

NEWS AVOIDANCE PHENOMENON OF "GENERATION Z" IN THE ERA OF INTELLIGENT COMMUNICATION—AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS BASED ON 311 QUESTIONNAIRES

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Abstract: With the rapid development of new technologies such as 5G, big data, and artificial intelligence, news communication methods and audience reception habits have undergone significant changes. This study focuses on "Generation Z" (born 1995-2009), a group of digital natives, and uses the questionnaire survey method to collect 311 valid samples to deeply explore the phenomenon of news avoidance among "Generation Z" in the era of intelligent communication. The study found that the news consumption habits of "Generation Z" are characterized by socialized channels, entertaining content, and visualized forms; news avoidance behavior is mainly caused by factors such as personal preferences, information overload, algorithmic recommendations, and information disorder; this behavior may have both negative effects such as information cocoons and social differentiation, as well as positive effects such as enhancing individual autonomy and promoting journalism innovation. Based on this, this study proposes countermeasures from five levels: communicator, content, channel, audience, and effect, aiming to build a trusted news ecosystem that conforms to the information consumption logic of "Generation Z".

Keywords: News avoidance; Generation Z; Intelligent communication; Digital natives; Media trust

1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2023, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism released the *Digital News Report 2023*, which revealed new trends in global digital news consumption: in 46 countries, more than one-third (36%) of respondents said they sometimes or often avoid news, mainly because news is depressing or difficult to understand. Additionally, in many Nordic countries, the reach of mass media to young audiences continues to decline, and the media are facing an unprecedented crisis of trust, low engagement, and news avoidance. Faced with the large "Generation Z" group of 260 million in China, how the news industry can cope with this challenge has become an important issue that needs to be solved urgently. This study aims to systematically investigate the phenomenon of news avoidance among "Generation Z" through empirical analysis, exploring the causes and dual impacts on society and the news industry, and providing theoretical and practical support for building a news industry trust system that aligns with the information consumption logic of "Generation Z".

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Origins of News Avoidance Behavior

The study of news avoidance behavior can be traced back to the 2001 annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), when scholars first held a special study on "Internet news avoiders." The emergence of this research paradigm marked a significant shift in communication studies from focusing on "what audiences are exposed to" to "what audiences are not exposed to."

Morten Skovsgaard defined news avoidance in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* as "the behavior of people who, over a continuous period of time, avoid or even completely refrain from news due to aversion to news or a higher preference for other media products[1]." This definition emphasizes the time continuity, motivational diversity, and behavioral manifestation of news avoidance, providing a theoretical basis for subsequent research.

2.2 Typological Analysis of News Avoidance Behavior

As research has deepened, scholars have begun to conduct typological analyses of news avoidance behavior. Wang Bin and Huang Jing[2], based on the Chinese context, refined news avoidance into four types: "disconnection avoidance" refers to completely cutting off contact with news; "encounter avoidance" refers to ignoring news when it is encountered unintentionally; "curation avoidance" refers to actively filtering and selecting news content; "monitoring avoidance" refers to reducing attention to specific issues or sources. This classification helps to more precisely understand the characteristics and causes of different avoidance behaviors. Meanwhile, similar international studies, such as Toff Benjamin, have categorized news avoidance into "emotionally driven" and "cognitively driven" types[3]. The former refers to avoidance due to negative emotions triggered by news content, while the latter refers to avoidance due to high cognitive load or complex and incomprehensible information. This classification reveals the psychological

mechanisms of news avoidance behavior. By comparing domestic and international research, it can be seen that the news avoidance behavior of "Generation Z" has both commonalities and differences across different cultural backgrounds.

2.3 Multidimensional Causes of News Avoidance Behavior

Foreign scholars have mainly explored the causes of news avoidance from three dimensions:

Individual Psychological Dimension: Toff Benjamin found through in-depth interviews with news avoiders that avoiders have an imbalanced and weakly internalized norm regarding the perceived obligation to stay informed[3]. They expect news to make them feel anxious, helpless, or angry, and thus choose to avoid it to protect their emotional health. This "emotional management" strategy reflects the self-protection mechanism of modern individuals in an information-overloaded environment.

Media Environment Dimension: Prior proposed the "high-choice media environment" theory, which suggests that in an environment with a rich selection of media, people are more likely to choose content based on their preferences, thereby leading to news avoidance[4]. The widespread application of algorithmic recommendation technology has further exacerbated this phenomenon by reinforcing users' existing preferences through personalized recommendations and reducing exposure to diverse information.

Socio-Cultural Dimension: Factors such as political polarization, declining media trust, and increased social complexity can all lead to news avoidance. When social issues are overly complex or political positions are too divided, some audiences may choose to avoid them to simplify their cognitive load.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs quantitative research methods and collects data through questionnaire surveys. The questionnaire design is based on literature reviews and theoretical frameworks, covering multiple dimensions such as demographic information, news consumption habits, news avoidance behavior, and its causes. The study aims to systematically collect and analyze data to deeply explore the phenomenon of news avoidance among "Generation Z" in the era of intelligent communication.

3.2 Sample Selection

The research subjects are individuals born between 1995 and 2009, known as "Generation Z." A total of 330 electronic questionnaires were distributed via the WJX platform, with the survey conducted from July to September 2023. After removing invalid questionnaires, 311 valid samples were obtained. The sample characteristics are as follows:

- Gender Distribution: 50.8% male, 49.2% female, which is relatively balanced.
- Education Distribution: 33.76% with an associate degree or below, 33.44% with a bachelor's degree, and 32.8% with a master's degree or above.
- Major Distribution: 48.87% in journalism and communication, 51.13% in non-journalism and communication fields.
- Geographical Distribution: The sample covers multiple provinces across the country, with a relatively balanced representation from both northern and southern regions.

3.3 Measurement Tools

The study used a self-designed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree), developed based on literature (Peng, 2019; Wang & Huang, 2023) and pre-interviews[5]. It included 3 core modules (30 items total):

1. News Consumption Channel Preference (8 items): Measures news access frequency via different channels;
2. News Avoidance Behavior (12 items): Assesses avoidance types and frequency;
3. Demographic Information (10 items): Collects gender, education, etc., for group analysis.

Reliability and validity tests were conducted via SPSS 26.0:

- Reliability Test: Overall Cronbach's $\alpha=0.901$; module α values were 0.872 (channel preference) and 0.895 (avoidance behavior), all >0.7 (good consistency). Results see Table 1.

Table 1 Cronbach's Reliability Test Results (N=311)

Cronbach's α Coefficient	Number of Items
0.901	12

- Validity Test: The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value is 0.939 (>0.9 , suitable for factor analysis); Bartlett's Test: $\chi^2=1168.908$, $df=66$, $p<0.001$ (significant correlation). Results see Table 2.

Table 2 Results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's sphericity tests (N = 311)

KMO value	0.939	
Bartlett' s test of sphericity	Approx.	1168.908
	Chi-Square	
	df	66
	P-value	0.000

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis employs statistical methods such as factor analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Factor analysis is used to extract the main dimensions of news consumption habits and news avoidance behavior, while ANOVA is used to examine the impact of different demographic variables (such as education level, region, gender, etc.) on news avoidance behavior.

3.5 Challenges and Solutions in the Research Process

During the research process, we encountered the following challenges:

1. Low Response Rate: Some potential respondents showed low willingness to participate in the survey, resulting in a lower response rate than expected.

- Solution: To enhance the attractiveness of the questionnaire (e.g., by simplifying questions and offering small incentives) and expanding the distribution channels for the questionnaire (e.g., through social media, school clubs, etc.), we were able to improve the response rate.

2. Data Quality Control: During the data collection process, some questionnaires were found to be incomplete or poorly filled out, affecting data quality.

- Solution: In the questionnaire design phase, logical validation functions were added to ensure the completeness and logical consistency of the questionnaires. During the data cleaning phase, clearly invalid questionnaires were removed to ensure data reliability.

3. Sample Representativeness: Due to the use of convenience sampling, the sample may have certain selection biases, affecting the generalizability of the research findings.

- Solution: When selecting samples, we endeavored to cover "Generation Z" individuals from different regions, education levels, and majors to enhance sample representativeness. Additionally, the limitations of the study were discussed, and suggestions for future research improvements were proposed.

Through these methods, this study systematically investigated the phenomenon of news avoidance among "Generation Z," ensuring data quality and the credibility of the research findings.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Characteristics of News Consumption Habits of "Generation Z"

4.1.1 Channel preferences: mobilization and socialization

The survey results show that the news consumption channels of "Generation Z" exhibit distinct mobilization and socialization characteristics. 44.05% of respondents choose to browse news through social media platforms such as WeChat public accounts, Weibo, and Douyin, far exceeding other channels. 36.01% choose to browse through websites, 28.94% through news clients, while the proportion of those who browse news through traditional media (newspapers, radio, television) is relatively low.

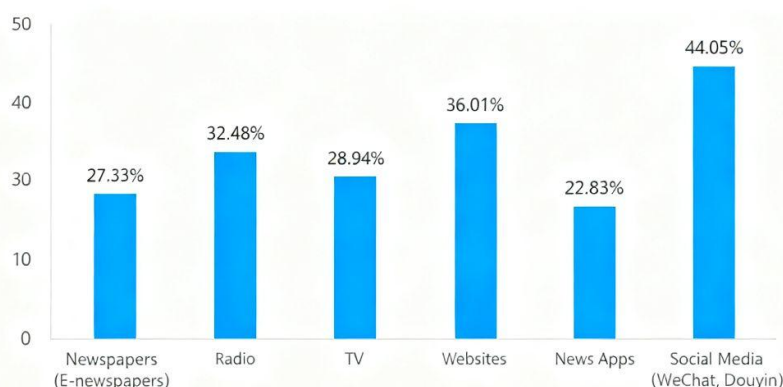


Figure 1 Distribution of News Consumption Channels among Generation Z (N = 311)

Figure 1 shows that "Generation Z" relies heavily on social media platforms compared to other channels. This preference not only reflects their high dependence on mobile devices but also highlights the significance of social media

in information dissemination. Further analysis reveals the following characteristics of social media news consumption among "Generation Z": First, platform diversification, as they obtain news from multiple social platforms simultaneously, forming a complex media usage matrix; second, social drive, as news consumption is often triggered by social relationships, with friends' shares and trending topics becoming important mechanisms for discovering news; third, interactive participation, as they are not only receivers of news but also disseminators and commentators, participating in news events through likes, comments, and shares.

4.1.2 Content preferences: coexistence of entertainment and utility

In terms of news content selection, "Generation Z" shows a coexistence of entertainment and utility. In terms of news categories, 76.06% of respondents prefer entertainment news, followed by sports and cultural news (33.12%) and social news (28.94%). At the same time, 65.92% of respondents indicated that they pay attention to hard news related to national livelihood and their own interests, reflecting this group's emphasis on practical information. Further analysis reveals that the content preferences of "Generation Z" exhibit significant situational dependency. In learning and working scenarios, they tend to seek information that is practical and related to their own development; in leisure and entertainment scenarios, they prefer light-hearted and interesting content. This situational information demand reflects the role-switching and psychological state changes of "Generation Z" in different life scenarios.

4.1.3 Disconnect behavior: media fatigue and selective avoidance

Despite being an online generation, "Generation Z" also exhibits significant disconnect behaviour. As shown in Figure 2, 61.1% of respondents indicated that they would actively or passively ignore certain news for a period of time.

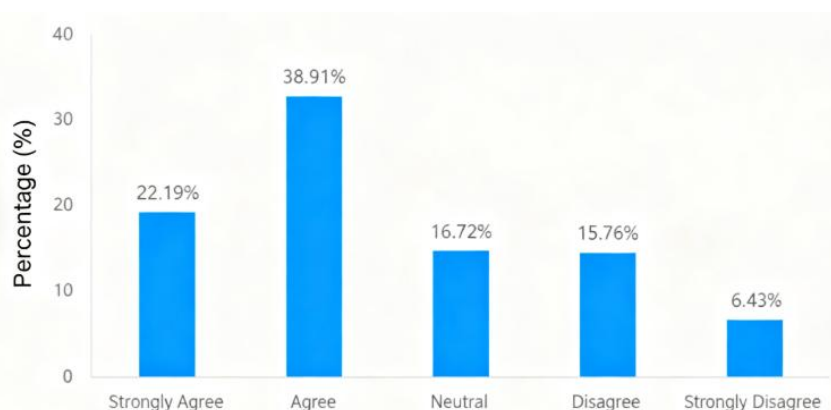


Figure 2 Proportion of Generation Z Respondents who Report Ignoring News under different Agreement Levels

Among them, 61.74% would choose to ignore news unrelated to themselves, and 62.71% would choose to ignore news that contradicts their existing views. It is worth noting that the disconnect behavior of "Generation Z" exhibits strategic and phased characteristics. They do not completely cut off contact with news but selectively reduce news exposure in specific periods or contexts. For example, during exam periods, busy work times, or low moods, they would actively reduce news consumption to protect their attention and emotions. This strategic disconnection reflects the adaptability and self-management awareness of "Generation Z" in the digital environment.

4.2 Causes of News Avoidance Behavior

4.2.1 Subjective causes: individual-level choices

Personal Preferences and Selective Exposure: From the audience perspective, the news avoidance of "Generation Z" is essentially a form of selective exposure. The Uses and Gratifications theory suggests that audiences, as individuals with clear needs, actively use media based on specific need motives. In the era of intelligent communication, "Generation Z" selectively exposes themselves to news that meets their needs and avoids the rest. This selective exposure reflects the proactive consumption characteristics of "Generation Z." They are no longer the traditional passive audience but active choosers with clear information needs, aesthetic standards, and value judgments. For example, in the questionnaire survey report, "Generation Z" prefers entertainment news (76.06%), while paying less attention to financial news (13.39%). This preference not only reflects their interest orientation but also their judgment on the value of different types of information.

Information Overload and Attention Diversion: Information overload is an important cause of news avoidance. In recent decades, the media environment has undergone tremendous changes, with a sharp increase in the amount of available content, leading people into a high-choice media environment. Under such circumstances, "Generation Z" faces unprecedented information pressure, with attention becoming a scarce resource, thus necessitating selective avoidance. Psychological defense mechanisms play an important role in news avoidance. When individuals are exposed to excessive information stimuli, they may experience cognitive overload and decision-making difficulties. News avoidance becomes a self-protection strategy, reducing information exposure to maintain mental health. While this avoidance behavior may alleviate anxiety in the short term, it can lead to information bias and cognitive limitations in the long run.

4.2.2 Objective causes: environmental constraints

Algorithmic Recommendations and Information Cocoons: Algorithmic recommendation technology provides users with personalized information while potentially reinforcing existing preferences, forming information cocoons. When "Generation Z" is constantly exposed to content that matches their preferences, they naturally develop avoidance behavior towards news that does not conform to their preferences. This technology-driven avoidance is often unconscious but has a more profound impact. Algorithmic recommendation systems analyze user behavior data (clicks, dwell time, interactions, etc.) to build user profiles and recommend content based on similarity principles. While this mechanism enhances user experience, it may also narrow the information horizon. The more users avoid a certain type of information, the less likely the algorithm is to recommend that type of information, creating a negative feedback loop. This "algorithmic bias" may exacerbate information segregation and polarization among social groups.

Information Disorder and Trust Crisis: The survey shows that 64.31% of "Generation Z" have a decreased trust in news media. Phenomena of information disorder, such as fake news, clickbait, and content homogenization, severely damage the credibility of the media. When audiences lose trust in the media, news avoidance behavior naturally arises. Information disorder not only includes the spread of false information but also the decline in information quality, content homogenization, and excessive commercialization. In a traffic-oriented media environment, some media outlets resort to exaggerated headlines, emotional expressions, and fragmented presentations to attract attention, compromising the professionalism and solemnity of news. This "survival of the fittest" phenomenon leads to an overall decline in news quality, thereby affecting audience trust and consumption willingness.

4.3 Impact of Demographic Variables

To further examine the drivers of news avoidance behaviour, we tested four demographic variables.

Gender Differences

An independent-samples t-test revealed no significant difference between male ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.86$) and female ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.83$) respondents, $t(309) = -0.27$, $p = .789$, $d = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.15, -0.20]$ (Table 3).

Table 3 News avoidance by gender (mean $\pm$ SD); $t(309) = -0.27$, $p = .789$, $d = 0.02$, 95 % CI $[0.15, -0.20]$, $N = 311$

	Gender	N ^o	Mean	standard deviation	t ^o	p ^o
"Generation Z" News Avoidance Behavior	Male	158	3.59	0.86	-0.268	0.789
	Female	153	3.61	0.83		
	Total	311	3.6	0.84		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Educational Background

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of education, $F(2, 308) = 7.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .05$. Post-hoc Tukey HSD indicated that respondents with an associate degree or below ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.65$) scored higher than both bachelor's ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.92$) and master's-level respondents ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.89$); the latter two did not differ (Table 4).

Table 4 News Avoidance by Education Level (mean); $F(2, 308) = 7.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .06$, $N = 311$. Post-hoc Tukey HSD: associate-degree group > bachelor = master groups

Educaton	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Junior College and Below	105	3.86	0.65	7.796	0.000**
Bachelor's Degree	104	3.5	0.92		
Postgraduate	311	3.6	0.84		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Academic Major

Journalism-communication majors ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.85$) and non-journalism majors ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.83$) reported similar avoidance levels, $t(309) = -1.65$, $p = .10$, $d = 0.19$, 95 % CI $[-0.35, 0.03]$ (Table 5).

Table 5 News Avoidance by Major (mean $\pm$ SD); $t(309) = -1.65$, $p = .10$, $d = 0.19$, 95 % CI $[-0.35, 0.03]$, $N = 311$.

	Major	N	Mean	standard-deviation	t	p
"Generation Z" News Avoidance Behavior	Journalism & Communication	152	3.52	0.85	-1.649	0.1
	Journalism & Non-Journalism Communication	159	3.68	0.83		
Total		311	3.6	0.84		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Regional Differences

Northern-region respondents ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.58$) scored significantly higher than southern-region respondents ($M =$

3.12, SD = 0.80), $t(309) = -11.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.36$, 95 % CI [0.82, 1.90] (Table 6).

Table 6 News Avoidance by Region (mean $\pm$ SD); $t(309) = -11.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.36$, $N = 311$. Northern-Region Respondents Scored Significantly Higher (i.e., greater news avoidance) than Southern-region Respondents

Region	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Southern Region	155	3.12	0.8	–	
Northern Region	156	4.07	0.58	–11.95	–0.000**
Total	311	3.6	0.84	–	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Dual Impact of News Avoidance Behavior

5.1.1 Negative impact

Individual Level: Information Cocoons and Cognitive Rigidity: News avoidance behavior may lead "Generation Z" into information cocoons, narrowing the scope of information exposure and rigidifying cognitive structures. Long-term avoidance of news that contradicts existing views will reinforce cognitive biases and affect the cultivation of critical thinking skills. This information bias phenomenon is not conducive to the comprehensive development of individuals. For example, a study on college students found that those who frequently avoid news often show lower information processing and critical thinking skills when facing complex social issues.

Societal Level: Decline of Publicness and Social Differentiation: When a large number of "Generation Z" avoid public affairs news, it may lead to a decline in citizen participation and the decline of publicness. Different groups, based on their preferences, selectively expose themselves to information, which may exacerbate social differentiation and affect the formation of social consensus, having a negative impact on the democratic process. For example, in some social hotspot events, due to uneven information acquisition, the differences in viewpoints between different groups are further amplified, leading to the intensification of social contradictions.

5.1.2 Positive impact

Individual Level: Enhancing Autonomy and Mental Health: Moderate news avoidance helps "Generation Z" maintain mental health in an information-overloaded environment. By avoiding negative and anxiety-inducing news, they can reduce information anxiety and enhance their sense of control over life. This selective exposure reflects individual media literacy and autonomy. For example, some respondents indicated that they would temporarily stay away from social media when facing a large amount of negative news to maintain a good mental state.

Industry Level: Promoting Innovation in Journalism: The phenomenon of news avoidance forces the news industry to reflect on and innovate itself. When a large number of audiences avoid traditional news, the media are forced to rethink how to improve content production and dissemination methods to re-attract audiences. This pressure helps promote the innovative development of the news industry. For example, some media have begun to try more interactive and immersive forms of news reporting to attract young audiences.

5.2 Theoretical Framework for Countermeasures

Based on Lasswell's "5W" communication model, this study constructs a countermeasure framework for dealing with the news avoidance behavior of "Generation Z" from five levels: communicator, content, channel, audience, and effect.

Communicator Level: Practicing the "Four Powers" of News Media, namely, physical strength, vision, brainpower, and writing ability, to improve the quality and attractiveness of news reporting. By delving into the grassroots, observing society, thinking deeply, and expressing precisely, news products that "Generation Z" is willing to watch and likes to watch can be produced.

Content Level: Empowering Content Production with New Technologies. Fully utilizing new technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and virtual reality to innovate the production methods and presentation forms of news content. By adopting new forms such as data journalism, immersive reporting, and interactive news, the attractiveness and dissemination effectiveness of news can be enhanced.

Channel Level: Promoting the Platformization of Mainstream Media. Mainstream media should actively adapt to the trend of platformization, strengthen cooperation with social media platforms while maintaining content advantages, and expand dissemination channels. By building autonomous and controllable platforms, the ability to reach "Generation Z" can be enhanced.

Audience Level: Cultivating New Media Literacy. Strengthening media literacy education for "Generation Z" and cultivating their abilities in information screening, critical thinking, and diverse information exposure. Through educational guidance, helping "Generation Z" establish healthy information consumption habits and reducing irrational news avoidance.

Effect Level: Developing Human-Computer Interaction Feedback. Establishing an effective human-computer interaction feedback mechanism to timely understand the information needs and preference changes of "Generation Z." By using data analysis and user surveys, content strategies can be dynamically adjusted to improve the precision and effectiveness of dissemination.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Main Conclusions

Based on the empirical analysis of 311 valid questionnaires, the following main conclusions are drawn:

1. The news consumption habits of "Generation Z" are characterized by socialized channels, entertaining content, and visualized forms, while also exhibiting significant disconnect behavior[6].
2. News avoidance behavior is mainly caused by personal preferences, information overload, algorithmic recommendations, and information disorder, with subjective and objective avoidance interacting with each other.
3. News avoidance behavior has dual impacts: it may lead to negative consequences such as information cocoons and social differentiation, but it may also enhance individual autonomy and promote innovation in the news industry.
4. There are significant differences in news avoidance behavior among "Generation Z" with different educational levels and from different regions, while no significant differences are found based on gender and major.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Innovation in Research Perspective: Focusing the research object on the "Generation Z" group of digital natives enriches the theoretical research on news avoidance behavior.

Construction of Analytical Framework: Based on the "5W" model, a countermeasure framework is constructed, providing a systematic analytical tool for related research.

Empirical Data Supplement: Through large-sample questionnaire surveys, empirical evidence for the study of news avoidance behavior is provided in the Chinese context[7].

6.3 Practical Implications

Implications for the News Industry: News organizations should pay attention to the changing information needs of "Generation Z" and re-establish connections with young audiences through content innovation, channel expansion, and form optimization. For example, they can try more interactive and immersive forms of news reporting to attract young audiences.

Implications for Policy Making: Relevant departments should pay attention to the potential social impacts of news avoidance and maintain a healthy media ecosystem through strengthening media regulation, promoting media convergence, and enhancing public media literacy.

Implications for Education: Educational institutions should strengthen media literacy education for "Generation Z" and cultivate rational and diverse information consumption habits. For example, they can offer relevant courses to help students establish healthy information consumption habits[8].

6.4 Research Limitations and Future Outlook

This study has certain limitations: First, the sample was mainly obtained through convenience sampling, which may introduce selection bias; second, cross-sectional data cannot reveal the dynamic changes in news avoidance behavior; third, the study did not delve into the differences among different types of news avoidance behavior. Future research can be carried out in the following directions: First, adopting a longitudinal research design to track the trends in news avoidance behavior; second, using in-depth interviews and other qualitative methods to better understand the psychological mechanisms behind news avoidance behavior; third, expanding the sample scope to improve the representativeness and universality of the research[9].

COMPETING INTERESTS

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