



**Politics, Social Networks, and the History of Mass Communications Research: Rereading Personal Influence (The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Series)**

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# Politics, Social Networks, and the History of Mass Communications Research: Rereading Personal Influence (The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Series)

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When the controversial book, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, was published in 1955, it made waves across the fields of communications, public opinion research, political science, and marketing. Written by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence* became the canonical statement of the "two-step flow" of communication, which posits that mass media flow to "opinion leaders," who in turn influence the behavior and opinions of people around them.

Throughout the last half of a century, *Personal Influence* has undergone rigorous critique, appeared in numerous citations, and become a key text in the history of mass communications. Why is a rereading of this text relevant now?

Upon the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publishing of *Personal Influence*, the editors of this volume of *The ANNALS* believed it was an ideal time to reflect upon the book's mid-century contexts and contemporary drawing upon enrichments of the field provided by feminism, critical and cultural studies, the new historicism, and progress in the social sciences. This unique volume of *The ANNALS* crosses generational, disciplinary, and national boundaries to piece together and pull apart a historically important text and use it to shed light on the contemporary environment.

Essays in this volume analyze the personalities who played key roles in the making of *Personal Influence*, their origins and social identities, the institutional organization of research in which it evolved, and the disciplinary consequences of its success. Other authors reread Katz and Lazarfeld's classic as a way to explore the relations between citizenship and consumption, the nature of media and political involvement today, and the relevance of the two-step flow paradigm for the study of contemporary audiences, social networks, and public campaigns.

A must-read for scholars, students, and professionals in the fields of communication, public opinion, political science, sociology, and marketing, this volume of *The ANNALS* dusts off a time-worn text and renews its significance in the field of mass communications with modern scholarly perspectives and contemporary methodology experience, inspiring a fresh outlook on this historical force.

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