

# 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**

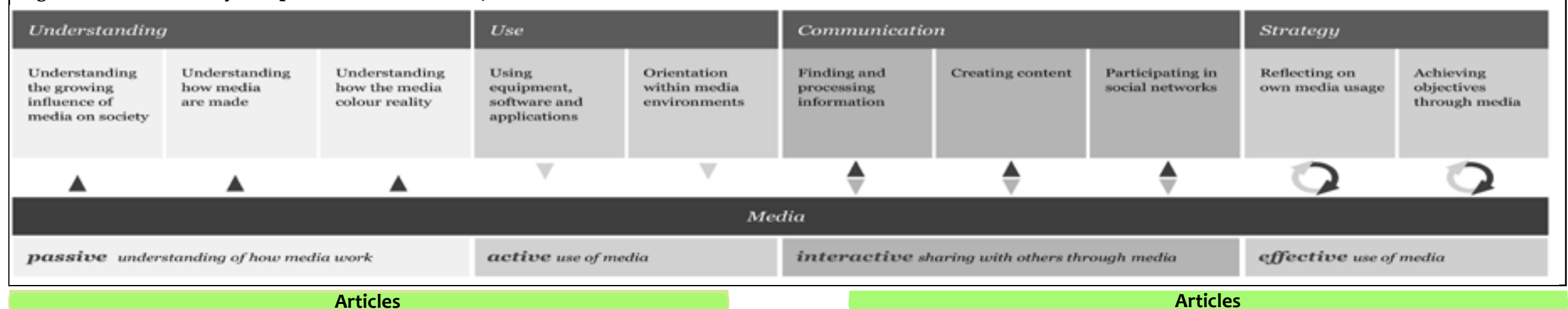
The discussed media literacy competence model is particularly meant for players in the professional field (e.g., teachers, library staff, media experts). It is less useful for scientific purposes as a theoretical framework is lacking. Moreover, methods for studying and evaluating the effectiveness of 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.

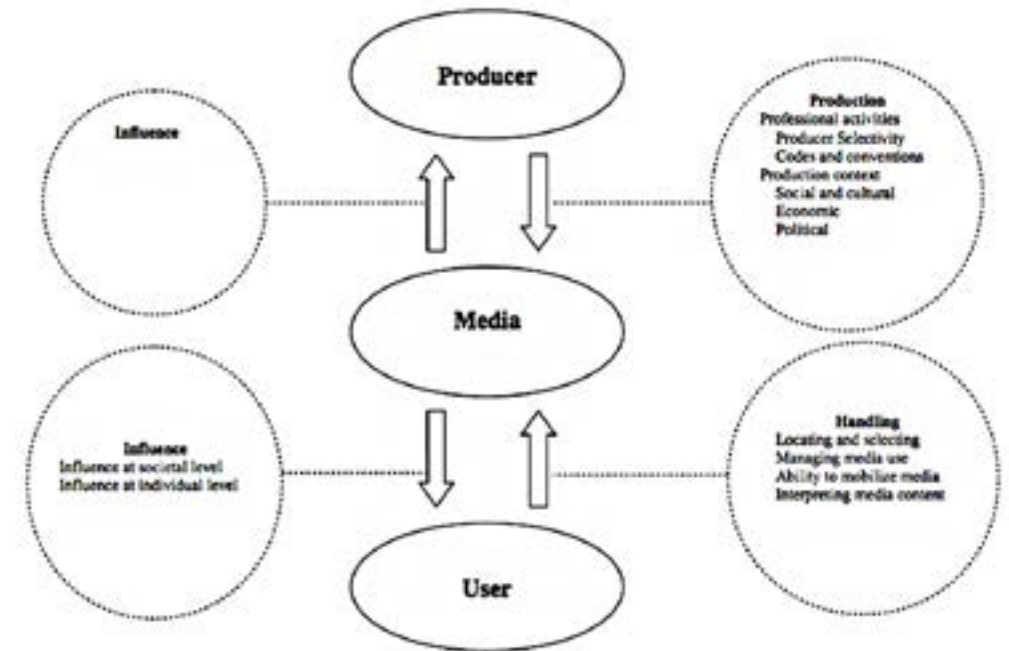
We use Rosenbaum’s model to measure student’s news media literacy knowledge instead of skills or attitudes. Although we are aware that we therefore do not include the most comprehensive measure of news media literacy in our study (cf. Ashley *et al* 2013; Clark and Monserrate 2011; Fleming 2014), we 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.

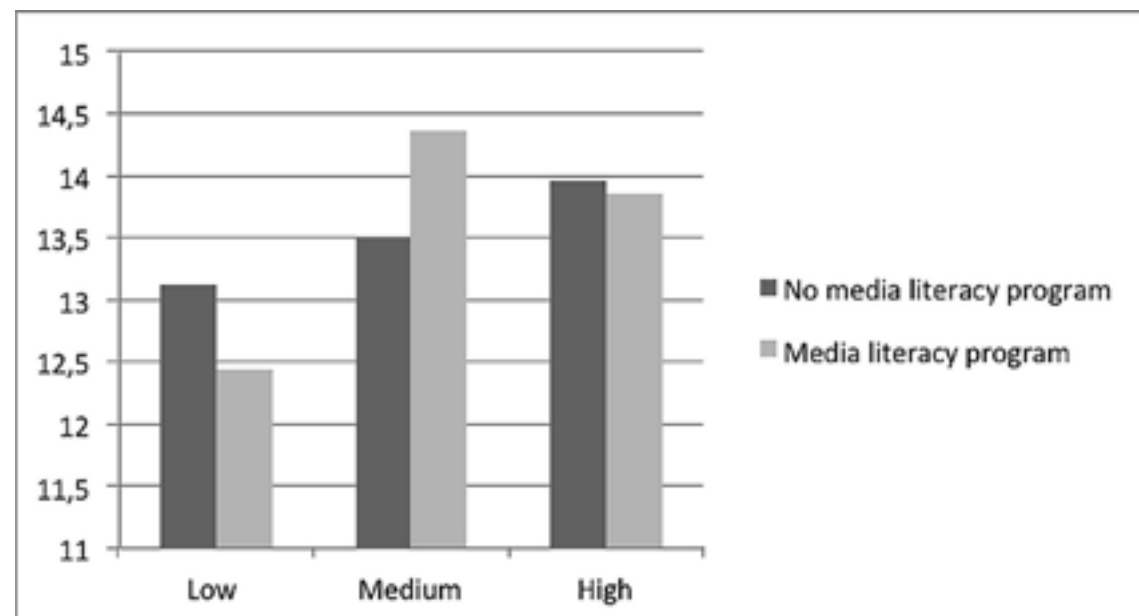
We also questioned (RQ2) whether gender might influence levels of news media literacy. We investigated differences in news media literacy between male and female students, but no variance was found ( $p = .884$ ). Moreover, we tested effects of age (H3). Results showed that age matters to some extent ( $F(2,1252) = 2.53$ ;  $p = .080$ ). 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