

**Media Literacy and the Public Sphere:
A Contextual Study for Public Media
Literacy Promotion in Ireland**

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Executive Summary

1. Media literacy represents an important public policy response to changes in the audiovisual and digital communications environment. The impetus provided by the Audiovisual Media Services Directive has acted as a catalyst in developing strategies towards media literacy promotion and measurement at individual member state level.
2. There is a long history of media education theory and practice which has its origins in response to modern media of communication. Despite widely varying approaches and very distinct traditions, there is evidence of a growing consensus within the field on the definition of media literacy as the ‘ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media content communications in a variety of communications contexts’.
3. The model of media literacy proposed identifies multiple actors and influences on media literacy policy. Actors in media literacy include government interests including media regulation, media organisations, media educationalists, and other civil society groups. Drivers influencing media literacy policy include social factors, specific policy interventions, regulatory conditions and market forces.
4. The basis of media literacy within the public sphere is based on communication rights and is identified as a central element of building and sustaining democracy. The supporting activities of UNESCO and the Council of Europe are noted and their central role in developing the international context for media education is described. In the contemporary context, institutions like public service media and independent media regulation are central to defending the public interest involved in media literacy promotion.

5. The framework for legislation and policy development for media literacy at a European level is described and outlined. A brief summary of key enabling instruments and policy initiatives such as AVMSD and the European Commission communication *A European Approach to Media Literacy in the Digital Environment* is provided.
6. Case studies of international practice in public media literacy from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Israel illustrates some of the opportunities and challenges that exist. The Broadcasting Bill 2008 provides for a comparable public initiative for media literacy promotion in Ireland and the case study examples show that Ireland is well placed to develop a proactive and progressive approach.
7. Media literacy represents a complex and sometimes contested area. The main thematic topics of media literacy: Technologies, Markets, Institutions and Content, are described. A number of tensions exist within the field which need to be considered in the development of media literacy policies. The pace of technological change and its disruptive character is identified as an important challenge for media literacy.
8. The development of more open markets for communication services also has the effect of a greater fragmentation of audiences and a reduction in the community-building aspect of national broadcasting structures. On the other hand, new media also have new community-building potential.
9. A distinct tension exists between consumer and citizen interests in media literacy policy. Concern is frequently expressed about the balance achieved between the two in media literacy approaches. There is also concern about the balance of

protection measures with the need to promote new opportunities in the digital communications environment.

10. Media literacy has the potential to establish new relationships between users and media institutions. This will require both audiences and media institutions to engage. Public service media can play a central role on this building on its traditional position of trust, particularly in time of intense technological change
11. Media industries also have important responsibilities to promote media literacy. Examples of media literacy partnerships from around the world illustrate the potential for effective intervention and contribution on the part of media organisations. The longer term sustainability of such partnerships needs to be considered however.
12. Fostering critical autonomy remains a central aim of media literacy. This is a complex area which has traditionally been the responsibility of media educationalists. An effective media literacy promotion programme will therefore require partnerships with educationalists and experts in the field. Significant challenges remain in this area and require careful definition and dedicated support.
13. Focus groups conducted as part of the research highlight contrasting levels of media competence, critical media awareness and understanding of the issues involved in public media literacy.
14. The report's findings conclude that public media literacy promotion provides an important opportunity to develop socially-responsive and innovative strategies for the benefit of consumers and citizens in Ireland. Media literacy policy is not

without its risks and the dynamic and unpredictable nature of new developments in media and communications mean that sustained attention to the topic is required.

15. Recommendations of the report emphasise the importance of research, the need to share information and good practice, as well as dedicated support. The formation of a media literacy expert group is also recommended.

Introduction

Media literacy is commonly regarded as essential to maintaining inclusivity in a rapidly changing environment for converged information, media and communications services. Media literacy has emerged as priority for the European Union as part of its Information Society strategy. New approaches to regulation have sought to harness the benefits of digital communications technology and to ensure its speedy development. It is recognised, however, that as new services and platforms develop, it is increasingly difficult to rely on old style, ‘protectionist’ regulation and that specific measures need to be taken to ensure that consumers and users are informed and better enabled to cope in this complex and dynamic environment. Internationally, media regulators are increasingly incorporating a commitment to media literacy within their remit. The proposed Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) will assume a similar responsibility. This research, therefore, documents the background to the development of media literacy as a matter of public policy and examines considerations that may be important in the emerging Irish debate on media literacy.

In order to further the BCI’s objective of being a leading source of information on trends in Ireland and abroad, and in anticipation of important new developments within public media literacy, this research seeks to contribute knowledge in three main areas:

- The international state of the art of public regulatory approaches to media literacy;
- Current trends in media literacy thinking among experts in the field;
- Public attitudes towards media literacy in Ireland.

The research for this report was funded under the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland’s Media Research Funding Scheme 2007. The Broadcasting Act, 2001 formalised and expanded the research function of the Commission, setting out the crucial role of research in assisting the Commission anticipate change and assess the continued relevance of BCI practice and procedure in an evolving broadcasting sector. This research function is itself acknowledged to be an aspect of media literacy (*BCI Research Policy*) and was identified as a research theme in its 2007 call.

The research for this project took place over a nine month period between November 2007 and July 2008 and fell into three main phases. Firstly, we conducted a review of the literature on media literacy, both academic and policy-related, detailing its origins and development as a concept. Secondly, we surveyed and consulted widely on current debates on the role of media literacy in regulatory contexts. This included contacts with experts in the field, additional desk research in relation to new and emerging developments, and thematic analysis of the main fault lines within the public debate on media literacy. Finally, we conducted a number of focus groups with a sample of adults in Dublin and in the West of Ireland, the purpose of which was to explore public responses and attitudes to emerging themes in the research.

With the exception of the focus groups which deal with the Irish context, the research for this project was oriented towards the international stage. It was decided at the outset that given the early stage of development of public media literacy as a project, the most valuable exercise would be a scoping one, examining international trends and identifying good practice elsewhere. It is also the case that the examination of the specific Irish factors – actors, drivers, and policies – would be a separate and equally challenging project. The first stage, however, is to identify the international policy context which is principal subject of this report.

The inclusion of media literacy within the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD, May 2007), and a European Commission Communication *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment* (Commission of the European Communities 2007), are indicators of its current policy significance. The Commission's approach to the future of European regulatory audiovisual policy stresses that regulatory policy in the sector has to 'safeguard certain public interests, such as cultural diversity, the right to information, the importance of media pluralism, the protection of minors and consumer protection and action to enhance public awareness and media literacy, now and in the future'. The definition of media literacy put forward in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive is an important one and provides the guiding parameters for this investigation:

Media literacy refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely. Media-literate

people will be able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore the development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and progress followed closely. (Commission of the European Communities 2007: recital 37).

In the Irish context, the proposed Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) will also be charged with the responsibility for promoting media literacy. This follows the example of the UK's Communications Act (2003) which places the responsibility on OFCOM to promote 'better public awareness and understanding of material published by electronic media, the purposes for which such material is selected or made available for publication, the available systems by which access to such published material is or can be regulated, and the available systems by which persons to whom such material is available may control what is received'.¹

Similarly, the drafting of a European Charter for Media Literacy by interested educational and other agencies to support the establishment of media literacy across Europe in September 2006,² alongside efforts by organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe to highlight its importance, point to a growing consensus for a greatly expanded media literacy provision. A report commissioned by the Radharc Trust, the research for which was carried out by the authors in 2007, sought to institute a debate about the role of media literacy in educational settings in Ireland (Barnes, Flanagan et al. 2007).³ The current research looks specifically at public interest aspects of contemporary media literacy and its relevant regulatory requirements. Such research, we argue, is timely given the relative lack of critical attention to the subject to date. There is also an urgency to the topic under

¹ Communications Act 2003, <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2003/20030021.htm>

² <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/index.php>

³ *Critical Media Literacy in Ireland* (2007) was commissioned by Radharc Media Trust and undertaken jointly undertaken by Dublin Institute of Technology and Dublin City University. www.mediaconference.ie/files/Radharc.Report.pdf

consideration. There is a tight timetable underpinning the AVMSD reporting requirement for levels of media literacy in Europe. Technology and media development is proceeding at a rapid pace and much greater public awareness is required of the fundamental changes underway and their implications for society as a whole.

1. What is Media Literacy?

The ability to read and write – or traditional literacy – is no longer sufficient in this day and age. People need a greater awareness of how to express themselves effectively, and how to interpret what others are saying, especially on blogs, via search engines or in advertising. Everyone (old and young) needs to get to grips with the new digital world in which we live. For this, continuous information and education is more important than regulation.

Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media, European Commission⁴

Media literacy, for long a concern of educationalists and media researchers, is now a major focus of public policy. Following many years of success in curriculum development, though hampered by limited governmental support, the concept has more recently become a buzzword in thinking about forms of regulation in the emerging converged communications market. The European Commission, governments of individual member states, media regulators across the world, and the media industry as a whole are considering their responsibilities and obligations towards supporting a better understanding of the fast changing media environment in which we live.

Central to the claim made by Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Information Society and Media, is that media literacy is a pre-requisite of effective participation in technologically-advanced societies in which rapid change in information and communications services has become the norm. Technologies are now central to many communicative processes and media literacy means acquiring a broad range of competences in new and traditional media that allow us to play a full part in today's society. Failure to do so will mean an increasingly atomised society and a growing digital divide between those who are skilled and well-connected and those who fall behind. Conversely, a highly media literate society is one in which social cohesion flourishes, and in which competitiveness in a knowledge economy is supported.

⁴ Commission of the European Communities (2007) Media literacy: do people really understand how to make the most of blogs, search engines or interactive TV? URL:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1970> (Accessed July 6, 2008).

Within academic and educational circles, there has been much discussion and debate about the term ‘media literacy’, its imprecision, and the manner in which it has been transposed into this public policy context. There is some concern that the definitions adopted are too vague and do not provide sufficient scope for developing the skills of critical analysis which media educationalists seek. There is also some suspicion about the motives of governments adopting policies towards media literacy as ‘passing the buck’ (Bragg, Buckingham et al. 2006: 40). As a recent report for the Australian Communications and Media Authority puts it: ‘when a government steps back from regulation, every consumer has to, in effect, become their own regulator’(Penman and Turnbull 2007: 40).

Defining media literacy

Discussion and debate on what media literacy actually means has a longstanding position within the literature on the subject and it is commonplace to begin a review of the subject acknowledging the fact that while we know it is a good thing, we are not entirely agreed on what it is.

Cecilia Von Feilitzen of the International Clearinghouse on Children Youth and Media, has argued that:

There exist many definitions of media literacy around the world. More and more often they include the ability 1) to access the media, 2) to understand/critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents, and 3) to create media contents/participate in the production process. It is not unusual that the definitions also include aspects of learning to use the media in order to participate in the process for social change, for development, towards increased democracy.(Commission Of The European Communities 2007: 6)

The definition of media literacy as the ability to ‘*access, analyze, evaluate, and produce both print and electronic media*’ (Aufderheide 1993) is probably the closest to an agreed definition (Livingstone 2004: 5). It is also, necessarily, a minimalist one and arises out of an attempt to bring together a wide variety of different views and perspectives on the purposes and goals of media education. This particular definition was consolidated at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy organized

by the Aspen Institute in Washington DC in 1992. This brought together leaders of the fledgling US media literacy movement to co-ordinate and agree on the basic strategies for the field. With some variations, the definition has been widely influential and has been adopted by organizations worldwide. Locating media literacy firmly within an educational context and within an agreed democratic pedagogical framework, the report of the conference recognised:

There have been and will be a broad array of constituencies for media literacy: young people, parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, citizens. And there are a variety of sites to teach and practice media literacy: public and private schools, churches, synagogues, universities, civic and voluntary organizations serving youth and families, mass media from newspapers to television.⁵

The fundamental objective of media literacy is, according to the Aspen Institute definition, a ‘critical autonomy relationship to all media’ organized around a set of common beliefs or precepts, which recognise that the media are constructed and that they have wide commercial, ideological and political implications (in Aufderheide 1993).

The significance of this definition is quoted here because it is important to point out that while much attention is given to definitional matters in relation to media literacy, and much emphasis given to its supposedly contested nature, there is in fact also much agreement on the central principles and attributes of what it means to be media literate. The definition is widely echoed across many different countries, organizations and interest groups who may not share the same ideological approach but draw on common themes and attributes. The Ontario government, for instance, outlined eight key concepts of media literacy which emphasise the critical awareness that:

1. All media are construction
2. The media construct reality
3. Audiences negotiate meaning in the media

⁵ Aufderheide, P. (1993). Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy Aspen, CO, Aspen Institute.. URL: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article356.html

4. Media have commercial implications
5. Media contain ideological and value messages
6. Media have social and political implications
7. Form and content are closely related in the media
8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form⁶

(Duncan 1989)

These closely resemble the US Centre for Media Literacy definition where it identifies five key concepts in its *CML MediaLit Kit*:

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same messages differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power.⁷

The use of the term ‘literacy’ in the context of ‘media literacy’ has tended to cause some confusion and controversy. Opponents will claim that it represents a misguided attempt to replace traditional literacy with something less demanding and more consumer-oriented. As media educators are at pains to point out, however, media literacy expands the concept of traditional literacy. UNESCO’s *Media Education Kit* describes media literacy as the outcome of an education process to acquire the skills and competencies required to read and write not just in print, but in visual, graphic and audio terms, in other words, in all the diverse languages that modern media communications draw on and expect their readers to comprehend (Frau-Meigs 2006: 20).

⁶ See http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/key_concept.cfm

⁷ See: http://www.medialit.org/bp_mlk.html

Similarly, the conflation of ‘media education’ and ‘media literacy’ has also been the subject of debate and differing interpretations. While analytically distinct and with separate objectives and methodologies, Fedorov’s survey of media education experts reveals, a high degree of commonality in the goals pursued within media education and media literacy. The vast majority in this survey agreed that the development of critical thinking skills and autonomy was the most important feature (Fedorov 2003). Acknowledging that media literacy is the outcome of media education, Israeli media education expert Dafna Lemish argues that the terminological difference should be set aside:

originally there was a difference, with media education being more a wider concept and media literacy perceived as being more a specific translation of critical analysis of media. Media studies was more an academic term for theoretical studies. I think today it is almost impossible and unnecessary to separate between them. Therefore in my mind today they are interchangeable, and it is not beneficial to try to theoretically make a distinction (in Fedorov 2003: 11).

The general statement of policy by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport on Media *Literacy and Critical Viewing Skills*, (quoting Livingstone and Bovill’s *Young People, New Media* (1999), states that ‘*To take their place in the twenty first century, children must be screen-wise as well as book-wise.*’ Amongst other necessary skills, children will need to appraise critically, and assess the relative value of, information from different sources, and gain competencies in understanding the construction, forms, strengths and limitations of screen based content (DCMS 2001).

The definition of the UK media regulator, Ofcom, in a neatly abbreviated form, expresses media literacy as: ‘*the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts*’ (Ofcom 2004). This followed an extensive public consultation in 2004, which received responses on all aspects of the proposed media literacy work of Ofcom. It was recognized that there could be no single agreed definition, and that for operational purposes Ofcom would organize its work around the three key terms in the definition. ‘Everybody involved will continue to use a definition that emphasises their own priorities and aims’, it was noted (2004:5). The newly established International Media Literacy Research Forum in May 2008

adopted a slightly amended definition as the ability to ‘access, analyse, evaluate, and create’ communications.⁸

The European Charter for Media Literacy, developed out of an initiative by the UK Film Council and the British Film Institute (BFI), has produced a comprehensive definition and set of principles which it invites institutions and individuals to sign up to. The Charter was devised to foster greater clarity and wider consensus in Europe on media literacy and media education, and to raise its public profile in Europe as a whole. Encompassing an extensive range of cognitive and practical skills, the Charter proposes that media literate people should be able to:

- Use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests;
- Gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources;
- Understand how and why media content is produced;
- Analyse critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;
- Use media creatively to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions;
- Identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;
- Make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.⁹

⁸ The International Media Literacy Research Forum is an initiative spearheaded by Ofcom and includes the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA), the Canadian Association of Media Education Organisations (CAMEO), Dublin Institute of Technology, the New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA), the US National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE formerly AMLA), and Ofcom as founding partners. Presentation from the inaugural conference are available at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/theforum/>

The European Commission with the input of its Media Literacy Expert Group, and following a public consultation in 2006, has adopted the definition of media literacy as *‘the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts’*.

Finally, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), one of the central instruments of European media policy, puts forward the definition of media literacy as the *‘skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely. Media-literate people will be able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and monitored’*.¹⁰

Accordingly, across a wide variety of contexts there is a high degree of commonality in how media literacy is described. There are emphases which vary: *critical literacy* may be deemed essential to being an informed consumer of media; while underscoring the ability to *create* and *communicate* messages may be fundamental in empowering citizens and enabling people to make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities. The feasibility of supporting all dimensions equally is a matter of policy and sufficient resources and is considered further below.

Why is Media literacy important?

A foundational event in the history of media literacy as it is now understood was the UNESCO International Symposium on Media Education at Grünwald in Germany in 1982. The Grünwald Declaration on Media Education, ratified by the 19 participating

⁹ <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/index_en.htm

countries, became a key milestone in the explanation and justification for why media education was so important. It stated:

‘We live in a world where media are omnipresent: an increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. In some countries, for example, children already spend more time watching television than they do attending school.’

‘Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today’s world. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen’s active participation in society. Political and educational systems need to recognize their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.’¹¹

As an historical statement of the importance and necessity for media literacy, the Grünwald Declaration is, David Buckingham notes, a succinct and powerful rationale that is of enduring relevance (Buckingham 2001). Like many forms of media education, it is rooted in a response to a media-rich environment and where social processes of communication are increasingly *mediated*. Crucially, it proposes, that the purpose of media education is not to condemn or endorse but to accept its impact as an established fact. Media literacy is the outcome of a positive engagement with media’s potential and harnessing of its ability to facilitate citizenship.

Responding to the challenge of the growing dominance of media in our lives is not a new phenomenon and many of the familiar themes of media literacy can be recognised in the early responses from the early part of the twentieth century to radio, cinema and television when they were relatively new media.

Many of the responses were couched in a concern about the rise of mass media of entertainment and their supposed effects through learned and imitated behaviour. For example, the famous Payne Fund studies, conducted between 1928 and 1933 by the Motion Picture Research Council in the United States, presented a series of research studies about potential effects of motion pictures particularly on children. Similarly, Cantril and Allport’s *The Psychology of Radio*, published in 1935, tried to map the new ‘mental world’ created by radio, a medium that in less than a generation had

¹¹ http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/MEDIA_E.PDF

come to dominate popular entertainment. These ‘effects studies’ were convinced that mass media had a powerful impact, and that a medium like radio was ‘preeminent as a means of social control and epochal in its influence on the mental horizons of men’ (Cantril and Allport 1935: vii). This appeared to be amply demonstrated in Cantril’s noted study of the panic surrounding the broadcast in 1938 of H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (Cantril 1940), and indeed in studies of the effects of propaganda during the Second World War (Hovland, Lumsdaine et al. 1949). In the United Kingdom, F.R. Leavis responding with alarm to the rise of advertising and other mass media, developed his programme of cultural criticism for teachers to enable them to counteract its pernicious effects through careful training in taste and discrimination (Leavis and Thompson 1933). Similarly, television, particularly with reference to its role in the lives of children, has been the subject of numerous studies (Schramm, Lyle et al. 1961), as has its supposed role in contributing to the experience of violence and disorder in everyday life (Lowery and DeFleur 1995; Ball-Rokeach 2001).

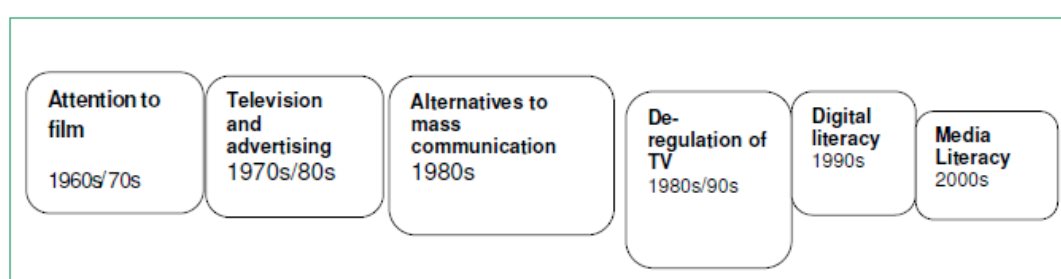
These kinds of responses have been characterised by David Buckingham as the ‘protectionist’ or ‘inoculation’ model of media literacy (Buckingham 1998). Describing the major paradigms of media education, he portrays its development as one moving from a position of cultural and political protectionism to a gradual democratisation and an approach ‘beyond protectionism’. This historical pattern of development is noted also by the authors of the European Commission Study on the *Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe* (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007). They identified three main trends in media literacy development in a European context:

- 1) The move from a perspective largely centred on the *educational context* to one focused on the *civic context*;
- 2) A shift in focus from the *mass media* (press, radio, television, film) to *ICT* and *digital media*;
- 3) A shift in perspective from one predominantly concerned with *protection*, and characterised by suspicion and mistrust of the media, to one where the focus

is to a greater extent on *promotion*, and harnessing the advantages and benefits of new media.

These trends, while broadly sequential, are not mutually exclusive and in practice media literacy policies and practices combine elements of each trajectory: protection and promotion, education and civic engagement (2007: 33). Within this context, media education initiatives and awareness of the relevance of media literacy to the contemporary world may be seen as a series of evolutionary phases:

Figure 1 – Stages of Media Literacy in Europe



Source: (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007: 30)

Though necessarily simplifying its historical development, this model locates our current understanding of media literacy within the context of growing body of sophisticated knowledge about the media and how it communicates. The 1960s, for instance, was characterised by a widespread interest in the aesthetics of film, associated with the creation of institutions like the British Film Institute, and the development of interest in film as an art form and a valid educational subject (Hall and Whannel 1964). Later in the 1970s, attention was focussed to a greater extent on television, the consumer society and advertising. Such concerns continued into the 1980s, encompassing a critical engagement with the power of mass communications, and a consideration of alternative modes of access and participation. This coincided with many of the principal innovations in the development of the modern media education curriculum with seminal educational texts as Len Masterman's *Teaching*

about Television (1980), Andrew Hart's *Understanding the Media* (1991), and David Lusted's *The Media Studies Book* (Lusted 1991). In the more recent past, digital media, the internet, and a focus on digital literacy skills has come to dominate public discussion and debate on media education. In the current context, convergence of audiovisual media and the digital world has brought renewed attention to the critical skills fostered by media education within a technology environment of new and emerging digital platforms.

Returning to the Declaration on Media Education at the UNESCO Grünwald symposium of 1982, it is clear that the trends identified in a world 'where the media are omnipresent' have intensified in highly significant ways and have made the need for media education all the more urgent. Commenting on the changes in the media environment since Grünwald, Buckingham has pointed out that economic, technological and social developments have seen a massive proliferation of electronic media, a broader commercialisation of contemporary culture and a greatly altered balance in the relationship of the global to the local in everyday life (2001: 3). Similarly, institutions which may have been dominant at the time of Grünwald, such as public service media have lost ground to commercial media, while new technologies have also facilitated greater global communication and the creation of transnational communities.

An operational model for media literacy

Definitions of media literacy now in circulation share a number of dimensions which constitute the starting point of an operational model for policy and programme development. These include:

- Questions of *access* including issues of both physical access to the media and as well as enabling skills or competencies required to use and avail of media communication.

- Ability to *analyse* and *evaluate*, drawing on critical skills of reading and understanding, as well as critically appraising information and communications across print, graphic, and audiovisual forms.
- The ability to *create* communications, and utilise technical, communicative and creative skills in different media and using different technologies of communication.

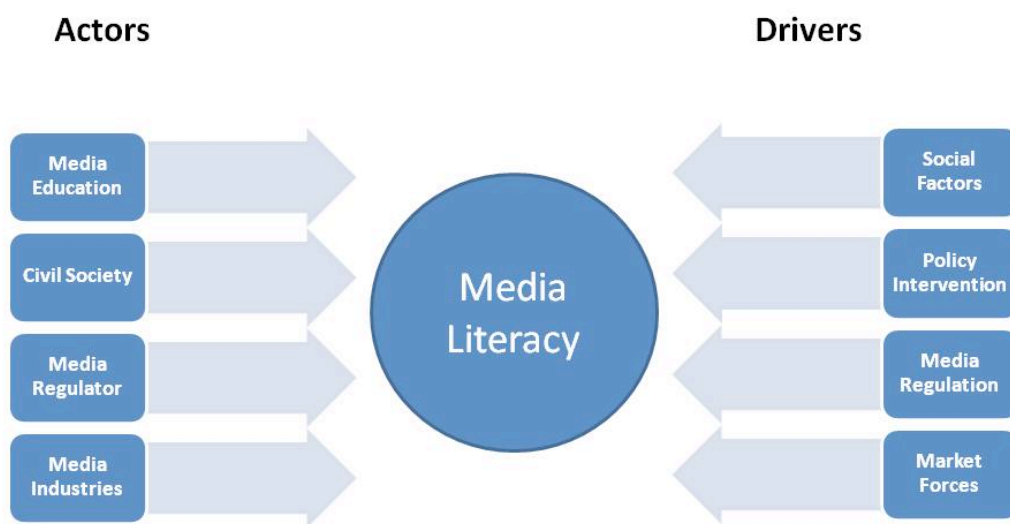
Such competencies are at the same time communicative human rights and, in the formulation agreed at the 1999 UNESCO Vienna conference, *Educating for the Media and the Digital Age*, such rights are seen as ‘a basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world’ and are ‘instrumental in building and sustaining democracy’ (UNESCO 1999). The follow-up UNESCO seminar in Seville in 2002 confirmed this approach and reasserted that media literacy has both *critical* and *creative* aspects, that media education takes place in both formal and informal settings, and that it should promote individual self-fulfilment and community and social responsibility (UNESCO 2002).

An operational model for media literacy is presented in Figure 2. This represents the distinct *actors* and *drivers* involved in media literacy. In addition to the media education community where media literacy has traditionally resided, there are now other providers and actors in the field including NGOs, advocacy groups, other civil society organisations, government interests, principally represented by the media regulator, and not least, media industries themselves. The relationships and partnerships between such actors are examined further in the next section.

There are also a number of distinct forces impacting on media literacy and driving particular goals. Presented here at a level of generality, such drivers include social dimensions such as demographic and population profile factors such as age and social class. Policy interventions, particularly in the ICT arena, have played a significant role in shaping approaches to media literacy and focussed attention on issues of access to and understanding of the new information and communications environment. Media regulation, in this instance, may be seen as the instrument of public policy and a determinant of the media environment, as both actor and driver,

within which media literacy policy operates. Finally, there are specific market forces impacting on the media landscape, bringing new services and platforms into the mix, shaping patterns of consumption, and creating new opportunities and challenges for media literacy.

Figure 2 – An Operational Model of Media Literacy¹²



Media literacy today has become a priority for debate and public action, involving a wide variety of stakeholders, responding to distinct social, political, regulatory and market forces. The specific context for media literacy in different countries may vary enormously and substantial research is required to properly assess and compare its position in different locations. However, while there remain large disparities in its status and development across the world, the differences between the fundamental goals being pursued are diminishing. The growing consensus of what media literacy is and why it is important has emerged within a distinct policy framework and is the subject of the next chapter.

¹² This draws on the model presented by Ofcom at the International Media Literacy Research Forum, London, May 14-16, 2008. URL: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/theforum>

2. The Policy Context

As indicated in Chapter 1, a concern with media literacy has moved from being a matter solely of interest to media educationalists to a question of public policy with a variety of stakeholders and actors involved in the process. That media literacy has caught the attention of governments and policy makers is something that has been welcomed by the media education community but also complicates its mission. This chapter looks at the policy context and examines the distinct role that media literacy plays within the public policy sphere, its grounding in international recognition of communication rights, and the provision for media literacy within European Union regulatory frameworks. This is followed in Chapter 3 by a brief examination of international examples of media literacy promotion among media regulators worldwide.

Media literacy in the public sphere and policy context

Reviewing definitions of media literacy, it is clear that there has always been a strong public dimension and democratic orientation underpinning media education. The first principle of media education, according to Len Masterman, is that: ‘At stake is the empowerment of majorities and the strengthening of society's democratic structures’ (Masterman 1985).¹³ Media education, advocates argue, is inextricably bound up with human rights of freedom of information and expression. The outcome of media education is the ability to make ‘one’s own judgment on the basis of the available information’ (Krucsay 2006). In fostering a sense of critical autonomy, the media literate person is empowered through a greater understanding of how the media *mediate* reality, rather than simply reflect it, and accordingly is better prepared to participate in society on more equal terms. Noting that only one in ten of American 18 year olds vote, media researcher Robert Kubey has argued strongly for the linking of media studies in schools with civics and social studies (Kubey 2004). He argues that

¹³ http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching_backgrounders/media_literacy/18_principles.cfm

‘in a representative democracy, people must be educated in all forms of contemporary mediated expression and well beyond the print media’ (2004: 69). Up to relatively recently, however, the objective of media literacy education, whether related to language arts or civics, has been education of young people in full-time educational settings through curricula designed to foster greater critical awareness at an individual level.

Against the background of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2008, there is a growing consensus that concepts such as media literacy and information literacy are best conceived through the lens of human rights (Frau-Meigs 2008). The Council of Europe’s support for the public service value of the internet¹⁴ focuses attention on strategies for realisation of the full democratic potential of the information society and the development of appropriate public spaces and information as a public good. For this, media literacy is an essential pre-requisite.

The fundamental basis for media literacy as a public policy concern derives from its origin in communication rights, in turn derived from basic human rights, as guaranteed by through such international declarations as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). The contribution of organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe in developing the public dimension of media literacy and its role in education has been a decisive one and hugely influential. UNESCO initiated the concept of media education in the 1970s and sought input from leading researchers to develop strategies for its incorporation into the education systems of all developed countries (Zgrabljic-Rotar 2006: 10). The Grünwald Declaration of 1982 originally argued the need for political and educational systems to promote citizens’ critical understanding of the phenomena of communication. Since then, UNESCO conferences in Toulouse

¹⁴ Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet. URL: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1207291&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

(1990), Vienna (1998) and Seville (2000) have built an international case for promoting media and information literacy as an integral part of people's life-long learning.¹⁵ UNESCO is also the official moderator within the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in priority Action Line C9 - Media, and promotes media education and information literacy as one of its sub-themes.¹⁶ Research, influencing policy and setting international standards for best practice are also a crucial element of UNESCO's involvement in media literacy. Its 2001 report *Media Education a Global Strategy for Development* (Buckingham 2001) outlined broad guidelines to media education, an appraisal of its application around the world and proposed a strategy for its future development. The accompanying *Youth Media Education Survey* (Domaille and Buckingham 2001) documented the central facilitative role that UNESCO has played in the development of media education at various stages in its history.

The Council of Europe has also played an active role in the promotion of media literacy within the public sphere. Within its mandate of protecting human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law, the Council has emphasised citizens' interests in the media and developed recommendations on policies concerning human rights, democracy, and the right to information and freedom of expression. Its work in the area has developed a particular focus around the protection and promotion of human rights, linked to member State responsibilities to protect and promote human rights, especially for young people, under the European Convention on Human Rights. Its Recommendation on *Empowering Children in the New Information and Communications Environment* was adopted in 2006 and advocated 'a coherent information literacy and training strategy which is conducive to empowering children and their educators in order for them to make the best possible use of information and communication services and technologies'.¹⁷ Member states accordingly are required to ensure that children are familiarised with, and skilled in, the new information and communications environment, have the necessary skills to create, produce and

¹⁵ [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27056&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

[URL_ID=27056&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27056&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

¹⁶ <http://www.wsis-si.org/media.html>

¹⁷ http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human_Rights/Media/Links/Events/Forum2006YEREVAN_en.asp

distribute content and communications, and that such skills should better enable them to deal with content that may be harmful in nature. A supporting *Internet Literacy Handbook*, published by the Council's Media Division, acts as a guide for parents, teachers and young people.¹⁸

The Committee of Ministers' 2007 recommendation to member states on promoting freedom of expression and information highlights transparency and reliability of information as a crucial element of human rights within the new information and communications environment.¹⁹ Advocating a multi—stakeholder approach between governments, private sector and civil society organisations, the recommendation recognises that exercising rights and freedoms in the new environment requires affordable access to ICT infrastructure, access to information as a public service and common standards and strategies for reliable information, flexible content creation and transparency in the processing of information. Member states are encouraged to create a clear enabling legal framework and complementary regulatory systems, including new forms of co-regulation and self-regulation, that respond adequately to technological changes and are fully compatible with the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Media literacy provision in the regulatory domain

It seems that an emerging trend in the system of communication in Europe is for regulatory authorities to participate in the field of media literacy and advance the development of media literacy in all sections of society, as well as conducting regular research to monitor it. (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007: 65)

Increasingly, it is in the regulatory realm that responsibility rests for the creation and maintenance of a democratic public sphere through implementation of policies such as the provision and promotion of media literacy. The European Commission's 2003 *Communication on the future of European regulatory audiovisual policy*, emphasised

¹⁸ http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/StandardSetting/InternetLiteracy/hbk_en.asp

¹⁹ <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1188541#RelatedDocuments>

the role of regulatory policy in safeguarding public interests, such as cultural diversity, the right to information, media pluralism, the protection of minors, consumer protection and the need to enhance public awareness and media literacy.²⁰ Media regulators in particular have a central role in the management of those public spaces where an information commons is created and maintained through a diverse and pluralist broadcasting landscape. Consequently, the ‘culture of independence’, acts as a crucial guarantor of democratic accountability and transparency in regulatory management of the media environment.²¹

Public service broadcasting, in particular, has been identified as a key instrument in promoting citizens’ democratic participation and access to public life (Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005: 12). Against a background of increasing marketisation and erosion of the public sphere through fragmentation, institutions such as public service broadcasting and the underpinning regulatory frameworks now play a central role in defining that public space in which rights for information, communication and expression are exercised and enjoyed. UNESCO has argued that optimal utilisation of the public space fundamentally relies on media literacy skills, and realising the full range of possibilities that media literacy offers. In a rapidly developing information and communications environment, therefore, regulatory bodies need to ensure a commitment to public access and utilise new and emerging platforms to enable participation and interaction, coverage of public events and major governance institutions and support for minorities and other interests who may require special measures to achieve full citizen-participation and information sharing.

The regulatory framework for Media Literacy in the European Union

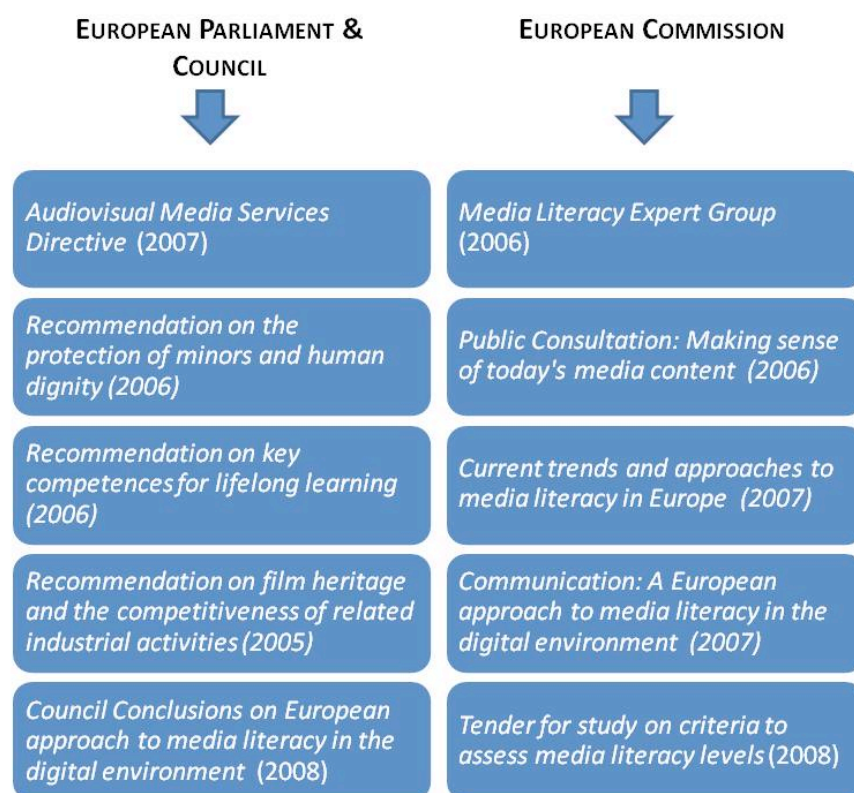
There are now a number of important legislative and regulatory initiatives governing media literacy across different European institutions, including at European

²⁰ *The Future of European Audiovisual Regulatory Policy*. URL: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0784:FIN:EN:PDF>

²¹ http://www.coe.int/t/E/Human_Rights/Media/4_Documentary_Resources/SpeechJSWarsaw15Apr08_en.asp

Commission and European Parliament level. The following brief overview, summarised in Figure 3, highlights the key elements and provisions as they impact on the field of media literacy.²²

Figure 3 – Overview of European Media Literacy Regulation



European Parliament and Council of the European Union

1. The pre-eminent instrument of European media policy is the *Audiovisual Media Services Without Frontiers Directive* or AVMSD (Commission of the European Communities 2007), formerly the *Television Without Frontiers Directive*. The

²² A survey of the principal European legislative instruments is available in: Celot, P. (2007). Media Literacy – the EU regulatory framework and the European Parliament. Brussels, European Association for Viewers Interests. Also see Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona (2007). Media Literacy Profile EUROPE. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.

new directive entered into force in December 2007 and member states have two years to transpose the new provisions into national law, so that the modernized legal framework for audiovisual media services will be fully applicable by the end of 2009.²³

The AVMSD has been designed to offer ‘a comprehensive legal framework that covers all audiovisual media services (including on-demand audiovisual media services), provides less detailed and more flexible regulation and modernises rules on TV advertising to better finance audiovisual content’. Responding to technological change, the directive seeks to create a level-playing field in Europe for emerging audiovisual media services. The key pillars of European audiovisual policy remain: cultural diversity, protection of minors, consumer protection, media pluralism, and the fight against racial and religious hatred. In addition, the new Directive aims at ensuring the independence of national media regulators.

Of central importance is the inclusion of media literacy within the terms of AVMSD, whereby from 2011 the Commission will be required to report to the European Parliament on levels of media literacy in all member states. Media literacy, as defined in the Directive, refers to ‘skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely’ (2007: para 37). The definition is not as expansive as in other communications below and appears restricted to exercising ‘informed choice’ and making use of new technological opportunities. Opportunities for the development of media literacy are also specifically referenced in relation to measures for the protection of minors and human dignity and for exercise of the right to reply.

2. *Recommendation 2006/952/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity.*²⁴ In the context of emerging information and audiovisual media services, this Recommendation promotes responsible attitudes on the part of professionals,

²³ See: http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/avms/index_en.htm

²⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32006H0952:EN:NOT>

intermediaries and users, respectful of human dignity and the need for protection of minors. A level of awareness among parents, teachers and trainers of the potential of the new services and their safe use is encouraged.

Examples of possible actions concerning media literacy are outlined in Annex II of the Recommendation:

- (a) continuing education of teachers and trainers, in liaison with child protection associations, on using the Internet in the context of school education so as to maintain awareness of the possible risks of the Internet with particular regard to chat rooms and fora;
- (b) introduction of specific Internet training aimed at children from a very early age, including sessions open to parents;
- (c) an integrated educational approach forming part of school curricula and media literacy programmes, so as to provide information on using the Internet responsibly;
- (d) organisation of national campaigns aimed at citizens, involving all communications media, to provide information on using the Internet responsibly;
- [...]

3. *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006).*²⁵ This Recommendation identifies key competencies that should be acquired by all in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are fundamental in a knowledge-based society. Key competencies include: *digital competence*, involving the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST); *social and civic competences* that equip individuals to engage in active and democratic participation; and competences of *cultural awareness and expression* which involves appreciation of

²⁵ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf

the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts).

4. *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities* (2005)²⁶ In addition to recommendations regarding support for the importance of a vibrant and competitive European film culture, this proposal recommends European film heritage should be made more accessible for educational, and cultural research and that training in media literacy should include:

17. promoting professional training in all fields related to film heritage to foster an enhanced exploitation of the industrial potential of film heritage;

18. promoting the use of film heritage as a way of strengthening the European dimension in education and promoting cultural diversity;

19. fostering and promoting visual education, film studies and media literacy in education at all levels, professional training programmes and European programmes;

20. promoting close cooperation between producers, distributors, broadcasters and film institutes for educational purposes while respecting copyright and related rights;

5. *Council Conclusions on European approach to media literacy in the digital environment* (2008).²⁷ The Council Conclusions, adopted in June 2008 endorse the 2007 European Commission Communication *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*, and provide strong political support for the Commission approach of developing and implementing media literacy programmes to promote active and aware citizenship in Europe. Specifically, the

²⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005H0865:EN:NOT>

²⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:140:0008:0009:EN:PDF>

adopted conclusions, echoing the Communication, now invite member states to ensure all appropriate authorities promote media literacy; support codes of conduct through modes of co- and self-regulation; encourage all media stakeholders to conduct research; promote awareness-raising, specifically in relation to the use of ICT by young people; and to promote media literacy within the framework of lifelong learning.

European Commission

1. *The Media Literacy Expert Group*:²⁸ In 2006 the European Commission established a Media Literacy Expert Group to analyse and define media literacy objectives and trends, to highlight and promote good practices at European level and to propose actions in the field. Against the background of rapid technological change, including the transition to digital television, this initiative is designed to guide and support the Commission's activities in the area. Terms of reference for the expert group include: the importance of promoting the protection of children, young people and human dignity in the media and support the creation of a media environment appropriate for citizens' social, educational and cultural needs.
2. *Public Consultation: Making sense of today's media content* (2006):²⁹ The objective of the Consultation was to identify the existing and possible approaches to media literacy and to provide a description of its emerging trends throughout Europe. Responses and feedback broadly endorsed the Commission's definition of media literacy, adding the ability 'to create and communicate messages'. Issues relating to the aims and target audience for media literacy initiatives supported a view of media literacy as a key requirement for citizenship in the information society, and a basic element of lifelong learning. 106 responses were received from 23 EU member states as well as responses from China, the

²⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/expert_group/index_en.htm

²⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/consultation/index_en.htm

USA and Russia. These were representative of a range of civil society (25%), media industry (27%), academic/education sector (7%), government/public institutions (23%) and 19% from individual respondents. The value of this type of consultation can be seen in the sharing of key issues which emerge as central even across such a broad range of positions, approaches and opinions, many of which are often at odds.

3. *Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe (2007)*:³⁰ The study, mapping current practices in implementing media literacy in Europe, was carried out for the Commission by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the second half of 2007. An overall Europe media literacy profile report is included as well as a number of individual country profiles.
4. *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (2007)*.³¹ A major building block of European policy on media literacy was added at the end of 2007 with the publication by DG INFSO of the European Commission of a Communication on Media Literacy. Building on the work of the Commission's Media Literacy Expert Group established in 2006, the conclusions of a public consultation in the field of media literacy, and the publication of the study on *Current trends and approaches to Media Literacy in Europe* (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2007), the Communication is designed to complement the AVMSD and to propose further action in the field.³² As the first formal policy document on the area at EU level, it focuses on the three areas of commercial communication, audiovisual works and online communication. As noted earlier, the Communication's definition expands on that contained in AVMSD and presents media literacy as: *'the ability to access the media, to*

³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/studies/index_en.htm

³¹ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf

³² http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/index_en.htm

understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts'. Levels of media literacy are described as including:

- feeling comfortable with all existing media from newspapers to virtual communities;
- actively using media, through, inter alia, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts);
- having a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to assess information, dealing with advertising on various media, using search engines intelligently);
- using media creatively, as the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel allow an ever growing number of Europeans to create and disseminate images, information and content;
- understanding the economy of media and the difference between pluralism and media ownership;
- being aware of copyright issues which are essential for a "culture of legality", especially for the younger generation in its double capacity of consumers and producers of content.

Highlighting good practices and policy objectives in the three areas of commercial communication, audiovisual heritage and online, the Communication calls on member states to:

- encourage the authorities in charge of audiovisual and electronic communication regulation to get more involved and to cooperate in the improvement of the various levels of media literacy defined above;
- promote systematic research into and regular observation of and reporting on the different aspects and dimensions of media literacy;

- develop and implement codes of conduct and, as appropriate, co-regulatory frameworks in conjunction with all interested parties at national level, and promote self-regulatory initiatives.

5. *Tender for study on criteria to assess media literacy levels* (2008)³³ As announced in the 2007 Communication, a tender for a study to devise appropriate criteria for assessing media literacy levels, as required for Commission reporting under AVMSD, has been issued and will report within 10 months.

Media literacy promotion either currently is, or is in the process of becoming, a central feature for media regulators in many jurisdictions, in Europe and internationally. Legislation and models of regulation, including co- and self-regulation are being introduced in Ireland, as elsewhere. A number of selected case studies is examined in the next chapter as possible models and examples of media literacy promotion and implementation.

³³ <http://ted.europa.eu/udl?uri=TED:NOTICE:89657-2008:TEXT:EN:HTML>

3. Case studies in international media literacy regulation

A small number of countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, all English-speaking countries, have tended to provide the most widely-cited and important international models for media literacy, whether in formal educational settings or in terms of public policy approaches. Provisions for media literacy promotion, and a brief synopsis of enabling legislation are profiled here. A further example is provided by Israel's media regulator which has developed a number of innovative approaches to media literacy promotion and is also briefly reviewed.

United Kingdom

With a long history of media education research, development and advocacy; strong curriculum support for media awareness and literacy; and active promotion of film and moving image education through institutions like the British Film Institute, the United Kingdom presents one of the most advanced international examples of media literacy in the public sphere.

Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services.³⁴ Under Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom has a duty to promote media literacy by bringing about, or encouraging others to bring about, a better public understanding and awareness of media content, processes, technologies and systems of regulation. Ofcom has adopted as its definition of media literacy 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts' (Ofcom 2004). It organises its activities under three main headings:

Research: developing a solid research base through wide-ranging research programme to investigate emerging media literacy issues, current levels of media literacy and to

³⁴ <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>

establish a tracking study. A major focus of Ofcom's research activities is its Media Literacy Audit, designed to provide measurable data on levels of media literacy across the UK, on how UK adults and children access, understand and create communications. The most recent audit was published in May 2008.³⁵

Connecting, Partnering & Signposting: Ofcom raises awareness and stimulates debates on media literacy matters and seeks to place media literacy on the agenda of all stakeholders.

Labelling: Ofcom prioritises clear, accurate and timely information about the nature of media content and proposes common labelling frameworks to enable consumers to make informed choices.

Ofcom is an observer at the UK Media Literacy Task Force.³⁶ The Task Force was formed by the UK Film Council, Channel 4, the BBC and the BFI to respond proactively to the provisions in the Communications Act to 'promote media literacy'.

In addition to Ofcom, the BBC also has a statutory duty to promote media literacy. As agreed in its charter renewal, the BBC helps ensure that viewers and listeners understand how the media works, how it influences our lives and how it can best be used.³⁷ As a founder member of the Media Literacy Task Force, the BBC is committed to ensuring 'the development of a media literate UK population by providing the significant portfolio of skills, knowledge and understanding needed by every citizen in the 21st Century' (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2006: 14).

New Zealand

Media education is well established in New Zealand and has been described by Geoff Lealand as one of the international 'success stories' (Lealand 2008). New Zealand's media education is one of the few cases internationally where it is established on a *national and broadly implemented* basis, and since 2000 the subject has been fully

³⁵ http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/ml_audit/

³⁶ <http://www.medialiteracy.org.uk/taskforce/>

³⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/framework/charter.html>

established within the leaving certificate programme. The UK and Canada are two other examples where media education is so established. In most other instances media education is on a partial basis with limited curriculum support. New Zealand has a well-established grass-roots organisation in the National Association for Media Education which acts as the major link between educational institutions such as the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). A new curriculum to be implemented in 2009 has been fully revised to take account of the internet age. In the wake of the success of the local film industry, extensive learning resources have been produced in conjunction with the New Zealand Film Commission and other significant contributions from the media industry.

Outside of the formal education system, provision for media literacy for the adult population is at a very early stage of development. The Broadcasting Standards Authority has taken a keen interest in the area, and has launched a number of informational and education initiatives, including a resource website for parents on media regulation and internet safety.³⁸

A review of New Zealand's regulatory system is also underway in the wake of significant changes in the broadcasting and telecommunications markets, new business models and changing consumer habits. The government first instigated a major review of New Zealand's regulatory regime immediately following the launch of free-to-air digital television in 2006. Its declared strategy is to ensure that there is a viable future for 'digital diversity' wherein "New Zealanders would have high levels of digital use and literacy, where diverse and high-quality local content would be effectively delivered, and where economic growth could be sustained across the market" (Ministry of Economic Development 2008). The risks of not taking appropriate action, it is noted, include a tendency towards monopolies, and the vulnerability of local content and public service broadcasting as audiences fragment across multiple channels and international content is instantly accessible via the internet. In addition to economic goals being pursued to ensure a healthy media environment, the report to Government argues that the appropriate regulatory regime will support diversity of content to foster and promote expressions of national and cultural identity, and will secure 'public value'

³⁸ See: www.mediascape.ac.nz

(encompassing cultural, educational, social and democratic value) by delivering benefits to audiences as citizens, and not simply as consumers. At the same time, significant digital illiteracy and consumer confusion are regarded as major threats to the ‘diversity scenario’ (2008: 11).

Noting international trends towards greater emphasis on media literacy and the part regulators can play in promoting it, the review process has included a consideration of options for media literacy. The current content regulatory structure in New Zealand is recognised to be reactive and essentially protective. In the face of a widening range of ways for the public to access content, the government is considering whether New Zealand’s regime ‘should become more outward-looking and proactive, further promoting media literacy initiatives and education, and conducting or fostering research about a wider range of broadcasting issues’. Therefore, it has proposed that the regulator will have a broader role beyond the traditional function of receiving complaints to include monitoring the broadcasting environment and promoting media literacy. In the context of the current review, media literacy is taken to include:

- a) Media literacy / end-user regulation: Steps taken to inform the end-user about consumer protection issues on the internet or steps taken by the end-user to regulate their own consumption of content (2008: 83).
- b) Media literacy as consumer empowerment technology, e.g. GetNetWise has as an example of enhancing consumer awareness about the issues and dangers surrounding usage of internet (2008: 85), and that
- c) All New Zealanders will have the necessary literacy skills to maximise their opportunities using digital means (2008: 44).

Australia

Australia has a long history of experience in media education and is an international leader in media and cultural studies research and in innovative pedagogic practices. Its educational system is federally organised and media education represented in the

curriculum reflects this diversity (Domaille and Buckingham 2001: 33). Media education has a role in both primary and secondary level through such subject areas as general arts, English and skills. Western Australia was the first state to introduce media studies in 1974, though with greater emphasis on encouraging retention within the school system, rather than explicit media literacy education (Penman and Turnbull 2007: 36). Curriculum initiatives are well developed and supported across the system and the Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) provides professional support, learning materials and publications.³⁹

As of 2005, Australia has a new converged media regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), which was formed from the merger of the Australian Broadcasting Authority and the Australian Communications Authority. The ACMA is responsible for broadcasting, the internet and telecommunications and works with industry on a self and co-regulatory basis (Shipard 2003). Its current relevant activities include investigating complaints about content across all media, developing codes of practice, conducting sector-specific investigations such as its current study of reality television, and providing advice about online safety issues, especially those relating to children's use of the internet and mobile phones.

In the area of internet content regulation, the ACMA and previously the ABA has been particularly mindful of international practice (Barnard 2003). Under the legislation, the ACMA liaises with regulatory and other relevant bodies overseas about cooperative arrangements including multilateral codes of practice and Internet labelling technologies. The Authority has closely followed European developments such as the Safer Internet Action plan and is an associate member of INHOPE, the internet hotline providers' group set up under the plan.

Building on these activities, ACMA is seeking to more formally develop a mandate under the heading of media literacy and has identified it as an important policy focus. It commissioned a report on the subject (Penman and Turnbull 2007) *Media literacy - Concepts, Research and Regulatory Issues*, concluding that appropriate skills and

³⁹ <http://www.metromagazine.com.au/index.html>

confidence in using new communications and media services, particularly for young people, would be increasingly important for participation in all aspects of Australian society. The report further concludes that research should play an important role in facing the challenges of new media. ACMA currently commissions detailed media monitoring research, such as *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007* (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2007) and has commissioned research on television advertising to children, with a focus on children's media literacy.⁴⁰ This, supplemented with evidence based on the actual experience of users of new media and communications services will, according to the authors, provide the most appropriate regulatory guide for future challenges.

Israel

Media education, according to the UNESCO survey of 2001, is not particularly well established in Israel (Domaille and Buckingham 2001: 62). Media education does exist as an elective element of the national curriculum. However, there is little formal training for teachers and a dearth of publishing. Media Education has low status in the Ministry of Education, partly because there are seen to be no clearly identified aims.

By contrast, Israel's media regulator, the Second TV & Radio Authority, has adopted a highly proactive approach to media literacy promotion. While the enabling legislation of 1990 does not explicitly mention media literacy, the function has been derived from its provisions for 'promotion of Israeli audiovisual works, fostering good citizenship and strengthening values of democracy and humanism, and maintaining broadcasts aimed at educating the general public and specific groups' (Loffler 2008). The agency is responsible for ratings and classification of broadcast content and has through consultation with educators and media literacy experts developed a new system to be promoted in 2008. It has produced a range of informational and educational materials, including a series of documentaries, produced by children and for children, as part of its commitment to media education.

⁴⁰ [ACMA Annual report 2006-2007](#)

Plans for an Israeli “clearinghouse” for media literacy are in development to be included as part of the regulator’s website, to support existing and new initiatives in media literacy, provide comparative international information, and a forum for consultation with all relevant partners in the field. The regulator has also committed to an active research function, both for monitoring media literacy levels and initiating and supporting new research about the emerging environment for media and communications users.

Canada

Canada’s pre-eminent position in media education internationally stems from a longstanding interest and concern with questions of communications and their role in the creation and maintenance of modern societies. The pioneering theoretical work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan established a distinct Canadian perspective on the binding power of communications systems and technologies. Canada’s media system is also widely admired with such institutions as the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and a thriving radio, television and new media sector.

Canada is often considered the country in which media literacy is most developed (Carlsson and Feilitzen 2006: 341). Its interest in media literacy stems in large measure from its position within one of the most crowded media environments in the world, straddling the border with the United States. Canada’s broadcasting and cultural policy has been designed to protect a distinctive Canadian voice in cultural production supported through a quota system for Canadian content on radio and television, as well as providing dedicated funding for investment in Canadian talent. In contrast to many media literacy initiatives in the United States, media literacy in Canada is centrally concerned with fostering independent, critical thinking, avoiding a protectionist or value-laden stance.

Canada is now one of the few countries in the world where media literacy is a required, formal element of the school curriculum across its ten provinces and three

northern territories. Support for media education became well established initially in Ontario in the 1960s with the formation of the Canadian Association for Screen Education followed by a strategy document by the Ontario government in 1970, *Screen Education in Ontario*. The formation of the Association for Media Literacy in 1978 as a comprehensive grass-roots organisation for media educators in Canada was highly influential leading to media literacy becoming a compulsory element of the Ontario school system in 1989, the publication of the widely-cited *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (Duncan 1989) and ultimately to the formal mandating of media literacy as part of K-12 Language Arts programs across Canada in 1999.⁴¹ While there are still gaps in areas such as teacher-training and on-going research support, the extent of its curriculum resources and the strength of its position within the education system ensures Canada's leading international reputation within the field.

From a regulatory perspective, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), does not have a formal mandate for media literacy. The focus and primary function of regulation is to support the concept of Canadian media content and to ensure that media provision in Canada is fully representative of all Canadians. Its approach as a media regulator has been market-led and deals with the need to ensure that services that matter to Canadians are provided.

The CRTC does, however, have extensive interests in the range of issues that are being considered by European media regulators through its social policy mandate.⁴² This includes issues of public interest and social policy, though it is an under-resourced aspect of the regulatory function at present.

With respect to content regulation, Canada's Broadcasting Act 1990 states that programming should be of high standard, respectful of equality rights and reflective of Canadian values. In pursuing these objectives, the Act also directs the CRTC to respect freedom of expression. The system currently in place relies largely on self-regulation by the industry in accordance with an obligatory code on violence

⁴¹ <http://www.aml.ca/home/>

⁴² Interview with Martine Vallé, Director of English Pay and Specialty Television and Social Policy, CRTC.

developed by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and approved by the CRTC.

The CRTC did promote a media literacy policy in the 1990s in the context of a major national debate on the subject of television violence.⁴³ In response to major public concern over school shootings and following similar incidents and disquiet in the United States, the CRTC adopted a package of measures including elements of regulation, labelling, V-chip technology, public information and support for media literacy. A TV violence/media literacy clearinghouse was established in 1993, later to become known the Media Awareness Network, to support media education and address public concerns about the influences of media on children and youth. A number of initiatives in partnership with media organisations were also undertaken providing educational support materials and public information campaigns. The cable industry, for its part, launched in 1995 a "Cable in the Classroom" initiative through which cable operators provide a service free of charge in schools, as well as copyright-cleared educational programming, along with supporting print materials, for use in the classroom.

Ireland

The Radharc Trust report of 2007 reviewed the provision for media literacy education in Ireland and found that there was a well-established curriculum basis for media literacy, though with significant gaps and uneven provision and development across the system (Barnes, Flanagan et al. 2007). Media education suffers from being considered a 'soft subject' and in an otherwise crowded curriculum struggles to maintain a sufficiently high profile appropriate to its international importance. The report suggests that a revised rationale for media literacy education needs to be developed with a new sense of partnership between stakeholders and with distinct responsibilities allocated to owners of the subject. The report acknowledged the responsibility for promotion of media literacy announced in the *General Scheme for*

⁴³ http://www.crtc.gc.ca/ENG/INFO_SHT/TV1.HTM

the Broadcasting Bill, 2006 while noting that this did not itself have an educational function.

The publication of the Broadcasting Bill 2008 now provides the principal basis for a new role for public media literacy promotion in Ireland. The Bill provides for the establishment of a single content regulator, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, which will assume the roles currently held by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC), as well as a range of new functions, primarily relating to the oversight of public service broadcasters. According to the Minister, “the Bill aims to level the playing field of the broadcasting market in Ireland and place greater emphasis on the needs of viewers and listeners”.⁴⁴ Among the measures supporting public needs is provision for the establishment by RTÉ and TG4 of Audience Councils to represent the views of listeners and viewers, and a ‘right of reply’ mechanism whereby individuals who feel their reputations have been damaged may have this corrected in a further broadcast. The Bill proposes some new approaches in relation to codes and rules for broadcasting in Ireland, in particular relating to food advertising aimed at children.

Echoing equivalent responsibilities defined in the United Kingdom’s Communications Act of 2003, the Bill defines promotion of media literacy among the functions of the Authority. One of its ancillary functions will be:

26 (g) to undertake, encourage and foster research, measures and activities which are directed towards the promotion of media literacy, including co-operation with broadcasters, educationalists and other relevant persons.

where media literacy is defined as follows:

“media literacy” means to bring about a better public understanding of:

5 (a) the nature and characteristics of material published by means of broadcast and related electronic media,

⁴⁴ http://www.greenparty.ie/en/news/latest_news/ryan_publishes_broadcasting_bill_2008

(b) the processes by which such material is selected, or made available, for publication by broadcast and related electronic media, or

(c) the available systems by which access to material published by means of broadcast and related electronic media is or can be regulated; (Broadcasting Bill 2008)⁴⁵

This places the proposed BAI in a good position to comply with AVMSD reporting requirements and to develop proactive and progressive strategies and policies towards media literacy promotion. The proposal suggests distinct research, promotional and intervention activities that can be carried out in a number of different ways:

- a) Research regarding media literacy carried out by the Authority or in co-operation with other partners;
- b) Public information and promotional activities carried out by the Authority regarding the systems and processes for media content production and regulation;
- c) Initiatives to support media literacy, with regard to achieving a better public understanding of media content;
- d) Partnerships with other organisations, including broadcasters and educational authorities in support of media literacy.

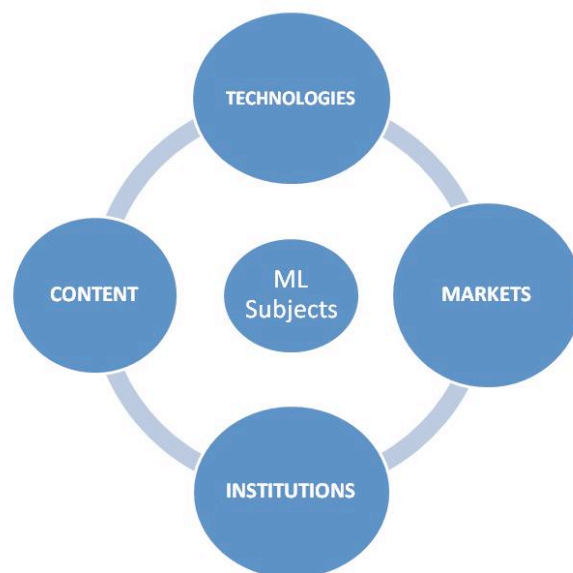
The combination of research, information promotion and targeted initiatives coincides with similar opportunities and challenges being considered by other regulatory authorities discussed earlier, and are located within an unfolding agenda for media literacy in the digital environment. A crucial influence on this will be further specification at European level of the criteria of measurement for media literacy, incorporated as part of the Commission's AVMSD reporting function, further development of which is expected by the middle of 2009.

⁴⁵ Available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2008/2908/b2908s.pdf>

4. Current Perspectives and Debates in Media Literacy

The promotion and implementation of programmes of media literacy by regulatory agencies is still at an early stage of development. It would be misleading to suggest that there are no inherent tensions or disagreements on the subject. Following a review of the academic literature and consultations with experts in the field, this chapter presents a review of some of the principal perspectives and current debates in media literacy. Chapter 1 presented an operational model of media literacy, identifying the role of the regulator as both driver and actor in media literacy implementation. But what are the potential priorities and objectives of such a programme? Arising from the definition of media literacy as the ability to ‘access, analyse, evaluate, and create communications in a variety of contexts’,⁴⁶ the following discussion groups issues in media literacy in a number of distinct themes. Figure 4 presents a model of four thematic nodal points around which there is extensive current debate and discussion.

Figure 4 – Media Literacy Implementation Themes



⁴⁶ The working definition proposed by Ofcom for the International Media Literacy Research Forum.

URL: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/theforum/>

Figure 4 represents thematically-related elements that policy makers and media literacy advocates currently engage with, and are the *subjects* or topics that a media literacy policy may contain. The model also represents different modes of engagement for citizens and consumers as the *subjects* of media literacy policy, and the kinds of relationships envisaged with participants in the field.

European policy goals link a media literate public with a strong and competitive economy as well as with a participative and inclusive democratic society, a fundamental requirement of which is ‘an independent, pluralistic and socially responsible media industry’ (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007: 65). The challenge for governments and media regulators, accordingly, is to balance these sometimes opposing aims and needs: the market-driven goals of private industry with requirements for more expensive or unprofitable forms of content; communication rights of citizens with needs of industry and technology development.

Technologies: empowering the user

Experiences of technological change

The rapid pace of technological change has been a central driving force behind the emergence of media literacy as an issue for public policy. European Commission media literacy initiatives first emerged in response to political pressure from the European Parliament, particularly in relation to the transition from analogue to digital television. The European Charter for Media Literacy defines a media literate person as someone who is, in the first instance, able to ‘use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests’. The Communications Act 2003 requires Ofcom ‘to encourage the development and use of technologies and systems for regulating access to such material, and for facilitating control over what material is received, that are both effective and easy to use’ (Ofcom 2004: 18). The BBC Trust’s statement of purpose includes a commitment to promote understanding of the benefits of new technologies,

particularly among the most vulnerable audiences.⁴⁷ AVMSD envisages that media literate people will be able to ‘take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies’ (2007: recital 37) and the Commission communication proposes active use *inter alia* of ‘interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts)’ (2007: 4).

The massive changes in technological development, whether through mobile communications, digital radio and television, user generated internet content or the convergence of delivery platforms for media content, make enormous demands on users to keep pace with technological change, to invest in new technologies, and to learn how to control them and make the best use of new services. According to David Buckingham, the accelerated pace of new technology development since UNESCO’s call for a media education response in 1982 has made the case for media literacy all the more urgent (Buckingham 2001: 3).

From the user’s point of view, such rapid technological change is profoundly disruptive. While popular media attention frequently celebrates the apparently natural facility that the ‘new digital generation’ has for everything ‘new’ (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1999), there is the converse position that new technologies present daunting, challenging and difficult experiences for people. Everette Dennis, writing about the ‘media literacy needs of grown ups’, argues that

...if there is a consistent argument for media literacy it is that of complexity. The media system is more complicated than ever and generates more content across various platforms, and is deemed more significant and powerful than any other time’. (Dennis 2004: 204)

Sonia Livingstone suggests that the question of the ‘legibility’ of the new communications and media environment, rather than the ‘literacy’ of its readers and users, is an issue of major public importance, and calls attention to the numerous

⁴⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/purpose/public_purposes/communication.shtml

ways in which information is not made available or that technologies do not lend themselves to transparent or user-friendly access (Livingstone 2008).

Technological change and media convergence has also led to a change in the context for media consumption. The once relatively homogenous domestic media environment, based around established platforms of print, radio and television, is now made more complex, and more perhaps more accessible, through cheaper personal computers, mobile phones, MP3 players, games consoles, DVD players and televisions. Consumption is increasingly a personalised and individual experience, located around and increasingly beyond the home (Silverstone 2004). As technologies become cheaper and proliferate, media such as television and video games are consumed and more internet time spent in relatively private settings, with fewer controls and generally less supervision or monitoring compared to traditional media.

Media convergence in this context refers to the coming together of the various forms of media and modes of consumption as facilitated by rapidly developing technology. The subsequent increase in complexity is an integral part of that convergence of media, computing and telecommunications. It is now possible to read newspapers on the internet, to listen to radio through digital television and to watch television on mobile phones. Convergence is one of the key features in the overall field of change and its primary effect is to increase both the opportunities for and the complexity of our daily media engagements. As both complexity and convergence occur, an active media literacy policy is needed to empower those who are otherwise at risk of being left out.

The concept of ‘empowering the user’ has been treated with some scepticism by commentators in the field. Concern is expressed that the policy shift toward individual empowerment is skewed towards economic concerns to the detriment of those who are excluded due to poverty, disability, old age and other barriers to full media engagement. Media literacy, in the U.K. has been described as ‘part of a package of measures to lighten top-down media regulation by devolving responsibility for media use from the state to individuals’ (Livingstone 2004: 11). Such a burden is seen as

unfair, and leaves individuals vulnerable to much more powerful forces, and without essential measures to guarantee and protect their rights.

Questions of Access

Within the context of European policy, media literacy is implicitly linked to the i2010 strategy, the EU policy framework for the information society and media, the objective of which is to promote the positive contribution that information and communication technologies (ICT) can make to the economy, society and personal quality of life. The i2010 strategy, bringing together all European Union policies, initiatives and actions, around the use of digital technologies, is a central part of the Lisbon strategy to make Europe a more competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy.⁴⁸ Enabling regulatory frameworks, supporting greater media literacy in support of an open and competitive digital economy are a key focus of the strategy (i2010 High Level Group 2007). The strategy factsheet foregrounds how convergence has impacted upon everyday life:

Digital convergence is changing your daily life!

Have you noticed just how much and how quickly your life has changed in recent years? Gone are typewriters – replaced by personal computers that are becoming ever more powerful and smaller. Almost gone are fax machines - replaced by email and computer-scanned documents. Television is rapidly going digital to keep pace with the higher quality of pictures and sound available from DVD recordings. Even your telephone has been digital for years, though you may not even have noticed it.

In short, what used to be three separate industries based on three separate technologies are no more or less one and the same. Technologies have converged, industries have restructured themselves and traditional market

⁴⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

distinctions are becoming blurred: between TV and radio broadcasting, paper and audio publishing or modern on-line and interactive services.⁴⁹

There is no shortage of utopian rhetoric about the potential of ICTs and new communications media to transform personal, social and political life (Rheingold 1993; Negroponte 1998), for instance, to name an obvious few. However, limitations of access, understood in all its dimensions, provides a reality check against such unrealistic assumptions. Papacharissi (2002) asks: ‘even if online information is available to all, how easy is it to access and manage vast volumes of information?’ (2002: 14). For this, in addition to just the access to the hardware and its infrastructure, technical skills to select, set up, operate and maintain a computer and its software are required as well as the skills of media literacy to assess, determine what is valuable and to evaluate results.

Access, therefore, is much more than simple availability or take-up of technology platforms. For the purposes of its media literacy audit, Ofcom takes ‘access’ to mean:

- Interest in and awareness of the digital features of the various media platforms
- Usage, volume of usage, breadth of usage of the platforms
- Competence in using the features available on each platform
- The extent and level of concerns with each platform
- Knowledge of and competence in using content controls, such as ability to block unwanted email messages

(Ofcom 2006: 8)

Furthermore, these are not discrete elements and there are close inter-relationships between dimensions of access: awareness related to competence and breadth of use, for example (2006: 26). Measuring and tracking levels of access is clearly an area of emerging importance and features prominently in EU policy-related discussion. Levels of access, adoption, and use of new digital platforms offer a broad overview of digital literacy as well as levels of exclusion and existence of a digital divide. Ofcom’s audit has identified barriers to media and digital literacy as being chiefly: age – older people are less likely to take up and engage with new technology, and

⁴⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/doc/factsheets/035-i2010-en.pdf

socio-economic status – cost is a key issue here. Gender, disability, ethnicity and proficiency in English language have also been shown to affect both, positively and negatively, literacy and uptake in various combinations. The lower age level among ethnic minority populations, for instance, probably accounts for a higher than average level of media literacy in this group, as they are disadvantaged in terms of income and class, also barriers to media literacy (Ofcom 2006).

For Livingstone, access rests on a dynamic social process, and is not a one-off act of provision (Livingstone 2003: 7). Detailed research is required into the many modalities of media and technology use, including the domestic practices of media use, the complex social networks within which ICTs are now routinely deployed, and the ways in which beneficial access can be supported and negative aspects curtailed.

As Livingstone et al explain (2005), people may have access to a wide range of media and communication goods; however, they may never get beyond the most basic of applications. This is particularly true in relation to traditional media and communication such as the television and the mobile phone, both of which now offer advanced functions ranging from, respectively, interactivity and point of view selections to photography and internet connectivity. With these familiar forms, the original and primary use is retained by the majority, they ‘see through to the content’ or original function and may disregard other more creative uses. Change in this context is absorbed but not exploited to its full capacity (2005: 18).

Media literacy, ICT, and the need for skills

Central to the i2010 strategy of supporting better access to information and communication technologies is development of ICT skills, digital literacy or ‘e-competence’ and is a major priority for the European Commission. The Commission communication states that media literacy will determine users’ confidence in digital technologies and media and, therefore, the take-up of ICT and media:

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) affect our lives every day - from interacting with our governments to working from home, from keeping in touch with our friends to accessing healthcare and education. To participate and

take advantage, citizens must be digitally literate - equipped with the skills to benefit from and participate in the Information Society. This includes both the ability to use new ICT tools and the media literacy skills to handle the flood of images, text and audiovisual content that constantly pour across the global networks. Digital literacy is therefore one element in the i2010 Strategy's emphasis on Inclusion, better public services and quality of life. But this is not just about Inclusion - ICT-related skills are vital for the competitiveness and innovation capability of the European economy (2007: 2).

EU policy closely link digital literacy and ICT skills to media literacy in an unproblematic manner. Media literacy, it is claimed, helps to condition our confidence with technologies that are new to us - with obvious benefits for the workplace. Indeed, ICT skills are essential to handle the flood of information available across various electronic platforms and which the digitally competent, media literate citizen can easily access, sort and sift through.

This implicit linkage has also been acknowledged in the academic literature by Potter (2004: 270) and by Livingstone (2004) as an extension to the traditional definition of media literacy. Convergence has brought a skills-based approach to media literacy to the fore. Livingstone et al (2005) align this aspect of the definition with a discourse around the 'knowledge economy':

In a market economy increasingly based on information, often in a complex and mediated form, a media-literate individual is likely to have more to offer and so achieve at a higher level in the workplace, and a media-literate society would be innovative and competitive, sustaining a rich array of choices for the consumer. (Livingstone, Couvring et al. 2005: 6)

The incorporation of technical, ICT-related skills within the concept of media literacy has the important effect extending and broadening our notion of media 'use' where this use now includes the ability to interact, to create and to engage in a more dynamic relationship with hitherto passive media content. Previous notions of media literacy have not always included the idea of content creation and placed greater emphasis instead on textual skills of analysis and evaluation. An ICT-orientation has shifted attention to a more active sense of media participation and highlighted creativity and

literacies as competences that call for active participation (Sefton-Green 1999; Jenkins 2006; Brereton and O'Connor 2007).

The close linkage between media and digital literacy poses an important challenge for regulation. For media regulators, depending on their specific focus on broadcast and content regulation, or an enlarged converged model of media and communications regulation, the promotion and implementation of media literacy requires a high degree of awareness-raising for the public of the practical benefits of ICT.

Media literacy initiatives to address skills gaps have more often than not been targeted at young people in formal educational settings. Adults, as Dennis has claimed, are often ignored in this context, despite the fact that the vast bulk of media is made by adults, for adults, is about adults and is engaged with by adults (Dennis 2004: 202). A media literacy policy for all, therefore, foregrounds issues about inclusion and must ensure that more vulnerable groups such as those living in poverty, the elderly, minority groups and those with disabilities are not left out.

In a relatively brief period, Irish households have experienced a dramatic expansion of their media technology infrastructure. Where once the domestic environment featured traditional established media platforms such as television, radio, and stereo systems, it now typically comprises an increasingly complex array of overlapping kinds of technology working alongside older forms. The new domestic media environment is interactive; it is mobile and, consequently, individuals now require new skill sets and competencies in order to fully engage with and benefit from their available media and communication choices (Livingstone, Couvering et al. 2005: 13). The development of these competencies cannot be taken for granted or understood as evolving and developing out of necessity.

The import of this is not that we suddenly need help to read the newspaper, or as Potter suggests, to protect ourselves from the flood of potential media messages which threaten to overwhelm us (Potter 2004: 270), but rather that we need guidance to fully understand and be aware of the multiple options which are now available to us in relation to what were previously simple media choices. Reading a newspaper online or watching a television programme on a website is not in itself difficult, once

access is available and basic skills are in place, but we need to be encouraged to be aware of how we can engage with, why we should engage with, and what we can gain from these new opportunities (Silverstone 2004).

Markets and Media literacy

Markets and Audience Fragmentation

The introduction of media literacy as part of the AVMSD comes as part of a package of measures to ensure an effective European single market for audiovisual media services. Responding to technological developments and seeking to create a level-playing field in Europe for emerging audiovisual media services, the Directive provides for ‘less detailed and more flexible regulation and modernises rules on TV advertising to better finance audiovisual content’. With proliferating services across television, cinema, video, websites, radio, video games and virtual communities, media literacy, in the Commission’s view, is required to make informed choices and to provide the critical, evaluative skills necessary to navigate a complex and crowded audiovisual space.

Liberalisation of the European audiovisual market has made its impact felt across nearly all domains of traditional media. Mass audiences are in steady decline, hastened by entrants into the marketplace who, enabled by the increase in bandwidth, have expanded their repertoire through the commodification of previously free-to-air public events (Murphy and White 2007: 253). For instance, the sale of the broadcast rights for Ireland’s national home soccer games to BSkyB highlights the increasingly complex relationship between sport, commercial, and public service media, and the state (Flynn 2004). The loss of such communal viewing experiences is linked also to declining audiences for public service broadcasting and, indeed, for all premium content including drama, comedy and film (Murphy and White 2007). The previous cultural unity of the mass audience has been displaced by specialised niche media catering for ever more specific interests, repositioning the viewer as an individual consumer with precise interests and preferences (Iosifidis 2007: 76).

At the same time, this fragmentation of national television monopolies and homogenous cultural reference points also represents a welcome diversification and a breaking down of dominant representations that marginalise minority views (see Livingstone, Couvering et al. 2005: 35). Experiences of new media platforms are also seen as a counter-tendency to the homogenisation of established media forms. While much further research is required about how they function, particularly in the lives of young people, it would appear that rather than fragmentation, new media forms are bringing more people together in a virtual sense than would be possible in the physical world. Just as television and radio have offered more personalised audience experiences, new media platforms offer further opportunities for creating and sharing content. Connecting otherwise isolated and fragmented audience members, new internet platforms such as social networking sites, video and digital photo sharing, podcasting, and internet telephony services, have radically altered the relationships and sense of distance that hitherto existed between media and its audience (Silverstone 2004: 444).

Media literacy, in this context, means far more than promoting internet safety, and needs to promote the fullest engagement with online resources and the potential for creative media usage. Potter comments that garnering support for a public media literacy policy that is active and empowering rather than one which is reactive to particular problems may be a challenge (Potter 2004: 267). There is an inherent danger that media literacy becomes associated with a negative message of protection against harmful content, or seeking to change practices of media consumption. Issues of video game violence or internet safety for children, for example, will always tend to have greater news value and be more likely to capture political attention. At the same time, in a less regulated market environment, the circulation of content of varying quality and appealing to different taste cultures becomes a matter of supply and demand. While audiences may be critical of much media content, change is unlikely unless interest and demand for such content falls or it becomes unprofitable (2004: 267).

Citizenship, Democracy and the Consumer

The competing interests of citizens and consumers is one of the central debates about public policy towards media literacy. At a European level, media literacy is consistently presented as serving both. Media literacy, it is said: ‘..empowers *citizens* with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious *consumers* and producers of content. Media literacy also supports freedom of expression and the right to information, helping to build and sustain democracy’.⁵⁰

The trend towards adopting a consumer-oriented approach within audiovisual regulation is well established. The Peacock Commission, for example, introduced the concept of ‘consumer sovereignty’ in 1989:

“[B]ritish broadcasting should move towards a sophisticated market system based on consumer sovereignty. That is a system which recognizes that viewers and listeners are the best ultimate judges of their own interest, which they can best satisfy if they have the option of purchasing the broadcasting services they require from as many alternative sources of supply as possible.” (in Helberger 2008: 139)

The Commission study identifies the tension between consumer and citizen interests within current regulatory frameworks, noting the rival, and sometimes contradictory goals which, on the one hand, give primacy to economic interests, the development of markets, and the fostering of skills for creating demand as well as employability, and on the other, the political interest in seeking to encourage active citizenship through media literacy (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona 2007: 67).

The creation of converged regulation for broadcasting, telecommunications and computing in the new communications technology environment is frequently characterised in the literature as a move towards deregulated, free market principles and the primacy of economic concerns over public interest (Silverstone 2004; Freedman 2006; O'Regan and Goldsmith 2006; Smith 2006; Iosifidis 2007). Commentators highlight concern for the maintenance of the public interest, as traditionally represented by public service broadcasting, for example, in the face of an

⁵⁰ <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1326&f>

overarching commercial imperative. Maintaining the balance between citizen and consumer interests, in this context, becomes more challenging when ‘harder’ economic logic is framed against ‘looser’, more abstract talk of the citizen interest and issues of social, cultural and democratic value that are harder to define (Livingstone, Lunt et al. 2007: 72). Freedman warns that media policy decisions may be increasingly driven by economics because the new, multiple stakeholders of converged regulatory regimes – policy makers, civil society interest groups, and industry representative, who may already be ideologically opposed to each other – will find it very difficult to agree on values which are nebulous and open to endless interpretation (2006: 918).

The establishment of Ofcom, following the Communications Act of 2003 in the United Kingdom, provides a useful case study in this regard and one which has been widely commented on in the literature. The Communications Act provides Ofcom with the duty ‘(a) to further the interests of *citizens* in relation to communications matters; and (b) to further the interests of *consumers* in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition’.⁵¹ There is concern among civil society groups that the alignment of both through the operation of market regulation marginalises the rights and interests of the public citizen, in favour of the private consumer (Livingstone, Lunt et al. 2007: 63). Focussing on the use of the conjoint term ‘citizen-consumer’, Livingstone et al chart the progression of this discourse from the Green Paper of 1998 to the Communications Act of 2003, and beyond, questioning how such diverse subject positions as audience, public, users, end-users, listeners and viewers can be ‘tidied away’ into just these two words – citizen-consumer – and is media literacy being driven forward to serve the interests of the citizen or the interests of the consumer? (Livingstone and Lunt 2007: 614). Sonia Livingstone poses the following question:

..is media literacy increasingly part of citizenship, a key means, a right even, by which citizens participate in society? Or is literacy primarily a means of realizing ideals of self-actualization, cultural expression, and aesthetic creativity? Will these goals be subordinated to the use of media literacy to support the

⁵¹ <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/sdrp/>

competitive cultural and economic advantages vital in a globalized, information society? (Livingstone 2004: 11)

The citizen-consumer dialectic is a critical question for media regulation as a whole, and particularly so for media literacy policy. Clarity about the purpose and meaning of media literacy is essential in this regard, before attempting to define what it should encompass and ultimately deliver. Media literacy can encompass the interests of citizens and the interests of the consumer. It can educate the public about the role media can play in a democratic society; it can inform people about opportunities for learning, communicating and self expression, and how to choose the best technology at the best price. These diverse functions highlight both the clear distinctions and the blurry crossovers between the citizen interest and the consumer interest (Livingstone, Lunt et al. 2007: 60). What is a concern for authors cited here is the lack of balance between the two.

Protection versus Promotion

Reflecting on an age old debate within media education, and which continues to be present in the various tendencies within media literacy movements, David Buckingham has characterised the evident tensions that exists between groups with highly diverse motivations:

... ranging from commercial promotion to 'counter-propaganda'. Some may see media education primarily as a matter of *protection* – as a means of weaning children off something that is deemed to be fundamentally bad for them; while others see it more in terms of *preparation* – as a means of enabling children to become more active users of media. (Buckingham 2001: 6).

As reviewed earlier, intense mediatisation has led to a focussed debate on the importance of media literacy as a necessary response to the highly complex and expanding media environment that young people grow up in. Supporting critical competences among children and cultivating greater awareness among teachers, parents and professionals are deemed essential to cope not just with the enormous volume of new media experiences but also to deal with potential harmful content and

negative effects. On the other hand, intense mediatisation has also revived debates about the need for greater controls and more regulation on a national and international level that might include ‘age limits, ratings/classifications, filtering, time schedules, watershed, warnings, labelling, codes of media conducts etc.’ (von Feilitzen and Carlsson 2003: 10). In practice, the question is never simply one of ‘*to promote or to protect ?*’ as if the choice exists between media literacy or media regulation. Like the blurred lines between citizen and consumer discussed above, the distinction is best viewed as being somewhat porous in nature, and can be mapped onto debates about regulation and the media. That is to say, neither total deregulation, nor over-zealous censorship is desirable, rather it is a consideration of both elements which will inform a responsible media literacy policy within the broader regulatory framework. A purely protectionist stance is neither effective nor desirable in that, as Buckingham highlights, the benefits and the pleasures of media are sidelined in order to focus entirely on the perceived harm they are assumed to cause (Buckingham 2001: 9).

A crucial question for regulators in this context has been summarized by Noa Elefant Loffler, of Israel’s radio and television authority, where she argues that a converged media environment has changed the aims and basis of traditional regulation. The rolling back of the regulatory protection paradigm places a public responsibility on the regulator to ensure that individual citizens are not left vulnerable:

The regulator’s abandonment of the user-protection mechanism without seeking a clear response to such questions and without taking responsibility for the empowerment of the users and promotion of their skills, may leave the user in a weakened state, specifically *due* to the onslaught of information against which they have no ability to strive. (Loffler 2008: 4)

Current European policy as expressed in AVMSD and in the Commission communication tends to an approach consisting of lighter regulation supported by media literacy: ‘Continuous information and education is more important than regulation’ according to Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and

Media.⁵² The protection of children as users of online technologies is of particular concern in this regard. Regulators have particular responsibilities in this area and Europe-wide legislation and standards exist for the protection of minors, electronic commerce, privacy and electronic communications and online distribution of child sexual abuse material.⁵³ Given the rapid changes taking place in the online environment, however, a co-regulatory approach between the authorities, industry, consumers and other parties concerned about child safety, is preferred however as more adaptable and effective. Self-regulation by industry players has been strongly encouraged by the Commission with examples such as the ICRA labelling system, the PEGI pan-European rating system for console games, and the PEGI Online project supported under the Safer Internet programme. Media literacy remains a crucial element of the strategy, though, and is clearly linked to goals of protection. Media literate people, according to the AVMSD ‘will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful, offensive or undesired content’ and will ultimately be the ones who choose what service they wish to engage with.

Practical examples of how media literacy can operate to inform and to empower are cited in the Commission’s communication in the area of commercial communication. *Media Smart*, a non-profit media literacy programme for school children, is presented as an example of good practice in industry self-regulation and provides materials for parents, teachers and children designed to encourage critical thinking and awareness about media advertisements.⁵⁴ Similarly, *Mediakompassi*, a media literacy site developed by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, has a section focusing on advertising for youth, parents and teachers.⁵⁵

⁵² Media literacy: do people really understand how to make the most of blogs, search engines or interactive TV? URL:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1970&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

⁵³ <http://www.fosi.org/conference2007/reading/>

⁵⁴ See: <http://www.mediasmart.org.uk>

⁵⁵ See: <http://mediakompassi.yle.fi/>

Media Institutions and Media Literacy

The Individual and Media Regulation

At the heart of the AVMSD approach to media regulation is a new form of relationship between the individual (citizen and consumer) and the media as institution with far reaching implications for roles and responsibilities of viewer/users and regulators alike. The new 'media-literate' audience, is no longer a passive subject, consuming programmes and services that have been selected and approved on their behalf. The media-literate viewer is required or 'challenged to make active choices in a commercialized and interactive programme landscape' (Helberger 2008: 140). In an environment of on-demand services, viewers, rather than consuming a pre-ordained media diet, subscribe through what is essentially a service contract for products and services. In the ideology of the AVMSD framework, all needs – civic, social and personal – are addressed through a market in which individuals exercise control through their purchasing power. Responsibility and the ethical dimensions of choice are shifted to the individual citizen and consumer, supported through media literacy.

For Silverstone (2004), the traditional understanding of how citizens relate to the media have also been eroded. As citizens, we were previously expected to take full responsibility for our media use and for that of our children. Familiar warnings such as the watershed or age limitations allowed us to control media in the home. The single television in the family living room is, however, no longer the sole access point for the majority (2004: 443). Lower prices mean accessibility to more technology and services. Technology, multi-platform delivery and individualisation of media consumption have rendered traditional protectionist regulation invalid. Rather than more powerful regulation or new forms of censorship, what is required, he argues, is 'a literacy of mass-mediated electronic texts, literal and critical' (p.447) and forms of critical thinking as alternatives to media regulation. A critically-aware citizenry do not need censorship or even regulation, he suggests. A responsible and accountable media culture, established through regulation, can only be sustained by a population who are critical with respect to, and literate in the way of, mass mediation and media representation (2006: 440).

A further requirement now for the media literate individual is engagement with the actual process of policy making itself. Greater accountability and transparency has been a feature of policy making processes in general in recent years. Media literacy in this instance seeks to promote a better public understanding of the systems by which the media are regulated. As Freedman notes, however, there is a broad public indifference to media policy as a topic, mirrored indeed by a lack of critical attention by media scholars to the policy formation process more generally (Freedman 2006: 907). The current availability of huge amounts of information available through websites and public consultations, gives detail about key steps and parts of the media policy process. All that this means, Freedman avers, is that this policy process is better publicised. It does not mean that the general public have any more of a voice in the eventual decisions that are taken, simply that they are better 'consulted'. 'A commitment to transparency does not, in itself, undermine the control of the policy agenda and may be more likely to legitimize the process in the eyes of the public' (2006: 915).

Public Service Media

The 'development and preservation of independent, pluralistic and responsibly minded media', in the words of the Commission study (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2007: 65), has traditionally been the combined responsibility of regulators and public service media. The changing role of users in audiovisual services means that this foundation has been shaken and government intervention in the audiovisual market place in the first instance is now being questioned (Helberger 2007). Public service media, it is recognised, have come under increasing pressure in the new digital communications environment. Historically, European public broadcasting has been heavily regulated, with extensive coverage and content obligations, but new technologies and new patterns of use and consumption place a query over the adequacy of this approach in the new environment (Betz and Ward 2004). Asking how can public service media survive, particularly in small countries, in the face of competitive commercial digital broadcasting, Iosifidis observes that in many cases they have had to adopt more populist programming content, in some cases

abandoning their traditional style of programming in order to keep audience share (Iosifidis 2007: 65). Commercially-funded services, by contrast, are freer to target niche audiences, rigorously tailoring and trimming content, advertising and technological developments to suit that audience, often to the deliberate exclusion of others.

Public service media, it has been recognised, have a vital role to play in media literacy (Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005). Indeed, there is a close inter-relationship between their respective functions and underlying philosophies. There is an inherent challenge within the media literacy agenda for public broadcasters to take on responsibilities beyond their own corporation's objectives (2005: 24). This is in turn related to additional challenges public service media face in defining their once traditional preserve of the 'national consensus'. As diversity in all forms – religious, racial, ethnic, social, familial, sexual and cultural – becomes a feature of modern societies, it is no longer feasible for public broadcasters to claim to serve a consensual national interest (2005: 112).

The BBC provides a prominent example of media literacy from the perspective of the public broadcaster. The UK Government White Paper 'A Public Service for All – the BBC in a digital age' (March 2006) states:

The BBC will also have a role to promote media literacy. It can help ensure viewers and listeners understand how the media works, how it influences our lives and how it can best be used. In this age, these are not peripheral skills, they are starting to match the importance of other forms of literacy to work and leisure and to the functioning of democracy. (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2006: 4)

The BBC's unique role in spearheading digital broadcast technologies and driving the uptake of new digital platforms constitutes another important dimension in its media literacy mission. Given its 'trusted' position as a television provider (Whittle 2004) and the fact that television remains the medium the British public are most familiar and comfortable with (Ofcom 2006: 17), the BBC role's in the switchover to digital television has been critical (Smith 2007). Media Literacy is crucial in this context as

television – the most familiar platform – undergoes dramatic changes in its nature, moving from a linear analogue service to on-demand and interactive digital services; from basic channel availability within national and nearby boundaries to multiple specialist interest channels from across the globe. Public service media have played a highly significant role in this process, encouraging consumer interest in digital services among all sections of the population, and making the target of analogue switch-off across Europe in 2012 seem achievable (Iosifidis 2007).

Partnerships with Media Industries

One of the less commented on features of media literacy policy is that in addition to new roles for citizens and consumers who assume greater responsibility for their own choices, there is an equivalent requirement on media industries to promote better awareness of processes of media production and organisation. The policies of co-regulation and self-regulation, supported by the European Commission, carry an implicit obligation to provide leadership and to support awareness-raising media literacy initiatives. This emphasis has been particularly clear in the question of online content and protection of minors. AVMSD encourages all communications media to provide information on using the internet responsibly (AVMSD: recital 37). Speaking to the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), Commissioner Reding told a roundtable gathering that: ‘Industry has a great opportunity to show how it can provide parents with the necessary information and tools so that they can decide what content they do not wish their children to be confronted with. A good example is the PEGI classification system for videogames that has been put in place by the industry’.⁵⁶ In the online environment where the user decides what content to receive from what is available, and when, industry co- and self-regulation combined with targeted media literacy initiatives are viewed as the only effective means of balancing freedom of expression with required protections against harmful content.

⁵⁶

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/374&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

A key function of the EU Media Literacy Expert Group is to identify good practice and to advise the Commission on ways in which effective partnerships between stakeholders might be facilitated. A quarter of the responses to the Commission Consultation on Media Literacy were from industry members - publishers, broadcasters, telecoms, advertisers and the music industry – a fact regarded as highly encouraging, as was the number who are currently active in media literacy promotion (Commission Of The European Communities 2007: 10). On the question of the financing of media literacy initiatives, 37% supported the notion of a public-private partnership, citing examples such as *"Newspaper in Education"* run by the European Newspaper Publishers' Association. The UK Media Literacy Talk Force in its submission argued that 'media organisations not only can, but must, play a significant part in extending the creative and questioning use of media products and services as well as conveying useful or essential information, guidance or skills'.⁵⁷

Ofcom has prioritised 'Connecting, Partnering & Signposting' as one of its three key strands of work, through which it works to put media literacy firmly on the agenda of all stakeholders (Ofcom 2004). Partnership in this context is based on the requirement in the Communications Act 'to encourage others' to promote media literacy and accordingly relationships with broadcasters, internet and mobile service providers, voluntary and commercial organisations, have been used to raise the profile of media literacy and to support research and implementation.⁵⁸ In the area of online, it has worked with the industry to create a British Standard or kite mark for domestic filtering software and to support initiatives that encourage older users of the internet.⁵⁹

Canada, whose leading role internationally in the field of media education has already been noted, also has a strong tradition of partnership between industry and education, a partnership that has grown up historically and has been supportive of the leading role that media literacy has played in the Canadian school system. The *Media Awareness Network*, based in Ottawa, provides a major example of cross media co-

⁵⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/contributions/89_106_stuv/102_91_uk_mltf.pdf

⁵⁸ http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=31

⁵⁹ <http://www.silversurfersday.org/>

operation in support of media literacy.⁶⁰ Incorporated in 1996, the Media Awareness Network, or MNET, is an independent, not-for-profit organisation specialising in producing high quality media literacy learning resources for teachers, parents, professionals and children. The organisation is funded on a public-private basis and has support of such major broadcasting and telecoms groups including Bell Canada, CTVglobemedia, TELUS, Microsoft Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, and the media regulator, the CRTC. One of its most successful initiatives is the annual National Media Education Week which raises the public profile of media literacy as an issue through events, media campaigns, media education activities and resource development.⁶¹

CHUM Television in Canada, now part of CTVglobemedia, also has a long history of involvement in media education. Initially within its public relations and marketing division, its music channel *MuchMusic* has developed a leading reputation among television companies for media education support as part of corporate social responsibility.⁶² The company provides commercial-free original programming and accompanying Study Guides written by media education professionals for use in the classroom. It funds media education initiatives throughout Canada and donates airtime and webspace to the issue. CHUM Television was a founding member of Cable in the Classroom, a partnership between cable companies and programming services on cable to provide educational, copyright-cleared, commercial-free education programming to schools across Canada. CHUM's recent sale to the CTVglobemedia conglomerate, yielded further resources for media literacy, whereby under Canadian rules a proportion of the value of the sale was allocated to specified public benefit projects.⁶³

Such successful examples of partnership between media companies and media education, illustrate the potential for positive social contributions and the benefits of media literacy as part of good business strategy within media communication.

⁶⁰ <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm>

⁶¹ <http://www.mediaeducationweek.ca/>

⁶² <http://www.muchmusic.com/mediaed/initiatives.asp>

⁶³ Interview with Sarah Crawford, Vice-President Public Affairs, CTVglobemedia.

However, without a social policy being mandated within a licensing process, such commitments become a matter of individual circumstances and vulnerable to cost cutting within a competitive marketplace.

Media Content and Critical Autonomy

Fostering critical autonomy

Using the widely accepted definition of media literacy understood as ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ (Ofcom 2004), the fostering of analytical and evaluative thinking skills of *understanding* remain a touchstone for what media literacy education aspires to. In Fedorov’s survey of media literacy experts, the central aim of developing the individual’s critical thinking, understanding and analysis of media texts were identified as among the field’s most important aims (Fedorov 2003: 12). Fostering critical autonomy is also a pre-eminent and enduring theme of media education. The Ontario Ministry of Education defined media literacy as concerned with ‘helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media’.⁶⁴ Canada’s Media Awareness Network offers additional formulations such as:

“Media literacy is the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain and sell to us every day. It’s the ability to bring *critical thinking skills* to bear on all media”.

“Media literacy is an informed, *critical understanding* of the mass media”.

“To be literate today, people must be able to: *decode, understand, evaluate and write through*, and with, all forms of media”

Similarly, the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA) characterises the media literacy movement as a:

⁶⁴ http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article176.html

“coalition of concerned individuals and organizations ... who seek a more enlightened way of *understanding* our media environment”.⁶⁵

For purposes of clarity and to aid a greater sharing of experience of this dimension of media literacy, support has been given to breaking down the notion ‘understanding’ into the distinct concepts of *analyse* and *evaluate*.⁶⁶ The skills of analysis of various kinds of media texts have long been a focus of the media education curriculum, requiring a knowledge of the concepts and analytical categories, e.g. agency, representation, technologies, audiences (Bazalgette 1989). There is, however, little point in analysis for its own sake without critical judgement and it is this critical dimension which, Livingstone suggests, poses some potential difficulties for policy (Livingstone 2003: 10). The basis and the legitimacy for taking a ‘critical’ position becomes quite a fraught issue with media literacy debate reflecting a range of diverse and sometimes contradictory political positions, from a liberal-pluralist one suggesting that such judgements can be politically neutral, to progressive positions on support for social causes, to radical critiques of dominant ideology, and conservative positions of reaction against modernising trends.

Partnerships with media education

The debate concerning the ‘critical’ dimension of media literacy is one that regulators would probably prefer not to enter, feeling it more appropriate to the domain of media education. The European Commission approach to media literacy, for instance, is one that defers competence in education matters to member state level and to the relevant education authorities. Likewise, regulators and industry involvement in media literacy initiatives have normally sought to partner with educators and specialists in media pedagogy. As Divina Frau-Meigs argues, there must be, in other words, a media literacy continuum within which parents, educators, media content providers, and regulators play a role (Frau-Meigs 2003). Ofcom’s partnering and signposting

⁶⁵ http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article247.html

⁶⁶ This was the approach proposed at the inaugural International Media Literacy Research Forum, hosted by Ofcom, May 2008. The Centre for Media Literacy in the United States now also uses this expanded definition. See: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/rr2def.php

strategy, likewise, operates on the basis of supporting and enabling those active in the field to achieve specific objectives within a broader based agenda of promoting media literacy among all stakeholders. Notwithstanding the importance of partnership and the involvement of diverse interests in the promotion of media literacy, there remains much work to be done in defining what we mean by the analytical and evaluative skills, and the fostering of critical autonomy in the 21st century. For policy to be effective, further specification and detail of the appropriate decision-making skills expected of the media-literate citizen are required and given the early stage of development of media literacy in the public sphere, significant challenges remain in this area.

A further concern expressed in relation to the partnership of media literacy policy and media education as more formally established, relates to whether giving media literacy a higher profile in the public domain becomes a substitute for the essential work of education. Cary Bazalgette has argued with reference to the United Kingdom:

Now that responsibility for fostering media literacy has been enshrined in the Communications Act (2003) as a responsibility of Ofcom, the new regulatory body for electronic media, there seems every possibility that the concept could conveniently shrink to a small and well-defined set of skills. Media literate “consumer-citizens”, as Ofcom likes to call us, will be able to launch a browser, do their tax returns online, announce family events by mobile phone, put their children to bed before the watershed and register complaints about bad language in *EastEnders*. Market forces, rather than expensive curricular initiatives, will ensure that they acquire these skills, so that schools can continue to concentrate on “the basics”, which are, presumably, those skills that the marketplace won’t deliver (Bazalgette 2003).

Media education development is a time-consuming and expensive process. Progress in media education, in Ireland and internationally, has been slow and despite the many declarations of its importance and its relevance for the modern age, media’s place in the curriculum is not assured (Barnes, Flanagan et al. 2007). For policy makers and for the different context within which public media regulation operates, such a slow pace of development is not sustainable. As a result, on-going negotiation between the

distinct domains of interest between media education and public media literacy will need to be carefully nurtured and maintained.

5. Public Responses to Media Literacy

The final section of this report consists of an exploratory study of public attitudes to media literacy. For the purposes of this project, four focus groups were held, two in Dublin and two outside Dublin, on a range of issues relevant to public concerns on media literacy matters.

Themes for the focus group discussion were selected from the European Commission Communication *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*, drawing in particular on the levels of media literacy identified in the Communication.

Five distinct themes were extracted:

- a) **Experience and Competence:** the extent to which members of the public feel comfortable with existing media from newspapers to online communities, mobile devices and other ICTs;
- b) **New Interactive Media:** the extent to which members of the public actively use media, through, *inter alia*, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities; exploit the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications; and the extent of use of the media, particularly digital media as tools for personal, social and creative expression.
- c) **Critical Media Awareness:** the degree to which members of the public display a critical attitude to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to assess information, dealing with advertising on various media, using search engines intelligently);
- d) **Political Economy:** the degree of awareness and understanding displayed by members of the public of issues of media ownership and control, the economic basis of media organization and social impact and significance of media communications;

- e) **Cultures of Legality:** the awareness by members of the public and attitudes to issues of copyright ownership and fair use of media; the ethics of online communication and regulatory codes of conduct.

A total of 25 people, drawn from a variety of backgrounds, took part in the focus groups. Slightly more women than men attended, giving a gender breakdown of 14 and 11 respectively. Two participants are Hungarian nationals, four are English nationals, but are long-term Irish residents. The youngest participant is Frank, 22, a wheelchair user, and the oldest is Marion, 69.

Group One showed a predominance of traditional media use with local radio and print newspaper featuring strongly alongside a growing interest in new technology and its applications. It is referred to here as the ‘Old Media’ group.

Group Two consisted of parents and was particularly interested in issues of the impact of media on children, young people and social life in general. It is referred to as the ‘Media and Families’ group.

Group Three was made up of higher education students aged between 26 and 33. This is referred to as the ‘New Media Group’ and was characterised by high levels of internet use, on-demand media viewing and extensive use of social networking sites.

Group Four consisted of community workers who used the media regularly for their work. They displayed a keen interest in learning about new technology and its benefits. They also wanted to keep pace with the young people they work to support. They are referred to as the ‘Social Issues’ group.

These are crude characterisations and are intended for descriptive purposes only in what is, in this instance, a purely exploratory study.

In terms of overall media access and use, all participants use mobile phones. All but one watch television and nearly half have a digital television service. The majority are internet users. Access to new media forms and media technology varied, with cost a prime consideration in relation to both digital TV services and internet access. Most participants, particularly those in Groups 3 and 4 made use of the internet as part of their work. Levels of interactive media use varied widely with relatively few

participants either able to fully exploit or aware of the full potential offered by new media forms. Creative media use was generally limited to private photo-sharing, maintaining social networking profiles and membership of online interest groups. None of the participants maintained a blog or had uploaded content to Youtube. Organisational media issues or the political economy of the media were not concerns for participants in the main. Participants tended to underestimate their levels of critical media awareness, particularly in relation to advertising and internet security. Illegal downloading was high on the agenda in two groups.

Group 1: 'Old Media'

There were six participants in this group all of whom work in the hospitality sector in the west of Ireland. They included: Emma (25), Mike (38), Leon (28), Marika (23), Pat (34) and Elaine (37).⁶⁷

Experience and competence : Members of the group do not use ICTs at work and the discussion mostly relates to media use in the home primarily for entertainment and for communication. The popularity of old media emerges strongly with local radio and print media popular as means of seeking news and entertainment. Mike, although he has digital television at home, rarely watches it, switching on only for matches or films. He has the radio on all day as he works in the kitchen and comments 'I'd have to have a radio, have to have a radio for music'.

While attached to 'old media' it is clear that media technology has filtered into everyday life for this group. Though not regarding themselves as media literate, they articulate concerns about security, about vulnerable users, and about the level of advertising to which people are exposed across a range of media. They also interact to a limited extent with a range of traditional and newer media platforms such as digital video recorders, MP3 players, Skype, online services such as photo sharing, social networking and internet shopping.

⁶⁷ The names of all participants have been changed.

All are relatively enthusiastic and experienced media users, with the exception of Pat, who states that he has little use for media beyond the basic services of terrestrial and cable television, DVD players, and his mobile phone. When asked if he is interested in new technology he replies ‘no, not at all, DVDs is as high tech as I go’. He does, however, use the internet when he needs to at his parents’ house and has in the past booked tickets and looked up information. He considers that we have too much technology now. Mike disagrees. He combines daily use of ‘old’ media with a great interest in new media particularly relating to music production, and file-sharing. Mike is one of the more experienced media users though he is also the most cautious and concerned about levels of security on the internet. He was the only one who would never book flights or shop in any form online:

Internet banking I won't use. I am totally against it like, I think there is too much detail in internet banking for someone who knows what they are doing, they can break into a bank [online] and take everyone's details. That's it, good luck, all your money, whatever you have inside there is gone like. I won't use a credit card on a website either, so if I want to book a holiday or whatever I will go to a travel agent and pay cash for it (Mike, Group 1 – Old Media).

Mike and Pat offer an interesting contrast. Mike uses the internet everyday and downloads music, in his own words, ‘24/7’; his son and daughter both have laptops and are constantly instant messaging, playing online games and using social networking sites, all of which suggests a high level of internet awareness and familiarity as a family. Pat does not have a computer, never uses email and only rarely feels the need to use the internet for information or entertainment, yet, he comments:

I would have no problem at all with [online use of] credit cards, flights and all – no problem. Total faith in it... (Pat, Group 1 – Old Media).

Emma is the only participant who feels that, although she does not engage with different media on a daily basis, beyond radio and television, she is somewhat media literate – at least enough to meet her own needs . ‘I have sufficient knowledge, enough to get by like. Not overly’. She is also aware that she does not exploit the media platforms to which she has access, to their fullest extent. While she uses email,

photo-sharing and social networking to keep in touch with friends and family, as well as shopping online she is interested only in new technology that can be practically useful.

Leon and Marika offer a slightly different perspective. Both are Hungarian nationals living and working in Ireland and regularly use the internet to keep in touch with their friends and families at home. Both are Skype users, are members of Hungarian versions of Facebook and Bebo and read Hungarian newspapers and websites online. Leon also reads local papers and occasionally listens to local and national radio stations in Ireland, though Marika states ‘I never listen to the radio here [laughs] no it is too difficult’. The language barrier also impacts on their television viewing and neither watch scheduled television, preferring to watch DVDs in their own language. Leon would like to get digital TV but finds it too expensive.

New Interactive Media: Cost is mentioned by this group as a barrier: there are some new forms of media they would be interested in but find it too expensive. With the exception of Pat, they feel it is important to keep up with new technology even when they can’t afford to buy. They are not always aware of the options available with existing technology. Elaine, for instance, is keenly aware of issues around media ownership and legality, but is unsure about how to use filter software on her computer. She also has a Sky + digital video recorder which she acknowledges has changed the way she watches television, to the point that she no longer watches it according to the schedule. She rarely uses the more complex functions though, and only uses the ‘red button’ for the Sky News interactive ‘mini-screens’

Mike uses his digital recorder for interactive news and sport. He does not use reminders or channel menus, though other family members do:

I wouldn't use it for reminders or anything but my wife does and my daughter does... if I am off some evening and I sit down in the sitting room to watch a programme I see all these things flashing in front of me like a reminder here a reminder there, so someone in the house is definitely using it (Mike, Group 1 – Old Media)

Critical Media Awareness: Three members of this group showed a high level of concern in relation to advertising in particular. Pat, echoing other parents in the study, is very concerned about advertising and children. He feels that many ads are often too ‘old’, even in children’s programming. Mike and Elaine also expressed concern for other vulnerable users, and referred to the prevalence of money lending ads on daytime TV:

...they are really targeting people who are unemployed and at home so in actuality like they are targeting desperate people who are looking for a desperate answer to their situation anyhow. There should be a regulation; there should actually be a watershed for those types of ads I think. (Elaine, Group 1 – Old Media)

... the one I hate the most is money lending ads ... 'we can give you a hundred thousand and you pay us back so much' and then you have got vulnerable people, ... who take this money like and they are not able to pay it back like and then at the end of the day they are brought to court ... It is very, very unfair... (Mike, Group 1 – Old Media)

In general, participants were not aware of regulations in place to limit and control particular types of advertising on Irish channels. However, they appear confident in their own ability to assess information directed towards them and reserve concern for other vulnerable users – the very young and the very old. Emma is the only participant who comments that she enjoys and watches television advertising:

I think ads on the TV, I suppose some of them would catch your attention, but the pop in ones on the internet I find really annoying. I wouldn't pay any attention to those, I tend to just click out of them. The ones on TV I'll definitely watch but that is about it though (Emma, Group 1 – Old Media).

Political Economy: Issues around political economy of the media such as ownership and plurality were not a major concern here as illustrated below. Elaine was the only participant to consider the possible implications:

Moderator: does it matter to you who funds or who owns television stations or the internet so long as you are getting a good service or good information? Have you ever thought about that?

Emma: no... I never thought about that

Mike: no

Leon: no

Marika: no

Pat: it doesn't matter who owns it does it?

Elaine: well it would bother me if it was government run or influenced in some way by the state and the content on the TV that is like, the way it happens over in China at the moment, where everything is filtered to make it look good, this kind of thing, that would concern me (Group 1 – Old Media).

Cultures of Legality: Concern was expressed about illegal downloading and about wider illegality online. Mike links illegal downloading to the inability of internet service providers to control how users behave when they are online. He feels strongly that all online content sharing and downloading should be enabled on the basis that anything that is put online was put there by someone who wanted to share it. Pat challenges this by raising the issue of consent and ownership, a point backed by Elaine who comments that jobs and livelihoods are put at risk by illegal downloads of music and films.

Asked how important it was to have a media literate public and who should be responsible for media literacy promotion, responses ranged from the school, to learning continued at home, though no one volunteered how adult media literacy might be supported.

While the group as a whole are happy with the service provided by 'old media' there are signs of major changes beginning to take place. In response to the question of which media they would miss the most Emma, Marika, Elaine and Leon all state that

they would miss the internet as you can now access television, radio and phone services as well as email and information.

Emma: I think the internet... you can find every thing you need, especially now with booking flights and you can do it all through the internet...

Leon: for me the internet and mobile phone. If I am interested in something it is the internet andmobile phone as well

Marika: I think that the internet because if we have that we can use the TV on the internet the radio everything so if you are using internet you can use everything that is why I would say the internet definitely.

Ev: ... I would go with the internet because you can use Skype and so you can keep in contact still. So that would be the biggest loss I would say (Group 1 – Old Media).

Group Two - Media and Families

The five members of this group work in a range of occupations including in the home. The age range is 36-54, with two males and three females. Three participants are Irish and two are originally from the UK but are long term Irish residents. Members include Sally (54), Hannah (48), Mark (36), Kenneth (50), and Sarah (36). Mark and Sarah are married to each other and have four small children under ten years old. Sally, Kenneth and Hannah are all parents of teenaged and adult children.

Experience and Competence: This group showed a diversity of attitudes towards new and traditional media content and their personal media experiences and competencies varied. Interestingly, it is the three women who are most technically aware and two in particular – Sally and Sarah – show a high level of media literacy in both a technological and critical sense. Neither male participant uses new media on a daily basis, at work or at home, nor do they profess any desire to do so. Kenneth is

extremely sceptical about the value and uses of new media and Mark, as the father of four small children, has very little time.

Kenneth, although he has a mobile phone, cannot text, and is a self confessed 'dinosaur'. His media use is primarily directed towards the traditional or 'old' media and is focused on the radio at work and at home. He reads the newspaper in printed format and watches very little TV although he does have a cable service. Mark holds strong views about advertising and media education although he does not interact with much media. He uses his mobile phone primarily to talk and has little time for TV or newspapers. Neither Mark nor Kenneth use the internet on any regular basis. Although Hannah uses the internet daily, reading the newspaper online and internet shopping, she appears to be quite traditional in her attitudes to media. She will reluctantly text but prefers to use her mobile phone to talk; her use of new media platforms is centred around newly convenient ways of accessing traditional materials. Her computer use and mobile phone use are simply updated ways of performing the same acts of communication and information gathering rather than entertainment or for the expression of personal creativity. Hannah watches Irish television stations, including TG4 with subtitles. She also listens to various different national and local radio stations throughout the day.

It falls to the remaining female group members; and to Sarah in particular, to profess a strong interest in new technology:

Moderator: do you consider ... that you have a real interest in new technology?

Sarah: I do yeah, if I had the disposable income I would be a lot more up to spec on the gadgets, I love gadgets ...I would be interested in the different enhancements on phones and laptops and PDA's and all that type of thing (Sarah, Group 2 – Media and Families).

Sarah, currently a rural housewife, is a former ICT Trainer, something which informs her interest in the social and technological side of media education and use. Her current media experiences are limited due to her location – there is no broadband available – and to her lack of time to watch, read and engage with media forms.

Sally, the oldest member of the group at 54 is also one of the more technologically able. She maintains a Facebook profile to keep in touch with her niece and uses a mobile phone and computer daily. She has ‘the radio permanently on at home’ and there is ‘a radio in every room’. She watches television and surfs the internet for information and entertainment. Sally also feels herself to be quite media literate and is very open to new technology provided that it suits her needs.

In terms of general experience the participants show a strong interest in traditional media forms with the radio, in particular, coming out on top as the media form that they would miss the most. Sarah would miss the internet claiming that she could ‘do without everything else now’. They are all relatively enthusiastic and experienced media users, even if Mark and Kenneth are, in a real sense, observing from the sidelines rather than actually participating.

New Interactive Media: While new and interactive media were not an identifying feature of this group, it is clear that new media use has been incorporated to a great extent into everyday media habits. Of the three who use computers and the internet on a regular basis, all are confident and able to perform the necessary tasks. Unlike Elaine in Group One, Hannah easily blocks pop-up adverts online. She also states that she keeps up with her son’s activities online, though it is unclear how she does this or if her son leaves his profile open for public access. Both Sally and Sarah have, respectively, a Facebook and a Bebo account, something they use for keeping in touch with friends and family abroad and for photo sharing in a private group. Neither uses the more interactive or creative elements of the social networking sites – it is more as a convenient way to keep in contact and to exchange photographs and news rather than a self promotional tool:

Sarah: But I don't have a Bebo profile like say like Rita's [a friend of Sarah] one where it is all personal photographs and diary entries and stuff like that ... I don't do any of that, I don't have time for a blog, come to my house any time and I'll blog you!

Moderator: Sally, you have a Facebook account?

Sally: I have yeah, I use it mainly to communicate with my niece who is at university and it is interesting as well just to see what's on there, just like to try to keep in touch with what's going on

Moderator: and would you look up other people's [Facebook or Bebo entries] is that like a private thing that you have access to other peoples or would you just search for anybody just for the fun of it?

Sally: yeah I would just search to see who is online

(Group 2 – Media and Families)

None of the participants has access to digital television or to digital recording and they are not too familiar with interactive features of television though some have heard about it.

Moderator: nobody here has Sky+ ? So you can set your time tables and your preferences...?

Group: no...

Sarah: you can record and such.

Hannah: I have heard that you can, yeah, a few of my friends have it and they say its great like, they catch up on programmes you know if they are out they can set the thing to ...

Sarah: when you have to go to the toilet you can stop it and then when you come back you press it and it comes on again! (Group 2 – Media and Families)

Most feel strongly that there is an age gap in relation to new media technology and platforms. For instance, in response to the Moderator's question – 'Are you interested in new technology or gadgets?' the group offers the following:

I am into news on the internet [and] if there is any way of getting that information much quicker I would be more than happy to use it. At the moment I just use a laptop, a wireless yeah, I get what I want, I don't have a great knowledge of new technologies that are around, I know it is moving very

quickly...but I find it impossible to keep up with what is going on to be honest with you (Sally, Group 2 – Media and Families)

Hannah says she finds new technology confusing. She had to ask her son to choose a mobile phone upgrade for her. However, she found it was too complicated, with too many functions and she was forced to revert to an older, less advanced model. Michael is interested in new technology in relation to his work but does not keep up outside of that. Kenneth also feels strongly that new technology is directed entirely at young people though for all the 'newness' the functions basically remain the same – a phone is still a phone. He claims new technology is marketing-driven and 'totally over the top'. Peer pressure and the abuse of technology such as camera phones are concerns for him in relation to young people but he accepts that this is the way things are now. Sarah is the only participant who does not feel 'aged out' of the technology- she uses her children's Nintendo DS gaming system and would like to get a Nintendo Wii. She is frustrated by the lack of broadband in her area as it prevents her from using Skype.

Critical Media Awareness: This group shows a high level of awareness of the media from a social point of view. Although several members of the group may not be media literate in a technical or practical sense, they are very aware of issues around inequality, peer pressure, advertising, online dangers and so on, more so than any other group.

Sally and Hannah both find ads online and on television to be very annoying, Hannah is considering Sky+ as a way of avoiding the advertising. Kenneth feels that media advertising has carved 'the whole year into buying sprees', citing Communion days and Christmas as examples. Sally is also concerned that the amount of media advertising reflects the level of commercialisation in social life though Mark finds advertising useful in introducing new products and ideas. He claims that the amount of advertising is because there is a lot of choice now. Sally disagrees:

for those who can't afford it ... it's in their face all the time - you must have this mobile phone you must have this designer this and ... does that mean you are not

successful anymore in this society because you don't own ...that's what concerns me...(Sally, Group 2 – Media and Families)

Sarah shares these concerns about advertising and strictly limits the television channels that her children are allowed to watch, directing them away from advertising-heavy children's cable channels towards advertising-free channels such as the BBC children's programming. The group as a whole feels that the quality of Irish broadcasting does not reflect value for money in terms of the licence fee, particularly when compared to the BBC. Kenneth is particularly dissatisfied:

...you would be hard put some nights, you look and you see what's on Bog 1 [RTE 1] and Bog 2 [RTE 2] and you say, what is on? You know, there is absolutely nothing on, you know that... on a Saturday night...? (Kenneth, Group 2 – Media and Families)

Political Economy: The issue of trust in the media was mentioned in this group, with internet sources considered particularly untrustworthy. Concerns about internet security and safety were also raised as was inequality of access and the digital divide. Sally is very concerned that technology and access to technology are not high on the political agenda. Sarah agrees and points out that if technology continues to develop as it has done in the past ten years, those who do not have access now will be even more marginalised in the future. Children, Sally states, who are not able to access technology, will be at a disadvantage in school and in the workplace. Mark raises the point that no matter how developed the national infrastructure is, unless parents are media literate and able to assist their children, those children will be unable to develop media literacy on their own.

Sarah talks about the stress that can be experienced by older people who are excluded from learning about, accessing and practising on new media platforms. The fact that this technology appears to be so naturally accessible and intuitive to young people means that adults and older people can be too daunted by their lack of knowledge to even try:

... I don't think the structures have been put in place ...to encourage people to keep up with technology and media whether that [means] the difference between

a high definition television and a regular Joe Soap or whether it is using the internet or email or using Paypal, ... I don't think enough credit is being given to the stress that that can cause people if they feel that they are not being given the opportunity to use these services... that they have just been excluded ... and they don't feel that they have the vocabulary to ask the questions and that's my concern. (Sarah, Group 2 – Media and Families)

The other issue of major concern is that of security in online environments. Sally makes the point that it is the very technology that is so popular with young people – mobile phones and internet sites like Youtube - that are the most difficult to police. This means that parents must take an active role in supervising their children and teenagers. However, if they themselves are not media literate, they are unable to do so. Mark suggests that the cinema type age limits which are familiar would help parents to know if a site is suitable for a particular age-group. The wider issue of security on the internet is a concern for all participants. Kenneth notes the thin line between safeguards and censorship. He does not feel that attempts to regulate the internet would be successful for any group beyond children even if, as Sally and Sarah point out, older people may also need help and guidance to be online safely.

Group Three – New Media

Group Three showed the highest level of new media usage and competence, and are almost all unique in respect of their wholesale embrace of internet and mobile technology. The six participants in this group range in age from 26-33 and all are currently pursuing higher education degrees. There are four female and two male participants. All are Irish nationals. The group includes: Lisa (26), James (28), George (33), Jackie (33), Amy (28), Karen (33).

Experience and Competence: This group is extremely well informed, articulate and eager to speak about their individual media use, experiences and rationale. All are computer literate and have broadband connections at home except Lisa, who accesses it at work. They are comfortable with both old and new media and have fully

integrated multiple new platforms and deliveries of traditional media content into their daily lives. Jackie, similar to Pat in Group One, is somewhat resistant to new media. She uses a mobile phone to talk and text, but finds widespread public use intrusive; while she will use a computer, it is never for 'entertainment, just for practical use' such as paying her car tax or doing research. She goes on to say that she doesn't use new media technology beyond the internet and her mobile phone because, she states, 'I would be afraid of it and I wouldn't have the patience for it'.

All the other participants make full use of mobile phones –talking, texting, listening to the radio and taking photos. To save money Karen and Amy regularly use free online texting facilities on the websites of their service providers. James, Karen and Lisa read newspapers online every day. Amy does so occasionally as does George. None of the participants regularly buys a printed newspaper. All listen to the radio, mostly while commuting on foot, in the car or by public transport. George listens to a mix of stations on the radio via his phone, but also listens at home, at work and in his car. Jackie is not an enthusiastic listener but will put on RTE Radio 1 in her car. Lisa and Amy listen to a mix of stations through MP3 players while on the move and in the morning at home. Both James and Karen express a strong dissatisfaction with Irish radio stations feeling they offer little choice and little in the way of variety. As a result both regularly listen to digital radio online, primarily for music:

yeah I never listen to Irish radio, I think it is appalling, and you know very, very little variety ... but I listen to digital radio online an awful lot ... (James, Group 3 – New Media)

I would listen to Radio One in the mornings - Morning Ireland ...and then after that, like James, I find there is nothing else on Irish radio to listen to at all, no variety so again digital music channels through the internet (Karen, Group 3 – New Media).

In relation to TV, there is an even split between viewers and non-viewers. Lisa and Amy both watch a lot of TV including American series, reality TV and soaps in Amy's case. Amy discusses how she bonds with her housemates through regular watching of certain programmes. Lisa also watches with her housemates but

acknowledges that in shared accommodation differences in viewing habits can arise. When this happens she explains that she will catch up the next day with programmes she really wants to see via the internet rather than having arguments with people. Both Lisa and Amy have a cable service, but not digital.

George enjoys watching television and has recently got Sky+ and is particularly happy with its recording facility. He records programming every day to watch when he has time. He states now that there is never 'nothing on' for him as he has stored programmes to watch as he likes.

New Interactive Media and Creative Media Use: The range of media competence is broader than other groups: mobile phone use, accessing broadcast content online, internet surfing, email, social networking, blogging are all part of this group's daily activities. With the exception of Jackie, they do not necessarily regard the media they interact with as being particularly 'new'. George comments:

I suppose I am not really into technology but listening to the radio over the internet, I have done it once or twice I was just there reading on my laptop and whatever reading stuff on the internet or whatever so I would just put it on but I would almost take that for granted I suppose really you know, I don't see it as modern technology, if that is modern technology then I thought of it as something else maybe...(George, Group 3 – New Media)

All are very interested in new developments in media. They are also discerning, following their interests only in areas that can be of use to them in work or in entertainment. Their main interest lies in personal and portable media such as MP3 players, i-pods, laptops and so on. Both Lisa and Amy say they are not interested in 'massive big home equipment kits or things like that' (Lisa) or 'big tellys' (Amy); it is more so in items that can, as Karen explains, 'make life easier'. The interest in personalised and portable media is reflected in the group's media usage. James and George, in particular, have freed themselves from the TV schedule, personally seeking out and 'pulling' the programming they are interested in. James has found a solution that suits him:

I never bought myself a digital radio or digital television or anything like that but there are kind of parallel systems running on the internet and you know I would use that so I suppose I am possibly into the more DIY forms... I kind of just pick it up over the internet really (James, Group 3 – New Media).

The group was asked if the internet had changed their use of other media. George, Amy and Jackie do not see a major change. George uses the internet more now that he has a faster broadband connection but he doesn't feel that it will replace his other media habits. Amy does not feel that it has changed her relationship to other media although she uses the internet a lot. Jackie feels that it has changed her ways of keeping in touch with people – but not in a positive way – she misses personal communication:

Jackie: well I think you know if everyone is going around carrying these things, you know plugged into their ears... you know one thing I loved about Dublin was great chats ... I lived in the States for 3 years and you know you don't talk to anyone and it is horrible and I really think that, you know, that these little gadgets are taking away from the whole social...

James: you ignore the people around you, have your headphones in and be texting a friend who you might not actually have a conversation with for two weeks

Karen: but I have to say I use buses everyday and I hate having to listen to other people's conversations, it does my head it, I just turn up my, I think it is great, block it all out. (Group 3 – New Media)

Asked which medium they would miss the most, Lisa and Karen would miss the internet the most, George, Amy and Jackie would miss their mobile phones and James is torn between the two.

This group has a very interactive relationship with the media. All had visited the website for a TV show; Jackie has texted into competitions, as has Amy, who also texts into reality show voting contests. James and George have both made complaints to TV stations - James in a personal context with regard to an appearance in which he feels he was misrepresented. George made a complaint to RTE about coverage of a

particular story and received a good response from the station. He is currently unhappy with the standard of language on daytime radio and is considering complaining about the level of swearing. None of the others has complained in an official sense although they would talk about an issue that annoyed them with their friends.

George is the only group member with digital TV but he makes use of the interactive features such as the mini screens and the ability to change the camera view of sport coverage. James has two MySpace pages, one of which is for his musical output, he also has a Facebook page and is active and posting on several message boards. He uses social networking sites for 'community building' and has made contact with many people who share his interests. He also actively follows a number of blogs, but has not had time to do his own. Lisa uses Facebook and Bebo to stay in touch with friends and to share photos. She does not write a blog as, showing an awareness of the durability of online information, she 'really wouldn't like to have that kind of digital record of what was going on at different times of my life'. Karen also has a Myspace page, primarily because of her interest in new music. She has become bored with social networking sites and has recently deleted her Facebook page.

Political Economy and Cultures of Legality: Levels of critical media awareness are clearly evident in all the activities conducted by this group. They are keenly aware of advertising and marketing in all its media forms. George records all children's programming for his two year old daughter so that she will not experience too much advertising. Karen, Lisa, Amy and Jackie are all annoyed by online, radio and television advertising and will change channel or click away from it when it impedes on their activities. James, because he avoids TV and radio, finds adverts to be a novel entertainment when he encounters any. However, he is now immune to online advertising. All are aware of the misuse of personal details for marketing purposes and are careful to not leave contact details behind them on the web.

James and Lisa both feel that there is insufficient distance between public service and commercial broadcasting in Ireland. Lisa refers specifically to the lack of distinction between a commercial station like Today FM and RTE radio. She feels that there is an

unwillingness to break the mould in Irish broadcasting and to try anything different. James is concerned by the blurring of public and private that emerges out of RTE's dual funding system. He feels however that a public service be upheld. George is also strongly in favour of public service broadcasting. He likes to know whether people are pushing an angle or not, or spinning a story and feels that the public service broadcaster is more trustworthy. Amy references the loss of sporting events to commercial channels and feels that publicly funded, free to air channels are essential and should be supported in bids for big events and matches.

The group doubts if regulation of the internet is possible. George comments that legislation would be too complicated to consider. He notes the gap between European legislation and any country's national laws - websites can set up in and operate from countries outside of our jurisdiction – and is just not realistic. Amy hadn't really thought about regulation before now, but she imagines it would be very difficult to do. She suggests that perhaps raising awareness would be a better way to go about it – for parents and children or young people in particular. Karen can't imagine how the internet could be properly regulated but she is concerned by the lack of quality control, she mentions seeing Wikipedia being quoted as an authoritative source in many instances. Karen agrees with George that individuals simply have to be able to filter it themselves.

Of the six participants in this group, four are avid and regular downloaders, George is interested in the legal discourse surrounding it but does not download himself. Jackie does not download material and is concerned that people's livelihoods may be put at risk by totally unregulated illegal downloading which ignores copyright. Although not actually asked, all admit to illegal downloading. Lisa feels that:

[from her] layman's perspective it seems like a bit of a minefield in terms of how it is being policed and even if there are, you know, sites that have been shut down in one country does that apply to Ireland and things like that...? So I suppose I would do it but I wouldn't worry particularly because ... it just seems like such a jumble out there at the moment that is it fine to still do it. (Lisa, Group 3 – New Media)

James feels that the industry is in a period of ‘denial’. He is personally excited about the notion of a creative commons where the industry can still make money but in ways that they have not yet explored. On the other hand, he also raises the point that many people feel they have been ripped off for a long time by an industry which has not been ethical in its own practices. Karen reiterates this view and while she freely admits to downloading a large quantity of music she contextualises it as a tasting exercise. If she likes a new band she will buy the album and also concert tickets. She does not feel that she is acting unethically by downloading and cites the explosion of new acts and says this is a logical response to trying to keep up with the new. Amy is caught in the middle between Karen and Jackie, saying people feel ripped off but conversely she feels bad about taking music for free.

All of the participants shop online. Jackie and George buy from one or two sites for tickets and from Amazon for books and music or film. George also banks online and is confident in the systems. He, like Lisa and James, cites common sense in shopping online and all participants are wary of giving out too much personal detail, using appropriate anti-virus software, researching sites to ensure their reliability, using intermediary payment options like Paypal and opting out of sites which ask for excessive and apparently unnecessary detail.

Group Four – Social Issues

The eight participants in this group are all community youth workers in Dublin and include: Joe (56), Aidan (50), Marion (69), Jill (56), Frank (22), Gwen (55), Andrea (66), and Billy (52).

Experience and Competence: All members of this group are, due to the nature of their work, computer literate and internet active. They display varying degrees of enthusiasm about their media use and experience. All have and use mobile phones, with only Andrea being a reluctant user, feeling that it impinges on her personal space. Jill is concerned about the cost of phone calls and searches for different options

when ringing her family in the UK. Marion and Andrea share concern at the rise in ‘text-speak’ and feel that younger people will be unable to spell correctly.

Radio is not as popular in this group as it has been in other groups. Jill loves talk shows and call-in shows and listens all day at work or in the car. Marion, by contrast, hates talk and call-in shows and only listens to BBC Radio 4. Aidan prefers what he calls ‘visual radio’ where you listen to plays or stories and have to imagine. He feels the quality has declined in recent years and misses:

...old fashioned radio ... where it is used as a medium rather than just some way of pumping out music and information like (Aidan, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Billy, interestingly listens to the Adrian Kennedy show on FM 104, but rather than listen to it on a radio, he ‘watches’ the show on his digital television service. He does not regularly listen otherwise, but if he hears about an interesting piece on the Joe Duffy show or on another show he will go and find it the next day on the internet. Although he does not call it digital radio, Billy is listening to his radio programming in digital context – through his television and online.

In relation to digital television, all members of the group have a cable or digital television service, although no one has a digital recording facility. Gwen was offered a service upgrade to include digital recording but declined as she did not want to give out her bank details over the phone. Aidan has digital television with approximately 100 channels although he feels that there is nothing on any of them anymore. He is very happy with the concept of digital television in terms of its delivery, but feels strongly that the quality of programming and production values have been damaged by the sheer quantity available. He claims there is ‘is no appointment to watch television any more’ and no guarantee that when you go to work the next day that there will be anyone else who watched the same show as you last night:

You can say television killed conversation but I think that digital television has finished it off because you know there is no stopping in the street and saying what about that thing that we saw last night you know? (Aidan, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Billy disagrees strongly with this, feeling that a lack of choice meant that people had to watch the same thing whether they were interested or not:

...don't forget years ago all you had was RTE 1 basically ...people were fascinated with the Late Late Show – why – because they had no other station on their television. So it was of course a topic of discussion the next morning or whatever but now you have such a variety... (Billy, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Joe criticises the information made available about new gadgets. He describes his experience with a phone upgrade that due to confused information led him to end up with an inferior model with few capabilities. He recognises an age gap between young people who are 'naturally' able to use and understand new media because they have grown up with it. Aidan is 'not into technology for technology's sake' he will only buy something if he needs it, and will only buy after extensive research. Marion and Jill are very interested in new technology. They both love reading about it although Marion would very rarely buy anything. Jill loves computer games and feels that it is important to:

keep up to date with it, I think you have to, like, if you are working with kids you have gotta keep up to date with the new technology coming in otherwise they are talking to you and you are going 'what?' you haven't got a clue what they are talking about (Jill, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Andrea and Billy are both interested and try to keep up with new developments, but also share concerns about the cost of new media. Billy is also aware that he would be unlikely to use any new form to its full extent:

If I buy a television, I buy a television with a remote control that has the most colours just because I say then there's an awful lot more on it and after five years I am still using just the volume and the channel you know ... and the wife always says 'well why are you always doing that?' It's because I think I am getting something that ... getting something extra for the price but at the end of the day I am no more interested, just give me the on off button and that, but it is fascinating yes... (Billy, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Frank's experience of new technology is slightly different due to his disability:

I do like technology and I find out my own ways to do things, because at the moment I am doing a course in Photoshop and I am getting to realise that you have to hold the mouse very steady and I wouldn't be able to do that so I am finding my own ways how to get around that ... (Frank, Group 4 – Social Issues)

All are regular internet users. Joe uses the internet daily at work and as well as the usual functions of email, booking flights and tickets and seeking information, he also looks up videos on Youtube and websites that the kids in the community centre tell him about. It is part of his everyday routine now. Aidan does not go online everyday but he appreciates the ease that technology brings to communication – now a group can be called together with one email rather than a series of phone calls, or writing and posting a letter. He is also a member of an online global photography group and enjoys the contacts he has made around the world. Jill, Marion, Billy and Andrea also use the internet at work and at home for communication purposes but also as an information resource, Gwen uses it at home and is currently working on a personal genealogy project for her wider family. No one maintains a blog or has a website. Only Billy accesses more traditional broadcast content online, although not as part of his regular media interaction.

Critical Media Awareness: No particularly strong feelings about advertising were expressed. Marion is concerned about the pressure continuous advertisements put on parents, children and young people. Jill and Billy are annoyed by TV advertisements and agree with Aidan who points out that every time there is an advertising break in a show, the first few minutes back are spent refreshing the viewer. Joe finds adverts rarely catch his eye, but if they do he usually doesn't mind them. Both Aidan and Frank report that often while they are entertained by adverts and can remember them, they regularly do not remember the product associated with the campaign.

The group was far more exercised about internet security and policing. Aidan, Billy and Joe are particularly worried about the ease with which violent and sexual material can be accessed, often in error. All cite examples of inappropriate and disturbing

websites, Youtube videos, and other online materials being brought to their attention by the young people with whom they work. Aidan feels that sites like Youtube are shirking their responsibility by not checking every item before it is put into the public domain:

I mean a site can't say 'look it we can't be responsible for what's on our sites' I mean Youtube started this nonsense, 'Oh we get 10000 new entries a day'. So what? Check them all, that is what you are there for. ... BBC RTE ... are all 24 hour seven days a week now. There is a maximum amount of content [but] every single bit of that has to go through their production values, their core values, the whole lot so why should they be any different. It [the internet] is a public broadcast facility so it should be treated the same. (Aidan, Group 4 – Social Issues)

The group has a lot to say on the lack of policing and online security and multiple examples are given all of which focus on the accessing of inappropriate material by young people. Marion is the only person in this group to voice concern about identity theft and fraud. She is very conscious of this and does not shop online beyond buying airline tickets:

When you asked me earlier on did I buy much on...? I am very slow to buy anything and it is mainly because I am kind of scared that they would steal my details and I think no matter even with secure sites people can I suppose, can hack in and that would be a concern of mine. (Marion, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Also echoing other groups' concerns about adults and media literacy, Marion is aware that very often, although parents may be worried about their children or teenagers' online activity, they are not knowledgeable enough to guide or to assist them.

Creative Media Use: Neither issues around culture of legality or personal media creation were high on the agenda for this group beyond concerns about the kind of uploaded material young people can access now. None of the participants blog or have their own websites, although Gwen and Aidan would consider setting one up for their photographic work. Frank is learning web design but has yet to apply it to site building. None of the participants has a social networking profile and Billy is the only

one to speak about it in relation to young people's use and its prevalence among all age groups:

99% of the young kids who use computers now is into Bebo, I don't care what anybody says, if it is not that it is Youtube, it is either Youtube or it is Bebo and that's all that they are interested in how to colour up their sites and be in, as I keep saying to the kids on the job 'am I in your top 16?' you know and they are saying 'how did you know what top 16 is Bill?' 'Because I am watching ye day after day after day' and I am hearing them out here 'Jenny am I in your top 16?' 'yeah, hang on a minute you are in it now' ... it's just Bebo, Bebo - it is a fascinating site... (Billy, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Political Economy: The issue of internet regulation is a key one, with social networking sites a particular concern:

...but sure you have a Bebo site now, you are supposed to be 13 years of age to go on to that I think, I think you have to be 13 or something but there is kids going on, six, seven and eight and how do they get on? Because they are putting in ... Joanne Bloggs or whatever it is, age, born 19th of the second 1980 odd and the computers aren't going back and ask you for identification, they just take it and you are in (Billy, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Joe, broadly echoing other concerns, fears that any attempts to start to regulate internet content or access would result in a return to censorship, something which he recalls as very restrictive when applied to film in this country. The issue of a global solution, which takes into account different laws in different countries, is not something which is seen as realistic in the future. Where other groups referred to media literacy as the best way to provide internet safety, Aidan suggests that 'ultimately the responsibility should be on the website'.

Referring to media structures and ownership, Jill admits she has not thought about this before. Aidan has strong opinions in terms of news values and contrasts the different emphases of Sky News and EuroNews as an example of how news stories are influenced by the organisation delivering them. Andrea and Marion both watch BBC

news as they feel it has 'good values' and Frank highlights the sensationalist nature of Sky:

well the only thought that I have is that watching Sky News usually what I see is sensationalist kind of stuff like - big bomb blows up a big building somewhere; a big plane crash and loads of people killed – but I find they don't concentrate on smaller issues. (Frank, Group 4 – Social Issues)

Billy argues strongly for media pluralism: "I just think we are lucky we are not in a place like North Korea where we have to watch what they tell us to watch".

Although generally mobile use and dependency is something that is associated with young people and teenagers, all participants here, with the exception of Aidan and Marion, state that they would miss their mobile phones the most if they had to lose one media form:

Joe: the mobile phone because it is, it's with you all the time now, it has become part of the outfit it is quick access, quick communication,

Jill: mobile phone I think in this day and age they are a necessity

Frank: my mobile phone because I use that for my alarm to wake me up for work in the morning... I use it for everything... if I am in trouble I use it and it is great and I would really miss it,

Marion: I would suffer withdrawal symptoms if I had to leave my computer, I would; I really just love it.

Andrea: I suppose mobiles you do kind of need mobiles

Billy: ...the mobile would definitely be it and the TV would be second (Group 4 – Social Issues)

Summary and implications for media literacy policy

The four groups represented in this study display an interesting range of common features and contrasts. Convergence and cross media use is in evidence across all ages within this adult population. While there is a predictable shift in media habits represented by younger members, the extent to which all participants, young and old, Dublin-based and beyond, are interested in harnessing the benefits of new media use is positive and encouraging.

The data supports similar findings from the UK with regard to the positive reception for new media. In contrast, for example, to the way in which television was initially received with great caution and indeed vilified as a dangerous medium, Livingstone has reported:

..this approach inscribes a broadly positive vision of media users - intrinsically motivated, striving after meaning, ready to learn and explore and socially connected, albeit impeded by various material and symbolic barriers.
(Livingstone 2003: 24)

At the same time, there are clear limitations in access to the full spectrum of opportunities provided by new media technologies. Whether due to the absence or poor quality of broadband services, or because of limited expertise and a lack of available models of good practice in using media in interactive and creative ways, there is clear evidence from the focus group findings of incomplete knowledge and interest in media literate practice. Significant generational gaps in access and in expertise are apparent, and a general unevenness with regard to media knowledge or skills, suggesting a fragmentation according to the specific interests of individuals concerned.

There is a general, if largely informal, understanding of the issues that media literacy deals with. The notion of 'media literacy' itself is not completely understood, nor are the concepts which media education typically uses widely circulated. The most prominent critical media literacy topics discussed in the focus groups included internet safety and issues of illegal downloading which have also been prominent media stories. Yet the value of a greater critical engagement with the media, or the

importance of having an open, successful and transparent media culture, did not arise to any great extent. Legitimate concerns are expressed about the quality of information and supports available, about the dangers that all members of the public are exposed to, especially children, and of the need for effective mechanisms of protection. Yet this arises in the context of little public debate on the topics concerned, and even less information from reliable sources about the risks and opportunities afforded by the new media and communications environment.

The question arises how under a new regime such as that envisaged by the European Commission policy framework or that of the Broadcasting Bill 2008 could media literacy aid and support members of the public as represented in this study's focus groups? Implications for policy may be summarised under the headings derived from the Commission Communication, and used to organise the focus group discussion.

- a) **Experience and Competence:** Varying levels of experience and competence were identified in the focus groups with Groups 1 and 4 displaying somewhat less experience across the full spectrum of media opportunities, and Groups 2 and 3 apparently having a wider range of both skills and experience. However, an appropriate scale of measuring media literacy competence is not yet available and a major task ahead in determining appropriate indicators of expertise and degrees of media literacy. This is one of the main challenges for media literacy under AVMSD and will be a key focus in the years ahead.
- b) **New Interactive Media:** As might be expected, the levels of experience with new interactive media (interactive television, Internet, participation in virtual communities) varied even more, depending on age, interests and access to technology and infrastructure. Creative applications of new media, though not specifically a focus of this study, were less in evidence, either for creative self-expression or for lifelong learning. As such, there is extensive scope for media literacy policy makers to expand on and make more visible the creative possibilities of the Information Society.
- c) **Critical Media Awareness:** An informal critical awareness was in evidence in the focus group discussions, quite separate to questions of skill and experience of

media. Here there is the greatest scope for bringing about a better public understanding of media materials, texts, processes, and systems, as envisaged in the Broadcasting Bill, for example, and for providing a stronger foundation through appropriate educational programmes and learning resources in a media literate culture. Evidence from this and other studies shows that access to media literacy education is very uneven. Information from media sources is also currently patchy and in this regard, media organisations also have a role in educating, informing and contributing to the raising of the profile of media literacy as a matter of public interest.

- d) **Political Economy:** As with critical media awareness, the degree of awareness and understanding displayed by members of the public of issues of media ownership and control, the economic basis of media organization or the social impact and significance of media communications is limited. The topics that raised the most concern in discussions were of a protectionist variety, as in issues regarding Internet safety and security. Arguably, critical media awareness veered towards the consumer end of the spectrum rather than to the citizen dimension, and little comment was made of the value of public engagement or participation, or the role of media systems in supporting democracy. Here again, there is an onus on media literacy providers and media organisations to contribute to a better public understanding of these issues and to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and learning opportunities about the public value involved.
- e) **Cultures of Legality:** Given the prominence of media coverage around certain aspects of legality regarding use of the internet, there was certainly an awareness by members of the public about issues of copyright ownership. Interestingly, particularly among younger members there was also a significant debate on the issues with different opinions being aired. With regard to the ethics of online communication or regulatory codes of conduct, there was much less discussion or apparent interest, and as a result there is a need for a much greater public awareness of the contexts in which cultures of legality become important. Such issues, arguably, go right to the heart of the Information Society and reinforce the

need for public intervention to ensure that information and opportunities for media literacy education are more widely available.

Finally, it may be noted that a fundamental requirement of effective media literacy provision will be a sound evidence base, and ongoing research will be needed to track the changing media landscape and the degree to which members of the public have access to and utilise the opportunities available to them. In this way, over a period of time it will be possible to gauge using appropriate indicators the development of media literacy and the impact of policy initiatives and public interventions in the field.

6. Conclusion

The policy environment for media literacy

The purpose of this report has been to map the background to the development of media literacy as a public policy issue and to place in context the provisions for public media literacy promotion as set out in the Broadcasting Bill 2008.

Media literacy, the report has found, is a highly significant development within the field of media regulation and is a crucial element of the response at national and international level to the changes underway within converging media and telecommunications markets.

Public policy towards media literacy is still at an early stage of development. Indicative of the emergent nature of the field and the fast pace of development, is the fact that during the course of this research, after its initial design was conceived, a number of significant events occurred. For example, in the months since November 2007 when the project began:

- Radharc Trust *Critical Media Literacy in Ireland* published its report (November 2007)
- The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) entered into force (December 2007)
- The report, *Study on the current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe* (the 'Commission' study) was published (December 2007)
- The European Commission published its Communication *A European Approach to Media Literacy in the Digital Environment* (December 2007)
- The International Media Literacy Research Forum was formed by Ofcom (May 2008)
- The Broadcasting Bill 2008 was published. (May 2008)

- Council conclusions on the European approach to media literacy were published (June 2008)
- A tender was launched for assessing levels of media literacy (June 2008)

By any standards, this is an extraordinary level of activity and does not even take into activities taking place elsewhere as reviewed in Chapter 3 of this report. On one level, the degree of attention media literacy is currently receiving augurs extremely well and must delight media literacy advocates who have laboured tirelessly over the years to gain the attention of politicians and policy makers. The policy field that media literacy now represents brings together the very constituencies who in the past the media education community has lobbied for greater recognition and support for the subject. There is, accordingly, within the current conjuncture a heady mix of political influence, of government interest, media industries, regulators, cultural institutions, educators and civil society groups. The potential for exciting, innovative and progressive media literacy initiatives is as never before, based on multi-stakeholder partnerships and the backing of powerful institutions.

However, there is also a sense and a danger that the potential may be overstated, and the optimism misplaced. As reviewed in this report, there is concern, from within the academic community and from some civil society groups, that media literacy's 'moment in the sun' may come at a cost. The revolutionary nature of the changes underway in the media and communications environment is such that its implications are far reaching but ultimately unknown. The blurring of distinctions between old and new media, the unravelling of traditional approaches to media content provision and regulation, the withering away of older, trusted institutions, and the rise of new, less certain ones, creates an environment that is at once mesmerising, yet deeply unsettling. AVMSD, as the primary vehicle of European media policy, is fully committed to realising the potential of the new communications environment and has instituted media literacy as one of the measures to support that. The question will remain for many though whether media literacy as currently defined has sufficient teeth to guarantee the public interest and to withstand the disruptive and destructive forces that may be unleashed.

It is, unfortunately, too soon to tell. There are few indications of what an effective public media literacy programme might look like. Hence, the emphasis that has been placed at international level on exchange of information and sharing of best practice. Practices in media literacy will necessarily vary widely and each has to respond to the particular cultural and social contexts involved. For this reason also, research has been identified as one of the very important requirements for effective policy implementation. There is, for instance, very little data available on how Irish people are adapting to the new media and communications environment. Research is currently service-led and provides communications market information on degrees of connectivity to new communications technologies. We know very little though about the issues involved in the take-up of these technologies, about the needs of those are connected, and the reasons why some are not. The focus group data in this research provided some tantalising glimpses into the kinds of issues emerging for Irish citizens and consumers. But in order to develop and implement meaningful and effective policies, ongoing systematic longitudinal research, of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, is needed.

Recommendations

Arising from the issues documented in this research, the following are offered as recommendations for the developing public policy scenario for media literacy in Ireland.

1. **Research:** The research function of the proposed Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is clearly signalled in the Broadcasting Bill 2008. In addition to media literacy provision, the research function includes gathering information on the broadcasting sector, monitoring international developments, determining skills requirements. The recommendation arising here is that *a media literacy dimension be identified within each of these research functions and that media literacy should act as an overarching framework for gathering information on the emerging communications landscape.*

2. **Industry support:** Among the examples of best international practice in media literacy promotion were those instances of effective media literacy support from media organisations. It was noted, however, that many such partnerships arise on the basis of individual circumstances and goodwill rather than being systematic in nature. *In order to mainstream media literacy as an essential component of participation in the communications market place, mechanisms should be identified to require media organisations to support media literacy initiatives.* The Canadian case of defining a social benefit percentage in sales of communications concerns is one of many international examples. Others include levies on distribution, licensing obligations, charter renewal etc.
3. **Information exchange:** A key element in developing effective media literacy strategies is information sharing both at a national and international level. To this end, media literacy agencies in this country should participate in organisations such as the *International Media Literacy Research Forum*.
4. **Expert group:** As part of the process of determining good practice and exchanging information, consideration should be given to *the formation of an Irish media literacy expert group to advise on definitions, strategies, and new developments. Such a group should comprise national experts and key stakeholders within the media literacy field.*
5. **Partnership support:** It is clear that successful implementation of media literacy promotion involves partnership with a diverse range of interests. Central to this are partnerships with providers of media literacy education both within formal education settings and in a host of adult learning environments. *The means of support for such civil society/cultural and educational organisations and groups needs to be considered in order to place media literacy provision on a sustainable footing. Given the centrality of media literacy as outlined in this report to the future health of the audiovisual sector, dedicated support from funds as, for example, defined in Broadcasting (Funding) Act, 2003 should be considered.*

Appendix – Focus Group Protocols

As part of its research on emerging issues in media literacy, the project will undertake a number of focus groups to explore opinions and attitudes to media literacy among the general public. Four groups are planned with 6 – 8 members each. Groups will be broadly constituted as follows:

- A. 25-34 age group, mixed gender, higher education based in Dublin.
- B. 45-54 age group, mixed gender, non-higher education, based in Dublin.
- C. 25-34 age group, mixed gender, higher education, outside Dublin.
- D. 45-54 age group, mixed gender, non-higher education, outside Dublin.

The focus groups will be independently facilitated, will last for approximately 1.5 hours and will discuss in an open-ended, informal way a range of questions indicated to be of strategic importance within media literacy. The following themes have been drawn from the European Commission communication on Media Literacy in the Digital Environment and indicate the levels of media literacy that are viewed as important for future European societies.

Questions and Themes for Discussion

- a) **Experience and Competence:** the extent to which members of the public feel feeling comfortable with existing media from newspapers to online communities, mobile devices and other ICTs;

Are you interested in new technology?

Do you try to keep up with new technology?

Do you think people rely too much on technology nowadays?

Would you be able to explain what digital radio or digital television is to a friend?

Can you explain what it is now?

Do you have digital television (through satellite or cable, for example)? Has this changed the way you watch television? If not do you intend to get digital television within the next year?

Do you have Sky+ or a Personal Video Recorder? Has this changed the way you watch television?

Do you have a broadband internet connection at home? Has this changed the way you use other media?

If there was a breaking news story, where would you go to find out more – the internet, Sky news or other news channel, newspaper, radio?

Which medium would you miss most?

- b) **New Interactive Media:** the extent to which members of the public actively use media, through, *inter alia*, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications;

Do you have interactive TV at home? Have you ever pressed the red button on your remote control to get more information about a programme?

Do you use any digital TV functions such as setting programme reminders, setting up a Favourite Channel menu or choosing viewing angles for sports broadcasting?

Have you ever visited the web site of a TV programme or sent a text message or email to the programme or channel?

What kind of activities do you currently use the internet for? Email? Downloading? News and Information? Social Networking? To send and share photographs with family and friends?

Do you participate in any virtual communities such as Facebook or Second Life?

Do you use internet search engines like Google or Yahoo to search for information online? What kind of information do you look for?

If you do not have the internet at home is there someplace else that you use to access online material?

Do you feel that interactive media is beneficial to you and to your life? What are the main advantages in your experience?

- c) **Critical Media Awareness:** the degree to which members of the public display a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to assess information, dealing with advertising on various media, using search engines intelligently);

Have you ever personally made a complaint about something that you have seen on TV?

Are you confident in your ability to deal with advertising and product placement across a variety of media forms including TV, Radio, Websites?

Do you feel the media is more or less balanced and representative across different media forms?

Are you concerned about online security matters? Do you take any measures when going online?

Do you make judgements about particular websites before using any information or entering any personal details?

Do you have any specific concerns about your own or others media use or participation? What are these concerns?

- d) **Creative Media Use:** the extent of use of the media, particularly digital media as tools for personal, social and creative expression.

Do you maintain a blog or personal/family website?

Do you create personal digital media content such as video clips, images or photographs by uploading material to content sharing sites such as Youtube or to Social Networking sites such as Facebook?

Do you maintain a personal profile on a social networking site?

If you do use the internet or digital media to create and to share personal media content do you feel it is beneficial to you?

Do you watch, read or otherwise engage with personal media content created and uploaded by others who are known/not otherwise known to you?

- e) **Political Economy:** the degree of awareness and understanding displayed by members of the public of issues of media ownership and control, the economic basis of media organization and social impact and significance of media communications;

Is media diversity (ownership/content) important to you?

Is non-commercial media important to you? How is it mainly funded?

How would you say commercial channels such as TV3 or Channel Six are funded?

As long as TV Programmes are good/enjoyable it does not matter who owns or funds TV Stations? Do you agree?

As far as you know are Television programmes regulated? Who is responsible for this regulation?

As far as you know is the internet regulated in terms of what can be written or shown? Do you think it should be?

To what extent would you trust the news from RTE TV/Radio news; Sky News or other news channels; Internet News Sites such as Yahoo or Breaking News?

How are internet sites and search engines mainly funded?

Should media organisations be actively supporting media literacy? What could they do?

What should the government, or agencies such as the BCI do to support greater awareness of media literacy.

- f) **Copyright Issues/Culture of Legality:** the awareness by members of the public and attitudes to issues of copyright ownership and fair use of media; the ethics of online communication and regulatory codes of conduct.

Do you ever download music, film or software on the internet?

Are you aware that there are both legal and illegal ways to download music and films on the internet?

Do you think that downloading in this way should be illegal?

Do you subscribe to or comment on the blogs or web diaries or other people/internet forums or discussion sites? Do you feel that the anonymity of the comments process encourages unethical communication?

Is the internet a safe place or do you think that there are dangers associated with its use?

Should sites, like Youtube, which feature digital media content often made by young people be subject to greater controls?

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