INCIDENTAL EXPOSURE TO ONLINE NEWS IN EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING CONTEXT:
MIXED METHOD STUDY
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ABSTRACT

The Internet and new technologies are changing the information behavior of news readers. News readership is shifting to the Internet because of accessibility, inexpensive technology, and free content. The prevalence of news on the Web provides opportunities for people to come across news in an incidental way as a byproduct of their online activities.

The present study explored the nature of incidental exposure to online news by applying Savolainen’s Everyday Life Information Seeking model, Erdelez’s Information Encountering model, and Uses and Gratifications theory. Online news readers participated in two phases of mixed method study. The first phase involved the analysis of a web survey with 148 participants recruited through the website of a local newspaper. Respondents who demonstrated an awareness of their incidental exposure to online news were selected for the second phase. In the second phase, the researcher interviewed 20 respondents using critical incident, explication interview, and think-aloud techniques.

The findings highlighted social, behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of online news reading behavior and incidental exposure to online news. The study indicates that online news reading happens in a habitual way. Incidental exposure to online news is becoming a major way for some respondents to get informed about news events. The study presents a model of online news reading behavior and four different types of online news readers: avid news readers, news avoiders, news encounterers, and crowd surfers. Respondents’ perceptions of incidental exposure to online news are grouped into three contexts: news reading, non-news reading, and
Internet in general. The majority of respondents stated that they have positive feelings about incidental exposure to online news.