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Advertising and the media literate experience

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Advertising and the media literate experience

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ADVERTISING AND THE MEDIA LITERATE EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

Death, pillage, love, happiness, heaven, and hell are all images and ideas that a person can be exposed to in only forty-five seconds of watching television; this could be just three commercials. Considering the average American watches television for approximately 24-48 hours a week, (Rockler-Gladen, par. 3), it comes as no surprise that every person may not put energy into critically analyzing the messages they receive. However, that is precisely what needs to happen. While it is the ultimate destination, expecting a person to be able to analyze a mediated message before they can understand the process or reasons why is similar to expecting a child to walk before he is able to roll over. The ability to be media literate involves an understanding of media, advertisements, and their effects on the average person, as well as an effort to put that knowledge to practice. The average television viewer will remain powerless to the effects of the advertised message that is encountered unless that person becomes media literate.

Although the idea of media literacy is not necessarily a new one, it first came about in Great Britain in the 1930's (Media Literacy, par. 4); there is still a need for the concept to be defined. "Media literacy" can be defined in many ways, but it breaks down to a simple statement. "Media literacy is a perspective that we actively use when exposing ourselves to the media in order to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Potter 4). This definition is the basic idea that will be used when discussing media literacy. What are important about this definition are three key words; perspective, interprets, and messages.

These words are important because they speak to the main idea of media literacy. Each person brings their own perspective to an experience, especially a mediated experience. Every mediated experience carries with it a message, and the way a person interprets that message can change drastically based on their experiences and perceptions. The reason it is so important to become media literate is because the media literate individual is better able to identify their perceptions and disarm the power of the messages.

Potter explains further that each person's perceptions are built from knowledge structures, which are built from information obtained through media and reality (4-5). The definition states that a person is actively using this perception because they not only need to be aware of the message, but they need to consciously interact with it and interpret it. While there is no conclusion to becoming media literate, a person who is interested in educating themselves on an advertisers' message and how to empower themselves needs to be aware not only of the definition of media literacy, but a wide variety of concepts. Among these are, the history of media; it is impossible to innovate if one does not know where they began. Also, principles of marketing, target audiences and how they are constructed, as well as the production of the message and by whom are concepts directly related to advertising and media literacy. Finally, the real innovation in the form of new media and teaching media literacy are the ideas that create the foundation of media literacy.

According to Elizabeth Thoman, there are three stages to media literacy (pars. 5-7). The first stage is simply discovering how much a person is mediated, and managing a balanced media "diet", in regards to the types and amounts of media one consumes. The

second stage reflects on the specific creative and production as well as editing decisions. This stage looks specifically at the advertisement and the decisions made. The third stage helps to "...explore deeper issues" (Thoman, pars. 5-7) in media literacy. In this stage, one will question who produces the messages, as well as the purpose behind mediated messages.

This particular study identifies with all three stages of development in media literacy and allows a person interested in becoming media literate the opportunity to investigate each stage. When studying media literacy, as with studying any subject, it is important to understand its history. Therefore, in order to discern the modern ramifications of mediated messages, one must be able to see the footsteps of those who have gone before. Therefore, a history of media is essential to the study of media literacy.

History of Media

To begin to become media literate, it is absolutely imperative to take a look at the medium being used, and examine its history. This examination of media literacy is focused on the advertisements found in media. The history of television is linked very closely with that of radio, as well as the idea of mediated messages. It would be impossible for one to call themselves "media literate" and only able to recognize messages through one medium. Therefore, a brief history of media will be uncovered.

Well before broadcast media, there were newspapers and other forms of print media. However, the story for broadcast media, or mass media as it was called, began in 1901 when Guglielmo Marconi was able to send a wireless signal from Ireland to

Canada, known as the trans-Atlantic transmission (Ideas, par. 4). This was the first hint of what radio waves could do, though at the time it was in the form of bips; Morse code. Only five years later, Reginald Fessenden was able to send the first long distance broadcast with the human voice; he read bible verses and poetry. The ability to send radio signals was used for a long time by ships to send distress signals and communicate with nearby ports. The event that solidified radio's use was the sinking of the Titanic. The night the Titanic sank, a ship just four miles away did not receive the distress signal because their only radio operator was off duty. After that day, the Radio Act of 1912 was enacted, which required all ships to have two radio operators at all times. In 1918, the machine Marconi used for his trans-Atlantic transmission was used by President Wilson to broadcast his ultimatum to Germany near the end of World War I (Ideas, par. 9).

During World War II, radio was taken into the hands of the United States military, and the beginning idea of commercial radio was put on hold. During the war, many technological advances were made with radio, and it was handed back to the American public in 1920. FM radio soon made its way onto the scene, and the Federal Communications Commission, FCC, became the regulatory commission over broadcast waves. With the popularity of television, radio had to learn how to adapt and compete. Soon, it became better known for its niche programming, and stations began to cater to specific groups of people; not just the “mass” market.

Although the first broadcast offering both picture and sound, television, was made in 1927, the technology did not affect the lives of the American consumer for almost 20 years afterward. Between 1945 and 1948 the number of commercial television stations went from nine to forty-eight (Golden Age, par. 2). By 1960, there was a television in

85% of United States homes. In what is known as the “Golden Age” of television, viewers saw color, new channels, and new regulations begin to define the television watched today.

Legislation defining the boundaries of broadcast media was originally created in Congress. However, it was quickly realized that the mediums needed a commission to help govern themselves as well as focus on the concerns of the growing industry. The Federal Communications Commission became that entity. The FCC acts as a regulatory commission. It is meant to be reactive to events that occur over the broadcast airwaves, but has no ability to censor anything before it is broadcast. While it is able to deliver rather hefty fines and create new legislation regarding the airwaves, it is consistently restricted by the United States Constitution, and must always be cautious that it is not offending any of those given rights. In the study of media literacy, it is important to understand where media has been to better analyze how it acts now and where it may go. The history of radio from a mass broadcast to a narrow audience is just one indication of the changes the technology and programming can undergo. Connections like this can be made only if there is knowledge of the history of media, which can begin or add to a persons' knowledge structure.

Knowledge Structures

Ideas and concepts like the history of broadcast media are things that can be placed into a person’s knowledge structure. A knowledge structure is something that every person has, but it is necessary for a person working to be media literate must become aware of. Knowledge structures are the way a person categorizes information

they know about a topic (Potter 4-7). For example, a musician will likely have a large knowledge structure about music composition, history, performance, and artists. In fact, this musician will probably have a different knowledge structure for each of these musical topics.

Every person has unique knowledge structures, and has a unique way of categorizing the system. For example, if two people were presented with a commercial for *Geico*, one may have a knowledge structure about *Geico* that tells them *Geico* is a respectable company and they can do business with *Geico*. The other person may have had a bad experience with *Geico* and their knowledge structure will tell them to walk away from any business with the company. Neither of these people is wrong. Every person's individual experiences in life are added to their knowledge structures in whichever way they choose. Each person is also able to link their knowledge structures so they are better equipped to handle a big situation. Using the above example, if the second person had a bad experience with *Allstate* before and not *Geico*, their knowledge structure may still tell them that if *Allstate* is irresponsible, then *Geico* must be as well and to stay away. It all depends on how topics and ideas are connected, and what the situation is.

Knowledge structures are important for a person in becoming more media literate because it explains why a person thinks the way they do. If one is able to identify what their knowledge structures are and how much information they hold, then that person would be able to truly analyze mediated messages they receive. While it will be established further that one key ingredient to becoming media literate is to pay attention

and really be aware of messages, another important factor is a person's ability to distinguish truth from fabrication, personal bias from perspective, etc.

Imagine a person who is aware of their knowledge structures as a commercial for a weight-loss supplement comes on their television. Depending on that person's knowledge structures, they may be able to decide if this weight-loss supplement would work for their body, as well as if the health information being discussed is accurate. Now, if a person who is unaware of their knowledge structures encounters this same commercial, they may be more susceptible to the glamorous ideas of weight-loss and beauty that the commercial represents instead of whether the ideas are acceptable for them.

It is important for a person to know what their knowledge structures are so they are able to identify correct information and decide what to do with new information. With an understanding of personal knowledge structures, one can store new information in an efficient manner. They will also be able to recognize the connections between the knowledge structures and call upon many different knowledge structures at once in an appropriate situation.

Being able to identify one's personal knowledge structure is of utmost importance to becoming media literate because it gives that person the power to validate an advertisement on their own instead of accepting the assumed authority of the advertiser. In this way, that person is shifting from a person who is merely media capable to a person who is working to be media literate.

Media Capable versus Media Literate

Naturally, it is difficult for anyone to be able to change their frame of mind so drastically that they become aware of every mediated message they encounter, as well as interpret it accurately. However, every person is already media literate to a degree and a willingness to understand more is all it takes to build on the knowledge that is already present. Most people know how to turn on a computer, plug in a VCR, speak a language, understand photographs, and expose themselves to all of the various kinds of media (Potter 3).

These skills show ways that each person is already media literate, and has a basic foundation of the understanding of the different media. However, even though a person is able to identify the pictures and technologies available to them, they still may not be able to identify and analyze the messages within the pictures and technology. Becoming more media literate is the only way to be able to de-construct the messages in advertising and understand its affect on the viewer. This is the fundamental difference between being media literate, and being media capable.

Any person can turn on a television and watch their favorite program. During a half-hour program, they will be exposed to roughly 22 minutes of the program, and 8 minutes of promotions for the station and paid advertisements (Introducing, par. 2). During an hour program, they will be exposed to roughly 41 minutes of programming and 19 minutes of advertising. Assuming this person turns the television on to watch the program, then turns it off once the program has ended, they would be required to actively analyze every advertisement they encounter for a maximum of 20 minutes.

The media capable person would be able to identify the difference between the program and an advertisement. They would also be able to change the channel, and make a clear decision regarding whether they like the programming and commercials or not. To be clear, it is possible for a person to go through their life as only media capable and still be able to recognize advertisements and potentially be aware of their basic emotional effects on that person. Although it is possible to never improve from media capable to media literate, it is a dangerous place to rest.

A person who is not media literate, and has no motivation to become more media literate will always be strictly media capable and helpless to the messages they receive. For example, imagine a media capable person was watching television and a commercial came on for Burger King, and that person suddenly felt that they were hungry. The person would most likely go get something to eat, and it is very possible that they would go to Burger King. A media capable person would not question this hunger or their motivation to go to Burger King to eat.

Imagine what this person may do with every commercial they encounter if he does not analyze any of them. If this person is willing to go to Burger King after watching a commercial for a Whopper, then they may also be willing to switch car insurance companies, get a new phone, redecorate their house, etc. The basic idea is, if a person is unwilling to question the messages they receive, then they will be unwilling to question their actions after they receive the message. The idea of questioning the messages received requires more than simply wondering what the advertisement was about. Most advertisements are very straightforward and make it simple for people to understand what is being asked of them. Since every person is slightly media literate, it

is generally simple to decide what most advertisements are about, on a fundamental level. To really be able to question the advertisements, a person will have to be equipped with knowledge of demographics, advertising principles, and media programming. These elements and more are what consist of the principles of marketing.

Principles of Marketing

While there are many theories around the best way to market a product and the best way to produce a commercial, there will always be the idea that following the “4 P's of marketing” will help to focus the marketing plan. This concept is important for the media literate viewer to understand, because it delves into the idea of how the marketer attempts to be seen. The 4 P's of marketing, also known as the marketing mix, are Product, Pricing, Promotions, and Placement (Marketing Mix, par. 2-3). These words are used to show the recognition that marketing is customer centered, and one must capture the customers' attention and address a need in the consumer if they are to be successful.

The first of the 4 P's is “product”. The idea of the product discusses the physical “product” that is sold/bought and services that can be bought or sold as well. The use of this category is brought out in the brand name, and in the packaging and the physical things of that nature (The Marketing Mix, par. 1). Whether the product is luxury or functional, any warranties that are associated with the product and its safety are all different aspects of the “product” part of the marketing mix.

Another aspect of the product idea is the product life cycle. This is represented from the introduction of the product to its withdrawal. The product life cycle is an important feature of the product area, because it helps marketers determine how to sell

their product, and helps determine other aspects such as how to place their product (Marketing Mix, par 3). The product life cycle is also important for marketing, because if a new product is going to come out, they want to be able to understand the trend of the competition and where the competition is at, so it can be more accurately judged on when to introduce the product. Introducing the perfect product at the wrong time could very easily and likely make it fail.

The second aspect of the marketing mix is “price”. Price has to do with the idea of how to price a product, if there are discounts allowed and at what times, how to bundle the product to sell it in bulk, and discriminating between products with the price (The Marketing Mix, par. 5). This is an important feature of the marketing mix as well because it often directly influences the consumer. Often, this is the “P” that is consciously considered by the consumer and they can be influenced on this “P” alone for certain products.

While it is obvious that no company can compete with any single aspect of the marketing mix and succeed, many still attempt to compete solely on price and often feel the strains of doing so. As earlier suggested, consumers are extremely sensitive to price, and it is seen on a couple of different extremes. On one side, the consumer will look for the cheaper product because they are looking for a sale or a good deal. On the other hand, it is perceived by many that a more expensive product is the better product because they would be paying for quality (Marketing Mix; 4 P's, par. 1).

The third prong of the marketing mix is “place”. Place is represented by how the product is distributed, the channels through which it is sold/distributed, how it is stored and transported, etc (The Marketing Mix, par. 6-8). This aspect of the marketing mix can

often be confused as being simpler than it is. Many perceive “place” to be the location of the store a product is sold in. However, it is slightly more complicated, and takes more knowledge of the customer than that.

The placement of a product has to do more with knowing where the customer is and where the sale will be made. This takes into account the many different channels that the product can be sold through, as well as the different channels to reach the customer (FW15, pars. 7-12). When discussing channels, there are three major channels that a product can be sold through. These channels are; selling to the customer, selling to the retailers, and selling to the wholesaler. While essentially, they all deal with selling and with the same product; the ways in which the buyer is approached and dealt with changes with the channel that is used.

The fourth and final aspect of the marketing mix is “promotions”. Promotions deal more with how the product is communicated to the consumer. This recognizes efforts in advertising, personal selling, sale promotions, public relations, etc. (The Marketing Mix, par. 10). The promotions aspect of the marketing mix is often the one people may think of when they mention marketing. This is natural, since this is the main communicator of the four aspects.

Some things that are done to satisfy the promotions portion of the marketing mix are, creating symbols to assist with customer recognition, sponsor promotional activities, and navigate the communication process so it is clear and simple. There are four basic promotion tools and they are; advertising, sales promotion, public relation, and personal selling (Marketing Mix, pars. 13-18).

These four tools are used in many different varieties by companies to create the

perfect campaign for a product. No two advertising campaigns are the same, and they do not want to be. In most cases, the mix of these tools is intended to differentiate the product from every other product on the market. In some cases, the intent of the packaging is to make a little-known product resemble a well-known product so much that it makes little difference to the customer who would make the decision between the two. However, generally, the way these tools are used is a carefully watched and evaluated; these are constantly being changed to consistently create the perfect mix.

All four P's of the marketing mix are treated similarly. They are evaluated and their reception by the consumer is evaluated to determine what needs to be changed in order to put the product in the perfect position to be a success in its market. The media literate viewer has a duty to understand these basic principles, because it speaks to why they are viewing a commercial when they are, the words that are used in the commercial and the image that is created within them after viewing the commercial. These ideas are also important to know so the media literate viewer is better able to identify the categories they may be placed in by the marketer. One of these categories is by his/her demographics.

Demographics

Once the basic principles of marketing are known, a media literate viewer will begin to ask questions that will allow them to better understand the messages they are exposed to. One of the obvious questions would be, how do the marketers know what to say and who to talk to? In order to have an effective advertisement or advertising campaign, there must be an intended audience. The process of choosing an audience and

marketing toward them is called targeting and the audience that is targeted can be determined based on a few key factors. These factors include, but are not limited to, demographics, psychographics, and consumer behavior.

Breaking a group of individuals down to their demographic traits is something that comes naturally to an average person, and has become a highly studied and specific art in advertising. Demographics are ways to categorize population characteristics (Demographics, par. 1). These characteristics can consist of age, weight, location, socio-economic status, etc. The demographic has a considerable effect on the outcome of an advertisement because it helps determine how things are said, who appears in the commercial and where the commercial is placed in the programming.

The idea of demographics is important because it is essential for a media literate person to understand what demographics they may fall into. If one could understand what demographic they fall into, they would be better equipped to recognize what marketing strategies are targeted toward them, and whether they are effective or not. Also, it would allow the person to understand when they are not being targeted and then they would be able to analyze whether the advertisement had an effect on them or not and why. One basic thing that a media literate viewer needs to understand is that everything in media is done purposefully.

In the case of demographics, everything in an advertisement is meant to reach a specific type of person. Say a fifty-five year old male saw a commercial for birth control. This person could have a few different reactions, namely boredom, aggravation, or apathy. The reason this person doesn't take well to the commercial is because it is not meant for him. The demographic that is being targeted would be women between the

ages of eighteen and forty, most likely. If this man were media literate, he would be able to recognize the targeted audience and the elements in the commercial that make it targeted to that audience. Some of these elements could be that there are all women, they use slang, they may be in the company of young people, the music may be of a younger generation, etc. These are all examples of how to define the demographic that is targeted in a commercial. However, commercials do not only target a group of people based on demographic alone, there are a few more elements that are also introduced. The next element is psychographics.

Psychographics

What is the difference between saying “hi” and “hey”? Some people may say “semantics”. If this difference is found in a mediated message, others may say it is all because of the psychographics of the targeted audience. While this example is very basic, both words can elicit a different response from the viewer and can set the tone for the rest of the commercial. One word is very casual and assumes the familiarity of a friend; the other is more distant and may often sound professional. Psychographic variables include personality, attitudes, interests or lifestyle of a targeted audience (Psychographics, par 1). These variables are also used to determine the intended audience and the content of a commercial.

Psychographics are used in advertising to help determine the actual message, as well as the placement. While demographics have a role in the placement, and message of the advertisement, they also are used to determine the audience. Psychographics is different because it includes demographics but goes further to identify a consumer'

personality and behavioral traits. There are different aspects of an advertisement that can be focused on the psychographic or demographic characteristics of the audience.

In order to better understand psychographics, it is important to understand what kinds of group people can be defined by. These groups help determine the type of people a target audience may consist of. The seven psychographic profiles are; belonger, achiever, emulator, socially conscious type A, socially conscious type B, balanced/totally integrated, and needs driven (Psychographics in Marketing, pars. 4-10). The following is a look at the seven profiles, and what kind of people can fall into the categories.

Almost forty percent of the United States population falls into the psychographic profile of a “belonger”, making it the largest profile. This person is one who enjoys being a part of a family and a community. They are likely to join an organization, and are very nationalistic. This group is also brand loyal and buys out of a personal relationship or a perceived relationship.

The group of “achiever” makes up about six percent of the United States population. This group thrives on both power and wealth. A person in this group does not want to belong to a group, and prefers to be an individual. This group will often buy the latest in technological advancements, and will try to impress their peers with what they can consume, but wants to do it quickly.

The group of people who can be seen as “emulators” consists of about fifteen percent of the United States population. This group attempts to be seen as an “achiever” but has neither the means nor self-esteem to become an achiever. Therefore, they attempt to look like one, in order to impress their peers who may still be fooled by the likeness.

Socially conscious type “A” group claims roughly twenty-five percent of the population, and socially conscious type B group has about seven percent. Both of these groups are concerned with their impact on society as a whole. What differentiates the two groups is; group A believes they can improve the world and that each person can work to make the world a better place, while group B believes there is no hope for the world, but they can improve things for themselves and the small group that agrees with them. An example of group A may be an environmentalist, while an example of group B would be a religious community in Texas; purposefully cutting itself off from the rest of the world.

The smallest group is the balanced/totally integrated group, almost two percent of the population. This group is essentially an “achiever” with a “social conscience”. This is a group of people who achieves at their endeavors, but attempts to do so without creating an expense for others. This group could be true philanthropists, who begin with a vision of helping others, or a repentant sinner who began without caring and later attempts to right whatever wrongs they may have committed on their uphill climb.

The last group, about fifteen percent of the population, is defined as “needs driven”. This group of people can be seen as the impulse buyer. This group of people does not put much planning into their purchases and enjoys showing the fact that they have money, when they do. A needs-driven person will see the idea of money as something that matters little and should be spent now, because it cannot be spent later.

Once a person is able to determine what psychographic group they could be categorized by, it is easier to understand what can motivate them. According to Kevin Hogan, there are three general motivation factors to why consumers buy; status,

experience, and principle. Principle-oriented people have a set of values that are ingrained into their actions and ways of thinking. A principle-oriented person is likely to make decisions based on what they think is right, and often in order to make a statement that shows their beliefs. This person will often value education and are not easily swayed in their decision making.

A status-oriented consumer is likely to buy something to impress others and show off their ability to buy. They will often buy to impress peers and improve or worsen their placement in society. This person is one who enjoys being a member of clubs and organizations, and will buy things that show their affiliation with them. This person also enjoys fitting into these organizations by appearance as well as in reality.

An experience-oriented person buys things because they want to take part in something. This is similar to, but not always an affiliation with an organization. This person generally buys things because it allows them to do something that is exciting, fun or challenging. They will buy to allow them the pleasure of an act, or to prevent the pain of doing something

It is important for the media literate person to be able to identify what motivates them and how they can be psychographically inclined because it gives them a better understanding of what kinds of advertisements appeal to them. When a person understands their personal motivations, they are able to recognize the techniques in advertising that appeal to those motivations. For example, if a person is an achiever who is status-oriented, they will be able to recognize when a “Lexus” commercial comes on and why they are attracted to it.

Some other examples could include commercials for products which no person has a real need for, but can be made to think they do, such as a *Taco Bell* commercial. Everyone needs to eat, but no one needs to eat *Taco Bell*, and the commercials are often entertaining to the point that a person will forget they only need sustenance and feel as though they need to eat *Taco Bell*. This is significant because often, the impulse buyers and status-oriented buyers are the ones targeted in commercials of this nature. This is important for media literacy because again, everything in media is done purposefully and the media literate viewer needs to be aware of all of the different techniques used. While these techniques can be formed based on the demographics and psychographics of the target audience, the behavior of the audience also factors into the decisions made.

Consumer Behavior

Many people think that television advertisements can influence consumer behavior to a point that a person has absolutely no control. This is a false idea, and it is one that makes media seem as though it has a life of its own. Studies have shown that, “while media exposure is substantial, the impact is not” (Neuman 79-96). The reason for this is that Americans tend to value things that are expensive and rare, and the use of television is not (Neuman 79-96). The study of consumer behavior is not used to show how media influences the behavior, but to determine any patterns in consumer behavior so advertisers have a better idea of how to reach the consumer and where they will be.

There is no simple equation to determine how to judge consumer behavior. However, it is an important part of advertising and the placement of commercials. The placement of an advertisement is crucial to its effectiveness. For example, it would be

perfectly understandable to place a commercial for Noxzema in the line-up for TGIF on Friday nights. This is because most of the people watching the show would be in a demographic that would make them likely to need to use Noxzema.

By studying this demographics' consumer behavior, the advertiser would probably be able to determine that this group of people will be watching the TGIF shows and would be likely to buy a brand like Noxzema, making this a good decision for a commercial in the stated time slot. However, it would not be so realistic to place this commercial during a show like *The O'Reilly Factor*. This is because the audience watching this show would be less likely to need the product, as their consumer behavior would be likely to show.

Consumer behavior is used mostly to determine the placement of advertisements. Due to the fact that media is a business, it is highly important for a company to make sure their advertisements are placed correctly and in front of the right audience. The reason it is so imperative to be placed in the correct time slot is the number of people who are viewing the commercial are what determines the cost of the commercial, the amount of time that it may take, and the amount of commercials to get placed during one show.

A study published by Michigan State University illustrated this further, “the audience size is the currency of advertising media” (Advertising Media, par. 3). This means, where the audience goes, the advertisers go. Therefore, it costs more money to advertise on a popular television show as opposed to a small, local newspaper. The business of advertising is so lucrative that there are large companies that specialize in the process of analyzing consumer behavior and instructing media buying and planning. This means that the company will be hired to determine a marketing strategy for a

business. This strategy is determined by all of the factors discussed above, as well as what times are available, the budget, the cost of production, and when the target audience will be available to view the advertisement.

The behavior of the consumer is what helps to determine most of the decisions made in the media buying and planning stage. Once a commercial has entered this stage, it would most likely have been developed creatively and decisions such as actors, scripts and design would have been made. The process of the advertisement is important for a media literate viewer to understand because it explains why some of the basic elements of the commercial are in place and why the commercial is appearing in the time slot it does. It is also important for the media literate viewer to be able to watch the commercial and be able to recognize the creative aspects of the advertisement that appeal to the viewer. Some of these elements have been highly debated, one such element is that of stereotyping.

Stereotypes

One of the main ways people are able to determine the characters and what they like about a program is from the impression they get in the first few seconds. The thing that allows a person to make such a decisive conclusion in such a short amount of time is the stereotypes used in the programming. The debate about stereotypes and their ethical ramifications has been one that continues today. Some see it as a positive way to socialize people on the actions and interactions of people they would not normally come into contact with. Journalism professor Tom Brislin of the University of Hawaii states, “While informing and entertaining, media are powerfully transmitting social values. (Day

387-410) Others view stereotyping in advertisements and on television as something that, “leaves little room for perceiving individual differences within a group” (Day 387-410).

Due to the fact that there may only be sixty seconds at the most in an electronic advertisement, one can understand the necessity of using stereotypes. The use of stereotypes in this case allows the director to move the story past the explanation of each character, and into a more interesting program. If every program or advertisement were expected to develop every character into multi-faceted, unique individuals, there would not be much time to get to a plot and many people would just not be interested. However, since the stereotyping of every kind of individual; from the ditzy blond, to the dumb jock, to the Mexican maid is taken so lightly and so completely by the audience, a large risk of discrimination and prejudice is accepted. The media literate individual is one who will be able to recognize when a stereotype is being portrayed and the real and fictionalized aspects of that stereotype.

With understanding that it is important to recognize a stereotype, the question remains as to what kind of clues are available to assist the media literate individual. As studied in basic methods of communication, some of the ways people communicate with each other include verbal, non-verbal, symbols, and language. These are all used in television commercials as well. However, since the average commercial is a mere 15-30 seconds long (How Long, par. 5), it is not a surprise that the advertisers use stereotypical symbols to get their message across. These symbols change depending on the target audience's demographics, psychographics, and consumer behavior.

There are three different kinds of symbols. These distinctions are not just in symbols on television or in advertising, but the categories are relied on in order for the viewer to understand the symbols used. The three kinds of symbols are; conventional, accidental, and universal (Communication, pars. 2-4). The audience and the intention determine which category is used.

The conventional symbol is one used in a specific industry or mathematics. These are symbols that can be recognizable to anyone, but will generally be more understood by those in the field the symbol is being used. An accidental symbol is one that comes by temporarily and connects one object or idea with another. This symbol could be recognizable by anyone, but may very well be accidental and last for the short time it is identified. A universal symbol is one that creates a relationship between the symbol and what it represents. This is often well known to the majority, and doesn't have to be questioned. For example, a drawing of a heart-shape is universal for love. Most people do not have to question the meaning of that symbol.

The way these symbols are used in stereotyping is quite fundamental. Generally, universal symbols are used, because the viewer does not have to question what is being said. In programming, these symbols go beyond the stereotypical character, to the format of the program, the production, and even the scripts. In advertising, because the characters do not get a chance to be as developed as in programming, stereotypes may be relied on even more. This deduction is easily reached based on the concept that, “the simpler the character or theme, the more likely it is to be stereotyped” (Holtzman 81-83). Most commercials on television are thirty seconds long, and most commercials on radio are now beginning to be either fifteen or thirty seconds long.

If an advertiser has only fifteen seconds to create an image of the brand, tap into a need or desire in the viewer, and give the viewer at least one reason to take action, it does not seem as though they will have much time to develop the characters into multi-dimensional, free-thinking individuals. Additionally, the viewer does not often expect any character development. It is important to be able to recognize the stereotypes being used, in order for the media literate individual to disarm the symbolism associated with that stereotype.

One of the main stereotypes in advertising is gender stereotypes. Within media, women are generally portrayed as concerned with relationships, they are often seen as thin and their appearance is noted more than with men (Holtzman 81-83). In advertisements, men are generally portrayed as able to work in more occupations; women are generally housewives or mothers. Also, women generally advertise for household products, and are shown in more domestic settings.

Men are shown as the authority, and gain authority with age. This is also carried over in radio. In a voice-over, that voice is seen as one of authority and it has been reported that up to 94% of radio voice-overs have been male voices (Television, pars. 13-14). While there are women voices used for voice-overs, they are mostly used for feminine care products and products for domestic use.

As a general rule, any way that a viewer can be categorized, demographically and psychographically, is also a way that a stereotype can be used in a commercial. Some other examples of stereotypes are; sexuality, age, socio-economic status, organizations/clubs, and even pet ownership. Media literacy understands the message, and the most important things in a message can go unsaid. These things are found in the

symbols and the stereotypes that are portrayed in the message. The media literate viewer must be aware of these symbols and stereotypes in order to disarm the power of the message and recognize that most of the situations portrayed in advertisements are highly unlikely to happen to the viewer. Even this simple concept is enough to empower the viewer into putting the advertisement in perspective.

Being able to recognize the stereotypes and symbols in an advertisement is the ability to actually see the images that the advertisement has placed on the screen or in the script. This small act is one of the easiest ways a person can become media literate, because they are remaining in a state of awareness when exposed to mediated messages. The ability to remain aware of messages allows a person to remain out of a state of automaticity, a state which is highly detrimental to the concept and practice of media literacy.

Automaticity and Triggers

It has been discussed previously that the media literate person is able to identify the principles of marketing, the target audience, and the ways messages are presented. However, what may be most important in becoming media literate is the ability to stay aware of what messages they encounter and to understand what triggers their attention. This is much more difficult than it may sound because it requires a person to resist the state of automaticity, and asks them to be able to analyze mediated messages at all times.

The state of automaticity is one that can be reached when participating in an activity that one has done many times and does not have to assign much effort to completing. For example, one can reach a state of automaticity when driving home from

work (Automaticity, par. 2). The experience of driving home and not remembering most of the drive derives from the state of automaticity that the driver reached, because they did not have to concentrate on every aspect of driving and navigating. While this can be dangerous in a drivers' safety aspect, this can also be dangerous in a media literate aspect as well. If the drive home took an hour, that person would have heard roughly fifteen minutes, though potentially even more due to the fact that evening drive time is the second biggest draw for advertising (Most Popular, par. 1).

In this example, if the person driving was able to drive home safely without fully concentrating on the act of driving, they also heard at least fifteen minutes of advertisements without concentrating on the messages in the advertisements. This state of automaticity allowed the driver to function but not analyze the messages they were exposed to. It has been established that it is imperative for the media literate individual to actively analyze mediated messages and to be fully aware of the messages they are encountering. Entering into a state of automaticity immediately takes the ability to analyze away from the listener, and makes them susceptible to the influence of the advertisers.

With the vast amount of advertising that every person is exposed to daily, it comes as no surprise that the act of listening to the radio or watching television has become second-nature and a person feels as though they can do these without navigating where they are going. Like driving home, watching advertisements on television has become an act that does not require much concentration. Therefore, it is easy for a person to enter the state of automaticity, and similarly easy for them to be revived from it.

It can be as easy as a word or sound or image and a person who is in the state of automaticity can be revived and alert to the message. The thing that draws a person from automaticity is called a “trigger” and is designed specifically to call attention to the advertisement. Most commercials are made with the knowledge that the general population will allow the advertisement to wash over them. Therefore, advertisers have created specific triggers that are meant to instantly attract the attention of a specific group of people, the target audience. While ever persons' trigger may be different, people in the same target audience will likely respond to the same triggers.

Often, commercials can seem annoying and frivolous, but the fact that a viewer is paying attention to that commercial shows that the trigger did its job. When a media literate person is torn from a state of automaticity, they would be able to identify the trigger, and recognize why it is a trigger for them. It is important for a person to be able to understand what triggers them because a trigger is likely to be something that the person considers important. If a person is able to understand what their triggers are, they will be able to disarm the message they are exposed to when they become aware of it. More importantly, a person who understands what triggers them will be better able to prevent themselves from entering a state of automaticity.

One of the biggest dangers of automaticity is that when a person is not paying attention to the mediated messages, they are still internalizing them, and cannot place the effect of the message. A person who does not realize the messages they internalize, no longer has control over their reaction to those messages. Therefore, if they are driven to act or think in a different way, they would have no knowledge of the fact that it was a mediated message that caused such a reaction. Media literacy requires a person to be in a

constant state of alertness and cognitive thinking. This is incredibly important so the person does not enter automaticity, and is further empowered to disengage from the message and understand it for what it is. If a media literate person were to slide into automaticity, they are then able to identify the triggers they responded to, as well as the possible reasons why they reverted to automaticity.

The point of most interest is that the media literate person knows what automaticity is and how to fight it, while the non-media literate person does not understand the concept of automaticity and believes that such a state is the natural way to experience media. Another aspect of media literacy that influences the advertisements a person is exposed to and also the message that is used in all forms of media programming and advertising, is the impact of consolidation and ownership.

Ownership

When discussing media literacy and the idea of understanding the messages, it is impossible to do so without identifying the people creating those messages. What is important to recognize is the incredible increase in consolidation of media ownership. Consolidation of media ownership means fewer companies own more newspapers, radio and television stations, and other forms of media. According to the Columbia Journalism Review, in 2006 there were approximately sixty companies that owned all of the major forms of media in the United States. These companies include Clear Channel Communications, Disney, Dow Jones and Company, General Electric, Cumulus, and more.

The six largest media companies in the world in order are; Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, News Corporation, and Vivendi Universal (Ultra, par. 1). The top three companies are ones that were successful in their own right and began to acquire more and more media companies, making them the largest players in the media world. To understand more completely what ownership in media really means, the following is a look into what the top company owns and how it has grown.

America Online and Time Warner merged in 2001 to become the biggest media company in the world. At the end of 2006, Time Warner reported a revenue increase of four percent which raised its revenue to over 44.2 billion dollars. The Time Warner Company has interests in many different avenues of media, all of which contribute to last years revenue increase. Its three largest revenue builders are the many cable and filmed entertainment companies, and networks that it owns. In regards to cable, Time Warner Cable is the main company that handles cable acquisitions. In 2006, after a few acquisitions and a few dispositions, Time Warner Cable managed roughly 13.4 million basic cable subscribers, 7.3 million digital video subscribers, 6.6 million residential high-speed subscribers, and 1.9 million Digital Phone subscribers (Time Warner, pars. 4-6).

Warner Brothers Entertainment and New Line Cinema are companies owned by Time Warner that deal in filmed entertainment. These companies are responsible for movies like *Superman Returns*, *Happy Feet*, and *The Departed* from 2007. These three films collectively earned over nine-hundred million dollars in the box office at the end of January 2007. Furthermore, Warner Home Video was ranked at number one for the sixth consecutive year in regards to home video sales.

Time Warner is highly invested in network television as well. Its top two networks are Turner Broadcasting and HBO. Additionally, in December 2006, Turner Broadcasting acquired “seven pay-television networks operating in Latin America for approximately \$235 million from Claxson Interactive Group, Inc.”(Time Warner, pars. 12-30). In 2007, HBO received three Golden Globe Awards, which tied it for the most Golden Globe awards of any television network that year. TNT ranked number one for the fourth consecutive year in the amount of adults it could deliver during the day time in 2006. Turner Broadcasting System is a network that owns *CNN*, *TCM*, and the *Cartoon Network*. HBO is a network that claims shows such as *Big Love*, *Sex and the City*, *Entourage*, and other successful programs, as well as *Cinemax*, a well-known movie channel (Time Warner, pars. 12-30).

Along with the previous mediums that Time Warner works with, it also owns twenty-four book brands including *Time Life Books*, thirty-five magazines including *Time* and *Fortune*, theme parks and *Warner Bros. Studio* stores in thirty countries, four sports teams, and *America Online* which claims over 27 million subscribers. This is all owned by just one company, and what was named were only the biggest producers of what the company owns.

There may not be an obvious reason for listing the holdings of one specific company, or in detailing the money that those holdings are capable of. However, when it comes to media literacy, there is absolutely no way a person can continue to advance their knowledge and capability of media literacy without acknowledging the growing consolidation and ownership of the various mediums. The issue at hand is quite daunting, the vast number of commercials a person can be exposed to in just a day, or

even an hour has been clearly defined. The media literate person can now recognize the number of advertisements they can be exposed to and is able to take it a step further into identifying more closely who is behind the message.

The idea of consolidation and ownership questions further into who is sending the message and what they may have to say. Each of these companies has an investment in creating a message to reach the consumer. Whether this is done by the advertisements that are placed in the magazine or during specific programming or by the advertisements they buy on other stations and through other mediums, will change with each situation. However, it is important to recognize that they are all driven by profit, and advertising is the major source of income in the business of media, and because of this fact, the idea of ownership goes hand-in-hand with the idea of censorship.

When any form of a mediated message is limited by the desires of a single entity such as a manager or an advertiser, or multiple entities such as a group of network affiliates or production managers, the message is being censored and this problem is growing with the growth of consolidation. The reality of censorship extends far beyond the rules and restrictions of the Federal Communications Commission, into the more substantial bottom-line of advertisers and investors.

Censorship

It has been established that the FCC has no ability to censor a program or event prior to the broadcast. However, there is still a force that is keeping the scandalous and provocative images from being displayed, and that force is the advertisers. The basic principles of marketing acknowledge that it is first and foremost a business. Therefore, it

only makes sense that the people who own the medium choose to use it in a way that promotes their business and discredits their competition. In the era of consolidation, it seems obvious that each company has so many different interests that it must use each to promote and prolong the other, while maintaining a positive and clean image for the parent company.

The idea of censorship understandably brings to mind images of the government tearing up a newspaper or cutting the signal to a broadcast. However, this form of censorship is one that some consider even more detrimental to the society-at-large, and one that may never cease to exist in a capitalistic market. This kind of censorship is driven by profit and image, on a corporate scale. Imagine a child playing with her friends. She begins to talk about how much she dislikes her sister and then about how much she thinks her parents are mean to her. Her parents are likely to take the child and tell her not to speak badly about any of the family members, especially to other people. The next time this child attempts to speak out against her family, her parents will probably take her out of the situation until she can learn not to do so. While this may be a somewhat elementary comparison, this is similar to the idea of censorship by media conglomerates and corporations.

According to David Croteau, there are a few different kinds of profit driven censorship; self-censorship, corporate censorship, conflicts of interest, and advertiser influence. Self-censorship is one of the hardest forms of censorship to identify because it is done on an individual basis and is usually the result of daily decisions made by a person in order to maintain their job. Self-censorship happens in the small decisions such as avoiding certain news stories, or changing the tone of one that may seem damaging to

the company. While there is not necessarily a memo sent out defining the kind of stories that should be avoided, or the interests of the company, the employees understand what it takes to keep their job and will try to write or publish stories that will allow them to do so. Due to its individual nature, self-censorship is extremely difficult to detect, however in one study over forty percent of journalists and media executives admitted to turning down stories or changing the tone due to potential damage to the company or out of interest of their job (Croteau 155-189).

The idea of self-censorship is very similar to that of corporate censorship because sometimes the fear of losing a job could be created by pressure from the corporate executives. When this happens, the form of censorship begins to change from self to corporate censorship. Corporate censorship generally occurs when the interests of the organization create conflict with the journalists' interests. While this form of censorship still happens within the organization, it is no longer a personal decision but one that is imposed by the executives and often creates dissent among those involved. These decisions are often caused by the financial interests of the company. The way these two forms of censorship is found in advertising is the decision regarding what advertisements to run, and on what channels. For example, the *Disney* Corporation owns quite a few companies and has financial interests in many aspects of media. If one of their companies had a bad year and was under quite a bit of scrutiny, *Disney* would likely try to keep advertising from that company's competition from its media, and it would want to keep any negative journalism or advertisements regarding the company out of its newspapers and media (Croteau 155-189).

Conflict-of-interest censorship encompasses the previous two but deals more with the idea that the people in the media want to put the business of media in good light. The result of this self-preservation is similar to that of self-censorship, though at an industry level. The industry will not be thrilled to publish stories and advertisements that put it in a negative light. Therefore, the most natural thing for an industry, which is fundamentally about the exchange of information, is to preserve itself and publicize itself in the best way possible, regardless of the types of stories that it feels it must ignore.

Advertiser influence is a form of censorship that can be rather intimidating when one realizes the impact of mediated messages and how much muscle one industry has on those messages. In regards to media literacy in advertisements, the advertiser influence is one that is most important of all the forces of influence over the message. The reason is, many people are unaware of the power that advertisers hold over every program and every message that is presented to the consumer. As stated before, the industry of media is first a business, and the advertisers are what supply the money. If a program is able to draw a large audience, then it will also draw many advertisers, thereby making a lot of money. When large amounts of money are at stake, media outlets become increasingly concerned about the strength and stability of the source of income. Therefore, when an advertiser tells a station not to air a program or report a story, it is generally difficult for the station to find a reason not to comply.

An example of this form of influence can be found with Chrysler Corporation (Hoynes, 2006). This company has presented a list of ideas to the media it advertises with, that explain the different types of stories or journalistic reports the advertiser would like to be aware of. One of the things that are listed is, if the general mood of the

newscast is sad with a lot of war and death in the stories, the company wants to be notified so they can move their commercial to a different time or day. This is an attempt on the advertisers' part to keep their name associated with only good things, so when a consumer sees the brand, they have a positive image. This is a form of image branding, but the techniques that are used in the form of the list can be quite disturbing.

With this example, the advertiser is made aware of most newscasts and programs, especially in times of war. While it is smart on their part to become aware of such topics in order to move their own advertisements, it can also be a way for them to request that some stories not be reported, or specific details of a story be omitted. This can happen if the advertiser or its financial interests are included in the story, but also if the advertisers' industry is shown in a bad light. In this case, and many like it, the advertiser has the final say in what is told to the consumer in regards to news and programming.

When one thinks of media literacy and advertising, it is generally limited to the thirty second commercial. However, due to consolidation and censorship, the strength of the advertiser is much larger and more intimidating. Due to the amount of money that is spent in advertising, it is critical for the media literate viewer to understand the idea of consolidation and censorship in order to fully appreciate the validity and depth of news stories and programs. As a general rule, if one looks at the advertisements on a station or during a program, one will be able to identify the target audience, and also the ideology of the station and its advertisers. All of these things can help a person understand the reason why decisions were made the way they were, from production to the time it is aired.

Production

In the previous examinations of stereotypes and marketing principles, it was established that the decisions made in advertisements are purposeful and aimed directly at the target market. Once the media literate viewer is able to identify the message, and unveil the people delivering the message, it is important for that person to then become aware of the process of producing an advertisement. This is important for media literacy because, once a person understands the abilities and the restrictions of a medium, the authority and mystery of advertisements and media will be removed.

In his book, Art Silverblatt identifies different production values that together, create an advertisement or program. The production values as outlined by Silverblatt are; editing, color, lighting, shape, scale, relative position, movement, point of view, angle, connotation, performance, and sound. While all of these elements are essential for production of any mediated message and the media literate person should be well-versed in them all, this instance will look specifically at editing, color, movement, and connotation. While it is recognized that not fully examining each of the previous elements is in fact a form of editing, so must the media literate person recognize that everything mediated has been edited. This process will be the first to be described.

As stated, editing occurs in everything mediated, as well as in the conversations two people can have with one another. The decision to tell one story over another is that person's form of editing, as well as the decisions made that are evident in advertisements and media. According to Silverblatt, there are a few key elements that describe the act of editing. These elements are; inclusion and omission, arrangement, and temporal and spatial inference.

Just as a friend may not share one story over another, stories and images can be included and omitted within an advertisement or program. In electronic media, these decisions are based largely on the time restriction of the radio and television medium. Electronic media attempts to sell something which is quite intangible, and that is time. The very real restrictions of time are that there are only twenty-four hours in a day, and even fewer hours during which there is a substantial size of an audience. This alone can be enough to force advertisers to omit quite a bit of information, as well as the pressure to create a need and sell a product, idea, or service.

With print, the restrictions of page size and number affect the editing process, but not as definitively as time does to electronic media. While a newspaper can expand its page numbers, and a magazine can add an insert, the costs and benefits of such changes may not always equal the benefits. Therefore, the size restrictions press on print media, in terms of editing, substantially. Editing decisions are made well before the production is exposed to the public, and are often made by very few people. In regards to advertising, some of the information that can be omitted could be anything from product details to contact information. There are some commercials that may not seem as though they have any point or congruency at all, and this was an editorial decision.

Another element of editing is the arrangement of information in an advertisement. "The arrangement of information makes a statement concerning the relative value of content" (Silverblatt 111-140). For this purpose, there is a reason why an advertisement about prescription drugs does not state the potential side-effects first. This advertiser will want the consumer to gain the perception that the positive effects of the drug and its ability to make a person's life more perfect are much more important than its potentially

harmful side-effects. In a commercial for *Wal-Mart* one will often see images of a store with smiling faces, an inviting atmosphere, and low prices, “Always”. The way this is edited shows the viewer that it is most important to have friendly staff, a welcoming atmosphere, as well as having low, competitive prices. The purpose of editing a *Wal-Mart* commercial in such a way is to trigger the attention of the audience that is looking only toward low prices, but to first establish that *Wal-Mart* is the friendliest place to find them.

The third form of editing is known as temporal and spatial inferences. This is especially important in editing because it demonstrates how the story is told. Most advertisements do not have a narrator telling the audience exactly everything that is happening, and what will happen next. Often, the “narrator” in an advertisement will give only outside information that the viewer cannot get from watching the action in the advertisement, such as side-effect information and time transitions. Temporal and spatial inferences occur when the editing shows a transition of time without necessarily saying, “The next day...” A temporal inference indicating a different day could be shown as a change in costume or a view of a house with the sun rising in the background. Similarly, a spatial inference could be showing that same house and then showing characters in a living room, the inference is that the characters are in a room inside the house that was shown (Silberblatt 111-140).

Other inferences that can be made through such editing can be the possible benefits of a product. For example, in an advertisement for a diet supplement, there would be a person standing in a bathing suit discussing how unhappy they were three weeks ago with their weight, then they would show an old pair of jeans, indicating those

were the jeans they used to wear. The inference is that this person wore those jeans just three weeks ago, next the audience is shown an image of the diet pills that presumably were the only thing that allowed this person to lose so much weight in such a short period of time. The significance of these types of inference is that an advertiser is able to make claims about the effectiveness of their product or service, without actually making a significant statement that they must prove. The concept of how much the message is handled and manipulated during the editing process is important for the media literate person to understand because it, like other aspects of media literacy, takes the mystery out of the mediated message, and allows the consumer to process the intentions as well as the inferences.

Another decision made during the production process is that of color. Color is incredibly important to mediated messages because of its visual power, and is so influential that even a slight change in a color shade could change its effect. According to Silverblatt, warm colors tend to evoke positive and secure feelings, cool colors make a person feel calm, and dead colors cause feelings of loneliness.

In every advertisement, the audience is asked to take action in some way, whether it is by shopping for their product, changing a frame of mind, or discussing a topic. The context in which colors are used will change the reactions of the audience as well as their perception of the action they may be called to. For example, the color green is generally associated with nature and natural elements, though in some contexts it can be construed as envy and greed. The same shade can be used in both of these situations and have completely opposite effects on the audience.

The third element of production is movement, which recognizes the fact that many people assume the events are real and tend to believe the messages without putting much thought into this or any of the elements previously discussed. Movement can convey many different meanings, depending on the type of movement and its direction. In both advertising and programming, movement is generally identified as occurring only in electronic media, but it can seemingly occur in print media as well. In print media, a picture of a person's back indicates they are walking away, while placing the person higher on the page can indicate an authority figure. Also, in radio the general sound of voices drifting away obviously indicates a person moving into the distance.

The importance of studying movement in media literacy is the psychological effect of movement on the audience. For example, in a car advertisement, often there will be a car driving down a country road. The advertiser must be careful to ensure that, if the car is shown driving from the left of the screen to the right, the next time it is shown it cannot enter the screen from the right. This movement would not be logical, and the audience would get a feeling of disorientation, thereby rendering the advertisement useless to the advertiser and a waste of money. The effects of movement in an advertisement are critical to media literacy because of their effects on the emotions and perceptions of viewers. Therefore, the media literate viewer must be able to recognize the psychological effects of movement alone in order to understand the broader picture of an advertised message.

Last, the final element of production to be discussed is connotation. There are two different elements to connotation, and they deal with the connotation of words and of images. In regards to connotation of words, the connotation is the meaning associated

with a word, not the definition of the word. Labeling groups or identifications are ways of connotation, and labels are found in stereotypes. Therefore, to understand the stereotype and the meaning behind why there is a specific stereotype used in that advertisement, it is important to understand connotation and the effects of labels. For example, in a *Victoria's Secret* advertisement, there are obvious examples of stereotyping beautiful women. However, all of the words that are used in this advertisement will be indicative that in order to be like these women, you must be “beautiful”, “sexy”, and able to afford expensive lingerie. *Victoria's Secret* is able to say that no person can possibly be seen as beautiful without wearing their product, from the clothes to the perfumes. This can all be found in the connotation, as well as the stereotypes, and it is important for the media literate person to be able to identify.

Connotative images can be an extension of a stereotype but it deals more with groups as a whole and general association with an entity. For example, connotations that are generally related to water are that it is refreshing, invigorating, and the idea of re-birth (Silverblatt 111-140). An example of connotative images in advertising can be as simple as a company that wants to associate itself with American principles and in order to do so they will display the American flag in an advertisement. In this advertisement, the company does not even need to mention the flag or the fact that they want to promote that image. It is done easily by one image of a flag, and the audience immediately has warm feelings of patriotism toward the company.

Like connotative words, connotative images are incredibly persuasive and the audience often has a gut reaction to the image or word, the media literate person is able to identify this reaction. The previous techniques are finding their ways onto the newest

medium, the Internet. Although the Internet became popular in the mid-1990's, its use as an advertising vessel is continually explored and its limits pushed. Marketing on the internet has followed an interesting pattern that does not necessarily mirror that of the mediums that have gone before it. Although the evolution of television seemed to replicate that of radio, the newer media of the Internet has created a shock-wave and it seems as though no one is positive how to respond.

New Media – Internet

The Internet and World Wide Web has become a method that most people use to connect with old friends, find information, and communicate with people from around the globe. While the Internet has been available since the 1990's, it has gone through various stages as advertisers discover how to send their message through the new medium. In the beginning of the Internet, “spam” and “pop-ups” were the norm, until users grew tired of the sheer number of advertisements in that form, and they were quickly taken care of in the form of pop-up blockers and spam protectors. Currently, search engines such as *Google* are growing in their popularity as well as profitability. *Google* uses an advertising agency known as “Adwords”.

This company sells space on the *Google* search page for advertisers to create their own advertisement and to appear on the page. The more times an advertisement is selected, the more money is paid to Adwords (Advertise, par. 3). Additionally, the more times an advertisement is selected, the higher chance it will have to appear on the first search page. The key in this type of advertising is to appear on the first page of a search because many people do not look onto the second, third, or thirtieth page that is found.

This is just one aspect of advertising on the Internet that has become successful, though because at this point there is no real definition to the restrictions of the Internet, new ways of advertising continue to be developed.

A few websites that have begun to be used increasingly for advertising a persons' website or professional information are those like "www.myspace.com". This website enables a person to create their own web page and allows other people to search and view the websites as they wish. Many people have begun to use this tool as an advertisement for their band, company, or service. Often, it will re-direct a person to another web-page in order to receive more information on the subject, but often there will be video/audio streaming on the *MySpace* account, and potentially links to purchase a product from the site.

Another form of advertising that tends to reflect the idea of appealing to an impulse buyer in a shopping mall are people who advertise on buying/selling websites such as *Ebay*. The advertiser knows that a person enters this website in order to purchase something; therefore they place their advertisements on the page in order to possibly influence the buyer to enter a second website and buy something from them. This is a technique that can be found in any shopping mall or grocery store, and the simple concept of an advertisement being placed in front of the buyer at the last moment is being transferred to the Internet.

While there are many new forms of advertising found on the Internet, it seems as though the tried-and-true techniques found outside the world of blogs and "www" are being used on the Internet to influence the consumer on a completely different level. The danger of this form of advertising is that the Internet is a rather intangible concept that

can easily seem as though it is not real. A person can see something they like on a website, enter a 16-digit credit card number and two weeks later a package appears at their home. While that is an exciting way to shop for some, it can be an enticing trap that others easily fall into.

The media literate person is required to understand and become well-versed in any form of new media because there could be endless possibilities to its capacity. In regards to the Internet, the media literate person must learn the forms of advertising on the new media in order to disarm the message that is there but also to anticipate ways advertisers may use the media to influence consumers in the future. The active state of analysis does not end with a mouse-click and cannot end only with the television. In order to continually identify new media and new techniques in advertising, a person has an increasing number of options for education.

Is media literacy taught?

It has been established that media literacy is imperative for every person to learn. The problem is many people feel as though they are already experts in the realm of media and advertising. These people believe that because they are media capable and have dealt with media and the newest advancements their whole life, that they understand its implications and its messages. However, media literacy is much more complicated than it seems and it is important for it to be taught at all levels. Below, is an examination of how media literacy is taught and at what levels a person can learn about media literacy.

To begin, there are a few projects currently underway that attempt to create a model that can be used to teach media literacy to children in schools. For the past three

years, the Alliance for a Media Literate America, AMLA, has partnered with Just Think and the Michael Cohen Group, MCG, to create a curriculum that teaches the impact of media arts education in middle schools. This project is being tested in two low-performing public middle schools in San Francisco, and is expected to be completed with results in the spring of 2007.

Another form of teaching media literacy is through the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, McREL. This organization has lesson plans and activities that can be used to teach media literacy to children in middle school through high school on its website. Some of the lesson plans include showing children a variety of media messages and giving them the opportunity to find out the people involved in creating that message. This is a successful way to teach media literacy because it allows the children to figuratively see the people behind the message and make it seem more real to them. This process takes the authority and magic in television and media away from the messenger and allows the children to empower themselves.

Carrie McLauren, a teacher at Berkeley Carroll High School in Brooklyn, New York developed a media literacy curriculum for twelfth grade students in 2003. This course is one of the more developed courses in media literacy below the college level that encourages the students to critically think about media and the messages. McLauren begins the first day of class by asking the students to name several of the trees and plants that are common to the local neighborhood. When the students are unable to do so, she presents a slide of brand logos and the students are able to identify almost all of them. Through this demonstration, McLauren is able to show the students how mediated they

already are, and how important it is to become media literate. The course goes on to discuss advertisements, censorship, ownership, history, and more.

Colleges and universities have a well-deserved reputation for leading the way in education and innovative thinking. Therefore, it is no surprise that media literacy is taught in many classes, whether it is called media literacy or not. While there are classes designed specifically to teach media literacy, Eastern Michigan University offers “Media Literacy” as an upper-level course for students in its Electronic Media and Film major, it is possible for a political science class to teach media literacy in the form of dissecting a political ad (College, pars. 4-6). Due to the fact that media literacy is strongly based in educating oneself, the concept of media literacy appears in many higher-education classes.

Another way media literacy is being taught is slightly more subtle, but has a more immediate impact on a specific type of consumer. National Sales Trainer Don Zavis holds sales training seminars for both Insurance Marketing Consultants and Insurance Agents. One of his sessions involves an examination of various mediated programs and the situations that are presented to the viewer.

In these training classes, he requires people to look beyond what is displayed in a mediated message, and asks them to really see what the message is actually saying. By doing this, he demonstrates to the participants, different aspects of influence in media and general advertising as well as programming. From there, he introduces the idea that much of mediated messages are based on emotions. He is supported by the idea that many people want to buy into a mediated message because it poses the possibility that another person’s life is in fact worse than theirs. Conversely, people may want to buy

into mediated messages because they believe that if they acted in the way people on the television screen or in the magazine act, they too can live such frivolous and lavish lifestyles.

Once Zavis has established some of the idiosyncrasies of mediated messages, he poses the question to his participants regarding how they can take the emotion-based and influential techniques of mediated messages and transform it into an over-the-phone or in-person insurance sale. This is an important aspect of teaching media literacy because it speaks to the possibility that even those who may be delivering a message could not truly be media literate and may not understand the impact of their message. The more media literate the messenger is, the more important it is for every consumer to be media literate. In the case of Don Zavis and local insurance agents, many insurance agents pay for some type of advertisement, often newspaper or radio. However, if this agent has attended a session with Don Zavis, or one similar to it, the agent is now able to definitively reach a specific audience and his/her company could grow exponentially simply because they took the time to understand the medium and a few influential techniques. While the impact of corporations are felt quite heavily in media, the impact of one local salesperson can be felt just as strongly if they have taken steps to become media literate.

Media literacy is something that is beginning to enter the curriculum of some classrooms. However, it is essential that it be taught on all levels, from elementary to professional because it is an ongoing educational requirement. Since every person is affected by media, it is imperative that every person have an understanding of their responsibility as a consumer and audience member, and that is done by working towards

media literacy. Another danger posed by not teaching media literacy is the view many people hold that they are experts at media, when in fact they have not even begun. This view is dangerous because a person who feels unaffected without truly understanding the industry could face the possibility of being influenced even more.

Conclusion

In the journey for media literacy, every person is at a different and unique stage. Through this examination, it is important to consider the fact that media and the industry of marketing is not a bad thing. The concept of media literacy is one that attempts to unveil the meanings behind mediated messages, not intimidate members of the audience out of media exposure. It is nearly impossible to completely ignore media and its messages, though it is possible to continue to be exposed to mediated messages and remain unaware of their effects on a person's emotional state and consumer behavior. Media is a vessel used for information and socialization, among many of the other things discussed in this research. Due to this fact, complete ignorance or apathy is incredibly dangerous for a person because they are essentially unaware of the cause of their actions and what influences their life.

To its core, media literacy is an educational tool that can be used by consumers and marketers alike in order to understand the messages and the purpose behind the messages. In order to become a better consumer, or to market oneself or a product more successfully, one must become media literate. In regards to advertising and the media literate experience, a person who is media literate and understands principles of media literacy and marketing is able to distinguish the facts of an advertisement over the purely

influential elements. Once they are able to do this, they can make a cognitive decision regarding their action, if any, as a result.

Media has undergone changes from a one-dimensional tool to a vehicle for communication and culture. Basic principles of marketing establish media as the vessel through which messages and information is expressed to the consumer by the advertiser, and the elements of production indicate the different techniques used in creating such advertisements. Knowledge structures continue to be built in regards to ones personal and general consumer research group they may fall into, while being able to recognize the validity and use of stereotypes. The person behind the message has been revealed as an editor, producer, consolidated company, or advertiser interested in protecting its image, all things that require the skills necessary to not only be able to effectively navigate the various mediums, but identify with the audience and speak to its needs.

Becoming media literate is not just understanding the concept of media, but the structure of one's culture and influences. The television was introduced to the majority in the 1950's and the Internet became most popular in the 1990's. Satellite radio, television, and digital technology quickly became the topic of conversation in the first decade of 2000. There is no telling where the influence of media will go, but one thing that is guaranteed is; consumers and advertisers will continue to have no power over the medium they use daily unless they learn how to become media literate, and practice it as one would practice medicine. This can only be done by understanding the perspective one holds while being actively exposed to the media as one interprets the messages received.

There is no doubt that the answer to concerns regarding media's power over the consumer and a companies power over the message can first be found in media literacy. Media literacy relies on information and a person's need to understand the world that surrounds them. Therefore, media literacy is not merely learning the concepts of marketing, but embracing media for what it is and how it can be utilized to convey a message. Media was originally intended as the property of the public. The only way for this to continue to ring true is for every person to actively become media literate and empower themselves, to be in control of their own actions and appreciate media for its capabilities, while embracing its flaws. As George Gerbner stated,

“If, as Aristotle said, 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' so, in today's life, the unexamined culture is not worth living in.”

Media is what drives and is emulated by the culture of today. The unexamined culture is not worth living in. Media literacy is an examination of mediated culture in its truest form. Therefore, if a person chooses not to become media literate, they also chose not to truly live in and appreciate the culture in which they could thrive. Much of this examination has questioned to the purpose of studying media literacy. However, the question can no longer be why, it must be; when. There is no point when a person can say they are one hundred percent media literate. Therefore, this ongoing process may begin here but can never end.

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