The Role of Media in Society

When a media text has been created it has been done so that it meets needs, it achieves a purpose and it will also influence attitudes and behaviour. This means that we have to be able to identify these three separate elements and think about the *hows* and the *whys*.

**Meeting Needs**

There are various reasons that consumers have for consuming a particular media text or product. Whilst there are different ways of isolating or phrasing them, it will always ultimately come down to three needs:

* To Entertain
* To Educate
* To Inform

Once we identify which of these needs is being met we then have to think about how the producers of the text use their knowledge of these needs to construct the text. This is actually quite simple as the producer just needs to know what kind of things they will need to include so that they meet the required need.

Example

**Consumer:** I want to be entertained

**Producer:** To be entertaining I need to provide you with something that you will enjoy. I will make sure that the text has a cute and fluffy dog, because this is adorable and you will feel like you want one, a scene that shows the dog to be in danger, because you will want to keep watching to find out if the dog is okay, and a contemporary pop hit song, because you will enjoy the recognition of the song and the listening of it as well.

Now we come to the final part, which is recognising how well the producer managed to meet those needs. This means that we have to think about the reactions to the content based on how well the needs were met.

Example

**Consumer:** I really enjoyed that text because I am a 14year old girl and I love dogs. I was scared that something might happen to the dog, but this was okay because he was okay in the end. I didn’t enjoy the music, but that is because I do not like that artist, but I liked that it was upbeat and fun. Overall, this was very entertaining.

**Achieving Purposes**

The text that has been created will also have a clear purpose as to why a person or a group of people might put in so much effort into creating it in the first place. Again, whilst there are many different ways we can put this, there only really three purposes to achieve (the three Ps):

* To make a PROFIT
* To PROMOTE a product, an idea or an individual or organisation
* To PROVIDE a PUBLIC SERVICE for an individual or group.

If we take our previous example and extend it into this area then we will end up with something like this:

**Producer:** Well, because you were entertained this means that you will tune in for the next show in the series. This will increase the ratings of the show, which means it is more likely to remain on air, or even move to an improved time slot. The end result of this is that it achieves my purpose of turning a profit, which is one of the considerations I had for creating the text in the first place.

This last part is where we realise that there is a clear and integral link between meeting the needs of the consumer and achieving the purposes of the producer.



**Influencing Attitudes and Behaviour**

The final element of that we must consider is that the producers have created the text so that it influences behaviour. Now, this could have been unintentionally; however, more often than not the consequences of their actions are well known to them.

If we go back to our example we can see that there can be elements of both.

**Consumer:** Because you included that song, that I previously did not like, I am now having positive associations with that song (coz your program is awesome) and I actually like that band now.

**Producer:** That is good because our parent company owns the rights to that band’ music and this will hopefully mean you either promote or even purchase the work by that band.

**Consumer:** Also, because you included the wonderfully cute and fluffy dog this has meant that I continue to support the idea that dogs make good pets.

**Producer:** Eh…okay. Whilst this does not affect us directly, it is good that we can continue to support and suggest the normality of what current western culture suggests is a positive, aspirational norm for you to want and engage in.

This means that producers of media texts have a responsibility and/or an interest in influencing the attitudes and behaviour of consumers. This can be anything from buying more products to trying to change attitudes towards climate change. Therefore, to be a savvy consumer you need to be aware of what has been included and how it has been represented in relation to the role that the producer is fulfilling in creating the text.