

Framing Themes of Palm Oil in Google Images English-Language Advertisements

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Abstract

The need to analyse the framing themes used for palm oil in a language largely used by business professionals which is English, is a response to the implementation of RED II and other related policy changes that have affected the palm oil industry since 2018. This study examines the framing themes employed in English-language palm oil advertisements post-2018, sourced from Google Images, utilising a content analysis approach. The study aims to investigate the framing themes employed in English-language palm oil advertisements sourced from Google Image Findings reveal that there are positive and negative framings used, influenced by geopolitical factors. The study contributes to our understanding of how palm oil and palm oil industry are portrayed in advertisements, offering valuable insights for policymakers, communication strategists, and researchers interested in the societal and environmental implications of this pivotal economic pillar of South-East Asian countries.

Keywords: *Positive and negative framing, palm oil, advertisement.*

Introduction

Palm oil, sourced from the fruit of the oil palm tree is one of the most used vegetable oils that are traded internationally. It is widely used as a main ingredient in many products ranging from foods, and cosmetics, to biofuels. Its importance, according to Naidu and Moorthy (2021) increases with the growing need for renewable energy. Indonesia, Malaysia and the European Union (EU) are three key participants in the worldwide oil palm trade with Indonesia and Malaysia from the South East Asian region being respectively the world's first and second-ranked producers of palm oil (Gardner & Rylander, 2022; ITA, 2021, Schouten et al., 2023). Both countries have significantly generated 90 percent of all palm oil produced worldwide (Arief et al., 2020; MPOC, n.d.). The EU on the other hand, has grown to be one of the biggest users of palm oil, especially for use as a renewable energy source (Widiani, 2017).

Palm oil is well regarded for its affordability and nutritional value and is making a substantial contribution to the world's need for oil and fat (Hinkes, 2019; Lim et al., 2015). Despite its extensive use and importance, palm oil has become a subject of global debate for many years. It has received “environmental criticism”, and has been said to cause unfavourable environmental, economic, and sustainability effects (Lim et al., 2015). The palm oil industry has been associated with deforestation, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss in regions where palm oil is cultivated (Lim et. al 2015; Schouten et. al, 2023). Concerns about labour rights violations and social injustices in palm oil production have also been raised (Sinaga, 2013; Setiyono et al., 2021). With all these negative messages being associated with palm oil, the European Parliament's 2017 “resolution 2016/222 (INI)” on "Palm Oil and Deforestation of Rainforest" sought to restrict the use of palm oil in the EU because of its link to deforestation. 2018 saw the adoption of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), which gradually phased away subsidies for high-ILUC biofuels, such as those derived from palm oil. With the implementation of RED II in 2019, the EU's stance on biofuels and environmental standards changed. In 2018, the European Parliament approved for the phase-out of solely based palm oil biofuels to start in early 2021 while other vegetable oils by 2030.

Message framing, rooted in the theory of frame analysis with influences from Erving Goffman's (1974) work is a strategic communication approach involving a strategic selection of language, emphasis, and context to deliberately shape the information presented to influence how people perceive, understand and respond to it (Alozie, 2005). Framing can be defined as the act of presenting information in a manner that diverts focus from specific elements while at the same time emphasising other aspects and has a role in shaping decision-making (Bullock and Schulman, 2021; Huang et al., 2021). Hence, it can significantly

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impact consumers' attitudes and intentions of use or purchase (Huang et al., 2021). Positive message framing emphasises the benefits and positive outcomes of a particular issue or decision, highlighting potential rewards and advantages. Conversely, negative message framing focuses on the risks and negative outcomes associated with an issue or decision, emphasising potential drawbacks and adverse consequences (Cheng et al., 2018). Both positive and negative framing can be effective, depending on the context and audience (Alozie, 2005; Bullock & Schulman, 2021; Entman, 1993; Fetter et al., 2019; Gitlin, 1980; Huang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Shan et al., 2020).

Since 2018, some research has been conducted on how messages on palm oil are framed. Hinkes (2019) for instance, studied how palm oil sustainability was framed by the European Union's policies. Rahmadan and Setiawati (2021) looked at the message-framing in the content of Indonesian local newspaper agencies, "Harian Kompas and The Jakarta Post". Schouten et al. (2023) also analysed the framing done in newspaper articles from Malaysia and the Netherlands. With 'The Internet of Things (IoT)' today, ways of how messages on palm oil are framed to the world through business English advertisements on online platforms, since the implementation of RED II in 2018 need to be looked into. Hence, this study aims to analyse the message-framing themes employed in English-language palm oil advertisements since 2018, sourced from Google Images.

Literature Review

Message Framing of Food Industry

Chen and Desalvo (2021) examined message framing in reducing food waste and observed that it influenced participants' attitudes towards food waste reduction messages in buffet-style restaurants. Consequently, framing through visual cues was recommended to encourage customers to prevent food waste and enhance their corporate social responsibility (CSR) perception. Kim et al. (2021) who investigated the use of clean and safety-oriented message framing in small restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that such framing not only made restaurant customers feel safer but also led to more positive repurchase intentions and improved sales volume. Negatively-framed messages used in advertisements of organic food were reported to enhance the appeal of organic food and significantly affected customers' attitudes and repurchase intentions (Kim et. al, 2021; Shan et. al, 2020).

Jada and Berg (2022) conducted an experimental study on promoting the adoption of biofortified maize in Ethiopia. They compared gain-framed and loss-framed messages and said that gain-framed messages were slightly more effective and had higher persuasiveness in promoting behaviour change. Few other researchers also supported the idea that the gain framing method has higher efficacy and persuasiveness than the loss framing method (Chen & DeSalvo, 2021, Huang et. al, 2021; Kim et. al, 2021). Wen and Lee (2019) who focused on food allergy communication and used gain-framed and loss-framed messages to assess their impact on restaurant customers with food allergies, reported similar findings. Their results showed that gain-framed messages were more persuasive, leading to increased communication with restaurant staff among allergic customers. Gain-framed messages were perceived as more useful, good, pleasant, and wiser, indicating their effectiveness in contrast to fear-mongering tactics.

Message Framing of Food Nutrition

In the realm of nutrition, Vidal et al. (2019) conducted research on the impacts of message framing on the use of nutritional warnings in decision-making. They found that both loss and gain-framed messages increased participants' attention to nutritional warnings. However, loss-framed messages were more efficient in encouraging participants to pay attention to the warnings during their decision-making process. This was supported by Eguren et al. (2021) who also observed the effectiveness of loss-framed messages in influencing consumers' use of nutritional warnings. These findings underscore the significance of message framing in the domain of nutrition.

However, Cucchiara et al. (2015) found that positively framed messages are more persuasive in encouraging organic food sales, highlighting the significance of a positive approach. Rosenblatt et al. (2019) who examined the influence of message framing and graphic imagery on perceptions of food product health warnings found that the use of negative message framing and imagery contributed to higher perceived

efficacy ratings compared to text-only and positively framed health warnings, underlining the power of negative framing in this domain.

Fetter et al. (2019) explored gain-framed and loss-framed health messages related to nutrition and physical activity knowledge and discovered that loss-framed messages were less effective, contradicting other research that had suggested their higher efficacy. In a different context, Binder et al. (2020) studied the influence of gain and loss-framed nutritional messages on children's healthy eating behaviour. Their research indicated that gain-framing was more successful in influencing kids' decisions about healthful eating, emphasising its superiority over loss-framing in this specific domain. These studies collectively underscore the nuanced and context-dependent nature of message framing, offering valuable insights into the art of persuasive business communication while raising questions about the consistency of message framing effects in communication.

Message Framing of Palm Oil Industry

Studies of message framing on palm oil sustainability have been done on Malaysian, Dutch and Indonesian media. Schouten et al. (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of the ways the Malaysian and Dutch media portray palm oil sustainability in Malaysia and the Netherlands. The findings of the analysis uncover that the Malaysian media portrays palm oil as a sustainable sector, rooted in a mistrust of international sustainability governance organisations, emphasising a belief that developing nations are unfairly treated by Western powers. Malaysian palm oil industries however, face criticism from pressure groups and green activists (Lim et al., 2015). In contrast, Dutch media depicts the West as proud users of palm oil, asserting their commitment to raising sustainability standards through international processes and NGO scrutiny.

In the case of Indonesia, Rahmadan and Setiawati (2021) explored how Indonesian newspaper agencies framed the issue of palm oil between Indonesia and the European Union's argument about the Renewable Energy Directive (RED) and Delegate Act. The result revealed that Indonesia defended its palm oil industry's image from being tarnished through negative message framings. Indonesia also conducted diplomatic discussions with other countries and international organisations to counteract the negative framing of the palm oil industry done by the EU (Noor, 2020). Both Indonesia and Malaysia negatively framed the policy change by the EU as a "ban on palm oil," a form of "crop apartheid," and the potential start of a "trade war." (Hinkes, 2019).

Message Framing of Biodiversity and Environmental Awareness

Literature has reported the impact of message framing in the domain of biodiversity conservation and environmental communication. Jacobson et al. (2018) conducted a study that embedded message framing in a series of simple videos designed to promote environmental conservation. Their findings revealed the persuasive power of message framing as respondents expressed a greater willingness to provide financial support and volunteer their time to organisations that produced positively framed videos as opposed to negatively framed ones. Chia et al. (2021) obtained similar findings when they explored the interactive effects of message framing and information content on carbon offsetting behaviours, specifically in the context of reducing excessive carbon emissions. Their research indicated that gain-framed messaging had a substantial positive effect on customers' purchasing intentions. On contrary, Amatulli et al. (2017) who examined how companies framed messages to highlight the detrimental environmental consequences of choosing less eco-friendly options (negative frame) or the beneficial consequences of choosing greener alternatives (positive frame) discovered that the negative framing approach was more efficient in encouraging pro-environmental behaviour. Respondents were inclined to adopt eco-friendly practices when confronted with the potential shame associated with choosing less environmentally responsible options, shedding light on the complex interplay of emotions and motivations in message framing.

Apart from positive and negative framings, Matchet and Armoudian (2020) conducted a comprehensive content analysis that examined various message-framing strategies for effective marine conservation communication. They identified six distinct message frame types, including emotional, problem/solution, outcome, value-based, distance, and social norm frames. Each of these frames was found to potentially meet the demand for effective marine conservation messaging, further underscoring the versatility of message framing in raising awareness and promoting behavioural change in the realm of marine conservation. Kusmanoff et al. (2020) on the other hand emphasised five critical lessons to guide more

effective biodiversity conservation message framing. These lessons include the importance of highlighting items that resonate with the audience, recalling positive social norms, minimising psychological distance, harnessing useful cognitive biases, and rigorously testing the effectiveness of communications. These guidelines serve as a valuable framework for developing persuasive and impactful messages in the conservation field.

Methodology




To gather the data for this study, a systematic approach was employed by searching picture advertisements from Google Images, an online search tool specifically designed for finding images on the internet, developed by the Google search engine. First, picture advertisements from Google Images were searched and sifted using the “Palm Oil Advertisements in English”. Then, a selection process of identifying, collecting, and sifting out a significant number of 231 picture advertisements was conducted to ensure relevant content and to avoid redundancies or similarities. The advertisements had to have captions written in English and the countries involved in the narration of palm oil were also observed. The advertisements were then organised by the publication date, the country involved, the link leading directly to the picture advertisements, and the themes used. As a result, a total of 12 post-2018 English picture advertisements were decided to be relevant for analysis.

The data was analysed in a 3 step-sequential process proposed by Alozie (2005). The first step involved multiple readings of the captions in the picture advertisements to capture the nuances and key points within the text. In the second step, a more focused examination was done to identify recurring themes and how the messages about palm oil were framed. In the final step, further analysis was done to scrutinise the language choices and discursive techniques to identify the advertisers’ stance through the framing of messages. The frames were later categorised to be positive or negative.

Findings

The objective of this study was to analyse how the messages of palm oil were framed in English-language palm oil advertisements after the adoption of the EU’s Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) in 2018. The analyses of the relevant picture advertisements sourced from Google Images showed that while palm oil is framed positively, the industry of palm oil is portrayed negatively. Malaysia was found to be the most active country in framing this vegetable oil positively followed by India. In contrast, the United States of America has been active in framing the palm oil industry, and not palm oil itself, negatively, followed by Uruguay. Moreover, no counter arguments were found on the positively framed palm oil. For the negatively framed palm oil industry, captions on the industry being sustainable with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), was used as a counter argument.

Table 1. Positive Framing Themes in Malaysian and Indian Advertisements

Countries and Organisations	Descriptions	Advertisements
Malaysia (MPOC)	<p>In advertisement 1, the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) frames the health benefits of palm oil compared to other oils because it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. nutritious, citing a balanced fatty acid composition and rich in vitamin E tocotrienols. 2. stable at high-temperature cooking unlike other vegetable oils <p>It is also framed to be sustainable when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is environmentally friendly, with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) that save resources and minimise pollution. 2. Malaysian Palm Oil is the first vegetable oil in the world to have received certification for sustainability. 	 <p>Why Malaysian Palm Oil is better than other vegetable oils?</p> <p>NUTRITIOUS It has a balanced fatty acid composition and is rich in vitamin E tocotrienols.</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) that save resources and minimise pollution are practiced in all palm plantations.</p> <p>PERFORMANCE AT HIGH TEMPERATURE Unlike other vegetable oils, palm oil can sustain high temperature of up to 220°C, making it an ideal choice for cooking at high heat.</p> <p>SUSTAINABLE Malaysian Palm Oil is the first vegetable oil in the world to have received certification for sustainability.</p>
Malaysia (MPOC)	<p>In advertisement 2, again the health benefits of palm oil are framed by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) as the oil is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. nutritious, highlighting that it contains vitamin E tocotrienols, free of trans fat and cholesterol, suitable for vegans, and non-GMO. <p>Again, it is framed to be sustainable when it is stated that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Malaysian Palm Oil is the first vegetable oil in the world to have received certification for sustainability. 	 <p>MALAYSIAN PALM OIL Healthy & Nutritious</p> <p>HEALTHY & NUTRITIOUS Free of trans fat and cholesterol, suitable for vegans, and non-GMO.</p> <p>ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) that save resources and minimise pollution are practiced in all palm plantations.</p> <p>SUSTAINABLE Malaysian Palm Oil is the first vegetable oil in the world to have received certification for sustainability.</p>
Malaysia (MPOC)	<p>Like previous advertisements, in advertisement 3, the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) frames palm oil to be healthful for its:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. nutritional benefits, possessing a balanced fatty acid composition and is low in linolenic acid. 2. to be the most stable frying oil that does not oxidise easily. 	 <p>MALAYSIAN PALM OIL</p> <p>has a balanced fatty acid composition, low in linolenic acid, making it the most stable frying oil.</p> <p>It does not oxidise easily.</p>

<p>Malaysia (Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd)</p>	<p>Advertisement 4 by Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd frames palm oil to be good for health as it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a premium fruit oil 2. versatile, withstanding heat up to 235C 3. healthy, being a healthy choice for all cooking needs, emphasising its absence of cholesterol and trans-fat, rich in Phytonutrient, and naturally contains vitamins A and E. 4. food quality enhancer and retainer of food natural goodness. 	 <p>Figure 4. Advertisement 4</p>
<p>Malaysia (Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd)</p>	<p>In advertisement 5, Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd frames palm oil as the oil that have health gains as it can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. improve energy levels 2. improve vision 3. prevent cardiovascular issues 4. prevent chronic diseases 5. support a healthy pregnancy <p>It is also framed to be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a good oil 2. an oil that brings more luck or prosperity (more 'ONG' in Chinese) 	 <p>Figure 5. Advertisement 5</p>
<p>Malaysia (Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd)</p>	<p>Advertisement 6 show that the Muhibah's advertisement frames palm oil to be beneficial for health because it can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. be a great source of vitamin E 2. be rich in antioxidants 3. aid in keeping a healthy immune system. 	 <p>Figure 6. Advertisement 6.</p>



<p>Malaysia (Profes Lipid Sdn Bhd - Harvist)</p>	<p>In advertisement 7 by Profes Lipid Sdn Bhd, palm oil is framed to have health benefits as it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. nutritional, highlighting that its palm oil product contains vitamin A, E, and Co-Q10. 2. suitable for Cooking and Frying 	 <p>Figure 7. Advertisement 7.</p>
<p>India</p>	<p>Stylecraze in India framed palm oil as good for wellness and beauty in its message as the oil that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. full of antioxidants and high vitamin E content, and tocotrienols that include anti-aging properties; protect from harmful UV rays and other contaminants. 2. contains unsaturated fats said to be beneficial for stronger bones, joints, and skin. 3. has zero trans-fat which makes it an ideal cooking medium, particularly for individuals aiming to lose weight. 4. has a lot of vitamin K that contributes to improving bone health and serves "as a blood coagulant. 	 <p>Figure 8. Advertisement 8.</p>

Table 1 shows that palm oil has been positively framed in English-language palm oil advertisements on Google Images since 2018 by Malaysia (seven advertisements), and India (one advertisement). The

advertisements were posted by MPOC (Malaysian Palm Oil Council), Muhibah Palm Product Sdn. Bhd. and Profes Lipid Sdn Bhd which produces red palm cooking oil under the brand, Harvist. In general, the positive themes employed are palm oil is a product that brings health benefits and luck/prosperity, is environmentally sustainable; and has cooking and food processing advantages. In India, Stylecraze, an online platform and a one-stop destination for advice on beauty, health and wellness, and lifestyle, framed palm oil as a source of wellness and beauty.

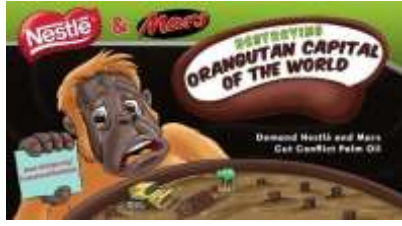
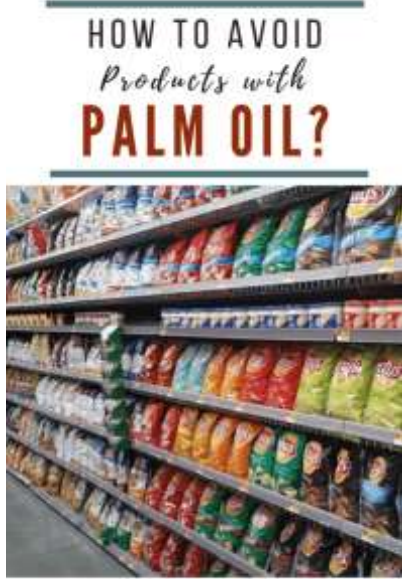

In terms of health benefits, various nutritional attributes of palm oil are foregrounded by the 4 organisations in their picture advertisements. Palm oil is framed as a source of good health, namely, it has a balanced fatty acid composition, unsaturated fats, vitamins A, E, Co-Q10, and zero trans-fat. It is also said to be rich in vitamin E tocotrienols, vitamin K, antioxidants, and phytonutrients, low in linolenic acid, and free of trans fat as well as cholesterol. The goodness of the oil in promoting wellness and beauty is also elaborated when it is associated with Ong or luck/prosperity, and the ability to protect the skin from harmful UV rays. Palm oil is mentioned to be able to provide an ideal cooking medium for stronger bones, joints, skin, and improve bone health. It is said to serve as a blood coagulant, support a healthy pregnancy, improve energy levels, improve vision, prevent cardiovascular issues, and prevent chronic diseases. Palm oil has been regarded as the best cooking oil for anyone trying to lose weight.

Among all advertisers, only the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) framed palm oil production as environmentally friendly, highlighting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), where palm oil is the first vegetable oil in the world to have received certification for sustainability.

Another positive framing used in most picture advertisements is palm oil's exceptional qualities in cooking and food processing. An advertisement from MPOC emphasises the oil's stability at high temperatures, making it an ideal choice for various culinary applications. It is stated in the advertisements that palm oil maintains its structural integrity at temperatures as high as 220°C, while in other advertisements it is mentioned that palm oil can withstand heat up to 235 degrees Celsius and does not oxidise easily while acting as food quality enhancer and retainer of food natural goodness.

Table 2. Negative Framing Themes and Description.

Countries and Organisations	Descriptions	Advertisements
United States of America (Global Green Travel)	Global Green Travel frames the act of buying products with palm oil as a move that encourages the destruction of orangutan habitat.	 <p>50% of all packaged food contains palm oil. Buying products made with palm oil encourages orangutan habitat destruction.</p> <p>Figure 9. Advertisement 9.</p>

<p>United States of America (Rainforest Action Network (RAN))</p>	<p>Rainforest Action Network (RAN)) also frames the act of buying products with palm oil as a move that encourages the destruction of the orangutan capital of the world.</p>	 <p>Figure 10. Advertisement 10.</p>
<p>United States America (Global Green Travel)</p>	<p>Global Green Travel discriminates against palm oil by asking the question: "How to avoid products with palm oil?"</p>	 <p>Figure 11. Advertisement 11.</p>
<p>Uruguay (World Rainforest Movement (WRM))</p>	<p>World Rainforest Movement (WRM discriminates palm oil by suggesting "Nine reasons to say No to contract farming with palm oil companies" and by mentioning about farmers losing out if they were to get involved in the palm oil industry.</p>	 <p>Figure 12. Advertisement 12.</p>

Negative message framings were also used in palm oil picture advertisements by different countries and organisations. As seen in Table 4.2, the negative themes that were employed in English-language palm oil advertisements were the environmental impact of the palm oil industry on orangutan habitat and why discrimination against products containing palm oil should be done. Three picture advertisements from the United States of America and one from Uruguay were found in the negative framing. It is observed that not many details are provided in the negative frames, unlike those messages which were framed positively. Implications of buying or producing palm oil were also not as detailed as those provided in positively framed messages.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study on framing themes in post-2018 English-language palm oil picture advertisements sourced from Google Images reveals how palm oil is portrayed with both positive and negative framings being present across advertisements, notably from two different groups of advertisers – Malaysia and India who frame it positively and the United States of America and Uruguay that choose to use negative framings for the

vegetable oil. Positive frames palm oil consumption have been used for messages related to potential health benefits, and prosperity are similar to the approaches on food nutrition, highlighted by Fetter et al. (2019) and Binder et al. (2020). Positive framings on palm oil production that emphasise "Environmentally friendly practices" and the implementation of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to prioritise sustainability, echoes previous research highlighting palm oil's potential sustainability by Lim et al. (2015). Negative framings, conversely, are used to highlight environmental consequences, such as habitat destruction and deforestation unlike the issues labour rights violations and social injustices in palm oil production raised by Sinaga (2013) and Setiyono et al. (2021). There is no negative framing specifically regarding palm oil's use as a cooking ingredient, with advertisements predominantly presenting it as a healthy choice.

The findings also show the influence of geopolitical factors in the use of framing themes in palm oil advertisements indicating the diverse perspectives and opposing attempts to persuasively shape consumer perceptions of palm oil and the specific business sector. By addressing diverse concerns through international educational programs, presenting correct and current facts of palm oil and its practices in production, stakeholders can provide consumers with a more accurate understanding of palm oil and its industry's impact, ultimately fostering informed decision-making and sustainable consumption practices.

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