

The New Personal Influence: How Facebook Friends Influence the News We Read

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The research methods are the ones that are used to design the methods used for the studies. Over the years, researchers and scholars in the field of media and communication have devised several research methods, such as content analysis, experimental designs, cross-sectional surveys, etc. The study design used in the research article, *The New Personal Influence: How Our Facebook Friends Influence the News We Read*, is a cross-sectional survey study design.

The design process of the study was complicated because the participants were given different surveys, such as a news feed with comments, a news feed with no comments, and a comparison of treated articles and not treated articles. This process made the research design complicated. However, in my opinion, it is a cross-sectional survey because participants were given different options to ask for their preferences, and the instruments were treated as cases and controls. A cross-sectional study collects data and makes inferences about the targeted population at one point in time (Hall and Lavrakas, 2008). Cross-sectional studies tend to provide a snapshot of the issue in concern. The study is relatively inexpensive and requires less time to conduct (Levin, 2006). This research method has the ability to study and observe multiple outcomes and exposures at the same time. Survey research is a quantitative methodology that involves a standardized questionnaire with mainly close-ended questions. The cross-sectional study design can cover three levels before, after, and over the period of time for any subject or interest under study. The main research tool in the study is a structured questionnaire that is properly developed based on the variables in the study. An analytical cross-sectional survey can inform the researcher about the relationship between the different forms of media and content consumption (Lule, 2013).

Survey studies are focused on specific populations such as magazine subscribers, social media users, and television viewers, and the selection of the participants and sampling methods for the participants are carried out based on the research question. Using the surveys, people can voice out their preferences, such as which articles or news the participants will prefer (Bornman, 2009). For example, survey research is used to understand how a large number of people who have participated in the study feel and respond to the variable that the study has selected. The selected variables are then tested using different instruments, such as questionnaires from the selected participants, and their responses are analyzed using frequencies and other statistical tests and graphical representations. The concept of the survey is that survey questionnaires are usually personal because respondents provide their personal opinions and information about their views and cannot provide responses on behalf of other people.

Questionnaire surveys usually provide the answers to *what* questions and are unable to provide

answers to *why* questions. For example, in the article "*The New Personal Influence: How Our Facebook Friends Influence the News We Read*," the respondent chose their preference of the news feeds but were not able to answer why the particular news or content was preferred. In media and communication, surveys are also not able to explore the content of any medical communication or content such as local content or television content (Bornman, 2009). The survey questionnaire is of several types when it comes to data collection, such as self-administered surveys, interview-based surveys, and surveys carried out via phone calls or posts. Self-administered surveys in which the questionnaire is handed to the respondent, and they fill the form on their own. For example, in the article, the survey method was a self-administered survey where participants were handed over the question and answered accordingly.

There are several advantages to using cross-sectional survey designs, such as low cost, large accessibility, time efficiency, flexibility, and timely data collection, and the time required for research is less than that of the other methods of the study. However, there are several disadvantages to the survey research methods, such as a response rate, not being able to form a relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and instead finding the association between the variables. The response rate issue can be addressed by following up with the participants, designing short questionnaires, and interviewing them. However, the survey can be used as a baseline for longitudinal studies and to establish a causal relationship between the variables in experimental studies.

Summary Of The Article:

The use of social media has increased over the years, and political information in the environment of social media shapes the dynamics of how individuals receive, process, and consume the information that is being provided on social media. Because the information provided on social media is random entertainment news, news seekers tend to stumble upon political news while they search for entertainment news. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter have a strong influence on users, and the influence comes from friends and endorsements based on the likes of the user. Social media is being used for leisure time, and people tend to avoid any political news which may appear on social media, but if the news is discussed by friends, then the user is more likely to read the political news. The main purpose of this study, '*The New Personal Influence: How Our Facebook Friends Influence the News We Read*,' (Anspach, 2017) is to determine whether the news selection rate is influenced by social media audiences and whether personal influence can determine the selectivity of partisan. Two waves of experiments were carried out to fulfil the purpose of the study. The first experiment had subjects from two different universities, one ethnically diverse with liberal mindset subjects and the other with conservative white subjects enrolled. In the first wave, the political fundamentals of the participants were measured, and a sample of friends and family members were snowballed.

The snowball sampling was used to generate a mock Facebook newsfeed. After the administration of the mock news feed from the snowball sampled participants, the survey was conducted again for the participants, and the response rate was 86% approximately. The survey featured three mock news

feeds presented to the participants in random order, and subjects were asked to select the preferred news feed from each of the three news feeds. The news feed was developed by news and activities by both fictional and real friends of the participants to understand whether the source of information matters in the selection of information. The mean age of the participants was 18.17 years, and 4.2 was the mean age of political knowledge among the participants. The result of the study shows that discussions regarding news that appears on the newsfeed of the users have an influence on the preference of the content users will read. The study concluded that social media users will select political news if their family and friends have posted it, regardless of the political ideology. However, if the activity is carried out by fictional people, then it does not impact the preference or selection of any particular news feed. The nature of the comment on the news has also influenced the selection and consumption of the particular news on the news feed, especially when the comments are counter-attitudinal. The methodology of the article and its findings are robustly indicating the originality and reliability of the article. The research has been carried out comprehensively and adds to the existing knowledge on the influence of social media and friends on the selection of content, as well as other factors which influence partisan content selection.

Strengths And Weakness:

The methodology section of the paper has been explained in great detail, which provides comprehensive information about the process and the way participants were selected, news feed was devised, and data were collected, as well as explaining the four mock news feeds which were created. The mock news feeds are devised following a proper protocol for the study purpose and are explained in a proper way regarding how these feeds are provided to the participants. The survey research method of study has proven to be inexpensive and time-efficient while collecting the data, which is a characteristic of survey research (Bornman, 2009). The study also was able to infer some association between the selection of news and the influence of other factors. Also, the survey research usually occurs in a realistic setting (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013), and the present study was carried out in a realistic setting despite the creation of mock news feeds.

The methodology might have been robust in terms of execution and findings, but the paper is not comprehensively devised, as the lack of headings or sections makes it difficult to comprehend the information. For example, in the first line, it is said the experiments are being carried out, giving the impression of an experimental study, but later on, it was observed that the study is survey-based. Also, the information on sampling strategies and how each participant was selected, as well as the number of participants from each pool, was not mentioned, which makes the whole research method weak. The main focus of the methodology section was the creation of the news feed and other aspects of the news feed. However, after the concluding remarks, towards the end of the paper, in the notes section, there are some features of sampling, the number of participants, and how participants were categorized in the pro-attitudinal or counter-attitudinal.

The methodology section also lacks information on the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the

participants, which are important in any research study design and are the gold standard for any quantitative research (Coughlan et al., 2007). Ethical committees and review boards have to permit any research to be carried out (Coughlan et al., 2007), and this survey or *experiment*, as mentioned in the article, does not have any section on ethical considerations. Also, the article lacks information on the ethical protocol of the study, which was considered for the selection and enrollment of the participants. If the information had been organized, the research method would have been comprehensive. The paper also does not have any section on the limitations or strengths of the study, which gives the reader an idea about the proposed limitation that might have hampered the research or limited the results of the study.

Alternative Methodological Approach:

An alternative methodological approach for a similar research question would be analyzing the reasons for influence. The qualitative research design for this study would be suitable as it will provide the reason why friends and family members influence the selection of news feeds, but the fictional people or the unknown do not impact the decisions. The phenomenological research method will enhance the understanding of the topic and interest of the present study. The alternative research method of phenomenology would add to the existing knowledge of the topic and the reasons and perceptions behind the factors influencing the selection of participants' news feeds because this process will involve in-depth interviews and focus group discussions among participants. Another alternative research method for the same research is case-control, exploring the interest of the participants and having a different treated article with noninvolvement of the family members or the friends for the control group and then determining the selectivity preferences. Social media has been one of the major sources of information, so political information and news feeds are consumed selectively, and future studies can cater to the limitations and weaknesses of the present to enhance the understanding of the association as well as for robust research methods.

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