**Abstract**

Crime statistic social media refers to social media pages dedicated to reporting real-time crime updates (traffic accidents and local crime) through police scanners and information from other social media users. This study examined participants’ perceptions of safety based on their crime statistic social media consumption. Participants were asked about their crime statistic social media consumption, then completed the following scales: Fear of Crime (FOC), Feelings of Safety (FOS), Right Wing Authoritarian (RWA), and Police Legitimacy (PL). The results indicated that the more individuals viewed the crime statistic social media, the less they feared crime and the safer they felt.

***Crime Statistic Social Media Consumption, Fear of Crime, and Perceived Feelings of Safety***

Increased media and news coverage on topics related to criminal acts and violent behavior can be attributed to a widespread fascination with crime among the public. ([McCall, 2007](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563217305174?casa_token=VdWePvw8oLgAAAAA:RfhlwenM1czHEmHcP4COkEd5eOezXcaVx4aM66PyRtEigkZGt7ixxwOz6i62O0tnCsJc0477vbs#bib53)). Research on the “Mean World Syndrome” suggests that individuals who spend more time consuming the news and other crime media sources are further inclined to believe that the world around them is more dangerous than it actually is (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Previous research has examined the relationships between individuals’ media consumption and their fear of crime by examining factors such as race and environment and how they coincide with individual perceptions of safety. To be newsworthy, criminal events must capture the attention of the consumer; therefore, they must be rare, shocking, or have some special significance (Chermak and Gruenewald, 2006). Traditional media (news, documentaries, television programs) gives a distorted version of the crimes within communities with a significant bias towards violence. The media (primarily television) generates fear, largely through their obsession with crime news, creating an overblown emphasis on the threat of crime through sensationalized coverage of usually violent crime (Gerbner and Gross, 1976); however, there is little to no research that focuses specifically on the effect of crime statistics in social media.

The purpose of this study was to examine people’s perceptions of safety based on their crime statistic social media consumption. Crime statistic social media refers to social media pages dedicated specifically to reporting factual real-time crime updates (traffic accidents and local crime) in a community through police scanners and through information from other social media users. Individuals who are interested in learning about crime and violence occurring in society may be motivated to consume more crime statistic content on social media (Intravia et al., 2017). Based on previous research, engagement in crime statistic social media may further foster higher levels of fear among the consumers. It was hypothesized that consuming crime statistics on social media directly would reduce individuals’ feelings of safety and increase their fear of crime. Different underlying mechanisms were also explored during this study.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of 503 (47.2% female, 47% male, 4.3% other, Mean Age = 37.01, SD = 12.91) adult collected online via Prolific.

**Materials**

After agreeing to the consent form, participants were asked, “Do you follow any social media profiles that post information from police scanners, reports of traffic accidents, or reports of crime?” If they answered yes, they were asked how often on average they read these posts on a scale of 1 – “less than once a month to 9 – “multiple times per day.” Participants were then presented with the following scales: Fear of Crime (FOC) and Feelings of Safety (FOS). The FOC scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .848) assesses how worried individuals are about encountering crime and being victimized on their street. Participants were asked how worried they were of “Someone breaking into your home” and “Somebody sexually assaulting you” with higher scores indicating feeling more worried (Weisburd et al., 2011). The FOS scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .869) asks participants to report on their feelings of safety about the block they live on through questions including “You are afraid of being attacked on your block” and “In general it is safe to walk on your block at night” with higher scores indicating feeling safer (Goldberg, White, & Weisburd, 2019). We also collected data on scales related to potential underlying factors including Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Polce Legitimacy (PL).

**Results**

Two separate linear regressions were conducted. The first was how often participants view crime statistic social media on the FOC scale, *R*2 = .06, *F*(1, 502) = 30.31, *p* < .001. The amount of crime statistic social media participants consumed significantly predicted their FOC, = -.23, *se* = 0.04, *t*(502) = -5.51.53, *p* < .001, *95% CI* [-0.31, -0.15]. The more often participants viewed the crime statistic social media, the less afraid of crime they were. The second linear regression analyzed the effects of viewing crime statistic social media on the FOS scale, *R*2 = .01, *F*(1, 502) = 6.39, *p* < .001. The amount of crime statistic social media participants consumed significantly predicted their FOS, = .81, *se* = 0.32, *t*(502) = 2.53, *p* < .001, *95% CI* [0.18, 1.44]. The more often participants viewed the crime statistic social media, the safer they felt in their community. None of the possible underlying factors were significant moderating or mediating factors, *p*s > .05.

**Discussion**

The results directly went against our hypothesis and found that the more often individuals viewed the crime statistic social media, the less afraid of crime they were and the safer they felt in their community. This finding was confirmed twice in two separate scales, the forward measured FOC scale and the backwards measured FOS scale. One explanation could be that the difference between sensationalized, violent, and delayed reports of crime showcased via the news, television programs, and documentaries resulted in its users’ fearing crime and feeling less safe in their communities. Crime statistic social media, on the other hand, reports on more minor, local crimes, resulting in its consumers to feel safer and more informed though the constant updates on crime, in turn, causing them to be less afraid of more major crimes. The study attempted to find the underlying mechanisms; however, none of the results were significant. Future studies should attempt to find the underlying mechanisms and further examine crime statistic social media literature and the effects on its users.