

Expert meeting on media literacy

By Zoetanya Sujon

The LSE Media Policy Project hosted an expert meeting on media literacy last week and is pleased with the outcome – stimulating debate and lively discussion! The **slides** are hosted on Scribd.

The meeting began with a brief introduction to the project, including its primary goal of fostering exchange between policy-makers, researchers and civil society, along with an overview of the project's five core themes, which very broadly include file-sharing, media plurality, media literacy, digital participation and UK media policy.

Sonia Livingstone provided an overview of media literacy as a concept and as a practice, focusing on the 2003 Communications Act and reflecting on the numerous and often problematic ways media literacy has been defined as, for example:

“the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts” (Ofcom).

Livingstone highlighted the numerous tensions arising not only from the attempts to define media literacy but also to measure, implement and enable such practices. Among the many points of friction emerging in debates about media literacy, some of the key points Livingstone highlighted included:

- issues of measurement (e.g. how much ‘literacy’ is enough?)
- the role of “media literacy” in advancing a neo-liberal agenda where responsibility is individualized rather than collective
- the role of media literacy and media (e.g. television, radio, film etc.)
- the scope of media literacy as a specialist strategy for disadvantaged or as a universal policy

Livingstone relayed Jeremy Hunt's assertion that media literacy is a priority for the current government (citing for example, the work of Ofcom, digital inclusion, the school curriculum, vocational education, the Bailey Review, Media Smart and the BBC). However, Livingstone questioned this prioritization in light of current government funding cuts and in comparison to all the work of the previous government. In line with the aims of the project, Livingstone called on researchers to contribute to media literacy policy-making by urging ambitious aims, providing expert measurement strategies and encouraging informed and evidence based views (from new and existing research).

Yinhan Wang looked at what current evidence can tell us about the effectiveness of media literacy in an informative presentation on research trends. Drawing from Ofcom's Media Literacy Audits for children and adults (2005-2009), Wang identified trends in the ways people use and verify information online, as well as for communicative/creative and civic uses of the internet in relation to socio-economic status and age. Notably, digital skills in 2009, such as blocking a virus, installing an internet filter and joining a debate, have remained the same or declined since 2007 across all classes.

Wang also discussed the role of media literacy in formal education, pointing to the need for teaching about television as well as adult interest in learning about digital technologies. Wang's analysis of the Ofcom data also showed that although young people use more social **networking**

sites, there is no significant increase in other digital creative activities, like making one's own website, across all age groups.

Drawing further from this data, Wang suggested that “without improved design, guidance or support” creative, civic and communicative uses of the internet “may not become widespread.”

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