The Impact of Regulatory Focus on Brand Choice and Category-Brand Associations

Arnd Florack, University of Basel
Martin Scarabis, University of Muenster

Two experiments examined whether the regulatory focus of consumers has an influence on product preferences and on category-brand associations. Experiment 1 provided evidence for the hypothesis that a context-specific regulatory focus has an impact on choice. Participants were more likely to choose products when presented in an advertisement with a claim compatible to the regulatory orientation of participants. Experiment 2 demonstrated that the regulatory focus also has an impact on category-brand associations. Category-brand associations were stronger when the claim of a target brand was compatible to participants’ regulatory orientation.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12427/volumes/v33/NA-33

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
than novel information, consumers may infer from difficulty of processing that the information is novel, resulting in favorable assessments of the product’s innovativeness. Second, once low fluency is attributed to innovativeness, it no longer leads to a negative response to the product. Instead, we observed a reversed pattern of the usual high fluency–high liking link. Third, our findings highlight the role of NFC in the use of fluency as a source of information for making specific attribute judgments. In our study, only low NFC participants relied on their fluency experience as a heuristic cue when asked to judge an objective product characteristic, innovativeness. In contrast, high NFC participants’ judgments of innovativeness were not affected by fluency, presumably because they relied on the substantive description of the product. Finally, high NFC participants used their fluency experience in making liking judgments, replicating the usual fluency–liking link. This reflects that liking judgments are subjective, rendering one’s fluency-related affective response (Winkielman and Cacioppo 2001) highly relevant.

References

The Impact of Regulatory Focus on Brand Choice and Category-Brand Associations
Arnd Florack, University of Basel
Martin Scarabis, University of Muenster

Consumer decisions vary with the specific wishes and requirements of consumers. For one consumer, a product has to be very reliable whereas, for another consumer, it has to be well designed. Recent research demonstrated that such decision criterions are affected by basic orientations and motivations which are related to hedonic goals of avoiding an undesired state and approaching a desired state. A very sophisticated framework to study the impact of these motivations is provided by Higgins (1997). In his regulatory focus theory, he posits two different self-regulatory strategies: The regulation of behavior according to ideals, hopes, and aspirations, termed promotion focus, and the regulation of behavior according to responsibilities, duties, and security, termed prevention focus. The promotion focus emphasizes the pursuit of positive outcomes. The prevention focus is related to the avoidance of negative outcomes. A basic assumption of regulatory focus theory is that individuals are more concerned with information relevant for the regulatory focus and that attributes compatible to this focus are given more weight in choice (Chernev, 2004; Florack, Scarabis, & Gosejohann, in press).

The main objective of the present paper is to complement this research by showing that the regulatory focus of consumers has an influence on product preferences as well as on the strength of the association of a brand with the product category. In particular, we assumed that category-brand associations vary over different contexts and that products of a category which are compatible to consumers’ regulatory focus are more likely to be associated with the category than products that are less compatible with the consumers’ regulatory focus. Product preferences and category-brand preferences are two important factors influencing choice. Whereas brand preferences determine the choice between available alternatives of a consideration set, category-brand associations have an influence on whether brands are recalled from memory (Posavac, Sanbonmatsu, Cronley, & Kardes, 2001). The latter is of particular importance when brands are not displayed and when they have to be recalled from memory (Negundagdi, 1990).

To examine our hypotheses, we conducted two experiments. The goal of Experiment 1 (N=415) was to show that the regulatory focus of consumers has an impact on the preferences of sun lotions with different claims. We asked participants to evaluate two different brands of sun lotions (cf. Aaker & Lee, 2004) and to indicate which one they would purchase for their summer holidays at the sea. The two sun lotions were presented by two pictures with an advertising claim for each. For one brand, we used a claim that was concerned with the avoidance of sunburn (“Give sunburn no chance. Brand X provides safe protection.”) while for the other brand we used a claim that stressed enjoyment of the sun (“Enjoy the warm rays of the sun. Brand X for a healthy tan.”). Before participants evaluated the brands, we induced either a promotion or prevention focus with a few questions. In the promotion focus condition, we provided participants with a list of positive things that could happen during their holidays (e.g., meeting nice people) and asked them to indicate which of these things they would actively pursue. In the prevention focus condition, we provided participants with a list of negative things that could occur during holidays and asked them to indicate those they would actively try to avoid (e.g., risk of terror attacks). As predicted, prevention-focused participants preferred the sun lotion with the claim that stressed protection more than promotion-focused participants. This pattern of
preferences was reversed as regards the advertisement for a sun lotion with a claim related to enjoyment. Thus, our results are congruent to those of Chernev (2004) who showed that the regulatory focus of consumers may have a direct effect on product preferences.

In Experiment 2 (N=110), we tested the question whether the manipulation of the regulatory focus of consumers also changes the association between a brand and a product category. In the first part of this experiment, participants saw advertising claims for various products and for the target sun lotion. In one condition, a promotion-focused claim and, in the other condition, a prevention-focused claim was used for the target brand. To guarantee that participants elaborated the claims, they were also asked to recall the presented claims.

In the second part of the experiment, we applied a procedure of Pham and Avnet (2004) to induce either a promotion or a prevention focus. In the promotion focus condition, participants were asked to list present and past hopes and ideals. In the prevention focus condition, they were asked to list present and past responsibilities and duties. Then, we measured the brand category associations with a procedure of Fazio, Herr, and Powell (1992). On a computer screen, we presented the name of a brand category (e.g., electronics) followed by the name of a brand. We presented a total of 60 category-brand pairs. The target brand was presented five times in the correct category-brand pair. The task of participants was to decide as fast as possible whether the presented brand belonged to the preceding product category. The response latency of the trials in which the correct pair was presented was used as a measure of category-brand associations. The results provided support for our hypotheses. Participants showed stronger category-brand associations for the target brand when the claim of the target brand was related to the primed regulatory focus of participants.

Since preferences and category-brand associations are important determinants of product choice, our findings suggest that advertising strategies are more effective when they consider the regulatory focus of the consumer at the point of purchase which may differ within the specific context of choice (e.g., buying a sun lotion in a pharmacy or in a shop for beach equipment).

References

Does Ingredient Branding Improve Choice of Host and Ingredient Brands?

**A Test of Brand Equity-Choice Behavior Consistency**

Kalpesh Desai, State University of New York, Buffalo

Vishal Singh, Carnegie Mellon University

Dinesh Gauri, State University of New York, Buffalo

S Ratneshwar, University of Missouri – Columbia

We extend prior research in ingredient branding in two important ways. First, we use real data about consumer’s choice vs. judgment measures employed by prior research to find out if ingredient branding improves choice (and not just brand attitudes) of host and ingredient brands. Second, with *attitudinal survey data*, we attempt to find out to what extent consumers’ equity perceptions about the ingredient product and the ingredient and host brands explain their choice behaviors towards these products. This investigation of the consistency between consumers’ brand equity perceptions and their choice behaviors is rare and thus adds to the brand equity literature. Our analytical approach involves running a Random Coefficient Logit Model of consumers’ actual choices of four ingredient products from a rich scanner data set.