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Young Consumer Response to Message Framing in Recycling Advertisements

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Abstract: Structuring effective methods for promoting pro-environmental behaviour is a complex process that requires an understanding of individual preferences and their receptiveness to marketing efforts that are aimed at changing this behaviour. Within this context, effective message framing appears to play key roles in affecting the attitudes and behavioural intentions of the target audience. While both framing respectively positive and negative framing have been studied for their individual main effects, the findings are mixed and do not offer clear justification in environmental studies. This study investigates the effects of competitive framing on positive versus negative frame recycling ads on Muslim adolescents. An experiment was conducted to examine the interaction effects between Islamic identity framing and prime framing (positive-negative) on respondent's attitude. The results found that informants will reflect different degrees of advertising effectiveness in response to different combinations of advertising framings and Islamic framing will induce a better attitude towards the ad and a greater inclination to recycling intention. The results indicate that in persuasive social contexts, positive frames may be most persuasive with Islamic appeals in order to have a greater persuasion impact.

Keywords: Message framing, recycling behavior, experimental design, Islamic identity, Islamic marketing

INTRODUCTION

For over three decades, recycling has been encouraged as a desirable social behaviour, but unfortunately, people do not recycle as much as they can or should. Thus far, recycling is not favoured in practice even though it has been proven that recycling is beneficial to the environment and economy. Behavioural researchers have made efforts to study pro-environmental behaviours, such as recycling, because this study may provide a broader understanding of the factors that relate to and encourage these behaviours. However, only a few studies have examined consumer receptivity to green advertisements and the credibility of the

message content, which leaves a significant gap in the research (Tucker, Rifon, Lee, & Reece, 2012). Not to mention, consumer response to pro-environmental advertisements or green advertisements is a complex puzzle that involves the interplay of themes, framing, and message credibility (T. Cheng & Woon, 2010; Tania. Cheng, Woon, & Lynes, 2011; S.-B. Kim & Kim, 2014; Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012; Ku, Kuo, Wu, & Wu, 2012; Rahim et al., 2012; Tucker et al., 2012). The main aim of the present study is to assess the role and the effects of message framing aimed specifically Islamic message framing in the prediction of recycling campaign success. Further investigation will extend the findings on how Islamic and non-Islamic message framing affects Muslims attitude. This research provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature on message framing and its use in social marketing campaigns aimed at environmentally sustainable behaviour change.

MESSAGE FRAMING AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Successful communication strategies should focus on the content of the communications, determining what specific desired behaviour the campaign is focused on, selecting key facts and information to include in campaign messages, and predicting what the target audience will believe or feel regarding the messages (Kotler and Lee, 2011). However, social marketers face major challenges in phrasing the advertising content or messages to present to consumers. Therefore, a technique known as message framing has been suggested as a way to enhance advertising effectiveness (Cox and Cox, 2001; Zhang and Buda, 1999). Message framing could generate greater efficiency in social marketing campaigns and to an increased ability to affect the attitudes and behavioural intentions of the target audience. However, the successful development of a particular campaign relies on the social marketer's or communicator's understanding of the importance of message framing. Along with facilitating the goal of "bringing about life-improving social change" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989), this technique could be the best way to "influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, modify, or abandon behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole" (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002).

From a social marketing perspective, the technique known as "message framing" theoretically considers construct meaning and shapes audience perception based on message composition its decoding by the viewer (Pelletier and Sharp, 2008). Some scholars believe that consumers react differently to different message compositions due to differences in framing the messages within or around the same objective information (Rothman *et al.*, 1993). In fact, two different studies (Krishnamurthy *et al.*, 2001) argue that message framing can be viewed as the presentation of semantically different but objectively equivalent message information. Additionally, a study by Winter *et al.* (2000) supports the concept that consumer perceptions can vary markedly depended on message compositions, with differences in this case observed between responses to messages on two different park signs: "Please don't litter our environment", and "Please keep our environment free".

Different types of framing: Positive versus negative (gain-loss)

In the classical goal framing paradigm (Pelletier and Sharp 2008), framing can be categorised as positive and negative frames. Positive frames (or gain frames) underline the favourable behavioural outcomes of complying with the advocated behaviour, while negative frames (or loss frames) stress the unfavourable behavioural outcomes of noncompliance with the advocated behaviour (Levin & Gaeth, 1988). In studies

of environmental communication, negatively framed messages are better for appeals to recycle (e.g. Loroz, 2007); and are more pronounced when they also emphasise the viewer as recipient of the behavioural outcome (e.g. Borah, 2011). Although Obermiller (1995) and Davis (1995) assert that negative framing is more predictive in the promotion of environmental behaviour, whereas Woodside and Singer (1994) argue that the effects of message framing persuasiveness may vary under different conditions. For instance, previous findings had relied on individual level involvement (Grau & Folse, 2007; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Putrevu, 2010; C.-C. Tsai & Tsai, 2006), product knowledge (Kaczynski, Havitz, & McCarville, 2005; K. Kim & Park, 2010), information processing (Levin & Gaeth, 1988), and gender (Putrevu, 2010; Yunhui Huang, 2010).

Despite the acceptance of negatively framed messages, Nan (2007) argues that negatively framed messages have developed based on the notion of negativity bias, or the over weighting of negative information when making judgements, resulting in the greater persuasiveness of negatively compared to positively framed messages. In fact, negatively framed messages engender feelings of threat and fear, which sometimes over bias the negativity explanation. Meneses (2010) argued that positive framing could become the basis of the ecological ideology of the new millennium. This researcher argued that positively framed messages could counter the moral paradigm of a fragile ecology and lead consumers towards a more pro-environment orientation.

THE INTERVENTION OF COMPETITIVE FRAMING: THE ISLAMIC IDENTITY FRAMING

This study highlights the potential of sub-culture as a unique individual characteristic or identity. As developing an effective advertisement and communicating the correct message can be integral the sub-cultural factor, such as religion-framed messages, could be the key in promoting pro-environmental behaviour. Studies considering the effect of culture on message framing (Orth, Koenig, & Firbasova, 2005; Van Gorp, 2006; see Walsh, Hassan, Shiu, Craig Andrews, & Hastings, 2010). Researchers (e.g Carrigan, Moraes, & Leek, 2011; Kennedy, Beckley, McFarlane, & Nadeau, 2009; Kronrod et al., 2012; McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Walsh *et al.*, 2010) suggested the effectiveness of focusing advertising to specific target markets considering sub-cultural factors and providing assertive and accurate messages towards a specific target audience. Previous studies on advertising effectiveness (e.g De Run, Butt, Fam, & Jong, 2010; Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2004; G. Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002; Waller, Fam, & Erdogan, 2005) found that religion as part of the subculture also played a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour and responses to advertising messages.

For instance, Rice (2006) began a new chapter in Islamic studies related to environmental behaviour as the findings found religiosity were found to be linked with pro-environmental behaviour, thus suggesting an “Islamic environmental ethic” (ibid. 62). Rice and Al-Mossawi (2006) presented a managerial decision-making framework based on Islamic values. For instance, the cultural dimension of activity orientation stresses environmental friendliness, cleanliness and good health. For instance, Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002, p. 4) use “...*God loves not the wasters...*” (Qur’an 7:31) and its exegesis as a directive to people and businesses not to generate waste that may be harmful. Based on this view, the concept of self-identity or self-referencing in this context plays important roles in the persuasive strategy for getting consumers to relate to message information in the advertisement, for instance, their individual self-structures (Robert E. Burnkrant &

Unnava, 1989; Robert E. Burnkrant & Unnava, 1995; Escalas, 2007; Lee, Fernandez, & Martin, 2002; Martin & Christina, 2004). Like any other identity concept, self-referencing occurs when one processes information by relating it to oneself or one's personal experiences (Burnkrant and Unnava 1995). In fact, in marketing, research suggests that self-identity or self-referencing can be appealed to through the design of an ad, such as by the exposure of message content or images (e.g. Lee et al., 2002; Martin & Christina, 2004; Martin, Veer, & Pervan, 2007). As individuals or consumers may relate the message or ad content to themselves, in this context, this study believes that self-identity or self-referencing (e.g., as a Muslim) represents a useful tool to persuade people to associate themselves with the ad messages (Islamic messages), as such engaging in pro-environmental behaviour (e.g., recycling). The extent to which Islamic identity framing influences Muslim consumers to recycle remains unknown and needs to be investigated, especially when considering social marketing initiatives. In this context, researchers have quoted verses from the Quran to promote environmental behaviour via Islamic identity framing.

THE EFFECT OF MESSAGE FRAMING ON AD ATTITUDE, RECYCLING ATTITUDE, AND INTENTION

In marketing studies, ad attitude plays a particularly important role as an important mediator of advertising response, especially in most advertising-experimental settings. For instance, in the context of brand information processing, previous studies suggest how important the impact of ad attitude is in advertising design (Lutz & Swazy, 1977; Xiaoli Nan & Heo, 2007; Praxmarer & Gierl, 2009; Spears & Singh, 2004; S. Tsai, 2007). The perfect mixture of well-defined theoretical background of multi-attribute attitude models (M. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) with a strong managerial relevance to the advertiser has generated substantial research in ad attitude (Biehal, Stephens, & Curlo, 1992). From a social marketing and health communication view, the attitude towards advertising is an important construct in advertising research, as it has an impact on changing attitude and predicting behaviour (M. Fishbein, 2000; Martin Fishbein & Cappella, 2006). Furthermore, the construct also represents both social and economic aspects of advertising (Anderson, Engledow, & Becker, 1978). A positive attitude towards recycling needs to be linked to an individual's beliefs that "recycling is worth doing". The positive ad attitude may be translated into a positive recycling attitude when people are persuaded that believing means doing it (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). In fact, "individuals who hold positive attitudes towards environmental activism, think that there is normative support for engaging in activism, and perceive that they can easily engage in activism, should they have strong intention to perform the behaviour" (Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008). As such, a positive attitude of oneself would lead to the belief that recycling behaviour could conserve natural resources and reduce wasteful use of landfills. These personal attitudes are based on "individual perception of the activity being right or wrong, good or bad, useful or not useful, desirable or undesirable, pleasant or unpleasant and interesting or boring" (Ramayah, Lee, & Lim, 2012, p. 142).

Previous research suggests that advertisements that are believed may impact the target audience's attitudes and intention to comply with the messages (Brus, 2011, Dec 22.; Tania. Cheng *et al.*, 2011; Cole & Fieselman, 2013; Gauzente & Roy, 2012; Grodzińska-Jurczak, Tomal, Tarabula-Fiertak, Nieszporek, & Read, 2006; Maibach, 1993; Park, Smith, Klein, & Martell, 2011; Prestin & Pearce, 2010). Within the context of social issues, it is expected that messages whose content is factual and believed by individuals will positively impact attitudes towards the issue and intention. Furthermore, there are few studies of framing

that really analyse the effects of framing on attitude and intention. For instance, an experiment by Van Triet *et al.* (2010) in health promoting messages shows that positive and negative framing have a significant effect on respondents' attitudes and intentions, but in a different way. Positive framing significantly correlated with information acceptance and attitude, whereas negative framing significantly correlated with intention. Moreover, a study by Hevey and Dolan (2013) related to skin cancer prevention posits that positive-gained messages were most predictive on sun-protective intentions for approach-oriented individuals, whereas negative or loss gained messages had most salience on avoidance-oriented individuals. These approach-orientated individuals are persuaded to engage in prevention behaviours by positive messages; conversely, negative messages are more persuasive in encouraging those who are avoidance-orientated. From social marketing perspective, particularly in how message campaign could affect consumer or individual attitude and intention, the findings remained insufficient but yet still helped researcher to have clear picture on how different framings (i.e. positive and negative framing) may exert their influence on persuasion through different pathways (Shen and Dillard, 2007).

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the light of the gap identified in this study, it is proposed that the Islamic framing invoked in a persuasive communication impacts and thus moderates the effectiveness of a particular message frame (positive or negative) on the favourableness of resulting attitudes and future behavioural intentions. This study examined how the use of message frame can be more effectively tailored to encourage recycling behaviours by identifying the effect combinations of message framing used in the recycling advertisement and its contributions to advertising effectiveness. Thus, in this study, it is hypothesized:

- H1. Information presented in positive and Islamic framed messages will have significantly greater mean scores than in negative setting on (a) ad attitude (b) recycling attitude and (c) recycling intention.

METHOD

Participants and experimental stimuli

This study employed a 2 (positive vs. negative: yes/no) X 2 (Islamic framing: yes/no) between-subjects experimental design. There were 428 undergraduate students participated in the experiment. On their arrival, they were welcomed and each of the respondents was then randomly assigned to either of the one of four experimental conditions. The participants were then provided a booklet that contained a recycling advertisement and questions. Participants were instructed to view the advert and complete the questionnaire attached at the end of the booklet.

Manipulation checks

For the manipulation check, participants rated themselves using 7-point Likert scales on four positive-negative items adopted from Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1970), while for the Islamic scales, the scales were constructed by the author. After reverse-scoring the negative items, all scales were averaged to form a three composite measure of the framing manipulations: positive-negative checks [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$], Islamic framed checks [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$].

Dependent variables

The first section included a set of three items intended to measure the ad attitude of each experimental group. Respondents were asked to assess each advertising by a 7-point bipolar adjective scale and items were adapted from Lutz *et al.* (1983) ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.23, \alpha = 0.85$). In the second section, participants were also asked to rate each page anchored by a six item 7-point Likert-type scale (Tonglet, Phillips, & Read, 2004) to measure attitude toward recycling ($M = 4.69, SD = 0.89, \alpha = 0.78$). Future recycling intentions to perform were measured by a three-item 7-point bipolar scale anchored by “very likely/very unlikely” and were adopted from Loro (2007) ($M = 4.66, SD = 1.09, \alpha = 0.90$).

RESULTS

The evidence that is found in this experiment of the effect of the treatment on the respondent’s behaviour and the advertising effectiveness were statistically significant. The descriptive analysis is presented in Table 1 which resulted from the one-way procedure for the respondent’s ad attitude, recycling attitude and intention data.

Table 1
Summary of the Mean Score between Experimental Groups

Groups	Frame/Treatment	Ad Attitude	Recycling Attitude	Recycling Intention
Control group 1A	Positive	4.11[1.03]	4.33[1.24]	4.15[0.92]
Exp. group 2A	Positive, Islamic identity	5.74[0.98]	5.65[1.21]	5.86[1.03]
Control group 1B	Negative	3.89[1.51]	3.71[1.21]	3.75[1.16]
Exp. group 2B	Negative, Islamic identity	5.37[0.84]	5.35[0.58]	5.52[1.02]
F		37.36**	15.17**	21.37**

One-way procedure for the respondent’s ad attitude, a stimulating starts for which the findings came from the control group in the positive group (1A; mean 4.11), the scores were higher than in the negative group (1B; mean 3.89). Under the second treatment of Islamic identity framing, the mean score for both groups (2A and 2B) shows a significant increase to 5.74 and 5.37, respectively (Figure 1). The results from the ANOVA of the mean scores indicated that there was a significant effect of each treatment on the attitude toward the advert [$F_{(3,424)} = 37.36, p < 0.001$] because positive framing has an impact on the ad attitude; thus, H1a is accepted. The combination of positive and Islamic identity framing displays the strength and credibility of the advert, which elicited a more positive impact on the attitude toward the advert.

Further test shows a significant effect framing effects on recycling attitude across the experimental groups. Figure 1b visualises mean score across the experimental groups. The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate that there were significant differences among the groups [$F_{(3,424)} = 15.17, p < 0.001$]. The respondents who were not in any treatments in the positive and negative groups had scores with means of 4.33 and 3.71, respectively. As anticipated, because groups 3A and 3B received an advert that contained the Islamic element, the gap between the two groups was more apparent with mean score 5.65 and 5.35 respectively. The result clearly indicates the different responses among the different experimental groups. The control group has the lowest scores when there was no additional framing compared to the

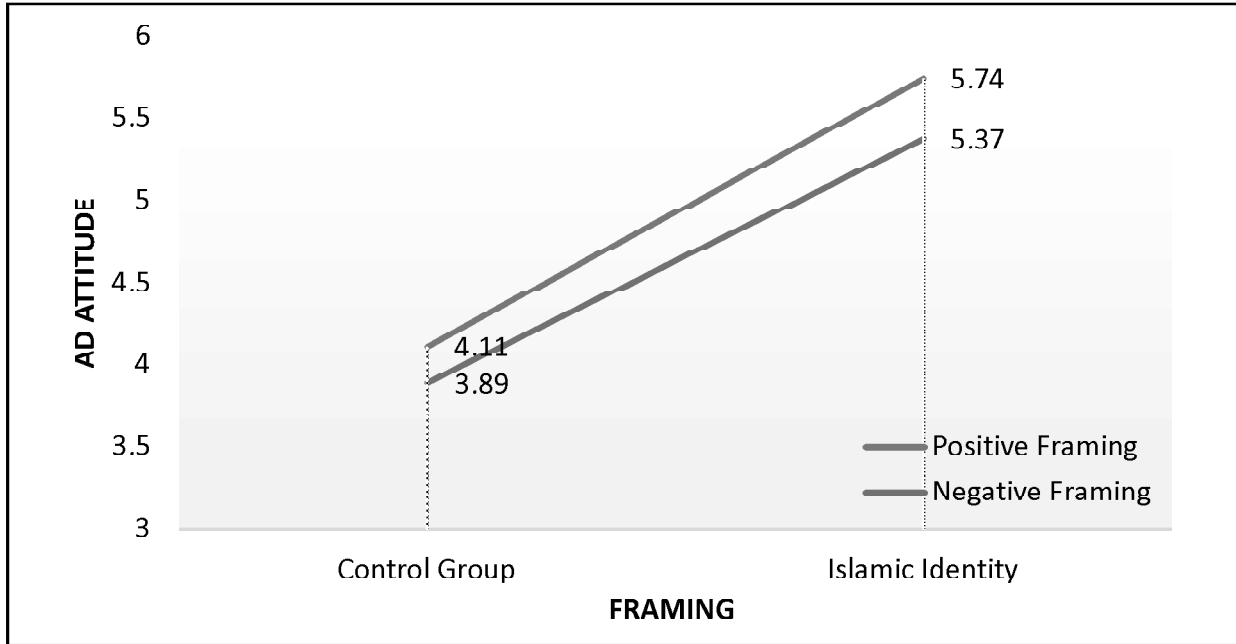


Figure 1a: Mean ad attitude between positive and negative framing groups

other groups. The group in the positive condition responds well compared with the other group in the negative condition, which reflects the Muslim’s preference toward encouragement and the optimistic framing rather than the fear appeals; thus, H1b is accepted.

The descriptive analysis and the analysis of variance on intention to recycle generated the results that are reported in Table 1 and Figure 1c. The evidence that is found in this experiment of the effect of the treatment on the respondent’s behaviour shows a statistically significant difference between the experimental

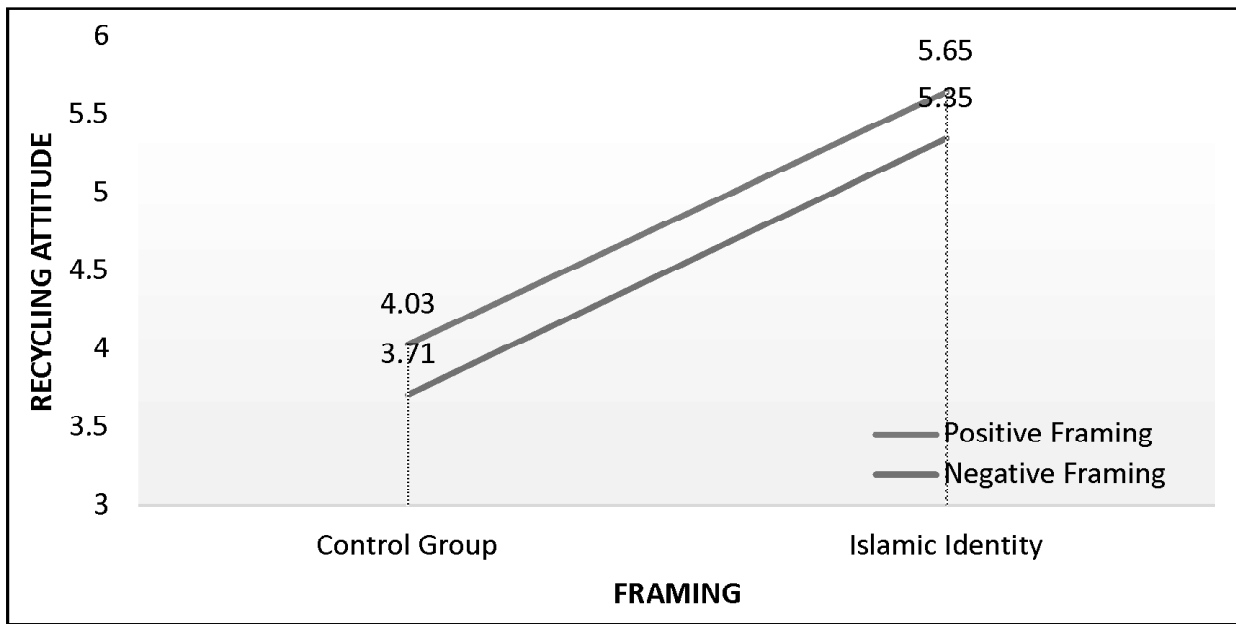


Figure 1b: Mean recycling attitude between positive and negative framing groups

groups. The respondents in the control group in the positive group score marginally higher than the others in the negative group, specifically, 4.15 and 3.75, respectively. Remarkably, the score for groups 3A and 3B increased significantly because of their response to Islamic identity framing. As expected, Islamic identity in the positive condition received a significant response compared with in a negative condition (means of 5.86 and 5.52, respectively). As hypothesised, ANOVA revealed a significant effect of each treatment on the respondents' intentions between groups [$F_{(3,424)}=21.37, p<.001$], and negative framing was found to have less of an impact compared to positive framing; thus, H1c is accepted.

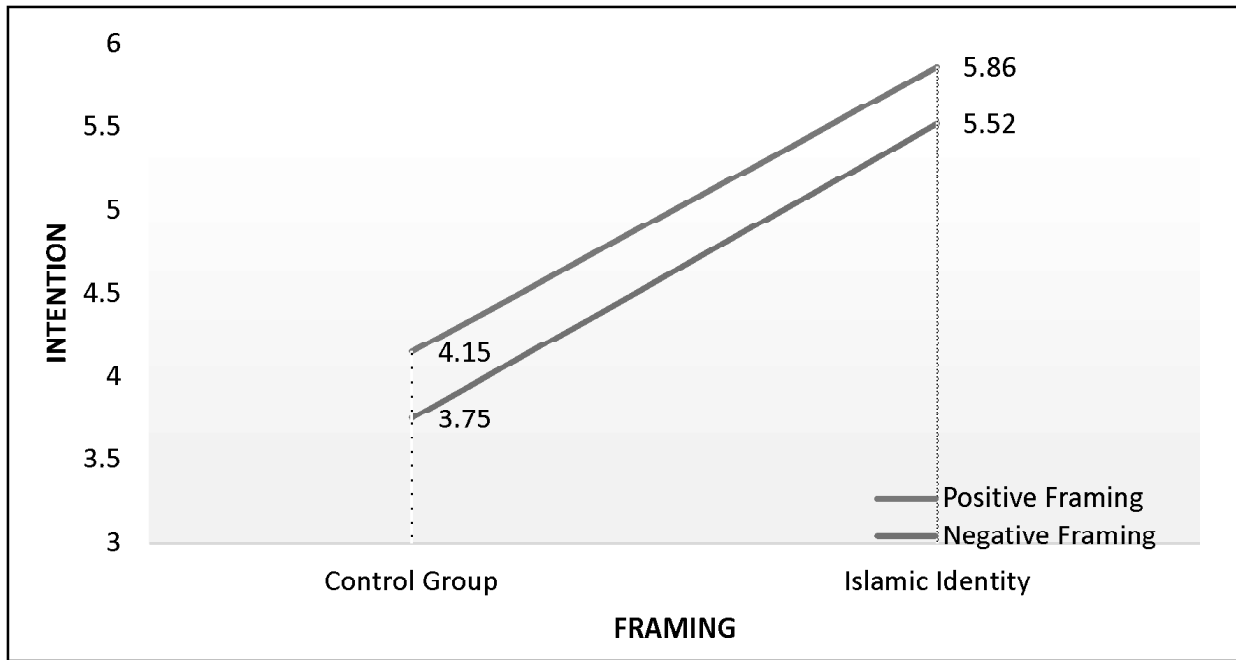


Figure 1c: Mean intention between positive and negative framing groups

DISCUSSION

This research had two main aims. The first was to introduce and highlight the new competitive framing based on identity framing. The second aim was to investigate the interaction effects of framing in promoting pro-environmental behaviour of recycling using alternative framing which is Islamic identity framing. The study explored how competitive framing, Islamic identity framing together with priming framing (positive and negative) affects respondent's behaviour. Overall, the results indicated that the respondents have different response toward messages when there are different combinations of message framing. Based on the results, in accordance with early prediction, a higher behavioural response toward ad attitude, recycling attitude and participation in actions to recycle in the future resulted in a strong combination of positive and Islamic identity framing messages.

Past research yields contradictory and inconsistent predictions as to whether positive or negative frames are more persuasive. This study more than proved that the most appropriate message framing to persuade a Muslim consumer who has a low involvement in recycling not only is based on positive framing but also adds a religious element into the recycling advert. Respondents from the positive group respond well with the Islamic identity framing compared to the negative group which indicates an extreme response

from the respondents toward the Islamic element that is emphasised in the advert. This result is not surprising given that Islamic identity elicits Muslims to be remarkable in their responses to a context that is related to recycling and cleanliness.

Promoting recycling as part of an environment program is essential because it is already proven that recycling is one of the best ways for people to have a positive impact on the world in which we live. Recycling is important to both the natural environment and human beings. The question 'how to make people recycle and help the environment' does not have a simple answer. If social marketers could provide better understanding of the benefits of recycling and how recycling helps the environment, the more inclined people will be to embrace recycling as a natural and important part of life. As many social and environmental psychologists have explored numerous theories to explain the gap between attitude and behaviour toward the environment, scholars deliberately urged to focus extensively in communication strategy in future research. As such, a few suggestions aroused not only to focus on designing a recycling communication campaign with specific strategies in future research (Davis, Phillips, Read, & Iida, 2006; Timlett & Williams, 2008, 2009) but also a strong communication campaign with a specific target segment should be formulated and coordinated as a strong mechanism to reinforce the attitudes (Bezzina & Dimech, 2011; Hong & Narayanan, 2006; Vicente & Reis, 2007, 2008).

Based on the findings, religion as part of individual identity could be a useful segmentation variable as it affects human value systems. Religion is a significant segmentation and targeting criterion, especially in marketing, as it remains a powerful influence on human life (Wood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Owen and Videras (2007) argued that culture as expressed by religious beliefs could contribute to the public good and it is relevant for understanding attitudes and behaviours towards environmental protection. As such, religious beliefs could potentially influence consumers to recycle. Therefore, framing concepts based on religious views could be beneficial and should be explored in future research particularly in social marketing and environmental communication. This study has unexpectedly revealed the variety of message formulations that could potentially lead to improved message effectiveness in the future. It is important to note that this study has the advantage of combining multiple framing rather than one frame type. The present research indicates that it would be beneficial to social marketers to recognise the potential of positive framing with the sub-culture element that is invoked in these messages and to prompt action with regard to the recommended behaviours in the future.

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