

Psychology, democracy and the media: are citizens learning from the news? A Self regulated learning perspective.

Sharon Coen & Karl Turgut Maloney Yorganci

One of the key functions of media is to transmit information. Indeed, this is a key attraction of the internet. Research adopting a 'Uses and Gratifications' perspective brings a psychological approach to the study of media in recognising the importance of goals and motivations in considering how people interact with it (e.g. Rubin, 2002) and has shown that the acquisition of goods and information is one of the fundamental reasons for people using the internet (Weiser, 2004). It is not surprising therefore that scholars have explored whether, how and to what extent we learn from information gathered online. This Chapter is dedicated to a particular type of learning: developing knowledge and expertise about issues that are important to us as citizens.

One of the key assumptions in this chapter is that democracy is at its best when citizens are informed. We therefore see political knowledge as essential for the health of our democratic society. We also claim (and will try to justify later in this Chapter) that news plays an important role in fostering and maintaining an informed citizenship, and that the internet plays an important role in providing access to the news. We will therefore begin the chapter arguing for the importance of media in informed citizenship by discussing the democratic value of news and contextualising it in the current evolving media landscape, characterised by the steady growth of the internet as a source of information. We will then hone in on the issue of transmission of knowledge. In order to do that, we will first focus on the definition of political knowledge, drawing on the way in which knowledge has been operationalised in the extant work on this issue. In particular, we will look at knowledge as ability to recall or recognise factual information (verbal and non-verbal), knowledge as ability to draw inferences about the world and knowledge as construction - thus adopting a perspective that recognises an increasingly central role of the audience in the knowledge making process. In view of this discussion we will revisit the idea of learning from the media, and how learning has been conceptualised in educational psychology. We will propose that a self-regulated learning approach to understanding the way in which citizens learn from the media could prove fruitful in providing a theoretical framework which would help organising extant work in the area, as well as identifying useful avenues of future research and development. We will argue that psychology in general, and particularly media psychology, can help shed light on the processes underpinning learning matters that are relevant for the health of our democracies in the context of the media landscape in the 21st

Century.

Overall, it is our hope that while the chapter will likely raise more questions than answers, it will nonetheless provide important pointers to the ways in which psychology can fruitfully contribute to the debate concerning the role of media in democratic societies.

Why is news important?

Stephen Cushion's (2012) 'The democratic value of news' reviews an extensive amount of work that demonstrates how the 'public service' function of journalism – so crucial in fostering informed citizenship - is often lost in media systems in which market-driven, commercial logic prevails. From a 'public service' perspective, he argues, news should deliver information on issues relevant to making informed decisions about social issues, e.g. politics, business, economics and international affairs, in an accurate and unbiased way. By presenting evidence from several studies in media and political communication, Cushion illustrates how systems in which there is a strong public service mandate, strong public service media (PBS – Public Broadcast Systems) are ultimately more successful in contributing to democracy as understood in western democratic societies. Indeed, when it comes to knowledge, a series of comparative studies combining content analysis of news with surveys in representative samples of the population (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Curran, Coen, Aalberg and Iyengar, 2012; Curran et al. 2014), suggested that participants in up to 21 countries studied across four continents, tend to be more informed about current national and international affairs (as measured by multiple choice questions concerning issues covered in the periods of data collection). Furthermore, Curran et al (2014) provide initial correlational evidence that exposure to television news which provides ample representation of 'democratic' (non-state) voices is able to reduce (or indeed close) the gap in political self-efficacy among individuals with different levels of formal education. In this context, therefore, reliable and unbiased news is vital for the health of democracies (McGraw & Holbrook, 2003) as it allows citizens to be sufficiently informed to make sound judgements and decisions (Trappel & Nieminen, 2018).

In today's media landscape, news is more readily available than ever and up-to-date information can be received almost instantly from a wide selection of different sources (Cushion, 2012). Technological transformations have led to an endless choice of online media, through easier and cheaper content production and distribution (Jenkins, 2006). The rise of 'do-it-yourself media' has led to an increasingly participatory media culture where members of the general public can be producers and contributors to news rather than merely consumers (Jenkins, 2006).

Most importantly, the internet has become an important platform for (intentional and accidental) news consumption (Molyneux, 2018). The potential of this new medium to contribute to democratic processes, by allowing new forms of interactions and information gathering and sharing, has opened up a debate concerning the role of the internet as a source of political knowledge.

Defining political knowledge

The previous section highlighted the importance of news (and online deliberation associated with it) as a tool to provide information and increase citizens' knowledge and awareness of social issues and current affairs. We discussed how news plays an important role in providing information, but also how the move to online media has been characterised by a debate concerning whether – and to what extent – media can function as a public sphere, i.e. intended as a realm of social life where access is guaranteed to all citizens with the freedom to express opinions on matters of general interest with the goal of forming something close to public opinion (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974).

In order to articulate an informed answer to the question of online news' role in democratic knowledge, we need to define what is meant by knowledge? A significant quantity of research on media effects concerning political issues has focused on the question of whether exposure to news media can increase public level of knowledge and awareness of public affairs? Scholars in media and political science interested in the knowledge gap (i.e. to what extent do media help close the gap in knowledge between those who did versus did not receive formal education) have developed a series of measures of knowledge, most of which have been widely adopted in the literature since the 1970s.

Political knowledge as 'Factual' knowledge

'Factual knowledge' of people, places and policies

Studies in this area often rely on 'objective' issues such as, what is the name of Country X's Prime Minister, what happened in Country Y, what is Policy Z about etc. as indices of news-induced knowledge which is independent from broader civic education. An example of this is Curran et al. (2009)'s study of public knowledge and media which combined a content analysis of media with a survey in representative samples of the population in four countries. Knowledge here was assessed by asking questions concerning both national and international current affairs which had been covered in the media in the sampled period. Advantages of adopting this method include its speed and ease of administration, as well as consistency throughout the sample – which allows ready comparisons.

While there is a solid rationale for this type of measure, there are also issues associated with it. Firstly, as Grabe and Bas (forthcoming) explain, recognition should not be limited to verbal recognition, but also audio-visual. Thirdly, this measure does limit the definition and scope of political knowledge as a construct. Indeed, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) reviewed the extant literature on political knowledge grounded in models derived from political psychology and argue that this approach permits measurement of knowledge as factual information available to the audience. Importantly, the authors argue that one of the fundamental indicators of political knowledge should be citizens' awareness of what a Government is and does.

'Factual knowledge' of institutions and processes

When it comes to citizen's political knowledge, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) state: *'We found considerable agreement that the core should be, in Barber's words, "what government is and does"' (p.38). Neuman operationalises the notion of 'what government is' as 'the basic structure of government, its basic values, such as citizen participation, majority rule, separation of powers, civil liberties, and its basic elements, such as the two-party system, the two houses of Congress, the role of the judiciary, and the organization of the cabinet' (1986, p.186). A citizen's knowledge of what the government does is well described by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee: 'The democratic citizen is expected to be well-informed about political affairs. He [S/he, nda] is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are' (1954, p.308). (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993, p. 1182).*

In this sense, political knowledge not only incorporates awareness of salient issues, people and places, but also civic knowledge (see also Barrett and Zani, 2014). In 1996, Delli Carpini and Keeter published a landmark book in which they summarised survey data from a number of national surveys in the United States. They showed how American citizens were better at recognising institutions and processes than people and policies. Interestingly, exposure to television news was negatively correlated to knowledge.

Moreover, Galston, (2001) stresses how in order for people to be effective citizens, they need to have a basic level of civic knowledge, otherwise they will form their political judgements on the basis of what Popkin and Dimock (1999, *ibid*) define as 'personal character' rather than 'political character'. In other words, it is possible that – in the absence of knowledge concerning the way in which the political system works, and decisions are made and implemented within their institutions - people will attribute individual public figures' behaviours to their personal characteristics rather than to the political

system, or their political persona. This evidence draws our attention to another important element of knowledge: the ability to make attributions and draw inferences on the basis of the factual information provided by news.

Knowledge as ability to draw inferences

Scholars have gone beyond exploring whether news can provide novel information which people can recall and explored also whether the information gathered from the news is related to people's estimations concerning political issues. For example, Tichtenor et al (1970) famously reported an analysis of the extent to which issues covered in the news could inform audience members' evaluations of the likelihood that cigarettes cause cancer or of Man reaching the moon. Methodologically, the rationale is that if there is a relationship between levels of exposure and perception of the issue, we find evidence of an association between news and knowledge. In other words, what is being measured here is how the information provided in the news supports (or helps shape) people's views of relevant current affairs. Indeed, this definition and way to measure knowledge, as a body of information shaping our view of the world, is not only more comprehensive, but it also allows to test another important theoretical development in the study of media effects: that of Cultivation Theory.

In Cultivation Theory, media in general (and news media in particular) have an influence on their viewers because these contribute to creating a particular view of the world. In a typical study based on this theory, for example concerning media and crime, participants are asked to estimate the occurrence of crime (or the risk of them being victims of crime), and this will be correlated with the exposure to media (or specific genres/outlets). In other words, a cultivation perspective would suggest that media inform how we see the world around us, and we develop a worldview grounded in the content provided by media. However Potter (2014) notices that – while Cultivation Theory has had success in promoting an impressive amount of research - in general it accounts for only about 1% of variance in cultivation indicators (i.e. knowledge, attitudes and emotions being among the most common indicators). Therefore additional approaches are required to understand the role played by media in political understanding.

An alternative explanation of the role of media in promoting (or hindering) people's ability to draw inferences concerning the preponderance of a phenomenon, or indeed to formulate accurate evaluations is that of *accessibility bias*. Iyengar (1990) reports a series of studies showing how television news coverage influences people's political beliefs and attitudes by rendering some

information more salient and readily accessible. This information is then used by citizens to inform their political attitudes and opinions concerning political actors and policies. However, while Iyengar and others often explain this phenomenon in terms of *priming* (i.e. information contained in the media activates and renders salient particular aspects of reality which are then used to inform judgements and draw inferences), others view it as evidence of *learning* (e.g. Lenz, 2009). In other words, news content provides novel information which citizens draw upon when making inferences. Indeed, the learning perspective moves the emphasis from a passive audience 'primed' by media content, to a more active audience engaging with media in order to gather political information.

Knowledge as construction

With the emergence of the 'Active Audience' perspective, that is, the idea that people are not passive recipients of media messages, but actively engage with its content (e.g. Encoding/Decoding, Hall, 1981) to achieve a goal or attain some gratification (McLeod and Becker, 1981), researchers have started viewing knowledge as the result of a process of construction, in which media messages are not simply absorbed passively, but elaborated and modified by the recipients of the message. This constructivist perspective has been explored mainly within qualitative traditions, for example adopting methods derived from Social Representations (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; Höijer, 2011) or discursive psychology (e.g. framing analysis, Giles and Shaw, 2009; or microanalysis of online data, Giles et al, 2015). For example, Schrøder & Phillips (2007) report three studies in Denmark: one analysing the discursive properties of media text concerning politics (discursive analysis), one looking at how citizens select media to gather information about politics (focus groups), and one looking at how people talk about politics (focus groups). Importantly, the authors state, 'We ascribe to the consensus view in media studies today that audience members are active meaning-makers, that media texts are polysemic and that texts set limits for meaning-production' (p. 893). In their analysis, the authors therefore explored how discourses in the media related to consumption choices and discourses about politics in the audience, while relinquishing claims about causality. What is interesting in their study is the analysis of interpretive repertoires offered by media and participants respectively, and in particular the preponderance of populist repertoires amongst both mainstream media and users. However, while the most prominent repertoire in the media was 'parliamentary democracy in action', focus groups participants focused instead on a view of parliamentary democracy and politics as 'dirty deals'. The authors propose the differences in the preponderance of discourses in media and among the participants as evidence against a direct causal relationship between the content of media and people's knowledge about - and perception of - the world. It is important to notice, however, that the active audience perspective has been criticised for overestimating the

agency of citizens while underestimating the role played by political, economic and media structures in shaping the information available in the news (e.g., Deacon, Fenton & Bryman 1999). Indeed, back in 1935 Cantril and Allport stated that - when exploring the impact of media on the public - social psychologists should consider three levels which closely resemble the approach taken in this volume: the first is concerned with the structural characteristics of the broadcast institutions and their regulations; the second level is concerned the medium characteristics and its content, while the third concerns users' tastes and habits. The assumption – in our interpretation of this work – is that in order to account accurately for the 'effects' of news on knowledge, we would need to consider all three of these levels, and how they impact individuals' subjective experiences in relation to the particular product of interest (in this case, news). Similarly, recognising the active role of the audience in constructing meaning does not – in itself – deny the influence broader societal, economic and political factors play in influencing what individuals will learn from the news. Rather, it takes a stance against the idea that individuals absorb content uncritically from the media. Indeed, for example, in the introduction of her book on the Psychology of Political Communication, Crigler (1998) explains how in order to understand political sense-making, it is important to consider processes of construction of the message by politicians and media producers (what Hall would call the Encoding process), as well as the complex and varied interpretative work by the audience. In other words, a psychological approach to mediated knowledge construction acknowledges that while learners do play an important and active role in meaning making, this occurs within the boundaries of the tools in which learning occurs, and these tools in turn shape individuals' thinking and sense-making (Vygotsky, 1978).

Setting the agenda

In recognition of the active role played by the audience in interpreting and extracting meaning from news, McCombs and Shaw (1972) stated famously that while media might not be effective in telling us what to think, they are successful in telling us what to think *about*. From this viewpoint therefore, the measures of knowledge proposed above might fail to accurately capture 'knowledge' derived from media. Scholars within this tradition have therefore focused on 'issue salience'. The basic assumption is that media coverage of a specific issue will influence people's perception of what is deserving consideration in that moment. For example, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) showed that political candidates' performance is evaluated on the basis of issues that were deemed important (and thus covered extensively) in the media. According to McCombs (2005), the finding that public affairs which are seen to be of the highest importance by the media are also seen to be of high importance by the public, has been replicated in hundreds of studies worldwide. However, it is important to stress that

when it comes to knowledge, not all coverage is the same, and that it is not sufficient for events to appear in the media to guarantee people will learn from it. Two empirical contributions can illustrate this point.

Firstly, in a meta-analysis, Zoizner (2018) showed how strategic news coverage (or 'horse race coverage', which focuses on how individual politicians perform in polls, how they strategically use particular policy issues to gain consensus, what their popularity levels are, etc) actually hinders what he defines as *substantial political knowledge*, i.e. the extent to which participants could recall facts, relevant arguments and answer questions concerning specific issues presented in the news item. The author also included in this variable much rarer questions measuring *perceptual learning*, i.e. the extent to which participants think they learned something from the news.

The second study was conducted by Delli Carpini & Williams (1996) and focused on people's views regarding environmental issues and toxic waste. Whilst the study's findings were in line with the agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) - because they suggested that the media has an impact on what citizens talk about and how they talk about it - they also revealed that some media messages are resisted by individuals. Delli Carpini & Williams (1996) revealed that television viewers construct and re-construct their opinions in a non-uniform and inconsistent manner by drawing on personal experiences and pre-existing beliefs as well as the views of others and information presented by the media. The study, which comprised nine focus groups with a total of 34 participants, also demonstrated that messages received by media audiences can bear little resemblance to the intended message of those who created them. Discussions following viewing of television programmes highlighted how some participants consciously ignored or rejected media messages as being illegitimate. One example of this rejection is visible in the reaction of a born-again Christian participant who stated that environmental problems are being overblown by the media, who are trying to attract greater interest in order to make a larger profit (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1996). This process of appropriation, framing and transformation of content becomes even more visible online, where individuals select, share - and provide context by adding text which effectively functions as a frame - and comment on news (cf. Lewis Pea & Rosen, 2010; Kümpel, Karnowski & Keyling, 2015).

The Rise of the Internet and implications for research on informed citizenship

In the UK, the 2020 report on news consumption conducted by OFCOM (the UK's communications regulator) shows that 65% of participants access news online. The rise of the internet and of social media, has allowed scholars to explore not only the 'agenda getting' (i.e. choices about news consumption) but also the 'agenda setting' role of ordinary citizens. For example, Russell

Neumann et al. (2014) conducted an elaborate analysis testing alternative accounts of who 'sets the agenda', as well as the direction of influence of framing. Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) does not necessarily attribute to media the power to influence our opinion on political matters. Rather, it looks at the role media play in determining the salience of political topics (what we think about) and collocating an issue within a particular area of relevance (second level agenda setting – McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014), e.g. is this an isolated event or something linked to a wider context/trend, or is this something that pertains to the environmental sphere or the economic sphere? Adopting a big data approach, the authors analyse online and mainstream media mentions of particular issues, as well as the frequency of appearance of a selection of frames across time. Results showed how the often hypothesised unilateral direction of influence (from media to audience) is not an accurate reflection of what appears to be happening. The authors show instead that there is a bi-directional relationship, where issues spill from media to audience in some cases, from audience to media in others and sometimes the influence seems to go in both directions in a mutually reinforcing cycle. This initial evidence shows how the change in the media landscape might be affecting journalistic practices. Moreover, it suggests that – at least when it comes to online media – the direction of influence might be reversed. An optimistic view of this could interpret this as evidence of the power of the Internet as a democratising force.

Moreover, while traditional media rely extensively on official communications from PR and press agencies to source the news (Lewis & Williams, 2008), a growing amount of research is showing how social media are frequently used as 'beats' (i.e. sources of a story) in modern journalistic practices. For example, in a series of studies, Broesma and Graham (2012; 2013) showed how Tweets are incorporated in journalistic practice in the UK and the Netherlands. The first (2012) study, looked at how Tweets were used as sources during the British and Dutch elections. Results showed significant differences in whose tweets were sourced (with a predominance of Vox Pop, especially in the tabloid publications for the UK), compared to the Netherlands, which tended to rely on politician's tweets as sources. Once again, therefore, we see an interaction between different levels: on the one hand the introduction of new media – and their affordances – in journalistic practice, on the other, different ways in which these are used within different professional and cultural contexts.

A psychological approach

So what can psychology add to this already impressive body of knowledge? Firstly, in our opinion, a psychological approach can help by focusing on the subjective experience of interacting with media in context. In other words, as psychologists we are interested in

understanding how individuals experience this interaction, and how it is incorporated in their subjective experience of the world. In this sense, while research looking at media systems will tell us how different organisation and regulation of the media environment is related to different offers in terms of frequency and type of news (Aalberg & Curran, 2012), a psychological approach will tell us how individual producers, editors, journalists or audience members experience this environment and how psychological processes will contribute to the way in which they will act within it (see, e.g. Coen and Bull, forthcoming). Secondly, we argue, literature on educational psychology can help us redefine what we mean by knowledge and how learning happens, especially when it comes to adult learning. In the next section, we argue that learning from the news is a form of self-regulated learning.

Learning from the news as self-regulated adult learning: a GAMES approach

In the first instance, we think educational psychology can give us useful insights into what knowledge is. Most media research is focused on knowledge interpreted as the ability to recall factual information, and use it (we have added) to make inferences about the world. A psychological perspective would widen this definition to include the ability to apply this information in practice. In this sense, therefore, we would argue that providing information which people can later recognise or recall is not sufficient to argue that news contribute to informed citizenship. Rather, adapting Boekaerts (1996), we argue that adequate news coverage is not simply aimed at transferring information to the audience's memory, and adequate learning from the news is not simply equated to the amount of accurate information people can remember from the news. In this sense, 'factual knowledge' is only an aspect of what we consider as knowledge in this chapter, that is, the acquisition of information, skills and beliefs that allow citizens to perform their role in Society. And indeed, we have seen scholars in the media field (e.g. Curran et al, 2014) moving from a model where knowledge (measured as factual knowledge) was the main outcome of news exposure, to one where factual knowledge is only part of the 'learning' process, which also includes increased levels of political efficacy and increased interest in politics. From an educational psychology perspective knowledge comprises all these

elements (and more).

Indeed, back in 2001 Albert Bandura, proposed a Social Cognitive perspective to account for learning from (mass) media. In this theory, learning is the outcome of several sequential processes: Attentional, Retention, Production and Motivation. Particularly interesting for the current news landscape (especially online), he states: *'People seek information that may be potentially useful to them from different sources. [...]. How extensively different sources are used depends, in large part, on their accessibility and the likelihood that they will provide the kinds of information sought.'* (p.284). In other words, the search for information is goal-oriented, and the goals will determine where and what information will be considered.

Based on the above, one can expect, for example, that a prospective student would look at several sources of information to make sure they get an accurate picture of what University they would like to attend, or that before moving home, an individual will strategically seek and select information which would help them choosing the area in which they are going to live.

More importantly for our proposal of applying self-regulated learning (SRL) theories to our understanding of news' contribution to informed citizenship, Bandura stresses how the ability to self-regulate, self -reflect and learn vicariously are at the heart of the socio cognitive theory of learning.

Schunk and Zimmermann (1994) define self-regulated learning (SRL) as 'the process whereby students activate and sustain cognitions, behaviours and affects which are systematically oriented toward the attainment of their goals. The literature in this area identifies few characteristics we think are relevant and applicable to understanding the role news play in informed citizenship, which we summarise below. Accordingly, self regulated learning can be considered within the following 'GAMES' model:

- **Goal- Oriented.** Pintrich (2000) defines goals as: 'cognitive representations of what individuals are trying to accomplish and their purposes or reasons for doing the task.' (p. 96). SRL literature places emphasis on goals as determinants of the outcome of learning. Evidence in support of this comes from different theoretical traditions, for example, Zimmermann and Kisantas (1999) showed how high school girls' performance improved when they shifted from an outcome goal (i.e. focus on

getting a good outcome) to an accuracy goal (i.e. focus on being accurate). Boekaerts is acknowledged as the theorist whose work focused on explaining the role of goals in learning and putting emphasis on the role of emotions in the process (Panadero, 2017).

- **Active.** At the most basic level of being able to retain factual knowledge, Bandura (2001) states: '*Retention involves an active process of transforming and restructuring information conveyed by modeled events into rules and conceptions for memory representation*'. From an SRL perspective, learners are active in that their learning is instrumental to the achievement of goals, and they actively monitor and direct their actions in pursuit of the goal.
- **Motivated.** We define motivation as the psychological 'push' to engage in an activity (or indeed avoid it). Pintrich (2000) identifies several motivational constructs which play an important role in education. Among these: goals, attributions, efficacy beliefs, interest, and intrinsic motivation are represented in most SRL theories (e.g. Rheinberg, Vollmeyer and Rollett, 2000). Moreover, literature on motivated cognition shows how our motivations have a significant effect on the way in which we select, attend to, recall, feel and act in our social context (e.g. Madan, 2017).
- **Emotion-laden.** Opt Eynde, De Corte and Verschaffel (2007) begin their chapter on the role of emotions in SRL with the following quote: 'Emotions are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature, they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature's reasoning itself' (Nussbaum, 2001, p.3). In the chapter, they present a reading of SRL through a Socio-Constructivist perspective on learning. Within this perspective, 'learning is characterized by a reflexive relation between *the context and the individual*' (p. 186). The authors further report a series of studies showing how emotions in learning are often the result of an interaction between the student and the environment, and that students often adopt coping strategies to regulate their emotions in the context of learning. Indeed this echoes the original work of Vygotsky (1962).
- **Situated.** Bokaerts (1996) proposes that a psychological perspective on learning – and adult learning in particular (Bruscaiglioni & Gheno, 2000) – views learning *in*

context. In other words, educational psychologists realised that students' perceptions, thoughts and behaviours are highly situated. Indeed, she notices how – while educators often work on the assumption that *'learning has been achieved when students have retrieved or used information sometime after it has been read, heard or discussed [...]* Yet it has become apparent that many students experience difficulties in applying the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to everyday situations' (p.101). Similarly, one can argue, the simple ability to recall information relevant to citizenry (at least in the eyes of the journalist), does not necessarily translate in its application to the practice of being a citizen. (see e.g. Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989)

Research in political psychology shows how similar processes are in play when we move outside the classroom to the context of informed citizenship. In the next section, we discuss how key aspects of learning identified above in the context of educational psychology, can be applied to understanding media contributions to generating and reinforcing citizens' learning about politics and public affairs.

News and Self-regulated learning

Considering the contribution of news to informed citizenship through the lens of the SRL approach helps us to identify several factors likely to influence the quantity and quality of learning citizens can attain through the media.

In adherence with a socio-constructivist approach to SRL, we see learning from the news as an interactive process between the media user and the environment (intended in terms of the cultural, social and historical context as well as in terms of specific media and their affordances). In this sense, existing research on the effects of key psychological constructs on the way in which both journalists and audience make sense of news can help in identifying important processes which play a role in determining the contribution of news to information processing.

Personal Identity and Roles

How journalists and News producers see their role in society can often play an important part in determining news values and coverage, i.e. which information is available in the news and how it is discussed. For example, Hardy (forthcoming) explains how changes in the structure, regulation, resource allocation and environment in which news is produced have raised important questions concerning the professional standing of journalists: who they are, what their function is in society, what expectations the public and media industry have of them. Olawale (ibid, forthcoming) further explains how this can impact on the way in which these roles are enacted. For example, a journalist may adopt a delivery style more attuned to capturing attention if they think their role is to make sure as many people as possible are exposed to their message, but what is the consequence for knowledge? Grabe, Lang and Zhao (2003) have shown how the public tend to pay more attention to content delivered in a 'tabloidised' manner (i.e. big, sensationalistic headings and sensationalised, highly emotional delivery), and they remember it better. However, they judge it as less trustworthy. Therefore if we measured knowledge as the ability to recall information, this study would suggest 'tabloidised' content would serve better the purpose. However, a Self-Reflective learning perspective highlights the study also showed people judged the content as less trustworthy.

From a GAMES perspective, we can expect that people who are motivated to draw an accurate picture of what is going on the world, in order to inform their thinking, feelings and actions as citizens, might not use information provided when constructing an argument. It is possible they might not use that particular source either when trying to achieve those goals. Indeed, research has illustrated a tendency for the 'most liked' and 'most viewed' articles to be typically those media communication experts call 'soft' and weird stories (e.g. Boczkowski and Michtelstein, 2013). It is important however to note that Boczkowski and Michtelstein (2013) show how – in line with the context dependence claim in SRL (see the 'situated' aspect of GAMES) - both journalists' and audience's content choices vary corresponding to what is happening in the political scene. Accordingly, during significant political events, such as elections, people do opt for 'harder' content, and the offer of such content increases in news outlets. Similarly, regardless of the 'popularity' of individual news items, research has shown that people are still very aware of 'what news should be about', in terms of informing citizenship and providing 'solid' information (Schrøder, nd). Therefore the evidence seems to

suggest people may use news as a form of entertainment (Thussu, 2008), but they know when it is time for them to use it for different purposes, that is -we argue- when they are thinking of their 'informed citizen' identity.

From an SRL perspective, we argue that media can be a source of learning for citizens, who will use it strategically when seeking information as part of that role.

Social Identity

Identity-related issues do not only concern personal identity and role conceptions: a long tradition in social psychology demonstrates how the social groups to which we belong are indeed part of our social identities and have a significant effect on how we think, feel and act on the basis of these (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Tajfel, 1981). Research has shown how the same processes identified as key motivators to join and identify with particular groups - or to think of our present, desired and future selves (for identity motives – see, e.g. Vignoles, 2011) - can explain the extent to which we use social media (Manzi et al., 2018). So, while access to news can be seen as a way to gather information we find relevant to our role as citizens, sharing news via social media can be part of our identity work. In other words, news sharing can be seen as a bonding activity which helps both claiming and reinforcing one's membership position in a particular group (e.g. Dwyer and Martin, 2017). Indeed, theories and evidence in social psychology suggest that online activities in which one engages can facilitate the emergence of new social identities, such as opinion-based groups (see, e.g. Thomas et al, 2015). News sharing and commenting can certainly be a powerful democratic tool, which allows for people who belong to marginalised and minoritised groups to come together, learn from each other, share and discuss their experiences (for an identity-related perspective on online forums, see, for example, David Giles' work on Pro Ana websites, Giles, 2006; Brotsky & Giles, 2007). On the other side however, the same activities can be an obstacle to democratic dialogue, with people interacting mainly with others who share similar opinions and thereby creating echo chambers, where one rarely gets to have positive interactions with people who share different opinions. Within these echo chambers, discussions tend to reinforce, rather than challenge, one's existing views, and even when information from other groups is shared, this is used to reassert the groups' initial values (for an interesting parallel on how sources of criticism inform groups' reactions in an intergroup context, see Hornsey,

2005). Scholars have suggested that this can be the mechanism underlying polarisation online (see, e.g. Wojcieszack & Garret, 2018).

From a Self-Reflective Learning perspective, we can therefore derive that affirmation and maintenance of a positive social identity affects learning. Indeed, the evidence presented above suggests that social identity processes influence the way in which people share, select and discuss the news. In other words, identity appears to be a goal, a driver for activity and a motivator for learning from the news.

Motivation

As discussed in the previous section, most of the literature on SRL acknowledges the important role played by motivational factors in determining learning. Similarly, the literature in media and communication has explored how motivation impacts individuals' media choices and effects. Media have been extensively explored within the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) perspective. In our opinion, the U&G perspective is a deeply psychological one, as it acknowledges that media messages are not received by every member of the audience in the same way. Rather, what one learns from a particular message depends on reasons for accessing the message and the gratifications sought by this activity (e.g. Rubin, 2009). For example, David (2009) argues that motivations and goals play an important role in determining the extent to which people will learn from the news. In her study, she analysed data from existing large studies - Electronic Dialogue 2000 (ED2K) and Healthcare Dialogue (HCD) projects – and showed how the motivations driving exposure to news (in terms of need for cognition and need for evaluation) were related to participants' interest in politics, exposure to news, attentiveness to political content and knowledge (measured in terms of both civic knowledge and issue-specific knowledge).

Research in the area of motivated reasoning further expands this point by showing how ideology can also function as a key motivator in determining the way in which citizens learn from news. For example, Nisbet, Cooper and Ellithorpe (2015) showed how accurate knowledge concerning climate change decreases for conservatives attending political news,

but increases when conservatives attend science news¹. Kahan et al. (2012) further shows how differences in concern about climate change cannot be accounted for by differences in factual knowledge and comprehension of science: in their study, those with the highest level of scientific literacy and numeracy were in fact the most divided in this respect. Indeed, Xue et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis exploring the effect of cultural worldviews (i.e. individuals' 'distinct preferences for how society should be structured', p. 249) on environmental concerns, showing how these play a (overall modest) role in determining citizens' perceptions of environmental risk.

Therefore, from a SRL perspective, we can conclude that motivational factors – such as ideological positions, worldviews and task orientation - will influence the way in which citizens draw on information to form beliefs about the challenges faced by the society they live in.

Emotions

The fundamental structural changes faced by news media, with an ever-increasing competition for attention (Nixon, 2020) have implications for how journalists try and capture people's attention and for the extent to which these 'tricks' may actually be effective (Thompson and Coen, forthcoming). For example, psychological research suggesting that negative information tends to be more attended to than positive information applies also to news (Soroka, 2014). Bachleda and Soroka (forthcoming) clearly show how emotions are featured in journalistic content and in peoples' reaction to the content. Applying an automated content-analytic strategy to analysis of the *New York Times* from 1980 to the present day, the authors showed how news reports frequently include expression of emotions and that this practice has increased in recent times. Moreover, the authors' analysis shows how the presence of emotional content increases public attentiveness to news. Similarly, Grabe's work (see, e.g. Grabe et al, 2003) shows that emotionally charged coverage (typical of tabloids) attracts more attention, but also hinders information processing. In this sense, leveraging on emotions entails clear risks when it comes to informed citizenship.

Despite this, Bas and Grabe (2015) clearly show that informative content does not

¹ No change is reported for liberals and moderates

need to be dull. They presented participants with news stories concerning issues deemed important for informed citizenship (e.g. corruption, child labour, industrial practices) which featured (versus not featured) an emotional testimony. Results showed how the presence of emotional personalisation not only improved ability to memorise and recall information, but also reduced the knowledge gap, by improving knowledge (at least in the short term) among those with lower levels of educational qualification.

Literature in psychology shows how emotions also play an important role in susceptibility to misinformation. Porter et al (2014) show that when individuals are primed with emotional content on exposure to 'neutral' images (e.g. people queuing at an airport), they become more susceptible to misinformation and false memories in a subsequent recall task.

The evidence proposed therefore suggests that emotions do play a role in determining the selection, interpretation and knowledge citizens derive from interacting with news content in different contexts. Nonetheless, the link between emotions and learning is not as straightforward as one would hope, with emotional content appearing as fostering – and at times hindering – learning from the news (see also Grabe and Bas, forthcoming). A SRL perspective can help further clarify the role played by emotion in civic engagement and identify ways in which emotions can be harnessed to foster the development of learning, engagement and dialogue in a democratic society.

Conclusion

While there is evidence supporting the idea that media can contribute to knowledge by providing participants with information concerning current affairs, this connection is much less straightforward than previously imagined. Contrary to suggestions in early research on media effects research, media 'consumers', their social groups and the environment in which they interact, their motivations and goals all play an active role in shaping whether and how the message will be received, evaluated and considered. The current media landscape, and in particular the online environment offers novel opportunities for learning and for citizens to encounter news – for example on social media – even where they are not actively looking for it. Indeed, research suggests that even this type of exposure leads to increased knowledge, where this is defined as the ability to recognise correct information (Lee and Kim, 2017). In this sense, one could argue that the internet offers novel and

unique ways in which citizens can engage with news, and learn about the world around them from a wider variety of sources.

However, it is important to resist temptation to underestimate the important role played by media providers in shaping public debates about social issues. For example, Curran, Fenton and Des Freedman (2016) warn against the optimistic view of the internet as an open, free platform of information sharing. They highlight how information online is subject to political and economic controls which often re-create the same dynamics as those observed in traditional media – and in the broader societal landscape. For example, Curran et al. (2013) report on a content analysis of news appearing on the landing pages of the most popular online news sources in nine countries. Contrary to what could be expected, the news provision of these online outlets focused on domestic issues (or international issues with a direct involvement of the home-nation) and still over-reliant on official sources. Moreover, the 24-hour cycle of news, the growth of media conglomerates and increased popularity of the internet have seen the erosion of rigorous reporting in favour of dubious practices which increase speed and quantity of production, such as the over reliance on PR and wires (e.g. Johnston and Forde, 2017). In the face of such decline in the quality of the offer (which is mostly due to the media landscape fostering a view of news as a product – or even as a form of entertainment - rather than a public service), evidence suggests that citizens are still very well aware – and demanding – of ‘quality’ journalism (Schrøder, nd).

From a (media) psychological perspective, the internet offers opportunities for scholars to test the effectiveness and quality of information available to citizens adopting both large (big data) and small (microanalysis) scale studies of online content, and explore the processes of sense-making in which individuals engage when consuming news. Moreover, research in psychology can highlight ways in which key psychological processes, such as identity – both personal and social – motivation and emotions, influence whether, how and what people will learn from (news) media.

We hope this chapter also provided a persuasive argument as to why moving away from a ‘traditional’ definition of learning, into a self regulated learning perspective would provide new and (possibly) more fruitful ways to consider the role of media in a democratic society. From this perspective, learning is (a) driven by individuals’ goals when consuming news, (b) determined by individuals playing an active role, and is influenced by (c) their motivations, (d) emotions and (e) situational factors in which it occurs.

We argue that reconceptualising learning from the news in terms of the GAMES approach offers a theoretical framework which can fruitfully account for the extant work on how media can be used to promote informed citizenship (cf. Grabe and Bas, forthcoming). Moreover, a vision of learning from the news informed by the literature on Self regulated learning will allow scholars to evaluate and

redefine the type and quality of political knowledge and skills modelled in news media and propose strategies to help journalists create – and educators help citizens navigate - a news environment which fosters the development of knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to modern societies. Put simply, in order to understand the complex process of learning from the news, research in media, journalism and psychology need to start where the individual is and understand where they are trying to go, and why.

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