

Executive Summary

People consume service experiences that combine pleasure and pain (e.g., roller coaster rides, massage therapy)—but the question of how to market such experiences is not well understood. The present research investigates consumer response to such service offerings as a function of: i) hedonic framing that emphasizes pain versus pleasure; ii) promotion versus prevention concerns either chronically or situationally salient to consumers; and iii) the presence versus absence of a service guarantee. Four experimental studies provided consistent evidence for the congruency effect between a pain frame and a promotion focus and between a pleasure frame and a prevention focus—consumers with promotion (prevention) concerns tend to react more favorably to a hedonic appeal emphasizing pain (pleasure).

This research provides several important managerial implications. A promotion or prevention focus may be momentarily heightened and induced through what people see and hear (e.g., TV, YouTube, magazines). For instance, the reality competition series *The Voice* is about realizing the dream of becoming a professional singer, potentially activating a promotion focus. Conversely, the documentary TV series *Mayday* covering air crash investigations may trigger a prevention focus. Therefore, marketers should ensure that their hedonic appeals are consistent with consumers' situational regulatory concerns, through a strategic selection of marketing vehicles. For example, pain-framed appeals can be inserted into shows similar to *The Voice*, and pleasure-framed appeals can be used in shows like *Mayday*.

Second, the study findings have important implications for online marketing. Employing big data and dynamic targeting technology, service providers can display targeted advertisements based on the viewer's unique profile, such as personal background and browsing data. Therefore, pain-framed appeals should be displayed to consumers who have recently searched or purchased promotion-focused products and services (e.g., RedBull, teeth whitening, stock investments), whereas pleasure-framed appeals could be sent to consumers who have recently browsed or used prevention-related products and services (e.g. insurance, flu shots, baby car seats).

Third, service providers offering experiences that combine pleasure and pain should develop marketing communications that leverage the hedonic framing effect. Specifically, a pain frame is best paired with information regarding promotion benefits, whereas a pleasure frame is most suitable when emphasizing prevention benefits. In addition, service marketers should pay attention to the congruency of hedonic framing with the service's broader positioning strategy. For example, CrossFit PHX uses the following advertising slogan: "The pain you feel today will be the strength you feel tomorrow!" That is, a pain frame coupled with a promotion-focused benefit that aligns with the brand's broader positioning.

Finally, this research provides practical guidance for using services guarantees. In the context of pain-framed appeals, offering a service guarantee has opposing effects. Specifically, service guarantees are effective when prevention concerns are salient but backfire when promotion concerns are activated. Hence, firms should consider the interplay of service guarantees with consumers' regulatory concerns and the firm's marketing communications. Consumers with a situational prevention focus might find service guarantees more attractive than their promotion-focused counterparts. When a pleasure-framed appeal is used, however, offering service guarantees has minimal impact—suggesting that service firms should deploy their resources elsewhere.