Understanding News Avoidance in China: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid evolution of the digital news environment, audiences have access to an increasingly diverse range of channels for obtaining news. However, this highly selective media environment has not led to the anticipated increase in news consumption. Instead, it has contributed to a significant global increase in news avoidance. This phenomenon poses a serious challenge, as it may undermine the public's knowledge base and weaken their capacity for civic engagement, making it a critical subject of concern in contemporary media scholarship. Although Western scholars have conducted extensive research on the motivations and mechanisms underlying news avoidance, there remains a notable gap in systematically summarising related studies within China's digital news environment. Addressing this gap, this study employs a systematic review of 24 empirical and theoretical studies published in both Chinese and English up to September 2024. The results show that the number of studies on news avoidance continues to grow, the research focus is on youth populations, quantitative methods dominate the field, and the theoretical framework is diverse. The thematic analysis identifies four core motives for news avoidance: emotion, cognition, trust, and selective preference, reflecting the complex mechanisms of audiences in emotion regulation, cognitive management, trust construction, and personalised choice. This study deepens and expands the multidimensional framework of news avoidance motives and promotes the progress of theories in the Chinese context. At the same time, a transparent research path combining systematic literature review and thematic analysis is proposed, which provides methodological guidance for subsequent academic exploration.

Keywords: *News avoidance, digital news environment, avoidance motives, systematic review, thematic analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the media environment has undergone significant changes, gradually transforming from traditional mass media represented by radio, television, and newspapers to a new media ecology dominated by digital media. This shift has dramatically changed the relationship between audiences and news, broadening the channels for news dissemination and profoundly affecting the audience's news consumption patterns (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2024; McQuail & Deuze, 2020). In the current digital media environment, audiences have more convenient access to news than ever. Search engines, news apps, and social media enable audiences to access a large amount of news content quickly. This high-choice media environment has brought audiences unprecedented freedom to obtain news, which should

theoretically encourage audiences to increase their exposure to news. However, a noteworthy paradox has emerged: despite the widespread availability of news content, active or passive avoidance of news has continued to rise globally (Newman et al., 2024).

The 2024 Reuters Digital News Report reveals that 39% of the 94,943 audiences surveyed worldwide were reported to avoid news, a three-percentage-point increase from 2023. This trend is particularly evident in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain, Brazil, and India. Among young audiences in some countries, the news avoidance rate has exceeded 50% (Newman et al., 2024). Although mainland China was not included in this survey, existing studies have shown that news avoidance behaviour is also rising among audiences in mainland China. Some Chinese studies focus on specific populations and identify information overload, political apathy, and emotional fatigue (Min & Li, 2023; Zeng et al., 2024) as the reasons behind this. The prevalence of news avoidance and its growing trend have attracted widespread academic attention. Studies have found that frequent news avoidance may reduce audience awareness of social issues, weaken political participation, and lead to misunderstandings of complex social phenomena and information polarisation (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022).

Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) defined news avoidance as the low level of news consumption behaviour exhibited by the audience over a specific period and, for the first time, distinguished between intentional and unintentional avoidance. In subsequent studies, this classification became a critical framework for understanding news avoidance behaviour. Following that, they further proposed three types of news avoidance from the perspective of the scope of avoidance: consistent avoidance, occasional avoidance, and selective avoidance. Among these three types of news avoidance, selective avoidance refers to the audience's intentional avoidance of news on specific topics or types. In addition to these insights, Andersen, Toff, and Ytre-Arne (2024) emphasised that news avoidance is a multidimensional media behaviour that manifests as overall news disconnection, phased avoidance, and selective avoidance and may change over time and context.

Furthermore, research on news avoidance uses a variety of theories to explain its formation mechanism. Uses and Gratifications Theory is widely used to describe how audiences choose to contact or avoid news based on cognitive needs, emotional states, or media preferences (Gorski, 2023; Schäfer et al., 2024). Information overload theory points out that when the amount of information exceeds an individual's processing capacity, the audience may reduce cognitive burden through avoidance behaviour, a view that has been verified in many studies (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; De Bruin et al., 2021; Damstra et al., 2023). However, scholars have also discussed how specific news topics or negative news trigger emotional reactions in the audience, prompting individuals to adopt avoidance strategies to manage news information pressure and emotional burden (Toff & Nielsen, 2022; Kaim & Bodas, 2024; Carbone et al., 2024). These theories and viewpoints constitute an essential theoretical basis for understanding news avoidance behaviour.

Shifting focus to the motives behind news avoidance, recent studies have also extensively explored the motives of news avoidance behaviour, covering cognitive, emotional, trust, and other social or political motives. Among them, cognitive, emotional, and trust motives are the three core motives the academic community pays the most attention to. Cognitive motive mainly includes news overload, content complexity, and the resulting cognitive burden. When news information exceeds the audience's processing capacity, individuals reduce psychological load through avoidance behaviour (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2024). Emotional motive involves emotional fatigue, anxiety, and reactions to negative news.

Previous studies have pointed out that emotional fatigue is particularly prominent in high-intensity political or social crises, prompting audiences to avoid news content that may cause discomfort (Carbone et al., 2024). In addition to cognitive and emotional factors, the trust motive reflects the audience's suspicion or distrust of news media and news sources. Existing studies have shown that audiences with low media trust tend to avoid the news (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024).

On the other hand, academic research on news avoidance first emerged in Western countries and has now formed a broad and in-depth empirical research system in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Northern Europe. These studies cover the types, motives, psychological mechanisms, and the role of digital platforms in shaping news avoidance behaviour (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022; Gorski, 2023; Andersen, Toff, et al., 2024; Schäfer et al., 2024). In contrast, news avoidance research in the Chinese context started late, is limited in number, and primarily focuses on identifying individual motives, such as information redundancy, emotional fatigue, political apathy, and lack of trust (Wu, 2023; Xu et al., 2024; Min & Li, 2023). Existing research on news avoidance in the Chinese context still lacks research methods and theoretical application. Most studies use cross-sectional quantitative surveys or single methods, lack in-depth qualitative analysis, and limit the understanding of behavioural mechanisms (Ni et al., 2023; Zheng, 2024). Moreover, regarding theoretical application, research usually borrows Western theoretical models (Setianto & Praceka, 2023) and has not fully considered China's unique political system, cultural characteristics, and media environment. In addition, there is a lack of systematic reviews of news avoidance research in the Chinese context, which hinders dialogue with international studies and restricts the further construction of local theories.

In light of China's large digital audience and distinctive news ecosystem (Zhou, 2024), a systematic review of news avoidance within the Chinese context carries substantial academic and practical significance. A systematic review of news avoidance research in the Chinese context helps address the shortcomings of current theoretical and empirical research, providing new empirical evidence for applying news avoidance theory in a cross-cultural context. To this end, this study adopts a systematic literature review method to comprehensively analyse Chinese and English literature published before September 2024 on news avoidance behaviour in China. Specifically, on the one hand, this study explores the characteristics of existing research, including the publication time distribution of literature, research objects, research methods, theoretical applications, and main research topics, to present an overall overview of news avoidance research in the Chinese context. On the other hand, based on the thematic analysis method, this study further identifies and summarises the key drivers of news avoidance behaviour to deeply explain the specific manifestations of news avoidance in the Chinese digital media environment and the driving factors behind it.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the method of systematic literature review. Building upon this, a systematic literature review is a rigorous, transparent and replicable research method that comprehensively summarises existing research in a specific field through systematic literature search, screening and analysis (Han & Abdrahim, 2023). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews follow predefined procedures to reduce selective bias and improve the credibility of the results (Latif et al., 2024). Therefore, in the context of news avoidance in China, systematic review methods can comprehensively and objectively identify the research

trends, theoretical perspectives and unresolved issues in the existing literature. Importantly, this study follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure the systematicity and transparency of the literature search, screening and data analysis process (Page et al., 2021).

To elaborate further, the search strategy covered four databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Relevant literature was screened according to pre-set eligibility criteria. Consequently, the final included studies were sorted and summarised through descriptive analysis and systematic thematic analysis to identify and summarise the characteristics, development trends, and primary motives proposed in the literature of news avoidance research in the Chinese context.

Search Strategy
The systematic literature review of this study followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure a systematic and transparent search and screening process. In addition, the search covered Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and the Chinese database China National Knowledge Infrastructure to obtain high-quality peer-reviewed literature in Chinese and English.

The search keywords were developed based on a preliminary literature review and thematic term analysis. Specifically, the search string was constructed using Boolean logic operators (AND, OR), and the final search expression was adjusted according to the syntax rules of each database. The specific search expressions are listed in Table 1 to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the search results. In contrast, other potential synonyms (such as disengagement) were not included in the initial search due to insufficient relevance. The search time range was limited to publication dates up to September 1, 2024. Thus, considering that relevant studies in the Chinese context may be published in Chinese journals, publications in both Chinese and English were included.

Table 1: Search strings and fields applied in each database

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("news" AND ("avoidance" OR "avoid*") AND ("China" OR "Chinese"))
Web of Science	TS=("news" AND ("avoidance" OR "avoid*") AND ("China" OR "Chinese"))
ProQuest	ab("news") AND (ab("avoidance") OR ab("avoid*")) AND (ab("China") OR ab("Chinese"))
CNKI	(SU="news avoidance")

It is worth noting that the titles and abstracts of all the literature were initially screened, and the literature that met the topic relevance was further included in the full-text review stage. Any doubts were resolved through team discussion or reference to established criteria. To improve the sensitivity and specificity of the search, manual search and backwards reference checking were also performed after the search was completed to identify important missed studies.

Eligibility Criteria
To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the literature analysis results and to fully present the current status of empirical research on news avoidance in the Chinese context, this study has established explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the research questions (see Table 2). In formulating these criteria, this study followed the common practice of systematic literature review methods, focusing on the research's relevance, time frame, language, and publication type. In addition, this study paid special attention to the fit between the research

topic of the literature and the concept of news avoidance, ensuring that the studies finally included mainly the core content, such as the definition of news avoidance, driving factors, and measurement methods.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publications in Chinese or English	Publications not in Chinese or English
Empirical or theoretical studies exploring news avoidance or related concepts in the Chinese context	Studies not related to news avoidance
Published on or before September 1, 2024	Published after September 1, 2024
Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, or theses/dissertations	Publications from non-peer-reviewed, commentaries, abstracts, book reviews, grey literature, or studies without full-text availability

A total of 128 articles were obtained from the initial search. Following this, after removing 12 duplicate records, the titles and abstracts of the remaining 116 articles were initially screened to exclude articles irrelevant to the topic or that did not meet the inclusion criteria. At this stage, articles that met the topic relevance (n = 62) were further included in the full-text review stage. Ultimately, a total of 38 articles were excluded, mainly due to the following reasons: publication type did not meet the requirements (such as reviews, columns, or inability to obtain full text, n = 4), irrelevant research topics (n = 26), and did not meet the eligibility criteria (such as not published in peer-reviewed journals or formally published conference papers and dissertations, n = 8). In conclusion, this systematic literature review formally included 24 articles that met all eligibility criteria, including 16 Chinese and 8 English articles. The PRISMA flow diagram details the screening process (see Figure 1).
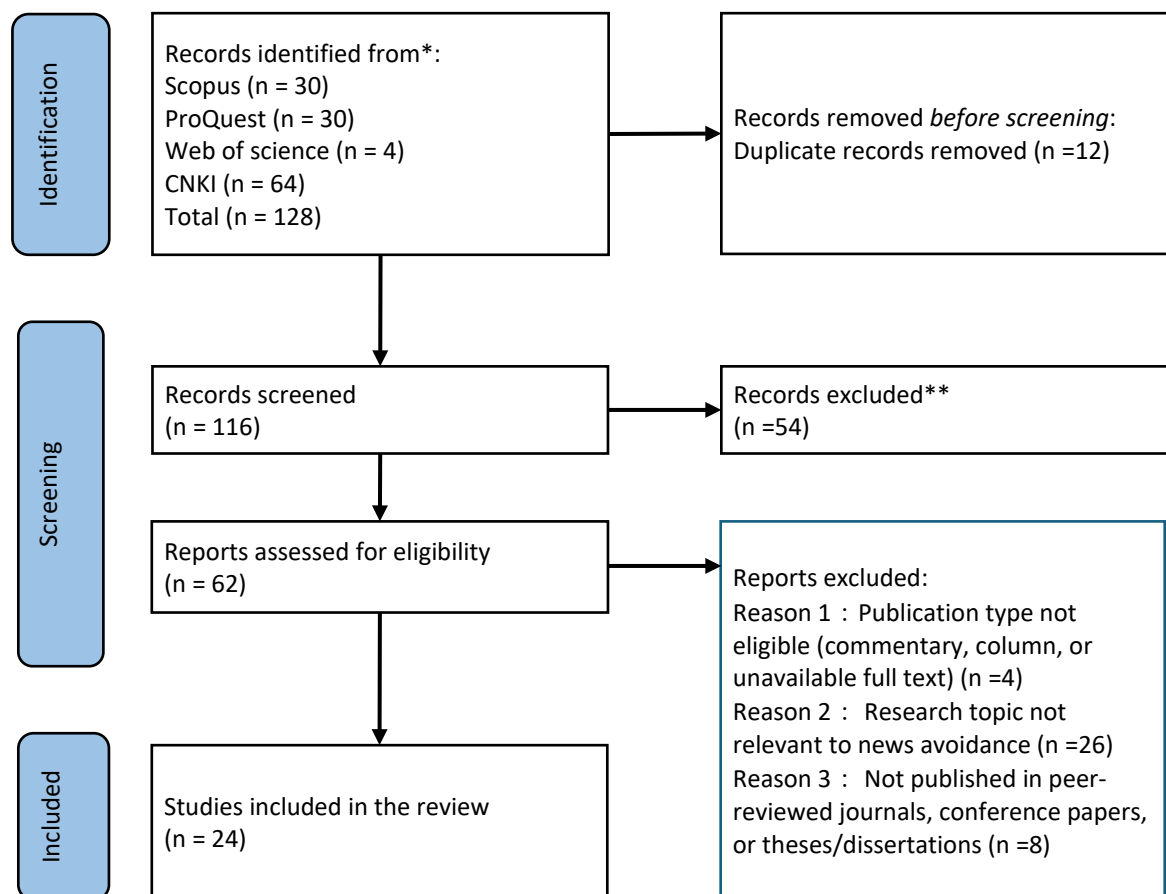
Figure 1: The flow diagram of study selection (Adapted from Page et al., 2021)

Data Analysis

This study employed two complementary data analysis strategies to conduct a comprehensive examination of the existing research. First, this study systematically presented the overall characteristics of China's news avoidance research by sorting and summarising the publication time, research methods, research population, theoretical framework and research topics of the included literature. Secondly, in exploring the motives for news avoidance, this study used thematic analysis to classify the data and identify the primary motives. The process of thematic analysis followed the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including data familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To further enhance the analysis, NVivo software was used to assist in data sorting, coding and theme induction to improve the systematicity and transparency of the analysis process.

To ensure reliability and consistency, two researchers employed the preliminary coding framework that was jointly created based on the research questions and the literature content to independently carry out the coding. This framework was consistently revised and refined during the practice process. For accuracy, some literature samples were randomly chosen to help guarantee the consistency of the coding outcomes. Coding results were computed to gauge Cohen's Kappa value (Coleman et al., 2024). In the next step, the researchers reached a consensus on the coding items with variances following the first coding round by means of discussion to enhance the dependability of the analysis outcomes.

Furthermore, ongoing comparison and cross-validation throughout the theme extraction process guaranteed that the summarised themes were explanatory and representative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics and motives of news avoidance research in the Chinese context, this study analysed the 24 eligible studies that were finally included. First, a descriptive analysis method was used to sort out the basic characteristics of the study, including publication time, research methods, research population, theoretical frameworks, and research topics, to reveal the overall development trend of this field. Subsequently, through thematic analysis, this study identified and summarised the four primary motives of news avoidance: emotional motives, cognitive motives, trust motives, and selective preference motives.

Study Characteristics
Among the 24 studies included in the analysis, 16 were published in Chinese and 8 in English. These studies exhibited clear trends and characteristics regarding publication time, research population, research methods, theoretical frameworks, and research topics.

In terms of publication time, most studies were published after 2020 (n=18) (e.g., Wei et al., 2024; Yu & Wang, 2024), and the number is increasing yearly. This trend reflects that with the rapid evolution of the digital media environment and the impact of significant social and political events (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), news avoidance as an essential media behaviour has attracted widespread attention from the Chinese academic community.

In terms of the research population, most studies focus on adolescents and young audiences, especially university students (n=15) (e.g., Zeng et al., 2024). This research tendency reflects the dominant position of digital natives in news consumption behaviour and their guiding role in media usage trends. In contrast, there are fewer studies on other age groups, and this focus may affect the broad applicability of the research results.

Most studies use quantitative methods, including questionnaire surveys and structural equation model analysis (e.g., Liyalin, 2024). Few qualitative studies (n=4), mainly using interviews or focus group discussions (e.g., Liu et al., 2023). In addition, some studies are theoretical analysis studies (n=8) (e.g., Wang Bin & Huang Jing, 2023). The distribution of research methods shows that scholars use quantitative methods to test the relationship between variables. These studies usually draw on Western theoretical models as an analytical framework. However, in-depth qualitative exploration based on the Chinese context is still insufficient.

Concerning research topics, the study mainly focuses on the identification of news avoidance motives (n=12) and the exploration of behavioural characteristics and their influencing mechanisms (n=8) (Tian, 2022). In addition, some studies focus on the impact of technology empowerment and platforms on news avoidance (n=3) (Jiang, 2023), and a small number of studies propose coping strategies for news avoidance (n=2) (Zhang Xue, 2020). These thematic distributions reflect scholars' concentrated attention on the internal motives and external mechanisms of news avoidance behaviour and reflect the preliminary exploration of the role of technology and practical coping strategies.

Motives Identified

Through thematic analysis of the 24 included studies, this study identified and summarised the primary motives of news avoidance behaviour in the Chinese context. The coding process followed a logical hierarchy from specific codes to sub-themes and then to themes (see Table 3), gradually refining the motives of news avoidance. Based on this process, the identified motives were finally summarised into four main themes: emotional motives, cognitive motives, trust motives, and selective preference motives.

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes of news avoidance motives

Themes	Sub-themes
Emotional Motives	Emotional fatigue and overload; Anxiety and frustration; Negative mood management
Cognitive Motives	News overload; Cognitive dissonance; Lack of relevance or usefulness
Trust Motives	Distrust in news institutions; Distrust in news sources
Selective Preference Motives	Political disengagement; Preference for entertainment

a.   Theme 1: Emotional Motives

Audiences in the digital news landscape are frequently subjected to an unending flow of news, and the emotional exhaustion brought on by this news overload has emerged as a major driver of news avoidance. Many studies have pointed out that in the face of reports on disasters, conflicts and adverse social events, audiences feel an increased psychological burden, which leads to boredom and alienation from the news. Yao Jin (2024) found that Generation Z audiences showed obvious selective avoidance behaviour when exposed to high-frequency disaster news to reduce psychological pressure. This finding is consistent with Gorski's (2023) recent cross-national research, which emphasised the close relationship between emotional load and news avoidance. In addition, Andersen, Toff and Ytre-Arne (2024) also proposed that emotional fatigue is a cross-contextual motive for news avoidance in different cultural contexts. It is worth noting that, compared with Western countries, emotional fatigue is more prominent among Chinese news audiences due to the faster speed of news dissemination and the higher intensity of social media algorithm recommendations.

On this basis, some audiences often experience more complex emotions in the process of news consumption, such as anxiety, frustration, anger or powerlessness, which further prompt them to avoid escalating emotional distress actively. Studies have shown that issues such as political events, social conflicts, and public health crises frequently trigger audience anxiety and frustration. For example, Tian (2022) pointed out that in the context of news overload and frequent social conflicts, audiences are prone to feel powerless and selectively skip specific news to reduce emotional load. At the same time, Edgerly's (2024) research found that audiences also tend to avoid news based on emotion management in the face of significant issues such as global social conflicts and epidemics. These findings show that emotional reactions are important in shaping news consumption behaviour in China and other cultural contexts.

It is worth noting that the manifestation of emotional motive in different audience groups and situations is dynamic and individual. Some studies have found that although most audiences selectively avoid news due to emotional fatigue, a few may seek more news to cope with uncertainty, thus showing different emotional regulation patterns (Mont'Alverne et al., 2023). In addition, factors such as sociocultural background, psychological resilience, and media literacy will also affect individuals' perceptions and coping methods for emotional load. For example, a higher level of media literacy helps audiences manage emotional stress

more effectively (Allam et al., 2024) and reduces the tendency of passive avoidance (Mont'Alverne et al., 2023). These findings further illustrate that emotional motive is not static but constantly evolves in the interaction between the audience's psychological characteristics and the media environment.

Furthermore, many audiences actively adopt emotion management strategies to protect their mental health by reducing exposure to news content that may cause anxiety or sadness (Villi et al., 2022). Young people, who often shy away from social and contentious issues as well as disaster news and instead concentrate on relaxing or entertaining information sources, show this coping mechanism especially clearly. This behaviour is consistent with the view of Emotion Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998), which states that individuals tend to regulate their emotional state by adjusting the way they are exposed to information. In addition, Ohme et al. (2022) pointed out in their latest research that digital platform algorithms further strengthen the audience's selective news consumption pattern by recommending personalised content, making emotion management one of the core mechanisms of news avoidance behaviour. This trend is particularly evident in China, where the recommendation algorithms of social media and news platforms often encourage individuals to avoid unpleasant news.

b.   Theme 2: Cognitive Motives

In news consumption, the audience's cognitive needs and abilities become important factors affecting their avoidance behaviour. News overload is widely regarded as the core manifestation of cognitive motives. China's digital news environment has an extremely high density of news information. When faced with a large amount of complex or repetitive information, the audience often feels that the cognitive burden is increased (Schäfer et al., 2023). News overload not only reduces audiences' willingness to consume news but also weakens their ability to process it. The audience faces time and cognitive resource constraints in news information screening and processing, resulting in selective exposure to news or complete avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2022). This result is consistent with Edgerly's (2022) research on young people in the United States. These studies have shown that cognitive load as a motive for news avoidance has cross-cultural applicability.

Furthermore, a major psychological motivator of news avoidance has been acknowledged as cognitive dissonance. When news content conflicts with the audience's existing values, attitudes or beliefs, the audience tends to avoid related issues to avoid the discomfort caused by internal cognitive dissonance (Ni et al., 2023). In the face of news content involving sensitive political issues or conflicting with personal identity, the audience is likelier to ignore or skip it to reduce the psychological burden. This phenomenon is particularly evident in China's social media environment, especially in that young groups tend to avoid reports that may challenge their worldview or cause conflicts in values (Li Biao et al., 2021). Cognitive dissonance is influenced by individual beliefs and how news is presented on digital platforms. Algorithmic recommendations may expand exposure to news that matches values while blocking cognitively dissonant content.

At the same time, a lack of relevance or usefulness is an important cognitive factor that prompts audiences to avoid news. When audiences believe that news content is irrelevant to their interests, needs or life experiences, they tend to pay less attention to such news or even avoid it altogether (Jiang, 2023). Related research shows that audiences are particularly inclined to ignore political and economic news that they think is obscure, lengthy

or lacks personal significance. This behaviour is consistent with the views on cognitive satisfaction in the Uses and Gratifications Theory. In line with studies conducted abroad, young Chinese viewers show great sensitivity to the intelligibility and relevance of news material, which causes a proactive avoidance of news content falling short of cognitive expectations.

c.   Theme 3: Trust Motives

Lack of trust is widely regarded as a primary motivation among the various reasons for news avoidance. Audiences' doubts about the authenticity and professionalism of news content and the credibility of news organisations have prompted them to reduce or stop their exposure to news. This trend is evident in China's digital news environment and consistent with international research results. In many countries, the decline in audience trust in news media has significantly increased the tendency to avoid news, especially among young groups (Strömbäck et al., 2022).

In China's digital media environment, changes in news production and distribution mechanisms have further exacerbated this trust crisis. Studies have pointed out that in a diffuse news environment, audiences generally doubt the accuracy and neutrality of algorithm-recommended content and are particularly concerned that negative or one-sided reports may mislead the public (Liu et al., 2023). This mechanism of personalised recommendation by news platforms through algorithms has also attracted academic attention worldwide (Baharom et al., 2023). Researchers refer to it as a 'filter bubble' or 'information cocoon', which limits the audience's access to diverse news sources.

The study also revealed, meanwhile, that the social and political context greatly affects the link between news trust and avoidance. Some audiences doubt the media's motives in reporting sensitive issues, worry that the news will be manipulated or biased and misleading, and then choose to avoid such news. Such research results show the profound impact of political and cultural background on news selection behaviour, echoing Western scholars' research on political apathy or ideological avoidance (Schäfer et al., 2023). In addition, research on the dissemination of fake news also reveals the close connection between a lack of trust and news selection behaviour. The audience's lack of trust in the source of information will reduce their attention to related content and may even lead them to actively avoid issues where unreliable information is present.

The lack of trust affects the audience's news choices and exacerbates the formation of information islands (Dodds et al., 2025), making news avoidance behaviour present a more complex motive structure. The motivations for trust among Chinese digital news audiences are multi-layered and situational. Compared with the emphasis on party bias or media stance in the Western context, the lack of trust among Chinese audiences is more reflected in concerns about the manipulation of news and the one-sidedness of news content.

d.   Theme 4: Selective Preference Motives

Among the motives for news avoidance, the audience's content preferences and selective interests are important foundations for avoidance behaviour. Many studies have shown that audiences tend to avoid news types that do not align with their interests, values, or needs. Audiences are not interested in serious news, such as politics and the economy, and prefer light content, such as entertainment and lifestyle (Gorski, 2023). This preference drives them to selectively skip news reports that do not match their interests. The increasing material variety in the digital media ecosystem lets people choose news that fits their tastes, thus

lowering their exposure to material they consider boring.

At the same time, the personalised trend of news acquisition is also strengthening this selective preference. Social media platforms continue to push the types of news that the audience prefers through algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, which not only meet the personalised needs of the audience but also invisibly reduce the exposure to news that conflicts with personal positions or interests. This system causes the audience to progressively shun news material that could cause cognitive dissonance or emotional discomfort, therefore supporting the creation of information cocoons and filter bubbles. In a highly algorithmic information environment, the active choices of users and the passive recommendations of algorithms significantly increase the selective characteristics of news avoidance (Vliegenthart et al., 2025).

It deserves attention that political disengagement is also an essential component of the motive for selective preference. Some audiences, especially young people, show a systematic lack of interest or even indifference to political news, leading them to avoid related content actively. This trend not only stems from the rejection of the complexity and obscurity of political issues but also reflects the audience's suspicion of the political process and its effectiveness. Zeng et al. (2024) show that short video platform users generally pay little attention to political issues and avoid political news through selective filtering. In addition, Edgerly (2022) pointed out that in the digital environment, young audiences' disengagement from politics further exacerbates preferential contact with news, becoming an explicit manifestation of news avoidance behaviour.

In addition, cultural and social norms also reveal the impact of selective preferences. When faced with controversial or sensitive social topics, some audiences skip related reports to avoid social conflicts or opposition to mainstream opinions. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the context of collectivist culture. A close connection exists between social norms and news avoidance strategies, and audiences tend to avoid news types that may cause cognitive conflicts or social dissent (Lindell et al., 2024).

To sum up, this paper takes a cross-cultural viewpoint to contrast results from the Chinese context with those from Western environments, therefore hoping to find similarities and differences based on the thematic analysis of the four categories of news avoidance motives. The news avoidance motives identified in this study have a consistent pattern worldwide and show unique characteristics in the Chinese context. Similar to the research results in Western countries (Edgerly, 2022; Gorski, 2023), emotional load, cognitive pressure, and doubts about the authenticity of news are also confirmed as the primary avoidance motivations among Chinese audiences. In contrast to European and American ones, Chinese audiences show more marked traits in terms of political apathy and sensitivity to algorithm-recommended material. This result may be closely related to China's unique media regulatory policies, social media environment, and social and cultural background. The government has high supervision over news content, forming a public opinion guidance system with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, the high degree of integration between social media and news platforms, as well as the widespread application of recommendation algorithms on digital platforms, further affects the dissemination of information and the audience's news consumption habits. These factors together shape a news consumption environment that is significantly different from that of Western countries. In addition, ideological polarisation, which is emphasised in Western studies as an essential factor driving news avoidance, is not significant in news avoidance behaviour in China. In contrast, Chinese audiences are more

concerned about the reliability of news and emotional management. These cross-cultural differences further verify the multidimensional nature of news avoidance motivations and highlight the contribution of this study in enriching the theoretical framework of global news avoidance.

LIMITATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study adopts a systematic literature review method to comprehensively analyse the relevant research on news avoidance in the Chinese context, several limitations remain. First, the included literature is mainly in Chinese, and the amount of English literature is relatively small, which may cause language bias and result in the absence of relevant research in other languages and academic backgrounds. Second, the time range of this study ends in September 2024, and the digital news environment is changing rapidly, so some recent research results were not included in the analysis. In addition, although this study summarises quantitative research, it does not further use meta-analysis methods to quantitatively integrate variable relationships, which limits the in-depth discussion of the consistency of research results and effect size. Finally, although the coding and theme induction process followed a systematic theme analysis process and was assisted by NVivo software, this process still inevitably has a certain degree of subjectivity.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned constraints, this work has greatly advanced theory and method. On the theoretical level, this study identified and integrated the core motives of news avoidance behaviour in the Chinese digital news environment through systematic thematic analysis, especially incorporating emotional motives, cognitive motives, trust motives, and selective preference motives into a unified explanatory framework, thereby expanding and deepening the existing news avoidance theory. On the methodological level, based on the systematic literature review framework, this study employed thematic analysis to systematically organise and summarise the included studies, establish a replicable and transparent research path, and provide a methodological reference for future research in related fields. In addition, the results of this study offer news organisations, digital platforms and policymakers a systematic understanding of the news avoidance behaviour of news audiences, which will help to formulate more targeted content distribution strategies and audience participation programs, thereby alleviating the phenomenon of news avoidance and optimising the effectiveness of news dissemination.

Future research should further expand the scope of language and region and include research in different languages and cultural backgrounds to strengthen cross-cultural comparisons. Meta-analysis can integrate data from existing quantitative studies to test the relationship between variables and assess their consistency. Future research designs should also be more diverse, using longitudinal or experimental methods to understand the causal mechanisms and temporal changes of news avoidance behaviour. At the same time, combining field surveys or multiple research methods will help verify and improve the motive framework proposed in this study.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that this work is a systematic literature review depending only on publicly accessible research published in Chinese and English. There were no human subjects or personal data involved; thus, ethical clearance was not necessary. There was no conflict of interest found, and the whole study followed academic criteria.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically analysed the empirical and theoretical studies on news avoidance behaviour in China's digital news environment published up to September 2024. Through the analysis of 24 Chinese and English studies, the study answered two core research questions. First, the characteristics of China's news avoidance research were sorted out, including the distribution trends of publication time, research population, research methods and theoretical application. Second, the primary motives for news avoidance were identified and summarised, covering emotional motives, cognitive motives, trust motives, and selective preference motives. These results offer a multidimensional view of selective news consumption and avoidance within the digital news ecology by exposing the intricate behavioural mechanisms by which audiences handle news overload, emotional load, cognitive pressure, and a lack of trust.

This study is of significance from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In terms of theory, this study enriches the motive system of news avoidance behaviour and promotes the development of theories in this field in the Chinese context. In practice, the research results can help news organisations, digital platforms, and policymakers better understand the audience's news consumption behaviour to formulate more targeted content distribution and audience participation strategies to meet the challenges of news avoidance.

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