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MEDIA LITERACY AND SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the media literacy and society empowerment. Media literacy includes the ability to develop and use critical thinking skills (such as sorting through, analyzing, and assessing information) to interpret media messages and to create meanings out of those messages in the new communicative environment - digital, global and multimedia – of the information society. Media literacy is considered the result of the process of media education. Media literacy highlights the idea of empowerment— by becoming media literate, people learn to use critical lenses both as consumers of media messages and as producers of their own messages. Media literacy here focuses on children and young people because they are deemed as the most vulnerable elements of society constantly bombarded with media. It is increasingly important that we as a society are able not only to identify but also to facilitate the acquisition of those skills and abilities required by the population at large to use today's information and communication technologies effectively and safely. The empowerment model, in contrast, sees citizens as continuously negotiating meaning as they watch, listen or read. This view sees citizens with media sharing the power to determine the influence of media. Without a democratic and critical approach to media literacy, the public will be positioned merely as selective receivers, consumers of online information and communication. The promise of media literacy is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user - from passive to active, from recipient to participant, from consumer to citizen.

Keywords: *Media Literacy, Information Communication Technology, Society Empowerment*

Introduction

Society obtain information whenever and wherever they want it. The accelerated pace of technology development, as well as the convergence of media platforms makes the case for media literacy all the more urgent. Selecting the best media requires considering not only cost and the number of readers, but also the efficiency with which the medium reaches the target audience. These developments have influenced the media usage habits of target audiences as well as the fit between the product and the characteristics of the medium.

The way we see the world is coloured by the experiences and influences we absorbed as children. People of all ages act according to how they reacted to childhood experiences and assumptions as they entered their twenties. Now in their twenties and older, the current workforce perceives work and work

performance differently. Many factors impact on the way people world-wide collaborate, interact and perform in the work environment. A condensed list of diversity factors includes culture, race, age, gender, socio-economic status, literacy, physical ability and legacy.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) should be seen both as a pedagogical tool and as a discipline in its own right for the development of effective educational services. These technologies are not merely tools, they inform and shape our modes of communication and our thinking and creativity processes. How should we act so that the benefit of this ICT revolution accrues to all mankind and does not become just the privilege of a small number of economically highly developed countries? How can we ensure access for all to these information and intellectual resources, and overcome the social, cultural and linguistic barriers to participation in knowledge societies? How should we promote the online publication of content that is increasingly more diversified and potentially a source of enrichment for the whole of humanity? From the privacy rooms to the public forums of presidential debates. the media serve as the informational network connecting the many elements of our society. There is no doubt that the media are significant and worth studying.

Literature Review

Media Literacy

Without media and communication, there is no such thing as modern society as the media with its messages connects and hold different societies together. We could say they are society's component and condition; without their dominant and participatory use, individuals can hardly imagine their daily life in which they live, work, learn, and are politically and culturally active. Media are everywhere and can sometimes act intrusively, especially to adolescents and children, who assert themselves in relation to media. Media are the scale for 'up to date' (Wakounig, in Ivani, 2013), which enable them to master media content and the capability of creating an appearance of the world, which would be unknown to us without the media

The wider access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in a society, the greater connections between different parts of a society. More social interconnectedness means greater ability of members of the society to work together to promote social benefits like transparency (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010).

Looking at the media, as more than merely a technical grammatical plural, is constructed out of a need to preserve a status outside of it, to maintain it as other, to be looked upon with the pedagogic gaze through judgments which - in the case of media literacy - are conservative in their preservation of the idea that there exists the media to be critical about. The media exist no more than literature exists. Both are constructions, demarcated for particular forms of pedagogic attention but neither are read critically, in Gee and Hayes' sense by students (Kendall & McDougall, 2012).

Citizenship education (or civics), as it has been developed in most countries, shares with programs for media literacy a tendency to prepare its recipients to perform conventional roles (as tax-payers, voters, volunteers, newspaper readers, television viewers) in which civic engagement is enacted through a vertical communication path. Neither citizenship education nor media literacy have paid much attention to forms of horizontal communication. Indeed, they have often sought to steer young people away from them. The need now is to expand media literacy with a view to encouraging network-building practices and skills. Emphasis here would be upon not only being able to access and operate media technologies, but also ways of using them to build publics around issues of common interest; not only sending out signals, but cultivating and responding to the attention of others (Coleman & Ross, 2010).

Children develop media literacy even in the absence of explicit attempts to encourage and promote it. Accordingly, the document begins by exploring the development of the three dimensions contained in Ofcom's definition of media literacy: 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'(Buckingham, Burn, & Cranmer, 2005).

Society Empowerment

Empowerment is using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to increase citizen engagement makes the citizens empowered to participate in openness initiatives and to promote cultural support for transparency (Fukiyama, 2001; Johnson, 1998 in(Bertot et al., 2010)

The social change approach is based in the idea of reform through social empowerment of citizens by allowing them to participate in institutional reform movements and by cultivating a civil, law-based society as a long-term deterrent to corruption (Johnson in (Bertot et al., 2010)). By changing cultural attitudes that have been accepting of corruption, citizens can ultimately protect themselves from corruption.

Birkerts (1994 in Croteau, 2012:307) concerned that new media would squeeze out prior cultural forms including reading and rigorous thinking. It's hard not to think of this sort of concern today when observing a group of people in a public space, all engrossed with their laptops and smartphones-and all ignoring each other. Jackson (2008), argues that our embrace of new media has produced a sort of attention-deficit culture, expressed through the presence of constant stimulation, interruption and multitasking. This fleeting culture of distraction. Such a culture undermines our ability to focus, concentrate, and attend to the deeper and more substantive issues in life that are the bedrock of intimate social relationships, wisdom and advances in culture. Powers (2010 in Croteau, 2012: 307), a journalist who covers technology issues, considers what he calls the 'conundrum of connectivity'. The technology allows us to connect to information and people from anyplace 24/7 is an awesome achievement. But history suggests that wisdom, insight, and perspective are gained from being *disconnected;* by creating time and space for solitude and contemplative thought. Carr (2010) argues that the fragmented, transient, and hyperstimulative environment of the

Internet and other new media contributes to ways of perceiving and thinking that are similarly fragmented and shallow. Carr turns to experimental evidence from neuroscience showing that surfing the Internet indeed develops different neural pathways in the brain than does reading a book. The constant stimulus, fleeting distractions, frequent interruptions, and pervasive multitasking that characterize the contemporary media environment help produce a decline in people's ability to focus, concentrate and engage in serious thought. The ability to concentrate, think seriously, read deeply and follow an argument are not instinctual.

Findings and Discussion

Active Citizenship and the Participatory Public Sphere

Based on Dewey's conception of an intimate linkage between participation and reciprocity, where by each person has to refer his own action in relation to that of others and to consider other's action as providing purpose and direction for one's own, the idea of the media as a space for active citizenship contrasts with the notion of mediation as authoritative dissemination. At least four developments in the late twentieth century began to give credibility to the idea of a participatory public sphere. The first was a growing sense that a new contract needed to be forged between authoritative institutions (governments, broadcasters, public services) and their users and supporters. Secondly, as the concept of "empowerment" came to dominate policy discourse in a range of contexts – from the treatment of school students to global transitions to a post-colonial order – the impact of institutional arrangements upon civic culture was much debated. At stake here was a conception of media citizenship which sought to transcend the binaric division between the production and the consumption of public knowledge. Thirdly, visions of a more participatory media culture were indirectly strengthened as scholars abandoned the simplistic media-effects models that had dominated communication studies. The public increasingly receives and sends its messages through mediated channels, from phone-ins to emails to reality television votes, it comes to look remarkably like an active audience. Manin's notion of an "audience democracy" is relevant here. Fourthly, new forms of media production emerged that challenged the claim of mainstream media to constitute the only effective model for public communication.

the extensive investment capital needed to launch risky online ventures and the traditional media venues (newspapers, television, etc.) to advertise and promote them (Harmon, 2001 in Croteau, 2012: 309).

The Social Construction of Media Technologies

A sociological approach emphasizes that media technologies are embedded in ongoing social processes that affect their evolution. For example, the Internet is subject to social forces that help to shape how it functions and how it is used. These forces include legal regulations, social norms, and market pressures, as well as the medium's inherent technical properties (Croteau, 2012). Together these forces-law, social norms, market pressures, and technological

architecture-have shaped the Internet, just as they have shaped every other communications medium. The development of media technologies entails thinking simultaneously about the technological and the social (Bijker and Law, 1992 in Croteau, 2012). To understand the relationship between media and society, the most important question is not. "What does a new technology do to people?" but, instead. "How do people use the new technology?" Scholars have documented the importance of these forces to the introduction and evolution of various new media technologies (Croteau, 2012: 291).

Building a Culture of Transparency through ICTs

Based on experience and research, it is not known if using ICTs to promote transparency can create a sustained culture of transparency. In terms of information access generally, results thus far aremixed. Filteringof Internet contentbygovernments is anexample in which the amount of information accessible has changed significantly in some countries with divergent reactions bymembers of the public (Bertot et al., 2010).

Coinciding with technology access is the need for users to be able to understand and use the technologies through which transparency tools are available. The digital divide is long documented (Bertot, 2003; Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1995, 2004) and broadly defined as the gap between those who have access to technologies and those who do not. However, there are in fact multiple divides that can exist, of which access to the ICTs is but one. Embedded within the divide are such issues as:

• Technology literacy—the ability to understand and use technologies; • Usability—the design of technologies in such ways that are intuitive and allow users to engage in the content embedded within the technology;

• Accessibility—the ability of persons with disabilities to be able to access the content through adaptive technologies (in fact, some mobile technologies such as the iPhone are completely inaccessible to persons with visual impairments due to the touch screen design which lacks a tactile keyboard); and

• Functionality—the design of the technologies to include features (e.g., search, e-government service tracking; accountability mea- sures, etc.) that users desire.

Thus, it is important to both use technologies that are widely deployed to provide a broad base of technology access, but there is s also often a substantial need to provide training, and engage in usability, functionality, and accessibility testing to ensure the broadest ability to participate in e-government services and resources. The use of social media as a core part of transparency initiatives also can create both new opportunities and new challenges. For example, the use of social media in combination with open government data has been promoted as a new way of enabling and facilitating transparency. This approach is typified by the nascent and ambitious plan by the Obama administration to make vast amounts of government data available through the www.data.gov site (White House, 2010). These types of transparency initiatives are directed toward the more tech- nically inclined citizen: researchers, technologists, and civic-minded

geeks. While everyone can benefit from the data and the by-products and analyses that the more technically inclined citizens would produce, to truly "democratize the data" would ultimately require a better, more conscious effort to make this initiative more inclusive and participatory to all citizens (Bertot et al., 2010).

As we move into an information society, is media literacy increasingly part of citizenship, a key means, a right even, by which citizens participate in society? Or is literacy primarily a means of realizing ideals of self-actualization, cultural expression and aesthetic creativity? Will these goals be subordinated to the use of media literacy to achieve the competitive cultural and economic advantages vital in a globalised, information society? This seems plausible insofar as media literacy, in the UK at least, is part of a package of measures to lighten top-down media regulation by devolving responsibility for media use from the state to individuals, a move which can be interpreted either as 'empowering' or, more critically, as part of a Foucauldian shift from centralized government to individual governance (Foucault, 1991). Perhaps even these economic goals will be undermined by the reproduction of the divisive standards and values of the established cultural elite? Of the research task developed in this paper, namely to extend our understanding of access, analysis, critical evaluation and content creation from familiar to new media, interestingly it is the latter two which have proved more contentious; yet these are the most crucial to the democratic agenda. Only if these are firmly foregrounded in a definition of media literacy will people be positioned not merely as selective, receptive and accepting but also as participating, critical; in short, not merely as consumers but also as citizens (Livingstone, 2004).

This paper has argued that literacy concerns the historically and culturally conditioned relationship among three processes, no one of which is sufficient alone: (i) the symbolic and material representation of knowledge, culture and values; (ii) the diffusion of interpretative skills and abilities across a (stratified) population; and (iii) the institutional, especially, the state management of the power that access to and skilled use of knowledge brings to those who are 'literate'. As we extend conceptions of literacy to embrace new media, the first process – that of representation – is barely addressed in the research literature: until we have a robust account of the media in which people might be judged literate, we can say little about the nature or uses of their literacy. The second process – that of skilled interpretation – has much to learn from the well-established traditions of readership and audience reception in two respects. First, media literacy has developed a sophisticated account of the individual skills involved in decoding media texts, although these have yet to be applied to the new media. Second, audience research has developed an interactive view of the relationship between reader and text which, in the context of new ICTs, must also encompass questions of technology. Literacy, by extension, cannot be conceived solely as a feature of the user but must also be seen as medium-dependent, a co-production of the interactive engagement between technology and user. Further, this paper has argued that, to claim that literacy is changing with the widespread

introduction of ICT, research establish that the literacy associated with the new media, especially the internet, differs significantly from that of print and audiovisual media. The third process – that of the institutional uses of literacy – invites a more critical take on literacy, particularly insofar as academic research is used to inform policy.

Crucially, however, it is the relationship among textuality, competence and power that sets those who see literacy as democratizing, empowering of ordinary people against those who see it as elitist, divisive, a source of inequality. Today's anxieties over the digital divide merely represent the latest steps in a long-standing struggle between critical and enlightenment positions whose outcome will influence who will have the power to benefit from information and communication in a technologically-mediated twenty-first century (Livingstone, 2004).

The idea of the communication revolution or the Information Society is nothing more than a kind of alibi for our true impotence to conduct the planet's fate toward human ends. Might this technical utopia be a mirage? Might we have converted to a technological religion (Noble, 1999) and agreed to be its preachers? If this is so, we would probably have to say that humanity has begun to lose faith in itself, its trust in human beings themselves.

It may seem to be a slight exaggeration, but when the discourses that conduct our society, the communication revolution or the Information Society — laden with rhetoric, promises and forced hopes — are considered, everything seems to indicate that indeed perhaps we tend to accept any technological progress without questioning it. Perhaps we have thus anaesthetised our critical conscience (Tornero & Varis, 2010).

The Never-Ending News Cycle

A society's dominant media help set the rhythm of social life. Media technologies have also given users more control over time. To watch or listen to a particular program, traditional broadcast media required audience members to tune in at a time determined by the broadcaster. *Time shifting* refers to the practice of recording or downloading media content to watch or listen at a later time that is more convenient for the audience (Croteau, 2012: 301).

Drawing together information literacy and media literacy, while media literacy and information literacy have developed as separate traditions, they share many of the same values. In general, the "media literacy" tradition stresses the understanding, comprehension, critique and creation of media materials, whereas the "information literacy" tradition stresses the identification, location, evaluation and use of media materials. Metaphorically, we might say that "media literacy" sees media as a lens through which to view the world and express oneself, while "information literacy" sees information as a tool with which to act on the world. Both perspectives are relevant for developing media literacy policy

In European cities, the importance of media communication in the everyday lives of children and adolescents is growing. Young people explore the world through online resources and participate in social life and politics by

publishing audio and visual material. In order to empower children and young people to profit from media according to their needs as citizens of our societies, we need to ensure their media education.

Not only does a skills-based definition of literacy focus on users to the neglect of text and technology, it also prioritizes the abilities of the individual over the knowledge arrangements of society. Yet as Hartley argues, 'literacy is not and never has been a personal attribute or ideologically inert "skill" simply to be "acquired" by individual persons... It is ideologically and politically charged – it can be used as a means of social control or regulation, but also as a progressive weapon in the struggle for emancipation' (Hartley, 2002: 136). If literacy is not an end in itself, so what are its social and institutional uses? How are these managed by media, governmental, educational, and commercial bodies? And what kind of critical stance should the academy take as policy is developed (Sterne, 2002)? These questions are currently pressing for those of us in the UK, for the current Communications Bill (2003) sets a government regulator the unprecedented brief of 'promoting media literacy'. What does, could, and should this (Livingstone, 2004)

Localism and Virtual Communities

Media technologies have altered our sense of space and place in other ways as well traditional media tended to be rooted in a particular physical location. By affecting our sense of place, media technologies have also altered our sense of community. Birkerts (1994 in Croteau, 2012: 302) notes that new media technologies created an entirely new social space, cyberspace, which allows for new forms of interaction with little connection to the physical world. The concept of *virtual community* (Rheingold, 2000) suggests that communities no longer need to be geographically based. People all over the globe can become "virtual" neighbors through the space-bridging technology of the Internet. By "friending" others on Facebook, joining discussions in chat rooms or online forums and playing in virtual worlds, users can employ the Internet to connect with others. Rheingold (2000) stated the Internet can constitute a powerful antidote to the loss of traditional community values and can help reestablish social ties. Finally, the loss of media rooted in distinct physical places has been accompanied by the loss of media content that is located in distinct social spaces. For example with the Internet and mobile media, the distinction between public and private has become blurry, and this process is intensified by new forms of mobile media (Ling and Campbell, 2009).

Consumers: Victims or Informed Choosers?

The views of the likes of Milton and Locke are correct in that truth will prevail in an open marketplace, in part because autonomous and rational individuals will be able to discern the difference between truth and falsity. This belief in the rational abilities of the people who receive media messages is directly responsible for such precepts as caveat emptor. "Buyer beware" assumes

that an intelligent consumer will be able to discern nuances in messages - nuances that the designer of the message may have intentionally obscured.

Media use among young people is even more extensive has been increasing signicantly in all forms -except for reading , which has found that, by 2009 in US, young people 8 to 18 years of age devoted the significant increase in media use over a 10 years period was due largely to the growth of the mobile media devices - especially cell phones, MP3 players and laptop computer – which made it easier to access media products anytime, anywhere (Rideout, Foehr and Robert, 2010).

Popular social media are more easily accessible from smartphones than from traditional desktops as many people have 24/7 access to smartphones. Beyond Technology: From Public Participation to Self-Organization ICT, social media and mobile technologies alter the larger context of public participation because they open up new possibilities for policy-makers, but perhaps more importantly, they empower and foster the self-organization of citizens. Social media are a powerful tool for citizen mobilization (Reinout, 2015: 240).

The younger generation that has grown up with new media is less informed, less literate, more selfabsorbed and more depressed than any that has preceded it (Bauerlein, 2008; Twenge 2006). They point to the popularity of social networking as one source of the problem. The immediacy and personalized nature of social networking, emphasizes the value of newness and facilitates an extreme focus on the self and immediate networks of friends. The result is a worldview that promotes entitlement and self-centeredness, what Twenge (2006) dubbed "Generation Me" (Such entitlement, meets reality soon enough and younger people have higher levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs and lives than earlier generations).

The trend toward briefer instantaneous messages not only threatens thoughtful communication, but it even promotes the erosion of traditional spelling grammar, and punctuation that have long served as a useful foundation for serious communication (Bauerlein, 2008). Neuman (in Croteau, 2012: 308) used the metaphor of a tug-of-war to describe the push-and-pull between the technical capabilities of new media and other social forces. We have already seen how various media, including the Internet, were affected by social forces as they were developed and deployed.

In terms of access, the literature suggests that children and young people already possess quite high levels of functional literacy - that is, the skills and competencies needed to gain access to media content, using the available technologies and associated software. Older children are generally aware of regulatory mechanisms and systems of guidance, and take these into account in seeking to make their own decisions. The large majority of young people show some awareness of risks relating to sexual dangers on the internet; although they are less aware of potential economic risks. Several studies in this area conclude that education in media literacy may be a more effective strategy than blocking or filtering. In terms of understanding, there is an extensive literature relating to the development of children's understanding of television. This literature suggests

that children's awareness of areas such as television 'language', the difference between representation and reality, and the persuasive role of advertising, develops both as a function of their increasing knowledge of the world, and as a result of their broader cognitive and social development. Children also learn to cope with potentially unwanted or upsetting emotional responses, and to make critical judgments about areas such as television violence, by employing forms of media literacy. It is important to emphasize that these areas apply just as much to fictional material as to factual material; and that critical understanding goes hand-in-hand with the development of aesthetic and emotional responses to media of all kinds. There is considerably less research about how children interpret, evaluate and respond to other media, including the various forms of content found on the internet.

By contrast, when it comes to creativity, there has been less academic research relating to 'older' media such as video and analogue radio than to new media, particularly the internet. Research here suggests that there is considerable potential for media to be used as means of communication and self-expression, not least by socially disadvantaged groups; that creative involvement in media production (particularly in the context of education) can make an important contribution to the development of critical understanding; and that new media such as online gaming and mobile telephony provide possibilities for new forms of interaction. Among the barriers to media literacy are several inter-related factors, of which social class and economic status are the most well-established. These barriers limit children's access to the internet, although not to established media such as radio or television. Potential enablers of media literacy include parents, teachers (both in schools and in informal educational settings) and other agencies such as broadcasters and regulators. Research suggests that parental mediation can play an important role in developing younger children's media literacy, for example in understanding the relationships between representation and reality. However, the role of parents depends upon broader beliefs about child-rearing, and many parents do not play as great a role as they like to suggest. Meanwhile, education about the media has a long history, at least in secondary schools although it remains a marginal aspect of the compulsory curriculum and is rarely found in primary schools. There is a growing body of evidence about the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies, both in respect of the 'understanding' and 'creativity' aspects, although there has been little sustained or systematic research into the learning potential of children at different ages. Media education is also developing in the informal sector, although there has been little sustained evaluation of such work. The review provides an indication of several important gaps in the literature. These include specific media (such as radio, mobile phones and online gaming) and particular population groups (such as younger children, those with disabilities, and ethnic minority groups). There is a particular need for research about children's ability to evaluate internet content; about their awareness of new commercial strategies in the media; about media production in the home; and about learning progression in media education. Of

the three areas in Ofcom's definition, 'creativity' is by far the least well-researched. (Buckingham, Burn, & Cranmer, 2005).

Conclusion

Too busy to think and the dangers of 24/7 connectivity. Some of Birkerts' early concerns are echoed and developed by later analysts. Maggie Jackson (in Croteau, 2012), a psychologist, argues that our embrace of new media has produced a sort of attention-deficit culture, expressed through the presence of constant stimulation, interruption and multitasking. This fleeting culture of distraction. she contends. Produces superficial "McThinking" that can be fun and engaging but that provides little intellectual nutritional value. Such a culture undermines our ability to focus, concentrate, and attend to the deeper and more substantive issues in life that are the bedrock of intimate social relationships, wisdom and advances in culture. New technologies and media forms will also pose new challenges and demands in terms of media literacy, so it is important that research in this field is regularly updated. There is a case here for more sharing of research findings and methodologies between academic and industry researchers.(Buckingham, Burn, & Cranmer, 2005).

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