

My Hero, Your Aggressor: Differences in Perceptions of News Media Brand Personality

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Though brand personality has been explored in the context of news media, the literature has yet to systematically examine differences in perceptions of news media brand personality among individuals with differing political ideologies. An analysis of 588 surveys where participants rated either mainstream ($n = 200$), liberal ($n = 192$), or conservative ($n = 196$) news media brands across the dimensions of aggression, heroism, and warmth revealed that while political ideology has little impact on individuals' perceptions of news media brand personality with regard to mainstream media, significant associations were present for perceptions of liberal and conservative news media. Controlling for education, age, familiarity, and gender, more conservative participants tended to find conservative news outlets less aggressive and more heroic and find liberal outlets more aggressive and less heroic; the differences in these associations were statistically significant. For both liberal outlets and conservative outlets, greater familiarity tended to be associated with higher perceived heroism. Significant gender and race associations are noted in perceptions of warmth. Ramifications in the context of political communication and media management are discussed.

Keywords: brands, brand personality, news media, media brands

Brands are expected to grow in importance in the media landscape as companies strive to make their products distinguishable in an increasingly crowded marketplace for finite audience attention (Malmelin & Moisander, 2014; McDowell, 2006). In his review discussing the emergence of partisan media and its relationship with political polarization, Prior (2013) suggests the need for further inquiry on brands' role as content cues in news media consumption and their effects on selective exposure. Yet, while research has commonly examined ideology-driven selective exposure (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Mutz & Young, 2011), such works have generally left aside intuitively relevant considerations found in branding research—namely, that concerning perceptions of brand personality.

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Studies on news media brand personality and individual differences in perception of news media brands are limited, with notable examples being a news media brand personality scale by J. Kim, Baek, and Martin (2010) and an examination of the antecedents of television news brand personality by Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008). Though Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) found cursory evidence—only examining the six outlets of NBC News, CBS News, ABC News, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC—for party identification effects on perceptions of news media brand personality, no systematic inquiry into the effect of audience political ideology on perceptions of mainstream and partisan media brand personality has been conducted. This a crucial oversight as congruence along personality and related dimensions between the self and a brand has been shown to be associated with various positive outcomes, such as loyalty (Kressman et al., 2006), purchase intent (Sirgy, 1985), and others in the marketing literature. Such effects can generalize into media consumption contexts (Nienstedt, Huber, & Seelmann, 2012), making the examination of the brand personality construct in relation to media relevant with regard not only to news media and media-induced polarization but to media consumption in general.

This article reviews relevant research in the fields of political science, communication, and media management and investigates how individuals' political ideology is associated with perceptions of mainstream and partisan news media brands using the brand personality construct. Ramifications in the context of media management and political communication are discussed.

Media Bias and Partisan Media

Studies on media bias, its precursors, and its effects are numerous in the literature. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) suggest that the typical consumer perceives news outlets providing information consistent with their beliefs to be of higher quality; their test of a model rooted in this paradigm suggests that bias emerges as news media companies tailor their coverage to increase their quality reputation by suiting the prior expectations of their audience (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). Research has also closely examined the role of this corporate profit motive in media bias (e.g., Gilens & Hertzman, 2000).

Beyond their mere formation, however, the spread of media bias through partisan media in this manner has been found to have significant effects. Research suggests that the proliferation of partisan media can influence the behavior of both politicians (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014) and the general voting public (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007). It has been suggested that this may be due to the tendency of partisan media to deliver attitude-congruent one-sided messages that are disproportionately perceived as strong and persuasive due to the resulting lack of counterargument (Klayman & Ha, 1987; Levendusky, 2013; Taber, Cann, & Kucsova, 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Such messaging may have negative effects in political discourse. The idea of ideology effects on selective exposure to news media is well explored in the literature (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Stroud (2010) found evidence that consumption of partisan media increases ideological polarization, but also found some support for the effect of polarization on consumption of partisan media. Levendusky (2013) found that consumption of partisan media polarizes viewers' ideological stances even further, with effects detectable several days after consumption.

However, some research challenges and adds nuance to the above findings, pointing to a need for examination of not only selective exposure but selective avoidance. Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch

(2013) find from analysis of 2004 and 2008 national survey data that consumption of attitude-congruent news sources is positively associated with consumption of attitude-incongruent sources. Such research suggests that a proattitudinal approach is not the same as counterattitudinal avoidance, with the two behaviors having distinct outcomes and new technologies such as the Internet allowing for exposure to more ideologically congruent information without sacrificing exposure to other information (Garrett, 2009). Indeed, Garrett and Stroud (2014), in calling for greater distinction in examinations of seeking proattitudinal information versus avoiding counterattitudinal content, find that Republicans are more likely to selectively avoid counterattitudinal information, while non-Republicans are more likely to selectively consume content including proattitudinal information, regardless of the copresence of counterattitudinal information. The Republican avoidance of counterattitudinal information—arguably a type of negative stimuli—seems to align with research suggesting conservatives' greater physiological responses to negative stimuli (Oxley et al., 2008; K. B. Smith, Oxley, Hibbing, Alford, & Hibbing, 2011). On the effects of such counter- and proattitudinal content, Arceneaux, Johnson, and Murphy (2012) suggest that, although counterattitudinal content is more likely than proattitudinal content to result in hostile perceptions of the media outlet, the availability of choice—that is, opportunity to escape counterattitudinal content exposure—nullifies this polarizing effect.

Given such research on media bias and its outcomes, it is worth considering how news media of different backgrounds—mainstream versus liberal or conservative partisan—are perceived and processed to selection, especially given that, ultimately, descriptive news tends to be relatively ideologically neutral regardless of outlet-level slant (Budak, Goel, & Rao, 2016). Brands may be of relevance in this regard. Indeed, Prior (2013) suggests that, as experiential goods, the exact properties of news stories only become known post-exposure, creating incentives for news media to construct brands that serve as content expectation cues. Citing findings by Iyengar and Hahn (2009) and Mutz and Young (2011) that suggest Republicans view Fox News even for travel and sports information—perhaps due to habit or taste for the presentation style as opposed to avoidance of attitude-incongruent programming—Prior (2013) suggests a need to further examine brands and their relevance to news media.

Brands and Brand Personality, News Media, and Ideology

One of the oldest definitions of the term *brand* is that proposed by the American Marketing Association (1960): a combination of word, design, or a set of symbols that serve as a marker of one party's products to differentiate them from those of others. It has also been suggested that brands are as simple as risk-reducing tools (Assael, 1984) or legal devices (Broadbent & Cooper, 1987; Crainer, 1995) to as complex as identity systems (Kapferer, 1992) and images (Gardner & Levy, 1955).

This sheer variety of possible definitions for brand has been explored by scholars (e.g., de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; Wood, 2000) in an attempt to narrow down a coherent definition for the construct. Drawing from a large body of research, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) present four guidelines to understand the brand construct: Brands are multifaceted and best described through several themes; the American Marketing Association's (1960) definition does not sufficiently take into account intangible aspects of a brand and how they are perceived by consumers; brands embody the alignment of practical and affective priorities set by a company with the practical and emotional desires of

consumers; and brands that better match the practical and affective needs of consumers are more successful. Jones and Bonevac (2013) similarly review prior literature and distill previously proposed definitions to suggest that a brand, simply put, "is a definition of a particular company or product" (p. 117) that places an item in a particular category by "[establishing] awareness and identification" (p. 118) and differentiates it from others through "promises, images, personalities, emotional characteristics, social characteristics, and various other objective and subjective qualities" (p. 118). For purposes of easier discussion, this article (though it does take into consideration the other elements) refers primarily to the name component of brands, which Kotler (1991) defines as the "part of a brand which can be vocalized" (p. 442).

Despite being an abstract construct, brands have been operationalized to possess various anthropomorphic characteristics. A popularly studied example of such a characteristic is brand personality. The idea of the personality of brands was popularized in research by Aaker (1997), who defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347) and developed a scale to measure the construct consisting of the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Researchers have since conducted countless studies using this and similar scales (e.g., Geuens, Weijters, & de Wulf, 2009) to investigate the idea of brand personality and its impact. Of greatest relevance in the present context, studies have generally found that brand-self congruence along personality and similar dimensions can lead to various favorable attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, such as purchase intent and loyalty (e.g., Branaghan & Hildebrand, 2011; Graeff, 1996; Hosany & Martin, 2012; Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy, 1985). In the most media-relevant context, Nienstedt et al. (2012) found that brand-self congruence was positively associated with loyalty to magazine brands.

As previously mentioned, as news media outlets develop their brands, the potential for counterattitudinal information exposure is created (Prior, 2013)—that is, in the paradigm of brand-self congruence effects, a viewer may consume and have loyalty toward a news outlet due to high brand-self congruence but then be provided by the news outlet with unexpected, brand-inconsistent content. However, such delivery of attitude-incongruent information, if purposive, arguably cannot be overly frequent; inverting Gentzkow and Shapiro's (2006) suggestion that news outlets with attitude-congruent content are viewed more favorably, repeated delivery of attitude-incongruent information may reduce a news outlet's appeal among the intended audience. More specifically with regard to brands, by Oyedeji's (2010) Credible Brands Model, lowered ideological congruence with a news outlet brand leads to less positive perceptions of the brand and, in turn, its credibility. This is simple to tangibly consider—*The Huffington Post* would likely lose appeal among its audience if its content began to lean conservative, while Fox News would lose appeal among its audience if its content began to lean liberal.

Inquiries on brand personality in media contexts, including, but not limited to, news, are present in the communication, marketing, and media management literature. Such endeavors generally build on concerns about broad, "macro" (Reynolds, 1988; Schwartz, 1992) measurements of brand personality with predictive and nomological validity (Valette-Florence & de Barnier, 2013) to construct "micro" (Reynolds, 1988) brand personality scales that capture personality traits accessible and relevant in specific categorical and cultural contexts (Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013; Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert,

2005). These micro measures can contain both parallels and differences with each other as well as in comparison with more general brand personality inventories.

For example, Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) note that their scale to measure the personality of French print media brands—consisting of the dimensions of respectability, disingenuousness, conviviality, assertiveness, and charm—contains little, if any, similarity in dimensions to the macro Aaker (1997) scale, which has been shown to be limited in non-North American contexts (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Koebel & Ladwein, 1999, as cited in Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013). Sung and Park's (2011) cable television network brand personality measure possesses a few more parallels to the Aaker (1997) measure and is conceptualized along the dimensions of excitement, warmth, intelligence, controversy, and ruggedness. They note that the excitement dimension is similar to that observed by Aaker but contains two subfacets—adventurous and young—capturing two different elements of excitement. They also highlight similarities between their warmth dimension and Aaker's but highlight the family-oriented and romantic subfacets arising from the topic domain and the nature of some channels observed, such as the Hallmark Channel, TV Land, and ABC Family (Sung & Park, 2011, p. 101).

Specifically with news media, J. Kim et al. (2010) suggest that the brand personality dimensions of TV, cable, and print news media can be measured across the dimensions of trustworthiness, dynamism, sincerity, sophistication, and toughness. They suggest that the presence of the trustworthiness dimension supports the idea that audiences value the credibility of media outlets, while the dynamism dimension seems to align with excitement as observed by Aaker (1997) and Sung and Park (2011), and the sophistication dimension aligns with the charm-elegance subfacet observed by Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013). Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2007), examining three broadcast news and three cable news outlets, posit a three-dimension conceptualization of television news brand personality consisting of competence, timeliness, and dynamism, which seem to reflect similar trait emphases as the measures described above.

The literature provides some evidence for significant differences in brand personality between different news media as well as differences in perceived brand personality depending on individual factors. J. Kim et al. (2010) provide a table of the mean ratings of various news outlets across their five personality dimensions based on their sample, displaying noticeable differences in dimension scores between different news media (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal's* 2.89 out of 7 on sincerity versus PBS's 4.93, Fox News's 4.17 on toughness versus ABC News's 2.69). Meanwhile, Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) found that Democrats tended to perceive NBC News and CBS News as more competent and NBC News, CBS News, and ABC News as more dynamic; Independents tended to perceive NBC and ABC as less timely and Fox News as less dynamic; and Republicans tended to perceive Fox News as more competent.

These findings by Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008), though limited by their narrow scope of brands examined (NBC News, ABC News, CBS News, Fox News, MSNBC, CNN), suggest that individuals' ideology can indeed influence their perceptions of news media brands. A better understanding of individuals' brand perceptions is critical because many studies on brand-self congruence effects use individual ratings as the measurement of the brand's personality against which individuals' ratings of their own personality are

compared to generate congruence measures. Given evidence that brand-self congruence effects on attitudes and behavior may generalize into media attitudes and behavior (Nienstedt et al., 2012), understanding how individuals of different ideologies and demographic groups perceive the personality of news media brands could be a step toward further research on brand-self congruence effects in selective exposure to political information.

The present study expands on the thread of inquiry studied by Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) to more rigorously examine the effect of political ideology on perceptions of news media brands. It examines not only how perceptions of news media brands can differ depending on political ideology but how such effects can vary depending on whether the news media in question is a mainstream, liberal, or conservative news outlet.

RQ1: How do perceptions of news media brand personality differ depending on an individual's political ideology?

RQ2: How does the association between political ideology and perceived news media brand personality interact with the partisan nature of the news outlet being rated—that is, how does the association differ depending on whether the news outlet under consideration is liberal or conservative?

Method

The sample and data collection procedure described below refer to the procedures used in an earlier article by D. D. E. Kim (2017), the study from which the data for the present article are sourced.

Measure

D. D. E. Kim (2017) refers to issues with measuring brand personality at a scope that is too broad, leading to validity concerns (Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2011), or too narrow, making comparison across media formats impossible. Based on these concerns, trait parallels in existing media brand personality scales (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007; J. Kim et al., 2010; Sung & Park, 2011), and the fact that media use theories such as mood management (Zillmann, 1988) have been tested with multiple media formats—suggesting a degree of commonality in perception of different types of media products—D. D. E. Kim constructs and empirically validates a scale that captures the common personality dimensions across which movie, video game, TV show, pop song, and news outlet brands are perceived. The resulting Unified Media Brand Personality Scale is an 11-item measure consisting of the dimensions of aggression, heroism, and warmth (see Figure 1). Though they are commonly perceived across all three media formats, these dimensions are notable in that their meaning and contextual valence can each vary depending on the media format under consideration—for example, high warmth, though positive in the context of many genres of movies or music, may be considered negatively in the context of news outlets (D. D. E. Kim, 2017).

Aggression	Heroism	Warmth
Dark Aggressive Hostile Violent Ruthless	Honorable Helpful Responsible	Sentimental Romantic Loving

Figure 1. Dimensions of the Unified Media Brand Personality Scale (D. D. E. Kim, 2017).

Procedure

Data collection took place in August 2016. Participants were recruited from the Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) service, restricted to native English speakers located in the United States over age 18 who had successfully completed at least 50 tasks on mTurk in the past.

To screen for eligibility, participants were asked about their level of familiarity with up to nine different movie, video game, pop song, TV show, and news outlet brands on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all familiar with it*; 2 = *have heard of it but don't know what it's about*; 3 = *have heard of it and know what it's about* [familiar, no consumption]; 4 = *have read/watched it a few times* [consumed a few times]; 5 = *have read/watched it regularly* [consumed regularly]). The brands were presented one by one, randomly selected from a list of 100 (20 of each category). A familiarity score of 3 or higher was necessary for one of the nine randomly presented media brands to be deemed eligible for the study. Participants indicating insufficient familiarity on all nine randomly presented options were ineligible to participate in the study.

For the first brand they indicated 3 or higher familiarity on, participants were asked to indicate to what degree they believed each of the 11 personality traits representing the unified media brand personality scale applied to the brand, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). Each participant rated the personality of only this one brand. Finally, participants were asked to respond to an array of demographics questions, including political ideology as adapted from T. W. Smith, Marsden, and Hout's (2016) General Social Survey's "polviews" item (1 = *extremely liberal*; 7 = *extremely conservative*).

The news outlet brands in the source data set were mostly adapted from the set of "well-known" news brands studied in J. Kim and colleagues (2010, p. 120), with "popular conservative and liberal blogs added" (D. D. E. Kim, 2017, p. 204). The source data set contained a total of 4,967 independent ratings, 1,354 of which were randomly screened for their familiarity with a news brand included in the study, and 988 of which indicated sufficient familiarity with a news brand presented to them to proceed to rating it.

Within this larger data set, 196 (192) individuals had rated either a cable news channel generally considered to lean conservative (liberal), Fox News (MSNBC), or one of three news outlets more trusted

than distrusted only among those with conservative (liberal) ideology according to the Pew Research Center (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley, & Matsa, 2014): *The Blaze*, *Breitbart*, *The Drudge Report* (*Daily Kos*, *The Huffington Post*, *Mother Jones*). To form the final data set for the present study ($N = 588$), the data for 200 individuals who had rated either the single mainstream cable news channel, CNN, or one of three arbitrarily selected mainstream news outlets (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*)—all recognized by at least 40% of the public and more trusted than distrusted by those of liberal to at least mixed ideology according to the Pew Research Center (Mitchell et al., 2014)—were combined with the data from those who had rated one of the four conservative or four liberal outlets.

This combined sample of 588 was 47.1% male and 81% White, with a median age of 34. Slightly more than 39% of participants had completed some college, while 50.5% of participants had completed a four-year college degree or more. One-way analysis of variance suggested no significant difference in mean political ideology ($F = 0.1.6925$, $p = .185$) between the mainstream media, liberal media, and conservative media rater groups, and mean political ideology for the combined sample hewed relatively close to the middle of the 7-point scale ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.69$), with a one-sample t test failing to reject the null mean of 3.5 ($t = -0.658$, $p = .511$).

Comparing to mTurk demographic data as examined by Huff and Tingley (2015), the predominantly White, majority female, and relatively high educational attainment suggest that the present sample is roughly representative of the American mTurker population, though the sample does not lean as heavily liberal ideologically as may be expected. Relative to the full source data set (A in Table 1), the subset that had been randomly offered a news brand as one of its up-to-nine familiarity check options (B), and the subset that had been randomly offered *and* indicated sufficient familiarity to rate a news brand (D), the sample used in the present study (E) remained roughly representative, though it did lean slightly older and more educated; given the nested nature of these sets and according lack of independence, tests for statistical significance in differences were not possible.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics for the Source Data Set and Data Subsets.

	Mean ideology (SD)	Mean age (SD)	% Female	% non-White	Median education
A. Full source data set ($N = 4,967$)	3.45 (1.60)	34.45 (10.76)	55.10%	19.4%	Some college
B. Offered news, all ($N = 1,354$)	3.53 (1.63)	36.13 (11.83)	55.69%	19.1%	Some college
C. Offered news, rated other ($N = 366$)	3.55 (1.56)	32.75 (10.32)	61.75%	21.9%	Some college
D. Offered news, rated news ($N = 988$)	3.52 (1.66)	37.38 (12.10)	53.44%	18.1%	Some college
E. Present study ($N = 588$)	3.45 (1.69)	37.22 (11.92)	52.89%	19.0%	Four-year college or more

Analysis

Aggression, heroism, and warmth dimension ratings corresponding to the D. D. E. Kim (2017) Unified Media Brand Personality Scale were calculated by averaging the ratings for their component personality traits for each participant. For the purposes of descriptive analysis prior to examining bivariate and multivariate associations, mean aggression, heroism, and warmth ratings were calculated at the set and outlet levels (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean Dimension Rating by Subset and Outlet.

	Aggression	Heroism	Warmth
Mainstream media	3.04 (1.17)	4.51 (1.37)	2.82 (1.14)
CNN	3.49 (1.20)	4.05 (1.53)	2.58 (1.16)
<i>The New York Times</i>	3.04 (1.07)	4.91 (1.30)	3.02 (1.17)
<i>USA Today</i>	2.80 (1.15)	4.54 (1.33)	2.92 (1.01)
<i>The Washington Post</i>	2.81 (1.16)	4.52 (1.19)	2.73 (1.22)
Liberal media	3.18 (1.30)	4.31 (1.49)	2.98 (1.21)
<i>Daily Kos</i>	3.44 (1.33)	4.53 (1.35)	3.12 (1.20)
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	3.24 (1.35)	3.79 (1.52)	3.05 (1.28)
<i>Mother Jones</i>	3.05 (1.10)	5.00 (1.31)	3.14 (1.12)
MSNBC	3.00 (1.40)	4.00 (1.52)	2.64 (1.28)
Conservative media	4.33 (1.41)	3.44 (1.71)	2.45 (1.21)
<i>Breitbart</i>	5.02 (1.39)	2.70 (1.62)	1.98 (0.93)
Fox News	4.24 (1.42)	3.47 (1.80)	2.53 (1.29)
<i>The Blaze</i>	3.68 (1.33)	4.05 (1.48)	3.04 (1.29)
<i>The Drudge Report</i>	4.34 (1.21)	3.57 (1.69)	2.29 (1.08)

The combined data set containing ratings of mainstream, liberal, and conservative news media showed little correlation between participant ideology (1 = *extremely liberal*; 7 = *extremely conservative*) and dimension ratings. However, when the data set was split into subsets by mainstream, liberal, and conservative outlets, notable associations emerged (Table 3).

Table 3. Participant Ideology (1 = Extremely Liberal; 7 = Extremely Conservative) × Dimension Rating Correlation by Outlet Type.

	Aggression	Heroism	Warmth
All	0.016	0.054	0.071
Mainstream media	0.169	-0.081	0.029
Liberal media	0.236	-0.313	-0.090
Conservative media	-0.375	0.525	0.313

Ideology-dimension rating associations were most noticeably present in the liberal and conservative media sets along all dimensions.² A comparison of ideology by dimension correlation coefficients between the liberal and conservative media sets suggests statistically significant differences in correlation between the two sets for all dimensions (aggression: $Z = 6.2045$, $p < .000$; heroism: $Z = -8.869$, $p < .000$; warmth: $Z = -4.044$, $p = .0001$).

Given the relatively weak associations in the combined and mainstream media data sets, further analysis focused on the liberal media and conservative media sets. To more rigorously explore the effect of ideology on perceptions of liberal and conservative news media brand aggression, heroism, and warmth, a series of multiple regression models were created. Data were first explored by subset, with separate regression models created for the liberal media and conservative media rating sets; then the two samples were combined to examine differences in effects of ideology on perceived brand personality depending on the type of media outlet evaluated.

Multivariate Associations by Sample

Liberal News Media

The output of multiple regression models with perceived aggression, heroism, and warmth of liberal news media as outcomes are presented in Table 4. The results indicate a significant association between ideology and perceived aggression ($b = 0.224$, $p = .032$), controlling for demographic and familiarity factors. However, the aggression model was, on the whole, statistically nonsignificant, $R^2 = .07$, $F(9, 182) = 1.42$, $p = .18$, with all variables other than ideology remaining statistically nonsignificant.

Though ideology only approached significance with perceived heroism ($b = -0.212$, $p = .054$), the overall heroism regression model was statistically significant, with a greater proportion of variance explained by the predictors than in the aggression model, $R^2 = .21$, $F(9, 182) = 5.38$, $p < .000$. Higher age ($b = 0.020$, $p = .015$) was significantly associated with higher perceived heroism. Non-Whites also tended to perceive higher heroism in liberal news brands than did Whites ($b = 0.528$, $p = .04$). Regular consumption was also significantly associated with higher perceived heroism ($b = 1.528$, $p = .019$).

The multiple regression model with perceived warmth as the output was also statistically significant, $R^2 = .11$, $F(9, 182) = 2.55$, $p = .009$. Relative to men, women tended to perceive lower warmth in liberal news brands ($b = -3.75$, $p = .035$). Conversely, non-Whites tended to perceive higher warmth in liberal news brands than did Whites ($b = 0.725$, $p = .001$). No significant ideology effect was present in perceptions of the warmth of liberal news brands ($b = -0.010$, $p = .917$).

² In the mainstream sample, multiple regression analysis revealed that ideology effects controlling for other variables were only significant for perceived aggression ($\beta = .107$, $p = .03$), so results are omitted for brevity. Two other significant effects of note were race (non-White) effects on perceived aggression ($\beta = -.590$, $p = .003$) and heroism ($\beta = .498$, $p = .04$).

Table 4. Regression Results for Liberal Outlets, Outcome: Dimension Score.

	Aggression			Heroism			Warmth		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	2.148			3.294			2.616		
Ideology (1 = <i>extremely liberal</i> ; 7 = <i>extremely conservative</i>)	0.224 *	.104	.032	-0.212 ^	.109	.054	-0.010	.094	.917
Age	0.001	.008	.880	0.020*	.008	.015	-0.005	.007	.499
Female <i>Base: Male</i>	-0.03 9	.194	.842	0.177	.205	.390	-0.375 *	.176	.035
Non-White <i>Base: White</i>	0.215	.250	.392	0.528*	.264	.04	0.745 **	.227	.001
Education Familiarity <i>Base: Familiar, no consumption</i>	0.060	.128	.642	0.041	.135	.762	0.143	.116	.219
<i>Consumed a few times</i>	0.367	.524	.485	0.718	.553	.196	0.430	.476	.367
<i>Consumed regularly</i>	0.021	.610	.972	1.528*	.644	.019	0.630	.553	.256
Ideology × familiarity interactions									
<i>Consumed a few times</i>	-0.09 0	.132	.495	0.005	.140	.971	-0.049	.120	.685
<i>Consumed regularly</i>	-0.01 1	.182	.950	-.153	.192	.427	-0.180	.165	.277
R^2		.07			.21			.11	
Adjusted R^2		.02			.17			.07	
<i>F</i> statistic (9, 182)	1.42 ($p = .1831$)			5.38 ($p < .000$)			2.55 ($p = .009$)		

^ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .000$

Conservative News Media

Regression models confirmed significant associations between ideology and perceived aggression ($b = -0.388$, $p = .000$), heroism ($b = 0.545$, $p = .000$), and warmth ($b = 0.168$, $p = .022$) in the conservative media sample (Table 5). All regression models were statistically significant: aggression, $R^2 = .20$, $F(9, 186) = 5.22$, $p < .000$; heroism, $R^2 = .35$, $F(9, 186) = 11.13$, $p < .000$; warmth, $R^2 = .18$, $F(9, 186) = 4.54$, $p < .000$. R^2 values are across the board higher than in their liberal media counterparts.

As with liberal media, familiarity only played a significant role in the case of heroism, with some consumers perceiving conservative media to be higher in heroism than the baseline ($b = 1.127$, $p = .026$), though there was an effect approaching significance for regular consumption in the case of aggression ($b = -1.852$, $p = .066$). As was the case with the warmth dimension in the liberal media sample, race was a statistically significant predictor of perceived warmth ($b = 0.496$, $p = .027$).

The results suggest that higher conservatism is consistent with lower perceived aggression, higher perceived heroism, and higher perceived warmth when it comes to conservative news media, an outcome that intuitively runs opposite to the results from the liberal media sample. Comparing the ideology regression coefficients, their significance, and the R^2 values, it seemed that ideology plays a greater role in perceptions of conservative media than liberal media. A third set of regression models was created to examine this possibility.

Table 5. Regression Results for Conservative Outlets, Outcome: Dimension Score.

	Aggression			Heroism			Warmth		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	5.463			1.415			2.982		
Ideology (1 = extremely liberal; 7 = extremely conservative)	-0.388 ***	.084	.000	0.0545 ***	.092	.000	0.168*	.073	.022
Age	0.006	.009	.469	0.008	.009	.389	-0.012	.007	.104
Female Base: Male	-0.155	.194	.425	0.129	.213	.545	-0.115	.168	.497
Non-White Base: White	-0.244	.257	.345	0.175	.282	.536	0.496*	.223	.027
Education	0.075	.143	.603	-0.177	.157	.260	-0.234	.124	.060
Familiarity Base: Familiar, no consumption									
Consumed a few times	-0.723	.459	.117	1.127*	.050	.026	-0.158	.398	.692
Consumed regularly	-1.852 [^]	1.00	.066	0.333	1.095	.761	-0.104	.867	.904
Ideology × familiarity interactions									
Consumed a few times	0.191	.120	.113	-0.223 [^]	.131	.090	0.054	.104	.601
Consumed regularly	0.233	.209	.265	0.165	.228	.469	0.167	.180	.357
R^2		.20			.35			.18	
Adjusted R^2		.16			.32			.14	
$F(9, 186)$	5.22 ($p < .000$)			11.13 ($p < .000$)			4.54 ($p < .000$)		

[^] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .000$

Comparing Effects

An additional regression model was created to examine the differences in the effect of ideology on perceived media brand personality between the liberal-rating and conservative-rating sample (Table 6). The liberal media and conservative media samples were combined ($n = 388$), and an interaction term was added to the regression models to examine how the effect of ideology on perceived aggression, heroism, and warmth varied depending on the type of news media, liberal versus conservative.

All three models were statistically significant: aggression, $R^2 = .25$, $F(11, 376) = 11.57$, $p < .000$; heroism: $R^2 = .32$, $F(11, 376) = 16.39$, $p < .000$; warmth: $R^2 = .16$, $F(11, 376) = 6.48$, $p < .000$. The variable to indicate whether a participant had rated liberal or conservative media (baseline: liberal media) was significant for all dimensions (aggression: $b = 2.65$, $p < .000$; heroism: $b = -3.123$, $p < .000$; warmth: $b = -1.516$, $p < .000$), suggesting that, on the whole, conservative media brands were perceived as more aggressive, less heroic, and less warm than liberal media brands. The significance of the interaction term between this indicator and ideology across all three dimensions (aggression: $b = -0.441$, $p = .000$; heroism: $b = 0.685$, $p < .000$; warmth: $b = -1.516$, $p < .000$) also suggested that the effect of ideology on perceptions of these dimensions was significantly different depending on whether one was evaluating liberal media or conservative media. Familiarity was again only a significant predictor with heroism (occasional consumption: $b = 0.924$, $p = .013$; regular consumption: $b = 1.09$, $p = .028$), and race again only played a significant role with warmth ($b = .603$, $p = .000$).

Discussion

The findings suggest that perceptions of news media brands' personality are indeed associated with an individual's political ideology. The effects of ideology were most consistent in the aggression dimension, with notable ideology effects on perceived warmth detected only in the conservative media sample. As would be expected, increasing conservatism/decreasing liberalism was associated with finding liberal news media more aggressive and less heroic as well as finding conservative news media less aggressive and more heroic. The statistical significance of the differences in ideology effect depending on the type of media examined was supported by the significance of the sample indicator by ideology interaction term in the final liberal-conservative combined sample regression model. The significance of the sample indicator term also statistically reinforced the higher mean perceived aggression and lower mean perceived heroism for conservative news media suggested in Table 1, controlling for all demographic factors. That familiarity was significant for heroism but not for aggression suggests that greater familiarity may be associated with higher perceived positive traits (heroism) but not necessarily lower perceived negative traits (aggression).

Table 6. Regression Results for Liberal + Conservative Media Sample, Outcome: Dimension Score.

	Aggression			Heroism			Warmth		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	2.636			3.907			3.513		
Ideology (1 = extremely liberal; 7 = extremely conservative)	0.118	.081	.149	-0.174*	.087	.047	-0.075	.072	.299
Age	0.003	.006	.556	0.015*	.006	.011	-0.006	.005	.240
Female Base: Male	-0.092	.135	.498	0.103	.145	.479	-0.231*	.120	.047
Non-White Base: White	-0.015	.179	.932	0.325 [^]	.192	.091	0.603***	.160	.000
Education Familiarity Base: Familiar, no consumption	0.061	.094	.521	-0.065	.101	.522	-0.037	.084	.660
Consumed a few times	-0.306	.343	.374	0.924*	.369	.013	0.076	.306	.804
Consumed regularly	-0.507	.460	.272	1.09*	.495	.028	0.010	.410	.980
Ideology × familiarity interactions									
Consumed a few times	0.074	.088	.401	-0.119	.095	.208	0.013	.078	.873
Consumed regularly	0.006	.116	.958	0.008	.124	.946	0.086	.103	.404
Conservative media sample Base: Liberal media sample	2.650***	.325	.000	-3.123***	.350	.000	-1.516***	.290	.000
Ideology × conservative media sample	-0.441***	.083	.000	0.685***	.089	.000	0.276***	.073	.000
<i>R</i> ²		.25			.32			.16	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²		.23			.30			.13	
<i>F</i> (11, 376)	11.57 (p < .000)			16.39 (p < .000)			6.48 (p < .000)		

[^] p < .10 ; * p < .05 ; ** p < .01 ; *** p < .000

Implications and Avenues for Further Research

The study's findings are interesting to consider in the context of brand-self personality congruence effects, such as that observed by Kressmann et al. (2006), and its potential relationship with selective exposure and polarization. Brand-self congruence along personality and similar dimensions has been suggested to be associated with positive outcomes such as brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006; Nienstedt et al., 2012), purchase intent (Sirgy, 1985), and brand identification (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010), and research suggests that visual elements of advertising materials (e.g., Ang & Lim, 2006; Boudreaux & Palmer, 2007; Lieven, Grohmann, Herrmann, Landwehr, & van Tilburg, 2014; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008) and the personalities of individuals associated with the brand (McCracken, 1989) can influence perceptions of brand personality.

This poses the question of whether careful management of news media brands through design and personnel choices—particularly in combination with group-level targeting and individual-level tailoring tactics (Kreuter & Wray, 2003)—can raise the likelihood of brand-self congruence and associated positive outcomes with a wide demographic to increase exposure to cross-cutting media. If targeted visual design in advertising and presentation can be applied to compensate for ideological differences in perceptions of news media brand personality and maximize brand-self congruence and its positive effects, then greater exposure to cross-cutting content may be possible. However, given significant research on the effects of another type of congruence—ideological congruence—on media selection (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008) and brand attitudes (Oyedeji, 2010), the question arises: How do brand-self congruence effects compare and interact with commonly observed ideological congruence effects, and how do both interact with prior knowledge? In addition, parallel to the need to examine both selective approach and selective avoidance, Bosnjak and Rudolph (2008) find that congruence with negative traits—undesired congruence—can influence attitudes toward consuming a product, suggesting the need to examine both desired and undesired congruence in attitudes and behavior. Further research should be constructed at the intersection of all of the above constructs.

Even controlling for ideology and familiarity and other factors, conservative news media on the whole are perceived more negatively (higher perceived aggression) and less positively (lower perceived heroism) than are liberal news media. Furthermore, examination of regression coefficients and R^2 values in all three regression models suggests that ideology effects on perceived aggression and heroism not only differ in their valence between liberal media (ideology coefficient) and conservative media (ideology coefficient + conservative media sample interaction term) but that the effect strengths are different—for example, the increase in perceived aggression of a liberal media outlet resulting from an individual being more conservative is smaller than the decrease in perceived aggression of conservative media resulting from being more conservative. This suggests that, despite both being partisan media, ideology less strongly influences perceptions of liberal media than it does conservative media. The mechanism behind this difference in effect size merits future research.

Also worth further consideration is that the present study examines only news media brands. Ideology may influence perceptions of media brands outside the news realm. Further research should be conducted to examine whether this is indeed the case and, if so, how such differences are associated with

media use. Any significant effects may suggest the need to ensure an ideologically representative sample during consumer research on perceptions of media brands of all types.

Limitations

The population from which the sample was recruited may be of concern for some. Though the literature suggests that mTurk users are demographically diverse compared with both standard Internet and undergraduate samples and possess reliability on par with more established sample pools (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), racial diversity was severely lacking in the sample, with only 19% of participants identifying as non-White. The effects of this study should be reexamined with a more fully representative sample.

The nature of the sample in that people self-select into rating a particular outlet through the familiarity check poses concerns in pinning down causality between ideological stance and perceived brand personality of liberal and conservative news media, especially given the familiarity effects observed with both liberal and conservative media in the present study as well as findings such as Levendusky's (2013), which suggests partisan media reinforce existing political views. The concern about the familiarity screening and resulting systematic differences is supported by statistically significant differences in percentage of females, $\chi^2(1) = 39.96, p < .000$, and mean age, $t(759.4) = -6.99, p < .000$, between those who had rated a news brand (D in Table 1) and those who had been offered but rated insufficient familiarity with the news brand(s) (C). Among the latter group, the vast majority, 90.16%, $\chi^2(1) = 234.56, p < .000$, had been offered one of the news media brands considered a liberal or conservative media outlet in the present study. Reinforcing the concerns noted above, the effects found in this study should be replicated with a more representative, balanced sample, especially given some of the differences in brand personality perception noted in this study.

The variables examined in the present data set were limited to those collected in the source data set from which it is adapted. As such, no psychographic variables, whose inclusion may have impacted the findings, are included. Some examples of such variables often studied in media effects contexts are sensation-seeking (Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978), self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974), and transportability (Mazzocco, Green, Sasota, & Jones, 2010). Future research examining perceptions of news media brand personality should account for such psychological variables in their data collection.

Though ecological validity is a strength in the present study due to its use of real-life news media brands, further research should be undertaken with an emphasis on internal validity. This may be possible through the use of pretested artificial partisan news media brands and examination of ideological congruence (e.g., random assignment to rate artificial partisan news media brands congruent with or incongruent with one's own ideology, etc.).

Conclusion

The results of this study show how partisan media brands on both sides of the ideological divide are perceived differently both in general and depending on one's political ideology and other demographic

factors, with broad implications across political communication, media management, and marketing contexts. The results point to a broad range of potential future avenues of research, highlighting the need for further research on brands, brand personality, and brand-self congruence effects in the context of news media and media in general. Future studies could examine how the brand personality construct and associated brand-self congruence may impact selective exposure and avoidance behaviors, how such brand-self personality congruence effects interact with ideological congruence effects, and how advertising and design of news media brands can be individualized to increase brand-self congruence and exposure to cross-cutting content. Such questions are likely relevant in understanding the use of not only legitimate news sources but, given concerns about the rise of “fake news” following the 2016 election (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), also possibly in understanding fallibility to sources of fake news.

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