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## “Be Less of a Slave to the News”: A Texto-Material Perspective on News Avoidance among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

The distinct media repertoire of young adults in the digital age, especially their increasing ability to bypass the news media, inspires a wealth of research. While previous studies have focused on social- and content-related motivations to avoid the news, we have yet to fully understand the interplay of such motivations with material, technology-related considerations. Drawing on 36 in-depth interviews with Israeli young adults, this paper explores the varied motivations of young audiences to avoid the news through a texto-material conceptualization of news avoidance as directed at both contents and objects. An inductive-qualitative analysis of young adults' media consumption narratives identified three main dimensions: content, medium, and user-oriented news avoidance. The study demonstrates the material aspects of both deliberate and unintentional news avoidance, and how they relate to content-oriented considerations. Furthermore, the Israeli socio-political context reveals that in times of crisis, these motivations are shared by both heavy and light news consumers. Taken together, the different avoidance motivations and practices identified in this study provide an analytical framework to further understand news avoidance and design differentiated strategies to address young adults' disengagement from news.

### KEYWORDS

Audience studies; news avoidance; news consumption; qualitative interviews; texto-material perspective; young adults

News consumption contributes to a range of desirable democratic outcomes, from civic participation and political knowledge to reinforcing people's sense of community (Bennett 2008; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013). Despite these oft-cited benefits, keeping up with the news also comes at the cost of time and emotional resources, which may lead to news avoidance (Newman et al. 2019; Palmer and Toff 2020; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020). The millennial generation in particular draws concerns regarding a decline in their news consumption, especially from legacy media (Antunovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018; Boczkowski, Mitchellstein, and Matassi 2018; Poindexter 2012). In an era of perpetual connectivity and extensive media use (Frosh 2018), when news is abundant and attainable with minimal effort and little awareness (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu 2017; Hermida 2016; Williams and Delli Carpini 2011), it is particularly important to examine the contexts and strategies through which young consumers not only engage with the news, but also actively disengage from it (Edgerly 2017).

While the existing literature has mostly focused on young consumers' motivations to bypass news *contents* (Edgerly 2017; Woodstock 2014), the possible role of *journalistic objects and technologies* (e.g., printed newspapers, mobile news alerts) in news avoidance has remained largely uncharted. This study therefore examines both textual and material aspects that figure into news avoidance behavior among young adults. By integrating literature on news and technology non-use, we show how news avoidance is a behavior that pivots on journalistic contents and technologies alike, while being connected to motivations for technology non-use more broadly (e.g., the perception of media as "time-wasting" or addictive). Employing a text-to-material approach (Siles and Boczkowski 2012) to the study of news avoidance, and contextualizing news non-use in young audience's broader consumption patterns, our analysis of 36 in-depth interviews with young Israelis (aged 18-34) provides a detailed account of news avoidance motivations and practices, highlighting three main dimensions. The first is content-related, i.e., avoiding journalistic topics or outlets; the second is medium-specific, i.e., avoiding news-related technologies deemed uncontrollable; and the third involves users' self-reflection, i.e., avoiding the news as part of a conscious attempt to reduce media consumption at large. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for understanding news avoidance and suggesting possible solutions to attract young news audiences.

## Young People and News Avoidance in the Saturated Digital Environment

### *Avoiding Journalistic Contents in Digital Platforms*

The rapidly evolving media environment is reshaping news consumption patterns (Hermida 2016) and undermining the traditional position of news as a crucial component of civic life (Bennett 2008; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Woodstock 2014). While digital technologies promote information seeking by offering novel ways to consume news, a wide-choice media environment reinforces selective exposure (Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016), so that users with little interest in politics may avoid news altogether (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Prior 2005; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013). The millennial generation in particular exhibits a shift from traditional to online journalism (Edgerly 2017; Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson 2016), along with a significant reduction in the volume and quality of consumed news (Antunovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018; Bengtsson and Johansson 2020; Lee and Chyi 2014; Poindexter 2012).

The increasing numbers of news avoiders across the globe (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Newman et al. 2017) have attracted scholarly interest to the phenomenon of news non-use. Nevertheless, the absence of a standardized measure for news avoidance has impeded conceptual rigor in the literature (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020). Defined as a continuous "low news consumption" (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020, 463), avoidance is operationalized either in relation to a pre-determined threshold (i.e., once a day, a week, or a month) (Newman et al. 2017; Toff and Nielsen 2018; Toff and Palmer 2019), or in comparison to the amount of consumption by others (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013). Alternatively, several studies have relied on consumers' explicit identification as avoiders, regardless of their general exposure (Newman et al. 2019; Woodstock 2014). This latter measurement aligns with the fluidity of avoidance behavior in an era of media convergence (Ribak and

Rosenthal 2015; Jenkins 2006), which may lead even “news junkies” to enact avoidance practices at times (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020).

Previous research has suggested an array of reasons for avoiding the news media. Among them, the inherent negativity of the news—and subsequent emotional responses to it—have been identified as primary motivations for avoidance (Newman et al. 2017, 2019; Toff and Palmer 2019; Wagner and Boczkowski 2019; Woodstock 2014). News distrust, political disinterest, or a lack of civic obligation to remain informed are other prominent avoidance catalysts (Edgerly 2017; Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Lee and Chyi 2014; Newman et al. 2017; Palmer and Toff 2020; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013; Toff and Nielsen 2018). Avoidance is also often related to a sense of news overload (Pentina and Tarafdar 2014; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), when consumers are disturbed by the incessant coverage of certain national or global political events, such as the “Brexit” referendum (Toff and Nielsen 2018), the 2016 US elections (Wagner and Boczkowski 2019), and the coronavirus pandemic (Kalogeropoulos, Fletcher, and Nielsen 2020). News avoidance can thus be seen as a self-preservation behavior, aimed to prevent information manipulation and to shield individuals from the distressing effect of engaging with the news (Toff and Palmer 2019; Woodstock 2014).

News is accessed online in what Hermida (2016) calls “ambient journalism”—that is, an information network that maintains a constant awareness to public affairs. The advantage of this highly engaging ecosystem for informed citizenship is incidental consumption of news, which may inadvertently expose people to current events information (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018; Edgerly 2017; Mitchelstein et al. 2020). Nevertheless, the same phenomenon may also backfire, instilling in users false expectations that important news will “find them,” thereby discouraging active information seeking and compromising political knowledge (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu 2017; Prior 2005; Toff and Nielsen 2018). Such an indirect avoidance form is further intensified in a wide-choice media environment through processes of personalized algorithms (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Prior 2005; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013), as well as by societal inequalities, demonstrated in demographic factors, such as gender and income (Kalogeropoulos, Fletcher, and Nielsen 2020; Toff and Palmer 2019).

The different and sometimes contradictory reasons for bypassing the news media led Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) to conclude that news avoidance is either intentional, driven by an explicit disapproval of news, or unintentional, driven by a strong preference for competing contents. Since news and entertainment consumption are weaved together in a hybrid media environment, the avoidance of such contents is also intertwined. We therefore adopt a holistic approach that considers news avoidance in the context of young audiences’ broader consumption patterns, including entertainment consumption and social media use.

### ***News Avoidance as a Type of Technology Non-Use***

Far from being solely a form of information acquisition, consuming the news occurs as part of the routinized consumption of journalistic objects (Bengtsson and Johansson 2020; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020). Avoiding the news therefore signifies both bypassing journalistic contents as well as circumventing news-related platforms and technologies, though the two literatures are rarely considered side-by-side.

Technology non-use includes various behaviors ranging from a complete refusal to engage in a medium (Bauer 1995) to a temporary restriction of its usage (Ribak and Rosenthal 2015). Accomplished either individually or collectively, technology resistance challenges the dominant social norms around media use (Portwood-Stacer 2013; Ribak and Rosenthal 2015); and news avoidance is no exception (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Bennett 2008; Woodstock 2014). Yet, the emphasis on the normative aspects of media avoidance may obscure the functional and mundane elements of this same behavior (Bauer 1995; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020). For example, while avoiding the news is often delegitimized, it has been found beneficial, in certain cases, to citizens' sense of calm and optimism (Woodstock 2014).

The declining engagement of young adults with journalism has often been described in the context of the digitization of news media (Antunovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018; Edgerly 2017; Poindexter 2012), yet, as discussed above, the majority of studies analyze young consumers' motivations to avoid the news in terms of its *content*, from political disinterest and distrust in news stories, to emotional overload caused by the negativity of news (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Edgerly 2017; Toff and Nielsen 2018). However, in line with the material turn in journalism studies, which calls for more nuanced research of journalistic objects and technologies (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018; Siles and Boczkowski 2012), we suggest that understanding the physical attributes of news consumption and how they are interpreted by audiences can also illuminate some of the motivations to avoid the news. For example, Boczkowski and colleagues' (2020) examination of daily newspaper consumption in Argentina portrays how undesirable physical attributes of print newspapers, such as their size, weight, and texture, may provoke audiences to avoid them regardless of their contents.

Current digital media environments may further intensify expressions of technology-oriented news avoidance. While traditional push media (e.g., live television or radio) provide audiences with unalterable newscasts, interactive pull media (e.g., websites, search engines) require users to actively obtain news content (Cover 2006; Jenkins 2006). The abundance of information-seeking options may add to the perceived civic demand for political knowledge, leading to a possible counter-reaction in the form of the suppression of news consumption among young adults (Edgerly 2017; Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson 2016; Toff and Nielsen 2018). Furthermore, digital technologies can heighten negative emotions and can in turn motivate user disengagement. Social media platforms, for instance, along with their involuntary push notifications and uncontrollable algorithmic contents, raise concerns over lack of privacy, "time waste," and addiction (Portwood-Stacer 2013). Similarly, smartphones' perpetual connectivity and demand for extensive user attention (Frosh 2018) may be overburdening at times (Ribak and Rosenthal 2015).

In a hybrid media environment, where news and entertainment are consumed side-by-side (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018), avoiding content deemed undesirable—like the news—is considered challenging and even impossible by some users (Toff and Nielsen 2018). Those who consciously wish to avoid the news must deliberately reduce incidental access by unsubscribing from mobile applications and disabling push notifications (Mitchelstein et al. 2020). Nonetheless, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the technology-oriented motivations and practices for avoiding the news.

To summarize, our theoretical framework highlights the significance of users' negative perceptions of both material artifacts (time wasting, addictive) and journalistic content (untrustworthy, repetitive, negative) for understanding news avoidance behavior. The two, moreover, occur in a specific socio-political context. Building on a texto-material approach that seeks to unpack users' content interpretations as part of their everyday artifact use (Siles and Boczkowski 2012), we thus consider how content- and technology-related aspects shape young Israelis' media consumption, sometimes leading to news avoidance as a chosen response to a particularly news-saturated media environment.

### ***The Israeli Context***

Understanding news use requires an integrated investigation of the consumption of journalistic information and technologies as part of the specific cultural context in which they are being consumed (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020). News avoidance may likewise be shaped by a constellation of texto-material elements and specific cultural environments.

In this study, we use the Israeli context as a valuable prism for understanding young adults' declining involvement with the news media. While news avoidance has been found to derive, in part, from a lack of interest, or from weak civic norms around news consumption (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013), Israel offers a unique case study for exploring news avoidance behavior. As a society embedded in an ongoing violent conflict, Israeli citizens, including young adults, are highly involved in politics and current affairs (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Maoz 2015). At the same time, Israeli society is deeply polarized with respect to people's political positions and interactions (Yarchi, Baden, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020).

Adopting a holistic approach to news consumption means examining it in the spaces in which it most frequently occurs, which, for young people, is often on social media (Antunovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018). In contrast to young Americans who seem reticent to post about politics on mainstream social media (Thorson, Vraga, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2014), young Israelis were found to perceive political content on social media as appropriate, and they express themselves politically on Facebook as a deliberate practice of impression management (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Maoz 2015). The same tendency, however, may decrease in periods of heightened security tension, which lead to heated online discussions and even the elimination of certain social interactions via unfriending (John and Dvir-Gvirsman 2015; Yarchi, Baden, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020).

The distinct set of dilemmas and coping strategies embedded into young Israelis' social media use may intensify both content and technology aspects of news avoidance. In line with other national-specific studies (Newman et al. 2019; Wagner and Boczkowski 2019), intensive coverage of political events, potentially entail a perception of news as biased, emotional, and overwhelming, thus motivating deliberate avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020). Alternatively, a conscious will to disengage from the coverage of such high-profile events might stem from the increase in involuntary push notifications and sound alerts that usually accompany moments of crises (Frosh 2018). Therefore, in the Israeli high-tension context, avoiders and frequent consumers might both be motivated to circumvent the news.

In this study, we draw on Skovsgaard and Andersen's (2020) typology, which distinguish between intentional and unintentional types of news avoidance. We aim to complement the news avoidance literature with an examination of users' perceptions of both contents and technologies, and the ways in which these same perceptions underlie purposeful and indirect news avoidance practices. We thus consider young Israelis' news avoidance behaviors within the broader context of their everyday media usage, and ask: What are the content- and technology-related motivations and practices that underlie news avoidance among young Israeli consumers?

## Method

This study builds on the analysis of 36 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Israeli young adults to characterize their news avoidance behavior.<sup>1</sup> In line with recent conceptualizations of young adults, we focus on 18–34 year olds, who represent the “emerging adulthood” life stage (Vespa 2017). In contrast to previous studies, which only considered users who completely disengage from news media (Palmer and Toff 2020; Woodstock 2014), our sample included both frequent and infrequent news consumers. This allowed us to identify and analyze a range of avoidance expressions.

Previous research stresses the role of demographic factors in shaping news avoidance motivations and practices. For example, whereas research on well-educated news resisters portrays avoidance as a performance of engaged citizenship (Woodstock 2014), studies on working- and middle-class avoiders, and women in particular, show opposite avoidance drivers: the perception of public life as uninteresting and remote (Toff and Nielsen 2018; Toff and Palmer 2019). To cover a wide range of content- and technology-oriented motivations, we sought for variance in interviewees' gender and class, as well as in their religious beliefs and political ideologies. The interviewees were recruited directly by the authors and their research assistants. Using a snowball sampling technique (Deacon et al. 1999), the researchers interviewed distant contacts, expanding the sample population to include interviewees' acquaintances from different social networks that were diverse in terms of gender, education, and occupation.

The result is a sample of 36 interviewees, 19 women and 17 men. Of them, 12 live in Israel's center, 15 in the Jerusalem area, seven in the north, and two in the south. All interviewees completed high school, three have not pursued higher education, three are attending a Yeshiva (a religious Jewish educational institution), 18 attended college and have an academic degree, and 12 are graduate students. Regarding employment, 21 of the interviewees work in professions ranging from software engineering to social work and teaching, two serve in the military, and the rest are students or are unemployed. The interviewees comprise four Muslims and 32 Jews, of whom 19 are secular, 10 religious, and three ultra-Orthodox.

The semi-structured interview guide addressed three media consumption domains—news, entertainment, and technological devices—and focused on daily media consumption habits (e.g., “Which TV programs have you watched lately?”; “What do you use your cellphone for?”). Drawing on a text-material approach, which focuses on the “mutual shaping of content and materiality in the use of media” (Siles and Boczkowski 2012, 228), the interview protocol included questions about news content (e.g., “Which news item has caught your attention lately?”; “How did you feel after reading that news



story?”) as well as about the material aspects of news use (e.g., “Which device do you usually use to consume news?”; “Do you sometimes inadvertently encounter news issues via social media?”). News avoidance was not an intentional aim for the interview guide, yet it quickly emerged as one of the prominent topics raised by interviewees. The prevalence and richness of the news avoidance discourse that emerged in the context of everyday media usage was a main incentive for this study.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face by a team of researchers and research assistants. They took place from mid-July 2017 until the end of October 2018 in locations (workplace, home, or cafe) and languages (four in Arabic and the rest in Hebrew) chosen by the interviewees. Interviews averaged 55 min, ranging from 30–95 min. This wide range was the result of the demographic variety of our corpus: while some respondents had extensive news consumption routines to elaborate on, others, especially ultra-Orthodox individuals, provided more condensed descriptions due to their restricted media habits or lack of technological devices.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The transcripts subsequently underwent an in-depth qualitative analysis consisting of several stages. After several rounds of in-depth reading, we extracted from the transcripts all references to news avoidance and news non-use. Since hybrid media environments merge news with entertainment (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018), we also considered border mentions of media and technology avoidance. Next, we classified these segments, by first identifying descriptive concepts (such as emotional overload, news distrust) and then recursively integrating the emerging themes, guided by theoretical reflection (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This process yielded a classification of three dimensions of news avoidance motivations and practices within the broader context of media usage: content, medium, and user-oriented news avoidance. The quotes included in this paper, were translated into English by the authors.

## **Findings: Three Dimensions of News Avoidance Motivations and Practices**

In our analysis, news avoidance is the focal point, yet our holistic approach also considers interviewees’ entertainment consumption patterns to contextualize their news-related perceptions and behaviors. The analysis revealed three dimensions of news avoidance motivations and practices articulated by the interviewees. The first concerns the attributes of news contents, such as their negativity, untrustworthiness, and commercialized nature. The second refers to the technological aspects of news consumption, mainly the inability to control live broadcasts and mobile push notifications. The last dimension demonstrates that the ubiquitous exposure to news, enabled by digital devices, may sometimes lead to a sense of overuse and even to a fear of addiction. As such, this dimension includes news avoidance practices that are not directed toward news contents or specific technologies, but rather result from a desire to reduce media consumption at large.

### ***Content Avoidance: Withholding Consumption of Journalistic Information***

All interviewees discussed the need to occasionally “take a break” from current affairs. They reported bypassing certain news topics, limiting their exposure to specific journalistic outlets and, in some cases, even avoiding news altogether. The reluctance to



consume certain journalistic stories—common to both heavy and light news consumers—stems from negative perceptions about the attributes of such contents.

One motivation for avoiding news is its perception as biased. The notion that news is driven by a political or commercial agenda provoked anger and frustration among young Israelis and prompted deliberate efforts to avoid reports, even ones encountered incidentally. Yoav (M, 32), a high-tech employee, said that the “biased and distorted” nature of *Ynet* (a popular Israeli news site) annoys him so, that he refrains from this popular site’s articles, even when shared on Facebook. Noor (F, 34), a literature major, even blocked one of her friends on WhatsApp for sending her “unobjective” news articles. Dana (F, 34), a lab assistant and enthusiastic news consumer, avoided all reports about the Druze rallies in Israel in July 2018. She asserted that her disinterest in this specific issue, in stark contrast with her generally high engagement with the news, stems from her anger about bias: “The coverage was unobjective. On a crazy level! ... It was very disturbing to me.”

Other interviewees reported avoiding news content with a political stance deemed extreme. Many young consumers wished to refrain from such content, consumed unintentionally on social media, as it is perceived to be “inappropriate” and “irritating.” For example, Manor (F, 22), a nutrition science major, mentioned that “if it [a Facebook post] is very, very political, I won’t click on it.” When contemplating what might be the reason for her avoidance, she mentioned that although “it is important to be involved in politics,” when she is exposed to political content she considers “very extreme” on Facebook, “the very act of seeing it and talking about it is not pleasant to me ... it deters me.” Manor’s words demonstrate young adults’ general aversion to political content encountered on social networks (Thorson, Vraga, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2014). This antagonism was evident among most of our interviewees, reflecting perhaps a disenchantment with social media as an appropriate venue for political conversation, and in stark contrast to the high motivation of young Israelis to engage in political discussion on Facebook found only several years ago (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Maoz 2015).

Consistent with the phenomenon of selective exposure (Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016), young Israelis tend to ignore news commentaries that contradict their political opinions and are therefore perceived as less reliable. For example, Eliav (M, 32), who works in the field of digital marketing and holds left-wing opinions, refrains from watching television newscasts because he considers TV journalists “right-wingers” and is “irritated by their commentary.” Similarly, Asaf (M, 27), a software engineer, expressed his distrust in *Haaretz* (a left-leaning daily broadsheet). He said he is therefore unlikely to open *Haaretz* articles that he encounters on Facebook:

My entry threshold for articles from *Haaretz* [on Facebook] is slightly higher ... if I’m hesitating [whether to open] ... then with *Haaretz* there’s a greater chance of a ‘no’ ... I relate less to the political views there and sometimes feel it’s a little exaggerated ... and so I take it with a grain of salt ... If something is, in my opinion, less reliable, then I tend to spend less time [on it].

News avoidance may also relate to the identity of the person who shared the article, or even the specific journalist mentioned in the byline. On social networks, some interviewees reported deliberately avoiding articles posted by friends with very different political opinions. Guy (M, 21), an openly gay undergraduate student, mentioned an article he

encountered on Facebook about the LGBT community. Although the topic intrigued him, Guy closed the article immediately upon identifying a journalist he dislikes:

It pissed me off, because I hate this tiresome journalist ... The subject interested me, I wanted to see what it was, because the title was a little provocative. Then I open it, see who the journalist is, realize that, well, it's not for me, goodbye. I don't want to give him the traffic ... I didn't want to swallow his bait.

Guy's remark about choosing to avoid journalistic bait relates more broadly to the emerging motivation of young adults to circumvent certain news outlets for commercial—and not only political—considerations. Some interviewees were irritated by the large number of commercials during television and radio newscasts. Others disapproved of the volume of promoted content and clickbaits on certain news sites. Lihi (F, 31), a data analyst, mentioned that she never clicks on articles from *Mako* (a popular news and entertainment website) on Facebook because they are “full of advertisements.” She then went on to condemn the commercial nature of news in general: “I often feel like [news] is very marketing-like and very commercial ... They [news creators] only provide you with the information they want you to know. And it's very, very hard for me, I'd rather see the full picture.”

Others avoid news media due to their negative nature. As found in previous studies (Newman et al. 2019; Woodstock 2014), avoiding exposure to disturbing content is a key motivation. As Sivan (F, 27), a graduate student, explained, “[to consume news] is to be exposed to a lot of suffering and evil and very disturbing things. I don't want to be exposed to this.” Indeed, in the turbulent context of Israeli politics, staying informed may be seen as a burden. Zvika (M, 25), a Yeshiva student, described his strong emotional reaction to the news coverage of a terrorist attack: “I sat afterwards, I cried, I had a very difficult time with it.”

The volume of breaking news in times of crisis, as well as the resultant emotional responses, may lead young people to a counter-reaction of indifference and avoidance. Danit (F, 28), a high-tech employee who usually eagerly follows news reports, chose not to open a push notification about a stabbing attack that occurred in Jerusalem during a period of heightened violence: “It's pretty sad, but it had become quite standard. So, it's like, well, I'll go into [the article], I'll read that someone was stabbed ... more of the same.” Others decided to completely opt out of being informed. Yael (F, 31), who works for a book publishing company, avoids all news; instead, she relies on social media to inform her of major events, demonstrating the prevalence of the “news-finds-me” perception (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu 2017; Toff and Nielsen 2018) that may be particularly strong in the Israeli context where current events are widely discussed on social networks (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Maoz 2015). As she explained:

I always assume that if something very big [happens], if there is a terror attack, I'll probably find out about it. Because someone will put a sad song on Facebook, someone will write something to commemorate them [the victims], someone will change their profile picture to the Israeli flag ... If something is big enough, I'll find out about it.

The strong relationship between negative news and the Israeli context is expressed in the words of Dean (M, 29), an International Relations major. Dean discussed leaving the country as the only viable option to disengage from the news, which to him reflects the many frustrating day-to-day problems in Israeli society:

When we talk about [living] abroad, one of the things I really imagine is the news as something distant ... getting away from the news. It's a little weird because you could just not read it, but ... to me, the news arrives afterwards ... I associate it with so many [societal] problems.

Journalistic content thus entails several attributes deemed undesirable by young adults, such as the perception that news is negative, untrustworthy, commercialized, and, when appearing on social media, also inappropriate. Some of the strategies designed to inhibit unwanted news stories require familiarity with national news structures, such as the circumvention of a specific "biased" news outlet or a particularly disliked journalist. Most content-related practices, however, were common to all interviewees, regardless of their level of political knowledge or news consumption.

### ***Medium Avoidance: Averting News-related Technologies***

The motivation to avoid the news emerges not only in relation to journalistic content but also in relation to technological features. The interviews demonstrate the prevalence of news avoidance behavior directed at certain media or platforms. Building on the distinction between unalterable push media and interactive pull media (Cover 2006), we found that Israeli young adults are often motivated to avoid the former type of news (e.g., live television broadcasts, mobile alerts), since they are perceived as decreasing user agency and choice.

In line with previous reports on the news consumption practices of young adults (Antonovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018), most of our interviewees do not consume traditional media. Only four of the 36 interviewees reported regularly reading print newspapers, 15 do not own a television set, and five own just a large screen linked to a personal computer. Even when alternative media (TV, print newspapers) are available, young adults prefer to consume news via their smartphones or laptops. The evasion of legacy media seems to stem from socio-technical considerations rather than from the conveyed journalistic content. For example, Oded (M, 32), who works at a biomedical company, complained that "you can't fast forward the [television] newscast if it's not interesting" and it therefore does not fit the contemporary "instant culture." Eliav (M, 32) asserted that television is an outdated medium. He prefers reading a print newspaper over watching live television news coverage, seeing it as a more controllable medium:

You don't have to read every single word [in the newspaper]. And on the [television] news, one has to hear the story to its end and it's tiring ... Throwing myself in at eight o'clock to ... watch TV is such an old-fashioned concept ... It's not on my terms.

The inability to control television and its negative perception as a medium in the eyes of young consumers leads to avoid it not only for news, but also for entertainment consumption. For instance, Yochai (M, 31), an Orthodox Jew from a small religious village in the West Bank who works as a shepherd, does not own a television set. He watches TV series on his smartphone, and occasionally, when his wife joins him, on their desktop computer. This television avoidance derives from a disgust of commercials, which he considers an expression of a loss of control:

You find yourself ... staring at commercials like an idiot ... you can't do anything else during those five minutes, right? Because in a second, once again, the program continues ... On the

computer, even if there are commercials, they kind of pop up and you close them in a second. It's not something that is, like, being forced on you.

Unlike radio and television, the smartphone is perceived as more convenient for consuming news as it offers a sense of control. Manor (F, 22) explained that given the possibility of disturbing content on the news, the ability for control on the smartphone is a notable advantage:

When it's on the phone ... it's in [your] complete control. If something doesn't seem right to you, you just stop it at that moment. And if you are with your family and there are young children around, or even ... someone who is just more sensitive ... you are more in control than with a [television] remote control that you need to find to change the channel.

The smartphone is thus portrayed as the preferred medium for news consumption. Yana (F, 26), a biomedical engineer, mentioned that news apps are "always available ... and up-to-date." Similarly, Gadir (F, 22), a school teacher, commented that via the Facebook app news can be obtained "anywhere and anytime." This ubiquitous exposure to news along with its ability to replace other media technologies places the smartphone as the fundamental media consumption device for young adults. This was the position taken by Meital (F, 21), an undergraduate student: "My whole life is in my cellphone ... I can watch TV ... listen to music ... . My cellphone has everything. Like, thank God, for whoever invented the smartphone ... it's hard to live without it now."

As a medium that converges various types of older media (Jenkins 2006), the smartphone is used in order to favor some platforms and avoid others. The general preference of young adults for interactive controllable media is also expressed on a micro level between different mobile platforms. Significantly, the interviews indicate young Israelis' clear inclination to actively seek news information rather than passively receiving unsolicited updates. Lior (F, 32), an economist, explained that she finds news notifications disturbing because the apps "send you a push about every silly thing." She would rather choose when to consume news and has canceled push notifications on her smartphone. Lihi (F, 31) also turned off her push notifications: "It's like I have no control over it. It feels like they're coercing me to know information that I don't want to know!"

There was one distinct exception to the desire to control the timing of news consumption that was shared by most interviewees: periods of heightened security tension that generate an acute need for frequent news updates. Nofar (F, 25), a public sector employee who installed a news app on her mobile phone during the 2014 Israel–Gaza conflict, expressed a bifurcated attitude toward incidental news consumption via push notifications. She has since deleted the news app because "it was a bit depressing. Every five minutes something would happen. I was receiving endless alerts." Nonetheless, she acknowledged the importance of this app in times of crisis for receiving updates:

I'll tell you when *Ynet* [a news site with push notifications] is good – when there's, God forbid, a war ... then *Ynet* tells you this and this happened, and this is where missiles landed – that's good. That you want to know.

Notably, during times of security tension, young Israelis' news consumption habits shift both quantitatively and qualitatively. These changes entail active technological choices and generate a distinct set of media preferences and avoidance behaviors. The statements by Chen and Manor, two 22-year-olds who grew up in turbulent Jerusalem,

indicate an increasing motivation to use news apps and follow social media contents that are updated regularly and frequently in times of crisis. Manor recalled following a Facebook page called “The Shadow” which is operated by a right-wing Israeli political activist. Although she acknowledged its news updates were not always accurate, she read them on a regular basis during the 2014 conflict because “his news shows up the fastest. He like knows everything ... even half an hour before [everyone else].” Similarly, Chen remarked, “I sometimes get ... news flashes from 0404 [an Israeli news site] ... I don’t appreciate ... their coarse language ... but ... in the West Bank there is a lot of stone throwing and stuff, so 0404 almost always writes about it.”

These examples illustrate the preference of young Israelis for instant and extensive reporting during periods of security tension, temporarily prioritizing speed over style or even factuality. The heightened motivation at such times for continuous push updates, in contrast to their usual avoidance, resonates with Ribak and Rosenthal’s (2015) conclusion that technology resistance is usually temporal and specific.

### ***User-Oriented Avoidance – Reducing News Consumption as a Type of Media “Detox”***

News avoidance is not necessarily driven by disinterest (Woodstock 2014). Intriguingly, this behavior may in fact result from over-interest, or in other words, a fear of overuse and of addiction. Many interviewees regretted their many hours of media usage and expressed a desire to cut down. This aspiration was extremely prevalent in our interviews and was invoked in relation to both news *and* entertainment consumption.

Generally, many of the interviewees were far from proud of some of their media consumption patterns, equating them with unhealthy dietary practices. Eliav (M, 32) compared social media usage on his smartphone to “eating French fries for dinner.” Similarly, Yochai (M, 31) compared his TV series binge-watching sessions to gorging on chocolate. In contrast to reading a book or listening to a podcast, which they find more “useful and nourishing,” Eliav and Yochai both referred to their entertainment consumption as an unhealthy “diet” that may have harmful ramifications, and wished to “put an end” to it. Other interviewees have even described their entertainment consumption patterns in terms of an uncontrollable addiction. For instance, Shir (F, 19), an IDF soldier, used a medical metaphor to describe her Instagram usage as a “disease” that should be “cured.”

Addiction discourse was prevalent not only in response to leisure activities, but also around news consumption habits. Some of the interviewees defined themselves as “addicted to news,” and they also expressed their wishes to wean themselves off their dependence on following current events. Moran (F, 30), who works in the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, noted, “I would like to find a balance between my news consumption habits and a calm and peaceful lifestyle, and to be less of a slave to the news.” Oded (M, 32) expressed his envy of those who manage to completely avoid the news. He portrayed himself as a news addict who wants to reduce the time he spends on news consumption. However, he felt he was unable to overcome his habit of checking the *Ynet* news app on his phone several times a day:

I would like to ... stop reading [news articles on *Ynet*], at least reduce the frequency ... surely there is no reason to be updated ... numerous times a day ... because what can change over

such short periods? ... It's the power of habit ... inertia I guess ... Theoretically I can just stop it ... maybe it's just hard at the beginning, like with any other addiction when you start a detox process.

Much of the interviewees' normative discourse about their consumption habits focused on smartphones. In contrast to its convenience as a news consumption device mentioned earlier, the constant availability and continual social contact facilitated by smartphones also aroused negative feelings, and it is therefore perceived as a very intense medium. According to Yochai (M, 31):

If there's something that gets you out of focus in life, it's this little box [the smartphone] that just makes a ton of trouble ... If you don't answer someone for five minutes ... [they] call the police ... You must always be available ... You are always getting notifications. It is always beeping.

Indeed, many interviewees expressed a desire to distance themselves, at times, from their smartphone—not only for news use, but for interpersonal use as well. Many reported refraining from use during meals or before bedtime and acknowledged a need to reduce usage on weekends, during social engagements, or when traveling abroad. Some practice smartphone disconnectivity routinely and frequently, and they proactively reduce the amount of time spent on smartphones by deleting apps or removing them from the home screen, changing sound and notifications settings, intentionally leaving their phones in their bags or at home, or even just turning them over to hide the screen. Four interviewees always leave their phones on quiet mode because they just “can't stand the noise.” Dean (M, 29) declared, “my cellphone is on quiet mode for most of the day ... I kind of loathe it ... I like to distance myself from it as much as I can.”

Smartphones seem to present a profound contradiction for young Israelis. On the one hand, they describe them as essential to their routine, and as a preferable medium to consume various content, and news in particular. Meital (F, 21) even described her smartphone as an organ of her body, equating its absence with feeling “as if someone cut my arm off!” On the other hand, most of the interviewees referred to their smartphone usage as an addiction and expressed a desire to reduce it. The interviewees' extensive smartphone use for consuming news and entertainment, despite their negative perceptions of it, indicates the ambivalent perception of media technologies in a saturated information environment (Ribak and Rosenthal 2015). Especially in mobile and digital environments, wherein journalistic content is always abundant and attainable, avoiding the news is not an opposite of, but rather an integral part of, regular news consumption behavior.

## Discussion: The Interaction of Materiality and Content in News Avoidance

This study identified three dimensions of news avoidance within the media consumption patterns of young Israelis: avoiding journalistic topics or outlets, avoiding news-related technologies deemed uncontrollable, and avoiding the news as part of an intention to reduce media consumption altogether. These three categories complement the understanding of news avoidance by demonstrating the material aspects of this phenomenon and their interaction with content-related aspects. This study therefore offers a new way to think about avoidance: not only as a behavior that pivots on users' content considerations, such as a dislike for news or a preference for entertainment (Skovsgaard and

Andersen 2020), but also as an object-related practice intended to circumvent technologies that deliver news.

The first avoidance category found in this study corroborates Skovsgaard and Andersen's (2020) model of intentional avoidance, and supports previous studies on the attributes that motivate it: the negativity and low credibility of news (Edgerly 2017; Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016; Newman et al. 2019; Toff and Palmer 2019; Wagner and Boczkowski 2019; Woodstock 2014). Accordingly, purposeful shunning of journalistic outlets or topics derives from an intention to avoid dissonant voices, biased information, or disturbing content. In our study, such content-related motivations were reported not only by habitual news avoiders, but also by frequent consumers. The latter were nonetheless compelled to circumvent news in response to the stressful Israeli context, where high-tension events and the polarized discourse they invoke (John and Dvir-Gvirsman 2015; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata 2013; Yarchi, Baden, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020) generate emotional overload, anxiety, and frustration. Global crises such as the recent COVID-19 outbreak may also invoke similar reactions over time. For example, in the UK, news distrust and emotional tension surrounding the pandemic played a crucial role in the rise of news avoidance (Kalogeropoulou, Fletcher, and Nielsen 2020).

Significantly, in addition to confirming content-related considerations familiar from previous research, our study also demonstrates the material aspects of news avoidance. Some of the avoidance behaviors reported by our interviewees were designed to avert not the news information directly, but the uncontrollable mobile alerts, or predetermined broadcasting flows, that convey it. Young Israelis notably prefer mobile and computer-mediated platforms that allow them to control the timing and topics of consumed news, and to skip segments at will. Whereas previous studies often diminish the role of technologies as merely content facilitators (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010; Prior 2005), thereby associating them only with unintentional behaviors (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), users' latent perceptions of technological platforms are crucial to both the use and non-use of news (Toff and Nielsen 2018). The demonstration of deliberate material-oriented news avoidance is a key contribution of the current study, which stresses the significance of applying a text-material approach (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018; Siles and Boczkowski 2012) to examine not only news consumption, but also news avoidance.

Still, technology also plays a crucial role in the manifestation of unintentional avoidance (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020) through its constant interaction with different types of content. Though our interviewees reported the wish to take a break from the news, they occasionally feel the same for entertainment and social media, which they clearly enjoy. The smartphone in particular, as a central medium for young adults' news consumption (Antunovic, Parsons, and Cooke 2018; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018), is the focal point for discourse reflecting media ambivalence and perceived overuse. In an era of media convergence (Jenkins 2006), any attempt to temporarily disengage from such devices may lead to indirect news avoidance. Since news and entertainment are no longer divided by times and domains (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018; Hermida 2016), avoiding only one of them is far more challenging and requires an active curation of information environments through practices of unsubscribing and unfriending (John and Dvir-Gvirsman 2015; Mitchelstein et al. 2020). In such a hybrid environment, the role of technology-oriented practices in news avoidance is, arguably, increasing.



In the debate around the influence of digital environments on consumers' political knowledge and the potential value of incidental news consumption (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018; Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu 2017; Mitchelstein et al. 2020; Prior 2005), this study stresses the conditional role played by different motivations. News resisters who condemn journalistic *content* would actively reject even stories encountered accidentally. They reported blocking users or excluding articles shared on their social networks, demonstrating the ability to use a customizable environment to expand news avoidance (Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016; Prior 2005; Williams and Delli Carpini 2011). Nevertheless, in the case of *medium avoidance*, stumbling upon news on an alternative platform (e.g., social media accounts) may reduce news overload (Pentina and Tarafdar 2014) and advance familiarity with current events, thus prompting, in Toff and Nielsen's (2018) words: "even the most committed news avoiders to tune in" (646).

Identifying news avoidance forms and their motivations provides insight into potential remedies for the declining news consumption of young audiences and calls for the attention of scholars, educators, journalists, and other stakeholders who attempt to understand and attract such audiences. Content avoidance, motivated by a disapproval of negative, repetitive, and untrustworthy journalistic content (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), may generate a durable resistant avoidance. Alleviating it requires increasing journalistic transparency and enhancing the appeal of news at the presentation level (Lee and Chyi 2014; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020). *Medium* and *user-oriented* avoidance, however, vary over time with personal circumstances (such as a family vacation or significant workload) and specific socio-political events. Consequently, these avoidance forms can be more readily overcome, for example, by juxtaposing news with legacy and online entertainment content (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), or by encouraging young users to adopt a media environment more prone to incidental news acquisition (Mitchelstein et al. 2020). Alternatively, some forms of legacy media are surprisingly in line with young audiences' expectations of news consumption. Print newspapers for example, are deemed controllable while also enabling news engagement as a form of technological "detox."

In contrast to previous studies that distinguished between engaged and disengaged news consumers (Edgerly 2017; Palmer and Toff 2020; Woodstock 2014), all our interviewees practice some news avoidance. As such, this study illuminates the centrality of avoidance behavior to the contemporary repertoire of daily media usage of both engaged and disengaged individuals. Future research can expand on these findings by examining media avoidance patterns of additional demographics that may exhibit a distinct set of motivations, interpretations, and choices. The differences between our findings and previous work on Israeli young adults (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Maoz 2015) warrant further examination of media consumption patterns both in various cultural contexts and over different time periods.

In the context of a news-saturated media environment, young Israelis clearly exhibit not only journalistic content ambivalence, but also, as we found here, technology ambivalence. While many try to re-engage young news audiences through the platforms and technologies in which they are most active (Lee and Chyi 2014; Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), we show that, at least in some cases, this may reinforce rather than deter news avoidance.

## Note

1. The interviews were conducted as part of the collaborative project NET that examined interpretative frames and affective attitudes toward news, entertainment, and technology across five national contexts: Argentina, Finland, Israel, Japan, and the United States.

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