

Information Bias in the Graphics Accompanying News Articles

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ABSTRACT

Bias in the mainstream news media has been studied for many years. In recent years, traditional mediums have given way to online and digital mediums, and with them new features are being presented to readers which could influence bias. This research aimed to determine if the level of bias perceived to be in a news article online could be impacted by an information graphic accompanying that article. The experiment involved participants reporting how biased they considered an article to be for three news stories, from three websites. Each story from each website was studied at three levels of distortion: with no graphic, with the original graphic, and with a tailored graphic.

The research found that an information graphic accompanying a news article will affect the level of bias perceived for the article as a whole, but that this effect was not found to be statistically significant, and no trend was found regarding what causes the bias level to increase or decrease. With a sample size of 124 participants, no statistically significant effect was detected. Closer examination of the data collected reveals findings which suggest further work would be worthwhile in this area.

The data collected also indicates strong tendencies among participants to avoid cognitive dissonance, and the presence of confirmation bias on the part of the participants. When participants were presented with a website they recognised, and which they previously had considered to be biased, they gave a significantly higher rating for bias in that article than for those who did not recognise the website. Additionally, those who recognised the website but did not previously consider it to be particularly biased, reported far lower levels of bias for that article than those who had not recognised it.

This research adds to an existing body of work in the area. Possible refinements to the study are proposed.