**Start with "Why", but Only if You Have to:**
**The Strategic Framing of Novel Ideas across Different Audiences**

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**Key words**: Novel Idea; Framing; Narratives/Storytelling; Novices/Experts; Audiences.

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**Research summary**: Building on social psychology research and entrepreneurship work on linguistic framing, we argue that the appreciation of novel ideas varies with the mental construal that members of different audiences use to evaluate them. Specifically, we theorize that the congruency between idea framing and audiences' mental construals depends on audiences' level of expertise in evaluating novel ideas. In four experiments, we found that innovators benefit from deploying framing strategies congruent with audiences' mental construals: novices (e.g., lay people, crowdfunders) appreciate more novel ideas framed in abstract *why* terms, while experts (e.g., professional investors, innovation managers) novel ideas framed in concrete *how* terms. Integrating the strategic framing of novel ideas with construal level theory and audience heterogeneity contributes to research on entrepreneurship, innovation and impression management.

**Managerial summary**: One of the critical challenges that innovators (e.g., entrepreneurs) face is to persuade relevant audiences (e.g., users, crowdfunders, professional investors, innovation managers) to support their novel ideas. This article integrates various literatures concerned with the evaluation of novelty to examine the impact of different framing strategies on the reception of novel ideas by different audiences. By demonstrating that the framing of a novel business idea affects audience members' evaluation, and that the effectiveness of different frames (*why* vs. *how*) varies with the target audiences (novices vs. experts), we offer actionable insights into how innovators can strategically use linguistic framing to increase the likelihood of eliciting favorable evaluations and resource commitment for their ideas.

In an exceptionally popular TED talk, Simon Sinek argues that if we want to mobilize people and resources around novel ideas, we should start our pitches with *why* (Sinek, 2009). Communicating an idea's purpose, according to Sinek, makes it easier for people to engage with the idea because it allows them to understand the motives and goals behind it. Grant (2016), on the other hand, in his best-selling book, *Originals,* points out that this approach may not be the preferred one because innovators championing novel ideas risk running into deep-seated convictions about what is possible. Accordingly, he suggests, innovators should spell out not why they do what they do but *how* they would implement their ideas, thus framing them in concrete *how* rather than abstract *why* terms. This debate illustrates one of the central challenges that innovators face as they ponder the proper framing for

pitching their ideas to the world. Not only do they have to establish whether an abstract or concrete framing is the most suitable way to bolster their ideas' appeal (Lu, Bartol, Venkataramani, Zheng, and Liu, 2019; Clarke, Cornelissen & Healey, 2019), but understanding which audiences they are targeting should also inform their choice (Fisher, Kuratko, Bloodgood, & Hornsby, 2017).

This challenge is especially acute in situations where evaluative feedback is given before any tangible product is produced and/or reputational information becomes available to relevant audiences (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003). In many contexts (e.g., pitch contests, film production, early stage funding, crowdfunding), the inherent potential of novel ideas is initially assessed primarily on the basis of subjective evaluations of oral or written narratives. Extemporaneous stories or *small narratives* (Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004, p. 4) that innovators share in conversations with funders, patrons, or employers are all examples of oral narratives. The proverbial "elevator pitch" made before business angels, venture capitalists, producers, media representatives, or bankers is also an example of an oral narrative. By contrast, written narratives include executive summaries, storylines, or taglines that appear in product packages, pitch decks, crowdfunding campaigns, promotional brochures, as well as longer narratives like business plans or story plots (Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007). Despite the frequency with which audiences are expected to evaluate novel ideas, little research exists concerning the linguistic features of such narratives and their effect on the evaluative processes and responses of different audiences (for an exception, see König, Mammen, Luger, Fehn, & Enders, 2018).

In this paper, we address this shortcoming by asking: How does the degree to which innovators use an abstract, *why*-focused framing of novel ideas as opposed to a concrete, *how*-focused framing affect different audiences' evaluative responses to the innovators' idea? To this aim, we draw from research on framing (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Fisher *et al.*, 2017; Pan, Chen, & Chen, 2020), construal level theory (henceforth CLT, Trope & Liberman, 2010), and domain-relevant expertise (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Chi, 2006; Dane, 2010; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Rousseau 2001) to examine

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the impact of different linguistic framing strategies on the reception of novel ideas across multiple audiences. In doing so, we follow the lead of recent linguistics-informed organizational scholarship. For instance, Pan, McNamara, Lee, Haleblian, and Devers (2018) have explored this issue by focusing on the use of concrete language during earning calls between top managers and investors. Huang, Joshi, Wakslak, and Wu (2020) have studied how speech abstractness can shape venture capitalists' willingness to invest in ventures that already exist. We extend this line of work in two ways.

First, we focus on the *championing phase* of a novel idea in its journey toward recognition. The championing phase refers to the "active promotion of a novel idea, aimed at obtaining approval to push the idea forward and, consequently, also obtaining money, talent, time, or political cover" (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017, p. 58). We concentrate on this early stage in the formation of a new venture, when (unknown) prospective entrepreneurs have nothing but an idea to pursue and, therefore, uncertainty about their idea's business potential is greatest. During this phase, audience members' evaluation cannot be based on tangible results, performance metrics, and/or market feedback, so it relies significantly on prospective entrepreneurs' oral or written narratives. Second, we theorize and test the effectiveness of different framing strategies across multiple audiences. Building on prior research on cognition suggesting that expertise – i.e., "high levels of domain-specific knowledge" (Johnson, 2013, p. 331) – accumulated through experience affects how audiences process information (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Maheswaran & Sternthal, 1990; Maheswaran, Sternthal, & Gürhan, 1996; Rousseau, 2001), we propose that the effectiveness of innovators' ideas framing (specifically, abstract vs. concrete linguistic frames) depends on the level of expertise in idea evaluation of their target audiences. Accordingly, we focus on two audiences with differing levels of domain expertise in idea evaluation – *novices* and *experts* – and examine whether linguistic framing strategies congruent with the mental construals of their members are more likely to elicit favorable evaluations.

We test these arguments in four experimental settings in the context of entrepreneurial idea

pitching – two online experiment with novices; one experiment with professional investors (experts) and one experiment with innovation managers from an Executive MBA program (experts) – and we examine whether the responses of experts and novices vary when the innovator frames the solution in terms of concrete actions (e.g., "*How the product/service can satisfy specific goals?*") or high-level purposes (e.g., "*Why the product/service is desirable*"). We analyze three types of evaluative outcomes: *attractiveness* of the idea (the extent to which audiences like and are willing to collect additional information on the business idea); *propensity to invest* in the idea (the actual amount of an earned bonus audiences are willing to give in support of the idea); and *investment amount* (the imaginary amount audience are willing to invest in the idea). We thus probe the evaluative process that underlies the recognition of an idea's novelty and the willingness to support its implementation (Mount, Baer & Lupoli, 2021; Mueller, Wakslak, & Krishnan, 2014) when audiences evaluate the same idea with varying levels of expertise in idea evaluation. Consistent with our first hypothesis, we find strong evidence that a *why* framing increases novices' appreciation of novel ideas. Confirming our second hypothesis, we show that experts appreciate novel ideas more when a *how* instead of a *why* frame is used. Finally, we examine the underlying mechanisms that might govern this evaluative process by exploring the mediating role of the perceived usefulness of the idea and the audience members' affective reactions to it.

Our study contributes to scholarship on the strategic mobilization of language (Giorgi, 2017; Huang *et al.*, 2020; Martens *et al.*, 2007; Vossen & Ihl, 2020) by showing that innovators can use linguistic framing strategies to affect audience members' appreciation of their novel ideas. While growing evidence suggests that audiences may have different evaluative orientations that shape their disposition toward novelty (Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014; Goldberg, Hannan, & Kovács, 2016; Pontikes, 2012), language-oriented organizational research has not yet studied how "the value of abstract vs. concrete language" (Pan *et al.*, 2018, p. 2220) might vary across different types of audiences. Furthermore, we explore more carefully "the contingencies that drive language attribute effectiveness"

(Pan *et al.*, 2018, p. 2220) and investigate more deeply "ways to frame creativity issues" (Lu *et al.*, 2019, p. 598) by demonstrating the effect of novel idea framing in shaping the evaluative responses of different audiences. Our findings elucidate how innovators can enhance the appreciation of their novel ideas by novices and experts while also exposing the role of perceived usefulness as an important mechanism through which idea framing affects evaluative outcomes. Finally, and more generally, the finding that an idea should be strategically framed to appeal to a particular audience has significant value in the broader arena of impression management (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Pan *et al.*, 2020; Pan *et al.*, 2018), particularly research on the dilemmas that innovators face as they try to persuade different audiences to provide them with the material or symbolic resources they need to implement their projects (Fisher *et al.*, 2017; Snihur, Thomas, Garud, & Phillips, 2021).

**THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

**The Framing of Novel Ideas**

Innovators often face strong resistance to gain acceptance for their ideas from relevant audiences (Barber, 1961; Cattani, Ferriani, & Lanza, 2017; March, 2010; Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012). The use of linguistic devices has been recognized as critical to deal with this challenge (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Cattani, Falchetti, & Ferriani, 2020; Czarniawska, 1998; Gabriel, 2004; Larrimore, Jiang, Larrimore, Markowitz, & Gorski, 2011; van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2015). Indeed, growing research in impression management and entrepreneurship adopts a framing approach to studying innovation and change (Clarke *et al.*, 2019; Martens *et al.*, 2007; Pan *et al.*, 2020). Although different modes of symbolization underpin acts of framing such as behavioral gestures (Clarke *et al.*, 2019) or visuals (e.g., product posters and prototypes), in this paper, we limit our focus to 'language' as the main vehicle for an actor's strategic framing. Following Cornelissen and Werner (2014), by

*strategic framing* we mean rhetorical devices that actors strategically deploy through their communication to "mobilize support and minimize resistance to a change" (p. 185).[1]

A significant body of work that approaches acts of framing from a rhetorical perspective is research on entrepreneurial storytelling. A core argument in this literature is that entrepreneurs, as skilled rhetoricians, can shape the sense-making process of key audiences by using storytelling tactics. Several scholars have drawn attention to the role played by language, communication, and narratives not only in reducing audience members' perception of the risk associated with the exploitation of novel entrepreneurial opportunities, but also in motivating them to commit capital to a venture idea (Clarke *et al.*, 2019; Garud, Schildt, & Lant, 2014; Huang *et al.*, 2020; Martens *et al.*, 2007; Snihur *et al.*, 2021; van Werven *et al.*, 2015; van Werven, Bouwmeester, & Cornelissen, 2019). Studies in this line of scholarship have elucidated how innovators acquire symbolic and material resources by means of narratives that borrow terms and categories from the dominant discourse that will help them persuade the audiences controlling those resources (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Vossen & Ihl, 2020). Yet, no research in this area has attended to the structural properties of novel idea framings (i.e., abstract *why* vs. concrete *how* framings) and their influence on the response of different audiences, even though "devising linguistic operations attending to different audiences is of strategic significance" (Pan *et al.* 2020, p. 12). The CLT literature (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2010) offers a powerful conceptual toolkit to address this shortcoming.

CLT is premised on the key observation that individuals construe information, events or actions using different mental representations. CLT theorists distinguish between two levels of mental

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[1] A framing-based notion of innovation accounts for the fact that individuals develop different expectations depending on the particular cognitive mode that is activated. As Goffman (1974, p. 38) wrote, "we can hardly glance at anything without applying a framework, thereby forming [...] expectations as to what is likely to happen." Thus, the notion of framing can be assumed to have a dual meaning: it may refer "to the (implicit) frame of understanding that is present in a manager's message with a specific content, and simultaneously to the interpretive frames that are primed, and that may guide and ground others' interpretations" (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 199).

representations: individuals can think about the same action (e.g., "launching an entrepreneurial idea") using abstract, high-level mental representations (e.g., "becoming an entrepreneur"), or using concrete, low-level mental representations (e.g., "finding investors"). The construal level that individuals apply to process information affects the type of information they draw attention to and how they understand it (Trope & Liberman, 2010). High-level construals emphasize global, central, and primary features of an action, and individuals with abstract construals focus on *why* actions are performed. By contrast, low-level construals emphasize local, detailed and specific features of an action, and individuals with concrete construals focus on *how* actions are performed (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). While high-level construals focus on the desirability or the value associated with the end state (the outcome), low-level construals focus on the feasibility or how easily the end state can be reached (the process) (Wiesenfeld, Reyt, Brockner, & Trope, 2017). In the case of an idea, individuals with high-level, abstract construals will concentrate on its broad and general information, whereas individuals with low-level, concrete construals on its narrow and detailed information.

Since mental representations influence evaluative responses and behavioral intentions (Trope & Liberman, 2010), it is plausible to assume that the appreciation of an idea may vary with audience members' mental construals (Mount *et al.*, 2021). Bolstering the plausibility of this argument, recent findings by Mount *et al.* (2021) suggest that the level of construal through which a highly novel idea is approached shapes decision-makers' propensity to invest in the idea. Thus, as the mental representations that individuals adopt to construe an idea affect the attitude toward the idea itself, we argue that innovators can purposefully select framing strategies to induce audiences to think about their ideas in more concrete or abstract terms. For instance, aspiring entrepreneurs can opt for a framing approach that emphasizes the reasons behind their ideas, thus priming an abstract construal; or they can focus on how these ideas work, thereby triggering a concrete construal. An entrepreneur

who wants to launch, say, a new lamp can focus on "why using the lamp" (i.e., abstract framing) or "how to use the lamp" (i.e., concrete framing). In the former case, audiences will process relevant information about the novel idea by employing high-level construals, while, in the latter, low-level construals. In sum, to the extent that framings activate an abstract or concrete mental construal, innovators can make strategic linguistic choices to influence the evaluation of their ideas. In line with this idea, Fisher *et al.* (2017) suggest that leaders of entrepreneurial ventures can use *emphasis frames* to "quickly and strategically adjust salient elements of their presentations, pitches, videos, documents, or meeting discussions" (Fisher *et al.*, 2017, p. 67) and shift audience evaluations (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Because the availability and understandability of the information that is emphasized in a frame are likely to vary across audiences, frames must be "chosen with an audience in mind" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 117) to be effective (Fisher *et al.*, 2017).

In our analysis of the impact of framing strategies on the evaluative response of different audiences, we concentrate on *how* and *why* frames for two main reasons: methodological considerations and popular appeal. First, in the CLT literature, using a *how* vs. *why* frame is a consolidated method to temporarily induce either concrete, low-level construals or abstract, high-level construals (e.g., Alter, Oppenheimer, & Zemla, 2010; Carter, Bobocel, & Brockner, 2020; Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004; Mount *et al.*, 2021; Mueller *et al.*, 2014). Second, the emphasis on *how* and *why* resonates with a growing debate in the popular press on the art of mastering storytelling. Especially after Sinek's (2011) bestseller book and record-breaking TED talk,[2] the debate around *how* or *why* has seeped into daily practice and has become part of the storytelling vernacular in business, marketing, and political communication.

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[2] Sinek's (2011) business book "Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action" has sold more than one million copies and his TED talk has received more than 50 million views (https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action).

**Congruency of Idea Framing and Audiences' Mental Construals:** *Novices* **and** *Experts*

To explicitly account for the effect of the construal framing on different audiences (i.e., novices and experts), we draw from cognitive research on expertise. By defining expertise as "a high level of domain-specific knowledge acquired through experience" (Dane, 2010, p. 580), this research suggests that knowledge is organized around schemas that differ between novices and experts. [3] A schema "represents a prototypical abstraction of a complex concept, one that gradually develops from past experience, and subsequently guides the way new information is organized" (Rousseau, 2001, p. 513). While experts (e.g., professional investors or innovation managers) are individuals who have acquired domain-relevant knowledge about novel idea evaluation over long periods of time, novices are not used to approach the idea evaluative task.[4] Thus, experts and novices tend to evaluate novel ideas using different schemas. Related research suggests that, compared to individuals in non-evaluative roles, individuals in evaluative roles (e.g., decision-makers) apply schemas that are tied to their experiences when evaluating novel unproven ideas (Mueller, Melwani, Loewenstein, & Deal, 2018).

Since schemas influence the way individuals process information and make evaluations (Maheswaran & Sternthal 1990; Maheswaran *et al.*, 1996; Su, Comer, & Lee, 2008), framing novel ideas in *how* or *why* terms will affect the response of novices and experts because they "differ in the amount and types of information they selectively consider" (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, p. 419). Unless individuals have developed articulated schemas or mental models through extended periods of training and practice, they tend to rely on abstract thinking and to base their evaluations on more global features (Bettman & Sujan, 1987; Navon, 1977). As Gasper and Clore (2002) noted, "focusing on global rather than local stimuli is usually the dominant, accessible strategy" (p. 34). Similarly, Fiske and

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[3] A schema is "the cognitive organization or mental model of conceptually related elements" (Rousseau, 2001, p. 513).
[4] We base our arguments on domain-relevant expertise in the evaluative task of novel idea by following Alba and Hutchinson's (1987) recommendation that "when the dimension of expertise is identified, predictions must be conditioned on the precise nature of the task" (p. 438).

Taylor (1991) pointed out that attending to global, general information is a normative, and hence accessible, evaluative strategy. Following this line of research, we argue that novices – i.e., individuals who have not developed domain-relevant expertise in evaluating novel ideas – use relatively simple schemas to complete the evaluative task and are more likely to process novel ideas with abstract, high-level mental construals. Therefore, they typically concentrate more on the desirability of an idea and its ultimate benefits. That is why, according to Alba and Hutchinson (1987), messages directed to "novices need to have the implications (or conclusions) of a message drawn for them" (p. 426). Abstract frames with an emphasis on *why* can help novices appreciate the reasons behind an idea and how desirable the idea is.

As information congruent with individuals' mental representations is more comprehensible (Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009; White, MacDonnell, & Dahl, 2011), it is easier for novices to process a novel idea if it is presented using an abstract framing that emphasizes the reasons for the idea (i.e., a *why* frame): indeed this frame matches the high-level construal that novices tend to use to process information during the evaluative task. As Kim *et al.* (2009, pp. 879-880) noted, when people process information that matches their mental representations, they are "likely to experience a feeling of fluency or ease of comprehension [...] which in turn generates a positive experience and thus influences the persuasiveness of the message." Also, a key finding of CLT research is that individuals weigh more information congruent with their construal levels (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Zhao & Xie, 2011). As a result, an abstract *why* framing of novel ideas will lead novices to weigh more the information related to the desirability and ultimate benefits of the idea. Novices will appreciate more information to which they attach more weight because construal congruency "enhance[s] individuals' positive experiences and attitudes" (Berson & Halevy, 2014, p. 233; see also Carter *et al.*, 2020).

Taken together, these arguments suggest that appreciation of novel ideas is enhanced when novices evaluate ideas framed in abstract *why* terms: a *why* framing is congruent with the construal level that novices usually adopt to approach novel idea evaluation. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: In novel idea evaluation, novices are more likely to appreciate novel ideas when a *why* as opposed to a *how* framing is used.

As argued previously, an abstract (*why*) framing is congruent with the mental representation of novices who approach idea evaluation with more cursory or top-down thinking to process information. However, the same type of congruency may not be as effective when audience members develop domain-relevant expertise in idea evaluation (e.g., professional investors, innovation managers, and so on). An extensive literature suggests that expert judgment is associated with qualitatively distinct cognitive processes from those of novices. Experts can recognize and rely on a broader array of informational cues and appreciate details and complex patterns even more when making evaluations (Boudreau, Guinan, Lakhani, & Riedl, 2016; Boulongne, Cudennec, & Durand, 2019; Camerer & Johnson, 1991; Johnson, Hassebrock, Duran, & Moller, 1982). Hence, "experts in some domain of knowledge make use of attributes that are ignored by the average person" (Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976, p. 430). Experts and novices do not focus their attention on the same cues but use different cognitive processes in making their evaluations. Because an "essential quality of having expertise is having more [...] accessibility to concrete details within one's domain of knowledge" (Magee, Milliken, & Lurie, 2010, p. 356), expertise directs attention towards more local and narrow information (Brauer, Chambres, Niedenthal, & Chatard-Pannetier, 2004) and, therefore, is associated with a natural tendency to process information more concretely (Magee *et al.*, 2010). The more individuals become experts in one domain, the more they will have detailed and accurate schemas to perform tasks related to their domain of expertise (Dane, 2010). This further suggests that audience members with high domain expertise (henceforth expertise) in idea evaluation

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can rely on their detailed and accurate schemas to approach the evaluative task and are more likely to process novel ideas with low-level, concrete mental construals. We thus expect concrete framings focused on how to use the idea (i.e., a *how* frame) to be congruent with experts' mental construals. This congruency will elicit more positive outcomes (Berson & Halevy, 2014; Carter *et al.*, 2020).

Along this line, prior impression management research (Pan *et al.*, 2018) indicates that the embedding of concrete language attributes in corporate communication is particularly effective in enhancing investors' reactions in situations of heightened uncertainty. As Pan *et al.* (2018, p. 2209) pointed out, these "attributes are especially beneficial when trying to reduce the cognitive stress associated with high-risk situations." This is typically the situation audience members face when evaluating the merit of a new business idea in the absence of tangible results or other informational cues, such as during the very early stage of a new venture formation (i.e., the idea championing phase). Concrete frames with an emphasis on *how* to use an idea can increase experts' confidence in the feasibility of the idea, particularly when tangible objects have not yet been developed. Detailed features on how an idea works provide experts with concrete information to get a clearer sense of the new product and visualize its functionality (e.g., whether potential customers can easily use the idea), thus reassuring them that the idea can be developed. The innovation literature suggests that the initial step that experts take in screening a new product idea to build an innovation portfolio is to figure out "whether a market exists and whether a product can be made to satisfy that market" (Day, 2007, p. 6). This is consistent with our argument that, as experts use more concrete mental construals to process the information associated with the novel idea, they tend to pay closer attention to the feasibility of reaching an end state and the means to achieve it (e.g., the process of developing the idea). Expertise thus affects the perception of feasibility considerations (Barreto & Patient, 2013).

In sum, as construal congruency enhances fluency or ease of comprehension (Kim *et al.*, 2009; White *et al.*, 2011), we expect experts to find it easier to process novel ideas that are framed in concrete,

low-level terms because this framing matches the low-level construal they apply to the evaluative task. Also, since the information that matches individual mental representations is weighed more (Liberman & Trope, 1998) and increases positive responses (Berson & Halevy, 2014; Carter *et al.*, 2020), congruency between idea frame and mental construal leads experts to value and appreciate more information about the feasibility of the idea and how easily it can be developed. Accordingly, we predict that the congruency between experts' mental construals and the use of a concrete *how* framing will increase their positive evaluative responses. In particular:

H2: In novel idea evaluation, experts are more likely to appreciate novel ideas when a *how* as opposed to a *why* framing is used.

## EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

We conducted four experimental studies designed to probe the conditions under which novel ideas are more likely to receive favorable evaluations (*idea attractiveness*, *investment propensity,* and *investment amount*) across two audiences: novices and experts. Specifically, in *Study 1* (with novices) and *Study 2* (with experts), we explore the effect of concrete and abstract construal framings on the attractiveness of novel ideas by varying the description of the idea in a pitch deck presentation. In *Study 3* (with novices) and *Study 4* (with experts), we use a different idea presented with a short narrative to explore the effect of concrete and abstract framings on, respectively, *investment propensity* and *investment amount*. We also tested the cognitive mechanism through which construal framing influences audience members' evaluation. In all four studies, the concrete construal framing emphasizes *how* to use the idea, while the abstract framing *why* the idea should be considered.

## STUDY 1 & STUDY 2

We tested our two hypotheses by conducting two experiments with two different groups of participants – respectively a group of novices (sample 1) and an expert group of professional investors

(i.e., venture capitalists and angel investors; sample 2) – who were asked to evaluate an entrepreneurial pitch deck. We used a pitch deck to present a novel idea and activate a concrete or abstract mental construal among the evaluators: we designed two different frames for championing the novel idea by varying the content of its description.

**Method**

*Participants*. Sample 1 included a group of 129 novices recruited via Prolific, an online UK-based platform of high-quality data (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). Each participant received 1 pound for completing the study. Prior research on entrepreneurial pitching has treated participants recruited through online platforms as representative of everyday citizens: the general public "constitutes a growing source of seed financing through online crowdfunding and offline means" (Kanze, Huang, Conley, & Higgins, 2018, p. 600). To detect inattention, we followed a highly recommended procedure when participants are recruited online: we excluded participants who missed a catch question (Meyvis & van Osselaer, 2017; Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). The final sample of novices included 117 participants[5] (51.3% female, $M_{age}$=39.3 years, 79.5% Caucasian). In terms of education level, 34.2% attended some college or high school, 38.5% have an undergraduate degree, and 27.4% have a master or higher-level degree (e.g., Ph.D). The samples were homogeneous between conditions with respect to the demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity.

Sample 2 comprised a group of experts recruited by contacting professional investors by email through the network of three centers for entrepreneurship located across the US and Canada. We received a total of 59 responses. Experts had an average age of 47.68 years ($SD = 12.7$), an average work experience of 23.81 years ($SD = 11.48$) and, on average, had made 31 investments (min. = 1; max. = 300 investments; $SD = 61.38$). Moreover, 81.4% of them were males, and 88.1% were

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[5] Our results are robust to the inclusion of participants who failed the attention check.

Caucasian. In terms of education level, 3.4% attended some college or high school, 18.6% have an undergraduate degree, and 76.3% have a master or higher-level degree (e.g., Ph.D). Of the 59 expert evaluators, 61% identified themselves as angel investors, 27.1% as venture capitalists, and 11.9% as angel investors and venture capitalists. The samples were homogeneous between conditions with respect to the demographic variables.

*Material and Procedure.* We used the same material (e.g., vignettes, questions, etc.) and procedure to run experiment 1 with novices (sample 1) and experiment 2 with experts (sample 2). In both experiments, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (construal framing: concrete vs. abstract) in a between-subjects experiment. Participants were then invited to see the pitch deck through an online survey tool. After watching the pitch deck, participants completed the questionnaire. We designed the experiment to reflect psychological and mundane realism (Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982; Colquitt, 2008) by basing the pitch deck on a real-case idea: a wearable sensor. We manipulated the construal framing of the idea by creating two pitch decks corresponding to the two experimental conditions. To ensure realism, we looked at the templates of real successful pitch decks and developed a short presentation for our idea by consulting the director of an entrepreneurial institute. The complete pitch deck for the two experimental conditions consisted of eight slides: the hook, the problem, the solution, the team, the market size, the product, the revenue model, and the concluding call to action. In our pitch decks, we named the idea 'TrackMee' and provided an estimated market price to control for potential confounds. The idea was described as follows in the solution slide of the pitch deck:

**The New Tracking Wristband**

TrackMee is the first waterproof tracking wristband that captures key physiological parameters of the human body through little sensors embedded in the core of its textile. Its textile incorporates a self-charging battery to harvest energy from body movements. TrackMee provides you with prompt feedback by emitting notification sounds in real-time and full-body activity metrics with its app. Estimated market price $150.

We manipulated construal framing by varying the content of the product slide in the pitch deck. Before running the two main experiments with the two types of audiences, we ran a pilot study to define our manipulation and create the pitch decks. We manipulated construal framing in the product slide by providing the participants with some information on the wearable sensor. This information was framed in *How* or *Why* terms depending on the experimental condition (see below for a complete description of the construal framing manipulation and refer to *Pilot Study 1* for a manipulation check of construal framing). After developing the construal framing manipulation, we incorporated it into the pitch decks. The online *Appendix 1* reports the pitch decks used in the two main experiments.

**Construal Framing Manipulation.** To define the manipulation of the construal level of the idea framing, we followed prior research (Kim *et al.*, 2009; White *et al.*, 2011) that varied the content of the description. We adapted the *How* and *Why* information in our pitches from real wearable sensors' crowdfunding campaigns. We reinforced our construal framing manipulation by considering the concreteness rating of the words used in the pitches based on the list developed by Brysbaert, Warriner, and Kuperman (2014).[6] The wearable sensor idea was framed in abstract or concrete terms. In the low-level construal, the wearable sensor description focused on *how* TrackMee operates; in the high-level construal, the wearable sensor description focused on *why* TrackMee is beneficial (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Thus, the concrete framing emphasizes the ways in which TrackMee can be used, while the abstract framing the reasons to consider TrackMee. In the concrete framing, the wearable sensor was described as follows:

**How to use TrackMee? Here is HOW:**
- Select your TrackMee model and buy it on its website

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[6] Similar to Huang *et al.* (2020), we also computed the Brysbaert Concreteness Index (BCI) for our *how* and *why* frames by relying on the concreteness ratings of the 40,000 English words reported in the Brysbaert dictionary. These concreteness ratings emerged from over 4,000 participants who rated the concreteness of a list of words on a scale from 1 (*abstract*) to 5 (*concrete*). In our study, the resulting BCI for the *how* frame was 2.74, while for the *why* frame was 2.33. The BCI was calculated as the mean concreteness of the words with available concreteness ratings. While the difference is small, Huang *et al.* (2020, p. 18) showed that even a relatively small variance in BCI scores is meaningful.

- Wear your wristband and start your workout: TrackMee stores and monitors your data
- Don't recharge TrackMee: it is charged by your movements
- Listen to TrackMee: it emits sounds when your physiological parameters reach critical thresholds

For the abstract framing of the wearable sensor, we used the description below:

**Why consider TrackMee? Here is WHY:**
- To train like an elite professional and maximize your training effectiveness
- To achieve ambitious training goals with super accurate insights
- To know your limits avoiding physical exhaustion and train at your optimum level
- To optimize your diet, improve your fit and make a big impact on your health

*Manipulation Check: Pilot Study 1.* To determine whether the two idea descriptions were appropriate for manipulating construal framing, we conducted a pilot study with 76 participants recruited through MTurk. Potential participants were restricted only to those located in the US with a 95% or greater approval rating on MTurk. We used a catch question to ensure data quality and excluded the participants whose responses were incorrect (Meyvis & van Osselaer, 2017; Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009). The final sample consisted of 72 participants (65.3% female, *Mage*=34.96 years, 68.1% Caucasian) who were randomly assigned to the concrete or abstract construal framing condition (the experiment was a between-subject design) and were asked to indicate the extent to which the information about the tracker was concrete (focused on specific actions) or abstract (focused on ultimate benefits) on a 7-point scale (1 = very concrete; 7 = very abstract; similar to Jin & He, 2013).

A one-way ANOVA on perceived concreteness of the information about the idea revealed a difference between the two frames (F (1, 70) = 6.41, p = .014, $\eta^2$ = .084): participants in the abstract framing construal condition rated the idea description as more abstract (M = 3.53, SD = 1.77) than those in the concrete framing construal condition (M = 2.64, SD = 1.15). We thus concluded that our manipulation worked well.

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**Measures**

*Dependent Variable*: *Idea Attractiveness*. We measured the dependent variable in the same way for both experiments (i.e., *Study 1* with novices and *Study 2* with professional investors). Prior research suggests that an investment decision is a multi-stage process and that entrepreneurial pitches are crucial to secure progress along this process, whether or not an investment decision eventually materializes (Clarke *et al.*, 2019). Prospective professional investors or novices, for instance, might evaluate the attractiveness of the idea (and collect further information about its market potential or the entrepreneur) before deciding whether or not to invest in it. We measured the attractiveness of the idea by asking participants to indicate how much they liked the idea on a 7-point scale (1 = "I liked it very much", 7 = "I disliked it very much"),[7] and whether they would consider collecting additional information about the business opportunity based on the pitch deck. We captured their likelihood to further consider the business opportunity on a 7-point scale (1 = "Not at all", 7 = "Extremely") by using the following 3 items: "find out more information about the entrepreneur/management team," "do further research into the industry and/or market of the business," and "find out more information about the business" (items adapted from Clarke *et al.*, 2019). We computed a single score of furthering the business opportunity by averaging the three items (novices' group (sample 1) α = .94, experts' group (sample 2) α = .91). We then combined this measure with the 'idea liking' measure into a summative indicator to capture the attractiveness of the idea. Supporting this operationalization, the two measures were highly correlated (novices' group (sample 1) r = .616, p = .000; experts' group (sample 2) r = .604, p = .000).

**Results & Discussion**

*Analysis for Study 1 (Sample 1: Novices) – Idea Attractiveness*. *Pre-analysis*. We first

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[7] To make the results easier to interpret, we reversed the coding for Idea *Liking* so that higher values correspond to a greater liking of the idea.

checked for the presence of outliers for our dependent variable, *idea attractiveness*, and identified one outlier based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD (Meyvis & van Osselaer, 2017; van Selst & Jolicoeur, 1994). We removed this outlier from subsequent analyses.[8] A one-way ANOVA showed that construal framing affected idea attractiveness ($F (1,114) = 5.82$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .049$): novices evaluated the idea as more attractive in response to the abstract (M = 9.73, *SD* = 2.48) than the concrete (M = 8.56, *SD* = 2.71) framing. In support of hypothesis 1, the results offer initial evidence that abstract framing construals increase the attractiveness of novel ideas for novices. Table 1 reports the results and Figure 1 shows the bar chart.

<p align="center">**&lt;Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about here&gt;**</p>

*Analysis for Study 2 (Sample 2: Experts) – Idea Attractiveness*. *Pre-analysis*. Based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD we did not find any outliers for our dependent variable, *idea attractiveness*. A one-way ANOVA showed that construal framing affected idea attractiveness ($F (1,57) = 4.36$, $p = .041$, $\eta^2 = .071$): experts appreciated the novel idea more in the concrete (M = 7.76, *SD* = 2.72) than in the abstract (M = 6.36, *SD* = 2.44) framing condition. These analyses produced results consistent with hypothesis 2 that concrete framing increases the attractiveness of the novel idea for experts. Table 2 reports the results and Figure 2 shows the bar chart.

<p align="center">**&lt;Insert Table 2 and Figure 2 about here&gt;**</p>

In summary, novices appreciated the novel idea more when the novel idea was framed in more abstract terms. By contrast, experts appreciated the novel idea more when it was framed in more concrete terms. Overall, *Study 1* and *Study 2* support our two hypotheses on construal framing and its different impact on the two evaluating groups: novices and experts.

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[8] Our results are robust to the inclusion of the outlier.

**STUDY 3 & STUDY 4**

The objective of *Study 3* and *Study 4* is to check the robustness of our findings by replicating the results of our first two experiments with a different idea. To this end, we recruited a different group of novices (sample 3) and a different group of experts (i.e., innovation managers; sample 4). For both *Study 3* and *Study 4,* the presentation of the idea took the form of a short narrative in which we used the same manipulation for construal framing. The only difference between *Study 3* and *Study 4* concerns the operationalization of the outcome variable: in *Study 3*, we employed a behavioral dependent variable that measures the actual support novices are willing to offer to the entrepreneurial idea.[9] We tested the effect of the construal frame in the evaluative process and performed additional analyses to explore the underlying mechanisms.

**Method**

*Participants*. Sample 3 of novices was recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk: MTurk participants have been used as 'amateur crowds' in entrepreneurial research on crowdfunding (Stevenson, Ciuchta, Letwin, Dinger, & Vancouver, 2019). Each of the 142 participants received 50 cents for completing the study. We restricted participants only to those located in the US with a 95% or greater approval rating on MTurk. As in the prior online studies, we employed a catch question to ensure data quality (Meyvis & van Osselaer, 2017; Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009). The final sample consisted of 138 participants[10] (60.9% female, *M*age=35.06 years, 75.4% Caucasian). In terms of education level, 46.4% attended some college or high school, 38.4% have an undergraduate degree, and 15.2% have a master or higher level (e.g., Ph.D). The samples were homogeneous between conditions with respect to the demographic variables.

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[9] In *Study 4*, we did not use a behavioral dependent variable because the Italian Business School where the experiment was run does not allow researchers to pay students/alumni who participate in research.
[10] Our results are robust to the inclusion of the participants who failed the attention check.

Sample 4 of experts was recruited from current and former students of an Executive MBA program in innovation management at a leading Italian business school. We invited these experts by email to participate in a study on idea evaluation.[11] We received responses from 72 participants, with an average age of 38.43 years ($SD = 6.35$) and an average work experience of 13.67 years ($SD = 7.22$). 77.8% of the participants were male, and 93.1% Caucasian. Given their occupational position,[12] all participants had a high level of expertise in idea evaluation across a variety of industries (e.g., automotive, banking, healthcare, food, energy, and fashion). The samples were homogeneous between conditions with respect to the demographic variables.

*Material and Procedure.* We conducted experiment 3 with novices (sample 3) and experiment 4 with experts (sample 4) by adopting the same material (e.g., vignettes, questions, etc.) and procedure, except for the measurement of the dependent variable. For both studies, we randomly assigned participants to one of the two conditions (construal framing: concrete vs. abstract) in a between-subjects experiment. Consistently with *Study 1* and *Study 2,* we increased the realism of both experiments by inviting participants to evaluate a short narrative of a real entrepreneurial idea identified in a crowdfunding platform. To show that our findings are not contingent on the type of idea under evaluation and the chosen mode of presenting this idea, we used a different entrepreneurial idea – a lamp that recreates natural light indoors – and a different presentation mode – a short narrative. In the short narrative, the idea was named SunLamp, and its estimated market price was set at $300 to control for confounds due to possible differences in price perceptions among experimental participants. The description for the lamp idea was as follows:

**SunLamp**

SunLamp is the first lamp that delivers the daily cycles of natural light to your home, bringing light to your workspace or reading chair. SunLamp is an electric powered lamp with a light bulb

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[11] Due to the University policy restriction, the participants did not receive any incentives (i.e., money or extra credit) for partaking in this research.

[12] Roles ranged from head of innovation, to chief innovation officer, to innovation portfolio manager with such responsibilities as idea scouting, funding allocation and supervision of innovation initiatives portfolios.

that recreates natural light. The estimated market price for SunLamp is $300.

In the short narrative, we manipulated construal framing by focusing the description of the lamp in *How* or *Why* information. *Pilot Study 2* was run to define the manipulation of construal framing and create the two short narratives for the lamp idea. The online *Appendix 2* contains the short narratives used in both *Study 3* and *Study 4*.

**Construal Framing Manipulation.** We manipulated the construal framing by following the procedure used in *Study 1* and *Study 2*.[13] In the descriptions of the lamp idea, the concrete framing explained how to use SunLamp, while the abstract framing focused on why to use SunLamp. The concrete framing for the lamp idea was:

**HOW to use SunLamp? Here is HOW:**
- Place the lamp on a table or nightstand, and connect it to a plug.
- Point the lamp in the direction you want natural light in the room.
- Turn on the lamp to light up your house with natural light.
- Don't change the intensity of the lamp: it follows the daily cycle of natural light.

The abstract framing to describe the lamp idea was:

**WHY consider SunLamp? Here is WHY:**
- To enjoy good health, let's light up our houses with natural light.
- Natural light improves productivity and concentration during the day.
- Natural light relieves stress and helps sleep cycles.
- Natural light enhances mood and positivity.

**Manipulation Check: Pilot Study 2.** We checked the effectiveness of our construal framing manipulation in a pilot study with 79 participants from MTurk (we followed the same recruitment and data quality procedure of our prior study by excluding participants who missed a catch question). The final sample consisted of 70 participants (37.1% female, $M_{age}$=36.89 years, 71.4% Caucasian). We randomly assigned participants to one of the two conditions (concrete framing or abstract framing) in

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[13] The BCI calculated as the mean concreteness of the words with available concreteness ratings in the Brysbaert dictionary was 2.78 for the *how* frame, while was 2.49 for the *why* frame.

a between-subjects experiment. First, participants read the description of the lamp idea with the *how* or *why* information; then, similar to *Pilot Study 1*, as a manipulation check for construal framing, they were asked to indicate the extent to which the information about the idea was concrete (focused on specific actions) or abstract (focused on ultimate benefits) on a 7-point scale (1 = very concrete; 7 =very abstract). A one-way ANOVA confirmed the appropriateness of the construal framing manipulation: the abstract framing (M = 5.12, *SD* = 1.41) was perceived to focus more on the ultimate benefits than the concrete framing (M = 3.89, *SD* = 1.95; F (1, 68) = 9.02, p = .004, $\eta^2$ = .117). Thus, our manipulation was effective.

**Measures**

*Dependent Variable: Investment Propensity (Sample 3: Novices).* To capture individuals' actual support for the entrepreneurial idea, we provided participants with the following choice: "You have earned a bonus payment of 10 cents. If you want, you can donate some of this bonus to support the development of SunLamp. How much of the 10 cents would you like to donate?". Participants reported their choice on a sliding scale ranging from 0 to 10 cents. This measure was designed to capture variations in novices' behavior by probing their actual intention to support the development of the idea (for a similar approach, see Berg, 2016).

*Dependent Variable: Investment Amount (Sample 4: Experts).* We measured the willingness to invest in the idea by asking the following question: "Imagine you are an investor and you have 20,000 euros that you can invest in SunLamp. How much of the 20,000 euros would you INVEST in the idea?". Participants answered using a sliding scale ranging from 0 to 20,000 euros.[14]

*Exploring Mediating Mechanisms:* To unpack the underlying cognitive process, we measured the idea's perceived usefulness and ran a mediation analysis. Our exploration for the

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[14] We used euros rather than dollars since the experiment was conducted in Italy.

mediating role of perceived usefulness builds upon the CLT literature (Trope & Liberman, 2010) that emphasizes the value of construal congruency. This research has shown how external stimuli are perceived to be more useful when they are congruent with evaluating audiences' mental representations (Zhao & Xie, 2011). For instance, consumers see a product as more useful when they experience congruency between the message embodied in the product and the time frame of their evaluation (Jin & He, 2013). Drawing from this research, we explored whether the perceived usefulness of novel ideas mediates the effect of construal framing on the evaluation of novices and experts. Specifically, we examined to what extent construal congruency enhances the perceived usefulness of the novel idea and, in turn, leads to more favorable evaluative responses. We also considered other alternative mechanisms discussed in the literature. In particular, we examined whether positive and negative affect might act as a mediating mechanism by testing a full model in which perceived usefulness, and positive and negative affect work as parallel mediators.

Accordingly, in both experiment 3 and experiment 4 (respectively, *Study 3* with novices and *Study 4* with innovation managers), we measured usefulness and positive and negative affect as follows:

*Usefulness.* We asked participants to rate the usefulness of the idea on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely) using the following items: functional, useful, workable and practical (novices' group (sample 3) α = .87; experts' group (sample 4) α = .85). We adapted the items used to measure the usefulness of an idea from the Creative Product Semantic Scale (O'Quin & Besemer, 1989).

*Positive and Negative Affect.* We used Mackinnon *et al.*'s (1999) short 10-item version of the original PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) to measure positive and negative affect. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate to what extent five positive emotions (e.g., enthusiastic, excited, etc.; novices' group (sample 3) α = .85; experts' group (sample 4) α = .81) and five negative emotions (e.g., distressed, upset, etc.; novices' group (sample 3) α = .91; experts' group (sample 4) α = .73) described how they felt on a 5-point scale (1 = "very slightly or not at all", 5 = "extremely").

For both *Study 3* and *Study 4*, we conducted our mediation analyses with a model that involves multiple mediators (Hayes, 2013; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

**Results & Discussion**

*Analysis for Study 3 (Novices) – Investment Propensity*. *Pre-analysis*. We identified three outliers based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD in the group of novices and removed them from subsequent analyses.[15] We conducted a one-way ANOVA on investment propensity. The analysis revealed that construal framing affected the novices' propensity to support the novel idea (F (1,133) = 13.08, p = .000, $\eta^2$ = .09): participants in the abstract framing condition (M = 2.44, *SD* = 3.44) were more likely to support the idea than participants in the concrete framing condition (M = 0.75, *SD* = 1.52). These results are consistent with hypothesis 1 that novel ideas framed in abstract terms enhance the novices' propensity to invest in the idea. See Table 3 for the results and Figure 3 for a bar chart.

*Mediation Analyses*. First, a one-way ANOVA on usefulness revealed that the idea was rated more useful in the abstract (M = 4.91, *SD* = 1.20) than in the concrete (M = 4.31, *SD* = 1.37) framing condition (F (1, 133) = 7.43, p = .007, $\eta^2$ = .053). For the group of novices, these results suggest that construal congruency increases the perceived usefulness of novel ideas. In contrast, a one-way ANOVA showed no effect of the construal framing on positive affect: F (1, 133) = 1.07, p = .304 ($M_{\text{abstract framing}}$ = 2.95, $SD_{\text{abstract framing}}$ = 1.03; $M_{\text{concrete framing}}$ = 2.77, $SD_{\text{concrete framing}}$ = 1.01). Similarly, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the construal framing did not influence negative affect: F (1, 133) = 0.90, p = .343 ($M_{\text{abstract framing}}$ = 1.32, $SD_{\text{abstract framing}}$ = 0.73; $M_{\text{concrete framing}}$ = 1.23, $SD_{\text{concrete framing}}$ = 0.42).

To examine the overall mediation model, we applied Hayes's (2013) PROCESS procedure (model 4) that uses bootstrapping to test the indirect effects. Mediation occurs when the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effects does not include zero. We conducted the mediation analysis

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[15] Our results are robust to the inclusion of the outliers.

by using 5,000 bootstrap iterations. While we found evidence for the indirect effect of construal framing on investment propensity through usefulness (b = 0.32, SE = 0.16, 95% CI [0.08; 0.74]), we found no evidence for the indirect effect of construal framing on investment propensity through both positive and negative affect (respectively, b = -0.02, SE = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.27; 0.08]; b = 0.03, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.05; 0.27]).

In sum, these results point to perceived usefulness as a mediator of the relation between construal framing and investment propensity. However, there is no evidence for positive and negative affect as a mediator. Hence, these findings suggest that the mechanism underlying the effect of construal framing on novices' idea evaluation is related to the perceived usefulness of the idea.

**<Insert Table 3 and Figure 3 about here>**

*Analysis for Study 4 (Experts) – Investment Amount.* *Pre-analysis.* We checked for the presence of outliers for our dependent variable, *Investment Amount*, and removed one outlier based on the Z-scores threshold of 2.5 SD.[16] We then conducted a one-way ANOVA on *Investment Amount.* The results showed that experts were willing to invest more when the novel idea was framed in concrete terms (M = 8,815 euro, *SD* = 5,711 euro) rather than in abstract terms (M = 5,777 euro, *SD* = 4,747 euro; F (1, 69) = 5.99, p = .017, $\eta^2$ = .08). These results are consistent with hypothesis 2 that experts were willing to support more novel ideas that are framed in concrete terms. See Table 4 for the results and Figure 4 for a bar chart.

*Mediation Analyses.* Similar to *Study 3*, we conducted a mediation analysis to unpack the underlying cognitive process. Before analyzing our mediation model, we conducted a one-way ANOVA on usefulness which showed no effect of construal framing: F (1, 69) = 0.23, p = .634 ($M_{abstract\ framing}$ = 4.48, $SD_{abstract\ framing}$ = 1.09, $M_{concrete\ framing}$ = 4.61, $SD_{concrete\ framing}$ = 1.25). We also ran a

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[16] Our results are robust to the inclusion of the outlier.

one-way ANOVA on positive and negative affect. In both cases, we did not find evidence for the effect of construal framing on positive and negative affect (respectively, $F(1, 69) = 2.78$, $p = .100$ ($M_{abstract\ framing} = 2.71$, $SD_{abstract\ framing} = 0.90$; $M_{concrete\ framing} = 3.05$, $SD_{concrete\ framing} = 0.86$; $F(1, 69) = 0.52$, $p = .474$ ($M_{abstract\ framing} = 1.78$, $SD_{abstract\ framing} = 0.77$; $M_{concrete\ framing} = 1.66$, $SD_{concrete\ framing} = 0.59$).

We ran the mediation analysis by using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS procedure (model 4), and found no evidence for the indirect effect of construal framing on investment through usefulness, positive and negative affect (respectively, $b = -283.60$, $SE = 603.49$, 95% CI [-1,482.38; 938.81]; $b = -473.44$, $SE = 378.84$, 95% CI [-1.524.12; 14.32]; $b = 10.16$, $SE = 137.63$, 95% CI [-198.03; 432.28]). Hence, for experts, none of our exploring mediating variables worked as a mediator of the relation between construal framing and idea evaluation, suggesting that other mechanisms might be at work.

**< Insert Table 4 and Figure 4 about here >**

Overall, *Study 3* and *Study 4* further confirm that the construal framing effect on novel idea evaluation is the opposite for novices and experts. Although these two experiments used different ideas, different modes of presentation, and different dependent variables, they replicated the results of *Study 1* and *Study 2*. In sum, our four experimental studies offer supporting evidence that an abstract framing increases idea appreciation by novices, while a concrete framing increases idea appreciation by experts. Our findings also point to perceived usefulness as the underlying cognitive mechanism by which construal framing influences novel idea appreciation (at least in the case of novices).

**DISCUSSION**

Research on creativity and innovation has focused primarily on novelty generation – particularly, the individual dispositions, talents, and agency that underlie the emergence of novelty – leaving largely underexplored another critical dimension: the need for recognition, that is, the process by which the new and unaccepted is rendered valid and accepted through the attainment of material and/or

symbolic resources from relevant audiences. Novelty generation and novelty recognition are two distinct phases of the journey of novelty, from the moment it emerges to the moment it takes root and propagates. This paper focuses on the recognition and endorsement of a novel idea in the championing phase by integrating CLT with the growing stream of research that adopts a linguistic approach to the study of innovation. Specifically, we propose a conceptual framework for examining the role of framing in shaping the reception of novel ideas across different audiences.

Central to our framework is the proposition that the degree of abstraction (*why*) or concreteness (*how*) of the idea framing will have a different impact on the evaluative outcome depending on the audiences' mental construals to approach novel idea evaluation. Since novices and experts rely on different schemas, they apply different mental construals to process information during the idea evaluative task. We conducted four experimental studies to test our predictions and found idea evaluation to be sensitive to the congruency between framing and audiences' mental construals. While novices appreciate novel ideas more when abstract *why* frames are used, experts (i.e., professional investors and innovation managers) prefer novel ideas that are framed in concrete *how* terms. We also found that perceived usefulness plays a critical role in shaping novices' idea evaluation.

**Implications for Theory**

A growing body of work on innovation and entrepreneurship incorporates a linguistic lens (Garud *et al.*, 2014; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016), calling attention to the rhetorical strategies – narratives or storytelling – innovators can deploy to gain access to the symbolic and/or material resources they need. We contribute to this research by showing how abstract and concrete framings differently shape the appreciation of a new idea by novices and experts. In this sense, we answer the call for "controlled experiments wherein real or simulated projective stories are pitched to research subjects to see if they would lend their support" (Garud *et al.*, 2014, p. 1488). We add

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granularity and micro-foundations to prior language-informed perspectives on innovation and entrepreneurship that have primarily focused on broader rhetorical approaches such as discourse, storytelling, and narrative.

Our findings complement recent impression management research that highlights how top managers' use of abstract (i.e., adjectives, nonspecific quantifiers, and future-focused words) or concrete (i.e., verbs, numbers, and past-focused words) linguistic cues may differently shape investors' reactions as reflected in their assessment of firm value (Pan *et al.*, 2018). We show that this choice should be informed by a deeper understanding of how individual cognitive processes of novelty evaluation depend on the target audience's level of expertise in evaluating novel ideas. Relatedly, our findings add to empirical studies on the role of expert evaluators and the thinking mode that their role is likely to activate. According to Berg (2016), for instance, managers evaluating novel ideas are often entrenched in their knowledge domain. They tend to adopt a convergent thinking style, thus focusing on accuracy, correctness, and adherence to a narrow set of relevant information during idea evaluation (Cropley, 2006). Convergent thinking processes are associated with the assessment of technical and financial feasibility. We extend this line of scholarship by exposing how (a) audience members' expertise in evaluating ideas shapes the cognitive processes involved in the assessment of novelty, and (b) the effectiveness of the idea framing strategies varies with audience members' expertise in novel idea evaluation. Our work responds to recent calls in the entrepreneurship literature to "explore different framing tactics and assess the effectiveness of each tactic, under different conditions or contexts" (Fisher *et al.*, 2017, p. 69) as only limited research has studied the complications of framing across multiple audiences (König *et al.*, 2018; Snihur *et al.*, 2021).

Finally, our study contributes to research on the legitimation phase of the idea journey (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Most of the work done so far in the area of novelty legitimation has focused on the role of the social structure in which innovators are embedded – including the innovator's status

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(Merton, 1965) and network (Cattani & Ferriani, 2008; Fleming, Mingo & Chen, 2007) or the openness of the evaluating audience (Cattani *et al.*, 2017; Pontikes, 2012) – in determining whether and how innovators can win support for their work. Likewise, studies that have highlighted the relationship between construal levels and people's views of creative ideas have devoted limited attention to the downstream consequences of such assessments (for a recent exception, see Mount *et al.*, 2021). In sum, as Mueller *et al.* (2014, p. 86) noted, "construal levels may affect people's views of creative ideas, but we do not know whether this translates into support for implementing the ideas." We believe that our study complements this emerging line of scholarship by examining how different framing strategies may persuade different audience members to invest in novel ideas.

**Implications for Practice**

Although audiences in control of resources that are critical to support innovation (e.g., crowdfunders, venture capitalists, angel investors, funding organizations, innovation or R&D managers, users, and so on) strive to select the best ideas, they often erroneously reject novel ideas and hold back innovation. Early stage funding of entrepreneurial projects abounds with cases in which key resource providers overlooked or even sneered venture ideas that later proved to be highly valuable. Notorious examples include such market busters as Apple, Southwestern Airlines, Airbnb, and Grameen Bank, which were all turned down repeatedly when originally pitched to professional investors. This devaluation is intrinsic to the paradoxical nature of novelty. Creating something genuinely new entails departing from existing categories, often by reconfiguring and recombining them in atypical ways. But relevant audiences are less likely to recognize the potential value of atypical combinations (Augier, March, & Marshall, 2015; Uzzi, Mukherjee, Stringer, & Jones, 2013), sometimes resulting in false negatives. "When first proposed, new ideas are often rejected because they are perceived as weird,

inappropriate, unworkable, or too risky, but these same ideas may later result in an outcome that the social context accepts as useful and breakthrough" (Mainemelis, 2010, p. 558).

By demonstrating that the framing of an idea affects audience members' preferences and investment propensity, we offer actionable insights into how linguistic framing can be used *strategically* by innovators striving to face this challenge. Going back to our opening puzzle, deciding whether to frame an idea in *why* or *how* terms depends on who is at the receiving end. Indeed, our evidence suggests that innovators championing novel ideas have a better chance of appealing to novices (e.g., the crowd, friends, family members) and attracting resource commitments from them when their idea is pitched emphasizing a *why* framing and abstract arguments. But the same ideas should be pitched by emphasizing a *how* framing and concrete arguments to experts (e.g., professional investors, innovation managers). In sum, innovators should be savvy about the rhetorical strategies at hand and their potential effect on relevant audiences. While future work could further explore this important aspect, we believe that our findings can be applied to a variety of settings where individuals use *small narratives* (e.g., pitch decks, storylines, taglines, etc.) to elicit initial resource commitments.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Our study has obvious limitations that also constitute opportunities for future research. First, while in this study we considered and found support for the differential impact of idea framing among audiences that vary in their expertise in novel idea evaluation, we believe that future work could study construal framing effect on other types of audiences. For instance, since prior research taking a cognitive-linguistic approach suggests that specialists, who focus on a single issue or domain, are more inclined to appreciate linguistic nuances and are more accurate in their judgments (Crilly, Hansen, & Zollo, 2016), future work on expert evaluators could explore whether the concrete or abstract framing of novel ideas affects specialist and generalist evaluators differently. Second, the present paper uses

pitch decks to investigate how innovators can affect evaluative outcomes. This approach could be expanded by using topic modeling or other coding procedures that prior research has applied to establish the level of abstraction in communication – e.g., in political speeches (Menegatti & Rubini, 2013) – to analyze more systematically how innovators can use language to shape audience members' evaluation of very early stage projects through their rhetoric, pitches and/or narratives. Third, we note that our studies were conducted in different contexts (online vs. email invitation) and hence participants might have different level of motivation (e.g., financial rewards) or engagement with the survey across contexts. Although the time taken by the participants to complete the survey has no effect on our results, investigating how the effectiveness of the framing strategy may vary with level of audience engagement is an interesting avenue for future research. Finally, while our samples may differ in other dimensions than experience with novel idea evaluation, our results were not affected when we controlled for the age and education level of the participants. The use of alternative, more direct, measures of evaluative experience could help further substantiate and refine our findings.

Several other questions are worthy of further investigation. For instance, one might wonder whether the strategic framing of novel ideas is more important for first-time entrepreneurs, as these individuals cannot rely upon any proven outcomes or credible cues and, therefore, are most dependent on argumentation to overcome their liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) and to convince relevant stakeholders (van Werven *et al.,* 2015). Because factors such as status, social ties, or reputation tend to affect the outcomes of the evaluative process (Aadland, Cattani, Falchetti, & Ferriani, 2020), they are also likely to interact with idea framing and novelty appreciation. Future research could explore whether the effect of novel idea framing depends on other cognitive or emotional features of the evaluating audience. Probing the role that differences in personal traits and social characteristics among audience members play in the evaluation process of novel ideas might help further elucidate differences in evaluative outcomes (e.g., Falchetti, 2021). Another interesting opportunity for

delineating the boundary conditions for the congruency effect on idea evaluation could be to examine the extent to which the magnitude of such effect varies with levels of expertise. For instance, in line with the accessibility-diagnosticity framework (Feldman & Lynch, 1988), according to which the positive experience of construal fit ought to be deemed more diagnostic for people with limited expertise, one might expect construal framing congruency to be relatively more effective in steering novices' as opposed to experts' attention towards a positive idea evaluation. Prior research in the context of political persuasion suggesting that more informed audiences are less sensitive to construal fit (i.e., congruence between message and mental representation) appears to support this intuition (Kim *et al.*, 2009). As part of this endeavor to explore scope conditions, scholars might also investigate the effectiveness of the framing strategies posited in our study at different levels of idea novelty. Scholarship in consumer research indicates that highly novel ideas that are discontinuous with existing categories are particularly challenging for experts to process because they prevent them from easily drawing analogies from their domain of expertise to the target domain (Moreau, Lehmann, & Markman, 2001). This, in turn, might suggest an especially acute need to prioritize factual framings that minimize ambiguous information. In contrast, the lack of elaborate knowledge and deep-seated expectations that distinguish novices imply that they may not perceive as much difficulty in constructing their mapping of the attributes of a radical idea from the base to the target domain (Fiske, Kinder, & Larter, 1983). This could reinforce the viability of a less precise but easy-to-relate *why*-focused framing when conveying the idea to novices. Recent scholarship on the nature of cognition regulating decision makers' pursuit of novel ideas may offer valuable guidance on pursuing this interesting research direction (Mount *et al.*, 2021). Finally, scholars interested in impression management, storytelling, and framing strategies could start exploring how entrepreneurial narratives need to vary across time – i.e., during the different phases of a novel idea journey – rather than across audiences. Indeed, as professional investors' "goals and intensity of information search may vary at

different stages" (Pan *et al.* 2020, p. 12), it would seem plausible to expect that no single framing strategy will be equally effective across all stages, but a different framing strategy should be devised for each of them. We focused on the early stages of idea championing when prospective entrepreneurs are still trying to develop their product ideas, and experts tend to evaluate their market potential and feasibility. However, once the product has reached product-market fit, we expect experts to be more interested in scalability and growth over time rather than in the new product itself and its feasibility (for a similar argument, see Huang & Knight, 2017). So, while in the early stages of the idea journey, one might prioritize a framing strategy that emphasizes concrete steps needed to accomplish a given goal, a *why* framing strategy could be more appropriate in later stages. Recent evidence on the funding outcomes for ventures that already exist (Huang *et al.*, 2020) lends credence to this possibility: at this stage of development, expert investors look for entrepreneurs with long-term growth orientations and prefer to invest in ventures whose founders emphasize the larger purpose and end goals of their actions. Future research looking at the effectiveness of framing strategies of venturing ideas over time could shed light on this intuition.

**CONCLUSION**

Growing scholarly attention has been paid to the emergence of novelty. Yet, several questions about recognition and support of novelty are still puzzling scholars. This study develops and tests a conceptual framework for understanding how different *strategic framings* affect the appreciation of novel ideas across multiple audiences. By showing the impact of idea framing on evaluative outcomes, our results suggest that innovators can improve the likelihood of gaining support from relevant audiences for their ideas by framing them differently, depending on the expertise of the evaluating audiences. While our experimental evidence on novelty recognition adds primarily to the innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity literature, it can also inform a broader literature as well as a variety of

evaluative contexts in which language may be used to frame novel ideas and hence exercise greater influence on the audiences that control crucial symbolic and material resources. From ancient Greece to the present day, rhetoric, or the art of using language to persuade audiences in specific situations, has been a crucial means for influence and the object of vast interest and research. We hope our findings will ignite renewed impetus for this fascinating and fundamental area of scholarly inquiry.

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**TABLE 1**
**Means per Experimental Condition for Novices (Study 1)**

|                    | How Frame      | Why Frame       |                    |
| ------------------ | -------------- | --------------- | ------------------ |
| **Idea Attractiveness** |          |                 |                    |
| Means              | 8.56           | 9.73            | F (1, 114) = 5.82  |
| *SD*               | (2.71)         | (2.48)          | (p = .017)         |
| 95% CI             | [7.86; 9.26]   | [9.06; 10.39]   |                    |
| N                  | 60             | 56              |                    |

**TABLE 2**
**Means per Experimental Condition for Experts (Study 2)**

|                    | How Frame      | Why Frame       |                    |
| ------------------ | -------------- | --------------- | ------------------ |
| **Idea Attractiveness** |          |                 |                    |
| Means              | 7.76           | 6.36            | F (1, 57) = 4.36   |
| *SD*               | (2.72)         | (2.44)          | (p = .041)         |
| 95% CI             | [6.72; 8.79]   | [5.45; 7.27]    |                    |
| N                  | 29             | 30              |                    |

**TABLE 3**
**Means per Experimental Condition for Novices (Study 3)**

|                    | How Frame      | Why Frame       |                    |
| ------------------ | -------------- | --------------- | ------------------ |
| **Investment Propensity** |        |                 |                    |
| Means              | 0.75           | 2.44            | F (1, 133) = 13.08 |
| *SD*               | (1.52)         | (3.44)          | (p = .000)         |
| 95% CI             | [0.37; 1.13]   | [1.62; 3.25]    |                    |
| N                  | 64             | 71              |                    |

**TABLE 4**
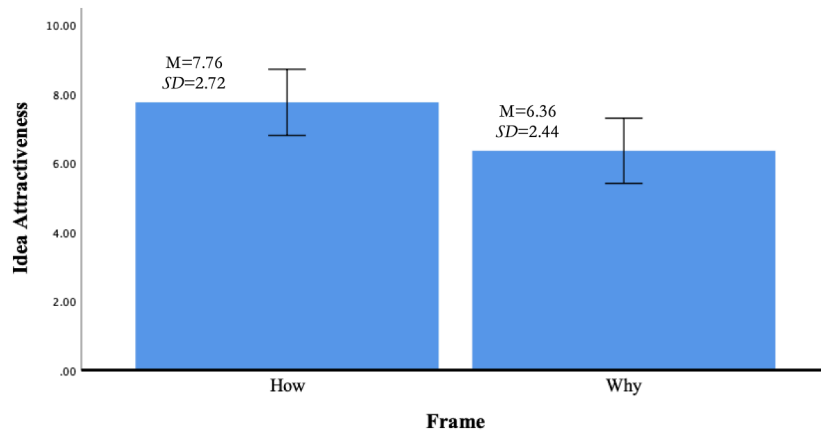**Means per Experimental Condition for Experts (Study 4)**

|                    | How Frame               | Why Frame              |                   |
| ------------------ | ----------------------- | ---------------------- | ----------------- |
| **Investment Amo** |                         |                        |                   |
| Means              | 8,815.12                | 5,777.37               | F (1, 69) = 5.99  |
| *SD*               | (5,711.22)              | (4,746.84)             | (p = .017)        |
| 95% CI             | [6,790.01; 10,840.23]   | [4,217.12; 7,337.62]   |                   |
| N                  | 33                      | 38                     |                   |

**FIGURE 1**
**The Effect of Idea Framing on Idea Attractiveness for Novices (Study 1)**
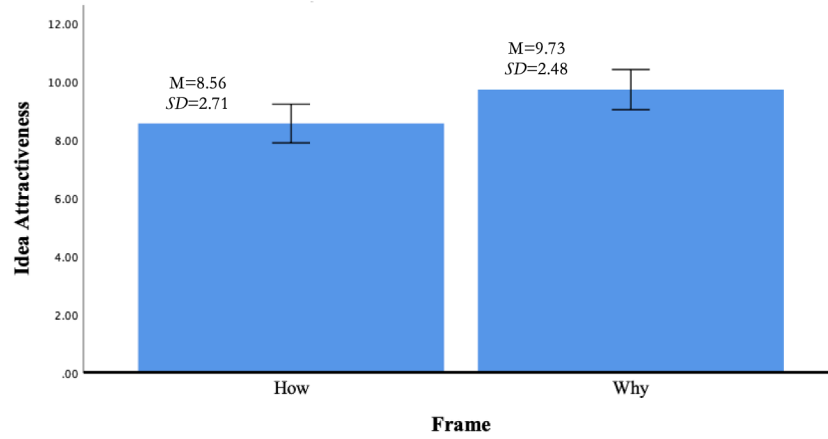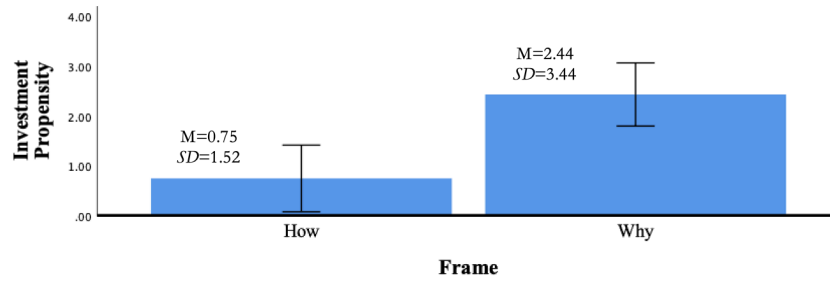


*Note*: Error bars: 95% CI

**FIGURE 2**
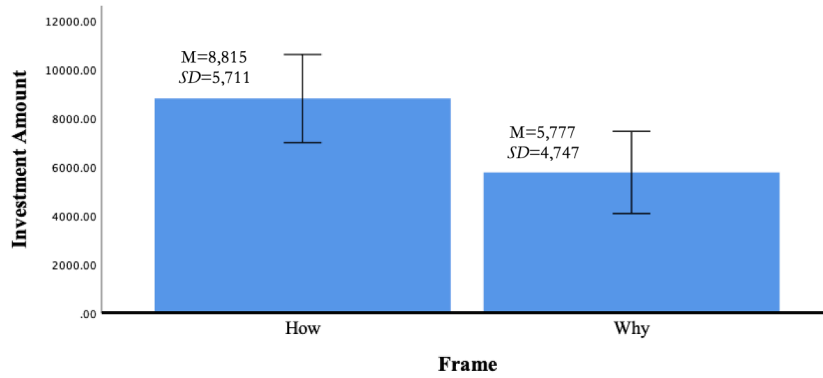**The Effect of Idea Framing on Idea Attractiveness for Experts (Study 2)**



*Note*: Error bars: 95% CI

**FIGURE 3**
**The Effect of Idea Framing on Investment Propensity for Novices (Study 3)**



*Note*: Error bars: 95% CI

**FIGURE 4**
**The Effect of Idea Framing on Investment Amount for Experts (Study 4)**



*Note*: Error bars: 95% CI