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# Re-thinking news, re-thinking news literacy: a user-centred perspective on information

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## **The story about the March, 2015 Lufthansa jet crash in France at the hands of co-pilot Andreas Lubitz unfolded as I was preparing this article.**

Three days after the crash I was tied to the Internet, feverishly accessing online newspapers, BBC radio news, and social media sites for information I could gather, speculate about and comment on. My preferred internet and radio sources, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, the BBC, and German newspapers *Bild* and *Berliner Zeitung*, among others, were updating as fast as they could, as were Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo, and Youtube, to name only a few. The tragedy and its mysterious nature cried out for explanation and more information. The always-on news cycle demanded it, and news organisations and participants in the social media stream churned it out as fast as they could.

Social media sites figured heavily in the information circulation about this crash, in the general social media whirl and in more traditionally prepared journalistic reports, both of which fed each other. Journalists embedded Twitter and Facebook postings from many different sources into their reports which were, in turn, re-posted on a host of other sites. Lubitz's Facebook page was repeatedly referenced, and by day three, as if on news cycle cue, Facebook was circulating links to posts from at least one blog about Lubitz's possible ties to Muslim extremism, though such information had not been included in the more mainstream news sites. I personally did not access Instagram or Youtube around this event, though doubtless they were included in the media mix for others.

As with most news and information circulation today - for events and issues tragic, banal, and somewhere in between - participation is the key driving concept. Around this tragedy I found myself participating in a routine of checking various sources, researching claims, using Facebook to write about and de-bunk what I considered un-credible sources of information, and commiserating about the tragedy while questioning the overall sense of it with my friends online. It was part of my own quest to sort through and add to the information mix in order to dispel rumor and champion some sort of “truth.” Through my participation I was clearly in a relationship with the entire stream of information about this tragedy.

The information swirl around this plane crash could be a good case study for understanding and examining news from the traditional academic theoretical perspectives of news values (Galander 2012), agenda-setting (Lee 2015), or news framing (Bruce 2014), perhaps within the current zeitgeist of terror threat or mental health issues in conjunction with previous major tragedies. But this event as circulated in the digital media sphere is also a prime example of how news is no longer a product of the traditional processes of journalism across legacy print and broadcast sources, and can no longer be examined in that way. Perhaps it should not be examined as its own separate genre at all.

## News is a verb *and* a noun

News today is a *process of participation* and *of relationships*. News is not just a set of messages, a message system, or a commodity. It is all of that and much more. It is a verb as much as it is a noun. News is multi-player participation in an environment of shared information, influence, access, and circulation. It is connection in many formats in a digisphere whose players are traditional news organisations, social networking sites, journalists professional and amateur, and everyone and everything in between; borrowing from and building on each other through links and hyper-links, using words, sound, and images in social media, on blogs, and on commercial, government-controlled, government-influenced, and non-profit sites. Most importantly for this analysis and for the News Literacy effort, *news* for young people is accessed as a steady stream of information on their (mostly mobile) screens, undifferentiated from other bits with which they are accessing and interacting. Rushkoff's (2013) term *digiphrenia* aptly conveys the "always on" feeling associated with the information onslaught they, and most all of us, experience as nodes on a persistent, de-centralised information grid.

In his detailed examination of the historical use and understanding of the term *information*, media ecologist Strate (2012) discusses the category of news in particular. He traces changes in the concept of news from the printing press to the age of electricity. Beginning with the telegraph, he argues, news radically changed because it transformed into electronic signals, which ushered in our modern conception of news as somewhat discrete bits of information. This easily transmitted, de-contextualised electronic news-as-information practice further developed with radio, then television, leading to information overload and centralised attempts to control it. He points out that, "News relates to information on the content level, and various efforts to analyze news would constitute meta-information on the *relationship* or *medium* level.... information overload gives rise to new methods and technologies to organize, analyze, and synthesize, and otherwise perform the function of control" (Strate 2012, 406, my emphasis). Clearly we have moved on from the centralised electronic radio and TV broadcast media model of information transmission to the de-centralised digital medium of web 2.0. "News" is not just information on the content level, but it has moved beyond centralised control to a stage of constant, de-centralised analysis, organisation and synthesis on the web. It is now, by Strate's definition, almost exclusively meta-information on a relationship or medium level. Anyone can participate in these relationships, in this medium.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that the entirety of relationships and participation in the digital information mix ought to be the focus of news literacy efforts—not continually separating news as its own genre, and not separating medium from message. The mix is an active, flexible online information environment that morphs and links participants in a mutually-inscribed set of relationships. Journalists—self-proclaimed, those with the label bestowed on them, and professionals—along with everyone else who desires can tweet, post, blog, comment and share. Anyone can create their own website and use info-gathering, production and distribution skills to access, circulate and comment as free agents of information about politics, entertainment, issues of advocacy and activism, and so on, from the micro-local to the international.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, it is vital to note that a thoughtful and developed discussion about *quality* and/or *necessity* of information, and the extent to which participants critically evaluate it or their participation in it, while incredibly important, is beyond the scope of this article. The point here is that online an undifferentiated mix exists. News—as we have traditionally defined it—is absorbed into the mix, not separate from it. The information mix is the medium, and vice versa.

This digital information/relationship mix is changing the way many people, particularly adolescents and young adults, understand and relate to the world. When discussing the potential for civic engagement afforded by the digital media mix, and particularly the way young people participate in the emerging digital environment, Allan (2012) describes a new media ecology which he says calls for new ways to think about media literacy and a re-thinking of well-worn conceptual categories in media studies.

Here I build on Strate's conception of news as information on a relationship level, and expand on Allan's argument that we ought to re-cast the way we think about news and about media. We continue to place "news" in its own separate category, but in the News Literacy effort such separation should no longer be considered useful. Educating people to critically understand and participate in the emerging information ecology requires a broader framework than News Literacy typically affords. This broader framework must encompass many different facets of messages and forms alike. Because Web 2.0 bleeds through old barriers, the new media ecology is an information environment of participatory relationships. Continually conceptualising news as a separate genre, journalism as a stand-alone enterprise, and persisting in the content/form dichotomy, no longer helps us to understand how media actually work, how information is constructed and circulated, or how people participate in it. That is not to say that assessments of quality, responsibility, and accuracy are no longer relevant. Rather that this paper suggests a paradigm shift, a re-thinking of genre separation because of how people actually operate on the web, which is made clear by a user-centered perspective.

To illustrate my points, I offer evidence of this need to re-think news as participatory relationships from a user-centered point of view in the emerging digital media ecology. In the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015 I conducted focus group sessions with students from two very different cultures: Brooklyn College in New York City, USA, and Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. In those focus group sessions, five in all with a total of 26 students, all of them ages 20-25, I asked them to talk about how they define news, where they get their news and information, how often, why, and to speculate about other facets of their own relationships with and thoughts on how they think about and participate in information online and across media. I left the categories and questions broad and open-ended to encourage their most open responses.

### Always on; always online

Not surprisingly the conversations with all of the focus group participants revealed that these young people are avid, dedicated participants in the digisphere, and that news, *per se*, is not necessarily a separate category for them, though it took some probing to make that clear. Students were initially asked "How often do you attend to news?" but it soon became clear that the question, posed in this way, triggered them to think about formal, traditional news sources, such as CNN or *Hurriyet*, or *The New York Times* online. The answers varied from "About one hour a day," to "two to 2 ½ hours a day," to "I don't seek out news very much." However, as we continued the conversation, most of the American and Turkish students in all of the groups revealed that they were on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Eksi Sozluk (like the Turkish Reddit, I was told) or using apps such as Pulse or Zeta almost all of the time, checking in constantly, getting updates, and circulating their contributions or re-sending links on a variety of issues in a constant stream of information—whether the topics fell within what they considered the traditional confines of news or outside of it.

When asked what they were attending to specifically on these sites, the students indicated a wide range of areas, including politics, the arts, entertainment, gossip, comedy, local events and issues, and so on. These were all equally accessed, read, commented on and

shared in the individualised, participatory media mix of each of them. Notably, and with the exception of two or three students, all of the sources of information both the Turkish and American students cited were online sources, whether journalistic sources, social networking sites, information aggregating sites or apps. Importantly, for almost all of them smart phones were the devices used to access those sources, though iPads, for some students, were used alongside smart phones as constant digital companions. One student, representing the majority, who kept Facebook, Instagram and Twitter open all at once, said, “I don’t check it every second, but I want it to be in the background, working.” For those few students who consulted sources beyond the web, a few hard copy newspapers—*The New York Times*, *LeMonde*, *Hurriyet*--and some television programs or networks—such as CNN--were named, but these were the exception. Only one or two students read hard copy newspapers at all, and many of the students said that if they watched any news on traditional television sets it was because the TV was on at home and their parents were watching, or it was on in the background during dinner and they had no choice about watching or listening to it. None of the students attended *only* to hard copy newspapers or to traditional television programmes for information. Some of the Turkish students who did watch TV news used the term “double-watching” to describe watching TV at the same time they were online accessing information in an effort to compare perspectives. Overwhelmingly, online sources were considered the gold standard of information of all sorts, the most convenient and most trusted, and they were constantly on, sometimes with several sites and/or apps opened at the same time.

While not a surprising finding, I found it interesting to compare their self-reports of online, mobile-dominant activity with reports from similarly-aged students from New York City who participated in focus group sessions I moderated around similar themes in 2007. At that time students reported seeking information on line, via laptop or desktop computer screens, but used traditional television more frequently, especially for information about major events, and were more apt to read traditional newspapers, if only occasionally. Twitter was not nearly as common then, nor were the kinds of online apps that students use today. Then, none of the students reported an interest in blogging or tweeting (Fry 2008). In only eight years the pace and variety of information participation, including dividing attention across sites and on mobile phones, has increased substantially. This is a very big leap in a very short span of time.

## Seeking diversity amid distrust

In all five focus groups the participants themselves eventually steered the conversation from amount of time spent with information media, to discussing topics that were important to them. Here is where the cultural/national differences became clear, revealing passions and moments of transformation for these young people in their relationship with politics and power, and how they negotiated them in their online participation. The Turkish students were highly keyed in on government control of news, while the American students focused on corporate control of news. Students from both countries expressed a profound skepticism for journalists who work in traditional news organisations, and expressed the need to seek out a wide diversity of opinions and viewpoints, from what they called “authentic” sources whenever possible.

### Turkish students

Clearly, Twitter, for most young people in Turkey, is a significant online medium. The series of Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in the summer of 2013 was for them the defining Twitter moment, a major turning point for the Twitter explosion in Turkey. The Turkish

students in all three of the focus groups said, over and over, that Gezi, 2013, was eye-opening because that was the moment it became blatantly obvious to them that the Turkish government was heavily censoring news. Repeatedly, they cited the now-famous Turkish CNN penguin documentary that ran during the protests, as the ultimate insult (Oktem 2013). For them it has become the metaphor for how the Turkish government created a news “black-out” of the protest, and continues to censor news at will. Despite the government’s best efforts to censor traditional news sources during Gezi, word of the growing protests spread online. Twitter, especially, was giving a completely different version of what was happening, was constantly updating, and that is what almost everyone was using to keep up.

Many of the Turkish students described a stark generational divide in media use and in understanding media bias, both during the Gezi protest period and beyond. They explained that their parents did not believe them when they told them what they were learning via Twitter about the protests in Istanbul. Their parents, they said, disagreed that anything like that could be happening because there was no news about it in the newspapers or on television. It took quite some convincing, and it wasn’t until much later that their parents understood that the government had deliberately censored all traditional news sources from reporting the protests. Realisation of this divide further fueled the students’ passions about government censorship, and strengthened their dedication to Twitter, a dedication still apparent.

All of the Turkish focus group participants reported that they well understood their government offers only very narrow versions of politics across the range of highly partisan Turkish newspapers and TV stations, so the students have turned to a variety of online sources, some journalistic, but many others as well that combine the thoughts and opinions of varied contributors, to follow political events, and to get other kinds of information. When pressed to explain why a variety of online sources was especially important, their replies fell into two basic categories: diversity of opinion and participation. “You become more than a receiver, you become a transmitter,” one student explained. Other responses were similar and, while not all of them confessed to transmitting a lot of their own original political information or insight via Twitter and other sites, they appreciated that many others did. Because of their passion for a range of opinions in light of government censorship, they indicated over and over that a wide variety of voices is necessary and, for them, reading the comments of others, no matter the source, is a way to be objective or to find out the truth. I gleaned from their word choices and overall comments that their active participation in seeking many sources and from gathering information from professionals, citizen journalists and many others allowed them to build an aggregate of information that they themselves could deem “trustworthy,” “faithful” or “objective.” For them, diversity of opinion was equal to objectivity and truth, and it was up to them to do the work to literally construct that truth. This indicates a notable shift in the understanding and use of the terms objectivity and truth, and particularly in the importance of one’s role in seeking them out.

The students’ use of the terms objective and truthful as equal to diverse illustrates Postman’s (1992) argument that, as media technologies shift, and, in turn our cultural ecologies shift, the way we use and understand certain terms also shifts. Traditionally, in the realms of journalism practice and journalism education, the concepts truth, objectivity and reliability, among others, have been held up as measures applicable to individual stories, reports, and messages. But that is not how these students were using those terms. They had re-cast them to mean multiple voices and multiple perspectives. Perhaps like the concept of privacy, the once stalwart concepts of what have been considered good journalism are

shifting, just as the very definition of news has been shifting for some time in line with shifting media technologies (Fry 2008).

### American students

Like their Turkish counterparts, American focus group participants are also very sceptical of traditional news sources and professional journalists as a whole, but their reasons, as reported to me, are different. The American students were clear that “the news” as they repeatedly referred to it in the aggregate, pushed a commercial agenda and they linked that to control. They were aware of, and very much against, the big money behind mainstream news in the U.S, and in their discussions they noted a corporate agenda in the type and quality of news and information found in traditional and online newspapers and television. As one student put it, “when six companies own all of the news, they have people to answer to, they have to answer to financial stockholders.” Like the Turkish students, who focused passionate discussions around one incident - the Gezi Protests - the American students focused their passions in discussions around the Ferguson, Missouri Michael Brown shooting and ensuing protest activities, and around Ebola, an international news story with wide circulation and interest in American - and specifically New York - media in 2014. The American students were clear, on the whole, that relying on traditional news sources was problematic in both instances because of the inherent corporate bias of mainstream journalism, and, like the Turkish students, indicated that getting insights from many other people involved in both cases leads to a better understanding of the issues, all of which were personal for them. If they wanted to know the truth, they needed to get beyond the corporate news with its limited commercial agenda. “Taboo subjects don’t make it much in the news,” said one student. One student, when talking about the Ferguson, Missouri, outcry after the shooting death of Michal Brown in the summer of 2014, explained: “the job of the news is to paint an image, to paint a picture of how to handle it [information about the protests] ... to keep us docile.” Another one chimed in, “they were stalling for time, to keep us cool.” “It’s [the news] there to placate biases. Things work well when everyone’s in their own bubble.” Referring to what he saw as a lapse in responsibility on the part of news organisations in general, another student said, “it’s no longer genuine journalism. They painted Mike Brown as a thug, the pictures they chose... photos that portray him negatively.” On a related note, but hinting at a possible opposite news manipulation for commercial gain in Ebola reporting during the summer and fall of 2014, one student said, “there’s a lot of money in fear, so if everyone’s going out to buy masks, etc., that’s the effect they want to have.” This was in response to what she considered hyperbolic Ebola news reporting.

To counter-act the limited agenda and control exerted in mainstream media, students consulted Instagram and Facebook for information on Ferguson. “I believe in the civilians more than I believe the companies,” said one student, referring to her use of Instagram to get information from actual Ferguson residents. “They’re on the ground, and I’m more for their agenda.” Another said, “I prefer the social media sites [mostly Instagram] because the commercial news has a bias... people on the ground are more trustworthy—authentic.” And while most of the students acknowledged the need to get some basic information and facts from traditional sources, especially for international news, they agreed that one cannot stop there. One student summed it up when she said, “you’ve got to do your research,” referring to the need to consult many different sources. In their scepticism of traditional journalism and journalists, and in their recognition that they needed to access a variety of sources, including especially non-journalistic sources, and that it required their active participation, American and Turkish students were very much the same.

Though the cultural circumstances and issues of major importance were different for the

Turkish students than for the American students, both groups indicated a sense of urgency tinged with hopelessness. All of the students vocalised passion for certain issues with which they closely identified, and at the same time indicated an acute awareness, and scepticism, of all-encompassing forms of control over their formal news structures, especially regarding those very issues. While they expressed a need, even a responsibility, to check sources on their own, to aggregate information themselves, and to become participants in the information mix, students from both countries indicated that the web, even with its multiplicity of sources and opportunities for participation, has its limitations, sometimes severe.

### Acknowledging limitations of the web

Turkish and the American students both discussed the importance of Instagram and Facebook as important sources of information. Turkish students reported being more active on Twitter than did American students, and both sets of students cited a variety of social media apps that called for their attention during most of each day to keep them up to date on a variety of issues: personal, entertaining and informational. While they relied on all of these sources, they acknowledged that some were better than others in the quest for varied opinions around some events and issues, and that one needed to be as careful and selective when assessing information from these sources as they were in assessing professional journalistic sources. But there was a big difference between the two sets of students in terms of their reasons for exercising caution in their online access and participation. American students cited the need to be cautious because of the quality of information across social media sites; Turkish students cited a similar concern, but more often cited fear of government retaliation because of social media sites.

While American students valued full participation on the web for the variety of perspectives, to which they could contribute, they also understood that the mix of information on social media sites, in particular, could be suspect, depending upon the topic. In this regard they showed an interesting contradiction in their responses about social media. “It’s [social media] too accessible. People can do or say as they please,” reported one student, while another student, discussing the postings around Ferguson, especially, said “social media is not the best place for it [reliable information] because people post stupid stuff and it feeds arguments.” When Ebola information was rampant across U.S. media, one student said, “there was a lot of garbage circulating out there.” Overall, the American students appreciated accessing and contributing to social media around major events, indicating the need for that access, but realised it required the same amount of caution as journalistic news sources, but for different reasons.

Turkish students expressed similar caution, but focused that caution on a different source. They largely agreed that Facebook, especially, only gives them a certain range of opinions and access because it is a narrower pool of their “friends” which makes it more selective and less diverse than Twitter. That is why Twitter has been such an important source for the most varied, reliable and up-to-date information. But, ironically, Twitter was also cited as potentially the most dangerous site, precisely because contributions (tweets) oftentimes run counter to official government reports (or non-reports) of news. “Sometimes people are intimidated or receive warnings on Twitter,” said one student, summing up the comments of many of them as the discussion veered toward the growing number of cases, which students divulged in detail, where individual Twitter accounts have been hacked and/or shut down by Turkish government mandate because of postings that were considered politically sensitive, inflammatory or disrespectful to the administration. Indeed,

students in all of the Turkish focus groups told me that their parents often warn them, sometimes beg them, not to post political messages on Twitter or other social media sites for fear they will be hacked, fined, or worse. This fear is virtually unknown by American students who enjoy strong freedom of speech and did not express any fear of reprisal, governmental or otherwise.

### A different news literacy, or no news literacy?

These focus group discussions as a whole demonstrated a number of crucial points. Young people are active and heavy participants in the new media ecology of information. They spend countless hours with mobile devices interacting simultaneously with various social media sites and apps, seeking, critically assessing, and commenting on a steady stream of information, while engaging in other tasks at the same time. News for them is not accessed separately, though they describe “news” as a separate genre and in negative terms. Reliability and truth are very important to them, but to be found outside of what they consider traditional news, and necessary for them to come to on their own, as a part of their participatory practice which includes aggregating opinion and perspective from many different sources, including mostly non-journalistic sources. Students from both countries use and revere social media and the web yet, when pressed, report a sense of caution about overall reliability or safety there. The reasons for their caution vary because of the very different cultural and political climates of their respective countries. As an education effort, News Literacy ought to take note of these points. At the very least News Literacy educators must drop any pretense of upholding traditional standards of journalism as their primary goal if they really want to reach young people.

I agree with Hobbs’s assessment that News Literacy ought not be about journalists telling war stories, or romanticising ideals of journalism. She argues that News Literacy programs “must focus on building learners’ critical thinking and creative communication skills (Niemann Reports, June 9, 2011).” Judging from the comments of the American and Turkish students in these five focus groups, there is no lack of desire for critical thinking, but their criticisms were unevenly distributed, at times contradictory, and not applied with analytic rigor. Highly sceptical of mainstream news, of corporations and of government, these students were clear that information shaped by any of these was to be evaluated alongside alternate sources, many of which they considered more authentic, and their own thoughts and opinions were to be included in that mix. Journalism, for these students, is suspect, but at times so is the web as a whole. There is reason for concern, as Mihailidis (2009) indicated, that scepticism has crossed into cynicism.

In light of this scepticism, in light of the vastly changing news landscape of always-on connection, and in light of the reality of the constant stream of participatory information and intertwined relationships in the current media ecology, I propose two essential and interrelated considerations for News Literacy. The first is to move away from maintaining News Literacy as a separate movement; and the second, a part of that, is to continue developing a comprehensive Media Literacy, one that understands the new media ecology and the way in which participants are engaged in it.

Perhaps there are those who wish to maintain the distinction between News Literacy and Media literacy because they identify news as a specific and separate genre form, in the legacy tradition, or because people are still trained in the profession of journalism. Perhaps for them there is too much at stake not to maintain a distinction: financially, traditionally, even culturally. I propose that some News Literacy educators examine the ways in which they continue to fetishise news as a separate genre, and cling to standards of journalism

that do not resonate with young people today. Clearly, we will always need touchstones of reliable, balanced information because our American Democracy demands an informed electorate, and so does everyone else, everywhere else. But realistically, the divide between theoretically “being informed” and the way corporate or government controlled journalism *actually* informs is, at times, laughably large, and young people are well aware of that. We media educators need to admit it, because in doing so we no longer ignore the way people actually participate with, integrate, talk about, and seek out information of all sorts. It’s not the genre that requires our focus, it’s the activity around it—the users. This doesn’t mean journalism as an enterprise should not be recognised at all, or is going away. It means that people who want to encourage critical thinking about the entire landscape of mediated information need to recognise that young people think about it and engage with it in vastly new ways, partly because of what they see as lack of reliability, but mostly because digital media demand new rules of engagement.

In the interest of both simplification and rigour, instead of continuing with our separations, we should focus on putting all our educational efforts into further developing the all-encompassing, rigorous Media Literacy movement. Participants in web 2.0, like these students, need a kind of Media Literacy education that will help them to focus their sceptical energies and develop a truly critical voice of empowerment. They need to understand how their understanding of the world as a whole is heavily influenced by digital media, how their lives are organised around the information flow and the ways in which they participate in it. True empowerment comes from a comprehensive critical understanding about and engagement with all media, with messages and forms, as well as the ability to understand how to most effectively participate in the whole information mix.

As this study makes clear, a comprehensive Media Literacy endeavour must also include regional and cultural differences. These focus group results show a clear difference between the concerns of American students and Turkish students because of their very different political and media cultures. They differ in how they understood and react to information control, and how they participate in the information mix, using caution and making assessments based on their cultural circumstances. Media Literacy must not be a one-size-fits-all enterprise, but tailored to the needs and realities of the communities in question, and preferably led by them as well (Fry 2014). There is a media ecological shift occurring, and, from the user perspective, it demands a re-thinking of the genre category called news. On the heels of that, a re-thinking of the educational endeavor called News Literacy. We need comprehensive *Media Literacy* to grapple with the whole ecological shift. If we are truly interested in helping to educate a critical mass of media users in this differentiated, complex media-saturated cultural ecology, we must begin by putting their perspectives before our own.

#### Endnotes:

For now this is the case in the United States. I am aware that freedom of web participation differs widely country by country, and changes within countries from time to time. I also acknowledge current threats to net neutrality which could change issues of net access quickly, in the United States and elsewhere.

Here I acknowledge that, obviously, news is not just found on the web. But, all major, and most minor, traditional print and broadcast news outlets today have a web presence, and have conformed their formats to the demands of the web, including becoming more participatory. Therefore, it is safe to say that the internet now has re-defined the practices of newsgathering and distribution (Robinson 2009).

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# From print newspapers to social media: news literacy in a networked environment

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**Abstract:** By devising critical news literacy frameworks centered on networked environments, this article will evaluate the benefits and drawbacks associated with new informational sources, as well as their emerging symbiotic relationship. Studies on generational changes in news acquisition tend to dichotomise each medium (print vs. social media) along old vs. new technology and trends. Rather than create artificial dualisms between old media / traditional journalism and new media / emerging social media, the approach herein offers a more complicated and nuanced notion of critical news literacy. News literacy models must acknowledge and address the porosity of legacy news outlets and social media as they work symbiotically in the Digital Age to distribute and constitute contemporary forms of news and networks.

The goal is to widen the scope of news literacy paradigms to better address the transformational shifts that are occurring within the production and dissemination of news in society. Using a critical approach, news literacy must carefully consider the gains of local-to-global news enabled through social media and networked environments, as well as how the loss of traditional print newspapers may affect the viability of an informed and engaged citizenry as the virtual transformation of society is rapidly altering the fabric of American democracy. Similarly, news literacy requires a critical understanding of internet access and the digital divide in order to address how the rising prominence of information in the digital age impacts those who do not have the social and economic affordances of technology in their daily work and life.

**Keywords:** News literacy, civic journalism, social media, newspapers, democracy, networked environments, digital divide.

## Introduction

The rapid emergence of social media technologies, mobile phones, wikis and video sharing systems such as YouTube have undoubtedly altered the production and distribution of news. On February 26, 2009, the social networking site