Introduction to Media Literacy: Crash Course Media Literacy #1

Crash Course: Media Literacy
https://youtube.com/watch?v=AD7N-1Mj-DU
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/AD7N-1Mj-DU

Hey there, everybody.

I'm Jay Smooth, and this is Crash Course Media Literacy. For the next few weeks we're going to take a deep dive into media - how we consume it, how we create it, and how it impacts our everyday lives.

Before we get started, do me a favor and think: how many hours did you spend consuming media today? Don't worry, I'll wait. What did you come up with?

Two hours? Three? Five?

If you're the average US adult, today you spent upwards of ten hours watching tv, listening to the radio, surfing the web, scrolling through your phone, or checking out awesome educational video series on YouTube. That's almost forty percent of your day. If you're a teen or tween, you spent a little less time - maybe six to nine hours.

Never before in history have humans spent so many waking hours consuming media. Since it's taking up more and more of our time each year, it's important that we understand its influence on everything we do.

[Opening music]

Now, when I say "media", I'm talking about a couple of different things. The literal definition of media is the plural of medium, or multiple mediums, so to speak. And a medium is a substance or method in which something is communicated. It's the vehicle for a message.

Books, films, paintings, songs, TV shows, poems, video games, magazines, podcasts, music videos, newspapers, web forums, coupons, email newsletters, tweets, straight-to-dvd sequels, receipts, traffic signs, both good and bad street art, Snapchat stories, those word of the day calenders your aunt always buys you, protest signs, embarrassing but cute childhood photos you post on throwback Thursday, breaking news push notifications that give you a mini heart attack, sex-ed pamphlets about your changing body, and by blu-ray copy of the second highest grossing film of all time, *Titanic* - those are all media.

When you think about it that way, it makes sense that we spend so much time consuming media. Whether you're at work, or school, or just hanging out, chances are you're almost always interacting with some sort of artifact of communication. As a culture, we often stick a "the" in front of "media" to refer collectively to mass communication. It's an umbrella term we use to talk about the widely-distributed newspapers, TV channels, websites, radio stations, movie studios, and more that create and distribute information, like CNN, the New York Times, NPR, Disney, or YouTube.

Whether you're talking about media as in multiple mediums or "the media" - and during this course we'll be talking about both - the ability to navigate the media is a powerful and crucial skill. Media scholars refer to this skill as media literacy. As a field of study, media literacy comprises and overlaps many different theories and subjects, from critical thinking and psychology to linguistics and ethics in technology.

In this series, we'll be using the definition of media literacy that's used by the National Association of Media Literacy Educators. And it describes media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.

Now, with this definition in mind, think back to the media you spent your time with today. What kind of content were you absorbing, and how did you get to it? Were you making sense of its messages? Were you aware that each message was created by someone with their own goals and opinions? When you create media, like a blog post or an Instagram, what is your responsibility to those who view it? Finally, what do you do with all that info you just received?

With media literacy skills, you'll have the power to think through each of these important questions every time you pick up your phone or flip on the radio. It'll be like putting on a pair of glasses for the first time - so eye opening you'll never want to take them off. Which is great because you won't actually be able to take them off. It'll be hard to look at media the same way. So I guess media literacy is more like laser eye surgery, but way cheaper.

Okay, media literacy lesson number one: understanding the differences between media messages and media effects. Media messages are the values and ideas that are promoted by the media, the things that get put into them. Media effects are their influences and consequences on audiences.

But talking about media in terms of these inputs and outputs is way, way too simple. Media doesn't just broadcast one easy-to-understand message straight into our brains. And readers and viewers don't just agree with whatever they say and move on with their lives. The creator's experiences and environment affect everything they create. Their messages are filled with tons of baggage. And we consumers have our own baggage, too, which determines how we react to and interpret messages.

Media scholars, cultural critics, and plenty of other smart, academic types have long understood that we need to think about messages and effects in a far more nuanced way. For instance, take British sociologist Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding, popularized in 1973. Hall wrote that before a message is distributed, it is encoded by the creator during its production. The message the creator wants to send is written in a code of sorts using a host of pre-understood meaning, symbols, and definitions that they think or hope the recipient will understand.

But the recipient - that's you - has their own mental dictionary for meanings, symbols, and definitions. When someone interprets a message they decode it by applying their knowledge and experience to decipher its meaning. When I say encode and decode, I don't just mean a secret code you use to talk to your friends or Morse code. As Hall would say, all language is coded.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble to break this down.

Say you're texting your significant other about where to go for dinner. You just heard about this fancy french restaurant that's supposed to be super romantic and perfect for a date. So you say, "Let's do Maison de L'amour *kissy face emoji*"

You're doing a little encoding here. You used the restaurant's name instead of "fancy French restaurant" because it sounds more impressive and makes you look cool for knowing a little French. You throw in a kissy face emoji to turn up the flirtatiousness. But also, notice, you say "do" instead of "go to" because, since you're already talking about where to eat, the activity you're doing at Maison de L'amour is already implied. Done. Send.

They respond, "Ok *crying laughing emoji*" Wait, what does that mean? Did you say something wrong? Do they not want to go? Are they just so stoked for this restaurant that they're laughing maniacally? Do they want to break up? What does this mean?

Here you're trying to decode this mysterious message using what you know about the English language, emoji, and your significant other. Maybe some social anxiety is working its way in, too. Either

way, you're thinking that clearly your romantic gesture was poorly received.

But perhaps all they meant by the crying laughing emoji was they'd love to go, despite your super cheesy taste in restaurants. They encoded their message, too, but something got lost in the decoding.

Thanks, Thought Bubble.

Hall's theory of encoding and decoding is a rejection of what's known as textual determinism, or the idea that a message's meaning is inevitably sent and received in its entirety, just as intended, every time. Hall gave way more credit to the consumer than many theorists before him, who often thought of most communication as a one-way street.

The significance of this theory is that as a media consumer, you're not just a helpless sponge, absorbing all kinds of messages without a second thought. You interpret messages in a unique way, which means you also have the ability to see what messages are being thrown at you and decide whether you want to catch them, pass them on, or drop them completely.

This also leaves plenty of room for miscommunication, and messages getting lost in translation. Of course, scholars, educators, parents, and consumers have always debated to what degree media really affects its consumers. Questions of whether media can truly harm or benefit us has lead to media literacy education in schools, media regulations like movie ratings and the labeling of advertisements, and tons of research into media effects. Plus, these days - when two thirds of US adults get news from social media, and some of that can be "fake" news - we have to constantly ask, "What information can I truly trust?"

The answers to questions like these aren't always obvious. Luckily, media literacy gives you the tools you need to find the answers. Whether you're feeling skeptical of social media's role in your political views, questioning the power of tech companies to control your news feeds, or just trying to get your message out into the world, learning how to navigate the media landscape is tough but possible with the right skill set.

Now, let's be honest with each other. If you're watching this video you're probably already pretty media savvy, or at least very interested in being so. You clearly love learning and found us here on the interwebs, so you've got some great skills already. Critics might even say we're just preaching to the choir. Well, guess what, if you're in the choir we want you singing. This is our official request that you sing to everyone you know about media literacy. OK, maybe not literally sing. That might get annoying.

But in all seriousness, media literacy education is only effective when we're all on the same page. And those who need the most help learning how to swim in the media deep end are also the least likely to seek out videos like this. So we need you to pass along these skills to friends, family, high school acquaintances you only talk to on Facebook - anyone who won't come across these lessons themselves. We're all in this together. As Academy Award-winning actress Kate Winslet says in 1997 hit film, *Titanic*: "You jump, I jump, Jack."

Here's how we're going to help. During the first half of this course, we're going to diver into the history of the field - spoiler alert: media literacy is not a new problem - learn how to find trusty sources of information, discover how media and your mind interact, and explore creating media and the responsibilities that come with it.

In the second half of the course, we'll use this theory to look at how media works in the world. We'll discover how it's regulated, the policies and economics of it all, the dark side of the media - like propaganda and misinformation - the lure of advertising, how the big tech companies are changing the media landscape, plus we'll take a look at where the field is headed.

Throughout the course, we'll return to the core principles of media literacy, to build a framework with which to approach our everyday, media-filled lives. I hope you'll join me on this journey. Until next time, I'm Jay Smooth for Crash Course. We'll see you next week.

Crash Course Media Literacy is filmed in the Dr. Cheryl C. Kinney Studio in Missoula, MT. It's made with the help of all of these nice people. And our animation team is Thought Cafe. Crash Course is a Complexly production. If you wanna keep imagining the world complexly with us, check out some of our other channels, like SciShow, Animal Wonders, and the Art Assignment.

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