claims can serve as positioning statements that influence consumer decisions. Research suggests that puffery has a lasting influence on consumers and at times it may lead to sub-optimal choices. For instance, consumers have been shown to prefer an inferior brand based on their memory of puffery information, even when available attribute information suggested a different choice (Chattopadhyay and Alba 1988; Alba, Marmorstein and Chattopadhyay 1992).

Consumers often discount the validity of exaggerated claims knowing these only reflect the opinion of the advertiser (Friestad and Wright 1994). Still, some researchers argue that certain puffed claims should be regulated because consumers believe them (Preston 1975, 1977, 1983a; Rotfeld and Preston 1981; Rotfeld and Rotzoll 1981; Shimp and Preston 1981). With combined comparatives the issue is not whether consumers believe the exaggerated superiority claims. The cause for concern is the potential for framing effects that bias how consumers process parity claims. Broad comparative statements that present the brand as superior are likely to suggest to consumers how other information in the ad should be interpreted. Such superiority statements will be like halo effects that result in overgeneralization about the brand’s superiority on specific attributes (cf. Pechmann 1996).

An additional cause for concern is that in legal challenges, advertisers have been given a lot of leeway in their use of puffery. The FTC dismissed challenges to superiority statements such as “Bayer works wonders” and “the world’s best aspirin.” Puffed claims such as these are not deemed legally deceptive or misleading by the FTC or the courts because, being the opinion of the seller, consumers should know not to rely on them (Deception Policy Statement 1983; Lanham Act Section 43(a)). Because they