

Fear of Spoilers: A Loss Aversion Perspective on Story Consumption Among Young Adults

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Abstract

This paper examines spoiler aversion in young adult viewers under the theoretical perspective of loss aversion to imply that the psychological loss of suspense gives stronger emotional effects than the otherwise emotional advantage due to foreknowledge. Based on the cross-sectional mixed-methods survey of people between the ages of 18 and 25, the research will focus on how the viewer type, the genre sensitivity, and the previous knowledge about the narrative impact the emotional involvement and the excitement of being exposed to media. Quantitative results show an average dislike towards spoilers, whereby greater liking is predicted by the dislike. Despite no statistical differences of significance, it is represented by descriptive data that the fan of mystery and thriller are more sensitive. Qualitative study also showed that these include disappointment and frustration, also the use of avoidance as one of the coping strategies. Such data sets spoiler aversion in its complexity that is more emotion-based and influenced by pre-conceived narrative aspects and mental preconceptions.

Keywords: *Spoiler aversion, loss aversion, media enjoyment, genre sensitivity, emotional engagement*

1. Introduction

Noted Walter Cronkite, the so-called most trusted man in America, who once pointed out that, the ethic of a journalist is to be able to recognize his prejudices and his biases and not to allow them to be in print. This utopian base has continued to inspire students who study journalism to report and expose apparent injustices in the society. The history of journalism has always been the reflection to the society-based on truth, integrity and honesty. The spirit of journalism of telling it like it is, telling it all, and keeping it all came to be sacred. Nevertheless, journalism has undergone massive changes during the age of modernity (Swart, 2021).

New-age media has transformed to a point where it not only broadcasts news or information, but forms the perception of people, media, politics and even law courts. Well-publicized incidents such as the deaths of Jiah Khan and Sushant Singh Rajput are similar to the fact that sensationalism regularly outweighs reportage based on reality. Similar controversies can be pointed out like the case of the Kannada actor, Darshan where covert PR strategies and media manipulation served to queue down justice.

1.1 The Role of Digital Influence

Influencer culture and focused advertising have taken over the existing media environment and made it highly manipulated. Acting as a relatable voice, the content presented by influencers will have the impression of personal opinion that is in fact paid. In the meantime, user profiles can be psychologically categorized and manipulated by the algorithms in creating the media feed that inclines or rejects the user to focus on a particular opinion or point of view. This also brings into question machinations of manipulation, consent and digital privacy.

This media power is especially strong in the cases of emerging adulthood (between 18 and 25 years of age), where people are largely opinion-shapers, content-consumers, and part of the voting populace at large, are digital natives. Their media food is overrun by platforms such as Instagram, Youtube and Twitter. The misinformation, or as called by the media, the "fake news" spread by such platforms leads to a global crisis that endangers democratic values, health, and social unity.

This is an emerging context between media, technology and the society that requires reappraisal of ethics about ethical journalism, controlling contents and the psychology of young media users

that are vulnerable. Trust, narrative framing and digital manipulation form a critical subject in the contemporary study of media.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 What is Spoiler, Spoiler Aversion?

One of the issues that individuals in the digital age are most concerned with is spoilers, or early exposure to crucial plot twists. The big concern here is among young adults which India has an abundance of when it comes to media consumption. They live in a world of individualization onto social networks and run into accidental spoilers on social sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The phenomenon of spoiler aversion can be assumed to be an emotional, behavioral act intended to maintain narrative suspense, immersion, and surprise. It represents a wider tendency towards control, authenticity and trust in the setting of digital storytelling.

2.2 Narrative disruption and Loss Aversion

Economists based on behavioral economics have coined this as loss aversion which is a reason why spoilers are very disruptive emotionally. According to Kahneman and Tversky (1979), emotional loss is felt stronger as compared to gains of the same proportion. By decreasing suspense and emotion payoff, spoilers are a psychological loss. This is also connected by Schnall (2017) to such emotional reactions on disappointment or disgust, and it is worth noting that there is a cognitive-emotional price tag on spoiled narratives.

2.3 Spoiler exposure, social media and emotional regulation

The use of social media encourages highly emotional interaction which in many cases supersedes adhering to the narrative. According to Wasike (2023), the fear of social ostracism is more of an inhibitor than factual correction- meaning that the immediate factor that contributes to spoiler sharing can be peer normalcy rather than ethics. Masking filters or spoiler warnings are the self-regulatory features whose development was influenced by emotional and social motives.

2.4 Credibility of Media and Type of Viewer

Where spoilers are concerned, responses of viewers can be seen as a manifestation of underlying

perceptions of media credibility. It was found that the perception of news credibility is affected by journalistic roles compared with demographics (Cassidy, 2007). In a similar way, the hardcore fans can either see spoilers as narrative privacy whereas, the casual watchers do not care one way or another-a demonstration of how viewer identity influences the content valuation.

2.5 Platform Specific Dynamics

Identifying the characteristics of misinformation shared across the platforms, Neyazi (2021) discovered that the user cultures may cause this or that sharing more than others. Also, the release of spoilers is platform-dependent, as they might be encouraged in open forums and restricted in closed ones such as WhatsApp based on the trust and group rules.

2.6 Narrative Trust and political disengagement

Rajadurai (2023) attributes the loss of youth political interest in India to a lack of interest in leadership. This kind of withdrawal is also observable in the field of media consumption, where the problem of spoilers undermines the investment of the emotions. The absence of narrative trust, even the equivalent of political alienation, may trigger the withdrawal of young users into a story-free zone.

2.7 Openings and Prospects

Research on spoilers is interdisciplinary since it addresses psychological, cultural, and platform-specific issues; thus, there is no study that solely views spoilers in the Indian context. Further research needs to be conducted into the interactions of spoiler behavior with trust, emotional regulation, and online peer dynamics in order to develop media in more informed ways and educate the public through literacy training.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Field of Study

It studied young adults (18-25) in Bengaluru, Karnataka who consume narrative-related media like films, TV shows, and books and video games shared on a daily basis.

3.2. Design of Research

The study assumed a cross-sectional and sprinkled mixed-methodology, where the quantitative research was combined with the qualitative one (both in the form of Likert-type questions and multiple-choice survey items, on the one hand, and open-ended questions, on the other). It is shown that the study was meant to evaluate the effect of spoiler aversion in terms of loss aversion and its impact on enjoyment of media.

3.3 Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Inclusion: Study members who were 18 to 25, used English, routinely used the media, and signed an informed digital consent form.

Exclusion: People who do not fall within the age category, those who have not been involved in the usage of narrative media during the last six months, irregular or overlapping answers.

3.4 Sampling

Purposive sampling on digital platforms was also employed to contact eligible participants in the study. It was possible to gather 51 valid responses, which are enough to undergo exploratory mixed methods analysis.

3.5 Data collection

- Loss aversion: e.g., concurring with statements such as: A spoiler is like taking a personal loss.
- Differences in the type of viewers: A comparison of casual and hardcore viewers.
- Genre sensitivity: Experimental participants chose genres which they believed were the most influenced by spoilers.
- Media pleasure: Measured using Likert items and thoughts on the effect of narratives.

3.6 Analysis of data

Quantitative:

- Descriptive statistics (SD, mean, variance) as a measure of the trends.
- Inferential tests:

-T-tests on differences in viewer types

-Genre-based ANOVA comparison

-Person correlation on the dislike of spoiler and aversion of loss

The analysis of the influence of spoiler aversion on the enjoyment through linear regression

Qualitative: Based on thematic analysis, themes such as emotional responses and coping strategies were determined, and the results were grouped into such categories as emotional impact, narrative immersion, and strategic engagement.

3.7 Ethical Implication

The study was of ethical nature: it was voluntary, informed consent was provided, a right to withdraw, anonymity and safe data storage. The study carried a low level of risk because it was based on day-to-day exposure on the media and spoiler.

4. Results

In this section, the author gives the results of both quantitative and qualitative data that were obtained through a cross-sectional survey. Relationships were analyzed between spoiler aversion, emotional disengagement, avoidance behaviour, loss aversion, and media enjoyment. Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics (t-tests, ANOVA), Pearson correlations and linear regression had been interpreted. Open-ended responses were also subject to thematic analysis to take account of qualitative shades.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables*

Variable	Mean		Mode Standard Deviation Variance	
Spoiler Dislike	3.0784	3	1.3554	1.8370
Avoidance Behaviour	0.6470	1	0.4779	0.2284

Emotional Disengagement	3.4118	4	1.1577	1.3402
Loss Aversion	2.7843	3	1.0903	1.1888

Table 2 *Minimum, Maximum, and Range of Key Variables*

Variable		Minimum Maximum Range	
Spoiler Dislike	1	5	4
Avoidance Behaviour	0	1	1
Emotional Disengagement	1	5	4
Loss Aversion	1	5	4

Table 3 *Distribution Analysis: Skewness and Kurtosis*

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Spoiler Dislike	-0.10	-1.12
Avoidance Behaviour	-0.63	-1.66
Emotional Disengagement	-0.55	-0.52

Loss Aversion -0.21 -1.00

Distribution analysis revealed slight negative skewness in spoiler aversion and emotional disengagement, indicating a tendency toward higher aversion scores.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

4.2.1 Viewer Type and Spoiler Dislike

Table 4 *Independent Samples t-test: Viewer Type and Spoiler Dislike*

Viewer Type	M	SD	t	df	p
Casual Viewers	3.05	1.10			
Hardcore Fans	3.21		1.18 0.47 49 .644		

An independent sample t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between casual viewers and hardcore fans in spoiler aversion.

4.2.2 Genre Differences in Spoiler Dislike

Table 5 *One-way ANOVA: Spoiler Dislike by Genre*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	1.34	4		0.33 5 0.78 .541	
Within Groups			20.95 46 0.455		

Total	22.				
	29				
	50				

No statistically significant difference was found among genres, although descriptive patterns indicated slightly higher spoiler aversion among mystery/thriller consumers.

Table 6 *Descriptive Pattern: Sum of Genres*

Genre	Sum
Mystery/Thriller	37
Horror	23
Drama	17
Sci-Fi/Fantasy	12
Comedy	6
Romance	7

4.2.3 Correlation Between Loss Aversion and Spoiler Dislike

Table 7 *Correlation Between Loss Aversion and Spoiler Dislike*

	Spoiler Dislike	Loss Aversion
Spoiler Dislike	1	.250*
Loss Aversion	.250*	1

*p = .076

A Pearson correlation indicated a weak positive correlation between loss aversion and spoiler dislike.

4.2.4 Predicting Media Enjoyment from Spoiler Dislike

Table 8 *Linear Regression: Spoiler Dislike Predicting Media Enjoyment*

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	p
0.467	0.218	0.201	1.053	.006

Spoiler aversion significantly predicted media enjoyment. The coefficient (B = 0.4) suggests that individuals who dislike spoilers tend to enjoy narratives more when unspoiled.

4.3 Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis

Table 9 *Thematic Analysis of Participant Responses*

Theme Domain	Subtheme	Description & Example Quote
Emotional Impact	Disappointment & Frustration	“It ruined the suspense.” – MP, 21, Female
	Emotional Neutrality	“Spoilers have no impact on me.” – RD, 21, Male
Narrative Engagement	Emotional Preparation	“It excites me to watch it.” – SK, 20, Female
	Decreased Immersion	“Can’t experience the story firsthand.” – HS, 23, Male

	Enhanced Appreciation	“Focus more on the little details.” – DP, 20, Female
	Conditional Engagement	“Spoilers or no spoilers, I will watch.” – RS, 22, Male
Coping Strategies	Reframing/Rationalizing	“Decide if it’s worth my time.” – NT, 19, Female
	Spoiler Avoidance	“Really upset, won’t watch anymore.” – AJ, 21, Male
	Strategic Spoiler Use	“Spoilers about new episode excite me.” – KR, 20, Female

Thematic analysis highlighted diverse emotional and cognitive reactions to spoilers, suggesting a wide spectrum of coping behaviors and engagement strategies.

5. Discussion

This study investigated spoiler aversion among young adults through the lens of loss aversion, suggesting that spoilers may be perceived as psychological losses due to the disruption of suspense and emotional payoff. Although the correlation between loss aversion and spoiler dislike was weak ($r = .250$, $p = .076$), qualitative responses vividly described spoilers as “ruining the suspense” or “killing excitement,” reinforcing the emotional weight of narrative disruption. Participants with higher loss aversion also reported emotional disengagement, indicating a diminished narrative experience.

Viewer type did not show a significant difference in spoiler aversion ($t = 0.47$, $p = .644$), yet qualitative data revealed meaningful differences in interpretation. Hardcore fans often approached spoilers analytically using them to deepen engagement or predict outcomes while casual viewers

were more likely to disengage entirely upon encountering spoilers. These contrasting reactions underscore that spoiler sensitivity may depend more on psychological orientation than media consumption frequency.

Similarly, while genre-based differences were not statistically significant ($F = 0.78$, $p = .541$), descriptive trends indicated that fans of mystery and thriller genres exhibited higher spoiler sensitivity. These genres depend heavily on suspense and twists, making spoilers more disruptive. Participants stated that knowing a mystery's outcome "ruins the core appeal," suggesting genre plays an important contextual role in spoiler aversion.

Regression analysis showed that spoiler dislike significantly predicted media enjoyment ($R^2 = 0.218$, $p = .006$). Participants who disliked spoilers reported reduced immersion and narrative satisfaction. Conversely, a few respondents especially those with anxiety or a high need for emotional preparedness found spoilers helpful in managing expectations and enhancing focus. These differing experiences reflect the complex interaction of personality traits, narrative preferences, and emotional regulation.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study presents a layered understanding of spoiler aversion. While statistical data offered measurable insights, personal reflections revealed deeper emotional meanings. Many participants framed spoilers as emotional losses, even when statistical correlations were weak, highlighting the value of a mixed-methods approach.

The results have both theoretical and practical implications. They partially support loss aversion theory and suggest that cognitive biases play a role in shaping emotional responses to narrative disruptions. Practically, content platforms could adopt spoiler-blocking tools or offer viewer-controlled filters to accommodate diverse preferences. Educators and therapists might also use spoiler aversion to explore emotional processing, narrative engagement, and information regulation.

The study, spoiler aversion is not merely a reaction to premature information but reflects broader concerns about emotional payoff, narrative trust, and control. While some hypotheses were not

statistically confirmed, the emotional narratives captured in this study provide meaningful insights into how spoilers affect engagement in an increasingly digital and personalized media environment. Future research should examine personality traits, platform effects, and cultural differences to better understand the evolving spoiler experience.

6. Conclusion

This study explored spoiler aversion among young adults through the theoretical framework of loss aversion. Findings from the cross-sectional mixed-methods design indicate that while spoiler aversion varies by individual, it is primarily driven by a perception of psychological loss. Though the correlation between loss aversion and spoiler dislike was weak, qualitative insights confirmed that participants often experienced spoilers as a disruption of emotional engagement and narrative immersion.

Spoiler aversion was found to significantly predict overall media enjoyment, suggesting that emotional suspense and anticipation play a central role in enhancing narrative experiences. Genre-specific differences were not statistically significant, yet descriptive data revealed that viewers of mystery, thriller, and drama genres reported heightened sensitivity to spoilers.

Viewer type (casual vs. hardcore) also did not yield significant quantitative differences, though qualitative responses demonstrated that hardcore fans often reframed spoilers as tools for analysis, while casual viewers were more likely to report emotional disengagement. This supports the notion that spoiler aversion is highly context-dependent, shaped by individual cognitive preferences, emotional regulation strategies, and viewing habits.

In conclusion, spoilers are not merely informational interruptions but are psychologically meaningful disruptions that can interfere with media gratification. The phenomenon of spoiler aversion reflects broader emotional processes related to anticipation, control, and narrative payoff. This study contributes to the emerging field of media psychology by reinforcing the idea that storytelling is a cognitive-emotional experience shaped by both narrative structure and audience psychology.

6.1 Implications

The findings of this research have several practical and theoretical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, the application of loss aversion theory to spoiler behavior offers new insights into how cognitive biases affect media consumption. The weak but consistent link between spoiler aversion and psychological loss supports the hypothesis that anticipated emotional outcomes influence behavior, even in leisure contexts. This connection may also help bridge behavioral economics and media psychology in future interdisciplinary research.

Practically, content platforms and media distributors can benefit from the findings by incorporating spoiler-sensitive design features. For example, spoiler-blocking tools, optional spoiler tags, or time-delayed comment sections could preserve the integrity of narrative suspense for sensitive users. Additionally, promotional strategies should be designed to build anticipation while avoiding overt plot revelations, thereby respecting diverse audience preferences.

In educational and therapeutic contexts, spoiler aversion may serve as a useful lens for exploring emotional regulation, narrative engagement, and even clinical constructs like anxiety or need for closure. Media literacy programs can use spoilers as case studies to teach students about narrative structures, emotional buildup, and audience psychology. Bibliotherapy practitioners might also consider spoiler sensitivity when selecting or recommending emotionally immersive stories for therapeutic purposes.

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