



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Social Science Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/soscij



Exploring the role of gain versus loss framing and point of reference in messages to reduce human–bear conflicts

Hang Lu^{a,*}, William F. Siemer^b, Meghan S. Baumer^b, Daniel J. Decker^b

^a Department of Communication, Cornell University, USA

^b Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 August 2016
Received in revised form 9 February 2017
Accepted 9 May 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Message framing
Point of reference
Risk perception
Human–wildlife conflict
Communication

ABSTRACT

As a fundamental social process, communication can help natural resource managers prevent or manage many human–wildlife conflicts, but research on how to present effectively information that contributes to the reduction of human–wildlife conflicts is scant. We examined the effectiveness of point-of-reference and gain-versus-loss framing in heightening intentions to prevent human–black bear conflicts. We randomly assigned 811 participants to one of six message conditions as part of a 3 (point of reference: family versus community versus bear) \times 2 (message framing: gain versus loss) between-subjects factorial design or a control condition. The findings show that a match between loss framing and low-construal referencing point (e.g., family-referencing), and a congruency between gain framing and high-construal referencing point (e.g., bear-referencing) lead to higher risk perception and behavioral intentions. This study provides guidance for continuing research and design of risk communication in the context of human–bear conflicts.

© 2017 Western Social Science Association. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The convergence of two changes on the landscape across North America – rapid human development in the wildland–urban interface and expansion of some wildlife populations into human-dominated areas – has resulted in growing incidence of human–wildlife interactions and subsequent increase in conflicts (Baruch-Mordo, Breck, Wilson, & Theobald, 2008; Poessel et al., 2013; Spencer, Beausoleil, & Martorello, 2007). Many of these conflicts pose severe risks to wildlife, threaten human livelihood and safety, and demand considerable resources from wildlife agencies and affected communities (Woodroffe, Thirgood, & Rabinowitz, 2005). Reducing human–wildlife conflicts

and minimizing the risks associated with them have been of increasing concern to wildlife managers, public officials, and residents of affected communities (Gore, Knuth, Scherer, & Curtis, 2008; Treves, Wallace, & White, 2009; Wieczorek Hudenko, Siemer, & Decker, 2010).

As a fundamental social process, communication plays an integral role in influencing public attitudes toward issues related to natural resources management (Tarrant, Overdeest, Bright, Cordell, & English, 1997; Teel, Bright, Manfredi, & Brooks, 2006). Educational interventions and risk communication are often considered the preferred strategies for managing human–wildlife conflicts because they have the potential to mitigate or avoid the root cause of such conflicts (Beckmann & Berger, 2003a). Indeed, many human–wildlife conflicts result from a lack of appropriate risk communication, which ideally would enhance understanding of conflicts with wildlife and empower different stakeholders to address such conflicts effectively (Madden, 2004). Despite the important role risk communication can

* Corresponding author at: Cornell University, 455 Mann Library Building, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA. Fax: +1 607 254 1322.
E-mail address: hl896@cornell.edu (H. Lu).

play in alleviating human–wildlife conflicts, research on how to present effectively information that contributes to the generation of positive outcomes (e.g., reduction of human–wildlife conflicts) in these contexts is scant (Lu, Siemer, Baumer, Decker, & Gulde, 2016; Slagle, Zajac, Bruskotter, Wilson, & Prange, 2013). Such research can guide how risk information regarding human–wildlife conflicts is organized and communicated for purposeful impact on the attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders who receive this information (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In response to the need for better risk communication concerning human–wildlife conflicts, we investigated the effectiveness of two message-level variables (i.e., point of reference and gain versus loss framing) in increasing intentions to adopt behaviors aimed at reducing human–black bear conflicts (e.g., property damage caused by black bears). In addition, we examined the role of risk perception in mediating the effects of message-level variables on conflict-prevention behavioral intentions.

1.1. Point of reference

Risk messages often convey information about the target impacted by a given risk behavior (Lindell & Perry, 2004). This target can be the individual who performs the behavior, but it can also include that individual's family and friends as well as others who are relatively distant to the individual. The different focus on the impacted target is a message-level variable referred to as point of reference, which is intended to influence the cognitive processes individuals adopt to understand incoming information that varies in psychological distance to the self (Debevec & Romeo, 1992; Segev, Fernandes, & Wang, 2015). Different types of point of reference are operative depending on psychological distance to the self: self-referencing (e.g., oneself; Escalas, 2007), self-other referencing (e.g., oneself and one's family or community; Loroz, 2007), and other-referencing (e.g., the environment; Segev et al., 2015).

Research investigating the effectiveness of different point-of-reference messages does not always yield consistent findings. On the one hand, messages that refer to a psychologically proximal target (e.g., self-referencing) are generally found to enhance learning and information recall (Klein & Loftus, 1988; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977). However, because people usually think that others are at greater risk than them, risk messages using psychologically proximal points of reference can sometimes lead to biased processing and psychological reactance, which reduce persuasion (e.g., Chen, Alden, & He, 2010). On the other hand, although messages that use psychologically distant points of reference (e.g., other-referencing) are less involving (Loroz, 2007), they are well-suited to address self-positivity bias and therefore able to augment persuasion in risk contexts (e.g., Gardner & Leshner, 2016). Despite a meta-analysis showing advantages of distant (i.e., other-referencing) versus proximal points of reference (i.e., self-referencing) in influencing health-related behaviors (Keller & Lehmann, 2008), research comparing the differential effectiveness of different types of psychologically distant points of reference is scant. For instance, is a risk message referring to a target that can be consid-

ered an extension of the self (e.g., one's community) more persuasive than one referring to a target that is clearly distinguishable from the self (e.g., the wildlife)? Focused research is warranted to investigate the nuances between these different types of psychologically distant points of reference, as they are likely to lead to different responses from the audience in a risk-related context.

Because of the broad range of targets who can be affected by an individual's behaviors, risk messages communicating information about human–wildlife conflicts are such that the selection of an appropriate referencing point is crucial for shaping message recipients' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Particularly, different actors, such as oneself, one's family and community and wildlife, are all susceptible to the risk of experiencing negative consequences of human–wildlife conflicts (e.g., a resident getting attacked by a bear; a bear being euthanized because of its attack on humans). Depending on how the audience perceives each of these actors, risk messages with different foci on the point of reference may receive quite different reactions from the audience. Since human–wildlife conflicts provide a unique context in which various points of reference (e.g., a person's family versus community versus wildlife) are involved, it poses an intriguing question of how risk messages emphasizing different points of reference may influence message recipients' intentions to engage in behaviors meant to prevent the conflicts.

1.2. Gain versus loss framing

Risk communicators often present the consequences of a behavior in one of two ways, either as benefits to gain by performing the behavior or as costs to suffer by not performing the behavior (Davis, 1995). This gain-versus-loss framing strategy has been under extensive investigation during the last few decades (Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, & Salovey, 2006). While evidence exists indicating that negative information should be more potent than positive information (e.g., Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Taylor, 1991), a series of meta-analyses showed that the differences between gain-versus-loss-framed messages were not consistent and often not significant (e.g., O'Keefe & Jensen, 2006, 2009), suggesting a need for more research into understanding the underlying mechanism through which gain-versus-loss framing functions (Van't Riet et al., 2016).

Both gain-versus-loss and point-of-reference framing are used frequently in risk communication. However, only a few studies have examined how these two message-level variables may interact with one another to influence persuasion (e.g., Loroz, 2007; Nan, 2007). For instance, Segev et al. (2015) examined how people responded to green advertising and found that a loss-framed, self-referencing message was more effective in increasing intentions to purchase green products than a loss-framed, environment-referencing message. To date, limited empirical evidence exists showing a clear pattern that helps predict how point of reference may moderate the effects of gain-versus-loss framing on attitudes and behavioral intentions. In the current study, by employing construal level theory (CLT), we

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6575946>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6575946>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)