A News Literacy Framework:
No Longer Just For Journalism Students

BCcampus – FLO Friday

Justin Harrison (he/him), Engagement & Learning Librarian, University of Victoria

Agenda

- Why news literacy now?

- News literacy as an evolving field of study

- 5 Cs News Literacy Framework

Learning Objectives

- Be able to define and explain the concept of news literacy and its importance in the current media landscape

- Be capable of linking news literacy and democracy

- Learn strategies to curate a balanced news diet

Positionality - Myself As Librarian

Information literacy professional

Increasingly polarized world, affecting the information landscape

We see a world of "post-truth" emerging, where facts aren't relevant or are attacked rather than refuted

As an academic librarian I am, like others here, in the thick of AI implications for information literacy

Challenges to Our News Diet

Information overload: The overwhelming volume of data makes it difficult to process information effectively, leading to potentially poor decision-making or reliance on shortcuts.

Crisis of authenticity: The proliferation of misinformation, deepfakes, and opinion makes it challenging to discern genuine, verified knowledge from false or misleading content.

Conflict between speed and accuracy: The fast-paced nature of digital information sharing often prioritizes speed over careful verification, contributing to the spread of unverified or inaccurate news.

Algorithms supporting our biases: Recommendation algorithms can create echo chambers by feeding users content that aligns with their existing beliefs (confirmation bias), thereby reinforcing biases rather than challenging them.

Why News Literacy Now?

- A dramatic evolution in our news consumption

- In an era defined by fake news, "post-truth," and political polarization, being conscious about our news consumption is more crucial than ever

- A growing awareness of the challenges facing democracy

- By learning how to think critically about what we read and share, we can help create a culture that values evidence-based knowledge, rational thinking, and a society that's inclusive and tolerant

Which of the following best matches your approach to news literacy?

1. Being able to identify credible vs. non-credible news sources

2. Understanding how and why news is produced

3. Knowing how to fact-check information on my own

4. Engaging with diverse perspectives and avoiding echo chambers

POLL QUESTION #1

Journalism and News

Not necessarily the same thing…

Journalism involves a specific set of professional practices for gathering and synthesizing information
- Has objective of providing a representation of reality for the benefit of the public sphere (Diakopoulous, 2019)
- Verification, Independence, Accountability

News is more broad
- Timely information of public interest
- Social media has forced an extension of what is considered "news" (e.g. stories, comments, and claims about public affairs)
- Increasingly, a growing emphasis on audience definitions of news
- De-emphasizing journalistic norms of production (e.g. Edgerly & Vraga, 2019)

Media Literacy: Too Narrow a Definition

Media literacy as a simple set of skills (Aufterheide, 1993; Buckingham, 2003; Hoechsmann & Pyntz, 2012)

How to access
Evaluate
Analyze
Create

This lacks a privileging of context, such as systems relating to the technological, economic, or political (Forsman, 2021)

In a time of quick and sharable media we also require an understanding of how media ecologies affect & facilitate our experiences, reflections, political awareness, and action

Literacies Terminology Evolution

- Media literacy (1970s)

- Digital literacy, new literacies, multiliteracy, information literacy, transliteracy, metaliteracy, dynamic literacies (Forsman, 2021)

- Civic literacy (Mihailidis, 2018)

- News media literacy (Fleming, 2009; Ashley et al., 2013; Vraga & Tully, 2016) – taking media literacy concepts and applying them to context of news-related processes

- News literacy (Craft et al., 2016)

- Some now view news literacy as "bloated" term (Tully et al., 2022; Yeoman, 2024)
    - Leading to recent years to new frameworks

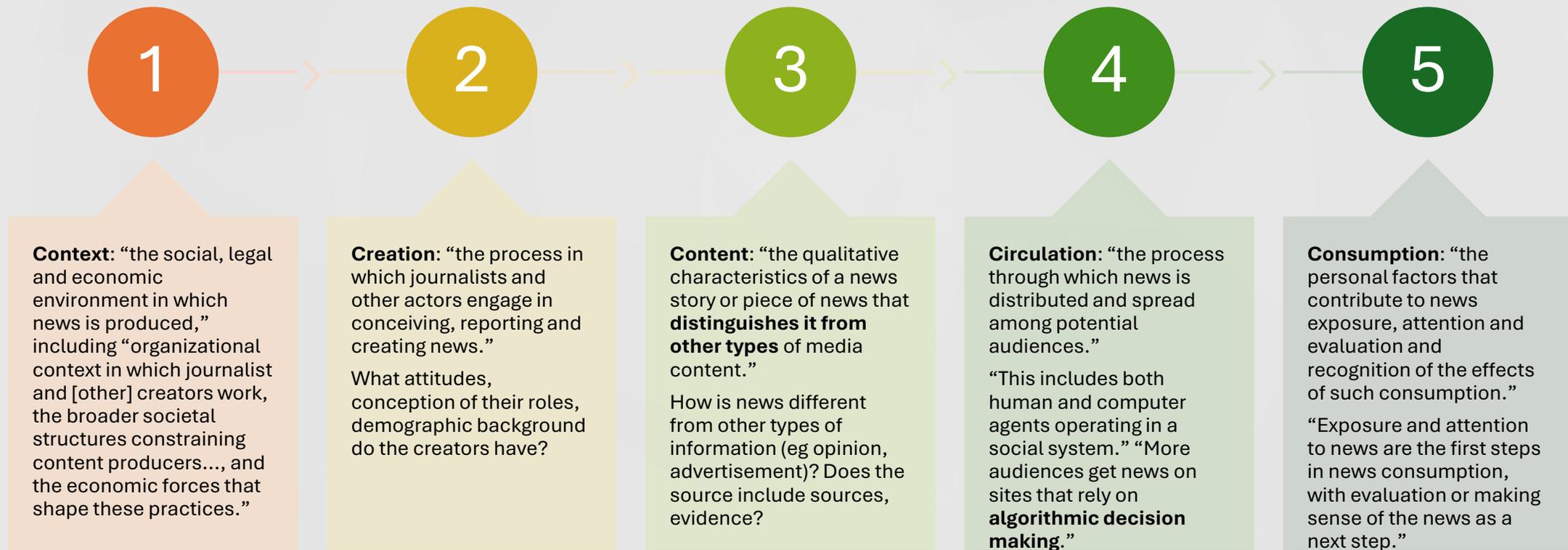# Building on Information Literacy – Digital Literacy & News Literacy

- "From an **information literacy** perspective, a digitally literate person will use **critical thinking** skills, which includes understanding how online **information** is **produced**, **prioritized**, and **presented**.

- A digitally literate person will also recognize that online information can provide **different perspectives** and **ways of knowing** and is aware of **biases** within online content and **technology**."

- (BC Digital Literacy Framework, 2024)

"A **news literate** person is aware of their own **news habits**, familiar with the way news is **produced**, **distributed**, and **consumed**, and has the ability to judge the **credibility**, **reliability** and **relevance** of news and information, **distinguish** between facts and opinion, identify **bias** and falsehoods, find quality and trustworthy journalism practices across media platforms, and understand and protect the vital role the First Amendment and a free press play in a **democracy**."

(Eisenstock, 2023)

News Literacy Definitions & Considerations

- Ashley (2020): "the critical evaluation of information **content** as well as the **contexts** where it is **produced** and **consumed.**"

- Vraga et al. (2021) add that being news literate is distinct from specific outcomes such as fact and source checking, or identifying misinformation.

- Tully et al.'s (2022) definition of news literacy consists of "knowledge of the personal and social **processes** by which news is **produced**, **distributed**, and **consumed** and [involves] skills that allow users some **control** over these processes."

- Bengtsson & Johansson (2024) speak also of "navigation" of the landscape.

Conceptualizing News Literacy - The 5 Cs

1

Context: "the social, legal and economic environment in which news is produced," including "organizational context in which journalist and [other] creators work, the broader societal structures constraining content producers…, and the economic forces that shape these practices."

2

Creation: "the process in which journalists and other actors engage in conceiving, reporting and creating news."

What attitudes, conception of their roles, demographic background do the creators have?

3

Content: "the qualitative characteristics of a news story or piece of news that **distinguishes it from other types** of media content."

How is news different from other types of information (eg opinion, advertisement)? Does the source include sources, evidence?

4

Circulation: "the process through which news is distributed and spread among potential audiences."

"This includes both human and computer agents operating in a social system." "More audiences get news on sites that rely on **algorithmic decision making**."

5

Consumption: "the personal factors that contribute to news exposure, attention and evaluation and recognition of the effects of such consumption."

"Exposure and attention to news are the first steps in news consumption, with evaluation or making sense of the news as a next step."

How would you use/teach news literacy in your own work?

Put your responses in the chat

Suggestions

- Discuss news and information in the context of emotions
- Focus on developing an "emerging media citizen" (Forsman, 2018; Mihailidis, 2014)
  - Reinforce linkages of news literacy to civic awareness in educational spaces (courses, curricula)
  - Discuss the direct relationship between the press and democracy

- Continue to surface linkages between AI and journalistic processes
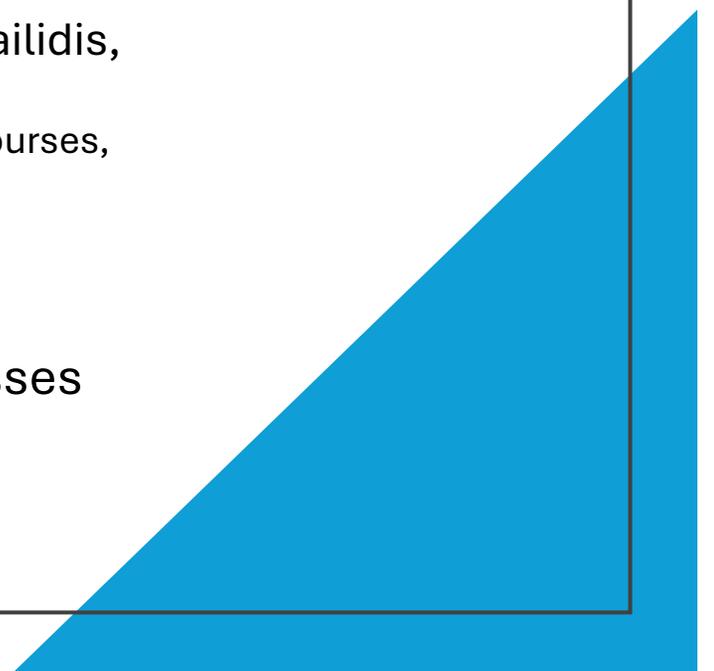
Suggestions

- Create activities/assessments that surface news literacy skills across Tully et al.'s five domains
  - Annotate news or media content to assess how claims are supported or verified in news versus opinion, journalism versus other "information neighborhoods" (e.g. news, entertainment, advertising, promotion, raw data)
  - Is the content independent from special interest, accountable for its reliability, been verified with sources?
  - Discuss how viewing a video on TikTok or YouTube alters the content displayed in the feed or algorithm

- Continue to think of news as being defined by the audience
  - Re-imagine and re-define "the news" as involving "the feed"

Some Current AI-induced Realities

Concern that with AI:

- News will be a conversation, a discussion, "real-time dialogue" – interactions
- Voice applications mimicking human voice nuance
- "Tell me what I need to know today" – in the context of "news is my feed" this could be bad...
- Complete absence of actively selecting news sources, as if they're all the same, the various media are all the same, etc.

Creating Critical Minds
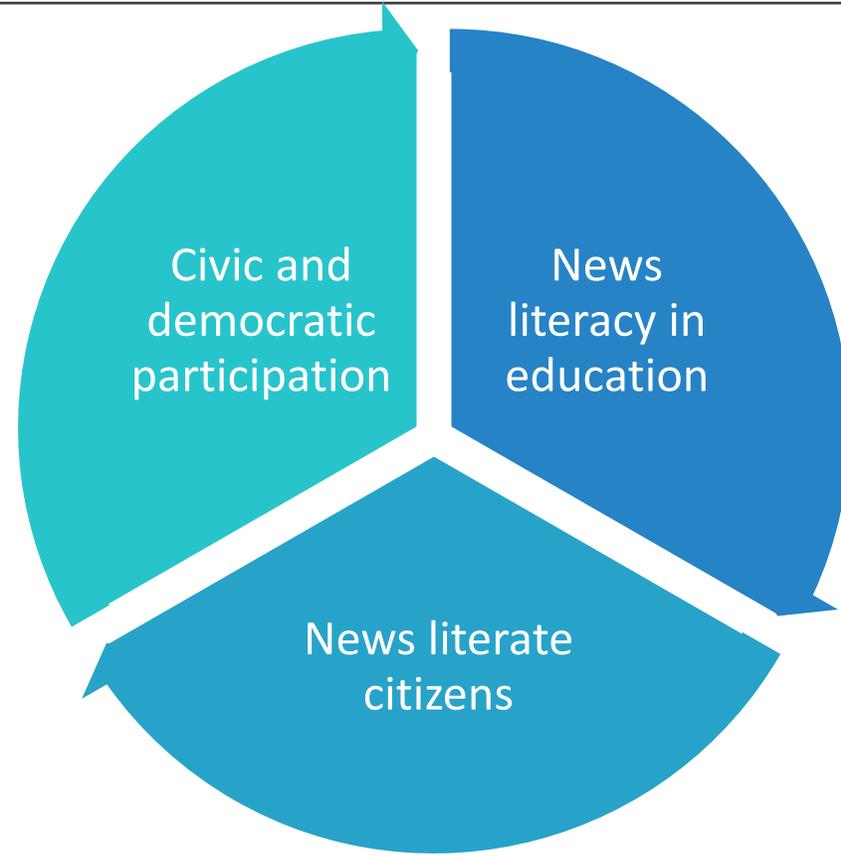
Questions / discussion

References

Ashley, S., Maksl, A., & Craft, S. (2013). Developing a news media literacy scale. *Journalism & mass communication educator*, *68*(1), 7–21.

Ashley, S. (2020). *News Literacy and Democracy*. Routledge.

Aufderheide, P. (1993). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Aspen Institute.

Bengtsson, S., & Johansson, S. (2024). *Navigating the News : Young People, Digital Culture and Everyday Life.* de Gruyter.

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Polity Press

Craft, S., Ashley, S., & Maksl, A. (2016). Elements of news literacy: A focus group study of how teenagers define news and why they consume it. *Electronic news*, *10*(3), 143-160.

Diakopoulous, N. (2019). *Automating the news: How algorithms are rewriting the media*. Harvard UP.

Edgerly, S. & Vraga, E. K. (2019). News, entertainment, or both? Exploring audience perceptions of media genre in a hybrid media environment. *Journalism 20*(6), 807-826.

Eisenstock, B. (2023). *News Literacy Now: How to "Read" the News*. Peter Lang.

References – cont.

Fleming, J. (2009). "Truthiness" and trust: News media literacy strategies in the digital age. In K. Tyner (Ed.), *Media literacy: New agendas in communication* (pp. 136–158). Routledge.

Forsman, M. (2020). The critical mindset in times of distrust: Critical thinking and critical consciousness and the biopolitics of the emerging media citizen. In M. Hoechsmann, G. Thesee, & P. R. Carr (Eds.), *Education for democracy 2.0: Changing frames of media literacy* (pp. 121-137). Brill.

Hoechsmann, M., & Poyntz, S. R. (2012). *Media literacies: A critical introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Mihailidis, P. (2014). *Media literacy and the emerging citizen: Youth, engagement and participation in digital culture*. Peter Lang.

Potter, W. J. (2019). *Media literacy*. SAGE.

Tully, M., Maksl, A., Ashley, S., Vraga, E. K., & Craft, S. (2022). Defining and conceptualizing news literacy. *Journalism*, *23*(8), 1589–1606.

Vraga, E. K., & Tully, M. (2016). Effective messaging to communicate news media literacy concepts to diverse publics. *Communication and the Public*, *1*(3), 305–322.

Vraga, E. K., Tully, M., Maksl, A., Craft, S., & Ashley, S. (2021). Theorizing news literacy behaviors. *Communication Theory*, *31*(1), 1–21.

Yeoman, F. (2023). The challenge of defining news literacy: Perceptions from the UK news literacy sector. *Journalism*, *25*(11), 2402-2419.

Thank you

Justin Harrison

justinh@uvic.ca

https://libguides.uvic.ca/newsliteracy