

QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

Politics, Social Networks, and the History of Mass Communications Research: Rereading *Personal Influence*

Special Editor: PETER SIMONSON
University of Colorado

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Prepared by Herb Fayer, Jerry Lee Foundation

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Perpetual Revelations: C. Wright Mills and Paul Lazarsfeld

John H. Summers, Harvard University

Background This article narrates the prehistory and post history of *Personal Influence* as an episode in the biographies of Paul Lazarsfeld and C. Wright Mills. It begins in 1945, when Lazarsfeld sent Mills to Decatur, Illinois, to undertake the fieldwork, and ends with Mills's death in 1962.

Decatur Study In the Decatur study, everybody answered three questions.

- Has anybody recently solicited your opinion concerning international, national, or community affairs or news events?
- Have you changed your opinion recently about any such events?
- Do you know anybody who keeps up with the news, anybody you trust to help you decide your opinion?

Answers from the Study The three questions asked, in the same sequence and with varying follow-up questions, covered not only public affairs but also fashions, movies, and brands. The intention was straightforward: who were the opinion leaders?

- Question 1 gave a list of people who claimed they had been consulted.
- Question 2 yielded people who had influenced the opinions of the women interviewed.
- Question 3 was a general list of esteemed people in Decatur.

Two-Step Flow Those voters who had changed their political opinion over the course of the election attributed the change to casual conversations among family and friends, to face-to-face interactions, rather than to formal media.

- Upon this insight, Lazarsfeld mounted his “two-step flow of information” hypothesis.
 - *Step 1:* Information came from the formal media.
 - *Step 2:* Informal groups or individuals mediated the information for other groups or individuals.

The Study To detect the “opinion leaders,” the analysis of the data needed to yield clues to three main problems.

- Could the actual flow of interpersonal influence in Decatur be isolated? Could “opinion leaders” be isolated as a social type?
- Could the influence be isolated in relation to the class structure of a community?
- Did the influence flow vertically, up and down class lines, or horizontally, within classes?

NOTE: Did their testimony mean that the first person could be called an opinion leader, and the second an opinion follower? The actual answers seemed to require a third category, so that the “opinion leaders” could be said to have given advice, “opinion followers” could be said to have gotten advice, and a third, “opinion relayers,” could be said to have given and gotten. But the design of the study had not anticipated the need for this third category.

Mill's Feud with Lazarsfeld The profession, Mills charged, was in the grip of “grand theory” and “abstracted empiricism”; the first tendency he charged to Talcott Parsons, the second, to Lazarsfeld.

- Mills and Lazarsfeld criticized the integrity of each other's work.
- Mills died in 1962 of a heart attack, age forty-five. Lazarsfeld and Merton, the men who urged him to New York in 1945, declined an invitation to attend his campus memorial service.

Personal Influence and the Bracketing of Women's History

Susan J. Douglas, University of Michigan

Background One of the central contradictions of the Decatur study is that it simultaneously disguises that it is women who are being studied here yet universalizes them as representative of the general population.

- The study represses what was distinctive to women's experiences in the 1940s; stereotypes them by focusing on their interest in fashion, marketing, and movies; and yet uses women as exemplars for everyone.

- Here we have a path-breaking study of women's reception of and relations to the mass media that underplays that very fact and, as a result, missed enormous opportunities.
- It is this tension and the contradictory attitudes toward women in this study that is explored in this article.
 - *Personal Influence* perpetuated the rather retrograde notion that women's experiences are somehow timeless.
 - This article reviews what *Personal Influence* revealed about the two-step flow within women's interpersonal networks and what it failed to capture that we so much wish we knew.

Opinion Leaders One of the most telling and insightful categories the researchers developed to determine who were opinion leaders was that of "gregariousness":

- Status and gregariousness were linked, and both helped determine whether a woman was an opinion leader.
- The opinion leader women read more magazines, newspapers, and books and listened to the radio more often than did those they influenced, so the mass media remained an important resource as part of the nexus and diffusion of decision making.
- In public affairs, authority flowed top-down, with high-status, gregarious women being the most sought-out opinion leaders.
- Certain of these women were deemed "cosmopolitans": people concerned with news and trends outside of their own community who consumed national media that originated elsewhere.

Third-Person Effect

What is difficult to determine from this study is the role of the third-person effect in shaping some of the results.

- When asked about decisions to change from buying one product brand to another, personal contacts had the most influence, magazine and newspaper advertising the least, and of those exposed to radio advertising, only 7.5 percent reported it to have affected their choices.
- The fashion leaders, not surprisingly, admitted to being influenced by the media; after all, fashion magazines and movies set themselves up as the arbiters of glamour and the latest styles.

Women and the Media

The study of women's often deeply contradictory relationship to the media, including "down market" fare like soap operas and romance novels, gained new life in the wake of the women's movement.

- Indeed, it was, in part, feminist reaction against the limited effects model, as embodied in *Personal Influence*, that gave rise to new path-breaking work on gender and the media.
- Feminist scholars took up this work because they recognized the absolute centrality of the mass media to women's sense of self, their possibilities, and to sustaining prejudices that kept women as second-class citizens.
- By 1955, despite the fact that more women were working outside the home than ever before, the mass media hailed women as housewives, mothers, and consumers, not as producers or citizens.

Conclusion

Despite the blind spots of *Personal Influence*, the Decatur study paid explicit attention to women's reception of media messages and to their influence on other women in areas where women traditionally made the major decisions—shopping, fashions, and movies—and an area where they did not: public affairs.

- Thus, *Personal Influence* pioneered the study of the flow of influence among women about products and information first laid before them in the mass media.
- One could claim that no comparable attention was again paid to women as audiences of the media until the early 1970s and the rise of feminist media studies.
- Thus, *Personal Influence* was a crucial reminder that women, despite being individual targets of much media fare, were also embedded in social networks through which they influenced other women and were, in turn, influenced by them.

NOTE: Rereading the book reminds one how much still needs to be done here by scholars about the interactions between individual girls and women, their social networks, and the mass media.

The Influences Influencing *Personal Influence*: Scholarship and Entrepreneurship

David E. Morrison, University of Leeds

Background

Lazarsfeld is seen as an innovator in higher education, having established in Vienna in 1925 the first social science research center of its kind in the world, and later the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University.

- This article examines the structural situation of the Bureau, showing how Lazarsfeld developed the role of entrepreneurial scholar to finance its operations.
- Lazarsfeld's psychological makeup made for ready cooperation with the world of business; the Bureau required commercial fund-raising.
- The final part of the article examines how the study was "sold" to *True Story* magazine.

*The Research
Bureau*

While *Personal Influence* has rightfully come to occupy one of the intellectual peaks of mass communications research, its facilitation was a dependent of a development of the research bureau.

- The development of research bureaus in the 1940s and 1950s represented a new organizational form of intellectual life more appropriate for large-scale empirical social research than the traditional structure of a teaching department.

- With the bureaus came the creation of an absolutely new intellectual role: that of the managerial or entrepreneurial scholar not just capable of managing a research organization, but also able to sell research.
- The bureau did indeed depend on support from the media industry.
 - Lazarsfeld's enmeshment with the media industry, at one point, made even those close to him question his commitment to academic life.

Student Labor

Given the commercial pressure to "perform," it is perhaps not surprising that most of the students' time was taken up with the mastery of routine research procedures, the most complex aspects being left to senior researchers.

- Some graduate students complained that they were not really being trained by learning through doing but were in fact exploited drudges.
- The least frequently learned or improved skills were those involved in analysis, design, and the final drafting of reports.
- Lazarsfeld's position was that if it was not for the money that his market research activity provided, many of the students would not be in a financial position to complete their studies.

Influencers

Below are some of the influencers on Lazarsfeld's methods.

- *The businessman*: Never would Lazarsfeld lose his awareness of, and appreciation for, commercial money as a source for funding research.
 - His style of work required substantial amounts of money, and the organization necessary for the conduct of his empirical work also required big money.
- *Exile and acceptance*: It was quite clear to Lazarsfeld that he would have to build his own world. He says, "I took it for granted that I would have to make some move similar to the creation of the Vienna Research Centre if I wanted to find a place for myself in the U.S."
 - He was described as a typical refugee, feeling he had to manipulate the people around him to secure his position.
- *Personality and approval*: Lazarsfeld was always very sensitive about his Jewishness, and one can also say that he was sensitive, perhaps excessively so, about his foreignness.

NOTE: At no point is one replacing structural explanations for Lazarsfeld's enmeshment with the world of commerce with psychological ones, merely showing how personality interacts with structure to assist process.

Conclusion

To understand fully the influences influencing *Personal Influence*, it is necessary to move beyond administrative research to a wider research setting that Lazarsfeld was instrumental in creating, namely, the development of the research bureau.

- For the production of knowledge, the Bureau of Applied Social Research had to depend on conducting applied work for a variety of "administrations."
 - In the case of *Personal Influence*, it was a magazine publisher.
- The scholastic position of *Personal Influence* is established, but that position, as shown, was created out of a much wider set of influences than those that immediately came to bear on the Midwest town of Decatur, not least Lazarsfeld's own personal path to establishment.

The Katz/Lowenthal Encounter: An Episode in the Creation of *Personal Influence*

Gertrude J. Robinson, McGill University

Background

In the 1930s, members of the Institute of Social Research from Frankfurt emigrated to New York to escape the Nazis. Among them were Horkheimer, Adorno, and Lowenthal.

- The Institute employed two general approaches in its analysis of Nazi authoritarianism.
 - One stressed the centrality of monopoly capitalism and changes in legal, political, and economic institutions, with only a passing glance at social psychology or mass culture.
 - The other saw Nazism as the extreme example of a general trend toward irrational domination in Western countries.
- Adorno introduced the concept of the “culture industry,” and increasingly Institute members came to feel that the culture industry enslaved people in more effective and subtle ways than the crude methods of domination practiced in earlier years.

Lazarsfeld

While the Institute group settled in at Columbia the members were unaware that another émigré scholar was also trying to establish a footing in the city: Paul F. Lazarsfeld, a social psychologist, trained in empirical research.

- Lazarsfeld’s idea to investigate radio effects fit in well with earlier U.S. empirical concerns of which Lazarsfeld was, however, unaware.
- Advertisers were interested in establishing national markets, while Roosevelt’s and Goebbels’s radio successes raised questions about radio’s social and political implications.
- Harold Lasswell’s propaganda work and Allport and Cantril’s *Psychology of Radio* (1935) seemed to indicate that radio had stronger political impact than print.
- Lazarsfeld created a research center that eventually became Columbia’s Office of Radio Research (1940-1944) with Robert Merton. Elihu Katz studied with them and helped with the production of *Personal Influence*, a portion of which was his PhD thesis.

Radio Studies

Personal Influence provided three important insights:

- The importance of “people” in mass communication processes.
- The development of sophisticated survey methods.
- And the “limited effects” of radio messages on individual audience members.

Lazarsfeld Studies

Lazarsfeld’s more numerous Bureau contributions are brilliantly illustrated in two of his studies: *Mass Persuasion* (1946, 1973) and his “Patterns of Influence” (1949).

Lowenthal

Lowenthal’s “The Triumph of Mass Idols” (1944) followed the idea that the culture industry was subtly enslaving and that literature needed to be used to identify the social and cultural structures that promoted such enslavement.

- Lowenthal concluded there was evidence that in the stage of corporate capitalism, the rise of the entrepreneur increasingly turned into pure fiction; and second, that America had transformed into a consumer society in which people were interested only in consumption.
- The challenging work opportunity came in 1949, when Lowenthal set up a research division for the “Voice of America,” after having analyzed German armed forces radio programs at the end of the war.
 - These researchers as well as their radio producers pioneered work in developing new ways of analyzing media effects.
 - His colleagues were the pollsters Joseph Klapper and Ralph White and the social-psychologist Marjorie Fiske.

Conclusion

In spite of their generational differences, the careers of Katz and Lowenthal have one great similarity: both are “border travelers,” and they have consequently contributed to the geographical transfer of ideas.

- In Katz’s case, the transfer is from the United States to the young state of Israel.
- For Lowenthal, the transfer was from Germany to the United States in the 1930s.
- As border travelers, Katz and Lowenthal also played key roles in setting up new research institutions, which would use their scholarly expertise.
- Finally, Katz’s and Lowenthal’s expansion of their theoretical horizons as a result of their cross-border engagement is well documented in their scholarly work.

NOTE: Through their outgoing personalities, integrity, and deep engagement with the world, they demonstrate that scholarly transfer “matters” in the globalized twenty-first century and that insightful scholarship from the past, including their own, provides bridges for the future.

The Part Played by Gentiles in the Flow of Mass Communication: On the Ethnic Utopia of *Personal Influence*

John Durham Peters, University of Iowa

Background

The author argues that *Personal Influence* is not only a landmark study within the sociological literature on networks, influence, and decision making. It is also an allegory of Jewish-ethnic identity in the mid-twentieth-century United States and a sideways commentary on modern Jewish involvement in communications.

- The book sees a utopian imagination of society in which Jews and Gentiles alike are centrally involved in the flow of communications.
- As well as managing communications institutions themselves, Jews have played an influential role in the intellectual interpretation of communications—as judges, activists, and media scholars and critics.

Influence

- Jews have arguably been the most successful communicators in history, providing a treasure trove of content to world culture.
- More than any other group in history, Jews have made enormous contributions to the channels, interpretation, and content of communication. *Personal Influence* is one chapter in this story.

Personal Influence moves from modern, anonymous society back to the honeycomb of face-to-face relationships, so it moves from the mass media to human communicators as the chief purveyors of influence.

- Behind the design of this study was the idea that persons, and especially opinion leaders, could be looked upon as another medium of mass communication, similar to magazines, newspapers, and radio.
- The whole book can be read two ways: as a social study advancing knowledge of the social psychology of influence and as a gambit in the drama of Jewish assimilation in mid-twentieth-century America.
- *Personal Influence* is a Jewish defense of the social self, connected and connecting to others amid the Gentile-genteel picture of the solitary and rational individual.

NOTE: Ostensibly, private opinions are often generated and reinforced in intimate groups of family, friends, or coworkers. Even an individual's seemingly personal opinions may be by-products of interpersonal relations.

Communicators

Just about everyone gets to be a communications trader in the world of *Personal Influence*, including, above all, "girls, wives, and matrons."

- Opinion leaders are obviously such, but the influencees are also understood as full participants in the flow of communication.
- Everyone gets to take part in the betwixt-and-between of exchange.
- Katz and Lazarsfeld conceive of interpersonal and group relations as networks of exchange instead of as closed bubbles.

NOTE: The book is not only a political defense of American democracy in an era of mass communication but also an ethnic-cultural defense of influence and networking as worthy activities, indeed the vital center of democratic life.

A Cross-Cultural Study

In conception and interpretation, *Personal Influence* is fruitfully read as a cross-cultural study in which Jewish cosmopolitans laid out their go-between network theory onto the Protestant locals, and everyone came out a happy family of white communicating Americans.

- The text of *Personal Influence* has a certain gaiety or lightness, especially in its various "discoveries"—the small group, interpersonal relations, and above all, people.
- It is a delicious irony that mass communication researchers wrote a book announcing the discovery of interpersonal communication.
- The study was explicitly designed to take place in a kind of ethnic tabula rasa—the methodological choice goes together with a fantasy of a world in which people would no longer have particular markings.

Conclusion

Personal Influence achieves what structuralists call a "markedness reversal." Whether Katz and Lazarsfeld were conscious of the rich history of "people"

as a term or not, the Jewish fascination with interpreting the puzzling ways of “the peoples” (the goyim) serves as a rich context for understanding the otherwise unmarked notion of “people” that social scientists study, or in the case of this book, “discover.”

- *Personal Influence* might be read alongside *The Jazz Singer* as two distinct approaches to how Jews might lay claim to membership in liberal America.
- In plays and film, Jews were widely considered to be a distinct race and discrimination was still quite overt; Jews played the parts of groups more racially marked on the color spectrum to suspend or background their own marked status or, more pointedly, to demonstrate that identity categories are no more binding than theatrical roles—*The Jazz Singer* whitened Jews and *Personal Influence* Judaized whites.
- The notion that ethnic identity can be freely performed, loaned, and borrowed is, of course, the essence of liberal pluralism, and it is one of the great cultural creations of mid-twentieth-century American Jews and their Gentile partners.

NOTE: Katz and Lazarsfeld unite mobile purveyors of the text and sedentary channelers of word of mouth—and they are all discovered to be people. The two-step flow performs an impressive piece of cultural work: writing and orality, text and interpretation, mobile and sedentary, mass and interpersonal, Jew and Gentile all shake hands within it.

Personal Influence and the End of the Masses

Paddy Scannell, University of Michigan

Background

Personal Influence was a key text in the then new and exciting field of mass communication, itself embedded in the larger field of American sociology.

- Two key considerations in what exogenous history of this famous sociological text look like:
 - What in the first place called forth the question of the media as a concern for sociology, and how was it raised?
 - What set of circumstances produced the Decatur study, its results, and its conclusions?
- From this perspective, *Personal Influence* is not so much a sociological text that resonates within the field of sociology as a historical text that resonates within its own historical, changing time and place.
- The question of communication, when it arose, was an extension of sociology’s basic question—hence a sociology of *mass* communication in which the emphasis falls on the first rather than the second term.

Mass

Communication

The study of mass communication was driven not so much by fear of the revolutionary potential of the masses as anxiety about their well-being.

- What was the effect of powerful new communication technologies on the ordinary man?

*Influences from
"Others"*

- Was he not vulnerable to manipulation because he was ill informed through lack of education and psychologically suggestible through economic insecurity?
- Lazarsfeld's key study was *Radio and the Printed Page*, whose aim was to answer the question, "What will radio do to society?"
- When we get to the other side of the forties and into the early fifties, the masses have faded away along with the power of the media.

The Decatur study was to identify the influence of others on the individual's shopping purchases, fashion tastes, movie choices, and news-related opinions.

- It is a key argument in Riesman that the new character type is, by definition, more involved in relations with other people than the old self-possessed (self-absorbed) inner-directed type.
- The rise of *sociability* is the manifest sign of the new people-minded social type.
- The study of the two-step flow, which endogenously checks personal influence exogenously discloses the rise of sociability in postwar, postmodern society.
- In such newly recovered *personal* relationships (relations between people as persons in their own right), the values that pertain to such relationships—intimacy, trust, sincerity, and authenticity—take on new meaning and significance.

NOTE: In the 1950s in the United States and in Europe, everyday life begins to achieve visibility and recognition as something distinctive and meaningful in its own terms and for its own sake. It becomes a good in itself, an end in itself, and not merely the means whereby labor reproduces itself as the instrument of capital.

- The role of personal influence in the formation of tastes, attitudes, purchases, and media consumption is convincingly established: it is an "almost invisible, certainly inconspicuous, form of leadership at the person-to-person level of ordinary, informal, everyday contact."

Conclusion

Personal Influence resolves a riddle—read as a key historical text, it points to the fading of the politics of poverty and the question of the masses and the emergence of a politics of plenty and the question of everyday life.

- The social question no longer presents itself only in terms of economic and political concerns.
- The importance of everyday life shows up in all sorts of ways:
 - It is there in the theatre, novels, and films of the decade but nowhere more so than television, which now becomes the definitive new medium of everyday life.

Significantly, it begins to show up as a new kind of politics, as the politics of the masses gives way to the politics of everyday life.

Rosa Park's action on a bus in Alabama perfectly encapsulated the emerging politics of everyday life.

Final Note

It is the argument of this article that the full significance of *Personal Influence* cannot be grasped by a purely immanent sociological reading.

- The exogenous historical reading necessarily starts from the internal history of the text and its position (at the time and since) in sociology, both of which are crucial to its understanding.
- But moving outward from this, we must think of it as embedded in the economic, political, social, and cultural determinants of its own and present times as these impinged upon and shaped the concerns of sociological work in progress.
- What the book discloses both in its internal history *and* as a response to the historical process of its own time (its inner and outer dialectic, so to speak) is the passage from modernity to postmodernity.

Fifteen Pages that Shook the Field: *Personal Influence*, Edward Shils, and the Remembered History of Mass Communication Research

Jefferson Pooley, Muhlenberg College

Background

Personal Influence's fifteen-page account of the development of mass communication research has had more influence on the field's historical self-understanding than anything published before or since.

- According to Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld's two-stage narrative, an undisciplined body of prewar thought had concluded naively that media are *powerful*—a myth punctured by the rigorous studies which showed time and again that media impact is in fact *limited*.
- This article traces the emergence of the *Personal Influence* synopsis, with special attention to
 - Lazarsfeld's audience-dependent framing of key media research findings, and
 - the surprisingly prominent role of Edward Shils in supplying key elements of the narrative.

Media Persuasion

As early as 1942, Lazarsfeld and others started to note the difficulty of bringing about attitude change through media persuasion.

- This observation was not yet framed as a claim of minimal media impact, nor as a happy repudiation of precursor overreach.
- The discovery of the obstinate audience was discussed as a *technical* problem, as an obstacle in the design of effective propaganda.
- There was a concern, on one hand, for finding out how to make persuasion *work* and, on the other, an effort to draw sweeping conclusions about media impact—making it hard to formulate a clean, coherent statement of limited effect.

Personal
Influence and
The People's
Choice

- The many social scientists who had mobilized for propaganda service came away from their wartime experience with a basic consensus:
 - Persuasion is not a simple affair.
 - It only works under certain conditions that should be heeded in future propaganda work.

Lazarsfeld, in his and Katz's *Personal Influence* narrative, characterized his own body of media research as the progressive unfolding of a counterintuitive insight: that the media have only minimal effects.

- In *The People's Choice* (1944), Lazarsfeld had stated that short-term media persuasion does not, on its own, change minds or behavior very easily.
- He noted that face-to-face influence works better than the mediated sort.
- He also surmised that the two kinds of persuasion may be complementary, or at least relatable in some way.

NOTE: In the first fifteen pages of *Personal Influence*, the finding that direct, broadcasted appeals only infrequently bring about observable change (on their own) was boldly redeployed to support a much farther-reaching assertion: that media have only limited effects.

- Some of Lazarsfeld's findings in *The People's Choice*, which had already been put to various use—the better performance of face-to-face over mediated persuasion in short-term campaigns, the hypothesis of a two-step flow—could be brought together in one coherent narrative.

*Lazarsfeld and
the Shils Effect*

The quest for scientific *distinction*—for peer respect—was one of Lazarsfeld's fundamental academic stimuli.

- The other crucial aspect for understanding Lazarsfeld is the *field* in which he staked his claims to credit—the extremely peculiar and fast-evolving field of *public opinion research*.
- This cluster of public opinion research served as the institutional context in which he made his highly entrepreneurial career.
 - The study of mass media was the opinion cluster's most pronounced topical research area.
- *Personal Influence*, published after he had effectively left the field of media research, was in this sense a last-word reputational sealant—a chance to establish, retroactively, the novelty and relevance of his fifteen-year effort.
 - The powerful-to-limited-effects story line was deployed in just these terms, as a summative and retroactive claim to the novelty and coherence of his body of media research.
- Why was the story line that Edward Shils put forward, under his name, the framing that Lazarsfeld and Katz selected for *Personal Influence*? Shils's story was selected, but why?
 - Very little attention had been paid, before Shils and Morris Janowitz's key 1948 *Wehrmacht* article, to the importance of small-group ties as an ongoing buffer between persuaders and their targets.
 - The Shils small-group story, in this context, was an irresistible aid.

Personal Influence and the New Paradigm: Some Inadvertent Consequences

Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang,
University of Washington

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Background

This article argues that the “new” conventional wisdom of the 1950s and 1960s, pitting personal influence versus mass media influence, discouraged a generation of sociologists from researching the effects, particularly long-range effects, of mass communication.

- Now some fifty years later, we are reexamining and critiquing the conclusions that Katz and Lazarsfeld drew from their study and the reception of their findings.

Reception of the Book

Personal Influence was immediately tagged as a major work when published.

- The book continues to be widely cited.
- It was acknowledged at the time for its elaboration of an explicitly sociological perspective on the mass media audience, one that looked beyond demographics and put a new emphasis on the multiple social relationships through which the media content is filtered, reinterpreted, and/or reinforced.

Mass Media Influence

Conclusions about mass media influence were drawn from surveys asking respondents what they recalled about specific influence incidents. The authors used these data

- to examine how informal leaders exerted influence “horizontally,” that is, within their immediate surroundings; and
- to give a firmer grounding to the “two-step flow” hypothesis, according to which mass media reach well-informed opinion leaders, who then act as transmitters of information and influence.

By changing the focus away from effects that occur en masse and over time toward the concrete responses of individuals, they concluded—incorrectly—that personal influence was more powerful than influences from the mass media.

This downplay of mass media influence had some unintended consequences.

- It put into question the value of further inquiry by sociologists into the new worlds these media had opened and into the more subtle influences the media might have over time.
- Another casualty of this reorientation was the sociological, as opposed to the ideological, concept of mass.
 - The fact that the members of media audiences do not live their lives in total isolation from other people, that they do not constitute a mass of anonymous individuals without any local attachments or shared ideals and common ideas does not render the concept of mass as related to mass communication obsolete.
 - The utility of this concept depends on whether one looks at the media-created audience in its entirety or at the concrete local audiences, whose members sift, evaluate, discuss, and bring past experience to bear on the media content.

*The Limits of
Interpersonal
Influence*

That people will seek advice from whomever they believe to know more than they do in deciding to try a new brand or to decide what movie to see seems pretty obvious. However,

- Consumer and media choices are less than fully autonomous but constrained by what is available, actively promoted, and/or in line with prevalent taste.
- An overly exclusive focus on how *individuals* choose has been at the expense of research on larger *aggregate* patterns of choice.
- Some influences of exposure may be too subtle for respondents to be aware of. Inability to name a specific item of information that has caused them to change their mind does not rule out the existence of media influences.
- Equally undeniable is that people do form pictures of the larger world beyond their direct experience and outside the orbits within which they move. An accumulation of impressions, each by itself of little consequence, can result in a significant movement of opinion.

*Opinion
Formation*

Direct media influence differs fundamentally from everyday decision making and opinion formation on public issues.

- People hold political opinions but actually make decisions only when specifically called upon to cast a vote.
 - The ideas and imagery that go into a vote develop as part of an ongoing discourse, with both influential and influencee being oriented to what the media carry and/or have highlighted over the years.
 - Viewed from this macro-perspective, the longer-term influence of mass communication on public opinion looms as relatively more important than it does when examining specific influences on private consumption.
 - Certainly, the effect of demonstrations that make news cannot be measured most successfully in isolation. Any influence on a participant is apt to be communicated to others who may only have “seen it on TV” so that the significance imputed to the video event comes to overshadow the “true” picture of the event, namely, the impression of a participant who was actually there. What all too often has been lost in the shift to the “new” mass communication paradigm with its emphasis on the part played by people is the simple and obvious fact that without a first step as the initial impetus in the two-step flow there might never have been a second or further step.

*The Debate
Has Not Ended*

Now to return to a question raised by Katz in his introduction to the anniversary edition of *Personal Influence*: Why has the struggle over the relative power of the individual, the media, and interpersonal influence lasted so long?

- Part of the answer lies in the promotional themes for the book, which overemphasized the superior power of personal influence.
 - Many questions about media monopolies and chummy relationships between journalists and the establishment have not been asked as often as they should have.
- Commitments made to sponsors of the study limited the leeway researchers had to add questions in which they were especially interested. Also, the sample in the study consisted solely of women.

- Things change—evidence shows that the average woman has become more sensitive to what the formal media convey.
- Finally, the long-term and society-wide consequences of any new medium are difficult to demonstrate by methods based on the individual as the unit of observation. Without minimizing the part played by people, there is much more yet to learn about the long-range and society-wide effects of the mass media.

As Time Goes By . . .

Thelma McCormack, Institute for Social Research

Background

Personal Influence is a study of political and consumer decisions in small primary groups—how ordinary people were both influenced and influencing.

- The Vietnam War challenged the paradigm as a new generation of scholars turned to larger units—state and society—and the power the media might have in reinforcing class structure.
- The conclusion raises questions about the future based on globalization and the decline of the nation-state.
- *Personal Influence* examined the process of influence among individuals, from person to person, and recognized two things:
 - All of us could be both influenced and influencing others.
 - The group was an actor, not just the tabula rasa that would passively record the attitudes, opinions, and ideas of others.

Personal Influence

Personal Influence crossed several thresholds—from the study of journalism as a craft to a profession; from the study of individuals, acting and thinking alone to the study of small groups; from the study of affinity groups to the study of factions and differences within them; from the study of policies to the study of the formation of consensus.

- Most important of all was the move from the study of technology—and naive theories of technological determinism to the study of the social construction of meaning.
- Process, groups, divisions within groups, the formation of consensus, and interpretation are the key ideas that together constitute a matrix, a paradigm that opened a floodgate of new research.
- *Personal Influence* was both a beginning and an end. Its roots were in the early study of voting behavior and grassroots democracy; its future lies in political activism on one hand, aesthetics on the other—or what Walter Benjamin called “the aestheticization of politics.”

Post Vietnam

After Vietnam, the country was changing; there was a new focus on the media as texts that could, via bias, editing, and self-censorship, manipulate audiences.

- What was clear from studies was that the media and the study of communication fell between our understanding of the material base, the means of production, and superstructure as ideologies.

Polls

- Journalists were ideologues writing about ideologues claiming an arm's-length distance.
- Gitlin raised a point of what was the distinction between understanding of events by insiders and outsiders.

The public opinion poll was one of the extraordinary innovations.

- Critics regarded polls or any similar measuring device as part of a system of social control, one of the ways of “managing consensus,” a strategy for manipulating the public and justifying the establishment.
- Polls could be part of a managerial function of the state but also part of a critical dialogue eventually transforming the state, making it more responsive and empowering citizens.
- Noelle-Neuman attributed a different function for opinion polls. They were, she said, a standard that voters consulted because they wanted to be certain they were in the mainstream.

Rational Choice Theory

James Coleman influenced by Max Weber and Talcott Parsons was one of the few sociologists urging us to think in terms of rational choice theory.

- Rational choice theory is a radical change from sociology based on community, neighborhoods, social interaction, and gradualism.
- Its starting point is elsewhere, in the board rooms of the corporate unit—it has given legitimization to studies in formal organization.
- It is the theoretical shadow of a highly rationalized global economy—it is light years away from the humanism of *Personal Influence*, which was instrumental in the development of the nation-state and an economy moderated by compromise and social legislation.

Conclusion

Personal Influence turned a spotlight on the social psychology of small groups and their empowerment, looking at a frangible process that moved erratically toward a resolution.

- It showed us turning to friends, family, and neighbors for practical advice on how to vote, buy winter clothes, discipline children, where to vacation, how to give and receive medical advice.
- Although our economy has changed toward a more privatized and competitive one, a new economy that takes pride in its ability to move information at incredible speed, the earlier Keynesian economy of the 1950s remains part of our heritage.
- As long as we have an open society, we will have elections, and as long as we have elections we will have polls, but neither may be as important in the long run as the larger international power structure.
- We are moving toward the study of events—the wedding of Charles and Diana, the visit of Sadat to Israel, and other similar events that elicit the attention of the entire nation, if not the Western world.
 - They are events that engage the public's attention beyond the level of politics-as-usual, and eventually, they become part of a system of markers that are internalized to become part of our collective memory.

The Troubling Equivalence of Citizen and Consumer

Michael Schudson, University of California,
San Diego

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Background As Todd Gitlin observed in his 1978 critique of *Personal Influence*, the authors treated consumer choices and voting choices as equivalent. This article

- contends that consumer choices have often been political,
- argues that political choices can be and often have been consumer-like, and
- calls for a reconsideration of what the differences between the worlds of politics and consumption really are.

Gitlin's Critique Ironically, Gitlin's critique may be stronger than he intended: the passive sovereignty of most consumers most of the time is matched by the passive sovereignty of most voters most of the time.

- When the women the *Personal Influence* team studied looked for advice in daily living, they overwhelmingly turned to other women.
- When these same women turned to other people for advice on public affairs, they overwhelmingly turned to men.

Choices Implicit in Gitlin's critique and in other critiques that object to treating political choices as consumer choices is a view that there are fundamental differences between political choices and consumer choices:

- Citizens vote, consumers demand.
- Citizens are public spirited and consumers are self-interested.
- Citizens inhabit cooperative communities and consumers live in isolated locales.

There are three reasons to complicate the consumer/citizen contrast:

- Sometimes consumer choice is political in even the most elevated understandings of the term.
- Sometimes political choices are complex matters of family, ethnic, and religious tradition; emotional links to one brand rather than another; based on limited information and limited experience; and expected by the individual to have limited personal impact, not unlike a great many consumer decisions.
- The elevation of politics to the realm of the highly intellectualized, highly instrumentalized, and highly public-regarding does not encourage political participation and may not even increase the quality of reasoning in voting or the intensity of political commitment and action of voters.

Consumer versus Political Choices The contrast between citizen and consumer stands not outside our civic life but is a constitutive element of it.

- A consumer choice can be political, such as boycotting grapes to support farm workers or driving a hybrid car for ecological reasons.
- Political choices can be consumer-like based on a person's pocketbook benefits or how taxes will affect their budget.

Concerns

- Making political choice less consumer-like is a task democracies undertake at their peril.
- The new voter should be motivated by ideas and ideals and information, not by social pressure or the social pleasure of a free drink and an extra dollar in the pocket.

Below are some concerns expressed by the author of this article.

- Is there a way to take politics seriously without making political interest severe?
- Is there a way to identify the distinctive value of public affairs without dismissing or demeaning the ordinary experience of private life, including the life of consuming?
- Is there a way to recognize that the high political theory and publicly legitimated political knowledge used to draw in very narrowly the circle of the politically adept now confront a politics broadened and loosened in ways that are largely to the good?

Conclusions

The author finds the commensurability between consumer and political choices that Katz and Lazarsfeld posited is more of an enduring provocation than a fault in their study.

- We will not enhance the value of public affairs by positing the moral weakness of consuming.
- Better to find strategic opportunity in consuming to enlarge the points of entry to political life and to underline the political dimensions of our world with cases in point.
- There are ways for the consumer and the citizen in each of us to meet.
 - One should have to step *up* to the political stage and be a little better than oneself, whereas in consuming it is normally enough to be oneself and not step on the toes of others.
 - In consuming, the circle of people one thinks about tends to be small; in politics, the circle of people one *should* be thinking about should extend to the boundary of whatever polity one is acting in—if not further.
- Consuming feels good not only because it may provide material pleasures but also because it is enacted largely within a comfortable social circle—politics feels tense and dangerous, even under relatively peaceful circumstances because it is performed in the midst of and because of significant conflict with others.

The Consumer and the Citizen in *Personal Influence*

Lawrence B. Glickman, University of South Carolina

Background

In *Personal Influence*, the advertiser, the radio executive, the propagandist, and the educator are all interested in the effect of their message.

- The book establishes a similarity in the interactions among the message, the media, and people in these and other realms.

- In *Personal Influence*, political topics and items of consumption are tantalizingly, sometimes jarringly, juxtaposed.
- The book also treats “campaigns” of all sorts—from rolling out new candidates to rolling out new products—as analogous processes.
- Such equivalences between electoral politics and daily consumption may seem at first glance to be flip and/or politically suspect, and critics have been wary of this linkage.
 - To say that politics and consumption are related or even similar processes, however, is not automatically to reduce the one to the other, or to demean the political.
 - To link consumption and politics is not necessarily to lament the degradation of politics as another site of passive, therapeutic meaninglessness.
 - Scholars and consumer activists have noticed similarities in the structure of the two, and activists have traded on the assumption of overlap between politics and consumption.

Networks

Lazarsfeld assumes that people make choices, not autonomously, but in the context of a variety of networks—communication and consumption networks, while distinct, operate in analogous ways.

- Katz and Lazarsfeld sought to show that individual agency was central to what they called the “flow of mass communications” and also to what we can call the flow of mass production and consumption.
- A key challenge posited by Katz and Lazarsfeld is to question the supposed relative powerlessness of shoppers in the web of consumption and of individuals in the web of communication.
- In both cases, “opinion leaders” serve as important nodes on these information and material circuits, not only passing on but interpreting and shaping the meaning of information and goods.

Consumer Choice

Notwithstanding the forces of markets, consumer choice is a form of power in modern society.

- In a market society, consumers exercise enormous influence every time they purchase a good, even if they are generally unaware of this power—their purchases influence business decisions worldwide.
- For consumer activists, the effects of consumption were far-reaching and therefore needed to be harnessed for socially useful causes.

Individual Differences

Lazarsfeld sought in his work to recognize individual difference within a framework of generalizable social principles.

- To be sure, Katz and Lazarsfeld emphasized difference in the book, particularly class difference.
- Katz and Lazarsfeld also note degrees of influence of women with large families and that “highly gregarious women . . . are more likely to be opinion leaders.”

Conclusion

Personal Influence is an extraordinary achievement of mid-twentieth-century social science.

- The book was a timely work of social science and moral inquiry whose historical context the author has aimed to elucidate.

- In this work, Lazarsfeld and Katz offered intriguing reasons to analogize consumption and citizenship.
- If their approach paid too little attention to the aftermath of consumption decisions, it offered scholars important reasons to understand consumption as a multidimensional political activity.

The One-Step Flow of Communication

W. Lance Bennett, University of Washington;
and Jarol B. Manheim, George Washington University

Background

It is to *Personal Influence* that contemporary scholars turn for the classic statement of the “two-step flow of communication” hypothesis.

- In the first step, messages are issued by the mass media to what is, to all outward appearances, a more or less homogeneous mass audience.
- In the second, innumerable small-group interactions powered by horizontal opinion leaders interpret and contextualize these mediated messages for their participants, who then internalize the content.

NOTE: The end result is a more or less differentiated understanding of the message across various social boundaries.

Media Influence

For society at large, one implication was that there were limits to the potential influence of mediated communication.

- Each individual’s knowledge networks and social interactions set limits, some of which might be systematic in character, others products of chance.
- At the same time, mediated communication was potentially so integral to interpersonal communication—providing it with both stimuli and information—that the two might no longer be distinguishable.
- This meant that mass society could never be entirely homogeneous but also that individual social locations could never be entirely isolated from mass influence.
- One must note the central importance of personal conversation—even the most casual of talk—in the democratic process.
- Effective political communication (influence) required understanding and controlling how these messages would be processed through social interaction before their effects would become manifest.
 - The “water cooler effect”—by which mass-mediated messages reach audience members who were not directly exposed to them, through secondary interactions with friends and colleagues—was not merely a means of expanding the audience for a given message, but it was also a potentially success-critical mechanism for assigning it meaning.

Thesis

The authors’ thesis is that society, communication technologies, and individual communication habits have changed fundamentally in ways that affect how individuals receive and process information.

- These social and technological changes directly challenge the underlying assumptions of the two-step flow hypothesis.
- The combination of social isolation, communication channel fragmentation, and message targeting technologies have produced a very different information *recipient* from those in the 1950s.
- Given the decline of group identifications and loyalties, individuals, even when reached, are hard to hold, whether in terms of attention or adoption of message content.
- The goal of the communicator is to identify the most effective specialized channels and to fit the boundaries and framing of messages to the needs, expectations, beliefs, preferences, and interests of the audience member.
- To the extent this is accomplished, the combination of social and physical technologies preempts the role previously played by social interaction within the audience, creating a *one-step* flow.

One-Step Flow The achievement of a one-step flow among large scale publics is typically neither simple nor inexpensive. It requires, at the very least, a marriage of basic communication skills with the availability of vast and highly differentiated data on members of the prospective audience.

- We could think in alternative ways about how the one-step flow could operate in democracies.
- People make practical choices about technologies—both technological and political—that render messages more or less engaging, transparent, public, exclusive, divisive, or cohesive.
- The choices affect whether citizens become further isolated through communication processes that emphasize unidirectional and highly manipulative information flows, or whether citizens share known social networks through the transparent interactive capabilities that are available through the same technologies.

Conclusion The ways in which communicators choose among technological alternatives for reaching fragmenting audiences may, in turn, have profound interactive effects on those audiences and their social and political relationships.

- It is important to emphasize here that technologies have the potential to create mutual understanding and peer to peer communication across various issue and demographic divides.
- Indeed, many social-movement networks have employed transparent social networking technologies with the aim of creating sustainable social bonds through the communication process.
- In the current transition between two historic public communication eras, it appears that the chosen emphasis is more toward the stealthy technologies that isolate individuals than toward transparent networking technologies that may unite citizens in common cause.
- Recognizing the transition of that paradigm into a fundamentally different one-step flow of communication will lead scholars and practitioners to generate alternative perspectives and knowledge that will similarly shape the future.

The Influence of *Personal Influence* on the Study of Audiences

Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics
and Political Science

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Background

This article looks back at the book *Personal Influence* to bring into focus the debate over the mass media audience during the twentieth century.

- Katz and Lazarsfeld's work and subsequent work by Katz and his collaborators suggests possibilities for convergence, or at least productive dialogue, as researchers collectively seek to understand how, in their everyday lives, people can, and could, engage with media to further democratic participation in the public sphere.
- *Personal Influence* was not just about "the part played by people in the flow of mass communications" but was also, more significantly, about the part played by people—acting as individuals, in peer or community groups, and through institutions—in the construction and reconstruction of meanings in society.
- The above should raise critical questions about power, interest, and inequalities, potentially integrating and so transcending the many conceptual oppositions—theoretical versus empirical or critical versus administrative or cultural versus economic—that have, sometimes unhelpfully, framed the study of media and communication.

Communication Flow

In *Personal Influence*, the part played by people in the flow of mass communication demonstrates that the supposedly direct flow of mass media influence is mediated by preexisting patterns of interpersonal communication in local communities.

- The innovative concept of the two-step flow challenged the popularity of the direct effects model as well as the separate study of mass and interpersonal communication, and it undermined the image of the viewer and listener as part of a mindless, homogeneous mass.
- *Personal Influence* examines various permutations of the relations among three different domains:
 - media (institutional contexts, though also texts),
 - public opinion (and its role in democratic processes), and
 - conversation (as embedded in interpersonal or peer networks).
- Everyday talk is central. What does it matter if the terms or topics of the conversation come from the mediated or face-to-face experience, from local social groups, or even other parts of the world?

Media Events

In the book *Media Events*, Dayan and Katz say media events illuminate both the opportunities and dangers of a media-dominated democracy.

- They can create a national or even international sense of occasion, providing liminal moments in which a society may reflect upon, idealize, and at the same time authenticate a vision of itself for itself.
- Yet if these liminal moments substitute for political participation and political change, then it is their potentially reactionary, manipulative, or narcotizing effects, rather than their potentially progressive, educational, or democratic effects, that should be at the forefront of our concern.

- Dayan and Katz look at the ways in which live broadcasting confers legitimacy and charisma on the “celebrities” involved, the interruption of everyday routines that casts viewers into roles proposed by the script of the ceremony, effects on the climate of opinion by encouraging or inhibiting the expression of certain beliefs, changes to the organization of politics and political campaigning, and instances of direct political or social change resulting from a media event.

Where Next?

The insight of *Personal Influence*, that processes of media influence are mediated by social contexts, including community and face-to-face interactions, is now a starting point rather than a discovery.

- The author argues that research must analyze the *artifacts or devices* used to communicate or convey information (raising questions of design and development), the *activities and practices* in which people engage to communicate or share information (raising questions of cultural and social context), and the *social arrangements or organizational forms* that develop around those devices and practices (raising questions of institutional organization, power, and governance).
- Where mass communication research spent decades struggling with the assumption of linearity (that production produces texts that impact on audiences, following the sender-message-receiver model), new media research need make no such assumption.

Conclusion

Though the shift from mass communication theory to theorizing mediation in all its forms will occupy scholars for some time, the broader agenda that *Personal Influence* prioritized—the examination of the relations between mediation, conversation, and community to understand the potential, positive and negative, of the media in democratic society—remains paramount.

- For the study of people’s engagement with the new media environment, that is, for the study of audiences as publics and of publics as mediated, this is still early days.
- It is to be hoped that, in developing these initial steps into a sustained research program, scholars will continue to draw on the multiple intellectual traditions, convergent epistemologies, and bold surmises that motivated earlier steps toward the same democratic project fifty years ago, as evidenced by *Personal Influence*.

Public Connection through Media Consumption: Between Oversocialization and De-Socialization?

Nick Couldry and Tim Markham, University of London

Background

This article reviews the ongoing contribution of *Personal Influence* to our understanding of media’s social consequences from the perspective of their recent research into the extent to which habits of media consumption help sustain, or not, U.K. citizens’ orientation to a public world.

*Media
Complexity*

- The article reviews the methodological similarities and differences between this recent project and that of Katz and Lazarsfeld.
- The result, the authors conclude, is to confirm the continued salience of the questions about the social embeddedness of media influences that Katz and Lazarsfeld posed.

Personal Influence was a major step forward in our understanding of media as complex processes of mediation.

- Using the contribution of “person-to-person communication” to the circulation of media-sourced information and opinion, Katz and Lazarsfeld marked a shift away from research dominated by a concern with media’s rhetorical power over “masses” toward how media messages filter through the intricate networks of social life.
- It prioritized the question of how media have social consequences in the ordinary run of things.
- Katz and Lazarsfeld’s famous two-step flow thesis, by ruling out of court the old paradigm of a radio listener shut up in his room with a self-sufficient supply of the world outside, remains a useful ally as, and when, that model gets revived in new circumstances.
- They framed their account of how the mechanism of mass media influences daily life within a longer history of liberal inquiry into how democratic citizens come to feel part of a wider polity.

*Authors’
Research
Project*

Like *Personal Influence*, the U.K. “Public Connection” project was started against a background of doubts about media’s contribution to the very basis of democratic engagement.

- Like Katz and Lazarsfeld, this article’s authors believed that it was crucial to study what people do and think on a daily basis in specific contexts that are only partly shaped by media themselves. However, the Public Connection project differed in focus, method, and context.
- Their focus was on the question of whether people across both genders, all classes and ages, are orientated, if at all, toward a public world beyond the private, and, if so, to what extent their media consumption sustains or works against that orientation.

*Research
Summary*

We have found some evidence of the older forms of authority structure (particularly between male and female partners) persisting in what, as Katz and Lazarsfeld pointed out, is the highly gendered area of public issues.

- However, any assessment of opinion formation overall in this area is constrained by evidence of the *gaps* in, and constraints upon, discussion and exchange of opinions on public matters, and particularly traditional politics. The field of public discussion is limited as to who can regularly participate within it, and when and where.
- While a significant degree of both discussion and public action was found, there was very little evidence of discussion *leading* to action.

Conclusion

In this article, the authors have used the findings of the Public Connection project to explore the extent to which Katz and Lazarsfeld’s account of opinion formation through “personal influence” in mid-twentieth-century America remains pertinent, particularly in the area of public affairs.

- Media are now a source of opinion and reference that is pervasive to a degree that could not have been fully anticipated in the 1940s and 1950s—the individualizing tendency of particularly narrowcast media fosters the de-socialized context for information transmission.
- The findings are, in some respects, rather different. Both talk and social expectations remain, according to the survey, importantly linked with engagement in a public world through media. Katz and Lazarsfeld's relation between the scale of people's social interactions and their degree of attention to public affairs has also been backed tentatively by the evidence of our sample.
- The authors' concerns about the contemporary salience of *Personal Influence's* argument—the argument that, by identifying the social networks through which mass transmissions are interpersonally mediated, we have identified a mechanism that effectively embeds media in the processes that sustain liberal democracy—lie elsewhere.
- The problem may be not the absence of a discursive context for our tracking of a public world through media but rather the lack of any link between that discursive context and any opportunities for *doing anything* effective about the issues we learn about through media.

NOTE: In that sense, the problem with contemporary democracy is larger than any study about the social mediation of media consumption can address. Is Katz and Lazarsfeld's whole study condemned to irrelevance? Quite the contrary—for it sustains our attention to one key term (talk) of a wider disarticulation that neither policy makers nor academics who care about the future of democracy can afford to ignore.

Personal Influence: A Radical Theory of Action

Charles Kadushin, Brandeis University

Background

Once scholars recognized the importance of adding interpersonal influence to the action scheme, they saw that influences naturally radiated from the immediate interpersonal environment to the larger social network.

- Both the interpersonal environment and further social network connections have been loosely termed *social capital*.
- Long before the term *social capital* entered the social science lexicon, *Personal Influence* explored the consequences of a network of advice-giving others.
- The book lacked some currently available technical and conceptual resources to fully meet its ambitious goal of locating the relative impact of personal influence on individual decision making.
 - Nonetheless, current students of social capital and decision making have more to learn from this book than they may realize.
 - *Interpersonal Influence* directly led to the study of social networks beyond what social network people now call the first-order zone.

*The Personal
Influence Factor*

When personal influence is a factor, the investigator has to do research of actual and potential influencers, the immediate ones and the larger social surround, and to try to assess their relative influence as compared with other factors in the accounting scheme ranging from sources of information in the mass media to the attractive aspects of the object being bought.

- One key component of *Personal Influence* involves tracing the networks of influencers in the sociometry of ego networks.

*Studying
Influentials*

Although our fascination with influentials has been whetted over these fifty years, we still do not have adequate systematic investigations of network brokers and influentials—their motivations, how they make their “profits,” the degree to which they themselves search for information and wisdom that they can pass on to the circle of their friends, and the extent to which they themselves rely on other people or on various media.

- In the consumption decisions studied in *Personal Influence*, decision makers are generally passive—they are “accidental consumers.”
- Respondents do not search for the best products, the best buys, or the best movies—information comes to them accidentally, as a result of environmental influences, including, of course, personal influence.

NOTE: *Personal Influence* does not directly inquire into the efforts respondents may have made to acquire consumer product information, although it does inquire into the latent network of potential experts. It would be nice to know the difference between the characteristics of members of the latent network as compared with those of the effective network.

Conclusion

Katz and Lazarsfeld, by systematically studying personal influence in such mundane acts as going to the movies and buying clothes, made major contributions to the theory of action and to the study of social networks.

- Both for social network theory and for action theory, in many ways we have yet to reap the full benefits of this pioneering work.

Personal Influence and the Effects of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

Robert Hornik, University of Pennsylvania

Background

Personal Influence put forward and tested a variety of hypotheses about how social contexts constrain media effects.

- Three hypotheses are about interactions of media exposure with social context (Stability, Conformity, and Instrumental).
- Two hypotheses are about two-step flow effects (Relay and Message Interpretation).
- Each is tested by the author with nationally representative panel data from the evaluation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign.

- The evaluation of the above campaign, surprisingly, has shown that more exposure to the campaign led to more interest in marijuana use.
 - This article examined whether those boomerang effects were magnified through interactions with siblings—in general, no evidence showed that siblings' beliefs or behavior interacted with individuals' exposure to campaign messages in producing effects.
 - However, older siblings were themselves affected by their own exposure to the campaign and, in turn, affected the beliefs and behaviors of their younger brothers and sisters, consistent with the two-step flow hypothesis.

Social Context *Personal Influence* argues that the social context matters for media effects in a variety of distinct ways.

- *The stability hypothesis*: The social network around an individual can be more or less consistent with regard to a particular issue, or it can be more or less stable in general, with a more stable environment expected to reduce vulnerability to media influence.
- *The conformity hypothesis*: The social network around an individual provides its own persuasive influence: if that influence is in the same direction as media messages, those media effects will be larger; if the social network contradicts media messages, media influence will be less..
- *The instrumental support hypothesis*: The social network can provide more or less instrumental support for media-recommended behavior, with a corresponding enhancement or reduction in media influence.
- *The message interpretation hypothesis*: Social networks provide meaning as people make sense of media messages.
- *The relay hypothesis*: Social influencers may be directly exposed to media messages—network members may be persuaded by their own exposure and in turn persuade others in the network.

NOTE: All of the author's analyses focus on the influence of the older sibling on the younger sibling. It is possible that the influence flows the other way, or is mutual. Also, given sometimes more than two siblings are in a household, but only two are included in the study, it is quite possible that a more complex dynamic in the family is lost. Nonetheless, it was worth proceeding with this assumption, given that older youth are much more likely to initiate drug use before their siblings.

Discussion The article presented two types of analysis to test the social context hypotheses described in *Personal Influence*:

- The first, whether the social context affected individual exposure effects.
 - In general, the evidence drawn from the first set of analyses was not supportive; most tellingly, whatever the sibling's beliefs and behavior were concerning marijuana, the apparent effects of the campaign did not vary significantly.
- The second, whether the influences of the campaign on older siblings was passed through to younger siblings.
 - Most clearly, older siblings appeared both to be affected by the campaign and to affect the behaviors and cognitions of their younger brothers and sisters; the second set of hypotheses was supported.

- Their evaluations of the campaign ads appeared to affect the younger siblings' ad evaluations also. These pass-through, or two-step flow effects, however, were not so strong that they provided a significant correlation between older sibling exposure and younger sibling outcomes, once control variables were included.
- Why is it that the social context did not seem to condition the response to the campaign? There are three competing explanations:
 - The first is that the hypothesis was wrong for sibling effects.
 - The second explanation is that the measures of sibling cognitions and behavior, which were used as surrogates for the actual context in which the youth received the campaign, did not capture that context.
 - The third explanation is that the statistical analysis was insufficiently sensitive to capture interactions.
- Clearly, these analyses and the claims made here do have some limitations. The statistics were not conservative insofar as they do not account for the complex sample design and the nonindependence of the cases; also while the control variables were important ones, it is certainly possible that other, not included variables might explain the apparent effects.

NOTE: The author is willing to claim a two step-flow; evidence for an effect appeared at each stage even though he could not show a direct effect of older sibling exposure on younger sibling outcomes. The greater power to detect main effects and the simpler criterion for success may explain why the effects appear more readily.