Chapter 5
Reasons for News Avoidance on Mobile News Consumption:
An Overview From Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study examined different news-following practices via mobile phones and questioned the reasons for news avoidance behaviour. In the study where in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 participants, 15 participants remarked that they had news avoidance. Five reasons for news avoidance behaviour have been identified: (1) disappointment, frustration, and stress avoidance; (2) losing curiosity; (3) lack of confidence and distrust of the media industry; (4) reduced quality and poor content of the news; and (5) overstimulation of the user. In the study, which revealed various news follow-up methods, it was seen that the main reason for news avoidance behaviour is the political atmosphere and social despair in Turkey and the world. News avoidance behaviour is both intentional and unintentional and has become a vicious circle that participants cannot escape. The digital platforms shaped by algorithmic selection are the main actors that prepare this outcome for the user who wishes to ignore the social realities despite the many stimuli surrounding daily life.

INTRODUCTION

In parallel with the global trend, mobile media use has expanded in Turkey. Recent research indicates that there has been a steadily increasing acceleration in both mobile news consumption and the rise of digital platforms as a primary news source (Kemp, 2022; Newman et al., 2021, 2022; Yanardağoğlu, 2021). The literature on mobile media use, algorithmic selection, and news consumption through digital platforms has revealed several different user attitudes against news reading (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Ross Arguedas et al., 2022; Thurman et al., 2019; Van Damme et al., 2020). However, during the CO-VID-19 pandemic, the loss of media trust and news avoidance grew bigger and today became a prominent

issue for media and journalism studies (Adekoya & Fasae, 2021; de Bruin et al., 2021; Edgerly, 2022; Ravenelle et al., 2021; Villi et al., 2022).

This study, therefore, set out to critically examine the changing positions of users in mobile news consumption against digital platforms, algorithmic selection, and news avoidance. The research aims to discover different types of mobile news reading practices and reasons for news avoidance and to discover divergent positions of readers against digital platforms and mobile applications. To that end, qualitative explanatory research is designed to determine different news reading approaches in Turkey's post-pandemic period. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 young adults aged 22-45 who are active digital media users living in Istanbul. The research questions are as follows:

(1) What are the different attitudes towards news consumption on mobile phones?
(2) Are the participants exposed to news or willing to receive news?
(3) According to which factors do the participants trust the news?
(4) Do the participants avoid news on their mobile phones; if yes, what are the reasons?

Background Information: Turkey, Digital Media, and the Rise of Mobile

Freedom House country report (2023) indicates that in Turkey, where the media atmosphere is currently concentrated in capital circles close to the political power, many activities, including digital platforms and internet content, are controlled. As for media pluralism, the indicators of the Media Ownership Monitor (MOM) Turkey project held by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reveal that while the political pressure on media and news organisations in the country is intense, this situation also affects audience concentration. The Media Audience Concentration indicator is on medium/high level, Cross-media Ownership Concentration, (Political) Control Over Media Outlets and Distribution Networks, (Political) Control Over Media Funding, and (Political) Control Over News Agencies indicators of the project are at the highest level (MOM Turkey, 2023).

The general elections were held in two rounds in May 2023 under unequal conditions. The Supreme Election Council (YSK), court, police, and media are all under the partisan control of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling party Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, Justice and Development Party). In recent years, they have actively employed these institutional mechanisms to subjugate or undermine their opponents, which has limited the opposition's capacity to garner support from voters and win elections in May 2023, when state-run media favoured the AKP in its coverage. The pressure environment increased with the approval of the law in the parliament that would allow individuals to be imprisoned for their social media posts, which could be instrumentalised to silence independent journalists (Freedom House, 2023).

Most Turkish media networks are owned by businesses that depend on public tenders or have close ties to President Erdoğan. Mainstream media reflect government positions and often carry identical headlines. Although independent outlets exist, they face tremendous political pressure and are routinely targeted for prosecution. Media outlets are often censored, fined, or shut down, and journalists are detained regularly. Business elites with close ties to Erdoğan have been accused of bribing journalists and orchestrating negative press against the opposition. (…) The government heavily monitors and censors the Turkish internet, contributing to an atmosphere of self-censorship. (…) The government continues to censor LGBT+ content in the media, including on Netflix (Freedom House, 2023).

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