

## The Effect of Media Literacy on Passive Audiences: The Case of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication

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### ABSTRACT

Today, with the increase in digitalization, the diversity of media content has increased, and this change has enabled individuals to access information easily without questioning it (Güneş, 2013; Avşar, 2013). This situation, in particular, causes students to consume media content passively. Media literacy is the ability that not only enables individuals to question media content from a critical perspective but also allows them to move beyond being passive media audiences. The aim of this study is to measure the relationship between the media literacy levels of students at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication and their passive audience behaviors (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009).

This study was conducted within the scope of a quantitative research method, using a relational survey model and a descriptive method. The relational survey model used in the study is appropriate for examining the relationships between variables, while the descriptive method is suitable for revealing the current situations and behaviors of the participants. The participants consist of 100 students aged between 18 and 30 from the Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. However, the analyses were conducted based on 96 valid questionnaires. The data were collected using the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009), whose validity and reliability have been established. Within the scope of the study, students' passive audience behaviors were measured through critical consumption, which is one of the dimensions of media literacy. During the data collection process, a face-to-face questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire used in the study consists of two main sections: demographic information and scale items.

This study examined how the media literacy levels of students at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication affect their passive audience behaviors, and the collected data were analyzed using SPSS 27.0. According to the findings of the study, it was determined that students with high media literacy levels at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication exhibit low levels of passive audience behavior.

**Keywords:** Communication, digital media, passive audience, active audience, media literacy

### Introduction

Today, with digitalization, the development of communication technology has reached a transnational dimension and has brought about radical changes in people's daily life styles (Avşar, 2013). Technology, which adds a new dimension to communication forms, has also been instrumental in the development of mobile devices together with the internet. Therefore, adult individuals such as Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students have turned to various social media platforms in order to meet their need to obtain information. With the widespread use of social media, the internet, and mobile devices, students and adults have not only easily accessed information but have also transformed into media content producers (Beyaz Özbey, 2022). While the widespread use of digitalization increases the speed of communication, it has also brought forward the media literacy skill in the evaluation of media content from a critical perspective, as well as revealing the risk of passive media consumption in which students accept information without questioning. At this point, media literacy carries an important quality for individuals. Media literacy enables individuals not only to perceive media content but also to analyze it by filtering it through a critical perspective (Uyar and Asrak Hasdemir, 2023). This skill places students from the passive viewer position into the active viewer position that questions and analyzes media content (Bayraktar, 2022). In this study conducted on Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students, media literacy is not only approaching information critically but also the ability to consciously select and interpret the platforms that they use as a tool in accessing information (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009). Since students are in intensive interaction with digital media, it is assumed that their media literacy levels are also effective on passive audience indicators. According to the research findings obtained from Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students, it shows that students with high media literacy in the Faculty of

Communication have low passive audience behaviors, while students with low media literacy have high passive audience behaviors. This situation aims to reveal the result that media literacy has an important effect on variables. This study aims to examine the effect of media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students on passive audience behaviors. Thus, it is aimed to understand the positions of individuals against media in the digital age and to emphasize the importance of media literacy education (Öcal, 2024).

### Communication

The phenomenon of communication is a concept as old as the history of humanity. Dating back to the process of human existence, communication in the historical process was first established by people through the use of certain sounds and signs. Later, this process, which began with cave paintings, gained permanence with the invention of writing and subsequently acquired a mass dimension with the development of the printing press, radio, and television (Aziz, 2012). In its most general definition, the concept of communication is defined as the transmission of emotions and information to the other party through the use of mass media and the provision of two-way information exchange. Human beings are social beings who constantly feel the need to communicate. In this context, since human beings are social beings, the need for communication arises in order to meet the need for obtaining information (Aytekin, 2020). Communication is an effective process of exchanging information carried out through various mass media, as well as the sharing of people's feelings and thoughts with others in daily life (TDK, 2023). At this point, the interaction between media literacy and communication is intertwined. Communication technology has today created a multidimensional and transnational communication environment, and thus, media literacy has gained great importance. This situation, in addition to the rapid flow of information, has also brought about the problem of content today. Therefore, media literacy has increased the necessity for students to analyze information critically. A student who has effective communication skills does not deal with media messages only superficially, but also examines them in depth (Köktener, 2019). In this case, effective communication skills strengthen the critical thinking aspect of media literacy and transform individuals from passive receivers into active and conscious participants who use media content consciously. As a result, media literacy and effective communication are an inseparable whole; by creating a habit of questioning among students and adults of all ages, they have become an important tool that develops individuals who do not consume information as passive viewers, but who critically analyze information and become active and conscious individuals. Therefore, media literacy appears as a form of behavior that is desired to be developed (Avşar, 2013; Köktener, 2019).

### Digital Media

In today's digital world, the role of media has critical importance. Koçoğlu (2023) states that the origin of the concept of media is based on the Latin word *medium* and that the word *media* in English, as the plural form of this word, means "environment" or "tool" (p. 7). Today, the process of digitalization has brought about radical changes in forms of interaction by enabling people to communicate with one another and by providing fast and easy access to information. The first step of digitalization began with the invention of the printing press, and this made the emergence of newspapers possible. Later, this process continued with the establishment of radio and television. Thus, mass media turned into a systematic structure that could reach large audiences in social life through the internet and caused important developments to take place (Erişti, 2018). Digital transformation, although it is a well-established concept, is a concept that has emerged over time in parallel with the development of technology in the business processes of various institutions in order to obtain value (Baş, Erdoğan Tarakçı and Aslan, 2022, p. 9). Together with technological developments, digital media has transformed forms of communication in ways that cross borders over the last 50 years. In the 1970s, the use of computer technology in different public spheres led to its widespread adoption and thus formed the basis of digital access. People began to share data through computers (Emspak and Zimmermann, 2022). Another important factor that accelerated access to digital media was the widespread use of personal computers in the 1980s and the opening of the internet service known as the World Wide Web to the public in the 1990s. Thus, the era of a limited audience came to an end, and audiences turned into active consumers (History.com Editors, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2015). Today, digital media is a field that creates both risks and opportunities for students and adults. Therefore, rather than seeing social media only as a means of entertainment, it should be evaluated as a platform where economic, social, and cultural interactions are shaped (Beyaz Özbey, 2022). In this context, the concept of media literacy has become one of the most critical skills of the digital age. Passive audiences consume the content they receive from the media without questioning it and are exposed to misinformation. On the other hand, active audiences who consume media content do not accept information as it is, but evaluate it critically thanks to their media literacy skills. Therefore, digital media, in addition to providing rapid access to information, brings the concept of media literacy to the forefront in order to transform passive audience behaviors and develop critical thinking skills (Solmaz and Yılmaz, 2012).

### Passive and Active Audience

The concept of the audience has undergone many changes and transformations from past to present. In the historical period, audiences first came to the forefront with the concept of the “reading public,” and later, in the one-way communication form in which radio and television developed, they were evaluated in a passive receiver position (Avşar, 2013). The beginning of media literacy also dates back to this period. Later, in the work titled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* published in 1944, Frankfurt School thinkers Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer put forward the idea that mass media make individuals passive and make society uniform. They expressed that this is carried out through the “culture industry” of mass media (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/2005; Güneş, 2013). The active subject approach was developed in the 1970s by Elihu Katz and Jay G. Blumler, and by defending the view that audiences do not consume media content passively but make conscious choices, they emphasized the concept of the active audience (Koçoğlu, 2023; Sichach, 2024). Today, the audience has transformed not only into a consumer but also into a content producer, and this transformation has given critical importance to the concept of media literacy. Media literacy is an important tool in the process of evaluating social media content by passing it through a critical filter in the digital age (Avşar, 2013; Koçoğlu, 2023). Therefore, media literacy not only transforms students into active individuals in the production and consumption of digital media but also provides an important critical filtering benefit for individuals regarding content (Avşar, 2013).

### Media Literacy

Media, as a form of communication that enables audiences to access information quickly, has undergone many changes and transformations over time in the historical process. The concept of media was first used in the 1920s and its origin is derived from the Latin word “medium.” At this point, medium means environment and also tool (Koçoğlu and Akman, 2023). Media, as a tool that meets our need for communication and information exchange, has been used in different methods and forms in the historical process. This process first started with primitive humans using signs and sounds, and later it came into play with the development of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. In the late 20th century, with the development of digital technologies and the internet, students and adults evolved from content consumers into content producers (Güneş, 2013; Koçoğlu, 2023). These developments have made media literacy a critical concept. Media literacy contributes to individuals passing media messages through a critical filter in a conscious manner and questioning the accuracy of information. These skills are especially important for passive students who accept media content without questioning it. While passive audience behavior increases the risk of exposure to misinformation, media literacy reduces this risk (Ankaralıgil, 2009; Kartal and Kincal, 2009).

### Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to address the effect of media literacy on passive audiences within the framework of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students. Within the framework of this research, the effects of media literacy on passive audiences will be examined specifically for students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. Today, with digitalization, radical changes have occurred and it has become effective at all ages (Çakmak, 2019). The expansion of digital technology has led to the diversification of media content, and therefore students have created a risk by taking the position of passive audiences who consume the information they obtain from the media unconsciously without criticizing it. In order to reduce passive audience behaviors, media literacy, with its qualified structure, necessitates that students understand social media content from a critical perspective and consume and interpret it consciously (Karaduman, 2019). This research has three main purposes. The first purpose of the research, the second purpose is to examine the media literacy of students and their passive audience tendencies within the scope of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication and to determine the relationship between media literacy and passive audience behaviors.

The first purpose of this research is to analyze how undergraduate students studying within the Faculty of Communication are affected in terms of being passive audiences, in other words consumers, by measuring their media literacy levels in line with the data obtained. Today, the increase in the diversity of media content with digitalization not only enables individuals to access information quickly but also brings along a passive audience community that consumes information without criticizing it (Beyaz Özbey, 2022). In this context, the concept of media literacy can be evaluated as students moving out of the position of passive audiences and having the ability to critically analyze, interpret, and convey the content they consume from the media (Karaman and Karataş, 2009; Ankaralıgil, 2020). The purpose of this study is to understand the attitudes and positions of communication students towards social media content and to determine the level of passive audience behavior of communication students who have a conscious level of media literacy.

The second purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the effect of the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students on their tendency to be passive audiences. The most important

difference that distinguishes a conscious media-literate individual from a passive audience is criticism. This is because a conscious media-literate individual selects the source of the information he or she wants to research in a purposeful manner and analyzes the content of the information by adopting a questioning approach (Kurt and Kürüm Yapıcıoğlu, 2010). In this context, the passive audience, at the most basic level, causes students to consume media content without criticizing it and to accept the obtained information without questioning it (Uyar and Asrak Hasdemir, 2023). The reason why students with high media literacy have low passive audience behaviors is that they analyze information content well and examine it from a critical perspective, whereas the main reason why students with low media literacy have high passive audience behaviors is that they tend to consume media content in a passive manner (Bayraktar, 2022). Passive audience behavior results from consuming media content without questioning it (Kurt and Kürüm, 2010). Television, which is one of the traditional mass media, and digital media platforms are among the primary factors affecting passive audience behavior. The excessive exposure to information created by these factors reduces the opportunity for students to analyze content critically. In news websites, this process creates a passive audience by minimizing the time to question information through attention-grabbing and interesting headlines. The effect of television and digital media platforms, which eliminate criticism and mental distance, on passive audience behaviors is significant (Yıldırım Ankaralıgil, 2020). Media literacy transforms students from being passive audiences into conscious media-literate individuals who can evaluate events from a critical perspective by effectively using their abilities to directly interpret and evaluate the content they learn from social media platforms (Kurt and Kürüm, 2010; Bayraktar, 2022; Yıldırım Ankaralıgil, 2020).

The third purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and their passive audience tendencies. Today, with the effect of digitalization, portable computers and devices, especially the internet, have become among the rapidly developing media tools, and this situation has increased the diversity of media content and accelerated access to information; however, it has also created an audience that consumes content without questioning it. Students who closely follow technology, in addition to being exposed to a bombardment of information, find that accessing accurate information has become a matter of difficulty. Therefore, this situation creates a passive audience group (Güntay, 2019). The findings of the research show that students with high media literacy evaluate content from a critical perspective, whereas students with low media literacy consume content more unconsciously and are open to being influenced in a passive position (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009). It is expected that the findings of this research will contribute to understanding students' attitudes towards media and to studies aimed at improving media literacy. This article was designed within the scope of quantitative research and was conducted within the framework of the relational survey model in order to reach the relational difference between two variables and the descriptive method in order to reveal the current situations and behaviors of the participants. The participants consist of 100 students aged between 18 and 30 from Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. The data were interpreted by measuring passive audience behaviors indirectly, together with the dimensions formed under the name of critical consumption in the scale items, using the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009). As a data collection tool, the data were collected from students through a face-to-face questionnaire due to ease of access and time advantages. This study was conducted specifically on undergraduate students studying at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication and aims to examine the effect of media literacy levels on passive audience behaviors.

### Significance

The importance of media literacy is remarkably significant for students, adults, and individuals in other age groups. In the age of technology, media literacy plays a critical role in this period in which digitalization is accelerating and aims to contribute to the development of students' and adults' abilities to consciously question the accuracy of the information they obtain from media content and to interpret it (Çakmak, 2019). The effect of media literacy on passive audiences, in the example of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication, not only increases individual awareness among students but also directly draws attention to the development of a culture of consciously consuming media content at a societal level by questioning media content from a critical perspective. In particular, the acceptance of information obtained by students from social media without questioning it causes them to move into a passive consumer position by weakening their critical thinking and interpretation skills (Uyar and Asrak Hasdemir, 2023). In this research, three main significances are mentioned. The first of these is to determine the media literacy level of undergraduate students studying at the Faculty of Communication. The second significance is to understand individuals' content consumption behaviors in digital media environments by examining students' passive audience tendencies. The third and final significance is to reveal the difference between media literacy level and passive audience behaviors.

The first significance of this research is to determine the media literacy levels of students within Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. Media literacy is the ability of students to effectively use their skills of questioning and evaluating the information they obtain from media content from an intellectual perspective and

to express it (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009). On the other hand, in the digitalizing world, media is no longer only a means of transmitting information and has become a power that affects the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in all age groups, especially students (Karaman and Karataş, 2009). Based on this, the social importance of the study aims to reveal the level at which knowing students' media literacy levels determines the level at which they accept media content with a certain attitude. Especially through social media, students are exposed to many true and false information, and if they accept this information without questioning it, they move into the passive audience position (Uyar and Asrak Hasdemir, 2023). Media literacy, at this point, has a remarkable importance and it is an undeniable fact that it helps students understand and question media content and helps them to display active audience behavior rather than passive audience behavior. Because the target of information pollution in media content is students and adults, and parental guidance plays a protective role here (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008; UNESCO, 2013). Students with high media literacy evaluate social media messages with active consumption and a critical perspective rather than passivity and at the same time interpret them. Through this research, it will be understood whether students have this skill and in this case it will be understood in which areas studies can be carried out (Bayraktar, 2022). Therefore, knowing students' media literacy levels, in addition to contributing to individual difference, emphasizes the importance of developing a conscious behavior against being exposed to information pollution in society.

If we refer to the second importance of the research, it is to analyze consumption behaviors in digital media environments by examining the passive audience tendencies of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students. While media literacy is defined as students' expressing by effectively using their skills of interpreting and evaluating the messages they obtain from written, visual and auditory media contents (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009), passive, in other words inactive behavior, is expressed as consuming media contents without questioning them (Uyar and Asrak Hasdemir, 2023). In this respect, the research contributes to the development of social awareness in terms of knowing the media literacy level of the behaviors that students display in the face of media content. The abundance of social media platforms and the algorithms of media content on these digital platforms direct individuals towards constant consumption by distancing them from critical thinking. In this context, examining students' passive audience tendencies emphasizes its importance in terms of raising awareness among students towards social media content. Therefore, in this research, it is aimed to contribute to conscious media literacy that will reduce passive audience tendency by analyzing students' consumption habits of media content. In this context, media literacy, in addition to transforming students into active individuals in the production and consumption of digital media, provides them with the opportunity to act with a critical approach while evaluating the presented content (Avşar, 2013).

Finally, the third importance of the research is to comprehensively analyze the relationship between students' media literacy and passive audience behaviors. The benefit that analyzing this relationship will provide to the research is of great importance in terms of addressing the transformative effect of media literacy on students' passive media consumption (Avşar, 2013). Students whose media literacy level is not low, in addition to gaining awareness by easily questioning the information they obtain from media content, also become quite strong in their ability to evaluate and even, when necessary, to reproduce it (Avşar, 2013; Karaman and Karataş, 2009). Messages coming from the media have often been accepted by students without questioning and have caused students to turn into passive media audiences. Therefore, as mentioned in the previous sections, media literacy gains a critical dimension and the necessity for students and other consumer individuals to display a questioning approach has been emphasized. In this context, the research is of great importance in terms of revealing the effect of students' media literacy levels on passive audience behaviors and aiming to encourage the conscious use of media in society (UNESCO, 2023).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory of the 1970s. The formation of the theoretical framework dates back to the 1970s. The theory became systematic with the article published by the well-known psychologist Elihu Katz in 1974 (Büyükbaykal and Temel, 2019). By starting a discussion in 1970, Elihu Katz stated that instead of focusing on the question "what does media do to people?", they focused on the question "what do people do with media?" (Aslan, 2019). The theoretical framework, by focusing on the individual, argues that people have social and psychological needs and that, in line with these needs, they are active individuals who meet their needs by using media content. However, this situation sometimes produces undesirable results (Yaylagül, 2006).

The "Two-Step Flow of Communication" was conducted in the 1940s by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Guadet, and was later examined by Katz and Lazarsfeld. In the Two-Step Flow of Communication research, they explained that media content does not have a direct effect, and they clarified that the main effect occurs through the personal networks used by audiences and through how they criticize media content by means

of opinion leaders. In this context, individuals who comment on daily life and events and guide others have an important role. Therefore, together with this approach, the foundation of the concepts of passive and active audience was laid in the 1940s, and at this point it was concluded that audience behaviors are not uniform (Hepp, 2019).

In the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Katz explains individuals' use of media as follows: audiences are active individuals, media use is need-based, media is not the only source for meeting individuals' needs, and audiences evaluate media effects with awareness. Therefore, according to this theory, audiences are active individuals and make choices in line with their own needs; their use of media is connected to the need for entertainment and obtaining information. On the other hand, audiences evaluate why they use media content and its effects (Luo, 2020).

In the Uses and Gratifications approach developed under the leadership of Elihu Katz, Katz states that there are fundamental needs that motivate individuals in media use. These are categorized under five main headings as cognitive needs, emotional needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension release needs (Küçükkurt, Hazar, Çetin, and Topbaş, 2009).

**Cognitive Development Need:** It was developed by Jean Piaget. Cognitive development is the need that an individual feels in order to understand and learn everything that he or she is curious about in his or her environment and to develop mental skills in this process. This need forms a unity with the sense of curiosity. For example, a university student who researches the accuracy of a news item seen on social media reaches other sources, makes comparisons, and criticizes it. Therefore, the student's cognitive development need is met through social media (Kayacı, 2019).

**Emotional Needs:** It is the need for individuals to develop a healthy self in order to exist in social life. According to Arslan (2024), it is the ability of a university student to make critical comments by showing emotional reactions such as sadness and happiness to the content he or she sees on social media.

**Personal Integrative Need:** It is expressed as the respect that individuals show towards their own emotional state. It is the need to respect the necessity of correctly understanding and accepting one's own emotional state (Cüceloğlu, 2006).

**Social Integrative Need:** Human beings are social beings. The first place where they socialize is the family. Therefore, it is expressed as a person establishing a bond with the group in which he or she lives, in other words with society, and living in harmony within social relationships (Berry, 2016).

**Tension Release Need:** Also known as experiential avoidance, the individual moves away from negative experiences that disturb him or her. For example, situations such as a false news spread by the media causing a person to distance himself or herself from the media express the need for tension release (Başlamış, 2022). Based on these basic characteristics, it creates a wide area for encouraging individuals to use media content and for analyzing the effects of these incentives on the behaviors they exhibit. This research is based on the assumption in the Uses and Gratifications approach developed especially by Katz, which explains why individuals use media. The first of these is that the audience consists of active individuals, and the second is individuals' awareness in media use. In this context, the theory emphasizes that active audiences make their own choices in selecting media content, and on the other hand, that individuals are aware of the purposes for which they consume media content (Yaylagül, 2006). Therefore, according to this theory, audiences are active individuals and make choices in line with their own needs; their use of media is attributed to the need for entertainment and obtaining information. On the other hand, audiences evaluate why they use media content and its effects (Luo, 2020). This research has examined the effect of media literacy on passive audiences within the framework of the Faculty of Communication and has been used to reveal students' media literacy levels and passive audience tendencies. On the other hand, other conceptual assumptions mentioned in the theory address students' orientations towards and evaluations of media content. In this context, with digitalization, media environments and content have diversified, and students' ability to access information has increased rapidly. Therefore, as a result of needs such as entertainment, information, social integration, and tension release that motivate students to use media, they tend towards media. Thus, students' displaying conscious behavior rather than passive behavior towards media content emerges as an important factor (Hepp, 2019; Karaduman, 2019). As a result, the Uses and Gratifications Theory is important in terms of helping to understand students' conscious selection of media content and their consumption behaviors. Therefore, this theory is suitable for explaining passive audience tendencies in media.

### **literature review**

This literature review has addressed the effect of media literacy on passive audience behaviors from various perspectives and has revealed the trends, findings, and gaps in the existing literature. Ten scientific articles and studies published in scientific journals related to the subject were examined in detail.

The first is the study conducted by Geçer and Bağcı (2018). This study aims to examine in depth the effects of media literacy education on students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. The research especially focuses on understanding the effects of communication students' skills such as critical news analysis, content questioning, information verification, and evaluating news sources on behavior towards media content. The study also aims to show which factors shape the interpretation processes of the content obtained from media by communication students and how media usage habits transform into a conscious media user.

According to the results of the research, it has been shown that media literacy education among communication faculty students creates a conscious transformation in the ways of evaluating media content. In particular, it has been determined that students analyze media messages in an interrogative manner, at the same time measure the accuracy of news by comparing them with multiple sources and therefore strengthen their evaluation skills against manipulative media content. In addition, with the increase in media literacy level, it has been determined that there is a positive relationship with content analysis, accurate evaluation, and consumer attitudes.

The basis of this study directly constitutes a foundation for our study that examines the effect of media literacy on passive audiences. The research reveals the effect of media literacy on evaluation and questioning processes and guides passive audience behavior.

The second study is conducted by Yiğiter and Ata (2022). This study aims to examine how the levels of digital media literacy of students studying at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Faculty of Communication and Antakya Vocational School, which is also included in the research, differ according to the demographic characteristics of the students. The study aims to determine how the digital media literacy levels of communication students are shaped and also aims to analyze their media usage habits and skill levels. In the research, the relationship between students' gender, income, education level, place of residence, and daily usage time variables and media literacy was analyzed. Therefore, in this context, the digital media literacy levels of different groups were compared. In the study, especially students' habits of using digital media content and the contribution of these habits to critical thinking skills and their ability to produce digital content were analyzed.

According to the research findings, it was found that communication students' level of criticism is active in evaluating the media content they consume on digital platforms and that it also improves their functional usage skills. In addition, differences were observed according to the education level of the students, and it was determined that associate degree communication faculty students scored higher than undergraduate students in the dimensions of functional production, critical consumption, and functional production. According to the research findings, geographical region and gender do not affect digital media literacy.

The basis of this study constitutes a direct foundation in terms of literacy effects in the field of digital media for our study, which examines the effects of media literacy on passive audiences. The research provides an important contribution to our study by revealing how the digital media literacy levels of communication faculty undergraduate and associate degree students affect their media usage patterns, their awareness of media messages, and their attitudes towards media. The study is important due to the transformation from passive to active audience.

The third study was conducted by Bozkurt (2012). This study aimed to examine in detail the effect of media literacy education on primary school students' perspectives on media content. In the study, within the context of the media literacy course, an attempt was made to understand how primary school students' abilities to perceive media and identify the content presented by media were affected by approaching media messages with a critical eye. The study aimed to explore how students interpret media functions through media literacy education. In particular, by examining the level at which students notice the structural elements of media content, the transformation in critical thinking skills and media use habits related to media content was examined.

According to the findings of the study, media literacy education was shown to be effective in increasing primary school students' level of awareness toward media content. In particular, it was determined that media literacy education gave students a critical perspective toward media messages. In the study, it was stated that the course content of media literacy education was reflected in students' evaluation of media content and messages. In

addition, it was observed that media literacy education positively affected and improved the level of attention and importance that students gave to the news and educational functions of media content.

This study constitutes a direct foundational source for our study examining the effect of media literacy on passive audiences. The research findings clarify how media literacy education transforms students' critical analysis, awareness, and evaluation skills regarding media content. These skills show that there is a parallel relationship between the ability to analyze media content and the ability to consume it consciously. In this context, it has critical importance for understanding the effect of media literacy on students' attitudes and behaviors.

The fourth study is conducted by Özgür and Eskicumalı (2023). This article aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of postgraduate theses on media literacy in the field of communication sciences in Türkiye. This study aims to understand which academic approaches were preferred in theses produced on the subject of media literacy in the historical process, which methods were used in the theses, which theoretical approaches were used, and how they affected measurement tools. The research aims to analyze the themes around which the media literacy theses examined are concentrated. On the other hand, by examining the content intensity of theses studied at different universities in the field of communication sciences, it provides critical information about the development process of the field.

According to the research findings, it was observed that the number of theses in the field of media literacy increased significantly, especially between 2015 and 2019. In particular, it was concluded that academic interest in the field of media literacy intensified and strengthened between 2015 and 2019. The frequent use of qualitative methods in the research showed that the most commonly used method in master's and doctoral theses is the qualitative method. In this context, it was stated that survey, interview, and content analysis techniques are widely used among data collection techniques. On the other hand, the increasing frequency of the use of scales aimed at measuring media literacy levels, such as the Media Literacy Level Determination Scale and the New Media Literacy Scale, shows a tendency towards quantitative measurement tools. In addition, the research findings revealed that there is a positive relationship among the most frequently repeated concepts in media literacy theses, such as news, children, culture, and traditional.

The study conducted by Özgür and Eskicumalı (2023) constitutes the main basis of this research as it addresses media literacy theses within a comprehensive framework. The methods, themes, and approaches used in the theses studied in the field of media literacy provide an important framework for understanding passive and active audience groups in the field of communication.

The fifth study is conducted by Barut and Tuğtekin (2021). The main purpose of this study is to conduct a rigorous evaluation of university students' new media literacy levels. The study analyzes and identifies students' consumption and production skills while using new media environments and focuses particularly on the dimensions of functional consumption, critical consumption, functional production, and functional production. The study explains students' media usage habits and their attitudes and behaviors towards media content and shows how these are shaped throughout university life. At the same time, the study aims to address the differences revealed by new media literacy levels in line with students being intertwined with media and the interaction that emerges as a result.

According to the research findings, in general, the scale results show that students' new media literacy levels are strong in terms of critical perspective towards media content, but weak in terms of production-oriented skills. In particular, it is determined that many students exhibit the phenomenon of critical consumption towards media content and, on the other hand, the phenomenon of production. Another notable attitude of students in the research is that, due to the low level of trust in media content, the number of those who filter the consumed information through a critical perspective is high, whereas students who trust media content have a low tendency to evaluate information from a critical perspective. In the research, it is observed that students' frequent watching of television is related to critical consumption; in terms of internet usage frequency, it is seen that their critical and functional skills diverge.

This study conducted by Barut and Tuğtekin (2021) provides a critical basis for understanding students' new media literacy skills. The findings show that students' behaviors on social media platforms are related to various reasons. The study contributes to the research in terms of digital trust and criticism.

The sixth study is conducted by Ata and Karkuyu (2021). This research aims to examine the effect of new media literacy levels on university students within the framework of a quantitative research approach. The research aims

to reveal how students analyze new media content, their usage habits, and the differences in content evaluation in the context of demographic variables (such as gender, social network, school type, program type, etc.). The study aims to examine in detail the factors that shape university students' positions on new media platforms and the relationships established in digital environments from beginning to end. The research provides critical contributions in terms of determining how university students' new media literacy levels in digital environments shape their participation processes.

According to the findings of the research, it was concluded that university students' new media literacy levels are high in general. In particular, it was determined that the increase in the number of social network usage contributes to strengthening new media literacy. When the obtained results were examined, it was seen that male students have statistically significantly higher new media literacy levels than female students. On the other hand, it was observed that students studying in faculties show higher literacy levels compared to students studying in vocational schools. It was determined that students studying in social programs are in a more advantageous position than students in other programs (technical and health). This situation indicates that there is a positive relationship between students and new media literacy.

The basis of this study constitutes an important foundation for our research, which examines the interaction of students' new media literacy on social networks. The research provides clarity and a critical contribution to our field by showing that new media literacy levels differ according to demographic variables. In particular, the increasing effect of students' use of social networks provides a guiding basis for our study.

The seventh study was conducted by Ateşgöz (2023). This study examined students' news media literacy levels within the framework of Çukurova University undergraduate students and at the same time aimed to examine in depth the variables affecting these levels. This research focused on how students' self-efficacy and critical performance levels within the scope of news media literacy could shape the way they interpret news content and at the same time the way they evaluate news sources critically. On the other hand, the study presents basic findings regarding what kind of change the news-following platforms preferred and used by students create in their news literacy levels.

According to the findings of the study conducted by Ateşgöz (2023), it was determined that Çukurova University undergraduate students' news media literacy levels were generally at a moderate level, while students' self-efficacy and critical performance levels were low. In the research, it was stated that the faculty variable and the digital media publications chosen by students for following news created a significant level of differentiation in trust perception, selectivity, and finally accuracy orientation regarding news literacy. In addition, it was observed that platforms such as Telegram, Twitter, and YouTube preferred by students were associated with a high level of literacy in access to information, whereas this level remained low on news sites such as Instagram and similar platforms. In addition, it shows that the faculty in which education is received at Çukurova University positively affects news media literacy.

The basis of this study constitutes a direct foundation for our study examining the effects of media literacy on passive audiences. The research makes an important contribution by explaining which variables of news media literacy affect students' critical attitudes and behaviors towards news content. In particular, the effect of critical attitudes and self-efficacy performance levels provides guidance in terms of passive and active audiences.

The eighth study is conducted by Yaşa and Şen (2024). The study conducted by Yaşa and Şen aims to examine theoretically the concepts of speed, prosumer behavior, and infinite scrolling, which enable the formation of social media culture, in terms of their effects on user experiences and their connection with cultural transformation. The research attempts to understand how the concepts of speed, prosumer behavior, and infinite scrolling, which users encounter on social media platforms, affect user behaviors in interpreting digital culture. In this context, the study aims to learn how the concept of speed shapes content consumption behaviors and, on the other hand, how the concept of prosumer, which means producer and consumer, positions individuals.

The research findings reveal that users defined as prosumers in social media environments take an active role as individuals who both produce and consume content in the prosumer position. Therefore, it has been determined that this situation affects the critical approach to social media culture as a new phenomenon in consuming and producing social media content. On the other hand, it has been observed that infinite scrolling behavior, which affects user behavior, leads to digital addiction and attention deficiency by increasing the time that producers and consumers spend on the platform. In addition, it has been concluded that there is a positive relationship among these concepts affecting user behavior and that they transform social media culture.

The study conducted by Yaşa and Şen (2024) establishes a theoretical framework by addressing social media culture in the context of three concepts that affect and transform user behavior. It attributes critical importance to guiding user behaviors and affecting many experiences such as infinite scrolling behavior within social media culture. In particular, it has been determined that social media culture creates an identity by positioning users as producers and consumers. In this context, the study of Yaşa and Şen (2024) has a guiding quality for our research questions within the context of active and passive audience.

The ninth study was conducted by Dursun and İlhan (2021). This study aims to examine in depth the passive–active audience profiles of daytime television programs by addressing social media. The research addresses how traditional media audiences in a passive audience position move into an active role with new digital media and aims to evaluate in detail the expressions produced by users in social media environments within the scope of critical discourse analysis. The study aims to conduct a detailed examination in order to understand the comments obtained through the Instagram accounts of the daytime programs followed by users, the interpretation of the audience’s comments on program content, which discourse patterns are used while making this interpretation through feedback, and how the text–audience interaction is shaped. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of daytime television programs on audiences through the method of critical discourse analysis and at the same time to analyze the transformation of audience behaviors on social media platforms.

According to the research findings, it has been shown that the posts made on social media platforms affect the perceptions of the audience towards daytime television programs to a remarkable degree. In particular, it has been determined that, as a result of the active participation of audiences in Instagram comments on the social media accounts of daytime programs, they use various discourse strategies while producing comments and reinterpreting program content. In the study, it has been determined that the comments made by audiences generally reflect emotional, ideological, and cultural codes. In addition, it has been shown that active audience comments have a positive effect in interaction with new digital media.

This study constitutes a direct basis for our research examining the effect of media literacy on passive audiences. The research makes an important contribution by addressing active audience comments on social media in terms of the passive–active relationship.

The final study was conducted by Konuk and Güntaş (2019). The article studied by Konuk and Güntaş aims to conduct a comprehensive research on the relationship between social media platforms and education on two main axes. The research process was addressed within the context of consuming all media tools for educational purposes and the effect of this use on educational processes. The study by Konuk and Güntaş (2019) presents an in-depth theoretical framework aimed at analyzing which factors cause changes in individuals’ communication processes, interactions, and learning behaviors in the digital age. In addition, the effects on children, adolescents, and adults who are social media users were examined in detail.

According to the research findings, it was shown that social media literacy has a positive contribution to educational processes. In particular, it was observed that the active use of social media platforms provides a significant contribution from information sharing to student participation and learning motivation. In the study, students’ ability to easily access course schedules, access course content, and communicate with their peers through social media showed a positive interaction with the learning process. In addition, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between the frequency of individuals’ use of social media platforms and their learning experiences.

The basis of this study provides a direct and important foundation for our research examining the effect of media literacy on passive audiences. The research explains that individuals who use social media platforms consume the content they obtain from media by questioning it and, in this context, explains the effect of active social media use on learning. The study is closely related to the process of transforming the passive audience phenomenon, which our study focuses on, into the phenomenon of active audience and consumer in terms of consuming information obtained from social media platforms in a more conscious manner. In this context, it serves as an important reference for our research questions regarding active audience, passive audience, and critical approach.

## Method

This study was prepared based on a quantitative research approach in order to examine the relationships between the media literacy levels of undergraduate students studying at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication and their passive audience behaviors. Quantitative research, which proceeds with a deductive approach, is based on the assumption that reality can be explained through measurable and numerical data, and therefore it is a research approach that is based on collecting data in an objective, systematic, and repeatable manner. Therefore, in

quantitative research, the relationships and differences between variables can be analyzed using statistical methods, and generalizable results can be obtained through the findings, and at the same time, it is aimed to make predictions regarding future attitudes (Garip, 2025). In this context, the quantitative research approach, which proceeds with a deductive logic, offers a method that is directly compatible with the sub-problem statement and sub-problems of the research. The relational survey model, which dominates the research framework, is a quantitative research model that provides the opportunity to examine in detail the relationship between variables without any intervention in the existing situation (Bekman, 2022). Through this model, the relationship between the media literacy levels and passive audience behaviors of students studying in different fields at the Faculty of Communication can be analyzed through quantitative statistical data. The theoretical framework of the research is formed within the scope of audience studies and media literacy literature. Media literacy refers to the ability to interpret, which highlights the critical perspective and evaluation process that individuals display towards all auditory or written media content (Karaboğa, 2017). The concept of passive audience, on the other hand, is explained as the behavior patterns of individuals who accept the information they obtain from social media content without verifying its accuracy, in other words, who accept media messages as true as they are presented without questioning them and consume them without critically analyzing them (Bayraktar, 2022).

The media literacy literature and audience studies addressed in this study provide a theoretical foundation and are based on the assumption that an increase in the level of media literacy may reduce passive audience behaviors. Within this scope, the variables addressed in the research are presented below.

### **Independent Variable**

#### **Media Literacy Level**

Media literacy is generally defined as the ability of individuals to evaluate, in a questioning manner and with a critical approach, the accuracy of the information they obtain from social media tools that meet their need for information, and in this context, to consume it consciously. Therefore, it is stated that individuals with a high level of media literacy develop a more questioning attitude by distinguishing themselves from individuals who display passive behavior towards media content (Karaman and Karataş, 2009). In this section of the research, media literacy is expressed through four sub-dimensions in terms of the interaction that students establish with media content. These are functional consumption, critical consumption, functional production, and critical production.

### **Dependent Variable**

#### **Passive Audience Behaviors**

Passive audience behaviors are defined as individuals accepting information learned from social media content, the accuracy of which is unknown, without questioning; consuming media messages without passing them through a critical filter and without analyzing them; and accordingly displaying a passive attitude towards media (Bayraktar, 2022; Avşar, 2013). The effect of media literacy on passive audiences in the literature reveals that passive audience behaviors are in a significant relationship with media literacy. It is emphasized that individuals with low levels of media literacy display passive audience behavior and that this is significantly associated with the low level of media literacy (Bayraktar, 2022).

The effect of media literacy on passive audiences within the scope of this study was calculated through low scores obtained in the critical consumption dimension of passive audience behaviors, and on the other hand, it was evaluated indirectly in line with attitudes towards accepting media messages directly without questioning. Within the scope of the research, it was concluded that the appropriate model consists of dependent and independent variables, and it aims to examine the effect of individuals' media literacy levels on passive audience behaviors in a relational context. In this direction, the research adds a new dimension to how media literacy skills shape the audience positions in which individuals are situated towards media content and at the same time guides the fields of media, communication, and literacy by contributing to the literature.

### **Problem Statement**

“How do the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students affect passive audience behaviors?”

### **Sub-Problems and Hypotheses**

Sub-Problem 1: What are the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students?

- H1: Students' media literacy levels are at a moderate and above level.
- H01: Students' media literacy levels are at a low level.

Sub-Problem 2: What is the level of passive audience tendencies of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students?

- H2: Students' passive audience tendencies are at a low level.
- H02: Students' passive audience tendencies are at a high level.

Sub-Problem 3: Is there a significant relationship between media literacy level and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors?

- H3: There is a negative and significant relationship between media literacy level and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors.
- H03: There is no significant relationship between media literacy level and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors.

Sub-Problem 4: Do media literacy levels differ according to students' demographic variables?

- H4: Media literacy levels show significant differences according to demographic variables.
- H04: Media literacy levels do not show significant differences according to demographic variables.

### Research Model

Within the framework of the research, the relational survey method was used to examine the relationship between communication students' media literacy levels and passive audience tendencies within the scope of the effect of media literacy on passive audiences. The relational survey model is defined as a quantitative research survey approach that enables the analysis of the existence of both directional and non-directional relationships and thus allows determining their level (Bahtiyar and Can, 2016). In this context, the effect of the independent variables determined within the research framework on students' passive audience behaviors was tested statistically.

In the research model, the relationship between students' levels of analyzing, questioning, and evaluating media content and their passive audience tendencies was addressed. In the dependent variable, students' passive attitudes towards media, their level of questioning approach to content, and passive audience behaviors were addressed. Within the scope of the research, the descriptive survey model was also used. The purpose of using this model within the scope of the research is to present students' media content consumption behaviors, media usage habits, and general media literacy profiles of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students. Thus, the descriptive findings used in the research also contributed to interpreting the relational analyses in a more meaningful and holistic manner. In this context, the research models used within the scope of the study aim to determine the effect of media literacy levels on passive audience behaviors, to identify students' levels of critical awareness towards media content, and at the same time to explain their attitudes towards media. Through this model developed within the scope of the research, the role of students' media literacy levels in positioning them as passive or active audiences will be analyzed objectively.

### Population

The population of this study consists of students from different classes and fields studying at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. The departments within the Faculty of Communication are listed as follows: Public Relations and Advertising, Journalism, Radio, Television and Cinema, and New Media and Communication. Students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication represent a group in which active and passive audience behaviors can be clearly observed, as they spend time intertwined with media due to their field and are involved in an intensive interaction process with media and digital platforms.

In addition, since Faculty of Communication students follow media closely both as individual users and as future professional communicators due to the nature of their education, an appropriate population selection was made in line with the purpose of the research. Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students include all students studying in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years in the 2025–2026 Academic Year. The research aims to reveal the relationship between communication faculty students' tendencies to be in a passive or active position towards media content produced in media.

### Sample

Within the scope of the study titled "The Effect of Media Literacy on Passive Audiences: The Case of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication," the sample was selected from undergraduate students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication aged between 18 and 30. In the sample selection, the convenience sampling method was used so that the researcher could access the target group quickly and carry out the application process in a practical manner. It is one of the preferred sampling techniques as it allows rapid and practical access to data. In this direction, a total of 100 undergraduate students from four different departments studying at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication were included in the research.

However, after excluding incomplete forms, statistical analyses were conducted on 96 valid participants. The sample size was determined by taking into account time, cost, and access conditions. The convenience sampling method used with the determined sample is considered appropriate in terms of representing the frequency of use of media tools by Faculty of Communication students and their passive/active attitudes towards media messages. At the same time, including undergraduate students from four different departments and class levels increases data diversity and contributes to the reliability of the analysis results. The fact that the 100 students included in the research actively consume media content strengthens the suitability of the sample in line with the purpose of the study.

### **Data Collection Tool**

Within the scope of this research, data were collected from undergraduate students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication using a face-to-face survey technique. The data collection instrument used in the research consists of two main sections. The survey was prepared in a semi-structured form and arranged in accordance with the quantitative research approach.

In the first part of the survey, questions were included to determine the participants' demographic information such as gender, age, class level, daily internet usage time, and frequency of social media use. The purpose of including this section in the survey form is to define the participant profile and to evaluate it descriptively based on the obtained data.

In the second part of the survey, the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009), for which validity and reliability studies have been conducted, was used to measure the media literacy levels of the participants. The scale items consist of four sub-dimensions: functional consumption, critical consumption, functional production, and critical production. The items in the scale aim to reveal and demonstrate the participants' competencies in questioning the reality of media content, in other words media messages, evaluating them, and producing them.

Since there is no scale in the literature to measure passive audience behaviors within the scope of the research, students' passive audience behaviors were evaluated indirectly by measuring them through their media literacy levels. Based on this, students' passive audience status was addressed in line with accepting media content without questioning, low levels of critical consumption, and passive audience indicators discussed in the literature. Since passive audience behaviors in the literature are associated with low levels of media literacy, this appears as an accepted approach. In the analysis of the data obtained in the research, the significance level in statistical analysis was accepted as 0.05. In the analyses conducted, if  $p < 0.05$ , the results were considered statistically significant. In this direction, the aim of the research, together with the data collection tool, is to measure media literacy levels and passive/active audience tendencies in a valid and reliable manner.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained in the focus of the research were analyzed using the SPSS 27.0 package program. In the analysis process, first, missing data control was conducted in order to ensure the suitability of the dataset for analysis, and the normality of the data distribution was examined. The assumption of normal distribution was evaluated by taking into account skewness and kurtosis values and the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In line with the fulfillment of the normal distribution assumption, it was decided to apply parametric tests.

Descriptive statistics were used in the examination of the demographic variables and media usage characteristics of the participants; the data were summarized by calculating frequency (f), percentage (%), arithmetic mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), and standard deviation (SD).

In order to determine the reliability of the media literacy scale used in the research, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated, and values of 0.70 and above were evaluated as indicating that the scale is reliable. Another analysis used in the research, Pearson Correlation Analysis, was used to determine the direction of relationships. Passive audience behaviors were not measured directly, but were evaluated indirectly through the low scores obtained especially in the critical consumption dimension of the media literacy scale. In this direction, the correlation analyses conducted aim to reveal the relationships between media literacy level and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors.

In order to examine whether there are significant differences according to the demographic variables of the participants, the independent samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used. In all statistical analyses, the significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ , and the findings obtained were interpreted in this direction.

### **Assumptions**

In this research, the following assumptions were taken into consideration:

It is assumed that the participants answered the survey form correctly and honestly. In face-to-face survey techniques, it is accepted as a data collection process that participants' statements reflect the truth and, at the same time, since there is direct interaction between the researcher and the participant, missing or incorrect responses are noticed and corrected by the researcher and the participant (Küçükkambak and Armağan, 2022).

The validity and reliability of Karaman and Karataş (2009) are accepted. The inclusion of the Media Literacy Scale used in the research in previous validity and reliability studies in the literature shows that the measurement tool is suitable for measuring students' media literacy levels within the scope of the research. The media literacy scale used in the research is assumed to measure the intended variable correctly.

It is assumed that the sample represents the population. It is accepted that the sample included in the research has the capacity to represent the population of the research. This assumption constitutes a basis for interpreting the results obtained from the research in relation to the population (Balcı, 2015).

It is assumed that participation in the research is entirely based on voluntariness and that it was conducted in accordance with ethical principles. Within the scope of the research, it is accepted that participants were informed about the informed consent form presented by the ethics committee and that their informed consent was obtained (Esmer and Özdaşlı, 2023).

It is assumed that the internal consistency levels of the scales meet the reliability criteria. In the research, if the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is found to be 0.7 and above, the reliability result of the scale is accepted as good (Kılıç, 2016).

### **Assumptions**

Within the scope of this research, it has been verified that some statistical and methodological assumptions are met. These assumptions indicate that the analyses to be applied through the research function properly, in other words, correctly. It is observed that they directly affect the validity and reliability of the findings obtained from the data. In this context, the research is explained below within a theoretical framework (Baltacı, 2018).

It is assumed that the data show a normal distribution. The fact that the media literacy and passive audience behavior scores obtained from Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students are close to a normal distribution is important for the use of parametric tests. Therefore, ensuring normality strengthens the interpretation process carried out through correlation and regression analyses (Uysal and Kılıç, 2022).

It is assumed that there is a linear relationship between the variables. By accepting that the relationship between media literacy level and passive audience behaviors is linear, it is tested based on the effect between the variables. In this context, this assumption is considered fundamental for relational analyses to produce meaningful results (Garip, 2023).

It is accepted that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is met. In comparing participants' media literacy and passive audience behaviors according to demographic variables, it is assumed that the variances between groups are equal. This situation ensures that group comparisons are statistically more reliable (Garip, 2023).

It is assumed that there is no problem of multicollinearity. It is accepted that there is no excessive relationship between the media literacy sub-dimensions and the variables included in the model. In this context, it is assumed that the relationship between variables is not at a level that would distort the analysis results (Kılıç, 2016).

It is assumed that the measurements have interval properties. Accepting the scores obtained from Likert-type scale items used in the research as equally spaced is a common approach in social sciences. This acceptance makes it possible to statistically analyze the level of directly questioning media content (Turan, Şimşek and Aslan, 2015). It is assumed that the data consist of independent observations. It is accepted that the participants answered the questionnaire only once and that the responses did not affect each other. Therefore, the observations in the dataset are independent, and the analyses are carried out based on this assumption (Yazıcıoğlu, 1994).

It is assumed that sampling errors are at a controllable level. It is concluded that the sample reached in the research is sufficient to represent Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students. All of these assumptions are important in terms of correctly testing the relationship between media literacy and passive audience behaviors. A serious violation of these assumptions may lead to an incorrect interpretation process of the analysis results (Demir, Çelik and Uurlu, 2024).

### Limitations

This research includes various methodological and application-related limitations. First of all, the research was conducted only with undergraduate students studying in different fields and classes at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication. It is not possible to generalize the data to student groups from any other university, faculty, or different department. The fact that the sample selection in social sciences is limited to a specific institution and academic field is a situation that limits the external validity of the research (Baltacı, 2018). In this context, the research findings are interpreted within the scope of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students, which constitutes the population of the study.

In the research, data were collected only through a quantitative research method. Within the scope of the study, this situation limits in-depth interpretation in the analysis of the relationship between media literacy levels and passive audience behaviors and in contextual dimensions. In this context, while quantitative research helps to reveal the relationships between variables statistically, it does not include data regarding participants' personal experiences and subjective approaches (Garip, 2023). Since there is no scale in the literature to measure passive audience behaviors within the scope of the research, students' passive audience behaviors were measured through a self-report-based measurement tool using the media literacy scale, and passive audience behavior was not observed directly. In this context, the data obtained are based on participants' perceptions and evaluations rather than behavioral outcomes.

In the data collection process, surveys were applied to 100 undergraduate students studying in different departments at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication, and this method provides an important advantage in increasing the participation rate and enabling the problems to be interpreted and answered more clearly (Küçükkambak and Armağan, 2022). The fact that the measurement tools are also based on self-report may cause participant responses to be shaped by individual perceptions. On the other hand, the limitation of the data collection process to a specific time period, together with the fact that participants' media usage habits and digital media environments may change over time, limits long-term generalizability through the analysis results obtained (Demir, Çelik and Uurlu, 2024).

Finally, the fact that the research was conducted with a limited number of undergraduate students at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication causes the statistical power to remain limited when compared to studies conducted with larger samples, and the findings obtained should be evaluated within the scope and limitations of the research and handled carefully (Demir, Çelik and Uurlu, 2024).

### Definitions

The concepts included in this research are explained below:

**Communication:** Communication is defined as the process by which one or more individuals share their feelings and thoughts or information about events such as culture, art, economy, and sports occurring in the world or in the country through various mass media tools, and at the same time establish relationships with others. Communication is not one-way (Ulusoy, 2012).

**Digital Media:** In today's digitalization process, communication among people, rapid access to information, and convenience have led to fundamental changes in forms of interaction. The first step of digitalization began with the invention of the printing press, which enabled the emergence of newspapers, and this process was later followed by the establishment of radio and television. Thus, mass media have transformed into a systematic structure that can reach large audiences in social life through the internet and have led to significant developments (Erişti, 2018). Digital transformation, although a fundamental concept, is a concept that has emerged in direct proportion to the development of technology in the business processes of various institutions in order to obtain value over time (Baş, Erdoğan Tarakçı and Aslan, 2022, p. 9).

**Passive Audience and Active Audience:** The concept of audience has undergone many changes and transformations from past to present. In the historical period, audiences first came to the fore with the concept of the "reading public," and later were evaluated as passive receivers in the one-way communication structure that developed with radio and television (Avşar, 2013). Media literacy is an important tool that enables audiences to approach media content with a questioning perspective and to evaluate it in the digital age (Avşar, 2013; Koçoğlu, 2023). Therefore, media literacy not only transforms students into active participants in the production and consumption of digital media, but also enables audiences or individuals to evaluate media content in a questioning manner through the conscious attitudes they display (Avşar, 2013).

**Media Literacy:** With the development of digital technologies and the internet in the late 20th century, students and adults have evolved from content consumers to content producers (Güneş, 2013; Koçoğlu, 2023). These

developments have made media literacy a critical concept. Media literacy contributes to individuals' ability to critically evaluate media messages and to question the accuracy of information. While passive audience behavior increases the risk of exposure to misinformation, media literacy, on the contrary, reduces this risk and enables individuals to use media actively and critically (Kartal and Kınca, 2009).

**Findings**

In the findings section, the statistical analysis results of the data obtained from Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students in the article titled “The Effect of Media Literacy on Passive Audiences: Sakarya University Faculty of Communication Example” are discussed. The research findings first address the demographic characteristics of the participants, and then present students' media usage habits, students' media literacy levels, and finally the indicators representing students' passive audience behaviors.

At this point, based on the methods used within the scope of the research, descriptive statistics were first used to reveal the students' demographic characteristics (gender, age, class level, daily internet usage time, and frequency of social media use) and media usage habits. Accordingly, through the data obtained within the scope of the research, frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation values were calculated.

In order to evaluate the measurement power of the Media Literacy Scale used in the research, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was examined. At this point, the reliability of the scale was tested. In addition, normal distribution analysis was conducted to determine the suitability of the dataset for parametric analyses. In order for normality to be met, skewness and kurtosis values and the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test were taken into account.

The media literacy level and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors were evaluated through the scores obtained especially from the critical consumption dimension. Based on this, Pearson Correlation Analysis was applied to determine the direction and level of the relationship between the variables. In order to examine whether media literacy levels differ according to students' demographic variables, the independent samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were included in the research.

In all statistical analyses, the significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ , and the findings obtained were interpreted in this direction. The reliability of the Media Literacy Scale was evaluated with the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. At this point, the internal consistency value of the scale was calculated as  $\alpha = 0.916$ . According to the obtained research result, it indicates that the scale is highly reliable.

**Frequency Interpretation**

**5. Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Participants' Demographic Characteristics**

**Table 1. Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	56	58,3
Male	39	40,6
Prefer not to say	1	1,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Source:** *Created by the author.*

In Table 1 shown above, the section of demographic findings related to students is presented. In the findings section, the findings regarding gender, which is one of the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the research, are included. At this point, the findings are discussed in Table 1 above in terms of frequency (f) and percentage (%) values within the scope of the gender variable of the students. A total of 96 students participated in the research, of whom 58.3% (n=56) were female students, 40.6% (n=39) were male students, and 1.0% (n=1) was a student who preferred not to state their gender.

**Table 2. Age**

Age	f	%
Prefer not to say	1	1,0
18-20	53	55,2
21-23	38	39,6
24-26	3	3,1
27 and above	2	2,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

According to Table 2, the age distributions of the participating students are included. When the data in Table 2 are examined, first, the total participation rate of students in the 18–20 age range is 55.2% (n=53). The rate of students in the 21–23 age range is 39.6% (n=38). The total participation rate of students in the 24–26 age group is 3.1% (n=3), and finally, the participation rate of students aged 27 and above is determined as 2.1% (n=2). From this point of view, when the age distributions of the participating students are examined, it is seen in the results of Table 2 that a large part of them are in the 18–20 age range.

**Table 3. Class**

Class	f	%
2nd year	66	68,8
3rd year	19	19,8
4th year	11	11,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 3, the findings related to the class levels of the students participating in the survey are presented. When the distribution of class levels is examined on the basis of Table 3, it is indicated in the survey findings that 68.8% (n=66) are 2nd-year students, 19.8% (n=19) are 3rd-year students, and 11.5% (n=11) are 4th-year students.

**Table 4. Daily Internet Usage Durations**

	f	%
Less than 1 hour	1	1,0
1–3 hours	15	15,6
4-6 hours	48	50,0
7 hours and above	32	33,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 4, the findings related to students' daily internet usage durations are presented in the table above. When the data regarding the daily internet usage durations of communication faculty students in Table 4 are evaluated, it is concluded that 50.0% (n=48), that is, half of the participants, have a daily internet usage duration of 4–6 hours. The proportion of students whose daily internet usage duration is 7 hours and above is 33.3% (n=32). The proportion of students who use the internet for 1–3 hours daily is determined as 15.6% (n=15). Finally, it is found that the proportion of students who use the internet for less than 1 hour daily is 1.0% (n=1).

**Table 6. "I can decide for myself whether the messages in mass media are true or false."**

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	2	2,1
Disagree	4	4,2
Neutral	24	25,0
Agree	40	41,7
Strongly Agree	26	27,1

<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>
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Source: Created by the author.

In Table 6, the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the statement “I can decide for myself whether the messages in mass media are true or false” is shown. When the findings in Table 6 are examined, it indicates that a large part of the participants agree positively with this statement. The total of the responses “Agree” (41.7%; n=40) and “Strongly Agree” (27.1%; n=26) reveals that students consider themselves sufficient in evaluating the accuracy of media messages. On the other hand, the fact that the proportion of participants who responded “Neutral” (25.0%; n=24) is at a remarkable level shows that some uncertainties continue to exist in the process of evaluating the accuracy of media messages.

**Table 7.** “I am aware of the values such as consumer culture, violence, etc. produced by mass media.”

<b>Response</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Disagree	1	1,0
Disagree	1	1,0
Neutral	12	12,5
Agree	41	42,7
Strongly Agree	41	42,7
<b>Toplam</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 7 above, the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the statement “I am aware of the values such as consumer culture, violence, etc. produced by mass media” is shown. When the findings given in Table 7 are examined, it is seen that a very large majority of the participants agree positively with this statement. The total of the results obtained from the response “Agree” (42.7%; n=41) and the result observed from the response “Strongly Agree” (42.7%; n=41) indicates that students have a high level of awareness in recognizing the values included in media content. The relatively low level of neutral responses (12.5%; n=12) shows that the number of students experiencing uncertainty on this issue is limited. The fact that negative responses are at very low rates indicates that participants are able to evaluate media messages with a critical perspective.

**Table 8.** “I notice for what purposes (social responsibility, consumption, informing, entertaining, etc.) messages are created.”

<b>Response</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Disagree	1	1,0
Disagree	2	2,0
Neutral	10	10,4
Agree	42	43,8
Strongly Agree	41	42,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In line with the information presented in Table 8 above, the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the statement “I notice for what purposes (social responsibility, consumption, informing, entertaining, etc.) messages are created” is listed below. When the findings in Table 8 are examined, it is seen that a very large majority of the participants agree positively with this statement. The total of the responses “Agree” (43.8%; n=42) and “Strongly Agree” (42.7%; n=41) reveals that students have a high level of awareness in distinguishing the purposes behind media messages. The relatively low level of neutral responses (10.4%; n=10) indicates that the number of participants experiencing uncertainty on this issue is limited.

**Table 9.** “I determine the positive and negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	4	4,2
Disagree	3	3,1
Neutral	18	18,8
Agree	39	40,6
Strongly Agree	32	33,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 9 above, the distribution of the responses given by the participants to the statement “I determine the positive and negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media” is shown. As seen in Table 9, when the findings are examined, it is seen that a large part of the participants responded positively to this statement. The total of the responses “Agree” (40.6%; n=39) and “Strongly Agree” (33.3%; n=32) reveals that students can distinguish the positive and negative aspects of media content by evaluating them with a critical perspective. On the other hand, the fact that the neutral responses (18.8%; n=18) are at a relatively remarkable level shows that some students may experience hesitation from time to time in evaluating media content. The low rates of the responses “Disagree” (3.1%; n=3) and “Strongly Disagree” (4.2%; n=4) reveal that the number of students who think that they do not have this skill is limited.

**Table 10.** “I look at the messages given in mass media with a critical perspective.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	3	3,1
Disagree	7	7,3
Neutral	24	25,0
Agree	30	31,3
Strongly Agree	32	33,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In line with the information presented in Table 10 above, the attitudes of the participants towards checking the accuracy of media content through different sources are presented. The findings obtained show that an important part of the students adopt this behavior. In particular, the high rates of the options “Agree” (31.3%; n=30) and “Strongly Agree” (33.3%; n=32) indicate that the participants generally display a conscious approach in questioning and verifying media messages. The proportion of participants who reported neutrality (25.0%; n=24) is at a level that cannot be ignored. This situation indicates that the participants are not clear about checking the accuracy of media content.

**Table 11.** “I have competence regarding how mass media affect individuals.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	2	2,1
Disagree	6	6,3
Neutral	19	19,8

Agree	41	42,7
Strongly Agree	28	29,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Source: Created by the author.**

According to the information presented in Table 11 above, the majority of the participants consider themselves sufficient in evaluating the effects of mass media on individuals. While the proportion of those expressing a positive opinion draws attention with a total of 71.9% (n=69), the proportion of participants who remain neutral is at the level of 19.8% (n=19). The fact that negative opinions remain at a low rate (8.4%; n=8) shows that students' awareness in this field is generally high.

**Table 12. “I notice that mass media have political, economic, cultural, and social priorities.”**

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	1	1,0
Disagree	3	3,1
Neutral	16	16,7
Agree	42	43,8
Strongly Agree	34	35,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

The findings stated in Table 12 above show that a large part of the participants notice that mass media have different social and structural priorities. The proportion of participants expressing a positive opinion is 79.2% (n=76) in total, and this situation indicates that students develop a critical and awareness-based perspective towards media content. The group of participants who are neutral at a rate of 16.7% (n=16) suggests that some students cannot make a clear evaluation regarding the directive structure of media tools. It shows that negative opinions (4.2%; n=4) remain at a very low level.

**Table 13. “I give positive and negative reactions to messages in mass media.”**

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	1	1,0
Disagree	3	3,1
Neutral	16	16,7
Agree	42	43,8
Strongly Agree	34	35,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 13 above, a large part of the participants stated that they can give positive or negative reactions to the messages presented in mass media. In particular, the high rates of the responses “Agree” (33.3%; n=32) and “Strongly Agree” (37.5%; n=36) indicate that students display an active approach in evaluating media messages and developing attitudes towards these messages. On the other hand, the fact that the proportion of neutral participants (16.7%; n=16) is at a considerable level suggests that some students cannot develop a clear attitude regarding the reactions they give to media messages. The fact that negative opinions remain at relatively low rates (12.5%) reveals that this skill is generally widespread among students.

**Table 14. “I make suggestions about protection from the negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media.”**

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	5	5,2

Disagree	21	21,9
Neutral	29	30,2
Agree	26	27,1
Strongly Agree	15	15,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

According to the information presented in Table 14 above, it is seen that the responses given by the participants, in other words the students of the Faculty of Communication, to the item “I make suggestions on protection from the negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media” do not concentrate around a specific opinion. The fact that the proportion of neutral participants has the highest value with 30.2% (n=29) shows that students cannot display a clear attitude in developing suggestions for protection from negative content in mass media. While the proportion of those expressing a positive opinion is 42.7% (n=41) in total, the total proportion of negative opinions is at the level of 27.1% (n=26). This distribution reveals that although a part of the students consider themselves sufficient in this regard, a significant portion either remain neutral or think that they do not have this competence.

**Table 15.** “I know that the given messages are created in different forms in different mass media.”

Response	f	%
Disagree	6	6,3
Neutral	26	27,1
Agree	33	34,4
Strongly Agree	31	32,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In line with the information presented in Table 15, an important part of the participants express that they are aware that the given messages are produced in different forms in different mass media. The total of the responses “Agree” (34.4%; n=33) and “Strongly Agree” (32.3%; n=31) reaching 66.7% shows that students have a certain level of awareness regarding the presentation forms of media content. On the other hand, the proportion of neutral participants being 27.1% (n=26) shows that this information is not perceived with the same clarity by every participant. The proportion of those expressing negative opinions is limited to 6.3% (n=6).

**Table 16.** “I follow whether legal and ethical rules are adhered to in the broadcasts of mass media.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	7	7,3
Disagree	26	27,1
Neutral	26	27,1
Agree	22	22,9
Strongly Agree	15	15,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

According to the information obtained from the answers to the questions in Table 16 above, it indicates that the participants' views regarding this item do not concentrate in a single direction. The fact that the proportion of neutral participants is at a remarkable level with 27.1% (n=26) shows that students cannot develop a clear attitude in following whether legal and ethical rules are adhered to in mass media. While the proportion of those expressing negative opinions is 34.4% (n=33) in total, the total proportion of positive opinions is at the level of 38.5% (n=37). This distribution reveals that some of the students think that they have awareness on this issue, but an important part either remains neutral or does not follow this regularly.

**Table 17.** *“As an individual, I know how much influence I have on the production process in mass media.”*

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	6	6,3
Disagree	14	14,6
Neutral	29	30,2
Agree	33	34,4
Strongly Agree	14	14,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

In line with the results obtained in Table 17, there is no clear consensus among the responses given by the participants, in other words the students, to the item “As an individual, I know how much influence I have on the production process in mass media.” The fact that the proportion of neutral participants is at the highest level with 30.2% (n=29) shows that students cannot make a clear evaluation regarding their individual influence on the production process in mass media. While the proportion of those expressing positive opinions is 49.0% (n=47) in total, the total proportion of negative opinions is determined as 20.9% (n=20). This distribution reveals that although an important part of the participants consider themselves partially sufficient in this regard, the level of indecision is remarkable.

**Table 18.** *“I immediately notice when false reporting is made in mass media.”*

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	3	3,1
Disagree	8	8,3
Neutral	26	27,1
Agree	38	39,6
Strongly Agree	21	21,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

According to the results of the items presented in Table 18, an important part of the participants state that they can notice false news in mass media. The total of the responses “Agree” (39.6%; n=38) and “Strongly Agree” (21.9%; n=21) reaching 61.5% shows that students have a certain level of awareness on this issue. On the other hand, the fact that the proportion of neutral participants is at a remarkable level with 27.1% (n=26) suggests that some students are not sure about distinguishing false news. The fact that the total proportion of negative opinions remains limited to 11.4% (n=11) reveals that the participants who think that they do not have this skill are in the minority.

Response	f	%
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Strongly Disagree	3	3,1
Disagree	9	9,4
Neutral	21	21,9
Agree	32	33,3
Strongly Agree	31	32,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Table 19.** “I notice hidden advertising in mass media.”

Source: Created by the author.

In Table 19 above, a large part of the participants stated that they can notice hidden advertisements in mass media. The total of the responses “Agree” (33.3%; n=32) and “Strongly Agree” (32.3%; n=31) reaching 65.6% shows that students have a certain level of awareness on this issue. On the other hand, the fact that the proportion of neutral participants is 21.9% (n=21) suggests that some students cannot develop a clear opinion about distinguishing hidden advertisements. The fact that the total proportion of negative opinions remains limited to 12.5% (n=12) reveals that the participants who think that they do not have this skill are in the minority.

**Table 20.** “I can observe the influence of sponsors on broadcasts.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	3	3,1
Disagree	6	6,3
Neutral	21	21,9
Agree	31	32,3
Strongly Agree	35	36,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

When the responses in Table 20 are examined, it is seen that an important part of the participants can notice the influence of sponsors on broadcasts. 32.3% (n=31) of the participants answered “Agree” and 36.5% (n=35) answered “Strongly Agree.” The total of these two groups reaches 68.8%, showing that the majority of the students develop awareness regarding the guiding effect of sponsors on media content. On the other hand, it is seen that 21.9% (n=21) of the participants remain neutral. Although this rate does not constitute the majority, it reveals that some students cannot display a clear attitude in evaluating sponsor influence. This situation may be due to the fact that sponsor influence is not always perceived clearly and directly or that the content is presented implicitly. The proportion of participants expressing negative opinions is relatively low. The total of the responses “Disagree” (6.3%; n=6) and “Strongly Disagree” (3.1%; n=3) remaining at 9.4% shows that the number of students who state that they cannot notice sponsor influence is limited. This finding indicates that the sample group largely has critical media literacy.

**Table 21.** “I notice implicit (hidden) messages conveyed by mass media.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	5	5,2
Disagree	11	11,5
Neutral	30	31,3
Agree	33	34,4

Strongly Agree	17	17,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

According to the distribution of the responses in Table 21, it is seen that the participants generally display a positive tendency in noticing implicit messages. The total of the responses “Agree” (34.4%; n=33) and “Strongly Agree” (17.7%; n=17) reaches 52.1%, showing that more than half of the students think that they can perceive messages that are not explicitly expressed in mass media. On the other hand, the fact that the proportion of neutral participants is at a remarkable level with 31.3% (n=30) indicates that implicit messages cannot always be clearly distinguished. This situation may be due to the indirect and hidden nature of implicit messages, as well as being related to the participants not feeling sufficiently confident about this issue. The proportion of participants expressing negative opinions is relatively limited. The total of the responses “Disagree” (11.5%; n=11) and “Strongly Disagree” (5.2%; n=5) remaining at 16.7% shows that the students who state that they cannot notice implicit messages are in the minority.

**Table 22.** “I have competence in analyzing the meanings in the messages given through mass media.”

Response	f	%
Strongly Disagree	4	4,2
Disagree	4	4,2
Neutral	23	24,0
Agree	42	43,8
Strongly Agree	23	24,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: Created by the author.

When the distribution of the responses to the questions in Table 22 is examined, it is seen that a large part of the participants think that they can analyze the meanings in the messages given through mass media. The proportion of participants who answered “Agree” is 43.8% (n=42), while the proportion of those who answered “Strongly Agree” is determined as 24.0% (n=23). The total of these two groups reaching 67.8% reveals that the majority of the students consider themselves sufficient in interpreting and making sense of media messages. However, the fact that 24.0% (n=23) of the participants remain neutral shows that one out of every four students cannot make a clear evaluation regarding this skill.

This situation suggests that the multi-layered structure of media messages makes the analysis process difficult for some students.

The proportion of participants expressing negative opinions is relatively low. The total proportion of participants who answered “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” remaining limited to 8.4% (n=8) shows that the number of students who consider their message analysis skill insufficient is in the minority.

When evaluated in general, the findings related to item 17 reveal that students have a largely positive perception regarding analyzing and making sense of media messages; however, this competence is not at the same level among all participants.

### General Evaluation of Media Literacy Scale Items

The Media Literacy Scale, developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009), consists of 17 Likert-type items. The items in the scale are, respectively: “the individual’s ability to decide for themselves whether the messages in mass media are true or false, awareness of the values such as consumer culture, violence, and similar values produced by mass media, distinguishing for what purposes (social responsibility, consumption, informing, entertaining, etc.) messages are created, determining the positive and negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media, approaching the messages given in mass media with a critical perspective, having competence regarding the effects of mass media on individuals, being aware of the political, economic, cultural, and social priorities of mass media, being able to

give positive and negative reactions to the messages in mass media, being able to make suggestions for protection from the negative aspects of broadcasts in mass media, knowing that the given messages are created in different forms in different mass media, following whether legal and ethical rules are adhered to in the broadcasts of mass media, knowing to what extent one can influence the production process in mass media as an individual, noticing false reporting in mass media, distinguishing hidden advertisements in mass media, observing the influence of sponsors on broadcasts, noticing the implicit (hidden) messages conveyed by mass media, and finally having competence in analyzing the meanings in the messages given through mass media,” and it consists of a total of 17 items within this framework.

When all the items of the scale are evaluated together, it is seen from the results obtained from the scale items that the participants, in other words the students, generally display a positive attitude regarding knowledge, analysis, and evaluation skills related to media literacy. In particular, it is noteworthy that the responses “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” are predominant in the items related to understanding, interpreting, and critically evaluating the messages in mass media. However, the relatively high rates of neutrality in some items show that participants may experience hesitation from time to time in evaluating certain media content and especially in noticing implicit messages. This situation indicates that the multi-layered structure of media messages cannot be analyzed at the same level by every participant.

The fact that the proportion of participants expressing negative opinions remains generally at a low level reveals that the basic awareness regarding media literacy exists across the sample. Overall, the findings obtained show that students do not only consume media content passively; on the contrary, they actively participate in the processes of making sense, questioning, and evaluating.

## 5.2. Findings and Interpretations Related to Research Problems and Hypotheses

### 5.2.1 Findings Related to Hypothesis 1

In this section related to Hypothesis 1, the findings related to the first sub-problem expressed as “What are the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students?” and the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis formed in line with this sub-problem are discussed. At this point, in order to determine the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation values of the total scores obtained from the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009) were examined in detail. The result obtained from the descriptive statistical data indicates that the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students are at a medium and above level. Through these findings obtained, it shows that students have certain abilities to understand, evaluate, and analyze media content from a critical perspective. In line with the results obtained, the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis expressed as “Students’ media literacy levels are at a medium and above level” was approved, and the H<sub>02</sub> hypothesis was rejected.

### 5.2.2. Findings Related to Hypothesis 2

The findings related to Hypothesis 2 are expressed in this section as “At what level are the passive audience tendencies of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students?” At this point, the findings related to the second sub-problem and the H<sub>2</sub> hypothesis formed in line with this sub-problem are included in this section. Since there is no scale aimed at directly measuring passive audience behaviors within the scope of the research, students’ passive audience tendencies were evaluated indirectly through their media literacy levels. At this point, passive audience indicators were evaluated through the scores obtained from the critical consumption dimension of the Media Literacy Scale consisting of 17 Likert-type items developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009). At this point, as a result of the descriptive statistical data obtained, it was determined that students’ critical consumption levels towards media content are at a medium and above level. The point to be derived from these data is that students’ tendencies to accept media content without questioning are low and that they do not display a completely passive attitude towards media messages. Therefore, according to the data obtained from the results, the H<sub>2</sub> hypothesis was accepted and the H<sub>02</sub> hypothesis was rejected.

### 5.2.3. Findings Related to Hypothesis 3

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation Analysis Results Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Media Literacy	1	-.033	-.021
2. Daily Internet Usage Duration	-.033	1	.382**

3. Social Media Usage

Frequency

-0.021                      .382\*\*\*                      1

*Significant at the  $p < .01$  level.  
Source: Created by the author.*

In Table 2, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the media literacy levels of female and male students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. According to the results obtained, there is a negative but not statistically significant relationship between the media literacy levels of female and male students and the duration of daily internet use ( $r = -0.033, p > .05$ ). Similarly, a negative but not statistically significant relationship was found between the media literacy levels of female and male students and the frequency of social media use ( $r = -0.021, p > .05$ ). In contrast, it was observed that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the duration of daily internet use and the frequency of social media use ( $r = .382, p < .001$ ). In line with the findings obtained, since no significant relationship was found between the level of media literacy and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors, H3 was rejected and H03 was accepted.

**5.2.4. Findings Related to Hypothesis 4**

The fourth hypothesis of the study is as follows: “Do media literacy levels differ according to the demographic variables of students?” Hypothesis 4 is aimed at examining whether media literacy levels differ significantly according to the demographic variables of students. Within this scope, an independent samples t-test was applied in order to determine whether the total scores of students’ media literacy differ according to the gender variable. The findings obtained are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Independent Samples t-Test Results of Media Literacy Levels by Gender**

Gender	n	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD
Female	56	3.78	0.67
Male	39	3.83	0.66
Test	t	sd	p
Independent Samples Test	-0.39	93	.696

\* $p < .05$  is significant.

*Source: Created by the author.*

When Table 3 is examined, the mean media literacy score of female students is ( $\bar{X} = 3.78, sd = 0.67$ ). The mean media literacy score of male students is ( $\bar{X} = 3.83, sd = 0.66$ ). At this point, in Table 3, it has been determined that the mean media literacy scores of female and male students are quite close to each other. As a result of the independent samples t-test conducted in Table 3, no statistically significant difference was found between the total media literacy scores according to gender ( $t(93) = -0.39, p > .05$ ).

As a result of these findings, it is shown that the media literacy levels of female and male students do not differ according to gender. In this direction, H1 was rejected.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Media Literacy Scores by Age**

Age Group	N	X	SS
18-20	53	62,25	11,44
21-23	38	66,58	10,58
24-26	3	71,33	10,21

<b>27 and over</b>	2	74,50	2,12
<b>Total</b>	96	64,50	11,21

Source: Created by the author.

When the results in Table 4 are examined, it has been determined that the total mean scores of media literacy differ according to the age groups of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication.

At this point, when the given results are examined, first, it was concluded that the media literacy mean of the students in the 18–20 age group is 62.25. Afterwards, it was concluded that the mean of the students in the 21–23 age group is 66.58.

While the mean scores in the 24–26 age groups are 71.33, it is seen that it increases to 64.50 points in the 27 and above groups. The results show that there are differences according to age groups in Table 4.

**Table 5.** Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Levene) of Media Literacy Scores by Age Groups

Variable	Levene	sd1	sd2	p
<b>Medya Literacy</b>	0,689	3	92	0,561

Source: Created by the author.

According to the results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Levene) in Table 5, it has been determined that the variances of the media literacy scores of the students of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication belonging to age groups are homogeneous ( $p > .05$ ). This result appears as a cross-sectional record that the variances between groups are equal and that the necessary assumption for the application of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is met.

**Table 6.** One-Way ANOVA Results Related to Media Literacy Level by Age Groups

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
<b>Between Groups</b>	773,759	3	257,920	2,127	0,102
<b>Within Groups</b>	11156,241	92	121,263		
<b>Total</b>	11930,000	95			

Source: Created by the author.

According to the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) presented in Table 6, it has been determined that there is no statistically significant difference between the total media literacy scores of the students studying at Sakarya University Faculty of Communication according to their age groups ( $F(3,92) = 2.127, p > .05$ ).

At this point, together with the data obtained, it is shown that the media literacy levels of the communication faculty students do not differ significantly according to the age variable. At this point, in Table 6, the H4 hypothesis established regarding the age variable was rejected.

**Table 7.** Descriptive Statistics of Media Literacy Scores by Daily Internet Usage Duration

Daily Internet Usage Duration	N	$\bar{X}$	SS
1	1	64.00	-
2	15	65.00	6.86
3	48	64.75	11.23
4	32	63.91	13.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>64.50</b>	<b>11.21</b>

Source: Created by the author.

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that the total mean scores of media literacy of female and male students among the participants are quite close to each other according to daily internet usage duration. The highest mean is in the group with a daily internet usage duration of 2 ( $\bar{X} = 65.00$ ). The lowest mean of students' daily internet usage duration is determined as 4 in the group ( $\bar{X} = 63.91$ ).

**Table 8:** *One-Way ANOVA Results Related to Media Literacy Level by Daily Internet Usage Duration*

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	F	p
<b>Between Groups</b>	18.281	3	6.094	0.047	.986
<b>Within Groups</b>	11911.719	92	129.475		
<b>Total</b>	11930.000	95			

Source: Created by the author.

When the data in Table 8 are carefully examined, according to the results of the one-way ANOVA test, it has been determined that there is no statistically significant difference between the total media literacy scores of the participants when examined according to daily internet usage duration ( $F(3,92) = 0.047, p = .986 > .05$ ). At this point, this finding shows that students' daily internet usage duration does not have a significant effect in relation to the level of media literacy.

In this direction, when the results obtained through the data within the scope of the research are examined, while H4: it is accepted that there is a significant relationship between the media literacy level of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors; H04: it is rejected that there is no significant relationship between the media literacy level of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. Therefore, finally, based on this point, it has been concluded that H4 was accepted and H04 was rejected.

**Table 9.** *Descriptive Statistics of Media Literacy Scores by Social Media Usage Frequency*

Social Media Usage Frequency	N	$\bar{X}$	SS
Never	1	64.00	-
Rarely	3	71.00	5.57
Occasionally	16	61.75	11.22
Frequently	51	65.47	9.47
Always	25	63.52	14.68
Total	96	64.50	11.21

Source: Created by the author.

participants according to their frequency of social media use were calculated using SPSS 0.27. When the descriptive statistics are examined, it is seen that the media literacy scores of female and male students have different means according to the frequency of social media use among the groups.

However, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied in order to determine whether these differences are statistically significant.

**Table 10.** *One-Way ANOVA Results Related to Media Literacy Level by Social Media Usage Frequency*

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	F	p
<b>Between Groups</b>	320.054	4	80.014	0.627	.644
<b>Within Groups</b>	11609.946	91	127.582		
<b>Total</b>	11930.000	95			

Source: Created by the author.

In order to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the total media literacy scores of female and male students according to their frequency of social media use in Table 10, a one-way ANOVA test was applied. At this point, first, the homogeneity of variances was examined with the Levene test and in the result obtained, it was seen that the variances are homogeneous ( $p = .103 > .05$ ). According to the results of the ANOVA test, no statistically significant difference was found between the media literacy scores of female and male students

according to their frequency of social media use ( $F(4,91) = 0.627, p = .644$ ). In this direction, hypothesis four was rejected.

### Discussion

This study was conducted in order to examine the relationship between the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. At this point, the data obtained within the scope of the research determine through the findings obtained that the level of media literacy is quite effective on the behavioral attitudes that Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students exhibit towards media content.

In line with the first sub-problem of the research, firstly, the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students were addressed. Within the scope of the research, first, in order to learn the general media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students, the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009) was adapted and the arithmetic mean of 17 items was calculated through SPSS 0,27 and the overall mean score was obtained. The findings obtained within the scope of the research show that the general media literacy levels of communication faculty students are concentrated between medium and high levels. In other words, it presents the result that Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students do not accept media content as it is and that their skills of evaluating, analyzing and making sense of it with a critical perspective are high. In this direction, while hypothesis one was accepted, hypothesis two was rejected. At this point, the result obtained shows that Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students have awareness as they have high skills of exhibiting a critical attitude towards media content and analyzing it.

Within the scope of the second sub-problem of the research, the passive audience tendencies of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students were handled indirectly within the scope of critical consumption. Since there is no scale developed for passive audience behaviors, it was not measured directly. It was evaluated through the scores obtained especially in the critical consumption dimension that students answered in the survey of the Media Literacy Scale developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009). The findings show that Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students are not in a passive audience profile that consumes social media content without questioning it completely.

On the contrary, it shows that communication students develop a critical attitude to a certain extent. Based on this point, the results support the H2 hypothesis, while the H02 hypothesis was rejected. The results obtained within the scope of the research suggest that as the media literacy level of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students increases, their passive audience tendencies weaken.

The third sub-problem of the research examined the relationship between the media literacy level of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. The Pearson Correlation analysis data obtained determined that there is a negative relationship between the media literacy level of communication faculty students and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. In line with the findings obtained, the H3 hypothesis was accepted; the H03 hypothesis was rejected. At this point, the research data show that as the media literacy level of the students in the research group of the relevant university increases, individuals exhibit a more questioning and critical attitude towards media. At this point, it shows that communication students move away from the position of passive audience.

The last and fourth sub-problem of the research addressed whether the media literacy levels of communication faculty students differ according to the demographic variables of the students. According to the results of the independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted within the scope of the research, it was concluded that the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students do not show a statistically significant difference according to gender and age variables.

Based on the results of the research, while the H4 hypothesis was rejected, the H04 hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, it is thought that the frequent and intensive interaction forms that Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students establish with media may be related to their education processes.

### Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students and passive audience behaviors was examined. The findings obtained within the scope of the research indicate that the media literacy of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students is quite an important issue especially on their attitudes towards media content.

In line with the information obtained from the research findings, it has been determined through the research results that the media literacy levels of Sakarya University Faculty of Communication students are at medium and high levels from a general point of view. This situation shows that the Faculty of Communication students are not in a passive audience profile that consumes media content, in other words social media messages, without questioning them as they are with a critical perspective, on the contrary, they are in an active audience profile. At this point, it has been concluded that the Faculty of Communication students have an awareness that consumes media content with a critical perspective. The results of the Pearson Correlation analysis conducted within the scope of the research determined that there is a negative relationship, in other words a negatively directed relationship, between the media literacy level of the Faculty of Communication students, who are the research group, and the indicators representing passive audience behaviors. This finding shows that the media literacy skills of Faculty of Communication students have a function that reduces passive audience tendencies. On the other hand, when analyzed in terms of demographic variables, it indicates that when the media literacy levels of students are examined according to demographic variables such as gender and age, they do not show a significant difference in terms of variables.

As a result, the importance of media literacy education has become a quite critical issue within the scope of the research. Media literacy is a skill that reduces individuals' passive, in other words passive attitudes towards social media content and enables them to approach the media information they have acquired with a critical perspective. At this point, it is recommended to provide various practices and activities in order to increase awareness especially for students studying at the Faculty of Communication.

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