News Media Literacy: Effects of Consumption

CHRISTINE MCWHORTER
Norfolk State University, USA

This study examines the relationship between news consumption habits, prosumption, and news media literacy among young adults. Maskl, Ashley, and Craft provide the basis for the modified survey instrument used in this study. The findings suggest that the amount of news consumed does not predict news media literacy on any level. However, news type can predict news media literacy. Moreover, acting as a prosumer by sharing unoriginal news stories (reposting) is associated with news media literacy. Sharing original stories, video, or pictures is not.

Keywords: news media literacy, news credibility, news consumption

Media are more ubiquitous now than ever before. Scholars note that young adults (ages 18–25) spend the bulk of their waking hours with technology (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015). During the course of a day, viewers are inundated with visual messages that include social, consumer, and political ideas. With the massive influence of advertising, corporate agendas, and entertainment in traditional news, along with the inaccurate information often found in online news sources, navigating media messages can be confusing. Educators argue that many adults, especially young adults, lack media literacy skills—the ability to analyze media messages. Many scholars believe helping consumers increase their level of media literacy—defined as the ability to analyze, access, evaluate, and create media (Aufderheide, 1993)—will enable them to navigate the complex layers of information that are encountered through media. However, empirical tests on media literacy are sparse, especially in the area of news.

Media Literacy in News

As media channels proliferate and evolve, it is necessary for consumers to gain the skill required to navigate media in various contexts. A topic that is of significant interest to educators and scholars is news media. News outlets, both traditional and new, are responsible for informing the public, gatekeeping, and monitoring the government—all while forming relevant agendas in the public sphere. The role of news media in aggregating the pressing, valuable information for citizens cannot be overstated (Christians, 2009). In a time when digital media and Internet use have become commonplace in the lives of young adults, many previously established patterns of how audiences interact with news organizations and content have shifted. The current news media environment is markedly different from the traditional news environment in many ways. An increase in soft news, changes in the presentation of news, and changes in how the audience

Christine McWhorter: christinemcwhorter@gmail.com

interacts could all affect how individuals assess and understand news media. As a result of these recent changes, educators and scholars are interested in news media literacy, or "the knowledge and motivations needed to identify, appreciate and engage with quality journalism" (Ashley, Maskl, & Craft, 2013, p. 7). News media literacy comprises

> the degree to which one engages in mindful versus automatic thought-processing of news, the degree to which one perceives herself as being in control versus the news media being in control of the influence of news media, and the knowledge one has of the institutions that produce news, the way in which the content of the news is produced and effects of that content on people. (Ashley et al., 2013, p. 7)

During the past few decades, educators, advocates, and researchers have developed initiatives to increase news media literacy. However, factors that contribute to news media literacy are still in the process of being determined. Changes in the news media landscape undoubtedly significantly affect the way people gain news media literacy.

This study explores how young adults consume news in terms of types of news, how much news is consumed, and whether they are active participants in news-related activity (blogs, etc.). The study explicates whether these variables are related to news media literacy.

Literature Review

This review of research and scholarship provides an overview of the current understanding of news consumption and news media literacy.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The uses and gratifications theoretical perspective supports the idea that consumption time and habits may affect news media literacy. According to uses and gratifications theory, audience members are not passive consumers of media. Instead, they purposely seek out media to satisfy individual needs. It has long been known that the uses and gratifications theory helps explain how different motivations for news use affect consumers' recollection of mediated news and information. For example, people who watch news primarily to gain information tend to recall more than those who watch for recreation (Gantz, 1978). In the same vein, people who consume specific types of news do so for particular reasons. For instance, an individual who uses hard news does so for informative purposes, while one who uses soft news does so to be entertained or to play (Hanson & Haridakis, 2008).

The introduction of fragmentation into the media landscape allows younger generations to have more choices, which could bolster their tendency to think critically about those choices (Deuze, 2008). Diddi and LaRose (2006) contend, "Members of 'the first internet generation' . . . are less likely to read newspapers than older people and less likely to watch network news" (p. 197). It is reasonable to believe that these digital natives (Prensky, 2001) understand the news process differently than previous generations. The uses and gratifications framework may help explain whether the consumption of certain

types or amounts of news or the use of particular news platforms is associated with level of news media literacy on all four dimensions used in this study, which are: knowledge of media structures, mindfulness, locus of control, and knowledge of media effects.

News Procurement Trends

News in American life is pervasive. On average, 92% of adult Americans obtain or are exposed to the news in various formats each day (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). Since the early 2000s, convergence journalism has blurred the boundaries among print, broadcast, and online journalism (Deuze, 2008). Participatory journalism and independent news blogs add layers of complexity to the media environment. Moreover, the proliferation of digital and social media environments enables citizens to reach others across the globe without going through traditional media gatekeepers (Flew, 2012). Although multinational media conglomerates still dominate the field, alternative forms of journalism are changing the practice of journalism, the decades-old paradigm of agenda setting, and the overall structure of news organizations in the United States (Messner & Distaso, 2008). As a result, scholars' understanding of how young adults consume news is evolving. Recent trends show an increase in online and incidental news consumption, the consistency of television as the primary news platform, and satire news shows as a growing source for news.

Online News

Many Americans get their news from an online source fairly regularly. In one study, 46% of the respondents indicated that they obtain their news online three or more times per week. In the same study, 32% went online for news daily (Pew Research Center, 2012). Many users of social media sites get their news from those sites. For instance, 50% of surveyed Facebook users obtain news from the social network platform. The same is true of Twitter; 50% use Twitter for news. However, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Pinterest all have smaller consumer bases that visit for news purposes (Hobbs, 2010).

Television News

Despite increasing fragmentation among news media and audiences, television remains the primary news source for people at home. A Pew Research Center analysis of Nielsen data reports that national cable news captivates audiences for the longest amount of time per day, but local television news attracts the largest audiences, with 71% viewing this type of news media content (Mitchell & Jurkowitz, 2013).

Incidental News Use

Not all news procurement is intentional; when this is the case, it is called incidental exposure (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001). It is likely that online news consumers receive a significant portion of their news inadvertently (Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013). Use of the Internet or social networks for any purpose raises the probability of inadvertent news consumption. Internet users are regularly exposed to news as a corollary of general Web use (Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Salwen, 2005). This scenario is especially prevalent among young adults and social media users. Friends post links on social media, and news retrieval

is almost accidental (Lee, 2007). Overall, exposure to the Internet is positively associated with incidental exposure to news. People who use the Web for news are also more involved in the political process and more knowledgeable about news overall (Tewksbury et al., 2001).

Satire News Shows

Televised political comedy shows have grown in popularity, particularly with young adult audiences. Research has shown that many young people obtain news through news satire shows such as *The Daily Show* (Hollander, 2005; Meroney, 2000). Some viewers apparently often use these shows as their primary source of news. Cao and Brewer (2008) note that 25% of Americans obtain information about political elections from political comedy shows. Austin, Pinkleton, Beam, and Borah (2013) found that *The Daily Show* was tied as the "third most cited source among young adults, just behind major newspaper websites (30%) and news from search engines such as Google and Yahoo (28%), and are on par with online news discussion blogs (26%), and TV news websites (26%)" (p. 5).

Media Consumption and News Media Literacy

Scholars have found relationships between media consumption and several variables related to news media literacy, such as knowledge, critical analysis of sources, and even media type.

Credibility, Consumption, and Knowledge

Much of the research on news media literacy involves the perceived credibility of the news source. Since criticism is a crucial component of news media literacy (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011), scholars contend that if people can accurately gauge the credibility of a news source, their level of news media literacy should be higher. However, young adults often have difficulty determining source credibility. Young adults rank online news sites linked to traditional media outlets as strong and credible (Melican & Dixon, 2008). Furthermore, although young adult consumers have a higher level of news media literacy than younger consumers, young adult audiences still do not analyze news and news sources at the same level as older adults. For instance, overall, young adult users find Internet sources to be more credible than older users do (Bucy, 2003; Metzger, Flanagin, & Zwarun, 2003). Moreover, many fail to verify online information from any source (Metzger, 2007).

Consumption also seems to affect news-related knowledge. Among light users of television news, news-related knowledge gaps exist between high and low education groups. However, among heavy users of television, the gap is not as pronounced. A similar pattern exists among newspaper users (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). The use of diverse news sources is also associated with a higher level of news knowledge (Kohut, Morin, & Keeter, 2007). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that consumption will affect an individual's level of news media literacy on each of the four dimensions: knowledge of media structures, mindfulness, locus of control, and knowledge of media effects.

Satire News Consumption

Another consideration in the relationship between consumption and news media literacy is the sheer proliferation of news satire on television and on the Web. Broadcast and cable television shows that feature news for entertainment present satirical news content that follows the traditional form and structure of stories published by established news organizations. Yet these programs are not intended to be news sources; rather, they are intended to entertain. Conventional wisdom would assume that since these shows are created for entertainment purposes, any news credibility of the anchors, hosts, and content would be minimal. However, studies show that these outlets have impacted public opinion (Polk, Young, & Holbert, 2009).

About one-third of young adults use television or online satirical news stories as their primary news source (Baum, 2003). Although these entertainment-centered news shows are openly based on satire, they acclimate people to the idea that cable news personalities are journalists. In one study, when participants were asked to name their favorite journalist, 10% named a cable talk show host, and only 5% named an anchor of a cable news program (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The format of these types of shows further blurs the line between traditional hard news and entertainment news. Comedians such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have received accolades on a national level as respected journalists. For instance, Jon Stewart was recognized as one of the 100 most influential entertainers in 2005; Stephen Colbert was a featured speaker at a White House Correspondents' Dinner (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008).

Much more scholarly research is needed to determine the extent to which and in what specific ways consumption of satirical news stories affects news media literacy. It is clear that satire news influences audience's perception of candidates for political office. Baumgartner and Morris (2008) found that when exposed to jokes about George W. Bush and John Kerry on *The Daily Show*, participants viewed the 2004 presidential candidates more negatively. However, avid viewers of the show also tended to believe they had more expertise concerning politics.

Scholars argue that the public forms a deeper understanding through entertainment venues than through news (Cao & Brewer, 2008; Polk et al., 2009; Tsfati, Tukachinsky, & Peri, 2009). Persuasion strategies such as humor distract audiences from the main message and reduce the likelihood that a viewer will counterargue. Critical thinking levels are also associated with satire news use (Austin et al., 2013; LaMarre & Walther, 2013; Thompson, 2009). These findings imply that young adults who consume satirical news are more aware of the news environment and its effects, indicating an association between news media literacy and knowledge of media effects.

Hard and Soft News Consumption

People prefer being entertained over being informed and will not forgo the payoff that entertainment brings (Baum, 2003). Thus, they are likely to focus on news that they find entertaining. The implication here is that soft news containing entertainment can sway people to pay attention to news they

would otherwise ignore. However, it is not clear whether audiences of this form of news are viewing, listening to, or reading it critically.

People tend to know more soft news than hard news. For instance, they might be familiar with news about celebrities and about scandals involving elected officials. Further, "people who prefer soft news are significantly less knowledgeable than those who prefer hard news" (Prior, 2003, p. 162), indicating hard news users may be more knowledgeable about media and its effects. Prior (2003) argues that people do not learn from soft news, which may suggest they are not consuming news mindfully.

Method

Since the measurement of news media literacy is still in its early stages, scholars have yet to identify all the factors that contribute to news media literacy. Discovering whether news use has a relationship with news media literacy is particularly useful because it is generally assumed that young adults with higher levels of news media literacy use reputable sources for specific reasons (such as credibility) and that they procure news often. However, existing research lacks evidence to support this assumption. Furthermore, no model currently exists that can accurately predict relationships among these factors. This study is exploratory in nature and aims to discover which variables are associated with one another.

The following research question is posed:

RQ1:   *Does an increase in news media consumption or the news type explain changes in news media literacy levels among multiple news media literacy dimensions in young adults?*

And based on the research described above, I present the following hypotheses:

H1:   *Increases in news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects.*

H2:   *Increases in news consumption will be associated with increased locus of control.*

H3:   *Increases in news consumption will be associated with increased mindfulness.*

H4:   *Increases in news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media structures.*

H5:   *Increases in soft news consumption will be associated with increased mindfulness.*

H6:   *Increases in hard news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects.*

H7:   *Increases in satire news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects.*

Changes in the nature of traditional news media reporting and dissemination influenced by technological, economic, and other trends; citizen journalism, blogs, and other social media platforms; a converged media system and related ethical problems; and other trends and issues are inextricable parts

of today's young adults' news media experience. It will be worthwhile to discover any relationships between these factors and news media literacy. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ2:   Does an increase in prosumption activity explain changes in the level of news media literacy among multiple news media literacy dimensions in young adults?

And based on the research described above, I present the following hypotheses:

H8:   Increases in sharing original content will be associated with increased knowledge of media structures.

H9:   Increases in sharing unoriginal content (reposting) will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects.

H10:   Increases in sharing original photos or videos will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects.

Design of the Study

A survey research approach is used to examine young adults' levels of news consumption and news media literacy and whether there is a relationship between the two. A modified version of Maskl et al.'s (2015) news media literacy scale serves as the basis for this study's measurement instrument.

Sample

A survey was developed and conducted using the SurveyMonkey platform (http://www .surveymonkey.com/). Young adults ages 18–25 from across the United States responded. In addition to recruitment via SurveyMonkey, an e-mail recruitment strategy was used. E-mails asking for participants were sent to undergraduate and graduate college students. Links to the survey were also shared with groups outside the college setting; for instance, religious groups, social groups, and hobby-based groups received appeals. Finally, a link to the questionnaire at the SurveyMonkey research site was shared through social networks Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. The goal was to garner a minimum of 500 completed responses over a three-week period. Over the three-week period, 509 respondents began the survey, and 408 completed the study, for a completion rate of about 80%.

The participants were 54% female, ethnically diverse (60% White/Caucasian, 9% African American, 6% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 6% Hispanic, 6% multiple ethnicities, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native), and ranged in age from 18 to 25. Respondents had attained various levels of education: 4% had earned a graduate degree, 28% had earned a bachelor's degree, 30% had completed some college, 9% had earned an associate's degree, 13% had earned a high school degree or its equivalent, such as a GED, and 3% had earned less than a high school degree.

News Media Literacy Measurement

This study uses an instrument based on Maskl et al.'s (2015) scale, which measures news media literacy in students using 60 individual continuous variables. The scale includes three of Potter's (2013) dimensions of media literacy: mindfulness, knowledge of media structures, and locus of control. The modified version of this instrument used in this study adds items intended to measure amount and type of news consumption. It comprises four of Potter's dimensions: knowledge of media structures, media effects, locus of control, and mindfulness. In this study, the factorability of the 12 news media literacy items was determined through principal components analysis.

Knowledge of Media Structures

Potter's (2013) dimensions of media literacy serve as the basis for the knowledge of media structures measurement dimension. It is measured using a previously published scale (Maskl et al., 2015) to assess knowledge about media organizations and how they work. The dimension was measured with seven multiple-choice questions that have one correct answer each. For example, one question asks, "Who has the most influence on what gets aired on the local TV news?" (a. Individual reporters, b. The anchor, the person reading the news, c. The cameraman, d. The producer/editor, e. Don't know). The index was computed by totaling the number of correct answers.

Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to the degree to which people believe they are in control of their news experience. Respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with seven statements using a 7-point scale. The scale (α = .77) was based on Maskl et al.'s (2015) scale (α = .635). For example, two of these items state, "If I am misinformed by the news media, it is my own behavior that determines how soon I will receive credible information" and "The main thing that affects my knowledge about the world is what I myself do." A higher score indicates a greater media locus of control.

Knowledge of Media Effects

Knowledge of media effects evaluates whether people understand that news media affect them. The scale comprises three items (α = .70) that were constructed based on media theories that state a person with higher media literacy will be aware of the effects media has on them (Davison, 1983; Potter, 2013). Respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with three statements on a 7-point scale. For example, one item states, "I believe news stories have an effect on my perceptions of the world around me." A higher score denotes a higher level of knowledge of media effects.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness assesses the degree to which people are purposeful, mindful thinkers about their news experience. Responses were measured by the extent to which participants agree or disagree with three negatively worded statements (α = .70) on a 7-point scale based on one developed by Maskl et al. (2015;

α = .780). The responses to these items were reverse-coded during the data analysis. For example, one item states, "I prefer to do something that challenges my thinking abilities rather than something that requires little thought." A higher score denotes a higher degree of mindfulness.

News Consumption Media Literacy Measurement

News Consumption by Frequency

The frequency of news use is measured by asking many hours per week the participant uses news via various media platforms. Participants chose among zero hours, less than an hour, one to two hours, three to five hours, and six or more hours per week.

News Consumption by Type

Participants also noted the number of hours per week they use hard news, soft news, and satire news. Again, respondents indicated whether they use each type for zero hours, less than an hour, one to two hours, three to five hours, and six or more hours per week.

Prosumption Measurement

The digital environment has revolutionized the way people interact with news (Bowman &Willis, 2005). With this in mind, several questions measure how active participants are in the news process. Prosumption through active news contribution is measured by asking how often participants contribute to news in various ways: sharing original news content, sharing previously published news content, and sending news-related photos and videos to news organizations. Participants can choose among never, every few weeks, a few (one to three) times a week, four or more times a week, and daily.

Results

SurveyMonkey and SPSS were used to generate descriptive statistics. SPSS was used to generate inferential statistics. To examine the relationships between consumption and news media literacy, multiple regression analysis of information was generated through SPSS. This section describes the results of the data analyses conducted to discover the relationship, if any, between the dimensions of news media literacy and news consumption.

Statistical Analysis

Factor Analysis

The factorability of the 12 news media literacy items was examined using a principal components analysis with an oblimin rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling was .772, confirming the adequacy of the sample. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at 1,743.62, $p < .001$, suggesting that

correlations between items were appropriate for principal components analysis. Three composite variables represented dimensions of news media literacy. The fourth dimension, knowledge of media structures, was measured using a short quiz about the news media industry rather than a composite variable. The emergence of these dimensions confirms the usefulness of the dimensions outlined in Maskl et al.'s (2015) and Potter's (2013) studies. In addition, a standardization of the means was computed to ensure that the means are comparable. The standardized means range from 1 to 10 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Standardized Means for Composite Variables Measuring News Media Literacy for Young Adults Ages 18−25.

	No. items	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*	Cronbach's α	Standardized mean
Knowledge of media structures	7	0	7	3.76	1.9		5.38
Mindfulness	3	3	21	7.8	3.7	.77	2.68
Locus of control	6	6	42	28.8	5.9	.77	6.33
Knowledge of media effects	3	3	21	13	3.7	.70	5.55

All four dimensions of media literacy are correlated at a statistically significant level ($p < .05$; see Table 2).

Table 2. Pearson Correlation of Media Literacy Variables.

	Knowledge of media structures	Mindfulness	Locus of control	Knowledge of media effects
Knowledge of media structures	1			
Mindfulness	−0.327	1		
Locus of control	0.315	−0.218	1	
Knowledge of media effects	0.311	0.39	0.351	1

The correlations are below .400, indicating somewhat weak relationships. However, this is because aptitude in one area of news media literacy does not guarantee aptitude in others. A high score in each level would denote a high overall level of news media literacy. Since people will be stronger in some areas than others, I determine the level of news media literacy by analyzing each dimension separately.

The Relationship Between News Use and News Media Literacy

The first hypothesis (H1) predicts that increases in news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects ($R^2 = .14$, $p < .01$). A linear regression shows that news consumption does not predict knowledge of media effects ($B = −.07$, $p > .05$). Thus, H1 is not supported. The second hypothesis (H2) predicts that increases in news consumption will be associated with an increased level of locus

of control (R^2 = .002, p < .01). A linear regression shows that news consumption does not predict locus of control (B = .070, p > .05). Thus, H2 is not supported. The third hypothesis (H3) predicts that increases in news consumption will be associated with an increased level of mindfulness (R^2 = .002, p < .01). A linear regression shows that news consumption does not predict mindfulness (B = −.03, p > .05). Thus, H3 is not supported. The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicts that increases in news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media structures (R^2 = .004, p < .01). A linear regression shows that news consumption does not predict knowledge of media structures (B = −.80, p > .05). Thus, H4 is not supported.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) predicts that increases in soft news consumption will be associated with an increased level of mindfulness (R^2 = .02, p < .01). The regression confirms that greater levels of soft news consumption predict a lower level of mindfulness (B = −.14, p < .01). Thus, H5 is supported. The sixth hypothesis (H6) predicts that increases in hard news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects (R^2 = .02, p < .01). A linear regression confirms that greater levels of hard news consumption predicts a greater level of knowledge of media effects (B = .123, p < .01). Thus, H6 is supported. The seventh hypothesis (H7) predicts that increases in satire news consumption will be associated with increased knowledge media effects. A linear regression shows consumption of satire news does not predict a greater level of knowledge of media effects (B = −.74, p > .05). Thus, H7 is not supported.

Overall, the amount of news consumed does not predict news media literacy on any level. However, news type can predict news media literacy.

Active Participation in the News Process Through Prosumption

This study finds that young adults use a variety of social media platforms to share news stories. The eighth hypothesis (H8) predicts that increases in sharing original content will be associated with increased knowledge of media structures (R^2 = .007, p < .05). A linear regression shows that sharing original content does not predict knowledge of media structures (B = .016, p > .05). Thus, H8 is not supported. The ninth hypothesis (H9) predicts that increases in sharing unoriginal content (reposting) will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects (R^2 = .016, p < .05). A linear regression shows that sharing unoriginal content (reposting news content) does predict knowledge of media effects (B = .054, p < .05). Thus, H9 is supported. The tenth hypothesis (H10) predicts that increases in sharing original photos or videos will be associated with increased knowledge of media effects (R^2 = .016, p < .05). A linear regression shows sharing news-based photos or videos with news organizations does not predict knowledge of media effects (B = .087 p > .05). Thus, H10 is not supported.

Discussion

News Consumption: Not How Much, but What Kind

This study examines the relationship between news consumption and news media literacy. The most important finding about this relationship is that news consumption by young adults as it relates to news media literacy is more dependent on the type of news consumed than the amount of it.

Although it was expected that total news consumption would increase news media literacy, several factors might explain why none of the dimensions were affected. The oversaturation young adults experience with news is one possible explanation. News is pervasive since the advent of digital and social media, and young adults consume news constantly, often encountering stories unintentionally. The constant exposure to news could mean that an increase in consumption does not bring about a substantial environmental change, and therefore would not affect literacy levels. It could also be the case that the below-average mindfulness level of young adults explains why more consumption does not lead to more literacy. If young adults are not viewing news in an analytical way, an increase consumption alone will not increase their critical viewing skills.

The findings that hard news consumption predicts knowledge of media structures and that soft news consumption has an inverse relationship with the level of mindfulness confirm research that relates to uses and gratification for informational and entertainment needs. Although no previous studies have attempted specifically to discover various aspects of the relationship between news type and news media literacy, the finding confirms Prior's (2003) research, which found that "people who prefer soft news are significantly less knowledgeable than those who prefer hard news" (p. 162).

The findings further inform scholarship in the area of news consumption. Traditional studies on news consumption assume a relationship between consumption and recall (Gunter, 1980; Katz, Adoni, & Parness, 1977; Neuman, 1976). More recently, scholars have found that news consumption has a positive effect on civic awareness (Boulianne, 2015), openness to civic discussion (Jordan, Pope, Wallis, & Iyer, 2014), and civic participation (Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010). These findings could lead to the expectation that total consumption of mediated news would positively predict news media literacy. However, the multidimensional nature of news media literacy, as measured in this study, differentiates it from earlier studies. Thus, although some research has found that total news consumption increases some types of knowledge, such as recall of news broadcasts and knowledge of current events, the current study shows that news knowledge that has been more specifically defined by news media literacy scholars and its relationship with specific types of news consumption may be a more promising focus for study. For example, as this study shows, knowledge of media effects and media organizations is not necessarily affected by the total amount of news consumed.

Young Adults as News Prosumers

An additional goal of this study was to discover ways in which young adults in the United States act as prosumers of news media and news content and determine whether this active participation is associated with news media literacy levels.

The finding that sharing unoriginal news stories (reposting) is associated with knowledge of media effects could be explained through a uses and gratifications perspective. The motivations of people who share news stories are likely to include a desire to persuade, influence, or change the perspective of the reader or viewer. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that news sharers would have a higher level of knowledge of media effects, indicating their understanding that media affect perceptions.

It was also expected that news media literacy would be increased by sharing original news stories and sending original photos and videos to news organizations. The study found that sharing original stories was not associated with knowledge of media structures. Moreover, sharing original video and photos to news organizations had no relationship with knowledge of media structures. Young adults are digital natives (Prensky, 2001) and are accustomed to regularly sharing several aspects of their lives through social media. This fact is particularly salient in the case of this study's participants, who were recruited online. Although it was assumed that the act of sharing original stories, photos, or videos might affect the mental processes that determine news media literacy, it is more likely the case that sharing content is already instrumental in influencing mental processes. Instead of prosumption creating a fluctuation effect, which means what or how a user thinks is changed temporarily, prosumption is more likely part of the baseline structure of the user's thinking (Potter, 2012).

Recent studies have acknowledged the fact that news media platforms are constantly evolving (Fransisco, 2014). Previous studies also have found that the use of social and digital media have become ubiquitous in the lives of young adults (Deuze, 2008; Friedman, 2012). In this new and evolving media environment, young adults, individually and collectively, have the opportunity to be prosumers rather than mere consumers of news media and news content. As these previous studies suggest, the ways in which content is created, delivered, shared, and responded to by young adults and other age groups has rapidly changed and developed.

Limitations

The current study presents meaningful findings for the media literacy field. However, there were some limitations, and they will be addressed here. First, to maximize participation in the study, respondents were enlisted using e-mail, social media, and recruitment through the SurveyMonkey platform. Although an ample, diverse group of respondents participated in the study, the study did not use a random sample. The participants in the study were not proportionally representative in terms of ethnic/racial diversity or education level. It may be the case that news media literacy levels among such dimensions vary in the general population of young adults, who have an overall lower level of education than the sample and are more racially diverse (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2014; Vespa, 2017). Additionally, given that the survey was administered in a fully online format, it is possible that participants in this study are more active on social and digital media than the overall population. This may have affected the outcome of the research question (RQ2) about active participation through prosumption. Therefore, although the results provide insight into the practices and news media literacy level of young adults, they are not necessarily applicable to all young adults in the United States. Future studies on the subject should be more representative of the total population of young adults in the United States.

Second, media literacy measurement in the field is still developing. Ashley et al. (2013) successfully measured news media literacy using Potter's (2013) dimensions. However, the fact remains that media literacy scholars define media literacy on several diverse dimensions, and measurement scales have been developed using varying foundations. Thus, a different literacy scale could yield different results or insights. For this study, the widespread acceptance of Potter's definition and the reliability and validity of Ashley et al.'s (2013) scale and the modified version forms a strong foundation.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

This study discusses the idea that many young adults procure their news media inadvertently, which is known in the scholarly literature as incidental exposure. However, the study did not use incidental exposure as a determining factor to discover whether any relationships exist between it and news media literacy. Future research can determine whether exposure to news as an inadvertent corollary of general Web use affects news media literacy skills. Moreover, this study makes an assumption based on previous literature that people tend to consume specific genres of news for specific reasons. For instance, hard news might be watched for informative reasons, while soft news might be consumed for entertainment. Future research that explicitly measures the motives of news consumption could bring additional value to the field.

Conclusion

Scholars are interested in finding ways to increase media literacy for several reasons: concern about the constantly changing standards of journalistic ethics (Ward, 2014), evolving procurement practices (Bowen, 2013; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007; Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Salwen, 2005), and changes in the presentation of news. It remains difficult to ascertain which media literacy interventions will increase media literacy. Potter (2013) states,

> At this time, the literature on media literacy interventions is equivocal. Perhaps because this line of research is so new and still rather small, we do not have an extensively developed set of findings about what types of interventions—natural or constructed—work consistently. (p. 427)

Even fewer studies address the issues and implications of news media literacy (Ashley et al., 2013). However, as Bui (2013) notes, there is a demonstrated need for news media literacy in educational settings.

Some suggest that media literacy courses are the best route to increase news media literacy (Lorenz, 2015). The practicality and effectiveness of that approach have been shown to a limited degree (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). While formal learning in a classroom setting shows promise, increasing news media literacy among young adults requires more flexible methods that can be used both inside and outside a classroom. The present study offers indicators of methods that might be used to improve news media literacy. This research helps fulfill the demonstrated need for empirical news media literacy research in young adults as well as the need for discovery about which methods and interventions are applicable and useful inside and outside classroom settings.

References

Ashley, S., Maskl, A., & Craft, S. (2013). Developing a news media literacy scale. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, *68*(1), 7–21.

Aufderheide, P. (1993). *Media literacy: From a report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy*. Queenstown, MD: Aspen Institute.

Austin, E., Pinkleton, B., Beam, M., & Borah, P. (2013, August–September). *Celebrities and media literacy: Satirical news and critical thinking about politics.* Paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Chicago, IL.

Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good news for the future? Young people, Internet use, and political participation. *Communication Research*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0093650210381738

Baum, M. A. (2003). Soft news and political knowledge: Evidence of absence or absence of evidence? *Political Communication*, *20*(2), 173–190.

Baumgartner, J. C., & Morris, J. S. (2008). One "nation," under Stephen? The effects of the Colbert Report on American youth. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *52*(4), 622–643.

Boulianne, S. (2015). Online news, civic awareness, and engagement in civic and political life. *New Media & Society*. Advance online publication. doi:1461444815616222

Bowen, S. A. (2013). Using classic social media cases to distill ethical guidelines for digital engagement. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *28*(2), 119–133.

Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2005). The future is here, but do news media companies see it? *Nieman Reports*, *59*(4), 6–10.

Bucy, E. P. (2003). Media credibility reconsidered: Synergy effects between on-air and online news*. Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *80*(2), 247–264.

Bui, L. (2013, April 15). Schools demanding news literacy lessons to teach students how to find fact amid fiction. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washington-post.com/local/education/schools-demanding-news-literacy-lessons-to-teach-students-how-to-find-fact-amid fiction/2013/04/15/e67b9c26-963d-11e2-9e23-09dce87f75a1_story.html

Cao, X., & Brewer, P. R. (2008). Political comedy shows and public participation in politics. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *20*(1), 90–99.

Christians, C. G. (2009). *Normative theories of the media: Journalism in democratic societies.* Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Davison, W. (1983). The third-person effect in communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *47*(1), 1–15.

Deuze, M. (2008). The changing context of news work: Liquid journalism for a monitorial citizenry. *International Journal of Communication*, *2*(2008), 848–865.

Diddi, A., & LaRose, R. (2006). Getting hooked on news: Uses and gratifications and the formation of news habits among college students in an Internet environment. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *50*(2), 193–210.

Eveland, W. P., Jr., & Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Connecting news media use with gaps in knowledge and participation. *Political Communication*, *17*(3), 215–237.

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2014). *America's young adults*: *Special issue, 2014.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from https://www.childstats.gov/pdf/ac2014/YA_14.pdf

Flew, T. (2012). The digital transformation of 21st century news journalism. *Journal of Communications Management*, *13*(2), 101–122.

Francisco, P. L. (2014). Legacy media: A case for creative destruction? *Palabra Clave*, *17*(4), 1097–1113.

Friedman, A. (2012, August 9). Journalists vs. curators: Can't we all just get along? *Columbia Journalism Review.* Retrieved from http://www.cjr.org/realtalk/journalists_vs_curators.php

Gantz, W. (1978). How uses and gratifications affect recall of television news. *Journalism Quarterly*, *55*(4), 664–681.

Gunter, B. (1980). Remembering television news: Effects of picture content. *Journal of General Psychology*, *102*(1), 127–133.

Hanson, G., & Haridakis, P. (2008). YouTube users watching and sharing the news: A uses and gratifications approach. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, *11*(3). doi:10.3998/3336451.0011.305

Hobbs, R. (2010, November 10). *Digital and media literacy: A plan of action* (White paper)*.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Hobbs, R., & Frost, R. (2003). Measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *38*(3), 330–355.

Hollander, B. A. (2005). Late-night learning: Do entertainment programs increase political campaign knowledge for young viewers? *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *49*(4), 402–415.

Johnson, T. J., Kaye, B. K., Bichard, S. L., & Wong, W. J. (2007). Every blog has its day: Politically interested Internet users' perceptions of blog credibility. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 100–122.

Jordan, G., Pope, M., Wallis, P., & Iyer, S. (2014). The relationship between openness to experience and willingness to engage in online political participation is influenced by news consumption. *Social Science Computer Review*, *33*(2), 181–197. doi:0894439314534590

Katz, E., Adoni, H., & Parness, P. (1977). Remembering the news: What the picture adds to recall. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *54*(2), 231–239.

Kim, Y., Chen, H. T., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2013). Stumbling upon news on the Internet: Effects of incidental news exposure and relative entertainment use on political engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(6), 2607–2614.

Kohut, A., Morin, R., & Keeter, S. (2007, April 15). *What Americans know: 1987–2007.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

Ksiazek, T. B., Malthouse, E. C., & Webster, J. G. (2010). News-seekers and avoiders: Exploring patterns of total news consumption across media and the relationship to civic participation. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *54*(4), 551–568.

LaMarre, H. L., & Walther, W. (2013). Ability matters: Testing the differential effects of political news and late-night political comedy on cognitive responses and the role of ability in micro-level opinion formation. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *25*(3), 303–322.

Lee, J. K. (2007). The effect of the Internet on homogeneity of the media agenda: A test of the fragmentation thesis. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *84*(4), 745–760.

Lorenz, C. (2015, August 31). Can you believe it? This news media class would teach people how to sort the true from the false. *Slate.* Retrieved from https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/08/news-media-literacy-class-which-newspapers-magazines-and-websites-are-reliable-and-trustworthy.html

Lupia, A., & Philpot, T. S. (2005). Views from inside the net: How websites affect young adults' political Interest. *Journal of Politics*, *67*(4), 1122–1142.

Maskl, A., Ashley, S., & Craft, S. (2015). Measuring news media literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *6*(3), 29–45.

Melican, D. B., & Dixon, T. L. (2008). News on the net credibility, selective exposure, and racial prejudice. *Communication Research*, *35*(2), 151–168.

Meroney, J. (2000). Late-night politics. *The American Enterprise*, *11*(7), 51–52.

Messner, M., & Distaso, M. W. (2008). The source cycle: How traditional media and weblogs use each other as sources. *Journalism Studies*, *9*(3), 447–463.

Metzger, M. J. (2007). Making sense of credibility on the Web: Models for evaluating online information and recommendations for future research. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *58*(13), 2078–2091.

Metzger, M. J., Flanagin, A. J., & Zwarun, L. (2003). College student Web use, perceptions of information credibility, and verification behavior. *Computers and Education*, *41*(3), 271–290.

Mitchell, A., & Jurkowitz, M. (2013, October 11). *How Americans get TV news at home.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/2013/10/11/how-americans-get-tv-news-at-home/

Neuman, W. R. (1976). Patterns of recall among television news viewers. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *40*(1), 115–123.

Pew Research Center. (2010, October 14). *Fewer journalists stand out in fragmented news universe.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org/2010/10/14/fewer-journalists-stand-out-in-fragmented-news-universe/

Pew Research Center. (2012, September 27). *Section 2: Online and digital news.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.peoplepress.org/2012/09/27/section-2-online-and-digital-news-2/

Polk, J., Young, D. G., & Holbert, R. L. (2009). Humor complexity and political influence: An elaboration likelihood approach to the effects of humor type in The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, *17*(4), 202–219.

Potter, W. J. (2012). *Media effects*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Potter, W. J. (2013). *Media literacy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1*. On the Horizon*, *9*(5), 1–6.

Prior, M. (2003). Any good news in soft news? The impact of soft news preference on political knowledge. *Political Communication*, *20*(2), 149–171.

Purcell, K., Rainie, L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T., & Olmstead, K. (2010, March 3). *Understanding the participatory news consumer.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from https://www.pewinternet.org/2010/03/01/understanding-the-participatory-news-consumer/.

Salwen, M. B. (2005). Online news trends. In M. B. Salwen, B. Garrison, & P. D. Driscoll (Eds.), *Online news and the public* (pp. 47–77). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tewksbury, D., Weaver, A., & Maddex, B. (2001). Accidentally informed: Incidental news issues and action in workplace privacy. *Journal of Labor Research*, *24*(2), 195–205.

Thompson, E. (2009). Good demo, bad taste: South Park as carnivalesque satire. In J. Gray, J. P. Jones, & E. Thompson (Eds.), *Satire TV: Politics and comedy in the post-network era* (pp. 213–232). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Tsfati, Y., Tukachinsky, R., & Peri, Y. (2009). Exposure to news, political comedy, and entertainment talk shows: Concern about security and political mistrust. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *21*(4), 399–423.

Vaterlaus, J. M., Patten, E. V., Roche, C., & Young, J. A. (2015). #Gettinghealthy: The perceived influence of social media on young adult health behaviors. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *45*, 151–157.

Vespa, J. (2017). *The changing economics and demographics of young adulthood: 1975–2016.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, United States Census Bureau.

Ward, S. J. A. (2014). Digital media ethics. Center for Journalism Ethics, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, WI. Retrieved from https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/digital-media-ethics