DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
AN EXAMINATION OF HOSTILE MEDIA PERCEPTIONS ONLINE

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by
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ABSTRACT

As the use of and reliance on blogs and other online news sources continues to increase, it becomes increasingly important to understand how people perceive online media messages originating from the news media and user-generated sources. This research examines hostile media perceptions of blogs and news websites. Hostile media perceptions are aroused in partisans who believe neutral or balanced media messages on an issue-relevant topic portray a biased or slanted view contrary to their opinion. Partisans (N = 760) who strongly supported and opposed the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage participated in this study, which was made available online to readers of political and issue-oriented blogs. There were four primary purposes guiding this research: 1) to extend theorizing on hostile media perceptions and explore whether or not these perceptions exist within the blogosphere; 2) to examine the relationship between explicit source biases, commonly identified within blogs and more traditional media sources, and how these biases influence hostile perceptions more or less favorably; 3) to examine third person perceptions as an explanatory mechanism of hostile media perceptions and how differences in the issue attitudes of others influences this bias; and 4) to link general media perceptions (media credibility and media skepticism) and media reliance to hostile perceptions.

This research shows blogs (media blogs and issue blogs) generate hostile perceptions. In addition, individual political characteristics play a distinct role in partisans’ judgments of media messages. Source bias also triggers more favorable and less hostile attitudes of media messages when the bias aligns with partisans’ views. Less favorable and more hostile perceptions are aroused from balanced messages when the
source does not align with their views. In general, this research shows source bias plays a
greater role in generating hostile media perceptions for partisans with liberal and
conservative orientations than reliance on online media or skepticism of mainstream
media. Additionally, third person perceptions, particularly the influence on others with
contrasting attitudes, proved a significant predictor of hostile perceptions, validating
claims that the media’s perceived influence on others does indeed contribute to hostile
perceptions of media coverage.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

During the last century, mass communication has evolved from print and broadcast (radio and television) to computer-mediated communication. Throughout this evolution, print and broadcast media have adopted online counterparts while new forms of online communication have emerged. Media consumers can obtain news and information online from a range of mainstream media sources or alternative online news sites. These alternative news sources include weblogs (also known as blogs), social media outlets (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.), and news websites (e.g., news aggregator websites like Digg.com). Not only are media organizations harnessing the power of online media to disseminate their messages — or letting readers share their message — but users can now interact and collaborate with each other, sharing in the creation of content instead of merely consuming it (Meraz, 2008; Metzger, 2009; Walther, Gay, & Hancock, 2005). Media audiences who were once limited to the role of consumer now have the resources to become mass communicators. The traditional media audience is now the media producer, repackaging, creating, and disseminating news and information either at their leisure or on a regular fulltime basis (e.g., CrooksandLiars.com, HotAir.com).

With the various types of media sources available to news consumers, little scholarly attention focuses on how different forms of online media shape reader attitudes and opinions similar to or different from more traditional news sources (e.g., Atkinson, 2007). This study is part of an effort to investigate how media audiences interpret and perceive online media messages online, particularly within the blogosphere.
Blogs are just one form of computer-mediated communication adopted by both media organizations and individuals for communicating news and opinion. Blogs empower people with the ability to mass communicate and influence other people they would not normally encounter (Blood, 2002a; Perlmutter, 2008). Within this media environment, content authors — otherwise known as bloggers — are at liberty to both pen and publish their personal opinions, providing commentary and reports on a variety of topics ranging from personal life events to contested political issues. Blogs are easy to use and require minimal resources (e.g., a personal computer and a blogging platform). As a result, they are an appealing venue for discussing news and information for individuals, organizations, and professional communicators alike. Individuals interested in recording and posting their viewpoints online can do so using a journal-like format (Blood 2002b; 2002c; Perlmutter, 2008). As a result, it is not uncommon to see blogs written by ordinary citizens and professional journalists (Lasica, 2001; Perlmutter, 2008).

Distinct from the traditional news story, blogs offer a unique blend of news and information coupled with self-expression communicating the blogger’s points of view (Blood, 2002b; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004; Kaye, 2005, Carver, 2002; Frauenfelder & Kelly, 2000). Blogs supplement mainstream media reports and also serve as alternate news sources (Graf, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2011). The content expectations for news stories versus blogs are somewhat different. Blogs are not necessarily expected to possess the same type of objective news coverage obtained from media, instead blogs reflect the blogger’s opinions (Kaye & Johnson, 2004a; Kaye, 2005; Perlmutter, 2008). Blog content often reflects the ideological leanings of the blogger and may even function as an op-ed column or an online version of political talk radio, where personal opinions
and viewpoints are exhibited (Herring et al., 2004; Johnson & Kaye, 2004a; Lasica, 2001; Rosenberg, 2002; Perlmutter, 2008).

Despite the wealth of accessible information, media audiences do not necessarily consume the smorgasbord of perspectives available to them (Takeshita, 2005; Smith, 2011). A study from Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project indicates more than one third of Internet users seek information reinforcing their pre-existing attitudes or beliefs (Smith, 2011). There is a tendency for people to choose like-minded sites and discussion groups online. People seek information that makes them feel comfortable, created by and for people like themselves (Sunstein, 2001). These alternatives to mainstream news media have the potential to create a fragmented, and a more polarized society (Sunstein, 2001; Takeshita, 2005), limiting the exposure to views individuals may not ordinarily come across on their own. But researchers like Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) found individuals who possess more polarized attitudes actually spend time with a range of online information reflecting and contradicting their viewpoints.

Media effects research, specifically research on the hostile media effect, shows media messages are interpreted differently by disparate media audiences (e.g., Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004). As a result, where people obtain their information has the potential to influence readers’ interpretations.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions people form as they survey the online media environment and expose themselves to a variety of sources (e.g., blogs versus an online news stories) and perspectives (sources aligning with their views,
sources contrary to their views, and sources without an identifiable issue position). Individuals who consume news and information from online sources aligning with their views are likely to have very different interpretations of the news than those people who are surveying the political landscape and obtaining information from sources opposing their views. Therefore, this study explores how an ideological source bias, identifiable in many online sources (e.g., Human Events: More Powerful Conservative Voices), influences perceptions of online media content when it aligns with or goes contrary to reader’s views.

**Hostile Media Perceptions**

Typically, when presented with information of any kind, the tendency is for people to interpret information as supporting their own views (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). This perception, known as assimilation bias, contrasts with an alternative perception known as hostile media bias or hostile media effect (HME; Lord et al., 1979; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). The hostile media effect is a biased perception of media content made by individuals who hold strong opinions about the particular issue or topic. Partisans on either side of an issue are more likely to perceive news coverage on an issue-relevant topic as biased, opposing their issue position rather than supporting it. This is particularly true when partisans are presented with potentially neutral or balanced media coverage including both favorable and unfavorable content supporting and opposing the partisan’s issue position. Likewise, those who maintain a neutral or indifferent attitude position perceive the same media coverage as fair and balanced (e.g., Choi, Yang, & Chang, 2009; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther, et al., 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt, et al., 2004).
The hostile media effect was initially identified in broadcast news coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre when both pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans rated balanced news coverage as portraying the conflict contrary to their issue position (Vallone et al., 1985). Researchers have since explored this phenomenon using a variety of issues, interest groups, and contexts to determine where and how this effect would manifest itself. Social and political controversies including abortion (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Kyun Soo & Yorgo, 2007), conflicts in the Middle East (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985), and the debate over genetically modified foods (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther et al., 2009; Schmitt et al., 2004) are among the many polarizing issues researchers have used to investigate hostile perceptions. But in each instance, it is only those individuals or partisans who held strong opinions on the issue who perceived the media coverage as biased and contrasting with their issue position.

Scholars have empirically demonstrated the hostile effect in experiments using traditional forms of mass media, namely newspapers (e.g., Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther et al., 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004) and televised news reports (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Vallone et al., 1992) as stimuli. Within the current media landscape, newspapers and TV broadcasts are no longer the primary venue for obtaining information on news and current events, particularly for those who are politically interested (Kaye & Johnson, 2006; Perlmutter, 2008). As a source of news with its own distinct writing style, format, and design, it is important to understand how perceptions of information reported in news sources like blogs are similar to or different from other media content found online. Further research
is warranted for exploring the hostile media effect online, particularly within the context of blogs.

This study explores hostile media perceptions outside the realm of traditional print and broadcast media to see how perceptions vary within the online media environment. This research extends theorizing on the hostile media effect and sheds light on how expectations of news and information found within the blogosphere influence individual perceptions. Specifically, how do media audiences, particularly those who possess strong opinions on a polarizing social issue perceive content contained within blog posts opposed to more traditional news reports? Are expectations and perceptions of blogs affiliated and unaffiliated with the news media similar to online news stories? Are user-generated media blogs perceived similarly or differently than blogs or news reports produced by the media? The content expectations associated with weblogs have the potential to influence reader perceptions differently than those associated with information found in traditional media. It is therefore important to understand how perceptions of media content change when it originates from a media institution rather than an online source unaffiliated with the news media. In addition, this research examines specific media content to learn more about where and how the hostile media effect manifests itself as well as the antecedents and explanatory mechanisms of this effect.
Chapter 2

Blogs and HME Background

To date, theorizing on the hostile media effect provides insight on audience perceptions of traditional news reports found in print and broadcast media, but it does not account for the dynamics of user-generated content found online. Research suggests hostile perceptions aroused from media content reported in newspaper stories and television broadcasts have the potential to reach and influence vast audiences (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). But the power to influence and communicate with mass audiences is no longer solely in the hands of professional communicators, institutions, or the media (Perlmutter, 2008; Sundar, 2008). “Personal broadcasting technologies” such as blogs, Twitter, or Facebook (see Sundar, 2008, p. 73) empower citizens — opposed to merely professional communicators — with the ability to create and disseminate content for mass audiences (Porter, 2006; Meraz, 2008). Although professional communicators and established organizations utilize online media, they are no longer looked to as the sole or perhaps even the primary message source. Essentially, blogs offer an alternative for producing, packaging, and consuming news, making them an interesting media source through which to examine the hostile media effect.

Blogs as Information Sources

With a wealth of information online, the sources that politically interested-information seekers have to choose from have expanded to include blogs (Perlmutter, 2008). Research indicates blog readers seek content within the online media environment primarily for information seeking purposes, their desire to obtain information they cannot
find within traditional media, and to verify the authenticity of traditional media reports (Kaye & Johnson, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2011). In a study on the uses and gratifications of weblogs, Kaye (2005) identified six primary factors motivating blog readers to use blogs, namely information seeking and media checking, convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance, social surveillance, and expression/affiliation. In addition, when examining six different genres of weblogs, Johnson and Kaye (2011) found the primary motivations for accessing each genre were generally the same. Among the more salient motivations, weblogs were considered an alternative to the information provided by mainstream media. They were also believed to augment information readers’ obtained from media outlets and provide access to more information. Survey research on political blog readers revealed similar results, with blog readers primarily looking to political blogs as a resource for news, political expression, and an entertainment diversion (Graf, 2006). Those who are more politically involved and had strong party ties primarily looked to blogs for expressing themselves and communicating with others like them (Kim & Johnson, 2012).

Blogs supplement news reports from more traditional sources and offer an alternative to media reports (Blood, 2002b, 2002c; Graf, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2011). Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) characterized the blogosphere as “partnering with news, helping to fill in gaps where news outlets no longer go and even joining forces with one another to increase their offerings” (Online Summary Essay, para. 29). Blogs provide readers with alternative ideas and perspectives distinct from mainstream media reports (Delwiche, 2005; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Information found on blogs can come from first-hand, eye-witness accounts or secondary sources
obtained from the news media or some of the more remote corners of the Web. They also offer a variety of perspectives ranging from the obscure opinion to the more traditional point of view. Within the blogosphere — or realm of the Internet where blogs reside — unique viewpoints and marginalized groups all have a voice (Blood, 2002b, 2002c; Perlmutter, 2008).

In his review of political blogs Perlmutter (2008) indicated “bloggers can serve the public as informants, investigators, collators and compilers, and revisers and extenders of public information” (p. 110). A blog can take on many forms, offering insight on matters of a more personal nature to highlighting various perspectives or ideas about external world events that may not otherwise find a voice within mainstream media (Perlmutter, 2008). Blogs also provide “news that is happening now almost in real time — not filtered, edited, or delay delivered, as with traditional media” (Wendland, 2003, p. 94).

Blogs serve as sources for shaping the issues discussed by the media (Drezner & Farrell, 2004) and setting the media’s agenda (Trammell & Kashelashvili, 2005). The social and political topics resonating with bloggers are not always the most prominent news headlines highlighted within news stories. In 2009, the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) began conducting a weekly analysis of top news stories discussed within the blogosphere as well as other social media sites like Twitter and YouTube. When comparing the top five topics capturing the attention of bloggers during each week of 2009 to the news stories prominently discussed by the media, there was a substantial difference between those topics highlighted by online media and traditional media.

During the 47 weeks examined, there were only 13 occasions when one of the top stories
identified within the blogosphere was also highlighted by traditional media (Pew Project for Excellence, 2010).

Not only are there differences in how news stories and blogs cover the news, but there are distinct content expectations associated with these two news sources. Blog users don’t necessarily expect blogs to possess the same objective and fair coverage expected from traditional news channels (Johnson & Kaye, 2007; Meraz, 2008). Blogs are thought to reflect the blogger’s bias. They even provide a more conversational tone (Hull, 2006). In many cases, such as the aftermath of September 11, 2011, and coverage of the Iraq war, these online information-sharing environments were looked to for more in-depth views on news and public opinion not necessarily found in other news sources (Blood, 2002b, 2002c; Johnson & Kaye, 2007, 2008; Kaye, 2005; Seipp, 2002; Perlmutter, 2008). Journalistic norms (e.g., writing styles like the inverted pyramid and a formal editorial or gate-keeping processes) and standards (e.g., ethics) accompanying journalists’ news reports also distinguish them from blogs.

**Distinctions among Blogs**

Making a distinction among the types of blogs is important when one considers how the individual dynamics of various types of blogs could potentially influence perceptions of media content.

Blogs are organized into various genres or categories based upon the characteristics of the content, source, or audience/community. Blood (2002b) identified two types of blogs: personal blogs and filter blogs. Personal blogs come from an internal source, and filter blogs come from an external source. The information in personal blogs originates from the blogger’s thoughts and it contains information relevant to his or her
private life (Blood, 2002b; Herring et al., 2004). Personal blogs, or what are sometimes referred to as online personal journals, function as online diaries allowing individuals to chronicle their daily lives (Ibrahim, 2006; Herring et al., 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Papacharissi, 2009; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, & Sapp, 2006).

Distinct from the personal blog is the filter blog, which functions as a place where the blogger gathers, deciphers, and disseminates information about news and events occurring in the world around them (Blood, 2002b). Bloggers not only discuss news and information within this open forum, but they redirect readers to other relevant stories or online sources through the use of links located throughout the content (Blood, 2002b). Blogs originating from industry experts, politically interested individuals, or institutions desiring to share knowledge with internal or external publics are recognized by some scholars as knowledge opposed to filter blogs (see Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Herring et al., 2004).

Despite the name used, filter blogs offer topical and issue-oriented content originating from the blogger’s external world (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Blood, 2002b; Herring et al., 2004; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008). The issue-oriented blog is more likely to target mass audiences (Harp & Tremayne, 2006) whereas the personal blog is more likely to target a “small community of known readers” (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008, p. 4; Nardi et al., 2004).

Blogs are also categorized by the specific issues or topics they cover (e.g., political blogs, war blogs, military blogs, etc.; see Kaye & Johnson, 2011). Researchers classify blogs by their individualistic or collectivistic, community-oriented nature as well
as the type of content bloggers choose to communicate (e.g., the personal details of daily living versus more topical content like politics; Herring et al., 2004; Blood, 2002b).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has the ability to facilitate both interpersonal and mass communication within the same mediated environment. Luders (2008) indicates the differences between mass media and personal media online are not necessarily distinguishable by the audience size, but rather the content origin. Mass media is produced by an institution and/or professional organization possessing a more formal institutional structure. Within this institutional structure, content is typically subject to a gate-keeping function where it is filtered and/or screened prior to distribution/publication. Personal media originates from an individual who operates on his or her own accord, without a gatekeeper (Luders, 2008).

Luders (2008) framework helps differentiate blogs further by classifying them as mass or personal media. Based upon this distinction, Luders (2008) would classify blogs affiliated with media institutions (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, etc.) as online mass media and blogs unaffiliated with a media institution as personal media. For bloggers, reader comments and feedback operate as a checks-and-balances process, allowing the blogger to identify errors and flaws and edit the information appropriately (Blood, 2002b, 2003). Despite the level of institutional control over blog content, reader comments and feedback perform a gate-keeping function, pointing out errors and flaws in ideas and content.

For many journalists who blog, media organizations do not subject blog content to the same obligatory editorial process required of news stories, but the level of editorial control varies depending upon the organization (Hull, 2006). In many instances, media
organizations give their journalist the freedom to publish the news and their readers the freedom to comment, without subjecting them an internal editing process (Hull, 2006).

**Media blogs.** When major news organizations began recognizing the value of blogs extends beyond a venue for gathering story ideas they started hosting blogs (Dube, 2004). Media blogs, sometimes referred to as journalism blogs or j-blogs, are blogs hosted by or on a media organization’s website. Media blogs are authored by reporters, industry experts (e.g., Barbara Streisand’s HuffingtonPost.com blog), and citizen journalists alike (Meraz, 2008). By 2006, most major media organizations (broadcast stations, radio stations and newspapers) experimented with some type of blog and many of them included blogs on their websites along with more traditional news reports (Meraz, 2008). The adoption of blogs by major news organizations comes as no surprise when recognizing blogs as an alternative form of journalism now adopted by news rooms and users alike (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Hull, 2006; Perlmutter, 2008).

In 2004, the *New York Times* Editor-in-Chief, Len Apcar, indicated media blogs provided more short-form reporting and analysis (Dube, 2004). Blogs highlight stories that don’t fit neatly into a newspaper column or broadcast story and allow for constant updates on breaking developments or additional insights (Dube, 2004). For the mainstream media, journalism blogs are “a cross between a column, a news story and a journal” (Robinson, 2006, p 65). They eliminate communication barriers between journalists and their readers and promote interaction between the two. In addition, “they allow the reader to see the journalist as a human being, connecting with them without the stiff, imperial voice that turns so many young people off” (Pohlig, 2003, p. 25).
Media blogs possess a variety of similarities and distinctions from news reports. Despite the means through which the message is communicated (e.g., news story or blog), the corporate interests of news organizations are still tied to journalist’s reports. Blogs affiliated with a media institution are subject to upholding the institutional and corporate ideals of the organization, even if they are at liberty to publish without going through a traditional gate-keeping process (Hull, 2006).

Other than a handful of empirical studies focusing on third person perceptions and credibility, there is not a lot of research exploring the perceptual distinctions between blogs and other news sources (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, 2006, 2007, 2009; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008; Kaye & Johnson, 2004c, 2011; Quig & Oyedeji, 2011). Banning and Sweetser (2007) compared third person perceptions of a media blog and a personal blog to an online newspaper and a traditional newspaper. Among the four sources examined, the researchers did not identify any significant differences in perceptions. The institutional trappings associated with a media blog versus a personal blog were not enough to significantly alter perceptions of influence.

Likewise, when comparing the credibility of a media blog hosted on CNN.com to a personal blog, Quig and Oyedeji (2011) did not identify any significant differences in credibility scores. Additional research examining credibility judgments of various types of blogs shows perceptions of blogs are based upon the personal characteristics of the reader (e.g. political ideology; Kaye & Johnson, 2011) as well as the specific type of news they are seeking (e.g., seeking information on the Iraq war; Johnson & Kaye, 2008). Johnson and Kaye (2008) examined credibility for seven types of blogs and found
military blogs were more credible (e.g., more believable, fair, accurate and in-depth) sources than general information blogs, media blogs, war blogs, political blogs, corporate blogs, and personal blogs for individuals seeking information on the Iraq war (Johnson & Kaye, 2008). Corporate blogs were the least credible sources followed by media and personal blogs. Despite journalists’ training and access to the news, the firsthand accounts of the war found in military blogs were viewed as more credible. Media blogs lacked the credibility, and perhaps even the expertise, of the military bloggers. The low credibility ratings of media blogs and corporate blogs were thought to reflect the negative attitudes associated with online information backed by corporate interests or corporate ties (Johnson & Kaye, 2008; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000, 2007). A subsequent study by the same researchers showed despite the perceived differences among blogs, those who supported the war in Iraq were also more critical of media coverage about it and more likely to consider all types of blogs credible (Kaye & Johnson, 2011). These readers were also more likely to be conservative and Republican. Those who were not as likely to support the Iraq war also believed media coverage was not biased against it and considered corporate and war blogs less credible. These individuals were more likely to be affiliated with the Democratic party and liberal (Kaye & Johnson, 2011). In both instances political variables opposed to demographic variables distinguished the two groups of readers.

**Hostile Media Perceptions**

Perceptions of media content can vary from the intended message. How individuals interpret media messages varies depending upon pre-existing issue attitudes and not necessarily the information consumed (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther
& Schmitt, 2004; Gunther et al., 2009; Schmitt et al., 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). This perceptual bias manifests itself as an unfavorable perception of media content, against the individual’s attitude position, and is known as the hostile media effect. Individuals who have strong attitudes about an issue-relevant topic or who exhibit high levels of issue involvement and on some level find the issue personally important are likely to perceive a hostile bias (Choi, Park, & Chang, 2011; Choi, Yang, & Chang, 2009).

Within the literature on the hostile media effect, individuals with strong attitudes opposing or supporting an issue are classified as partisans (e.g., Christen, Kannaovakun, & Gunther, 2002; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). An individual’s level of involvement can range from an extreme attitude position to complete apathy. Individuals who are not motivated to make any kind of cognitive or affective investment — because the issue is perceived as less personally relevant or it is not viewed as central to their self-concept or intrinsic values — gravitate toward a more neutral or less extreme attitude position (e.g., Choi et al., 2009; Gunther & Christian, 2002; Gunther et al., 2009).

The assimilation and contrast model (Eiser, 1992; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sheriff & Sherif, 1967) sheds light on why partisans would judge seemingly neutral information as being rather hostile towards their position. This model reveals how individuals use their own attitude position as an anchor for gauging all other attitude positions (Eiser, 1992). Depending upon how much the message deviates from pre-existing attitudes or beliefs individuals will either embrace or reject a message. A message aligning with or deviating from an individual’s attitudes either falls within the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of non-commitment, or the latitude of rejection (Sherif
The more a message aligns with personal views and falls within the latitude of acceptance
(the range of positions with which a person agrees), the easier it is to accept the message.
When the message deviates from personal views, individuals are more likely to reject the
message because it falls within their latitude of rejection (the range of positions with
which a person disagrees). Within the range of acceptable and unacceptable information
is the latitude of non-commitment, which encompasses positions with which an
individual neither agrees nor disagrees (Eiser, 1992; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sheriff &
Sherif, 1967; Sherif et al., 1973).

As the issue’s personal importance increases the latitude of rejection expands to
encompass a greater breadth of objectionable information, minimizing the range of
acceptance (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Hovland,
1961). In contrast, low issue involvement or importance produces a smaller range of
rejection and broader range of non-commitment. For individuals who possess a highly-
involved issue attitude, their latitude of rejection, or the range of positions they deem
objectionable, is quite vast, encompassing contrasting messages that both support an
opposing position and even those more ambiguous, containing impartial or neutral
messages could equally support both positions (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Sherif, Sherif, &
Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Hovland, 1961). In the case of the hostile media effect, the
more important the issue is to an individual, the narrower their latitude of acceptance
becomes. This limits the range of acceptable perspectives and results in more biased
perceptions.
Within some of the earlier hostile media studies, researchers who found a lack of overwhelming support for this hostile effect often claimed the need for partisans who possessed stronger issue attitudes. Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) examined perceptions of Ronald Regan and Jimmy Carter supporters after the 1980 presidential election and found participants did not possess strong opinions about either candidate. Due to this lack in partisanship researchers did not identify a hostile media effect.

Subsequently, this lack of partisan involvement in the issue prompted the exploration of “an issue that prompted fiercer and more enduring partisanship” (Vallone et al., 1985, p. 579), namely the examination of media coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre by pro-Arab or pro-Israeli partisans who were members of issue-relevant student organizations. Other researchers examining this effect have also identified more unfavorable perceptions of media content, against their position, when using partisans (students or otherwise) who attribute some type of cognitive or affective importance to the issue (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004).

**Understanding Partisan Perceptions**

Research aimed at understanding the hostile media effect primarily focuses on how the hostile media effect occurs (e.g., processing mechanisms) and explores theoretical explanations for why the hostile media effect occurs (e.g., media’s reach and influence). For nearly three decades, researchers have focused their efforts on exploring three processing mechanisms such as different standards, selective categorization, and selective recall in an attempt to explain “how” partisans perceive, identify, and remember media content and attribute it with a hostile bias. But empirical evidence does not
provide clear and consistent evidence or support for the use of these mechanisms for processing hostile content (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2004; Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985). Theories explaining “why” the hostile media effect is a characteristic of mass media content has also captured scholar’s attention, lending support to theories of the mass media’s ability to reach and influence others. This explanation is useful in understanding why perceptions of media content change when viewed by partisans. It is also the area explored within this research.

The media’s reach. Research suggests hostile perceptions are aroused from the media because media messages have the potential to reach vast audiences (Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther et al., 2009). Gunther and Liebhart (2006) determined when messages come from an “information channel with a broad reach that speaks to a wide audience” it will appear biased in an unfavorable direction (p. 450). Research suggests the influence of the media’s reach exists on a continuum (Gunther et al., 2009). As the media’s influence increases, and its ability to reach a greater number of people expands, partisan’s unfavorable perceptions of the content grow (Gunther et al., 2009).

A series of experiments aimed at exploring whether or not the hostile media effect is specific to the mass media suggests partisans classify more content as hostile when they encounter it in a context that has the potential to reach more people. When a message has the potential to reach more people partisans are more likely to possess hostile perceptions (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther and Liebhart, 2006; Gunther et al., 2009). Gunther and Schmitt (2004) found partisans perceived information presented
in a non-mediated context with a very limited readership (e.g., student essay) differently than when it was presented in a mass-media context with the potential of reaching a greater audience (e.g., newspaper story). An examination of partisans who strongly supported or opposed the controversial issue of genetically modified foods indicated neutral content presented in a newspaper story was biased against their viewpoint. This same information presented in a student essay did not elicit the same contrast effect from partisans; instead, traces of biased assimilation, the interpretation that information supports rather than opposes one’s point of view, was identified by readers of a college student’s essay (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004).

Gunther and Liebhart (2006) replicated this mass media effect and sought to distinguish between the influence of the content source (college student opposed to journalist) and the content’s reach (newspaper opposed to classroom competition) on perceptions of media bias. Although the very nature of a journalist’s job would suggest that as a content source, journalists have the potential to capture a larger audience than a student author, hostile perceptions emerged both when the source was a journalist and when the content had the potential of reaching a greater number of people (high-reach condition using a newspaper story opposed to an essay; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006).

Gunther et al. (2009) sought to distinguish the effects of the media’s reach from the source (content’s author and the media channel) by gauging how partisan perceptions differ when there are varying degrees of reach. Within this experiment, articles were identified as reaching a mass audience to virtually no outside audience at all. Gunther and colleagues (2009) used a national newspaper (USA Today) to represent a mass audience with the greatest potential audience/reach. A daily regional newspaper
represented a news media outlet with a more limited reach and a student essay eliminated the mass audience altogether. The results showed a linear trend for reach in the direction of a hostile media bias, but only a relative hostile media bias, suggesting a media bias that was less positive and more neutral, but not necessarily negative. Media outlets with a greater reach, and in this case a familiar and prominent national newspaper, was more influential. Perceptions of the source with a more limited reach were perceived more congenial, leaving evidence of assimilation bias. The greater the reach the more neutral the content was considered.

**The media’s influence on others.** Third person perceptions provide a potential explanatory mechanism for better understanding what leads partisans to perceive media coverage on an attitude-congruent topic more unfavorably against their opinions. Third person perceptions result from a belief in the susceptibility of others to the media’s persuasive influence. Essentially, others are perceived as being more vulnerable to the media’s influence (e.g., attitude change or attitude reinforcement) than one’s self (Davidson, 1983; Oliver, Yang, Ramasubramanian, Kim, & Lee, 2008; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000). Researchers have identified this perceived effect on people who are exposed to a range of communication messages, including news (Gunther, 1991; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2002; Price, Huang, & Tewksbury, 1997), entertainment (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997), and more persuasive messages found in advertisements and political communication messages (Meirick, 2004; Paek, Pan, Sun, Abisaid, & Houden, 2005; Perloff, 1989; White, 1997).

Individuals form third person perceptions by using themselves as a barometer for gauging the media’s effect or influence on others (Mcleod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997;
Paul, et al., 2000). The more dissimilar others are from one’s self the more vulnerable they are to the media’s influence; the more similar others are considered, the more likely they will possess comparable abilities for fully comprehending media messages and resisting their persuasive influence. As a result, there is an underestimation of the media’s influence on others who are similar to one’s self and an overestimation on those who are dissimilar (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Cohen, Mutz, Price & Gunther, 1988; Gunther, 1998; White, 1997). This perceived effect increases as the self versus other differences increase. The more distinct or “distant” individuals identify themselves from others the greater the perceived effect (Cohen et al., 1988; Paek, et al., 2005). Research shows a greater effect on others who are more geographically distant. For example, Cohen and colleagues (1988) identified a greater perceived effect on public opinion at large followed by other Californians and then other Stanford students. Brosius and Engel (1996) found psychological distance (e.g., friends and acquaintances followed by other people in general) increases third person perceptions. Not only has this perception been identified by those who are more socially distant, but research shows even when others’ attitude positions differ from one’s self third person perceptions become more pronounced (Oliver et al., 2008).

Existing attitudes about media messages influence third person perceptions (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Perloff, 1989; Tsfati & Cohen, 2004). On matters of personal importance where individuals are highly involved, Gunther and Liebhart (2006) suggested other people with attitude positions differing from one’s self are considered less informed and more susceptible to being duped by information supporting a contrasting view. As a result of this optimistic bias (David & Johnson,
1998; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999; Gunther & Storey, 2003), these individuals are vulnerable to misinterpreting misleading, deceptive, false, or irrelevant information.

Researchers have found media messages, which contrast with pre-existing attitudes, accentuate third person perceptions (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Oliver et al., 2008). Driscoll and Salwen (1997) examined how attitudes of O.J. Simpson’s perceived guilt or innocence in a murder trial affected how vulnerable others were to the media’s perceived influence. They found a greater effect on others when messages did not align with pre-existing beliefs of Simpson’s guilt. The effect was less pronounced when the message aligned with the respondent’s attitudes. Cohen and Davis (1991) looked at how candidate supporters and opponents gauged the influence of negative political advertisements on others relative to themselves. Generally, when supporters viewed advertisements attacking the candidate they supported, they considered themselves impervious to the media’s influence and perceived the ads as having a greater influence on others. When viewing negative advertisements of a candidate they did not support, respondents were not as likely to think others would be as influenced by the opponent’s negative advertisement.

Familiarity with an issue can also influence this effect. Tsfati and Cohen (2004) suggest familiarity with the issue(s) discussed by the media makes one’s self and others more resistant to the media’s influence than those who are less familiar with the issue(s). Those who are not as familiar with the topic are more vulnerable and less resist the media’s persuasive influence.
Media Skepticism, Reliance, and Credibility

Media skepticism, media reliance, and media credibility are all variables influencing how individuals perceive the media. As a result, how individuals perceive and rely on the media channel itself is likely to contribute to how favorably or unfavorably partisans perceive media content.

Concern about diminishing public trust and faith in the mass media to deliver accurate, fair, unbiased, and believable news coverage is not new (Abel & Wirth, 1977; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Gantz, 1981; Kiousis, 2001). Researchers have examined and conceptualized the level of trust media consumers place in the news and information they receive from the mass media as media skepticism and media credibility. Conceptually, media skepticism is a distrust of mainstream media as a whole (Tsfati, 2003a; 2003b; Tsfati & Capella, 2003), whereas media credibility is an assessment of the trust or believability of the various channels through which the news is delivered, namely television, radio, newspapers, news magazines, and the Internet (Abel & Wirth, 1977; Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Stempel, 1973). Researchers have also looked at media credibility of specific online media channels such as blogs and mainstream media’s online counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2004b).

The level of trust media audiences place in a particular medium, or the media as a whole, depends upon how fair, accurate, and objective they perceive the reporting of news and events. Skeptics of the mass media are more likely to believe the media do not provide a complete story of news or events and they subsequently perceive it as an unreliable source of information. Many of these perceptions originate from the expectation that journalists should serve the public interest and not their own personal
welfare (e.g., personal biases and ambitions). In addition, the institutional interests of the organization (e.g., corporate financial interests) are perceived as influencing both how and what information journalists report (Tsfati & Capella, 2003). In many cases, the lack of transparency inherent in the reporting process and the limited personal access to sources privy to journalists does not make it feasible for media audiences to verify news reports themselves, thereby attenuating reader’s distrust of media reports and subsequently the media (Blood, 2003; Tsfati, 2010).

Audience expectations of the media’s ability to deliver reliable and believable accounts can influence perceptions of the news reports found therein. Individuals who distrust the media as a whole, or even a particular medium itself, are more likely to think the media coverage found therein possess a greater bias (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Choi et al., 2009; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994). Choi and colleagues (2009) found media skepticism strongly predicted hostile perceptions; those who were highly skeptical of mainstream media were more likely to perceive a balanced news story opposed their issue position. The more skeptical individuals were of the mass media and their ability to deliver fair and balanced coverage, the more likely they were to perceive the coverage as biased.

As user-generated content continues to grow online, blogs have become a more accepted and credible source of information (Quig & Oyedeji, 2011; Johnson & Kaye, 2008). The importance of examining how credible audiences perceive the media is underscored by the assumption people pay attention to sources they trust. Those who mistrust media seek alternatives. Therefore, it is not surprising media skeptics expose themselves to more sources unaffiliated with mainstream media; those who trust
mainstream media use it more (Tsfati, 2010). Research indicates there is relationship between how credible individuals perceive a particular medium and their use, reliance, familiarity, and preference with it (e.g., Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986, Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Specifically, the more individuals rely on a particular medium, the more credible they perceive it (Austin & Dong, 1994; Wanta & Hu, 1994; Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2004b, 2000, 1998). This finding rings true for blogs; the more individuals rely upon blogs for news and information the more credible they perceive it (Johnson & Kaye, 2004a).

Relying on the media for news and information favorably influences perceptions of how credible the media is perceived. Research shows reliance is often the strongest predictor of credibility for online news sources (e.g., online broadcast television, online cable television, online newspapers, online news magazines, and online radio news; Johnson & Kaye, 2004b). However, reliance on traditional and online media does not necessarily possess a halo effect and favorably influence all online news sources such as blogs.

Those who rely more on blogs for news and information view them as even more credible sources of information (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b; 2006, 2007, 2009; Johnson et al., 2008, Kaye & Johnson 2004b) then Internet users in general (e.g., Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Banning & Trammell, 2006). As a result, reliance on traditional and online news sites produces more skeptical and negative perceptions of blogs; the more individuals rely on traditional and online media the less credible they perceive blogs (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b). As blogs serve as both an alternative and supplement to mainstream media sites (Kaye & Johnson, 2011), it is not surprising those who rely on
blogs view them as being a more trustworthy and a more believable source for news and information than mainstream media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b; 2006, 2007, 2009; Johnson et al., 2008, Kaye & Johnson 2004b).

Those who do not rely on blogs don’t consider them as much of a reliable or trustworthy source (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b). Blogs, unlike mainstream media, do not possess the reputation for reporting the news associated with mainstream media organizations. Additionally, those who are unfamiliar with blogs are perhaps more skeptical of a source heralded for its commentary and opinions. The lack of journalistic values such as fairness and objectivity do more to discredit blogs than boost its credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2007).

Partisans who possess strong opinions on an issue-relevant topic are more likely to express skepticism of the news media’s ability to cover an issue (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Choi et al., 2009; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994). Likewise, those who are more skeptical of mainstream media are more likely to rely on blogs and perceive them as more credible (Tsfati, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2004b). Despite the relationships among media skepticism, media reliance, and media credibility, how all three of these variables influence perceptions of bias within a media message is unclear. This study examines these variables and whether or not they predict more unfavorable perceptions of media content against partisan’s attitude positions.
Chapter 3

Exploring the Hostile Media Effect

This study examines how perceptions of media bias are influenced by the news source, particularly when it does not originate with or from the news media. Unfavorable perceptions of media messages, which oppose one’s own opinion, are thought to result from partisans’ belief in the media’s potential to reach and influence large audiences of other people (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006). Gunther and Schmitt (2004) suggested “when partisans observe a communication that reaches a broad audience of others, they perceive more undesirable or disagreeable information” (p. 58). Researchers have attempted to test this claim empirically through experimental means, with a newspaper story able to arousing hostile perceptions where a student essay was not. Gunther and colleagues (2009) tested this idea further by varying the type of media using a national newspaper with the greatest potential reach, a daily regional newspaper with a limited but still wide reach, and a student essay with an isolated and small reach (Gunther et al., 2009). The researchers found a national newspaper aroused less favorable perceptions than the other two communication channels, suggesting a more familiar and prominent newspaper, which reaches a greater number of people, will arouse stronger hostile perceptions.

Experimental research examining the nuances of hostile media perceptions have found media messages in traditional newspaper stories and news broadcasts elicit this effect (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). From this research, it is reasonable to assume online news sites, much like their offline counterpart that cover
polarizing social issues in which partisans are highly involved will elicit hostile perceptions online and offline similarly. However, no research has explored partisan perceptions of user-generated content and how variations in the news source, namely user-generated versus media-generated content, alters perceptions more or less favorably.

This study explores whether or not judgments of news reports published by independent bloggers who cover news and events varies from media sources recognized for creating and disseminating news and information to mass audiences. Unlike established media organizations, known for producing print and online news, independent political blogs, unaffiliated with news organizations are not likely to have the mass audiences presumed to accompany traditional media. Much like traditional news sources, blogs can vary in their reach and audience size. Within the blogosphere the most utilized and linked to blogs, otherwise known as A-list blogs/bloggers identified within various blog genres (Perlmutter, 2008; Trammell & Keshelashvilli, 2005), have a greater potential to reach and influence others based upon their established prominence. In addition, superblogs (e.g., TownHall), known for “unifying blogging and talk radio” (Perlmutter, 2008, p.187), resemble mainstream news sites and could therefore have a greater presumed influence.

In an attempt to distinguish perceptions of blogs from news sites, this study examines independent bloggers who write on issues, albeit a political issue(s), of importance to him/her.¹ The nuances of the Internet make blog posts and online news available to virtually anyone with access to the Internet (Metzger, 2009). As a result, both of these sources are capable of reaching vast audiences.
The blogging literature raises some unique questions regarding how the distinct nature of blogs could also influence reader’s perceptions different from news stories. Essentially, the blog’s attributes (personal journal vs. topical insights, community vs. individualistic, institutional vs. de-institutional, personal media vs. mass media etc.) and its affiliations (blogger, website host, advertisements, etc.) could arouse very different perceptions. Luders’ (2008) distinction between personal and mass media suggests issue-specific blogs are personal media, which contain independent thoughts, free from outside influences, perspectives, or points-of-view purported by an entity or organization. This does not mean independent bloggers cannot be influenced or sponsored by other entities and even conceal their affiliation (Burns, 2008), but the lack of associations suggests their independence to write freely (Perlmutter, 2008). Media/journalism blogs, much like corporate blogs, would be subject to the social and political influences espoused by the institution that sponsors them. However, Luders (2008) distinction between personal media and mass media does not account for the mass audiences likely to accompany media sources online and subsequently the influence these messages are likely to have on readers.

Unlike news stories, most bloggers and blog readers explicitly recognize blog content espouses the bloggers’ opinion. Traditional news stories, on the other hand, are characterized by different news values and news styles such as the inverted pyramid where the most important information is written first and followed up with less essential story elements (Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2008, 2009; Johnson, et al., 2008; Robinson, 2006; Perlmutter, 2008).
To date, no research has examined whether or not more unfavorable perceptions of media content (HME) are aroused online in blogs. Based upon the distinctions between blogs and news stories, it is likely reader perceptions of blog content from independent blogs, which cover specific political issues, will differ from online news sites characterized as mass media such that partisan perceptions of blog content may be perceived more favorably than news stories.

**H1:** Partisans perceive an online news story as being more unfavorable against their attitude position (greater hostile perceptions) than an issue blog post.

Luders (2008) continuum of personal and mass media suggests media blogs are mass media and therefore have a greater potential reach and influence vast audiences. According to Luders (2008), not all blogs would be considered mass media because they do not have institutional ties. Therefore, it is important to understand how various types of blogs are perceived in relation to traditional mass media news sources. This study examines two different types of blogs, namely media blogs and issue-oriented blogs, concerned with advocating about specific political or social issues, and how these sources are perceived similarly or differently from more traditional media sources (e.g., online news stories).

Media blogs are published on news websites and/or written by journalists. In many respects, media blogs share similarities with online news stories. The unique associations between these two types of media (e.g., blogs and news stories) have the potential to influence how individuals perceive them as a source for news and information in two unique ways. First, perceptions of a media blog may align with those
of the news article and not other types of blogs. Much like online news sites, media blogs combine the unique characteristics of a blog with the established reputation of news organizations, and even the journalist (Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2005). Media blogs and news stories both have access to and utilize journalists (sometimes industry experts) for creating and writing about news and information. Both of these news sources are typically hosted on a media website and share its affiliation. Because users toggle between blog posts and news stories (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010), the distinction between these two types of media is often blurred. As a result of these similarities, researchers of third person perceptions have been unable to identify significant differences in how blogs (personal or media) and news stories (print newspapers or online) influence the attitudes and opinions of other people (Banning & Sweetser, 2007).

Second, the distinction between blogs and news stories is such that readers may have very different expectations of blogs as a whole and perceive content within blogs and news stories very differently. Blogs and news stories differ in the content expectations associated with them. Blogs are a looser form of journalism. They are not expected to possess the same objective, fair, and balanced coverage provided by other news entities (Johnson & Kaye, 2008; Kaye, 2005). In addition, blogs have been identified as having similar characteristics as talk radio (Johnson & Kaye, 2004c; Perlmutter, 2008). Generally, blogs differ from other news styles in its format, purpose, and approach (Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2008, 2009; Johnson, et al., 2008; Perlmutter, 2008).
Perceptual judgments among various blog genres also have the potential to vary (e.g., media and issue-oriented blogs). Blogs are accessed for various reasons, including for information people cannot obtain from traditional media, for a diverse range of ideas and information, and for specific information of interest (e.g., Kaye, 2005; Kaye & Johnson, 2011). When examining various types of blog users Kaye and Johnson (2011) found very subtle differences in motivations for using different types of blogs (media blog, war blog, political blog, general information, corporate blog, and personal blog). Although motivations for blog use only diverged slightly from one blog to another, Kaye and Johnson (2011) found blogs have the potential to elicit different perceptions, depending on the type of blog and the political ideologies of the reader. Users who gravitated toward liberal blogs were more likely to identify themselves as being liberal and as having strong ties to the Democratic party. This political group rated both war and corporate blogs about the Iraq war as less credible. Those with conservative views who identified themselves as Republican were more likely to support the Iraq war and trust how government handled it. They were also the only group to judge all blogs types as credible (Kaye & Johnson, 2011).

Although blog readers access different kinds of blogs for fairly similar reasons (Kaye & Johnson, 2011), judgments of them have the potential to vacillate. As a result, judgments of media bias for issue blogs and media blogs may vary along with perceptions of online news stories. However, the lack of research specific to hostile media perceptions and social judgments for these three sources leads to the following research question:
**RQ1:** How do partisan perceptions of media blogs differ from perceptions of an online news story or an issue blog post?

**Presence of Bias in a News Source**

Even with the objective to provide fair and balanced coverage, it is not uncommon for media organizations to report the news using a somewhat biased lens, highlighting one ideological perspective or position over another. Some have even charged the media with a liberal bias (Goldberg, 2003), while others look to specific programs like Fox News or other news sources to obtain a more conservative perspective (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2004; Pfau, Houston, & Semmler, 2007). Likewise, media cater to specific audiences and report the news favoring a particular viewpoint. For example, a hometown newspaper is more likely to cover the town’s collegiate sports more favorably than a newspaper in the rival team’s hometown (Arpan & Raney, 2003). Similarly, blogs provide a venue for people to post their perspectives, politics, and personal experiences (Blood, 2002b; Perlmutter, 2008).

Within the context of the HME, it is plausible media outlets possessing an explicit bias toward an issue could influence partisan perceptions of media content. However, not much research has been done to identify how an ideological source bias (e.g., conservative vs. liberal) explicitly identified by the news media itself influences audience perceptions more or less favorably.

In an examination of sports media coverage, Arpan and Raney (2003) found sports fans thought news reports from a hometown paper portrayed a more favorable view of their team than a rivaling town’s newspaper. Fans who read the same story in a
rivaling newspaper thought it was more hostile towards their team than the hometown paper. Other research in this area found mixed results when examining the influence of media possessing a source bias. Gunther and colleagues (2009) identified a combination of six publications likely to promote a sympathetic or unsympathetic view of genetically modified wild rice. Neither members nor non-members of the Native American tribal group perceived sources sympathetic to their beliefs more favorably than unsympathetic or neutral sources. However, a source by group interaction raised some interesting questions. The interaction indicated those who were not members of the tribal group perceived those sources supporting the opposing position more favorably. In addition, for the Native American group, whether or not the source aligned with the Native American’s views didn’t really alter their perceptions of the content. Their perceptions remained neutral when viewing a source that was either sympathetic or unsympathetic to their views. However, the lack of support for this hypothesis may be a function of the partisan group or the sources used.

Despite conflicting evidence regarding the influence of source bias on hostile perceptions (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther et al., 2009), it is plausible partisan prejudices about news sources that do not share their same issue position should elicit more hostile judgments than a source aligning with their issue attitude. This hypothesis has not been widely explored within this research area, particularly with sources espousing an explicit source bias. This research explores how an identifiable source bias in the news outlet itself influences partisan perceptions. Partisans are likely to possess more favorable perceptions of media content when it is published in a medium supporting their own attitude position than when it is published in a medium rivaling their position.
In addition, how perceptual differences change when partisans are reading an issue blog, a media blog, or online news story possessing a source bias has not yet been explored. Therefore, the following hypotheses and research questions are posed:

**H2:** Partisans have more favorable perceptions of media content possessing a source bias agreeing with their attitude position than sources possessing a source bias against their attitude position.

**RQ2a:** Do partisan perceptions of media bias vary among online news stories, media blogs, and issue blogs possessing a pro source bias?

**RQ2b:** Do partisan perceptions of media bias vary among online news stories, media blogs, and issue blogs possessing an anti source bias?

**RQ3:** Will partisan perceptions of media bias vary among online news stories, media blogs, and issue blogs (media type) and the presence or absence of source bias?

**Explaining Partisan Perceptions**

One particularly intriguing explanation for the hostile media perception is partisans’ concern about the mass media’s influence on “others” (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Davidson, 1983; Perloff, 1989). As an indirect media effect, this means “people perceive some influence of a message on others and then react to that perception of influence” (Gunther & Storey, 2003, p. 201). This perceived influence is thought to result from a presumption that others are perhaps not as well informed on the issue(s) and they are potentially more susceptible to misleading information. This lack of information leads them to support an alternate point of view (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Storey, 2003).

The present study looks at whether or not perceptions of the media’s influence on others’ is likely to influence media content more or less favorably and result in hostile
media perceptions. Specifically, other people in general as well as others who possess attitudes similar to the partisan, contrasting with the partisan, or neutral are examined.

Third person perception research suggests the more dissimilar others are presumed, the greater the perceived influence (Paul, Salwen & Dupange, 2000). In many cases, others who are considered more socially distant (e.g., less similar to one’s self, more geographically distant, less well known by individuals, and larger groups) or have dissimilar attitudes elicit greater third person perceptions (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Cohen et al., 1988; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Oliver et al., 2008; Paek, et al., 2005; Perloff, 1989; Tsfati & Cohen, 2004).

When partisans examine media content on an issue with which they possess a strong issue attitude, researchers suggest perceptions of the media’s influence on others who possess contrasting views will be greater than those who possess similar attitudes (Oliver et al., 2008). Those who are perceived as having a neutral attitude position on the issue are also susceptible to being influenced by the media as their views are not as clearly defined.

When examining the media’s persuasive influence on others, researchers commonly examine the influence on an ambiguous group of other people in general (Davidson, 1983; Paul, Salwen, & Dupange, 2000) or neutral others (Perloff, 1989). However, no research in this area has looked at the range of attitudes held by others on an issue relevant topic. Therefore, the following hypotheses and research question seek to first establish third person perceptions among these groups of others with distinct attitudes.
H3: Partisans will consider the media’s influence on a) other people in general, b) others with contrasting attitudes, c) others with similar views, and d) others with neutral views as being significantly greater than the media’s influence on themselves.

H4: Partisans will perceive other people who possess attitudes aligning with their own partisan views as being influenced by the media less than a) other people in general, b) others with contrasting attitudes, and c) others with neutral views.

RQ4: For partisans, how will the media’s perceived influence on a controversial social issue differ among a) other people in general, b) others with contrasting attitudes, c) others with similar views, and d) others with neutral views?

Media effects are not limited to one medium, nor are the same effects universal for each (Metzger, 2009). Third person perceptions are no exception (Paul, et al., 2000; Metzger, 2009). Not only has the third person perception been identified in more traditional news coverage (Gunther, 1991; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2002; Price et al., 1997), it has also been identified in the blogosphere (Banning & Sweetser, 2007). Banning and Sweetser (2007) examined online media to see if variations in third person perceptions existed among blogs and traditional media, which they suggested as being potentially more impersonal and more socially distant than blogs. Their experiment showed personal blogs, media blogs, online newspapers, and print newspapers all elicited the third person effect. One medium did not elicit this effect more than another. Much like research conducted by Banning and Sweetser (2007), this study looks at whether or not the type of media and its bias will influence third person perceptions differently. Additionally, how will perceptions change when others with differing attitudes view messages from different types of sources?

Partisans representing different ideological positions and possessing strong political and/or social views may or may not believe different types of media have the
ability to reach and influence others. A meta-analysis of third person perceptions showed researchers heavily rely on college student samples for testing this hypothesis (Paul et al., 2000). The resulting effects are typically larger than other populations. Therefore, a closer examination of partisans’ third person perceptions of different media sources is warranted. Research Question 4 and 5 explores the influence of these variables:

**RQ5:** Does the media’s perceived influence on a) other people in general, b) others with contrasting attitudes, c) others with similar views, and d) others with neutral views vary as a function of partisan group?

**RQ6:** Will partisans’ perceptions of the media messages’ influence on a) other people in general, b) others with contrasting attitudes, c) others with similar views, and d) others with neutral views vary as a function of media type and the presence of a source bias?

Research shows pre-existing attitudes by those involved in an issue arouse third person perceptions (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Perloff, 1989). Researchers identified this perception in individuals who possessed existing attitudes and favored a particular political candidate (Cohen & Davis, 1991) and also those who believed in the presumed guilt or innocence of a murder suspect (Driscoll & Salwen, 1997). In such instances, others were perceived as being influenced when messages did not align with the individual’s beliefs.

Existing issue attitudes can also influence how favorably or unfavorably messages are perceived among others with neutral attitudes. Perloff (1989) examined this perceived influence on broadcast news coverage about a Middle East conflict. After viewing media coverage on the issue, Israel supporters believed neutral viewers who watched an equivalent number of broadcast news stories for and against the issue would perceive media messages as portraying Israel less favorably than Palestinian supporters and the control group. Palestinian supporters had similar thoughts, but believed a neutral
audience was more likely to view Israel’s Arab enemies, the PLO, less favorably than Israeli supporters and the control group. Essentially, partisans believed others with neutral attitudes would become more unfavorable toward their position and more favorable toward the opposition (Perloff, 1989). Perloff’s (1989) study suggests others with neutral attitudes who have not yet identified with a particular position are perhaps more susceptible to the media and its persuasive influence.

Research suggests third person perceptions will ultimately predict more unfavorable perceptions of media content (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Perloff, 1989). Based on the third person perception literature, the more dissimilar others are considered from oneself, the more unfavorably they will view media coverage (e.g., greater hostile media perceptions). As a result, the influence on others in general as well as others with neutral and different attitudes is likely to predict a hostile media bias. Perceptions on others with similar attitudes will predict more favorable attitudes of the media content as these attitudes align with the partisans’ views.

**H5a:** Partisans perceived influence of the media message on other people in general predicts hostile media perceptions, which elicit unfavorable perceptions of media content.

**H5b:** Partisans perceived influence of the media message on other people who possess contrasting attitudes predicts hostile media perceptions, which elicit unfavorable perceptions of media content.

**H5c:** Partisans perceived influence of the media message on other people who possess similar attitudes predicts assimilation bias, which elicit more favorable perceptions of media content.

**H5d:** Partisans perceived influence of the media message on other people who possess neutral issue attitudes predicts hostile media perceptions, which elicit unfavorable perceptions of media content.

This research also looks at the role third person perceptions play as a mediating variable. As previously mentioned, the media’s perceived influence on others (third person perceptions) who are perceptively less similar to the partisan is likely to influence
hostile media perceptions (see Hypothesis 5; Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Perloff, 1989). In addition, source bias is likely to influence perceptions of media bias (see Hypothesis 2; Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther et al., 2009). When the bias (e.g., conservative, liberal, etc.) of online news sources does not align with partisans’ issue attitude it is likely partisans will perceive media coverage more negatively. When online sources align with partisans’ issue attitude they will perceive the media coverage more favorably.

Assuming both hostile and third person perceptions are influenced by source bias, it is plausible third person perceptions will mediate the relationship between source bias and/or media type and hostile media perceptions. When partisans view sources possessing a bias aligning with the opposing attitude position they are likely to think it reinforces the opinions of others, namely the opposing party’s position. As a result, partisans will perceive the message as more unfavorable, against their attitude position (hostile media perceptions). When partisans view sources possessing a bias aligning with their own attitude position they are not as likely to believe the message has as great of an impact on others. As a result partisans will perceive the message more favorably. The following hypothesis explores this possibility:

**H6:** Source Bias → Third Person Perceptions → Hostile Media Perceptions

**Antecedents of the Hostile Effect**

This research explores how media skepticism, media reliance, and media credibility all contribute to hostile media perceptions. Choi and colleagues (2009) surveyed college students about coverage of the National Security Law in South Korea.
and found those who are more skeptical of the media had more unfavorable attitudes of media coverage against their opinion. However, researches of the hostile media bias have yet to explore the influence of media reliance and media credibility on perceptions of media bias.

Blog readers who rely heavily on blogs for news and information may have different perceptions of how favorably (assimilation bias) or unfavorably (contrast bias) the media cover an issue than those who do not rely on this medium. The literature suggests partisans who rely heavily on weblogs for obtaining news are more skeptical of mainstream media and more likely to see neutral information presented in mainstream media sites as contrasting with their opinion (hostile bias; Arpan & Raney, 2003; Choi et al., 2009; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994); however, as blogs are utilized as an alternative to mainstream media (Blood, 2002b; Graf, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2011), perceptions of blog content may align more favorably with the readers’ views (assimilation) opposed to contrasting with them (hostile bias). Additionally, those who are more skeptical of mainstream media may rely more on blogs and those who rely on blogs may possess more media skepticism. Both media skepticism and blog reliance are likely to lead to perceptions of blog credibility.

Whether or not blog credibility directly influences content perceptions more favorably (assimilation) or unfavorably (contrast/hostile media) is unclear. Kyun, Soo, and Yorgo (2007) found news stories aligning with partisan views, which possessed either a pro-life or pro-choice bias, were perceived more credible. When no source bias was present and the news story contained a more balanced perspective on the abortion issue, the researchers were unable to establish a relationship between credibility and
perceptions of the news story’s bias. However, these findings are cautiously interpreted as perceptions of the student sample surveyed may not reflect partisan perceptions as college students are still in the attitude forming stage and may not possess a high level of involvement on the issue.

Research Question 7 explores media reliance, media skepticism, and media credibility as antecedents of the hostile media bias.

**RQ7:** For partisans, are media skepticism, media reliance, and media credibility antecedent of the hostile media effect?
Chapter 4

Methodology

Study’s Context

The context used for this study is the divisive social and political issue of legalizing same-sex marriage. The legal right of same-sex couples to marry is an evolving social issue in the United States. Some have even deemed this highly contested issue “the civil rights movement of the 21st Century” (“Campaign Courage,” n.d.). The decision of whether or not these couples can legally unite is currently left up to each state. Prior to 2011, five states (e.g., Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia granted same-sex marriages. In June 2011, the New York State Senate voted, making New York the six state (Confessore & Barbaro, 2011).

The divisive nature of this issue as well as its social impact makes it an ideal issue from which to examine hostile media perceptions. In a March 3, 2011, poll by Pew Research Center, public attitudes about same-sex marriage were closer than ever, with 45% of adults in favor of the issue and 46% opposing it. This narrow gap in opinions has shifted considerably since 1996 when 65% opposed and 27% were in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage (Pew Research, 2011).

Research Procedures

This experimental research examines user and media-generated content to determine how individuals perceived communication messages more or less favorably in blogs similar to or different from traditional news reports. Hostile media perceptions of
partisans who oppose or support legalizing same-sex marriage were examined. Third person perceptions were explored as an explanatory mechanism of this effect.

Partisan participation \((N = 760)\) was solicited online from blog readers who either supported maintaining the traditional definition of marriage between men and women \((n = 306)\) or legalizing same-sex marriage \((n = 454)\). A link to the study appeared on more than 20 blogs between October 4 and November 14, 2011. Blogs self-identified as being either politically conservative (e.g., Hot Air), politically liberal (e.g., Crooks and Liars), or supporting a specific partisan viewpoint (e.g., pro legalizing same-sex marriage: Prop8TrialTracker.com; pro traditional marriage: Patriot Statesman) posted the survey link. After completing the study, participants were asked to share a link to the survey with other partisans. In addition, some bloggers chose to post or share the link on other social media sites (Twitter or Facebook) instead of, or perhaps in addition to, their blog. Participants did not receive any compensation or incentives for participation.

This non-probability, self-selected, volunteer sampling method was coupled with a snowball sampling method, which allowed respondents to forward a link to the study to others who may be interested in participating. This method was used in an effort to obtain partisans who possessed strong issue positions and who were at least familiar with or relied somewhat on blogs or online news sites for news and information. Johnson and Kaye (2004b; 2004c; 2007; 2009; Kaye, 2005, 2007; Kaye & Johnson, 2011) successfully used sampling methods similar to those employed here in previous blog studies.

Respondents were told the research study would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. After coming in contact with the survey, participants read an implied informed
consent form. After proceeding with the survey, respondents specified their attitudes about the media (media skepticism and media credibility) and identified how much they relied upon online and offline media sources. Participants were then asked to indicate their views on whether or not states should legalize same-sex marriage or maintain the traditional definition of marriage. Then they specified the importance of this issue to them personally.

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of nine experimental conditions where he or she was asked to read either a news article or blog post. Random assignment among partisan groups helped eliminate the possibility of exposing partisans on either side of the issue to one experimental condition more than another. After reading the news article/blog post (stimulus), respondents completed the remaining attitudinal measures and demographic questions.

**Participants**

Of the participants who took part in the study, 60% identified themselves as pro partisans or supporters of legalizing same-sex marriage and 40% identified themselves as anti partisans who opposed legalizing same-sex marriage and strongly supported maintaining the traditional definition of marriage. Sixty-nine percent of those who accessed the survey online completed it.4

As a whole, more respondents indicated their biological sex was male 56.6% (pro: 66%; anti: 34%) than female 43.4% (pro: 51.5%; anti: 48.5%). Respondents provided their age as of their last birthday. Half (49.1%) the respondents were less than 45 years old, with 8.3% between the ages of 17 and 24 and 40.9% between 24 and 44. Forty-one
percent (41.4%) were between the ages of 45 and 64, and the other 9.5% were 65 years or older.

Less than four percent (3.6%) had the equivalent of a high school diploma or less. Nearly a quarter (24.4%) of respondents had some college education, 37.3% had a four-year degree, 24.4% had a master’s degree, and 10.3% had more than a master’s degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, JD, DDS).

Thirty-two percent (32.2%) of the sample made less than $50,000, 36.9% made between $50,000 and $99,999, 19.4% made between $100,000 and $149,000, 5.0% made between $150,000 and $199,999, 5.0% made more than $200,000, and another 6.4% did not identify their income.

Overall, there were 59.1% heterosexual (pro: 33.3%; anti: 66.7%), 34.6% homosexual (pro: 99.6%; anti: 0.4%) 6.2% bisexual (pro: 100%) and 0.1% asexual (anti: 0.3%) participants. This sample of LGBT individuals is much greater than those in the general population. In 2011, the Williams Institute reported approximately 3.5% of adult Americans were openly LGBT, with more people identifying as bisexual (1.8%) than lesbian or gay (1.7%; Gates, 2011).

**Partisans and political views.** The data indicated participants had very distinct political views. In this sample partisans who supported legalizing same-sex marriage (pro partisans) were primarily liberal (99.5%) and registered with the Democratic party (97.5%). Those who did not support legalizing same-sex marriage (anti partisans) were more conservative (92.2%) and registered with the Republican party (93.7%). Table 1 compares the political and demographic characteristics of this sample with those identified during the same year by Gallup Research (see Newport, 2011).
### Table 1: Comparing Supporters of Legalizing Same-sex Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Present Study</th>
<th>Gallup Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>((N = 760))</td>
<td>((N = 1,018))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue Supporters</strong></td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue Opponents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Party</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>6.3% (12)</td>
<td>93.7% (179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>97.5% (276)</td>
<td>2.5% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>67.5% (54)</td>
<td>32.5% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>66.7% (14)</td>
<td>33.3% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Registered</td>
<td>53.7% (94)</td>
<td>46.3% (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Leans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2.8% (8)</td>
<td>97.2% (278)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>67.1% (51)</td>
<td>32.9% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>99.5% (393)</td>
<td>0.5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men, 17 to 49</td>
<td>65.5% (182)</td>
<td>58.9% (83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men, 50+</td>
<td>34.5% (96)</td>
<td>41.1% (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, 17 to 49</td>
<td>58.1% (97)</td>
<td>58.3% (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, 50+</td>
<td>41.9% (70)</td>
<td>41.7% (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 – 34</td>
<td>67.1% (149)</td>
<td>32.9% (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 54</td>
<td>56.3% (178)</td>
<td>43.7% (138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 +</td>
<td>41.3% (187)</td>
<td>58.7% (124)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Issue supporters’ percentages indicate those who favor legalizing same-sex marriage. Issue opponents percentages indicate those who favor maintaining the traditional definition of man-woman marriage. The Gallup research reported here is based on Gallup’s May 5-8, 2011, Values and Beliefs poll (Newport, 2011). Telephone interviews were conducted with adults aged 18 and older living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Respondents of the Gallup poll were asked, “Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?”

Within the sample utilized within this study, those of the Democratic party who are liberal and support legalizing same-sex marriage are over represented. Those who are conservative, affiliated with the Republican party, and favor legalizing same-sex marriage are underrepresented. These differences are likely a result of soliciting
participants from those who read blogs/websites supporting a particular issue position. Many of the websites possessed a specific political ideology. Respondents affiliated with these political parties and political views were likely to selectively expose themselves to websites supporting their same views (Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008), so obtaining a sample proportionate to a nationally representative sample was not feasible with the sampling procedures employed. However, for age and biological sex this sample is comparable to the national sample taken the same year, lending support to political partisans’ selective exposure to online media.

**Experimental Conditions**

Participants viewed one of nine web pages resembling an online news story, a media blog, or issue blog, each with identical messages. However, each news source espoused an ideological bias favoring the legalization of same-sex marriages, opposing the issue, and supporting maintaining the traditional definition of marriage, or no identifiable source bias showing favoritism toward one side of the issue or the other. The only source previously utilized within experimental studies was the news site without an ideological bias (e.g., *USA Today*; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther et al., 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). The media’s source bias was identifiable in the website banner for each blog and news website. Table 2 outlines the various media sources and how friendly they were to the issue.

Each news story/blog post was time stamped with a fictitious date and time, which corresponded with the New York legislature’s passing of a ballot measure on June 24, 2011, allowing same-sex couples to marry within the state. All nine experimental conditions were said to be written by the same gender-neutral author, Casey Williams.
Table 2: Online Sources used for Experimental Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Source Bias</th>
<th>Online News Websites</th>
<th>Media Blog&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Issue Blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Source Bias</td>
<td>USAToday.com</td>
<td>USA Today’s OnDeadline Blog</td>
<td>OnDeadline Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-no tag line-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Legalizing Same-Sex</td>
<td>BayAreaReporter.com</td>
<td>Bay Area Reporter’s LezTalk Blog</td>
<td>LezTalk Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>“Serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities since 1971.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“LGBT Rights, Equal Rights”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>“Delivering conservative views since 1971”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Traditional Families with Traditional Values”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Since media blogs are typically hosted on a news organization’s website, all media blogs included the tag lines identified for online news websites as well as those in the issue blog.

The news sources representing online news sites included three news websites: USAToday.com, BayAreaReporter.com, and FreedomJournal.com. USAToday.com is a nationally daily newspaper ranked second in print circulation and ninth in its digital edition for the six-month period ending September 30, 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011). USAToday is also recognized as a centralist publication without a blatant conservative or liberal ideological bias or political leaning (Lakeland Liberty...
BayAreaReporter.com is a weekly newspaper published in San Francisco, which serves as an advocate for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community, and is friendly toward the issue examined in this study. FreedomJournal.com is a fictitious online newspaper created to appear friendly toward the issue of traditional man-woman marriage.

The three media blogs included within this study, namely OnDeadline, LezTalk, and StraightTalk resembled blogs written by journalists. Each blog was hosted on one of the aforementioned news website and espoused the same ideological bias or lack thereof (see Table 2). USA Today.com’s OnDeadline blog, was the only existing media blog used in this study, all other blogs were fictitious. For each media blog a banner with the blog’s name appeared below the news organization’s banner.

The three issue blogs utilized for this study included the OnDeadline blog, the LezTalk blog, and the StraightTalk blog. The newspaper banner on each media blog was removed so it did not have any identifiable connections to a media organization and resembled an issue blog. The tag lines associated with each blog specified its potential source bias, or lack thereof (see Table 2).

**Message content.** Similar to other experimental studies on the hostile media effect, each stimuli (news story and blog post) contained identical content. Only the source of the content changed. The stimulus message consisted of a 761-word news story/blog post created from national media coverage of the June 24, 2011, New York Senate vote, which granted same-sex couples the legal right to marry within New York. The story/post titled “State Definitions of Marriage,” introduced the issue by highlighting the New York Senate’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage and then it discussed the
decisions other states have made and will have to make on this issue. The introduction
maintained a neutral position and preceded two sections focusing on arguments
supporting each side of the issue. The section subtitled, “Changing the Definition of
Marriage,” advocated for redefining marriage and focused on the benefits of allowing
two people of the same sex to marry opposed to merely engage in a civil union or a
domestic partnership (e.g., provides equal rights, emotional and economic security, etc.).
Another section subtitled, “Marriage, without a Redefinition,” advocated for traditional
marriage and discussed why it should not be redefined (e.g., institution designed only for
unions between men and women, beneficial for society and children who are raised by
their biological parents). The last section highlighted both sides of the issue and
questioned how states will define marriage in the future.

The order in which the two issue arguments were presented was varied between
participants and counterbalanced within each of the nine online source conditions.
Additional care was taken to obtain a balanced article that did not favor one side of the
issue over another. The two sections outlining each issue position included an equivalent
number of words (e.g., 244 vs. 245), paragraphs (five), and hyperlinks (three). The
message was pretested to ensure it provided a balanced perspective on the issue.6

Pretest

Prior to distributing the study in its entirety it was pretested online with a
snowball sample of more than 30 respondents of varying issue attitudes in geographic
locations throughout the country. This pretest ensured the online survey instrument and
experimental conditions were working and capturing the opinions of individuals with
varying attitudes and technological capabilities. The pretest didn’t identify the need for any alteration in the survey instrument.

Measurement

Partisanship

This study measured partisanship by first gauging the issue position individuals supported (e.g., legalizing same-sex marriage or maintaining the definition of marriage between one man and one woman) and second by identifying respondents level of personal involvement with the issue.

Prior to engaging with the stimulus, and to identify issue position, participants were asked to provide their attitude about who they think should be able to legally marry within the United States: 1) “Same-sex partners should be able to legally marry within every state.” 2) “States should only recognize marriages between a man and a woman.” Participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 7-point response scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Within previous hostile media studies (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006) a similar one-item, issue-relevant question assessed issue position (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006); however, to accurately measure participants’ attitudes and to provide multiple-item reliability, this study used two questions.

The second question about issue attitudes was reverse coded such that attitude positions reflected support for legalizing same-sex marriage and the items were averaged to create a single-item index. Partisans who agreed or strongly agreed with both statements were identified as issue proponents and those who disagreed or strongly
disagreed with both statements, when reverse coded, were considered issue opponents. Those individuals who indicated their attitudes were somewhere in the middle were excluded from the analysis.

**Issue involvement.** After identifying a respondent’s position on the issue, participants identified the salience of the issue to them personally. As highly involved partisans were sought for this study, scores for level of personal involvement were examined only for respondents who indicated they agreed or strongly agreed ($M \geq 6$) with a particular issue position. For measuring the importance of this issue to respondents, this study adopted five items from Zaichkowsky’s (1985, 1994) personal involvement inventory (PII).

Using a 7-point semantic-differential scale, partisans rated how important the issue of legalizing (or not legalizing) same-sex marriage was to them using the following five items: important/unimportant, of much concern/of no concern, matters to me/doesn’t matter to me, means a lot/means nothing, and significant/insignificant ($\alpha = .82$).

Respondents who possessed a high level of personal involvement on this issue ($M \geq 6$) were included in the final analysis and identified as partisans ($N = 760$), resulting in more pro partisans (60%) who favored legalizing same-sex marriage than anti partisans (40%) who opposed legalizing same-sex marriage and favored traditional marriage.

**HME Antecedents**

**Media reliance.** This study examined how much respondents relied upon online newspapers and blogs (blogs in general, media blogs and issue blogs) for obtaining news and information on political and social issues. The measurement for these items were adopted by Johnson and Kaye (2004a; 2004b; 2010b) who examined how reliance on
online and more traditional media sources for political information influence its credibility.

Respondents were presented with a list of four media sources and asked, “In general, how much do you RELY on the following sources for obtaining news and information on political and social issues?” Reliance was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from no reliance (1) to rely heavily (7). Respondents answered the same question for how much they relied on online newspapers, blogs in general, media blogs, and issue blogs. The four single-item scores were used in subsequent analysis.

**Media credibility.** Media credibility is a multidimensional construct utilized for assessing traditional (e.g., television, newspapers) and non-traditional media (e.g., online news; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Kaye & Johnson, 2011; Johnson & Kaye, 2010a, 2010b, 2009, 2004a, 2004b, 2002, 2000, 1998; Meyer, 1988; Newhagen & Nass, 1989; West, 1994). This study assessed the credibility of online news sites, media blogs, and issue blogs.

Media credibility was measured by assessing how believable, accurate, fair, and in-depth individuals perceived online news sites, media blogs, and issue blogs. Using a 7-point Likert scale respondents indicated how much they strongly disagreed or strongly agreed with each of the following statements: 1) online news sites accurately discuss the issues; 2) online news sites fairly represent the issues, 3) online news sites are believable; and 4) online news sites provide in-depth information on news and events. Questions were worded similarly for media blogs and issue blogs. Reliability was high for online news credibility ($\alpha = .92$), media blog credibility ($\alpha = .95$), and issue blog credibility ($\alpha = .94$).
**Media skepticism.** This study assessed how skeptical respondents are of mainstream media. Media skepticism measures originated from Gaziano and McGrath’s (1986) news credibility scale and were adopted by Tsfati (2010, 2003a, 2003b; Tsfati & Capella, 2003) and others (e.g., Choi, et al., 2011; Choi, et al., 2009) to measure distrust of mainstream media opposed to specific media channels. This study measured media skepticism by asking respondents how a) unfair/fair, b) biased/unbiased, c) tells the whole story/doesn’t tell the whole story, d) accurate/inaccurate, and e) untrustworthy/trustworthy they perceive mainstream news media. Answers to these five items were assessed using 7-point semantic differential scales. Higher scores indicated greater media skepticism, necessitating three items to be reversed coded (fair, unbiased, and trustworthy). Mean scores on all items produced a single media skepticism index ($\alpha = .85$).

**Dependent Variables**

**Hostile media perceptions.** Survey research assessing the hostile media bias is based on assessments of media coverage on an issue or topic as a whole. However, experimental studies such as this use media bias measures for assessing how favorably or unfavorably a particular media message is perceived. The more inaccurate, unfair, or incomplete the story is considered, the more biased it is perceived.

In this study, perceptions of *hostile media bias* were assessed using five questions adopted from previous experimental research on the hostile media effect (see Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004, Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Perloff, 1989; Schmitt et al., 2004; Valone et al., 1985;). The first two questions examined reader perceptions of the article’s bias as well as the author’s (journalist/blogger) bias: “Would
you say that a portrayal of same-sex marriage in the *news article/blog post* you just read provided a balanced and accurate portrayal of the issue or was it biased for or against legalizing same-sex marriage?” and “Would you say the *journalist/blogger* responsible for writing this *news article/blog post* was strictly neutral, or was the *journalist/blogger* biased?” The third question asked participants to assess the overall tone of the *news article/blog post.* All three questions were rated on an 11-point response scale ranging from -5 (*strongly biased against legalizing same-sex marriage*) to +5 (*strongly biased in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage*) with 0 as the (*neutral*) midpoint.

The fourth and fifth questions asked respondents to indicate the percentage of the *news article/blog post* favoring or opposing legalizing same-sex marriage. Respondents were asked, “What percentage of the *news article/blog post* favored legalizing same-sex marriage?” and “What percentage of the *news article/blog post* favored traditional marriage?” Both of these questions were measured on a scale ranging from 0% (meaning none of the story/post) to 100% (all of the story/post). The latter question regarding the percentage of favorable references made to traditional marriage was reverse coded such that positive values reflected the perceived media bias favoring same-sex marriage.

A media bias index was created by obtaining the mean scores of all five questions ($M = -0.17, SD = 1.55; \alpha = .84$). For data interpretation, the researcher used multiplied the media bias index by -1 for anti partisans, so negative numbers reflected the perception the news story/blog posts opposed legalizing same-sex marriage and positive numbers reflected support for the issue. Similar procedures have been used by other researchers in this area (Gunther et al., 2009). This procedure was not conducted for pro partisans as
negative numbers already reflected more unfavorable perceptions, against pro partisans' attitude position.

Third person perceptions. After reading the news story/blog post and indicating how biased they perceived it, respondents answered one question about the perceived influence of what they read on themselves and four additional questions about the perceived effect of what they read on others. Respondents indicated how much influence they thought the story/blog would have on the attitudes and opinions of 1) others in general, 2) others with contrasting attitudes, 3) others with similar attitudes, and 4) others with neutral attitudes.

For all four questions respondents indicated the degree of influence using a 7-point semantic differential scale ranged from no influence at all to a great deal of influence. Research on the third person effect is calculated subtracting scores for the media’s influence on “others” from its influence on “self” (Davidson, 1983; Cohen et al., 1988). In this study, the four individual scores gauging the media’s influence on other people (other people in general, others with similar views, others with different views, and others with neutral views) were subtracted from scores of the media’s influence on self. In each instance, positive scores indicated a third person perception, with scores further away from zero having a greater perceived effect than scores approaching zero.
Chapter 5

Results

Research questions and hypotheses were explored using a 2 (partisans) x 3 (media type) x 3 (ideological source bias) between-subjects experiment. Media type and identifiable ideological source bias were randomly assigned between participants whereas partisan group was a measured attitudinal variable within the population of interest.

Partisanship, Source Bias and Media Type

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the effects of partisanship, media type, and source bias (H1, H2, RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Hypothesis 1 and Research Question 1 examined partisan perceptions of media sources without an explicit source bias. An ANOVA was conducted using partisans (pro and anti) and media sources not possessing an explicit source bias (online news story, media blog post, and issue blog post) as independent variables.

Hypothesis 1 predicted partisans would perceive the online news story more unfavorable against their issue position than issue blogs. The results show an interaction for partisans and media type, $F(2, 242) = 4.98, p < .01$ partial $\eta^2 = .04$. There was no main effect for partisans, $F(1, 242) = 2.18, p > .05$ partial $\eta^2 = .01$, and media type, $F(2, 242) = .03, p > .05$ partial $\eta^2 = .00$. Pro partisans perceived the online newspaper story significantly more unfavorably ($M = -1.17, SE = .20$) than anti partisans ($M = -.13, SE = .25$). As shown in Figure 1, for issue proponents, perceptions of the online news story ($M = -1.17, SE = .20$) were more unfavorable than the media blog ($M = -.75, SE = .21$).
Note. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorable or unfavorable the information is perceived.

followed by the issue blog ($M = -.45, SE = .21$). A similar trend was found for anti partisans, but in the opposite direction, with the issue blog ($M = -.82, SE = .24$) being perceived more unfavorable than the media blog ($M = -.62, SE = .23$) followed by the online news story ($M = -.13, SE = .25$).

As Figure 1 illustrates, exposure to each media source generated negative perceptions from partisans. Even though there was not a significant difference in
partisans perceptions of the online news story and the issue blog, the online news story aroused more unfavorable attitudes from pro partisans and more favorable perceptions of issue blogs, lending partial support to Hypothesis 1. Anti partisan perceptions were in the opposite direction, with more favorable attitudes of the online news story and less favorable perceptions of the issue. Significant differences in perceptions were aroused by partisans most notably in the online news condition (see Figure 1).

Research Question 1 explored how partisans perceived media blogs in relation to issue blogs and online news stories. An ANOVA using partisans and media type as independent variables highlights an interaction effect between these two variables, $F(2, 242) = 4.98, p < .01$ partial $\eta^2 = .04$. As Table 3 illustrates, there was no main effect for partisans, $F(1, 242) = 2.18, p > .05$ partial $\eta^2 = .01$, or media type, $F(2, 242) = .03, p > .05$ partial $\eta^2 = .00$. These results show there was no significant difference in how each partisan group perceived media blogs (pro: $M = -.75, SE = .21$; anti: $M = -.62, SE = .23$) in relation to online news stories (pro: $M = -1.17, SE = .20$; anti: $M = -.13, SE = .25$) and issue blogs (pro: $M = -.45, SE = .21$; anti: $M = -.82, SE = .24$). In addition, there was no significant difference in pro ($M = -.75, SE = .21$) and anti ($M = -.62, SE = .23$) partisan perceptions of media blogs. Of note, for both partisan groups mean scores for media blogs were always preceded by online news stories and followed by issue blogs, despite how favorably or unfavorably partisans perceived online news stories (see Figure 1 and Table 3).

Hypothesis 2 and Research Question 2 examined the presence of a source bias on hostile media perceptions. Hypothesis 2 indicated the presence of a source bias would influence partisan perceptions such that sources aligning with the partisans’ issue attitude
Table 3: Hostile Media Perceptions: Partisan by Media Type Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Online News</th>
<th>Media Blog</th>
<th>Issue Blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-1.17_{aA}</td>
<td>-.75_{aA}</td>
<td>-.45_{aA}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.13_{aB}</td>
<td>-.62_{aA}</td>
<td>-.82_{aA}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the information is perceived.

*Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons means with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$. Capital letters indicate comparisons by columns whereas lower-case letters indicate comparisons by rows.

$F (2, 242) = 4.98, p < .01$ partial $\eta^2 = .04$

would be perceived more favorably, and less hostile, than sources aligning with the opposing position, regardless of media type. The results of a 2 (partisan: anti and pro partisans) X 2 (source bias: pro source bias and anti source bias) X 3 (media type: online newspaper story, media blog, issue blog) ANOVA revealed an interaction for partisans and source bias, $F(1, 500) = 15.35, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. There was no main effect for partisan, $F(1, 500) = .06, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, media type, $F(2, 500) = .29, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, or source bias, $F(1, 500) = .00, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. In addition, no interaction existed for partisans and media type, $F(2, 500) = .58, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, media type and source bias, $F(2, 500) = 1.31, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, or partisan, media type, and source bias, $F(2, 500) = .45, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. 
### Table 4: Hostile Media Perceptions: Partisan by Source Bias Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Source Bias</th>
<th>Pro Source Bias</th>
<th>Anti Source Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro Partisans</td>
<td>Anti Partisans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.27 $^{aA}$</td>
<td>-.77 $^{bA}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance, higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the information is perceived.

*Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons means with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$. Capital letters indicate comparisons by columns whereas lower-case letters indicate comparisons by rows.

$F(1, 500) = 15.35$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$

The mean differences associated with the significant partisan by source bias interaction are in Table 4. For both partisan groups, the results support Hypothesis 2. The interaction revealed pro partisans perceived sources with a source bias aligning with their views (pro source bias) more favorably ($M = -.27$, $SE = .11$) than anti partisans who perceived the pro sources less favorably ($M = -.74$, $SE = .14$). Likewise, anti partisans perceived sources aligning with their views (anti source bias) more favorably ($M = -.24$, $SE = .14$) than pro partisans exposed to the same sources with an anti bias ($M = -.77$, $SE = .11$). As this data revealed, both groups of partisans had more favorable perceptions of media content possessing a source bias agreeing with their attitude position than a source bias that did not align with their position.
Research Question 2 examined potential differences among partisan perceptions of all three types of media when they possessed a pro source bias (2a) and an anti source bias (2b). As the results of the 2 (Partisan) x 2 (Source Bias) x 3 (Media Type) ANOVA conducted for Hypothesis 2 indicated, there was only a partisans and source bias interaction, $F(1, 500) = 15.35, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. No additional main effects or interactions associated with media type proved significant (media type main effect: $F(2, 500) = .29, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$; partisans and media type interaction, $F(2, 500) = .58, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$; media type and source bias interaction: $F(2, 500) = 1.31, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$; and, partisan by media type by source bias interaction: $F(2, 500) = .45, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$). Likewise, there were no main effects for partisan, $F(1, 500) = .06, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, or source bias, $F(1, 500) = .00, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$.

Table 4 shows the means and standard errors. These results indicate there were no differences in partisan perceptions of online news stories or the blogs posts when they possessed a source bias aligning with or opposing their attitudes on the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage. The partisan by source bias interaction suggests the type of media viewed did not alter partisan perceptions.

Research Question 3 explored partisan perceptions of a hostile media bias among all three media sources, exploring the relationships among sources without a source bias and those possessing a bias supporting or opposing the issue. A 2 (partisans: pro and anti partisans) X 3 (source bias: no source bias, pro source bias, and anti source bias) X 3 (media type: online news story, media blog, and issue blog) ANOVA was computed to investigate this question. The analysis revealed an interaction effect for partisans and source bias, $F(2, 742) = 8.18, p < .001$ $\eta^2 = .022$, as well as a partisan by media type by
source bias interaction, $F(4, 742) = 2.64 \ p < .05 \ \eta^2 = .014$. There were no main effects for partisans, $F(1, 742) = 1.11 \ p > .05 \ \eta^2 = .00$, media type, $F(2, 742) = .24 \ p > .05 \ \eta^2 = .00$, or source bias, $F(2, 742) = .95 \ p > .05 \ \eta^2 = .00$. In addition, the partisan by media type interaction $F(2, 742) = .75 \ p > .05 \ \eta^2 = .00$, and the media type by source bias interaction, $F(4, 742) = .69 \ p > .05 \ \eta^2 = .00$, was not significant.

Table 5 provides the means and standard errors associated with the partisan and source bias interaction identified as part of Research Question 3. This interaction revealed the relationship among sources without a bias and those with a bias. Pro partisans considered sources aligning with their views significantly more favorably ($M = -.27, SE = .11$) than when it did not possess a bias ($M = -.79, SE = .12$) and when it opposed their position possessing an anti bias ($M = -.77, SE = .11$). Anti partisans considered sources with a bias aligning with their views significantly more favorably ($M = -.24, SE = .14$) than when it did not possess a bias ($M = -.74, SE = .14$). There was no significant difference in perceptions of sources without a bias ($M = -.52, SE = .14$) and sources with a bias (pro or anti). The results show when both pro and anti partisans viewed sources opposing their views they thought the message was significantly more unfavorable than sources aligning with their views.

Results of the media type, partisan, and source bias interaction identified in Research Question 3 is found in Table 6. Pro partisans thought the online new source presented a more biased story opposing their position ($M = -1.17, SE = .20$) than anti partisans ($M = -.13, SE = .25$). What this interaction showed other data have not been able to identify is pro partisans perception of an online news story without an overt bias compared to when it possessed a bias aligning with their position. Pro partisans
Table 5: Hostile Media Perceptions: Partisan by Source Bias Interaction, including Sources without a Bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Bias</th>
<th>No Bias</th>
<th>Pro Bias</th>
<th>Anti Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.79$_{aA}$</td>
<td>-.27$_{bB}$</td>
<td>-.77$_{aD}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.52$_{cdA}$</td>
<td>-.74$_{cC}$</td>
<td>-.24$_{dE}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the information is perceived.

*Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons means with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$, except “B” and “C,” which differ at $p = .06$ and “c” and “d” which differ at $p < .07$. Capital letters indicate comparisons by columns whereas lower-case letters indicate comparisons by rows.

Partisans x Source Bias: $F(2, 742) = 8.18$ $p < .001$ $\eta^2 = .02$

considered an online news source without an overt bias ($M = -.117$, $SE = .20$) less favorably than when it had a pro bias aligning with their position ($M = -.11$, $SE = .19$). For this partisan group the online news story without an overt bias aroused less favorable perceptions than any other source.

Predicting Hostile Perceptions

Hypothesis 3, 4, 5, and 6 as well as Research Question 4, 5 and 6 explored the relationship between third person perceptions and hostile media perceptions. Paired sample t-tests were used to identify the presence of this effect. Multivariate analysis of
Table 6: Hostile Media Perceptions: Partisanship, Media Type, and Source Bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online News</td>
<td>Media Blog</td>
<td>Issue Blog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Overt Bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.17 $a_A$</td>
<td>-.75 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.45 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.13 $a_B$</td>
<td>-.62 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.82 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.11 $a_B$</td>
<td>-.40 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.29 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.74 $a_{AB}$</td>
<td>-.89 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.57 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Bias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.84 $a_{AB}$</td>
<td>-.81 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.67 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>-.52 $a_{AB}$</td>
<td>.02 $a_C$</td>
<td>-.21 $a_D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the information is perceived.

*Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, means in the same columns and rows with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$. Capital letters indicate comparisons by columns whereas lower-case letters indicate comparisons by rows.

Partisan x Media Type x Source Bias Interaction: $F(4, 742) = 2.64 \ p < .05 \ \eta^2 = .014$
variance (MANOVA) explored the relationships among partisanship, media type, and source bias and its influence on third person perceptions. A hierarchical regression analysis was employed to establish whether or not the third person perception is a predictor of the hostile media perception. Mediation tests were also conducted for this variable.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a difference between how partisan perceptions of online media (e.g., blog posts and online news story) would influence their own attitudes on the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage versus the attitudes of other people. This hypothesis predicted the influence on other people would be greater than the influence on self. In total, eight independent sample t-tests were conducted, four for pro partisans and four for anti partisans. In each instance, these tests revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between partisan perceptions of the media’s effect on themselves (Pro: $M = 1.39, SD = 1.04$; Anti: $M = 1.54, SD = 1.22$) versus other groups of people. As Table 7 illustrates, this differences existed for other people in general (Pro: $M = 3.08, SD = 1.50, t(447) = -22.19, p < .001$; Anti: $M = 3.27, SD = 1.57, t(294) = -18.39, p < .001$) as well as others with similar attitudes (Pro: $M = 1.82, SD = 1.32, t(446) = -9.50, p < .001$; Anti: $M = 2.08, SD = 1.44, t(296) = -8.01, p < .001$), others with different attitudes (Pro: $M = 2.49, SD = 1.83, t(445) = -11.55, p < .001$; Anti: $M = 2.95, SD = 2.00, t(294) = -11.86, p < .001$), and others with neutral attitudes (Pro: $M = 3.36, SD = 1.51, t(438) = -26.13, p < .001$; Anti: $M = 3.67, SD = 1.51, t(293) = -23.24, p < .001$). In every instance the data support Hypothesis 3, with mean scores indicating partisans perceived a greater influence on others than on themselves, revealing the presence of a third person effect on others in
Table 7: Perceived Influence of Online Media on Self and Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self in General</th>
<th>Others with Similar Attitudes</th>
<th>Others with Different Attitudes</th>
<th>Neutral Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro Partisans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>(1.04)</td>
<td>(1.32)</td>
<td>(1.83)</td>
<td>(1.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>-22.19***</td>
<td>-11.55***</td>
<td>-26.13***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>(447)</td>
<td>(445)</td>
<td>(438)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti Partisans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>(1.22)</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(2.00)</td>
<td>(1.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>-18.39***</td>
<td>-11.86***</td>
<td>-23.24***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>(294)</td>
<td>(294)</td>
<td>(293)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For each partisan group paired sample t-tests were used to examine differences between perceived influence on self and perceived influence on each group of “other” people using a 7-point semantic differential scale. Higher values represent a greater perceived media influence.

*** $p < .001$

general, others with similar attitudes, others with different attitudes and others with neutral attitudes (see Table 7).

Hypothesis 4 predicted other people in general as well as others who possessed opinions contrasting with partisan views and those who held neutral views on the issue would be more affected by media coverage than others who possessed attitudes similar to the partisan. Three paired sample t-tests for each group of partisans revealed significant differences in perceptions.
Pro partisans perceived a greater effect on others in general ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 1.59$) opposed to those who possessed similar attitudes ($M = .43$, $SD = .96$), $t(444) = 16.58, p < .001$. In addition, this group of partisans overestimated the effect on those with attitudes that contrasted with their own opinion ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 1.89$) than they did with those who possessed attitudes similar to their own ($M = .43$, $SD = .96$), $t(442) = 6.98, p < .001$. The same was true for the perceived effect on those with neutral attitudes ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.59$) opposed to those with similar attitudes ($M = .43$, $SD = .97$), $t(435) = 20.02, p < .001$.

Anti partisans also overestimated the effect of the information on others in general ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.62$) opposed to others with similar attitudes ($M = .54$, $SD = 1.60$), $t(294) = 12.32, p < .001$. Anti partisans perceived a greater effect on others with contrasting or different attitudes ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 2.05$) than on others with similar attitudes ($M = .55$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(294) = 7.37, p < .001$. Others with neutral attitudes ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.70$) were also considered more influential than others with similar attitudes ($M = .53$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(293) = 16.03, p < .001$.

The data fully supported Hypothesis 4, with partisans believing those who were similar to themselves were less influential by the information they read than others with contrasting attitudes, others in general and neutral others. These findings were consistent for both partisan groups.

To answer Research Question 4 and determine if there were differences among perceptions of media influence on others in general and those who have similar, different, and neutral attitude positions, six paired sample t-test were conducted for each partisan group. The tests revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions between each
pair of others (e.g., similar and others, similar and different, similar and neutral, others and different, others and neutral, different and neutral). For pro partisans, there was a statistically significant difference between the perceived effect on others in general ($M = 1.70, SD = 1.60$) and others with neutral views ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.59$), $t(437) = -4.50, p < .001$, as well as others in general ($M = 1.68, SD = 1.60$) and others with attitudes that differed from the partisan ($M = 1.09, SD = 2.00$), $t(444) = 7.78, p < .001$, and others with different views ($M = 1.12, SD = 2.01$) and others with neutral views ($M = 1.97, SD = 1.58$), $t(436) = -9.22, p < .001$. As identified in Hypothesis 4, significant differences also existed between others with similar views ($M = .43, SD = .96$) and different views ($M = 1.08, SD = 1.98$), $t(442) = 6.98, p < .001$, as well as others with similar views ($M = .43, SD = .96$) and others in general ($M = 1.68, SD = 1.59$), $t(444) = 16.58, p < .001$, and others with similar views ($M = .43, SD = .97$) and neutral views ($M = 1.99, SD = 1.59$), $t(435) = 20.02, p < .001$.

For anti partisans, there was a significant difference between the perceived effect on others in general ($M = 1.73, SD = 1.62$) and others with contrasting attitudes ($M = 1.41, SD = 2.05$), $t(293) = 3.18, p < .01$. Others in general ($M = 1.73, SD = 1.62$) differed from and others with neutral views ($M = 2.13, SD = 1.70$), $t(293) = -5.02, p < .001$, others with contrasting views ($M = 1.41, SD = 2.05$) differed others with neutral views ($M = 2.13, SD = 1.70$), $t(292) = -6.13, p < .001$, others with similar views ($M = .55, SD = 1.18$) differed from others with different views ($M = 1.41, SD = 2.05$), $t(294) = 7.37, p < .001$, others with similar views ($M = .54, SD = 1.60$) differed from others in general ($M = 1.73, SD = 1.62$), $t(294) = 12.32, p < .001$, and others with similar views
Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations identified in Hypothesis 4 and Research Question 4, and displays the differences between each group of others. The data showed partisans overestimated the effect of the message on those with neutral opinions, suggesting they considered this group the most influential and perhaps even the most dissimilar from them. This perceptual effect diminished for other people in general followed by others with views that starkly contrasted with the partisan. Others with similar views were considered the least influential group. These perceptions held for both partisan groups.

**The Influence of ‘Other’ Variables**

Research Question 5 explored the differences in third person perceptions for partisans. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using partisans as the independent variable (anti partisans and pro partisans) and third person perceptions on each group of others (e.g., similar others, others in general, different others, and neutral others) as the dependent variables. The omnibus results revealed there was not a significant interaction between partisans and third person perceptions, Wilks’ $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 731) = 1.26, p > .05, \eta = .007$. Subsequent univariate tests showed both pro and anti partisans did not have different perceptions of the media message when considering its influence on others in general, $F(1, 734) = .21, p > .05, \eta = .000$, as well as others with attitudes that were similar, $F(1, 734) = 1.91, p > .05, \eta = .003$, different, $F(1, 734) = 3.05, p > .05, \eta = .004$, and neutral, $F(1, 734) = .99, p > .05, \eta = .001$, on the issue. These
Table 8: Differences in Third Person Perceptions between Groups of 'Other' People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pro Partisans</th>
<th>Anti Partisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
<td>$M (SD)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>1.08    (.43)</td>
<td>6.98***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.98)  (.96)</td>
<td>(442)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.68    (.43)</td>
<td>16.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.59)  (.96)</td>
<td>(444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1.99    (.43)</td>
<td>20.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.59)  (.97)</td>
<td>(435)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>1.09    1.68</td>
<td>7.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.00)  (1.60)</td>
<td>(444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1.98    1.70</td>
<td>-4.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.59)  (1.60)</td>
<td>(437)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>1.97    1.12</td>
<td>-9.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.58)  (2.01)</td>
<td>(436)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Within each partisan group, paired sample t-tests were conducted for third person perceptions on each pair of other people. Third person perceptions were gauged by asking respondents to indicate how much influence they thought the new story/blog post they read would have on others (e.g., other people, others with contrasting issue attitudes, others with similar issue attitudes, and others with neutral issue attitudes) and then subtracted from the perceived influence on themselves. Attitudes were measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

results indicated there was not a significant difference between how pro and anti partisans thought the news story/blog post they read would influence others.

For Research Question 6, a MANOVA was used to explore the influence of three different variables on the perceived media influence on others. Media type (online
newspaper story, media blog, and issue blog), source bias (no source bias, pro source bias, and anti source bias) and partisanship (pro and anti partisans) served as the independent variables. Perceived influence on a) others in general, b) others with different attitudes, c) others with similar attitudes, and d) others with neutral attitudes served as the dependent variables.

The omnibus results did not indicate a significant main effect for media type, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .95$, $F(8, 1430) = .35$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .002$, source bias, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99$, $F(8, 1430) = .95$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .005$, or partisans, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99$, $F(4, 715) = 1.22$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .007$. Additionally, there was no media type by source bias interaction, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99$, $F(16, 2185) = .64$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .004$, media type by partisan interaction, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .99$, $F(8, 1430) = 1.03$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .006$, or media type by source bias by partisan interaction Wilks’ $\Lambda = .98$, $F(16, 2185) = .77$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .004$. However, there was a significant partisan by source bias interaction, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .98$, $F(8, 1430) = 2.11$, $p = .03$, $\eta = .012$.

Subsequent univariate tests for partisan and source bias revealed a significant partisan by source bias interaction for the perceived effect on others with attitudes contrasting with the partisans’ attitude, $F(2, 718) = 3.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta = .008$. Additional univariate tests did not reveal any significant partisan by source bias interactions on the other three dependent variables gauging the perceived effect of the information on others in general, $F(2, 718) = .82$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .002$, others with similar attitudes, $F(2, 718) = 1.83$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .005$, and others with neutral attitudes $F(2, 718) = .01$, $p > .05$, $\eta = .000$.

Bonferroni post hoc comparisons were conducted to examine significant differences within the partisan by source bias interaction. Pro partisans viewing a source aligning with their views (pro bias) did not think this source would influence others with
opposing attitudes nearly as much ($M = .71, SE = .17$) as sources possessing an obvious bias opposing their views (anti bias; $M = 1.37, SE = .17$). Differences also existed between pro and anti partisan presumptions about sources with a pro bias. Anti partisans ($M = .1.52, SE = .21$) thought sources with a pro bias, which opposed their opinion, would influence others with differing attitudes significantly more than pro partisans ($M = .71, SE = .17$). Table 9 provides the additional means and standard errors for this interaction.

**Table 9: Third Person Perceptions of Others with Contrasting Attitudes: Partisan by Source Bias Interaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Influence on Others with Attitudes Differing from Partisans</th>
<th>No Bias</th>
<th>Pro Bias</th>
<th>Anti Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.15$_{abA}$</td>
<td>.71$_{aC}$</td>
<td>1.37$_{bD}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti Partisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>1.27$_{aA}$</td>
<td>1.52$_{aB}$</td>
<td>1.27$_{aD}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The dependent variable measured the perceived effect on others using a 7-point semantic differential scale.

*Using Holm’s sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons means with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$. Capital letters indicate comparisons by columns whereas lower-case letters indicate comparisons by rows.

Partisan x Source Bias Interaction: $F(2, 708) = 4.27, p < .05, \eta = .01$

**Explaining the Hostile Media Effect**

A hierarchical regression was used to examine Hypotheses 5 and determine whether or not the perceived effect of the media messages on others (e.g., third person
effect) predicted more unfavorable (hostile media effect or contrast bias) or favorable (assimilation bias) perceptions of a media bias in the media messages partisans read. Attitude about other people (e.g., others in general, others with similar attitudes, others with different attitudes, and others with neutral attitudes) served as the four predictor variables, while attitudes about media bias served as the criterion variable. A regression analysis was run for both pro and anti partisans.

The order of the independent variable placed in each block mirrored the order of the perceived influence on others. The results of this study showed partisans perceived the influence on others incrementally increased with each group. Others with similar attitudes were the least group influential followed by those with different attitudes, others in general, and others with neutral attitudes. The first predictor block consisted of the influence on other people with similar attitudes. The second block consisted of others with different attitudes. The third block consisted of others in general and the fourth predictor block consisted of others with neutral attitudes. Table 10 reports the statistics associated with these variables, and shows that together, these variables account for a significant portion of the variance in perceptions of media bias for both partisan groups.

Hypotheses 5 probed the likelihood a perceived influence on others in general (H5a), others with different attitudes (H5b), and others with neutral attitudes (H5d; third person effect) would result in more unfavorable perceptions of media content. For pro partisans, the influence of the media message on other people with different attitudes ($\beta = -.43, p < .001$) was a significant predictor of less favorable attitudes of media coverage against respondents’ opinion. Attitudes about the perceived effect on others in general
Table 10: Predictors of Hostile Media Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Pro Partisans</th>
<th>Anti Partisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Attitudes</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental $R^2$</td>
<td>.011*</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Attitudes</td>
<td>-.43***</td>
<td>-.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental $R^2$</td>
<td>.233***</td>
<td>.147***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other People in General</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental $R^2$</td>
<td>.010*</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Attitudes</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental $R^2$</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.031***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final $R^2$</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Coefficients are final standardized $\beta$. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the media message is perceived.

Model Pro Partisans: $F(4, 428) = 36.75***$
Model Anti Partisans: $F(4, 288) = 16.93***$

*p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001

also proved to be a significant predictor of a negative media bias ($\beta = -.16, p = .017$). For anti partisans, thinking about the perceived effect on others with similar attitudes produced more favorable attitudes ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) whereas thinking about the perceived effect on others with different attitudes produced a less favorable and more negative media bias ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$). Contemplating a perceived media effect on others with neutral views predicted a more unfavorable media bias ($\beta = -.24, p = .001$).
The regression results show Hypotheses 5a, examining other people in general, was only supported for pro partisans, not anti partisans. Hypothesis 5b, examining other people with different attitudes, was fully supported for each partisan group in the predicted direction. Hypothesis 5d examining others with neutral attitudes was fully supported for anti partisans, but not pro partisans.

Hypothesis 5c examined the likelihood that a perceived influence on other people who possess issue attitudes similar to the partisan would result in more favorable attitudes of media bias, resulting in an assimilation opposed to a contrast effect. The results indicated the perceived effect on those with similar partisan views significantly predicted a positive media bias for pro ($\beta = .27, p < .001$) and anti ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) partisans. Hypothesis 5c was fully supported in the predicted direction for both partisan groups.

**Third Person Perceptions as a Mediator**

Hypothesis 6 predicted third person perceptions would mediate the relationship between source bias (no source bias, pro source bias, and anti source bias) and hostile media perceptions. These relationships were examined using a macro developed for SPSS by Preacher and Hayes (2004). The Sobel test results (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) are reported for third person perceptions on all four groups of others examined within this study: a) other people in general, b) others with similar attitudes, c) others with different or contrasting attitudes, and d) others with neutral attitudes.

**Other people in general.** When the source did not have an explicit bias, the relationship between the independent variable (no source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) approached significance ($\beta = -.06, p = .084$). After
controlling for the mediator (influence on others in general) this relationship still approached significance ($\beta = -.30, p = .094$). When the source possessed a pro bias the relationship between the independent variable (pro source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .05, p = .114$). After controlling for the mediator (influence on others in general) this relationship was still not significant ($\beta = -.30, p = .164$). When the source possessed an anti bias the relationship between the independent variable (anti source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .01, p = .891$). After controlling for the mediator (influence on others in general) this relationship was still not significant ($\beta = -.30, p = .786$). Hypothesis 6 was not supported for the perceived influence on other people in general.

**Others with similar attitudes.** When no source bias was present, the relationship between the independent variable (no source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) approached significance ($\beta = -.06, p = .086$) and it became less significant, but still approached significance after controlling for the mediator (influence on others with similar attitudes) ($\beta = .08, p = .091$). When sources possessed a pro bias the relationship between the independent variable (pro source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .06, p = .149$). After controlling for the mediator (influence on others with similar attitudes) this relationship was still not significant ($\beta = .09, p = .128$). When sources possessed an anti bias the relationship between the independent variable (anti source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .01, p = .791$). This relationship was still non-significant after controlling for the mediator (influence on
Hypothesis 6 was not supported for the perceived influence on others within similar attitudes.

**Others with contrasting attitudes.** When the source did not have a bias, the relationship between the independent (no source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) approached significance ($\beta = .07, p = .065$). This relationship was still significant after controlling for the mediator (influence on others with contrasting attitudes) ($\beta = -.40, p = .049$). Using sources with a pro bias, the relationship between the independent (pro source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) approached significance ($\beta = .04, p = .098$). After controlling for the mediator (influence on others with contrasting attitudes) this relationship was not significant ($\beta = -.40, p = .235$). For sources with an anti bias, the relationship between the independent (anti source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .03, p = .856$). After controlling for the mediator (influence on others with contrasting attitudes) this relationship was still not significant ($\beta = -.40, p = .446$). Hypothesis 6 was not supported for the perceived influence on other people with contrasting attitudes.

**Others with neutral attitudes.** When there was no identifiable source bias a significant relationship existed between the independent variable (no source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) ($\beta = -.07, p = .049$). When controlling for the mediator (influence on others with neutral attitudes) the relationship between the variables did not change and were still significant ($\beta = -.22, p = .052$). For sources with a pro bias the relationship between the independent variable (pro source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant ($\beta = .05, p = .136$).
After controlling for the mediator (influence on others with neutral attitudes) this relationship was still not significant (β = -.22, p = .147). When examining sources with an anti bias the relationship between the independent variable (anti source bias) and the dependent variable (hostile media perceptions) was not significant (β = .02, p = .649). This relationship was still not significant after controlling for the mediator (influence on others with neutral attitudes) (β = -.22, p = .635). Hypothesis 6 was not supported for the perceived influence on other people with neutral attitudes.

In no instance was Hypothesis 6 supported. Third person perceptions for other people in general, others with similar attitudes, others with contrasting attitudes, and others with neutral attitudes did not mediate the relationship for source bias and hostile perceptions.

**Antecedents of Hostile Perceptions**

Research Question 7 examined antecedents of the hostile media effect. Media skepticism, media reliance, and media credibility were all thought to predict more unfavorable attitudes of media content and therefore result in a contrast bias or hostile media perceptions. For each partisan group hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to explore the research question. The first predictor block consisted of eight sociodemographic variables (age, education, income, biological sex, sexual orientation, political leanings, and political party). Three additional blocks of variables were entered sequentially: media skepticism (Block 2), media reliance (Block 3; reliance on blogs in general, media blogs, issue blogs, and online newspapers), and media credibility (Block 4; online news credibility, media blog credibility, and issue blog credibility).
Hierarchical regression analysis featured four blocks of variables for both groups of partisans. For pro partisans income level (\( \beta = .12, p < .05 \)) proved a significant predictor. Media blog credibility was a positive predictor of attitudes (\( \beta = .25, p < .001 \)) and issue blog credibility was a potential negative predictor (\( \beta = -.11, p < .10 \)). For anti partisans political party proved the only significant predictor of hostile perceptions (\( \beta = -.14, p < .05 \)). As Table 11 highlights, only media credibility proved to be a significant predictor in the overall model for pro partisans. For research question 7, the findings suggest media skepticism and media reliance were not predictors of hostile perceptions of actual media content. Media credibility is a potential predictor of hostile perceptions, but only for pro partisans.
Table 11: Antecedents of Hostile Media Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pro Partisans</th>
<th>Anti Partisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodemographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sex</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Leanings</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Party</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.14†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Skepticism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Reliance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Newspaper</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs, in General</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Blogs</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Blog</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Credibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online News Credibility</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Blog Credibility</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Blog Credibility</td>
<td>-.11†</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.038**</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final R²</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Entries are standardized regression coefficients in a hierarchical multiple regression. For anti partisans, there was no variability in sexual orientation so it was left out of the analysis. Coefficients are final standardized betas. Only the final model entry coefficients are shown. Mean scores for perceptions of media bias are measured on an 11-point Likert scale. The scale was multiplied by -1 for anti partisans so in every instance, higher values represent favorable media perceptions aligning with partisan views. Negative values represent perceptions of media bias against partisan views. The greater the score the more favorably or unfavorably the information is perceived.

Model Pro Partisans: $F(15, 377) = 1.71^*$
Model Anti Partisans: $F(14, 226) = .74$

$p ≤ .10 \ast p ≤ .05 \ast\ast p ≤ .01 \ast\ast\ast p ≤ .001$
Chapter 6

Discussion

Hostile Media Perceptions Online

This study explored how the hostile media effect manifests itself in online communication. Unlike other experimental studies of this effect, which utilize broadcast and print media sources, this research accounts for the nuances of user-generated content and compares it to news content. The power of perceptions in shaping attitudes is evident in how partisans perceived both traditional and online media coverage on issues with which they were highly involved. As this study illustrates, disseminating news and information through blogs is not necessarily more advantages than using other online media channels. Despite the medium used, partisans are likely to see unbiased news on an attitude-congruent issue as biased against their position when reading both blogs and more traditional online media.

Hypothesis 1 found partisans’ perceptions of media coverage were not necessarily more favorable when reading information posted on an issue blog than on a more traditional news source (e.g., online news story). When partisans viewed either an issue-oriented blog or an online news story, without an identifiable source bias, the type of media viewed did not exert more or less influence in shaping perceptions. Issue opponents and proponents perceived media content unfavorably, against their opinions; the type of media did not influence perceptions more or less unfavorably.

However, differences existed in partisan perceptions of online news stories, with pro partisans considering media coverage even more unfavorably than anti partisans. This difference in perceptions is likely a result of partisanship and how this issue
resonates with individuals of varying political positions. The participants in this study were not only divided in their support and opposition of legalizing same-sex marriage, but each group was clearly identifiable by unique political characteristics. Gallup research reported in 2011 shows supporters of legalizing same-sex marriage are primarily affiliated with the Democratic party and liberal than the Republicans party and and conservative (Newport, 2011). Much like those surveyed within this study, issue supporters identified themselves as having liberal views and being registered with the Democratic party. Opponents were conservative and identified with the Republican party.

Not only does this study show attitudes about the issue itself generate hostile perceptions, but other personal characteristics such as an individual’s political disposition contribute to perceptions of online news reports when they cover a polarizing political issue. Researchers have found partisans, particularly those differentiated by distinct political characteristics (e.g., Democrats and Republicans, conservative and liberal, etc.), possess separate media consumption patterns, gravitating toward media content aligning with their views (Hollander, 2008), and consider different types of media credible (Kaye & Johnson, 2004b; 2011). Likewise, this study shows judgments of media bias, much like those of media credibility (Kaye & Johnson, 2011), vary among users of differing political and ideological interests, influencing how favorably or unfavorably they view online news sources.

When considering the political composition of partisan groups, it is not surprising these individuals diverged in their opinions. Research shows conservatives are more skeptical and distrustful of mainstream media than liberals (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Pew
Research Center for the People and Press, 2004) and these biases inform perceptual judgments of specific news sources (Kaye & Johnson 2004b; 2011; Selepak, 2006). When politically conservative and politically liberal individuals consider the conservative or liberal bias of specific media sources they form very different opinions (Selepak, 2006). For example, Selepak (2006) found conservatives and liberals believed specific news programs and newspapers favored their political opponents. When political partisans considered the bias of eight media sources, conservatives considered Newsweek, The Daily Show, CNN, 60 Minutes, The Washington Post, and The New York Times to have a liberal bias. Liberals indicated only the Fox News Channel and Rush Limbaugh’s radio show had a conservative bias. As the current research study illustrates, the opinions of these two politically disparate groups can vary in more than their perceptions of the news source. Attitudes held by those with differing political ideologies help shape and influence perceptions of the media message resulting in different opinions of media messages published in the same news source.

Based upon these diverging partisan perspectives the current study, it would be reasonable to assume issue opponents would view media coverage in a mainstream newspaper more unfavorably than issue proponents. However, the reverse was true. In this case, conservatives considered the online news story more, not less, favorably. Liberals thought the message portrayed their position less favorably. This variation may be a result of partisans’ political makeup as well as the issue itself.

When considering how the issue itself could have influenced partisan perceptions it is important to recognize the nuances of this political debate. Legalizing same-sex marriage conforms to the desires of issue proponents. Currently, most states only
perform marriages between one woman and one man (Confessore, & Arbaro, 2011; “Same-Sex Marriage in the United States,” n.d.). The recognition of one-man, one-woman marriages supports the conservative agenda whereas the fight to legalize same-sex marriage advocates for the liberal agenda (Newport, 2011). When accounting for partisans’ political makeup, along with the dynamics of the issue itself, the results show issue proponents who are advocating for a change from the current system consider information published by mainstream media more biased against their opinion. Issue advocates who desire to change existing policies, procedures, or processes may have a tendency to be more critical of news coverage as they are more involved in the issue than their opponents who are merely trying to maintain the existing structure or social system. This variation in how the issue proponents and opponents in this study view this issue could cause differing views of traditional news sources previously examined within prior studies.

In addition, perceptions of the source identified as not having an explicit source bias chosen for inclusion within this experiment may have impacted perceptions of these two political groups differently. The print version of *USA Today* is a widely distributed newspaper provided in hotels across America (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011). This newspaper has been identified as a “centralist” paper (see Lakeland Liberty Research Guides, 2006), without a liberal or pro Republican agenda. As a result, conservatives may see it as a less threatening and more friendly to their ideology. On the other hand, on this particular issue, liberals may consider this source more threatening to their ideology. This reasoning would support other findings within this study suggesting initial perceptions of the source itself may generate a more hostile bias in individuals
when reading a balanced story from a source opposing their position. The differences among the two parties could influence perceptions such that the source itself contributed to more hostile perceptions identified by proponents.

How media blogs were perceived in relation to online news stories and media blogs was also explored (Research Question 1). The results show media blogs were perceived similar to media reports published in blogs on media and independent websites. Although no significant differences existed between each media type, media blogs were never perceived more or less unfavorably than online news stories or issue blogs (see Figure 1). This trend existed for both groups of partisans. Issue proponents considered the message found in online news stories less favorable than the same information presented in the media blog. The media blog was perceived less favorable than the issue blog. The reverse trend was also true for issue opponents: the online news story was viewed more favorable than the media blog, which was perceived more favorable than the issue blog.

The result of Research Question 2 are not surprising as media blogs exhibit characteristics of both traditional media reports and other types of blogs (Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2008; 2009; Johnson et al., 20007; Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2005). As this study shows, the author and publisher, which in this case was identified as coming from USA Today, influenced partisan perceptions such that individuals could not disassociate their perceptions of traditional media from that of the different format, style, and design of blogs. These findings imply media organizations who provide blogs and traditional news stories on their news websites are not likely to influence partisan perceptions very differently by merely presenting the news in a different venue. Pre-existing attitudes for
or against an issue exert a greater influence on partisan perceptions than the type of online source they view, even if sources like blogs are known for more subjective than objective content (Blood, 2002b, 2002c; Johnson & Kaye, 2004a, 2008; 2009; Johnson et al., 2008; Perlmutter, 2008).

The results of the current study show blogs signal a broader audience of other people and are capable of generating hostile perceptions of media content from partisans. Much like traditional media sources, which are thought to possess a broader reach thereby signaling a greater influence on other people (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004), blogs elicit similar perceptions and are therefore capable of arousing hostile perceptions. This is true for blogs affiliated (media blog) and unaffiliated (issue blog) with news organizations as well as blog posts published by users and industry experts alike, not just reporters. Ultimately, individuals who are exposed to mass media make judgments about the angle or bias it possess. They assume the media has a broad reach and the media content influences others (Gunther & Storey, 2003). Assuming these assumptions about mass media are true, then this study shows blogs are viable media sources subject to similar cognitive assessments and judgments.

**Media Source Bias**

Blogs and traditional media sources don’t always identify themselves as offering a balanced perspective of the news. They report the news through a biased lens and identify themselves as possessing an explicit source bias, advocating for one particular position or agenda (e.g., liberal agenda) more than another (Goldberg, 2003, Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2004; Pfau, Houston, & Semmler, 2007). The present study explored how hostile perceptions were influenced by
an explicit bias from the news source (e.g., the explicit liberal or conservative leanings of the news source). Hypothesis 2 identified partisan perceptions of online media when it possessed a source bias aligning and opposing their issue attitude. As predicted, when the news source possessed a bias aligning with partisans’ attitude positions it was perceived more favorably. When the news source possessed a bias opposing the partisans’ attitudes position it was perceived less favorably. Unlike other hostile media studies in this area (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther et al., 2009), these results provide a clearer picture of how source bias influences perceptions of online media, including blogs.

The influence of additional variables such as the type of media where partisans read the news, as well as its source bias was also explored. The data suggest the actual source of the news (e.g., USAToday.com) opposed to the venue where it appears (e.g., within a blog, news story, etc.) will impact perceptions of the content. Individuals look to news sources for cues regarding how to interpret messages and then gauge the slant of the messages contained therein. Results from Research Question 2 showed regardless of the type of online source viewed, there were no variations in how partisans perceived online news stories, media blogs, and issue blogs possessing a source bias. When any of the three online sources possessed a source bias aligning with partisans’ attitudes it was perceived more favorably than when it opposed partisans’ views. Merely presenting news and information online through what Luders (2008) defined as mass media (websites with institutional ties) or personal media (websites without institutional ties) is insufficient to significantly alter perceptions and elicit hostile perceptions. When reading online sources for news and information, individuals see what they expect to see.
Reading news from a biased source taints the lens through which individuals view the media content itself.

*Research Question 3* took this one step further by exploring the relationship among partisans, media type, and source bias when sources possessed an explicit bias and when they did not. The data revealed issue proponents considered the source without a bias and the source opposing their position more unfavorably than when the source aligned with their views. Issue opponents viewed sources with an explicit bias more unfavorably when it opposed their view (pro sources) and less favorably when it aligned with their view (anti sources). Unlike issue proponents, issue opponents did not view sources without a bias differently than those with a bias. Partisans differed in this regard, illustrating how partisans’ involvement in the issue examined varies and subsequently influences how the source (Selepek, 2006; Arpan & Raney, 2003) and its message is viewed.

A partisan by media type by source bias interaction also showed issue proponents considered information presented within the online news site with no identifiable bias significantly more hostile than when it was presented on a news site advocating their opinion. This same distinction for sources opposing their position tends to be much more hostile as well. However, the lack of significant difference between pro and anti sources here might be a result of the stimulus itself as the anti news source was a fictitious news site and the other two news sources came from existing news sources.

Taken together, these results indicate partisans, and in this instance pro partisans, are likely to view sources without a bias similar to those sources with an opposing source bias. This cannot be said for issue opponents as there was no difference in how issue
opponents viewed different types of media sources without an explicit bias and those with a bias. These findings lend support to why in Hypothesis 1 issue proponents perceived the online news story more unfavorably than issue opponents. They considered the online news source without a bias to have distinct characteristics from the pro source that aligned with their views, and maybe even considered this seemingly neutral source, which is not known for explicit liberal or conservative leanings (Lakeland Liberty Research Guides, 2006) as being a biased source with more conservative leanings for this issue.

**Thinking about Others**

Research shows preexisting attitudes and opinions about a message have the potential to influence third person perceptions, both diminishing and attenuating the effect (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Oliver et al., 2008; Tsfati & Cohen, 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising Hypothesis 3 found partisans who possessed strong opinions on a controversial social issue perceived the media message as having a greater effect on others who could potentially read the message than on themselves. This perceived influence was not only overestimated for other people in general, but also on others with attitudes similar to their own, others with attitudes different from their own, and others with neutral attitudes. Hypothesis 4 confirmed partisans considered individuals with attitudes resembling their own to be the least influential group of others. Driscoll and Salwen (1997) found preexisting beliefs of O.J. Simpson’s guilt or innocence influenced third person perceptions by reducing the magnitude of the effect when readers’ attitudes aligned with the media message. As others with attitudes aligning with the partisan were the group most similar to the partisan, it stands to reason
partisans thought these individuals would be influenced by the information they read the least. Third person research suggests those who share similar attitudes are influenced by the media’s message less than those with dissimilar attitudes (Cohen et al., 1988; Eveland et al., 1999; Oliver et al., 2008).

For each partisan group, Research Question 4 shows the perceived influence of the article/post significantly increased for each of the four groups of other people examined. As partisans perceived others as being less similar and more dissimilar from the partisan the media’s influence for this group increased (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Cohen et al., 1988; Driscol & Salwen, 1997; Oliver et al., 2008; Paul, Salwen, & Dupange, 2000). For both groups of partisans, those with similar attitudes were always the least influential group of others and the group perceived as being the most similar to the partisan (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Cohen et al., 1988; Driscol & Salwen, 1997; Paul, Salwen, & Dupange, 2000). The magnitude of influence increased for those with contrasting attitudes followed by others in general and then others with neutral attitudes. Third person perceptions did not significantly differ for issue proponents or opponents when they were considering the influence of the message on others with varying issue attitudes (see Research Question 5).

Partisans identified others in general as the third most influential group. They were perceived as being significantly more influential than others with contrasting attitudes. This is the most ambiguous group of others, leaving partisans without a clear identity, description, or attitude position regarding the persons being referenced. Others with neutral attitudes were considered the most influential group. Again, this is not surprising when one considers the attitudes of these individuals do not reside with a
partisan group. Partisans would perceive individuals with neutral attitudes as being more susceptible to misleading or opposing information (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Storey, 2003) that could influence them to believe the information, change their attitudes, and support an opposing position.

Research Question 6 probed the influence of media type, source bias, and partisanship on the third person effect. The findings of this study replicate research by Banning and Sweetser (2007), showing various types of blogs and traditional news stories elicit third person perceptions similarly. Changing the media source from a blog to an online news site did not elicit distinct third person perceptions of others with distinct attitude differences. However, partisanship and source bias did have the potential to influence this perception. The presence of source bias influenced the media’s perceived potential to influence others with contrasting and different issue attitudes. When issue proponents viewed a source aligning with their issue position (pro bias source) they underestimated the influence of the media message on their opponents. This same group of partisans (issue proponents) overestimated this influence on issue opponents when reading a source that did not align with their attitudes but aligned with the attitudes of their opponents. Like proponents, opponents overestimated the media’s influence on issue proponents when the source aligned with the opposition.

When partisans view sources with an issue-relevant bias third person perceptions are aroused as a result of partisans interpreting the media message as reinforcing others’ attitudes opposed to merely changing their attitudes (Oliver et al., 2008). When considering the influence of the message on others who are members of the opposing political party, partisans believed the media message matched the viewpoint held by
those of the ‘other’ partisan group. The perceptual effect identified here occurred because partisans thought the message was actually reinforcing the opposing party’s attitude, not because they were afraid of the persuasive influence it would actually have in changing issue opponents’ attitudes to align with their own.

The implications of these findings are intriguing when considering the tendency for partisans to gravitate toward media more in line with their views (Hollander, 2008) and scan the political landscape for news and information regarding the opposition. These results show partisans on both sides of the political spectrum who survey the political landscape and read blogs and news sites that do not align with their views will consider the media to have a greater influence on others with whom the media’s bias does align. When partisans access news from online sources aligning with their views the media’s perceived influence is likely to be attenuated for others with whom the news bias does align.

The primary reason or establishing the existence of the third person perception within this research was to determine if the perceptions discussed here can indeed predict why partisans perceived media coverage of a controversial social issue as biased when reading unbiased content. As Hypothesis 5 revealed how partisans perceived others would be influenced by media coverage of a controversial social issue of great importance to them was able to predict how favorably or unfavorably they perceived media content. The influence of the media message on others with similar attitudes independently predicted more favorable attitudes of online media messages for issue proponents and opponents. Likewise, the perceived influence on others with contrasting issue attitudes predicted a greater hostile media bias, resulting in more unfavorable
perceptions of the media messages against the partisans’ attitude position. The attitudes of issue opponents and proponents veered from one another in their predictions of the perceived influence on other people in general and others with neutral attitudes. For issue proponents the influence on others in general predicted more unfavorable attitudes of media coverage whereas for issue opponents those with neutral attitudes were more likely to view the media coverage unfavorably, against their opinions. Although this study is not designed to test the potential partisan differences here, the results show the perceived influence on others arouses hostile perceptions. This supports conjectures from others research and shows hostile perceptions are aroused from the perceived influence on others who are considered more dissimilar from one’s self.

When making judgments of how the media are covering an issue of great importance to them, this study confirms the media’s perceived influence on others does indeed impact perceptions of the media’s perceived bias. Partisans not only use their own attitude position to gauge the influence on others, but the differences in others who possess attitudes that differ from or align with their own attitudes are used as a referent for gauging how biased they perceive media coverage for or against their attitudes.

This study confirms when individuals read a news source they consider its ability to reach or influence others (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Perloff, 1989). This perceived influence alters how biased messages are considered. However, this influence on others does not explain why hostile perceptions are formed when partisans read messages from news sources with a bias (see Hypothesis 6). In this instance, the perceived influence on others was not a mediating variable. Although third person perceptions predict hostile perceptions and source bias influences hostile
perceptions, there is not necessarily a relationship between source bias and third person perceptions. Therefore, no mediating relationship was identified.

**Antecedents**

The findings of this study indicate media reliance and media skepticism are not predictors of hostile perceptions. Blog credibility is a potential predictor, particularly for the issue proponents in this study. As the present study shows, media skepticism does not translate into actual interpretations of a hostile bias of the media stories themselves. These results contrast with prior research (Choi et al., 2009) showing media skepticism can play a role in hostile media perceptions and positively predict them. Choi and colleagues (2009) examined perceptions of the National Security Law in South Korea and found those who were more skeptical of mainstream media thought the media covered the issue more negatively against their opinion.

As the current research shows, more general perceptions of the media itself (media skepticism and media credibility) and reliance on it do not influence hostile perceptions of specific media coverage, specifically for issue opponents. The same is true for issue proponents, except when credibility is involved. For proponents, media blog credibility predicted more favorable attitudes and issue blog credibility predicted more unfavorable attitudes; however, the overall variance this variable explained within the model was not particularly large.

Survey research using nationally representative samples (e.g., Atkinson, 2007; Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Eveland & Shah, 2003; Gunther, 1992; Gunther & Christen, 2002), as well as experimental studies, have both successfully identified the hostile media phenomenon (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Schmitt,
Within survey research participant responses reflect general assessments of topical coverage portrayed by specific types of media (e.g., newspapers, television, radio, the Internet, etc.) opposed to perceptions of actual content on an issue-relevant topic. Ultimately, results obtained utilizing these two different methodologies tell two very different stories, one that reflects perceptions of specific, identifiable content (experimental research) and another that highlights overall media coverage perceptions of an issue (survey research).

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited in the specific message content utilized for each type of media. In order to gauge differences in the various media outlets it was essential to keep the content the same and only vary the order of the arguments. Although formatting and website design helped create the appearance of online newspapers, media blogs, and issue blogs, the writing style of blogs and news stories are not necessarily similar and they can vary by blog genre (e.g., personal blog vs. media blog) or the personal writing style and preferences of the blogger. News stories are accompanied by journalistic norms, including the formulaic writing style of the inverted pyramid. Blogs are less formulaic and capture the writing style of the individual blogger or bloggers. It would be interesting to see if a looser writing style would produce a greater and more pronounced effect for issue blogs without a clearly identifiable source bias. Research shows the type of blog can produce different credibility judgments based upon the political characteristics of the individuals accessing the news (Johnson & Kaye, 2008; Kaye & Johnson, 2011). Perhaps more introspective thoughts regarding the news story, such as
those provided within personal journals or first-hand accounts of the issue (e.g., war blogs written by those experiencing war; Johnson & Kaye, 2008) would produce more pronounced differences in perceptions of blogs and alter perceptions.

Future studies in this area may consider the use of other issues to gauge whether or not partisan reactions to information presented in an online news story, a media blog, or an issue blog are similar to those identified here in the context of legalizing same-sex marriage. Additional studies examining perceptions of blogs may explore blogs that are well-known by readers and not necessarily fictitious. This could include more prominent A-list blogs/bloggers (Perlmutter, 2008; Trammell & Keshelashvilli, 2005) and how the media’s prominence and extended reach influence content perceptions.

As the partisans who participated in this study were comprised of very distinct political characteristics researchers should examine other divisive political issues to compare how political partisans differ or align with these findings. Recognizing the dynamics of this issue could also influence these results, additional research examining political characteristics and issue advocacy among partisans warrants replication of this study utilizing various issues and blog genres, particularly when no source bias is present.

Even though reliance on media was not a predictor of hostile perceptions, these findings may be limited by the fact respondents gained access to the experiment online from blogs and websites associated with the issue. In most cases they accessed the study from sites aligning with their views. Therefore, it is possible the potential for blogs to reach and influence others and subsequently arouse hostile perceptions were in some way associated with their perceptions of the site on which they accessed the study. If respondents thought the website or blog on which they accessed the study had a greater
reach than they might consider the specific blog they viewed to have similar characteristics. Similar findings have been identified in the transferability of trust.

Accessing and reading a news story from a credible news site through a news portal (e.g., Yahoo News and Google News) actually boosts trust in the portal (Kang, Bae, Zhang, & Sundar, 2012). Making the study available through offline means may help eliminate any potential effects this could cause.

The nature of online communication has potential drawbacks for researchers. The risk of making survey research available online, particularly on well-known blogging websites, is having participants publish their comments about the research on the very site participants could access the study. Comments posted below blog posts featuring the survey link have the potential to sway future participants about whether or not to participate. In this study, readers of one activist website were inclined to comment on what they thought about the study. One participant even provided a “spoiler alert,” offering their perspective on the purpose of the research. For an online experiment this is particularly dangerous because there are nine experimental conditions and those posting comments only viewed one of them. However, this particular commenter was gracious enough to clearly alert the reader they were providing a potential “spoiler” and told readers not to read further unless they wanted to know more.

Gauging perceptions of blog readers on this particular issue increases external validity. However, maintaining control over where participants come across the link and take part in the study is not easily controlled. Some individuals chose to post the survey link on Facebook, twitter or other forums. Although the questionnaire asked participants to identify where they came across the study, this source was not always identified and
some respondents indicated they could not remember. But for the most part participants accessed the study through blogs. In addition, the study was not created for mobile devices. Those trying to participate in this study through a mobile device may not have been fully exposed to the stimulus. Future researchers should take care to consider the implications of individuals accessing media stories, broadcasts, and blog posts online using portable devices. Other drawbacks of online research include what participants do during the study. Individuals could be taking part in the study and at the same time attempting to validate whether or not the news article/blog post, media source, or author truly exists. In instances like these, a more controlled setting may be warranted.

**Conclusions**

Public relations practitioners and news reporters alike should recognize how they present a message is not necessarily how it’s perceived. Partisans see what they expected to see. Regardless of how truly balanced reporters write stories or campaign managers present information, the ideological bias or lens through which many online and offline news sources report the news (e.g., liberal or conservative) is likely to play a greater role in influencing perceptions than the type of media through which it appears. When no bias is present or identifiable within the news source, partisans are left to look at the message itself and interpret the message through their own biased lens. This means, regardless of how messages are presented, when news outlets are perceived as catering to either a specific audience, namely conservative or liberal groups, partisans are likely to perceive the news stories and blog posts associated with them as having a matching bias. Prior attitudes and the level of involvement with the issue will alter perceptions, regardless of the message presented online.
This study shows within the online news environment, user and media-generated messages posted online on blogs or news websites elicit hostile perceptions similar to offline media (e.g., television broadcast news). Media blogs are a particularly intriguing venue for professional communicators to use. They lend the long-standing journalistic traditions individuals have relied upon for decades with the more free-flowing style of blogs readers identify as being more credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2002; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2009; 2010a; 2010b). However, as this study indicates, blending the blogging format and journalistic news style does not significantly alter how the message is perceived. Partisan perceptions of news are not more favorably influenced by user-generated news sources than those coming from a news organization.
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Appendix A: Measurement Instrument

Media Skepticism

What are your general perceptions of mainstream news media?

1. Unfair  (-3)-------(-2)-------(-1)-------(0)-------(1)-------(2)-------(3)  Fair
2. Biased  (-3)-------(-2)-------(-1)-------(0)-------(1)-------(2)-------(3)  Unbiased
3. Accurate (-3)-------(-2)-------(-1)-------(0)-------(1)-------(2)-------(3)  Inaccurate
4. Untrustworthy (-3)-------(-2)-------(-1)-------(0)-------(1)-------(2)-------(3)  Trustworthy
5. Tells the whole story  (-3)-------(-2)-------(-1)-------(0)-------(1)-------(2)-------(3)  Doesn’t tell the whole story

Media Reliance

In general, how much do you RELY on the following sources for obtaining news and information on political and social issues?

1. Social Networking Websites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily

2. Blogs, in general
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily

3. Blogs written by a journalist or hosted on a news media website
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily

4. Blogs written about issues or topics of interest to you that are NOT affiliated with the news media
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily

5. Newspapers
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily

6. Online Newspapers
   No Reliance  0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7  Rely Heavily
7. **Television News**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

8. **Television News Online (MSNBC online, NBC Nightly News online, etc.)**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

9. **News Magazines**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

10. **Online News Magazines**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

11. **Radio News**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

12. **Online RADIO News**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

13. **Issue-Oriented Websites (general information or organization sites)**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily

14. **Online News Websites (Yahoo News, Digg.com, Google News, etc.)**

No Reliance 0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7 Rely Heavily
**Media Credibility**
(blogs in general, online news sites, media blogs, and issue blogs)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
In general, I think *Online News Media Websites*...

1. **Online news sites accurately discuss the issues.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree

2. **Online news sites fairly represent the issues.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree

3. **Online news sites are believable.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree

4. **Online news sites provide in-depth information on news and events.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree

In general, I think *Media/Journalist Blogs*... (Blogs written by a journalist or hosted on a news media website.)

1. **Media blogs accurately discuss the issues.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree

2. **Media blogs fairly represent the issues.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Somewhat Disagree  (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree  (5) Somewhat Agree  (6) Agree  (7) Strongly Agree
3. **Media blogs are believable.**

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4. **Media blogs provide in-depth information on news and events.**

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In general, I think blogs, specifically those written about particular issues or topics of interest to me... (These blogs are NOT affiliated with the news media.)

1. **Issue blogs accurately discuss the issues.**

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2. **Issue blogs fairly represent the issues.**

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3. **Issue blogs are believable.**

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4. **Issue blogs provide in-depth information on news and events.**

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Attitude Extremity Measures
(Attitude Strength)

How much you agree or disagree with the following statements about same-sex marriage in the United States:

1. **Same-sex couples should be able to legally marry in every state.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Somewhat Disagree (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree (5) Somewhat Agree (6) Agree (7) Strongly Agree

2. **States should only recognize marriages between a man and a woman.**

   (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Somewhat Disagree (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree (5) Somewhat Agree (6) Agree (7) Strongly Agree

Personal Involvement

How important is the issue of legalizing (or not legalizing) same-sex marriage to YOU?

1. **Unimportant** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Important**

2. **Of no concern** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Of much concern**

3. **Doesn’t matter** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Matters to me**

4. **Means nothing** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Means a lot**

5. **Insignificant** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Significant**

6. **Irrelevant** (1)-------(2)-------(3)-------(4)-------(5)-------(6)-------(7) **Relevant**

INTRODUCTION OF STIMULUS MATERIAL
Media Bias Scale

Please provide the opinion of what you just read…

1. Would you say the news article / blog post you just read provided a balanced and accurate portrayal of the issue or was it biased for or against legalizing same-sex marriage (SSM)?

   5-------4-------3-------2-------1-------0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5
   Strongly Biased Against                Neutral                 Strongly Biased in Favor of
   Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage                         Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage

2. Would you say the journalist / blogger responsible for writing this news article / blog post was strictly neutral in his or her opinion, or was the journalist / blogger biased?

   5-------4-------3-------2-------1-------0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5
   Strongly Biased Against                Neutral                  Strongly Biased in Favor of
   Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage                         Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage

3. What percentage of the news article / blog post favored legalizing same-sex marriage?

   0%----10%-----20%-----30%-----40%-----50%-----60%-----70%-----80%-----90%----100%

4. What percentage of the news article / blog post favored traditional marriage?

   0%----10%-----20%-----30%-----40%-----50%-----60%-----70%-----80%-----90%----100%

5. How would you rate the overall tone of the news article / blog post you just read?

   5-------4-------3-------2-------1-------0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5
   Strongly Biased Against                Neutral                 Strongly Biased in Favor of
   Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage                         Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage
Third Person Perceptions

When thinking about what you just read…

Self Question

1. How much influence did the *news article / blog post* you just read have on your *own attitude* about legalizing same-sex marriage?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence

Others Question

2. How much influence will the information contained within the *news article / blog post* you just read have on the attitudes or opinions of *other people* who read this *article / post*?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence

Social Distance Corollary

3. How much influence will the *news article / blog post* you just read have on the attitudes or opinions of other people who possess opinions on the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage *that are very similar to your own*?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence

4. How much influence would you say the *news article / blog post* you just read have on the attitudes or opinions of *other people who possess opinions that sharply contrast with and are very different from your views* on legalizing same-sex marriage?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence

5. How much influence will the *news article / blog post* you just read have on the attitudes or opinions of *other people who have neutral opinions* on legalizing same-sex marriage?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence

6. How much influence will the *news article / blog post* you just read have on the attitudes or opinions of *other people who are undecided* about whether or not they think states should legalizing same-sex marriage?

   0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6
   No Influence at All                               A Great Deal of Influence
Media Source Familiarity

1. Prior to today, how familiar are you with (name of specific article/blog source*)?  

0-------1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6  
Not at all familiar  Very Familiar  
(I’ve never visited this site)  (I visit this site regularly)  

*In instances when a media blog was viewed, two questions were asked, one for the media outlet and another for the blog.

Media Use Questions

1. On a typical weekday, how many hours do you spend reading/viewing news websites?  

   Hours __________  
   Minutes __________  

2. On a typical weekday, how many hours do you spend reading/viewing blogs (blogs of any kind)?  

   Hours __________  
   Minutes __________  

Demographic Questions

1. In general, how do you view yourself politically?  
   a. Very liberal  
   b. Liberal  
   c. Moderate  
   d. Conservative  
   e. Very conservative

2. What political party are you registered with?  
   a. Republican  
   b. Democratic  
   c. Independent  
   d. Libertarian  
   e. Green  
   f. Other  
   g. None

3. As of your last birthday, what is your age? _______
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Less than high school
   b. High school graduate / GED
   c. Some college education (including education from a technical or trade school)
   d. Four-year college degree
   e. Master’s degree
   f. Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Ed.D.) or professional doctoral degree (MD, JD, DDS)

5. Please estimate your 2011 household income.
   $ __________ [Use Drop Down Menu]

6. What is your (biological) sex:
   Male    Female

7. What is your sexual orientation?
   a. Heterosexual
   b. Lesbian
   c. Gay
   d. Bisexual
   e. Asexual

8. Where did you learn about this study?
   a. From someone I know (e.g., friend, family member, coworker, etc.)
   b. Online (provide name of blog or website
   ____________________________
Appendix B: Media Message

State Definitions of Marriage

Last night, the New York Legislature voted, making New York the sixth, and largest, state in which gay and lesbian couples can legally wed. New York is not only the third most populated state in the nation, but it is more populated than any other state, including the District of Columbia, which currently grants marriages for same-sex couples.

Prior to the New York Senate’s approval, same-sex couples in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the District of Columbia enjoyed the same marital privileges as opposite-sex couples. But most states define marriage as a relationship solely between a man and a woman.

In the upcoming 2012 election year, voters and state legislatures alike within Minnesota, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Oregon could possibly face similar decisions as they determine who can legally marry within their geographic borders: one man and one woman or any two persons.

Thus far, states that have put this issue on the ballot for voters to decide have consistently banned the practice of same-sex marriage. It is the individual state legislatures that have both legalized and prohibited this practice through various legislative redefinitions.

Marriage, without a Redefinition
Advocates of traditional man-woman marriage say disregarding the gender of married couples, and redefining marriage to include any two persons of the same sex, undermines the institution of marriage. This suggests states like New York, which have redefined marriage, are not only changing the definition of marriage, they are changing the very nature of marriage.

Those in favor of traditional marriage consider marriage a sacred institution intended exclusively for unions between men and women. Some religions believe God designed marriage this way.

Opponents of legalizing same-sex marriage say marriage is more than a commitment shared between any two people who love each other; marriage is a social institution characterized by other fundamental and important attributes such as childbearing and childrearing. Subjecting this long-standing institution to a redefinition attempts to change the most basic unit through which society operates, and has operated for centuries.

The Family Research Council claim traditional marriage is beneficial for all family members. Redefining marriage to include unions between any two persons is likely to have an adverse impact on society and its most fundamental unit—the family.
Research indicates the unique contributions made by both a father and a mother who are able to participate in the child-rearing process produces a variety of positive psychological and behavioral effects not easily compensated for by two partners of the same-sex. Giving children an opportunity to grow up in a home with a biological mother and father protects and promotes the well-being of children.

Changing the Definition of Marriage
Gay-rights advocates consider the adoption of state alternatives to legalizing same-sex marriage such as civil unions and domestic partnerships insufficient alternatives to marriage. Civil unions are considered an intermediate step to obtaining marriage equality.

Even though civil unions are accompanied by many of the same state-level rights (e.g. death benefits, insurance benefits, hospital visitation privileges, adoption rights, propriety rights, etc.) and responsibilities of marriage, those in favor of marriage equality say they are devoid of the same title and status afforded to couples comprised of men and women, namely marriage.

Marriage equality supporters say classifying unions between two people of the same sex as anything other than marriage is a form of second-class citizenship. Marriage is a public expression of love as well as a personal commitment to another person. In order to obtain marriage equality, all individuals in a loving, committed, and enduring relationship should have the right to legally marry and be given in marriage.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force claim an inclusive definition of marriage, which embraces any two adult persons, creates an equal opportunity for all Americans to participate. Marriage is not only a civil right; it is a basic human right.

Research indicates a redefinition of marriage does more than recognize gay and lesbian married couples as families or give them government protections. Marriage provides these couples with the benefits of greater economic security and peace of mind that could benefit the children raised in these homes.

The Definition's Future
New York’s re-definition of marriage, which was determined by four senate votes, illustrates the social and political controversy surrounding each states definition of marriage. Moving forward, the responsibility of defining marriage may not rest in the hands of state representatives or even ballot box initiatives; the destiny of this definition may ultimately reside with the Supreme Court and future rulings on this issue. Only time will tell.
Appendix C: Media Stimuli

1. News Site with No Identifiable Bias

2. News Site with Pro Source Bias

3. News Site with Anti Source Bias

4. Media Blog with No Identifiable Bias
5. Media Blog with Pro Source Bias

6. Media Blog with Anti Source Bias

7. Issue Blog with No Identifiable Bias
8. Issue Blog with Pro Source Bias

LezTalk...
LGBT Rights, Equal Rights

Home Archives About

9. Issue Blog with Anti Source Bias

StraightTalk
For traditional families with traditional values

Home Archives About
Notes

1. This is not a personal blog where the blogger discusses issues of importance to his or her private life and chronicles daily life. The content originates from an external source such as the social or political environment around them (Blood, 2002b; Herring et al., 2004).


3. Bloggers who chose to post the survey link on social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) instead of, or in addition to, their blog: Catholic Vote: American Papist, Crystal Clear Conservative, and Political Christian.

4. The cooperation rate (Basson, 2008) for participation in the current study is much higher than the cooperation rate obtained by other scholars who used similar methods (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 2011, cooperation rate of 27%) and is most likely to due to blog reader’s interest in the issue that served as the study’s context.

5. Casey is a popular name for both girls and boys. Baby naming websites indicate it has been historically favored for boys and girls.

6. The message was subject to a two-phased pretest to ensure it provided a balanced perspective on the issue. Initially, two graduate students in different academic programs who identified themselves as strong partisans examined the article and
provided their feedback on how to make each portion of the message more balanced. In each instance, argument presentation and wording were revised and re-examined by the researcher until it was perceptively more balanced.

The second phase of the message pretest consisted of nine respondents rating the message and providing comments on any items they felt swayed the balance of the article for one side more than another. Participants (ages 24 to 55) were split in their support for legalizing same-sex marriage, with four supporters and five opponents. After reading the message respondents rated it using an 11-point scale. Scores at polar ends of the scale indicated a stronger bias in favor of or against the issue. Scores approaching the midpoint suggested participants perceived the essay as more balanced or neutral. Three single-sample t-tests showed how closely the essay provided a balanced portrayal of the issue. In every instance, scores did not significantly vary from the median ($Mdn = 6.0$), suggesting respondents thought the essay provided a balanced portrayal of the issue ($M = 5.89$, $SD = .93$), the student author was neutral in his/her opinion ($M = 5.78$, $SD = .67$), and the essay’s tone was balanced ($M = 6.0$, $SD = .87$).

Participants also rated the percentage of favorable references made to advocates of legalizing same-sex marriage as well as advocates of traditional marriage using an 11-point scale ranging from 0% to 100%. A paired sample t-test showed no significant difference between the percentage of favorable references made to advocates of legalizing same-sex marriage ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.86$) and advocates of traditional marriage ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 2.13$), $t(8) = -.35$, $p > .05$. Within each section of the article that either advocated or opposed legalizing same-sex marriage,
argument strength was measured using a five-point scale ranging from very weak to very strong. A paired sample t-test did not reveal any significant differences between perceptions of argument strength for the portion of the essay advocating for legalizing same-sex marriage ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.16$) and the portion supporting traditional marriage ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.07$), $t(6) = -.35$, $p > .05$.

Within both phases of the message pretest, those who examined the message were told a senior in communications at a northeastern university wrote the article as part of a class assignment. Hostile media effect research shows partisans reading messages presented as a student essay compared to a news article perceive the message as more balanced (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Therefore, the student essay format was a formidable environment for message testing. It stands to reason that if the message used in this study was balanced partisans would perceive it as such when examining it in the essay format. Additionally, identifying a target group of neutral individuals for testing the message was not feasible as the researcher did not want to elicit socially desirable answers from those who were forming attitudes on this issue.

7. Within this study, preliminary tests of age, biological sex, income, education, sexual orientation, political leaning and political party did not affect the overall results, so they were excluded from the analysis.
Pamela Jo Brubaker
Vita

Academic Background

2002  M.A.  Mass Communications, Brigham Young University
2000  B.A.  Public Relations, Brigham Young University
1996  A.A.S Interpersonal Communications, Ricks College (renamed BYU-Idaho)

Teaching

Research Methods in Advertising & Public Relations
  Penn State University Comm 420: Fall 2010, Spring 2011, 2012
Public Relations Methods (Writing Course)
  Penn State University Comm 471: Spring 2010
Introduction to Public Relations
  Brigham Young University Comm 235: Summer 2002
Introduction to Public Speaking
  Utah Valley University TMA 150: Fall 2003, Spring 2003, 2004;
  Brigham Young University Comm 1100: Fall 2001, Winter 2002

Professional Experience

Connect Public Relations, Provo, UT, Senior Account Executive, 2004-2007
Power Innovations, Orem, UT, Marketing Communications Manager, 2002-2004
Novell, Orem, UT, Public Relations Specialist, 1999-2000

Publications


Conferences where Research Presentations/Posters Presented (# of presentations/posters)

International Communication Association: 2011 (1), 2010 (2), 2009 (2)
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication: 2010 (1), 2009 (1), 2008 (1); Midwinter Meeting: 2008 (1)
European Association for the Study of Religions: 2009 (1)
International Conference on the Social Sciences: 2003 (1)

Recognition & Awards

Moeller Award (2010). Student Paper Competition, First Place. AEJMC
Top Research Paper Award (2008). New Media and Politics Competition, AEJMC
Moeller Award (2008). Student Paper Competition, First Place. AEJMC