

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

The media are changing, and so is citizens' use of such media. New information and communication technologies make it much easier for anybody to retrieve and disseminate information, communicate, publish or even broadcast. The ability of people to critically analyse what they find in the media and to make more informed choices – called 'media literacy' – therefore becomes even more essential for active citizenship and democracy. Following an EU-wide survey last year, the European Commission has announced today its plans to encourage the development of media literacy and the exchange of good practice across Europe.

"In a digital era, media literacy is crucial for achieving full and active citizenship," said Information Society and Media Commissioner Viviane Reding. "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."

Media literacy relates to all types of media, including television, cinema, video, websites, radio, video games and virtual communities. It can be summed up as the ability to access, understand, evaluate and create media content. Ordinary people are increasingly accessing and posting on-line content, which is visible across the world. Yet today, not everybody always fully understands the context within which such material is written, seen or read, or the possible consequences of publishing something themselves. Everybody therefore needs to develop new skills, as active communicators and creators of content. In a global and multi-cultural environment, new media-related challenges arise and create concerns regarding safety, inclusion and access for all.

Today's Commission Communication is the first policy document on media literacy at the EU level. It focuses on the following three areas:

- media literacy for commercial communication, covering issues related to advertising,
- media literacy for audiovisual works, which is in part about raising awareness of European film and enhancing creativity skills,
- and media literacy for online which, for example, will give citizens a better knowledge of how Google and other Internet search engines work.

The Communication adds a further building block to European audiovisual policy. It complements the new Audiovisual Media Services Without Frontiers Directive (see [IP/07/1809](#)), and the MEDIA 2007 support-programme for the development and distribution of European film. It also announces a study to be launched in 2008 on how to assess media literacy levels and will feed into the report on the levels of media literacy provided by the new Audiovisual Media Services Without Frontiers Directive. *"I believe that especially with regard to advertising, promoting media literacy is a much more appropriate approach than advocating advertising bans, which I oppose"*, said EU Commissioner Reding.

The Commission actively promotes the development and exchange of **good practice on media literacy** in the digital environment through existing programmes and initiatives, and will adopt if necessary a set of recommendations in the future. Finally, the Commission calls on Member States to encourage their regulatory authorities to become more involved and to cooperate further in improving people's level of media literacy. It also aims to develop and implement codes of conduct and co-regulation frameworks with all interested parties at national level.

Background information:

The Commission Communication on media literacy is an integral part of its general policy to enhance the trust in, and take-up of, content online. It follows the launch of a survey held last year (see [IP/06/1326](#)) which covered all parties involved; that is to say: media organisations and industry, education institutions, content-providers and producers, research and cultural institutions, regulators, citizens and consumers' associations. This Communication is the result of this broad consultation.

The Communication can be found at:

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

The results of the public media literacy consultation are available at:

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