

Key Concepts of Media Literacy



1. All media are constructions of reality.

Material that is presented in the media is a representation of reality. Although the finished products we see appear natural, they are in fact, carefully constructed. The final product we see is based on numerous and careful decisions that have occurred well before the product is presented to the public. The success of a product lies in its apparent naturalness.

2. All media constructions involve the use of forms, conventions, and codes (symbols).

Meaning is conveyed not only through words, but other forms as well. Camera angles, music, colour, sound effects, lighting, costumes, and set design are all used by media to create meaning and effect.

3. Mass media industries do not exist merely to entertain; they are meant to generate billions of dollars in revenue.

Media production is a business and must make a profit. Companies pay massive sums for advertising space or time when they can be assured a large chunk of their target audience is paying attention. This advertising happens both obviously (through commercials, advertisements, billboards, etc.), and less than obviously (a tactic called "product placement" in which advertisers pay to have their product used in a medium). A relatively small number of individuals control what we watch, read and hear in the media. Media literacy aims to encourage an awareness of how the media are influenced by commercial considerations, and how these affect content, technique and distribution.

4. Mass media contain beliefs, values, and messages which affect how we live and how we view the world around us.

All media products proclaim values and ways of life. Explicitly (obviously, directly stated) or implicitly (implied, indirectly stated), the mainstream media convey ideological messages about such issues as the nature of the good life, the virtue of consumerism, the role of women, the acceptance of authority, and unquestioning patriotism.

5. The audience negotiates (works out, comes to its own) meaning when viewing media.

The media provides us with much of the material upon which we build our picture of reality, and we all negotiate meaning according to individual factors: personal needs and anxieties, the pleasure or troubles of the day, racial and sexual attitudes, family and cultural background, and so forth.

Constructing emotional appeal

Once advertisers have chosen their target markets, they have eight main elements or ingredients to use for constructing an ad that speaks to the heart. These eight elements are:

models, setting, copy, sound, story, colour, point of view, and details.

Although every individual responds to an ad in his or her own way, based on his or her experiences and attitudes, advertisers carefully build each ad to create a specific emotional appeal. Through research and experience, advertisers can predict fairly accurately how large groups of people will respond to a campaign.

The elements of an emotional appeal in advertising

Models : people, animals, animated characters

Setting : the place, décor, time of day, era, lighting, natural or artificial surroundings

Copy : words – whether written or spoken

Sound : voices, music, natural noises, special effects

Story : what is happening in the ad – ads tell a story much like a sitcom or comic strip

Colour : bright and cheerful, warm and comforting, cool and professional – every colour suggests a mood or tone

point of view : close up, long shot, looking up or down, looking in or out, sharing a person's perspective

details : clothing, jewellery, price tags – nothing, no matter how small, is included by accident