

Edcom abstract

The research question for this study was: “How does issue involvement influence the effectiveness of positive and negative message framing in persuading consumers to buy less meat?” A total of 250 participants completed a self-administered questionnaire about three messages persuading them to buy less meat, each using a different argument, relating to a different issue (health, environment and animal well-being). In the questionnaire, participants were randomly assigned a questionnaire with either positively or negatively framed versions of the messages.

It was hypothesized that perceived risk and message familiarity are associated with issue involvement and persuasiveness of the message, respectively. Furthermore, positive relations between understanding of/agreement with the message and the persuasiveness of the message were anticipated. Moreover, the effectiveness of negative framing was expected to increase with the level of issue involvement, and the effectiveness of positive framing was expected to decrease with the level of issue involvement. Lastly, negatively framed arguments relating to issues for which people have a medium level of involvement were hypothesized to be most effective in persuading consumers to change their behavior.

T-tests, correlations and regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. Significant differences between frames (in terms of persuasive power) were found for only one issue, where the positive frame was more persuasive. The results of this study also indicate that the effectiveness of message framing in terms of persuasion is dependent on the issue presented in the message. Furthermore, the results suggest a curvilinear relationship between issue involvement and persuasion. This research has supported existing literature as message understanding, agreement, familiarity, involvement and risk perceptions were found to be important predictors of persuasion.

The results of this study are relevant to the field of commercial communications, as one of the top marketing research priorities in the tier 1 category of 2014-2016 includes “understanding customers and customer experience”. Moreover, understanding consumer perception of risk and how it affects consumer behavior is a key issue for both consumers and the food industry. Enhancing understanding of the effects of issue involvement on message framing in the food industry will bridge knowledge gaps as well as contribute to the existing line of knowledge. In terms of the media industry, media professionals (such as marketers and advertising agencies) can use the results of this study to create more persuasive messages.

As this study investigated three issues related to meat eating, future research could focus on finding the issue-dependent predictors of persuasiveness for other issues. Furthermore, as previous studies show divergent findings and the range of issue involvement was limited in this study, the curvilinear relation between issue involvement and persuasion needs further exploration. This study could also be replicated for other non-Western cultures in order to determine whether culture

influences the relations that were found. Lastly, this study could also be replicated as a qualitative study, in order to understand in more detail why people were more persuaded by one message than another.