How Race and Gender Impact the Perceived Objectivity of Broadcast Women of Color on Twitter

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Abstract
Using an online survey (N = 528), this study examines the impact of race/ethnicity and gender on the perceived objectivity of broadcasters who are women of color. Findings show that when the broadcaster is a woman of color, Twitter engagement does not necessarily lead to positive perceived objectivity. Most respondents (52.6%) following broadcasters on Twitter agreed that broadcast women of color were more biased than other broadcasters they follow on Twitter, with men being more likely to agree than others. In addition to perceived objectivity, 38.7% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that the race/ethnicity of the journalist impacts their objectivity. Of the respondents who follow broadcast women of color on Twitter, 57.4% either agree or strongly agree that they share too many opinions. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords
broadcast journalism, women of color, Twitter, objectivity, race, survey

Introduction
Social media has become a significant source of news for most (68%) US adults, according to the Pew Research Center (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). In addition to using social media to access news, 42% of those who access news on social media describe it as “largely accurate” (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). Specifically for Twitter, the American Press Institute found that of the 86% of Twitter users who use Twitter for news, 74% visit daily (Rosenstiel et al., 2015). Not only is the audience using Twitter, but journalists are too. Studies have found that 83% of journalists use Twitter, and 25% of Twitter’s verified users are journalists (Kamps, 2015). Journalists make up the largest segment of verified users, with the next closest group being sports figures and teams at 18% (Kamps, 2015).

The intersection of race, gender, journalism, and Twitter creates an interesting space for broadcasters, specifically women of color. As noted by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), women of color have a unique lived experience because of both their gender and race. This intersection of race and gender adds a layer of complexity to their relationship with the audience and colleagues that men and white women do not experience. A recent study found that as television stations encourage (or even require) their on-air talent to engage on social media, journalists report an increase in viewer criticism (Finneman & Jenkins, 2018). However, this criticism is not just related to their job performance. Finneman and Jenkins (2018) found that 25% of journalists have received criticism on Twitter, and 89% “agreed that social media have increased viewer criticism about their appearance.” The criticism and judgment of broadcasters did not begin with the advent of social media. An earlier study by Engstrom and Ferri (2000) found that the biggest barrier in the career advancement of women anchors was their appearance, demonstrating that appearance-based criticism exists both inside and outside the media organization.

While news outlets continue to encourage journalists to engage on Twitter, self-disclosure (sharing personal information) on Twitter has been found to positively impact the audience’s intention to consume news but negatively influence the audience’s perception of objectivity (Lee, 2020). Since

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women journalists have been found to share more information about their personal lives on Twitter than their male counterparts (Hedman, 2016; Lasorsa, 2012; Molyneux, 2019), examining the perceived objectivity of women broadcasters on Twitter is warranted.

The perceived objectivity of journalists has been studied for decades, with significant findings leading to the design of this study. Newhagen and Nass (1989) found that the news audience uses different criteria to judge television and newspaper media outlets. Audience members were found to judge television news credibility by their perception of the on-air talent and judge newspaper credibility by their perception of the news organization (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). This finding is significant because it demonstrates the important role that the on-air talent plays in both delivering the news and credibility of the news organization.

This combination of appearance expectations, social media criticism (bordering on harassment), race, and gender can offer interesting insights into perceived objectivity, specifically concerning broadcasters who are women of color. Since many journalists share personal details and job-related tweets, the social media audience may have more insight into the broadcaster as a person, which may influence perceived objectivity. Two prior studies have found that women are more likely to share personal information on Twitter than men, potentially creating an objectivity discrepancy based on gendered usage of social media (Hedman, 2016; Molyneux, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to examine how race, gender, and Twitter usage impact the perceived objectivity of broadcast journalists, specifically women of color. Focusing on broadcast journalists is an important component because of their visibility. Prior studies have shown that women of color broadcasters are subject to more online harassment than their male counterparts as well as their colleagues working in radio or newspaper journalism (Gardiner, 2018; Koirala, 2020; Lewis et al., 2020). While the audience may not know the race/ethnicity or gender of the broadcaster by watching, the expectation is that a broadcaster’s appearance impacts how the audience perceives them and how objective the audience perceives them to be (and how they interact with them on Twitter). In addition, prior research has also shown that audiences make assumptions regarding race based on voice (Thomas & Reaser, 2004). Therefore, broadcasters who are women of color can potentially be subjected to racial/ethnic stereotyping and inherent biases based on their appearance, voice, and mannerisms. We expect to find a difference in perceived objectivity based on the race/ethnicity and gender of both the audience member and the broadcast journalist as well as significant findings in the audience’s perception of journalistic use of Twitter for both news and personal opinions. While prior studies have examined how journalists use Twitter to interact with their audiences, this study builds on those findings by examining how the audience is perceiving the objectivity of journalists based on their Twitter usage plus race and gender.

**Literature Review**

**Objectivity, Credibility, and Journalistic Norms**

The standard of objectivity is a foundational construct of journalistic norms and practices. Objectivity is described as “impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible” news reporting (Deuze, 2005, p. 447). Journalists have long pledged to the ideals that their work is balanced and credible. The goal of achieving this is to allow a neutral space to uphold facts and minimize personal values or opinions in storytelling (Schudson, 1978). However, there remains a debate on whether objectivity can truly be achieved. Tuchman (1972) argued that objectivity is a “strategic ritual” upheld by journalists to protect themselves from criticism and mistakes. Contrary to Tuchman’s critique, objectivity is seen as both an expected and a necessary practice by journalists in their coverage of daily and controversial topics. In short, objectivity is closely connected to journalist credibility.

Prior scholars have studied the audience perception of credibility and objectivity. Newhagen and Nass (1989) defined credibility as, “...the degree to which an individual judges his or her perceptions to be a valid reflection of reality.” Therefore, while objectivity and credibility are core tenets of journalism, they are subject to the perception and beliefs of the individual consuming the media. Since 1989, several studies have found audience perception of objectivity and belief in credibility directly related to the amount of personal disclosure by the journalist (either on social media or a website) (Curry & Stroud, 2021; Johnson & St John, 2021; Lee, 2020). While projects such as trustingnews.org are striving to educate journalists and media organizations on how to demonstrate credibility and earn trust by educating their audiences on news processes, research continues to show that personal disclosure by the journalist has a measurable impact on perceived objectivity.

Despite one’s stance on objectivity, Twitter is challenging this norm in a constantly evolving flow of information (Molyneux, 2015). Prior studies have found that journalists are likely to abandon objectivity on Twitter in lieu of opinion, humor, and developing their personal brand (Molyneux, 2015). Instead of being seen as part of a news organization, Twitter allows journalists to become individuals, with personal followings, potentially disrupting audience allegiance to a specific news organization. Researchers have also found that journalistic practices of objectivity are being disrupted with the relaxed environment on Twitter (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Molyneux, 2015). This is especially true for journalists in local markets or journalists who do not work at an elite national news organization. In fact, the nonelite journalists were found to be more likely to post opinions, tweet about their personal lives, and link to external websites (Lasorsa et al., 2012).

In recent years, journalists have begun to share more personal and opinionated information in their news content (Coddington et al., 2014; Hedman, 2016). While Twitter’s “280-character messages” allow for a more relaxed
environment for journalists to interact with audiences, the role of objectivity is still valued. There appears to be a fine line regarding how much information should be shared on Twitter. In a 2019 study about objectivity on Twitter, sharing one’s opinions harmed journalist credibility with respondents (Johnson). However, in a 2021 study, researchers found that transparency can help build trust and credibility with consumers but sharing too much information caused participants “to question whether [the journalist] could truly be objective” (Johnson & St. John III). Not only were consumers forming opinions based on what the journalist shared on media, but Houston et al. (2020) found that respondents had an expectation of objectivity for journalists. Combining these three studies implies that the audience expects a level of transparency but crossing this yet-undefined subjective line can measurably impact perceived objectivity. This shows that despite progress to be more conversational in two-way interactions on social media, audiences still value the cornerstone practice of objectivity.

Researchers have also found that when audience members engage with journalists on Twitter, perceptions of editorial bias decline (Diehl et al., 2019). Therefore, a more “personal” knowledge of a broadcaster should make them more trustworthy, unbiased sources; however, it is possible that a “personal” knowledge could have the opposite effect. For example, if a journalist tweets about going to the gun range on the weekend for target practice, the audience may question her ability to be objective, unbiased. Since many broadcasters use Twitter for both personal and professional purposes from their employer on their personal profile, essentially requiring them to blur the line between their professional and personal online selves.

Based on findings from prior research that found personal disclosure and audience engagement on Twitter leads to a decrease in the perception of editorial bias and an increase in perceived objectivity, we hypothesize that audiences will have a critical awareness of their own perceptions of journalists and a belief in reliability in reporting as it relates to news information on Twitter. Therefore, the following research question and hypotheses are proposed:

RQ1. Does the audience perceive broadcast journalists to be objective, reliable sources of news?

H1. The audience members who have a Twitter account will perceive Twitter to be a reliable source of news.

H1a. Audience members who follow journalists on Twitter will believe Twitter to be a more reliable source of news than those who do not follow journalists on Twitter.

Curating Your “Self” in 280 Characters or Less

Erving Goffman (1959) proposed the idea of self-presentation in everyday life using the concept of a theater. According to Goffman, we each play a variety of roles in our daily lives. Goffman argues that in our life as actors on a stage, we see an audience observing our performance and reacting to it. Our life on the stage is called the “front stage” role. In this role, we are aware of the audience, and their expectations influence our behavior. Opposite the “front stage” is the “backstage” role, where performers are more relaxed and allowed to be more like their normal, non-mediated selves (Goffman, 1959).

The advent of social media creates more complicated “front” and “backstage” roles as people curate their online “self” to create their virtual persona. This has been studied by scholars across several online platforms, including personal home pages (Dominick, 1999), weblogs created by teenage girls (Bortree, 2005), photos that college students post on Facebook (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010), and celebrity athlete usage of social media (Sanderson, 2011). Commonly considered a modern version of Goffman’s (1959) self-presentation theory, prior scholars have also shown that self-presentation on social media is worthy of exploration, specifically related to celebrities and public figures (Hull, 2014; Hull & Lewis, 2014; Sanderson, 2011). More recently, Mellado and Alfaro (2020) examined Goffman’s self-presentation theory in relation to journalists on social media. The authors examined how journalists curate their online identities on Twitter and Instagram and how they engage in online branding activities. Ultimately, they found that journalists often feel pressure to post news from their employer on their personal profile, essentially requiring them to blur the line between their professional and personal online selves.

Specific to this study, we are examining how broadcasters’ Twitter usage impacts their perceived objectivity when reporting the news. Twitter and journalism are now inextricably intertwined. Newsrooms have social media policies (Adornato & Lysak, 2017), and newspapers like the Boston Globe show a live stream of staff tweets on a Twitter Board. The New York Times offers an online directory of their reporters on Twitter. Not only do media outlets have Twitter guidelines for their employees, but Twitter published a “Twitter for Newsrooms” in 2011, which later became Twitter Media, offering tips for journalists and news organizations looking to best use the platform (Artwick, 2013).

Prior research has found that journalists are encouraged and, in some cases, required to offer a more personal online presence and curate their personal brand (Canter, 2015; Canter & Brookes, 2016; Finneman et al., 2019; Hansuch & Bruns, 2017; Mellado & Alfaro, 2020). However, this personal look into the life of a journalist seems to open the door for more direct harassment and judgment of perceived credibility and objectivity. This begs the question of whether the audience’s knowledge regarding the personal life of a journalist truly encourages open dialogue and the belief that a broadcaster who is active on Twitter is more trustworthy and unbiased. Since many broadcasters use Twitter for both
personal and work tweets (conflating the “front stage” and “backstage” roles), it is possible that Twitter usage can influence how the audience perceives their on-screen persona and, therefore, their perceived objectivity.

**The Twitter Environment for Women of Color in Journalism**

In 2017, Amnesty International conducted a study examining online abuse against women—specifically women who were journalists or politicians (“Women abused on Twitter every 30 seconds,” 2018). This study found that Black women were “84% more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets.” Volunteers examined tweets from 778 women who participated across the United States and the United Kingdom and found that 1.1 million tweets were “problematic or abusive,” which was 7.1% of the tweets in the study (“Women abused on Twitter every 30 seconds,” 2018). Researchers found that political stance was not indicative of abuse. Both liberal and conservative politicians, as well as women at “left and right-leaning media organizations,” were the recipients of abuse. Once compiled, Amnesty termed Twitter “a toxic place for women” and presented the data to Twitter (“Toxic Twitter,” n.d.). They argued that Twitter’s lack of response to the situation was allowing women to be abused every day, disproportionately causing Black women to be silenced and marginalized (“Women abused on Twitter every 30 seconds,” 2018).

Research has also shown that women broadcast journalists are disproportionally impacted because of their visibility (Lewis et al., 2020). Young women were especially prone to online harassment, often with attackers specifically citing their physical appearance (Finneman et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2020). “Not only do female journalists—and especially younger women who work in television—face a greater degree of online harassment, but they are also more often subject to its worst types” (Lewis et al., 2020, p. 1062). One study, conducted on The Guardian’s website, revealed that not only are women more subject to online harassment, but women of color and minorities are often the favored targets (Gardiner, 2018).

Many journalists are now required by their employer to be active on Twitter and post regularly as well as interact with the audience (Finneman & Jenkins, 2018). For some women, specifically women of color, this could be like requiring an employee to tolerate daily harassment to stay employed. According to a 2019 Twitter Transparency Report, about 5% of accounts are reported for abuse every 6 months. Twitter evaluates all reports but only takes action on about 8% (“Twitter Rules Enforcement,” 2019). While the focus of this study is not online abuse, the conversation is relevant because the prevalence of abuse can impact the environment, what broadcast women of color are posting (or required to post by their employer), and how their online activity may impact their perceived objectivity and career as a journalist.

In 1990 and 1992, Entman examined race in local news programs and found that the widespread employment of African Americans in local news caused viewers to believe that racial discrimination, and therefore racism, is no longer an issue in our society. Because viewers saw African Americans sitting in the anchor chair, the average audience member believed that racism is not prevalent. Using the term “modern racism,” Entman juxtaposed the depictions of African Americans as criminals in the newscast with African Americans sitting in the anchor chair. He argued that the audience believes who they see anchoring the news is not the average African American. In fact, the audience still believes that most African Americans are criminals. However, because the station hired an African American, racism is no longer an issue (hence the term “modern racism”) (Entman, 1990, 1992). Almost 30 years have passed since Entman’s studies, and yet, research continues to show that African Americans are overwhelmingly depicted as criminals and the “good guys” are still White in newscasts (Dixon, 2017; Poindexter et al., 2003).

In addition to the concept of “modern racism” and a toxic social media environment, there is another layer to consider when studying how broadcast women of color are perceived on Twitter—inhomogeneous in-group bias. This natural bias has been studied by scholars for decades and often includes discussions related to social identity theory (Rand et al., 2009; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & Doria, 1981). Prior research has also examined audience perception of the media and, more recently, interactions on social media, specifically focusing on how fans of athletic teams interact on social media during major events (Smith & Smith, 2012). The theories (both in-group bias and social-identity theory) propose that we have inherent biases as human beings. These biases have been consistently shown to be present concerning gender and ethnicity and political affiliation (Rand et al., 2009). These biases are not necessarily malicious. They are often unrecognized and exist merely as a more favorable attitude toward others who are members of our own “group” (Smith & Smith, 2012). They can be as simple as having a natural inclination to be nice to someone who shares your name or birthdate. Groups allow us to categorize things (and people) based on what we know so that our brains can work more efficiently (Seger & Miller, 2010). However, often without realization, these biases can create an impression that our “group” is superior, making others “inferior” (Smith & Smith, 2012).

This combination of prior research on audience perception of objectivity, how Twitter is impacting journalistic norms, and in-group biases allows us to broadly examine audience perception of objectivity for a specific subgroup, broadcasters who are women of color. These women are easily identified (although potentially incorrectly) by their gender and race because they are prominent on websites, television screens, and social media feeds locally, nationally, and internationally. While their followers may not realize
that they have an inherent in-group bias, we expect it to show up in the data. Because of “modern” views toward racism and prior findings regarding harassment toward women broadcasters, specifically women of color (Engstrom & Ferri, 2000; Finneman & Jenkins, 2018; “Women abused on Twitter every 30 seconds,” 2018), we anticipate noted bias toward broadcasters who are women of color simply based on their race and gender. The following research question and hypotheses are proposed:

**RQ2.** To what extent does the race and gender of the broadcast journalist impact their perceived objectivity?

H2. The audience will perceive that women of color are more biased than other journalists on Twitter.

H3. The audience demographics will impact their opinion on the objectivity of the women of color broadcasters.

H3a. The race of the audience member will impact their opinion on objectivity.

H3b. The gender of the audience member will impact their opinion on objectivity.

In addition to examining perceived bias in objectivity based on race and gender, we will also explore perceived bias toward women of color covering controversial topics, such as politics, health care, the presidential election, and police shootings. For women of color, these topics could be problematic because of both their race and their gender, so examining this through the lens of intersectionality is key. Again, we anticipate perceived bias toward women of color broadcasters based on topics covered as well as their race and gender. For example, Entman discovered that when African Americans were not depicted as criminals, most of the other portrayals were of political coverage, depicting African Americans as biased politically and practicing “special interest politics” (Entman, 1990, 1992). Entman clarifies this by acknowledging that the Black community is not homogeneous and therefore has many varying opinions regarding politics. His theory of modern racism assumes “... that the majority of blacks do have interests in electing African-American office holders,” specifically to address issues of discrimination (Entman, 1992). Considering this finding, we propose the following research question:

**RQ3.** Does the audience perceive that broadcast women of color can objectively cover controversial topics (police shootings, #MeToo, politics, health, etc.)?

Combining the concepts of “modern racism,” in-group bias, and self-presentation theory, this study will address one final theoretical concept, third-person effect (TPE). Initially conceptualized by Davison (1983), TPE argues that people tend to underestimate the impact that media has on their own belief system and overestimate the impact that media has on “attitudes and behaviors of others” (p. 3). Specific to racial bias, in 2008, Chapin examined the TPE of media’s impact on racism and found that people optimistically believed themselves to be less susceptible to the effects of racial media depictions than others. These theoretical concepts overlap and intertwine notions of personal bias, how we present ourselves on social media, and societal views toward racism. Respondents may be unaware of their own biases or are aware but unwilling to admit to them. Examining the same biases through their belief of others will allow us to gauge whether the respondents believe that perceived objectivity just simply is not impacted by demographic characteristics or if they believe that these characteristics can impact perceived objectivity but that others are more susceptible than themselves. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** Respondents will believe that the broadcaster’s race and gender impact the perceived objectivity of others more than it impacts their own perceived objectivity.

**Method**

To examine how race, ethnicity, gender, and Twitter usage impact the perceived objectivity of broadcasters on Twitter, a Qualtrics survey was developed. The “tenets of good journalism” eight-item Likert-type scale by Holton et al. (2013) was adapted to measure perceptions of broadcast-specific journalists. The original Likert-type scale asked respondents to rate journalists on “being objective, covering stories that should be quickly, providing analyses and interpretation of complex problems, verifying facts, giving ordinary people a chance to express their views, and being a watchdog for the public” (Holton et al., 2013). In this study, the term “journalists” was modified to be “broadcast journalist” and defined as those you see reporting the news, sports, and so on, electronically (on television or internet) locally or nationally. In addition to the modified Likert-type scale on the role of broadcast journalists, questions regarding objectivity, Twitter-specific questions regarding the use, and believed truthfulness of news on the platform were included. We use the term broadcaster widely to refer to anyone regularly representing a local or national news station on the air, including sportscasters, news anchors, and reporters. This term was also clearly defined in each survey question to ensure that respondents understood the concept.

The 11 questions developed were included as part of a yearly survey at a School of Journalism at a large southeastern university that also includes general demographic questions and questions regarding media use and political affiliation. Graduate students and faculty submitted proposals to be included in the study, and those approved were combined with questions from other approved proposals. A combined mass survey was distributed to a Qualtrics panel,
funded by the school of journalism. The Qualtrics panel was gathered via quota sampling, ensuring that specific demographic requirements were met. Because Qualtrics has demographic data on its survey audience, they can target specific demographics at the release of the survey so that those not meeting requirements are not solicited.

The survey was launched on 11 March 2020, and closed on 17 March 2020. All data were scrubbed by Qualtrics to verify requirements for inclusion, and the scrubbed file was provided to researchers in an SPSS file. This SPSS file was then imported into Jamovi for analysis. After removing “speeders,” incomplete surveys, and ensuring specific quotas for diversity based on gender, ethnicity, and age, a total of 528 respondents were identified as completing the entire survey and passing the screening questions. The average age of respondents was 45.8, with the youngest participant being 18 and the oldest 82. By design, the age and gender of the participants were evenly distributed. Respondents were most likely to have a household income of US$50,000 to US$74,999 (20.3%), hold a degree beyond high school (70.3%), and be White (62.7%). The demographic details of respondents are shown in Table 1.

### Table 1. Respondent Demographics.

| Demographic          | Frequency | % of total |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| **Age**              |           |            |
| 18–34                | 160       | 30.3%      |
| 35–54                | 180       | 34.1%      |
| 55+                  | 188       | 35.6%      |
| **Gender**           |           |            |
| Male                 | 257       | 48.7%      |
| Female               | 271       | 51.3%      |
| **Household income** |           |            |
| <US$20,000           | 77        | 14.6%      |
| US$20,000–US$34,999  | 58        | 11.0%      |
| US$35,000–US$49,999  | 75        | 14.2%      |
| US$50,000–US$74,999  | 107       | 20.3%      |
| US$75,000–US$99,999  | 70        | 13.3%      |
| US$100,000–US$149,000| 84        | 15.9%      |
| US$150,000–US$199,999| 36        | 6.8%       |
| US$200,000 or more   | 21        | 4.0%       |
| **Education level**  |           |            |
| Less than high school| 10        | 1.9%       |
| High school diploma  | 147       | 27.8%      |
| 2-year college degree| 114       | 21.6%      |
| 4-year college degree| 165       | 31.3%      |
| Graduate degree      | 92        | 17.4%      |
| **Race**             |           |            |
| White                | 331       | 62.7%      |
| Black/African American| 64       | 12.1%      |
| Hispanic             | 87        | 16.5%      |
| Asian                | 29        | 5.5%       |
| Other                | 17        | 3.2%       |

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### Results

RQ1 explored audience perceptions of broadcast journalists in general and whether journalists are believed to be objective and reliable news sources. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to test for internal consistency of the “tenets of good journalism” eight-item Likert-type scale that was adapted for broadcast journalists (Holton et al., 2013). This scale asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with items such as “broadcast journalists are objective,” “broadcast journalists help people,” and “broadcast journalists verify facts.” The original scale by Holton et al. did not specify “broadcast,” instead using “journalism” as a general descriptor. In the 2013 study, Holton et al. reported Cronbach’s alpha of .95, M = 30.3, SD = 12.2. Our adapted scale for broadcast journalists has a Cronbach’s alpha of .95, M = 36.1, SD = 11.5. The average mean of the scale was 4.52, with an SD of 1.43, showing that most respondents were slightly above neutral on the matter. However, although the mean showed mostly neutrality, it is important to note that all of the topics also had ardent support for “strongly agree.” For the statement, “Broadcast Journalists are Objective,” 14.2% of respondents selected “strongly agree.” The highest agreement was for the statement, “Broadcast Journalists get information to the public quickly,” at 18.9%. A positive correlation was also found between respondents who said they watch the news “Daily” and their level of agreement with the tenets of good journalism (r = .381, p < .001), meaning that the more often respondents watch the news, the more they believed that broadcast journalists adhered to the tenets of good journalism.

H1 explored whether audience members who have a Twitter account would find Twitter a reliable news source. An independent samples t test showed that the 252 (47.7%) respondents who reported having a Twitter account were statistically more likely to believe that Twitter was a credible news source than those who did not have a Twitter account, supporting H1, t(526) = 9.72, p < .001.

H1a looked specifically at audience members who have a Twitter account and follow journalists to see if they find Twitter to be a more reliable source of news than audience members who have a Twitter account but do not follow journalists. An independent samples t test showed that the 132 (52.4%) respondents who follow broadcast journalists on Twitter were more likely to believe Twitter was a credible news source than those who did not have a Twitter account, supporting H1a, t(520) = 8.30, p < .001.

RQ2 examined whether perceived objectivity is impacted by the race or ethnicity of the broadcaster. A survey question addressed this directly by asking respondents to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “The race/ethnicity of the broadcast journalist impacts their objectivity.” While 32% of respondents were neutral on the topic, 38.7% either “agreed” or “strongly agreed,” with 13% selecting “strongly agree.” On the opposite end of the spectrum, 29.3% selected either “disagree” or “strongly disagree,” with 14.2% choosing “strongly disagree.” Like RQ1, a positive correlation was
found between how often respondents watch the news and their agreement with that statement, meaning people who watch the news more often were less likely to believe that the broadcaster’s race or ethnicity impacted their objectivity.

Of the 528 respondents who completed the survey, 47.7% (252) reported having a Twitter account, and of those 252, 14.7% (37) said that Twitter was the social media platform that they used the most. Also, of the 252 who had a Twitter account, 36.1% (91) accessed it several times per day, 24.2% (61) accessed it daily, 12.7% (32) accessed it several times per week, 8% (20) accessed it weekly, and the remaining 19% (48) accessed it several times per month, monthly, or never. Of the 252 reported Twitter users, 48.4% (122) said that they follow broadcast journalists that are women of color on Twitter. Examples given were Soledad O’Brien, Tamron Hall, April Ryan, Robin Roberts, Ann Curry, Hoda Kotb, or someone in their local market.

H2 proposed that “The audience will perceive that women of color are more biased than other journalists on Twitter.” Of the 122 respondents that follow a broadcast journalist woman of color on Twitter, 57.4% (70) either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the broadcast women of color that they follow shared too many opinions. 13% (16) were neutral, and 29.5% (36) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagree.” “Strongly agree” was the largest single response for that question at 27.9% (34). In addition to sharing too many opinions, 52.6% (64) of respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the broadcast women of color that they follow on Twitter are more biased than other broadcast journalists that they follow on Twitter, supporting H2. In addition, 15.6% (19) were neutral on the question, and 31% (39) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” While most respondents were neutral on the “tenets of good journalism” scale (examined for RQ1) including the statement, “broadcast journalists are objective,” these results show that the majority of respondents believe broadcast women of color to be more biased than other journalists.

Linear regression showed no significant correlation between the race of the respondent and whether the respondent felt the broadcast woman of color shared too many opinions (r = .113, p = .216), or whether they felt that she was more biased than other journalists on Twitter (r = .146, p = .109). However, there was a significant relationship between gender of the respondent and whether they thought the broadcast women of color they follow share too many opinions (r = .281, p = .002), and whether they felt like the women were more biased than other broadcasters they follow on Twitter (r = .359, p < .001). An independent samples t test showed a significant difference between men and women, t(120) = 3.21, p = .002, with men being more likely to respond that the broadcast women of color share too many opinions on Twitter. Another independent samples t test found similar results between men and women perceiving that broadcast women of color on Twitter are more biased than other broadcasters on Twitter, t(120) = 4.22, p < .001. This shows that men who follow broadcast women of color on Twitter are significantly more likely to believe the broadcast women of color share too many opinions and to believe that they are not as objective as other broadcasters on Twitter.

H3 proposed that the audience demographics would impact their opinion on the objectivity of women of color broadcasters. Using a Likert-type scale to measure general bias, the survey asked respondents to rate their belief that “Broadcast journalists who are women of color are more biased than other broadcast journalists.” The answers for this question showed a fairly even split with 36.5% of respondents voting either “disagree” or “strongly disagree,” and 31.6% of respondents voting neutrally, and 31.6% voting either “agree” or “strongly agree.” A linear regression showed no significant relationship (r = .008, p = .84) between race of the respondent and whether they were more likely to believe that broadcast journalists who are women of color are more biased than other journalists; therefore, H3a was not supported. However, there was a significant relationship between gender and whether participants believed that broadcast journalists who are women of color are more biased than other broadcasters (r = .136, p = .002). An independent samples t test showed a significant difference between men and women, with men being more likely to believe that broadcast journalists who are women of color are more biased than other journalists, which supports H3b, t(526) = 3.15, p = .002.

RQ3 assessed objectivity based on race/ethnicity, gender, and topics covered by the broadcaster. The question asked, “I believe broadcast journalists who are women of color can be objective when covering…” and listed the following topics: daily politics, presidential elections, Obamacare, Global Warming, Immigration, Women’s Rights (#MeToo), Climate Change, Affordable Care Act, and Police Shootings of Black victims by white officers. These topics were intentionally controversial and several intentionally overlapped. For example, Climate Change and Global Warming are used interchangeably in news coverage, as are the Affordable Care Act and Obamacare. The reason was to see if certain terms were more controversial than others. Cronbach’s α was calculated to test scale reliability and found α = .97, M = 4.83, SD = 1.58. A mean of 4.83 shows that most respondents were between “neutral” and “agree” on the majority of topics. For example, on the question of whether broadcast women of color can objectively cover police shootings of a Black victim by a White officer, 28.8% selected “neutral,” and 54.2% selected “strongly agree” or “agree.” The remaining 35% selected either “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” “Strongly agree” and “neutral” had the highest percentage of respondents on all questions. The police shootings question had the most “strongly agree” answers of any of the options, with 139 respondents making that selection. Both Obamacare and the Affordable Care Act had a mean of 4.85, whereas Climate Change had a mean of 4.78 and Global Warming was slightly higher at 4.82. However, a paired samples t test
showed that this was not a significant difference, CC 
$M = 4.78, SD = 1.80, GW M = 4.82, SD = 1.74, t(527) = -0.773, p = .44$. A linear regression also showed no relationship 
($r = .015, p = .73$) between the respondents’ race and the mean of the controversial topics scale (this was true for the scale 
mean and individual scale items). There was also no significant 
relationship ($r = .058, p = .184$) between gender of the 
participant and the mean of the controversial topics scale or 
the individual scale items.

In addition to these specific demographic questions, a TPE 
question asked respondents to rate their perception that the 
race, gender, and/or ethnicity of the broadcaster impacts their 
opinion about objectivity and also if they believe race/ethnic-

ity and gender impact the objectivity of others. A paired sam-

ples $t$ test showed a mean of 3.67, $SD = 2.02$, for the question 
of personal impact and a mean of 4.14 and $SD$ of 1.72 for the 
question of impact on others, a statistically significant differ-

ence of $-0.473, t(527) = -6.72, p < .001$, showing that respond-

ents believe that others are impacted more than themselves. 
Interestingly, 66.5% of respondents reported that when they 
watch the news, they do not notice the broadcaster’s race or 
ethnicity. A linear regression showed a significant relationship 
between this statement and gender ($r = .183, p < .001$) but not 
significance based on race ($r = .021, p = .635$).

Discussion

This study’s findings offer interesting theoretical and practi-
cal insights into the perceived objectivity of broadcasters, 
specifically women of color, and how Twitter usage and daily 
news consumption may impact inherent bias. In general, peo-

ple who watch the news daily are more likely to believe that 
broadcast journalists are objective. Also, 38.7% of people 
who watch the news daily believe that the broadcaster’s race/ 
ethnicity impacts their objectivity. These two findings may 
seem contradictory to each other, but the impact on perceived 
objectivity could be either positive or negative. Also, most 
respondents selected either “neutral” or “strongly agree” on 
whether they thought broadcast women of color could cover 
controversial subjects objectively. So, while most respond-

ents perceive that broadcast women of color can cover con-
troversial topics objectively, they also believe that the 
broadcaster’s race/ethnicity impacts their objectivity.

This study also found that 57.4% of respondents who fol-
low broadcast women of color on Twitter believe that they 
share too many opinions (27.9% strongly agree with that). 
Not only did respondents who follow broadcast women of 
color on Twitter believe they share too many opinions, but 
52.6% also believe that they are more biased than other 
broadcasters that they follow on Twitter. Men were signifi-
cantly more likely to agree with these statements than 
women. Therefore, by layering race/ethnicity and gender 
onto the question, this study adds depth and clarity to the 
findings by Diehl et al. (2019) that engagement with journal-
ists on Twitter lower perceptions of editorial bias. It also 
echoes the findings by Lasorsa (2021) that women are more 
likely to share information about their personal lives than men while adding insight into the findings by Lee (2020), 
which increased self-disclosure negatively impacts the per-
ception of objectivity. In fact, this study shows that when 
considering race/ethnicity and gender, engagement with 
journalists on Twitter may increase perceptions of editorial 
bias by men.

These findings also show perceived bias in objectivity 
based on race/ethnicity and gender of the broadcaster, both on 
Twitter and on screen. While only 33.5% of respondents said 
that they pay attention to the race/ethnicity of a journalist 
when watching the news, a TPE question showed that they 
believe others are more impacted by race/ethnicity and gender 
of the broadcaster than they are. These findings are interesting 
because it shows that respondents (at least some) are willing to 
report that race/ethnicity and gender of the broadcaster matters 
when considering objectivity, but they are not willing to com-
mit to that bias in every scenario. However, a measurable bias 
based on race/ethnicity and gender was found and should be 
explored further in future studies.

Theoretical Implications

By examining the impact of race/ethnicity and gender, this 
study adds to current literature on self-presentation theory, 
ingroup bias, and TPE. Prior literature on self-presentation 
theory focuses on the performance of the person and their 
impression of the audience’s reception. However, this study 
demonstrates that race and gender can impact the “perfor-

mance” of a broadcaster in a way that is beyond their control. 
For example, by merely being a woman of color, a broadcaster 
on Twitter is fighting against her audience’s inherent in-group 
biased (specifically male members of her audience) to post what 
they deem to be objective nonpersonal information. They are 
so essentially beginning a tweet with two strikes against them 
that their white, male colleagues do not encounter.

This study also adds an exciting layer to prior literature for 
TPE. Again, examining race/ethnicity and gender of the broad-
caster causes respondents to consider their own biases and the 
biases of others. This study was conducted in early 2020 
before the murder of George Floyd and the civil unrest that 
followed. However, the responses show that while participants 
may not be willing to admit to their own biases regarding 
objectivity (66.5% said they do not notice the race or gender of 
the broadcaster when they watch the news), they believe that 
others are impacted by the race/ethnicity and gender of the 
broadcaster, with women being more likely to believe that oth-
ers are more impacted than themselves than men were.

Limitations and Future Studies

While these theoretical findings are both interesting and sig-
nificant, they are also troubling. Further clarification may 
offer additional insight. Examining which broadcast women
Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study shows that the audience considers race/ethnicity and gender of individual journalists when they consume news (either on television or online). While consumers may not want to admit to blatant racism or sexism in a survey, they have confirmed that race and gender factor into their opinion of broadcasters. In an age where broadcast women of color are getting harassed or attacked daily on Twitter, the broadcaster’s race and gender cannot be avoided. News outlets need to consider their policies regarding the requirement of Twitter’s journalistic use and be proactive in addressing any harassment their broadcasters face. Choosing to ignore race or gender when employing people is not an option. Media outlets need to be vigilant and actively support all broadcasters, with specific attention toward women of color.

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