



Media Engagement and Attitudes Toward Police among College Students

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EAST

INTRODUCTION

Media coverage of the crime fighter image of police may negatively affect citizens' attitudes toward the police. Previous studies have found a significant relationship with the consumption of media and its impact on citizens' attitudes toward the police. Yet, there has been minimal research on whether how individual's engagement of police-related news on the internet and social media has an impact on their perception of the police. Using a sample of college students from multiple universities, the current study contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between engagement in police-related news and attitudes toward police.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Contemporary studies suggest that police can influence the public's perception of their departments using social media platforms (Beshears, 2016; Intravia et al., 2020).
- In surveying a collection of Arkansas sheriff departments, findings state that most of them supported the idea of using social media to improve relations with their communities as well as assistance in crime solving (Beshears, 2016).
- Reading negative stories on the internet about law enforcement negatively effects the public's perception of police legitimacy (Hu et al., 2018).
- The way the media involves the viewer can change their attitude towards police, as well as whether police are effective in their duties, especially if the police are highlighted in reality-tv or other nonfictional types of programming (Kort-Butler & Sittner-Hartshorn, 2011).
- Social media can positively or negatively influence relations between the public and police (Intravia et al., 2020).

METHODS:

The data were collected through an online survey (i.e., Qualtrics) administered to young college students attending four universities located in the West, Midwest, and Southwest in 2021. The survey instructions explained the voluntary nature of participating, anonymity of responses and there were no penalty associated for not participating.

TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N=433)

	%/Mean	Range
Dependent variable		
Procedural Justice	21.09	7-28
Independent variables		
<i>Respondent demographics</i>		
Gender (Male = 1)	32.79%	
Race (White = 1)	70.67%	
Age	25.58	18-64
College Status	3.09	1-5
CJ Major	55.43%	0-1
Victim	10.85%	0-1
Fear of Crime	4.02	2-8
Media Consumption (Days per week)		
Watch Television	3.67	0-7
Watch Local TV News	1.98	0-7
Watch National TV News	2.02	0-7
Use Internet	6.55	0-7
Watch Crime Shows	3.36	0-7
News Engagement	3.26	2-8
Discussion of Police Related Violence		
Internet	2.49	1-4
Social Media	2.20	1-4

Table II. OLS Regression for Procedural Justice (N= 433)

	b (SE)	β
<i>Demographic variables</i>		
Gender (Male = 1)	.925 (.511)	.091
Race (White = 1)	.713 (.495)	.068
Age	-.040 (.030)	-.070
College Status	.043 (.184)	.012
CJ Major	.882 (.464)	.092
Victim	-.633 (.704)	-.041
Fear of Crime	-.673 (.166)***	-.213
Media Consumption (Days per week)		
Watch Television	.003 (.099)	.002
Watch Local TV News	.151 (.140)	.065
Watch National TV News	-.059 (.143)	-.025
Use Internet	-.230 (.203)	-.053
Watch Crime Shows	-.015 (.094)	-.008
News Engagement	-.472 (.149)**	-.172
Discussion of Police Related Violence		
Internet	.093 (.255)	.019
Social Media	-.504 (.255)*	-.112
Intercept	27.254 (1.892)***	
F-test		6.234***
R ²		.183

Note: *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, ***p < .001

RESULTS

- An F-value of 27.254 (p < .001), the regression model is found to be statistically significant
- R² of .183, indicates that 18.3% of the variance of procedural justice is explained by independent variables in the model.
- Fear of crime was a significant predictor for procedural justice (b = -.673, p < .001). Fear of crime was negatively and significantly related to the procedural justice.
- News engagements was a significant predictor for procedural justice (b = -.473, p < .01). News engagement measures were negatively related to attitudes toward procedural justice.
- Discussion of police related violence on social media also shows a statistically significant relationship with the procedural justice (b = -.504, p < .05).

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSIONS

- The study can be used to further examine how social media impacts individuals on their perceptions of the police.
- The current study adds to the limited but growing body of research untangling the relationships between online media habits and public perception of police.
- Types of media consumption were not found to be significantly related to procedural justice. Further examination is needed to explain what type of media consumption or the length of media consumption impacts individuals' perception of the police.
- Future studies should focus on expanding how media consumption may be a significant factor in various perceptions such as fear of victimization, fear of crime, and confidence in the police.

LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional data
- Young adults only
- Non-random sample

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