

Ethnicity and Framing Effects on the Distribution of Satisfaction Responses

Teri R. Shaffer, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana
Bradley S. O'Hara, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond Louisiana

This paper reports findings from two studies examining the impact of decision framing on ethnic groups. In Study 1, Americans and immigrants who had attended either a seminar or consultation with an immigration law firm were sampled. Half of the respondents received positively framed satisfaction questions and the other half received negatively framed questions. No significant differences were found for the American sample. Question form had a significant impact on satisfaction responses for the immigrant sample. However, the two samples were also significantly different in respects other than ethnicity. In order to address this potentially confounding effect, a second study was conducted. In Study 2, foreign and American students from southeastern universities were matched demographically with the exception of ethnicity. Students completed a questionnaire measuring satisfaction with their most recent haircut. Results from Study 2, suggested that question form did not significantly influence the distribution of responses for either sample.

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, customer satisfaction has received more research attention than any other construct in marketing. The obvious goal of this body of research is to ascertain "true" levels of customer satisfaction. There is however, some question as to whether this goal has been achieved in much of the research reported in the literature. A common thread throughout virtually all of the satisfaction studies is the finding that self-reported measures of satisfaction are uniformly skewed left. Given this finding, Peterson and Wilson (1992) questioned whether most satisfaction ratings reflect "true" satisfaction or whether satisfaction ratings reflect, to some degree, artifacts of research methodologies and/or individual differences. To the extent that the later is true, "caution must be employed when interpreting them [self-reported measures of satisfaction] or using them in decision making" (Peterson and Wilson, 1992, p.61).

Peterson and Wilson (1992) suggest that question framing is one of the potential methodological artifacts that could partially explain the distribution of satisfaction ratings obtained in previous studies. The finding that subjects often respond differently to different descriptions of the same problem has come to be known as the "framing effect" (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). The framing effect results in decisions or questions framed in positive terms producing more positive responses than those framed in negative terms. Empirical evidence for the framing effect is found in a multitude of studies across a number of different contextual settings including civil and national defense spending (Fischho Kramer 1989); consumer borrowing and saving (Darke and Freedman, 1993; Hirst, Joyce, and Schadewald 1994); health care. (McNeil, Pauker, Sox, and Tversky, 1982; Meyerowitz and Chaiken, 1987); negotiation (Bazerman, Magliozzi, and Neale, 1985; Neale and Bazerman, 1992; Neale, Huber, and Northcraft, 1987); and social dilemmas (Brewer and Kramer, 1986; Fleishman, 1988; McDaniel and Sistrunk, 1991).

To further explore the potential confounding effects of question framing, Peterson and Wilson (1992) conducted two studies. In the first study, automobile owners from two large metropolitan areas were randomly selected to participate in a telephone interview. A split ballot approach was used: half of the subjects received a positively framed version of the survey ("How satisfied are

you with your primary vehicle?") while the other half received a negatively framed version of the survey ("How dissatisfied are you with primary vehicle?"). The findings supported a framing effect. The positively framed question elicited significantly more positive responses than the negatively framed question. In the second study, members of a national consumer panel received one of two different versions of a questionnaire. One version asked respondents if they would pay \$30 to eat at a restaurant if there was a 50 percent chance of being satisfied with the restaurant. The other version was identical to the first with the exception that participants were told there was a 50 percent chance of being dissatisfied. Although these two versions are identical from a rational choice perspective, a significant framing effect was found.

While much research has been conducted in this area, little or no work has focused on specific subgroups of the population. Thus, this research extends the work of Peterson and Wilson (1992) by investigating whether question framing has a greater influence on judgments for some consumer segments than for others. In other words, are certain segments more susceptible to framing effects than others? In at least one study, it was found that age may influence whether someone responds in ways corresponding to those predicted by Tversky and Kahneman's model (1979, 1981). This research examines another individual difference variable, ethnicity.

Ethnic consumers, including immigrants, represent a growing segment for many products and services. The population in the United States grew by 2.7 million in 1993; nearly one-third of that growth was due to immigration (Usdansky, 1994). As ethnic segments grow in number, it is paramount that we obtain customer satisfaction ratings from these groups. Moreover, it is important that we investigate whether any methodological artifacts influence the distribution of satisfaction ratings for ethnic segments. This paper reports the findings from two studies examining the impact of decision framing for immigrants and non-immigrants.

STUDY 1

Sample

A sample of American and ethnic consumers was obtained from a list of potential clients generated by a southeastern, immigration law firm. Persons that comprised this list consisted of individuals who had either attended an initial consultation with the senior lawyer of this law firm or attended a seminar conducted by this same lawyer. Prospective clients on this list consisted of both foreigners and Americans. A large number of the American citizens on the list held positions as foreign student advisors at various universities in the southeastern region of the United States.

A cross-sectional mail survey was used for the study. A systematic sampling procedure was employed. An initial sample of 520 names was randomly drawn from the complete list. The selection procedure involved randomly selecting a starting page followed by the inclusion of names contained on every other page of the mailing list. Subjects were pre-notified of the study through a monthly newsletter provided by the firm to prospective and current clients.

As the initial mailing resulted in a limited number of responses, an additional set of 300 names was randomly selected and mailed surveys. The individuals for the second mailing were selected in the same manner as the first. The poor initial response rate may have been attributable to the nature of the individuals on the mailing list and the timing of the mailings. As most of the people

on the mailing list were either students or individuals employed in higher education and both mailings occurred during the summer months, there was the potential to "miss" these individuals during the time frame of the study. Further, given the two mailings, there was a potential for differences among the two sets of respondents. As a result, sample characteristics of the first group of respondents were compared to those of the second group. No significant differences were noted.

In aggregate, 122 useable questionnaires were returned (for a response rate of 14.9%). The average age of participants was 35. Half of the sample held administrative, executive or professional positions; the other half of the sample was students. Thirty-three of the individuals were American citizens. The rest of the sample consisted of persons from 30 different countries; 15 of whom held permanent residency status; and 74 of whom had either tourist or student visas.

Measurement

Satisfaction with the seminar/consultation was measured using a modified version of Oliver's (1980) global satisfaction scale. The nine satisfaction items were scaled according to a five-point Like-type format (whereby 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Half of the respondents received surveys with positively framed satisfaction questions (e.g. "How satisfied were you ... ?"). The other half of the respondents received surveys that contained negatively framed satisfaction questions (e.g. "How dissatisfied were you... ?). Otherwise, the questionnaires were identical.

Reliability tests were performed on the satisfaction items; the results of which are shown in Table 1. First, each of the items had item-to-total correlations greater than .30; therefore all nine items were retained for analysis. Additionally, a strong Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .96 was generated which is well above expected standards, particularly for exploratory research (Nunnally, 1978). Further, to assess measurement equivalence, reliability tests were performed separately for American respondents and immigrant respondents. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .96 was maintained for both groups.

Analyses and Results

As with most satisfaction research, the distribution of the satisfaction items in this study were negatively skewed (Peterson and Wilson, 1992). Cross-tabulation analyses were performed for each of the nine items. In the cross-tabulation procedures, the impact of framing was investigated for each group. For the American sample, there were no significant differences found in responses to the nine satisfaction items between respondents receiving positively and negatively framed questions (Table 2). However, for the immigrant sample, question form had a significant impact on satisfaction responses (Table 2). Significant differences were detected for six of the nine items ($p < .05$) and marginal differences were found for the other three items ($p < 10$). Positively framed questions resulted in a greater incidence of satisfied responses.

Although these results would suggest that question framing may produce more serious confounding effects for some consumer groups than for others, these results should be viewed with two limitations in mind. First, given the small sample of Americans ($n=33$) and the skewed distributions of responses, there was in some cases an inadequate number of people in each response category. A problem such as this can distort the chi-square value (McDaniel and Gates,

1991). Second, the American and immigrant samples were significantly different in respects other than ethnicity. In particular, the immigrant sample consisted of more younger, male students than the American sample. Thus, in order to address these limitations and to isolate the impact of framing on different ethnic groups, a second study was conducted.

STUDY 2

Sample

A student sample was utilized for the second study. Foreign students who attend different southeastern universities completed a short, self-administered questionnaire measuring satisfaction with the place that they received their most recent haircut (n=185). Satisfaction with a haircut was chosen as the focal product/service because it was felt that most consumers, American and foreign, purchase a haircut on a regular basis. Once again, a split ballot approach was used whereby half of the respondents received positively framed questions and the other half received negatively framed questions.

One of the deficiencies noted in Study 1 was that the American and immigrant samples were not equivalent demographically. In Study 2, an attempt was made to sample American students such that they were demographically equivalent to the foreign students except for ethnicity. In this respect, a convenience sample of American students and graduates from a southeastern university were also asked to complete the same questionnaire using a split ballot approach (n=155). Sixty percent of the total sample consisted of males. The majority of the sample (66%) had an undergraduate degree or less. Slightly more than half of the sample (53%) was under the age of 24. Cross-tabulation procedures were performed to assess the equivalence of the foreign and American samples. No significant differences were detected.

Measurements

Satisfaction with the establishment where respondents' received their most recent haircut was measured using a modified version of Oliver's (1980) satisfaction scale. Seven items were included in the student survey. As in Study 1, satisfaction was assessed on a 5point Likert scale where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". Reliability tests were performed for the student sample as a whole and separately for the American and foreign student samples. Each of the items had item-to-total correlations greater than .30; therefore, all seven items were retained for analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .96 which is well above accepted standards (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also .96 for the American and foreign student samples individually (Table 1).

Analyses and Results

As in Study 1, the distribution of the satisfaction items were negatively skewed in Study 2. Using cross-tabulation procedures, the impact of framing was examined for the foreign and the American samples. There were no significant differences detected (Table 2). Unlike Study 1, question form did not significantly influence the distribution of responses for either sample in Study 2.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The potential impact of ethnicity on satisfaction research is conceptually appealing and has considerable importance for investigators. Minimally, the mixed findings from this exploratory study on framing effects suggest that ethnicity should be controlled in future research settings. Further, the wave of satisfaction research that has come to delineate many research firms and marketing corporations may be questionable if this demographic factor has not been taken into account.

In this light, we admit that our research may be somewhat flawed. Findings from Study 1, as previously mentioned, may be suspect due to different sample sizes and other demographic differences between these groups. Additionally, the use of different services as our stimulus object in Studies 1 and 2 may also impact findings as research has shown that variables such as these influence satisfaction ratings (Peterson and Wilson, 1992). A haircut (a repeated service encounter for all individuals) may not elicit the same results as seeking legal services (a one time service encounter for many individuals). Additionally, satisfaction data using different research modes may not be comparable (Peterson and Wilson, 1992). Study 1 results were obtained through self-administered questionnaires returned by mail, while Study 2 findings were based on self-administered questionnaires completed in face-to-face settings. Finally, the issue of timing may also put these findings in jeopardy. Customer satisfaction appears to be highest immediately subsequent to consumption, and tends to decrease over time (Fisk, Brown, Cannizzaro, and Naftal, 1983). No provisions were made to control for the time between the provision of the service and administration of satisfaction instrument.

All of this suggests that future research in the satisfaction area must control for several factors such as timing and utilize equivalent research methodologies. However, with respect to framing, we strongly suggest that future efforts be focused on examining a particular ethnic group as opposed to using a "melting pot" approach such as that used in this study (i.e., individuals from over 30 ethnic groups were treated as one). As ethnicity has been shown to influence several issues such as attitudes towards advertising (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee, 1993) and brand loyalty (Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu, 1986), an examination of satisfaction issues along ethnic lines is essential to the efforts of marketers as they attempt to become more efficient and effective in the provision of products and services.

REFERENCES

- Alden, Dana L., Hoyer, Wayne D. and Lee, Choi, Identifying Global and Cultural Specific Dimensions of Humor In Advertising: A Multinational Analysis. *J. of Marketing* 57 (1993): pp. 64-75.
- Bazerman, M. H., Magliozzi, T., and Neale, M. A., Integrative Bargaining in a Competitive Market. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 35 (1985): pp. 294-313.
- Brewer, M. B. and Kramer, R. M., Choice Behavior in Social Dilemmas: Effects of Social Identity, Group Size, and Decision Framing. *J. of Personality and Social Psychology* 50 (1986): pp. 543-549.
- Darke, Peter R. and Freedman, Jonathan L., Deciding Whether to Seek a Bargain: Effects of Both Amount and Percentage Off. *J. of Applied Psychology* 78 (December 1993): pp. 960-965.

Deshpande, Rohit, Hoyer, Wayne D., and Donthu, Naveen, The Intensity of Ethnic Affiliations: A Study of the Sociology of Hispanic Consumption. *J. of Consumer Research* 13 (1986): pp. 214-220.

Fischhoff, Baruch, Predicting Frames. *J. of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 9 (1983): pp. 103-116.

Fisk, Trevor A., Brown, Carmheil J., Cannizzro, Kathleen, and Naftal, Barbara, Creating Patient Satisfaction and Loyalty. *J. of Health Care Marketing* 10 (1983): pp. 5-15.

Fleishman, John A., The Effects of Decision Framing and Others' Behavior on Cooperation in a Social Dilemma. *J. of Conflict Resolution* 32 (March 1988): pp. 162-180.

Hirst, D. Eric, Joyce, Edward J., and Schadewald Michael S., Mental Accounting and Outcome Contiguity in Consumer- Borrowing Decisions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 58 (April 1994): pp. 136-152.

Kahneman, Daniel and Tversky, Amos, Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk. *Econometrica* 47 (March 1979): pp. 263-291.

Kramer, Roderick M., Windows of Vulnerability or Cognitive Illusions? Cognitive Processes and the Nuclear Arms Race. *J. of aperimental Social Psychology* 25 (January 1989): pp. 79- 100.

McDaniel, Carl and Gates, Roger, *Contemporary Marketing Research*. West Publishing Co., St. Paul, MN., 1991.

McDaniel, William C. and Sistrunk, Francis, Management Dilemmas and Decisions: Impact of Framing and Anticipated Responses. *J. of Conflict Resolution* 35 (March 1991):pp.2142.

McNei,B., Pauker, S. G., Sox, H. C., and Tversky, A., On the Elicitation of Preferences for Alternative Therapies. *New England Journal of Medicine* 306 (1982): pp. 1259-1262.

Meyerowitz, B. E. and Chaiken, S., The Effect of Message Framing on Breast Self-Examination Attitudes, Intentions, and Behavior. *J. of Personality and Social Psychobgy* 52 (1987): pp. 500-510.

Neale, Margaret A. and Bazerman, Max H., Negotiating

Rationally: The Power and Impact of the Negotiator's Frame. *Academy of Management Executive* 6 (August 1992): pp. 4251.

Neale, M . A., Huber, V. L., and Northcraft, G. B., The Framing of Negotiations: Contextual Versus Task Frames. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 39 (1987): pp. 228-24 1.

Nunnally, Jum C., *Psychometric Theory*. Mc-Graw-Hill, Inc., New York, NY., 1978. Oliver, Richaid, A Cognitive Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Satisfaction Decisions. *J.*

of Marketing Res. 17 (November 1980): pp. 460-469.

Peterson, Robert A. and Wilson, William R., Measuring Customer Satisfaction: Fact and Artifact. *J. of the Academy of Marketing Science* 20 (Winter 1992): pp. 61-71.

Tversky, Amos and Kahneman, Daniel, The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice. *Science* 211 (January 1981): pp. 453-458.

Usdansky, Margaret L., Population of the USA up to 259,353,627, USA Today (January 3, 1994): Sec A, p 1.

TABLE 1. ITEM TO TOTAL CORRELATIONS AND CRONBACH'S ALPRA			
Study 1 Items	Total Sample(n=122)	American Sample (n=33)	Immigrant Sample(n=89)
Overall, I am very satisfied with xxx	.84	.88	.82
My choice to go to the seminar/consultation was a wise one.	.87	.86	.87
If I had it to do all over again, I would still go to the semi n ar/consu Itation.	.83	.80	.84
I don't feel bad about my choice to go to the seminar/consultation.	.86	.89	.85
I think I did the right thing when I decided to go to the seminar/consultation with xxx	.89	.88	.89
I am pleased with the information provided at the seminar/consultation.	.88	.86	.89
If I had it to do all over again, I would go to another seminar/consultation with xxx	.79	.71	.82
I would recommend that others attend a seminar/consultation given by xxx	.85	.86	.85
If I were to need future legal assistance with immigration issues I would consider going to xxx	.78	.81	.77
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	.96	.96	.96

Study 2 Items	Total Sample(n=340)	American Sample(n=155)	Immigrant Sample (n=185)
Overall, I am very satisfied with the place where I got my haircut	.87	.89	.85
My choice to go to this haircut place was a wise one.	.89	.88	.88
If I had it to do all over again, I would still go to the place where I got my haircut.	.87	.89	.84
I don't feel bad about my choice to go to this haircut place.	.87	.87	.86
I think I did the right thing when I decided			

to go to this haircut place.	.89	.89	.88
I would recommend that others use this haircut place.	.86	.82	.88
If I were to need future assistance, I would consider going to this haircut place.	.86	.91	.80
Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	.96	.96	.96

TABLE 2. FRAMING EFFECTS FOR AMERICANS AND IMMIGRANTS Chi-Square (Significance)		
Study 1	American Sample	Immigrant Sample
Overall, I am very satisfied with xxx	1.06 (.589)	12.65 (.002)
My choice to go to the seminar/consultation was a wise one.	.62 (.733)	6.00 (.050)
If I had it to do all over again, I would still go to the seminar/consultation.	.31 (.855)	5.40 (.067)
I don't feel bad about my choice to go to the seminar/consultation.	2.17 (.338)	9.98 (.007)
I think I did the right thing when I decided to go to the seminar/consultation with xxx	1.43 (.488)	11.63 (.003)
I am pleased with the information provided at the seminar/consultation.	.79 (.673)	5.68 (.058)
If I had it to do all over again, I would go to another seminar/consultation with xxx	1.52 (.467)	9.62 (.008)
I would recommend that others attend a seminar/consultation given by xxx	.93 (.629)	9.00 (.011)
If I were to need future legal assistance with immigration issues I would consider going to xxx	1.84 (.398)	5.79 (.055)
Study 2	American Sample	Immigrant Sample
Overall, I am very satisfied with the place where I got my haircut.	7.94 (.09)	.93 (.92)
My choice to go to this haircut place was a wise one.	4.60 (.33)	3.37 (.50)
If I had it to do all over again, I would still go to the place where I got my haircut.	1.82 (.77)	2.63 (.62)
I don't feel bad about my choice to go to this haircut place.	6.87 (.14)	5.88 (.21)
I think I did the right thing when I decided to go to this haircut place.	3.48 (.48)	6.20 (.18)
I would recommend that others use this haircut place.	7.23 (.12)	5.20 (.27)

If I were to need future assistance, I would consider going to this haircut place.	3.01 (.55)	6.56 (.16)
--	------------	------------