

# Student Article Review: "A Test of Structural Model for Fear of Crime in Social Networking Sites"

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*By David Kenon – September 28, 2025*

## **Introduction and Relevance to Social Science**

In their 2019 article, Lee, Choi, Choi, and Englander investigate the factors that influence users' fear of crime on social networking sites (SNS). This study is highly relevant to social science because it treats online behavior as a social phenomenon shaped by demographic traits, social networks, individual perceptions, and risk. By integrating theories of vulnerability, social context, and risk perception, the authors bridge the fields of cyber studies, criminology, sociology, and communication (Lee et al., 2019).

## **Research Question, Hypotheses, and Variables**

The main research question posed by the authors is: What factors affect a user's fear of victimization on SNS? To answer this, they develop a structural model based on the risk-interpretation model. Their hypotheses include:

- Demographic factors (such as sex and age) directly impact fear of victimization.
- Experiencing prior victimization increases perceived risk and, consequently, fear.
- Opportunity factors (like how much personal information is shared and the number of offending peers) influence fear, with perceived risk acting as a mediator.
- Social context factors (such as bridging network ties and collective efficacy) influence fear directly or indirectly.

The independent variables (IVs) are demographic traits, victimization experience, opportunity factors (e.g., self-disclosure, offending peers), and social context variables (network bridging, collective efficacy). The dependent variable (DV) is the fear of victimization on SNS (Lee et al., 2019).

## **Research Methods**

To test their model, the authors conducted a quantitative survey using structural equation modeling (SEM). They gathered responses from 486 university students in South Korea and used SEM to analyze the relationships between latent constructs and hypothesized paths. This method is common in social science research for exploring complex relationships (Lee et al., 2019).

## Data Types and Analysis

The study's data come from self-report surveys, which included demographic questions, experiences with victimization, SNS usage, opportunity and social context measures (like bridging ties and collective efficacy), and fear indicators. The authors performed confirmatory factor analysis and structural path modeling to test both direct and indirect effects. For example, they found that bridging social networks had both direct and mediated effects on fear, and that actual SNS incidents had a strong impact on fear of victimization (Lee et al., 2019).

## Connection to Course Concepts

This article connects well with course themes, such as how individual differences, environment, and network structure shape online behavior and risk perception. Ideas like social capital, risk perception, mediating variables, and structural models—which we've discussed in class—are directly reflected in the study's approach. The article shows how social science theory can inform practical strategies in cybersecurity (Lee et al., 2019).

## Marginalized Groups: Challenges and Contributions

Although the sample consists of university students, the authors highlight that demographic factors contribute to different levels of vulnerability. For instance, women often report higher fear of crime. The model implies that some groups may feel more exposed online due to their social ties and experiences. This raises important points for marginalized communities, such as older adults or those with less social support, who might experience greater fear on SNS and be less likely to participate online. Insights like these help in designing inclusive cybersecurity policies and interventions tailored to groups with higher perceived risks (Lee et al., 2019).

## Contributions to Society

Lee et al.'s research extends traditional criminological models of fear into the context of digital social networks, shedding light on how the SNS environment shapes feelings of safety. Their findings are valuable for social scientists, policymakers, and social media platform designers seeking to understand and address factors that increase online fear. By identifying risk factors, the study can inform features, campaigns, or interventions aimed at supporting high-risk groups. As social media plays a bigger role in public life, understanding and reducing fear on these platforms becomes essential for digital inclusion and safety (Lee et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

Overall, Lee et al. (2019) provide a thorough empirical study on the ways demographic, experiential, opportunity, and social context factors shape fear of crime in SNS environments. Their work is grounded in social science theory, uses robust quantitative methods, and offers insights with practical implications—particularly for vulnerable or marginalized groups. The study's focus on fear in digital spaces is increasingly important as social media becomes more central to daily life.

## Reference

Lee, S., Choi, K., Choi, S., & Englander, E. (2019). A test of structural model for fear of crime in social networking sites. *International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence & Cybercrime*, 2(2), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.52306/02020219SVZL9707>