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Framing Novelty: A Linguistic Approach To The Understanding Of Entrepreneurship, Creativity, And Innovation

Mixed feelings, mixed outcomes? When emotionally ambivalent framing enhances idea appreciation

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Abstract

Research Summary: Despite growing interest in how linguistic strategies shape audience responses to innovative ideas, prior evidence on the benefits of using emotional language remains mixed. Building on research on emotional ambivalence and social evaluation, we introduce the concept of emotionally ambivalent framing (i.e., the combination of positive and negative emotional language when presenting ideas) and investigate its effects on audience evaluation. Analyzing data from 3284 TED Talks, we find that emotionally ambivalent framing increases receptivity, but only for typical ideas. For atypical ideas, instead, such framing tends to undermine the audience's appreciation. However, we show that speakers' fame mitigates this effect, enabling emotionally ambivalent framing to serve as an effective communicative strategy for atypical ideas as well. These findings advance our understanding of the interplay between emotions and cognition in shaping the effectiveness of linguistic framing, contributing to research on entrepreneurship, ambivalence, and social evaluation.

Managerial Summary: It is still unclear whether and when using emotional language to frame ideas helps innovators

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and entrepreneurs overcome audience resistance. In this study, we find that combining both positive and negative emotional language when presenting an idea (a strategy we call emotionally ambivalent framing) improves audience receptivity to typical ideas. However, an emotionally ambivalent framing loses its effectiveness for atypical ideas. We also find that this effect depends on how well-known entrepreneurs are: for famous ones, emotionally ambivalent framing becomes a powerful tool for increasing audience receptivity, particularly for atypical ideas. Overall, we show how innovators and entrepreneurs can strategically leverage emotional language and craft effective framing strategies that shape how audiences evaluate their ideas.

KEYWORDS

atypicality, emotional ambivalence, fame, framing, innovative ideas, social evaluation

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholars in entrepreneurship and innovation have increasingly emphasized how linguistic framing can enhance (or derail) the receptivity of innovative ideas, products, and practices (Falchetti et al., 2022; Snihur et al., 2022; Tauscher & Rothe, 2024). Much of this work foregrounds the cognitive dimension of framing, examining how entrepreneurs and innovators strategically deploy specific linguistic elements to articulate opportunities and shape how relevant audiences interpret and evaluate them (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Fiss & Zajac, 2006). Yet, the recognition that evaluation is influenced not only by cognitive but also affective factors (Zajonc, 1980), has spurred a growing stream of research showing how the inclusion of affective components or variations in the emotional tone underlying a message can meaningfully influence evaluations (Huang et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2019; Raffaelli et al., 2019).

Intriguingly, research shows mixed findings on whether linguistic framing strategies emphasizing emotions have a beneficial effect on audience evaluation. For example, while Anglin et al. (2018) found that positive emotional language improves fundraising performance, scholars have also documented substantial variation in audience receptivity to it. For example, studies show that overly positive emotional expressions can be detrimental for entrepreneurs presenting their ideas (Sitruk et al., 2025; Warnick et al., 2021). Conversely, in some cases, negative emotional language—for instance, words that convey anger or anxiety—can also help in persuading audiences (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Taken together, the inconsistencies in these findings suggest that examining positive or negative emotional language in isolation may offer an incomplete picture and that the effectiveness of emotional language may instead depend on how emotional cues of different valences are combined.

However, extant research has largely examined emotional language through its valence (a continuum from positive to negative) or through discrete affective states in isolation, paying little attention to the combination of both positive and negative emotional language as a deliberate linguistic framing strategy. This is a consequential issue, not least because individuals presenting innovative ideas—whether intentionally or not—often pair multiple, contrasting emotions rather than relying on a single emotional tone. For example, speaking at the launch of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence at Cambridge University in 2016, Stephen Hawking paired enthusiasm with concern



when arguing that: “Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks.” (University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, responding to recent calls for research on the effects of communication strategies that combine both positive and negative emotional orientations (Colombo, 2021; Sitruk et al., 2025), we ask: *How do audiences respond to emotionally ambivalent framing, that is, the combination of both positive and negative emotional language when presenting an idea?*

To develop our reasoning, we start from two premises of scholarship on emotion: (i) that using emotional language has the potential to orient the audience's affective state through a process of emotional contagion and (ii) that these affective states can then shape the audience's cognitions and influence their evaluations (for reviews, see: Barsade et al., 2018; Van Kleef et al., 2010). Building on these premises, we reason that a framing strategy combining both positive and negative emotional language will orient the audience toward the concurrent experience of opposing emotional orientations, a state known as emotional ambivalence (Rothman et al., 2017), which then will influence their evaluation of the idea presented.

Importantly, prior research demonstrates that language can prime people to feel emotional ambivalence, which in turn affects how they think (Liang et al., 2016; Williams & Aaker, 2002). Additionally, scholars suggest that whether this process facilitates or hinders engagement with innovative ideas depends on contextual conditions that shape whether ambivalence is interpreted as positive or negative (Rothman et al., 2017). Drawing on this emphasis on contextual conditions, we integrate insights from scholarship on emotional ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014; Fong, 2006) and social evaluation (Cattani et al., 2022; Deichmann et al., 2024) to investigate how two fundamental aspects of idea evaluation may shape the effectiveness of an emotionally ambivalent framing: the nature of the idea and the characteristics of the speaker (Aadland et al., 2020; Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a; Uzzi et al., 2013).

Specifically, we propose that when ideas are atypical (i.e., deviate from contextualized expectations of representativeness; Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a, p. 7), an emotionally ambivalent framing will not enhance audience receptivity. Atypical ideas require greater cognitive effort to process (Winkielman et al., 2006), which often triggers negative affective responses (van Harreveld et al., 2015; Winkielman et al., 2003). This mutually amplifying cycle between cognitive effort and negative affect can easily make the discomfort associated with ambivalence more salient and push audiences to seek ways to reduce it, for instance by resorting to more rigid responses such as selective information processing or one-sided thinking (Clark et al., 2008; Rothman et al., 2017; van Harreveld et al., 2015). These responses ultimately may make audiences less cognitively flexible, hindering their ability to appreciate atypical ideas.

Conversely, when innovative ideas are more typical, and hence more closely aligned with an audience's established mental models, they are processed more fluently, resulting in a pleasant experience that elicits positive affective reactions (Reber et al., 2004). As a consequence, for typical ideas, emotionally ambivalent framing is less likely to trigger discomfort-reduction responses and more likely to foster greater openness to new perspectives and promote cognitive flexibility in the audience (Fong, 2006; Rees et al., 2013; Rothman & Melwani, 2017). As a result, for typical ideas, we expect an emotionally ambivalent framing to be more likely to increase audiences' appreciation.

In addition, we contend that speaker fame, defined as how well an individual is recognized by the general public (Currid-Halkett, 2010), is important to understand how ideas framed in emotionally ambivalent terms will be received. Famous individuals tend to be perceived as more likable, trustworthy, and credible (De Veirman et al., 2017; Menon & Blount, 2003) and elicit positive affective responses (Blaseg & Hornuf, 2024; Rindova et al., 2006). We therefore argue that fame can alleviate the overall discomfort experienced by the audience during the processing of atypical ideas, thereby making emotionally ambivalent language a more viable strategy for presenting them.

We tested our hypotheses in the context of TED, a platform dedicated to disseminating innovative ideas through short-form public presentations. An advantage of this setting is that it offers a large and diverse set of ideas presented that vary in speaker, topic, language style, and audience reception. This allows us to systematically measure both the nature of the ideas presented and the characteristics of each talk, providing a rich context for testing our theoretical framework. Our data includes all TED Talks uploaded on the official TED YouTube Channel

between 2006 and 2020 ($n = 3284$). Analytical findings yielded by a combination of natural language processing tools and econometrics support our hypotheses: emotionally ambivalent framings increase audiences' appreciation for typical ideas, whereas this is not the case for atypical ideas. However, when famous speakers present such ideas using emotionally ambivalent language, it becomes an effective framing strategy.

Our study offers three key contributions. First, we advance entrepreneurship research on framing (Clarke et al., 2019; Falchetti et al., 2022; Snihur et al., 2022) by introducing the concept of emotionally ambivalent framing and showing under what conditions using language that jointly evokes positive and negative emotions can increase an audience's receptivity to innovative ideas. Second, our theory and results are relevant to research on novelty evaluation (Cattani et al., 2022; Deichmann et al., 2024). We show that the evaluative consequences of emotionally ambivalent language are fundamentally contingent on the speaker and the nature of the idea, expanding our understanding of the interplay of cognition and affective states in the evaluative process (Cudennec & Huynh, 2023; Kalvapalle et al., 2024), and enriching prior research that examined these factors separately (e.g., Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024b; Deichmann et al., 2021; Smith & Chae, 2016). Third, we contribute to research on ambivalence in organizational and managerial settings (Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Rothman et al., 2017) by suggesting that the sources of ambivalence (i.e., the speaker and the message) are important boundary conditions to understand whether the effect of emotionally ambivalent framing will be beneficial or not. Our findings also offer important recommendations for practice by outlining under what conditions using emotional language is likely to help or hinder innovators and entrepreneurs, particularly in online settings where competition for attention is fierce.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Linguistic strategies: Emotionally ambivalent framing of ideas

Entrepreneurship and innovation researchers have emphasized how actors can strategically influence audiences' receptivity to their ideas by leveraging linguistic framing (e.g., Clarke et al., 2019; Falchetti et al., 2022; Tauscher & Rothe, 2024; for a recent review, see Snihur et al., 2022). The act of framing refers to the use of specific verbal strategies (Clarke et al., 2019) and involves deploying rhetorical devices in communication to "define a situation for another and influence their thinking and behaviors" (Giorgi, 2017, p. 713). By emphasizing certain aspects of reality and hiding others, framing strategies can direct audience attention and help innovators mobilize support and gain legitimacy (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014).

Indeed, framing strategies can support or hinder the journey of innovative ideas by influencing how audiences construct meaning around them (Snihur et al., 2022). A key mechanism explaining the effectiveness of specific framing strategies is their ability to facilitate congruence with audiences' cognitive representations and understanding (Giorgi, 2017). An appropriate linguistic framing of an idea, in fact, can provide audiences with the means to reduce ambiguity, confusion, and uncertainty, consequently enabling them to process ideas more easily and favorably (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; van Werven et al., 2015). For example, Falchetti et al. (2022) experimentally demonstrated that framing strategies using concrete language appeal more to expert evaluators, whereas those using abstract language appeal more to lay evaluators. Peng et al. (2024) found a strong association between the use of promotional language in framing and founders' and scientists' support for and adoption of innovative ideas. Tauscher and Rothe (2024) illustrate that framings emphasizing social impact or innovativeness not only influence audience evaluations but also vary in effectiveness depending on prevailing market conditions.

In addition to this cognitive perspective, another influential body of work has focused on the role of language as a conduit for emotions (Reilly & Seibert, 2003), discussing how the use of emotional language also shapes evaluation (Baron, 2008; Cudennec & Huynh, 2023; Huang et al., 2023). A central proposition in this literature is that emotional language can trigger emotional responses that intertwine with cognitive processes (Catino & Patriotta, 2013; Schwarz & Clore, 1983) and "contributes to drawing attention, setting priorities, and making a relevant decision"



(Sitruk et al., 2025, p. 2; Lerner et al., 2015). Building on this perspective, several studies highlight the importance of using emotional language in shaping audience receptivity to ideas, products, or opportunities. However, while emotional cues in language are powerful, research reports mixed findings on when and what type of emotional cues in framing ideas are beneficial. For example, Anglin et al. (2018) demonstrated that using words with more positive valence in project descriptions correlates with improved fundraising performance on Kickstarter. However, more recently, Sitruk et al. (2025) reported that displaying overly positive emotions in crowdfunding campaigns is associated with reduced investment levels. While Berger and Milkman (2012) showed that New York Times articles spread more widely when they contain language evoking strong positive (e.g., awe) or negative (e.g., anger, anxiety) emotions.

Despite the wide range of emotions examined in the literature, there is a general tendency to conceptualize affect along a simple positive–negative spectrum and to focus on framing strategies centered around discrete emotions (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991; Sitruk et al., 2025). This is problematic because individuals often, intentionally or unintentionally, communicate innovative ideas through messages that combine contrasting emotions (Ashforth et al., 2014). Consequently, current research may be too simplistic to capture the inherent complexity of using emotional language as a framing strategy. Researchers have therefore recently called for investigations into the role of emotions in linguistic framing, with a particular focus on how the joint use of positive and negative emotional language affects the evaluation of entrepreneurial communication (Colombo, 2021; Sitruk et al., 2025). Responding to these calls, we introduce the concept of emotionally ambivalent framing—defined as the joint use of both positive and negative emotional language when presenting an idea—and investigate how and when this framing strategy can support innovators.

We propose that, like any other verbal expressions of emotion (e.g., Cheshin et al., 2011; Van Kleef et al., 2004), emotionally ambivalent framing can influence audiences' perceptions (Zajonc, 1980) by “eliciting affective reactions” (Van Kleef, 2009, p. 184) that may subsequently influence cognitions and evaluative judgments (Barsade et al., 2018). This influence operates through emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993), described as “a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50 as quoted in Barsade, 2002). Importantly, emotional contagion has been shown to spread through verbal expressions of emotion, including in virtual communication (Barsade et al., 2018; Van Kleef et al., 2010).

Applying emotional contagion theory to our study, we argue that framing ideas by combining both positive and negative emotional language has the power to evoke emotional ambivalence in the audience—that is, the concurrent experience of both positive and negative emotions toward a given object or situation (Ashforth et al., 2014; Rothman et al., 2017; Rothman & Melwani, 2017). The resulting ambivalent affective state can then shape the audience's cognitive processing and evaluative responses to the presented idea. Supporting this intuition, scholars in marketing have found that exposure to messages containing mixed emotions (i.e., both sadness and happiness) induces emotional ambivalence and affects evaluations (Williams & Aaker, 2002). Similarly, research in consumer psychology finds that when donation appeals are framed using both positive emotions (e.g., strength) and negative emotions (e.g., sadness), recipients effectively experience emotional ambivalence, which ultimately influences their intention to donate (Liang et al., 2016). Finally, Pratt and Barnett (1997) show that Amway distributors sought to induce emotional ambivalence in recruits through language expressing conflicting emotions to make them more receptive to their message.

Taken together, this research suggests that presenting ideas with an emotionally ambivalent framing can—through emotional contagion—prime people to feel ambivalent emotions, which in turn may influence their evaluative processes. In the next section, we focus on these processes to hypothesize when and why emotionally ambivalent framing helps or hurts audiences' evaluative responses to innovative ideas. Specifically, we theorize that emotionally ambivalent framing does not have a uniformly positive or negative effect, but its effect depends on contextual factors.

2.2 | Evaluating novelty under emotional ambivalence

Organizational and psychological research on emotional ambivalence points to potentially conflicting directions regarding its effects on the audience during the idea evaluation process. A body of work suggests that framing an idea using emotionally ambivalent language may increase its receptivity by enhancing cognitive flexibility, defined as the ability to expand one's cognitive breadth and scope of attention (Fong, 2006; Jonas et al., 1997; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991). That's because emotionally ambivalent framing can evoke an ambivalent affective state, signaling to individuals that they are in an unusual situation (Rothman & Melwani, 2017). This perception of unusualness challenges existing cognitive routines and suggests a need to take a different approach, prompting a broader search for novel responses (Fong, 2006). Consistent with this view, Rees et al. (2013) provided evidence that individuals who experience emotional ambivalence seek and incorporate a broader range of information into their decision-making processes.

Additionally, several studies suggest that the experience of emotional ambivalence may affect an audience's predisposition to ideas by facilitating engagement with and receptivity to the message presented (Hodson et al., 2001; Jonas et al., 1997). For instance, Pratt and Barnett (1997) found that Amway distributors incorporated conflicting emotions into their recruitment messages (positive emotions of excitement and desire, as well as negative emotions of dissatisfaction and fear) to prompt prospects to break their preexisting cognitive routines and make them more receptive to Amway messages. Along the same lines, Lefsrud et al. (2020) theorized that experiencing ambivalent emotions motivates individuals to engage in deeper and more active consideration of presented ideas.

However, earlier scholarship in social psychology has cast a more negative light on the consequences of emotional ambivalence, suggesting that it may negatively impact how audiences evaluate ideas. Because experiencing ambivalence conflicts with fundamental consistency motives (Heider, 1946), it is often considered to be an undesirable and unpleasant experience (van Harreveld et al., 2014, 2015), which motivates individuals to avoid or reduce the discomfort it elicits (Ashforth et al., 2014). Research shows that coping strategies used to reduce the experience of ambivalence, such as one-sided thinking and reluctance to consider alternative perspectives, are associated with greater cognitive inflexibility (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Rothman et al., 2017; Rothman & Melwani, 2017; Sincoff, 1990). For instance, Clark et al. (2008) showed that when ambivalence is high, individuals pay more attention to information that confirms their existing views. Similarly, Sawicki et al. (2013) suggested that ambivalence can restrict thinking and increase the selection of confirmatory evidence, particularly when individuals are unfamiliar with the issue. Indeed, according to Rothman et al. (2017), ambivalence can strengthen confirmation biases through "heightened accessibility, search, consideration, and use of information that benefits their current conceptions (e.g., hypothesis, belief, or attitude) and neglect [of] information that may disprove them" (Rothman et al., 2017, p. 40). As a consequence, an emotionally ambivalent framing may ultimately risk diminishing the audience's openness to (innovative) ideas.

To reconcile these inconsistent responses, Rothman et al. (2017) argued that the outcomes of emotional ambivalence depend on the individual's experience of ambivalence, underscoring the fundamental role of contextual and situational conditions. For instance, the experience of ambivalence is more likely to be perceived as unpleasant and produce negative outcomes in psychologically unsafe environments than in psychologically safe ones (Pratt & Barnett, 1997), or when individuals are forced to choose between opposing orientations (van Harreveld et al., 2015). Accordingly, rather than focusing on a baseline effect of emotionally ambivalent framing, we theorize about the contextual conditions under which framing ideas in emotionally ambivalent terms may be advantageous or disadvantageous. In particular, we focus on the atypicality of the idea and the fame of the speaker, two aspects central to the process of idea evaluation (Aadland et al., 2020; Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a).

2.3 | The role of idea atypicality

We first contend that the positive effect of emotionally ambivalent framing may be contingent on the characteristics of the idea presented (Deichmann & Jensen, 2018; Falchetti et al., 2024). Specifically, we focus on the atypicality of



the idea (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a), as it may affect their cognitive and affective responses to emotionally ambivalent framing. Atypical ideas, as opposed to typical ones, are those that counter conventional paradigms or substantially deviate from existing understandings of the world (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a). Atypical ideas are critical catalysts for driving innovative breakthroughs and profound sociocultural transformations (Rao et al., 2003; Uzzi et al., 2013). Yet, research consistently shows that atypical objects, including products, actors, and ideas, are often evaluated more negatively than typical ones and are more prone to dismissal (Gouvard & Durand, 2023). Although prior work has mostly investigated the direct effect of atypicality on evaluation decisions (Smith, 2011; Zuckerman, 1999), our focus lies on how the relationship between emotionally ambivalent framing and idea appreciation differs when the idea framed is atypical (vs. typical).

Because atypical ideas clash with established mental models (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a), they tend to be processed with lower fluency and generate confusion (Reber et al., 2004; Winkielman et al., 2006). An important consequence of this increasing cognitive load is that this perceptual mechanism can spark negative affective responses (Winkielman et al., 2003). Under these circumstances, an emotionally ambivalent framing is especially likely to exacerbate the negative effects of ambivalence, as the combined cognitive and emotional burden leads audiences to feel intense discomfort (van Harreveld et al., 2015).

To address this discomfort, audiences may resort to more rigid coping strategies, such as selective and confirmatory information processing (Rothman et al., 2017), which curtails their capacity to revise their existing associative and cognitive patterns. This outcome impedes the fundamental process of open-mindedness required to appreciate atypical ideas (Schilling, 2005). By contrast, when an idea's atypicality is low, we expect emotionally ambivalent framing to enhance the audience's receptivity to the message. This occurs because typical ideas are processed more fluently, resulting in a "conscious experience of processing ease" (Winkielman et al., 2003, p. 193) that also generates positive affect due to the availability of well-established knowledge structures for interpretation (Reber et al., 2004). As a result, when audiences encounter more typical ideas framed in emotionally ambivalent terms, they are unlikely to experience confusion or discomfort, so an emotionally ambivalent framing is more likely to encourage them to engage in broader, deeper cognitive processing, facilitating openness and receptivity to the ideas presented.

In summary, when emotionally ambivalent framing is used to propose atypical ideas, their cognitive complexity is likely to exacerbate confusion and discomfort, triggering the negative consequences of ambivalence, such as reliance on confirmatory and selective information processing, which ultimately makes audiences less appreciative of the ideas being proposed. By contrast, for typical ideas that are processed more fluently, emotionally ambivalent framing can heighten cognitive flexibility and thus induce more favorable responses from audiences. Thus:

Hypothesis 1. (H1). An emotionally ambivalent framing is less positively associated with idea appreciation when ideas are atypical (vs. typical).

2.4 | The moderating role of fame

Audience evaluation depends as much on the characteristics of the idea as on the attributes of the innovator (Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020). Indeed, innovators' characteristics such as fame, status, legitimacy, or reputation serve as social intangible assets that offer an interpretive lens, shaping how audiences perceive and respond to information (Hubbard et al., 2018; Pfarrer et al., 2010). For instance, audiences tend to be more receptive to ideas introduced by high-status actors (Rao et al., 2003; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014) because "status serves as a source of information about actors' unobserved quality" (Aadland et al., 2020, p. 1). Accordingly, we propose that the relationship described above may be moderated by the fame of the speaker presenting the idea.

Fame is a socio-cognitive construct emphasizing "the quantity of recognition" (Currid-Halkett, 2010, p. 66) that an individual or organization receives (Pfarrer et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2006). Fame thus captures the "visibility of, and public attention to, information" (Wei et al., 2017, p. 2105) about an actor. Evidence from social psychology and

sociology suggests that fame influences how audiences evaluate both actors and their outputs (Blaseg & Hornuf, 2024; Reitzig & Sorenson, 2013). For example, quality is often inferred from popularity (Salganik & Watts, 2008), and well-known individuals tend to be perceived as more likable, trustworthy, and credible (De Veirman et al., 2017; Menon & Blount, 2003). Moreover, fame is frequently associated with positive affective reactions among audiences (Blaseg & Hornuf, 2024; Rindova et al., 2006).

We argue that the negative effect of emotionally ambivalent framing on the appreciation of atypical ideas (compared to typical ones) may be mitigated for famous speakers for two principal reasons. First, fame may foster a sense of psychological safety (Pratt & Barnett, 1997), which can attenuate the negative experience of ambivalence (Rothman et al., 2017), thereby increasing the likelihood it fosters greater cognitive flexibility in the audience, even for atypical ideas. Second, the positive affective responses elicited by fame may activate emotional and cognitive processes that help audiences make sense of atypical ideas (Burns et al., 2008; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), ultimately reducing the confusion and resulting discomfort often arising when processing them.

In sum, by reducing the cognitive burden and negative affect arising during the evaluation of atypical ideas, and by fostering a safer space for this evaluative process, famous speakers may increase the likelihood that the use of emotionally ambivalent language will yield positive outcomes and broaden the audience's cognitive scope, thereby enhancing appreciation also for atypical ideas. Thus:

Hypothesis 2. (H2). Speaker fame attenuates the negative interaction between idea atypicality and emotionally ambivalent framing on idea appreciation, such that this negative effect is weaker for more famous speakers than for less famous speakers.

Figure 1 summarizes our overarching research model.

3 | EMPIRICAL SETTING: TED TALKS

We tested our hypotheses in the context of TED Talks, a platform that provides speakers with opportunities to share their ideas with audiences around the world. TED Talks, a non-profit organization dedicated to sharing “Ideas Worth Spreading,” began in 1984 as an elite conference focused on technology, entertainment, and design. In 2006, it started making conference videos available online, becoming one of the largest and most appreciated open repositories of ideas available online (Gomez-Marín, 2024).

TED Talks have recently attracted attention from academics in management (Meier et al., 2020; Miron-Spektor et al., 2023) and constitute an ideal context for studying how framing strategies shape audiences' receptivity to ideas for several reasons. First, TED is a unique platform where speakers from diverse fields and disciplines can present their ideas to heterogeneous, global audiences. The cultural and disciplinary backgrounds of these audiences vary, enabling us to investigate how people with different perspectives respond to emotionally ambivalent framing.

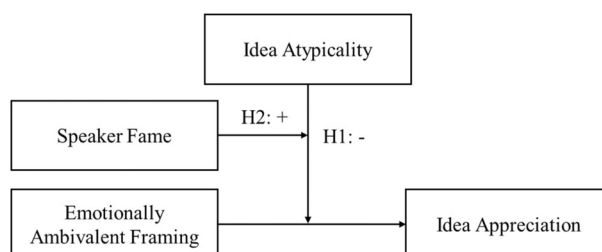


FIGURE 1 Research model.



Second, TED Talks serve as a natural laboratory for examining this framing effect across a broad range of topics spanning technology, art, science, and social issues, and speakers ranging from relatively unknown individuals to highly recognizable figures (Gomez-Marin, 2024). Moreover, all the information about talks and speakers is readily quantifiable.

4 | DATA AND METHODS

Our dataset comprises transcripts of the video recordings of all TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Talks from 2006 to 2020 that were uploaded to the official TED YouTube Channel. From the initial sample ($n = 4092$), we excluded all talks delivered in languages other than English, as well as all interviews and live performances (i.e., talks where speakers played music or danced), leaving 3284 talks in our dataset.

4.1 | Measures

Dependent variable: Idea appreciation. Consistent with previous research on audience engagement in online settings (Antretter et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2025; Seigner et al., 2023), we measured *idea appreciation* as the total number of likes received by each talk as our dependent variable.

Independent variable: Emotionally ambivalent framing. We conceptualized *emotionally ambivalent framing* as the joint use of positive and negative emotional language when presenting ideas. This can be illustrated with an excerpt from Leila Pirhaji's TED talk, "The Medical Potential of AI and Metabolites": "I've been developing algorithms to analyze biological data. So, it sounded easy...Then I realized why no one has done this before: it's extremely difficult." The emotional cue "sounded easy" conveys a sense of positive orientation toward her project, but the subsequent remark "it's extremely difficult" reflects a negative one directed at the object. By contrast, a framing with univalent emotions (Rothman & Melwani, 2017) would instead highlight only one orientation, for instance, communicating joy or excitement alone, voicing only fear or frustration, or omitting emotional cues altogether and remaining neutral.

We employed a lexicon-based approach for our purpose, as content dictionaries and associated word frequencies are the most widely used methods for analyzing the sentiment qualities of a given text (Pennebaker & Francis, 1999). We closely follow prior empirical work on the verbal expression of emotional ambivalence (Harrison & Dossinger, 2017), and measured emotionally ambivalent framing as the product of the negative and positive affect from LIWC (official dictionaries: *tone_pos* and *tone_neg*), with a correction for dissimilarity between the two, ensuring that opposing emotions were similar in magnitude:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Emotionally Ambivalent Framing} = & (\text{Positive Affect Score} * \text{Negative Affect Score}) \\ & - (\text{Max}[\text{Positive Affect Score}, \text{Negative Affect Score}] \\ & - \text{Min}[\text{Positive Affect Score}, \text{Negative Affect Score}]). \end{aligned}$$

A positive value of emotionally ambivalent framing, therefore, indicates that a speaker presented ideas by juxtaposing a mixture of equally intense positive and negative affect words (Fong & Tiedens, 2002).

To assess the reliability of our measure, two of the authors independently viewed and rated a random sample of 10 talks. Their ratings were then compared to the scores generated by our dictionary-based approach, and the high degree of alignment between manual ratings and automated scores provides initial evidence of reliability in capturing emotionally ambivalent framing. To further establish face validity, we complemented this test with a large language model-based approach. Specifically, we selected the three talks with the highest and lowest levels of ambivalent framing according to our measure. As a preliminary illustration of the face validity of our measure, the talk with the

highest ambivalence score, “How to Fix a Broken Heart” by psychologist Guy Winch, contrasts the pain and sadness of heartbreak with the hope of recovery, offering a set of ideas to leverage this emotional tension to heal and move forward. We then applied OpenAI's GPT-4o to the six talk transcripts, prompting the model to identify instances in which speakers communicated both positive and negative emotions. The LLM's classifications accurately distinguished talks across high- and low-ambivalence categories, thereby providing further evidence for the validity of our measure.

Independent variable: Idea atypicality. We derived our measure of *idea atypicality* using word embedding models, a family of unsupervised machine learning techniques that utilize neural networks to represent words in a high-dimensional vector space (Aceves & Evans, 2024). We used Word2Vec to train our embedding model on the entire corpus of Ted Talks. Following standard practices, we trained a 300-dimensional model using a window size of 10 words and confirmed its validity by performing various most-similar queries and word analogy tasks (Mikolov et al., 2013). Since word embeddings represent concepts as points in a multidimensional geometric space (Kozłowski et al., 2019), we leveraged the information encoded within this geometric space to map the conceptual landscape of ideas presented by entrepreneurs, enabling us to identify ideas occupying a peripheral position (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a). Formally, i and j represent two ideas, and c_i and c_j represent the centroid vectors of their respective transcripts. We define $d_{(i,j)}$ as the cosine distance between c_i and c_j . We measure the atypicality of an idea i as the sum of the distances from i to every other idea presented (thereby resembling a measure of semantic farness/centrality, i.e., the sum of all the distances from a node to every other node in a graph).

$$\text{Atypicality}_i = \sum_{j \neq i} d_{(i,j)}.$$

Finally, guided by previous research (e.g., Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024b; Schilling & Green, 2011), we created a binary variable to classify ideas above the mean level of atypicality as atypical. Figure 2 provides a graphical illustration of the measure based on two examples of typical and atypical ideas presented in talks.

Independent variable: Speaker fame. Consistent with previous studies examining fame and popularity in online settings (Cha et al., 2010), we measured speaker *fame* as a speaker's number of followers on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) at the time of data collection. We chose X because of its increasingly important role as a

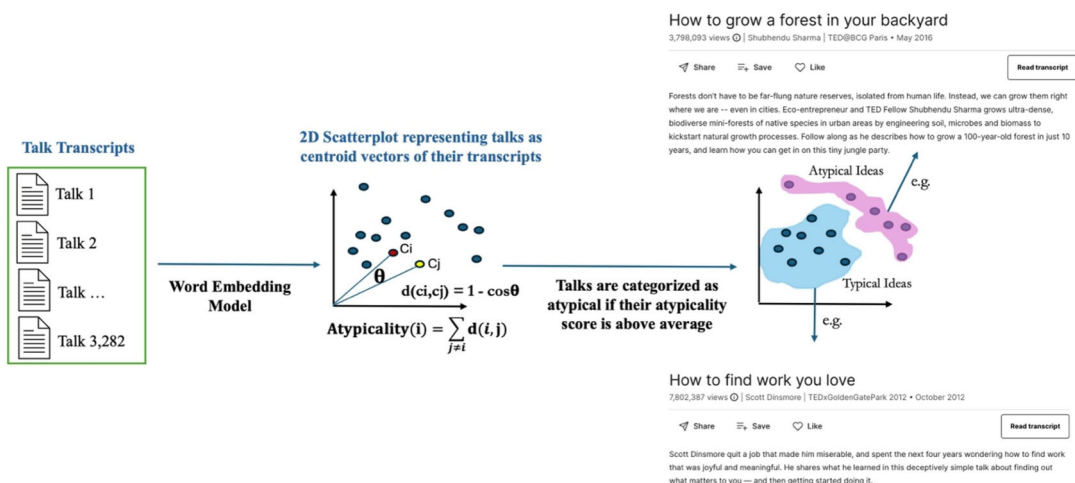


FIGURE 2 Idea atypicality: Measurement approach.



source of information, ideas, promotion, and innovation (Fischer & Reuber, 2014; Seigner et al., 2023). We used a log transformation to address the skewed nature of the data.

Control variables. We also included several control variables at the speaker, content, and context levels that may further influence idea appreciation. At the speaker level, we controlled for *gender* and *nationality* because previous research corroborates the existence of significant evaluative disparities based on these aspects (Balachandra et al., 2019; Wesemann & Wincent, 2021). Another potential factor affecting idea evaluation is the speaker's unobservable capabilities and context-specific skills (Deichmann et al., 2021). For this reason, we accounted for whether a speaker had *prior TED Talk experience* and whether they were an *entrepreneur* or an *academic*, as persuasive skills are central to both professions (Bhardwaj, 2025; McCloskey & Klamer, 1995). Finally, to ensure that our results do not hinge on a few extremely popular celebrities, we controlled for *celebrity outliers*. At the content level, we considered several linguistic elements that may affect a speaker's success in eliciting positive responses. Building on research on rhetoric and persuasion (Rapp, 2023), we controlled for *analytical thinking* and *authenticity*. We also controlled for the extent to which ideas were presented using a *narrative* structure, as narratives are powerful persuasive devices (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024b; Turner, 2025) and for the *topics* of the talk, given that certain topics are naturally more engaging and interesting, thus increasing the likelihood that they will attract attention and become very popular (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Finally, we controlled for additional features that could mechanically influence or indirectly affect the number of likes, such as the talk's *length*, the use of *music*, the talk's *upload* date on YouTube, and the number of *tags*. At the context level, we controlled for the *TED event type*, since some events are curated differently and therefore receive varying levels of advertisement and promotion. Table 1 summarizes all the control variables used in the study and their operationalization.

4.2 | Estimation

We decided to use a negative binomial regression model since our dependent variable is a nonnegative count variable with overdispersion¹ (Hausman et al., 1984), and to include robust estimators (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998). Following a hierarchical approach to introducing our independent variables (Cohen et al., 2013), our baseline model includes only the control variables. Model 1 introduces the interactions between emotionally ambivalent framing and idea atypicality to test H1. Model 2 includes the three-way interaction between emotionally ambivalent framing, idea atypicality, and speaker's fame to test H2. We mean-centered the emotionally ambivalent framing term by subtracting its mean from all the observed values (Aiken & West, 1991).

5 | FINDINGS

We provide descriptive statistics for all variables in Tables 2 and 3. Means and SDs are calculated on untransformed measures for ease of interpretation. Correlations are reasonably low, and we further controlled for multicollinearity using variance inflation factors (VIFs). Results show a mean VIF of 2.27, well below the traditional threshold of 10 (Cohen et al., 2013), suggesting that multicollinearity is unlikely to influence our analyses. Table 4 presents the results of the regression models and corresponding fit statistics.

The baseline model includes only the control variables. It shows significant relationships between several control variables and positive responses to a talk. Interestingly, the upload date is negatively associated with idea appreciation ($\beta = -0.007$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that simply being online for longer is not sufficient to increase positive responses. We also find that a more authentic approach supports idea appreciation ($\beta = 0.017$, $p = 0.000$), but surprisingly a logical thinking pattern does not ($\beta = -0.036$, $p = 0.002$).

Model 1 introduces the interaction between emotionally ambivalent framing and idea atypicality. The results show a significant negative interaction between the two variables ($\beta = -0.095$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that the

TABLE 1 Operationalization of control variables.

Variable	Operationalization
Gender	Binary variable: 0 = male, 1 = female
Nationality	Categorical variable to account for the speaker's country or region of origin: 1 = United States 2 = Europe 3 = South America 4 = Africa 5 = Asia 6 = Oceania 7 = Canada 8 = Not reported
Prior TED Talk Experience	Binary variable indicating whether the speaker had previously given a TED Talk before the talk was recorded (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
Speaker Academic	Binary variable indicating whether the speaker is affiliated with an academic institution (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
Speaker Entrepreneur	Binary variable indicating whether the speaker has founded or is running a business (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
Celebrity outliers	Binary variable indicating whether the speaker has an exceptionally high number of followers (above the 95th percentile, 0 = No, 1 = Yes)
Authenticity	Captures the extent to which speakers use words reflecting an honest, unfiltered, and spontaneous style (based on the Authenticity variable in the 2022 LIWC program—Boyd et al. (2022))
Analytical Thinking	Captures the extent to which speakers use words suggesting formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking patterns (based on the Analytical Thinking variable in the LIWC program—Boyd et al. (2022))
Narrativity	Captures the extent to which the talk is organized as a story (e.g., beginning, climax, ending) (based on the Narrativity variable in the LIWC program by Boyd et al. (2022))
Topic	Set of binary variables based on the most frequent tags: Activism; Art; Biology; Business; Collaboration; Communication; Community; Creativity; Culture; Design; Economics; Entertainment; Future; Global Issues; Health; Humanity; Innovation; Medicine; Science; Social; Change; Society; Technology
Talk Length	Continuous variable representing the number of words in each talk
Music	Binary variable indicating whether music is included in the talk (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
Upload date	Continuous variable measuring the number of months from the date the talk was posted online to the date of data collection
Number of Tags	Continuous variable representing the total number of tags associated with each talk
TED Event type	Categorical variable to account for the different TED Events: 1 = TED Stage Talk 2 = Original Content 3 = TED-Ed Original 4 = TEDx Talk 5 = Best of Web 6 = TED Institute Talk

positive association between emotionally ambivalent framing and idea appreciation becomes significantly weaker when ideas are atypical. Figure 3 graphs this effect. Notably, the positive and significant coefficient of idea atypicality ($\beta = 0.284, p = 0.002$) indicates that, in this context, audiences generally appreciate atypical ideas more than typical ones. However, the interaction also shows that pairing such ideas with emotionally ambivalent framing



TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for binary variables.

Variable	%
Atypical ideas	38.34%
Gender (female)	39.37%
Academic	55.48%
Entrepreneur	12.33%
Prior TED Talk experience	25.85%
Music	8.37%
Celebrity outliers	0.55%
Event type	
TED Stage Talk	72.62%
Original Content	17.97%
TED-Ed Original	4.69%
TEDx Talk	1.74%
Best of Web	1.55%
TED Institute Talk	1.31%
Nationality	
America	48.84%
European	18.67%
Unknown	13.06%
Asian	7.52%
African	4.32%
Canadian	3.23%
South American	2.65%
Australian	1.71%
Topics ^a	
Activism	7.52%
Art	9.01%
Biology	7.55%
Business	13.06%
Collaboration	7.00%
Communication	8.92%
Community	8.68%
Creativity	8.62%
Culture	17.20%
Design	14.59%
Economics	6.70%
Entertainment	9.35%
Future	9.77%
Global issues	16.50%
Health	9.96%
Humanity	11.02%
Innovation	10.17%

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Variable	%
Medicine	6.76%
Science	23.60%
Social change	14.74%
Society	15.80%
Technology	27.25%

^aTopics are not mutually exclusive.

attenuates, and even reverses, this effect. Holding other factors constant, atypical ideas presented with a highly emotionally ambivalent framing (2 standard deviations above the mean) received 4238 fewer likes than typical ideas presented with the same framing strategy. A slope test confirms that the slope for typical ideas is positive and significant ($b = 0.078$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the slope for atypical ideas is negative but not statistically significant ($b = -0.017$, $p = 0.521$). Taken together, these findings indicate that the positive association between emotionally ambivalent framing and audience appreciation is present for typical ideas but disappears for atypical ones, thereby supporting H1.

Finally, Model 2 introduces speaker fame. Not surprisingly, famous speakers generally perform better ($\beta = 0.077$, $p < 0.001$), supporting findings from various fields that fame shapes how audiences evaluate actors and their outputs in several ways (Reitzig & Sorenson, 2013). Most importantly, we find that the coefficient for the three-way interaction between speaker fame, idea atypicality, and emotionally ambivalent framing is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.015$, $p = 0.008$). This indicates that famous speakers benefit from presenting atypical ideas with emotionally ambivalent framing. Specifically, when atypical ideas are presented with highly emotionally ambivalent framing (at two standard deviations above the mean) by a famous speaker (at one standard deviation above the mean) they received 516 more likes than typical ones.

In plotting the interactive effect (Figure 4), we used one standard deviation above and below the mean value as high and low conditional values of speaker fame (for a similar approach, see Dawson & Richter, 2006). A slope difference analysis reveals that the simple slope of emotionally ambivalent framing in predicting audience appreciation of an idea differs significantly for atypical ideas depending on speaker fame. Specifically, the slope is significantly more negative when speaker fame is low (vs. high) (slope difference: $z = -2.88$, $p = 0.004$, Bonferroni corrected $p = 0.024$), thus supporting H2.

5.1 | Robustness checks

To ensure robustness, we conduct an extensive set of additional tests, reported in Table 5. First, we tried to alleviate concerns that the results are driven by specific choices of our measures. For this reason, we first reran our analysis using a continuous measure of atypicality (Model 3), and results continue to be robust to this alternative measure. It is also plausible that ideas discussing popular topics are more likely to cluster tightly in the embedding space, while those in sparsely represented genres may appear atypical simply because they have fewer semantic neighbors. To rule out this possibility, we introduced a variable that explicitly captures topics' popularity. Specifically, we leveraged the tag system used to categorize the topics covered in each TED talk, counted how many times each tag appears in the corpus, and, for each talk, computed the average frequency of all the tags assigned to it. This measure is not correlated with our measure of atypicality (-0.0974), and when introduced in the model, results remain unchanged (Model 4). Also, to further address the confounding effect of genres' distribution, we restricted the analysis to entrepreneurs only (i.e., those whose descriptions included the labels "entrepreneur" or "founder"). This is because



TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for continuous variables.

Continuous variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Idea appreciation	10929.94	44123.36	31	1,350,361	1								
2. Emotionally ambivalent framing	1.42	2.86	−6.65	37	0.073	1							
3. Speaker fame	7.18	4.25	0	17.81	0.121	0.101	1						
4. Authenticity	44.43	17.27	1	99	0.131	0.335	0.089	1					
5. Narrative	13.26	27.68	−55.95	89.61	−0.007	0.029	0.057	0.027	1				
6. Analytical thinking	43.46	18.38	1	96.43	−0.102	−0.055	−0.063	−0.333	−0.107	1			
7. Talk length	2235.98	1006.73	228	6912	0.050	−0.009	0.142	−0.011	0.003	−0.199	1		
8. Upload date (months)	74.65	46.83	0.33	170.33	−0.030	−0.160	0.020	−0.041	0.004	−0.095	0.270	1	
9. Number of tags	7.91	3.96	1	33	−0.003	0.028	0.012	−0.040	−0.004	0.058	0.039	−0.265	1

TABLE 4 Regression analysis (robust standard errors reported).

Variable	Baseline model		Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing			0.078***	0.020	0.063	0.041
Idea atypicality			0.284**	0.093	0.491**	0.166
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality			−0.095**	0.032	−0.192***	0.049
Fame					0.077***	0.012
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Fame					0.001	0.004
Idea atypicality × Fame					−0.031	0.019
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality × Fame					0.015**	0.006
Gender (female)	−0.101	0.093	−0.072	0.090	−0.096	0.090
Academic	−0.377***	0.092	−0.419***	0.089	−0.358***	0.088
Entrepreneur	−0.273*	0.132	−0.250	0.128	−0.231	0.125
Prior TED Talk experience	0.022	0.099	0.027	0.095	0.000	0.095
Celebrity outliers	2.745***	0.797	2.859***	0.772	2.112**	0.753
Authenticity	0.017***	0.003	0.016***	0.003	0.015***	0.003
Analytical thinking	−0.009**	0.003	−0.01***	0.003	−0.009***	0.003
Narrative	−0.001	0.002	−0.001	0.001	−0.001	0.002
Length	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000
Upload date	−0.008***	0.001	−0.007***	0.001	−0.007***	0.001
Number of tags	0.037*	0.015	0.033*	0.015	0.028	0.015
Music	−0.039	0.186	−0.017	0.178	0.002	0.179
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Topics	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Event type	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	8.677***	0.331	8.485***	0.313	7.930***	0.317
Ln alpha	0.572	0.027	0.557	0.027	0.524	0.028
Log pseudo likelihood	−32,064.502		−32,029.528		−31,952.201	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	609.32 (47)		685.20 (50)		796.28 (54)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: $n = 3284$.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

entrepreneurs are likely to present ideas that are more thematically clustered than, for example, those of academics, activists, or comedians. Although this reduces the sample to 405 (Model 5), all effects remain significant. Finally, to rule out the possibility that our atypicality measure might simply capture unusual linguistic choices rather than unconventional ideas, we also developed an alternative, independent measure of atypicality based on the tag system. Specifically, we created a vector of tags for each talk and measured atypicality as the deviation from the average tag vector, that is, the central tendency vector for all the talks (for a similar approach, Smith, 2011). The results of this analysis (Model 6) are fully consistent with those of the main model.

We also assess the robustness of our results using alternative approaches to measure emotionally ambivalent framing. First, to ensure that our measure effectively captures the joint use of contrasting emotional language as a

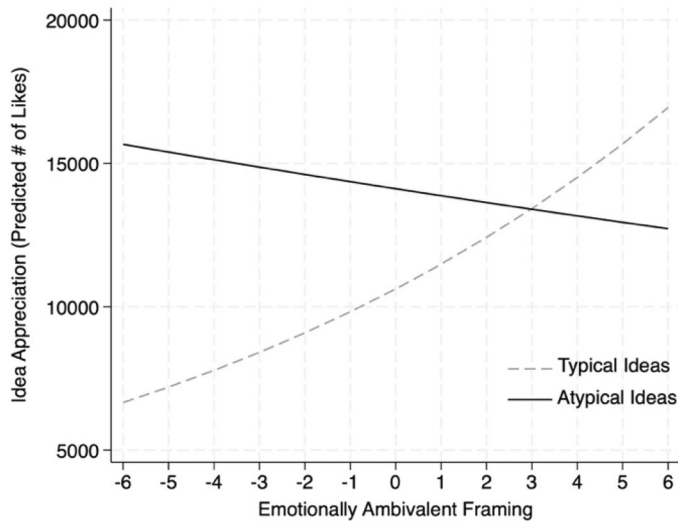


FIGURE 3 Interaction plot: Emotionally ambivalent framing $\times$ Idea atypicality.

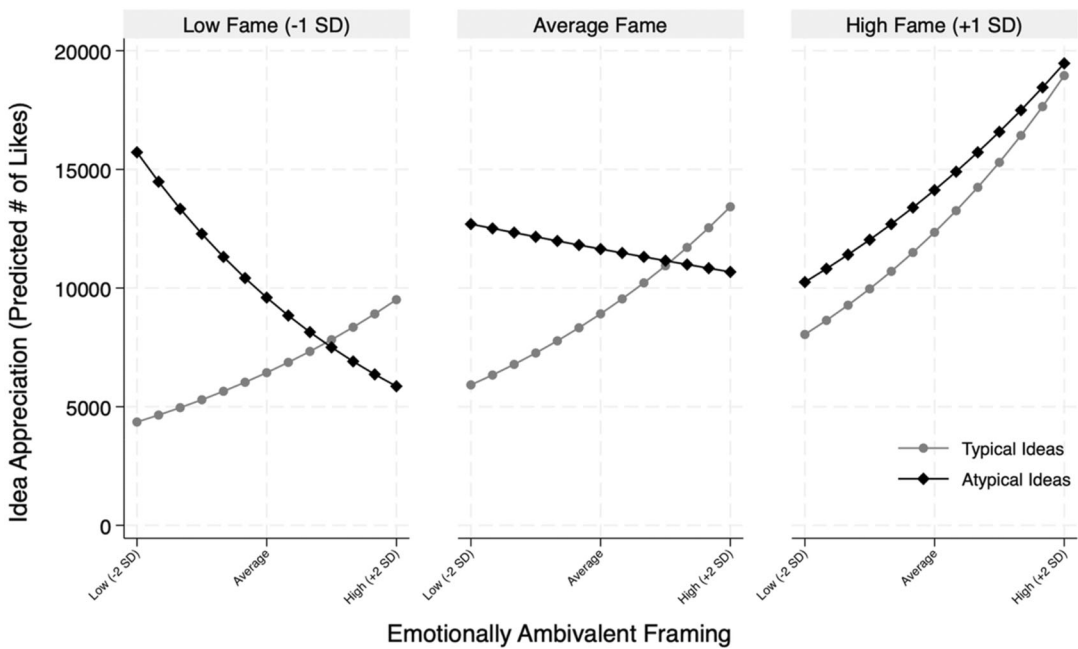


FIGURE 4 Interaction plot: Emotionally ambivalent framing $\times$ Idea atypicality $\times$ Fame.

linguistic framing strategy to frame a single idea rather than simply reflecting separate positive and negative emotional expressions occurring at different moments in the talk or referring to different facets of the idea (or even unrelated content), we split the transcripts into chunks, measuring emotional ambivalence framing in each chunk and taking the average. The underlying logic is that by reducing the window of measurement, we are better able to capture ambivalent orientations toward the same aspect of the idea. Results are consistent when using 3, 5, and 7 chunks (we report results for 7 chunks in Model 7). To further confirm this, we segmented the text into sentences,

TABLE 5 Robustness checks (robust standard errors reported).

Variable	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing	0.295***	0.083	0.062	0.041	−0.080	0.078	−0.067*	0.027
Idea atypicality	0.006**	0.002	0.497**	0.165	1.392***	0.301	−28.43***	5.622
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality	−0.002***	0.000	−0.191***	0.048	−0.352**	0.121	−11.07***	2.476
Fame	0.143***	0.032	0.077***	0.012	0.084***	0.019	0.061***	0.010
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Fame	−0.019*	0.009	0.001	0.004	0.001	0.009	0.012***	0.003
Idea atypicality × Fame	−0.001*	0.000	−0.032	0.019	−0.107**	0.033	1.917***	0.420
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality × Fame	0.000***	0.000	0.015**	0.006	0.050***	0.014	0.894***	0.202
Topics' popularity			0.001	0.001				
Gender (female)	−0.100	0.092	−0.091	0.090	−0.113	0.130	−0.114	0.093
Academic	−0.350***	0.088	0.000	0.095	0.215	0.149	−0.350***	0.090
Entrepreneur	−0.213	0.134	−0.360***	0.087			−0.241	0.139
Prior TED Talk experience	−0.003	0.096	−0.238	0.125	−0.155	0.131	−0.017	0.097
Celebrity outliers	2.118**	0.741	2.115**	0.754	1.216	0.873	2.117**	0.700
Authenticity	0.014***	0.003	0.015***	0.003	0.020***	0.004	0.014***	0.003
Analytical thinking	−0.009**	0.003	−0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002	−0.007**	0.003
Narrative	−0.001	0.002	−0.009**	0.003	−0.003	0.005	−0.001	0.002
Length	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000
Upload date	−0.008***	0.001	−0.007***	0.001	−0.009***	0.002	−0.008***	0.001
Number of tags	0.029	0.015	0.037	0.022	−0.020	0.025	0.035*	0.015
Music	−0.017	0.180	0.003	0.179	−0.459*	0.231	−0.040	0.186
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Topics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Event type	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	7.300***	0.45	7.798***	0.403	6.469***	0.539	8.238***	0.325
Ln alpha	0.530	0.029	0.524	0.029	0.040	0.063	0.542	0.029
R-squared/Log pseudo likelihood	−31,964.242		−31,951.724		−3733.119		−31,992.979	
Wald chi-square (d.f.)	776.13 (54)		801.28 (55)		481.28 (52)		1007.60 (54)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: N = 3284 (Model 5, N = 405).

Variable	Model 7		Model 8		Model 9		Model 10	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing	0.084	0.047	−0.027	0.034	0.158	0.252	0.065	0.041
Idea atypicality	0.719***	0.172	0.613***	0.170	0.399*	0.190	0.498**	0.165



TABLE 5 (Continued)

Variable	Model 7		Model 8		Model 9		Model 10	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality	−0.203***	0.055	−0.088*	0.040	−1.033*	0.407	−0.193***	0.049
Fame	0.079***	0.012	0.081***	0.012	0.079***	0.013	0.076***	0.012
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Fame	−0.001	0.005	0.002	0.004	−0.006	0.027	0.001	0.004
Idea atypicality × Fame	−0.052**	0.020	−0.047*	0.020	−0.026	0.021	−0.031	0.019
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality × Fame	0.017**	0.006	0.013*	0.006	0.0963*	0.045	0.015**	0.006
Conceptual breadth							0.025	0.068
Gender (female)	−0.092	0.090	−0.113	0.091	−0.096	0.091	−0.095	0.090
Academic	0.013	0.095	0.005	0.094	−0.320***	0.089	−0.001	0.095
Entrepreneur	−0.350***	0.088	−0.336***	0.088	−0.237	0.131	−0.359***	0.088
Prior TED Talk experience	−0.215	0.129	−0.253	0.130	0.012	0.096	−0.229	0.125
Celebrity outliers	2.019**	0.734	2.095**	0.783	2.104**	0.790	2.101**	0.752
Authenticity	0.014***	0.003	0.016***	0.002	0.016***	0.003	0.015***	0.003
Analytical thinking	−0.001	0.001	−0.001	0.001	−0.009***	0.003	−0.001	0.001
Narrative	−0.009**	0.003	−0.009***	0.003	−0.001	0.002	−0.009**	0.003
Length	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000
Upload date	−0.008***	0.001	−0.008***	0.001	−0.008***	0.001	−0.007***	0.001
Number of tags	0.026	0.014	0.034*	0.015	0.0347*	0.015	0.028	0.015
Music	0.001	0.179	−0.041	0.174	0.011	0.177	0.004	0.179
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Topics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Event type	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	7.878***	0.319	7.922***	0.324	7.915***	0.333	7.111**	2.203
Ln alpha	0.527	0.029	0.534	0.028	0.533	0.029	0.524	0.029
R-squared/Log pseudo likelihood	−31,958.185		−31,973.906		−31,972.841		−31,951.963	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	782.51 (54)		750.36 (54)		741.82 (54)		798.62 (55)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: N = 3284.

Variable	Model 11		Model 12 DV (future likes)		Model 13 DV (monthly likes)		Model 14	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing	0.076**	0.027	0.057	0.040	0.086	0.045	0.086*	0.043
Idea atypicality	0.272*	0.134	0.511*	0.199	0.265	0.162	0.460**	0.159

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Variable	Model 11		Model 12 DV (future likes)		Model 13 DV (monthly likes)		Model 14	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality	−0.122**	0.043	−0.185***	0.051	−0.214***	0.052	−0.203***	0.049
Fame	0.080***	0.014	0.010***	0.015	0.052***	0.013	0.066***	0.012
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Fame	−0.002	0.004	−0.001	0.005	−0.003	0.005	−0.001	0.004
Idea atypicality × Fame	0.004	0.021	−0.043	0.025	−0.014	0.019	−0.020	0.018
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality × Fame	0.007	0.007	0.020**	0.007	0.017**	0.006	0.016**	0.006
Humor							0.063***	0.008
Gender (female)	−0.071	0.091	0.124	0.118	−0.117	0.087	−0.079	0.092
Academic	0.002	0.092	−0.390**	0.119	−0.300***	0.086	−0.188*	0.092
Entrepreneur	−0.404***	0.087	−0.519***	0.146	−0.241*	0.118	−0.272*	0.120
Prior TED Talk experience	−0.269*	0.119	−0.007	0.121	0.013	0.095	0.020	0.098
Celebrity outliers	2.264**	0.743	0.793	0.645	2.305**	0.761	1.697**	0.648
Authenticity	0.016***	0.003	0.011**	0.003	0.013***	0.003	0.013***	0.003
Analytical thinking	−0.001	0.001	−0.012***	0.003	−0.006*	0.003	−0.011***	0.003
Narrative	−0.010***	0.003	−0.001	0.002	−0.001	0.001	−0.002	0.001
Length	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000	0.000***	0.000
Upload date	−0.008***	0.001	−0.007***	0.002	−0.008***	0.001	−0.030***	0.001
Number of tags	0.041**	0.016	0.016	0.020	0.021	0.013	0.002	0.014
Music	−0.075	0.169	−0.337	0.213	−0.004	0.171	0.086	0.168
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Topics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Event type	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	8.247***	0.299	7.148***	0.451	7.983***	0.321	6.185***	0.379



TABLE 5 (Continued)

Variable	Model 11		Model 12 DV (future likes)		Model 13 DV (monthly likes)		Model 14	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Ln alpha	0.526	0.030	1.032	0.020	0.490	0.030	0.538	0.029
R-squared/ Log pseudo likelihood	−31,955.131		−25,411.956		−31,871.753		−19,011.86	
Wald Chi- square (d.f.)	882.25 (54)		1342.13 (54)		900.09 (55)		1891.39 (54)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: N = 3284 (Model 7, N = 3210).

Variable	Model 15 DV (views)	
	Coeff.	S.E.
Emotionally ambivalent framing	0.034	0.038
Idea atypicality	0.509**	0.156
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality	−0.160***	0.044
Fame	0.071***	0.011
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Fame	0.002	0.004
Idea atypicality × Fame	−0.043*	0.018
Emotionally ambivalent framing × Idea atypicality × Fame	0.011*	0.005
Gender (female)	−0.018	0.084
Academic	−0.303***	0.083
Entrepreneur	−0.235*	0.118
Prior TED Talk experience	0.001	0.087
Celebrity outliers	2.019**	0.709
Authenticity	0.014***	0.003
Analytical thinking	−0.007**	0.002
Narrative	−0.001	0.001
Length	0.000***	0.000
Upload date	0.001	0.001
Number of tags	0.027*	0.014
Music	0.146	0.164
Nationality	Yes	
Topics	Yes	
Event type	Yes	
Constant	11.41***	0.287
Ln alpha	0.434	0.029
R-squared/Log pseudo likelihood	−45,462.498	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	849.71 (54)	
p-value	0.000	

Note: N = 3284.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

measured emotionally ambivalent framing at the sentence level, and took the average. Using this more conservative measure (Model 8), all coefficients remain significant and show consistent results. Our results are robust to a different operationalization using the more LIWC dictionary of emotions instead of affect (Model 9). Finally, to rule out that we did not capture the effects of consistency of argumentation in the talk, rather than expressing emotional ambivalence, we followed Aceves and Evans (2024) to construct a measure of *conceptual breadth* capturing the interweaving of divergent concepts residing at a distance within the conceptual space. Model 10 shows that results continue to be strongly supported for all hypotheses.

In addition, we explored Wikipedia as an alternative fame measure. Almost all the speakers have a Wikipedia entry, and Wikipedia pages are often self-created, so we decided to use the average number of views for each Wikipedia page as a proxy for fame. For this purpose, we collected page view information of each speaker's Wikipedia article using the official Wikipedia APIs.² Initially, we thought of collecting the average number of views before the date of the talk, but since data were made available in July 2015 and some talks go back to 2006, we instead collected the average number of views in the 6 months before the data collection. As expected, the correlation between the two measures of fame is high (0.698). Using this alternative measure (Model 11), the results are substantially unchanged; only the three-way interaction is in the expected direction but not significant. Results, however, remain constant and significant when using the lagged measure of likes we proposed as an alternative dependent variable (see next point).

We then address concerns regarding the possibility that fame on X and likes on YouTube may be interrelated. Because fame was captured at the same time as likes, famous speakers may actually have accumulated some of their followers on X as a consequence of their performance on the TED talk. To address this possibility, we collected information about likes at multiple points in time. The results of Model 12, where the dependent variable is the difference between the first (January 2020) and the most recent data point (January 2025), confirm that our main findings are robust regarding the effect of fame on subsequent likes. To further ensure that our findings are not influenced by the amount of time available for talks to accumulate likes, we also constructed a monthly likes measure (total number of likes divided by months spent online). Our results remain consistent when using this alternative dependent variable (Model 13).

We further explored the effect of alternative unobserved factors by controlling for humor (Model 14) using a simple count of the number of instances of audience laughter indicated in the transcripts (for a similar approach, see Miron-Spektor et al., 2023). While humor has a positive effect on idea appreciation, our results remain consistent when including this control variable.

Finally, we performed an additional analysis measuring idea appreciation as the number of views each talk received on YouTube (Model 15). All coefficients of interest remain significant and in the expected direction. Given that YouTube counts a view when a user clicks play and watches for at least 30 s, these findings further strengthen our confidence in the results.

6 | DISCUSSION

Previous research has explored idea evaluation across a variety of domains, including entrepreneurship (Jung et al., 2022), science (Uzzi et al., 2013), design (Hargadon & Sutton, 1997), art (Berg, 2022), and even comedy (Reilly, 2017). In all these contexts, innovative ideas and concepts must be introduced to address evolving demands and navigate uncertain competitive landscapes (Puccio & Cabra, 2012). Yet, many of these ideas are often resisted and rejected by relevant audiences (Augier et al., 2015). Over the years, scholarly attention has shifted from recognizing these tensions to understanding how innovators can increase receptivity to their ideas, pointing to the crucial role of linguistic framing (Cattani et al., 2024).

In this study, we theorized and empirically investigated how framing ideas in emotionally ambivalent terms, that is, combining both positive and negative emotional language when presenting an idea, influences audience



evaluations. Our findings suggest that communicating conflicting emotions can foster favorable reactions, but only for typical ideas. However, for famous speakers, the effects of emotionally ambivalent framings when presenting atypical ideas differ markedly. Our findings actually suggest that, for very famous speakers, communicating contrasting emotions can become an effective strategy for increasing audience receptivity to atypical ideas.

Our work makes several important theoretical contributions. First, our study contributes to the study of framing in entrepreneurship and innovation research (Clarke et al., 2019; Falchetti et al., 2022; Snihur et al., 2022; Taeuscher & Rothe, 2024). By bridging scholarship on entrepreneurial framing with research on emotional ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014; Rothman et al., 2017), we advance understanding of how and when the emotional language in framing ideas can enhance or diminish audiences' evaluations. Specifically, we demonstrate that the effectiveness of combining positive and negative emotional language in shaping idea receptivity hinges on "different conditions or contexts" (Fisher et al., 2017, p. 69). This directly addresses recent calls to examine how entrepreneurs' use of positive and negative emotional language shapes the evaluation of their ideas (Colombo, 2021; Sitruk et al., 2025). Our study thereby lays the groundwork for a more integrative agenda on how the cognitive and affective dimensions of framing interact in shaping audiences' receptivity to innovative ideas (Giorgi, 2017; Kalvapalle et al., 2024) and positions emotionally ambivalent framing as an important communication strategy for entrepreneurs and innovators.

Second, we contribute to research on the evaluation of novelty and atypicality (Cattani et al., 2022; Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a; Deichmann et al., 2024; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Smith & Chae, 2016). By showing how a message, its framing, and characteristics of its messenger interact to shape the evaluation of atypical ideas, we contribute to the conversation on the interplay of cognition and emotion in the evaluative process of innovations (Rindova & Petkova, 2007). Our study suggests that linguistic framing can be used not only as a "navigational device" (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024b) to help audiences understand atypical ideas, but also to spread affective states that systematically shape evaluations of atypicality (Cudennec & Huynh, 2023). Additionally, our findings about the contingent role of speaker fame expose how proponents' social assets play a major role in determining the effectiveness of linguistic strategies in offsetting the penalty of atypicality.

Third, our study contributes to the literature on ambivalence by identifying two important new boundary conditions that help explain "why and when ambivalence leads to good and bad outcomes" (Rothman et al., 2017). Although existing research has provided ample insights into contextual and relational factors (Pratt & Barnett, 1997), we posit that the source of ambivalence itself is relevant. Specifically, we have demonstrated how characteristics of an idea (its atypicality) and an individual's social standing (fame) can influence whether ambivalence promotes openness to a diverse range of information (Rees et al., 2013). In addition, our findings challenge the assumption that experiencing emotional ambivalence in settings devoid of high-stakes choices increases the likelihood of reaping its benefits (Rothman et al., 2017). By examining how multiple, interrelated factors influence whether experiencing ambivalence leads to negative or positive outcomes, we provide a more nuanced perspective.

Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical work to date has examined how emotional ambivalence affects audiences' evaluation of ideas. Prior research has examined how experiencing conflicting emotions affects creative performance (Fong, 2006), or how expressing ambivalence in social interactions can provoke others who observe this expression to engage or disengage from the ambivalent partner (Rothman et al., 2017). Yet, this work has overlooked how framing innovative ideas with the combination of positive and negative emotional language shapes the extent to which creativity is appreciated. Our study offers one of the first empirical tests of the conditions under which emotionally ambivalent framing can foster greater flexibility in audiences' evaluative processes and increase their appreciation of innovative ideas.

Lastly, we make a methodological contribution by introducing a novel way to measure idea atypicality. Previous research has highlighted the challenges of observing and measuring categorical positioning using feature-level data (Pontikes & Hannan, 2014), because the space of observable features that define categorical membership is often multidimensional in nature, hard to observe, and unstable over time. As a result, prior work has frequently relied on proxies based on category labels (which consist of agreed-upon profiles of features) to measure atypicality, thereby

capturing only part of its multidimensional and evolving nature (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a). By introducing a method to measure the atypicality of an idea without relying on explicitly observed, feature-level data, we join other scholars (e.g., Le Mens et al., 2023) in demonstrating the potential of machine learning techniques to overcome the limitations of existing methods for measuring atypicality. Specifically, we show how embedding models, which construct latent feature spaces optimized for relational tasks (Mikolov et al., 2013), can enable systematic assessment of atypicality by identifying objects occupying peripheral positions within a reference group (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2024a).

Beyond these contributions, our study also offers several practical implications. To begin, entrepreneurs and innovators should carefully consider how they convey emotions when presenting novel ideas to their audiences. As our paper shows, combining positive and negative emotional language is a powerful strategy to increase idea appreciation. Ultimately, this is also more faithful to the lived experience, as innovation is an uncertain and unpredictable journey (Podoynitsyna et al., 2012), and entrepreneurship is frequently described as “an emotional rollercoaster of rapidly alternating extreme positive and negative emotions” (De Cock et al., 2020, p. 2). This is not, however, a one-size-fits-all solution, as entrepreneurs and innovators should always consider the type of idea for which they are seeking support. For novel ideas that are more aligned with broader contextual expectations, an emotionally ambivalent framing can make audiences more open and appreciative. Yet when ideas deviate substantially from the status quo, mixed emotional language loses its effectiveness.

Moreover, our results point to the importance of cultivating visibility as a strategic asset, as well-known innovators and entrepreneurs can reap the benefits of combining emotional cues even when presenting highly unconventional ideas. These implications are particularly relevant in an era in which a growing share of economic and social life is digitized, and interactions increasingly unfold online (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram have become critical venues where entrepreneurs and innovators engage with key stakeholders and capitalize on new opportunities (Fischer & Reuber, 2014; Roccapiore & Pollock, 2023), offering important resources that entrepreneurs can leverage to build fame.

6.1 | Limitations and future directions

Our study also has limitations that offer opportunities for future research. One limitation arises from the online setting in which our study was conducted. We believe our findings generalize to other online digital contexts, such as crowdfunding or social media platforms, where innovators and entrepreneurs present their ideas, products, or projects to engage potential customers or attract new investors. However, future research should also consider other important settings in which ideas are presented and evaluated. For instance, it is possible that emotionally ambivalent framings exert different effects in more formal or professional settings where audience evaluations involve heightened uncertainty or higher stakes (van Harreveld et al., 2009), when interactions happen in person (Van Kleef, 2009), or when audiences display different characteristics such as degrees of expertise (Falchetti et al., 2022), previous exposure to atypicality (Landwehr et al., 2013), or preference for novelty (Pontikes, 2012).

Another worthwhile extension of our study would be to use an experimental design to directly test the mechanisms underlying the effects of emotionally ambivalent framing on idea receptivity. While we proposed emotional contagion as the main mechanism through which such framing influences audience evaluations, prior research suggests that its effects may also arise through the inferences audiences draw from the expression of ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014). This pathway is articulated by Van Kleef's (2009) emotions-as-social-information model, which posits that emotional cues could also be “read” more indirectly via cognitive processing (“why does a person feel that way?”), thereby providing an important piece of information that shapes and guides observers' judgments and behavior. For instance, previous research shows that when experts express ambivalence about a decision in their area of expertise, people tend to question the expert's competence and decisiveness (Marsh & Rothman, 2013). Although this alternative account yields consistent predictions regarding the direction of effects of using emotionally ambivalent language when presenting atypical or typical ideas, the underlying mechanisms would differ, involving



factors such as trust, credibility, authenticity, or ambiguity (Rothman, 2011; Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). Future research could disentangle these pathways to develop a more nuanced understanding of how emotional ambivalence influences idea evaluation.

Furthermore, it could be fruitful to explore whether and how other properties at both the idea and speaker levels shape how audiences perceive and evaluate ideas framed in emotionally ambivalent terms. For example, prior research highlights that other characteristics like idea feasibility (Maxwell et al., 2011), the speaker's gender (Wesemann & Wincent, 2021), or perceived authenticity (Sitruk et al., 2025) can also influence framing effectiveness. Similarly, future research could distinguish between different forms of fame, such as ephemeral popularity and institutionalized fame (e.g., viral social media success versus long-standing, endorsed reputation), to provide a more nuanced interpretation of how the multiple dimensions of social assets (Pollock et al., 2019) shape audience receptivity to emotionally ambivalent framing.

Finally, our work focuses primarily on linguistic framing, yet communication is fundamentally multimodal (Lefsrud et al., 2020). Nonverbal cues (e.g., body language, facial expressions, vocal tone; Clarke et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2019) and visual elements (Huang et al., 2023; Sitruk et al., 2025) can serve as additional channels for communicating emotions. Research shows that even when people use strictly unambivalent language in their communication (e.g., adopting a consistently positive or negative tone), emotional ambivalence may nonetheless “leak out” through nonverbal cues (Ashforth et al., 2014). Moreover, different modes differ substantially in the type and intensity of emotions conveyed (Sitruk et al., 2025). Future studies could therefore adopt a multimodal perspective to better capture the joint use of positive and negative emotional cues in communication, examining how these various modes interact to shape audience receptivity to ideas framed in emotionally ambivalent ways.

7 | CONCLUSION

Throughout history, there has been an enduring, almost magnetic fascination with novelty. From the philosophies of ancient Greece and the revolutionary scientific breakthroughs of the Renaissance to avant-garde movements in art and modern innovations in artificial intelligence, the pursuit of novel and unconventional ideas has constantly propelled societies forward. Yet, despite this innate drive, securing support for innovative ideas, products, or practices remains a persistent challenge, as emphasized in research on entrepreneurship, innovation, and organizations. By linking emotionally ambivalent framing, idea atypicality, and speaker fame, we have offered a novel perspective on how innovators can use language to help audiences recognize the merits of innovative ideas. We hope our findings stimulate further research at the intersection of emotions and framing, ultimately enhancing our understanding of how evoking contrasting emotions can shape the journey of novelty.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ A likelihood ratio test and a Lagrange multiplier (LM) test from Cameron and Trivedi (1998) indicated that a Poisson model was not appropriate for the data. Nevertheless, to increase confidence in the results, we ran each of the models using a Poisson specification and obtained similar results.
- ² <https://pageviews.wmcloud.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&range=all-time&pages=Cat|Dog>.

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