CHAPTER **1**

Why Increase Media Literacy?

Key Idea: We put our minds on "automatic pilot" to protect ourselves from the flood of media messages we constantly encounter. The danger with this automatic processing of messages is that it allows the media to condition our thought processes.

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When you go to a supermarket and buy, let's say, 25 items, how many decisions have you made? The temptation is to say 25 decisions because you needed to have made a decision to buy each of your 25 items. But what about all the items you *decided not to buy?* The average supermarket today has about 30,000 items on its shelves. So you actually made 30,000 decisions in the relatively short time you were in the supermarket—25 decisions to buy a product and 29,975 decisions not to buy a product.

How is it possible to be so fast and efficient in decision making? The answer is that you have automatic routines in your brain that direct you to filter out almost all products and focus on a small, manageable set of products. This makes it possible for you to shop efficiently and not spend all week in the supermarket.

There is a great advantage of using automatic routines. However, there is also a serious disadvantage to using automatic routines—we can become too focused on efficiency and lose sight of why we go shopping. Perhaps you are very health conscious. Had you been less concerned with efficiency, you would have read the labels on more products to make better selections. For example, not all low-fat products have the same fat content; not all products with vitamins added have the same vitamins or the same proportions. Or perhaps you are very price conscious. Had you been less concerned with efficiency, you would have looked more carefully at the unit pricing and might have gotten more value for the money you spent.

Message Saturation

Our culture is a grand supermarket of media messages. Those messages are everywhere whether we realize it or not, except that there are far more messages in our culture than there are products in any supermarket. This proliferation of messages comes to us through the mass media (see Table 1.1). For example, this year in the United States alone, there will be almost 65,000 book titles published, and each of these is available in public libraries or through online bookstores for a relatively modest price. Furthermore, books are only one channel of information. Throughout the world, radio stations send out 65.5 million hours of original programming each year, and television adds another 48 million hours. In this country alone, the seven major film studios have an additional 169,500 television programs in their archives.

With personal computers, we have access to even more information than ever when they connect to the Internet. The Internet gives us access to about 3,000 newspapers (Kawamoto, 2003). Also, the World Wide Web offers access to about 2.5 billion documents. These are the publicly available pages, referred to as the surface web. There is also what is called the deep web, which consists of pages that require memberships, fees, or are otherwise private. This deep web has been estimated to be 400 to 550 times the size of the surface web (Lyman & Varian, 2003).

The information problem has shifted from one of gaining access to one of protecting ourselves from too much. Until about two centuries ago, the majority of the population could not read, and even if it could, there were few books available. In the early 1300s, the Sorbonne Library in Paris contained only 1,338 books and yet was thought to be the largest library in Europe. Only elites had access to those books. Today, there are many libraries with more than 8 million books, and they lend out their books to millions of

Table 1.1   Information Vehicles

Medium	United States	World
Books (titles per year)	64,711	968,735
Radio stations	13,261	47,776
TV broadcast stations	1,686	21,264
Newspapers	2,386	22,643
Mass-market periodicals	20,000	80,000
Scholarly journals	10,500	40,000
Newsletters	10,000	40,000
Archived office pages	3×10^9	7.5×10^9

SOURCE: Lyman and Varian (2003).

people every year. With literacy rates high and the availability of public libraries in every city and almost every small town, access to books, magazines, newspapers, and audiovisual materials of all kinds is no problem.

Not only is information easily available to almost anyone today, but information also keeps getting produced at an ever increasing rate. More information has been generated since you were born than the sum total of all information throughout all recorded history up until the time of your birth. Half of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today and producing information. Also, the number of people in this country who identify themselves as artists increased from 737,000 in 1970 to 2.2 million in 2000, the number of musicians grew from 100,000 in 1970 to 187,000 in 2001, and the number of authors quadrupled to 128,000 (Kiger, 2004). These artists, musicians, and authors are pumping even more messages through our media channels everyday.

Researchers estimated that in the year 2002 alone, there were 5 exabytes of information produced worldwide (Lyman & Varian, 2003). How much information is this? A byte is a unit of information storage. A kilobyte (KB) is 1,000 bytes or the information contained in two typed pages or a low-resolution photograph. A megabyte is a million bytes, which is the information in a small novel or 6 seconds of a high-fi recording. A gigabyte is 1 billion bytes. A terabyte is 1,000 gigabytes, a petabyte is 1,000 terabytes, and an exabyte is 1,000 petabytes. To put 5 exabytes in perspective, the 19 million books and other materials in the U.S. Library of Congress, if digitized, would take up about 10 terabytes of information. This means that the amount of information produced in 2002 alone is 500,000 times the amount of all the holdings in the Library of Congress. As if that is not scary enough, Lyman and Varian (2003) estimate that the rate of growth of information increases at 30% each year. This means that in 2005, the amount of new information

produced *in that one year alone* will be 10 exabytes or about 1 million times as much information currently in the Library of Congress.

The information problem is no longer about how to get access. The much more pressing problem is how to keep up with all the information. For example, if you were to try to read only the new books published this year, you would have to read a book every 8 minutes for 24 hours each day with no breaks over the entire year. All that effort would be needed just to keep up with the new titles published in only the United States! You would have no time left to read any of the other 66 million book titles in existence worldwide (Lyman & Varian, 2003). Also, the world produces about 31 million hours of original TV programming each year (Lyman & Varian, 2003). If you wanted to watch all the television programming broadcast in this year alone, it would take you about 35 centuries—if you took no breaks!

We live in an environment that is far different from any environment humans have ever experienced before. And the environment changes at an ever increasing pace. This is due to the accelerating generation of information and the sharing of that information through the increasing number of media channels and the heavy traffic of media vehicles traversing those channels. Messages are being delivered to everyone, everywhere, constantly. We are all saturated with information, and each year the media are more aggressive in seeking our attention.

We have long since reached a saturation point; it is a hopeless expectation to keep up with information. There is now so much information that the information problem has shifted from one of access, to one of trying to keep up, to one of avoidance.

How can we protect ourselves? We can stop buying and reading books. We can cut back on our subscriptions to magazines and stop newspaper delivery. We can reduce our time searching for particular messages in radio, television, and the Internet. But exposures will still occur because the media are aggressive and will create hundreds of opportunities each day to grab our attention. We cannot avoid all media messages unless we physically remove ourselves from our culture. But then we lose the opportunity to experience all the good things about the media. What can we do? Instead of physically removing ourselves from the culture, we psychologically remove ourselves. This means that we place our brains on automatic pilot so that our minds filter out almost all the messages bombarding us.

The Default Model of Automaticity

To keep ourselves sane in the information-saturated culture, we program our minds to filter out almost all messages automatically. Psychologists refer to this automatic processing of information as *automaticity*. Automaticity is a state where our minds operate without any conscious effort from us. Thus, we can perform even complicated tasks routinely

without even thinking about them. For example, typing is a relatively complicated task, but after we learn to type, we do it automatically. Think about your experience in first learning to type. You had to think of the individual letters in each word, think about which key controlled which letter, and then command a finger to press the correct key. It took you a long time to type out a word. But with practice, you are able to type out paragraphs without thinking much about which finger needs to strike which key in which order. Now when you type, you enter the state of automaticity where well-developed habits guide your actions without requiring you to think about them.

Although automaticity is a very efficient state for filtering *out* almost all media messages, there are times when we want to filter *in* a message; that is, we want to pay attention to it rather than ignore it. So the state of automaticity has "triggers" programmed into it so that when a particular kind of message is in the environment, our attention is triggered. To illustrate this, imagine yourself driving in your car with the radio playing while you are talking to your friend. Your attention is on the conversation with your friend, and your mind is automatically filtering out the music playing from the radio. But then your favorite song starts playing, and your attention to the music is triggered. You are likely to interrupt your conversation and shift your attention to the music.

An important question for media literacy is, Who or what programs your triggers? Naturally, you program some of your triggers. When we are aware of particular motives and goals for entertainment or information, we can easily program our triggers. You make your favorite song a trigger. Your favorite actors are triggers; when you scan through the newspaper, quickly skipping over most stories, the name or picture of your favorite actor appears, and this triggers your attention, so you slow down and read the story.

When we have specific goals or needs for certain kinds of messages, it is easy to program our triggers. But a great deal of the time, media exposure is done mindlessly; that is, we are not really sure what we want so we have no goals as we flip through a magazine, have the radio playing in the background, or "veg" out in front of the television set. At times like these, the media program your triggers. They use programming strategies to condition you into habitual exposure states and then reinforce those habits. The longer you stay in the mindless state of automaticity, the more power the media have at conditioning you to stay in that state, where they can continue to program the triggers. Therefore, the problem with following the default model is that we do not think about what our triggers are,

Figure 1.1   The Default Model

and we do not care. We float along day after day, being exposed to some information, and feel we are being informed. We are being exposed to exciting images and feel we are being entertained. We are being exposed to problems with easy solutions that we can buy in stores and feel we have control over our lives. These superficial, programmed feelings keep us pleasantly in the state of automaticity. We lose the opportunity to exercise a high degree of control over our lives. We lose the opportunity to satisfy our innate needs rather than the media-programmed needs. We lose the opportunity to construct meaning for ourselves and achieve goals that are truly our own.

Traps

The state of automaticity is a wonderful tool protecting us from being overwhelmed by the flood of messages. But this state has traps that can hold us back from achieving our own goals. These traps divert our attention from the disadvantages of being in the state of automaticity. They give us a false sense of well-being, but the longer we are caught in these traps, the more susceptible we are to negative effects of the media. I will illuminate four of the more dangerous traps in this section.

Trap 1: Information Fatigue

The media present so many messages and aggressively compete for our attention that we have no choice but to retreat into the state of automaticity. It is natural to feel fatigued by all the information and want to avoid it. But we must also realize that many messages in that flood could be very valuable to us. There is information that we need to live a better life—information about nutrition, exercise, avoiding dangerous behaviors, building relationships with other people, and finding a means to support ourselves in a rewarding manner. There are messages we need to expand our experience beyond our everyday lives—messages about other kinds of people, places, times, feelings, and accomplishments. We must get beyond the fatigue and get energized in the search for information we need and want.

If we cannot get beyond the fatigue, then we stay in the state of automaticity and have the same narrow set of experiences over and over. Thus, we automatically watch a few kinds of TV shows and listen to only one kind of popular music and read one kind of magazine. We have no energy to explore any of the wide spectra outside our little groove, and that is a trap. The longer we stay in this trap, the feeling of fatigue is reinforced, and it becomes harder and harder to find the energy to explore other kinds of messages. The media get more powerful in programming our triggers to keep us in the same habitual exposure patterns. We lose interest in programming our own triggers. Over time, our experience gets more and more narrow, and eventually we lose the ability to break out of these heavily reinforced routines.

Trap 2: False Feeling of Being Informed

Because our culture bombards us with so much information, we think we are informed. We are marinating in information; how could we not be absorbing a great deal of information?

The problem is not with the *amount* of information. The problem is with the *variety* and *type* of information. When we stay in the state of automaticity, the variety of information gets more constrained. We stay in a narrow groove of messages while the media program us to stay with the same kind of exposure over and over.

As for the type of information, the state of automaticity is a mindless state, so when we are presented messages, we simply accept the surface meanings. Media messages are typically constructed to be slick and superficial; that is, rarely do messages trigger people to engage their minds and dig deeper. Instead, media messages appear easy to understand, and thus people are satisfied when they are exposed to the surface meaning. To illustrate, think of television news programs. For example, CNN is a major news organization with reporters all over the globe and with a huge news hole of 24 hours a day, 7 days each week. With all of these resources, CNN could offer messages that are really in-depth and reveal the complex nature of the major issues in our economy, political system, and culture. But CNN does not use its considerable resources to do this. Instead, it presents very short, superficial stories over and over again all day and night. CNN, as well as other news presentation services, has chosen repetition of stories over depth of stories. Rarely is there any depth in reporting, even on the many complex issues that demand it. Instead, we are presented with a short 90-second story if it is important or a 30-second story if it is not a "major" story.

For many people, however, watching 30 minutes of news each night provides them with a feeling that they are staying informed of all the important issues of the day. About half the adult population also reads a newspaper every day, and this exposure serves to further reinforce in them the feeling that they are informed. But the stories in the typical newspaper are the same stories that are on the television news. Although print stories are longer than television stories, they do not provide significantly more depth in their reporting.

Trap 3: False Sense of Control

Most of the new technological developments with the mass media channels give us, the audience, the potential for more control over our exposures. But the irony is that as we are offered greater control, we exercise less and less control. That is, we feel overwhelmed by all the messages available and default to more time—not less—in the state of automaticity, where the media message providers exercise their control over us.

To illustrate the greater potential for control by us, think about how the newer media deliver their messages compared with the way the older media deliver messages. With

print, which is the oldest of the mass media, consumers have had almost all the control over exposures. Books could not expose themselves to consumers; we have to take the initiative to go out to a store or a library. Magazines and newspapers are a bit more intrusive because they are delivered to our doors, but we need to subscribe for this to happen. Also, with all forms of print, we control the exposure sequencing and pace. We could begin reading a magazine with any story, read the stories in any order, and read the stories as fast or as slow as we wanted. Thus, with the print media, we exert a relatively high degree of control with all the important exposure decisions: whether to be exposed, which stories to read and in which order, the timing of the exposure, and the pace of the exposure.

With the arrival of electronic media, new forms of control were established that contrasted with print media. In the 1920s, radio was introduced, and people began to lose some of their control over the media exposure. Of course, radio requires that someone turn on a radio receiver for information to flow, but once the audio is in the environment, everyone is exposed. In this way, radio is more intrusive than print. Also, radio controls the timing, sequence, and pacing of the messages. If you want to listen to a particular show, you have to tune in when the program is broadcast. You have to listen to the messages in the order they are broadcasted. Radio producers also gained control of the interruptions (for ads) and when to suspend the story (as in serialized stories). Of course, some magazines present serialized stories, but an audience member could wait for all issues to be published and then read them all at once; this was not possible with serialized radio dramas. Radio, then television, trained us to structure our lives around certain times when their shows were broadcast; they trained us to tolerate interruptions for commercial messages, and they trained us to develop weekly habits of exposure.

Over time, some technological innovations have been made available to give people the potential for more control over media exposures. For example, tape recorders and MP3 players enable people to rearrange audio messages through editing; also, people can control the playback time. VCRs do the same for video. And computer software seems to give people more control over searching for information (Web browsers and search engines). But to use these technologies, we have to expend more effort. It also requires us to scan more messages to make our decisions about what to record or use, and this serves to increase our exposures. Therefore, most people stay with their media-shaped habits of exposure most of the time. Also, these technologies have hidden features that serve to reduce our control while making it appear that they are increasing our control. For example, Internet service providers (ISPs) and search engines make people feel that they are in control of their Internet searches, but these devices constrain people's access. ISPs have links to favored Web sites while excluding others. Search engines cannot possibly access more than a small percentage of Web pages, so the decisions concerning which pages to access lies at least as much with the search engine company as it does with the user.

We are at a time when the amount of messages bombarding us is at an all-time high, and it continues to grow. The providers of those messages are at a high point in being able

to control our knowledge, our attitudes, and our behaviors. However, at the same time, we have more potential now than ever before to control our own exposures and their effects on us, but sadly, few people recognize this potential. Most people are either too fatigued by the onslaught of messages to confront it consciously. Or people who do want to confront the problem and gain control for themselves are not sure about what to do.

Trap 4: Faulty Beliefs

The information-saturated environment and our response to it leaves us vulnerable to faulty beliefs. Either we will accept the beliefs presented to us in the media, or we will construct our own beliefs, which tend to be faulty if we rely on the superficial and spotty information we absorb during automatic exposures.

A fruitful place to observe faulty beliefs in the general population is to examine the results of public opinion polls. Often, these polls will ask people about issues that would seem to be very important. However, when we look at the patterns of public beliefs, we can see that many people are not really well versed about these seemingly important issues. We can see that these beliefs are clearly faulty because they either are not accurate reflections of reality or are logically inconsistent.

In public opinion polls about crime, only 17% of people think crime is a big problem in their own community, whereas 83% of Americans think crime is a big problem in society (Whitman & Loftus, 1996). People think this way because most do not experience crime in their own lives and therefore do not think it is a big problem where they live. However, they are convinced that it is a big problem in society. Where could the public get such an idea? From the media's fixation on deviance in the news. Also the news media prefer to present sensationalized events rather than typical events. So when a crime is reported, it is usually a violent crime, following the news ethic of "if it bleeds, it leads." Watching evening newscasts with their highlighting of crime and violence leads us to infer that there must be a high rate of crime and that most of it is violent assaults. But in reality, less than 20% of all crime is violent. More than 80% of all crime is property crime, with the victim not even present (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Furthermore, the rate for violent crime has been declining in this country since the mid-1980s, yet very few people are aware of this decline (Whitman & Loftus, 1996). Instead, most people believe that violent crime is increasing because they continually see crime stories and gory images in the media. They have fashioned their opinions on sensationalized events, and this type of information provides no useful basis to infer an accurate picture about crime.

In a wide range of public opinion polls, we find that people not only exaggerate the problems with crime but also overestimate the problems with health care, education, religion, and family—believing that they are all serious, growing problems. For example, with health care, 90% of adults think that the health care system is in crisis, but at the same time, almost 90% feel that their health care is of good quality. About 63% of people think

other people's doctors are too interested in making money, but only 20% think their own doctor is too interested in making money. As for education, 64% give the nation's schools a grade of C or D, but at the same time, 66% give their public school a grade of A or B. As for religion, 65% say that religion is losing its influence on American life, whereas 62% said religion is becoming a stronger influence in own their lives. As for responsibility, almost 90% believe that a major problem with society is that people don't live up to their commitments, but more than 75% say they meet their commitments to families, kids, and employers. Nearly half of the population believes it is impossible for most families to achieve the American Dream, whereas 63% believe they have achieved or are close to the American Dream. And 40% to 50% think the nation is currently moving in the wrong direction, but 88% of Americans think their own lives and families are moving in the right direction (Whitman, 1996).

Most people think that the media, especially television, have a very strong effect on other people. They have an unrealistic opinion that the media cause other people to behave violently. Some believe that if you allow PSAs (public service announcements) on TV about using condoms, children will learn that it is permissible and even a good thing to have sex. This is clearly an overestimation. At the same time, people *under*estimate the influence the media have on them. When they are asked if they think the media have any effect on them personally, 88% say no. These people argue that the media are primarily channels of entertainment and diversion, so they have no negative effect on them. The people who believe this say that they have watched thousands of hours of crime shows and have never shot anyone or robbed a bank. Although this may be true, this argument does not fully support the claim that the media have no effect on them; this argument is based on the false premise that the media only trigger high-profile, negative, behavioral effects that are easy to recognize. But there are many more types of effects, such as giving people the false impression that crime is a more serious problem than it really is or that most crime is violent.

There is a faulty belief in this country that television is to blame for the educational system not being very good. The media often present reports about how poorly this nation's youth do on learning compared to youth in other countries. For example, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, which is administered to eighth graders in 41 countries, revealed that American students rank 28th in math and 17th in science in the world ("The Learning Lag," 1996). The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress, administered nationally by a group established by Congress, reported that one third of high school seniors lack even a basic understanding of how the American government is run, and only 26% of seniors were considered well versed enough in civics to make reasonable, well-informed choices during elections (McQueen, 1999). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that only about one quarter of American schoolchildren have achieved the proficiency standard in writing (Wildavsky, 1999). Reports such as this lead critics to complain that children in this country watch too

much television. However, the same report says that students in Japan rank 3rd on both tests, although they watch as much television as do American kids, but this bit of information is rarely reported.

Many conscientious parents have accepted the belief that it is bad for their young children to watch television. They believe that TV somehow will make their children's minds lazy, reduce their creativity, and turn them into lethargic entertainment junkies. If this happens, children will not value achievement and will not do well in school.

This belief is faulty because it blames the media, not the child or the parent, for poor academic performance. It also focuses only on the negative effect and gives the media no credit for potentially positive effects.

This is an important issue, but again it is not a simple one. When we look carefully at the research evidence, we can see that the typically reported finding is wrong and that when we look more carefully, there are several effects happening simultaneously (see W. J. Potter, 1987a). For example, the typically reported finding is that television viewing is negatively related to academic achievement. And there is a fair amount of research that reports this conclusion. What makes this faulty is that this relationship is explained better by something else—IQ. School achievement is overwhelmingly related to IQ. Also, children with lower IQs watch more television. So it is IQ that accounts for lower achievement and higher television viewing. Research analyses that take a child's IQ into account find that there is no overall negative relationship; instead, there is a much more interesting pattern. The negative relationship does not show up until the child's viewing has passed the threshold of 30 hours per week. Beyond that 30-hour point, the more television children watch, the lower their academic achievement, and that effect gets stronger with the more hours they watch beyond that threshold. This means that academic achievement goes down only after television viewing starts to cut into study time and sleep. But there is no negative effect for less than 30 hours of viewing per week. In fact, at the lowest levels of television viewing, there is actually a positive effect; that is, a child who watches none or only a few hours a week is likely to do less well academically than a child who watches a moderate (around 12 to 15 hours per week). Thus, the pattern is as follows: Children who are deprived of the source of information that television provides do less well in school than children who watch a moderate amount of television; however, when a child gets to the point where the amount of television viewing cuts into needed study time, academic performance goes down.

When we pose the question, "What effect does viewing television have on a child's academic performance?" we could give the simple, popular answer: There is a negative effect. But now you can see that this answer is too simple—it is simpleminded. It is also misleading because it reinforces the limited belief that media effects are negative and polarized and that the media are to blame. This conclusion is not so simple as to lend itself easily to a short sound byte or flashy image, so it is not likely to be presented in the mass media.

The reason faulty beliefs are such a dangerous trap is because they are self-reinforcing. By this, I mean that as people are continually exposed to faulty information, they feel even more secure that their faulty beliefs are accurate. They feel less and less motivation to

challenge them. When someone points out that the information on which their beliefs are based is faulty, they do not accept this criticism because they are so sure that they are correct. Thus, over time, they are not only less likely to examine their beliefs but also less tolerant of other beliefs having the possibility of being correct.

Need for Media Literacy

We encounter almost all media messages in a state of automaticity—that is, mindless acceptance—when we are not interested in investing the effort for conscious attention, much less the effort to analyze and evaluate the messages and to find more information to construct more accurate interpretations. We cannot eliminate the need for this state of automaticity because it is an essential tool that helps us avoid being overwhelmed by the flood of messages from the media. However, we can do two things to work with this tool and become more media literate.

First, we can reduce the time we spend in the state of automaticity. We do this by planning to expose ourselves to messages that are different from what we habitually do. This expands our experience with media messages. It also requires us to think about these new messages; that is, we cannot take them for granted. New types of messages, as well as messages on new topics, force us to confront the unknown and to work a bit to make sense of this new information. As we work on trying to make sense of the messages, we stay away from the mindless state of automaticity.

Second, we can try to program our triggers. In doing this, we need to be guided by our own goals rather than let the media set our goals for us.

Summary

We cannot physically avoid the glut of information that aggressively seeks our attention in our culture. Instead, we protect ourselves by psychologically avoiding almost all of the messages in the flood of information. We do this by keeping our minds on automatic pilot most of the time. This automaticity allows us to avoid almost all messages and to do so efficiently.

Automaticity, however, comes with a price. We allow the media to condition us while we are in this automatic state. The media condition us to habitual exposure patterns to the messages they want exposure for. This increases the risk that we will miss many of the messages that might have value for us. The media also condition us to accept unchallenged the meaning they present in their messages. This increases the risk we will accept faulty meaning.

Taking control is what media literacy is all about. Becoming more media literate gives you a much clearer perspective to see the border between your real world and the world

manufactured by the media. When you are media literate, you have clear maps to help you navigate better in the media world so that you can get to those experiences and information you want without becoming distracted by those things that are harmful to you. You are able to build the life that *you* want rather than letting the media build the life *they* want for you.

Those who fail to develop their literacy of the media will get swept along in a tide of messages. They will have a false sense that they know what is going on in the world simply because they are exposed to so much information. Everette Dennis, who is the executive director of The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University in New York and vice president of The Freedom in Arlington, Virginia, refers to media illiteracy as "potentially as damaging and poisonous to the human spirit as contaminated water and food is to our physical well-being" (Dennis, 1993, p. 4). The metaphor of pollution is an apt one. The media industries provide us with many products that we desire—products that are good for us—but these same media industries are also producing harmful by-products and dumping them into our culture. If we are not literate, we don't know the difference, and we consume the bad with the good.

This book will show you how you can become more media literate. It presents a plan of action for you. If you work hard at executing this plan, you will develop your media literacy to a much higher degree. You will acquire a great deal of information about media content, the industries, and their effects on us as individuals and on society. But developing a high degree of media literacy requires more than knowledge; it also requires the development of skills. The more you develop your skills, the more levels of meaning you will be able to perceive in the media. By the end of this book, you should have a highly developed set of skills that will help you elaborate the beginning knowledge structures presented in the heart of this book.

Further Reading

Wurman, R. S. (1989). *Information anxiety.* New York: Doubleday.

Although this book is now more than 15 years old, its intriguing ideas about how much information has invaded our culture and how that flood is affecting us are still compelling. The author has written it in a nonlinear manner so that the chapters and even the paragraphs can be read in any order.

Lyman, P., & Varian, H. R. (2003, October 27). *How much information? 2003.* Retrieved May 14, 2004, from www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/

A research team at the UC Berkeley School of Information Managements and Systems has analyzed the world's media and constructed estimates for how much information is produced each year. This is a very ambitious project that presents startling results about the amount of information available.

CHAPTER 2

Defining Media Literacy

Harry and Ann are discussing their relationship over lunch on campus.

"Harry, you never pay attention to what I say!"

"How can you say that? We spend almost all day together everyday and you are constantly talking," Harry replies. "I hear what you say."

"Maybe, but you don't understand what I say."

"Yes, I do. I know a lot about you. I know the names of all your brothers and sisters, and where you went to high school, and your favorite color and . . ."