



How to measure news literacy and civic engagement in 9-11-year-olds

A summary for researchers and practitioners

Research Briefing: May 2024 Summary

- *The NewsWise programme aims to cultivate news literacy in primary school children aged 9-11 in the UK. To evaluate this programme, **a new validated set of self-report news literacy measures** suitable for this age group was created.*
- *To supplement these self-report measures, a performance-based twelve-item **test of 9-11-year-olds' ability to spot "fake news"** was created.*
- *Since the study was conducted to explore whether an increase in children's levels of news literacy corresponds to an increase in their civic engagement, **a new validated civic engagement measure** suitable for this age group was also created.*
- *The measures developed as part of the NewsWise project could be used by future researchers – as well as stakeholders such as policymakers, educators and civic society practitioners – seeking to capture levels of news literacy and/or civic engagement among children aged 9-11.*
- *Relatedly, the measures could be used as part of the evaluations of future educational interventions aimed at improving 9-11-year-olds' levels of news literacy and/or civic engagement.*

Background to the study

We live in societies that are highly mediated by the use of digital technologies. These present a wealth of opportunities (e.g., in terms of social interaction and participation in society) but also considerable risks. One of these, which can be particularly harmful to a functioning democracy, relates to the spread of online mis/disinformation.

Children often lack the critical skills needed to assess the reliability of information. The NewsWise programme was designed by the Guardian Foundation in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association to improve news literacy in children aged 9 to 11.

Partners on the NewsWise in Primary Education project, which was funded by Nuffield, include the University of Birmingham, the University of Liverpool, the Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association. The project aimed to explore the impact of the programme.

As such, it examined whether, to what extent and in what ways NewsWise was effective in developing children's news literacy (i.e., "the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to evaluate news stories and understand the broader news ecosystem"). At the same time, it addressed the question of whether children's development of news literacy corresponds to an increase in their civic engagement (understood as "community involvement, acts of service, and political participation that is appropriate to their age").





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The evaluation of NewsWise sought to answer four research questions. Given the lack of validated and reliable measures for 9-11-year-olds, one of these questions included “How can news literacy and civic engagement be measured in 9–11-year-olds?”.

A new validated set of news literacy measures suitable for this age group was created. These new measures were used, and found to be reliable, to assess three dimensions of news literacy, and five associated constructs, among children aged 9-11.

Dimension of News Literacy	Related Constructs
Dimension 1: Attitudes towards news reporting and trustworthiness Definition: An appreciation of the importance of news reporting in terms of quality and trustworthiness.	Construct 1A: News motivation Definition: the motivation required to engage with the news.
	Construct 1B: News attitudes Definition: Beliefs that news should be balanced, honest, fair, and useful.
Dimension 2: knowledge of news production and consumption Definition: An understanding of the processes of news production and consumption inherent in the news industry, and of the role of audiences.	Construct 2: News knowledge Definition: An understanding of the processes of news production and consumption inherent in the news industry, and of the role of audiences.
Dimension 3: Evaluation skills and strategies Definition: The ability to deploy different strategies to evaluate the trustworthiness of information and news stories.	Construct 3A: News evaluation self-report Definition: The self-reported ability to evaluate the trustworthiness of news stories.
	Construct 3B: News vigilance Definition: The self-reported actions taken if/when confronted with misinformation.

To supplement the self-report measures above, a twelve-item test was created and used to assess 9-11-year-olds’ ability to spot “fake news”. Participants were presented with online news items and, for each item, asked to select “Real”, “Fake”, or “Not enough information to decide”.

Meanwhile, a new validated civic engagement measure suitable for 9-11-year-olds was also created. This measure consists of three constructs.

Construct	Definition
Awareness	Awareness of the issues that pertain to the socio-political context.
Attitudes	Positive attitudes towards community and political life and towards one’s own rights and responsibilities as a citizen.
Action	Participation in community and political activities in the present time.



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Both the news literacy and civic engagement instruments developed as part of the project were designed, piloted and tested prior to conducting the study. Both measures were found to have good psychometric properties.

What do these measures mean for researchers and practitioners?

There is an urgent need for effective media and news literacy education suitable for the digital age. Equally, there is an urgent need for more robust evaluations of relevant interventions in this area. This means that it is essential to use validated and reliable instruments that can be used as part of these evaluations. Given the lack of such instruments for 9-11-year-olds, the development of new measures as part of the NewsWise project has implications for future research and practice.

These measures are suitable for use in further studies seeking to measure the news literacy and/or civic engagement of 9-11-year-olds. As such, they may be used by future researchers – as well as stakeholders such as policymakers, educators and civic society practitioners – seeking to capture levels of news literacy and/or civic engagement among children aged 9-11 in the UK and/or in other English-speaking countries. Relatedly, the instruments may be used as part of the evaluations of future educational interventions aimed at improving 9-11-year-olds' levels of news literacy and/or civic engagement.

It is only by adopting robust methodologies that interventions can be better designed and conducted with a view to promoting news and media literacy education. Both the news literacy and civic engagement measures developed for 9-11-year-olds as part of the NewsWise project can be downloaded here: <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/project/news-literacy-and-civic-engagement/>

Further Information

For more information, please visit the project website <https://jubileecentre.ac.uk/project/news-literacy-and-civic-engagement/> or contact Professor Tom Harrison (t.j.harrison@bham.ac.uk).