

Reappraisal in Critical Media Literacy: A Reply to Kellner & Share

Yezi Zeng

University of Toronto, Canada

Abstract

Kellner & Share has pointed out in *Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy about how media as informal learning affected people's life.* Since informal learning usually occurs from activities of daily living related to work, family, or leisure, it is not structured in terms of learning goals, learning time, or learning support. Thus, individuals are hard to aware that media are unintentionally educating them. The power of such informal learning can shape one's views and influence their sense of identity. In the current information technology environment, media plays an enormous role in everyone's life, and we are all involved in this process. In this paper, I would like to reappraisal my viewpoints as a response to Kellner & Share.

Keywords

Media Literacy; Cultural studies; Critical thought.

1. Introduction

To start, the theme of *Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy* is to appeal to American education to focus on cultivating students' critical media literacy in order to enhance their judgment on media materials and to help students express their voice in the face of injustice, as well as to create a better social environment. On the one hand, resisting media manipulation is an important means to promote students to gradually develop critical media literacy. If one sees the media information and accepts all without thinking, it will cause serious consequences because all media information is "constructed", which resulting voices from the women, the elderly, the poor, the sick, and the inability are becoming harder to be heard, and their interests are becoming harder to be protected. On the other hand, due to teaching, critical media literacy should be a participatory and collaborative project, using media materials in a more motivated and constructive way is necessary to create a better social environment. It is of great importance to guide students to share their own views and to explore solutions forward to core issues that people and society are actively concerned about based on the criticizing of existing media materials.

2. Media Cultural Invasion

The word "media culture" indicates that the media has colonized the culture in some parts of our life, and it has become the basic carrier for the distribution and dissemination of culture in the era of technological revolution. Individuals have exposed themselves into different channels of media cultures, and in this process, they are easily to be oriented by its strong guiding ability without rational judgement, and media literacy can be classified into different levels, it directly affects whether individuals can treat the media rationally and effectively identify the values and political views implied in media information. Thus, media literacy is arguably more important at this time than ever, the media literacy education should be applied to every individual in the society. It mainly emphasizes that media culture affects individuals invisibly through the continuous development of new technologies and applications, the media culture has infiltrate into all fields of our daily life with its unique advantage, it has changed individuals' thinking

modes as well as the behavior modes silently. To defeat the invasion of some undesirable media culture, critical media literacy is our vital weapon in facing the shock of the media culture, and cultivating students' critical pedagogy in media education is imminent.

Perhaps if I knew how to deconstruct and challenge media around me, I could have learned to reject narratives of my identity as exoticized or tokenized, and perhaps if our education system actively taught critical media, we would see a greater rejection of sexist archetypes. While recent social media movements, and adoption of 'woke' mentality by corporations, businesses, media and pop culture are a clear sign of some sort of progress, it is questionable whether or not these 'steps in the right direction' are genuine, or if they are simply the results of virtue signaling (Kanai & Gill, 2020). Regardless this issue is nowhere near solved as body dysmorphia, eating disorders, suicide and depression are rampant amongst young teenage girls and have been directly correlated to pop culture influences, media and apps such as Instagram and Tiktok (Turner & Lefevre, 2017; Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). By preparing children at a young age to practice awareness, critical thinking, and self-reflection, as well as teach them to decode multiple meanings and question media content around them and in cyberspaces, we can heighten their resistance to media manipulation and guide them in fostering a productive and constructive relationship with media instead (Kellner & Share, 2005).

In responding Sandra Harding's suggestion that "we begin our attempt to perceive and understand phenomena from the standpoint of marginalized groups in order to gain multiple perspectives on issues and phenomena that appear as common sense" (Kellner & Share, p.371) at the earlier stage of culture literacy cultivation. The media culture nowadays gradually converge to form a diversified multicultural education, and the boundary between the edge and the core of social contradictions and issues is blurring and weakening. What's more, the media is a double-edged sword. The flood of fragmented information and the various media content pleases people, but they can unintentionally distort people's perception and understanding of the world. Media content can lead people to disregard social phenomena such as discrimination and social inequality. Although people can receive various opinions and information while reaching the Internet, not everyone can distinguish the authenticity of media content and critically think about each topic. It is precisely because the process and results of such informal learning are too invisible, therefore people often neglect the cultivation and education of media literacy.

3. Critical Response to Media Literacy

In one point, media culture has empowered every individual to be motivated and competent participants in social life; and to keep the empowering expression of voice and democratic transformation, critical autonomy is necessary. In other words, "key part of the reflective literature around the growth of Media Studies and Culture Studies does of course focus around the extent to which the subject-discipline can remain radical, critical or indeed political (in any sense of the word)." (J. Green, p.57)

On the other hand, it was more about building the awareness of how media can construct meaning and how the algorithm of social media will make people receive the information it wants you to receive and ultimately achieve the effect of controlling users' minds. Learning cyberliteracy was an intriguing experience for me. Media literacy class makes people pay close attention to their daily use of media and be aware of how media might consume people while people are consuming them. Further, media literacy has become more and more critical in the digital age. The way media are unintentionally influencing the public can lead to negative perceived social norms.

With the vigorous development of Internet technology all over the world, there is a trend that most people are surrounded by more and more complex media information every day. When it

comes to students, it is necessary for the school to cultivate their critical media literacy due to it that they do not have enough social experience to properly face this complicated information. To some extent, students, living in the information age, should correctly view media materials from a diversified perspective. In addition to the voices of the mainstream media, we will find that different regions, different ages, and different organizations will express different views on the same matter from different positions. For example, Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou recently returned to China after being detained in Canada for more than 1,000 days. The Chinese media message was that because of the country strength of China, the United States and Canada had released the innocent Meng Wanzhou unconditionally. The message from the United States and other Western media was that the U.S. Department of Justice allowed releasing people and reserved the right to pursue the crimes of Meng Wanzhou because Huawei and the U.S. government reached an agreement. Different views exist on hot incidents, include Trump's defeat, the tracing of the source of COVID-19 pneumonia, and the Taliban situation in Afghanistan. How to maintain independent thinking ability in the face of this media information, we need to teach the students to train both independent and interdependent critical thinking to break the dependence on the media utilizing critical media literacy.

In addition, media literacy not only requires individuals equipping with the critical judgement of information, but also encourage them to use the media as modes of self-expression and social activism. The critical media literacy can be interpreted as a way to enable individuals to recognize the various characteristics of cultural products. There are many aspects of it, different ones pays attention to the specific features of the object from a special angle: focusing on or clarifying some features of a text from a specific angle while ignoring others. It is the analysis of narrative structure, language, image, semiotics system, the interpretation of audience goals and the evaluation of certainty and feasibility of information. Therefore, the method of multiple perspectives will provide a warehouse of critical weapons and a series of perspectives of anatomy, interpretation and criticism of cultural products. To reaffirm, "critical media literacy offers the tools and framework to help students become subjects in the process of deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society." (Kellner & Share, p.382) In China, self-media producers and internet celebrities seem to be the most popular and desired professions by young people. I once asked the students in my class about their future career plans when I was a teaching assistant, and I found that most of the girls aspired to be a blogger or a web-celebrity, and the reason they told me was simple, because they only need to buy things to share with everyone every day. Their answers are very different from our answers when we were kids. I remember when my teacher asked us this question when I was a kid, most of the answers were doctors, lawyers, teachers, and the like. This shows that one-sided media messages are undoubtedly misleading teenagers today.

Cultures appreciated by the most people of the society are mainstream cultures, which are advocated and have a major impact. However, those cultures that are not in the dominant position are subcultures, only certain community members share such cultures. Subcultures seem to be oppressed by the powerful mainstream cultures, but they are bonded closely and at some point, some subcultures may convert into mainstream cultures surprisingly by means of media literacy. More and more TV series and films include more multicultural characters that audiences would find resonated with. For example, there are 8 main characters in the Netflix show called *Sense 8*, each one of them is unique, Sun is from Korea, Lito is a Mexican movie star who's out as a gay man, Nomi is a transgender lesbian, Kala is an Indian scientist...despite their different cultural backgrounds in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social class, they connect to each other spiritually in a harmonious way, they can not only share mutual emotions and thoughts, but also language skills in the setting of the series. The show brings subcultures on screen to gain more publicity, on the one hand, the viewers who identify as a part of those cultural representations enhance their own self-image identification, on the other hand, those

who share mainstream cultures would have a better understanding of such subcultural communities than diminish the conflicts caused by lack of awareness towards subcultures. The positive images of subcultures on the show also send messages that suggest more multiple and pluralistic representations of social identity in streaming media programmes.

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, media culture is an indispensable part of people's life, work, and study. We are constantly and unconsciously influenced and educated by the different messages and values through various media every day. I believe that the real point of media culture is to contribute positively to education, not to increase prejudice and stereotypes. Therefore, we need to develop critical media literacy, analyze media content rationally, and reduce misinformation and perceptions. Furthermore, we can learn the different values related to race, gender, and classes through media culture, and solve social problems to achieve social justice. Furthermore, cultural studies empower individuals to reflect on themselves by thinking critically, individuals are expected to use forms of media to shape their own ideas within cultural, historical, logical contexts. Media literacy makes it possible for people to develop cultural studies, teaching critical media literacy is helpful to reduce discrimination and misunderstandings towards those subcultural community members, thus to contribute to equality in the world.

References

- [1] ChallengingMedia. (2006, October 4). Representation & the media: Featuring Stuart Hall [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTzMsPqssOY>
- [2] A. Kanai & R. Gill, :Woke? Affect, Neoliberalism, Marginalised Identities and Consume Culture. *New Formations*, Vol.102 (2020) No.102, p.10-27.
- [3] D. Kellner & J. Share, (2005): Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies In The Cultural Politics Of Education*, Vol.26 (2005) No.3, p.369-386.
- [4] Luxton, D. D., PhD., June, J. D., B.A., & Fairall, J. M., B.S. Social media and suicide: A public health perspective. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol.102 (2012) p.195-200.
- [5] J. Sefton-Green: Cultural Studies and Education: Reflecting on differences, impacts, effects and change. *Cultural Studies*, Vol.25 (2011) Nov.1, p.55-70.