

How to overcome end-point bias in the media to make smarter decisions

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"End-point bias" is a well-known psychological tendency to interpret a recent short-term fluctuation as a reversal of a long-term trend. A study published in *Environment Communication* has concluded that end-point bias can be overcome by use of the LIVA – Leveraging-Involving-Visualizing-Analogizing – method, which has the potential to improve decisions made by the public and policy makers.

When scientists reported a significant increase in the extent of Arctic sea ice in 2013, a FoxNews.com story evoked end-point [bias](#) by contrasting the historically low previous year with the presumed recovery and de-emphasizing the clear [downward trend](#) since 1979. Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) distinguished research fellow Bruce Hardy and APPC director Kathleen Hall Jamieson found that when liberals and moderates were exposed to the story, "Arctic sea ice up 60 percent in 2013," they were less likely to correctly answer questions about the [sea ice extent](#) and less likely to predict the downward trend – the same outcome seen in a prior study with conservatives who were shown the story. This demonstrated that even liberals and moderates, who are suspicious of the accuracy of news outlets, can be influenced by such decontextualized information.

The researchers found that it is possible to overcome end-point and ideological bias by actively engaging people in understanding the overall scientific trend. Using a method that they call LIVA, the authors found that they could counter the effects of selective information and increase the likelihood that an audience will draw correct inferences from

scientific information.

"The LIVA model invites the audience to make sense of the changes over time in the whole trend to overcome end-point and ideological bias," said Hardy, an assistant professor at Temple University's School of Media and Communication. "When we ask people to answer questions about the data points across the years, as opposed to one fluctuation, they're more likely to understand the downward trend and to accept the existence of climate change."

The study was based on two waves of survey data collected from Research Now's US Consumer Panel from May 28-June 4, 2014 and August 20-September 3, 2014. The study involved 958 participants, randomly divided into three groups: 326 were shown the FoxNews.com article, 305 were shown the FoxNews.com article plus the LIVA message, and 327 were shown an unrelated control story, about baseball.

The group with the LIVA message was shown a 22-second animated graphic that visualized the decrease in the extent of Arctic sea ice over 34 years as a series of plotted points connected by a downward trend line. The LIVA group also was shown an analogy to help to illustrate the trend.

The study concludes that news outlets' online sites make it possible for them to communicate with iterative graphics and incorporate the LIVA model. The authors said the LIVA model could be used by government science agencies and news organizations, among others. The model also could help blunt the end-point bias "lurking in headlines."

More information: Bruce W. Hardy et al. Overcoming endpoint bias in climate change communication: the case of Arctic sea ice trends, *Environmental Communication* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2016.1241814](https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2016.1241814)

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