

Framing Action and Attitudes - Nanotechnology, Media, and Neuromarketing

Abigail Foerstner, Co-director of Graduate Science Journalism Programs, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Abstract

Nanotechnology has garnered widespread positive media coverage for applications in electronics, medical treatment, aerospace, and even Italian wine production. Business and consumer media focus most often on new product innovations and advantages, applying the term nanotechnology with the assumption of widespread public recognition and a stress on benefits, costs, markets, and jobs. Science coverage of nanotechnology exhibits contrasts, with more stress on explaining the technology behind the applications and the potential risks as well as benefits. Science and environmental reporters have been the likeliest to explore concerns about the environmental impacts of nanoparticles and nanotechnology. Yet consumer support remains strong, underpinned by widespread social acceptance in a technology arena where many people don't understand the science behind such advances as the carbon nanotube. Compare the attitudes based on perceived benefits afforded by a complicated science that a limited number of consumers may understand to the attitudes about climate change, where the basic science is far easier to grasp, yet the acceptance of urgent risks is polarized. Current social science, cognitive science, and brain research show how beliefs plays a stronger role than reason in influencing the dynamics of action, opinion and persuasion. The growing field of neuromarketing is assessing belief systems, motivation and reward/aversion models to reframe inquiries about influencing or changing opinion and action based on multi-disciplinary neurological and psychological research.