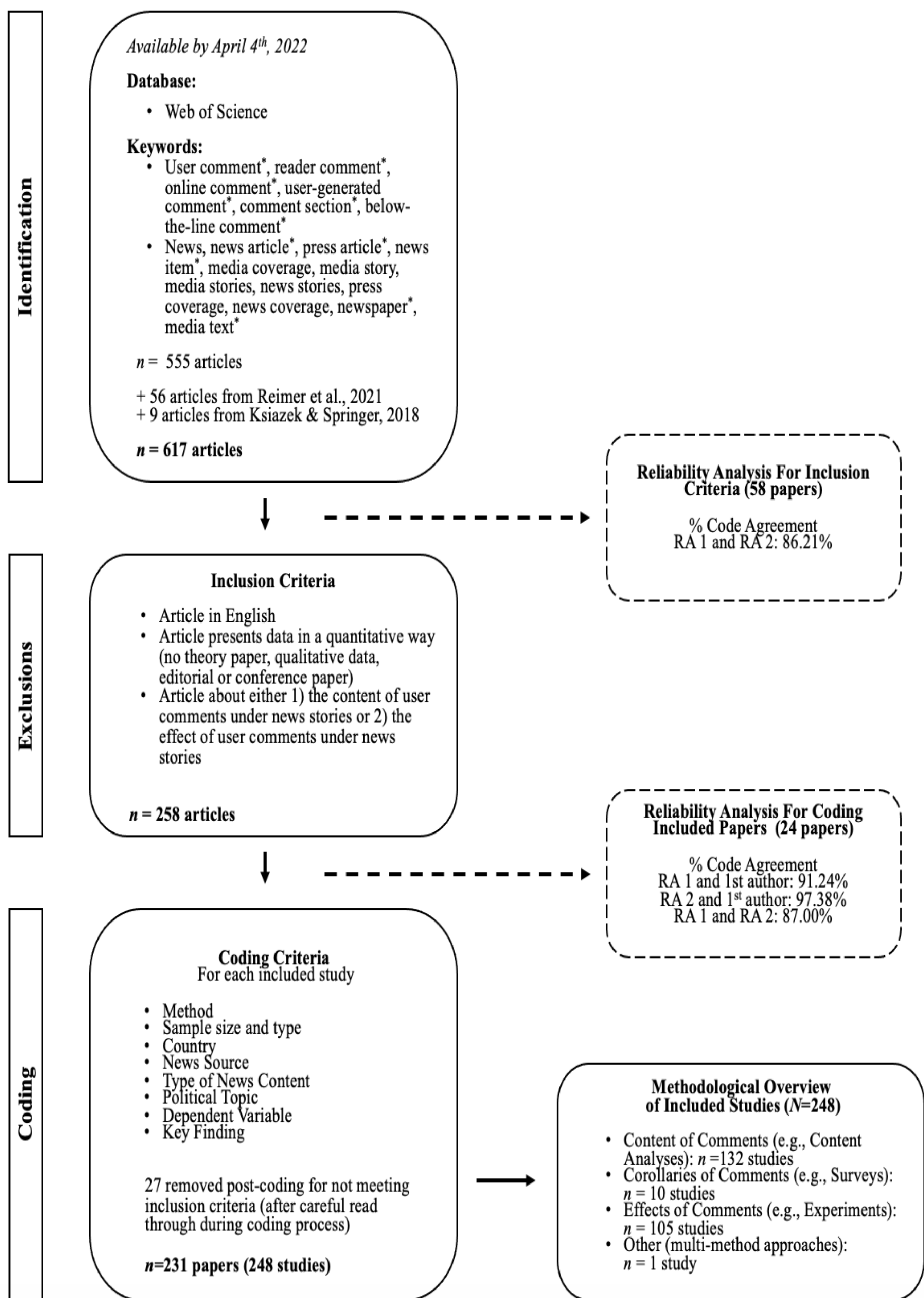


Introduction

Today people not only can access news online (e.g., via social media or online news sites)—but can leave comments in response to them. These **user comments** shape attitudes and beliefs and have become a key area of research in recent years. In this review, we systematically analyze 248 studies about user comments posted under news to understand 1) what these comments look like (i.e., content analysis), 2) constructs that correlate with user comments (i.e., surveys) and 3) the effect of these comments (i.e., experiments). This systematic review provides understandings of what we know about user comments and provides insights into research gaps.

Methods



Qualitative Results

Large topic diversity in news content and user comments. Examples include:

- ❖ **Controversial issues:** climate change, immigration, LGBT adoption rights, discrimination / racism, abortion rights, gun control
- ❖ **Health-related topics:** vaccinations, mental health care, disease outbreak
- ❖ **Scandals and crisis:** political scandals, company reputations and crises, electoral integrity
- ❖ **Education-related topics:** laws within schools, lawsuits against schools, conduct between educators and students

Key Results. We synthesized results to understand themes across studies.

Demographics of Commenters:

- ❖ Majority of comments come from few active commenters, especially in political news.
- ❖ There is a gender disparity in comments with women participating less and being more civil.

Why People Comment

- ❖ To challenge perceived biased media.
- ❖ To persuade others in politics. Many comment on controversial social issues and politics.
- ❖ For humor or entertainment value.

Effects of Comments

- ❖ Consistent evidence of uncivil and negative comments reducing perceptions of journalist/news credibility.
- ❖ Strong evidence that comments can shape perceptions of public opinion, and sway readers attitudes in a like-minded direction.

Moderating Comments: Considering how news platforms engage (or not) with commenters.

- ❖ Knowledge of news platforms moderating comment sections reduces persuasive effects of news content and can make news sites seem more biased. Consistent evidence this can be combated when content is moderated by artificial intelligence.

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Research on user comments have increased over time.
- ❖ Uncivil and negative comments consistently reduce perceptions of journalist/news credibility.
- ❖ Strong evidence that comments influence public opinion and can sway readers' attitudes in a like-minded direction.
- ❖ People comment to challenge, persuade, or entertain others.
- ❖ There is much diversity in news topics & user comments, ranging from social issues to education.
- ❖ Women comment less but exhibit more civil behavior.
- ❖ More studies are needed that use representative and / or diverse samples.
- ❖ There is not enough research on comments under video news or certain social media sites.

Quantitative Results

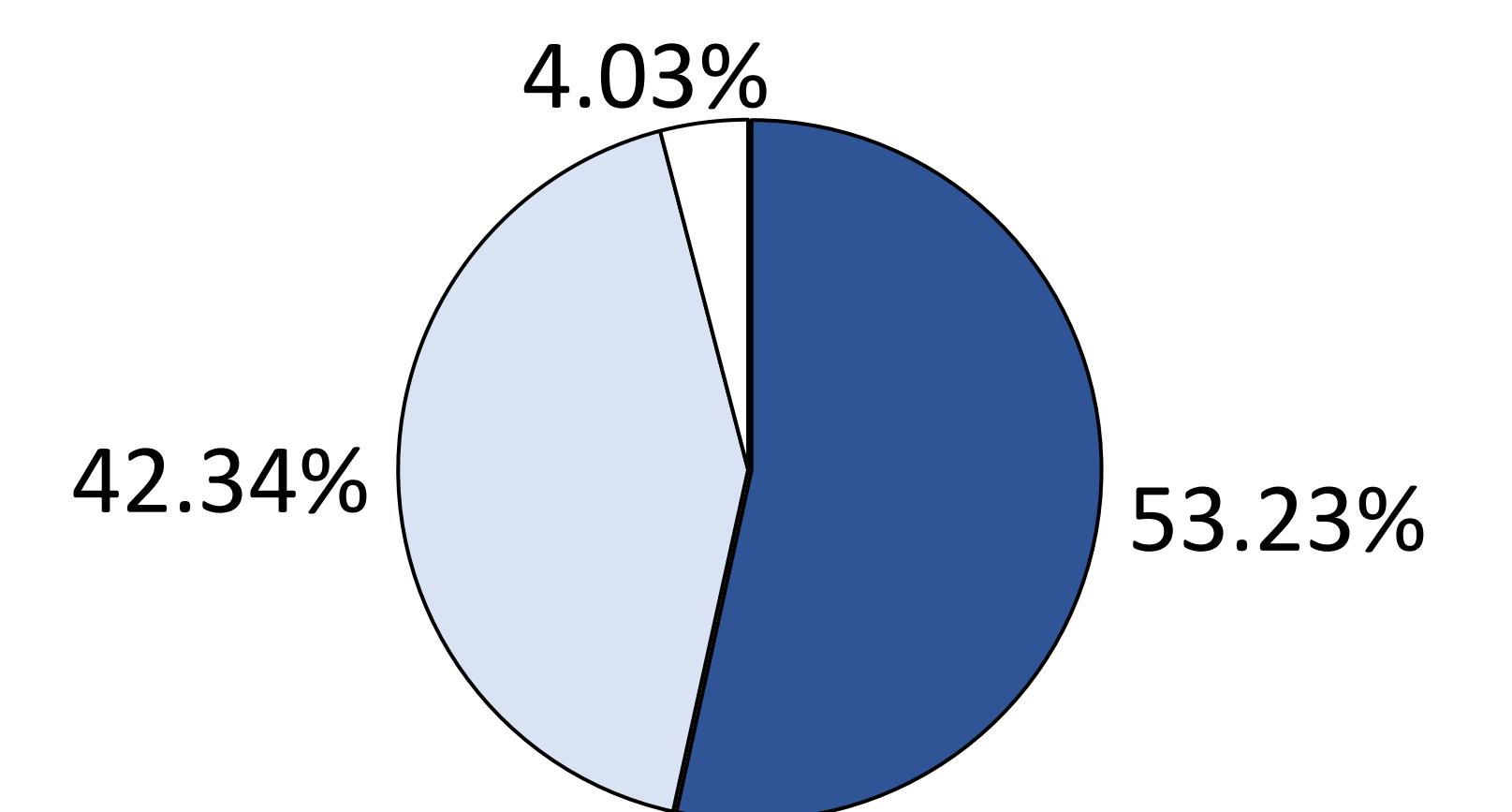
Distribution of Samples Across Countries



- ❖ **Sample Characteristics.** Many studies included student samples (36.52%), but few were representative samples (2.61%).

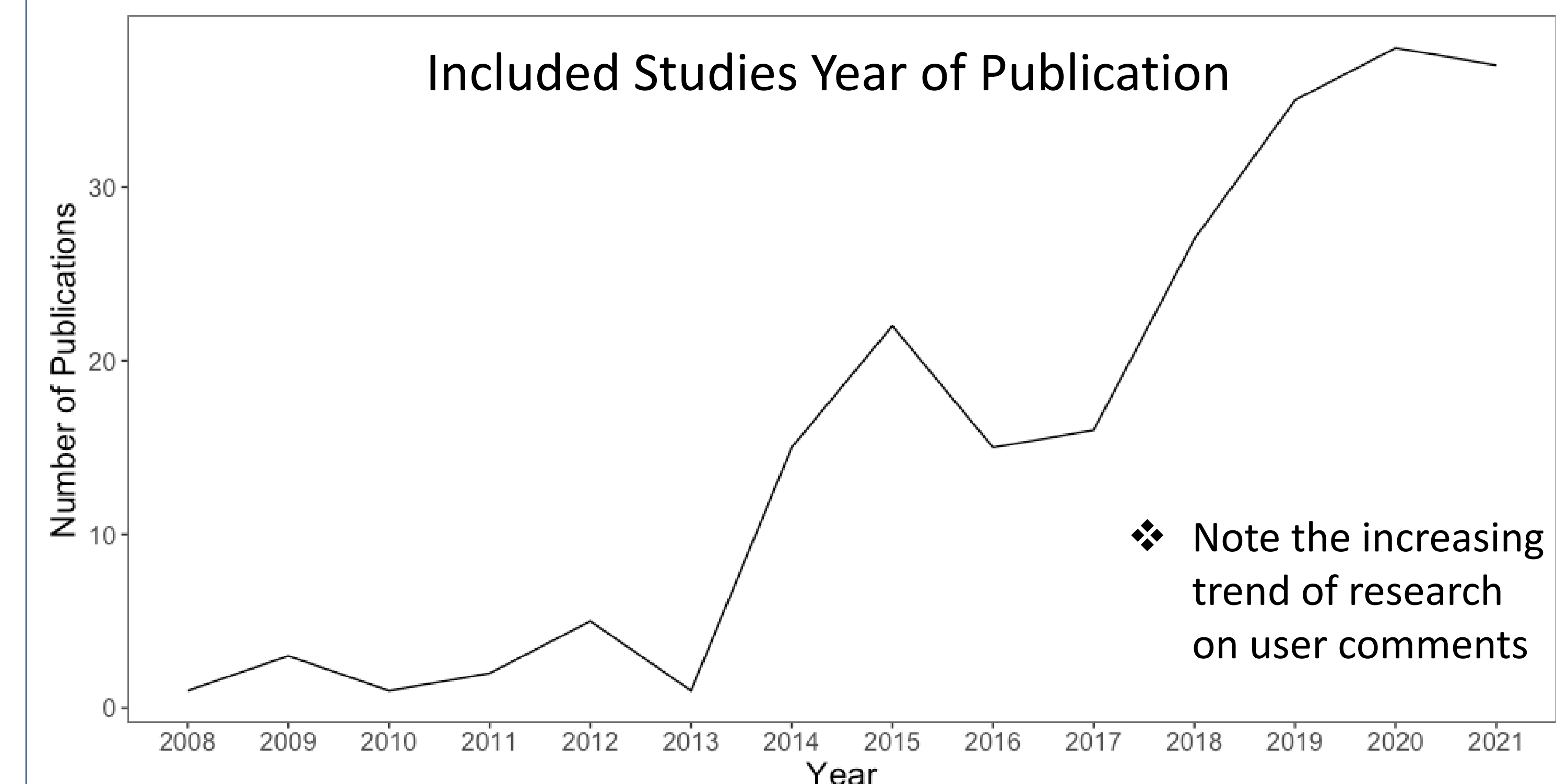
Methodology

- Content Analysis
- Experiments
- Surveys



- ❖ **News Content.** Most studies focused on comments under news articles (89.52%). Yet, much of the news content we see today is video/audio content. Only 5.24% of studies considered news videos and their comments.
- ❖ **Social Media News Content.** Many people primarily get their news from social media (Pew Research Center, 2021). However, only 19.35% of studies considered news content on social media in their analysis of comments.
 - ❖ Of these studies, 80% looked at Facebook, 15.38% used YouTube, and 9.23% used Twitter. There were no analyses of TikTok—a growing social media site for news content.

Included Studies Year of Publication



- ❖ Note the increasing trend of research on user comments