Group Allegiances and Perceptions of Media Bias

Taking Into Account Both the Perceiver and the Source

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People have a tendency to view media reports of intergroup conflicts as biased against their own group (hostile media perception). However, limited research has been conducted investigating how group membership of the perceiver and group membership of the media source combine to influence perceptions of bias. Muslims and Christians in Indonesia (N = 212) read an article describing inter-religious conflict. The article was attributed either to a Muslim newspaper, a Christian newspaper, or an unidentified newspaper. Results indicated the hostile media perception only among high identifiers. There was also some evidence for the predicted role of newspaper religion in influencing perceptions of bias: the article was seen to be biased in favor of Muslims when attributed to a Muslim newspaper, biased in favor of Christians when attributed to a Christian newspaper, and intermediate when the newspaper was not identified. The effect of newspaper religion was mediated by prior beliefs of bias. Results are discussed in terms of heuristic explanations of bias perceptions in the media.

Key Words: hostile media perception • intergroup relations • social identity

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