

**THE SELECTIVE AVOIDANCE OF NEWS: AN INTEGRATED  
ASSESSMENT AT THE INDIVIDUAL, GLOBAL,  
AND MACRO-SOCIAL LEVELS**

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## ABSTRACT

Selective avoidance has been conceptualized and most often analyzed as a mirror image of selective exposure since the origins of political communication research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). However, recent studies have served to differentiate selective avoidance from selective exposure (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Song, 2017; Tsfati, 2016), and the current project explores the selective avoidance phenomenon at the individual, global, and macro-social levels. Secondary analyses were conducted on three reputable global-level data sets (i.e., World Values Survey [1981-2020, N = 174,450], European Values Studies [1981-2020, N = 114,983] and Digital News Report [2019, N = 75,749]) using a wide range of univariate and multivariate procedures. Results show that politically interested people are less likely to avoid news and people on the extreme ranges of political ideology tend to avoid news across the globe. Macro-level cultural values did not serve as a moderator, but other factors (e.g., Freedom House Index, Internet penetration rate, and Urbanization rate) moderated the relationship between political interest and extremity and selective news avoidance in a series of post-hoc tests. Individuals' affective reaction to the news (i.e., being worn out by news) significantly predicts selective news avoidance. Stepping away from a consistency-based theoretical foundation, the current study has introduced affect as a new theoretical avenue that can direct future research on selective avoidance.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of selectivity to political information is as old as the field of communication (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Which messages individuals choose to consume have been studied extensively; however, little is known about what individuals choose *not* to consume and under what circumstances decisions of this kind are made. The latter phenomenon is referred to as selective avoidance, or “motivated avoidance of messages discrepant with one’s beliefs” (Stroud, 2018, p. 9). Recent studies have focused on distinctive mechanisms and processes that distinguish this phenomenon from selective exposure (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Song, 2017; Tsfaty, 2016). However, it is rare to find research exclusively studying selective avoidance as a phenomenon of interest. It has most often been conceptualized and analyzed as a byproduct of selective exposure. The general rationale for the latter focus being that as someone is choosing one piece of content he/she is by default choosing not to consume something else in the media environment. Given the exponential increase in political media content and various channels through which these messages are being provided by the attention industry (Wu, 2017), there is a growing need for information management and individuals will often do so in accordance with their political predispositions such as political interest and party identification.

As most studies regarding selectivity have paid attention to individual-level explanations, there is also a need to incorporate macro-social elements in the study of these phenomena. The consideration of the macro-social level is not uncommon in

political communication from a comparative studies tradition (See Esser & Pfestch, 2004). On one hand, political communication systems of different societies (e.g., political culture, system, and media system) were taken into consideration to comprehend diverse communication acts (e.g., Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992; Curran & Park, 2000). In addition, worldviews or values of different regions were used to understand media use (Norris & Inglehart, 2009) and political discussion (Inglehart, 2018). The current study explores selective avoidant media behavior using a cultural values framework (e.g., traditional versus secular societies) in the context of changing the media environment at the global level.

There are three reasons why it is important to explore selective avoidance through a combination of macro-social and individual levels. First, there is a wide disparity in the knowledge generated to date for partisan selective avoidance when compared to selective exposure. Despite its long history, partisan selective avoidance has not often been looked at as an independent concept. Rather, it has been envisioned as a mirror image of selective exposure research. Since recent studies have established that selective avoidance is distinct from selective exposure with empirical evidence (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Song, 2017; Tsfaty, 2016), the present study focuses exclusively on selective avoidance using different theoretical angles. Second, most research that has mentioned selective avoidance has been undertaken within a Western context, predominantly the United States (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2014). Incorporating other regions with different cultures and political histories will allow for an assessment of the range (i.e., explanatory power) of the theoretical application. A comparative framework of political communication is critical to advance

the theory (Esser & Pfestch, 2004) and this initial effort with a holistic view of selective avoidance across countries will contribute to the future selective avoidance literature. Three, besides considering established individual-level predictors, macro-social variables such as cultural values could potentially account for selective avoidance. With the use of cultural map (See Inglehart, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2009), there can be an exploring of the moderation roles of macro-societal factors to better understand the phenomenon (Chaffee & Berger, 1987; Slater & Gleason, 2012).

The current study used secondary data from the World Values Survey (WVS), European Values Study (EVS) collected from 1981 to 2020, and the 2019 Reuters Institute Digital News Report. Thirty-eight countries that the WVS/EVS and Reuters data both covered were analyzed to assess selective avoidance of political information at a global level. A qualitative assessment from multiple sources displaying country profiles was also conducted to understand the media environment in each country and provide additional context for the quantitative analyses. Results from the WVS/EVS data will demonstrate the wide range of media selection available for political information over the course of time in each country and help explain the rise of avoidance in high-choice media environments. To provide an overview of the extent to which political predispositions predict active avoidance of news media, the Reuters data were used ( $N = 75,749$ ). Adopting a comparative political communication research framework, these results suggest that selective avoidance is not limited to the Western countries, but instead is present as a communication phenomenon worldwide. Finally, using meta-analytic procedures, the potential moderators of partisanship- and interest- driven avoidance as macro-societal factors were explored. Besides partisan selective avoidance

with cultural values, other individual and societal factors were incorporated in a series of post-hoc tests to expand the potential paths to future selective avoidance research.

## CHAPTER 2

### SELECTION AND ITS PROBLEMS

Selection is an aspect of human behavior that has long been studied across the social sciences. From a psychological perspective, a behavioral choice is made in order to satisfy motivation-driven needs (Maslow's hierarchy of needs [Bayne, 2015]). From an economist's perspective, individuals make choices that align with their self-preferences (rational choice theory [Oppenheimer, 2010]). The former has had a heavy influence on the study of mass communication (e.g., uses and gratifications framework; See Ruggiero, 2000), while the latter has heavily influenced voting studies in political science (an economy theory of democracy [Downs, 1957]). From a sociologist's perspective, individual-level choice is explained by social relations such as family, gender, or religion (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). For communication scholars, communicative acts are engaged in as a result of choices made, which broadly covers everything from whom to talk to (interpersonal communication [Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970]) to which media we consume (mass communication [Hartmann, 2009]).

In the communication subfield of political communication, researchers have studied the selection of political information since Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948). In the study of the U.S. presidential campaign in 1940, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) asserted that voters have a tendency to select messages in accordance with their pre-existing political attitudes and beliefs. It was shown that political campaign messages are persuasive for people's voting choice when working through three stages: activation, reinforcement, and conversion. In the activation stage, "attention is selective" (p.80) to

political materials in accord with their own taste and bias but undecided voters still explored information from both sides. However, at the second stage, “exposure was consistently partisan and such partisan exposure resulted in reinforcement” (p.89). For conversion, the higher the degree to which individuals were exposed to the opposing party’s campaign against their political predispositions the more likely they were to vote for that party. The major concern here regarding the media effect is “exposure”, not the selectivity of individuals. Viewed collectively, reinforcement is where selectivity occurs because individuals are in pursuit of reassuring their predetermined vote choice.

As Lazarsfeld and colleagues argued, “Availability plus predispositions determines exposure” (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948, p. 89), selective exposure would not happen without a variety of choices for informational content and individuals’ political orientation. Such predispositions as party identification and political interest have explained this type of selective exposure (Skovsgaard, Shehata, & Strömbäck, 2016), which is called *partisan* selective exposure. For example, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) noted that strong partisans paid more attention to their own party candidate around the presidential election season. It was also believed that those interested in politics were highly exposed to political campaigns.

However, the degree to which partisan selective exposure occurs under certain conditions has led researchers to question the existence of the phenomenon itself (Sears & Freedman 1967; Frey, 1986). For example, Frey (1986) observed that various features of information play a primary role in selective exposure in addition to Festinger (1964)’s revision of cognitive dissonance theory from the information utility perspective. Relevant to the current study, individuals’ choice of information in experimental settings and their

commitment to a position resulted in individuals becoming more exposed to dissonant information.

Initial research regarding selectivity led to the formation of the active audience research tradition and the limited effects era of mass communication research (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2008; Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011). Unlike the notion of the powerful media effect that assumed all propaganda messages were influential (Smith, Lasswell, & Casey, 1946), the active audience research tradition is grounded in the belief that people are selective toward what they choose to engage with. Selective avoidance was formally introduced to the field of communication as a separate concept within the uses and gratification theory tradition (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). As the uses and gratification researchers were immersed in exploring new motives of media use, it was recognized that the conceptualization of gratification sought through media should be preceded by understanding underlying motivation structures. Following this notion, McLeod and Becker (1974) stressed that avoidance as a negative orientation to media content was not merely negative restatements of the positive gratifications sought from media.

As the field learned more about selective exposure, it became evident that selective avoidance is distinct from selective exposure (See Frey, 1986; McLeod & Becker, 1974; McGuire, 1968). With a separate measure from media exposure, low interest in politics, preference to entertainment media use over watching political news, and distrust of politics and politicians were found as motives of political news avoidance (McLeod & Becker, 1974). These factors constructing avoidant behaviors are still under

examination in recent studies regarding avoidance (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Prior, 2007; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014).

While some work would distinguish between the two types of selectivity, exposure and avoidance, the two have been confounded theoretically within political communication literature. Selective exposure, which is primarily used to account for the concept of selectivity since Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), was formally defined as the “tendency of people to expose themselves to mass communication in accord with their existing opinions and interests and to avoid unsympathetic material” (Klapper, 1960, p.19-20). This explicit definition confounds exposure and avoidance and has been circulated for several decades in many influential communication textbooks (e.g., Mass Communication [McQuail, 1987]; Media Effects [Bryant & Oliver, 2009]). The same approach can be found in work by McCombs, Einsiedel, and Weaver (1991). Their definition of selective exposure is as follows: “the active attempt to seek out complementary information and avoid that which is discrepant” (p. 84). Defining selective exposure through selective avoidance was established early as common practice and remnants of this approach are evident in more current research.

Empirical studies have confounded selective exposure and avoidance as well. The focus of earlier studies was on whether selective exposure, interchangeably named information seeking, exists. From the pessimist’s view, “the evidence for selective exposure turns out to be thin” (Kinder, 2003). Sears and Freedman (1967) called it “de-facto selectivity” in their argument for discounting selective exposure effects. They argue, “Selectivity may at best be a rather trivial variable relative to other influences upon exposure” (p. 212). Selective exposure occurs due to pre-determined conditions

such as education level, information utility, or previous exposure, not specific cognitive-driven factors in action at the moment a communication decision is made.

Recent studies revisiting selective exposure have provided solid empirical evidence that selective exposure is not elusive, but tangible in the realm of politics (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Stroud, 2008). In some early research, there was discussion that the focus on selective exposure needs to be reconsidered (Frey, 1986; McLeod & Becker, 1974). Using a uses and gratifications framework, McLeod and Becker (1974) emphasized that positive orientations such as gratification sought from the media are not the only factors in determining exposure effects. They argued negative avoidances should be given attention equal to that of positive gratifications to understand the underlying motivations of media use. Frey (1986) also asserted that selective exposure is not the only type of form that accounts for selectivity given all the factors influencing informational selectivity. Furthermore, the recent discussion surrounding selectivity in political communication points to empirical evidence that selective exposure and avoidance are distinct (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Song, 2017; Tsftati, 2016).

However, there was also a concern for why the field would want to make selective avoidance a conceptual focus of communication research. Chaffee and colleagues (2001) made a strong argument:

Avoidance or selectivity is simply the wrong conceptual approach to understanding counter-attitudinal attention, an act of political communication that is important in its own right. Democracy presumes that citizens pay attention to arguments and information from two or more sides of issues. And social scientists should seek to understand what people do, not what they tend not to do despite pessimists' predictions that they might (p. 249).

Their argument seems proclamatory from the perspective of normative theories of democracy. Even if a phenomenon that is frequently observed does not seem to be beneficial for democracy, it is our obligation as researchers to understand the phenomenon. Abstention in elections is the classic example of a research subject opting out of a desirable behavior from a democratic perspective (e.g., Feddersen & Pesendorfer, 1999). Understanding the process of not voting is as important as studying the process of voting. Political distrust is another example of this sort (e.g., Bertou, 2019; Mishler & Rose, 1997).

The current study argues that avoidance is not an improper approach to selectivity research, but rather an important concept to explore. In today's fast changing media environment where individuals are offered a tremendous amount of information through a variety of media outlets and formats, avoidance is observed more frequently compared to previous eras (Sunstein, 2007; Zhu, Skoric & Shen, 2017). Understanding the mechanism of avoidant behavior can be beneficial to society because understanding the causes and mechanisms of this undesirable behavior from a normative theorist view can provide opportunities to seek solutions that lessen the behavior. Additionally, the media industry is embracing and perpetuating an attention information ecosystem in the sense that all media outlets are seeking to maximize attention levels to generating revenues. Each medium uses various tools to try to get people to come to a piece of content and pay attention to it longer – in the face of an industry focused on our attention, it is all the more important to understand how, why, and when individuals choose *not* to pay attention.

## Theoretical Underpinnings of Selectivity

A wide range of theories in behavioral psychology attempt to explicate the psychological mechanisms driving selective behaviors: cognitive dissonance theory [Festinger, 1957]; motivated reasoning <sup>1</sup>[Kunda, 1990]; moods and emotions [Jonas, Graupmann, & Frey, 2006]). Selectivity concerning political information heavily relies on Festinger's (1957, 1964) cognitive dissonance theory (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Stroud, Feldman, Wojcieszak, & Bimber, 2019). Thus, in this section, cognitive dissonance theory will be reviewed in relation to selectivity and an argument will be made that selective avoidance should be treated as a distinct concept. Moreover, in an extension of moods and emotions for information seeking, mood- and emotion-related theories are reviewed for their potential connection to avoidance.

### *Cognitive Dissonance Theory*

Cognitive dissonance occurs when “two items of information psychologically do not fit together” (Festinger, 1962, p. 93). Individuals who are in a dissonant situation are motivated to seek a solution that resolves this uncomfortable stage and regain consistency in their mind. There are preconditions of dissonance occurrence. Festinger (1957) originally formulated that the magnitude of dissonance is determined by the number of dissonance cognitions divided by the summation of the number of consonant cognitions and dissonant cognitions. Cognitions can be attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. From this

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<sup>1</sup> Motivated reasoning was initially driven to understand the mechanism of the dissonance reduction process as mentioned in the previous section about Festinger's (1957, 1962) experimental design. However, contrary to the theory of cognitive dissonance that focused on a psychological drive, motivated reasoning has attempted to address a more complete mechanism of biased processing “under what conditions, with what structure, and through what mechanism bias likely occurs” (Redlawsk, 2002, p. 1023) when processing information. This is more relevant to selective exposure research tradition rather than avoidance. Thus, the current study does not expand it further.

‘dissonance ratio’, it is possible to infer that when all the cognitions are either consonant or dissonant to an individual, no dissonance occurs. Thus, the precondition for the existence of dissonance is the mixture of consonant and dissonant cognitions.

It is important to note that dissonance occurrence is not limited to the conflict of two current cognitions, but also between current and past cognitions. In short, dissonance may also occur due to past experiences. The example given by Festinger (1957) is: “If a person were standing in the rain and yet could see no evidence that he was getting wet, these two cognitions would be dissonance with one another because he knows from experience that getting wet follows from being out in the rain” (p.14). From his previous experience of feeling wet in rain, a dissonant cognition would arise if he were to stand in rain and not feel wet.

Application of this example to the relationship between partisans and news consumption can be demonstrated by the following scenario: a strong Republican has previously experienced disturbance from watching CNN. When he encounters CNN by accident, these two cognitions create dissonance because he knows based on his past experience that emotional disturbance *follows from* watching CNN. Using the same example above, suppose he has experienced dissonance from viewing news on CNN. In this case, he seeks a new piece of information that reduces the dissonance, normally from a media outlet that is in line with his preferred politics. Selectivity comes into play here. Individuals are motivated to reduce dissonance and achieve consonance such that they actively avoid situations where they view information likely to generate dissonance. Both behaviors that reduce dissonance have been termed selective exposure in established literature (Festinger, 1957, 1967; Klapper, 1960).

Despite this theoretical explanation, empirical studies have shown mixed evidence that there is no general psychological preference for supporting consonant information and avoiding contradicting information (Frey, 1986; Sears & Freedman, 1967). However, in Festinger (1964)'s revised version of cognitive dissonance theory, this tendency of selectivity is explained from the information utility perspective. When dissonant information is perceived as easily refutable, individuals have confidence in their ability to handle that level of dissonance and do not avoid the dissonant information. Another element of information utility is perceived usefulness of information for the future. Even though dissonant information is not deemed useful at the moment, if an individual foresees future usefulness of the dissonant information, they will retain it for future use and not avoid it.

Considered together, Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957, 1962) can parcel out avoidance behaviors from exposure. The original theory covers a wide range of motivational behaviors drawn from conflicting cognitions. Selective exposure is one behavior out of several identified that can reduce dissonance. Since this study's focus is on how political information can be managed to reduce dissonance, we limit our approach to two branches here: selective exposure and selective avoidance. These two coping behaviors to reduce dissonance differ in the way in which they approach congenial information. Selective exposure involves weighing the justification of decisions already made, whereas avoidance prevents further dissonant information.

The strength of each behavior is also different because the two behaviors are not explained by the same moderators (Frey, 1986). Thus, it makes sense to conceptualize selective avoidance and exposure in two different ways. One could argue that exposure to

consonant information or avoidance to dissonant information achieves the same dissonance reduction and question why we need to differentiate them. The answer to this is both logical and philosophical.

Suppose two different actions [exposure and avoidance] that are seemingly opposite cause the same effect [dissonance reduction]. Should we consider the cause as the same entity because both result in the same effect? If the underlying mechanism of each action is distinct, the behaviors should be understood distinctively. This is not a new idea, as Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson (1997) discussed almost 25 years ago. They claim that if a pair of concepts is activated by distinguishable processes and has distinct antecedents and consequences, bivariate understanding could be beneficial to advance the theory. They argue, “If the bivalent processes underlying some attitudes are not captured fully by bipolarity, the bivariate framework provides a better heuristic for representing these processes and for guiding research on their unique antecedents and consequences” (p. 21).

The next part will demonstrate the dissonance reduction processes and how these processes work differently between selective exposure and avoidance, which potentially displays how cognitive dissonance theory may not be a theoretical ground for the avoidance. There are four potential ways to reduce dissonance in terms of selective exposure to information (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019): removing dissonant cognitions, adding new consonant cognitions, reducing the importance of dissonant cognitions, and increasing the importance of consonant cognitions. With the original example of a habitual smoker, the four different ways are explained first and a relevant case regarding selective exposure and selective avoidance is displayed next.

When a smoker receives new information that smoking is bad for one's health, this new information conflicts with their established behavior and this imbalance generates dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). The most effective way to reduce the dissonance is to change the behavior (i.e. stop smoking), but the smoker will first try to avoid making a behavioral change. Instead, the smoker will deal with the conflicting idea at a cognitive level through various paths of rationalization. First, the smoker can deny the fact that smoking is bad for health (eliminating the dissonant information). Second, they can look for a new positive effect of smoking to justify the behavior (e.g., smoking keeps me thin; adding new consonant information). Third, the smoker can argue the negative effect of smoking on health is negligible compared to other behaviors such as the chance of experiencing a car accident while driving (reducing the importance of dissonant cognitions). Lastly, the smoker can put forward evidence that smoking may be slightly harmful to the lungs, but it does a great job of relieving stress, which is beneficial for health (increasing the importance of consonant cognitions).

These four ways of the dissonance reduction processes have been applied in the context of political communication (e.g., Holbert, LaMarre, & Landreville, 2009). To provide a relevant example for the current study, say a Democrat receives new information that their preferred party candidate has engaged in criminal misconduct. If this is manageable dissonance, they will start the process of reducing the dissonance. First, they can deny the fact that the candidate was involved with a crime by arguing the investigation is purely political (eliminating dissonant information). Second, they can collect new information to rationalize the behavior (adding new consonant information). For example, the supposed illegality was actually undertaken for the greater good of the

nation (the good end newly realized justifies the means). Third, the conduct can be deemed trivial, therefore, bringing no harm to the politician's candidacy - the formal charge (e.g., lying to investigators) is not a high crime (reducing the importance of dissonant cognitions). Finally, the partisan can determine that their preferred candidate's policies outweigh any smaller misconduct (increasing the importance of consonant cognitions). Yes, the candidate technically committed a crime, but look at all the good he is doing in terms of his policies and leadership.

As described, all four of these scenarios are applicable for selective exposure, but not so for selective avoidance. This is because the listed scenarios require new information except for the first example in which the dissonant information is removed. In the first example, eliminating dissonance information is purely the process that rejects new information at the cognitive level. Thus, individuals can go either direction in the information process: exposure or avoidance. If they decide to expose themselves to more information regarding the issue, they are motivated to search for additional content that will support their pre-existing cognitive structures (e.g., the investigation is purely political). However, if they decide to avoid further information on the issue, there will be no more information regarding the criminal charge and their opinion will remain the same.

The other three scenarios of the reduction processes necessitate a subsequent step of attaining new information, which later shifts its weight. Selective exposure presents through the process of adding new consonant cognitions and reducing or increasing the importance of the dissonant and consonant cognitions. However, avoidance does not do much in any of these three reduction processes. From a dissonance reduction standpoint,

avoidance can reduce the dissonance even before entering any reduction processes. In other words, avoidance does not reduce existing dissonant cognitions, but rather prevents the expansion of existing dissonant cognitions and the possibility of discovering more information that is dissonant. Avoidance limits the capacity of understanding the issue from the opposing view and saves cognitive energy that could otherwise have been spent weighting the gathered information.

### *Discrete Emotions and Moods*

Beyond the dissonance reduction explanation at the cognitive level, moods and emotions at the affective level are a potential theoretical ground for selective avoidance (Song, 2017). Affect is a broad concept that encompasses feelings of all sorts<sup>2</sup>. Adding to bipolar valence such as positive or negative, the discrete emotion approach extricates emotions on the basis of their qualitative distinct states that are varied in terms of intensity (Dillard, 2012). Given that discrete emotion theory categorizes emotions more in-depth based on their associated behavioral motivations, it can serve as a critical tool for selective avoidance research.

To be specific, discrete emotions are designed evolutionarily to solve problems; thus, each emotional response stimulates an action tendency such as approach or avoidance. For example, the discrete emotion approach differentiates between fear and anger. Fear is characterized as acquiescence. Its predominant action tendency is avoidance to the behavior. Anger is categorized as an approach emotion that prompts engagement with emotional related stimulus. The reaction to each emotion can be linked

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<sup>2</sup> Moods and emotions will be used interchangeably here to make the arguments focused on the selective avoidance; however, moods and emotions are conceptually distinctive in a way that moods last longer than emotions (Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2005).

to approach or avoidance in relation to consumption of political information. Avoidance is a reaction to a perceived threat and approach is a reaction to an incentive. Selective avoidance, also termed “defensive avoidance” (Festinger, 1957) can be analyzed further concerning its behavioral processes driven by emotions. While most studies considering discrete emotion theory so far have been found in persuasion literature regarding information processing and attitude change (e.g., Nabi, 1999; 2002), the theory can also account for selective avoidance.

When selective exposure research declined in political communication after the mid-1980s, the concept of selective exposure was utilized in mass communication as it relates to mood. Mood management theory is formulated to account for selection of entertainment media (Zillmann, 2000). It explains how emotions influence media selection and its role in entertainment media. The basic assumption of this theory is that individuals are hedonists and seek to enhance their moods and maximize pleasure. Mood management theory posits that people have a tendency to organize their stimulus environments in such a way that increases the likelihood that bad moods are short-lived and their experiential intensity reduced (Zillmann, 2000). Similarly, people look to sustain good moods and heighten their experiential intensity. Four distinct characteristics of media messages for mood management are discussed: excitatory potential, absorption potential, semantic affinity, and hedonic valence (see detail in Reinecke, 2017, p. 2).

Among these, hedonic valence has drawn the most attention from the field of entertainment media use as it can be linked to avoidance behavior. For example, media messages with a positive and hedonic purpose (e.g., a comedy program) are more likely to alleviate negative moods and enhance positive moods than messages containing

negative affective valence. This explains why selective avoidance occurs against political content even if hedonic valence is least used in the political communication (Holbert, Weeks, & Esralew, 2013). As political content can also generate affective reactions to audiences (Zillmann, Taylor, & Lewis, 1998), this approach would be valid for selective avoidance. Furthermore, recent scholarship in entertainment media use has distinguished hedonic media use from eudemonic media use (e.g., looking for meaning from pleasure; Oliver & Raney, 2011). This will also provide relevant discussion points for the selective avoidance research that not all avoidant behaviors may be driven by hedonic purpose.

As far as political avoidant behavior is concerned, moods and emotions serve as a baseline motivation to avoid information. Negative emotions such as fear or anxiety have often been associated with information avoidance. Even if induced moods have nothing to do with the information, individuals in a negative mood show a tendency to avoid dissonant information (Jonas, Graupmann, & Frey, 2006). In addition, those who experience anxiety avoid balanced information; rather they seek out useful counter-attitudinal information for the purpose of defending their own positions (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). Second, moods and emotions are outcomes of information processing. For example, when partisans successfully defend against information that challenges their preferred candidates, the area of the brain in charge of pleasure is activated (Westen, Blagov, Harenski, Kilts, & Hamann, 2006). Either as precedents or outcomes of avoidance, moods and emotions explain associations with information avoidance behavior.

Considered together, moods and emotions play major roles in political information processing (Jonas, Graupmann, & Frey, 2006; Valentino et al., 2009; Westen

et al., 2006). The John Q's Public model (Lodge & Taber, 2013) provides theoretical understanding of when, how, and why affect can be related to cognition and ultimately influence behavior. From an information processing perspective, they mention, "affect arises first in the stream of processing, is unintentional, and is difficult to control" (p.20). Political evaluation of candidates is affectively charged and affect becomes a main indicator of political polarization (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). It is impossible to account for how political information is processed without considering moods and emotions.

## CHAPTER 3

### HIGH-CHOICE MEDIA AND BEYOND

Research regarding selectivity has recently revived and incorporated the concept of avoidance into their discussion as a result of the growth of multiple cable television channels and online news (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud; 2008). Discussion of high-choice media environments established a notion that selectivity research, primarily selective exposure, needs to be considered in today's media environment where audiences have multiple choices ranging from political content to sports and entertainment options on cable television channels. The basic premise of this high-choice media discussion is that individuals are living in a saturated media environment and selection of political information is based on their partisan predispositions.

In consideration of diverse media options, selective exposure studies emphasize that content selection varies from political content only to political content and entertainment content (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012; Prior, 2007). This shift reflects the changing media environment as well as the increasingly diverse interests of audiences (Sunstein, 2007). Partisan selective exposure is not just a matter of political choice of either ideologically congruent or incongruent messages, but also a choice of entertainment content over political content.

Prior (2007) details that political interest makes selective exposure more noticeable in high-choice media environments. When respondents were assigned to the low-choice condition where they were able to choose one of five options, ABC, NBC,

CBS, *PBS NewsHour*, or turning off the television, 80 percent of the respondents chose news in the limited options or showed increased willingness to turn off the TV set. Respondents demonstrated a tendency to choose entertainment or sports over news channels when they were placed in the high-choice condition. They were provided the same five options as the low-choice condition plus additional cable news channels (Fox and CNN or MSNBC), and several entertainment options (a comedy or sitcom program, a drama program, a science fiction program, a reality TV, or a sport program). When an option to tune out was provided in cases where only political content was made available, individuals tended to retract themselves from the medium entirely. This indicates that selective exposure to political news is highly dependent on one's interest in politics. Even when considering multiple types of news media in longitudinal studies, political interest has been a key motivational factor behind news consumption (Stromback, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013).

Besides cable television news, it is also evident that selective avoidance research relating to online news environments is needed in the context of political interest level (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001). Unlike the basic proposition of information gaining where individuals are motivated to seek out information, a group of researchers found evidence that individuals do not have to make purposeful and conscious efforts for information acquisition under online environments (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001). This refers to incidental exposures, a process by which online news users are accidentally exposed to current affairs information while not actively seeking it out. Due to the abundance of information online, it is very difficult for individuals to entirely avoid issues that are covered extensively on news aggregators or mentioned in social media

networks. From the normative perspective, this incidental exposure is a positive sign for democracy because it has positively influenced political participation (Kim, Chen, & Gil De Zúñiga, 2013), political discourse (Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee, & Kwak, 2017), and increases access to political news to politically low-interest individuals (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

In technologically advanced online news environments, our evolving understanding of partisan selective exposure necessitates investigation of partisan selective avoidance. News aggregators such as Apple News, Google News, etc. that utilize personalized recommended systems tailored to their users preferences are prevalent. These systems make it possible for users not to approach the news, but rather consume an algorithmic feed curated to their specific interests (Thorson, 2020; Thorson & Wells, 2016). Public opinion scholars raised normative concerns that citizens are restrained from diverse opinions due to the growing algorithm generated news environment, which prevents fully informing citizens (Sunstein, 2007). This fear is not entirely true, but partially confirms that we are living in a filter bubble as a result of algorithms (Pariser, 2011). Beam (2014) categorized personalization at sublevels such as computer-generated personalized recommendations and user-customized recommendations. His experiment showed selective exposure increased when people use computer-generated personalized news systems. Surprisingly enough, when users customized their news recommendations, they were more likely to view counter-attitudinal information. This result is promising for the aforementioned concerned public opinion scholars.

In social media environments, partisan selective exposure seems to work poorly in comparison to traditional media environments such as cable television and online blogs. The most recent studies related to partisan selective exposure under the social media context demonstrate that increased selectivity does not necessarily corner media users into viewing strictly ideologically aligned information (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). Social media environments where individuals connect with their friends online can expose people to information from like-minded individuals (echo chambers). Additionally, the social aspects of information that are shared by their network may increase exposure to attitudinally congruent information. Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015) examines whether homophily is truly occurring in online social networks for political information consumption. With user data from Facebook, results indicated that regardless of algorithmic interference such as frequency of accessing social media or favorability of content, social media users are exposed to some degree of crosscutting information. For example, information from friends of different ideological affiliations such as Conservative is exposed to individuals from the Liberal perspective and vice versa. This type of exposure to partisan content occurs not only on Facebook, but also on YouTube and Twitter, which particularly influence younger populations and those with low interest in news (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

#### Contemporary Empirical Study of the Selectivity of Political Media

The classic notion of partisan selective exposure through party identification and political interest has been reaffirmed by recent studies in a changing media environment. In a high-choice media environment, partisan media content fills 24- hour news cycles in which news presenters along with political commentators take the sides of partisans

(Stroud, 2008). In doing so, partisan media attracts audiences who share their same political ideologies. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) observed this partisan selective exposure phenomenon empirically. In online experiments where the presence and absence of partisan news source logos were manipulated, results indicated that more interested and involved conservatives use Fox news as their dominant news source whereas more interested and involved liberals had a strong aversion to Fox news. This finding was consistent regardless of news type (Hard news *vs.* Soft news). This study offers empirical evidence of which channels are considered partisan media to audiences in an ideologically polarized media landscape. More importantly, individuals are selecting partisan information sources in line with their ideologies no matter what content partisan media delivers in the news.

The selection of political information based on partisan ideology is worrisome due to associated consequences at the perception level. When it was assumed or desired that media was nonpartisan in terms of their journalistic values, people perceived news media as suspicious due to their political ideology (hostile media effect; see Feldman [2012]). Conversely, in today's fragmented media environment where the news media is no longer considered unbiased, the hostile media effect is invalid as media seeks to satisfy ideologues. As a result of selectivity to partisan media, oppositional hostile media effect then occurs. This concept refers to partisan media generating biased reporting which may cause viewers to be suspicious of contradicting information from their existing ideology. Arceneaux, Johnson, and Murphy (2012) provide empirical evidence of the oppositional hostile effect through a partisan selective exposure lens. Participants who viewed pro-attitudinal content considered these programs more fair and unbiased,

whereas people who watched counter-attitudinal programs tended to view the content as more hostile and biased.

Another line of research that claims avoidance should be separate from exposure arose from the observations that exposure and avoidance show different magnitude to dissonant information (Frey, 1986; Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jang, 2014; Song, 2017; Tsfati, 2016). Taking a dissonance reduction approach, avoidance is even independent from the amount of induced dissonance. Additionally, the magnitude of selective avoidance is relatively weaker than the magnitude of selective exposure.

Recent studies have reiterated earlier studies' findings in different contexts (e.g., traditional and online media together [Chaffee et al., 2001], online news environment [Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013], and multi-tasking environment [Jang, 2014]). Some studies demonstrate how antecedents work differently on both phenomena (Song, 2017; Tsfati, 2016). Song (2017) demonstrates a distinctive mechanism of discrete emotions that account for selective approach and avoidance. For example, anger towards presidential candidates decreases exposure to counter attitudinal news programs, which was found to be more pronounced with Republicans than Democrats. Enthusiasm also functions as to increase counter attitudinal news exposure to Democrats rather than Republicans. Tsfati (2020) utilizes the established frame of personality traits (Big Five model) that shows different types of personality traits have connected separately with selective approach and avoidance. For example, individuals who are closed to new experiences are more likely to avoid ideologically incongruent information whereas this trait was not significantly associated with selective approach.

Additionally, individuals who are less empathetic to others show a tendency to avoid information compared to more empathetic people who are more willing to approach the incongruent materials.

Selective avoidance or defensive avoidance, “practice of screening out counter-attitudinal information” (Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013, p. 114) was featured in many early mass communication theory textbooks, but the topic failed to survive due to the lack of findings demonstrating sizable effects in selective exposure (Chaffee et al., 2001). What we have learned about selective avoidance of political media over time is that it is the corollary of selective exposure research. Consequently, the literature is broken into small pieces dispersed throughout selective exposure literature. Thus, the object is to put the pieces together in order to give a summary focusing on selective avoidance.

Most studies concerning selective avoidance have focused on making it comparable to selective exposure research. When it comes to online environments where choices are essentially unlimited in comparison to previous eras, selective avoidance shows a weaker magnitude compared to selective exposure (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett, Carnahan & Lynch, 2013; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jang, 2014). Legacy media companies have migrated to online platforms and political blogs market to audiences who seek information aligned with their ideology. It was speculated that in the fragmented online news environment where the number of ideologically oriented political blogs are growing, online media users might tune in to attitude-consistent political information. However, several studies have found this is not the case.

Garrett (2009a, 2009b) found individuals reading news online encounter reinforcing information about their preferred candidates more often. However, this does

not mean that they are avoiding sources with which they disagree. Although they are less frequently visiting websites that contain challenging information, they are still aware of counter-arguments against their preferred candidates. People prefer to consume opinion-reinforcing political information while not systematically avoiding opinion-challenging information. Consistently, Jang (2014) reiterates the same point in a series of online experiments considering multi-tasking environments and Garrett, Carnahan and Lynch (2013) found that individuals who visited attitude consistent sites also visited attitude discrepant sites in the American presidential elections around 2004 and 2008. Garrett and Stroud (2014) echoed that aversion to the counterattitudinal messages is weaker than the magnitude of selecting pro-attitudinal messages. Party identification works distinctively such that Republicans are more engaged in selective avoidance of counter-attitudinal information, whereas Democrats and others have a tendency to engage in selective approach.

Despite a tremendous amount of literature accumulated in selective exposure research over time, selective avoidance has not been discussed on its own but has rather served in a complementary role to selective exposure. The major reason why communication researchers have disregarded selective avoidance as a distinct theoretical concept is that it is often believed that selective avoidance occurs at the same time as selective exposure and is an inverse of selective exposure (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009).

It is entirely possible that these interpretations of selective avoidance as a mirror of selective exposure were not an intention of the original researchers. The word “avoidance” would have been necessary to explain the observed selective exposure

phenomenon in the partisan media environment. However, appearances of the word avoidance in the selective exposure literature were often taken at face value rather than being elaborated on to systemically refine the concept.

All in all, this oversimplified framework of information avoidance needs to be reconsidered relative to today's media environment. The following question must be raised. *How do we approach the study of selective avoidance?*

Reflecting the placement of selective avoidance as a lesser degree of significance in the literature of selectivity in political communication, the major culprit is the unsystematic approach taken to the phenomenon. Selectivity is one of six communication concepts that Katz and Fialkoff (2017) nominated to be retired: opinion leader, two-step flow, selectivity, cross-pressure, spiral of silence, and cultivation theory. In conclusion, they suggest why such concepts should be retired (p.89): (1) the concept is poorly named or has multiple names, (2) the hypotheses associated with the concepts are only weakly confirmed by empirical testing, (3) the concept is so vague or ambitious that it is of little further use, (4) the concept is poorly conceptualized, (5) the concept is poorly operationalized, (6) the changing world (e.g. new media) has made the concept obsolete. These listing items give an insight on the direction of how these concepts with rich history should be revised to survive. Particularly with selective avoidance, the name has been consistent, but its explanatory power was found to be relatively weak so far. Concept itself shows a clear distinction, but the conceptualization and operationalization were problematic as reviewed in the current study. Without rigorous steps for the refinement of the concept, it is hard to detect how the phenomenon works.

The basic steps of conceptualization and operationalization should have been taken to establish the concept of selective avoidance. These, however, were disregarded due to lesser emphasis on the phenomenon. This is the exact reason why some early scholars had a hard time detecting the effect of selective avoidance. Frey (1986) points out that only a few studies found avoidance effects (Rhine, 1967; Mills, 1965). This is because too few experimental research studies derived avoidance measures directly, and instead reported indirectly from preference ratings. The approach of terming selective avoidance as the opposite of selective exposure has been taken in many recent studies (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). Hmielowski (2018) suggested measuring partisan selective avoidance on its own and provided assessment validation with (un)correlates using four different issues that were prominent during the 2016 Presidential Election.

Another way to apply the systematic approach to selective avoidance is to reflect on the counterevidence in existing studies. The traditional understanding of information is that it can be categorized through binary features as congenial or uncongenial. This understanding is outdated. In a hypothetical situation where only congenial or uncongenial exist, when a person chooses congenial, they automatically choose to avoid the uncongenial information. This line of thought could be detected in the context of partisan selective approach under the two-party political system. However, because the premise about the binary attribute of information can be easily rebutted in a high-choice media environment where the complexity of information exists in different mediums, it is necessary to consider the changing world when studying avoidant behavior.

## Two Paths of Study Selective Avoidance of Political Media: Ideology and Interest

To advance our understanding of selective avoidance, dual foci on ideology and interest are crucial to be considered in the study of selective avoidance for the following two reasons. First, even though selective exposure literature has accumulated much knowledge in relation to both variables, it is not transferable to selective avoidance due to the methodological concern described above. Second, considering that partisan selective exposure originates from selectivity driven by political ideology, political interest has served as a safeguard for confirmation of whether the level of exposure is captured properly or not, but not mainly included as a primary variable of research. It is obvious that the more people are interested in politics, the more they seek exposure to political content. However, in applying the same proposition to selective avoidance it is unclear to what degree those who are politically interested avoid political information. In this section, I will review how avoidance in conjunction with political ideology and interest has been envisioned in selective exposure research and argue that it needs to be investigated as a standalone concept through two paths.

### *Ideological Extremity Focus of Selective Avoidance of Political Media*

Ideology driven avoidant behavior was mentioned as an afterthought of partisan selective exposure research (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Pfau, Houston, & Semmler, 2007). In a situation where multiple media were compared for the partisan selective exposure effect, not selecting a particular media was considered avoidance. For example, research conducted around the 2000 and 2004 American presidential campaigns found that Republicans listened to talk radio more frequently whereas Democrats tended to avoid talk radio shows preferring to instead consume late-night entertainment (Pfau, Houston,

& Semmler, 2007). In the literature focusing on partisan media outlets of cable television, the act of Conservatives not selecting television programs slanted toward Democrats was speculated to be selective avoidance behavior (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Put differently, the extent of disliking television content aimed toward Democrats is assumed equivalent to liking content in favor of Conservatives, which in turn affects selective avoidance and exposure respectively. The same thought process was found in the research regarding selective avoidance driven by political interest.

A study by Zhu, Skoric and Shen (2017) showed ideology driven avoidance behavior in the social media context. Using the case of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement protests in 2014, they investigated whether Facebook users unfriended friends or hid content due to conflicting views about the protests. 15.6% of the respondents reported removing content and/or unfriending Facebook friends. The association between political ideology and avoidance is hidden in their operationalized definition of selective avoidance, which is “individual choices that users make to shield themselves from undesirable dissonant views by removing unwanted information and breaking social ties that transmit such information” (p. 112).

This clearly indicates avoidant behavior is driven by different political ideology. Since the research context is limited to political protest, it is reasonably assumed that “undesirable dissonant views” refer to the conflict of political ideology. This point is reiterated from their interpretation of avoidance as a coping method to deal with perceived threat from outgroups, which means this accounting understands selective avoidance as a communicative (re)action to ideologically challenging content.

One important implication of this study for measuring selective avoidance is that selective avoidance requires an element of active motion. In the study of Zhu et al. (2017), avoidant behaviors were measured through the action of disconnecting with friends or hiding content. However, considering that not all selective avoidant behaviors entail such actions, the current study defines selective avoidance as a self-governing behavior that does not require further action beyond avoidance itself.

Taken together, with existing literature relevant to partisan selective avoidance, the current study sets a hypothesis to explore the relationship between ideological extremity and individuals' avoidant behaviors of political news. As far as political ideology is concerned, researchers in partisan selective exposure tend to map individual ideological placement (either Left or Right) with partisan media outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009) or like-minded information about various political issues such as abortion, affirmative action, or gun control (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Ideological strength was not a main concern. However, particularly in the high-choice media environment, this pattern of information avoidance behaviors could be more pronounced for those on each end of the ideological spectrum. This is because when the amount of available information is so vast, the proportion of information matching with an individual's political ideology must be relatively smaller than that available through traditional media environments. Thus, individuals who have a strong ideological leaning toward a party will be more likely to avoid news whereas individuals who are relatively neutral on the ideological scale will be less likely to avoid news. The following hypothesis is posed to understand the relationship between ideological extremity and selective news avoidance.

H1: Ideological extremity is positively associated with active news avoidance.

*Interest Focus of Selective Avoidance of Political Media*

There are a number of situations where selective avoidance can occur in conjunction with political interest. First, a low level (or complete lack) of political interest has been identified as a main culprit of selective avoidance of this kind. Recent studies demonstrate individuals who are less interested in politics choose to engage with programs other than political news (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012; Prior, 2007). This indicates active avoidance of all kinds of political content occurs due to the lack of interest in politics. For those who are less interested in politics, political entertainment programs (e.g., political television satire, late night comedy shows, etc.) have served as an instrument to gain political information (Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017; Young, 2013). This is because most types of political entertainment content provide implicit political information rather than factual information (Holbert, 2005). It is possible to expect that people might choose to avoid serious political content over political entertainment content.

Next, those who have a low level of political interest in conjunction with perceived importance of politics in life may also avoid political information. Although citizens are imbued with normative values of politics, everyone has different views on the effect that politics has on their lives (See Holbert, Zeng, & Robinson, 2017). Individuals who think politics are not important in life may not find any reason to consume political content. Ironically, individuals who perceive politics as important to life may not be

motivated enough to engage with political content because of disinterest in it. These cases also result in avoidance. Eliasoph's (1997) work on avoidance of political talk and civic engagement provides insight into this unexplored cause of selective avoidance. In her field study, political apathy leading to political disengagement is not entirely derived from disinterest in politics, but from the communication process of expressing self-interest. In other words, people are interested in politics, but not as much as they desire to join political conversation and actively convey their own interests. This combination of political interest and importance also works in a similar way to explain avoidance. Given that individuals are consistently taught to regard politics as important, selective avoidance is not entirely driven by their understanding of importance; but rather by the relative leverage of its perceived importance and utility (in this context, interesting content to draw attention for the audience).

In empirical studies, selective avoidance driven by political interest was understood merely as an opposite of selecting political content (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Prior, 2007; Stromback, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). Politically less interested people seek entertainment or other types of non-political content (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Prior, 2007). It is often interpreted that those with a lower level of political interest avoid political content. News avoidance was operationalized as not consuming news from multiple types of mediums including television and beyond (Stromback, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). From this approach, the conclusion was drawn that a growing number of news avoiders in Sweden could be explained by their level of political interest across time.

Avoidant behavior is also detectable as a function of political interest level. Bode, Vraga, and Troller-Renfree (2017) examined how fast social media users skip political content with eye-tracking methods where they observed users' gazes and the amount of time that individuals actually spent viewing political content. Results showed that as soon as people read a cue indicating that a post included political information, their attention moved quickly to the next content, regardless of the format of the content (either words or picture). This tendency is more pronounced among those least interested in politics.

Although the association between political interest and selectivity receives less attention in existing literature, it is a critical component of the high-choice media environment discussion. Individuals with a low interest in politics could choose to avoid political news over other types of media content such as sports, entertainment, and so on (Prior, 2007; 2013). It is also thought that those with a high interest in politics are less likely to avoid political information because they seek political information to satisfy their interest in current affairs (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Schehata, 2013). As displayed in Bode et al. (2019), the tendency of avoiding political content is more recognizable in the online environment. However, there is no empirical study to present a low level of political interest that has affected selective avoidance of political news. To clarify the relationship between political interest and selective avoidance, the following hypothesis is posed:

H2: Political interest is negatively associated with active news avoidance.

## CHAPTER 4

### GLOBAL ASSESSMENT NEEDS FOR SELECTIVE AVOIDANCE

In addition to the extension of political predispositions, selective avoidance research needs to extend its breadth and depth to the global level at this early stage of literature. Since communication phenomena, not limited to selective avoidance, is intrinsically universal behavior, it is important to meet the need for a global perspective relative to the change of media and political communication environments (Van Aelst et al, 2017). Changes in news supply systems have had a significant impact on demand from news audiences. This draws attention to normative concerns of political information consumption including political polarization and audience fragmentation within democratic societies. Selective avoidance is one of the culprits that intensify those concerns, both of which are detrimental to democracy. Empirical studies have provided evidence in America and European countries that the selective avoidance phenomenon is more evident in high-choice media environments. The current study aims to expand our understanding to different regions of the globe including non-English speaking countries.

A global assessment of selective avoidance is also needed in the early stage of scholarship to extend the research scope to different nations and cultures as a type of replication study, which has the positive effect of theory building and knowledge accumulation (Keating & Totzkay, 2019). Between the two types of replication including direct and conceptual replication (see Benoit & Holbert, 2008), the current study follows the direct replication tradition since this study tests the same hypotheses with the same procedures, but with data collected from different regions. It cannot be said that one

replication type is superior to another because the choice of method is mostly dependent on research questions and available resources. However, some replications are more valuable than others due to their utility for future studies as Rosenthal (1990) has stated, "Replications conducted early in the history of a particular research question are usually more useful than replications conducted later in the history of a particular research question" (p. 2). Given that selective avoidance has not been granted singular attention as a research topic and recent studies regarding selective avoidance have predominantly focused on America or European countries, the inclusion of multiple countries across cultures into the current study is beneficial in building selective avoidance theoretically and expands our knowledge of the phenomenon.

Few studies have incorporated macro-level factors regarding media consumption (Norris, 2000; Norris & Inglehart, 2009). This is because selectivity to media content is often considered as an outcome of an individual's choice, not much affected by societal factors. However, the high-choice media discussion presented by Prior (2007) made a clear point that understanding the media environment individuals are in is crucial for the selection of political information. It is important to reflect contextual levels in terms of selective avoidance research. Whether the collection of cable television channels is wide-ranging or accessibility to the Internet is easy, the infrastructure that delivers political information must be considered. Furthermore, individuals who share the same political agenda in a society should be understood at a country level. If a country experienced political turmoil such as national level protests perpetuated by corrupt governments or went through a severe decline in journalistic values, the coverage of political news in that nation may provoke different reactions in terms of news consumption. Thus, the current

study has taken the following two approaches to explore selective avoidance in the global context.

#### Cultural Map as a Framework for Comparative Research

Studies considering culture are somewhat rare within the comparative political communication research framework. Country selection is often chosen arbitrarily for a researcher's convenience rather than through theoretical framework. Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) periodically reviewed literature regarding political communication with comparative viewpoints since 1975 and found the field had become mature enough to explore communicative processes in politics with awareness of globalization in political environments. Even though they argue that political culture – “how the political process is to be performed within a particular political system” (p. 335) is an organizing framework, it seems operationalization of this concept of political culture is relatively challenging in practice. Stevenson (2004) argued even if it is theoretically challenging to use culture in the comparative political communication research due to the difficulty of defining the boundaries of culture, which restrains researchers to use culture as the basis of human behavior, “Culture [should] be a key variable in political communication” (p. 381). Since we now have comparable data available at the global level and analytic tools in our hands, he insists that political communication scholars should try examining cultural influence on the effects of political media.

What makes this conjectural claim come to realization is Ronald Inglehart and his colleagues' prominent work on the World Value Survey beginning in 1981. From a macro sociologist's perspective, he supports modernization theory postulated by Karl Marx that socio-economic development drives modernization from agricultural to

industrial, and to post-industrial societies. This process of modernization subsequently determines cultural changes in individual's value orientations (Inglehart & Wenzel, 2005). They aggregated personal orientations to certain values – “enduring belief” of a specific conduct or existence that individuals prefer personally or socially over the opposite (Rokeach, 1973) and categorized it as culture across nations. Whether individuals think a certain mode of conduct is important or they place more weight on different conducts is a measure of cultural change. They found some aspects of traditional cultural values are slowly replaced by modern values over time. For example, people used to believe God is important in their life. However, with the increase in scientific knowledge, this traditional value has diminished in many modernized countries. The faithful who once respected the authority of religious leaders and the scripture, now rely on human power instead of super-natural power. This work has provided insight into how societies have developed as their intrinsic values changed throughout the post-industrialization process.

This cultural change within each nation is displayed on the cultural map. It is built based on two major dimensions of cross-cultural variations in the world from the perspective of human development. The first dimension is survival values versus self-expression values. As societies have gone through post-industrialization, survival values relating to the necessities to sustain life such as economic and physical security grow weaker, while self-expression values stipulated as subjective well-being, self-expression, and quality of experience are rising. The other dimension on the cultural map is traditional values versus secular-rational values. Traditional values have an emphasis on the importance of religion and traditional family values, whereas secular-rational values

have the opposite preference. From these two dimensions, the cultural map having four quadrants is drawn and acts as a framework to explain how societal values have changed. This framework projects the social and political behaviors of each nation that cannot be captured by standardized economic indices.

The most relevant value change that this project pays particular attention to is self-expression values placed in the opposite continuum of survival values. Self-expression values are rising in many societies particularly where existential security is held with a condition of individualization and freedom of choice. In their revised version of modernization theory, Inglehart and Wenzel (2005) points out that self-expression values play an important role in humanistic transformation of modernization in general and political communication process in specific. In other words, in the political realm, self-expression values are the reflection of declining authority and increasing political participation. They declared, “Rising self-expression values push for more genuine democracy” (p. 43). How selective avoidance comes into play in between self-expression values and growing democracy is revealing and worth exploring.

The idea of connecting macro-level variables (here cultural values) to individual-level media variables has been studied, but the relationship is not clear enough to claim causality. Norris and Inglehart (2009) found that media users in cosmopolitan societies where information flow has no restrictions across national borders reside in societies that demonstrate the highest secular values. They believed that exposure to (news) media content imported from Western Culture induces changing cultural values. Therefore, media use is the origin of value formation in a society. However, from a media scholar’s perspective, this argument repeats the same error that the powerful media effect research

tradition postulated, which believed media equals effect. Thus, values as an outcome should be carefully considered in media effect research.

Tsfati and Ariely (2014) examined how macro-level factors such as the political system individuals belong to as well as the extent to which society's post-materialistic values interplay with trust in media at the individual level. Results showed that individuals in societies where post materialistic values are higher have a more skeptical political culture and are less trustful of the media. Their findings point to opposing directions of cultural values and individual level variables in contrast to Norris and Inglehart's work.

The value-behavior relationship is a longstanding debate even in psychology due to the reciprocal relationship between the two concepts (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). The intent of introducing cultural values to the current study is to provide a reputable framework following the comparative political communication research tradition and to explore country level comparison for selective avoidance research. Accordingly, this study sees cultural values as a driving factor of avoidant behavior rather than claiming causality for this new relationship.

#### High-Choice Media Environments by Nation

Beyond culture, the current study embraces the high-choice media environment discussion relevant to selective avoidance research. Given that each nation has different growth rates of media markets, this study considers elements representing their media environment. Two major components of high-choice media environments are the variety of content options and polarized political content (Skovsgaard, Shehata, & Strömbäck, 2016). This variation implies that each country might show different levels of

characteristics in regards to the high choice media environment. The “How” question that naturally arises here is intrinsically the same as what most comparative political communication scholars are challenged within their subject field.

Given that the essence of high-choice media environments is all about the availability of options to the audience, the major components of media infrastructures that changed the news environment should be considered. First, the number of television channels must be considered. There is no doubt that television has been a major medium for political information since its invention even though evolving technology has broadened its transmission format. As the early high-choice media environment discussion has focused on the exponential growth of cable television markets that entails polarized news media environments (Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2008), the current study will reaffirm this approach in the global context. For example, the number of television networks in the U.S. nearly tripled in less than a decade from 28 cable TV networks in 1980 to 171 in 1998 (NCTA, The Internet & Television Association), indicating that the U.S television audience has been exposed to a high-choice environment since the late 1990s. In contrast, due to the relatively late introduction of television in the nation, South Africa had 5 television channels in 2005 and 67 in 2011 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2012). This indicates that South Africa may not yet be classified as a high-choice media environment. It is challenging to make countries comparable in terms of the number of television channels because most of the media related variables at the international level focus on the audience side rather than the overall media landscape (Nielsen, 2010). Media market research tends to concentrate on its own territory due to intricacies in each market and data that is often proprietary to

commercial users. UNESCO's Media Development Indicators project (2012) is the only international level effort made to understand each nation's media environment for comparative purposes.

Another indicator to define the high-choice media environment in terms of the number of options is to study how Internet penetration rate has risen over the years within countries. Internet access itself does not necessarily mean that news consumption will rise, but higher levels of Internet accessibility can increase chances to expose media users to more diverse news sources compared to countries with lower accessibility to the Internet. In the case of South Africa, the Internet penetration rate was merely 56.2% in 2019, which seems low as the bottom line of the average rate is 58.8% worldwide. However, in the two decades from 2000 to 2019, the penetration rate of South Africa increased exponentially by 950% from 5.35% (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). This could be interpreted that South Africa is still catching up with other developed countries meaning their media environment in 2019 would be similar with the time when other countries had that level of internet accessibility (or overall accessibility to comparable media content). Without assessing each nations' media environment, it is hard to move forward the discussion of selective avoidance regarding high-choice media environments. The current study first focuses on understanding how high-choice media environments have changed media consumption patterns by taking a longitudinal approach to individual nations. Thus, the following research question is posited for exploratory purposes.

RQ1: Does the current landscape of political news consumption differ by countries with the rise of high-choice media environments?

According to the 2017 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, news avoidance is a global phenomenon despite substantial variations by country. In specific, more than 50% of respondents in Greece and Turkey answered that they avoid the news. Nordic countries such as Denmark and Norway showed relatively lower levels of news avoidance. However, it remains unclear what makes individuals in different countries selectively avoid political news at different levels. Building off of the discussion about political news consumption in each country, selective avoidance phenomenon should be further investigated in accordance with the study of high-choice media environments. Specifically, whether approachability to high-choice media environments in countries is associated with a higher level of selective avoidance and whether cultural values across countries has anything to do with selective avoidance could be further examined. Unlike existing studies which found political news avoidance is considered equal to low levels of media exposure (Brundidge, Garrett, Rojas, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014; Garrett, 2009a; Garrett & Stroud, 2014), the current study uses a single measure of selective avoidance that asked individuals whether they are actively avoiding political news in order to explore selective avoidance in the high-choice media and cultural values. Thus, the second research question is as follows:

*RQ2: Does selective news avoidance vary by nation?*

#### *Assessing Selectivity by Macro-Social Value Orientations*

Since the relationship of political predispositions and political news avoidance has been established in hypothesis one and two, attention is now turned to the cultural map. A major rationale for dividing survival values and self-expression values in the map is

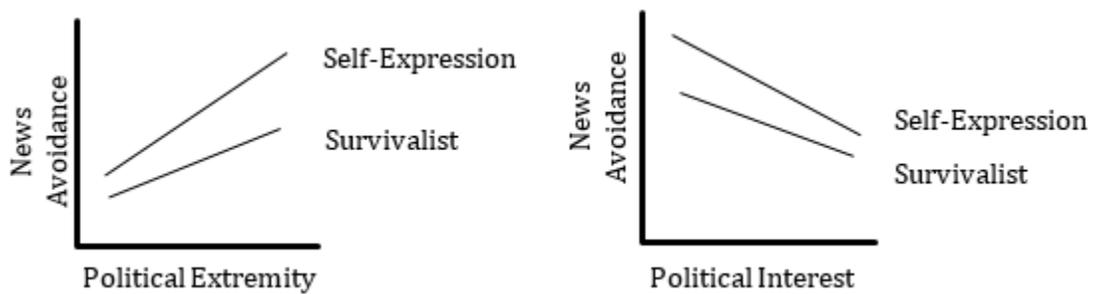
autonomous human choice: “As external constraints on human choice recede, people (and societies) place increasing emphasis on self-expression or individualisms” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p.138). We can reasonably assume how society’s self-expression values potentially interplay with selective avoidance in the high-choice media environment context. When considering ideological extremity, self-expression values could make those who are ideologically driven turn to their own preference of media choice. For example, individuals who show a strong ideological orientation could show their preference easily in societies like the U.S where self-expression values are high. Thus, the following hypothesis that describes the relationship of political extremity and news avoidance moderated by survival value and self-expression value is stated (See Figure 1):

H3a: Being nested within a self-expression versus survivalist global values area is a contributory moderator of the relationship between the ideological extremity and selective news avoidance such that the ideological extremity-political news avoidance relationship is statistically significant and positive regardless of region, but stronger for those individuals who live in a self-expression values area.

Political interest is also another way to account for selective avoidance with value propositions considered at the global level. For example, in the high-choice media environment when individuals have many choices of what to consume, people in the high self-expression valued societies can express their preference of media choices freely. This means, if they are less interested in politics, their selective avoidance behaviors in the

high self-expression valued society must be more notable, and vice versa. Thus, the following moderation hypothesis is stated (See Figure 1):

H3b: Being nested within a self-expression versus survivalist global values area is a contributory moderator of the relationship between political interest and selective news avoidance such that political interest-political news avoidance relationship is statistically significant and negative regardless of region, but stronger for those who live in a self-expression values area.

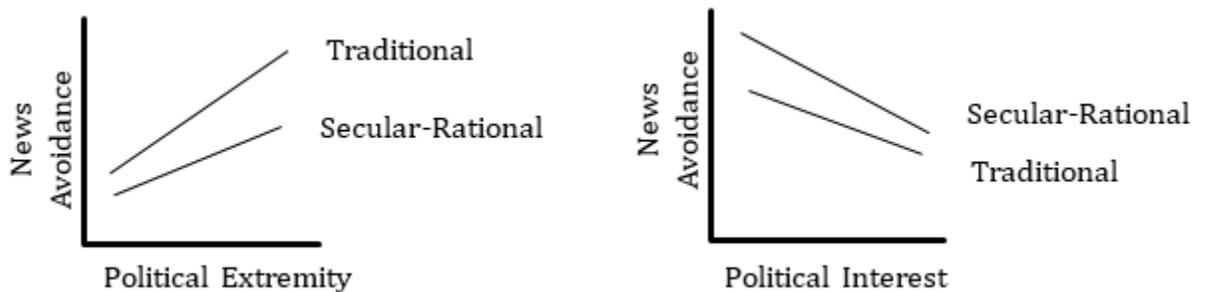


*Figure 1.* Self-Expression versus Survivalist Global Values as Moderator of Political Extremity/Interest (IVs) and Political Selective News Avoidance (DV)

Even though secularization has gradually weakened religious identities in advanced industrial societies, religious beliefs and ideological positions on the political spectrum cannot be separated from one another (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). For example, religious values continue to be associated with Right political orientations in most industrial and postindustrial societies. Thus, the following hypothesis states the moderating role of traditional-secular values in association between ideological extremity and selective avoidance behaviors in political news. We can posit that those living in

societies leaning toward traditional values may hold on to their political identities by avoiding political news (See Figure 2).

H4a: Being nested within a traditional versus secular-rational global values area is a contributory moderator of the relationship between ideological extremity and selective news avoidance such that ideological extremity-political news avoidance relationship is statistically significant and positive regardless of region, but stronger for those who live in a traditional values area.



*Figure 2.* Self-Expression versus Survivalist Global Values as Moderator of Political Extremity/Interest (IVs) and Political Selective News Avoidance (DV)

Assuming societies whose secular values are higher than others have more options for media content as maturity of media markets often correlate with content diversity, their avoidant behaviors of political news must be dependent on their interest in politics. To consider all aspects related to value orientation and media intake together, the final hypothesis examines the moderating role of traditional-secular values at the societal level in political interest and political news avoidance (See Figure 2).

*H4b*: Being nested within a traditional versus secular-rational global values area is a contributory moderator of the relationship between political interest and selective news avoidance such that political interest-political news avoidance relationship is statistically significant and negative regardless of region, but stronger for those who live in a secular-rational values area.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHOD

#### Data

This study uses three sets of secondary data collected at the global level. The first dataset is the World Values Survey (WVS) and the second set of the data is the European Values Studies (EVS). Both are large-scale, cross-national, and longitudinal surveys started in 1981. The World Values Survey grew out of the European Values Studies, which is “a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life” ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). With a combination of probability and stratified sampling method, they both have collected data every 5 years mainly using face-to-face interviews. The World Values Survey has conducted nationally representative surveys in almost 120 countries with a minimum sample size of 1,200 for most countries (See details in Appendix A). The European Values studies focus on European countries/regions such that in total 70,000 people in Europe have been interviewed. With a shared mission that produces representative comparative social surveys, both organizations cover overlapping questions that offer the integrated codebook for the crosswalk and recently started to collaborate in carrying out the most current wave (2017-2021). The present study utilizes the longitudinal data integrated from the World Values Survey for the 1981-2020 period and European Value Survey for the 1981-2021 period to generate the cultural map, a primary interest of the current project. The details of this data integration process can be found in Appendix A, which follows the instruction on the World Values Survey website.

The second dataset that this project utilizes was obtained from Digital News Report 2019 of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University. Reuters has collaborated with multiple academic partners since 2012 and has surveyed over 75,000 news users in 38 countries across the world. Reuters data has provided the most comprehensive view on news audience trends in each country and perspectives on the changes of news industries. The current project uses 2019 data, which was collected by YouGov polling company from the end of January to the start of February 2019 quota sampled in each country to ensure proportional representation across nations (See details in Appendix B). Reuters data is the first cross-national survey that asked about news avoidant behavior in a standardized question format. To explore selective avoidance behavior at the global level, this study utilizes 38 countries of which WVS/EVS and Reuters data both covered.

### Country Profiles

To give an overview of each country that the current project studies, 38 country profiles are provided in four indices as follows. The range of this study covers four continents including Africa, North/South Americas, Asia Pacific, and Europe. Europe includes 25 countries because the leading institution for the Digital News Report is Oxford University in the United Kingdom. Even though this study is not particularly interested in some of standard metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per Capita and Urbanization (%), it is useful to understand the country's general economic or residential situation, which relates to its media environment. Since the Reuters data was collected in 2019, all the other data points to gauge country level indices are recorded here based on that year.

In 2019, the average GDP per capita of the 38 studied countries was \$36,734 (lowest country: South Africa = \$7,346 and highest country: Norway = \$92,556) according to the World Bank (2019). The average urban population rate<sup>3</sup>, describing the percentage of the total population living in urban areas was 78%. The country with the lowest rate was Slovakia (53.7%) whereas Singapore and Hong Kong showed 100% urbanization rates (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2019).

More relevant to the current project using cultural values, Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. HDI is on a scale of 0 to 1 grouping countries on four categories (very high human development = .800 and above, high human development = .700-.799, medium human development = .550-.699, and low human development = below .550). In 2019, all of 38 sample countries fall under either very high or high human development countries (United Nations Human Development Programme, 2019). Lastly, Freedom House is considered the most respected index started in the 1950s for comparative study of political and media environments at the global level. The Freedom House index measures political rights and civil liberties composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country. Political rights and civil liberties have assigned a rating from 0 to 7 separately, with the latter combined and averaged to arrive at their Freedom Rating (1.0-7.0). Countries are categorized under one of three freedom status (Free = 1.0-2.5, Partly Free = 3.0-5.0 and Not Free = 5.5-7.0). To provide a comparative view within the

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<sup>3</sup> For the urbanization rate, the latest year that the UN has published the report was 2018. The following years' data points are provided as estimated values. Thus, 2018's rate was used here.

freedom status category, below offers the 0-100 scale before converting to the freedom status rating as well (Freedom House, 2019).

Table 1

*Country Profile by Continents*

	GDP per Capita (US\$)	Urban population (%)	Human Development Index (0-1 scale)	Freedom Status	Freedom House (0-100 scale)
<b>Africa</b>					
South Africa	7,346	66	0.71	Free	79
<b>Americas</b>					
Argentina	9,742	92	0.85	Free	84
Canada	51,589	81	0.93	Free	99
Chile	15,091	88	0.85	Free	94
Mexico	10,268	80	0.78	Partially Free	63
United States	55,753	82	0.93	Free	86
<b>Asia Pacific</b>					
Australia	57,187	86	0.94	Free	98
Hong Kong	37,928	100	0.95	Partially Free	59
Japan	49,188	92	0.92	Free	96
Malaysia	12,487	76	0.81	Partially Free	52
Republic of Korea	28,675	82	0.92	Free	83
Singapore	58,830	100	0.94	Partially Free	51
Taiwan	25,873	78	0.75	Free	93
<b>Europe</b>					
Austria	50,553	58	0.92	Free	93
Belgium	47,618	98	0.93	Free	96
Brazil	11,122	87	0.77		75
Bulgaria	9,059	75	0.82	Free	80
Croatia	16,510	57	0.85	Free	85

	GDP per Capita (US\$)	Urban population (%)	Human Development Index (0-1 scale)	Freedom Status	Freedom House (0-100 scale)
Czech Republic	24,266	74	0.90	Free	91
Denmark	65,820	88	0.94	Free	97
Finland	49,397	85	0.94	Free	100
France	44,317	80	0.90	Free	90
Germany	47,447	77	0.95	Free	94
Greece	24,024	79	0.89	Free	87
Hungary	17,572	71	0.85	Partially Free	70
Ireland	79,703	63	0.96	Free	97
Italy	35,680	70	0.89	Free	89
Netherlands	55,489	92	0.94	Free	99
Norway	92,556	82	0.96	Free	100
Poland	17,407	60	0.88	Free	84
Portugal	24,659	65	0.86	Free	96
Romania	12,092	54	0.83	Free	81
Slovakia	20,999	54	0.86	Free	88
Spain	33,393	80	0.90	Free	94
Sweden	58,013	87	0.95	Free	100
Switzerland	79,407	74	0.96	Free	96
Turkey	15,125	75	0.82	Not Free	31
United Kingdom	43,712	83	0.93	Free	93

*Note.* Taiwan's GDP is drawn from International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2020). Taiwan

HDI value was not available and replaced with the averaged value from East Asia and the Pacific.

Czech Republic and Republic of Korea are interchangeably named as Czechia and South Korea.

## Measures

Two macro-level variables (High-choice media environment scores and Cultural values scores) and two individual-level variables (political interest, ideological extremism) are independent variables for the hypothesis testing. A single item (selective avoidance of news) is used for the dependent variable.

### *Data manipulation process for macro-level variables*

#### *High-choice media environment*

To better understand when each country may enter the high-choice media environment, a mixed approach was taken. For the quantitative portion, increased number of cable television channels over time within countries and Internet penetration rates were composed from the most reputable sources. Global level data published by special agencies of the United Nations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) were used as a primary source for the above-mentioned elements. In case there is missing information in a country, information published by country-level agencies was used as a supplementary source such as European Audiovisual Observatory affiliated with European Union.

Qualitative assessment examines major changes of policy/regulation of the media systems in each nation that often elevates a country to the high-choice media environment. For example, when Korea Communications Commissions (KCC) relaxed the regulation of the limit for the number of cable channels in late 2010, existing television program providers started to expand the number of channels on top of the preexisting channels. As Internet penetration rates have been all time high in South Korea

since 2004 at around 74%, it makes sense to account for the country's recently amended media law to find out the point when this particular country enters a high-choice media environment.

Primary source is the Reuters Institute Digital News Report published since 2012 because it summarizes highlights of each country's media profile by local media experts providing insights on changes of media policies and regulations. For the more general country profile regarding media industries of each nation, BBC monitoring and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s World Factbook were used since they both offer comprehensive summaries of each country's media market history as well as current affairs. Lastly, the regulation body for communications at country level equivalent to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in America or Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) in European Union was used as an alternative source. Due to language barriers, this limited access to information of some countries whose official language does not include English.

*Cultural values scores.* To draw the cultural map, the time-series data merged from WVS and EVS was used to generate factor-loading scores that construct X-axis (Survival versus Self-expression values) and Y-axis (Traditional versus Secular-Rational Values). Two factorial scores are calculated from the following nine items: Feeling of Happiness, Most people can be trusted, Future changes: Greater respect for authority, Political action such as signing a petition, How important is God in your life, Justifiable: homosexuality, Justifiable: abortion, How proud of nationality, and Post-Materialist index (four items), and Autonomy Index (four items). The details of how each item was measured and how factorial scores were calculated can be found in Appendix A (WVS/EVS Data



*Individual-level independent variables: Ideological extremism and Political interest.*

Individual level variables were obtained from Reuter's Digital News Report 2019 data. Ideological extremism (Q1F) was measured as followed probe from Left-Right Ideology Scale: "Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale?" The 7-point scale is recorded from 1 = Very Left-wing, 2 = Fairly Left-wing, 3 = Slightly Left-of-Centre, 4= Centre, 5 = Slightly Right-of-Centre, 6 = Fairly Right-wing, 7 = Very Right-wing. To generate ideological extremism scale, the responses on the 1, 2, and 6, 7 were recoded as most ideological and the responses on the center were recoded as least ideological. Political interest (Q2\_new2018) was measured by the following question: "How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?" on a scale of 1 = Extremely interested, 2 = Very interested, 3 = Somewhat interested, 4 = Not very interested, 5 = Not at all interested. This item is recoded to have a higher score indicating higher interest level.

*Selective exposure (Traditional news and Web-based news)*

Selective exposure is a summation of traditional news and web-based news consumption, which was measured by the following statement, "Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select all that apply. (Q3)"

Traditional News is calculated from the following four dichotomous items (0 = Have not used and 1 = Have used) that aggregated to 0 to 4: Printed Newspapers, Television news bulletins or programmes, 24 hour news television channels, Printed

Magazines, and Radio news programmes or bulletins. Web-based news is calculated from the following four items becoming an index of 0 to 4: Websites/apps of Newspapers, Websites/apps of news magazines, Websites/apps of TV and Radio companies, Websites/apps of other news outlets (news aggregators such as Apple news).

*Dependent variable: Selective avoidance*

Selective avoidance was measured with a single item (Q1di\_2017): “Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?” on a 4-point scale of 1 = “Often”, 2 = “Sometimes”, 3 = “Occasionally”, and 4 = “Never”. This item is recoded as the higher score indicating higher level of avoidant behavior.

*Selective avoidance measure explanation*

There has been ongoing discussion of how to measure selective avoidance. Several studies have attempted to measure selective avoidance as an opposite side of selective exposure to pro-attitudinal information (Garrett, 2009b; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). For example, when participants who select pro-attitudinal information are coded as one (1), those who select counter-attitudinal information are automatically coded as zero (0). This is because of the contrast feature of selective approach and avoidance. However, some scholars have recognized the distinction between intentional avoidance and mere disinterest that possibly generates confounding results when selective avoidance is measured in the binary framework of selective exposure (Prior, 2013; Young, 2013). A more complex form of information that makes scholars stray away from the binary thought of selective exposure-avoidance and efforts of separating compounding from political interest lead to a discussion in developing a scale to measure exclusively avoidance (Hmielowski, 2018).

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Variables by Countries*

Country	Ideological Extremism			Political Interest		Traditional News		Web-based News		Selective Avoidance	
	Range: 1-4			Range: 1-5		Range: 0-4		Range: 0-4		Range: 1-4	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Argentina	926	2.06	0.82	3.46	1.00	1.67	1.15	1.32	1.10	2.23	0.94
Australia	1475	2.12	1.00	3.30	1.12	1.63	1.16	0.89	0.98	1.94	0.94
Austria	1464	1.92	0.86	3.45	1.00	1.93	1.11	1.05	1.09	1.98	0.93
Belgium	1300	2.24	0.93	3.06	1.08	1.63	1.02	1.19	1.02	1.90	0.95
Brazil	1599	2.53	1.13	3.73	1.03	1.67	1.15	1.38	1.25	2.02	1.03
Bulgaria	1588	2.12	0.97	3.42	0.87	1.78	1.03	1.21	1.13	2.27	0.89
Canada	1595	2.03	1.00	3.26	1.04	1.56	1.15	1.09	1.12	1.92	0.94
Chile	1043	2.22	0.84	3.20	1.11	1.94	1.19	1.32	1.15	2.38	0.93
Croatia	1503	2.35	1.01	3.16	0.95	1.72	1.05	1.63	1.22	2.51	0.86
Czechia	1561	1.89	0.89	3.13	0.92	1.83	1.14	1.40	1.13	1.82	0.87
Denmark	1445	2.31	0.86	3.31	1.04	1.60	1.13	1.10	0.97	1.64	0.81
Finland	1259	2.47	0.84	3.29	1.05	1.56	1.05	1.49	1.08	1.66	0.83
France	1236	2.68	0.96	3.20	1.06	1.60	1.04	1.06	1.17	2.05	0.94
Germany	1481	1.88	0.78	3.63	1.00	1.77	1.15	1.00	1.12	1.84	0.91
Greece	1646	2.05	0.88	3.69	0.96	1.40	1.07	1.52	1.21	2.40	0.96
Hong Kong	1526	1.91	0.96	3.13	0.98	1.81	1.20	1.23	1.13	1.80	0.94
Hungary	1456	2.02	0.96	3.29	0.89	1.35	1.00	1.14	1.11	2.09	0.91
Ireland	1506	1.95	0.90	3.41	1.05	1.84	1.29	1.30	1.14	1.99	0.94
Italy	1278	2.25	0.85	3.43	1.06	1.70	1.08	1.01	1.01	2.12	1.02
Japan	1210	1.61	0.82	3.36	1.01	1.50	1.08	0.83	0.91	1.43	0.73
Malaysia	1517	1.55	0.85	3.01	0.95	1.50	1.17	1.19	1.08	1.99	0.89
Mexico	1433	2.08	0.91	3.67	0.95	1.60	1.25	1.36	1.13	2.14	1.06

Country	Ideological Extremism			Political Interest		Traditional News		Web-based News		Selective Avoidance	
	Range: 1-4			Range: 1-5		Range: 0-4		Range: 0-4		Range: 1-4	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Netherlands	1340	2.18	0.83	3.08	0.96	1.61	1.08	1.13	1.00	1.97	0.92
Norway	1301	2.37	0.89	3.31	0.82	1.72	1.21	1.47	1.06	1.76	0.84
Poland	1398	2.14	0.96	3.44	0.93	1.93	1.16	1.43	1.17	2.29	0.98
Portugal	1366	2.34	0.92	3.00	1.05	2.00	1.15	1.13	1.21	1.95	0.88
Romania	1488	2.09	0.84	3.45	0.97	2.04	1.10	1.66	1.35	2.12	0.94
Singapore	1383	1.62	0.87	3.06	0.97	1.45	1.20	1.34	1.21	1.82	0.86
Slovakia	1585	1.98	0.99	3.17	0.79	1.86	1.13	1.29	1.19	1.86	0.94
South Africa	1677	1.97	1.03	3.32	1.05	1.81	1.18	1.41	1.21	2.04	0.96
South Korea	1821	2.14	0.97	3.10	0.90	1.42	1.09	1.21	0.91	1.83	0.90
Spain	1497	2.34	0.86	3.48	1.04	1.78	1.20	1.18	1.09	2.03	1.04
Sweden	1517	2.54	0.87	3.39	0.96	1.53	1.08	1.40	1.05	1.75	0.88
Switzerland	1403	2.06	0.89	3.20	1.01	1.74	1.16	1.34	1.06	1.94	0.90
Taiwan ROC	813	1.44	0.66	2.83	0.96	1.54	1.11	1.54	1.21	1.85	0.87
Turkey	1830	2.16	1.08	4.02	1.00	2.03	1.29	1.60	1.23	2.59	1.03
United Kingdom	1375	2.26	0.89	3.59	1.01	1.83	1.19	1.11	1.03	2.03	0.99
United States	1520	2.57	1.06	3.82	1.11	1.22	1.05	1.17	1.32	2.23	0.96

Aligned with the discussion of selective avoidance measure, the current study utilizes a single item measure of selective avoidance. When conducting a paired-sample t-test, the result indicates that the opposite of selective exposure (traditional news and web-based news exposure) is not the same as selective avoidance,  $t = -372.728, p < .0001$ . Furthermore, this avoidant measure can be validated by exploring correlations with existing news consumption measures. It is possible that people who are consuming more news are also avoiding news. However, considering that avoidance is a resistant action toward the object, we can reasonably assume that the association between news consumption and news avoidance should be negative. After controlling for demographic variables (age, sex, education, and income), news avoidance shows negative correlations with news use regardless of types of news. Traditional news and selective avoidance showed stronger negative correlates,  $r = -.142, p < .0001$  than web-based news with avoidance,  $r = -.075, p < .0001$ ).

Table 3

*Correlation Coefficients of Selective Avoidance/Exposure Measures*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Selective Avoidance	1			
2. Traditional News	-.14	1		
3. Web-based News	-.08	.22	1	
4. Selective Exposure	-.14	.78	.78	1

## Analytical Plan

A direct replication approach will be taken to test the first research question. With qualitative assessments, time series data will be analyzed for the purpose of within-countries comparisons on each country in order to see the changes of media consumption behaviors. To test the second research question and research hypotheses, a meta-analytic approach was taken. Given the structure of the WVS and Reuters data where a merged data with meta-information at the country level from external data sources has a hierarchical structure: Individual-level variables (Level-1) and Country-level Variables (Level-2), it is thought that multi-level approach is necessary to perform the hypotheses testing (Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998).

However, in the process of analyzing the data with a multilevel analysis approach, a few issues arose restraining the country-level comparison. For example, after applying the design weight, Turkey shows the highest income that implies higher income people were over-sampled in Turkey (2.56) on a scale of 1-3 [low, medium, high incomes]. South Korea (2.22) and Poland (2.15), Romania (2.15), Slovakia (2.14) were followed by Turkey. Based on GDP per capita as shown in Table 1, Turkey is placed 9<sup>th</sup> from the bottom and the other countries mentioned above were not in top five. Income is not of primary interest in the current study; however, given that it normally functions as a moderator of education, which later predicts political media consumptions (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011), this cannot be ignored for the choice of analytic method. One way to correct this over-sampling issue is to calculate another weight based on the population size (i.e., normally called power-weight in cross-national research). However, a cross-national data generally uses certain demographic variables (e.g., age, sex, education)

from their census, which makes it relatively straightforward to calibrate the data across the nations (European Values Study [EVS, 2020]). Creating another weight may not fix the issue that remains existing in the income variable.

It is possible that a meta-analytic approach can resolve this issue. Traditionally, a meta-analytic approach is to synthesize multiple studies of the same agenda. Beyond this way, it is now being used to cull multiple test results within a study level. This is not an entirely new approach in communication research. Stroud and Muddiman (2019) conducted 48 online experiments to understand how strategy and issue-framed political news play differently on news audience engagement in social media environments, particularly Facebook. They used a meta-analytic approach to incorporate multiple experimental study results within one study.

Warner et al. (2020) also followed the same practice. They have conducted surveys over four election cycles (2004-2016) where participants in 35 different schools watched 30 debates and evaluated candidates' performances. To ease the complication of the data collected, they aggregated results across multiple studies to test the same core hypotheses with a meta-analytic approach.

As Reuters aggregates a dataset collected from multiple countries using the same questions, the meta-analytic approach can be taken for the current study. This will normalize the sample size to calculate the effect size, which will control for the over-sampling issue mentioned above. To proceed the meta-analysis, Pearson's partial-correlation values between ideological extremity and political interest, and selective avoidance were pre-populated after controlling demographic variables (age, gender, income, and education) using SPSS. Then, the package, "metafor" in R (Viechtbauer,

2010) was used to execute a series of meta-analyses. A series of post-hoc tests will be considered after testing Hypothesis 4a because Right political orientation could possibly show different patterns of avoidance behaviors in Traditional-Secular valued societies.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS

This chapter will begin with a demonstration of selective avoidance behaviors at the individual level. Two research hypotheses serve a confirmatory role of examining selective avoidance by its degree of occurrence based on political predispositions including ideological extremism and political interest. A brief overview of current media environments at global level will then be provided, with particular focus given to television and Internet exposure for news. From there, the high-choice media environment discussion will be extended to the macro-social level.

#### Demographics of News Audience by Avoidance Level

In an attempt to understand avoidant behaviors at the individual level, a one-way ANOVA was examined by comparing non-avoiders. As shown in Table 4, not all news users are actively avoiding news. Around 60.9% of news users in all types including traditional news and web-based news indicate that they have actively avoided political news ( $n = 31,423$ ). On the other hand, 39.1% of news users responded that they never avoided political news actively ( $n = 20,163$ ). In details, avoiders ( $M = 46.13$ ,  $SD = 15.37$ ) are slightly younger than non-avoiders ( $M = 49.69$ ,  $SD = 15.45$ ),  $t = -25.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . It is more likely that avoiders are female than male,  $t = 14.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . As household income levels are higher, they are less likely to avoid the news,  $t = -12.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Political interest is a key to discern avoiders and non-avoiders. Those who answered that they are avoiding news ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) showed lower level of political interest, whereas politically interested people are less likely to avoid news ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .97$ ),  $t = -38.67$ ,

$p < .001$ . Education level and political extremity were not statistically significant which does not help much to understand the differences between the two groups.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics and Independent Sample T-test result by Avoidance Level*

	Range	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	18-99	Avoiders	46.13	15.37	-25.56	42815	< .001
		Non-avoiders	49.69	15.45			
Sex (Female = 1)	0-1	Avoiders	0.50	0.50	14.23	51584	< .001
		Non-avoiders	0.43	0.50			
Education	0-10	Avoiders	6.28	1.83	-0.98	51584	.323
		Non-avoiders	6.30	1.77			
Household Income	1-3	Avoiders	2.01	0.71	-12.78	51584	< .001
		Non-avoiders	2.09	0.70			
Political Interest	1-5	Avoiders	3.24	1.00	-38.67	51584	< .001
		Non-avoiders	3.59	0.97			
Political Extremity	1-5	Avoiders	2.12	0.96	-1.821	43136	.069
		Non-avoiders	2.13	0.95			
Traditional News	0-4	Avoiders	1.64	1.09	-36.05	51584	< .001
		Non-avoiders	2.00	1.12			
Web-based News	0-4	Avoiders	1.28	1.11	-15.33	51584	< .001
		Non-avoiders	1.43	1.16			

*Note.* Avoiders = 31423.37; Non-avoiders = 20165.66

## Political Predispositions and Selective Avoidance (H1 &H2)

To test hypotheses one and two that explore the association between political predispositions (political extremity and interest) and news avoidance, a series of linear regression models were examined with the entire sample (weighted  $N = 54360.95$ ). The result supports both hypotheses to establish the relationship between political predispositions and news avoidance. Hypothesis 1 is also supported,  $b = .039$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $t = 9.31$ ,  $p < .001$ . Those who are extreme on a political ideology scale, both Left and Right, are more likely to avoid political news compared to those who are moderate on the ideology scale. Hypothesis 2 is supported,  $b = -.069$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $t = -16.93$ ,  $p < .001$ . Those who are less interested in politics tend to avoid political news. This result resembles how political predispositions play with news consumption.

Table 5

### *Political Predispositions Predicting Selective Avoidance*

Predictor	<i>Selective Avoidance</i>			
	<i>Political Extremity</i>		<i>Political Interest</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
(Intercept)	2.281***	.023	2.536***	.023
Age	-.007***	.000	-.006***	.000
Sex (Female = 0)	.120***	.008	.100***	.008
Education	.007***	.002	.013***	.002
Income	-.068***	.006	-.060***	.006
Political Predispositions	.039***	.004	-.069***	.004
$R^2$		.021		.025
$F$		233		273.7

*Note.* Weighted  $N = 54360.95$ .

There was a concern regarding the small variance accounted for selective avoidance during the first two hypothesis testing. When news exposure variables were entered in the

regression models, the variance explained almost doubled. However, the current study decided not to include those to give full attention to selective avoidance.

#### Current Landscape of Political News Consumption (RQ1)

It is necessary to understand the media environment in terms of a high-choice media discussion since it is widely believed that avoidance often occurs due to the variety of options. Two broad angles on TV and the Internet will account for the political news landscape from the media audience's standpoint. First, the presence and availability of news media will be discussed in particular consideration of the number of television channels. As the increased number of options in television (mostly concerned about cable TV) was ascribed as the main culprit of not consuming political information, it is important to trace how many television channels are available. Moreover, the extent to which TV exposure to each medium has changed over time will be discussed with the longitudinal data from WVS/EVS. Second, as the Internet becomes an unlimited source for political information, one way to gauge whether countries have entered a high-choice media environment is to check the Internet penetration rate in each country. This approach will also show whether each country follows a specific pattern of news use through the Internet over time as their speed to entering the high-choice media environment may vary. To give a better sense of changes in the figures, a qualitative assessment was incorporated as some regulatory changes in media law or historic political events explain the changes that the quantitative portion cannot cover. Results are organized in a way each country is located on the cultural map.

### *TV Supply and Consumption*

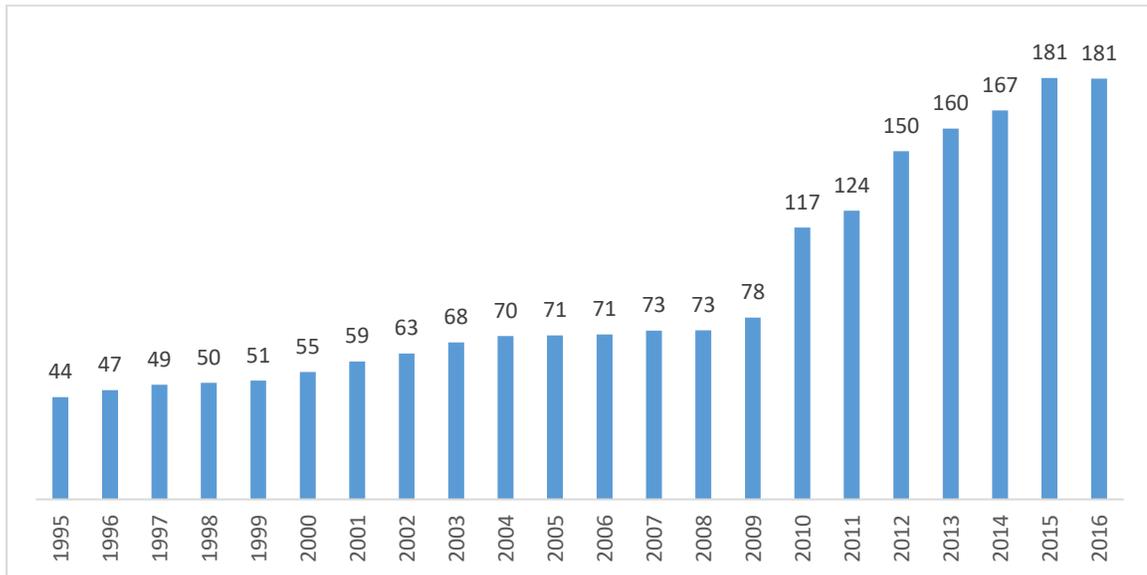
As an expansive number of television channels are a major pillar supporting the high-choice media discussion, understanding TV as a political news source is the first step for the selective avoidance discussion. TV certainly becomes a global platform in the world as the percentage of television reach in each market already passed over 90% (Nielsen, 2010). UNESCO used to keep track of the number of television receivers in use under the culture and communication section of their annual Yearbook, but the collection of these data ceased in the early 2000s. Considering what is delivered through the equipment, the initial attention is paid to the number of channels available in each country. In the real world, it is almost impossible to count the number of TV channels available to the public at the global level because defining the boundaries of available channels depends on many conditions (e.g., regions, technical transmission methods [free to air, cable, satellite, etc.], and options in the service package)<sup>4</sup>.

Nonetheless, it is important to provide a comprehensive view of TV channels supply when resources are available. In the case of America, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has published a report titled “Cable Industry Prices Reports” since 1995 to fulfill the requirement of the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992. To provide the primary information, average rates charged by cable operators for basic service, the number of channels has been surveyed. The 2018 report indicates that the number of cable channels in America has

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<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to devise UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators, UNESCO had surveyed 28 countries to understand their media landscapes in two separate surveys: Global media survey (2005-2006) and Pilot media survey (2011-2012). Along with many other aspects of broadcasting systems, the number of news channels was reported by the relevant government agencies of each country. However, a serious concern of data due to many missing data and incapability of being replicated with the original data source restrains from using it in the current project.

been increased by 211% from 44 channels in 1995 to 181 channels in 2016 when considering the price of expanded basic programming service.



*Figure 4.* Number of Cable TV Channels in America from FCC (2018).

Attachment 7 Historic Averages 1995-2016, p. 28.

Another systematic endeavor was found in the 2014 Yearbook published by the European Audiovisual Observatory, which covers the wider range of regions that this project is of interest. It provides channels available in 39 European countries using the MAVISE database (<http://mavise.obs.coe.int/>) that is a free access database on television channels and on-demand services and licensees in European countries and Morocco managed by the European Audiovisual Observatory. Since the database deals with the live data, the annual Yearbook published by European Audiovisual Observatory offers census data to give a comprehensive view of the markets in Europe since 2014. Among those 39 European countries, 24 countries that are overlapped with the sample countries of this dissertation project are synthesized. On average, 540 TV channels were available

to these countries. Spain is the country having the highest number of channels, 995 and the smallest number of channels was found in Switzerland, 222. When categorizing changes by different genres, the number of TV channels entirely devoted to news is ranged from 15 (Sweden) to 62 (France) and an average 5% of the total television channels was taken up in the selected countries.

Table 6

*News Channels on Television in EU by Countries*

Cultural Map	Country	Available TV Channels	News Channels	Total TV Channels for Genre	News to TV channels (%)
<b>Q1</b>	Finland	327	20	308	6%
	Slovakia	302	19	294	6%
	Ireland	480	27	470	6%
	France	902	62	1,091	6%
	Croatia	404	22	397	6%
	Czech republic	413	21	413	5%
	Netherlands	716	36	723	5%
	UK	591	28	619	5%
	Germany	827	36	851	4%
	Sweden	350	15	362	4%
	Austria	601	21	604	3%
	Denmark	503	18	523	3%
	Hungary	778	22	770	3%
	Spain	995	21	1,007	2%
	Belgium	482			
Switzerland	222				
Norway	232				
<b>Q2</b>	Greece	303	22	297	7%
	Bulgaria	460	31	452	7%
<b>Q3</b>	Turkey	667	35	661	5%
	Romania	606	24	604	4%
<b>Q4</b>	Portugal	307	21	300	7%
	Poland	760	32	772	4%
	Italy	738	36	1,256	3%

*Note.* Total TV channels for Genre are adjusted for the genre categorizations, which

makes discrepancies with Available TV Channels in the first column. European

Audiovisual Observatory (2014). pp.124-127.

From the audience side, the level of television exposure has shown steadily high with a small change over time according to the WVS/EVS data. On average, 94% in 36 countries have used TV over time. There was some downturn in the mid-2000s in a few countries including the U.S., Chile, Spain, Taiwan, and Brazil with the various extent of the decrease in TV news exposure. This could be explained in the displacement theory that media audiences have a limited time and the time spent in new media displace the time from the existing media. As the introduction of the Internet may serve as a complementary role with traditional media such as television and newspapers (See Dutta-Bergman, 2004), TV for news use does not entirely decline and has recovered at the same highest level as before later in the 2010s. None of the countries has shown lower than 90% of TV exposure in the most recent year of data collection. This shows that media industries have become mature overtime at a global level.

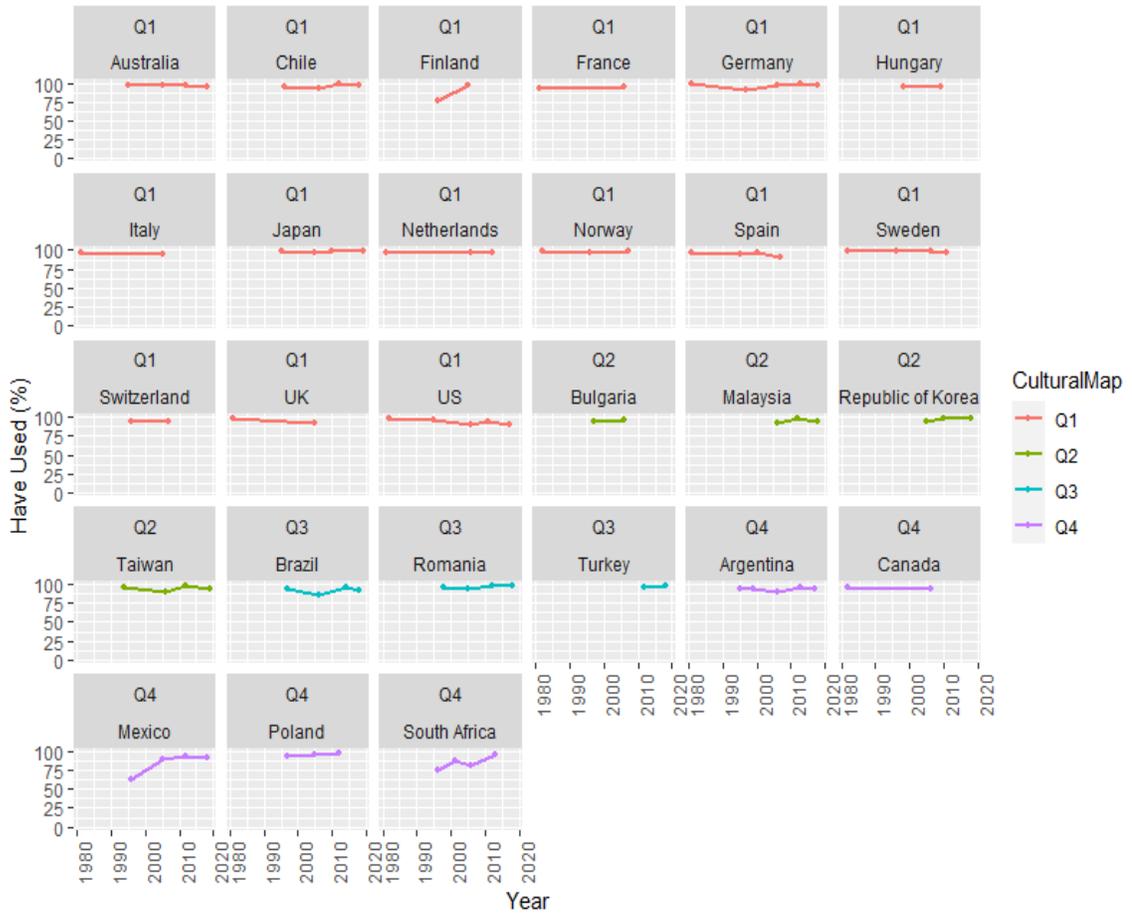


Figure 5. Trend of TV exposure (n = 27) from WVS/EVS (1984-2020)

*Note.* This figure displays only the countries whose data have more than 2-time points to generate a trend line for TV exposure. Other countries that were not listed here had limited data points to generate a trend line. Austria and Portugal have participated in WVS/EVS, but the questions regarding information sources were not asked.

The trend line of countries located on the first quadrant of the cultural map is relatively flat with minor changes overtime except for Finland<sup>5</sup>. In contrast, there is a

<sup>5</sup> According to Standard Eurobarometer 46 whose fieldwork was done in 1996, which is the same timeline as EVS, 95% of the Finnish cited television as their general news source. Given that the estimated number of television receivers in use of Finland in 1996 showed a higher number (605

noticeable rise in some countries, particularly South Africa and Mexico in the fourth quadrant. They both started at a lower rate of television exposure in the late 1990s, 76%, and 63% respectively. Later in the 2010s, they reached almost as high as other countries. Given that South Africa introduced television to the public in 1976, which was one of the latest countries in the world (Harrison & Ekman, 1976), this steep increase displays that TV became a prime media in a relatively short time of diffusion of media technology. They are both located in the fourth quadrant of the cultural map where Survival and Traditional Values are high.

#### *Internet use for news from WVS/EVS*

Another pillar of the high-choice media environment discussion is the abundance of information online. As shown in Figure 6 below, over 20 years, the Internet became more accessible in the world. Eighty-three percent of people in the sample countries ( $n = 38$ ) are using the Internet in 2018 compared to 2000 when only 26% of people had access to the Internet. Many of the countries in the first quadrant started with a relatively high penetration rate on average 28% in 2000 as well as some countries in other quadrants (Republic of Korea [Q2], Singapore [Q3], Canada [Q4]). However, countries located in Q4 including Mexico, Poland, and South Africa had shown less than 10% start point and showed steep growth in the chart but still showing under 80% penetration rate.

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per 1000 inhabitants vs. 501) than other Nordic countries (UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, 1997), EVS Finland data collected in 1996 may not represent well its nation's TV exposure. Nonetheless, this should not be the reason to discount the value of EVS/WVS as its aggregated form made it possible to analyze the trend data in a consistent manner at the global level.

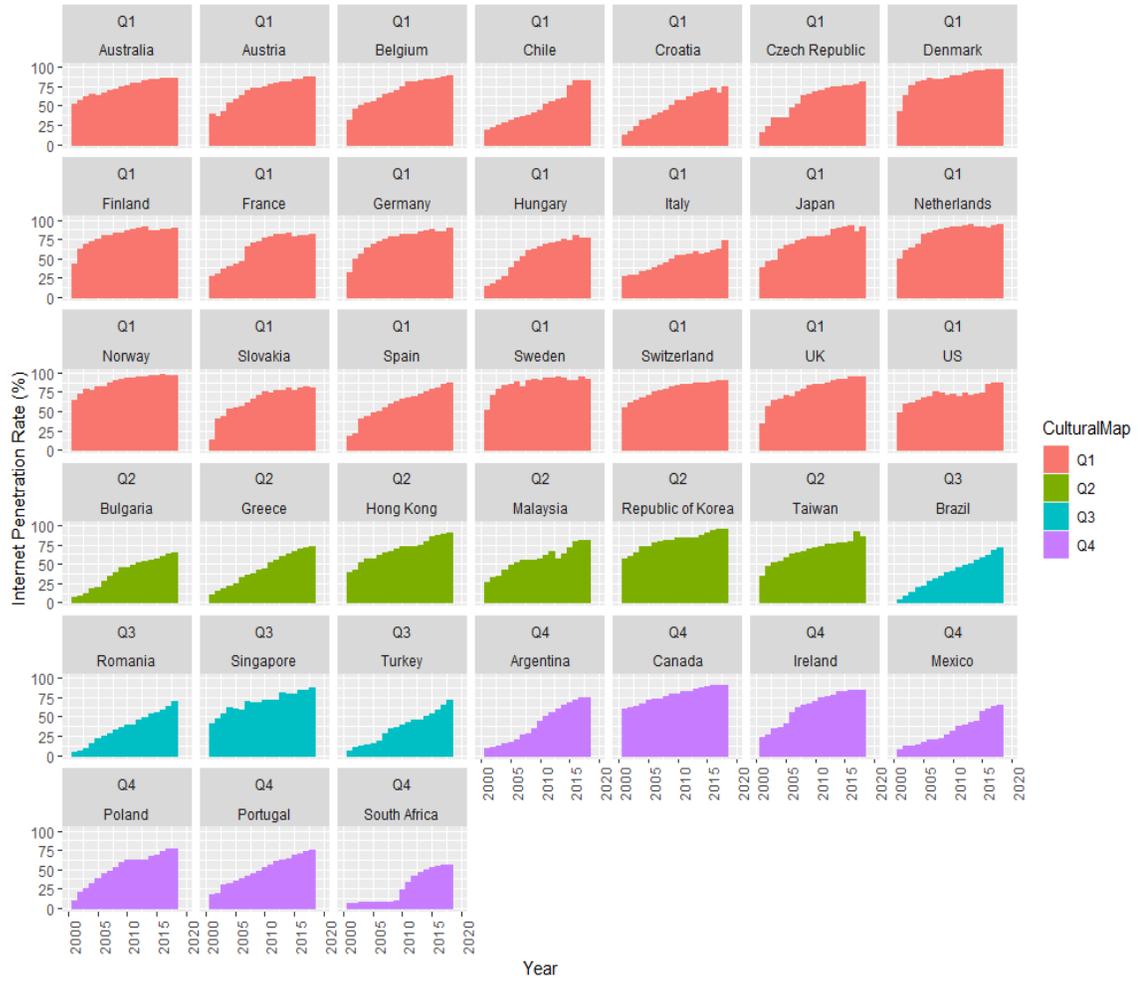


Figure 6. Individuals using Internet (Internet Penetration Rate, %) from ITU World Telecommunication.

With the growth of Internet access at the global level, WVS/EVS data have shown that 58% of respondents on average in the selected countries ( $n = 30$ ) accessed the Internet for news since 2000. Countries in the first two quadrants on the cultural map (high on Secular-Rational Values) led the highest level of Internet exposure 64.4%; countries in the third quadrant, showed 52%, and countries in the fourth quadrant showed the lowest level of Internet use for news purpose (43.5%). The U.S is a leading country of Internet use for news where 94% of the respondents answered they have access to the Internet for news. This is again reinforcing our point that studies of selective exposure focusing on the U.S context may not apply to the other countries.

Malaysia and Turkey that are both located in the quadrants (Q2, Q3) with higher survival values showed a dramatic upsurge of their internet use for news in the mid-2000s. For example, in 2006, only 36% of the respondents in Malaysia answered they have used the Internet, but in 2018 ( $n = 1313$ ), 93% of the respondents answered that the internet is their news source. The exponential growth of Malaysians' internet use has been attributed to the "Bill of Guarantees", that a pledge by the regime that the internet will not be censored unlike the traditional media<sup>6</sup> (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017, pp. 122-123). Turkey follows a similar pattern as Malaysia. In 2007, only 21.95% of people answered they have used the Internet, whereas, in 2018, 85% answered that to this question.

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<sup>6</sup> Malaysia is under an authoritarian regime where there are many constraints in the political, legal, and economic areas. That particularly restrains the criticism of the regime through any type of media. Sedition Act (1948) is one of the abusive laws that are still in use and in 2015 and 2016, some socially influenced public figures such as journalists, academics, politicians, and activists were detained due to this law. In May 2018, a historic win of Pakatan Harapan (PH) in the general election in more than six decades gives hope that Malaysian news media will experience freedom (BBC News, Feb 17, 2020).

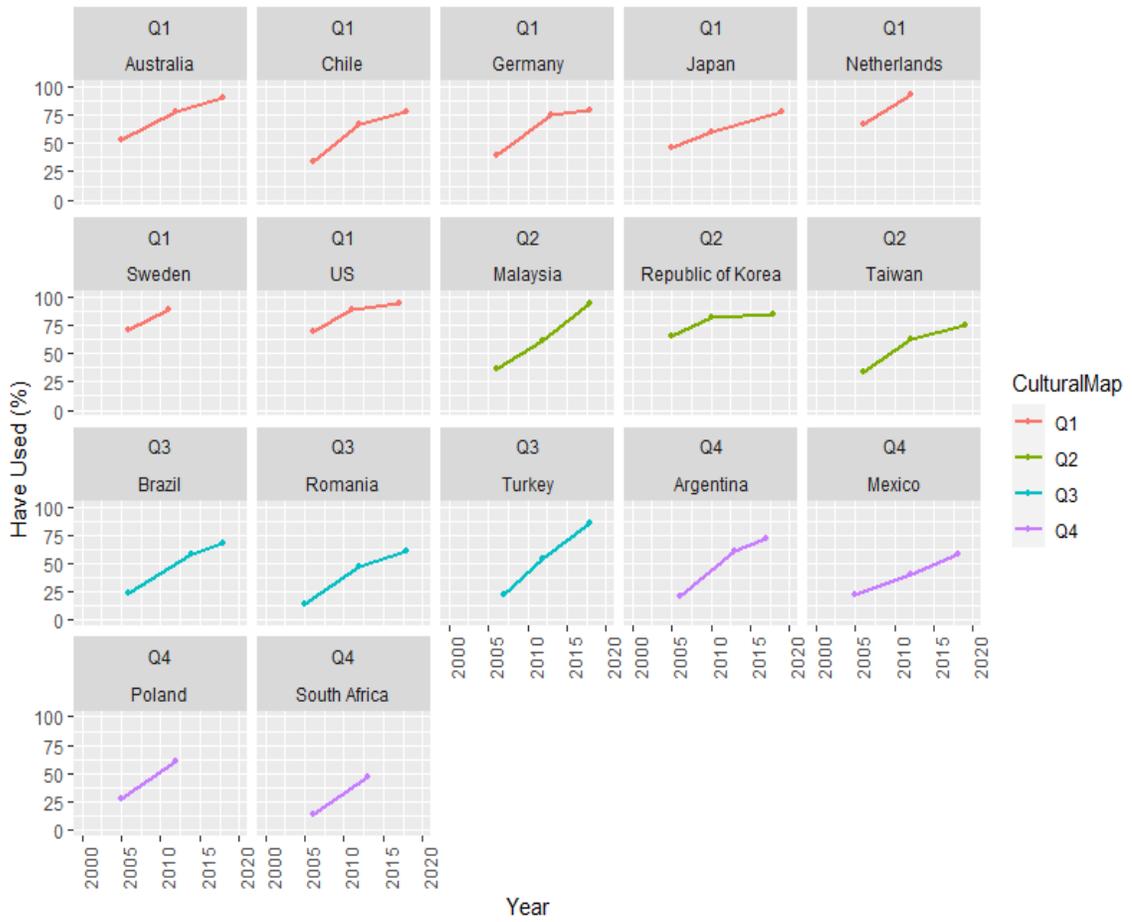


Figure 7. Trend of Internet exposure (n =17) from WVS/EVS (1984-2020)

## Current Level of News Avoidance (RQ2)

To understand the current landscape of news avoidant behavior, Reuters data (2019) was utilized, which directly measured the level of active news avoidance. In contrast to the past research that indirectly measured selective avoidance from media exposure measures, this data point will provide a full scope of selective avoidant behavior. As illustrated in Table 7 below, except for a few countries (Japan, Norway, Denmark, and Finland), more than a half of the respondents in each country indicate that they have avoided political news these days.

This country-level comparison could be explained in regards to freedom of media. For example, three Nordic countries where the proportion of respondents who answered “Never” avoided news is more than 50% display the highest Freedom House Index (Norway [2019] – 100; Denmark [2019] – 97, and Finland [2019] – 100). Likewise, Japan’s Freedom House Index [2019] is 97, which is ranked as one of the highest groups. It is reasonable to assume for the comparative purpose that countries where the media system is well established and journalism is free from its government are creating a safer space to tune into political news rather than avoiding it.

However, the index of media freedom may always not be aligned with the level of news avoidant behaviors in some countries. In this case, detailed stories of political or media related incidents give peripheral information. Croatia shows the highest level of news avoidance across all countries where 87% of the respondents answered they have actively avoided the news. Although Croatia’s Freedom House Index is ranked as “Free” (85 out of 100 scale), that does not illustrate much about avoidant behaviors. In fact, more than 1,160 lawsuits against journalists and news outlets in Croatia were filed by

politicians and public figures (Newman et al., 2019, pp. 76-77). Their reasoning is due to ‘shaming’ which is still a part of the Croatian Criminal Code such as mental anguish or tarnished reputation. This potentially explains the highest level of Croatia’s avoidant level.

Another example could be found in Turkey. Eighty-one percent of Turkish respondents answered they have avoided political news. With a rank of “Not Free” from the Freedom House Index (2019), Turkey’s failed coup in 2016 wounded its media environment. Traditional channels including broadcast and print media that are government-friendly limit critical ideas to the government and it is relatively easy to find opinions of dissent online (BBC News, July 22, 2019). Under a state of emergency in July 2016, nearly 150 media outlets were shut down by the authorities (Newman et al., 2017, pp. 98-99). This political turmoil would be a significant factor in the avoidance behavior in Turkey.

Table 7

*Selective Avoidance Level (Avoiders and Non-Avoiders) and Independence T-Test Results in Ascending Order by Avoiders (%)*

Country	Total (n)	Avoiders (%)	$M$ (SD) Avoider	$M\_Diff$	$t$
Japan	1209.54	30%	2.41 (0.60)	1.42	68.10
Denmark	1444.78	46%	2.40 (0.60)	1.40	65.40
Finland	1259.28	46%	2.43 (0.61)	1.44	60.99
Sweden	1516.70	50%	2.51 (0.64)	1.51	65.00
Hong Kong	1525.85	51%	2.57 (0.71)	1.57	60.10
Norway	1300.60	53%	2.45 (0.58)	1.45	61.36
Slovakia	1584.97	53%	2.62 (0.64)	1.62	69.13
Germany	1480.60	54%	2.55 (0.66)	1.55	61.21
South Korea	1820.55	54%	2.52 (0.64)	1.53	68.22
Czech Republic	1561.49	55%	2.49 (0.60)	1.49	65.31
Belgium	1299.81	55%	2.61 (0.67)	1.61	57.56

Country	Total ( <i>n</i> )	Avoiders (%)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) Avoider	<i>M_Diff</i>	<i>t</i>
Singapore	1382.86	56%	2.47 (0.59)	1.47	61.18
Canada	1594.81	58%	2.59 (0.68)	1.60	60.85
Brazil	1598.67	58%	2.74 (0.74)	1.75	61.06
Taiwan	812.57	58%	2.45 (0.65)	1.46	41.23
Spain	1497.22	59%	2.75 (0.75)	1.76	57.51
Australia	1475.38	60%	2.57 (0.68)	1.58	56.39
Great Britain	1375.06	61%	2.68 (0.70)	1.69	55.47
Netherlands	1340.39	61%	2.57 (0.64)	1.57	55.08
Ireland	1505.56	61%	2.60 (0.65)	1.61	59.19
Austria	1463.79	62%	2.59 (0.65)	1.59	57.67
Switzerland	1402.65	62%	2.51 (0.65)	1.51	53.36
South Africa	1676.87	62%	2.67 (0.66)	1.67	63.87
Portugal	1365.80	62%	2.51 (0.60)	1.51	56.43
Mexico	1433.45	64%	2.77 (0.78)	1.78	51.77
Italy	1278.16	64%	2.74 (0.73)	1.75	51.28
Malaysia	1517.31	65%	2.52 (0.62)	1.53	55.98
France	1236.43	66%	2.59 (0.67)	1.59	48.01
Romania	1487.88	68%	2.65 (0.65)	1.65	55.25
Hungary	1456.13	69%	2.57 (0.65)	1.57	50.52
United States	1520.41	72%	2.70 (0.68)	1.70	51.10
Argentina	926.24	73%	2.68 (0.66)	1.69	39.68
Poland	1398.37	75%	2.72 (0.73)	1.73	43.72
Greece	1646.35	77%	2.82 (0.65)	1.83	54.18
Bulgaria	1587.58	77%	2.64 (0.64)	1.65	48.93
Chile	1043.46	80%	2.73 (0.68)	1.73	36.96
Turkey	1830.21	81%	2.95 (0.76)	1.96	47.48
Croatia	1503.18	87%	2.73 (0.66)	1.74	36.91
Total	54360.95	33%	2.63 (0.68)	1.63	343.93

*Note.* Weighted data  $n = 54360.95$ ; Unweighted  $n = 54,422$ . For those who are

categorized as non-avoiders have the same descriptive statistics ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 0.00$ ).

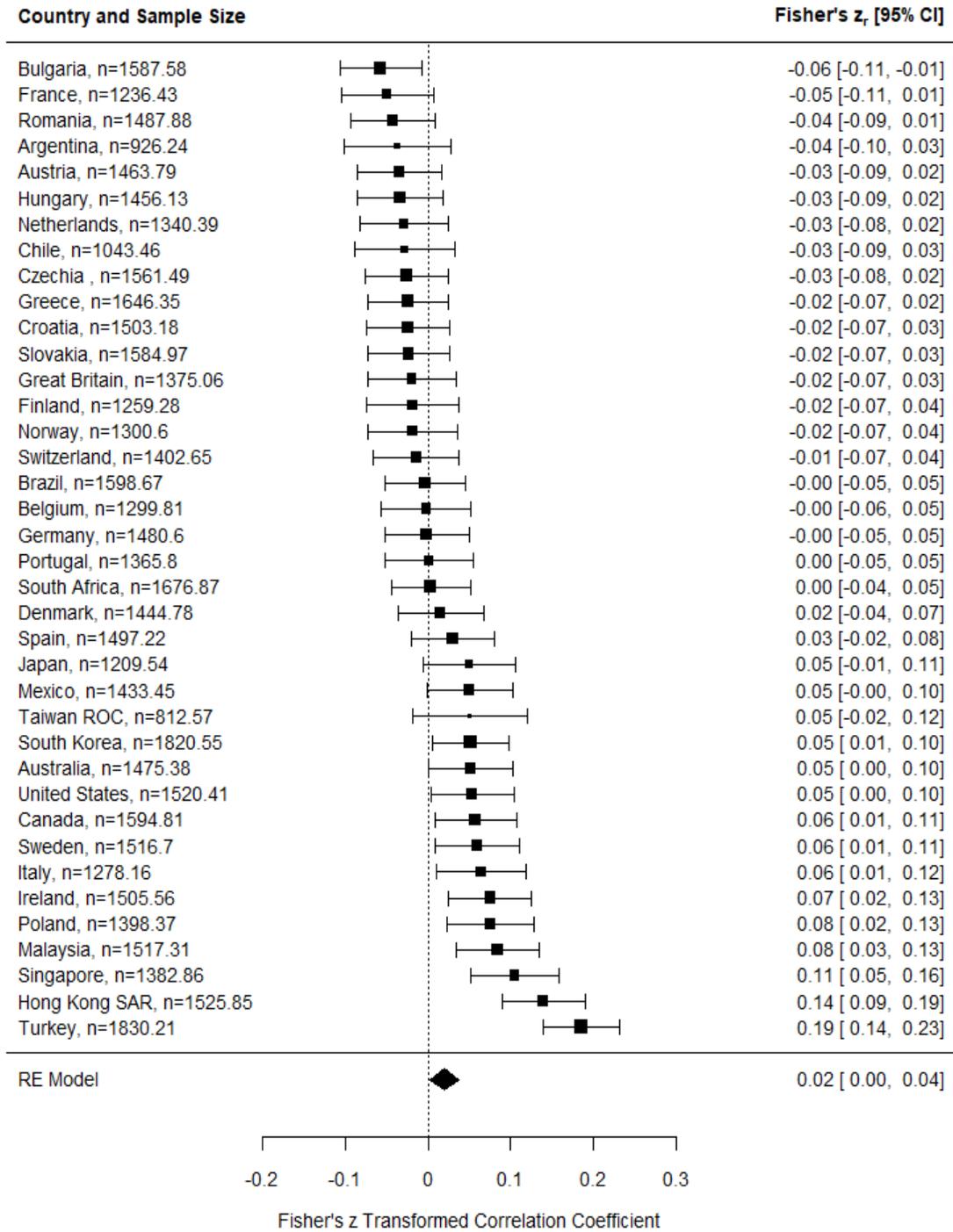
Beyond understanding potential possibilities accounting for the avoidant behaviors for the country-level comparison, Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was used to see whether selective avoidant behaviors are explained at country-level variables or individual-level variables. This is normally used in the preliminary step for the multi-level linear model. Even if the current study does not take a multi-level approach for the analytic method due to some constraints that previously mentioned in the method section,

it is useful to understand how much variance that Level 2 units (country) can account for the selective avoidant behavior. ICC is relatively low at 6.16, which can be interpreted as selective avoidance of political news is mostly explained by individual levels.

Nonetheless, as Norris and Inglehart (2009) in their book *Cosmopolitan Communications* argued media exposure could be explained by societal-level variables (e.g., GDP, Freedom House, etc.), the current study explores both possibilities. Given avoidant behaviors imply active reactions to the objects rather than exposure, we prioritize to examine how individual-level variables predict selective avoidance and incorporate societal-level variables later.

#### Cultural Map as a Moderator of Association between Political Extremity and Selective Avoidance (H3a, H3b)

Before testing whether cultural map moderates the association between political extremity and selective avoidance, a test for heterogeneity was performed to see if there is a variation across countries in the main effect relationship of political extremity and political avoidance. The result shows that countries are varied on the relationship between political extremity and selective avoidance due to heterogeneity rather than chance,  $Q(df=37) = 173.4083, p < .0001, I^2 = 77.81\%$ . This again echoes with what hypothesis 1 found earlier in this chapter. Overall, a higher level of political extremity was associated with higher political news avoidance,  $z = .0192 (p < 0.01, CI [.0013, .0371], k = 38)$ . When Cultural Values were taken into account in the random-effects model, the result did not show significantly different from each subgroup,  $Q(df=3) = .0350, p = .5652$ . Thus, hypotheses 3 are both rejected.



*Figure 8.* Meta-Analytic Approach to Political Extremity on Selective Avoidance by Country after Controlling for Demographics Variables

### *Explanation of H3a and H3b results*

Since cultural values did not serve as a moderator, this section devotes its space to explain the result of H3 at individual country level. On the top portion of Figure 8 above, Bulgaria, France, and Romania show the highest negative strength between political extremity and news avoidance. This can be interpreted that extremists in these countries are not avoiding news. One possible explanation for this could be age. France sampled an older population ( $m = 51.02$ ,  $sd = 15.90$ ) and Romania and Bulgaria are the countries where population ageing accelerated noticeably among its eastern European counterparts. Older people tend to follow traditional media consumption patterns, for example, watching an entire TV show rather than simply a clip online.

When looking at the bottom of Figure 8, it is shown that countries with the highest positive strength of the relationship between political extremity and selective avoidance are Turkey, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Turkey and Hong Kong ranked at the top when it comes to news avoidance only (see Table 7) and the correlation between an individual level factor (political extremity) and their avoidance levels remain high out of 38 countries. Singapore showed a relatively low level of avoidance in Table 7 (12th lowest avoidance level out of 38 countries), but when considering the relationship with individuals' extremity, its correlation shows one of the strongest. It can be interpreted that political extremists tend to avoid news more in Singapore. The overall population in Singapore tends not to avoid news but when it comes to extremist groups, the relationship between political extremity may be intensified due to the urbanized characteristics of the society.

## Cultural Map as a Moderator of Association between Political Interest and Selective Avoidance (H4a and H4b)

Similar to Hypothesis 3, before testing the moderation effect of Cultural Values in the relationship between political interest and selective avoidance, a test for heterogeneity was conducted. The result shows that there is significant variation across studies (dividend by country sample) that is due to heterogeneity rather than randomness (e.g., sampling errors),  $Q (df = 37) = 695.7444, p < .0001, I^2 = 94.44\%$ . Overall, a higher level of political interest was associated with lower political news avoidance,  $z = -.1105 (p < .0001, CI [-.1462, -.0747], k = 38)$ , which reiterates what hypotheses 2 described earlier in this chapter. When Cultural Values were entered as a moderator for the random-effects model, the moderation model did not show a significant difference between each subgroup,  $Q (df = 3) = 1.6667, p = .6444$ . Thus, hypotheses H4a and H4b are both rejected.

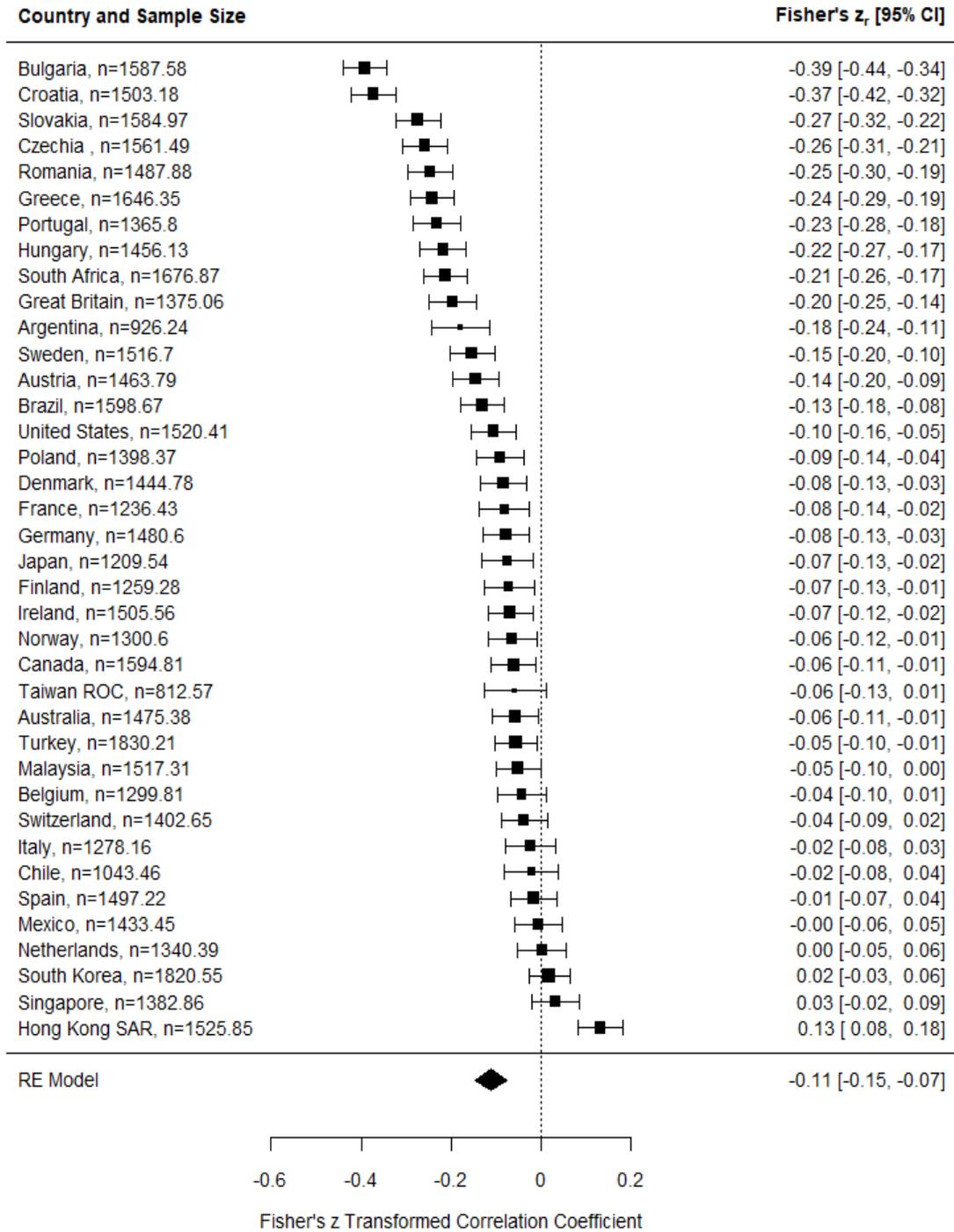


Figure 9. Meta-Analytic Approach to Political Interest on Selective Avoidance by Country after Controlling for Demographics Variables

### *Explanation of H4a and H4b results*

Due to the inadequacy of cultural values serving as moderators, the relationship between political interest and selective avoidance can be interpreted at a country level. The majority of countries in Figure 9 show a negative correlation between political interest and selective avoidance with variation of strength. This result indicates that politically interested people are less likely to avoid news at the global level. However, in some countries such as the Netherlands, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong, there was a positive relationship between political interest and news avoidance. This is particularly interesting because even for those who are interested in politics, they are more likely to avoid news, which indicates that there must be other factors playing into the news avoidance. Those urbanized societies may prompt individual's interest in politics, but they are not actually consuming news.

### Post-Hoc Analyses to Explore Potential Moderators of Political News Avoidance

In the science community, when a study found a null finding, it is natural to question further explanation. As Bakan (1966) once claimed, "there is really no good reason to expect the null hypothesis to be true in any population" (p. 4). Particularly, considering that the sample size of the current study is quite large, it is unusual to find non-significant results. That indicates that it is necessary to reconsider the potential theoretical explanations by taking different approaches to the phenomenon of interest. This section will devote its space to explore potential moderators of political news avoidance both at the societal level and at the individual level.

### *Meta-analyses using other societal factors*

Four societal-level indices are considered as a moderator for political predispositions (political interest and political extremity) and selective avoidance: Internet penetration rate, urbanization population rate, Human Development Index, and Freedom House Index. The first three indices are indicators of a country's development from several aspects. For example, the Internet penetration rate is a single indicator of Internet accessibility, which explains directly news consumption online (Norris, 2001) and potentially news avoidance. The urbanization population rate shows the degree to which a country develops from rural to urban areas. This index also predicts news readership (Norris, 2000), which potentially becomes a moderator of news avoidance. Human Development Index (HDI) is created to explain a country's development through human aspects rather than economic growth. Three main dimensions including long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living construct HDI. Lastly, the Freedom House Index mirrors the country's political situations, which are directly related to the freedom of expression.

Freedom House Index functions as a negative moderator between political extremity and selective avoidance,  $Q = 115.47$ ,  $F = 16.3522$ ,  $p < .001$ . In a country where the Freedom House Index is high, the relationship between political extremity and news avoidance gets weaker, whereas, in a country where the Freedom House Index is low, the relationship between political extremity and news avoidance gets stronger.

For the political interest, Internet penetration rate and urbanization population rate are found to be significant moderators for selective avoidance as illustrated in Table 8. Internet penetration serves as a moderator between political interest and selective

avoidance,  $Q = 517.04$ ,  $F = 12.0009$ ,  $z = .0057$ ,  $p < .001$ . As the Internet penetration rate is higher, the relationship between political interest and news avoidance gets stronger, whereas, in a country where the internet penetration rate is low, the relationship between political interest and news avoidance gets weaker. Urbanization population (%) also indicates that there is a significant positive moderating effect on the relationship between political interest selective avoidance,  $Q = 463.3185$ ,  $F = 17.2932$ ,  $p = .0002$ ,  $z = .0053$ . In a country where the urbanization population is high, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Belgium, and Netherlands, the relationship between political interest and news avoidance is more pronounced compared to the country where the urbanization population is low (e.g., Slovakia, Rumania, Croatia, and Austria).

Table 8

*Potential Societal Level-Moderators of Political Extremity/ Interest and Selective Avoidance*

Moderator	<i>Selective Avoidance</i>					
	<i>Political Extremity</i>			<i>Political Interest</i>		
	<i>Q</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Q</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Cultural map*	162.10	.690	.564	663.49	.557	.646
Internet Penetration (%)	171.50	.429	.516	517.04	12.000	.001
Urbanization Population (%)	161.85	2.199	.146	463.31	17.293	.000
Human Development Index	173.26	.011	.914	691.04	.227	.636
Freedom House Index	115.47	16.352	.000	679.43	.690	.411

*Note.* \*Cultural map statistics is provided for the reference point.

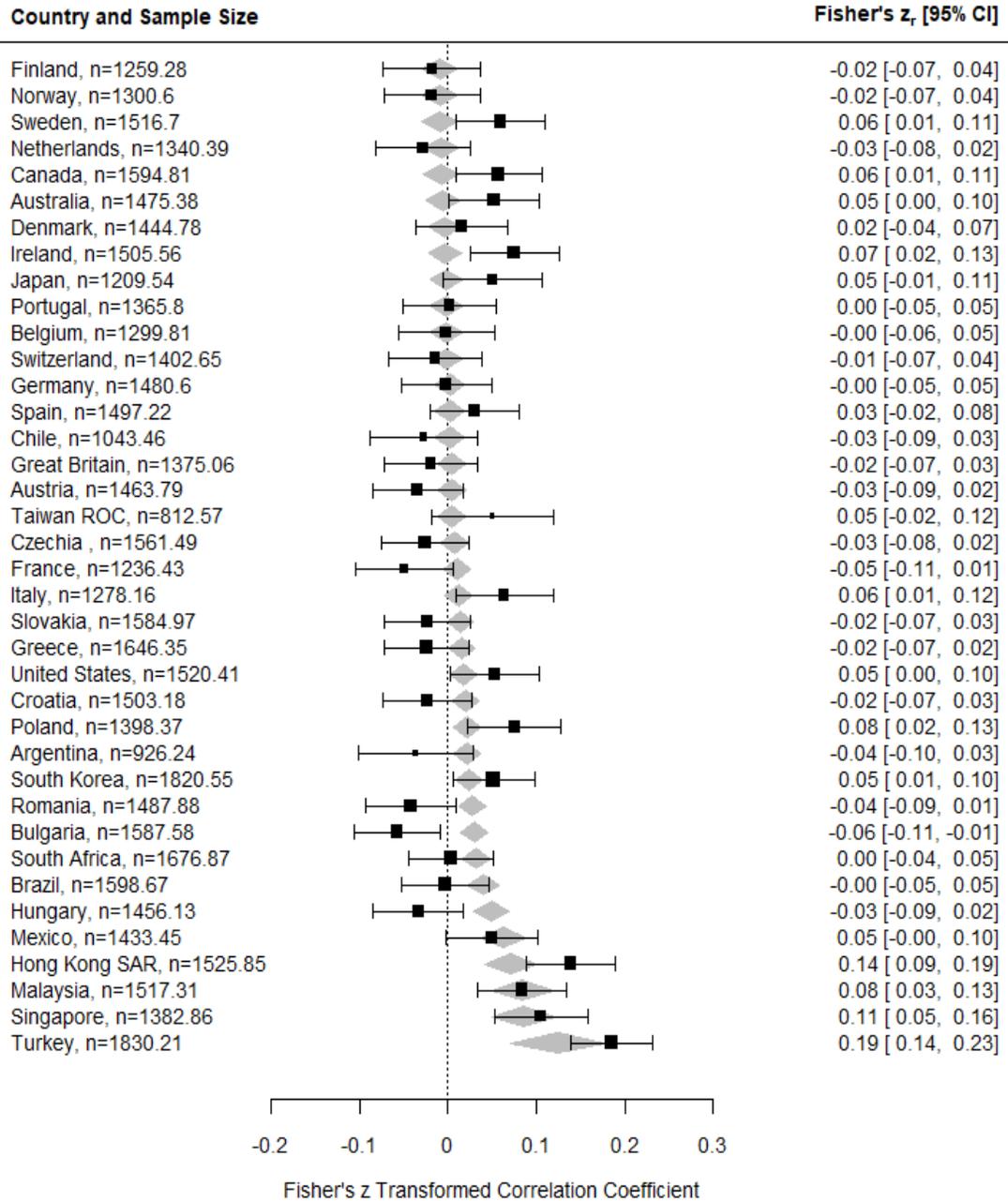


Figure 10. Political Extremity and Selective Avoidance by Freedom House Index

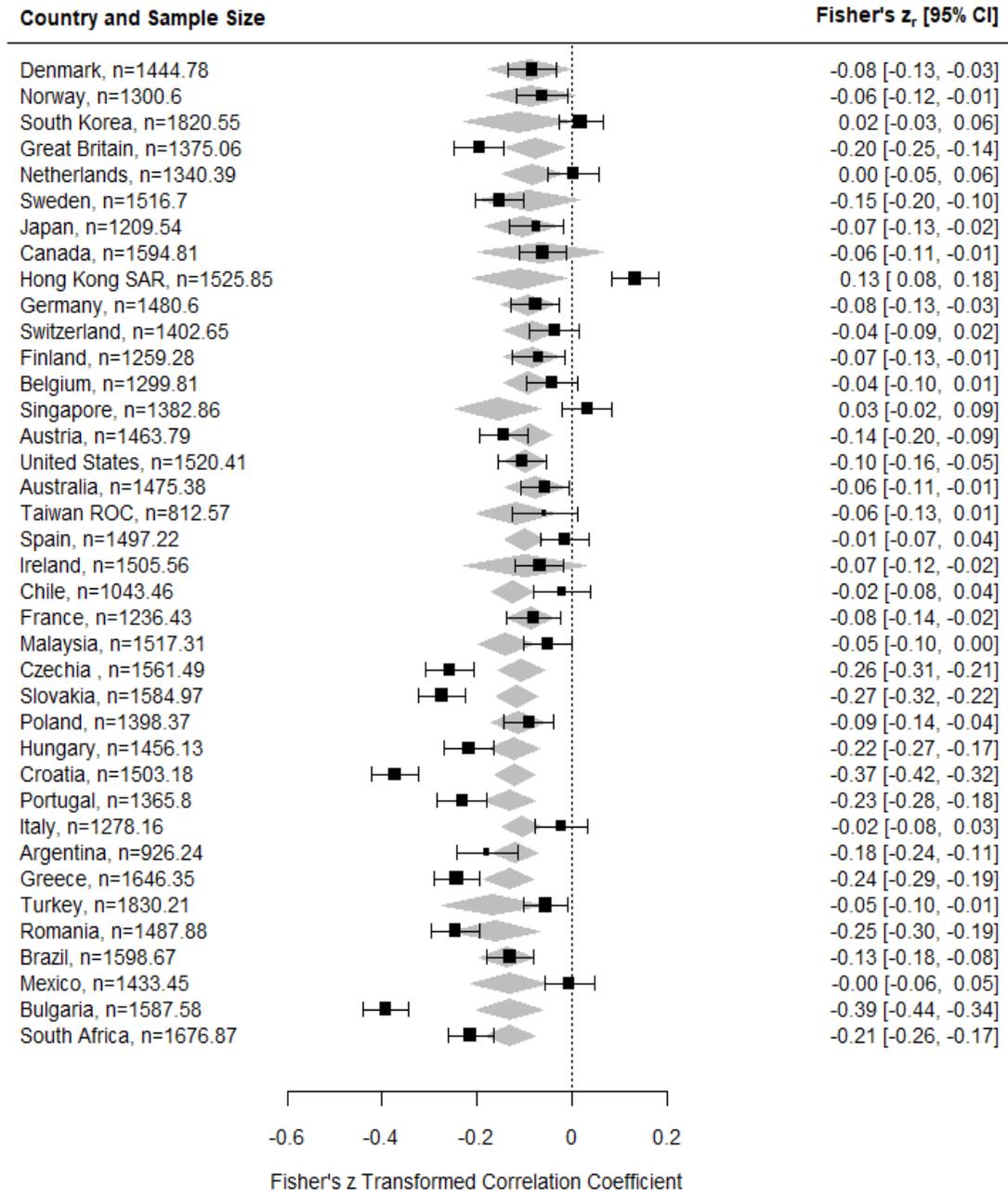


Figure 11. Political Interests and Selective Avoidance by Internet Penetration (%)

*Individual level variables as predictors and moderators*

Beyond political predispositions, two individual-level variables were taken into consideration to explain selective avoidance: affective state (worn-out) and attitudinal state (trust in media). First, the following statement was asked to measure the affective state toward news consumption, “I am worn out by the amount of news there is these days” (Q1e\_2019) on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The descriptive statistics for worn out variable are as follows:  $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $Median = 3$ ,  $Range = 4$  (1 to 5). In terms of distribution of worn out variable, it is slightly positively skewed and flatter than a normal curve (Skewness = .11, Kurtosis = -.81).

Table 9

*Worn Out Predicting Selective Avoidance*

	<i>Selective Avoidance</i>					
	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
(Intercept)	2.219***	.035	63.620	1.269***	.037	34.457
Age	-.007***	.000	-19.427	-.006***	.000	-18.058
Sex (Female=1)	.110***	.011	9.734	.082***	.011	7.691
Education	.015***	.003	4.681	.011***	.003	3.454
Income	-.051***	.008	-6.165	-.050***	.008	-6.422
Political Extremity	.056***	.006	9.298	.011***	.006	2.041
Political Interest	-.045***	.006	-7.840	.049*	.006	8.679
Worn out				.284***	.005	57.962
$R^2$			.025			.128
$F$			121.1			596

Note. Significant level: \*\*\* < .0001, \*\* < .001, \* < .01

When entering the worn out variable to the model 1 in Table 9 including demographics and political predispositions, the variance explained ( $R^2$ ) increased almost 10% from 2.5 % to 12.8%. The regression result of model 2 including worn out variable

shows that people who felt exhausted by the amount of news are more likely to avoid news,  $B = .284$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $t = 58.014$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 10

*Interaction of Worn Out with Political Interest/Extremity on Selective Avoidance*

	Selective Avoidance					
	Political Extremity			Political Interest		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
(Intercept)	1.381***	.045	30.553	1.345***	.058	23.054
Age	-.006***	.000	-17.926	-.006***	.000	-18.177
Sex (Female=1)	.080***	.011	7.521	.082***	.011	7.709
Education	.012***	.003	3.793	.010***	.003	3.246
Income	-.050***	.008	-6.337	-.051***	.008	-6.490
Political Predispositions	.015	.014	1.065	.021	.014	1.551
Worn out	.253***	.012	21.084	.288***	.017	16.731
Political Predispositions X Worn out	.013**	.005	2.727	-.001	.005	-.181
$R^2$						
$F$						

Note. Significant level: \*\*\* < .0001, \*\* < .001, \* < .01

In Table 10, when considering worn out as a moderator of political predispositions, the result shows that those who have politically extreme views are more likely to avoid political news when they felt worn out by the amount of the news,  $B = .013$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $t = 2.727$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Worn out was not statistically significant to moderate the relationship between political interest and news avoidance,  $B = -.001$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $t = -.181$ ,  $p = .856$ .

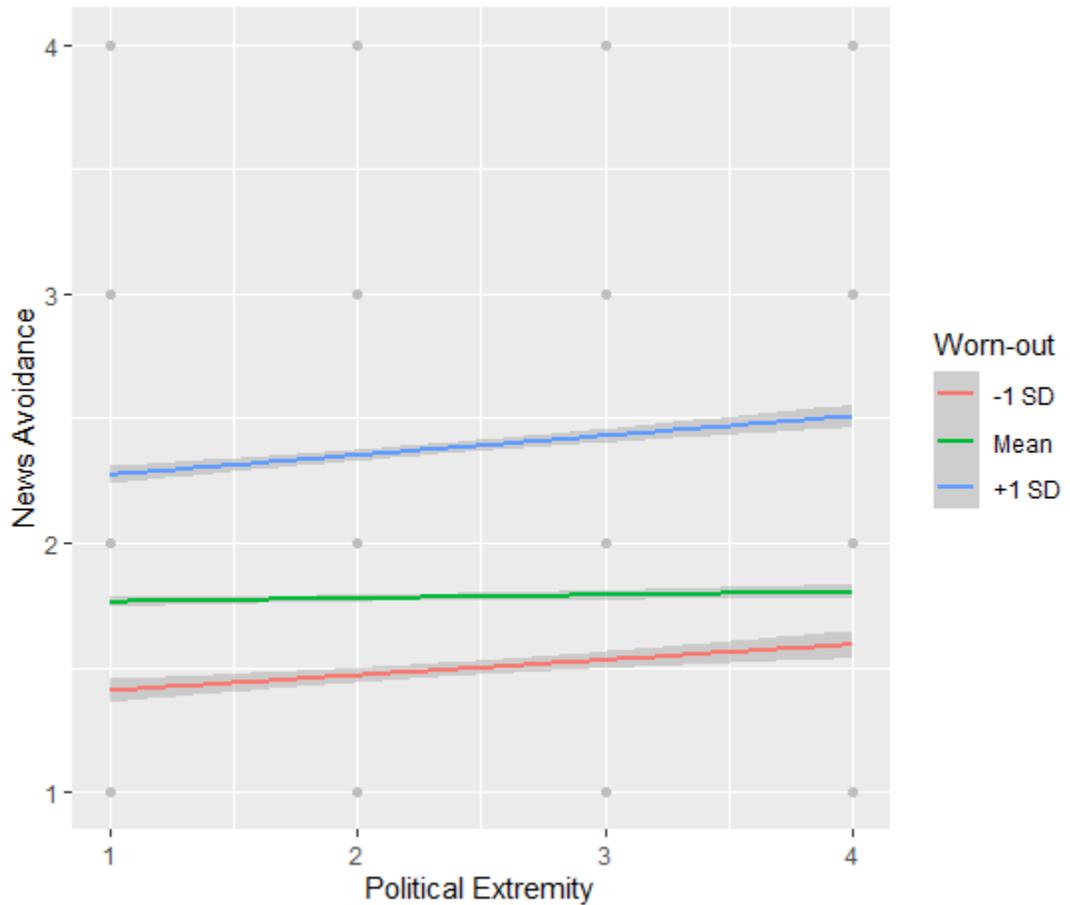


Figure 12. Worn Out as a Moderator of Political Extremity on News Avoidance

As shown in Figure 12, the interaction graph emphasizes the group of people who experienced less exhaustion by the amount of news in that their political ideology predicts avoidance the least.

Second, at the attitudinal level, trust in media is considered to explain selective avoidance. Trust in media is measured with the following statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree): “I think I can trust most news most of the time”(Q6\_2016). The descriptive statistics for trust in media show as follows:  $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $Median = 4$ ,  $Range = 4$ ,  $Skewness = -1.28$ , and  $Kurtosis = 1.89$ .

Table 11

*Trust in Media Predicting Selective Avoidance*

	<i>Selective Avoidance</i>					
	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
(Intercept)	2.219***	.035	63.620	2.339***	.042	55.632
Age	-.007***	.000	-19.427	-.007***	.000	-18.958
Sex (Female=1)	.109***	.011	9.734	.112***	.011	9.931
Education	.015***	.003	4.681	.014***	.003	4.499
Income	-.051***	.008	-6.165	-.050***	.008	-6.067
Political Extremity	.055***	.006	9.298	.054***	.006	9.069
Political Interest	-.045***	.006	-7.840	-.044***	.006	-7.637
Trust in Media				-.034***	.007	-5.102
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.025			.026
<i>F</i>			121			107.6

Note. Significant level: \*\*\* < .0001, \*\* < .001, \* < .01

As displayed in Table 11, a regression model 2 result shows that trust in media serves as a predictor of selective avoidance,  $B = -.034$ ,  $SE = .007$ ,  $t = -5.102$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Thus, this can be interpreted that those who trust less in media are more likely to avoid political news.

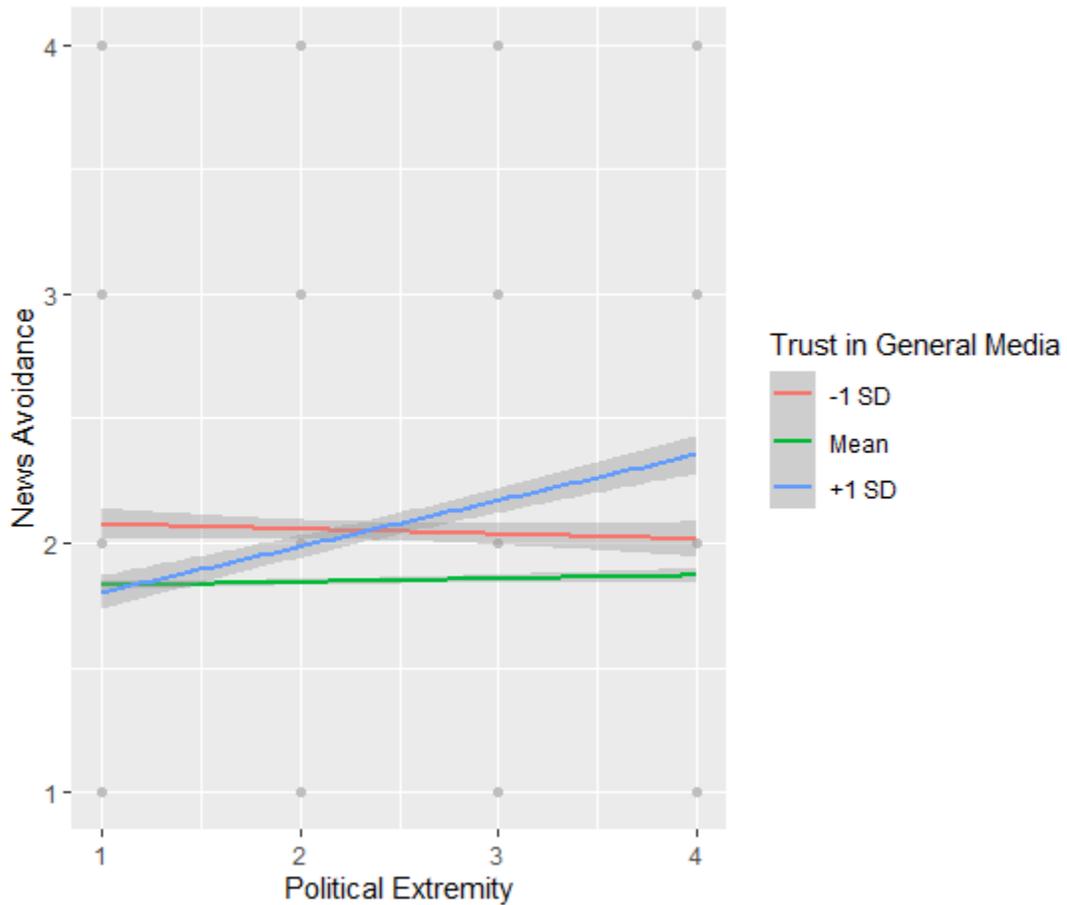
Table 12

*Trust in Media as a Moderator of Political Interest and Selective Avoidance*

	<i>Selective Avoidance</i>					
	<i>Political Extremity</i>			<i>Political Interest</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
(Intercept)	2.669***	.072	37.204	3.469***	.094	37.094
Age	-.007***	.000	-19.455	-.007***	.000	-18.278
Sex (Female=1)	.123***	.011	10.993	.113***	.011	9.997
Education	.010**	.003	3.237	.013***	.003	4.054
Income	-.055***	.008	-6.666	-.052***	.008	-6.219
Political Predispositions	-.130***	.026	-5.064	-.319***	.024	-13.283
Trust in Media	-.147***	.017	-8.640	-.313***	.024	-13.201
Political Predispositions X Trust in Media	.047***	.007	7.093	.076***	.006	12.142
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.025			.028
<i>F</i>			106.4			117.1

Note. Significant level: \*\*\* < .0001, \*\* < .001, \* < .01

Trust in media also moderates the relationship between political predispositions and selective avoidance. When it comes to the association between political extremity and selective avoidance, trust in media plays a moderating role,  $B = .047$ ,  $SE = .007$ ,  $t = 7.093$ ,  $p < .0001$  in Table 12.



*Figure 13.* Interaction Graph of Political Extremity on News Avoidance  
by Trust in General Media

People with extreme political ideology tend to avoid news, but with consideration of trust in media, the level of avoidance became attenuated for the group showing average and less than average trust level as shown in red and green lines of Figure 13. However, for those who show above average trust in media, extremity and avoidance relationship is more pronounced compared to other groups.

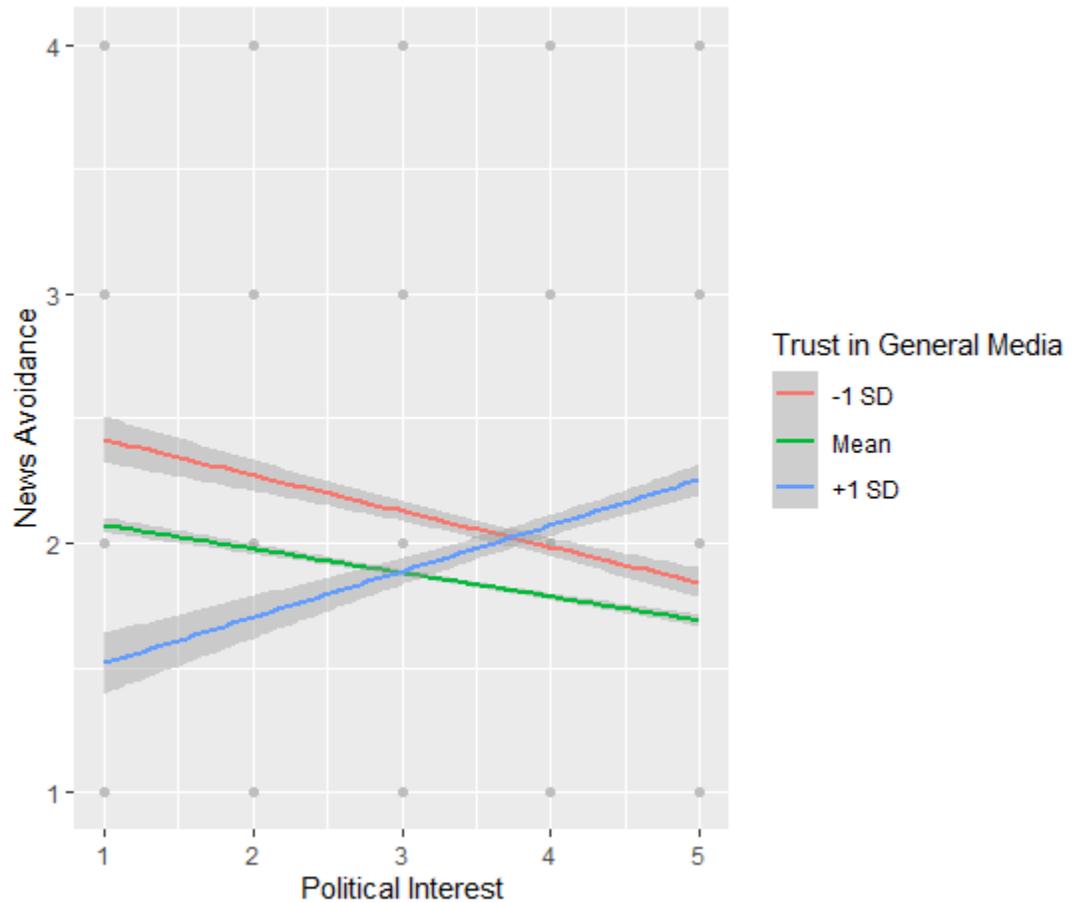


Figure 14. Interaction Graph of Political Interest on News Avoidance by Trust in General Media

Those who are politically interested and trustful of media are more likely to avoid political news,  $B = .076$ ,  $SE = 006$ ,  $t = 12.142$ ,  $p < .0001$  in Table 12 above. This result is counter-intuitive because it is assumed that politically interested people are less likely to avoid news and their trust level should have contributed to their low level of avoidance. In fact, this group in blue line of Figure 14 consumed more news either traditional or web version news than two other groups; thus, their avoidance level is also higher than others are.

*Additional Analysis with political ideology and selective avoidance*

The previous analyses show that political extremity turned out to be a factor interplaying with individual-level variables at affective and attitudinal levels. Given that political extremity was folded from the political ideology variable on a 7-point Left-Right Ideology Scale where 1 was Very left-wing and 7 was Very right-wing, political ideology is here recoded to binary such as Left (0 = Very left-wing, Fairly left-wing) and Right (1 = Fairly right-wing, Very right-wing). Three scales from the center (3 = Slightly Left-of-Centre, 4 = Centre, and 5 = Slightly Right-of-Centre) were discarded to understand the clear distinction between Left and Right groups.

To examine whether there is a significant difference between the Left and Right groups, an independent sample t-tests with the entire sample ( $N = 19,038$ ) was conducted. The result shows that two groups are statistically different from each other on selective avoidance,  $t = 12.792, p < .0001, M_{Left} = 2.14, M_{Right} = 1.94$  as well as new exposure measures. This group is also more likely to consume web-based news,  $M_{Left} = 1.33, M_{Right} = 1.24, t = 5.853, p < .001$ , but not traditional news.

Table 13

*Independent T-Test Results on Selective Avoidance, Traditional News, and Web News with the Entire Sample*

	Range	$M_{Left} (SD)$	$M_{Right} (SD)$	$F$	$t$	$p$
Selective Avoidance	3 [1-4]	2.14 (1.03)	1.94 (.97)	87.67	12.792	< .0001
Traditional News	4 [0-4]	1.60 (1.15)	1.71 (1.14)	4.47	-7.019	< .0001
Web News	4 [0-4]	1.33 (1.17)	1.24 (1.14)	24.51	5.853	< .0001

*Note.* Left = 10,260; Right = 8,778.

Taking a meta-analytic approach, which standardizes mean difference based on the sample size varied across the countries, the group difference by political ideology on selective avoidance was tested. A test for heterogeneity shows that there is significant variation across studies (dividend by country sample) that is due to heterogeneity rather than chance,  $Q (df = 37) = 162.0167, p < .0001, I^2 = 78.93\%$ . Overall, there is a significant difference between Right and Left groups on political news avoidance,  $z = .17 (p < 0.0001, CI, .1048, .2353, k = 38)$ . In the country levels, Turkey shows the biggest gap between the Right and Left,  $M\_diff = .86$ , and Canada displays the narrowest gap between the Right and Left,  $M\_diff = .18$  among 22 countries that show a statistically significant difference between groups.

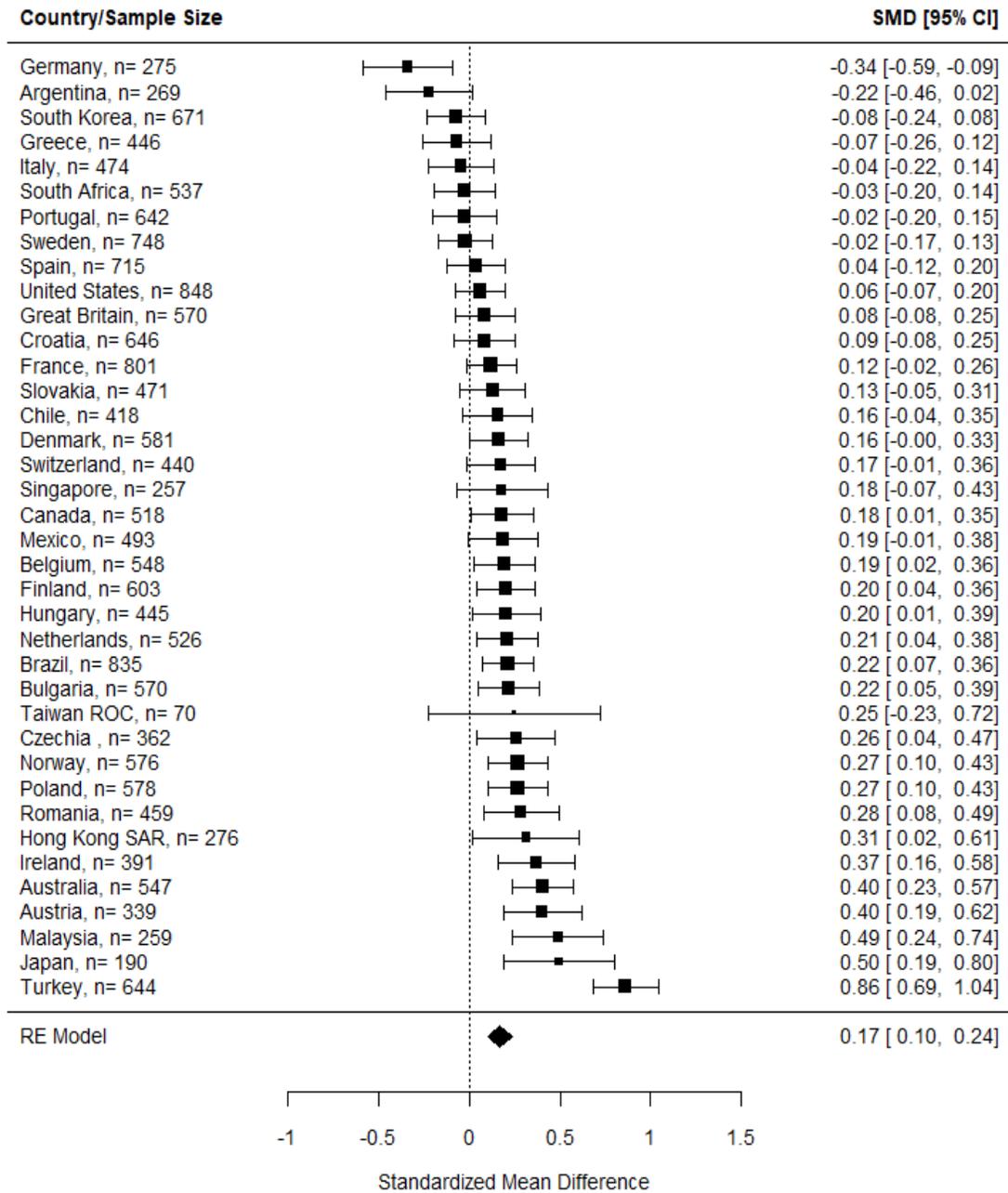


Figure 15. Meta Analytic Approach to the Difference between Political Ideology Groups on Selective Avoidance

*Note.* Taiwan has shown a very small sample size ( $n = 70$ ) because most respondents fall under the middle. They are recoded back to both ends where they originally belong to; for example, “Slightly Left or Centre” to “Left” and “Slightly Right or Centre” to “Right”. A one-way ANOVA with the newly coded group still shows that there is no significant difference between three groups on selective avoidance,  $F(df = 2) = 1.562, p = .21$ ,  $M_{left}(n = 136) = 1.95$ ,  $M_{center}(n = 522) = 1.82$ , and  $M_{right}(n = 159) = 1.78$ .

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION

This study explored the explanatory factors of selective news avoidance through individual, global, and macro-social levels. First, political predispositions including political extremity and political interest were examined to find association with selective avoidance globally. Second, by adopting the high-choice media environment discussion, each country's status in media use and its supply was investigated. Third, the cultural map was used as a comparative framework to understand the moderating effects of political predispositions and selective avoidance at the macro-social level. A series of post-hoc tests results were examined to understand the aspects of selective avoidance from diverse theoretical underpinnings.

The basic two lines of political predispositions (political extremity and political interest) account for selective avoidance. Political extremity was positively associated with selective avoidance. This indicates that political extremists, regardless of their party identification, tend to avoid news. This finding is particularly important because existing studies of the U.S context have focused on partisan aversion of information or opinions discrepant with their ideas (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). In the current study, people having politically extreme views are, however, actually avoiding news altogether even if the type of news is not listed as partisan news. It is worth noting that the association of political extremity and selective avoidance is not limited to Western culture and can be replicated at the global level.

This finding is important due to the consequences of the relationship between political extremity and avoidance. Like any type of avoidance (e.g., avoidance of assignments, or avoidance of conversation), avoidance itself does not appear to be immediately harmful to the object of the action because the outcome of avoidance is normally not an active action, rather a flight reaction from something. The consequences of avoidance behaviors may have a long-term boomerang effect (e.g., avoiding assignments negatively affecting GPA, or avoiding conversation creating confusion or misunderstanding).

News avoidance may seem inconsequential, but the practice and its related consequences are worrisome. For example, avoiding news forfeits chances of being exposed to new information or opinions carried in the news. This then prevents individuals from developing informed opinions on issues, which can result in increased chances of taking a partisan stance on issues.

The action of avoidance can put into motion a chain of events that ultimately aggravates polarization. This places a heavy burden on democracies, which often results in an aggressive form of political expression. The U.S capitol attack on January 6 in 2021 by Right-Extremist groups in response to Donald Trump's failed reelection campaign is a recent incident of this kind. The attempted insurrection was allegedly planned through the encrypted communication channel, Telegram (Schechter, Feb 21, 2021). On this platform, the extremist's communication was shown to have escalated to the point where the irrational collective action of breaching the symbol of modern democracy was justified.

Another finding of the current study is that politically less interested people are more likely to avoid news. It is clear that politically interested people are more likely to

expose themselves to news. However, the relationship between political interest and selective avoidance is less clear. This is because avoidance behavior is not solely dependent on interest level, but could be impacted by other factors. Nonetheless, political interest is still a primary factor for the avoidant behavior because having a higher level of interest in politics is often linked to willingness to surveil their environment. This point shares some portion of the high-choice media environment discussion where politically interested people may avoid news less often (Prior, 2013).

Before going into the country level comparison using the cultural map, a qualitative assessment was conducted to understand the high-choice media environment of each country. Without understanding the media environment where individuals are residing, it is difficult to make a claim that the avoidance is needed as a part of information management. TV became the prevailing news medium around the world, with saturation standing at over 90% in 2010 according to Nielsen's most recent report detailing the global market (Nielsen, 2010). The average Internet penetration rate in 2018 among the 38 studied countries was 82.6%. Internet penetration also soared in many European countries, the Americas, and some Asian countries that this project examined with Africa being the exception (South Africa only in this study). Though some countries were late to adopt the internet, once the technology became available, the rate of implementation was extremely quick, allowing them to catch up to earlier adopters in the West. This implies that the knowledge that was generated regarding a high-choice media environment in the Western context may apply for the latecomers now. Overall, this qualitative assessment was valuable to understand that high-choice media environments

not only exist in the Western culture, but also can be found anywhere media technology is being used.

Even though globalization of high-choice media environments has been glimpsed from the qualitative analysis, the framework of the cultural map did not serve as a moderator of the relationship between political predispositions and selective avoidance. Regardless of potential connections to selective avoidance, the macro social aspect that was aggregated from individuals' values perception did not explain differences between societies. The potential explanations of why the cultural map was not serving as a moderator could be twofold. First, it is because the number of countries that the current study considered was relatively small compared to the number of countries that was used to generate the cultural map values. In other words, the small variance of country level values within the cultural map may not be enough to explain the avoidant behavior. Second, it is because the cultural map values are constructed in a multi-layered index. Most studies have used one axis or one variable instead of using the entire cultural map (Norris & Inglehart, 2009; Tsfaty & Ariely, 2014) but the current study recognized the benefit of using the original framework particularly because this study has exploratory purpose.

To fill the gaps between the individual and macro-social levels accounting for selective avoidance, a series of post-hoc analyses using the macro-social level indices showed interesting results. When it comes to explaining the relationship between political extremity and selective avoidance, the Freedom House Index turned out to be a significant moderator. For example, Turkey ranked at the bottom of the Freedom House Index and showed the highest correlation between political extremity and selective

avoidance whereas Finland and Norway displayed the lowest correlation between the two variables. This can be interpreted that in the countries where media freedom is restrained, individuals on the extreme range of political ideologies tend to avoid news more frequently. It may also be the case that if a society has a free media system, individuals may not be inclined to avoid news regardless of political ideology because the level of avoidance may be disproportionate to the Freedom House Index.

Internet penetration rate and urbanization rate were serving as moderators for the association between political interest and selective avoidance. When politically less interested people are living in a society where the internet penetration rate or urbanization rate is high they are more likely to avoid news. When internet access is easier and the residential environment is urbanized, individuals may have other distractions in life rather than news media and the level of avoidance to news could be heightened. In other words, countries like South Africa, which has a very low internet penetration rate, individuals who have a higher interest in politics, are less likely to avoid news because the internet may serve as a tool for information and fulfill their surveillance desire. This pattern is forced to be linear in the analytic tool, but when reviewing individual countries, there are some outliers that do not fit the linear graph (Figure 10). There must be more factors to consider rather than simply taking numeric indices to understand what factors are actually at play during the process of avoidance.

#### Need for Diversity of Theoretical Underpinnings for Avoidance Research

One of the important contributions from the current study to the field is that affect explains a great deal of selective avoidance. Research regarding selectivity has relied heavily on consistency related theories (e.g., cognitive dissonance theory, motivated

reasoning); however, in terms of avoidance, the explanatory power of these theories are minimal. This can be the reasoning of why selective avoidance should be considered separately from selective exposure.

In the post-hoc test, the variance explained by the worn-out variable was nearly 10%, which was the single biggest predictor of the avoidance. This finding is aligned with the report from the Pew Research Center published around the 2018 election season that found approximately two-thirds of Americans feel worn out by news, which explains the news fatigue phenomenon in America (Gottfried, Feb 26, 2020). The importance of this finding is that news fatigue is not limited to the American news environment, but is present around the globe, more importantly with potential variance between regions.

It is important to note that this finding of news fatigue leading to news avoidance has theoretical significance for the field that counts on cognitive dissonance theory from the beginning of the time explaining phenomenon regarding selectivity. Avoiding news can be considered as reducing dissonance when focusing on avoidance itself. However, given that avoiding behavior does not require much of the dissonance reduction processes, it is hard to claim that avoidance is explained by cognitive dissonance theory. Rather, the current study found a similar pattern of news avoidance processes as mood management theorists claim that individuals follow hedonic principles in which they seek pleasure and maintain positive emotions. Feeling exhausted by the news is not improving their moods, thus leads to news avoidance. This theoretical argument is not limited to entertainment media content, but can be expanded to news content as well.

A positive interaction effect was found between political extremity and worn-out in predicting avoidance. This finding indicates that people who are on the extreme ranges

of political ideologies tend to feel more overwhelmed by the amount of news, which later leads to avoidance. When dividing the extreme group by two separate positions, either Left or Right, people who are on the Left tend to avoid news more compared to people on the Right. This insight requires careful interpretation because the avoidance measure did not specify the object of the avoidance. This oversight means the respondents may have connected avoidance with their frequently used media. For example, people on the Left are more exposed to online news whereas people on the Right are more exposed to traditional news. The Left's higher avoidance level may have connected to their frequently used media, which happens to be online news. It is noteworthy that any secondary analysis has inherent limitations, "having little to no control over the quality of the data" (Holbert & Hmielowski, 2011, p.83). Nonetheless, the current dissertation recognized the limited information about the measures in the data and strived to use it creatively. Further analyses using mediation or moderation models in conjunction with their news use would help to clarify the relationship between political extremity and news avoidance behavior. In particular, the mediation requires the incorporation of panel data, which will help to overcome the limitations that current cross-sectional data showed.

As far as political interest is concerned, affect and mood related theories explain these findings well. For those who are interested in politics, they can easily turn away from politics when political content is not "interesting". The equation of "interest in politics" equal to "the experience of news consumption is interesting" is the wrong proposition. The latter is truly experiential attitude whereas the former can be interfered with instrumental attitude such as how important politics is in their life. Those who are

interested in politics are less likely to avoid news if they do not see any importance in it. In fact, they are still avoiding news.

Another important contribution of the current study to the field is that a systematic endeavor was made to incorporate the high-choice media environment discussion to selective avoidance research. Individuals' behaviors living in a high-choice media environment were often studied in labs where participants were given options. However, the current study used multiple sources to take a closer look at individual countries' media environments and factored that into the avoidance explanation. Although the provided data is not integral to displaying each country's media environment, the current study has found that the high-choice media environment of different countries is not Americanized, but individual countries have their own unique development in terms of media technology. For example, in many countries of South America, WhatsApp (messenger application) and Facebook are embedded on devices meaning they have free access to these apps without extra charges for data usage. This boosts their use of these apps as communication channels compared to other legacy media options.

#### Limitations and Future Studies for Selective Avoidance Research

As with any other dissertation, the current dissertation has some limitations in understanding selective avoidance. In this section, the limitations will be described and future agendas for avoidance research will be suggested.

First, even though the current study tried to be as comprehensive as possible in terms of how the concept of selective avoidance has been developed from the scholarly origin, a systematic attention devoted to elaborate conceptualization and operationalization of the concept is required in this research area. Due to the nature of

secondary analysis, the measure given by the data was not an exact match with the research questions or hypotheses in the current study. A measure of selective news avoidance can be elaborated through specific language. The wording of questions could be written to prevent any potential confusion about which objects individuals are avoiding. For example, for those who are using online news more often, when they were asked to answer, “Do you actively avoid news?” the response could be related to their online news consumption. Similarly, when mentioning news, the genres of news could be specified to have a clear distinction of what people consider as news since the boundary of news has become blurry with the combination of the popularity of non-traditional news content (e.g., BuzzFeed, Mashable, etc.) and news mimicking content.

To resolve this confounding conceptualization, the following two elements of selective avoidance should be categorized: the object of avoidance (what is being avoided?) and the [re]actions toward the object being avoided (what types of avoidance behavior can occur?). In the high-choice media environment, selective avoidance is often connected to the element of ‘in what channels’ from Laswell (1948)’s classic model of communication, “who said what in what channel to whom with what effect”. This is because multiple channel options often determine the avoidance of content where heuristics work faster than ever before. Seeing news labels (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009) or detecting cues regarding political content (Bode, Vraga, and Troller-Renfree, 2019) makes individuals turn away from content faster. The information heuristics of avoidance can even be applied to individuals who share content within social media networks.

Thus, the discussion of the object of the avoidance could be categorized by content distributor types in the context of mass communication, interpersonal

communication, or mediated-interpersonal communication such as social media environments where individuals serve as a conduit for the sharing of content created by the media outlets. Selective avoidance has often been studied in the context of mass communication where media outlets became the object of the avoidance (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Stroud, 2008). Avoidance as a tactic has been studied in the interpersonal communication context (e.g., Morey, Eveland, Hutchens, 2012; Mutz & Martin, 2001). Avoiding conversation with a person who shows a conflicting opinion can happen regardless of the mode of communication (either offline or online). There is limited research on the mix of the two and it is often related to the social media environment (Zhu, Skoric, & Shen, 2017).

In terms of behavioral types of avoidance, it can be phasic or tonic. The former is a short-lived response at the onset of a stimulus and the latter is a sustained response that activates during the course of the stimulus and a block against future dissonance. Phasic avoidance is found in research taking a psychophysiological approach (e.g., Bode, Vraga, & Troller-Renfree, 2017) in the experimental setting because the main purpose of this kind of study is to detect avoidant behaviors at their triggers. As the focus is on the action of avoidance itself, the current study took this approach in seeking to understand avoidance behavior. Tonic avoidance study looks at selective avoidance by entailing subsequent behaviors (e.g., Zhu, Skoric, & Shen, 2017). For example, avoidance behavior results in blocking, unfriending, or hiding in the social media environment. This is an action to prevent future discomfort and can be considered as a stronger reaction to the object. As followed by the discussion in this section, proposed survey instruments that can measure news avoidance are attached in Appendix C.

Second, the current study focused on the phenomenon itself rather than examining processes or consequences of news avoidance. Future research needs to expand the examination level further as this effort will corroborate why avoidance is an important research topic. As exposure is preceded by avoidance, the basic research model of the processes of avoidance can start investigating whether the presence or absence of exposure explains the presence or absence of avoidance.

In the post-hoc test, trust in media was found to be a predictor of news avoidance. Even if trust in media is an individual's perception, overall change in trust often originates from political events. It is important to understand whether trust in media predicts selective avoidance and is moderated by the existence of national level political events. For example, if national level political movements originated by distrust of media systems or governments increase levels of avoidance, the approach should be taken within group comparison or avoidance can be a reflection of current political situations.

Political animosity, uncivility, and impoliteness are examples of consequences of selective avoidance. The assumption being made here is that citizens who are exposed to dissonant information can have better understanding, engagement, or tolerance to views in opposition to their own. Following the three levels of communications, each type of communication has different consequences. Avoidance from traditional media outlets such as Cable TV or newspapers may cause individuals to have limited knowledge in depth and the width of their knowledge may be shallow. News avoidance through social media entangles with social aspects such that narrowing social networks limit potential paths wherein cross cutting information would be encountered. Extremists form their own groups online and subsequently discourage diverse ideas that interfere with their extreme

collective behaviors. Lastly, news avoidance from entertainment leads audiences to be hedonic for their media use and the amount or quality of political information they are retaining can also be very limited throughout their media consumption. Thus, the role of political entertainment in political knowledge will be more important for this type of media audience.

Lastly, macro-social level components of selective avoidance were not captured well in the current study. A creative methodological approach would add a unique view to selective avoidance research. Due to the deficiency of the proper level of comparable international data, the high-choice media environment discussion was not expanded as expected. In 2009, UNESCO launched an ambitious project, Media Development Indicators Framework, to understand the media landscape at the global level. However, the way that they conducted their research about the media industries of each nation was not reliable in terms of data quality. For example, a survey was sent to governmental agencies or representable organizations to answer questions about their media environment, but the data was not representative as many countries did not participate in the survey. Alternatively, indirect metrics such as market size of media industries or revenues of advertisement in the traditional or online media outlets could be a gauge to understand how rapidly each country has developed as they enter the high-choice media environment. Nielsen, a global media company, is a great resource too for this type of research, but as a corporation, some variables that academics are interested in are ignored and most of the data have limited access restricted to for-profit uses only.

## Conclusions

There is a misperception that our knowledge of selective avoidance is sufficient given what we have learned from selective exposure. However, the current study claims that the study of selective avoidance should not be treated as a mere afterthought of selective exposure. This study has expanded the study of selective avoidance at the global level. It details clear relationships between political predispositions and selective avoidance rather having to rely on making indirect inferences based on the empirical study of selective exposure processes.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is an incorporation and identification of emotions and affect as potentially important mechanisms that spark selective avoidance. Apart from the literature's consistency-based theoretical underpinnings (e.g., Cognitive Dissonance Theory), the current study substantiated an expansion of the theoretical diversity can serve to advance our understanding of the phenomenon and suggests potential directions for future research.

Methodologically, this study first attempts to understand selective avoidance at a global level using the trend of global media consumption. It is often considered challenging to handle the global-level data due to the complex normalization process of the measures across different waves and datasets given each country has unique media environment. However, the current study followed a rigorous data manipulation process in that the global data show news saturation, and with this pervasiveness comes the need to understand how often and why people seek to avoid this content. A meta-analytic approach was a creative solution for the data having some restrictions of direct comparison to the

38 countries and it offers a comprehensive view on the political predispositions and selective avoidance through macro-social level variables.

Overall, the current dissertation expands our understanding of news avoidance in high-choice media environments. Selectivity of the information is not limited to motivated exposure to the information, but aversion to the information. Media audience has a higher level of agency to control over the information thanks to the development of media technology and avoidance will occur as long as individuals have preferences and ability to execute the action.

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APPENDIX A:  
WORLD VALUES SURVEY/EUROPEAN VALUES STUDIES

*WVS Sampling and Data collection*

The World Values Survey (WVS) has been collected at the global level since 1981 and a variety of values regarding social, political, economic, and religious values were asked. WVS has been administered every 4 years: Wave 1 (1981-1984), Wave 2 (1990-1994), Wave 3 (1995-1998), Wave 4 (1999-2004), Wave 5 (2005-2009), Wave 6 (2010-2014), and Wave 7 (2017-2020). The number of questions has been expanded since the beginning and in Wave 7, the most current wave administered, 290 questions were asked. A master questionnaire is developed in English and then translated for the other languages through rigorous steps for internal validity. The main sampling method is decided by the national team either fully probability or a combination of probability and stratified. This national sample covers its public between the ages of 18 and 85. The minimum sample size is 1200, which will be included into the national data set. The main method of data collection is face-to-face interview at respondent's place of residence and respondents' answers are recorded either in a paper questionnaire or by CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview). The response rate was not reported on their official website. All the collected data is anonymous. Data is available at three different levels: Country levels, Wave level, and Longitudinal Level. The current study used longitudinal level, but for the verification of variables or individual country data, country and wave levels data were referenced.

### *EVS Sampling and Data collection*

The European Values Study (EVS) was initiated to understand the core questions of moral and social values underlying European social and political institutions and its governing conduct before the first elections for the European Parliament. The first survey was conducted in 1981 in ten European countries and it later expanded to administer the same questionnaire in North and South America, the Middle and Far East, Australia, and South Africa. Since then, EVS has been conducted approximately once per a decade: Wave 1(1981-1984), Wave 2 (1989-1993), Wave 3 (1999-2001), Wave 4 (2008-2010), and Wave 5 (2017-2021) (<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/evs-trend-file-1981-2017/>). The most recent wave was conducted between 2017 and 2020, and almost 100 questions were asked. They have centrally coordinated with translating the questionnaire since 2008. The primary mode of data collection is face-to-face interview, but in 2017 mixed-mode was introduced for an experimental purpose. Using the quota sampling method, the size of the sample in the first three waves was 1000 in each country. Later, using only probabilistic representative sampling, the size increased up to 1500 in 2008, and 1200 in 2017. The population is older than 18 years among residents. The data is available by country level and wave level, and longitudinal level through GESIS Data Collection site (<https://www.gesis.org/home>).

### *WVS/EVS Data Integration*

Since WVS/EVS have some common questions, integrating both sets of the data was necessary to generate a cultural map and solve research questions. First, longitudinal data sets of WVS Longitudinal Wave 6 (1981-2016: spss v20180912.sav) and EVS Longitudinal (1981- 2008: ZA4804\_v3-1-0.sav) were combined based on the primary variables of interest. Next, WVS Wave 7 (2017-2020: WVS\_Cross-National\_Wave\_7\_spss\_v1\_2.sav) and EVS Wave 5 (2017-2021: ZA7505\_v-0-0.sav) are downloaded to include the core variables of interest and combined. Due to unavailability of some country level data at the time of creating the cultural map, the integrated data from the first step was used for the cultural map generation. A factor analysis was run with the following items that create two scores (Traditional versus Rational values and Survival versus Self-Expression values):

- A008 Feeling of happiness
- A165 Most people can be trusted
- E018 Future changes: Greater respect for authority
- E025 Political action: signing a petition
- F063 How important is God in your life
- F118 Justifiable: homosexuality
- F120 Justifiable: abortion
- G006 How proud of nationality
- Y002 Post-Materialist index 4-item
- Y003 Autonomy Index

WVS Longitudinal Wave 6 data provides the pre-calculated factor scores of Traditional-Rational Values and Survival-Self-expression Values followed by the process that they described in the syntax in the website (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>). However, those are based on the WVS countries, not EVS countries combined. Given that factor loading scores are

fluctuating depending on the data, to have closer scores that WVS used to draw the cultural map posted on their website, using a merged WVS and EVS data from the step 2 was necessary.

### *Media Use Variables*

Although many of the core variables in the survey have been consistently measured, some of the questions are updated depending on the importance of the questions and its values to the survey. In this case, the integrated coding book provides an identifiable variable number and measures to map the overlapped variables that have changed the wording of questions or variable numbers both in WVS/EVS. The table of variable information and values below is derived from the document: F00003844-WVS\_Time\_Series\_List\_of\_Variables\_and\_equivalences. Waves referred to below are WVS's waves for convenience, but in the analyses, year was a key to integrate responses for the relevant questions.

When it comes to media use variables, the first question regarding news use was “How often follows politics in the news on television or on the radio or in the daily papers?” on a scale of 1 (Every day) to 5 (Never). This item was measured only once in Wave 4 (2000-2004) and discontinued after that. More questions regarding media use were added under the frame of information source in the Wave 5 (2005-2008). Media variables were first measured in a binary scale of 0 (Not used last week) and 1(Used last week) for the following news sources: Daily newspaper, News broadcasts on radio or TV, Printed magazines, In depth reports on radio or TV, Books, Internet & Email, and Talk with friends or colleagues. The above items were revised and measured in a scale of 1 (Daily) to 5 (Never) since Wave 6 (2010-2014): Daily Newspaper, TV News, Radio

News, Mobile Phone, Email, Internet, and Talk with friends or colleagues. In Wave 7 (2017-2021), Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) was added to the information source. Among multiple media sources mentioned here, Books, Mobile Phone, or Talk with friends or colleagues was not considered as news media in the current project since they do not involve journalistic practice.

Table 14

*WVS/EVS Measures and Categories*

Variable	Measures	Categories
X001	Sex	1:Male 2:Female
X003	Age: Year difference between the year of survey and the year of birth.	
X025	Education: What is the highest educational level that you have attained?	1:Inadequately completed elementary education 2:Completed (compulsory) elementary education 3:Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type/(Compulsory) elementary education and basic vocational qualification 4:Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type/Secondary, intermediate vocational qualification 5:Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type/Secondary, intermediate general qualification 6:Complete secondary: university-preparatory type/Full secondary, maturity level certificate 7:Some university without degree/Higher education - lower-level tertiary certificate

Variable	Measures	Categories
		8:University with degree/Higher education - upper-level tertiary certificate
X047	Household Income: On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group in your country. We would like to know in what group your household is. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions and other incomes that come in.	1:Lower step 2:second step 3:Third step 4:Fourth step 5:Fifth step 6:Sixth step 7:Seventh step 8:Eighth step 9:Nineth step 10:Tenth step 11:Highest step
E023	Political Interest: How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you (read out and code one answer):	1:Very interested 2:Somewhat interested 3:Not very interested 4:Not at all interested
E033	Left-Right Ideology Scale: In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking? (Code one number):	1:Left 2:2 3:3 4:4 5:5 6:6 7:7 8:8 9:9 10:Right
E150	How often do you follow politics in the news on television or on the radio or in the daily papers?	1: Every day 2: Several times a week 3: Once or twice a week 4: Less often 5: Never
	Information Source: People use different sources to learn what is going on in their country and the world. For each of the following sources, please indicate whether you used it last week or did not use it last week to obtain information (read out and code one answer for each):	0:Not used last week 1:Used last week

Variable	Measures	Categories
E248	Daily newspaper	
E249	News broadcasts on radio or TV	
E251	In depth reports on radio or TV	
E253	Internet, Email	
	Information Source: People learn what is going on in this country and the world from various sources. For each of the following sources, please indicate whether you use it to obtain information daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never (read out and code one answer for each)	1:Daily 2:Weekly 3:Monthly 4:Less than monthly 5:Never
E248B	Daily newspaper	
E258B	TV news	
E259B	Radio news	
E262B	Internet	
	Cultural map variables	
A008	Feeling of happiness: Taking all things together, would you say you are	1:Very happy 2:Quite happy 3:Not very happy 4:Not at all happy
A165	Most people can be trusted: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?	1:Most people can be trusted 2:Can't be too careful
E025	Political action - signing a petition: Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it	1:Have done 2:Might do 3:Would never do

Variable	Measures	Categories
F118	Justifiable - homosexuality: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card.	1:Never justifiable 2:2 3:3 4:4 5:5 6:6 7:7 8:8 9:9 10:Always justifiable
Y002	Post-Materialist Index 4-item: If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? And which would be the next most important?  1. Maintaining order in the nation 2. Giving people more say in important government decisions 3. Fighting rising prices 4. Protecting freedom of speech	1:Materialist 2:Mixed 3:Postmaterialist
E018	Future changes-Greater respect for authority: I'm going to read out a list of various changes in our way of life that might take place in the near future. Please tell me for each one, if it were to happen, whether you think it would be a good thing, a bad thing, or don't you mind?	1:Good thing 2:Don't mind 3:Bad thing
F063	How important is God in your life: How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate. 10 means "very important" and 1 means "not at all important."	1:Not at all important 2:2 3:3 4:4 5:5 6:6 7:7 8:8 9:9 10:Very important

Variable	Measures	Categories
F120	Justifiable-abortion: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card.	1:Never justifiable 2:2 3:3 4:4 5:5 6:6 7:7 8:8 9:9 10:Always justifiable
G006	How proud of nationality: How proud are you to be [country's nationality]?	1:Very proud 2:Quite proud 3:Not very proud 4:Not at all proud
Y003	Autonomy Index: $Y003=(A029 + A039)-(A040 + A042)$ .  A029= Important Child Qualities: Independence A039= Important Child Qualities: Determination, Perseverance A040= Important Child Qualities: Religious Faith A042= Important Child Qualities: Obedience	-2:Obedience/Religious Faith -1:-1 0:0 1:1 2:Determination, perseverance/Independence

APPENDIX B:  
REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT

The Digital News Project is the comparative survey of the major trends in digital news consumption at the global level and it has been conducted annually by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism since 2012. This project is concerned about changes in how people have access to news, trust in media, and misinformation in digital media environments. The Digital News Project started surveying a small group of European countries in 2012 and expanded its scope of coverage to around 40 countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia Pacific, and Africa in 2020. Among many funders around the world, Google News Initiative is the major sponsor.

The survey was conducted by YouGov, a British based market research company, using an online questionnaire at the end of January/beginning of February each year. Samples were selected using nationally representative quotas for age, gender, region, and education. They do not provide details on their response rate in their report or official website.

The data were weighted to targets based on census, and industry accepted data. There was no further explanation about how the weight was created. As the survey mainly focuses on the online news consumption, those who said that they had not consumed any news in the past month were filtered out. Accordingly, the sample does not represent people who are not online. A direct comparison between countries needs

special attention because in some countries sampling leaning toward urban areas and other countries had notably lower internet penetration rates.

Variable	Measure	Categories
Q1di_2017	News Avoidance: Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?	1: Often 2: Sometimes 3:Occasionally 4:Never
	Which, if any, of the following have you used in the _last week_ as a _source of news_? Please select all that apply.	
Q301	TV News: Television news bulletins or programmes	0:No 1:Yes
Q302	TV News: 24 hour news television channels	
Q303	Radio News: Radio news programmes or bulletins	
Q304	Printed Newspapers	
Q306	Websites/apps of news papers	
Q307	Websites/apps of news magazines	
Q308	Websites/apps of TV and Radio companies	
Q309	Websites/apps of other news outlets: News aggregators	
age_int	Age	
gender_int	Gender	1: Male 2: Female

Variable	Measure	Categories
education	Education: What is your <b>**highest**</b> level of education?>If you are currently in full-time education please put your highest qualification to date.	1: I did not complete any formal education 2: Early childhood education 3: Primary education 4: Lower secondary education (GCSEs or equivalent level) 5: Upper secondary education (A-Levels or baccalaureate) 6: Post-secondary, non-tertiary education (generally vocational/ professional qualification of 1-2 years, e.g. college, trade school) 7: Short-cycle tertiary education (vocational education and training, studying towards a non-academic degree, e.g. nursing/ teaching diploma) 8: Bachelors or equivalent level degree 9: Masters or equivalent level degree 10: Doctoral or equivalent level degree
Household Income	Income	1: Low 2: Medium 3: High
Q2_new2018	Political Interest: How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?	1: Extremely interested 2: Very interested 3: Somewhat interested 4: Not very interested 5: Not at all interested
Q1F	Left-Right Ideology Scale: Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale?	1: Very left-wing 2: Fairly left-wing 3: Slightly left-of-centre 4: Centre 5: Slightly right-of-centre 6: Fairly right-wing 7: Very right-wing

APPENDIX C:

PROPOSED QUESTIONS OF SELECTIVE AVOIDANCE OF NEWS

		[re]Actions toward the object being avoided	
		Phasic	Tonic
Object of avoidance	Mass communication	<p>How often do you turn away from [types of] news [channels or names of the news] as soon as you step on it?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Often 5: Frequently</p>	<p>Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid [types of] news these days due to conflicting views provided by the news?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Often 5: Frequently</p>
	Interpersonal communication	<p>How often have you actively deviate the subject of a conversation from political news topics with [friends, family, or etc.] due to conflicting views?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Sometimes 5: Frequently</p>	<p>How often have you ended a friendship due to conflicting views on political subjects?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Sometimes 5: Frequently</p>
	Mediated-interpersonal communication (e.g., social media)	<p>How often have you avoided news shared by friends on social media (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Sometimes 5: Frequently</p>	<p>How often have you unfollowed, unfriended, or blocked anyone from your social networks due to conflicting views on political news?</p> <p>1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Sometimes 5: Frequently</p>