

Approaching Advertisements and Consumerism Through Critical Media Literacy

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Purpose

Through advertisement and consumer strategy analysis, educators aim to equip students with critical media literacy awareness. These skills will help them recognize how media and marketing target specific audiences with the intention of reinforcing social constructs. The ultimate goal is that students will enter adulthood as lifelong learners and active community members who are not maintaining the status quo of social constructs, but rather consciously recognize how the media influences our evolving society.

Instructional Procedure

Introduction to Critical Media Literacy

1. Introduce students to the idea of critical media literacy.

Definition: Critical literacy is “about how we see and interact with the world; it is about having, as a regular part of one’s life, the skills and desire to evaluate society and the world” (Wolk 102).

2. Ask students: “why should we be concerned about developing critical media literacy when looking at advertisements, media, and products?”

Explain that advertisements are a huge part of life today:

-We are bombarded with advertisements everywhere we look: on T.V., in magazines, on billboards, on Facebook...we can’t even watch most Youtube videos without having to first watch an ad while the video buffers.

-In fact, there has even been research that suggests “we have gone from seeing about 500 ads a day in the 1970s to as many as 5,000 a day today”

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3445_162-2015684.html

-We live in a consumer-driven culture, and therefore need to educate ourselves about what we are really buying and the effects it has on our society.

3. Do advertisements really make THAT big of a difference? YES. Explain to students what the social learning theory is:

According to this theory, people are more likely to act in the ways that they have seen modeled.

Therefore, with this theory in mind, we can see that advertising companies are intentionally creating their advertisements with certain underlying messages to best sell their products. We need to be aware of these messages and how they affect us.

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A Strategy for Critical Literacy

1. Introduce students to Bloom's Taxonomy as a strategy to develop critical thinking:

Bloom's Taxonomy suggests that there are different levels of thinking that people go through when they encounter information. Often, we go through these stages of thinking without even realizing it. The stages for thinking are as follows (go through an example with an ad as you explain the different levels of thinking):

- i) Knowledge: tell, list, describe, relate, and name.
i.e. list what you see in the advertisements
- ii) Comprehension: explain, interpret, outline, discuss, distinguish, predict, compare
i.e. compare different images in the advertisements
- iii) Application: show, use, examine, classify
i.e. classify advertisements based on messages/effects
- iv) Analysis: analyze, distinguish, compare/contrast, identify, explain
i.e. identify implied messages
- v) Synthesis: predict, plan, propose, design, imagine, formulate
i.e. predict the effect these messages could have.
- vi) Evaluate: judge, decide, debate, assess
i.e. assess the best way to be aware of the potential effects advertisements could have on you and others. How can we challenge these messages and their effects?

Increase Awareness: What kind of targeting do media use?

1. Explain to students that before they can begin to critically analyze advertisements and products, an awareness of how marketing strategists use media to hit target their audience. Such uses of media in respect to adolescents have been identified as:

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- i) Entertainment: This is what the media is often USED for. It is the most obvious purpose for media: to entertain their audience. We watch movies because they interest us, we play video games that we find fun. Commercials that do not entertain or intrigue us are not always as effective as commercials that capture our attention.
- ii) Identity Formation: This is the “big one” when considering advertisements. The development of one’s values, abilities, and hopes for the future often occurs during adolescence. Advertisements have a great influence on such identity formation:
- i.e. the “ideal” self and the “feared” self. Advertisements place value on beauty, physique, sex, etc. These values are often received by adolescents as something to be desired.
 - i.e. gender role identity. Advertisements often enforce gender roles (women being submissive, men being powerful and violent, etc.)
- iii) High Sensation: Sensation seeking has to do with the novelty and intensity of a sensation.
- i.e. action films are often portrayed to have male-dominated audiences because of the sensation of explosions, violence, etc. This further enforces gender roles.
- iv) Coping: This strategy is especially used by music artists as a way to sell their music.
- i.e. girls often listen to Taylor Swift’s relationship-driven music and be able to relate the lyrics to their own lives, and therefore it will help them “cope” with negative emotion.
- v) Youth Culture Identification: This strategy is used to influence a sense of belonging amongst youth.
- i.e. students will feel a sense of belonging if they own the “cool” and newest products, or have seen the newest movies, etc.

Undo Desensitization

1. Explain to students that without critical thinking, we become completely oblivious to these strategies and how they can affect ourselves as well as society as a whole. Society has become *desensitized* to the messages that are being infused into our world through advertisements and consumerism.

This desensitization has resulted in stopping the process of higher thinking. Many people do not go through Bloom’s Taxonomy of thinking when they see these ads. Many people are also unaware of the uses of media. In order to become critically literate, we need to learn how to go through these steps when looking at an advertisement or product.

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2. Group Work: get students to get into groups of 3-4. Hand out some Advertisement and Consumerism work sheets (see supplementary worksheets) and have students analyze the ad using Bloom's Taxonomy and answer the supplementary questions. After students have completed this, have a class discussion about each of the advertisements.

Resources

Wolk, Steven. "Teaching for Critical Literacy in Social Studies". *The Social Studies*. 62(4), 101- 106. (2003).