Social Media Use, Fear of Crime, and Perceived Risk of Victimization

among College Students Attending Non-Residential Campuses

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Abstract

With Internet connectivity becoming increasingly accessible and mobile, more people are turning to the Internet for news. With this has come concern about partisan echo chambers, misinformation, and online filter bubbles which silo users into separate, often disparate media universes shaped by culture, confirmation bias, and personalized content. The potential for online news to influence perceptions of social, public health and public safety issues is ominous, given that perceptions and facts are sometimes at odds. This is also true for crime rates and perceptions of crime risk. Fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization can influence social integration, anxiety and psychological wellbeing, and research on the impact of social media use on these is lacking. Sampling 371 students attending non-residential community college and university campuses in Washington State, we test the predictive power of Facebook use and political ideology on fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization when controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, prior victimization, perceived community cohesion, risk-taking behaviors, and routine activities. Results indicate that Facebook use and political ideology were not significantly associated with fear of crime or perceived risk of victimization over and above these factors.

Introduction

More than half of U.S. residents (67%) turn to online social networking sites (SNS) for at least some news (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017). SNS are defined by communications and technology scholars as web-based services which allow individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Emerging research has shown that peoples' perceptions of crime are influenced by news features on SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Intravia, Wolff, Paez & Gibbs, 2017), but studies focusing on Facebook use are lacking. Facebook is unique in that users can do much more than read or watch news. Users can share, read, view, comment on and rate content obtained anywhere on the SNS—from news organizations to police departments to long-lost relatives. This diverse utility has the capability to not only inform users of local crime stories, but also to inform users of national crime reports and local instances of disorder or danger via their online social network.

Fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization correlate with a range of psychological and physiological factors (Stafford, Chandola & Marmot, 2007). Higher levels of fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization have been associated with increased levels of anxiety, withdrawal from social activities, decline in social integration, and changes in routine daily activities (Zhao, Lawtonk & Longmire, 2015). However, levels of fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization commonly do not match actual crime risk. According to 20 out of 24 Pew Research Center surveys conducted between 1993 and 2016, 57% of registered voters reported that crime had gotten worse, despite crime data collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and Federal Bureau of Investigation showing a notable decline in violent crime and property crime nationwide during the same period (Gramlich, 2019). Such an evident, subjective disconnect from objective reality raises important questions about the extent to which the rapidly evolving online media landscape shapes our perceptions.

Literature Review

The Internet 2.0 has allowed for anyone to post, blog, comment, and broadcast from virtually anywhere, at any time. As such, misinformation, partisan media echo chambers, and targeted, personalized content confirm biases and impact the way we search and consume information (Garrett et al., 2014; Pariser, 2011). That the proliferation of sensational content, misrepresented facts and false or misleading news stories is so great is no surprise, given the rapid democratization and decentralization of online news. However, awareness of and concern about the consequences of online news is also increasing, and 64% of U.S. adults say fabricated news stories cause confusion about facts, events, and issues (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017).

One salient consequence of this new abundance of online news is a growing mistrust of news media writ large. Researchers have found evidence that the mere existence of the online news market has influenced general levels of trust in news media among those who rely solely on traditional news media outlets for their news (Fisher, 2016; Watkins et al., 2015; Watkins et al., 2016). Although this mistrust is widespread, differences are more pronounced along partisan lines. A 2014 Gallup survey found that trust in the media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly among Democrats dropped to a 14-year low of 54%, while Republicans' trust in media dropped to 27%—just one point above Republicans' all-time low of 26% in 2012 (McCarthy, 2014). This mistrust in media may impact the perceived credibility of sources prior to investigation, further limiting news sources to those in line with users' ideological preferences.

Although some research has suggested that perceived credibility of online sources does not significantly impact intentionally biased information seeking online (Johnson & Kaye, 2013), a growing body of evidence

indicates that people who fall on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum do tend to search and consume online news differently (Garrett et al., 2014; Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Research suggests people generally differ in these regards according to which online platform they use to search and consume news, the heterogeneity of their network, and the topics they search (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014; Wojcieszak, 2010). There is evidence too that differences in ideological viewpoints can affect internet search behavior, whether a Facebook user will actively search for news beyond their news feed, and what content users might share (Lee et al., 2014; Lee & Ma, 2012). These differences in search behavior across political affiliations are important to consider because of the potential for information segregation to result in different perceptions of reality among members in a single community. Given this, that one half of a community may believe crime has risen drastically while the other half believes crime rates have gone down is not an unreasonable outcome to imagine.

Algorithms: The New Gatekeepers?

Differences in manual search behavior and recommendations based on user preferences are not well studied in relation to community-level crime and crime risk, though researchers have investigated the differences between what is provided by algorithms and what is manually searched for regarding traditionally polarizing topics (Aktolga & Allen, 2013; Munson & Resnick, 2010). Koutra, Bennett and Horvitz (2015) studied the browsing behavior of 29 million Internet users on the controversial topic of gun control in the wake of the shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and found that people use the Internet to access information they agree with, and that domains continue to provide a myopic view of controversial topics, despite such disruptive events. Moreover, personalization algorithms used by SNS display content of similar perspective, removing opposing views altogether, resulting in users being exposed to news shared by their friends alone (Matsa & Mitchell, 2014; Pariser, 2011). Thus, users exposed to a different type of news story than their ideological counterparts (be it fake, misleading, accurate or sensational) via an algorithm designed to recommend content based on their interests replaces the traditional gatekeepers, such as newspaper editors or network producers.

These so called "filter bubbles" are a product of marketing strategies adopted by tech giants that target advertising to user preferences (Pariser, 2011). The filter bubble effect presents the potential for individual users to live in worlds in which actual crime rates, community characteristics, and subjective probabilities of risk are not congruous with the information and symbols they receive online. These filter bubbles, in addition to partisan echo chambers (e.g., only watching MSNBC or Fox News), may explain the wide gaps between conservative and liberals regarding the salience of issues on the ballot in an election. Most recently, a 2020 poll conducted by Pew Research Center found that 74% of Trump supporters said violent crime was "very important" to their vote, while 46% of Biden supporters said the same (Pew Research Center, 2020). Given findings such as these, it is important to explore the potential for SNS to influence users' fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization—either positively or negatively—independent of official crime rates and other indicators used to calculate subjective probability of victimization.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between Facebook use, political ideology, fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization among students attending non-residential college campuses over and above sociodemographic characteristics and measures of mainstream media (MSM) consumption, prior victimization, perceived community cohesion, routine daily activities and risk-taking behaviors. We

focused on college students, who prior literature has shown to be generally between the ages of 18 and 25: the age group also most likely use SNS (Perrin, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Those in this age group are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors, which have been shown to influence fear of crime and perceived risk (Ferraro, 1995; SAMHSA, 2014). Further, unlike students who attend college at residential campuses, students who attend non-residential campuses are more likely to have social and familial ties within the communities in which they attend school This is important to the present study because levels of perceived community cohesion have been shown to be significantly correlated with fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization, controlling for demographic characteristics and precautionary behaviors (Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012; Mesch, 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation theory. Borrowing from the field of communications, Gerbner's (1969) cultivation theory was used to test and explain the relationship between Facebook use and the response variables. Cultivation refers to the effect television has on viewers' conceptions of social reality—independent of other factors (Gerbner, 1969). Gerbner posited that television formed a common symbolic environment that reached a variety of individuals and communities, bringing them together through a shared environment of socialized roles and behaviors (Gerbner, 1969; Griffin, 2012). However, media scholars have argued that the cultivation approach can be applied to any dominant medium in society (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2014). Because U.S. adults not only use SNS to seek and consume news, but also continue to seek news content from cable television sources and other MSM (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016), cultivation theory was a logical framework to guide the design and explain the results of the present study.

Although some researchers have found that local television news significantly predicts crime-risk perceptions (Heath, 1984; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987), others have found that cultivation effects of local news have not had a significant impact on fear of crime or perceived risk of victimization when controlling for demographic and contextual factors (Dowler, 2003; Goidel, Freeman, & Procopio, 2006). However, tests on the impacts of Facebook use on these perceptions in today's polarized, segregated media environment are conspicuously absent from this literature. Crime events, whether authentic, sensationalized or outright false, can have immense reach, alter routine activities or otherwise contribute to anxieties about safety that may not have been present were it not for the ability to instantly scroll, click, view and interact with others about the event.

Routine activities. Routine activities theory was also used to inform which control variables would be included in the study design. Developed initially by Cohen and Felson (1979), the routine activity approach focuses on the circumstances under which crimes are carried out, rather than the characteristics of offenders alone (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Media portrayals of crime and victimization—whether delivered via local news, television drama, or fiction—have been shown to influence perceptions of risk and fear of crime (Heath, 1984; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987). Researchers have also found that prior victimization is associated with actual risk of victimization (Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012; Mesch, 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Those who have experienced victimization (direct) are also more likely to perceive a higher subjective probability of victimization (Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange & Farraro, 1989). The victimization experience is rare for most individuals, and most are exposed to indirect victimization through their friends, relatives, and social networks, and research suggests that individuals acquainted with significant others who have been victims of crime have a higher perception of risk (Mesch, 2000).

Since its inception, researchers have built upon routine activities theory to include more nuanced definitions of its core elements with considerations for lifestyle variations and social differentiation (Rountree & Land, 1996). Certain lifestyle behaviors such as going out with friends, binge drinking, recreational drug use,

and others are prevalent among college students (SAMHSA, 2014). Research has shown that these lifestyle behaviors are predictive of the use of guardianship behaviors (behaviors intended to deter crime), and that these behaviors increase as feelings of safety decrease (Riger & Gordon, 1981; Rountree & Land, 1996; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003). Apart from guardianship behaviors, type of residence (e.g., apartment, house, gated community) has also been examined in relation to its association with fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization, though researchers have found mixed results (Diamond, 1997; Wilson-Doenges, 2000).

Hypothesis

Based on previous research and these theoretical approaches, we hypothesized that intensity of Facebook use and political ideology would be significantly associated with increased or decreased levels of fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization over and above sociodemographic characteristics, household composition, routine activities, and perceived community cohesion.

Methods

Data were collected in 2017 during the fall sessions of three non-residential college campuses in Washington State from 371 undergraduate students.

Recruitment

The requests for study participants were sent to student affairs and administrative staff at four non-residential colleges: three community colleges and one state university. Of these four, three responded (75% institutional response rate). This study was approved by the Wasghington State University Institutional Review Board. To maximize the overall response rate, 33 questions were included in the survey instrument. Surveys were sent via email to a simple random sample of all registered students from two of the participating institutions. Administrative staff from the first institution, a community college in Washington State sent a link to the online survey to a simple random sample of enrolled students. Administrative staff from the second institution provided a simple random sample of email addresses for all students enrolled and attending school either online or at one of their four satellite campuses across Washington State. A convenience sample was also collected using an anonymous survey link made available to all registered students on the home page of the third institution's learning management system (LMS).

The survey was anonymous, and participants were given the option to enter a sweepstakes to win a $100 gift card for their participation. Participants entered the sweepstakes by providing email addresses. Email addresses were collected by redirecting participants to a second survey page to ensure anonymity. Emails sent to students enrolled in the first two institutions contained an informed consent statement, as did the first page of the online survey to ensure consent was obtained from all participants.

Measures

Independent variables of interest included intensity of Facebook use and political ideology. Intensity of Facebook use was measured according to the frequency with which respondents logged on to their Facebook profile and the amount of time spent on Facebook when logged in. To increase the response rate these were measured using items from the Facebook Intensity Survey developed by Valenzuela et al.(2009) that asked about frequency and duration of Facebook use. Consistent with previous literature dealing with Facebook use

measurement (Li et al., 2016), a reliability analysis was performed and produced an acceptable Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha=.670$. Respondents were also asked whether they received updates from their local police department via Facebook. These measures were added to create a composite variable and an overall score of intensity of Facebook use ranging from zero to eleven, with higher scores indicating more intense use of the SNS. Political ideology was self-reported and measured using a scale from one to five, with one meaning very liberal and five meaning very conservative.

Perceived community cohesion was measured using the community characteristics portion of the Fear of Crime in America Survey (Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992). Respondents reported whether they felt their neighbors would help if there was a problem and whether they felt as though they were a part of their community. Both items had dichotomous reference categories, with one meaning yes and zero meaning no. These items were added to create an overall measure of respondents' perceived community cohesion ranging from zero to three, with a higher score indicating greater levels of perceived community cohesion.

Dependent variables were also measured using portions of the Fear of Crime in America Survey (Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992) specific to fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization. Items were chosen based on previous research and the need to increase the response rate for the study by shortening the length of time required to complete the survey. Based on prior theoretical and empirical work, the present study included both fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization because both constructs are conceptually distinct (i.e., fear of crime is an emotional state while perceived risk is a subjective evaluation of probability) and should be examined accordingly (Ferraro, 1995; Rountree & Land, 1996). Respondents answered questions about their general fear and chances of being victims of crimes ranging from fraud to murder. Based on previous research, questions related to assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and whether crimes were committed by a known or unknown individual were also included (Fisher, Sloan, & Cullen, 2006; Gordon & Riger, 1991; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1995; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2006).

Specifically, participants were asked how fearful or to what extent did they perceive the likelihood of them being victims of being a) cheated, b) conned or swindled out of money, c) having someone break into their home while they are away, d) having someone break into their home while they are there, e) being raped or sexually assaulted by a stranger, f) being raped or sexually assaulted by an acquaintance, g) being physically assaulted by a stranger, h) being physically assaulted by an acquaintance, i) being murdered, j) being attacked by someone with a weapon, k) having their car stolen, l) being robbed or mugged on the street, m) having their property damaged by vandals, n) being a victim of domestic violence, o) being stalked by a stranger or p) being stalked by an acquaintance (Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992; Fisher, Sloan, & Cullen, 2006; Gordon & Riger, 1991). Scores for each item ranged from one to ten, with one meaning not afraid or likely to be a victim of the crime, and ten meaning very afraid and very likely to be a victim of the crime listed.

Control variables included questions about respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, and gender. Based on previous research, the survey also included questions about other factors associated with fear of crime and perceived risk, such as respondents' leisure activities, drug and alcohol use, MSM consumption, prior direct or indirect victimization, type of residence (house or apartment), perceived community cohesion and household composition (live alone or with others) (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Rountree, 1998; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003).

MSM consumption was measured according to the frequency with which respondents reported consuming national television news, local television news, radio news programs, news magazines, daily local newspapers, national daily newspapers, and news websites. Respondents were asked to rate how often they consumed news from each source with scores one meaning never and five meaning every day (Truman, 2005). A composite MSM consumption variable was then created to assess respondents' overall consumption of news

via MSM outlets. This score ranged from seven to twenty-seven, with higher scores indicating greater levels of MSM consumption.

To measure demographic variables, respondents were asked to indicate whether they consider themselves to be male, female, or neither male nor female. This variable was dummy coded for multivariate analysis as zero for male and female as the reference category, one. Respondents were asked to identify themselves as White/Caucasian, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, American Indian or Pacific Islander, or other. These were dummy coded for multivariate analysis as zero for white, with nonwhite as the reference category one. Respondents were asked to report whether they lived in an apartment, house, or other type of dwelling. This variable was dummy coded for multivariate analysis with living in a house as the reference category one. Respondents were also asked to report their household composition, whether they lived alone, with roommates (spouse, friends, etc.), with parents, or had other living arrangements. These items were dummy coded for multivariate analysis with living with roommates other than parents as the reference category, one.

With respect to the leisure activities measures, respondents were asked to rate how often they socialize or party with friends and socialize or party with strangers on a scale from one meaning never to six meaning daily or almost daily (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Rountree, 1998; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003; Truman, 2007). To measure risk-taking behaviors, respondents identified on a scale of zero meaning never to six meaning daily or almost daily how often in the previous year they had enough alcohol to get drunk, smoked marijuana or hashish, or used other illicit drugs (modified from Fisher, Sloan, & Cullen, 1999; see also Truman, 2007). An index was then created to measure respondents' overall engagement in risk-taking behaviors. These scores ranged from three to twenty-two, with a higher score indicating greater levels of risk-taking behaviors reported among respondents.

To measure prior direct or indirect victimization among respondents, respondents were asked whether they had been the victim of crimes ranging from property crime to sexual violence by answering one for yes or two for no (Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Truman, 2007). Respondents who indicated they were victims of these crimes indicated whether the victimization took place within the past year and whether the offender was known to them, both measured by asking respondents to select one for yes or two for no. An overall victimization index was recoded for multivariate analysis with a range of zero to three, with a higher score indicating more instances and severity of victimization. Victim measures comprising this index were measured with zero indicating respondents were not victims of any listed crimes, one indicating respondents were a victim of property crime, two indicating respondents were a victim of property crime and nonsexual violence victim, and three indicating respondents had been victims of crimes in all three categories: property crime, nonsexual violence and sexual violence. Respondents also indicated whether a close friend or relative had been the victim of a crime in the past year, which was later recoded with yes as the reference category one.

Analytic Strategy

Analyses of the data collected were conducted at the univariate, bivariate and multivariate levels. Frequency distributions are provided for measures of respondents' Facebook use intensity, sociodemographic characteristics, types of residence, household composition, risk-taking behaviors and leisure activities, perceived community cohesion, prior direct and indirect victimization, MSM usage, political ideology, fear of crime, and perceived risk of victimization. Given the ideological differences in media diet, Internet search behavior, and attitudes toward crime, as well as the potential for SNS filter bubbles to amplify users' media echo chambers and subsequent perceptions of crime and crime risk, we chose Facebook use and self-reported political ideology as the independent variables of interest. Hierarchical linear regressions were then calculated

to examine the relationship between political ideology, Facebook use, fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization, controlling for all other factors.

Results

Overall, a total of 3,689 students had an opportunity to complete the survey, with 425 responding, for a total response rate of 11.62%. This low response rate is likely because surveys were not sent to students at the beginning of fall semester, and some emails may have gone directly to students' spam email folders. Of these responses, 54 were younger than 18 and therefore did not meet the minimum age requirement for participation. These responses were removed from the dataset, leaving a total of 371 valid responses. The results of an a priori power analysis for a linear multiple regression: fixed model, R^2 increase using the G*Power software program suggested a sample of 119 was needed for a medium effect (.95 at α=.05), given the quantity of independent variables in the study design.

The sample obtained includes a total of 371 undergraduate students from three separate non-residential colleges and university campuses in Washington State. Table 1 shows frequency distributions of respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, MSM use, political ideology, prior victimization, risk-taking behaviors, and perceived community cohesion. Approximately 21% of respondents reported their gender as being male, approximately 78% were reportedly female, and approximately 1% reported identifying as neither male nor female. Given that the number of respondents identifying as neither male nor female was so few, these responses were excluded from subsequent analyses. Respondents' mean age was approximately 26. More than 70% of respondents reported their race/ethnicity as white, while approximately 2% identified as black, 7% as Hispanic/Latino, 4% as Asian, 3% as American Indian or Pacific Islander, and 5% as other.

Approximately 20% of respondents reported living in an apartment, and roughly 80% reported living in a house or other type of residence. Only 5% of respondents reported living alone, while roughly 55% reported living with roommates, 34% reported living with their parents, and 6% reported another type of housing composition that did not fall into these categories. Political ideology was normally distributed across cases and the average respondent identified as moderate, though the sample was slightly skewed toward liberalism over conservatism, with a mean score of 2.86 (N=286).

Facebook and MSM Consumption

Respondents' consumption of MSM was evenly distributed across categories, apart from news magazines, national daily papers, and daily local papers, which were the most negatively skewed categories. Respondents were asked how often they used each medium for news consumption, with one meaning never and six meaning daily or almost daily. An overall media use index produced an actual range of zero to twenty-seven, and was normally distributed among cases, with a mean score of 15.78 (N=331). Overall, respondents preferred local television and web-based news over other mediums. Of 371 valid responses, approximately 93% of respondents reported having a Facebook account. The mean score for duration of Facebook use was 2.75 (i.e., most respondents reported spending 10-30 minutes a day on Facebook). As shown in Table 1, overall intensity of Facebook use ranged from zero to eleven and values were normally distributed among cases with a mean score of 5.19.

Prior Victimization, Routine Activities, and Perceived Community Cohesion

Overall property crime-victimization scores ranged from zero to three, or non-victim to victim within the past year and victim with the offender known to the respondent. The mean reported for overall scores of property crime-victimization was .84. The mean reported for overall nonsexual violence and sexual violence were .64 and .67, respectively. . With respect to indirect victimization, responses were evenly split among respondents, with 48% reporting that a close friend or relative had been the victim of a crime.

Individual items measuring respondents' risk-taking behaviors and leisure activities ranged from one to six. Overall risk-taking behaviors scores ranged from three to twenty-two, with higher scores indicating more risk-taking behaviors. This was normally distributed, with a mean value of 11.42 (*N*=330). Regarding perceived community cohesion, 54% of respondents reported that they felt they could rely on their neighbors for help than those who did not, though a lower percentage (44%) reported feeling like they were a part of their community than those who did not. Overall scores ranged from zero to two, with higher scores indicating greater levels of perceived community cohesion. Overall scores were positively skewed, and the mean value was 1.23 (*N*=293).

Table 1: Frequency Distributions for Sociodemographic Characteristics, Mainstream Media Consumption, and Facebook Use (n = 371)

Variable	mean	*SD*	Total	Range
Gender (1=Male)	-----	-----	-----	0-2
Male	-----	-----	21.4%	-----
Female	-----	-----	77.7%	-----
Race (5=other)	-----	-----	-----	0-5
White	-----	-----	78.4%	-----
Black	-----	-----	1.8%	-----
Hispanic/Latino	-----	-----	7.0%	-----
Asian	-----	-----	3.6%	-----
American Indian or Pacific Islander	-----	-----	3.3%	-----
Other	-----	-----	5.1%	-----
Type of Residence (2=other)	1.84	.466	-----	0-2
Apartment	-----	-----	19.9%	-----
House	-----	-----	75.9%	-----
Other	-----	-----	4.2%	-----
Household Composition (3=other)	2.41	.687	-----	0-4
Live Alone	-----	-----	5.1%	-----
Live with Roommates	-----	-----	54.7%	-----
Live with Parents	-----	-----	33.9%	-----
Other	-----	-----	6.3%	-----
MSM Consumption (Overall)	15.78	4.787	-----	0-6
National T.V. News	2.41	1.195	-----	-----
Local T.V. News	2.64	1.230	-----	-----
Radio News Program	2.57	1.280	-----	-----
News Magazines	1.63	.873	-----	-----
Daily Local Newspapers	2.01	1.04	-----	-----
National Daily Newspapers	1.69	.937	-----	-----
News-Based Websites	3.10	1.357	-----	-----
Political Ideology (5=Very Conservative)	2.84	1.218	-----	1-5
Facebook Use (Overall)	5.19	2.812	-----	1-11
Has Facebook (1=Yes)	1.93	.253	93.1%	-----
Follows police department page (1=Yes)	.37	.483	36.8%	-----
Facebook Use for News	3.36	1.426	-----	1-6
Duration of Facebook Use	2.75	1.386	-----	1-6
Prior Victimization (Overall)	2.11	2.042	-----	0-9
Property crime (overall)	.84	.900	-----	0-3
Victim (1=Yes)	-----	-----	31.3%	-----
Victimization in past year (1=Yes)	-----	-----	19.3%	-----
Offender known (1=Yes)	-----	-----	4.8%	-----
Nonsexual violence (Overall)	.64	.978	-----	0-3

Victim (1=Yes)	-----	-----	3.9%	-----
Victimization in past year (1=Yes)	-----	-----	21.3%	-----
Offender known (1=Yes)	-----	-----	4.3%	-----
Sexual violence (Overall)	.67	.988	-----	0-3
Victim (1=Yes)	-----	-----	4.7%	-----
Victimization in past year (1=Yes)	-----	-----	24.3%	-----
Offender known (1=Yes)	-----	-----	4.4%	-----
Indirect Victim (1=Yes)	.48	.500	39.1%	-----
Risk-Taking Behaviors (Overall)	11.42	3.882	-----	1-6
Socializing/partying with friends (past year)	4.02	1.231	-----	-----
Socializing/partying with strangers (past year)	2.01	1.270	-----	-----
Had enough alcohol to get drunk (past year)	2.49	1.430	-----	-----
Smoked or eaten marijuana (past year)	2.18	1.780	-----	-----
Perceived Community Cohesion (Overall)	1.23	.822	-----	0-2
Rely on neighbors for help (1=Yes)	.78	.412	53.9%	-----
Feel a part of your neighborhood (1=Yes)	.66	.474	43.9%	-----

Sample sizes vary slightly due to missing cases

Multivariate Analyses

Hierarchical linear regressions were conducted to predict fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization. The first model included control measures of sociodemographic characteristics, perceived community cohesion, prior victimization, risk taking behaviors and overall media use. Measures of respondents' political ideology and intensity of Facebook use were then added to the second model. Calculations and diagnostic tests were conducted where applicable to ensure assumptions were not violated. All coefficients are reported from the full second model, unless otherwise noted.

Predicting fear of crime. Table 2 presents the results of a hierarchical regression analysis predicting fear of crime. Political ideology and intensity of Facebook were excluded from the first model, and the regression equation was significant ($F_{(9,238)}=5.557$, p=.000, $r^2=.174$). The regression equation remained significant for the second model, which included political ideology and intensity of Facebook use ($F_{(2,236)}=4.695$, p=.000, $r^2=.428$). Variance inflation factors and tolerance levels were within acceptable ranges and multicollinearity among variables was not detected. Respondents' levels of fear of crime were normally distributed among cases and case-wise diagnostics did not reveal any problematic outliers. Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, standardized residual plots were generated to confirm homogeneity of variance.

No support was found for the hypothesis that Facebook use and political ideology would be significantly associated with fear of crime with all else held constant ($\beta=.075$, p=.221), and the second model reported an r^2 value of .006 after the addition of political ideology and overall intensity of Facebook use. However, both models found fear of crime to be greater among females with all other factors held constant ($\beta=.364$, p=.000 and $\beta=.344$, p=.000, respectively).

Table 2: Hierarchical Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Estimating Effects Political Ideology and Facebook Use on Fear of Crime (n = 371)

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Gender (1=Female)	29.519	5.081	.364***	27.887	5.240	.344***
Race/Ethnicity (1=Nonwhite)	1.162	5.39	.013	1.561	5.469	.017
Type of Residence (1=House)	.532	6.019	.005	.500	6.024	.005
Household Composition (1=Does Not Live with Parents)	-9.398	4.570	-.126*	-9.799	4.586	-.131*
Indirect Victim (1=Yes)	4.757	4.665	.069	5.177	4.673	.069
Victim Score (Overall)	-.981	1.157	-.054	-.995	1.163	-.054
Risk-Taking Behaviors (Overall)	.329	.590	.034	.279	.596	.029
Perceived Community Cohesion (Overall)	-10.092	2.726	-.222***	-9.961	2.734	-.219***
MSM Use (Overall)	-.204	.471	-.026	-.269	.474	-.034
Political Ideology (5=Very Conservative)				-.927	1.883	-.030
Intensity of Facebook Use (Overall)				1.001	.816	.075
(Constant)	72.029	12.649		72.291	14.535	
F	5.557***			4.695***		
Adjusted R²	.142***			.180		
Change in Adjusted R²				.006		

Sample sizes vary for select variables due to missing cases.
*p < .05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Predicting perceived risk of victimization. To test the hypotheses that that political ideology and intensity of Facebook use would be significant predictors of greater levels of perceived risk of victimization over and above other factors, two hierarchical regression models were calculated, with political ideology and intensity of Facebook use excluded from the first. Variance inflation factors and tolerance levels indicated no problematic levels of multicollinearity. Case-wise diagnostics did not report any problematic outliers. However, frequency distributions reported a negative skew for overall measures of respondents' perceived risk and a subsequent regression analysis confirmed the presence of heteroscedasticity. A Glejser test was conducted and the squared value of the residuals reported in the original regression models was regressed on all independent variables, revealing a statistically significant level of noise in the relationship between gender and perceived risk ($p=.036$), though no other relationships demonstrated a concerning level of unequal variance among variables.

To address this violation of the assumption of equal variances, a log transformation of respondents' overall perceived risk was computed and both models were calculated using the log-transformation of the dependent variable. A standardized residual plot was calculated, and the presence of heteroscedasticity was not detected. Table 3 presents the values for both models using the log-transformation of perceived risk of victimization. Both models one and two were significant predictors of perceived risk of victimization among respondents ($F(9,238)=3.206$, $p=.001$, $r^2=.108$ and $F(2,236)=2.871$, $p=.001$, $r^2=.077$, respectively).

No support was found for the hypothesis that Facebook use and political ideology would be significant predictors of perceived risk of victimization, and the change in the r^2 value for the second model was not statistically significant and reported at .010.

While the first model detected that gender (1=female) was significantly associated with increased levels of perceived risk of victimization, Table 3 shows no significant relationship was detected when all factors were held constant in model 2 ($\beta_1=-.067$, $p=.032$ and $\beta_1=.062$, $p=.052$, respectively). In other words, when political ideology and intensity of Facebook use were excluded from the model, gender (1=female) was associated with a 6.7% change in perceived risk of victimization.

Table 3: Hierarchical Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Estimating Effects of Political Ideology and Facebook Use on Log $_{10}$ of Perceived Risk of Victimization (n = 371)

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	β_1	B	SE	β_1
Gender (1=Female)	.067	.031	.141*	.062	.032	.131
Race/Ethnicity (1=Nonwhite)	.005	.033	.010	-.003	.033	-.006
Type of Residence (1=House)	.003	.037	.006	.004	.036	.008
Household Composition (1=Does Not Live with Parents)	-.043	.028	-.098	-.042	.028	-.096
Indirect Victim (1=Yes)	.029	.028	.067	.030	.028	.069
Victim Score (Overall)	.019	.007	.177**	.018	.007	.167*
Risk-Taking Behaviors (Overall)	.002	.004	.036	.001	.004	.022
Perceived Community Cohesion (Overall)	-.049	.017	-.185**	-.048	.017	-.179**
Mass Media Use (Overall)	.002	.003	.051	.002	.003	.052
Political Ideology (5=Very Conservative)				-.018	.011	-.102
Intensity of Facebook Use (Overall)				-.001	.005	-.012
(Constant)	1.477	.077		1.546	.088	
F	3.206***			2.871***		
Adjusted R^2	.074***			.077		
Change in Adjusted R^2				.010		

Coefficient estimates are based on the log transformation of perceived risk of victimization.
*p < .05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Discussion

The results of the analysis suggest Facebook use has no significant relationship with users' fear of crime or perceived risk of victimization when controlling for all other factors. This finding does not lend support for cultivation theory, insofar as the SNS's role in the cultivation of symbolic environments. Interesting to note, however, is that greater levels of reported conservatism, though not statistically significant, was associated with lower levels of perceived risk among respondents when all factors were controlled. This finding runs somewhat counter to expectations, given previous research on perceived risk of victimization, media consumption and political views (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013; Stroud, 2011; Unnever, Cullen, & Fisher, 2007).

When political ideology and intensity of Facebook use were excluded from the second regression model, gender (1=female) was associated with a 6.7% change in perceived risk of victimization. Although not statistically significant, this result is worth noting, given the marginal decrease in the percentage of the variance explained (.05%). While some research has shown that females report lower levels of perceived risk than males (Truman, 2007), there is general agreement that measures of both fear and perceived risk are too narrowly defined in a male-dominated society (Sacco, 1990). Moreover, researchers have argued that constant confrontation with sexual harassment has produced a ceiling effect, in which the true extent of perceived risk can be difficult to capture (Fisher et al., 2006; Sacco, 1990).

The lack of statistical significance in this case is not indicative, then, of counterfactual findings, but does support previous contentions that fear of crime and perceived risk are conceptually distinct and should be examined accordingly (Ferraro, 1995; Rountree & Land, 1996). Interesting to note too is that, when controlling for all other factors, living with roommates other than one's parents was a significant predictor of decreased levels of fear of crime among respondents (β=-.126, p=.034), which aligns with. previous research which suggests strong social ties and social mobility has been found to be associated with lower levels of fear of crime (Hale, 2013; Sampson et al., 1997).

However, these results could be an artifact of lower socio-economic status, which has been shown to increase the probability of victimization and, consequently, perceived risk (Hale, 2013; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). Finally, despite previous findings that persons of color tend to experience greater levels of fear than whites (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Liska, Sanchirico & Reed, 1988), it is interesting to note that race/ethnicity was not a significant predictor of fear of crime over and above other factors.

Overall, although SNS use and television viewing are arguably more similar than different and, given the tendency toward sensationalized content across both SNS and MSM, the results of these analyses do not support the Gerbner's (1969) cultivation theory. Despite the frequency and duration of Facebook use among respondents, no statistically significant relationships were detected between this and fear of crime or perceived risk of victimization at the multivariate level. Although SNS is being used more frequently, and more so for news consumption, the overall impacts on our psychological and physiological wellbeing are not obvious, at least within the context of this study.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationships between SNS use and political ideology among college students attending non-residential campuses when controlling for perceived community cohesion, sociodemographic characteristics, prior victimization, risk-taking behaviors, and MSM consumption. Political ideology was not significantly associated with decreased levels of perceived risk of victimization when all other factors were held constant, and no significant relationship was detected between Facebook use and fear of crime or perceived risk of victimization when controlling for all other factors. Thus, it is arguable that despite

the filter bubble effect of personalized news content recommended by algorithms is not a significant influence on users' perceptions of crime and risk, regardless of which end of the political spectrum their filter bubble leans.

Although this study makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between SNS use, fear of crime and perceptions of risk, several limitations are acknowledged. First, more robust measures of fear, perceived risk and SNS use were omitted from the final survey instrument to increase response rate by lowering the burden of participation. Items measuring respondents' perceived safety and use of other SNS platforms would provide more reliable measures of these variables. Second, the response rate for the survey was notably low at 11.62 %, which may be due to a time effect as the surveys were not sent or otherwise accessible at the beginning of participants' terms. However, the sample had enough power.

Emails sent containing anonymous links to the survey instrument did not report metrics in terms of which recipients opened and read the email and therefore which had equal opportunity to participate. Similarly, the anonymous link posted to the LMS homepage of the institution from which the convenience sample was collected could not report how many enrolled students visited the homepage. Given this sample, the results are not generalizable beyond college students. Further, there was a great deal of variability in the gender and racial distributions for each institution and satellite campus sampled, and some demographic data was not available because of the geographic dispersion of students attending the global, online campuses of two of the three institutions. The year that the present study was conducted, 57.8% of U.S. college students were male, 54.7% were female, 56% were White, and 13.6% were Black (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020). As such, the sample is likely non-representative. Still, despite these threats to generalizability and representativeness, this is emerging research and therefore the benefits outweigh the threats and show promising evidence of the relationship between SNS use, fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization.

Future research should focus on sampling respondents from a greater cross-section of the population to expand the sample frame. Researchers should also consider collecting a larger, random sample without the convenience sample included in this study. Studies should also include more granular measures of neighborhood-level characteristics (such as crime rates and characteristics of the communities sampled), political ideology, and Facebook use. Measures of underlying attitudes about crime and punishment, as well as measures of Facebook group membership, comment and response frequency could provide a more complete picture of ideology and actual SNS use. More precise measures of frequency and duration of Facebook use than self-report should also be considered, such as actual time spent on Facebook reported from users' cell phones or desktop computers. Finally, future studies examining SNS use on fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization should also include variables such as gun ownership, self-defense training, use of home security systems, and other precautionary behaviors in their analyses, given that previous research has shown that use of precautionary behaviors is significantly related to both fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization (Fisher & Sloan, 1996; Ferraro, 1992).

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