

Media Literacy Among Public Relations Students: An Analysis of Future PR Professionals in the Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses various aspects of media literacy among a national sample of 727 public relations students from 115 U.S. colleges and universities. Student definitions of media literacy transcended basic interpretation of messages and extended to higher-level concepts such as understanding and vetting messages and how media organizations operate. PR students considered themselves to be fairly media literate, including their ability to consume media content critically. Implications for public relations educators are discussed.

Keywords: media literacy, student attitudes, media effects, disinformation, public relations

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The previously obscure term *post-truth* gained so much message momentum over the past several years that in 2016, the Oxford Dictionary declared it Word of the Year (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Post-truth, which often is used to refer to political discourse and mediated messages—including fake news—places the goal of persuasion above the need to be accurate and truthful. The recommended antidote-of-choice to combat post-truth communication in today’s fast-paced society and against today’s fragmented media horizon is media literacy, which is itself a complex phenomenon, but one that is believed to hold promise for an optimally informed citizenry and functioning democracy.

U.S President Donald Trump did much to popularize the term “fake news,” when he used it to describe negative news coverage of him during the 2016 presidential campaign and after his election. For example, after Trump’s inauguration ceremony, the media disputed whether the actual audience size was accurately reflected in Trump’s description of the enormous crowd (Robertson & Farley, 2017). According to an NPR story, Keith (2018) reports that from January 2017 to August 2018, Trump’s tweets about news information that he deems “fake,” “phoney,” or “fake news” increased over time both in scope and frequency. He has tweeted about “fake books,” “fake dossier,” “Fake CNN,” and “fudged news reports.” An NPR analysis of Trump’s tweets found that he included the words “fake news” in 389 posts during this time frame (Keith, 2018). Not only has media content been called into question, but trusted news organizations also have been labeled as “fake news” providers.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (Ries et al., 2018), 63% of Americans indicate they have trouble distinguishing “real news” from “fake news.” The fake news label not only confuses the public but also raises critical questions for educators preparing students to enter the media industry. In response to the recent emphasis on fake news, some scholars have suggested that media literacy training is imperative (Hobbs, 2017;

Silverman, 2018). To answer this call, the current study investigates levels of self-reported media literacy found among a national sample of public relations students, examines their attitudes toward news media literacy, and explores their definition of media literacy in the context of fake news.

Literature Review

Understanding students' notion of what news is and what news is not will help PR educators better prepare future practitioners to work in this new and rocky media landscape. Thus, it is important to consider the existing framework of fake news, post-truth communication, and media literacy.

Fake News

Regardless of whether the news coverage of Trump is accurate, the connotative meaning for audience members of the term "fake news" is likely associated as false, untruthful, or misleading information. Although "fake news" is a decades-old term, issues of media trust and credibility have experienced renewed societal emphasis (see Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017). Rini (2017) discovered that fake news is more than just intentional lying. The motives are often complex, and intent may vary. Rini (2017) offered the following definition of fake news:

A fake news story is one that purports to describe events in the real world, typically by mimicking the conventions of traditional media reportage, yet is known by its creators to be significantly false, and is transmitted with the goals of being widely re-transmitted and deceiving at least some of its audience. (p. E45)

In the era of yellow journalism, journalism and politics often were intertwined, and the line between editorial content and promotion was blurred. So-called yellow journalism (Office of the Historian, n.d.), which favored sensationalism over well-researched facts, was the norm. In his history of the New York press, Sidney Pomerantz wrote that late 19th century New Yorkers were sick of fake news (Pomerantz, 1958).

In 1910, the first journalism industry code of ethics was created in New York (McKerns, 1976) and similar codes eventually were adopted by the press nationally. These codes emphasized the journalistic values of truth, accuracy, and objectivity. Ultimately, the press would serve a fourth-estate duty as a check on government.

Today, the convergence of media allows for quick dissemination and re-dissemination of both “truthful” and “fake news” stories, which affects the veracity of information (Conill, 2016). According to Samuel (2016):

The internet may have made fake news a bigger problem, and it certainly has made it a more complicated problem to tackle, but there is a longstanding tension between a public interest in conscientious reporting and private interests in salacious headlines and easy profits. (para. 25)

Online, the “fake news” problem is compounded due to a number of factors that make it difficult to determine source accuracy, including the ability to self-publish, sponsored posts, personal blogs, lack of bylines, promoted stories, and native advertising. Click-bait and headlines that often lead to sensationalized stories earn advertising revenue (Perloff, 2020). “Fake news” stories often are unknowingly (and sometimes knowingly) shared by the public on social media. A BuzzFeed analysis found that during the 2016 presidential election, the “Top 20 Fake News” stories received more engagement than the “Top 20 Legitimate News” stories from 19 trusted news outlets (Silverman, 2016). Recent news media scandals may point to a shift in news values. Stories of news outlets involved in plagiarism, leaked information, propaganda, lack of fact checking, and fabricated sources contribute to public distrust of the industry.

Post-Truth

Many scholars contend that fake news is a function of the post-

truth political era in which we now live (see, for example, Andersen, 2017; Davies, 2016; Lewandowsky et al., 2017). In post-truth politics, campaign information feeds the sensational nature of news and is framed by appeals to emotion over policy details. Politicians tend to focus on talking points, even when contradiction or questioning by the media occurs. Twenty-four-hour news outlets and the ambiguous nature of social media have helped to create a post-truth culture. Harsin (2015) penned the phrase “the regime of post truth” to describe the many contributing variables, including microtargeting with strategic use of false information or rumors; media gatekeeper fragmentation; news media scandals; information overload; user-generated content; lack of trusted authorities; and algorithms governing social media rankings and searches (p. 327). This study examines a generation of students that has come of age during the post-truth era and examines their ability and understanding regarding news media literacy.

Media Literacy

Simply defined, media literacy is the ability to access, analyze and evaluate communication (Aufderheide, 1993; Hobbs, 2006). News media literacy is a subset of the broader field of media literacy (Ashley et. al, 2013) and also intersects with digital literacy and civic literacy (Maksl et al., 2017). Malik and colleagues (2013) stated that the definition should include understanding the role that news plays in society, the motivations consumers have to seek out news, the ability to find and recognize news, the ability to critically evaluate news and the ability to create news. Austin et al. (2007) found that media literacy training can impact attitudes and reduce risky behaviors. They also noted that media literacy training can change the way individuals consider media portrayals and can increase awareness of advertising efforts.

According to Schilder et al. (2016), researchers across many countries have taken widely different approaches to assess aspects of

media literacy among various populations. Instruments include those that test news knowledge and current events, gauge attitudes toward media and media organizations, explore how media messages are created and disseminated, and probe “higher order” issues regarding the role and importance of media and news in a democratic society (Schilder et al., 2016). Specialized tests of media literacy have included those about health media literacy (Bergsma & Carney, 2008; Harper, 2017), alcohol media literacy (Eintraub et al., 1997), and other subjects. The instrument used in the current study was itself an example of a specialized media literacy test, having its origins in a study by Primack et al. (2009) of consumer media literacy about smoking. The smoking media literacy framework contained the core concepts of authors and audiences (AA), which included items about consumer targeting and the profit motive; messages and meanings (MM), which addressed points of view, message interpretation and the effect of messages; and representation and reality (RR), which included items about media filtering of information and omission of information.

In an attempt to validate a media literacy scale proposed by Ashley et al. (2013) and to expand its scope, Vraga and colleagues (2015) tested a 27-item 7-point Likert scale across two samples (undergraduate communication students and adults). Their scale contained five underlying dimensions based on prior work (Ashley et al., 2013; Vraga et al., 2015), including dimensions that measure individuals’ self-perception of media literacy and dimensions that measure opinions about the value of news media literacy for society.

The study by Vraga et al. (2015), which is partially replicated in this study, involved mostly first-year college students enrolled in either a public speaking course or an interpersonal communication course. The study revealed that the value of media literacy (VML) was a good predictor of news media knowledge, knowledge of current events, and skepticism toward the news media as a whole. Those who more strongly

valued news media literacy were more likely to have greater news media knowledge and greater knowledge of current events, as well as more skepticism toward the news. Understanding of AA was positively related to news knowledge, while MM, RR and self-perceived media literacy (SPML) showed no effect on news media knowledge, current event knowledge, or skepticism.

Kendrick and Fullerton (2018) conducted a national survey of American Advertising Federation student members to assess their media literacy using Vraga's (2015) scale. Students in the advertising study exhibited higher degrees of understanding and interest in the MM and AA dimensions than they did in the VML. Students with higher grade point averages and access to internships placed a higher value on media literacy than other groups of advertising students.

Scholars who attempt to measure media literacy often include scales intended to assess how literate their respondents are in terms of media *consumption* separate from media *prosumption*, which involves producing consumer messages (see Lin et al., 2013). Toffler (1980) used the term *prosumption* to highlight the blurring of roles between consumers and producers, and media researchers among others have perpetuated the term in studies involving consumer production and co-production of media content. Using a sample of more than 1,200 Turkish adults, Koc and Barut (2016) applied a 35-item new media literacy instrument that differentiated between abilities to consume content versus create content and also between the presence of digital media skills and the use of critical thinking. The result was an instrument that included items about functional consumption, functional prosumption, critical consumption, and critical prosumption of digital media messages. The current study utilizes the Koc and Barut (2016) critical consumption sub-scale to further understand how public relations students consume and understand digital media content.

For future communication professionals, media literacy is

important not only for critically analyzing messages, but also for learning to create public relations messages, advertising copy, audio recordings, video packages, and multimedia content. According to Wyatt (2006), media literacy has the potential to serve as a trust builder for professionals. With the audience at the mercy of the fake news/post-truth environment, tools for helping the public distinguish between truthful and misleading content are needed, and public relations practitioners play an important role in this service to civil society.

Research Questions

Recognizing that public relations education has a key role to play toward resolving what some have called a fake news crisis (Lévy, 2019), PR instructors need to know more about the levels of media literacy among their students. By way of a survey of PRSSA members from across the United States, this study provides insights about how current PR students understand, perceive, critically consume, and define news media by way of the following research questions:

1. What levels of media literacy are held by public relations students in U.S. colleges and universities?
2. Do levels of media literacy vary among students according to demographic or other variables, such as political orientation?
3. How do public relations students define media literacy?

Method

This study employed a national online public relations student survey via the SurveyMonkey platform. The survey was funded by a grant from the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication at Pennsylvania State University. Two methods of data collection were employed. On April 25, 2018, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) sent an email invitation to 360 student chapter (Public Relations Student Society of America or PRSSA) presidents with a link to the survey, asking them to complete the survey and share the link with

chapter members. This collection method resulted in 331 responses. On May 1, 2018, a second email invitation was sent to an additional 3,000 randomly selected PRSSA members via the internal SurveyMonkey email invitation system. This method resulted in an additional 624 responses. Data collectors were configured to prevent students from taking the survey more than once. Both invitations included an incentive for a \$5 Starbucks gift card for completing the survey. While 955 students responded, only 727 students from 115 schools completed the survey and received the Starbucks electronic gift card. The 727 completed responses make up the sample for this study.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information about students' academic year, career preferences, demographic profile, internships, mentoring, and plans after graduating college. Using three validated instruments, the current study also measured multiple aspects of media literacy among U.S. college public relations students. By way of an instrument from studies by Vraga et al. (2015) and Ashley et al. (2013), public relations students' news media literacy was assessed, along with an instrument from Koc and Barut (2016) measuring critical consumption of digital media. Taken together, the measurement of public relations students' self-perceived media literacy, value of media literacy, and critical consumption of digital media provided a first-of-its-kind look at the ability of an arguably media-sophisticated audience to differentiate and categorize various media content.

Results

Respondent Profile

The national sample was predominantly female (90.6%), which is in line with estimates of gender representation in specific U.S. public relations programs (Morgan, 2013). Most of the students in the study (87.8%) identified as public relations/strategic communication majors. Their age ranged from 18 to 52 with a median age of 21 years. The

average self-reported overall GPA was 3.50 on a 4.0 scale. In terms of year in school, 34.9% were seniors, 34.3% were juniors, 21.9% were sophomores, and 8.9% were first-year students.

Participants were asked with which race they most identified and were allowed to choose more than one. In response, 80.2% of the students indicated they were White non-Hispanic, 11.0% Hispanic, 6.3% African American, 5.9% Asian American, .6% Pacific Islander and .4% Native American. About 1% indicated they were international students (non-U.S. citizens). Only 6% of the students worked on the annual Bateman national case study competition (Public Relations Student Society of America, n.d.).

RQ 1: What levels of media literacy are held by public relations students in U.S. colleges and universities?

Four scales were used to evaluate media literacy. The first was a 13-item scale developed by Ashley and colleagues (2013), which measured news media literacy by focusing on three latent dimensions: how authors target audiences, the values and production techniques that appeal to different viewers, and how the filtering of information in the media affects perceptions of reality. In this study, the scale was used in total by combining the 13 items into one news media literacy variable. The sub-scales—authors and audiences (AA), messages and meanings (MM), and representation and reality (RR)—were not individually analyzed in this study because their internal reliability was weak. The researchers determined that one holistic scale of news media literacy, which achieved an acceptable alpha score of .78, was the most appropriate level of analysis. The news media literacy variable produced an overall mean score of 4.19 on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree (see Table 1), indicating that the sample, as a whole, felt fairly adept at news media literacy.

Self-perceived media literacy (SPML) and value of media literacy

(VML) were measured using Vraga and colleagues' (2015) adjusted scale, which allows researchers to measure notions of self-efficacy and competence related to media literacy. SPML produced an alpha score of .70 and a mean score of 3.87 on a 5-point scale, while the mean score for VML (alpha = .69) was 4.20 (see Table 1). Finally, Koc and Barut's (2016) critical consumption (CC) scale was used to measure public relations students' ability to criticize digital content. The CC scale produced the strongest internal reliability (alpha = .82) and a mean score of 3.90 on a 5-point Likert scale (see Table 1).

RQ 2: Do levels of media literacy vary among students according to demographic or other variables, such as political orientation?

Very few significant differences were found on any of the media literacy variables among demographic subgroups, including gender, age, race (Caucasian versus non-Caucasian), year in school, GPA, and participation in PRSSA's Bateman competition. A weak, yet significant, relationship was found between self-reported GPA and value of media literacy ($r = .10$; $p = .007$), indicating that students with higher GPAs had a higher perceived importance of media literacy than others with lower GPAs. Similarly, older students were somewhat more likely to perceive themselves as more media literate than their younger counterparts ($r = .07$; $p = .04$).

Students were asked at the end of the survey to place themselves on a 7-point scale based on their political views, with extremely liberal at 1 and extremely conservative at 7. Weak, yet significant, inverse relationships were found for SPML ($r = -.10$; $p = .006$) and VML ($r = -.13$; $p = .0001$), indicating that students who considered themselves more liberal also perceived themselves as being more media literate and held a higher value for media literacy in society.

RQ 3: How do public relations students define media literacy?

Answers to the open-ended question regarding the definition of

media literacy were coded using the analysis software NVivo11. Within NVivo, nodes are a place to collect references to a specific theme. Nodes were first established based on an analysis of a random sample of the data and a brief overview of the literature to identify themes related to media literacy such as understanding and knowledge. Participants' answers could be coded in more than one category to account for longer and more complex responses.

The most mentioned aspects in definitions of media literacy were “understanding,” “analyzing,” and “knowledge.” Half of the students (49.4%, $n = 359$) explained that media literacy implies an understanding of the media and its various components. Respondents pointed out that being media literate means that one understands how media outlets work and is able to use media tools to communicate or send a message. They also mentioned that being media literate helps to understand the power of media. More specifically, media literacy entails understanding the power of the media and the importance in society. More than one-in-five (22.3%, $n = 162$) remarked that media literacy implies analyzing and/or interpreting media messages and narratives. Media literacy provides tools to make sense of media messages. Being media literate implies that people are active participants when receiving media messages. According to these answers, media literacy allows people to be critical of what they see or read. In particular, media literacy is important in distinguishing between true information and fabricated messages.

Another one-fifth (21.6%, $n = 159$) used the word “knowledge” to describe the meaning of media literacy. Public relations students associate media literacy with knowing about and understanding the inner workings of the media and how media messages are created. In general, participants explained that media literacy deals with understanding/knowing all forms of media, not just one. Just slightly fewer (18.9%, $n = 137$) associated media literacy with the creation of media content. Slightly more than one-

eighth (13.7%, $n = 100$) of respondents associated media literacy with using media outlets and specifically knowing how to use media outlets to communicate. Media literacy can provide both an understanding and appreciation for media content creation and distribution. Respondents sometimes explained that media communication is targeted at a specific or a large audience and that a literate media user and creator knows how to navigate the difference. Another 12% ($n = 87$) explained that the media can be deceiving and that media literacy protects against biases and misleading media strategies. These respondents indicated that media literacy can serve as an important tool for distinguishing between true information and fabricated messages.

Discussion

Contemporary public relations students are living in a post-truth era. U.S. college students have grown up experiencing a convergence of news media and a blurring of sensational and truthful news content. Scholars have suggested one way to impact media attitudes and to crystalize understanding of news content is through media literacy training. Thus, it is important to understand how U.S. public relations students view media literacy.

This study assessed how U.S. public relations students define media literacy, the degree to which they believe they possess media literacy, and the importance they attribute to it. There were no significant differences among the demographic variables of gender, age, race, competition team participation, and year in school. Most categorical subgroups of public relations students did not exhibit differences in attitude. However, significant differences were found with the variables of GPA and political leaning.

Judgments about PR students' own degrees of media literacy on three attitudinal scales (news media literacy, self-perceived media literacy, and critical consumption) indicated that public relations students consider

themselves fairly competent overall, with composite scores hovering around a 4 on a 5-point scale. The researchers found a positive correlation with GPA—those who self-reported higher GPAs felt they were more media literate. The importance attached to media literacy (VML) again was about a 4 on a 5-point scale, with those who said they had more liberal political views and higher self-reported GPAs holding VML in higher regard than others. PR students in this study who were more liberal politically also perceived themselves to be more media literate on the SPML scale. The Edelman Trust Barometer (Ries et al., 2018) of U.S. adults also found differences along party lines. In the 2018 Edelman survey, there was a 34-point difference in media trust with Clinton supporters more trusting of the media (61%) than Trump supporters (27%). In this study, students identifying as more liberal (presumably similar to the Clinton supporters) rated themselves higher in media literacy knowledge. Therefore, it seems that individuals who are more trusting of media are also more confident in their media literacy knowledge.

Although politically liberal public relations students with higher GPAs may feel they are media literate, they may not be as adept at identifying fake news as they think they are. Thus, it is important to educate students, especially those who make good grades and may consider themselves part of the liberal elite, that they are as susceptible to fake news as anyone.

Bateman competition students are often the most engaged students in public relations programs. However, this study found they do not perceive themselves as being more media literate. Perhaps, media literacy should be incorporated into Bateman coaching and consideration should be given to how the “client” may counter claims should fake news coverage occur.

Public relations education stresses mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. A key concept is that public

relations is “unseen” as individuals often do not recognize they are being influenced by PR messaging (Holladay & Coombs, 2013). Thus, PR students are taught to craft messages that bypass media gatekeepers, and they are often trained in journalistic style. For these reasons, PR students may feel they are more media literate than others. Feeling more confident in media literacy knowledge, PR students may feel that it is less important to receive media literacy training. This supports the Austin et al. (2007) suggestion that level of skill or involvement impacts understanding of media literacy.

Asked to define the term media literacy, public relations students largely transcended the most basic meaning of the word “literacy”—the ability to read and write—and gravitated toward higher-order words such as “understanding,” “knowledge,” “analysis,” and “operation” of media organizations. Indeed, the academic community is not in agreement over definitions of concepts involving “media” and “literacy.” Multiple dimensions and distinctions abound when attempting to operationalize such a heterodox phenomenon. For some, being media literate may mean that one is an active participant in understanding media messages. More than one in five students used words related to “interpretation” of media messages and a deeper understanding, vetting, and contextualization of information apart from simply recognizing its literal meaning.

It may be these interpretive skills beyond simple understanding are the most difficult to measure as well as to teach, as information channels abound and message formats continue to evolve. Repeated references to “different forms” of media in participants’ responses reflected the wide range of verbal and visual messages channeled through traditional, digital, and shared formats. If messages are consumed without critical evaluation, they are more likely to be taken at face value, possibly providing a skewed worldview.

Media literacy training can be used to encourage students to be

critical of the news they see and read. However, a fairly small percentage of students (12%) mentioned some aspect of combating “fake news” as a reason to be media literate. Given the post-truth climate, the finding that relatively few students considered the discovery of truth in defining media literacy could be a source of concern. To be media literate, some argue that students must be able to create truthful and well-produced content. Almost one-fifth of respondents (18.9%) associated media literacy with content creation. Some stressed the importance of creating new media content. Indeed, having a working understanding of what separates legitimate news gathering and dissemination from other less credible sources of information is crucial for public relations students.

Implications for PR Educators

Given the lack of a clear definition of media literacy among both scholars and students, it is important to consider the implications for public relations educators. The Public Relations Society of America’s (PRSA) Code of Ethics focuses on the principles of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. In the PRSA Code Provision of Conduct (Public Relations Society of America , n.d.), the provision of “Disclosure of Information” calls for public trust-building by revealing all information necessary for decision making. By strengthening public trust, the profession is enhanced. Thus, it is important for public relations students to understand channels of communication and their potential effects. Not only can media literacy help to create more critical consumers of media, but media literacy training also may help move PR students to a position of empowerment. According to Holladay and Coombs (2013), “Media literacy involves recognizing that media messages are constructions (rather than reflections of reality) and understanding who does the constructing and for what purpose” (p. 128). It is important for PR students to consider motivations, values, and decision-making in message creation, whether it is in a press release, a

native advertisement, or some other form. Emphasizing media literacy in the classroom can be a valuable asset in training future public relations professionals.

Media literacy training for public relations students may impact the way they consider transparency in strategic communication messaging. Additionally, media literacy training can help to make public relations students more savvy media consumers. Austin and colleagues (2007) found that media literacy training can change the way individuals think about media. Media literacy education also has been found to increase awareness of advertising efforts to sell products or services. In turn, awareness may influence decision-making and intended behaviors (Austin et al., 2007).

There are many strategies for teaching media in the PR classroom, including exercises to evaluate the credibility of sources, recognize bias in news reporting, identify credible media outlets for daily consumption of news, and how to research using digital archives. Several PR and journalism textbooks, including some free and open access books (for example, *Be Credible* by Bobkowski and Younger, 2018), provide student assignments to improve media literacy skills. Likewise, online resources, such as NewseumED, provide videos and teaching lessons to help students understand and identify fake news. The Public Relations Society of America and the Arthur W. Page Center also provide ethics training modules for use in the classroom. Although resources do exist for public relations educators, how media literacy information is incorporated and how much of the course content is devoted to the topic vary based on the students and their existing knowledge, the course content, and the professor. While the attitudes of educators were not measured in this study, it is possible that they, like the undergraduate students, assume that students studying public relations are, by nature, already media literate. This study revealed that this is not necessarily the case. Thus, educators

should consider the extent that their students understand and value media literacy.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was conducted among a large number of college students who were members of PRSSA, and as such, they do not necessarily represent all public relations students nor other individuals who may pursue careers in that area. Additionally, social desirability bias could have influenced student respondents to respond in certain ways based on guessing the purposes behind the study or how results would be interpreted.

This survey measured self-reported levels of media literacy among public relations students. However, it did not measure PR students' ability to recognize fake news or other types of ambiguous content, such as native advertising. Future studies that gauge student competence at distinguishing valid news stories and other legitimate content from disinformation and propaganda would be beneficial. The responsibility to prepare future public relations professionals to practice communications ethically in the public sphere and to knowledgeably navigate the media landscape is essential. Studies such as this one and others that measure specific media literacy skills and abilities could help faculty better execute their educational mission.

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Table 1
Public Relations Student Responses to Media Literacy Scales

	% Agree/ Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
News Media Literacy (NML)	<i>a</i> = .78	4.19	.37
The owner of a media company influences the content that is produced	82.0	4.07	.76
News companies choose stories based on what will attract the biggest audience	89.0	4.23	.72
Individuals find news sources that reflect their own political values	93.0	4.32	.68
Two people might see the same news story and get different information from it	97.5	4.53	.57
People are influenced by news whether they realize it or not	97.6	4.53	.56
News coverage of a political candidate will influence people's opinions	92.5	4.34	.67
News is designed to attract an audience's attention	90.6	4.29	.73
Lighting is used to make certain people in the news look good or bad	84.2	4.13	.76
Production techniques can be used to influence a viewer's perception	95.9	4.41	.58
When taking pictures, photographers decide what is most important	71.6	3.81	.82
News makes things more dramatic than they really are	55.5	3.60	.85
A news story that has good pictures is more likely to show up in the news	73.9	3.90	.82
A news story about conflict is more likely to be featured prominently	88.9	4.25	.67
Self-Perceived Media Literacy (SPML)	<i>a</i> = .70	3.87	.52
I have a good understanding of the concept of media literacy	74.8	3.81	.83
I have the skills to interpret news messages	90.5	4.16	.58
I understand how news is made in the U.S.	73.5	3.81	.76
I am confident in my ability to judge the quality of news	83.7	4.00	.66
I'm not sure what people mean by media literacy*	16.4	2.40	.98
Value of Media Literacy (VML)	<i>a</i> = .69	4.20	.47
Media literacy is important to democracy	86.4	4.23	.69
People should understand how media companies make decisions about news content	89.8	4.20	.66
It is the role of the press to represent diverse viewpoints	82.0	4.12	.80
The news media have a role to play in informing citizens about civic issues	92.6	4.32	.63
People need to critically engage with news content	83.5	4.14	.73
The main purpose of the news should be to entertain viewers*	10.4	2.07	.95

Critical Consumption (CC)	<i>a</i> = .82	3.90	.43
I can distinguish different functions of media (communication, entertainment, etc.).	96.3	4.32	.56
I am able to determine whether or not media contents have commercial messages.	88.4	4.09	.63
I manage to classify media messages based on their producers, types, purposes and so on.	67.5	3.69	.85
I can compare news and information across different media environments.	89.1	4.09	.64
I can combine media messages with my own opinions.	86.9	4.05	.66
I consider media rating symbols to choose which media contents to use.	39.2	3.16	.98
It is easy for me to make decision about the accuracy of media messages.	71.2	3.75	.79
I am able to analyze positive and negative effects of media contents on individuals.	87.6	4.07	.58
I can evaluate media in terms of legal and ethical rules (copyright, human rights, etc.).	75.4	3.85	.78
I can assess media in terms of credibility, reliability, objectivity and currency.	85.7	4.05	.67
I manage to fend myself from the risks and consequences caused by media contents.	70.5	3.79	.68

**Mean scores calculated on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.”*