

More feelings of misinformation lead to more news avoidance, study shows

May 7 2024



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As people have more difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction in the United States, they are more likely to feel news fatigue and avoid news altogether, according to a University of Michigan study.

More than an unintentional avoidance because of lack of media exposure, the researchers say people actively avoid news. The work is [published](#) in *Journalism Studies*.

The researchers also find that people who identify as strong Democrats begin relying more on nonpartisan news media when feeling misinformed, while people who identify as strong Republicans report using less news media overall, including less conservative news media.

"The more confusing or difficult to navigate that you find the news environment, the more you actively avoid news—but it's not just news," said lead author Ariel Hasell, U-M assistant professor of communication and media and faculty affiliate of the Center for Political Studies at the Institute for Social Research. "News avoidance also includes people avoiding discussing politics with others as well. So it's not just not consuming news, you're stepping out of the conversation completely."

Hasell and Audrey Halversen, U-M doctoral student in communication and media, drew data from three waves of a national online survey of adults in the United States. The first two waves were collected leading up to the 2020 presidential election, and the final wave was collected shortly after. Nearly 1,200 adults completed the surveys, and the sample closely resembled the U.S. adult population.

The researchers asked the respondents to rate their feelings of being misinformed online, their active news avoidance, their news fatigue and their online news media use. They also asked the respondents detailed questions about what kinds of news and news websites they read, and found that news avoidance and fatigue increased leading up to the 2020 presidential election.

Additionally, the researchers showed that being white, conservative and using more conservative media were all significantly associated with feeling more misinformed online, while political interest, political knowledge and nonpartisan news use were significantly associated with feeling less misinformed online.

"For a lot of people, public discussion about misinformation, the crowdedness of digital media environments and [social media](#), and the amount of information that comes out from so many different sources, drives them away from news," Hasell said. "There's this paradox that the more information that is available, the more people just opt out because it becomes too hard for them to make sense of it."

Hasell says she thinks the low [trust](#) environment within the United States is contributing to the effect.

"That is, when we don't trust institutions, we don't have those mental shortcuts to determine whether nonpartisan news outlets are sharing information viewers can trust," she said. "Ten years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we had a higher trust environment. Even among Democrats, the trust in mainstream news is declining. If you looked at another Western democracy that had more institutional trust in the [news](#) media, I'm not sure you would get this same effect."

More information: Ariel Hasell et al, Feeling Misinformed? The Role of Perceived Difficulty in Evaluating Information Online in News Avoidance and News Fatigue, *Journalism Studies* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2024.2345676](#)

Provided by University of Michigan

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