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Who Are They? Different Types of News Avoiders Based on Motives, Values and Personality Traits

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ABSTRACT

The number of people that intentionally avoid the news is growing. This could have several personal and societal implications. Previous research exposed various motives to avoid news, which lead to different manifestations of news avoidance, and consequently different implications. However, so far less is known about the differences in news avoidance types. In this study, we aim to explore different profiles of news avoiders beyond demographics, based on their motives to avoid news, values in life and personality traits. We analyze how this relates to background characteristics, the degree of news avoidance (occasional, regular, consistent), and news consumption. We rely on a survey conducted in The Netherlands ($N = 2798$) in March 2022. We conducted a Latent Profile Analysis and found seven news avoiders' profiles: (1) interested occasional avoider; (2) emotive occasional avoider; (3) critical occasional avoider; (4) status-driven occasional avoider; (5) skeptical frequent avoider; (6) news outsider; and (7) convinced frequent avoider. This provides a nuanced picture of news avoidance.

People seem to increasingly turn away from the news (Newman et al. 2023; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2022). The percentage of people who actively avoid the news (sometimes or often) has gone up worldwide from 29% in 2017 to 36% in 2023 (Newman et al. 2023). News avoidance is considered problematic from a democratic perspective, as news consumption increases political knowledge and political- and societal engagement (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013) and the worry exists that news avoidance will lead to the opposite effect. More specific, there are concerns that news avoidance could be detrimental to a well-functioning democracy if people do not obtain sufficient information to make informed political decisions and contribute to society in a meaningful way (Blekesaune, Elvestad, and Aalberg 2012; Prior 2007; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2022). However, studies have shown that news avoidance might also have positive consequences, at least from the news avoiders' perspective (Woodstock 2014). For example, during the COVID-19 crisis, people who avoided the news showed more societal

participation and reported better perceived well-being over time (de Bruin et al. 2021; Ohme et al. 2023).

Nevertheless, until now there is no clear explanation for these possible divergent effects and maybe more importantly, we know little if these effects differ due to different types of news avoiders. In this paper, we examine news avoidance in a comprehensive manner and aim to establish different news avoider types by analyzing motives to avoid news and the related socio-psychological factors. In previous research news avoiders are mostly studied as a specific group, either based on self-reported news avoidance or on low levels of news consumption (Palmer, Toff, and Nielsen 2023; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020; 2022). Research shows that "news avoiders" are often women, younger people, or people with lower socioeconomic status (Kalogeropoulos and Nielsen 2018; Lindell and Mikkelsen Båge 2022; Toff and Palmer 2019). However, the different manifestations and different possible implications of news avoidance demand a more nuanced picture of differences in news avoiders, beyond demographics.

The starting point of our research is the uses and gratifications paradigm. While previous studies investigated news avoidance behavior by focusing on demographics and political attitudes (de Bruin et al. 2021; Edgerly 2022; Toff and Palmer 2019) or contextual influences of news consumption (Lindell and Mikkelsen Båge 2022; Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020; Toff and Palmer 2019), the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) takes an individual-centric approach. The UGT acknowledges individual diverse needs, motivations, and choices regarding media-consumption, especially in the contemporary high-choice media-environment (Ruggiero 2000). Therefore, this perspective can build upon previous research and offer valuable insights into the complex motivations and patterns of news avoidance, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how audiences engage with and avoid news media. Following the UGT, we can understand *intentional* news avoidance as a specific form of media behavior, or as an expression of media consumption. The UGT is grounded in several assumptions; (1) Communication behavior is a conscious act, goal-driven, and motivated; (2) Audiences are active communicators; (3) A combination of social and psychological factors guides, mediates, or filters these media behaviors; and (4) these individual circumstances and people's own initiative or motive, mediates the behavior, satisfaction, and consequences of media use. Consequently, this means that the same media uses can have different effects or gratifications for different people (Rubin 2009). Likewise, news avoidance can result in different gratifications and consequences among different individuals. Therefore, we assume that news avoiders are active communicators, with different social and psychological circumstances and motives to avoid news. In this paper, we analyze these components to profile different news avoider types. We take several steps.

Firstly, we include motives for establishing differences among news avoiders. The UGT has been widely applied to media *uses*, but scales for motives and gratifications of *avoidance* have not been established yet. However, previous research found many different motives that lead to news avoidance behavior, ranging from news overload and news fatigue (de Bruin et al. 2021; Gorski 2023), to low trust in media (Goyanes, Ardèvol-Abreu, and Gil de Zúñiga 2021; Kalogeropoulos, Toff, and Fletcher 2022), other or no interest in news (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), media-illiteracy or low news-efficacy (Edgerly 2017). Secondly, we include people's values in life as social factors to profile different news avoiders. Following the uses and gratifications approach, media

consumption is driven by an individual's social and psychological needs (Lee 2013; Rubin 2009). Lifestyles are herein important social predictors and explain media usage and news consumption behavior to a large extent (Palomba 2021; Rubin 2009; Vyncke 2002). Lifestyles are primarily functions of user's values (Vyncke 2002). These values are proven to be stable factors throughout people's lives and are assumed to be more effective in predicting consumption behavior than demographics (Kahle and Kennedy 1988). Lastly, we include personality traits as the last component to establish news avoider profiles. Personality traits have been found to be important psychological origins and are effective additional predictors in understanding differences in individual media consumption (Palomba 2021; Rubin 2009). Concretely, we aim to get a comprehensive picture of news avoidance in general, by looking at differences within news avoiders in motives, values in life and personality.

We use data from a survey that was conducted among a representative sample of the Dutch population in the run-up to the 2022 Dutch local elections ($N = 2798$). In total 1797 participants (65%) said they avoided the news (sometimes, regularly, or always). We conduct a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) among (self-reported) news avoiders based on (1) motives for avoidance; (2) values in life and (3) personality traits. Consequently, we study how the news avoider profiles differ in socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education level, gender, and political leaning). Lastly, we investigate how the profiles differ in the degree of (self-reported) avoidance and news consumption behavior. The results uncover seven different profiles of news avoiders. This study shows the diversity within news avoiders and indicates that neither the implications nor solutions for news avoidance should be generalized.

The Multifaceted Nature of News Avoidance

People seem to increasingly avoid the news (Newman et al. 2023). With the notion of the need for an informed citizenry in a democratic society in mind, in which news plays an important role, the increasing news-avoiding behavior could have problematic consequences. Especially in our current high-choice media environment, it is interesting to understand why and how people are turning away, and what implications this has (Chadwick 2013).

News consumption is related to being informed or having knowledge about certain issues, but it is unclear whether (intentional) news avoidance leads to citizens being less informed about important political and societal issues. For example, in this high-choice media landscape, it might even be quite impossible to avoid the news at all (i.e., incidental exposure), and there are more ways to be informed about matters of public concern besides news (i.e., public connection; Swart et al. 2022). News consumption also influences people's engagement with society (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013), which would suggest people avoiding news are less engaged. However, during the COVID-19 crisis, people showed more societal participation when avoiding the news (Ohme et al. 2023). Moreover, during the COVID-19 crisis, people who avoided the news reported better perceived well-being over time (de Bruin et al. 2021). Although the body of knowledge on news avoidance is growing, a lot remains unclear about the relationship between individual circumstances, motives, specific avoidance behavior, and the possible consequences of news avoidance.

Understanding news avoidance behavior is complex and there is much scholarly debate about how to define it (Palmer, Toff, and Nielsen 2023). For example, intentionally avoiding the news does not always result in a low amount of news consumption (Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020), which could count for different consequences than having a low news usage. Therefore, conceptual distinctions are made between intentional and unintentional avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020); occasional, selective, and consistent avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2022); general and news topic avoidance (Ohme et al. 2022); no use of news (Villi et al. 2022), and low use of news (Ohme et al. 2022). In this study, we aim to obtain a nuanced understanding of news avoiders and focus on intentional news avoidance, which can be seen as an expression of news use. Although focusing merely on the intention to avoid news might leave out certain *structural* reasons or *habitual* behavior and might not always lead to actual low-news consumption (Palmer, Toff, and Nielsen 2023), looking at the intention of news avoidance is useful to expose the attitudes underlying news avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020). Particularly, when we see that recent studies show an increasing percentage of people specifically stating they avoid the news (Newman et al. 2023). Moreover, the uses and gratifications framework proposes that (a) people are very well capable of knowing and formulating their media behavior and intent, and (b) people are active agents in their use or non-use (Rubin 2009).

Who Are News Avoiders?

In previous studies, news avoiders are often studied as one specific group and correlated to certain socio-demographic characteristics and predictors, leaving out the differences and complexity within this heterogeneous group. This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Following the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), the intentional avoidance behavior and its consequences are driven by a combination of social and psychological factors, and certain needs, attitudes, or motives (Lee 2013; Rubin 2009). The theory provides a valuable foundation for understanding news avoidance for several reasons. When understanding intentional news avoidance as a function of news use, it is useful to understand the individual needs, circumstances and gratifications obtained from avoiding news. The theory takes an individual-centric approach which allows us to explore the various drivers of why individuals might actively avoid news. With the proliferation of online news sources and social media, individuals have more choices and control over their media consumption. Therefore, in today's digital era, these personal influences become of more importance (Ruggiero 2000; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013). The theory can be applied to understand how people navigate this vast media landscape and make choices about news content. Furthermore, by exploring the different individuals, their needs and motives, the theory enables to us to identify distinct "profiles" of news avoiders with specific reasons for avoiding the news, providing a nuanced understanding of this behavior (Ruggiero 2000).

The UGT is grounded in several assumptions. Firstly, audiences vary in their behavior and are active communicators, and this communication behavior is conscious, goal-driven, and motivated. Secondly, this behavior is guided, mediated, or filtered by individual social and psychological factors. And the initiative itself to use or not use media, mediates the patterns and consequences of media use. The same media uses

can have different effects or gratifications for different people (Rubin 2009). Therefore, news avoidance can result in different gratifications depending on the motives and individual circumstances. Of course, the UGT is not without criticism. Firstly, the UGT assumes that media consumption involves rational and conscious decision-making processes (active communicators). However, previous audience research has shown that individuals may not always be fully aware of their motivations when selecting media content. Unconscious factors, such as more habitual behavior, social structures, or power dynamics play a role in shaping media consumption patterns which the UGT does not fully consider (Ruggiero 2000). However, this study is a first step in understanding self-reported intentional news avoidance and its diverseness and therefore the UGT individual-centric approach is a fruitful starting point and offers an innovative theoretical approach to news avoidance (Ruggiero 2000)

In this study, we argue that news avoiders are not to be seen as a homogeneous group but as different people with different origins and reasons for avoidance, leading to different implications. For example, someone who is sensitive to the negativity of news will avoid the news to keep a healthy mental state. This person presumably will experience different gratifications or implications from news avoidance, than someone who is skeptical and avoids the news for not feeling represented, or than someone with low news-efficacy or low-interest in current affairs and politics.

The different motives whether to consume something or not are rooted in both social and psychological origins. Therefore, we explore whether news avoiders with different motives can be profiled in combination with values in life and personality. Individuals' values are part of people's worldviews and are important lifestyle determinants—meaning it heavily influence people's interests, time-use, and (media) behavior (Vyncke 2002). Personality traits predict how open people are to certain media or genres and how they respond to them and are found stable and reliable predictors of media behavior (Rubin 2009).

Motives for News Avoidance

People are becoming more selective in their media consumption due to the increasing supply of news and information. Therefore, individual motivations and personal preferences have become even more important for explaining media uses (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013). A variety of gratifications, such as environmental surveillance, understanding the world, appearing to be informed to others, or informed decision-making drive news *consumption* (varying across individuals) and relate to specific media use behaviors (Lee 2013; Valenzuela, Bachmann, and Aguilar 2019). At the same time, other desired gratifications can also lead to *no* media use. Under certain conditions, people may, for example, intentionally avoid news to maintain their (safe) state of uncertainty, rather than being exposed to information about negative circumstances or consequences (Yang and Kahlor 2013). However, so far, the UGT has not been applied to news avoidance specifically.

Previous qualitative and quantitative research already established different motives to avoid the news. Firstly, a common argument is news overload due the abundance of news and information. People feel (emotionally) overwhelmed or confused by various news coverage (e.g., Wagner and Boczkowski 2021). Other individual motivations for news

avoidance include: news being seen as excessively negative, leading to a feeling of emotional overload (Toff and Palmer 2019); news being experienced as untrustworthy (Goyanes, Ardèvol-Abreu, and Gil de Zúñiga 2021; Kalogeropoulos, Toff, and Fletcher 2022); news fatigue due to abundance of sources or prominence of certain news topics (de Bruin et al. 2021; Webster 2014); or time allocation (Gorski 2023). Villi et al. (2022) divide these in emotional drivers (emotions triggered by the news like fear or anger) and cognitive drivers (news inundation, overload, or fatigue) of news avoidance. And finally, studies show that news avoidance can be more habitual in nature and a result of socialization (Shehata 2016: Valenzuela, Bachmann, and Aguilar 2019), lack of ties to communities that stimulate news use (Palmer and Toff 2020), (media-)illiteracy or low news-efficacy (Edgerly 2017). In this study, we want to understand the differences between news avoiders with different motives. Similar to Gorski (2023, 5) we established a list of motives for news avoidance based on the previous described findings (see Appendix A, table A1).

Values in Life

To profile news avoiders, we aim to contribute what people with the same news-avoiding motives have in common beyond demographics. Media behavior is heavily influenced by people's social and psychological circumstances, including lifestyle, life position, and personality (Rubin 2009). Adding these "psychographics" is a way to add "richness of the social and behavioral sciences to demographics" (Vyncke 2002, 447) as demographic profiles provide relatively hollow classifications and reveal little about the motives underlying consumption. Therefore, we include lifestyles, more specifically values in life. Lifestyles are patterns of how people spend their time and money, or patterns of action that differentiate people, and are primarily functions of people's values (Vyncke 2002). Values are part of individuals' basic worldviews, and directly influence interests, time-use, and roles, which in turn influence (news) consumer behavior and are assumed to be more effective in predicting consumption behavior than demographics or socioeconomics (Chan and Leung 2005; Kahle and Kennedy 1988; Vyncke 2002). Therefore, we explore whether people with different values will have different motivates for news avoidance.

Several measuring instruments for values and lifestyle segmentation have been developed (Vyncke 2002). One popular measuring instrument is the list of values (LOV) by Kahle and Kennedy (1988), which we adopt in this study. The LOV typology is based on Maslow's hierarchy of values and other typologies (such as Rokeach 1973). It measures what people value in life such as: security, sense of belonging, being well-respected, fun and enjoyment of life, warm relationships with others, self-respect, sense of accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and excitement.

Personality Traits

Similarly, personality traits are not demographically determined, and like values, more stable over time and effective in predicting individual media uses (Lin et al., 2017; Palomba 2021). People with different personalities engage in different consumption behaviors (Chan and Leung 2005). For example, personalities are important determinants in how open consumers are to certain media genres and to a lesser extent predict how

consumers select certain platforms, or for which gratifications they use certain platforms (Palomba 2021). Personality traits are patterns in which consumers express their actual or idealized selves (Palomba 2021). And therefore, individuals with different personalities may have different needs and gratifications from news use and avoidance. For example, people with extravert personalities often seek interpersonal communication instead of mediated communication, where introverts may seek (print) media for a sense of control. And people with neuroticism, who are often anxious, may prefer entertainment media as a form of escape or distraction (Finn 1997; Lin et al. 2017). Presumably, people who have a more anxious personality may avoid perceived threats (like the negativity of news), and more skeptical personalities may have doubts about the credibility or trustworthiness of news. Therefore, we include personality traits in the different profiles. We do this by using a 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory (Rammstedt and John 2007). The Big Five Inventory is a personality trait measurement that is widely used and extensively researched (Rammstedt and John 2007). The 10-item shortlist includes items such as "I see myself as someone who easily gets nervous" to "I see myself as someone who tends to be lazy".

Based on the previous theoretical and conceptual reasoning of media consumption, we now focus on their *joint* influence on avoidance. We propose the following research question: *RQ1: Which different types of news avoiders can be distinguished based on (1) motives for avoidance; (2) values in life and (3) personality traits?*

Contextualizing Different News Avoider Types

In this study, we argue that social and psychological factors are rich predictors for media behavior. Nevertheless, adding demographics and socioeconomics can say more about the likelihood of certain societal groups belonging to a certain news avoider profile, for which the implications of news avoidance can differ. There are normative concerns that news avoidance, or low news consumption can increase gaps between citizens, for example in political knowledge or participation (Blekesaune, Elvestad, and Aalberg 2012; Prior 2007; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2022)—but the question is whether these implications count for all news avoiders. So far, research shows that younger people, women, and people with lower education levels or social positions and politically left tend to avoid news more often (de Bruin et al. 2021; Edgerly 2022; Lindell and Mikkelsen Båge 2022; Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020; Toff and Palmer 2019). In news avoidance studies, more attention is given to the idea that news avoidance is not only certain people avoiding news, but also news organizations avoiding certain people (Edgerly and Thorson 2023). For example, both women and younger people express that news does not cover topics of their interest or their perspective, fitting the "news is not for me" narrative (Edgerly 2022; Newman et al. 2023). Simultaneously we see politically engaged avoiding the news as well—with positive implications for the individual (Woodstock 2014). Therefore, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the differences between the profiles of news avoiders, and see whether certain socio-demographics characteristics are stronger represented in specific profiles, we propose the following research question:

RQ2: How do different types of news avoiders differ in age, gender, education, and political leaning?

Lastly, we explore how the different types of news avoiders differ in their degree (occasional, regular, or consistent) of news avoidance behavior and how that relates to their news consumption. As argued above, we can see (intentional) news avoidance as a function of news use. Additionally, studies on news avoidance show that intentional news avoidance does not always manifest in low amounts of news consumption (Damstra et al. 2023; Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020). The question is raised whether self-reported news avoidance therefore is useful to study the normative implications, such as political knowledge or participation (Palmer, Toff, and Nielsen 2023). Therefore, we wonder how the motives, values and personalities, and characteristics, relate to the eventual behavior in degree of news avoidance and the type of news media they use. We propose the last research question:

> RQ3: How do different types of news avoiders differ in their degree of avoidance as well as news use?

Dutch Context

This study was conducted in The Netherlands in March 2022. The Dutch media system can be categorized as a typical democratic-corporatist model (Hallin and Mancini 2004) with a public service broadcasting system at local, regional, and national level that holds a strong place within Dutch society. Further, the Dutch media landscape includes large commercial broadcasting enterprises and two large publishing houses dominating most of the newspapers market. While in the past decade, large mergers have taken place, the Dutch media landscape is still characterized by diversity, pluriform voices, and a self-regulatory policy, in which the government has the role of facilitator of independent journalism. In other words, the average Dutch user has a wide variety of available news sources to choose from (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2017). The trust in news media is relatively high and stable and viewership, newspaper readership and subscriptions are relatively high (Newman et al. 2023). The proportion of the population that is highly interested in news is stable, around 51% (Newman et al. 2023). Also press-freedom is high (sixth on the World Press Freedom Index, 2023). The characteristics show a healthy and adequate news environment, like most Northern European countries. The Netherlands is therefore an interesting case to study individual motives and circumstances for news avoidance, as news avoidance is increasing while the circumstances would argue for stable or high news consumption, not news avoidance (Toff and Kalegeropoulos 2020).

Methodology: Latent Profile Analysis

For this study, we conducted a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). This is a suitable method to identify different clusters or subgroups in a population (i.e., types of news avoiders).

Sample

For this paper, we rely on survey data that was conducted by ISO-certified research company I&O Research among a representative part of the Dutch adult population in

the run-up to the 2022 Dutch local elections. A stratified sample from the I&O's panel was drawn by gender, age, region, and education level. About 5752 panel members were invited. The relevant parts of the questionnaire were fully completed by 2798 panel members, a response rate of 48.6%. Mean age of the sample is 53.7 (SD = 16.7) and 49.6% identified as female. The survey was in the field between March 9 and March 22. For this analysis, we rely on news avoiders, i.e., those respondents that answer to the question "Do you ever avoid the news?" ("Yes, occasionally", "Yes, regularly" or "Yes, always"). This leads to a subsample of news avoiders with a total number of respondents of 1797.

Latent Profile Analysis

For our analysis, we seek to identify different types of news avoiders by means of a latent profile analysis based on motives for news avoidance, values in life and personality traits. All three are measured with a battery of different items. The motives for news avoidance are measured by 22 statements that are scored on a seven-point scale ranging from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (7) (e.g., "The news has a negative effect on my mood"). For values in life, we asked respondents to rank-order a range of matters in order of most important (1) to least important (9) (e.g., "Feeling of belonging"). For personality traits, we relied on a battery of items describing how the respondents see themselves, again ranging from 1 "totally disagree" to 7 "totally agree" (e.g., "I see myself as someone who is reserved"). See for all precise formulations Appendix A (Tables A1, A2 and A3).

To reduce the number of items for the latent profile analysis, which is warranted for the *GSEM* implementation in STATA, we first conduct separate Principal Component Analyzes (PCAs) for motivations for news (avoidance), values in life and personality traits (see Kruikemeier, Boerman, and Bol 2020, for a similar approach). Substantially, this analysis for each of those aspects yields several factors (categories), each based on the factor loadings of all the items included. We also provide a substantial label. Second, the factor scores of those components are the input for the latent profile analysis that is used to identify different types of news avoiders. The number of profiles is identified based on the fit statistics (the likelihood ratio test and Bayes information criterion). For the most optimal solution, we report the profile count and proportions. We also report the average latent profile probabilities for most likely membership for each profile. Based on those scores, each respondent can be assigned to one of the profiles. In our data, this means that each respondent belongs to a certain category of news avoiders. Average scores on each of the earlier identified factor scores and underlying variables can be used to provide meaningful descriptions for each of the profiles.

In a second step, we compare the different types of news avoiders in terms of their background characteristics such as age (M = 51.8; SD = 16.9), gender (54.9% female), education (using the following question "What is your highest level of education completed?" with seven categories, ranging from no education (1) to university degree (7), M = 4.73, SD = 1.51); and left-right positioning ("When it comes to political beliefs, they are often described as being "left" or "right." If you think about your own political beliefs, where would you place yourself on the scale below, ranging from 1 to 11?" M = 5.33, SD = 2.37). Here, we rely on a multinomial regression analysis to predict membership of each of the types of news avoiders based on those background characteristics.

We compare the different types on their degree of (self-reported) news avoidance as and news use. For news avoidance, we do so by using the distinction between "occasional", "regular" and "consistent" avoiders. We use the question "Do you ever avoid the news?" with answer categories "Yes, occasionally" (77.46%), "Yes, regularly" (17.58%), "Yes, always" (4.95%). We rely on crosstabs to explore the potential relationship between type of news use and news avoiding behavior.

For news use, we rely on the following question: "In the past week, how often did you use the following sources to stay informed about the news and current affairs?", followed by a list of 25 potential sources. Answer categories ranged from 1 ("never") to 7 ("multiple times per day"). For the analysis, we grouped the different sources in different commonly used categories, and accordingly, relied on the following types of sources: online news (sum score of online news sites and -apps, sites that collect news, and online talk shows; M = 8.08; SD = 3.10), social media (social media and YouTube; M = 4.88; SD = 3.02), alternative media (alternative news media, own media channels of political parties, blogs; M = 3.73; SD = 1.98), television (news on public broadcast, news on commercial channels, news on local and regional channels, current affairs programs and talk shows; M = 12.12; SD = 5.56) and print media (national newspapers, regional newspapers, local newspapers, magazines; M = 8.49; SD = 4.25). We use the different news type users as predictors for different types of media use in a multivariate regression model.

Principal Component Analysis

We conducted three PCA analyzes. For "motives for news (avoidance)" this reduces the 22 original items to four components with eigenvalues above 1, accounting for 58.4% of the variance in the original items. These components can be substantially labeled "indifference", "negative emotions", "lack of news quality" and "difficulty of news". Items that indicate other interests and lack of time and interest to follow the news score high on the "indifference" component. For negative emotions, items that include eliciting feelings about the news, such as anger and sadness, score high. "Lack of news quality" covers issues such as bias and lack of representation. Finally, on "difficulty of understanding news" includes items that emphasize that news is difficult and hard to capture. It is noteworthy that factor loadings are relatively low, possibly due to the fact that we do not work with existing batteries of items here and the reasons for avoidance that are included are highly varied (see Appendix B, Table B1).

For values in life, we find three components with eigenvalues >1, accounting for 56.6% of the variances in the original items. These three can be labeled "status", "relations" and "self-development" (see Appendix B, Table B2). Finally, for personality traits, we find five factors with eigenvalue >1, explaining 67.9% of the variance in the original items. We can label those factors as "calm", "introvert", "dreamer", "critical" and "a-cultural" (Appendix B, Table B3).[1] Detailed results for the factor analysis are reported in Appendix B.

Results: Seven News Avoider Profiles

We use 12 factors as input for the Latent Profile Analysis. To select the most appropriate model, we rely on the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). We strive for a parsimonious

Table 1. Seven news avoider profiles.

No.	Size	Motive (news) avoidance (-*)	Values in life	Personality traits (-*)	Label
1	18.8%	-indifference, -negative emotions, -low quality news	relations	calm	Interested Occasional Avoider
2	10.9%	negative emotions	self-development, relations	dreamer, - a-cultural	Emotive Occasional Avoider
3	24.4%	-indifference, low quality of news	relations	a-cultural	Critical Occasional Avoider
4	9.8%	-indifference, -negative emotions	status	calm, -dreamer	Status-oriented Occasional Avoider
5	7.7%	indifference, negative emotions, low quality news	self-development	critical	Skeptical Frequent Avoider
6	24.7%	indifference, news difficult	n/a	-calm, introvert, dreamer	News Outsider
7	3.7%	indifference, negative emotions, low quality news, news difficult	status	critical	Convinced Frequent Avoider

Note: $N = 1797$. * - *score low on this component*.

model and this criterion penalizes the inclusion of additional parameters (profiles) more heavily than for example the Akaike Information Criterion (Stoica and Selen 2004). A model with seven profiles shows the best model fit according to the BIC (BIC = 71,231.32, Log likelihood = −35,233.47, df = 102; for six profiles: BIC = 71,235.45, Log likelihood = −35,284.25, df = 89 and for eight profiles: BIC = 71,242.37, Log likelihood = −35,190.29; df = 115). Table 1 reports the size of each profile, as well as average latent profile probabilities for the most likely membership for each profile. Furthermore, it reports the most distinctive higher and lower (−) scores on the twelve factors, as well as a label that describes the profile. Table 2 presents the results of the multinomial regression analysis assessing how different profiles differ in terms of background characteristics. Table B4 in the Online Appendix provides mean scores for all profiles on each of the twelve factors.

Below we describe each profile, also referring to the demographic characteristics and their news use and avoidance of respondents, thus answering research questions 1–3. For a complete overview of the different profiles see Table 5.

Profile 1. Interested Occasional Avoider

The interested occasional avoider represents 18.8% of the avoiders. This group scores consistently lower than average on the motives to avoid news, meaning they are less likely to have a negative sentiment towards news or strong reasons to avoid news. They score noticeably lower than other profiles on "indifference" and "negative

Table 2. Background characteristics across different profiles.

	Idealistic occasional	Critical occasional	Status-oriented occasional	Skeptical frequent	News outsider	Convinced frequent
Age	.988* (.006)	1.000 (.005)	.983** (.006)	.955*** (.006)	.974*** (.004)	.974** (.009)
Female	1.441 (.276)	1.143 (.174)	1.056 (.207)	.852 (.184)	1.474*** (.229)	1.012 (.292)
Education	1.192** (.084)	.848*** (.046)	.841* (.058)	.878 (.068)	.694*** (.038)	.725** (.074)
Left-right	.802*** (.036)	1.143*** (.038)	1.023 (.044)	1.057 (.049)	.989 (.036)	1.163* (.072)
Constant	.850 (.532)	1.221 (.614)	2.434 (1.525)	5.821 (3.872)	1.294 (.747)	1.442 (1.3053)

Note: Interested limited avoider is reference category, reported are relative risk ratio's; $N = 1707$; LL = −2912.53; Pseudo $R^2 = .046$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. News avoidance behavior across different profiles.

	News avoidance		
Profile	Occasional	Regular	Consistent
Interested occasional	**93.5%**	6.2%	0.3%
Emotive occasional	80.5%	17.9%	1.5%
Critical occasional	88.4%	11.6%	
Status-oriented occasional	83.0%	15.9%	1.1%
Skeptical frequent	**34.8%**	36.2%	**29.0%**
News outsider	70.7%	23.2%	6.1%
Convinced frequent	**34.3%**	**41.8%**	**23.9%**
average	77.5%	17.6%	5.0%
Chi-squared		418.496***	

Note: $N = 1797$. *** $p < 0.001$; bold are remarkable scores discussed in-text.

emotions", meaning they specifically do not avoid the news for these reasons. They tend to score highest among the three different value components in relations, meaning they are more likely to value close relationships with family and friends. They are more likely to have a calm personality. In the analyzes of demographical characteristics (Table 2), they serve as the reference category. They are more often a bit older (M = 54.14) than the average age-score of the sample and then 5 of the other profiles and are more likely to have a higher educational level than most other profiles. 93.5% percent of this group states they only occasionally avoid the news, and 6.2% regularly, hardly never consistently (Table 3). A logistic regression predicting being an occasional avoider demonstrates that this group differs significantly higher than all other groups on the probability of exhibiting this behavior. Compared to other groups they score highest on the use of regular news sources (online media, television and print media) (Table 4). All things considered, this is a group with a high appreciation of journalism and does not experience news negatively (Table 5).

Profile 2. Emotive Occasional Avoider

Profile 2, the emotive occasional avoider, represents 10.9% of the avoiders. They score highest on the motive for news avoidance that news leads to negative emotions. They are more likely to value self-development and relations. They tend to show personality characteristics of a dreamer and are more often culturally interested. This profile consists of 62.5% females, most of all profiles—as can also be seen in Table 2, where the relative risk ratio for females is well above 1 but is just not significant. They have a comparable age

Table 4. News use across different profiles.

	Online media	Social media	Alternative	Television	Print
Emotive occasional	−.298 (.274)	.009 (.271)	.189 (.176)	−2.255*** (.474)	−1.477*** (.371)
Critical occasional	−.219 (.220)	−.006 (.218)	.165 (.142)	.447 (.381)	−.416 (.299)
Status-oriented occasional	−.565 (.283)	.509* (.280)	.377** (.182)	−.130 (.490)	−.421 (.384)
Skeptical frequent	−1.813*** (.308)	.886*** (.305)	.972 (.198)	−5.566*** (.532)	−3.732*** (.417)
News outsider	−1.177*** (.220)	.514** (.218)	.461*** (.141)	−2.182*** (.380)	−1.699*** (.298)
Convinced frequent	−1.853*** (.407)	.423 (.403)	1.475*** (.262)	−4.683*** (.704)	−2.117*** (.552)
Constant	8.734*** (.166)	4.621*** (.164)	3.391*** (.106)	13.414*** (.286)	9.580*** (.225)
R2	.038	.010	.029	.107	.059

Note: Interested limited avoider is reference category, $N = 1797$; * $p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Overview of all seven profiles (RQ1–RQ3).

Avoider Profile	Motive	Value in life	Personality	Demographics (significantly differs*)	News avoidance (% consistently)	News use (significantly*)
Interested occasional	n/a	Relations	Calm		0.3%	
Emotive occasional	Negative emotions	Self-development/ Relations	Dreamer, Cultural	Younger, Higher educated, politically left	1.5%	-Television, -print
Critical occasional	Quality of news	Relations	A-Cultural	Lower educated, politically right	0%	
Status-driven occasional	n/a	Status-driven	Calm	Younger, lower-educated	1.1%	
Skeptical frequent	Indifference, Negative emotions, Quality of news	Self-development	Critical	Younger	29%	-Online, +alternative, -television, -print
News outsider	Indifference, too difficult	n/a	Introvert, Dreamer	Younger, female, lower-educated	6.1%	-Online, +alternative, -television, -print
Convinced frequent	Indifference, negative emotions, quality of news, too difficult	Status-driven	Critical	Younger, lower educated	23.9%	-Online, +alternative, -television, -print

Note: * Interested Occasional avoider is the reference category.

with most of the other profiles, have the highest educational level and are more likely to position themselves on the left politically. 80.5% avoids the news occasionally and only 1.5% avoids it consistently. They use television and print media significantly less than the interested limited avoider. In conclusion, this group values journalism, but it influences their emotions negatively.

Profile 3. Critical Occasional Avoider

The third profile, the critical occasional avoider, represents 24.4% of the news avoiders. They are more likely to value relations in life and have an a-cultural personality. Their motive to avoid news is because of the perceived lack of quality of news. They score average on many demographical characteristics. They are a bit older than the average age of the sample (55.85 years) and are more likely to have an average educational level. They score slightly more to the right on the political spectrum. This is the second largest group, but scores average on most and represent the average majority. They mostly avoid news occasionally (88.4%) and never consistently. In terms of their news use, they are comparable to the interested limited avoider and do not differ significantly on any of the news categories from this group. Concluding, they avoid the news occasionally due to perceived lack of quality.

Profile 4. Status-Oriented Occasional Avoider

This fourth profile, the status-oriented occasional avoider, represents 9.8% of the avoiders. They largely value status in life, in an outspoken way, meaning they are more often very

concerned with gaining respect and recognition from others. They are more likely to have a calm and realistic personality and do not stand-out on any of the motives for news avoidance compared to the other profiles. They are more often younger and higher educated (Table 2). They avoid news mostly occasionally (83%) but rely to similar degrees as the rational limited avoider on different news sources.

Profile 5. Skeptical Frequent Avoider

The fifth profile, the Skeptical Frequent Avoider, represents 7.7% of the avoiders. Respondents that belong to this group score high on indifference, negative emotion because of the news, and the low quality of news as motives to avoid the news. They are more likely to care highly about self-development and have a critical personality. They are mostly male, are the youngest profile (43.22 years average) and are higher educated. They have very negative attitudes driving them to avoid the news often. While 34.8% avoids the news occasionally, 29% avoids news consistently, which is the highest percentage of consistent avoidance of all profiles. A logistic regression predicting being a consistent avoider demonstrates that this group differs significantly from the other groups except for the convinced frequent avoider. In terms of their news use, they rely most heavily on alternative media, and significantly less on more traditional news media (online, television and print).

Profile 6. The News Outsider

The news outsider represents the largest part (24.7%) of the avoiders. The news outsiders score higher on indifference towards the news and find news often too difficult. No component of what they value in life stood out—they scored below average on all components. They are most often female (60.6%) and have a lower educational level. For this large group, news seems to be too difficult, and they tend to not find the news interesting. Still, 70.7% avoid the news occasionally and 6.1% avoid it consistently. They use alternative media more than the rational limited avoider and most other profiles and rely less on traditional sources compared to those groups. Concluding, in sum, this group seems to avoid the news occasionally, as they do not always feel connected with the news.

Profile 7. The Convinced Frequent Avoider

The last and smallest profile, the convinced frequent avoider, represents 3.7% of the avoiders. The convinced frequent avoiders score high on all motivates for avoidance. They value status in life and have a critical personality. Members of this group are more likely male (47.8% female), have a lower education-level and are more likely to hold a more politically right-wing position. This group has a very negative sentiment towards news. Only one-third avoids the news occasionally and 23.9% regularly, and 19.2% consistently. They rely heavily on alternative media. They score low on other, more traditional, news sources. In conclusion, this rather small group avoids the news because they are not satisfied with the offered news, especially perceive the quality of news low, and they feel it affects their mood and well-being.

Conclusion and Discussion

The number of people who say to avoid the news is on the rise. This may have negative implications, both for individuals and society. For example, it might foster inequality in political knowledge or participation (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2022). However, we lack a fundamental understanding of who avoids the news and why, and to whom these different implications apply. Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of different types of news avoiders and poses the following questions: (*1) Which different types of news avoiders can be distinguished based on motives for avoidance, values in life, and personality traits; (2) how do these types differ in age, gender, educational level, and political leaning, and; (3) how do they differ in the degree of news avoidance and type of news use?*

This resulted in seven different news avoider profiles: (1) interested occasional avoider; (2) emotive occasional avoider; (3) critical occasional avoider; (4) status-driven occasional avoider; (5) skeptical frequent avoider; (6) news outsider; and (7) convinced frequent avoider. Looking at the complete overview of the profiles, we can make several overall conclusions. First, most types of news avoiders avoid the news *occasionally*, not consistently, supporting the argument that from a uses and gratification perspective news avoidance seems to be an expression of news use. Typically, the two groups that show the most consistent news avoidance manifestation count for the smallest percentages (the skeptical and convinced frequent avoider, respectively 7.9% and 3.9%)—and this avoidance behavior seems to relate to having a critical personality. Moreover, this finding corresponds to the argument that intentional news avoidance does not necessarily lead to low amounts of news consumption, nor does it have to lead to negative normative implications (Palmer, Toff, and Nielsen 2023).

Second, looking specifically at the role of personality traits in avoidance behavior, there also seems to be a relation between having no outspoken motives to turn away from news and calm personality traits. Our second conclusion underlines that individuals' motives are grounded in personality traits, however combined with other (social) circumstances lead to differences in avoidance behavior.

Third, our study shows that (emotional) overload, or the negativity of news is not a dominant motivation per se, unlike previous studies have suggested (Villi et al. 2022). The negativity of news is only highlighted in the group of emotive occasional news avoiders. The main motive to avoid news, that was visible in different profiles, is the assessed quality of news. This result challenges previous studies and journalism professionals suggesting that constructive and positive forms of journalism might be a solution to news avoidance behavior (Ahva and Hautakangas 2018).

Last, we see that the largest two groups (the critical occasional avoider and news outsider; together count for 50.1% of the avoiders) are more likely to have a lower educational level. One avoids the news because of the perceived low quality, and the other because they perceive news as uninteresting or too difficult. These motives are related to a disconnection between what journalists produce and how users assess it. It relates to the "news is not for me"-narrative and turns the news avoidance question the other way around: whether news is avoiding specific people (Edgerly and Thorson 2023). The disconnection between journalistic products and news consumers' appreciation of them calls the (radical) audience turn both in journalism and journalism

studies to investigate what the audience perceives as valuable journalism in an inclusive manner (Swart et al. 2022).

Taken together, this study contributes to the field in several ways. First, the study emphasizes the benefits of the UGT for the study of news avoidance. The UGT suspends normativity of value judgment about using or avoiding news media but firstly understands the underlying processes and gratifications obtained. It acknowledges that media use and its consequences are socially and psychologically grounded and affected by individual differences, preferences, and choices (Rubin 2009). Therefore, this study illustrates that both the intention *and* the behavior determine the normative implications of news avoidance.

Second, it contributes to the literature on news avoidance by applying an individual-centric approach in assessing the normative implications of news avoidance, offering a more user-centric approach to this phenomenon. The identification of news avoiders' profiles provides a valuable typology that goes beyond traditional demographics, offering a nuanced understanding of news avoidance within the population by focusing on lifestyles and personality traits. Shortly said, the study shows we should not tar all news avoiders with the same comb. We emphasize, even more so in this high-choice media environment, the importance of the influence of individual differences. This study enables a more targeted understanding of diverse "avoiders" and their drivers and aids researchers and practitioners in tailoring strategies to engage different audiences.

Third, the study shows that indeed the intentionality of news avoidance does not necessarily lead to "no-news consumption". It shows that it can be seen as an umbrella term for different kinds of reasoning behind (no) news consumption. In fact, the term news avoidance is not a clear description of the motivation and behavior of many of the profiles and we suggest being cautious about using news avoidance and prefer to make a distinction between "conscious consuming" and general news avoidance behavior.

Furthermore, the research sheds light on the societal implications of news avoidance, emphasizing potential inequalities, especially related to educational levels. The connection between avoidance motives and lower educational levels suggests challenges in bridging the gap between journalistic products and the preferences of a diverse audience. These findings prompt journalism studies to explore ways to address (educational) disparities in news consumption and improve inclusivity in media engagement.

Last, the use of LPA contributes methodologically to the literature by providing a statistical method to identify underlying subgroups within the population. This enhances the sophistication of typologies beyond traditional demographics, offering a systematic way to categorize news avoiders.

This study also has two specific caveats. Firstly, this interpretation of the results of our study needs to be considered in the context of when it was conducted. This was during the Dutch municipal elections in 2022 and around the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The war might have led to much unease leading to more people avoiding the news, as we also witnessed during COVID-19 (de Bruin et al. 2021), and might therefore cause a larger part of the sample to avoid the news.

Secondly, we noticed that the news outsider did not specifically stand out in the "values in life" measures. Although still frequently used, these measurements are partly based on the Rokeach values that are criticized for representing American middle-class

values (Vyncke 2002). This leads to a discussion of inclusion in scientific research practices and measurements. Therefore, we must continue inductive, both qualitative and quantitative, research on hard-to-reach audiences and participants.

Furthermore, this study is explorative by nature, and if other social or psychological factors could have been included, this might have led to other distinctive profiles. However, the curiosity and distinctive approach to news avoidance illustrate the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon—both validating and adding to the existing literature.

In summary, this study shows that news avoidance behavior can be manifested in many forms and has various underlying motivations, which could be more an act of conscious news consumption than overall news avoidance.

Note

1. These categories deviate somewhat from the big five personality traits that originally underlie the used items (see Rammstedt and John 2007). Give the explorative nature of our study, we decided to re-interpret the outcomes of the PCA and adopt a different labeling.

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