mother's) mobile phones.

Only four of the students (St-26,girl,7; St-31,girl,7; St-33,girl,6 and 60, boy7) who used a computer to access social media said they used it alone. The rest said they shared the computers with their parents and siblings. Tablet users also share it with other family members. Only one student (St-48, girl,6) said the tablet belonged to him.

Except for one (St-25, boy, 8), all other students said they accessed social media when they were at home, citing a Wi-Fi network at home as their means for connecting to the Internet. One student (St-25, boy, 8) said that he used social media more when he was elsewhere as a guest.

All the students interviewed said that they had difficulty accessing social media only when the internet connection was weak. At the same time, all said they use the Internet every day. Participants said they were online over 3 hours per day. However, this does not mean that they spend over 3 hours on social media every day. Because of the global pandemic, classes are now conducted online, so students are required to spend a lot of time online.

Research question 2: What are the social media usage habits of students in primary schools in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

In this part of the study, we examined the use of social media by the participants, and their habits.

The students who took part in the study frequently used the Internet and social media. All students said that they used the Internet to attend online classes through various programs. The vast majority of students said they use the Internet to communicate with their friends (45%), to collect information for doing their homework (35%), to play games(40%), and to improve their foreign language skills (10%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Purposes of students to use social media

Purposes	Number	Frequency (%)
to join online classes	60	100
to communicate with their friends	27	45
to collect information for doing their homework	21	35
to play games	24	40
to improve their foreign language skills	6	10

Most participants (80%) said that they do not actively use Facebook or Instagram to communicate with their friends because their parents do not allow it. Only one student (St-1, boy, 7) said he has profiles on Facebook and Instagram. These profiles are managed by his father, who often takes pictures of him and shares them on social media. 22 of the participants stated that they communicated with their classmates, teachers, and relatives only via WhatsApp by using their mothers' mobile phone. Some of them said they just sent emojis to their friends. 32 participants stated that their parents (mostly mothers) are with them while they are using social networking sites. One student (St-8, boy, 7) said his parents do not allow him to share his photos on social media.

Most of the other students find the Internet useful because they join classes online and they attend the online classes by using MS Teams, Zoom platforms. Some find the Internet useful for collecting various interesting information from Google and watching educational videos on YouTube. All participants said that they used YouTube videos for lessons and homework. One student (St-11, boy, 6) said that YouTube is especially useful for learning computer science. Some students said they could get some interesting information only on social media.

Some students find the Internet useful because they can play games. There are also students, who find the Internet useful for watching videos to improve their English and Russian-language skills, as well as dancing, etc… One student (St-31, girl, 7) said that he read the news on social media and learned about what is happening in

the world. Another (St-35, girl, 6) said he was collecting information about the planets. However, there were students who did not use social media:

(St-40, girl, 7) thinks that the Internet and social media are useless.

(St-16, girl, 6) said he had learned nothing from social media.

(St-17, boy, 6) said that he does not need social media because he believes he can get any information he needs from books.

Thirty-four of the students (57%) said they would be sad if there was no Internet and social media. Most of them attributed this to the inability to attend classes, watch YouTube videos and cartoons, and play games. Fifteen students (25%) said they would not be sad without social media and the Internet, adding that there are more interesting things in life.

Research Question 3: What are the skills of students in primary schools in using social media technologies in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

The research results showed that all participating students can join online classes and can chat with their friends by using the WhatsApp application. The participants can use social media to gather information to do their homework. In addition, 38 students (63%) stated that they watch movies, cartoons, and some educational videos on YouTube. Based on their answers, we can conclude that there is almost no feedback; students do not comment on anything, do not ask questions, and do not share anything themselves.

Research Question 4: What are the critical perspectives of students in primary schools about safety and risks in using social media technologies in Azerbaijan in the 2020-2021 academic year?

(1) Safety

The researcher asked questions to the students to learn how they ensured their safety on social media and the following answers were obtained:

Only 32% of the students said that they took no action to protect their safety on social media. 68% of the students implied they took precautions to keep their safety by following some strategies, such as

- They do not watch the advertisements on social media for security reasons (St-4, St-9, St-15, St-24, St-35, St-36, St-38, St-39, St-44, St-52, St-56)

- They skip advertisements on media (St-4, St-35, St-37, St-42, St-60)
- They do not watch age-inappropriate content on social media for security reasons (St-6, St-9, St-15, St-25, St-32, St-43, St-47, St-58)
- They do not give their passwords to anyone for security reasons (St-52, girl,7)
- They change their privacy to protect their safety (St-27, St-31, St-44, St-56)

One student said that he did not watch scary videos (St-37) and only one student stated that he always watched the advertisements on social media. 5 students think that spending too much time on social media can only hurt their eyes (St-5, St-7, St-11, St-24, St-43)

(2) **Risks**

The researcher asked questions to the students to learn the opinions of the students about the potential risks and harms of the social media and the following answers were obtained:

(i)Reasoning

According to the results of the interviews, 26 out of 60 students (37%) believe that there is nothing on social media that children might find worrying or upsetting, and that there is no need to be afraid of social media. 22 of these students believe children cannot abuse each other on social media and adults cannot be rude to children on social media. The overwhelming majority of students stated they had not encountered unpleasant situations on social networks and could not give an example.

34 students (57%) think that harmful information, such as watching scary videos or reading bad news can disappoint children. In addition, 19 of them believe children can hurt each other, speak harsh words, criticize one another, and make inappropriate jokes on social media. In terms of specific examples, most of the students who fear social media said they saw scary videos. Three students said they were disappointed by the internet outage while using social media (St-7, St-27, St-31). One student said uninteresting content irritated him on social media (St-10). Two students said they did not use social media because they thought it would disappoint them (St-4, St-9). Forty-five of the participants (75%) had no idea what else could disappoint them and their friends on social media. Three of the remaining 15 students said the content might be offensive and inappropriate for their age; one said he feared a virus could infect computers, and one said it could cause problems connecting to online classes (St-25).

One of the potential harms of social media is that young children may communicate with strangers (children do not know them) and send them their personal data such as photographs, home addresses, phone address, etc. The researcher asked questions to take the opinions of the participants about the harm that strangers can cause on social media. The following answers were obtained from the participants:

56 of the participants (93%) think that it is not good to be in touch on social media with people they do not know personally. According to them, there is no need to share information, photos, play games, etc. with strangers. However, most of them do not know the reason for this and simply explain that they are not allowed to use social media.

Only 16 students think it is not safe for them to connect with a stranger on social media. They stated that a stranger "can be malicious", "find out my address", "rob our house", "kidnap me", "slander us", "harm us", and "disturb us". When asked why they think so, they usually answered that they heard about these types of risks of social media from their parents, movies, or TV (St-3, St-5, St-8, St-11, St-17, St-25, St-27, St-28, St-33, St-35, St-41, St-44, St-48, St-52, St-56, St-58). The opinions of some students about the potential risks and harms of social media are as follows:

Participants	Feelings
St-23	'I talk to people I don't know. They are very funny and kind. But I do not join the conversation with those who speak rudely'.
St-4	'Not all strangers are good, and some are bad'.
St-29	'I can't share photos on social media because my mother does not allow me to share my photos on social media'.
St-7	'Playing a game with a stranger on social media is bad, because he can deceive me, mislead me, and I lose the game'.
St-53	'I was frustrated with sometimes inappropriate words and jokes in group chats. My brother and I have received such messages from strangers'.
St-41	'I played games and talked to strangers on the Internet. Sometimes there are foreigners in the game; we don't understand each other's language, so we can't talk'.
St-50	'I played chess with strangers on the Internet but did not talk to them. Because I do not want to give them information about myself, it is not safe for me'.

Discussion

Nowadays, children and young people can access the Internet and social media through a great variety of devices such as smartphones or tablets, but also more and more through smart toys and connected household appliances. As UNICEF's Representative to Azerbaijan, Edward Carwardine, said, "The Internet provides many opportunities for young people and children to learn, to express their vision and creativity, meet new people, and to explore other cultures…" (Mollazade 2019). Such accessibility, although unthinkable a few years ago, has brought up many benefits to daily life, but it has also led to concerns about privacy and online safety (Donoso 2019, 7).

According to Fedorov (2010), media literacy allows children and families to know that messages can be intended and unintended. Children learn to create these media messages and think critically about them. These skills allow children to control the media that surrounds them, rather than allow the media to control them (Fedorov 2010). Information culture today characterizes personality development, its ability to assimilate the most general methods and technologies that will allow to master knowledge, skills of searching, transferring, and processing information. Social sharing sites are widely used and are becoming increasingly popular. This situation causes children and young people to be open to any kind of influence that may arise through social media. This requires that individuals gain enough knowledge and skills about social media literacy starting at a younger age.

This study aimed to measure the social media literacy level of primary school students in Baku by gathering information about the type of devices that students used to connect to social media, purposes, and skills of the students to use social media, their opinions about the safety, potential risk and possible harm issues related to using of the social media. A qualitative research method was used in the research and randomly selected 60 students in the 1st and 2nd grades of the public primary schools in Baku (Azerbaijan) were interviewed. The data were analyzed using the content analysis technique.

In this research, it was found that the participant students mostly used their parents' mobile phones (57%), and also PCs, tablets, and smart TVs to access social media. Most of the students stated they use social media at home and share their computers with their parents and siblings. Also, students use the Internet every day because classes are now conducted online, so students are required to spend a lot of time online because of the global pandemic. Besides online courses, the participants stated that they use social media to communicate with their friends, to collect information for doing their homework, to play games, and to improve their foreign-language

skills. Most of them stated they use WhatsApp to communicate with their friends and family members.

The results of the research revealed that the participant students had skills to join online classes, to chat with their friends by using WhatsApp, and to use social media to gather information to do their homework. In addition, 38 students (63%) stated that they watch movies, cartoons, and some educational videos on YouTube. It is worrying that only a small percentage of students use social media to watch educational videos. Based on their answers, we can conclude that students do not comment on anything, do not ask questions; and share nothing themselves on social media.

Social media and its applications, which are in our pocket, have increased their influence by surrounding us compared to the past. While the boundaries of the act of thinking decreased in this invasion, the doors to surveillance, exposition, and populism were opened wide. What emerges is that well-packaged forms of the massification process are repeatedly put into the service of capital (Oğuzhan 2015, 11). The more time children spend online, the more opportunities they get, but they may also face more risks and potential harm. As Donoso (2019), noted, thus more educational efforts are needed to ensure that all children develop the skills and capacities needed to maximize their positive online experiences while limiting the risks. According to Kline et al. (2006), children should learn more about the role of the media in their lives. Media literacy can help them become more responsible and can help to reduce the risks they face by using the media. It is pleasing to learn that 68 % of the students implied they took precautions to keep their safety by following some strategies such as not watching advertisements, age-inappropriate content on social media, and not giving their passwords to anyone for security reasons. In addition, it is very pleasing that most of the students (57%) are aware of the possible potential risks and harms of social media for children. 93% of the participants think it is not good to be in touch on social media with people they do not know personally because they believe a stranger can be malicious; find out their addresses, rob their houses, kidnap them, slander them, or disturb them.

Conclusion

Social media literacy is not about keeping children away from social media to protect them from the harms of social media. Social media literacy aims to enable children to use social media applications effectively and efficiently, to protect them against risk and harmful content of social media; to understand the effects of social media, and to act consciously while using social media applications. The important thing is

to make children conscious users and producers that can actively use social media applications. It is imperative that children gain some kind of self-protection ability. Also, the sooner they gain social media literacy skills, the better.

In this research, it was revealed that the participant primary school students in Baku City (Azerbaijan) can use social media to attend online classes, to gather information for doing their homework, to communicate with their friends, to play games by using mobile phones, tablets, PC and smart TV. 68% of students take precautions to ensure their safety; 57% are aware of the potential risks and harms of social media; and 93% of them do not communicate with people they do not know personally.

It can be concluded that primary students in Baku City need to be educated to become social media literate so that they can use social media applications effectively and they can protect themselves against the possible potential harms of social media. The social media usage of the students is mostly controlled by their parents so that also the parents can be educated about being social media literate so that they can control their children properly. It is highly suggested that social media literacy education can be given to the students at the schools and the universities can educate the parents about being social media literate by the delivery of the courses at their campuses or online as part of their social responsibility to their communities.

Disclosure statement

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