

Chapter 8

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post–Truth: Paradigm Crisis

Elizaveta Friesem
Media Education Lab, USA

Yonty Friesem
Columbia College Chicago, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors use Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions to examine the development of media literacy as a field of study and practice. More specifically, they focus on the current stage of media literacy, which they believe to be model drift that reveals the emerging crisis of the current paradigm based on epistemological assumptions of modernity. The authors look at this stage against the current social background of the era of post-truth and through the prism of ongoing debates between different media (literacy) scholars and educational practitioners. The era of post-truth can be seen as a logical manifestation of postmodernity, when the idea that truth and facts are relative is becoming part of the public discourse. In this period, different scholars and practitioners offer different ideas on what media literacy is and what its import may be. These debates are not new; yet, today they might have more serious consequences, signaling a need to reevaluate the existing paradigm that has formed the foundation of media literacy education since the field’s emergence.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is twofold. First, to describe the development of media literacy education (MLE) using Kuhn’s model of scientific revolutions (Kuhn (1996[1962])) and through the prism of major debates that have defined the field throughout the years (see Fig. 1). Second, to use the notion of the paradigm crisis for interpreting the latest big debate about media literacy triggered by statements of danah boyd (2017, 2018), media scholar for Microsoft and founder of the research institute Data & Society. The

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9261-7.ch008

chapter suggests that the field of MLE is in the stage of model crisis, which signifies the impending change of the current paradigm of media literacy based on epistemological assumptions of modernity.

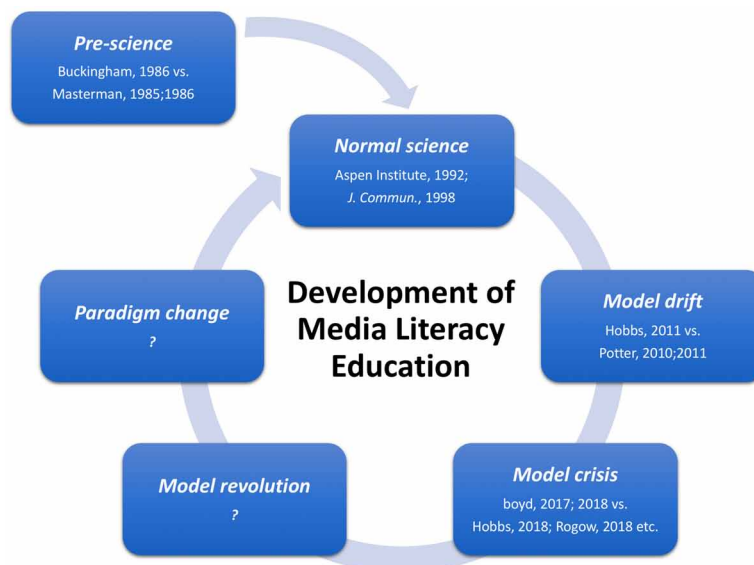
The chapter is structured as follows:

1. Introduction, including a brief description of the era of post-truth and stages of Kuhn’s model, as well as a note on the authors’ subjectivity.
2. Analysis of the *pre-science* and *normal science* stages (according to Kuhn’s model) through:
 - a. a debate between David Buckingham (1986) and Len Masterman (1985; 1986);
 - b. a consensus and disagreements that emerged at the Aspen Institute gathering in 1992 and inside the 1998 special issue of the *Journal of Communication*.
3. Analysis of the *model drift* and *model crisis* stages (according to Kuhn’s model) through:
 - a. a debate between Renee Hobbs (2011a; 2011b) and W. James Potter (2010; 2011);
 - b. a debate between danah boyd (2017, 2018) and several MLE scholars and practitioners (e.g., Doctorow, 2018; Doxtator, 2018; Hobbs, 2017; 2018; Rogow, 2018).

Post-Truth

Following the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald J. Trump as the president of the United States, Oxford Dictionaries chose “post-truth” as the word of the year 2016. They define the term as “[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). A while back, philosophers predicted the emergence of a new cultural configuration that would render the term *objective facts* altogether meaningless; they called it postmodernity (Lyotard, 1984[1979]).

Figure 1. Stages of Kuhn’s model and corresponding MLE debates (Friesem & Friesem, 2019)



Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

Postmodernity has been described as an era when old ways of knowing have proved to be insufficient, when the border between objectivity and subjectivity has become so blurry that this distinction does not matter anymore. In the past, people referred to facts as a stable and reliable reference point. In postmodernity, facts are relative. This does not mean that nothing can be known, but rather that everything can be questioned. Such questioning does not lead to the discovery of one objective truth but to multiple local truths that can be mutually exclusive and yet complimentary, partially valid yet all having a right to exist. The era of post-truth can be, thus, described as the time when this new worldview is penetrating popular culture, politics, and education. This leads to the epistemological crisis: uncertainty about what can be known and about how knowledge itself is constructed.

It is important to note that the term *post-truth* gained traction against the background of the conversation about so-called implicit biases. This topic had become so popular in recent years that the Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton even discussed implicit bias during presidential debates between her and Donald Trump (Black, 2016). If everybody is biased, as some scholars believe (e.g., Ariely, 2008; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), how can we distinguish between “objective facts” and “personal belief” juxtaposed in the definition of post-truth by Oxford Dictionaries? And if these two cannot be distinguished, what form should the efforts to promote media literacy take to be effective? This chapter suggests that the answer may lie in moving away from the current paradigm of MLE in a process that can be described through Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions (1996[1962]).

Kuhn’s Model

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn described a cycle of stages that all scientific disciplines go through over time. According to Kuhn, scientific disciplines develop not by gradually accumulating knowledge but through occasional introduction of radically new ways of thought, which he called paradigms. The cycle starts with a *pre-science* stage, which happens only when a new discipline is formed. At this stage, the main problem or the central concern has not been yet formulated. There is no coherence of ideas or terminology. Pre-science is followed by *normal science*, when common terminology and model have been achieved, and scholars start using them to advance the field. However, the coherence is only partial because no model is perfect. Contradictions are building up but they are not resolved.

After a while, however, the model cannot deal with the accumulating contradictions anymore. It grows weaker: Kuhn calls this stage *model drift*. As the weakening continues, the discipline enters the stage of *model crisis*. It is clear that the model has lost its explanatory power. Finally, a different model is proposed and *model revolution* takes place. The new model becomes the field’s new paradigm. It is radically different from the old model to the point of incompatibility, although the legacy between the two can still be traced. Finally, on the stage of *paradigm change* the field transitions to the new model and improves it. After this stage, the cycle begins again with the new *normal science*.

Authors’ Subjectivity

The structure of the chapter as well as its conclusions stem from the authors’ choices and interpretations. The history of MLE has been shaped by numerous debates (RobbGrieco, 2018), of which the exchanges that the chapter focuses on provide just a small sample. In addition, Kuhn’s model is only one way of looking at the development of the field. As any other model, it has its merits and limitations. For example, an argument can be made that MLE is not a scholarly field of the kind discussed by Kuhn, but

rather a field of practice. It is important to note that MLE has grown on the foundation of media studies and media education; thus, it includes studying educational practices and not only implementing them.

The chapter pays special attention to the current stage of MLE as the authors believe that it is especially important to understand changes that the field is experiencing in the era of post-truth. This stage is characterized by the new understanding of such terms as *facts* and *critical thinking*, which have played a crucial role in MLE (Scheibe & Rogow, 2011). The interpretation of arguments developed by danah boyd takes a special place in the chapter because, as the authors believe, she was able to capture challenges that MLE practitioners and scholars face in the era of post-truth as they deal with these key terms. To the authors' knowledge, researchers working with other major media corporations, such as Google, Facebook, or Apple, did not make comments about the era of post-truth. If they did, their comments are not well known and did not produce an exchange similar to the debate that followed boyd's statements.

The authors do not interpret the model crisis and the future paradigm change as a problem for which solutions must be found. According to Kuhn, the progression of a discipline through stages is a logical manifestation of its development. This chapter does not purport to eliminate the crisis or formulate a new paradigm: this would be unduly ambitious and, most importantly, premature. Therefore, the chapter merely describes what the authors perceive as the current state of the field, addressing the latest challenges of MLE that emerged in the post-truth era.

Finally, it is important to note that the authors describe the progress of MLE using a U.S. focus, as they define themselves as U.S.-based scholars and practitioners. Representatives of other countries may have different interpretations of the field's paradigm and its development.

Emerging Paradigm

In his comprehensive history of MLE in the United States, Michael RobbGrieco (2018) suggests that all the stages in the development of this field have been marked by debates. These debates have been sometimes formative and sometimes divisive. This section is dedicated to the stages that, using Kuhn's (1996[1962]) terminology, the authors describe as pre-science and normal science. For the stage of pre-science, the following section discusses the debate between David Buckingham and Len Masterman that took place in 1986. To explore the stage of normal science, the authors discuss the shaky consensus that emerged during the Aspen Institute gathering in 1992 (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993) and inside the special issue of the *Journal of Communication* dedicated to media literacy (1998).

Pre-Science

According to Kuhn (1996[1962]), every scholarly field starts with pre-science, when a problem or area has been identified but no consensus has been yet achieved. The authors suggest that, before the cornerstone term *media literacy* was clearly defined in a way that was accepted by the community of scholars and practitioners, the field of MLE was on the stage of its initial formation. Calling this stage *pre-science* is not meant to minimize its importance but to note that ideas about media literacy were still in flux.

Some proto forms of MLE could be found as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, when the emergence of powerful media technologies led to the intensification of fears about the media's role in society (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). For example, film appreciation classes of the time aimed to help participants discern between high and low cultural forms. As media studies were developing through the works of Harold Lasswell (1948) and Paul Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944),

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

scholars' understanding of communication mediated through technology became more sophisticated. Yet it was still often colored by concerns about ways media technology could be used for harm. Other, sometimes contradictory, influences that became a melting pot of ideas behind MLE included concerns about popular culture (Leavis, 1975) and curiosity about it (Hebdige, 1978), attempts to reveal ideologies embedded in everyday life (Barthes, 1972[1957]), and calls for new forms of education that would empower students (Freire, 2000[1970]), helping them become part of a democratic society (Dewey, 1916; 1936). The genealogical tree of MLE is so complex that the authors do not purport to give credit to all its grandparents (Hobbs, 2016). It is out of this melting pot that the modern MLE gradually emerged. Before the term "media literacy" became popular among media scholars and educational practitioners, in their writings they talked about *media education*, which meant teaching both about and through media.

During the 1960s, the work of Marshal McLuhan influenced strategies of teaching media in North America. His book *Understanding Media* (1994[1964]) provided a theoretical foundation that explained the evolution of electronic media and its impact on society. Educational programs such as Media Now provided first curricula and pedagogical practices that included analysis and production of media messages ranging from magazines, to radio, films, TV, and comics. The pioneering work of Media Now was used in middle and high school across the U.S., Israel, Sweden, and Canada (Friesem, Quaglia-Beltran, & Crane, 2014). With the increase of media use from radio to TV and digital devices, these educational practices became more affordable and provided opportunities for students to analyze existing media texts and create their own messages.

In his seminal volume *Teaching the Media*, Masterman (1985) used the term "media literacy" arguing that it "is essential if all citizens are to wield power, make rational decisions, become effective change-agents and have an active involvement with the media" (p. 13). Masterman's ideas, for example on critical autonomy and contractedness of media messages, were crucial for the development of what is now known as MLE. Yet the term "media literacy" in Masterman's writing was subordinate to "media education" as the consensus about the definition of media literacy has not been yet achieved.

One instance of the struggle to reach this consensus can be seen in the debate between Len Masterman and David Buckingham on pages of the *Screen* journal in 1986 (both Buckingham's criticism of Masterman's *Teaching the Media* and Masterman's response were published in the same volume). Although this exchange had many unique features due to the time period when it happened and its cultural background, it also had something important in common with future key debates about media literacy: it was a clash between media studies (theory) and media education (practice). It would be wrong to associate each author with only one approach. At the time of the publication, both were versed in theory and experienced in teaching about media. Yet Buckingham's criticism portrayed Masterman as primarily a scholar who was not aware of complexities of teaching and learning. On several occasions, Buckingham (1986) juxtaposed his experience in the classroom to Masterman's conceptualization of ideologies contained in media texts. In particular, he lamented that Masterman "did not provid[e] an adequate account of the complexity of the learning process, or fully acknowledg[e] the *difficulty* of implementing [his] proposals in the classroom [emphasis in original]" (p. 90). Buckingham's argument foreshadowed future debates between MLE proponents concerned about what media literacy is and how it should be developed.

It is important to note that in his reply Masterman (1986) stressed his educational experience and described Buckingham's criticism as a misinterpretation. In particular, Masterman pointed out his emphasis on critical autonomy and respect for students' experiences, even though the teachers' focus should be on uncovering problematic ideologies that shape mediated communication.

The first theme that the polemics between Masterman and Buckingham revealed was the ideological nature of mediated communication. *Ideology* is a complex term that many scholars have grappled with, and it can have a variety of interpretations. Opinions also differ on who creates ideologies and how they are maintained. Even though we might agree in theory that ideologies are manifestations of unequal power relations, in practice there exist a variety of ways (some contradictory and other complimentary) of examining these manifestations in the classroom. The second theme of this debate was the tug-of-war between protectionism and empowerment. Few members of MLE community can truly exemplify only one of these tendencies. Rather, every MLE practitioner and scholar (including Masterman and Buckingham) represents a combination of both, although some still see this division as crucial for understanding MLE goals and practical approaches (RobbGrieco & Hobbs, 2013).

Finally, a key theme in the evolution of MLE that the debate between Masterman and Buckingham exemplified is the challenge of developing students' critical thinking. Same as ideology, critical thinking is difficult to define. If we want to develop students' critical thinking, and we consider ourselves to be critical thinkers, how do we make sure that we are not trying to make students think like us? Studies show that even well-meaning educators who want to empower their students may use protectionist strategies that could actually limit their students' ability to think independently (Friesem, 2018). How do we help students be critical about certain media texts and practices without undermining their pleasures and disrespecting their experiences?

The debate between Masterman and Buckingham was not amicable; in fact, they failed to overcome their differences on the pages of *Screen* back in 1986 or later. Their exchange was symptomatic of the search for a consensus about why teaching the media is important and how it can be done in the classroom. Therefore, the authors believe that this polemics exemplifies well the stage of pre-science in the development of MLE, when its first model was still on the study of formation.

Normal Science

According to Kuhn (1996[1962]), pre-science is followed by the normal science stage, when consensus about the most basic tenets has been achieved. Yet this consensus is never absolute. In fact, dissent and contradictions exist even after the paradigm has emerged.

For the field of MLE (especially its U.S. version), such a consensus was reached in 1992. That year, U.S. national leaders gathered at the Aspen Institute and defined media literacy as "the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p. 6), with analysis including decoding and evaluation, and production aimed to negotiate cultural meanings and provide alternative expression. Possible outcomes included "informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence" (p. 9). The formulation of the common definition of media literacy at the Aspen Institute may be seen as an emergence of a model or a dominant paradigm as described by Kuhn, however contested this model soon proved to be.

Another proof that the field was established in the United States came six years later, when in 1998 the high-ranking *Journal of Communication* devoted a special issue to media literacy, inviting leaders of the field to write about their work. One of the most influential articles from this issue was "The seven great debates in the media literacy movement" (Hobbs, 1998). In it, Hobbs discussed polemics around such topics as protectionism vs. empowerment, the role of media production, the use of popular culture texts in the classroom, educators' ideological agendas, in-class vs. out-of-school initiatives, integration of media literacy into existing subjects, and dangers of accepting funding from media organizations. Hobbs

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

summarized these debates as a paradox: diversity that serves as a source of vitality yet at the same time paralyzing, leading MLE enthusiasts “away from efforts to work together” (p. 27).

Despite the numerous debates, MLE was by then a coherent field that aimed to explore how mediated communication works and find the most effective ways of developing people’s understanding of communication mediated through technology. Yet the rift between theory and practice that had become apparent in the debate between Masterman and Buckingham was still present, causing disagreements and misunderstandings.

The Aspen Institute gathering (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993) and the special issue of the *Journal of Communication* brought together scholars from media studies and media education; however, it also planted seeds of the upcoming debates and crisis of the field. Media scholars such as Alan M. Rubin and W. James Potter (media effects), Joshua Meyrowitz (media ecology), and Paul Messaris (visual communication) represented a broad scope of perspectives on the variety of literacies connected with media consumption. Media education scholars such as Robert Kubey, William G. Christ, and James A. Brown (media education policy), Renee Hobbs and David Buckingham (teaching and learning media), Herb Zettl (media production), and Justin Lewis and Suh Jhally (critical pedagogy) represented multiple perspectives on ways of teaching and learning with and about the media.

Media scholars discussed competencies and interpretations of audiences, motivations of media producers, and affordances of media texts. For them, media literacy was a possible solution for problems of mediated communication that their studies uncovered. At the same time, media education scholars, like Buckingham (1998b) focused on practices of teaching and learning about media. His article in the special issue of the *Journal of Communication* explained that media theories – even when they aim to explain social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of media consumption – are not enough when it comes to developing classroom practices because processes of teaching and learning need to be examined from an educational perspective. So while media scholars approached media literacy from a problem-based perspective, media educators were primarily solution-oriented.

Underneath the visible consensus and the debates between and within different camps was lying an assumption essential for both MLE scholarship and practice. It was the belief that MLE works by helping students understand certain truth about mediated communication, and the world in general. This belief was shared by those who argued that the media manipulate people and those who believed in the power of audiences to interpret media texts in many different ways; for those who wanted their students to focus on analyzing media texts and those who relied on media production; for those who emphasized the inquiry-based approach and those who preferred to guide their students towards a set of predetermined answers (RobbGrieco, 2018). This assumption was especially true for those media literacy practitioners who understood critical thinking as the ability to discern facts from lies, and truth from deception.

The first paradigm of MLE was based on the epistemology of modernity: the idea that objective truth exists and can be uncovered. Media educators often talked about the importance of acknowledging a variety of interpretations, of allowing students to express a range of opinions (Buckingham, 1998a; Scheibe & Rogow, 2011). Yet it was not clear how MLE practitioners were supposed to act if students brought to their classrooms ideas radically incompatible with the truth that teachers favored (Turnbull, 1998). The range of students’ interpretations was limited by the unspoken assumption about the stability of facts and truth. For instance, Scheibe and Rogow (2011) recommended to have students always support their answers with evidence but did not problematize *evidence* as being interpreted differently by different people. This unspoken assumption was soon to be tested by the new cultural reality: the era when the meaning of truth and facts became contested.

According to Kuhn, on the stage of normal science contradictions exist and they keep building up, but they are ignored or rationalized to fit the current paradigm. The paradigm can be adjusted but it is not entirely rejected. Although on the stage of normal science MLE developed a commonly accepted definition of media literacy, this consensus was ripe with contradictions. They included the rift between media theory and education practice, as well as the implicit belief (based on the epistemology of modernity) in the objective truth about the media and society. The shaky consensus was soon to receive two blows. On the stage of model drift, it became obvious that media scholars and practitioners still have very different interpretations of the field, and their differences are not going away. And on the stage of model crisis, it was suggested that the cornerstone assumption of the MLE epistemology does not fit the new cultural realities of postmodernity.

Paradigm in Crisis

After a while, contradictions within the dominant model (Kuhn, 1996[1962]) become increasingly obvious: Kuhn called this new configuration *model drift*. As the sentiment that the current paradigm might need to be changed slowly emerges, the paradigm enters its *model crisis* stage. For the stage of model drift, the section looks at the debate between Renee Hobbs and W. James Potter that took place in 2010-2011. This polemic showed that the common definition of media literacy did not heal the rift between the two foundations of MLE: media studies and media education. The section then turns to a detailed discussion of a debate sparked by provocative statements coming from media scholar danah boyd (2017, 2018). Unlike the stages of the past, the model crisis of MLE is more difficult to capture and describe because it is still happening. The section situates this last debate within the era of post-truth, which can be seen as a logical manifestation of postmodernity.

Model Drift

MLE is a result of the marriage between theory and practice, and this combination has not been unproblematic. While the element of theory allows MLE community members to discuss social problems through the prism of mediated communication, the element of practice brings the focus on developing solutions. Unfortunately, the understanding of the problems and the solutions does not necessarily match, producing disagreements within the MLE community.

Exemplifying this mismatch, Renee Hobbs engaged in a polemic with W. James Potter on pages of *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* in 2010-2011. This debate consisted of four essays, of which the first one bore a telling title “The State of Media Literacy.” The authors were discussing the field that already existed, even though Potter was reluctant to see it as coherent. He (2010) defined media literacy as a set of skills that can mitigate against negative media influence. As for possible solutions, he described a variety of interventions that could help media consumers become aware of these effects. Hobbs (2011a) lamented that Potter viewed MLE as a tool for protecting media consumers but missed the conversation about its empowering potential supported by theories of active audiences. In response, Potter (2011) critiqued the divide between protectionism and empowerment promoted by Hobbs. He defended his view of MLE as growing out of the concerns about problematic media influence, and noted that protectionist and empowerment perspectives are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

If in the debate between Masterman and Buckingham back in 1986 it was impossible to say that any opponent represented only scholarship or only practice of media education, in the exchange between

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

Potter and Hobbs this delineation was clearer. When Potter was asked to describe the current state of media literacy for the first essay (Potter, 2010), he started by analyzing 18,700 articles that he found through the Google Scholar search (Potter, 2011). In response, Hobbs emphasized her experience as an educator and policy-maker. In a way reminiscent of Buckingham (1986) criticizing Masterman for not being aware of complexities of media education as a classroom practice, Hobbs (2011b) wrote about Potter: “[H]is review examines media literacy from a too-traditional mass communication perspective, rooted in the media effects tradition, and as a result, it neglects much important recent work from this increasingly global and interdisciplinary community of scholars and practitioners” (p. 601). In his responses, Potter pointed out that Hobbs was also looking at media literacy from a perspective narrowed by her identity, in this case – of an educator and MLE advocate.

During this debate, the opponents articulated views about the discipline that could appear incompatible. While Potter described media literacy as a solution for a problem of negative media influence, Hobbs stressed that it is essential for being an active citizen of the twenty-first century. The biases of both authors did not allow them to overcome their differences, although Potter (2011) chastised Hobbs for not “drawing connections between [the] two essays in a constructive manner and showing how the ideas from the two essays work together to increase [the readers’] understanding of both breadth and depth” of the field (p. 600).

The model of media literacy formulated at the Aspen Institute gathering in 1992 and refined on pages of the *Journal of Communication* in 1998 had different interpretations for different members of the MLE community, depending on whether they focused on social problems or on possible educational solutions. On the stage of model drift, the paradigm that emerged in 1992 was still holding, but the rift in its double foundation was not healing. The next section focuses on a debate that can be interpreted as a commencement of the model crisis stage of MLE, when the field faced an even more serious challenge. Reflecting the cultural changes of postmodernity, this stage has introduced uncertainty about such cornerstone notions of media literacy as critical thinking, knowledge, and truth.

Model Crisis

The model crisis (Kuhn (1996[1962])) is a crucial stage in any discipline’s development when the major assumptions of the field as well as its values and practices come under attack. In case of MLE, such a crisis started with a criticism about the field’s inability to help audiences deal with misinformation that flooded social networks prior to the U.K. Brexit vote and the 2016 presidential election in the U.S. The criticism came from media scholar danah boyd (2017; 2018) and it was more than questioning MLE’s strategies captured in the Aspen Institute definition (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). In her post (2017) and later speech (2018) boyd claimed that MLE in its current form is ill-equipped for dealing with the crisis of truth in the era of postmodernity. Her argument further amplified the rift between media scholars and practitioners, as she critiqued media educators for not changing their practices to fit the cultural reality that research has uncovered.

Unlike the previous three stages described in this chapter, the exchange that is the focus of the current section happened mainly on social networks. The emergence of social media is often described as the most significant sea change in modern communications (van Dijck, 2013). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge the role of this shift in the era of post-truth. Communication through social networks exposes us to a variety of opinions that challenge our understanding of truth and facts. Social networks help us connect and stay updated, but they also enable misinformation and feed into our confirmation

bias. It is by using social networks that, as boyd acknowledged (2017, 2018), our critical thinking skills are most challenged.

Both in her initial post (2017) and in the speech that followed (2018), boyd discussed the insufficiency of such media literacy practices as fact-checking and teaching students to look for the best information sources. Moreover, boyd argued that these popular strategies can do more harm than good, resulting in students' confusion and cynicism, or even in political radicalization and violent acts. She also described limitations of the focus on critical thinking, especially in the current cultural context. One of the main challenges of this new context is our changing relationship with truth, which the post-truth era has made especially apparent. Fact-checking and the search for the best sources presuppose the existence of an objective truth that must be uncovered. However, boyd argued, the reality is more complicated. Thinking critically may mean that students will criticize the truth prioritized by the teacher. Indeed, multiple truths can be simultaneously valid, but it is also important to acknowledge that some truths can do harm. According to boyd, the current approaches to media literacy do not offer room for this discussion. Solutions that boyd offered all had to do with the notion of personal responsibility: realizing the existence of epistemological differences, questioning our own ways of knowing, and using empathy to understand truths different from ours.

It is important to note boyd's emphasis on the epistemological crisis – the challenge of reconciling multiple truths with our own truth without losing our integrity. Considering cultural realities of post-modernity, this epistemological crisis makes sense. In the era of post-truth, this crisis has become more apparent but it is yet to be resolved. Moreover, the nature of the crisis explains why not everybody has accepted the need to explore the existence of multiple truths in the first place. It is not surprising that critics of boyd's argument focused on her description of MLE but did not discuss the complexities of the new epistemology that she was trying to untangle.

Both the post (2017) and the speech that followed (2018) were interpreted by MLE community as an attack on the field. This can be explained by their intentionally provocative tone and titles: "Did Media Literacy Backfire?" for the 2017 post, "What Hath We Wrought?" for the speech in 2018 and "You Think You Want Media Literacy... Do You?" for the post that summarized it. Critics noted that boyd had presented an outdated version of MLE and misinterpreted the work done by the media literacy educators (Hobbs, 2017). Specific criticisms targeted what was perceived as an omission of any responsibility of powerful media industry actors (Bali, 2018; Doxtador, 2018; Hobbs, 2018); boyd's misinterpretation of critical thinking (Noula, 2018; Rogow, 2018); boyd's apparent lack of awareness about successes of media literacy practices (Hobbs, 2017, 2018; Noula, 2018; Rogow, 2018); and the insufficiency of proposed solutions (Bali, 2018; Doxtador, 2018; Rogers, 2018).

In her response to boyd's first post (2017) Hobbs made a point to contrast boyd as a "pundit" with "us workers-in-the-field" (para. 10), who have a better understanding of how MLE works. Other critics (e.g., Doxtador, 2018) noted that boyd is a media studies scholar who works for a corporation (Microsoft) and thus has a vested interest in focusing on personal responsibility rather than on power imbalances perpetuated by powerful players of the media industry. The divide between media studies scholars and media educators is important to acknowledge: it can be traced in all the four stages discussed in this chapter. However, the authors believe that in the last stage focusing on this crisis can distract attention from the more important development: the gradual shift away from the old paradigm of MLE. This shift can be difficult to notice also because of the invisibility of the key epistemological assumption hidden within the current model of media literacy and shared by both MLE scholars and practitioners: the unspoken notion of objective truth characteristic for modernity.

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

When teaching students to be critical thinkers, media educators focus on their personal responsibility to get to the truth about the media, and about the world in general. This approach would work well, boyd (2018) believes, if it was not for multiple truths to grapple with. When we tell people to get to the bottom of something, there is no guarantee what kind of truth they encounter. Browsing social media can lead them to the truth of Martin Luther King Jr. or to the truth of neo-Nazism. Moreover, it is not enough to simply reject some truths that we believe to be fake without exploring them, but engaging with viewpoints that our ideologies do not support is likely to make us feel very uncomfortable. We can either instruct students to find the most reliable experts out there or to distrust all experts and rely only on their own critical thinking skills. But who decides what's reliable and what's not? Experts disagree, and outcomes of our own critical thinking depends on our positionality and experience, to say nothing about our biases (Ariely, 2008; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Fry, 2015; Livingston, 2004).

The invisibility of the paradigm that boyd (2017; 2018) attempted to challenge might explain why only a few commentators acknowledged her ideas about the crisis of current epistemology (Levine, 2018; O'Donnell, 2018). For many critics, her argument about the need to grapple with multiple truths did not make sense because MLE already incorporated the idea that different interpretations matter (Scheibe & Rogow, 2011).

It would be wrong to equate MLE with fact-checking or news literacy because it is much more than that (Mihailidis, 2018). But the idea that there is a certain truth or a set of facts to be discovered is fundamental for the media literacy inquiry, same as it is fundamental for critical pedagogy that aims to reveal hidden power imbalances perpetuated through mediated communication (Kellner & Share, 2007). Media literacy educators may say that they invite a variety interpretations but there is always a limit to such welcoming. As soon as a student in the class says that global warming is a hoax, it will quickly become clear what truth the teacher supports, even if she uses questions instead of absolute statements. Rogow (2018) exemplified this well when in her reply to boyd she wrote: "Reason matters... It is absolutely important to respect and understand all the ways of knowing that one's students bring into the classroom. But some ways of thinking support democracy better than others..." (para. 26), and it is the role of the media literacy teacher to help students develop them.

Unfortunately, in the era of post-truth this position might no longer hold. If media literacy educators want to be brutally honest with their students, they will have to reveal that each person's way of knowing is just one of many possible ways. We will need to admit that we *believe* that global warming is real but we have not studied every single paper on this issue. We choose to believe the current scientific consensus, but times and times again scientific consensus of the past has been declared wrong.

As recently as in the 1960s, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders still described homosexuality as paraphilia, and then as sexual orientation disturbance (Bayer, 1981). Scientific racism (a belief that racism can be justified by scientific evidence) has been rejected as obsolete by most scholars only in the second half of the twentieth century (Barkan, 1992). There are many other scientific facts whose validity has been fluctuating over time. The debate about breastfeeding comes to mind, with doctors referring to science first to promote the use of formula and then to warn against it (Rosin, 2009). Eugenics was once popular among respectable scholars, until it was used in the Nazi Germany to justify killing millions. But even after that it inspired claims about the need to control the Earth population, which led to China's infamous experiment of the now failed one-child policy, with many victims of its own (Fong, 2016).

In order to remain relevant, media literacy educators' efforts to develop their students' critical thinking need to take this complexity into consideration. It is not enough now to wonder what is true. We

should ask ourselves about the roots of knowledge itself. But, as boyd pointed out, taking this road can be deeply uncomfortable, and it is unclear where the journey can lead us or our students. Importantly, she did not propose a new paradigm for the media literacy field. As such, her critique was destabilizing rather than constructive, which may have been another reason why it was not taken well by the MLE community. However, if we see boyd's argument as introducing the model crisis of media literacy (Kuhn (1996[1962])), its impetus for destabilization makes more sense.

This section argues that the stage of model crisis in the field of media literacy has begun, and that the debate ignited by danah boyd's post (2017) and speech (2018) can be seen as an indication of this approaching shift towards the new paradigm. Since the change has just started, the authors' goal was to describe its first signs. At this point, providing a more thorough description would be premature, as well as offering any definitive solutions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter contains an overview of the developments in MLE through the prism of Kuhn's model of scientific revolutions (1996[1962]). Using Kuhn's terms, the authors looked at four stages of the field: pre-science, normal science, model drift, and model crisis. Debates about media literacy on each of these stages reveal the long-standing tension between scholars and practitioners, or rather between media education and communication scholarship that both have served as foundations of MLE. The context of the debates has been changing, and in the era of post-truth reconciling the two sides may seem to be particularly difficult. There is hope that the new paradigm predicted by Kuhn's model will allow the MLE community to deal with this rift through a revolution in the ways of thinking about the nature of knowledge itself. The new paradigm might also involve moving past the rift between empowerment and protectionism, which may create confusion about goals and practices of MLE (Author 2, in press).

In this chapter, the authors did not purport to provide specific solutions for what they believe to be the emerging crisis (Kuhn (1996[1962])) of the old paradigm of media literacy. Their goal was to describe the field as shaped and at the same time divided by debates. The authors believe that the crisis brought on by the post-truth era can be overcome only if people with different opinions about what media literacy looks like and how it should be developed see value of each other's ideas. After all, this is what the epistemological shift of postmodernity is all about: acknowledging compatibility of radically different modes of knowing, finding ways to communicate across ideological divides, and seeing where this new collaboration can take us.

REFERENCES

- Ariely, D. (2008). *Predictably irrational, revised and expanded edition: The hidden forces that shape our decisions*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Aufderheide, P., & Firestone, C. M. (1993). *Media literacy. A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Washington, DC: Aspen institute. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED365294.pdf>

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

Bali, M. (2018, March 15). *Too critical, not critical enough*. Retrieved from <https://blog.mahabali.me/social-media/too-critical-not-critical-enough/>

Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Barkan, E. (1992). *The retreat of scientific racism: Changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1957)

Bayer, R. (1981). *Homosexuality and American psychiatry: The politics of diagnosis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Blake, A. (2016, September 26). The first Trump–Clinton presidential debate transcript, annotated. *Washington Post* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/09/26/the-first-trump-clinton-presidential-debate-transcript-annotated/?utm_term=.cd8fdf05c6c8

boyd, d. (2017, January 5). *Did media literacy backfire?* Retrieved from <https://points.datasociety.net/did-media-literacy-backfire-7418c084d88d>

boyd, d. (2018, March 9). *You think you want media literacy... do you?* Retrieved from <https://points.datasociety.net/you-think-you-want-media-literacy-do-you-7cad6af18ec2>

Buckingham, D. (1986). Against demystification: A response to ‘Teaching the media’. *Screen*, 27(5), 80–95. doi:10.1093/screen/27.5.80

Buckingham, D. (1998a). Fantasies of empowerment?: Radical pedagogy and popular culture. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy* (pp. 1–17). Bristol, UK: UCL Press.

Buckingham, D. (1998b). Media Education in the UK: Moving Beyond Protectionism. *Journal of Communication*, 1(48), 33–43. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02735.x

Dewey, J. (2008). *Democracy and education: An Introduction to the philosophy of education*. Radford, VA: Wilder Publications. (Original work published 1916)

Doctorow, C. (2018, March 9). *How denialists weaponize media literacy and what to do about it*. Retrieved from <https://boingboing.net/2018/03/09/how-denialists-weaponize-media.html>

Doxtdator, B. (2018, March 10). *No, ‘cognitive strengthening exercises’ aren’t the answer to media literacy*. Retrieved from <http://www.longviewoneducation.org/no-cognitive-strengthening-exercises-arent-answer-media-literacy/>

Fong, M. (2016). *One child: The story of China’s most radical experiment*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos Trans.; 30th Anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Friesem, E. (2018). Too much of a good thing? How teachers’ enthusiasm can lead to protectionism in media and gender literacy classes. *The Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 10(1), 134–147.

- Friesem, E., & Friesem, Y. (2019). Media literacy education through Kuhn's model of scientific revolutions [blog]. *Media Education Lab*. Retrieved from <https://mediaedlab.com/2019/03/14/scientific-revolutions-media-literacy>
- Friesem, Y., Quaglia-Beltran, D., & Crane, E. (2014). Media Now: A historical review of a media literacy curriculum. *The Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 6(2), 35–55. doi:10.23860/JMLE-2016-06-02-4
- Fry, K. (2015). Developing media literacy: Managing fear and moving beyond. *Journal of MLE*, 6(3), 65–70.
- Hebdige, D. (1978). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hobbs, R. (1998). The seven great debates in the media literacy movement. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), 16–32. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02734.x
- Hobbs, R. (2011a). The state of media literacy: A rejoinder. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 55(4), 601–604. doi:10.1080/08838151.2011.619399
- Hobbs, R. (2011b). The state of media literacy: Response to Potter. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 55(3), 419–430. doi:10.1080/08838151.2011.597594
- Hobbs, R. (Ed.). (2016). *Exploring the roots of digital and media literacy through personal narrative*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Hobbs, R. (2017, January 9). *Did media literacy backfire?* Retrieved from <https://mediaedlab.com/2017/01/09/did-media-literacy-backfire/>
- Hobbs, R. (2018, March 10). *Freedom to choose: An existential crisis*. Retrieved from <https://mediaedlab.com/2018/03/10/freedom-to-choose-an-existential-crisis/>
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 59–69. doi:10.1007/11519-007-0004-2
- Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3rd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press. (Original work published 1962) doi:10.7208/chicago/9780226458106.001.0001
- Lasswell, H. D. (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. *The Communication of Ideas*, 37, 215–228.
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1944). *The people's choice*. Oxford, UK: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.
- Leavis, F. R. (1975). *The living principle "English" as a discipline of thought*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, P. (2018, March 15). *Media literacy and the social discovery of reality*. Retrieved from <http://peterlevine.ws/?p=19717>
- Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14. doi:10.1080/10714420490280152

Media Literacy Education in the Era of Post-Truth

- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minnesota, MI: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Masterman, L. (1985). *Teaching the media*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Masterman, L. (1986). A reply to David Buckingham. *Screen*, 27(5), 96–103. doi:10.1093/screen/27.5.96
- McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press. (Original work published 1964)
- Mihailidis, P. (2018). Civic media literacies: Re-imagining engagement for civic intentionality. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(2), 152–164. doi:10.1080/17439884.2018.1428623
- National Association for MLE (NAMLE). (n.d.). *NAMLE's history*. Retrieved from <https://namle.net/about-namle/namles-history>
- Noula, I. (2018, June 21). *I do want media literacy... and more. A response to danah boyd*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/06/21/i-do-want-media-literacy-and-more-a-response-to-danah-boyd>
- O'Donnell, B. M. B. (2018, March 10). *Messy thoughts: Epistemology v personal epistemology & epistemological ethics*. Retrieved from http://life-is-learning.britnibrowndonnell.com/uncategorized/epistemology_v_personalepistemology/
- Oxford Dictionaries. (2016). *Post-truth*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>
- Potter, W. J. (2010). The state of media literacy. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(4), 675–696. doi:10.1080/08838151.2011.521462
- Potter, W. J. (2011). Potter's response to Hobbs. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 55(4), 596–600. doi:10.1080/08838151.2011.619397
- RobbGrieco, M., & Hobbs, R. (2013). *A field guide to MLE in the United States: Working paper*. Retrieved from https://mediaeducationlab.com/sites/default/files/Field%2520Guide%2520to%2520Media%2520Literacy%2520_0.pdf
- RobbGrieco, M. (2018). *Making media literacy in America*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Rogers, J. (2018, March 14). *Teaching media literacy with a cape after SXSW Edu*. Retrieved from <http://mediashift.org/2018/03/teaching-media-literacy-cape-sxswedu/>
- Rogow, F. (2018, March 28). *What a media literacy educator hears when danah boyd talks about media literacy*. Retrieved from <https://medialiteracyeducationmaven.edublogs.org/2018/03/28/what-a-media-literacy-educator-hears-when-danah-boyd-talks-about-media-literacy/>
- Rosin, H. (2009). The case against breast-feeding. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/04/the-case-against-breast-feeding/307311/>
- Scheibe, C., & Rogow, F. (2011). *The teacher's guide to media literacy: Critical thinking in a multimedia world*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Turnbull, S. (1998). Dealing with feeling: Why girl number 20 still doesn't answer. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy* (pp. 88–106). Bristol, UK: UCL Press.

van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001

Handbook of Research on Media Literacy Research and Applications Across Disciplines

Melda N. Yildiz
New York Institute of Technology, USA

Minaz Fazal
New York Institute of Technology, USA

Meesuk Ahn
New York Institute of Technology, USA

Robert Feirsen
New York Institute of Technology, USA

Sebnem Ozdemir
Beykent University, Turkey

A volume in the Advances in Multimedia and
Interactive Technologies (AMIT) Book Series



Published in the United States of America by

IGI Global
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA, USA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

Copyright © 2019 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher. Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Yildiz, Melda N., 1969- editor. | Fazal, Minaz, 1965- editor. | Ahn, Meesuk, 1965- editor. | Ozdemir, Senem, editor.

Title: Handbook of research on media literacy research and applications across disciplines / Melda N. Yildiz, Minaz Fazal, Meesuk Ahn, Robert Feirsen, and Sebnem Ozdemir, editors.

Description: Hershey : Information Science Reference, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018060061 | ISBN 9781522592617 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781522592631 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Mass media in education. | Educational technology. | Media literacy.

Classification: LCC LB1043 .H315 2019 | DDC 374/.26--dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018060061>

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Multimedia and Interactive Technologies (AMIT) (ISSN: 2327-929X; eISSN: 2327-9303)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.