

The Effects of Leading Questions on Opinion of News Media

Braeden Miller, Mythili Menon
Department of English, Wichita State University

Extensive research has been conducted on the effects of leading questions on the memory of witnesses. A leading question is a question that influences its audience to respond in a certain way e.g. “The suspect was wearing red, wasn’t he?” Some research on the subject has demonstrated that leading questions can influence people’s opinions of minority groups, but this research seeks to address the lack of research in how leading questions can influence opinion of news media. To test this, we will give participants a pre-screening survey that measures their opinions on crime and healthcare on a seven-point Likert scale asking five questions about the subject. 1-3 days after completing the survey participants would receive the second half of the study via email. The second half consisted of participants reading 3 articles about the UnitedHealthcare assassination and answering a total of twelve questions (nine multiple choice three open ended) about the articles to develop their comprehension and opinion of the subject. Half the participants would receive three leading questions intended to make them sympathetic to the suspect of the UnitedHealthcare assassination. Afterwards, participants would answer the same Likert scale and any change in opinion would be recorded. Because this research is still in progress it is impossible to discuss the results. But the pre-screening survey has a sample size of N=5 female respondents and N=2 gender nonconforming respondents. Participants report that they are dissatisfied with the state of healthcare and tend to be sympathetic towards criminals with motives they relate to. They disagree about whether or not there is a circumstance in which murder is okay. We expect that participants who receive leading questions will be swayed more than the ones who don’t.