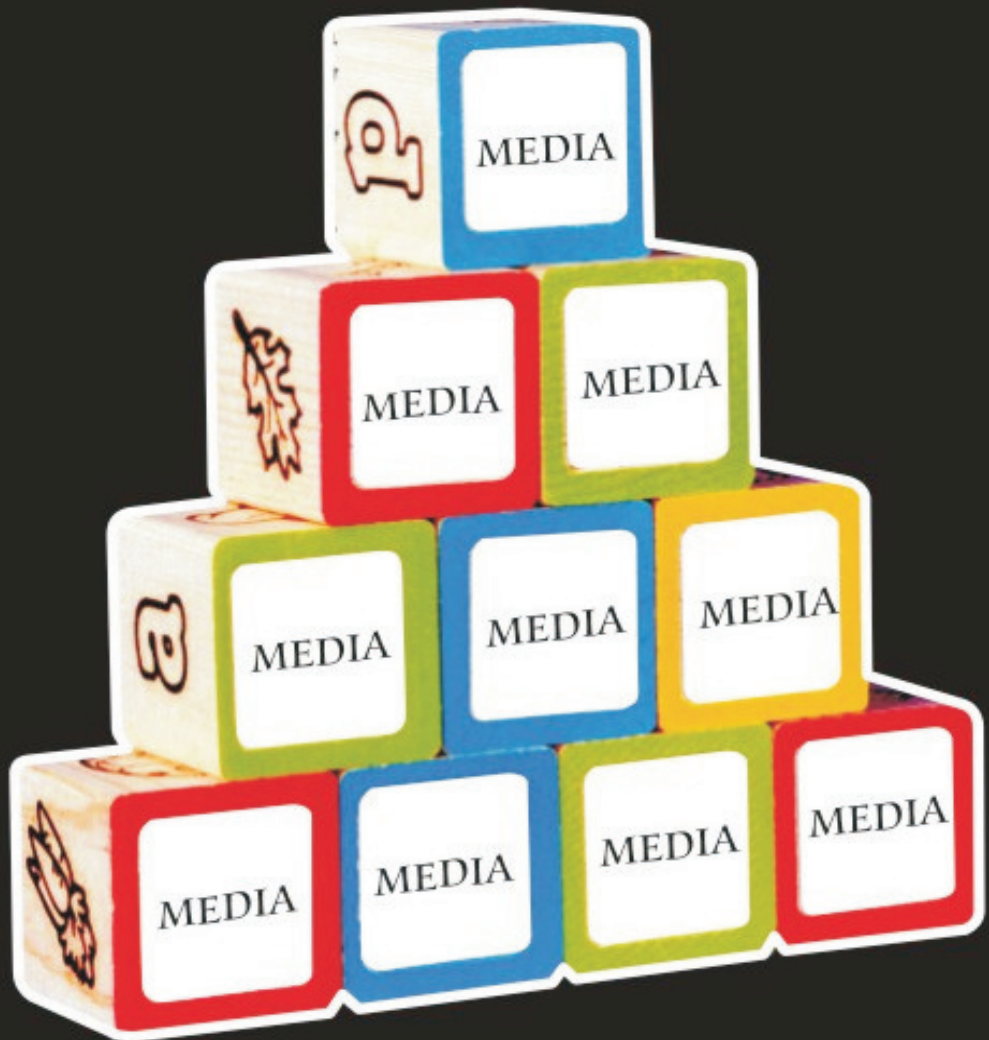


Media Literacy and its Importance



Sajjad Malik

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Literacy**
and
its Importance

Sajjad Malik

Society for Alternative Media and Research

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*Media education is not about having the right answers;
it is about asking the right questions*

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Preface

Media spread during the last few decades has given birth to new debates and terminologies regarding relationship between media and an individual on the one hand and media and society on the other. The initial popular welcome to the freedom of expression soon changed into skepticism about the role of media and a large number of people realized that apparently 'free' media was not as free as people thought, and that certain unseen hands were continuously manipulating it to further certain vested interests.

The media skeptics realized that modern media messages were usually loaded with multiple ideas and usually help to mould opinion of gullible masses in favour of prejudices and choices that held selected few sitting on the top. The skeptics also felt that a large number of media targeted audience lacked the ability to decipher such messages.

As the modern media are not limited to the reading skills only, but in wider perspective they involve the important abilities like understanding the media messages. The critics of modern media evolved a new term called Media Literacy to highlight the importance of media understanding. According to them, media literacy is not just reading but also ability to know the media products more critically and analytically.

In Pakistan, both print and electronic media try to mould opinion of masses in favour of their benefactors. Media audiences direly need the skill to understand and analyze the contents of news and views which are being printed and broadcast by media outlets in the country.

Mazhar Arif,
Executive Director,
Society for Alternative Media and Research,
Islamabad.

December, 2008

Definition

Media literacy is generally understood as an informed, critical understanding of the prevalent mass media, and it involves examining the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in media production; being able to critically analyze media messages; and recognizing the role audiences play in making meaning from those messages.

It is a kind of an expanded information and communication skill that is responsive to the changing nature of information in our society. It addresses the skills students need to be taught in colleges and universities, the competencies citizens must have as they consume information in their homes and living rooms, and the abilities workers must have to understand the 21st century challenges of a global economy.

Like traditional literacy it includes the ability to both read (comprehend) and write (create, design, produce). Further, it moves from merely recognizing and comprehending information to the higher order critical thinking skills implicit in questioning, analyzing and evaluating that information.

Media literacy is also the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain and sell to us every day. It's the ability to bring critical thinking skills to bear on all media- from music videos and Web environments to product placement in films. It's about asking pertinent questions about what's there, and noticing what's not there. And it's the instinct to question what lies behind media productions- the motives, the money, the values and the ownership- and to be aware of how these factors influence content.

It is linked with general media education which encourages a probing approach to the world of media. For example it trains a person to raise such question: Who is this message intended for? Who wants to reach this audience, and why? From whose perspective is this story told? Whose voices are heard, and whose are absent? What strategies does this message use to get my attention and make me feel included?

The proponents of media literacy say that in modern world of

multi-tasking, commercialism, globalization and interactivity, media education isn't about having the right answers; it's about asking the right questions. The result is lifelong empowerment of the learner and citizen.

The traditional definition of literacy, when print was the supreme media format, was the ability to decode, understand and communicate in print. But the world has evolved, and print is no longer the dominant media format and that role has been usurped by the electronic media.

To be literate today, people must be able to: decode, understand, evaluate and write through, and with, all forms of media read, evaluate and create text, images and sounds, or any combination of these elements. In other words literate individuals must possess media literacy as well as print literacy, numeral literacy and technological literacy.

Therefore, media literacy comes down to having enough understanding the fact from fiction and discernment to comprehend media messages. The critical understanding of mass media also helps to properly examine the techniques, technologies, individuals and institutions involved in media and acts like a strong tool to check against the wishes and vagaries of media bosses and owners who sometimes become part of power brokerage system and poison public minds for the sake of hidden agendas.

What is *not* Media Literacy?

Well known media experts Elizabeth Thoman and Tessa Jolls have noted that, because the definition of media literacy can be so vast, it is almost easier to define what is *not* media literacy.

For instance, they state that media literacy is not media bashing, but involves critically analyzing media messages and institutions. It is not just producing media, although production skills should be included. Media literacy is not simply teaching with videos, the Internet, or other technologies, but it is teaching about the media in society. It is not just looking for stereotypes or negative representations, but exploring how these representations are normalized in society. It's not just based on one perspective rather it encourages multiple perspectives and various viewpoints. Finally, media literacy is not an effort to restrict media use, but to encourage mindful and critical media consumption.

Thoman and Jolls also cite media literacy consultant Faith Rogow who cautions teachers against conveying pre-ordained denouncements of the media and challenges them to reflect on the analytical skills they teach. Are they encouraging critical environments that allow for the expression of substantiated interpretations that may differ with their own or are they inadvertently “preaching” only the “right” answers? She posits this negative approach as “fatally flawed”, often resulting in the creation of a “cynical” rather than an “intellectually skeptical” attitude among audiences.

Citizens for Media Literacy

David Considine who is teacher and expert on media studies and chaired the first National Media Literacy Conference in 1995, defines media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create information in a variety of media formats including print and non-print. It is mindful viewing, and reflective judgment. It is a new, expanded view of traditional literacy.

He says that since most people today get most of their information from television and other visual technologies, informed citizens need the new information skills involved in media literacy. Educational institutions the world over are increasingly including these competencies in the emerging curricula. He suggests that families can make media literacy a part of their lives.

In an age when most people get most of their information from television not textbooks, pictures not print, we need a wider definition of what it means to be literate. Many of us grew up hearing the proverbs and adages like these: *You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover, A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words.*

These words are even truer today in an age not only of computers and telecommunications but of virtual reality and imagineering. Today's technologies represent a startling fusion of sight and sound that frequently make it difficult for us to discern illusion from reality, fact from fiction. Special effects like those seen in movies

merge the past with the present, color with black and white, the dead with the living, fact with fiction in such a way that the real truth can often be confused with the reel truth. It would be one thing if such technologies were employed only in the entertainment media, but increasingly these production values are evident in broadcast news. A reporter in a TV studio is, for example, magically transported by computer onto the Parliament lawn. The mere location lends power, authority and therefore credence to the reporter and the story. This form of set decoration or window dressing is deceptive, especially when it is utilized during a program which is meant to provide us with factual information that we can rely upon.

While such techniques may render the program more visually pleasing, they represent the emergence of infotainment and the decline of objective, neutral and reliable news.

Given these trends, responsible citizens need to possess the ability to question the accuracy and authenticity of information in all its forms, not just print. They need the ability to make reflective critical responses to this information.

But media literacy is about more than just consuming information. A media literate individual is able to produce, create and successfully communicate information in all its forms, not just print. A simple example of why these skills are now necessary is evident in the emergence of CD-ROM. This technology represents a fusion of two previously discrete technologies, the computer and the video camera. It also represents a fusion of two information formats, print and picture.

Media literacy seeks to empower citizens and to transform their passive relationship to media into an active, critical engagement-capable of challenging the traditions and structures of a privatized, commercial media culture and finding new avenues of citizen speech and discourse. *Media education does not aim to shield people from the influence of the media, and thereby lead them to better things, but to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf.*

The need to study the media in a critical and coherent way has become increasingly obvious in recent years, as they have come to occupy a central position in our cultural and political life. Virtually all that we know, or think that we know, about the world beyond our immediate experience comes to us through the media.

The fact that the media have come to dominate so many aspects of our society, and indeed our individual consciousness, is a tribute to their power to influence us on things of which we are unaware. It is not surprising then, that we have come to study the media; it is only surprising that it has taken us so long to start.

Media literacy is concerned with the process of understanding and using the mass media. It is also concerned with helping people develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, it is education that

aims to increase people's understanding and enjoyment of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized and how they construct reality.

Ultimately, media literacy education must aim to produce people who have an understanding of the media that includes knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, biases and priorities, role and impact, and artistry and artifice. It shows that media literacy is a life skill and the sooner the average citizen arms himself/ herself with it, the better it would be for the society and the civilization.

Three stages of Media Literacy

Elizabeth Thoman, Founder and President, Center for Media Literacy, Los Angeles says that media literacy is an overall term that incorporates three stages of a continuum leading to media empowerment:

The first stage is simply becoming aware of the importance of managing one's media "diet"- that is, making choices and reducing the time spent with television, videos, electronic games, films and various print media forms.

The second stage is learning specific skills of critical viewing-learning to analyze and question what is in the frame, how it is constructed and what may have been left out. Skills of critical viewing are best learned through inquiry-based classes or interactive group activities, as well as from creating and producing one's own media messages.

The third stage goes behind the frame to explore deeper issues. Who produces the media we experience- and for what purpose? Who profits? Who loses? And who decides? This stage of social, political and economic analysis looks at how everyone in society makes meaning from our media experiences and how the mass media drive our global consumer economy. This inquiry can sometimes set the stage for various media advocacy efforts to challenge or redress public policies or corporate practices.

Although television and electronic media may seem to present the most compelling reasons for promoting media literacy education in contemporary society, the principles and practices of media literacy education are applicable to all media- from television to T-shirts, from billboards to the Internet.

Media Study, Media Education or Media Literacy

Chris Worsnop in his book *'Screening Images: Ideas for Media Education'* says that media teachers today use the terms 'media education', 'media study', and 'media literacy' almost interchangeably. He uses the term 'media education' as a broad description of all that takes place in a media-oriented classroom, whether the subject matter is English, history, geography or science. (There's plenty of media learning that can be done in all those subject areas and others.)

He says that media study occurs when schools or teachers organize specific courses or units to study the media. And media literacy is the expected outcome from work in either media education or media study. The more you learn about or through the media, the more media literacy you have. Media literacy is the skill of experiencing, interpreting/analyzing and making media products.

Media Literacy-key concepts



Media educators base their teaching on key concepts and principles of media literacy. These concepts provide an effective foundation for examining mass media and popular culture. Here are Eight Key concepts for media literacy.

- **All media are constructions**

Media do not present simple reflections of external reality. Rather, they present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and result from many determining factors. Media Literacy works towards deconstructing these constructions, taking them apart to show how they are made.

- **Media construct reality**

Media are responsible for the majority of the observations and experiences from which we build up our personal understandings of the world and how it works. Much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in. The media, to a great extent, give us our sense of reality.

- **Audiences negotiate meaning in the media**

Media provide us with much of the material upon which we build our picture of reality, and we all 'negotiate' meanings according to individual factors: personal needs and anxieties, the pleasures or troubles of the day, racial and sexual attitudes, family and cultural background, and so forth.

- **Media have commercial implications**

Media Literacy aims to encourage an awareness of how the media are influenced by commercial considerations, and how these affect content, technique and distribution. Most media production is a business, and must therefore make a profit. Questions of ownership and control are central: a relatively small number of individuals control what we watch, read and hear in the media.

- **Media contain ideological and value messages**

All media products are advertising, in some sense, in that they proclaim values and ways of life. Explicitly or implicitly, the mainstream media convey ideological messages about such issues as the nature of the good life, the virtue of consumerism, the role of women, the acceptance of authority, and unquestioning patriotism.

- **Media have social and political implications**

Media have great influence on politics and on forming social change. Television can greatly influence the election of a national leader on the basis of image. The media involve us in concerns such as human rights issues, earthquake, and the Dengu Virus epidemic.

- **Form and content are closely related in the media**

As Marshall McLuhan noted, each medium has its own grammar and codifies reality in its own particular way. Different media will report the same event, but create different impressions and messages.

- **Each medium has a unique aesthetic form**

Just as we notice the pleasing rhythms of certain pieces of poetry or prose, so we ought to be able to enjoy the pleasing forms and effects of the different media

Five core concepts and five key questions for Media Literacy

Media Literacy experts have developed a series of five key concepts for media literacy education, and five key questions that correspond to each of these concepts.

Five core concepts:

- 1-All media messages are constructed.
- 2-Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- 3-Different people experience the same messages differently.
- 4-Media have embedded values and points of view.
- 5-Media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power.

Five key questions:

- 1-Who created this message?
- 2-What techniques are used to attract my attention?
- 3-How might different people understand this message differently from me?
- 4-What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?
- 5-Why was this message sent?

Approaches to Media Literacy

Media literacy should be conceived as a means of facilitating the integration of critical thinking skills, aesthetics, the study of value messages, and the study of the social and political implications of media texts. Media education should permeate many activities in geography and global education, science, language and arts which will be conditioned by the mass media experiences.

Nine factors that make Media Literacy flourish

A study of media literacy around the world shows that there are nine factors that appear to be crucial to the successful development of media literacy in secondary schools.

- 1- Media literacy, like other innovative programs, must be a grass-roots movement.
- 2- Teachers need to take the initiative in lobbying for its inclusion in the curriculum.
- 3- Educational authorities must give clear support to such programs by mandating the teaching of Media Studies within the curriculum; establishing guidelines and resource books; ensuring that curricula are developed; and making certain materials available. Faculties of education must hire staff capable of training future teachers in this area.
- 4- There should also be academic support from tertiary institutions in the writing of curricula and in sustained consultation.
- 5- In-service training at the school district level must be an integral part of program implementation.
- 6- School districts need consultants who have expertise in media literacy, and who will establish communication networks.
- 7- Suitable textbooks and audio-visual materials, which are relevant to the country and/or area, must be available.
- 8- A support organization must be established for the purposes of workshops, conferences, dissemination of newsletters, and developing curriculum units. Such a professional organization must cut across school boards and districts to involve a cross-section of people interested in media literacy.
- 9- There must be appropriate evaluation instruments suitable to the unique attributes of Media Studies.

Because media literacy involves such a diversity of skills and expertise, there must be collaboration between teachers, parents, researchers and media professionals.

Importance of Media Literacy

Today's definition of literacy is more than reading and writing. In order to be functionally literate in our media-saturated world, children and young people- in fact, all of us- have to be able to read the messages that daily inform us, entertain us and sell to us. As the Internet becomes a fact of life, the critical thinking skills that help young people navigate through traditional media are even more important.

Here are some viewpoints on the importance of media literacy from well-known media educators.

1- Because it makes you a better citizen

Media literate people understand that media are constructed to convey ideas, information and news from someone else's perspective. They understand that specific techniques are used to create emotional effects. They can identify those techniques and their intended and actual effects. They are aware that the media benefit some people, but leave others out. They can (pose and sometimes answer) questions about who benefits, who is left out, and why. Media literate people seek alternative sources of information and entertainment. Media literate people use the media for their own advantage and enjoyment. Media literate people know how to act, rather than being acted upon. In this way, media literate people are better citizens.

2- Media saturation

Television is not the only mass medium that accounts for media saturation. When one considers pop music, radio, newspapers, magazines, computers and video games- in addition to TV- we are exposed to more mass media messages in one day than our grandparents were in a month.

● **Media influence**

Media sell “audience consciousness.” They try to predispose people not just to buy certain detergents, cars or aspirin, but to simply buy.

● **The manufacture and management of information**

Most governments and businesses have public relations (PR) departments, whose purpose is to get the good news about them out into the public consciousness. Many succeed so well that much of what is reported as 'news' in fact comes directly from PR departments and press releases.

● **Media education and democracy**

Political leaders have discovered the influence of the media. Those who use the media will get their way regardless of public policy or personal integrity.

● **The increasing importance of visual communication and information**

For hundreds of years, society has valued literacy- the reading and understanding of texts. In today's society, the visual image is arguably more important than the printed word- yet there has been no corresponding focus on reading the meaning of visual images.

● **The growing privatization of information**

The world economy is fast becoming an information economy, with information a commodity to be bought and sold. A danger exists that new classes of 'information-rich' and 'information-poor' people may result, with the information-poor unable to afford the information they need to better their lives.

● **Educating for the future**

The above issues will not decline in importance. Tomorrow's world, in fact, will be increasingly dominated by mass media and communications technologies. Generations of the future will need to understand how the mass media influence society.

3- The storytellers of our generation

Media bring the world into our homes. From them, we learn about war and peace, the environment, new scientific discoveries, and so on. We are dependent upon mass communication for knowing what is going on in our physical, social, economic, and political environments. In other words, almost everything we know about people, places, and events that we cannot visit first-hand, comes from the media. We also rely on media for entertainment and pleasure. Television and film have become the

storytellers of our generation: these stories tell us about who we are, what we believe, and what we want to be.

4- Six reasons for teaching media literacy

Dan Blake of Canadian Association of Media Education says that when he was doing workshops on “Media Literacy: The New Basic,” he presented the following five reasons for teaching about the role of the media in society:

- 1- We live in a mediated environment.
- 2- Media literacy emphasizes critical thinking.
- 3- Being media literate is part of being an educated citizen.
- 4- Media literacy promotes active participation in a media-saturated environment.
- 5- Media education helps us to understand communication technologies.

Media Literacy: A Socratic approach

Socrates approach is actually written by Art Silverblatt who is Professor of Communications and Journalism at Webster University, St. Louis, Missouri and U.S.A. According to him, a Socratic approach to media literacy offers a strategy for detecting illogical assumptions, beliefs, and values that are embedded in media presentations. Adapted from a method of inquiry developed by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, this approach enables individuals to identify the implicit suppositions behind the messages in many media presentations.

According to Alain de Botton, people are generally unwilling to challenge conventional opinion. Established ideas, such as the purpose of work or the institution of marriage, are products of a particular time and culture and, consequently, are considered matters of common sense. But de Botton points out that animal sacrifice and slavery were accepted societal conventions in the ancient Greek society; however, these practices no longer seem normal or reasonable in modern society.

In addition, the widespread acceptance of prevailing opinion reinforces the feeling that the prevailing views must be correct and legitimate. Alain de Botton in his *'The Consolations of Philosophy'* (published by Pantheon Books, New York) explains:

“Our will to doubt can be...sapped by an internal sense that societal conventions must have a sound basis, even if we are not sure exactly what this might be, because they have been adhered to by a great many people for a long time. It seems implausible that our society could be gravely mistaken in its beliefs and at the same time that we would be alone in noticing the fact. We stifle our doubts and follow the flock because we cannot conceive of ourselves as pioneers of hitherto unknown, difficult truths.”

Indeed, individuals who challenge conventional ideas are often ostracized- or worse. Witness the fate of Socrates, who was sentenced to death for challenging the basic tenants of Greek society. But even in less extreme cases, people who hold contrary views often feel isolated and marginalized.

The Socratic method of inquiry consists of the following steps:

1. Locate a statement confidently described as common sense. For purposes of illustration, de Botton cites a fundamental tenant of ancient Greece: "Being virtuous requires money."
2. Imagine for a moment that, despite the confidence of the person proposing it, the statement is false. Search for situations or contexts where the statement would not be true.
 - Could one ever have money and not be virtuous?
 - Could one ever have no money and be virtuous?
3. If an exception is found, the definition must be false or at least imprecise.
 - It is possible to have money and be a crook.
 - It is possible to be poor and virtuous.
4. The initial statement must be nuanced to take the exception into account.
 - People who have money can be described as virtuous only if they have acquired it in a virtuous way, and some people with no money can be virtuous where they have lived through situations where it was impossible to be virtuous and make money.
5. If one subsequently finds exceptions to the improved statements, the process should be repeated. The truth, in so far as a human being is able to attain such a truth lies in a statement which it seems impossible to disprove. It is by finding out when something is not that one comes closest to understanding what it is.
6. The product of thought is...superior to the product of intuition.

Adapting the Socratic approach to the analysis of media programming provides a strategy for identifying inconsistent and illogical suppositions in the presentation. These ideas frequently go unchallenged because they are characterized by their *naturalness*, that this is the way that it is supposed to be.

Media programs often present a *preferred reading*, in which the audience sees the world from the point of view of the main characters and, consequently, assume the role, perspective and orientation of the primary figures. Because the perspectives adopted by the protagonists are presented as natural and normal, the values and beliefs that make up the world view of the presentation go unquestioned.

However, the Socratic method of inquiry can bring these illogical suppositions to light. To illustrate, consider the following television commercial for Dr. Pepper:

A handsome young man struts down a city street. He is wearing a sleeveless tee shirt, displaying a trendy tattoo on each shoulder. The young man is the center of attention. He glances behind him; following his gaze, the camera spies two young women admiring him. The camera again shifts to the young man; however, he is now chugging a can of Dr. Pepper. The camera shifts to a shot of a third young woman who puts her hand on her chest, seemingly breathless at the sight of our hero. Next, we see a male doorman who is visibly impressed by the striking appearance and attitude of our Dr. Pepper drinker. These visuals are accompanied by a blusey jingle.

The camera then tilts downward, revealing that the protagonist is a dog walker who has a full complement of canines on leashes. As he turns the corner, our hero becomes entangled with an attractive young woman who is also walking a cadre of dogs. This is almost a disaster, nearly causing our protagonist to spill his soft drink. In the last shot, the two are walking down the street together, accompanied by the lyrics, "Dr. Pepper--you make world taste better."

The first step is to identify the implicit assumptions in the commercial. Then, the Socratic method of inquiry can be employed to ascertain the truth of these statements.

1. Being admired by others (most particularly, by members of the opposite sex) is a matter of ultimate importance.
 - Is the young man's happiness dependent upon the approval of others?
 - Would the young man be unhappy if he wasn't the center of attention?

2. Attractive people are accepted, admired, and are important:
 - Is it possible for a person who is not physically attractive to be considered acceptable, admirable, and important?
 - Is it possible that a physically attractive person would not be considered acceptable, admirable, or important?
 - Are there attributes other than physical beauty (e.g. integrity, decency, or humor) that could be considered acceptable, admirable, and important?

The Socratic method of inquiry reveals illogical suppositions in the commercial that convey disturbing messages. The ad presents a narcissistic world in which the main character derives his greatest pleasure by watching others admire him. A hierarchy of appearance exists in this world, in which physical attractiveness is the sole criterion for attention, admiration, and romance. Within this context, Dr. Pepper is a magic elixir that “makes the world better” by transforming a person’s appearance and, therefore, making romance possible.

The Socratic approach to media literacy offers a strategy for uncovering false suppositions contained in media programming in order to identify misleading and deceptive messages in the text. This theoretical framework is a useful tool that enables individuals to develop a critical distance from what they watch, read, and hear, so that they can make independent judgments about the messages contained in media programming.

Finally, it should be noted that the Socratic approach to media literacy is one of a number of strategies that can provide fresh insight into media content. Depending on the specific area of study, one approach may be more useful than others. Becoming familiar with these various approaches will enable students of media literacy to interpret media content from different perspectives.

Media Literacy Charters

The advocates of media literacy have build a strong case for media education, as they believe that without properly understanding of media outputs, the society and the individual were at a greater risk to lose their hard earned right of freedom and right of choice.

The efforts of media literacy had already taken the form of a campaign and activists had been making efforts for greater cooperation among supporters of media literacy. In UK the campaign helped to draw a broad charter for media literacy and so far 112 prominent UK based organizations have signed and endorsed the charter. There are also a further 33 individual signatories from the UK.

UK's Charter for Media Literacy

The charter signatories commit to the aims and principles of this Charter and to advocating and developing a media literate UK. It has five sections, out of which the last two, Section 4 and 5, are optional.

In Section 1, the charter commits raising public understanding and awareness of media literacy, in relation to the media of communication, information and expression; advocating the importance of media literacy in the development of educational, cultural, political, social and economic policy; and supporting the principle that every UK citizen of any age should have opportunities, in both formal and informal education, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their enjoyment, understanding and exploration of the media.

Section 2 says that media literate people should be able to use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests; gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources; understand how and why media content is produced, and the technological, legal, economic and political contexts for this; analyse critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey; use media creatively to express and communicate ideas,

information and opinions; identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful; and make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.

Section 3 says that signatories will help develop a media literate UK population by encouraging, enabling or offering opportunities for people to broaden their experience of different kinds of media forms and content; develop critical skills in analysing and assessing the media; and develop creative skills in using media for expression and communication and participation in public debate.

The Optional additional clauses are only for signatories who are providers of activities that directly promote media literacy.

In Section 4, the signatories pledge to support or participate in research that will identify and develop: Better understanding of what it is to be media literate; effective and sustainable pedagogy for media literacy; and transferable evaluative methods and assessment criteria for media literacy.

In Section 5, the signatories agree to undertake, or enable others to undertake, the following: Build links with other signatories and contribute to the growth of a European network for media literacy; identify and share evidence of the outcomes of media literacy initiatives which we undertake or are associated with; work to make content legally available to be used for media education purposes; and publish an Action Plan on the Charter website.

In addition there are 61 signatories from across Europe and beyond from the following 19 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey.

Conclusion

If people are to participate fully at work or in their community, or communicate effectively with family, friends and colleagues globally, or consume media intelligently they need to be media savvy. They need to understand how media works and to feel comfortable questioning what they watch and read. They need a sense of who knows or owns what, and to what extent what you see is really what you get. And, very importantly, they need to become confident in using and exploiting the possibilities of new devices and media channels.

Today the range of media which is being used by non-professionals to communicate and express themselves, through the world of picture, blogs and home video editing software, is already greater than the total output of all the world's TV stations.

Although the 24/7 media environment in which we live means that most people are already avid media consumers, this doesn't necessarily give us all the skills to understand, or question it, or the know-how to use it to express our own ideas. And as media outputs proliferate, we need to be ever more aware of alternative and culturally diverse sources of stories, ideas and information. A media literate society is therefore not a luxury, it is a necessity in the 21st Century - for social, economic, cultural and political reasons - as we try to make sense of a sea of Reality TV, iPod downloads and streaming video on the Internet.

This is what encouraging media literacy is really all about: giving people the choice to communicate, create and participate fully in today's fast-moving world. And this will help create a society in which everyone is enfranchised - whatever their economic, social and ethnic background - and in which the creative and knowledge economies are able to draw upon the widest possible bank of creators and producers.

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG

Society for Alternative Media and Research

204, 2nd Floor, Kiran Plaza,

F-8 Markaz, Islamabad

Ph: +92-51-2855011/022

email: contact@alternativemedia.org.pk

website: www.alternativemedia.org.pk

