THE FOX NEWS EFFECT: MEDIA FRAMING AND IMPLICIT BIAS

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INTRODUCTION

News media sources utilize framing methods in order to change or influence the way in which people think about the information they are receiving. Many news stations that are central in popular media are strongly politically affiliated, meaning that their distribution of information is influenced by the network’s views. Topics such as race and ethnicity are framed differently across conservative and liberal news media sources. For example, conservative and liberal news stations may discuss and cover topics such as police brutality and immigration in significantly different ways. Even if the news an individual consumes does not entirely align with their explicit values, it may influence their implicit biases.

POPULATION

We began this study by only excluding individuals that were younger than the age of 18. Of our collecte d responses, 96 participants were pulled for data analysis. We compared the d-scores. A positive d-score indicates the associative level of bias. A positive d-score reflects the association: Target A+ Positive, Target B+ Negative. A negative d-score reflects the association: Target A+ Positive, Target B+ Negative. We compared the d-scores of white and black liberals against the d-scores of white and black conservatives. Non-black and non-white individuals were excluded from our data as well. One subject’s Implicit Association Test was completed too quickly, so their data was excluded from our analysis. The se people were then categorized based on their political demographic responses, which they answered prior to completing the Implicit Association Test. This resulted in 41 liberal individuals and 35 conservative individuals. 42 people in total viewed a neutral, control video, and 44 viewed a racially charged Fox News video.

METHODS

Materials: To run our experiment we used a survey built through Qualtrics. The survey included basic demographics questions, a video, an Implicit Association Test (IAT), and ended with qualitative questions. To build the IAT we used IATgen, a program that allows you to build a customized version of the IAT and create a CSV file for Qualtrics. IATgen also analyzes the data and calculates the d-score which is the measurement of their bias. The images and words used in our IAT were sourced directly from Project Implicit through their OSF page. Our videos were sourced through YouTube. We looked for Fox News segments that were racially charged and reduced them to a minute. For our control we had two neutral local news clips of similar time lengths. For our qualitative questions we referenced a survey distributed to college students: TOCAR Collaborative Campus and Community Climate Survey for Students.

Procedure: At the beginning of the survey participants were asked basic demographic questions on race, age, sex, and political ideology. Participants then watched either a one minute racially charged Fox News video or a neutral local news segment of a similar amount of time. Immediately following the video participants were asked to rate their emotional response. Following this, participants took the skin conductance level (SCL) test to measure their physiological responses to the video, and then a 20 minute break. Lastly, participants were asked qualitative questions on their explicit attitudes toward race, news media, and politics.

Measures: The scores from the IAT were calculated using IATgen’s software. The qualitative question results were reviewed in excel to show demographic trends regarding explicit bias.

Analyses: After running the data through IATgen to get the D-scores, we then used Excel to learn the average d-scores of multiple groups (e.g., white liberals vs. black liberals). We then took our organized data and used SPSS to run a T-test to measure significance between groups. We used SPSS to run an ANOVA, and also used Excel to gather the average responses to our qualitative questions.

RESULTS

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) evaluates the association between a concept or group and evaluations or stereotypes. The Skin Tone IAT requires people to sort pictures of people, light-skinned and dark-skinned, and categorize words into groups titled either good or bad. According to Project Implicit: “The IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). The main idea is that making a response is easier when closely related items share the same response key.” There are multiple trial rounds, and the subject must use their keyboard to assign each prompt a category. If they choose incorrectly, the program will make them correct their response. Their results are based on the time it takes them to correctly identify each prompt with its designated category. Based on this reaction time, each individual will receive a D-score which reflects their results. This number will reflect the subject’s level of implicit bias regarding, in this case, skin tone. The D-scores scale form +2, strong bias against dark-skinned people to -2, strong bias against light-skinned people.

CONCLUSIONS

Originally, we hypothesized that watching a politically charged Fox News video would increase the d-scores of all subjects, particularly conservatives, meaning there would be an increased bias towards dark-skinned individuals. Our data yielded a trend in significance towards the idea that the d-scores of liberals decrease after watching Fox News, meaning there is an increase in bias against light-skinned people.

We also found that non-liberals who watched Fox News had a slightly higher bias towards dark-skinned individuals. In our data set we found that all black liberals who viewed Fox News demonstrated a bias towards light-skinned people.

Although these findings weren’t significant, they are trending in that direction, meaning that in a larger study we feel we would find results that would reaffirm these conclusions regarding the effects of framing method on news media’s implicit racial bias.