

## *The News Literacy in Views of Thai News Consumers in Media Convergence Era*

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### **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the meaning of news literacy in views of Thai news consumers in media convergence era; 2) to study the characteristics of news literate Thai consumers in media convergence era; 3) to study the factors that affect the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era; and 4) to build a model of news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era. The research was done using qualitative research methods. The results showed that 1) news literacy had 2 major significations. The first meaning focused on immunity to being overly influenced by the media and the second meaning had to do with the ways in which news was presented. 2) The characteristics of news literate Thai consumers consisted of news reading/listening/watching skills, ability to access news and select news, curiosity, ability to access news from diverse channels, ability to analyze the credibility of news, ability to analyze the ideals behind and impacts of news events, evaluation, fact- checking and news production skills, and civic conscience. 3) The factors that affected the news literacy of Thai news consumers were education, occupation, personal interest, concern for public interest, previous exposure to the news, positive attitude towards news, and opportunities to access news. 4) The model of the news literacy of Thai news consumers consisted of personal factors, types of news consumers factors, and news exposure behavior factors.

Keywords: News Literacy, Thai News Consumers, Media Convergence Era

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## **I. Introduction**

At present society is more complex than in the past. Events happen quickly and situations change very quickly in the political, economic and social spheres. The rapid changes in technology have created a flood of news and information, which increases in volume every day. All the many channels of both traditional media and new media are filled with a wealth of new information every day. News has undeniably become an important factor that influences people's way of life. Anyone who has information or who receives valuable, up-to-date information, who can stay abreast of current events and can put that information to good use will be powerful. For this reason, all the people in society are thirsty for information, especially news, which is an important kind of information (Ruggenberg, 2007). Likewise, Malik, Cortesi and Gasser (2013) wrote that news is information that aims to inform people about events and empowers people to participate in civic society and the democratic process.

News is information that can empower people in their daily lives, their careers, and all their social interactions and exchanges. Rainie (2010) wrote that news is social experience that is shared, and that people can use news as a medium of social exchange and cultural exchange within the social network of news consumers. News has become a participatory activity because people can report on events or their own experiences and can post messages about their opinions or reactions to various events. In the same vein, Burns (2013) wrote that news is information that people use to make decisions about things that are happening in the world around them. News can help people in society manage their daily lives by checking information such as weather forecasts, traffic reports, transportation problems and warnings about possible disasters or dangerous situations. Especially in the era of media convergence, when different forms of media are being integrated and mixed, news consumers can access or consume news very easily from a wide variety of different channels including print media, radio, television, computers, mobile phones and social media.

When you consider the context of social changes due to globalization, you cannot deny that Thai society has been inevitably affected by globalization. News consumers can now access news from a broad range of different media, and they tend to accept and believe all the news that is presented as true, accurate, and appropriate without being dubious or questioning it. There is a huge amount of news and information flowing in from diverse channels. People can immediately make use of the news they receive, but it is far from certain that all the news that consumers are receiving is accurate, true and unbiased (Powers, 2010). News is all around today's consumers and it is difficult for them to avoid being exposed to it. In their position as news consumers, the citizens of today need to be able to understand, search for, differentiate, and evaluate news critically. That is the meaning of news literacy.

News literacy is a branch of media literacy. It is an important life skill for all news consumers to be able to weigh the value of the news content they read, watch or listen to (Powers, 2010) so that they can choose to consume credible news. The major point is to enable consumers to evaluate the credibility of the news to which they are exposed (Adams, 2014). News literacy can be a valuable tool, giving people the capacity to use and critically evaluate information from different news sources (Vraga et al, 2012), so it increases consumer acumen.

Malik, Cortesi & Gasser (2013) stated that news literacy is composed of 1) understanding of the role of the news that is presented to society; 2) motivation to search for news and to seek to understand the process of good news reporting; 3) ability to search/filter/perceive news based on the user's individual needs and context; 4) ability to critically evaluate news with understanding of the context, the motivations and the interests behind the production of that news and how the news relates to other ideas; and 5) ability to create news through the best methods, which are to study the complexities, the subtleties of perspective, the evidence and the presentation, in order to ultimately create news that we consume as direct participants in the news.

News literacy is a process of description, interpretation and evaluation of news that stimulates news consumers to change from taking an inactive role to taking an active role, or, in other words, news literacy can create informed citizens (Panagiotou & Theodosiadou, n.d.). News literacy is essential for every news consumer in media convergence era, to enable them to appropriately and efficiently utilize what they learn from the news in their everyday lives.

This situation led the researcher to become interested in studying news literacy in media convergence era, to discover what news literacy means in views of Thai news consumers, the exact characteristics of news literate Thai consumers, and which factors affect the level of news literacy among Thai news consumers in media convergence era, with the aim of developing a model that summarizes the key components of news literacy in Thailand. The knowledge gained from this research can be applied to develop better news literacy among today's news consumers. It also helps build the body of knowledge about communication arts, journalism, and mass media for the benefit of continued teaching, learning and research in the area of news literacy.

## **II. Research objectives**

1. To study the meaning of news literacy in views of Thai news consumers in media convergence era.
2. To study the characteristics of news literate Thai consumers in media convergence era.
3. To study the factors that affect the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era
4. To build a model of news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era.

## **III. Research methods**

This was a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews.

### **1. Study approach**

In this study, In-depth interviews were held with key informants to gain information on their opinions about news literacy.

### **2. Key informants and sample selection**

There were 3 groups of key informants, chosen through purposive sampling. Group 1 (academics) consisted of 3 journalism and mass communication instructors. Group 2 (people or general public) consisted of 3 regular news consumers who had experience reading/watching/listening to news through various channels, including conventional

media and social media, and who were able to discriminate and critically evaluate news. Group 3 (civil society) consisted of 3 people with media-related work experience.

**3. Research tools** An interview form was used, consisting of open-ended questions on the topics of the meaning of news literacy in views of Thai news consumers in media convergence era, the characteristics of news literate Thai consumers in media convergence era and the factors that affect the news literacy of Thai consumers in media convergence era.

**4. Data analysis** Data from the interviews was analyzed using the technique of qualitative content analysis.

#### **IV. Results and Discussion**

##### **1. The meaning of news literacy in views of Thai news consumers in media convergence era**

Two major significances of news literacy were identified. The first meaning focuses on immunity to being overly influenced by the media. “Immunity” in this case means “knowledge” or “education,” meaning 1) the ability to distinguish, discriminate, ask questions, and investigate or check facts from different sources, as well as the ability to compare and evaluate; and 2) understanding of the nature of news and the work process of journalists and the media. The second major meaning of news literacy focuses on the methods through which news is presented, that is, news literate consumers are able to distinguish which news content has to do with actual facts and which content or part of the presentation comes from the presenters’ personal opinions, biases or organizational agendas. This indicates that news literacy is an essential skill for every citizen, so that as a news consumer they can choose to consume news correctly and thoroughly. Just as Powers (2010) stated that news literacy is an important life skill for every news consumer so that he or she can weigh the value of the news he or she reads, watches or listens to. Similarly, Vraga et al (2012) wrote that news literacy can become an important tool in its status as the ability of an individual to evaluate news and information from different sources critically and to judge the credibility of news.

##### **2. Characteristics of news literate Thai consumers in media convergence era**

Data from the interviews revealed that news literate Thai consumers have the following characteristics: 1) News reading/listening/watching skills- this is something that today’s news consumers should pay attention to because it will enable them to get the main points of news stories and then be able to ask questions about the credibility of the news they received. People who lack good reading/listening/watching skills will not be able to ask critical questions about the news that is presented. 2) Ability to access news and select news – savvy news consumers should know where to get news about the subjects they want and where to get the most reliable news. 3) Curiosity-savvy news consumers should not easily believe everything or reach conclusions too quickly about news that is presented when they have received it from only one source. They should be eager to find out more information and access additional sources to verify the accuracy of what they have heard. 4) Ability to access news from diverse channels- news consumers should read/listen to/watch news from a wide variety of channels, including those that they normally don’t like, so that they can get more

diverse perspectives on what is happening. 5) Ability to analyze the credibility of news- discriminating consumers should not automatically believe all the news they receive from their preferred news channels but should use their discrimination to compare news from different channels and be able to analyze and critique the accuracy and credibility of different news content. 6) Ability to analyze the ideals and impacts of news- news literate consumers should be able to analyze the ideals, special interests or motives behind news stories produced by different media and should be able to envision the possible impacts of news items, as well as knowing sources and methods for investigating facts. 7) Evaluation, fact-checking and news production skills- news literate consumers should be able to evaluate and check the accuracy of news that is broadcast and should be able to produce and share their own user generated content. 8) Civic conscience- because news is public information, the media have influence on society at large and news savvy consumers, as stakeholders in society, should be aware of their duty to participate in social issues for the public good and their role in questioning the news presented by the media.

These characteristics are important because not all the news that is presented these days is an accurate reflection of real events. This situation may be due to the limitations caused by both internal and external factors that affect the journalists and the organizations they work for. Some of the factors are beyond the control of journalists but inevitably affect the news that they present. This makes it imperative for news consumers to develop skills and gain knowledge that will help make them more news literate. This idea coincides with the work of Potter (2011), who reported that to be media literate, a person must rely on a knowledge structure and have advanced skills to better view the actual content of news.

Based on this analysis of the characteristics of news literate Thai consumers in media convergence era, the researcher drew up a summary table of the major characteristics of 3 types of Thai news consumers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: News literacy characteristics of 3 types of Thai news consumers in media convergence era

News Literacy Characteristics	Types of Thai News Consumers		
	Passive Audiences	Active Audiences	Active Users
1. Have access to the news	✓	✓	✓
2. Choose to receive favorite news	✓	✓	✓
3. Eager to seek additional information		✓	✓
4. Choose to receive news from diverse channels		✓	✓
5. Able to find reliable news		✓	✓
6. Question what the media present		✓	✓
7. Able to analyze news content		✓	✓
8. Able to compare news from different sources		✓	✓
9. Verify the sources of the news		✓	✓
10. Evaluate the accuracy of news reports		✓	✓
11. Able to critique news content		✓	✓
12. Able to post, debate and exchange news			✓
13. Able to share, create and disseminate news			✓
14. Enables others to understand and make use of news			✓

### 3. Factors that affect the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era

Data from the interviews showed that the following factors affect the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era: 1) Education- consumers with higher levels of education generally have more opportunities to be exposed to news from diverse channels, are more likely to be questioning, and have more possibilities for checking the accuracy of facts than consumers with lower levels of education. Consumers with little education are more likely to believe most news and take it at face value without questioning. 2) Occupation- people in some career fields such as business, marketing or accounting often rely on up-to-date news for their work, especially as a basis for decision-making, planning, investing and other business transactions. People in certain occupations have experience in frequent news consumption and are more likely to be discerning news consumers. 3) Personal interest- some people have intense interest in the news, so they access the news using different sources, analyze and critique news and are eager to post, debate and exchange news. These people tend to have high news literacy. 4) Concern for public interest- people who care about social welfare and people's well-being will catch up with the news and are critical of the information they receive. These people have high news literacy. 5) Previous exposure to the news- consumers who received the news, for example a few weeks ago or a month ago and then there is an update of the same news, these people will become eager to catch up with the news, evaluate, share, debate and exchange the news. Their news literacy will become higher. 6) Positive attitude towards news- consumers who have a positive attitude about receiving news tend to consider it important and are more likely to seek additional information and be

discerning news consumers. By contrast, people who have a negative attitude about news in general tend to shut out news, avoid receiving it, and thus are not news literate. 7) Opportunities to access news- consumers who have better opportunities to access news from many channels such as newspapers, television, radio, online media and social media are exposed to more information from more perspectives and can build greater immunity and avoid falling victim to misleading news. This may be because each individual news consumer has different demographic characteristics, different experience with media, different background knowledge of media content and different needs or desires for news. This naturally leads to a variation in the level of news literacy among different consumers. Potter (2011) also concluded that news literacy depends on personal locus, knowledge structures and skills.

#### 4. A model of the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era

All the identified characteristics of the 3 types of news literate consumers in Thailand and the factors that contribute to news literacy were synthesized into a model of news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era (Figure 1). The model consists of 3 components. The first component is personal factors, consisting of education, occupation, personal interest, concern for public interest, and positive attitude towards news. The second component is types of news consumers factors, consisting of passive audiences, active audiences and active users. The third component is news exposure behavior factors, consisting of previous exposure to the news and opportunities to access news. All three components relate to methods of consuming news that can help promote news literacy among Thai news consumers in media convergence era, giving a deeper and broader picture of this topic. The three components certainly play a role in the news literacy of Thai consumers in media convergence era.

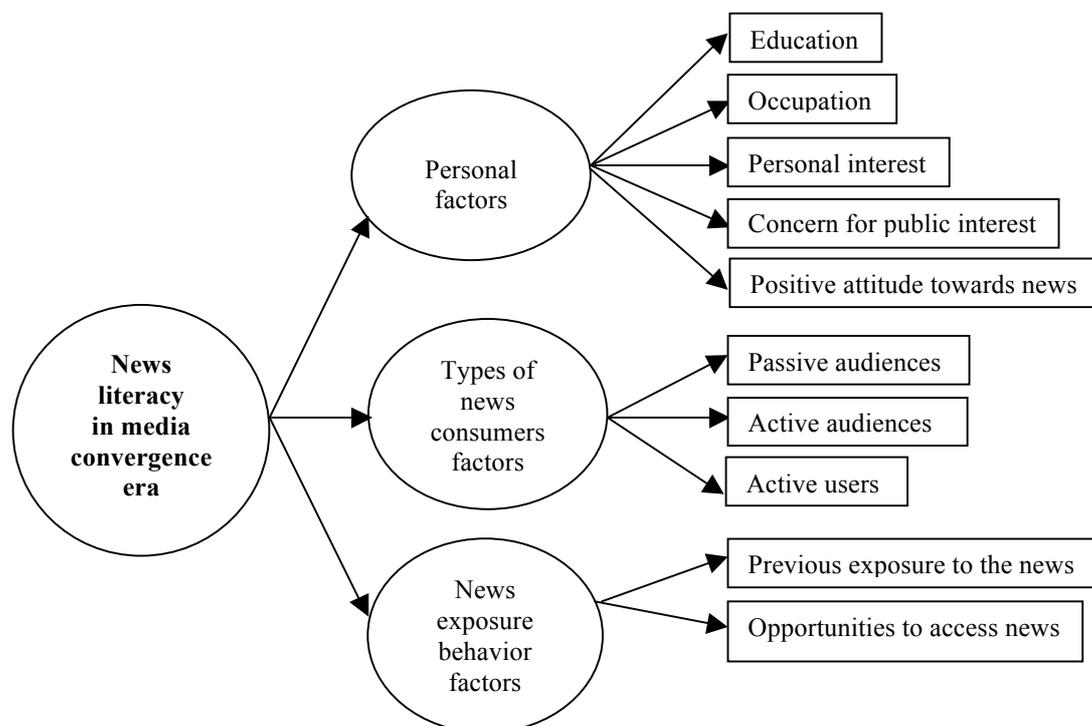


Figure 1: Model of the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era

## **V. Recommendations**

### **Policy recommendations**

1. Government agencies involved with education, such as the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Commission, should have a standardized systematic policy for teaching news literacy to children and youth, for instance by offering news literacy courses in the curriculum.

2. Non-governmental organizations or civil society groups that are involved with children and youth or with the media should institute a policy of supporting and promoting news literacy among youth, for instance by organizing workshops about analytical thinking and news consumption.

3. Educational institutions should include in their curricula courses related to news literacy, from the primary school level up to the higher education level. The courses should focus on letting students practice critical thinking and discretion in receiving news and information in media convergence era.

### **Recommendations for applying the findings**

The research also showed that in media convergence era, some news consumers are also news producers who produce their own news. The related agencies, such as professional media organizations, educational institutions, the institution of the family, and non-governmental organizations should join forces and make coordinated efforts to promote learning about the right way to produce news for all the independent news producers of the future.

### **Recommendations for further research**

1. This research on the news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era was carried out using the qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews and content analysis. Additional research should be done using quantitative methods such as a cross-sectional survey in order to gain a broader perspective on the level of news literacy of Thai news consumers in media convergence era.

2. A model of the news literacy of Thai consumers in media convergence era was synthesized in this research. In future research the model should be tested with concrete data so that news literacy can be developed more efficiently in Thailand.

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