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Title: Hostile Media Perception: Message or Messenger?

ABSTRACT

Hostile media perception phenomenon—a tendency for highly involved partisans to perceive that the media coverage of a controversial issue is biased against their own point of view and supports the other side--was experimentally tested to delineate the “target” of such “hostility” whether it is directed against the media message itself or the messenger conveying the message to the audience.

The experimental stimulus was a well balanced news article containing strong arguments both supporting and opposing a Korean version of the Affirmative Action Program (AAP) that would provide university graduates outside of Seoul with a favored treatment in their employment opportunities. The article introduced the AAP as a government-sponsored bill pending legislation at the National Assembly. Subjects in the experiment were 905 university students, almost equal in numbers between Seoul and the three provinces outside of Seoul. Subjects read the AAP article attributed to one of the four sources: *The Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative anti-government daily; *The Hangyoreh*, a liberal pro-government daily; *Media Daum*, an Internet portal site; and a student essay in a writing class.

A 3 x 4 design—3 existing attitudes toward AAP (favor, neutral, oppose) x 4 attributed sources (*The Chosun Ilbo*, *The Hangyoreh*, *Media Daum*, and a student)—was employed to test both the main effect and the interaction effect of the “audience” variable (attitudes toward the AAP) and the “source” variable (4 attributed sources) upon biases in the article as perceived by the subjects (measured with four items).

The study expands the scope of the “source” variable in hostile media perception research by adding the “perceived editorial stance of the source” to the previous research which had investigated the effects of source credibility (e.g., *The New York Times* vs. *The National Enquirer*) and the perceived “reach” (e.g., *The U.S.A. Today* vs. a student essay).

The study also raises a significant theoretical question, “Can the hostile media perception be an issue-specific phenomenon?” Would the experimental subjects in the present study have reacted any differently, if, for example, they were reacting to news coverage on issues with little or no ideological or policy ramifications, such as genetically modified food, UFO, etc.?