YOUTH AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN THE COVID-19 ERA IN MAURITIUS

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ABSTRACT

News diffused across media platforms increasingly form part of youth media consumption. The attention of the youth is continually solicited online and incidental news is constitutive of their everyday practice. In a notable way, Covid-19 and its restrictions have induced the youth to organize their lives digitally in an environment of news abundance. Beyond rational usage which often molds understanding of news and media consumption, this paper asks 'can an 'affective turn' provide insight into youth incidental news media consumption during the Covid-19 pandemic?' Through the notion of liminality, the paper questions incidental news and media consumption by the youth and the extent to which these are tied to their lived experiences. It delves into the habits of media consumption generally, with a focus on incidental news consumption in the participatory cultures of social media and considers the need to grasp youth media use and consumption as a social experience that is liminal. Through interviews with final year Mauritian secondary school students, this paper argues that the experiences of incidental news and media consumption encompass experiences which are affectively loaded and which evolve around passive and active engagements. It emphasizes the role of the platforms as gateways and gatekeepers. Through a decolonial lens, it makes the case for dialogic perspectives to offset the challenges posed by the platforms.

Keywords: Incidental News Consumption, Liminality, Engagement, Dialogue

INTRODUCTION

There are rare and tepid breakoffs from social media. Except for bedtime, avowedly most of the time youngsters are connected online. This may appear

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to be a truism as the youths increasingly live their lives digitally and Covid-19 has hustled this transition to online media environments. Akin to countries across the world, in Mauritius, the lives of people, especially of youngsters, have been disrupted in unprecedented ways with the Covid-19 crisis, its interregnum and restrictions. With the stay-at-home orders that Mauritian authorities enforced to prevent Covid-19 contaminations, the affordances of technological platforms have arguably allowed youngsters, to re-organize their lives digitally and to develop new socialities through online interactions. Users are being increasingly confronted to streams of information which include incidental news and contents. Defined as the "probability that a user will encounter news on the Internet or in social media with no intention of doing so" (Goyanes & Demeter, 2020:3), incidental news consumption is a rising trend.

Traditionally, media consumption is tied to practices that are rational but with little consideration to the affective and moral implications thereof. With the inordinate amount of information available on digital platforms, this paper explores the extent to which incidental news consumption forms part of the lived experiences of the youths. More broadly, it delves into the continuum of rational and emotional engagements that shape news media consumption, with an emphasis on incidental news consumption as part of the participatory cultures of social media and questions whether an 'affective turn' can explain contemporary youth incidental news practices. These are some of the questions that have been addressed in this paper based on the concept of liminality and taking into stock the context of Mauritius and, more broadly, the vantage point of a developing country. This study offers the possibility to hear the voices of Mauritian youths from the bottom-up, allowing them to define their spheres of agency, actions and constraints in the networked environments of social media platforms. It argues that incidental news consumption is to be regarded as part of media flows and social experiences which are shaped both by affect and disaffect rather than just practical uses. It highlights the need to understand youth incidental news consumption and media practices as liminal, to the extent that they are protean involving passive and active states of beings, and foregrounds the importance of dialogue and media literacy in view of the challenges posed by the platforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of 'youth' is a contested term insofar as definitions and conceptions vary. Some definitions hinge on the biological principle of age, and consider youths as people who are between 15 to 24 years (UN, 2021). In this sense, it is considered as "adolescence" and "a distinct phase of bio-physiological transformation that [begins] with puberty and [ends] in mature adulthood" (Osgerby, 2004: 6). Around 30% of the Mauritian population can be categorized as young (Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, 2016). On the African continent, figures concerning the youths point to the 'youth bulge' that the continent is experiencing. Nonetheless, this notion of the youth, as a universal category based on biological factors is a shibboleth that neglects the contextual realities that "manifest many differences among them" (Dahlgren, 2011:2). Youth experiences in different contexts have garnered scholarly attention, especially as socio-cultural trends and patterns vary. Hence, untapped lines of enquiry have opened up with media scholars underlining youth experiences of class inequalities and emphasizing "the importance of gendered identities and power structures within young people's lives" (Osgerby, 2004:8). Moreover, the techno-structures of social media platforms and the cognate power relationships are coming under scrutiny. To this effect, the curation-enabling platforms are viewed as gateways to information. They are also viewed as digital gatekeepers that are harnessed by powerful interests. While gateways can refer to the digital ecosystems of the networks (2021) argues that digital gatekeepers can be defined "as property owners that may permit and restrict access to their websites much like landowners may do with private land" (p. 955).

In the networked architectures of digital platforms, the collapse of the boundaries of the public and the private, news and non-news, the rational and the sensory, the producer and the consumer, confounds the traditional canons of sociability. Bruns and Schmidt (2011) propose the term 'produser', emphasizing the blurred lines between consumer and producer. Bruns (2006:8) contends that audiences are creative and active as media "has shifted away from mostly passive, mass reception to more interactive, individualized modes of active engagement" . However, Papacharissi (2011:317) observes that sociability "no longer stands for what it used to be" and that there are "varieties of behaviors that are unquestionably social, yet also practiced from variably passive states of engagement" . Such latent states involve exposure

to incidental news as consumers have to 'feel their way' into the stories they have stumbled on. Young audiences come across news online while doing other things and the fact of bumping into information may appear as a mere diversion, foreclosing the fact that media engagement is a "strategic way within the media industries to capture social media analytics and rating performances" (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020). Some scholars argue that incidental news exposure and consumption is a 'distraction' as citizenship deserves more commitment (Banaji & Cammaerts, 2015:119). Others, like Costera Meijer (2007) contend that the shifting patterns of news consumption have diversified media experiences and citizenship practices in an "ambient media system" (Hermida, 2010).

The phenomenon of incidental news exposure and consumption seems to be new and to have particular relevance in the context of digital media even though Boczkowsk*i et al* (2018:3524) claim that "incidental news consumption long predates social media, from perusing the headlines of a publication while waiting in line to pay at the supermarket, to briefly watching a story on display in an electronic shop". Weeks and Lane (2020:1121) foreground users as passive consumers or outsiders brought into a news frame as they argue that incidental exposure refers "to news or information that happens outside active, effortful or intentional information-seeking behavior". Nonetheless, Mitchelstein *et al* (2020) contend that information which bubbles up on the platforms has to be conceived as part of a "continuum" that routinely involves incidental news that can be a pathway to purposive news consumption.

More specifically, this spectrum of passive and active states and vice versa hinges on the concept of liminality. Initially proposed by Arnold van Gennep to analyse ritual passages, liminality refers to "the passage of an individual or social group from one status to another" (Thomassen, 2009: 6). The term was later revisited by Victor Turner, referring to "any "betwixt and between" situation or object" (Thomassen, 2009:16). Papacharissi (2015:124-125) has further explored the term through the lens of social media as she asserts the importance of agency through online interactions noting that "the very function of liminality is to abandon structure so as to permit activity that will result in the birthing of a new structure, and therein lie both potential empowerment and disempowerment" . Put succinctly, liminality refers to the interstices of passive and active states or "the short time between the fall of one state of being and the emergence of a new status quo" (De Wiele & Papacharissi, 2021:1114).

Traditionally, liberal democratic theory has foregrounded the importance of reason and cognition to the detriment of 'non-rational' elements that consist of emotions and affects (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Nonetheless, an 'affective turn' will take on board not only the binary interfaces of passive and active emotional engagements with regards to online incidental news but also the subjective dispositions thereof. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019:149) adds that the "emotional architecture [is] a key factor in shaping engagement with and participation through social media". For their part, Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer (2019:639) stress on the material, sensory and affective dimensions of everyday uses noting the need to shift away "attention from how news users make sense of media messages toward people's actual everyday news practices" .

In a way, liminality allows an understanding of news consumption as social practices that coagulate between passive and active modes. Lewis, Markham and Holcombe-James (2021:3) assert that liminality "mark[s] the uncanny or unstable experience of existing *between"* and "is marked by a profound disruption of one's sense of self, one's phenomenological being in the world, and in relation to others" . Put otherwise, liminality on the networks refers to the felt experiences of connection and disconnection and "many of the complexities, profound paradoxes, fears, and hopes that characterize the human and machinic entanglements" (Lewis et al, 2021:2). Notwithstanding the gateway to information flows represented by social media, the latter also stands as gatekeepers controlled by Big Tech. To this effect, media engagement increasingly evolves around audience and performance metrics. Referring to the fetish of affective capitalism, Karppi (2018) underlines the difficulties that users have to disconnect from Facebook and as users feel less control over their digital lives.

On the human-machine relations, Leeker and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2017:77) observe that online habits are interactive and socially constructed as "we learn habits from others and in response to our environment [and] most provocatively, habits are scars of others that live in our repeated actions" . The digital habitus of algorithms and agentic activities foregrounds homophily which "assumes that love is love of the same" as the "recommendation systems place you in segregated neighbourhoods based on your intense likes and dislikes" (p. 79). However, these facets of predictive analytics based on algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) may not necessarily be known

and visible, especially to the youths. What are the biases of such algorithms and the ethical implications? What are the roles and responsibilities of Big Tech?

This puts into sharp focus the importance of datafication as "a process of abstracting and extracting life across various spaces to generate profits" (Mejias & Couldry, 2019: 6). The authors critically observe that through datafication we are "becoming dependent on (external, privatized) data measurements to tell us who we are, what we are feeling, and what we should be doing, which challenges our basic conception of human agency and knowledge" (p. 4). As gateways and gatekeepers, networks rely on data extraction which increasingly defines our digital selves and frames the bonds of digital capitalism (Sampson, 2016). Ricaurte (2019:361) augurs that "as data becomes the preferred way of representing knowledge in our time, we must pay attention to the diverse worldviews that come into tension in an unequal world" . She argues that the reproduction of inequalities, racism and discrimination, polarization are perpetuated online through algorithms that replicate biases and oppressions that exist in the offline world.

Broersma and Swart (2021) have studied how habits of news and media consumption have been challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic. They establish a typology of five categories of news users in the disruptive context of the pandemic namely the 'news avoiders', 'followers turned avoiders', 'stable news users', 'frequent news users' and 'news junkies' as they "shed light on what cues activate the formation of news habits and what factors might explain why habits do or do not sustain" (p. 2). Whilst they delve into these (novel) habits, they also observe that "affective cues boost habit formation, both negatively and positively" (p. 553) as they underline the dynamics of engagement and disengagement thereof. For their part, Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer (2017:680) note that practices of checking, monitoring, scanning which are associated to incidental news consumption "fulfil valuable functions for users, including being brought up to speed on the latest 'public affairs' developments without interrupting one's news flow".

However, incidental news flows can also entail encountering online hate speech, discrimination, misogyny, fake news and conspiracy theories. These may constitute elements of an online anti-public sphere that scoff off civility and undermine the dignity of persons. Davis (2021:145) observes that there is no dichotomy between a 'good' public sphere and one which would be

'bad'. Rather he notes that "anti-public discourse is routinely intermingled with everyday democratic speech" . Online experiences of news consumption are not always fulfilling experiences as they "can involve positive jolts and attachments, […] or induce negative registers of fear, disgust and shame" (Paasonen, Hillis & Petit, 2015:4/5).

However, envisioning incidental news consumption highlights the liminality of passive to active states and vice-versa as the platform networks are perceived as gateways. To this effect, liminality can magnify the binary of passive and active consumption and the affective and emotional bonds that allow connection and/or disconnection. Notwithstanding the subjectivity of users, the networks as gatekeepers also highlight the powerful oligopolistic interests at play and the lack of control that users feel over their digital lives. To this effect, media literacy can take into consideration the liminal states of passive and active consumption. It involves "the ability to read media texts critically, understanding the relationship between media and audiences, and knowing how media production processes work" (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2022). This may also involve demystifying the role of the platforms as gateways and gatekeepers through dialogic perspectives that empower youngsters to reflect on their news consumption habits.

METHODOLOGY

To find out about incidental news consumption by young citizens in the era of Covid-19, thirty males and females students between 17 to 18 years were interviewed. They were drawn from various economic and class backgrounds from Mauritius using a snowball sampling technique. The interviews were carried from August 2021 to February 2022. Given that secondary schools remained closed during the 2021 lockdown in Mauritius and that teaching took place remotely, the first round of interviews was carried online mainly via WhatsApp and lasted one hour to the maximum. At the turn of the year in 2022, when schools resumed, a second set of interviews – mainly group interviews with a different set of students – were carried out on a face-to-face basis, mainly in a private fee secondary school in the Mauritian capital and the participants were again voluntarily enlisted.

The data gathered from the interviews have been organized through thematic tropes using Weeks's and Lane's (2020) ecological framework to understand incidental news consumption. They propose six ecological

levels which are interrelated and which consist of two levels: individual and environmental factors. On the individual front, the following factors have been identified, namely cognitive level; demographic/identity level; perception of information environment level; motivation level whilst environmental factors consist of social network level and media system level. The themes overlap and information gathered through the interviews has been roughly extended and mapped on the categories identified by Weeks and Lane.

Quotes from participants have been anonymized to maintain their privacy and the names of the participants have been altered to maintain anonymity. The interviews were carried out in Mauritian Creole and translated in English by the author.

Perceptions of Information

Incidental news comes seemingly as unrequested. It can circulate at meso-level between the personal network of the user and the networks of friends and contacts as part of 'homophily' based on the principle that 'similarity automatically breeds connections' (Leeker, 2017). Michelstein *et al* (2020:16) consider that such incidental news is hybrid and 'not purely incidental' insofar as recipients 'have a larger degree of control over who they follow' underlining the dynamic and interpersonal features thereof. Such incidental news defies conventional understandings of news as consumed rationally as it is based on perceptions of the information environment of social media.

Mohammed asserts that: "When a friend puts a story on Facebook, I receive an automatic update about their status. To me, this update is news that is informative and it comes as unexpected. For instance, when there is a cyclone, my friend's status can allow me to have a concise idea of the weather situation but it may also suggest gleefully whether school will resume any soon".

Incidental news also seems to aggregate information about popular personalities and influencers. Samuel notes that incidental news on his wall can concern the famous. He explains: "Talking of news that comes unannounced is, for example, the shocking video of Kurt Zouma, the footballer from West Ham United, chasing and abusing his cat. It popped up my wall and I got interested and shared it with my friends." Incidental news also often takes the form of breaking news that should seemingly not be missed. Richard reflects on his online media consumption of incidental

news as "news [that] finds me" (Weeks & Lane, 2020:1128) underlining the perception that digital environments are pathways to information. He remarks: "Bad news in my feeds grabs my attention… especially if it is presented as 'breaking news' on social media. I am tempted to find out more… road accidents… because of the casualties…. Last time there was an accident where on impact, the car broke into pieces and it involved youngsters living not far from my locality… It was all over social media as breaking news… Recently there were three cases of suicide that did the rounds on social media. It concerned youngsters who were unsatisfied with their exams results. Automatically, I wanted to find out more…"

For his part, Paul, reflects on his consumption of incidental news as news that he snacks on, without any forms of engagement but just the fact of 'sensational topics and curiosity-arousing elements' (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015). Paul remarks: "Sometimes screaming or enigmatic headlines would appear on my wall. I would automatically click on them… even though the article may contain zero interest". Thence, attention grabbing clickbait materials lure the youths reinforcing the 'perceptions of digital environments as places for news' (Weeks & Lane, 2020:1128). Nita observes the following: "I came across a picture of a baby who died at the maternity at the hospital. What shocked me most was that they [the hospital staff] had put her body in a small box and returned it to the parents. As a young woman, this shocked me." She recalls how she made screenshots of the story and started a conversation with her friends on WhatsApp.

For her part, Cathy notes the following: "There were images of a woman who was sequestered by her male partner and she had clearly suffered from domestic violence and abuse. The shocking images of her wounds over her body surfaced all over social media and when I looked at them I felt that women have no safety in society and wondered what was the problem of the perpetrator. How come he had physically abused her?"

In a nutshell, incidental news is often perceived as the by-product of the information environment of digital media and its consumption involves switching from passive to active states and vice versa. Its liminal character hinges on whether it would be snacked and/or consumed intentionally. Such news is affectively loaded, in many instances sensational, and forms part of the ambient architecture of the networks as gateways.

Self-Actualization

Notwithstanding the perceptions of the 'socio-technical constructs' of platforms (Poell, Nieborg & van-Djick, 2019:5), incidental news and contents can also provide psychological rewards and boosts to morale and can meet self-actualization needs. Nonetheless, such incidental media flows are often programmed by media corporations 'instrumentally using a reductive meaning of engagement as a measurement of interest' (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020:1). In the context of Covid-19 as time seemed to have decelerated with the stay at home injunctions, the platforms provided the space to spend time and to linger. Streaming films and series as part of binge-watching seemed to have settled as a trend, especially with possibilities of relating to the subjectivities of users. Javed asserts that the algorithms of Netflix provided him with series and movies which he watched as a way not to feel let down and to keep his morale high in a context of school closure. He notes the following: "I spent countless hours binge-watching movies and Netflix series, one after the other. For instance, I watched the series *Arrow* where the actor had to go through a number of trials. This helped me to get motivated, keep myself on track and to develop my own spirit of resilience with regard to Covid-19".

Ludic and 'entertainment' formats of media corporations can allow place-making in the home, especially in the Covid-19 context. Groot and Costera (2019:648) note that 'place-making describes how people – through their repeated practices and routines – eventually come to feel familiar in and ascribe meaning to environments' . Bill who identifies himself as 'queer' asserts that "Netflix is very inclusive and during the Covid-19 lockdowns, I came across queer movies on Netflix. I used to watch movies at home, with my mother, especially queer movies hoping that my family and my mom would develop understanding and acceptance of my sexual difference". 'Queer' icons, he notes, allow a sense of belonging: "I love to watch music videos on YouTube… Taylor Swift, my pop star icon, creates a world of intrigue in her music videos and she breaks the codes established in society. I follow people like Selena Gomez… for my mental health and the rapper Lil Nas X to create a sense of belonging to the 'queer' community."

Thus, Netflix, YouTube and other social platforms can provide entertainment and related personalized marketing materials and publicity stunts that appear as incidental media flows to lure the youth. Importantly it is a way for media organizations to keep the traffic coming to their platforms and points

to the power of streaming media industries as gateways and gatekeepers to affectively and actively engage with audiences through the collection of user metrics.

Cognition

Notwithstanding the ludic aspect of incidental news flows, alternative pedagogies and multimodal delivery streams have become popular during the lockdowns. Lamesh notes: "During the lockdowns, I have started to enjoy online educational platforms and apps on my mobile phone. In the past my mobile phone was only for phone calls and play. Now, I use it also to swipe on educational videos…. I would post short-form videos about my revisions and difficulties I encounter. I have come to appreciate the importance of visuals, background music and videos. Animated contents, like on TikTok, grab my attention". The case of Lamesh points to his active and creative online engagement on platforms.

However, not every student seems to have had the same positive and active experience of remote learning. Trisha reflects on her Zoom consumption and fatigue: "We usually received the Zoom links from our teachers before the start of the classes. In online classes, we switched off our mic and camera. I got tired of Zoom classes. When the teacher asked a question, no one responded while in class we were supposed to. It would have been better that the teacher recorded his class and shared it on YouTube". Rather than relying solely on Zoom, this highlights the need to optimally harness the platforms in multimodal ways, through different distribution streams, to advance teaching and learning. Ideally, the gateways provided by the platforms should be used in different formats to render online classes more interactive.

Super-Saturation

If at the beginning of the pandemic it was a matter of adjusting to new habits and getting as much information about the outbreaks and likely cures, it is no longer a topic of interest as it causes 'burnout' and 'news fatigue' amongst the youths. Michael has found out that: "There is news which I do not follow anymore and tend to avoid, especially regarding Covid-19 and vaccination. To be honest, I am just fed up with all these. In the beginning of the pandemic when there were a few cases, I was attentive and eager to find out more in which area cases were being reported. But now I just hardly pay attention".

Along with news fatigue is also the problem of false news and dis-and-misinformation that have triggered an 'infodemic' (WHO, 2022). Alia observes that "fake news is shared and received mainly via WhatsApp and it keeps coming. For example, it may be shared that by eating garlic you can cure Covid-19… I had to block a few contacts on WhatsApp because they would share news on Covid-19 in which I had no interest in".

Jim has similar reactions with respect to politics: "online views and opinions seem always to be in the extremes and this has been aggravated with the pandemic. There are the pro-vaccination and the anti-vax. Both sides clash. Just before and after the second lockdown in Mauritius, there was the Kistnen murder case which topped the news. I saw the deliberations over the case which appeared to be a political assassination of a political agent of the ruling party. I kept receiving online information that referred to the matter as a political assassination… I have been following the group of lawyers that named themselves as the Avengers… their plea was livestreamed on Facebook… but the case got polarized... I got tired and disillusioned as I had initially thought the culprits would be identified and prosecuted".

The phenomenon of dis-and mis-information around Covid-19 and vaccination reflects the 'weaponisation of information'. Incidental news revolving around fake news and conspiracy theories, is particularly prolific in a Mauritian online media landscape where culture wars are prevalent. Social media as gateways have created the possibilities of democratization but with 'information noises' they have also pathologized democracy.

Online Harms

How do we create safe spaces on social media when it seems so accommodating of hate speech and stigma? This is especially so with regard to offensive, explicit materials that proliferate and circulate as incidental contents. Prisha notes the following: "Take the example of nude pictures that have been circulating online via Telegram and WhatsApp. The problem is not only the circulation of such sexual contents that keep cropping online. The girls in the videos are trashed and scapegoated while the boys are hardly blamed. This is the result of a macho culture which is prevalent in the Mauritian society. The question is whether such pictures can be deleted once posted and shared? At any point in time, they keep resurfacing…"

Bill, who identifies himself as 'queer', observes how social media has turned into a space of hate and stigma. He notes: "social media is hateful and it is a place where we encounter threatening and homophobic language. The challenge remains about creating online spaces which provide positive experiences to people who are different. At times, I just want to leave social media by deleting my account but it is difficult".

In a way, detox or disconnecting from social media can be a way to restore one's well-being. However, such disconnections are increasingly difficult given the 'affective bonds' and the interfaces that 'limit the opportunity to opt-out' (Karppi, 2018). Put otherwise, online platforms can be spaces for abusive and harmful contents that undermine the well-being and mental health of the youth and the challenge remains as to how to offset the negative characteristics of platforms?

DISCUSSION

This paper has argued that incidental news consumption, in the context of Covid-19 and more generally, is constitutive of the ecology of the platforms and increasingly forms part of the lived experiences of the youth. Often the youth stumble on incidental news and contents while doing other things online. Under the concept of liminality, incidental news exposure can be conceived as interstices of passive and active consumption that seek the attention of the youths. It is the contention of this study that exposure to incidental news and contents is a part of media flows and that news, as much as non-news, are tied to the online experiences of the youth. Covid-19 has forced youngsters to organize their lives digitally and the online ecology of digital media, including incidental news, has triggered different ways of engagement and/or disengagement. To hit on information is to enter into experiences which may entail positive and/or negative experiences as part of the 'ambient' ecology of social networks. To be informed no longer means only looking for news in purposive ways as news is increasingly associated with experiences of media contents available online.

Approaching incidental news exposure through an affective turn allows an understanding of media consumption beyond rational consumption. Traditionally media perspectives have underlined the view that people actively look for information for their usage. For instance, the uses and gratification approach offers a pertinent foray into media consumption even

though it emphasizes the "superrational" choice of audiences (Ruggiero, 2000). Utilitarian perspectives also presuppose universal usage to the extent that every user has the same, uniform experience. However, this article has emphasized the need for an "affective turn" insofar as incidental news practices appear differently to different individuals in different ecological environments. To this effect, there is need to become alive to the lived experiences of the youths, their mental health and well-being and emotional skills (Walsh & Walsh, 2022). Media literacy cannot be based on a one-size-fits-all approach that emphasizes utilitarian perspectives of technology. Rather the lived experiences of the youth in different online ecologies and social contexts have to be borne out. Simultaneously, an ethics of care in the form of social listening may open new avenues for digital media literacy and political participation.

Finally, this puts into the limelight the role of Big Tech, algorithms and data collection and extraction. The platforms are both gateways and gatekeepers. Incidental news which evolves around abuse, violence, sexism, misogyny is often reproducing the violence that happens in society. Ricaurte (2019) observes that algorithms tend to reproduce the same epistemic violence in society that started from the period of colonisation. As the platforms become part of our everyday lives and as they reconfigure our lives through curation and information flows, can technology be used for the greater good and for our shared humanity?

A decolonial perspective to datafication starts first with the reckoning that data extraction, as part of our online experiences, aims to dispossess us from control and to quantify us as 'the objects of datafication' (p. 7). As much as the Global South is dependent on Western technologies and episteme, a decolonial perspective would consider the need to hold 'dialogues' around Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence, and the limits of the platforms as gateways and gatekeepers of powerful interests. Media literacy can focus around issues of data colonization and extraction, reproduction of violence and inequalities and the subjectivities of the youth. Such 'dialogue' should be multimodal (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2022) and involve an activism that raises consciousness and resistance to the inhumane and exploitative aspects of technology. Such a 'dialogue' does not only mean talking but also upholding an ethics of listening with empathy.

This paper has a number of limitations, including the fact that the findings do not provide clearcut responses. Nonetheless, it may be worthy to focus on the news consumption and online experiences of youths, both from secondary and tertiary levels, as a way to understand the current trends in youth media consumption and the gaps in terms of media literacy to turn the web into a safe space, and to consolidate a democratic and civic public sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the ways news, especially incidental news, is consumed by the Mauritian youths arguing that incidental news and news consumption generally should be considered as a social experience. Instead of providing pessimistic or optimistic accounts of youth media uses, it has laid out a more nuanced picture, highlighting the need to go beyond utilitarian purposes to consider incidental news consumption through an 'affective turn' as part of the ecology of the platforms. It has argued that liminality as a metaphor can capture the interstices of positive and negative experiences that are felt online by the youths and has laid down a decolonial perspective highlighting the need for dialogic perspectives to consider the lived experiences of the youths and their emotional well-being.

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