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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA EFFECTS LITERATURE

By W. James Potter and Karyn Riddle



This study focuses attention on scholarship on mass media effects. Our purpose is to profile that effects literature in terms of specific medium tested, type of content, use of theory, use of method, and type of effect. We conducted a content analysis of the mass media effects literature published in sixteen scholarly journals published from 1993 to 2005.

It is essential for scholars to form communities in order to share their perspectives on the phenomena they study, develop conventions about how to study them, and share the insights they generate. Periodically, it is important for scholars in a community to take stock of what they do so they can observe patterns in the direction a community is headed and assess the pattern of findings that forms the context for their thinking. This study profiles the mass media effects literature by examining published articles in terms of media studied, type of content, use of theory, method, and type of effect.

Rationale

According to So,¹ “self reflection is a mark of maturity,” and a field’s maturity requires periodic examinations of its scholarly activity.² It is important to trace the movement of ideas through the “invisible college” to see where ideas come from and which scholars and fields are being influenced by them.³ Self-examination is also important from a practical perspective, so we can track patterns in our literature and make better decisions about what research needs to be designed next. Kamhawi and Weaver⁴ argue that when viewing a literature “from a distance, one can discern larger patterns and trends in mass communication research. Knowing them can help researchers and students identify areas of strength and weakness, and of abundance and scarcity, in the research.”

In 1979, Lowry⁵ observed that “for the most part, communication researchers have neglected to conduct systematic studies of their own output,” a serious shortcoming because such studies can draw attention to what is emphasized in a field and what is ignored. In the intervening years, researchers have addressed this shortcoming, with studies gener-

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ally falling into two groups: bibliometric studies and content analysis studies of the characteristics of the published research.

Bibliometric studies examine citation patterns to determine which authors, studies, and journals rely on the ideas of other authors, studies, and journals. For example, Reeves and Borgman⁶ studied citations in nine core communication journals and found communication scholars dependent on journals outside of communication. Communication journal articles exhibited five citations of other journals for each citation they received. Rice, Borgman, and Reeves⁷ found three clusters of journals and citations: interpersonal, mass media, and residual isolated journals. Rice et al.⁸ supported the conclusion of So in their bibliometric analysis of forty years of the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, finding a greater percentage of citations from core communication journals after 1985 compared to citations in articles before 1985.

This body of bibliometric research suggests that there is a “field identity” growing over time, with the balance shifting slowly to self-citation from out-of-field citation, and communication journal studies increasingly being cited in other social science journals. Also, authors of mass media studies published in core mass media journals (*Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Human Communication Research*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Communication Research*) are likely to cite the core journals and other social science journals, but not other communication journals.

Not all bibliometric studies conclude that the field of communication is developing its own identity. So⁹ found that “communication currently still depends heavily on psychology for its intellectual input. This situation does not differ much from that in the first half of this century, when communication research was basically a spin-off from psychology.” He observed that there “are indications of gradual development in the field,” but that “in comparison with other social science fields, communication is still less developed and occupies only a peripheral position in the ecology of knowledge.”¹⁰

Content analyses studies, on the other hand, examine characteristics of published research to determine practices common among researchers. Some analyze research in only a single journal.¹¹ Others focus on only one medium.¹² Each of these studies has contributed a valuable insight to the building of a complete picture of the nature of mass media research.

This study content analyzes mass media effects studies published in scholarly journals in order to construct a profile of the recent mass media effects literature so we can compare the more recent pattern to older patterns. Also, we will contextualize the patterns we find in terms of how those salient characteristics of the mass media effects literature are likely affecting the development of the research field.

Medium. Research activity seems to have followed development of the different media. In an early analysis of published content, Schramm¹³ analyzed articles in *Public Opinion Quarterly* from 1937 to 1956 and found print media dominated, with 486 articles. Perloff¹⁴ analyzed 1,490 articles

in *Journalism Quarterly* from 1955 to 1974, finding that among those articles concerned with a specific medium, 67% involved print media, compared to 6% about electronic media, and 26% related to both. Weaver and Gray¹⁵ found 56% of articles in *Quarterly* between 1955 and 1974 dealt with print.

Electronic media grew in research importance beginning in the early 1970s. In their analysis of research in *Quarterly* from 1971 to 1995, Riffe and Freitag¹⁶ found that newspaper content accounted for 46.7% of all content analyses, followed by television (24.3%), magazines (13.6%), and other (15.4%). They do not provide trend analyses but it is likely that the percentage of articles dealing with newspaper content decreased while the number of articles dealing with television increased over that twenty-five-year period. Such a trend was indeed reported by Kamhawi and Weaver,¹⁷ who found that broadcast media grew in importance to researchers through the 1980s and 1990s, accounting for 42.2% of all media studies at the expense of print, which accounted for 28.7%. They concluded that traditional broadcast and print continued to dominate mass media research, but asked, "Will these media continue to dominate research as we enter further into the 'Internet Age?'"¹⁸ In an analysis of the 961 articles published in five leading communication journals from 1994 to 1999, Tomasello¹⁹ found that only 4% of those articles dealt with the Internet.

Type of Content. While published analyses focus on studied medium, few summarize type of content areas typically studied. One exception is the study by Riffe and Freitag,²⁰ which found that in published content analyses, 71.0% focused on news/editorial, compared to 10.1% advertising, 7.2% entertainment, and 11.7% visual/graphics/other.

Theory. Scholars who examine our literatures frequently observe that the use of theory is at a low level and that there needs to be a more explicit use of theory both in the generation of empirical research studies and in the interpretation of results.²¹ In an analysis of eight journals from 1965 to 1989, Potter, Cooper, and Dupagne²² found that only 8.1% of 1,326 articles were guided by a theory and provided a test of that theory; another 19.5% were tests of hypotheses but these hypotheses were not derived from a theory. Kamhawi and Weaver²³ reported that only 30.5% of articles in ten communication journals from 1980 to 1999 specifically mentioned a theory, which led them to argue that "theoretical development is probably the main consideration in evaluating the disciplinary status of the field. As our field grows in scope and complexity the pressure for theoretical integration increases. It seems that scholars in the field should be developing and testing theories to explain the process and effects of mass communication. However, that was not widely evident in our sample."

Method. Exploration of which methods are used most has been a popular topic. A few content analyses of the published literature have focused on whether a study employed a qualitative or quantitative method. For example, Schramm's²⁴ 1937-1956 *Public Opinion Quarterly* study found the percentage of articles using quantitative methods grow-

ing. Perloff's²⁵ 1955-1974 *Journalism Quarterly* study found that 56% used quantitative methods.

Some examinations of the literature simply count frequency of a method, such as content analysis.²⁶ Riffe and Freitag²⁷ focused on methods in twenty-five years of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, reporting that of the 1,977 articles appearing during that period, 486 (24.6% of the total) used content analysis.

Other studies compared method used. Lowry²⁸ analyzed empirical articles published from 1970 through 1976 in seven journals and found 30% used survey, 19% used experiments, and 13% used content analysis. Also, 42% used subjective reports from respondents, while 21% used observations of behavior, and 12% used archival records. Kamhawi and Weaver²⁹ examined articles published from 1980 to 1999 in ten communication journals, finding that 33.3% used survey method; 30.0% used content analysis; 13.3% were experiments; 4.7% used historical method; 10.3% used other qualitative methods; and the remaining 8.4% used a combination of methods.

Type of Effect. Despite the popularity of books and university courses on media effects, it seems only one content analysis of the media literature has looked for the prevalence of different kinds of effects. Cooper, Potter, and Dupagne³⁰ analyzed 1,326 articles published in eight U.S.-based internationally distributed peer-reviewed journals from 1965 to 1989. About one quarter of them were effects studies—22.4% of them dealt with effects on individuals and 2.5% dealt with effects on society.

Providing a picture of the patterns in mass media effects thinking and research is a very large task. To be conducted in full, it would of course require examination of published journal articles, books, government reports, industry reports, instructional materials from consumer activist groups, theses, and dissertations. Among periodicals, there are likely hundreds carrying mass media effects articles. Nonetheless, we hope to provide a reasonable start based on a counting of published studies in mainstream or "core" scholarly journals, because research journals have been called the "nerves of the discipline"³¹ and "the barometer of the substantive focus of scholarship and research methods most important to the discipline."³²

We began by selecting the five journals that have generally been considered the core journals of mass media research by scholars who have conducted content analyses of the research literature and scholars who have looked at bibliographic citation patterns:³³ *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*. To these five core journals we add three more that publish mass media effects research but were too new to be included in many previous analyses: *Critical Studies in Mass Media*, *Communication Theory*, and *Media Psychology*. We added five other communication journals (*Human Communication Research*, *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Education*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, and *Mass Comm Review*).

Method

Finally we added one journal from advertising (*Journal of Advertising*), education (*Audio-Visual Communication Review*, now renamed *Educational Technology Research and Development*), and political science (*American Political Science Review*).

We examined all issues of sixteen journals published in the odd years between 1993 and 2005. This included 109 journal/years (*Media Psychology* has been publishing only since 1999). Within each issue, all articles were coded if they involved mass media effects as defined below. We did not code editorials, book reviews, introductions to symposia, or editors' reports, but we did include articles labeled as "Research in Brief" or given similar designations.

In order to be coded for this study, an article first had to deal with a mass media effect. Mass media are defined as the channels of transmitting messages to particular audiences in a way to attract and condition their attention for repeat exposures. Thus, traditional mass media were included—television, radio, film, newspapers, magazines, mass market books, recordings, and the Internet—while telephone conversations, use of computers for e-mail, and the like were excluded.

Second, the authors needed to make some claim or provide some evidence that the mass medium in question exerted some influence or a recognizable effect, whether at a macro (such as an institution, the public, society, the economy) or individual level.

Each article was coded for identifying information: journal, year, issue, beginning page, and authors' names. In addition, we coded for five key variables: medium, type of content, theory prominent, method, and type of effect. For each of these variables we began with a list of coding values (see below) but during the coding procedure, the coders added values to the list when they felt the beginning lists did not include codes to capture the essence of an article.

Medium. Initial codes included all media, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, recordings, film, Internet, new media, and other. If an article seemed to deal with all media without specifying any one in particular, it was coded as "all." If an article mentioned more than one medium specifically, those mentioned media were all coded. For example, a study might be an experiment that compares learning from television vs. newspaper; in this case the study would be coded for both television and newspaper.

Type of Content. We began with three categories of content: news/information, advertising, and entertainment. As coding progressed, several sub-categories were added. During the analysis, however, the sub-categories were too scattered to report frequencies beyond the three categories.

Theory Prominent. This variable essentially had two values: yes and no. In order to be coded yes, the article needed to feature a theory prominently; i.e., if the name of the theory appeared in the article's title, the abstract, or in a heading or sub-heading of the article. The coder also recorded the name of the theory.

Method. Values included experiment, survey, focus group, ethnography, history, secondary analysis, meta-analysis, review, and theory

piece. During the coding we added values for critical analysis, discourse analysis, textual analysis, and several other qualitative methods. If a study used more than one method, all were recorded.

We also added a code for content analysis. Although content analysis is not a method to generate data for effects directly, there are times when authors use data generated through a content analysis to develop a substantial argument for effects. For example, tests of the cultivation hypothesis require content analyses of patterns in the television world. Some studies conducted content analyses that focused attention more on the presumed effects of content patterns than on the content patterns themselves; however, these studies were atypical. Another example is a study using a content analysis of newspapers that coded for story topic, use of sources, story tone, and gender of reporter.³⁴ This at first appeared to be a content study, but the authors' focus was on looking for patterns in the news across gender of reporter in order to make attributions about differential socialization of reporters—thus making it an effects study; that is, how reporters were affected by their news organizations.

Effects. We began with the consideration of whether the unit of analysis for the effect was at the individual or macro level. Individual level codes included attitude, belief, affect, cognition, physiology, and behavior. Attitudes were defined as evaluations where research participants were asked for evaluations of something, such as political candidates, advertised products, elements in media content, etc. Beliefs were perceptions about the reality of something, such as how many people worked in law enforcement, etc. An affective effect is one that shows up as an emotional reaction in the participants; mood states were also included. Cognitive effects are those that focus on changes to a person's factual knowledge or the processing of information. Physiological effects are those automatic changes stimulated in the body, such as heart rate, galvanic skin response, etc. Behavioral effects focus on observable actions of the participants. Macro level codes included effects on the public, effects on an institution, and effects on the media themselves. During the coding, sub-categories were developed to capture the essence of the effects in more detail.

Testing Reliability. Approximately 10% of the sample was coded by both coders (the two authors of this study) to create an overlap that could be used to test reliability. First the unitizing was tested and it was found that there was agreement 92% of the time with the yes-no decision of whether to include the article (this was essentially a decision about whether the article dealt with a media effect). Second, we tested for the percentage of agreement on the codes assigned to the variables for the part of the sample selected by both coders. We used the initial values in the design and not the elaborations to the codebook during the coding process. Percentages of agreement were as follows: medium, 92%; type of content, 91%; method, 91%; type of effect, 88%; and use of theory, 78%.

We identified 962 articles published in the sixteen journals in the seven years examined from the twelve-year period of 1993 to 2005. The journal presenting the greatest number of media effects articles was the

Results

TABLE 1
Concentration of Mass Media Effects Articles across Sixteen Journals

Journal	Mass Media Effects Articles	Total Articles in Journal	Percentage	Average per Year	Years Publishing
<i>JOB/JOBEM</i>	129	219	58.9%	18.4	49
<i>JQ/JMCQ</i>	120	316	37.9	17.1	82
<i>J of Advertising</i>	116	189	61.4	16.6	34
<i>Comm Research</i>	113	205	55.1	16.1	32
<i>Media Psychology</i>	64	64	100.0	16.0	7
<i>JOC</i>	110	255	43.1	15.6	55
<i>CSMC</i>	71	149	47.7	10.1	22
<i>MCR</i>	62	110	56.4	8.9	32
<i>AVCR</i>	61	159	38.4	8.7	53
<i>HCR</i>	28	147	19.0	4.0	31
<i>POQ</i>	21	194	10.8	3.0	69
<i>Comm Monographs</i>	21	151	13.9	3.0	72
<i>Comm Theory</i>	20	115	17.4	2.9	15
<i>Comm Ed</i>	13	153	8.5	1.9	54
<i>APSR</i>	12	322	3.7	1.7	99
<i>QJS</i>	1	107	0.9	0.1	91
Totals	962	2,855		144.1	

Note: Years publishing at the end of 2005

Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, which published an average of 18.4 effects articles per year (see Table 1). Eight other journals publish an average of more than 8 effects articles a year. This set of nine journals can be considered core to mass media effects scholarship—accounting for 87.9% of all mass media effects studies we found in our analysis. While the other seven journals published a substantial number of mass media effects studies ($n = 116$) and should not be ignored, the primary focus of those journals lies outside of mass media effects research. While *Public Opinion Quarterly* had been included in samples of many studies of communication literature in the past,³⁵ it presented only 21 articles dealing with mass media effects over the seven years examined. Media effects researchers are now more likely to publish their research in newer journals (such as *Media Psychology* or *Critical Studies in Media Communication*) where mass media effects research is central to the editorial focus.

Medium. Television is the most prevalent single medium examined, accounting for almost 41% of all coded articles (see Table 2). Also, electronic media appear to be more than twice as likely to show up in the mass media effects literature compared to print media. The Internet is becoming more popular as a medium for mass media scholars to examine (12.5%). Tomasello³⁶ had reported that only 4% of articles pub-

TABLE 2
Profile of Media Effects Studies by Medium

Medium	n	%
All Media	191	19.9
Electronic Media	423	44.0
Television	392	40.7
Radio	23	2.4
Recordings	8	0.8
Print Media	183	19.0
Print in General	61	6.3
Newspapers	91	9.5
Magazines	24	2.5
Books	7	0.7
Film	36	3.7
Internet	120	12.5
Other	23	2.4

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100.0% because some studies examined more than one medium. Studies were coded as "All media" if they did not specify a particular medium and instead studied the effects of media use in general.

lished in five leading communication journals (*CR*, *HCR*, *JOBEM*, *JOC*, and *JMCQ*) from 1994 to 1999 dealt with the Internet.

Type of Content. We grouped content into three types: news and information, advertising, and entertainment. The most common type of content in the recent media effects literature was news and information, representing 33% of studies coded. Studies exploring the effects of advertising content represented 17.8% of the articles coded, and studies exploring the effects of general entertainment content represented 16.4% of all articles. Some studies ($n = 100$, 10.4%) did not focus on a specific type of content. Another subset of studies ($n = 208$, 21.7%) that largely ignored content included studies where researchers asked respondents about reactions to the media in general or their usage patterns by medium instead of content.

Methods. Quantitative methods dominated in this sample with survey, experiment, secondary analysis, and content analysis accounting for 71.4% of all articles (see Table 3). The single most-used method was the laboratory experiment followed by the in-class survey.

Theory. Thirty-five percent of coded articles featured a theory prominently. This figure is higher than found previously. Potter, Cooper, and Dupagne³⁷ found only 8.1% of their articles were guided by theory, and Riffe and Freitag³⁸ reported only 27.6% of *JMCQ* content analysis studies used a theory. Kamhawi and Weaver³⁹ found theory in only 30.5% of articles they analyzed from 1980 to 1999.

We found a total of 144 *different* theories named in the 336 articles that featured a theory prominently. The theories cited most often were cultivation (representing 8% of the 336 articles that featured a theory prominently), the third-person effect (7.4%), agenda setting

TABLE 3
Profile of Media Effects Studies by Method

Method	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Survey</i>	308	32.0%
In class	195	
Telephone	100	
Mail	13	
<i>Experiments</i>	277	28.8
Laboratory	261	
Field	10	
Quasi	6	
<i>Qualitative</i>	148	15.4
Interviews	28	
Critical Analysis	27	
Ethnography	24	
Textual Analysis	20	
Historical Analysis	14	
Rhetorical Analysis	11	
Focus Groups	8	
Case Study	7	
Discourse Analysis	6	
Reception Analysis	3	
<i>Secondary Analysis</i>	78	8.4
<i>Theory Piece</i>	53	5.5
<i>Review of Literature</i>	47	4.9
Narrative Review	36	
Meta-Analysis	11	
<i>Content Analysis</i>	24	2.5

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100.0% because some studies examined more than one medium. Studies were coded as "All media" if they did not specify a particular medium and instead studied the effects of media use in general.

(7.1%), and uses and gratifications (5.7%). Only twelve of the theories were mentioned in more than 5 articles; the remaining 132 theories were spread out over the remaining 168 articles that featured a theory prominently. This indicates a pattern of rather thin theory development. Kamhawi and Weaver⁴⁰ found that only three theories (information processing, uses and gratifications, and media construction of social reality) were mentioned in as many as 10% of their analyzed articles. Of these, only uses and gratifications showed up as a frequent theory in our study.

Type of Effect. Published articles were found in all seven categories of effects (see Table 4). Cognitive effects were the most prevalent, followed closely by behavioral, attitudinal, and macro categories. The cognitive category was dominated by studies that examined the acquisition of factual material during a study, while the attitudinal category

TABLE 4
Profile of Media Effects Studies by Type of Effect

Type of Effect	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Cognitive Effect</i>	246	27.6%
Examining existing knowledge base	13	
Facts acquired during study	113	
Examining reasoning process	48	
Making inferences	38	
Mental abilities	21	
Other	13	
<i>Attitude Effect</i>	202	21.0
Examining existing attitudes	48	
Attitudes acquired during study	149	
Attitude formation	3	
Other	2	
<i>Belief Effect</i>	145	15.1
Examining existing beliefs	104	
Beliefs acquired during study	14	
Belief formation process	3	
Other	24	
<i>Affect Effect</i>	90	9.4
Triggering emotions	72	
Emotional attachment to characters	13	
Emotional motivations to use media	5	
<i>Physiological Effect</i>	7	0.7
<i>Behavior Effect</i>	234	24.3
Patterns of media use	126	
Triggering behavior	25	
Later behavior	33	
Conditioning behavior	5	
Behavioral intentions	27	
Other	18	
<i>Macro Effects</i>	183	19.0
Public affected	82	
Institutions affected	15	
Mass media affected	86	

was dominated by studies that looked at what attitudes were formed during a study. Both of these two sub-categories of studies are characterized by experiments where the designs focused on the conditions (by medium or by content type) under which people are affected more by the media.

The behavioral category was dominated by studies that focused on patterns of media use. This literature was less likely to include studies that observed behavior triggered during the study compared to studies that asked participants to indicate their intentions for later behavior.

The macro effects category was composed primarily of studies that either looked at how the public (public opinion, public knowledge, or

public behavior) or the mass media themselves were affected. The belief category was composed mainly of studies that measured the beliefs participants had prior to the beginning of their study. Studies that triggered emotions dominated the affect category. Finally, there were very few studies in the physiological category.

Discussion

Some early content analyses as well as bibliometric studies provided a picture of mass media research, as well as communications research, as often importing ideas and methods from other fields of study. There are indications, however, that mass media research is "breaking away" from those "parent" fields. Bibliometric studies reviewed above, for example, show a trend toward more citation of communication research compared to research from other scholarly fields. These studies identify a core set of journals for communication and especially mass media research. This was evident in the present study as well. Nine of ten mass media effects articles were concentrated in half of the sixteen journals analyzed.

It also appears that mass media research is breaking away from the traditional methods used in psychology, a departure from So's⁴¹ conclusion, based on analysis of the communication field from its early days until the 1980s, that psychology remained a strong influence over communication research. In psychology, researchers typically start with a mid-level theory, operationalize a test using a mass media message as a treatment, then run an experiment to test the hypothesized influence. Our findings show that this is seldom the pattern with mass media effects research published in the core communication journals. Almost two-thirds of our sample mentioned no theory, and fewer than three in ten used an experimental method.

The bibliometric literature argues that it is good for communication researchers to establish a unique identity and a community of scholars who can more powerfully and efficiently focus on communication phenomena. However, it appears from our results that any move away from theories and methods that structure parent fields has not been followed by mass media researchers constructing a unique identity. Instead, it appears that the focus of researchers has become more specialized or even fragmented. Media scholars are producing an amorphous mass of individual studies rather than constructing a field with unifying theories and methods that focus scholars' attention. There is no dominant method used by mass media effects researchers; instead there is a wide range of methods that cover just about every social science method as well as most humanistic research methods. Also, there is a wide range of effects being explored. Taken together, these two findings could be viewed positively, as an indication of a dynamic field, one with a willingness and ability to use many different tools to address a wide range of effects. However, it could arguably be an indication the field is stretched thin; a wide range of effects being studied and a wide range of methods among a small number of researchers may mean fragmentation of effort, little overlap in research work, and limited programmatic

study. This could make it difficult for scholars to share definitions of key terms and a "big picture" understanding of the overall field.

Perhaps most indicative of the fragmentary nature of the mass media effects scholarship is the low level of theory use. Theories guide research by directing attention to certain systems of explanation that need testing; they provide consistent definitions for key ideas; they gather research findings relevant to their explanations and interpret those findings in an integrated manner. Thus theories provide an important evaluative function of calibrating which findings are valid and important, and provide an important synthesis function by integrating findings into systems of explanation. To the extent that researchers cluster around a few theories, a field shares a common focus and the results of the empirical work can be more easily integrated into larger knowledge structures and more easily shared. To the extent that theories are ignored, researchers lose considerable efficiencies in the design of studies, incorporation of their findings into a body of knowledge, and achievement of conceptual leverage for their work. The low level of theory use also makes it considerably more difficult to educate new generations of scholars. New students who expend the significant effort needed to learn the top dozen theories we found in our study would find that this learning would prepare them for less than 18% of the recently published mass media effects literature.

This study extends existing bibliometric and content analysis studies. Some of the findings of the present study give reason to celebrate, for example, the finding of a core set of common journals to publish media effects research. At the same time, some of the findings of the present study give cause for concern. The low level of theory use and the fragmentation of methods and focus, for instance, suggest a lack of cohesion and integration among effects scholars.

Communication scholars must make a better effort to consistently employ and test theories in their research. However, we stop short of arguing that media effects scholars as a group need to be less diffuse in their methods of study and exploration of specific effects. After all, one appeal of studying mass media is the number of interesting content areas (such as politics, sports, news, violence, or sex) and possible effects (attitudes, behavior, emotions, and so on). Furthermore, the use of multiple methods may be the best way to provide the richest understanding of mass media phenomena. Therefore, scholars should continue their exploration of a variety of effects under a variety of mass media content scenarios, employing the multitude of research methods that are at their disposal.

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