The Significant Other:
A Longitudinal Analysis of Significant Samples
in Journalism Research, 2000–2014

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This study examined the methodology journalism scholars use when studying significant samples, or "those persons who have attained an unusually pervasive and lasting reputation, regardless of whether that reputation be great or small." Using Simonton's work as the theoretical guide, the study content analyzed a census of articles published in 10 major journalism journals from 2000 to 2014. Results showed that the typical study examining significant samples is psychometric and is also quantitative, nomothetic, longitudinal, singularly focused, and exploratory. In addition, it uses macro units and observes the subject indirectly. The study also found similarities between the study of significant samples and extant work in terms of the preponderance of quantitative methods and the use of content analysis as a data collection method. The ramifications are discussed.

Keywords: research methods, significant samples, journalism research, meta-analysis, Simonton

This study examined the research and methodological patterns that journalism scholars use when studying eminent or newsworthy individuals, also known as *significant samples* in other fields such as political science and psychology. Despite the similarity in terminology, significant samples have little to do with the term *statistical significance.* The term s*ignificant samples* was coined by Dean K. Simonton in a seminal dissection of the concept and its application to psychology research. In the paper "Significant Samples: The Psychological Study of Eminent Individuals," Simonton (1999) defined significant samples as "those persons who have attained an unusually pervasive and lasting reputation, regardless of whether that reputation be great or small, positive or negative" (pp. 426–427).

Another way to look at it would be the study of prominent or even infamous personalities and groups. Examples include presidents, famous athletes, movie stars, Nobel Prize laureates, historical figures, or exemplary media figures. Significant samples are not limited to historical figures, per se, but could also include common people who for one reason or another become noteworthy or newsworthy. Such subjects include Jeffery Dahmer, Rodney King, or Nadya Suleman the "Octomom." Societal stature notwithstanding, the uniqueness of these subjects to research methodology lies in the fact that they possess certain traits and/or characteristics that are not readily generalizable to the population; these traits and characteristics (in the scope through which they are studied) do not appear widely in the general populace.

Therefore, using Simonton's (1999) aforementioned work as a theoretical guide, this study analyzed 10 major journalism-oriented academic journals from 2000 to 2014 regarding to the following variables as delineated by Simonton: (1) traditional methodological approaches to significant samples including historiometric, psychometric, psychobiographical, and comparative methods; (2) research dimensions used to study significant samples including quantitative/qualitative, multiple cases/single case, nomothetic/idiographic, confirmatory/exploratory, longitudinal/cross-sectional, and direct/indirect assessment methods; and (3) the specific data collection methods used in the studies.

Rationale

Three reasons merit this study. First, although there is an abundance of meta-analytical studies in mass communication research, few if any have specifically focused on how human subjects (eminent or not) have been examined as units of analysis. Most meta-analyses have examined a plethora of issues including communication patterns, media effects, knowledge diffusion, dialectics, health communication, and business communication, among others. The same can be said of studies that have meta-analyzed methodological patterns. As I discuss in more detail later, such studies have focused on pertinent issues such as content analysis, quantitative versus qualitative approaches, research topics, and more. None of these have examined when and how human subjects have been studied.

Another reason to study significant samples is purely methodological. Scholars can and have examined eminent subjects sorely on the basis of intrinsic or innate values these subjects possess in reference to characteristics not shared widely. This way, significant samples can be studied as stand-alone subjects sorely on their unique characteristics. Pertinent studies have examined the psychographics of Pulitzer Prize winners (Volz & Lee, 2012), how social media communication affects the scientific impact of top nanoscientists (Liang et al., 2014), how top bloggers shape their public personae (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), among others. Depending on the sampling techniques, results from such studies mostly come with no sampling error because the unit could easily be considered a population. Another methodological reason has to do with accurate replication of such samples. Given that some are so precisely defined, scholars can duplicate them (with little error) for further inquiry to test for longitudinal effects (Simonton, 2014).

Last, the use of significant samples is quite common in fields such as psychology, political psychology, and political science. For example, the political science journal *Presidential Studies Quarterly* is devoted solely to the study of the U.S. presidency. Also, political psychologists have extensively analyzed U.S. presidents and other heads of state when examining such issues as rhetorical complexity, charisma, and leadership. In addition, scholars in these fields acknowledge the concept and mention it in their work (e.g., Simonton, 2014; Thoemmes & Conway, 2007). Such is not the case in journalism research, despite the fact that scholars in this field study their fair share of significant subjects and the publications *Journalism History* and *American Journalism* focus on historical figures and events. In these two and many other journalism publications, scholars have examined issues such as the U.S. presidency and the media agenda, presidential rhetoric and its impact on public knowledge, the effect of historical figures on media narrative, violence and sports media, and factors that mitigate media coverage of

Hollywood stars and race issues, among other topics. It is therefore important to examine the dynamics in such scholarly undertakings and thus this study.

Theoretical Framework: Applying the Simonton Study

In his aforementioned work, Simonton (1999) discusses the four traditional approaches commonly used when studying significant samples:

Historiometric approach: The oldest of the four approaches, historiometrics involves the use of quantitative and qualitative analysis of historical data via methods such as content analysis or archival research. It involves the use of specific units of analysis to analyze both cross-sectional and longitudinal research topics. Time-series analysis about certain aspects of prominent subjects would be an example of such inquiry, and historiometrics has been widely applied in leadership studies. In a study of Machiavellianism among notable 20th-century leaders, Bedell, Hunter, Angie, and Vert (2006) found that this characteristic was mitigated by leadership style, with pragmatic leaders showing more Machiavellianism than charismatic or ideological leaders. In a similar study on U.S. presidents, Deluga (2001) found that a president's charisma and performance rating correlated with Machiavellianism.

Psychometric approach: This is the second oldest methodological approach, and here researchers mostly apply the method to single-case analysis of prominent individuals in regard to their personality and related factors. However, whereas most psychometric research uses direct analysis tools such as questionnaires and personality tests, such opportunities are not always readily available to scholars examining eminent individuals. For instance, presidents are rarely available for a battery of tests for research purposes. Hence, Simonton (1999, p. 429) discusses alternative "unobtrusive" or "nonreactive" methods such as the use of secondary material to measure the psychological aspects of these subjects. A good example would be the use of content analysis on presidential speeches to determine their integrative complexity, a cognitive marker linked to performance, stress, diplomatic tactics, and charisma (Suedfeld & Jhangiani, 2009; Thoemmes & Conway, 2007; Wasike, 2015).

Psychobiographical approach: This approach is rooted in Sigmund Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci. Unlike the historiometric and psychometric approaches, it is almost exclusively single case, with researchers examining one subject. The approach is mostly qualitative and longitudinal. Unlike psychometrics, researchers usually use indirect assessment methods and sources but with a heavily longitudinal and biographic aspect. In an analysis of an American president, Houck and Kiewe (2003) examined Franklin D. Roosevelt's visual and oral rhetoric and how he used those to conceal his disability and change the public's perceptions of it throughout his presidency.

Comparative approach: Researchers use this method to compare prominent individuals based on a number of factors. An example would be Fitch and Marshall's (2008) analysis of Hillary Clinton's and Condoleezza Rice's leadership styles. Both subjects possess high levels of conscientiousness and display high demanding patterns for themselves and others. They, however, differ in leadership styles, with Clinton preferring a more confrontational approach and Rice more likely to avoid the spotlight

Simonton (1999) also discusses the seven research dimensions that scholars have used to study significant samples. Below is a brief summary of each:

Quantitative versus qualitative: Quantitative methods use operationalized variables and numerical data for statistical analysis. Qualitative methods such as cultural studies and ethnography are mostly interpretive and do not seek measurement.

Multiple cases versus single case: Multiple-case studies focus on more than one subject, whereas single-case studies examine a single subject, where $N = 1$.

Nomothetic versus idiographic: Scholars use nomothetic methods to generalize and seek association between factors. Idiographic methods study the peculiarities of a single subject to make specific observations.

Confirmatory versus exploratory: Confirmatory methods rely on hypothesis testing to confirm predictions. Exploratory methods are more inductive and are used to discover trends that arise from open curiosity and might use research questions rather than directional hypotheses.

Cross-sectional versus longitudinal: Cross-sectional methods are used to study occurrences across subjects within a particular time frame. Longitudinal methods examine subjects over a given time period.

Micro- versus macroanalytical units: This dimension refers to the number of analytical units under study. For instance, an article focusing on multiple markers of leadership qualities such as charisma, rhetorical complexity, and performance would qualify as a macro-unit study.

Direct versus indirect assessment: Direct assessment occurs when researchers administer measurement directly on the subject, for example, via an in-depth interview.

Eminent People in Mass Communication Research

One related area that has drawn a lot of scholarly inquiry is the presidency. For instance, Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, and McCombs (1989) found some correlation between the State of the Union address and the media agenda. Here, Nixon was unlikely to shape his rhetoric in accordance with the media agenda, a personality trait lacking in Carter, who was more reactive to the media coverage of issues. Loquaciousness has also been determined to be a positive determinant of media attention to presidential speeches, with lengthier speeches getting more of it (Bradshaw, Coe, & Neumann, 2014). Related studies have examined presidents in regard to other issues, including the media portrayal of Obama's statements on race (Daniels, Fears, & Tait, 2014) and the effect of George W. Bush's war rationale on news coverage (Coe, 2011), among others.

Some scholars have sidestepped the presidency and examined significant historical figures and their impact on media narrative. Maurantonio (2014) found that themes in the media portrayal of Rodney King mirrored themes of the coverage of such Civil Rights-era figures as Martin Luther King. An example would be the *Intelligencer Journal*'s reportage of Rodney King's attempts at quelling racial tensions during the L.A. riots with the plaintive question "Can we all get along?" juxtaposing it to Martin Luther King's more elaborately orated sermons carrying a similar message. Regarding Pope John Paul II, Brown (2009) examined the dynamics of the diffusion of the news of his death and its effect on the public's perception of his policy positions. The study found that those who watched the pope's funeral were more likely to support his position on abortion and his concerns for the disabled and the elderly. Saukko (2006) examined the media effect on female self-image in regard to the coverage of Princess Diana's eating disorder. The study found similarities between the coverage of her death and bulimia and the anorexic death of 1970s singer Karen Carpenter in terms of the portrayal of famous women with eating disorders. Celebrities such as Michael Jackson have also drawn scholarly inquiry. Gondwe (2013) found that Africans hold a uniquely positive perspective of the controversial star, different from most other people.

Hollywood has not eluded scholarly inquiry either. Research shows that movie stars too can affect the media agenda, especially when they undertake development aid projects such as the benefit Music for Life concert for the 2010 Haiti earthquake victims (Panis & Van den Bulck, 2014). Others have studied the dynamics of "elevated individuals" and magazine coverage. This way, Arakaki and Cassidy (2014) found that *People* magazine's portrayal of celebrities on its covers misrepresented real census demographics, with an underrepresentation of racial minorities and an overrepresentation of female celebrities. Other topics of interest have been the discourse on race, violence, and sports in regard to troubled NBA star Ron Artest (de B'béri & Hogarth, 2009); the effect of Lady Gaga's song "Born This Way" on opinions about LGBTQ issues (Jang & Lee, 2014); the public relations tactics used by serial killers such as Jeffery Dahmer (Gibson & Chavez, 2004); and the unique hybridization of sit-com/reality TV show *The Osbournes* (Morreale, 2003).

Pervious Research on Methodological Trends

Before presenting the research questions, it is important to make brief mention of literature that has longitudinally reviewed methical and research trends in communication scholarship. An oft-cited example would be Riffe and Freitag's (1997) study of the changing nature of content analysis between 1971 and 1995. Among other findings, a minority of articles in that time period used research questions or hypothesis (46%), that is, most articles then were neither exploratory nor confirmatory. In addition, very few studies used random samples (10%). Another commonly cited study is Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) meta-analysis of methods used in mass communication research from 1980 to 1999. The study showed the use of quantitative methods outpacing qualitative methods in that time period, 72% to 26%, respectively. Overall, mixed approaches were not very common and their use remained mostly constant at 2.5% overall. Regarding specific data collection methods, the study found that surveys were the most common methods (33%), followed by content analysis (30%), experiments (13%), and historical methods (4.7%).

Scholars also have taken more nuanced approaches by examining trends within narrow foci. For instance, Manganello and Blake (2010) compared research methods between health communication journals and communication journals in general between 1985 and 2005. Communication journals were more likely to study a variety of topics, issues, or concepts, that is, scholars here took a more nomothetic approach than their health communication counterparts. In a study focused on Chinese scholarship, Li and Tang (2012) also found a preponderance of content analysis (54%), with textual analysis and reviews tied at 24% between 2000 and 2010. In another study of research trends in communication scholarship in China between 1985 and 2002, Baohua (2006) found that qualitative methods outpaced quantitative methods by a 71% to 26% margin. Another narrowly tailored study is Tomasello's (2001) analysis of Internet-based research between 1994 and 1999. Among other factors, the study found that pertinent focus on Internet-based research had risen over time, albeit with up and down variations in that time period. In a more recent study (from 1990 to 2006), Tomasello, Youngwon, and Baer (2010) found similar trends (a steady rise with periodic ups and downs) in new media research focused on such topics as computer, digital, Internet, online, and Web-related media.

For this study, I posed the following research questions:

RQ1a: *How did journalism scholars apply the four traditional approaches when studying significant samples?*

RQ1b: *Where there any changes in the application of the four traditional approaches between 2000 and 2014?*

RQ2: *What were the most common research dimensions used by journalism scholars when studying significant samples?*

RQ3: *What were the most common data collection methods used by journalism scholars when studying significant samples?*

RQ4: *Where there any changes in the study of significant samples in journalism research between 2000 and 2014?*

Method

Sample

Most meta-analysis studies use keyword searches to find articles in databases. However, because significant samples cannot be searched comprehensively using any given set of keywords, I deemed this search method unsuitable for this study. I therefore examined a census of all articles published in 10 prominent peer-reviewed journalism-related journals between 2000 and 2014. Because this study focused strictly on journalism research, I limited the analysis to journals that are specifically dedicated to journalism scholarship and not mass communication or communication research in general. This method is similar to Li and Tang's (2012) aforementioned analysis of mass communication research in China. The

journals selected for the current study were *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*; *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*; *Journalism & Communication Monographs*; *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*; *Journalism Studies*; *Journalism Practice*; *Newspaper Research Journal*; *Journalism History*; and *American Journalism.* To capture research on broadcast journalism, I included the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* in the analysis, for a total of 10 journals.

Data Collection

Content analysis was used to collect data and the unit of analysis was a single peer-reviewed journal article. Book reviews were not included in the analysis. I went through each and every volume published in the 10 journals during the years of interest to identify articles that examined significant samples. Significance was limited to well-known figures (including infamous or other newsworthy figures) in any one field, or those to whom a particular author emphasized significance (see the Appendix for full list of subjects). Even though I conducted the content analysis, reliability tests were carried out with a secondary coder until reasonable agreement was reached on the four traditional approaches to significant samples. These were also the categories that needed a reasonable level of personal judgment, unlike the research dimensions and data collection categories that mostly used numerical counts for the coding. The agreement for the traditional approaches were Krippendorff's alpha = .8 and Scott's pi = .8. Author-conducted or single-coder content analysis is not uncommon in meta-analysis and/or journalism research. Pardun (2000) personally analyzed content in a meta-analysis of research patterns of qualitative works published in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. Likewise, Handley (2010) personally analyzed news articles in a study of George W. Bush's framing patterns regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Other single-coder work includes the Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) study.

Coding Categories

The coding categories were derived and modified from the Simonton (1999) study. The first set of categories captured the four traditional approaches and the second set captured the 12 research dimensions. To capture a more detailed picture of the research dimensions, I added a third category to capture the specific data collection methods used in the articles.

Category 1: Traditional approaches. This category measured which of the four broad methodological approaches scholars used in their work:

Historiometric approach. This subcategory includes studies that were fully historic or biographical in nature.

Psychometric approach. According to Parkinson's (2000) handbook on psychometrics, this approach deals with measures of mental performance including other personal factors such as "personality or temperament, careers or employment interests, values, attitudes and motivation" (p. 7). However, and as mentioned earlier, Simonton discusses the difficulty of directly analyzing eminent subjects and proposes the use of such indirect methods of analysis such as the use of secondary material. Hence, this

category included articles that used methods such as content analysis, but only to determine the personality traits of the subjects without a biographical aspect.

Psychobiographical approach: This approach is mostly single case. This means that a qualifying article analyzed an individual's psychological framework but with a longitudinal or biographical emphasis. Because psychobiographical studies primarily use biographic and archival material as sources, this category included only articles that were psychological, biographical, or longitudinal.

Comparative approach. This subcategory included articles that primarily deployed a comparative approach to delineate the similarities and differences between subjects.

Category 2: Research dimensions. This study adopted 12 subcategories of the research dimensions that denoted how the scholars analyzed their subjects. Each variable was dummy coded as 1 = yes, 2 = no, and 3 for both methods being used in the same article.

Quantitative versus qualitative. Studies that fell under the first subcategory used numerical data in their analysis, whereas the other category included articles using discursive or critical analysis methods.

Multiple cases versus single case. Multiple-case studies analyzed more than one subject or groups, whereas single-case studies examined a single subject or group.

Nomothetic versus idiographic. Because the pilot study revealed overlap between this category and the macro- versus microanalytical units category, these two were collapsed into one. Therefore, nomothetic work includes articles that examined a variety of variables and/or topics/issues/concepts/events, whereas idiosyncratic studied focused on a single topic/issue/concept/event.

Confirmatory versus exploratory. Confirmatory studies had to have directional and/or predictive hypotheses. Studies that used open-ended research questions or were largely inductive or discursive were coded as exploratory.

Cross-sectional versus longitudinal. Studies that adopted analysis based on a specific time frame were coded as cross-sectional, whereas those that examined trends over time were deemed longitudinal.

Direct versus indirect assessment. The direct assessment dimension applied to studies that directly examined a subject, for example, via an interview. Indirect assessment includes the use of methods such as archival records research or the content analysis of news articles.

Category 3: Data collection methods. Although no a priori list was used (a better way to capture all methods), this category anticipated some of the commonly used data collection methods in

communication research such as content analysis, surveys, experiments, secondary data, archival, interviews, focus groups, mixed methods, and so forth.

Results

The results were derived from a census of articles examining significant samples between 2000 and 2014 in the 10 journals and therefore represent true population parameters and do not require the use of inferential statistics. A total of 248 articles examining significant samples were identified. All journals except *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* had qualifying articles (see Table 1).

***Table 1. Number of Articles Examining
Significant Samples per Journal (2000–2014).***

Journal	n
Journalism History	69
Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly	50
Journalism Studies	34
American Journalism	33
Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism	23
Newspaper Research Journal	19
Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media	12
Journalism Practice	6
Journalism Monographs	3
Total	249[a]

Note. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator had no
qualifying articles.
[a]This total includes a single article from 2015, which was not
included in the analysis.

The psychometric approach was by far the most used to study significant samples, accounting for slightly more than half of the articles analyzed (51%). The historiometric approach was the second most used (22%), followed by the psychobiographical approach (19%) and the comparative approach (6%). Only 2% of the articles used a combination of approaches. As shown in Figure 1, all methods displayed swings and variations in use from year to year except for the mixed approach, which hardly registered on the radar to begin with. The historiometric approach showed the highest variations, with a sharp uptick between 2008 and 2010, only to drop equally sharply in the next two years. A similarly sharp increase occurred between 2012 and 2013. The psychometric, psychobiographical, and comparative approaches displayed similar variations, but with much less pronounced swings yearly.

As shown in Table 2, the typical journalism studies article examining significant samples was quantitative in nature; involved a single subject; was multifaceted in terms of variables, issues, topics, and concepts (nomothetic); and was longitudinal rather than cross-sectional. The article was also exploratory in nature; in case it was quantitative, it was more likely to use research questions rather than hypotheses (confirmatory). In addition, the article used indirect methods such content analysis, textual analysis, or archival methods to study the subject rather than traditionally direct methods such as interviews, direct observation, or experiments.
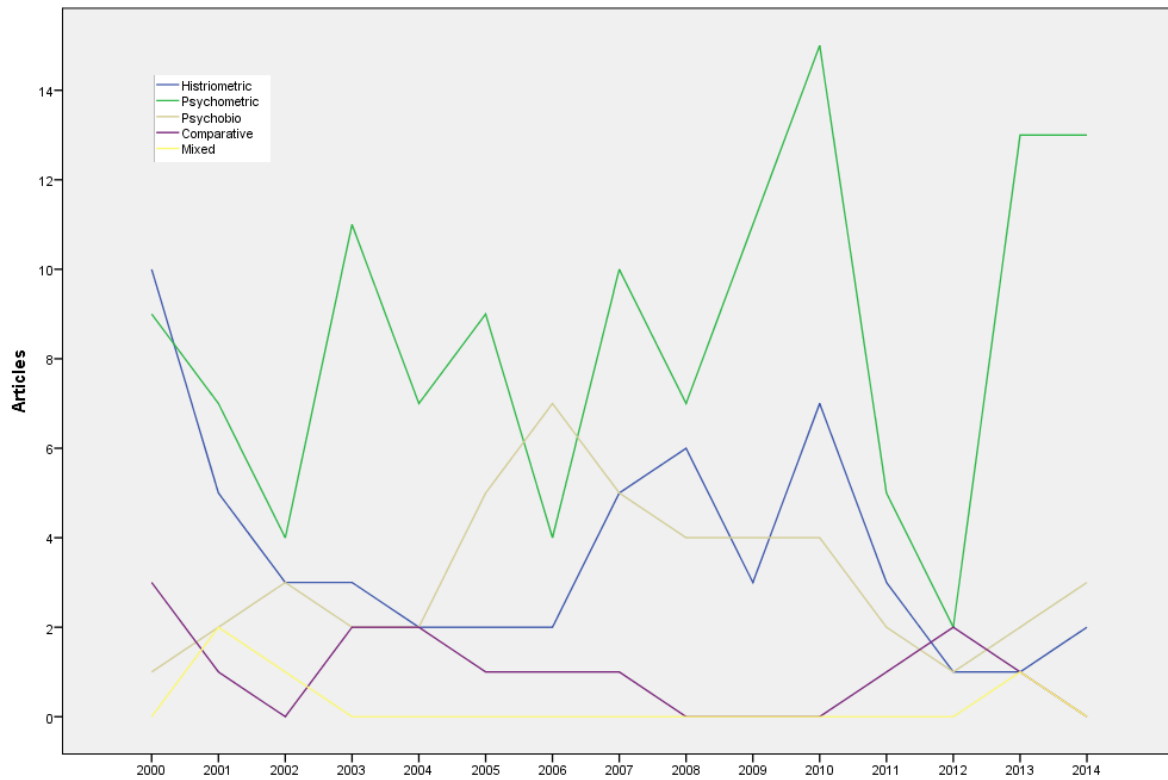

Figure 1. Traditional approaches used in articles examining significant samples (2000–2014).

Table 2. Number of Dimensions in Articles
Examining Significant Samples (2000–2014).

Dimension	n	%
Quantitative	184	74
Qualitative	50	20
Both	14	6
Total	248	
Single case	152	61
Multiple cases	96	39
Total	248	
Nomothetic	226	91
Idiosyncratic	22	9
Total	248	
Exploratory	224	90
Confirmatory	14	6
Both	10	4
Total	248	
Longitudinal	148	60
Cross-sectional	100	40
Total	248	
Macro	242	98
Micro	6	2
Total	248	
Indirect	234	94
Direct	11	5
Both	3	1
Total		

In terms of the data collection methods, the results indicate that most articles used archival material, with content analysis being the second most popular (see Table 3). The least deployed methods of data collection were experiments and focus groups, both of which were used only once each. Interviews were equally scarce.

***Table 3. Number of Data Collection Methods in
Articles Examining Significant Samples (2000–2014).***

Method	n	%
Archival	140	57
Content analysis	71	29
Mixed methods	15	6
Survey	9	4
Interview	3	1
Secondary data	2	1
Experiment	1	<1
Focus group	1	<1
Other	6	2
Total	248	

This study also examined longitudinal trends in the study of significant samples in journalism publications. Like variations in the use of the four traditional approaches, Figure 2 shows similar trends for the overall study of significant samples in journalism studies. Scholarly interest in these samples showed a varied increase beginning in 2002 and peaked in 2010, only to drop sharply by 2012. A sharp increase in 2013 indicates renewed interest.
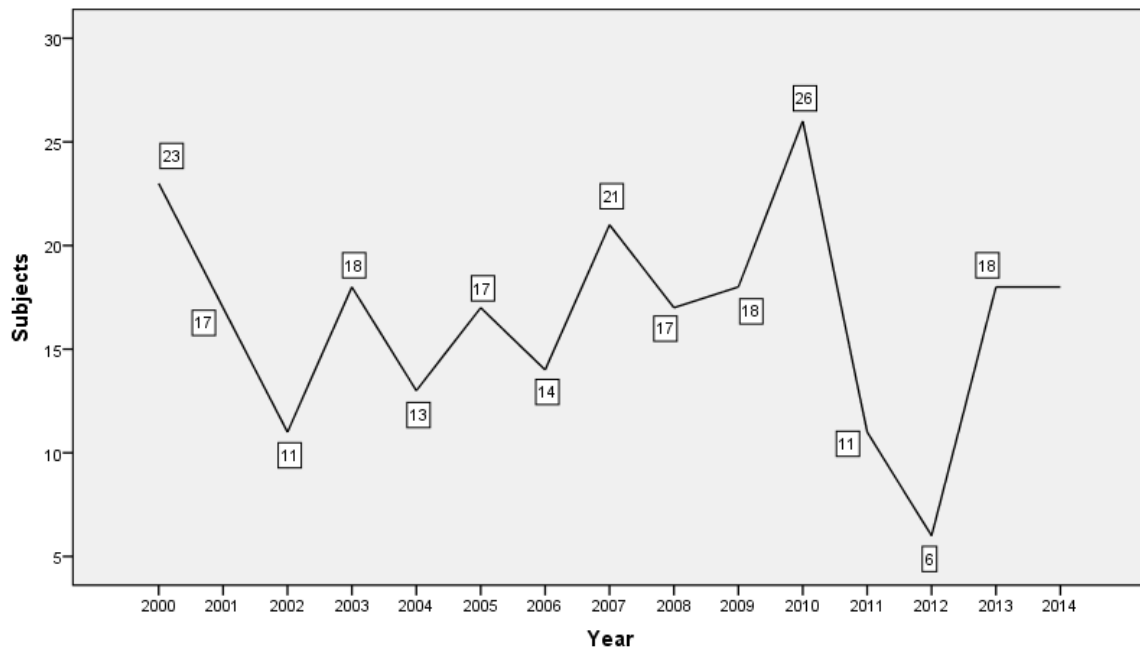
Figure 2. Significant samples over time.

Discussion

In this study, I analyzed how scholars in journalism research have examined significant samples. Using Simonton's (1999) work as a theoretical guide, I examined the use of the four traditional approaches, the 12 research dimensions, and also the specific data collection methods used in such analyses. As discussed earlier, many mass communication scholars have performed similar research trend studies. However, this study in itself provides a unique contribution to journalism research in particular and mass communication research in general given that it introduces and applies a relevant concept from another field: political psychology.

The study also creates a portrait of the typical journalism study that would examine significant samples. First, such a study would be psychometric in nature. Second, the same study would be quantitative, examine a single subject in a multifaceted manner, and be longitudinal. It also would use research questions rather than hypotheses and would deploy data collection methods such as content analysis or archival research. To paraphrase Simonton (1999), this psychometric study would be quantitative, nomothetic, longitudinal, singularly focused, and exploratory; would use macro units; and would observe the subject indirectly.

For purposes of emphasis, whereas psychometric studies traditionally use direct measures to study subjects, such means are not readily available to scholars studying significant samples such as heads of state and/or other newsmakers. This compels researchers to use indirect methods to delineate

personality traits from secondary material, a method discussed by Simonton (1999) in his article. In this respect, it makes sense that this was probably the most common psychometric method used in the articles analyzed, as more direct methods such as experiments and direct observation were rarely used.

On another level, this study fits quite well with extant literature. For instance, Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) oft-cited study found a preponderance of quantitative methods in mass communication research. The margins there were 72% to 26%. Similar trends in the current study show that scholars overwhelmingly used quantitative over qualitative research dimensions, with like margins of 74% to 20%. Other similarities include the use of content analysis, which was the second most popular in the Kamhawi and Weaver study. Likewise, Li and Tang's (2012) study had content analysis as the most common method of data collection. The current study found archival methods to be the most popular, and content analysis came in second. This is not an anomaly given that most eminent subjects are most likely to be historical too, and archival records are usually the most appropriate if not the only method in such situations. Of important note is that during the data collection process, I realized that in the past most historical journalism publications did not require authors to specifically state their methods of data collection. In such cases, I had to examine the reference list and/or endnotes to determine the data collection method. In addition, it was common for authors of older articles to use the phrase *textual analysis* when in fact the method was either archival or content analysis.

Riffe and Freitag's (1997) article also has some similarities with the current study. A majority of scholars then (1971–1995) did not use either research questions or hypothesis. The current study determined that a majority of scholars used research questions (90%), but only 10% of the articles examined used hypotheses. This could be explained because significant samples are not generalizable to the population and the need for hypothesis testing might not be as pressing as it is with the use of random samples. Another similarity would be with Manganello and Blake's (2010) study that found that most mass communication research is pluralistic in term of topics, issues, and concepts studied. This denotes Simonton's (1999) nomothetic approach, one that the current study found to be common in the study of significant samples (96%). Another similarity with extant literature is the varied nature with which scholars emphasize the study of certain aspects in mass communication. This trend was common in the current study, Tomasello's (2001) study on Internet-based media, and Tomasello and colleagues' (2010) study on new media. All three studies showed that although interest in significant samples, Internet-based media, or new media saw a steady increase over time, the increase was not linear. Period spikes and fluctuations punctuated the upward trend.

Ramifications for Journalism Research

In a lamentation of the lack of emphasis on important figures in mass communication research, Sterling and Keith (2006) posed the question "Where have all the historians gone?" (p. 345) in an article appearing in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. The same edition of the journal carried a specific call for papers on historical research and eminent figures titled "Here Are the Materials, Where Are the Scholars?" (Godfrey, 2006, p. 171). Although both quotations were published a while ago and referred to purely historical scholars, the study of eminent figure goes well beyond that one specific field of study.

For example, the current study analyzed articles that examined such varied figures as prominent journal editor Barbara Cloud, South American revolutionary leaders, Walter Lippmann, infamous journalists such as former *Los Angeles Times* photographer Brian Walski, and members of the British royal family. Given that only 248 articles examined significant samples in a 15-year period, Sterling and Keith's lamentation has yet to be answered, and thus is impetus for more studies like this one.

All in all, the study of significant samples deserves a bigger presence in journalism research. The theoretical discussion shows the impactful findings of scholars examining these subjects. But there is room for more, especially regarding emergent figures who have or are driving the social media world, a sphere that has thrust the media industry into flux. I did not come across any study that looked at such subjects, despite the fact that people such as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg have transformed present-day communication and media patterns. It would be interesting—in a scholarly fashion—to examine the psychometrics of other figures such as Twitter founder Jack Dorsey, Reddit founders Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian, or Pinterest's Ben Silbermann. Other notable figures would include newly minted social media commentators such as comedian PewDiePie of YouTube fame with 40 million subscribers (and a $12 million earning in 2015). Another would be *National Geographic* photographer Cory Richards, who chronicles his extreme mountain climbing feats on Instagram to more than 352,000 followers.

Another area of development could be studies of renowned communication educators and scholars. This one group is notable given that this study did not find a single qualifying article in *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, which would have been an appropriate venue to publish such works. In this vein, researchers could examine subjects such as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Krieghbaum Under-40 Award winners, who are recognized annually for excellence in research, teaching, and service. Another area of study could focus on recipients of the International Communication Association's Young Scholar Award. This award honors recent PhD recipients based on the production of an impactful body of work and future potential of the same. Of the three traditional approaches discussed earlier, the psychometric approach would be the most appropriate to elicit a personality profile of these eminent scholars and educators alongside other psychological markers that make them stand out. Because these recipients are basically role models for upcoming scholars and educators, such findings could provide fodder for a guiding framework to improve performance in the communication field as a whole.

Limitations

One limitation is that this study analyzed top-tier journalism-only publications, and the results are to be viewed within that prism. It is possible that regional journals carry articles that examine significant samples. In addition, conference papers could also show different trends than those reported here. Book reviews were not analyzed as well, and some of these could have contained biographical reviews of eminent personalities. Also, I do not assume that the totality of journalism research appears only in the publications examined here. Other publications such as the *Journal of Communication*, *Mass Communication and Society*, *New Media & Society*, *Political Communication*, and the *International Journal of Communication* likely contain journalistic studies, and some of these might have analyzed significant samples.

Second, studies of significant samples are conditional on the existence of special circumstances to even be executed. For instance, one could not examine a controversial figure in the absence of that controversy or a notorious but newsworthy figure without the infamous act occurring in the first place. Although there may exist a lot of eminent and newsworthy people, not all of them necessarily align with specific scholarly interests. A related weakness has to do with generalization. This is especially so when dealing with singular subjects or in the examination of a very select group of figures who represent the entirety of the subjects under interest (i.e., a population). Such situations render generalization and inferential statistics needless. Even though such studies serve an important purpose and contribute to scholarship no less than traditional sampling studies, research shows that the publication process is biased in favor of studies that use inferential statistics and produce statistically significant results (Carpenter, 2012; Franco, Malhotra, & Simonovits, 2014; Turner, Matthews, Linardatos, Tell, & Rosenthal, 2008). Such situations might discourage scholars from pursuing research on significant samples, or doing so only on an exploratory basis.

Third, because this study was adapted from systemic review and meta-analytic methods, it is important to mention the advantages and disadvantages of such procedures. One advantage is that they allow for a systematic and structured analysis of extant literature, in this case, research on significant samples. Such procedures allow for the examination of scholarly patterns in the field of interest and point out areas that need further inquiry. Related findings are further strengthened when scholars incorporate such empirical methods as well delineated research problems, a priori categories to guide the analysis, and thorough interpretation of results. However, the same methods do not lack weaknesses. Examples of such include the lack of referencing the primary data used in the original publications under study and the aggregation of disparate scholarly works. Critics also point out the discouraging effect on scholars borne of the overwhelming volume of articles to be analyzed as yet another weakness of meta-analysis.

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Appendix: List of Subjects (duplicates have been deleted).

12-year-old Okinawan rape victim	Kenneth Starr
187 famous journalist/literary figures	Kevin Rudd
2008 Olympic athletes	Kobe Bryant

2008 presidential candidates	Kofi Annan
2008 presidential primary candidates	Kurt Cobain
9/11 victims	Kwangju protestors
A-list bloggers	Laura Bush
Abraham Lincoln	Leonardo de Caprio
Adolph Hitler	Lewis and Clark
Al Gore	Libbie Custer
Alfred Harmsworth	Liberty Hyde Bailey
Alistair Cooke	Lisa Sergio
Andre Maurois	Lord Northcliffe
Angel Gonzalez	Lost Boys of Sudan
Annie Wittenmeyer	Madeleine McCann
Ansel Adams	Mae West
Barbara Cloud	Major General Benjamin F. Butler
Bat Masterson	Marcus Garvey
Bess Furman	Margaret Sanger
Bill Clinton	Marshall McLuhan
Bill O'Reilly	Martha Stewart
Bill Tilden	Mary McGrory
Billie Sol Estes	May Craig
Brian Walski	Michael Ignatieff
British royal family	Michael Jordan
Carl B. Stokes	Milton Hershey
Carl Mydans	Mohamed Bouazizi
Carol Sutton	Monica Lewinsky
Carry Nation	Morris K. Udall
Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner murders	Nancy Hart
Charles Kuralt	Nat Turner
Chet Huntley	Nellie Bly
Christopher H. Sterling	Nelson Poynter
Civil rights figures	News and PR exemplars
Clare Boothe Luce	Norman Corwin
Cleveland Amory	Norman Lear and Larry Gilbert
Cole C. Campbell	Norman Rockwell
Colonel Edward M. House	O. J. Simpson
Condoleezza Rice	Oliveira Salazar
Curt Flood	Olof Palme and Anna Lindh
Dan Rather	Osama bin Laden
David Brinkley	Paul Branzburg
Delhi gang rape	Paul Burrell, royal butler
Democratic and Republican primary candidates 2000	Paul Deutschland and Wayne Danielson

Dora the Explorer	Paul Gilmartin
Dorothea Lange	Paul Lazarsfeld
Drear Pearson	Phoebe Snow
Dwight Eisenhower	Pierre Bourdieu
E. W. Scripps	Pim Fortuyn
Edward Bernays	Pioneering women
Edward Bok	Princess Diana
Elizabeth Smart	Pulitzer Prize winners
Emmett Till	Rachel Maddow
Evelyn Waugh	Ralph W. Tyler
Famous child murderers and abductors	Retired State Supreme Court justices
Female suffragists	Richard Adams Locke
Ford Frick, Babe Ruth	Richard Fox, John L. Sullivan
Founding Fathers	Robert Lewis Shayon
Frances Willars	Roger Maris
Fred Friendly	Ronald Reagan and Muammar Gaddafi
Frederick Douglass	Rose Wilder Lane
Gabriel Prosser	Rudy Eugene, "Causeway Cannibal"
General George S. Patton, Jr.	Rupert Murdoch
George F. Will	Ryszard Kapuscinski
George Gallup	Saddam Hussein
George Orwell	Sarah Palin
George W. Bush	Scott Perterson
George William Curtis	Senator J. William Fulbright
Gretta Woodson	Senator Warren G. Harding
H. Allen Smith	Several advertising magnates
Harry Ayers	Sir Neville Henderson
Hearst	Stephen Colbert
Helen Thomas	Supreme Court Justices
Henry Luce	Sylvester Harris, folk hero
Herbert Hoover	Terri Schiavo
Hillary Clinton	Texas gang rape victim
Horace Greeley	The Beatles
Hugh Byas	The Black Panther Party
J. Edgar Hoover	The Jenna 6
J. Ross Browne	The Prophet Mohamed
Jack Johnson	The U.S. Surgeon General
Jack Kevorkian	The Warren Commission
Jackie Robinson	Theodore Davis
Jacob Zuma	Tiananmen Square protestors
Jacqueline Kennedy	Timothy McVeigh
Jade Goody	Tipper Gore
James Bryce	Tobias Peucer

James Carey, journalism history luminary	Tom Brokaw
James Frey	Tom Reilly
James J. Kilpatrick	Top nanoscientists
Jane Grant	Top U.S. newspaper editors
Jane Scott, famous rock critic	Ty Cobb
Jessica Mitford	U.S. presidents
Joe Biden	Upton Sinclair
Joey Galloway	Virgil Thomson
John Brown	Virginia Tech shooter
John Cameron Swayze	Walter Cronkite
John Curtin	Walter Lippmann
John F. Kennedy, Jr.	Watergate scandal
John Gilmer Speed	Wen Ho Lee
John Hersey	Westbrook Pegler
John Kerry	WikiLeaks group members
Johnny Depp	William H. Rehnquist
Jon Stewart	William James Sidis
Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly authors	William McKinley
Judith Miller	William Oatis
Julian Assange	William Tecumseh Sherman
Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr.	William Worthy, Jr.
Kate Adie	Woody Guthrie
Kate Moss	Zapatista Army