The role of emotional styles in information avoidance regarding negative news

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Abstract

Introduction. This study explores the influence of emotional styles on students' information avoidance behaviour, particularly about negative news.

Method. Using a sample of participants, we employed the Emotional Styles Questionnaire (ESQ) to measure emotional styles, alongside an information avoidance questionnaire to assess participants' tendencies to avoid distressing news. Cronbach's Alpha for both questionnaires indicated good reliability.

Analysis. Data analysis involved confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and regression analysis to validate the instruments and explore the relationships between emotional styles and information avoidance.

Results. Results demonstrated that higher resilience and greater sensitivity to context are significantly associated with increased information avoidance among students.

Conclusion. These findings suggest that students with resilience and sensitivity to context emotional styles engage in strategic information avoidance to manage their emotional well-being. The study's implications highlight the need for tailored interventions to enhance emotional resilience and adaptive coping strategies, offering insights for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. Future research should investigate cultural differences and longitudinal changes to further understand the dynamics of information avoidance. This research underscores the importance of considering emotional dispositions in information-seeking behaviours, contributing to the broader theoretical framework of emotional regulation.

Introduction

The deliberate effort to avoid or delay acquiring potentially unpleasant information, known as information avoidance, can be observed in various aspects of human behaviour and interaction. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of bad news, such as receiving medical diagnoses, experiencing professional setbacks, dealing with personal challenges, distressing global events, personal setbacks, or societal issues that can evoke strong negative emotions (Torabi & Mirzabeigi, 2021). As a coping mechanism, people may engage in information avoidance to protect themselves from distress or to retain a sense of control. To effectively manage difficult situations and encourage adaptive responses to adverse news, it is important to understand the dynamics of information avoidance (Case et al., 2005). Understanding the dynamics of information avoidance is crucial, especially in academic settings where students often encounter challenging information that may affect their mental well-being and academic performance.

Individuals may use information avoidance as a way to cope with negative stimuli and regulate their emotions, which is closely related to feelings of anxiety, fear, and discomfort (Case et al., 2005). When presented with information that has the potential to trigger negative emotions like sadness or distress, people may consciously or unconsciously choose to avoid it to preserve their psychological well-being (Sweeny et al., 2010). However, this avoidance strategy may inadvertently reinforce anxiety and contribute to a cycle of avoidance, as individuals continue to evade potentially discomforting information instead of processing it (Schell et al., 2023). Ultimately, while information avoidance may provide temporary relief from negative emotions, it can hinder emotional growth, impede problem-solving efforts, and limit opportunities for personal development and resilience-building.

Emotional styles refer to the unique ways in which individuals experience and express their emotions. Factors such as anxiety, fear, or emotional resilience can significantly affect individuals' information-seeking behaviours. People with high anxiety levels may be more likely to avoid information that could cause negative emotions, while those with greater emotional resilience may be more inclined to actively seek out information, even if it means confronting distressing news (Narayan et al., 2011). These emotional styles play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of risk and their ability to tolerate uncertainty, which in turn, affects decision-making (Sobczak et al., 2023). Moreover, emotional styles also influence how individuals cope with adverse information.

Research on the connection between emotional styles and information processing is vital for developing tailored interventions that can help individuals effectively manage challenging situations and promote adaptive coping strategies (Ding et al., 2021). By incorporating insights about emotional styles into research and practice, professionals can develop more effective interventions to mitigate information avoidance and promote healthier information-seeking behaviours. For example, those with high anxiety levels might benefit from stress management and emotion-regulation techniques, while those with greater emotional resilience might respond better to cognitive reframing and acceptance-based approaches. By developing these tailored interventions, individuals can learn how to effectively manage their emotional responses to information, and develop adaptive coping strategies that can help them make informed decisions, even in the face of uncertainty (Ding et al., 2021).

In regards to the connection between emotional styles and information avoidance, there are some possibilities. For example, individuals with a negative outlook, who generally expect the worst, might avoid bad news to prevent their negative expectations from being confirmed. People with low social intuition, who struggle to understand others' emotions, might avoid bad news, especially if it relates to others, to avoid the emotional discomfort of not fully understanding the implications. Individuals with low self-awareness, who have difficulty understanding their own emotions, might avoid bad news because they lack the emotional skills to cope with it effectively. Those with low

sensitivity to context, who struggle to adapt their emotional responses to different situations, might avoid bad news to prevent the potential emotional discomfort of not knowing how to respond appropriately. To sum up, individuals with specific emotional styles might be more prone to information avoidance when it comes to bad news as a way to regulate their emotions (Alharbi & Alnoor, 2024; Andriopoulos & Kafetsios, 2015; Dai et al., 2020). University students, who are often at a critical developmental stage, face unique emotional and cognitive demands. They are regularly exposed to a variety of news topics, some of which can be deeply distressing and may influence their academic and personal lives. Given the increasing concern about students' mental health, it is essential to understand the emotional mechanisms behind their engagement with or avoidance of negative news.

Studies have recognised the impact of emotions on how we process information and make decisions (Zuckerman et al., 2024). However, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how individual emotional styles, contribute to our tendency to avoid or seek out information, especially if it is negative (Foust & Taber, 2023). This will help us understand the underlying mechanisms and potential interventions to alleviate maladaptive avoidance strategies in contexts where bad news is prevalent, such as in healthcare, organisational management, or personal relationships.

This study is part of a larger initiative conducted at the Ketabbase Lab (https://www.researchgate.net/lab/Ketabbase-Lab-Mahsa-Torabi), which focuses on exploring various dimensions of information avoidance and its implications. There is a gap in understanding how emotional styles influence information avoidance, especially among students. University students often come across distressing information in academic and social settings, which can affect their mental health, decision-making, and academic performance. It is important to explore how specific emotional styles, such as resilience, social intuition, and sensitivity to context, impact students' tendency to avoid negative news, as emotional regulation plays a crucial role in managing difficult information (Figure 1). The research question is as follows, based on the aforementioned gap:

> **RQ:** Do the emotional styles (resilience, outlook, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context and attention) affect students' information avoidance about bad news? If so, how?
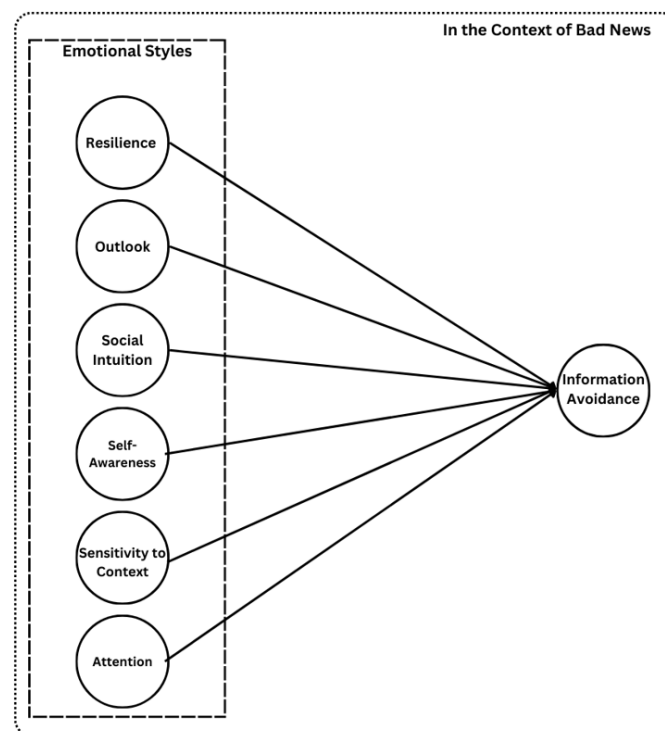
Figure 1. The research model

Understanding information avoidance

The term "information processing" refers to the cognitive mechanisms individuals use to perceive, interpret, store, and retrieve information to transform it into usable knowledge. "Information search" is a focused and intentional activity aimed at locating specific information, often involving interaction with databases or systems. "Information seeking" is a broader concept that encompasses all efforts to obtain information, whether actively or passively, and includes emotional and social dimensions. "Information behaviour" covers the full range of interactions with information, including seeking, using, and avoiding it, and is shaped by broader contextual factors. This paper focuses on "*information avoidance*," which involves deliberately avoiding information actively, especially when it may be distressing or unwelcome (Sweeny et al., 2010).

The act of avoiding information, even when it could be helpful or important, is known as information avoidance (Torabi & Mirzabeigi, 2021). This behaviour can be influenced by factors like personal beliefs, social norms, personal characteristics, health status, perceived utility of information and motivations (Gruener & Mußhoff, 2023). Multiple studies have revealed that individuals may engage in information avoidance for a variety of reasons, ranging from self-serving to pro-social motives, with political attitudes being a significant factor (Link, 2022; Momsen & Ohndorf, 2023). Health information avoidance is a particular form of this behaviour that involves actively avoiding health-related information that may be distressing or threatening, affecting a person's decisions regarding healthcare and preventative measures (Zhou & Yin, 2023).

Avoiding information can have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it can help people deal with emotional challenges and serve as a protective mechanism, as documented in (Mirzabeigi et al., 2023). On the other hand, information avoidance can have negative consequences for healthcare promotion and prevention efforts, as it can hinder knowledge acquisition and delay the uptake of preventive behaviours (Link, 2022).

The concept of information search theory provides a solid foundation for comprehending information avoidance (Link, 2022). Seeking and avoiding information are interrelated procedures, and both are shaped by the perceived significance of information, which can impact an individual's actions, emotions, and thoughts (Sharot & Sunstein, 2020). While decision-making heavily relies on available information, certain information may be avoided due to factors such as overwhelming emotional weight or information overload (Golman et al., 2022; Soroya et al., 2021). People's yearning for information stems from their innate drive to fine-tune their beliefs and concentrate on those that evoke positivity.

In this paper, *information avoidance* is described as the deliberate effort to avoid or delay acquiring information, especially when it is perceived as distressing, unwanted, or likely to cause discomfort. Unlike information seeking, where individuals actively pursue knowledge, information avoidance involves consciously steering clear of certain types of information, such as bad news or distressing updates.

Factors influencing information avoidance

There are numerous factors that contribute to information avoidance. These include various user-related aspects, such as demographic characteristics, health-behaviour perception, personality traits and perceived threat (Guo et al., 2023; Mirzabeigi et al., 2023). Additionally, information-related factors like information quality, information overload, and dissemination can play a role in avoidance behaviour. Emotion-related factors, such as emotional states before and after encountering information, also significantly influence avoidance (Li, 2023). Furthermore, the effects of information awareness, search purpose, search expectation, and search subject type on information avoidance are significant (Momsen & Ohndorf, 2023). In the context of COVID-19, factors like channel belief, information overload, and psychosocial aspects impact information avoidance behaviours (Link, 2022). Additionally, political attitudes can influence the type of information avoidance exhibited, with Democratic voters demonstrating pro-social avoidance and Republican voters engaging in self-serving avoidance. It is important to note that these voters are located in the US (Momsen & Ohndorf, 2023).

As mentioned in emotion-related factors, the role of emotions in influencing information avoidance behaviour is significant; according to research, negative emotionality and a sense of coherence have a direct and indirect impact on emotionally motivated information avoidance, with manageability mediating this relationship (Heinström et al., 2022). In emotional decision-making, individuals tend to simplify the process and facilitate emotional choices by avoiding information (Ahmadi et al., 2019). Research has identified guilt, anger, and shame as motivating factors for seeking or avoiding information on sensitive topics like race and policing, with political orientation also influencing information avoidance behaviour (Kelly et al., 2021). Furthermore, individuals with high emotional eating tendencies tend to avoid emotional content, especially negative faces, indicating a link between emotional regulation strategies and information avoidance (Deroost & Cserjési, 2018).

Information avoidance about bad news

Various factors contribute to the avoidance of negative news, including personal characteristics, news genre preferences, and contextual factors at the country level. Studies have found that demographic factors, political beliefs, and genre preferences can all impact an individual's tendency to avoid certain types of news (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Additionally, personality traits such as neuroticism may influence the desire for positive news among cancer patients (Ehsani et al., 2022). Other reasons for intentional news avoidance may include a preference for other activities, fatigue from negative news, and concerns about bias or reliability (Gorski, 2023). Interestingly, research conducted in China suggests that news overload and emotional impact can

also influence news avoidance behaviour, with demographic factors having less of an impact on social media news consumers (Ni et al., 2023).

The influence of emotions on news consumption cannot be overstated, particularly when it comes to avoiding bad news (Song, 2017). People tend to steer clear of negative news due to the anxiety it can cause, as well as the perception that it lacks practical value (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). Emotional factors such as fear and anxiety can contribute to this avoidance tendency. When it comes to delivering bad news, strong emotions like anxiety, guilt, and fear can make communication a challenging task (Wein, 2024). Coping mechanisms like magical thinking, which is the belief that one's thoughts, wishes, or words can influence the physical world in nonscientific ways, can also impact how bad news is perceived and processed, affecting engagement with such news. Thus, emotions not only shape how individuals approach or avoid bad news, but also influence the communication and reception of such news (Guo et al., 2023). It is clear that emotions play a complex and important role in shaping news avoidance behaviours.

When it comes to university students, they are especially prone to avoiding bad news due to a combination of personal traits, emotions, and environment. Certain personality traits, such as neuroticism, can make students prefer positive news, especially when dealing with challenges like health issues. Emotions also play a significant role, as anxiety and fear often drive students to avoid bad news, perceiving it as lacking practical value. The university environment can also contribute to this, with academic pressure, social comparisons, exposure to negative news on social media, and concerns about bias or reliability in news sources leading to information overload and fatigue (Sobczak et al., 2023; Tian, 2022; Wu et al., 2023). Understanding this behaviour is crucial for supporting students' well-being and academic success, as it can lead to increased anxiety, decreased motivation, and poorer academic performance.

Emotional styles and decision-making

Emotional styles are unique ways in which individuals adapt and respond to the world. They include dimensions such as outlook, resilience, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention (Bilucaglia et al., 2022; Kesebir et al., 2019) (Table 1). The Emotional Style Questionnaire (ESQ) is a self-report measure that assesses variations across these six dimensions, providing an overall score of emotional health (Frevert, 2022). The ESQ has been validated in different languages, to understand cultural nuances in emotional responses within populations (Kantola, 2014).

Emotional style	Definition
Resilience	Refers to the ability to recover from negative emotions.
Outlook	Refers to the ability to sustain positive emotion over time.
Social intuition	Refers to one's degree of attunement to nonverbal social cues.
Self-awareness	Refers to the ability to perceive one's bodily signals that reflect emotions.
Sensitivity to context	Refers to the degree to which our emotional and behavioural responses take into account our social context.
Attention	Refers to the ability to screen out distractions and stay focused.

Table 1. Emotional styles (Kesebir et al., 2019)

Emotional styles and decision-making are closely connected, as shown by several studies. Rajkumar et al. (2023) found that decision-making styles, such as rational and avoidant, significantly impact academic procrastination among Indian students, highlighting the influence of emotions on procrastination. Furthermore, the research of Lonbani et al. (2023) emphasises the role of emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, use, understand, manage, and handle emotions, in improving decision-making among higher education teachers. It indicates that EI plays a crucial role in stress-coping strategies, social self-efficacy, and decision-making styles, ultimately affecting teaching quality and teacher attrition rates. Ghosh (2021) indicates that EI plays a significant role in shaping the decision-making approaches of managers. Different decision-making styles are associated with varying levels of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, emotional labour, defined as the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job, has been identified as a mediating factor that amplifies managers' decision-making styles in the IT industry, highlighting a strong connection between emotional intelligence, emotional labour, and decision-making capabilities (Ramirobass, 2021). Additionally, Ulyukin et al. (2022) discovered that emotional creativity, defined as the ability to experience and express original, appropriate, and authentic combinations of emotions, is a key factor in decision-making processes, particularly in dealing with uncertainty post-COVID-19, highlighting the significance of emotional factors in decision-making scenarios. These studies collectively underscore the complex relationship between emotional styles, decision-making processes, and various outcomes in academic and professional settings.

Students often engage in information avoidance, especially when overwhelmed by negative news cycles. Research shows that high levels of information overload can lead to increased anxiety and stress among students, prompting them to avoid consuming news as a coping mechanism (Tandoc & Kim, 2022; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). For example, a study found that students who engaged in avoidance behaviours experienced more negative emotions and fewer positive emotions, indicating a direct link between avoidance and emotional distress (Ziegler, 2022). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many young adults avoided news due to its negative content, which worsened feelings of anxiety and emotional fatigue (Soroya et al., 2021). This pattern of news avoidance can create a cycle where disengagement with important information contributes to misinformation beliefs and emotional distress, highlighting the complex relationship between emotional responses and information-seeking behaviours among students (Song, 2017).

As mentioned, there have been some studies on how emotions can affect decision-making, but there is still a significant gap in the research when it comes to understanding how different emotional styles contribute to information avoidance as a decision-making strategy. In summary, the interaction between emotional styles and information avoidance is intricate and multifaceted. Understanding the influence of these elements on decision-making can offer valuable insights into the behaviours of students and others when faced with negative news.

Methodology
The current study is causal. Emotional styles are the independent variable, and information avoidance is the dependent variable.

Participants
The study's participants were students from Shiraz University, Iran. The study employed a non-probability sampling technique to select participants. To ensure adequate representation from different faculties, we used purposive sampling. We utilised cluster sampling by choosing five faculties (Engineering, Science, Humanities, Law, and Social Sciences) out of 16 as clusters and collected data from students within those selected faculties. This non-probability technique allowed us to target specific subgroups to achieve a more diverse sample. Data was gathered through a questionnaire in the academic year 2023-2024, and 200 students (32% men, 68%

women) with an average age of 28.03±8.32 responded to it. A potential reason for this is the inclusion of graduate students who may be older than typical undergraduate students. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 2.

Demographics	Items	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	136	68.0
	Male	64	32.0
Grade	BS	123	61.5
	MS	55	27.5
	Ph.D.	22	11.0
Faculty	Engineering	38	19.0
	Science	42	21.0
	Humanity	36	18.0
	Law	44	22.0
	Social Sciences	40	20.0

Table 2. Sample's demographic information

Recruitment and consent

Participants were recruited through announcements in their respective faculties and were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaires honestly and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Information avoidance questionnaire

To assess participants' tendency to avoid information related to bad news, the researchers utilised Howell & Shepperd's (2016) information avoidance questionnaire (Appendix 1). This questionnaire consisted of 8 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The average score of these items was used to measure information avoidance.

It is important to note that the questionnaire included an item asking participants to identify their three worst news subjects. They were then asked to complete the information avoidance questionnaire based on their response. The most distressing news reported by the participants were, in order, reports of murder (52%), rape (23%), and execution (19%).

Emotional styles questionnaire

The emotional styles of the participants were measured using the ESQ (Kesebir et al., 2019) (Appendix 2). The ESQ is a 24-item self-report measure using a seven-point Likert scale designed to assess how individuals vary across six dimensions of emotional styles. These dimensions include outlook, resilience, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention. Together, these dimensions reflect an individual's unique way of experiencing and adapting to emotions in life.

Data analysis

The content validity of the ESQ and the information avoidance questionnaire was rigorously evaluated by a panel of five experts in psychology and emotional intelligence. The experts assessed the relevance, clarity, and representation of the constructs measured by each item in both questionnaires. The ESQ assesses emotional styles, including outlook, resilience, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention, while the information avoidance Questionnaire measures participants' tendencies to avoid negative news.

A Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated for each item and the overall scale, with a threshold of 80% agreement required for an item to be considered valid. The findings revealed that all items in both questionnaires received high relevance ratings, with the ESQ having an overall CVI of 0.88 and the information avoidance questionnaire exceeding 0.85.

In this study, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the construct validity of the ESQ and the information avoidance questionnaire. CFA is a statistical method that examines the factor structure of observed variables based on a predetermined theoretical model. We conducted CFA on the items of each questionnaire to confirm the specified factor structures.

The ESQ comprises six dimensions - outlook, resilience, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention - with strong factor loadings above 0.4 for the sample size of 200, confirming their relevance to the respective constructs (Cheung et al., 2024). Similarly, the Information Avoidance Questionnaire demonstrated a single-factor structure, with all eight items loading above 0.4, consistent with the conceptualisation of information avoidance as a unified tendency to avoid distressing news. The high factor loadings indicate a strong relationship between the items and their corresponding constructs, providing evidence for the convergent validity of both instruments. By keeping only those items with loadings above 0.4, the analysis ensured that the final questionnaires included only the most relevant items (Table 3).

Emotional style	Item	Factor loadings	Emotional style	Item	Factor loadings	Information avoidance	Item	Factor loadings
Resilience	R2	0.725	Self-awareness	SA4	0.712	Information avoidance	IA1	0.850
	R8	0.618		SA10	0.567		IA2	0.850
	R14	0.762		SA16	0.777		IA3	0.754
	R20	0.423		SA22	0.638		IA4	0.648
Outlook	O1	0.564	Sensitivity to context	SC5	0.762		IA5	0.762
	O7	0.545		SC11	0.738		IA6	0.606
	O13	0.725		SC17	0.765		IA7	0.661
	O19	0.688		SC23	0.549		IA8	0.777
Social intuition	SI3	0.590	Attention	A6	0.666			
	SI9	0.671		A12	0.659			
	SI15	0.622		A18	0.649			
	SI21	0.576		A24	0.731			

Table 3. The results of CFA for research questionnaires

Besides the CFA, the validity and reliability of the ESQ and the information avoidance questionnaire were assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. These metrics are crucial for determining the internal consistency of the instruments, ensuring that the items within each questionnaire effectively measure the same underlying construct. A CR and Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7 indicates good reliability, supporting the questionnaires' use in research (Bujang et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2024).

In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha for the ESQ was 0.728, demonstrating acceptable reliability, and the information avoidance questionnaire exhibited higher reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.886. The individual CR values for the constructs within the ESQ ranged from 0.709 to 0.799, indicating a consistent representation of all emotional styles measured. The information avoidance construct showed a CR of 0.907. These results, summarised in Table 3, confirm that both questionnaires possess strong reliability, making them suitable tools for investigating the relationship between emotional styles and information avoidance behaviours. The high-reliability scores reinforce confidence in the data collected and the subsequent analyses conducted in the study (Table 4).

Variable	CR	Alpha
Resilience	0.732	0.728
Outlook	0.727	
Social intuition	0.709	
Self-awareness	0.770	
Sensitivity to context	0.799	
Attention	0.771	
Information avoidance	0.907	0.886

Table 4. The CRs and Alpha factors for each variable

To assess the discriminant validity of the ESQ and the information avoidance questionnaire, the researchers used the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). HTMT is a method used to assess the uniqueness of constructs by comparing the correlations between different constructs (heterotrait) to the correlations within the same construct (monotrait). A commonly accepted threshold for HTMT is 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015); values exceeding this threshold may indicate a lack of discriminant validity, suggesting that the constructs are not distinct enough. The HTMT values calculated for the emotional styles and information avoidance constructs were all below the 0.90 threshold, supporting the discriminant validity of the constructs. Specifically, the HTMT values for resilience, outlook, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention concerning information avoidance ranged from 0.36 to 0.86, indicating that although there may be some relationships between emotional styles and information avoidance, each construct maintains its unique identity (Table 5).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Outlook						
2. Resilience	0.81					
3. Social intuition	0.76	0.63				
4. Self-awareness	0.83	0.86	0.73			
5. Sensitivity to context	0.77	0.79	0.67	0.55		
6. Attention	0.69	0.80	0.62	0.61	0.68	
7. Information avoidance	0.38	0.42	0.45	0.40	0.39	0.36

Table 5. HTMT factors for research variables

After conducting construct validity checks, the research questions were addressed through regression analysis using SPSS v.27.

Results

To address the research inquiries, the Pearson correlation was utilised to examine the relationships between various emotional styles and information avoidance. The findings are presented in Table 6. It was revealed that, of all the emotional styles, only resilience (r=.227, p=.001) and sensitivity to context (r=.206, p=.003) exhibited a statistically significant positive influence on information avoidance.

p<.01**, p<.001***

| Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Outlook						
2. Resilience	0.421***					
3. Social intuition	-0.266***	-0.467***				
4. Self-awareness	0.390***	0.389***	-0.445***			
5. Sensitivity to context	0.279***	0.302***	-0.403***	0.484***		
6. Attention	0.411***	0.309***	-0.375***	0.605***	0.481***	
7. Information avoidance	-0.009	0.227**	-0.108	0.024	0.206**	0.034

Table 6. Correlations between research variables

Following the findings of Table 3, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted, wherein resilience and sensitivity to context were included as predictors to examine their collective ability to predict information avoidance (Table 7).

		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	sig
1	Constant	3.508	0.320		10.956	<.001***
	Resilience	0.237	0.072	0.227	3.286	.001**
2	Constant	2.796	0.464		6.027	<.001***
	Resilience	0.190	0.075	0.182	2.526	.012*
	Sensitivity to context	0.168	0.80	0.151	2.102	.037*

Table 7. The results of stepwise regression for predicting information avoidance based on resilience and sensitivity to context

The findings from the stepwise regression analysis on predicting information avoidance using resilience and sensitivity to context indicate that the model is effective in making predictions. The results show that resilience on its own is able to predict information avoidance ($F_{(1, 198)}$=10.796, p=.001, R^2=.227), accounting for 22.7% of the variance (B=.237, p=.001). Furthermore, when both resilience and sensitivity to context are considered together, they are able to predict information avoidance ($F_{(1, 197)}$=7.701, p<.001, R^2=.269). In this combined model, resilience explains 18.2% of the variance (B=.190, p=.012) and sensitivity to context explains 15.1% of the variance (B=.168, p=.037). Essentially, an increase in both resilience and sensitivity to context is associated with a significant increase in information avoidance with regard to negative news (Figure 2).
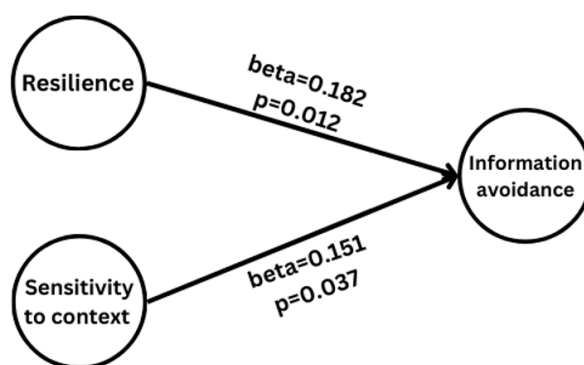
Figure 2. The final model

Discussion

The investigation found that among different emotional traits, resilience and sensitivity to context were the only factors that showed a strong positive correlation with the tendency to avoid information about bad news. This finding is especially important in the context of students, who often encounter specific emotional difficulties in academic environments.

Resilience, which is the ability to bounce back from adversity and adapt to change, is crucial for students in managing their emotional well-being. To protect their mental health, resilient students may choose to avoid negative news, especially during high-stress periods like exams or project deadlines. Constant exposure to distressing news can increase stress levels and make students feel helpless, which undermines their resilience. By selectively ignoring bad news, students can maintain a positive outlook, which is essential for tackling academic challenges effectively and recovering from setbacks (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

In addition, resilient students usually use proactive strategies to solve problems and manage stress. They focus on positive and actionable information instead of negative news, which helps them save emotional energy for more productive activities. This selective approach to information not only improves their resilience but also leads to a healthier emotional state, which is crucial for academic success (Yi et al., 2020).

The strong link between being sensitive to context and the inclination to avoid negative news can be explained by looking at emotional regulation and adaptive coping strategies. Sensitivity to context means how well someone can understand and react to situational cues, which greatly affects their emotional reactions and decision-making (Hillebrandt et al., 2022). For students, this means that those who are highly attuned to their environment may strategically avoid distressing information, particularly when the context suggests potential social or emotional turmoil, such as during group projects or collaborative learning scenarios (Case et al., 2005). This adaptive behaviour helps students reduce immediate emotional distress, enabling better information processing when they are emotionally prepared (Rosenzweig, 2012).

Furthermore, sensitivity to context involves recognising when to engage with potentially distressing information while balancing the need for emotional well-being. This thoughtful approach aligns with theories of emotional intelligence, where students adept at navigating emotional contexts may use avoidance strategies judiciously to protect their mental health without sacrificing overall awareness of their surroundings (Hillebrandt et al., 2022; Tranberg & Brodin, 2023). Thus, the strong correlation highlights the adaptive nature of sensitivity to context in managing emotional responses to difficult information and underscores its role in maintaining psychological resilience and interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, the weak connection between outlook, social intuition, self-awareness, attention, and the inclination to steer clear of negative news might indicate the intricate nature of emotional tendencies and information-processing methods in students. While aspects like social intuition may impact the preference for positive or negative news, they do not necessarily determine avoidance behaviours. Instead, these aspects contribute to broader cognitive and emotional regulation processes that differ among individuals, influencing how they react to potentially distressing information (Scherer et al., 2022).

Additionally, outlook, defined as one's general perspective or mindset, encompasses diverse cognitive styles that may not consistently predispose individuals towards avoiding negative news, depending on situational context and personal coping strategies. Hence, while these factors are integral to emotional and cognitive functioning, their specific influence on information avoidance in the context of emotional dispositions appears nuanced and multifaceted.

In summary, this study emphasises the important role of emotional styles—specifically resilience and sensitivity to context—in influencing university students' tendencies to avoid negative information. The results suggest that resilient students often use strategic information avoidance as a way to cope with stress and maintain their emotional well-being, particularly during challenging academic periods. By selectively ignoring distressing news, these students may protect their mental health and concentrate on positive, actionable information that supports their academic success. Similarly, sensitivity to context may allow students to effectively navigate their emotional environments and avoid distressing information when it is most harmful to their well-being.

Research limitations

The study has a few limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the sample size and composition of this study included 200 university students from a single institution, with a predominance of female participants. This may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should seek

a more diverse sample across multiple institutions and demographic groups. However, it is worth noting that the results of this study can be applied to similar groups within academic contexts. Other contexts still require replication of this study for comparison. Secondly, the study's reliance on self-reported measures of emotional styles raises concerns about potential biases and inaccuracies. To enhance the validity of these findings, it is recommended that future research incorporate additional instruments, such as structured interviews, to gain a more nuanced understanding of participants' emotional experiences and expressions. Additionally, potential confounding variables, such as prior experiences with negative news and psychological well-being, were not controlled for and should be considered in future research.

Conclusion

To summarise, this study emphasises the important roles of resilience and sensitivity to context in influencing information avoidance behaviours, especially when it comes to negative news. The results show that individuals with higher resilience tend to avoid negative information to protect their mental well-being and maintain a positive outlook. Similarly, those with heightened sensitivity to context strategically avoid negative news to regulate their emotional state and preserve intrapersonal harmony. These behaviours represent adaptive emotional regulation strategies to reduce immediate distress and promote better emotional and cognitive functioning.

The findings of this study have practical implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. Understanding the impact of resilience and sensitivity to context on information avoidance can help tailor interventions to enhance these emotional styles in individuals. For example, implementing resilience training programs and mindfulness practices can help individuals cope more effectively with distressing information. Educational institutions can also integrate EI curricula to develop sensitivity to context, enabling students to better manage their emotional responses in different situations. These practical applications can lead to improved mental health outcomes and more adaptive coping strategies when facing adverse news, ultimately fostering a more emotionally resilient society.

On a theoretical level, this study contributes to a broader understanding of emotional regulation and information processing by highlighting the specific emotional styles that influence information avoidance behaviours. It fills a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on how resilience and sensitivity to context interact with information-seeking and avoidance mechanisms. These findings suggest that emotional styles are crucial determinants of how individuals process and respond to negative information, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between emotions and cognition.

In future research, it is important to explore the complex connections between different emotional styles and the behaviour of avoiding information. Studies should go beyond emotional styles and also look into emotional features like different emotional states, emotional regulation and temporal emotions to understand how they individually and together affect information avoidance. Longitudinal studies can help us understand how these connections change over time and at different stages of life. Additionally, it would be valuable to investigate how emotional styles and information avoidance differ across cultures to gain a more global perspective. Using experimental designs to manipulate emotional states can provide insights into causal relationships, which can improve our theoretical and practical understanding of how to reduce harmful information avoidance and encourage adaptive coping methods in diverse populations.

It is essential to consider the specific context of university students to understand the implications of this study. Students face unique academic pressures and are frequently exposed to distressing news. Therefore, fostering resilience and contextual sensitivity can significantly enhance their coping mechanisms. By equipping students with the skills to navigate negative information effectively, educational institutions can promote not only better academic performance but also

overall well-being. This focus on emotional styles in relation to information avoidance underscores the importance of developing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of students as they confront challenging news in their academic journeys.

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Appendix I

Information avoidance questionnaire

1. I would rather not search for this kind of news.

2. I would avoid searching for this kind of news.

3. Even if it will upset me, I want to search for this kind of news. (R)

4. When it comes to this kind of news, [sometimes] ignorance is bliss.

5. I want to know about this kind of news. (R)

6. I can think of situations in which I would rather not know about this kind of news.

7. It is important to search about this kind of news. (R)

8. I want to search for this kind of news immediately. (R)

Appendix II

Emotional styles questionnaire

1. When something good happens to me, the positive mood does not last long. (Outlook, R)

2. I find it hard to regain my calm after experiencing something negative. (Resilience, R)

3. When I am talking with people, I am always attuned to their emotional state. (Social intuition)

4. There can be long periods of time when I am not conscious of my own bodily and emotional states. (Self-Awareness, R)

5. I have sometimes been told that I behaved in a socially inappropriate way. (Sensitivity to context, R)

6. I have good concentration skills. (Attention)

7. I am very good at seeing the positive side of things. (Outlook)

8. When I experience a setback, I do not stay upset for very long. (Resilience)

9. I am not particularly good at reading people's emotions. (Social intuition, R)

10. I am typically very aware of my feelings, both in my mind and my body. (Self-Awareness)

11. I have suffered setbacks at work or had fallingouts with friends because the way I acted was apparently not acceptable. (Sensitivity to context, R)

12. I do not get distracted easily, even in situations where a lot is going on. (Attention)

13. I find it easy to be hopeful about the future. (Outlook)

14. When I'm in a bad mood, it tends to last a long time. (Resilience, R)

15. I am sensitive to other people's emotions. (Social intuition)

16. I am not good at identifying my own feelings. (Self-Awareness, R)

17. I have sometimes done things others thought of as tactless or embarrassing. (Sensitivity to context, R)

18. I sometimes feel like I have little control over where my attention goes. (Attention, R)

19. When things are bad, I have a hard time believing that eventually, they will work out. (Outlook, R)

20. I recover quickly when things don't go the way I want them to. (Resilience)

21. I can feel when something is bothering a person by just looking at them. (Social intuition)

22. Usually, I am not attentive to what is going on in my body. (Self-Awareness, R)

23. Oftentimes, when other people think something is inappropriate, I disagree. (Sensitivity to context, R)

24. If I get distracted by something, it takes me a long time to refocus. (Attention, R)