

Understanding News Media: What is the Message?

All media messages are constructions. That is to say, media messages are carefully created and are the end result of many decisions based on various determining factors. For example, the message and the channel used to relay it may change

◆ Message ◆

Communication in writing, in speech, or by images or signals; and the underlying theme or idea.

depending on the age, gender and culture of the intended audience. Other factors include time, cost, and the availability of media channels.

However, one of the most important factors is the purpose

behind the message. Even when examining this topic within a single media channel – newspapers, one will find various sections or parts of the newspaper, in print or electronic, are more appropriate and effective in relaying certain messages.

If the purpose is to persuade others to buy a product or think a certain way that content is probably an advertisement. Or, if it is to provide important factual information one would look at news articles and images. Life style features, comic strips, crossword puzzles and the daily jumble are meant to entertain. While letters to the editor and political cartoons serve the purpose to express opinions and points of view.

When thinking about media messages it is also good to keep in mind that different people will interpret the same message differently. A commercial, movie or television program that appeals to viewers in the United States may not have the same effect on an audience in another part of the world. And, depending on the content, a news item of great interest to adults in their 60s may have little value to younger readers and vice versa.

Next installment: *What Makes News?*

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Look through the newspaper for media messages that appeal to you. For each identify: What is the message? Who created it and what is its purpose?
- ◆ Select one form of media message from the newspaper - an article, photograph, cartoon, advertisement, etc. and construct your own media message that expresses who you are - you're talents and strengths, your interests and hobbies - anything that makes you uniquely you.