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The Impact of Mainstream News Consumption on Individual Opinions
Toward Arabs: An Undergraduate Study of Attitude Formation

Zeinah Abdelsalam
West Virginia Wesleyan College

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between media consumption and American attitudes toward Arabs, utilizing survey data collected from 294 respondents via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Results indicate that consumption of social media platforms – specifically Twitter and Instagram – correlates with more favorable opinions, while traditional television news consumption exhibits a weaker, though still significant, influence when isolated from social media variables. Direct personal interactions with Arabs are positively associated with favorable attitudes, whereas mere association shows a counterintuitive negative relationship. These findings underscore the nuanced role of different media sources and personal contact in shaping ethnic perceptions. Limitations include sample representativeness and measurement constraints, suggesting avenues for methodological refinement in future research.

Introduction

Following the tragic 9/11 – a focal point for forming attitudes toward Arab and Muslim people generally – the U.S. government began pursuing communities of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Arab descent as potential threats to national security. The result was strengthened public narratives that were xenophobic and Islamophobic (“Racial Profiling,” 2023) that remain prevalent to this day, especially reflected in highly consumed news sources through certain language and repetition as a more subtle method of enforcing an unfavorable narrative. Upon heavy reliance on mainstream news sources, the effects of a lack of credible information have contributed to Americans’ negative perceptions of Arabs.

This dilemma poses challenges that extend beyond public attitudes. It complicates support for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and impacts domestic politics and civil society. Since 2001, the rise in anti-Arab sentiments and hate crimes illustrates the real-world consequences of these media-driven biases (Kishi, 2017). Routine consumption of mainstream media shapes cognitive patterns that influence everyday attitudes toward ethnic groups, with these attitudes heavily dependent on how such groups are portrayed. My research will specifically investigate the impact of mainstream news consumption on individual attitudes toward Arabs.

Despite evidence that mainstream television news may be unreliable or driven by profit motives, many people continue to consume it, often out of habit or convenience. For instance, television news is frequently used as background noise, making it a passive but pervasive influence. This passive consumption makes it easier for biased or misleading narratives to embed themselves in viewers’ minds without critical engagement. Even those aware of the potential for disinformation may still absorb and internalize these narratives, illustrating how deeply

immersed and insidious these flaws are. Another limitation of this type of media is incomplete or biased coverage exemplified by current world events, such as the wars on Gaza and Lebanon – where essential discoveries and raw footage often go unseen by those who rely solely on mainstream television news. The consequences of incomplete information are significant in shaping our society’s ability to coexist.

Moreover, polling data underscores the influence of Americans’ primary news sources on their perceptions of Arabs. For instance, a 2015 poll by the Arab American Institute revealed a correlation between news sources and favorability ratings. Respondents who identified CNN as their main news source had the highest net unfavorable rating of Arab Americans, and similarly, those who relied on Fox News exhibited the highest unfavorable rating of American Muslims. Conversely, Americans who turned to alternative news sources were less likely to harbor unfavorable views of Arabs (“American Attitudes,” 2015). This is a deeply problematic observation, as unfair media portrayals can extend to other ethnicities or groups as well – influencing attitude formation toward them.

Literature

The ordinary mind may wonder why mainstream news corporations function the way they do in the first place. "Disinformation creates chaos. The public finds itself confused about what is true and reality suddenly becomes murky. Without clear and reliable information, people revert to visceral tribalism based on the narrative they like the most. Cleavages deepen. The mission of the disinformation campaign is accomplished." (Chatterjee et al., 2020) Furthermore, patterns of media propaganda often carry the mere purposes of confusing, separating, and instigating. To profit-maximizing news outlet corporations, division is the utmost goal that provides fertile ground for both profit and power growth.

There is no doubt that this dilemma impacts our entire globalized and interconnected world; or at least the world that consumes or is consumed by the media daily (ties to Hannah Arendt's Modern Public Sphere). But, the reason for a specific focus on the United States is because it is evidently affected by internal biases toward different identity groups that arise from historical and cultural contexts. For instance, Americans may have a certain viewpoint on Jews because of the Holocaust, and similarly, a certain view on Muslims because of the September 11th attacks. According to the Pew Research Center (Tevington, 2023), "Far more Americans express favorable than unfavorable views of Jews (mainline Protestants and Catholics). At the other end of the spectrum, more Americans express negative than positive attitudes toward Atheists, Muslims, and Mormons (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)."

Similarly, other identity groups sustain stereotypes toward Americans. This is not to say that all Americans, Jews, Muslims, or any other identity group have only those ideas in their heads. However, it is important to acknowledge these biases, as they could lead to people seeking and finding comfort only in the information they want to hear. This concept is also

referred to as selective exposure, which can be unintentional, and ultimately applies to the type of news coverage people are drawn to. Moreover, corporations feed into these internal biases, and simultaneously capitalize on them. “Narratives, to some extent, play an effective role in creating a conflict and perpetuating it. The way narratives are constructed, fashioned, and disseminated in society through socialization agents and through the political elites produce stereotypical images instead of creating a climate conducive to peace. The conflict continues because the negative narratives continue.” (Daoudi et al., 2013) Ultimately, these narratives ought to be consumed by somebody out there.

Alternate Causes

Now, we transition into the several variables other than mainstream news that may influence American attitudes toward Arabs. According to preceding scholars, demographics play a major role in the way in which these attitudes lean. In a study by Pedersen (2005), researchers utilized the “Attitudes Towards Asylum Seekers Scale” (ATAS) to demonstrate the differences in gender, age, education, political affiliation, religious affiliation, and national identification, and their influence on attitudes toward those seeking asylum specifically. This scale may apply to attitudes toward anything. The findings of similar studies carried out after reveal that negative attitudes toward refugees tend to be held by certain demographics, being male in gender, elders in age, nationalists, conservatives, those religiously affiliated, and those with less valuable education. Moreover, opposing demographics tend to carry relatively fewer negative attitudes toward the same group(s) (Cowling et al., 2019).

Theory

Public opinion is formed, influenced, and solidified by a variety of variables in the context of media, including the attempts made by journalists, advocacy organizations, fact-finding missions, and regular citizens to gather, disseminate, and comment on information (where internal biases come to play), as well as the efforts of the state to control information flows (because not every country is a perfect democracy, therefore not every country has the freedom of press). This intricate combination creates a volatile environment for media conflict that has enormous ramifications for both the legal system that oversees wars (Walzer et al., 2017), and how those legal systems and countries involved in wars are perceived by the people. Such perceptions are important to look at because they determine the levels of legitimacy the people will grant their own governments and other governments as well.

Furthermore, the use of certain language to characterize a group or general informational gaps that can highly influence attitudes and opinions are classified as a type of propaganda. Over the decades, it has been emphasized that propaganda is a powerful tool because we are all prone to consuming it somehow, but it becomes too overpowered when we fail to recognize that we are exposed to it, because of how deeply embedded (or normal) it becomes within our society. The “why” this occurs in the first place lies within institutional structures that allow for this phenomenon to go unnoticed by ordinary people. Mass media, which serves the overall populace, convinces its consumers that it is on their side by occasionally critiquing what the masses seem to be against at that very moment. However, though this critique is well-balanced to gain the people’s trust (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, 61), it must be limited enough to disregard any pathway leading to the destruction of our dominant capitalist system in which we operate.

When looking closely at the channels through which we are exposed to propaganda (which are considered “mainstream”), an appropriate way to analyze this consumption is through *social cognitive theory*, and its relation to attitude formation. This exhaustive stereotype framework combines elements of media content (such as message repetition and simplicity) with motivations (such as positive or negative reinforcements in the content) and specific viewing audience characteristics (such as cognitive ability, past reinforcement, and character identification) with the social environment to address the mechanisms through which media may influence consumers (Mastro, 2009).

The framework assumes that the extent to which different races/ethnicities are depicted or represented in the media is how stereotypes are born within those consuming that media. Studies maintain that negative sentiments against minorities are mostly caused by the media's portrayal of them. For instance, when minorities are continuously linked with crime or terrorism, it becomes cognitive practice for one to assume the next individual of that minority group must have committed one of those acts, crime or terrorism. The brain creates a shortcut – association. It has been persuasively shown through content analysis of news reports that minorities are negatively characterized and linked to unfavorable concerns such as the examples used above. Consumers of mainstream media may then develop unfavorable racial prejudices as a result of these portrayals (Schemer, 2012).

Noting that media stereotypes are so ubiquitous, they may often be quickly and easily accessed as cognitive shortcuts that shape future assessments. Racial stereotypes are so persistently accessible that even minute racial cues in the media can trigger racial attitudes that affect judgment without conscious thought. Stereotypical beliefs can undoubtedly be formed or reinforced by the media, but in terms of attitudes, it also has a significant impact on how viewers

understand and retain information in ways that align with their preexisting beliefs and schemata (Rabasubramanian, 2010), as well as how they act out these interpretations when interacting with ethnic groups – more especially, Arabs.

Looking back at Cowling's study of refugees as an example (2019), the results indicate that these negative perceptions and attitudes are being driven by unfounded fear and false beliefs that are fueled by media misrepresentations of refugees as a threat to society because of their alleged illegality and ties to terrorism. People who believed that refugees posed both realistic and symbolic threats to Australia were more likely to hold negative opinions and support harsher policies regarding refugees.

Thinking of digital media as a potential sphere in which the line separating the private and public spheres has become indistinct, there is a trend toward the typecasting of individuals as symbols of movements, ideas, positions, or viewpoints. The intricacy and ambiguity of every person's life, and the opaqueness and mystique of our inner selves are being progressively stripped away as we are reduced to basic social, cultural, and political roles that are instantly identifiable to a viewership (Benhabib, 1997). The pathway linking what we consume from the media to the human brain is made much smoother due to technological and media advancements, thus making it easier to classify and stereotype.

It is concerning that these advances in the media that we devote much of our time consuming do not serve the characteristics of mind (which Seyla Benhabib refers to using Kant's concept of "the enlarged mentality") that much of public sphere theorists – Hannah Arendt included – emphasize (Benhabib, 1997). This pattern becomes ever so problematic in the sense that it hinders the process of forming an individual political opinion, and only further feeds into

the dilemma of generalizations and shortcuts made on political/social topics. As a result, the victims of such patterns become easy targets of media propaganda.

The extent to which the mass media operates as a public sphere that is inclusive, accessible, and represents the populace (which is a very important indicator of democracy) is how it continues to multiply in popularity. It also acts as an intermediary between governing powers and their respective constituents. With that in mind, the concept of democracy becomes highly relevant. Within democracy, the flow of information is a defining characteristic that establishes the level of which the populace may hold the government responsible and act on well-informed judgments (Gillwald, 1993). However, through the media especially, it is not trusted how well-informed one might be, as I have established several times that the flow of information is frequently impeded by many circumstances, making the public information somewhat faulty and leading to the manifestation of political propaganda.

Generally, it is crucial to link mental and physical behaviors to what had caused them: the information that had been perceived. In the case of stereotyping and acting upon mental stereotypes (hate crime being an extreme example), these behaviors are surely, to an extent, caused by exposure to certain types of information flows. It would be safe to say that the media (an umbrella that *does* include television broadcasting), being our new public sphere, is the primary medium through which this information is usually displayed or communicated. This general linkage has had and continues to have tons of political implications.

The media plays a pivotal role in communicating political ideas and beliefs. However, it also contributes to the danger of generalization, driven by our tendency to follow trends – often mistakenly perceived as purely fashionable – or to create cognitive shortcuts reinforced by repeated reporting biases. Unfortunately, these “trends” and shortcuts can significantly influence

individual political and social affiliations, shaping attitudes and perceptions (with demographics also playing a key role in the extent of media influence). This raises the need to examine the severity of monopolistic media's impact on our daily lives by studying its correlation with cognitive and behavioral attitudes.

Data & Methods

Study

Scholars have continuously examined how what media we consume may potentially (and dangerously) impact and undermine our ability to coexist. This has been done in a more general manner without specifically examining how different types of news coverage might shape our overall views and sensitivity toward a certain ethnic group. More specifically, the type of consumption I am concerned with is that of the common news sources in our present day, such as televised news channels/networks, and how potential imperfect information they present on the Middle East/North African region may undermine American attitudes toward Arabs.

H1: As consumption of television mainstream news sources increases, so does negative American attitudes toward Arabs.

Methodology

This study will utilize a survey as the data collection method. It will be distributed through an external crowdsourcing platform called Amazon's Mechanical Turk, characterized as a pivotal resource in the "golden age of survey research" due to its ability to provide prompt access to a diverse, responsible, and non-student participant pool (Samuel, 2018). The aim is to explore the correlation between types of media/news sources consumed and attitudes toward Arabs. Data will be analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistical Tool, with the primary independent variable being the news source consumed, hypothesized to influence the dependent variable: attitudes toward Arabs. Additionally, analyses of other independent variables will be conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the many facets at play when it comes to attitude formation.

Sampling and Limitations

The survey will aim to collect data from around 297 randomized respondents through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. To incentivize participation, each respondent will receive a compensation of \$1.20 upon completion of the survey on Mechanical Turk. Besides the fact that the sample size will not account for 1,500 respondents (which is typically the target number for making accurate generalizations for the U.S. as a whole), a concern with the MTurk platform is that in comparison to the United States' population, which is the population I am seeking to generalize upon using a sample, MTurk participants are typically younger, less religious, educated on a higher level, and politically less diverse. This poses a limitation on the reliability of the data's interpretation at the population level (Litman, 2024).

Measures

The survey will gather demographic data and information on variables operationalized from potential alternate causes. Specifically, it will assess respondents' familiarity with mainstream news outlets such as BBC News, Fox News, or CNN, and their consumption frequency of varying news sources ranging from television, social media, radio, newspapers, etc. The survey will also attempt to capture respondents' levels of trust in television news outlets' portrayals of Arabs, as well as their personal attitudes toward Arabs.

Attitudes Toward Arabs For clarification, it is important to identify who would be classified as 'Arab', which in this study would be any person originating from countries that are members of the Arab League. General opinions toward Arabs were computed using a Likert scale, with 1 being "Very unfavorable," and 5 being "Very favorable." This was not reflected in the survey itself (as creating a Likert scale on Google Forms only defines the lowest and highest

value in the scale). In coding this variable, “2” was defined as “Somewhat favorable,” “3” was defined as “Neutral,” and “4” was defined as “Somewhat favorable.”

Consumption of Mainstream News According to the Pew Research Center, Americans classify the following seven outlets as mainstream media: ABC News, MSNBC, Fox News, CNN, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Post (Shearer et al., 2021). Respondents were first asked to select however many of these television outlets they were familiar with. Since they could select as many options as they see fit, this question led to the creation of seven separate variables (one per news channel). If they selected a news outlet, that fulfilled their familiarity with it, which translated to a “Yes” that was coded as “1.” If they did not select/ignored a news outlet, it was assumed that they were not familiar with it and therefore would answer “No” to familiarity with that respective source. Therefore, any blank spaces for any of the outlets were coded as “0.”

The follow-up question will then consist of a list of media sources: “Twitter,” “Facebook,” “Instagram,” “TikTok,” “Television,” “Radio,” and “Newspaper,” asking the respondent which three of those they consume news from the most, and approximately how much time per day is spent on each (for general use, not necessarily political). The consumption of each of these six media sources was coded into seven separate variables. If a media source was not selected, it was assumed that it was left blank not because the respondent did not answer the question, but because they “Do not consume” that source. This assumption was coded as “0.” “Less than 30 minutes” was coded as “1,” “30 minutes – 1 hour” was coded as “2,” “1 – 2 hours” was coded as “3,” and “2+ hours” was coded as “4.” If a respondent selected multiple time ranges for the same source, only the highest time range was considered. For instance, if an

individual chose both options of “Less than 30 minutes” and “2+ hours” for Twitter, only “2+ hours” was taken into consideration when their response to the question was assessed and coded.

Television Outlets’ Reliability American attitudes toward Arabs’ portrayal in news outlets were measured using a six-item index, with the following statements (Shami, 2020): “Television news outlets truly present Arabs’ personality characteristics as they really are in real life,” “Television news outlets give me somewhat of an insight on Arabs’ personality traits,” “Television news outlets portray positive stereotypes of Arabs,” “Television news outlets portray negative stereotypes of Arabs,” “If I see something positive about Arabs’ personality characteristics on television news outlets, I am not sure it is really that way,” and “If I see something negative about Arabs’ personality characteristics on television news outlets, I am not sure it is really that way.”

Since respondents were able to select as many statements as they resonated with, each of the six statements were created into their own variable. If respondents picked a statement, that translated to a “Yes” which was coded as “1.” If they did not select it, it is assumed that did not agree/resonate with that statement, which was then translated to a “No” and coded as “0.”

Perceptions of Arabs & Explicit Contact Similar to a measure in research carried out by Brown, C. S., et al. (2017), in order to assess the respondents' explicit knowledge of what it means to be "Arab," each participant was asked if they had ever heard the term before, with the option to respond affirmatively or negatively initially. “No” was coded as “0” and “Yes” was coded as “1.” Given they answered “Yes,” they were asked to explain the context of the encounter with the term in an open-ended question. Qualitative coding – outside the scope of my quantitative analysis – was not utilized, and therefore this variable was not included in analysis. Furthermore, participants were asked if they directly know, know of, or associate with any

Arab/Middle Eastern/North African person, by answering “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe.” “No” was coded as “0,” “Maybe” was coded as “1,” and “Yes” was coded as “2.”

Personal Interaction with Arabs Even if respondents do not know, know of, or associate with an Arab individual, they may have interacted with one at some point. The first question of this section asked the respondent if they have ever directly interacted with an Arab individual, with the options “Yes” or “No.” “No” was coded as “0” and “Yes” was coded as “1.” If they answered yes, they were met with two follow-up questions. First, they were asked about the frequency of interaction, with the five options being: “Singular occurrence” coded as “0,” “Yearly occurrence” coded as “1,” “Weekly occurrence” coded as “2,” “Monthly occurrence” coded as “3,” and “Daily occurrence” coded as “4.”

Then, respondents were asked about the overall tone/quality of the interaction(s), with the chance to select multiple options in the case they have had multiple different interactions with either the same or different Arab individual(s); the options were: “Non-significant interaction” coded as “0,” “Negative/contradictory” coded as “1,” “Neutral/casual conversation” coded as “2,” and “Positive/constructive” coded as “3.” Since respondents were able to select multiple answers, only their most positive interaction/highly coded response was taken into consideration and remained in the data set. Any other option they may have picked was eliminated. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that a positive interaction with a member of a group would override a neutral or negative one when it comes to influencing attitudes toward that group of people. This is why a positive interaction was coded the highest.

Demographics These variables would affect direct exposure to and consumption of the mainstream news sources I am exploring. They included age, race and ethnicity, gender, education, and employment. The fulfillment and combination of any of these variables would

likely influence whether certain persons would be attracted to mainstream news channels in the first place, the way in which they would interpret the news, or their general opinion toward Arabs. A few examples: (1) a respondent under the age category falling under Gen-Z may resort more to social media platforms to retain global news than they would television channels. (2) Women may be more empathetic in their interpretation of news than men.

Survey questions attempting to gather this data were rather straightforward. Age was measured through the options: “18-29” coded as “0,” “30-44” coded as “1,” “45-49” coded as “2,” “50-59” coded as “3,” “60-78” coded as “4,” or “78+” coded as “5” (Robinson, 2024). Race and ethnicity were measured through a survey question similar to that of the Census Bureau’s (except for the separation of “Middle Eastern/North African” from “White” for the purposes of this study as well as the addition of “Hispanic/Latino”) asking which race the respondent best identifies with, with the options being: “White,” “Black or African American,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” “Hispanic/Latino,” or “Middle Eastern/North African” (*About the Topic of Race*, 2022).

No respondents fit into the categories of “Middle Eastern/North African” or “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” therefore those two options were eliminated when coding the variable of race and ethnicity. Around 83% of respondents fell under the category “White,” taking away from all other remaining races’ statistical power. Therefore, in coding this variable, the race categories of “Hispanic/Latino,” “Asian,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” and “Black or African American” were combined into one variable: “Other.” This was coded as “0.” “White” was coded as “1.” The updated version of this race variable (with only two possible options), categorical in nature, was then transformed into a dummy variable.

Gender was measured through a survey question also similar to that of the Census Bureau's, asking whether the respondent identified themselves as "Man," or "Woman," while also providing an "Other" option (File, T., and Lee, J.H., 2021). "Man" was coded as "0," and "Woman" was coded as "1." This categorical variable was then transformed into a dummy variable.

Education was measured by asking respondents what the highest level of education they have completed is, with their options being: "No formal schooling completed," "Less than high school," "High school graduate, diploma, or the equivalent," "Some college, no degree," "Associate degree," "Bachelor's degree," "Master's degree," "Professional degree (i.e., JD, MD)," or "Doctoral degree (PhD or equivalent)" (*About Educational Attainment*, 2021). This would enable a clear distinction between different categories of education, and how they may potentially influence responses to questions on attitudes. For instance, a college campus is generally considered more socially diverse than high schools, meaning an attainment of some college education may influence the various cultures an individual may have been exposed to and therefore, their perceptions toward certain ethnic groups.

Based on the frequencies of data collected for this question, several responses were combined and coded as such. "No formal schooling completed," "Less than high school," and "High school graduate, diploma, or the equivalent" were combined into one category coded as "0." "Some college, no degree" and "Associate degree" were combined into one category coded as "1." "Bachelor's degree," which was the most popular response among this sample, remained its own category – coded as "2." Lastly, "Master's degree," "Professional degree," and "Doctorate degree" were grouped as one category and coded as "3." The updated variable of

education contained four categories instead of the initial number of nine but was still considered an ordinal variable.

Employment was measured through a question asking what the respondent's employment status currently is, with their options being: "Full-time," "Part-time," "Actively seeking," "Retired," and "Prefer not to say," (*15 Demographic Questions for Surveys*, 2023). This would largely determine the respondent's availability in terms of time, which would ultimately influence daily consumption patterns. Another effect employment status could have is the extent of exposure to diverse workforces, which a full-time employee would experience more frequently relative an unemployed person. In coding the variable, "Retired" was excluded as an option as it was not selected by any respondents and did not apply to generalized statements that could be made on relative involvement in the workforce. The frequencies of "Actively seeking" and "Part-time" were relatively small, so the two categories were combined and coded as "0." "Full-time" was coded as "1."

Borrowed from the Pew Research Center, religious affiliation was measured by asking respondents what their present religious affiliation or philosophy is, with the options being "Protestant," "Roman Catholic," "Mormon," "Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox," "Jewish," "Muslim," "Buddhist," "Hindu," "Atheist," "Agnostic," "I do not affiliate with any of these options," or "Other" (*How Does Pew Research*, 2018). All options except for "Roman Catholic" and "Protestant" had relatively low frequencies and were therefore combined into a single "Other" category that was coded as "0." Theoretically, it would have made sense to isolate the category "Muslims" out of this combination (as Muslims are likely to have a positive opinion on Arabs), but there were simply not enough cases relative to the more frequently chosen religions. "Roman Catholic" was coded as "1," and "Protestant" was coded as "2." After

narrowing down the categories of this religion variable, it was transformed into a dummy variable.

Findings**TABLE 1: Initial Regression Model**

	<i>General Opinion Toward Arabs</i>		
	β	SE β	Significance
Consumption of television for news	-.001	.415	.994
Consumption of Twitter for news	.219	.057	.005**
Consumption of Facebook for news	.054	.056	.427
Consumption of Instagram for news	.136	.053	.037*
Consumption of TikTok for news	-.128	.055	.080
Consumption of Radio for news	.038	.062	.658
Consumption of Newspaper for news	.071	.057	.339
True presentation of Arabs' traits on television news outlets	.064	.108	.310
Insight on Arabs' traits on television news outlets	-.027	.100	.653
Positive stereotypes of Arabs on television news outlets	-.039	.100	.511
Negative stereotypes of Arabs on television news outlets	.128	.105	.036*
Uncertainty about positive portrayals of Arabs on television news	.117	.144	.085
Uncertainty about negative portrayals of Arabs on television news	-.067	.203	.350
Familiarity with the term "Arab"	.216	.146	.004**
Relationship/association with an Arab	-.315	.087	<.001***
Interaction with an Arab	.239	.210	<.001***
Tone of interaction with an Arab	.105	.054	.083
Age	.018	.075	.774
Race			
White	-.084	.158	.190
"Other race" used as reference category			
Gender			
Man	-.034	.127	.577
"Woman" used as reference category			
Education	.104	.090	.105
Employment	.075	.219	.218
Religion			
Catholic	.057	.129	.456
"Other religion" used as reference category			
Protestant	.023	.170	.765
"Other religion" used as reference category			
Constant		.415	.005**

Observations (N) = 245

R² = .339

f = 4.709, p < .001***

Note:

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

The first regression model ran included every possible independent variable measured (without error; unlike a few variables that were excluded) that could influence opinions toward Arabs. This broad approach provided a basis for further analysis. The first independent variable, consumption of television as a news source, was arguably the most important since it is hypothesized to influence opinions toward Arabs. Variables that came after were other independent variables and control variables (the list of control variables begins at age). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.339, meaning that 33.9% of the variance in opinions toward Arabs is explained by the independent variables in this model. The relatively high R^2 value indicates that the model does have some predictive power. The f -statistic was below 0.001, confirming that the overall model is statistically significant and that the relationships observed are unlikely to be due to chance.

The significance of television news consumption, indicated by its t -test, was low, suggesting that its impact on opinions toward Arabs may not be as strong as initially hypothesized. Given the centrality of television news consumption as the main independent variable in this research, this finding warranted further exploration. Another potential explanation, which will be elaborated on later, is that the influence of other media sources may have overshadowed the effect of television news. This interpretation is supported by the high significance levels found for news consumption on platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Specifically, Twitter news consumption had a p-value of 0.005, and Instagram news consumption had a p-value of 0.037. TikTok consumption was also notable, approaching significance with a p-value close to 0.05. No other media sources measured reached statistical significance.

Though an insignificant variable in this model, the coefficient for television news consumption was negative, aligning with the hypothesized relationship between television news consumption and opinions toward Arabs. Similarly, the coefficients for Twitter and Instagram news consumption were positive, as expected, suggesting a positive relationship between these platforms and opinions toward an ethnic group.

Out of the next six variables – statements that respondents either resonated with or not – only a belief that television news outlets do portray negative stereotypes of Arabs had a significant effect on opinions toward Arabs. This variable's coefficient was positive, which aligns with its expected relationship with the dependent variable. Next, familiarity with the term "Arab" was significant at a level of .01; with a positive coefficient, which reinforced the expected correlation – if someone was familiar with the term, they would move up the scale of favorability toward Arabs.

Knowing, knowing of, or association with an Arab individual has a very high significance – with the variable's p-value being less than .001 – on opinions toward them. However, this variable's coefficient had an unexpected negative sign, indicating that if the respondent had a relationship/association with an Arab, their favorability of them would decrease. Similarly, with a p-value below .001, interaction with a single Arab individual or multiple has a highly significant effect on opinions toward them. This variable's coefficient had an expected positive sign – meaning if someone did encounter and interact with Arab(s), their favorability of them would likely increase. Besides those mentioned, no other variable was statistically significant. But, the signs of the coefficients of all control variables were theoretically valid.

TABLE 2: Television News Consumption & Significant Independent Variables' from Model 1 as Predictors of Opinions Toward Arabs

	<i>General Opinion Toward Arabs</i>		
	β	SE β	Significance
Consumption of television for news	-.007	.048	.903
Consumption of Twitter for news	.303	.044	<.001***
Consumption of Instagram for news	.120	.048	.037*
Negative stereotypes of Arabs on television news outlets	.164	.100	.004**
Familiarity with the term "Arab"	.056	.122	.391
Relationship/association with an Arab	-.223	.077	.001***
Interaction with an Arab	.216	.153	.001***
Constant		.181	<.001***
Observations (N) = 288			
R ² = .206			
$f = 10.380, p < .001$ ***			

Note:

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The second regression model was streamlined to focus on television news consumption and significant predictors identified in the first model. This narrowed approach aimed to hone in on the most influential factors impacting opinions toward Arabs. In this model, the coefficient for television news consumption remained statistically insignificant, with a p-value of 0.903, confirming that its impact on opinions toward Arabs is minimal – similar to the results of the first model. The negative relationship identified through the coefficient remained theoretically valid, though.

News consumption on Twitter retained high significance, with a p-value of less than 0.001 and a positive coefficient which reflected an expected relationship. This indicated that increased Twitter news consumption is strongly associated with more favorable opinions toward Arabs. Similarly, Instagram news consumption remained significant, with a p-value of 0.037 and a positive coefficient, also consistent with its expected relationship with the dependent variable.

The belief that television news outlets portray negative stereotypes of Arabs approached significance with a p-value of 0.004 and a positive coefficient of 0.164, suggesting that awareness of these stereotypes may significantly influence opinions. Familiarity with the term “Arab” lost the significance it had in the previous model with a p-value of .391, but still had a positive coefficient, indicating that respondents familiar with the term tend to have more favorable views toward Arabs.

Relationship or association with an Arab and interaction with an Arab both remained highly significant predictors, with p-values of 0.001. However, the relationship variable still had a negative coefficient under this model, which was deemed an unexpected sign. Interaction with an Arab had a positive coefficient, supporting the idea that personal interactions foster more favorable opinions. The overall model had a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.206, meaning 20.6% of the variance in opinions toward Arabs was explained by these variables. The model's f -statistic was 10.380 with a p-value below 0.001, demonstrating that the model was statistically significant.

TABLE 3: Second Regression Model Less Twitter & Instagram News Consumption

	<i>General Opinion Toward Arabs</i>		
	β	SE β	Significance
Consumption of television for news	.136	.046	.020*
Negative stereotypes of Arabs on television news outlets	.170	.105	.005**
Familiarity with the term “Arab”	.066	.129	.338
Relationship/association with an Arab	-.216	.081	.002**
Interaction with an Arab	.209	.162	.003**
Constant		.164	<.001***
Observations (N) = 288			
$R^2 = .103$			
$f = 6.471, p < .001$ ***			

Note:

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The results of the third regression model were largely consistent with those of the second regression, with one notable exception: the p-value for television news consumption as a predictor of opinions toward Arabs significantly decreased, rendering it a statistically significant variable. This outcome validated the decision to conduct a third regression, which excluded Twitter and Instagram news consumption, because they suggested the presence of a dominant variable issue. In this case, the high correlation between Twitter and Instagram news consumption and opinions toward Arabs likely overshadowed the significance of television news consumption as a predictor. As anticipated, their absence from the model increased the significance of television news consumption.

Discussion

The findings from the three regression models reveal nuanced insights into how media consumption and various personal factors shape American opinions toward Arabs. These results align with the theoretical frameworks on media influence and stereotype formation, yet they also present some unexpected relationships worthy of discussion. All models were consistent with maintaining opinions toward Arabs as the dependent variable and keeping television news consumption as the main independent variable, regardless of expected/actual significance.

The first regression model incorporated all independent variables, aiming to comprehensively analyze their influence on attitudes toward Arabs. Despite the initial hypothesis that television news consumption would play a significant role in shaping opinions, the results showed that its coefficient was statistically insignificant ($p = 0.994$). This finding challenges the assumption that mainstream television, considered a driver of public perception in the literature, is a dominant factor in shaping opinions toward Arabs. The low significance may suggest that the influence of television news is diffused when considering the concurrent impact of other media sources.

Notably, consumption of Twitter ($p = 0.005$) and Instagram ($p = 0.037$) emerged as significant predictors with positive coefficients, indicating that individuals who consume news from these platforms are more likely to hold favorable views toward Arabs. This result aligns with existing literature suggesting that social media, known for its interactive and diverse content, can offer counter-narratives to mainstream portrayals, potentially mitigating negative stereotypes.

Other significant variables included familiarity with the term “Arab” ($p = 0.004$), which had a positive coefficient, reinforcing the idea that prior knowledge of the term and its several

possible contexts correlates with more favorable opinions. However, the variable measuring relationship or association with an Arab showed an unexpected negative coefficient ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that familiarity may not always translate to positive attitudes. Interaction with an Arab, on the other hand, had a positive and significant impact ($p < 0.001$), supporting theories that direct, positive interpersonal experiences can improve opinions.

The second regression model focused only on significant predictors from Model 1, streamlining the analysis. Here, television news consumption remained insignificant ($p = 0.903$), and its negative coefficient persisted. This result reinforces the hypothesis that, when analyzed alongside highly impactful media variables such as Twitter and Instagram consumption, the significance of television news consumption diminishes.

Twitter maintained its strong significance ($p < 0.001$) with a positive coefficient, underscoring its role in shaping favorable attitudes. Instagram also remained significant ($p = 0.037$), highlighting how different types of media can variably influence perception. The belief in negative stereotypes portrayed by television news had a p-value of 0.004, supporting the notion that awareness of such portrayals correlates with opinion formation. Familiarity with the term “Arab” lost its significance in this model ($p = 0.391$), which may suggest that while initial familiarity plays a role, other variables take precedence when considered together. The relationship/association variable continued to show a negative and significant coefficient ($p = 0.001$), an intriguing result that could indicate the complexity of real-world relationships affecting opinions and attitudes.

The third regression model excluded Twitter and Instagram consumption to test for multicollinearity. This adjustment revealed a significant result for television news consumption ($p = 0.020$), suggesting that the prior insignificance was due to overshadowing by dominant

variables. The emergence of significance supports the idea that television consumption does impact attitudes, albeit less prominently when competing variables – like social media platforms – are present. Negative stereotypes in television news retained significance ($p = 0.005$), indicating that perception of biased portrayals continues to influence opinions. The relationship/association with an Arab remained negatively significant ($p = 0.002$), whereas interaction with an Arab ($p = 0.003$) continued to show a positive impact.

These findings suggest a layered relationship between media consumption and attitudes. The significant influence of Twitter and Instagram supports the expectation that advanced and more interactive media offer alternative perspectives and play a substantial role in challenging traditional stereotypes. The eventual significance of television news consumption in Model 3 underscores that while its influence exists, it may be diluted by other, more direct or interactive forms of media. The consistent negative relationship for the “association” variable raises questions about the contexts in which familiarity impacts attitudes. It may point to experiences that reinforce stereotypes, underscoring that not all interpersonal contact is uniformly positive. In contrast, the positive impact of direct interactions aligns with contact theory, which posits that meaningful interactions can reduce prejudice.

Limitations & Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of media consumption on attitudes toward Arabs, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged, along with suggestions for future research to build on these findings. One significant limitation of this study was the measurement of the primary independent variable, “consumption of television mainstream news.” The variable assessing “familiarity with mainstream news” allowed for

subjective interpretation, making it less precise as a measure of actual consumption. This ambiguity may have led to inconsistencies in how respondents reported their familiarity and engagement with mainstream news channels, which is not necessarily covered in the "television news consumption" variable as respondents could consume television news from channels that are not classified as "mainstream" according to the literature. In future research, a more straightforward and structured approach could be adopted for measuring media consumption.

The measurement challenges extended to other variables in the study as well. Some questions, while intended to capture broader aspects of media and personal experiences, may have lacked clarity, or could be interpreted in multiple ways. This underscores the need for future surveys to use more direct and specific questions to limit respondent confusion and enhance the accuracy of data collection. Simplifying variable measurement could improve the reliability of responses and ensure that participants' interpretations align with the intended meaning of the survey questions.

Another notable limitation was the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk as the crowdsourcing platform for survey distribution. While MTurk provided a convenient means to access a non-student respondent pool, it did not capture a truly diverse and representative sample of the U.S. population. Future studies could aim to collect responses from more varied and representative platforms or techniques that better mirror the U.S. population.

Self-reporting bias is another inherent limitation of survey-based research and likely impacted the results of this study. Respondents may have reported their media consumption habits and attitudes in a way that aligned with socially desirable behavior rather than their actual practices and beliefs. This bias could have influenced the accuracy of data, particularly in questions related to attitudes toward Arabs and perceptions of media reliability.

Another area for consideration is the sample size. The study's sample of 294 respondents, while sufficient for initial analyses, limited the ability to generalize findings broadly. A larger sample size could enhance the statistical power of certain categories within future studies, allowing for more nuanced subgroup analyses and increasing the reliability of results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shed light on the complex relationship between media consumption and attitudes toward Arabs, emphasizing the significance of certain media platforms and the varying impact of personal interactions. The findings indicate that while television news consumption (not necessarily limited to mainstream channels) was significant in shaping opinions, its influence was not as pronounced relative to social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. However, limitations such as imprecise variable measurement as well as data and sampling biases highlight the need for methodological improvements in future research, which would enhance the robustness of subsequent studies.

Appendix**Regression 1**

Y = Opinions Toward Arabs
X = Any appropriately coded
variable that could influence
Y

Regression 2

Y = Opinions Toward Arabs
X = Television news
consumption + any
statistically significant
variable from *Regression 1*

Regression 3

Y = Opinions Toward Arabs
X = *Regression 2* –
consumption of Twitter as
news source – consumption
of Instagram as news source

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