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BUILDING A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND ACCIDENTAL NEWS CONSUMPTION ON INSTAGRAM



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ABSTRACT – This article proposes a theoretical and methodological framework to understand incidental news consumption on Instagram, based on a systematic review and a process of conceptual adaptation (Jaakkola, 2020). The results point to a triad that underpins incidental news consumption on Instagram: algorithm, human action, and platform structure, each of which plays a fundamental role in this context. It also identifies that each category of the app fosters news exposure differently, demonstrating that Explore is the space with the greatest potential for discovery.

Keywords: Digital Consumption. Digital Journalism. Instagram. Accidental News Consumption.

A CONSTRUÇÃO DE UM FRAMEWORK PARA COMPREENDER O CONSUMO ACIDENTAL DE NOTÍCIAS NO INSTAGRAM

RESUMO – Este artigo propõe um framework teórico-metodológico para compreender o consumo acidental de notícias no Instagram, a partir de uma revisão sistemática e de um processo de adaptação conceitual (Jaakkola, 2020). Os resultados apontam para uma tríade que sustenta o consumo acidental de notícias no Instagram: algoritmo, ação humana e estrutura da plataforma, sendo que cada uma delas desempenha um papel fundamental para esse contexto. Também identifica que cada categoria do aplicativo fomenta a exposição a notícias de forma diferente, mostrando que o Explorar é o espaço com mais potencial para a descoberta.

Palavras-chave: Consumo digital. Jornalismo digital. Instagram. Consumo acidental de notícias.

CONSTRUYENDO UN MARCO PARA COMPRENDER EL CONSUMO ACCIDENTAL DE NOTICIAS EN INSTAGRAM

RESUMEN – Este artículo propone un marco teórico y metodológico para comprender el consumo incidental de noticias en Instagram, basado en una revisión sistemática y un proceso de adaptación conceptual (Jaakkola, 2020). Los resultados apuntan a una tríada que sustenta el consumo incidental de noticias en Instagram: algoritmo, acción humana y estructura de la plataforma, cada una de las cuales desempeña un papel fundamental en este contexto. También identifica que cada categoría de la app fomenta la exposición a las noticias de forma diferente, lo que demuestra que Explorar es el espacio con mayor potencial para el descubrimiento.

Palabras clave: Consumo Digital. Periodismo Digital. Instagram. Consumo Accidental de Noticias.

1 Introduction

Smartphones connected to the internet accompany Brazilians from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to sleep. In 2023, the average daily use of online services reached 9 hours and 32 minutes, according to Data Reportal. In Brazil, 90% of households have internet access, expanding the possibilities for information consumption. Among the main reasons for internet use, the search for information stands out, especially on digital social media platforms.

In this context, Brazilians dedicate 3 hours and 46 minutes daily exclusively to social media, according to the same report. Instagram, for instance, totals 15 hours and 54 minutes of monthly browsing per user, being the only platform that registered an increase in screen time consumption over the last year.

This scenario impacts not only ordinary individuals but also journalism, which has had to adapt to the logic of digital social media. The 2023 Atlas da Notícia identified 2.791 digital outlets in Brazil, including blogs and social media profiles, representing 59% of the online journalistic market. This growth reflects the consolidation of platforms as one of the main means of news distribution, surpassing traditional media such as printed newspapers and television.

Within this movement, Instagram emerges as one of the most relevant platforms for news consumption. According to the Digital News Report 2023, produced by the Reuters Institute, the social network rose to the 3rd position in public preference ranking, cited by 39% of respondents – a four-percentage point increase compared to the previous year. In 2022, it occupied the 4th position, with 35%. These data reinforce the relevance of Instagram in the contemporary informational context.

Regarding consumption behavior, the phenomenon of incidental news consumption stands out, which occurs when users encounter journalistic content without the prior intention of seeking it out. A survey conducted by the author for her final course assignment (Ferreira, 2022) found that 63.3% of the participants, who comprised 102 individuals aged 18 to 24, reported consuming news incidentally on Instagram Stories. This behavior is characterized by the absence of initiative to seek out news, favoring the casual contact provided by the algorithm.

In the academic literature, the term “accidental news consumption” was found in a single article, authored by Gabriela Zago (2016). Zago utilizes the term as a translation of the idea presented by Mitchell and Page (2014), who describe how news appears mixed with other content on digital platforms, leading users to consume it unintentionally. However, there is no in-depth conceptual definition of the term.

Starting from a systematic review of the international literature and a process of theoretical adaptation (Jaakkola, 2020), this study proposes a conceptual framework to explain incidental news consumption on Instagram based on the interaction between human and technological constructs. This methodological choice

allows for the identification of new dimensions of the concept, thus introducing an innovative theoretical lens. As Jaakkola (2020) argues, theory adaptation is particularly useful for expanding concepts by connecting different constructs and testing them in new contexts. The article is structured to present, first, the context of the phenomenon and the research gaps; subsequently, the conceptual constructs that underpin the proposal; and finally, the developed framework.

Therefore, this study contributes to the elucidation of incidental news consumption on Instagram – a platform that, although widely used, still lacks in-depth studies exploring its relationship with contemporary information behaviors.

2 Mapping of related articles

Recognizing that studies on the condition of incidental news consumption are scarce, yet existing – and initially conducted abroad – this study draws upon the analysis of these works to develop the proposed concept. The systematic review utilized the Scopus and SAGE Journals databases, identifying four relevant studies between 2018 and 2021. In this sense, table 1, presented below, was elaborated to provide an overview of the located articles.

Table 1

Mapping of related articles “incidental news consumption”

TÍTULO	ANO	AUTORES
The Mechanisms of “Incidental News Consumption”: An Eye Tracking Study of News Interaction on Facebook	2021	Adrián Vergara; Ignacio Siles; Ana Claudia Castro; Alonso Chaves
Incidentality on a Continuum: A Comparative Conceptualization of Incidental News Consumption	2020	Eugenia Mitchelstein; Pablo J. Boczkowski; Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt; Kaori Hayashi; Mikko Villi e Neta Kligler-Vilenchik
Incidental News Consumption in a Context of Social Network and Multiple Screens	2018	Francisco J. Fernández Medina; Valentina Proust; Enrique Núñez-Mussa
“News Comes Across when I’m in a Moment of Leisure”: Understanding the Practices of Incidental News Consumption on Social Media	2018	Pablo J. Boczkowski; Eugênia Mitchelstein; Mora Matassi

At first glance, when comparing the results presented in table 1, three of the four studies analyze incidental consumption from the user's perspective, employing interviews as the main methodological instrument. Regarding the sample population, two studies exclusively utilized the opinions of Latin American participants, while a third combined Latin American opinions with populations from other parts of the world. Only the study by Medina, Proust, and Núñez-Mussa (2018) does not use interviews as a tool, as it conducts a literature review.

Conversely, another observed aspect is that the studies aim, at some level, to expand the existing literature, and, to this end, they utilize different theories, such as Structuration Theory (Mitchelstein et al., 2020) and Practice Theory (Boczkowski et al., 2018). It is also common for the studies to address "social media", but without focusing on any specific platform in terms of keywords. However, the study by Vergara et al. (2021) utilizes Facebook in its methodology.

To provide depth to the analysis of the four articles located, the materials were read in full, aiming to answer the aforementioned guiding questions in detail. The observed items are described in the texts that follow, which correspond to each studied research.

a) The Mechanisms of "Incidental News Consumption": An Eye Tracking Study of News Interaction on Facebook.

The study by Vergara et al. (2021) is the most recent and proposes a combination of data collection and analysis. Considering it an exploratory study, the authors make use of eye-tracking technology to measure interaction with news based on three dimensions: attention, reading, and involvement.

Across the study's 20 pages, in addition to a retrieval of related studies in the field, drawing from authors such as Ahmadi and Wohn (2018), Boczkowski et al., (2018), Fletcher and Nielsen (2018), Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2020), and Yadamsuren and Erdelez (2016), the researchers detail their findings. They list information such as the manner in which participants encountered news, the quantity of news, visual interaction, and the most relevant topics.

Vergara et al. (2021) understand that incidental news consumption is related to "finding news that was not purposefully sought out" (Vergara et al., 2021, p. 1) and that, despite not being a new habit, it is a defining characteristic of the digital era. However, they argue that "consumption" may not be the optimal term, due

to the vast quantity of existing forms of interaction, which do not denote a standard behavior often associated with the concept.

A relevant finding of the research lies in the analysis time for both news and non-news items, which was similar among participants. They also found that the decision time in the sample to read or not read a news item was six seconds, and that the forms of consumption are not linear, involving different ways of viewing the publication.

b) Incidental News Consumption on a Continuum: A Comparative Conceptualization of Incidental News Consumption.

In this study, Mitchelstein et al. (2020) seek to broaden the discussion of the concept, bringing an apparatus of similar quantitative studies as justification for their proposal. They resort to a qualitative approach by interviewing 200 people from five countries using the snowball technique, in order to develop research aimed at revealing the social dynamics of intentionality in news consumption. It also makes use of the Structuration Theory.

They define the concept as “the public’s encounters with news content that they did not purposefully seek out” (Mitchelstein et al., 2020, p. 2). They also bring older studies into the discussion, such as those by Downs (1957) and Blumler (1970), in addition to more recent bibliography, including Ahmadi and Wohn (2018), Mitchell et al. (2017), and Yadamsuren and Erdelez (2010, 2017).

Across the article’s 18 pages, the audience is the main focus, but there is no specific platform targeting – they combine “broadcast, digital, and social media platforms” (Mitchelstein et al., 2020, p. 14). The research found that intentional and incidental consumption is ambivalent. The authors discuss various rules and resources that enable users to engage in incidental news consumption and name three levels: micro, meso, and macro, which are related to the actual and perceived control over the conditioning factors for news access.

c) Incidental News Consumption in a Context of Social Network and Multiple Screens.

This research is a literature review concerning studies conducted on incidental news and consumption in the context of social networks. Medina et al. (2018) write 12 pages, briefly revisiting the context of the internet and presenting an overview of the concept. The authors utilize scholars such as Boczkowski et al. (2017), Erdelez (2004), Heinström (2006), Williamson (1998), and Yadamsuren and Erdelez (2010).

In the study, they observe four areas based on the existing literature: 1) origin of incidental news; 2) emergence of incidental news; 3) new dynamics of news consumption; and 4) impact on online journalism, changes in the agenda, and influences of content personalization.

Regarding the understanding of “incidental consumption”, the authors discuss the importance of considering the intensity, form, and time at which the news discovery occurs, as well as the method of news production and the platform for its distribution. They also highlight social networks as facilitators of a process that makes news access more incidental and less voluntary. Thus, algorithms favor less intentional actions.

“News comes across when I’m in a moment of leisure”: Understanding the practices of incidental news consumption on social media.

Boczkowski et al. (2018) exemplify incidental consumption for other scopes that existed before digital social networking platforms, such as reading a headline while waiting in a queue. However, for the article, they adopt the definition of “encountering news while on social media” (Boczkowski et al., 2018, p. 4) to limit and guide the study. In addition to interviewing 50 young people aged 18 to 29, they use Practice Theory to answer the two questions they proposed, which are related to the practices and consequences of incidental consumption. Thus, the study’s focus is on the user, and there is no specific targeting of a platform.

Across the 17 pages, authors such as Downs (1957), Gil de Zuñiga et al. (2017), Lee (2009), Tewksbury et al. (2001), and Yadamsuren and Erdelez (2017) are cited. It also presents some findings from the research, such as the intertwining of content and technological possibilities, the non-existence of space-time, the nature of routinization, and everyday sociability as practices of incidental consumption. Regarding consequences, they mention fragmented attention, the loss of hierarchy, and changes in news selection practices.

The issues presented so far highlight the importance of studies that shed light on the role of platforms and human-platform interaction in the accidental consumption of news. Furthermore, they demonstrate the fundamental nature of diverse methodology to broaden the discussion complementarily, given that the research conducted to date follows quite similar patterns.

2.1 Considerations on correlated works

The previous section evidences how the audience is at the core of the discussion regarding incidental news consumption. By observing the existing works cited in the previous sub-chapter, it is possible to perceive common traits among them. The set of bibliographic references is particularly noteworthy, as it is quite similar across the studies. Furthermore, the oldest article among the four is also cited in the other works. One of the authors also has other individual works cited. This aspect reinforces the view that few studies are being conducted in the area, even though it is not a subject exclusive to contemporary society.

Another common characteristic, except for the literature review, is the applied methodology. Despite different combinations, all studies start with interviews, emphasizing the participants' reports and not exploring other elements. Nevertheless, this did not impede ensuring relevant and complementary results. Even so, the necessity of applying other methods as a form of investigating the phenomenon remains evident.

The participation of Latin American audiences in the research also stands out. This may be a reflection of what Mitchelstein et al. (2020) state: research on incidental consumption is quite individualized, often using only one territory as the basis for discussion. This issue, when combined with the one pointed out in the previous paragraph, limits the study to a geographical reflection.

Furthermore, the similar structure of the articles is observable, as they provide a historical overview of the studies but fail to update them, followed by the methodological application, which is usually focused on during and post-incidental consumption. That is, focusing on the moment it occurs and the consequences it brings.

Given this panorama, the next sub-chapter presents the conceptual adaptation of accidental news consumption, focusing on how the phenomenon manifests itself in the context of Instagram, as a digital social networking platform.

3 Accidental news consumption on Instagram: conceptual adaptation

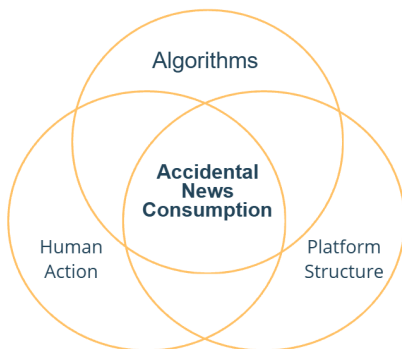
As noted by the authors (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Mitchelstein et al., 2020; Medina et al., 2018; Vergara et al., 2021), the subject is not recent and has been addressed through different nomenclatures.

Examples of this include the studies on “attracting the news” and “news find me”. From Thorson’s (2020) perspective, news attraction occurs based on user preferences, as some individuals are more prone to receiving news than others. This logic is fueled by individual actions, which are read by the algorithms of digital social media platforms to then recommend content to that profile.

Based on the previous readings, three main theories were selected to discuss the topic and perform the theory action, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1

Triad of accidental news consumption on Instagram



The diagram represents the integration between the platform structure, user behavior (or user action), and algorithms as the basis for accidental news consumption on Instagram. These three points are extremely integrated within the platform society. Therefore, they must also be discussed from the perspective of the concept to be adapted.

In previous years, other conceptual propositions were developed to address this non-active acquisition of news. Williamson (1998) discussed “incidental information acquisition”, which follows the line of unexpectedly encountering information, citing friends, family, and neighbors, for example, as sources of this encounter. Furthermore, they remind us that “some of the information acquired through all these sources was subsequently used” (Williamson, 1998, p. 24).

“Information encountering” was defined by Erdelez (2004) as “an unexpected discovery of useful or interesting information” (Erdelez, 2004, p. 364). The author (2004) also developed categories for information users based on the frequency with which they encountered information: super-encounterer, encounterer, occasional encounterer, or non-encounterer. In 2006, Heinström introduced psychological aspects to the subject, including issues such as cognition, motivation, and emotion. Her contribution states that “fortuitous information acquisition” demands less cognitive effort and more attention (Heinström, 2006). She further argues that recognizing relevant content depends on correspondence with the recipient’s interests, familiarity with the topic, motivation, and emotional response.

It is clarified that the term “accidental news consumption” was chosen for this study because it is understood that this concept more satisfactorily encompasses not only how news is read but also the consequences of this action. An accident is commonly related to something that generates a severe consequence. It is understood that news consumption, when unintentional, also generates something severe: it relies on third parties to actually reach an individual.

The term “accidental consumption” is considered to better reflect the involuntary nature of the reading, which is not merely casual but may also contribute to the decrease in the active search for news, a point previously discussed by Fernández-Medina et al. (2018). Furthermore, the term “accidental exposure” was rejected, as exposure does not necessarily imply the reading of the content, only that it was delivered to the user, who may have ignored it. “Accidental consumption” is related to the user’s choice to pay attention to the content, even if it did not reach them intentionally.

It is observed that contact with multiple screens, especially those connected to the internet, contributes to individuals being exposed to news even without a specific activity (Fernández-Medina et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Ligeiro (2021), smartphones are the main way young people access news. These devices provide different experiences while they browse platforms, and contact with news information is one of them. This browsing is directly related to accidental news consumption, given that it is passive and unintentional (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018).

During the course of this research, provocations concerning the term “accidental” arose, observing that what occurs on digital

social media platforms is not an accident but a sum of factors. This aspect is highly relevant and, therefore, deserves attention.

What is argued here is that the consumption is accidental, meaning the information is absorbed in a non-intentional manner while other social and entertainment activities are taking place. However, the exposure (which is not the focus of this study) is not viewed as an accident; it can be algorithmic and even capitalistic (see platform advertisements). We proceed from the idea that exposure can be influenced by algorithms, but it is the user's activity that frequently triggers this exposure; therefore, the responsibility cannot be attributed only to the platform, disregarding the role of the subject.

With this background, we move on to aspects of definition. The studies analyzed in the systematic review presented different syntheses for the concept of "incidental news consumption", yet they share the same essence: the casual encounter between news and audience in any type of space.

According to Ahmadi and Wohn (2018), accidental news consumption "occurs when individuals acquire news while not consciously seeking it" (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018, p. 2). In the studies by Canavilhas and Fidalgo (2009), this habit is explained from the perspective of passive consumption via external initiative (push). This means the subject is encouraged to read a piece of news through notifications, alerts, or, in the case of digital social media platforms, through algorithmic mediation.

Previous studies focused primarily on users, broadening the discussion regarding individual practices, the moment these news items reach them, and the decisions surrounding consumption. In this research, the audience is understood as a fundamental, but not the only, part of this process.

Therefore, this study aims to observe the cycle preceding this encounter: the proposal is to understand how news is delivered, thereby identifying the constructs behind accidental news consumption on Instagram. Therefore, it is essential to relate the human-technology interaction to obtain a more realistic portrait of the context.

Based on previous research, different examples of accidental consumption are observed. From these, levels of awareness about news exposure and consumption on platforms are proposed here, as shown in table 3.

Table 3

Levels of awareness in accidental news consumption

Level	Explanation	Example applied to Instagram
Low level of awareness	It occurs when news consumption is unexpected, given that the audience has no news affiliation in that medium.	A news item suggestion in the Instagram Explore page.
Medium level of awareness	It occurs when the user signals a predisposition to news exposure.	An Instagram Story from a followed profile.
High level of awareness	It occurs when the user is in a news-oriented medium but is searching for something specific.	Browsing a news outlet's feed to look for specific information.

These levels of awareness are directly related to the individual's predisposition to news consumption. The lower the level, the less likely the individual is to be impacted by news, given that the indication of interest is slight; the higher the level, the greater the possibility, as the demonstration of interest is significant.

The level of awareness is also related to the depth of the relationship with journalism. That is, according to what is proposed, the news consumer with a high level of awareness is in spaces that allow them to find diverse news, for example, within a news website, reading reports on one subject and being "hooked" by another that was not the focus. Conversely, the consumer with a low level of awareness is dependent on chance, as they do not relate (or relate little) to journalism: they will be impacted when they receive a news link from another person or when it appears as a search result, for example, because they do not usually engage with the media. The consumer with a medium level of awareness is the one who shows signs of wanting to be informed but does not exert great effort to achieve this. Thus, they end up being impacted in proportion to their effort.

A previous study, conducted by Fernández-Medina et al. (2018), corroborates this proposition of levels. Based on third-party readings, the trio states that the more an internet user engages with other

people (and why not other content), the more information they are exponentially exposed to. Following this logic, it can be said that the more news one reads, the more news one encounters. Furthermore, they state that the audience makes the selection of what they wish to consume based on their particular needs (Fernández-Medina et al., 2018). By observing the proposed levels of awareness through this lens, it is possible to perceive that they function as a marker (or beacon) for news.

This discussion shows that, within the scope of digital social media platforms, conditioning accidental news consumption solely on the inactivity of the human being is not efficient. One of the factors also linked to this habit is the platform itself and its structure. In their literature review, Fernández-Medina et al. (2018) cite language, interface, and participation between media outlets and the public as important issues in addressing accidental consumption.

In addition, the platform's affordances are fundamental, as interaction also emerges from the consolidation of users' practices with the interface. Based on the platform's perceived and actual properties, the audience can swipe up to continue viewing subsequent posts, double-tap the screen to like content, tap the speech-bubble icon to write a comment, or swipe a Reels post to the left to access the content creator's profile, for example. Each of these practices is detected and analyzed by algorithms, which in turn result in the (non-)recommendation of content.

This relationship is made explicit by Mosseri (2023), which states in its discourse: "How you use Instagram strongly influences the things you see and do not see" (Mosseri, 2023). Thus, it becomes evident that the platform's interface (and what it affords) and users' actions are key pillars in content distribution, directly impacting the incidental consumption of news on Instagram. In this regard, Fernández-Medina et al. (2018) argue that algorithms are shaped by users' interests, actions, and contacts, as well as by the design of the graphical interface used to position content on the screen, which ultimately leads certain news items to incidental encounters with potential users (Fernández-Medina et al., 2018, p. 317).

Based on levels of awareness, it becomes possible to understand different intensities of engagement in the incidental consumption of news. This conceptual structure serves as the foundation for the framework presented in the following section.

3.1 Framework for incidental news consumption on Instagram

Incidental news consumption on Instagram is a widely disseminated behavior and a contemporary mode of being in cyberspace: multiple platforms are used simultaneously, which fosters the involuntary condition of encountering diverse types of content, such as news (Ligieiro, 2021). As previously demonstrated, digital social media platforms play a fundamental role in this discussion. It is precisely with their popularization that research in this area has gained momentum, as evidenced by the periods of analysis and data collection in the aforementioned studies.

Bringing these aspects into the context of Instagram, it is understood that the modes of informing are adapted to this medium. Grohmann (2021) had already pointed to changes in language as one of the challenges facing journalism as a result of its platformization. Concerning the interface, an observation of Instagram reveals features that contribute to incidental exposure, such as the feed containing posts labeled “suggestions for you” or the Explore tab. The latter is closely linked to engagement and interaction, insofar as this exchange between the two ends (media outlet and audience) is enabled by the platform, whether through direct messages, comments, reactions, or other varied forms of interaction.

Furthermore, regarding Instagram’s operation, it partially allows users to select the sources of push content (as in Stories, which display posts only from followed profiles or from targeted advertisements). Content may also be recommended – such as in the Explore tab and Reels – based on algorithmic processes, due to the platform’s emphasis on personalization (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018).

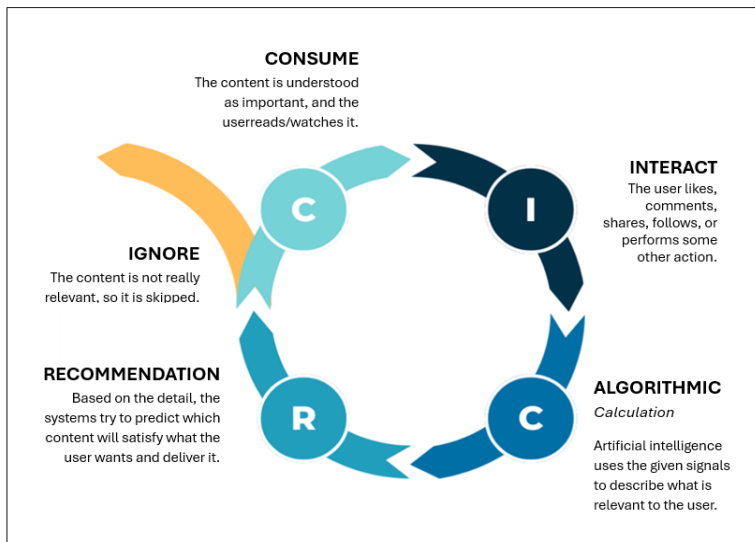
Therefore, it becomes clear that when an individual is on Instagram, they are in an environment that favors conditions of incidental exposure, as the platform also provides the convenience of accessing entertainment, information, and social connections consolidated in a single space (Ligieiro, 2021, p. 51).

On Instagram, the condition of accidentality is also shaped by the content produced, the algorithms, the user’s prior behavior, and their intentions. After all, it is no longer necessary to wait in order to read, watch, or listen to the news; one can actively search for a specific profile to obtain information. The actions performed by a user within this platform are therefore crucial to the functioning of

recommendation systems. In other words, although technology is an indispensable factor in determining whether content is distributed, it is human activity that ultimately sustains this chain. To illustrate this relationship, figure 2 was developed.

Figure 2

Content chain on Instagram



Observing the constructed chain, it is evident that 50% of this cycle is human (interacting with and consuming or ignoring content), while the other half is technological (algorithmic calculation and recommendation). This balance constitutes the main contribution of this research to theories related to incidental news consumption (and its related concepts). While Boczkowski et al. (2018), Mitchelstein et al. (2020), Fernández-Medina et al. (2018), and Vergara et al. (2021) have shed light on what occurs when audiences encounter such news, this study contributes by positioning the public as active agents in this process, in addition to focusing its efforts on understanding the stage before the encounter with news on the Instagram platform. Discussing this is essential, as some communication concepts are grounded in a “view of the audience as passive, credulous, and unreflective receivers of information” (Fletcher, 2023, n.p.).

This proposed chain (figure 2) is primarily driven by two

factors: attention to the attention economy when producing content, and the affordances that stimulate user actions upon it. If individuals absorb only a small volume of information compared to what they are exposed to and take only a few seconds to decide whether to consume content, it becomes essential for media outlets to be precise and strategic in developing Instagram posts so that they are read or watched. This, in fact, constitutes the first point of interaction: the amount of screen time spent.

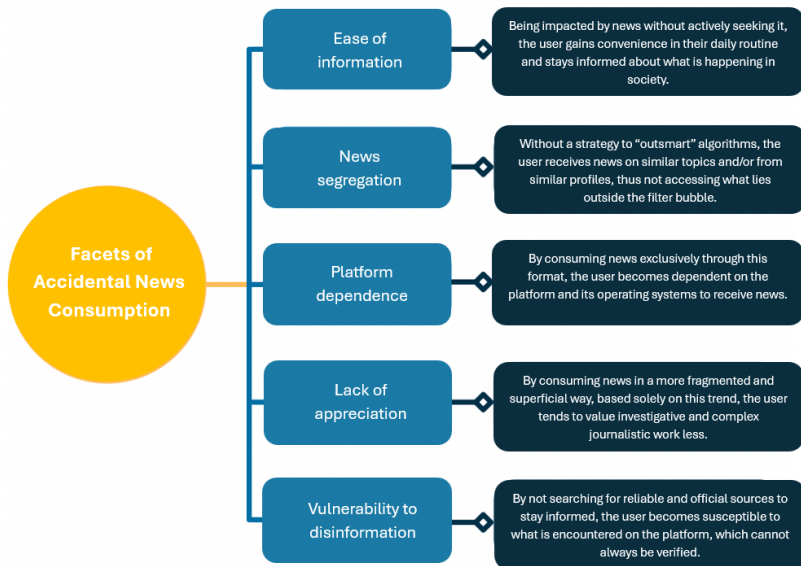
While platform personalization contributes to users consuming content aligned with their interests, it may also give rise to a problem: the avoidance of content perceived as irrelevant. In a study, Fletcher (2023) found that this is a concern among audiences. According to the author, there is a fear of “missing something due to excessive personalization” (Fletcher, 2023, n.p.), that is, the segregation of content that differs from what users signal a clear interest in consuming. As Kaiser et al. (2018) point out, content recommendation has significant implications for news organizations; however, it is the audience that may suffer the most from these effects, since users who do not actively seek out news on Instagram become susceptible to the platform’s intelligence.

In contrast, users can develop strategies to encourage the presence of diverse content and profiles, as well as make use of the personalization features offered by the platform. According to Mosseri (2023), there are “explicit” actions that influence what is displayed. Some of these include marking accounts as favorites, selecting close friends, pausing suggested posts for 30 days, muting accounts, and responding to Instagram polls (Mosseri, 2023, n.p.).

Even with the possibility of influencing algorithms in favor of broader personalization in terms of informational content, incidental news consumption does not bring only conveniences and benefits. This practice presents different perspectives and concerns. Figure 3 was developed to explain five facets considered important from a journalistic standpoint.

Figure 3

Perspectives on incidental news consumption on Instagram



This panorama highlights the complexity of incidental news consumption on Instagram and also calls for reflection on the importance of critical and conscious navigation on the platform. Although this mode of news acquisition is functional for staying informed, active information seeking – both on digital social media platforms and through other media channels – needs to be part of everyday routines.

After discussing the concept and adapting it through complementary constructs, it is necessary to deepen the understanding of the interactions among them that foster this form of news consumption. Accordingly, the framework below (table 4) aims to clarify the relationships between the human and technological factors that influence incidental news consumption on the platform.

Table 4

Framework for incidental news consumption on Instagram

DEFINITION	It occurs when an individual comes across a news item in one of Instagram's environments without having directly sought it, that is, when they are engaged in another activity and news consumption takes place as a consequence of that initial activity.	
HUMAN CONSTRUCTS	Attention	A human characteristic that is limited and can be both conscious and unconscious (Ramirez, 2021; Heinström, 2006).
	Consumption	A social process of use, enjoyment, or re-signification of a good, service, or knowledge that also contributes to the construction of individual identity (Barbosa & Campbell, 2012; Ramalho, 2020).
	Engagement	It is related to the amount of time users remain connected and, above all, actively interacting on the platform, whether in positive or negative ways (Santos, 2022).
TECHNOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS	Affordances	The perceived and actual properties of an object, especially those essential characteristics that define precisely how the object can be used (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).
	Algorithm	Computational and mathematical processes that can describe the steps involved in executing procedures and in predicting a trajectory (Tomaz & Silva, 2018; Goffey, 2008).
	Recommendation systems	It is an intelligent agent designed to anticipate consumers' interests in the digital environment and predict their preferences, to recommend new products (Sá, 2009).
LEVELS OF AWARENESS	Low	It occurs when news consumption is unexpected, as the audience has no prior news-related engagement in that environment.
	Medium	It occurs when the user signals a predisposition to exposure to news.
	High	It occurs when the user is in a news-oriented environment but is searching for something specific.
CATEGORIES OF ENCOUNTERERS	Super-encounterer	They encounter news incidentally with high frequency (Erdelez, 2004).
	Encounterer	They encounter news incidentally at a moderate frequency.
	Occasional encounterer	They encounter news incidentally on a few occasions.
	Non-encounterer	They never encounter news incidentally.

OUTCOME	Incidental news consumption on Instagram does not occur in a single way; rather, it is reconfigured according to users' experiences on the platform. Moreover, it is built upon six main pillars, which are divided into two categories: human and technological. As such, it is a concept that is interconnected with others and cannot be understood from a single perspective.	
IMPLICATIONS	Ease of access to information	Users receive news on similar topics and/or from similar profiles, without accessing content that lies outside their bubble.
	News segregation	Users are presented with news concerning similar topics and/or comparable profiles, thereby precluding access to information outside of their filter bubble.
	Platform dependency	The user becomes beholden to the platform and its operational systematics for news acquisition.
	Lack of valorization of journalism	Consuming news in a more fragmented and superficial manner or a trend towards more fragmented and superficial news consumption.
	Vulnerability to disinformation	The user remains susceptible to the content encountered on the platform, which may not always have been verified.

This representation makes it possible to consider different dynamics related to incidental news consumption on Instagram. From it, for example, different hypotheses can be formulated, such as a “super-encounterer” being a highly engaged user or a “non-encounterer” failing to take advantage of the ease of access to information. Thus, beyond providing a theoretical foundation, the framework also serves as a guide for future research and practical interventions concerning incidental news consumption.

Moreover, the proposed model offers a structured view of the adapted concept, focusing specifically on Instagram. Therefore, it should be emphasized that it is not intended to apply to other digital social media platforms.

4 Final considerations

Digital platforms such as Instagram play a central role in the dissemination of information in journalism. Although originally designed for photo sharing, Instagram has become a space conducive to news consumption, whether incidental or intentional. This study

identified that both users' actions and algorithms are decisive in this process, demonstrating that the content users are exposed to is related to their interactions, followed profiles, and recommendation systems. Thus, incidental news consumption on Instagram is shaped by both human and technological constructs.

The main contribution of this research lies in updating the concept of incidental news consumption for the Instagram context, highlighting the intersection between human and technological constructs as an integrated whole. These findings provide relevant insights for both the media industry and audiences, helping news organizations adjust their strategies and enabling users to refine their habits to access more diverse and relevant information. The adaptation undertaken combined prior literature with the identified constructs, generating contributions such as the triad of incidental news consumption, the content chain, and levels of awareness.

The study also highlights both the advantages and the challenges of this mode of consumption. On the one hand, it allows users to receive important information even without actively seeking it. On the other hand, fragmentation and lack of context may lead to superficial understanding. For future research, it is suggested to investigate whether different news sections affect incidental consumption in distinct ways and to adapt the proposed model to the specificities of other platforms, such as TikTok, thereby broadening the understanding of news consumption dynamics.

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