# Exploring the antecedents of news avoidance behavior among university students in Pakistan

**Filza Imran**[1],
University of South Asia, Pakistan
**Farahat Ali**,
Beaconhouse National University, Pakistan

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## Abstract

News avoidance has emerged as a growing concern, influencing how information is received, shaping civic engagement, and forming individual perspectives. This study investigates the key factors contributing to this behavior, particularly in the evolving media landscape where traditional news sources face increasing competition from digital platforms. Conducted across six universities in two metropolitan cities in Pakistan, the research aims to explore the complexities of news avoidance behaviors through a survey-based methodology with a purposive sampling approach. A total of 558 university students participated in the study, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of diverse variables influencing news consumption habits. The study examines critical factors, including news overload, news fatigue, the perception of "news finding the individual", trust in news sources, political interest, news efficacy, negativity in news, and information overload. These variables were systematically analyzed to determine their influence on news avoidance. Among them, two significant predictors emerged: news fatigue and the perception that "news finds me". These findings highlight the intersection of media consumption habits and individual traits, providing deeper insights into the behavior of university students in Pakistan. By identifying the key drivers of news avoidance, this research contributes to the theoretical framework of media studies while offering practical recommendations for fostering greater engagement with news. Addressing the psychological and

[1] **Corresponding author:**
Farahat Ali, Beaconhouse National University, Pakistan.
E-mail: farahat.ali@bnu.edu.pk

behavioral dimensions of news consumption can help develop strategies to encourage informed and active participation in news discourse, particularly in an era of rapidly evolving digital media.

## Keywords
News avoidance, news consumption, news engagement, political interest, Pakistan.

## Introduction
The modern media environment has experienced remarkable changes in how news is consumed, driven by the swift progression of digital technologies. Although news is now more readily accessible than in the past, allowing for consumption at any time and location, it has also given rise to a significant trend: news avoidance. News avoidance is the deliberate and persistent avoidance of news content through selective exposure or complete disengagement (Palmer, & Toff, 2020; Stroud, 2010; Mitchelstein, & Boczkowski, 2010). News avoidance is a significant phenomenon, particularly among the younger generation. Research suggests that individuals who actively avoid news have pre-existing perspectives about news that shape their attitudes and behaviour (Toff, & Nielsen, 2022). This news avoidance behaviour among people seems to be new, but early research has also traced this concept. Early research, such as Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (2000) and Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) highlighted how individual characteristics influence news consumption and avoidance. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identified reasons for news avoidance, including perceptions of irrelevance, negativity, and bias. Zaller (2004) noted that news is avoided when perceived costs outweigh benefits. The role of social media in news avoidance has also been explored, with Pentina, Covault, and Tarafdar (2016) finding that social media users are less likely to avoid news due to the personalized nature of content. Recent studies, especially post-COVID-19, have shown a nuanced relationship between anxiety levels and news consumption (Newman et al., 2021; Nielsen et al., 2020).

In literature, various factors have been identified as precursors of news avoidance. These factors encompass news overload, political interests, trust in news media, and the concept of "News Finds Me" (Bruine de Bruin, Saw, & Goldman, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga, & Diehl, 2019). Furthermore, news fatigue has emerged as a principal motivator, leading individuals to refrain from news consumption as a coping strategy (Fitzpatrick, Harris, & Drawve, 2020). Additionally, family characteristics and news habits have been associated with

news avoidance behavior (Shehata, 2016). Scholars have now categorized news avoidance into intentional, driven by negative sentiments towards news, and unintentional, stemming from a preference for other media content (Bode, 2016; Prior, 2005; Skovsgaard, & Andersen, 2020). Some other factors contributing to this trend include the overwhelming volume of news, especially on topics like politics and COVID-19, and the negative emotional impact of news consumption (Newman et al., 2022). This phenomenon is observed not only in Western countries but also in Pakistan, where issues like media manipulation and information overload during the pandemic have exacerbated news avoidance (Rathore, & Farooq, 2020; Adam et al., 2023).

Pakistan offers a unique and compelling setting for studying news avoidance, particularly in light of its vibrant yet highly complex media environment. The country has witnessed a rapid evolution in its media industry over the past two decades, transitioning from state-dominated broadcasting to a landscape with over 90 private television channels and a rapidly expanding digital news sector (Mulla, 2020). While this proliferation has enhanced access to information, it has also intensified the saturation of political content, sensationalist reporting, and frequent ethical controversies. The Pakistani news cycle is often dominated by coverage of political instability, security threats, and national crises, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and news fatigue among consumers (Saeed et al., 2021). These dynamics are exacerbated by deep-seated challenges such as state influence over editorial decisions, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and fierce competition for audience attention, all of which contribute to diminishing public trust in mainstream media (Akhtar, & Pratt, 2016). As a result, patterns of disengagement and selective news avoidance have become increasingly visible, particularly among younger, digitally active populations.

Within this context, the present study investigates the antecedents of news avoidance among university students in the metropolitan city of Lahore and the industrial city of Sialkot, two urban centers that offer contrasting yet insightful perspectives on youth media behavior. The study adapts and tests motivational factors previously identified in Western contexts to assess their relevance and explanatory power within Pakistan's distinct socio-political environment. Through this, the research aims to uncover the unique drivers of news avoidance in Pakistan and contribute to the global literature on this phenomenon. Guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), the study posits that media consumption, and avoidance, is an active, purposive behavior shaped by individuals' needs.

## Literature review

News overload pertains to the sensation of being inundated by the abundance and regularity of news materials, contributing to detrimental impacts on mental well-being, including feelings of unease, tension, and weariness. This phenomenon can be attributed to the continuous 24-hour news cycle, the pervasiveness of news across social media platforms, and the incessant notifications originating from news applications. In essence, "news overload" signifies an excessive accumulation of news content or processed information in various spheres (Holton, & Chyi, 2012; Vartanova, 2025). The proliferation of news across social media has raised concerns about news overload, leading to news avoidance (Zhang et al., 2022; Dunas, & Babyna, 2024). Studies show a positive correlation between news overload and news avoidance, where the overwhelming volume of news prompts individuals to withdraw from news consumption (Park, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, news avoidance served as a coping strategy, though it also negatively impacted civic engagement (Ohme et al., 2022). Attitudes toward news media influence avoidance behaviors, with negative perceptions correlating with higher avoidance (Edgerly, 2022; Rabeson et al., 2024; Javed et al., 2025). Thus, news overload's relationship with news avoidance is multifaceted, involving perceptions, attitudes, and coping mechanisms. So, to test this relationship between news avoidance and news overload based on the literary evidence, the following is suggested:

*H1: News overload is positively associated with news avoidance*

The "News Finds Me" (NFM) perception, identified by Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl (2019), refers to individuals' belief that they do not need to actively seek news because they expect to receive pertinent updates through social media networks. This shift in news consumption habits has been facilitated by the rise of social media and personalized news algorithms. Research by Strauß Huber and Gil de Zúñiga (2021) shows that heavy social media use, large social networks, and active political discussions increase the likelihood of adopting the NFM perception, whereas older age, higher education, and belonging to priority ethnic groups decrease it. Segado-Boj et al. (2019) found that the NFM perception correlates positively with news consumption but not with news sharing, indicating that while individuals may consume more news passively, it doesn't necessarily lead to increased sharing. Similar trends in passive news consumption were observed in a study by Vu (2025), which examined news consumption patterns among Vietnamese media students, highlighting the dominance of smartphone-centric and social media-driven news engagement. Recent studies have linked the NFM perception with news avoidance, suggesting

that individuals who expect news to find them are less proactive in seeking news and more likely to avoid it (Goyanes et al., 2023).

*H2: News Finds Me is positively associated with news avoidance*

Political interests refer to the attitudes, beliefs, and values that individuals or groups hold regarding political issues, policies, and decision-making processes. In the book "Political Interest and Participation in Germany," the concept of political interest is given, which refers to the degree of attraction or concern an individual or group holds towards political issues, institutions, and processes. The author emphasizes that political interest is a complex construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements (Rebenstorf, 2013). Political interest significantly influences political behaviors and democratic engagement. It is a stable personal disposition and an intrinsic motivation that drives engagement in political activities, including news consumption (Blais, & St-Vincent, 2011; Lecheler, & de Vreese, 2017; Prior, 2010; Shah et al., 2007; Strömbäck, & Shehata, 2010). In media-rich environments, those with minimal political interest can easily avoid news in favor of entertainment, utilizing diverse media channels and tools to exclude political content from their consumption (Strömbäck et al., 2013; Prior, 2005). Conversely, those with high political interest increase their news consumption in these settings. A longitudinal study in Sweden (1986-2010) showed that as media options grew, political interest had a stronger positive impact on news engagement (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). Similarly, Prior (2005) found that in the U.S., access to a wide array of media options led to a preference for entertainment over news among individuals with low political interest, reducing their political knowledge.

*H3: Political interest is negatively associated with news avoidance*

As observed by Fisher (2018), there exists no unanimous agreement on the precise definition of trust in news media. Nevertheless, certain researchers have proffered their own explanations of trust in news media. According to a study by Newman et al. (2021), trust in news denotes the level of confidence individuals have in the precision, impartiality, and dependability of news organizations and the information they disseminate. This notion of trust in news is intricate and multifaceted, influenced by an array of factors such as political ideology, media literacy, and exposure to misinformation. It stands as a critical constituent within a robust democracy, facilitating well-informed decision-making and ensuring the accountability of elected representatives. Trust in news remains a multidimensional construct shaped by a diverse spectrum of factors, encompassing political

orientations, media aptitude, and encounters with misinformation. A primary driver of this behavior is a pervasive lack of trust in media and news content, even when verified for accuracy. Studies have revealed that distrust in media is a critical factor in news avoidance (Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; Islam, Das, & Tabassum, 2023). For example, a Reuters Institute survey found that many news avoiders cite mistrust as a key reason (Schrøder, 2015). This skepticism towards news media is also prevalent in Pakistan, where mistrust in electronic news media stems from biased reporting and sensationalism (Saeed et al., 2021). Similarly, distrust was a notable factor among Spanish respondents, where nearly 30% avoided news due to doubts about its truthfulness (Serrano-Puche, 2020). Cross-sectional studies affirm that trust in news is a significant predictor of news avoidance globally (Toff, & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Additionally, qualitative explorations highlight how distrust in corporate and governmental influences on news prompts some individuals to resist news consumption as a strategic choice (Woodstock, 2014). Thus, it is evident that media distrust substantially contributes to news avoidance, leading to the hypothesis four.

*H4: Trust in news is negatively associated with news avoidance*

News efficacy, similar to self-efficacy, refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to effectively find, understand, and use news. This concept has become crucial in today's complex media landscape. High news efficacy is associated with proactive information-seeking behaviors, whereas low news efficacy correlates with news avoidance (Park, 2019; Yan et al., 2016). Additionally, those with high news efficacy are better at managing cognitive loads and interruptions while consuming news (Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, & Polavin, 2020; Basoglu, Fuller, & Sweeney, 2009). Conversely, low news efficacy leads to increased news avoidance, particularly when individuals feel overwhelmed by news overload on social media (Park, 2019).

*H5: News efficacy is negatively associated with news avoidance*

News fatigue, the feeling of exhaustion from constant news exposure, has become a prevalent issue, particularly in the digital age. Studies have shown that repeated exposure to the same news issues and the overwhelming volume of news contribute significantly to news fatigue (Gurr, & Metag, 2021; Schumann, 2022). This fatigue often leads to news avoidance as a coping mechanism (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Surveys indicate that a significant portion of the population feels "worn out" by the amount of news available, particularly in crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic (Gottfried, 2020; Fletcher et

al., 2018). The relationship between news fatigue and news avoidance is well-documented, with individuals using avoidance to manage the cognitive burden and emotional distress caused by excessive news exposure (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2020). Hence, the hypothesis is:

*H6: News fatigue is positively associated with news avoidance*

Negativity in news, characterized by the predominance of negative content, has significant implications for news consumption behaviors. Exposure to negative news can increase stress and anxiety, prompting individuals to avoid news to preserve their emotional well-being (Boukes, & Vliegenhart, 2017; Wagner, & Boczkowski, 2019). This avoidance is particularly noted during crises, where the relentless focus on negative news can be overwhelming (Toff, & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; Ytre-Arne, & Moe, 2021). Studies indicate that demographic factors, such as gender and education, influence the propensity for news avoidance due to negativity (Grabe, & Kamhawi, 2006; Skovsgaard, & Andersen, 2019). Consequently, the hypothesis is:

*H7: Negativity in news is positively associated with news avoidance*

Information overload occurs when the volume of available information exceeds an individual's capacity to process it, leading to stress and decreased productivity (Allen, & Wilson, 2003; Bawden, & Robinson, 2009). In the context of news consumption, this overload can result in news avoidance as a strategy to cope with the cognitive burden (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2020). Studies highlight that excessive news from social media contributes to this phenomenon, affecting perceptions of journalistic norms and increasing susceptibility to misinformation (Lee, Kim, & Koh, 2016; Tandoc, & Kim, 2022). Strategies such as filtering and withdrawing are commonly used to manage information overload, but their effectiveness varies (Savolainen, 2007). Therefore, the hypothesis is:

*H8: Information overload is positively associated with news avoidance*

This research incorporates the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which elucidates why individuals select media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs. It emphasizes the active role of media selection in fulfilling these needs (Stark, & Schneiders 2022; Shestova et al., 2025). UGT helps understand news avoidance, linking it to factors like news overload, News Finds Me perception, political interests, media trust, news efficacy, negativity in news, news fatigue, and information overload. Studies show that news overload and fatigue positively correlate with news avoidance, while political interest and trust in news negatively correlate (Edgerly, 2022; Goyanes, Ardèvol-Abreu, & Gil de

Zúñiga, 2023). News Finds Me perception increases avoidance, as does low news efficacy, and negativity in news content leads to avoidance as a self-protection mechanism (Tsfati, & Cappella, 2003; Prior, 2010). UGT's framework is supported by research demonstrating that individuals avoid news to manage cognitive strain and emotional stress from excessive or negative news, seeking gratifications from more manageable and trustworthy sources (Ruggiero, 2000; Schumann, 2022).

## Sample and method

*Participants' characteristics*

This research utilized a cross-sectional survey design with a quantitative approach to investigate news avoidance among university students. Participants were enrolled in ADP, BS, MPhil, and PhD programs at six universities located in Lahore and Sialkot, two prominent cities in Pakistan. The selection of Lahore and Sialkot as research sites was guided by their contrasting socio-economic, media, and educational profiles, which allow for a more comprehensive understanding of news avoidance behaviors among university students in urban Pakistan. Lahore, the capital of Punjab and the country's second-largest city, serves as a major media hub, housing several leading news organizations, media schools, and cultural institutions. It is characterized by high media exposure, political discourse, and a diversified urban youth demographic (Chaudhary, & Abdullah, 2020; Saud, & Ashfaq, 2024). In contrast, Sialkot is a mid-sized industrial city known for its export-driven economy and conservative social structure, offering a different yet increasingly digitalizing context for media consumption (Rabia et al., 2020). By comparing student populations in these two cities, the study captures both high-density media environments and relatively peripheral urban experiences, enhancing the external validity of the findings across different types of Pakistani cities.

Furthermore, both cities have high student populations, with numerous public and private universities, making them ideal for purposive sampling focused on youth media behavior. To uphold diversity across academic disciplines, a purposive sampling technique was implemented, enhancing the findings' generalizability. This method effectively targeted individuals who were most pertinent to the study's goals while also capturing a wide range of news consumption and avoidance behaviors. Ultimately, 558 responses were gathered, as participants voluntarily completed the survey.

*Measures*

This study employed a structured questionnaire consisting of validated scales adapted from prior research to measure key constructs relevant to news

consumption and avoidance behaviors. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Constructs such as news avoidance, news fatigue, news overload, information overload, trust in news media, political interest, news efficacy, negativity in news, and news finds me perception were measured using established multi-item scales drawn from previous empirical studies. A summary of each construct, including the number of items used, conceptual focus, and original sources, is provided in *Table 1*.

*Table 1*

**Summary of constructs and measurement scales**

| Construct | Measurement description | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| News avoidance | Assesses the extent to which individuals intentionally avoid news and the reasons for avoidance | 5 | Pentina et al. (2015) |
| "News Finds Me" (NFM) | Measures the perception that news will automatically reach the individual without active search | 6 | Song, Gil de Zúñiga, & Boomgaarden (2020) |
| News overload | Evaluates feelings of being overwhelmed due to the volume and frequency of news exposure | 6 | Chen, & Masullo Chen (2019) |
| News fatigue | Assesses emotional exhaustion caused by repetitive news consumption; includes 3 additional adapted items | 9 | Song et al. (2017) plus adapted items |
| Information overload | Measures difficulty in processing excessive information from various sources | 15 | Chen, & Masullo Chen (2019); Beaudoin (2008); Eppler, & Mengis (2004) |
| Trust in news media | Measures confidence in the accuracy and reliability of news across print, electronic, and digital platforms | 5 | Watson, Peng, & Lewis (2019) |
| Political interest | Captures interest in political affairs and engagement with political news | 5 | Lee, & Kim (2017) |
| Negativity in news | Evaluates perceptions of news as overly negative and emotionally distressing | 7 | Bachleda et al. (2020); Goyanes et al. (2023) |
| News efficacy | Measures confidence in understanding, interpreting, and evaluating news content | 3 | Park (2019) |

*Source: Authors*

*Data collection*

The survey was administered in person at six universities in Lahore and Sialkot. Permission was obtained from university authorities prior to conducting the research. Printed questionnaires were distributed in lecture halls, and students were invited to voluntarily complete the survey within 15 to 20 minutes. In-person administration facilitated a high response rate and enabled clarification of any ambiguities. The study followed ethical guidelines, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality throughout data collection.

*Data analysis*

The data were analyzed with Smart PLS 4.1 version. First, the measurement model was checked for reliability and validity. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), and validity was checked with convergent validity using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). After the measurement model met the required standards, the structural model was tested. Path coefficients were examined using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples to see if the relationships between constructs were significant. R-squared ($R^2$) values showed how well the independent variables explained news avoidance. Effect size ($f^2$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2$) were also calculated to support the structural model. This analysis helped explain how news fatigue, news overload, and trust in news media relate to students' news consumption and avoidance.

## Results

This research study analyzes the demographic distribution and various factors influencing university students in Pakistan, aiming to understand the causes of news avoidance behavior. The information is categorized by gender, locality, qualification, and the university attended. A total of 558 university students were surveyed in Pakistan. These participants included 267 (around 47.8%) males, and 291 (about 52.2%) females. This indicates that the sample is relatively balanced in gender, with a slightly higher proportion of female respondents.

The participants in this study are from two primary cities: Lahore and Sialkot. Of the total respondents, 278 (about 49.8%) are from Lahore, and 280 (around 50.2%) from Sialkot, resulting in nearly equal representation from both areas. In this group, 45 respondents (approximately 8.1%) have completed an ADP, 501 (approximately 89.8%) hold BS degrees, and 12 (approximately 2.2%) have achieved MPhil degrees. In this case, most of the respondents possess a BS degree; however, fewer of them have completed either ADP or MPhil degrees.

The participants belong to different universities across Pakistan. The distribution within these institutions is: USKT: 126 respondents (approximately 22.6%), UMT Sialkot: 103 respondents (about 18.5%), GAUS: 45 respondents (around 8.1%), UCP: 121 respondents (approximately 21.7%), UOL: 103 respondents (about 18.5%), and UMT Lahore: 60 respondents (approximately 10.8%). The highest participation comes from USKT and UCP, while the least representation is from GAUS. Overall, this picture shows the demographic characteristics of university students in Pakistan who participated in this study on news avoidance behavior. The distribution of gender, locality, education level, and university attended provides a comprehensive account of the sample's composition, essential for deriving meaningful conclusions about factors underlying news avoidance behavior among Pakistani university students.

*Table 2* reports psychometric properties of the different survey constructs used in this study. It describes the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments used in the research. The measured constructs involve aspects related to news consumption behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses. Values of Cronbach's Alpha, which describe internal consistency, express the degree of homogeneity of items within each construct. All the constructs have a high internal consistency, ranging from a minimum of 0.73 to a maximum of 0.886. It means that the items within each construct are consistently measuring the intended latent variable. Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) underlines the reliability of the constructs by considering both the internal consistency of the items constituting the construct and the variance extracted by the latent variable. Values of both types of composite reliability are consistently high, ranging from 0.736 to 0.889, showing strong measurement consistency and reliability.

AVE represents the variance captured by the latent variable in contrast to the variance due to measurement error. The AVE values range from 0.512 to 0.727, surpassing the threshold of 0.5 recommended, which suggests sufficient convergent validity. This therefore indicates that the survey constructs have good psychometric properties, which also justifies the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments applied in measuring news consumption behaviours and attitudes. These findings reinforce the acceptability of the results of this study and further add to the robustness of the research output.

*Table 2*

**Reliability and validity of scales**

| Variables | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability (rho_a) | Composite reliability (rho_c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Information overload | 0.886 | 0.889 | 0.904 |
| Negativity in news | 0.848 | 0.861 | 0.884 |
| News avoidance | 0.773 | 0.774 | 0.846 |
| News efficacy | 0.812 | 0.821 | 0.889 |
| News fatigue | 0.827 | 0.845 | 0.87 |
| "News Finds Me" | 0.73 | 0.736 | 0.817 |
| News overload | 0.809 | 0.827 | 0.861 |
| Political interest | 0.854 | 0.828 | 0.888 |
| Trust in news | 0.781 | 0.79 | 0.848 |

*Source: Authors*

Direct effects of different news consumption factors on news avoidance, as proposed by the structural model analysis in SmartPLS, are shown in *Table 3*. From the significant predictors, news fatigue turned out to be a strong determinant of news avoidance, with a positive effect size, $\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$, and a T-value of $t = 5.48$. Correspondingly, "News Finds Me" perception had the most substantial positive effect on news avoidance, $\beta = 0.321$, $p < 0.001$, supported by a T-value of $t = 6.776$. These results point towards the fact that individuals who feel fatigued due to news and those relying on passive news consumption through social networks are more likely to avoid news.

In contrast, a number of factors did not have a statistically significant impact on news avoidance. These included information overload ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.492$), negativity in news ($\beta = 0.028$, $p = 0.590$), news efficacy ($\beta = -0.049$, $p = 0.281$), news overload ($\beta = 0.090$, $p = 0.096$), political interest ($\beta = 0.050$, $p = 0.443$), and trust in news ($\beta = -0.045$, $p = 0.353$). Although news overload narrowly approached significance, its effect failed to reach the threshold necessary to be impactful. These results point out that cognitive and contextual factors like overload, trust, and political interest have limited direct influences on news avoidance behavior.

In order to confirm the structural model, further measures like effect size ($f^2$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2$) were calculated. The $f^2$ values represented small to medium effects by significant predictors, news fatigue ($f^2 = 0.076$) and "News Finds Me" perception ($f^2 = 0.103$) had the most significant effects. Other variables such as information overload ($f^2 = 0.002$), negativity in news

($f^2$ = 0.001) and political interest ($f^2$ = 0.003) had negligible impacts. The news avoidance $Q^2$ value was 0.204, which shows a good predictive relevance, and the model is able to explain variance in the dependent variable. All these findings together prove the strength of the structural model and its applicability in investigating antecedents of news avoidance.

*Table 3*

**Direct effect between news consumption factors and news avoidance**

| Variables | Original sample | Sample mean | Standard deviation | T statistics | P values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Information overload News avoidance | 0.037 | 0.042 | 0.053 | 0.687 | 0.492 |
| Negativity in news a | 0.028 | 0.035 | 0.053 | 0.538 | 0.59 |
| News efficacy a | -0.049 | -0.052 | 0.045 | 1.079 | 0.281 |
| News fatigue a | 0.287 | 0.284 | 0.052 | 5.48 | 0*** |
| "News Finds Me" a | 0.321 | 0.319 | 0.047 | 6.776 | 0*** |
| News overload a | 0.09 | 0.087 | 0.054 | 1.665 | 0.096 |
| Political interest a | 0.05 | 0.051 | 0.065 | 0.768 | 0.443 |
| Trust in bews a | -0.045 | -0.03 | 0.048 | 0.93 | 0.353 |

*Source: Authors*

*Note: Significance level= * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001*

## Discussion

The study sought to identify the antecedents of news avoidance among Pakistani university students, focusing on a range of variables related to news consumption behaviors. The findings revealed that only two variables, news fatigue and the perception of "News Finds Me", significantly influenced news avoidance. Specifically, news fatigue showed a strong positive correlation with news avoidance, indicating that individuals who experience exhaustion from constant news exposure are more likely to disengage from news consumption. Similarly, the 'news finds me' perception positively predicted news avoidance, highlighting the tendency for individuals who passively rely on social networks for news to avoid actively seeking news, aligning with prior studies by Gil de Zuniga and Diehl (2019) and Palmer and Toff (2019).

These results highlight the interplay between psychological overload and passive media reliance in shaping avoidance behaviors, particularly among digitally native youth in developing contexts like Pakistan. In an era of algorithmic news feeds and 24/7 digital access, such patterns may exacerbate information gaps, reducing civic participation and informed decision-making (Newman et al., 2022). Comparatively, similar trends have been observed in Cyprus media landscapes, where fragmented news flows during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased news fatigue and avoidance, as audiences grappled with polarized content and information overload (Spyridou, & Danezis, 2022). This cross-cultural resonance suggests that news avoidance is not isolated to Western or South Asian contexts but is amplified in regions with high media saturation and political instability.

Contrary to expectations and previous research (Song et al., 2017; Park, 2019), news overload did not correlate significantly with news avoidance. This finding highlights the complex nature of news consumption habits, where some individuals can process a high volume of news without actively evading it. For instance, in Bangladesh, a country with socio-economic similarities to Pakistan, young audiences exhibit varying trust in media amid overload, which indirectly influences avoidance without a direct causal link (Islam et al., 2023). Extending this, Vartanova et al. (2019) found that Russian journalism students expressed a desire to filter news due to "unfiltered news flow". Despite this, their news diaries showed that they were not completely disengaged from topics they claimed to be "tired" of, such as some international news. This indicates that while students might express a desire for selective avoidance, it does not always lead to complete disengagement from certain topics. Political interest demonstrated a complex yet statistically insignificant relationship with news avoidance, resonating with the findings of Strömbäck et al. (2013) and Toff and Kalogeropoulos (2020), which emphasize the conditional nature of this relationship. Trust in news media was negatively associated with news avoidance, though not at a significant level, aligning partially with Ardèvol-Abreu et al. (2018) and Tsfati and Cappella (2003), who argued that trust plays a crucial role in shaping media consumption patterns.

Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between news efficacy and news avoidance, diverging from prior studies such as Edgerly (2022), which emphasized the importance of confidence in news understanding. Negativity in news showed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with news avoidance, consistent with observations by Bruine de Bruin et al. (2020). Lastly, information overload failed to predict news avoidance significantly, contrasting

with earlier research by Bruine de Bruin et al. (2020) but aligning with findings from Lee et al. (2016). These non-significant results may reflect the resilience of Pakistani youth to negativity and overload, possibly due to habitual exposure to crisis-driven news (Rathore, & Farooq, 2020). In contrast, a study by Simons et al. (2021) highlights an intergenerational gap in Russia that leads to a failure in transmitting cultural memory between "analogue" and "digital" generations. This generational divide may lead to a different dynamic, where younger audiences cope with information overload by selectively filtering rather than completely avoiding it.

The study offers theoretical contributions by extending the uses and gratifications theory to understand news avoidance behaviors. By emphasizing the roles of news fatigue and the "News Finds Me" perception, the research aligns with the theory's focus on how individuals actively or passively fulfill their needs through media. Specifically, it demonstrates how individuals experiencing fatigue from overexposure to news or passively relying on social networks for news gratification are more likely to avoid active news consumption. Practically, the findings suggest that enhancing media literacy, personalized content delivery, and balanced reporting can mitigate news avoidance. Tailored educational programs and innovative content framing are recommended to foster informed news consumption among university students. From a broader implications' perspective, these findings imply risks to democratic discourse in Pakistan, where news avoidance could widen knowledge gaps and reduce political engagement among youth, a demographic crucial for societal change. The results emphasize the need for news organizations and policymakers to address the reasons behind news avoidance. By recognizing the effects of news fatigue and personal perceptions of news exposure, they can develop strategies to reduce news avoidance behavior and promote a more engaged news-consuming society. This could include promoting diverse, non-sensationalist platforms to rebuild trust and lessen fatigue.

## Conclusion and limitations

This research effectively explores the complex dynamics of news avoidance among Pakistani university students. Through the study of some of the key variables, which include news overload, the "News Finds Me", political interest, trust in news, news efficacy, news fatigue, negativity in news, and information overload, the study offers a lot of understanding on the factors behind such a behavior. The results demonstrate great importance of news fatigue and the perception of the "News Finds Me" on the news avoidance and reflect the overlap

between personal media behavior and specific traits in a specific environment. These findings highlight the need to focus on the emotional and behavioral aspects of using the media to reduce tendencies of avoidance.

These antecedents reflect the global trends of passive news consumption within Pakistan's rapidly digitalizing and politically unstable media landscape, which could impact civic literacy and engagement. Additionally, Pakistan's situation illustrates how the deterioration of political stability and crisis reporting can lead to a fatigue-like detachment from news. This supports the idea that news avoidance is not unique to Pakistan, but part of a broader global trend driven by technological factors and declining trust in institutions. Furthermore, news avoidance may contribute to the spread of echo chambers by reducing exposure to diverse perspectives, thereby affecting the democratic process.

In the context of the findings from this study, there are some limitations that must be emphasized with regard to the nature of the research approach and scope. The purposive sampling can be subject to certain biases in participant selection, which may ultimately limit generalizability of findings to a wider group of university students in Pakistan. Even though purposive sampling is advantageous in terms of focusing on the particular qualities of interest, it is not fully representative of diversity within a wider population. As a consequence, such findings may only be relevant outside of the context of the sampled population to a limited degree. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the research provides a snapshot of participants' attitudes and behaviors that do not take into account temporal dynamics that may be influencing the pattern of news avoidance. The study relies on self-reported data; thus, it is prone to response bias which may impact the actual news consumption patterns being reported. Finally, attention to specific cities and cultural contexts in the case of Pakistan places serious limitations on the generalizability of findings from this study to other areas that may have different media consumption habits and sociocultural variables. Although the selected variables cover a wide range of determinants, some influences on news avoidance, such as psychological factors or media literacy, were not included.

In the light of such limitations, a number of avenues could be suggested for future research. First of all, more diversified and representative methods of sampling may be selected to enhance the external validity of findings. Besides, gender, personality traits, and media literacy can act as moderators for these relationships. Longitudinal studies could illuminate how news avoidance behaviours themselves evolve and the way in which the importance of these factors leading to avoidance evolves over time. Integrating qualitative

insights from interviews or focus groups could yield a fuller understanding of the motivations underlying the avoidance of news. The interaction between media literacy and news avoidance might better clarify how individuals at different levels of media literacy use news information. With the increasing technological changes in media, one might also examine the influence of emerging technologies in future studies on news avoidance behaviour. Finally, interventions that attempt to reduce news avoidance might be designed and their efficacy in improving informed news consumption tested to further our overall understanding of news avoidance and some of its possible solutions.

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