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Fall 11-30-2022

Social Media Effects on People's Fear of Terrorism

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Recommended Citation

Pastore, Cameron, "Social Media Effects on People's Fear of Terrorism" (2022). *Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters*. 555.

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Abstract

In the past few decades, social media has constantly been upgraded to comply with users' needs. Social media has become a prevalent tool today as many use it to share their thoughts and gain a glimpse into other people's lives, but a lot of people also use social media to obtain news about what is going on in the world and their communities. In this article, I examine social media's influence on people's fear of a potential terrorist attack on their homeland. The data for this research was obtained through The Chapman University Survey on American Fears (CSAF), conducted in 2022. The information I use takes into consideration what news sources people pay attention to, what outlets people get their news from, and how often they obtain news from social media. The results of the tested data showed support for multiple hypotheses stated in this research paper. Although social media is a growing convenience for people with busy schedules, it does allow people to see more about what is happening around the world. This is both good and bad as people are less censored to events outside of their country, but it does create this growing fear that these events and attacks may personally affect them.

Hypotheses

1. Social media increases the American public's fear of terrorism.
2. Social media increases the American public's fear of White Supremacists.
3. American party identification plays a role in people's fear of terrorism- Democrats are more afraid of a terrorist attack than Republicans.
4. American party identification plays a role in people's fear of White Supremacist- Democrats are more afraid of White Supremacists than Republicans.
5. CNN viewers are more fearful of White Supremacists and an act of terrorism than Fox viewers.

Method:

Data for this research comes from The Chapman University Survey on American Fears (CSAF) conducted in 2022. The primary objective of this survey is to collect annual data on the fears, worries, and concerns of Americans, the personal, behavioral, and attitudinal characteristics related to those fears, and how those fears are associated with other attitudes and behaviors. CSAF was conducted online via the SSRS Opinion Panel and invited adults aged 18 and older to participate via the web. It included 1,020 participants and data collection was conducted from April 5 to 15, 2022.

Table 1. Correlation Between Social Media News Consumption vs. Fear of a Terrorist Attack
Correlation Between How Often You Get News from Social Media and How Afraid You are of a Terrorist Attack

		Q1 5ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?
Q1 5ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	Pearson Correlation	1	.141**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	1018	1018
Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	Pearson Correlation	.141**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	1018	1020

** Notes: Shows how when people often get news from social media, it is statistically significant in the empirical relationship and that it is not a random finding.

Table 2. Crosstab Between Fear of White Supremacists and Social Media News Consumption

Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists? * Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media? Crosstabulation

Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?		Count	Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?						Total
			Every day	Most days	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Less than once a month but at least once a year	Never	
Very Afraid	Count	66	59	37	14	12	38	226	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	28.9%	23.0%	20.6%	17.7%	16.2%	18.8%	22.2%	
Afraid	Count	34	39	31	14	18	40	176	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	14.9%	15.2%	17.2%	17.7%	24.3%	19.8%	17.3%	
Slightly Afraid	Count	35	70	47	20	12	39	223	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	15.4%	27.3%	26.1%	25.3%	16.2%	19.3%	21.9%	
Not Afraid	Count	84	82	57	28	28	79	358	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	36.8%	32.0%	31.7%	35.4%	37.8%	39.1%	35.1%	
I don't know who/what this is	Count	9	6	8	3	4	6	36	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	3.9%	2.3%	4.4%	3.8%	5.4%	3.0%	3.5%	
Total	Count	228	256	180	79	74	202	1019	
	% within Q9k. How often do you.... Get news from social media?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Findings

1. In the data research, I found that social media has a weak positive relation (.141) with a statistical significance (<.001). Due to the small p-value (<.001), this means that there is a higher significance in the degree of likelihood that the observed, empirical relationship could be attributable to sampling error, this also means that it is not a random finding. However, the weak relation in the correlation coefficient tells me that social media is not related to a person's level of fear of a terrorist attack.
2. In the findings on if social media increases the fear of White Supremacists, I found something very interesting. According to people who get news from social media every day, about 28.9% of the data sample claimed they were "Very Afraid" of White Supremacists whereas 36.8% of the data sample who gets their news from social media said they were "Not Afraid". There are similar findings with people who get their news from social media most days, 23.0% said they were "Very Afraid" while 32.0% said they were "Not Afraid".
3. In the findings on if party identification plays a role in a person's fear of a terrorist attack, the findings appear to line up with the hypotheses of this paper. According to the data provided, about 28.1% of Republicans said they were "Very Afraid" of a terrorist attack, 29.5% of Moderates said they were "Very Afraid", and 42.4% of Democrats said they were "Very Afraid". As for "Not Afraid", Republicans were at 31.9%, Moderates were at 35.5%, and Democrats were at 32.5%. These findings line up with the hypothesis that party identification does play a role in determining a person's fear of a terrorist attack and that Democrats are more afraid than Republicans.
4. In the data findings on if party identification plays a role in a person's fear of White Supremacists, the data agreed with the hypothesis. According to the data, only 10.2% of Republicans said that they were "Very Afraid" of White Supremacists, 29.2% of Moderates said they were "Very afraid", and 60.6% of Democrats said they were "Very Afraid". As for "Not Afraid" Republicans were at 32.9%, and Democrats were at 16.6%. These findings supported the hypothesis that party identification does play a role in determining a person's fear of White Supremacists and that Democrats are more afraid than Republicans.
5. As for the last hypothesis, the data is not on the poster, however, the data did support the hypothesis that everyday CNN viewers were more afraid of a terrorist attack and White Supremacists. The data shows that 37.7% of everyday viewers of CNN were "Very Afraid" of a terrorist and only 3.8% said they were "Not Afraid". As for everyday Fox viewers, 31.4% said they were "Very Afraid" and 12.7% said they were "Not Afraid" of a terrorist attack. The data also suggest that 42.6% of everyday CNN viewers were "Very Afraid" of White Supremacists and 20.4% said they were "Not Afraid". Compared to everyday FOX viewers, 15.5% Said they were "Very Afraid" and 54.4% said they were "Not Afraid".

Table 3. Crosstab Between Party ID and Fear of White Supremacists
PartyID * Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists? Crosstabulation

PartyID		Count	Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?				Total
			Very Afraid	Afraid	Slightly Afraid	Not Afraid	
1.00	Count	23	36	62	180	18	319
	% within Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?	10.2%	20.5%	27.8%	50.6%	50.0%	31.4%
2.00	Count	66	51	67	117	14	315
	% within Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?	29.2%	29.0%	30.0%	32.9%	38.9%	31.0%
3.00	Count	137	89	94	59	4	383
	% within Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?	60.6%	50.6%	42.2%	16.6%	11.1%	37.7%
Total	Count	226	176	223	356	36	1017
	% within Q18b. How afraid are you of the following: White supremacists?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4. Crosstab Between Party ID and Fear of a Terrorist Attack
PartyID * Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack? Crosstabulation

PartyID		Count	Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?				Total
			Very Afraid	Afraid	Slightly Afraid	Not Afraid	
1.00	Count	61	90	114	53	318	
	% within Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	28.1%	34.5%	30.6%	31.9%	31.3%	
2.00	Count	64	75	118	59	316	
	% within Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	29.5%	28.7%	31.7%	35.5%	31.1%	
3.00	Count	92	96	140	54	382	
	% within Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	42.4%	36.8%	37.6%	32.5%	37.6%	
Total	Count	217	261	372	166	1016	
	% within Q15ak. How afraid are you of the following events: A terrorist attack?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: In both graphs above 1.00 = strong Republican, moderate Republican, and leaning Republican. 2.00 = Independent. 3.00 = strong Democrat, moderate Democrat, and leaning Democrat

Conversation

The reason why this data is important is that it is a very good tool for determining where the American people's attention lies. Political leaders can use this information and use specific platforms to help them get their message across to the audience that they want to reach. This can also help if a political leader is trying to pass legislation to prevent terrorism, they might use these specific platforms in order to reach an audience and ask for their help in supporting their bill.

Another reason why this research is important is that it can help in determining the guidelines for social media and what people can post on the apps they use. However, this could also be a bad thing because people might feel as if they are being censored on their social media. Now, this is how a lot of younger people get their news and how can they if people can not post about the bad things that are happening around the world? The way that social media could have guidelines though is by censoring images and videos that are too graphic for younger children. Or perhaps having a consent option for social media accounts that are posting graphic content about acts of terrorism. Social media platforms should also be monitoring accounts that look like they are promoting terrorism and terrorist groups (Hossain). This is because terrorist groups are now using social media to push their agenda toward younger people, and they are also using it to entice fear in the masses.

This research is also important because it shows that long-standing news sources like FOX and CNN still have a large influence over the American population and where they get their news from. Social media is still a new resource for people and not everyone uses it to look at the news but mostly for staying in the loop on the lives of family, friends, and people they are interested in. Because it is new people do not have a lot of trust in the news that comes from social media, many people believe that it is all fake news, or it is altered in some way. People have a lot more trust in established mass media sources like FOX, CNN, and MSNBC and when people want news, this is where they get it from.

References:

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