

Book Review/Kitap İncelemesi

A REVIEW OF W. JAMES POTTER'S BOOK: SEVEN SKILLS FOR MEDIA LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates W. James Potter's 2019 book "Seven Skills for Media Literacy". Potter critiques media literacy resources for offering ideas but lacking specifics. He argues existing research focuses on the need for these skills but fails to show how to teach or assess them. His work bridges this gap by identifying seven core skills (analyzing, evaluating, grouping, inducing, deducing, synthesizing, and abstracting) and outlining methods for developing them. Potter examines algorithms, heuristics, and trap-avoiding strategies for each of the seven skills in the following chapters. Finally, Potters highlights the importance of these seven skills discussed in the previous chapters and shows how they work together to promote media literacy.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Skill, Algorithms, Heuristics, Avoiding Traps

W. JAMES POTTER'IN SEVEN SKILLS FOR MEDIA LITERACY KİTABI ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, W. James Potter'ın 2019 yılında yayımlanan "Seven Skills for Media Literacy" kitabı değerlendirilmektedir. Potter, medya okuryazarlığı çalışmalarının alana katkı sunmakla birlikte somut önerilerden yoksun olduğunu eleştirmektedir. Potter, mevcut araştırmaların medya okuryazarlığı becerilerinin gerekliliğine odaklandığını ancak nasıl öğretilcekleri veya değerlendirilecekleri konusunda bilgi vermediğini savunmaktadır. Kitap, yedi temel beceriyi (analiz etme, değerlendirme, gruplama, tümevarım, tümdengelim, sentezleme ve soyutlama) tanımlayarak ve bunları geliştirmek için yöntemler sunarak bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Potter, sonraki bölümlerde yedi becerinin her birinin algoritmalarını, sezgisel yaklaşımları (*heuristics*) ve tuzaklardan kaçınma stratejilerini incelemektedir. Son olarak, Potter önceki bölümlerde ele alınan yedi becerinin önemini vurgulamakta ve bunların medya okuryazarlığını nasıl birlikte geliştirdiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medya Okuryazarlığı, Beceri, Algoritma, Heuristics, Tuzaktan Kaçınma

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The interconnectedness of information, media, and technological progress has transformed the way we communicate and access knowledge in the modern era. This convergence has led to the emergence of a pervasive ecosystem that shapes how we interact with information and media content. It influences various aspects of our daily lives, from how we consume news and entertainment to how we engage with technology in our personal and professional endeavors. Therefore, media literacy is vital to access accurate information in this complex environment, critically evaluate media content, and effectively utilize technology (Kellner & Share, 2019).

Media literacy, which enables individuals to comprehend how media work, how information and media messages are produced, and how these messages impact our perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, actions, and behaviors, is rapidly becoming an essential skill for people in the digital age. Media literacy involves actively questioning and critically analyzing the messages received from the media, emphasizing the importance of 'individual interpretive responsibilities' (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Zoë Druick (2016) believes that the concept of media literacy is often associated with progressive and modern values, emphasizing the ability to engage with new media in a positive and forward-thinking manner. Additionally, there is a shift towards expecting individuals, especially children, to navigate the complexities of the online world with less institutional guidance and more reliance on their own judgment. W. James Potter's (2019) "Seven Skills for Media Literacy" offers a comprehensive framework for developing these essential competencies. What is different about this book are the unique depth and professional experience that are brought to media literacy by the author.

W. James Potter is a distinguished scholar in the field of communication and media studies. He is currently a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His research primarily centers on media literacy, media effects, and the sociology of knowledge. Before reading and reviewing this book, I had been using Potter's (2016) *Media Literacy* as a primary source in my "Media Literacy" course for

first-year students at New Media and Communication department for the preceding two years. It is a comprehensive resource that guides readers how to steer through the vast amount of incoming information and protect themselves from being bombarded in today's media-rich environment.

In his *Seven Skills for Media Literacy* book, Potter mentions that research on media literacy is extensive, with the term frequently appearing alongside the concept of "skill" within the relevant literature. For example, Cho *et al.* (2024) suggest that competency-based conceptions of media literacy may be limited as they may assume common content, evaluation criteria, and value of production. In one of these studies, Art Silverblatt (2018) emphasizes the significance of creating a critical distance from mass communication messages, showing that media literacy education improves critical thinking skills in various areas, with a focus on teaching individuals how to think independently to support democracy. Potter further identifies three core themes that constitute the field of media literacy studies. He highlights four perspectives on how authors view the nature of skills as tools for media literacy.

Potter criticizes the media literacy literature for its lack of detailed guidance despite offering numerous ideas. He particularly points out that while authors emphasize the importance of skills, they often fail to specify what these skills are, how to teach them, or how to measure them. In this work, Potter identifies a critical gap: despite calls for improved skills, existing research lacks detailed guidelines to effectively enhance essential media literacy competencies. This work, Potter argues, aims to bridge this gap by focusing on seven core media literacy skills: analyzing, evaluating, grouping, inducing, deducing, synthesizing, and abstracting. By doing so, it provides the necessary specifics to facilitate the development of these crucial competencies. Compared to the conceptual framework of media literacy presented in Potter's *Media Literacy*, this work offers a more practical approach, providing actionable guidance for enhancing essential media literacy skills. Potter's

comprehensive work is crucial as he not only employs simple and clear language to explain complex contexts but also encourages readers to develop critical thinking.

Detailed Content

The book is a first edition, consisting of 10 chapters and 192 pages. Except for the 10th chapter, which synthesizes the content and concludes the book, each chapter ends with a review section summarizing the other 9 chapters. It centers on two core resources: a framework of guidelines (including algorithms, heuristics, and trap avoidance strategies) and a collection of practical exercises. Potter clarifies the seven skills he suggests in seven chapters, from Chapter 3 through Chapter 9. These chapters are structured around Potter's **algorithms** (clear procedures for using each skill), **heuristics** ("rules of thumb" for enhanced skill application beyond algorithmic steps), and **avoiding traps** (including trap avoidance strategies when using these skills). Potter focuses on the importance of skill development for media literacy (Chapter 1) and identifies the seven chosen skills as core to improvement (Chapter 2). He then clarifies and examines each one of the seven skills' algorithms, heuristics, and trap avoiding strategies in the following chapters. As a concluding chapter, Chapter 10 brings together the seven skills discussed in the previous chapters and shows how they work together to promote media literacy.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the importance of media literacy skills. Here, Potter explains three shared ideas that characterize the media literacy literature. He additionally explores four perspectives on the nature of media literacy skills held by authors in the field. These perspectives focus on broad perspectives on media, the protecting and empowering role of these skills, the notion of media literacy as a continuous development process rather than a category, and finally, faith that these skills can be learned and improved. Finding "critical thinking" too ambiguous and to avoid the confusion surrounding "critical thinking", Potter proposes seven specific skills for media literacy which he discusses in the following chapters (3 through 9).

The essential skills are listed as analyzing, evaluating, grouping, inducing, deducing, synthesizing, and abstracting by Potter in this chapter.

Chapter 2 begins with Potter addressing the overwhelming amount of information bombarding us in today's world. Following this, the chapter examines our unconscious adaptations to this ever-growing information flood. Potter argues that people have developed *automatic routines* to cope with the information overload. To prepare readers for future chapters, Potter defines algorithms and heuristics, which are problem-solving tools we use to navigate information overload.

Chapters between 3 and 9 focus on the seven skills of media literacy identified by Potter: analyzing, evaluating, grouping, inducing, deducing, synthesizing, and abstracting. Upon examining these chapters, it becomes evident that Potter's intention is to establish the book's function as a practical guide to media literacy, designed not only for students and academics, but also for the general public. These chapters exhibit a consistent structure, systematically dissecting each essential skill in a methodical manner. Each chapter commences with a comprehensive definition of the skill at hand, followed by a detailed exploration of algorithms, heuristics, and trap avoidance strategies pertinent to the skill's effective application. This structured approach ensures a thorough understanding of the skill's nuances and practical applications. Chapter 3 highlights that deeper *analysis* leads to richer understanding, revealing gaps for a more effective synthesis. Chapter 4 focuses on a successful *evaluation* based on the judicious selection of a suitable standard and its subsequent systematic application to the subject matter. For a thorough evaluation, Potter emphasizes that a message analysis is crucial, yielding a well-defined set of elements that are subsequently evaluated for source credibility and assigned appropriate weights. Potter warns that efficient *grouping* requires the five-step algorithm provided in Chapter 5. He cautions that many tasks are partially specified, and utilizing heuristics is crucial to avoid common pitfalls. Chapter 6 points out that media message analysis through *induction* starts with observations, utilizes heuristics for falsification and adaptation, while

avoiding common traps like detail overload, intuition neglect, overgeneralization, limited observation, and faulty generalization bases. Chapter 7 has an excellent discussion on *deduction*, the essence of which, according to Potter, is to simplify things into a clear logical process, making the conclusion so obvious that no one can argue against it. Chapter 8 continues this journey by introducing the skill of *synthesis* which is the process of assembling elements into a coherent whole, involving multiple steps and other skills like analysis, evaluation, and grouping. It addresses challenges by either altering existing knowledge structures, beliefs, or opinions, or by creating something novel, such as a new message or solution to a problem. Finally, Chapter 9 covers *abstracting* which can be defined as the process of condensing information to its essential points, such as how news organizations select and summarize the most important events of the day into a coherent package.

As the concluding chapter, Chapter 10 synthesizes the seven skills discussed in the previous chapters, demonstrating how they collectively enhance media literacy. Potter highlights that continually developing your skills leads to enhanced thinking, greater rewards, and transforms learning into an enjoyable experience.

When considered as a whole, this study reveals how comprehensively understanding the complex structure of the media environment can assist individuals in navigating how to interact within this environment and how media literacy can be helpful. This book employs a step-by-step methodology to impart media literacy skills. Each chapter (Chapters between 3 and 9) systematically explores one of the seven essential skills (analyzing, evaluating, grouping, inducing, deducing, synthesizing, and abstracting), providing clear definitions, practical algorithms, heuristics, and strategies to avoid common traps. By systematically identifying and examining seven core skills, Potter provides educators and learners with a practical guide for enhancing their ability to critically evaluate and create media. This resource offers an accessible approach to cultivating media literacy skills, broadening its applicability beyond the traditional confines of the classroom. Furthermore, the book demonstrates how these

skills can change the way one thinks and learns about the world around you. However, despite being clear and comprehensive, the book's in-depth explanations could feel repetitive for some readers who prefer a quicker pace. While this in-depth level of detail is beneficial for those new to the topic, it could potentially be superfluous for those who are already well-versed in media literacy or who are seeking a more concise overview. Despite this, this book can be recommended as a practical guide (compared to Potter's *Media Literacy*) to understanding media in the complexities of the digital world.

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