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Media Literacy as Resilience: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Throughout the years, media literacy has been considered an aid for many societal ills in the Western world: from fighting against stereotypical representations of different (marginalized) groups to combating mis- and disinformation. However, these educational initiatives build upon a Western view of the world, and do not take into account issues faced by societies in permanent crisis. The aim of this article is to propose a conceptual framework called H.E.L.P. that positions media literacy as a form of resilience in areas fraught with wars, migration, famine, climate catastrophe, and other adversities. In the H.E.L.P. framework, we identify four core elements: habit (focusing on media use and media environment); escapism (focusing on entertainment and media avoidance); listening (discussing attentiveness to affective and bodily reactions); and participation (highlighting active engagement with media). We discuss implications for media literacy research and provide guidelines for practitioners.

Keywords

crisis; disinformation; media literacy; refugees; resilience; Russian-Ukrainian war

1. Introduction: Media Literacy "Outside the Usual"

In recent years, media literacy education has become instrumentalised as a response to the rampant mis- and disinformation crisis (Robinson & Fassbender, 2024). It has even been proposed as a "strategic defense strategy" for NATO countries (Jolls, 2022). However, if we look back in history, media literacy as a concept and field of study has gained considerable attention since at least the 1980s, most prominently in Western countries (Neag et al., 2022). Since its inception, the concept has become an umbrella term for various types of literacies and competencies, such as digital literacy, information literacy, news literacy, or more recently, "ecomedia" literacy and algorithmic and AI literacy. While media literacy education is used to counter mis-

and disinformation globally, it is often conceptualized and applied according to the frameworks developed in the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) world (Bozdağ et al., 2022). As Melki (2018) claims, "second world problems," such as dictatorships, wars, famine, and migration, require a totally different approach, which he calls the "media literacy of the oppressed." This approach takes into account constant socio-economic turmoil, weak independent media, low institutional trust, and conflict. In recent years, this push towards a more inclusive media literacy has gained momentum even in democratic societies, where academics have focused on the inclusion of marginalised groups (Neag et al., 2022).

Bridging the gap between the experience of groups and societies in the state of *information precarity* (Wall et al., 2017) and Westernized media literacy education, we propose a conceptual framework of media literacy as resilience. Building on previous research, we selected key aspects of media literacy education in (permanent) crisis by building on previous literature on disinformation resilience (Humprecht et al., 2020; Kont et al., 2024), mediated trauma (Al-Ghazzi, 2023; Pinchevski, 2019), media avoidance (Aharoni et al., 2021; Kozyreva et al., 2023; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021), and civic media literacies (Mihailidis, 2018). This theoretical basis is complemented by our previous empirical research with unaccompanied refugee youth (from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Morocco, and other countries in crisis) and older adults in Ukraine, which we use to illustrate our conceptual framework. We end the article with further research lines and practitioner guidelines for media literacy projects in precarious environments.

2. Literature Review: Towards Building a Conceptual Framework

2.1. Resilience: Overview of the Concept

Despite the long-standing assertion that media literacy education should balance protectionism with support for self-reliant media exploration (Buckingham, 2009; McDougall, 2019), the bulk of policies still focus on protecting people from "disinfodemic" (e.g., "During this coronavirus pandemic," 2020). However, in precarious environments, it is impossible to avoid or completely shield oneself from the risks associated with media use. Unless people take special measures, they are usually exposed to mis- and disinformation, mediated violence, and uncivil online discussions. These negative experiences affect well-being, informedness, and social trust. Poor quality of information about health, economics, and politics also affects citizens' decision-making, deterring them from improving their precarious situation.

Why do we suggest that resilience is a key concept when it comes to media literacy "outside the usual"? In contrast to protection from adversity, resilience to detrimental media effects is an adequate strategy that helps people make sense of the world amidst unreliable information and manage risks associated with media use. It is a weapon of the weak, as people who face oppression and scarcity develop strategies to continue using the media despite these hardships, getting information and communicating their struggles to the outside world.

There is ample literature on the concept of resilience, spanning multiple academic fields, from environmental sciences to psychology. Bonanno (2004) defined resilience as the ability of those exposed to highly disruptive events to maintain psychological and physical functioning and the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions. A more nuanced conceptualization of resilience moves away from the idea of a return to a previous "normal" state, embracing change through adaptation and learning (Davoudi,

2012). In this sense, resilience is not a trait, but a dynamic process "encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543).

When adopting the conceptualization of resilience to the field of media studies, we first need to highlight the mediated nature of risk exposure. On the one hand, mediation might mitigate the negative effects of disruptive events. Scholars go as far as to claim that risk exposure is necessary to build the capacity to manage harm during internet use (Hammond et al., 2023; Vissenberg et al., 2022). This view also aligns with our considerations about the impossibility of sanitizing the media environment and avoiding harm altogether. On the other hand, mediated risk exposure might have more subtle immediate effects, but lead to fatigue and emotional drain that affects the willingness to engage with media in the long-term (Pasitselska, 2022a; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021).

Media literacy as resilience, in our understanding, should provide strategies not only for coping with falsehoods of different types and origins, but also for managing one's media environment, including the scope and intensity of media use, opportunities for emotional relief, and for action against oppression. While we focus here on individual strategies and capacities, we do not aim to promote an individualistic ideology sometimes associated with the use of the term "resilience" (Davoudi, 2012). Instead, we agree with Ungar's (2011) conceptualization of resilience as the ability to access the resources needed to sustain well-being from communities and governments. We also agree with Moe (2020) that the distribution of burdens among citizens when it comes to media literacy should promote the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Resilience has thus a multidimensional characteristic that spans from the individual to the collective societal level (Kont et al., 2024).

In the following section, we will establish the theoretical link between resilience and media literacy and outline the broader needs for media literacy education in precarious media environments.

2.2. Coping With Adversity in Precarious Media Environments

2.2.1. Resilience to Falsehoods

Research on the prevalence, detection, and characteristics of misinformation, disinformation, and "fake news" has exploded in recent years (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). Particularly, data-driven research, relying on computational and quantitative methods, has been developing in parallel to media literacy scholarship, without an effort to establish interdisciplinary dialogue. As a result, information processing and opinion-making are usually studied as detached from their social context (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024; Pasitselska, 2022b). While researchers report the effectiveness of inoculation and prebunking against mis- and disinformation (e.g., Carey et al., 2025; Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021), these measures are usually tested in artificial conditions and are limited to immediate effects (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). In contrast, media literacy education often foregrounds individual reflection and choice rather than stimulus–response medical-like interventions (Anderson, 2021; cf. Huang et al., 2024). Especially when aiming at building resilience, media literacy presupposes adaptation and change of media use practices over time (McDougall, 2019), which requires longitudinal intervention design based on existing individual habits and practices.

A separate string of research investigates "resilience to disinformation," which Kont et al. (2024) define as "a capability that manifests in the process of encountering disinformation and results in either questioning or recognizing disinformation and consequently dismissing it" (pp. 537–538). This research acknowledges the contextual and multidimensional nature of resilience, which also, for example, depends on the level of populism or polarization in media systems, as well as the availability of trustworthy media sources and public trust in media (Humprecht et al., 2020). While recognising the role of institutional and interpersonal trust, existing studies rarely take into consideration the processing of political information that is not based on epistemic thinking. Truthfulness for many people has nothing to do with the accuracy of information, depending primarily on their identity-driven considerations (Schulz et al., 2020). In the context of war and conflict, partisan, religious, and ethnolinguistic ties increase susceptibility to propagandistic narratives (Szostek, 2017). Studies show that in real-life conditions, people often process information relying on social and identity-related cues rather than knowledge-based considerations (Pasitselska, 2022b). Centering media literacy practices around individual habits and routines that are also embedded in the existing social world (co-viewing and co-listening practices, messaging groups, news monitoring distributed among family members) might help overcome ideological resistance and media distrust.

One of the promising paths to develop media literacy approaches congruent with the discussed challenges is through recognition of media-related needs and gratifications people derive from media use in times of crisis. Kozman and Melki (2018) identified five main categories of media-related gratifications during war: Next to cognitive gratifications (that relate to knowing what is happening), affective, escapist, social-integrative, and survivalist gratifications were also important. Realising that people might consume untrustworthy information and turn to dubious sources to maintain high morale or cope with uncertainty (Dekker et al., 2018; Pasitselska, 2022a), we need to change our approach to media literacy interventions.

2.2.2. Resilience to Trauma

The tension between epistemic engagement with media and affective proximity to conflict poses challenges to media literacy application during crisis and war (Al-Ghazzi, 2023; Pasitselska, 2024). The "war feed" (Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023), unmoderated and uncensored, brings torture and war crimes into the digital devices of everyone watching and demands that the witnesses stay connected, appealing to their sense of duty and empathy. Pinchevski (2019) claims that mediated transmission of traumatic events exceeds transmission of meaning or information proper, taking place on the affective rather than on the cognitive level. Moreover, given the pervasive news consumption through social media, political conversations intertwine with personal networked communications, often taking on affective qualities not previously associated with political discourse (Lokot, 2023). Embodied witnessing combines a deeply personal, even intimate experience of relating to suffering, with a collective experience of shared destiny as a part of a community (Chouliaraki, 2010). Since media use during crises often entails (re-)traumatization, we need to rethink prioritizing critical thinking, cross-source validation, and other media literacy techniques that entail more intense media consumption. The competencies of media non-use might become crucial instead.

Media non-use should draw broader attention from the media literacy field, as news saturation and platformized attention economy pose even higher demands from users (Good & Ciccone, 2025). Media non-use is also conceptualised as news avoidance, technological disconnection, and "detox," among other terms. News avoidance is considered an anti-democratic practice that leaves citizens uninformed (Delli

Carpini, 2000); however, complete avoidance is relatively rare and usually connected to a lack of trust in media and politics (Strömbäck et al., 2020). Studies show that news avoidance increases in times of crisis. Aharoni et al. (2021) note that the volume of breaking news and its emotional intensity lead to indifference and avoidance. Ytre-Arne and Moe (2021), in their study of news use during Covid-19, conclude that "doomscrolling" creates information overload and emotional drain. Taken together, these studies suggest that "literate" avoidance strategies are essential in the highly saturated news environment, and especially in a crisis. Kozyreva et al. (2023) address this problem by introducing the competence of "critical ignoring": "a type of deliberate ignorance that entails selectively filtering and blocking out information in order to control one's information environment and reduce one's exposure to false and low-quality information" (p. 83). In line with this discussion, we can add to our framework the ability to reduce one's exposure to violent or traumatizing content. There is another benefit of limited news consumption that is related to civic empowerment, which we discuss in the following section: Avoiding news may help people stay focused on issues they feel they can change (Woodstock, 2014).

2.2.3. Resilience to Oppression

In the age of social media, online political expression becomes even more important in a context where one can bear witness to injustice, document, and testify to one's experience (Lokot, 2023). This matters not just for the formation of public opinion in the conflict-affected country and the support for humanitarian efforts abroad (e.g., in boosting the conflict visibility online, Kasianenko & Boichak, 2024), but also for collective memory and archiving (Kot et al., 2024).

For our purposes, Mihailidis' (2018) concept of "civic media literacies" is essential. It highlights the need to shift from training individual skills to community-oriented, participatory, and value-driven pedagogy. The connection between media literacy and civic agency prioritizes justice and positive social change. With the development of digital technologies (such as AI), the instrumentalization of information warfare by anti-democratic actors has become even more widespread and skillful (Applebaum, 2024). This must urge media literacy educators to be more proactive when it comes to citizens' political engagement. Teaching people to be detached critical observers is simply not enough. It is also harmful as it cements existing power structures where those with the most resources are more visible online.

When centering civic participation within media literacy curricula, it is important to balance once again affective and epistemic practices of expression. While affective proximity to conflict and injustice can undermine the credibility of the testimonies (Al-Ghazzi, 2023), producing and sharing affective, embodied knowledge counteracts epistemic inequalities and affirms the civic resistance of ordinary citizens (Lokot, 2023). Next to affective expression, playful epistemologies (such as meme production) should be recognized as powerful practices of civic resistance (Kasianenko & Boichak, 2024), and therefore also included in "civic media literacies," as Mihailidis (2020) suggests.

To summarize, we have reviewed existing literature on how media literacies can build resilience against disinformation, traumatic content, and civic disengagement. We identified key changes that we see as essential to be included in our "media literacy as resilience" framework. In Section 4, we propose a four-component framework and illustrate it with examples from our previous empirical studies in precarious environments.

3. Note on Empirical Studies

The conceptual framework we propose is informed by our previous empirical studies in precarious media environments and with media users in precarious situations. The first study, Media Literacy for Older Adults in Ukraine (Study 1), conducted by Pasitselska in cooperation with a local NGO after the full-scale Russian invasion, explored existing media literacy practices, skills, and perceived needs of older adults during war in the digital age. The second study, Media Literacy for Unaccompanied Refugee Youth (Study 2), was a research project carried out by Neag in four different European countries (Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and the UK) that looked at the lived media experience of young refugees trying to settle in and build a new life on their own. A detailed account of the data collection, analysis, and ethical procedures can be found in our previous publications (Neag, 2020; Pasitselska, 2024). Both studies took a user-centric approach to media use and aimed to create media literacy materials that could aid the studied populations.

4. The H.E.L.P. Framework

We have named our conceptual framework H.E.L.P. based on its building elements, namely: Habit (focusing on media use and media environment); Escapism (focusing on entertainment and media avoidance); Listening (discussing attentiveness to affective and bodily reactions); and, finally, Participation (highlighting active engagement with media). In the sections below, we showcase the importance of each element, also through empirical evidence (see Figure 1).

4.1. Habit

Media use is a situational and contextual practice (Schnauber-Stockmann et al., 2025). Environments (routines, time and location of use, collective norms) and media contexts (access, affordances) influence how people engage with media. Simply put, media use is a habit. In an environment full of distractions, developing a news habit also takes a lot of cognitive and motivational energy (Groot Kormelink, 2022), especially given that one's general, long-term informedness is often not a priority. Hence, effective media literacy interventions should account for the time needed to build new routines. After an initial effort of habit-building, as Tokunaga (2020) shows, comes relative ease, when behavioral sequences are automatically initiated without conscious self-instruction.

In Study 1, we see multiple accounts of people stabilizing and routinizing their media consumption after the initial shock of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when they were "glued to their screens." A male participant from the Kharkiv region describes his routine:

> Well, in the morning, I do a quick review, "two cups of coffee," as I call it. That is, the situation on the front lines, the general situation in Ukraine. In the evening, I watch [a political blogger on YouTube]. He collects all the latest news during the day, including all the foreign news. (m, 60+, Kharkiv)

For some participants, these routines took months to build, accompanied by emotional and cognitive exhaustion from information overload and traumatizing content. A female participant from the Cherkasy region described how she "watched news, and cried, and cried" (f, Cherkasy) until she found a way to reduce and restructure her consumption, with the help of her son.

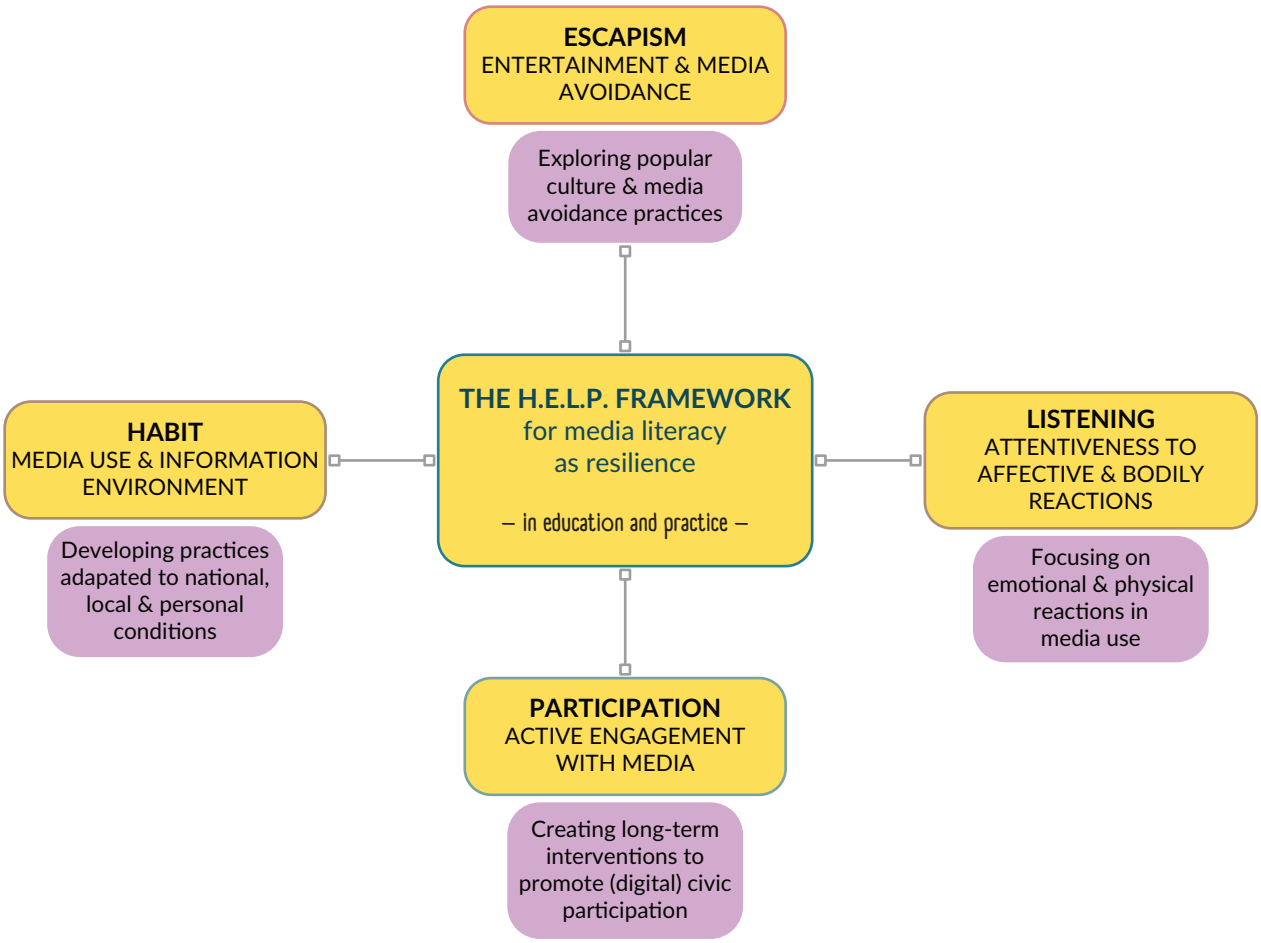

Figure 1. The H.E.L.P. framework.

An important part of the media literacy routine is curating one's media environment so that media use becomes smoother and less cognitively exhausting. Curation practices depend on factors external to an individual (such as media infrastructures, sources, and legislation) and internal factors that users can manage themselves (home internet connection, available devices, subscription to news sources).

In terms of the external factors, authorities have an important role in creating a more equal infrastructure, even more so in political and social crises. We know from previous studies that providing digital access to economically disadvantaged groups helped alleviate (to some extent) inequalities (Bozdağ et al., 2022). Media regulation and state censorship are also important factors, as media can be weaponized for information warfare (Szostek & Orlova, 2024).

In Study 1, participants named many infrastructural aspects that critically influenced their ability to get reliable information and stay updated on the developments on the front, such as the absence of electricity (no internet, no television), antennas working improperly (only a limited number of TV channels available), or the absence of public Wi-Fi or internet connection.

In Study 2, one of the refugee participants mentioned how useful he found the screens in trains and buses in Sweden, as these showed short news snippets. Another young person then mentioned a national public

broadcasting website that used easier language to present the most important news of the day. For people who are new to a country or learning the language, providing such a curated media environment is essential to overcome the proliferation of dis- and misinformation available online.

In terms of the internal factors, a disrupted media environment requires specific curation on the user's side. In such environments, the tactics of "distributed discovery" (Toff & Nielsen, 2018), relying on incidental news exposure and occasional googling, can become ineffective or harmful. Computational propaganda, often led by authoritarian state actors (Applebaum, 2024), relies on amplification of malevolent and inauthentic content (Lin, 2024). Studies show that by using professional journalistic sources, citizens gain more political knowledge than by relying on social media and user-generated content (Amsalem & Zoizner, 2023). Even one carefully chosen professional media outlet can become a foundation for a healthy news diet.

In addition to media curation, it is important to foster social connections that encourage literate media consumption (Palmer & Toff, 2020; Pasitselska, 2022a). Beyond immediate connections, belonging to imagined communities of media consumers and/or parasocial interactions with journalists or political commentators play important roles in shaping news habits (Palmer & Toff, 2020).

4.2. Escapism

In this block, we highlight the two key categories of media gratifications identified by previous research on media use during war (Kozman & Melki, 2018): affective (to be entertained and to maintain a high morale); and escapist (to "kill time" and escape loneliness).

While some scholars criticize the use of media for entertainment as it diverts attention from political content and news (Prior, 2005), or leads to addiction (LaRose et al., 2003), others also recognize that it can help with (mental) well-being. In a study on young African Americans' social media use, Smith et al. (2023) conclude that students use social media for entertainment to escape from daily stresses, which is acceptable if balanced with seeking information that is also empowering and uplifting (p. 434). The type and pace of entertaining content also matter. For instance, the practice of doomscrolling (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021) is different from intentionally watching a movie. As one of the participants in Study 2 mentions:

> It's boring when you're alone, watching TV all day and then you're tired, you have nothing to do, you can't think of something else, so I'm watching movies because I want to spend my time or forget the situation that happened to me….And playing games, like PlayStation, or computer. (m, 16, Afghanistan)

Hållander (2021) argues that escapism can be understood as a conscious choice to "slow things down" and "create space for reflection and rest" (p. 495). We argue that digital escapism can offer a much-needed respite from everyday tragedies. In precarious environments, the media literacy routine should support healthy escapist practices. While sustaining a news habit is important, the proportion of news content can be radically reduced, which will contribute to better quality of processing of the available information and leave more time for rest. Participants in both studies mentioned turning to content other than news for relaxation and escapism. For instance, in Study 1, when feeling overwhelmed with news, participants would watch programmes about nature, religious content, hobby-related YouTube channels such as beekeeping, or listen to music. In the case of the unaccompanied refugee youth, instead of traumatic news, online music

brought them together, away from their home. By getting together and searching for popular local musicians, young people bonded and created a space of relaxation and wellbeing in the midst of a difficult migration process. Escaping from news became thus an informed decision:

> Interviewer: So you're not following any pages on Facebook coming from Afghanistan?
>
> Participant: Nope, not any kind of page from my country.
>
> Interviewer: Is that a conscious choice?
>
> Participant: That is a choice that I decided not thinking about there, probably sometimes when you go to work and you have hearing bad news what is happening there and you cannot concentrate on your job, the time and the place that I'm working I need to listen every second what they're gonna say, what they need and things like that. (m, 16, Afghanistan)

While complete disconnection from "real life" and political information is neither desirable nor feasible in the situation of war and conflict, it is essential to take breaks and recharge.

4.3. Listening

If exposure to mediated war and conflict is unavoidable, what then would be a "media literate" way to cope with it? Based on the literature about mediated trauma and post-traumatic anxiety and stress, we claim that listening to one's emotional and physical state while consuming media content is the first important step to reduce the harmful impact of such content.

Accumulated research warns that quantity (possibly also repetitiveness) and the graphic nature of mediated exposure to traumatic events are associated with physical and psychological effects akin to direct trauma exposure (Holman et al., 2019). These studies recommend limiting traumatic content exposure as a central coping strategy. When feeling overwhelmed or experiencing intense emotional reactions, media users can opt for critical ignoring (Kozyreva et al., 2023) instead of critical engagement. In practice, this means reducing the number of media sources and choosing professional over user-generated content. Chao et al. (2020) demonstrate that the use of new media, in contrast to traditional media during the Covid-19 pandemic, was significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. In parallel, the research in psychology claims that disengaging from one's own emotions can be harmful for mental health (Compas et al., 2017). Coping strategies such as emotional expression and seeking emotional social support, therefore, might be more beneficial (Eissenstat et al., 2024). In Study 2, one of the mentors of the refugee participants (themselves also a refugee) described how they watched together a music video dedicated to people who have lost their lives on the sea. This allowed them to have a deeper conversation about the refugees' experience and current psychological state. Here, again, we highlight listening to oneself and others during or after exposure to mediated traumatic content as an important component of media consumption.

In Study 1, we note a strategy of following one's bodily reactions and leaving room for "decompressing" from the heavy news load. In the words of a female respondent from the Kyiv region:

> During my lunch break, I try to switch off and just eat my food. Because it's quite hard on the mental state. It's the only time in a day, let's say, morning coffee, or lunch, when you can relax and disconnect a little from the outside world. And then you dive back into the news. (f, 60+, Kyiv)

For some participants, the disconnection also became routinized, adding to the habitual media use practices discussed above. For others, disconnection would only happen when they noticed having a "heavy head," or intense emotional reactions such as crying.

4.4. Participation

In a crisis, civic participation remains an important component of media literacy education; however, the feeling of powerlessness becomes harder to overcome as preventing tragedies is most often outside of one's control. We see two alternative routes for civic participation through media consumption and mediated political expression. During crises, citizens have social-integrative needs, such as the need to maintain high morale, trust the nation's leaders (Kozman & Melki, 2018), or feel a part of a national community. Even in tragedy, joining the process of collective witnessing creates a shared existential experience (Chouliaraki, 2010) that helps to endure the gruesome reality. The first route to civic participation is therefore through the consumption of media content that celebrates victories and heroic acts. However, this strategy might also backfire. Participants' mood and mental state often swung according to the events at the front, superseding any other everyday events:

> Well, how do I feel? Good news means good feelings. Bad news means bad feelings, that's all. What interests me is the liberation of my territory, the Zaporizhzhia region. We are watching every step our guys take. They took half the village, and we are happy. They took one street—we are also happy. And it is hard because we are waiting for something good to happen but often it turns out worse. (m, 60+, Cherkasy)

The second route to civic participation is via problem-focused stress coping that has proven to be one of the most effective coping strategies (Eissenstat et al., 2024). Taking action against the oppressive conditions can improve an individual's mental state and, more broadly, contribute to community resilience. Pervasive digitalization further enhances and expands citizens' possibilities to exert influence in crises. As Boichak (2022) puts it: "Blurring the boundaries between military and civilian actors, physical and virtual battlefronts, weapons and witnesses, digital media afford unprecedented opportunities for involvement and remote participation in wars" (p. 2). Crowdfunding and online activism are among the most powerful practices in the citizens' toolbox (Kasianenko & Boichak, 2024). Finally, there is a practice of embodied witnessing and sharing of one's experiences to shape collective memory in the digital environment, providing a public narrative about disruptive events. Observing the digital witnessing practices during the full-scale Russian invasion, Kot et al. (2024) claim that social networks can become a powerful mechanism of witnessing, narrating, co-constructing, and sharing the experience of living through the war.

In Study 1, we saw that online participation is among the weakest dimensions of Ukrainian older adults' media use. Despite growing digital proficiency, older adults remain mostly online content consumers, not producers (Serrat et al., 2020). Providing more possibilities for participation, including through improving media literacy skills, might help alleviate the feelings of helplessness articulated by multiple participants in Study 1.

In contrast, in Study 2, we saw countless examples where young refugees were using social media for civic engagement. Their participation ranged from choosing particular cover photos on Facebook showcasing solidarity with people in Kabul to uploading local music from Afghanistan to YouTube to illustrate the cultural richness of the country (for an in-depth discussion, see Neag & Sefton-Green, 2021).

5. Discussion

Joining the call to combat epistemic imperialism in English-language "mainstream" knowledge production (Hendl et al., 2024), in this article, we propose a theoretical framework of *media literacy as resilience*. As we firmly believe in the importance of transcending the confines of the academic "ivory tower" to foster meaningful impact in the real world, we want to combine the theoretical aspects with hands-on suggestions on how this framework might be applied in societies in crisis. We will do so by focusing on the four pillars of the framework and providing possible media literacy approaches.

5.1. Discussion on Implications for Media Literacy Research and Practice

5.1.1. Habit

When it comes to habits relating to media use, we argue that media literacy interventions must work with participants on developing practices that are adapted to the national, local, and personal contexts of the participants. At the same time, media literacy education should strive to alleviate long-standing inequalities along the lines of race, gender, age, abilities, and class (Lindell, 2017; Neag et al., 2022), which are usually exacerbated in times of crisis. Educators should tie the new habits to the existing routines based on thinking first about the external factors: What kind of media infrastructure exists in this location? Is there stable access to electricity? What are the cheapest media available? From there, educational programs should build on people's rituals (When do people have time to use media during the day? What activities do they find pleasurable? Do they use media individually or collectively?) and socializing patterns (What are the practices of news sharing? Whom do people trust to discuss media events?). While it is more difficult to influence external factors, media educators can (and should) provide support in co-creating healthier media environments, based on their expertise and the available infrastructures. Such support can be anything from providing a curated list of trusted media sources to newsletter subscriptions and setting up push notifications in news apps to remain updated but not overwhelmed (Groot Kormelink, 2022). A good example is "The list of transparent and responsible media" curated by the Institute of Mass Information (2024) in Ukraine.

Attention to existing habits and media environments is also essential when it comes to media literacy research that wants to go against epistemic imperialism. Researchers would need to place their projects within the cultural, historical, and social contexts of communities and begin from there an exploration of people's media use.

5.1.2. Escapism

Scholars have previously cautioned that media—and in particular, social media—is often used for entertainment, instead of educational or empowerment purposes (e.g., Smith et al., 2023). However, for

media educators working in war zones and during other societal crises, it is important not to take a paternalistic or judgmental approach towards people's media use. While we do not support a total alienation from civic issues through entertainment media, our examples above show that people living in precarious environments do have a dire need to unwind. Through our H.E.L.P. framework, we advise media literacy educators to first understand how their students/learners use entertainment media as a means of escaping difficult life situations and later explore these lived media experiences through critical questions: When and why is a certain type of media content used as a way of relaxing? To what extent can such media help? How might different types of media content influence the way people cope with everyday challenges or emotions? These questions can then lead to a broader discussion on media use and well-being. Furthermore, by critically reflecting on these experiences, groups of learners can collect and curate a list of media content to share with others and alleviate stress or cope with anxiety.

Media literacy has always been a field that builds on popular culture to start discussions, create debate, and build essential critical skills. Previous studies have shown that popular music can create "powerful opportunities for dialogically teachable moments and engagement in literacy learning" (Gainer, 2007, p. 106). Moreover, we also know that including pop culture into education can make formal educational initiatives and curricula more accessible (Hill, 2009). Popular culture can also be used within media literacy as a vehicle for social justice (Currie & Kelly, 2022).

In light of these observations, we deem it essential for media literacy researchers to build upon such literature and not dismiss or overlook these escapist practices, but instead promote an epistemological pluralism. By making a concerted effort to understand how pop culture content intertwines with coping mechanisms in precarious media environments, researchers will be able to present more valid and diverse knowledge.

5.1.3. Listening

In most instances, media education curricula focus on what one should learn or know, based on a set list of teaching outcomes. However, this can only be possible in rather homogeneous groups. Previous calls have highlighted the importance of starting any kind of media education from where learners are situated in terms of knowledge and (media) experience (Supa et al., 2022; Zezulkova & Neag, 2019). Building upon this, we go further and argue that beyond existing cognitive and educational skills, media literacy interventions should also take into account how learners *are feeling*: in other words, listening to their bodily and emotional reactions. As shown above, in times of war or prolonged crisis, media educators and researchers should ask relevant questions, such as: How does one feel when engaging with media, and otherwise? Does (specific) media use cause any kind of emotional and bodily reaction? In educational practice, in recent years, calls have been issued on enhancing emotional and social skills in schools to help the development of students (Banks et al., 2013). Hübner (2023) also highlights that the basis of media literacy—beyond intellectual abilities—should be the development of physical and emotional abilities. In the case of media education in times of crisis, this aspect is even more important. We recommend practitioners to make space (both figuratively and literally) for exploring learners' bodily reactions and feelings towards what they see, hear, or interact with on (social) media.

This is especially relevant for research as well, as such a focus would center on an emotional, spiritual, or intuitive way of knowing in academic perspectives. Participatory, art-based, or autoethnographic methods

would be most suitable then for an engaged and accountable form of knowledge production (Leurs et al., 2023).

5.1.4. Participation

In the framework, we discussed the importance of digital civic participation. As we noted, in the case of marginalised groups, this can be a hurdle difficult to overcome. The development of media literacy skills has long been seen as a way to nurture civic participation among youth (see, e.g., Frau-Meigs et al., 2017). However, there has been an active discussion within the academic community about the limits of media literacy education when it comes to civic skills. As Römer et al. (2023) highlight in their study on working with vulnerable groups, media literacy interventions seemed to have a positive educational effect, but the enhancement of their long-term civic participation remained questionable. The researchers recommend long-term interventions, collaborations with the broader community, and an adaptation of media literacy programmes to the specific needs of learners.

In the case of people living in difficult socio-political situations, we argue that being able to do even small civic acts for the community (online and offline) builds resilience to trauma, strengthens ties, and helps develop stronger coping mechanisms. To better understand the long-term effects of media literacy on such practices, future research could prioritize longitudinal projects that start from participants' own definition of digital civic participation. Furthermore, researchers should make an effort to evaluate the impact of media literacy education on the development of civic skills, with particular attention to intersectional differences, in precarious environments.

5.2. Limitations and Paths Forward

We recognise that this framework cannot be applied in the same way across regions torn by wars, unrest, and other societal crises. The aim of this framework is thus to become a starting point for educators and other stakeholders who are interested in providing media literacy interventions in societal situations "outside the usual". We also need to highlight here the role of policy-makers and national or local public institutions in fostering media literacy as resilience. While in the two studies we carried out, we noted that many of the media literacy skills have been self-learnt, in the long run, alongside self-learning, societal resilience can be strengthened if media literacy is integrated in public education or offered as part of other support schemes to (older) adults by their respective authorities. Educators have long called for a stronger emphasis on media literacy in mandatory school curricula; however, in times of war and other unrest, we argue that this type of education is nothing less than a crucial need for audiences of all ages.

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