



Media Literacy: An Introduction

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The Influence of the Media

- The media has played a major role in positive developments like **fight against racism, gender bias, world poverty** etc.
- However, there is no denying that the media also tends to **exaggerate, sensationalise** and even **trivialise matters of utmost importance** for the sake of **political gains, entertainment** or the **profit margin**.
- This has resulted in the **unnecessary glorification of violence, beauty, a consumerist lifestyle** and other **unhealthy/warped perceptions of reality**.

What is Media Literacy?

- An **informed, critical understanding of the mass media** via a critical examination of the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in **media production**.
- Seeks to **empower individuals** and to transform their passive relationships with media into an **active, critical engagement** that is able to **challenge traditions and existing structures**.

Media Literacy

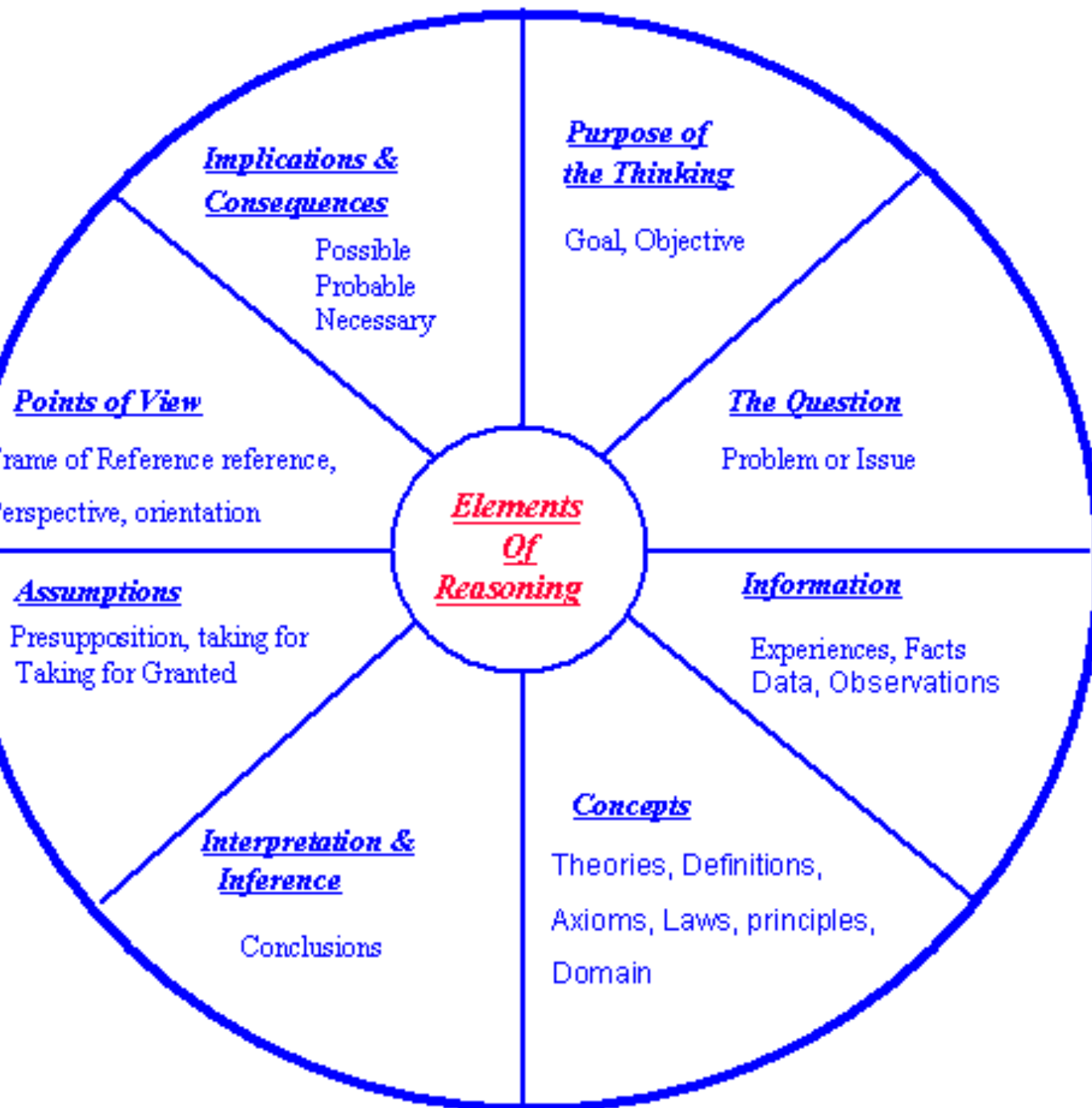
- A key step that leads to media empowerment.
- This involves **3 stages**:
 1. *Managing one's media diet*
 2. *Having skills of critical viewing*
 3. *The ability to engage in deep social, political and economic analysis*

Group Discussion

■ Spend **20 minutes** reading **ONE** of the Following Articles:

1. *“A Ready Channel for Lies & Half Truths”* (By Christopher Walker & Robert Ortung, ST, 25th April 2011)
2. *“Alternative Media: New era in ties?”* (by Cherian George, ST, June 2011)
3. *“US Style Media ‘could do great harm to Singapore’* (ST, 6 Nov 2010)
4. *“Educate Student about Politics, says Shanmugam”* (ST, 17 Dec 2009)
5. *“Gap in Multiracial Message”* (ST, 26 Nov 2011)
6. *“Two Racial incidents, Two Different Reactions”* (ST, 13 Oct 2012)
7. *“A Step Forward for Self-Regulation Online”* (ST, 13 Oct 2012)

- **What do you think are the key messages in each article?**
- **What is your critical response?**



**INTELLECTUAL
STANDARDS**
CLARITY
ACCURACY
PRECISION
RELEVANCE
DEPTH
BREADTH
LOGIC
SIGNIFICANCE
FAIRNESS

NOTE:
**These are non-linear
interrelationships that are
interdependent.**

Sample of Routine Questioning in the Critical Mind:

- *What is the most fundamental issue here?*
- *From what point of view should I approach this problem?*
- *Does it make sense to assume this?*
- *What can I infer from this data?*
- *What is the fundamental concept here?*
- *Is this information consistent with common logic?*
- *How do I check the accuracy of this information?*

8 Key Concepts for Media Literacy

1. Media are **carefully crafted constructions** that reflect **the decisions of the powerful and the privileged**
(State News Media can create an almost insurmountable obstacle for civil society and political opposition groups)
2. Media **construct social reality and our personal understanding** of the world
(it can construct a parallel reality for a population & deprive dissenters of a wider audience)
3. Audiences **negotiate meaning with the media** in accordance to individual factors/traits
e.g. personal needs/anxieties, family and cultural background etc.
4. Media **have commercial implications**
e.g. it is a profit-driven business that drives content, techniques and distribution.

8 Key Concepts for Media Literacy

5. Media are **ideological and ideologically-laden** – and seek to impose values and world-views.
6. Have **social and political implications** – informing us of national issues and global concerns.
7. **Form and Content** are associated with specific forms due to differential codification of reality.
8. Each medium has a **unique aesthetic form**

Key Concepts for Media Analysis

- **Purpose** – to inform, entertain or persuade?
- **Values** – implicit or explicit?
- **Representation** – affiliation/subject matter?
- **Codes, Conventions and Characteristics**
- **Production** – actors & purpose?
- **Interpretation** – knowledge, experiences, values?
- **Influence** – on attitudes, behaviour and values?
- **Control of resources** – positions of power
- **Scope** – Political, Social, Economic and Intellectual Domains.

Class Discussion

1. How would you define **New Media**?
2. How has the New Media **revolutionised the domain of Media Literacy**?
3. What are the **implications**?

Please Read:

- *“MPs going Cyber”* (The Straits Times, 4 Jan 2012)

“MPs going Cyber”

(The Straits Times, 4 Jan 2012)

- Of 90 MPs in Parliament, 87 have some form of social media presence.
- Skeptics: *“sometimes a veil is needed to preserve political charisma”* (Dr Marko Skoric of the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication & Information, 2012)
- **“Buzz”** – raw count of comments, “shares”, “likes” & “retweets”.
- **“Reach”** – calculation is based on the number of each MP’s Facebook friends and likes on their fan pages & Twitter followers.
- **Social media has the potential to encourage more active engagement in politics & community life.**

“MPs going Cyber”

(The Straits Times, 4 Jan 2012)

Key questions:

- 1. How wide is their reach on social media?*
- 2. How do they use social media?*
- 3. How do they engage?*
- 4. Who is the most effective & why?*

What works on social media?

1. An unassuming character
2. Personal (non-corporate)
3. Sharing what is necessary (information about SG & not his lunch)
4. Being genuinely interested in the people's views.

“FB aims to influence users’ taste”

(The Straits Times, 24 Sept 2011)

- FB aims to be a **force that shapes what you want to watch, hear, read & buy** i.e. a force that defines your online & offline life.
- FB has a **treasure trove of social data** (of 800 million users’ habits & desires) which can be used **to sell more fine-tuned advertising & leverage peer-pressure on a grand-scale.**
- It aims to become omnipresent on the web by **adding commerce, video/games & mail** to their early successes with news feeds & picture tagging.

New Media

- A broad term that encompasses the **amalgamation of traditional media** such as film, images, music with the interactive power of the computer and communications technology and internet enabled consumer devices.
- **Wikipedia** is a good example of the New Media phenomenon combining internet accessible digital text, images, video with weblinks, the creative participation of contributors, interactive user feedback and the formation of a community.
- The key features are **manipulability, interactivity** and **the formation of an accessible network**.

Implications of the New Media

The New Media:

1. Signals a potentially **radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources.**
2. Involves the evolution of a **universal interconnected network of audio, video and electronic text communications** that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between private and public communication.
3. Replaces the “**one-to-many**” model of traditional mass communication to a “**many-to-many**” web of **communication** – as **any individual** with the appropriate technology can now produce online media and include multimodal images, texts and sound.

Implications of the New Media

It will:

1. Alter the meaning of geographic distance
 2. Exponentially increase the volume of communication
 3. Radically increase the speed of information exchange
 4. Provide opportunities for interactive communication.
- It provides the potential for a post-modern public sphere in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to policies and their social structures.

Some Caveats

- **Tensions within the concept of the “public sphere”** when public communication becomes restructured and removed from national political and cultural institutions.
- **Virtual Communities** result in a loss in the quality of real human engagement – where we transfer our souls into a soulless machine i.e. **the use of online portals to exchange pleasantries, argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, brainstorm, make plans, gossip, feud, fall in love.**
- **Unequal access** can lead to discrimination/ oppression and be a hindrance to broad-based movements.

New Media as a Tool for Social Change

- Used by **social movements** to educate, organise, share cultural products, communicate, build coalitions etc.
- This is due to its **high degree of interactivity** - evolving from the rapid dissemination of information through an internet access point, the digitalisation of the media and media convergence
- Note that it is **constantly modified and redefined** by the interaction between the creative use of the masses, emerging technology and cultural changes etc.

The New Media Industry

- Shares an open association with many market segments:
 1. **Software/Video-Game Design**
 2. **The Arts** – Literature, Film, TV
 3. **Advertising and Marketing** (many large agencies now run multi-million dollar interactive advertising subsidiaries & interactive PR Practices).
- These market segments aim to tap on the advantage of a 2-way dialogue with consumers primarily through the internet.

The New Media Industry: **A Caveat**

- Although **Social Media** have been a **critical tool for creating political openings**, opposition groups need **national outlets** for **durable, institutional reforms** to take place in societies that have endured manipulation and repression.
- Transforming **politically dominated television and radio networks** into more transparent and democratic institutions is a long and arduous process – as the **vast majority of citizens in authoritarian nations** continue to **consume a twisted version of reality** through **the looking glass of state-controlled media**.