Message strategies to promote healthy behavior: loss framed or gain framed?

Authors: Leila Jahangiri*, Tahere Pashaei

Abstract: Introduction: Messaging is the process of moving the message through people to which the audience is more apt to relate, in situations that offer opportunities for action in which the audience is more apt to engage. Method: Prospect theory describes the nonlinear relationship between gains and losses in objective outcomes and one’s subjective reactions to them. The framing implications of prospect theory suggest that individuals respond differently to factually equivalent messages depending on whether they are framed to emphasize either benefits (gain framed) or costs (loss-framed). Prospect theory also suggests that when gains are salient, people are averse to risk, and when losses are prominent, individuals seek risk.

Results: This concept applies to messages intended to promote health. Gain-framed appeals are more effective when targeting behaviors that prevent the onset of disease, whereas loss-framed appeals are more effective when targeting behaviors that detect the presence of a disease. Gain-framed messages are more effective in motivating prevention behaviors such as sunscreen use at the beach because these behaviors will very likely prevent health problems (e.g., skin cancer) and incur few risks. In contrast, behaviors result in an outcome associated with a high level of risk, loss-framed messages are more effective compared to loss-framed messages. Studies on the use of sunscreen, the use of infant car seats, and intentions to use condoms endorsed that gain-framed messages were more effective compared to loss-framed messages.

Discussion: In light of these findings, we consider how message frames may affect other types of health behaviors and identify the need to understand better the processes that shape how people construe health behaviors. It is not clear that in Iran what types of message framing would work better in adopting preventive or detective behavior.

Presentation: Oral