

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 70th 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 70th, Hong Kong belongs to the "noticeable problems" group along with Japan and South Korea. Vietnam, on the other hand, came in at 175th, grouped in the "very serious situation" category where China (176th) and North Korea (179th) 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

Source Evaluation Checklist			
<i>Source = Any individual who provides information to a reporter, whether quoted, paraphrased or otherwise cited</i>			
I	Independent	Does the quoted person (source) have personal interests at stake?	Potential personal interests: Financial, Emotional, Political, professional, Religious, Safety
M	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?
V	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?
A	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?
I	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?
N	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.
			Red Flags: Does this source have greater access to the scene or information?
			Red Flags: Credible people, but outside their expertise. I.E. Lawyer talking science, engineer talking investments.
			Red Flags: Strong language, emphatic tone, instead of strong evidence.
			Red Flags: Family, team-mates, house-mates, friends are less credible than independent corroborators.
			Red Flags: Employer/investor, Lover, Patron, Colleague, Pastor, Neighbor

(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
Primary Goal	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.
Methods	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.
Practitioners	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.
Outcomes	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