

Media Literacy in the Era of Convergence

Itam, Barnabas Clement

Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Calabar- Nigeria
Email: barnabasc9@gmail.com
Telephone: +234 806 3519 463

&

Nnodim, Euphemia Osinakachukwu

Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Calabar-Nigeria
Email: euphivyfiles@yahoo.com
Telephone: +234 7034698262

&

Margaret Funmilayo Adie

University of Calabar
raimifunmi2@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of literacy has been changed from an individual transformation of learning how to read and write, to the social transformation of becoming a media-literate audience. Especially in an era, when the convergence of media is shaping a new form of meaning-making process, media literacy skills are essential. Convergence of media is leading to need of facilitating multi-literacy in media education for creating a collaborative teaching-learning environment and a more responsible usage of media. This paper clarifies the concept of media literacy from the etymological foundations and theories that shape the perspective of the concept. It adopts a critical discourse approach and argues that though media literacy has been defined differently in different ages according to peculiarities of the times, it can no longer be defined as such in this era of convergence due to the presence of digital technologies, hence, acquiring critical media literacy skills helps the media producers and consumers in achieving autonomy in understanding and creating the meaning of experiences, accommodating differences in ideas and opinions in the age of convergence. The paper also emphasized the need for a multimodal curriculum of media education for developing critical media literacy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Literacy, Media literacy, Convergence and postmodernism.

Introduction

The ongoing media revolution has brought in a situation in which an average human being is subject to thousands of media messages every moment of one's life and majority of them with hardly any relevance at all. In such circumstances of being bombarded with information in the form of news, entertainment, infotainment etc. human beings need to confront a serious question. That is, how do we sift through such a sea of information or messages of all imaginable kinds and decide to take cognizance of only those which one may feel is relevant for his or her life at all.

The term 'media literacy' as popularized by John Culkin in 1964, has a very significant role in the 21st century's knowledge society in which it fosters development of a vigorous public sphere. It is the holistic approach to utilize media as the fourth pillar of an informed democratic country like Nigeria.

However, in an era when information has become packaged commodities, media literacy helps to develop the skills to protect from the harmful effect of media content in the society. The media and culture theorists of communication research argue that media can influence the accessibility and quality of information we use in our day-to-day life while interacting with the social world. In such a situation it is important to inculcate the cognitive skills to improve our control over media in creating meaning.

Also, since the inception of mass communication, there had been growing concern on effects of the mass media on individuals and society. The mass society theorists are of the assumptions that the media are a powerful force, capable of subverting the social order, norms and values of the society; directly influence the mind of average people and transform their views; ruin individual lives and create social problems (Baran & Davis, 2012, p.66). With the continuous growth of technology, and the complexities of communication and culture, understanding the media, their roles and effects on the audiences, and their relationship with other institutions becomes important.

In considering the importance of media education, Buckingham (2003, p.5) holds that "The media are major industries, generating profit and employment; they provide us with most of our information about the political process; and they offer us ideas, images and representations (both factual and fictional) that inevitably shape our view of reality. The media are undoubtedly the major contemporary means of cultural expression and communication: to become an active participant in public life necessarily involves making use of the modern media. The media, it is often argued, have now taken the place of the family, the church and the school as the major socializing influence in contemporary society."

In view of this assertion, how much audiences, who are the concern of media scholars in the society, understand media content and use the same becomes crucial.

Theoretical Foundation

This work is anchored on technological determination theory. Technological determinism as a term was first used by Innis (1950) before McLuhan (1964) elaborated on it and built a theory out of it. The theory states that media technologies shape how we as

individuals in a society think, feel, act and how a society operates as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal –literate -print -electronic). Griffin (2000) elaborates McLuhan's theory of 1964 that we learn, feel and think the way we do because of the message we receive through the current technology that is available.

McLuhan (1964) explains that the radio required us to only listen and develop our sense of hearing. On the other hand, television engages both our hearing and visual senses. We then transfer those developed senses into our everyday lives and we want to use them again. With the development of technology, the profession of journalism after test running the effects of latest medium then explores its potentials to reach the audience. Today internet is the latest through which journalism thrives (McQuail, 2005).

Uses and Gratification Theory

Proposed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler in 1974, the uses and gratification theory assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media contents. Rather, the audience has power over what is consumed and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives.

Folarin (1998, p.65), posits that this theory perceives the recipient as actively influencing the effect process, since he selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his or her needs, beliefs, etc. The focus is thus shifted from media production and transmission functions to the media consumption function. The basic assumptions of the theory are:

1. An individual has some needs related to communication;
2. He or she selects the media that appears likely to satisfy those needs;
3. He or she selectively consumes the contents;
4. An effect will occur.

In the context of media literacy, for the audience to control the effect of media messages in the era of convergence where a lot of information is projected to, and competing for the attention of the same audience; there is need for adequate development of skills to foster selectivity and consumption of media contents. This also implies that an average media user must be well equipped to be able to determine or judge between what is satisfactory and beneficial to him or her, as well as what is not. Here, gratification is achieved based on the ability of the individual to manipulate various media platforms that satisfy his communication needs.

Methodology

This paper is a critical discourse on media literacy in the age of convergence. According to Dijk (2006, p.252), critical discourse analysis is primarily interested in and motivated by the endeavour to understand pressing social issues. Wodak and Mayer (2009, p.7) argue that critical discourse analysis emphasises the need for interdisciplinary work in order to gain a proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge in organising social institutions. Rogers et al (2005, p.368) state that critical theories are generally concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, race, class, gender,

religion, education, and sexual orientation construct, reproduce or transform social systems. The Human subjects use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations in the labour of everyday life while at the same time, texts position and construct individuals, making available various meanings, ideas and versions of the world (Lucke 1996. P.12).

A Conceptual Clarification of Media Literacy

The concept of literacy has been changing its focus from the micro level to a macro level of understanding with the changing time and technologies. The old school of thought emphasized on the individual transformation through learning to read and write while in the 21st century, the concept of literacy has broadened its sphere emphasizing on it as a social transformation. Especially, when collective intelligence has been becoming a common phenomenon in a network society, literacy is no more only an individual occurrence but an outcome of socio-cultural interaction in a participatory form (Borua & Abhijit, 2017, p. 2).

Although the word “literacy” in its simplest sense means “one’s ability to read and write”, media literacy goes beyond the mere “ability to read and write” media messages; to include the acquisition and application of critical and analytical understanding of the media, their operations and relationship with other social institutions (Adum et al, 2015, p.2). It is the consciousness of a mediated environment and consumption of mass communication messages by an individual as well as his or her ability to responsibly comprehend, access, select and use the media in his personal and professional life.

Potter (2010, p.22) posits that media literacy is the skillful collection, interpretation, testing and application of information regardless of medium or presentation for some purposeful action. Silverblatt and Eliceiri (1997, p.48), add that it is “a critical thinking skill that enables audiences to decipher the information that they receive through the channels of mass communication and empowers them to develop independent judgments about media content”. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), USA, sees media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms”. Here, the term “access” refers to both physical accesses to media and to the content of the media while “ability” implies both cognitive and practical skills in using media. A number of perceptions have been deduced from the numerous definitions of media literacy.

According to Baran and Davis (2012, p.414), the media literacy movement is based on various perceptions as follows:

- 1) The audience members though really active, are not necessarily knowledgeable of what they do with media.
- 2) Access to media and media content affect the audience’s needs, chances, and choices.
- 3) Media content can directly and indirectly provide a guide for action.
- 4) It is essential that people realistically assess how their interaction with media messages can influence the purposes that interaction can serve them in their environment.

- 5) People's use of media and the gratification derived from them are determined by the differing levels of "cognitive processing ability" of the audience members.

Hobbs also opines that "most conceptualizations of media literacy now involve a type of 'critical' literacy based on reflection, analysis, and evaluation, not only of the content and structural elements of specific media texts but of the social, economic, political, and historical contexts in which messages are created, disseminated, and used by audiences" (Hobbs, 2005, p. 866).

In a monograph published by UNESCO, media literacy is defined as:

The process of assimilating and using the codes involved in the contemporary media system as well as the operative skills needed to properly use the technological systems on which these codes are based [and as] the capacity to access, analyze and evaluate the power of the images, sounds, and messages with which we are faced every day and which play an important role in contemporary culture. It includes the individual capacity to communicate using the media competently. Media literacy concerns all media, including television, film, radio, and recorded music, the press, the Internet, and any other digital communication technology. . . . They share the idea that media literacy is a basic skill, one that supports many others and that it therefore should not solely be taught as a specific field of knowledge, nor simply as a skill, nor as a collective practice (Kamera, 2013).

Media Literacy Schools of Thought

To further understand the concept of media literacy, it is pertinent to consider scholarly thinking or schools of thought on the subject matter. The media literacy field is separated into two dominant schools of thought: protectionist and empowerment. Contemporary protectionist theory is founded on the work of British media scholar David Buckingham (1998). Protectionists define media literacy largely in line with the leading authority in the protectionist media education: James Potter. Potter is considered a leading authority in the field of protectionist media literacy and his textbook, *Media Literacy*, originally published in 1998, is in its 7th edition with an 8th edition released in 2016. Potter has also written textbooks on *Media Effects*, and *On Media Violence*. Potter's research focuses heavily upon media effects, and media violence. In *Media Literacy*, Potter defines it as "a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter." He further described how perspectives are built from knowledge structures which can be built given one has tools (our skills), raw material ("information from the media"), and willingness (which "comes from our personal locus") (p.25). In an interview conducted in 2011 with The Center for Media Literacy, Potter states that "over the past few years, the phenomenon that we are studying is growing so fast and changing so much... we need to have more closure and conversation amongst scholars and more of a clustering of certain ideas in order to get the field a profile and a better definition."

On the other hand, the empowerment perspective defines “media literacy” differently from Potter and the protectionist school of thought. The empowerment school of thought, as articulated by Henry Jenkins et. al. in 2009 and paraphrased by Renee Hobbs in 2011, is less vague:

Generated by the rise of social media and other digital tools that enable anyone to be an author, there is an explosion of interest in media literacy as a tool for empowerment. Emerging theoretically from constructivist learning theory and articulated in the work of visual literacy specialists, media educators, and youth development professionals, this approach to media literacy emphasizes young people as capable, resilient and active in their choices as both media consumers and as creative producers. It values and celebrates the pleasure that children and young people experience as media consumers and as media makers (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Empowerment scholars define media literacy largely in line with the National Association for Media Literacy Education or NAMLE as earlier stated. Meanwhile, David Buckingham in his 1998 article *Media Education in the UK: Moving Beyond Protectionism* states:

The view of children as passive victims of media effects has steadily been challenged and surpassed. This is not, of course, to say that the media have no effects on children, or that there are not areas they need to know more about. Teaching children about the media - enabling them to analyse how media texts are constructed, and to understand the economic functions of the media industries - is seen as a way of empowering them to resist such influences (Buckingham, 1998).

The current shift in educational paradigms is in line with Dewey’s observation that change must engage an experimental attitude to handle large-scale social change. Dewey witnessed the end of an economy dominated by agrarian considerations, and the rise of urban/industrial economies in the United States. This economic shift demanded a change in educational models of the era. Indeed, Dewey’s philosophical work in education laid the groundwork for the creation of a civically engaged set of literate citizens for the 20th century. He notes that, “the obvious fact is that our social life has undergone a thorough and radical change. If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation” (1899, p. 29). Dewey explains: “since conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, experiments must always be retried” (1899, p. 34). Since conditions are ever changing in society “it is impossible to prepare” a child for “any precise set of conditions” (Dewey, 1959, p. 21).

For Dewey, education should train an individual for social interaction and community life and the graded difference in age, the fact that some are born as some die, makes possible through transmission of ideas and practices the constant reweaving of the social fabric (Dewey, 1916, p. 3). Orderly change, according to Dewey, is created by communication; while

disorderly change is an invitation to revolt and revolution (Dewey, 1927, p. 84). Again, for Dewey, literacy of mediated forms of communication is a necessity for substantial civic participation. As a result, those excluded and marginalized by their lack of media literacy are effectively disenfranchised. The problem with this is that throughout history, those without a political voice turn to violent and civil disruption.

These disruptions can be avoided as “a sophisticated and powerful vision of literacy shows potential to enable each person to at least join the debate by skillfully negotiating within the existing power structure, as well as outside it” (Tyner, 1998, p. 4). This is an important outcome of literacy and literacy education: the ability to participate in society as an engaged and enlightened citizen. As Dewey explains:

Whenever we have in mind the discussion of a new movement in education, it is especially necessary to take the broader, or social view. Otherwise, changes in the school institution and tradition will be looked at as the arbitrary inventions of particular teachers; at the worst transitory fads, and at the best merely improvements in certain details-and this is the plane upon which it is too customary to consider school changes. It is irrational to conceive of the locomotive or the telegraph as personal devices. The modification going on in the method and curriculum of education is as much a product of the changed social situation and as much an effort to meet the needs of the new society that is forming, as are changes in modes of industry and commerce (1959, p.34).

The tools individuals use to learn and communicate have changed. This is reflective of the change in society that has occurred.

Elements of Media Literacy

According to media scholar, Art Silverblatt (1995), the fundamental elements of media literacy which should be considered in a discourse of this nature are:

1. An awareness of the impact of media on the individual and societies: This implies that if we ignore the impact of media on our lives, we run the risk of being caught up and carried by it instead of in control of it.
2. An understanding of the process of mass communication: If we know the components of the mass communications process and how they relate to one another, we can form expectations of how they serve us.
3. Strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages: We must consume media thoughtfully; otherwise, the meaning dies with its creator and is lost because we cannot comprehend it. Therefore, to consume media thoughtfully, we need a foundation to base thought and reflection. This also implies that if we make meaning, we must possess the tools with which we make it.

4. An understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture and our lives: For the longest time communication has been the way in which to pass along culture and now that mass media is our biggest form of communication, that is how it is done.
5. The ability to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content: Media is not all about knowledge; it includes other activities that we enjoy such as watching TV, reading books, documentaries, all for enjoyment sometimes.
6. An understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners: To make informed judgments about the performance of the media, we also must be aware of the competing pressures on practitioners as they do their jobs. We must understand the media's official and unofficial rules of operation. In other words, we must know, respectively, their legal and ethical obligations (Baran, 2004, p.54).
7. Development of appropriate and effective production skills: The traditional literacy assumes that people who can read can also write. Media literacy also makes this assumption. Our definition of literacy (of either type) calls not only for effective and efficient comprehension of content but for its effective and efficient use. Therefore, media literate individual should develop production skills that enable them to create useful media messages (Baran, 2004, p.56).

Having examined the elements of media literacy, it is pertinent at this juncture to consider the principles of media literacy as a step further on the clarification of the subject matter.

Stages of Media Literacy

As James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente explained in their stages of behaviour change theory, media literacy consists of three stages according to (Malik, 2008) as follows:

- I. Awareness: The first stage is the awareness of the importance of managing one's media "diet". That is, the critical selection of the media contents one exposes oneself to and the reduction of the time spent with television, videos, electronic games, films and various print media forms.
- II. Acquisition: The second stage is the acquisition of specific skills of critical viewing. This means learning to analyse and question what is in the frame, how it is constructed, and what may have been left out. Skills of critical viewing are best learned through

inquiry-based classes or interactive group activities, as well as from creating and producing one's own media messages.

- III. Framing: The third stage is going behind the frame to explore deeper issues. That is, the critical engagement with the media. Here, one is equipped with the ability to pose questions; identify fallacies; and link the ideas or scenes in a media message. He or she can discern the source or producer of the message; its purpose; the beneficiaries and losers; and the judge.

This stage of social, political and economic analysis considers the meaning-making experience of everyone in the society and how the media drive the global consumer economy.

Principles of Media Literacy

Drawing inference from the agenda-setting theory, the media do not tell us how to think but give us a picture of what to think about. The media mould people's perception about the world and their environment. The media often times do not offer reality, but mere representations of reality. It takes media literacy to understand the distinction between the media and the real world (Allen, et al 2015, p.4). According to Turrow (2003, p. 27), in Allen et al (2015), there are six basic principles of media literacy as explained below:

1. Media materials are constructions: The media do not reflect reality, but construct it. They also shape people's sense of reality. Media materials are always designed for specific purposes. They carry values and ideologies. A media literate understands how highly constructed and value-laden media messages are.
2. Media and their contents have commercial implications: Most media organisations are established for profit-making purposes. Thus, their activities are geared towards revenue generation. All media contents (including news) are for commercial purposes. With media literacy, one becomes aware of how media ownership and the commercial motives of the media affect media productions, operations and distributions.
3. Media and their contents have social and political implications: The media are carriers of socio-political interests, values and ideologies. As constructors of reality, media can powerfully construct messages that could cultivate various effects in individuals and the society. They could be used to propagate ideologies, values, and other aspects of culture; set agenda; form public opinion; confer status; etc.
4. Media contents are presented within the genres of news, entertainment, information, education, and advertising. Each of the genres are characterised by their codes, conventions and attributes which determine how messages are constructed, transmitted and interpreted. A media literate person easily identifies media contents in their forms and genres; and understands how these attributes affect media messages.

5. Media audience are active: There is a “meaning-making negotiation” at the audience reception of media messages. Individuals have different perception of media messages. They do not receive media messages the same way. Their meaning-making experiences undergo some selective processes and could be influenced by some demographic, socio-economic, and psychographic factors. A media literate individual understands the activity of the media audience in constructing meanings out of media messages; how media contents convey multiple meanings; and why people’s perception of media messages differ.
6. Media representations influence people’s perception of reality: How the media construct messages influence people’s perception of reality. People’s perceptions of issues depend on how the media portray such. A media literate person understands the values and ideologies behind media content; how media confer status on issues, individuals, people, organizations, groups, etc. and reinforce those statuses.

The above principles and elements of media literacy are interwoven by the concept of convergence. It is important to look into the element of convergence before proceeding to other aspects of media literacy for the purpose of understanding.

Media Convergence

This discourse will be lopsided if the concept of convergence is not considered. Scholars have studied media convergence since the introduction of satellite communications in the 1970s (Carey, 2009). Different authors have defined the term in different ways. The ongoing merger of media enterprises as well as between media production and consumption, signals the emergence of a global convergence culture, based on an increasingly participatory and interactive engagement between people and their media as a business, as well as between professional and amateur media makers (Jenkins, 2006). Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments.

Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users (Jenkins, 2004). Convergence is a very polysemous (that is several meanings for a word) concept that has been used to describe various trends in journalism that have something in common; the blurring of the limits between different media, professional skills and roles strategies. (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006).

However, the term “convergence” is often used to describe the synergies between technology, media and information that are changing societies worldwide. The word is used in

conjunction with journalism and media to help us understand how the internet and broadband wireless devices have shifted control from the source to the receiver. This means that the power to decide what is seen, read or heard is increasingly in the hands of the consumer (Boriss, 2007). Convergence is defined as, 'multiple-platform publishing' or as 'integrated journalism' (Quinn, 2005). It is also seen as how individual consumers interact with others on a social level and use various media platforms to create new experiences, new forms of media and content that connect us socially and not just to other consumers, but to the corporate producers of media in ways that have not been as readily accessible in the past (Lisa, 2014).

Killebrew (2005), opines that media convergence is 'a movement in the field of mass communications undertaken in the late twentieth century and now moving quickly in the early twenty-first century, bringing previously competitive media delivery formats (platforms) to one another.' The term is also viewed technologically on one hand and informatively on the other. From the technological perspective, the general concept has been to bring the platforms together to provide information to the public through shared multiple technical resources or pipelines. On the information or content delivery perspective of convergence, the founding idea was to ensure relatively equal distribution of information through each platform, thus creating a partnering of equal information providers.

Importance of Media Literacy

The importance of media literacy cannot be overemphasized in today's globalised world. Media literacy is a crucial skill that all media consumers must have. There are many factors that can change how we interpret media messages and how they affect us, and there are few main skills that can aid consumers in being more media literates than ever. Baran (2004, p. 56) identify such skills to include:

- a) Understanding and respecting the power of mass communication messages: An important skill for media literacy is to acknowledge just how dominant mass communication is in our lives and around the world. Through mass communication, media shape, entertain, inform, represent, reflect, create, move, educate, and affect our behaviours, attitudes, values, and habits in direct and indirect ways. Virtually everyone in the world has been touched in some way by mass communication, and has made personal and professional decisions largely based on representations of reality portrayed through mass communication. With this skill, we understand and respect the power of media in our lives as well as understanding how we make sense of certain meanings.
- b) Understanding content by paying attention and filtering out noise: Anything that hinders effective communication is noise. Much of the noise in mass communication originates with our consumption behaviours. This skill is essential in multi-tasking

while consuming media contents. It helps to understand and retain the meaning of what is received from the media amidst other activities.

- c) Understand emotional versus reasoned reactions to mass communication content in order to act accordingly: A great deal of mass communication content is intended to touch the audience on an emotional level. Therefore, it is important to understand our emotional reactions to mass communication. Reasoned actions which require us to think critically about the mass media information we consume before we come to conclusions, are simply based on our emotional responses.
- d) Development of heightened expectations of media content: This is referring to viral videos or articles on the internet that are the “most viewed” or “top ten” that audiences settle on and give meaning to, when they are not searching for anything specific. Today, on the internet there is so much content to filter through that people tend to scroll through it mindlessly, not looking for underlying messages, or meaning. It therefore means that meaning is given to the random content the audiences fall on.
- e) The knowledge of genre conventions and the recognition of their mixing: This means that it is necessary to understand different genres and how information is given by those sources. For example, an audience is more likely to believe a documentary about weight loss, than what’s in a magazine for weight loss. By being aware of that fact, the audience can determine what is true and what is not, or if the source is reputable.
- f) Think critically about mass communication messages, no matter how credible their sources: It is essential that we critically consider the sources of all mass communication messages. No matter how credible a media source, we cannot always believe everything we see or hear because all mass communication messages are motivated by political, profit, or personal factors. Publicists, editors, and publishers present the information from their perspective—informed by their experiences and agenda. Even if the motive is pure or the spin is minimal, we tend to selectively interpret meanings based on our own lived experiences. Audiences do not always hold similar perceptions regarding mediated messages.
- g) Understand the internal language of mass communication to understand its effects, no matter how complex: This skill requires us to develop sensitivity to what is going on in the media. It means being familiar with the intent or motivation behind the action or message. “Each medium has its own specific internal language. This language is

expressed in production values—the choice of lighting, editing, special effects, music, camera angle, location on the page, and size and placement of headline. To be able to read a media text, one must understand its language.”

The Concept of Critical Media Literacy

In a social structure, where omnipresent media is shaping our thoughts directly or indirectly, critical media literacy as a cognitive skill of analyzing and evaluating media has become an important skill to cope with the mediatized meaning-making process. Convergence of media is accelerating the flow of media content making it easy to navigate information and also expanding opportunities to participate actively in the knowledge society. In the contemporary convergent media framework, students are not only media consumers; they are also becoming producers as well as distributors of media content. Jenkins (2006) idea of a convergence culture, defines it as “where old media and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of media producer and the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways”.

So, the convergence culture is narrowing down the gap between the producers and the consumers of media in which the traditional model of media literacy has become insufficient in order to understand the political-economic perspective of media as an industry of manufacturing consent. Therefore, adding a critical notion to media literacy helps in the deeper understanding of the media culture in context to its link with power politics. Critical media literacy enables reading texts considering it as a constructed text in the nexus of media representation on the crucial dimension of socio-cultural issues such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, etc., and also struggle for power, i.e. control.

The importance of critical media literacy in the curriculum of media education is to enable the students to interpret and make an informed judgment and thereby develop civic responsibilities. Regarding what is critical in media education; Robert Morgan (1998) suggests “this process comes to be seen as a form of conversion. Through the powers of analysis, students are seen to move from an unconscious to conscious state, from being enslaved by bodily pleasure and emotional response to being rational and sceptical in their dealings with the media.” The focus here is on exploring the concept of critical media literacy from a postmodern perspective and understanding it as a social meaning of literacy in the age of media convergence.

A Sociological Approach to Critical Media Literacy

The concept of critical media literacy can be understood from a sociological aspect as it is based on the deconstruction of the meaning-making process which is the interplay of audience, text, and culture. A social aspect of critical media literacy suggests that an individual does not create meanings in isolation, but through their involvement in social networks or interpretive communities which promote and value particular forms of literacy (Buckingham, 2003). Thus, individuals have their own media experiences within their historical context and

different social groups have different orientation towards media. According to David Buckingham, the concept of media literacy cannot be defined objectively as it is based on one's ability to use and interpret media which is very subjective and differ from person to person. So the question regarding who is media literate is very subjective in nature as the meanings are created in different social contexts with different competencies within different social situation they encounter in their everyday life. Therefore, "if the context of one particular media text is taken out and re-presented or remixed, understanding of its message will vary because of the different context that readers bring with them, their prior knowledge, belief, and experiences" (Funk, et.al. 2016).

The curriculum of media education requires developing not only technical skills but also cognitive skills for critically framing their learning on issues of power, race, class, religion, etc. Developing critical media literacy as a consciousness for recognizing power game exerted in media texts, boosts the students to become an agent of social change against the naturalization process of oppressive representation. The concept of critical media literacy underlines on the principle of representation which is very complex in nature, because, "judgment on representation is a complex process and it is not academic imposition on students" (Buckingham, 2003). This process requires broader understanding of media in relation to its context including socio-economic and historical aspects in which texts are produced, consumed and distributed. Hence, critical media literacy works towards social functions as its consequences depend upon the social context and social purposes. Such a focus on social and cultural presentation of media defines critical media literacy as a social meaning of literacy.

This social aspect of literacy involves a more inclusive classroom in which cultural and linguistic diversities are stimulated for preparing the students in a globalized world. Such an inclusive meaning of literacy assigns plurality in terms of acknowledging the differences of contexts, subjectivities and also multiple texts genres. The emergence of convergent media is accelerating this inclusion process through facilitating interactivity as well as collaborative learning using audio-visual modes of technologies. Introducing multimodal teaching-learning practices in the classroom opens scope for developing multiliteracies. The concept of multiliteracies which was first coined by the New London Group in the mid-90s addresses technological advancement and its impact in teaching-learning practices. "The multiplicity of communication channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches" (The New LondonGroup, 1996). It advocates a multimodal classroom curriculum using different technological tools and communication channels for more participatory classroom in which both the teachers and students become co-learner embracing socio-cultural diversities. For instance, teachers are using social media, blogging, video conferencing and other communication channels to build learning networks and thereby promoting a collaborative learning environment. The pedagogy of multiliteracies in media education relates to

understanding media representation on different media forms critically analyzing and evaluating media texts fostering multiple reading from diverse perspectives.

Other Approaches to Media Literacy

Media literacy is an interdisciplinary course and therefore can be approached from different angles. Each approach emphasizes what it wants the consumer to know. Aririguzoh (2007, p.150), opines that no particular approach is the total or best approach to media literacy. Different approaches can be merged together for synergy. The appreciation of media literacy increases when both producers and consumers understand the basic philosophy behind each approach. According to Aririguzoh (2007, p.151), the approaches are:

1) The media arts approach: This teaches the critical analysis of production skills. The student or audience is made to appreciate the aesthetics of the media. But beyond this is the critical analysis of what is read, seen or heard. It involves studying language, grammar and vocabulary of the media so as to be appreciative of their own codes, registers and conventions. An understanding of their language means an appreciation of their basic composition or frame. For example, in basic broadcast production, key elements include lighting, sound, camera movements and shots. The different types of lighting and camera movements convey different types of messages. Little or no light means that the action is taking place in the night. A close up shot, for example, of the face of the actor is used to show a particular detail while the long shot establishes the location or scene of action.

2) Production Approach: The aim is to give a hands-on experience in the processing and assessing of information to the student. The student learns how to apply production techniques and actually produces content. He learns photography, cinematography and videography. He also learns script writing. In addition to improving on the traditional literacy skills, the technical skills associated with production widens the employment opportunities for the student.

3) Citizenship: This aims at using the media to turn out responsible citizens that can be good ambassadors of the nation as well as participate in the democracy project. Ambassadorship goes beyond the painting of country in good colors to include decision making skills. Media literacy aims to make the citizens understand the challenges and complexities of nation building and how to overcome them. The media provide the contextual meaning to societal problems. It connects the community issues and promotes sociopolitical development. This approach enthrones mediocracy instead of meritocracy. It is at the heart of the informed society for those who can manipulate symbols, information and the media would be in charge. It teaches students how to differentiate substance or reality from personality and rhetoric.

4) Protection: This approach teaches the student to develop resistance or refuse media influence. The media influences by making people do things that ordinarily they would not have done. In other words, what we watch on television, read from the newspapers or listen to,

from the radio determines some of the things that we do. When the Nigerian government through the Ministry of Health banned the importation of bleaching creams and smoking in public places, it was deliberately reacting to this belief. This government believed that some people can be lured into smoking when they see others doing so. Similarly, it thought that when girls of impressionable ages see white skinned women, they attempt to use these creams to change their skin colour. In the process, they burn their skins. The society is crying out against explicit sex, obscenity and violence in the media. Censor Board, at times, ban some movies it thinks would offend the sensibilities of others.

Understanding Critical Media Literacy as a Postmodern Idea

The concept of critical media literacy is based on the postmodern idea that power relation plays the crucial role in structuring all social truth and realities. It believes that texts are not objective rather meanings are polysemous and their interpretation depend on the subjectivity of the readers. Postmodernism asserts a heterogeneous meaning-making process celebrating differences and pluralism which rejects the idea of absolute truth or generalization. The question of absolute reality is the major debate of postmodernism as it resists metanarrative, a narrative which assumes the universality of meaning irrespective of differences in contexts. It confirms the idea of critical literacy that critical scepticism is required in deconstructing the dominant meanings in order to unveil the socio-cultural and political ideologies underpinned in the texts.

The postmodern perspective of critical media literacy challenges the traditional idea of considering media as a conscious industry. According to this perspective, although the media have powerful influence on audience reinforcing what to think about, yet it is difficult to inject a repressive ideology directly into the consciousness of the audience who are not passive victims of mediatized culture. It believes that in spite of powerful influence of media, it is difficult to fix a preferred meaning as different individuals read messages in different ways. The autonomous and sophisticated audiences may have multiple reading of media representations that shape a diverse media culture.

According to Sholle and Denski (1995), "the early versions of media literacy were constructed on a model of the media acting as a creator of messages that imposed meaning on the audience." Earlier, the concept of media education was more about developing an inoculative approach among the students for protecting them from the negative effect of the media. Such an inoculative approach considered the audience as passive consumers of media text placing them within a similar social context and with similar predispositions. But in a postmodern context, the subjective reading of texts denies the metanarrative interpretation of the text and argues for a meaning-making process which is differential and subject to the heterogeneity of culture.

Postmodernism emphasizes on a pragmatic perspective of understanding texts which varies from context to context. The role of context in deriving meaning is the key idea of this

philosophy according to which the process of deconstruction of representation is differential from subject to subject. The postmodern theory explains how we create subjectivity based on our own experiences and dispositions which ultimately leads to differences between meanings and its effect on the audience. Hence, autonomy of every individual work in the process of reading and rereading of media texts. Critical media literacy in such postmodern condition considers every individual as an autonomous entity and focuses on developing skills of empowerment and protection. According to Hobbs (2016), "empowerment focuses on how knowledge and critical thinking skills increase people's active engagement with media in ways that support civic participation, while protection emphasizes on the potential dangers and risks of exposure to offensive or harmful media content or conduct". Such empowerment and protection are possible through developing skills of critical reflection on political correctness of media text. Such critical reflection on media content, media institutions, and media ownership, exploring issues of institutional power and examining quality, credibility, equity, social justice, issues of representation, etc. empower the audience in understanding political correctness of the media texts in context to its existence as an ideological text.

Critical media literacy as a pedagogical approach in media education equips the students with inculcating counter-hegemonic skills of reading preferred meanings. It helps in identifying discursive meanings which are constructed in the production of texts. This process of demystification of meanings can be understood in the works of Stuart Hall, who developed the theory of encoding and decoding explaining the relationship between the encoder (sender) and the decoder (receiver) of a text. In the book, *Media and cultural studies keyword* (Durham & Kellner, 2001), the Stuart Hall's essay on "Encoding/Decoding" explains the process of encoding and decoding of meaning in terms of circuit of four stages of communication including production, circulation, use, and reproduction. According to him, though the meanings are constructed in the production phase based on institutional ideologies, assumption about audience, etc. yet it is not identical with reception of meaning on the audience parts. Differences in production and reception of meanings occur because of the existing asymmetric socio-cultural relations between the decoders and the encoders. Such an asymmetric relation is possible because of the existing correlation among the elements of knowledge, culture, social and historical context at the connotation level of understanding texts. Stuart Hall discussed three hypothetical situations explaining the process of deconstruction of media text based on subjective capacity of the receivers in deriving meaning. At the first hypothetical situation, receivers take the dominant hegemonic position in which they accept the preferred meaning which is the naturalized meaning determined by institutional, political ideologies of the encoders. On the other hand, the second position refers to a negotiated position in which the decoders may accept the legitimacy of the dominant meaning but they create their own version of a negotiated meaning based on some adaptive as well as oppositional elements. Such elements are determined by the situational position of the receivers in reading the text which differs from discourse to discourse. The third position as explained by Hall is related to oppositional codes of the decoders in which they reject the message and take part in the struggle

over meanings. In this third position, receivers create alternative meanings to give voice against the dominant or preferred meanings.

Developing critical media literacy skills among the students help them to enhance their skills in understanding their position in relation to a preferred meaning. A classroom environment should encourage the students to empower themselves in negotiating meaning as well as create alternative meanings recognizing the socio-cultural context based on their own judgments. Such a process of media education opens scope for a dialogical classroom in which teachers and students are engaged in democratic classroom practices. A multimodal classroom in which students participations are encouraged through providing scope for interactivity between teachers and students facilitating them to enhance their cognitive skills in understanding and creating the meaning of experiences.

The Need for a Multimodal Curriculum of Media Education for developing Critical Media Literacy in Nigeria

A postmodern view of media education emphasizes on a democratic classroom environment in which students as audience have been liberated in the classroom in interpreting media texts. It also focuses on developing instructional practices and theoretical frameworks that support diversity of responses of the students rather than creating consensus. Such an approach to media education gives it an investigative nature fostering both critical understandings as well as awareness in students for inculcating critical judgments about media representations. Masterman (2001) argues that "media education should facilitate the students to increase their understanding of the media-of how and in whose interest, they work, how they are organized, how they produce meaning, how they go about the business of representing a reality".

A multimodal teaching-learning classroom empowers the students to communicate their individual cultural experiences interacting with varied social contexts. Blending different modes of teaching including text, audio, video, and image, a multimodal curriculum produces collective meanings facilitating a dialogical classroom. A dialogical classroom, in which both the students and teachers play role as co-investigator in the teaching and learning process, requires recognizing the diverse background of the students. For meaningful learning, students should learn to critically synthesize the information through a cognitive process of integrating existing knowledge in analyzing and evaluating media texts. This synthesizing process furthers development of collaborative intelligence in which students and teachers can easily form an interactive platform using different communication technologies. Teachers need to encourage the students for liberal decoding of the text in the classroom through negotiating meanings based on their experiences. The content of media education also needs to recognize the diversity of pleasure of reading the text instead of enforcing the preferred meaning on the students. Therefore, the postmodern view believes that no longer the educators are the legislators of creating meanings and imposing legitimized culture on the students. Teachers are

the interpreters, making available multiple realities and diverse forms of perception and knowledge (Buckingham, 2003).

According to Paulo Freire, it is the problem-posing education that facilitates a dialogical relationship in a classroom environment for development of critical consciousness. Problematization of the process of representation and engaging with issues of power and pleasure through the lenses of ideology, naturalization, stereotypes, etc., media education facilitates students in developing the skills of critical media literacy. Problem-posing education makes the students as critical thinkers and helps them to overcome their false perception of the reality engaging themselves in a situation which is presented as a problem to them. Freire believed that a dialogical classroom culture helps in demythologizing such problems through encouraging the students to unveil the reality. "Dialogical relations are indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors. The students are no longer docile listener –are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher." (Freire,1970).

Conclusion

Media literacy is pivotal to understanding the world around us in this era of convergence, given the predominance of media in our daily lives. To be media literate, it is important to be able to interpret and analyze media information. If an individual is unable to decipher between what is true and untrue, mediated and non-mediated, then they will have a much more difficult time navigating media effectively. Being media literate is essential for the media consumer and it is important that everyone takes media literacy seriously, hence, it has been established that in the era of convergence; critical media literacy skills and a multimodal curriculum of media education are apt for all media users, especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

References

- Allen, N. A., Ojinime, E. O. & Winnie, U. O. (2015). A Discourse on Child Media Literacy. *Mgbakoigba: Journal of African Studies*, 4, pp.2-3
- Aririguzoh, S. A. (2007). Media Literacy and the Role of English Language in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, pp.150-151.
- Baran, S. & Davis, D. (2012). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Fervent and Future. (Sixth Ed)*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Baran, S. J. (2004). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Boriss, S. (2007). *New group forms: "J-School Deans Against a Free Press."* *The Future of News: A vision of the future and commentary on developments*. Retrieved on March 4,

- 2020 from: [http:// the future of news. com/2007/12/ 23/ new - group –forms -j- school – deans –against -a- free-press](http://the-future-of-news.com/2007/12/23/new-group-forms-j-school-deans-against-a-free-press)
- Boruah, M. & Abhijit, B. (2017). Media Literacy. *Global Media Journal, Indian Edition*, 8(2), pp.2-3.
- Buckingham, D. (1998). *Teaching popular Culture beyond Radical Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Carey, J. W. (2009). “Where Journalism Education Went Wrong.” Symposia conducted at the Seigenthaler First Amendment Studies on Journalism Education, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, April 1996. Retrieved on March 4, 2020 from: [http://www.mtsu.edu/~masscomm /seig 96/ carey / carey.htm](http://www.mtsu.edu/~masscomm/seig96/carey/carey.htm)
- Dewey, J. (1897). *My Pedagogic Creed*. Chicago: A. Flanagan Company.
- Dewey, J. (1899). *The School and Society; being three Lectures*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston: D.C. Heath
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and its Problems*. New York: H. Holt and Company.
- Dewey, J. (1959). *Dewey on education: Selections*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Dewey, J. (1976). *Democracy and education 1916: The middle works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, volume 9*. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, J., & Boydston, J. (1976). *John Dewey: The middle works, 1899-1924*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dijk, T. A. (2006). *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- Dupagne, M. Garrison, B. (2006). The meaning and influence of Convergence: A Qualitative Case Study of Newsroom Work at the Tampa News Center. *Journalism Studies*, 7, pp. 237-255.
- Durham, M. G. & Kellner, D. (Eds.).(2006). *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*. U S A: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Folarin, B. (1998). *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. N Y: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Funk, S., Kellner, D., & Share, J. (20016) .Critical Media Literacy as a Transformative Pedagogy. In *Handbook of Research on Media Literacy in the Digital Age (1)*. Retrieved on March 4, 2020 from <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/FunkKellnerShare2016CriticalMediaLiteracy.pdf>
- Griffin, E. (2000). *A first look at Communication Theory (4th ed.)*. Boston, Ma: McGraw-Hill.
- Hobbs, R. (2011). The State of Media Literacy: A Rejoinder. *Journal of Broadcasting & amp; Electronic Media*, 601-604.
- Hobbs, R. (2011). The State of Media Literacy: A Response to Potter. *Journal of Broadcasting & amp; Electronic Media*, 419-430.
- Hobbs, R. (2016). Understanding media and how they work. In *What Society Needs from Media in the Age of Digital Communication (6)*. Retrieved from https://mediaeducationlab.com/sites/default/files/Hobbs%2520What%2520Society%2520Needs%2520PDF_0.pdf
- Innis, H. (1950). *Empire and Communication*. London: Clarendon Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2004). The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence. *International Journal of cultural studies*, 7(1): 33–43, DOI: 10.1177/1367877904040603
- Jenkins, H. (2004). The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7, 33–43.
- Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robinson, A., & Weigel, M. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Kamera, D. (2013). Media Literacy. *Communication Research Trends*, 32(1), pp.14-15.
- Kate, M. (2010). “John Culkin, SJ: The Man Who Invented Media Literacy: 1928–1993” Center for Media Literacy. Retrieved on March 3, 2020 from: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article408.html
- Len Masterman (2001). *Media literacy in the information age: Current Perspective*. Retrieved on March 3, 2020 from: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article408.html

- Lisa, L. R (2014). Journalism Education in the Age of Media Convergence: A Survey of Undergraduates' Technology-Related News Habits. *International Journal of Trends in Economics, Management and Technology*, 3, pp.41-48.
- Lucke, A. (1996). Text and Discourse Analysis. New York: American Educational Research Association, 21, pp.3-17.
- Malik, S. (2008). *Media Literacy and its Importance*. Retrieved on March 3, 2020 from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/06542.pdf>
- McLuhan, H. M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- McQuail, D.(2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (5th Ed.)*, London: Sage Publications.
- National Association for Media Literacy Education. (n.d.). Key questions to ask when analyzing media messages. Retrieved March 4, 2020 from <http://namle.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/NAMLEKeyQuestions0708.pdf>.
- Potter, W. J. (2010). The State of Media Literacy. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 54, (4) pp. 675-696.
- Rogers, R., Malamcharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D & O'Garro Joseph, G. (2005). *Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature*. Washington. Sage Publications.
- Sholle, D., & Denski, S. (1995). *Critical media literacy: Reading, remapping, rewriting, rethinking media literacy : A critical pedagogy of representation*,4:7-31
- Sholle, D., & Denski, S. (1995). *Critical media literacy: Reading, remapping, rewriting, rethinking media literacy : A critical pedagogy of representation*,4:7-31.
- Silcock, W. & Keith, S. (2006). Translating the tower of Babel? Issues of definition, language and culture in converged newsrooms. *Journalism Studies*, 7, pp.610-627
- Silverblatt, A. (1995). *Media Literacy*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- The New London Group (1996). A pedagogies of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, http://newarcproject.pbworks.com/f/Pedagogy%2Bof%2BMultiliteracies_New%2BLondon%2BGroup.pdf
- Tyner, K. (1998). Literacy in a digital world teaching and learning in the age of information. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.UCL Press.

UNESCO. Media and Information Literacy Clearinghouse. <http://milunesco.unaoc.org/>

Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London and New York: Longman