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Competing Identity Cues in the Hostile Media Phenomenon: Source, Nationalism, and Perceived Bias in News Coverage of Foreign Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The global media ecology offers news audiences a wide variety of sources for international news and interpretation of foreign affairs, and this kind of news coverage may increase the salience of both domestic and national partisan identity cues. Based upon the recognition that individuals hold multiple partisan identities that can be more or less salient in different situations, the current study draws upon self-categorization and social identity theory to design a set of studies that pit competing partisan identities against one another. The results of two experiments indicate that both national and domestic partisan identities are directly related to perceived media bias regarding the coverage of U.S-Chinese relations from both domestic and foreign media sources. Results varied based on the dimension of media bias considered, with perceived favorability towards the United States impacted more consistently by source origin than perceived favorability toward personal worldview. Results are discussed in terms of how they advance theory about perceived media bias, specifically in light of the implications of the global media environment for our understanding of partisanship.

The modern day global media ecology offers audiences a wide variety of sources for international news and interpretation of foreign affairs. In 2011, millions of ordinary citizens across the Arab world took the street to partake in an unprecedented wave of political protest known as the Arab

Spring. As the geo-political map of the Middle East was reconfigured by citizen demand for change, the powerful impact of televiorks such as Qatar's Al-Jazeera, along with social media platforms, emerged as modern tools of international relations (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Jumet, 2018). Recognizing the great potential of mass media in influencing foreign public opinion (Aalberg et al., 2013; Wanta et al., 2004) and in fostering real life consequences, rival governments entered into a global media arms race (Golan, 2015).

At the core of government-sponsored media are two specific goals: (1) promoting desired foreign policy news frames (Entman, 2008), and (2) discounting those of rivals (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). The significant role of global media as a tool for engaging with and shaping foreign public opinion is evident by government investments in state-sponsored news platforms. While traditional global broadcasters in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Russia have been broadcasting since the Cold War, new actors such as Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabyia, China's CCTV, and Iran's Press TV have set up powerful global broadcasting arms supported by various social media platforms (Golan et al., 2019). Two primary perspectives are common in regards to government-sponsored broadcasting. That of Western broadcasters such as the United States' Voice of America and Germany's *Deutsche Welle* are based on a pure journalism format that keeps government editorial influence at an arm's length. The second is the propaganda model of China's CCTV and Russia's RT which offers news framing consistent with the worldview and foreign policy interests of the government (Cheng et al., 2016; Stoycheff & Nisbet, 2017). The western model is based on a liberal worldview that assumes that audiences will view a free journalism model as more credible than government propaganda. As more authoritarian regimes around the world are expanding their broadcasting and social media engagement activities, audience perceptions of source bias are more salient than ever.

The current study directly tests the relationship between international news source and perceived bias in the context of the hostile media effect (Vallone et al., 1985). Recognizing the centrality of partisanship in predicting the HME phenomenon, we argue that partisanship is not always limited to a single issue or single dimension of self-identity, but rather can be understood in the context of a wider process of self-categorization (Reid, 2012). Therefore, our study aims to understand the role of that nationalism (rather than political party) may contribute to audience perceptions of global news sources in their coverage of international relations.

But even more importantly, from a theoretical point of view, is the fact that international news sources can make competing identities salient at the same time. For example, a news story disseminated by a "hostile" news source about a favored candidate can create an internal competition among an individual's

national and partisan identities. But in this scenario, which identity is stronger in terms of producing perceptions of media bias? The prior literature has not yet satisfactorily addressed this question, and this study fills that gap in the literature. In doing so, it significantly advances theory on the hostile media phenomenon by offering a unique examination of competing identities, and how they may impact evaluations of international broadcasters' coverage of foreign policy.

Literature review

The hostile media phenomenon

Research on the hostile media phenomenon kicked off nearly 35 years ago with Vallone et al.'s (1985) seminal study. Building on the idea that people process information in light of their prior beliefs, the researchers were interested in what appeared to be an exception to the "selective perception" rule (Perloff, 2015): While people normally tend to selectively perceive information that fits with previously existing viewpoints (Lord et al., 1979), they seem to do the opposite when mass media are involved, focusing on opposing information instead. The team showed an ostensibly neutral report about the 1982 "Beirut massacre" to both Arab and Israeli student groups at Stanford University. Both groups perceived the report to be biased against their side, and the researchers thus coined the term, "hostile media phenomenon." Gunther (1992) explains that the phenomenon, which is also called the hostile media effect or hostile media perceptions, is a "relational variable—an audience response to media content," (p. 147). In other words, the hostile media phenomenon is a function of audience perception rather than an objective assessment of media content.

Subsequent experiments replicated initial findings about Arab and Israeli student groups (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Perloff, 1989), and they also tested the effect relative to different public issues, including genetically-modified foods (Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004), labor union strikes (Christen et al., 2002), primate research (Gunther et al., 2001), and abortion (Kim & Pasadeos, 2007), as well as among different ethnic groups (Gunther et al., 2009; Matheson & Dursun, 2001) and even sports fans (Arpan & Raney, 2003). Survey research has also generally supported the central premise of the hostile media phenomenon: that "partisans" (those with strong political beliefs) tend to perceive media as biased against them (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Gunther & Christen, 2002; Huge & Glynn, 2010; Lee, 2005; Watson & Riffe, 2013; Wei et al., 2011). Indeed, the hostile media effect is one of the most long-standing, consistent effects observed in media research (Hansen & Kim, 2011; Perloff, 2015).

Partisanship and the hostile media effect

One of the key takeaways from this relatively large body of research is the centrality of partisanship in the hostile media effect. Drawing from earlier ideas about the role of ego-involvement in social judgment theory (Hovland et al., 1957), Vallone and colleagues assumed that the hostile media phenomenon was specific to groups of opposing partisans, although they did not define what partisanship means. As Perloff explains (Perloff, 2015), this less-than-specific approach has led to some disagreement among scholars about (a) what partisanship is and (b) whether it should be included as part of the definition of the hostile media phenomenon or considered to be a moderator. On the first point, scholars have examined the role of issue importance (Gunther & Lasorsa, 1986), political involvement (Gunther et al., 2001), and attitude extremity (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther, 1988), but, as we shall discuss below, it is group membership that has been the most influential on current research (e.g., Gunther, 1992). On the second point, some studies have defined the hostile media phenomenon as occurring only among partisans (e.g., Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther et al., 2001; Hansen & Kim, 2011), whereas others suggest that it is a phenomenon that occurs among the general population, which is strongest or most likely to occur among partisans (Huge & Glynn, 2010; Perloff, 2015). Either way, it is clear that partisanship plays an important role in the hostile media phenomenon.

The origins of research on the hostile media phenomenon date back to an era in which most U.S. news media were relatively balanced or centrist in terms of partisanship. However, partisan media have proliferated since that time (Stroud, 2011), and news audiences now have a broader range of partisan sources from which to choose. These developments have, naturally, raised questions about the dynamics of hostile media perceptions in response to media content and sources that are intentionally slanted toward one party or ideology (Gunther et al., 2017). For example, Gunther et al. (2001) found evidence of a "relative" hostile media effect: While both sides saw slanted media content as biased toward the same side, the opposing side saw it as more biased, while the supportive side saw it as less biased. Once again, subsequent research supported the idea of a relative hostile media effect based on content (Coe et al., 2008; Feldman, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2004). Thus, the "hostile media" approach has proved robust to the historical rise of partisan media. Recognizing the centrality of partisanship in the hostile media phenomenon, scholars have turned to investigating the role of news sources in cueing partisan responses to media. While previous scholarship focused on psychological mechanisms for the hostile media phenomenon that drew inspiration from social judgment theory, including latitudes of acceptance/ rejection, selective recall, and selective categorization (Schmitt et al., 2004), scholars have more recently forwarded Social Identity Theory as an alternative explanation for the phenomenon (Gunther et al., 2017; Hartmann & Tanis,

2013; Reid, 2012). According to this explanation, media may contain partisan cues that activate the salience of party membership, which then becomes the primary basis for perception and judgment of media (Reid, 2012). The more salient party membership is, the more likely an individual is to perceive and judge media content as partisan. Because partisan news sources, by the very nature of their partisan slant and reputation, make party membership salient, they have been shown to be relatively effective as cueing partisan responses to media (Gunther et al., 2017). This research on the effects of news source has primarily been conducted with partisan media from a single country (specifically the United States). While American politics are significantly shaped by domestic partisanship, there has been little investigation of the potential competition between domestic and international identities as related to hostile media perceptions in the context of international news. The current study provides a unique investigation of such identity competition as suggested by a growing body of self-categorization theory.

Self-categorization theory & identity salience

As often argued by hostile media scholars, partisanship in its various manifestations is the key concept that can be attributed to the formation of hostile media perceptions (Coe et al., 2008; Gunther, 1992; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). While individuals hold different partisan stands on different issues, aggregate issue partisanship tends to conform to a wider political identity allowing individuals to identify themselves with particular political parties or movements (Carsey & Layman, 2006; Goren et al., 2009).

The social identity approach is key to understanding not only the socio-psychological foundations of group belonging but also their relation to communication outcomes (Hogg & Reid, 2006). The authors argue that self - categorization theory (Turner, 1999; Turner et al., 1987) is fundamental to the social identity approach as it describes the cognitive mechanisms that lead individuals to develop their self-concept within the context of their in-group identification. Facing a complicated world that presents individuals to an array of complex issues, individuals tend to self-categorize themselves (and others) into in-group categories that provide straightforward cognitive heuristics (Carlin & Love, 2013). Beyond the reduction of cognitive load, self-categorization provides individuals with esteem and belonging (Abrams & Hogg, 1988, 1990; Hogg & Terry, 2000), leads them to adhere to in-group social norms (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006), develop in-group and outgroup prototypes (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015; Steffens et al., 2018), and ultimately may lead to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Johnson, 2010; Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Mou et al., 2015; Page et al., 2015).

Foreign news narratives often present international affairs in the context of group identification based on nationality or patriotism (Jones & Sheet,

2009; Sheets, Rowling, & Jones, 2015). Simplifying complex matters of foreign policy into palatable news narratives that paint events in such dichotomous frames s as freedom versus terrorism, democracy versus dictatorships, foreign news coverage often provide group salience cues that prime audience group membership allowing for audience to quickly choose sides and make sense of foreign events in under two minutes. While the emergent body of scholarship supports the basic hostile media phenomenon, scholars recognize that various psychological mechanisms may be useful in accounting for perceived source bias (Feldman, 2011; Gunther et al., 2009; Matthes, 2013). Recognizing that partisanship is a key predictor of the hostile media effect, Reid (2012) argues that self-categorization theory is distinctly useful for explaining the phenomenon. Since issue partisanship often primes larger in-group and out-group associations, individuals are likely to process and evaluate news content through the prism of group categorization. Reid (2012) explains: "Like the different standards explanation, and social judgment theory, the more partisan the observer, the greater the hostile media perception. Unlike these explanations, however, this should only occur when partisan identity is psychologically salient" (p. 385).

Indeed, there is evidence that hostile media perceptions mostly occur when an individual's partisan identity is salient (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). There is little reason to predict that individuals will perceive media reports as biased unless they perceived some threat to their individual or group standings from the news source or content to activate their partisan identity (Hartmann & Tanis, 2013; Watson & Riffe, 2013). In other words, individuals are likely to conform to what they view as group norms in trusting in-group sources while questioning information provided by out-group media sources.

Recognizing that in the past decade, much of news media has fragmented into partisan echo chambers that frame many news stories in the context of us versus them (Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017; Stroud, 2011; Van Klingeren et al., 2017). The prominence of group conflict news frames has contributed much to perceived media bias (Kim, 2016; Matheson & Dursun, 2001; Stroud et al., 2014). As individuals apply group category heuristics to process partisan news content, they are likely to maximize in-group similarity and outgroup differences as predicted by the meta-contrast principle (Haslam & Turner, 1995; Zhang & Reid, 2013). We posit that strong in-group identification will lead individuals to conform to group norms (Hogg & Reid, 2006), and that identification will in turn affect how individuals process news sources and content.

More specifically, we examine nationalism, which is one type of political partisan identity and its potential impact on perceptions of media bias. We recognize nationalism as an important form of political partisanship (Roccas et al., 2008), and therefore predict that it will play an important role in audience evaluations of global news.

Drawing from social identity and self-categorization theories, we hypothesize that the foreign news sources will be perceived as more biased than the domestic sources, and that this effect will be stronger among those who are strong national identifiers.

H1: Subjects will perceive the foreign stories to be less favorable toward the United States than the domestic stories.

H2: Nationalism will moderate the effect of source on perceived favorability toward the United States.

H3: Subjects will perceive the foreign stories to be less favorable toward their worldview than the domestic stories.

H4: Self-reported nationalism will moderate the effect of source on perceived favorability toward subjects' worldview.

Study 1 method

An online experiment was conducted to examine how perceptions of hostile media bias vary between domestic and international sources across weak and strong nationalists. Subjects were asked to read a news article about trade relations between the United States and China either attributed to a domestic partisan source (MSNBC or FOX), an international source (BBC, CCTV, or Al Jazeera), or the Associated Press. Afterward, subjects completed a post-exposure questionnaire that measured the manipulation checks of interest, perceptions of hostile media bias, and respondent demographics.

Sample

Participants were recruited from the crowdsourcing web site *Amazon Mechanical Turk* (MTurk), a widely used platform for data collection that offers sample heterogeneity that is greater than traditional college samples and comparable to other online panel services when attention checks and automation checks are used to minimize noise caused by careless or automated responding (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 2011). Subjects were required to pass two manipulation checks to qualify for inclusion in the final sample including (1) accurate recall of the source for the news article and (2) accurate identification of the news source as either U.S. or international. This filtering procedure resulted in a final sample of 337 participants from North America.

In terms of sample demographics, sixty percent of subjects identified as male with a mean age of 39.37 ($SD = 11.15$). When asked to identify their political party, 41% identified as Democrat, 32% identified as Republican, 25% identified as Independent, and 1% identified as "other"; the slight over-representation of Democrats and Independents is common for samples recruited from MTurk (Buhrmester et al., 2011). When asked to self-report their race, 85% of subjects identified as "White," 7% identified as "Asian," 5% identified as "Black or African American," 1% identified as "American Indian or Alaska Native," and 2% identified as either "other" or "multiple races." Each participant was paid 50 cents for their participation in the study, which was approved by the institutional review board where data collection was hosted.

Procedure and stimuli

Subjects read a consent form, agreed to participate in the study, then proceeded to complete a pre-exposure questionnaire that measured their political party and self-reported nationalism. After the pre-exposure questionnaire, participants were assigned to read one of six possible news articles that varied the source of the news article, as determined by random assignment. Finally, subjects completed the study by answering a post-exposure questionnaire that measured the manipulation checks of interest along with the items related to hostile media bias.

Subjects were asked to read an approximately 300-word article entitled, "Trump's Stance on China Trade to Impact U.S. Economy." The article discussed an upcoming meeting between U.S. and Chinese leaders to discuss trade including quotes from White House officials and a summary of the recent rivalry between the two economies. Although the use of a single-message design has possible limitations (e.g., O'Keefe, 2018), the present study decided to focus on a single news exemplar to heighten the statistical power of the central manipulation. Many past HME studies have utilized similar single message designs; more broadly, maximizing sample size is a priority for experimental research given the objective of demonstrating causality (relative to maximizing external validity, which is the primary objective of survey-based work).

Independent variable

News source

Subjects were asked to read a news article attributed to one of six possible new sources: (1) the Associated Press, (2) FOX News, (3) MSNBC, (4) BBC, (5) CCTV, or (6) Al Jazeera. Three of the news sources were international (BBC; CCTV; Al Jazeera) while the other three news sources were based in

the United States (AP; Fox News; MSNBC). The source of the news article was identified by a logo for the source at the top of the page while the content of the news article was held constant across conditions.

Dependent variable

Hostile media effect

Perceptions of hostile media bias were measured along two dimensions: (1) perceived hostility toward the United States and (2) perceived hostility toward subjects' worldview, using established measures from prior research (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Tsfati, 2007). Specifically, subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which the news article was "strongly biased against or in favor of the USA" and "strongly biased against or in favor of your worldview" with higher scores indicating a perception of favorable news coverage. Subjects were also provided with a slider to indicate "the percentage of the article that was favorable towards the United States" (0% to 100%) as well as "the percentage of the article that was favorable towards your worldview" (0% to 100%). Finally, subjects were also asked "based on the story you just read, would you say that journalists and editors are strongly biased against or strongly biased in favor of the United States/your worldview?" Two indices were created by combining the three items related to US bias ($M = -.07$, $SD = .83$; Cronbach's alpha = .85) and the three items related to worldview bias ($M = -.12$, $SD = .80$; Cronbach's alpha = .82), respectively. Perceptions of US bias (skewness = .44, kurtosis = .03) and worldview bias (skewness = .18, kurtosis = .56) were both within acceptable boundaries ($|2|$) for skewness and kurtosis. Prior to scale formation, z-scores were calculated for each variable to account for differences in measurement across items. Given this transformation and how the measures were collected, positive scores represent perceptions of favorable news coverage while negative scores represent perceptions of hostile news coverage.

Other measured variables

Nationalism

Eight questions measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale were adapted from prior research (Roccas et al., 2008) to measure feelings of nationalism toward the United States. Sample items include, "I feel strongly affiliated with the USA," "Being American is an important part of my identity," and "It is important to me that others see me as American." An index was formed by averaging the eight items, which was reliable ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.37$; Cronbach's alpha = .92).

Demographics

Subjects were asked to report their age, sex, and race for the purpose of compiling descriptive statistics for the sample.

Results

Manipulation checks

Previous research has found that some news readers are more likely than others to notice the source for a news article (Price & Czilli, 1996). Given that our study aimed to test the effects of news source, it was necessary for the sample to only include those subjects who were able to recall the source of the news article. Furthermore, it was also necessary for subjects to correctly identify if the source was based in the United States or if the source was international. To that end, two manipulation checks were included in the study which asked subjects to recall the source of the news article with the options, "Al Jazeera," "AP," "BBC News," "China Central Television (CCTV)," "MSNBC," or "Fox News." Subjects were also asked whether the source they identified was either "American" or "International." Any subject who either incorrectly recalled the source of the news article or misidentified the origin of the news outlet were excluded from the final sample.

Hostile media bias: United States

H1 predicted that foreign news sources would be perceived as more hostile in their news coverage of the United States than domestic news sources. Furthermore, H2 predicted that this effect would be moderated by self-reported nationalism, such that subjects scoring higher in nationalism would perceive international news sources as more hostile in their coverage of the United States than subjects scoring lower in nationalism. To test these hypotheses, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with source type and the continuous variable of nationalism as independent variables and perceived hostility toward the United States as the dependent variable. Positive scores indicated lower perceptions of hostility, while negative scores represented higher perceptions of hostility. A main effect of source type was revealed, $F(5, 324) = 11.81$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .14. As shown in

Table 1. Main analyses, one-way ANOVA.

	Fox News	MSNBC	AP	BBC	CCTV	Al Jazeera
USA	.41[a] (.09)	.12[a] (.11)	−.15[b] (.10)	−.21[b] (.11)	−.38[b] (.11)	−.52[b] (.11)
Worldview	.08[a] (.09)	.02[a] (.10)	−.05[ab] (.11)	−.31[ab] (.11)	−.09[ab] (.12)	−.48[b] (.11)

Marginal means (standard error); any cells that do not share a superscript are significantly different at $p < .05$ based on Sidak correction.

Table 1, Al Jazeera and CCTV were seen as the most hostile in their news coverage of the United States while Fox News and MSNBC were seen as the least hostile. Adjusting for multiple comparisons reveals that the effect was primarily because Al Jazeera and CCTV were seen as more hostile than the domestic partisan sources (Fox News; MSNCBC). This effect of source did not vary based on self-reported nationalism, $F(5, 324) = 2.03$, $p = .07$, partial eta squared = .02. Given this pattern of results, H1 was supported while H2 was not supported.

Hostile media bias: Worldview

A similar series of hypotheses predicted that international news sources would be perceived as more hostile to one's personal worldview than domestic news sources, with the effect expected to be stronger among those who identify as strong nationalists. A main effect of source type was again revealed, $F(5, 324) = 3.47$, $p = .005$, partial eta squared = .04. As shown in Table 2, Al Jazeera was again perceived as the most hostile source while Fox News and MSNBC were perceived as the least hostile sources. Similar to before, adjusting for multiple comparisons revealed that the effect was primarily because Al Jazeera (and surprisingly, BBC to a lesser extent) were seen as more hostile to one's worldview than the domestic partisan sources (Fox News; MSNBC). This effect of source did not vary based on self-reported nationalism, $F(5, 324) = 2.03$, $p = .07$, partial eta squared = .02. Given this pattern of results, H3 was supported while H4 was not supported.

Study 1 discussion

The emergent body of literature on the hostile media effect places partisanship as a key predictor of perceived media bias on a wide array of contested issues (Perloff, 2015). Recognizing that partisanship is not always limited to a single issue or single dimension of self-identity, but rather can be understood in the context of a wider process of self-categorization (Reid, 2012), the current study aims to understand the role of that nationalism (rather than political party) may contribute to audience perceptions of global news sources in their coverage of international relations.

More specifically, Study 1 tested perceived source bias regarding the coverage of US-China foreign relations across several domestic and international sources. We found that two international sources, Qatar's Al-Jazeera and China's CCTV, were perceived as more biased against the United States and against participants' worldview than the other competing sources. Furthermore, we found that this perceived bias held true across

both weak and strong nationalists indicating that international news sources may be intrinsically less trusted than domestic sources.

Such findings are best explained by the self-categorization theory argument that posits that individuals will self-categorize themselves into in and outgroups in order to solidify their self-concept (Hogg, 2000; Turner & Reynold, 2011). As such, the participants in our experiment viewed partisan sources such as the Associated Press, Fox News, and MSNBC as in-group sources while they identified foreign sources as out-groups. Notably, both Fox News and MSNBC were seen as favorable, likely because Democrats and Republicans were both represented in the sample (although Democrats were slightly more common, thus resulting in higher favorability scores for MSNBC). In either case, our findings grounded in HME theory support previous studies on media credibility that examined perceived bias in media coverage of foreign news, which also found that out group sources were perceived as less credible than domestic sources (Nisbet et al., 2017).

Study 1 implies a strong role for national identity, spurred by the national origin of the news source. Our findings are limited to evaluations of news sources. However, it may be the case that one's national partisanship may impact evaluations of not only source but also content. At the same time, recognizing that all individuals posses various partisan identities, one could also make the case that competing identities and one's need to conform to in-group norms may present a much more complex process of partisan impact on hostile media perceptions.

But the study raises additional questions about the circumstances under which national identity takes precedence over domestic party identities. That is, when do people stop thinking of media bias in terms of party and start thinking of it in terms of their national identities as Americans? Study 2 is designed to test this question.

Study 2

As demonstrated by previous HME research, partisanship is a key predictor of perceived media bias (Perloff, 1989). Moving beyond one's stance on an issue, scholars point to personal involvement and group identifications (Gunther, 1992; Matheson & Dursun, 2001) as key components of issue partisanship. While it is true that there is variance in issue partisanship among members of the same partisan group, it is also true that individuals' maintain several partisan identities that become salient at different times based on the context of the issue at hand (Roccas et al., 2008; Stryker, 2000). In the current study, we offer a direct test of competing partisan identities (national/domestic) and test their potential impact on hostile media perceptions. In Study 1, the experimental design primed a single partisan identity (source). In Study 2, our experimental design directly primed both national and domestic political

partisanship at the same time in order to test the interplay between the two. While theories of identity provide ample theoretical reasoning for the salience of partisanship and its impact on media effect (Hogg & Reid, 2006), they are limited by the contextual nature of political partisanship across issues and political, religious, and national context. A growing body of media scholarship highlights the role of partisanship in increased political incivility and political polarization (Gervais, 2019; Muddiman & Stroud, 2017). This line of research focuses on a singular dimension of political identity (e.g., Liberal versus Conservative), but it does not consider the multiple political identities of individuals and how their competition may impact media effect.

We identify this limitation of previous studies, and therefore present the following research questions that may help inform future scholarship about the interplay between competing identities and their potential impact on hostile media perceptions.

RQ1: The effect of source on HME about the United States will be moderated by headline slant, such that source will heighten HME for nonpartisan headlines whereas no effect of source will be found for hostile headlines.

RQ2: The effect of source on HME about one's worldview will be moderated by headline slant, such that source will heighten HME for nonpartisan headlines whereas no effect of source will be found for hostile headlines.

Study 2 method

An online experiment was conducted to examine how perceptions of hostile media bias vary based on two factors: source (domestic vs. international) and headline slant (politically congruent vs. politically incongruent). Subjects were asked to read a news article about trade relations between the United States and China that was attributed to either an international source (Al Jazeera or CCTV) or a domestic source (the Associated Press). Furthermore, the headline of the news article was varied to either be congruent with subjects' political beliefs or incongruent with subjects' political beliefs. Afterward, subjects completed a post-exposure questionnaire that measured source recall, headline recall, and perceptions of hostile media bias along with respondent demographics.

Sample

An a priori power analysis determined that a sample size of 472 would be adequate to obtain 80% power if alpha = .05, $DF = 4$, and $f = .16$ was assumed to

be the effect size of minimum practical and theoretical interest. To that end, participants were again recruited using the online crowdsourcing web site *Amazon Mechanical Turk* (*MTurk*). Subjects who self-identified as "Democrats" were included in the final sample ($N = 479$). Democrats were purposively sampled so that the effects of headline congruency could be tested with an audience holding relatively homogenous political beliefs. Participants on *MTurk* are typically more liberal and more likely to identify as a Democrat than the general population, thus making the purposive selection of Democrats an effective filtering criteria for Study 2.

In terms of demographics, 51% percent of participants identified as male ($n = 242$) with a mean age of 36.96 ($SD = 11.61$). When asked to self-report their race, 72% of subjects self-identified as "White," 16% identified as "Black or African American," 9% identified as Asian, and 2% identified as either "American Indian," "multiple races," or "other." Each participant was paid 75 cents for completing the study, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board where data collection was hosted.

Procedure and stimuli

Subjects read an informed consent form and afterward completed a pre-exposure questionnaire that measured their political beliefs and self-reported nationalism. Next, subjects were randomly assigned to one of six possible news articles that varied the source and slant of the article's headline, as determined by random assignment. Last, subjects completed a post-exposure questionnaire that included the manipulation checks and perceptions of hostile media bias. In regards to the stimuli, subjects were asked to read the same news article that was used in Study 1, but with one key difference: the headline of the news article was manipulated, as described in more detail below.

Independent variables

News source

Subjects were asked to read a news article attributed to one of three possible sources: (1) The Associated Press, (2) Al Jazeera, or (3) CCTV. The source of the article was identified by a logo at the top of the page alongside a flag that represented the country of origin for the news organization (e.g., an American flag for the Associated Press).

Headline slant

Subjects all read the same news article describing an upcoming meeting between U.S. and Chinese leaders (as described in Study 1). The key difference between groups was the headline that preceded the article

which was either even-handed (to serve as a baseline) or slanted toward a Republican (e.g., Trump more Successful than Obama on US-China Relations) or Democratic politician (e.g., Obama more Successful than Trump on US-China relations). For a sample comprised exclusively of Democrats, it was expected that the pro-Republican headline would be perceived as more hostile than the neutral headline while it was expected that the pro-Democratic headline would be perceived as more favorable than the neutral headline.

Manipulation checks

Source recall

Subjects were asked whether the story they read came from either "Al Jazeera," "The Associated Press," or "China Central Television." A chi-square test with source as the independent variable and recall as the dependent variable was statistically significant, x^2 (4) = 805.82, $p<$ .001 revealing that accuracy was high across conditions (90.3% to 96.8%). In short, the manipulation was successful.

Dependent variable

Hostile media effect

Perceptions of hostility were measured along the same two dimensions (with the same measures) used in Study One: perceived hostility toward the United States (Cronbach's alpha = .82; M = .004, SD = .84) and perceived hostility toward one's personal worldview (Cronbach's alpha = .81; M = .00, SD = .85). Two indices were again created using standardized scores with higher values again representing more favorable perceptions of media coverage.

Other measured variables

Demographics

Subjects were again asked to report their age, sex, and race for the purpose of compiling descriptive statistics about the sample.

Results

Hostile media bias: United States

To test study hypotheses, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with source type and headline slant as the independent variables and perceived coverage hostility toward the United States as the dependent variable. A main effect of source

type was revealed, $F(2, 470) = 5.21$, $p = .01$, partial eta squared = .02. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey method revealed that CCTV (−.13) was seen as more hostile in its news coverage than the Associated Press (.16; $p = .01$) while the difference between Al Jazeera (−.03) and the Associated Press was not statistically significant. A main effect of headline slant was also found, $F(2, 470) = 3.63$, $p = .03$, partial eta squared = .02. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that the pro-Republican headline (.14) was perceived as less hostile to the United States than the Pro-Obama headline (−.10, $p = .03$), although neither headline varied significantly from the even-handed headline which served as a baseline (−.03, all $ps > .16$). The interaction between source type and headline slant was not statistically significant, $F(4, 470) = .84$, $p = .50$, partial eta squared = .01. In light of these findings, RQ1 was answered in the negative.

Hostile media bias: Personal worldview

A similar two-way ANOVA was conducted to further test study hypotheses which found a main effect of headline slant, $F(2, 470) = 6.25$, $p = .002$, partial eta squared = .03. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that the Pro-Republican headline (−.19) was perceived as more hostile to one's personal worldview than the even-handed headline (.13; $p = .003$) or the Pro-Democrat headline (.07; $p = .02$). The main effect of source type was not statistically significant, $F(2, 470) = .25$, $p = .78$, partial eta squared = .001, nor was the interaction between source type and headline type statistically significant, $F(4, 470) = 1.10$, $p = .35$, partial eta squared = .01. Therefore, HQ2 was also answered negatively.

Study 2 discussion

In sum, Study 2 findings varied based on the dimension of hostile media in question. For hostility in coverage of the United States, a main effect of source was found such that CCTV was perceived as more hostile toward the United States in their coverage than the Associated Press. By comparison, no effect of source on hostility toward one's personal worldview was found. As for the effects of headline slant, the pro-Republican headline was seen as less hostile to the United States but more hostile to one's personal worldview.

As noted, the salience of individual identity and self- categorization are ever-changing (Klar, 2013; Margolis, 2018; Veenstra et al., 2016). For example, an individual's group salience as a member of a religious group may be primed by media coverage of moral issues. At a different time, an individual's in-group salience as a woman, may be primed by media coverage of salary differences between men and women. Identifying in-group identification (a form of partisanship) as a key

predictor of the HME (Feldman, 2011; Reid, 2012), our study provides a unique test of the phenomenon by directly testing how domestic and international competing identities may interplay in predicting perceived media bias.

Study 2 manipulated both source and headline content in order to pit partisan and national identities against one another. As demonstrated by the results, participants viewed foreign media coverage of US-China relations as biased against the United States suggesting that their identification as Americans (international partisanship) was salient. At the same time, we found that pro-Trump headlines led to perceived media bias against participants worldview, suggesting that their domestic partisanship was salient in predicting the HME. The study builds off of Gunther et al. (2017), who also manipulated both source and content in the context of domestic news about science. Prior HME research has found effects of both source (e.g., Arpan & Raney, 2003) and content (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994), but fewer studies have examined the interaction of the two. The results of our study provide some initial support that both domestic and international cues have an impact on hostile media perceptions. The study also tests the interaction between the two, but these tests did not support the interaction. Rather, they suggest that such a phenomenon should be further investigated by future scholars.

The present study is also one of the first to directly test the interplay between competing identity salience in the context of the HME. While other studies have, for example, pit national and supranational identities against one another in the context of European politics, no studies have, to our knowledge, pit partisan and national identities against one another in a study of hostile media perceptions. The results of our study suggest that different identities may play different roles in different contexts, although they do not support the idea of an interaction. Future research is needed to elaborate about the effects of manipulating informational contexts.

General discussion

This study represents an advancement in hostile media research, which has primarily examined partisanship in terms of ethnic-group, issue-based, or political party identity. For example, Vallone et al. (1985) famously studied Arab and Israeli student groups. Meanwhile, Gunther and colleagues studied groups that fall on opposing sides of controversial social issues, such as primate research (e.g., Gunther & Schmitt, 2004) or GMO foods (e.g., Gunther et al., 2001). Finally, Reid (2012) studied the role of political partisanship. The current study complements the prior literature by examining national identity as a form of partisanship, and by pitting it against political partisanship. Building upon Reid's (2012) argument for the

appropriateness of self-categorization as a potential explanation for the hostile media phenomenon, we integrate the idea of competing identities into the mix.

Recognizing audience tendencies to perceive bias across in- and out-group sources has meaningful implications not only to source trust but also to public opinion regarding international affairs, and even support for foreign policy. As demonstrated by public opinion scholarship, the news media, especially television news, play an important role in shaping audience opinion regarding international affairs (Aalberg et al., 2013). As predicted by indexing theory research (Bennett, 1990; Livingston & Bennett, 2003) elite sources such as the president, congress, and domestic elites are often successful in shaping not only what but also how the news media cover international relations, especially at times of international conflict (Bennett et al., 2006), our study's results indicate that audiences are more likely to perceive such coverage as fair, while discounting foreign sources as biased. Such a phenomenon has important implications.

As demonstrated by a wide body of research, individuals are more likely to consume news content that is consistent with their worldview or as explained by self-categorization theory, congruent with their in-group narrative (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017). We argue that this phenomenon can actually place audiences at a disadvantage. Recognizing that audiences often depend on domestic news sources to provide substantive analysis and interpretation of what often seems like complex international events, the presence of a dominant frame in domestic sources may automatically trump any alternative news frames presented by outgroup media sources. As such, audiences may be more open to a single news frame while discounting alternative frames leaving them with a very limited understanding of international affairs as was demonstrated during the second Iraq War (Entman, 2004).

This study is limited in several important ways. First, the study is experimental, and therefore results should be extrapolated to the "real world" with caution. Likewise, we have tested the impact of source with a single media exemplar, which improved our ability to detect subtle effects but which does limit the scope of the work's generalizability. Future research could test these same processes using other methods and with different media stimuli. Second, the design is limited by the fact that some subjects didn't remember the source or recognize the foreign sources as international; future studies could strengthen the manipulations to reduce these recall errors so that more of the full sample could be retained. Third, our measure of national identity was not taken directly from the literature, but rather adapted from other measures of identity. Future research could focus on validating these measures and replicating results. Finally, the interactions between competing identities did

not materialize in the results. Future research could perform additional tests of these interactions, exploring the interaction between competing identities.

Despite these limitations, this study offers a relatively strong comparison of perceived bias in foreign and domestic sources, and it also tests the interaction of competing national and partisan identities. In the first study, the foreign sources are perceived as more biased against the United States and subjects' worldviews. In the second study, both national and partisan cues play a role in shaping hostile media perceptions, but they do not necessarily interact. These findings suggest identity is not a zero-sum game, and that overlapping identities are not necessarily in competition with one another. They also suggest that hostile media perceptions can arise from multiple identities, and not just from domestic partisanship

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