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Media Depictions of Minority Groups: A Meta-Analytic Review Examining the Effects of Positive and Negative Portrayals on Outgroup Evaluations

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ABSTRACT

After more than five decades of research on media depictions and outgroup evaluations, there remains a need for a comprehensive analysis that includes both positive and negative portrayals across a wide range of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. This meta-analysis of 60 studies from 49 articles fills this gap, revealing that negative media depictions of racial and ethnic minorities ($k = 56$, $n = 16{,}476$) lead to unfavorable evaluations of these groups, while positive portrayals ($k = 24$, $n = 7{,}899$) produced the opposite effect. Both positive and negative portrayals yield similar effect sizes, highlighting media's dual potential to shape intergroup attitudes. Importantly, these findings remain consistent, with no significant moderating influences detected based on the target outgroup (Black, Latinx, Immigrant/Refugee, MENA), outcome type (cognitive, affective, behavioral, policy), media type (text or film/TV), genre (entertainment or news), or study design (cross-sectional or experimental). These results highlight the robustness of the observed effects in the context of media portrayals and their impact on intergroup outcomes.

Media portrayals of historically marginalized ethnic and racial groups often perpetuate stereotypes that characterize these groups as deviant, threatening, or subservient (Ramasubramanian et al., 2023). Although positive representations exist, misrepresentations remain prevalent in mainstream mass media (Nielsen, 2023; UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, 2024). With many media users consuming vast amounts of content while inhabiting relatively homogeneous social circles, media become a critical source of information about

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outgroups, potentially influencing attitudes and behaviors toward those groups (Mastro, 2015).

Despite over five decades of scholarly inquiry into the impacts of mediated portrayals on intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and several high-quality narrative reviews (e.g., T. Dixon, 2019; Mastro, 2015), previous meta-analyses have addressed only specific aspects of media effects, leaving significant gaps. For instance, Banas et al. (2020) examined the impact of parasocial and vicarious contact across various outgroups, not necessarily focusing on racial and ethnic groups, while Gaur (2019) concentrated solely on negative portrayals of African Americans. These gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive analysis that includes both positive and negative portrayals across a wider range of racial, ethnic, and religious outgroups.

Several key questions remain unanswered. Some studies show that positive portrayals improve intergroup attitudes while negative portrayals harm them, yet others report null findings. A meta-analysis provides a standardized approach to assess the strength and direction of these effects across diverse studies, helping to reconcile these inconsistencies. It allows for the aggregation of findings, facilitates quantitative comparisons, and addresses statistical power and sample size considerations, thus enhancing methodological rigor and providing a solid foundation for future research.

Additionally, a meta-analysis allows for the examination of both theoretical and methodological moderators, offering nuanced insights into media effects. Theoretical moderators, such as the depicted group (e.g., African American, Latino American) or type of outcome (e.g., cognitive, affective, behavioral), reveal how media may have varying impacts on different groups or outcomes. Methodological moderators, such as study design (e.g., survey, experiment), help explain inconsistencies in findings. By analyzing these factors, this meta-analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the robustness of media effects and the contexts in which they are most influential.

Theoretical Processes

Various theoretical frameworks suggest that media portrayals of outgroups can shape attitudes both immediately and over time, with the effects influenced by factors such as the nature of the portrayal, the viewer's preexisting beliefs, and their reliance on media as a source of information about the outgroup (e.g., T. Dixon, 2019; Genner & Süss, 2017). Key theories, including priming theory, cultivation theory, social identity theory, and contact theory, provide different perspectives on how these media effects unfold.

Priming theory posits that even a single media exposure can activate related concepts in viewers' minds, potentially influencing how they perceive and evaluate members of these groups in real-world interactions (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Negative media depictions can reinforce negative concepts,

while positive depictions are theorized to activate and strengthen positive associations. Cultivation theory suggests that long-term exposure to media depictions might gradually shift viewers' perceptions toward the version of reality presented in the media, subtly shaping their worldviews over time (Shrum, 2017). This approach often involves examining and comparing across individual differences in overall media exposure without focusing heavily on message characteristics, to examine long-term effects from cumulative consumption.

Social Identity Theory provides crucial insights into why media effects on racial and ethnic attitudes may differ from those on other outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These identities are deeply tied to self-concept, cultural heritage, and entrenched societal hierarchies, making them more salient and enduring than transient or situational identities (e.g., sports team affiliations). As a result, media depictions of these groups may carry distinct psychological and societal implications, shaping both individual perceptions and broader intergroup dynamics. Extending these ideas, contact theory proposes that media can serve as an indirect form of intergroup contact, influencing attitudes when direct contact is limited, with the effects depending on whether the depictions are positive or negative (Joyce & Harwood, 2014).

Collectively, these frameworks highlight short- and long-term processes through which media exposure can influence attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups. Priming and contact theories, for instance, make specific predictions about the effects of positive versus negative depictions, while cultivation theory emphasizes the role of sustained media exposure in shaping general perceptions. These distinctions guide researchers' methodological choices, such as whether to specify valence (e.g., overall media exposure versus positive/negative media) or focus on group-specific portrayals when examining media effects on outgroup attitudes.

Media Representation of Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Minorities

In examining media representations of marginalized groups, it is crucial to consider both the content and context of these portrayals. While globalization and digital platforms have expanded access to media tailored for specific racial and ethnic groups, we focus on portrayals within mainstream media designed for mass audiences, such as television, film, and news, given their documented role in shaping majority group perceptions of minorities (Abrams et al., 2003). These portrayals are often the primary source of information about outgroups for many individuals who lack direct interpersonal contact with these communities (Mastro, 2015).

Content analyses have documented distinctive patterns in how racial, ethnic, and religious minorities are portrayed, often relying on deeply ingrained stereotypes that confine these groups to limited and

sometimes unfavorable roles (T. Dixon, 2019). Additionally, the underrepresentation of certain minorities, such as Native Americans, contributes to the limited availability of media content that accurately reflects the diversity within these groups (Leavitt et al., 2015). Notably, disparities exist not only in the frequency of representations but also in the quality of those representations, with some groups consistently portrayed in a more negative light (Tukachinsky et al., 2015; UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, 2024). Although there are important distinctions in how different racial and ethnic groups are represented (see Alsultany, 2016; Cox, 2020; T. Dixon, 2019), these media characterizations can be broadly categorized into two overarching themes: (a) negative and antisocial representations, emphasizing threat, deviance, or subservience, and (b) counter-stereotypic and positive exemplars, which challenge prevailing negative stereotypes and offer more affirming models for audiences.

A compelling illustration of this pattern emerges in U.S. news coverage. For instance, U.S. news coverage has historically depicted Black Americans as criminals, a portrayal that often contradicts crime statistics and reinforces harmful stereotypes (T. Dixon, 2008). Recent content analyses, however, indicate a trend toward more nuanced and improved representations of African Americans in news media (T. L. Dixon & Williams, 2015). Similarly, Latinos in the news are frequently associated with undocumented immigration and crime, narratives that can mislead public perceptions about immigration (Madrigal & Soroka, 2023). Muslim and Middle Eastern individuals are typically portrayed in the context of terrorism, despite the rarity of such events, contributing to an exaggerated sense of threat (T. L. Dixon & Williams, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2024).

Positive depictions, though less common, often serve to disrupt the stereotypic portrayals that dominate the media landscape. This includes Latinos in roles as protagonists, Black characters in highly professional positions, Asians in roles with high social standing, and Muslim and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) characters as patriotic (e.g., Alsultany, 2016; Tukachinsky et al., 2015). Research suggests that even counter-stereotypic portrayals, which may not be explicitly positive, can disrupt entrenched negative schemas and reduce negative outgroup attitudes (Bruneau et al., 2017; Saleem et al., 2017). These disruptions are significant because they challenge long-standing media stereotypes that may shape public perceptions of these outgroups. However, the number of studies examining the consequences of positive outgroup media depictions remains limited compared to those examining negative media depictions.

Effects of These Media Depictions on Majority Members

Prior meta-analyses

Despite the number of individual studies examining these effects, only two meta-analyses have systematically reviewed them. Gaur (2019) examined 49 studies finding a positive association ($r = .22$) between media stereotypes of African Americans and negative attitudes toward this group. Banas et al. (2020) focused on mediated intergroup contact, reporting that positive depictions (and reverse-scored negative portrayals) were associated with more favorable evaluations of the depicted groups.

Notwithstanding the contributions of these meta-analyses, we add to the literature in this area by addressing several areas requiring further investigation and verification. First, the theoretical frameworks guiding these past studies were distinct, influencing their inclusion/exclusion criteria and the coding of relevant moderators. Gaur (2019) focused on negative depictions of a single group (African Americans) and their impact. Banas et al. explored the effects of mediated parasocial and vicarious contact on prejudice, across various types of outgroups (e.g., racial group, opposing sports teams, fictional characters, sexual minorities, people with disabilities) and including forms of communication not typically considered mass media, such as high school basketball training videos, imagined contact with outgroup members, and verbal storytelling. In contrast, our meta-analysis is grounded in a media psychology approach, examining the effects of exposure to positive and negative mass media depictions of marginalized racial, ethnic, and religious groups on a range of theoretically- and empirically driven outcomes, and including variables unique to media processes and effects.

Second, our study expands the range of outcomes examined. Previous meta-analyses primarily focused on attitudinal outcomes, such as cognitive and affective outgroup attitudes, or combined theoretically distinct outcomes (e.g., perceptions, emotions, policy support, behaviors) into a single category. This approach does not provide the opportunity to test how different aspects of outgroup evaluations might be moderated by media representations. Alternatively, our analysis considers a diverse array of outcomes, including cognitive, affective, behavioral, and policy-related impacts, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of how media representations influence various aspects of outgroup evaluations.

Third, our meta-analysis emphasizes valence-specific media exposure, whereas previous studies often included depictions where valence was ambiguous, unmeasured, or not explicitly linked to the outgroup in question. Gaur (2019) primarily examined negative portrayals but included studies that did not clearly define valence (e.g., ad manipulations), potentially conflating different types of media exposure. Similarly, Banas et al. (2020) incorporated

studies that lacked a specific focus on valence in their overall analysis (e.g., exposure to Google news), addressing this only in a follow-up valence moderation test. Our meta-analysis deliberately excluded such studies to provide a more direct and conservative assessment of how the valence of media depictions influences attitudes. This approach helps to avoid confounding variables and ensures that the effects we observe are directly attributable to the nature of the media portrayals.

Prior research and methodological variations

Early research in this area primarily employed single cross-sectional survey designs, often measuring overall media consumption, rather than exposure to specific portrayals, and correlating it with attitudes toward outgroups. For example, T. Dixon (2008) found that increased overall news consumption (due to its heavy emphasis on coverage associating crime with Black people) was associated with unsympathetic views about the structural constraints faced by Black people in society and policies affecting Black people. Other studies have taken a more targeted approach by examining exposure to specific positive or negative portrayals and their influence on outgroup attitudes (e.g., Pagotto & Voci, 2013; Wirz et al., 2018).

However, not all findings from cross-sectional research align, with some studies reporting null or even contradictory findings (e.g., Graf & Sczesny, 2019; Neuendorf et al., 2009). These discrepancies likely stem from methodological differences in how media exposure is measured. For instance, studies assessing (1) overall media consumption (e.g., general TV viewing habits), (2) frequency of outgroup depictions without specifying valence (e.g., how often Latinos appear on TV), or (3) reliance on media as a primary information source (e.g., how much individuals depend on media for information about Muslims) introduce potential confounds. Such measures fail to distinguish between positive, negative, or mixed portrayals, making it difficult to isolate media effects. Additionally, assessing exposure across multiple media types and genres introduces further methodological challenges (e.g., inconsistencies in how exposure is measured, difficulty isolating the effects of specific portrayals, and increased potential for confounding variables), an issue that only a few studies have explicitly addressed (Schieferdecker & Harwood, 2023).

Experimental studies have provided stronger causal evidence linking media exposure to outgroup evaluations (e.g., Arendt et al., 2015; Dalisay & Tan, 2009; Figueroa-Caballero & Mastro, 2019). For instance, in one experiment, participants randomly assigned to view news linking Muslims to terrorism (i.e., negative valence) were more likely to perceive Muslims as aggressive and endorse harsher policies against them compared to those exposed to neutral depictions (Saleem et al., 2017). Conversely, participants exposed to news portraying Muslims engaging in community volunteering (i.e., positive valence) were less likely to perceive Muslims as aggressive and less supportive

of punitive policies compared to those in the neutral condition. However, null and inconsistent effects have also been observed in some experimental studies (e.g., Arendt, 2016; Lopes & Jaspal, 2015).

Methodological variations across experiments may significantly influence findings. Key differences include control condition design, type of comparison groups, exposure duration, stimulus format (e.g., text vs. video), and whether pre-testing or manipulation checks were utilized. Some studies compare positive and negative depictions of an outgroup without a control condition, making it difficult to determine whether observed effects stem from positive or negative valence (e.g., Ramasubramanian, 2011). Among studies incorporating control conditions, substantial variability exists. Some use neutral, non-group-based controls, such as nature videos or news stories that omit references to any group (e.g., Arendt, 2023). Others employ group-based controls, but the nature of these references varies considerably. For instance, some studies compare negative portrayals of an outgroup with neutral or positive portrayals of the same group (e.g., Lissitsa et al., 2023), allowing for a direct test of valence effects within group. Other studies contrast negative portrayals of an outgroup with portrayals of an ingroup (e.g., Ash & Schmierbach, 2013), shifting the comparison from within-group valence differences to intergroup contrasts, which introduces a different psychological and social dynamic.

From a priming theory perspective, any reference to an outgroup, whether positive or negative, activates associated schemas and influences attitudes. Positive portrayals reinforce favorable associations, negative portrayals strengthen negative biases, and neutral portrayals maintain baseline perceptions. However, interpreting results becomes more complex when valenced media are compared to control conditions lacking outgroup references, as the schemas held by participants in those conditions remain unknown. These methodological differences serve as crucial moderators, which we systematically examine in this meta-analysis to clarify how they shape media effects on outgroup attitudes.

Exposure duration also varies widely across experimental studies. Most experiments rely on single exposures, though some have explored the effects of repeated exposure to negative portrayals (e.g., Arendt, 2013). Among studies using video stimuli, exposure length ranges from under three minutes to over eleven minutes, potentially influencing effect sizes and even the direction of findings. Additionally, whether studies pilot-test stimuli or confirm valence through manipulation checks can affect internal validity and generalizability.

Although fewer in number, longitudinal studies have provided valuable insights into the long-term effects of media exposure. For example, Schemer (2012) found that Swiss participants who were exposed to negative news about immigrants developed more negative attitudes toward them two months later, while exposure to positive news produced the opposite effect. However, even

within longitudinal designs, variability in media exposure measurements, number of waves, and the duration between assessments may influence observed effects.

Current Study

The literature overview presented above documents both the theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence supporting the idea that exposure to media portrayals of outgroups can have significant effects on attitudes and behaviors toward these depicted groups, both in the short and long term. These effects are contingent on the valence of the exposure. Accordingly, we devise the following hypotheses based on this summary.

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to negative representations of minoritized racial/ethnic groups in the media will be associated with unfavorable group evaluations.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to positive representations of minoritized racial/ethnic groups in the media will be associated with favorable group evaluations.

As noted earlier, existing research exhibits considerable diversity in the outgroups and outcomes examined, as well as the types of media and genre studied. Investigating the robustness of effects across these factors can provide valuable theoretical insights.

Different outgroups

Content analyses reveal that racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups are often portrayed negatively in mainstream media, with improvements in representation remaining uneven (Nielsen, 2023; UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, 2024). African Americans, for instance, have seen gains in both frequency and nuance of portrayals (T. L. Dixon & Williams, 2015; Tukachinsky et al., 2015). In contrast, Native Americans remain severely underrepresented, MENA populations are predominantly depicted negatively, and Latinos face both underrepresentation and stereotyping. Theoretically, when groups are both underrepresented and predominantly portrayed negatively, media depictions are likely to foster unfavorable evaluations (Abrams et al., 2003). These differences in representation highlight the importance of examining whether and how the effects of media vary by outgroup, as the specific patterns of visibility and valence may shape audience attitudes in distinct ways.

Outcomes

Media effects influence a range of cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioral outcomes (Potter, 2020). Studies on media depictions and outgroup-related cognitions have examined constructs like symbolic or realistic threats, evaluations of outgroup traits, and beliefs about outgroup culpability. These cognitive outcomes are measured both implicitly (e.g., Implicit Association Test) and explicitly (e.g., self-reports). Affective outcomes include measures of prejudice (e.g., feeling thermometers) and discrete emotional reactions (e.g., anger, empathy, disgust) toward outgroups. Behavioral outcomes involve actions or behavioral intentions directed at outgroups, such as the amount of money donated to an outgroup-related cause or aggressive behavior. Finally, studies in this area have frequently assessed participants' support for policies targeting outgroups, both real (e.g., affirmative action, three-strikes law, Muslim Ban) and hypothetical (e.g., I would support a proposal to restrict the number of refugees coming into this country). These variations highlight outcome type as a key moderator in assessing media's impact on outgroup evaluations.

Media genre

The entertainment genre is theorized to have a stronger influence on individuals compared to news content due to processes like identification, transportation, and parasocial relations, which are more prevalent in entertainment (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). However, news media, often featuring negative portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities, can strongly shape attitudes, as negative information typically has a greater impact than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; T. L. Dixon & Williams, 2015; Soroka et al., 2019). These dynamics highlight the need to examine whether the effects of positive and negative media depictions on outgroup evaluations vary by content genre – entertainment versus news.

Medium

The medium of media delivery, such as television, newspapers, or digital platforms, shapes exposure effects through its unique affordances and constraints (e.g., Eveland et al., 2002; Furnham & Gunter, 1989). For instance, the visual qualities of television, including its use of imagery, close-up shots of facial expressions, and dynamic storytelling, may engage and impact viewers differently compared to the more text-based content of newspapers. Video games add interactivity and perspectives (first versus third person), further influencing outcomes. Factors such as narrative style, message elaboration, and interactivity affect how audiences process and retain information. Additionally, media platforms vary in production techniques, genre emphasis, and representation of racial and ethnic groups (UCLA Hollywood Diversity

Report, 2024), making medium a key moderator in the effects of media depictions on outgroup attitudes.

Building on the research above, we examined how these moderators might influence the outcomes proposed in Hypotheses 1 and 2, leading to the following research questions.

Research Question 1: Do the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on the group being depicted (i.e., African American/Black, immigrant/refugee/foreign, Latinx, Muslim/MENA)?

Research Question 2: Do the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on the type of outcome serving as the dependent variable (i.e., cognitive, affective, behavioral, policy)?

Research Question 3: Do the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on the type of media (i.e., film/television, text)?

Research Question 4: Do the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on the media genre (i.e., entertainment, news)?

Methodological variations, particularly in study design and experimental controls, may significantly influence outcomes. Although much of the prior research has relied on cross-sectional designs, more recent studies have begun to shift toward experimental approaches. However, these vary in comparison conditions, such as manipulating valence within a group (e.g., negative vs. neutral news about Black people), across groups (e.g., negative news about Black vs. White perpetrators), or using controls without group references (e.g., nature videos). Such choices shape how media effects are interpreted, leading to:

Research Question 5: Do the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on the study design (i.e., cross-sectional, experimental with ingroup control, experimental with outgroup control, or experimental with no group reference)?

Although experimental designs are ideal for establishing causality, they often suffer from a lack of thorough manipulation checks and stimulus sampling, which can undermine the internal validity and reliability of the findings (Potter, 2020). Therefore, we specifically focus on these methodological aspects to assess their impact on the outcomes of interest.

Research Question 6: Does a manipulation check in experimental studies impact the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups?

Research Question 7: Do effects of (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups vary based on pilot testing stimulus material in experiments?

We also explored if publication year (Research Question 8), the nature of sample (student vs. non-students) (Research Question 9), and the location of the research sample (Research Question 10) influenced the effects of exposure to (a) negative and (b) positive media portrayals of minoritized groups.

Method

Literature Search

Three research databases were used to locate relevant peer-reviewed articles published through December, 2023. These included: (1) PsycINFO, (2) Communication and Mass Media Complete, (3) Political Science Complete. To ensure comprehensiveness, we employed an extensive list of search terms (media OR television OR tv OR film OR movie* OR news OR social media AND race OR racism OR racist OR racial OR prejudice OR stereotyp* OR ethnic* OR minority OR minorities OR intergroup OR outgroup* OR immig* OR latino OR latina OR latinx OR black OR hispanic OR african american OR asian OR arab OR middle eastern OR muslim OR asian american OR American Indian OR native American NOT sexual orientation OR sexuality OR gender). These search terms were applied to query the subject terms within the aforementioned databases, resulting in a total of 4,115 articles.

To capture additional articles beyond our initial search, including unpublished research, we issued calls for both published and unpublished manuscripts across six Listservs: (1) Communication Research and Theory Network (CRTNET) (now called CommNotes), (2) Society for Political Methodology (POLMETH), (3) Social Psychology Network, (4) SPSP Connect, sponsored by the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, (5), RACE POL, sponsored by the Section on Race, Ethnicity and Politics of the American Political Science Association, and (6) LATINO-C, sponsored by the Latino Caucus of the American Political Science Association. These efforts yielded ten unpublished manuscripts. Additionally, we reviewed two existing meta-analyses on related topics (Banas et al., 2020; Gaur, 2019) and identified five previously unlocated relevant articles, which were incorporated into our analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Our search yielded 4,130 articles, but not all of them were relevant to this meta-analysis. We then screened titles and abstracts, eliminating articles for reasons including: 1) qualitative and not quantitative design, 2) IV, DV, or design not in alignment with the objectives of the study, and 3) study included more than 50% of the sample from a racial or ethnic minority group. This initial screening identified 516 articles for further scrutiny. Next, two team members independently evaluated these 516 articles to assess their adherence to the inclusion criteria.

Variables

For inclusion in the meta-analysis, study variables were required to meet two criteria. First, studies needed to incorporate a predictor variable assessing or manipulating the valence of media representations pertaining to a racial, ethnic, or religious minority group. Second, outcome variables were required to assess cognitions/attitudes, emotions, behaviors, or support for policies toward racial or ethnic minorities.[1]

Participants

As our primary focus was to investigate the impact of media representations of racial and ethnic minorities on the attitudes of majority group members, our inclusion criteria specifically encompassed studies that featured a majority of participants from the dominant racial and ethnic groups within a given society.

Language

Only articles published in English were considered for inclusion.

Research design

Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies were included in the analysis. Systematic reviews, meta-analyses, qualitative studies, commentaries, editorials, book chapters, and corrections were excluded. We also excluded any content analysis studies that did not examine the effects of the content on the audience. Finally, experimental studies exposing participants to different valences in a within-subject design were excluded.

The study encompassed a final sample of 49 distinct articles that aligned with the specified inclusion criteria (see Appendix A for a list of studies). It is pertinent to note that several of these articles featured multiple studies, resulting in a total of 60 individual studies analyzed. Among these, 56 studies delved into the examination of negative media depictions ($N = 16{,}476$), and 24 studies investigated positive media portrayals ($N = 7{,}899$). The PRISMA flow-chart, illustrating the comprehensive process of article selection and screening,

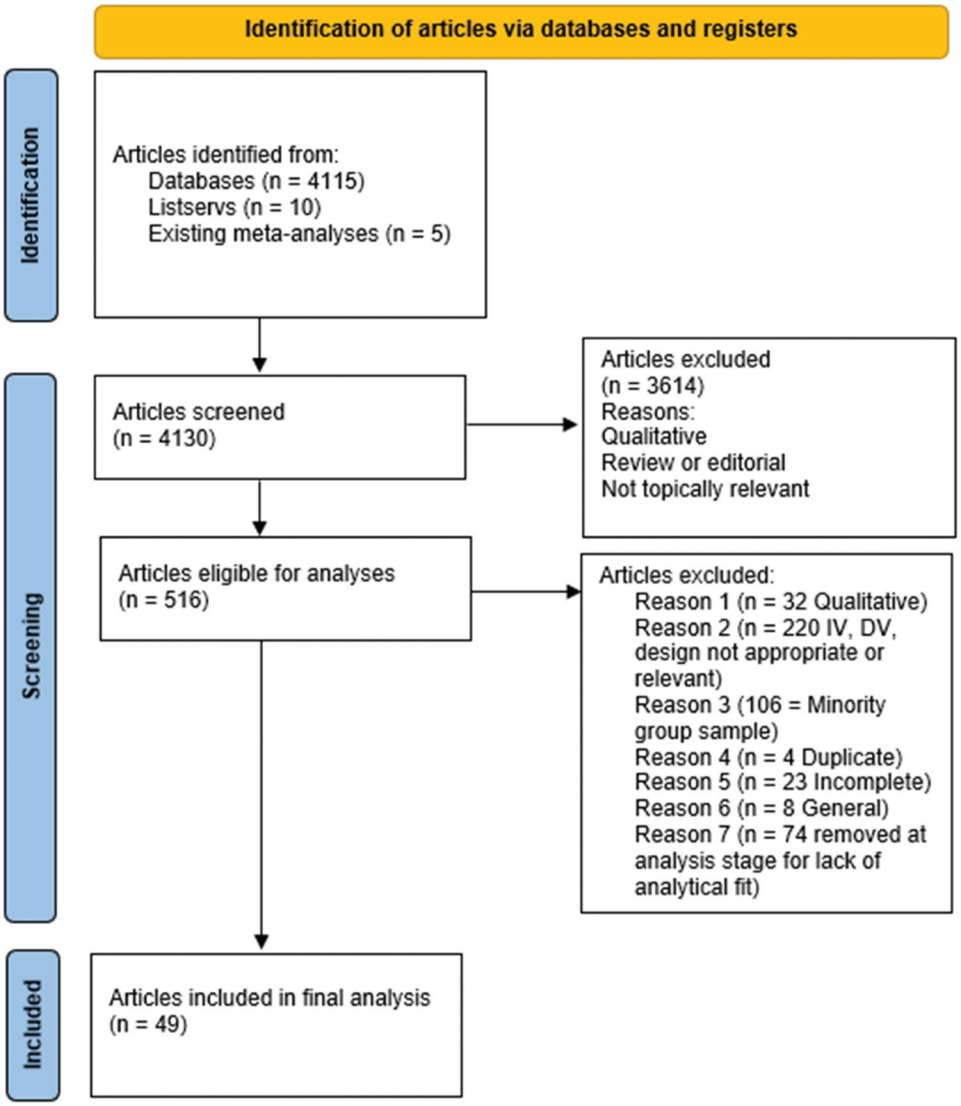


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of literature search.

is presented in Figure 1. A detailed table outlining the characteristics of the studies included is provided in Appendix B.

Data Extraction and Study Variables

The research team iteratively developed and refined the codebook for our variables of interest through evaluations, discussions, and revisions. Twenty studies from the sample were independently coded by two team members to establish intercoder agreement. Krippendorf's Alpha was calculated to assess inter-rater reliability for coded variables, with all variables falling within an

acceptable range, minority group depicted ($\alpha = 1.00$), outcome type ($\alpha = .72$), media type ($\alpha = 1.00$), media genre ($\alpha = 1.00$), manipulation check ($\alpha = 1.00$), and stimulus pretesting ($\alpha = 1.00$). Discrepancies were resolved through discussions with the lead author.

Negative portrayals

Negative media portrayals were defined operationally based on the original researchers' hypotheses and terminology. Specifically, we categorized portrayals as negative if they were expected by the original researchers to reinforce prejudice or negative attitudes toward minority groups. This includes both self-reported exposure to such portrayals in cross-sectional studies and direct exposure in experimental studies. For instance, in a cross-sectional study, participants could be asked about their exposure to television content depicting different racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups perpetrating crimes (Ramasubramanian, 2010). In an experimental study, participants could have been exposed to a news story featuring a racial, ethnic, or religious minority member as a perpetrator of a violent crime (Hoewe, 2014).

Positive portrayals

Similarly, positive media portrayals were defined according to the original researchers' expectations and terminology. Portrayals were categorized as positive if they were anticipated to reduce prejudice or improve attitudes toward minority groups. This included self-reported exposure to positive media depictions in cross-sectional studies or direct exposure in experimental settings. For example, in cross-sectional studies, this could include experiences with positive outgroup contact through the mass media (Graf & Sczesny, 2019). In experimental studies participants were exposed to stimuli depicting minority groups engaged in positive activities, such as volunteering for charity or assisting the homeless (Lopes & Jaspal, 2015).

It is important to note that stereotypical portrayals are not always negative, just as counter-stereotypical portrayals are not always positive. For instance, the "model minority" stereotype attributed to Asian Americans is often considered positively valenced, as it emphasizes qualities like hard work and success. However, this portrayal also reinforces a narrow, unidimensional perspective, limiting perceptions of Asian Americans to specific careers and traits. In our analysis, we primarily relied on the original researchers' categorizations but also assessed the likely impact on prejudice. Thus, portrayals such as the "model minority" stereotype were classified as positive when they framed the group in a favorable light – such as highlighting diligence and achievement – even if they remained stereotypical (e.g., Dalisay & Tan, 2009).

Moderator variables

Our research questions explored how key theoretical and methodological moderators could influence the effects of minority portrayals. RQ1 examined the outgroup depicted, leading us to categorize racial and ethnic outgroups into four subcategories: 1) African American/Black, 2) Immigrant/Refugee/Foreign (IRF), 3) Latinx, and 4) MENA/Muslim. Although we recognize important distinctions among some grouped categories, the constraint of limited data prompted us to consider their collective categorization. Further, certain groups are conflated in media narratives (e.g., MENA and Muslims), producing similar effects on audience attitudes (Saleem & Anderson, 2013; Saleem et al., 2016). Thus, we examined media depictions of these groups collectively. Additionally, although immigrants, refugees, and foreigners may not universally constitute racial and ethnic minorities, in our corpus, they predominantly belonged to such groups within their respective countries. Within our corpus, most studies focused on IRF ($k = 27$), followed by African Americans ($k = 14$), MENA ($k = 13$), and Latinx ($k = 5$).

RQ2 centered on the type of outcomes as a moderator and thus dependent variables were categorized into one of four categories: cognitive, affective, behavioral, or policy. Cognitive outcomes included explicit or implicit perceptions and thoughts pertaining to group attributes including assessments of attitudes toward the group, such as trustworthy, moral, and respected (Joyce & Harwood, 2014), perceptions of threat associated with an outgroup (Lueders et al., 2019), and implicit bias assessments such as the Implicit Association Test (Ash & Schmierbach, 2013). Affective outcomes measured discrete emotions like anxiety (e.g., "cautious," "troubled") and empathy (e.g., "tenderness," "sympathy") (Pagotto & Voci, 2013). Behavioral outcomes assessed actions or behavioral intentions toward minority group members. These included actions like monetary donations (or lack thereof) for outgroups (Tamborini et al., 2017) and aggressive behaviors (Pan et al., 2017). Finally, we categorized participants' positions on political and social policies as policy support. Policy support outcomes included positions on affirmative action (Dalisay & Tan, 2009) and civil restrictions, like voting rights for Muslims (Saleem et al., 2017). Within our corpus most studies examine cognitive outcomes ($k = 46$), followed by affective ($k = 18$), policy support ($k = 14$), and behavioral ($k = 5$). To examine the overall effects of minority portrayals, all four outcomes were combined with larger values indicating more negative outcomes.

RQ3 examined whether media type moderated the hypothesized effects. Thus, we coded stimuli as text ($k = 26$) or film/TV ($k = 21$). RQ4 focused on the genre as a moderator, leading us to code if the studied media were entertainment or news. Most studies within our corpus focused on news ($k = 41$) rather than entertainment ($k = 12$) media.

In addressing RQ5, we examined the influence of study design by categorizing studies as either cross-sectional ($k = 17$) or experimental ($k = 43$). Experimental studies were further categorized into three groups: (1) outgroup depictions (positive or negative) compared to neutral portrayals of the same group ($k = 7$), (2) outgroup depictions compared to similarly valenced portrayals of the ingroup (e.g., whites; $k = 12$), and (3) outgroup depictions compared to control conditions without a group reference (e.g., nature videos; $k = 30$). Some experimental studies included multiple conditions, allowing for comparisons across more than one of these categories.

RQ6 and RQ7 examined whether methodological factors, specifically manipulation checks and pilot testing, moderated the hypothesized effects. We coded whether each experimental study included these elements, finding that 23 studies (53%) lacked manipulation checks and 24 (56%) did not conduct stimulus pretests. For RQ8, we assessed whether publication year moderated the effects, treating it as a continuous variable. In RQ9, we explored sample characteristics, categorizing studies as student ($k = 33$) or non-student ($k = 26$) samples. Finally, in RQ10, we investigated the influence of research location, coding studies as U.S.-based ($k = 34$) or non-U.S.-based ($k = 26$).

Search for Missing Information

To secure missing data for our analysis, we reached out to the first authors of articles. In total, we contacted authors from 89 articles, obtaining 40 responses. Of these, 16 furnished all the required information, while 24 provided partial data.

Comparison with Previous Meta-Analyses

Of the 60 studies included in our meta-analysis, 11 were included in Banas et al. (2020) and seven in Gaur (2019), highlighting the distinctiveness of our dataset, which examines valence-specific media effects across diverse racial, ethnic, and religious outgroups.

Effect Size Extraction

The effect size r was chosen for its accessibility to a broad audience. Positive r values were standardized to indicate more negative evaluations or responses toward minority groups. Effect sizes were extracted directly from primary studies when r values were reported or estimated based on means, standard deviations and, t or F values using the esc package in R (Lüdecke, 2019). Following standard practice (Borenstein et al., 2009), Fisher's r-to-

z transformation was applied during analyses, with results transformed back to *r* for reporting.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Random effects meta-analysis models (Borenstein et al., 2009) were used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. These models account for between-study variability and generalize the results to the population of studies examining media portrayals of minority groups. Inverse sampling variance weights were used, and only a single estimate from each primary study was included in the analyses conducted to test the hypotheses or per subgroup for the moderator tests. For each analysis, we report the weighted mean effect size, number of primary studies included (k), total sample size (n), a test of the heterogeneity of effect sizes (Q), and the I^2 coefficient. The I^2 coefficient captures the proportion of variance in effect sizes representing real differences (Borenstein et al., 2009). The package meta in R was used to conduct the analyses and construct the figures (Viechtbauer, 2010).

Results

Test of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Effects of negative portrayals

The random effects model meta-analysis for negative portrayals showed that negative portrayals of minoritized groups led to more negative evaluations of these groups. Across the 56 studies that evaluated negative portrayals, the weighted mean effect size was statistically significant, $r = .14$, *95% CI* [.10, .18], $k = 56$, $n = 16{,}476$, $I^2 = .86$, supporting H1. A forest plot illustrating the primary studies included in this analysis can be found in Figure 2. The overall effect size exhibited heterogeneity, $Q(55)$, 360.68, $p < .001$, suggesting the potential presence of moderators.

A series of mixed effect meta-analyses were conducted to evaluate the moderators identified in the research questions (see Table 1). Stimulus material pilot testing in experimental studies was a significant moderator such that larger effects of negative portrayals were observed in studies that included a pilot test for stimulus materials compared to studies that lacked pilot testing. None of the other moderator tests were statistically significant.

Effects of Positive Portrayals

The random effects model meta-analysis for positive portrayals revealed that positive depictions of minoritized groups led to more positive group evaluations. Across the 24 studies evaluating positive portrayals, the weighted mean

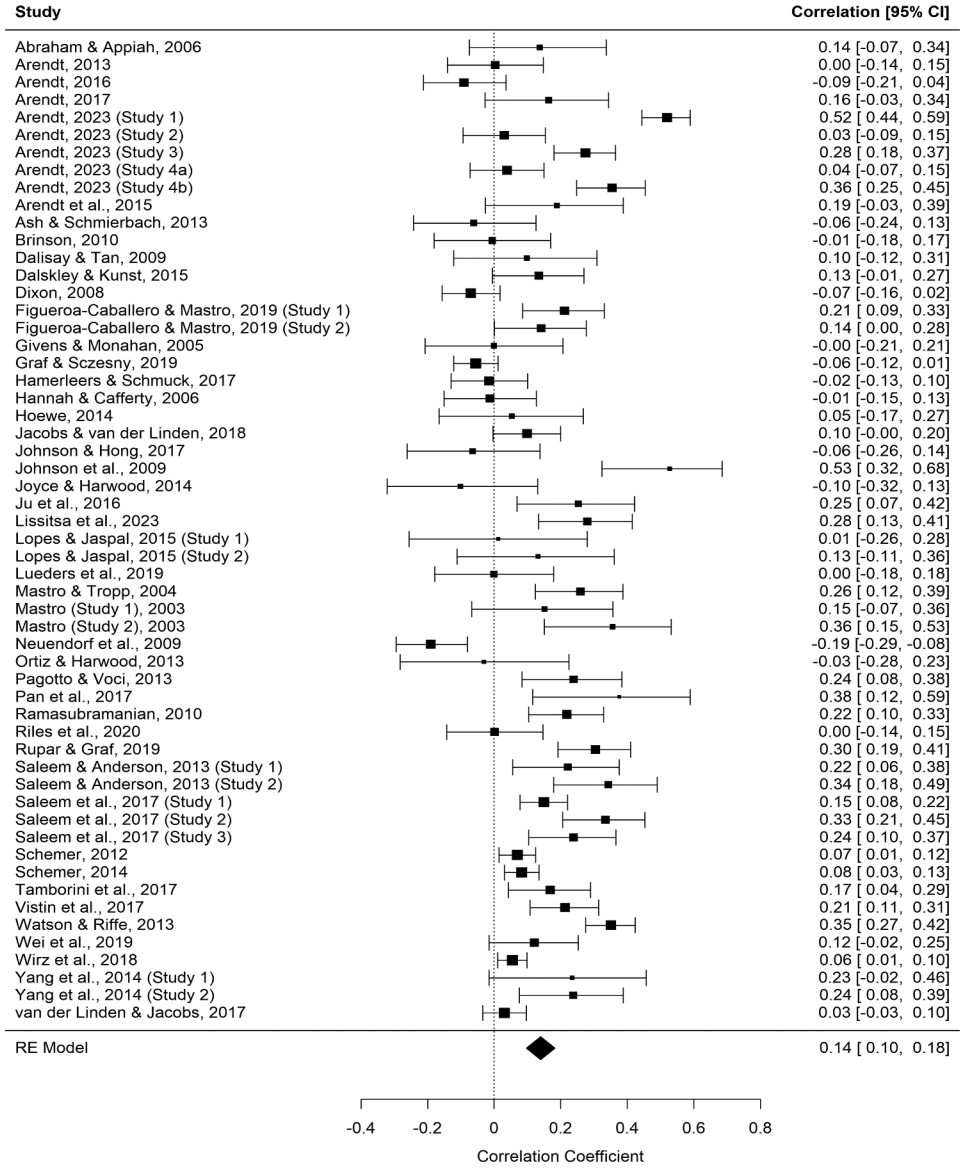


Figure 2. Forest plot of primary studies included in analysis of negative minority groups portrayals.

effect size was statistically significant, $r = -.17$, *95% CI* [− .25, − .08], $k = 24$, $n = 7{,}899$, $I^2 = .93$, supporting H2. Figure 3 displays a forest plot of the primary studies for this analysis. The overall effect size for positive portrayals of minoritized groups exhibited heterogeneity, $Q(23) = 313.15$, $p < .001$.

Prior to testing the moderators proposed in the research questions, we first inspected the number of primary studies in each subcategory for all the moderators. To avoid misleading estimates from underpowered analyses (Hedges & Pigott, 2004), we only included subgroups that contained at least five primary

Table 1. Moderator tests for the effects of negative and positive portrayals of minorities.

Moderator	Subgroups	Moderator test	*k*	*r*	95% CI
Negative portrayals of minorities					
Minority group		$Q_M(df = 3) = 1.45$, $p = .69$			
	African American/Black		14	.09	.00, .18
	Immigrant/Refugee/Foreigner		27	.14	.08, .20
	Latinx		5	.17	.02, .31
	Muslim/MENA		11	.16	.06, .25
Outcome type		$Q_M(df = 3) = 1.56$, $p = .67$			
	Cognitive		42	.13	.08, .18
	Affective		18	.17	.09, .24
	Behavioral		5	.07	−.08, .21
	Policy		14	.15	.06, .23
Study design		$Q_M(df = 3) = 6.80$, $p = .08$			
	Cross-sectional		16	.18	.10, .26
	Experimental-no group control		27	.10	.04, .17
	Experimental-ingroup control		7	.28	.15, .40
	Experimental-White control		12	.18	.08, .28
Media type		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.03$, $p = .86$			
	Film/TV		17	.13	.06, .21
	Text		26	.12	.06, .18
Media genre		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.66$, $p = .41$			
	Entertainment		11	.20	.10, .29
	News		41	.15	.11, .20
Manipulation checks		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.26$, $p = .61$			
	Yes		18	.11	.04, .17
	No		22	.13	.07, .19
Stimulus pretesting		$Q_M(df = 1) = 9.85$, $p = .002$			
	Yes		17	.18	.13, .24
	No		23	.07	.02, .11
Location		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.03$, $p = .87$			
	United States		31	.14	.08, .20
	Other Countries		25	.14	.07, .20
Sample type		$Q_M(df = 1) = .002$, $p = .96$			
	Non-student		26	.14	.08, .20
	Student		29	.14	.07, .20
Publication year		$Q_M(df = 1) = 1.73$, $p = .19$			
	Publication year (meta regression)	$b = .006$, $p = .19$	58		
Positive portrayals of minorities					
Minority group		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.96$, $p = .33$			
	Immigrant/Refugee/Foreigner		15	−.21	−.32, −.10
	Muslim/MENA		5	−.10	−.29, .10
Outcome type		$Q_M(df = 1) = 2.78$, $p = .10$			
	Affective		11	−.25	−.35, −.13
	Cognitive		16	−.12	−.22, −.02
Study design		$Q_M(df = 1) = 2.71$, $p = .10$			
	Cross-sectional		10	−.25	−.36, −.12
	Experimental-control		14	−.11	−.22, .01
Media type		$Q_M(df = 1) = 1.36$, $p = .24$			
	Film/TV		10	−.12	−.26, .02
	Text		10	−.24	−.37, −.11
Media genre		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.28$, $p = .60$			

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Moderator	Subgroups	Moderator test	*k*	*r*	95% CI
	Entertainment		5	−.13	−.32, .08
	News		17	−.19	−.29, .08
Manipulation checks		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.95$, $p = .33$			
	Yes		8	−.13	−.23, −.03
	No		6	−.05	−.17, .07
Stimulus pretesting		$Q_M(df = 1) = 0.06$, $p = .81$			
	Yes		6	−.11	−.23, .01
	No		8	−.09	−.20, .02
Location		$Q_M(df = 1) = .09$, $p = .76$			
	United States		7	−.14	−.31, .03
	Other Countries		17	−.18	−.28, −.07
Sample type		$Q_M(df = 1) = 1.19$, $p = .27$			
	Non-student		13	−.21	−.32, −.09
	Student		9	−.11	−.25, .05
Publication year		$Q_M(df = 1) = 1.53$, $p = .22$			
	Publication year (meta regression)	$b = -.01$, $p = .22$	24		

Meta regression was used to conduct the moderator test for publication year because it was a continuous variable.

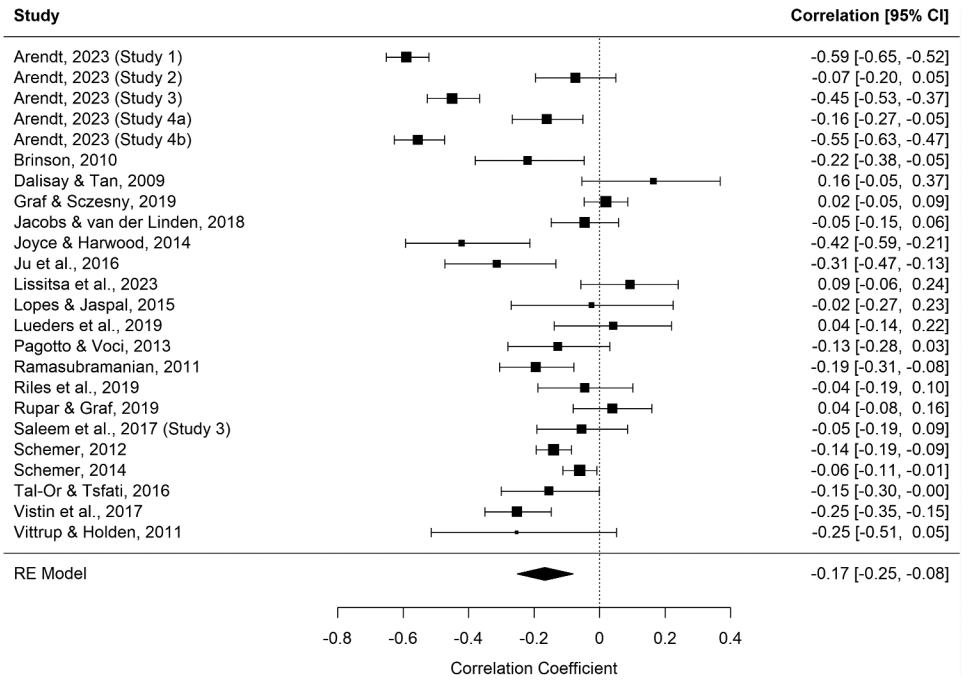


Figure 3. Forest plot of studies included in analysis of positive minority groups portrayals.

studies. The results have been reported in the bottom half of Table 1. None of the moderator tests for positive portrayals were statistically significant.

Publication Bias

The potential influence of publication bias was evaluated for the tests of positive and negative portrayals using contour-enhanced funnel plots and trim-and-fill analysis. The funnel plots were symmetrical, and the trim-and-fill analyses indicated that no studies were missing. Complete details about these analyses are included in the supplementary materials (Appendix C). These analyses collectively indicated that the influence of publication bias was likely trivial. The estimates reported in this manuscript would not change meaningfully due to the inclusion of studies missing as a result of publication bias (Borenstein et al., 2009).

Discussion

Building on the contributions of previous, related meta-analyses (e.g., Banas et al., 2020; Gaur, 2019), the current meta-analysis provides a comprehensive examination of how positive and negative media depictions of racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups influence cognitive, affective, behavioral, and policy-related outcomes. We also explored whether these effects are moderated by theoretically and methodologically relevant factors.

As predicted in H1, exposure to negative representations of minoritized racial and ethnic groups was significantly associated with more negative evaluations of those groups. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing the pivotal role of media depictions in shaping stereotypes and attitudes (T. Dixon, 2019; Mastro, 2015). Additionally, media portrayals have been shown to influence behaviors toward and public policy decisions involving depicted groups (Hawkins et al., 2024). The significant weighted mean effect size (r = .14) indicates that exposure to negative portrayals of minoritized racial and ethnic groups is associated with a small but statistically significant increase in negative evaluations of these groups. Importantly, this effect was observed across the subgroups examined. Although there is variation in how frequently minoritized racial and ethnic groups are represented, the themes used to depict them, and the degree to which audiences rely on media over direct interaction, media exposure consistently shapes attitudes toward these groups.

Theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence suggest that media indirectly affect behaviors through alterations in cognitive processes and affect (Potter, 2020). Given these established propositions, one might expect media effects to exert a stronger influence on cognitive and affective outcomes compared to behavioral outcomes. However, our findings did not indicate significant moderation by outcome type. This

null result may stem from substantial variation in measurement approaches across studies, complicating direct comparisons. Additionally, averaging across different outcome types within studies to generate a single effect size may have obscured potential differences in effects.

Theoretically we expected significant moderation effects based on media type (film/TV vs. text) and genre (entertainment vs. news), but the data did not support these propositions. Notably, most studies in our corpus examined news media rather than entertainment media, despite theories suggesting stronger effects for the latter (e.g., Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Methodologically, we also anticipated moderation effects based on study design (cross-sectional vs. experimental) and variations in experimental control groups. None of these tests were significant. This contrasts with Banas et al. (2020), who found stronger effects in experimental studies compared to cross-sectional studies. However, a key distinction in our study is that we only included studies where valence was explicitly assessed, which may explain why cross-sectional studies in our corpus produced effect sizes comparable to experimental studies. A marginal trend emerged in studies examining negative media exposure, suggesting that experiments using control conditions featuring the same ingroup as the negative valence condition produced stronger effects than those using control groups featuring outgroup members (e.g., white individuals) or no group reference (e.g., nature videos or text). However, these experiments were relatively few ($k = 7$), limiting the ability to draw definitive conclusions.

Beyond study design, we tested moderation effects based on sample type, study location, publication year, manipulation checks, and stimulus testing. The only significant methodological moderator was stimulus pre-testing, where studies that pre-tested materials produced stronger effects of negative portrayals. This finding reinforces the methodological importance of pre-testing experimental stimuli, as it ensures the intended message and emotional tone are conveyed accurately, reducing variability across conditions and enhancing internal validity. However, over half of experimental studies lacked manipulation checks (53%) or stimulus pretests (56%), raising concerns about internal validity. These findings align with calls for increased methodological rigor in media effects research (Potter, 2020). Future research should prioritize robust pre-testing and validation procedures to ensure that experimental manipulations accurately capture theoretical constructs of interest.

Supporting H2, exposure to positive depictions of minority groups was associated with more positive group evaluations. This finding is consistent with previous work (Banas et al., 2020) and reinforces the potential of media to shape positive perceptions of marginalized groups. The significant negative weighted mean effect size ($r = -.17$) suggests that such portrayals can effectively counteract negative stereotypes and improve group evaluations.

Moreover, the absence of significant moderation effects indicates that these relationships remain robust across various study conditions.

Although our meta-analysis revealed significant heterogeneity in effect sizes for both positive and negative portrayals, few of the tested moderators reached significance. This indicates that, despite considerable variability across studies, the moderators included in our analysis may not adequately account for the sources of this variation. Additional factors, such as audience identification with depicted characters, the salience of intergroup comparisons within the stimuli, and external influences like real-world contact with minority groups, may contribute to the residual heterogeneity observed. We address these possibilities in greater detail in the broader implications and limitations sections.

Notably, the effects of both negative and positive media portrayals on attitudes toward depicted groups are of approximately similar magnitude, mirroring findings in the Banas et al. (2020) meta-analysis regarding parasocial and vicarious contact effects. Despite the prevalent negative context in which racial and ethnic minoritized groups are often portrayed in mainstream media (T. Dixon, 2019) and the psychological tendency to give greater weight to negative information than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001), positive media depictions are equally influential in shaping outgroup attitudes. However, it is crucial to recognize that despite the potential for positively valenced media content to improve outgroup attitudes, the predominant trend in U.S. media remains the prevalence of negative portrayals, as evidenced by numerous content analyses (Nielsen, 2023; UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, 2024). This discrepancy highlights a critical issue: if the opportunities for exposure to positively valenced media depictions of marginalized racial and ethnic groups are limited compared with negatively valenced media portrayals, then the possibility of prosocial outcomes is also constrained.

Broader Implications and Recommendations

The effect sizes observed in this meta-analysis for both positive and negative portrayals are relatively small, yet they align with those commonly reported in communication and media research, where average effect sizes range from $r = .18$ to .21 (Rains et al., 2018). Although these effects may appear modest, their broader impact must be evaluated in light of the cumulative nature of media exposure, the pervasive presence of media in daily life, and its interaction with other socializing forces.

First, it is essential to consider how repeated media exposure accumulates over time, a well-established concept in media effects research (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Frequent and consistent exposure to media portrayals of minority groups, whether negative or positive, likely lead to gradual shifts in attitudes. Most experimental studies in this meta-analysis focused on short-

term effects, using brief stimuli (e.g., 2–3 minute clips, single articles). However, real-world media consumption is persistent and pervasive, shaping attitudes over extended periods (Nielsen, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2021). Although limited in our corpus, longitudinal research provides evidence of these cumulative effects. For example, Saleem et al. (2016) found that individuals who relied on media for information about Muslims developed increasingly negative attitudes over nine months, alongside greater support for restrictive policies targeting this group. To advance beyond theoretical speculation, future research must prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs that systematically manipulate the frequency, duration, and valence of media exposure. This approach would allow researchers to determine whether small, short-term effects aggregate into more stable, long-term shifts in intergroup attitudes (Long, 2023; Shehata et al., 2023).

Second, media effects do not operate in isolation but interact with interpersonal experiences, social identities, and ideological beliefs (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). The extent to which media influence intergroup attitudes is often contingent on these external factors, making it essential to examine their interplay. Indeed, the heterogeneity we observed within the effects of positive and negative portrayals might stem from interconnections between such real-world factors. For example, media stereotypes may exert stronger effects on individuals with limited real-world contact with outgroups (Fuochi et al., 2020). In segregated communities with racially homogeneous networks, media often serve as the primary source of information about other groups (Mastro, 2015). Moreover, preexisting ideological biases (e.g., social dominance orientation) and identity-based variables (e.g., ingroup identification) may amplify or mitigate media effects, either reinforcing or counteracting stereotypical portrayals. Despite theoretical recognition of these interactive influences, empirical studies rarely test them in tandem (see Saleem et al., 2019 for a similar argument). Future research should systematically identify these boundary conditions to clarify when and for whom media representations are most and least impactful (Paluck et al., 2021).

One critical gap in the literature is the lack of research examining behavioral outcomes. Cognitive and affective measures currently dominate media effects studies; however, understanding how exposure to different portrayals translates into behaviors such as intergroup approach, avoidance, cooperation, or hostility is arguably even more critical. Additionally, few studies in our corpus tested theoretically relevant mediators that explain how media exposure influences policy preferences and intergroup behaviors. Future research should incorporate mediation models to examine whether cognitive (e.g., stereotype activation) and affective (e.g., fear, empathy) factors function as mechanisms driving these effects. A more systematic focus on these pathways will enhance our understanding of how media not only shape attitudes but also influence tangible social behaviors and policy decisions.

Lastly, the finding that negative and positive media portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities have similar effects on audience attitudes highlights the responsibility of content creators to produce more accurate and diverse representations. Stereotypical and oversimplified portrayals persist largely due to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in key creative roles (UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, 2024). To counter this, greater investment in mentoring and supporting content creators from minoritized communities is essential to fostering authentic, nuanced, and inclusive media content. Several organizations have already taken steps to connect underrepresented talent with industry opportunities (e.g., Writers Guild of America, National Association of Latino Independent Producers, Pillars Fund). Additionally, stronger industry-wide initiatives should encourage media creators to be mindful of their portrayals, ensuring that they challenge rather than reinforce stereotypes (e.g., DuVernay Test; The Representation Test, Riz Test[2]). Since audiences respond similarly to both negative and positive portrayals, sustained and widespread efforts across all sectors are crucial to shifting the media landscape toward more equitable and responsible representation.

Limitations

Although this meta-analysis strives to provide comprehensive insights into the influence of media depictions on outgroup evaluations, it is essential to recognize certain limitations that affect the scope and generalizability of our findings. First, a challenge commonly encountered in meta-analyses is the presence of missing data within the included research articles. Despite proactive efforts to reach out to authors for any missing information and to identify unpublished studies through relevant listservs, it is possible that some relevant studies may have been inadvertently overlooked, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of our analyses.

Second, the scope of our study was contingent upon the existing corpus of data in this domain. While our intention was to investigate the impact of media depictions on evaluations of a diverse array of racial, ethnic, and religious outgroups, the limited number of relevant studies pertaining to certain outgroups (e.g., Asians, Native Americans) posed constraints on our examination. This underrepresentation is concerning, as content analyses suggest that these groups face distinct media portrayals (e.g., Asian Americans as a "model minority" or perpetual foreigners; Indigenous Americans as largely invisible). The absence of research on these populations constrains the generalizability of our findings and highlights the urgent need for studies specifically examining their media portrayals and effects.

Third, most studies were conducted in Western countries, with a significant portion originating from the United States. Although evidence from content

analyses suggests similar disparities in media depictions exist in other countries, our findings are largely reflective of a Western context. As such, our conclusions should be interpreted with caution, acknowledging the potential for global differences that may not be fully captured in our analysis.

Lastly, while our analysis did not intentionally exclude studies involving children, our final dataset included only one study that focused on children. Given that early media exposure plays a formative role in shaping intergroup attitudes during childhood and adolescence, the lack of research on developmental differences in media effects presents a critical gap. Future studies should focus on how media exposure shapes intergroup attitudes across different life stages.

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, this meta-analysis advances media effects research and intergroup relations by synthesizing how positive and negative portrayals of racial and ethnic groups shape majority group members' perceptions. While effect sizes are modest, they align with broader media effects research, reinforcing media's pervasive influence on intergroup attitudes. Negative portrayals consistently elicit more negative evaluations, whereas positive portrayals counteract stereotypes and improve perceptions. The comparable effects of both types of portrayals highlight the dual role of media in promoting and hindering intergroup beliefs, attitudes, and policy support.

Notes

1. In some cases, our conceptualization of predictor and outcome variables differs from those of the original authors. For non-experimental designs where the relationship between variables allowed, we inverted the roles of predictor and outcome to align with the inclusion criteria of this meta-analysis.
2. Media content creators and critics have developed tests to evaluate the representation of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in media. The DuVernay Test examines whether people of color are portrayed as fully realized characters with their own stories, names, and speaking roles. The Representation Test awards points for avoiding harmful stereotypes and including diversity behind the camera. The Riz Test assesses whether Muslim characters are portrayed as multidimensional, avoiding stereotypes such as terrorism or oppression.

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