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Latency Mismatch in Platformized Journalism and Media: AI-Mediated Access and the Temporal Governance of Cognitive Practices

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Abstract

Journalism and media studies increasingly describe a communication environment in which news, explanation and public orientation are accessed through search engines, social feeds, notifications, short-form video, platform summaries, podcasts and conversational artificial intelligence. Existing accounts identify attention scarcity, information overload, platform power, news avoidance and AI disruption, yet they do not fully explain why some communicative practices become less sustainable while faster forms of orientation expand under the same conditions. This conceptual paper develops an integrative theoretical synthesis across media practice theory, deep mediatization, platform studies, digital journalism, digital reading research, cognitive load theory, acceleration studies and AI-mediated communication. It proposes latency mismatch as a middle-range mechanism of temporal selection. Latency mismatch occurs when the time a practice requires to generate stable understanding exceeds the continuity intervals that a media environment makes available, rewards or treats as reasonable, especially when lower-latency alternatives provide sufficient orientation. The concept clarifies how platformized journalism and media environments govern not only visibility and attention but also the durations through which information becomes meaningful, trustworthy and actionable. It reframes long-form news reading, investigative engagement and other high-latency practices as structurally vulnerable but socially necessary conditions of public knowledge.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; digital journalism; latency mismatch; media practice; news consumption; platformization; public communication; temporal governance; reading

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1. Introduction

Digital journalism and contemporary media culture are increasingly organized around rapid access to relevance. News audiences encounter public information through headlines, alerts, search results, newsletters, social feeds, live blogs, recommendation systems, short videos, podcasts, explainer formats and conversational artificial intelligence (AI). These forms do not simply add new channels to an older media system (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). They reorganize the ordinary temporal conditions under which users come to feel informed, oriented and able to act. The same person may read a long investigative article, skim a breaking-news live feed, ask an AI system for a summary, watch a sixty-second explainer, save a report for later, and never return to it. The problem for journalism and media studies is therefore not only that attention is scarce or that audiences are distracted. It is that public knowledge is

increasingly pursued through temporally different routes (Hermida, 2010; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018; Newman et al., 2024).

Debates about digital media often describe this transformation as a decline of attention, a weakening of reading, a crisis of news engagement or a shift toward algorithmic dependence (Carr, 2010; Paasonen, 2016; Büchi, 2024; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). These descriptions identify real pressures, but they leave a conceptual gap. If users continue to seek information, compare accounts, follow public issues, listen to explanatory podcasts, prompt AI systems, share links and participate in mediated debate, then the issue cannot be reduced to a simple abandonment of knowledge. What appears to be changing is the temporal form of knowledge access: how long users are expected to remain with a source, how quickly a usable answer should appear, and which communicative practices seem reasonable when faster alternatives are available (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

This article argues that the reconfiguration of cognitive and communicative practices in platformized journalism and media environments can be understood through the concept of latency mismatch. In interactive systems, lag or latency denotes the delay between an input action and its corresponding output response (MacKenzie & Ware, 1993). Transposed into journalism, media and cognition, the relevant question becomes how much time a practice requires before it can generate usable understanding, and how much time the surrounding media environment makes available, rewards or treats as socially reasonable. Latency mismatch occurs when the temporal requirements of a practice exceed the continuity intervals and response expectations cultivated by the environment, especially when lower-latency substitutes provide sufficient orientation for immediate purposes (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

The concept is not intended to describe slowness as inherently virtuous or speed as inherently superficial. Many low-latency practices are valuable. Alerts can warn publics about urgent events; short videos can provide accessible entry points into complex topics; summaries can help users triage information; AI systems can support translation, explanation and accessibility. The analytic issue is structural rather than moral. When low-delay access becomes the default standard against which media practices are evaluated, practices that require longer temporal investment become less likely to be selected unless institutional, cultural or personal supports preserve the continuity they need (Büchi, 2024; Sharma, 2014; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

The article takes sustained news reading and long-form interpretation as a central case, but it is not only an article about reading. Sustained reading is analytically useful because it condenses a wider transformation in journalism and media. It requires continuity, recursive integration, source evaluation, inferential patience and delayed stabilization of meaning across textual sequences (Wolf, 2018; Seidenberg, 2017; OECD, 2021). These requirements become particularly visible in investigative reporting, explanatory journalism, policy analysis, long-form essays and public-interest documents (Barnhurst & Nightingale, 2018; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2015). Such practices do not lose value in platformized environments (Wolf, 2018; Barnhurst & Nightingale, 2018). They lose ordinary fit when the interval required for their value to become available conflicts with the shorter intervals normalized by search, feeds, summaries, short audiovisual formats and AI-mediated synthesis (Schellewald, 2023; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2024; Newman, 2026).

The same logic may extend beyond reading to source verification and comparative news assessment, both of which require continuity before their epistemic value becomes available.

The article contributes to journalism and media studies in three ways. First, it specifies a mechanism that links media infrastructures, audience practices and cognitive temporality.

Second, it extends debates about platform power beyond visibility, ranking and data extraction by showing how platforms and AI systems also govern the durations through which information becomes meaningful (Gillespie, 2010; Bucher, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018; Noble, 2018). Third, it reframes news reading, media literacy and public knowledge as temporally conditioned practices rather than solely as individual skills, preferences or motivations (Tully et al., 2022; Vraga & Tully, 2021; Sharma, 2014). The question is not only whether audiences value journalism, but whether media environments sustain the durations through which journalistic knowledge can be encountered, reconstructed and judged (Costera Meijer, 2020; Swart et al., 2022; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Media Practice, Platformization and the Audience Turn

The conceptual materials synthesized here come from eight bodies of scholarship. Media practice theory provides a vocabulary for understanding media not merely as channels or texts, but as patterned actions, competencies and routines (Couldry, 2004). Deep mediatization explains how media infrastructures become background conditions for social reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Platform studies explain how visibility, participation and cultural production are reorganized by programmable infrastructures and data-driven intermediation (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2010; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018). Digital journalism research clarifies how news production, distribution and audience relationships are transformed by platforms, metrics, automation and changing news use (Carlson, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2019; Hermida, 2010; Lewis et al., 2019; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022; Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

These traditions establish that media environments are not neutral containers for content. Media practice theory directs attention to patterned forms of doing, while platformization scholarship shows how infrastructures organize visibility, circulation, metrics and participation. For the present argument, their limitation is temporal specificity: they explain how practices and infrastructures are constituted, but not why practices that remain meaningful and valued may become selectively less viable when their payoff arrives more slowly than competing routes to orientation.

The audience-turn literature further shifts analysis from what journalism prescribes toward how people actually incorporate news into everyday life. Costera Meijer (2020) documents the institutional move toward audience responsiveness, while Swart et al. (2022) argue for treating audiences as active agents whose informational practices exceed industry-defined categories of news use. This perspective is central to latency mismatch because the mechanism concerns selection among practices from the user side: the analytical question is not whether audiences still value journalism, but which route to orientation becomes reasonable under situated temporal conditions (Costera Meijer, 2020; Swart et al., 2022).

2.2. Attention, Cognitive Load and Digital Reading

The synthesis also draws on attention economy theory, cognitive load theory, digital reading research and media temporality. Attention economy approaches explain why abundant information creates competition for limited processing resources (Simon, 1971; Webster, 2014). Cognitive load theory explains how interface complexity and extraneous demands interfere with comprehension (Sweller, 2011; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022). Digital-reading research shows that medium, time pressure, navigation conditions and hyperlink structures shape comprehension and reading strategy (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014, 2020; Furenes et al., 2021; Jayes et al., 2022; Mangen et al., 2013).

The attention economy remains an indispensable starting point because it explains why cognition and public attention become contested under conditions of information

abundance. Simon (1971) famously argued that information consumes attention, and Webster (2014) extended this insight into the analysis of audience formation in a media marketplace. In platformized journalism, attention is not simply a scarce psychological resource; it is also an operational target. Metrics, notifications, recommendation systems and engagement infrastructures turn competition for attention into a routine organizational principle for news organizations and platforms alike.

Yet attention remains too general a category when the question concerns the viability of particular communicative practices. Reading a long article, watching a short explainer, scanning a feed, listening to a news podcast, opening a push notification and asking an AI system for a briefing all involve attention. They differ, however, in the temporal pattern of attention they require and the delay between engagement and usable output. A theory of attention can explain why users cannot attend to everything, but it does not by itself explain why practices requiring delayed stabilization of meaning become disproportionately vulnerable in the same scarcity regime (Paasonen, 2016; Büchi, 2024).

Cognitive load theory moves closer to the processing conditions of comprehension by distinguishing between demands intrinsic to a task and extraneous burdens introduced by design, navigation or unnecessary complexity (Sweller, 2011). This distinction matters for journalism because digital news is often encountered within cluttered, modular and interruptive environments. Pop-ups, hyperlinks, related story modules, embedded video, infinite scroll, advertising, recommendation panels and live updates can add overhead to the work of maintaining coherence. Digital-reading research supports this point by showing that comprehension is sensitive to medium, time pressure, navigation, reading goals and textual density (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018; Furenes et al., 2021; Mangen et al., 2013).

Still, cognitive load theory does not fully explain the cultural and infrastructural normalization of faster substitutes. It can explain how friction impairs performance, but it does not explain why friction becomes decisive when low-delay alternatives are available and socially legitimate. A user may not fail to read a long article because the article is incomprehensible. The user may instead select a summary, a video, a headline thread or an AI-generated explanation because the environment repeatedly demonstrates that orientation can be obtained more quickly elsewhere (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

Deep reading scholarship adds a normative and cognitive account of what is at stake when sustained textual engagement weakens. Wolf (2018) describes reading as a plastic cultural circuit that supports inference, reflection, empathy and critical judgment, while Hayles (2012) differentiates close, hyper and machine reading as historically specific modes of attention. The limitation of this literature is not that it overvalues reading. The cognitive distinctiveness of sustained textual engagement remains important for journalism and public culture. The limitation is that it often explains why reading matters more fully than it explains the structural mechanism through which reading becomes less ordinary in environments where understanding can be partially outsourced, compressed or delivered through other channels (Hayles, 2012; Wolf, 2018; OECD, 2021).

Digital-reading research sharpens this problem by showing that medium, time pressure, navigation and strategy shape comprehension rather than merely reflecting a stable individual capacity (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018; Furenes et al., 2021; Habók et al., 2024). News-literacy scholarship similarly conceptualizes effective news use through knowledge and evaluative skills (Tully et al., 2022; Vraga & Tully, 2021). Yet neither literature, by itself, specifies the relational condition under which a slower practice loses ordinary fit because a faster alternative is perceived as sufficient. Latency mismatch is

designed to capture that selection problem, not to replace accounts of attention, cognitive load, reading comprehension or literacy.

2.3. Journalism Temporality and Temporal Affordances

Journalism has an established temporal literature that directly precedes the present argument and therefore defines an important boundary around the novelty claimed here. Barnhurst and Nightingale (2018) show that time is constitutive of news realism; Bødker and Sonnevend (2018) identify shifting temporalities as a central concern for journalism research; and Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2015) demonstrate that print and online news can organize different temporal orientations. Most directly, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2018, p. 39) define temporal affordances as the potential ways in which time-related possibilities and constraints associated with news production and dissemination are manifested in news narratives.

Latency mismatch builds on this literature but addresses a different analytical object. Temporal affordances characterize time-related possibilities and constraints associated with media technologies and journalistic forms. Latency mismatch, by contrast, specifies a relational incompatibility between (a) the time a communicative practice requires before it yields usable understanding, (b) the continuity interval and response expectation normalized by the surrounding environment, and (c) the availability of a lower-latency route that the user perceives as sufficiently functional. The proposed novelty therefore lies not in claiming that journalism has temporal properties, but in theorizing when temporal conditions become selection pressures across alternative practices.

This distinction also separates latency mismatch from distraction. Distraction concerns interruption after attention has been allocated. Latency mismatch concerns the comparative selection of a practice before, or independently of, interruption. A user may therefore bypass sustained engagement not because attention has already failed, but because another route is expected to provide sufficient orientation sooner. This relational focus is the conceptual gap developed in the sections that follow.

2.4. Acceleration, Social Time and Temporal Inequality

Finally, acceleration and temporality scholarship shows that speed is not merely a technical feature but a social relation that organizes modern life unevenly (Crary, 2013; Rosa, 2013; Sharma, 2014; Wajcman, 2015).

Theories of acceleration and media temporality provide the broader historical frame. Rosa (2013) argues that modernity is organized through reciprocal accelerations in technology, social change and the pace of life; Wajcman (2015) shows that digital speed interacts with work, gender, institutions and everyday time pressure; Sharma (2014) demonstrates that temporal arrangements are politically uneven. These accounts explain why speed is a social relation rather than a neutral technical improvement. However, acceleration remains too broad unless connected to a mechanism of practice selection. Latency mismatch provides that connection by showing how accelerated media environments alter which practices remain viable without special protection.

Acceleration theory supplies the macrosocial condition under which short response expectations become culturally intelligible, while latency mismatch operates at a narrower level of analysis: the fit between a particular practice, a situated continuity interval and available substitutes. This middle-range positioning also makes temporal inequality intrinsic to the model. Because control over time is socially differentiated, the continuity required for high-latency practices cannot be treated as an evenly distributed individual resource (Sharma, 2014; Wajcman, 2015; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019).

2.5. AI-Mediated Communication and Emerging News Access

Human–machine communication scholarship provides a further necessary foundation because conversational AI should be understood not only as a tool but as a communicative intermediary that can reorganize roles, agency and the presentation of knowledge (Lewis et al., 2019; Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hepp, 2020). Generative systems are temporally distinctive because retrieval, selection, synthesis, explanation and reformulation can be compressed into one conversational exchange. This does not imply equivalence with source-level reading; it changes the comparative temporal profile of the route through which orientation is obtained.

Empirical evidence suggests that this pathway is emerging but should not be overstated. Fletcher and Nielsen (2024) found high awareness but limited routine use of generative AI, with only a small minority reporting use for the latest news, alongside substantial uncertainty about AI in journalism. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 documents broader changes in digital news consumption and platform use, while Newman (2026) identifies answer engines and AI-mediated access as a growing strategic issue for publishers (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2024; Newman et al., 2024; Newman, 2026). Accordingly, the present paper treats AI-mediated news access as a developing low-latency condition rather than an already dominant audience practice.

2.6. From Adjacent Explanations to Differential Temporal Viability

These studies were selected according to explanatory necessity rather than exhaustive coverage. Each accounts for a dimension of the phenomenon: media practices, infrastructural power, digital news distribution, attention scarcity, interface burden, reading comprehension, cultural acceleration and AI-mediated communication. Yet none of them, taken alone, fully explains why some practices of public orientation become less viable while other practices expand under the same media conditions. Latency mismatch is developed as a middle-range concept to specify that missing relational mechanism.

The unresolved issue is therefore relational. Attention scarcity explains competition for processing resources; cognitive load explains burdens on comprehension; digital-reading research explains how reading conditions and strategies affect performance; temporal-affordance scholarship explains time-related possibilities and constraints of news technologies and forms; audience-turn research explains situated user practices; and acceleration theory explains broader cultures of speed. What remains under-specified is why one communicative practice can retain value yet become less likely to be selected when its required time-to-understanding exceeds the continuity treated as reasonable and a faster alternative appears good enough. Latency mismatch is proposed as a middle-range mechanism for that residual explanatory problem.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Synthesis

This is a conceptual paper based on integrative theoretical synthesis and theory adaptation. It does not report new empirical data, and it is not a systematic review. Its purpose is to identify a theoretical problem, reconstruct the limits of existing explanatory repertoires and develop a mechanism that makes several disconnected observations intelligible together. Conceptual work of this kind is valuable when a field has accumulated strong partial explanations but lacks a relational mechanism that connects them (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005).

The design is therefore an integrative conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic literature review. The literature set is purposive and problem-driven: sources are included when they contribute to at least one component of the focal relation—temporal requirements of practices, environmental response expectations, continuity and friction, substitution

among routes to orientation, or the social distribution of time. This approach follows the logic of conceptual article design, in which the objective is to connect established constructs into a theoretically explicit mechanism rather than to estimate a pooled empirical effect (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005).

The conceptual procedure proceeds in five analytic steps. First, the article identifies an anomaly in contemporary journalism and media use: users seek more orientation while often spending less time inside some practices historically associated with sustained understanding. Second, it reconstructs the limitations of existing explanations when the issue is not attention in general but the differential viability of temporally distinct practices. Third, it proposes a conceptual model in which continuity intervals, temporal friction and substitution pressure mediate the relation between media environments and practice selection. The result is not a causal model that has already been empirically tested, but a theoretical framework designed to guide future empirical research.

Two further analytic steps are added to strengthen discriminant validity. Fourth, the proposed mechanism is compared with proximate concepts—especially distraction, cognitive load and temporal affordances—to identify what latency mismatch explains that those concepts do not. Fifth, boundary conditions and empirically tractable expectations are derived without presenting the mechanism as already validated. The resulting framework is thus intended as a testable conceptual model: it specifies relations that future research can operationalize, rather than reporting causal effects established by the present paper.

4. Latency Mismatch as a Mechanism of Temporal Selection

4.1. Low-Latency Journalism and Media Environments

Platformized journalism and media environments are not merely fast in the descriptive sense that information circulates quickly. They are increasingly organized around reducing the delay between need, signal and usable response. Search engines compress the time between question and retrieval. News alerts compress the interval between event and awareness. Social feeds compress the time between opening an application and receiving relevance, affect or novelty. Recommendation systems compress discovery by pre-sorting visibility through data-driven inference. Short-form video compresses explanation and affective orientation into brief audiovisual units. Conversational AI compresses query, retrieval, selection, synthesis and reformulation into a single interface that presents interpretation as an immediately available output.

In journalism, this tendency interacts with platform dependence and changing audience routines. News organizations publish within ecosystems in which visibility is partly governed by platforms that do not share journalism's institutional time horizons (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). The cadence of news is shaped not only by editorial judgment but also by search optimization, analytics dashboards, social media circulation, algorithmic ranking and audience metrics. Tandoc and Vos (2016) show how social media becomes part of the gatekeeping process, while Hermida (2010) describes ambient journalism as a condition in which fragments of news circulate continuously through networked environments. These developments alter the ordinary timing of public information: news becomes less a bounded product encountered at a specific moment and more a stream of updates, cues and prompts.

Low latency should therefore be understood as both an infrastructural property and a cultural norm. An interface returns something quickly, but it also trains expectations about how quickly things should return. In feed-based environments, the next object is available before the current one has demanded interpretive commitment. In breaking-news environments, successive updates may reach audiences while the evidential and interpretive context of the event is still developing. In short-video environments, completion,

novelty and affective reward arrive in compressed cycles. In AI-mediated environments, explanation appears in response to a prompt without requiring the user to traverse the source materials from which the answer claims to draw.

Within the framework, normalization of low delay matters because repeated exposure may shape what users come to regard as a reasonable response interval. If a search result provides a headline and snippet immediately, a full article may appear slow. If an AI system produces a summary in seconds, a source document may appear unnecessarily laborious. If a short video makes a complex public issue feel graspable within one minute, a long explanatory feature may seem inefficient even when it offers greater evidential depth. The framework therefore expects repeated exposure to rapid outputs to make speed increasingly legible as convenience, relevance and design quality. These statements are theoretical expectations derived from platform and temporality scholarship, not empirically established effects in the present study (Bucher, 2018; Chun, 2016; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

The argument is not that low-latency media practices are degraded or inauthentic. They can expand access, reduce barriers, help users cope with overload and make public issues intelligible to people who lack time, background knowledge or institutional support. They can also serve journalism by distributing urgent information and creating entry points into deeper engagement. The issue is that when low-delay access becomes the default temporal standard, high-latency practices require justification. Long-form reporting, investigative reading, deliberative comparison and source-level verification persist, but they become less likely to function as ordinary routes to orientation (Schellewald, 2023; Büchi, 2024; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018).

4.2. Sustained News Reading as a High-Latency Communicative Practice

Sustained news reading occupies a central place in this argument because it reveals the temporality of communicative practice with unusual clarity. Reading is sometimes treated as a neutral channel for receiving information or as an individual skill that succeeds or fails independently of media conditions. Such a view is inadequate for journalism and media studies. News reading is a historically situated media practice organized through genres, platforms, institutions, devices, professional norms, audience expectations and habits of time. It is also a cognitive practice that requires recognition, memory, inference, prediction and metacognitive monitoring (Seidenberg, 2017; Wolf, 2018).

The temporal demands of reading become especially visible in investigative, explanatory or conceptually dense journalism. A reader must hold earlier material in mind while incorporating later claims, distinguish a local statement from the larger argument, evaluate sources, track evidence, revise provisional interpretations and stabilize meaning across an extended structure. The practice therefore leaves significant interpretive labor with the reader. This distinguishes it from compressed formats in which selection, sequencing and synthesis are performed in advance by another system, institution or interface.

A summary, explainer video, live-blog digest or AI response may be useful and may be adequate for many immediate purposes. Its temporal profile is nevertheless different. It reduces the delay between a user's need for orientation and the arrival of an organized output. Sustained reading requires the user to inhabit the process through which coherence is gradually made. The difference is not merely one of length. It concerns where interpretive labor is located and how long users must remain with a bounded object before its value becomes available (Fitzsimmons et al., 2020; OECD, 2021; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

Digital-reading research supports this distinction without requiring a nostalgic opposition between print and screen. Meta-analyses and experimental studies show that reading

comprehension can vary with medium, time pressure, task complexity and navigation conditions (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018; Furenes et al., 2021; Mangen et al., 2013). Other studies show that skimming and hyperlink navigation are patterned strategies rather than random failures of attention (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014, 2020; Jayes et al., 2022). These findings matter for journalism because online news reading often takes place in environments that invite scanning, switching and rapid relevance judgment rather than sustained reconstruction of an argument (Habók et al., 2024; OECD, 2021).

The value of treating sustained news reading as a paradigmatic high-latency practice lies in the way it clarifies a broader structural transformation. Long-form journalism does not lose environmental fit because it lacks value. It loses fit when the interval required for its value to become available conflicts with the shorter interval normalized by the media environment. The opening section of a difficult investigation may not yet provide the practical orientation a user seeks, while a summary, headline thread, short video or AI-generated synthesis often returns something immediately usable. Once this comparison becomes part of everyday media experience, the time required by reading is reclassified as a cost. Delay, which is an ordinary condition of interpretive development, becomes felt as friction (Barnhurst & Nightingale, 2018; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2015).

4.3. AI-Mediated Access and the Compression of Interpretive Delay

Generative AI can intensify low-latency media culture because it compresses stages of knowledge access that were previously distributed across separate activities. Search, selection, reading, summarization, comparison, reformulation and application can now be experienced through a conversational interface that generates a structured response to a prompt. This does not mean that AI systems understand in the same way human readers understand, and it does not erase the risks of error, fabrication, bias or misplaced trust. Bender et al. (2021) warn that large language models can produce fluent outputs without grounded understanding, while Bodó (2021) shows that technological intermediaries reorganize the conditions through which trust is delegated. AI-mediated access is therefore not merely a faster tool. It is a reconfiguration of the interaction through which users come to feel oriented.

For journalism, AI-mediated access matters on both the production and reception sides. On the production side, automation and human–machine communication are changing reporting, editing, distribution and audience engagement (Diakopoulos, 2019; Lewis et al., 2019). On the reception side, AI systems increasingly provide users with summaries, explanations, comparisons and contextual frames that may substitute for direct engagement with journalistic texts. A user who once faced a choice between reading a difficult article and remaining uncertain may now face a choice between reading the article and receiving an immediate synthesis that is good enough for many purposes.

Recent cross-national evidence warrants treating this as an emerging rather than universal audience condition: generative-AI use for news remained limited in 2024, even as awareness and expectations of future impact were substantial (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2024). The conceptual relevance of AI here therefore rests on the temporal structure of the option it introduces, not on a claim that it has already replaced direct news use at scale (Newman et al., 2024; Newman, 2026).

The AI output need not be epistemically equivalent to the source in order to become behaviorally attractive. It only needs to satisfy a practical threshold of orientation in a context where time is scarce, interruptions are frequent and rapid response is socially expected. This threshold is crucial for latency mismatch. If the user's immediate goal is to know what happened, why it matters or what the main arguments are, an AI-generated answer may

appear functionally sufficient even when it omits evidence, uncertainty, rhetorical structure or source-level nuance.

AI-mediated access may also change the perceived cost of verification. Users may understand abstractly that AI outputs require checking, but the convenience of immediate synthesis can reduce the likelihood that they will return to the original article, document or dataset. Striphas (2015) argues that algorithmic culture involves the delegation of cultural judgment to computational systems, and Noble (2018) demonstrates that such delegation can reproduce structural inequalities under the appearance of neutral information retrieval. AI-mediated news access extends this problem into the temporality of interpretation: rapid outputs may displace slower encounters with evidence, ambiguity and contradiction.

This does not imply that AI should be rejected as a degraded substitute for reading. AI systems can support accessibility, translation, explanation and inclusive participation, particularly for users who face linguistic, cognitive, institutional or practical barriers to extended textual engagement. The problem emerges when compression becomes the default relation to knowledge and when the grounds of selection, omission and synthesis remain opaque. Under these conditions, latency mismatch widens because the high-latency practice must justify its delay against a low-latency alternative that appears functionally adequate.

Low-latency orientation can, however, operate through more than one pathway. It may substitute for source-level engagement when the user perceives the compressed output as sufficient, but it may also function as a gateway when rapid orientation increases relevance, curiosity or confidence and directs the user toward the underlying source. Audience research showing that browsing and clicking decisions are pragmatically situated, together with the PINGS framework's emphasis on diverse news-use environments, supports treating substitution and gateway effects as competing possibilities rather than assuming displacement (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

4.4. Formal Specification of the Latency Mismatch Mechanism

Latency mismatch names the relational mechanism that connects the temporal structure of media environments to the differential viability of cognitive and communicative practices. It occurs when the time a practice requires to generate stable understanding exceeds the time budget that an environment makes available, rewards or treats as reasonable, particularly when lower-latency alternatives provide sufficient functional equivalence for immediate purposes. This definition contains three elements: the temporal requirement of the practice, the response expectation of the environment and the availability of substitutes that satisfy enough of the user's goal at lower temporal cost.

Functional equivalence is analytically divided into perceived functional equivalence and objective or epistemic equivalence. Perceived functional equivalence exists when the user judges a faster alternative to be good enough for the immediate task. Objective or epistemic equivalence concerns whether that alternative actually preserves the evidence, context, uncertainty and argumentative structure relevant to the task. Latency mismatch can therefore influence selection even when perceived equivalence is high and objective equivalence is low; this distinction prevents user sufficiency judgments from being conflated with epistemic adequacy.

The mechanism can be specified through five supporting concepts: continuity interval, temporal friction, substitution pressure, functional equivalence and temporal governance. These concepts are analytically separable but practically interdependent. A long continuity interval can protect a high-latency practice even when substitutes exist. Low temporal friction can make sustained engagement easier even in a crowded media environment. High substitution pressure can destabilize a practice even when users continue to value

it. Latency mismatch is theorized to intensify when continuity intervals shrink, temporal friction rises and substitutes become normalized as adequate routes to orientation.

These relationships are propositions of the conceptual synthesis rather than empirically established effects. Their value lies in specifying conditions that can be independently measured and tested.

To synthesize the theoretical contribution developed throughout the article, Figure 1 presents the latency mismatch framework as an integrated conceptual model. The figure summarizes the sequential relationship between platformized media environments, the temporal expectations they cultivate, the emergence of latency mismatch as a mechanism of temporal selection, and its consequences for the selection of communicative practices and the production of public knowledge.

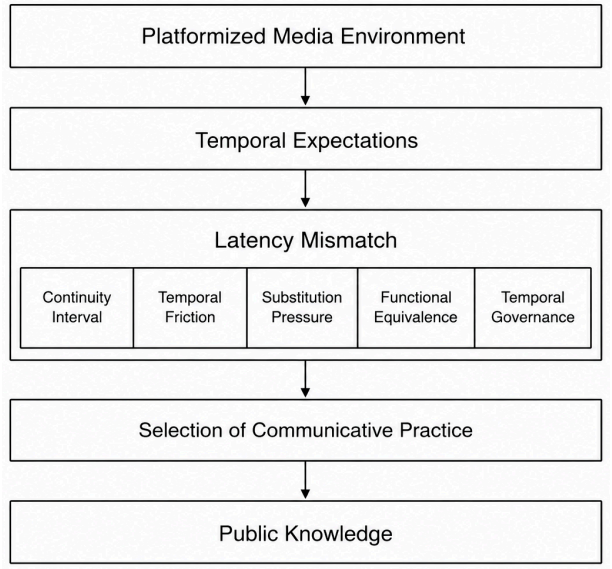


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of latency mismatch in platformized journalism and media environments.

Figure 1 should be interpreted as a conceptual synthesis rather than as an empirically validated causal model. It illustrates the central theoretical claim of this article: platformized media environments increasingly shape not only what information becomes visible but also the temporal conditions under which communicative practices remain viable. The framework proposes that, through latency mismatch, media infrastructures may progressively influence which pathways to public orientation are more likely to be selected, thereby reshaping the conditions through which public knowledge is constructed.

To clarify the theoretical architecture of the proposed framework, Table 1 summarizes its five core concepts and illustrates how each operates within contemporary journalism and media environments. Rather than functioning as independent variables, these concepts describe interdependent dimensions through which platformized media temporally organize the viability of communicative practices.

Taken together, these concepts specify the internal structure of the latency mismatch framework. They demonstrate that the mechanism cannot be reduced to individual attention or technological speed alone. Instead, latency mismatch emerges from the interaction between the temporal requirements of communicative practices, the temporal expectations embedded in media environments, and the growing availability of functionally sufficient low-latency alternatives.

Table 1. Core concepts in the latency mismatch framework.

Concept	Definition	Journalism and Media Example	Conceptual Grounding/Derivation
Continuity interval	The amount of uninterrupted time users can realistically devote to a practice before switching pressures or opportunity costs become decisive.	Time available to read an investigative report before alerts, work messages, feeds or alternative summaries interrupt the practice.	Author-derived synthesis; informed by media-practice and temporal-affordance scholarship (Couldry, 2004, pp. 115–132; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018, pp. 37–55) and social-time scholarship (Sharma, 2014).
Temporal friction	The additional time and attention required to remain with a practice when interfaces, navigation systems or competing options make continuity effortful.	Hyperlinks, ads, live updates, recommendation panels and device notifications that make sustained news reading harder to preserve.	Author-derived synthesis; informed by cognitive-load and digital-reading research (Sweller, 2011, pp. 37–76; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022, pp. 171–196; Jayes et al., 2022, e0263669).
Substitution pressure	The attractiveness of alternative practices or tools that deliver enough orientation at lower delay.	Choosing an AI summary, short video, headline thread or podcast recap instead of a full article.	Author-derived synthesis; informed by situated news-use and information-environment research (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018, pp. 668–683; Kümpel, 2022, pp. 223–242).
Functional equivalence	The practical threshold at which a faster alternative appears good enough for the user's immediate goal, even if it is not epistemically equivalent. Perceived functional equivalence concerns user-judged sufficiency; objective or epistemic equivalence concerns whether the alternative actually preserves task-relevant evidence, context and argument.	A two-paragraph briefing that answers what happened and why it matters without exposing the evidence or argument structure.	Author-derived distinction. Perceived equivalence concerns user-judged sufficiency; objective/epistemic equivalence concerns task-relevant evidential adequacy. Informed by situated news-use research (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018, pp. 668–683; Kümpel, 2022, pp. 223–242), news-literacy scholarship (Tully et al., 2022, pp. 1589–1606), and human–machine communication research (Guzman & Lewis, 2020, pp. 70–86).
Temporal governance	The organization of expected intervals of response, value and attention by media infrastructures, institutions and norms.	Platforms and AI systems making rapid explanation appear ordinary, thereby redefining longer interpretive delay as friction.	Author-derived synthesis; informed by acceleration, temporal politics and platform governance (Rosa, 2013; Sharma, 2014; Wajcman, 2015; van Dijck et al., 2018).

Note. The five definitions in Table 1 are author-derived conceptual syntheses rather than verbatim definitions adopted from the cited works. The sources and page ranges identify the principal conceptual grounding; they should not be read as textual sources for the exact wording of the definitions.

As summarized in Table 1, each construct is anchored in an adjacent body of scholarship, while the contribution of the present framework lies in combining them into a single relational account of practice selection.

Latency mismatch differs from distraction because it explains selection rather than merely interruption. A distracted reader may fail to continue because attention is pulled away. A user experiencing latency mismatch may choose not to enter sustained reading at all because the environment has made another route appear more reasonable. This

distinction matters for journalism. The weakening of sustained news reading is often diagnosed after the fact as a failure to persist. Latency mismatch directs attention to the prior comparison among available practices.

The selection may be locally rational and structurally consequential at the same time. If an AI response can provide a structured explanation within seconds, or if a short video can provide adequate gist before a long article has developed its context, the user does not simply abandon attention. The user selects among temporal pathways to orientation. That choice may make sense within a busy day, but repeated across platforms, institutions and publics can alter the social status of high-latency practices.

The pathway is therefore conditional rather than deterministic: a low-latency option is theorized to function as a substitute when perceived functional equivalence is sufficient for the immediate goal, but as a gateway when it increases relevance and directs the user toward higher-latency engagement (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

Latency mismatch can vary by degree. Low mismatch occurs when a practice's temporal requirements align with environmental expectations, as when a breaking-news alert provides immediate value within the expected interval of the medium. Moderate mismatch occurs when a practice requires more continuity than the environment easily provides but remains sustainable through habit, professional obligation, institutional support or strong motivation. High mismatch occurs when a practice requires continuity that the environment repeatedly interrupts, devalues or renders costly, while substitutes deliver sufficient orientation more quickly. Sustained engagement with long-form journalism may frequently occupy this third condition in everyday platformized media environments, although the degree of mismatch varies across users, institutions, issues and tasks.

The low, moderate and high categories are conceptual expectations to be operationalized empirically, not observed categories established by this paper.

This formulation clarifies the relation between media power and cognitive practice. Platform power is not only the capacity to rank content, extract data, shape markets or moderate expression. It is also the capacity to stabilize temporal expectations by repeatedly rewarding particular intervals of engagement. Chun (2016) argues that new media are organized through habits that update while remaining structurally repetitive. Applied to the present framework, this insight suggests that repeated exposure may normalize expectations that useful outputs should arrive quickly, that switching remains available and that delay signals inefficiency. Latency mismatch is therefore theorized to convert media temporality into a form of governance when these expectations systematically shape the comparative selection of communicative practices. This extension complements rather than replaces established accounts of platform and algorithmic power (Gillespie, 2010; Bucher, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018).

5. Discussion: Reconfiguring News Use, Journalism and Public Knowledge

5.1. Redistribution of Interpretive Labor and Preprocessed Orientation

Once latency mismatch is understood as a mechanism of temporal selection, the apparent decline of sustained reading can be reinterpreted as part of a wider reconfiguration of news use and public knowledge. Users do not simply stop thinking, learning or seeking orientation. They redistribute cognitive labor across practices that fit the temporal organization of their media environments. Skimming, scanning, listening, watching, prompting and summary consumption are not merely signs of collapse. They are adaptive responses to environments in which rapid orientation is useful, interruption is common and the opportunity cost of extended engagement is repeatedly made visible (Costera Meijer, 2020; Swart et al., 2022; Büchi, 2024).

Skimming provides an instructive example because it is often moralized as shallow reading, yet empirical research shows that it can be an adaptive strategy for online environments (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014, 2020; Jayes et al., 2022). From the perspective of latency mismatch, skimming is a temporal compromise. It preserves some relation to the original text while reducing the delay required to identify relevance. Its value is practical, but its cost is that inferential depth and recursive integration may be reduced. The user remains within text, but not within the same temporal relation to text.

Short-form audiovisual explanation represents a different adaptation. It does not simply reduce reading time; it reorganizes interpretation through voice, image, pacing, affect and platform circulation. Such formats may support understanding, especially when they provide entry points into complex topics or when users benefit from multimodal explanation. Yet they also shift the relation between audience and argument. The user receives a sequence curated for quick uptake, often shaped by platform attention economies and expectations of immediate engagement (Schellewald, 2023; Kümpel, 2022).

AI-mediated querying is the most consequential adaptation because it can simulate the outcome of interpretation without requiring users to traverse the original sequence through which the interpretation would otherwise be built. The user can ask for main claims, implications, counterarguments, examples, definitions or applications, and the system can produce a coherent response that appears to organize the material on the user's behalf. In some contexts this supports learning and accessibility. In others it weakens the user's encounter with evidence, uncertainty and argumentative structure.

Human–machine communication research supports treating this process as a redistribution of communicative and interpretive agency rather than as the disappearance of interpretation (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hepp, 2020).

The broader cultural shift is from interpretive construction toward preprocessed orientation. This does not mean that construction disappears. Users still interpret AI responses, platform feeds, podcasts, short videos and summaries. However, the starting point changes. Instead of entering an original object and building coherence across its structure, users increasingly begin with outputs that have already compressed, ranked or synthesized the object. This alters the balance between agency and mediation. It can expand access for some users while reducing the routine practice of reconstructing arguments for others.

The contrast should therefore not be read as a binary between interpretation and non-interpretation. Users continue to interpret compressed outputs; what changes is how much prior work of selection, sequencing, contextualization and synthesis has already been performed by journalists, platforms or AI systems before the user encounters the output. "Preprocessed orientation" is used here to denote that redistribution of interpretive labor (Lewis et al., 2019; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

The implications of latency mismatch become particularly visible when different journalistic formats are compared according to their temporal characteristics rather than their informational quality alone. Table 2 summarizes the principal routes through which contemporary audiences achieve public orientation and highlights the distinct temporal profiles, communicative contributions and mismatch risks associated with each.

Table 2 makes this comparison explicit by showing that routes to public orientation differ not only in speed but also in where selection, synthesis and evidential exposure occur.

The comparison illustrates that latency mismatch is not a criticism of rapid information formats. Alerts, explainers, podcasts and AI-generated briefings all perform valuable communicative functions within contemporary media ecosystems. The theoretical issue is that, as these formats increasingly become the default pathways to public orientation, high-latency practices such as sustained investigative reading or long-form

analysis may lose their ordinary environmental fit despite retaining their epistemic and democratic importance.

As Table 2 indicates, the relevant risk is route-specific rather than a general indictment of low-latency communication.

Table 2. Temporal routes to public orientation in platformized journalism and media.

Route to Orientation	Temporal Profile	Contribution	Latency Mismatch Risk
Long-form reporting or analysis	High latency; value emerges through sustained sequence, evidence and context.	Supports source-level judgment, complexity and accountability.	May be avoided when faster summaries appear adequate.
Live updates and alerts	Very low latency; value appears through immediacy and event awareness.	Supports urgent public awareness and responsiveness.	May fragment context and privilege novelty over integration.
Short-form explainers	Low-to-moderate latency; value appears through curated compression.	Provides accessible entry points and multimodal explanation.	May substitute for source engagement without evidential depth.
Podcasts and audio briefings	Variable latency; can be compressed or extended depending on format.	Can support intimacy, routine and contextual explanation.	May convert complex issues into digestible but selective narratives.
AI-generated briefings	Very low latency; value appears as on-demand synthesis.	Supports personalization, translation and rapid comparison.	May obscure selection, omission, source hierarchy and uncertainty.

5.2. Cognitive Agency and Journalistic Authority

The first implication concerns cognitive agency. Sustained news reading is not valuable only because it conveys information. It is valuable because it leaves significant responsibility for coherence, relevance and judgment with the reader. The reader must follow an account through its own sequence, encounter its evidence, identify omissions, compare claims and decide how parts of the argument relate to one another. This is not the only way citizens can learn, and reading should not be romanticized as an automatic source of democratic judgment. Nevertheless, sustained engagement remains one of the practices through which publics encounter the evidential and argumentative structure of journalism (Wolf, 2018; OECD, 2021; Tully et al., 2022).

Low-latency media can support agency when they provide access, orientation and alternative entry points. They can reduce exclusion for users who lack time, background knowledge or linguistic access. They can also help audiences identify which issues merit deeper engagement. But they can reduce agency when preprocessed outputs become the ordinary form through which meaning arrives and when users lose contact with the selection processes that produced those outputs. Bodó's (2021) account of mediated trust is relevant here because technological intermediaries do not merely transmit information. They reorganize the conditions under which trust is formed. Latency mismatch extends this point by showing that trust is also temporal: users may accept outputs partly because they arrive quickly enough to satisfy immediate need.

The concept also helps explain changes in journalistic authority. Carlson (2017) argues that journalistic authority must be legitimated, not assumed. In platformized environments, authority is increasingly encountered through intermediaries: search rankings, social feeds, platform labels, recommendation systems, influencers, newsletters, podcasts and AI outputs. Latency mismatch adds a temporal dimension to this process. Journalistic authority may become less directly grounded in the audience's encounter with reporting

and more dependent on compressed forms of orientation that summarize, rank or reframe journalism before users engage with the original text.

This does not mean that authority disappears. It may be redistributed. Journalists may gain authority through explanatory formats, audio intimacy, transparent process, metajournalistic narration or visible expertise. Yet the temporal conditions of authority change when users encounter journalism after it has already been compressed by platforms or AI systems. The challenge for journalism is therefore not only to be accurate, trustworthy and independent, but to make its evidential labor legible within media environments that reward faster routes to relevance.

This interpretation is consistent with news-literacy scholarship, which treats users as capable of exercising control over their relationship with news, while extending that work by foregrounding whether the temporal conditions for source-level judgment are available in the first place (Tully et al., 2022; Vraga & Tully, 2021).

5.3. Public Culture and Temporal Inequality

The second implication concerns public culture. Democratic and public knowledge practices require more than exposure to information. They require capacities to follow extended arguments, tolerate ambiguity, compare sources and resist immediately satisfying formulations. These capacities are not produced by reading alone, and compressed formats can contribute meaningfully to public debate. The problem is ecological. If media environments increasingly privilege gist, summary and rapid synthesis, public culture may become more efficient at delivering orientation while becoming less hospitable to shared deliberation around complex problems (Tully et al., 2022; Vraga & Tully, 2021; Barnhurst & Nightingale, 2018).

This issue is especially important for journalism because public-interest reporting often depends on delayed payoff. Investigative projects, policy analysis, climate reporting, corruption investigations, science journalism and legal reporting frequently require audiences to move through context before reaching practical conclusions. The value of such journalism often appears only after connections have been built across time. Latency mismatch helps explain why such work can remain normatively valued while becoming harder to sustain as an ordinary audience practice (Barnhurst & Nightingale, 2018; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2015).

The third implication concerns inequality. Temporal conditions are unevenly distributed. Sharma (2014) argues that social time is politically differentiated, while Wajcman (2015) shows that digital speed interacts with work rhythms, gendered labor and institutional demands rather than accelerating everyone in the same way. van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) similarly demonstrate that digital inequality extends beyond access to devices and includes material conditions that shape the benefits users can derive from connectivity. Latency mismatch adds that inequality is also cognitive-temporal.

Users with secure work, quiet spaces, institutional support and control over their schedules are better positioned to protect continuity intervals for high-latency practices. Users living under precarious, fragmented or highly monitored conditions may be structurally pushed toward compressed modes of orientation even when they value deeper engagement. This point complicates moralizing accounts of news avoidance or shallow media use. A person may know how to evaluate sources and still lack the continuity required to do so. A student may understand the limits of AI-generated summaries and still rely on them because institutional time pressures reward output over interpretive process (Sharma, 2014; Wajcman, 2015; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019).

Digital literacy should therefore be conceptualized as a temporal capacity as well as an evaluative skill. Literacy requires knowing how to check sources, assess credibility, com-

pare accounts and use AI systems critically. It also requires conditions under which such practices can be exercised. Media literacy programs that teach verification without addressing continuity intervals, device environments, platform incentives and institutional time pressure risk placing responsibility on individuals while leaving the temporal organization of media environments unexamined.

This formulation extends established news-literacy accounts rather than replacing them. Knowledge of production, circulation and credibility remains essential, but the exercise of those competencies also depends on continuity, device conditions and institutional time budgets (Tully et al., 2022; Vraga & Tully, 2021).

5.4. Implications for Journalistic Design and Media Governance

A latency mismatch perspective also has practical implications for journalism, platform design and media governance. If media systems govern temporally, then interventions cannot focus only on content quality, fact-checking or source transparency. They must also consider how infrastructures organize the time available for interpretation. For news organizations, this may involve designing pathways from low-latency orientation to high-latency engagement rather than treating summaries and long-form reporting as competing products. A short explainer, alert or AI-assisted briefing can function as an entry point if it preserves visible routes back to evidence, sources and full context.

This implication is consistent with audience-centered journalism research that argues for designing around situated news-use practices rather than assuming a single ideal mode of engagement (Costera Meijer, 2020; Swart et al., 2022).

Journalistic design can also reduce temporal friction. Reading modes, clear structure, contextual sidebars, estimated reading times, stable source links, transparent update histories and summary boxes that do not displace the full argument may help users sustain engagement. The point is not to slow all media down, but to protect transitions between quick orientation and deeper interpretation. In low-latency environments, the design challenge is to prevent compression from severing the connection between output and evidence.

These design principles are also consistent with cognitive-load and digital-reading research showing that navigation burden, time pressure and interface structure can influence comprehension and strategy (Sweller, 2011; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022; OECD, 2021).

For AI-mediated news access, the implication is that provenance and temporality should be designed together. AI summaries should not only identify sources; they should make visible what kind of interpretive delay has been compressed. They should indicate whether an answer is based on a single article, multiple sources, a live event, an outdated corpus or a journalistic investigation. They should support return paths to original reporting and make uncertainty visible rather than presenting fluency as finality. Such design principles would not eliminate latency mismatch, but they could reduce the degree to which low-latency outputs displace source-level engagement.

This extends work on mediated trust and human–machine communication by treating the compressed temporal relation between an output and its evidential basis as part of transparency itself (Bodó, 2021; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

For platforms and regulators, latency mismatch suggests that public-interest media policy should consider the temporal conditions of exposure and interpretation. Ranking systems, notification defaults, recommender designs and AI answer interfaces shape not only what users see but how long they are expected to remain with any route to meaning. Media governance debates often focus on misinformation, transparency, competition and data protection. These remain essential, but they should be supplemented by attention to the temporal architecture of public knowledge.

The proposal therefore complements established platform-governance scholarship by adding temporal architecture to concerns about ranking, datafication, moderation and public value (Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck et al., 2018; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

6. Boundary Conditions, Limitations and Future Research

Latency mismatch does not imply that high-latency practices are universally displaced, nor that low-latency environments uniformly undermine cognitive depth. The mechanism is theorized to be relevant under specific conditions that must be analytically specified in order to avoid overgeneralization. It is most relevant where a practice requires delayed stabilization of meaning, where environmental response expectations are shorter than that requirement and where lower-latency substitutes provide enough functional equivalence for immediate tasks. It is less relevant in situations where the value of a practice is itself tied to duration and where users enter the practice for experience rather than orientation, as in some forms of literary reading, long-form listening, documentary viewing, gaming or ritualized media consumption. This conditional formulation is consistent with evidence that news-use practices are heterogeneous and that low-latency encounters can function either as substitutes or as gateways to further engagement (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018; Kümpel, 2022).

The mechanism is also less straightforward where institutions strongly protect high-latency practices. Legal analysis, specialized scholarship, medical review, investigative reporting teams and professional procedures may preserve continuity through accountability norms and organizational routines. Even in these contexts, however, mismatch may emerge when compressed tools are introduced as preliminary or substitute pathways. A newsroom may still value investigative depth while relying on analytics dashboards, AI summaries or platform metrics that reshape how time is allocated and justified (Sharma, 2014; Wajcman, 2015).

Latency mismatch varies across expertise. Expert readers may experience lower temporal friction because they possess stronger genre knowledge, prior schemas and strategies for navigating difficulty. Novices may experience high mismatch more quickly because the practice requires more effort before reward becomes visible. Yet expertise can also increase mismatch in contexts where experts recognize that adequate interpretation requires more time than institutional or platform conditions allow. The concept is therefore relational rather than individualizing: it describes the fit between practice, competence, infrastructure and expectation (Sweller, 2011; Habók et al., 2024; OECD, 2021).

The article's limitations follow from its conceptual design. It does not provide new empirical measurement of continuity intervals, temporal friction, substitution pressure or functional equivalence. It synthesizes existing studies to develop a mechanism that can guide future research, but it cannot by itself establish causal relations among platform use, AI-mediated access, news reading and public understanding. It also risks overgeneralization if low-latency media are treated as a single homogeneous environment (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005). Platforms differ, news genres differ, users appropriate systems in situated ways and compressed formats can support as well as undermine understanding.

Future research can operationalize the framework in several ways. Continuity intervals can be studied through time-use diaries, device logs, observational research or ethnographic accounts of when users are able to remain with demanding news or informational tasks. Temporal friction can be measured through interruptions, navigation steps, notification exposure, interface switching and subjective reports of effort required to maintain continuity. Substitution pressure can be examined by comparing when users choose full texts, summaries, short videos, podcasts or AI-generated responses for similar informational goals.

Operationalization should distinguish perceived from objective or epistemic functional equivalence and should record whether a low-latency encounter terminates an information-seeking episode or initiates movement toward a higher-latency source.

Experimental studies could vary time pressure and availability of AI summaries to test whether users shift away from reading even when they expect deeper comprehension from the original text. Survey research could examine whether users who value journalism nevertheless rely on compressed orientation because of time pressure or platform routines. Newsroom ethnographies could investigate how editorial teams design connections between alerts, summaries, explainers and long-form reporting. Comparative research could examine whether latency mismatch varies across political systems, media markets, age groups, languages and levels of institutional trust.

A particularly important test would compare substitution and gateway conditions by varying whether summaries preserve visible links, provenance cues and invitations to inspect underlying evidence.

The framework also invites normative research. Scholars can ask which high-latency practices are essential for public culture, which can be responsibly compressed and which should be protected by institutions. Not all delay is valuable, and not all compression is harmful. The point is to make temporality visible as an object of analysis. Journalism and media studies need concepts that can distinguish between speed that expands access and speed that erodes the conditions of judgment (Tully et al., 2022; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

7. Conclusions

This article has argued that platformized journalism and media environments reorganize cognitive and communicative practices through temporal selection. The weakening of sustained news reading should not be understood simply as a loss of attention, motivation or cultural seriousness. It should be understood as one instance of a broader mismatch between practices that require continuity before yielding stable understanding and environments that increasingly normalize low-delay access to relevance (Rosa, 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

Latency mismatch contributes to journalism and media studies by naming the mechanism through which this loss of fit occurs. It links attention scarcity, cognitive load, digital reading, acceleration, platformization, AI-mediated communication and news use without reducing one to the other. The concept shows that media power operates not only through visibility, data extraction, representation, persuasion or moderation, but through the organization of temporal expectations that make some practices easier to sustain than others. It therefore reframes debates about digital distraction, news avoidance and reading decline around a more structural question: whether media and institutional environments preserve the durations that certain forms of public knowledge require.

Relative to temporal-affordance scholarship, the added claim is specifically relational: temporal possibilities and constraints become selection pressures when the requirements of a practice, normalized continuity intervals and perceived functional substitutes no longer align. Latency mismatch therefore extends temporal analysis from the properties and affordances of news forms to the comparative viability of alternative communicative practices (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2018).

The stakes extend beyond reading. As AI systems and platform infrastructures increasingly provide compressed pathways to orientation, societies must decide whether high-latency practices will remain ordinary, protected and institutionally valued, or whether they will become specialized privileges available mainly to those with time, resources and authority. Low-latency access can expand participation, but it can also redistribute interpre-

tive labor away from users and toward systems whose operations are opaque and unevenly governed. The future of journalism and media culture will therefore depend not only on what information circulates, but on how the durations of knowing are organized, valued and made available (Sharma, 2014; Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Tully et al., 2022).

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