

Political information and incidental exposure in social media: the cases of Argentina, Chile, Spain and Mexico

Información política y exposición incidental en las redes sociales: un análisis de Argentina, Chile, España y México



Javier Serrano-Puche. Senior Assistant Professor at the School of Communication of the University of Navarra and a research fellow for the Center for Internet Studies and Digital Life at the same university. He is a collaborator on the 'Emotional Culture and Identity' project at the Institute for Culture and Society. He has been a visiting researcher at the London School of Economics (LSE). His lines of research are digital news consumption, emotions linked to the use of technology and media literacy. His publications on these topics have featured in publishers such as *Springer*, *IGI Global*, *McGraw Hill* as well as in journals like the *International Journal of Communication*, *Comunicar* or *Communication & Society*

Universidad de Navarra, España

jserrano@unav.es

ORCID: 0000-0001-6633-5303



Carmen Beatriz Fernández. Researcher and doctoral candidate at the Center for Internet Studies and Digital Life of the School of Communication at the University of Navarra (UNAV). She teaches Political Communication in the IESA (Venezuela and Panama), UNAV and UNIR. She has a Master in Business Administration (IESA, Venezuela) and Electoral Campaigns (University of Florida, USA). She is the president of DataStrategia and coordinator of the website of Iberoamerican Policy e-lecciones.net and the co-founder of the Organization of Latin American Political Consultants OCPLA. She was awarded the Aristotle Excellence Award 2010 for her work in cyberpolitics and is also part of the "Global Dream Team," which recognises the best political consultants in the world. She has also been awarded the Eikon Regional 2013 award for the best viral campaign, as well as several "Victory Awards" (2014-2017) for influential women, academic excellence and the best social network campaigns.

Universidad de Navarra, España

cbfer@datastrategia.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-0609-0695



Jordi Rodríguez-Virgili. Professor of Political Communication in the School of Communication, University of Navarra (UNAV) and the vice dean of Teaching Staff and Academic Organisation in its Faculty of Communication. He is a researcher at the Centre for Internet Studies and Digital Life at the UNAV. He has been a visiting professor at the Graduate School of Political Management at The George Washington University. In 2016 he was awarded the Victory Award for Merit for Excellence in Teaching in Political Communication. He has been the director of the Master's degree program in Political and Corporate Communication (MCPC) at UNAV.

Universidad de Navarra, España

jrvirgili@unav.es

ORCID:0000-0002-7952-5664

How to cite this article:

Serrano-Puche, J.; Fernández, C. B; Rodríguez-Virgili, J.(2018). Political information and incidental exposure in social media: the cases of Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico. *Doxa Comunicación*, 27, pp. 19-42.

<https://doi.org/10.31921/doxacom.n27a1>

Received: 31/08/2018 - Accepted: 02/11/2018

Abstract:

Information consumption is not an independent activity anymore. Instead, it forms part of a continuous connection to the digital space. Thus, users do not often deliberately search for news on social networks. Instead, it is found accidentally amongst other social or entertainment contents. The phenomenon of incidental exposure is an emerging trend in digital consumption, having ramifications for political participation and citizens' understanding of public affairs. This work provides a comparative analysis of digital users' incidental exposure to news in four Spanish-speaking countries, on three platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Samples from Argentina (n = 2,003), Chile (n = 2,005), Spain (n = 2,006) and Mexico (n = 2,003), have been used from those surveyed in the Digital News Report 2017. The results show that a) Spain is the country with the highest incidental exposure rate among users who use social networks to be informed; b) it is more frequent when using Facebook and YouTube than on Twitter; and c) age, ideological orientation and the degree of interest in news influence this phenomenon.

Keywords:

Political communication; News; Incidental exposure; Social media; Facebook.

1. Introduction

Post-truth, fake news, and disinformation have become the major global players in the latest political processes, due to a complex interaction between technological infrastructure, communicative practices, and social behaviour.

The process, quality, flow and consumption of available information is fundamental in any political process. Few citizens are directly involved in governments' and parliaments' decision-making or are in direct contact with political representatives as political experience is usually mediated. While direct communication between politicians and citizens has increased, as well as the possibilities of following it live and even participating in specific political processes thanks to technological development, for most citizens, the media represents the main (and sometimes the only) source of political information.

The higher relevance of the media in relation to other political actors is related to the phenomenon of mediatisation. In other words, the long-term structural changes involving the media, culture, and society, due to the media's growing presence and importance (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Harvard, 2017). According to authors like Krotz (2007), this dynamic occurs together with three other meta-processes that characterise contemporary societies: globalisation, individualisation, and industrialisation. Thus, the media contribute to dissociating social relationships from immediate contexts and relinking them in broader contexts. Other authors narrow the focus by understanding media as an independent social

Recibido: 31/08/2018 - Aceptado: 02/11/2018

Resumen:

Hoy en día el consumo informativo ha dejado de ser una actividad independiente para formar parte de la conexión continua al espacio digital. Así, en las redes sociales a menudo las noticias no son buscadas deliberadamente, sino que el usuario se encuentra con ellas de manera fortuita y entre otros contenidos sociales y de entretenimiento. El fenómeno de la exposición incidental es una tendencia emergente en el consumo digital, con implicaciones para la comprensión ciudadana de los asuntos públicos y la participación política. Este trabajo ofrece un análisis comparativo de la exposición incidental a noticias de los usuarios digitales de cuatro países de habla hispana, a lo largo de tres plataformas: Facebook, Youtube y Twitter. Se han empleado muestras de Argentina (n=2.003), Chile (n=2.005), España (n=2.006) y México (n=2.003), encuestados en el Digital News Report 2017. Los resultados muestran que a) España es el país con mayor índice de exposición incidental entre los usuarios que utilizan las redes sociales para informarse; b) es una tendencia más frecuente en Facebook y Youtube que en Twitter; y c) la edad, la orientación ideológica y el grado de interés en las noticias influyen en la incidencia de este fenómeno.

Palabras clave:

Comunicación política; Noticias; Exposición incidental; Redes sociales; Facebook.

institution with its own set of rules. From this perspective, mediatisation refers to the adaptation of different social fields or systems to these institutionalised rules, which are described as “media logic” (Altheide and Snow, 1979). Non-media actors must conform to this “media logic” if they want to be represented in the media or successfully participate in media culture and society. It is clear how “media logic” has imposed itself in the field of politics, making itself visible in the banalisation of politics, now marked by trends such as spectacularisation (in Mazzoleni’s and Sfondini’s (2009) words “pop politics”), which ultimately leads to a loss of authentic public space (Donsbach, 2011).

The proliferation of the media and its technological development does not necessarily imply an increase and improvement in political information. The use of political information does not only depend on its availability but also on factors such as consumer habits, interest, and competition, correlated with sociodemographic characteristics such as age, education, nationality or occupation (Meilán, 2010).

Traditionally, a direct relationship between the media and the functioning of democratic life has been established. Normative media theories, those that determine their nature and functions, are still in place even now that digitisation has led traditional media into a crisis of unforeseeable consequences. As Rodríguez Polo and Martín Algarra (2008) point out, this political function of the media is essential to any democracy. The relevance of this influence on politics depends on the quality of its contents. Research has pointed to the political nature of media content and the responsibility it has for the functioning of the democratic system (Martín Algarra, 2005).

1.1. Political Communication in the digital ecosystem

In the current media landscape, along with what has been indicated so far, there is a convergence between traditional media and online social media that affects the development of politics. New and old media intermingle and co-evolve, shaping a complex system based on adaptation, interdependence, and diffusion of power. Thus, what emerges is a hybridisation “between the older logic of transmission and reception, and the newer logic of circulation, recirculation, and negotiation” (Chadwick, 2013: 208). As Millaleo and Cárcamo have noted, this hybridisation reshapes all the social dimensions of the information process: “in the purely social dimension, it restructures the power relationships among the actors, in the temporal dimension, it affects the information flows, and in the object dimension, it modifies the meanings of the news” (2014: 14).

There has thus been a transition from the “news cycle” to the “political information cycle” (Chadwick, 2011). The former is typical of the traditional media’s logic, which bases professional routines on work guidelines for news writing and publication. These routines have been altered due to the rate of immediate publication that the Internet allows, which is already part of the users’ connective experience (Martín Algarra, Torregrosa and Serrano-Puche, 2013). In this way, the interconnection processes fostered by social networks have forced traditional media to adapt to the “political information cycle.” It is a complex assembling wherein the professional media intersect with the practices, genres, technologies and temporary nature of the new digital media, and where power relations between news actors are subject to continuous tensions and changes. In the life cycle of political information, the intervention of news professionals and other actors’ point of view (politicians, activists, citizens, etc.) are combined, contributing to the construction and response of the news in real time.

In this hybrid model characterised by Chadwick, the public may continue to learn about politics through television, but how they see it changes, that is, how they get to the contents and how they consume them. Watching the programming of a channel in front of the TV is not the same as arriving at a specific programme through the recommendation of a social network, where users are probably commenting on the content of that programme. Just as it is not the same to see only a fragment of a particular program or political debate days after the broadcast through a video platform such as Youtube than to follow the programme or entire debate live (López, Gamir and Valera, 2018: 71).

On the other hand, the configuration of the digital space through social networks has produced what some authors have called an echo chamber, a kind of information bubble in which users are exposed mainly to the news that reinforces their beliefs and political opinions (Sunstein, 2017). That is to say, the increase in offer and diversification increase the ideologisation of the contents and citizens' selective exposure. By following people on social networks who are generally like-minded, we create "a virtual space where the information that we receive is an echo of our prejudices and beliefs about how the world works" (Calvo, 2015: 15).

Also, the logic of algorithms and affinity criteria with which major browsers and social networks regulate access to information on the Internet through search history and browsing different contents would enhance this filter bubble (Pariser, 2011). However, it should be noted that recent empirical studies question this resonance chamber effect produced by search engines (Barberá et al., 2015; Nechushtai & Lewis, 2018). Nonetheless, these echo chambers could be one of the causes of the rise in political polarisation according to various authors (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2002, 2017). Consequently, the fragmentation of public space produced by the digital environment does not seem to favour greater pluralism but rather contributes to locating the public in smaller political spheres, where there is less exchange of arguments, ideas or opinions.

However, as we shall see in the next epigraph regarding accidental exposure, such bubbles can also "burst" because "in an increasingly fragmented media environment, in which growing segments of the audience are turning away from older channels of delivery, political information cycles increase the likelihood that multiple, fragmented audiences will be exposed to political content and they increase opportunities for intervention by citizen activists" (Chadwick, 2013: 102).

Or by knowing of the existence of these bubbles, organised communication strategies can also be deliberately reinforced and seek to approach certain political targets (Castells, 2009); although this reality has been studied little empirically until now (Baldwin-Philippi, 2017).

1.2. Media consumption and incidental exposure to news

As has already been noted, the multiplication of platforms and the abundance of information brought about by the digital environment are redefining the dynamics between the distribution and consumption of both political and other news. Therefore, more media and more content compete for users' attention. This alteration in the circulation process of content affects how individuals navigate and orient themselves through spaces and flows of representation and how their communicative practices intermingle with other activities in daily life (Jansson and Lindell, 2015: 79).

Nowadays, citizens' exposure patterns to news are conditioned by various factors. These aspects include the overabundance of information from multiple channels, constant connectivity, attention economy, screen multiplicity, and their simultaneous use, and the socialisation of information consumption (Serrano-Puche, 2017).

The sum of these factors results in a change in media exposure routines that needs to be studied as a dynamic phenomenon, which affects the very development of political communication. "Cross-media" is one of the keys to media consumption, which can be accessed through different itineraries in the media landscape. Together with "cross-media" user participation and mobility, which are also distinctive features of news consumption (Picone, Courtois and Paulussen, 2015; Salaverría, 2018). Citizens participate in the creation, distribution, and interpretation of news (through actions on social networks such as content sharing, retweeting, evaluating news, etc.). This does not necessarily occur in the domestic environment -where media consumption traditionally took place-, this is increasingly taking place from mobile devices and in movement, turning spatiality into a key contextual element in this consumption experience (Peters, 2015).

These days each user has a digital device. Therefore the access to news is eminently individual. However, at the same time news consumption has paradoxically become more socialised, given the pre-eminence of interconnecting through networks and interpersonal contacts acquired in the digital sphere. This prevalence of social interactions means that sometimes the person who accesses the Internet to be entertained or to socialise encounters the news without looking for it directly. This phenomenon is called accidental exposure to information. News consumption thus becomes a by-product of online activities. It is no longer an independent activity and forms part of the continuous connection to the online environment. Therefore, the news is not searched for in itself, but reaches the user mixed with other social and entertainment content and is often devoid of context or hierarchy. This is due to the growing perception among users that "information is out there" and if the news is important enough, it will find them, and they will not need to look for it (Toff and Nielsen, 2018; Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018). Incidental exposure to online news can be considered a type of informational serendipity or accidental information retrieval (Erdelez, 2005; Purcell et al., 2010).

From a historical perspective, the phenomenon of incidental exposure to online news is inherent in the digital medium. There has been relevant scientific evidence since the late 90s which supports this (Tewksbury, Weaver and Maddex, 2001). Nevertheless, the popularisation of social networks has made it an increasingly common phenomenon. In a survey of U.S users (n=2,259) in 2010, 80% of online news consumers said this happened several times a week, and 59% said they experienced incidental exposure every day or almost every day (Purcell et al. 2010).

Research on this phenomenon suggests that incidental exposure to news is influenced by both environmental factors in the media environment and individual differences and personal political predispositions (Lee, 2009). Thus, the heterogeneity in the structure of a user's network of contacts and the prevalence of weak links in that network correlates positively with incidental exposure (Lee and Kim, 2017). In research on users in Italy, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States, Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) concluded that incidentally exposed users utilise significantly more digital news sources than non-users. Accidental exposure has an important effect on younger people and those with little interest in the news, and that it is more significant for YouTube and Twitter users than for Facebook users.

Among the effects of this incidental consumption of online news, it might seem that it would boost echo chambers and, consequently, political polarisation. However, the literature review indicates that incidental consumption mitigates users' selective exposure (Masip, Suau-Martínez and Ruiz-Caballero; 2018), it is useful for promoting citizens' political commitment (Kim, Chen and Gil de Zúñiga, 2013), could produce an agenda-setting effect by increasing users' perceived importance of certain political problems (Feezel, 2017) and could perhaps serve as an equaliser in online political participation, given "that inadvertent encounters with political content on social media are likely to reduce the gap in online engagement between citizens with high and low interest in politics, potentially broadening the range of voices that make themselves heard" (Valeriani and Vaccari, 2016: 1857). On the other hand, unexpectedly finding informative content can increase the emotional reaction to a news item (Yadamsuren and Heinström, 2011).

Bearing all this in mind, this work provides a comparative analysis of digital users' incidental exposure to news in four Spanish speaking countries (Argentina, Chile, Spain and Mexico), to investigate a digital consumption trend so far barely studied in the Ibero-American region, except in the case of Argentina (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein and Matassi, 2018; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2018).

2. Methodology

Based on this theoretical framework, the objective of this paper is two-fold. On the one hand, and firstly, to provide a comparative study of digital users' interest and self-perception of their knowledge about political issues in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico. On the other hand, to analyse the phenomenon of incidental exposure to news among these users. This digital consumption trend can have implications for citizens' understanding of public affairs and political participation as indicated in the literature review.

The four analysed countries are among those that have higher Internet penetration in Spanish speaking countries, ranging from 65.3% of the population in Mexico to 92.6% and 93.1% in Argentina and Spain, according to data from World Internet Stats (Table 1).

Table 1. Penetration of the Internet in analysed countries

COUNTRY	POPULATION	INTERNET USERS	PENETRATION RATE	FACEBOOK USERS
Argentina	44,688,864	41,586,960	93.1 %	30,000,000
Chile	18,197,209	14,108,392	77.5 %	13,000,000
Spain	46,397,452	42,961,230	92.6 %	23,000,000
Mexico	130,222,815	85,000,000	65.3 %	85,000,000

Source: World Internet Stats, 2017

The following research questions (RQ) were initially formulated to guide the analysis:

- RQ1: What are digital users' self-perception about their knowledge of politics in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico, as well as their interest in news on this subject?
- RQ2: What impact does accidental exposure to the news have on digital users' information consumption in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico? Are there any differences between the countries analysed?
- RQ3: How do different digital platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) affect the phenomenon of incidental exposure?
- RQ4: What sociodemographic factors influence accidental exposure to the news?

This study is based on the survey carried out by *YouGov* for the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, an international study on the digital consumption of information promoted in 2012 by Oxford University. It has been published in Spain since 2014 by the University of Navarra and currently covers 36 countries in Europe, America, and Asia. The online questionnaire encompasses a wide range of questions on news consumption. The questions related to access to political information channels and incidental exposure have been used for this research. Specifically, as will be explained in the results section, the following questions from the questionnaire and their sociodemographic crosses have been analysed using descriptive statistics.

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:
 - I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country
 - I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.
- How interested are you in the following types of news? Political news:
- Thinking about when you have used social networks for news. Please indicate your level of agreement for the following statements:
 - I often see news from outlets that I would not normally use.
 - I often see news stories I am not interested in.
- You say you use Facebook/Twitter/Youtube for news. Which of the following statements applies best to you?
 - I think of Facebook/Twitter/Youtube as a useful way of getting news.
 - I mostly see news when I'm on Facebook/Twitter/Youtube for other reasons.
 - I don't know.

The fieldwork took place at the beginning of 2017. *YouGov* selected around 2000 users in each country to compose national panels for surveying the consumption of digital news. The participants in the *Digital News Report* are adult Internet users who have consumed news in the last month, representative of the connected population according to sociodemographic and geographical criteria. The data were weighted according to official censuses and data accepted mainly by industry according to age, sex, region, newspaper reading, and educational level, in order to reflect the population of the countries analysed.

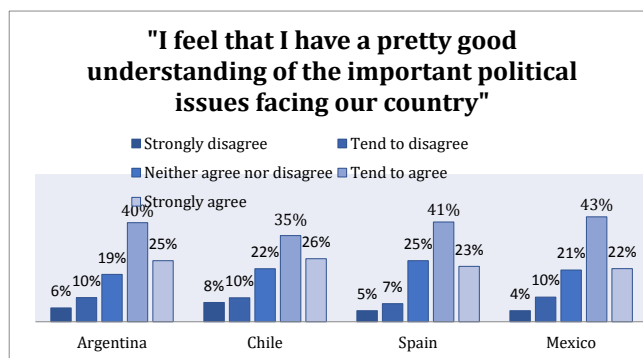
In this research, samples of Internet users from Argentina (n=2,003), Chile (n=2,005), Spain (n=2,006) and Mexico (n=2,003) have been used. In the case of Mexico, however, the sample is the only representative of urban populations. All participants are individuals over 18 who filled in the online survey between late January and early February 2017.

3. Results

3.1. Users' self-perception: knowledge, capacity, and interest in policy issues

As a general approach to the analysis of information consumption in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico, first of all, it is interesting to measure respondents' perception of their understanding of political issues in their respective countries. As Table 2 shows, most of the respondents fully or partially agree with the statement that they have "a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country." There are no significant differences between the countries, the sum of those who entirely or partially agree with the statement ranges from 65% in Argentina and Mexico to 61% in Chile, and 64% in Spain who totally or partially agree with this statement.

Table 2. Self-perception of knowledge of political matters

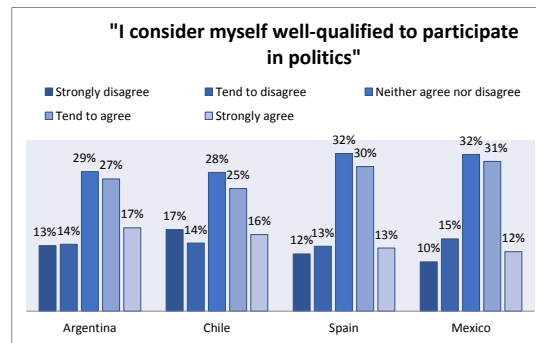


Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.

Sample base: Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

Respondents generally have a good image of themselves. However, this is not reflected in the same way in the statement "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics," where the results are moderate. Thus, 44% of the digital users surveyed in Argentina, 41% in Chile and 43% in both Spain and Mexico fully or partially agree with this statement. On a negative note, at least one in four respondents fully or partially disagree with the statement about their ability to participate in politics (between 25% and 31% of respondents in the four countries).

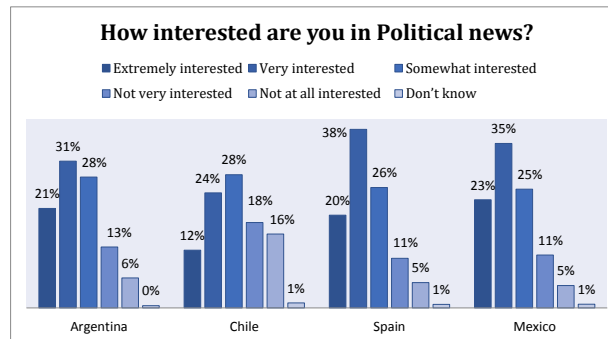
Table 3. Self-perception of qualification for political participation



Source Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.
 Sample base: Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

While users in the four countries self-analysed their competencies to understand and participate in political affairs similarly, there are relevant differences in citizens' relative interest in political news. From the 58% majority of interest expressed by Mexicans and Spaniards (adding "Extremely interested" and "Very interested"), to Chileans' relative disinterest in political affairs with a 35% minority expressing their interest in political information, to 52% of Argentinians showing an interest.

Table 4. Interest in political news.



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.
 Sample base: Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

3.2. News consumption on social networks

Focusing on information consumption, global data from *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* indicates that the proportion of users who think of social networks as a means of accessing news (both deliberately and incidentally) is high. From the 36 countries surveyed worldwide, it reaches 58% in the case of Facebook internet users, 30% on YouTube and 19% on Twitter.

Therefore, Facebook is the most relevant social network as a source of news information, but there are significant differences among the four countries analysed. The behaviour in Spain is below the global average, while in the three Latin American countries access to information via social networks exceeds the average of the 36 countries considered in the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. For the countries included in our work, information consumption through Facebook ranges from 45% for Spain and 66% for Chile. The importance of YouTube and Twitter is noticeably lower for all cases, with differences in the four countries analysed, as shown in the table below.

Table 5. News consumption on social networks (including deliberate and incidental consumption)

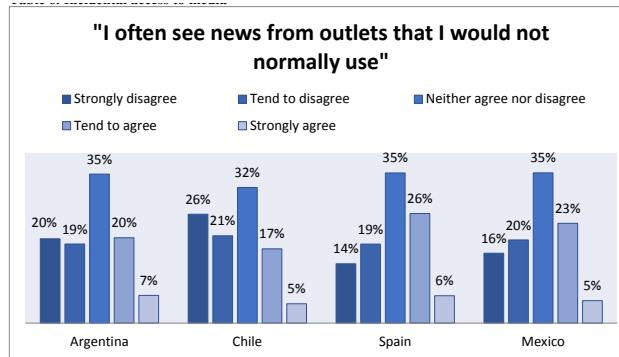
	Facebook use for news	Twitter use for news	YouTube use for news	Sample size
Argentina	63%	18%	27%	2001
Chile	66%	23%	24%	2005
Spain	45%	18%	23%	2006
Mexico	62%	23%	38%	2003
Global	58%	19%	30%	71.795

Source: *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017*.

Aggregation of the answers “*I consider Facebook/Twitter/Youtube as a useful way of getting news,*” plus “*I mostly see news when I’m on Facebook/Twitter/Youtube for other reasons*”.

Moving on to the distinction of incidental news consumption, we have found that around a quarter of those surveyed acknowledges that they “*often see news from outlets that they normally would not use*” (Table 6). Thus, between 22 and 32% of respondents- if we add those who wholly or partially agree with this statement- say they often do so, or at least acknowledge that they are aware of doing so.

Table 6. Incidental access to media

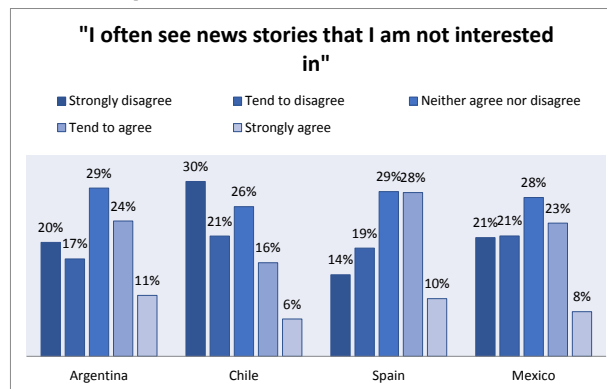


Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.

Sample base: Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

If we focus more specifically on the news and not on the media they come from (Table 7), the proportion of respondents who say they often see the news that they are not interested in is slightly higher, ranging from 22% in Chile to 38% in Spain. The questions refer to the media and news in general, without discriminating social networks or political news. However, the questions can act as a general indicator that is useful for comparative purposes. It also shows how interactions take place in the digital space, where a user's central activity is content sharing (Hermida, 2014; Kümpel, Karnowski and Keyling, 2015), thus distributing information and other messages among their networks of contacts and giving their online access a margin of unpredictability regarding what they may find.

Table 7. Incidental exposure to news.



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.

Sample base: Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

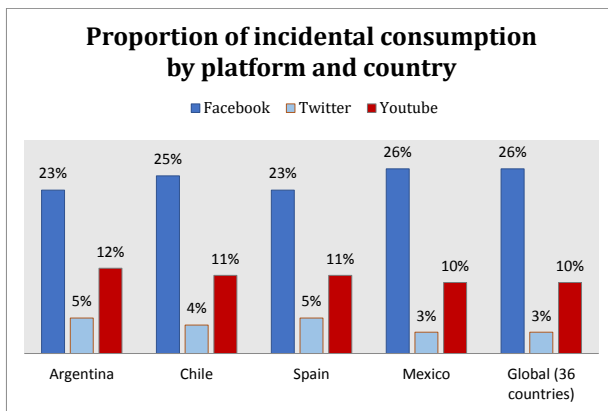
3.3. Deliberate and incidental news consumption on social networks

When analysing the characteristics of the use of social networks for information purposes, it is essential to distinguish between deliberate consumption (*I think of Facebook/Twitter/Youtube as a useful way of getting news*) and incidental consumption (*I mostly see news when I'm on Facebook/Twitter/Youtube for other reasons*). As aforementioned (Table 5), Facebook is the priority social network for information consumption, besides being the platform with the most users in each of the countries studied. In Table 8 we can see that it is also the main platform in terms of incidental exposure to news. The graph shows the proportion of users in Argentina, Chile, Spain and Mexico that have inadvertently encountered news on all three platforms in relation to the total samples for each country (including digital users who do not use social networks for information purposes, but other purposes).

As the graph indicates and as we will see in more detail in the following tables, there are relevant differences as to how users relate to information while using different platforms. Often, those who access Facebook and YouTube with motivations such as entertainment or sociability come across news without directly searching for it (between 18% and 26% in the case of Facebook and 10-13% on the video platform). News consumption becomes a by-product of the user's leisure or social activities on both platforms. On the other hand, the data suggests that users deliberately access Twitter for news. As a result, the proportion of incidental consumption is lower (between 4 and 5% of digital users in the four countries)

Since Facebook represents the platform most used as a news provider (doubling YouTube and tripling Twitter, see Table 5), its impact on incidental news consumption is substantially higher. It should be noted that on a global scale (taking into account the 36 countries surveyed in the *Digital News Report 2017*), a quarter of respondents would be exposed to incidental consumption of news on Facebook. In other words, one in four Internet users “come across” news.

Table 8. Incidental news consumption by platform and country

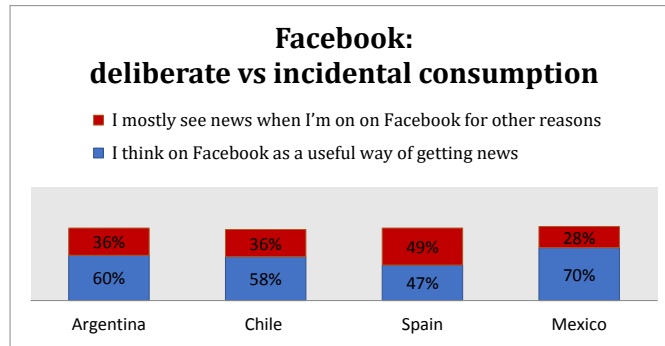


Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.

Sample base: Global (n=71.795), Argentina (n=2001), Chile (n=2005), Spain (n=2006) and Mexico (n=2003).

Platform disaggregated analysis provides interesting data on how both forms of news consumption (deliberate or incidental) occur in each national context among those users who use social networks to obtain news. Regarding Facebook, we found that the behaviour among the countries analysed varies significantly. For example, 70% of Mexican digital users consider Facebook a useful way of getting information, but only 47% of Spaniards feel the same. Between the two extremes are those surveyed in Chile (58%) and Argentina (60%).

Table 9. News consumption on Facebook

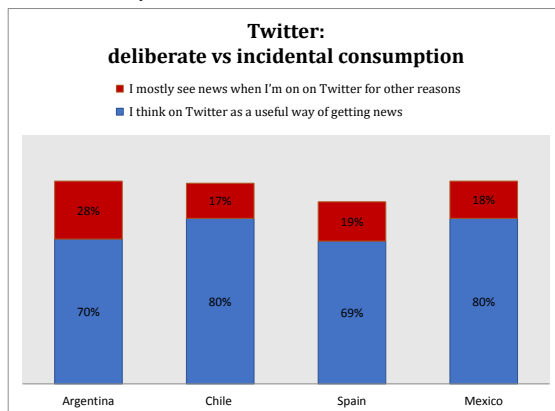


Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used Facebook to find news Argentina (n= 1302), Chile (n= 1403), Spain (n= 934) and Mexico (n= 1258). "I don't know" has been excluded from the table (4%/6%/4%/2%).

Concerning Twitter, the proportion of users that consider the platform a useful space for information purposes is higher [(between 69% (Spain) and 80% (Chile and Mexico)]. The very digital architecture (Bossetta, 2018) of the social network seems to favour the prevalence of a more specific type of digital user than on Facebook (Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz, 2017), leaving less room for accidental news discovery.

Table 10. News consumption on Twitter

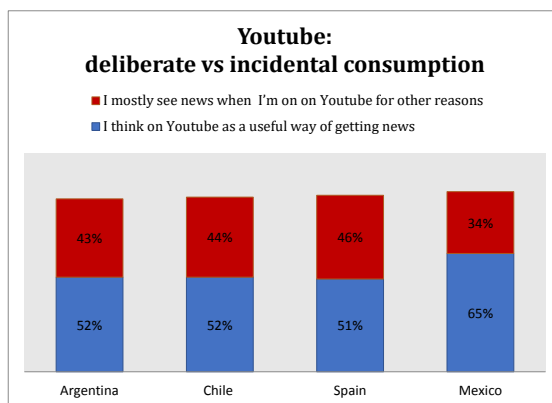


Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

Sample base only considering those who said they had used Twitter to find news [Argentina (n=379), Chile (n=465), Spain (n=367) and Mexico (n=463)]. "I don't know" has been excluded from the table (2%/3%/2%/2%).

Finally, Youtube- perhaps conditioned by the limitations of only hosting videos and not other formats- is the least attractive site for receiving news on the platforms among users (ranging from 51% in Spain to 65% in Mexico). This fact does not prevent between 34% and 46% of users from being exposed to them when they are using the platform for other purposes.

Table 11. News consumption on YouTube.



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

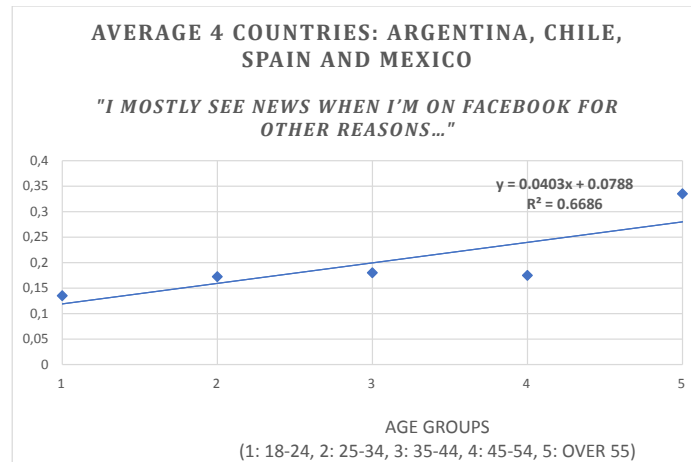
Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used YouTube to find news [Argentina (n=560), Chile (n=500), Spain (n=482) y Mexico (n=778)]. "I don't know" has been excluded from the table" (5%/4%/3%/1%).

3.4. Incidental consumption of news on Facebook: analysis of sociodemographic factors

The statistical cross-section of sociodemographic variables revealed that factors such as gender or income level do not show a clear correlation with incidental news consumption, so they have not been included in this work. However, two elements do merit further study, as they play a significant role in the phenomenon studied: users' age and ideological orientation. As seen in the previous section the analysis emphasises Facebook, given that this platform is the social network where this phenomenon has a higher incidence, even though regression analysis was also performed for the other two platforms. From a global perspective and taking into account the group of 36 countries surveyed in the *Digital News Report 2017* -, the data suggests that there is a strong correlation between incidental news consumption on Facebook and the user's age. The older the user, the more prone to accidental consumption he/she is, with $R^2 = 0.89864$. There is also a positive relationship between accidental consumption and age for YouTube, albeit less notable ($R^2 = 0.8195$). However, it is weak for Twitter ($R^2 = 0.3197$).

In the case of Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico, this behaviour is repeated when considering the average of all four countries (table 12), however the linear correlation is not so perfect, with $R^2 = 0.6686$.

Table 12. Linear relationship in incidental consumption on Facebook and the average age for Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico



Source: *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017*
 Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used Facebook for news [Argentina (n= 1302), Chile (n= 1403), España (n= 934) y Mexico (n= 1258)].

However, the average conceals critical national differences, as shown in Table 13. There is a greater positive correlation between incidental news consumption on Facebook and age in Spain, among the four countries analysed.

Table 13. Incidental news consumption on Facebook by age and country

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Argentina	14%	19%	17%	17%	32%
Chile	15%	18%	17%	19%	32%
Spain	6%	11%	20%	19%	43%
Mexico	19%	21%	18%	15%	27%
Average	14%	17%	18%	18%	34%

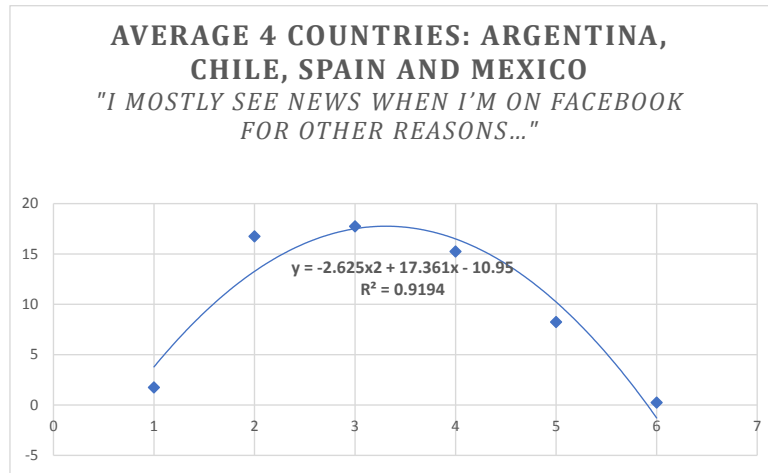
Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used Facebook for News [Argentina (n= 1302), Chile (n= 1403), Spain (n= 934) and Mexico (n= 1258)].

There also seems to be a relationship between ideologisation and incidental consumption; in which the most ideologised are less prone to this accidental consumption. This relationship is non-linear, polynomial type. Among respondents in the global survey of 36 countries, incidental consumption has less impact on those who situate themselves at the two extremes of the ideological spectrum (particularly those who define themselves as “left-wing”). By correlating both data, where the value 1 is associated with the category “very left-wing” and 6 with the category “very right-wing,” deliberate consumption increases in both ideological extremes, with a high coefficient of $R^2 = 0.8578$ (the greater the ideologisation, the higher the deliberate consumption). While the incidental consumption of news decreases in both extremes with $R^2 = 0.8409$, demonstrating that the greater the ideologisation, the lower the accidental consumption.

The phenomenon is also identifiable in the four countries covered by our study; it is even more pronounced with $R^2 = 0.9194$ (table 14). Behaviour takes the form of a normal curve, in which incidental consumption is much more pronounced among those who report an ideological orientation closer to the centre. Both extremes (1, “very left-wing and 6, “very right-wing”) are less prone to incidental consumption on Facebook.

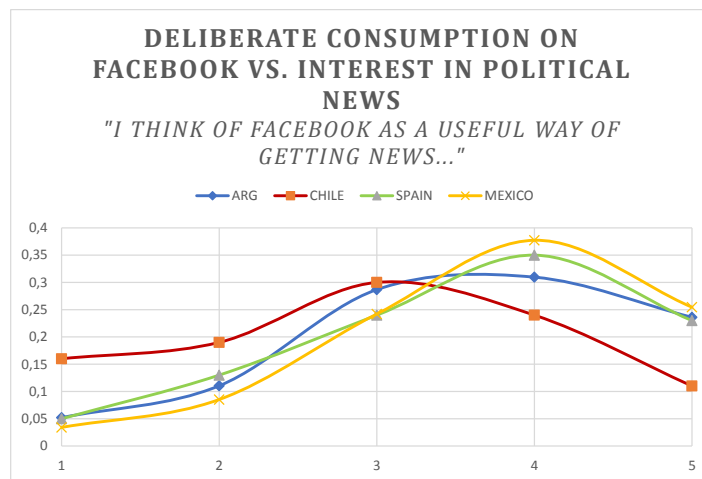
Table 14. The relationship between news consumption on Facebook and ideological orientation (average for Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico)



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.
The self-defined "centre" was excluded, which was an option in the original question
Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used Facebook for news Argentina (n= 1302), Chile (n= 1403), Spain (n= 934) and Mexico (n= 1258)].

Finally, the relationship between incidental consumption on Facebook and the degree of interest in political information has been explored. The questionnaire examines the level of interest in political news on a scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (extremely interested). It seems reasonable to think that the higher the level of interest in politics the lower the level of incidental consumption would be, given the users' control over sources, especially for a given topic. In other words, when investigating this variable a direct linear correlation between deliberate consumption and interest in politics was to be expected. There is although the linear relationship is weak, with an $R^2 = 0.5272$ in the average of the four countries. The behaviour between both variables resembles a graph of the law of diminishing returns, where a more significant interest in political information correlates with a greater degree of deliberate consumption, but only to a certain extent, after which the relationship changes and starts to become inverse. When a polynomial relationship is established between both variables, the correlation is almost perfect $R^2 = 0.9969$ for the average in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico. This dynamic between interest in political news and deliberate consumption is fulfilled for each of the four countries analysed, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15. The relationship between level of interest in political information (from 1 to 6 on the horizontal axis) and the deliberate consumption of news on Facebook (vertical axis) for Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico.



Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017.

Sample base considering only those that claimed to have used Facebook as a useful way of getting news. Argentina (n= 788), Chile (n= 818), Spain (n= 442) and Mexico (n= 880).

4. Discussion and conclusions

In the preceding pages we have performed a comparative analysis of both interest and self-perception of knowledge about political issues and digital users' incidental exposure to news in four Spanish-speaking countries on three social networks: Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter.

After analysing the data, it can be said that the respondents in Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Mexico perceive their understanding of political issues to be very high (RQ1). Two-thirds of digital users think they have a pretty good understanding of the main political issues in their respective countries. These figures are consistent with users' interest in political news, although there are some differences among the countries analysed. 58% of Mexicans and Spaniards expressed interest (adding "Extremely interested" and "Very interested") 52% of surveyed Argentinians expressed the same, in contrast this dropped to 35% for Chileans.

The interest or the disinterest in politics depends in part on voters' perception of their own political capacity. The concept of citizens' political effectiveness has two dimensions: internal effectiveness, which refers to the extent to which the person is considered competent in politics (Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz, 2017); and external effectiveness, i.e, the citizen's idea of leaders' and institutions capacity and willingness to respond to the demands of the population. From the perspec-

tive of internal effectiveness, between 25% and 31% of the respondents in the four countries wholly or partially disagree with the statement that they can participate in politics.

Regarding the consumption of information on social networks, as a news source Facebook appears as the most important platform, a result that coincides with previous research on the use of social networks for political information (Fernández and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2017). The use of platforms such as YouTube and Twitter is notably lower in the four countries analysed.

Regarding the importance of incidental exposure to news in relation to information consumption (RQ2), around a quarter of the respondents in the four countries acknowledge that they often consult media they would not usually use or that they access news that does not interest them. From a comparative viewpoint, users in Argentina and Chile behave similarly regarding most indicators. Spain is the country with the highest rate of incidental exposure among users who use social networks for information, whether it be Facebook, Youtube or Twitter. Facebook is a case of particular interest, as incidental consumption on this social network in Spain is as important as the deliberate consumption of news, while in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico there is a more intentional search for news.

Incidental exposure to news does not occur homogeneously on the three platforms studied (RQ3), it is much higher on Facebook, followed by Youtube and is much lower on Twitter. This finding refers both to the digital architecture and affordances of each social network (Bossetta, 2018; Bucher and Helmond, 2018) and to the users' expectations and preferences. Thus, on Facebook and Youtube- where different contents are mixed, and motivations such as entertainment or sociability co-exist- it is more likely to find news without having looked for it intentionally. News consumption is often an unplanned derivation of the social or free time interactions that had led the user to these platforms in the first place. On the other hand, on Twitter, the results suggest that users intentionally seek information and therefore, the proportion of incidental exposure is significantly reduced.

In response to the fourth research question (RQ4), two sociodemographic factors that influence accidental exposure to news, are the users' age, and ideological orientation. Age positively correlates with the phenomenon of information consumption, the older the user is, the greater their incidental exposure to news. It is a somewhat unexpected discovery as one might think that young peoples' continuous connectivity and the changeability of their digital interactions are the enabling environments for inadvertently discovering news, while older users would seem more prone to a more controlled, targeted use of the Web. Even this result is contrary to previous research (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2017). Therefore, this relationship between age and incidental consumption needs further study.

Regarding the link between incidental consumption and users' ideological self-positioning, the fact that the most ideologised Internet users have less involuntary exposure to news is consistent with the hypothesis that they have greater control over their information sources (probably those with similar ideas). This could lead to an echo chamber effect or not (Colleoni, Rozza, and Arvidsson, 2014; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2016; Dubois & Blank, 2018). In any case, the reasonable assumption that reinforces this study- the greater the ideologisation, the lower the incidental consumption- must be confirmed in future works. The finding of the inverse relationship between interest in political affairs and accidental consumption, also merits further study.

To conclude, it is worth noting some limitations of the research and possible developments for future works. Concerning the samples used by *YouGov* for the *Reuters Insititute Digital News Report*, the survey was filled out online and is focused on understanding digital news consumption, so it is not representative of the populations' total media exposure as a whole. In the case of Mexico, as aforementioned, it is not representative in a geographical sense either, but only of urban populations. Also, like any media use survey, the respondents' recall or perception does not always coincide with actual media use. At the same time, what has been presented here is a secondary analysis of data from a very broad survey covering various aspects, so that questions on the phenomenon of incidental exposure are limited and susceptible to an improved formulation. Specifically, the questionnaire presents dichotomous options which in a digital user's habitual activity may often occur alternately, depending on specific circumstances in which the questionnaire itself does not allow in-depth analysis. Another limitation of this work is that when referring to incidental exposure, the survey does not discriminate the subject matter of the news found involuntarily by citizens. Hence, incidental consumption described here includes not only political news (whether at a regional, national or international level), but also other types of information both "hard" (science, health, technology, etc.) and "soft" (lifestyle, entertainment, culture, sports, etc.)

Likewise, a variable that we consider key to understanding the extent of incidental consumption, particularly regarding its propensity on Facebook, would be to understand the impact of cyber advertising, or the advertising guidelines on this platform, as an element that affects unintended news consumption. In other words, the fact that the news consumer has been incidentally exposed to news does not necessarily mean that it is entirely accidental. Although it is an issue that requires further analysis (it is not always easy given the lack of transparency on digital platforms), what seems to be incidental to the user may be an intended consequence of the algorithms that operate on social networks (especially on Facebook).

Therefore, it will be interesting to enrich and compare data in the *Digital News Report* in future research with more specific questionnaires and qualitative and/or experimental research, such as discussion groups with users to learn their motivations regarding the consumption of political information and the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of incidental exposure. Moreover, it would be of great interest to use techniques that allow users' activity to be traced (such as tracking or observational data), in order to contrast individuals' discourse with their actual activity on the Internet (Hindman, 2008). At the same time, and given the multinational nature of the survey, the comparative analysis could be extended to other countries. For that purpose, it might be relevant to choose samples from different media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), to explore the influence that these political-media contexts have on the phenomenon analysed here.

5. Bibliographic references

Altheide, D. L. & Snow, R. P. (1979): *Media Logic*. Beverly Hills: SAGE.

Baldwin-Philippi, J. (2017): "The Myths of Data-Driven Campaigning," *Political Communication*, 34 (4), 627-633. Doi: 10.1080/10584609.2017.1372999.

- Barberá P, Jost JT, Nagler J, et al. (2015): "Tweeting from left to right: is online political communication more than an echo chamber," *Psychological Science* 26, pp. 1531–1542. Doi: 10.1177/0956797615594620.
- Bergström, A. & Jervelycke Belfrage, M. (2018): "News in Social Media. Incidental consumption and the role of opinion leaders", *Digital Journalism*, 6:5, pp. 583-598. Doi: 10.1080/21670811.2018.1423625.
- Boczkowski, P., Mitchelstein, E. & Matassi, M. (2018): "'News comes across when I'm in a moment of leisure': Understanding the practices of incidental news consumption on social media," *New Media & Society*. Article first published online: January 2. Doi: 10.1177/1461444817750396.
- Bossetta, M. (2018): "The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95 (2), pp. 471-496. Doi: 10.1177/1077699018763307.
- Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2018): "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms." In J. Burgess, A. Marwick, & T. Poell (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media* (pp. 233–253). Sage Publications.
- Calvo, E. (2015): *Anatomía política del twitter en Argentina. Tuiteando #Nisman*. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual.
- Castells, M. (2009): *Comunicación y poder*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Chadwick, A. (2013): *The Hybrid Media System. Politics and Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colleoni, E.; Rozza, A. & Arvidsson, A. (2014): "Echo Chamber or Public Sphere? Predicting Political Orientation and Measuring Political Homophily in Twitter Using Big Data", *Journal of Communication*, 64 (2), pp. 317–332. Doi: 10.1111/jcom.12084.
- Couldry, N. & Hepp, A. (2017): *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Donsbach, W. (2011): "Weimar 2.0. Acerca de la pérdida del espacio público". *Diálogo político*, 28 (2), pp. 123-135.
- Dubois, E. & Blank, G. (2018): "The echo chamber is overstated: the moderating effect of political interest and diverse media," *Information, Communication & Society*, 21 (5), pp. 729-745. Doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656.
- Erdelez, S. (2005): "Information Encountering." In Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez & Lynne E.F. McKechnie (Eds.), *Theories of information behavior* (pp. 179-185), Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.
- Feezell, J. T. (2017): "Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era," *Political Research Quarterly*. 71 (2), pp. 482-494. Doi: 10.1177/1065912917744895.
- Fernández, C. B. & Rodríguez-Virgili, J. (2017): "El consumo de información política de los públicos interesados comparado con el del electorado general. Los casos de las elecciones de Argentina, España y Venezuela de 2015", *Revista de Comunicación*, 16 (2), pp. 60-87. Doi:10.26441/RC16.2-2017-A3.

- Fletcher, R. & Nielsen, R.K. (2017): "Are People Incidentally Exposed to News on Social Media? A Comparative Analysis". *New Media and Society* 20 (7), pp. 2450-2468. Doi: 10.1177/1461444817724170.
- Halpern, D., Valenzuela, S., Katz, J. (2017): "We face, I tweet: How different social media influence political participation through collective and internal efficacy," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22, pp. 320-336. Doi:10.1111/jcc4.12198.
- Hjarvard, S. (2017): "Mediatization." In Rössler, P; Hoffner, C.A. & van Zoonen, L. (eds.) *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, vol. III. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1221-124.
- Hallin, D. & Mancini, P. (2004): *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Nueva York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hermida, A. (2014): *Tell everyone: Why we share and why it matters*. Toronto, Canada: Anchor Canada.
- Hindman, M. (2008): *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jansson, A.; Lindell, J. (2015): "News Media Consumption in the Transmedia Age," *Journalism Studies* 16 (1), pp. 79-96. Doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2014.890337.
- Kim, Y., Chen. H.-T., Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2013): "Stumbling upon news on the Internet: Effects of incidental news exposure and relative entertainment use on political engagement," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, pp. 2607-2614. Doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2013.06.005.
- Krotz, F. (2007): "The Meta-Process of 'Mediatization' as a Conceptual Frame," *Global Media and Communication*, 3(3), pp. 256-260. Doi: 10.1177/17427665070030030103.
- Kümpel AS, Karnowski V, Keyling T (2015): "News sharing in social media: A review of current research on news sharing users, content, and networks," *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), pp. 1-14. Doi:10.1177/2056305115610141.
- Lee, J. K. (2009): *Incidental Exposure to News: Limiting Fragmentation in the New Media Environment*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Texas at Austin.
- Lee, J. K. & Kim, Y. (2017): "Incidental exposure to news: Predictors in the social media setting and effects on information gain online," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, pp. 1008-1015. Doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2017.02.018.
- López, G.; Gamir, J. & Valera, L. (2018). *Comunicación política*. Madrid: Síntesis.
- Martín Algarra, M. (2005): "Medios de comunicación de calidad son medios de comunicación con responsabilidad", *Comunica*, 3, pp. 21-30.
- Martín Algarra, M; Torregrosa, M. y Serrano-Puche, J. (2013): "Un periodismo sin períodos: actualidad y tiempo en la era digital". En García, A. (coord): *Periodística y web 2.0: hacia la construcción de un nuevo modelo*. Estudios de Periodística XVII. Madrid: CEU Ediciones, pp. 73-83.

- Masip, P.; Suau-Martínez, J.; Ruiz-Caballero, C. (2018): *Questioning the Selective Exposure to News: Understanding the Impact of Social Networks on Political News Consumption*. *American Behavioral Scientist* 2018, Vol. 62(3), pp. 300–319. Doi: 10.1177/0002764217708586.
- Mazzoleni, G. & Sfardini, A. (2009): *Politica pop. Da “Porta a porta” a “L’isola dei famosi”*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Meilán, X. (2010): *Causas y consecuencias del consumo de información política en España (2000-2009)*. Madrid: CIS.
- Mitchelstein, E. & Boczkowski, P. (2018): “Juventud, estatus y conexiones. Explicación del consumo incidental de noticias en redes sociales”, *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública*, 13 (24), pp. 131-145. Doi: 10.22201/fcpys.24484911e.2018.24.61647
- Millaleo, S. & Cárcamo, P. (2014): *Mediaciones del sistema político frente al activismo digital*. Santiago de Chile: Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo.
- Nechushtai E. & Lewis S.C. (2018): “What kind of news gatekeepers do we want machines to be? Filter bubbles, fragmentation, and the normative dimensions of algorithmic recommendations”, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2018). Doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2018.07.043
- Pariser, E. (2011): *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*. Penguin.
- Peters, C. (2015): “Introduction. The places and spaces of news audiences”, *Journalism Studies*, 16(1), pp. 1-11. Doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2014.889944.
- Picone, I., Courtois, C. & Paulussen, S. (2015): “When News is Everywhere. Understanding Participation, Cross-Mediality and Mobility in Journalism for a Radical User Perspective”, *Journalism Practice*, 9(1), pp. 35-49. Doi: 10.1080/17512786.2014.928464.
- Purcell, K., Raine, L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T., & Olmstead, K. (2010): “Understanding the participatory news consumer”, *Pew Research Center*. Recuperado de: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx>
- Rodríguez Polo, X. R. & Martín Algarra, M.I (2008): “Medios y democracia: la Teoría de la Responsabilidad Social”, *Revista de Comunicación*, 7, pp. 154-166.
- Salaverría, R. (2018): “Allá donde estés, habrá noticias”, *Cuadernos de Periodistas*, 35, pp. 15-22.
- Serrano-Puche, J. (2017): “Metaanálisis del consumo digital en el ecosistema mediático contemporáneo: factores distintivos e implicaciones emocionales”. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, 8(1), pp. 75-85. Doi: 10.14198/MEDCOM2017.8.1.6.
- Sunstein, C.R. (2002): *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sunstein, C. R. (2017): *#Republic. Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.
- Tewksbury, D., Weaver, A. J., & Maddex, B. D. (2001): “Accidentally Informed: Incidental News Exposure on the World Wide Web,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78 (3), pp. 533-554.

Toff, B. & Nielsen, R. K. (2018): “‘I Just Google It’: Folk Theories of Distributed Discovery,” *Journal of Communication*, 68 (3), pp. 636–657. Doi: 10.1093/joc/jqy009.

Valeriani, A. & Vaccari C. (2016): “Accidental exposure to politics on social media as online participation equalizer in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom,” *New Media & Society* 18, pp. 1857–1874. Doi: 10.1177/1461444815616223.

Yadamsuren, B. & Heinström, J. (2011): “Emotional reactions to incidental exposure to online news.” *Information Research*, 16(3) paper 486. Recuperado de: <http://www.informationr.net/ir/16-3/paper486.html>

Zuiderveen Borgesius, F.; Trilling, D.; Möller, J.; Bodó, B.; de Vreese, C. & Helberger, N. (2016): “Should we worry about filter bubbles?,” *Internet Policy Review*, 5(1). Doi: 10.14763/2016.1.401.