

Media Literacy

Sara Poggi

School of Communication

Illinois State University

Normal, IL 61790-4480

Discussion: What is Media Literacy?

Media literacy is the process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating messages in a wide variety of forms. It uses an inquiry-based instructional model that encourages people to ask questions about what they watch, see and read. It provides tools to help consumers critically analyze messages to detect propaganda, censorship, and bias in news and public affairs programming (and the reasons for such), and to understand how structural features -- such as media ownership, or its funding model^[1] -- affect the information presented.

Media literacy aims to enable people to be skillful creators and producers of media messages, both to facilitate an understanding as to the strengths and limitations of each medium, as well as to create independent media.

Media literacy's purpose is to transform the process of media consumption into an active and critical process, helping people gain greater awareness of the potential for misrepresentation and manipulation (especially through commercials and public relations techniques), and to help people understand the role of mass media and participatory media in constructing views of reality.^{[2][3]}

Class Activity: Watch several clips of political ad campaigns and check the statements made in them using <http://www.factcheck.org/>

Clip #1: Dr. Seuss Ad

A DCCC ad attacking Illinois Republican Pete Roskam claims Roskam, "supported banning classic books. Even a book with writings by Martin Luther King, Laura Ingalls Wilder and Dr. Seuss."

The tale: That's misleading. Roskam never supported banning any books by Dr. Seuss or King, or Wilder's Little House on the Prairie, which is among those pictured in the ad. (He once said his own children read that one.)

The truth: The book "with writings" from Dr. Seuss and the others was an anthology called Impressions that sparked national debate in 1990 and 1991 when some parents and religious groups claimed that a handful of the 822 selections in the 15-volume series promoted Satanism and witchcraft. But the DCCC has produced no evidence that Roskam ever voiced support for "banning" that anthology. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* on Oct. 20, 1992 endorsed

Roskam's opponent and gave Roskam's "tacit support" for banning Impressions as a reason. But "tacit" support isn't active support, and could mean no more than not speaking out against the book-banning advocates.

The real action: According to news accounts at the time, Roskam did support legislation in 1992 that would have required parents to be more involved in the state's formal screening process for school textbooks, but the bill itself wouldn't have banned anything.

Clip #2: 98% Ad

The tale: A typical ad is one in Pennsylvania which begins, "Melissa Hart votes with George Bush and Rick Santorum 98 per cent of the time." On screen, a counter rapidly runs up to 98 and then stops. Hart is pictured with Bush and Republican Sen. Santorum, both of whom are scoring poorly in recent polls.

The truth: In this case the DCCC is exaggerating a bit. *Congressional Quarterly* actually puts Rep. Hart's record of voting for bills endorsed by the President at 89 per cent in 2006 and also in 2005. Throughout her nearly 6-year House career she's supported Bush's legislative agenda 92 per cent of the time, according to CQ .

Clip #3: Clinton Ad

The tale: Republican John Spencer says Hillary Clinton "opposes the Patriot Act" **The truth:** In fact she voted for the law in 2001 and again in 2006 when it was renewed.

The tale: Additionally, Spencer claims "National Security Agency wiretaps of terrorist suspects were vital to stopping this attack" on US-bound airliners.

The truth: Actually, US law enforcement played a relatively small role. British officials uncovered the alleged plot and quietly followed its development for months before alerting US officials' just days before the arrests.

The tale: The Spencer ad displays a headshot of Clinton beside one of Osama Bin Laden as the announcer states that "Hillary Clinton opposes the Patriot Act and the NSA Program that helped stop another 9/11."

The truth: However, Clinton voted for passage of the original Patriot Act in 2001, as well as the reauthorization in 2006.

The action: Clinton did join 46 other senators in that vote, including 5 Republicans. Those who wanted debate to continue didn't necessarily oppose the law itself, however, but were pushing to give federal judges greater control over some of the expanded surveillance powers the law gives to law-enforcement officials.

At the time, Clinton released a statement explaining her vote. In the statement, Clinton listed concerns about lack of a risk-based system to

allocate homeland security funds and a need to balance civil liberty protections along with the security measure:

Clinton: I believe the conference report falls short of this goal, and I am hopeful that with more time, those negotiating these provisions will find the proper balance.

Debate on the reauthorization of the Patriot Act continued when Congress came back from its winter recess. After some changes, Clinton voted for the bill when it came up for final passage on March 2, 2006.

The Moral of the Story: The Inspector General's report also noted in passing that appearances can be deceiving. It said public officials "should be aware that while such appearances may often have no basis in fact, they may be incorrectly assumed as fact by the casual observer." The message to officials is to be careful of how things look. But citizens should be equally careful not to be a "casual observer" of political spots.

Artifact #3: Seeing is Believing

Our discussions and activities have revealed that you cannot always see what you believe. Your assignment is to watch some tv, in search of a political ad campaign, or presidents speech. After watching, write a 2 page paper with the first part being on: detailing their argument, any fallacies, references they used to support data, the goal of the ad, how it made you feel or try to make you believe. Second, factcheck the ad or speech to see if the material presented is a tale or true. Write about what you found, tale or truth. Does this change your opinion of the person who ran the ad, about voting in general? What did you learn from this activity?