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Exposure to Video Media and its Effects on Attitudes Towards Law Enforcement

Amante Gonzalez

Andrews University, amante@andrews.edu

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J. N. Andrews Honors Program
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HONS 497
Honors Thesis

Exposure to Video Media and its Effects on Attitudes Towards Law Enforcement

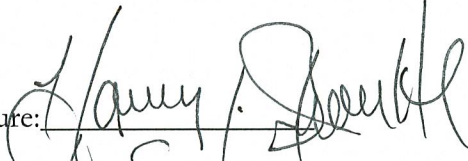
Amante Jordan Gonzalez

March 28, 2016

Advisor: Dr. Harvey Burnett

Primary Advisor Signature:

Department:


Behavioral Sciences

Abstract

This study examined how exposure to video media (specifically media geared toward a social media platform) depicting either negative or positive police interactions with individuals will influence perception of law enforcement officials. Using a modified version of the Building a Relationship of Trust Community Perception Survey (BRTCPS) subjects (N=43) responses were analyzed using a two way ANOVA. Results indicated a strong main effect for exposure to both the negative and positive police interaction videos in regards to attitudes towards law enforcement. These findings support the thesis that the videos emotional valence is extremely successful in altering individual's attitudes towards law enforcement in the intended direction.

Exposure to Video Media and its Effects on Attitudes Towards Law Enforcement

Throughout the history of American law enforcement, public perception of police has varied quite drastically. Actions taken by police and experienced either directly or vicariously by the public has served to either unite individuals in support of law enforcement or served to polarize people in their stances regarding law enforcement. With the recent rise of social media sites, police recorded footage, and the trend of video sharing via various news outlets, access to police encounters with the public has become easier than ever. Short, emotionally valenced videos proliferate via the internet with ease and potentially affect attitudes towards law enforcement. This study examines, using a quasi-experimental design, the effects of visual media on attitudes towards law enforcement in order to determine if varying emotionally valenced videos have a strong, if any, impact on these aforementioned attitudes. We hypothesized that both videos will push individual's attitudes towards law enforcement in the intended emotional valence of the video itself. With positive videos making subjects have more positive attitudes and similarly, negative videos making subjects have more negative attitudes.

Literature Review

In regards to shifting attitudes of police perception, various factors have been identified that as correlates to an individual's perception of law enforcement. Perhaps the strongest indicator of an individual's perception of law enforcement is derived from their own personal interactions as well as experiences they hear of from close trusted sources like friends and family (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005). Another study conducted regarding public perceptions of state police found that individuals perception of police officers is heavily influenced by the number of tickets/citations (i.e. encounters with police officers) the individual had received (Correia, Reisig, & Lovrich, 1996). While the number of interactions plays a large role in individuals

perception of police officers, another study identified that police officers attitudes during these various encounters (essentially how they treat the individual) is crucial to perception (Horowitz, 2007).

These studies indicate that the sheer number of police interactions an individual has affects how they perceive law enforcement. They also indicate that interactions they hear from family members, friends, or other close sources affect their perception. With an increase in ease of access to videos documenting both positive and negative police interactions, social media has created a new dynamic in which individuals can “encounter” law enforcement which could potentially alter their perceptions.

Pfeiffer, Windzio, & Kleimann (2005) found that the viewing of police-recorded crime shows (much akin to COPS) was associated with a belief that crime is rising. This study indicates that media that presents a certain image of crime or police (i.e. that crime is rising, police are brutal, minorities are committing most crimes) can effectively alter people’s perception of reality or factual information. There was however, no indication if the footage would be considered positively or negatively valenced. While there was a correlation recorded in this study, another study supported this concept yet admits that the correlation is a relatively weak one (Dowler, 2003). Another study conducted by the United States Department of Justice involving the LAPD found that individuals who rely on mass media do not tend to report less favorable attitudes involving perception of police than those were most influenced by personal experience (Ashcroft, Daniels, & Hart, 2004). Therefore there are somewhat conflicting studies done on whether media (in regards to crime) has a significant influence on people’s perception.

In light of these somewhat contradictory findings, this study will examine the following research question: How does exposure to visual media effect attitudes towards law enforcement? Do the positive and negative videos alter attitudes with equal strength?

Procedure

Subjects

Subjects were recruited from both the Behavioral Sciences Research Subject pool as well as social media solicitation. Subjects were required to be at least 18 years of age and a student at Andrews University.

Materials

Subjects were given a demographic questionnaire that collected data regarding age and race. In order to accurately measure individual's perceptions of law enforcement, subjects were given a modified survey that was based off the Building a Relationship of Trust Community Perception Survey (BRTCPS) used by the Department of Justice. The modified survey consists of thirteen Likert style questions inquiring about participants attitudes towards law enforcement in general. Participants answered on a scale ranging from 1, they strongly disagree to 5, they strongly agree to a statement regarding law enforcement. These scores were used to determine the individuals over all perception of law enforcement before the exposure to the video stimulus as well as their shifted attitudes towards law enforcement after the exposure to the video stimulus.

The video vignettes that subjects were exposed to consisted of emotionally valenced material. The negative video was classified as negative due to the officer's verbal and physical roughness with the individual. The officer also raised his voice and (according to proper police etiquette) overstepped his bounds both in his tone of voice as well as his physical interaction.

The positive video was classified as such due to the officer maintaining a calm demeanor, being respectful of the individual's time, and even inquiring about the individual's potential plans for the remainder of the day. These two stimulus were chosen for two reasons. 1. It demonstrated both a clearly positive and clearly negative interaction with which to expose subjects. 2. They were both encounters the everyday individual could potentially experience, as to keep the stimulus as practical as possible

Experimental Design

This experiment used a modified Solomon 4-group design. Subjects were randomly divided into one of four groups. This design control for potential confounding factors as well as examining the potential effects the pretest may have on the posttest results. The first group given the survey, followed by the positive video stimulus, and then the survey again. The second group were exposed to the positive video with no pretest survey and then given the survey after being exposed to the video. The third group mimicked the first with the exception that their video stimulus was negative. And the fourth group mimicked the second with the exception that their video stimulus was also negative. (See Appendix A for a table illustrating these groupings).

The data was analyzed using both a two way ANOVA and t-tests to look for potential testing effect, strength of differences, as well as overall effect size. Data was examined between groups to specifically account for potential testing effect. Data was then examined within groups for strength of effect and changes in attitudes towards law enforcement.

Results

Data Analysis

A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of the social media video treatment on attitudes towards law enforcement, as measured by (Abbrev)

Community Perception Survey. Results showed no statistically significant interaction effect between the pretest scores and exposure to social media video stimulus, $F(1, 39) = 2.270$ $p = .14$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.055$. There was a statistically significant main effect for exposure to social media video on attitudes towards law enforcement, $F(1, 39) = 11.017$ $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$. No statistically significant main effect was found on the pretest scores and posttest scores, $F(1, 39) = 0.009$ $p = .927$, $\eta_p^2 = 0$ (See table A2 in Appendix A).

Based on the significant main effect, a second two-way mixed ANOVA was performed in order to explore further the within subjects effect on attitudes towards law enforcement after exposure to the social media video stimulus. Results showed a significant interaction effect between pre/posttest scores and type of social media video exposure, $F(1, 20) = 13.447$ $p = 0.002$, with a large effect size ($\eta_p^2 = 0.402$). There was no statistically significant main effect for pretest/posttest scores on BRTCPS, $F(1, 20) = .798$, $p = .382$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$. The type of social media video exposure had a statistically significant main effect on posttest BRTCPS scores, $F(1, 20) = 5.364$, $p = .031$, with a large effect of ($\eta_p^2 = 0.211$). (See table A3 in Appendix A). In other words, subjects who were exposed to positive social media video about law enforcement had more positive BRTCPS posttest scores. While subjects who were exposed to negative social media video about law enforcement had more negative BRTCPS posttest scores.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effects of social media video exposure on attitudes towards law enforcement. Using mixed ANOVA's, a main effect was found indicating that exposure to social media visual stimulus effectively changes attitudes towards law enforcement. The large effect size indicates that regardless of the context of the video, in this case the exposure to the pretest, the video stimulus' effectiveness for altering attitudes towards law

enforcement is not significantly affected. Mixed ANOVA results found a statistically significant interaction, indicating that the emotionally valenced videos did effectively alter attitudes towards law enforcement in their intended direction.

These results support my hypothesis that social media video stimulus exposure would be effective in altering attitudes towards law enforcement. It also supports the hypothesis that positive videos make attitudes towards law enforcement more positive and negative videos make attitudes towards law enforcement more negative.

This body of work supports the work done by Pfeiffer et al. (2005) indicating that viewing of police recorded footage changes people's perception of law enforcement, however, this study sharpens the focus on the specific quality (positive or negative) of recorded police footage to indicate that these exposures do in fact change individual's attitudes. This data is, interesting in light of work done by Ashcroft et al. (2004). This body of research would seem to assert that social media or mass media exposure may be more important to attitudes of law enforcement than initially assumed.

A few limits to this study of note are primarily demographic related. This study was conducted on a religious college campus. While this may have influenced results, it is not enough of a limitation due to this particular campuses eclectic geographical, cultural, and racial composition. Another potential limit to this study is the small subject size, however, this study is concerned primarily with very large main effects and used powerful statistical tools in order to glean relevant data with the given sample size.

With no truly neutral video existing, this data is especially applicable in a social media context with individuals sharing noticeably positive or negative videos. With video sharing becoming more prevalent, this data (and further research) is informative both to the average

social media user as well as to public relations for police forces in regards to both the number and quality (in terms of emotional valence) of police videos that are released and shared by the public.

This data also indicates that having an effective social media strategy or taskforce for law enforcement could be extremely effective in changing attitudes towards law enforcement and generating a more hospitable relationship with the public. The finding that positive videos had a larger effect on attitudes towards law enforcement also is important in that it should inform law enforcement agencies that empirically, even one time exposure to a positive police interaction video can greatly influence people's attitudes towards law enforcement.

This research could be expounded by examining more closely contextual effects or the video's presentation as well as the longevity or effects. These components, with a potential emphasis on race demographics, could add to our knowledge of social media as well as law enforcement interactions in general.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Visual Representation of Solomon 4-group Design Conditions

<p>Group 1 <i>Pre-Test ---- Positive Tx ---- Post-Test</i> Police Perception Survey ---- Positive Video - --- Police Perception Survey</p>	<p>Group 2 <i>Positive Tx ---- Post-Test</i> Positive Video ---- Post-Test</p>
<p>Group 3 <i>Pre-Test ---- Negative Tx ---- Post-Test</i> Police Perception Survey ---- Negative Video ---- Police Perception Survey</p>	<p>Group 4 <i>Negative Tx ---- Post-Test</i> Negative Video ---- Post-Test</p>

Table A2

Analysis of Variance Results for Pretest and Video Exposure

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>η</i>
Pretest	1	.271	.009	.927	.000
Vid	1	348.545	11.017	.002**	.220
Pretest*Vid	1	71.803	2.270	.140	.055

Note. ** denotes statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level.

Table A3

Analysis of Variance Results for Test Type and Type of Video Exposure

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>η</i>
Test type	1	5.864	.382	.382	.038
Vid	1	289.293	5.364	.031**	..211
Test type*Vid	1	98.864	13.447	.002**	.402

Note. ** denotes statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level.