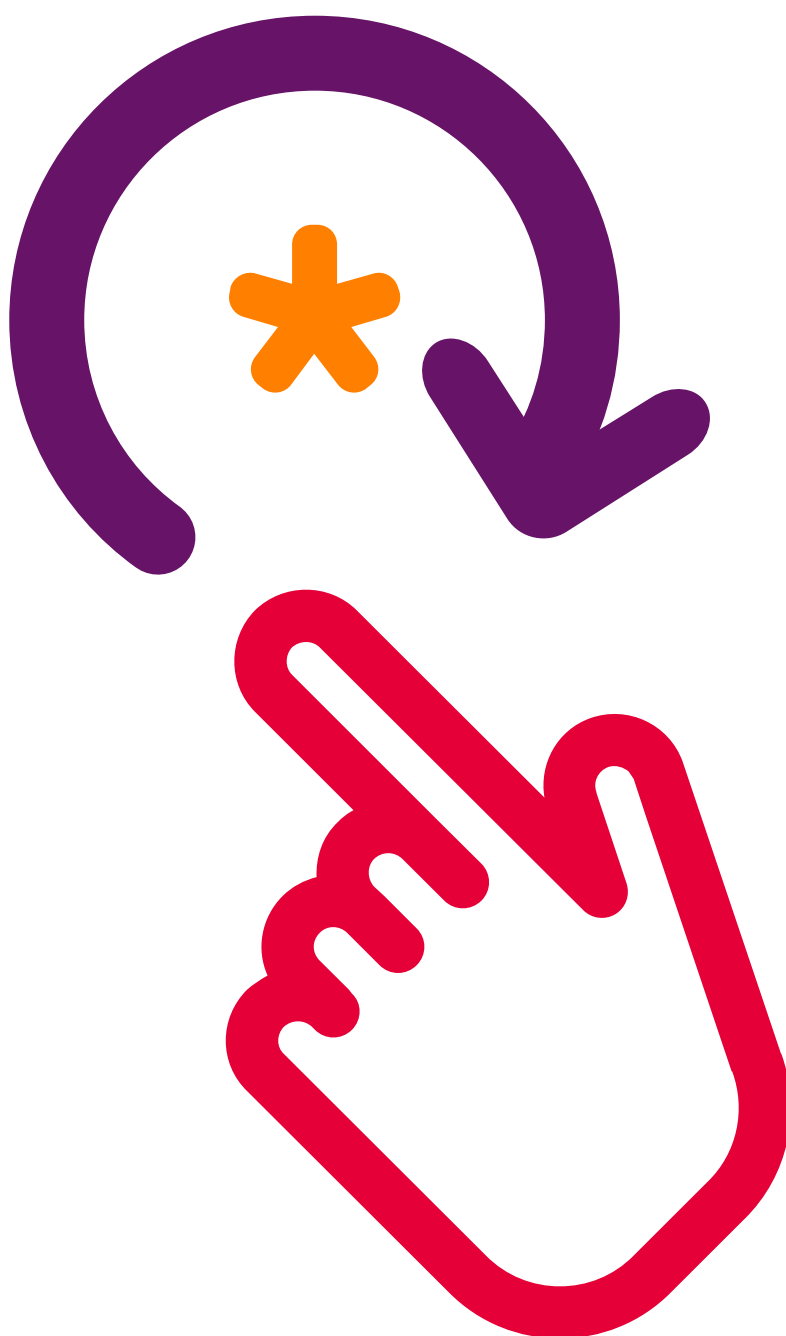


Ofcom Media Literacy Bulletin

Issue 1
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- Let us have details of your research, publications and events

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of Ofcom's quarterly media literacy bulletin.

The bulletin is your opportunity to keep up to date with the latest media literacy developments, whether from Ofcom or our stakeholders.

To achieve this we need your input, so if you want to promote a wider awareness of your media literacy events, proposed research or publications let us know and we will seek to highlight the work in future issues. We also have a dedicated media literacy section on the Ofcom website (www.ofcom.org.uk/consumer_guides/media_literacy/) where we are happy to link to relevant websites – again let us know if you are aware of useful resources. Please pass on details of the website and the bulletin to any colleagues who may be interested.

Please note that some of the items in this bulletin have been produced for us by stakeholders; whilst we want to keep you aware of relevant developments the views or opinions in those items are those of the authors and should not be attributed to Ofcom.

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News

Ofcom's statement

On 2 November last year Ofcom set out in a statement its approach to the promotion of media literacy. The statement followed a public consultation begun on 1 June 2004. Ofcom received 94 responses to the consultation from a wide range of stakeholders.

In the statement we defined media literacy as:

'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'

This is Ofcom's definition, but we acknowledge that stakeholders may define media literacy in more specific ways appropriate to their work.

We set out 3 key areas of focus for our work:

- **Research:** A wide ranging research programme will be undertaken to assess the extent of media literacy in the UK. Ofcom's media literacy research forum (see below) provides advice to us on the scope of the programme.
- **Connecting, partnering and signposting:** We aim to add value to existing media literacy activity, stimulate new work and promote and direct people to advice and guidance concerning new communications technologies.
- **The development of a common labelling framework for information about challenging content.** We think there needs to be greater consistency in presenting information related to possible harm and offence and to protect young and vulnerable people from inappropriate material. We have invited

key stakeholders to form an audio visual content information working group (AVCIWG) to help us understand how viewers prefer to receive information about challenging content. In the next bulletin we will provide an update on the progress of the AVCIWG.

Tackling digital exclusion – funding for charitable groups

Microsoft has partnered with Citizens Online (www.citizenonline.org.uk) to provide 30 awards of £2,500 to UK-based community and voluntary groups in 2005. The awards are specifically seeking to tackle the issue of digital exclusion through supporting informal, supportive, training projects that introduce ICT skills and training to disadvantaged young people and adults across the UK in the most appropriate way. This is the second round of awards scheme following its launch in June 2004.

You can find out more about the awards and download the application form from www.ukcommunityawards.com. The closing date for applications is 24th March 2005.

Media literacy on the Ofcom website

We have an area dedicated to media literacy on the Ofcom website, at www.ofcom.org.uk/consumer_guides/media_literacy/. As well as providing links to our publications, the site also links to resources around the world, encompassing a wide range of media literacy issues. We are keen to get feedback from you, in particular on suggestions for new and useful links and content. Send your suggestions to media.literacy@ofcom.org.uk

Ofcom media literacy research programme

Ofcom's research programme intends to do 4 things:

- to distil the constituent parts of media literacy;
- to find out the extent to which they are present – or not – throughout the nation;
- develop an understanding of the types of media literacy; and
- undertake further work on distinct areas to understand the barriers and enablers to literacy.

Initially the research aim is to investigate the elements of media literacy *taken as a whole*, and examine relative levels and types of literacy. To this end, Ofcom will conduct an audit of media literacy across the UK, including both adults and children. Coverage will include the Nations and Regions, socially disadvantaged and ethnic groups. Some elements of the audit will be revisited to suggest how and whether media literacy skills develop over time.

Some of the findings of the audit might point to areas where immediate action is required. In other cases the results would suggest areas where further detailed research is required to gain better understanding.

A number of other, small scale, projects are planned to build understanding in specific areas of media literacy.

Ofcom media literacy research forum

On 11 November last year Ofcom hosted the first meeting of its media literacy research forum. The role of forum members is to act as critical friends - to help us ensure our research looks at the right areas, asks the right questions and uses the most appropriate methodologies.

Research forum members are drawn from a range of backgrounds including the broadcast, internet and telecoms industries, academia, consumer groups and Government departments. The full list of organisations involved in the forum will be available shortly on our website at www.ofcom.org.uk/consumer_guides/media_literacy.

Emotional literacy, political literacy and the media

On 24 November 2004 Ofcom hosted a seminar exploring emotional literacy, political literacy and the media.

The event was jointly organized by Ofcom and Bournemouth Media School's Centre for Public Communication Research and Centre for Creative Media Research.

Attendees were drawn mainly from academia with further representatives from broadcasters and other organisations.

Barry Richards* (Professor of Public Communications, Bournemouth Media School, Bournemouth University <http://www.cpcr.org.uk>) summarised the key points raised below:

- Firstly, an ideal (though a contested one – see below). The three forms of 'literacy' which were discussed - media, emotional and political - interlock and overlap. When seen as linked together, they give us an ideal of civil society in which the media stimulate and support both emotional development and the capacity for democratic participation. In this ideal, new forms of citizen identity converge with the positive elements of therapeutic culture in a revitalised public sphere. Whether such an ideal can be put to work in the context of regulatory policy remains to be seen.
- Some forms of popular entertainment programming can serve as vehicles for emotional learning. The more that audiences can approach these programmes in a media-literate way (e.g. by understanding the contexts of their production), the more discriminating they will be and the more they will be able to benefit from them in terms of emotional learning. This is one of many close connections between media literacy and emotional literacy.
- There is a creative dimension to media literacy which it is valuable to focus on, both in exploring and in enhancing it. This is likely to be relevant not only to the creative component of media literacy, but to researching aspects of access and understanding. It is also - given the emotional dimension of creative processes - of especial relevance when considering the links between media and emotional literacies.

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- The importance of media literacy today reflects the importance in modern life of the media. However for all three forms of literacy to take social root and to flourish, there needs to be a crucial process at work outside of the media - a process of reflection on media content by and between individuals in everyday life. Engagement in dialogue with others is necessary to make full sense of media content. How to promote institutional and cultural supports for such dialogue has yet to be researched, but is vital for the health of the media.
- Political literacy is dependent upon the provision of spaces within the media for education and debate. The web is of especial importance here, as is the BBC as public service web publisher. Again, people with higher levels of media literacy (understanding contexts, as well as access skills, etc.) are likely to derive greater benefit from these spaces. A key issue is how to prevent the internet leading to a fragmentation of the public sphere. The 'evaluative' component of media literacy is crucial to this.
- The project of media literacy (defining, auditing, researching, and enhancing it) is opposed by some, who fear that it means unnecessary and unwelcome intervention. This opposition may be heightened if the links between media, emotional and political literacies are emphasised, thus expanding the project. However it is important to maintain awareness of how much is at stake in people's relationships with the media.

Publications

Media literacy literature reviews

On 10 February Ofcom published two literature reviews. *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People* by Professor David Buckingham and *Adult Media Literacy* by Professor Sonia Livingstone.

Ofcom asked the authors of the reviews to provide:

- an outline of the range of academic and other research where publicly available;
- the gaps in research;
- examples of innovative methodologies;
- an outline of possible barriers and enablers to media literacy.

Some of the recommendations in these reports will be used by Ofcom to plan its future research and activity; others may be more relevant to other stakeholders. The full reviews are available online at

www.ofcom.org.uk/consumer_guides/media_literacy/Medlitpub/?a=87101 and are summarised below:

Children and young people

The review suggests that children can use the technology well. The large majority of young people are aware of risks relating to sexual dangers on the internet, but less aware of the economic risks.

There is much research into children understanding of television. There is evidence to indicate children understand different forms of television and learn to cope with

potentially unwanted and upsetting material. They develop critical judgements in areas such as television violence. However, there is little research into how children interpret, evaluate and respond to content on the internet.

Research suggest that the creation of content (e.g. domestic video and web content) is a useful means of communication and self expression, not least by socially disadvantaged groups.

Social class and economic status limit children's access to the internet but not the more traditional media of television and radio. Less is known of potential barriers such as disability and ethnicity and individual dispositions and motivations. There is evidence to suggest that access to the internet at schools often remains very limited.

Parents, teachers, broadcasters and regulators have the potential to enable greater media literacy in children. Research suggests that parental mediation can play an important role in developing younger children's media literacy. However, the role of parents depends upon broader beliefs about child-rearing, and many parents do not play as great a role as they like to suggest.

The review provides an indication of several important gaps in the literature. These include specific media (such as radio, mobile phones and online gaming) and particular population groups (such as younger children, those with disabilities, and ethnic minority groups). There is a particular need for research about;

- children's ability to evaluate internet content;
- their awareness of new commercial strategies in the media;
- media production in the home; and
- learning progression in media education.

New technologies and media forms will pose new challenges and demands in terms of media literacy, so it is important that research in this field is regularly updated.

Adult media literacy

The review found that research suggests that poor design and content offered on digital television's enhanced services (interactivity) is a barrier to greater take-up by the audience. Relatively little academic research addresses this interaction; what there is suggests that the public has not been very enthusiastic about these opportunities

Key barriers to access are demographic (age, gender, socio-economic status, disability), these in turn contributing to the material and symbolic barriers of finances, understanding, disposable time, and, also crucial, the production, content and design features of media access devices.

A research gap exists when considering the skills relating to advanced access to internet and mobile content and services, the public's ability to find appropriate content, and their ability to protect themselves and their children from content they do not wish to see.

Research on the audience's understanding of television content is divided between evidence pointing to a creative, sophisticated, "media-savvy" audience and evidence pointing to an often forgetful, confused, biased or inattentive audience low in critical literacy skills.

As channels of information proliferate, research suggests that many viewers are overwhelmed by multiple content sources that they find difficult to evaluate or compare.

Barriers to media literacy include the changing forms of media representation (especially hybrid genres that blur reality and drama) and the demographics of the audience (though their effect is contingent on different viewers' interests, knowledge and experience).

Little is known about how well adults understand online content, but small-scale studies suggest that they are often unaware of the provenance of information and may lack the skills to take into account the point of view from which information is presented. A considerable gap exists in our knowledge of how people understand advertising and the economic processes of online content production.

Both e-government and e-health have been touted as ways in which digital interaction could change society. But early evidence suggests that these services mostly help those who are already advantaged (in education, class, income etc), and further evaluation of specific initiatives is needed.

Internet literacy among children and young people: report

The UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) project has published its fourth report 'Internet literacy among children and young people'. It presents findings from the UKCGO survey focusing on young people's online literacy and its relation to the take up of opportunities and risks on the internet.

The report found that while skilled users were, perhaps unsurprisingly, taking advantage of more opportunities online, it was this group who are also exposed to greater risks. Skilled users are more trustful of online content but are able to exercise a degree of critical analysis in their online activities. The report can be downloaded from the www.children-go-online.net website.

In focus

Mobile commercial content gets the classification treatment

By Paul Whiting*, project director, Independent Mobile Classification Body.

Advances in mobile technology such as high quality colour screens, video and picture messaging have enabled service providers to greatly increase the range of products and services available to mobile phone users. Whilst much of the content on offer will be innocuous, some of the services will be of an adult nature and so only suitable for customers who are 18 or over.

The UK mobile operators recognised that the availability of adult content on mobile phones may give rise to concern amongst consumers, particularly parents, so in January 2004 they announced a joint code of practice for the self-regulation of these new forms of content.

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As part of the code, the operators committed to appointing an independent classification body to provide a framework for classifying content that is only suitable for customers 18 years and older.

In October 2004 the Independent Mobile Classification Body (IMCB) was appointed by the mobile operators to serve this role. IMCB is a subsidiary company of ICSTIS, the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services, the regulatory body for all premium rate charged telecommunications services.

IMCB's remit is to determine a classification framework for commercial content on mobile phones (which does not extend to the general internet) against which content providers can self-classify their own content as 18 where appropriate. Such content will then be placed behind access controls by the operators so that, when combined with age verification arrangements, it is only available to those identified as 18 or over.

Commercial content services which fall within IMCB's remit and the Classification Framework include:

- Still pictures
- Video and audiovisual material
- Mobile games, including java-based games

The classification arrangements put in place by IMCB will provide a common standard against which content providers can self-rate certain of their commercial content as 18. The operators will be responsible for addressing instances of misclassification through their own contractual arrangements with content providers – IMCB will not be providing an enforcement or regulatory function as the “regulatory grip” sits best with the six mobile operators through their contractual arrangements with third party suppliers of content.

The approach being adopted is that commercial content deemed suitable only for those 18 and over by content providers by reference to the Classification Framework set out by IMCB will be inaccessible to those under 18. All other content not rated as 18 will be generally unrestricted and available to all users. This differs from the position with other classification systems such as the British Board of Film Classification scheme for films and video who provide a comprehensive classification scheme from “U” through to “R18”. In an environment, however, where the operators ability to determine the age of a phone user is severely restricted by many issues, they have committed to the achievable. Operators aim to protect children from content obviously aimed at “adults” by using age verification tools to determine whether a customer is 18 and then putting access controls in place.

The Classification Framework and the Code of Practice, together with other information about the work of the IMCB, can be found at www.imcb.org.uk

British Music Rights: Promoting Media Literacy in Practice

By Emma Pike*, Director General, British Music Rights.

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Building understanding of how creative people earn a living from their work is a key aspect of media literacy.

Increasingly consumers are getting music, film and games over the Internet or on their mobile phones. This is driving sales of consumer electronics and encouraging consumers' to be more media literate in order to use them. It is also bringing new players, such as ISPs, mobile operators and telcos, into the business of distributing music.

These new players – together with those involved in creating the music (songwriters, recording artists, music publishers and record companies) – all have to compete with the widespread availability of free illegal pirate content. Digital Rights Management (DRM) technology goes some way towards protecting legitimate content from abuse but so far has made few inroads into the “illegal jungle”. So for legitimate paid for content to compete with illegal free content, all players in the new value chain are relying heavily on consumers choosing to respect the value of creative products and the right of those who created and distributed them to be paid for their work.

So there is a lot of work to be done by all stakeholders to support legitimate services by:

- raising copyright awareness;
- labelling and signposting legitimate services;
- issuing consumer warnings regarding illegitimate offerings; and
- ensuring that advertising campaigns for new services or devices are conducted responsibly.

British Music Rights has made a start by designing a free teaching resource for secondary school music teachers. It aims to help create a better understanding amongst 11 to 14-year-olds of how the music industry works, what it means to be a creator and how they might earn a living from their creativity through copyright. The resource can be downloaded from www.bmr.org or ordered via our helpline on 0870 242 5572. British Music Rights feel that this initiative is a small but valuable contribution to providing a better understanding of copyright.

BMR looks forward to continuing its work with all stakeholders in the value chain to encourage further successful initiatives in this important area. There is much to be done but we are confident of making further progress by working in partnership.

Further information can be read on the British Music Rights website www.bmr.org

Watch Out For ...

Adult learners' week 2005

Ofcom will be working closely with The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education - England and Wales (NIACE) in the run up to and during Adult Learners' Week (21-27 May). Adult Learners' Week is the UK's largest festival and celebration of adult learning and for the first time media literacy will be one of the key themes. We will be encouraging organisations – such as colleges, voluntary and community sector providers, libraries and media companies - to offer open days during Adult

Learners' Week, enabling adults to try out different media literacy tasters. You can find out more at <http://www.niace.org.uk/alw/2005/default.htm>. We will be including a round up of activity in the next edition of the bulletin.

Media literacy workshops for older people

The older population has particular needs in terms of developing media literacy skills. Ofcom and Help the Aged will be running a series of media literacy workshops for members of the 'Speaking Up for Our Age' forums. The workshops will be hosted by regional broadcasters (ITV and the BBC) across the country and will give attendees a chance to develop their media literacy skills and cascade these skills back to other forum members. We will produce a report on the events later on in the year.

Kite mark for filtering software

Ofcom is supporting consumer groups, the industry and the Home Office on work to develop on a BSI kitemark for home based internet filtering software. The kitemark, which will be launched later this year, will provide reassurance to consumers that software carrying the mark has met certain key minimum standards. A steering group, formed of representatives from consumer groups, the industry, the Home Office and Ofcom is currently assessing what those standards should be and how they will be measured.

Events

A Panacea for all ills? What can media literacy achieve?

Ofcom is hosting a joint Ofcom-IPPR half day conference looking at current media literacy initiatives and considering the key themes to creating a media literate population. Spaces are limited, so please contact Kay Withers (k.withers@ippr.org.uk) if you would like to attend.

Date: 17 March 2005

Venue: Ofcom, London

Contact: K.Withers@ippr.org

eLiteracy

eLit2005 is the 4th international conference examining the challenge of eLiteracy. eLit2005 will draw together teachers, educational researchers, policymakers, trainers, librarians, IT support staff, learning technologists, and many others to share experiences and to talk and think through issues such as the embedding of eLiteracy skills in the curriculum to the convergence of library and IT services and the challenges of creating online education.

Date: 15-17 June 2005

Venue: University of Strathclyde

Contact: www.elit-conf.org/elit2005/index.html

Cybersafety

The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) is organizing a conference, in collaboration with the University of Auckland, NetSafe, EURIM and others, to address the value choices and conflicts surrounding cybersafety in a converging world. The conference will feature international authorities from government, industry, NGOs and academia, including the computer sciences, humanities, law and the social sciences.

Date: 8-10 September 2005

Venue: University of Oxford

Contact: www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/?rq=cybersafety/conference

Promote your activity

We want to keep our stakeholders informed about developments in media literacy. Do let us know if you are running an event, undertaking research or have published recently on any aspect of media literacy. We can put information up on our website or in our bulletin. Also let us know if you have colleagues who may be interested in receiving our bulletin.

If you have any other suggestions for this bulletin contact

<mailto:media.literacy@ofcom.org.uk>

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