

EDUCATING STUDENTS IN SUSTAINABLE MARKETING: EVALUATING FRAMING MESSAGES TO INFLUENCE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Evaluating the effectiveness of gained (positive) versus loss (negative) framed messages within the context of sustainable marketing can help faculty members educate students on how to influence consumer behavior to engage in environmental lifestyles. This pedagogy method helps marketing students develop sustainable marketing strategies that can convert consumers into sustainable consumers. Moreover, this teaching innovation assists students with discovering ways to create lucrative sustainable marketing strategies that can increase sales for eco-friendly products.

In an effort to provide students with theoretical and applied experience with sustainable marketing, this current study involves undergraduate student research supervised by a tenure-track marketing faculty member, where the researchers focus on evaluating the effectiveness of pairing gained versus loss framing messages with how and why construal statements. This undergraduate research study provides an opportunity for students to gain marketing research experience by evaluating how matchmaking particular messages can educate and persuade consumers, specifically to purchase eco-friendly cleaning products. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide students with a hands-on learning experience by investigating how framing messages and construal statements can shape purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly cleaning products.

For the current study, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Consumers presented with the loss-framed messages with concrete “how” construal statements will exhibit more positive purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly cleaning products.

H2: Consumers presented with the loss-framed messages with concrete “how” construal statements will exhibit more positive purchasing intentions toward eco-friendly cleaning products.

Stimuli Development

Four web advertisements will be prepared through a graphic design company to ensure marketing materials are professionally designed. Each web advertisement will have two columns. The first column will feature the framed manipulation, either a gained-framed or loss-framed message, on purchasing eco-friendly cleaning products. In the second column, the construal manipulation will be shown with either concrete reasons on how consumers can identify eco-friendly cleaning products or with abstract reasons on why consumers should purchase eco-friendly cleaning products. Therefore, the web marketing stimuli will create four conditions: loss/how, loss/why, gain/how, and gain/why.

Survey Design

An online pre-test survey will be created and launched in January 2015. This online survey will be pre-tested for face validity. It will be distributed to a small sample of our desired population as a pilot test. Any changes indicated by the pre-test will be made to refine our confirmatory survey. A sample of survey items include measurement of purchasing intentions: (1) how likely are you to purchase eco-friendly cleaning products (anchored by 1 = highly unlikely and 5 =

highly likely); (2) how inclined are you to purchase eco-friendly cleaning products (anchored by 1 = not very inclined and 5 = very inclined); and (3) how willing are you to purchase eco-friendly cleaning products (anchored by 1 = very unwilling and 5 = very willing). As an additional measurement to determine the consumer mind-set, participants will be asked open-ended questions related to how would they identify eco-friendly cleaning products and why would they purchase eco-friendly cleaning products. An example of a concrete “how” mind-set statement includes: what steps will you take to determine if a cleaning product is eco-friendly? An example of an abstract “why” mind-set statement includes: what purpose would you purchase eco-friendly cleaning products? The participants’ responses will be coded for concrete and abstract thoughts.

Sampling Process

Once the confirmatory survey is finalized, we will partner with a marketing research firm to distribute our survey to an online panel. Our population is defined as U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 64 who are the primary household shopper. A sample size of 75 participants is desired for each condition, for a total of 300 participants.

Conclusion

This undergraduate research study provides students with a deeper theoretical understanding and practical insights on how to move the consumer purchasing behavior needle toward sustainability. This results of this study will also help marketing educators develop lectures in a variety of marketing courses to discuss how combining gained versus loss marketing messages with how and why construal manipulations can make consumers more (or less) likely to become environmental consumers. By investigating this matching strategy, marketing educators can also help students develop sustainable marketing campaigns to activate mind-sets in other eco-friendly behaviors such as conserving water and eating organic foods.

References

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