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Exegesis:

**An Understanding of Media Literacy,
News Media Literacy and Transliteracy
for research as practice production.**



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Introduction

Media Literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages through a variety of contexts. Users should be able to identify and furthermore, facilitate the acquisition of the skills to understand the media effectively (Bazalgette, 1997; Hobbs, 1996; Livingstone, 2004; Potter, 2004). This project aims to explore three traditional areas of theoretical knowledge and practice when describing conventional theoretical approaches dealing with news, fake news and conspiracies (Manuel Pérez Tornero, Samy Tayie and Tejedor, 2018):

- Theories about the mediatization of the political sphere.
- Theories about journalism.
- Theories about media literacy in a broad sense.

The project will explore aspects of transliteracy and how interaction can influence user media literacy understanding. This will be demonstrated through developing a transmedia experience with the implementation of constructed interventions (Potter, 2010). This should raise queries surrounding media literacy and presents opportunity for an analytical approach to user unique media literacy. News media literacy and transliteracy to further how they utilise this to engage and understand texts, platforms of consumption and overall construction of the media text. Developing a transmedia experience that challenges, sympathises and torments the idea of news, fake news and conspiracy theories surrounding the topic of the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdowns associated with it, and hopes to engage the user's media literacy.

Literature Review

Media literacy research approaches focus on the idea of user processing of media texts (Potter, 2004) and how they evaluate and critically engage with mediated messages (Hobbs, 2010; Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015). Assessment of the effectiveness with media literacy understanding proves problematic (Martens 2010; Potter, 2004). Media literacy suggests that media representation is flawed and inaccurate (Hobbs and Frost, 2003). News media content informs users (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001) whereas emerging digital media promises an online avenue which spirals into research that suggests news audience's media literacy should be better informed to understand the conditions in which the news is produced (Hobbs 2010; Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015).

“Though we may little understand how, we are all assuming more control over what we know about the world beyond our direct experience. We are becoming our own editors, our own gatekeepers, our own aggregators” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010). The digital age and cultural associations displace traditional media consumption (Mihailidis, 2014) and raise queries surrounding how difficult it is to obtain reliable information (Patterson 2013). Juxtaposing this with news consumption (Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015) and the ability to differentiate journalism content within the mass news media content available online (Carr, 2011; Gitlin, 2007; Johnson, 2012) provides evidence for study of media literacy development and furthermore, interventions to measure and gauge an understanding of news media literacy levels.

Potter's (2004) media literacy model provides a framework for media literacy study. Potter (2004) proposes knowledge structures based on media texts, which in turn argues that media literacy is enhanced when users are consciously prepared to be exposed to media texts. Assessing users' level of media literacy whilst identifying components of news media literacy and where gaps can be addressed through interventions to construct an audience that thinks deeply about their media engagement (Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015; Potter, 2004).

The transmedia project will form a constructed intervention that refers to the research as practice with the aim to increase an aspect of media literacy (Potter, 2010). Applying these interventions effectively through experimental design then followed by measuring the user's level of media literacy to measure the success of the intervention. How user's media literacy skills correlate with the effectiveness and level of influence the media inflicts have been studied through various correlational studies (Nathanson, 1999), focus groups (Cohen, 2002), qualitative interviews (Moore, DeChillo, Nicholson, Genovese and Sladen, 2000), and participant observations (Bragg, 2002) that may define as media literacy interventions designed to affect users in a way that raises their media literacy level.

Relevant to the project, studies surrounding analysis of health and fear inducing content that is consumed through variables that individual users come with. Health content where the media message communicates and glamorises (Potter, 2010) behaviours that can affect health in both positive and negative ways that can have an effect on society for example fake news stories surrounding masks and lockdowns may be consumed differently depending on news media literacy levels surrounding health. (Choma, Foster and Radford, 2007; Herzog and Eddy, 2009; Wilksch and Wade, 2009). Fear inducing content where users experienced anxiety and fear surrounding news programmes, the use of improving media literacy skills aid users in immunity to exaggerated news. This has been amplified throughout lockdown where clickbait is common, fear content has been rumoured proposed to try to control audiences throughout lockdown similar to cultivation theory methods, this has resulted with an impact in audiences having different opinions on the situation based of their news media literacy (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Weiner and Kendall, 2008; Olson and Pollard, 2004; Slone and Shoshani, 2006; Thoman and Jolls, 2004). How these can be related to how user's media literacy can affect their perception surrounding news throughout lockdown.

News within a democratic environment plays a unique role within its society, providing information to aid with decisions. Therefore, it is important to measure context and construction of news to compare to social implications (Fleming, 2013). Knowledge of reality poses a query to news media depictions of reality where news stories are not always the finished product, neglect aspects or news stories and often offer an incomplete

narrative. A user's motivations for seeking news affects how they will consume the news media literature (Potter, 2004). This is only developed through user's unique development and reasoning for obtaining information (Eveland, 2002). Through specific news productions we might expect self-perceived news media literacy to be most influential, whereas in other situations understanding of publications and users or higher value for news media literacy may be more powerful due to importance of news media literacy in navigating increasingly complicated news environments (Marchi and Clark, 2018; Vraga et al., 2015). Young audiences show decline in engagement with traditional news practices. The digital era media leads to new ways to engage with and understand news (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2020) where younger audiences are consuming news on the go through mobiles, there are multiple options on where to get news from making news more accessible for everyone although with this comes the risk of being exposed to fake news.

Fake news is news content with the aim to intentionally mislead the audience (Grace and Hone, 2019). Fake news emerged into the political debate recently, as well as journalism and academic studies about journalism and media. New theoretical approaches have resulted in the emergence of a specific area of media literacy known as news literacy (Manuel Pérez Tornero, Samy Tayie and Tejedor, 2018). The political critiques of news (Mourão, Thorson, Chen and Tham, 2018) and the production of fake news (Newman, Levy and Nielsen, 2017) contribute to manipulation of news stories and users believing false information the level of this manipulation is often linked to their media literacy levels. Equipping consumers with a news media literacy level, particularly across social media to encourage a positive interpretation with news sources would allow for a safer and accurately informed engagement with the news. (Hermida, A., 2012; Mihailidis, 2014). Audiences within the digital era consistently have to differentiate between real and fake news (Grace and Hone, 2019). The mass spread of online sources of misinformation where journalism has become easy to manipulate or fake has provided opportunity for users to be misled (Demestichas, Remoundou and Adamopoulou, 2020).

The attempt to differentiate real and fake news by labelling it, whilst efforts within social media to label questionable news sources provides limitations (Grace and Hone, 2019). Labelling social media news stories as user generated content although this does not

help readers who are exposed to the content outside of traditionally controlled environments where news media literacy and transliteracy must be utilised for an understanding of news across platforms (Thomas et al., 2007). it may be more effective to address the systemic issue via news literacy on a transliteracy plane through an intervention, it is more productive to train consumers of content to identify it on their own through a transmedia experience that allows them to identify where they engage with fake news and engages their news media literacy (Grace and Hone, 2019).

Belief in conspiracy theories appears to be driven by motives that can be characterized as epistemic (Swami, 2012). Berghel (2017) examines how conspiracy theories can outperform main-stream news through the digital era (Mihailidis, 2014) and how social platforms can act as an echo chamber for virality. The disbelief or the constructed fabrication of the news that raises the awareness and discomfort can lead the public to find satisfaction through conspiracy theories, thus the idea that one's beliefs can be another person's conspiracy theory (Berghel, 2017; Craft, Ashley and Maksl, 2017). Examining how the effect of new media without knowledge of media literacy (Potter, 2004) can lead to mass anxiety which persuades the audience to believe conspiracy theories due to their promise of safety and awareness that is constructed based of what they believe through their media literacy.

Linking the user's comfort or discomfort from poor media literacy within main-stream news provoking users to seek for fulfilment through alternate avenues (Berghel, 2017; Craft, Ashley and Maksl, 2017). Utilising a transmedia experience to explore how these social platforms echo chamber's function and also how they affect media literacy will result in users being able to identify the news they are engaging with that is inaccurate (Swami, 2012). Deliberately creating uncomfortable interactions as part of culturally challenging experiences will heighten engagement. (Benford et al., 2012). This discomfort should provide mindfulness and awareness within the virtual environment. Providing virtual sensory awareness of the world, much like meditation will achieve an avenue for users to increase their media literacy and news awareness (Konnikova, 2014). The use of rabbit-holes and mysterious narrative hooks to allow the user to opt-in to the uncomfortable

experience, that will consistently allow the user to drill into the experience through choice (Finch, 2015; Meggs, 1997).

Jenkins (2004) discusses a participatory culture that represents self-awareness depending on socio-cultural environments, within engagement with cultural productions. This resulted in a top-down driven communication society with the aspect of a pre-tailored consumption model (Ciastellardi and Di Rosario, 2015). The emergence of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2004) in the digital era provided a migration for users to engage with media depending on their desires.

Well informed transmedia experiences provide opportunity for enhanced and expanded learning, with the ability to heighten media literacy (Alper and Herr-Stephenson, 2013). When transliteracy is utilized, it allows us to develop media literacy within transmedia (transliteracy) both diachronically and synchronically. “Diachronically, it helps us understand, for example, how the practice of blogging might draw upon non–digital methods of combining modes in handwritten media or how personal blogs relates to diaries and journals. Synchronically, it can help us see how multiple media and modes of communication are used in relation to each other at the same time” (Thomas et al., 2007).

Transmedia storytelling is storytelling by a number of decentralized authors who share and create content for distribution across multiple forms of media. Transmedia immerses an audience in a story’s universe through a number of dispersed entry points, providing a comprehensive and coordinated experience of a complex story” (Jenkins, 2004). Jenkins (2004) discusses the seven principles associated with Transmedia storytelling (See production log p.26-35

Consistent use of transmedia storytelling principles (Jenkins, 2004) and conjunction of Pratten’s (2011) insights on narrative formatting to provide user engagement to explore user’s media literacy, news media literacy and transliteracy to allow them to improve their media literacy and news awareness.

Transliteracy allows for interactivity in an era of distributed authorship (Ciastellardi and Di Rosario, 2015). Opportunities for users to acquire further digital literacy by engaging with core competencies (Gilster, 1998) associated with transmedia. Users' abilities to become active and participative audiences through a variety of platforms and tools from the media (Thomas et al., 2007) will improve engagement with the experience whilst engaging their news media literacy. Transmedia Storytelling represents a process where constructed elements systematically disperse across multiple delivery platforms to create a unified experience where each element contributes to the narrative (Jenkins, 2007).

The concept of transmedia and the translation to being transliterate where reading and writing are not sufficient and do not engage user's awareness of their media literacy more examine it (Thomas et al., 2007). Within a transliterate world elements across multiple platforms are understood, rather than standing isolated but instead used in conjunction with the user's media literacy to the publication standards surrounding the elements posted. Grigar's (2004) emphasis on liminal spaces between providing the user with crossroads and choices to discourage a fictional conclusion and raise awareness of the media users are engaging with to provoke a reaction from their news media literacy.

Media literacy cannot solely rely on a broad sense, variables such as culture and age (Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015) must be considered to create a furthered representation of media literacy. Potter (2004) would argue that once users/ are aware of the media construction and their information processing, these processing tasks become informed decisions. Therefore, individuality, motivations and choice must be considered when producing media content (David, 2009).

Current literature surrounding media literacy is ambiguous. There is an opportunity for development of further interventions that examine user habits and responses (Potter, 2010). Transliteracy requires further research with potential across multiple fields including philosophy and the arts (Thomas et al., 2007).

Methodology

This project focuses on how a news based interactive transmedia experience can provide an analysis of user media literacy. The project proposes an interactive environment where users can engage with the news in a unique way through their individual news media literacy. The target audience for this experience is ages 18-40 although will recognise that anyone can utilise the experience. Aiming to fulfil psychological needs of the user will allow a level of comfort with the news (Maslow, 1943). Older and younger generations may not suffice the news media literacy to understand the blur in reality and take the experience to be real, for these reasons it must also be ethically correct and be understood as a fictional transmedia experience that draws a narrative from reality to engage user's media literacy. The experience considers responsive design for mobile; in 2020, more than 50% of users are utilising mobile (Mobile percentage of website traffic 2020 | Statista, 2020). The project will be designed for both mobile and desktop and should take advantage of the platform's technology (Blazquez Cano, Perry, Ashman and Waite, 2017). The average person has over 8 social media accounts and over 83% of internet users use social media (Dean, 2021), which opens the opportunity to take advantage to engage users through social media in a transmedia context.

The project proposes an answer to the gap within academic research by providing an intervention to develop media literacy whilst focusing on user engagement with a transmedia experience narrative's blurred reality to encourage transliteracy. The project will further this by specifically focusing on the Lockdowns within the United Kingdom and the culture associated and recognise this in its findings. Individuality will be considered when tracking users through the site through Google analytics and lead to conclusions through user journeys analysis.

Consideration of transmedia narrative design and its construction will be tailored to engage the audience's media literacy and allow the user's independence when exploring the snowflake narrative on a transmedia plane and how the analysis of this will provide data on engagement with the news (Pratten, 2011) whilst in return providing awareness of news media literacy for the user.

Based on Jenkins' (2004) seven principles, the project should be drillable and primarily draw from multiplicity, immersion, world building, provide seriality, subjectivity and performance. It will utilise Pratten's (2011) theory of three platforms to construct a transmedia text following a snowflake-based narrative. Building a narrative that utilises and recognises the 1-9-90 (Nielsen, 2006), narrative hooks and rabbit-hole techniques will provide user engagement with the constructed narrative and provoke user engagement (Pratten, 2011).

I have selected the qualitative methodology that has been selected due to the mass engagement with news, due to the mass number of users engaging with the news, larger amount of people should be examined. Questionnaires alongside informal focus groups would be conducted to understand users' news media literacy and then throughout prototyping a transmedia experience, user feedback to analyse user engagement analysing accessibility, relevancy, and ethical individual such as culture, religion and age affect the experience. Utilising this feedback to develop the research as practice experience that engages user's media literacy. Research design decisions surrounding audience immersion, displacement and discomfort alongside news engagement will inform the project to provide an effective and functional experience with a target audience.

Drawing findings, conclusions and from the qualitative research I conducted, the questionnaire (See Appendix 1) resulted in 57 responses. This was then informed with informal focus groups to discuss reasons for individual answers.

When collecting data surrounding thinking structures (A1) the findings suggest that the majority of participants prefer to engage thinking that challenges them whilst engaging them in a simple way.

When engaging participants in questions with their liability for news and fake news engagement (A2) it shows that most of the participants want to be informed correctly from news, users seem to desire higher levels of news media literacy, with close to half in the mindset that they dictate what they engage with and believe in the news. Relevantly 20

participants hold themselves accountable for the news they engage with and strive to become more informed based on their individual skepticism.

Moving on to examining research questions around production/publication awareness and news media literacy, the majority of participants are aware that the BBC has a political bias although upon further focus group discussion resulted that all 12 participants that did not answer the BBC engaged with the BBC multiple times a week which has consistently been seen as a government news source that is constructed and manipulated (See Appendix 3). The Majority of participants were unaware of who has the most influence on what gets produced through most publications. 53 participants were aware that the news affects our societies behaviour, although 17 believe they see the news effective others more than themselves (See Appendix 3), this suggesting naivety across levels of engagement in news media literature. This was further examined with 10-participant informal focus group sessions where the majority of participants did not believe in the use of masks although all participants still wore them when advised (in stores etc.)

Interestingly, safety within the news proved obscure with none of the participants believing the news makes the world seem any better although 1 user believed if news is covered then it is likely important. 1 user believed that news was organised in such a way to divert attention or provide false security. This argument for an over anxiety within true media literacy to where what is believable. The participants remained split for their reasons for following the news and tended to come down to individual reasons (for information, fear or entertainment etc.), remaining split across why news is constructed. Providing multiple levels of news media literacy.

This research suggests the need for a safe intervention environment that caters to all level of news media literacy that juxtaposes news in a systematic correlated fashion that raises questions of news media literacy on a transmedia plane.

Conclusion

The research surrounding media literacy continues producing literature surrounding media literacy. It is forecasted this literature will continue to grow as media use increases and as the public concern about potentially negative effects also increases.

The media literacy research is relatively new. The majority of the literature was produced in the last three decades (Potter, 2010). Throughout my research, consistent themes emerge surrounding media literacy and its association with the news and targeting to equip people with a news media literacy to avoid negative media effects (Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015). There remains potential for specific media literacy research surrounding specific variables such as demographics within different cultures and religions. Opportunity to develop successful designs for media literacy interventions to achieve more positive outcomes that will utilise media exposures but also enhance media literacy understanding (Potter, 2010).

Research suggests that media literacy interventions are often successful, proving positive effects on media knowledge to translate into a better perception of realism, behavioural psychology and media manipulation (Jeong, Cho and Hwang, 2012), although if news media literacy knowledge of a user is present although motivation to process and understand the news, then the processing of information would be diminished (Maksl, Craft and Ashley, 2015).

My research as practice as a transmedia project aims to contribute to understanding of news media literacy that allows for users to build on their prior knowledge and thrive in a contemporary media environment that engages the user effectively and raises their awareness of media literacy overall.

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Appendix

(A1) - Question Surrounding thinking structures.

Tick all that you agree with:

1. I don't like to have to do a lot of thinking (6)
2. I try to avoid situations that require thinking in depth about something (17)
3. I prefer to do something that challenges my thinking rather than something that requires little thought (40)
4. I prefer to think about complex to simple problems (33).
5. Thinking hard something gives me little satisfaction (7)

Appendix 2 (A2) - Question around liability for news and fake news engagement

Tick all that you agree with:

1. When I engage with fake news media or misinformation, it is up to me to determine how soon I will learn to locate credible information. (20)
2. I dictate the information I get from the news media. (24)
3. When I am misinformed by the news media, it is my fault. (17)
4. What affects my knowledge about the world is what I myself do and what I engage with. (40)
5. If I pay attention to different sources of news, so can avoid being misinformed. (53)
6. If I take the right actions, I can stay accurately informed. (55)

(A3) - Questions around production and news media literacy.

Which of the following cable news networks is generally thought to have a political bias?

(Tick one)

- a.) BBC (45)
- b.) ITV (1)
- c.) The Sun (2)
- d.) Sky (0)
- e.) Don't know (9)

Who has the most influence on what gets aired on the local TV news? (Tick one)

- a.) Individual reporters (2)
- b.) The anchor, the person reading the news (3)
- c.) The cameraman (1)
- d.) The producer (7)
- e.) Don't know (34)

Most people think the news has (Tick one):

- a.) A greater effect on themselves than other people. (4)
- b.) A greater effect on other people than themselves. (17)
- c.) The same effect on themselves as others (36)
- d.) Does not have any effects on anyone (0)
- e.) Don't know (0)

People who engage with a lot of news often tend to think the world is (Tick one):

- a.) More violent and dangerous than it actually is. (15)
- b.) Less violent and dangerous than it actually is. (0)
- c.) Just as violent and dangerous as it actually is. (23)
- d.) Don't know (29)

If a topic gets a lot of coverage in the news, people are:

- a.) More likely to think the topic is important. (56)
- b.) Less likely to think the topic is important (1)
- c.) Neither more nor less likely to think the topic is important (0)
- d.) Don't know (0)

Tick all that you agree with:

- 1. I don't see what news does for me. (0)
- 2. I follow the news because I'm supposed to. (16)
- 3. I follow the news for my own good. (16)
- 4. I follow the news because I like to. (21)

Tick all that you agree with:

- 1. I think the news is fair. (22)
- 2. I think the news tells the whole story. (13)
- 3. I think the news is accurate. (16)
- 4. I don't think the news can be trusted. (17)
- 5. I think the news helps society in solving its problems. (25)
- 6. I trust the media to report the news fairly. (17)
- 7. I have confidence in the news organisations. (13)