

Is no news good news? News avoidance and its ambivalences

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In today's fragmented media environment, where digital media and platformization play an important role in our daily lives, it is possible to identify ambivalences in news consumption and avoidance, specifically being at the mercy of the algorithm. Digital media has transformed the way citizens engage with news, with unparalleled new methods to have the news at their fingertips. However, the overabundance of news and choices of news media, can lead to information overload and fatigue, as well as difficulties in processing the plethora of information available. Additionally, the appearance of streaming platforms, or podcasts, has increased the tendency to avoid the news and, therefore, consume less information.

Scholars have been studying this phenomenon for an extended period of time. Skovsgaard & Andersen (2019), for example, posit that news avoiders have a regular and repeated low level of news consumption. This behaviour may be on purpose and a consequence of the content's averseness, or it could be unintentional, as they prefer to spend their free time on the various platforms that exist in today's media environment. Fitzpatrick (2022), on the other hand, adds that it may be a temporary behaviour aimed at limiting the amount of information consumed. Newman et al. (2023) group news avoiders into two categories: they differentiate between individuals who make an effort to avoid all sources of news regularly and people who prefer to restrict their news consumption according to specific topics or times.

Young adults (aged 18-24) are more likely to be news avoiders, and according to academia, this is due to the lack of trust in mainstream media and the negativity in its news pieces (de Bruin et al., 2021; Edgerly, 2021; Ohme, Araujo, et al., 2022; Ohme, Bruin, et al., 2022). In respect of digital media, the centrality of social media platforms in young adults' lives makes it challenging for them to avoid the news on those formats (Edgerly, 2023), specifically because they may still be receiving news through incidental exposure (Merten, 2021). In other words, the personalization on individual's newsfeed is a result of their preferences, algorithms, and news organizations, and how they coexist in this ecosystem (van Dijck et al., 2018).

Based on these considerations, the research questions of this qualitative, exploratory study are threefold: (RQ1) What is the Portuguese young adults' reasoning for avoiding the news? (RQ2) How is news consumption and avoidance affected by its format (rather than the content *per se*)? (RQ3) What type of news avoiders can be identified? The purpose of this research is to explore individuals' perceptions of news avoidance as well as identify the presence of ambivalences, such as the dichotomy of their (un)conscious news consumption and their affirmation of being news avoiders. In this sense, this study supports itself on qualitative methodology, more specifically on semi structured interviews of 12 participants' age ranged from 18 to 24.

The preliminary results of this exploratory study provide a springboard to map Portuguese young people's perceptions of their news consumption and avoidance, explore the categories they fall into – intentional or unintentional – and debate whether the format significantly influences their (possibly ambivalent) avoidance behaviour.

Keywords: News avoidance, Portuguese, young adults, qualitative analysis, ambivalence

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Bio

Sádiya Munir is a PhD student in Communication Studies at the Faculty of Human Sciences – Catholic University of Portugal, awarded with a Studentship from FCT. She holds a Master’s degree in Political Science and International Relations and a Bachelor’s degree in International Relations. She is a researcher at CECC (Research Centre for Communication and Culture) and has collaborated on the project *ABIDE - Animal ABidings: recoverIng from DisastErs in more-than-human communities* (ERC, ABIDE, Grant agreement ID: 101043231, 2023-2028). Her PhD thesis focuses on news consumption and news avoidance of Portuguese young adults (aged 18-24). Her areas of interest are media and politics, political communication, news and democracy.