The role of individual moral foundations in regulating emotional responses using different reframings in online political communication

A quasi-experimental pilot study

SN studies show that not only users' preferences are consistent with respect to their own belief system, thereby facilitating polarization, but also that public interactions on ethical issues are morally polarized. What does not emerge clearly from online contexts are the moral motivational systems that can moderate users' emotional responses. In fact, the communicative technique of *moral reframing* affects recipients' responses: the more the message matches the recipients' moral-value system, the more likely it is to be effective. The aim of this research is to understand how certain political messages structured according to different moral reframings activate distinct emotions moderated by the users’ moral domains. Through a quasi-experimental study among subjects (N=95, M=32; F=63; Mage=34.03, SDage=10.9) we explored the different moral-emotional activations of users after the presentation of the theme of the reception of immigrants in Italy by means of three different moral framings: the first one structured according to a safety framing, the second one adopting a benevolence framing, and the third one a control message. The source of the messages is kept identical, to avoid biased judgments towards a specific source. The results show that the moral framing of safety elicits significant emotional responses in those who report a higher activation in the domain of Fairness (in particular sadness and compassion), while the benevolence framing activates more (for compassion and distress) those who have a more active Care domain, and simultaneously deactivates empathy (and significantly activates indifference) for the Authority domain.

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