

Media Literacy for Citizenship: A Canadian Perspective

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Media Literacy for Citizenship: A Canadian Perspective

By Kozolanka, K. & Orlowski, P.

Canadian Scholars, 2018, 247 pages

ISBN 9781773380797 eBook \$57.95

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Media Literacy for Citizenship: A Canadian Perspective is a review of public/privatized media platforms, the governments that interact with them, and the citizenship involved with their consumption. Kristen Kozolanka and Paul Orlowski present a core concept review of theories in democracy, journalism, types of media, and political structure, while beginning a pedagogical *deep dive* into neoliberalism and its impact on civil society, the environment, and our communication practices. The authors provide compelling arguments with evidence to demonstrate how Canadian media has dramatically changed in the past 50 years, with private ownership, lobbyists, and ‘fake news’ driving what information is distributed.

Insights into Main Argument

The first chapter examines Neoliberalism, the authors “as the primary assault on democratic citizenship and equality. To prepare the average citizen for psychological warfare, critical thought and media literacy is an individual’s fundamental layer of protection. Without media literacy that focuses on understanding the political ideology behind corporate media, a citizen could fall prey to “false political consciousness” (p. 4), which explains “why some people consider themselves to be politically conscious and yet vote against their own best interests” (p. 4). Today’s average citizens are not given the unbiased, politically moderate information that was once standard until the mid 1970s (p. 16). Media literacy and active critical thought are now the only ways to protect the individual citizen from consuming, accepting and distributing false information.

The authors review Canadian media sources starting with the ‘Media Giants’ who own 57% of the market, in comparison to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (the CBC) in terms of corporate structure, shareholders, and political leanings. Kozolanka and Orlowski discuss the purpose of publicly funded media, and how the decline of federal funding over time has forced the CBC to take on a more corporate structure and rebranding.

Kozolanka and Orlowski give Canadian examples of the systematically negative impacts of the corporate-owned mass media, including Indigenous representation in the media, and the issue of climate change. Historically, Indigenous peoples are categorized in a negative light in the media, using stereotypes such as the term “trouble makers” (p. 166). Recently, there has been an increase of content development being created by and for Indigenous people. The 2012 ‘Idle No More’ movement to protect Canada’s waterways and protest the anti-democratic changes to the Environmental protection laws became the ‘largest Canada-wide social action movements since the civil rights movement of the 1960s’ (p. 181-182). This Indigenous-led movement was misreported by all major news outlets, with some focusing on the drumming and dancing, while other media outlets intentionally attacked the movement stating that this ‘Indigenist ideology (was) a direct challenge to the existence of Canada as a state’ (p. 183). The authors also review the use of media exposure of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, which follows the pattern of misrepresentation, obtuse generalizations, and a lack of journalistic integrity. The development of media that is written by Indigenous peoples and shared through an Indigenous lens has recently become an essential part of citizenship equity. Another example of systemic misinformation is the ‘science’ of climate change. There is still a disturbingly high percentage of Canadians that question the authenticity of climate change, and the vast research to support it. Kozolanka and Orlowski examine the realities and facts of climate change as a global issue. They show how access to information has been limited by the Canadian government to prevent this knowledge from reaching the public. Under Prime Minister Harper, scientists were forbidden from speaking about their research unless they obtained a rarely granted government approval first (p. 134). Kozolanka and Orlowski also shed light on the 2007 investigation by George Monbiot finding there is a list of websites actively publishing fake data that focuses on the positive sides of the oil and gas industry to discredit genuine science. Monbiot ‘made the very disturbing discovery that all of these groups have been funded by Exxon’ (p. 127). Many of the privately-owned media distribution companies are affiliated with lobbying groups that support the fossil fuel industry. It is the public’s responsibility to apply media literacy strategies and think critically about the information they receive.

Implications

Kozolanka and Orlowski support the argument that media literacy is an essential skill for Canadians. The concept of media literacy is explored briefly, but there is very little

instruction on how to apply media literacy techniques. Media literacy should be explored from the applicable perspective, especially when introduced next to complex concepts. There was room for more detail on how to apply media literacy pedagogy from the perspective of an educator to improve a critical lens for their students.

Additionally, the readers could have benefitted from more Canadian-centric content. There are several chapters where the authors completely focus on the American landscape. One of the most exciting aspects of this book is the promise of a Canadian perspective for media literacy and citizenship. The authors may consider a reduction in non-Canadian material, or at least maintain a consistent balance through the book.

General Value for Canadian Scholars, Students, and/or Educators

The authors of this book have created an educator's dream tool by providing outstanding resources, reference lists, and extension activities throughout. Each chapter includes topic-specific highlighted material, pre-written questions for discussion, recommended assignments to further knowledge, and a well-detailed citation list. Kozolanka and Orłowski have offered an option for the reader to activate their newly learned information in a constructive way. The suggested extension activities are well thought out and show that there was clearly a larger amount of information available that was considered for this publication.

Conclusion

Kozolanka and Orłowski's *Media Literacy for Citizenship: A Canadian Perspective* compiles evidence to support their argument that mainstream media is evolving rapidly, and that it is our responsibility to practice media literacy and critical thinking when consuming information. Their focus on the changing landscape of the corporate/public media platforms within a Canadian context gives the reader a deep understanding of the mass-media industry and the influential political ideologies. The examples throughout the book are tangible and highly relevant, and each chapter provides the reader with resources to explore media literacy to the fullest.