

Information Avoidance in the Pandemic Era: A Literature Review

*Yanuar Yoga Prasetyawan*¹

¹Library Sciences Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemics resulted in a crisis in various aspects, such as the extreme number of deaths, the restriction of social activity, the paralysis of economic activity, and the uncertainty of Science. On the other hand, the internet and digital platforms do not constantly share information that occurs around COVID-19. This leads to an avoidance of the information found. "Any behaviour intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information" is the definition of information avoidance. This article aims to reveal how information avoidance can occur. This article proposes a systematic literature review. A methodical search query has been applied to Scopus to search for academic articles. Then the recalled article is assessed for suitability through a controlled literature selection procedure. The findings clearly show that psychological conditions due to the fear that emerges are one of the causes of information avoidance, in addition to the information overload that entails, as if there is uncertainty about scientific information, so that there is a sceptical attitude towards any information received.

¹ Corresponding author: yanuaryoga@live.undip.ac.id

1 Introduction

The development of digital media is one of the reasons why social media has become one of the platforms for interpersonal interaction and participation in information communication. The phenomenon of information overload is inevitable. Everyone has the same opportunity to obtain, produce, and share information. These phenomena can affect both good and bad at the same time. Since the announcement of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, communication networks through news, social media, and other digital platforms have been dominated by information about COVID-19. However, the interesting thing is that with the massive news about COVID 19, not a few individuals are actively avoiding information about COVID 19. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre found that 7 out of 10 adults in the United States take a break from COVID-19 news, a challenge for public health officials who rely on the media to spread important information [1]. This phenomenon of information avoidance is influenced by a variety of factors, including socio- cultural, cognitive, and emotional factors, which allow individuals to divert their attention from news coverage and social media news feeds to avoid themes and contradictory information [2].

In addition, personal social networks are also influential in shaping information avoidance behaviour. Personal social networks serve as a source of social support and information. Due to its intimate nature, it can affect a person's understanding of COVID-19 and their information-seeking behaviour. Studies have shown that most adults in the United States get COVID-19 information from friends and family [3]. The structure and content of personal social networks can affect their tendency to avoid COVID-19 information. Understanding these influences is essential for relevant policymakers to develop effective communication strategies and campaigns to address information avoidance and ensure accurate and reliable dissemination of COVID-19 information.

2 Research Methods

From the formulation obtained, 32 document results were obtained. The recalled article was then assessed for suitability through a controlled literature selection procedure. From the screening process, 15 documents were relevant; subsequently, the eligibility results included 9 documents.

3 Result and Discussion

Misinformation and a sense of information overload can contribute to information avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of misinformation, which refers to false or inaccurate information, can create confusion and uncertainty among individuals. When people are exposed

to a large amount of misinformation, they may become overwhelmed and find it difficult to discern accurate information from false information. This can lead to a sense of information overload, where individuals feel that the amount of information available exceeds their cognitive capacities to process and make sense of it. In response to this overwhelming situation, individuals may choose to avoid information altogether as a coping mechanism. They may intentionally avoid sources of information, such as social media and websites, where misinformation is more prevalent. By avoiding these sources, individuals can reduce their exposure to potentially misleading or false information, which can help alleviate feelings of confusion and uncertainty. Furthermore, the presence of misinformation can erode trust in information sources, making individuals more sceptical and cautious about the information they consume. This scepticism can contribute to information avoidance, as individuals may be hesitant to trust any source of information, leading them to avoid seeking information altogether. Overall, the presence of misinformation and a sense of information overload can create a challenging environment for individuals to navigate during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors can contribute to information avoidance as individuals try to manage the overwhelming amount of information and protect themselves from potentially misleading or false information [5].

In addition to these external factors, it turns out that internal factors originating from extreme emotional or psychological suffering conditions are the cause of a person's avoidance of information [6]. This explanation was stated by Mirzabeigi et al. in previous research, Neuroticism has been found to have a positive and significant effect on information avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, neuroticism refers to a personality trait characterised by emotional instability, anxiety, moodiness, and a tendency to experience negative emotions. Neurotic individuals, characterised by emotional instability and anxiety, are more likely to experience feelings of discomfort and anxiety when confronted with information that is cognitively different from their mental structure. This cognitive dissonance theory suggests that neurotics are more likely to avoid information that causes them distress and anxiety. Therefore, individuals high in neuroticism may be more inclined to avoid COVID-19 information to alleviate their feelings of anxiety and insecurity [7].

Such a devastating pandemic situation causes fear in humans. Neuroticism includes an individual's tendency to experience negative emotions, including anxiety and fear. Excessive and reactive fear of situations that pose threats or uncertainty is one of the characteristics of neuroticism. Sultana et al. suggest that fear plays a significant role in influencing online information avoidance during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. When online communication is framed negatively and induces fear, individuals are less likely to see how the received

information can address health complications. Additionally, people tend to avoid fear-inducing online information to reduce psychological stress during a crisis. Individuals are more likely to avoid the information to protect their positive emotions and reduce psychological stress [8]. Fear and powerlessness mediate the relationship between perceived risk and information-avoidance behaviour. The study by Zhang et al. found that the perceived epidemic risk of COVID-19 positively predicted information-avoidance behaviour, fear, and powerlessness. Fear significantly predicted powerlessness, and powerlessness significantly predicted information-avoidance behaviour. The results of the mediation analysis showed that fear and powerlessness mediated the relationship between perceived risk and information-avoidance behaviour. The perceived risk of COVID-19 had an indirect effect on information-avoidance behaviour through powerlessness. This suggests that individuals who perceive a higher risk of COVID-19 are more likely to experience fear and powerlessness, which in turn leads to information-avoidance behaviour [9].

Individuals with lower levels of health literacy are more likely to avoid information about COVID-19 due to several reasons. Firstly, lower health literacy may lead to difficulties in understanding and comprehending complex health information, including information about COVID-19. This can create feelings of confusion and overwhelm, causing individuals to avoid seeking out information. Secondly, individuals with lower health literacy may lack the necessary skills to navigate and access health information effectively, especially in the digital age. This can include challenges in using technology or accessing reliable sources of information, which can contribute to information avoidance. Additionally, individuals with lower health literacy may experience heightened anxiety or fear when confronted with health-related information, including information about COVID-19. This can lead to avoidance as a coping mechanism to reduce distress and anxiety. Furthermore, individuals with lower health literacy may have limited trust in the healthcare system or authority figures, which can influence their willingness to seek out and engage with information about COVID-19. Overall, the combination of difficulties in understanding, accessing, and processing health information, along with heightened anxiety and limited trust, contributes to the higher likelihood of information avoidance among individuals with lower levels of health literacy [10].

However, the opposite applies, according to a study conducted by Mirzabeidi et al. The ability to detect fake news was found to have a negative and significant effect on information avoidance. Individuals with a higher ability to detect fake news, which is a characteristic of information literacy, are more likely to distinguish between misinformation and accurate information. This ability enables them to identify and avoid unreliable information, reducing their tendency to

engage in information-avoiding behaviour. Therefore, individuals who are more skilled at detecting fake news tend to avoid it. These findings are supported by research showing that exposure to and acceptance of misinformation can lead to increased information avoidance. In contrast, individuals who have the ability to discriminate between fake news and actual news are less susceptible to unreliable information and, consequently, less likely to engage in information avoidance. Overall, the ability to detect fake news has played a critical role in reducing information avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic [7].

But under the current conditions, when the COVID-19 pandemic is gradually normalising, people no longer pay attention to information about the development of information about the pandemic situation (the number of people infected, the number of people who died due to infection, and policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic). This condition can be interpreted as a health information avoidance behaviour [11].

4 Conclusion

Information avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic can be influenced by a combination of external and internal factors. The presence of misinformation and information overload can overwhelm individuals, leading them to avoid information sources that may contain false or confusing information. Additionally, individual psychological conditions, such as neuroticism and fear, can contribute to information avoidance as a coping mechanism to reduce anxiety and protect positive emotions. Lower levels of health literacy can also be a contributing factor, as individuals may face challenges in understanding, accessing, and processing health information related to COVID-19. On the other hand, higher information literacy, particularly the ability to detect fake news, can have a positive effect on reducing information avoidance. Overall, addressing information avoidance during the pandemic requires efforts to combat misinformation, improve health literacy, and promote information literacy skills to empower individuals to make informed decisions and effectively navigate the vast amount of information available.

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