FEAR IN THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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Abstract

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Many researchers believe that perception of crime is formed by how crime is presented or framed by news media. News media has previously been society's only gateway to the rest of the world. "Violent crimes are prominent and presented as the norm in news media and commercial television programs, thus providing millions of people with a daily diet of rape, murder and drug abuse" (Greer, 2005). Emergence of social media may be removing many of the controls news media had in place with instantaneous, supposedly unbiased, unfiltered information. Social media may also be exacerbating the effects of news media by providing many different accounts and opinions on a current topic, altering the perception of crime in society more profoundly than news media alone. Several decades of research proves a correlation exists between news media and fear of crime. With the evolution of technology and introduction of social media, society now has a new forum to investigate events all over the world without the mediation, or manipulation, of the entities controlling news media. The purpose of this research is to investigate whether the consumption of social media mitigates the effect news media has on college students' perception of crime.

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Chapter 1

Fear in the World of Social Media: Introduction

Many researchers believe that perception of crime is formed by how crime is presented or "framed" by news media (Berry, 2012; Boda & Szabo, 2011; Waymer, 2009). Social media's portrayal or presentation of crime may remove many of the controls news media has had in place with instantaneous, supposedly unbiased, unfiltered information. On the other hand, social media may exacerbate the inaccurate or skewed perceptions of crime by providing different accounts and opinions on a current topic, altering the perception of crime in society more profoundly than news media alone.

News media accounts of crime fundamentally influence the criminal justice system. Consumers often call for an immediate change in criminal justice policies and procedures depending on the way issues are portrayed in news media. Valkenburg and Patiwael (1998) revealed the majority of people viewing court television on a regular basis had a more negative perception of crime than those that did not view court television. Pfeiffer, Windzio, and Kleimann (2005) discovered that, despite lower crime rates, people believed the crime rate was increasing. Further, Busselle (2003) noted that news television affected fear in the viewer as well as everyone the viewer communicates with.

Media shapes and influences the public because the media is the only lens used to view the world (Entman, 1992). For years, researchers have explored the ways in which news media affects the public. However, less is known about how social media affects public opinion related to crime and criminal behavior. "Social" media, which includes internet sites, personal social conversation sites, cellular phone applications, and a number of other electronic media, offers a different way to consume information.

Some differences between social media and news media are lack of responsibility, speed in which news is delivered, and ability to reach more consumers than ever before.

Despite the growing popularity of society's use of social media, researchers have largely failed to study the consequences social media has on the viewer's perceptions of crime. Evolution has not stopped with news media. Research should not either. The purpose of this research is to explore how college students perceive crime and what role social media plays in that perception, and if the level and type of education acts as a modifier to that perception. A better understanding of social media's impact on perception of crime can aid policy makers and other criminal justice practitioners when deciding ways to counteract those consequences. It could also aid in the creation of social media policies.

Chapter 2

Fear in the World of Social Media: Literature Review

For the purpose of this study, the definitions used will be those explained in the following section. This is important because many other researchers and scholars have effectively created definitions that fit the mold for which they were using them, but those molds may not fit what is needed in this research. Three terms must be defined in order to minimize confusion; news media, social media and fear of crime.

Definition: News Media

As more official news broadcasters use social media to stay in touch with the masses, the definition of news media has changed. News media is defined as information about recent events reported, edited, monitored and broadcast by acknowledged news industry professionals. There must be accountability, credibility and reliability in order to qualify as news media. Platforms include, but are not limited to; newspapers, news radio stations, news television, news internet blogs, and official news professional social media accounts.

Definition: Social Media

Social media platforms are ever-changing. What might have been popular last year may no longer be relevant next year. However, as a whole, social media will continue to carry the same definition regardless of the platforms used. Social media is defined as electronic communication through websites, applications, and other electronic devices allowing the user to create and/or participate in communities where no moderation is offered and feedback is encouraged. Examples of social media include but are not limited to; twitter, instagram, youtube, facebook, snapchat and vine. Older examples of social media include; myspace, yahoo, mIRC, and html chat sites. Accountability, credibility and responsibility are not required and these qualities are often

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not desired. Consumers of social media appear to expect a certain level of fallibility and seem to be much more forgiving about indiscretions among the opinions posed on social media platforms.

Definition: Fear of Crime

Fear of crime is defined in numerous ways. Garofalo and Laub (1979) suggest fear is an interpretation of "urban unease", while Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) define fear of crime as a collection of negative emotions formed through reactions to crime. This research uses the O'Mahoney and Quinn (1999) definition of the fear of crime as anticipated anxiety about a general sense of fear, rather than direct fear of specific danger. An example of this type of fear in the real world is a woman who is anxious or feels fear if she knows that she must walk to her car alone late at night. However, that woman does not fear that she will be brutally raped. Another example is that a family locks their doors at night to avoid a general feeling of being scared that something might happen but that family does not think that a masked man will break into their home and violently murder them.

Review

Crime is a socially constructed phenomenon that generally occurs out of public view. When crimes occur in public, such as graffiti on walls, drug deals on street corners, or a group of rowdy sports fans in a bar fight, onlookers can speculate the frequency of which these crimes occur based on what they witnessed. Because crime is often not public, we as a society rely on media reports as our sole source of information (Pfeiffer, Windzio and Kleimann, 2005.) How news media represents crime continues to occupy general and scholarly discussion (Gebner and Gross, 1976; Gunter, 1987; Sparks, 1992; Chiricos, Eschholz and Gertz, 1997; Howitt, 1998). Surette (2007) claims that crime, criminal justice and media should be studied together because they are wedded in an

arranged marriage. It is the hope, with this research, that social media is added to this arrangement.

Moral Panic

The phenomenon of moral panic was used to describe the vast influence media has on the public ideas of criminal justice policy and procedure.

> "the importance of this research is that it demonstrates how the mass media…can promote specific ways of understanding sentencing policy and the appropriateness of sentences given to offenders. Politicians may then respond to these preconceived climates of opinion or may attempt to harness them for electoral advantage" (Berry, 2012, p.#583).

Individuals consuming more media are more wary of the criminal justice system's ability to handle crime. This translates to a heightened support of more punitive measures (Altheide, 1993; Best, 1999; Cohen, 1972; Fishman, 1978; Hall, 1978) which politicians can then use as platforms on which to build electoral campaigns.

Moral Panic is used to define social problems. For example, alcohol under Prohibition (Gusfield, 1963), anti-pornography and censorship (Greek and Thompson, 1992), and the drug panic (Reinarman and Levine, 1989) have been manipulated to generate public support for political change. The basis of these examples is a widespread public fear that evildoers were harming the very foundation of society. According to Becker (1963), moral panic defines evildoers as the enemy of society and to claims makers, they deserve punishment and to be treated poorly by the public.

> Cohen (1972) defines "moral panic" as:
>
> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; it's (the panic) nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people…Sometimes the subject of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten…at other times it has more serious and long lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.

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In order for an event or behavior to become a moral panic, there must be a heightened level of concern of the event or behavior and a negative impact on society. There are a number of ways to measure concern. The most accessible are newspaper reports, polls and political or social movements. Concern is always real to those who make a claim or demand action, whether they originated from fabricated or concrete threats.

Evildoers refer to groups of people or people with certain behaviors in which a level of hostility can be directed, and tend to be outside mainstream society. DeYoung (1998) and Becker (1963) claim that demonization of evildoers or outsiders is easy as they typically have fewer resources, less credibility and are often already marginalized making it difficult to counter stigmatization. This has been witnessed throughout history, as seen from poor women accused of witchcraft to poor minority males tied to drug offences.

Moral panic must be widespread and hold some level of agreement. However, it is not necessarily universally held and may not even effect the majority. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) concluded, "moral panics come in different sizes – some gripping the vast majority of the members of a given society at a given time, others creating concern only among certain of its groups or categories." The last element moral panic must have is the belief by a group of non-deviant people that a disproportionate number of people in the population engages in disturbing behavior, or that the perceived harm is greater than the actual harm.

The spread of violence creates a feeling that no place is safe and suggests breakdown of social order. Elliott (1998) claims that senseless, petty and random violence has invaded American's lives and shows a disregard for life. This fear has moved beyond the boundaries of poor, inner-city neighborhoods and reaches more

affluent suburban and rural areas. When a large part of society fears a particular threat from an evildoer, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) suggest a moral panic occurs and "typically involves strengthening the social control apparatus of the society, including tougher or renewed rules, increased public hostility and condemnation, more laws, longer sentences, more police, more arrests, and more prison cells."

Minorities in the Media

Communication media, according to Bauman (1997; 2002), exceedingly constructs socially weak groups into prime targets for harsh punitive action. Panic is raised for a need for harsh punishments and longer imprisonments though blocked or neutralized human suffering. "A conscious belief in the principles of deterrence and proportionality, for example, falls short of illuminating the incessant desire to confront horror in mediatized accounts, the more so since such accounts do not reflect imperial reality. The imagery of crime and punishment, it is argued instead, allows audiences to project unconsciously the guilt and insecurities of everyday life onto weak minorities of strangers" Cheliotis (2010, p. 173).

Hough and Roberts (1999) claim that media maintain influence by selecting specific stories and framing them in a way to highlight the desired aspects in an attempt of garnering as much response as possible. Roberts et al. (2002) adds that media features crime in such a way to create epidemics where there are none in reality, and that these are reflected in public perceptions. Minorities have historically been the largest group to be both the target and the victim in the false perceptions created by media influences. Minority neighborhoods endure a disproportionate amount of news coverage devoted to crime involving their communities (Entman, 1992). By media framing minorities as the culprits of the majority of crime, an unintentional consequence is the

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creation of minority victims. This is often witnessed through acts of aggression, distrust, or discrimination in response to the accusations against their community as a whole.

Framing effects attitudes about nearly any issue, including poverty, crime, violence, inequality, discrimination, and the blame of events (Gilens, 1996; Iyengar, 1990; Valentino, 1999; Gandy, Koop, Hands, Frazier, & David, 1997; Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; and Chong and Druckman, 2007). News media has played an important role in shaping perceptions of politics and social events (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). According to empirical evidence, African Americans are seen as an underclass in society and usually represented negatively (Gilen, 1996). Public perception of groups is influenced by the race of individuals appearing on television (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987).

Barak (1994) points out the today's criminal predator is a euphemism for young black male. Creation of code words has allowed society to never have to face the word "race" by replacing it with words like crime. When there is talk about locking up people, what's really being talked about is locking up more black people, or building more prisons, longer sentences, throwing away the keys, everyone knows it's implied the conversation is about blacks and now there is no limit (Szykowny, 1994). Beckett and Sasson (2000) and Roberts (1993) argue support for harsher punitive responses is founded in a belief system which constructs crime in terms of race, and race in terms of crime. While speaking about black-on-black crime, the Reverend Jesse Jackson expressed relief when strangers approaching on dark streets are not young African American men (Cohen, 1993).

Perception of the "criminalblackman" is a reflection of the image of black male criminals and receives support from media featuring Willie Horton in the 1988 presidential campaign with George Bush (Jamieson, 1992; Mendelberg, 1997). Hawkins and Russell

(1998) presume a link between crime and black men, and claim that it is well established in society. Since civil rights and more integration, the link has grown more conspicuous according to Barlow (1998). Media has played a pivotal role in establishing this link between crime and race.

<center>Media, Fear, Policy and Politics</center>

Social issues such as homosexuality, abortion, drug use and other socio-moral issues are explained as the result of what sociologist, politicians, policy advocates and the media term as an American "culture war". Political discourse has been greatly influenced by this perspective (Wuthnow, 1994). "My friends, this election is about much more than who gets what. It is about what we believe, what we should stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on for the soul of America. It is a culture war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself" (Buchanan cited in Galloway, 1992).

The culture war metaphor has gained strength through the media. For example, the research database Nexis/Lexis found 75 articles containing the term in 1990, by 1994 there were 655. News media may not explain sociological theories, however the assumptions come through with the "war" portion of the metaphor. War is not an issue between people that can sit down and discuss peaceful resolution, but instead is fought between people with irreconcilable differences, usually with casualties on both sides (Evans, 1996). Issues placed in the category of "cultural wars" are irreconcilable because they are not about some specific topic, but rather about a "struggle to achieve or maintain the power to define reality" (Hunter, 1991). It is unquestionable that people have an impulse to define reality and universalize their worldview. This impulse is strengthened by an existence of another worldview and represents a certain need to desecrate any other worldviews.

Influence between media and politics flows both ways. Through the use of mass media, social actors define what is, and what is not, relevant by framing political concerns in a particular way (Entman, 1993; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Maher, 2001). Framing is defined by McCombs (1997) as "the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributions for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular subject is discussed." By using framing techniques, political parties use their influences over the media to have particular topics broadcast at an unusually higher rate to gain more support for their campaign issues.

In one example of the relationships created by media: The murder of innocence. Patrick Bulger was a two year old boy abducted, tortured and murdered by two ten year old boys in 1993. He disappeared from a shopping center and his mutilated body was found two days later. Thompson and Venables were charged with his abduction and murder. The Guardian, a Pulitzer Prize winning news publisher framed the story as "straight out of the nightmare fairy-tales of the Brother Grimm." This set the tone for how this story would be seen in the eyes of the public (Phillips and Kettle, 1993)

News stories depicted outrage, demanded retribution and offered policy proposals designed to increase punitive policies in the criminal justice system (Franklin and Petley, 1996). Intense media focus on this high profile case coincided with significant public disorder. Angry mobs drove families from their homes who later had to be rehoused for their own protection. Following the court decision a newspaper published a series of articles aimed at increasing the boys' sentence under the headlines "80,000 call T.V. to say Bulger Killers must rot in jail." Once these articles are published, Fiskin (1995) says, they take on a life of their own and become the representation of public opinion communicated to political candidates to charge their political campaigns with promises to deal with the situations (Green, 2006). Stabile (2001) echoes the sentiment of Friskin's

statement by adding, stories that focus on crime generate a moral panic and scare people into believing a crisis exists. This warrants immediate police action to stop the crisis and calm public panic.

The public learns of a situation, event, or behavior and is disturbed. Those concerns are compounded by hearing, reading, and/or watching coverage of that situation or a similar situation (Fritz and Altheide, 1987). As the fear builds through intense media coverage, the public begins to feel that "something needs to be done" about the situation (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). However, the public does not have the ability to address the situation and turns to government officials to handle it. Politicians recognize the public's concern and use their position to make announcements and appearances about how they plan to handle the situation (Cohen, 1972). The media then covers the politician's stance which provides additional legitimacy of the "problem" leading to an increase of the public's concern. This cycle of responses and reactions result in policy and punitive actions against evildoers.

Politicians rely on media outlets to identify issues that need to be addressed as these are the issues the public will recognize. Politicians then provide the media with a higher legitimization by speaking about issues or responding to situations covered by the media. This provides credibility and makes the situations or problems seem more dire, important and real to public consumers. These interactions among politicians, the media and the public mostly consists of politicians providing the media with information on how they plan to address any given issue and the public using the media to provide a direction for the politicians (Becker, 1963; Sutherland, 1950).

<div align="center">Fears of Violence and Urban Crime</div>

In democratic societies, crime policy and its management depends on trends of crime. If the media report the number of crimes committed as increasing and if the public

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focuses on unordinary, violent crimes, policy makers come under heavy pressure to increase statutory punishments and tighten rules for criminal prosecutions (Pfeiffer et al., 2005). This concept is enacted by influence of the public's perception of their own knowledge in the prevalence of crime and ways in which the criminal justice system works.

Evidence indicates news media focus on sensational, violent crime (Chermak, 1995; Yanich, 2001) and responses to media accounts of violence increases and modifies fear of crime (Bryant, Carveth, & Brown, 1981; Chiciros, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; Gomme, 1988; Tamborini, 1984), higher estimates of crime prevalence (Busselle, 2001; Gebner, et al, 1977; Shrum, 2001), and precautionary behaviors (Gerber, et al, 1978; Tyler, 1980). Media obsession with sensational, violent and overblown emphasis on crime threat produces undue or irrational fear of crime in society (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1977).

Coleman (1993) states physically distant places can lead to a fear of unfamiliar places and that fear is stimulated by media crime. Heath and Gilbert (1996) suggest media reinforcement of high crime in urban areas rather than rural areas leads to more extensive fear of cities. Thompson (2005) describes a term called despatialised dimension, which is explained as a broadening of the field of view that was once limited by spatial and temporal properties, or here and now. The field of view has enveloped distinctive properties portrayed in communication media without those constraints, Brighenti (2007). It has also been argued that media creates what can be described as geographies of fear, affecting society's interaction with public and private spaces (Smith, 1986; Valentine, 1992; Shirlow and Pain, 2003), which echoes Thompson's assessment.

Theoretical Foundation

Impact of fear of crime plays on everyday life has been questioned by researchers for years (Miethe et al., 1991; Roundtree et al., 1994; Miethe and Meier 1994; Wilcox et al., 2003). The main focus puts the offender as the source of crime and attempts to discover their behavior, choices, and pressures to engage in deviant acts. A classical perspective of free will shifts the focus from offender to victim (Hindenburg et al., 1978). Where victimization has been claimed to be a product of the victim's lifestyle. Specifically, routine daily activities exposed individuals to crime.

This micro-level theory was expanded by Cohen and Felson (1979) into a macro-level perspective suggesting that "the routine activities of everyday life influences criminal opportunity and therefore affects trends in predatory crime." They further expanded the theory by claiming that the offender, victim and environment had a symbiotic relationship. The Routine Activities Theory by Cohen and Felson (1979) contend that there must be a connection between a motivated offender and a vulnerable target with inadequate guardianship for a crime to occur. In this macro-level perspective, the victim's actions led to a criminal event, not the offender's actions. Jensen and Bromfield (1986) and Sampson and Lauritsen (1990), amended the theory to claim that proper guardianship against victimization is hindered by recreational activities. Sampson, Eck & Dunham (2010) examined the routine activity theory and concluded that while the theory itself provides a foundation for understanding crime, it does not account for controllers that may be absent or ineffective.

Traditional criminological theory focuses on distant modifiers, such as genetics, childhood experiences, schools, neighborhoods, and society (Akers, 1997). Wortley and Mazerolle's (2008) environmental theory accounts for proximal influences of environment on the criminal's decision to commit crime and how the crime will be carried out. The

environmental approach to the routine activity theory fails to take into consideration the reasons why organizations have failed to find successful preventative measures against crime. Sampson et al. (2010) expanded on the routine activity theory in an attempt to bridge this gap by exploring what influenced people and organizations to take preventative measures against crime.

Each of the three elements within the routine activity theory, offender, victim and location, has a moderator that helps to control the condition, called a "controller". The offender's controller is called a handler. Handlers are the people that have emotional bonds with the offender. An effective handler will keep the offender from committing crimes (Tillyer, 2008). This can be seen in businesses that require an adult to accompany a minor in order to prevent theft. Guardians protect targets and can range from a parent, to a police officer, to random strangers on the street looking out for each other either intentionally or unintentionally (Cohen and Felson, 1979). Managers are owners and representatives of locations and include janitors, landlords, lifeguards and clerks. Their main goal is to maintain order and a smooth flow at the location (Eck, 1994).

Crime prevention, in the context of routine activity theory, relies heavily on effective controllers. According to Rana et al. (2010), the best way to mobilize effective controllers is through super controllers. They call the people, institutions and organizations that persuade controllers to prevent crime super controllers. Some examples are the State Liquor Boards, influencing policies put in place by bar owners. Super controllers define who influences who, how, and under what circumstances. Diffuse super controllers are not institutions or single entities, rather, they are collections. Diffuse super controllers influence super controllers but might not know precisely which super controller is influenced or the manner in which that influence manifests. For example, a media report might influence a political action, or stimulate regulatory

reactions. And in similar fashion, police may use the media to influence the way a controller addresses crime.

Media attention can also sway peer group pressure. Rana et al. (2010) says that peer group pressure can influence controllers at both the super controller and diffuse controller level: "in essence, controllers influence over other controllers, as well as offenders, targets and places." Media can also alert the public to areas that are safe, or unsafe, as an incentive for the managers of establishments in those areas to become more effective at controlling crime. It is this concept that social media would most greatly influence. Social media reaches more consumers faster than news media alone, which could exponentially expand the influences of content media produces.

In conclusion, media has a history of effecting various facets of society and the criminal justice theory of routine activity. Media created moral panic lures consumers into deciding that criminal justice system is incapable of solving problems leading to a desire for more punitive measures. Minorities in the media prove weak groups are prime targets for harsh punishments and longer imprisonment. Framed around poverty, inequality, discrimination and the blame of events. High social moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and drug-use are used to create a culture war. Politics build entire campaigns around these issues and media validates them with continuous and repetitive coverage. This creates a relationship between media, politics and policy. Focus on violent and urban crime creates a heightened sense of urgency in dealing with these crimes despite factual evidence that these are among the least prevalent types of crimes. Controllers modify the three branches of the routine activities theory. Media has played a large part in moderating all three of the branches; the offender, victim and location. Media moderation could either be exponentially enhanced or could be detrimentally hindered by social media.

Chapter 3

Fear in the World of Social Media: Current Research

Fear of crime among youth has rarely been studied despite both policy makers and academics recognizing increased crime rate and victimization risk among youth compared to the adult population. (Lane, 2006; May, 2001; May and Dunaway, 2000; May, Vartinian, & Virgo, 2002; Rand and Catalano, 2007; Shaffer and Ruback, 2002). Victimization and crime is a normal life experience among many youths, leading to a raised level of fear and anxiety. Despite this fact, youths are rarely asked about their experiences. Lane (2006) examined this and concluded the reason may be largely due to the political stance that delinquent youth should be punished not pampered. With the dawn of social media, youth perception of crime is becoming more influential because they have an outlet to voice their opinion.

Regardless of which affect media has, it is through controlled or altered perception that those repercussions are so powerful. Combining the instant, seemingly unbiased, uneducated, unfiltered and unmonitored content of social media with the controlled, monitored, carefully constructed content of news media could prove to be much more powerful than either one of these types of media on their own. Not because they will incite more panic, call for more policy changes, increase the level of mistaken knowledge or imbed deeper false concepts of the world, but because they could produce a widely and immeasurable amount of altered perceptions. If left unchecked, the world's inhabitants will no longer have a true, or even realistic view of the world, but they will be misled, misinformed and lost in a new world of perceived crime.

Due to the extreme limitation of research focusing on social media, it is the researcher's belief that it is not only necessary, but imperative that research into social media begin. Through this research study we will attempt to uncover any differences that

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education plays in the influence of social media. The study will determine if level of education acts as a buffer to limit or lower the amount of response students have towards news through social media.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

The research employed an online survey to conduct quantitative research. Britto and Noga-Styron (2014) claim that younger citizens are more susceptible to media influences. Television, movies, games and the internet are believed to have profound influence over the way young people view the world around them. However, there is very little research to support the views of society's youth.

This research was designed to discover exactly how the younger generation perceives crime on their university campus. The first assumption was that the difference in perception of crime and reality would be smaller among college students studying criminal justice than those in other major fields of study. The second assumption was that students that would rather take online classes would be less likely to have a strong difference between perception and reality than students that prefer classes on campus.

The research was conducted in the spring of 2015 on the University of Texas at Arlington college campus. The sample was obtained by conducting a random selection of undergraduate courses offered at the university during the spring 2015 semester from departments representing social science, health science, and mathematics. These areas were selected to provide a broad range of student experiences and interests.

Random selection was conducted through a random number generator using department registration summaries for criminology and criminal justice, mathematics, biology, kinesiology, history, anthropology and sociology. On-line courses and classes with large numbers of enrollment were over-sampled to maximize response rates. Twenty-six courses were selected during the sampling process. E-mails were sent to the

instructor of record for each course asking if the instructor would be willing to allow his/her class to participate in the research. If the instructor agreed, (s)he was asked to complete the permission form to allow research to be conducted in their classroom. Of the 26 course instructors that were contacted, six agreed to participate (23%), one declined to participate, and 19 did not respond. The enrollment for these classes was 390 students.

A total of 53 students responded to the survey for a 12% response rate. According to Woolnough (2009) and Couper (2000), 11% response rate is average for e-mail surveys. This may be due, in part, to the high volume of surveys and other e-mail students receive during the semester, lack of interest in the research, or lack of understanding of the subject matter. Despite the low response rate, there was a 99% completion rate, which is well above the average. Given the size of the sample, further research would be necessary to determine generalizability.

As Table 1 shows, minorities were over-represented in this study with 49% of the respondents identifying as minority. More females (70%) than males (30%) participated and a large number of older students (47%) replied. Almost half (57%) of the respondents were from the criminal justice field of study, which evenly reflected the 50% spread between criminal justice and other fields of study chosen to participate.

Of the respondents, a surprising 53% claimed that they would prefer taking online classes versus on campus classes. When asked where the students find support and comfort in others, 17% agreed, 59% disagreed and 24% were neutral. These demographics were important in understanding the mindset of the respondents when looking for connections between social media and perceptions of crime. Data was coded, recoded and analyzed in the SPSS program. Similarities and differences between the groups were evaluated by the researcher to determine any significant findings.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of college students

	N	%
Age		
18-24	28	53
25+	26	47
Gender		
Male	16	30
Female	36	70
Ethnicity		
Majority (White)	27	51
Minority (Other)	26	49
Field of Study		
Criminal Justice	30	57
Other Discipline	23	43
Online Support		
Agree	9	17
Disagree	31	59
Neutral	13	24
Online Classes		
Yes	28	53
No	25	47

Analysis and Findings

Dependent Variable – Fear of Crime

Fear was measured as a general concept of fear. The question asked was "Are you afraid, anxious, nervous or worried about your safety in general" with yes or no choices.

Independent Variables

The independent variables were classic media, entertainment media, social media, and victim. The media choices were measured by asking three separate questions "how many hours average per week do you spend with…" All three questions had the same answer choices: 0-7 hours per week, 8-14 hours per week, 15-21 hours

per week, more than 22 hours per week. The victim variable was measured though a two part series: "have you ever been a victim of a crime somewhere other than on or near school campus" and "have you ever been a victim of a crime on or near school campus", both with yes or no answers. These two questions were combined to acquire a measurement of victimization in general.

Table 2: Independent Samples T-Test: General Fear

	Mean (*SD*)	*t*	Sig. (2 tailed)
Age 18-24 25+	1.86 (.40) 1.32 (.48)	-1.11	.271
Gender Male Female	1.50 (.52) 1.11 (.32)	3.29	.002**
Ethnicity Majority Minority	1.22 (.42) 1.28 (.46)	-.47	.639
Victim Yes No	1.28 (.46) 1.22 (.42)	.47	.639
Field of Study Criminal Justice Other Discipline	1.28 (.45) 1.22 (.42)	.48	.637
Online Preference Yes (online classes) No (campus classes)	1.25 (.44) 1.25 (.44)	0.00	1.00
Online Support Yes (Online Friends) No (Offline Friends)	1.50 (.53) 1.12 (.34)	2.43	.020*
Hours with Social Media 0-2 hours a day 2+ hours a day	1.26 (.44) 1.22 (.44)	.21	.836
Hours with Classic News Media 0-2 hours a day 2+ hours a day	1.28 (.45) 1.19 (.40)	.68	.497
Hours with Entertainment Media 0-2 hours a day 2+ hours a day	1.27 (.45) 1.14 (.38)	.69	.491

***p=.001; **p=.01; *p=.05

Table 2 shows the general perception of fear expressed across the various independent variables. The only two variables that held any significance are; gender and online support. According to the findings, females are more likely to perceive a higher threat of crime than men. Respondents that are more comfortable with finding support online also perceive a higher rate of crime than those who seek support in face-to-face interactions. The implications of the gender difference could be due to the powerless way in which women have been portrayed for centuries, implanting a fear of vulnerability manifesting as a fear of crime. The significance of respondents having an online support group versus a face-to-face support system could be attributed to the strength of that support system being stronger in the face-to-face group. Which would give the respondent a feeling of greater safety. It could also indicate the respondents with stronger online support groups having less faith in people around them, leading them to feel more vulnerable and fearful in face-to-face situations.

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Test

	Fear	Courses	Support	Victim	Age	Gender
Fear Correlation	1	-.012	.001	-.121	.164	-.389**
Sig. 2 Tailed		.934	.993	.389	.240	.004
Online Courses Correlation	-.012	1	.007	.207	-.136	.045
Sig. 2 Tailed	.934		.962	.137	.333	.749
Online Support Correlation	.001	.007	1	-.293*	.007	.013
Sig. 2 Tailed	.993	.962		.033	.962	.925
Victim Correlation	-.121	.207	-.293*	1	-.247	.070
Sig. 2 Tailed	.389	.137	.033		.075	.619

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Table 3: Continued

Age Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	.164 .240	-.136 .333	.007 .962	-.247 .075	1	-.120 .394
Gender Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.389** .004	.045 .749	.013 .925	.070 .619	-.120 .394	1
Classic Media Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.118 .401	.129 .355	-.050 .724	.008 .955	-.082 .561	.162 .245
Social Media Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.024 .863	.177 .206	.025 .858	.159 .254	-.125 .371	.078 .576
Entertainment Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.110 .433	.160 .251	-.144 .303	.215 .122	-.002 .991	.012 .934
Race Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	.055 .698	.131 .349	-.175 .211	.245 .077	-.096 .496	.316* .021
Field of Study Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.057 .686	.012 .935	.135 .336	.055 .698	-.217 .118	-.088 .533

Table 4: Bivariate Correlation Test

	Classic	Social	Entertainment	Race	Field of Study
Fear Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.118 .401	-.024 .863	-.110 .433	.055 .698	-.057 .686
Online Courses Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	.129 .355	.177 .206	.160 .251	.131 .349	.012 .935
Online Support Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	-.050 .724	.025 .585	-.144 .303	-.175 .211	.135 .336
Victim Correlation Sig. 2 Tailed	.008 .955	.159 .254	.215 .122	.245 .077	.055 .698

Table 4: Continued

Age Correlation	-.082	-.125	-.002	-.096	-.217
Sig. 2 Tailed	.561	.371	.991	.496	.118
Gender Correlation	.162	.078	.012	.316*	-.088
Sig. 2 Tailed	.245	.576	.934	.021	.533
Classic Media Correlation	1	.230	.162	.219	-.263
Sig. 2 Tailed		.097	.247	.115	.057
Social Media Correlation	.230	1	.335*	.260	.111
Sig. 2 Tailed	.097		.014	.060	.429
Entertainment Correlation	.162	.335*	1	.053	-.031
Sig. 2 Tailed	.247	.014		.704	.827
Race Correlation	.219	.260	.035	1	-.326*
Sig. 2 Tailed	.115	.060	.704		.017
Field of Study Correlation	-.263	.111	-.031	-.326*	1
Sig. 2 Tailed	.057	.429	.827	.017	

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Tables 3 and 4 show a bivariate correlation between 11 different variables; fear, online courses, online support, victim, age, gender, hours spent on classic media, hours spent on social media, hours spent on entertainment media, race and field of study. Out of these different tests there were a total of five (5) significant findings. The most significant finding is between gender and fear at -.389. Historically, females have been more fearful of crime, and the findings here reinforced that finding. This may be due to the fact that females are often portrayed in the media as meek and more susceptible to crime, or they feel they would not be as well equipped to fend off various types of attacks.

The second most significant correlation is between the number of hours spent with entertainment media and the hours spent with social media at .335. This is a surprising finding and could mean the participants that spend time with classic media do not spend as much time with social media or entertainment media because they are not as interested in the electronic world and could be spending more time finding their entertainment offline. As the world of face-to-face interaction gets replaced with electronic interactions this number should become more and more profound.

Race and field of study is the third most significant correlation with .326. There are more white students in criminal justice who participated in the survey than other ethnicities in other disciplines. Gender and race at .316 was the fourth most significant correlated variables. Of those that participated in the survey the majority were minority males.

Participants that went online to find moral support were also victims at a .293 significant correlation score. This could be explained by assuming once a person becomes a victim they become withdrawn and find comfort in an electronic medium where they are less likely to be victimized again. This could also be due, in part, to the media interpretation that once a person is a victim they are much more likely to become a victim again. In some media cases, victims actually look for situations in which they are more likely to be victims again.

<div align="center">Summary and Discussion</div>

Limitations to this study included deployment at a single university and lack of faculty participation. In order to obtain generalizability, this research should be performed on a larger scale to include more students as well as other Universities. Question #20 on the survey was coded incorrectly and resulted in several respondents being unable to fully respond. Influences other than social media that were not controlled for in this study

might have skewed the evidence. However, as the first research of its kind, it is hoped that this examination will spark further studies.

Other limitations include the variety of classes chosen to participate in the survey. Social sciences were chosen due to the need to include criminal justice. Health sciences were included in the sample list because of the assumption that students who chose to major in health sciences are more likely to enjoy face-to-face interactions with other people. Mathematics was chosen under a similar assumption, that those who chose to major in mathematics enjoy a more electronic platform. These three fields together should have provided a broad range of students to survey.

As previously discussed, gender and online support were found to significantly influence fear of crime. The implications of the gender difference could be due to the powerless way in which women have been portrayed for centuries, implanting a fear of vulnerability manifesting as a fear of crime. The significance of respondents having an online support group versus a face-to-face support system could be attributed to the strength of that support system being stronger in the face-to-face group, which would give the respondent a feeling of greater safety. It could also indicate the respondents with stronger online support groups having less faith in people around them, leading them to feel more vulnerable and fearful in face-to-face situations.

The student's perception of crime on campus, as the posed research question, appears to be insignificant. When answering the first assumption of difference in perception of crime between those in a criminal justice field and those in other disciplines was insignificant. The second assumption that students who prefer taking online classes would have a lesser sense of fear than those that prefer to go to campus for classes was also insignificant. These findings may not be conclusive that social media has an impact

on a student's perception of crime, but there are other findings that point should be examined more in depth.

<div align="center">Social Media in the Future</div>

As discussed in the literature review, moral panic is a phenomenon created and fueled by classic news media. Social media has the opportunity to either farther fuel the fear created by classic media, or it will be the tool used to extinguish that fear. In order for an issue to be considered a moral panic there must be a heightened level of fear that an event or behavior will have a negative impact on society.

With social media as an enabler for the creation and continuation of moral panic formed through classic news media, a story could be first consumed through classic media forums, then expanded upon in social media. As fear is created, it could gain momentum through unedited, unmonitored comments and opinions from onlookers. These comments could be consumed by other people and morphed into new, different ideas so that by the time the whirlwind of fear and panic has subsided the original issue may not be remotely factual.

An example of this may be found in looking through information on the attacks in New York on September 11th, better known as 9-11. Pursuing classic media alone, the facts of the attacks include two planes being flown into the trade center towers. Twin towers collapsing, followed by several other buildings in the area collapsing, causing hundreds of deaths. The same story researched through social media would include stories of conspiracy, blaming the government for staging the attacks in order to gain access to oil, bombs going off inside the buildings being the true reason for the collapses and many other social opinions. By the time the social media frenzy ended there was difficulty for the average citizen to know the difference in what was fact and what was opinion.

Moral panic can also be squelched by social media. A good example of this would be the issue of homosexuality. Through social media platforms, the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community has been able to stage protests, inform the general public and garner support for the movement to end the moral panic and bring about equality for homosexual equality. Without social media there is no telling how long it would take for such a monstrous campaign to become successful.

Another area media has historically played a part in was minorities and how they have been portrayed in the media. Black males have been persecuted in the media at such a high level of instance that the term "criminalblackman" was born and continues to be used today. With social media and the presence of cameras in every citizen's hand, these perceptions that the black male is always the criminal are constantly being contested. Stories run through classic media might be able to show one or two choppy clips of video footage, but social media could have the entire event from start to finish and several angels available. This could prove dangerous if the armature videos were posted out of context to create a new, incorrect perception of the evil doer in retaliation for the minority's oppression.

An example of this could be seen in viewing footage from the 2015 Baltimore riots. Footage from one camera shows police officers throwing rocks into crowds of black protesters. The same event from a different camera shows an angry mob rushing police officers with rocks and various other make-shift weapons. Yet another camera caught a longer timeframe of the event and showed a group of angry protesters yelling and threatening the police, throwing rocks at them. A few of the officers threw the rocks back at the crowd and this caused the crowd to rush the police officers. There were no videos released that showed what happened prior to that incident.

Social media could also play several different parts when discussing policy and politics. Police departments, such as the Dallas Police Department, are already implementing social media to help look for wanted criminals, gather information on gangs and trouble spots in the city, and give out information on crime to be watchful of. Some police stations also use social media to get closer to the communities they serve by posting speed trap warnings, or hosting fun social media events and inviting users to participate. This aids in creating a closer feeling between citizens in an area and the police that patrol that area, closing perceived disconnect.

Politicians also use social media to become more visible to the community. One of the largest obstacles facing politicians is that citizens in the past have been forced to rely on what media has displayed about the different politicians. With social media, politicians are able to contact citizens virtually directly, answer questions and get a better idea about the issues society feels are important to set up their campaigns on. By becoming more accessible, communities will be better armed with information on who to vote for when election times come around. Citizens can also turn to other citizens for input on who to vote for through social media platforms.

Violence and urban crime are two of the most often portrayed types of crime on classic news media. Chermak, (1995) and Yanich, (2001) claim the coverage of violent crime is due to the focus on sensational crimes that appeal to stronger emotions of the audience. Coleman (1993) states that urban crime is often used in media to stimulate fear of unfamiliar or physically distant places. Social media has the capability of bringing more realistic and prevalent crime to the forefront of societies minds. Everyday crimes which are considered unsensational but are severe and important to the audience, such as robbery, carjacking, and missing person crimes that are left out of the media will garner the attention needed through social media outlets.

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Users of social media could take control of what crimes are paid attention to, and due to the close relationship with the audience, this control might become powerful enough to outweigh what is presented in classic news media. People that use social media often trust the people on their social media platforms and tend to pay attention to what is being said by those people. The important factor is, how many of those people take the opinions posted on social media at face value, and how many of those people seek information from other sources before feeling as if they know the whole situation. Power to question the authorities and follow crime events in more areas also provide a clearer picture for anyone interested in that particular event.

Theoretical implications on the routine activity theory expose the controls used to mediate the offender, victim and location will expand to include social media. The routine activity theory states that in order for a crime to occur there must be a willing offender, a vulnerable victim and an unguarded location. According to the expanded version of the theory as posed by Sampson et al. (2010), each of these three elements have controllers. Controllers moderates the element's conditions. Examples of controllers are: an offender's controller may be a strong family bond, a probation officer or a good mentor; a victim's controllers may be parents, good friends, or strangers looking out for each other; location's controllers are owners, managers, employees and security guards.

Super controllers are entities that influence the controllers. Examples of super controllers are the board are State Liquor Boards, City Councils, Neighborhood Watch groups, and the media. Media is one of the most potent super controllers. It can influence political debates, create moral panic, nurture fledgling community services, and encourage peer pressure. Social media has the ability to accomplish all of the same, or similar effects using minimal effort in a fraction of the time and with an exponentially greater impact.

Appendix A

Survey

- 1. What is your gender (what do you identify as)?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

- 2. How old are you?

☐ 18-21

☐ 22-24

☐ 25-29

☐ 30+

- 3. What race/ethnicity do you identify with?

☐ Asian

☐ Black

☐ Hispanic

☐ White

☐ Other (please specify)

[ ]

- 4. What is your major field of study?

☐ Criminal Justice

☐ Social Services

☐ Other (please specify)

[ ]

- 5. Do you enjoy online courses?

☐ Yes, I would rather take online classes

☐ No, I would rather take classes in a classroom

- 6. Please indicate which value most describes you in regards to this question: I go online to find the majority of physical, emotional and other forms of support?

☐ Always (I am most comfortable online and very rarely turn to people I know offline for support)

☐ Sometimes (I am more comfortable online, but I have a few people I turn to offline for support)

☐ Seldom (I am more comfortable offline, but I have a few people online that I turn to for support)

☐ Never (I am most comfortable offline and I very rarely turn to people I know online for support)

☐ Depends (I am comfortable with them both equally so I turn to people online as often as I turn to people offline for support)

☐ Unknown (I never really thought about it, I go to whoever I can when I need support)

- 7. How many hours average per week do you spend with news media (examples: reading newspapers, watching news television, listening to news radio stations or browsing news websites)? *These sources do not usually allow feedback or comments

☐ 0-7 (approx. an hour a day or less)

☐ 8-14 (approx. two hours a day)

☐ 15-21 (approx. three hours a day)

☐ 22+ (more than approx. three hours a day)

- 8. How many hours average per week do you spend with entertainment media (examples: reading books, watching entertainment television, listening to music radio stations or browsing entertainment websites)? *These sources do not usually allow feedback or comments

☐ 0-7 (approx. an hour a day or less)

☐ 8-14 (approx. two hours a day

☐ 15-21 (approx. three hours a day)

☐ 22+ (more than approx. three hours a day)

- 9. How many hours average per week do you spend with social media (examples: Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, Pinterest)? *These sources encourage feedback or comments

☐ 0-7 (approx. an hour a day or less)

☐ 8-14 (approx. two hours a day

☐ 15-21 (approx. three hours a day)

☐ 22+ (more than approx. three hours a day)

- 10. Where do you get the majority of your news or updates on current events?

☐ Talking with other people face-to-face; friends, family, other students

☐ News media; newspapers, news radio, news television or news websites

☐ Social media; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest

- 11. Do you follow any official organizations that discuss crime and criminal justice related topics on social media applications? Such as the Arlington Police Twitter, Facebook or YouTube accounts?

☐ Yes, only locally

☐ Yes, multiple (APD, CNN, Fox News, LAPD ect.)

☐ No

- 12. If a friend tells you about a current event, do you attempt to look into other sources to find out more of the facts of the event?

☐ Yes, I talk to other people I know and trust

☐ Yes, I look it up on news media; newspapers, news radio, news television or new websites

☐ Yes, I look it up on social media; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest

☐ d. No, I don't care

- 13. What do you believe is the most accurate and honest source of current events?

☐ Community, Friends, Family, Other people I know

☐ News media; newspapers, news radio, news television or new websites

- ☐ Social media; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest
- • 14. Have you ever been a victim of a crime somewhere other than on or near school campus?

☐ Yes

☐ No

- • 15. Have you ever been a victim of a crime on or near school campus?

☐ Yes

☐ No

- • 16. In reference to questions 14 or 15: What type of crime have you been a victim of? (Mark all that apply)

☐ Personal (Non-violent) Examples: verbal abuse, bullying, neglect, emotional abuse

☐ Personal (Violent) Examples: physical abuse, assault, robbery

☐ Property (Non-violent) Examples: burglary, theft, vandalism

☐ I prefer not to answer

☐ I have never been a victim of a crime

- • 17. Do you know someone that has been a victim of a crime

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

- • 18. In reference to question 17: What type of crime where they a victim of? (Mark all that apply)

☐ Personal (Non-violent) Examples: verbal abuse, bullying, neglect, emotional abuse

☐ Personal (Violent) Examples: physical abuse, assault, robbery

☐ Property (Non-violent) Examples: burglary, theft, vandalism

☐ I prefer not to answer

☐ I don't know anyone that has ever been a victim of a crime

- 19. Are you afraid, anxious, nervous or worried about your safety in general? Mark all that apply

☐ Yes, at home

☐ Yes, in social settings (with people I know; parties, friend's houses, the dorms, etc.)

☐ Yes, in large crowds (with people I don't know; stores, stadiums, school campus, etc.)

☐ Yes, in vacant areas (with nobody around; empty parking lots, streets, parks, etc.)

☐ Yes, in general (it doesn't matter who I am with or where I am, I am always worried)

☐ No, not at all (I am never worried, or I don't think about my safety)

- 20. How much would you say are afraid of the following crimes?

	Never afraid	Only afraid when something is reported in the area	Afraid for a few weeks after a reported incident in the area	Afraid for several months after a reported incident in the area	Afraid even with no reported incidents in the area
Being murdered	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being raped/sexually assaulted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being attacked by someone with a weapon	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having someone break into your home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having your car stolen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being robbed or mugged on the street	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having your property vandalized/damaged	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being cheated, conned, scammed or swindled out of your money	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Being approached on the street by a beggar or panhandler	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being beaten up or assaulted by strangers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being bullied	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being cyberbullied	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having your identity stolen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- 21. Do you find that you are more anxious, nervous or worried about your safety after you hear of a crime on campus from an unofficial social media source?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

- 22. Do you feel more alert and worried about crime on campus if you hear it through an official media source? (Such as MavAlerts)

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

- 23. Have you followed any criminal events at any of the country's schools? Such as shootings, rapes, thefts, or assaults on or near the campuses?

☐ Yes, one or two

☐ Yes, but only the ones my friends talk about

☐ Yes, as many as I can find out about

☐ No, I don't care

- 24. Do you think that social media will eventually replace news media?

☐ Yes, news media; newspapers, news radio, news television or new websites will be completely replaced by social media; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest ☐ Yes, the two will blend together to form a new type of news media

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☐ No, they will continue to be completely separate

☐ I don't know

- 25. If you learned about a crime through social media, how likely are you to believe it without looking into it further?

☐ Not likely at all, I don't believe anything without looking into it

☐ Somewhat likely, but I would still want to look into it through other sources

☐ Most likely, I believe that social media is where the truth is and everyone else is bias

☐ I don't know, or I don't care

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During her studies at TCC she joined the Community College Honor Society: Phi Theta

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While at SHSU she joined the Golden Key, International honor society. After graduating

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