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Cultivating Anxieties:

Media Consumption and Fear of Violent Crime in America

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Abstract

The current study examines the relationship between social media consumption and fear of violent crime. The goal of our study is to make three contributions to the literature. One is to provide further evidence about social media consumption and the fear of violent crime, as previous research has yet to find a link between the two. A second is to provide evidence on various types of media consumption and their association with fear of violent crime, specifically. While research has evaluated the relationship between multiple types of media consumption and fear of crime in general, little research on fear of violent crime as an outcome variable has been conducted. The third contribution of our study is to provide evidence on the impact of mass communication on fear of violent crime, using samples from several regions. Most existing studies that measured fear of crime as a dependent variable have relied upon young adult samples from one or two schools. All these studies have suggested that future research should use larger, more diverse samples to replicate previous findings. Addressing these gaps in the extant research, the current study empirically builds on research on media consumption and fear of crime by examining a national sample of 1,014 U.S. adults from the American Fears survey.

Keywords

Fear of Violent Crime; Media Consumption; Media Effect

Introduction

Over Research on fear of crime began with the President's Commission on Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in the U.S. in the 1960s and has since developed into a vital area of criminological research (President's Commission, 1967). Since that time, researchers have

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investigated different types, determinants, consequences, and contexts in which individuals experience fear for their safety (e.g., Ferraro, 1995; Garofalo, 1981; Hale, 1996; Henson & Reyns, 2015). Yet, questions about fear of crime remain unanswered. While fear of crime was traditionally conceptualized in terms of neighborhood conditions, prior victimization experiences, and media exposure to crime themes in newspapers or on television, recent research has begun to explore the intersection between remote or online experiences, including social media exposure, and fear of crime (e.g., Henson et al., 2013; Henson et al., 2017; Näsi et al., 2021).

Within these remote or online spaces, social media offers greater depth and scope than was historically provided by traditional media (Morris, 2021). Traditional television news and print media are finite, in the sense that the consumer reads or views to the end of the story and moves on to something else (Hastuti et al., 2025). In addition to providing crime news and related content from all over the country and the world, social media sources also cater to users' interests through their clicks and engagement. In short, a story on a given topic will appear more frequently the more the user shows interest in it. This cycle can be repeated for as long as the user stays engaged, with a nearly endless supply of future stories on the topic (Enders et al., 2023).

In terms of fear of crime, this constant source of engagement on a news topic may be associated with users' perceived risks of becoming crime victims themselves. For example, homicide is a relatively rare form of crime victimization, yet a social media user caught in a feedback loop depicting stories of criminal homicide may be more likely to perceive that their likelihood of victimization is higher than it actually is. As has been observed in prior fear of crime research, even though actual crime rates may not align with what is seen on social media, the cultivation of these fears is associated with differences in how individuals perceive their environment and their safety (e.g., Niu et al., 2022; Waters et al., 2017; Wahlberg & Sjoberg, 2000).

Despite the potential association between social media use and fear of crime, significant gaps remain in researchers' understanding of how these contemporary media patterns are associated with fear of violent crime. For example, prior research has examined the influence of social media on fear but has often relied on samples of young adults from a single academic institution. While valuable, the logical next step in growing this body of research is to utilize samples from the general population to ensure greater applicability and generalizability of the findings. Further, while general fear of crime is well-documented, it is necessary to examine the specific nuances of violent crime, as opposed to general risk, because it is uniquely susceptible to media distortion and sensationalism. Not only are violent crimes more likely to dominate social media feeds, but their overrepresentation may also create higher perceived risk and skew perceptions of safety in ways that general crime stories may not.

The current study addresses these limitations by making three contributions to the fear of crime literature. First, we further examine the role of social media in explaining fear of violent crime, a research area where prior work has yet to reach consensus. Second, the current study examines the frequency of media consumption to assess the impact that the degree of media consumption may have upon fear of violent crime. Finally, this study utilizes a large nationwide sample of the U.S. general population to provide a more diverse and generalizable perspective than has been possible in prior research. In doing so, we also build upon established communication theories to understand the intersection of digital media, public perception, and criminal justice.

Theories

The relationship between media consumption and fear of violent crime has been a topic of discussion in the criminal justice field, especially with the growth of digital media platforms and the news cycle.

Crime-related media content consumption has been demonstrated to be associated with perceptions of personal safety and perceived risk of violent victimization (Callanan, 2012; Chadee et al., 2019; Chiricos et al., 1997; Intravia et al., 2017; Roche et al., 2016). News broadcasts have been dominated by the topic of crime, particularly violent crime, which calls into question how this continual display forms public understanding and if those understandings and perspectives align with reality.

There are various forms of media, ranging from traditional platforms such as newspapers and television to digital platforms such as online news and social media, all of which play an important role in shaping perspectives on crime. Violent crime remains a common subject in media coverage, and exaggerated depictions are frequently associated with greater fear of victimization (Chiricos et al., 2000; Romer et al., 2003; Kort-Butler & Habecker, 2017). The representation of crime, regardless of whether it is unrealistic in news reports or crime shows, has been associated with public fear, even though crime rates do not exactly match media depictions (Callanan, 2012; Chiricos et al., 2000; O'Hear, 2020; Romer et al., 2003). Understanding this relationship is crucial to understanding public reactions to crime and its potential implications for criminal justice policy.

Cultivation Theory and Fear of Violent Crime

The theoretical framework that has had the greatest impact on understanding the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime is cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969). Cultivation theory states that extended experience with media, specifically violent crime-related media, skews an individual's perspective of reality, forming their thoughts about the widespread occurrence and threats linked to criminal activity. The media not only depict society but also construct and reinforce certain explanations of the world, especially in crime-related contexts.

As outlined by cultivation theory, the more an individual is exposed to media that represent violent crime, the greater the likelihood they are to misjudge the actual potential of being a victim of violent crime. Romer, Jamieson, and Aday (2003) state that sensationalized media coverage and crime-related television shows contribute to the public's increasing fears. For example, even though there has been a decrease in actual crime rates, media coverage frequently overemphasizes the incidence of violent crime, resulting in individuals believing that crime is more common than what the facts suggest. This skewed perception of reality can be harmful, leading individuals to adopt safety measures or embrace viewpoints that align with a false depiction of reality.

Cultivation theory highlights the significance of prolonged media consumption in influencing these perceptions. The more individuals become influenced by media representations of crime, the more their shared comprehension of crime becomes distorted, resulting in an exaggerated fear of victimization that does not align with the real level of threat. In addition, Gerbner's (1969) study stated that some individuals who have minimal personal experience with violent crime in their daily lives are more prone to the cultivation effect. These individuals begin to believe that the media's depiction of crime accurately reflects the world. This is especially problematic because it influences views of crime and an individual's actions, perceptions of law enforcement, and support for more severe criminal justice policies.

Despite its enduring prominence, cultivation theory faces notable theoretical and empirical limitations. A key criticism is that it often conceptualizes media audiences as passive recipients of uniform messages, overlooking the active, interpretative role consumers play when processing content. Consequently, cultivation effects may be less pronounced among individuals with higher levels of educational attainment or stronger media literacy skills, as these viewers are typically better equipped to evaluate media representations critically rather than absorbing them uncritically.

Addressing these audience-level variations is essential for developing a more nuanced understanding of how media exposure intersects with perceptions of crime.

Conditional Effects and Fear of Violent Crime

Prior research suggests that as an individual increases their consumption of crime-related media content is associated with greater fear of crime (Dowler, 2003). In research conducted by Dolliver, Kenney, Reid, and Prohaska (2018), they found a positive association between media consumption and fear of crime. This model suggests that an individual's fear response to violent crime in the media can differ, based on individual qualities such as prior victimization experiences, general risk evaluations, and neighborhood crime perceptions. For instance, individuals who have lived in areas with high crime rates or have undergone violent crime have a higher chance of experiencing increased fear of crime, regardless of whether the media content they consume is not explicitly violent.

Unlike cultivation theory, which focuses on the cumulative effects of continuous exposure, conditional effect models focus on the conditions under which media consumption may be associated with fear-related perceptions. These models provide a framework for examining how exposure to media accounts of violent events may be associated with perceptions of safety. Consequently, even uncommon incidents of violent crime, when widely publicized by the media, may be associated with greater public anxiety, especially if individuals are easily swayed by media influence. These models emphasize the importance of evaluating not only how much media is consumed, but also the type 0of content consumed.

Moreover, there is an increasing concern that social media usage, especially X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, may be associated with greater fear of crime. Intravia et al. (2017) suggest that recurrent exposure to social media materials containing crime-related content is associated with greater perceived danger, particularly among individuals who rely on these platforms for news updates. Similarly, Näsi et al. (2021) examined the relationship between media consumption and fear of violence using data from the Finnish National Crime Victim Survey. Their study found that consumption of traditional news, social media, and alternative information sources about violent crime was associated with fear of street violence, even after accounting for demographic factors, prior victimization, economic strain, and interest in violent crime news.

Audience Traits

Gender is a crucial factor that may be associated with variation in the relationship between media consumption and fear of violent crime. Prior research has reported that women have greater fear of violent crime than men (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2015; Henson & Reyns, 2015). The media has frequently depicted women as victims of violent crimes, especially in cases of domestic violence, homicide, and sexual assault. These depictions may be associated with perceptions that women are more susceptible to becoming victims of violent crimes, even if the statistics go against it. A woman's fear of crime may be influenced by extensive media depictions of women as vulnerable victims, which may contribute to heightened feelings of vulnerability. Crime dramas and media reports frequently highlight women's vulnerability to victimization and may be associated with public perceptions of women's safety (Callanan, 2012). Therefore, women might feel the need to exercise additional caution, such as changing their behavior and avoiding certain locations, to minimize their perceived danger. On the other hand, men typically report lower levels of fear of violent crime,

especially when the media represents them as capable of self-defense or committing violent behaviors. In crime dramas, male protagonists are frequently portrayed as strong and able to defend themselves against violent crime, which may be associated with a lower sense of danger among male viewers (Eschholz, 1997).

The depiction of ethnic and racial groups in the media may be associated with how communities assess crime and their risk of victimization. Media depiction of crime frequently racializes the perpetrators of crime, with Black, Latino, and Indigenous groups often portrayed as the primary criminals in violent crime events (Kim, 2023). This disproportionate representation of racial minorities in crime-related media may be associated with perceptions, particularly among White audiences, of crime occurring in communities of color. These depictions may reinforce stereotypical beliefs and be associated with a greater fear of violent crime among individuals exposed to violent crime content.

Additionally, individuals from racial minority communities might potentially feel more defenseless because of the media's focus on violence in their own neighborhoods. For example, Latino and African American individuals, who frequently reside in neighborhoods with significant criminal activity, may come to accept the representation of their communities as dangerous, which may be associated with greater perceived vulnerability and fear of victimization among residents (Prieto Curiel et al., 2020). Such depictions may also be associated with race-related fear among White individuals and with policy preferences favoring increased policing and criminal justice involvement in communities of color (Näsi et al., 2021). Media portrayal of crime has been associated with public fear and crime-policy attitudes, including perceptions related to marginalized communities

Age is another factor that may be associated with variation in the relationship between media consumption and fear of violent crime (Henson & Reyns, 2015). It has been continually demonstrated that older adults typically have a greater level of fear of violent crime than younger individuals. This may be the result of a blend of physical vulnerability, the belief that one lacks self-defense skills, and greater media exposure. As people age, they may view themselves as more susceptible to victimization, which may be associated with greater fear, particularly during the consumption of crime-related media content (Kohm et al., 2012). On the other hand, younger individuals frequently report lower levels of fear, especially young adults or college students, who may believe they are better prepared to manage dangerous or threatening situations. Younger individuals may be more likely to consume social and digital media, which may be associated with distinct responses to crime-related content (Williams et al., 2021). Yet, the presence of highly interactive digital environments raises questions about whether the age gap in fear of crime persists, considering modern media channels, as younger cohorts may face unique vicarious exposure online.

Education may also shape how people perceive violent crime and respond to crime-related media. Prior research has identified education as one of several individual characteristics associated with fear of crime, suggesting that media effects may differ across audiences rather than affect everyone in the same way (Williams et al., 2017). For example, Näsi et al. (2021) found that people with secondary and college education reported greater fear of street violence than those with only primary education. The authors suggested that more highly educated individuals may be more likely to recognize certain situations as threatening or violent. Overall, these findings suggest that education may be important in understanding how people interpret crime-related information and evaluate their own risk of victimization.

Social class can play an important role in the association between media consumption and fear of violent crime. Individuals who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently go through elevated exposure to criminal activity occurring in their neighborhood, in addition to various media platforms. These individuals have a higher chance of consuming crime-related content that is sensationalized and frequently portrays violent crime as more widespread in their neighborhoods.

This type of exposure may be associated with greater perceived vulnerability and greater fear of violent crime (Romer et al., 2003). In contrast, individuals who are from wealthier classes are likely to consume media content that highlights criminal activity in economically deprived neighborhoods. Even though they might not live in these neighborhoods, this type of exposure may be associated with greater perceived vulnerability and greater fear of crime, particularly if they perceive crime as more common than it is. At the same time, better access to security resources may be associated with lower fear.

Political ideology may also be associated with both media and fear of violent crime. Those who have a more conservative leaning are typically more worried about crime and support a more punitive criminal justice approach (Dolliver et al., 2018). News sources with a conservative orientation may portray violent crime as a prevalent threat, and exposure to these portrayals may be associated with greater fear of crime. On the other hand, liberal individuals can view crime as an outcome of systemic issues like inequality and poverty and typically exhibit less fear. These ideological differences indicate that political beliefs may be associated with media selection, perceptions of crime, and preferences for criminal justice responses.

Another contributing factor to the fear of violent crime is religiosity. Although studies have varied results on the relationship between religiosity and fear of violent crime, some research suggests that individuals with strong religious beliefs may have higher fears of crime, potentially from conservative viewpoints and concerns about moral decline. Some individuals argue that religion can provide protective benefits by fostering a sense of belonging and social unity, thereby reducing fear. Although Callanan (2012) does not directly focus on religiosity, the idea is connected to greater cultural views influenced by social dynamics and media. These different theories point out the significance of further research into how religiosity and fear of violent crime are connected across diverse demographics.

Methods

The 2022 Chapman University Survey on American Fears (Wave 8) was a nationwide online poll conducted via the SSRS Opinion Panel, featuring a sample of U.S. adults aged 18 and older. SSRS is a full-service survey and market research firm. It included 1,020 participants (44% completion rate), and data were collected from April 5 to 15, 2022. After accounting for missing values through listwise deletion, the final sample size was 1,014.SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based on a nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design. The SSRS Opinion Panel has also recruited some hard-to-reach demographic groups via a random-digit-dialing (RDD) telephone sample. ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence (CDS), a regularly updated listing of all known addresses in the U.S. for the Opinion Panel; known business addresses are excluded from the sample frame.

Measures

Dependent variable. Fear of violent crime was measured using three items. Respondents were asked, "How afraid are you of being the victim of the following crimes?" which consisted of "mugging, murder by a stranger, and murder by someone you know." The available responses were "very afraid to not afraid." The coding was reverse-coded to reflect a higher level of fear. The response was coded as 1 = not afraid, 2 = slightly afraid, 3 = afraid, and 4 = very afraid. The index's reliability score is .877.

Independent variables. Social media and media consumption were the focal variables for the study. Social media was measured using a one-item question. Respondents were asked, “How often do you get news from social media?” The available responses were every day to never. The response was reverse-coded to reflect from 'never' to 'every day'. The response was coded as 0 = never, 1 = less than once a month but at least once a year, 2 = once or twice a month, 3 = once or twice a week, 4 = most days, and 5 = every day. Media consumption was measured using 10 items. Respondents were asked, “How often do you read a local newspaper from your hometown, read a national newspaper such as USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, or The New York Times, read online news websites, watch the national nightly network news, watch Fox news, watch CNN, watch MSNBC, watch the local TV news to learn about your area, watch daytime talk shows, and listen to a talk radio show that discusses politics. The response was coded as 1 = never, 2 = less than once a month but at least once a year, 3 = once or twice a month, 4 = once or twice a week, 5 = most days, and 6 = every day. The index’s reliability score is .754.

Demographic variables. Seven demographic variables were used in the analysis: gender, education, employment, income, age, political party, and religion. Age ranged from 18 to 99 years. Respondents were asked to report their current age at the time of the survey completion. Gender is measured as a dichotomous variable, coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Education is an ordinal variable. Respondents were asked to indicate the highest level of school they have completed or the highest degree they have received, which ranged from 1 (less than high school) to 4 (some postgraduate or above). Employment is an ordinal variable. Respondents were asked, “Currently, are you yourself employed full-time, part-time, or not at all?” This is coded as 0 = not employed, 1 = part-time, and 2 = full-time. Income is an ordinal variable. Respondents were asked to indicate their income level, ranging from 1 (less than $15,000) to 9 ($100,000 or more). Political affiliation is measured as a dichotomous variable. Respondents were asked to indicate, “Do you think of yourself as Republican, Democrat, or independent?” This is coded as 0 = not Republican and 1 = Republican. Religion is an ordinal variable. Respondents were asked to indicate, “How religious do you consider yourself to be?” This is coded as 1 = not at all religious, 2 = not too religious, 3 = somewhat religious, and 4 = very religious.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (*N*=1,014)

	%/Mean (SD)	Range
Dependent variable		
Fear of violent crime	1.92 (0.926)	1-4
Independent variables		
Respondent demographics		
Gender (Female = 1)	53.55%	
Education	2.83 (0.812)	1-4
Employed	1.07 (0.925)	0-2
Income	6.19 (2.564)	1-9
Age	50.40	18-99
Political party	31.46%	0-1
Religious	2.57 (0.997)	1-4
Media consumption	1.78 (0.914)	0-5
Social media	2.88 (1.811)	0-5

Several model diagnostics were conducted prior to analysis to ensure the integrity of the regression model. These included descriptive statistics, normality assumptions, and multicollinearity checks, which were conducted to assess the effects of independent variables on fear of violent crime. Descriptive statistics were examined to identify any anomalies in the data. The distribution of residuals was examined to assess the normality assumption, and the data were found to meet the normality assumption. Multicollinearity was assessed through variance inflation factors (VIFS) and tolerance (TOL). All VIF values fell below the conventional threshold of 10, and tolerance values remained above 0.10. Missing data were treated using listwise deletion. OLS regression was used to analyze the data, as this method is well-suited to continuous outcome variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1. The mean of the dependent variable, fear of violent crime, was 1.92, indicating respondents were slightly afraid of violent crimes. For social media consumption, the average was 2.88, suggesting they accessed news on social media approximately once or twice a month. The average media consumption score was 1.78, indicating that respondents use media less than once per month. The average respondent was approximately 50 years old. More than half the respondents were female (53%). The average respondent reported educational attainment near the “some college” level. Respondents averaged near part-time employment, and average income ranged from $40,000 to $50,000. About 31% of respondents identified as Republicans. The average score for religion was 2.57, suggesting moderate religiosity.

Table 2. OLS Regression for Fear of Violent Crime (*N*=1,014)

	b (SE)	β
Gender (Female = 1)	.480 (.054)	.258***
Education	-.071 (.036)	-.062
Employed	.027 (.033)	.027
Income	-.057 (.012)	-.157***
Age	-.007 (.002)	-.143***
Republicans	-.156 (.060)	-.078**
Religious	.033 (.027)	.035
Media consumption	.153 (.030)	.151***
Social media news	.046 (.015)	.090**
Intercept	2.071 (.172)	
F-test	29.794***	
R^2	.211	

Notes. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p<.001

The results of the OLS regression analysis are reported in Table 2. With an F value of 29.794 (p < .001), the regression model is statistically significant. The R2 value is 0.211, indicating that the variables explain 21.1% of the variance in fear of violent crime. Gender was significant, with females reporting higher fear of violent crime (b = .480, p<.001). Income was significant: higher-income

individuals reported lower fear of violent crime (b = -.057, p < .001). Age was statistically significant, indicating that older individuals had a lower fear of violent crime (b = -.007, p < .001). Respondents who indicated they were Republicans had lower fear of violent crime (b = -.156, p < .01). More frequent social media news consumption was positively associated with greater fear of violent crime (b = .046, p<.01). More frequent general media consumption was also positively associated with greater fear of violent crime (b = .153, p<.001).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the associations between demographic characteristics, media consumption patterns, and fear of violent crime. The analysis revealed that both general media consumption and social media consumption were positively associated with fear of violent crime. Specifically, respondents who reported more frequent general media consumption and more frequent use of social media for news also reported greater fear of violent crime. This pattern is consistent with prior research linking traditional media use, social media use, and other crime-related information sources to fear of crime (Nasi et al., 2021).

The observed associations are also consistent with expectations derived from the cultivation theory. Cultivation theory proposes that sustained exposure to mediated depictions and discussion of crime may be associated with perceptions of a more dangerous social environment, greater perceived risk of victimization, and greater fear of crime. News and other media sources often devote disproportionate attention to serious or sensational violent offenses relative to their frequency in everyday life. Thus, the positive association between media consumption and fear of violent crime is consistent with the possibility that repeated engagement with crime-related media content may be related to perceived danger and vulnerability. Importantly, these findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that media consumption causes fear of violent crime. Due to the cross-sectional data, the temporal ordering between media use and fear of crime can't be established. A plausible interpretation, consistent with cultivation theory, is that greater exposure to media depictions is associated with greater fear. However, reverse causation is also a possibility; individuals who already have a greater fear of violent crime may be more likely to seek crime-related news or consume higher media focusing on violence. The results provide correlational evidence consistent with cultivation theory but do not provide causal confirmation of the relationship between the two variables.

With respect to social media, the variable measured whether individuals obtained news from social media rather than the duration or frequency of use. Interestingly, relatively few participants reported regularly obtaining news from social media, with the average respondent indicating they did so only once or twice monthly. This limited social media news consumption may reflect the sample's demographic composition, with an average participant age of 50. From a cultivation perspective, this pattern is consistent with a relationship between traditional media consumption and perceived risk and vulnerability in this older demographic cohort. Future research should evaluate whether social-media news use is differentially associated with fear among younger populations and whether such associations vary by the type, frequency and algorithmic delivery of content.

As noted in prior literature and found in this study on fear of crime, females consistently report a higher fear of violent crime (Dobbs et al., 2009; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2013; León et al., 2022; Pryce et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2015). This finding aligns with the vulnerability perspective, suggesting women perceive themselves to be more physically vulnerable to victimization. However, contrary to the vulnerability perspective and prior literature, this study found that older individuals reported lower fear of violent crime than younger individuals. This unexpected finding may be associated with generational differences in exposure to direct and vicarious forms of victimization.

Because this relationship holds even after controlling for media consumption frequency, it suggests that younger cohorts may possess an inherent, heightened baseline perception of vulnerability, or that the nature of the digital content they encounter is more strongly associated with fear than that of traditional broadcast formats (Lee et al., 2022).

Socioeconomic factors were also found to have a significant association with elevated fear of violent crime. Consistent with previous research, the findings confirmed that higher-income individuals were less likely to report fear of violent crime (Skogan, 1990, 1993). This relationship may be explained, in part, by the advantages associated with higher income. For example, higher-income individuals may be more likely to live in neighborhoods with lower levels of visible disorder, greater residential stability, stronger informal social control, and better access to protective resources. These neighborhood and individual-level advantages may be associated with lower perceived vulnerability to violent victimization, thereby lowering fear of violent crime. Political orientation was also found to be significantly associated with fear of violent crime. Individuals who identified as Republicans had a lower perception of fear of violent crime. This finding contributes to a growing body of research examining the relationship between political ideology and perceptions of crime (Boateng & Adjekum-Boateng, 2017; Onat et al., 2023). This inverse relationship may stem from differing levels of trust in mainstream media narratives or from an ideological inclination toward individualistic self-reliance and defensive confidence (e.g., firearm ownership), which may be associated with lower perceived vulnerability.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the measurement of fear of violent crime remains inconsistent throughout the literature. This limits the generalizability of the results to studies that employ similar operational definitions. Future research would benefit from a standardized measurement approach to measuring fear of violent crime. Distinguishing between different types of fear and their cognitive and emotional dimensions would benefit future research.

Secondly, as noted in prior research, cross-sectional data are commonly used in fear-of-crime research, and such data cannot establish temporal causality (Boateng, 2019; Lytle & Randa, 2015). Consistent with prior literature, media consumption and fear of violent crime were found to be significantly associated (Näsi et al., 2021). However, due to the limitations of the data, it is difficult to determine whether fear of violence occurred prior to exposure to the media or vice versa. Thus, longitudinal designs/data are needed to clarify temporal ordering, evaluate possible reciprocal relationships, and more rigorously assess potential causal mechanisms linking media consumption and fear of violent crime.

Finally, the sample's age distribution (mean age of 50) may limit generalizability to younger, digitally native populations who utilize entirely different information channels. Future research should explicitly target younger cohorts to evaluate whether modern social-media environments are differentially associated with psychological vulnerability and fear of violent crime relative to traditional broadcast formats.

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