

NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: THE IMPERATIVE OF MEDIA LITERACY

Ariunzaya.N*, SA, CHULA**

*Associate Professor, Ph.D, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, National University of Mongolia

**Master's student, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, National University of Mongolia

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Modern information and communication smart devices have become essential to human life. This is evident from several statistics. Currently, over 700 films are produced worldwide each day, 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, commercial television broadcasts approximately 48 million hours of programming each year, and more than 1,500 books are published daily. Additionally, as of 2017, teenagers spent an average of 12 hours daily on media (Hanson, 2020), a figure that increased to 13 hours and 27 minutes by 2023 (statista.com, n.d.). While our ability to connect online with every corner of the globe offers unprecedented freedom, questions arise about our understanding of the chaotic flow of information: What do we know about it? How do we navigate it? How do we

select information? How do we process the information received? How can we avoid drowning in this information flood? Addressing these questions compels us to consider several critical points.

We need to reflect on what exactly the media transmitting this vast amount of information is, how it operates, what messages it conveys, what role it plays in society, and how recipients perceive the messages delivered. This underlines the urgent need for public media literacy. Before discussing public media literacy, it's essential to address the concept of information disorder.

Information disorder encompasses misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information (Buturoiu, 2023). Misinformation generally refers to false information that can cause minimal harm but often spreads quickly via misunderstandings, rumors, and mistakes through media and online platforms. Disinformation involves deliberately misleading information spread with malicious intent. Campaigns to

disseminate false information are often organized by individuals, organizations, or governments to manipulate public opinion, create misunderstandings, or achieve specific political and economic goals. Malinformation is intentionally distorted false information designed to harm an individual's reputation or target a specific group by disclosing private information from personal emails or photographs.

Another significant issue is information disorder's impact on trust in media, exacerbating divisions in society, politics, and influencing election outcomes. Combatting information disorder requires enhancing public media literacy, which includes critical thinking, fact-checking, and promoting transparency and accountability in online interactions.

Today, media literacy can be defined as the comprehensive set of competencies required to effectively engage with media at all levels of communication. For instance, it involves actively utilizing media to understand, process, and interact with various messages. Moreover, predicting and interpreting the meaning of media messages is also part of media literacy. It is not something we possess or lack but varies in level among individuals, with differing knowledge and awareness (Hanson, Mass Communication, 2020).

Individuals with high media literacy have significant control over their perceptions of the world as presented through media and can comprehend the meanings of the messages they receive. In contrast, those with low media literacy may accept messages about pressing societal issues despite

conflicts with their personal experiences and beliefs, leading them to trust exaggerated portrayals. For example, those who spend excessive time watching television may perceive the real world as overwhelmingly dangerous due to constant exposure to crime-related content.

Low media literacy individuals often believe media negatively influences society and the public while perceiving themselves as unaffected. Lastly, those with insufficient media literacy typically do not attempt to utilize these literacy skills, which remain underdeveloped. Researcher Potter defines measures of media literacy, which include:

1. Cognitive Dimension
2. Emotional Dimension
3. Aesthetic Dimension
4. Ethical Dimension (Potter, 2021)

Cognitive Dimension. This aspect includes the ability to process information intellectually through media. It encompasses skills such as interpreting written text, evaluating the impact of suspenseful music in films, or understanding the representation of wealth in characters. For instance, the "Wonder Woman" franchise, which evolved from comic books to high-budget films, offers rich narratives connecting to Greek and Roman mythology, prompting deeper engagement from audiences familiar with those stories.

Emotional Dimension. This includes the feelings elicited by media content. For instance, a child's fear while watching a horror film or a parent's joy while seeing a story of a rescued child reflects this dimension. People often engage with various media to evoke

specific emotional responses, as seen when women resonate with empowerment themes in "Wonder Woman," contributing to its success at the box office.

Aesthetic Dimension. This involves analyzing media content aesthetically or critically. Questions include how well the content is crafted, what skills were utilized in its creation, and how it stands out among similar works. Understanding these aspects requires extensive learning beyond superficial observations.

Ethical Dimension. This dimension begins by evaluating the value of media messages. For instance, analyzing an advertisement from an aesthetic viewpoint can inform purchasing decisions. According to film critic Richard Brody, a central message in "Wonder

Woman" is that malevolent forces emerge not from external entities but from within individuals themselves.

In today's world, the need to develop media literacy is increasingly pressing. Like other skills, enhancing media literacy requires significant effort and practice. It is not something that can be fully developed at once; rather, it is a broad competency that must be cultivated throughout one's life. A person's media literacy begins to develop from birth, starting in infancy when they begin to recognize their surroundings and interactions with others. This initial stage is where we

learn the foundational elements of communication. From a very young age, we come to understand that there are people around us who interact with one another, marking the first form of recognizing interpersonal relationships.

The next step involves becoming familiar with language. Young children learn that sounds convey specific meanings related to emotions such as laughter and happiness, anger, and affection. They start to grasp not only spoken words but also musical tones

and other sounds. For instance, children begin to understand sounds that express joy or sorrow that cannot be articulated with words.

The third step is understanding the speaker. As we start to comprehend language, we also begin to grasp narratives. This includes

recognizing the difference between fictional and nonfictional accounts and understanding how a story is told, including the sequence of events. Being able to distinguish whether a story is fabricated or based on real life is a crucial aspect of media literacy. Furthermore, we learn that even fictional stories can reflect real aspects of our lives.

The fourth step involves fostering skepticism. As we examine who is sending a message, we start to recognize how those convey messages attempt to persuade us. The more we differentiate between advertisements



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and journalistic content, the better we become at identifying exaggerated claims within advertisements. As we gain this experience, we learn to be skeptical and understand that we cannot simply believe everything we see.

The fifth step is intensive development. At this stage, individuals begin to develop specific interests that prompt them to study further. They build a comprehensive understanding of their chosen topics, allowing for deeper contemplation. For example, if someone is interested in politics, they will learn how to find reliable information on that subject and will likely possess greater insights into the nature of political discourse. As individuals expand their knowledge about current political matters, they become more analytical about the information they consume.

The sixth step is gaining diverse experiences. People typically seek out various experiences, leading them to engage with different forms of media content. For example, individuals might choose to watch a newly released horror film to experience fear or adrenaline in a safe environment. Generally, our reactions and feelings associated with media are not negative; rather, they highlight the purpose of consuming such content.

The seventh step is critical evaluation. This occurs when individuals develop the ability to analyze media content separately from their personal feelings. For instance, one can critique a hip-hop song's composition and lyrical quality even if they are not a fan of the genre. Appreciating something does not necessitate personal

preference, similar to how someone can acknowledge a book they enjoy may not be considered a literary masterpiece.

The eighth and final step is recognizing social responsibility. As one's media literacy increases, individuals learn to adopt an ethical perspective regarding the value of certain content compared to others. They begin to understand that some media content and our consumption habits can have moral implications for society as a whole. Furthermore, they come to realize that their choices in media consumption can contribute to making the world a better place. For example, before sharing a provocative post from social media bots or trolls, individuals should verify the accuracy and source of the information. Even if a meme aligns perfectly with one's beliefs, it is still essential to check its validity before sharing.

In conclusion, as the digital information landscape continues to expand at an unprecedented rate, the necessity for robust media literacy becomes increasingly apparent. Individuals must cultivate the skills to discern and critically evaluate the information they encounter, navigating challenges posed by mis-information and dis-information. By embracing a multi-dimensional approach to media literacy—encompassing cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and ethical considerations—people can empower themselves to engage thoughtfully with media content. This journey of media literacy is lifelong, beginning from the earliest stages of life and evolving through diverse experiences and critical reflection.

Ultimately, enhancing our media literacy not only equips us to make informed choices but also fosters a more engaged and responsible society. As we become more media-literate, we can contribute to a culture of accountability, ensuring that our consumption and sharing of information align with a commitment to truth and social responsibility.

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Summary

The digital information environment is increasingly pivotal in modern life, with vast amounts of content produced daily, including films, videos, and books. As teenagers reportedly spend over 13 hours daily engaging with media, understanding how to navigate the chaotic flow of information becomes critical. This involves recognizing the role and function of media, which underscores the importance of public media literacy.