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The Impact of Shopping the Right Way: the Influence of Fit Between Mindsets and Shopping Orientations on Product Evaluations and Willingness to Pay

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We examined whether consumers experience regulatory fit when the active mindset supports how they usually shop. Across three studies, we found that a fit between mindset and chronic shopping orientation enhances the evaluation of products and increases consumers' willingness to pay.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In retailing, value for consumers is created not only by the offered products, but also by the shopping experience. Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006), for instance, found that music played in a store that fits the shopping orientation of the consumers affects the pleasantness of the shopping experience and the intentions to visit a store and to make purchases. In this article, we argue that it is not only a fit between the store environment and shopping orientations that has value for consumers, but also the fit between mindsets of cognitive procedures applied during shopping and shopping orientations. In line with research on regulatory fit theory (Higgins et al. 2003), we assume that consumers “feel right” when mindsets that are active during shopping match the way consumers prefer to shop. We suppose that this feeling right spreads to the evaluations of products and strengthens the willingness to purchase an appealing product, and to pay a higher price for such a product.

Research on regulatory fit has found that when people are able to pursue a goal in a way that sustains their regulatory orientation, they “feel right” and enjoy the action more (Freitas and Higgins 2002). Moreover, the value from feeling right may spill over to the outcome of the process, resulting in a more positive evaluation of products and persuasive appeals, as well as in a higher willingness to pay (Avnet and Higgins 2003, 2006; Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004; Higgins et al. 2003). Regulatory fit effects, however, have not been examined for a regulatory orientation that is especially important at the point of purchase: consumers’ shopping orientation. Two fundamental shopping orientations can be distinguished: a utilitarian shopping orientation and a hedonic shopping orientation (cf. Babin et al. 1994; Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006). Under a utilitarian shopping orientation, consumers consider shopping a task to be done and they are satisfied when they accomplish their mission as efficiently as possible. In contrast, hedonic shoppers focus on experiencing pleasure from the process of shopping itself.

We assume that these two shopping orientations entail different mindsets (Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999). We argue that shopping under a hedonic orientation draws on cognitive procedures that constitute a deliberative mindset, and that shopping under a utilitarian orientation draws on the cognitive procedures of an implemental mindset. This assumption is supported by a study using verbal protocols on shoppers’ in-store experience (Büttner 2008).

In line with regulatory fit theory (Higgins et al. 2003), we assume that consumers experience regulatory fit when the active mindset provides cognitive procedures that support how consumers usually shop. Hedonic shoppers will experience regulatory fit when in a deliberative mindset; utilitarian shoppers will experience regulatory fit when in an implemental mindset. When consumers are confronted with attractive products, regulatory fit (non-fit) increases (decreases) the value they attribute to the product. As a consequence, consumers are more tempted by the offer and are willing to pay higher prices. Hence, hedonic shoppers are more tempted by the offer and are willing to pay higher prices when in a deliberative mindset than when in an implemental mindset. Utilitarian shoppers are more tempted and willing to pay higher prices when in an implemental mindset than when in a deliberative mindset. We examined these assumptions in three experiments.

In Study 1, we examined the assumption that a fit between consumers’ chronic shopping orientation and activated mindset increases their susceptibility to persuasive communication in a point-of-purchase setting. We applied a 2 (chronic shopping orientation: utilitarian vs. hedonic) X 2 (deliberative vs. implemental mindset) between-subjects design ($N=66$). We measured chronic shopping motivation using a seven-item scale and manipulated active mindset by the personal problem versus project paradigm (e.g., Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, & Steller, 1990). Results from moderated regression support the fit hypothesis. Utilitarian shoppers were more willing to taste the product in an implemental mindset; hedonic shoppers were more willing to taste the product in a deliberative mindset.

Study 2 and 3 used the same design and the same measure for chronic shopping motivation, but different scenarios and mindset manipulations. In Study 2 ($N=140$), we manipulated participants’ mindset by either writing down the pros and cons of buying a new car (deliberative mindset), or by listing five important steps when planning to buy a new car (implemental mindset) (Dhar, et al., 2007). A product-sampling scenario followed the mindset manipulation. As expected, we found that a fit between chronic shopping orientation and active mindset increased consumers’ desire to consume the offered product and increases the price that consumers were willing to pay for the product.

In Study 3 ($N=62$), mindsets were evoked by either writing down the pros and cons of preparing an Italian dinner (deliberative mindset), or by naming the five most important steps when preparing an Italian dinner (implemental mindset). In a subsequent impulse-purchasing scenario, we found support for the fit hypothesis: utilitarian shoppers were more willing to pay a premium in an implemental mindset; hedonic shoppers were more willing to pay a premium in a deliberative mindset.

Overall, we established the fit effect between activated mindset and chronic shopping orientation across three studies. Utilitarian shoppers were more tempted by products encountered at the point of purchases and were willing to pay higher prices when in an implemental mindset. Hedonic shoppers, on the other hand, were more tempted and were willing to pay a higher price when in a deliberative mindset. These findings extend research on regulatory fit: while Higgins et al (2003) speculated about fit effects concerning mindsets, this link had not yet been empirically demonstrated. Moreover, the studies contribute to research on mindset effects on consumer behavior. Our findings suggest that these effects, such as the shopping momentum effect (Dhar et al. 2007), are moderated by consumers’ shopping orientation. Concerning practical implications, our results suggest that retailers’ persuasive attempts at the point of purchase as well as consumers’ strategies to shield themselves against unwanted purchases are more effective when they are tailored to consumers’ chronic shopping orientation.

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