

A. Title:

Does social media context affect your estimations of media effects?: Testing third-person effect in news consumption via online news sites and Facebook<sup>1</sup>

B. Restatement of problem researched:

This experimental study investigated how people evaluate online news consumption based on third-person effect framework. Although third-person effect has been researched extensively in traditional media, it has not been conducted to such an extent with online or social media (Antonopoulos, Veglis, Gardikiotis, Kotsakis, & Kalliris, 2015). In addition, research findings from social media are quite limited and less clear. For example, one study found significant third-person effect in news consumption via social media but could not explain how social media context influenced this effect (Banning & Sweetser, 2007). So, this experimental study attempts to revisit third-person effect under social media context to see how Internet users evaluate their and others' news consumption based on diverse message attributions such as desirability, credibility, and relevance. In addition, this study explores how social media context influences news consumers' assessments of online news stories. Impersonal-impact hypothesis and differential impact hypothesis are discussed to provide theoretical backgrounds for this study.

C. Brief review of the research procedure:

This experiment used a 3 X 2 X 2 mixed design with between-subject variables of news story delivery conditions (adding a story link on Facebook (FB) page, posting an whole story on FB page, and a story posted on online news site) and news source conditions (news organization's site versus personal blog) and a within-subject variable of story relevance (high versus low) and story presentation order. To avoid potential order effects, news stories presentation was controlled in every experimental condition.

All participants read the same two news stories varied at their perceived relevance. Participants assigned to the news site conditions were asked to read news stories through either a news organization's site or a personal blog site—in this way, they could recognize their news sources. In FB with direct posting conditions, participants read whole stories on their own FB page directly. But, in FB with news link conditions, they still could read a news title and first few lines of story and were asked to click the posted news links to reach whole news stories that were available on its source sites—the same sites participants in the news site conditions were directed to. News source information was provided for participants in FB with direct posting condition as a part of news stories. Message credibility, source credibility, message relevance, message desirability, and third-person perceptions were indexed and measured to test hypotheses.

D. Summary of findings

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<sup>1</sup> This study was presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Prague, Czech Republic, May 2018.

This study found that people's evaluation of news effects was related to news story's attributions. The most significant results emerged when message relevance was considered together with message desirability. When the relevance is considered, for the high-relevant story, message desirability significantly increased perceived news effects on self as well as first-person effect as predicted. But, for a low-relevant story, message desirability significantly increased not only perceived effects on self but also on comparison others—led to no observable change in differences between perceived effects on self and those on others. This finding could explain one of the long-lasting scholarly inquiries of why there has been inconsistent findings of first-person effect for socially positive or desirable messages (Duck & Mullin, 1995; Duck et al., 1995).

The finding of positive correlations between credibility and differential estimations of news effect on self and others is also interesting. This study found that both perceived news effects on self and those on others increased as perceived credibility of news stories increased for both a high-relevant and low-relevant news stories. The result of the decreased third-person effect, in part, is consistent with past studies (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Gunther, 1991) that found a negative relationship between credibility and third-person effect. However, this result is still surprising because this negative relationship was revealed for a news story perceived as having socially positive influences while Gunther (1991) found it for a negative news story. Another result of the increased first-person effect seems also contributing to extend our understanding of first-person effect phenomena.

#### E. Conclusions and recommendations

The present study found that, regarding their online news consumption, people assessed a larger news effect on themselves, on others, and first-person effect as they perceive news as more credible—something not found before in previous studies. Although there is much to investigate, these findings provide a useful guide for future third-person effect studies to examine online as well as traditional media effects.

#### Reference

- Antonopoulos, N., Veglis, A., Gardikiotis, A., Kotsakis, R., & Kalliris, G. (2015). Web third-person effect in structural aspects of the information on media websites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 44(Supplement C), 48-58. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.022>
- Banning, S. A., & Sweetser, K. D. (2007). How much do they think it affects them and whom do they believe?: Comparing the third-person effect and credibility of blogs and traditional media. *Communication Quarterly*, 55(4), 451-466. doi: 10.1080/01463370701665114