

Global Trends in Information Avoidance Research: A Bibliometric Analysis

Shakil Ahmad¹, Mohamad Noorman Masrek^{2*}, Wan Nor Haliza Wan Mokhtar²

¹Central Library, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

^{2,3}Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Perdana Campus, UiTM Selangor, 40150 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The topic of information avoidance has gained the attention of researchers in the fields of health and other disciplines. However, the bibliometric method has rarely been applied to analyze information avoidance research. This study aims to analyze the research published on information avoidance using bibliometric indicators. The source of data for this study is the Scopus database. The study examines the authors' keywords, visualizes the thematic evolution, provides yearly growth of publications and citations, and identifies the highly cited papers and most productive countries, institutions, and authors. The study examines the current status of research and provides a reference for future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

Information avoidance is a common communication phenomenon and can be defined as “any behavior intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information” (Sweeny et al., 2010). It involves choosing not to seek out or learn information that is available but could be unpleasant or harmful. Information avoidance, which has its theoretical roots in Uncertainty Management Theory (Barbour et al., 2012) enables people to restrict interactions to either harmful or superfluous information and may cause psychological discomfort. People try to forget information that is unpleasant to them.

There are varied strategies and methods to avoid information. People intentionally avoid information by not using specific social media applications, not reading particular newspapers, or listening to specific radio or television programs. People sometimes avoid information by being inattentive and not focusing on the information that has adverse implications. Sometimes, people interpret the received information

biasedly (Golman et al., 2017). People can attend to some elements in an information source but ignore others (Song et al., 2021). People also engage in information avoidance to cope with cognitive load. Information avoidance behavior has serious adverse effects on individuals and organizations, such as decreased productivity, increased stress, and reduced decision quality (Fu et al., 2020). This information avoidance behavior can negatively impact areas such as national security, health, finance, and disaster management (Narayan et al., 2011). The implications of avoiding relevant information are often immense, sometimes affecting businesses at a macro level.

Considering the abovementioned issues, it is vital to understand why, how, and when people avoid information. It is also essential to know the status of research that has already been done on this important phenomenon. This study aims to analyze the most recent and dominating research trends of scientific literature on information avoidance to uncover research themes and collaboration patterns.

Study Objectives

In view of the above, this study is prepared to map out the information avoidance research with the following objectives:

1. To identify the most prolific countries/regions, institutions, and individuals producing information avoidance research
2. To investigate the evolution of publications and citations of literature on information avoidance
3. To examine the authorship patterns in information avoidance research
4. To analyze the thematic evolution and frequently used keywords in information avoidance research
5. To investigate the highly cited and trending articles in information avoidance research

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Phenomenon of Information Avoidance

Nowadays, people get their information from everywhere, including social media, but not all of it is helpful or relevant. People have a limited ability to digest information; hence, an excess of data could lead to information avoidance (Bawden & Robinson, 2020). A person who practices information avoidance will not seek out accurate data. As a result, people are less likely to seek out relevant information and are more likely to ignore crucial details (Bendau et al., 2021). People may become even less likely to ask for information if they actively avoid it. Even though there are many advantages to obtaining information, individuals frequently choose to stay uninformed. Avoiding information involves any action that attempts to prevent, delay, or decrease the acquisition of accessible but potentially unwanted information (Song et al., 2021). The subject of information avoidance behavior has drawn substantial attention from information science and behavioral research alike. Information avoidance behavior is defined as individuals' purposeful shunning of information, even though this information may have been otherwise beneficial. In addition, there are many ways in which people can avoid information. The phenomenon is also intriguing because of the domains in which it invades, from health to finance to personal decision-making.

Effects of Information Avoidance

There are many effects of information avoidance. This is important across a wide range of domains: health, finance, and personal relationships. In the health domain, avoiding information about potential health risks or treatment options can result in delayed diagnosis and treatment and, ultimately, poor health outcomes (Tran et al., 2021). When individuals avoid information about their medical conditions, they may inadvertently avoid information about how to treat or manage them and thus may do things that worsen

their health or shorten their lives (Rajagopal et al., 2022). In the financial domain, avoiding information about market trends or the risks of an investment can mean suboptimal choices that cause financial losses or missed opportunities. In the financial sector, information avoidance can cause lousy investment decisions and financial instability by leading people to disregard available information about probable returns and volatility in the investments they hold or are considering making. The ramifications of avoiding political information are considerable for democratic processes and civic engagement. By not bothering to search for different political information, citizens thus risk weakening public debate and democratic decision-making (Karami et al., 2020). On a broader level, the implication of information avoidance is even easier to see. Public health, safety, and policy-making can all be significantly damaged if large societal groups engage in information avoidance (Lucantoni et al., 2022).

Bibliometric Method of Research

Bibliometrics is a widely used method to measure the output of scientific research. The method can also be used to measure the research performance of individuals, institutions, countries, and regions (Bajwa et al., 2022). Several bibliometric studies have been conducted to measure the specific scientific fields (Aqil et al., 2022). Information avoidance is an important issue, and knowing the research landscape and trends is vital. Researchers from various academic fields, including communication, social psychology, information science, and information systems, have examined information avoidance in great detail. However, minimal bibliometric research on information avoidance has been published so far. Therefore, little is known about the status and dynamics of scientific literature on information avoidance.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This investigation is based on scholarly literature, i.e., journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters indexed in the Scopus database. The bibliometric method has been applied to carry out this research. The bibliometric methodology involves quantitative methods to analyze the corpus of scientific literature, e.g., units of publication and citation. It provides an overview of the research in a given field.

DATA COLLECTION

Data Source

The data for this research was retrieved from the Scopus database. Scopus is one of the most significant citation and indexing databases of scientific literature. Scopus was selected due to its quality standards and broad coverage of the information science field.

Data Extraction and Collection

The coverage time and document language were set to open to retrieve the maximum number of records. Hence, no date and language filters were applied. The data extraction process involved the construction of a search query. The relevant keywords were prepared after a review of the pertinent literature. The keywords were combined with Boolean operators.

The following query was prepared to retrieve the bibliographic records:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("information avoidance" OR "information avoidance behavior")

The online search was performed in a single day on October 29, 2024, to avoid changes in data due to frequent data updating by databases.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Once the data were retrieved, an exclusion criterion was applied to eliminate the non-peer-reviewed documents. Table 1 explains the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Initially, the search query resulted in 380 papers. To perform the analysis on the peer-reviewed documents only, document types of editorials, notes, and letters were excluded. After excluding the non-peer-reviewed items, 377 items were selected for analysis. The search strategy was limited to the document types of journal articles, conference papers, reviews, and book chapters but was not restricted to any language.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Filters	Selected	Excluded
Document types	journal article, conference paper, review, book chapter	editorials, notes, and letters
Study period	all years	none
Language	all	none

Data Analysis and Visualization Tools

The following software and tools were used to visualize and analyze the results:

VOSviewer (version 1.6.20), Bibliometrix – biblioshiny (version 4.1.2), MS Access (2016), MS Excel (2016)

STUDY FINDINGS

Relevant Keywords

The keyword “information avoidance” was the most frequently used and represents the largest cluster, as shown in Figure 1. Three minimum number of occurrences of a keyword were selected; hence, 54 keywords consisting of seven clusters met this criterion and appeared in the figure. A different color represents each cluster. Clusters are based on the occurrences and link strength. Information seeking is the other prominent keyword based on the link strength and occurrence. The keywords leading the other clusters are COVID-19, health behavior, avoidance, uncertainty, experiment, and health information behavior.

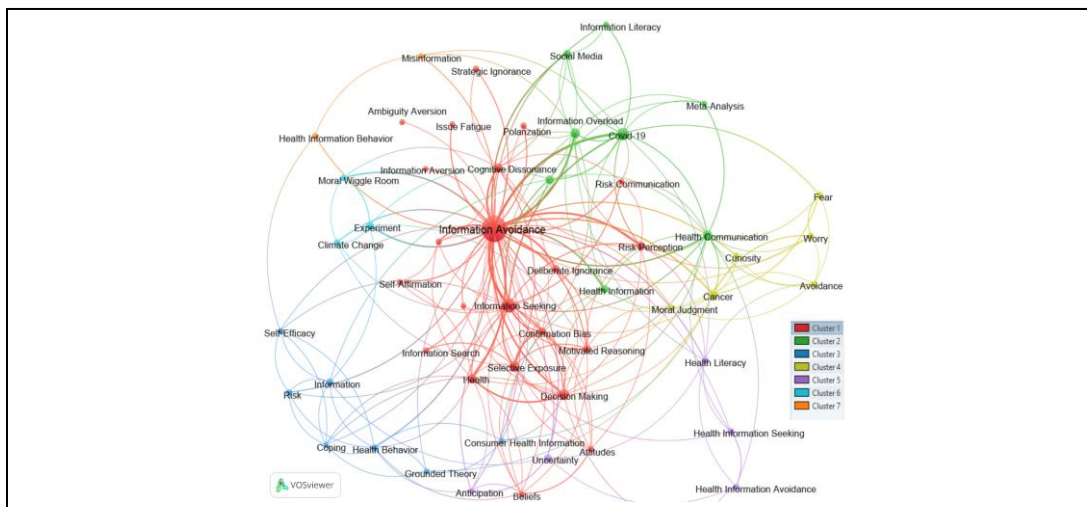


Figure 1: Most Relevant Keywords Information Avoidance Research

Thematic Evolution

Figure 2 presents the thematic evolution of information avoidance research. The study period was divided into three different periods. The researchers in the field have consistently used “information avoidance” as the most frequently used term. The term “information search” was used initially but was not common in the later periods. Similarly, the term “worry” is absent from the research published during the last decade. “Polarization,” “health behavior,” and “fear” emerged as new terms.

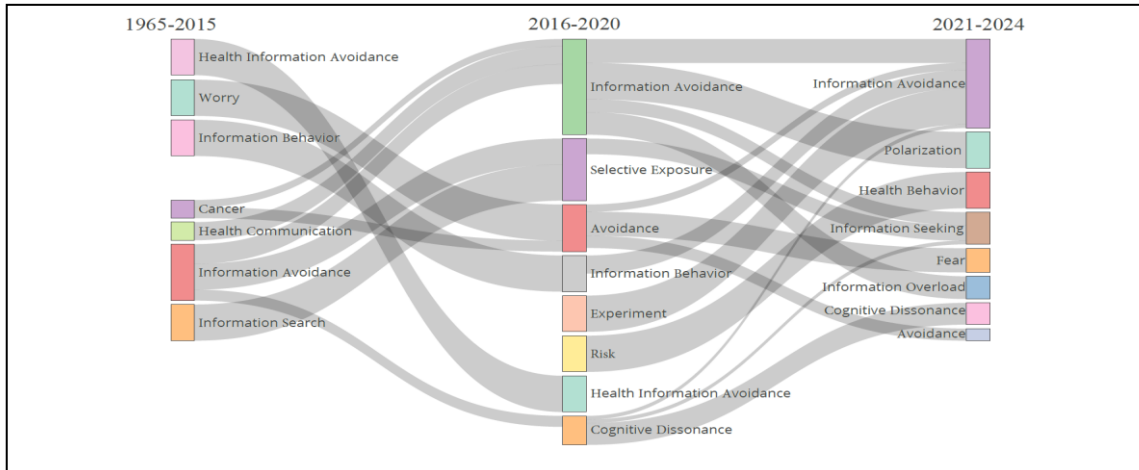


Figure. 2: Thematic Evolution of Information Avoidance Research

Growth of Publications on Information Avoidance

Research on information avoidance spans over fifty-nine (59) years, from 1965 to 2024. Figure 3 shows the growth of publications and citations on information avoidance. The first document published on the topic was in 1965. The highest number of papers were published in 2024. The highest number of citations were received on information avoidance research in 2020. The highest citation impact was recorded in the year 2000.

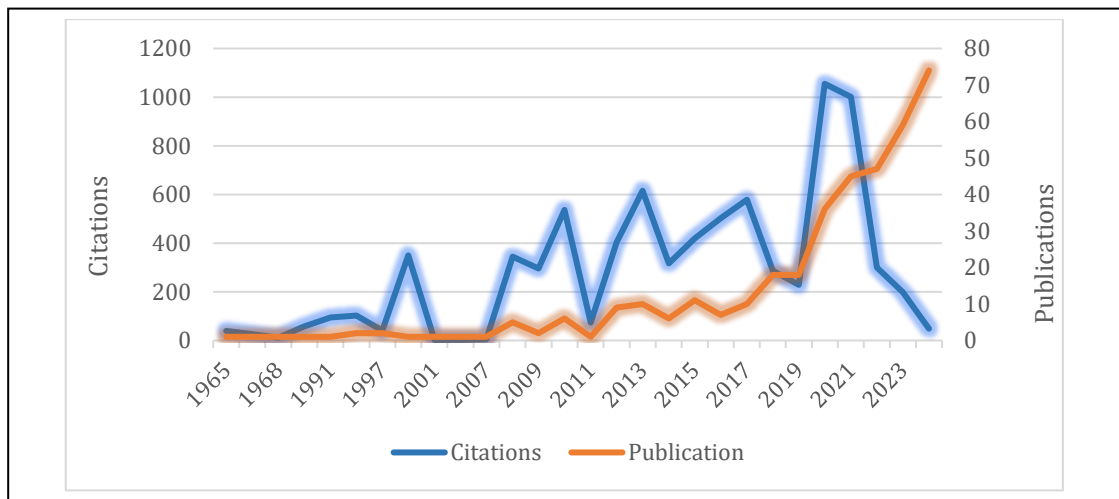


Figure 3: Yearly Growth of Information Avoidance Research

Authorship Pattern

Figure 4 reveals that single authors authored 53 publications. Two-author studies have the highest numbers (n=108) and citations (n=1930). The 2nd highest number of studies are prepared by three authors jointly. Sixty-four publications were prepared in a collaboration of four authors. The highest number of authors who collaborated on a study is 24.

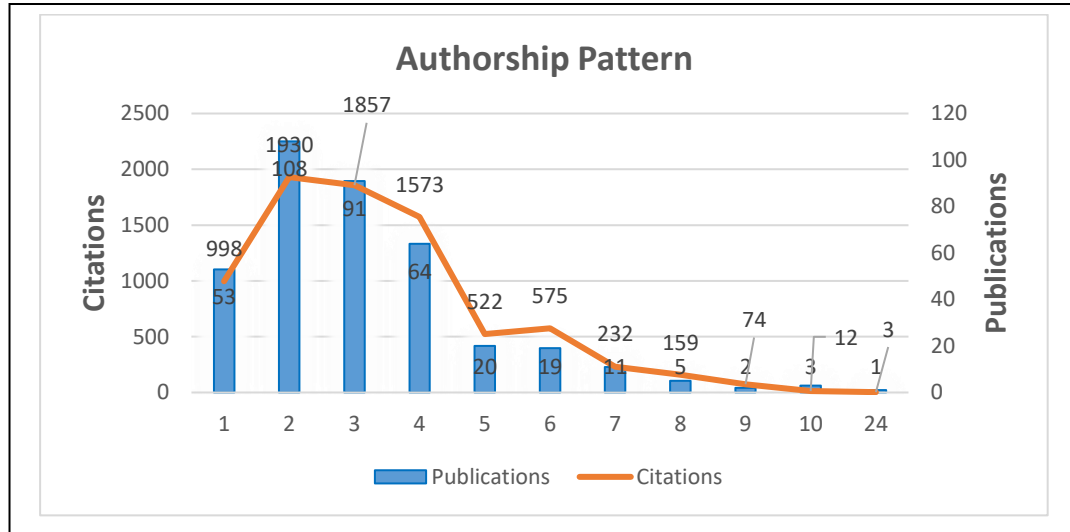


Figure 4: Authorship pattern of information avoidance research

Table 2. Highly Cited Articles in Information Avoidance Research

Title	First Author	Year	Source Title	Citations
Information Avoidance: Who, What, When, and Why	Sweeny K.	2010	Review of General Psychology	405
Information avoidance	Golman R.	2017	Journal of Economic Literature	391
Communication in the management of uncertainty: The case of persons Living with HIV or AIDS	Brashers D.E.	2000	Communication Monographs	350
From information seeking to information avoidance: Understanding the health information behavior during a global health crisis	Soroya S.H.	2021	Information Processing and Management	331
What, Me Worry? The Role of Affect in Information Seeking and Avoidance	Yang Z.J.	2013	Science Communication	250
Information, avoidance behavior, and health: The effect of ozone on asthma hospitalizations	Neidell M.	2009	Journal of Human Resources	237
Effects of COVID-19 Misinformation on Information Seeking, Avoidance,	Kim H.K.	2020	Science Communication	209

and Processing: A Multicountry Comparative Study				
Information avoidance behavior on social network sites: Information irrelevance, overload, and the moderating role of time pressure	Guo Y.	2020	International Journal of Information Management	188
What motivates Chinese consumers to avoid information about the COVID-19 pandemic?: The perspective of the stimulus-organism-response model	Song S.	2021	Information Processing and Management	173
Avoiding health information	Barbour J.B.	2012	Journal of Health Communication	166

Most Cited Articles

Table 2 provides the list of highly cited articles in information avoidance research. The article “Sweeny, K., Melnyk, D., Miller, W., & Shepperd, J. A. (2010). Information avoidance: Who, what, when, and why. *Review of general psychology*, 14(4), 340-353” is the most cited article on information avoidance research. The other highly cited articles are “Golman, R., Hagmann, D., & Loewenstein, G. (2017). Information avoidance. *Journal of economic literature*, 55(1), 96-135” and “Brashers, D. E., Neidig, J. L., Haas, S. M., Dobbs, L. K., Cardillo, L. W., & Russell, J. A. (2000). Communication in the management of uncertainty: The case of persons living with HIV or AIDS. *Communications Monographs*, 67(1), 63-84.

Table 3. Most Productive Countries in Information Avoidance Research

Rank	Country	TP	TC	CI
1	United States	173	4973	28.75
2	China	66	698	10.58
3	Germany	38	367	9.66
4	United Kingdom	26	749	28.81
5	Singapore	12	308	25.67
6	Australia	11	128	11.64
7	South Korea	11	397	36.09
8	Finland	10	513	51.30
9	Sweden	9	111	12.33
10	Canada	8	269	33.63

Most Productive Countries

The United States is the most productive country in producing research on information avoidance, as shown in Table 3. The United States-based authors have published 173 publications, and 4973 citations were received for these publications. China and Germany followed the United States in producing more research on information avoidance, with 66 and 38 publications, respectively.

Table 4. Most Productive Organizations in Information Avoidance Research

Rank	Organizations	TP	TC	CI
1	University of Florida	23	1247	54.22
2	University at Buffalo, The State University of New York	13	614	47.23
3	University of Kentucky	10	141	14.10
4	Washington University in St. Louis	9	209	23.22
5	National Cancer Institute NCI	9	297	33.00
6	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	9	20	2.22
7	Kent State University	9	83	9.22
8	Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center	8	113	14.13
9	The University of Texas at Austin	8	259	32.38
10	Carnegie Mellon University	8	563	70.38

Most Prolific Organizations

Table 4 presents the list of organizations that are most active in producing research on information avoidance. The number of publications, citations, and citation impact is provided for each organization. Data shows that the University of Florida is the most productive organization and has published the highest number of publications (n=23) and 1247 citations with a citation impact of 54. The University of Buffalo and the University of Kentucky are the other prominent organizations, with 13 and 10 publications each.

Table 5. Most influential authors in information avoidance research

Author	Affiliation	TP	TC	CI
Shepperd, James A.	University of Florida, Gainesville, United States	20	1211	60.55
Howell, Jennifer L.	UC Merced, Merced, United States	15	638	42.53
Waters, Erika A.	Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, St. Louis, United States	10	173	17.30
Link Elena	Department Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany	10	82	8.20
Hay, Jennifer L.	Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, United States	9	172	19.11
Orom, Heather	University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, Buffalo, United States	9	172	19.11
Taber, Jennifer M.	Kent State University, Kent, United States	9	135	15.00
Kiviniemi Marc T.	Department of Health, Behavior and Society, University of Kentucky, Louisville, KY, United States	8	166	20.75
Klein William M. P.	National Cancer Institute, Rockville, MD, United States	8	278	34.75
Ferrer, Rebecca A.	National Cancer Institute (NCI), Rockville, United States	7	289	41.29

Most Influential Authors

Table 5 presents the most influential authors of information avoidance research. James A. Shepperd, affiliated with the University of Florida, is the most prolific author with 20 publications and 1211 citations,

with average citations of 61 per publication. Jennifer L. Howell, affiliated with UC Merced, published 15 publications and received 638 citations on them. Erika A. Waters and Link Elena published 10 papers each and received 173 and 80 citations, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the already published literature on information avoidance (Blajer-Gołębiewska et al., 2018; Huang, 2018; Soroya et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2022), our keywords analysis shows that the concept of information avoidance is linked to information overload, information seeking, information search, confirmation bias, information aversion, and health information avoidance.

This study provides a broad picture of research on the topic and helps in a better understanding of the research landscape of information avoidance research. It traced the historical development of the research on the topic that started about six decades ago. The research on information avoidance got the pace with the beginning of the 21st century as more than 97% of the research was published during the last two and half decades. As more research has been produced on information avoidance in recent years, so have the citations in these publications. The rise in the volume of publications and citations indicates the increased focus of researchers. The findings of this research are consistent with other bibliometric studies on information behavior. The growth of publications and citations validates the findings of (Xia et al., 2022).

Authorship trend reveals that the authors in the field of information avoidance preferred to work collaboratively, as only 14% of total publications were prepared by single authors. Publications prepared with joint authorship received more citations. The United States is the main force of research on information avoidance; the institutions in the United States are the most active in publishing research on the topic. “Shanghai Jiao Tong University” was the only institution outside the United States that appeared in the list of top ten highly productive institutions of information avoidance research. No other institution based in Europe, Africa, or other parts of the world appeared on the list of top producers. The most prolific authors of information avoidance research are also affiliated with institutions in the United States. The research produced in Finland had a remarkable citation impact.

This study is different from the previous bibliometric studies as most of these cover information avoidance from a health perspective. This study covers information avoidance from an overall perspective using the Scopus database, which is one of the most comprehensive indexing databases of scientific literature. Furthermore, this study is a global study covering the status of information avoidance research from around the world.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is limited to and relies on the Scopus database to retrieve bibliographic data of publications on information avoidance behavior. Other citation databases, like Web of Science, were not used in this study. The study revealed the knowledge structure of information avoidance research and offered a reference for researchers in the field to comprehend the research status and existing research networks. The study will help researchers understand the evolutionary paths to knowing the development context and emerging trends in information avoidance research. This study's findings will help researchers find the related themes and research gaps for their future research projects. Future research using the same method should use the other indexing and citation databases. Systematic literature reviews can be an alternate option for researchers. The research content can differ for future research, like co-citation analysis of sources and bibliographic coupling.

CONCLUSION

Information avoidance behavior has been the focus of researchers from around the world, particularly from the United States, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, as they are the top producers

of research on information avoidance behavior. In this study, the relevant scientific literature on information avoidance was retrieved from the Scopus database to perform a bibliometric analysis. The study, without any time span and language limit, allowed to compile a comprehensive report. The analysis identified the research hotspots, active authors, institutions, countries, and thematic evolution, providing an understanding of the development context of the research. The research on information avoidance behavior is on the rise and constantly evolving with growth in publications and citations. Most of the peer-reviewed documents in the domain of information avoidance are journal articles. American organizations are the most active in publishing research on information avoidance. Researchers of information avoidance preferred to work in teams as most of the research was carried out collaboratively.

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