

Examining How Public Service Media Shapes Citizens' News Media Attitudes and News Avoidance: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis

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A normative democracy presumes that citizens keep themselves informed on current events that provide them with the knowledge and capability to participate in political and civic life. Recent years, however, have seen an increasing global trend of intentional news avoidance among citizens, even doubling in some countries within a few years. Based on the premise that quality journalism could be an effective strategy against this trend, this study examines the role of public service media (PSM) in news avoidance and its antecedents. Drawing on national surveys in 22 countries, the findings showed that PSM news access was generally related to news trust and perceived media independence and negatively related to perceived media cynicism across the countries. News trust was also consistently negatively related to news avoidance. The study suggests that PSM as a proxy for quality journalism could play a role in attenuating news avoidance by engendering news trust, even in countries where PSM has a relatively small market presence and low audience reach.

Keywords: public service media, public service broadcasting, news avoidance, news trust, media cynicism, media independence

A functioning and healthy democracy requires citizens who are interested in and knowledgeable about what is happening in politics and society so that they can make informed decisions and participate in civic life (Delli Carpini, 2000). This necessitates an information environment where media organizations provide high-quality political news that citizens are able and willing to access (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Despite the abundance of information that is readily accessible online, an increasing number of individuals around the world are intentionally engaging in news avoidance. Between 2017 and 2022, the percentage of people who say that they "sometimes" or "often" avoid news has increased around the world (see Appendix B; Newman, Fletcher, Robertson, Eddy, & Nielsen, 2022). While a few scholars have noted some psychological benefits of intermittent news avoidance, such as reduced tension and stress (Wenzel, 2019), others have framed it more broadly as a "democratic problem"

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because of the normative implications for societies if some or many citizens are uninformed about issues that are relevant to their lives and others (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). Assuming the latter, we use cross-national data to build on the literature that seeks to elucidate the antecedents of news avoidance (e.g., Chan, Lee, & Chen, 2022; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Specifically, we focus on individuals' attitudes toward the news and the news media generally in their country, including trust in the news, cynicism toward news organizations, and perceived independence of news organizations from undue external interference.

More importantly, we take the first step in following up on the proposed solutions to attenuate intentional news avoidance. In their proposal, Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) recommended, among other things, the need for more "fact-based," "transparent," and "constructive" journalism, and they argued that "such changes will help overcome perceptions that there is an overload of negative news, which cannot be trusted" (p. 470). This is analogous to the broader notion of "high-quality" political news and the normative concern that its reduced supply and demand could lead to lower levels of political knowledge among citizens (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Admittedly, what constitutes "quality journalism" or "high quality news" has been the subject of much debate, and many scholars and practitioners have attempted to define and operationalize these concepts (see Vehkoo, 2017). More agreeable to scholars is that the positive characteristics of journalism mentioned above have traditionally been associated with public service media (PSM)¹ and its general remit to inform and engage citizens with high-quality content (European Broadcasting Union (EBU), 2012) and provide substantive and impartial coverage of current and world affairs (Soroka et al., 2012).

Because of the difficulties in operationalizing "high quality news," this study takes an indirect approach by examining the relationship between individuals' news consumption through PSM and whether it is related to normatively desirable (i.e., trust in and perceived independence of the news media) and undesirable (i.e., media cynicism) attitudes about the overall news media in their countries as well as intentional news avoidance. In doing so, the study can provide empirical support and justification that PSM news use could be one of the contributing solutions to the problem of news avoidance, which can spur further research. We do this with a different systems design, comprising surveys of individuals in 22 countries that have diverse types of PSM across various continents.

News Avoidance

The concept of news avoidance has been defined and operationalized in different ways. Past studies predominantly conceived of news avoidance in relative terms by classifying news avoiders based on how their news use frequencies compared with others in the study population. Edgerly, Vraga, Bode, Thorson, and Thorson (2017) used cluster analysis of 27 news consumption items to uncover a "news avoiders" category among young people characterized by low use of various news through multiple

¹ Much of the previous literature used the term public service broadcasting (PSB) as public media is historically associated with television and radio. We use the term public service media (PSM) advocated by several scholars, as it encompasses the transition of PSB toward multimodal content delivery through different platforms (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2022; Hendy, 2013).

platforms. Strömbäck (2017) adopted cut-off points of one standard deviation above and below the mean to classify “news seekers” and “news avoiders” based on the study sample’s average news consumption levels. These studies equated news avoidance with low news consumption. Recent scholarship has taken a more nuanced understanding by conceiving news avoidance as intentional or non-intentional behavior that is independent of overall news consumption (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Unintentional news avoidance can occur based on individuals’ preferences for non-news-related content (e.g., entertainment), which can be compounded by algorithms that interpret lack of attention as lack of interest in news (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). In this study, we focus on intentional news avoidance, which is an increasing global trend where individuals intermittently disengage from the news (Newman et al., 2022; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Of course, taking a break from the news for structural and practical reasons (e.g., going on a long vacation) is understandable, but it is a normative concern when news avoidance is due to negative perceptions of and experiences with the news and the news media more generally, which can over time lead to disengagement from the news altogether.

Antecedents of News Avoidance

Past studies examining why people intentionally avoid the news typically emphasized one of two broad explanations. One follows a cognitive load management perspective whereby news avoidance is a necessary behavior for the maintenance of psychological well-being (Schäfer, Aaldering, & Lecheler, 2022). Thus, perceptions of high information overload (Song, Jung, & Kim, 2017), feelings of news fatigue (Chan et al., 2022), and increased stress in sorting real or misleading news (Wenzel, 2019) can lead individuals to consciously control or reduce the amount of news they access and consume. The other is related to individuals’ attitudes toward news and the news media environment more generally. Indeed, the notion of “trust” and its lack was explicitly mentioned by Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) as something that must be addressed to attenuate news avoidance. News trust entails uncertainty and risk because individuals typically have neither the time, expertise, nor resources to assess the veracity of the information they receive from the news media. Thus, they are motivated through utility maximization to consume information from the news media that results in the most “gains” (e.g., factual knowledge that aids decision making) rather than “losses” (e.g., misinformation; Strömbäck et al., 2020; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Based on this logic, higher trust in news should be negatively related to news avoidance because trust in news would, in theory, lead to more gains.

Other attitudes have received less attention, even though they could also play pertinent roles in increasing or decreasing intentional news avoidance. One is media cynicism, which is often considered the opposite of media trust and more generally focuses on the motives and degree of self-interest of the news media (Markov & Min, 2021). Those who are cynical of the news media are more likely to believe that news media organizations serve their own ideological and economic interests rather than the interests of their audiences, which can lead to “intentional disengagement from the information infrastructures that provide civic cohesion” (Mihailidis & Foster, 2020, p. 616). Related to this are broader attitudes toward the country’s media system in relation to other structures in society. Media independence has long been perceived as a normative ideal for journalists and news media organizations in liberal democracies, as they fulfill their watchdog roles and inform the public (Bennett, 2014). It is a multilayered and contested concept, but media

independence can generally be conceived as freedom from external influences so that news media organizations can act and report according to their professional values and practices (Karppinen & Moe, 2016). External influences, or undue interference, can come in several forms, such as from governments (i.e., political) and commercial interests (i.e., economic), which could result in journalistic values and standards being compromised. When citizens perceive these influences to be rampant, they might question the integrity and quality of the news and disengage with it. Based on these antecedents, we first propose the following:

H1: (a) News trust and (b) perceived independence of the news media are negatively related to news avoidance, while (c) media cynicism is positively related to news avoidance.

The Normative Role of Public Service Media

Historically, PSM fulfilled a normative role in democratic society through its remit and goals to “inform, educate, elevate, and emancipate the masses” (Donders, 2012, p. 12). By providing trusted, high-quality, and unbiased content, PSM is supposed to keep citizens abreast of political and social issues as well as engender informed debate and reduce information gaps between those who are interested and disinterested in politics (Castro-Herrero, Nir, & Skovsgaard, 2018). Of course, whether and to what extent PSM has fulfilled this role has been the subject of much scholarship in the past decades, given various challenges such as changes to the media environment due to digitalization and cuts in government support (Cushion, 2012). Nevertheless, past research has consistently shown that PSM news differs from that of commercial outlets. Content-wise, scholars have argued that, all things being equal, PSM provides more hard news compared with the commercial media, as demonstrated in the UK context where the BBC has greater coverage of politics, public affairs, and international issues relative to the commercial news media (Cushion, 2021). This difference has served as a common explanation for the differential outcomes of PSM and commercial news exposure. In their pooled analysis of citizens in 27 European countries, Fraile and Iyengar (2014) showed that PSM news exposure was positively related to political knowledge, whereas commercial news exposure was negatively related. This led to their conclusion that “news programs aired by the public broadcaster tend to be more substantive than the offering of commercial channels” (Fraile & Iyengar, 2014, p. 289). Soroka et al. (2012) provided a more nuanced by-country rather than pooled analysis and found diverse patterns of findings. While individual use of PSM (i.e., “public TV”) was positively related to hard news knowledge in four of the six countries (Canada, Japan, Norway, and the UK), it was negatively related in Italy and had no relationship in Korea. The authors provided several ad-hoc explanations based on the structural characteristics of PSM in those countries. For example, they attributed the wider knowledge gaps between public and private TV consumption in Japan, Norway, and the UK to greater levels of public funding and lower levels of editorial independence of PSM in Italy as to why PSM was negatively related to hard news knowledge. The possibility that structural aspects of PSM could shape different outcomes will be elaborated on later.

Because of the normative benefits of PSM, past comparative studies have also used it as a country-level moderator between news behavior and outcomes, such that “strong” PSM accentuated the positive relationship between news consumption and political knowledge (Park & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021)

and the relationship between dual screening and political participation (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018). More specific to news avoidance, Toff and Kalogeropoulos (2020) found that individuals were less likely to avoid the news in countries with higher PSM market shares, but only at borderline levels of statistical significance.

While including PSM as a country-level variable provides some context for the news media environment in that country and is suitable for multiple-country studies, it does not tell us whether a person's actual exposure to PSM is related to the person's news avoidance tendencies. Thus, in this study, PSM is conceived at the individual level and measured in two ways. The first is the most straightforward: Whether an individual consumes any news from a PSM outlet or not. The second is the extent to which PSM news comprises an individual's overall news consumption from both PSM and commercial sources. This is related to the concept of "news repertoires" and the notion that individuals' construct their own news information environments through different sources and platforms (Oh, Lor, & Choi, 2021). In today's news information environment, characterized by an abundance of choices, it is more than likely that a person consumes news from various outlets, and exposure to PSM news, if any, is relative to news from other commercial sources. Theoretically, this may mean that the normative benefits of PSM are proportionate to the number of PSM sources in one's news repertoire. In sum, based on previous arguments that PSM content provides tougher news, we assume that there is less need for individuals to intentionally avoid the news as PSM news exposure increases. Thus, we propose the following base hypothesis:

H2: Greater exposure to news from PSM is negatively related to news avoidance.

Public Service Media and the Antecedents of News Avoidance

How would PSM relate to news trust, media cynicism, and perceived independence of the news media, which were proposed earlier as predictors of intentional news avoidance? Previous research on PSM has focused predominantly on political outcomes (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, and participation) rather than on news or the news media. This is understandable given decades of scholarship examining whether the media has positive (i.e., virtuous circle) or negative (i.e., media malaise) influences on democratic attitudes (Curran et al., 2014). Studies have shown that PSM use is related to higher political trust in government, as PSM news typically frames politics in terms of policies and issues, whereas commercial news may frame politics as a "strategic game" among self-interested actors, which influences audiences' views of government and politics in general (Ceron & Memoli, 2015; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2016). Political trust is closely aligned with media trust in what Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2017) call the "trust nexus." That is, news from PSM not only shapes how citizens evaluate the government but also their evaluation of the news media and journalism profession. Campos-Rueda and Goyanes (2022) also demonstrated in their analysis of PSM in Spain that audiences' views and expectations of the public broadcaster RTVE were generally consistent with the normative characteristics of PSM, such as "independence" and "professionalism." In other words, citizens can have distinct observations and expectations of PSM relative to commercial media, which, in turn, could influence their attitudes toward PSM more generally and the content it produces. Therefore, we raise the following hypothesis:

H3: PSM news consumption positively predicts (a) news trust and (b) perceived independence of the news media.

For the same reasons that PSM news consumption can increase news trust, it may also be related to the decreased cynicism of the news media because audiences would assume that PSM serves the general interests of the public rather than its own political or ideological interests. This was demonstrated in a study by Quiring et al. (2021), which showed that watching public service television was related to less media cynicism among German citizens (e.g., conspiring to manipulate people's opinions and being the mouthpiece of those in power), whereas there was no significant relationship for private television or the tabloid press. However, as the authors stated, this could be due to the particularly strong PSM tradition in that country. Nevertheless, we propose the following:

H4: PSM news consumption negatively predicts media cynicism.

Different Models of Public Service Media

Even though PSM companies in many Western countries are formally committed to the values of "universality," "independence," "excellence," "diversity," "accountability," and "innovation" (EBU, 2012), their ability to uphold them is largely determined by the institutional arrangements and available resources determined by governments in power. Moreover, PSM in other parts of the world has followed different development trajectories. For example, whereas the BBC's original remit to "inform, educate, and entertain" served as the model for Japan's own public broadcaster (NHK) (Laurence, 2022, p. 4), the notions of pluralism, diversity of content, and high-quality news were never prominent among PSM in Latin America (Becerra, 2019). Thus, the proposed normative benefits of PSM on news attitudes and behaviors explicated above would likely not be equally applicable to all PSM contexts around the world, as demonstrated in the case of hard news knowledge in Italy, as found by Soroka et al. (2012).

A useful PSM typology was outlined by Neff and Pickard (2024) based on their cluster analyses of PSM in 33 countries around the world, along with three main structural variables: (1) overall public funding, (2) audience share, and (3) regulatory frameworks that engender editorial independence. Their results revealed distinct models of PSM. Countries under the democratic corporatist model were characterized by stable long-term public funding per capita, large audience shares, and strong regulatory protections that support editorial independence (e.g., Denmark, Germany), whereas those under the liberal-pluralist model had less funding, low audience shares, and weaker regulatory protections (e.g., Canada, France). Countries under the direct funding model had stronger regulatory protections and similar levels of public funding, but they were drawn directly from the public, such as in the form of license fees (e.g., Italy, Japan), while the commercial-public model was characterized by low audience share and reliance on private funding (e.g., India, the United States). Finally, the state-administered model comprises PSM in countries with very low editorial independence from the government (e.g., Tunisia). Their additional country-level analyses also showed that a few structural variables, such as "multiyear funding," had positive relationships with several democracy indicators, such as political participation.

The ability of PSM to fulfill its normative role to provide diverse and high-quality news can therefore be influenced by its level of funding and editorial independence, which at the individual level are likely to influence citizens' attitudes toward and engagement with the news. With this in mind, we raise the following research question:

RQ1: Do the proposed relationships specified by the hypotheses vary according to different types of PSM models?

Methodology

Sample

We used cross-national survey data from the 2022 Reuters Institute Digital News Report (DNR; Newman et al., 2022). All surveys had the same core set of questions related to this study and were administered by YouGov in the native language of the country sample in January/February 2022. Quota sampling was adopted to approximate the online population in each country according to age, gender, and region.² While the 2022 DNR featured surveys of news attitudes and behaviors across 46 countries, this study used DNR data from 22 countries that were included in the PSM typology explicated by Neff and Pickard (2024). These included Canada and the United States (North America); the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Europe); India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Asia); Argentina, Chile, and Colombia (South America); and South Africa and Australia. By aligning the countries in this way, it is possible to observe variations in the results (if any) across the different PSM models.³

Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics of each country. These include the average number of news outlets accessed by respondents in the previous week and the percentage of respondents who accessed at least one PSM media outlet in the previous week. Moreover, a certain percentage of respondents in each country did not access any news via any platform in the previous week. These respondents were excluded from subsequent analyses because this study focused on the relationship between PSM and news avoidance as intermittent behavior, whereas these respondents already avoided all kinds of news.⁴

² See "Methodology" at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/methodology> for more details and nuances across the country samples in terms of data collection and sample representativeness.

³ The DNR does not have any countries under the "state-administered" model.

⁴ As a robustness check, we also reran all analyses with "consistent" news avoiders. The results were consistent with those reported in this study.

Table 1. Study Sample Overview Based on PSM Model.

PSM funding model	Country	N	Mean no. news outlets ¹	Percentage accessed PSM ¹	Percentage accessed no news
Democratic Corporatist	Denmark	2059	6.1	75	1.0
	Germany	2002	6.9	63	1.5
	Norway	2010	7.5	74	0.7
	Sweden	2064	6	77	0.6
	UK	2410	4.3	76	3.5
Liberal-Pluralist	Argentina	2012	7.4	23	3.0
	Canada	2012	6.2	51	3.6
	France	2059	6.4	54	3.2
	Spain	2028	6.9	32	1.8
Direct Funding	Czech Rep	2009	7.2	62	0.6
	Finland	2064	6.6	81	0.4
	Ireland	2016	7.8	73	1.2
	Italy	2004	7.1	63	0.8
	Japan	2015	6.1	54	1.8
	South Africa	2008	10.4	68	0.6
	South Korea	2026	8.9	55	2.2
Commercial-Public	Australia	2038	6.1	60	4.3
	Chile	2011	7.8	50	2.8
	Colombia	2027	7.8	14	2.0
	India	2035	10.4	41	1.3
	Taiwan	2115	9.1	21	1.0
	USA	2036	6.6	22	4.7

¹Based on Reuters Digital News Report 2022 country data. Percentage of no news = individuals who accessed no news in the previous week. They were not included in the analysis. Mean no. news outlets = mean sum of news outlets accessed in the previous week. PSM audience = percentage of respondents in the sample accessing at least one PSM outlet in the previous week.

Core Measures

News Avoidance

The degree to which respondents found themselves “actively trying to avoid news these days” was measured with a 4-point scale (1 = *Never*, 2 = *Occasionally*, 3 = *Sometimes*, and 4 = *Often*).

Measures of News Access

All respondents answered affirmatively on whether they had accessed a list of the most prominent (1) offline and (2) online news outlets in their country (i.e., “which of the following brands have you used

to access news offline [online] in the last week? Please select all that apply.”). Three measures were created from the answers: (1) total number of news sources, (2) PSM access: A dichotomous measure (Yes/No) of whether the respondent accessed at least one PSM news outlet in their country (see PSM list in Appendix A), and (3) PSM% of total news access: Proportion of news that is derived from PSM outlets in all news outlets accessed. Using the UK as an example, a respondent who accessed BBC News and BBC News online along with three non-PSM news outlets in the previous week (online or offline) would score 5, yes, and 40%, respectively.

News Trust

Respondents answered their level of agreement on whether they could “trust most news most of the time” and trust “the news I consume most of the time” on a 5-point scale from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Both items were combined to form a composite score ($r = .71, p < .001$).

Media Independence

Respondents answered their level of agreement on whether the news media in their country was independent of “undue political or government influence most of the time” and “undue business or commercial influence most of the time” on a 5-point scale from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Both items were combined to form a composite score ($r = .75, p < .001$).

Media Cynicism

Respondents answered two questions on a 5-point scale: “which of the following comes closest to your view of news organizations in your country?” One question ranged from 1 = *All of them put what’s best for society ahead of commercial interests* to 5 = *All of them put commercial interests ahead of what’s best for society*. The other ranged from 1 = *All of them put what’s best for society ahead of their own political views* to 5 = *All of them put their own political views ahead of what’s best for society*. Both items were combined to form a composite score ($r = .76, p < .001$).

Control Variables

Additional news-related measures included news use frequency (i.e., access “national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform”), which ranged from 1 = *Never* to 10 = *More than 10 times a day*, and those who answered “never” were removed from subsequent analysis; and news interest, which ranged from 1 = *Not at all interested* to 5 = *Extremely interested*. Ideology strength was a folded measure of political ideology, where respondents indicated that they were 1 = *Center* to 4 = *Very left-wing* or *Very right-wing*. Demographic measures included gender, age, and education. Household income was not included in the analyses because of consistently sizable missing values in the samples (e.g., 26% in the UK).

Results

Descriptive Findings

Figure 1 summarizes the percentage of respondents who answered “sometimes” or “often” to the news avoidance question. The overall mean across all countries was 35%, with a low of 15% for Japan and a high of 46% for the United States.

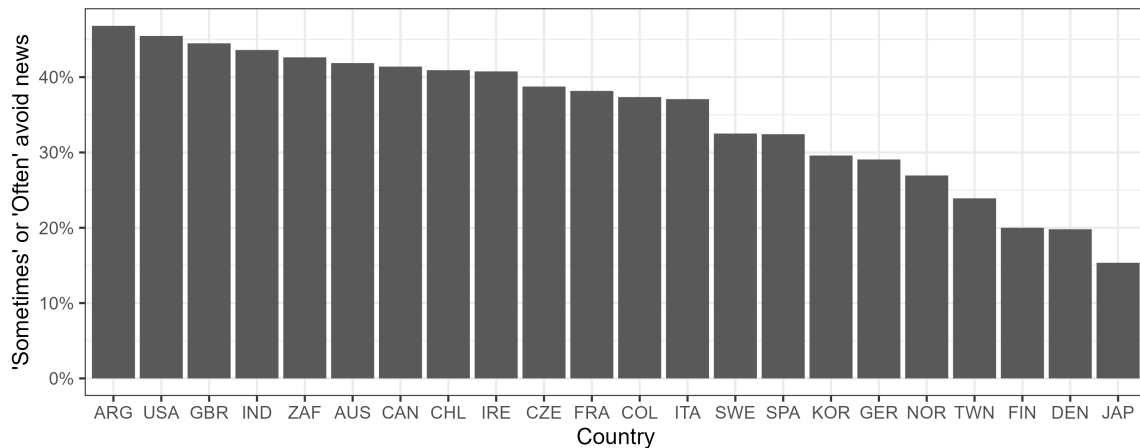


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who “sometimes” or “often” avoid the news.

Figure 2 summarizes the proportion of PSM news outlets accessed in relation to the total number of news outlets for each country. The overall percentage was 14%, with a 2% low for individuals in Columbia and a 35% high for those in the UK.

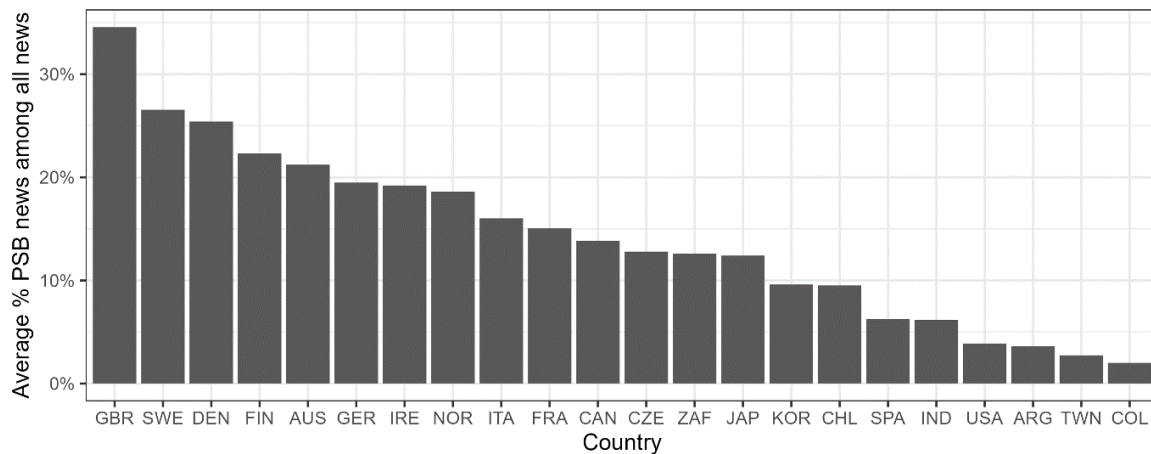


Figure 2. PSM news outlet access as a percentage of overall news outlet access.

Predicting News Avoidance

We ran linear regression analyses for each country to examine the extent to which PSM and news media attitudes predicted news avoidance and the extent to which PSM predicted news media attitudes and avoidance. Regression results by individual country are available upon request from the authors. Table 2 summarizes the results of the models, focusing on the coefficients of the key study variables. News trust was negatively related to news avoidance (H1a) across all samples, though marginally so for South Africa and Taiwan. The findings for perceived media independence (H1b) were mixed. It was negatively related to news avoidance in Germany, Finland, and Sweden, which are countries with a relatively long PSM tradition as well as PSM comprising a relatively high percentage of individuals' overall news media diets (see Figure 2). Conversely, it was positively related in five countries (Australia, Colombia, Italy, India, and South Africa). Media cynicism was positively related to news avoidance (H1c) in 12 countries. For the PSM measures, using PSM was negatively related to news avoidance in only South Korea and South Africa, while PSM% was negatively related to news avoidance in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and South Korea.

Table 2. Summary of PSM and Media Variables Predicting News Avoidance in Each Country.

<i>Dependent variable</i>	News avoidance				
<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>PSM access</i>	<i>PSM%</i>	<i>News trust</i>	<i>Media independence</i>	<i>Media cynicism</i>
Democratic Corporatist					
Denmark			-.09**		.05 [#]
Germany		-.30*	-.13***	-.07*	.11***
Norway		-.41***	-.11***		.08***
Sweden			-.12***	-.06*	
UK			-.18***		.12***
Liberal-Pluralist					
Argentina			-.11***		
Canada			-.14***		.12***
France			-.12***		.09**
Spain			-.11***		
Direct Funding					
Czech Rep			-.18***		.07*
Finland			-.07*	-.06*	.08*
Ireland		-.27*	-.08**		
Italy		-.42**	-.15***	.09**	
Japan			-.14***		
South Africa	-.27***		-.05 [#]	.14**	.08***
South Korea	-.13**	-.46*	-.06*		
Commercial-Public					
Australia			-.15***	.15***	.08**

Chile	-.05*		.05 [#]
Colombia	-.10***	.04*	
India	-.12***	.09***	.07**
Taiwan	-.06 [#]		
USA	-.12***		

[#] = $p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. Only significant betas at $p < .10$ are reported.

PSM and News Media Attitudes

To examine whether PSM news exposure (PSM = Yes) and PSM as a percentage of overall news outlet access (PSM%) were related to news media attitudes, we ran linear regression models for all three attitudes (news trust, media independence, and media cynicism) in all countries with the PSM measures and control variables. Table 3 summarizes the beta coefficients for PSM (yes) and PSM% in the models. The PSM measures were positively related to news trust in 19 of the 22 countries (H3a), but they were negatively related in Colombia. The PSM measures were also positively related to media independence in 14 countries (H3b) and negatively related to media cynicism in 18 countries (H4). Notably, the PSM measures were negatively related to media independence for South Africa and Australia, and positively related to media cynicism for Australia. Argentina and Taiwan were the only countries in which PSM did not predict any of the news media attitudes.

In terms of whether the relationships would differ across different PSM models (RQ1), the results showed that H3 and H4 were consistently supported in countries within the *democratic corporatist* model. Of the five countries within the model, four included at least two significant news attitude predictors of news avoidance that were also related to PSM news use. In other words, using PSM for news predicted news attitudes that attenuated news avoidance. Similar findings were found in two of the four *liberal-pluralist* countries (i.e., Canada and France); two of the seven *direct-funding* countries (i.e., the Czech Republic and Finland), and one of the six *commercial-public* countries (i.e., India). The implications of these findings are discussed next.

Table 3. PSM and PSM% News Use Predicting News Attitudes.

Dependent variable	News trust		Media independence		Media cynicism	
Independent variable	PSM (Yes)	PSM%	PSM (Yes)	PSM%	PSM (Yes)	PSM%
Democratic Corporatist						
Denmark	.12**	.27***	.12*	.26**		-.19*
Germany	.28***	.71***	.37***	.89***	-.23***	-.50***
Norway	.28***	.66***	.32***	.83***	-.13**	-.27*
Sweden	.32***	.76***	.92***	.34***	-.23***	-.35***
UK	.28***	.40***	.22***	.31***	.24***	-.28***
Liberal-Pluralist						
Argentina						
Canada	.22***	.51***	.17***	.40***	-.21***	-.57***
France	.14***		.14**		-.10*	
Spain	.21***	.52**			-.19*	

Direct Funding

Czech Rep	.20***	.33**	.18***	.41**	-.14***	
Finland	.19***	.34**	.26***	.51***	-.15**	-.29**
Ireland	.30***	.62***	.20***	.52***	-.15**	-.42***
Italy	.15***	.30**			-.09*	
Japan	.08*					
South Africa			-.17**		-.12*	
South Korea	.13***		.09*		-.09*	

Commercial–Public

Australia	.09 [#]			-.52***		.30***
Chile	.10*		.09 [#]		-.10*	
Colombia		-.77*				
India	.15*		.31***	.80***		-.40 [#]
Taiwan						
USA	.22***	.62**	.17**		-.22***	

[#] = $p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. Control variables are included in all models.

Discussion

Scholarly debate on the global phenomenon of news avoidance has progressed from its definition, antecedents, and normative consequences for examining the ways in which it can be attenuated. Following this line of inquiry, this study examined how PSM could be one of several potential “solutions” to reduce intentional news avoidance (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). Indeed, as shown in the descriptive findings, a third of citizens across the sample engaged in intentional news avoidance, which may have normative implications for their knowledge of public affairs and engagement in democratic life.

Our analysis of the 22 democracies showed that trust in the news media is a consistent negative predictor of news avoidance, which supports the previous country-level findings of Toff and Kalogeropoulos (2020). Put simply, if audiences perceive that the news they consume will lead to more gains than losses, then there is less incentive to engage in avoidance behaviors, presumably because the news sources are credible and contain useful and important information. In half of the countries, increased media cynicism was related to news avoidance. If audiences perceive the news media as adhering to their own political and economic self-interests rather than the interests of the public, then the incentive for avoiding news can increase. The findings for perceived news media independence were mixed. As hypothesized, it was negatively related to news avoidance in Germany, Finland, and Sweden but positively related to Australia, Colombia, India, Italy, and South Africa. That individuals would engage in news avoidance when they believed that the news media was free from government and commercial interference was an unexpected finding attributable to specific dynamics in those countries, such as a polarized media environment that can

spur periodic disengagement from the news (Wenzel, 2019).⁵ Specific recent incidents could also be contributing factors, such as the high-profile resignations of the ABC chairman in Australia and reports of government harassment of SABC journalists in South Africa. These findings remind us that exposure to PSM may not always have the intended normative benefits on individuals' attitudes toward the news media, especially when PSM in a particular country has been immersed in scandal, undergone chronic underfunding, or is targeted with political pressure to toe the government line.

Comparatively, there was scant evidence that PSM directly predicted less news avoidance. In Germany, Norway, Ireland, Italy, and South Korea, citizens who had a higher proportion of PSM news relative to commercial news in their overall news diet were likely to avoid the news less, whereas accessing PSM news compared with not accessing PSM news predicted less news avoidance only in South Africa and South Korea. Collectively, these findings suggest that while PSM may not have a general role in reducing news avoidance across countries, it is possible that its influence can be indirect through news media attitudes. In particular, exposure to PSM news led to higher news trust in 18 of the 22 countries, and higher levels of news trust in those countries predicted less news avoidance. Because this study used cross-sectional data, it would not be appropriate to conduct formal statistical mediation analyses to test the PSM-trust-avoidance pathway across most countries. However, as more data points become available in future iterations of the DNR, future research can test over time the influences of PSM and news avoidance via trust and other attitudes toward the news media.

In relation to the PSM typology (Neff & Pickard, 2024), the hypothesized findings were most consistent in countries with PSM under the democratic corporatist model. This suggests that the normative ideals of PSM (e.g., providing impartial and informative news content) are more likely to manifest in PSM that has strong financial backing, strong regulation that supports editorial independence, and high market share. Indeed, Germany represents the "ideal type" in terms of PSM engendering trust and perceived independence of the news media and decreasing cynicism, all of which were also related to decreased news avoidance. Only Canada under the liberal-pluralist model and Finland under the direct funding model of PSM exhibited similar degrees of robust findings as the countries under the democratic corporatist model. Thus, future research on strategies to attenuate news avoidance among the citizenry should consider examining the news ecology and journalistic practices of PSM news outlets in these countries.

There were less discernable patterns of findings for the other PSM models, though the relationships were notably the least consistent in countries under the commercial-public model, which is characterized by relatively lower market share and greater reliance on commercial funding. This might suggest that strong funding, editorial independence, and high audience share are fundamental prerequisites for high-quality journalism that can influence news attitudes and attenuate news avoidance. However, even in countries like Spain and the United States where PSM reach is very low and comprises a relatively small proportion of citizens' overall news diets, accessing PSM was still related to news trust and news trust was related to less news avoidance. This suggests that the structural elements within the PSM typology tell only one aspect of

⁵ For example, according to Varieties of Democracy (VDEM) data (Coppedge et al., 2022), Colombia, India, Italy, and South Africa had very high levels of affective and issue polarization whereas Germany, Finland, and Sweden had very low levels of polarization.

the PSM and news avoidance relationship, and that there could be other factors in the case of Spain, the United States, and others that also demonstrated a potentially significant PSM-trust-avoidance pathway. Geography and democratic development are other possible factors. All the countries under the democratic corporatist model are European, have long PSM traditions and are considered “full” democracies (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024). Conversely, the development of PSM in Latin America has been significantly uneven. Of the three countries in the study, only Chile is considered a “full democracy,” and while PSM exhibited somewhat consistent (though statistically marginal) relationships in line with the hypotheses, it played a negligible role in Argentina and Colombia, both of which are “flawed democracies” and whose funding for PSM has been drastically cut by their governments (Becerra, 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study can be addressed in future research. First, because it is not possible to measure “quality journalism” or “high quality news” directly, this study followed the extant literature by assuming that these features are inherent to PSM news, which serves to increase normatively desirable attitudes and behaviors (e.g., news trust, perceived independence of news media, etc.) and reduce undesirable ones (e.g., media cynicism and news avoidance). While it is apparent that the “benefits” of PSM news exposure are very robust in countries under the democratic corporatist model of PSM, more work is still needed to identify the specific practices of PSM that can attenuate news avoidance. Second, the attitudes measured in the study were more generally about the news media environment in the respondents’ countries than PSM specifically. Only recently have studies begun to consider perceptions of PSM from an audience perspective and examine more closely the expectations citizens have for PSM in their own countries (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2022). Therefore, future studies of PSM and news avoidance can benefit by examining individuals’ attitudes toward PSM in addition to the overall news media environment. Third, even though both measures of PSM in the study are relative to commercial media, the findings cannot definitively show that PSM news was more effective than commercial media in predicting normatively desirable news behaviors. Similar to the comparative findings of Soroka et al. (2012), the significant findings in this study could be due, in part, to wider PSM/commercial gaps that predicted the outcome variables. For example, while it is likely that PSM and PSM% predicted news trust in democratic corporatist PSM countries because there were indeed differences in news quality between PSM and commercial news providers, the null findings in France and Japan could be due to a smaller or negligible “quality gap” between PSM and commercial news media. Future studies can address this by directly asking respondents about their perceived quality and impartiality of PSM *and* the commercial outlets they use for news. Fourth, as this study was based on secondary data, we were limited to data availability in terms of the news attitudes that could be examined. Future studies can examine a more extensive range of attitudes, such as media skepticism, which is often associated with more critical yet constructive attitudes toward the media in contrast to media cynicism (Quiring et al., 2021). Fifth, regarding the definition of “news avoidance,” we followed the definition of Toff and Kalogeropoulos (2020) where it is an “intermittent” practice, whereas Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020) considered it a longer-term process of “low news consumption over a continuous period of time” that is caused by “dislike of news” (p. 463). The normative consequences are obviously heavier for the latter definition, but further examination would require longitudinal designs as well as questions that touch upon people’s emotional valence toward the news. Finally, this study focused

only on intentional news avoidance and not unintentional news avoidance. Recent studies have begun to examine both concurrently (Damstra et al., 2021), and whether PSM has any role in unintentional news avoidance can be further examined.

Despite these limitations, this study makes several important contributions to the news avoidance literature by providing cross-national evidence at the individual level showing the relative importance of news media attitudes on news avoidance, and how access to PSM news media can engender these attitudes that then attenuate news avoidance, even when PSM comprises a relatively small portion of an individual's overall news media diet. Moreover, the pattern of findings based on the PSM typology suggests that PSM type also matters. Public service media was not explicitly mentioned as one of the "solutions" for news avoidance proposed by Skovsgaard and Andersen (2020), although they mentioned the journalistic practices of "constructive journalism," "fact-based recording and transparency," and "news curation and slow journalism" (p. 469), which the previous literature suggested are qualities often associated with PSM. Thus, an important future step would be to closely examine the various practices that PSM outlets around the world adopt when selecting and presenting the news relative to commercial media, and then systematically examine how such practices influence audiences' news attitudes and subsequent news engagement and avoidance behaviors.

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Appendix A. Summary of Public Service Media (PSM) News Outlets in the Study.

Country	PSM	Offline channels	Online channels
Argentina	RTA	TV pública Radio Nacional	TV pública (tvpublica.com.ar) o Radio Nacio
Australia	ABC SBS	ABC TV News ABC Radio SBS TV SBS Radio	ABC News Online SBS News Online
Canada	CBC ICI	CBC/CBC News Network ICI Radio-Canada Info/ICI RDI	CBC News Online CBC/Newsworld en ligne ICI Radio-Canada/ ICI RDI Nouvelles en ligne
Chile	TVN	24 Horas (TVN)	24horas.cl
Colombia	RTVC	Señal Colombia	Señal Colombia Online
Czech Republic	ČTV ČRo	Ceska televize Cesky rozhlas zprávy	Ceskenoviny.cz
Denmark	DR	DR Nyheder Radio: P1 P3 P4 (DR)	DR.dk nyheder
Finland	Yle	Yle tv-uutiset Yle-radiouutiset	Yle-uutiset verkossa
France	FT radiofrance	Les chaînes du groupe France Télévisions Radios publiques	Franceinfo.fr Franceinter.fr francebleu.fr
Germany	ARD/ZDF	ARD Tagesschau ARD Tagesthemen ZDF heute Xpress+ ZDF heute-journal ZDF heute	FUNK (das Jugendangebot von ARD und ZDF) Heute.de (bzw. Zdf.de, heute Xpress, heute journal)
India	Prasar Bharati	DD News All India Radio	DD News Online
Ireland	RTÉ	RTE TV News RTE Radio News	RTE News Online
Italy	RAI	Telegiornali RAI RaiNews24 Radiogiornali RAI	RaiNews Online
Japan	NHK	NHK News	NHK News
Norway	NRK	NRK Nyheter på TV NRK Nyheter på Radio	NRK Nyheter på nett
South Africa	SABC	SABC News SAFM	SABC News
South Korea	KBS	KBS	KBS
Spain	RTVE	RTVE	RTVE Online

Sweden	SR/SVT	Sveriges Television (SVT) Sveriges Radio (SR)	SVT Nyheter Online SR Nyheter Online
Taiwan	PTS	Public Television Service	Public Television Service News Online
USA	PBS NPR	PBS News NPR News	NPR News Online
UK	BBC	BBC TV News BBC Radio News	BBC News Online

Appendix B. Comparison of News Avoidance Across Countries Across DNR Reports.

Country	DNR 2017	DNR 2019	DNR 2022	Difference (2017–2022)
Argentina	31%	45%	46%	+15%
Australia	30%	29%	42%	+12%
Canada	28%	29%	44%	+16%
Chile	40%	43%	39%	-1%
Colombia	-	-	37%	-
Czech Republic	23%	25%	38%	+15%
Denmark	14%	15%	20%	+6%
Finland	18%	17%	20%	+2%
France	29%	33%	37%	+8%
Germany	24%	25%	29%	+5%
India	-	-	43%	-
Ireland	30%	32%	40%	+10%
Italy	28%	36%	35%	+7%
Japan	6%	11%	14%	+8%
Norway	20%	21%	27%	+7%
South Africa	-	36%	44%	+8%
South Korea	26%	24%	26%	0%
Spain	26%	32%	33%	+7%
Sweden	21%	21%	32%	+11%
Taiwan	19%	21%	23%	+4%
USA	38%	41%	44%	+6%
UK	24%	35%	44%	+20%

% of respondents who answered "Sometimes" or "Often" to the question: "Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?"