

Benjamin Toff, Ruth Palmer, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, **Avoiding the News: Reluctant Audiences for Journalism**, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2024, 288 pp., \$32.00 (paperback).

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In *Avoiding the News: Reluctant Audiences for Journalism*, readers are urged to be interested in people who are not at all interested in the news. Or, to be as consumed as the authors are by a “gnawing curiosity” about those who say they “never” or “less often than once a month” access news (p. 178). News avoiders represent a growing portion of the population, though their ranks depend on where you live. The Reuters Institute’s latest Digital News Report shows an average of about four in 10 people actively avoiding the news, with as many as 63% saying they “sometimes or often avoid the news” in Bulgaria, compared with just 11% in Japan (Newman et al., 2025, p. 27). Picking up on the Reuters Institute’s sprawling annual surveys of news consumers, Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen note that so little engagement “seemed strange—impossible, even” (p. 178). That feeling that something was off motivates the kinds of questions that might haunt journalists, publishers, broadcasters, and journalism and communication scholars who are deeply invested in sustaining news as a practice, a business, and an area of investigation:

How could it be true that some people consumed no news whatsoever? What about on social media, even incidentally? Were they expressing some rejection of news but still consuming it? Were they intentionally avoiding news, or did they just never develop the habit? Above all, why *not* news? (p. 178, emphasis in original)

To answer these questions, the researchers conducted more than 100 one-on-one and often place-based interviews with people in the United Kingdom, Spain, and the United States between 2016 and 2020. According to the Reuters Institute’s 2025 report, the United Kingdom, Spain, and the United States represent average rates of news avoidance: 46%, 37%, and 42%, respectively (p. 27). The interviews in *Avoiding the News* add nuance to those kinds of numbers, providing anecdotal evidence and direct quotes from news avoiders and some news lovers. Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen find and share personal answers to their questions, as well as patterns of behavior, socialization, and shared perceptions of what the news is and how it fails to serve everyone. The results, depending on the reader’s point of view and investments in the field of journalism, are at least worrying and perhaps even depressing. This said, the authors’ findings demand attention and follow-up questions.



Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen tell the stories of people who do not engage with the news because it can be alienating, burdensome, and not terribly useful. News avoiders introduced are not taking short-term news breaks or social media detoxes. They might distrust professional journalism altogether, or see news as not made for them, too boring, too difficult to understand, too political, too biased. They might report no need for news, finding it repetitious, unnecessarily time-consuming, and unchangeable—as in, stories reported had little impact on their lives, and they could do little to change the things being reported. News avoiders, the authors found, tend to be “socially and politically disadvantaged,” namely, “women, younger people, and those from lower socioeconomic classes” (p. 7).

These are the broadest findings, covering some of the same ground published in studies before and since (cf. Kalogeropoulos, 2026; Kassam & Hodson, 2025; Newman et al., 2025; Villi et al., 2022). Numerous data visualizations illustrate the authors’ findings. However, the authors also pay close attention to the textures of people’s lives, making space for participants to share their own insights as to why news does not work for them, including how they define it. This approach follows recent calls in journalism studies to “decenter” journalism, or, more specifically, decenter its production, consumption, and presumed importance, to turn to people’s lived experiences in a more dynamic media landscape (Carlson & Peters, 2023; see also Swart et al., 2022). In Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen’s book, news avoiders matter whether or not they can be won over by news producers. If you are reading this book for clear solutions that will help you sell subscriptions or reach new viewers, listeners, or readers, the authors offer insights but no neat to-do list.

Instead, for journalism practitioners and students of the field, the authors’ findings and recommendations point to a need to be reflexive and curious about “who the news is for.” In their conclusion, Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen suggest some practices, or “Five things that can be done to respond to consistent news avoidance” (p. 164), that could make news more accessible to more people, including encouraging news organizations to look closely at who they serve and evaluate who is missing, and suggesting journalists be more forthcoming about their work and its relevance.

For those invested in the business of journalism or policy frameworks that govern journalism as an industry and public service, the realities of news avoidance carry policymaking and funding implications. The reviewer of this book is a journalist, educator, and researcher based in Canada, where a range of government initiatives have been built up in the last decade to sustain the accessibility of the news (cf. Konieczna & Girardin, 2024). Such initiatives are justified by a shared understanding that journalism does, in fact, serve the public. Growing signs of news avoidance, and books like this, challenge news organizations to revisit their own mandates (as well as those of their funders) and pay attention to who they are reaching and who they are not.

For researchers and educators, the authors provide starting points for further investigation as well as detailed descriptions of and insights into their own methodology. Throughout the book, they note socioeconomic class, explain whether participants were socialized to engage with the news growing up or now in their peer and work circles, and touch on gender, race, religion, and political affiliations. Here, there is room for future researchers to dig deeper. Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen note religion and race “came up less often and in a more individualized way” for interviewees (p. 84). Their shared interview guide (Appendix C)

shows detailed questions about participants' daily routines, memories of, and reactions to news and major events, but no direct questions about race, religion, or languages spoken, read, or written at home. Recently, findings from the Reporting in Black Communities project showed how persistent negative stereotypes in Canadian news directly affect Black news "consumers'" lives (Martis et al., 2026). This study is just one example of how future work focused on news "avoiders" could more directly interrogate race alongside participants' perceptions of the news.

It is a testament to the authors that, with all the data and interviews brought together in *Avoiding the News*, readers will likely want to know still more about people who have decided news is not for them, perhaps borrowing some of the authors' "gnawing curiosity." Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen provide welcome insights into how they engaged with self-described news avoiders in three appendices. Their first is narrative in style, allowing the authors to reflect on the promises and challenges of their multicountry, multiyear study, where they invested time and resources, and how real-life interviews departed from their interview guides. The second appendix is organized as a table containing short descriptions of each participant, when they were first interviewed, where, their gender, age, employment status, social class, news use frequency, and brief additional notes. The authors share their interview protocols in their final appendix. The appendices are effective and accessible, useful to other researchers who hope to better understand news avoidance, and they would make for excellent assigned reading in research methods courses.

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