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Exploring News Media Literacy and its Dimensions

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A B S T R A C T

Our civic and democratic participation mostly relies on the quality of the news we consume. In this study, news media literacy dimensions are explored. It looks at how intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control relate to one's knowledge of news media. It adopted the measure of news media literacy, which defines who a news media literate is. Through a two-part questionnaire on a media knowledge test and self-reported news literacy dimensions sent to Grade 11 students of a Philippine private high school, results show that the students have a low news media literacy level. The absence of a news literacy course is considered a reason for this. Results also challenge the idea that higher news literacy levels result in higher levels of intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control. Although the results indicate evidence of these factors, knowledge structure appears irrelevant in one's motivation to consume and engage in news media, levels of news media skepticism, and media locus of control. Recent news literacy studies have identified other factors, such as the need for cognition and social norms, as legitimate considerations when understanding news literacy dimensions. These findings lead to the importance of adding news literacy competencies, which are recommended for the high school curriculum. Further research on other dimensions, such as those identified earlier, is recommended as news literacy is a developing area of news media literacy study.

RESUMO

A nossa participação cívica e democrática assenta sobretudo na qualidade das notícias que consumimos. Neste estudo, as dimensões da alfabetização midiática são exploradas. Ele analisa como a motivação intrínseca, o ceticismo da mídia de notícias e o locus de controle da mídia se relacionam com o conhecimento da mídia de notícias. Adotou a medida de alfabetização midiática, que define quem é um alfabetizado midiático. Por meio de um questionário de duas partes sobre um teste de conhecimento de mídia e dimensões auto-relatadas de alfabetização de notícias enviadas a alunos da 11ª série de uma escola particular nas Filipinas, os resultados mostram que os alunos têm um baixo nível de alfabetização de mídia de notícias. A ausência de um curso de alfabetização jornalística é considerada uma razão para isso. Os resultados também desafiam a ideia de que níveis mais altos de alfabetização jornalística resultam em níveis mais altos de motivação intrínseca, ceticismo da mídia jornalística e locus de controle da mídia. Embora os resultados indiquem evidências desses fatores, a estrutura do conhecimento parece irrelevante na motivação de alguém para consumir e se engajar na mídia jornalística, nos níveis de ceticismo da mídia jornalística e no locus de controle da mídia. Estudos recentes de alfabetização jornalística identificaram outros fatores, como a necessidade de cognição e normas sociais, como considerações legítimas ao entender as dimensões da alfabetização jornalística. Esses achados levam à importância de agregar competências de alfabetização jornalística, que são recomendadas para o currículo do ensino médio. Mais pesquisas sobre outras dimensões, como as identificadas anteriormente, são recomendadas, pois a alfabetização jornalística é uma área em desenvolvimento no estudo da alfabetização midiática.

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Introduction

The new challenges of the digital age demand new skills like News Media Literacy (NML). UNESCO (2017) identifies NML as an empowering tool in literate societies. Media experts Maksl et al. (2015) define News Media Literacy as the knowledge and motivations required to identify and engage with news or journalism in general.

NML can help learners navigate the complex landscape of information and news access (Jeong et al., 2012; Maksl et al., 2017). In the practice of these literacies, the aim is a media-literate society that is empowered with quality information in making personal, professional, and political decisions.

This study draws upon the ideas of Maksl et al. (2015) where they designed a tool to assess levels of news media literacy among teenagers. The tool was primarily based on the work of Potter's (2004) Cognitive Model of Media. Potter's model asserts that news media literates are critical of media content, perceive they have control over media influence, and have high knowledge about how the media operates. Accordingly, highly news-literate respondents are also more motivated news consumers, more skeptical, and more knowledgeable of current events than their less news-literate peers.

The Cognitive Model of Media has four factors: knowledge structures, individual locus, competencies and skills, and information processing tasks. Potter (2004) sees these factors as an interactive system that begins with knowledge structures which refers to one's knowledge of media content, media effects, industries, the real world, and the self. These structures are processed through the individual locus (goals and drives), which can be used to describe one's motivation for news consumption (Maksl et al., 2015). Several studies indicate that news media knowledge can predict outcomes such as skepticism for conspiracy theories and critical consumption of news (Ashley et al., 2017; Craft, 2017; Maksl et al., 2015). Intrinsic motivation for news media means that news validation is essential to news consumption and literacy (Ku et al.,2019). Several studies indicate that intrinsic motivation predicts relevant news literacy skills such as healthy skepticism, critical news consumption, and evaluation (Tamboer et al., 2022; Maksl et al., 2017; Maskl et al., 2015). News-literate individuals are also likely to know more about current events (Maksl et al., 2015). Media Locus of Control (MLOC) refers to the degree of individuals' belief on how they are affected by news media (Maksl et al., 2017). It helps in addressing online disinformation and misinformation (Nagel, 2021). It is also identified as a moderating variable in social media information seeking (Su & Xiao, 2022). While avoiding cynicism, skepticism allows the ability to distinguish between high-quality and low-quality (or false) information (Vraga & Tully, 2019). Other studies point to the relationship between knowledge structures as a predictor of media skepticism, political participation, and valuing media literacy (Ashley et al., 2017; Craft et al., 2017; Maksl et al., 2015; Tully & Vraga, 2018a).

Altogether, news media literacy is multi-faceted, demanding an understanding of how these dimensions interact.

Being able to understand and engage with media messages is vital to society. Research supports this idea, and it is important that to address the challenges that go with the digital age. NML Education can allow students to learn how to distinguish between misinformation and disinformation. Not only does this better them as digital citizens but also as civic participants.

Hence, the study aims to contribute to the need for more studies on news literacy for younger populations, as Maksl et al. (2015) identified. Several stakeholders, such as the teachers and students, can benefit from the study. The study can provide opportunities for critical thinking, which is pivotal to society.

This study aims to assess students' news literacy level, especially in the following areas: knowledge structures, intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following problems: to determine students' news literacy level on knowledge structure (knowledge of media content, media effects, and industries) and to analyse the students' level of news literacy on knowledge structures with Intrinsic Motivation, News Media Skepticism, and Media Locus of Control.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive quantitative approach to assess the participants' news literacy level. The study was conducted at the University of Baguio Science High School, specifically for Grade 11 students from the academic year 2021-2022. Using the Cochran formula with the desired level of precision of 93%, the sample is computed at 95 from the total population of 219. The data was collected through a questionnaire based on the study of Maksl et al. (2015) on Measuring News Literacy. The measure is an open resource replicated, adapted, and modified by several studies (Nagel, 2021; McWhorter,2019; Maksl et al.,2017). Some items were modified to fit the Philippine context. For example, western cable channels in the original questionnaire on knowledge structure were changed (from PBS, an American non-profit TV network, to PTV, the closest Filipino counterpart for item 2 on testing knowledge structures). The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on testing the respondents' knowledge structures, including knowledge of media content, media effects, and industries. This section is a 10-item multiple-choice test. The final section of the questionnaire covers the following factors on personal locus (Potter, 2004): Intrinsic motivation (4 questions), Media locus of control (5 questions), News media skepticism (8 questions).

To test the knowledge of the respondents on news media industries, frequency and percent were used to present the students' knowledge of media (knowledge structure). A score of 1-5 is described as low literacy, while a score of 6-10 is high.

To identify whether the student's knowledge structure relates to other factors (intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control), the researchers used the mean to generalize the data.

The researchers maintained confidentiality, ensured anonymity, and secured identifiable information from the participants.

Results and discussions

The Students' Knowledge Structures on News Media

Based on the 10-point knowledge structures test, most students scored below 6 points. 60% of the students have low literacy on knowledge structures, while less than half have high literacy. A majority of the students need a basic understanding on the knowledge of media content, media effects, and industries, which are indicators of knowledge structures.

Table 1.

The knowledge structure for news media

Knowledge Structure	frequency	Percent (%)
Low literacy	57	60.00
High literacy	38	40.00

Students needed help with the values underpinning news production and media ownership, as these factors significantly impact news content. Information is the foundation of knowledge structures since it is seen as necessary to engage and process information (Potter, 2004). Apart from the skills of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating messages, one of the critical components of news literacy is knowledge (Tully, 2021). Similarly, news knowledge is vital to NML-related skills such as news consumption, civic engagement, detection of false information, and disbelief of conspiracies (Vraga et al., 2020).

The respondents' non-exposure to a news media literacy course may contribute to the low scores in knowledge structures. The importance of a news media literacy curriculum agrees with studies indicating that taking NML courses results in higher news media literacy (Jeong et al., 2012; Maksl et al., 2017; Guess et al., 2020). The results also establish why an NML course is necessary, as knowledge of media industries can help prevent misinformation (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Miller, 2019).

Apart from the absence of a news literacy course, other NML dimensions may explain why the results yielded low literacy. Individual differences, specifically one's Need for Cognition (NFC), may have affected the results. NFC is characterized by a person's engagement and enjoyment of critical thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). It also contributes to news media

literacy levels and growth (Maksl et al., 2015; Tully & Vraga, 2017). The respondents may have low levels of NFC, which this study has not explored.

The Students' News Literacy Level and other News Literacy Dimensions

Based on the results, the students demonstrate other news literacy factors, identified as intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control.

Both NML groups who scored high and low in knowledge structures share the same values in news consumption – that there is an inherent benefit to it. Maksl et al. (2015) argue that highly news-literate individuals are likely to be motivated to consume news because of the value they can derive from it. However, regardless of NML level, students see an inherent drive to consume news. The results denote an understanding of adolescents' motivation for news and what other news literacy skills it predicts. Apart from the absence of an NML course, as discussed earlier, the result can be attributed to the respondents' attitudes toward the media and how they apply NML values in news analysis.

Table 2.

The Students' Knowledge Structure in relation to other NML Dimensions

Other NML Dimensions	Knowledge Structure	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intrinsic Motivation	High Literacy	3.03	0.5446
	Low Literacy	3.05	0.5148
News media skepticism	High Literacy	2.54	0.2919
	Low Literacy	2.52	0.3341
Media locus of control	High Literacy	3.15	0.4914
	Low Literacy	3.03	0.4137

The results validate how adolescents value the news and their internal motivation to seek it (Tamboer et al., 2022; Ku et al., 2019). Although adolescents see news to be important, they perceive it as not inclusive (Tamboer et al., 2022) and portray them unfavorably (Condeza-Dall'Orso, 2014). They are also inclined to share content regardless of accuracy as long as it resonates with their interests (Herrero-Diz, 2020).

The other dimension of NML, value for media literacy (VML), is also a potential factor in understanding the results. People require more than simply information in order to apply their news literacy. To raise critical engagement with news, efforts to increase news literacy should consider various knowledge, skills, and other vital aspects, including attitudes, motivation, and perceived norms (Tully, 2021).

Rather than early adolescents' knowledge, valuing news literacy is a consistent component in news analysis and evaluation (Tamboer et al., 2022). VML also improves other critical dimensions of news literacy (Tamboer, et al., 2022; Tully, et al., 2018a).

The result demonstrates the benefits of motivation to boost news literacy application while deemphasizing the significance of knowledge on news production (Tamboer, 2022). Qualitative and quantitative studies support the significance of motivation in early adolescents' critical engagement with news (e.g., Swart, 2021; Tamboer et al., 2020; Vandamme & Van Leuven, 2019).

Adolescents' motivation is crucial in becoming more informed news consumers (Tamboer et al., 2020). Potter (2018) recommends valuing NML and motivation makes adolescents critical news consumers.

The results also show the same pattern for news media skepticism. Regardless of NML level, the respondents share the same skepticism towards news media. Aside from intrinsic motivation, skepticism predicted the critical thinking skills of adolescents (Ku et al., 2019; Kartal et al., 2017). Although several studies show that news media knowledge contributes to NML outcomes like skepticism (Ashley et al., 2017; Craft et al., 2017; Maksl et al., 2015), the students perceive themselves to be cautious of news media, even with little to no background on news media knowledge. Increased exposure to news can be a factor since new media have made news accessible, whether the youth seek it or not (Ohme et al., 2022). The relationship between skepticism and news consumption is corroborated by several studies (e.g., Elvestad et al., 2018; Vraga & Tully, 2019; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006).

Notably, value for media literacy (VML) can also be attributed to the results for media skepticism since VML is also found to predict news media skepticism (Tamboer et al., 2022). Hence, further study can include how VML plays a role in motivation and skepticism. Nonetheless, skepticism remains an essential dimension for NML since it allows individuals to distinguish factual information from opinion to make informed decisions in the post-truth era (Ku et al., 2019; Vraga & Tully, 2021).

Similarly, the results point to evidence of media locus of control. This means that the students have a sense of control over the media they consume, which is true regardless of their news media literacy levels.

There are a few studies (e.g., Vraga et al., 2015; Maksl et al., 2015) that have dealt with the relationship between news media knowledge and perceived locus of control, and these led to the idea that highly literate teens have high levels of media locus of control and high levels of a knowledge structure (i.e., the basic understanding of the economic and regulatory structure of news media). The results of this study indicate otherwise. Individual characteristics can help explain why the results for media locus of control (MLOC) differ from knowledge structure results. Not only are individuals found to have a unique locus of control (Hussin & Hamzah, 2021), but one's perception of the importance of media literacy also

influences the development of other dimensions of NML (Tully & Vraga, 2018a). Considering adolescents' news consumption is also recommended when determining their locus for news (Tamboer et al., 2020).

MLOC and knowledge structures also have distinct effects on other NML dimensions and skills as seen in several studies (Nagel, 2021; Ashley, et al., 2017; Tully & Vraga, 2017; Maksl et al., 2017;). As a case in point, there is a weak correlation between news media locus of control and critical analysis of news stories. Instead, an individual's knowledge of news media production is identified to contribute to the critical evaluation of news (Ku et al., 2019).

Overall, the computed mean for students with high literacy and low literacy implies that the NML level of the students does not affect the students' views on intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control. Thus, having high or low literacy will not guarantee a high news level of motivation, skepticism, and media locus of control. Other than the reasons raised earlier, it is possible that the student's perception of their peers' NL behaviors can explain why there seems to be an incompatibility between their NL level (knowledge structure) and other NL dimensions (intrinsic motivation, news media skepticism, and media locus of control).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can help understand news literacy behaviors by considering the three factors: attitude towards the behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. Among these three, social norms could have played a role in the results as these generally consider the social pressures people feel about exhibiting news literacy behaviors (Vraga et al., 2021). Although social norms have yet to be considered in this study, this gap can be a viable area of exploration.

Supportive social norms, where peers see the inherent value in news literacy behaviors, such as verifying news content, are prerequisites to adolescent NL behaviors. This is evident in several studies (e.g., Swart, 2021; Tamboer et al., 2020; Vraga et al., 2020).

Additionally, individuals' perception of their media habits, as captured in self-perceived media literacy (SPML), goes together with their valuing of news media literacy (Vandamme, K., & Van Leuven, S. (2019). The respondents may have overestimated their levels of news media literacy. This inaccurate estimation of one's media literacy level (Vraga et al., 2015; Tully & Vraga, 2018b) can be why knowledge of news media scores and other dimensions in the NML is incompatible with the results of Maksl et al.'s (2015) study.

When looking at NML, it is imperative to study the dimensions and how they relate, as NML is multi-dimensional and complex. NML studies support this (e.g., Vraga et al., 2015; Tamboer et al., 2020; Swart, 2021; Tamboer et al., 2022).

Final considerations/ Conclusions

The results in this study do not reflect the operationalized assumption that a high level of news literacy is congruent to a high level of other indicators such as intrinsic motivation,

news media skepticism, and media locus of control. There are several reasons for this. First, the absence of a news literacy course, or any related subject like media literacy, could have contributed to the disconnection between knowledge structures and the other indicators. Second, the results show how several indicators play a role in understanding NML. Since NML theory is deemed multi-dimensional, other factors not found in the original NML scale should be considered in understanding news media literacy. For example, the students' need for cognition (NFC), value for media literacy (VML), self-perceived media literacy (SPML), as well as social norms may have played a role in the assessment of news media literacy. These dimensions are areas undetermined in this study, but this very absence may be a reason for these results.

These are the recommendations based on the conclusions of the study. First, an NML subject, including its competencies, must be infused in aligned senior high courses such as Media and Information Literacy and Trend, Networks, and Critical Thinking. An NML course aids in improving news literacy. Second, future studies on other dimensions of news media literacy like NFC, VML, and SPML can be tested and how it connects to students' knowledge structures.

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