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# Between Media Voluntarism and the Order of the Media Landscape:

## Avoiding Media Types in a High-choice Media Environment

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# News avoidance in high-choice media environment

## The media landscape structural transformation

- Multiplication of media types (web, SNS)
- Multiplication of media outlets
- Multiplication of alternative media sources
- Access to non-media and non-professional sources
- Media and content convergence

(Thorson & Wells, 2016; Karlsen et al., 2020; Strömbäck et al., 2022)

## News avoidance as individual needs fulfillment

- To focus on entertainment
- To avoid negativity
- To avoid information overload
- To avoid opinion-value incongruent news sources
- To avoid politics
- To avoid professional media

(Prior 2005; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Edgerly, 2022; Villi et al., 2022)

# News avoidance as a danger?

- Potential impacts on
  - awareness of current events (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020)
  - voting behavior (Edgerly, 2015; Ksiazek et al., 2010; Prior, 2007)
  - political interest (Palmer, 2020)
  - civic engagement (Palmer, 2020)
  - political knowledge and participation (Palmer, 2020)
  - fragmentation and polarization of public sphere (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018; Dahlgren, 2019)
  - habitualization of news avoidance (Aharoni et al., 2021)

# Research directions

## Styles and forms of media avoidance

- Measuring relative or absolute general news avoidance
- Intentionality and non-intentionality of news avoidance  
(see Aharoni et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2023; Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Villi et al., 2022)
- Comparing online & legacy media (Stier et al., 2020)
- Focus on the role of use of artefacts/technology in news avoidance (Aharoni et al., 2021)

## Predictors of media avoidance

- Politically motivated news avoidance (populism) (Stier et al., 2020)
- Individual predictors (media literacy/skills, age, income, education,...) (see Geers, 2020; Lindell & Mikkelsen Båge, 2022)

# Knowledge gap

- Focus on general news avoidance provides only limited and volatile information (see Palmer et al., 2023).
- Yet, members of audiences actively construct and re-construct their media ensembles/repertoires (see Dvir-Gvirsman, 2020; Tóth et al., 2022) by seeking out some media and, at the same time, actively avoiding some others.

RQ1: How does general media avoidance differ from avoidance of particular types of news media?

# Knowledge gap

- Voluntaristic premises of media avoidance. However, both news consumption and avoidance result from a complex set of factors based on cultural context (see Villi et al., 2022; Pasitselska, 2022; Tóth et al., 2022) and structure of a given media landscape.
- Lack of research systematically considering the structural characteristics of the media field (see Lindell & Mikkelsen Båge, 2022). However, there are types of media characterized by distinct editorial politics implying different audiences and different news content.

RQ2: How do avoidances of certain types of news media (public service media, commercial TV broadcasters, tabloid outlets and alternative media) differ in their predictors?

# Participants and data collection

- **Survey** (December 2022)
- **Czech adult population** (+18), representative sample
- **Quota sampling**
  - gender, age, education, size of the place of the residence, region of residence
- **N = 2,340**
  - CAWI n = 1,772
  - CAPI n = 568



# Measures

Dependent variables assessing selective and general news avoidance

- Avoidance of **public service TV**
- Avoidance of **commercial TV broadcasters**
- Avoidance of **tabloid print & online outlets**
- Avoidance of **alternative media** (anti-system, conspiracy or pro-Russian)
  - Binary variables
  - Based on participants' indication of news media outlets and information sources they explicitly avoid
- **General news avoidance**
  - Binary variable
  - Based on participants' indication of frequency of their news consumption



# Measures

## Independent variables

- Media reflexivity
- Trust in most of the media
- Normative trust in individually important media
- Cohesive trust in individually important media
- News importance
- Gender, age, education
- Conspiracy thinking
- Ontological security
- Interest in politics
- Left-right leaning
- Populist attitudes
- Pro-Western Orientation
- Political antagonization

# Measures

## Independent variables: details

- **Media reflexivity:** 7 items ( $\omega = .89$ ), 5-point
  - *participants' frequency of rethinking and evaluation of their news media diet and practices*
- **Trust in most of the media:** 1 item, 5-point
- **Normative trust in individually important media** (Smejkal et al., 2022): 3 items ( $\omega = .91$ ), 5-point
  - *a dimension of trust linked with the media expected to be professional and independent*
- **Cohesive trust in individually important media** (Smejkal et al., 2022): 3 items ( $\omega = .85$ ), 5-point
  - *a dimension of trust linked with the media expected to perform in line with participants; in-group needs and interests*
- **News importance:** 1 item, 5-point
  - *a degree of individual importance of news consumption*
- **Conspiracy thinking** (Čechová, 2018): 9 items ( $\omega = .90$ ), 5-point
  - *an individual tendency for preference of conspiracy narratives*
- **Ontological security:** 9 items ( $\omega = .89$ ), 5-point
  - *participants' fundamental sense of safety and self-continuity in the world*
- **Interest in politics:** 1 item, 10-point
- **Left-right leaning:** 1 item, 10-point
- **Populist attitudes:** 8 items ( $\omega = .90$ ), 5-point
- **Authoritarianism:** 6 items ( $\omega = .83$ ), 5-point
- **Pro-Western Orientation:** 3 items ( $\omega = .82$ ), 5-point
- **Political antagonization** (Macková et al., 2023): 4 items ( $\omega = .80$ ), 5-point
  - *participants' tendency to hold antagonized attitudes towards people and institutional actors with opposing attitudes and values*

# Analysis

Logistic  
regression

5 models

- One for each dependent variable
- Identical sets of independent variables

CI 95%

# Assumptions

## Public service TV

- Avoided by participants who are younger, with lower education, low trust in media, higher populist and authoritarian attitudes, lower interest in politics and public affairs, more antagonized, with anti-Western orientation.

## Commercial broadcasters

- Avoided by participants with less populist attitudes, lower trust in media and higher interest in politics and public affairs.

## Tabloids

- Avoided by participants with higher education, less populist attitudes, higher interest in politics and public affairs, and with higher normative expectations from journalism.

## Alternative media

- Avoided by participants with pro-Western attitudes, higher trust in mainstream media, less populist attitudes, lower tendency for conspiracy thinking, lower need for representation of their in-group, and lower political antagonization.

# Assumptions

Male-female

Age

Education

Media reflexivity

Trust in most of the media

Trust in media - normative

Trust in media - cohesive

News importance

Conspiracy thinking

Ontological security

Interest in politics

Left-right leaning

Populism

Authoritarianism

Pro-Western Orientation

Political antagonization

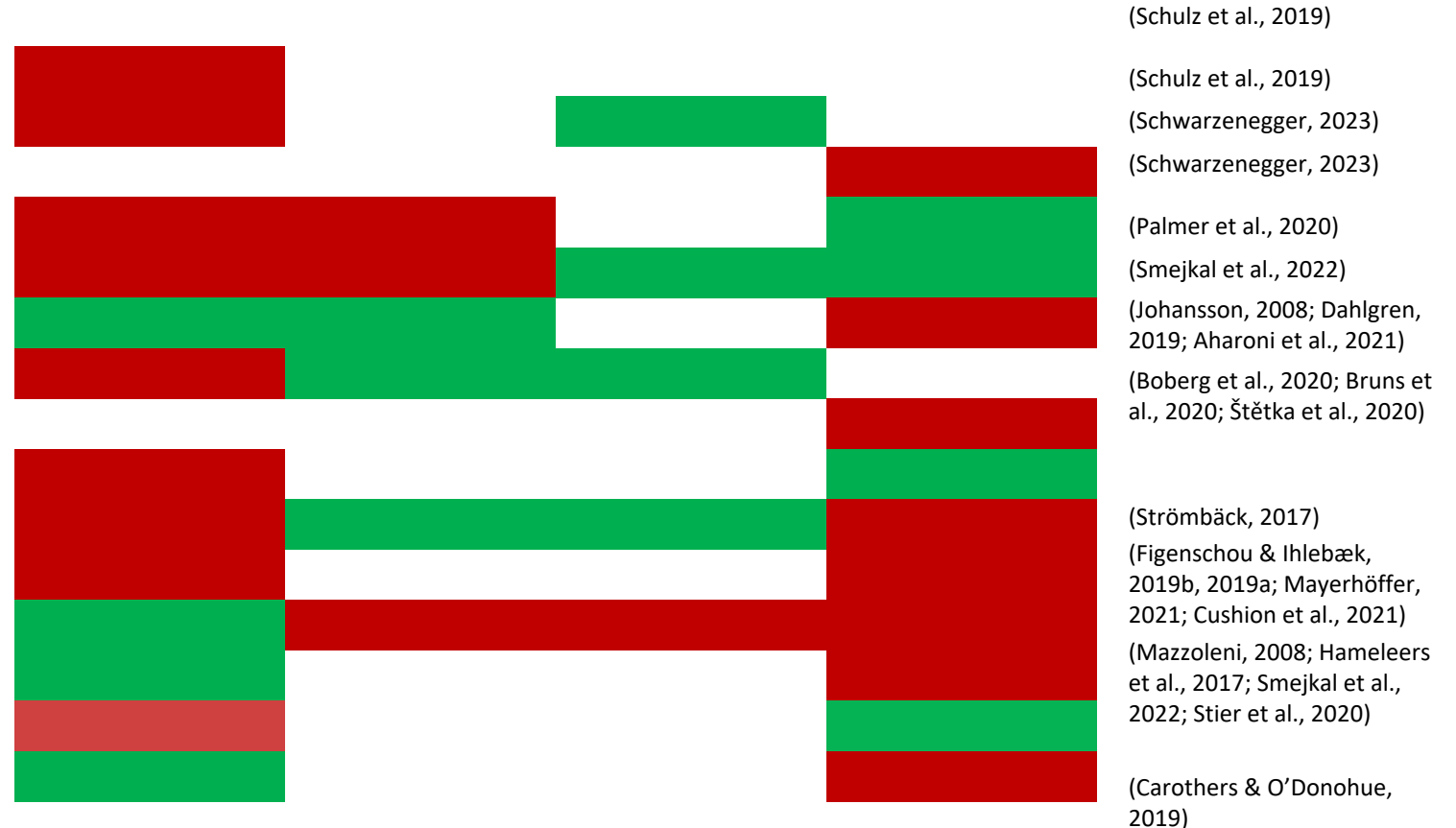
Avoiding public service TV

Avoiding commercial broadcasters

Avoiding tabloids

Avoiding alternative media

Examples of sources



positive effect = green, negative one = red

# Results

	Avoiding public service TV Exp(B)	Avoiding commercial broadcasters Exp(B)	Avoiding tabloids Exp(B)	Avoiding alternative media Exp(B)
Male-female	<b>0,59</b>	0,87	<b>0,81</b>	0,86
Age	<b>1,13</b>	0,98	1,03	<b>1,17</b>
Education	0,94	1,02	<b>1,19</b>	1,02
Media reflexivity	<b>0,78</b>	<b>0,84</b>	1,09	1,11
Trust in most of the media	<b>0,63</b>	0,92	<b>0,87</b>	0,89
Trust in media - normative	0,98	<b>1,21</b>	1,02	1,17
Trust in media - cohesive	<b>1,42</b>	1,05	<b>1,21</b>	0,97
News importance	<b>0,79</b>	0,93	1,04	0,99
Conspiracy thinking	<b>1,54</b>	1,20	<b>1,27</b>	<b>0,70</b>
Ontological security	<b>0,72</b>	0,96	1,10	1,14
Interest in politics	1,02	<b>1,08</b>	1,03	<b>1,15</b>
Left-right leaning	1,04	1,04	<b>1,06</b>	1,04
Populism	1,20	0,84	1,00	0,89
Authoritarianism	<b>0,72</b>	0,88	0,89	0,91
Pro-Western Orientation	<b>0,59</b>	<b>1,13</b>	<b>1,30</b>	<b>1,53</b>
Political antagonization	1,15	0,93	<b>0,88</b>	1,07
Constant	1,23	1,01	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,02</b>
Nagelkerge R2	0,31	0,06	0,08	0,18

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Ontological security	<b>0,72</b>	0,96	1,10	1,14
Interest in politics	1,02	<b>1,08</b>	1,03	<b>1,15</b>
Left-right leaning	1,04	1,04	<b>1,06</b>	1,04
Populism	1,20	0,84	1,00	0,89
Authoritarianism	<b>0,72</b>	0,88	0,89	0,91
Pro-Western Orientation	<b>0,59</b>	<b>1,13</b>	<b>1,30</b>	<b>1,53</b>
Political antagonization	1,15	0,93	<b>0,88</b>	1,07
Constant	1,23	1,01	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,02</b>
Nagelkerge R2	0,31	0,06	0,08	0,18

# Results

	General avoidance Exp(B)	Avoiding public service TV Exp(B)	Avoiding commercial broadcasters Exp(B)	Avoiding tabloids Exp(B)	Avoiding alternative media Exp(B)
Male-female	1,05	<b>0,59</b>	0,87	<b>0,81</b>	0,86
Age	<b>0,79</b>	<b>1,13</b>	0,98	1,03	<b>1,17</b>
Education	0,89	0,94	1,02	<b>1,19</b>	1,02
Media reflexivity	1,07	<b>0,78</b>	<b>0,84</b>	1,09	1,11
Trust in most of the media	1,04	<b>0,63</b>	0,92	<b>0,87</b>	0,89
Trust in media - normative	<b>0,67</b>	0,98	<b>1,21</b>	1,02	1,17
Trust in media - cohesive	1,35	<b>1,42</b>	1,05	<b>1,21</b>	0,97
News importance	<b>0,45</b>	<b>0,79</b>	0,93	1,04	0,99
Conspiracy thinking	1,02	<b>1,54</b>	1,20	<b>1,27</b>	<b>0,70</b>
Ontological security	0,88	<b>0,72</b>	0,96	1,10	1,14
Interest in politics	<b>0,90</b>	1,02	<b>1,08</b>	1,03	<b>1,15</b>
Left-right leaning	<b>0,93</b>	1,04	1,04	<b>1,06</b>	1,04
Populism	0,86	1,20	0,84	1,00	0,89
Authoritarianism	1,04	<b>0,72</b>	0,88	0,89	0,91
Pro-Western Orientation	1,02	<b>0,59</b>	<b>1,13</b>	<b>1,30</b>	<b>1,53</b>
Political antagonization	<b>1,25</b>	1,15	0,93	<b>0,88</b>	1,07
Constant	<b>20,00</b>	1,23	1,01	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,02</b>
Nagelkerge R2	0,29	0,31	0,06	0,08	0,18

# Results

## News in general

- Avoidance negatively predicted by news importance, normative trust in individually important media, age, interest in politics and leaning to political right.
- Positively predicted by political antagonization.

## Public service TV

- Avoidance negatively predicted by pro-Western orientation, being a female, trust in most of the media, ontological security, media reflexivity, news importance, and surprisingly, by authoritarianism.
- Positively predicted by conspiracy thinking, cohesive trust in media and age.

## Commercial broadcasters

- Avoidance predicted negatively by media reflexivity.
- Positively predicted by normative trust in individually important media, pro-Western orientation and interest in politics.

## Tabloids

- Avoidance negatively predicted by being a female, trust in most of the media, and by political antagonization.
- Positively predicted by pro-Western orientation, conspiracy thinking, cohesive trust in individually important media, education and by leaning to political right.

## Alternative media

- Avoidance negatively predicted by conspiracy thinking.
- Positively predicted by pro-Western orientation, age and interest in politics.

# Conclusions

1. The **general avoidance** of news is a **distinctive phenomenon** compared to the avoidance of particular types of media: it differs basically in all the tested predictors.
2. **Reasons why people avoid media clearly differ depending on what type of media they avoid.** In other words, tabloids are avoided for different reasons than public service broadcaster, commercial broadcasters or alternative media.
3. Avoidance of commercial broadcasters' news and tabloids finds only limited explanation in political attitudes or attitudes to media.
4. In the Czech context, **pro-Western orientation** – a proxy for pro-system attitudes – plays a prominent role in relation to particular media avoidance.

# Conclusions

- 5. The more authoritarianism, the lower odds for avoiding the public service TV?** The public service TV is typically described as a pro-liberal, counter-populist outlet explicitly supporting open public discussion. Therefore, this finding is rather counter-intuitive and requires a more nuanced rethinking.

# MUNI

## Thank you for your attention

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