

Group Questionnaire Design Project
Frequency of News Consumption and Stress Level

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Division of Labor:

Elena (Informed Consent Letter; Purpose of Scale Types and Response Formats; Ordering and Formatting of the Questionnaire)

Jacob (Digital Survey; Questionnaire Procedures; Potential Threats; Hypotheses, Research Question, IV, and DV)

Kainat (Introduction; Target Population and Sampling Frame; Digital Survey, APA Reference Formatting)

1. Introduction

In today's increasingly polarized world, the news media and journalism industries are becoming more and more competitive. With so many ways for viewers to gain access to the news, journalists often have to fight to gain the attention of their viewers. As a result, much of media coverage thrives on "clickbait"—excessively dramatized headlines that tend to focus on negative aspects of the news (Huff, 2022). Indulging in clickbait and the bombardment of news leads to a type of suffering called "media saturation overload" or "doomscrolling," referring to the psychological strain of constantly being exposed to grim news. While these specific terms are relatively new, the idea that news consumption causes an increased level of stress is not new to psychologists, who are aiming to understand the science behind this relationship.

While the frequency of news consumption seems to have a direct impact on levels of stress in an individual, the type of news also seems to have an impact (Mayo Clinic, 2024), with negative or sensationalist news driving the body's fight or flight response (Mental Health America, n.d.). According to the American Psychological Association, more than half of adults in the U.S. get news from social media, which tends to thrive on clickbait news (Huff, 2022). Furthermore, stress seems to be directly related to social media news consumption. The president of APA's Division 26 notes that individuals often don't even realize the impact of news on their mood, but it is quietly bothering them in the background.

Psychologist Adam Anderson also talks about how sensationalist, dramatized news tends to be more attention-grabbing and even sought out by viewers. While this type of news may result in increased levels of anxiety, it is ironically also the type of news that individuals keep coming back to. He expands on this phenomenon by explaining that humans are innately curious about the world and wired to seek information that is thrilling, intense, and unnerving (Mayo Clinic, 2024). He explains that sensationalist news can release a dopamine-like response in viewers, resulting in them craving more even when this type of news inevitably increases their levels of stress.

The purpose of our study is to explore in further depth the relationship between frequency and type of news consumption with levels of stress. As discussed, individuals are constantly bombarded with news—particularly through social media—which often makes it challenging to filter through without being pulled in. Hence, through our study, we're aiming to explore the impact news consumption may have on levels of stress.

2. Target Population and Sampling Frame

We want to consider our target population as 18+ young adults who consume the news. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 76% of Americans ages 18-29 get their news

from social media. Hence, young adults are “most likely to get news incidentally—that is, without looking for it” (Heldebrandt, 2026). 70% of young adults receive news through social media (Instagram/TikTok) without looking for it while 30% actively seek it out. We intend to measure the impact of the frequency and type of news consumption on levels of stress, and since young adults are most often exposed to news, they would be the most suitable target group.

We would like to narrow down our sampling frame to Rutgers students. This would include people in classes, campus spaces, university group chats/forums, and announcements/email lists. We want to get approximately 150 participants for our study so that we may receive at least 100 completed surveys. We have several variables, including frequency of news consumption, type of news consumed, time spent per news post/site, news-induced stress/anxiety, and more. Thus, it's important to have a large sampling frame that would accommodate and explore the many different variables and categories of news in our study.

In our study, we would be utilizing a combination of convenience sampling and volunteer sampling methods. Since we would be recruiting Rutgers students through various communication methods (classes, group chats, campus spaces, etc), they would be of easiest access to us. We would also have volunteer sampling, since students who choose to participate in the survey would be most likely to finish it and would also receive a \$15 Amazon gift card. In order to get individuals to participate, we would be present on all campuses on the busiest day of classes during the busiest class hours, to ensure we are able to access a wider range of students. We would also post fliers and send the online link in group chats/forums/emails/announcements for those who would prefer a digital version.

3. Hypotheses, Research Question, IV, and DV

Research Question:

How does exposure to different types of news content influence perceived stress levels among Rutgers students/other study participants?

Independent Variable (IV):

Type of news content consumed (e.g., political news, crime-related news, entertainment news, positive/uplifting news).

Dependent Variable (DV):

Participants' perceived stress levels after consuming news content.

Assessment of Variables:

The independent variable (type of news content) will be assessed by asking participants to indicate the primary types of news they consume (e.g., political, crime-related, entertainment, or

positive/uplifting) through categorical survey questions. Frequency of news consumption will also be measured using a scaled response format (e.g., daily, several times a week, rarely).

The dependent variable (perceived stress levels) will be assessed using Likert-scale questions, where participants rate their stress levels after consuming news (e.g., 1 = never to 5 = very often). Additional items may be used to capture overall stress related to news exposure to ensure reliability of the measurement.

Hypotheses:

H1 (Directional Hypothesis):

Participants who are exposed to negative news content will report higher levels of stress compared to those exposed to positive news content.

H2 (Directional Hypothesis):

Participants who consume news more frequently will report higher overall stress levels than those who consume news less frequently.

H0 (Null Hypothesis):

There is no significant relationship between the type or frequency of news consumption and perceived stress levels among participants.

4. Purpose of Scale Types and Response Formats

In this questionnaire, we will use two types of measurement (categorical and continuous) to evaluate the independent and dependent variables. For questions #4, #12, #13, and #14, we will use categorical measurement. Question #4 allows us to identify the types of news participants consume, as they may find some stressful. Question #12 helps us understand participants' occupational roles, which may influence the types or amounts of news they consume. Questions #13 and #14 assess participants' identity markers to determine whether certain demographic groups are disproportionately affected by the news.

We will evaluate the remaining questions using continuous measurement and ordinal response formats, which allow us to assess the frequency of news consumption and the intensity of the participants' psychological responses. We analyze questions #1, #2, #3, #9, and #10 in single-item format, since each question captures all the data needed. For questions #5, #6, #7, #8, and #11, we use Likert-type scale response sets (5-point) and multi-item response formats to measure general stress and stress intensity across different news categories.

For the purpose of this study, we define perceived stress as the degree to which an individual views situations in their life as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. Previous

studies have discovered a “direct relationship between negative news exposure and negative emotional states” (Hoog & Verboon, 2019). As such, multi-item measures are most appropriate for understanding the degree to which participants’ emotional states are affected. Questions #5, #6, #7, and #8 utilize the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), developed by Sheldon Cohen, Tom Kamarch, and Robin Mermelstein, to measure psychological stress. PSS-4 comprises four questions, scored to indicate high or low levels of stress (Campbell, 2024). This score also provides a baseline for us to understand how much or how little the news contributes to participants’ overall stress levels.

5. Ordering and Formatting of the Questionnaire

The survey follows a funnel approach, starting with simpler, more concrete questions before moving to psychological self-reflection and seeking demographic information. Question #1 serves as our anchoring question by addressing our research objects while ensuring cognitive ease. While participants may not find the question particularly engaging, it is simple to answer before completing the rest of the survey. We intentionally included demographic questions at the end of the survey to reduce potential discomfort. This structure allows participants to become familiar with the survey content, starting with general habits before transitioning to specific emotional and identity-related assessments.

Both the paper and digital versions of the survey include a cover letter detailing the purpose of our research and an informed consent letter. These documents use straightforward language to ensure participants fully understand our research objectives and their rights, including the ability to withdraw at any time. The presentation of both the paper and digital surveys is easy to follow with clear instruction sets and visual cues to guide participants. We intentionally chose Rutgers-themed colors and graphics for our digital survey since our target population is Rutgers University students.

Our survey contains items that measure what we intend to measure, enhancing the construct validity of our measurement. Moreover, by utilizing the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), the survey distinguishes between participants’ baseline life stress and their news-related anxiety. This distinction increases our study’s internal validity by isolating news consumption as a specific causal factor.

6. Questionnaire Procedures

The questionnaire for this study will be administered using both paper-based and online formats to maximize accessibility and participation. Before beginning the survey, participants will be presented with an informed consent form that explains the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and how their responses will be used. Only individuals who confirm they are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate will proceed to the questionnaire.

The survey is designed to take no more than 30 minutes to complete, though most participants are expected to finish in less time. Paper surveys will be distributed in classroom or campus settings and collected immediately upon completion to encourage a higher response rate. The online version will be distributed through a Qualtrics link, allowing participants to complete the survey at their convenience.

Participants will answer a series of structured questions related to their frequency of news consumption, the types of news they engage with, and their perceived stress levels. The questionnaire primarily uses closed-ended formats, including multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions, to ensure consistency and ease of analysis.

All responses will remain anonymous, and no identifying information will be linked to participants' answers. If participants choose to enter the raffle for a \$15 gift card, their email address will be collected separately from survey responses. Once completed, participants will be thanked for their time, and all data will be securely stored and used strictly for academic research purposes.

7. Potential Threats

Several potential limitations may affect the validity and reliability of this study. One of the primary concerns is self-report bias, as participants are asked to estimate their own news consumption habits and stress levels. Individuals may not accurately recall how often they consume news or may underestimate behaviors such as frequent checking or “doomscrolling.”

Another potential issue is social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses they believe are more socially acceptable rather than completely honest answers. For example, respondents might downplay the amount of negative or sensationalized news they consume or underreport their stress levels.

Sampling bias is also a concern, as the survey is likely to be distributed within a college or similar environment. This may result in a sample that is not fully representative of the broader population, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or demographics with different media consumption habits.

Additionally, nonresponse bias may occur if individuals who choose not to participate differ significantly from those who do. For instance, individuals experiencing higher levels of stress may be less likely to complete the survey.

Finally, there are measurement limitations to consider. While Likert-scale questions provide useful insights, they may not fully capture the complexity of stress as a psychological construct.

Even with these limitations, steps such as ensuring anonymity and using consistent question formats help strengthen the overall reliability of the study.

Invitation Letter

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the relationship between news consumption and stress levels. This study is being conducted as part of a communication research project.

You were selected to participate because you are part of a general audience that regularly consumes news media. The purpose of this study is to better understand how the frequency and type of news consumption may influence individuals' stress levels.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief survey about your news consumption habits and your experiences with stress. The survey includes questions about how often you consume news, the types of news you engage with, and how you feel after consuming news content. This study will take approximately no more than 30 minutes to complete.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or stop at any time without penalty.

There are no known risks associated with this study beyond those encountered in everyday exposure to news media. If you choose to participate and complete the survey in its entirety, you will be entered into a raffle to receive a \$15 Amazon gift card as a token of our appreciation for your contributions to the time and effort you are putting towards the survey. There will also be a digital version. If you prefer to take the survey online, your responses will help contribute to a better understanding of how media consumption may impact stress.

All responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The data collected will only be used for academic purposes and will not be linked to your identity.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact one of the researchers listed on the informed consent form via their university email.

Thank you,
Research team

Note: By proceeding with the survey, you are indicating your consent to participate in this study.

LINK TO DIGITAL SURVEY: https://rutgers.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_baa4xeqYg9QFABU

Informed Consent

Title of Research Study:

News Consumption and Stress Levels

Investigators:

Elena Conti, Jacob Kohner, Kainat Azhar

Supported By:

Rutgers University School of Communication and Information

Why Am I Being Asked to Take Part in This Research Study?

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are part of the general population whose news consumption habits and stress levels are being studied.

What Should I Know About a Research Study?

- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and change your mind later.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- Paper and electronic versions of this survey are available.

Who Can I Talk To?

Please reach out to the principal investigator, Elena Conti (elena.conti@rutgers.edu), with any questions or concerns, or if any issues arise. This research has been approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may speak with them if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being addressed by the research team.
- You are not able to reach the research team.
- You wish to talk with someone outside the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about the research.

Why is This Research Being Done?

The goal of this research is to better understand how the frequency and type of news consumption affect stress levels.

How Long Will the Research Last?

The survey is expected to take no more than 30 minutes to complete, although it may take considerably less time.

What Happens if I Agree to Participate in the Research but Change My Mind?

The survey is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Please contact the research team via email with any questions about continuing.

Is There Any Way Being in This Study Could Be Bad for Me?

This survey does not include sensitive questions. However, some of the questions about stress and news consumption may cause mild discomfort. You may skip questions you do not wish to answer or stop taking the survey at any time.

What Happens to Information Collected for the Research?

Upon receiving your survey, any possible identifiers will be destroyed. You will be identified only by a unique subject number. The email address you provided will be stored separately from the data associated with your survey and will be collected only for payment-related purposes. All information will be stored on a password-protected computer, only accessible to members of the research team. The general research findings may be published, but your name will never be used.

What Else Do I Need to Know?

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be entered in a raffle to win a \$15 Amazon gift card sent to the email address you provide at the end of the survey. To receive the gift card, you **MUST** meet the criteria listed below.

PLEASE VERIFY:

- ☐ I am 18 years of age or older
- ☐ I have received less than \$100 for participating in this study
- ☐ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study

Survey**Part 1: About Your News Consumption**

1. When was the last time you checked the news?

- ☐ Today
- ☐ This week
- ☐ This month
- ☐ This year

- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ Unsure

2. How many hours do you spend checking the news each week?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-3 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ 7-9 hours
- ☐ 10+ hours

3. On average, how much time do you spend viewing news during a single visit?

- ☐ Less than 5 minutes
 - ☐ 5-10 minutes
 - ☐ 11-30 minutes
 - ☐ 31-60 minutes
 - ☐ 60+ minutes
-

Part 2: About Your Type of News Consumption

4. Please indicate all types of news you consume.

- ☐ Politics / government
- ☐ Economy / business
- ☐ Crime
- ☐ Lifestyle
- ☐ Entertainment
- ☐ Breaking news
- ☐ Culture
- ☐ Financial trends
- ☐ Celebrity news
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Science and technology
- ☐ Investigative journalism
- ☐ Editorials / opinions
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Part 3: About Your News Consumption and Stress Levels

5. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?

- 1— Never
- 2— Almost never
- 3— Sometimes
- 4— Fairly often
- 5— Very often

6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

- 1— Never
- 2— Almost never
- 3— Sometimes
- 4— Fairly often
- 5— Very often

7. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things out of your control?

- 1— Never
- 2— Almost never
- 3— Sometimes
- 4— Fairly often
- 5— Very often

8. In the last month, how often have you felt things were going your way?

- 1— Never
- 2— Almost never
- 3— Sometimes
- 4— Fairly often
- 5— Very often

9. In the last month, how often have you felt anxious after consuming the news?

- 1— Never
- 2— Almost never
- 3— Sometimes
- 4— Fairly often
- 5— Very often

10. In the last month, how often have you avoided the news because it made you feel stressed or anxious?

- 1— Never

- 2— Almost never
 3— Sometimes
 4— Fairly often
 5— Very often

Part 4: About Types of News Consumption and Stress Levels

11. Please describe how stressful you consider each type of news to be on a scale of 1-5, where 1= not at all stressful and 5= extremely stressful. Please select only **one answer per question**.

		Not at all stressful	Slightly stressful	Moderately stressful	Very stressful	Extremely stressful
1	Politics / government	1	2	3	4	5
2	Economy / business	1	2	3	4	5
3	Crime	1	2	3	4	5
4	Lifestyle	1	2	3	4	5
5	Entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
6	Breaking news	1	2	3	4	5
7	Culture	1	2	3	4	5
8	Financial trends	1	2	3	4	5
9	Celebrity news	1	2	3	4	5
10	Sports	1	2	3	4	5
11	Science and technology	1	2	3	4	5
12	Investigative journalism	1	2	3	4	5
13	Editorials / opinions	1	2	3	4	5
14	Other (please specify): _____	1	2	3	4	5

Part 5: About You

12. What is your current occupation (select all that apply)?

- ☐ Student
☐ Part-time employed
☐ Full-time employed
☐ Unemployed
☐ Other (please specify): _____

13. Which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander

- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Multiracial or biracial
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

14. Which of the following best describes your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ A gender not listed here
- ☐ Prefer not to say

THIS IS THE END OF THE SURVEY.

You are eligible to enter the raffle to receive a \$15 Amazon gift card. Please provide your email address below.

Thank you for your participation.

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