

Differential Framing Effects from Valence and Time-Differentiated Message Requests on Donation Behaviour

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to investigate whether differential framing effects in an environmental charity's campaign influence favourable consumer response. Past literature that has evaluated different types of message framing effects have found no conclusive findings on when or for whom, what type of messaging is most appropriate in gaining compliance. We investigate two framing domains; (i) message valence and (ii) time-differentiated message request which have been studied in a stand-alone fashion. A series of experiments will be performed to understand the causal effects of framing domains in predicting the effectiveness of an environmental charity's campaigns. The research utilizes sentiment analysis to understand the existing framing strategy used by a charity and incorporates it in stimulus development. The expected findings of the study will help the charity to create effective campaigns with the aim of increasing received donations.

Keywords: Message Valence, Message Request, Donation Behaviour

Track: Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing

1. Introduction

Past research indicates an increase in consumer awareness and concern with social and environmental issues, mainly in the charity sector, which does not necessarily translate to positive donation behaviour (Leiserowitz, 2006; Nickerson, 2003). Donation behaviour, usually defined as contribution of time and/or money (Botner, Mishra & Mishra, 2015), facilitates funding to independent charities who are primarily reliant on individual donations (Ramia, Powell, Cortis & Marjolin, 2018).

It is well known that environmental charities struggle to get donations (McCrindle, 2017; UK Civil Society Almanac, 2014; The Almanac of American Philanthropy, 2016). Past research suggests that most individuals are less likely to donate to environmental causes compared to other charities due to two primary reasons; (i) environmental issue is perceived as future-oriented cause (McCarty & Shrum, 2001) and (ii) donating to the environmental cause may not directly benefit them (Pieters, Bijmolt, Van Raaij, & de Kruijk, 1998).

Previous studies have suggested that message framing strategies in charity campaigns influence donors' motivation to donate to a charity's cause (*see* Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996). A recent study from Botner et al. (2015) demonstrated that charities' framing strategies in campaign translate to positive or negative donation behaviour. Hence, this research is motivated to investigate how the differential framing effects in the charity's campaign could lead to positive donation behaviour.

The expected contribution of the study is to help charities improve the effectiveness of their campaign messaging by understanding the effects of framing used in their campaigns. Furthermore, understanding that charities as a non-profit organisation with a limited budget for their operational expenses (Ramia et al., 2018), this study will hopefully help charities to manage their expenses on fundraising costs with effective campaign messaging.

2. Background

Previous studies indicate that message valence and message request tone play equal parts in predicting donation behaviour (Bendapudi et al., 1996; Chang & Lee, 2009). However, these framing effects have been studied separately in the past. This research will combine both framing effects to understand donor behaviour in evaluating the effectiveness of a charity's campaign. The

combination of the framing effects is based on a realistic charity's campaign that often includes appeal message and donation request message in the advertisement.

The appeal message in the charity's campaign provides persuasive information on the beneficiary group and the charity's stand on the causes (Seargant, 1999). Botner et al. (2015) has operationalised the charities' appeal valence as supportive (promotion-focus) versus combative (prevention-focus) framing. This framing is based on the regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) that explains promotion-focus framing as persuasive when emphasising positive consequences; and prevention-focus framing as persuasive when emphasising negative consequences. This strategy has assisted advocacy behaviour by activating natural tendencies to process information, based on sensitivities to expected outcomes in an advertisement (Cesario, Corker & Jelinek, 2013).

2.1 Message valence and time-differentiated donation request

There is a mismatch on how the message valence has worked in eliciting donation behaviour. A recent study by Erlandsson, Nilsson and Västfjäll (2018) shows that negative appeals are more effective in getting donations. However, Botner et al. (2015) demonstrated that large numbers of charities rely on combative framing (negative appeal), which is inducing lower donations than charities that use supportive framing (positive appeal). We propose that framing valence, supportive or combative, may work differently based on the type of charities (i.e. softer health/people-oriented cause charities versus hardcore environmentalists) and the type of people (i.e. casual donors versus hardcore environmentalists).

Additionally, from a review of their advertising, we have found that environmental charities have used assertive language in their campaigns, requesting urgent actions from the public to be more pro-environmentalist (Kronrod et al., 2012). However, this urgent message request mode is not always effective in generating positive behaviour. Past research suggests that compliance with social or environmental behaviour is perceived as non-favourable and a potential threat to consumers' personal goals, and hence, a refusal is expected (Wiener & Doescher, 1991).

Unlike message valence that has been studied extensively in the past, time-differentiated message request -urgent versus nonurgent- is still in its infancy. Loewenstein (1988) has successfully demonstrated how a time-differentiated message request influences consumer decision making. In his paper, the effects of a reference point (framing valence of gains versus

losses) are successfully manipulated with a time-differentiated message – immediate actions (urgent) versus delayed actions (nonurgent).

In communication literature, assertive language that is used for requesting urgent action is perceived as a counter-intuitive approach to gain compliance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Vanderveken, 1990). Baek, Yoon and Kim (2015) suggest that in order to promote pro-environmental behaviour, a non-assertive message that is not requesting urgent actions from the consumer will be more effective. Hence, understanding when the message should emphasise on immediate actions (high immediacy) versus delayed actions (low immediacy) is going provide more insights towards our research on donation behaviour. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: There is a significant interaction between message valence and time-differentiated request toward consumer response. Such that:

H1a: In the supportive framing condition, a high immediacy message request will lead to more favourable consumer response.

H1b: In the combative framing condition, a low immediacy message request will lead to more favourable consumer response.

To illustrate our hypotheses, a charity's campaign with supportive framing (versus combative framing) is more effective when it is matched with high immediacy (versus low immediacy) message request, is based on past findings (Kronrod et al., 2012; Botner et al., 2015). Furthermore, processing information in the advertisement must be associated with consumer attitudes, especially in donation behaviour (Fazio, 1985; 1995; Webb, Green & Brashear, 2000). Fazio (1985, 1995) proposes that consumers who already formulated their attitude and aligned themselves with an issue (i.e. such that they know environmental issues are important and needed immediate actions) will prefer to be persuaded with high immediacy requests. In contrast, consumers who do not align themselves with the issue, may feel pressure to process information in combative framing and may refuse to act when they see a high immediacy donation request.

2.2 The Moderating Role of Perceived Expertise

Past research indicates differential level of perceived expertise among consumers would influence the consumer motivation to comply with the advertisement (Maheswaran & Sternthal, 1990; MacInnis, Moorman & Jaworski, 1991). Ahluwalia and Burnkrant (2004) suggest that an

expert consumer is sensitive to advertising tactics and therefore, is the hardest to persuade. However, Kim, Rao and Lee (2009) propose that an expert consumer is less affected by the advertising tactic and lacks motivation to process information. Given these conflicting, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Differential levels of perceived expertise will moderate the strength of the relationship between differential framing effects toward favourable consumer response.

Please refer to Figure 1 for the research framework of the study.

3. Methodology

In order to answer our research hypotheses, this study will manipulate two independent-variables at three-levels (message valence: supportive, combative, neutral) x (time-differentiated message request: high immediacy, low immediacy, neutral) between-subjects design. There will be six environmental campaigns developed for the study. To enhance the managerial implications of the study, we plan to develop the ad stimulus depicting realistic environmental charity campaigns. Therefore, the study has conducted sentiment analysis on past and current charity advertisements to understand existing messaging used in the environmental charity campaigns.

4. Current Research Data and Analysis

The advertising data for the study has been obtained directly from a worldwide environmental charity. The charity provided us with five-years (2013-2017) of social media posts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube). We ran the sentiment analysis on the Facebook posts with R “TidyText” package. Overall, there are about 3,422 Facebook posts. We use “bing” lexicon to identify the polarity of the text as either positive or negative. The usage of “bing” lexicon is suitable to capture the languages on social media posts, and it often shows stable and consistent result as compared to another lexicon (Silge & Robinson, 2018). The sentiment analysis produces sentiment word frequency and sentiment word contribution score of the charity campaigns.

5. Results

The results of the analysis showed that the charity’s campaigns have higher frequencies of positive words (N=2489) as compared to negative words (N=1974). However, over the years, negative words (N=2931) contributed higher scores than positive words (N=1535). This means that

the environmental charity relies more on negative sentiment in their campaign to persuade donors. See Figure 2 for an example of the charity's campaign sentiment score for December 2014. The sentiment score result is usually visualised in the bar chart (Grogan, 2017) as it provides more information as demonstrated in past research (Na, Thet, Khoo, & Kyaing, 2011). This result will help us to design the ad stimulus of the study better.

6. Discussion

Our sentiment result on the existing message framing strategy used in the campaign has confirmed with past study (Kronrod et al., 2012) that environmental charity is indeed relies more on the negative tone of the message to persuade donors. Our next research stage is to answer the research hypotheses **H1** and **H2** with a series of the experimental survey with the developed ad stimulus.

The ad stimulus of the study is not only be based on past studies (Botner et al., 2015; Kronrod et al., 2012) but also based on existing message used by the charity. We anticipate that the results from this study will provide further understanding of how environmental charities should frame their campaigns regarding domains; valence and time-differentiated message requests.

Apart from the managerial contribution, our study will address the existing gaps in the framing literature by understanding message valence - supportive versus combative (i.e. supportive framing leans more toward positive orientation whereas combative framing leans more towards the negative orientation of a message). Second, the message valence will be combined with time-differentiated message request to understand the overall effectiveness of a charity campaign and that these two framing effects should be adhered together and not being studied in isolation.

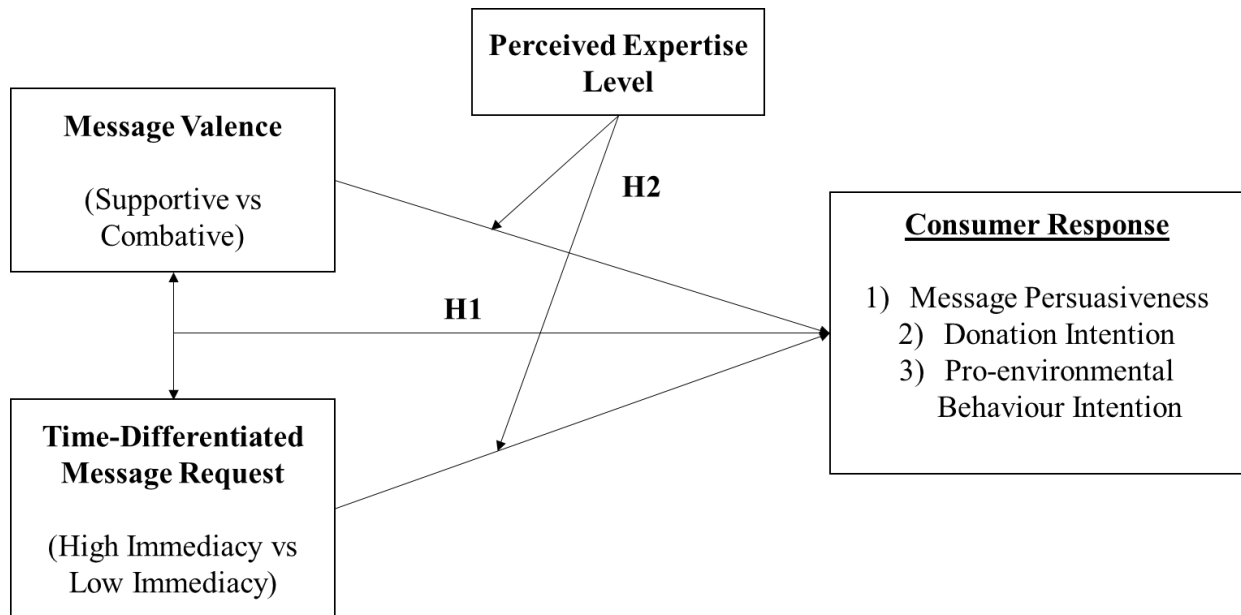


Figure 1. Research framework

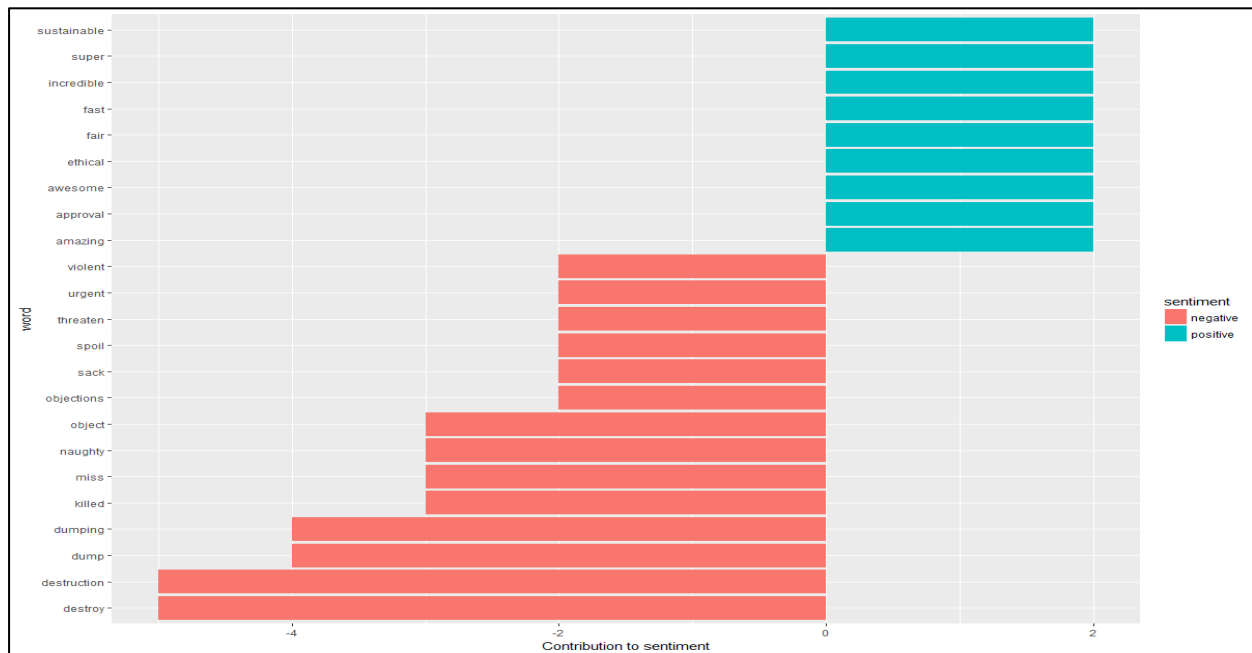


Figure 2. Result of the charity's sentiment score on December 2014.

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