

World Literacy Day 2019: Why our children need to be media literate

It's [World Literacy Day](#) this Sunday, 8 September 2019 - a day set aside by the United Nations to celebrate literacy and to reflect on the world's remaining literacy challenges. The foundations of this are the original three 'Rs'- reading, writing and arithmetic, but the ubiquity of smart phones, fake news and social media has created the need for an additional basic skill: media literacy.



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Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act, using all forms of communication. It also promotes an awareness of media intention and influence, and teaches people how to take an active and considered approach to how they create and consume media, by providing a framework to access, analyse, and evaluate messages, whether in print, online, or in broadcast media.

While stats for South Africa are sketchy, Americans are exposed to as many as 10,000 adverts per day, and it's realistic to say that online South Africans are not far behind. These are the ads that are telling teens how thin or 'buff' they should be, what they should eat and drink, what's cool or uncool, and what they should be thinking, wearing and doing.

"Connected kids are relentlessly targeted by big tech and media companies, gaming houses, video content and other content that's way beyond their years – all created and promoted by people they've never met and have no reason to trust ... at a time when tweens and teens are in crucial stages of their emotional and intellectual development," says Dean McCoubrey, founder of [MySocialLife](#), which supports parents, teachers and psychologists to help children feel safer and behave smarter online.

McCoubrey adds that the various massive media corporations have created algorithms that ensure that users are the editors of the content they receive. That's not the positive outcome that it may seem at first: users unconsciously select the content that re-confirms their bias too, limiting and narrowing their view of the world.



Dean McCoubrey, founder of MySocialLife

"This is why media literacy education is such an essential part of tween and teenage education, giving kids the tools, habits and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective

communicators, and active citizens in today's world – all skills that certainly can't be shared via a YouTube video!" McCoubrey continues.

Parents can't be around at every minute of the day to help children assess each message critically. Indeed, that's completely unrealistic and simply a bad idea, as they'll never learn the skills that they need to be good digital (and IRL) citizens if they're not equipped with the tools they need to navigate their way through the media landscape themselves.

It's time to commemorate World Literacy Day 2019 by equipping children to be critical of what media they consume so that they can control their interpretation of what they see and hear, rather than letting media control them.

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