

ABSTRACT

The present research, consisting of two laboratory experiments, examined how the motivation of self-enhancement would affect people's perceptions of media message effects under different conditions of normative fit. A review of the past first/third-person perception research suggested that self-enhancement and self-categorization might jointly determine the extent to which people believed they were more or less influenced than others by media messages. Currently available explanations of the first/third-person perception, however, are unable to help us untangle the relation between self-enhancement and self-categorization in relation to those perceptions.

Drawing on the social identity perspective (e.g., Hogg, 2006) in general and the leash model (Giles & Reid, 2005) in specific, the current study proposed and tested two general hypotheses: (1) people report first/third-person perception because they desire a positive social identity but (2) the strength of the perceptions depends on whether social reality agrees or not with that desire. The findings of both experiments were largely consistent with the predictions. Experiment 1 found a significant interaction between message bias (which should capture the effect of self-enhancement) and comparison target, meaning people would make media effect perception depending on with whom they were compared. Experiment 2 replicated this two-way interaction, and, more importantly, found the target three-way interaction. An explication of this interaction generated clearly demonstrated the moderating effect of self-categorization (captured by normative fit). Implications of the current study on the leash model and the first/third-person perception research were discussed.