Sono Shah

Pew Research Center
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Technical: R · Python · SQL · AWS

Experience

2024–present

Associate Director, Data Labs, Pew Research Center
- Serve as technical and methodological lead for an 8-person team across 3–5 concurrent projects; manage 4 direct reports and have shipped 20+ public-facing computational social science projects with national media coverage and academic impact.
- Lead annual research agenda planning in collaboration with the Managing Director, setting strategic priorities and project portfolio for the team.
- Direct research agenda across a portfolio of concurrent projects spanning AI and media behavior, platform dynamics, and digital trace data — providing methodological and design guidance from conception through publication.
- Lead active research evaluating the validity of LLMs as synthetic survey respondents — assessing where model-generated responses align with and diverge from human public opinion data.
- Direct team's development and implementation of standards and practices for applying LLMs to classify text, audio, and video data at scale, including protocols for responsible data use and model validation.
- Oversee development and deployment of team's research and engineering infrastructure for data collection and analysis; led migration from a custom Kubernetes/AWS environment to Posit Workbench, managing vendor evaluation and transition while maintaining research continuity.
- Translate computational methods for non-technical leadership and external audiences.

2023–2024

Senior Computational Social Scientist, Data Labs, Pew Research Center
- Partnered with the Managing Director to develop annual research proposals defining the team's project portfolio and strategic priorities.
- Co-authored study on House Freedom Caucus Twitter behavior, measuring how negative rhetoric drives disproportionate engagement.
- Built geospatial analysis linking EV charging infrastructure access to public attitudes across U.S. markets.

2019–2023

Computational Social Scientist, Data Labs, Pew Research Center
- Designed and executed studies on how political voices drive engagement dynamics on Twitter, reaching tens of millions of posts across multiple election cycles.
- Produced research on Asian American identity and political behavior using national survey data.
- Developed methodology for constructing representative samples from social media platform data, published in *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

2018–2019	*Researcher*, Center for Social Innovation
2012–2019	*Researcher*, AAPI Data
	Seven years of research on Asian American and Latino political participation, civic engagement, and public opinion.

Education

2020	PhD in Political Science, University of California, Riverside
2015	MA in Political Science, University of California Riverside
2011	BA in Political Science, University of Central Florida

Examples of past work

Below are selected projects I authored or directed at Pew Research Center; for a complete listing visit here.

2025	How Parents Use Online Communities — Analyzed engagement and discussion patterns across Reddit's largest parenting communities using platform data at scale.
	Google Users Are Less Likely to Click on Links When an AI Summary Appears (as Associate Director) — Measured how AI-generated search summaries change real-world click behavior using passively collected browsing data.
	What Web Browsing Data Tells Us About How AI Appears Online — Used behavioral web browsing data to quantify how AI enters Americans' everyday online experience.
2024	Who U.S. Adults Follow on TikTok (as Associate Director) — Analyzed following patterns across entertainment, news, and cultural content categories on TikTok.
	Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure in the U.S. — Combined geospatial infrastructure data with national survey data to study how proximity to EV chargers shapes public attitudes.
2023	House Freedom Caucus on Twitter: Going Negative and Getting Attention (with Samuel Bestvater) — Measured how negative rhetoric drives disproportionate engagement on Twitter.
2022	Politics on Twitter: One-Third of Tweets from U.S. Adults Are Political (with Sam Bestvater).
2020	How Democrats and Republicans Behave on Twitter (with Emma Remy and Aaron Smith).
	Democrats on Twitter More Liberal, Less Focused on Compromise Than Those Not on the Platform (with Aaron W. Smith, Adam Hughes, and Emma Remy) Covered by Bloomberg, Forbes, Vox

Refereed Publications

Since finishing graduate school, I have remained active in pursuing academic publications and collaborations with other researchers. Below is a selection of my refereed articles, for a complete listing see here.

2024	

Training Computational Social Science PhD Students for Academic and Non-Academic Careers, (with Aniket Kesari, Jae Yeon Kim, Taylor Brown, Tiago Ventura, and Tina Law), **PS: Political Science [] Politics**, January 2024, Vol 57 (1).

2021   "Convergence Across Difference: Understanding the Political Ties That Bind with the 2016 National Asian American Survey",(with Janelle Wong), **RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences**, Apr 2021, Vol 7 (2).

"Using Administrative Records and Survey Data to Construct Samples of Tweeters and Tweets", (with Stefan D. McCabe, William Hobbs, Adam Hughes, Emma Remy, and David Lazer), *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

"Messaging Matters: How Information about Underrepresentation Affects the Political Participation of Racial and Ethnic Groups in California"with Cheryl Boudreau [] Jennifer Merolla *California Journal of Politics and Policy, 1 (1)*

2020   "The Trump Effect: An Experimental Investigation of the Emboldening Effect of Racially Inflammatory Elite Communication" (with Ben Newman, Jennifer Merolla, Danielle Casarez Lemi, Loren Collingwood, and Karthick Ramakrishnan) *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-2 (2020). Ungated Link

2019   "Asian American Attitudes Toward Undocumented Immigrants and Immigration Policies" (with Janelle Wong) *CUNY FORUM*, Vol 7, Issue 1 (Fall 2019 - Winter 2020).

2018   "Who sees an Hourglass? Assessing Citizens' Perception of Local Economic Inequality" (with Ben Newman and Erinn Lauterbach) *Research and Politics*, Vol 5, Issue 3 (2018).

2018   "Race, Place, and Building a Base: Ethnic Change, Perceived Threat, and the Nascent Trump Campaign for President" (with Ben Newman, and Loren Collingwood) *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 82, Issue 1 (2018).

2016   "Gaps in Civic Engagement among Latinos and Asian Americans,"(with Karthick Ramakrishnan), in Klofstad, Casey (ed.), *Resources, Engagement, and Recruitment: New Advances the Study of Civic Volunteerism.*

Updated as of March 6, 2026