The Implementation of Framing Effects in Product Advertising and Political News

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Abstract: Framing effects is a widely discussed and applied concept in social psychology and various industries. This work evaluated the findings of six different studies regarding framing effects' implementation in product advertising and political journalism in this review. It considered the influence of positive, and negative framing, verbal description, and vivid imagery included in the frame content. This article discovered that consumers' familiarity with products could moderate positive and negative framing; moreover, negative framing and vivid imagery such as Instagram posts are especially persuasive in political propaganda and news coverage.

Keywords: Framing Effects, Advertising, Political Propaganda

1. Introduction

Consider the following hypothetical scenario: You are walking down an aisle of sweets in the supermarket, craving for chocolate. However, you must keep in mind your blood sugar level. Two options capture your attention, one verbally labeled "90% sugar-free" and the other described as "10% sugar". Which option might you choose, at one level, the options are equivalent.

People tend to choose "90% sugar-free" despite the sugar content in both sweets being equivalent [1]. This preference is prompted by a concept in psychological decision-making called the *framing effect*. The framing effect has been described as a cognitive bias where people decide between options based on whether the options are presented with positive or negative connotations rather than the objective values [2]. The decision-maker could also be swayed by social norms, personal characteristics, upbringing, and community environment [3]. In this scenario, the "90% sugar-free" product highlighted the percentage of sugar it *did not* contain (a negative attribute), while the "10% sugar" product highlighted how much sugar it *did* contain (a positive attribute). Naturally, the massive amount of sugar-free content consoled customers who are inclined to avoid sugar due to health maintenance reasons.

2. General Information

2.1. Conceptual Background

The framing effect was first described by Israeli psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in 1979 [4], who established the Prospect Theory and demonstrated how the framing effect influences

decision-making. Prospect theory describes how people value gains and losses differently, usually placing more weight on perceived or potential gains compared to perceived or potential losses. The framing effect has been continuously developing and is applied in various fields now, including business, media, marketing, advertisements, and politics [5]. These decision frames have covered important and common areas of everyday life; thus, this work would give a demonstration of the implementation of the framing effect in product advertising and political media.

A frequently raised question is why the framing effect occurs, especially on its significant influence on public opinion [6], which this article would elaborate on afterward. Public affairs, such as environmental sustainability, social protests, immigration [7], international relations, and so on, can be deciphered contrastingly based on their framing. For instance, the framing effect influences voters' intention by concealing unfavorable achievements of a certain political candidate [8]. Or consider combating climate change, environmentalists and policymakers encourage environmentally friendly behaviors by "nudging" individuals; they take advantage of investors' cognitive biases and propose interventions like allowing consumers to try green products before investing [9]. Oftentimes, despite the beneficial nature of the issue, the public still views those activities horribly because of their negative framing. Similarly, political standpoints and conduct that do not benefit the public's interest might be welcomed because the advocates emphasized the positive attributes of the information presented, and individuals could make unwise decisions.

According to the prospect theory, people are considerably susceptible to framing, so they show a tendency to avoid losses. In common decision frames, it draws attention to perceived positive gains or perceived negative losses through opposed verbal emphasis and wording, graphics, or statistical data. To exemplify, an exhibition at the working lab for behavioral science, Mindworks, in Chicago, presented a circumstance regarding loss aversion and the framing effect. In one scenario, the participant bought a lottery ticket worth a maximum of $1,000 and was offered two options: either a sure win of $250, or a 25% chance to win $1,000, and a 75% chance to win nothing. On the other hand, the participants imagined that they made a bad investment of $1,000. Again, they were offered two options: either a sure loss of $750, or a 25% chance to lose nothing, but a 75% chance to lose $1,000 [10]. The exhibition's results indicated that most participants took risks when the alternative contained potential gains while playing safe when it appeared to be negatively framed. This scenario conveyed that sure gains are more preferred than probable gains, and probable losses are more preferred than sure losses. Because people want to avoid negatively framed choices revealing sure losses, they often find positive attributes in an option more attractive, so they favor options or information depicting certain gains.

2.2. Preceding Findings and Implementation

This literature review focuses on the application of the framing effect in both product advertising and political journalism. It defines product advertising as any method of communication about the promotion of a product in an attempt to induce potential customers to purchase the product [11]. Political journalism is the practice of gathering, assessing, and disseminating information about current events in politics [12]. The framing effect materialized in political media has several means of appearance, whether it is social media, newspaper articles, or television coverage.

The framing effect in marketing and business takes the shape of "loss aversion", where the satisfaction of gaining money is less significant than the displeasure of losing money. Therefore, when firms and businesses are advertising their products and services, they associate them with potential or perceived gains. For example, consumers prefer gas stations offering discounts [13]. Besides gain framing and loss framing, other approaches can also influence customer evaluation and advertising effectiveness, including attribute framing (e.g., asking participants to choose between

ground beef labeled as 75% lean or 25% fat) [14], goal framing (e.g., raising taxes could be framed as contributing to public infrastructure), and risky choice framing (e.g., Asia Disease Problem) [15].

The framing effect is implemented in both politics and journalism. Researchers Ardent et al. [16] investigated the new coverage on suicide, where psychological experts recommended using "suicide", a neutral word, instead of "free death" or "self-murder", which are connected to negative attributes. Participants in this study demonstrated the framing effect, after reading news reports containing the concept of free will. They showed greater support for suicide victims. This suggests that wording and messaging, alongside belief content, belief importance, and political knowledge notably influence media viewers and, therefore, public opinion [17].

The framing effect implemented in the political context varies; governments use it deliberately to increase policy popularity [18], election campaign contestants use it to raise support and attract sponsors, and political media might use it to polarize public opinion and intensify international conflicts. Responsibility framing was found to be most commonly used by serious news outlets (newspapers or television news coverage), in addition to conflict, human interest (used more by sensationalist media), economic consequences, and morality frames [19].

2.3. Moderators of Framing Effects

The framing effect, also used by market campaigners and policymakers, has expanded to healthcare behavior advertising scenarios such as mammography [20], blood donation [21], general healthcare products [22], social protests [23] and actual political campaigns [24]. The framing effect is particularly relevant for the communication factors, the vivid imagery's effectiveness compared to verbal messaging, and positive, negative, and mixed-framed messages, since they might not be equally persuasive. Frightening or pitiful imagery has been repeatedly shown in commercial charity advertising, as well as verbal messaging, like putting "positive" frames alongside "negative" imagery to imply that charitable donations or volunteering offer solutions [25]. In a study by Chang and Lee [26], they investigated the charitable appeals of message framing and the presentation of vivid images, and additional factors (statistical data in temporal frames) which are not the major focus of this article. Likewise, framing effects address the events or issues disparately in news stories. For example, in the context of social protests, television news emphasizes the protestors' violent actions and appearances (vivid imagery, or in this case live streaming and videos), instead of the effectiveness and justification of the action [27].

Besides descriptions and imagery, this article also investigated positive and negative framing. Attribute framing is highlighting one specific characteristic of a single object or situation, either positively or negatively [28]. Goal framing asserts that whether acting on the decision or not (considering gain and loss) has consequences, for example, "people who have regular health checks are more likely to find medical conditions in their early stages". In the framing of health-related messages, studies have shown contrary findings: some participants understood the message more clearly when it was framed negatively, and others perceived little difference in the persuasiveness in positive and negative framing, though positively framed messages improve the perception of the service's effectiveness. However, in goal framing, it is the opposite conclusion, loss messages have led to a more positive perception of effectiveness, and it is more persuasive for treatment messages. The difference in behavior is negligible [29]. The type of framing affects whether to implement positive or negative frames in messages.

Positive and negative framing displayed similar effects on advertisements. Shiv et al. [30] tested whether consumers prefer brands with negative frames, even if this results in a reduction in positive attitudes toward the company that sells the product.

Two logically equivalent political statements, framed positively or negatively, strongly influence people's evaluation of the message. Negative framing receives higher truth ratings than positive

messages because it enhances the trustworthiness of the communicator [31]. When consumers associate positivity with persuasive sources such as advertisements or politicians, they assume that it is attempting to choose a certain alternative, seeing it as a threat to their freedom, and are motivated to reestablish that freedom [32].

3.   Hypotheses

Thus, the hypotheses of the persuasiveness of positive, and negative framed messages, verbal messaging, and vivid imagery on consumers' decision-making and behavior in advertising and political journalism are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. When implemented in the advertisements of products, framing effects show that our cognitive bias is more sensitive to verbal descriptions compared to images and flyers.

Hypothesis 2. Media coverage (social media, news coverage, television reports, etc.) put framing effects into practice by presenting videos or live streaming, since they are more straightforward and impactful than news stories (a form of verbal messaging).

Hypothesis 3. Consumers rate negatively framed messages higher in terms of persuasiveness, especially when they have previous experience with the product.

Hypothesis 4. People receiving news reports or other forms of media outlets on politics perceive negative framing as more trustworthy, whether or not they have engaged in that certain event or issue before.

4.   Analysis

First of all, it should be noted that gender influences behavioral intention when receiving framed advertisements: females are more willing to donate to child poverty charities compared to their male counterparts [26]. Respondents initiated more thoughts after reading and viewing negative framed messages and negative vivid images, instead of positive framed messages and positive vivid images [26]. Moreover, when respondents received negatively framed messages with negative images (congruent), they evoked more favorable thoughts than unfavorable thoughts, and the opposite was found with positive message-photograph congruence posters [26]. The results confirmed my Hypothesis 3, but no main evidence supporting Hypothesis 1 was observed.

Chang's research [22] also suggests that this work should consider third-party factors like product familiarity, product traits, and perceived risks. For instance, respondents showed higher behavioral intentions for newly promoted products in gain-frame advertisements, and mixed-framed messages are more persuasive when participants are unfamiliar with the product. Additionally, gain frames promote the prevention products more effectively, while loss frames promote the detection products more effectively. Positive framing proved to be more effective when promoting products with low perceived risks, though negative framing is more effective with high-risk products.

Levin and Gaeth's research [14] partially supported Chang's findings [22]: framing effects are the largest when consumers have no prior experience with the product. However, they discovered that participants gave more favorable responses when reading the positively framed label, which contradicts my Hypothesis 3. Therefore, this work can only conclude that comparing only the persuasiveness of positive and negative framing is rather one-sided; instead, the results should take related characteristics like product experience and product traits (charity donation, healthcare products, or cuisines) into account.

Negative framing's effectiveness in politics supports Hypothesis 4 [33], as negative frames result in negative attitudes and that negative framing is almost entirely stronger than positive framing. De Vreese et al. [33] certified that exposure to valenced news article frames indeed influences attitudes as well.

The effectiveness of positive and negative frames can also be mediated by third-party factors. In McLeod and Detenber's study [23], they introduced status quo support, a factor that greatly affected respondents' identification with the protestors, the protest's effectiveness, social support, and newsworthiness of the protest in a social protest media frame.

Political image frames include positive and negative framing. For instance, the "Sure Loser" politician frame projects the candidate negatively, while the "Ideal Candidate" and "Populist Campaigner" present candidates in opposite light [34]. Most presidential primary candidates presented themselves as the "Ideal Candidate" on social media. They often included patriotic features, campaign paraphernalia, and elected officials in their images. They frequently conveyed family associations, physical proximity, and large audiences. Through Instagram marketing, Muñoz and Towner [34] investigated how presidential candidates virtually constructed their political selves by applying visual framing and specific themes. Political candidates' strategies proved to be successful as they generated likes, comments, and support. Texts integrated images are regularly posted, and the content inside is varied: there are quotes, thank you messages, branding elements, etc. Hence, it can be assumed that while texts carried messages, delineated images of politicians on social media are more persuasive. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

5.   Conclusion

This literature review investigated the factors of positive/negative framing, verbal message framing vs. vivid imagery, and their influence on the effectiveness of the implemented framing effects in the aspects of product advertisement and political journalism. This work found no evidence supporting or contradicting Hypothesis 1; verbal descriptions, posters, and symbols proved to be most successful when messages and imagery are congruent [26]. Hypotheses 2 and 4 are both confirmed: in the context of political journalism, viewers of political media perceive negative framing as more trustworthy, and framed imagery presenting political figures or social issues is more impactful than written news texts [23,33,34]. Nevertheless, the results show disparate evidence regarding Hypothesis 3. Product newness affected consumers' perception of positive/negative framing. Researchers [14,22] found that when participants had previous experience with said product, they preferred negative or mixed frames, whereas participants unfamiliar with the brand were strongly influenced by positive framing.

This literature review findings are relevant to the businesses, corporations, and institutions that are planning on applying framing effects in product advertisements or political media content. Producers of goods and services should consider their targeted participants' previous experience and familiarity with their products, and campaigners should strategically design their propaganda by introducing imagery, videos, and negatively framed texts. This article dug into framing research papers to explore a unique perspective of social psychology, marketing, and communication: framing effects' implementation.

Undoubtedly, this research analysis was impacted by limitations. The hypotheses were proposed rather one-sidedly, which made the background research challenging because most research conducted did not include either information on positive/negative framing or verbal descriptions/vivid imagery. Moreover, this article only analyzed six research studies, which certainly have not covered all product advertisements or every method the political campaigner employed (other than verbal messages, images, and videos).

In the end, this work proposes that future research directed at the implementation of framing effects in product advertising and political media can include other aspects such as product newness, temporal framing, product traits, etc. Additionally, researchers can evaluate the application of positive and negative framing in all sorts of political media outlets, since the results found little information in this area during background research.

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