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# Journalism Education

**Journalism Education** is the journal of the Association for Journalism Education a body representing educators in HE in the UK and Ireland. The aim of the journal is to promote and develop analysis and understanding of journalism education and of journalism, particularly when that is related to journalism education.

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# Contributors

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Paul Mihailidis is an associate professor in the school of communication at Emerson College in Boston, MA, where he teaches media literacy and civic media. He is also Principle Investigator and Co-Director of the Engagement Lab at Emerson College, and Director of the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change. His research focuses on the nexus of media, education, and civic voices. His newest book, *Media Literacy and the Emerging Citizen* (2014), outlines effective practices for participatory citizenship and engagement in digital culture. Under his direction, the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change, a global media literacy incubator program, annually gathers 75 students and a dozen faculty to build networks for media innovation, civic voices and global change. Mihailidis has authored numerous books and papers exploring civic media, and traveled around the world speaking about media and engagement in digital culture. He earned his PhD from the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park.

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### Julie Frechette

Julie Frechette, (PhD) is Professor of Communication at Worcester State University, Worcester, MA, where she teaches courses on media studies, critical cultural studies, media education, and gender representations. She is the co-editor and co-author of *Media Education for a Digital Generation* (Routledge, 2016) and *Media In Society* (Bedford / St. Martin's Press, 2014). Her book, *Developing Media Literacy in Cyberspace* (Praeger Press, 2002), was among the first to explore the multiple literacies approach for the digital age. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on media literacy, critical cultural studies, and gender and media. She serves as Co-President for the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME).

### Megan Fromm

Megan Fromm is an assistant professor of mass communication at Colorado Mesa University. She is the director of educational initiatives for the Journalism Education Association and specializes in scholastic journalism education, press law, and news and media literacy. Fromm is also faculty for the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change, a summer media literacy study abroad program in Austria. Fromm received her Ph.D. in Journalism and Public Communication from the University of Maryland at College Park. Her first textbook, *Scholastic Journalism and Media Literacy*, co-authored with high school journalism experts H.L. Hall and Aaron Manfull, was published in 2014.

### Katherine G. Fry

Katherine G. Fry is Professor of Media Studies, Chair of the Dept. of Television and Radio at Brooklyn College, and recent Fulbright recipient to Turkey. Her most recent research, teaching, and publications have been in news literacy, news criticism, media ecology, and media literacy. She's lectured internationally, and is Co-founder and former Education Director of The LAMP, a grass-roots media literacy organization in New York City.

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Joy Jenkins is a Ph.D. candidate in journalism at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Her research focuses on studying shifts in the media environment from a sociology-of-news perspective, specifically the changing roles of editors in newsrooms; the potential of news organizations to spur social change, particularly in urban contexts; and the evolution of magazine journalism. Her work has been published in journals including *Journalism Studies*; *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Critique*; and *Journalism Practice*.

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Masato Kajimoto (PhD) is an Assistant Professor at the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at the University of Hong Kong. Dr. Kajimoto specializes in international news literacy education, multimedia storytelling and social media in journalism. He heads the Asia Pacific Digital Citizens Project at the university as the project leader. His recent research focused on the influence of social and political climate on the pedagogical design and implementation of news literacy curricula in Asia. He also taught a Massive Open Online Course on news literacy on edX under the title Making Sense of News. Before beginning a career in teaching and research, he worked as an online reporter and a web producer for CNN International.

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Mariska Kleemans is assistant professor at Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University. Her re-

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## Michael Koliska

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## Ed Madison

Ed Madison's multifaceted career began as a high school intern at the CBS television affiliate in Washington, D.C. during the Watergate scandal. Shortly after graduating from Emerson College in Boston, at age 22, he became a founding producer at CNN. Madison holds a Ph.D. from the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon, where he is an assistant professor. He is also an Apple Distinguished Educator. His current book is *Newsworthy – Cultivating Critical Thinkers, Readers, and Writers in Language Arts Classrooms*, from Columbia University Teachers College Press.

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## Wendy W. Wallace

Wendy W. Wallace is director of the High School Journalism Program at The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla. She is also Poynter's grants manager. Wendy came to Poynter from the *St. Petersburg Times*, now the *Tampa Bay Times*, where she worked as a reporter, copy editor and marketing manager. Wendy is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Indiana University and former editor of the *Indiana Daily Student* and of her high school newspaper, the *Kirkwood (Mo.) Call*.

# Exploring News Literacy: Preparing future journalists – and citizens – for engagement in global digital culture

## Special Issue of *Journalism Education*: Editor's Introduction

Paul Mihailidis, Emerson College, Boston, USA

In September of 2014 in Chicago, the Poynter Institute in partnership with the McCormick Foundation, brought together more than 100 participants for a News Literacy Summit, where researchers, educators, practitioners and funders gathered to set the course of practice, pedagogy and research in news literacy.

The summit highlighted some cutting edge work being done in classrooms, in communities and in universities. Central to these conversations were best practices for teaching future journalists—and citizens—about critical engagement in the news landscape in contemporary digital culture. Scholars at this gathering presented findings from research exploring where news literacy exists, how it's taught and evaluated, and how new technologies are impacting the ecosystem for news.

The summit was rich in exploration, dialog and in critical reflection. Many voices had the chance to engage in direct dialog about best approaches to teaching, learning, and investigating news and information in today's digital landscape. Of course, along with the gathering of diverse voices came a seemingly needed but longstanding conversation about the continued contesting of terminologies, definitions, approaches, stakeholders and outcomes. Differences emerged at the mere notion of what we should call "news literacy," who should be responsible for defining what belongs and does not belong in that umbrella, how traditional news and journalistic structures approach news literacy, and how far back work in this area has been happening.<sup>1</sup> It is not the premise of this introduction, or special issue, to tackle these debates directly, but to acknowledge that such tensions can be inherently beneficial to an emerging space of study and practice. Specifically in the ability to frame dialog around the new knowledge sets that explore how best to equip a populace with the skills and dispositions to be more involved in the news making and reception processes on local, national and global scales. The two figures below (see Figure One & Figure Two) present unique if not distinct portraits of how news literacy can effectively leverage similar discourses in the literacies for growth and expansion of impact. In *News Literacy: Global Approaches to the Newsroom and the Classroom* (2012), I set about to broaden the discussion of how we understand news and global society in an emerging digital media landscape. In that book, composed largely when "connective" technologies were just emerging,

<sup>1</sup> The debate is framed generally between those that see the beginning of the news literacy movement 10 years ago with the first large grant and creation of a *Center for News Literacy* at Stony Brook University in New York, while others seeing the trajectory of news literacy for decades and beyond, with research into the myriad of ways that news has been taught in and outside of the classroom, but under various titles, such as journalism education, media literacy, screen education, and so on.

## Figure One: Concentric circles of News Literacy. *Graphic by Peter Levine*

Source: <https://engagementamelab.wordpress.com/2014/09/28/seeking-coherence-reflections-on-the-national-news-literacy-summit/>

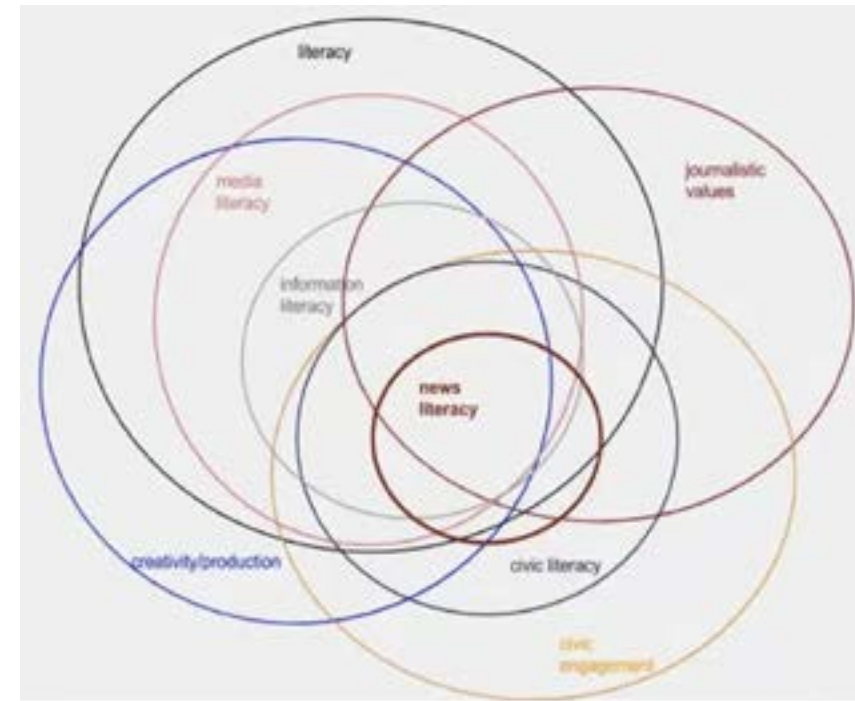
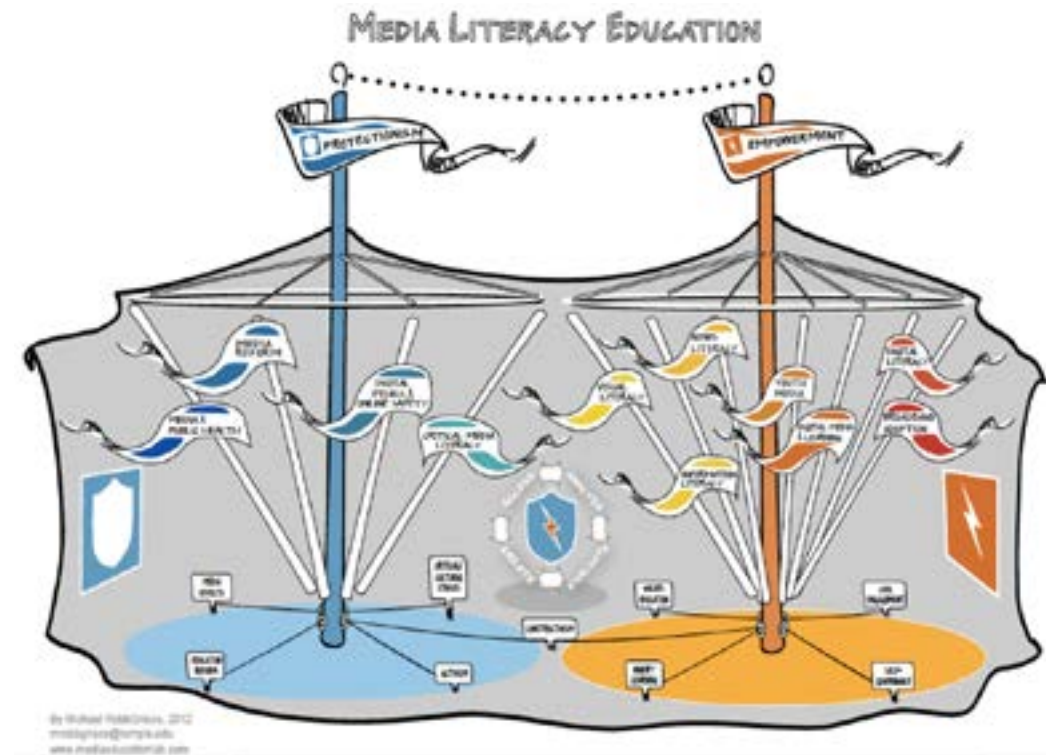


Figure Two: Media Literacy's Big Tent by Michael Robb Grieco & Renee Hobbs. Source: <https://mediaedlab.com/2013/07/28/media-literacy-s-big-tent-at-namle-2013/>



I outlined my thinking of news literacy as:

“...is seen as a subset of media literacy: the core concepts developed in the media literacy movement as applied directly to news. News, in this sense, adopts a traditional formulation of civic information about current affairs, and community issues relevant to awareness, engagement, and participation in local democratic processes. The result is a focus on how comprehension, evaluation, analysis, and production of news can help enable better teaching and learning strategies for more empowered, tolerant, aware, and active participants in 21<sup>st</sup> century civic democracy.” (Mihailidis, 2011, 4).

This special issue of *Journalism Education* builds on the key frameworks explored at the 2014 news literacy summit, and the work done before that, with the specific goal of expanding and diversifying meaningful conversations about news literacy teaching, research and practice. This includes news literacy’s relationship to journalists and the journalism industry, but also to the myriad of ways that technologies, practices, and designs are redefining news and information in global digital culture. At the same time, the collection of essays and articles here are meant to highlight the collective value of the diverse and rigorous work being done in the space of news literacy today. I’ve listed a few guiding principles for this special issue:

*Participation Matters* – Theories of participation in contemporary digital culture (Jenkins, 2006), and specifically participation in the news process (Gil de Zúñiga et al, 2012) are no longer questioned as central to discussions about news and information habits today. The proliferation of connective technologies and reliance on social networks for news consumption has led to a new reality for thinking about critical evaluation, assessment and inquiry around news. In the context of participation being a default behavior in digital culture, research featured in this issue explores the role of civic participation in news as much as the critical reception of news.

*Appropriation Matters* – Beyond the act of participation in general, news literacy explorations in this issue think about the ways in which citizens appropriate news and information. Appropriation, in this sense, alludes to a personalization, a remixing or retelling of news and information, and the sense of agency that accompanies these acts. Lawrence Lessig (2010) has detailed the role of remix in promoting the *democratization of innovation, creativity and creation*, and *freedom* to have access and share culture. This necessarily incorporates the role of the news curation by citizens in their personal online spaces (Mihailidis 2016), and how that monitoring, sifting, selecting and re-appropriating impacts news flow in general.

*Storytelling Matters* – Perhaps above all, embedded in the articles of this issue is the core function of storytelling. Many of the research pieces here acknowledge the changing nature of journalistic inquiry, information gathering and dissemination. As news becomes embedded in the daily information and communication habits of citizens, storytellers, or journalists, as authors argue, need to become multimodal storytellers, engaging their work at multiple touch points in the digital ecosystem. The continued growth of organizations like Buzzfeed, Vice, and Huffington Post for news content, and Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, and Reddit for news dialog and appropriation, affirms the need for consideration of how storytelling mechanisms reinforce news literacy education and practice.

This journal issue is separated into four sections. *Invited essays*, written from the academic, organizational, development, and professional perspectives, provide unique perspectives into key issues in news literacy through distinct questions that are guiding each author’s work in this space. In the *critical perspectives* section, the essays provide “big picture” inquiries into framing debates in news literacy, offering deep explorations into the historical, contextual and cultural issues that are defining key academic debates in news literacy today. From exploring evaluation studies into youth production of news and

learning about news in secondary and higher education, to surveys and pilot study that offer field assessments of curricular, philanthropic and capacity-building, the *research section* provides rich inquiries into what is happening in the classroom and beyond. Lastly, the *looking forward* section offers provocative insights into what opportunities and constraints exist for news literacy research, teaching and practice going forward. They leave us with some critical questions to consider, about the direction of news literacy research, pedagogy and practice.

News literacy is a growing space. Just in the last decade we’ve witnessed a burgeoning movement responding to a rapidly changing landscape for news and its role in contemporary civic life. I believe the growth of news literacy mirrors the growing uncertainty about the ways in which news will be disseminated, received, and supported, both structurally and process-wise. And in my opinion that uncertainty, while alarming in the short term, offers opportunities for a reinvention of the future. This special issue is an attempt to help support the new technologies, practices and designs that will facilitate a future of vibrant, inclusive and critical news literacy practice and research.

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# Invited essays

This edition's guest editors invited essays from key practitioners and academics on the theme of preparing future journalists - and citizens - for engagement in global digital culture.

## The very old and very new challenge of news literacy

Stephanie Craft, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

*"News comes from a distance; it comes helter-skelter in inconceivable confusion; it deals with matters that are not easily understood; it arrives and is assimilated by busy and tired people who must take what is given to them."*<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 100 years ago, when Walter Lippmann published his accounts of the immense difficulties of reconciling "the world outside and the pictures in our heads," most news came "from a distance" via newspapers and magazines.

And yet, even with this limited range and number of news purveyors, in *Liberty and the News* and, later, the highly influential *Public Opinion*, Lippmann describes "inconceivable confusion" among the busy and tired people who had to make sense of it. Lippmann's earlier career included a stint as a propagandist (and a very successful one) for the Creel Committee during the First World War, so he knew something about the construction of messages and the many forces along the path from sender to receiver that could shape their meaning, rendering the world outside opaque and unknowable. How was democracy going to work, Lippmann wondered, if people were incapable of being adequately informed about important issues? Indeed, Lippmann's view seemed so dire that John Dewey called *Public Opinion* "perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived ever penned."<sup>2</sup>

Everything—and nothing—has changed since then. Certainly the world must have seemed a complicated, confusing place in the newly industrialised, post-war era in which

*Public Opinion* appeared. Our present time is no less complicated, in either perception or reality. What's a bit startling, however, is how momentous change in one area—namely, the revolutionary expansion of mass communication capabilities—seems to have altered the experience of those busy and tired people so little. Yes, people can contribute to and engage with the news stream in ways that were impossible before. But that doesn't change the fact that for issues and events happening outside their direct experience, people still "must take what is given to them" by the news media and try to make sense of it. That task is arguably more, not less, difficult with the proliferation of sources and platforms.

Comparing Lippmann's words with today's realities isn't just a way of noting the old saying about how the more things change the more they stay the same (though it certainly does that too). Rather, I want to think more about how Lippmann's views might be useful as we consider where news literacy has been and is, or ought to be, going.

My research collaborators, Seth Ashley and Adam Maksl, and I began our work in news literacy with what we thought would be an answerable question: What is it? If we could define it, then maybe we could measure it. And if we could measure it, then we would have done something useful for researchers interested in investigating relationships between news literacy and other civically important things, such as political participation, as well as for educators who were developing curricula and programs and wanted to evaluate their effectiveness. It all seemed pretty straightforward.

Our initial theorizing regarding the "what is news literacy" question focused more on the "literacy" part than the "news" part. If literacy encompasses the ability to analyse and interpret news messages, then what might someone need to know about news to analyse and interpret it? This is a somewhat odd way to think about news, which is generally considered successful to the extent it doesn't require much analysing. It is designed to be taken at face value. Many people, especially those coming from the world of professional journalism, often define news literacy in terms that reflect this "face value" notion. In this view, news literacy is the ability to distinguish "real" news from the burgeoning numbers of imitators that might look like works of journalism on the surface, but are not the products of journalistic practices involving verification and so on. This definition influenced our thinking, and we began to consider news literacy in the context of—and as a product of—professional journalism. What does one need to know about the system that produces news to be able to interpret that news? In addition, we were thinking about journalism in terms of the roles it plays and the consequent responsibilities it has in a democracy. Those were, after all, the things that made news literacy important in the first place, it seemed to us.

All of this led us, early on, to spin our wheels a bit. We were looking at what people knew about what journalism *should* do. (It turns out that the college students who were the participants in that early research knew, or could at least guess, the "correct" answers about that.) While that's good to know, it wasn't really helping us figure out if they knew enough about how professional journalism *actually* works to be able to analyse the news messages it produces. Our next steps, then, focused more on identifying the tools someone might bring to the task of analysing news messages, and less on whether and how someone appreciates those messages. We adapted a model of media literacy that had never been operationalised before to create the News Media Literacy scale, which combines items measuring knowledge about the news media system (among other things) with items addressing psychological traits and motivations relevant to interpreting the news.

Doing this was not without controversy. The rich, if somewhat conceptually scattered, media literacy literature informing our work has been dismissed by some journalists as too ideological, too critical of journalism. For example, the idea that knowing about the commercial underpinnings and pressures of the media system might be important in in-



terpreting news rankled some of those closely aligned with the journalism industry. In addition, including psychological measures seemed too far afield. In some ways, this reflects a desire to focus on NEWS literacy more than news LITERACY. Which brings us back to Lippmann.

“We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception.”<sup>3</sup>

Lippmann, applying insights from the then-relatively new field of social psychology, described how stereotypes and blind spots work to filter and skew our interpretation of mass media messages. Remember, this is at a time when there were fewer news sources and it was far easier to make some sort of determination about any source’s credibility than it is today. So the problem Lippmann is identifying has almost nothing to do with message sources and everything to do with limits on our interpretive abilities. To me, that suggests that the focus of news literacy ought to be less on distinguishing among news sources and more on how the ways we get news—mediated by technologies, a host of institutional and organisational forces and our own psychological tools—shapes our understanding. And if we adjust our focus in that way, news literacy research and practice also need to make sure the scope is broader than professional journalism and the definitions of news more inclusive. In the end, that might mean news literacy is perhaps less distinct from media literacy than some might desire. But I think it could be better positioned to help citizens handle the challenges to democratic decision-making Lippmann identified all those years ago.

## References

- 1 Lippmann, W. (1920). *Liberty and the News*. New York: The Free Press, p. 5.
- 2 Dewey, J. (1922). “Public Opinion,” *The New Republic* 30 (May 3), p. 286.
- 3 Lippmann, W. (1922/1965). *Public Opinion*. New York: The Free Press, p. 59.

# Why - and how - news publishers worldwide help with news literacy

**By Aralynn Abare McMane, PhD, Executive director for youth engagement and news literacy, The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Paris**

**When 34 journalists were killed while covering a Philippine election, Raia and Ruel Landicho, publishers of two small weeklies in the region of the deadly attack, organized a day of free workshops at their Sinag printing plant to help local youth understand the role of a free press. Ruel said at the time, “We believe that in a time when press freedom is being attacked in our country... it is important to teach our youth that journalism is a noble profession.” They expected perhaps one hundred participants. One thousand attended.**

Such publisher commitment to news literacy is essential, deserves to be honoured and should be copied. So it was that the Landicos’ initiative won a World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) World Young Reader Prize in 2011.

A unique strength of news literacy comes from its origins in journalism and journalists, with the natural emphasis on informed questioning of all information. That said, an understanding of how journalism works, the dangers to some of those who do it, and its purpose in encouraging democracy all need to be at the start of any news literacy (or media literacy) activity, well before the classic deconstruction of media messages.

That philosophy was reinforced for WAN-IFRA after inviting Paul Mihailidis, director of the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change and an editor of this volume, to report to WAN-IFRA in 2008 about the results of an experiment involving a University of Maryland media literacy course. He found that while the course did a good job of training students to be critical thinkers about media messages, it also left them become highly cynical about and media and about the role of journalism in a democracy (Mihailidis 2008).

That course has been repaired, but there remains a challenge elsewhere that in the name of “media literacy” quality journalism becomes demonized if we are not very, very careful. Or, the central watchdog role of news media can be ignored, which is the case in one state-of-the-art media lab in Central Europe where the only mention of this role by nongovernment news media is that the fines imposed on them contribute to facility’s operating costs.

WAN-IFRA encourages its constituency of online and print news publishers around the world to concentrate on helping local educators with some crucial, platform-agnostic elements of news literacy:

- > An understanding of the relationship between freedom of expression and freedom of the press and the importance and fragility of both.
- > A chance to come face-to-face with the work of journalism through interaction with the people who do it.
- > An opportunity to sample doing journalism, even for a few hours, to practice some reporter skills that will also serve in strengthening news participation, consumption and sharing.

This work recognizes and publicizes excellence in these areas and others by news pub-

lishers in our annual World Young Reader Prize awards, encourages school-publisher partnerships that teach news literacy while giving some value added to publishers, and offers basic resources to adapt to local conditions.

In the long term, news literacy work by publishers often works best as a joint effort. To encourage this approach, WAN-IFRA has designated 16 of its member news media associations as “Centers of Youth Engagement Excellence” for their effective, enduring and evolving programs and groundbreaking activities to help young people better use and navigate the news. These centres are in Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Norway, The Netherlands, and the USA.

Their actions vary but all have the goal of promoting news literacy. For example, The Netherlands has organized a traveling Road Show of face-to-face student-journalist debates about freedom of expression. Finland just did new research on how 13- to 15-year-olds assess the reliability of various sources and then created new tools for examining source criticism in news and in social media and how journalism differs from other kinds of content.

Sometimes a joint global initiative can help newsrooms connect in new ways with local young people. One recent WAN-IFRA global campaign challenged editors to give control of some or even the entire main news offer as part of a “World Teenage News Takeover,” with the help of a guide explaining how others had done so. Editors reported an appreciation of the students, and the students got an up-close-and-personal understanding of how hard it can be to get it right when doing news work. The guide for the campaign detailed how publishers in five countries had approached the idea. A second WAN-IFRA guide outside the campaign - based on a Finnish original - offers help for the reverse activity: a journalist going into the classroom.

Some news literacy practitioners emphasize that they are not in the business of teaching journalism. However, offering children and teenagers the chance to do professional journalism for an hour, a day or a week provides very memorable lessons. Reporting is fun, scary and demanding, and there’s nothing like trying it even for a very short time to appreciate all of that. Newsrooms staffs also learn from this activity as working with young people breaks stereotypes about them. One recent WAN-IFRA international project aimed to do both: The My Dream Interview Festival. The initiative was first done nationally in Hungary and Chile by two of WAN-IFRA’s Centers of Excellence. In the WAN-IFRA international version, teachers in eight other countries used a special guide for teaching about journalistic interviews to help groups of teenagers create interview questions for someone inspiring to them. A partner local newspaper chose the best set of questions, helped make the interview happen and published the result. Few students chose to talk to the film and music stars or athletes they were assumed to admire. Instead, they tended toward activists as the people about whom they wanted to learn more.

All of this activity is part of a continuing effort to encourage news publishers to take young people seriously and to help them learn about news: what it is, who does it, its limitations, its power and how they can get involved. We do this because we believe it’s good for their businesses, good for journalism and good for creating civic-minded, media-savvy citizens who can create and encourage a democratic way of life all over the world.

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# News literacy: Ever had someone say, ‘I’ll know it when I see it’?

## Or When news literacy takes center stage

### Wendy Wallace, Faculty, Grants Manager, Poynter Institute

**My son joined me recently at a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prizes. The evening event, organized by The Poynter Institute, chronicled the impact of social justice journalism through the decades. We heard how white newspaper editors in the South took stands against segregation and decried lynchings and brutality, risking their livelihoods and their safety for what they knew was right.**

On the way home, my son shared how impressed he was, how moved and inspired. This from a 15-year-old who dozed off during a Cirque du Soleil acrobatics and special effects arena show a few weeks before.

A student of history, he knew the context for these discrete acts of bravery but not these details. I doubt he had given thought to the role journalism played in influencing or accelerating change. The passion of the editors, the power of their language and the visceral nature of the images on the screen above the stage captivated him.

I thought then how powerful that message would be for young people -- even old people -- everywhere as news organizations struggle to find sustainability. That night was the most powerful news literacy experience I could have crafted for my son. He heard, saw and felt the impact of journalism and the role of the journalist. Narrators, actors and singers shared the words, music, ideas, enterprise and courage of Pulitzer winners. My son saw how society changed because of brave reporters and editors who wrote about the even braver African-American men and women who dared defy the status quo of segregation and violence.

I reflected on that evening when I read the articles in this journal. Two years ago, I organized a News Literacy Summit for the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. We looked back at five years of news literacy initiatives and tried to galvanize disparate interests to help the movement gain traction. Interest in news literacy was growing, but not fast enough.

My takeaway from hearing the students, teachers, journalists, and advocates for media literacy, news literacy and civic literacy at that summit was that we needed to give educators resources to bring the news into their classrooms and communities. I also came to the realization that student media, a passion of mine since I was my son’s age, could be the Trojan Horse that gets news literacy into the schools. Could we broaden involvement in school media -- engage students across campus through crowdsourced articles and live Tweeting the football game -- so that by acting as journalists they could more fully appreciate journalism?

The articles in this journal reflect good progress since that summit in 2014.

This issue chronicles projects in the United States and around the world to give students real-world journalism experience, as Aralynn McMane and Renee Hobbs describe.

Article authors wrestle with how to teach news literacy and how much “context” should wrap around the skills of sourcing and identifying bias so commonly (and vitally) taught. One study, by Megan Fromm and Caleb O’Brien, began as a precursor to the summit.

Research in this journal depicts young people’s views about journalists and their habits in consuming news.

And more than one piece addresses head on the relationship between news literacy and media literacy, a discussion that generated more than one moment of tension in that hotel meeting room in Chicago.

I wish more students had experienced the Pulitzer event that captivated my son. Not intended as a news literacy event, yet it was - a celebration of journalism and why it matters. We didn’t hear about bias or sourcing, tools for teaching news literacy. It was aspirational. It showed the impact journalism has when done bravely and done right. And isn’t that the lesson? Isn’t that why news matters?

At the event, in an airy 1926 Christian Science church converted to a performing arts hall, an actor performed Atticus Finch’s closing argument from “To Kill a Mockingbird,” a Pulitzer winner for fiction. We heard a troubadour sing, “The times, they are a-changin’,” representing Bob Dylan’s honorary Pulitzer (technically a citation). The evening ended with the Power of Song Community Choir, Congressman John Lewis of Georgia and Poynter Vice President Roy Peter Clark holding hands on stage singing, “We shall overcome,” as the audience sang along.

My son told me on the car ride home he considered joining the group on stage for that finale. Had he, then this erstwhile news literacy event would have converted understanding and appreciation into action. May the work of these researchers and advocates find comparable success.

# How do they keep all this stuff straight?

## Mark Baldwin, Executive Editor, Rockford Register Star and the Journal-Standard

**How do they keep all this stuff straight? That’s my first thought whenever Beloit College releases its annual Mindset List. The list, published each year at the start of the academic year, is a compilation of the cultural touchstones that inform the world view of entering college freshman.**

The Mindset List for members of the Class of 2019, who started college last fall, included these gems:

- They have never licked a postage stamp;
- They have grown up treating Wi-Fi as an entitlement;
- Charlton Heston is recognized for waving a rifle over his head as much as for waving his staff over the Red Sea;
- Color photos have always adorned the front page of The New York Times.

The full list comprises 50 items.

When I started college, in 1975, the list wasn’t nearly so long. The cultural dialogue was dominated by the lingering effects of Watergate and the fall of Saigon. Love was keeping the Captain and Tennille together. Walter Payton was a Chicago Bears rookie. A mechanical shark called Bruce had propelled “Jaws” to the top of the box office.

The Mindset List underscores what most of us understand intuitively — namely, that thanks to digital technology, there’s more information available in more forms than at any time in history. And therein lies a problem.

Not every drop from the digital fire hose is as important as every other. Worse yet, not everything is true. We’ve all seen urban legends whip around the world in seconds.

And that’s why news literacy matters, or ought to matter, to news organizations and the communities they serve.

To be sure, there’s a bit of healthy self-interest involved. A news literate community provides a built-in competitive advantage for our rapidly evolving, multiplatform industry, which faces challenges from competitors whose standards of verification and fair play are nowhere near ours but that attract large audiences nevertheless.

If we can work with local educators to provide students the tools they need to become effective consumers of information, we will plant the seeds for a new, younger audience of news consumers. And so, in Rockford, we’ve assembled a coalition of the willing, drawn from local public and parochial high schools, to work toward embedding news literacy training in their courses.

It simply makes good business sense.

But at least two other values are in play as well that relate directly to the traditional newspaper mission of First Amendment journalism and thought leadership: good citizenship and dialogue.

The skills taught by the news literacy movement are essential to citizenship in a democracy. They boil down to questions we all ought to ask about the information we receive:

- Who created the information?
- Who researched it?
- Is the information designed solely to inform? Persuade? Entertain? Smear?
- What's my own bias? People are wired to seek out information that confirms what they already think.
- What standards are present in terms of sourcing and fairness?
- What's missing? Am I getting a comprehensive report?
- And finally, am I willing to believe the evidence — and to change my mind based on fresh evidence?

These questions aren't a partisan fetish. They ought to be embedded in the DNA of everyone who takes citizenship seriously. After all, it's these questions that enable citizens to exercise their rights under the First Amendment — it's not a stretch to say that the First Amendment assumes a news literate public — and, more generally, as voters.

Talk to public officials as often as my fellow editors and I do, and a common refrain emerges: Too many members of the public form their views of public business, at the local, state and federal levels, based on half-truths and misinformation gleaned from Facebook, Twitter and barstool conversations.

In that environment, productive debate on important public issues becomes nearly impossible — as does the ability to govern. And that leads to a further dividend provided by an investment in news literacy.

The tools of news literacy lay the groundwork for productive civic dialogue, too.

That's been our experience in Rockford, a city of around 150,000 residents 60 miles northwest of Chicago. The community was hard hit by the recession of the 2000s, which worsened the social challenges caused by the decline of old-line manufacturers over the previous 40 years.

We've got high crime and a poverty rate around 25 percent. Throw a stone, and you'll hit a foreclosed home. You get the idea.

Throughout 2015, debate raged over plans to construct an affordable-housing complex in a middle-class residential neighbourhood, part of a broader strategy designed to reduce the concentration of poverty on the city's heavily African-American west side. Many of those expected to move to the new complex live right now in a dilapidated 1960s-era public housing complex operated by the Rockford Housing Authority.

Because the issue of public or affordable housing sat at the nexus of race, class, income inequality and residents' distrust of government, the debate was beyond ugly. In public meetings, angry residents shouted down pleas for civility and understanding. And on social media, the discussion was hateful, and sometime overtly racist.

The low point came at a public meeting in June held in an overcrowded, un-air-conditioned school gym. Backers of the housing development were shouted down. A resident grabbed a mic from Rockford's mayor. The evening was a disaster. The Register Star covered the event, of course, and responded to the chaos with an editorial and column from the executive editor in which we challenged the community to find constructive means of debating the issue.

Coincidentally, early in the year, the Rockford Register Star had been selected by the American Society of News Editors to participate in ASNE's National Community and News Literacy Roundtables Project. It works in communities around the country to identify a challenging local topic and help a diverse array of community leaders, activists, students and residents parse the topic using the tools of news literacy. The end goal is to expand the

community's capacity to think critically about the issue and thereby foster civil discourse.

In Rockford, affordable housing certainly qualified as a challenging topic, so we organized a two-day forum and roundtable to discuss the issue. The first day's session was devoted to interviews by Register Star staff members of key stakeholders who could lay out the facts of the situation.

The following day, the principles of news literacy figured prominently as eight community members representing diverse points of view on housing participated in a structured dialogue designed to uncover shared values, identify sources of factual information versus its less-credible cousins, and teach the community how to have a deep, civilized discussion of the issue. Our goal wasn't to come up with solutions but simply to help people with opposite views engage in a healthy fashion.

By all accounts, the event worked to change the tone and trajectory of the housing discussion. As Ron Clewer, CEO of the Rockford Housing Authority put it:

"The unique approach was not a platform for storytelling or debate, but rather intentional dialogue where participants spoke to and with each other, in a facilitated environment. The end result, while disagreement still existed, fostered understanding."

Particularly poignant feedback came in a letter to the editor, published early in 2016, expressing the wish that the entire housing discussion had begun with our roundtable.

"I think that if we had started with a roundtable, we may have had a different situation now," wrote reader Mike Sartino of Rockford.

Over the next year, the Register Star will double down on its commitment to promoting news literacy, working with partner educators and organizing additional dialogues. In Rockford, news literacy is here to stay.

# Articles

All papers in the Articles section are peer reviewed and discuss the latest research in journalism and journalism education. These are intended to inform, educate and spark debate and discussion. Please join in this debate by going to [www.journalism-education.org](http://www.journalism-education.org) to have your say and find out what others think.

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## The struggle over news literacy: can we include political economic contexts in the emerging field of news literacy?

**Seth Ashley, Boise State University**

**ABSTRACT:** Surging in popularity, news literacy has tended to centre on an understanding of journalistic content and its importance for preserving democratic life. What typically receive less attention are the political, economic and cultural contexts in which news is produced. A focus on content is warranted, but examination of the institutions and structure of news media systems also is essential for developing a full appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of news content. Drawing on literature in media literacy, political economy of media, and media sociology, this paper argues for a context-centred approach to the critical analysis of news content as well as its production and consumption.

**The nascent domain of news literacy has tended to centre on an understanding of journalistic content and its importance for preserving democratic life. When viewed in isolation, news literacy is about exporting the journalistic epistemology to ordinary citizens struggling to navigate daily life: checking facts, evaluating sources, examining evidence.**

Considering the messiness of the digital media landscape, who wouldn't want to train citizens in the ways of the journalist? The information-gathering skills practiced by hard-nosed reporters are vital in the digital age and are surely in need of widespread dissemination. Citizens are better poised to navigate the media landscape in general and the news landscape in particular with these tools of thought and analysis.

But literacy means more than this. Particularly when news literacy is considered in the context of longstanding domains of media literacy and civic literacy, it becomes clear that critical analysis of the information environment requires a deeper understanding of the contexts in which news is produced. The purpose of this article is to advocate for a critical, contextual approach to news literacy that can supplement the increasingly popular content-based approach. Drawing on literature in critical media literacy, political economy of media, and media sociology, this article reviews the connections that must be made and the contexts that must be considered in order to critically analyze news content as well as its production and consumption.

This is not a new question in the context of media literacy, where scholars have long debated the role of political, economic and social contexts in media education (see Hobbs 1998; Lewis and Jhally 1998; Kellner and Share 2005). News literacy thus far has tended to be viewed as an isolated educational endeavour, where a few early adopters and powerful funders have gained significant traction with their particular approach. For the field of news literacy to gain the widespread acceptance it seeks and deserves, the field must be considered in the context of the umbrella discipline of media literacy. It is important to situate this burgeoning area in terms of existing academic literature and debate.

There are many open questions about how to define and teach news literacy, and this article focuses on the topic of political, economic and social contexts. Some educators and practitioners have dismissed or neglected these connections (see Jolly 2014; Key Concepts of News Literacy 2015; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010), but we must have an honest and open consideration of the role of contexts if news literacy is going to legitimise itself as an area worthy of serious study and attention. A decision to omit these contexts from consideration is just as value-laden as a decision to include them, so we need to account for these different values and consider their role in creating an informed and engaged citizenry, which is surely our broadly shared goal.

As Lewis and Jhally wrote regarding media literacy in 1998:

“we are advocating a view that recognizes that the world is always made by someone, and a decision to tolerate the status quo is as political as a more overtly radical act” (Lewis and Jhally 1998, 119).

Accepting the world as it is runs contrary to the purpose of critical thought, which is to question and challenge and - when necessary - to change. It is a fundamental problem with our depoliticized cultures if we pretend to discuss and understand news media messages without discussing the contexts and structures that produce them. Indeed, tolerating the status quo - or worse, altogether ignoring that there is a status quo - is a failure to recognize a fundamental truth about reality and a missed opportunity to engage our students in the world they seek to know.

## What the content-centred approach misses

In their 2010 book *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload*, journalism populists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel call for the introduction of civic and news literacy into middle and high school curricula in order to improve the skills of citizens. They go out of their way to distinguish news literacy from media literacy, dismissing an entire discipline in one fell swoop:

"And by "news literacy," we mean something different from "media literacy," a curriculum developed mostly from a left-leaning perspective that teaches how the media in all its forms manipulates us on behalf of commercial and establishment interests. By "news literacy," we mean the skills of how to "read" the news - the discipline of skeptical knowing." (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010, 202)

This framing is frustrating for many reasons. First of all, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of media literacy, which seeks broadly to empower individuals to question media content and institutions based on a holistic understanding of the media landscape. Media literacy education aims to make individuals aware of their media environments and increase critical thinking about media's constructions of reality. Broadly, media literacy can be defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate" a variety of media messages (Aufderheide and Firestone 1993; Hobbs 2008). More to the point, Christ and Potter (1998) note that media literacy is "more than just the development of certain skills, but also the acquisition of knowledge structures, especially about the media industries, general content patterns, and a broad view of effects" (8). To ignore these contexts is to see only part of the picture.

Kovach and Rosenstiel take a content-centred approach to news literacy as they emphasize the "skills of how to 'read' the news." In their book, they encourage a "skeptical way of knowing" based on six questions:

"What kind of content am I encountering?

Is the information complete; and if not, what is missing?

Who or what are the sources, and why should I believe them?

What evidence is presented, and how was it tested or vetted?

What might be an alternative explanation or understanding?

Am I learning what I need to?" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010, 32)

To be clear, these are great questions, and a great starting point. In *Blur*, the authors build on their previous work in *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (2007), which also aims to transfer to the public the knowledge and skills possessed by good journalists to aid understanding of news messages. The path forward for news literacy is to pair these skills and tools embodied in the content-centred approach with the broader contexts that have long been central to media literacy education.

For most people, news media can offer a key connection to civic life. Anyone who cares about news literacy surely believes in the potential of news to help meet the needs of a democratic society. But it is no secret that news media occasionally miss the mark and provide incomplete or inaccurate portrayals. The "skeptical way of knowing" is a good start but is not sufficient for identifying systemic weaknesses and shortcomings. Any U.S. election cycle demonstrates the need for a contextual approach to understanding the news. Election coverage is typically dominated by image-based narratives and horse-race mentality, with a dearth of attention paid to issues or policies. When nations engage in international conflict, news messages often take an ethnocentric flavor, ignoring conflicting points of view. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrated the difficulty of challenging official perspectives even when conflicting evidence was available. News media offered no

warnings of the financial collapse of 2008 and have demonstrated little desire for accountability in its aftermath. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, news coverage of global warming has been notoriously two-sided, exemplifying the false balance that objectivity often promotes. The collapsing news business has opened up the search for new revenue streams, including the increasingly popular sponsored content and paid posts. For people who get news from social media outlets, algorithms govern what news will reach them in the first place.

These shortcomings related to news media are well documented in the academic literature and are born from the very structures, contexts, and institutions that create and deliver news (See Shoemaker and Reese 2013; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Examining content alone does not help address or even identify any of these structural, contextual issues. A variety of approaches to studying media contexts, including such resilient theories as gatekeeping, framing and agenda-setting, have demonstrated the need for a contextual approach to understanding news media. Therefore, news literacy education must go beyond simple skill sets in order to evaluate the context in which news appears.

## The context-centred approach

In a 1998 themed issue of the *Journal of Communication*, Lewis & Jhally wrote in *The Struggle Over Media Literacy* about the need for a contextual approach to media literacy education:

"Media literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers. The mass media, in other words, should be understood as more than a collection of texts to be deconstructed and analyzed so that we can distinguish or choose among them. They should be analyzed as sets of institutions with particular social and economic structures that are neither inevitable nor irreversible. Media education should certainly teach students to engage media texts, but it should also, in our view, teach them to engage and challenge media institutions." (Lewis and Jhally 1998, 109)

Applied to news literacy, this critical approach opens up opportunities to invite students to see how and why news messages are made, to gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and to engage as participants in the social construction of reality. This does not mean students are drawn to reach a certain conclusion or that it is acceptable to preach a narrow ideological perspective. It simply means that any kind of literacy is more meaningful if students are encouraged to see and ask questions about the bigger picture.

It is not surprising that the potential ideological implications of a critical approach are significant and are the subject of debate. As Renee Hobbs has suggested, "there is an obvious ideology that underlies even the most basic tenets of media literacy education - teaching students to question textual authority and to use reasoning to reach autonomous decisions. This agenda is radical enough, without adding additional baggage associated with other explicitly formulated political or social change objectives" (1998, 23). Indeed, there is a line to be drawn between educating students and propagandising to them. But a contextual approach is possible and essential, as it "allows students to see the media within a framework of interests and power relations" (Lewis and Jhally 1998, 117).

As a conceptual framework, Potter's cognitive model of media literacy (2004) is a helpful way to contextualize media messages and provide a holistic approach to news literacy. Potter says his model requires more "conscious processing of information" and "preparation for exposures" (68), and identifies five basic knowledge structures that facilitate information processing and meaning construction. These include media effects, media content, media industries, real world, and the self. Equipped with Potter's knowledge structures,

“people are much more aware during the information-processing tasks and are, therefore, more able to make better decisions about seeking out information, working with that information, and constructing meaning from it that will be useful to serve their own goals” (69). Taken together, these areas form a foundation for understanding the media environment broadly.

Tailored to news, these areas create an outline for what holistic news literacy education might look like. In my own research with colleagues (Maksl, Ashley and Craft 2015), Potter’s model has been adapted to news and used to create a news media literacy scale that helps define what a contextual approach to news literacy might look like and has proven useful as a way to gauge high and low levels of news literacy. In addition to helping to explicate the meaning of news literacy, this scale is a useful assessment tool that can be applied broadly across different educational environments and can be compared to other measures such as those related to civic and political knowledge and engagement.

A context-centred approach also has roots in political economy, which provides a helpful lens for viewing the relationship between media and power in society. The framework is useful for studying media because it encourages a critical approach to examining the interactions of media and power with a focus on the impact of these interactions. When well taught, it is an open and questioning approach that aims to provide a holistic view of the media landscape and invites students to draw their own conclusions based on their own critical thought and analysis. Robert McChesney (2008) offers this contemporary understanding of the political economy of media and its purpose as an analytical framework:

It is a field that endeavors to connect how media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labor practices, and government policies. The political economy of media then links the media and communications systems to how both economic and political systems work, and social power is exercised, in society. Specifically, in the United States and much of the world, what role do media and communication play in how capitalist economies function, and how do both media and capitalism together and separately influence the exercise of political power? The central question for media political economists is whether, on balance, the media system serves to promote or undermine democratic institutions and practices. (2008, 12)

Why is this critical approach useful and can it be taught in a way that allows students to draw their own conclusions? As Lewis and Jhally (1998) suggest, the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers. Media literacy, they say, is “a way of extending democracy to the place where democracy is increasingly scripted and defined” (1998, 109). They continue:

“The mass media may be producing art, but they are also producing commerce. We feel that it is impossible to understand one fully without comprehending the other. Unlike some of the more public service-oriented broadcasting systems in Europe and elsewhere, the goals of a loosely regulated, commercial media have no educational, cultural, or informational imperatives. As much of the literature on the political economy of media suggests, they are there to maximize profits and to serve a set of corporate interests. These imperatives provide a framework that helps to shape both the form and content of media texts.” (1998, 110)

Media literacy, therefore, is more than a matter of basic comprehension. The skills needed to fully understand media content must also include the analysis of contexts. Lewis and Jhally write:

“Media literacy, in short, is about more than the analysis of messages, it is about an awareness of why those messages are there. It is not enough to know that they are pro-

duced, or even how, in a technical sense, they are produced. To appreciate the significance of contemporary media, we need to know why they are produced, under what constraints and conditions, and by whom.” (1998, 111)

As mentioned earlier, critics say this type of conceptualization is too radical or ideological for media education. But Lewis and Jhally emphasize that this is not their aim. Rather, they propose only to demonstrate to students the factors that influence media content so that students can draw their own conclusions. Failing to do so is effectively an embrace of dominant norms, which could be considered just as ideological as an attempt to challenge them. As Potter (2004) notes, the goal should not be to accept or to embrace any particular ideology but rather to embrace critical questioning so that individuals may be empowered to decide for themselves:

“I argue that rejection of the ideology is not the goal; the goal, instead, should be to allow people to appreciate parts of the ideology that are functional for them and create new perspectives where the ideology is not functional for them. That is, the choice should be up to the individual. Mindlessly rejecting the media ideology *in toto* is not much better than mindlessly accepting it *in toto*.” (2004, 57)

Understanding the ideology of media—especially news media—is key to interpreting and decoding media messages; but it should be left up to individuals to decide for themselves what conclusions they wish to draw. This is the essence of critical thinking.

Len Masterman, who is considered one of the forefathers of media literacy, suggests that this critical approach inevitably leads to improved citizenship and social change. In “A Rationale for Media Education,” he writes:

“The democratization of institutions, and the long march toward a truly participatory democracy, will be highly dependent upon the ability of majorities of citizens to take control, become effective change agents, make rational decisions (often on the basis of media evidence) and to communicate effectively perhaps through an active involvement with the media.” (1997, 60)

Institutions cannot be democratised without a thorough understanding of their values and practices. Another noted media scholar, Stuart Ewen, agrees with Masterman’s conceptualisation of the role of media literacy in democratisation and social progress.

“Media literacy cannot simply be seen as a vaccination against PR or other familiar strains of institutionalized guile. It must be understood as an education in techniques that can democratize the realm of public expression and will magnify the possibility of meaningful public interactions” (Ewen 1996, 414).

To be sure, some scholars do not attempt to conceal their contempt for what they see as the growing commercialisation and homogenisation of society. Ewen (2000) describes his story of his own personal awakening amid the growing hypercommercialism of the 1950s, suggesting that advertising in particular teaches homogenisation and creates a culture that is a comfortable womb for capitalism and consumption and little else. As a result, commercial values foster the weak political culture that gives rise to consumption and waste, rather than citizenship and democratic participation. To scholars like Ewen, these issues are fair game for critical media literacy.

Dyson (1998) agrees that corporate media are not held accountable for their inattention to issues of citizenship and democratic participation, and suggests that more attention should be “drawn to dated definitions of censorship and freedom of expression and how these are being exploited by corporate interests for the purpose of protecting unfettered freedom of enterprise, without any regard for the social and cultural fallout” (1998, 159). In Dyson’s view, the public at large must demand responsibility and better accountability from corporate media giants who are now free to use the public airwaves in whatever way

they choose.

“Consider. This is quite a remarkable exemption at a time when other industries are increasingly being held accountable for destruction of the natural environment” (*ibid.*).

Dyson demands better vigilance over the communications industry from already existing regulatory bodies established to function on behalf of the public interest. At the same time, she says, media literacy educators must be prepared to address both content and context:

“one without the other will leave us all endlessly spinning our wheels in quicksand while we continue to be seduced by economic imperatives” (1998, 165).

Many educators will be uncomfortable with some of these positions, and that is just fine. A variety of perspectives help to make a field vibrant, strong and ever growing. But decades of scholarship in media and communication—from cultural and critical studies and from social scientific approaches—can tell us a great deal about the news media landscape and our role in it as consumers and citizens. Let us not shy away from the large and growing body of work that can help individuals gain a clearer view of their world. Also, none of this is meant to suggest that, to understand media, one must have a graduate-level education in the political economy of media or in media theory and criticism. But a contextual approach to understanding media - especially news media - is vital to an open, inquiry-based, questioning perspective that is the essence of literacy.

### News literacy and critical apathy: a warning

The critical, political economic perspective espoused by some of the scholars mentioned above is likely what Kovach and Rosenstiel were thinking of when they described media literacy as arising from a “left-leaning perspective that teaches how the media in all its forms manipulates us on behalf of commercial and establishment interests” (2010, 202). But media literacy is much larger than this narrow interpretation, and the breadth of perspectives included under the media literacy umbrella is the reason for the field’s success to date. Furthermore, there are reasons to believe that the “skeptical way of knowing” and the content-centred approach to news literacy espoused by Kovach and Rosenstiel is actually a potentially damaging attempt to engage citizens in news and civic life.

A growing number of scholars have asked the question, why have new media and the digital revolution not led to an increase in democracy? One possible answer is that even when we are armed with critical consumption habits, we are still fundamentally consumers, powerless to affect change. When we bring our savviness to media content alone, we engage only on a superficial level and fail to see or address the larger political or social contexts that prefer some types of content over others. Jan Teurlings, referencing Mark Andrejevic’s work on reality television, writes that the “savvy viewer is not duped but instead analyses and understands - often endlessly so - but sees no way in which things could be different” (Teurlings 2010, 368). It is one thing to possess the skills necessary to analyse content, to verify claims, to evaluate sources, but all too often this can leave the consumer in a powerless position where nothing can be done except continued consumption. Teurlings calls this a viewing position of “critical apathy,” which “engages our critical faculties, yet does so by directing us away from political action instead of towards it. It is, so to speak, the televisual equivalent of conspiracy theories: nothing is what it seems, everything is being manipulated, thus let us abolish politics” (368).

This is a valuable warning for proponents of a content-centred approach to news literacy that might leave us drowning in a sea of words and images with no critical faculties that might help us address the larger questions of how and why. Kovach and Rosenstiel write that they see news literacy as a subset of civic literacy, which helps us function in society:

“Civic literacy, in our minds, is a curriculum that would teach what we need to know

to function as citizens of a community. It is something beyond civics, something more engaged, more Socratic and more personal. News literacy is a subset of it” (2010, 209).

Indeed, “reading” the news is a key part of our ability to function as citizens, but that includes our ability to comprehend the structures and contexts that help shape and influence civic life. Kovach and Rosenstiel also write: “the real information gap in the twenty-first century is not who has access to the Internet and who does not. It is the gap between people who have the skills to create knowledge and those who are simply in a process of affirming preconceptions without ever growing and learning. It is the new gap between reason and superstition” (2010, 201). What better case could there be for examining the structures and contexts that shape our preconceptions and allow us to grow and learn?

And finally, it is arguably a more “political” approach to target content anyway, particularly in today’s polarised and highly-charged landscape. Teachers today are often scared of bringing media content into their classrooms at all for fear of being charged with political bias. As Renee Hobbs has said, “It’s likely that [teachers] have some anxiety, because the news climate right now is so polarized. It’s polarized in a way that you’re damned if you bring in CNN and you’re damned if you bring in Fox” (Jolly 2014). One way around this is to take a holistic approach to considering media systems and contexts. It is potentially less political to consider the system as a whole and the structure and arrangements of institutions within that whole. At least that way a teacher can avoid being branded with a certain political perspective from the moment they begin to speak.

### Where to go from here

In 1998’s media literacy-themed issue of the *Journal of Communication*, Renee Hobbs wrote about the “seven great debates” in the then rapidly expanding field of media literacy and asked if the different approaches to the movement would help it succeed or lead to its downfall: “Does the wide diversity of perspectives among educators serve as a source of strength for the emerging media literacy movement, or does it suggest the essentially problematic nature of recent attempts to define and implement such an expansive and unstable concept as media literacy?” (Hobbs 1998, 16). Today media literacy is a well-established field, taught around the world in one form or another. It is even part of the new Common Core standards that have been widely embraced throughout the U.S. But debates about what to teach and how to teach it are ongoing even in the now well-established field of media literacy (see Potter 2010; Hobbs 2011; Ashley 2015). For a subject area as broad as media education, it is no surprise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and that the field has been successful by being broadly inclusive of a variety of perspectives.

News literacy must now undergo this same process of considering a variety of perspectives from the many diverse interests who have a stake in how citizens understand and engage with news. Even the very notion of “news” is contested today by younger generations such as millennials, who have whole worlds of information at their fingertips unlike anything their parents have known. What constitutes news to young people looks different from what we might expect, and it remains to be seen how the concept of news will evolve in the coming years and decades. Young people today often maintain that if some piece of information is important, it will find them. If ever a mindset called for a contextual understanding of how news is made and disseminated, this is it.

For now, here are a few ideas for getting students to think contextually about how and why news is produced and disseminated:

Horse race coverage of elections. Any election is a good opportunity to look past political bias and focus on structural biases in the news: good narratives, good pictures, conflict frames, keeping the viewer’s attention (see Patterson 2013).

Filter bubbles. How do the online algorithms that disseminate information affect the con-



tent you see (see Pariser, 2012)?

The net neutrality debate. Consider the function of policymakers such as the FCC in determining the structure of the Internet (see Stiegler 2014).

Comparative cross-national study. Compare major outlets such as CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera. Consider different ownership and funding structures, different cultural influences and the possible effects on content (see Curran et al. 2009).

Campaign finance and free speech. Have students debate whether unlimited spending on political campaigns is a matter of free speech or should be regulated to ensure a balance of viewpoints (see Nichols and McChesney 2013).

Sponsored content and regulation of advertising. With the rise of paid posts in outlets from Buzzfeed to The New York Times, consider how and whether this fits with a journalistic mission and how regulatory bodies should treat this material (see Carlson 2015).

History of broadcasting. Arguably the most studied area of modern communication, the origins of broadcasting and the structure of early broadcasting systems in different countries, especially the U.S. and Britain, can illuminate news media contexts. How are these structures the same or different for the Internet today (see Barnouw 1966, Scannell and Cardiff 1991, McChesney 2013)?

As I noted at the outset, transferring the critical abilities of the journalist to ordinary citizens is a fine enterprise. But let's not forget that we all can have blind spots when it comes to how we do and see our own work. If we want to produce true critical thinkers, we must not stop at verification of claims and evaluation of sources. An astronomer can't find meaning in the stars without a foundation in physics. A jigsaw puzzle is much harder to complete without knowing what the end product is supposed to look like. And citizens cannot fully comprehend news messages without understanding how and why they exist - or fail to exist - in the broader media landscape. As Lewis and Jhally write, "although we see textual analysis as an integral part of media education, we suggest that in any media system, the reason why we see some messages and not others raises the question of power and the active construction of the social world" (1998, 109). This formulation is especially true of news and its role in constructing the social world.

I hope the current chapter of news literacy education is being written at the outset of a period of searching and inclusiveness, and I hope these comments are seen as a constructive urging to engage as wide a variety of viewpoints and perspectives as can be found. Like media literacy more broadly, news literacy will succeed on its ability to embrace a range of approaches and should not ignore or turn its back on decades of work by scholars, educators and practitioners that can help inform the current moment. News literacy is not so different from media literacy, as both fields seek to empower citizens to reach individualised goals as well as participate in democratic self-governance and civic life.

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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 on-line, 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

## Twitter beat the traditional mainstream news media in being the first to provide dramatic photos of a Turkish Airlines plane crash in Amsterdam.

Upon confirming with Dutch officials that the crash had happened, *CNN International* then followed with their own reporting of the story. In an unusual revelatory admission, *CNN* correspondent Errol Barnett conceded, “this proves that social networking sites can be a real asset in covering breaking news and gathering eyewitness accounts” (Edition.cnn.com 2009). Barnett’s acknowledgement that *Twitter* “stole a march” on traditional media was followed by a tactical disclaimer about such significant shifts in news information coverage: “The web should always be treated with extreme caution” (ibid., 2009). That same spring, when a building explosion in Bozeman, Montana levelled a downtown block and released debris over 200 feet, it was reported within minutes on *NewWest.com* - a Missoula-based online network covering the Rocky Mountain West (Lowery 2010). The news footage for the story was not obtained through traditional news reporters. Instead, photos and news details emerged from “crowdsourcing,” namely amateur spectators using new social media tools and Web 2.0 technologies to tell their stories and share them.

Although many news events and stories have since been covered in similar ways, these early examples served as avant-garde reporting, providing a glimpse into the social and economic displacement that hegemonic news organisations are experiencing in the new social media millennium. As documented by a June 2014 Gallup poll,

the circulation of newspapers continues to shrink to the point that University of Southern California’s Annenberg Center for the Digital Future estimates that most print newspapers will not exist in five years. Television news continues to see a proliferation of new cable news networks, including the launch of Al-Jazeera America in August 2013. Meanwhile, news from the Internet now figures prominently in the average American’s news diet, whereas not so long ago this mode did not even exist (Dugan 2014).

When controlling for age, digital news media have surpassed television and print in worth for the younger generation, with studies showing that digital is significantly more dominant than other news platforms. In fact, among consumers aged 16-34, print does not even measure on the scale (Blodget 2014).

Given the dramatic changes in the field of media, this paper explores the seismic shifts in news production and social activism that have emerged from new social media, and provides a news literacy framework for addressing the transformation of information in networked environments. As a result of the rapid deterioration of print newspapers as primary sources of information over the past decade, the paper addresses the symbolic, political and economic transformations that have resulted from social media and Internet networks as a means to develop news literacy models suitable for the digital age. While studies have explored the “structural and functional characteristics of mass/ interpersonal/ and peer communication” as they have evolved with Web 2.0, new epistemological approaches to news literacy in networked environments must develop in accordance with vast changes in the social construction of news and information in the digital age (Walther et al. 2011).

By devising critical news literacy frameworks centred on networked environments, this study 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. Just as the aeroplane did not replace the automobile, news literacy models must acknowledge and address the po-

rosity 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.

### News literacy 2.0

One of the fundamental goals of media literacy is to inform readers and viewers about the social construction of news and information. W. James Potter (2005, 101) explains that “news is not a reflection of actual events; it is a construction of news workers who are subjected to many influences and constraints”. Web 2.0 has shifted the emphasis of news production by expanding the scope of news workers beyond mainstream news reporters to include a broad swathe of people and communities referred to as crowdsourcing. With more people participating in news production and blogging, the range of public interest stories has led to a renewed interest in civic journalism. According to the Pew Center, civic journalism refers to “both a philosophy and a set of values supported by some evolving techniques to reflect both of those in journalism. At its heart is a belief that journalism has an obligation to public life - an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts” (2015). The idea behind civic journalism is to foster the democratic process of discussion and debate within the public sphere as a means to validate the contributions of community members alongside journalists who shape and participate in civic life. In theory, the goals of civic journalism are rendered more easily within digitally networked environments as they have expanded the public sphere and led to the proliferation of new voices, narratives and issues. However in praxis, there are no definitive measures to qualitatively and quantitatively determine the ability of digital networks - of which social media are a part - to exclusively provide civic journalism as a necessary means of democratic engagement.

The swift and steady erosion of traditional newspapers gives pause to the idea that digital networks are a democratic panacea. As Evgeny Morozov (2012) explains in his assessment of the rise of social media and its ability to advance social revolution for democracy and freedom, *people* are far more likely to advance social causes and liberate humanity from government oppression than digital technologies [emphasis mine]. Digital networks are not enough because governments who wish to suppress civic journalism can do so by controlling the platforms used by those seeking social and political mobilisation.

When applying a Marxist approach of labour and surplus value to digital spheres of production and surveillance, many scholars have argued that all users of digital tools are labourers by producing social media content, news and/or entertainment (Curran, Fenton & Freedman 2012). As such, the production of news content in digital networks isn’t necessarily aligned with the goals of civic journalism because not everyone shares the same goals or economic standing in such environments. Not only are broad swathes of society left out of the production of civic ‘net-journalism’ due to the digital divide, but those who are producing news via such platforms may find the results of their labour unsustainable for investigative reporting and research. In the cyber-industrial complex, the ownership,



design, and architecture of online platforms reward the corporate owners of technological infrastructures over the values and practices of civic journalism. As Curran, Fenton and Freedman explain (2012), the owners of digital media sites have amalgamated and outsourced the data they have collected about their users to advertisers for a profit, providing a new type of e-commerce that keeps them profitable and dominant through a culture of surveillance.

Similarly, the 'pluralisation' and 'amateurisation' of news sources online may not necessarily lead to quality civic journalism. Although the evolution of social media is inevitably leading to profound shifts in the cultural and economic capital of traditional mainstream news media and journalism in the twenty-first century, concerns over the accuracy, representativeness, and democratic nature of these new media modes remain acute. In today's digital age, the overabundance of news channels and media sources has made it easier for Millennials and non-Millennials alike to access news and information online and through mobile apps. The challenge, however, is to develop critical thinking skills that go beyond the buzz-based algorithmic news feeds that reproduce the mainstream media's celebrity gossip, punditry and spin. According to the 2014 Pew Research Journalism Project, "Facebook reaches far more Americans than any other social media site... [with] three in ten adults get[ting] at least some news while on Facebook" (Matza and Mitchell 2014). The study explains that, while the range of news topics on Facebook is broad, entertainment is the pinnacle of news that users report seeing. These findings beg the question: is coming across a social media newsfeed the same as developing strategic search skills to find significant and verifiable news necessary for informed democratic participation? As the Pew Research Journalism Project (2014) indicates, getting "news" on Facebook is an incidental experience, leading critics to argue that inadvertently seeing news from your friends is not the same as using critical news literacy skills to locate trustworthy sources from diverse viewpoints. For the majority of today's media users, finding reliable sources of news is a challenge, especially for Millennials cultivated in a media landscape that encourages them to surf entertainment, trivia, gossip and pseudo-news from their friends rather than informative citizen-oriented news.

Given the challenges brought on by the Digital Age, news literacy must draw from multiple frameworks and multiliteracies. For instance, news literacy includes:

Layered Literacy, which describes the way that print and digital overlap, creating intertextuality; Transliteracy, or the ability to read and write across a wide variety of media formats; Electracy, which refers to the pedagogical skills necessary for new digital skills; and digital citizenship, which covers the role and rights of a person within the digital world (Briggs 2014).

A multiple literacies approach also consists of critically analysing media content, narrative structures, grammar, medium theory, advertising, and institutional analysis of media ownership, production and distribution (Frechette 2002). In order to help cultivate news literacy in the age of digital information, educators must go beyond including more platforms and technology into their lesson plans. Rather, teaching news literacy means addressing how citizens can leverage networked technology and infrastructures to enhance the quality, access, and diversity of news sources from local-to-global sources. It's about using networked news environments "to locate oneself in digital space, to manage knowledge and experience in the Age of Information" (Briggs 2014). The following ten key frameworks address the specific ways to achieve this kind of news literacy.

**News Literacy Framework #1: Social media in a post-Internet world have displaced the hegemonic role and function of traditional mainstream news media outlets.**

Few would disagree with the notion that social media have displaced the hegemonic role and function of traditional mainstream news media outlets. The transformation of the mainstream media landscape has been enabled by the pervasiveness of digital tools, allowing individuals and organisations to benefit from low-cost distribution networks in new online and portable media environments.

There are many examples of quality journalism found within online platforms. *ProPublica* is an important online venue for investigative journalism, offering an independent, non-profit e-newsroom that sheds light on issues affecting public interest. Its focus on exposing truth for social justice is its trademark as it seeks to provide stories with "moral force" (Joyner 2015). Leaning to the left of the political spectrum, *The Huffington Post* provides powerful public interest stories on its daily blog, and has steadily increased its commitment to underwriting original investigative reporting. Signalling a monumental shift in the sourcing of the Washington press corps, President Obama called on *Huffington Post* blogger, Sam Stein, at his first prime-time news conference in 2009 (Kurtz 2009). On the international scene, *GlobalPost* is an online news outlet that began providing in-depth coverage of newsworthy subjects in January 2009. Using an expansive network of professionally-trained journalists, its site has been recognised for its stellar investigative field reporting and blog updates on subjects from the global fiscal crisis to the war in Afghanistan (Sennott 2010).

Among others, these sites have proffered using experimental business models ideally suited to digital age reporting. The low-cost entry to the web, combined with large networks of writers, has allowed digital news providers to create entrepreneurial models of success. Non-profit online journalism has been ideally suited to offering in-depth and investigative reporting via digital platforms, particularly since low budgets have been standard for this genre of news. *Voiceofsandiego.org* (VOSD), the non-profit online daily, boasts that it is able to produce quality news under a million dollars since it is not burdened with the costs associated with paper printing (Donahue and Scott 2009). Whereas newsprint can total up to 86% of the cost of a traditional news organisation, online daily publications using this model explain that web hosting and production represent a small portion of their costs, allowing them to spend the vast majority of their budgets on trained journalists. Given the economical affordance of digital media, the VOSD site offers a glimpse into what non-profit online community news looks like editorially, covering a range of local issues and narratives from local activists leading the conversations on racial justice, to controversy surrounding the funding and building of a new city stadium, to California's epic drought. "Powered by 1,915 members", the site's editorial staff cover key communal issues, like the campaign financial scandal, concussions among the Chargers' football players, police misconduct, emergency response times, school performance, and state government (VOSD 2015). It offers a variety of podcasts with RSS feeds covering arts/culture, economy, education, food, government, headlines, land use, opinion, public safety, science/environment, and sports. Most uniquely, it offers an entire section to Partner Voices, which provides non-profits "a platform to showcase their contributions to the community in a more interesting format than traditional promotions" by allowing non-profits to fund their own coverage or to obtain funding from "local businesses or philanthropists who support their efforts" (ibid., 2015).

Given the significance of such structural and economic shifts within contemporary digital news production, access, and distribution, news literacy in the digital age must acknowledge the ways in which informational economies on the Internet and in the blogosphere allow alternative narratives and stories to thrive in local, national and global communities.

**News Literacy Framework #2: Privacy invasion, data mining and marketing**

### are rendered more easily within networked environments

Given the vast amounts of personal data mining and marketing within networked environments, the rapid shift toward digital social media may very well lead to unintended consequences (see Zuboff 1988). Concerns have abounded as digital social media quantify how much content is downloaded, what type of information users prefer, what share of the market access content, during what time span, through what behavioral patterns, and so on. Governmental and consumer rights groups have assailed attacks on content providers who have registered personal user information through stored data via the aforementioned software tracking devices. For instance, in late April 2010, privacy changes on Facebook's social networking site prompted cacophonous alarm among site users and federal regulators when it was revealed that personal data would be disclosed for advertising and marketing purposes. As a strategic marketing initiative, Facebook asked users if they wanted to link personal demographics information (such as current city, hometown, school, and workplace history) with business-operated Facebook pages, upending user-designated privacy settings (Richmond 2010). Advocacy groups such as *Privacy Journal*, *PrivacyActivism.org*, and *The Center for Digital Democracy* harshly criticised these changes, openly calling for government legislation to "address this massive and stealth data collection that has emerged" (Chester, cited in McCullagh 2010).

Accordingly, news literacy frameworks designed for networked environments must go beyond addressing the impact of traditional advertising by critically assessing issues associated with privacy, data mining, and marketing in the digital age (Frechette 2002).

### News Literacy Framework #3: Social media often promote narcissism, celebrity news and "infotainment" rather than civic journalism

Alongside the market's penchant to obtain and register demographic information for advertising, marketing and branding as a means to offering customised content portfolios, there are legitimate concerns that "social" media will become even more narcissistic by supplying users with exclusive tailored content at the cost of providing a range of content that reflects broader social issues related to the larger public sphere. The privileging of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and news "apps" symbolically and materially leads to a gravitational value shift toward individualised and personalised news and information over shared public information through a collective common. For those who revere the notion of civic journalism through a shared medium - even in spite of its inherent problematic of advertising and institutional conventions - online-only publications may signal a further demise of a tangible, equally-accessible public press.

As networked manifestations of news and information become more commercially specialised toward amusing and soliciting the individual, the function of news as a *public* commodity is marginalised. Celebrity news and "infotainment" have increasingly overshadowed muck-raking and watchdog analysis. As *New York Times* writer Andrew Rice explained early on when news trending became predominant, more often than not, high-ranking posts on people's websites revealed sex, scandal and Sarah Palin (2010). GlobalPost, an online publication for international news, also revealed a similar trend when noting that, during its serious coverage of international wars and earthquakes, two popular sites in their first year were for a post titled "Meet India's First Porn Star" alongside a slide show of Japanese cat outfits (Rice 2010).

As Ken Tucker contends in his more recent analysis of mainstream American morning news shows, most programmes like NBC's *Today*, ABC's *Good Morning America* and CBS *This Morning* are turning to social media models of infotainment to redefine their contemporary news model through trending social media promotions and synergistic ad promos at the cost of substantive news. He writes,

I discovered that the networks' news divisions are pumping out morning TV that is a riot of brightly colored sets, social-media branding and sponsored segments. They wave wildly for the attention of viewers who can get hard-news headlines on a multitude of formats and platforms. Their efforts are both heroic and dismaying (Tucker 2014).

Currently, with consumers spending more time obtaining entertainment news and content via their mobile devices and tablet apps (New York Daily News 2014), news will become even more tailored to their personal profiles, social interests, past search history, and spending capital. To best address these content shifts, news literacy must help users distinguish between civic journalism and other forms of information available digitally.

### News Literacy Framework #4: Not all news providers are equal within networked environments

As with the previous framework, this measure is concerned with shifts in the authorship of news content among digital media. Although more voices and perspectives are feasible within networked environments, the professional training and craft associated with journalism is eroding as freelancers and novice writers colonise the blogosphere. Resulting from training, experience and depth reporting, professional reporters are skilled to investigate and expose corruption while raising critical questions about public policy and civic issues. Yet many amateur citizen-journalists "do not have the skills and background to produce the most accurate journalism", leaving "space for rumor, incorrect facts, and just plain nonsense" (Abramson 2010). In fact, the vast majority of investigative and watchdog journalism reports that are publicised still come from newspapers with professional reporters and editors, generating fodder for bloggers and websites who serve as secondary sources. Accordingly, whole occupations are vanishing as traditional newspapers and media organisations restructure in the current fiscal and cultural climate.

Although the potential for more voices to find their way online in digital media helps to further democratic ideals, inaccuracy remains a major concern among educators and news consumers alike. The findings of a 2014 Media and Public Opinion (MPO) study documenting the rise of internet news as the most dominant media source raises several news literacy concerns. As MPO journalist Katherine Mendelson explains,

with so many people turning to the internet for their news, who is there to vet which sources are accurate and which are sensational? Will journalists lose their ethical compass and publish at a whim. Sure, it's ultimately up to the reader to decide for him or herself what to believe and what not to believe, but in this fast paced day and age, will news consumers really have time for that? I don't believe that the majority of us will which means we're entering the wild west of news consummation. My motto - buyer (or surfer in this case) beware...

Given these important concerns for legitimacy and trustworthiness, news literacy in a networked environment requires the critical analysis and production of accurate and ethical media across digital platforms and channels. This means learning to make distinctions between the validity and reliability of amateur bloggers, crowdsourcing, and stories produced by qualified journalists.

### News Literacy Framework #5: Networked environments do not necessarily sustain investigative journalism.

Investigative journalism has become a casualty in the new social media environment, as costs associated with probing news stories are prohibitive for failing news organisations. Budgetary cuts among most regional newspapers have significantly hampered efforts by writers to investigate complex socio-political and economic stories affecting the political elite, the disenfranchised, and those in between. For example, the decreased number

of credible journalists available to investigate wrongful convictions and exonerations for prisoners is a noteworthy harbinger of the declining newsroom's investigative capacity. Diminished newsroom resources have impeded efforts by death-penalty opponents to seek out indisputable DNA evidence related to innocent executions in America.

Science journalism is another victim among dwindling news organisations with fewer expert journalists to render complicated ideas into palatable "public interest" stories. Civic journalism champions Robert McChesney and John Nichols (2010) contend that the elimination of science beats and specialist journalists threatens journalism's function as a democratic cornerstone: "When CNN eliminated its entire science, space and technology unit in 2008, the field was left almost entirely to newspapers and magazines. Unfortunately, print publications were following the CNN route..." (25).

The trend of budget slashing combined with fewer bureaus and specialised news departments have further reduced the ability of professional journalists to address newsworthy stories affecting whole segments of the civic sector. National news magazines, such as *Newsweek*, have also been unable to compete with the new business model for providing quality journalism in the digital age, as they seek new ownership (Vanacore 2010). Local dailies, providing the ethos of most communities, are among the last holdouts, suffering cutbacks and layoffs among their staff.

Finally, many fledgling news organisations seeking to boost online advertising revenue have turned to automation to create quantifiable readership traffic boosts by creating feeds from their news pages to post scheduled headlines and links to Twitter and Facebook accounts. Such actions circumvent the qualitative purpose of social media to add value to stories by "pulling important information, soliciting feedback and in general, acting like a human, not like a robot" (Lowery 2009).

While networked environments level the playing field of production among digital media users, news literacy models must address the political and economic factors affecting investigative journalism.

### **News Literacy Framework #6: Social media and traditional media constitute a symbiotic relationship**

There is growing concern that the weakening of traditional news media institutions will lead to the loss of an important collective public medium. At the very same time that participatory social media enterprises have demonstrated their function, popularity, and success as alternatives to corporate media, there are concerns about the financial demise of several large media companies that provide civic journalism. Many American cities are facing a dilemma as established daily newspapers are undergoing economic restructuring through downsizing, bankruptcy, or worse - closing publications.

In light of the economic downturn among traditional newspapers, the "new media" vs. "old media" paradigm may not accurately represent the continuum that stretches between alternative news media on one end, and traditional print journalism on the other. Inasmuch as the advent of the aeroplane did not render meaningless the function of the automobile, the emergence and function of alternative online dailies and social media should be conceptualised as a symbiotic relationship in which they work alongside institutional news media rather than replace the journalistic function of a vibrant daily newspaper in any given metropolitan area. Newsroom practitioners, such as *NewWest.Net* editor, Courtney Lowery (2010), have observed the importance of both traditional and social news media. Lowery describes the importance of her news organisation in filtering and fact-checking incoming information, testifying to the critical functions of traditional news organisations alongside new social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Given the benefits of both forms and structures of traditional and digital media and their interconnectedness, news literacy frameworks will need to establish and draw from the symbiotic relationship between old and new media.

### **News Literacy Framework #7: Web 2.0 funding models alter the quality, scope, diversity and frequency of news**

As capital investments have shifted away from traditional journalism to non-traditional digital media start-ups, there are mixed reviews about the formation of new economic models for producing news content. From a market standpoint, investors of institutionalised news organisations have been fostering experimentation in order to remain financially viable. Unique versions of financing through "pay walls" and "crowdfunding" that ask readers to pay for some of the news costs have been employed to deal with declining advertising revenue and institutional budgets (Kilby 2010; Szendro Bok 2010). The Knight Foundation, a large non-profit institution dedicated to improving journalism worldwide, has helped news organisations transition into the digital age. Having invested more than \$400 million on traditional journalism programmes since 1950, the foundation began exploring digital alternatives in 2007 by investing \$25 million in new exploratory projects over a five-year period (Bebinger 2009). Included in these projects was the early crowdsourcing site *Spot.us*, a website offering journalistic news content based on donations from those seeking to have an issue or story covered by reporters. The decision to cover stories was based upon revenue generated through community funds to cover the costs of reporting expenses. Designed as an open source project, tax-deductible donations were solicited to cover news stories commissioned by the public on topics deemed significant or otherwise marginalised. If a news organisation decided to buy exclusive rights to the content, donations were reimbursed.

*Spot.us* offered an inventive idea at a time when news was going digital. It was purchased by Public Insight Media (PIN) in 2015. Instead of allowing anyone to write a story based on community member interest, today's new site brings journalists and citizens together by pairing crowdsourced stories with established public and private news outlets, such as National Public Radio, American Public Media, the Center for Public Integrity, the Washington Post and state public radio networks across the country. The key difference in this model is that the general public is encouraged to "sign up to share knowledge and insights with journalists, helping them cover the news in greater depth and uncover stories they might not otherwise find" (Public Insight Network 2015). In spite of earlier goals for crowdsourcing from diverse sources, results of the proportionality and representativeness of the PIN stories accepted by community members are not disclosed.

Unlike the dissolution of *Spot.us*, *EveryBlock.com* remains solvent as a crowdsourcing digital news bulletin, offering community members in Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver and Boston "a new way to keep track of what's happening on your block, in your neighborhood and all over your city". By selecting a neighborhood or typing in a zip code, tailored news corresponding with a geographic center point is provided to the site user. In addition to providing news, trends are tracked over time in selected regions, including crime, local violations and permit applications.

As a whole, social media experiments like these offer promises as well as perils for civic journalism. On the one hand, paying journalists story by story to provide news media coverage of an issue may be considered a viable means to dealing with shrinking news coverage of important beats, such as science, healthcare and education, within mainstream news. According to Matt James, the senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation, alternative crowdfunding news systems like these can help their organisations obtain the news they require. In Kaiser's case, dwindling news stories about healthcare have led

the company to form its own news service by supplying stories to newspapers with whom they have formed partnerships, including *The Washington Post* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Bebinger 2009). While such practices may have been deemed unacceptable in previous economic climates, they have been warranted by cuts in news coverage.

On the other hand, a system of journalism that renders a dollar into a vote for news coverage is fraught with problems. While stories that are marginalised in the corporate press may potentially have a greater cyber-market share if citizens mobilise collectively to pay for them, the costs - both literally and figuratively - acquiesce to a capitalist system that renders civic journalism obsolete. In this model, news about school committees, local organisations, community forums and government agencies no longer fall under the purview of civic journalism; they are now subject to the interests and whims of the dominant classes valued in privileged geographic locations. In these new neoliberal systems, those who cannot pay for news content or produce it no longer retain membership in “public interest” circles as they are redefined through social media.

In fact, the recent dissolution and buyouts of these online news sites by for-profit corporate media firms confirms the vulnerability of crowdsourced public interest news. For instance, the Canadian social media news site NowPublic.com was bought out by a private investor and closed in 2013, with traffic redirected to Examiner.com. While the new site claims it draws its content from independent contributors, the goal is no longer quality public journalism. Today, its function is to offer “dynamic entertainment, news and lifestyle” content vetted to support the Examiner.com’s business model. Boasting a viewership of more than 20 million monthly readers across the U.S. and around the world, the website looks like any other commercial entertainment news provider, chock full of celebrity photos and trending stories. Similarly, Newsvine.com also states that it is a collaborative crowdsourced news website; yet it is privately owned by MSNBC with an amalgamation of news content links from mainstream news and Associated Press. It uses algorithmic, ad-revenue-generated funding for its content, leading content contributors to push for increased traffic to their stories, topics and photos - not unlike those popular with mainstream sources. Likewise, AllVoices.com is fuelled by corporate branding and funding, and dictated by private commercial editorial considerations.

With local news shifting to digital platforms, contemporary modes of news literacy require that community members become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are to help contribute knowledgeably about their communities to other interested citizens. This means that more participants will need to take an active role in public interest news participation and production. Moreover, members of the public sphere will need to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community. Given the rapid rate at which public news sites are being purchased and privatised, citizens will need to establish news information portals and digital news networks that value community-based stories for their members.

**News Literacy Framework #8: Informed publics must learn to become watchdogs for detecting secrecy, inaccuracies or libel in social networks.**

In addition, the editorial independence of journalism is called into question when news organisations provide content on a pay-as-you-go system. Unlike traditional advertising, which, as an aggregate, helps to fund the majority of news in a given programme or venue, individual sponsors are able to underwrite single-focused news content. This practice will invariably raise concerns about the influence of sponsorship on the fairness and balance provided in a news story. As *Pew Journalism Project* director Amy Mitchell explains, this will mean that “there’s a lot more responsibility put on members of the public to be wise about where their information is coming from and to be doing some of their own background work on organisations and who they are and where they’re coming from” (cited in

Bebinger 2009).

Likewise, the onus will be on well-funded online news sources or public groups to engage in watchdog and muck-raking practices. According to a recent review of thousands of federal court records conducted by Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, it was discovered that mainstream media organisations “were filing fewer lawsuits challenging federal government secrecy than in past years” (Johnson and Hall 2015).

Although more FOIA lawsuits were filed against the federal government in the 2014 fiscal year, Syracuse researchers found that the “*The New York Times* was the only so-called ‘legacy’ news organisation to have brought several legal challenges in federal court” (Johnson and Hall 2015). Although other news groups, namely *ProPublica*, *MuckRock*, *VICE News*, and advocacy groups such as the left-leaning Public Citizen and the right-leaning Judicial Watch, were more likely than several traditional news organisations to issue lawsuits under the FOIA, the Syracuse report discovered that private interests have now surpassed public ones when it comes to filing FOIA suits for watchdog purposes (ibid., 2015).

As such, with private interests and alternative news sources now usurping the power of legacy news organisations to provide investigative journalism, news literacy will require teaching the public how to become watchdogs for detecting inaccuracies or libel within networked environments by accessing open source portals and access sites.

**News Literacy Framework #9: Clear and overt funding mechanisms are needed for quality journalism in networked environments.**

As for localised news through *EveryBlock.com* and *PublicInsightNetwork.org*, the promise of participation is held through a belief that people will become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are knowledgeable about their communities. While this may occur, the funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within a given geographic area are not rendered clear.

“If it is a long-term project, the mainstream media doesn’t have the interest or necessarily the resources to play what I’d call the long game,” said Hodes, who added that “mainstream media had a lot of money in the past and they used big law firms. And big law firms charge big fees.” So who has the money, and the inclination to spend it? (cited in Johnson and Hall 2015).

According to Matt Smith, a veteran journalist with the *Center for Investigative Reporting* in Emeryville, California, private and individual interests are much more likely to show up in FOIA logs for investigative inquiries:

“Often it’s all law firms, or if you Google names on a FOIA log they are industry investigators or their competitors,” said Smith. “It seems to be less sort of public-serving organisations and more individual interests that are using FOIA for something from which they can profit” (cited in Johnson and Hall 2015).

Accordingly, without the proper structural mechanisms designed to fund investigative journalism online, the fear is that public interest may be trumped by private interests when it comes to having the necessary resources to access the FOIA and other muck-raking sources. Moreover, within alternative digital news portals, there are no journalistic caveats prescribing who is best qualified to provide fair and accurate news and information in a given community on an online news site. Therefore, news literacy should encourage members of the public to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community, while also teaching skills unique to detecting and reporting inaccuracies or libel.

**News Literacy Framework #10: Readers will need to learn to become politi-**

## cally engaged with social media by broadening their scope of news and information from local to global sources, and by “becoming the media”.

If social media sites function as trend recorders through data mining and targeted marketing, the qualitative aspects of community journalism will be displaced in favor of for-profit advertising and marketing, expediency and apolitical social networking. Online tracking features such as “Google Analytics” allow news providers to know precisely which published stories are read, and how often, thereby altering the choices news organisations make to produce items that drive traffic to their online sites (LaPointe 2010). Such traffic is quantified to lure advertising dollars to a particular site. Joel Kramer explains the powerful effect that Google Analytics has on *MinnPost’s* site as it impacts the process of news production: “It makes us want to do more of what gets read, and less of what doesn’t, while remaining true to our mission.” (Kramer 2010) Inevitably, shorter news stories generate more traffic to the site, forcing Kramer to concede that short-form work “does mean that we do a lot fewer ambitious investigative reports than I would like us to publish” (6).

In documenting the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo where two successive wars since 1996 have killed more than five million people, freelance journalist Anjan Sundaram offers a poignant critique:

“The Western news media are in crisis and are turning their back on the world. We hardly ever notice. Where correspondents were once assigned to a place for years or months, reporters now handle 20 countries each. Bureaus are in hub cities, far from many of the countries they cover. And journalists are often lodged in expensive bungalows or five-star hotels. As the news has receded, so have our minds. To the consumer, the news can seem authoritative. But the 24-hour news cycles we watch rarely give us the stories essential to understanding the major events of our time. The news machine, confused about its mandate, has faltered. Big stories are often missed. Huge swaths of the world are forgotten or shrouded in myth. The news both creates these myths and dispels them, in a pretense of providing us with truth”. (2014).

Given the unequal ways in which some issues and areas of the world are covered, and the institutional limitations associated with dwindling global news bureaus, shrinking sound bites, and the reduction of news stories to 140 characters, international news coverage continues to remain marginalised in the digital sphere. Ultimately, there are clear differences between using social media technology to stay connected with one’s pre-defined social group, and being a member of a public sphere where tensions and important issues require a firm commitment to civic engagement. What’s more, the hyper-localised, hyper-personalised content delivery system of social media may paradoxically alter the global nature of cyberspace by altering the scope of the user’s social interactions. Accordingly, news literacy must address shifting behaviours and patterns of social media practices by encouraging readers to scan a wide variety of sources within global contexts rather than rely upon individually-tailored news or local contexts.

Moreover, news literacy must incorporate media production skills so that students learn by doing, through effective blogging, vlogging, podcasting, creating new apps, etc. By “becoming the media,” students will learn to use social media for their own transformational outcomes in limitless ways via local, regional, national and international networked platforms.

### Conclusion

Public participation in social media is proliferating at a pace that few can track and comprehend. New paradigms of news literacy in networked environments must evolve alongside technological developments. As the business model of journalism creates new distribution systems, it remains unclear who will fill in the gap for shrinking mainstream news,

and who the winners and losers will be. Longstanding print dailies, such as *The New York Times*, have already turned their once free online news into a pay-as-you-read system, indicating profound changes in the accessibility of news dailies. Moreover, the distinctions between professional and amateur journalists are becoming blurred as bloggers and crowdsourcing alter the composition of news institutions. While the participatory nature of social media has endowed certain populations within particular geographic regions with a new set of agency, others have not found their place within these social spheres due to political, economic and social reasons. With dwindling numbers of the public reading newspapers, watching mainstream news, and participating in institutional electoral politics, the concept and function of journalism within civil society will continue to change as new social media evolve.

Although new choices of media sources will continue to proliferate within networked digital spheres, thereby offering alternatives to those provided by corporate news organisations, the ability of news producers and users to access and assess the quality and reliability of news content remains a concern. The importance of recognising how these changes will affect public awareness, public opinion and civic engagement are ever more pressing in an information age defined by technology. In the end, news literacy skills are needed to address networked environments:

News literacy in a networked environment requires the analysis and production of ethical media as well as media criticism skills.

Without traditional gate keeping, the public will have to be wise about where their information is coming from and actively engage in their own background work on bloggers, organisations and their credentials.

This means learning to make distinctions between the validity and reliability of amateur bloggers, crowdsourcing and stories produced by qualified journalists.

Distinctions between civic journalism and news that promote narcissism, celebrity news and ‘infotainment’ will need to be made across digital media.

Given the benefits of both forms and structures of traditional and digital media and their interconnectedness, news literacy frameworks will need to establish the symbiotic relationship between old and new media.

If localised news is digitised through sites like *PublicInsightNetwork.org*, *GoLocal*, and *Placeblogger*, community members will need to become more locally invested and civically engaged if they are knowledgeable about their communities. This means that more participants will need to take an active role in social media participation and production.

The public will need to demand and maintain clear and overt funding mechanisms for producing and sustaining quality journalists within the community.

Bloggers and their readers will need to create journalistic caveats to help determine what stories to cover and who is best qualified to provide fair and accurate news and information in a community on these sites.

The onus will be on the public to become watchdogs for detecting inaccuracies or libel.

Readers will need to scan a wide variety of sources within global contexts rather than rely upon individually tailored or local contexts.

By incorporating a holistic approach through these key frameworks, the hope is that news literacy will provide viable measures for digital citizenship by encouraging all generations to rethink their approach to obtaining and producing valid and reliable news and information that serve civic interests and democratic ideals.

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# When teens create the news: examining the impact of PBS/news hour student reporting labs

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## Abstract

The PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program ([www.studentreportinglabs.com](http://www.studentreportinglabs.com)) connects middle and high school students to local PBS stations and broadcast news professionals in their communities to report on critical issues from a youth perspective. Through a project-based, active learning model, students learn how to synthesise information and investigate important topics, while building media literacy, communication and problem-solving skills necessary for the knowledge economy of the 21st century. The program involves more than 50 schools and community centers across the country and each site has adapted the program to meet the particular educational needs of its students, faculty and community. The intended goals of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program are to help students gain a better understanding of what constitutes news; evaluate the credibility of the information they receive via news content; strengthen their appreciation for the norms of professional journalism; and build skills and confidence as communicators through learning how to produce news content in a collaborative real-world environment where what they create may be viewed by an authentic large audience and publication becomes the ultimate assessment. Findings from pre-post quantitative research conducted with nearly 500 high school students who participated in the program reveal the development of media production skills that involved gathering and synthesising information, using digital media and technology to communicate ideas in the format of a broadcast news package, and engaging in cycles of revision and feedback to polish their work. This study found significant increases in collaboration and teamwork competencies, including intellectual curiosity, the ability to give and receive feedback, and confidence in self-expression and advocacy.

**Keywords:** journalism, media, media literacy, education, high school, secondary education, public broadcasting, news, partnership, program, evaluation

**The inclusion of broadcast journalism learning experiences in the context of American secondary education has been recommended for decades by media scholars and educators as a way to advance adolescent development. Scholars suggest that these programs support the acquisition of media literacy (Hobbs 2011), deepen students' interest in news and current events (Mihailidis 2008) and contribute to civic engagement (Kahne, Feezel, and Lee 2011). But what do we know about whether broadcast journalism experiences, implemented in high schools, actually result in such outcomes?**

To address declining levels of engagement among learners, high school teachers have been experimenting with the use of news, current events and multimedia video composition. For many young people, academic achievement declines in adolescence as youth face a crisis of relevance, which develops as students question the relationship between the knowledge and skills that are valued in the classroom and what is valued in contemporary society (Masterman 1985). Many of today's students see no connection between the classroom and the culture, and these attitudes have a negative impact on motivation. For example, only 28% of graduating high school seniors believe that what they do in classrooms is meaningful and useful to their lives or futures (Messersmith and Schulenberg 2008), and this proportion has been decreasing for many years.

Fortunately, new approaches to engaging learners are building upon some of the changing models of citizenship that are the result of the shift from a print to a digital culture. Indeed, the conceptualisations of the dutiful citizen, one who simply votes in elections, is being replaced by the actualising citizen, whose engagement in the public sphere is connected to person and social identity (Bennett, Wells, and Freelon 2011). Citizens are expected to be both "readers" and "writers," participating in discussion and debate that advances civic action. One form of civic learning focuses on the production of information that is created and shared by peers, where teens learn to use self-produced and self-distributed digital and social media and participate in peer-centered special interest groups. New forms of civic learning include a focus on producing information that is created and shared by peers, learning to use self-produced and self-distributed digital and social media, and participating in peer-centered special interest groups. These creative practices of civic participation are dependent upon an appreciation of the role of media in democratic societies. As Banks (2001, 9) explains, "To become thoughtful citizen actors (we) must understand the ways in which knowledge is constructed and how knowledge production is related to location of knowledge producers in the social, political and economic contexts of society."

For educators who are looking to develop a genuine inquiry-centered classroom, journalism education gives high school students the opportunity to research a topic, interview experts and compose a news story – and such learning experiences can be transformative. One important example of this work is the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program ([www.studentreportinglabs.com](http://www.studentreportinglabs.com)), which connects middle and high school students to local PBS stations and broadcast news professionals in their communities to report on critical issues from a youth perspective. Through a project-based, active learning model, students learn how to synthesise information and investigate important topics, while building media literacy, communication and problem-solving skills. In 2013 – 2014, the program involved more than 50 schools and community centers across the country, with each site adapting the program as needed to meet the particular educational needs of its students, faculty and community. During the 2012 - 2013 academic year, high school students, working with a teacher and a mentor from a local PBS affiliate created over 70 broadcast news stories. Table 1 shows a sample of the content and topics addressed by high school students.

**Table 1**

Sample of topics explored by students in PBS newshour student reporting labs
➤ Are Constitutional rights upheld in South Carolina schools?
➤ Student athletes asked to monitor social media presence
➤ Texas residents reflect on damages after an Austin fire
➤ Chicago teen reflects on gang-related deaths that altered his life
➤ Water conservation: Friend or foe?
➤ How does Alabama's immigration law affect student retention?
➤ Philly teens explore possible solutions to high school dropout epidemic
➤ Oakland youth urge citizens to deal with climate change

The intended goals of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program are to help students gain a better understanding of what constitutes news; evaluate the credibility of the information they receive via news content; strengthen their appreciation for the norms of professional journalism; and build skills and confidence as communicators through learning how to produce news content in a collaborative real-world environment where what they create may be viewed by an authentic large audience and publication becomes the ultimate assessment (Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem, and Moen 2014).

In this paper, we reporting findings from pre-post quantitative research conducted with nearly 500 high school students who participated in the program. We reveal the development of media production skills that involved gathering and synthesising information, using digital media and technology to communicate ideas in the format of a broadcast news package, and engaging in cycles of revision and feedback to polish their work. Research results include: significant increases in collaboration and teamwork competencies, including intellectual curiosity, the ability to give and receive feedback, and confidence in self-expression and advocacy. We also found increases in media literacy analysis skills, more selectivity in media use choices, and a shift towards high-quality news sources over entertainment-type news. Students had a less apathetic view of news and journalism, as well as orientation toward journalism careers. We also observed increased commitment to civic activism and an interest in civic engagement activities, particularly ones that are digital and collaborative. We conclude the paper by offering recommendations for how high schools and news media organisations like PBS News Hour can continue to advance innovation in media education through collaborative programs that activate youth voice and bring their perspectives to broader audiences nationwide.

### Media education in high schools

High school English and social studies teachers have been experimenting with the use of multimedia video composition and the use of journalism and other forms of non-fiction media since the 1970s as a means to support the needs of all learners and to address the crisis of relevance that develops as students question the relationship between the knowledge and skills that are valued in the classroom and what is valued in contemporary society (Palmieri 2014; Masterman 1985). For at least the past ten years, a variety of English education organisations, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on English Education (CEE) have also recognised the need to include both the critical analysis of nonprint texts and multimodal creative production projects into the secondary English curriculum, and the Common Core standards seems to support media literacy when it states, "To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in



a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesise, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyse and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new” (21st Century Information Fluency 2012).

When implemented in either school or informal learning settings, digital and media literacy (including both media analysis and media composition activities) enables students to reflect on their uses of media and technology, analyse and evaluate media messages, and create works that are “dynamic, interactive, generative, exploratory, visual and collaborative” (Swenson et al. 2005, 1). The National Council for the Social Studies position statement (2009) on media literacy education notes that media literacy entails “broadening the definition of what is considered acceptable text to include multiple ways people read, write, view, and create information and messages” (1). In this view, legitimate texts include popular culture, advertising, photographs, maps, text messages, movies, video games, and Internet web sites, as well as print. Media literacy also involves multimedia production as students learn to create messages with different media and technology. In composing with image, language and sound, students must consider audience, purpose, genre, form, and context. By creating presentations, Internet blogs, videos, podcasts and other forms of expression and communication, students gain confidence in using their voices to explore the relationship between information, knowledge, and power.

In the informal learning sector, digital storytelling activities provide opportunities for young people to discover the creative and collaborative accomplishments that result from the experience of gaining a sense of voice and agency through digital media. These programs often make use of an adult mentor who leads youth through a step-by-step process of first creating a story and then converting it to a storyboard, shooting images, learning video editing software, writing and performing scripts, and selecting music to accompany their final productions. Productions are seen to provide a means by which youth can exemplify and personify the self in direct relation to their peers and community members (Hull and James 2007). Similarly, the MacArthur Foundation has supported research in digital learning in an informal setting, and there has been an explosion of evidence showing the increased levels of motivation and engagement that result from connected learning, where students pursue their interests in “a socially meaningful and knowledge rich economy of engaging participation, self-expression and recognition” (Ito and Salen 2012, 1).

Little is known, however, about how multimedia production experiences in high school have impact on student learning. There is only a slender body of research on video production courses in American high schools, even though many high schools have offered courses in video production since the 1970s when schools built TV studios and equipped them with the latest in audio-visual educational technology. Today, about 50% of American high schools have video production courses, generally as part of a career and technology education sequence (U.S. Department of Education 2010). For example, the Audio Video Production and Animation program at Anderson High School in Austin, Texas offers a program that is designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore careers in the film and animation industries. Courses emphasise cinema/animation history, media analysis, principles of digital photography, and filmmaking and animation practices. Students work in collaborative groups in order to write, shoot, and edit projects using professional editing software. Typically, students are offered a sequence consisting of an introductory course which includes a mix of both media analysis and video production activities, followed by a series of more advanced production courses, including courses in animation, video game design, news broadcasting, or film. In such courses, students will typically use software tools such as Final Cut Pro 7, GarageBand and Soundtrack Pro, and

Adobe Photoshop CS6. But not every student will have identical learning experiences in a video production course, because these courses generally involve students in active peer collaboration, engaged in a variety of different types of projects that involve a wide variety of knowledge and skills. For this reason, it is important to carefully document the kinds of skills that are activated in video production learning experiences and to consider how these skills intersect with attitudes and behaviors that contribute to civic engagement.

We had the opportunity to study a particular news media literacy initiative, entitled the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program ([www.studentreportinglabs.com](http://www.studentreportinglabs.com)), which connects high school students to local PBS stations and broadcast news professionals in their community to report on critical issues from a youth perspective. Through a project-based, active learning model, students learn how to synthesise information and investigate important topics, while building media literacy, communication and problem-solving skills necessary for the knowledge economy of the 21st century. The program involves more than 50 schools and community centers across the country and each site has adapted the program to meet the particular educational needs of its students, faculty and community. More than 1,000 students participated in the program in 2012-2013, its third year.

The intended goals of the NewsHour Student Reporting Lab are to help students gain a better understanding of what constitutes news; evaluate the credibility of the information they receive via news content; strengthen their appreciation for the norms of professional journalism; and build skills and confidence as communicators through learning how to produce news content in a collaborative real-world environment where what they create may be viewed by an authentic large audience and publication becomes the ultimate assessment.

## Methodology

We conducted a large-scale pre-test – post-test study of students and teachers who participated in the Student Reporting Labs program during the 2012 – 2013 academic year. Students completed a battery of online survey items at Time 1, between September 1 – October 10, 2012, and again at Time 2, between May 1 - 30, 2013. The online survey instrument evaluated student media behavior, attitudes, and learning outcomes. Using a combination of scaled multiple-choice items and performance-based tasks, the instrument addressed news media consumption, production skills, program experiences, life skills, media literacy competencies, attitudes toward news media, civic engagement, attitudes toward education, and demographics. The research documented in this report presents the final year of a three-year inquiry. We used a combination of formative and summative program evaluation methods including: teacher and student interviews, observations of classrooms and professional development programs for teachers, examination of student work samples, and online survey research with both students and teachers. At regular intervals, we produced reports to share evidence with the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs team in order to improve program development.

Online survey research was used to gather quantitative data about the impact of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program on student learning. To develop reliable and valid measures, we first conducted a pilot study with a sample of 85 students in 2011. Evidence from this study was used to refine the items used in the present study (Hobbs et al. 2014).

Sample. Teachers from 38 participating schools recruited students to participate in the program. A complete list of schools whose students participated in the research is shown in Table 2. At Time 1, a total of 566 students took the pre-test, with 429 students completing the survey. At Time 2, a total of 358 students took the post-test. After cleaning to eliminate incomplete data, 283 complete records were usable. Participating students came

from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, with 30% white, 13% African American, 36% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% Native American and 17% other. Students ranged from 13 – 18 years of age, with 40% of the students being age 17 at the time of the post-test. There were more males (60%) than females (40%) in the program. About 35% of students came from families whose parents had a high school education or less, an indicator of lower socio-economic standing.

**Table 2**

**List of Participating Schools**

America's Choice SAND School; Arts Academy at Ben Rush; Attucks Middle School; Austin High School; Broad Ripple Magnet High School; Brooklyn Community Arts and Media High School, Communications Arts High School; Daniel Pearl Magnet School; Desert Pines High School; E.L. Haynes Public Charter High School; Fort Mill High School; Fraser High School; Free Spirit Media/Gary Comer Youth Center; Future Leaders of America's Gulf (F.L.A.G.); Golightly Technical; Granby High School; Hopi Junior Senior High School; Howard University Middle School of Math/Science; Jalen Rose High School; John F. Kennedy High School; John Hopkins Middle School; Lakewood High School; Magnolia High School; Marietta High School; Media Enterprise Alliance; Murrah High School; Pacific High School; Pearl-Cohn Entertainment Magnet High School; Pflugerville High School; Putnam Middle School; Richwood High School; Sentinel High School; Shenandoah High School; T.C. Williams High School; Windsor High School; Withrow University High School; York Comprehensive High School; Youth News Network.

**Online survey instrument.** The online survey instrument evaluated student media behavior, attitudes and learning outcomes (Hobbs et al. 2014). The instrument addressed news media consumption (TV, radio, digital and print), production skills, program experiences, life skills, media literacy competencies, attitudes toward news media, civic engagement, attitudes toward education, and demographics. Prior to administering the post-test in May 2013, we added some additional items for measuring collective civic engagement in response to feedback from participants who attended a presentation of the results of pilot study data. These items are the only variables where we cannot compare student responses at both Time 1 and Time 2. Other measures were also gathered; this data is not reported in this particular paper.

Research was conducted with a sample of nearly 500 students from 44 schools who participated in the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program during the 2012 - 2013 school year. In order to assess the impact of the program on students, we measured knowledge, attitudes and skills at two points in time, during the beginning of the school year in September 2012 (Time 1) and again in May 2013 (Time 2).

## Findings

**Media Production Skills.** The PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs uses an instructional model that enables students to gain significant knowledge and skills through engaging with real-world current events. By taking on the role of news reporter, student must seek out and evaluate information and opinions from a variety of sources, then synthesise

and present ideas using a combination of language, images and sound, all in a collaborative environment, with support from teachers and PBS media professional mentors, and working under deadline pressure. High school students developed media production skills that involved gathering and synthesising information, using digital media and technology to communicate ideas in the format of a broadcast news package, and engaging in cycles of revision and feedback to polish their work.

Gathering and synthesising information. Students who participated in the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program developed knowledge about topics including climate change, the Supreme Court, education, medicine and public health, business and the economy, immigration, and policy issues that affect all Americans. They developed meaningful relationships with community stakeholders in local government, business, and education; they deepened their tolerance for complexity as they encountered people and information sources with a variety of points of view. The program emphasises exposure to challenging informational content combined with dynamic instructional practices that emphasise critical thinking about messages and creative, collaborative authorship using language, image and sound. These factors contribute to good alignment between the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs and the Common Core State Standards, which emphasise the importance of developing students who are college and career ready. The following Common Core Standards are aligned with the goals of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program:

- Demonstrate independence in reading, analysing and expressing ideas, seeking out and using resources to gain knowledge
- Gain a strong base of content knowledge across a wide range of subject matter, gained by listening, reading and sharing information and expressing ideas
- Adapt their communication in relation to audience, task and purpose with sensitivity to the way in which different disciplines call for different types of evidence
- Are engaged, open-minded and discerning readers and listeners, asking critical questions to assess the veracity of claims and the soundness of reasoning, using evidence to develop their ideas
- Use technology to gain knowledge and express ideas, with sensitivity to the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and media
- Appreciate diverse interpretations and points of view to understand points of view that are much different from their own.

Table 3 shows the percentage of students who reported completing key activities aligned with Common Core Standards during their participation in the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs program. Table 4 shows that students developed media production skills that involved gathering and synthesising information, using digital media and technology to communicate ideas in the format of a broadcast news package, and engaging in cycles of revision and feedback to polish their work. While not all students were able to participate in every activity, overall participation increased dramatically throughout the year. These diverse production experiences helped students gather information from a variety of sources and synthesise it into concise, informative and balanced news reports.

**Table 3**

Student news production experiences align with common core standards

<b>Gathering and Synthesizing Information</b>	<b>Percentage of Students who reported participating</b>
Analysed videos	70%
Created a story board	65%
Conducted interviews	68%
Fact-checked information	49%
Pitched a news story	54%
Discussed different points of view about social and political issues	53%
<b>Using Digital Media to Communicate Ideas</b>	
Used a video camera to record visuals	69%
Wrote a script	64%
Performed in front of the camera	65%
Worked behind the scenes in different roles	64%
Logged footage	43%
Edited visuals and sounds	68%
Used a variety of images and sounds to tell a story	54%
Posted videos online	38%
<b>Engaging in Cycles of Revision and Feedback</b>	
Edited reports in response to feedback from others	38%

**Table 4**

Students Expand Both Communication and Technical Skills

<b>Production Skills</b>	<b>TIME 1</b>	<b>TIME 2</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>
<b>Communication</b>			
I am confident interviewing a stranger.	2.55	2.73	+ .18*
I know how to conduct interviews to gather information.	2.33	2.86	+ .53*
I can compare fact and opinion.	2.88	3.29	+ .41*
I know how to develop a news story pitch.	2.04	2.59	+ .55*

I use the Internet to gather reliable information.	3.10	3.18	+ .08
I know how to present myself on camera.	2.61	2.97	+ .36*
<b>Technical</b>	2.69	3.28	+ .59*
I can easily set up a tripod and camera.			
I can fix audio and video quality.	2.24	2.91	+ .67*
I can do substantial video editing.	2.16	2.90	+ .74*
I can plan, direct and produce a video news report.	2.16	2.64	+ .48*
I have the skills I need to make a professional news video.	2.10	2.68	+ .58*
I can use a video camera to film news reports.	2.69	3.10	+ .41*

N = 283, \* p.&lt;.05

**Development of Communication and Technical Skills.** Significant growth over time was evident in the development of both communication and technical skills. Students were asked to rate their abilities on a four-point scale ranging from “not much like me” to “very much like me.” As Table 4 shows, students gained proficiency in gathering information using interviewing. They made substantial strides in comparing fact and opinion. They learned on-camera performance skills in presenting themselves to a public audience. Students also showed impressive gains in the many technical skills involved in using digital technology to gather video footage and edit it. For students now growing up at a time when every citizen is both a consumer and producer of information, these competencies will give students a distinctive advantage in preparing them for college and careers. Through the experience of working as part of a journalistic production team, students developed key collaborative skills. These competences dramatically increased over the course of the academic year and are linked to production learning experiences.

**Intellectual Curiosity:** Students were significantly more likely to agree with the following statements: “I want to learn about all sides of a given issue,” “I am curious about ways to solve issues in my community,” and “I often find myself questioning things that I hear or read.” This willingness to explore multiple sides of an issue and orientation toward community problem-solving are clearly linked to pre-production processes, such as brainstorming, information-gathering, seeking out topics and interview subjects, and developing angles and interview questions. Students with a high level of intellectual curiosity may be more likely to produce news reports that tackle underreported topics or offer fresh perspectives on familiar ones.

**The ability to give and receive feedback:** Students were significantly more likely to agree with statements including “I am open to constructive criticism,” “I motivate others to do their best,” and “I know how to give detailed feedback.” Being able to provide constructive and motivational feedback is a key skill for anyone who works as a member of a team. Students who learn how to collaborate well during their high school years are at a distinct advantage when entering college or the workplace.

**Confidence in self expression:** Students were significantly more likely to agree with the following statements: “It is easy for me to express my views and opinions,” “I have a clear

idea of what values are important to me,” and “I am willing to express my opinion even if I know it is unpopular.” These skills are linked to the research and creative dimensions of the message production process. In addition, students who are comfortable expressing their own values may be more comfortable asking hard interview questions and holding authority figures accountable key skills for budding journalists.

Table 5 shows students’ mean scores in a four-point scale ranging from “not much like me” to “very much like me.” The change in scores over time indicates that the program had a meaningful impact on the “soft skills” that are so important to success in the world outside the classroom. While participating in news media production experiences helped shape students’ abilities as communicators, evidence from this study show improvements in intellectual curiosity, giving and receiving feedback, and confidence in self-expression, competencies that will serve students in any 21st century workplace.

**Table 5**

Students developed intellectual curiosity, collaboration skills, and confidence in self-expression

<b>Intellectual Curiosity</b>	<b>TIME 1</b>	<b>TIME 2</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>
I want to learn about all sides of a given issue.	3.08	3.31	+ .23*
I am curious about ways to solve issues in my community.	2.67	2.97	+ .30*
I often find myself questioning things that I hear or read.	3.10	3.33	+ .23*
<b>Giving and Receiving Feedback</b>	<b>TIME 1</b>	<b>TIME 2</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>
I am open to constructive criticism.	3.00	3.36	+ .36*
I show respect for people’s ideas and feelings, even when I disagree with them.	3.44	3.53	+ .09
I motivate others to do their best.	3.05	3.18	+ .13*
<b>Confidence in self-expression</b>	<b>TIME 1</b>	<b>TIME 2</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>
It is easy for me to express my views and opinions.	2.99	3.28	+ .29*
I have a clear idea of what values are important to me.	3.25	3.49	+ .24*
I am willing to express my opinion even if I know it is unpopular.	3.10	3.32	+ .22*

N = 281, \* p > .05

## Discussion

This study offers insight on the development of the co-called “soft skills” of communication, which until now have not been explicitly studied by news literacy researchers. Today, educators are trying to enhance students’ writing, reading and research skills in ways that

cultivate intellectual curiosity, the ability to give and receive feedback and confidence in self-expression. This study has shown that news literacy initiatives like PBS Student Reporting Labs can be effective in engaging students to increase their cognitive and emotional investment in their own learning. Video production activities can support the development of key literacy competencies and because reporting the news is a form of social power, students can tap into this social power by learning the norms and conventions of broadcast journalism. When students learn to activate their voice, using language, images and sounds to tell a story, they also develop important social and interpersonal skills as they learn to talk to people they don’t know, ask good questions, and explain complex ideas with clarity and precision.

When teachers use journalistic composition in the classroom, the work has a credibility and authority that comes from its obvious relevance to community, regional and national issues. Students are encouraged to have intellectual curiosity, develop strategies to find and use information, and use creativity in expressing what they learn.

Strengths and limitations of the study must be noted. This study’s strengths include the measurement of competencies at two periods of time to observe pre- and post effects and the racial and ethnic diversity of the sample. It is also noteworthy that these robust findings of attitude and behavior change occur even in the face of multiple settings and contexts, with different populations of students participating in the program and different levels of experience and skills of teachers and local PBS mentors. However, the study has several limitations, particularly the lack of a true experimental design and the lack of a control group. Students could not be randomly assigned to condition and it was possible to gather data only from students who participated in the news literacy program. The differences in student attitudes and behavior may be due to factors other than participation in the Student Reporting Labs program. For example, maturation or other factors may also have played a part. Students chose to enroll in this program and selection bias may have affected outcomes. Only a true experiment, where students are randomly assigned to participate in the program could demonstrate that the educational program caused these important improvements in communication skills, technical skills, intellectual curiosity, giving and receiving feedback and confidence in self-expression.

Still, this study provides robust evidence that media literacy is effective in advancing the academic competencies of adolescents and that partnerships between high schools and national news media organisations can yield important learning outcomes. Future research must continue to explore how teachers develop the capacity to participate in such important partnerships and the conditions that optimise effective participation. This study demonstrates that a journalism education program that involves a partnership between teachers and a public broadcaster can have important benefits to students that go far beyond career, technical and vocational education to address one of the most important competencies our students need for future success: intellectual curiosity, or the ability to “learn how to learn” is the skill that will promote a lifetime of learning, in and out of schools.

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# Understanding news: the impact of media literacy education on teenagers' news literacy

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## Abstract

Media literacy education is presented as an answer to the increasing demand for active citizenship in democratic societies. Consequently, educational programmes that empower teenagers to deal with the opportunities and risks that media pose are developing fast. Against this background, a number of secondary schools in The Netherlands started specific media literacy programmes, but it is unexplored to what extent these programmes are effective in promoting news media literacy among teenagers. To investigate this, a survey was conducted to measure news media literacy levels among more than 1,300 students that did or did not participate in a media literacy programme. Results show that media literacy programmes promote teenagers' news media literacy to a certain extent. However, the contribution of media literacy programmes to news literacy is small. Moreover, findings show that the level of news media literacy was moderate, and that educational level and age were stronger predictors of the student's level of news media literacy than media literacy education itself. There is thus room for improvement with regard to delivering (news) media literacy education across school levels in the Netherlands.

## Introduction

**Catch them young, as the saying goes, is the simple, but crucial idea behind the growing attention for media literacy education worldwide. Although media literacy education has a long history, the rise and rapid development of digital technologies has led to an increasing recognition of the importance of media literacy education in both national and international policies (European Commission 2009; Koltay 2011; Tuominen and Kotilainen 2012).**

Media literacy is deemed important in light of the increasing demand for active citizenship in democratic societies, stemming from developments such as globalisation and individualisation. Media literacy is seen as a promising way to develop informed, reflective and engaged citizens that are essential for the functioning of democracy (Mihailidis and

Thevenin 2013). In addition, the increasing presence and use of media in today's society emphasises the importance of media literacy (Buckingham 2003).

Media literacy education should enable citizens to (better) understand and evaluate mediated information, but also to provide people with the skills they need to make sense of today's overwhelming flow of information (European Commission 2009; Potter 2004, 2008). Although media literacy could—and should—be addressed at different levels (cf. Dutch Council for Culture 2005; European Commission 2009), incorporating media literacy education in school curricula seems to be most obvious as the common assumption is that especially young people need to become more media literate. Media play an increasingly significant role in young people's lives, which makes it important to teach them about the media (Buckingham 2003). Moreover, young people need to be prepared for their future role as active citizens in democratic societies, and becoming media literate is seen an important aspect of this process (European Commission 2009). Teaching media literacy in schools also has the advantage that this context offers a more or less equal opportunity for young people to become more media literate, which is important as *all* young people should be empowered to deal with opportunities and risks media pose (Tuominen and Kotilainen 2012). It is thus not surprising that educational programmes that aim to improve young people's level of media literacy are developing fast.

Although there is common sense that media literacy education is highly important, major differences exist in the implementation of media literacy programmes in schools. Three main models of implementation can be discerned (Perez Tornero and Varis 2010; Tuominen and Kotilainen 2012). Curricular transversality is a first way of implementing media literacy in schools. The idea behind this is that the knowledge and skills related to media literacy are required for all students and should therefore be included in (almost) any subject that is educated. However, critics are afraid that integrating media literacy across the curriculum will result in incoherency, marginal attention for the issue, and will make media literacy an unvalued additional skill within the curriculum (Hobbs 1998). They therefore advocate that schools should offer unique programmes and specific subjects that educate media literacy, which can be defined as the second model of implementation. Finally, some countries have a less formal and more practical implementation of media literacy education: activities such as the production of a school newspaper, magazine or a radio broadcast are seen as ways to make young people more media literate (Clark and Monserrate 2011).

Within these three main models, a large variety of content is taught. Prominent topics in media literacy education are digital literacy, production skills, information literacy, and internet safety (cf. Buckingham 2003; Hobbs 2010; Koltay 2011; Perez Tornero and Varis 2010). Another important topic under the media literacy umbrella concerns *news media literacy*, which involves acquiring knowledge about the production, content, and effects of news and the skills to apply this knowledge when using news media (cf. Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013; Clark and Monserrate 2011; Fleming 2014; Martens 2010). News is a major facilitator of democracy, and news media literacy may foster news consumption, civic engagement, democratic participation, and active citizenship (Ashley *et al* 2013). As media literacy education is especially deemed important to promote active participation of (future) citizens in democracy (cf. European Commission 2009; Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013), one would expect that news is a core topic in media literacy education, and additionally that it receives major attention in media literacy research. However, although the question how teenagers' news media literacy can be improved recently gained more attention among scholars, journalists, and educators, there is much unknown about news media literacy (cf. Maksl, Ashley, and Craft 2015; Fleming 2014). The current study therefore aims to shed more light on this issue by investigating the role of news literacy in media

literacy education.

The current study particularly focuses on The Netherlands, a country in which media literacy education is under strong development. There are several reasons why the Dutch situation is an interesting case to study. The commonly witnessed limitations regarding news media literacy, such as a lack in common definitions and approaches, the doubtful role of news literacy as part of media literacy education, and the consequences this has for the effectiveness of (news) media literacy education, are reflected in the Dutch situation. To be more specific, media literacy education in The Netherlands is still in its infancy. There is a large variety in attention to (specific aspects of) media literacy in Dutch school curricula, but common approaches are absent (Gillebaard *et al* 2013). Some schools have implemented media literacy education as a unique programme, while others only pay attention to the theme in a more informal way. In between, the curricular transversal model is also applied in the Dutch context. There are thus great differences in how media literacy is educated, and one might wonder what the consequences of these various ways of implementation are. In addition, there are preliminary indications (cf. Gillebaard *et al* 2013; Walraven 2014; Walraven, Paas, and Schouwenaars 2013) that the news literacy component is overshadowed by attention for practical skills and that the main focus is on topics such as internet safety and digital skills. As the promotion of active participation in democracy serves as a main rationale behind the growing importance of (news) media literacy education in the Netherlands (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science 2008; Oser and Veugelers 2008), more insight into this issue is relevant.

Besides questions about the effectiveness of (news) media literacy education in The Netherlands, there is another reason why this country is interesting to study. The Netherlands has a quite unique educational system, offering the possibility to investigate to what extent students with varying educational levels benefit from media literacy education. The Dutch educational system has a more selective character compared to educational systems in, for instance, the United States and Anglo-Saxon countries (Scheerens, Luyten, and Van Ravens 2011). Learning processes are purposefully adapted to the different needs of students within the same class. Moreover, already at secondary schools, children are divided over different educational levels based on their achievement scores obtained at primary schools. Thus, the Dutch context provides the possibility to extend previous research on the topic by including level of education as an additional explanatory factor for level of news media literacy among teenagers.

In all, the current study aims to extend knowledge about the level of news media literacy among Dutch teenagers and to get more general insights in how (news) media literacy programmes can be improved. The main question of the study is to what extent media literacy programmes are effective in promoting news literacy among Dutch teenagers, and whether educational level plays a role in this regard. This will be investigated by conducting a survey among students at secondary schools that do or do not participate in a specific media literacy programme.

### **(News) media literacy in the Dutch context**

As already outlined by a large number of authors (e.g., Ashley *et al* 2013; Hobbs and Jensen 2009; Maksl *et al* 2015; Martens 2010; Vanwynsberghe, Paulussen, and Verdegem 2011) a large variety of definitions regarding media literacy has been employed by scholars and educators. A frequently quoted definition is that of Aufderheide (1993), stating that media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. This is a quite abstract and broad definition, and several authors

therefore build on this definition in further defining media literacy (cf. Martens 2010). This goes hand in hand with the elaboration of the theoretical rationale behind the concept. Although several scholars have already discussed the different conceptual and theoretical viewpoints in this regard (e.g., Hobbs 2005; Maksl *et al* 2015), there is still inconsistency and incoherency. As Hobbs (2005) already witnessed, focus is more on the development of key concepts that should be taught, instead of what media literacy means.

Media literacy can be envisioned on a continuum, as Potter (2008) suggests, that runs from a protectionist view to a constructivist view. The protectionist stance, rooted in the media effect paradigm, defines media literacy as an answer to the negative influence that media may have. The constructivist view, positioned within the cultural critical studies paradigm and constructivist theories in education, mainly emphasises the opportunities that media pose (Hobbs 2005; Martens 2010). For instance, Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013) define media literacy as a core competence for engaged citizenship in participatory democracy, by making people able to act as critical thinkers, effective creators and communicators, and agents of social change.

Against the background of the current study, we reflect on the Dutch approach to media literacy. Although the effects of media on children get a lot of attention (cf. Valkenburg 2004), The Netherlands does not have a long history with regard to media literacy. Related to that, the theoretical framework in which media literacy education is embedded is thin. The Dutch Council for Culture officially launched the term media literacy in 2005, which is years after the increasing attention of scholars and educators worldwide that Hobbs (1998) described. The leading definition considers media literacy as the set of competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that citizens need to be able to actively and mindfully participate in the mediated society. According to this definition, the goal of media literacy education is particularly to make citizens capable to participate in society, and not (or not that much) to teach them how to deal with media (Dutch Council for Culture 2005). This implies that the need for media literate citizens stems from a generally constructivist view on media: media poses opportunities for society and people should be learned how to take advantage of these opportunities. This is fairly in line with the cultural critical studies perspective as conveyed by, for instance, Buckingham (2003) and Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013).

In contrast to this, the daily practice of media literacy education in The Netherlands seems to be more in line with a protectionist perspective. To be more specific, the network organisation Mediawijzer.net—the Dutch center of expertise for media literacy that is initiated by the Dutch Government—built a model that serves as point of departure for media literacy initiatives. Mediawijzer.net defined four main categories under which ten media literacy competences are classified (see Figure 1): understanding, use, communication, and strategy. At first glance, the model seems to present a rather neutral view on media literacy. However, when taking a closer look we see that the advantages of media literacy in terms of opportunities for society are not explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, an analysis of teaching methods based on this model shows a particular focus on the risks instead of opportunities that media pose (Walraven *et al* 2013). According to this, media literacy education in The Netherlands seems to focus on the reduction of the negative impact of media on young people, which is in sharp contrast with the ‘official’ aim as formulated by the Dutch Council for Culture (2005).

The fragmentation in conceptual and theoretical views on media literacy education is also witnessed in the subfield of news media literacy (Ashley *et al* 2013; Fleming 2014), which is at the core of this study. In The Netherlands, news media literacy is underexposed in both research and education. The Dutch Council for Culture does not explicitly mention it when defining media literacy, and it plays only a minor role in the competence model de-

veloped by Mediawijzer.net. Regarding the latter, only two competences can more or less directly be related to news media (see Figure 1 at base of page): *to understand how media are made* and *to understand how media colour reality*.

**Measuring the effectiveness of news media literacy education**

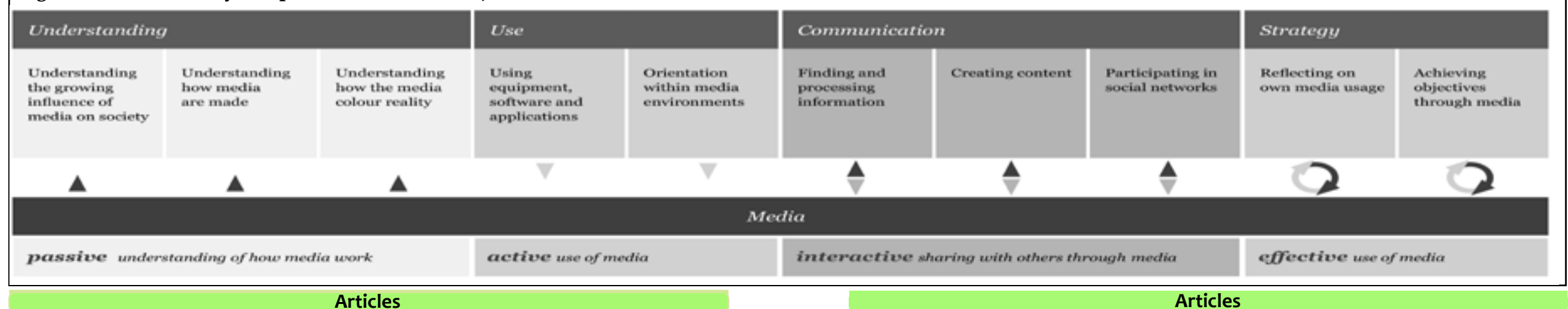
The discussed media literacy competence model is particularly meant for players in the professional field (e.g., teachers, library staff, media experts). It is less useful for scientific purposes as a theoretical framework is lacking. Moreover, methods for studying and evaluating the effectiveness of this competence model are not available. We therefore use Rosenbaum’s media literacy model (Rosenbaum 2007; Rosenbaum, Beentjes, and Konig 2012) as the basis for our measurement of news media literacy in the current study. This model (see Figure 2) comprises a schematic representation in which all of the (news) media literacy literature and definitions can be placed. Therefore, it can be seen as an overarching model that incorporates a variety of elements related to (news) media literacy.

Central to Rosenbaum’s model is the interplay between producer, media, and user. Rosenbaum states that “media literacy entails the awareness of different aspects of the production of media content, the influence of media on its users and producers, and the way in which users deal with the media” (Rosenbaum *et al* 2012, p. 338). This implies that being news media literacy involves understanding of the production, content, and users of news media. These aspects will therefore be taken into account in our investigation of the effectiveness of specific media literacy programmes in The Netherlands.

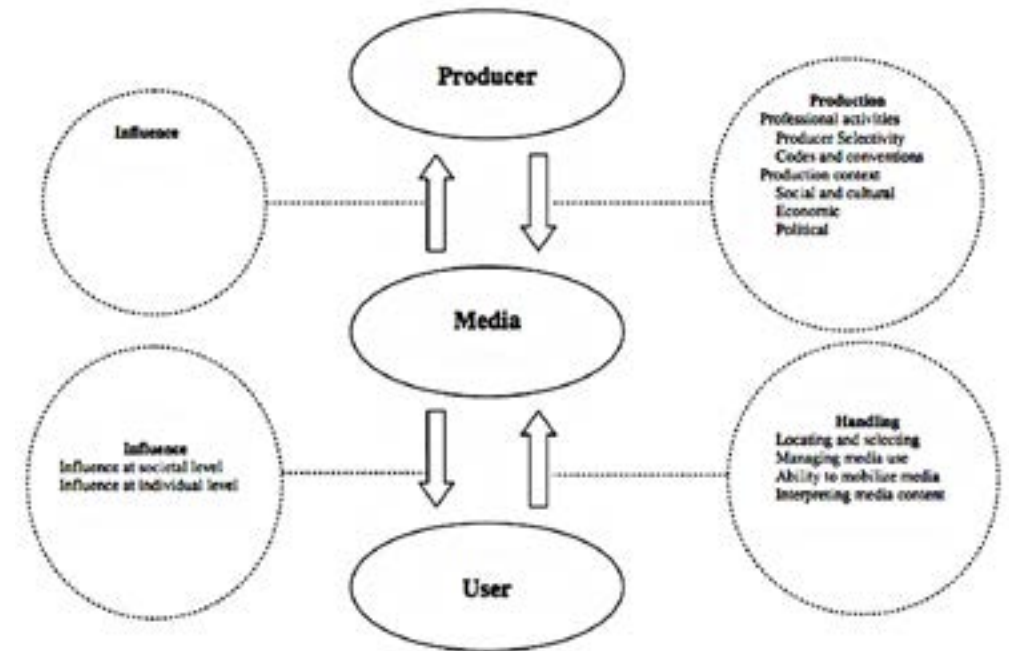
We use Rosenbaum’s model to measure student’s news media literacy knowledge instead of skills or attitudes. Although we are aware that we therefore do not include the most comprehensive measure of news media literacy in our study (cf. Ashley *et al* 2013; Clark and Monserrate 2011; Fleming 2014), we have at least two reasons for this choice. First, one might assume that knowledge forms the starting point for any kind of media literacy skill or attitude (cf. Rosenbaum *et al* 2012). As the current study is the first that scientifically evaluates media literacy programmes in The Netherlands, starting with knowledge seems to be a reasonable first step. Second, the two news-related competences in the competence model (Mediawijzer.net, n.d.) are placed under the passive component of the model (understanding) and thus refer particularly to knowledge. It therefore makes sense to focus on what other authors (e.g., Potter 2004, 2008; Ashley *et al* 2013) define as “knowledge structures” in this study.

As media literacy programmes aim to make students more media literate, one might

**Figure 1. Media literacy competence model** (Mediawijzer.net, n.d.)



**Figure 2. Aspects of media literacy** (Rosenbaum *et al* 2012, p. 319).



expect that students following these programmes have more knowledge about the production, content, and users of news and about the four processes signified by the arrows in Figure 2. We therefore expect the following effect of media literacy programmes on students’ news media knowledge:

H1: Students following a specific media literacy programme at their school are more news media literate than students following a regular programme

In addition to the examination of the effectiveness of media literacy programmes in The Netherlands, the study also aimed to disentangle the moderating role of educational level in this regard. Although previous research on the relation between educational attainment and (news) media literacy is scarce, there are reasons to expect that level of education influences the effects of media literacy education on the student’s level of news media lit-



eracy. First, having a higher level of education can be seen as indicator of better cognitive abilities, which may positively affect the ability to understand the production, content, and use of news media. Moreover, the Dutch educational system places more emphasis on knowledge at higher levels of education, whereas at a lower level vocational training is at the core of the curriculum (cf. Scheerens *et al* 2011). This implies that students at higher levels may have more possibilities to acquire knowledge. Also a higher motivation to consume news might play a role here. Higher levels of education are associated with greater levels of news consumption (American Press Institute 2014), suggesting that these students are more motivated to follow the news. In the study of Craft, Maksl and Ashley (2013), it is reported that the intrinsic motivation to consume news correlates with higher levels of news media literacy. We thus expect that:

H2: Students at higher levels of education are more news media literate than students at lower levels of education

As we are studying specific media literacy programmes, one might ask to what extent these programmes are able to influence students' media literacy levels at different educational levels. Following the above reasoning, one can on the one hand argue that the effects of media literacy programmes will be stronger at higher levels of education, as these students are better able to process and remember information provided in these programmes. On the other hand, students at lower levels can benefit more from media literacy programmes as they consume less news and thus may have less prior knowledge. Consequently, there is more potential for growth in news media literacy among these lower educated students. As support for one of these two lines of arguments is lacking, the following research question is formulated:

**RQ1:** Is there variation in the impact of specific media literacy programmes between different levels of education?

Besides level of education, literature in the field of (news) media literacy indicates that other demographic characteristics may influence literacy levels too (e.g., Vanwynsberghe *et al* 2011; Ashley *et al* 2013). Gender and age are the most prominent demographics in this regard and are thus important to take into account in the current study (cf. Ashley *et al* 2013; Maksl *et al* 2015; Rosenbaum 2007).

Starting with gender, there is ample research supporting the existence of a gender gap in news use: women lag behind men in following the news (American Press Institute 2014; Pointdexter 2010). As men consume more news, one might expect that they are also more news media literate. However, past studies among students do not provide support for this reasoning as no difference between boys and girls was found with regard to their levels of news media literacy (cf. Craft *et al* 2013; Maksl *et al* 2015). As previous research does not support the theoretical expectations with regard to gender, we pose the following question:

**RQ2:** Is there variation in the impact of specific media literacy programmes between male and female students?

Regarding age, one might argue that older students will be more news media literate. Children's cognitive abilities increase over the years (e.g., Potter 2008), which may imply that they also acquire more knowledge about media when they get older (Rosenbaum 2007). Initial support for this is provided by Maksl *et al* (2015) and Craft *et al* (2013). They found that older students tend to be more news media literate than younger students. We thus expect:

H3: Older students are more news media literate than younger students

## Method

To investigate the extent to which media literacy education at Dutch secondary schools is effective in promoting news literacy skills among teenagers, a survey was conducted among secondary school students in The Netherlands. Recruitment of respondents involved a two-step procedure. First, schools that do or do not offer a specific media literacy programme were approached with the request to participate in the survey. After a school agreed, classes were visited to advertise the opportunity for students to participate. It was not obligatory to participate, thus only students that volunteered to take part in the study filled in a paper-and-pencil questionnaire.

## Sample

A total number of 17 schools across The Netherlands agreed to contribute to the study. Within these schools, students from several classes participated. Only students that completed the questionnaire were included in the sample, resulting in a study sample that consists of 1373 students: 725 male teenagers (52.8%) and 648 female teenagers (47.2%). They had an average age of 12.79 years ( $SD = .75$ ), with a range of 11 to 16 years. These students either attend the lowest level of secondary education (i.e. pre-vocational education;  $n = 330$ ), a medium level of secondary education (i.e. preparing for higher professional education;  $n = 539$ ), or the highest level of secondary education (i.e. pre-university education;  $n = 504$ ).

Within this sample, a number of students participate in a special media literacy programme ( $n = 635$ ), whereas the other students ( $n = 739$ ) follow a regular curriculum programme. Although the exact content of the media literacy programme differed between schools, they have in common that they offer special programmes focusing on media and media literacy. The division of the media literacy programme students over the different educational levels was respectively 108 students at the lower educational level, 286 students at the medium level, and 241 students at the highest level.

## Measures

The original questionnaire consisted of numerous questions related to media. In the current study, we focus on the items that were included to test the student's specific knowledge about news media. The dependent variable of the study, *News media literacy*, was measured using previously developed scales by Ashley *et al* (2013) and by Rosenbaum (2007). Ashley *et al* (2013) developed and tested a measurement scale that successfully measured news media literacy. Rosenbaum (2007) created a large questionnaire to measure teenager's general level of media literacy, which included questions related to news media. To reduce the length of the questionnaire used in the current study, a total number of 20 items were selected from both questionnaires. These were translated to Dutch and sometimes slightly adapted in order to make them suitable for this study.

As shown in Table 1, the items that were selected cover a wide range of topics related to news media. In accordance with the model that served as basis for our measurement (Rosenbaum 2007; Rosenbaum *et al* 2012), items refer to the (interplay between) production, content, and use of news media.

**Table 1: News Media Literacy Items** (based on Ashley et al 2013; Rosenbaum, 2007)

Items	Correct answers
1. Television news presents a complete picture of what is going on in the world	40.9%
2. Every television station will present news on the Islam in the same way	79.7%
3. When an event is presented on the news, it looks the same as when you where there and saw it yourself	66.8%
4. The stories you see on the news are about the only important events that took place at that day	69.4%
5. A television station that has to make money off its programmes will often make the news more exciting	75.1%
6. A story produced for a children's news programme will be the same as a story made for a regular news programme	71.8%
7. Some television news stations do not have to make a profit	45.1%
8. A reporter who is at a higher age makes other news stories than a young reporter	62.3%
9. When a news anchor reads the news, other TV station employees are in the studio	92.2%
10. News about gay marriages is presented in the same way in different countries	90.4%
11. News makes things more dramatic than they really are	56.0%
12. People know that they are influenced by the news	49.2%
13. A journalist's first obligation is to tell the truth	63.7%
14. Production techniques (such as music) can be used to make a news story more exciting	56.5%
15. Two people might see the same news story and get the same information from it	68.9%
16. A story about conflict is more likely to be featured prominently	68.0%
17. When taking pictures, photographers decide what is most important	87.3%
18. News companies choose stories based on what will attract the biggest audience	92.8%
19. News is designed to attract an audience's attention	91.4%
20. Lightening is used to make certain people in the news look good or bad	72.5%

As media literacy is a multi-faceted, complex concept (Rosenbaum 2007), it is impossible to develop an instrument that covers all aspects of (news) media literacy. We therefore decided to focus mainly on knowledge with regard to the relation from producer to media and from media to user. We chose for these particular aspects as they are most frequently mentioned as indicators for news media literacy in the literature (e.g., Ashley et al 2013; Craft et al 2013; Potter, 2004).

The first ten items reported in Table 1 were derived from Rosenbaum (2007), the other questions were developed by Ashley and colleagues (2013). For each item, students had to indicate whether the statement was true or not. A sum score was calculated, reflecting the number of statements that were correctly judged as either true or false. As a number of students did not respond to all items, we decided that only respondents that answered at least 75% of the news media literacy statements were included in the analysis ( $n = 1255$ ; 91% of the original sample).

In addition to news media literacy, the demographic characteristics - gender, age and level of education - were included in the analysis. Moreover, a crucial factor was of course

whether or not the respondent participated in a media literacy programme. Out of the 1255 remaining respondents (52.9% male,  $M_{age} = 12.78$ ;  $SD_{age} = .74$ ), 565 of them (45%) participated in a media literacy programme. The division of these students over the different educational levels was respectively 91 students at the lower educational level (43.33%), 264 students at the medium level (52.27%), and 210 students (46.77%) at the highest level.

## Results

Univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to test the effectiveness of media literacy education among different subsamples of the respondents in the study. First, we investigated how attention for media literacy in the curriculum, level of education, and the combination of these two variables affect the respondent's level of news media literacy. The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that students following a media literacy programme at their school are more news media literate than students that follow a regular curriculum programme. This hypothesis was supported ( $F(1,1253) = 4.41$ ;  $p = .036$ ). The students in the media literacy programmes were slightly more media literate ( $M = 13.86$ ;  $SE = .11$ ) than those who follow a regular curriculum ( $M = 13.54$ ;  $SE = .10$ ). Second, students at higher levels of education were expected to be more news media literate than students at lower levels of education (H2). This expectation was also supported ( $F(2,1252) = 16.44$ ;  $p < .001$ ): students attending the lowest level of education were less news media literate ( $M = 12.92$ ;  $SE = .15$ ) than students at the medium ( $M = 13.95$ ;  $SE = .12$ ) and highest level of education ( $M = 13.90$ ;  $SE = .13$ ). As the means already indicate, the difference between the latter two educational groups was not large enough to reach significance ( $p = .965$ ).

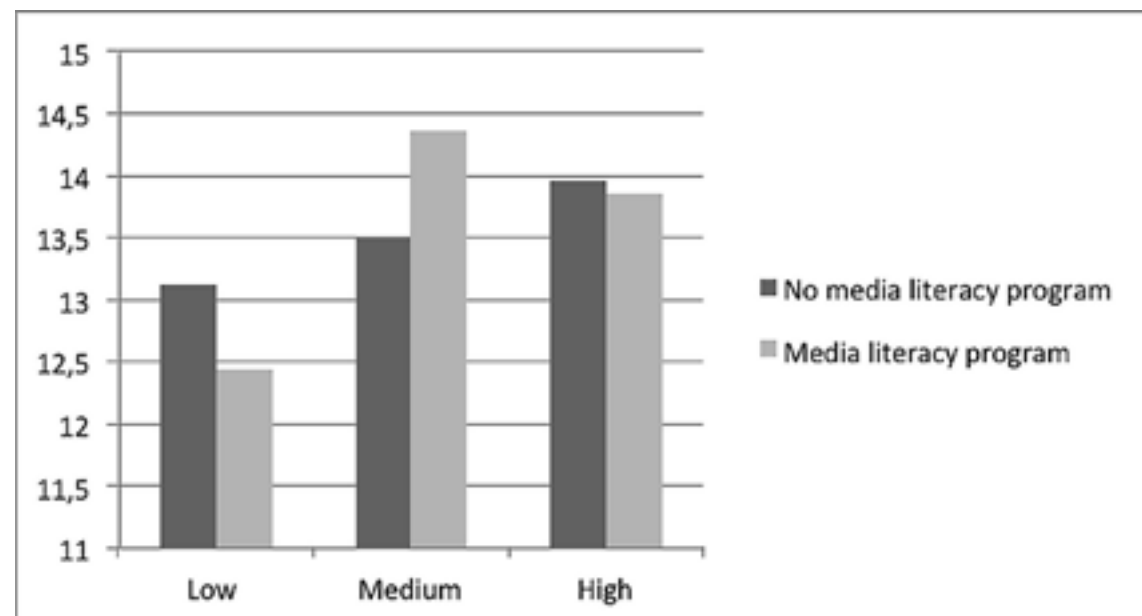
In addition to these factors, we investigated whether the impact of the media literacy programme differs between the three educational levels (RQ1). Also this interaction was significant ( $F(2,1249) = 8.28$ ;  $p < .001$ ). As shown in Figure 3, the beneficial effect of media literacy education only appeared at the medium level of education ( $p < .001$ ). In contrast, at the lowest level of education, students that do not follow a media literacy programme have a higher level of news media literacy compared to students who are in a media literacy programme ( $p < .040$ ). At the highest level of education, students did not differ in their level of news media literacy.

We also questioned (RQ2) whether gender might influence levels of news media literacy. We investigated differences in news media literacy between male and female students, but no variance was found ( $p = .884$ ). Moreover, we tested effects of age (H3). Results showed that age matters to some extent ( $F(2,1252) = 2.53$ ;  $p = .080$ ). Students aged 11 or 12 were almost as news media literate ( $M = 13.64$ ;  $SE = .12$ ) as students aged 13 or 14 ( $M = 13.69$ ;  $SE = .10$ ). However, students with an age of 15 or 16 years old had a higher news media literacy score ( $M = 15.42$ ;  $SE = .78$ ). Age differences did not vary between students that do or do not follow a news media literacy programme ( $p = .539$ ). In all, there are indications that teenagers become more news media literate when they grow older, which supports our third hypothesis.

### Figure 3. News media literacy level for educational level by media literacy programme

## Discussion

The current study aimed to contribute to the (sub)field of news media literacy by investigating the effectiveness of media literacy programmes taught at Dutch secondary schools.



Based on the results, it can be concluded that media literacy programmes promote teenagers' news literacy to a certain extent, but especially that there is a strong need for improvement with regard to (news) media literacy education. A few specific results underlie this conclusion. First, students showed to have a moderate level of news media literacy (average score: 13-14 correct answers out of 20). As only knowledge (instead of the ability to apply this knowledge, which may reflect a more advanced level of media literacy) was measured, this finding can be interpreted as a cause for concern. Second, students following a specific media literacy programme showed to be more news media literate compared to students following a regular programme, but the difference is very small. This implies that specific media literacy programmes only slightly enhance student's understanding of news media. Third, other factors than media literacy education (i.e., level of education and age) were found to be stronger predictors of the student's level of news media literacy than media literacy education itself. This further emphasises the minor contribution of current media literacy programmes to the level of news media literacy of young people.

A result that deserves specific attention is that at the lowest level of education, students that do not follow a media literacy programme have a higher level of news media literacy compared to students following a media literacy programme. As it is unlikely that media literacy education reduces levels of news media literacy, other factors may have affected the results. In particular, we suggest that motivation may serve as an explanatory factor in this regard. As recently outlined by Maksl *et al* (2015), motivation to engage with the news affects learning from the news: a higher intrinsic motivation to consume news relates to a higher level of news media literacy. Although it sounds paradoxical, it might be that the lower educated students that chose to follow the specific media literacy programme were less intrinsically motivated to acquire knowledge with regard to (news) media than the lower educated students that chose to follow the regular programme. Students at the lowest level of education are mainly interested in (and able to learn) practical skills instead of knowledge. For students that are the least motivated to learn, an opportunity to "exchange" the regular, more knowledge-based curriculum for a programme that seems to offer more possibilities for practical learning is of higher interest. As a media literacy track offers numerous opportunities to use media in a practical way (e.g., creating content, us-

ing equipment, software and applications), choosing for such a programme is reasonable for this specific group of lower educated students. Stated differently, not interest in news and media, but the fun parts of media literacy programmes (e.g., multimedia production, learning digital skills) may have influenced students in their choice to follow a media literacy programme. This, therefore, might explain why these students showed to have a lower level of news media literacy than students in a regular programme. Following Maksl *et al* (2015), it would be interesting to test this assumption by measuring motivational factors in future research.

The current study is a first step in evaluating news media literacy education in The Netherlands. Related to that, some remarks need to be made. First, in accordance with scales developed by for instance Ashley *et al* (2013) and Maksl *et al* (2015), Likert-type scales instead of dichotomous answer categories may have given a more detailed view of someone's level of news media literacy. Second, more information about the specific content of media literacy programmes can be helpful in better understanding why these programmes do not significantly contribute to news media literacy. Although there is evidence that minor attention is paid to the news component in these programmes (e.g., Gillebaard *et al* 2013), it might be interesting to investigate how competences are taught and how they particularly relate to news media literacy. Conducting experiments or intervention studies may enhance our knowledge in this regard. Finally, future research should include a more comprehensive measure of news media literacy by measuring not only knowledge but also skills to apply this knowledge.

A few recommendations can be derived from this study, which are not only relevant for the Dutch situation but may also enhance news media literacy education in other countries. Media literacy education is meant to make a whole generation of young people more media literate. It is thus beyond discussion that media literacy is equally important for higher and lower educated youngsters (European Commission 2009; Tuominen and Kotilainen 2012). As the latter group is shown to be less media literate, it is recommended that efforts to improve (news) media literacy education includes particular attention for the question how this lower educated young people can become more media literate. They need and deserve alternative ways to acquire the knowledge and skills related to (news) media literacy. The potential pitfall of focusing on practical production skills without considering the context in which news is created should be avoided (Hobbs 1998). This thus calls for collaboration between scholars and educators with different disciplinary backgrounds to guide the classroom practices of media literacy educators (Hobbs 2011).

A second recommendation concerns increasing focus on news media literacy within the broader field of media literacy. Notwithstanding the importance of media literacy components such as digital literacy and production skills, growing attention for news media is crucial in light of the aim to make (young) people more capable to function as active citizens in democratic societies. The vital role of news in this regard cannot be ignored and should therefore receive increased attention in both research and education (see also Ashley *et al* 2013). The last recommendation, related to the previous point, involves the necessity for a critical evaluation of the competences that are required with regard to news media literacy. The Dutch case showed major contradictions between the aims and competences of media literacy education, and comparable discrepancies are witnessed in other countries (e.g., Hobbs 1998; Maksl *et al* 2015; Martens 2010). The media literacy framework for engaged citizenship (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013) may serve as a good starting point in this regard. The model presents four core media literacy competences (i.e. a participatory competence, a collaborative competence, and expressive media literacy competence, and a critical competence) that together empower young people to participate in democracy and to survive in today's media society.

In all, this study shows that there is a long way to go when it comes to news media literacy. We hope that our study contributes to emerging national and international attention for news media literacy by displaying the challenges that are faced regarding the conceptual and theoretical framework of news media literacy, and the consequences that this current lack in clarity seems to have in, and possibly also outside, The Netherlands.

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# Following the money: philanthropy and news literacy education

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**Abstract:** This qualitative case study explores philanthropic investment in news literacy education with a focus on programs informed and inspired by journalistic principles and practices such as the ones developed at the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project. Collectively, these programs attracted the majority of foundation funding dedicated to the emerging field between 2006 and 2015. By highlighting the perspectives of those involved in news literacy grantmaking, a more complete picture of news literacy education in the United States emerges. The results suggest that news literacy funding was at first largely experimental and curricula developed by journalists-turned-educators significantly influenced how foundation executives defined news literacy skills and how their organizations positioned news literacy investments. The findings also indicate that as news literacy funding evolved and matured along with the discipline, some foundation decision makers said they prefer module-based programs geared towards middle and high school students, while others stated they would like to see more meaningful connections between news literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy pedagogies.

## Introduction

**In response to sweeping changes to journalism professions brought on by digitization (see Downie and Schudson 2009), Howard Schneider, founding dean of the Stony Brook University School of Journalism, argued that journalism educators should not only focus on preparing majors for jobs in journalism, they should also educate those on the "demand side" of the information equation through news literacy instruction.**

Schneider (2007) reasoned that young people schooled in the principles and practices of the press would develop critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports and come to appreciate investigative, watchdog journalism many deem essential for democracy to function well. More than \$3 million was raised from a variety of philanthropic organizations to support the development, instruction, and expansion of the Stony Brook conceptualization of news literacy. In fact, a trendsetting \$1.7 million grant

from the Knight Foundation in 2006 to create a Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook<sup>1</sup> and to teach a newly developed news literacy course to 10,000 Stony Brook undergraduates proved pivotal in popularizing the term “news literacy.”

The News Literacy Project<sup>2</sup> represents another program born from journalistic methods and mindsets that has attracted significant investment and attention from philanthropists. Founded by former *Los Angeles Times* investigative reporter Alan Miller, the News Literacy Project curriculum is designed to help middle and high school students use the standards of quality journalism to sort fact from fiction and to develop an appreciation for the role of a free press in democracy. It also manages a network of seasoned journalists who go into classrooms in New York, Chicago, the Washington, D.C., area and Houston to help make news literacy lessons more impactful. Since the News Literacy Project's inception in 2008, more than 25,000 students have participated in its programs, and close to \$5 million from national, regional and family foundations has been raised to advance its instructional aims.

In addition to multimillion-dollar investments in the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project, foundations have dedicated hundreds of thousands of more dollars to other news literacy-related initiatives including research papers (Craft, Maksl, and Ashley 2013; Hobbs 2010a) conferences (Wallace 2014), massive open online courses (Arizona State University 2015), and curricular resources (American Press Institute 2012; The Poynter Institute 2015), yet the perspectives of funding decision makers have largely been overlooked. To date, no published scholarly research is available that investigates why news literacy matters to funders, even though they have arguably been the most influential stakeholders in shaping the meaning and direction of news literacy education.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the motivations, understandings, and future directions of news literacy grantmaking. By following the money, so to speak, a more complete picture of news literacy education in the United States is revealed. The findings suggest that news literacy grantmaking is rooted in journalistic beliefs about news, information and democracy, and news literacy has evolved from an experimental concept to more strategic, evidence-based programs. Looking ahead, those interested in funding news literacy projects in the future stated they prefer module-based approaches, and they believe the interests of educators and young citizens would be served best if news literacy curricula were integrated into a larger spectrum of digital and media literacies aimed at improving civic education and engagement.

## Background and theoretical orientations

The link between philanthropy and education in the United States is well established (Bernstein 2014; Brundage Sears 1922/1990; Thelin and Trollinger 2014). In fact, journalism education begins, for all practical purposes, when newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer “pressed many dollars into the somewhat reluctant hands of Columbia University” (Carey 1978: 848). In the early 1900s, Pulitzer sought to legitimize journalism as a new area of study and rebuild a tarnished reputation by attaching his name to an Ivy League institution. Even with the lure of millions of dollars in endowment funds, it took Pulitzer more than 10 years to convince Columbia to start a journalism program (Boylan 2003). Scholarly critics were against the move, arguing that the university was no place for professional education, while newspaper workers attacked the idea on the premise that the most appropriate place for aspiring journalists to learn journalism was on the job. But Pulitzer (1904: 655) argued that the best kind of education for journalists was university-

1 For more information on the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy, go to: <http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/>

2 For more information on the News Literacy Project, go to: <http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/>

level instruction designed to develop character and an appreciation for the public good. He wrote: “It is the idea of work for the community, not commerce, not for one’s self, but primarily for the public, that needs to be taught [in journalism schools].”

Pulitzer’s \$2 million investment in journalism education at Columbia<sup>3</sup> not only reflects the philanthropic activities of his contemporaries—contemporaries such John D. Rockefeller who gave \$34.7 million to the University of Chicago, Leland and Jane Stanford’s \$20 million donation to start a new university in California, and Henry C. Frick’s bequest of \$15 million to Princeton (Kimball and Johnson 2012)—it also echoes a desire and a responsibility to affect positive social change through giving, which is summed up best in Andrew Carnegie’s (1889/1906: 537) famous quote, “The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced,” in *The Gospel of Wealth*. The philanthropic field in the United States has evolved and expanded significantly since Pulitzer and Carnegie’s time to more than 75,000 foundations with combined assets of close to \$650 billion (Foundation Center 2015). However, the thinking behind philanthropic investments has remained constant for more than a century: The use of wealth to help address income inequities and to affect social and cultural change in the name of the greater good.

While the altruistic intent of philanthropy “runs deep in the American grain and national character” (Thelin and Trollinger 2014: 2), the large sums of money associated with voluntary giving for the public good signify substantial power and influence. As such, Fleishman (2007: xvi) uses the word *polyarchy* to encapsulate the unique role foundations play in modern America because it suggests the existence of many, separate, independent power centers. He writes: “In America’s civic (not-for-the-profit) sector, it is the foundations that put the power of concentrated money behind individuals and the associations they form, thereby transforming American pluralism into a polyarchy with effective firepower.”

Moving now to the contemporary “firepower” of media funders exclusively, more than \$2 billion was directed towards media-related philanthropic projects in the United States between 2009 and 2012, according to data compiled and analyzed by researchers at Media Impact Funders. Media Impact Funders (2012) is a network of foundations, government agencies, donor affinity groups, philanthropic advisors, and individual donors that invest in media and technology programs to create “social change.” To help inform members, researchers at Media Impact Funders pull together data on media-related grants of more than \$10,000 from grantmaker reports, IRS tax returns, grantmaker web sites, annual reports, the philanthropic press, and various other sources. Media Impact Funders tracks data on grants directed towards media literacy, journalism education, and news literacy programs hence the importance of the organization’s data to this project.

The Freedom Forum, Inc., the Ford Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are among the largest nonprofit funders of media-related projects (Media Impact Funders 2012). The category of investment<sup>4</sup> that received the most attention and investment in recent years has been “journalism, news, and information,” with a marked increase in the investigative journalism category. Promi-

3 The University of Missouri established the first journalism school in 1908. Missouri was considered first in the United States because Pulitzer’s \$2 million gift to Columbia, which equates to roughly \$50 million today, was not endowed until after his death in 1911. Journalism classes at Columbia began in 1912. Today, the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism offers one of the most-coveted journalism degrees in the world, and the Pulitzer Prize, also part of the publisher’s bequest to the university, is the most prestigious award in American journalism.

4 Media Impact Funders codes grants into 29 different “media activity” categories. Advocacy journalism, audio, citizen journalism, constituency journalism, freedom of expression/1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, journalism education, media access and policy, media literacy, and public broadcasting are among the list. The Media Impact Funders website, (<http://mediaimpactfunders.org/media-grants-data/>), includes a full listing of and definitions for each category. It is important to note that grants can apply to multiple categories in the taxonomy. For example, a grant to NPR for news programming would be coded as “journalism, news, and information” as well as “radio.”

ment investigative journalism grant recipients include organizations such as Pro Publica, the Center for Public Integrity, and the Center for Investigative Reporting. The thinking is that investigative journalism, which many view as high quality, fact-based, democracy-enhancing watchdog journalism (Schudson 2008), might not survive in a highly competitive and fragmented digital media environment, so not-for-profit funding sources are needed to guarantee its survival. Westphal (2009: 3) reasons: “In a world without philanthropists and foundations, the practice of investigative reporting might not be long ... It’s expensive, it’s time-consuming, it has an unreliable payoff—and there’s no obvious free market way to make sure it gets done in the new-media world.”

Lewis (2012) takes an in-depth look at the strategic transition from “journalism” to “information” at one of the largest media grantmakers, the Knight Foundation, which has been funding projects in the news industry for decades. In a qualitative case study, Lewis (2012: 311) finds that the foundation has been able to expand its influence and trigger innovation in journalism by supporting projects aimed at renegotiating traditional boundaries between the “professional logic” of journalists and the “participatory logic” of digital media empowered audiences. Of note, the Knight Foundation was the first major foundation to make a significant investment in news literacy education informed by journalistic perspectives starting with the \$1.7 million Stony Brook grant in 2006. Eric Newton, a Knight Foundation vice president at the time of the investment, said: “A college that could teach its students to tell quality journalism from junk could, in theory, change the way they consume news. At the very least, we expect it to boost student awareness of the value of a free press” (cited in Finder, 2007).

For all intents and purposes, news literacy education is a specialized approach to media literacy education, given the intent of news literacy instructors is to sharpen critical thinking skills about media content. Media literacy education is a diverse, interdisciplinary, and growing field with roots in education, media studies and critical/cultural perspectives (Buckingham 2003; Potter 2010). Loosely defined, to be media literate means one has developed an ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide 1993; Christ & Potter 1998). A number of frameworks have emerged to assist in the instruction of media literacy skill development in American classrooms including, but not limited to, the National Association for Media Literacy Education’s (2007, 2009) core principles of media literacy education and associated key questions to ask when analysing media messages, and the Center for Media Literacy’s (2009) questions to consider about media content. These questions include: 1) Who created this message? 2) What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? 3) How might different people understand this message differently? 4) What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message? 5) Why is this message being sent?

The key differences between all-encompassing frameworks such as the ones put forth by the National Association for Media Literacy Education and the Center for Media Literacy and approaches to news literacy can be found in instructional focus and disciplinary origins. As the name implies, *news* literacy educators focus on teaching critical analysis skills about news texts exclusively, whereas media literacy lessons can be applied to any type of media content including feature films, comic books, advertisements, and news, to name just a few. Generally speaking, the thinking behind the news literacy movement is that news analysis instruction needs unique analytic optics given the non-fiction nature of news as well as the belief that news outlets play a central role in developing a well-informed citizenry. Altschull (1995: 5) calls this line of reasoning the democratic assumption: “In a democracy ... decisions made by the people in the voting booths are based on information made available to them. That information is provided primarily by the news media. Hence, the news media are indispensable to the survival of democracy.”

Much like media literacy, there is no one way to define or teach news literacy, which is where disciplinary origins of educators come into play (Buckingham et al. 2005; Potter 2010). RobbGrieco and Hobbs (2013) divide news literacy education into two instructional paradigms: Global and journalism school. Global versions of news literacy reflect more general approaches to media literacy in the sense that practitioners typically adhere to frameworks that guide students to question media representations versus reality, to analyze the techniques used to construct messages, and to hypothesize about the potential effects of messages on audiences. Mihailidis’ (2009) experiment with media literacy instruction at the university level is consistent with this approach. He finds that the frameworks are effective in the development of critical media analysis skills. At the same time, however, he reports they did little to develop an understanding of the media’s role in democratic society.

Ashley, Maksl, and Craft (2013) first turn to critical media literacy as well as a previously tested smoking media literacy instrument for conceptual cues in the design of a News Media Literacy scale aimed at measuring understandings of news production and consumption. The researchers later shift the theoretical grounding of the NML scale in a McCormick Foundation funded project that examines the levels of news literacy in hundreds of teenagers. In this study, Maksl, Ashley, and Craft (2015) adapt Potter’s (2004) model of media literacy to news media. More specifically, the NML scale was adjusted to assess awareness of personal information processing habits and knowledge about news content and industries. Maksl, Ashley, and Craft (2015: 37) comment that Potter’s model provided a “useful framework” to evaluate levels of news media literacy, and they conclude: “News literate teens are defined by their intrinsic motivations toward news consumption, greater skepticism about the news content they receive, and greater knowledge about current events. They are also likely to be more selective and proactive in choosing what news to consume.”

The other news literacy paradigm identified by RobbGrieco and Hobbs (2013) is known as the “journalism school” approach because lessons echo journalistic views on information and they celebrate the value of a free, investigative, and accurate press in democracy. Scholarship on the journalism school approach includes Fleming’s (2014) qualitative examination of the Stony Brook curriculum. She reports that Stony Brook instructors focused on teaching students how to assess the veracity of information in news texts and understand journalistic decision-making and values. At the same time, she notes that there were potential ideological blind spots in the Stony Brook curriculum because instructors didn’t question structural and institutional factors that influence news. The lack of critical perspectives in the Stony Brook curriculum has caused concern for some media literacy scholars (Hobbs 2010b, 2011). The argument is that critical perspectives such as Herman and Chomsky’s (1988/2002) propaganda model—perspectives that prompt students to identify, question, and challenge often unseen commercial and political biases embedded in news texts and production practices—are essential if the goal of news literacy instruction is for students to become critical consumers of news. Other published materials on the Stony Brook program include Klurfeld and Schneider’s (2014) reflection on developing and teaching the news literacy course and Loth’s (2012) descriptive account of the curriculum. No specific scholarly research is available on the News Literacy Project, but stories about its philosophy and activities have appeared in popular press outlets (Bui 2013; Candelriello 2011; Cunningham and Miller 2010).

Connecting these ideas back to trends and data in media philanthropy, a comprehensive assessment of news literacy investments is difficult to come by because news literacy is not one of the topics tagged specifically in the Media Impact Funders database. Not to mention, funded programs aimed at educating general audiences about news might not

include any reference to “news literacy.” Even without a dedicated news literacy category, foundations can self-report news literacy as the focus of a project, so researchers may be able to manually find grants across multiple categories through key word searches. For example, a search of “news literacy” brings up more than 50 grants tied to a variety of categories with “media, multiple areas” being the most common, followed by “media literacy,” and “journalism, news, and information.”

The Robert R. McCormick Foundation was the largest and most frequent news literacy grantmaker between 2009 and 2012. The top recipient of funds associated with news literacy in general during the same timeframe was the News Literacy Project with 42 grants totaling nearly \$1.8 million (Media Impact Funders 2012). When one takes into account grants previous to 2009 such as the Knight Foundation’s trendsetting \$1.7 million Stony Brook investment in 2006 and its \$250,000 grant to the News Literacy Project in 2007 as well as grant programs after 2012 such as the McCormick Foundation’s “News Literacy/Why News Matters” \$6 million grant-making initiative that started in 2013, it is fair to say that more than \$12 million in foundation funds have been directed to news literacy programs in the U.S. since 2006, with the majority of investments supporting journalism-based variants of news literacy reflected in Stony Brook and News Literacy Project curricula. These figures raise several questions: 1) How do foundation executives approach news literacy education grantmaking? 2) How do they define news literacy and connect it with the mission of their organizations? 3) What is the future of news literacy education grantmaking?

## Methods

To understand the motivations behind philanthropic support of news literacy initiatives, two types of qualitative data were collected and analyzed: Interviews and documents (Patton 2001). Over the course of eight weeks (April 2015 – May 2015), the researcher conducted phone and/or email interviews with six people associated with foundations that supported the two most high profile and well-funded programs to date, the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project. The researcher also concurrently gathered and analyzed materials published by philanthropic organizations that have supported news literacy efforts—materials such as mission statements, project spreadsheets, press releases, and media clippings—as well as media grants data derived from Media Impact Funders. Given the focus of this study is on the perspectives of foundation leaders directing and managing news literacy grants, interviews served as primary sources of evidence; documents were considered supplemental sources.

Four of the six interviewees agreed to be identified in materials resulting from this research: Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation (interviewed May 12, 2015), Clark Bell of the McCormick Foundation (interviewed May 11, 2015), Julie Sandorf of the Revson Foundation (interviewed May 8, 2015), and George Irish of the Hearst Foundations (interviewed May 27, 2015). Contacts at the Dow Jones Foundation preferred to respond collectively to questions sent via email (interviewed May 14, 2015) and thus wanted all references and quotes to be attributed to the Dow Jones Foundation, instead of any one individual. The sixth interviewee (interviewed May 20, 2015) opted to remain anonymous because he has since moved on from his foundation program officer position. He was assigned the pseudonym Mark Ruiz.

The resulting case study database included six interview transcripts and more than 100 documents. These data were qualitatively analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and key

words that would suggest consistency among and contradictions between how foundation stakeholders view news literacy education. From this close analysis of the evidence, three broad themes were discovered.

## Results

### Overview of the findings

First, investments in news literacy education were largely viewed by foundation decision-makers as experimental. In other words, many grants, particularly those awarded in the first few years of news literacy grantmaking, were seen as seed money to help get intriguing instructional ideas off of the ground at a time when the future of quality journalism seemed in jeopardy and the onslaught of information available through increasingly diverse digital channels and technologies seemed poised to overwhelm and confuse young and old news audiences alike.

Second, the argument that news literacy educators could teach young people how to sort fact from fiction and identify and appreciate high quality journalism for the sake of democracy made practical and conceptual sense to many working in organizations that funded news literacy projects, given their professional experiences in journalism and/or the missions and backgrounds of their foundations. To put this differently, the major grantmakers and grantees in the news literacy funding space shared similar views and values about news, information, and democracy.

Third, as news literacy education funding evolved and matured several foundation decision makers came to believe that news literacy education should be positioned and funded as one curricular spoke in a larger wheel of literacies deemed essential for active and full citizenship in the digital age. In addition, most of those interviewed favored module-based programs such as the ones offered by the News Literacy Project, believing they would be the most effective and realistic, especially in middle and high school classrooms, given the crowded, bureaucratic, and politicized K-12 curriculum realities in the United States. These patterns are explored further in the following three sections: “An Experimental Concept,” “Shared Values and Similar Missions,” and “A Civic-Oriented, Module-Based Future.”

### An experimental concept

In the years since the Knight Foundation’s \$1.7 million, six-year investment in Howard Schneider’s ambitious demand side journalism education experiment at Stony Brook University in 2006, the term “news literacy” has become common in media literacy, journalism education, and philanthropic communities. Foundations that have dedicated thousands of dollars, and in several cases millions of dollars, to news literacy initiatives between 2006 and 2015 include but are not limited to the Knight Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Charles H. Revson Foundation, the Gannett Foundation, the Hearst Foundations, and the Dow Jones Foundation. Even so, those interviewed for this study considered news literacy investments by and large experimental.

Eric Newton, who was senior adviser to the president of the Knight Foundation when data were collected for this study,<sup>5</sup> said that the strategy at the time of the news literacy investments he was involved with as director and vice president of the Knight Foundation journalism program was one of “broad” experimentation. Newton said that they started

<sup>5</sup> Eric Newton has since moved on from the Knight Foundation to Arizona State University’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, where he is Innovation Chief and Professor of Practice.



“scores of projects” to see which ones would gain traction and what they could learn from the experiences. He commented: “We didn’t have a formal initiative with overall goals in the area of news, digital, civic or media literacy. Our overall goal was simply to experiment.”

In addition to the Stony Brook grant and a \$250,000, two-year investment in the News Literacy Project in 2007, Newton listed other programs in the “scores” of news-related education programs funded by the foundation. For example, Globaloria received \$227,500 in 2009 to create web-games that focused on First Amendment, news literacy, and other journalism topics. Globaloria programs have since been integrated into middle and high schools across West Virginia. Newton also pointed to news literacy curricular materials, blogs, and other resources available through the “News University” website (The Poynter Institute 2015) as well as youth news literacy resources developed at the American Press Institute (2012).

At the same time, Newton said that the idea to teach audiences about the practices and principles of the press was nothing new to him because of his familiarity with programs at the Newseum and the Freedom Forum. In fact, Newton said that his experiences at these organizations prompted him to suggest the title “News Literacy” to Schneider when they were discussing what to call the course he was developing at Stony Brook. According to Newton, Schneider liked the “News Literacy” name because he, in part, wanted to avoid calling the class “Media Literacy.” Newton added that even though education about news for general audiences was not necessarily a new idea at the time of the Stony Brook grant, he admitted that it was “fair to say that Stony Brook popularized the [news literacy] phrase.”

Ultimately, Newton said that none of the Knight Foundation news literacy grants were renewed due to the experimental intent of the investments as well a shift in funding priorities at the institutional level (for more on funding philosophies and strategies at the Knight Foundation, see Anheier and Leat 2006; Lewis 2012). One to three year grants were the norm for the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project (Media Impact Funders 2012). One major exception was the \$1.7 million, six-year Stony Brook grant from Knight. The extended timeframe was needed so 10,000 students could complete the newly created “News Literacy” course, which was a stipulation of the grant. The 10,000-student benchmark was met in fall 2014. On the changing priorities and preferences of foundations, Newton pointed out:

“Foundations can be as simple as one person, a funder who knows what he or she wants at first sight and really doesn’t need to describe it, to large organizations with crafted public positions on strategic initiatives. To make things even more complex, foundations can frequently change funding priorities or never change them.”

Mark Ruiz, who was a program officer responsible for managing hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants awarded to both the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project, noted a similar shift in priorities at the institutional level. He said the foundation he worked for was well known for providing funds to a large number of small projects to help them get off of the ground, but a change in leadership brought a change in funding strategy and a change in expectations of grantees. More specifically, Ruiz said executives wanted the foundation to focus on larger and therefore fewer evidence-based projects with high impact. In the journalism space that meant a shift to funding news content programs. Ruiz said that there was still some “wobble room for exploration,” but not as much as before.

According to Clark Bell, who was director of the McCormick Foundation’s journalism program at the time data were collected for this study, the foundation started tracking

news literacy as a potential funding area in 2008. The foundation first experimented with news literacy through a journalism grantee, Chicago Youth Voices, because it complemented the foundation’s news audience building funding strategy. Bell said news literacy grant making at the foundation has been primarily focused on the Chicago area and has increasingly centered on youth programs, both in and out of school. Leading up to the McCormick Foundation’s “News Literacy/Why News Matters” three-year, \$6 million grant making initiative that started in 2013, Bell said that the foundation spent about \$2 million on news literacy activities, including substantial investments in the Stony Brook program (\$505,000) and the News Literacy Project (\$400,000). Clark estimated that total foundation news literacy expenditures by the end of the Why News Matters program will add up to about \$8 million.

The McCormick Foundation’s “News Literacy/Why News Matters” initiative has emerged as the most substantial and sustained grantmaking program dedicated to news literacy exclusively. Media organizations, high schools, universities, two-year colleges, community organizations and libraries throughout the Chicago area were invited to submit proposals for funding to support programs that had the potential to “educate and energize” citizens about the value of news and to help them assess information. Some of the grantees include the City College of Chicago (\$200,000), Columbia College (\$375,000), the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana (\$100,000), Illinois Press Foundation (\$200,000), Local Initiatives Support Corporation (\$100,000), Newspaper Education Foundation (\$150,000), and Street-Level Youth Media (\$150,000). The foundation also sponsored news literacy coverage in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (see Adler, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Jolly, 2014a; Jolly, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2014f), and it hosted a fall 2014 News Literacy Summit (Wallace, 2014).

While there was a dominant theme of experimentation, some foundation executives decided to opt out of early news literacy funding all together until programs could prove their viability and effectiveness as well develop long term strategies. George Irish, Eastern Director at the Hearst Foundations, said the foundations first received a grant proposal from the News Literacy Project in 2009, but sensed that the organization was still in its nascent stage. Five years later, Irish said that he had seen steady progress and concluded that the News Literacy Project was beyond the “concept stage” and “on the right track and much needed, particularly in the burgeoning digital media space.” In April 2015, the Hearst Foundations awarded a one-year, \$75,000 grant, their first in the news literacy education space, to the News Literacy Project.

### Shared values and similar missions

It seems as though one important reason the architects of journalism-based variants of news literacy were so successful in fundraising early on in the development of their programs was because their worldviews, and the curricula spawned from them, were consistent with the worldviews of many foundation decision makers, particularly those at organizations that were born from newspaper fortunes such as the Knight Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, and the Dow Jones Foundation. These organizations already had well-developed and dedicated journalism funding programs mostly staffed by former journalists when Stony Brook’s Howard Schneider, a former *Newsday* reporter and editor, and the News Literacy Project’s Alan Miller, a former *Los Angeles Times* reporter, came looking for funding.

For example, Clark Bell of the McCormick Foundation previously worked as a reporter or editor at numerous publications including the *Dallas Times Herald*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Chicago Daily News*. With assets of more than \$1.5 billion, the Chicago-

based McCormick Foundation was established in 1955 under the Last Will and Testament of Col. Robert R. McCormick, long time publisher and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. Bell talked about changes brought on by digitization to news industries and how those changes affected funding decisions and strategic directions. He defined news literacy as an “ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports and information sources,” and mentioned that he believes news literacy is all about questioning where information comes from: “You have to question photos; you have to question videos; you have to question texts; you have to question people and politicians. It’s basically critical thinking skills.”

Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation led the *Oakland Tribune* newsroom before moving onto opportunities at the Freedom Forum and Newseum. With an endowment of more than \$2 billion, the Miami-based Knight Foundation was established in 1950 by John S. and James L. Knight to carry on the philanthropic activities of their newspaper publisher father, Charles Landon Knight. Broadly speaking, Newton defined news literacy as the “ability to find, understand, share, use and create news.” He said that this definition is reflected in Hobbs’ (2010a) Knight Foundation-funded report, *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*. He added that he sees a lot of similarities between non-fiction media literacy frameworks and news literacy programs.

George Irish of the Hearst Foundations served in multiple executive positions at Hearst Newspapers, including president. The Hearst Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, referred to collectively as the Hearst Foundations, have a current asset value of approximately \$1 billion. The foundations were established in the 1940s by William Randolph Hearst who is best known for creating the largest chain of newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even with deep roots in journalism, Irish said the foundations typically steer clear of journalism investments to avoid any grantmaking that could be deemed beneficial to the Hearst Corporation. For Irish and his colleagues at the foundations, the News Literacy Project represented an opportunity to address literacy concerns in low-income communities. He stated that news literacy is achieved when one is able to “sort fact from fiction.”

Mark Ruiz, who worked at a major national newspaper before joining a leading foundation that supported several news literacy initiatives, said news literacy skills are essential for both individuals and news industries. Ruiz said that he believes that a news organization is as only as good as its consumers so the notion that a demanding readership or viewership that holds news media accountable would make journalists do much better jobs at producing content. Ruiz defined news literacy as the “ability of an individual to determine if the quality or integrity of a news report meets the standards and ethics of the field. Is it balanced? Is it transparent? Does it provide the sourcing that is necessary? Does it significantly add to the public knowledge?”

Funders at the Dow Jones Foundation said that four grants totaling \$185,000 awarded to the News Literacy Project came about as the result of professional journalism networks. They called the News Literacy Project an “appealing funding opportunity” because it matched the goals of the foundation’s literacy and education initiatives, and it touched on the journalism program area. Dow Jones Foundation funders added that more than 20 *Wall Street Journal* journalists have participated in News Literacy Project activities ranging from teaching classes in inner-city schools to working on video projects. They defined news literacy as the “ability of news consumers to tell the difference between fair, accurate and timely news and analysis compared with unreported gossip, propaganda and inaccurate, self-promoting ‘news.’”

The connection to journalism was not as explicit for several other major news literacy funders, which is where the democracy-enhancing, social change missions of many foun-

dations became more prominent in news literacy grantmaking. For example, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has assets valued at approximately \$6.3 billion to assist in its mission to support “creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world.” The MacArthur Foundation awarded two grants to the News Literacy Project totaling \$675,000. Created with gifts and bequests from Edsel and Henry Ford, the Ford Foundation is the second largest private foundation in the United States, with an endowment of more than \$10 billion. Its goals include strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, promoting international cooperation, and advancing human achievement. The Ford Foundation provided two grants to the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy totaling \$385,000. It also funded three News Literacy Project grants totaling \$525,000.

The largest funder of the News Literacy Project has been the Charles H. Revson Foundation. The New York-based foundation was established in 1956 by Revlon, Inc. founder Charles H. Revson. Its program areas include urban affairs, Jewish life, biomedical research, and education in New York City. Revson Foundation president, Julie Sandorf, defined news literacy as “learning the differences between fact and fiction; how to find and validate information so it is factual; and learning the basic tenets of a free press in this country.” She said the News Literacy Project fit in nicely with the aims of the foundation’s education unit: “Our education portfolio has been for the last twenty years in areas of civic education, holding government accountable and so on. Given the era we’re living in, [the News Literacy Project] seemed like a very timely and important thing to invest in.” The foundation has awarded the News Literacy Project two three-year grants totaling \$1.2 million. Sandorf said the biggest challenge for the News Literacy Project is how to get it adopted and adapted at scale in middle and high schools because the program is up against “big bureaucracies and all sorts of other competing interests and curricula bombarding schools on a daily basis. There’s a lot of noise out there.”

### A civic-oriented, module-based future

The future of news literacy education funding seems to lie in the citizenship-building, democracy-enhancing potential of the pedagogy as well as the ability of news literacy educators to create evidence-based modules that can easily be integrated into a variety of grade levels and subjects that also complement the broader themes of digital and media literacy. Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation commented: “Increasingly all these forms of literacy are going to encompass the ability to make one’s way around cyberspace. So that’s important going forward.” Clark Bell of the McCormick Foundation noted foundations invest a great deal in education and in the age of mediated citizenship he believes that if news literacy educators move forward “sensibly and strategically” the field will emerge as an important component of civics instruction in the digital age: “For those of us in the foundation world, we’re looking for programs that increase civic engagement and participation and help people become better citizens.”

Bell added the idea of having free standing news literacy classes in “every eighth grade classroom [across the country] is not going to happen. There just isn’t enough time in the day.” Instead, Bell believed that module-based news literacy education programs that could be used across the curriculum seemed to be a more realistic and effective approach that has worked well at the McCormick Foundation: “We’re working math teachers, and science teachers, and history teachers, and English composition teachers to make sure they have the platform, the building blocks, the curriculum of news literacy, so they can add these resources and tools to their instruction.” Bell also said recent restructuring at the foundation had delayed grant making into 2016, but he fully expected that news literacy would continue to be part of the foundation’s strategic democracy-enhancing efforts:

“We’re still keenly interested in furthering the concepts and acceleration of news literacy as a movement.”

Mark Ruiz agreed news literacy might not be valued for much longer in the funding community as a stand-alone issue and instead could just become part of digital literacy initiatives in general. He favored the News Literacy Project’s module-approach because it makes it easier to integrate news literacy principles into every subject. Ruiz said module-based news literacy education has the potential to cut across the disciplinary spectrum and into the sciences and the humanities. He offered an example: “If there are news articles written on a subject, even an obituary of a mathematician, news literacy principles apply by prompting students to ask: Can the person who created this [obituary] be trusted? Is this a fair and accurate view of the deceased?”

Funders at the Dow Jones Foundation echoed the position that news literacy education should not be a stand-alone course and it should be worked in as a module into other subjects such as history. They added that news literacy education should start relatively early—maybe in the fourth or fifth grades—and continue through high school: “We’d like to see a world where students at a fairly young age are given this important lesson in critical thinking. That is, what is fact and what is rumor—and why knowing the difference is essential.”

Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation said the ability to tell non-fiction from fiction is important for people of all ages and is a “core piece” of news literacy. At the same time, Newton suggested news literacy should be grouped together with other “21<sup>st</sup> century literacies” that include traditional literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and civics literacy. He pointed to a report prepared by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities (2009: 2) to further explain his position. In the report, the commission argues that the future of American democracy requires “informed communities,” which are “places where the information ecology meets people’s personal and civic information needs.” Along these lines, Newton reasoned that educating citizens in the digital age means teaching them about political processes and institutions as well as how to access and make sense of information through a combination of digital literacy, media literacy, and news literacy lessons.

## Conclusion

There is little doubt that the millions of dollars in grants from foundations have significantly enhanced the scope and reach of news literacy programs grounded in journalistic principles and practices such as the Stony Brook Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy Project. More than 10,000 students have completed the news literacy course at Stony Brook and variants of the Stony Brook curriculum have been used by instructors at universities across the U.S. and around the world (Hornik and Kajimoto 2015). In addition, the News Literacy Project has reached more than 25,000 middle and high school students in the U.S., with plans to connect with thousands of more educators and students through its CHECKOLOGY™ virtual classroom, which launched in May 2016. Combined, these journalism-inspired instructional strategies aimed at teaching young people how to identify and analyze news make up one of the largest curricular movements in modern journalism and media literacy education. Not to mention, they have also significantly influenced the conceptual boundaries of news literacy education to emphasize the veracity of information and the importance of a free, investigative, and accurate press in democracy.

From the perspectives of foundation executives interviewed for this study, approaches to news literacy created by journalists at first represented promising experiments at a time of

dramatic changes in news industries and news consumption preferences. Because these approaches echoed widely held views in journalistic and philanthropic circles on the relationship between independent, verified, and accountable journalism and a vibrant democracy, news literacy education programs created by seasoned journalists seemed like logical investments. The thinking was young people taught how to separate fact from fiction through lessons inspired and informed by journalistic methods and mindsets would become better equipped to navigate the fast-moving, fragmented digital media environment. However, the third theme identified in this study is perhaps the most important finding: In the eyes of numerous grantmakers, news literacy education belongs under a comprehensive civics education umbrella.

As news literacy education matured and digital media developments such as social media and Smartphones continued to revolutionize and democratize the information ecosystem once ruled by journalistic gatekeepers, funders seemed to put a higher priority on all-encompassing evidence-based programs in which digital literacy, media literacy, and news literacy come together. This evolution in news literacy grantmaking seems to organically be aligning journalism-inspired variants of news literacy more closely with established and emerging media literacy paradigms that reflect critical approaches to news analysis, the participatory logic of modern news production and consumption, and multiperspectival understandings of the relationship between media and society. And, after ten years of news literacy grantmaking, funders said they tend to favor middle and high school news literacy modules, instead of stand-alone courses, because modules are accessible and they can easily be adapted to numerous grade levels and integrated into a variety of subjects. Understandably, this topic deserves further study as society moves deeper into the digital age and foundations decision makers move forward with investment strategies that seek to explore and influence the interconnections of citizenship, media, education, and democracy.

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# Placing trust in others: how college students access and assess news and what it means for news literacy education

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**Keywords:** college students, credibility, journalism, mixed methods, news consumption, news literacy education, news media perceptions, mixed methods, personal influence

**Abstract:** This mixed-methods study (survey and subsequent in-depth interviews) investigates the role of personal influence in how students (n=135) across disciplines at a U.S. university find news, evaluate the credibility of news sources, and form their opinions about the news media. Specifically, this study explores how opinion leaders and primary socialization sources shape students' understanding and use of news at this stage of their development. Findings show that students place great trust in those around them to access and assess news, sometimes at the expense of making independent choices and judgments about the content they consume. Implications for news literacy education are discussed.

**News organizations across the United States face an uncertain future as they seek to find sustainable economic models in the digital age (Pew 2013a; Picard 2010). Critical to their efforts are attracting the attention and earning the loyalty of young audiences as they develop their news consumption habits and form their views of the news media.**

People in their teens and twenties are often portrayed as disinterested in the news (Bennett 2000), and more likely to gravitate toward satirical news than to the work of professional journalists (Pew 2012a; Hart and Hartelius 2007). Research shows that when young people follow the news, they often place a premium on convenience at the expense of credibility (Jarvis, Stroud, and Gilliland 2009). If young audiences do not regularly follow

news, consume credible content, and develop a favourable view of journalism, the news media's function in the democratic process may be undermined.

In response to concerns about the future of journalism and civic life, educators developed news literacy curricula that aims to teach students the critical thinking skills necessary to become discerning news consumers in the digital age. News literacy pedagogy stresses analytic information-processing techniques that are informed by journalistic mindsets and methods (Fleming 2012). Students are taught to sort through a high volume of content and identify credible news from trustworthy sources (Schneider, personal communication, July 6, 2010). Central to the notion of being news literate is the ability to make independent choices about what news to consume and whether that news is credible (Silverblatt 2008)—all of which is critical to being an engaged, well-informed citizen in a democracy (Mihailidis 2012; Martens 2010).

Rather than focusing on the future supply of journalists, news literacy education targets young news consumers and hopes to build demand for credible journalism. One of the pedagogical challenges facing news literacy educators is understanding how students access and assess news. Why do students follow news and how do they choose what news to consume? When students talk about “credibility” and “bias” what do they mean? How do they form opinions about the news media in general and about specific news outlets? Do they make these choices and evaluations independently or rely heavily on others? Answers to these questions may help news literacy educators tailor their curricula to the ways in which college students engage with and perceive news at this stage of their development.

To better understand a population that is critically important to the future of journalism and lives in a highly networked digital environment (Watkins 2009), this exploratory, mixed-methods study (survey and subsequent in-depth interviews) investigates the role of personal influence in how students across disciplines at a U.S. university access news, evaluate the credibility of news sources, and form their views of the news media in the digital age. Specifically, this research considers the extent to which students' perceptions of the news media are based on direct experience versus what others have told them, as well as how much they actively seek out news content or let others – including “opinion leaders”—filter and select it for them. This study examines how well the two-step flow theory of communication (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) and the primary socialization theory explain students' news consumption habits and perceptions of the news media, and suggests ways to expand the definition of opinion leaders. Survey (n=135) and interview (n=20) results reveal that students, the minority of whom studied journalism or communication, rely heavily on “primary socialization sources of the family, the school and peer clusters” (Kelly and Donohew 1999, 1034) to determine their news diet, evaluate credibility, and help shape their opinions about the press. Implications for news literacy education are discussed.

## Accessing and assessing news

Many young people are in the habit of consuming news as part of their daily routine. A study from the American Press Institute and the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 85% of 18- to 34-year-olds in the United States reported that keeping up with the news is at least somewhat important to them, and 69% said they consume news daily. Becoming an informed citizen was the top reason cited for following news (Media Insight Project 2015). However, young people spend less time with news daily than other age groups (Pew 2012b) and commonly report turning to news outlets that they do not trust (Jarvis, Stroud, and Gilliland 2009).

The ubiquity of digital and portable media technologies and ever-growing media content have altered the way young people access and consume news (Broddason 2006; Pew Research Center 2010). Ninety-four percent of 18- to 34-year-olds in the United States own smartphones connected to the internet, and half own tablets (Media Insight Project 2015). People under age 25 are more likely to access news online than through print or broadcast platforms (Pew 2012a). The trend toward online media consumption among young adults, coupled with the vast supply of content on competing media platforms and the constant decline in credibility ratings for major news organizations over the past decade (Pew 2012b), raise the question of how college students evaluate news credibility in the digital age.

Credibility evaluation is a complex process in which users may weigh a range of factors (Metzger 2007; Rieh and Hilligoss 2008), including their relationship to the medium, the news source, and the content itself (Flanagin and Metzger 2007). Seminal news source credibility scales developed by Gaziano and McGrath (1986), and Newhagen and Nass (1989) include criteria such as fairness, bias, accuracy, trustworthiness, concern about the public interest, and concern about the community. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) gauged how credible students considered various media channels based on the dimensions of believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness. They found that students were more trusting of online information than were adults (Flanagin and Metzger 2000). Subsequent studies found that students displayed a low level of proficiency in identifying or making distinctions between sources of information and weighing source credibility (Britt and Aglinksas 2002; Kioussis and Dimitrova 2006), and were at greater risk for falsely accepting a source's self-asserted credibility (Flanagin and Metzger 2008).

Students often compensate for the uncertainty that comes with evaluating news sources by relying on “an authority they trust or on sources that corroborated each other” (Francke, Sundin, and Limberg 2011, 691). Rieh and Hilligoss (2008) found that students placed a premium on information that is convenient to access and considered search engines such as Google as authoritative sources. Many students viewed the first search engine result as credible because they trusted the search engine brand to identify relevant content (Hargittai et al. 2010). A later study (Powers, 2014) also found students to be very trusting of sites that rely upon algorithms to deliver the most newsworthy results. Relying upon perceived reputation or prominence was the strategy used most commonly to evaluate the credibility of news outlets. Students said they perceived “brand-name” news outlets as credible because they had earned the trust of others over time. Students often were at a loss to determine how to evaluate a news item and thus relied upon the reputation of the news outlet as a proxy (Powers, 2014). These findings align with what Tseng and Fogg (1999) called reputed credibility, evaluations based on the assumptions of others, in contrast to experienced credibility, a user's first-hand experience with media sources.

While studies have examined the ways in which college students find news and evaluate credibility, few have specifically examined the role that personal influence plays in students' decision making. Given the emphasis in news literacy education on students making independent evaluations of news stories and news sources, educators would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of whether college students primarily use their own well-defined criteria or rely on the judgments of others when accessing and assessing news.

## Personal influence and the two-step flow theory

Social purposes were just behind being an informed citizen as the top reasons why 18- to 34-year-olds in the United States follow news. Specifically, young people cited an interest

in talking to friends, family, and colleagues about news. “The findings suggest that Millennials view news as fairly important and use it in ways that are an almost equal mix of social, civic, and practical” (Media Insight Project 2015, 7). Young people are exposed to news they may have otherwise missed or ignored because friends recommend and comment on stories through social media and personal networks (Pew 2013b). “The news, in effect, is already contextualized as important to their lives because it is important to the members of their social networks” (Media Insight Project 2015, 7).

Young people rely heavily on their personal networks to identify news (Kushin and Yamamoto 2010). Those under 30 are the age group most likely to have news forwarded to them (Purcell et al. 2010). College students far more commonly “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that “I like to receive news from other people” (75%) than said “I like to actively search for news” (48%) (Powers, 2014). Pew Research Center (2013b) found that 70% of 18- to 29-year-olds in the United States reported that word of mouth is the most common way they get news from family and friends, with social media sites (23%) as a distant second. Interpersonal exchanges such as word-of-mouth communication are often viewed as highly credible (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989; Bickart and Schindler 2001). Family members’ views about news sources (particularly local newspapers) have been found to influence credibility evaluations (Armstrong and Collins 2009).

One explanation for these findings is the primary socialization theory, which suggests that family, friends, and peers are essential for young people to learn normative behaviors and values. Media and other socialization factors become secondary, while “parents, schools, and peers are the primary mediators of media in an adolescent’s life” (Kelly and Donohew 1999, 1041). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) described these primary mediators as opinion leaders who pay close attention to the media and their messages, influencing others by passing on that content with their interpretations. The two-step flow theory of communication highlights the influence of interpersonal networks in the dissemination process of news media messages. Katz and Lazarsfeld argued that personal influences through opinion leaders can have a significant impact on attitudes and the behaviour of others.

Even though interpersonal relationships have been widely recognized as influencing attitudes and behaviour, with more than 3,900 studies testing the two-step flow theory (Watts and Dodds 2007), few studies have examined the sway of opinion leaders on college students as they develop their news habits. This study proposes that personal influences, as described in the two-step flow theory, are major factors in how young adults access news and evaluate the credibility of the news media and individual news outlets. College students are often still in the early stages of developing an understanding of and a relationship to the news media as an important information source. Thus, examining students’ news consumption habits, credibility evaluations, and views of the news media during their time in college can provide a better picture of the socialization process.

In order to explore the ways in which personal influence plays a role in how college students access news, evaluate news sources, and form their views about the news media, this study included an online survey and subsequent interviews with a cross-section of undergraduates, as described below. Given the complexity of these processes, researchers focused on open-ended research questions rather than hypotheses. Specifically, this study addressed the following three questions:

RQ1: What is the role of personal influence in college students’ news consumption habits?

RQ2: What is the role of personal influence in how students evaluate the credibility of news?

RQ3: What is the role of personal influence in shaping students’ views of the news media?

## Method

### Participants

This mixed-methods study targeted undergraduate students at a large university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. We did not attempt to extrapolate from this sample of students to the entire adult population. Rather, this study considered students themselves as an audience worthy of investigation, particularly given that they are the primary targets of news literacy education. In order to recruit a wide variety of students across academic disciplines, we randomly selected large introductory courses found through the university’s course registry system, as well as residential college programs that include students of all years. We attempted to avoid over-sampling journalism or communication students because they represent a minority of undergraduates, and likely have news consumption habits and views of the news media that are not representative of most college students.

### Procedure

We introduced the study to students and requested their participation at the start of course lectures. Directors of randomly selected residential college programs also forwarded a survey link to undergraduates. The online survey was distributed via e-mail to students. They completed the survey at a time and place of their choosing with no time limit. The survey’s final question asked whether students were interested in taking part in an interview about their news consumption habits and views about news media credibility. We e-mailed all students who expressed an interest in the interviews. We met with students for semi-structured interviews that lasted 20 to 45 minutes. Participants were asked permission to have their comments recorded. We masked the identities of the interviewees by using pseudonyms that indicate gender. Descriptions of students also include their academic major for context.

### Instrumentation

We selected a mixed-methods approach starting with an initial survey followed by semi-structured interviews in order to triangulate findings in this exploratory study. Statistical data used in conjunction with interviews may be used for inductive reasoning (Bromley and Neal 2011; Feeney and Heit 2007). This sequential, mixed-method design (Creswell 2009) was employed for the purpose of complementarity—to elaborate, illustrate, and clarify quantitative findings through qualitative interviews (Greene 2007; Plano Clark 2010). Interviews were deemed ideal as a form of “biographical description” (Fontana and Frey 2005, 699), which helps to shed light on the “hows” behind the “traditional whats” (698), enrich the data, and make up for some limitations of the non-probability sample. The number of survey respondents (n=135) allowed researchers to keep the standard error reasonably small (Gorard 2003). The number of interviews (n=20) were within the range of what Kvale (1996) suggests as reasonable to provide information to “investigate in detail the relationship between the individual and the situation” (102-3).

The online survey included 31 questions about students’ demographics and news consumption habits—including interest in news, use of technology to access news, and social engagement with news. Specifically, interest in news included Likert scale items such as “I consider it important to follow the news” and “I think of myself as paying close attention the news,” adapted from a news interest index utilized by Armstrong and Collins (2009). Use of technology to access news was measured by multiple-choice questions such as “What is the way you most commonly access news?” Social engagement with news was measured by Likert scale items such as “I like to discuss news with others after I read it.”

Researchers purposefully defined news broadly—“published or broadcast reports about current events or public affairs”—so that students would have latitude to discuss their experiences.

Students' views about news media credibility were assessed by selecting and ranking qualities that factor into students' definition of credibility. Participants were asked to check all that apply from choices such as: accuracy, balanced reporting, expertise, familiar news outlet, familiar author, coverage of issues of interest, forthcoming about political views, and avoids conflict of interest. The dimensions of credibility, adapted from pre-existing credibility scales, included: accuracy/factualness, balance/lack of bias trustworthiness, and concern about community/watches out for your interests (Flanagin and Metzger 2000; Gaziano and McGrath 1986; Newhagen and Nass 1989; Kioussis 2001). Likert scale questions addressed both source and medium credibility: “How credible do you consider the U.S. news media generally?” and “How credible do you consider news from the following sources (national newspapers, network television, social media sites, etc.)?” (Armstrong and Collins 2009; Tseng and Fogg 1999).

Semi-structured interviews allowed students an opportunity to expand on their survey responses and to cover new ground. Questions explored credibility evaluations and the influence of others on students' news consumption habits: “Why do you follow the news?” “How important is credibility of the news source to you when you are evaluating content?” “What do your friends and family say about particular news sources or the press in general?”

### Data analysis

Survey results were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive (frequency count, percentage, correlation) and inferential statistics (t-tests, regression) were used to analyse and present college students' news habits to tease out possible differences between majors and political attitudes. Interview data obtained from the students were coded thematically and analysed together by the researchers. We employed emergent coding, creating categories based on student responses that covered themes such as news consumption habits, credibility evaluations, and perceptions of the news media. As a first step, we independently reviewed the material, taking notes to create a theme checklist. Then we compared notes and reconciled differences that occurred in the initial checklist. After the checklist was refined and consolidated, a codebook was created. In the final step, we worked in tandem using the codebook as a reference to code all interviews.

## Results

### Survey demographics

A majority (61%) of the 135 survey respondents were female. Respondents were largely underclassmen: freshmen (45%), sophomores (30%), juniors (13%) and seniors (12%). Nearly two-thirds of students (65%) reported being politically liberal, compared with 25% politically conservative and 10% centrist. Journalism/communication was the most common major (22%), but the vast majority of participants were in other disciplines. Thirty percent had taken a university course in journalism, and 26% indicated having experience working as a journalist.

Findings from both the survey and subsequent interviews with 20 students whose demographics closely match the above description are reported in the following sections. Results are broken into categories that correspond to our three research questions: news

consumption habits, credibility evaluation, and perceptions of the news media.

### News consumption habits

Our first research question asked: What is the role of personal influence in college students' news consumption habits? Findings reveal that students relied heavily on people in their personal networks—and on technology—to access the news they consumed, and they were driven to consume news for social reasons. Interviews revealed that friends (n=11) and parents (n=10) were most commonly referenced by students as being influential in determining what news they consumed. Teachers were rarely mentioned (n=2).

While several students said in interviews that they actively seek out news and enjoy being the tastemaker who directs their friends to online news, far more said they would rather have friends, family, or people in their social networks find and filter news for them. Astronomy major Florence noted:

“I don't go out and read the news, and I get things from social networks or from my friends and family passing on news. So I don't seek it out but I do follow what I hear.”

Computer engineering major Morris said that he trusts how people select news and information on social networks.

“The way I usually get news is on a Facebook news feed or Twitter. I'm basically having someone else find the most relevant and most important news for me. You wouldn't just post any piece of garbage on your Facebook status.”

Computer science major Tyson did not so much crowdsource as he outsourced the news collection process to one person:

“I have one friend that reads The New York Times and the campus newspaper every day and he keeps me informed.”

When it came to sharing and analysing news, survey respondents generally did not return the favour: Only 4% reported somewhat or very often commenting on news posted online, and nearly half (47%) rarely or never forwarded news to family, friends, or acquaintances.

Survey results showed that the vast majority of students (87%) at least somewhat agreed that they like to discuss news with others after they read it. Florence noted that:

“I read a lot of what my friends post because it's interesting and pertains to them and I want to be up to date on what's interesting to them.”

Family members also played an important role in influencing students' news consumption habits – more so when they lived at home than after they arrived at college. Students commonly mentioned in interviews that they first became interested in news by reading the newspapers and magazines that their parents had delivered to their homes. Several students noted that they discussed the news with their parents and often continue to read the same publications as college students that their parents received. Caitlyn, a political science major, commented that:

“A lot of times I talk to my parents about [news] because they know what's going on. With things that are kind of going over my head or with things I haven't been paying attention to, it's nice to have someone who gets it fill me in.”

Students not only trusted other people to access news, but they also allowed decisions about what they read to be made by algorithms on sites like Facebook and Google, and by software presets on their computer. Justin, an undeclared student, explained that:

“When you download Firefox, they have the BBC feed. So you just click on it and it happens to be the BBC. If I downloaded Google Chrome and they had MSNBC I'd do that. I do use MSNBC a lot, too, because that's my homepage.”

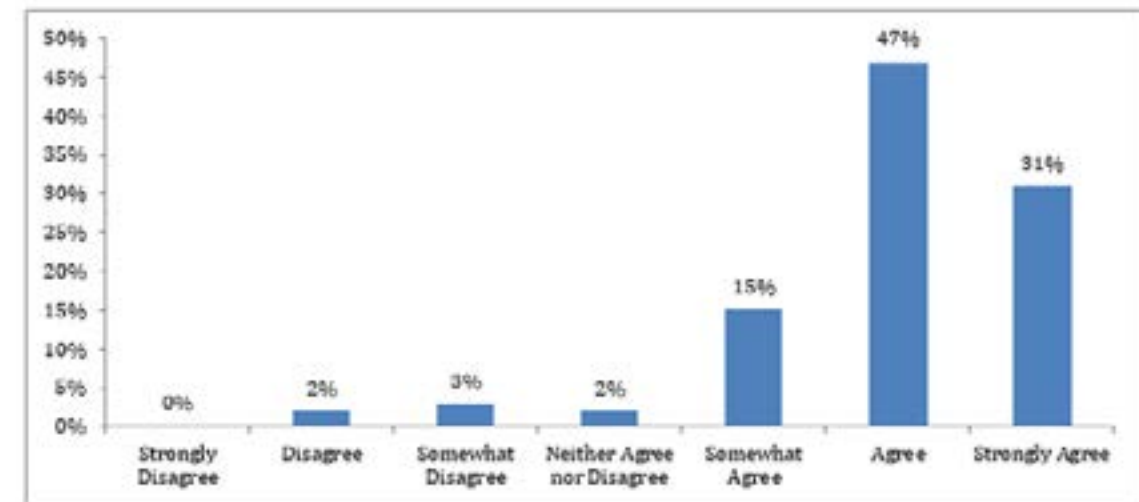


Students commonly reported accessing news that required little effort to find, as illustrated by computer science major Ben's comment that:

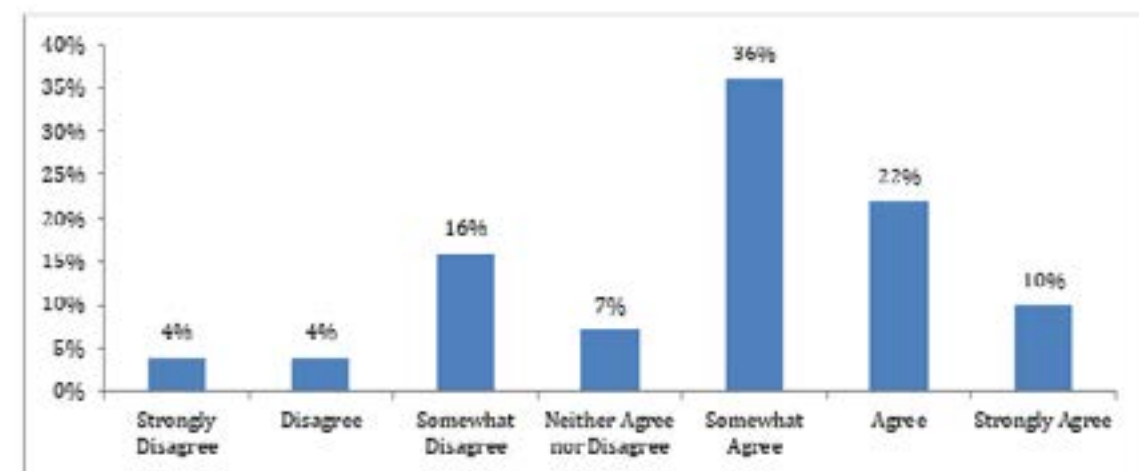
Sometimes I feel like looking for interesting stories and I go to some sections of the site, but usually it's just whatever happens to be on the front page or, you know, whatever pops up on my screen.

Survey results showed that many students spent little time accessing news: 43% reported spending one hour or less a week watching, reading, or listening to news, while just 27% spent more than two hours weekly consuming news. Charts 1 and 2 (below) illustrate the discrepancies in students' answers when asked on the survey both whether they consider it important to follow the news and whether they think of themselves as paying close attention to the news.

**Chart 1. Response to the statement "I consider it important to follow the**



news."



**Chart 2. Response to the statement "I pay close attention to news."**

Both variables above strongly correlated ( $r(133) = .64, p < .001$ ), and the responses show that participants much more frequently at least somewhat agreed that they want to follow the news (93%) than say they at least somewhat closely follow the news (68%).

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During interviews, many participants explained that they follow news as a way of staying informed and escaping the "college bubble." Journalism major Karl responded that he considers it his responsibility as a citizen to follow the news:

"A lot of people have opinions but I don't think a lot of people have stuff to back it up. When I go into a political debate or form my opinions I'd like to have information to back up [my arguments]."

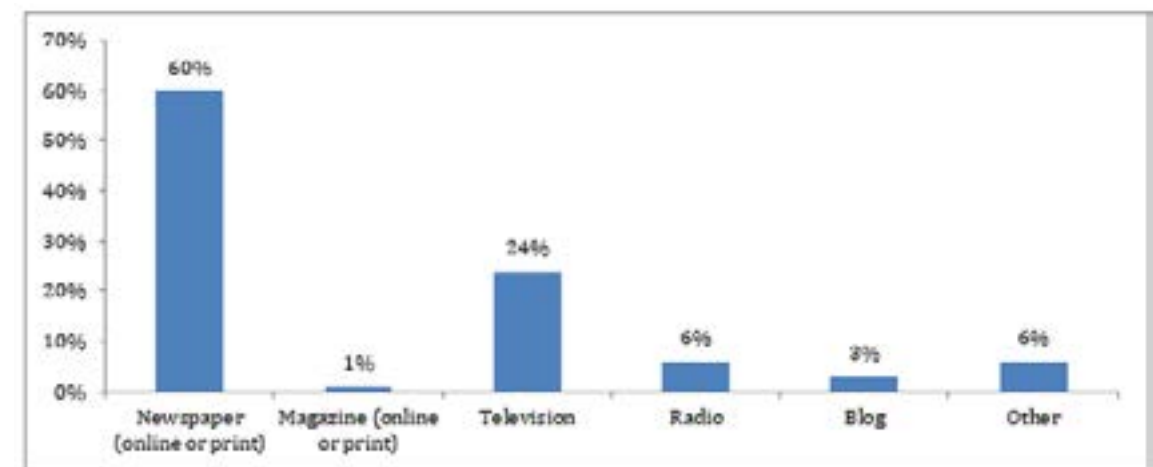
Interviewees listed a variety of reasons why they choose not to follow the news. The most common response was being too busy. Several students also responded that they would not go out of their way to follow news or that news is too depressing to follow. Astronomy major Florence noted that:

"General news and world news – it doesn't pertain to me so I don't really follow it."

Similarly, computer engineering major Morris commented:

"I don't have a personal stake in the news so I'd rather stay away from it."

Students surveyed preferred reading news to watching or listening to it, as Chart 3 (below) illustrates.



**Chart 3. Students' preferred medium for accessing news**

Differences between journalism/communication students and other majors were identified through Independent samples t tests. These groups were in several ways significantly different. As compared to their non-major counterparts, journalism/communication students thought of themselves as paying more attention to the news ( $t(133) = 2.82, p = .006$ ; MJ/C = 5.40, SD = 1.25, MNon-J/C = 4.54, SD = 1.53), forwarded more news to family and friends ( $t(133) = 2.10, p = .038$ , MJ/C = 2.80, SD = 1.07, MNon-J/C = 2.41, SD = .95), and also spent more time reading news per week ( $t(133) = 4.05, p < .001$ , MJ/C = 3.43, SD = 1.07, MNon-J/C = 2.51, SD = 1.10). Willingness to pay for news also differed significantly between journalism/communication and other majors ( $t(40.4) = 3.91, p < .001$ , MJ/C = 3.47, SD = 1.66, MNon-J/C = 2.18, SD = 1.34).

## Credibility evaluations

Our second research question asked: What is the role of personal influence in how students evaluate the credibility of news? Findings suggest that students often rely heavily on the judgments of others rather than first making an independent evaluation of a news story

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or news outlet. The most common theme mentioned in interviews about news credibility was the importance of prestige and how well respected a news outlet is by others. Students commonly placed trust in the masses—if enough people were reading something, it must be trustworthy. They more often referenced trusting the crowd – largely made up of weak ties such as acquaintances and strangers online – than trusting close ties such as parents and friends when making credibility evaluations.

Students tended to look either at the overall body of work or at a specific historical event, illustrated by one student who mentioned trusting the Washington Post because of its Watergate coverage. But they often seemed to assume that there is a reason a news source has become trustworthy without being able to name it. Said Justin:

“I figure if a lot of people are reading it I’ll skim through and see what they are reading. Usually I go to the most read unless I see something that interests me on the home page.”

Environmental studies major Marlen said she trusts reputable brands:

“I don’t really know much about news sources so if everyone respects The New York Times or The Washington Post the more likely I am to believe that.”

Reputation played a large role in students’ views on credibility. Students explained that legacy news outlets were known entities that had earned others’ trust over time, as illustrated by Morris’ comment that:

“Any of the big-name companies, big-name journalists, I would trust them more mainly because they are big and credible and shown time and time again that they are credible... Since I’m not into picking out what’s good and what’s bad I do leave trust in other people...I guess I just use the public to determine the news source credibility.”

Government and politics major Marianne also trusts other people to assess the credibility of news outlets:

“I know that’s kind of blindly following. But [the news outlets have] gotten to be as big as they are for a reason so people seem to trust them.”

A minority of interviewees reported that their views about credibility depended largely on what they were exposed to at home and through their peers. As neurobiology major Tori said:

“Being raised in a house where we got The Washington Post, I would see it every morning and I just kind of never assumed that it wasn’t credible.”

In their answers about prestige and trusting others, several themes emerged: Students wished they were better equipped to vet sources independently, but absent that training decided to put faith in people who pay close attention to the news to do the vetting for them.

On the survey, students were asked to select all that apply from a list of possible concepts that factor into definitions of news outlet credibility. The most common answer (chosen by 97% of respondents) was “accuracy,” followed by “balanced reporting” (84%), “expertise” (78%), “avoids conflict of interest” (52%), “forthcoming about political views (if any)” (41%), “provides regular coverage of issues important to me” (41%) and “familiar author/anchor/host” (28%). When asked during interviews to expand on their definitions of news outlet credibility, a majority of students said that they want news presented in an unbiased fashion—devoid of opinions and considering all viewpoints—although several mentioned that this is a mostly (or entirely) unattainable goal.

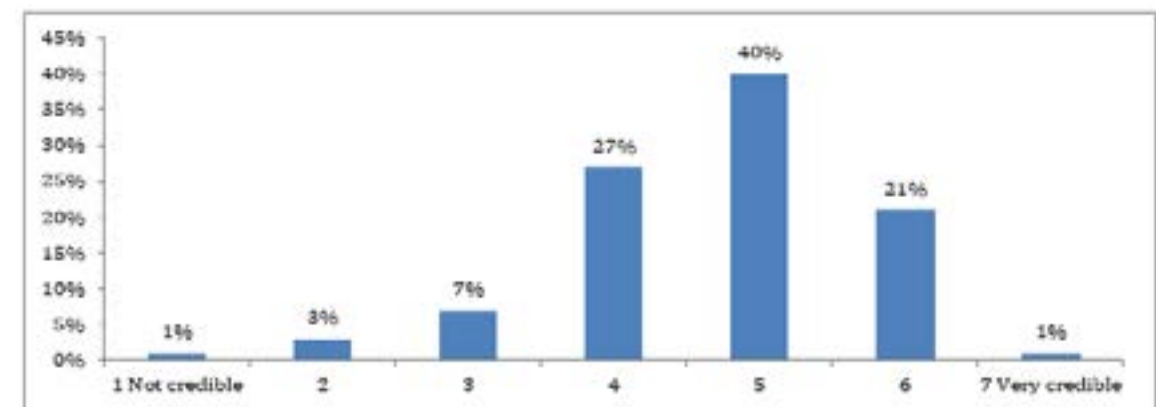
Several students described their practice of clicking on links to see the original source of information, cross-checking information found on blogs and paying attention to whether an author is a dispassionate source. But interviews often revealed a difference between

what students say about credibility in theory and what they do in practice. Several students admitted that they do not actually pay close attention to the credibility of their news source.

### Perception of the news media

Our third research question asked: What is the role of personal influence in shaping students’ views of the news media? Findings revealed that students were mostly trusting of the press—specifically legacy news outlets—and were less often influenced by others than they were in the other two research questions. Just four students said their parents, three said their friends, and three said their teachers had influenced their perceptions of the news media.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the U.S. news media as a whole and specific categories of news outlets on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 being not credible and 7 being very credible. Results show that students generally found the U.S. news media credible (Chart 4).



**Chart 4. Students’ ratings of U.S. news media credibility**

Interviews showed that few students were disillusioned with the news media as a whole—many didn’t have strong feelings about the press one way or another. Most students could not name a personal experience with the news media that greatly shaped their perception of the press. But one factor in students’ evolving views about the news media was exposure to college classes. Said government and politics major Marianne:

I’m more sceptical of news now than when I first started watching...Specifically in the last few years, I’ve taken a communications and a journalism class here. You realize even if you try to write completely objectively you can’t. Your political views and your fundamental beliefs are always going to come through.

Economics major Ben was among the minority of students who said his family influenced his views of the news media, commenting that:

“I come from a pretty liberal family so we make fun of Fox News.”

The majority of students said in interviews that their default tendency is to be trusting of news outlets, particularly those that are widely known. Students overwhelmingly responded that when a news source does something that makes them lose their trust, the feeling is specific to that news source—it doesn’t lead to widespread distrust of the news media.

Survey results found that students rated legacy news organizations as more credible than non-traditional sources such as blog and social media sites. Eighty-four percent of students gave national newspapers an above-average credibility rating, ahead of local newspa-

pers (70%), network television (70%), and national magazines (66%). In contrast, personal blogs and social media sites received a 1 or 2 on the credibility scale by about half of students. The top five sources that students surveyed deemed credible were The Washington Post, The New York Times, CNN, NPR, and NBC.

The preference for newspapers was also echoed during interviews. Students noted that newspapers have a long tradition of publishing compared to online sources, and that newspapers are held to a higher journalistic standard. They noted that blogs often lack editorial oversight and are prone to include ranting and slanted news coverage. And despite their routine of scouring Facebook and Twitter for information, many interviewees said they don't particularly trust social media. Journalism major Karl reported:

"I feel like you can write anything on these websites and there is no restriction on it."

Researchers created composite average scores of students' ratings of different types of news media platforms, specifically print (national newspapers, local newspapers, national magazines), online (online magazines), broadcast (network television, local television, cable television, public television, public radio, private radio), and social media/blogs (organizational blogs, personal blogs, social media websites). The composite subscales had reliabilities in the expected range for the number of items (print:  $\alpha=.71$ ; broadcast:  $\alpha=.81$ ; social media/blogs:  $\alpha=.69$ ). Students rated these news sources as similarly credible (Table 1).

Source type	Print	Online magazines	Broadcast
Print			
Online magazines	.53**		
Broadcast	.63**	.44**	
Social media and blogs	.27**	.32**	.44**

**Table 1. Correlations in the credibility ratings of different types of sources.**

Note: Correlations significant at the .01 level are marked \*\*.

Reported time spent consuming news was significantly positively related to perceived credibility of the news media generally ( $r=.21$ ,  $p=.017$ ) and print sources specifically ( $r=.17$ ,  $p=.045$ ). Journalism/communication majors perceived the U.S. news media as more credible than other majors ( $t(133)=3.06$ ,  $p=.003$ ), and rated print sources ( $t(131)=1.98$ ,  $p=.05$ ) and online magazines ( $t(131)=2.69$ ,  $p=.008$ ) as more credible than did non-majors. Students who have taken at least one journalism class also provided higher credibility ratings for the news generally ( $t(133)=2.78$ ,  $p=.006$ ), print media ( $t(133)=2.51$ ,  $p=.013$ ) and online magazines ( $t(133)=2.61$ ,  $p=.01$ ) than students who had not taken a journalism class. Mean credibility ratings for all source types are presented in Table 2.

Source Type	Major		Taken a journalism course	
	<i>Journalism/Communication</i>	<i>Not Journalism/Communication</i>	Yes	No
News in general	5.20 (.96)	4.55 (1.04)**	5.08 (.94)	4.54 (1.06)**
Print	5.53 (.92)	5.15 (.90)*	5.54 (.85)	5.11 (.912)*
Online magazines	4.77 (.94)	4.17 (1.10)**	4.68 (.97)	4.14 (1.11)**
Broadcast	4.87 (.81)	4.67 (.99)	4.85 (.87)	4.66 (.99)
Social media and blogs	3.11 (1.04)	2.86 (.96)	3.06 (1.05)	2.86 (.95)

**Table 2. Average credibility ratings across types of news media.**

Note: All means out of 7 possible points. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. \* denotes significance at the .05 level. \*\* denotes significance at the .01 level.

In order to understand whether academic major predicted ratings of general credibility when controlling for other factors, we regressed credibility rating on major while controlling for time spent on news. Even after controlling for time spent on news, major significantly predicted ratings of credibility ( $\beta=.54$ ,  $p=.018$ ,  $R^2=.08$ ), suggesting that journalism/communication majors were more likely to rate the news media as more credible compared to their non-major counterparts with similar time spent on news.

## Discussion

This mixed-methods study of college undergraduates, the target demographic for many news literacy courses, provides educators with nuanced data about students' engagement with news that may be useful in shaping pedagogical priorities. One important takeaway is that students rely heavily on people in their personal networks to identify and evaluate news, sometimes at the expense of making independent choices and judgments about the content they consume. College students have come of age in a networked environment where they are accustomed to finding links to stories and recommendations from a variety of sources on the web. With the glut of information available to them in the digital age, students appear to rely on friends, family, and others in their online networks to be news curators.

Coming across news shared by trusted people in one's personal network is not inherently problematic. But students in this study often outsourced not just the step of finding news but also the critical stage of evaluating news stories and sources. While students professed to care deeply about the credibility of news, they admitted to sometimes not taking the time to vet information or sources and instead relied on others to make the determinations for them. Our study appears to confirm previous research that students often compensate for uncertainty that comes with evaluating news by relying on "an authority they trust" (Francke, Sundin, and Limberg 2011, 691).

During interviews, rather than citing specific attributes of news outlets that made them credible, most students referenced what is best described as reputed credibility—the reputation that a source has earned over time as measured by audience size or name recognition. Results showed that students turned to and trusted the same types of sources that have long been at the center of the American news ecosystem. Students gave blogs and cable news low credibility ratings, and listed newspapers as their preferred and most trusted category of news source. This may be yet another indication of the importance of reputed credibility, as legacy news organizations such as The New York Times and The Washington Post (the two most credible news outlets, according to students) have had well over a century to burnish their brands. They are also the type of news sources—along with national magazines and network television—that students grew up seeing at home. Familiarity rather than personal experience with these sources seemed to drive students' responses.

These findings highlight the important role that news literacy can play in teaching students how to independently access, verify, and evaluate news—critical thinking skills that appear to be lacking among many of this study's participants. Several students explicitly mentioned that they wished they were better equipped to evaluate news but without such training fell back on others' judgments or on the reputation of the source in making quick credibility evaluations. Students tended to be trusting of news sources by default, in particular those that are "brand names." The role of news literacy education is teaching stu-

dents to be discerning news consumers rather than blindly trusting news reports—even those that come from the biggest names in journalism. Specific attention should be paid to helping students identify balanced news coverage and assess the accuracy of information—the two terms that survey respondents said were most associated with credible journalism.

Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow theory remains particularly useful to explain how students receive news and develop their views of specific news outlets and the news media in general. Students often appear at least one step removed from the direct consumption of news when putting trust in "opinion leaders"—primary mediators who pay close attention to news and influence others by passing on content with their interpretation. Tyler's comment that he has one friend who is a voracious news consumer and "keeps me informed" is a classic example of relying upon an opinion leader. In these cases, students understand the importance of following news but still may not actively engage in finding or evaluating news.

In the context of this study, opinion leaders may be friends, classmates, family, or teachers—anyone who, according to the primary socialization theory, teaches students normative behaviours and values (in this case what news to consume and how to evaluate news credibility). Beyond human opinion leaders, we suggest an extension of the term to include technological tools such as algorithms that drive news aggregators and online "most emailed" or "most read" lists. Our results suggest that students are willing to consume and trust whatever the crowd decides is the most interesting story, whatever Google or Facebook's algorithm features prominently, or whatever news sources Chrome or Firefox decides to include in its browser presets. Given students' high level of trust in technology to deliver relevant and credible news, news literacy educators may consider devoting time to explaining how digital media platforms use algorithms to personalize content to individual users and what this means for the news consumer.

The two-step flow theory highlights the influence of interpersonal networks in disseminating news and affecting the attitudes and beliefs of people in the network. Our findings suggest that students are highly influenced by interpersonal exchanges such as word-of-mouth communication. The vast majority of survey respondents said they enjoyed discussing news they consumed, and several students commented in interviews that they were motivated to follow news so they could know what their friends were reading and talking about. While students use social media to keep tabs on what news people in their personal networks are consuming and commenting on, they generally do not trust material posted there—particularly content written by users that does not include a link to a professional news source.

The main limitations of this study are the reliance on self-reported data, our use of a convenience sample, the oversampling of journalism/communication majors, and the lack of geographic diversity in our sample. This study is based on self-reporting on surveys and in interviews, which raises the possibility of students providing normative responses to the researchers about their news consumption habits, credibility evaluations, and views of the news media.

Obtaining a true probability sample was not feasible given the absence of a comprehensive list of undergraduates. While we attempted to reach out to students from across campus, those who opted to take the survey and sit for interviews may have been more engaged in news and interested in speaking about our topic than the general student population. Journalism students, while a minority of study participants, were still overrepresented as compared to the overall makeup of the university population. This self-selection process reduces the accuracy of our predictions toward the student population at a large U.S. university.

Time and resource limitations prevented us from seeking participants from other U.S. or international universities. Expanding the scope of our sample beyond one institution would have increased the diversity of participants and enabled us to claim more generalizability of results. Future studies may benefit from international collaboration in data collection. However, we believe this study's findings are useful for international scholars who seek to understand how their students access and assess news. The influence of personal networks and algorithmic recommendation engines is a worldwide phenomenon, aided by the ubiquity of social media and mobile technology. For instance, Facebook reports that approximately 83.5% of its daily active users are outside of the United States and Canada (Facebook 2015), and Twitter reports that 79% of all accounts are from users outside of the U.S (Twitter 2015).

Recent studies confirm the flattening effect of technology, showing that college students across the globe report similar levels of addiction to social media and mobile technology (Moeller, Powers, & Roberts 2012), and that young news consumers universally prefer online news to news on other platforms (Fletcher, Radcliffe, Levy, Nielsen & Newman 2014). The worldwide trend toward news consumption through social media, search engines, and on mobile devices illustrates the ease of tapping into personal networks and using technology to access news. While trust in the news media differs greatly by country, with the United States being among the least trusting populations (Fletcher, Radcliffe, Levy, Nielsen & Newman 2014), we would expect a comparative study to show that students do not differ greatly in the ways in which they evaluate credibility and form their views of the news media. Finally, our focus on a U.S.-based university can be seen as informative to international scholars within the larger framework of higher education. The modern American university has served as a global model for higher education and is seen as the most influential academic model worldwide (Altbach 1998; Palfreman 2008). While regional and national cultures may differ, critical thinking among students and engagement with news are universal concerns that this study helps to address.

## Conclusion

This study provides fresh evidence that news literacy education's focus on helping students be discerning news consumers is necessary and in demand at the college level. Results showed that the vast majority of students think it is important to follow the news, although fewer actually closely followed the news in practice, in part because they did not see the relevance to their lives. Students overwhelmingly trusted others to access and assess news. Some said they wished they had the critical thinking skills necessary to make independent judgments about news, and others commented that exposure to news during college classes made them shrewder consumers. Non-journalism/communication majors, often the target of news literacy courses, were found to be less avid news consumers, less likely to pass along news, and less willing to pay for news. Given these findings, news literacy educators may wish to consider two pedagogical priorities: (1) Finding ways to motivate students to take a more proactive role in accessing news and to see the relevance of news to their lives; and (2) helping students independently evaluate the credibility of news sources so that they can be engaged, well-informed citizens.

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# Finding consensus: a pilot survey in news literacy education

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the findings of a pilot study of news literacy programs in the United States in which respondents were surveyed about the concepts, pedagogy, and assessments used. It presents an ongoing lack of consensus in the field about not only what constitutes news literacy but also how news literacy is implemented in secondary and higher education classrooms. The research is framed within the context of contemporary scholarship on best educational practices and ongoing efforts to assess both news and media literacy education. The pilot survey, funded by the McCormick Foundation and the Poynter Institute, was administered to a small sample of news literacy educators across multiple grade levels. Respondents reflected on the structure and intent of their news literacy programming and were asked to consider the role of their programming as it relates to greater departmental or institutional goals. The study finds that while educators are using a mix of best practices in assessment, such as student portfolios, a lack of consensus still exists regarding other critical elements of news literacy education and implementation, including learning objectives, main concepts, and pedagogy. The researchers suggest scholars in the field must do more to articulate the role of news literacy education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and provide clear direction on how to implement news literacy education in the classroom.

## Introduction

**News literacy is an expanding field in the United States, thanks in part to new educational standards at the primary and secondary levels that focus on informational and non-fiction texts. Sometimes placed under the umbrella of concomitant literacies such as digital and media literacy, news literacy is finding a foothold among educators and practitioners who seek to bridge news media's producer-consumer dichotomy.**

In doing so, news literacy has been variously described as "the acquisition of 21st-cen-

tury, critical-thinking skills for analysing and judging the reliability of news and information, differentiating among facts, opinions and assertions in the media we consume, create and distribute” (ASNE’s Youth Journalism Initiative, n.d.); “the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports from all media: print, TV, radio or the web” (Centerfornewsliteracy.org 2015); and “the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports and information sources” (Why News Matters 2015).

Most recently, educators, journalism practitioners, and researchers have explored news literacy as means of reinvigorating education with current, timely, historical documents, including news reports. Because of news literacy’s emphasis on critical thinking and analysis, its study requires students to synthesize those educational fundamentals and link them to real world events and skills, all while aligning with increasingly stringent state and local standards. In the wake of a September 2014 News Literacy Summit held in Chicago, a white paper compiling the summit conclusions and recommendations held that “The Common Core and ‘21st Century skills’ movements create an opening for news literacy advocates to join with others and embed these concepts and abilities into the curriculum across disciplines” (Wallace 2015). The Common Core State Standards is a U.S.-based educational initiative that outlines learning goals and standards for each grade in math and English and language arts. While not a government-mandated initiative, as of summer 2015, forty-three states had adopted Common Core standards (Ujifusa 2015). The standards, particularly for English and language arts, emphasize informational and non-fiction texts. However, the standards do not explicitly mention news or media literacy learning objectives. Rather, the standards state that:

“just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the twenty-first century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards” (“Key Points ELA” 2015).

While this new educational standards framework has provided an opening for news literacy education in primary and secondary school classrooms, there is, as yet, no tie between these standards and post-secondary news literacy education objectives.

Recognizing this gap, founding partners at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and the Poynter Institute encouraged and supported researchers to engage in studies that would better map the field of news literacy—how, where, and to what extent it is being taught. The summit in particular sought to identify what is known about the field, its unknowns, and next steps for all stakeholders. This paper is the result of that approach—a preliminary, limited-scope survey aimed at taking first steps in identifying how and why news literacy is currently being taught. The argument for this tactic is simple: We cannot begin to fully understand news literacy, the direction of the field, or its implications, unless we first understand how those teaching it conceptualize and execute what they do. Therefore, this paper seeks to capture a snapshot of the on-the-ground challenges educators face and successes they’ve achieved.

The sixty respondents who completed this news literacy pilot survey span the United States and represent a diverse array of teaching and learning programs: from classrooms and professional training programs, and from storied institutions to those that are just beginning to incorporate news literacy into their curriculum. Their responses offer a glimpse into the complex reality educators face, and could offer a blueprint for strategists and advocates working to broaden the reach of news literacy. What’s more, this survey stands as a directive that without more consensus inside the classroom on what news literacy means and how to teach it, the field could continue to remain fragmented, and measuring successful initiatives will be difficult at best without a comparative baseline.

## Mapping progress in a young field

“News literacy—a field pioneered by journalists rather than theorists or psychometricians—is still a young discipline that needs time to accumulate a body of evidence for its efficacy.” (Beyerstein 2014)

To begin, it is vital to distinguish between areas of study that are widely conflated, including media education and media literacy, journalism education, and news literacy, the latter being the focus of this study. In describing early media and media literacy education in the United States, Kubey (1998) identifies roots in both cultural studies and inoculation approaches. Media education, he found, was most often a means of educating against media, as if to stem an infection or cure a disease. While European media education moved beyond such recursive approaches to adopt a cultural approach, Kubey found many American school systems stymied, in part due to a failure to communicate the value in media education beyond simply curtailing media’s excessive use among young adults (1998). In considering the historical foundations of media literacy, RobbGrieco, a media literacy historian, articulated a similar divide in approaches that emphasized either protectionism or empowerment but rarely both (2014). He summarized a well-accepted definition of media literacy education—“the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms” (RobbGrieco 2014, 5)—and visualized a model of “Media Literacy’s Big Tent” that places news literacy squarely under the flag of “empowerment,” where media is used “to participate more fully in our democracy, economy and cultures” (2014, 5). As such, this study accepts news literacy as an approach centred within media literacy, a particular area of study aimed at examining those news media products, processes, and institutions that impact citizens via their participation in democracy.

Additionally, this empowerment function of news literacy helps marry it to the craft of journalism, an industry that, at its core, seeks to keep tabs on democratic institutions and systems of power and voice. In this way, journalism is often the object of news literacy practice. Journalism’s relationship to news literacy, however, is more complex than simply being one side of the producer/consumer coin. Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem and Moen (2013), for instance, found students’ positive attitudes about news and journalism served as predictors for intent to participate in civic engagement. Because news literacy often asks students to critically consider the messages and accuracy of news information, the study of news literacy principles often includes the study of journalism production. Indeed, core professional ideologies of a journalist—objectivity, impartiality, accuracy—are among the same metrics the news literacy consumer uses to evaluate products (Clark 2013). Normative expectations of “good” journalism versus “bad” journalism, paired with concepts such as media effects and cultivation theories, create a sometimes circular and reactive news literacy process in which delineating between cynical and critical dispositions becomes a legitimate concern for educators (Mihailidis 2008). Additional nuances among media literacy and media education, journalism, and news literacy are too numerous to articulate here, but understanding the links and shared approaches is critical to placing news literacy education within—and aside—these established constructs.

While news literacy is indeed a still emerging area of study and practice, its relatively fast growth through educational institutions indicates that schools and professionals are responding to a well-established need for young adults to sort fact from fiction. As Craft, Maksl, and Ashley (2013) stated in their executive research summary on a study aimed at measuring news media literacy, “better understanding of what makes news reliable and credible is a first step toward a citizenry that is better equipped to make smarter decisions and engage in democratic society” (p. 2). Even recent changes in k-12 education standards are reflecting an increased emphasis on fact-finding and critical thinking that allows

students to recognize bias and opinion in original texts. In fact, the Common Core State Standards Initiative developed anchor standards for English and language arts that require students to draw conclusions from texts, determine central ideas, analyse how word choices shape meaning and tone, and integrate and evaluate content from diverse media formats (Corestandards.org 2015). These skills all speak directly to a need for news literacy, as they mandate the same critical, fact-finding mission students undertake when analysing journalism or even fiction texts (Craft, Maksl, and Ashley 2013).

The intent behind news literacy curriculum and programming is clear and generally well-received among those in the field. The intersection of civics, critical thinking, and emerging media present a compelling interest for educators and policymakers who seek to engage youth and create active, intentional citizens in a democracy. However, there remains significant incongruity concerning the best ways to teach news literacy, including disagreement over which learning objectives are most important and whether any news literacy curriculum must also ask students to engage in news media or other media content creation (Jolly 2014).

The 2014 News Literacy Summit was envisioned precisely to answer some of these questions, to build a cohesive framework in which the field can continue to grow, and to develop shared goals among all stakeholders—including journalists, researchers, academicians, and educators. As such, one group of summit participants—representative of these fields—was tasked specifically with answering: “How do you teach news literacy? What are best practices?” After some debate and deliberation, the group developed a set of recommendations for news literacy education:

- News literacy education must be student-centred by “teaching the concepts of news literacy from the perspectives of individual students.”
- News literacy programs should “address and engage journalistic ideals and ethics, the impact of hyper-partisan politics on how news is perceived, and the changing nature of journalism.”
- The news literacy field should embrace “the creation of a teacher learning program that allows outstanding educators to serve as exemplars at the lesson, curricular, and classroom level.” This recommendation also includes a caveat to support those teachers who are often overlooked because they do not fall into this cohort of exemplar teachers.
- The field needs the creation of an open-source clearing house of news literacy teaching resources. (Wallace 2014)

These recommendations highlight the need for greater understanding of what, exactly, is happening in news literacy classrooms or programs. Put more succinctly, the News Literacy Summit report on conclusions and recommendations frames the status of the field in two short sentences: “A precise definition of news literacy remains elusive. We have yet to agree on what to measure and how so that we know news literacy has been accomplished” (Wallace 2014, 17).

The survey findings presented here contextualize this gap in understanding and demonstrate an urgent need for more research and development on two fronts in order to better understand the news literacy field: First, we must know what is happening inside news literacy classrooms. Second, there is a need to develop consensus among those in the field on what matters most in news literacy pedagogy, including teaching methods and learning outcomes. For these purposes, consensus here does not mean unequivocal agreement among scholars, duplication of teaching efforts or even replication of curriculum in the classroom. Instead, this study presents the idea of consensus as a need for a baseline of normative learning objectives, pedagogy and assessment methods that practitioners can

share to promote news literacy and enhance educational outcomes.

## Methods

For this study, we set out to conduct a pilot survey to explore how news literacy is currently being taught across myriad institutions. Pilot surveys are routinely used in the field of social sciences to help researchers hone the survey instrument and determine the proper course of action for a major research project. The study, funded jointly by the McCormick Foundation and the Poynter Institute with logistical support offered by the American Society of News Editors and the Journalism Education Association, was designed to provide context illuminating the current state of news literacy education. Staff members at ASNE and the primary researchers developed the survey instrument with input from the McCormick Foundation and Poynter Institute. Aside from demographic questions, the survey asked 22 questions across four areas: news literacy program background and makeup; concepts, approaches and assessments used in the program; audience and population reached; and the future of the program in question. Questions asked respondents to describe their commonly used teaching techniques, identify main learning objectives, and describe challenges and successes to their program. The survey was designed to answer the central research question:

RQ1: How do you teach news literacy in your classroom?

Secondary research questions included:

RQ2: Which news literacy learning objectives are most important in your program?

RQ3: How do you assess news literacy learning outcomes?

RQ4: Which teaching methods do you most routinely use in your news literacy program?

These questions reflect a desire to better understand the “best practices” used in news literacy pedagogy. They also reflect contemporary understandings of the tools used to measure educational success. For example, respondents who might report news literacy program learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessments consistent with today’s pedagogical research would exemplify and reinforce the relevance of news literacy in the classroom. On the other hand, respondents who might report learning objectives, methods, or assessments that are inconsistent with both the standards of news literacy and educational research would suggest a need for increased attention to teacher professional development and a more unified message from the news literacy field. While the sample is purposely limited, the data presented here illustrate what some researchers and educators in the field have been seeing anecdotally.

Researchers sent a survey link, explanation, and invitation to a purposive sample of roughly 111 individuals who were pre-identified as associated with news literacy education. In addition, the survey link was sent out via listserv email to approximately 1,200 members of the Journalism Education Association and the American Society of News Editors. Because of the nature of listserv membership and email distribution lists, it is not possible to track the total population who chose not to respond to the survey or who simply never saw it in their inbox, a notable limitation of the survey. Because this survey was meant to act only as a pilot study before launching a large-scale research project, the wide distribution and comparatively low response rate—sixty responses—was a necessary but acceptable limitation of the survey design and implementation. With additional manpower and funding, a higher response rate would have yielded more generalizable results.

Survey data was collected over the period of four months, with occasional follow-up emails to remind potential participants to respond. Data was collected directly via Google



forms and uploaded into a spreadsheet. Open-ended responses were coded to collapse myriad data into meaningful categories for comparison and evaluation. For example, survey respondents were asked to list the top five news literacy concepts addressed in their educational program, and the multitude of responses were coded into categories representing a specific learning concept such as bias, credibility, or writing/editing skills.

## Results

Responses from sixty individuals were analysed and, when necessary, coded into more accessible and consolidated categories for comparison's sake. The majority of the respondents (42) taught high school students. Of the remainder, fourteen taught college-level students, two taught students younger than ninth grade, and two did not indicate the level of their students. The majority of respondents identified as teachers or teachers with additional duties, followed by professors (six full professors, three associate professors, one assistant professor). Four respondents were full-time advisers of high school media programs. Two respondents were librarians, and one respondent each represented other areas, including: retired teachers, instructors, chairs, writers in residence, senior lecturers, directors, and CTE educator. Respondents provided insight into their news literacy programs according to five assessment areas: program size and scope, content, concepts, pedagogy, and perceptions of the role of news literacy in the greater educational framework of their host institution.

### Program Size and Scope

Many survey respondents indicated institutional affiliation that evinced significant news literacy experience. The median length of time a survey respondent's institution has taught news literacy was eight years, whereas the mean was nearly fourteen years. Ten respondents did not offer specific information, and one program had yet to begin. In general, the respondents' institutional affiliation suggested a solid foundational relationship with the news literacy field. Respondents' news literacy programs varied greatly in size. Accounting for differences in program length among the varied program types—courses, workshops, or curricular units/lessons—the majority of programs (35) reached fewer than 50 students over the duration of their program. Eleven programs reached between 50 and 99 students. Eight reached between 100 and 149 students; three reached between 150 and 199 students, and three reached more than 200 students over the duration of each program (class, workshop, or discrete curricular unit/lesson).

The mean instructional hours dedicated to news during the implementation of each program was 46.2 hours, with a median of 32 hours. Many of the programs (22 of 60 respondents) featured news literacy as a component within a related course, whereas 18 programs represented semester-long standalone courses. Seven programs represented yearlong courses, and one respondent each reported programs of these durations: a month long course, a half hour per day during homeroom, and a four-year initiative.

### Content

The majority of the programs as self-described by survey respondents incorporated news literacy concepts into the curriculum and assessments; more than half included some kind of media production. When asked to select the descriptions that best characterized their

news literacy program, 42 respondents indicated their news literacy program included classroom experiences that are incorporated into the curriculum and assessed. Just over half of the programs were classroom experiences that include media production, and ten respondents described programs characterized as after school experiences that include media production. Seven respondents reported programs that were classroom experiences but that are not assessed. Outlier responses included a program described as a classroom experience that did not include media production; a program described as having no specific requirements; an afterschool program without media production; and a webinar/web-based program.

### News literacy concepts

Respondents indicated the five most important news literacy concepts explored in their program. The concepts, while varied among all respondents based on their unique course and program frame, were coded into categories that represented the following conceptual themes: Bias (39), Credibility (32), Information verification and accuracy (17), Ethics (14), Press freedoms (12), Writing and editing skills (11), Sourcing (8), What is news (7) News values and newsworthiness (6), Balancing opposing viewpoints (6), Reporting and interviewing skills (5), Media trends and history (5), Understanding how media operates (5), and Critical thinking (5). Of these responses, the five concepts respondents identified as most challenging for students to master were: bias; credibility; skills associated with writing, editing, or publishing; skills associated with reporting and interviewing; and context.

### Pedagogical approach and assessing learning

Respondents reported enlisting an array of pedagogical approaches to teach news literacy. Fifty-seven teachers reported using lectures to facilitate information, and nearly as many, 55, reported having their students work in groups. Roughly a third of the teachers reported inviting guest lecturers to address the class, and forty-four teachers reported they require students to develop a personal portfolio or project. Three reported relying on online modules or live video sessions (such as Skype) with practicing journalists.

Educators reported using a mix of summative and formative assessments to evaluate student learning. While a majority of those who responded also reported using student portfolios as assessment devices, less than half of the respondents reported using tests as a main method of assessment.

## The role of news literacy

In an open response question, teachers were asked to describe how news literacy fit the larger goals of their departments and institutions and, if they taught at the secondary level, how they aligned news literacy content with state standards. The responses fell across identifiable themes of citizenship, critical thinking, and journalism and media education. These perceptions articulate and reflect the nuanced relationship between news literacy, media literacy and media education, and journalism, as discussed earlier. The following excerpts demonstrate the range of open-ended responses.

### Citizenship

"We are a journalism and communications school. So we turn our journalists and other communications professionals. Now, with news literacy, we are also focusing on the public—citizens, consumers, residents—to educate people to know the difference between news and other forms of communication. This fits our larger goals by strengthening the

relationship among the public, democracy and journalism. We open the course only to non-journalism majors and we recruit students from across campus."

"It fits by helping to produce students who can understand and decipher news, glean nuances of bias and make informed decisions about their world, thus producing better prepared citizens for our country."

"The goal of the course is to educate non-journalism majors about how the news media work, and how to become smarter news consumers and engaged citizens."

### Critical thinking

"There are no state news literacy standards. Overall, the news literacy course I developed and teach adheres to the university's critical thinking guidelines and thus qualifies as a critical thinking course in the general education program."

"The mark of a well-educated person and well-informed citizen is the ability to critically navigate the changing information landscape, where the enormous volume of available information makes it difficult to evaluate and assess that information, where the lines between fact and fiction are increasingly blurred, and where the distribution and flow of information is not always equitable. At the same time, these changing technologies have given ordinary citizens greater control over information. Developing critical thinking skills when dealing with 21st century literacies, along with an historic understanding of traditional literacies that have shaped news and information, is a major goal for [our institution]."

### Journalism and media education

"We offer a course that fulfills a general social science core requirement for the university. This fits our goal of providing an introduction to media education to as many students as possible on our campus. We also use news literacy principles in our beginning reporting/writing course to help students identify and appreciate the components of solid reporting."

"This is a major component of [our] journalism program."

"It is part of media literacy education, which has a history at our institution."

"Students are being asked increasingly to respond to and understand nonfiction writing (Common Core). While these standards are often seen as add-ons in the traditional English classroom, they are a fundamental part of the Journalism program."

### Discussion: Finding consensus in news literacy education

To begin, the news literacy concepts teachers described as most important to their program are simultaneously reflective of and at odds with contemporary news literacy education. Most news literacy conceptual frameworks prioritize helping students learn to identify bias in sources, to pinpoint credible information, and to sort fact from fiction in news media reports. The majority of teacher respondents indeed reported these goals as primary, upholding the traditional news literacy perspective that news literacy skills should focus on consumer- or demand-oriented issues. However, the noticeable inclusion of journalist- or supply-oriented issues, such as ethics, press freedoms, writing, editing, and news values reflects the current schism in the news literacy field. As an illustration of this dilemma, many news literacy practitioners and even some from outside the field take issue with confounding journalism education and news literacy. Media literacy and civic engagement scholar Renee Hobbs explained this view in an article for Nieman Reports:

"Some educators and news practitioners think of teaching news literacy as a journalism class for non-journalists. Essentially, they dump the content of an introductory course in journalism... News literacy needs to be thought about as teaching a different set of skills—more focused on those who consume news and not those who produce it, though they are interconnected in many ways." (Hobbs 2011)

The inclusion of journalistic and production-focused learning goals also reflects the greater lack of consensus among news literacy practitioners about what, exactly, is news literacy. Because much of the scholarly work in the field (including this one) are funded by a handful of organizations, the field is somewhat pigeon-holed into the conceptual and learning outcomes most interesting to those specific grant-making institutions. Even the McCormick and Knight Foundations, two of the largest journalism-related funders, have made motions to expand the relatively nascent idea of news literacy so that it begins to align and intersect more with other fields, including information, digital, and media literacy.

Without consensus on what is news literacy and its conceptual framework, including holistic and unified learning objectives, educators are likely to continue to mix methods, so to speak, by teaching about journalism in those settings in which it is most natural—journalism or other media courses. Instead of rejecting this combination, we encourage funders and researchers to think beyond an institutional definition of news literacy and to instead focus on specific, student-centred learning objectives that embody the heart of a news literate disposition. Based on this study, this researcher would argue for learning objectives that target news media systems knowledge at various levels, instead of learning objectives that tend to articulate vague skill sets which often require educators to parse meanings in ways that over-generalize the news literacy approach. For example, a learning objective that states, "students will learn to identify bias in news media content" emphasizes the consumer-producer divide and provides little direction to the educator facilitating learning. Instead, a learning objective that emphasizes the analytical skill of detecting bias via specific news media structures (both institutional and within content or presentation) provides a more specific focus for both the student and teacher. This kind of learning objective might read: "students will identify steps in the news-making process that create opportunities for factual or context manipulation." In doing so, the focus can and should shift from debates over nomenclature to more significant conversations about empowering students to both understand and use all kinds of media in the most engaging, democratic ways.

### Using best practices in the news literacy classroom

Remarkably, the number of respondents who reported using primarily lecture-style teaching to engage students runs contrary to what we know about pedagogy and learning styles for students. In a field that focuses specifically on the unique capacity of individual students to guide and engage with their media use, the reliance on lectures represents a disconnect and calls for better teacher preparation for news literacy educators. How can we make strides in news literacy education if we do not teach in the most engaging, effective ways?

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on the efficacy of diverse pedagogical techniques and styles, many of the studies are narrowly tailored to fit a specific subject. However, a handful of widely accepted, generalizable best practices for the modern classroom have emerged. These techniques and strategies can be easily applied to news literacy instruction, and further research should be conducted to see how they might best convey news literacy frameworks. For example, Pashler et al. (2007) describe seven use-

ful education-enhancing techniques to have in one's pedagogical toolbox: "Spacing learning over time," "Interleaving worked example solutions and problem solving exercises," "Combining graphics with verbal descriptions," "Connecting and integrating abstract and concrete representations of concepts," "Using quizzes to promote learning," "Helping students allocate study time efficiently" and "Helping students build explanations by asking and answering deep questions." The authors argue that to space out the learning process, teachers should revisit fundamental content during class, structure and assign homework for periodic practice of essential material, and administer cumulative exams and finals (Pashler et al. 2007). That many respondents indicated using lectures as a primary pedagogical approach—as opposed to the multi-method framework described here—suggests a need for more foundational guidance in news literacy pedagogy. In short, we know very little about not only how news literacy is being taught but also whether those practices align with contemporary findings on successful student engagement.

However, that a majority of respondents reported using group work and discussion throughout their news literacy programs represents some consensus in the field regarding best practices for student learning. At the very least, using these methods reflects an educational desire to use methods that engage students and redirect the learning experience back onto the individual. While researchers have found full class, small group, and online discussions to be equally effective (or ineffective) at achieving conceptual understanding, small group discussions have been found to be superior at raising new questions and stimulating student interest (Hamann et al. 2012).

Scholars have already documented just how messy and seemingly non-linear media-related literacies can be to teach in certain settings. Moor, Donnelly, and Hobbs (2014) describe some of the challenges of integrating media and information literacy at Mark Day School through a yearlong professional development program: "In the process, we discovered the faculty's existing understandings of media and information literacy and pushed them further within their own contexts. This process of discovery and flexibility required several key shifts from standard top-down professional development models and through a process Hobbs and Moore have called messy engagement... Rather than focusing on a product to be completed after a predetermined and linear course of learning and synthesis, messy engagement is exploratory and iterative." If teaching teachers about news and media literacy requires such exploratory pedagogy, one can only imagine that teaching students might necessitate similar or perhaps even more flexible and experimental methods.

## Assessing learning

Deploying efficacious pedagogical strategies isn't enough; educators must effectively assess student learning, and assessing news literacy can be a challenge. However, there are lessons to be learned from existing research on news, media, and information literacy education. These existing models for understanding news and media literacy, as well as the art of learning, should be considered when assessing learning in any news literacy program.

That the majority of respondents reported using a mix of both summative and formative assessments, including portfolios, suggests educators understand the very real need to engage in news literacy education in ways that are student-centred and self-reflective. Still, whether these tools are actually the most effective means of assessing learning remains a larger question of the field, one researchers are attempting to answer from a multitude of perspectives without yet landing on a clear answer. For example, Craft, Maksl, and Ashley (2013) have successfully developed a scale for assessing news media literacy that uses a media knowledge index to anticipate news literacy outcomes. Such a scale presents a valu-

able tool for assessing concrete baselines and outcomes because the authors found that "a separate media system knowledge index also was a significant predictor of knowledge about topics in the news, which suggests the need for a broader framework." Additionally, a team at California State University sought to assess the level of information literacy in its students (Dunn 2002). To do so, they took a multipronged approach to assessing information literacy skills by administering questionnaires, conducting multi-method qualitative studies observing how students search for info, and other methods including longitudinal studies and faculty surveys. They found that information literacy is an imprecise concept that challenges those seeking to measure it. The more nebulous literacies (media, news, information) present specific challenges to educators and researchers, but consistent and intentional assessment of student learning is integral to understanding the impact of the field.

To better assess student learning, and therefore to better understand the impact of news literacy education writ large, researchers must be able to analyse how learning objectives, pedagogical methods, and assessments are used in concert to effect specific media attitudes, dispositions, and knowledge systems. This kind of research will only be possible when both educators and scholars agree on the nature of news literacy education, its conceptual foundations, and specific learning outcomes. Simply put, to test the field, scholars must first know the field, and the myriad and developing approaches to assessing news literacy education suggest that there are still enough discrepancies to make meaningful research difficult.

## The role of news literacy in 21st century education

The wide variety of responses to the question "How does news literacy fit the larger goals of your department/institution?" demonstrate perhaps the quintessential limitation and benefit of news literacy: In today's educational field, it is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. On one hand, respondents saw a need to cultivate news literacy skills in not only their journalism students but also in students across curricular areas. On the other hand, much of the current news literacy instruction happening in classrooms is tied directly to existing journalism programs. This begs the question, where does news literacy fit? And perhaps more importantly, does it even matter? For those seeking to understand and grow the field, the answer to the first question matters greatly because it enables scholars, educators, practitioners, and policymakers to be more targeted in their actions. With limited resources in education today, a one-size-fits-all approach to news literacy education may do little to impact students and is likely an insufficient tool for 21st century education, which demands healthy consumer scepticism and critical knowledge of media systems.

## Conclusion

### Beyond consensus

In 2011, scholar Faith Rogow suggested a path forward for the next decade of media literacy education, much of which is applicable to the field of news literacy as well. Rogow predicates her recommendations on two important realizations: First, those in the field must continue to talk about media literacy in terms of educational practices and what is happening in the classroom. Second, the language used to describe the field matters. Rogow argues that "[m]edia literacy advocates would have a better chance of appealing to educators if we were less insular in the way we describe our work" (16). Rogow's assertions,

though articulated years prior and in regards to the “big tent” of media literacy, speak to the findings of this pilot study: To continue to frame news literacy education in a compelling way for educators and policy makers, we must first understand exactly how it is operating in the classroom and to what effect. This level of awareness is not meant to derive consensus in the form of regimenting the field. Rather, awareness and shared positioning of educational outcomes and methodology will provide a better foundation on which news literacy educators may stand. In doing so, we must, as Rogow contends, reimagine the dialogue we use to articulate our goals and the place of news literacy in education today. More specifically, this new dialogue must include clear direction from the field on best practices in news literacy education, including a focus on promoting the predominant learning objectives, concepts, pedagogy, and assessments.

Furthermore, the findings presented here, while representing a notably limited sample of news literacy education programs, supports a shift in how we, as scholars, continue to conceptualize our field. Instead of putting down roots, of staking claim or carving out a particular niche for news literacy, we must look beyond silos of journalism and media education to integrate news literacy values across all curricular areas, subjects, and grade levels. In short, we must learn to reframe our approach to news literacy education, not by asking “How can we develop news literacy programming and curriculum here?” but instead by asking “How do existing curriculum and content areas lend themselves to teaching the most important news literacy skills? And how do we teach those skills according to proven and efficient methods? ” When any teachable moment—from journalism to science to math—becomes a teachable news literacy moment, we may finally start to see gains in our field like never before. In those moments, consensus in news literacy education creates a stable, tested, and reliable platform from which we can then take risks with dynamic and creative approaches in our classrooms.

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# Developing news literacy curricula in the age of social media in Hong Kong, Vietnam and Myanmar

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**Abstract:** This paper comparatively analyzes the patterns of social media usage among the students in news literacy-related courses in three Asian countries and explores how news literacy educators have incorporated, or should incorporate in the future, their students' digital news habits into their curricula under the different socio-cultural and political environment. It specifically focuses on the degree of press freedom and the roles of social media platforms in news distribution and sharing in Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Myanmar. By cross-examining the distinctive characteristics of educational circumstances under 1) the relatively free media ecology in Hong Kong, 2) the heavily restricted media environment in Vietnam, and 3) the transitional and volatile press conditions in Myanmar, the study identifies common patterns of news consumption across the borders and discuss how the region-specific issues need to be pedagogically integrated into the development and modification of news literacy curricula.

## Introduction

**In today's social media-saturated, mobile world, it is essential for media educators to effectively teach how to navigate through the abundance of media content while distinguishing reliable facts and knowledge from the problematic.**

News stories, in particular, require special attention in our educational system because unlike other content types such as fictional movies, novels, comic books, TV dramas and advertisement, the news is considered to be representing real people in real situations.

Schudson (2003, 13) wrote of this magnitude of news in modern society by stating that news “has become—where it was not three centuries ago or even two centuries ago—a dominant force in the public construction of common experience and a popular sense of what is real and important” (see also Schudson 2005).

In this view, the news audience's experience with the “reality” is often not a direct individual experience but a mediated encounter with news content and its messages (Baudrillard 2005; McQuail 1985). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) argued that routine consumption of news stories is something very primitive and fundamental in human society. In any known civilization, news sharing—from exchanging family tidings and other information (for hunting, farming, and so forth) to making announcements and to even gossiping—has been unquestionably part of human life since ancient days. In other words, the information provided by news stories is an essential part of human socialization which influences how individuals perceive the world they live in.

This conceptual apprehension of what news is has a significant value in the digital age. “The great irony of our time is,” argued Schneider and Klurfeld (2014, 3) “that there is more information available at our fingertips than anytime in human history, but less and less confidence in that information.” For untrained eyes, it is now much harder to clearly distinguish between independent journalism and advertising, for instance, especially advertorials and native advertising that are intended to look, read and sound like genuine news. The distinctive lines among news, opinions, entertainment, propaganda and other types of media content have been muddled and blurred in the last decade or so (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2011).

Many journalism and media educators around the world have been concerned with the increasing need for teaching the kind of critical thinking skills that address the technology-driven patterns of news consumption and dissemination in the digital age. The news literacy curriculum developed by the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University, known as the Stony Brook model (Adler 2014; Beyerstein 2014; Fleming 2014; Fleming and Kajimoto 2016; Klurfeld and Schneider 2014), the initiative set forward by the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change (Mihailidis and Moeller 2010) and the educators' collaboration through UNESCO's Global Forum on Media and Information Literacy (Lee et al. 2013), are a few examples of this international movement to develop pedagogical tools that help students identify reliable information in the news.

It should be noted, however, that devising a pedagogy for universally applicable news literacy education is by no means an easy task. The curricula need to encompass a broad spectrum of theoretical underpinnings from sociology to psychology to political economy to media studies. In authoritarian countries, the day-to-day news cycles are undoubtedly different from those of the nation states that protect freedom of the press, even though the global networks of computers and electronic devices arguably made McLuhan's notion of a “global village” wherein the flow of information instantly transcends geographical distances a reality (McLuhan 1994).

In each country, institutional politics, media ownership, cultural behaviours, technological infrastructure and other factors play different roles in the news distribution paradigm (Fleming and Kajimoto 2016; Hornik and Kajimoto 2014; Silverblatt, Saisanan Na Ayudhya, and Jenkins 2014) that has morphed into an intricate web of many-to-many communication flow in which “mass amateurization” of journalism has brought about a new dimension to the minute-by-minute (now arguably second-by-second) news cycle (Shirky 2008).

This paper comparatively analyzes six news literacy courses in schools in three Asian cities—namely, Hong Kong (China), Hanoi (Vietnam) and Yangon (Myanmar)—in order to

explore how media educators have incorporated, or should incorporate in the future, their students' patterns of digital news consumption into their curricula under the different socio-cultural and political environment.

By cross-examining the distinctive characteristics of educational circumstances under 1) the relatively free media ecology in Hong Kong, 2) the heavily restricted media environment in Vietnam, and 3) the transitional and volatile press conditions in Myanmar, the study aims to pinpoint overarching international news literacy concepts in the age of social media while sketching out the region-specific issues.

## Background

The theoretical frameworks in the field of news and media literacy often centre around the idea that educational interventions would help students become discerning citizens who could make informed judgments and actively contribute to the public discussions of important matters in a democratic society (Buckingham 2000; Mihailidis 2012; Fleming 2014; Klurfeld and Schneider 2014). However, many Asian countries are not democratically run. In the Asian countries where the media systems are tightly controlled and the press is not entirely free (Merrill and de Beer 2009), educators need to negotiate the meaning of citizen participation in their teaching. Laws, regulations and other limitations governing the flow of information in each country would naturally affect the way people get and consume news.

Among the three political systems under which the news literacy courses examined for this study were taught, Hong Kong has freer press freedom. The China's Special Administrative Region has its own constitutional Basic Law that guarantees the Western-style of freedom of the press, which drastically differs from the constitution of mainland China. In recent years, however, major international journalists organizations such as the Reporters Without Borders (2015), the Committee to Protect Journalists (2014) and the International Federation of Journalists (2015), all pointed out a serious decline of such media freedom in the city, citing increasing political and business pressures on the local news media outlets.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association (2014) calls the political pressure as "invisible hands," referring to the tactic by the Chinese government that seemingly exerts influence on the advertisers—multinational corporations and large local businesses. Like most commercial media businesses in developed countries, many news outlets in the city depend greatly on advertising revenue; thus, advertisers' decisions to place or withdraw advertisements could often impact not only their businesses but also their editorial stances. Since many of the media outlets are owned by the business tycoons whose financial interests are tied to the mainland, such financial pressure often make the media owners editorially restrict the newsrooms and "self-censor" what they report, according to the Association (see also The Committee to Protect Journalists 2014).

A series of layoffs of outspoken journalists as well as violent attacks against journalists in the last few years also made the situation worse, according to the International Federation of Journalists (2015) and the 2015 Freedom of the Press report by Freedom House (2015). In 2014 Hong Kong public's trust in the mainstream news media plummeted to the lowest level since the territory was returned to China in 1997 (The Committee to Protect Journalists 2014; The Hong Kong Journalists Association 2014) and their credibility were questioned by many during the two-month-long civil disobedience movement known as Umbrella Revolution (Kaiman 2014). The annual World Press Freedom Index compiled by the Reporters Without Borders (2015) ranked Hong Kong at 70<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in 2015, down nine places from the previous year, due to the concerns over self-censorship

and political pressure.

The World Press Freedom Index attempts to measure freedom of information based on such variables as media independence, legislative frameworks, and transparency. It categorizes the 180 countries into five groups—a country is either in "good situation," "satisfactory situation," "noticeable problems," "difficult situation" or "very serious situation." At 70<sup>th</sup>, Hong Kong belongs to the "noticeable problems" group along with Japan and South Korea. Vietnam, on the other hand, came in at 175<sup>th</sup>, grouped in the "very serious situation" category where China (176<sup>th</sup>) and North Korea (179<sup>th</sup>) also belong. In April 2015, the country was named one of the "10 most censored countries" in the world by the Committee to Protect Journalists (2015). Not only professional journalists but also outspoken citizens like independent bloggers are persecuted through "street-level attacks, arbitrary arrests, surveillance, and harsh prison sentences for anti-state charges," the Committee reported.

In Vietnam, the Communist Party dominates and dictates the large part of public conversation on the media (Broadcasting Board of Governors 2013; BBC 2012). By law, the news media and journalists must serve the interests of the state and the nation's political stability as the "mouthpiece of Party organization" which is stipulated in the Article 1, Chapter 1, of the nation's media law (The Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1999). Since no print or broadcast outlet can be privately owned, there is no "independent" local news organization by the definition often used by Western media educators. For example, in the Stony Brook model, press independence is defined as "freedom from control, influence and interest" (Digital Resource Center) but such conceptualization would simply negate the existence of true journalism in the country, possibly making the discussion of such basic concept in the news literacy education a politically sensitive matter (Fleming and Kajimoto 2016).

Myanmar ended its 50 years of military rule in 2011 and paved the way to democratic transition. In 2012 pre-publication censorship also came to an end and in the following year, privately owned news dailies were introduced (Freedom House 2014b). Despite the development of media reform in the last few years, however, international information watchdogs drew attention to the increasing threat of arrests and harassments for local and foreign journalists, reporting that the news media landscape is still volatile (Freedom House 2015; The Reporters Without Borders 2015). Like Vietnam, Myanmar was also named as one of the "10 most censored countries" by Committee to Protect Journalists that observed:

"The Printers and Publishers Registration Law, enacted in March 2014, bans news that could be considered insulting to religion, disturbing to the rule of law, or harmful to ethnic unity. Publications must be registered under the law, and those found in violation of its vague provisions risk de-registration." (The Committee to Protect Journalists 2015)

It should be noted that the World Freedom Press Index (2015) and other watchdog reports mentioned above (Freedom House 2015; The International Federation of Journalists 2015; The Committee to Protect Journalists 2015) primarily concern the freedom of the news media and working journalists. The degree of freedom of expression for ordinary citizens, especially on the internet, also needs to be taken into consideration when discussing news literacy curricula in today's digital age.

Even though the issues of self-restriction and self-censorship by the media outlets have become more prominent in Hong Kong in recent years, for example, the open access to the internet and the right to free speech on social media are well protected. Hong Kong has one of the highest internet usage rates in Asia with 79 percent of the population actively accessing the internet, and 66 percent has active social media accounts, according to the annual report by We Are Social (Kemp 2015b).

In Vietnam, a controversial internet law that some said would prohibit online users from

sharing news stories and other “non-personal” information came into effect in 2013 (BBC 2013; Palatino 2013). The country has continually cracked down on the social media, targeting prominent bloggers and even Facebook campaigners who criticized the government (Nguyen and Lipes 2014; Petty 2013; Stout 2013). The 45 percent of its population actively uses the internet and 33 percent with active social media accounts (Kemp 2015b). As part of the media reform, Myanmar, on the other hand, relaxed its control over the internet in 2012, making previously blocked news sites such as the Democratic Voice of Burma and Irrawaddy accessible for everyone in the country. However, the bandwidths of the networks and cost of connections limit the accessibility (Freedom House 2014a) in the country where only 5 to 7 percent of the population actively uses the internet and social media (Kemp 2015b).

## Methodology

This study has adopted a comparative case study in which the quantitative results of classroom survey and the teaching materials are analysed along with the qualitative data collected through direct observations and interviews. The goal of this method was to examine the specific circumstances surrounding the pedagogical efforts and discover salient similarities and differences across the countries.

The case study is limited in the sense that its findings cannot be generalized; at the same time, however, it is believed that the insights gained from the real-life examples among the observed groups of instructors and students would help understand the contexts necessary to advance global news literacy education. In particular, the following three steps were taken for data collection between November 2014 and March 2015:

1. A standardized, online-based survey on social media usage was given to the students at the early stage of the news literacy courses (see Appendix 1 for the actual questionnaire).
2. The researcher visited and observed the classes, collecting instructional documents such as syllabi, handouts and assignments. The researcher also conducted at least one lecture as a guest instructor to gain the sense of the dynamics of the students in each classroom.
3. Group interviews and personal interviews were conducted with the students and educators respectively. E-mails and online communications were also used for follow-up discussions and clarification with some of the participants.

Following the conventional approach in educational research, in this paper all participants are kept anonymous and assigned pseudonyms. This was also necessary for them to freely speak to the researcher without the fear of unforeseen consequences that could result from having their real names printed in a publication. Their schools, course titles and other specific names are also withheld. All observed courses and their curricula have integrated some elements of the Stony Brook model in their pedagogy, which Fleming (2014) described as one of the most ambitious curricular experiments in modern journalism and media literacy education (for the development of international news literacy curricula based on the Stony Brook model, see Adler 2014; Jolly 2014a; Hornik and Kajimoto 2014; Fleming and Kajimoto 2016; Fleming, Hornik and Kajimoto 2016). Other details of the data from each country are described below:

## Vietnam

A journalism instructor Linh works at a prominent public university in Hanoi. Due to the

political climate in Vietnam, her institution is not supportive of news literacy education. However, she also teaches at a private university and two high schools in the city regularly. In these three schools, she offers a course on news and media literacy. A total of 35 students in her classes responded to the survey. The researcher visited her class at the private university in November 2014 and interviewed Linh and three of her students.

Linh’s university course was dubbed as a “life-enhancement” elective on media skills because featuring the words like “news literacy” and “current affairs” conspicuously in the course title could potentially create problems with the senior management at the university and invite possible interference in the course content. In the two high schools, she has incorporated the key news literacy concepts into existing media education classes.

In particular, there were three main components from the Stony Brook model (for details of the curriculum, see Fleming 2014; Klurfeld and Schneider 2014) that were conspicuous in her teaching. The first was the analytical framework to evaluate the individuals quoted or paraphrased in news stories and the ways to gauge the information given by those sources, described by its mnemonic IM VAIN (see Appendix 2).

The second was the conceptual understanding of what makes news stories in the society. An activity to map the different types of information in the media products called the Taxonomy of Information Neighbourhoods (see Appendix 3) and an exercise called You Be the Editor in which students produce their own newspaper front pages based on their editorial discussions were used to illustrate the social and cultural values and individual preferences that people have in producing and consuming news content.

The other element involved how to look at visual images in news and other media content. Linh has broadened the scope of her teaching in this area by expanding the lessons on photo and TV news in the original curriculum to include ideas traditionally taught in Media and Cultural studies as well as in Media Literacy education such as body image, representation and stereotypes. As discussed later, she had done so to accommodate the media environment in the country as well as the patterns of media consumption among her students.

## Hong Kong

The observation comes from the two courses offered at a public university in the city between January and April 2015. One course almost fully incorporated the internationalized version of the Stony Brook model (for details of the curriculum, see Hornik and Kajimoto 2014) and the other focused on the broader issues surrounding the Internet and media (not just news media and journalism) The former was taught by a journalism lecturer Elizabeth, who has a substantial professional experience in the news industry, and the latter course was taught by the researcher himself.

The full-semester news literacy course was an elective for all university students. It covered the following core concepts in the original curriculum that were divided into nine modules:

- Why news matters. Why news literacy matters. Patterns of news consumption and distribution in the digital age.
- Information Neighbourhoods.
- News values. What makes news. Who decides what news is.
- Source analysis. IM VAIN.
- Truth and accuracy. Direct and indirect evidence in news stories.

- Fairness, bias and false equivalence. Media bias and audience bias. Cognitive dissonance.
- Opinions in journalism. Opinion journalism.
- Images in news.
- Verification, debunking and news deconstruction.

The second course was built upon the idea that the news literacy skills can be applicable to a critical examination and discussion of the duties and responsibilities of the Internet users. It was offered as one of the required university-wide core courses that the first and second-year students can choose. In particular, the course adopted the methodological tools of news evaluation and deconstruction when discussing the mediated messages including personal communications on social media. The course covered a wide range of topics such as digital censorship, online privacy, freedom of expression, piracy, open data movement and cyber security. It explored how the digital transformation of the communication has been redefining people's lifestyles.

Pedagogically, the second course differed from the Stony Brook model, but its goals and learning objectives were aligned with the first news literacy course. They both aimed at teaching students how to become discerning media users at the end of the course and the instructors of each course frequently discussed and shared their teaching materials. In total, 163 students from the two courses responded to the survey. Instead of formal interviews, daily communication with Elizabeth and the students, especially through small-group tutorial discussions, were recorded in the field notes for the analysis.

## Myanmar

A private college in Yangon started offering a series of journalism-related courses in 2015. In the previous year, Aye Myat, an English Literature instructor, was tasked to develop its first elective journalism course, and without knowing anything about the discipline, she turned to the Stony Brook model and adopted the internationalized version created in Hong Kong. She based her syllabus on the aforementioned course Elizabeth has been teaching and made it a more encompassing introduction to journalism course by adding elements of hands-on news reporting, media law, ethics and even data journalism. The effort seems to have resulted in a mixture of news literacy, which primarily aims to educate news audience, and basic journalism training, which emphasizes the practical knowledge and techniques of day-to-day news production, as well as more advanced discussions on the roles, laws and ethics of news media and journalism in the society.

The syllabus of the 15-week-long course arguably read like an outline of two to three separate journalism courses crammed into one. Because her institution lacked experienced media educators, she found and assigned outside guest lecturers for each lesson. Some were educators from overseas universities such as the researcher himself and others were practicing journalists within the country. Each week, Aye Myat followed up with the students as a supporting instructor after the main lectures.

Because of this segmented arrangement, as Aye Myat admits, the pedagogical approach lacked the kind of continuity and consistency observed in Vietnam and Hong Kong. The aforementioned components of the original curriculum such as IM VAIN and the Taxonomy of the Information Neighbourhoods were rarely included in the real teaching even though the overall course was designed with exercises and activities based on such con-

cepts. Twenty students were enrolled in the course but only 16 students were present when the 3-day site visit took place in early February 2015. Fourteen students responded to the survey. The researcher interviewed Aye Myat, two other working journalists who helped teach the course as guest instructors for a few weeks, and also nine students.

## Findings

Several notable commonalities emerged in the examination of the social media usage survey across the six classrooms in three cities:

— In all classrooms, female students are the majority; about 70 percent in Hong Kong and Vietnam, 57 percent in Myanmar.

It is often said that there is a consensus, at least anecdotally, among the university educators that media and journalism related academic subjects attract more female students than male students. The survey has supported this observed trend despite the socio-cultural and economic differences among the three countries. Although the phenomenon is not directly related to the focus of this study, the result is worth noting here because the demographic dynamics could affect the design and development of the news literacy teaching material.

For example, one of the assignments given to the students in Vietnam was to produce a 4-page magazine to discuss the issues learnt in the news literacy course. One of the predominant themes in the projects was the images and portrayals of female bodies in the media and the usage of photo manipulation technology. Linh said that given the sensitive nature of political news in her country, her students tend to prefer discussing less sensitive news topics; and it seems many of her female students have chosen to delve into the sexualisation of women in entertainment news.

In Hong Kong, when the researcher discussed the privacy issues associated with the usage of social media services, the in-class discussion was inclined towards the victimization of women as a result of online stalking and harassment among the students. The gender imbalance in the classrooms seems to have affected the talking points in these cases.

— Laptop computers and smart phones are the preferred choice of devices for the significant majority of the students in all classrooms. Significant majority of the students spend less than one hour a day to consume news in total.

Not surprisingly, mobile devices that can be carried around are the most popular choice to get on the internet. The universal patterns of news consumption among the students seem to be that they read and watch news stories here and there when they find time while doing other things on their devices. The non-linear style of their news habits is in line with the findings of other recent studies in the United States (see, for example, Pew Research Center 2015; Poetranto 2013), which could suggest that the technology is affecting the cycle of news production and consumption in a similar fashion regardless of a country's political system or economic status. It indicates that certain aspects of digital news literacy could be addressed internationally, which leads to the next finding:

— Facebook is by far the most frequently used social media service in all classrooms. The social media platform is also the most popular means to get news.

The survey results show that Facebook, the world's most popular social media service with 1.3 billion active users as of January 2015 (Kemp 2015a), is also the most popular among the students in the six classrooms. According to the research done by We Are Social, 18-24 year olds are the biggest Facebook account holders in the Asia Pacific region with 179 million active users as of March 2015 (Kemp 2015b), and 90 percent of the surveyed students



belong to that age group. Even in Myanmar where the penetration of internet usage is far below the international average, the younger generation who could afford mobile devices seem to have become enthusiastic Facebook users. The students also responded that the social media platform is where they get news most frequently.

The notable difference found in the survey is that in Myanmar print newspapers are almost equally popular source of news whereas in Vietnam and Hong Kong, news websites and mobile news apps come second; in the two cities, TV is behind the online sources and print newspapers are far less popular. All news literacy educators indicated that they were aware of their students' news consumption patterns and their heavy reliance on Facebook to get news by observation even before the survey results came out. The news examples used and discussed in the classrooms in Vietnam and Hong Kong mainly originated from digital sources while in Myanmar print newspaper articles were heavily used as well. However, the two Burmese guest instructors of the course also said if the slow speed and unreliability of the internet improves in Myanmar, they believe the younger generation would read less print papers and rely more on online news sources.

— Significant majority of the students do not frequently comment or share news items.

Somewhat surprisingly (to the researcher, at least), the surveyed students indicated that they “rarely” or only “sometimes” share or comment news items on Facebook and other social media platforms. This is understandable in Vietnam where such activities could potentially lead to negative repercussions, but the results from Hong Kong and Myanmar were no different.

The survey results of the college-age students in the news literacy classrooms revealed that in today's technologically interconnected societies in Asia, some pertinent elements of social media usage and news consumption behaviours are universal. The common grounds described above indicate that the core units of news literacy curricula could be developed collaboratively around the world regardless of the political systems under which it is being taught – perhaps by mitigating the goal of cultivating the citizenry participation under a democratic system. One of such core units should be the awareness of individual patterns of media consumption and cognitive processes when internalizing information, as argued by Potter (2013).

The previous research on the internationalization of the Stony Brook model in Malaysia, Vietnam and Hong Kong also reached a similar conclusion:

“The final pattern identified was a belief among instructors overseas no matter their country of origin that the Stony Brook model is still valuable without its informed citizenry foundations because of the emphasis on developing critical thinking skills about information.” (Fleming and Kajimoto 2016)

However, the qualitative research conducted along with the survey also brought to light the importance of including the local contexts as supporting units to the core curricula. The uniqueness of the current environment surrounding the news organizations, social media usage, journalism education and other relevant factors in each country needs to be understood and incorporated for the news literacy instructions to be effective.

In Hong Kong, for instance, a great number of the news examples to illustrate key concepts used by Elizabeth in her teaching in early 2015 were from the Umbrella Revolution. The student-led civil disobedience movement has proven that the young generation in the

city has already developed healthy scepticism towards the news amid the chaos of internet rumours and intentional misinformation. Many students also possess the digital and analytical skills to navigate through the abundance of information in the online world (Beam 2014; Jolly 2014b; Kaiman 2014). The last question of the social media usage survey (see Appendix 1) asked the students how confident they are in detecting false news stories on the internet. The Table 1 shows the results from each country.

**Table 1**

Q16: How confident are you in detecting hoaxes (fake news stories) on the internet?						
	Hong Kong (n=163)		Vietnam (n=35)		Myanmar (n=14)	
Answer choices	Re-sponses	Percentage	Re-sponses	Percent-age	Re-sponses	Percentage
Not confident at all	5	3.07%	5	14.29%	4	28.57%
Slightly confident	43	26.38%	6	17.14%	3	21.43%
Somewhat confident	78	47.85%	10	28.57%	5	35.71%
Quite confident	35	21.47%	14	40.00%	2	14.29%
Extremely confident	2	1.23%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Although the sampling method and the size of the respondents from different classrooms in each country wouldn't warrant any generalization, the results do show that as far as the students in the observed classrooms are concerned, Hong Kong students are the most confident ones. Only 3 percent of the students perceive themselves as lacking the skills to catch hoaxes, which is substantially lower than the classroom in Myanmar and Vietnam.

The challenge for news literacy educators under such circumstances is to devise a method to meet the need of “advanced” students who understand how to critically assess information in the news. One project that seemed to have worked well in the author's course was to make the students drastically alter their social media habits for a month. In this assignment, the students were asked to make a “social media pledge” in which they had to declare how they would do things differently for a month and then keep a record of how they have felt and what they have discovered. At the end of the experiment, each student video-recorded a monologue to discuss what he or she has learnt from the activity and shared the clip with the classmates online. The pledges ranged from serious ones like severely limiting the social media usage and “commenting on at least three news articles on Facebook every day” to trivial ones such as posting a “newsy” on-campus picture a day on Instagram, but many students said the assignment was “eye opening” at various levels.

The situation in Myanmar seems to be, at many levels, the opposite of that of Hong Kong. After the 50 years of military control, the concept of journalism appears to be a confusing concept for many of the students. One student understood journalism and its mission as “making a political statement to support democracy”; another said learning news literacy is about learning how the government controls the media; another took the course because a journalism related subject would make her learn “how to talk to strangers”; another said learning about journalism would help her to become a better lawyer in the future; another told that she was concerned about the “unethical” conducts by journalists (she opined that attacking people in the news is unethical regardless of the evidence gathered by the reporters). The course was supposed to be an introductory one for the newly established journalism elective (a few other courses on news writing and ethics were planned to be offered after this course).

Aye Myat expressed that coordinating the course was difficult especially because the na-

tion fundamentally lacks properly trained media educators or seasoned journalists who could teach a news literacy course or a journalism course throughout a semester. As discussed earlier, her approach as a coordinator was to produce a syllabus based on the modified Stony Brook model used in Hong Kong. Keeping the consistency and the standard was an issue, according to her, and she tried to close the gap by offering supplemental lectures by herself and giving reading assignments. But she found that some of the examples and ideas in the Stony Brook model were “too advanced” for the Burmese media landscape.

She said, “our media does not have much history and we know that it is still a mess. The news literacy [curriculum] doesn’t really address what we have.” The readings Aye Myat gave to the students were mostly in English that discuss the Western concept of news and journalism. The *Elements of Journalism* by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) was one such material, for instance. In many weeks, she spent one hour after the guest’s lecture “in order to link the reading material to the practice [in Myanmar].” She believes that it had helped at least some students understand the kind of critical attitudes embedded in the news literacy curriculum. In the focus group interview with nine students, however, all of them expressed that the reading material was difficult to fathom—the language was certainly an issue for all but another reason was, according to two students, that many ideas were “too foreign” to understand for the Burmese.

In Vietnam, this gap between the idealism and the domestic reality was also pointed out by Linh. One central difference in her country according to Linh, however, is that the Western notion of journalism—the roles of news media in a participatory democracy, for instance—could be discussed in high schools and universities in recent years along with Marxism-Leninism philosophy. She believes that at least some of her students, who constantly consume Western films and TV dramas on the internet, are fully aware of the gap between what is in the textbooks and how the news is actually produced and controlled in the communist country. The three students who took the news literacy course said they had learnt about the censorship when they were younger and they already knew they should be skeptical when consuming news stories before enrolled in the course.

In the survey, out of the 35 Vietnamese students, 14 of them said they are “quite confident” in detecting hoaxes on the internet and another 10 said they are “somewhat confident.” In comparison, the students in Myanmar were far less confident (see Table 1). Linh said that one of the pressing issues in her classrooms is the apathy and indifference among the students towards the news that concern politics. In her observation many students are fully aware of the governmental control, including the specific tactics targeting the social media (Petty 2013; Pham 2013; Stout 2013), and thus they tend to become less interested in such news report. The popularity of light-hearted, entertaining news items on social media among the students would also divert their attention, she added. In this sense, to her, the news literacy education in the country should not just be about developing the critical thinking skills and online news consumption strategies but also understanding the dynamics and intricacy of the relationship between mediated messages and students’ everyday life (on the circumstances surrounding the overall news literacy education in Vietnam, see Jolly 2014a; Fleming and Kajimoto 2016).

## Discussion and future direction

This study indicated that the core of news literacy education in the digital age – a pedagogical instruction to teach the younger news audience how to strategically consume news and critically evaluate information in the news reports – could be developed and employed globally as the observed patterns of news consumption behaviors and social media

usage among the mostly college-age students under the three different political systems have shown greater similarities than differences.

Of course, one needs to take into consideration the fact that the contexts of the observed classrooms were drastically different. As discussed in the methodology section, the pedagogical approach and the actual content of the six courses varied to a great degree. Other variables such as the teaching skills of the instructors and the dynamics of the students must have influenced the learning experiences, and thus the outcome of this research as well. The study presented in this paper does not directly indicate the efficacy of the specific news literacy curriculum in this sense.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the six course all have adopted and adapted, in one way or another, some elements of the Stony Brook model of the news literacy curriculum that focuses on micro-level analysis of news reports in which students are taught to cross-examine each news story and evaluate the news sources, evidence, fairness and context. It is believe that the findings sheds light on the possible common grounds in this global endeavour of developing pedagogical tools to educate the future generation of news literate audience. The Stony Brook model is said to aim at helping students “learn to be their own editors and identify for themselves fact-and-evidence-based news and information” (Klurfeld and Schneider 2014, 19). Such skills are surely essential in today’s digitally connected world where every citizen with a smart phone could act as a mass communication channel (Fleming 2014). The interviews with the students and instructors of the six classrooms have also anecdotally confirmed the relevance and effectiveness of some basic concepts in the news literacy curriculum across national borders, echoing the previous research and assessment (Loth 2012; Spikes 2014; Adler 2014; Hornik and Kajimoto 2014).

They also made clear the heavy weight of understanding the uniqueness of each country’s social, political and economic environment. In a country like Myanmar where commercial news media operations have just begun and the concept of journalism is not widely understood, for example, a pedagogy with a premise to train the future news audience needs to be drastically modified and internalized to be valuable. Under a political climate that suppresses public discussions of certain topics like the one in Vietnam, talking points need to be carefully chosen with domestic issues to engage and sustain students’ interests. When most students see themselves as having proficient digital skills to navigate the abundance of information and misinformation on the internet, an extra step needs to be taken to make them realize their weaknesses so that they could further develop their ability. When most students get news primarily from Facebook and very few reads print newspapers, the various aspects of online news—such as the information cycles on social media, gate-keeping/agenda setting abilities of computer algorithms, news media’s emerging business models in cyberspace, technological aspects of online censorship and so forth—should be the focus of instruction in many modules.

Overall, this study suggests that, for a news literacy course to achieve what it promises to deliver, educators must 1) identify their students’ news consumption patterns at the early stage of the course, 2) incorporate their news habits into the curriculum and 3) design exercises, assignments and other teaching and learning activities that reflect the real-life reality of journalistic practices in the country. Hong Kong, Vietnam and Myanmar are by no means the only countries with their unique news media ecology in Asia. The very systematic and elaborate censorship mechanism in mainland China; the strict restrictions imposed on the news media in Malaysia; the life-threatening political conditions for investigative journalists in the Philippines; the closed press club system in Japan; there are many country-specific issues that must be amalgamated with the curriculum in this part of the world.

What remains to be seen in the future is the development of appropriate measuring sys-

tems to assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical efforts in the field of news literacy. A few approaches were proposed in the past, but as Beyerstein noted:

Students may get better at certain critical-thinking skills in a news-literacy class, but then the question becomes: Better compared to what? Does a course on news literacy move the needle as much as, or more than, a traditional civics course, or a philosophy course on critical thinking? Nobody knows. (Beyerstein 2014)

The lack of rigorous assessment tools to gauge the impact of pedagogical methods is something that needs to be addressed for the news literacy education to be global although it would not be easy to standardize it, given the significance of local conditions in the design of curricula. In 2013, Ashley, Craft and Maksi (2013, 10) endeavoured to create a “valid and reliable” measuring scale of what they call News Media Literacy (NML) with a premise that an established framework used in more traditional media literacy assessment could be modified “from the ground up” to be focused on news consumption. Ashley et al. (2013) designed a survey with 102 items in which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement in a Likert-type scale with a series of statements that were intended to measure the respondents’ media attitudes and knowledge in news media system.

The result of the study suggests that the NML scale is indeed a statistically valid tool to diagnose and predict certain outcomes of media literacy intervention through education and it could be remodelled to take into account the situations in different countries. However, it is not meant to evaluate the effectiveness of specific curricula or particular news literacy skills taught in the news literacy courses; the scale doesn’t test an ability to pinpoint verified facts, assertions and inferences within a news coverage, for instance, or it does not evaluate the students’ ability to analyse the news sources quoted in a news report.

In the future, the curricula based on the discussions and suggestions made in this paper need to be tested by an empirical assessment method of news literacy instructions and their impact. Such system ideally allows researchers to combine demographic information, attitude-based surveys and pragmatic news literacy skills as well as digital media proficiency in a flexible manner. It should also be politically and socio-culturally appropriate for the environment under which a course is taught. When collaborating educators and researchers could meaningfully cross-examine the impact of such parameters as a particular instructional approach and an experimental assignment, the development of news literacy curricula in Asia and other regions would reach a new level.

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## Appendix 1

### I media usage survey

Q1. Are you a male student or a female student?

- Male
- Female

Q2. How old are you?

Q3. Which of the following describes your student status?

- In secondary school (high school / middle school)
- First-year university student
- Second-year university student
- Third-year university student
- Fourth-year university student
- Graduate student
- Other (please specify)

Q4. If you are a university student, what is your major?

Q5. Where are you most often when you use the internet? (If applicable, check more than one)

- School
- Transport (car, bus, MTR, etc)
- Coffee shop / Restaurant (McDonald's, KFC, etc)
- Friend's home
- Library
- Outside (parks, etc)
- Other (please specify)

Q6. Which of the following devices do you most prefer to use to connect to the internet? (If applicable, check more than one)

- Smart phone

- Laptop computer
- Desktop computer
- Tablet
- Other (please specify)

Q7. In a typical day, how often do you log into social networking services and photo/video sharing platforms (e.g. Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, etc.)?

- About once a day
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Less than a few times a month
- Almost never

Q8. Name three social networking services and/or photo/video sharing platforms you most often use in a typical day.

Q9. In a typical day, about how much time do you spend using social networking services and photo/video sharing platforms?

Q10. In a typical day, where do you get your news mostly from?

- Print newspaper
- News websites
- News apps on mobile devices
- Messaging apps on mobile devices (WhatsApp, WeChat, etc)
- On social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc)
- Other (please specify)

Q 11. What kind of news are you most interested?

Q12. In a typical day, about how much time do you spend on reading and/or watching news?

Q13. What news outlet(s) do you trust the most?

Q14. When you're on social networking and photo/video sharing platforms (like Facebook and Instagram), how often do you post comments on news items?

- All the time
- Very frequently
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

Q15. How often do you share news items on social networking and photo/video sharing platforms?

- All the time
- Very frequently
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

Q16. How confident are you in detecting hoaxes (fake news stories) on the internet?

- Not confident at all
- Slightly confident
- Somewhat confident
- Quite confident
- Extremely confident

## Appendix 2

Appendix 2

Source Evaluation Checklist						
<i>Source = Any individual who provides information to a reporter, whether quoted, paraphrased or otherwise cited</i>						
<b>I</b>	Independent	Does the quoted person (source) have personal interests at stake?	Potential personal interests: Financial, Emotional, Political, Professional, Religious, Safety	Red Flags: Employer/Investor, Lover, Patron, Colleague, Pastor, Neighbor		
<b>M</b>	Multiple	Are there two or more people who are saying the same thing?	If only one source, is there a good reason? If there are two or more, are they related in any way that could limit their ability to contradict one another?	Red Flags: Family, team-mates, house-mates, friends are less credible than independent corroborators.		
<b>V</b>	Verifies	Does the source provide material that verifies what they say (Data, Documents, Photos, Recordings, etc)	Look closely at statements. Are declarations backed up with evidence, or merely asserted?	Red Flags: Strong language, emphatic tone, instead of strong evidence.		
<b>A</b>	Authoritative	Does the source have the training or experience to back up what they say?	Is this the right person to ask? Do they have the expertise or experience that gives their comments greater weight?	Red Flags: Credible people, but outside their expertise. I.E. Lawyer talking science, engineer talking investments.		
<b>I</b>	Informed	Is this source well-informed about the specific news topic: e.g. an eye-witness or participant?	How does this source know what they know? If they do not have personal knowledge, where did they get their information?	Red Flags: Does this source have greater access to the scene or information?		
<b>N</b>	Named	Is this source quoted by name?	Named means the source is answerable for what they say and therefore more likely to be reliable.	Red Flags: Legitimate reasons for anonymity can include fear of physical harm, retribution, humiliation.		

(From the Center for News Literacy, Stony Brook University School of Journalism)

Appendix 3

A Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods					
	Journalism	Entertainment	Promotion	Propaganda	Raw Information
<b>Primary Goal</b>	To Inform	To Amuse or engage people during their leisure time in activities in which they are passive participants.	To Sell goods, services and talent/personalities by increasing their appeal to consumers.	To Build Mass Support for an ideology by canonizing its leaders or demonizing its opposition.	To Bypass institutional filters and distribution constraints in order to Sell, Publicize, Advocate, Entertain, and Inform.
<b>Methods</b>	Verification, Independence, Accountability.	Story-telling, performance, the visual arts & music.	Paid Advertising & Public Relations activities, Press releases, public statements, staged events, sponsorship, product placement, web sites, viral videos, etc.	One-sided accounts or outright lies, relying on emotional manipulation through images, appeals to majority values and fallacious reasoning.	Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, websites, weblogs, comment sites, chain email, text message forwarding, flyers, graffiti.
<b>Practitioners</b>	Reporters, Photographers/Videographers, Editors, Producers	Writers, actors, artists, musicians, designers.	Ad agencies, Publicists, Public Relations experts, Government spokespersons.	Political operatives and organizations.	Anyone with a web connection, photographer, or can of paint.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Empowers citizens by educating them.	Distraction from or changed view of daily life. Reinforcement or critique of social norms.	Increased sales of products and services or higher fees for talent being promoted.	Helps an ideological group seize or maintain power, by influencing public opinion and motivating the public to take action consistent with the ideology.	Outlet for self-expression, entertainment, promotion, advocacy, propaganda.

(From the Center for News Literacy, Stony Brook University School of Journalism)

# Stay tuned St. Louis: a case study in educational collaboration

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As journalism schools focus on providing students with practical training for a changing media environment, immersive education structured in real-world newsrooms can serve as a learning lab.

Studies have suggested that teaching approaches that allow students to engage with community members within an established network (Barabasi 2003; Beckett 2008; Castells 2000; Jarvis 2006), rather than creating content with an imagined audience in mind, can enhance students' understanding of journalism's democratic function as a component of news literacy (Mensing 2010). This emphasis may also introduce students to newswork incorporating the values of civic journalism, as socialization within newsrooms has shown to play a key role in journalists' acceptance of these practices (McDevitt, Gassaway, and Perez 2002). Although journalism programs have used hands-on experiences to instill tacit knowledge of the roles and functions of public journalism and develop more civic-minded practitioners (Haas 2000; Nip 2007), public-journalism training should also incorporate multimedia techniques. Further, multiplatform approaches to storytelling should allow students to apply a variety of converged skills while also interacting with audiences (Condra 2006), opportunities that professional media environments can easily provide.

Case studies on journalism education have primarily focused on classroom experiences and undergraduate students (Beam, Kim, and Voakes 2003; Garman 2005; Quinn 1999; Steel et al. 2007). The current study examines the experiences of journalism graduate students, as students are increasingly attending graduate programs before entering journalism careers (Tumber and Prentoulis 2005). Graduate programs allow students to not only gain a more nuanced understanding of the roles of journalism in a democratic society through news-literacy education but also to demonstrate their knowledge in professional settings. This study examines the development and execution of "Stay Tuned," a live weekly public-affairs show produced by a St. Louis, Missouri, public television station, the Nine Network. The show sought to incorporate Twitter, Facebook, and live videoconferencing (via Google Plus Hangouts) into discussions of issues facing the St. Louis community. Show producers also worked with the University of Missouri School of Journalism's Reynolds Journalism Institute, which provided faculty expertise for production and social-media engagement and graduate student assistants. The resulting case study includes interviews with three graduate students, their professor, and members of the show's production staff, as well as observations of the show's production process. This exploratory study evaluates how the students learned about local journalism and news production in the newsroom environment, students' and the faculty member's impressions of that educational experience, the roles they played in the newsroom, and the news organization's expectations for the students' involvement in the show.

The "Stay Tuned" model incorporates a new approach to journalism that we have termed "trustee networked journalism." Trustee networked journalism, like models of public and civic journalism, cultivates connections between news organizations and the public. In this model, news organizations focus on three components: encouraging viewer input and involvement, ensuring substantive social media interaction with broad networks, and producing civic-minded journalism. For "Stay Tuned," this engagement is achieved through

using digital and social media to interact with audiences as well as fostering connections with community members and organizations, thereby creating networks. These networks may become resources for the news organization as well as a sounding board through which viewers can critique the news organization and discuss local issues. Therefore, news organizations like the Nine Network can use the community as a resource and contribute to the future of solutions-oriented journalism.

This study seeks to address the challenges and opportunities associated with engaging journalism students in the production of trustee networked journalism as well as what this emerging model can teach them about the evolving functions of journalism in communities. The study is the second in a series of three studies developed around this case. The first study demonstrates how “Stay Tuned” represents an ideal case to examine the trustee networked journalism model. The third examines viewers’ perceptions of the social-media approach and production of the show as reported in an online survey.

## Literature review

Universities are working to prepare students for a world of ever-evolving technological advances and new media offerings (Castaneda, Murphy, and Hether 2005). Some university programs have addressed these shifts through introducing curricula and educational programs focused on media convergence. Convergence, which can be broadly defined as “any kind of news partnership, alliance and/or collaboration with print, broadcast (TV or radio) or online news outlets, including their station’s Website,” was widely practiced in medium- and small-market newsrooms around the country in 2005 (Tanner and Smith 2007, 216). Tanner and Smith’s survey of journalists showed that although most respondents said they had the necessary skills to work in a converged newsroom, they desired additional training. The authors suggested that educators focus on teaching students to “work smart, think quickly, and repurpose content across media” (222) to prepare for newsroom realities.

In 2005, 85 percent of universities included in a national survey had adapted their journalism curricula to focus on convergence, although few programs trained students in a range of media skills and programs’ overall emphasis remained on print (Kraeplin and Criado 2005). However, in a convergence program, students are encouraged to learn skills that cross traditional media platforms, such as print and broadcast (Auman and Lillie 2007). This understanding, however, raised questions as to whether universities should focus on equipping students as “backpack journalists” or whether they should specialize in a particular area (Auman and Lillie 2007). As a result, the conventional journalism-school practice of offering separate tracks — print, broadcast, etc. — has been questioned (Huang et al. 2006). Professional editors prefer journalists to enter newsrooms with the necessary convergence skills, although they recognize that some advanced skills can only be learned on the job (Huang et al. 2006). Professors have also suggested that students learn how to tell stories on multiple platforms and apply digital technologies that allow them to interact with audiences while also focusing on the core skills journalists need (Condra 2006). These emphases suggest educational approaches that move beyond the classroom to real-world newsroom experiences.

More recently, scholars have replaced convergence with an emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches incorporating connectivism (Boers et al. 2012). Within this model, students learn multi-modal editorial planning and cross-channel news-story development. For example, a proposed curriculum would allow students to launch, run, and staff an online magazine focused on a specialized readership. In doing so, they would apply narrative

skills in multiple media, including video, audio, mobile, and social, as well as interact with user-generated content. They would also become familiar with both the integrative aspect of convergence, or merging technologies to create new products and modes of delivery, and the divergence aspect, or the flow of content across platforms, media industries, and audiences. Students also begin to interact with connectivism, which considers the web as a site of community formation and students as aggregators and generators of content whose knowledge and skills continually change (Boers et al. 2012). This approach prepares students not only to produce journalistic content but also to develop networks through which information and feedback flow freely between journalists and community members.

## New models of journalism education

Journalism schools have diversified to provide the journalism work force with graduates trained in newsgathering, evaluation, production, and distribution that is not focused on the medium (print or broadcast) but the craft (Mensing 2010). While emphasizing practical training, many journalism programs, particularly at the graduate level, also focus on innovation and applying key skills. This approach is evident in a confluence of mentorship, curriculum, and hands-on learning that contributes to the art of “multimedia storytelling” rather than information flow (Mensing 2010, 512). In this vein, students apply many of the skills used with traditional print and broadcast media while learning the convergence and multimedia approaches that have transformed the way journalists do journalism (Overview 2004).

Instructors, especially those who teach production-focused classes and have professional experience, also seek to produce a future journalist who can effectively function in a changing world of journalism (Becker, Fruit, and Caudill 1987; Mensing 2010). As learners, however, students often straddle the line between professional and student in internships where they learn to apply practical knowledge and training. Their newsroom supervisors may encourage them to adopt a professional demeanor as well as an ideology encompassing traditional journalistic values while challenging them to adjust to the real-life circumstances of the media environment (Mensing 2010). For some students, navigating these dual responsibilities as they adjust to the newsroom culture can present challenges.

The newsroom-focused training model, however, offers a springboard for students to engage with their community and learn journalistic skills. Community-centered journalism education provides a realistic environment where students can engage with an actual community. By producing journalism within an established network, students develop skills that take advantage of strong ties that already exist in a community (Barabasi 2003; Beckett 2008; Castells 2000; Jarvis 2006). As professionals work alongside students to study information networks and channels through which information is obtained, as well as apply and experiment with new technologies and models of distribution, journalistic practices change from the ground up but also contribute to the community (Mensing 2010). This approach puts students back in the center of the community and “at the heart of news communications” (Beckett 2008, 166) while teaching them the news-literacy skills they need to integrate into the workplace.

## Teaching public journalism

In the early 2000s, many scholars and journalists supported the role of public journalism in facilitating voter participation and civic participation in community affairs, while

many also remained critical, particularly in regard to journalistic autonomy and neutrality (Haas 2000). Scholars began to question the implications of the public-journalism debate for journalism education. Addressing criticism that public journalism focuses on promoting consensus, which would require students to concede editorial autonomy to dominant community voices, Haas (2000) suggested that instructors teach students how to “actively promote civic participation among all segments of the community within the confines of a commercial news media system” (30). This participation could be achieved through asking students to conduct surveys and interviews with community members to identify issues concerning them; focus on “mobilizing information” to address how residents could get involved with those issues; and experiment with narrative forms that encourage critical reflection (Haas 2000). Mensing (2010) advocates for an approach to journalism education in which students build “functioning communication structures within communities” (516). Rather than emphasizing an imagined audience, students engage with communities not only to serve as reporters and editors but also as facilitators of journalism’s democratic function.

Socialization also plays a role in journalists’ acceptance of civic journalism. A survey of journalism students and professional journalists in the same community found that students who had written for a campus newspaper became more like professional journalists and less like their fellow students in how they evaluated civic journalism (McDevitt, Gasaway, and Perez 2002). For example, these students were less supportive of news media attempting to increase participation than students without newsroom experience. The authors attributed this lack of acceptance of civic-journalism practices to the focus on journalistic autonomy in campus newsrooms. A later study (Rauch, Trager, and Kim 2003), however, found that students were more supportive of modest approaches to civic journalism, such as newspapers developing enterprise stories to focus attention on community problems and reporting alternative solutions, than more radical ones, such as replacing traditional editorials with commentary written by readers and journalists spearheading community causes. Therefore, understandings of public journalism among younger journalists may be shifting, perhaps inviting new understandings of community engagement.

## Trustee networked journalism

Local journalism spurs community discourse (Christians 2009) and identity formation (Kannis 1991) through engagement, both on and offline, that brings together different groups from across the community (Eveland, Marton, and Seo 2004; Rheingold 2008; Richards 2012). Local participation in online media forums often reflects real-life community participation and correlates with real-life concerns about those topics (Dutta-Bergman 2006; Rosenberry and St. John 2010).

Therefore, public journalism does not represent a new form of journalism but models trustee journalism, in which journalists are seen as trustees of citizens’ need to hold government, business, and society accountable, thereby affording them a role in making decisions about news content and how it is distributed (Schudson, 1999, 2009). Within this understanding, journalists do not lose their autonomy — a frequent criticism of public journalism — but focus on generating and participating in conversations among citizens. Journalists are also responsible for providing timely information about issues important to the community (Rosen 1999). Audience members actively seek information that they see as important and bring ideas to their media experience, which could influence them in some way (Rosen 1997, 1999). Through addressing issues, connecting to the community, engaging individuals as citizens, and facilitating public deliberation, public journalism

should also represent solutions-focused journalism (Nip 2007). For the broadcast medium, a focus on public journalism allows journalists to move beyond event-focused reporting to long-term coverage that draws connections between news stories (Meyer 1995).

Citizen journalism emphasizes the role of audience members in telling stories (Bentley et al. 2006; Littau 2007b), empowering citizens through providing them a voice in the larger community discussion (Glaser 2004). Citizen-generated journalism is the product that results from trustee journalists soliciting content from citizens and publishing it on their news platforms. Citizen-centered approaches enhance and diversify the content and topics trustee news organizations address while providing a space for minority voices to be heard (Carpenter 2008). In today’s media landscape, social media play key roles in the development of citizen-generated journalism. Through Twitter and Facebook, journalists learn about breaking information from people experiencing it, engage in conversations with news users, share their content with users, and react with users to community issues and events. Online commenting sections and video-discussion forums allow journalists and audiences to interact while offering platforms for diverse voices.

An organization that recognizes and/or ascribes to the tenets of public journalism while also welcoming citizen-generated journalism represents a new type of journalism entity. Within this approach, which we call trustee networked journalism, a news organization is a member and creator of many networks through which information flows among audiences and journalists. Although journalists continue to serve as gatekeepers of news topics and content, they also focus on stimulating conversation among viewers and readers and participating in those conversations using online tools, such as email, websites, and social media. These tools allow audiences to find news content and offer their perspectives on it while potentially suggesting and seeking solutions to community challenges. Ideally, this involvement allows audiences to build social capital (Littau 2007a) through which they are empowered to not only critique the media through offering verification and suggestions for story topics but also assess local problems.

We argue that public media organizations are particularly well situated to apply the trustee networked journalism model. Public media have been shown to take advantage of innovative journalistic approaches (Hermida 2010; Nip 2007) and incorporate projects focused on addressing community issues (Aufderheide 1991; Rosen 1999; Schudson 1999). The current study evaluates a public television program that reflects the motives of public journalism while emphasizing the use of digital tools, such as web content and social media. “Stay Tuned,” which premiered in fall 2012 on the Nine Network of Public Media in St. Louis, Missouri, emerged as part of a partnership among the network, the University of Missouri, and the citizens of St. Louis. The program sought to address critical issues in the community while forging connections with audience members and soliciting their input and involvement.

In relationship with the University of Missouri, Nine Network staff consulted with journalism faculty members throughout the show’s development and launch. Graduate journalism students assisted with the show’s production during its first year. This study, part of a multi-level evaluation, examines the role of “Stay Tuned” as a site for hands-on journalism instruction for university students and provides insight into how other universities and public media organizations may partner to achieve similar aims.

To assess the role of the students in the show and the value of “Stay Tuned” as an educational experience, this study addressed two research questions:

RQ1: How were graduate journalism students involved in the planning and execution of the “Stay Tuned” public affairs program?

RQ2: How did the students benefit from their experiences in terms of education and



## Method

“Stay Tuned” airs at 9 p.m. each Thursday on the Nine Network of Public Media in the greater St. Louis area. This area includes St. Louis, Missouri, and southwestern Illinois. “Stay Tuned” is one of two new shows the network launched in 2012 to provide more engaging community programming. The show airs live, following “Donnybrook,” a community roundtable show that has aired continuously since the 1980s and appeals to an older (age 50-plus) audience. “Stay Tuned” aims to serve as a televised town square in which individuals in the community gather, via social media and online video-chat systems, to engage in “in-depth discussions of issues important to the long-term vitality of the region” (para. 2), including health care, civic involvement, education, and at-risk youth (“Stay Tuned,” 2015). Each week the show examines a new topic through a pre-produced “pathway for people to connect and impact the community” (“Stay Tuned,” 2015, para. 5), including both live and pre-recorded segments. “Stay Tuned” also seeks to reach 20- to 50-year-old adults who do not normally watch public television programming and attract voices not represented on “Donnybrook” through social-media conversations and participation in the studio audience (Gasper 2012, 2013). During the show’s development, the Nine Network also reached out to a network of organizations and individuals who had been involved in other programs and invited them to provide sources and ideas for the show.

The network partnered with the University of Missouri School of Journalism’s Reynolds Journalism Institute to leverage its expertise in research, social media, and journalism education. A professor at the university said the aim for the show on the part of the Reynolds Journalism Institute was to “make the forum of journalism broader and deeper” and “excite a social media conversation on any of the topics we were going to do in the week’s program” (personal communication, 2013). Ultimately, according to the professor, this conversation should engage diverse voices while creating a more robust public forum on issues important to the St. Louis community. The professor and three master’s level journalism graduate students were assigned to help develop and execute the social-media strategy for the show, considering where messages should be disseminated to encourage public feedback. They worked alongside a Nine Network digital strategist, who created a Twitter hashtag, #StaytunedSTL, for viewers to use while watching the show; posted questions for viewers on the Nine Network Facebook page; and incorporated Google Plus Hangouts, an online video-chat system, into the show’s live broadcasts. Overseeing the Hangouts, including identifying and training community members to participate, was a key responsibility for the graduate students. They also assisted with identifying show guests to broaden the show’s community network. An additional four master’s level journalism graduate students worked as reporters in the St. Louis area, creating video segments on the show’s weekly topics.

## Sample and procedure

We evaluated “Stay Tuned” over a year-long period in 2012-2013. During an initial meeting, we provided information to the “Stay Tuned” staff and production crew about best practices used in past community journalism projects. After this meeting, we began observing the show’s creation in planning meetings, watched two show tapings, watched several online streaming broadcasts of the show, and observed staff and viewer activity on the

show’s Twitter and Facebook pages.

We also conducted interviews with a University of Missouri professor, the three students involved with social-media execution, and five Nine Network staff members about the show’s development and production processes. We asked the professor, whom we interviewed both during and two years after the partnership began, about the origins of the show and its relationship with the University of Missouri, goals for the show, his role with the program, what was done well and what could be improved, and how other universities and TV stations could replicate the partnership. Students were asked how they got involved with the show, the roles they served, their expectations for their work, their experiences in the newsroom, what they learned, their thoughts on the show’s incorporation of digital tools, and suggestions for improving the student experience. As of fall 2015, “Stay Tuned” continued to be broadcasted on the Nine Network on Thursday nights.

## Findings

Interviews with students, their professor, and Nine Network staff members revealed both benefits and challenges of engaging in an immersive model of newswork related to trustee networked journalism. Challenges manifested in the changing roles students fulfilled while working on “Stay Tuned,” learning new technology associated with show needs, and navigating different views of how show topics and sources should be cultivated. The show also presented opportunities for students to learn about and apply new tools that could expand the network and enhance the conversation associated with the show and its implications.

### Changing roles

In navigating the culture of the Nine Network newsroom, students described obstacles they faced in fulfilling their duties for “Stay Tuned.” In particular, the students’ roles changed substantially during the course of their work, which they said revealed some of the internal challenges the staff as a whole experienced as they produced the new show. During the first few months of their involvement, the students were tasked with identifying show guests based on topics staff members provided. They specifically identified guests who would engage with the show via Google Plus Hangouts, or online roundtables involving participants from various locations. Staff members largely focused on using the Nine Network’s network of contacts when developing show topics and sources. Although staff members said this approach allowed them to find sources on complex or wide-reaching topics, accessing the network was largely dependent on leveraging existing connections. For example, staff member 2 said she connected with contacts at a local university and at the regional health commission when researching guests for a show on heroin usage. As a result, she said:

“When we pick the topic and I’m starting to feel like I have X amount of time to produce this show, I now have this network of people who can help me get my mind around it, who I know are good on TV and are reliable guests.”

For this staff member, the local network was a taken-for-granted aspect of the news-gathering process in that she had little time to prepare for a show but had a stable of willing people to contact. Student 3 suggested that although Nine Network staff asked students to use the network to identify show guests, the students ultimately did not have the knowledge of the community that was required to adequately complete the task, particularly on a short timetable.

As a result, the students later shifted their focus from identifying guests to exclusively

focusing on preparing guests to participate in the show via the Google Plus Hangouts. Student 2 said this role involved calling guests to gauge their interest, helping them establish a Google account, remaining in contact with them in the days before the show to ensure they would participate, and then conducting a “practice run” with them the day of the show. Students also “produced” the Hangout for the show’s duration, which required them to launch the Hangout when that segment of the show began. The students said they were largely new to the Google Plus Hangouts technology; however, they found ways to adapt during the course of their involvement with the show. For example, student 2 said she often worked with show participants who were older and not familiar with the Google Plus technology, which added to the time involved with preparing for the show. To ease these challenges, student 1 said the students created a Google Plus Hangout manual to assist “Stay Tuned” guests and other broadcast companies interested in incorporating the tool into their programming.

## Expectations for newswork

Although the students expected to contribute to the work of the Nine Network, as outsiders, they could not engage the community as local journalists and therefore said they could not contribute to the local identity formation for which local news has been known (Kaniss 1991).

The Nine Network’s network played a key role in how the “Stay Tuned” program was developed. However, staff members and students expressed different views regarding the network’s function and value. Staff member 2 said show topics were “largely framed by the network of people that know these issues.” Similarly, staff member 3 said a focus on cultivating topics from the network could mean that although the network deemed a particular topic a crisis or epidemic, the viewing public might not see the topic in the same way. Staff member 3 said, “That is uncharted territory for us, navigating the balance between engaging that audience and what we see as a commitment to our community. There are sometimes issues that need to be elevated.” Therefore, as journalists, Nine Network staff navigated between addressing topics they felt necessitated coverage with considering the network’s view of the importance of events as well as the potential response of the show’s younger viewers. It was unclear, however, which perspective the staff members prioritized.

The students had diverging perspectives about the value and function of the network. Student 2 said emphasizing the network could hurt the show because, when students relied on the network, they recruited show participants who had already appeared on “Stay Tuned.” Student 2, though, also recognized the convenience of relying on guests who were already familiar with the show. She said, “They were people who were trained in the technology, they could give good sound bites and interviews. So, in a way, I’ve been thinking, it both benefited and hurt the show.” In this comment, the student addressed the challenge of balancing the norms of newswork, such as ensuring guests are “TV-ready,” with the need to present diverse perspectives, particularly regarding complex issues. The professor suggested that the initial goal of “Stay Tuned” was not only to leverage the station’s network but also to broaden it through connecting with partnering organizations’ constituencies. He said this emphasis was particularly successful with a program on St. Louis’ dropout rate:

“We need to ask those people for their friends and families to get deeper into the discussion, deeper into the community to enhance the discussion. I think we were remarkably successful with that. I was pretty pleased. So it was that kind of effort to find sources at the grassroots citizenry level.”

This focus on finding grassroots sources suggested an emphasis on extending beyond

elite sources to identify people directly affected by community challenges. A reliance on the network, however, might limit rather than encourage the inclusion of diverse voices.

## The role of social media in broadening the network

Technology was also not always effective in broadening the network to external sources. Many individuals with whom the show engaged did not understand how to use the technologies employed on the show. The use of Twitter, Facebook, and Google Plus Hangouts provided opportunities for outreach but also limited involvement to those who were familiar with the tools. Sources of authority, the show producers, and the students were often capable of using these technologies, whereas those people who were affected by the issues the show sought to address faced challenges with applying the tools. In addition, some local voices did not have access to the Internet or other technologies that allowed them to engage fully with the show.

For example, student 2 cited a “Stay Tuned” episode focused on the mortgage-lending crisis for which reporters identified a woman who lost her home. This woman, student 2 said, likely did not have the Internet and may not have been able to participate in a Google Plus Hangout, but featuring her experiences as part of a show package diversified the perspectives presented. Thus, she concluded that the reported pieces were typically more effective in incorporating diverse voices than the live show. However, staff members said that by using Twitter, they found new sources and connected with local residents they would not have found otherwise. Although social media were often seen as advantages, the staff did state that many of their social media followers were limited to viewers and sources from previous shows.

The show’s multimedia producer, graduate student staff, and the in-house production team indicated an embedded fear about working with technology. This was demonstrated in staff member 1’s account of how staff members considered Google Plus Hangouts:

I think we’re a little afraid of technology not working. It’s not based on some sort of far-fetched reasons. I think if there’s a trust of putting the right system and process in place so it works, then we could actually use Google Hangout the way it’s intended.

Staff members had high expectations for the technology and its potential for incorporating diverse voices, but in actuality, it was implemented as a tool for conducting one-on-one interviews with local sources rather than roundtable discussions with sources from around the country. They had also aimed to use the Hangouts to interact with viewers, but the learning curve for the technology was difficult for non-users. As a result, they focused on using the technology with trained show guests. This tactic may stem from the newness of the technology and uncertainty about its function on a live news program. The professor also noted that social media usage did not always meet the initial expectations for the technology because of the time and effort involved with producing the show.

The reach of social media was limited to the network the Nine Network had previously established and connections viewers and staff members brought to that network. Because none of them was from the St. Louis region and they were all based more than 124 miles from the show studio, graduate students were not part of the established network in the St. Louis region. One student commented that seeing people “face to face” might have been more beneficial than online interaction with training show guests, but because of the distance between where the students were based and where the show was filmed (and where most of the guests lived), meeting face to face was not a possibility. The students discovered that no matter the quality of the technology, it was no replacement for operating in the same location.

Therefore the students could not connect to sources within the network as easily as staff

members, and social media were useful primarily for strengthening already existing connections. The professor suggested that external relationships might be strengthened by sending out social media messages weeks before the broadcast to “generate buzz, identify sources,” and “use that network for distribution of information about the subject beyond what the program could do in an hour,” rather than social media networks generating activity from those already watching the broadcast.

### Suggestions for change

The students shared suggestions for ways to improve their involvement with the show. Student 1 said expectations for the students’ responsibilities should be made clear early on, such as what days they should visit the station. She said an initial training at the Nine Network would have also oriented the students more fully to their roles and the staff members’ expectations. She also suggested that student staff members should wait to get involved until after taking some prerequisite broadcast classes, rather than in their first semester of graduate school. Student 3 suggested developing an internship program that would allow students to visit the station more frequently so they would not consistently work remotely. This program would also help students to become part of the newsroom culture rather than feeling like outsiders. In terms of content, student 1 also expressed an interest in assisting Nine Network staff members with show topic selection. This assistance could help staff members identify topics and guests earlier. For example, student 2 said:

“Having a clear focus for what you want to talk about would have made it go much smoother because they would have known who to contact, how they’re affected, what research needs to be done, what statistics to include... and then also finding topics that flowed together and made sense to create something more fluid.”

This comment suggests that identifying guests earlier could create an overall cohesion for the show that would allow episodes to build on one another and potentially suggest clear directives for addressing city issues.

The professor said the partnership with “Stay Tuned” allowed students to become immersed in a sophisticated news organization and contribute to an innovative approach to television production. In particular, the students involved with producing social media for the show watched how elements, such as Tweets and Google Plus Hangout discussions, were incorporated into the live broadcasts. This integration also presented a challenge, however. As the professor said:

“The biggest challenge was also the biggest opportunity, and that was to go into a TV station that we didn’t know and didn’t control, that was very high quality and had very high standards, and try to integrate our learning into that environment, in a place that was not designed as a teaching facility.”

In this statement, the professor described the challenge of converting a professional newsroom into an educational lab for students. Further, the professor said that rather than assigning some students to produce social media and others to report for “Stay Tuned,” he recommended that all students focus on social media. He said this focus would also be effective for other universities aiming to implement similar programming designed to enhance public discussions of community issues.

### Discussion

The use of the Nine Network’s “Stay Tuned” program as an educational lab for University of Missouri graduate journalism students presented both challenges and opportunities. Although the students said they were excited to get involved with a program focused on

reaching a young audience, integrating social media in an innovative way, and connecting with the community by addressing important topics, they were only minimally involved with the production of the show. Their roles evolved from identifying show guests and preparing them to participate in the show via Google Plus Hangouts to focusing exclusively on the Hangouts. This approach allowed the students to learn about a new tool and develop best practices for its usage in a broadcast setting. They also, however, expressed frustration that they had minimal time to learn the tool before deploying it for audience consumption.

These concerns reflect some of the challenges other universities have faced in preparing students for the realities of a changing newsroom. Although this focus previously referred to an emphasis on convergence as collaboration between print, broadcast, and online news outlets (Tanner and Smith 2007), in the case of “Stay Tuned,” convergence has integrated social media to connect with audience members and further the show’s goals. The staff members at “Stay Tuned,” like the professional editors addressed in previous studies, expected that students come to the newsroom with the necessary skills to work across platforms (Huang et al. 2006). However, the expectation to use cutting-edge convergence skills can be challenging, as many newer tools have not been taught in journalism programs.

Professors have also suggested that students receive opportunities to interact with audiences while developing their core skills (Condra 2006). At “Stay Tuned,” students engaged with community members through teaching them about the Google Plus Hangouts, but their interactions were limited by their lack of membership in the St. Louis community and in the Nine Network culture. As a result, a focus on training the students not only in technical tools but also the practices of the newsroom could teach them about news-creation processes and more fully incorporate them into newswork. This approach takes a more community-oriented focus, reflecting the tenets of connectivism (Boers et al. 2012), an approach to multimedia journalism education that considers the web as a site of community formation and students as aggregators and generators of content whose skills evolve. This model also supports the tenets of trustee networked journalism by identifying students as nodes in the communication network.

The students who worked with “Stay Tuned” recognized a need for the show to broaden its reach to under-represented segments of the community. This focus would involve extending beyond the show’s existing network to engage with individuals in the community directly affected by topics the show addressed. These responses from the students reflected an interest in the ideals of public journalism, which would involve actively promoting civic participation among all facets of the community (Haas 2000). Haas (2000) suggested that to teach public journalism, students should have opportunities to conduct surveys and interviews with community members to identify issues concerning them. For “Stay Tuned,” these surveys and interviews largely materialized through social media, providing audience members with a forum to share their concerns and views. Students, though, were not highly involved with audience members, representing perhaps a missed opportunity to encourage engagement. This practice could, as Mensing (2010) suggested, allow this audience to go from imagined to actual while allowing students to help fulfill journalism’s democratic function. The students might also gain additional insights into the role news organizations serve in local communities and the propensity they hold for affecting change at the grassroots level by empowering community members to get involved with pressing issues. This experience provides students not only with knowledge of journalistic practice but also how journalism works more broadly in society.

Students described challenges associated with the distance, both actual and perceived, between themselves and Nine Network staff members. Students expressed a desire for a formal training program in the newsroom that would allow them to engage with staff

members earlier and learn about the newsroom culture. Studies have shown that socialization plays an important role in journalists' acceptance of civic journalism. Students who worked for campus media thought more like regular journalists and similarly evaluated public journalism (McDevitt et al. 2002). If the students received more exposure to staff members' views on the value of public-affairs-focused reporting, they might take a more integral role in encouraging community engagement. Additional newsroom engagement could also allow students to apply practical knowledge and training while adjusting to the challenges of a real-life media environment (Mensing 2010). Staff members and instructors should focus on producing future journalists who can effectively function in a changing world of journalism (Becker et al. 1987; Mensing 2010) through hands-on instruction and training. This approach could situate "Stay Tuned" as a springboard for students to engage with their community and benefit from an established network while learning skills they can apply in a converged newsroom.

The main goals of "Stay Tuned" were to engage new voices and educate audiences about show topics. Trustee networked journalism seeks to use a traditional trustee model, with media managers and elites making decisions while incorporating the input of a broader, invested network of community members. The Nine Network aimed to bring new voices to discussions while maintaining relationships with previously established sources. However, by relying on an established network, the show more often reinforced existing relationships than invited new ones. Incorporating new actors into a network, however, can enhance storytelling in the digital age (Bentley et al. 2006; Littau 2007b) and empower citizens through offering them a voice on community issues (Glaser 2004). Social media also offer avenues for citizens to suggest story ideas, experience news events as a community, and engage in conversation (Carpenter 2008). Although the students were part of the trustee networked journalism model and the model was applied in creating the show and recruiting show guests, the show staff often relied too heavily on technology to create connections with audiences. Developing relationships with people is key to broadening a network and verifying information (Hermida 2012). The trustee networked journalism model can use social media as sources to connect new viewers with the show community, but they cannot be the sole sources for that community. Technology is also only as useful as the people using it, and training is often necessary to enrich a network (Hermida 2012; Schudson 2009).

Ultimately, "Stay Tuned" represented a notable case in which a university and a broadcast news organization partnered for the benefit of both students and the community the news organization serves. Based on the experiences of both students and staff members during the first year of the show's production, we offer the following suggestions for other institutions interested in adopting a similar approach to hands-on journalism instruction:

- 1) Implement a training program to teach students about the newsroom's culture, mission, and expectations for newswork. Make students' duties clear, and ensure they are prepared to enact their assigned roles.

- 2) Students should become immersed in both the newsroom and the community through prolonged and frequent visits and opportunities to engage with the news organization's audience through in-person and social-media-engaged interactions.

- 3) The university and news organization should align their goals and expectations at the onset of the program and meet continually to assess their progress in meeting goals.

- 4) Ensure that all participants are aware of and understand the tenets of trustee networked journalism, including their goals for content, community integration, and audience interaction and feedback.

- 5) Social media are key elements of trustee networked journalism; however, the effective

usage of social media requires a strategic plan for use and assurance that those overseeing the tools are familiar with the tools' limitations and capabilities.

Based on the above observations and the suggestions identified for journalists and journalists-in-training, trustee networked journalism provides a platform for the integration of technology and new practices alongside traditional journalism approaches. These suggestions will benefit the show as well as others interested in integrating news production, news literacy, and community collaboration.

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# News literacy in the digital age: challenges and opportunities

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## Introduction

**The advent of Web 2.0 was arguably the greatest game-changer for the practices, conventions, and scope of mass communication. In its aftermath, journalistic education and journalistic practice need a thorough revision in order to continue serving their socially assigned purposes.**

In the wake of this sorely needed update, professional journalism finds itself facing a multitude of technical, conventional, conceptual, and societal challenges. Some of them are truly recent while others find their roots in previous stages of mass media development, but the fact remains: today's news personnel are in a digital perfect storm, and for the first time in the history of mass media, professionals get to learn from amateurs.

The digital turn in mediated human communication has opened up the traditionally walled off, one-way, regulated, curated, and professionalized news-reporting process (cf. Thorne 2008). Painstakingly educated correspondents supported by trained crews now make way for citizen journalists whose contributions are increasingly considered on par with those of seasoned news pros. During the Boston Marathon bombings of April 2013 or the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015, a large portion of the public did not turn to their TVs or to the major news network websites. Instead, they clung to their smartphones, tweeting, retweeting, blogging, posting pictures from the scenes, and commenting on others' visual and textual reporting. Their information entries travelled across the globe, and professional news channels such as CNN quickly adopted them as part of the iReport wave. These are examples of extraordinary events, but such explosions of user-generated media content which is readily adopted by the mainstream communication channels merely bring a peak to a phenomenon that is now omnipresent in all network societies (cf. Castells 2005). As the extent and impact of "amateur" media production grow, our working understanding of news literacy is in dire need of updating. We become news-literate through our exposure to and consumption of mediated news reporting. The news literacy of the digital age is overwhelmingly locked in understanding citizen journalism's user-generated norms and practices (cf. Bruns 2007)—and for the first time in its history, the journalistic guild has to look beyond its education and professionalization to stay relevant.

The article explores the interplay between the norms and practices of professional and citizen journalism in the digital arena. In the absence of many traditional constraints regarding the canvas, production, and consumption aspects of multimodal expression (cf. Bateman 2008), both the content and presentation of news items online pose new requirements to today's professional media producers. They also keep the definition of news literacy in constant flux. Its parent concept of media literacy is similarly pushed in new, sometimes opposing directions by rapid technological growth. The opportunities for two-way dialogue, the numerous design and composition choices (cf. Seizov 2014), the feeding frenzy, and the drastically shortened news production cycle create new criteria for news

composition and newsworthiness. The article traces the effects the Internet age has had on the concept of media literacy and proposes a functional definition of news literacy, which poses conceptual and practical questions for contemporary journalistic education. It then singles out blogging as a fruitful avenue for developing the professional, social, and personal skills which can help modern-day journalists keep up with the wave of user-generated communications (cf. Bruns 2007, 2008; Tofler 1980) and deliver quality content which is visible, accessible, and shareable.

## Rethinking media literacy in the digital age

Before approaching news literacy as a term, we need to define its parent concept of "media literacy" and contextualize it in the present time. It, too, has seen major revisions thanks to the technological and procedural developments in media practice over the last decades. As Marshall McLuhan famously postulated, "the advent of a new medium often reveals the lineaments and assumptions, as it were, of an old medium" (McLuhan 1960, 567). The rise to power of the World Wide Web, which went from a specialized scientific intranet to a global information "superhighway" (after Benjamin and Wigand 1995), has indeed exposed a number of fundamental features which lie at the core of what we now call "traditional" news media, be they print or broadcast. The most prominent features of these media are: (a) one-way communicative disposition (cf. McQuail 2005); (b) well developed professionalization which rests on society-bound ethical codes (cf. Hallin and Mancini 2004); and (c) medium-specific canvas constraints (cf. Bateman 2008)—or technical/production limitations—which actively shape the amount and kind of information that each medium can relay.

The ways a medium maps onto the three dimensions above determine the literacy levels it requires from its audience as well. While the concept itself has sparked long-standing debates (cf. Luke 1989), there is general agreement around Aufderheide's (1993) and Christ and Potter's (1998) definitions of media literacy, summarized as "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms" by Livingstone (2004, 5). The nature of traditional media focuses on the access, while typically language-centred education (cf. Kress 2010) makes sure audiences have the basic skills for analysing and evaluating the mediated information's verbal component, be it spoken or written word. The presence of other modalities and their mutual, semantically significant interaction are not usually of primary production importance even though they play a crucial role in reception.

Analysis and evaluation rest on the recipient's perception. As mass media are becoming increasingly dependent on advertising revenue, which correlates directly with the size and composition of their audiences, the acute awareness of what the audience can and what they want to perceive during their media consumption becomes central to the journalistic process. This holds especially true for news media, arguably the most dynamic field in the mass communication spectrum. Therefore, advanced understanding of both the production and reception processes behind contemporary news consumption needs to become an integral part of journalism education.

In the context of the Internet's global penetration rising, we can use the three key media dimensions above to circumscribe the clash of "old vs. new" media and to illustrate the ways in which the Web in all its incarnations has surpassed its predecessors as a dominant mass medium. The dimensions also help us demonstrate how the concept of media literacy is changing rapidly, encompassing an ever-broadening set of skills (cf. Ette and Stoker 2014). This competence shift has important implications for journalism education and hints at the new abilities media professionals as well as media audiences need to acquire in

order to stay current. To emphasize the idiosyncrasies behind the former audience's quickly growing tech savvy, the rest of the paper will focus on professional journalism's Web 2.0 skill gap and how it can be remedied. Journalists' education is in particular need of updating, so they can continue serving their socially endowed roles (cf. Peters and Witschge 2015), which roughly encompass the necessities to inform, educate, and persuade. For the first time in the profession's history, however, the learning curve is so steep (cf. Barrett 2014; Wolfe 2014), and there is another group of media- and tech-competent actors who are already way ahead in the game, as will be discussed in the following section.

While the challenge ahead of journalism education is certainly formidable, this is not the first time the guild has to face rapid technological expansion and increasing competence demands. Advances in printing have long broken up the rigid newspaper and magazine layouts, and broadcast media have made gratuitous use of new technologies, running split-screen or embedded video segments accompanied by infographics, newsflash strands, and other information-carrying elements. These developments demonstrate how both traditional and new media become increasingly hybrid (cf. Kraidy 2005), complex (cf. Bate-man 2008), and multimodal (cf. Seizov 2014). As a result, the set of features pertinent to contemporary news content grows wider and demands increasing levels of literacy and competence from all parties involved in the exchange of information. This growing complexity poses a challenge to effective communication: both producers and consumers need to acquire new skills and rely on a shared set of relevant communicative conventions. In other words, they need to be mutually media-literate.

The concept of media literacy is, therefore, the starting point of our debate, and it is a contested construct in its own right (cf. Livingstone 2004). Having moved beyond the simplistic definition of being able to read and write, "literacy" raises important, discursive questions about possessing the necessary authority to access, interpret, and (re)produce texts (Livingstone 2004; Luke 1989). These considerations become particularly amplified in the digital age where access depends equally on having the relevant technology (i.e. a networked device) and the taught and/or acquired experience to "read" online content; where interpretation is supported by the sum-total of the media users' experiences with both producing and consuming online mediated content; and where (re)production relies on easily acquired skills in a variety of widely available and affordable media production software applications (e.g., image and video editors, web content management systems, etc.). The key aspect here is the low threshold in front of today's media prosumers. Their media literacy is, seemingly, taken as a given: if they may call themselves prosumers, then they must possess it. However, assuming the same of professional journalists and sending them off into the Internet realms without targeted preparation and experience carries far-reaching risks for further eroding the profession's societal impact and perceived authority. Hence, a concerted effort at updating journalists' own news literacy and online skill set is needed in order to prepare them for the challenges of the day.

## Journalism in the digital age: functions, norms, produsage

The major hurdle in front of journalism in the digital age is the unexpected competition the profession gets from amateur producers—or prosumers as we will call them from now onwards (cf. Tofler 1980). The widespread practice of creating, curating, and disseminating content that reaches increasingly large audiences continually inspires new individuals to jump on the bandwagon of prosumption individually—or collaboratively, in what Bruns (2008a) terms produsage. This practice tends to erode the authority full-time journalists used to command thanks to their professional and institutional backing (cf. Pew Research

Center 2012). What used to be an environment of scarcity defined by gatekeeping and quality control is now a wide-open playing field with strong and varied competition.

Therefore, traditional journalism, best exemplified by its "offline" representatives like print newspapers or TV broadcasts, faces considerable challenges which it cannot address by merely transferring its established practices to the networked context. It is also important to note that it has brought a large portion of this challenge onto itself by: (a) cultivating a gnawing need for breaking news and constant updates which prosumption can now satisfy more quickly and efficiently; (b) building up barriers to information access (e.g., limited number of freely available articles in the online edition, "premium" content, etc.) which prosumption inherently lacks and, indeed, strives to bypass; and (c) sticking to a relatively slow news production process which involves several stages of content generation, editing, post-production and final approval before dissemination. Many would say the latter is an essential part of professional routines and, indeed, what sets journalists apart from "iReporters." However, the blossoming of digital citizen journalism (cf. Allan 2007; Allan and Thorsen 2009; Bruns 2007) demonstrates that audiences are not overly concerned with the quality assurance behind news stories—especially not when they are breaking or scandalous. This trend has important implications for the way we define news literacy in the digital age.

The chief concern when revising our view of news literacy in the digital age, hence, should be what the public accepts as news and how it recognizes news value in the ubiquity of texts available on the World Wide Web. Given the difficulties even established media institutions are facing, we would do well to adopt a functional approach to creating a new definition as opposed to the normative view which has been dominant in the field. To start on this task, we first need to explore the societal functions of journalism and how they are evolving in the digital age (cf. Peters and Witschge 2015). As we take on this task, it is crucial to consider the defining characteristics of new news media without falling into a "reductionist discourse of novelty" (Carpentier 2009, 408) which might threaten to cloud our (re-)evaluation. While exploring said societal functions, we will also refer back to the way they map onto the Web 2.0 infrastructure and define journalistic challenges and opportunities therein.

### Information and commentary

This is easily the most basic societal function of mediated news. In the words of Zaller (2003, 110), "news should provide citizens with the basic information necessary to form and update opinions on all the major issues of the day." Despite its prescriptive phrasing, this definition helps news' most important function flesh out, namely the imparting of high-quality knowledge which the audience finds relevant in the political, social, or any other essential context. Journalism is often criticized for not doing enough in this department (cf. Franklin 1997), and Web 2.0 is seen as the panacea: where professionals fail, the crowd will deliver.

It follows, therefore, that digital news literacy involves the ability to seek out and filter through relevant information—a combination of access and evaluation as defined earlier (cf. Livingstone 2004). We will do well not to dismiss access as merely the provision of the pertinent hardware and connectivity, however. With equal importance, it denotes the ability—rather than the mere opportunity—to get to a desired news source, and it goes hand in hand with evaluation, or the ability to judge the newsworthiness of an online publication. Both of these are based on users' experience collecting information from traditional news media and their Internet competences. In other words, digital news literacy depends on the close interaction between discreet sets of on- and offline skills.

Because traditional media have taken many and often winding routes to establishing

their digital presences (cf. Tameling and Broersma 2013), a good portion of the Internet public has turned to alternative sources of news which rely on an environment of “discursive and deliberative” citizen journalism (Bruns 2007, 2) appropriate to the Web 2.0 sensibility. Apart from creating new forms of competition, prosumer-generated news actively modifies the very definition of “news” in the public mind. Previously key properties such as reliability, trusted source, or professional production become secondary to speed, realism, and crowdsourced support expressed via social media activity. Prosumers, therefore, recognize news not by the long-established, institutionally bound tokens anymore; the social media noise (liking, pinning, commenting, reposting, etc.), the short production cycle, and the attention-grabbing presentation become markers of good information and/or commentary and, therefore, of newsworthiness in the digital age.

### Watchdog

Another important function of traditional journalism is keeping powerful political and commercial actors in check for the benefit of society at large (cf. Peters and Witschge 2015). Fulfilling this function usually involves whistleblowing in cases where private interests endanger the public’s wellbeing. It often takes the shape of meticulously researched pieces of investigative journalism, which demand: extensive preparation and construction of the case, not unlike detective work; specialized access to sources which oftentimes are not publicly available and require anonymity and protection; and institutional support for the investigative journalists themselves which guarantees their freedom to pursue such high-risk stories. The last point has been particularly contentious in the context of traditional media where many conscientious journalists are stifled top-down by political parallelism (cf. Hallin and Mancini 2004) and general clientelism (cf. McChesney 1999). Having whistleblowing instincts and all the connections in the world cannot compensate for the lack of motivation and institutional backing necessary to complete and publicize an investigation.

The Internet has brought heaven on earth for whistleblowers of varying proportions. The promise of anonymity and the easily achievable mass audience reach, given the right set of skills, create the ideal conditions for relegating whistleblowing to the crowd. Hence, the “liberalization” of the watchdog function circumscribes an area where traditional journalism has fallen considerably behind, in terms of both reach and output. The ease with which content can be generated and published online (thanks to advanced smartphones, high levels of computer literacy, and ubiquitous connectivity opportunities) has brought about an astounding number of citizen reports across a wide spectrum: from indolent illegal parking on the streets of Bulgaria to the Edward Snowden revelations about the NSA. The growing number of significant cases of citizen investigative journalism online has further diminished the public’s perception of traditional media as likely whistleblowers. This shift has also consistently eroded the perceived necessity for institutional support behind investigative journalism in the public’s mind. In the digital age, anyone can be a watchdog. In acts of collaborative produsage and filtering (Bruns 2007), media prosumers can now collectively seek out meaningful information in order to classify, evaluate, and disseminate it further down the presumption chain. The collaborative aspect of the task mimics the institutional backing professional journalists may rely on and, thus, provides a number of support channels for prosumer whistleblowers.

The implications of the citizen watchdog phenomenon for news literacy are far-reaching. On the one hand, technology allows common people to shine a light on wrongdoings of various magnitudes and, thus, erodes the perceived need for investigative journalism in the first place. Even worse so, it lowers public trust in the professional investigative pieces that do get publicized, so any institutionally backed example of watchdog journalism re-

ceives much closer scrutiny and is always taken with a grain of salt. The implications for news literacy in this journalistic function are that content and author become much more important for the story’s impact than the publication context. This development puts a lot of tension on professional journalists and pushes them to venture beyond their institutional “homes” in order to get their whistleblower content to the masses. On the other hand, this institutional unshackling also points journalists in an exciting new direction which will be discussed later in this article.

### Mediator in political communication

The remaining two functions of journalism, as defined by Peters and Witschge (2015), pertain to representing the public in matters of politics and mediating for politicians. We can subsume this under the common moniker of “public mediation” since the task entails the two-way communication between political actors and society at large. Traditional journalism has lost a lot of ground in this avenue as well, since both politicians and the public have acquired powerful tools for self-representation on a mass scale, mostly thanks to the Internet’s penetration in our daily lives. The advent of the World Wide Web was seen as an opportunity for leveling the playing field for political actors large and small and for opening up two-way dialog with the constituency after more than a century of passive message reception.

As political persuasion and political discussion moved online in the 1990s, scholarship was divided between: (a) the hope for free, two-way communication between politicians and the public (cf. Coleman 2001; Endres and Warnick 2004); and (b) the fear that path dependency would prevail and the status quo of the “professional,” one-way campaign would merely transfer into the new medium (cf. Foot and Schneider 2002; Gibson and Römmele 2001; Xenos and Foot 2005). Research is still detailing the benefits, costs, and pitfalls of online political communication. What we definitely know is that it is consistently multimodal and inclusive, allowing for a multitude of voices and just as many expression patterns (cf. Seizov 2014) to circulate with less constraints than ever before.

While the dream of free dialogue might not have materialized yet, the loosening of technological constraints and the virtual elimination of traditional media’s gatekeeping role are established realities, and prosumers, working for themselves or for political actors at the grassroots level, are happy to collaborate in sifting through relevant political information and making it part of their own political communications on the Web (cf. Bruns 2007). Traditional journalism still has much to learn from both politicians’ and the public’s drive to represent themselves online. The wide gamut of expression means and layouts available to both groups allows them to find unique new ways of multimodal message relay and to test their effectiveness in real-life contexts. This process of trial and error, of forging new communicative designs, is especially pronounced on the side of the public since politicians still rely on PR professionals with know-how on par with seasoned journalists—or even more advanced. The public, on the other hand, often works independently which means: (a) less support in terms of finance, infrastructure, and equipment; (b) less taught knowledge and skill in favour of learning-by-doing; and, conversely, (c) more creative freedom and opportunity for bottom-up innovation.

It is the last point that holds the biggest potential for journalism’s reinvention in the digital age. Professionals stand to benefit a lot if they take their cue from prosumers regarding the best contemporary formats, in which news ought to be presented. They also have the expert training and the ethos to remedy the inherent vices of presumption by publishing news speedily, with little editorial interference but still adhering to their professional code of conduct and the principles which make good journalism (e.g., focus on facts, clearly marked editorial pieces, reliable sourcing, and so on). A pairing of presumption’s strengths



with traditional journalistic ethics and best practices is possible, and it plays right into the principles of news literacy in the digital age. Journalism education, therefore, ought to prepare professionals of all ages to think like journalists and act like prosumers. It is a long road which goes through the core of the prosumption phenomenon and requires news reporters to approach it academically and get well versed in its primary modus operandi: Internet-powered multimodality. The following sections offer an elaboration and illustrations thereof.

## Prosumption as a guide

The pairing of information access and information generation, thanks to Web 2.0, ushered in the age of the media “prosumer” (cf. Bianco 2009; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) or “produser” (Bianco 2007). The former term, coined by futurologist Alvin Toffler (1980), merges “producer” and “consumer”, while the latter is a portmanteau of “producer” and “user”. The dual role both concepts describe is a central tenet of communicative processes in the context of Web 2.0, an environment built upon an “architecture of participation” (O’Reilly 2007, 17) and collaboration (Bruns 2008a). Media conglomerates’ monopoly over the creation and distribution of content has been broken, and nowadays prosumers play a central role in mass communication processes (Comor 2011), creating new communicative rules, trends, and affordances as they walk hand in hand with rapid technological development. Along the way, they also create new media literacies and reshape the shared understanding of what constitutes news and how it should be reported. As individuals become increasingly interconnected—as they join the “network society” (e.g., Castells 2000, 2005)—sharing texts, visuals, and the meanings they carry becomes second nature. There is a new kind of functional news literacy being born right before our eyes, as the public reacts to events and creates its own representations and interpretations of them.

For all the freedom and fluidity that it provides, prosumption is also a double-edged sword. Comor (2011, 309) notes that “both mainstream and progressive analysts conceptualize prosumption to be a liberating, empowering and, for some, a prospectively revolutionary institution.” As we have discussed above as well, the revolutionary character of prosumption lies in its potential to lift the traditional barriers around mass mediated communication and provide access to tools and information which were previously unavailable to the wider public. However, the rumbles prosumption sends all the way down to the fundamentals of most Western media systems do not always bring good vibes.

One particular concern identified by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010, 13) is the trend towards amateur, unpaid, and abundant content generation within a system where scarcity and professional monopoly used to be the norm. Prosumption offers an adequate and accessible response to the mass audience’s “feeding frenzy” (cf. Sabato 1991)—the constant hunger for more news even if none exists—and all that free of charge, a feat professional journalists cannot match (cf. Ritzer 2007). Furthermore, the trade-off between speed and accuracy puts a strain on journalists’ professional ethos. It also threatens to create a jaded kind of newsworthiness and news literacy which may bypass rigorous fact-checks in favour of round-the-clock updates.

This “fast food” approach to news stands to benefit greatly from an infusion with journalistic values, where speed is just as vital but does not come at the expense of truthfulness. Media professionals are in an excellent position to harness or harvest “the hive” (cf. Bruns 2008b)—the collective prosumer mind and its media prowess—by adopting prosumption practices and regaining a central role in the mass communication process thanks to their already well-established community structures. To make the most of this opportunity,

however, journalists need in-depth training in media production in order to be able to craft content and publicize it themselves, as part of the prosumer crowd, reducing production cycles and building up a new kind of expertise and rapport with their prosumer audiences. This education begins with a crash course in multimodality and online communication.

## Multimodality as an essential component of digital news literacy

Multimodality is one of the defining qualities of our surrounding world and the way we perceive and make sense of it. It refers to the interactions of different communication modes, like images, text, sound, movement, and so on. It is a rich and varied field for academic research, as reviewed by, e.g., Bateman (2008) and Kress (2010). Multimodal document research works primarily with media artefacts in which “a variety of visually-based modes are deployed simultaneously in order to fulfill an orchestrated collection of interwoven communicative goals” (Bateman 2008, 1). The “interaction and combination of multiple modes within single artefacts” (ibid.) are of major interest to researchers and media practitioners alike because of their potential for “multiplication of meaning” (Lemke 1998). Understanding the inner workings of multimodal communication, therefore, is at the core of media literacy today. As the dominant communicative practice revolves around such orchestrations of text, audio, and still as well as moving images, producers, consumers, and prosumers face a steep learning curve when it comes to learning how to make meaning.

Multimodality has been around for a long time, but it has blossomed on the fertile grounds of Web 2.0 where production constraints are loosened and the hunger for information is greater than ever. This allows for the integration of two or more communication modes, which then form a richer and more compelling message (cf. Thibault 2001) that gets collectively and collaboratively disseminated far and wide (cf. Bruns 2007). Contemporary media documents, especially prosumer-generated ones, are “born” multimodal thanks to quantum leaps in Web publishing and the necessity to pack quality information in attractive layouts to increase visibility. Therefore, prosumer media content displays much higher rates of modal density (Norris 2004) or co-deployment (Baldry and Thibault 2006). In this field of growing complexity, journalists need to strike a balance between attention-grabbing and information-centred designs. Here is where targeted, multimodal news literacy education can help.

“Multimodal literacy” comes at the heels of the “visual turn” in communication (Bateman 2008, 2) and relies on prosumers’ ability to encode (produce) and decode (interpret) image-text relations. In other words, it garnishes our functional definition of “media literacy” with a concrete modal layer. The paths to acquiring that literacy are multiple. The “prosumer way” is to process large volumes of multimodal online content, approach it critically, and start producing in turn, emulating and improving upon the production routines which have been deduced in the perception process. By virtue of their profession, journalists are exposed to volumes of multimodal documents on a daily basis, and many of them also possess technical know-how acquired during their interactions with typesetters, cameramen, and other media production staff. Hence, they are in a favourable position to quickly master the dominant multimodal expression patterns of the day and to apply them in order to create a “Prosumption Premium” trend: one where speed and attention grabbing meet professional ethos and quality content.

## Getting an empirical perspective on multimodal content design

The first step towards augmenting journalists’ existing content creation expertise with

empirical insights from the growing body of multimodal media research is familiarizing them with some prominent and practicable approaches to analysing and annotating multimodal content. The following section reviews two such models and their possible contributions to expanding the theoretical as well as practical component of multimodal production in journalistic education.

One prominent approach to multimodal document analysis revolves around the concept of genre, best operationalized as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. [...] In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. (Swales 1990, 58)

This definition of genre ties in with our functional view of news literacy: the qualifying characteristics of the news genre, such as style, content, or intended audience in the quote above, naturally lead audience members in certain interpretative directions. The main challenge in front of multimodal research right now is to create the empirically motivated bedrock of specific genre definition. To address this task, Bateman et al. (2002) developed an analytic-synthetic model: GeM (“Genre and Multimodality”) which provides exhaustive descriptions of base units, layout, organizational, and rhetorical mechanisms in multimodal documents, in order to allow for an empirically motivated determination of genres. The scheme is further elaborated by Bateman (2008) and calls for concerted further research in order to arrive at verifiable genre hierarchies. The usefulness of the GeM annotation framework for journalism education might not be immediately apparent, but its principle of exhaustive documentation of meaning-carrying units and establishing semantic relationships between them is at the core of the digital incarnation of news literacy as we know it. GeM’s rigid protocols will make journalists mindful of the implications of their word, illustration, and layout choices when composing news segments.

The other multimodal annotation scheme with direct implications for digital news literacy is ICON (“Imagery and Communication in Online Narratives”), presented in Seizov (2014). Focusing on the analysis of political communication online, the annotation model characterizes the spatial and semantic relationships between images and text, the two most common communication modes which digital prosumers employ. Based on an initial analysis of a sample of political webpages, including an international sample of news websites, the author arrives at three main structural configurations (“lead visual,” “multiple visual,” and “text-flow”) which map onto three distinct communicative functions (“inform,” “persuade,” and “reason,” respectively) (for further detail, see Seizov 2014, 130–134).

After getting sensitized to the amount and kind of meaning-carrying base units and their meaningful combinations thanks to the GeM framework, digital journalists can enhance their understanding of online rhetoric with ICON, a more immediate, effect-oriented guide. The three basic designs are simple enough to duplicate and manipulate according to the article’s needs, and their functions cover the central purposes of news reports and/or editorials, which are the traditional journalistic genres the public has come to expect. Working within those loose constraints, journalists can explore the possibilities each of the three ideal types offers and create relevant, information-rich content which meets the public’s modal expectations and plays to its prosumer sensibilities.

### **Blogging: applying multimodal news literacy in real time**

“Blogging has the potential to be a transformational technology for teaching and learning,” Williams and Jacobs (2004, 232) observe, and this form of Web publishing certainly does not fall short of its promise in the realm of journalism education. The insights from

multimodal document analysis need to be integrated into the curriculum in a practicable manner which allows current and future professionals to apply them in a real-time, fast-paced, editor-free environment—the way the World Wide Web usually works. The most natural move would then be to start a blog and approach it as a multimodal message lab where different strategies and designs can be tested in the field. While a number of professional journalists have naturally gravitated towards blogging as a powerful (albeit secondary to their respective jobs) channel for communicating news and especially commentary to the public, it has not yet become a focal point of journalistic education. Where it has been included, blogging is usually not studied holistically: writing the message tends to be in focus, while the composition, design, illustrations, and layout are covered in passing or considered self-explanatory. As discussed above, however, the medium, the genre, and the presentation of the message possess powerful semantic effects and can, in fact, obscure the verbal text’s intended meaning completely.

The call for practice-based multimodal literacy comes at a time when journalists are expected to be “multi-skilled [...] self-starters” (Barret 2014, 56) with growing technical know-how garnered via theoretical education and multiple work placements throughout their university studies. Knight and Yorke (2004) have demonstrated how important self-beliefs and perception of competence are for university graduates’ career development later in life, and blogging presents an excellent opportunity to create a set of skills “in action” which then boost professional expertise as well as self-confidence for young journalists in an environment of high stress. Active blogging is also an excellent opportunity to spread good professional practices within the guild, as Willis (2010, 15) argues that “journalists learn what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from other journalists”—a self-perpetuating, constantly updated cycle of ethical and practical norm internalization. Such a fluid set of rules matches the unconstrained environment of the World Wide Web closely. It presents great learning opportunities for young media professionals to practice new forms of multimodal news literacy and get real-time feedback from colleagues, prosumers, and consumers alike.

Blogging also provides ample opportunities for critical reflection, which Fowler-Watt (2014) identifies as an important component of journalism education, too. The environment of instant feedback and open dialogue, which should be made compulsory in the blogging task, forces journalists to not only acquire the technical skills and the information necessary to create a blog post, but also to consider the implications of their communicative choices and the reactions they elicit in their audiences. Journalists rarely visit the comment sections underneath their online publications; when they blog, however, the incentive to participate in the discussion is much higher. This high level of accountability provides a “cure” to the problem of vaguely defined, tacit professional knowledge which, instead of “spontaneous and automatic” (Schon 1995, 60), becomes situational and perpetually de-/reconstructed. In this prime example of experiential learning—i.e. “through first-hand experience” (Ette and Stoker 2014, 92)—journalists expand their capabilities for “examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work and personal development” (Kolb 1984, 4). The multimodal blogging approach promises to build up a solid new set of skills for journalists and, thus, to improve their professional expertise while also boosting their confidence and sense of self-worth along the way.

### **Conclusions**

The multivariate effects of Web 2.0 on media practice, media literacy, and news values have put visible dents in the traditional understanding of journalistic best practices and

news production routines. As professional reporters face increasing competition from amateur (if only by their lack of journalism education) media producers, their monopoly on the dissemination of credible information—and, hence, their authority—is crumbling. The ability to recognize, evaluate, and disseminate news is no longer a given for any media actor, professional or amateur. In the constantly changing environment of digital media and the 24-hour news cycle, it is best to adopt a functional definition of news literacy and tie it to the shared media production practices of the wider public, or the prosumer crowd as it has been presented above. When assuming the passive role of an audience, prosumers will actively look for the information designs they recognize and utilize themselves. This should also be the starting point of a new approach to training journalists.

Journalism education, therefore, needs to prepare journalists for the prosumer era, and the easiest path towards that goal is the integration of multimodal literacy and blogging into the curriculum. Furnishing students with the necessary Web 2.0 skills like basic HTML, content management systems, and so on is only the beginning of the process. The Web is inherently multimodal and arguably the least constrained medium in terms of production options. This freedom is a blessing for obvious reasons, but also a curse, especially when it comes to mastering a multitude of new expression means and formats, on which professional journalists tend to rely, as they have done historically (e.g., straight-on news reports, opinion/editorials, or advertorials). This is where targeted education in online multimodal expression can help. The integration of multimodality research into journalism training serves a double purpose: it introduces students to the many possible orchestrations of textual, visual, audio, and/or video multimodal designs; and it demonstrates how the shared social practices combine those communication modes into evolving genres.

Multimodality's grounding in social practice allows it to stay abreast with the latest developments in online communication, and its reliance on genre as an anchor of meaning creation and dissemination trains journalists to work within positive, productive constraints rather than face the wide-open canvas of the Internet in its expressive totality. Instead of being stupefied by the sheer number of choices, journalists will learn to ground their message designs in social and generic contexts which are directly tied to their audience's news literacy levels. To go one step further, being mindful of widely used multimodal expression constructs lets journalists bend them and reinvent them, actively shaping the shared news values and literacies in their audience circles. Multimodal online readiness, thus, closes the digital news literacy cycle and promises to give the power back to the professionals who can then apply the necessary ethics and quality controls to the new, fast-paced environment of instant information sharing. It also stands to make journalism much more effective, impactful, and sustainable in the digital age and to ingrain the multimodal principles of meaning-as-use and socially defined communicative convention into journalistic practice, so that it can stay on top of further innovations and continue to serve its informative and societal goals. Ignoring these new developments might not pose any imminent danger to the profession; however, the low opportunity costs and the immense potential of journalism's Web 2.0 skill update make this educational shift all but imminent.

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# The survival of student journalism: exploring new models for sustainability

Ed Madison, University of Oregon

**The strength of a democracy is often said to be inextricably linked with the strength of its free press. Yet recent news reports suggest that the future of the student journalism in the United States is in jeopardy. In May 2013, *The New York Times* found that only 1 in 8 New York public high schools had a student newspaper (Hu 2013).**

A month later, *National Public Radio* aired a report titled “High School Newspapers: An Endangered Species” (Simon 2013).

This downward turn in student journalism could influence the future of the mainstream press. Ellen Austin, Dow Jones Journalism Educator of the Year (2012) says, “Fifty percent of future journalists start in high school and seventy-five percent of minority journalists start in high school” (Interview 2011). Changes at the scholastic level are reflected by a sharp decline in professional journalism jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 13% decrease in journalism positions for the reporting period between 2012 and 2022, resulting in 7,200 fewer jobs (Occupational Outlook 2012).

These troubling trends don’t fully account for industry movement from print to online publishing. However, they suggest a bleak future for the journalism profession as a whole—one that could potentially threaten its watchdog function in democracy.

Journalism’s crisis is largely tied to economics. Writer Stuart Brand is attributed with the slogan “information wants to be free” (Wagner 2003), noting that consumers are now accustomed to having free and instant access to news created by legacy media and then aggregated by Google and through social media. But first-rate reporting still comes at a cost.

The problems plaguing student journalism are akin to the challenges confronting mainstream journalism. Faced with budget shortfalls and strained resources, many school administrators face tough choices about where to make cuts. Scholastic journalism in the U.S., when offered in secondary education, often exists as an elective that does not count towards graduation or as an underfunded after school program. Administrators who are not transparent leaders may welcome an opportunity to cut student publications, given their watchdog function. The press has a mandate: to examine questionable policies and expose misdeeds.

To fulfill journalism’s purpose, present and future practitioners must answer a vital question: How can journalism cover costs, remain sustainable, and potentially thrive in a climate where audiences of all ages are consuming more media but are less willing to pay for it?

Spreading awareness and fostering knowledge about vital issues is a primary function of a free press. Self-governing works when citizens are civically engaged and make informed choices based on accurate information. However, the public needs to be equipped with the necessary skills to interpret news. In a word, they benefit from having a foundation of *literacy*.

*News literacy* is viewed as a sub-discipline of media literacy, looking primarily at news content as a resource for teaching critical thinking and media analysis skills (Mihailidis 2102). Student publications (including newspapers, digital publications, and broadcasts)

provide young people with opportunities to apply news literacy skills through journalistic practice (Loth 2012). However, most of that practice centers on reporting, editing, and multimedia production—with little or no emphasis on business.

A survey of news literacy online teaching resources reveals limited materials on media business. The Journalism Education Association’s online curriculum has a module on social media and entrepreneurship. However, the approach centers on reading cases studies rather than experiential fieldwork (JEA 2015). The American Press Institute’s 213 page *Introductory News Literacy* guide advises teachers to have students sell ads, but makes no mention of social media. Nor does it discuss evolving trends related to sponsored content (API, 2012), which Andrew Sullivan and other noted critics argue is damaging editorial integrity (Braiker, 2014). Stony Brook University’s Center for News Literacy online resources mentions social media, but only in the context of newsgathering and consumption (Center for News Literacy 2015).

In this article, I argue for a more robust approach to teaching *business literacy*, beyond what is presently offered within the news literacy movement, and more broadly within journalism education. I reference the award-winning Palo Alto High School media arts program in Northern California, which I studied through extensive fieldwork between 2010 and 2013. Twelve visits were made for three to four consecutive days at a time, and students were followed into the field. I continue to track the evolution of the program, visiting once or twice a year.

The Palo Alto High School program is answering this call by placing emphasis on teaching entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, I discuss an after school experiment in Oregon. It brings students from several high schools together to the university’s journalism school to create a citywide magazine in partnership with the town’s local newspaper.

An appropriate lens for looking at these journalism programs is *Self-determination Theory* (Deci and Ryan 1985, 2000). Drawing a comparison from biology, it posits that human organisms have basic psychological needs that sustain their ability to lead healthy and productive lives. The theorists identify distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations are internally based and are linked to authentic interests, as opposed to extrinsic motivations which are tied to some external driver, i.e. financial compensation, social status, getting good grades, or parental praise. They further assert that a continuum exists, in which one can experience high levels of intrinsic motivation or lower levels of extrinsic motivation, with amotivation (a sense of helplessness) at the lowest level.

The theorists identify three components that catalyze intrinsic motivation: *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. Autonomy refers to one’s sense that his or her actions are self-directed; competence refers to one’s sense that he or she is capable of attending to the task at hand; and relatedness refers to one’s sense of communal belongingness and support. I’ll explore how each of these components can inform the process of injecting *business literacy* lessons into news and media literacy curricula.

A first step in framing this discussion is to raise some overarching questions that speak to the topic’s relevance. These questions relate to significant societal consequences. Is it possible there is a correlation between our failure to teach journalism students and practitioners business literacy skills and the financial troubles that now plague many mainstream news organizations? Might a more financially literate press corps have asked tougher questions in the lead up to the 2008 financial meltdown, and previous economic crises? Would a more informed press have done a better job of forewarning the public that banks were over-leveraging their assets and making questionable loans?

There is no way to know for sure; however, these questions warrant further examination of the profession’s historical aversion to engaging with matters of business. Journalists

have long joked about being bad at math. A recent Poynter article on dual journalism career couples was entitled “The Best, and the Worst, of Having a Journalist for a Valentine: No One Can Do Math” (Hare 2014). The profession’s discomfort with matters of finance has a storied past.

The earliest American newspapers were one-person operations where publishers reported, wrote, edited, sold ads, and made deliveries. Subscription revenue was insufficient, and advertisers were notoriously slow to pay (Lyon 1965). To stay afloat, publishers often sought loans and donations. Financial backers sought to influence content, which threatened editorial integrity (Hamilton 1936).

“The Wall” is an industry term used to describe the historical practice that later evolved to separate news editorial and advertising departments. *Chicago Tribune* founder Col. Robert McCormick famously installed separate elevators for news staff and sales staff, and forbade communication between the two (Merritt 2005). The intention was honorable. Credibility is the currency that news media organizations live by, and publishers sought to maintain the integrity of their news operations.

Many news organizations now realize the imprudence of employing reporters who lack a fundamental understanding of their role in the sustainability of the enterprise. In this era of sponsored content and native advertising, the ethical boundaries can become blurred. Yet these boundaries are essential to the profession’s integrity, credibility, and therefore its longevity. These new and daring business practices will inform the evolution of the profession, and establish new guideposts for the next generation of journalists.

There is general consensus that in journalism, sales should not drive editorial decision-making. However, it is no longer sensible to be dismissive of sales and marketing, or refer to these legitimate disciplines as “the dark side” (Culver 2014). In a 146-page published report, the Columbia School of Journalism found that most reporters don’t understand their business (Bazilian 2011). A relatively recent *Forbes* article headline said it best, “Journalists Need to Understand the Ad Business, Not Sulk and Go Home” (DVorkin 2012).

Yet the notion that marketing—and more specifically sales—are shameful practices has cultural currency, particularly among millennials. In a study of students beginning a Principles of Marketing class, almost half believed that marketing was a “bad business practice,” and nearly a fourth thought it was a poor career choice (Ferrell and Gonzales 2004). Yet, at its core, marketing is a well-established strategic method for creating awareness with its own set of profession ethics and guidelines (AMA 2013), and one of its key components is sales.

At Palo Alto High School, Esther Wojcicki and her colleagues teach students the importance of how business supports journalism by having them sell advertising. Nearly 80% of the \$3,000 cost of printing an issue of *Campanile*, the school’s newspaper, is covered by local advertising sold by students. Wojcicki stated:

“Everyone sells ads. It’s one of the most important things they can learn, because it is a fundamental of our capitalist system. But it’s hard for them, because they are apprehensive about talking to strangers.” (Interview 2015)

The Palo Alto High School journalism program has come a long way. When Wojcicki took the helm in 1984, only 19 students were participating. Now more than 500 of its 1,800 students are engaged in journalism and media arts, producing nine different publications. They include a newspaper, a news website, three feature magazines, a sports magazine, a yearbook, and a daily three-camera newscast—all led by students. The program consistently wins top honors in the Columbia Scholastic Press Awards (CSPAs), and President Barack Obama has acknowledged its excellence.

It would be easy to dismiss the success of the program as solely attributable to privilege. Situated directly across from Stanford University, and in close proximity to Facebook and Google’s headquarters, Palo Alto High School is located in one of the wealthiest communities in the United States. However, a broader quantitative study of 664 English language arts (ELA) students at 10 U.S. high schools (including Palo Alto High) indicated that its journalism program’s results are potentially attainable in communities of diverse socioeconomic circumstances with students of diverse ethnicities, when controlling for school and student demographics (community type, class-standing, or socioeconomic status). Students taught journalistic strategies in less affluent communities reported motivational beliefs and learning strategies that were similar to students in affluent communities, which challenges the presumption that Palo Alto High’s results are an anomaly. In the study, ELA students who used journalism strategies also reported significantly higher levels of personal growth and sense of self than ELA students not exposed to journalism strategies. (Madison 2012, 2015).

Wojcicki and her team’s pedagogical practices exemplify the principles of Self-determination Theory. Each publication has a student-elected team of editors who fully manage day-to-day operations, including decisions about equipment purchases that are typically handled by teachers and administrators.

I witnessed an exchange between an instructor and a student who suggested that the program should invest in a particular model of video camera. Rather than issue a verdict, the instructor asked her to research it further and make a formal pitch to the student editorial team. She did, and her proposal was accepted.

Empowering students to advocate for their convictions fosters *autonomy*, critical thinking, and teaches invaluable business skills. It teaches students that their voices matter, and that their futures can be self-determined. Additionally, when students are encouraged to step outside of their comfort zones and to take risks, it bolsters *competency*.

To prepare their students to close sales, Wojcicki and her team engage them in paired role-play exercises. “Learning to provide a service [like advertising] and be paid for it is an invaluable lesson” Wojcicki stated. Support from teachers and peers touches on Self-determination Theory’s third principle, *relatedness*. When students work in teams, and are mentored by peers and teachers, they feel supported and safe to experiment. The bond created with their community further exemplifies the principle. Local businesses value having an opportunity to support students and learning. Additionally, Wojcicki reports that once her students realize that their audience extends beyond teachers, peers, and their immediate family, they bring a higher level of commitment to their journalism assignments.

The program also engages students in critical examination of evolving trends in funding journalism. In 2015, “InFocus,” the students’ newscast, experimented with producing an advertorial about a make-up and hair artist prior to their prom with minimal controversy. However, the response was different when “PalyVoice,” their online publication, received a request from a local business to write about it in exchange for payment that was to be labeled “sponsored.” Student staffers engaged in a vigorous debate about how to reply. “It didn’t take long for the distaste to emerge in the general discussion and it became apparent that the students weren’t going to go there, said Paul Kandell, the publication’s faculty adviser. “Their credibility is important to them -- thank goodness -- and I’m happy to let them exercise critical thinking about their values in our sheltered high school world” (Interview 2016).

Kandell added:

“To be sure, many of them will likely encounter situations in the future when they won’t have as much freedom and are just expected to do what it takes to maximize profit. Where

else will they get the chance to be idealists or to work in a world where integrity is everything -- and to explore those ideas with peers who can reinforce their value? (Interview 2016)."

Cynics might suggest that Palo Alto has a tax base that allows businesses to engage in higher levels of discretionary spending, such as buying ads in student publications. And yes, there is no denying that Palo Alto is a very wealthy community. However, such an assertion negates the fact that businesses everywhere promote their services by some means. Such a contention would also imply that less affluent youth are somehow less valuable as a target market for businesses. I would argue that students who face socioeconomic challenges have as much if not more to gain from practicing these skills. Some are less likely to have role models who can demonstrate business principles. Learning to advocate for oneself and to negotiate financial transactions can be transformative.

Many high schools are without a news literacy or journalism program that can support students in learning these skills. At the University of Oregon, we facilitate journalism after school programs and summer camps that draw students from a mix of high schools, some of which have floundering journalism programs. The result is *Cascadia Magazine*, produced quarterly by the students and supported in part by local businesses through advertising. While initial focus has been on creating and curating content, we also engage students in critical discussions about sustainable solutions for funding journalism. *Cascadia Magazine's* value to advertisers is enhanced by an agreement with the *Register-Guard*, the citywide newspaper, which inserts it in Sunday editions. It's a model that shows promise, and that can be replicated by other journalism schools.

The high school students receive training in journalism practices, and gain an understanding of emerging business models. In terms of additional benefits, high school students, who may not have family members who attended college, receive mentorship from university students. In turn, our university students experience the rewards of giving back. These are just two examples of programs where business practices are being injected into journalism education.

Recognizing the value of teaching these skills, the Scripps Foundation funds a weeklong Journalism Entrepreneurship Institute, which convenes each winter at Arizona State University's Cronkite School. Selected fellows promise to use the strategies learned to infuse business skills into their own college-level journalism curricula. Following my participation as a member of the program's first cohort in 2012, I established our school of journalism's first media entrepreneurship course. Now in its fourth year, the class challenges students to develop original media products and services. During the final session they pitch their business concepts to a panel of professionals. Several of the ideas have spawned viable projects.

Business literacy not only complements news and media literacy, it is essential for the sustainability of the profession.

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# Reviews

The reviews pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed, please contact Tor on [tclark@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:tclark@dmu.ac.uk)

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**Journalism and Politics provides a theme to the latest Reviews section. Professor Ivor Gaber, a well-known figure at AJE gatherings, offers a fascinating and topical insight into Stephen Cushion's investigation of the changes which have taken place in TV politics, shedding light on how the format has developed and its implication for the practice of political journalism and audience engagement.**

As the 2016 American presidential election gathers pace, Richard Jones offers a timely look back at a classic episode which changed political journalism forever in Matt Bai's account of how Gary Hart's quest for the Democratic nomination for the US presidency in the 1980s ended up focusing more on the personal than the political.

The serious issues around media plurality and democracy, which of course centre around political journalism, are examined in Steven Barnett and Judith Townend's new edited collection, which offers a useful and timely new resource in an under-researched area for Journalism courses.

Meanwhile prolific book editor and regular JE reviewer John Mair delves into the fascinating career of former top BBC executive Roger Mosey, which progressed from local radio to BBC editorial supremo, via the Today programme and the London Olympics coverage, with some politics thrown in for good measure.

For those of you needing some comic relief from all the politics, Michael Foley comes to your rescue, recommending Michael Frayn's journalism novel, *Towards the End of the Morning*, set in the Fleet Street of almost half a century ago, to offer a little context, and not a few laughs, to Journalism students and their tutors alike.

The Reviews section is, as ever, grateful to its small but enthusiastic band of reviewers and invites all JE readers to suggest books about Journalism for review, or better still offer to review relevant works themselves. As ever, all and any offers will be gratefully received at [tclark@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:tclark@dmu.ac.uk)

**Tor Clark, Reviews Editor**



## A classic from the Journalism bookshelf

### Towards the End of the Morning by Michael Frayn

Review by Michael Foley, Dublin Institute of Technology

**I started my career in Fleet Street, and it was still the Fleet Street of Michael Frayn's novel, *Towards the End of the Morning*, even though Frayn set his book ten years before I had my first pint in the King and Keys in 1978.**

Most national newspapers had moved out by 1967 when *Towards the End of the Morning* was set, but there was still the *Express* and the *Telegraph* actually on Fleet Street and by the time I arrived there lurked, up side streets major newspapers, the *Evening Standard*, *The Sun* and the *Mirror*. Times Newspapers and the *Guardian* were up Gray's Inn Road, *The Times* in Blackfriars, but all within pub distance.

*The Irish Times* office, where I laboured as a freelance, was at 85 Fleet Street, which was, as many old hacks will recall, the HQ of the PA and Reuters. I, as a very young journalist, revelled in jumping into a taxi at the Houses of Parliament, having just covered Northern Ireland Questions, nonchalantly giving my destination as either the 'PA building,' or 'Reuters,' depending on how I saw my career developing and which one would most impress the taxi driver.

But it was still the Fleet Street of Frayn's very funny novel. Lorries delivering newsprint blocked side streets, pubs were full most of the time because somewhere someone was always coming off a shift, and there was the improbably named drinking club, the City of London Golf Club. In Bouverie Street, Fetter Lane and Shoe Lane you could hear the rumble of printing presses and the comings and goings of reporters with notebooks and newspapers under their arms and printers moving from one office to the next.

*Towards the End of the Morning* tells the story of a few journalists working in a miscellaneous department – crosswords, nature notes, church notes - of a newspaper that could be the *Guardian*. While the Fleet Street of the novel seems ageless, the lunchtime pints, expenses, the gentlemanly pace and the assumption that everyone would join the NUJ, and journalism's obsession with itself, there are subtle changes taking place. Darcy, the head of department is seeking ways out, but while everyone seems to think they have to out by 40, with a book deal, Darcy is looking towards television and a new fangled thing called celebrity. There is the new sub, Erskine Morris, representing the flash modernity of the 1960s – he even has an electric typewriter - who talks about the great future newspapers have and that he might even buy a title.

If one could only recommend one novel about journalism to students, would it be Waugh's *Scoop* or Frayn's *Towards the End of the Morning*? I would plump for Michael Frayn. He is funnier and more humane and *Towards the End of the Morning* tells a story that still resonates - if the reader has imagination.

**Towards the End of the Morning by Michael Frayn, Faber and Faber; First published 1967. This edition with an introduction by the author, 2000. ISBN 0571204244.**

## All The Truth Is Out by Matt Bai

Review by Richard Jones, University of Huddersfield

**Before Bill Clinton, there was Gary Hart. Charismatic, intelligent and youthful, he was the overwhelming favourite to win the Democratic nomination for the 1988 presidential election. But then his campaign was spectacularly derailed by a piece of investigative journalism.**

It was the *Miami Herald* which discovered a woman, not Hart's wife, coming and going from the candidate's Washington townhouse. An infamous photo was published of the woman, actress and former beauty queen Donna Rice, perched on Hart's lap on a yacht. In the snap, the politician wore a T-shirt bearing the boat's name, *Monkey Business*. Both Hart and Rice said they were just friends, but the Senator's hopes of the White House were over forever.

In *All The Truth Is Out*, long-time *New York Times* political writer Matt Bai (now with *Yahoo*) revisits the scandal, and argues it led to a significant change in how the American media covers politics. Before Hart, reporters would look the other way when a John F Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson took mistresses. Since then, almost everything has been fair game.

Bai shows America's collective memory of the scandal isn't quite how it played out. In response to rumours about his private life, Hart is well remembered for his hubris in challenging a journalist to 'follow me around', only for the *Herald's* Tom Fiedler and his colleagues to do just that. In reality, the quote appeared in a *New York Times* article on the same day the *Herald* published its story and was a complete coincidence.

The *Herald's* reporters don't come out with spotless reputations. Lurking in the bushes outside Hart's place, they forgot to stake out his back door, so couldn't have known for sure whether Rice had really stayed the night or not. Then, they confronted Hart in an alleyway, writing up the whole escapade in a breathless third-person narrative, just like their heroes Woodward and Bernstein. What did or didn't happen on the *Monkey Business* wasn't exactly Watergate, but it was still enough to bring down a major political figure.

The post-Hart focus on a candidate's 'character' rather than policy positions has, Bai suggests, contributed to the dreary soundbites of the modern professional politician, and a lowering of the standards of American political debate. Presidential candidates are no longer allowed by their handlers to bat complicated issues around in long, late-night, chats with reporters. For their part, journalists and their editors are generally much less interested in explaining those policy positions, too. There's no room for nuance on 24-hour news, much less Twitter. In this context, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised it's non-politicians like Donald Trump and Ben Carson who have been making much of the running in this current US election cycle.

Not that this is all Hart's fault. What happened to him was bound to happen to somebody, sooner or later. The fact it had already come around once by the time Clinton became embroiled in the Gennifer Flowers scandal during his run for the presidency four years later, helped him survive it. Bai reveals around 1990, Clinton had met Fiedler, and asked him where he thought journalists would now draw the line over reporting a candidate's extramarital affairs. When the media came at him, Clinton was ready for it.

The book ends with a poignant final act, Hart in a long semi-retirement with his wife at his remote Colorado home, occasionally sharing his foreign policy insights with Clinton in particular, but never getting the call to return to public life in a major role. He seems to have been too proud to ask for a job, even as politicians involved in far worse scandals were

rehabilitated. Bai argues if Hart had given the now familiar tear-filled public apology on a TV sofa, he could have come back. But even a quarter of a century later both Hart and Rice still refuse to confirm or deny anything that may, or may not, have happened, something Bai clearly admires.

This book would be particularly useful for students on undergraduate modules that deal with the reporting of politics, investigative journalism, or journalism history more generally. It fills in some of the 'what happened next' in American journalism for when students have finished *All The President's Men*. The tale of the *Herald's* pursuit of Hart offers a classic case study for ethics seminars.

Shortly after the book's publication last year, the long exile finally ended when Hart was appointed by his friend John Kerry to be the new US special envoy to Northern Ireland. But even if he manages to achieve some progress there, Hart will always be the 'Monkey Business guy'. If it means intelligent, thoughtful people like him are put off standing for political office, it makes America and the rest of the world all the poorer.

**All The Truth Is Out by Matt Bai, Alfred A Knopf, 2014, ISBN 978-0307273383, RRP £17.76, 263 pp.**

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## Media Power and Plurality: From Hyperlocal to High-Level Policy, edited by Steven Barnett and Judith Townend

Review by Tor Clark, De Montfort University, Leicester,

**When ITV, several years ago, provocatively suggested it could no longer afford to produce its teatime regional news magazine programmes across the UK it caused an outrage among politicians, bemoaning the threat to diversity and plurality the proposed closures would cause at local level.**

It was a reaction welcomed by many journalists and even more locally-based politicians. It raised the issue of media plurality more prominently than had previously been the case despite shrinking of local and regional news providers over previous decades.

Sceptics pointed out local MPs were only making such a fuss because they needed to get themselves on regional TV to ensure recognition among their constituents. They also suggested the BBC ran more popular, often more professional-looking programmes covering the same geographic areas and often exactly the same stories. Those in the regional press also added those very stories had often been broken and already featured prominently in local newspapers. No matter. The legacy of this issue was it significantly raised the political profile of media plurality and, whatever their motives, at least politicians had an understanding and stake in the issue.

Though it might seem as the media grows exponentially the issue of media plurality has become unnecessary, this new collection of articles, stresses how the need to ensure a diversity of opinion and information has never been more necessary.

This is a timely contribution to an area often taken for granted or overlooked, and its reach extends from the very local to international affairs. The authors each focus on specific areas and issues. They analyse the existing situation and current problems, and mostly

suggest solutions towards greater guarantees of plurality. These solutions are interesting, but not without practical difficulty.

The four-part structure of this work is helpful. The first is an 'overview of the policy landscape' emphasising the UK. Barnett, a regular expert contributor to national media on this topic and the BBC in particular, contributes a useful chapter on protecting public service broadcasting.

The second part focuses on the place where arguably plurality is of the greatest and most pressing importance – the regionals and local media in the UK. The third part looks at media policy-making through international case studies and the final section offers comparative international case studies.

The editors have assembled a diverse cast of academics and other informed contributors to illuminate the landscape of plurality, including Raymond Kuhn (on media plurality in France), Peter Humphreys (on media policies in Europe) and Philip M Napoli (on US media policy-making).

The stand-out chapter for me was by Martin Moore, Director of the Media Standards Trust, and looked at lack of plurality at the smallest level, locally. In comparison to the issue of regional TV news mentioned above, where the threat was that plurality became a BBC monopoly, Moore points out in a growing number of areas (he uses the example of Port Talbot in south Wales) even the monopoly has vanished, to be replaced by an absence of locally-produced news. The impact for this on civic participation and democracy is a troubling scenario. The value here is that while this issue has been recorded in a piecemeal fashion as it has developed in trade press and the like, Moore has pulled the issues together in a compelling exposure of the crisis in parts of the UK regional media, a crisis of civic engagement and democratic participation receiving little attention.

The issues are laid out well throughout the book and solutions proposed. State intervention in proactive media policy to ensure plurality is much discussed, as is a US-style model of news media as charitable enterprises. Both these remedies deserve greater exploration in the UK, but despite the need for them, it seems unlikely these initiatives are or will become Government policy priorities. Perhaps it is time to rattle the cages of those local MPs again?

It is easy for those of us with entrenched interests in the plurality of journalism to become depressed by the issues raised in this book, but ultimately its value ought to be to give plurality greater exposure to students, academics, policy-makers and the wider public. For these reasons, this text deserves to be on the reading lists of as many Journalism, Media and Politics courses as possible.

**Media Power and Plurality: From Hyperlocal to High-Level Policy edited by Steven Barnett and Judith Townend, Palgrave, 2015, Hardback, 228pp**

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## Getting Out Alive: News, Sport and Politics at the BBC by Roger Mosey

Review by John Mair, journalist and academic, co-editor of *The BBC Today; Future Uncertain*.

**Life as a BBC executive is like being a frog on a pond full of lilies. You start off on a small leaf then you hop to another, getting bigger and bigger until you either drown or become a prince. Former Director General Mark Thompson is the latter, now president of the New York Times. Roger Mosey is the former. Eventually he ran out of lilies to grace and is now Master of an Oxbridge college.**

It never pays to stay in a job for life in the Corporation. Two years hop, then two years hop again all the time saying: 'This is the best job I have ever had' and decrying ambition. That's for the troops and the wannabe presenters.

Mosey had a humble start in broadcasting as a community producer at Pennine Radio, a commercial station. That home town station did not delay him long. Soon he was off to BBC local radio as a reporter then producer at BBC Radio Lincoln and Northampton. He got the management bug and it has never left him.

That stage proved too small, so off to network radio, where his talent outed on The World at One. Mosey is an interventionist producer/editor. Little presenter power for him. From WATO to the flagship Today. Early morning starts but a programme that speaks into the ears of the UK's ruling classes daily.

Editors either come out of Today smelling of roses or in a career coffin. Roger has always had a bouquet about him. Off he went to help set up the new-fangled Radio Five Live, mixing news and sport in a unique blend. It worked. 'Radio Bloke' found an audience. More fragrant perfume for Roger.

And so to television and, with no experience of that medium, the editorship of television news. Mosey imposed his taste and refused to transmit execution videos, substituting stills instead. That editorial edict did not prove universally popular in a TV newsroom.

Soon time to hop again to a new lily, this time to be head of sport in a department which was losing the rights to sport like so much ballast in a balloon going down. Grandstand had to be confined to the great television graveyard in the sky. Instead the BBC concentrated on doing its limited remaining portfolio well.

A shrinking department was no home for a Mosey so the London Olympics beckoned. Mosey became the BBC supremo for a fortnight of brilliant television. London 2012 was a triumph on the track and on the screens as the BBC delivered on its promise of 'every minute of all the action anywhere'.

The London Olympics showed the BBC at its magnificent best. Mosey and Olympic veteran Dave Gordon delivered a broadcasting treat only later spoiled by their peers in BAFTA deciding it was more PC to give the big gong to Channel Four's Paralympic Games coverage.

Roger had alighted on his biggest lily to date and should have jumped onto the bank and away

But, as ever, just one more job beckoned. He wanted to be director of television, in charge of the whole shooting match. It was not to be, Danny Cohen got that gig. Roger shunted off to be editorial director of the whole Corporation, a la Mark Byford but without the Deputy Director General courtesy title. Time for an exit. Selwyn College Cambridge fell into his lap. The frog was off to a new pond.

But release from the Corporation meant a looser tongue. No need to toe the corporate line all the time. Post-BBC Roger has become a bit of a hired gun for some non-BBC-likers. He is against the Corp's size, now, and against the perceived bias, now.

Hence this book, a sort of love song to the BBC and a career on the broadcasting pond with some barbs thrown in. Very well written it is too. But with friends like this so critical, how can the BBC survive the greatest existential threat in its 93-year history with a Prime Minister intent on 'closing them down' and a Secretary of State whose motto seems to be: 'Private, good; BBC bad!'

The BBC, one of the great inventions of the twentieth century, may have survived the machete assaults of the Tories but in what shape? Time for some other big bullfrogs to come to it defence.

**Getting Out Alive; News, Sport and Politics at the BBC, by Roger Mosey, Biteback, 2015. ISBN 978 1849548311**

## **News and Politics: the rise of Live and Interpretative Journalism by Stephen Cushion**

**Review by Ivor Gaber, University of Sussex**

**The current controversy over the BBC's coverage of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn makes Cushion's book a timely and important contribution to our understanding of the role of television's coverage of politics within the fast-shifting ecology of contemporary news media.**

Cushion, who has been writing extensively about television journalism in recent years, seeks to place the notion of 'mediatization' at the centre of debates about broadcast coverage of politics. Mediatization is an approach to the study of political communication which posits that the media are not just neutral vehicles for communicating political news and information but also shape and frame the processes, and narratives of politics both as an activity in itself and of the society where that activity is located.

So, for example, the notion of 'political leadership' becomes one no longer based around the political and personal skills of an individual per se but becomes primarily focused around that leader's ability, or lack of, to use the media effectively, and also the extent to which he or she is used by the media to shape a positive or negative political persona. The negative framing of Labour leader Ed Miliband at the last election is a particular case in point.

Mediatization, as a concept, is particularly relevant to political coverage because politics accounts for more moments of 'live' television than any other topic. The two-way gives the reporter great scope to introduce his or her own interpretation of events, as opposed to the scope he or she has when doing a standard television news package.

Cushion covers the way politics has been covered in fixed-time television news bulletins, comparing changes over time and place over the last 40 years in the US, the UK and Norway on both public and private channels. He analyses the formats of television reporting including newscasters reading to camera, reporter packages, interviews and his particular focus, 'the live', which includes either, or both, the reporter delivering his or her interpretation of the 'story' straight-to-camera, or the newscaster and the reporter in the field having a semi-scripted interview about current developments.

The argument - and it is a difficult one to refute - is it is in these 'lives' the real power of the reporter lies and thus their presence or absence can be seen as the real driver of the mediatization process. The live piece-to-camera is, in one way, less risky in that it has a large element of scripting or at least memorisation. The two-way, on the other hand, although it usually has a loose semi-scripted structure can lead the reporter into areas of interpretation and speculation he or she might, on reflection, rather not have gone.

An example of this was the now notorious two-way between BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan and the presenter of Radio 4's Today programme in 2003, in which Gilligan suggested the then government had deliberately lied about Sadaam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction. The consequences of this 'slip' are now well-known, leading to a major inquiry, the resignation of BBC top brass and, some would argue, the hobbling of BBC reporting for the decade that followed.

Cushion's point is now 24-hour news channels, social media and other online forms of

news have displaced the static television news bulletin as principle sources of breaking news (just as the TV bulletins did with newspapers) then the bulletins have had to find a new role. This they have done by becoming vehicles of news interpretation as much, if not more, than they are vehicles of news dissemination. Cushion reveals between 1992 and 2012 the percentage of time of either live pieces-to-camera, or two-ways, on the early evening TV news bulletins on the BBC went up from 2.2% to 10.8% and the corresponding figures for ITV were 9.3% and 14.9%.

This trend has significant implications for the processes of democracy and communication. Despite the fact TV news bulletins now have to compete with many other sources of news, the latest research confirms the trend of the last 30 years - that for the majority of the population these bulletins are still their most used and most trusted sources of news. So, to what extent should we be concerned so much of the political coverage being carried by these bulletins is less reportage and more opinionage (to coin a phrase)?

Cushion suggests this is not necessarily a matter for disquiet, in that the interpretative mode gives the political reporter the space and the time to put into some sort of perspective, and context, the hurly burly of the day's breaking story. And providing this is done with a passion for rigour and fairness, this can be seen as a positive addition to the cornucopia of news offerings now available to the public.

This has been at the heart of the controversy that has raged since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party in 2015, when many have criticised the BBC and its political editor Laura Kuenssberg. She has been accused of allowing her own views of Corbyn's suitability to lead Labour to negatively influence her coverage. This controversy reached a crescendo when Kuenssberg persuaded a Labour shadow minister to resign live on the BBC's Daily Politics show. Cushion's book helps us to understand how events such as this can be understood as moments of political mediatization par excellence.

**News and Politics: the rise of Live and Interpretative Journalism by Stephen Cushion published by Routledge 182 pp price £90.22 hardback £24.99 paperback**

# Information for contributors

**We accept original articles about journalism education and topics linked to journalism and education that are not offered for publication elsewhere at the time of submission. Articles for peer review should be in the range of 5000-7000 words.**

Articles for Comment and Criticism should be shorter at about 3,000 to 4,000 words.

The copy deadline for the next issue is: Aug 30, 2012 but material sent earlier would be appreciated. Articles should be submitted to the editors at [ajejournal@gmail.com](mailto:ajejournal@gmail.com) together with a 100-150 word abstract. Comment and criticism articles can be more polemic and do not require an abstract.

## Presentation and submission:

Articles should be produced in Word format, double spaced and set in Times New Roman 12pt with the minimum of formatting. Please **do not** press the "enter" button to put a double space between paragraphs and do not use specialist templates. Referencing should be in standard Harvard form with citations in the form: (Simmons 1955, p404) whilst notes should be set as endnotes.

## Book Reviews:

Reviews of appropriate books should be approximately 400 words. We do not accept unsolicited reviews of books, but are always grateful to be given the opportunity to consider a review proposal. Please contact Tor Clarke, the reviews editor, if you wish to submit a review. All book reviews should include author, title, ISBN number, publisher, number of pages and price.

## Presentation and submission:

All tables and figures should be produced separately either at the end of the article or in a separate file. Each should be clearly labelled Table 1:..... Table 2:..... Fig. 1:.... Fig. 2: etc and a note inserted in the text identifying approximately where it should be placed.

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Papers are sent to at least two referees for comment. On return your paper will be accepted, accepted following editing as identified by the referees or refused. Comment and criticism pieces and book reviews will be decided by the editors but may be accepted on the basis that they are edited as identified.

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Once accepted, authors are expected to return proofs within 72 hours of receipt.

# Journalism Education

## The Journal of the Association for Journalism Education

The Association for Journalism Education is a subject discipline membership association of journalism schools in higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland.

## Volume five, number one. Inside this issue:

**Special issue, guest edited by Paul Mihailidis and Stephanie Craft.**

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### Reviews

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