EDUCATING THE PUBLIC THROUGH NEWS MEDIA:
CASE STUDIES OF NEWS LITERACY IN THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

BY: BRIAN J.WILLIAMS

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in the Faculty of Education
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Education

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
September, 2016

Copyright © Brian Williams
ABSTRACT

Two decades of unprecedented changes in the media landscape have increased the complexity of informing the public through news media. With significant changes to the way the news industry does business and the way news consumers access this information, a new set of skills is being proposed as essential for today's news consumer. News literacy is the use of critical thinking skills to assess the reliability and source of the information that people consume on a daily basis, as well as fostering self-awareness of personal news consumption habits and how it can create audience bias. The purpose of this study was to examine how adults experience the news in their everyday lives and to describe the nature of the news literacy skills people employ in their daily news consumption. This study purposefully selected four adults who have completed high school, and who regularly consume news information across a number of platforms, both traditional and digital. Two of the participants, one man and one woman, were over 50 years old. One other male participant was in his 30's and the final participant, a young woman, was in her 20's. They all utilized both traditional and digital media on a regular basis and all had differing skill levels when using social media for information. Their news experiences were documented by in-depth interviews and the completion of seven daily news logs. In their daily logs the participants differentiated news information from other information available on-line but the interviews revealed a contradiction between their intentions and their news consumption practices. All four participants had trouble distinguishing between news and opinion pieces in the news information realm. In addition all but one seemed unaware of their personal bias and any possible effect it was having on their news consumption.
Further research should explore the benefits of an adult-centered news literacy curriculum on news consumers similar to the participants, and should examine the development of audience bias and its relationship to the daily exposure people have to the torrent of information that is available to them on a daily basis.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my committee members, Richard Reeve and Denise Stockley, for their guidance and encouragement through the process.

To my wife, Michelle, for her ongoing support in so many ways.

To my son, Conor, who shall always remain my highest priority.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... v

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
Purpose .................................................................................................................. 3
Rationale ............................................................................................................... 3
Theoretical Framework .......................................................................................... 4
  * Role of modern journalism ........................................................................... 4
  * News literacy curriculum .............................................................................. 5
  * Digital news ecology ..................................................................................... 6
Research questions .............................................................................................. 6
Chapter Summary ................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2: Literature Review ............................................................................. 8
News Literacy Curriculum .................................................................................... 8
How News Consumers Navigate in the Digital Information Age ..................... 14
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 17

Chapter 3: Method ............................................................................................. 18
Qualitative Method .............................................................................................. 18
Ethics .................................................................................................................... 18
Data Collection ................................................................................................... 18
Participant Recruitment and Selection ............................................................. 18
Limitations........................................................................................................... 45
Further Research ................................................................................................. 45
Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 47
References........................................................................................................... 49
Appendix A: Ethics Approval, Letter of Information, and Consent Form.......... 53
Appendix B: Twitter Recruitment Posts............................................................... 56
Appendix C: Preliminary Survey........................................................................ 57
Appendix D: Pre-News Log Interview Guide....................................................... 61
Appendix E: Daily News Log............................................................................... 62
Appendix F: Post-News Log Interview Guide...................................................... 65
Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the primary objectives of journalism has always been to inform the public of events and issues that affect the community around them (Postman & Powers, 2008). However, one of the biggest handicaps that all journalists encounter in the day-to-day practice of their profession is that informing the public appears to occur in a vacuum. Most journalists never know how much of their story, or television/radio report, reaches the intended audience or if the audience appreciates the information that the journalist wanted to convey.

The genesis for this research project began 15 years ago during my journalism training at Ryerson University. During the completion of a Bachelor of journalism degree that focused on broadcasting, I came to understand the inner workings of the broadcast industry in Canada at the time. While it was an enlightening and challenging program that answered many questions that I had about the practice of journalism in Canada, once completed, more questions arose about what happens to the news on the other side of the microphone. Questions of what people thought of the news and what they didn't know about the news process were constant companions to my thoughts about the news industry itself as I first began to work in the field: did they understand the difference between fact and opinion, did they recognize bias in news coverage, did they know about the relationships between news makers and journalists?

Many years later, after a career in a field unrelated to journalism, my interest in the role of journalism as public educator and the changes in the industry brought me to this research project under the auspices of the Masters in Education program at Queen’s University.
In the intervening years the field of journalism had experienced tectonic shifts
from its original profile that I had first encountered. From one view, the industry had
completely changed and was under siege by both the early iteration of the World Wide
Web, and by the rise of what is often referred to as Web 2.0:

Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which
software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is,
as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and
published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a
participatory and collaborative fashion. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010 p. 60)

The public no longer needed to pay for the news, no longer had to wait for the
news and indeed could choose their own news and ignore all else. But along with the
unprecedented access to news that was now a few mouse clicks away, came a flood of
other information from a vast array of sources, both official and not. The information
superhighway that was building up speed during my training was now a quaint, but
insufficient metaphor. A new layer of questions on top of the old ones about the news
consumer came into play: Do they differentiate between news and the other forms of
information they encounter every day, like entertainment, propaganda, or social media
posts in an ever-increasing cacophony of an unlimited online experience?
Purpose

This study’s primary purpose is to explore and describe how four adults experience the news in their everyday lives. The goal being to gain a deeper understanding of their news-related learning experiences and to gain some understanding of the strategies people employ to manage the current flow of the information.

Rationale

People access news information in more forms than ever before, and this access is becoming increasingly digitized. Traditional forms of news media are no longer the predominate mode of accessing news (Pew Center for Research, 2011). In addition, the vast quantity of information that news consumers are exposed to on a daily basis makes distinguishing news from other kinds of information extremely difficult (Loth, 2012; Schneider, 2007).

This study will focus on the participants’ experiences of issue-driven coverage. Examples of issue-driven news include the long-form census debate, and the Canadian gun registry, as opposed to informative news coverage of events such as extreme weather. Issue-driven types of news stories tend to be active through more than a single weekly news cycle, and have more than one news piece developed around them. Informative news coverage, in contrast, tends to be developed as a story unfolds and is more likely to figure in digital media sources than issue-driven news stories. It is also prone to more mistakes and errors in reporting.
By conducting this study, the intention was to develop a better understanding of people's experience of news consumption by looking at their actual everyday news behaviors.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is the theory of media literacy proposed by W. James Potter (2013) in which he states that the underpinnings of media literacy are the three elements of personal locus, knowledge structures, and skills. Personal locus is described as the goals or driving forces of the media consumer to seek out information. Knowledge structures are the sets of knowledge or assumptions that the media consumer has established previously, and the skills component is what Potter describes as the “tools to mine through the large piles of facts, that we can uncover the particular facts we need and brush away the rest” (p. 13).

Potter (2004) also maintains that media literacy is a continuum. A person's position of the continuum depends on the number and depth of their knowledge structures and skills. Most importantly, there is always room for improvement. In the field of news literacy, with the speed and breath of change in the digital news ecology, this continuum approach to media literacy is particularly appropriate.

The context in which this study takes place consists of three elements: role of modern journalism, news literacy curriculum and digital news ecology.

**Role of modern journalism.** The role of modern journalism as it developed just after the turn of the 20th century was one of gatekeeper, watchdog, and public educator. John Dewey (1927) viewed the news media of the time as a form of public educator, rather than simply a public distributor of information. This links directly to the overall
goal of the news literacy curriculum that has been developed at Stony Brook University, in Long Island, NY (Fleming, 2013). In 1927, Dewey wrote in *The Public and Its Problems* “we have the physical tools of communication as never before. Communication alone can create a community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible” (p. 142). For Dewey and for the news literacy movement, democratic participation depends on being well informed. In the information flood of the 21st century the responsibility of filtering and verifying that information now must be shared between the journalists and the news consumer (San Martin, 2012).

**News literacy curriculum.** Filtering the information flow is the goal of news literacy educators (Schneider, 2008; Loth, 2011; Fleming 2013). Appraising and evaluating the information consumers receive into appropriate categories are just the first steps for a news literate consumer. The news literacy curriculum at Stony Brook University in New York State helps news consumers navigate the conflict zone with deeper understanding of the information neighborhoods and the driving forces of news production (Fleming, 2013; Loth, 2012). The curriculum strives to give the news consumer the skills to verify the source of the information, to understand the driving decisions that make the information newsworthy, and ultimately to decide what information to use in forming their own opinions in the public conversation in which they are participating.

It is these information-handling skills that educators need to teach to their students, thus empowering them to navigate the new digital landscape of information, and the rapidly evolving traditional media landscape.
**Digital news ecology.** While the traditional role of journalism has always been subjected to the economic pressures that are inherent in the traditional news media model, pressure now also comes from the ongoing evolution of the digital news ecology. How news is consumed has changed dramatically just within the past few years with the development of new devices (e.g. Smartphones, tablets, e-readers) and new forms of media for the distribution of information (e.g. Twitter, Reddit, Facebook). This has led to changing news consumption habits. While the desire for news information has grown, the traditional methods of getting the news have fallen behind in the number of consumers using them to access the information they want (Pew, 2010).

The new digital information environment has created an unprecedented challenge for the news producers. There is pressure to compete with new digital information sources while the economic pressures created by shrinking revenues means making more news with fewer resources. News consumers want more local information but are using newspapers and television less and less to get their information (Pew, 2011). Traditional news organizations with the standards to act as public educators are struggling to adapt while social media is able to provide the raw information almost immediately but without verification or vetting for the news consumer (Pew 2011, 2012, 2013).

**Research Questions**

This study will focus on three research questions:

1. How do participants consume news and for what purpose?

2. How do participants exhibit the appraisal and assessment skills that news literacy educators outline in their curricula?
3. What is the nature of participants’ news consumption from digital news sources (i.e., social media, websites, etc.) and traditional news sources (i.e., radio, television, and print news)?

Chapter Summary

With the proliferation of information available to the general public on a daily basis, questions are raised about how news consumers are engaging with this information and for what purpose. To answer these questions we need the context of the role of journalism, the developing news literacy curriculum, and the nature of digital news as part of the larger, interactive, digital world of information known as social media and Web 2.0.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a time when information has never been more plentiful and the routes to access it never more varied, the skills required to find reliable information are at the heart of a growing field of study. News literacy is becoming a vital skill set in the modern era.

In simple terms, news literacy is the ability to critically appraise the news information we consume, regardless of the platform on which it is received (Loth, 2012).

This literature review will provide an overview of the key areas of interest in this field with respect to this study and the research questions outlined above, namely the development of the news literacy curriculum, with particular focus on Stony Brook University's curriculum, and the ongoing research into the behaviors of news consumers.

While the first group of articles reviewed below give a clear picture of how the Stony Brook program evolved, the second group of readings addresses the much more difficult challenge of trying to summarize an ever-changing information landscape of news consumers and the methods and means with which they get their information.

News literacy curriculum

Renee Loth's article, "What's Black and White and Retweeted All Over? Teaching news literacy in a digital age" (2012) on news literacy and the Stony Brook University experiment in the field, is an excellent introduction to the field of news literacy. At Stony Brook the educators focus on teaching students three fundamental skills: a) differentiating between the different types of information available to them, b) recognizing bias on the part of both news media and the audience, c) differentiating
between news and opinion. Students should then be able to find reliable, accurate and independent news information.

By taking a candid look at the first big venture in news literacy education by a post-secondary institution in North America, Loth is able to provide a crash course in what news literacy is and, more importantly, what it is not.

Loth (2012) also presents a clear representation of the elements that converged to allow the program at Stony Brook to be created, but she also has a few cautionary notes about some of the challenges the program has faced in its short history. This reading also provides a clear summary of the challenges that this program and any others like it will need to surmount if they hope to make the kind of meaningful impact that is clearly the underlying passion of the supporters.

Loth's (2012) examination of the news literacy program goes beyond interviews with the key players on the academic side, but includes surveys and interviews with current and past participants, leaving the reader with balanced view of the current state of the program.

Stony Brook University is an obvious choice for this kind of examination of the news literacy field. As one of the first news literacy programs of its kind, it was looked to as an example of what to do and what not to do in the realm of news literacy education. Jennifer Fleming's case study “What Do Facts Have to Do with It? A Case Study of News Literacy at Stony Brook University” (2013), provides a much more detailed look into the step by step methods that news literacy educators at Stony Brook University use to achieve their educative goals. It also draws a clear line between news literacy's broader
goal of a news literate consumer and the informed democratic participant of John Dewey’s vision (Dewey, 1927, 1954).

Howard Schneider’s (2007) article, “It's the Audience, Stupid!” about the genesis of the news literacy program at Stony Brook University in New York State provides valuable insight into the need that drives the growing interest in news literacy programs. Schneider’s experience with undergraduate students highlighted for him the crisis of information faced by people trying to navigate the sea of information on a daily basis. In light of the article by Loth (2011) it also serves as a cautionary note about expecting to achieve too much too soon. The ideals that Schneider outlines here (circa 2007) are clearly not being fulfilled in 2010 when Loth (2012) undertook her research into the success of the program. Determining the failure points in the process will be a difficult task in itself. The program has had success by inspiring similar programs undertaken at other post-secondary institutions in the United States.

Seven years later, together with James Klurfeld, Schneider (2014) provides a deeper retrospective both at the genesis of the news literacy curriculum at Stony Brook University, as well as an accounting of its success. The recounting of recent events and the lack of impact of news media on the issues, such as the H1N1 vaccine deployment, offer a sober re-enforcement of the value of the news literacy curriculum. The article also warns of the consequences, as seen by the authors, of the ongoing information revolution: While there is no doubt that we are living in the midst of the greatest revolution in communications since Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press, there is no evidence that we as a polity are better informed. Indeed, recent surveys show the contrary. The consequence of this for our democracy is alarming. Without an
underlying consensus on the facts – on what we know to be true – we face an unending dispute and policy paralysis. (Klurfeld & Schneider, 2014, p.3)

Klurfeld and Schneider (2014) provide a clear vision of where news literacy curriculum fits in a post-secondary education, positioning news literacy as a course in journalism, critical thinking, and civics education.

As for the effectiveness of the Stony Brook curriculum, the authors are optimistic but cautious based on early success in changing the behaviors of students interviewed after taking the class. Increased voting rates and higher, more critical engagement with the news media are early signs the news literacy curriculum had the desired effect. The longevity of those changes still remains to be seen as they continue to track the study participants.

Guerrero and Restrepo (2012) provide an excellent summary of the role of journalism in society up until the 21st century as gatekeepers of information and watchdog for the general good in their article “Media literate ‘prodiences’: Binding the knot of news content and production for an open society”. As these and other writers (Fleming, 2010, 2012; Loth, 2012; Mihailidis, 2012) point out, audiences are now becoming producers, or as these authors refer to them, “prodiences” (Guerrero & Restrepo, 2012). However, as the means of communication have exploded over the past twenty years, so has the role of gatekeepers and watchdogs. News media, they argue, is no longer a one-way flow of information.

In their article, Guerrero and Restrepo (2012) explore the ways in which the traditional roles of the news media have shifted due to the increasing influence the audience has on the content of the news as well as changes to the news industry itself.
The authors argue for a much different model of journalism going forward, one where the
media literate “prodiences” have a direct, and in some cases immediate, impact of the
various elements that shape the content of the news. The authors outline a particular
vision of the future of journalism, the realization of that vision may take some time as the
industry resists the changes they discuss. The ability of various sectors of the industry
(i.e., print, radio, or television) to resist the changes will vary greatly from one sector to
another as well as region to region.

Many writers in the news literacy field describe the role of journalist as one that is
under attack from the changes that are occurring in the information medium, from
bloggers to citizen journalists. In “Reaffirming the Journalist” as vital to 21st century
information flow, civic dialog and news literacy, San Martin (2012) endeavors to define a
new role for professional journalists in the new landscape of public information.

The author’s point-counterpoint discussion highlights some challenges faced by
the journalism profession. From “journalists are no longer the only voices” (San Martin,
2012, p. 90) to the very real need for continued traditional journalism outlets, “not
everyone is on the web” (San Martin, 2012, p. 91) and while journalists may not be the
first to report the facts of the information of a news story, the author contends their role
as watchdogs is still needed to put that information into meaningful context (San Martin,
2012).

In Mujica’s (2012) article “Creating Shared Dialog through Case Study
Exploration: The Global Media Literacy Learning Module”, the author lays out a concrete
model for implementing many of the theories and approaches to news literacy discussed
in the above article by Guerrero and Restrepo (2012), as well as San Martin (2012) in the same volume. Like the other authors, Mujica seems to be coming from a media literacy background and like the other authors uses the term interchangeably with the term news literacy.

After outlining prominent theories of media literacy that underlie his case study approach, Mujica (2012) proceeds to outline the development of this model at the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change. By allowing the students to participate in the selection of the material used in the case study, Mujica found greater interest of the students and further exploration of their preconceptions. While there are some areas of concern with this approach: i.e. focusing too much on the content of the material in the case study and not the broader issues that underlie it) the author feels with proper guidance from the instructor those concerns can be avoided (Mujica, 2012). We are then presented with numerous commented examples of case studies that explore many of the underlying issues in news literacy and its instruction, such as the participation of citizen journalists, addressing cultural and religious divides. The case studies also explore the analysis of these issues using the 5 A’s of media literacy: access, awareness, assessment, appreciation and action (Mujica, 2012).

This article provides examples of the way case studies can be used to engage students in a media literacy exercise, while showing how to achieve a broader, world view of the media, rather that an American-centric exploration of the issues.

In summary, the changes to the journalism field from traditional media to the digital realm and the way news consumers interact with them, as well as the evolving role for journalism in society, form the basis of the need for news literacy skills. Success of a
news literacy program will depend on a greater understanding of how news consumers currently navigate the information worlds of both traditional and digital media.

**How News Consumers Navigate in the Digital Information Age**

In developing an effective news curriculum, educators at Stony Brook University and others had to understand how news consumers are getting their information. This has proven to be a difficult task given the pace of change in digital technology and the growing variety of access points as the readings outlines below will demonstrate.

The study commissioned by the Associated Press in 2007, “A New Model for News: Studying the deep structures of young-adult news consumption” (Associated Press, 2008), was undertaken to provide the organization with a better understanding of how their target audience interacts with the news. The goal was to have some insight into how best to re-shape the way they deliver their product. While undertaken to improve a business model for delivering a product to the customer, the study unexpectedly provided valuable insight into how young adults behave as news consumers in a digital and mobile information environment. By utilizing a research methodology of ethnography, this study puts a human face on the growing movement away from traditional news outlets to the digital and mobile realm. Participant profiles show the abundance of information that can be accessed with ease but they also highlight concerns about the quality of information that the digital news consumer is getting.

The use of an ethnographic research model also let the researchers explore the various motivations of the participants to seek out news information. Participants used news as social currency while interacting with the people in their lives, but also as a way to pass the time. The study also highlighted some news experiences were more satisfying
than others; namely ones that had story resolution or utilized satire to explore issues (Associated Press, 2008).

The study’s model for news, with four areas of content (i.e., Updates, Facts, Back Story, Future Stories), highlights the fundamental problem of too much information (Updates and Facts) with little or no context (Back Story and Future Stories). This leads to news fatigue, as described by the participants, as well as a sense of helplessness to do anything about it (Associated Press, 2008).

The report also makes recommendations to address some of the highlighted issues: providing more depth, addressing news fatigue and creating social currency. The report describes news consumers “using news as ‘social currency’ in a variety of ways: to stay connected with loved ones, to be the hub in their circle of friends, to advance their careers, and to engage with others they don’t know” (Associated Press, 2008 p. 50). While some of those innovations are highlighted in the report as well, the success of the changes remains to be seen (Associated Press, 2008).

A series of articles published by the Canadian Media Research Consortium (2011), “Social Networks Transforming How Canadians Get The News”, “Canadian Consumers Unwilling To Pay For News Online and Even in the Digital Era”, “Canadians Have Confidence in Mainstream News Media”, provide valuable insight into the differences between the Canadian and American experience on the part of news consumers. While research in the United States continually shows a declining trust of the media on the part of the public (Pew, 2011), the opposite appears to be true in Canada. Traditional media scores high in reliability and trustworthiness while social media are not
seen to be a trustworthy source of information (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011a).

Canadians seem to be getting more and more of their news through social media, much like their counterparts in the United States (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011b). This is similar to findings by the Pew Research Centre (Pew, 2011), and like the Pew Centre's research, it is the younger demographic groups in the study that show the greatest use of social media as a source for news (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011b).

Canadians and Americans also show similar preferences when it comes to paying for online news. While there have been some isolated cases of success in the United States with news organizations establishing pay-walls, the same cannot be said for similar news outlets in Canada. Consumers met attempts by The Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star with a great deal of resistance (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011c).

Given the enormous influence of American culture in Canada, similar attitudes towards the issues of social media and paying for online news content are not surprising, but Canadian attitudes in the area of trust of the news media is significantly different than Americans. What role this would play in news literacy education remains to be seen (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011a).

Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2014) offers similar insights to the news consumption habits in a number of European countries. The use of social media networks as curators of the news people consume, and the rapid growth of the mobile platform outlined in this report both mirror the trends that have been documented in the United

In summary, given the wide array of access points in the digital information age, news consumers often use more than one method to stay informed on various topics. Tracking those patterns and habits is made more challenging because of the ever evolving nature of the technology. As new technologies come into widespread use, news consumption habits change.

Researchers are also limited to high level conclusions about news consumption habits and the impact of geographical differences can often be overlooked.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades both journalism and the way people access information have undergone significant changes. Journalism struggles to still perform the societal function of watchdog, communicator and curator of public debate while adapting to the changes its business model as well as the consumption habits of news consumers. These changes make it harder for journalism to fulfill its role while at the same time making its role more vital in democratic societies.

While the key may lie in understanding how news consumers access the information, gaining that understanding remains extremely difficult as news consumption habits shift due to geographic, democratic and technological changes. Contending with this constantly moving, yet vital target may be biggest challenge for news literacy educators and researchers.
Chapter 3: Method

Qualitative method

By choosing a qualitative approach, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of adults’ use of news media to access information, as well as a sense of how much content they extract from it. This offered insight into adult learners and their level of understanding of news media: how they access, interpret, and critically appraise the wealth of information available on a daily basis.

Ethics

Once the study’s parameters and process were finalized, ethics approval for the study was sought from appropriate ethics boards at Queen’s University, including the Education Research Ethics Board, and the General Research Ethics Board (Appendix A).

Data collection

The study comprised of three phases of data collection: preliminary interviews with participants, news logs completed by participants, and follow-up interviews.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

I recruited four volunteers for the study by posting a link to the letter of information on Twitter, with the local hash tag of #YGK to bring it to the attention of local users. YGK is the airport code for the Kingston airport and has been adopted by the local twitter community to distinguish their tweets from those related to Kingston, Jamaica or celebrities/companies using the name Kingston. This was done a total of 4 times over the course of five days (Appendix B). Twitter was used because of its highly active local usage as well as news literacy’s focus on the digital nature of access to news
and other information. Twitter users, as participants, ensured digital access to information would be part of their news consumption habits.

Twenty-one responses were received. After checking the Twitter profiles of all respondents, one respondent was eliminated due to a prior working relationship with me. One respondent was eliminated due to an educational background in journalism and current position in the communication field.

Though purposeful selection, four individuals were recruited who had different educational levels and age groups. Recruitment was focused on individuals who have been out of secondary school for a minimum of 5 years in order to mitigate the influence of the Ontario education curriculum in media literacy, as well as help finding individuals whose news consumption habits and democratic participation have settled into a pattern of behavior that was based on their own level of interest and motivations, rather than ones influenced by education or work requirements. Using a preliminary survey (Appendix C), I found participants who consume news on a regular basis (at least once every two to three days) and who consume news from at least one digital platform (mobile devices or via websites) in addition to other news outlets (i.e., newspapers and television). Given that one of the primary purposes of the news literacy curriculum is to enable people to be able to distinguish between news and other forms of information, it was important that the participants of this study experience news consumption from both the traditional and digital sources.

All participants are referred to by pseudonyms in order to protect their identity to the extent possible.
**Initial interviews and observation exercise.** Participants were interviewed at the beginning of the study regarding their news media consumption: where, when, how often they look for news information (Please see Appendix D for the interview guide). Participants were also asked to demonstrate the way in which they access news information using newspapers and computers or devices that were provided to them during the interview. This walk-through enriched the information from the interview as well as increased the application of “multi-method triangulation of data across inquiry techniques” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 331).

**News consumption logs.** To gain a better understanding of how people experienced news media on a daily basis, participants were asked to keep a news media journal for a period of one week, via an online survey platform. During this news log period they were asked to document where and when they accessed news every day (Appendix E). They were encouraged to document any thoughts or feelings about the news items they accessed and their thoughts on how well the news item informed them about the subject matter. If possible these journal entries were collected throughout the news log period. They enabled me to track what ongoing news stories the participants followed. A selection of these news items (i.e. newspaper articles, news reports, websites) was collected to augment the analysis of the participants' journals and inform the follow-up interview.

**Follow-up interviews.** After analysis of the initial interview, observation and news logs, follow-up interviews helped to probe for deeper understanding about participants' thinking processes around particular news stories mentioned in the news logs (Please see Appendix F for the interview guide).
Data Analysis

Both pre- and post-interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were examined through an iterative process to find emerging themes. The emerging themes were then compared to the news literacy skills described in the literature and currently at the centre of news literacy curriculum.

A priori codes. While most themes were developed through an inductive approach, some themes were pre-existing in regards to the nature of research question number two: How do participants exhibit the appraisal and assessment skills that news literacy educators outline in their curriculum? The inspiration for these codes was the curriculum as it is conceived at Stony Brook University.

The first theme I kept in mind was how the sources of the information are defined in the news literacy curriculum. Lott and others refer to these as information neighborhoods (Lott, 2012; Fleming 2013, Klurfeld & Schneider, 2014). This is the ability to distinguish news from other sources of information such as entertainment, advertising, publicity, propaganda, and raw information. During both the preliminary interview and the post-interview, I tried to get a better understanding of the participants’ choices of news sources and what opinions they had about them. Examples of the kinds of responses that would be included in this code would be ones that indicate whether or not the participants differentiated between news organizations, community or political organizations and individual posting such as personal blogs. Also included in this group are statements of value that the participants place on the different sources of information as well as which ones they trust or distrust and why.
The second pre-existing theme that grew out of the news literacy curriculum at Stony Brook University is do individuals differentiate between news and opinion. In traditional, as well as digital news platforms, the mixture of news and opinion, often in the same news program or news piece, can make distinguishing between the two very difficult (Lott, 2012; Fleming 2013, Klurfeld & Schneider, 2014). In the follow up interviews I was looking for some expression of that ability from the participants in regards to the items that they discussed in the interview and highlighted in their logs. Specifically, comments that indicated awareness of the difference between news and opinion pieces, and the role of opinion pieces within the news sources they accessed and referred to in their news consumption log.

Finally, the last element of the news literacy curriculum that I am using as a pre-existing theme is the awareness of bias in the information sources as well as personal bias that the participants are aware of. This would include the use of the phrases such as bias, media bias, political bias or similar. Recognizing personal bias is an important skill that the news literacy program at Stony Brook tries to develop in their students. This study seeks to see if this awareness is present in the participant’s news consumption experience.

Beyond these pre-existing codes I analyzed the data for other naturally occurring themes that emerged around their daily habits of news consumption. These themes would relate directly to research questions one (How do participants consume news and for what purpose?) and two (What is the nature of the participants’ news consumption from digital and traditional news sources?) This was done using a recursive process, similar to that described by McMillan & Schumacher (2010). The first iteration identified coded information that aligned with the a priori codes outlined above. The second iteration
identified “information units” outside of the pre-existing coded during which the coding system was developed from the data. The third involved “the categorization of the information units” (p. 378). Finally, direct participant quotations and data from the participants own log were used to support the themes that emerge.

In addition to the data collected from the participants, I conducted exercises to increase the reflexivity of my analysis of the results by consulting with other education researchers in a peer-debriefing exercise, and maintaining my own journal through the coding process.

An inter-reliability exercise was used partly because of the parallel with the process between journalists and editors in the production of quality, long form news pieces such as magazine articles or radio documentaries. The journalist would often propose the story, not unlike a researcher, and the editor would ensure the story is accurate, not unlike the second reader of the coding data.

**Participant Profiles**

**Mary.** Mary is a single woman in her early twenties who has just completed a college program in a social services related field. She accesses news content mostly through her mobile device, but also watches news programming on occasion when it is on in her vicinity. This participant relies mostly on Twitter to decide which news stories to follow. She exercises some caution before re-tweeting news content. She follows both news organizations as well as individuals and relies on those sources to provide a summary of ongoing news events.

**Frances.** Frances is a female in her late sixties who has completed a post-secondary education and is retired from and administrative position in the performing arts
sector. She is sometimes drawn to stories with a personal connection but not always. She considers it a duty to stay informed through news consumption. She does access news online but also utilizes traditional media sources and has daily newspaper subscriptions. She describes herself as “not a news hound” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14).

**James.** James is a married male with three children with a post-secondary education in liberal arts, who works in the financial industry. Most of his news access is through a mobile device and is extremely connected to the local Twitter community with multiple accounts for community information purposes and has followers that number in the thousands. As well, this participant is involved in local community movements that are largely organized through Twitter. He relies on Twitter for most news but does not follow news organizations, only individuals. He re-distributes information regularly throughout the day and describes himself as a connector.

**Samuel.** Samuel is a highly educated male in his late sixties. He is retired from a mid-level administrative position with one of the provincial ministries. This participant actively pursues news for fun and is highly analytical of news products and news sources. Samuel lacks an in-depth knowledge of news operations but tries to understand as much as he can from the outside. He is aware of biases in news media outlets and seeks out news media from the other side of international issues. This participant’s news choices appear to be driven by personal interest with the subject. He does not demonstrate an awareness of his own individual biases either from his own political views or from his news media choices. He does not pay for news content online and gets the majority of his news through a mobile device. As well his interest is primarily in the area of international news more so than local or provincial news.
Chapter 4: Results

In the previous chapter I outlined the methodology for examining my research questions with the four participants along with their brief biographical descriptions. I begin this chapter with more detailed profiles of the participants, this time as news consumers, exploring, in their own words, the ways in which they access news using both digital and legacy media platforms (e.g. newspapers, radio and television) along with their motivations. In the second part, I will explore, based on the data, responses to the research questions I proposed in chapter one again by using the data collected to compare the participants experiences with digital and traditional news and drawing connections from the participant’s experiences to what trends have been found in the literature outlined in chapter two.

Mary Profile

This participant is 24 and has just completed one three-year post-secondary program at a local college with the intention of moving to begin a second program in a related field.

She describes herself as a daily consumer of news via the Internet using a mobile device, relying heavily on Twitter and Facebook for access to news stories that are of interest to her. Despite this she references a news item that she watched on television at work. Her television exposure is limited to while she is at work, but is outside of her control, as she does not own a television. She seems to be very aware of media bias but does not classify the individuals she follows on social media the same way. They simply share her interests. This participant does not seem to hold any brand loyalty when it comes to news organizations in that she will read news stories from most news outlets if
they come to her attention through her social media accounts. While all of the items she discussed in her daily news logs are from what would be considered the news neighborhood according to the news curriculum, she also readily accepts information from single sources like the local police or school board as news. This would indicate that she does not differentiate between information sources as the news literacy curricula suggests, namely distinguishing between news neighborhoods. Instead for her the more social media posts an account has, the more trustworthy it seems to her.

The police are going to post obviously the most accurate information they can. The school board is going to post that. It may not be as full information as say a news article on the item might be but it gives me the information I need to know and it’s – I find especially here in Kingston – it’s more up to date. It is the news. It might be missing items but those items I’ll find out throughout the course of the event. (Participant Interview, 05/30/14)

There seem to be a number of conflicts in her description of how and why she consumes news. She wants to manage her consumption and sources “because I want to know the truth. I don’t want to know someone’s biased opinion on what has happened. I want to know the facts on what’s happened,” (Participant Interview 05/30/14) but is unaware of how a lot of the information comes her way. Referring to Facebook, she states: “I think it’s fairly pre-determined. I think sometimes what you click on generates further because I noticed the more that I’ve been going on it kind of… it’s more the articles have interested me” (Participant Interview 05/07/14). Despite saying she wants to be well informed about people and places, she also said she didn’t follow the election announcement because she was moving out of the province.
She seems to be largely unaware of personal bias as it is defined in news literacy curricula. She tries to be careful about the validity of information that she shares, but it remains unclear if she has assessed the reliability of the people she follows on social media.

While there is an effort to control the flow of information that she consumes and is exposed to, it remains haphazard and random. “I have forty-five minute bus rides one way to work so I’ll just go through and I follow the people who’ve interested me and then I’ll read the articles that they post that interest me further” (Participant Interview 05/07/14). Overall there seems to be a disconnection between motivation and actions in trying to be a well-informed news consumer.

**Frances Profile**

This 64 year-old participant is the oldest of the group. She had been working in the arts sector as a marketing administrator for a number of years before retiring and moving to Kingston. She has a subscription to a newspaper at the time of the interviews but is considering dropping it because of concerns about the quality of the local paper’s content since its change in ownership.

She found out about the study through a reposting by an acquaintance on Facebook. “I don’t check the Twitter as often” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). While the newspaper is described as a major source, so is Facebook. “I do find I tend to go on Facebook now almost before I hit the news to see what sort of trending (from) people. It’s almost like it’s … they’re curating the news for us, you know” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14).
She also regularly watches the evening news but uses Twitter for breaking news and she values it for the direct links to news stories. Her overall approach is to utilize traditional media outlets like television news and newspapers while also letting social media act as a curator of what particular news items she will follow.

As a news consumer, she has a strong brand loyalty for the new organizations, while noticing changes to some of the specific news outlets:

Well, I mean, the Whig. It’s ridiculous now that it’s Sun Media. It’s more right wing. It’s certainly more conservative and it’s dumb. … I trust the Globe a lot. CBC seems pretty thin. They get thinner all the time these days. (Participant Interview, 05/06/14)

She relies heavily on the curating of news information by social media to bring things to her attention. She follows local municipal politicians as if they were news sources “There’s a couple of city councilors I follow and they’re sort of different spectrum and then I figure well if there’s that kind of news here we’ll get to it that way” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). At the same time, she is aware of civic responsibilities with the pending election “I have to get more informed. I’m just not patient enough yet. It’s not maybe close enough quite yet to election time to sit right down. … I’ll read them but it’s more dutiful than it is genuine, deep interest, you know” (Participant Interview, 05/14/14).

She has a strong interest in Arts news because of her previous career and is aware of that influence on her news choices. She is a heavy user of the mobile platform stating that she “tends to be more of a phone addict” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14) and
admits that this will limit her engagement in a news story “There’s sort of a limit it seems like, you know, three screens full is plenty” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14).

Her motivation is also unique among the four participants. She is the only participant to specifically reference civic duty. “It feels like a civic duty a bit, you know. You know, one should be on top of what’s going on in the world at least in some sense, you know” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). She expands further:

I think it’s a citizen’s duty to be at least informed of the basics. I mean, it’s like: Why should you vote? It’s a bit of the same sort of thing. That the affairs of the world are something that we need to be informed about so we can take whatever action that we can. (Participant Interview, 05/14/14)

She has given some thought during the journaling period about how and why certain news stories are done. It has also clearly prompted her to think more about how the news industry works.

She has a clear understanding of the role of journalism, and some ideas of the limitations due to the business model. “That’s the news – the business of people who are in the news industry. To capitalize on interest that’s already there, you know” (Participant Interview, 05/14/14). In practice, however, she often gives equal weight to social media posts, by people in public positions and doesn’t fully distinguish between news and opinion “Well, for me it was news. I mean, I guess, I didn’t know anything about it. So maybe it is an opinion piece. … I don’t differentiate too much” (Participant Interview, 05/14/14). Likewise, with her personal bias, she has clear ideas in the abstract “It’s interesting to know that you have certain leanings but also to challenge them is important (Participant Interview, 05/14/14).
James Profile

This young man is 34 years old and married with three children. He has completed an undergraduate degree in the area of liberal arts. He is employed in the banking industry and is active in a number of volunteer community organizations. While much of his information ultimately comes from news organizations, how he gets to information is through individuals. He reasons this gives him the broadest exposure to multiple sources while counter-acting news media bias:

Because, from my perspective, they have a general bent to the way that they present certain things. You know, whether it’s… it’s a liberal point of view or a conservative point of view or a pro-business or an anti-business or whatever… whatever it is. Whereas the people that I… the individuals that I follow tend to be more diverse in group and it’s interesting to see which article it is that they use to present their points of view. (Participant Interview, 05/01/14)

His choice of Twitter as the main source for those individuals is also clearly reasoned:

I very specifically follow people with diverse viewpoints that I know I’m going to disagree with specifically so that will happen. So that I can get a better sense of, you know, what’s really going on out there other than just getting the confirmation bias that, you know, if that tool wasn’t available, I would be subject to. (Participant Interview, 05/01/14)

His understanding of how to use information sources such as Google and Wikipedia is in-depth, including an understanding of the limitations of those tools.
Well I know that one of the things I googled as… when it’s determining what goes at the top of the search is how many other organizations are linking to that particular link. So that’s a good source. It’s not infallible but it’s a good way of knowing whether that’s a reputable page or not to rely on, you know, because it’s kind of a peer review-type thing. (Participant Interview, 05/01/14)

Two of his motivations for news consumption are social currency and self-interest:

It’s to see if there’s anything that is going to directly affect me and so that I can react in some way to it so that I’m not adversely affected by it. Secondly, it’s so that I can have worthwhile conversations with people throughout the day.

( Participant Interview, 05/01/14)

His third motivation is a desire to learn. “I mean, that’s part of… that’s why you read the articles in the first place. It’s to learn something rather than just to keep, you know, thinking the exact same thing” (Participant Interview, 05/01/14).

This news consumer also understands the limitations of sticking to only one organization for information. He feels his ad hoc method of reading diverse sources would also help off set his own personal biases, of which he is keenly aware:

Most of the time it will have to do with, you know, a political stance that I’ve taken based on information that I’ve read from somebody who has a clearly biased view and I happen to agree with that biased view and then somebody presents a study that shows a contrarian view to that and I’m perfectly happy to take that new information and change what the view is and then sheepishly
apologize for having taken the opposite view - and that’s ok. (Participant Interview, 05/01/14)

**Samuel Profile**

The second male participant is 64 years old. He has completed the highest level of education with a Master’s degree in an area of study related to his former field of employment.

Despite his reservations and criticisms of news media bias he largely follows news organizations on social media and considers it one of his primary sources. His use is mostly one-sided in that he does not disseminate much of what he sees or reads. While he does follow individual reporters on Twitter, he is disappointed with the information it provides, hoping it would offer opinion or analysis of events.

Rather than relying only on the Western media perspective he actively seeks out international sources for news:

I also have an interest in American news generally because the networks that I watch tend to be very political or they’re all political, really. So, you know, I have a bit of a fascination with politics and I suppose particularly American politics. So that gives my… you know, that feeds that sort of interest in what’s going on.

(Participant Interview, 05/02/14)

His news consumption tends to be more from traditional sources with a lot of television news. Rather than accessing newspapers physically, he relies on the Twitter feeds from traditional news outlets. His tendency is to follow news links from Twitter to the sources website. He subscribes to numerous Western news outlets as well as many Eastern European news organizations. His motivations for seeking out news information
in both digital and traditional media sources seem to be mostly those of general interest in world political events. While he thinks it is important to be informed about what is going on in the world around him, he doesn’t give any specific reason. He describes his interest in political news as fun and a continuation of the type of work he did while working in the public sector. He has also expressed an interest in the process of media and its interaction with politics. This stemmed from a personal involvement in a provincial news story about his area of employment. He describes the event negatively and it seems to have created a sense of mistrust in news media in general:

Prior to ’96, I wasn’t what I would call a real news junky – if I can use that term – but what got me interested in this was as a civil servant, we got caught up in a real mess in one of our institutions . . . and it got to the point where not only was the newspaper reporting stuff, they were reporting stuff about me and my colleagues about these events that were going on. (Participant Interview, 05/02/14)

While he is mostly interested in following politics from the United States or to a lesser degree, Canada, he does mention following a number of international news stories, which have a personal connection with him and his family. He is aware of the bias in many of these sources and clearly seeks them out for the alternative point of view on any given topic. Some of the sources are state controlled media but he seems to consider it no more biased than the Western news outlets that he follows:

I try to get feeds that might give a little more of their national perspective as opposed to what our national perspective might be so I can, hopefully, draw some of my own conclusions as (opposed) to… the conclusions that western journalism or western media might want me to have. (Participant Interview, 05/02/14)
This news consumer is very interested in the relationship between politics and media and describes himself as very analytical of the information that he consumes though the news media, he also describes it as a pastime, something he does for fun. His diverse sources give him many different points of points from which to consider issues and events.

With these four news consumer profiles in mind, I would like to look once again at the three research questions I outlined in chapter one. I will look at each question separately to try to answer them based on the data that has been collected and by comparing the responses of the participants. I will also put their behaviors and choices in context of findings of other studies that look at news consumption.

**How do Participants Consume News and for What Purpose?**

All participants rely heavily on social media for their news contact point. Twitter and Facebook posts by friends and acquaintances most often provide links to the news stories that they sometimes read, but usually not in its entirety. Many of the participants indicated in their selections surveys, and in their pre-interviews that their mobile devices were their primary access point for the majority of their news consumption. They also indicated in their pre-interviews that there was a limit to how much they are willing to read on those devices. James admits that it can limit his time with a news article, that:

If it looks like I’m going to have to scroll through four or five times in order to read the whole article, I will either not bother reading or I’ll pull it up on the laptop and read it there (If it’s not available). I won’t bother. (Participant Interview, 05/01/14)
Likewise Samuel acknowledged his mobile device is a limiting factor for how much he will read (Participant Interview, 05/02/14).

All participants still get some news through traditional media outlets such as television, newspapers and even radio. In the selection survey, Mary indicated that she only accessed it through her mobile device and computer, but included two news stories in her daily news log that she accessed by television and a physical newspaper. Only one of the participants, Frances, has a paid subscription to a physical newspaper. Significantly, she is considering terminating it (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). It is also consistent with the declining subscriptions to newspapers in Canada, which has seen newspaper subscriptions fall to only 20% of Canadian households (Communications Management, 2015). None of the participants have a digital subscription to an online newspaper. These choices for news sources are consistent with the findings of a number of studies in Europe and the United States. (Pew, 2010, 2011, 2016).

Participants’ motivation to consume news was most often stated to keep up with current events so they could engage in conversation with others, or what has been described as social currency (Associated Press, 2008; Reuters Institute, 2015). James described it as “...so that I can have worthwhile conversations with people throughout the day. You know, I meet new people on a regular basis and it gives me something that I can draw upon to start out a conversation” (Participant Interview, 05/01/14).

Interestingly, three of the four participants listed items in their daily news logs that held a significant personal connection or interest to them. Mary spoke of being interested in a local story in the newspaper about midwives being of interest to her because of her plans to study the in the field. Another local story about a barn fire caught
her interest because of her interest in horses (Participant Interview, 05/30/14). Her daughter’s field of study motivated Frances’ interest in a television news report on farming (Participant Interview, 05/14/14). Samuel’s interest in the political situation in the Ukraine is motivated by an interest in political news stories; he also has a personal connection to the story because of family members who live there (Participant Interview, 05/12/14). This tendency of remembering news that has a personal connection or that the news consumer agrees with has been documented in studies conducted in Europe, North America and Asia (Associated Press, 2008; Reuters Institute, 2015).

Only one of the participants spoke directly about a civic duty to be informed, while another spoke at length about the importance of being informed about what is happening around them, but didn’t seem able to expand further on the reasons for it’s importance when pressed. It is also important to note that, even though a provincial election had been called, none of the participants felt that their news consuming habits had changed during the data collection period. Mary claimed it wasn’t of interest to her because she would be leaving the province soon, while Frances and James thought that they would probably become more engaged and the provincial campaign progressed.

Samuel was following the political messaging of one party very closely and spoke at length about the previous governments of that party and how it affected him personally.

“I was in the Ontario public service when we went from the sort of Liberal collapse back in the 80’s to the, you know, very surprising election of the NDP in the 90’s to Harris and then back to McGuinty. And it’s very hard to describe to
people the kind of impact that those radical shifts in political power had on the
Ontario public service.”(Participant Interview, 05/12/14)

How do Participants exhibit the Appraisal and Assessment Skills that News Literacy Educators Outline in their Curricula?

During the data collection period, all participants documented items in their daily news log items that news literacy educators would describe as being from the “news neighborhood” (Fleming, 2013; Loth, 2012). Items referenced by the participants were either from newspaper websites, or television news programs. In the interview process however, many participants refer to information that comes directly from a person (i.e. politician) or organization, (i.e. police department, municipal government) as news. Frances spoke about information from local city councilors as a news source. “There’re a couple of city councilors I follow, you know, and they’re sort of different spectrum and then I figure well, if there’s that kind of news here we’ll, you know, we’ll get to it that way (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). While Mary described the Twitter account of the local police the same way, believing they were reliable source of news because of the frequency of tweets on the account. When asked if she considers that information news she said, “Depending on what they’re posting, yeah. It may not be… as full of information as say, the news article on the item might be, but it gives me the information I need to know” (Participant Interview, 05/30/14).

Additionally, all four participants confused opinion pieces with news items, which is a big distinction for the news literacy curriculum.
All participants expressed concern over media bias identifying certain news outlets as either conservative or liberal. In one case, this bias was extended to ALL Western news outlets.

I try to get feeds that might give a little more of their national perspective as opposed to what our national perspective might be so I can, hopefully, draw some of my own conclusions as (opposed) to... the conclusions that western journalism or western media might want me to have. (Participant Interview, 05/02/14)

Only one of the participants seemed to be aware of the effect of relying on social media might be having on the kinds of news he was accessing. His ad hoc approach to social media is an attempt to counter-balance his own biases yet there seems to be some doubt in his mind that it is a successful approach.

“I’m sure I miss lots of worthwhile, smart articles because the masses haven’t up-voted it or haven’t re-tweeted it. But I think on the grand scheme of things because I’ve got a limited amount of time to be able to disseminate through all of that, I think that’s the lesser of the two evils.” (Participant Interview, 05/15/14)

With the unprecedented ability of news consumers to personalize their news experiences, and the subtle influence the functionality of social media websites to limit exposure to new information and contrary opinions, recognizing personal bias in news consumption is a central tenant of the news literacy curriculum. “The news literacy view on bias is that bias is primarily the product of individual consumption and interpretation habits and, therefore, it is important for news literate citizens to make the distinctions between news media bias and audience bias.”(Fleming 2013, p.109)
What is the Nature of Participants’ News Consumption from Digital and Traditional News Sources?

Both digital and traditional news sources are used but it is primarily digital news sources the participants rely on. The older participants use traditional news media intentionally, setting aside times in the day to either watch television news or read the newspaper, while it seems more haphazard for the younger participants. One doesn’t own a television and only saw it while at work, while the other younger participant only listens to the radio in the car. It is interesting to note both news items that they saw/heard though traditional media ended up being included in their daily news consumption log. This focus by the two younger participants is consistent with the research into news consumption habits both here in North America (Pew, 2015; Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011b; CMI, 2015) as well as Europe (Reuters Institute, 2013). More and more news consumers are getting their news online and increasingly through their mobile devices.

The digital news presence is much higher for all participants but is equally haphazard and, more significantly, overwhelming by their own description. The older participants relied more on news organization’s presence on social media for breaking news, while the younger participants didn’t follow news organizations but rather simply followed individuals, some of who were news professionals, but the majority of whom are not. The only exception to this seemed to be the local newspaper and a local website.

All participants expressed concern about the volume of information that they are exposed to on a daily basis and some described being overwhelmed. They expressed a desire to better manage the amount, the kinds and the diversity of information they are
exposed to, but were unsure how this could be done. There seems to be an inconsistency between what they want to do and what they do in practice. James described using Google to search for more information on topics that struck his interest, acknowledging that there are problems with finding false information there but still believing that “Google could act a type of peer review” (Participant Interview, 05/01/14). Frances described using Facebook to find news because “It’s almost like it’s … they’re curating the news for us, you know” (Participant Interview, 05/06/14). Both these methods remove control of the information that the participants want from the consumer. One of the purposes of media literacy as described by Potter is to “empower individuals to shift control from the media to themselves” (Potter, 2004, p.68).
Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

Long before the advent of the Internet, news consumption required an awareness of bias and the application of critical thinking on the part of news consumers. With practice, news consumers learned who they could trust and where news organizations were on the political spectrum. With the arrival of the Internet, however, news consumers now have more to appraise and more control over what news they consumed. They could customize their news experience with news stories they read to partially create their own newspaper of sorts, and do it all for free. Initially it was a one-way stream of information, but with the advent of the interactive web, Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), news consumers are no longer passive recipients of the news. Social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook mean they can now choose what news they see, and more importantly, what they can do to respond to it. The role of the news consumer has become one of news producer and disseminator to their digital social circles. New digital devices mean that social conversation can take place almost anywhere anytime, and at a speed that has never been possible before.

New Media Landscape

The new landscape of digital information has extensive implications for the news industry and the news consumer. For the industry, the old business model is no longer working. There is a continued search for a new model.

For the consumer it means a more personalized, yet relentless, stream of information that expands the definition of what constitutes news. Ironically, the unprecedented control the consumer now holds over the news they see has lead to more information at their fingertips than ever before: more access to information but with less
engagement with news stories. As news consumers become their own news curators, they were lacking the tools to take control of the media that is now consuming more of their time than ever before. In addition, curating of the news has shifted from the journalistic organizations that produce the news to the consumers of news. In turn it is now much more difficult for a common national conversation to take place on any issue.

Much research has been done by organizations such as the PEW Research Center and Reuters Institute in an attempt to track the changing news consumption habits of the digital news consumer. Even though these studies took place in numerous countries as well as the United States, the participants of this study displayed many of the same general trends that people on other countries have displayed. The participants talked, during both interviews, about getting their news from different sources as well as on different platforms. Mobile devices are figuring more and more prominently in their online news consumption habits and it’s affecting the amount of time they are spending with news and other types of information. They are accessing more news stories through their mobile devices but, more significantly, spending less time with the stories. They are also adapting their news sources to the types of information they want. Local news is more likely sought through traditional media, while other news categories are more likely to be sought out online. All of these behaviors by the participants are mirrored in the larger global studies of online news consumption.

**News Literacy Curriculum**

The older participants of this study know that things have changed in the way news is done, yet continue to follow news organizations as a source of news. They appear to be cognizant of the impact of the business of news on the end product but only in the
vague terms of advertising pays for news production and the higher the ratings the better for the business model of the news (i.e. Higher ratings means more advertising revenue). Not the understanding that is a key goal of Stony Brook’s program, which explores the day-to-day functioning of a newsroom and the editorial choices that impact the content that the news organization produces. The younger participants appear to have an inherent mistrust of news organizations, preferring to follow individuals and only resorting to the local newspaper because of the lack of any other content from local news organizations.

The result for all four participants is a personal bias (i.e. having the news they consume affected by the sources and the methods they use to access the information) that varies in degree, depending on their place on the media literacy continuum that Potter (2004) describes. While some are aware that how they get their information affects what they see, others are less aware of their bias in their approach, (i.e. all news is suspect, and therefore the same). While the participants all expressed concern over the quality of the information available, and in some cases described steps they took to prevent being fooled by fake, or biased news, they all described daily news consumption behavior that left them open to the errors they said they wanted to avoid. In the interviews they expressed a desire to be well informed and not to be taken in by hoaxes online or not to be mislead, but they are unsure how to achieve this and admit to being fooled by things sent to them by sources they trusted. This is where the news literacy curriculum could assist them the most.

They all describe following information through social media that does not come from a professional news source, but describe it as “news”, such as press releases from the police and their local politicians. Therefore, in theory they know the difference and
only log news sources for their daily news log, but then, in the course of the interviews, they described other sources as news as well.

As for distinguishing between news and opinion, one of the central skills the Stony Brook curriculum focuses on, half of the participants actually included opinion pieces in the news log. When probed in the follow-up interviews all four participants discussed how they hadn’t noticed the opinion component of the piece at the time but expressed an understanding that there was a difference between a news piece and opinion piece. In this way all of the participants displayed the behaviors that are at the heart of the Stony Brook University’s news literacy curriculum thus suggesting the curriculum could help to mitigate these news behaviors.

If we were to consider the participants on a continuum as Potter (2004) describes then James would be the furthest along on the continuum, utilizing social media as a community engagement tool. Mary and Samuel are about the same place, with Mary utilizing social media more, particularly Twitter, to follow individuals and not news organizations. Samuel’s bias toward mainstream media is much more pronounced than the other participants, to the point of using foreign media with known biases. Francis is the lowest on the media literacy continuum. Her use of social media, mostly Facebook, leads her to information that is curated for her. Ironically, she is the only participant with a subscription to a physical newspaper, and the only one who believes being well informed is a civic duty. In a pre-digital information age, her skills would be much stronger and place her much further along the continuum. This reinforces Potter’s (2004) assertion that media literacy skills are a continuum. With the ever-evolving state of the
digital landscape, Francis is an example of why being a literate news consumer requires the ongoing development of new skills.

**Limitations**

This study was conducted with four participants and their news log period was for an intense one week. This is a small number of participants to draw any conclusions about the news consumption habits of Canadians or even residents of the city in which they reside. However, by limiting the number of participants I was able to delve more deeply into their news consumption experiences and their motivations for seeking out information online.

The time frame of the study was short at only one week in length. However the shorter time frame also allowed me to conduct richer explorations of their motivations regarding the choices they made on a daily basis. It also allowed me to capture their experiences over the course of a normal news period, at the beginning of the logging exercise, when these events and issues in the news could be described as largely normal. I was also able to see the effects of the announcement of a major news event, the provincial election. As I suggest later in the further research section of this chapter, this would provide an interesting comparison to a similar study conducted entirely in an election period.

**Further Research**

There are a number of research avenues that naturally grow out of this exploratory study. The first, and most obvious step would be to conduct the same study with similar individuals in a larger media marketplace such as Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver. These have always been the largest media markets in Canada, and as such would have a
more robust traditional news economy. They would also have a similarly large digital media economy that would provide more vigorous competition for the traditional media outlets, especially in the area of local news, which all of the participants commented was something they found their city was lacking.

A second area of research would be to conduct a largely similar study, but to conduct it during a significant political process such as an election or referendum for a longer period of time. This could give greater insight into news consumer’s use of new media for democratic purpose, while also providing a better understanding of the role of social media news consumption in the development, and maintenance, of audience bias in participants. Studying news consumption during a significant news event such as an election would allow comparison between habits and motivations between those circumstances and the ones under which this study was conducted.

The third possible study would be the development of an adult focused news literacy curriculum and apply it to four similar participants to determine if the curriculum would in fact change the behaviors that this study highlighted. At present, the curriculum currently used at Stony Brook is not focused on the adult education approach, as it is directed at university undergrad students. This approach would incorporate the adult education components of self-guided study, self-reflection and incorporating the participant’s previous knowledge and experience.

The fourth avenue of investigation would be an exploration of the development of audience bias and how it relates to news consumers’ attempts to control the flow of information they are exposed to on a daily basis. Is it the interplay between the two that we need a curriculum to address? What role do these two elements play in the
development of motivated reasoning; the dismissing of new information that contradicts pre-existing ideas or beliefs (Nyhan and Reifler, 2012).

**Conclusion**

Going forward we need both qualitative and quantitative research if we are to develop a clear understanding of how people are being informed, or informing themselves, in a digital information age. Qualitative research would provide a richer understanding into the news consumer’s experience of the digital information age; how they manage the flow of information and their motivations for seeking out information. It could also give insight into how that information is integrated into what Potter (2013) calls their existing knowledge structures, or why it is rejected. More detailed quantitative research is needed on where people are going to get information, how they get there and what they ultimately do with that information. Following both these streams of research will begin to give researchers a clearer understanding of the shape of the digital Canadian community, who is part of it, who is missing and the influence it has on the interaction of Canadians as citizens of their country.

The results of this study show that people are aware of the need to be careful of where and how they get information, but their daily practices often result in them making the mistakes they claim to want to avoid, like falling for fake news stories or mistaking opinion pieces for news stories. If we view news as a way for building and maintaining a community, as John Dewey envisioned it: “Communication alone can build a great community” (Dewey, 1927), and we recognize the need for audiences to have control over the media they consume, as James Potter describes in his theory of media literacy, then researching the mechanics of how news consumers access digital information is not
enough. Just as the printed word changes the way people thought, so too is the digital word affecting the way that news consumers are perceiving, managing and using information. Just as understanding the written word became a necessary skill in the modern world, understanding the digital word and its implications must become a key skill in the digital world.
References


Pew Research Center (2010). *Americans spending more time following the news* Retrieved online: https://www.peoplepress.org


www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion_papers/d71_loth.p df


Appendix A

March 31, 2014

Mr. Brian Williams
Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-684-13; Romeo # 6010518
Title: "GEDUC-684-13 Educating The Public Through News Media: How people learn from the news in the new media landscape"

Dear Mr. Williams:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-684-13 Educating The Public Through News Media: How people learn from the news in the new media landscape" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair, General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Richard Reeve, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Benjamin Bolden, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Stacey Boulton, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research
Letter of Information
“Educating the Public Through News Media”

This research is being conducted by Brian Williams, as part of his Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Richard Reeve, in the Department of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to better understand how people access news information from traditional and digital sources. The study will require two audio-recorded interviews of approximately one hour each and the completion of a brief news log for one week with one log entry per day. Participating will require a time commitment of approximately three hours in total over the course of a two-week period.

Is my participation voluntary? Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time. Participating in this study involves no more risk to the participants’ normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to you associated with agreeing to this research.

What will happen to my responses? We will keep your responses confidential to the extent possible. Only researchers and transcribers will have access to the data. The data obtained in this study may be used for secondary analysis, in which case it will contain no identifying information. In accordance with the Faculty of Education’s policy, the data from this study will be retained for a minimum of five years. The data may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will not breach individual confidentiality to the extent possible. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings by supplying contact information in the indicated area on the consent form.

Will I be compensated for my participation? No, there is no monetary compensation for participating.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation, or requests to withdraw from the study, either during or after participation, may be directed to the Brian Williams at (613) 533-6206 or 9bw11@queensu.ca or my supervisor, Richard Reeve, at (613) 533-6000 Ext. 77296 or by e-mail at reever@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or (613) 533-6081.
Consent Form
“Educating the Public Through News Media”

Name (please print clearly): ________________________________

1. I have read the Letter of Information and retained a copy for my records. I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called “Educating the public through news media”. I understand that this means that I will be asked to participate in two audio-recorded interviews of about an hour each and to complete a daily news log for one week, which should take approximately 10 minutes each day.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time during or after the completion of the study. Requests to withdraw may be directed to the Brian Williams at (613) 533-6206 or 9bw11@queensu.ca or my supervisor, Richard Reeve, at (613) 533-6000 Ext. 77296 or by e-mail at reever@queensu.ca. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future to the extent possible. Only researchers involved in the project at the Faculty of Education and a transcriber will have access to this area. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and maintain confidentiality to the extent possible.

   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequence. If I do withdraw from the study I may request that all data with my participation is destroyed. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentially to the extent possible.

4. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact Brian Williams (613) 533-6206; 9bw11@queensu.ca; project supervisor, Richard Reeve (613)-533-6000 Ext.77296; reever@queensu.ca, or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board (613) 533-6081; chair.GREB@queensu.ca, at Queen’s University.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research:

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it to the researcher. Retain the second copy for your records.

Signature: __________________________ Date: _________________

*Please provide either an email address or a postal address in the space below if you would like a copy of a brief report on the findings of this study.
Appendix B

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 19 Apr 2014
Hey #ygk, how do you stay informed? A study about online news habits is being done at Queen’s and needs volunteers: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 18 Apr 2014
What kind of news habits do you have, #ygk? This study is being done at Queen’s and is looking for participant’s: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 17 Apr 2014
Are your news habits keeping you informed or in the dark? Join a study about news habits being done at Queen’s #ygk: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 16 Apr 2014
Hey #ygk, how do you stay informed? This study about news habits being done at @queensu is looking for participants: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 16 Apr 2014
What kind of news habits do you have, #ygk? A study at Queen's about news habits is looking for participants: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG

Brian Williams @bwilli17 · 15 Apr 2014
Hey #ygk, how do you stay informed? This study about news habits is being done at Queen's and needs volunteers: surveymonkey.com/s/5DDNKQG
Appendix C

Selection Survey

Letter Of Information

Thank-you for your interest in this research project.

This research is being conducted by Brian Williams, as part of his Master’s thesis, under the supervision of Richard Reeve, in the Department of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen’s policies.

What is this study about?

The purpose of this research is to better understand how people access news information from traditional and digital sources. The study will require two audio-recorded interviews of approximately one hour each and the completion of a brief news log for one week with one log entry per day. Participating will require a time commitment of approximately three hours in total over the course of a two-week period.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time. Participating in this study involves no more risk to the participants’ normal daily activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to you associated with agreeing to this research.

What will happen to my responses?

We will keep your responses confidential to the extent possible. Only researchers and transcribers will have access to the data. The data obtained in this study may be used for secondary analysis, in which case it will contain no identifying information. In accordance with the Faculty of Education’s policy, the data from this study will be retained for a minimum of five years. The data may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will not breach individual confidentiality to the extent possible. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a
copy of the findings by supplying contact information in the indicated area on the consent form.

Will I be compensated for my participation?

No, there is no monetary compensation for participating.

What if I have concerns?

Any questions about study participation, or requests to withdraw from the study, either during or after participation, may be directed to the Brian Williams at (613) 533-6206 or 9bw11@queensu.ca or my supervisor, Richard Reeve, at (613) 533-6000 Ext. 77296 or by e-mail at reever@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or (613) 533-6081.

By completing this survey, you are granting permission to gather this information for use in this study.
Selection Survey

* 1. What is your first name?

* 2. What is your last name?

* 3. What is your age?

* 4. How would you like to be contacted? Please provide e-mail address or phone number.

* 5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Did not attend school
   - Graduated from high school
   - 1 year of college/university
   - 2 years of college/university
   - 3 years of college/university
   - Graduated from college/university
   - Some graduate school
   - Completed graduate school

* 6. How often do you read/watch/listen to the news?

* 7. How do you get the news? (Check all that apply)
   - Internet
   - Radio
   - TV
   - Newspapers
   - Mobile Device
8. What kinds of news do you read/watch/listen to on a regular basis? (Check all that apply)

☐ Local News  ☐ National News  ☐ International News  ☐ Sports

☐ Entertainment

Powered by SurveyMonkey
See how easy it is to create a survey.
Appendix D

Pre-News Log Interview

In the selection survey you indicated that you access news information from multiple sources. Could you tell me a little more about what those are? How often do you access these sources?

Why do you access the news? Are there some sources that you trust more than others? Which ones? Why?

Do you often find the information insufficient? How often do you look for information elsewhere?

How do you usually access them? Can you show me/walk me through how? Why do you access this information in this way?

Do you share what you read through social media? How? How often? Do you have any rules you follow about sharing (i.e.) certain content, certain sources? Are there some things you do not share?

How often do you access news from unfamiliar sources? Is this initiated by you or by something you have received electronically from someone you know? Do you usually take any steps to confirm what you have been sent by others?
Appendix E

Final Daily News Log

* 1. Name

* 2. How do you access the news today? (Check all that apply)
   - TV
   - Radio
   - Newspapers
   - Internet
   - Mobile Device

* 3. What kinds of news do you read/watch/listen to today? (Check all that apply)
   - Local News
   - National News
   - International News
   - Sports
   - Entertainment

4. Thinking back on the news you read, watched or heard today, was there one story that stands out? Why did you read it? (Please indicate the name of the organization that produced the news story)
5. How did you find this news story?

6. What made it memorable?
7. Did you look for more information about the topic?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I wanted to, but didn't have time

8. In your opinion, was it a good news piece on the topic? Why/why not?
Appendix F

Post-News Log Interview

In the selection survey you indicated that you access news information from multiple sources. Could you tell me about which ones you used this past week? How often do you access these sources?

Why kinds of events prompted you to access the news this past week? Are there some events which you followed more closely that others? Which ones? Why?

How often find the information insufficient? How often did you look for information elsewhere?

In your log you mentioned a particular story that stood out for you about (topic to be determined by log entries), could you tell me a little more about why it stood for you?

Was this initiated by you or by something you have received electronically from someone you know? Did you take any steps to confirm the information in the story?