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Message framing: keeping practitioners in the picture
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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how message framing is commonly used by magazine advertisers.
Design/methodology/approach – Following the classification suggested by Levin et al., the frequency and nature of message framing in magazine advertising is explored using a content analysis of 2,864 advertisements in a sample of popular US magazines.
Findings – Results suggest a lack of consistency between marketing practice and academic findings. Contrary to academic recommendations, advertisers used positive framing in almost all advertising messages. Further, the use of attribute framing and combined attribute and goal framing was more popular than pure goal framing.
Research limitations/implications – Although the findings are limited by a judgement sample of US magazines, they do suggest the need for academics to conduct more research on the effectiveness of combined attribute and goal framing techniques.
Practical implications – Of equal importance is the need for practitioners to explore the potentiality of negative framing in their advertising content.
Originality/value – Adopting the Levin et al.’s typology, this paper highlights the need for advertising researchers to engage with practitioners to try to understand current industry practice with regard to message framing. The inconsistencies revealed in this paper point to either an insufficient understanding of message framing by one or both parties or the need for better communication between the two.

Keywords Magazines, Advertising, United States of America
Paper type Research paper

Introduction
One of the key issues for an advertiser is deciding how to phrase the advertising content which consumers will be exposed to. To this end, message framing has been suggested as a useful technique for advertisers to consider for enhancing advertising effectiveness (Chen et al., 1998; Cox and Cox, 2001; Zhang and Buda, 1999). Message framing is defined as the presentation of semantically different, but objectively equivalent message information (Krishnamurthy et al., 2001; Levin et al., 1998). For example, a glass of water can be described as “half full” or as “half empty.” Likewise, in advertising, a brand of yogurt, for instance, could be promoted as “90 per cent fat free” (i.e. a positive frame), or as “only 10 per cent fat” (i.e. a negative frame). Both scenarios present the same objective information on the fat level of the product. However, each presentation, or message frame, has a positive or negative valence. Thus, framing effects relate to consumers’ responding differently to different descriptions of the same objective information (Braun et al., 1997).

A substantial amount of research continues to be conducted on framing in domains ranging from psychology to organisational behaviour (Kuhberger et al., 2002; Levin et al., 2002; Mandel, 2001). This study focuses on message framing in advertising content and, in particular, positive and negative valence framing effects. Three valence framing effects predominate in the literature, including attribute framing (such as the example of the fat-free yogurt), goal framing (i.e. emphasis on the benefits of a product or advocated behaviour) and risky choice framing (i.e. negative or positive framing of discrete choices of riskless and risky options) (Levin et al., 1998, for a review).

For researchers, discovering how framing is actually used can aid the external validity of future studies by indicating which framing types and combinations of framing types are most commonly used by advertisers.
This may provide insight into whether the assumptions made in designing a study match advertising practice. For example, practitioners’ adherence to established academic thinking about the use of negative versus positive framing?, and extent of use of the different valence effects of framing in advertising messages. Further, it gives some indication of the effectiveness with which the academic community has communicated its knowledge to the business community. For advertisers, the findings of the present study may reveal opportunities for using a framing effect, which is currently underused. Importantly, this study uses the framing typology of Levin et al. (1998) which has been offered as a holistic and comprehensive account of framing effects. Since its publication, this typology has been frequently cited by marketing scholars in discussing the theoretical implications of framing effects (Chandy et al., 2001; Keller et al., 2003; Martin, 2003; Mittal et al., 2002).

This study proceeds by first outlining the extant knowledge on message framing in marketing and related disciplines in order to develop a set of research questions. We then explain the method and report findings of a content analysis of magazine advertisements in the USA. To conclude, a discussion addresses the implications of the findings, as well as limitations and directions for future research.

**Frequency and type of message framing**

The marketing literature has achieved some result consistencies on the relative effects of message framing on consumer response. However, it is yet to establish a consensus that can be clearly articulated to practitioners. Indeed, at this time we have little knowledge of practitioners’ response to message framing despite assertions that “message framing is pervasive in marketing communications and package designs” (Keller et al., 2003, p. 54; Martin and Marshall, 1999; Smith, 1996).

Past research suggests the use of framing is common (Keller et al., 2003). However, evidence to support this is largely anecdotal. Further, we know little about how different types of framing are used in advertising, in relation to the Levin et al. (1998) typology (LSG). As highlighted, this typology distinguishes between three types of framing: attribute framing, goal framing, and risky choice framing. First, attribute framing involves the framing of information relating to some feature or characteristic of an object or event (Levin et al., 1998). For example, Braun et al. (1997) studied attribute framing for a chocolate bar with the frames “80 per cent fat-free” (i.e. positive frame), and “20 per cent fat” (i.e. negative frame). Attribute framing effects have been found across a wide variety of contexts, from product evaluations to medical treatment scenarios and resource allocation (Dunegan, 1995; Marteau, 1989).

Second, goal framing involves the framing of information relating to the consequences of an action or behaviour. Positive frames can invoke a goal of obtaining a benefit, negative frames the goal of avoiding a loss (Levin et al., 1998). For example, in advertising, we could expect positive goal framing to relate to ad copy presenting the benefits of product purchase. Thus, while a positive attribute frame for yoghurt may be “98 per cent fat free,” a positive goal frame could emphasise how consuming this yoghurt will help the consumer lose weight (i.e. a benefit of consuming the product). Conversely, negative goal frames could emphasise a benefit foregone (e.g., foregoing the opportunity to lose weight) or suffering a loss (e.g., gaining weight on your usual diet) if the product is not consumed. Goal framing research in marketing has focused on preventive health behaviour advocacies, such as mammography (Cox and Cox, 2001; Keller et al., 2003). In addition, researchers have found goal framing effects in a more commercial context for products such as advertisements for mouthwash (Homer and Yoon, 1992), cell phones (Martin and Marshall, 1999) and credit card usage (Ganzach and Karsha, 1995).

Third, risky choice framing derives from the prospect theory research of Kahneman and Tversky (1979). Here, framing relates to the outcomes of alternative choices which have different levels of risk. For example, Levin et al. (2002) tested risky choice framing by asking subjects to choose between two different programmes for treating high cholesterol. Each frame emphasised success or failure for the two. For example, the positive frame (negative frame in parentheses) stated that Programme A offered “1/3 (2/3) of the persons treated will succeed in reducing (fail to reduce) their cholesterol,” and that Programme B offered a 1/3 chance that all of the persons treated will succeed (none of the persons treated will fail) and a 2/3 chance that none of the persons treated will succeed (all of the persons will fail to reduce their cholesterol).

Thus, for advertising, risky choice framing presents alternative choices in the context of the message. Scholarly opinion asserts that goal framing is the most popular advertising technique (Chandy et al., 2001). Yet this assumption has not been tested empirically. This is relevant, given that a relatively robust finding for attribute framing is that positive frames are more effective than negative frames, whereas mixed findings are evident for goal framing (Levin et al., 1998 for a review). Further, the multiple choice format of risky framing, while useful in a buying decision context (Qualls and Puto, 1989), appears unlikely to be evident in much advertising, except perhaps instances of comparative advertising.
In addition to advertisements using only one framing technique, how prevalent is the use of multiple framing techniques in the one advert? To continue with the yogurt example, an advert may present both a fat-free attribute and also a fitness benefit, allowing both attribute framing and goal framing to be used:

RQ1. How often does message framing appear in the sampled magazine advertisements?
RQ2. Which type of message framing is most common in the sampled magazine advertisements?

Positive and negative framing
In addition to framing type, another important dimension of the LSG typology is the use of positive and negative framing valence effects. This issue is salient, given that framing research considers the relative merits of using positive or negative frames. Scholarly opinion suggests that positive frames dominate most advertising (Buda and Zhang, 2000; Cox and Cox, 2001; Ganzach and Karsh, 1995). Indeed, Cox and Cox (2001, p. 101) suggest that advertisers avoid negative framing through fear of a “potential backlash to negative appeals.” Positive frames represent a safer alternative than negative frames. Yet other research has suggested that negative frames are becoming increasingly popular. For instance, Shiv et al. (1997, p. 285) suggest, “the use of negatively framed ads has been on the increase in both political (‘Negative Spots Likely to Return in Election ’88’, 1987) and consumer-product domains (‘Mudwrestling’, 1992), which suggests that marketers believe that ‘going negative works.’”

Similarly, Smith (1996) suggests that there has been an increase in the use of negatively framed advertising by well known brands, such as AT&T, Visa, and Holiday Inn. In a follow-up study, Shiv et al. (2004) reported that negative framing was more effective where processing motivation was low and level of elaboration was low as manipulated by processing opportunity. Further, Shiv et al. (2004) state that positive framing was more effective where processing motivation was low and also where processing opportunity was high. Their findings also support previous studies which suggest that negative framing is more effective where processing motivation is high, regardless of the level of processing opportunity.

The consensus in the literature is that both positive and negative framing effects are useful communication strategies. RQ3a and RQ3b explore whether advertising practice matches the recommendations of framing research. Krishnamurthy et al. (2001) was used as a basis for RQ3a and RQ3b owing to their conceptualisation of involvement, and the product involvement data collected in the present study. That is, the findings of Krishnamurthy and colleagues (2001) related to enduring involvement, which was more appropriate than comparing the predictions of framing research using situational involvement manipulations (Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy, 1990) with findings related to product involvement data. This is relevant, given the lack of agreement on a unified definition of involvement (Laczi̇niak and Muehling, 1993; Muehling et al., 1993).

Product involvement is defined here as a product class-specific form of enduring involvement (Muehling et al., 1993 for a review of different types of involvement). Product involvement has been shown to act as an important predispositional determinant of a consumer’s level of advertising message involvement (Laczi̇niak et al., 1999).

Krishnamurthy et al. (2001) tested the LSG typology for goal framing and attribute framing in the context of a medical treatment. In two experiments, they show that goal framing valence effects are moderated by a consumer’s level of intrinsic self-relevance (ISR). ISR represents a form of intrinsic involvement occurring “when a decision maker spontaneously relates to the decision context” (Krishnamurthy et al., 2001, p. 386). For their study, low-ISR subjects were college students, while high-ISR subjects were health clinic patients to whom a medical treatment was more self-relevant. Thus, they focused on intrinsic or enduring involvement, rather than on a situationally manipulated involvement level.

For goal framing, where findings have been mixed (Levin et al., 1998), negative frames were more persuasive for low involvement subjects, based on the assumption that losses tend to be more motivating than gains. By contrast, owing to more detailed processing, there were no differences between positive and negative frames for high involvement subjects. These results suggest that advertisers should use positive frames for attribute framing, irrespective of product involvement level and negative frames for goal framing for low involvement products.

RQ4 unpacks the nature of adverts which use multiple framing techniques. To what extent are advertisers consistent in their use of framing valences in a single advert? For example, is positive attribute framing, and yet also negative goal framing, used within the same advert? We use the term “valence congruent” to refer to adverts where the valences of the different framing types match. Adverts where the valences do not match, we term “valence incongruent”. For instance, an advert for cereal promoting the attribute “95 per cent fat free”, and extolling the benefit of staying slim would be valence congruent. In contrast, an advert stating “5
per cent fat” (i.e. negative attribute frame) as well as the slimness benefit (i.e. positive goal frame) would be valence incongruent:

RQ3a. Are positive frames most commonly used in the sampled magazine advertisements which contain attribute framing only?
RQ3b. Are negative frames most commonly used in the sampled magazine advertisements which contain goal framing only for low involvement products?
RQ4. In advertisements with multiple framing approaches, to what extent is the framing valence congruent (e.g., positive attribute framing and positive goal framing in the same advertisement) or valence incongruent (e.g., positive attribute framing and negative goal framing in the sampled magazine advertisements)?

Variations in manipulation of goal framing
Recently, scholars have suggested the need to explore the linguistic variations used to manipulate framing (Levin et al., 2002; Mandel, 2001). Levin et al. (1998) highlight that goal framing can be operationalised in different ways, and that these linguistic variations may be responsible for the mixed findings in the literature for goal framing effects. They classify goal framing as either using an alternative terminology or simple negation approach. Alternative terminology means presenting polar opposites (positive frame-obtain gain, and negative frame-suffer loss). Simple negation restates the benefit or loss from one frame in the wording of the other frame (e.g., positive frame-obtain gain, negative frame-forego gain, or, positive frame-avoid loss, negative frame-suffer loss). Thus, simple negation can involve different combinations across frames (Levin et al., 1998, pp. 173-9). Levin (2001) suggest that the alternative terminology combination A-B (i.e. gain vs loss) may be most effective since it provides the most extreme contrast.

Accordingly, goal framing using simple negation may be less effective than an alternative terminology approach, owing to a less extreme valence contrast influenced by the similarity in the wording. Yet given the suggested aversion of advertisers towards using negative language (Cox and Cox, 2001), one could argue that advertisers would prefer using a negative goal frame mentioning the benefits foregone rather than a loss sustained. Consider, for example, an airline package stating “If you don’t fly to Hawaii, you won’t be able to enjoy relaxing by the beach” (i.e. benefits foregone negative frame, simple negation) as opposed to saying “If you don’t fly to Hawaii, you will become stressed” (i.e. loss incurred, alternative terminology). Simple negation is also relevant given its widespread use by marketing scholars in goal framing research (Block and Anand-Keller, 1995; Keller et al., 2003; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy, 1990; Martin and Marshall, 1999):

RQ5. For advertisements containing goal framing, which types of advertisement copy manipulations are most common for positive and negative frames, respectively?

Method
Sample
Magazines were selected on a judgement basis using the following criteria. First, as shown in Table I, two magazine titles, published in the USA, were selected for each of seven different magazine topic areas. This sample captured a wide range of ad types for a variety of products and services. Likewise, topic areas of both general and speciality magazines allowed insights into a cross-section of different advertising which consumers are exposed to (Leigh, 1994). Following Kolbe and Albanese (1996), magazines were selected which targeted a large readership. Readership levels for each magazine derived from circulation listings from AdAge and the Editorial Photographer Magazine Database were used as guides. Each of the magazines selected currently enjoys large readerships (AdAge, 2003; EP Magazine Database, 2003). National Geographic 6.89 million readers, Time 4.11 million, U.S. News & World Report 2.02 million, Rolling Stone 1.25 million, Vanity Fair 1.07 million, New Yorker 924,745 readers, Forbes 900,000, Fortune 833,600, GQ 759,750, Esquire 676,200, Muscle & Fitness 485,300, and Guitar Player 148,545 readers. Thus, all magazines are widely read in the USA and the advertising in them has the potential to reach a large number of consumers.
Table I. Print advertisements by magazine topic area and magazine title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine topic area</th>
<th>Magazine title</th>
<th>Number of ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td><em>Fortune</em></td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Forbes</em></td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td><em>Time</em></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and travel</td>
<td><em>US News &amp; World Report</em></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td><em>National Geographic</em></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Geographical</em></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td><em>Muscle &amp; Fitness</em></td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle/editorial</td>
<td><em>Esquire</em></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>GQ</em></td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary and political reviews</td>
<td><em>New Yorker</em></td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Vanity Fair</em></td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td><em>Rolling Stone</em></td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each magazine title, issues were selected for three months: April, August and December 2000. For monthly magazines, one issue per month was selected; for weekly magazines, the second and fourth issues per month. Advertisements one quarter page and larger were included for analysis (Ford et al., 1998; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996, for a similar criterion). This resulted in a sample of 2864 adverts. Further, following previous research (Cacchett and Lee, 1994; Taylor and Stern, 1997), duplicates were retained in the sample (n ¼ 289 ads) to reflect the natural occurrence of framing in the advertising consumers are exposed to.

Coding
Message framing was classified according to the LSG typology. Specifically, one variable measured the type of message framing present (1 ¼ goal framing, 2 ¼ attribute framing, 3 ¼ risky choice framing, 4 ¼ combined: goal and attribute framing, 5 ¼ combined: goal and risky choice framing, 6 ¼ combined: attribute and risky choice framing, 7 ¼ combined: goal, attribute and risky choice framing, 8 ¼ no framing). A second variable considered the valence of the framing for goal framing (1 ¼ positive framing-obtain gain, 2 ¼ positive-avoid loss, 3 ¼ negative-forego gain, 4 ¼ negative-suffer loss, 5 ¼ does not apply), attribute framing (1 ¼ positive, 2 ¼ negative, 3 ¼ does not apply), and risky choice framing (1 ¼ positive, 2 ¼ negative, 3 ¼ does not apply). This coding matches the terms of Levin et al. (1998, p. 173) and thus aided to judge understanding.

Additional variables included:
- Type of advertising organisation (1 ¼ for-profit organisation, 2 ¼ not-for-profit).
- Product type, measured using 42 categories adapted from the Fortune 500 industry classification scheme (Fortune, 2001).
- Product involvement (1 ¼ low, 2 ¼ high).

Variables were also included relating to magazine topic area, magazine type, issue details, page number, and if the advert was a duplicate. Data were also collected regarding affective tone, the presence of actors, and the setting. However, since these variables lie outside the scope of this paper, they will not be discussed further. Two independent judges (one male, one female), both postgraduate marketing students, coded the data. Both judges had experience in conducting content analysis, and were familiar with the method. Using judges of different genders also allows for enhanced reliability (Ford et al., 1998). Judges also differed in terms of ethnicity (one Indian, one White). Both judges were given comprehensive training. Further, both judges were given copies of Levin et al. (1998) to read in depth and prepare questions that they may have regarding the conceptualisation of key constructs for discussion at a follow-up meeting. During this meeting, the first author ensured each judge clearly understood the construct to be coded before proceeding to the coding sheet and a discussion of the operational definitions to be used in the content analysis. Examples of coding were then demonstrated for 20 adverts with judges able to raise questions for clarification. After this instruction, both judges independently coded a random selection of ten magazines, after which they discussed any disagreements with the first author. Since coding agreement was virtually unanimous at this stage, and both coders felt confident in their understanding, the main data collection was then performed.

Interjudge reliability
Given concerns in the literature regarding the use of percentage of agreement between judges as a measure of interjudge reliability (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991; Rust and Cool, 1994); Perrault and Leigh’s (1989) index of
reliability was calculated. Index scores (I) were 0.996 for product type, 0.994 for product involvement, 0.982 for advert setting, 0.991 for advert affective tone, 0.962 for message framing type, 0.963 for goal framing type, 0.982 for attribute framing type, 0.998 for risky choice framing type, 0.999 for presence of actors, and 1.000 for the profit/not-for-profit variable. These estimates exceed Kassarjian’s (1977) recommended 0.85 criterion for coefficients of reliability. Consequently, the coding was deemed to be sufficiently reliable.

**Results**

RQ1 asked how often message framing appeared in the sampled magazine adverts. It was found that 92.1 per cent of adverts used framing. Moreover, 100 per cent of those for not-for-profit organisations (n = 55 ads), and 91.9 per cent for profit-oriented organisations (n = 2,582 ads) used framing. Those with no framing (7.9 per cent) tended to have no advertising copy, often showing only a picture of the product and brand logo. Of the no framing adverts, clothing and footwear was the product category most frequently represented (47.1 per cent), with specialty retailers (e.g., Toys “R” Us) next on 10.6 per cent. Yet overall, these results suggest that message framing is widely used by advertisers.

The second research question addressed what type of framing is used by advertisers in adverts containing framing. Table II displays the results by magazine topic area. Analysis of the data revealed that the three framing approaches most popular with advertisers were:

1. attribute framing only (51.8 per cent);
2. a combined approach of both goal and attribute framing in the same advert (40.3 per cent); and
3. goal framing only (7.4 per cent).

The other framing types (i.e., risky choice framing only, combined goal and risky choice framing, combined attribute and risky choice framing, and combined attribute, goal, and risky choice framing) comprised the remaining 0.5 per cent of the data. Consequently, the remainder of this section will focus on the three most popular framing types which formed the bulk of the data.

Table II. Magazine topic area by message framing type for attribute framing, goal framing, and, combined goal and attribute framing ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine topic area</th>
<th>Attribute framing only</th>
<th>Goal framing only</th>
<th>Combined goal and attribute framing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and travel</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle/Editorial</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary and political reviews</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive frames were found to dominate adverts containing attribute framing only (RQ3a). Specifically, for the 1,365 adverts with pure attribute framing, 99.9 per cent used positive framing, with the remaining 0.1 per cent using negative framing. For example, one ad for a charity emphasised levels of suffering. Yet none of the other four charity adverts in the pure attribute framing data used negative framing. A similar result was also found for RQ3b, which examined framing valence by product involvement level for those adverts containing goal framing only. Specifically, 100 per cent of the goal framing adverts promoting low involvement products (n = 57) used positive framing. Similarly, positive frames were used in 99.3 per cent of adverts (n = 136) for high involvement products, with only one negatively framed advert evident in the data.

RQ4 examined whether those adverts using a combination of framing approaches within a single advert were either valence congruent or valence incongruent. Adverts using a combined framing approach comprised 40.8 per cent (n = 1,075) of those using framing. Of these combined adverts, 98.9 per cent used a combination of attribute and goal framing, with the remaining 1.1 per cent spread across the other three combinations. Consequently, it was decided that the analysis for RQ4 should focus on those adverts using a combination of...
attribute and goal framing only (n ¼ 1,063 ads). Of these, all were found to use positive goal framing. Moreover, 99.8 per cent (n ¼ 1,061) used positive attribute framing (i.e. a positive attribute framing-positive goal framing combination), with the remaining two using a negative attribute framing-positive goal framing approach. Thus, advertisers tend to employ positive valence congruency when using adverts which combine attribute framing with goal framing.

The fifth research question addressed how advertisers operationalise goal framing in terms of linguistic variations. Overall, the most common copy manipulation for goal framing adverts using positive frames was positive framing-obtain gain (94.8 per cent), rather than positive framing-avoid loss (5.2 per cent). Table III displays these results and distinguishes between pure goal framing, combined goal and attribute framing, and “other” (i.e. combined goal and risky choice framing, and combined attribute, goal, and risky choice framing) adverts. Negative frames were not included as only one advert used negative goal framing. Analysis reveals that advertisers prefer to emphasise gains obtained through purchase, in adverts using pure goal framing (93.8 per cent), combined goal and attribute framing (95.2 per cent), and other combinations of goal framing (72.7 per cent), rather than the avoidance of losses (x 2 ¼ 11.61, df ¼ 2, p, 0.01). Moreover, the larger proportions for a positive frame-avoid loss manipulation for the other goal framing approaches (27.3 per cent) reflects the smaller number of these types of adverts represented in the data.

Table III. Positive goal framing manipulation by pure goal framing, combined goal and attribute framing and, other combined framing types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manipulation</th>
<th>Goal framing only</th>
<th>Goal framing type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive – obtain gain</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive – avoid loss</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: critical values: x 2 = 11.61, d = 2, p < 0.01. “Other” variable includes remaining (combined goal and risky choice framing, and combined attribute, goal, and risky choice framing) data. Data combined to avoid violating assumption of cells containing expected counts of five observations or more

Discussion
The most important finding of the present study is the lack of consistency with which academic findings translate to marketing communication practice. This is highlighted by the prevalence of attribute framing and combined attribute and goal framing techniques, and the lack of negative framing techniques in the advertisements examined.

Whilst it has been suggested that goal framing predominates in advertising (Chandy et al., 2001), the results of this study show that attribute framing is the most popular framing approach used by magazine advertisers. This suggests that advertisers often seek to frame how the features and characteristics of their products are presented to consumers. Also, contrary to suggestions in the academic literature, was the prevalence of adverts using a combination of framing types. Indeed, of these combinations, adverts containing both attribute framing and goal framing were second only to pure attribute framing in their popularity. Thus, adverts containing pure goal framing, considered most popular amongst practitioners by academic researchers, were in a distinct minority, comprising only 7.4 per cent of the data. This suggests that advertisers often mention attributes in advertising copy presents benefits, rather than simply presenting benefits only. More research needs to be done on the effectiveness of combined attribute and goal framing as currently practitioners have little to draw on in this area in the academic literature. Consistent with expectations, risky choice framing was an unpopular choice with advertisers. This is unsurprising, given the nature of risky choice framing which involves an emphasis on risk and the choice between two objects, an unlikely scenario in advertising practice. It would be prudent for advertising researchers studying framing to focus on attribute framing and/or goal framing in their experimental design in order to assess the efficacy of current advertising practice. In terms of framing valence, positive framing clearly dominated the data. As a result, the use of positive frames for attribute framing matches the recommendations of framing theory (Levin et al., 1998). However, this positive framing dominance was also evident for goal framing adverts, irrespective of the level of product involvement. Indeed, only 1 of 137 adverts which used goal framing for high involvement products chose a negative frame. Here, again, advertising practice appears to differ from the recommendations of framing research, which suggests the use of positive and negative valence effects given different levels of elaboration (Krishnamurthy
et al., 2001, Shiv et al., 2004). Further, for adverts which used a combination of framing approaches (40.8 per cent of all adverts which use framing), advertisers use a positive valence throughout the advert in all cases (RQ4). None of the combined ads used negative framing.

This study also provides insights into how goal framing is operationalised. Specifically, do advertisers use the polarised contrasts of alternative terminology or simple negation in their advertising copy? For positive goal frames, the emphasis by advertisers was clearly on obtaining gains in advertising copy, rather than on avoiding some form of loss by consuming the product or service. This result was evident for both pure goal framing adverts and combined goal and attribute framing adverts. For advertising researchers, this result supports future research using an alternative terminology or a simple negation approach manipulation. However, in contrast to positive frames, few adverts used negative goal framing. Indeed, only one advert in the data (for a charity) used a negative goal frame, employing a benefits foreground approach. While this is a token representation, it does support the simple negation approach of much goal framing research in marketing (Block and Anand-Keller, 1995; Keller et al., 2003; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy, 1990; Martin and Marshall, 1999).

It is clear from the results of this study that advertisers need to explore the value of negative framing in their advertising content. Although findings are drawn from a limited sample of US magazine publications, the evidence suggests that advertisers are averse to the use of negative framing in their messages. To this end, our results support the suggestion that negative frames are a rare occurrence in advertising (Cox and Cox, 2001). Therefore, this result appears to contradict the notion that the use of negative frames is increasingly popular (Shiv et al., 1997; Smith, 1996). It was also interesting to note that the single negatively framed advertisement identified, used simple negation as the linguistic approach to communicate the negative frame. This is the less extreme contrast and is also perhaps indicative of the desire of advertisers not to appear too negative. Practitioners are therefore advised to explore the possibilities of negative framing. Academic research suggests that there is a place for this approach in advertising content, particularly for high involvement products, and also for the use of alternative terminology, the linguistic approach with the more extreme contrast, to operationalise the message frame.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has a number of limitations which should be acknowledged. First, following previous content analyses (Leigh, 1994) this study used judgement sampling. Further research based on probability sampling is needed to assess the robustness of the results. In addition, all of the magazines analysed were published in the USA and had largely US readerships.

While both judges were experienced in content analysis, were given extensive training, and differed in gender and ethnicity, their product involvement codings reflected their own estimations of what is an involving product. Thus, given that product involvement relates to “the degree of personal relevance an individual assigns to a product class” (Muehling et al., 1993, p. 45), these codings may differ for judges with different inherent interests. In addition, other potentially important communication issues such as advertisement size and position were not considered (Stern et al., 1981).

In terms of future research, first and foremost this study suggests the need for advertising researchers to engage with practitioners to try to understand current industry practice with regard to message framing and in particular the hesitancy shown to use negative framing in advertising. The inconsistencies revealed in this study point to either an insufficient understanding of message framing by one or both parties, and/or poor communication between the two.

Regarding issues of external validity, our findings indicate the need to examine combined attribute and goal framing advertisement copy. An examination of combined adverts would not only be relevant to advertising practitioners, but would also contribute to the framing literature which has tended to study framing in its pure form. A related issue is the effect of valence incongruency on consumer evaluations of advertising. In this study, magazine advertisers use valence congruent copy across different framing types within a single advert. However, given research suggesting that stimulus incongruency can increase message elaboration ( Houston et al., 1987), this topic appears a useful avenue for research. Research should also examine whether framing effects differ by product class or by magazine context. Though not reported, the data did reveal some differences in the products and magazines using particular types of framing. Accordingly, research should consider how the context in which the framed advert appears influences consumer evaluations. For example, recent research suggests that media context can influence consumer mood states (Martin, 2003) and that mood may influence framing effects (Keller et al., 2003). Likewise, research into cognitive priming (Yi, 1993), where a magazine paper primes positive or negatively-valenced associations in memory, may offer a useful perspective for future research.
Research also needs to be conducted using different publication types and readership profiles both within the US and across cultures. The low occurrence of negative framing in our data may indicate that the use of negative frames is more evident in media contexts other than magazine advertising. Future research could provide useful insights into this issue, especially since researchers are beginning to explore framing effects in the context of television adverts (Chandy et al., 2001). Further, content analyses comparing print and television adverts have revealed differences in content and objectives between these two media (Banerjee et al., 1995). Finally, the advertising copy writers who actually frame messages should be studied in order to gain insight into the rationale behind their decisions.

References

Further reading

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