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General Introduction
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The American linguist George Lakoff (2016) argued that Donald Trump won the presidential elections because of his extreme, hyperbolic language and his well-chosen metaphors. Trump’s campaign speeches were full of figurations. For example, he repeatedly promised to “put America first, and make America great again” (Lakoff, 2016). According to Lakoff (2016), Trump knew how to frame the public debate, while the Democrats did not. On the other side of the Atlantic, the people of Great-Britain voted in favor of leaving the European Union. According to Musolff (2017a), the voting preferences of the British people were motivated by the metaphorical frames that dominated the Brexit debate. The Euro-skeptical British newspaper The Telegraph, for example, wrote: “the only viable British relationship with the EU is one that keeps this country at a healthy distance from the whole doomed European project” (The Telegraph, 2015). These observations suggest that figurative language including metaphor and hyperbole serves as some kind of magic wand with which politicians and other public actors can wave to steer people’s minds and influence political reality.

Yet some of these claims about the impact of figurative language on people and society seem quite strong. Hillary Clinton lost the battle for the Oval Office, but won the popular vote (CNN, 2016). In Britain, it was a neck-and-neck race between the remain and leave campaigns, with leave winning by only 51.9 % of the vote (BBC News, 2018). Clearly, Trump’s words did not convince every American to vote for him and the metaphorical anti-EU frames did not influence the entire British electorate. This raises the question whether, when and for whom the effects of figurative frames in political discourse are as strong as is oftentimes suggested (Charteris-Black, 2006; Lakoff, 2016; Musolff, 2017a; Santa Ana, 1999; Thibodeau, 2016).
In this dissertation, I address this question by studying the persuasive effects of figurative frames in political discourse on political opinion. More specifically, I focus on two types of figurative language that are commonly used by political actors: metaphor and hyperbole. The main research question of this dissertation is:

*RQ: How do figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion?*

To further understand the concept of figurative framing and unravel how figurative frames in political discourse can affect political opinion, and hence, society, this dissertation bridges research from the fields of communication science, linguistics and political science. In the next paragraphs, the concept of figurative framing is explained in greater detail, and the potential persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse is addressed from different research perspectives. I conclude with an overview of the research chapters included in this dissertation. The four research chapters of this dissertation can be divided into two main parts. The first part comprises an extensive systematic literature review on the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse (*Chapter 2*). The second part comprises a series of experimental studies that compare and contrast different theoretical models that explain how figurative frames in political discourse can affect political opinion (*Chapters 3, 4 & 5*).

**FIGURATIVE FRAMES IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

The concept of framing is important in explaining how (political) messages can affect their recipients (de Vreese, 2012; Scheufele, 1999). In framing research, many different conceptual and operational definitions of framing and frames have been used (de Vreese, 2012). This dissertation starts from Entman’s (1993, p. 52) commonly used definition of framing, which states that: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicated text, in such a way as to promote a
particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Thus, a frame can highlight certain bits of information, while it downplays other parts. Thereby, a frame can determine what most people notice, how they understand and remember an issue, how they reason about the issue that is framed, and, eventually, how they act upon that issue (Entman, 1993). Over the years, many studies have shown that framing can affect people’s opinions about social and political issues (e.g., Borah, 2011; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011; Slothuus, 2008). However, persuasive effects of framing are generally considered to be statistically small in magnitude; i.e., changes in people’s opinion due to framing effects are small (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2011; Lang, 2013; O’Keefe & Jensen, 2007).

In framing theory, frames are typically defined as comprising of two elements: (1) framing devices, which are clearly perceptible elements in a text or specific linguistic structures such as metaphors, and (2) reasoning devices, which are the underlying, latent elements in a text, which imply a certain problem, cause, evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the issue presented (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Joris, d’Haenens & van Gorp, 2014). Consider for example the ‘game frame’, which has become a dominant way to frame political news (Aalberg, Strömback & de Vreese, 2011). With this frame, politics is presented with the metaphor a game (framing device). By focusing on questions regarding who is winning and who is losing elections (problem implication), how politicians and parties perform (evaluation), and tactics and strategies used in political campaigns (cause), the ‘game frame’ can work as a reasoning device.

Framing has been studied from a variety of disciplines and this abundance of approaches has led to a fragmented research field (Entman, 1993; Brugman & Burgers, 2018), with framing being defined and operationalized in different ways across disciplines. To that end, various scholars have called for approaches to framing that can bridge various disciplines and paradigms (Borah, 2011; de Vreese, 2012). In this
dissertation, I investigate such an overarching approach to framing, namely figurative framing. Figurative framing is a theoretical perspective that connects linguistic research on figurative language with framing theory and explains that figurative language can be important in shaping political discourse (Burgers, Konijn & Steen, 2016). Consider the following examples of figurative framing in political discourse:

1. Wilders: We are about to face a tsunami of Islamization.\(^1\)  
   *de Volkskrant, 2006*

2. Prospectless asylum plague moves on undisturbedly.\(^2\)  
   *De Telegraaf, 2017*

Both frames come from the Netherlands and address the issue of immigration. Over the past decades, the issue of immigration has been, and still is, a highly debated and politically charged topic in the Netherlands (Lucassen, 2018; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007). Moreover, both frames comprise two types of figurative language: metaphor (a cross-domain mapping, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and hyperbole (extreme exaggeration, Norrick, 2004). Although metaphor and hyperbole are different types of figuration, they can co-occur (Burgers, Renardel de Lavalette & Steen, 2018; Carston & Wearing, 2015). The ‘tsunami of Islamization’ from example (1) is a hyperbolic extension of the commonly used metaphor of ‘immigration wave’. The ‘asylum’ plague from example (2) is a dehumanizing hyperbolic metaphor; it equates a group of people with large numbers of vermin, parasites, or other species most people detest. Hence, this figurative frame does not only take away their human characteristics: it portrays immigrants as one of the lowest classes of animals. Thus,

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\(^1\) Original Dutch text: Nederland staat aan de vooravond van een tsunami van Islamisering.

\(^2\) Original Dutch text: Kansloze asielplaag ongehinderd verder.
examples (1) and (2) illustrate how a figurative frame can comprise both metaphor and hyperbole.

From a traditional framing-theory perspective, the hyperbolic metaphors from example (1) and (2) would be categorized as framing devices (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). Until the late seventies, figurative language was generally seen as a matter of language; an artful deviation adding rhetorical flourish to a speech or text (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). Since the 1980s, however, it has been widely acknowledged that metaphors, hyperboles, and other types of figurative language are not just linguistic packages of information; they might transfer conceptual content as well (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consider example (1) in which (Islamic) immigration is portrayed as a tsunami. A tsunami is a highly dangerous phenomenon that causes serious trouble, is difficult to control and requires action to stop it from harming the nation and its inhabitants. Thereby, the hyperbolic metaphor ‘tsunami’ does not just work as a framing device, but also as a reasoning device; it implies a problem evaluation, causal interpretation and a treatment recommendation and thereby fulfills one or more framing functions described by Entman (1993). The same goes for example (2), in which economic refugees are framed as a plague. The hyperbolic metaphor ‘plague’ implies that economic refugees are harmful and come to the Netherlands in large numbers (problem definition). The ‘plague’ suggests that Dutch inhabitants might be negatively affected (causal interpretation), and that the problem will likely grow exponentially when it is not controlled immediately (problem evaluation and possible problem solution).

These examples show that figurative language can work both as a framing device and as a reasoning device (Burgers et al., 2016). Thereby figurative language can affect how people reason on the issue that is addressed, and hence steer recipients’ opinion more in line with the figurative frame (Bougher, 2012; Burgers et al., 2016; Robins & Mayer, 2000; Sopory & Dillard, 2002). With this dissertation, I examine how recipients
are affected by figuratively framed political statements. Hereby, I will provide more insight in the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse.

**HOW FIGURATIVE FRAMES AFFECT POLITICAL OPINION**

**A DIRECT-EFFECTS MODEL OF FIGURATIVE FRAMING**

Many scholars attribute strong and direct effects to metaphors, and argue that figurative frames can shape political reality (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2006; Lederer, 2013; Musolff, 2017a, 2017b; Santa Ana, 1999; Thibodeau, 2016). For example, scholars have reported that the dominant use of anti-immigration metaphors “sustains the racist world-view” (Santa Ana, 1999, p. 217), “contributes to the formation of legitimacy in right-wing political communication” (Charteris-Black, 2006, p. 579), and “reinforces only the negative stereotype of immigrants” (Lederer, 2013, p. 265). In the time of the Rwandan genocide (1994), dehumanizing metaphors framing Tutsis as cockroaches were used by Hutu extremists to achieve legitimacy of and support for these extremists’ atrocious political agenda (Hussein, 2013). Metaphorical frames are thus considered powerful tools of persuasion. In a recent article, Thibodeau (2016) even referred to extended metaphors in political communication as the “home runs of persuasion”. Such strong effects are attributed to metaphors because they highlight particular relations between different concepts and hereby establish systematic patterns of inference (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), for example between a societal group of people and cockroaches (Hussein, 2013). Hence, metaphorical frames can determine how people reason about societal issues (Robins & Mayer, 2000; Thibodeau, 2016).

Thus far, hyperbolic frames have received less empirical attention than metaphorical frames. Nevertheless, powerful persuasive effects have been attributed to the use of hyperbolic language as well (e.g., Doig & Phythian, 2005; Kaufmann, 2004). Hyperboles can be used to increase the emotional
attitude attached to a topic (Claridge, 2010) and to create public and political attention for that topic (Doig & Phythian, 2005). Threat exaggeration, for example, has been described as a powerful rhetorical tool in convincing the public of the existence and importance of a presumed threat (Doig & Phythian, 2005; Kaufmann, 2004). Kaufmann (2004), for instance, argued that support for the Second Iraq War was created by the Bush Administration by consistently exaggerating the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction. When reality is repeatedly distorted, the distorted information might seep into people’s heads. People want to believe information when this information matches pre-existing beliefs, even when this information is false. Attempts to refute false information might even serve to solidify it (Stuckey, 2017).

Hyperboles can thus be used to exaggerate issues and to emphasize certain aspects of an issue. Hyperboles thence do not only serve as framing devices, but also as reasoning devices that can affect recipients’ opinion (Burgers et al., 2016).

These claims about the power of metaphor and hyperbole suggest that figurative frames affect recipients in a strong and direct way. The hypothesis stating that communicated messages can have a strong impact on individuals, and hence society, is considered as one of the first general theories of mass communication (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Within communication science, this theory is known as the ‘bullet theory’ (Schramm, 1971). Other scholars also refer to this model as the ‘hypodermic needle theory’ (Berlo, 1960), or the ‘stimulus-response theory’ (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Bullet theory suggests that people are highly vulnerable to mass communicated messages; if the message hits its target (i.e., the message is received by a recipient), it will most likely have the desired effect (Schramm, 1971). Many scholars who study the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse (implicitly) assume that figurative frames in political discourse work in such a way (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2006; Lederer, 2013; Santa Ana, 1999; Thibodeau,
2016): as a ‘bullet’ that directly affects its target. This hypothesis is visualized in Figure 1, which presents a direct-effects model of figurative framing, based on ‘bullet theory’. This model represents how figurative frames can affect recipients’ political opinion in a direct way.

![Figure 1. Direct-Effects Model of Figurative Framing.](image)

**AN INDIRECT-EFFECTS MODEL OF FIGURATIVE FRAMING**

Not all scholars who study the persuasive impact of figurative frames support a direct-effects model of figurative framing. Several scholars argue that persuasion through figurative framing is more complex than is oftentimes assumed (Hartman, 2012; Landau, Keefer & Rothschild, 2014; Reuchamps, Dodeigne & Perrez, 2018; Steen, Reijnierse & Burgers, 2014). These scholars suggest that figurative frames work under certain boundary conditions and affect recipients in indirect and subtle ways. Together, they put forward several factors that might influence figurative-framing effects.

For instance, recipient characteristics have been shown to moderate the persuasive impact of figurative frames. For example, in one experiment, recipients with a low level of political knowledge were influenced by a metaphorical frame, while recipients with a higher level of political knowledge were not (Reuchamps et al., 2018). Another factor is the role played by recipient perceptions of the frame under consideration, which can also mediate figurative-framing effects. For example, when recipients perceived a metaphorical statement as of high quality, this facilitated political persuasion (Hartman, 2012). Results from these studies (e.g., Hartman, 2012; Landau et al., 2014; Reuchamps et al., 2018) thus suggest that a more complex picture of how figurative frames affect political opinion has to be drawn.
The idea that communicated (political) messages likely affect political opinion in a complex and indirect way has been supported by many communication-scientific theories. These theories contradict the idea that communicated messages work as bullets that affect everyone who is targeted (McQuail, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). In the 1920s and 1930s, scholars of mass communication generally used hypodermic needle and bullet models to explain the effects of communicated messages (Sproule, 1989). A few decades later, a majority of communication scholars adopted the theory of people actively resisting communicated messages: media effects were considered small and more complex than thus far assumed (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1948; Klapper, 1960). More recent communication theories restore some of the persuasive power of mediated (political) messages and argue that mass media potentially indeed can have strong persuasive effects but that these effects are conditional upon several factors (McQuail, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006), including recipients’ prior attitudes (Byrne & Hart, 2009) and other recipient characteristics such as political knowledge (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006).

Scholars who studied the persuasive impact of mediated messages, transformed contemporary communication-scientific theories into various theoretical media-effects models (e.g., Slothuus, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). What most of these models have in common is that they expect the persuasive impact of mediated messages to be influenced by other variables that can either moderate or mediate persuasive effects. First, many scholars acknowledge that effects of messages on beliefs, attitudes and behavior can be enhanced or reduced by individual differences (e.g., Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Slothuus, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Individual differences, such as personality (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), political awareness (Slothuus, 2008), mood (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and partisanship (Hart & Nisbet, 2011) can serve as moderators. That is, they can modify the direction and/or strength of the message’s persuasive effect (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Second, many scholars with a communication-
scientific background presume that media effects are mediated (Slothuus, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), for example by emotions (Nabi, 2009; Wirz, 2018) or message perceptions, such as perceived language intensity (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). For instance, messages that evoke emotions are considered to be more persuasive than more neutral messages (Nabi, 2009; Wirz, 2018).

These hypotheses about how mediated messages can affect recipients are in line with the ideas put forward by the several figurative-framing scholars who, contrary to figurative-framing scholars working from a direct-effects paradigm, describe the persuasive impact of figurative frames as conditional, depending on several factors that can moderate or mediate figurative-framing effects (e.g., Hartman, 2012; Landau et al., 2014; Reuchamps et al., 2018). The hypotheses that figurative-framing effects can be influenced by recipient characteristics and recipient perceptions can be included in a second model of figurative-framing effects: an indirect-effects model of figurative framing (see Figure 2). In this model, individual differences that might moderate figurative-framing effects (e.g., political knowledge, epistemic motives) are named ‘recipient characteristics’. Variables that might mediate figurative-framing effects, for example ‘emotions’ and ‘perceived intensity’, are named ‘recipient perceptions’.

![Figure 2. Indirect-Effects Model of Figurative Framing.](image-url)
Thus, from the extant literature on figurative-framing effects, two models can be deduced to explain how figurative frames may affect political opinion. Currently, many scholars who study figurative-framing effects seem to work from the direct-effects model of figurative framing (e.g., Lakoff, 2016; Lederer, 2013; Musolff, 2017a, 2017b; Thibodeau, 2016). However, some figurative framing scholars adopt a more complex model of figurative framing (Hartman, 2012; Landau et al., 2014; Reuchamps et al., 2018). The hypothesis that figurative frames likely affect recipients in a more complex, indirect way, is supported by different media-effects models that more generally explain how media, and not specifically figuratively framed messages, affect people (e.g., Konijn & Hoorn, 2005; Slothuus, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). To further increase understanding of how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion, this dissertation empirically compares both models and answers the question which model best explains the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse.

**THE TWO PARTS OF THIS DISSERTATION**

The following chapters of this dissertation can be divided into two main parts. The first part comprises a systematic literature review on the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse (presented in Chapter 2). Figurative-framing effects in political discourse have been studied by scholars from different research perspectives, working from different research paradigms. To create an overview of the current state of research on figurative-framing effects, the systematic literature review compares and contrasts research from different research perspectives. More specifically, the systematic review aims to gain insight into (1) the different characteristics of figurative frames that are studied, (2) the persuasive effects attributed to figurative frames in political discourse, and (3) the different recipient characteristics and recipient perceptions that
might influence figurative-framing effects. Thereby, the systematic review provides input for the second part of this dissertation and puts forward several key issues that should be addressed in future research on figurative-framing effects.

The second part of this dissertation comprises a total of four experimental studies in which the two proposed models of figurative-framing effects are tested and compared. These studies are presented in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. In each study, I test a variation on the direct-effects model of figurative framing (Figure 1), and a variation on the indirect-effects model of figurative framing (Figure 2). These variations are based on the key issues that are important to address when conducting research on figurative-framing effects that were put forward by the systematic literature review (Chapter 2). In the next paragraphs, I introduce these key issues and explain how these issues are integrated in the different, testable variations of the two basic models that explain figurative-framing effects.

KEY ISSUES TO ADDRESS IN FIGURATIVE-FRAMING EFFECTS RESEARCH

The systematic literature review suggests three key issues to address in future research on the persuasive impact of figurative frames: (1) characteristics of figurative frames, (2) characteristics of recipients, and (3) underlying mechanisms of figurative-framing effects (indirect effects via recipient perceptions). These key issues will now be explained in further detail.

KEY ISSUE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF FIGURATIVE FRAMES

The systematic literature review shows that, in general, scholars have paid little attention to the (subtle) variations between the different figurative frames they study. Differences between these frames, both evident and subtle, might explain why different studies report differential effects of
figurative frames. When addressing differences between figurative frames, we must realize that figurative language can be analyzed on different dimensions, as explained by a three-dimensional model of figurative language.

A three-dimensional model of figurative language

When looking at differences between figurative frames, we have to take into account the multiple dimensions on which the characteristics of figurative discourse can be modeled. Metaphor has been situated in a three-dimensional framework that distinguishes the following dimensions: (1) metaphor in language, (2) metaphor in thought, and (3) metaphor in communication (Steen, 2008; 2011). This three-dimensional model has thus far only been explicated for metaphorical (Steen, 2008; 2011) and ironic language (Burgers & Steen, 2017). However, like metaphor and irony, hyperboles can differ in their linguistic form, can transfer conceptual content (Burgers et al., 2016; Gibbs & Colston, 2012) and can be used to shift or confirm a certain perspective on an issue (Burgers et al., 2016; Doig & Phythian, 2005; Kaufmann, 2004). Therefore, it seems logical to apply a three-dimensional model to hyperbole as well.

Since the 1980s, it has been widely acknowledged that metaphors and other types of figurative language not only serve as linguistic ornaments that add rhetorical flourish to a text or speech but are able to transfer conceptual content as well (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The hypothesis that figurative discourse can contain and transfer conceptual information started to gain ground with the introduction of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT posits that metaphors in language can be clustered into larger structures, referred to as conceptual metaphors. For example, the linguistic metaphor from example (2), ‘asylum plague’ can be traced back to the dehumanizing conceptual metaphor of
IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS. Such a conceptual metaphor can serve as a cognitive structure that helps recipients to interpret and understand abstract and complex issues (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The shift in thinking about figurations solely as a matter of language to thinking about figurations as being both a matter of language and of thought has been labeled ‘the cognitive turn’. This cognitive turn was first made for metaphor, and later for other types of figurative discourse, such as hyperbole and irony (Gibbs & Colston, 2012).

About a decade ago, Steen (2008, 2011) added a third dimension to this two-dimensional, cognitive-linguistic model of metaphor: the dimension of metaphor in communication. He argued that metaphors not only manifest themselves in language and thought but serve a communicative function as well. For example, some metaphors are deliberately used to invite readers to carry out some cross-domain mapping and to adopt a different perspective. Most metaphor use, however, is non-deliberate; these metaphors are not presented as metaphors and likely do not draw recipients’ conscious attention to other conceptual domains. Rather, these non-deliberate metaphors are simply used as the available language means (Steen, 2015, 2017).

When identifying variations between figurative frames in political discourse, it needs to be specified on which dimension of figurative discourse these differences and/or similarities are addressed. This can be illustrated with examples (1) and (2), which can be compared on each of the three dimensions of figurative discourse. On the dimension of language, (1) and (2) share the characteristic of comprising both metaphor and hyperbole. However, (1) and (2) differ on the dimension of thought: the metaphors ‘tsunami of Islamization’ and ‘asylum plague’ are derived from different conceptual metaphors (IMMIGRATION IS A WAVE versus IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS). These different metaphors bridge different

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3 Conceptual metaphors are generally presented in small capitals (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).
concepts (source and target domains) and offer different conceptual
frameworks to understand the issue of immigration (Steen, 2008, 2015). At
the dimension of communication, (1) and (2) were used with a different
communicative goal: (1) was used to promote anti-immigration measures,
and (2) was used to invite readers to read a newspaper article. These
examples underscore that, when comparing figurative frames, it is
important to be specific about the dimension of figurative discourse that is
subject to the comparison.

Novel and conventional figurative frames

A first characteristic of figurative frames that is addressed in this
dissertation is novelty. When metaphors and other figurations are first
introduced, they are novel. When figurative expressions are frequently
used to frame a specific concept, recipients become familiar with the
frame’s intended meaning and it becomes conventional (Bowdle &
Gentner, 2005; McCarthy & Carter, 2004). The characteristic of novelty can
be applied to different dimensions of figurative discourse, which will be
illustrated with example (1). When first introduced in 2006, the figurative
frame ‘a tsunami of Islamization’ was highly novel. At that time, the word
‘tsunami’ was mostly used in a literal way to refer to a tidal wave as a
result of a seaquake. However, at the dimension of thought, example (1) is
based on a highly conventional conceptual metaphor, namely the
conceptual metaphor IMMIGRATION IS A WAVE (Charteris-Black, 2006). Since
2006, the linguistic ‘tsunami’ metaphor has been frequently used, and over
the years it has become conventional to refer to large magnitudes of all
kind, in terms of ‘tsunami’ (e.g., ‘silver tsunami of loneliness’, Cacioppo &
This illustrates the shift of novel linguistic metaphor, derived from a
conventional conceptual metaphor, to a conventional linguistic metaphor
over time (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005).
This dissertation addresses the characteristic of novelty on the dimension of language and thought. According to the Career of Metaphor Theory (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005), novel metaphors are processed in a different way than conventional metaphors. Novel metaphors attract attention and invite readers to actively compare source and target domain to get to the intended meaning. The Career of Metaphor Theory posits that these metaphors are processed by comparison (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). By contrast, the intended meaning of conventional metaphors is already stored in the recipient’s mental lexicon, who can immediately understand its meaning without having to actively compare source and target domain; these metaphors are likely processed by categorization (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). A similar process likely happens when hyperboles shift from novel to conventional. When hyperboles become conventionalized they may no longer be perceived as a purposeful exaggeration with a specific communicative goal, but rather as the normal way of talking about something (e.g., ‘I have been waiting for ages’, McCarthy & Carter, 2004).

Novel and conventional figurations are considered to be persuasive in different ways. Novel metaphors attract attention, and recipients have to solve a small puzzle to get to the metaphor’s intended meaning. Solving this puzzle might provide pleasure (Giora et al., 2004), and hence, novel metaphors can positively influence recipients’ affective responses to the message. These affective responses, in turn, might affect persuasion (Jansen, van Nistelrooij, Olislagers, van Sambeek & de Stadler, 2010; Read, Cesa, Jones & Collins, 1990). Conventional metaphors, on the other hand, provide a framework for thinking about issues and can make it easier to understand difficult and/or abstract concepts (Morris, Sheldon, Ames & Young, 2007; Burgers, Konijn, Steen & Iepsma, 2015). Conventional metaphors can thus positively influence how recipients cognitively perceive a message. This cognitive type of text perception can mediate the persuasive impact of conventional metaphors (Burgers et al., 2015, Morris et al., 2007). Therefore, novel and conventional metaphors and hyperboles
might affect people’s opinion in different ways (McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Steen, 2011; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011). Therefore, the frame characteristic of novelty is addressed in Chapter 3.

Combinatory figurative frames

A second characteristic of figurative frames that is addressed in this dissertation is the combination of metaphor and hyperbole. The systematic literature review shows that several of the frames studied as being metaphorical by scholars who took a Critical Discourse Approach (CDA), are in fact combinatorial figurative frames; they comprise both metaphor and hyperbole. These frames metaphorically describe one concept in terms of another concept (metaphor) and involve an exaggeration (hyperbole). When metaphor and hyperbole are combined, two rhetorical operations occur at the same time (Burgers et al., 2016).

In example (1), immigration is not just metaphorically compared to ‘a wave’, which would portray immigration as an ongoing natural force. Rather, this metaphorical ‘wave’ is hyperbolically extended into the largest wave possible, which implies that this natural force issue is extremely dangerous, can have devastating consequences and requires immediate action because it will seriously harm the country and its people. In example (2), refugees are dehumanized in an extreme way; the hyperbolic metaphor not only takes away their human characteristics; it equates a group of people to one of the lowest classes of animals, animals that most people detest.

The examples suggest that variations on the linguistic dimension of figurative discourse might influence its other dimensions. For instance, ‘a tsunami’ likely activates different connotations than a metaphorical ‘wave’ would do (dimension of thought). Second, linguistic extremity might change its communicative function (dimension of communication); it seems more likely that Wilders deliberately invited recipients to change their perspective when he portrayed Islamic immigration as a ‘tsunami’,
than when he would have used the words ‘a wave of Islamization’. Because a combinatory frame combines the strength of metaphor (shapes a concrete image) and hyperbole (increases importance), it becomes harder for critics to challenge this frame, which could increase its potential persuasiveness (Burgers et al., 2016). Therefore, it is hypothesized that frames that combine different types of figurative language have more persuasive potential than frames that are solely metaphorical or hyperbolic (Burgers et al., 2016).

Although frames that combine metaphor and hyperbole seem to be common in political rhetoric (Kalkhoven, 2015), scholars who originally studied these frames purely focused on their metaphorical nature. Therefore, the persuasive effects of such combinatory figurative frames have, thus far, not been tested and empirical evidence on the impact of combinatory figurative frames in political discourse is currently missing from literature. To provide more insight in the persuasive effects of combinatory figurative frames, Chapters 4 and 5 test whether combinations of metaphor and hyperbole have differential effects on political opinion than frames that are solely metaphorical, hyperbolic, or non-figurative.

**KEY ISSUE 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF RECIPIENTS**

The systematic literature review shows that roughly a quarter of all experimental studies on figurative-framing effects do not report any direct effect of figurative frames (Chapter 2). A possible reason why different experimental studies do not univocally attribute persuasive effects to figurative frames might lie in variations in the participant samples these studies used. Many communication scholars argue that effects of mediated messages are moderated by individual differences (e.g., de Vreese, 2012; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005; Slothuus, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). For example, it is generally acknowledged that messages that go against one’s beliefs are unlikely to be persuasive (Byrne & Hart, 2009; Meirick & Nisbett, 2011). Such messages, which advocate a stance opposite to the
recipient’s viewpoint, can even establish boomerang effects: the message can steer the recipient’s opinion further away from the position advocated (Meirick & Nisbett, 2011). Although such boomerang effects have hitherto not been attributed to figurative frames, it might very well be that the persuasive impact of figuratively framed political statements only holds for specific parts of the public, and that these effects get lost when heterogeneous participant samples are used. Many current framing studies (e.g., Arendt, Marquart & Matthes, 2015; Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, 2013; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017), and, more specifically, studies on figurative-framing effects (e.g., Hartman, 2012; Robins & Mayer, 2000; Steen et al., 2014), use heterogeneous participant samples. Therefore, little is known about how different sub-groups of recipients respond to figuratively framed political rhetoric.

In the experimental studies in this dissertation, the issue of recipient characteristics is addressed in terms of type of voters. That is, I examine how two important characteristics of voters influence the persuasive impact of figuratively framed political statements: Chapter 4 tests how political affiliation moderates figurative-framing effects, and Chapter 5 uses a unique sample of (right-wing) populist voters to test whether party-identification strength influences the persuasive impact of figurative frames.

**KEY ISSUE 3: UNDERLYING MECHANISMS OF FIGURATIVE-FRAMING EFFECTS**

The systematic literature review (Chapter 2) shows that most scholars who study figurative-framing effects assume that a direct-effects model of figurative framing (Figure 1) can be used to explain figurative-framing effects. Within research on figurative-framing effects, little attention has been paid thus far to the underlying mechanisms of figurative-framing effects. However, from a communication-scientific perspective, it seems unlikely that mediated messages affect opinion in a direct way, and
communication scholars have put forward different mechanisms that might underlie persuasive effects of mediated messages (e.g., Nabi, 2003; Slothuus, 2008, Valkenburg & Peter, 2013; Wirz, 2018). To provide more insight in these underlying mechanisms, this dissertation tests for several underlying mechanisms through which figurative-framing effects are established.

The mediating role of recipient perceptions

First, figurative frames might affect opinion via recipient perceptions. Both metaphor and hyperbole can influence how recipients perceive a statement that is figuratively framed, and these recipient perceptions might mediate the persuasive impact of figuratively framed statements. Zooming in on metaphors, different types of linguistic metaphors are considered to be persuasive through different underlying mechanisms. As briefly discussed above, novel metaphors can increase affective text perception, and hence affect persuasion (Giora et al., 2004; Jansen et al., 2010; Read et al., 1990). Conventional metaphor can positively affect cognitive perception, which can mediate the persuasive impact of conventional metaphors (Burgers et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2007).

To provide more insight in how different linguistic metaphors (novel, conventional) may affect opinion, Chapter 3 of this dissertation tests whether different underlying mechanisms indeed mediate the persuasive effects of novel and conventional metaphors. Moreover, since recipients’ perceptions of a metaphor’s novelty can affect the processing fluency of a figurative sentence (Chiappe, Kennedy & Smykowski, 2003; Pierce & Chiappe, 2008), perceived novelty was measured in all experimental studies of this dissertation as a control variable that potentially mediates figurative-framing effects. Several scholars have connected perceived novelty to perceived aptness (i.e., the degree to which a recipient believes a metaphor captures important topic features; Chiappe et al., 2003; Pierce & Chiappe, 2008; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011; the degree to which a hyperbole
fits its context; McCarthy & Carter, 2004), and perceived aptness has been proposed as a prerequisite for the persuasive impact of figurative language (Steen, 2011; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011). Therefore, all empirical chapters of this dissertation take into account that both perceived novelty and perceived aptness might influence figurative-framing effects.

Another message-perception variable that might serve as a mediator for figurative-framing effects is perceived message intensity (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). Both metaphor and hyperbole can influence perceived message intensity, either by activating connotations to extreme concepts (metaphor: Charteris-Black, 2006), or by exaggerating some aspect of reality (hyperbole: Kalkhoven, 2015). Intense language adds to a statement’s emotionality, vividness, and memorability. This can increase the persuasiveness of statements that are perceived as intense, compared to more neutral statements (Buller et al., 2000; Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). Therefore, perceived message intensity might be another underlying mechanism through which figurative frames can establish their persuasive impact. The mediating role of message intensity is addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

The mediating role of emotions

In addition to text perception and perceived message intensity, many framing studies show that emotions are an important mediator of framing effects (Lecheler, Bos & Vliegenthart, 2015; Nabi, 2003; Wirz, 2018). Emotions can be sparked by metaphors and hyperboles: metaphors can evoke emotions by eliciting a vivid image of an issue (Charteris-Black, 2006; Claridge, 2010), and hyperboles can be emotive by exaggerating danger and emphasizing threats (Doig & Phythian, 2005; Kalkhoven, 2015).

For example, when Wilders referred to Islamic immigration as a ‘tsunami’ (de Volkskrant, 2006), this might have evoked both fear about how Islamic immigration threatens the nations, and anger towards either Islamic immigrants or the established political elite for not protecting the
nation from this rising danger. Since figurative language can spark emotions (Charteris-Black, 2006; Kalkhoven, 2015), and emotions are considered important mediators of framing effects in general (Lecheler et al., 2015; Nabi, 2003; Wirz, 2018), emotions might also work as mediators for figurative-framing effects. To provide more insight into the role of emotions in figurative-framing effects in political discourse, the experiments presented in Chapters 4 and 5 examine whether such effects work via the underlying mechanism of emotion.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The following chapters of this dissertation comprise four research papers that (1) create an overview of the current research on figurative-framing effects in political discourse, and (2) experimentally test the persuasive impact of figuratively framed political statements on the basis of two competing theoretical models of figurative-framing effects: (1) a direct-effects model of figurative framing versus (2) an indirect-effects model of figurative framing. Table 1 provides an overview of the research chapters of this dissertation and presents the different variations of the basic models of figurative-framing effects that are tested in the experimental studies of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 reports on a systematic literature review that examines whether different research approaches that study metaphorical framing effects are in agreement or disagreement about the impact of metaphorical frames in political discourse. This systematic literature review results in an overview of the current state of research on metaphorical framing effects in political discourse. Moreover, it reveals three key issues to address in figurative framing research: (1) characteristics of figurative frames, (2) characteristics of recipients, and (3) underlying mechanisms of figurative-framing effects. The following empirical chapters (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) report on a series of experimental studies in which these key issues are addressed.
Chapter 3 reports on an experiment that compares the persuasive effects of different types of linguistic metaphorical frames: novel and conventional metaphorical frames. Participants are exposed to short news items about the reorganization of a fictitious multinational, either framed with (a) a novel metaphor, (b) a conventional metaphor or (c) a nonmetaphorical control. The experiment also focuses on indirect effects of linguistic metaphors on opinion, by testing the hypothesis that novel and conventional linguistic metaphors establish persuasive effects through two different underlying mechanisms: affective text perception (novel metaphors) and cognitive text perception (conventional metaphors).

Chapter 3 tests a variation on the direct-effects model of figurative framing (Figure 1), and a variation on the indirect-effects model of figurative framing (Figure 2). These variations are presented in Table 1.

Chapter 4 reports on two experimental studies that test for the effects of figuratively framed right-wing populist statements on recipients’ political opinion. Metaphor and hyperbole are common within right-wing populist rhetoric (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Kalkhoven, 2015). Nevertheless, their effects in this context have not been experimentally tested before. Both experiments use a 2 (metaphor: present, absent) x 2 (hyperbole: present, absent) between-subjects design, and both use nationally representative samples of Dutch voters, who read a right-wing populist statement that promotes stricter anti-immigration policy. Both experiments tested the hypothesis that frames comprising both metaphor and hyperbole are more persuasive than frames that comprise one type of figuration (either metaphor or hyperbole). Moreover, both experiments tested whether these figuratively framed political statements have differential effects on voters with different political affiliations. Furthermore, both experiments examine the indirect effects of figuratively framed political statements on political persuasion via (1) different emotions and (2) perceived message intensity.

Chapter 4 tests two models of figurative-framing effects (see Table 1): a
variation on the direct-effects model (Figure 1), and a variation on the indirect-effects model (Figure 2).

Chapter 5 reports on an experiment that replicates the second experimental study from Chapter 4 in terms of design and stimuli. Yet, this experiment specifically addresses the role of recipient characteristics by using a unique sample of Dutch right-wing populist voters. Although this group of partisan voters is generally assumed to be most susceptible to the persuasive impact of typical right-wing populist rhetoric (Krämer, 2014), thus far, no experimental research had tested how these voters actually respond to typical figuratively framed right-wing populist rhetoric. This experiment tests the hypothesis that metaphors and hyperboles can steer the political opinion of partisan voters more in line with right-wing populist ideas. It assesses the expectation that these persuasive effects depend on the extent with which voters identify with their favorite right-wing populist party. Moreover, it tests whether emotions and perceived message intensity mediate these persuasive effects. Table 1 shows that, in Chapter 5, two models of figurative-framing effects are tested: a variation on the direct-effects model (Figure 1), and a variation on the indirect-effects model (Figure 2).

Chapter 6 provides a general discussion of the findings of this dissertation. It combines the results from the studies presented in this dissertation to answer the main research question of this dissertation. It discusses which model best explains how figurative frames affect political opinion and results in updated model of figurative-framing effects in political discourse. Theoretical and societal implications are discussed and the caveats of this dissertation, as well as directions for future research, are addressed.
Creating an overview of: (a) characteristics of studied figurative frames, and (b) reported figurative-framing effects
Part 2: Testing different models of figurative-framing effects

Chapter 3

Variation on the direct-effects model

Metaphor: novel/conventional → Issue opinion

Variation on the indirect-effects model

Metaphor: novel/conventional

Affective text perception

Cognitive text perception

Issue opinion
Chapter 4

Variation on the direct-effects model

- Metaphor: present/absent
- Hyperbole: present/absent

\[ x \]

→ Political opinion

Variation on the indirect-effects model

- Metaphor: present/absent
- Hyperbole: present/absent

\[ x \]

→ Political opinion

→ Emotion

→ Perceived message intensity

→ Political affiliation
Chapter 5

Variation on the direct-effects model

Metaphor: present/absent

Hyperbole: present/absent

Political opinion

Variation on the indirect-effects model

Metaphor: present/absent

Hyperbole: present/absent

Party-identification strength

Emotion

Perceived message intensity

Political opinion
REFERENCES


