The Rise of Social Media and the Fall of Internal Peace: How does Media Influence People's Fear of Mass Shootings?

Christian Grevin

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts

Part of the Political Science Commons
The Rise of Social Media and the Fall of Internal Peace: How does Media Influence People’s Fear of Mass Shootings?

Christian Grevisn
Department of Political Science, Chapman University; Orange, California

Abstract:
The impact of traditional versus social media on people’s fears of a mass shooting is a matter worthy of research and analysis. Many studies have been conducted evaluating the connection between local TV news and fear, showing that the consumption of local TV news has increased people’s fear of crimes. More recently, social media has caused a shift in the distribution of news, with increasing numbers of people turning to platforms like Twitter and Facebook to receive their daily news. There have been few studies examining the relationship between social media usage and one’s fear of crime, particularly one’s fear of mass shootings. According to data collected by Chapman University in their Survey of America Fear of Crime, social media usage appears to increase one’s fear of being a victim of a mass shooting in comparison to more traditional forms of media consumption measured in the study (i.e. local and national newspapers, national nightly and local TV news, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, talk radio shows, and online news websites). Media consumption isn’t the only variable found to have a relationship with a person’s fear of being a victim of a mass shooting. Among the interesting findings, gender also influences a person’s fear of being a victim of a mass shooting; women tend to have higher levels of fear than men. The vulnerability model partially explains this correlation between gender and fear. In this article I will explore people’s fear of a mass shooting; women tend to have higher levels of fear than men. I seek to find the correlation between fear of mass shootings and different media sources, as well as other variables like gender and age. I seek to provide an explanation for the high levels of fear associated with social media usage, as both mass shootings and social media have increased in prominence in the past decade and require more scholarly attention.

Hypotheses:

H 1: The more a person relies on social media as a news source, the more likely they are to fear being a victim of a mass shooting.

H 2: Women are more likely to fear being a victim of a mass shooting.

H 3: The older a person is, the more likely they are to fear being a victim of a mass shooting.

Data:

Hypothesis 1 Data
- Tested using regression.
- For each additional unit of social media usage - from never to everyday - there is a change of 0.109 in fear of being a victim of a mass shooting. (This data is statistically significant at the p-value of .000).
- Social media usage has the greatest impact on the fear of mass shootings in comparison to other forms of media, based on its standardized coefficient beta of 0.181.
- Table 1 shows that social media is the most statistically significant of the media types measured (it’s the only one that’s p-value is less than 0.001), with national nightly news, Fox News, CNN, and local TV news being the only other statistically significant variables.
- Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data.
- The positive unstandardized coefficient B of 0.109 shows that as social media consumption increases, so does one’s fear of mass shootings.
- The standardized coefficient beta’s demonstrate that social media has the greatest influence on one’s fear of mass shootings, in comparison to other media forms displayed in Table 1.

Hypothesis 2 Data
- Tested using a crosstab between fear of mass shootings and gender.
- 54.5% of women answered that they are afraid of being a victim of a mass shooting, in comparison to 27.3% of men who indicated the same.
- Figure 1 visually displays this difference of 27%, which reveals that women are more likely to fear being a victim of a mass shooting than men.
- The data supports hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 Data
- Tested using a crosstab between fear of mass shootings and age.
- The data yielded the following results: 54.4% of people ages 18-29 are afraid of mass shootings, 43.2% of people ages 30-49 are afraid of mass shootings, 30.9% of people ages 50-64 are afraid of mass shootings, and 37.6% of people ages 65+ are afraid of mass shootings.
- This data does not support the prediction made in hypothesis 3.
- Figure 2 depicts a general trend that the older someone is the less likely they are to fear mass shootings.

Findings:

- Hypothesis 1: Media Usage
  - Social media, more so than any other media form, examined impacts people’s fear of mass shootings.
  - The more someone uses social media to retrieve news, the more likely they are to fear being a victim of a mass shooting.

- Hypothesis 2: Gender
  - Women are more likely to fear being a victim of a mass shooting than men.
  - Supports previous findings on gender and fear of crime.
  - Supports the Vulnerability Model.

- Hypothesis 3: Age
  - Generally the older someone is, the less likely they are to fear being a victim of a mass shooting.
  - Age group 18-29 was the most fearful of mass shootings.
  - Does not support previous findings on age and fear of mass shootings.
  - Does not support the Vulnerability Model.

Conclusion:

The rise of social media, coupled with the increasing occurrence of mass shootings, has had profound impacts on Americans. Mediatization’s role in fueling unhealthy levels of fear of mass shootings must be understood in order to create a healthier and better informed population. Further studies should be conducted to drive understanding, awareness, and development of mitigative measures to protect people.

While there have been numerous studies conducted on the fear of crime and gender, deeper analysis of the connection between gender and fear of mass shootings is necessary. Extensive research has revealed the high levels of fear of crime exhibited by older people. But additional studies should be conducted on younger generations to identify the issues that our future leaders wrestled with during their formative years. As society progresses into the future so must its research, keeping pace with the underlying causes - such as technological innovation and generational shifts - that spark changes in significant societal trends.

Acknowledgements:
I would like thank Dr. Amy Gordon for the guidance she has provided me throughout the entire process of conducting my research. I would also like to thank everyone who has worked on the Chapman Fear Survey as my research would not have been possible.

References:
- Rodriguez & Keane, 2018; (2018). The Rise of Social Media and the Fall of Internal Peace: How does Media Influence People’s Fear of Mass Shootings?
- Duguay, 2018. The Rise of Social Media and the Fall of Internal Peace: How does Media Influence People’s Fear of Mass Shootings?