



Preliminary Development of a Scale for the Measurement of Information Avoidance

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Received: March 15, 2023. Revised: March 26, 2023. Accepted: March 26, 2023.

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is a preliminary study to develop a comprehensive information avoidance scale that includes various search contexts. **Research design, data and methodology:** This study is a part of exploratory sequential design of mixed method for the development of information avoidance scale. Based on the themes derived from the analysis of the in-depth interview data collected in the qualitative research of the first stage of the study, 45 preliminary items on information search and avoidance were constructed. The factors related to information searching included information recognition, information seeking purpose, and information search expectations. Individual, information, time, and system factors were related to information avoidance. Pearson's correlation analysis was performed for the correlation between factor items, and Cronbach's alpha analysis was performed for the reliability analysis of the items. Exploratory factor analysis was applied to examine the construct validity of 35 items of information avoidance. **Results:** Among the information avoidance items, one of the less relevant among information purpose items, two information factor items, and one time factor item were excluded. **Conclusions:** A secondary survey should be conducted to confirm the validity and reliability of the scale composed of adjusted items (35) based on the results of exploratory factor analysis. The strength of this preliminary scale is that it was developed based on vivid qualitative data of ordinary people who had experiences of search and avoidance in various search contexts.

Keywords : Information Behavior, Information Avoidance, Scale, Wellness

JEL Classification Codes : E44, F31, F37, G15

1. Introduction

Wellness means overall health and happiness in terms of physical, mental and social aspects. In order for people to maintain this wellness, it is very important to search for and utilize the right information. Because, if people have the right information, they can make healthy choices in various everyday situations.

However, with the rapid increase in the amount of information today, information congestion has been aggravated. Paradoxically, despite the increased amount of easily accessible information, it is a daily occurrence that people who need to make healthy decisions avoid information in order to maintain wellness.

Human information avoidance is an interdisciplinary research interest. It has been studied with different emphasis to investigate human information avoidance in

* Acknowledgement: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea(NRF-2019S1A5A8037668).

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communication sciences, psychology, health sciences, economics, and information science. Several definitions of information avoidance have been proposed by various academic fields and researchers. A widely accepted definition is “any behavior designed to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information” (Sweeny et al. 2010, 341).

Psychology or health science has mainly discussed in relation to psychological, emotional, and affective aspects. Health science considers cognitive, emotional and affective factors such as disease awareness, anxiety, self-efficacy, perceived crisis, uncertainty, coping ability, and personality characteristics as variables related to information avoidance. In particular, the information avoidance scale developed in psychology takes a hypothetical scenario method assuming a specific situation (Howell & Shepperd, 2016; Miller et al. 2011; Sexton & Dugas, 2008; Miller, 1987).

This study aims to develop a measurement tool that emphasizes the interactive aspect between the searcher and information by reflecting information characteristics based on data derived from information avoidance experiences in various contexts. In the age of information explosion, information avoidance behavior is expected to continue to increase. Therefore, in order to evolve into a human-friendly information environment, an information avoidance scale reflecting the characteristics of information is required at the personal or social level.

2. Literature Review

Information avoidance behavior has been evaluated in communication, psychology, public health, library and information, and economic studies.

Previous studies related to information avoidance have been conducted in the contexts of tasks (Anderson 2006), health information (Addison, 2017; Howell & Shepperd, 2016; Emanuel et al., 2015; Barbour et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2011; Sairanen & Savolainen, 2010; Miles, 2008; Sexton & Dugas, 2008; Mayer et al., 2007; Muris et al., 1994; Miller, 1987), disaster information (Choo, 2017; Yang. & Kahlor, 2013; Gangemi et al., 2012; Neidell, 2008), and daily life (Golman et al., 2017; Isaksson, 2014; Narayan et al., 2011).

Previous studies have used quantitative (Addison, 2017; Emanuel et al., 2015; Barbour et al., 2012; Gangemi et al., 2012; Miles et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 2007; Muris et al., 1994), qualitative (Isaksson, 2014; Narayan et al., 2011; Sairanen & Savolainen, 2010; Anderson, 2006), and mixed (Addison, 2017; Isaksson, 2014) methodologies to explore information avoidance in a specific context or to develop measurement scales (Howell & Shepperd, 2016; Miller et al., 2011; Sexton & Dugas, 2008; Miller, 1987). In addition, literature analyses have been conducted to explore the

theoretical background of information avoidance (Golman et al., 2017; Choo, 2017; Sweeny et al., 2010; Case et al., 2005).

Information overload, lack of information literacy, time, and interest, indolence, and excessive options may lead to information avoidance (Isaksson, 2014). Information avoidance has been evaluated mainly in health studies using psycho-emotional factors, such as disease awareness, anxiety, self-efficacy, perceived crisis, uncertainty, and coping ability (Kim, 2021). Recent studies have also evaluated situational factors, information literacy, and informational aspects.

Previous studies have improved our understanding of information avoidance in specific contexts. However, such studies have only been conducted in certain contexts or have evaluated only theoretical factors. In addition, tools to measure information avoidance have mainly been developed for use in the field of psychology. As a result, such tools are based on psychological factors and measure health information avoidance.

This study aims to develop a universal information avoidance scale in various contexts while overcoming the limitations of previous studies.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Study Design

This study was designed in two stages, qualitative and quantitative, using "exploratory sequential design of mixed method" for scale development (Creswell & Clark 2011, 124). This study investigated the validity of preliminary scales as part of the second stage quantitative research.

In the first stage of research, qualitative data were collected and analyzed for scale development. By using the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998), information avoidance experiences of various contexts and different levels were collected and analyzed to derive themes that constitute information avoidance experiences. In other words, it analyzed information avoidance experience among various participants and in various contexts, including the seeking of information on tasks (researchers, students, and professionals), health (general public and patients), purchases (consumers), disasters (general public), and social opinions (general public) (Kim, 2022). In the second research stage, a scale was developed and statistical validity is demonstrated. Develop scale items based on themes derived from the 1st stage study, design scales, and verify statistical validity through evaluation process. This study was a preliminary study for scale development in the second stage.

3.2. Preliminary Items

45 preliminary items on information search and avoidance were constructed. The factors related to information searching included information recognition (3

items), information seeking purpose (4 items), and information search expectations (3 items). Individual (10 items), information (17 items), time (4 items), and system factors (4 items) were related to information avoidance (Kim 2022) (table 1).

Table 1: Preliminary Items of information Avoidance

Information Search		
Category	Subcategories	Items
Information Searching	Information Awareness	1. to take the lead in my area of interest 2. to adapt and grow in my life 3. to communicate with others
	Purpose of Seeking Information	1. to expand my knowledge. 2. to grow my point of view. 3. to find the basis for my actions 4. for simple interest
	Information Search Expectations	1.Expectations Regarding Confidence in searching 2.Expectations of search results 3.Expectations about the future that solving search problems will bring
Information Avoidance		
Individual	Basic Ability	1. Linguistic limitations 2. Lack of prior or background knowledge
	Information literacy	3. Unknown information location (website or book) 4. Difficulty selecting search terms (keywords) 5. Difficulty selecting quality information 6. Difficulty judging subject suitability
	Situation	7. No time for search 8. Lack of psychological motivation to search 9. Tired 10. Burden of payment
Information	Quantity of Information	1. Repeated content in search results 2. Large number of search results 3. Few search results
	Quality of Information	4. Lack of Accuracy Information 5. Lack of Currency Information 6. Lack of Novelty Information 7. Lack of Practicality 8. Lack of reliability Information
	Subjective Perceptions of Information	9. Information unsuitable for the situation and level 10. Information contradicts opinions and beliefs 11. Causes anxiety or fear 12. Conflicting content 13. Contents that cause prejudice
	Form of Information	14. Non-specific information (statistics and video information) 15. Poorly structured information 16. No summary of main points 17. Sloppy sentence description
Time	Time Taken	1. Excessive time spent in search 2. Lack of time for reading and understanding search results
	Change in Situation	3. Search no longer needed 4. Information not necessary immediately
System	Use of System	1. Excessive advertisements 2. Demand of excessive personal information 3. Complicated registration and use 4. Non-working link

3.3. Preliminary Scale Evaluation

3.3.1. Data Collection

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of JWU. The study respondents were selected based on their demographic characteristics, including education, occupation, location and gender. The sample size required for validation of the measurement tool was 5- to 10-fold higher than the number of questions (i.e., approximately 100-200 respondents) (Devellis 2017).

3.3.2. Data Analysis

SPSS (version 21.0; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and AMOS (version 21.0) software were used to determine the reliability and validity of the developed tool. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented as frequencies with percentages or means with standard deviations.

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed for the correlation between factor items, and Cronbach's alpha analysis was performed for the reliability analysis of the items. Exploratory factor analysis was applied to examine the construct validity of 35 items of information avoidance.

	Doctorate	4(2.2)
Job	Office worker	118(65.9)
	Professional	17(9.5)
	Houswife	23(12.8)
	Student	2(1.1)
	No Job	10(5.6)
	etc	9(5.0)
Frequency of IA	1-3 times/week	65(36.3)
	4-6 times/week	38(21.2)
	Every day	76(42.5)
Seeking information type	Task Information	22(12.3)
	Health Information	10(5.6)
	Purchase Information	71(39.7)
	Society/Opinion Information	47(26.3)
	Disaster Information	2(1.1)
	Other Interests	27(15.1)

4. Results

4.1. Respondents

For this preliminary test, a survey was conducted by requesting an online specialized survey agency, and the data from a total of 179 respondents who participated in the survey were analyzed. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents included in the preliminary test analysis. The respondents were aged ≥ 27 years with a college education or higher degree who had experience with avoiding information (table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=179)

Variable	Category	Frequency(%)
Gender	Male	88(49.2)
	Female	91(50.8)
Age	27-29	43(24.0)
	30-39	45(25.1)
	40-49	44(24.6)
	50-59	23(12.8)
	60-69	24(13.4)
Education	Bachelor	148(82.7)
	Master	27(15.1)

4.2. The Descriptive Analysis of Items

The descriptive analysis of responses to scale items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Responses to Items

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Awareness 1	3.66	.867	-.807	.865
Awareness 2	4.15	.601	-.224	.374
Awareness 3	3.96	.729	-.730	1.428
Purpose 1	4.06	.751	-.987	1.939
Purpose 2	3.94	.728	-.347	-.008
Purpose 3	4.06	.762	-.710	.982
Purpose 4	3.43	.861	-.155	-.442
Expectation 1	4.01	.640	-.394	.729
Expectation 2	3.82	.780	-.394	-.075
Expectation 3	3.91	.717	-.414	.781
Individual 1	3.41	.946	-.295	-.518
Individual 2	3.16	.898	-.126	-.330
Individual 3	2.94	.972	-.024	-.893
Individual 4	2.78	.969	.200	-.689
Individual 5	3.09	.987	-.051	-.694
Individual 6	2.78	1.003	.124	-.516
Individual 7	2.47	.973	.457	-.140
Individual 8	2.54	.961	.548	-.212
Individual 9	2.84	.959	-.068	-.622
Individual 10	3.36	1.021	-.329	-.327
Information 1	3.59	.676	-.264	-.065
Information 2	3.71	.817	-.291	-.342
Information 3	2.95	.901	.239	-.152
Information 4	3.06	.853	.332	-.420
Information 5	3.01	.887	.076	-.388
Information 6	3.15	.883	-.053	-.115
Information 7	2.93	.881	.193	-.179
Information 8	2.91	.837	.345	-.195
Information 9	2.88	.859	.401	-.616

Information 10	2.71	.796	.571	.193
Information 11	2.55	.855	.514	.031
Information 12	2.98	.824	.214	-.758
Information 13	2.91	.879	.036	-.465
Information 14	2.96	.860	.086	-.627
Information 15	3.04	.908	.150	-.498
Information 16	3.11	.867	-.219	-.405
Information 17	2.99	.951	.090	-.371
Time 1	3.25	.871	-.089	-.044
Time 2	3.15	.927	.037	-.683
Time 3	2.84	.923	.143	-.536
Time 4	3.03	.827	.299	-.108
System 1	3.75	.969	-.575	-.112
System 2	3.33	1.032	-.139	-.475
System 3	3.26	.991	.013	-.495
System 4	3.06	.894	.212	.014

As shown in Table 3, the mean and standard deviation were within the theoretical range. Kline (2016) suggested that absolute skewness and kurtosis values of ≤ 3 and ≤ 10 , respectively, indicated normality, whereas Curran, West, and Finch (1996) suggested that these values should not exceed 2 and 7, respectively. The skewness and kurtosis values showed that the data were normally distributed based on the criteria of Kline (2016) and Curran, West, and Finch (1996).

4.3. Correlation Coefficients for the Scale Items

The correlation coefficients for the scale items are as follows. A correlation coefficient of 0.2–0.6 is appropriate.

The correlation between information recognition items ranged from a minimum of 0.343 to a maximum of 0.385. The correlation between information search purpose items ranged from 0.168 to 0.644, Correlation between information search expectation items ranged from 0.492 to 0.598, and correlation between personal factors related to information avoidance behavior ranged from 0.479 to 0.598. In addition, the correlation between information factors related to information avoidance behavior ranged from 0.195 to 0.697, the correlation between time factors ranged from 0.103 to 0.647, and the correlation between system factors ranged from 0.352 to 0.58.

4.4. Reliability Analysis

This study performed reliability analysis for all items. Using the Cronbach’s alpha, which is the reliability of the scale, the corrected correlation coefficient was calculated between individual item and total scores. Normal and good reliability was indicated by Cronbach’s alpha of $\geq .6$ and $\geq .7$, respectively (Nunnally, 1978). The correlation between the item and total score was considered acceptable and unacceptable when Cronbach’s alpha was $\geq .2$ and $< .2$, respectively. An item was considered problematic if the Cronbach’s alpha was increased after removal of the item.

The reliability of information recognition items was .617

(i.e., acceptable). There were no changes in the item-total score correlation coefficients and the Cronbach’s alpha when the items were deleted, so all three items were considered to be good.

The reliability of seeking purpose was good (.712) (table 4). When the item was deleted, the item score-total score correlation coefficient of the fourth item was .284, which is lower than that for the other items. In addition, the Cronbach’s alpha value after item deletion was .787 and the reliability increased from .712 to .787. Therefore, it was appropriate to remove this item. As shown in Table 4, this item had a relatively low correlation with other items.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis for Information Seeking Purpose

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	
.712	4	
Item Score-Total Score Statistics		
	Corrected Item Score-total Score Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha after Item Deletion
Purpose 1	.549	.620
Purpose 2	.644	.565
Purpose 3	.570	.606
Purpose 4	.284	.787

The reliability of search expectation was good (.763). There were no differences in the item score-total score correlations or the Cronbach’s alpha value when the item was deleted, so all three items were considered to be good.

The reliability of the individual factor scale was good (.884). In addition, there were no changes in the item score-total score correlations after item deletion. However, the Cronbach’s alpha increased very slightly and nonsignificantly when items 1–10 were removed, so the items were good.

The information factor had very good reliability (.912) (table 5). When the item was deleted, the item score-total score correlations were relatively lower for items 1 and 2 than for the other items. Similarly, the Cronbach’s alpha was slightly reduced when the item was deleted. As shown in table 8, item 1 and 2 had relatively lower correlations with other questions and thus were removed.

Table 5: Information Factor Reliability Analysis

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	
.921	17	
Item Score-Total Score Statistics		

	Corrected Item Score-total Score Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha after Item Deletion
Information 1	.339	.922
Information 2	.250	.925
Information 3	.655	.915
Information 4	.712	.913
Information 5	.735	.913
Information 6	.679	.914
Information 7	.664	.915
Information 8	.730	.913
Information 9	.661	.915
Information 10	.631	.916
Information 11	.532	.918
Information 12	.489	.919
Information 13	.602	.916
Information 14	.678	.914
Information 15	.673	.914
Information 16	.660	.915
Information 17	.639	.915

The time factor had a good reliability (.770). When the item was deleted, the item score-total score correlations and Cronbach's alpha were not changed, so the four items were considered to be good.

The system factors had a good reliability (.835). When the item was deleted, the item score-total score correlation was unchanged, whereas the Cronbach's alpha was increased to .845. Overall, the items were considered to be good.

4.5. Correlations between Subscales

Table 6 presents the correlation coefficients between the subscales (total score) of the information avoidance behavior scale. The correlation coefficients between subscales were .288 to .603, indicating significant correlations.

4.6. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 7 presents the exploratory factor analysis of the 35 questions of the information avoidance behavior scale. Because the scale was based on four factors, exploratory factor analysis was performed using the principal axis factor decomposition method. For the interpretation of the subfactors for each item, four-way rotation was performed using the Promax method.

Table 7: Information Avoidance Coefficient Matrix

Pattern Matrix ^a				
	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Individual 1	.098	.532	-.255	.153
Individual 2	.005	.814	-.139	.054
Individual 3	.033	.658	.073	.005
Individual 4	-.274	.739	.239	.099
Individual 5	.070	.824	-.050	-.119
Individual 6	.057	.569	.276	-.069
Individual 7	.006	.303	.506	-.126
Individual 8	-.030	.386	.494	-.086
Individual 9	.042	.376	.443	-.121
Individual 10	.053	.467	-.035	.066
Information 1	.287	.165	-.136	.139
Information 2	.194	.036	-.052	.183
Information 3	.716	.089	-.114	.096
Information 4	.704	.002	.029	.085
Information 5	.817	-.001	-.061	.046
Information 6	.800	-.084	-.032	.030
Information 7	.698	.007	-.003	.091
Information 8	.641	-.123	.253	.002
Information 9	.646	.206	-.027	-.053
Information 10	.171	-.087	.583	.124
Information 11	-.043	-.002	.665	.152
Information 12	-.042	-.047	.611	.143
Information 13	.076	-.088	.615	.158
Information 14	.578	.105	.175	-.123
Information 15	.643	-.057	.265	-.203
Information 16	.680	-.069	.149	-.126
Information 17	.342	-.124	.561	-.113
Time 1	.398	.238	-.130	.263
Time 2	.225	.225	.031	.299
Time 3	.348	-.001	.252	.173
Time 4	.343	-.012	.214	.267
System 1	.083	.071	-.114	.543
System 2	-.135	.018	.137	.862
System 3	-.075	-.015	.157	.791
System 4	.128	-.072	.146	.610

Note: Extraction method: Principal axis factoring.

Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.

^aRotation converged in seven iterations.

Items with factor loadings of <.3 or .4 were considered inappropriate. For the information factor, questions 1 and 2 had a value <.3 and a poor reliability (Table 19). Therefore, information factors 1 and 2 were removed. In addition, the second item of the time factor was removed because it was not clearly related to the other factors (i.e., value <.3). The exploratory factor analysis removed three items and confirmed the usefulness of four factors (table 8).

Table 8: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Pattern Matrix ^a				
	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Individual 1	.074	.519	-.215	.139
Individual 2	.015	.820	-.160	.052
Individual 3	.042	.678	.034	.023
Individual 4	-.235	.762	.172	.103

Individual 5	.079	.828	-.078	-.115
Individual 6	.081	.590	.218	-.052
Individual 7	.021	.317	.465	-.113
Individual 8	-.050	.387	.503	-.077
Individual 9	.024	.376	.454	-.116
Individual 10	.030	.462	-.008	.068
Information 3	.739	.096	-.140	.089
Information 4	.740	.016	-.017	.072
Information 5	.811	.004	-.059	.047
Information 6	.817	-.067	-.064	.032
Information 7	.760	.033	-.090	.102
Information 8	.671	-.105	.204	.004
Information 9	.641	.198	-.018	-.068
Information 10	.190	-.063	.542	.136
Information 11	.004	.026	.593	.158
Information 12	-.082	-.067	.681	.127
Information 13	.029	-.107	.692	.151
Information 14	.561	.099	.192	-.123
Information 15	.628	-.062	.276	-.197
Information 16	.657	-.077	.176	-.130
Information 17	.323	-.137	.590	-.122
Time 1	.421	.234	-.135	.225
Time 3	.366	.007	.235	.157
Time 4	.358	.000	.200	.260
System 1	.077	.072	-.083	.533
System 2	-.112	.040	.132	.844
System 3	-.037	.022	.111	.800
System 4	.159	-.044	.111	.615

Note: Extraction method: Principal axis factoring.
 Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.
^aRotation converged in six iterations.

Table 9: Exploratory Factor Analysis

	Pattern Matrix ^a		
	Factor		
	1	2	3
Individual 1	-.111	.462	.147
Individual 2	-.151	.791	.060
Individual 3	.009	.709	.028
Individual 4	-.191	.850	.108
Individual 5	-.028	.829	-.111
Individual 6	.184	.667	-.052
Individual 7	.315	.448	-.117
Individual 8	.262	.531	-.080
Individual 9	.306	.506	-.120
Individual 10	-.014	.470	.072
Information 3	.627	.013	.108
Information 4	.723	-.039	.088
Information 5	.764	-.064	.065
Information 6	.773	-.137	.049
Information 7	.688	-.041	.120
Information 8	.822	-.103	.011
Information 9	.618	.160	-.056
Information 10	.547	.060	.135
Information 11	.389	.174	.153
Information 12	.368	.109	.117
Information 13	.485	.065	.142
Information 14	.697	.118	-.123
Information 15	.839	-.030	-.202
Information 16	.796	-.074	-.128
Information 17	.725	.001	-.121
Time 1	.302	.167	.240
Time 3	.518	.035	.166

Time 4	.480	.014	.273
System 1	-.014	.022	.555
System 2	-.076	.044	.872
System 3	-.013	.017	.832
System 4	.200	-.055	.643

Note: Extraction method: Principal axis factoring.
 Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.
^aRotation converged in six iterations.

All factor loadings exceeded .3. The results of the exploratory factor analysis, based on the three factors with consideration of the item content and interpretation, are presented in table 9.

The correlations among the three extracted subfactors are presented in table 10.

Table 10: Correlation between Subfactors

Factor Correlation Matrix			
Factor	1	2	3
1	1.000	.600	.501
2	.600	1.000	.291
3	.501	.291	1.000

Note: Extraction method: Principal axis factoring.
 Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.

5. Discussion

This preliminary scale of information avoidance is a scale developed based on the searcher's vivid experience data, focusing on the interactive elements of information such as the properties of information.

In this study, 35 items consisting of three factors related to information avoidance: individual, information, and system were developed and verified as a preliminary scale. In addition, as factors related to information search, the searcher's information recognition, information seeking purpose, and expectations for information search were developed and presented.

This scale emphasizes the interactive aspects with information, complements the limitations of existing information avoidance scales that have focused on various emotional, affective, and perceptual aspects, and can be seen as contributing to a holistic understanding of information avoidance behavior.

As a result of the analysis of this preliminary scale, "Large number of search results", "Repeated content in search results", and "Lack of time for reading and understanding search results" items were deleted. Since these items were frequently mentioned in the qualitative experience data of research participants and were frequently pointed out as causes of avoidance in previous studies on information avoidance, it is necessary to investigate the reason.

In order for this preliminary scale to increase its usability in the actual information environment and to become a valid

and reliable scale, continuous verification research will be needed. In addition, follow-up studies should be additionally conducted to identify related variables that cause information avoidance behavior. The utilization of this scale will be further increased only when follow-up studies examining the influence relationship with various mediating variables are conducted.

6. Conclusion

Wellness is an effort to improve the quality of our lives, aiming for a healthy and balanced life mentally, physically and emotionally. Information plays a vital role in achieving these wellness goals.

This preliminary study developed a multipurpose information avoidance scale that can be applied in various contexts. The scale was developed based on factors derived from qualitative data on information avoidance in various information seeking contexts. The preliminary scale is composed of personal, information, and system factors.

Existing information avoidance scales can only measure health information and are based on psychological or personality characteristics. In the present study, this preliminary scale measured information avoidance from various perspectives after taking measures to overcome the limitations of previous.

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