

How regulatory focus influences consumer behavior

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Abstract

According to Higgins (1997) the theory of regulatory focus says that in terms of both information processing and motivation it makes a difference whether people have a promotion or prevention focus. In this paper, this theory will be applied to the area of consumer psychology. In three experiments we show that consumer's regulatory focus either measured or induced in a given situation influences product evaluations. Study 1 shows that consumers are interested in different product features depending on their focus; whereas in the prevention focus they are more interested in safety-oriented aspects, in the promotion focus they concentrate more on comfort-oriented qualities. In Study 2, a typical prevention product and a typical promotion product are compared with one another and data shows that focus compatible products are evaluated more positively. In Study 3 we demonstrate that advertisements that correspond to the focus of the consumer lead to more positive evaluations of the product than advertisements that are incompatible with the focus of the consumer. Theoretical and practical implications will be discussed. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

The advertising industry would love nothing more than to be able to predict or influence what a consumer pays attention to, what moves him or her to make a purchase, or what prevents an individual from doing so. On the whole, in the last few decades consumer psychology has focused primarily on individual cognitive and affective variables, showing a dominant cognitive approach to understanding how purchase decisions are made (Bargh, 2002). In order to predict and influence consumer behavior more comprehensively, a theory is required that takes into consideration both affective, as well as, cognitive and behavioral factors, which appear to nonconsciously influence consumer behavior (see also Chartrand, 2005; Dijksterhuis, 2004; Dijksterhuis, Smith, van Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2005; Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, in press). The theory of regulatory focus takes a collective look at the various components influencing consumer behavior (Higgins, 1997, 1998, 2002). The Regulatory Focus Theory demonstrates that due to self-regulatory functions, higher needs or goals such as safety and

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ideals have an important influence on consumer behavior (on self-regulation see Faber & Vohs, 2004), which includes cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components.

THEORY OF REGULATORY FOCUS

Basic Assumptions

The theory of regulatory focus (henceforth RFT) postulates two different self-regulatory systems to achieve a goal: People can either target their attention towards the achievement of ideals and gains, or the fulfillment of duties/the avoidance of losses. Dependent upon how individuals direct their attention, they find themselves in either a so-called promotion or prevention focus (Higgins, 1997). According to the RFT, the two foci arise out of different needs: On the one hand, every individual has the need for promotion and self-realization, wants to maximize positive action results (gains) and minimize non-positive losses (so-called promotion focus). In order to achieve this goal, people apply promotion strategies: They work directly towards a goal in order to allow positive events to occur (gains) and concentrate on activities that are linked to desires, ideals and hopes (so-called ideal goals). An example of the promotion focus in action would be a consumer who wishes to purchase a particularly *promising, luxurious or comfortable* product. On the other hand, other individuals have a need for protection and safety, and want to protect themselves against the occurrence of unpleasant states (so-called prevention focus). Individuals that focus their attention to these needs employ prevention strategies, i.e., strategies that should prevent the occurrence of negative events (loss) such as the non-achievement of a goal. More specifically, they focus their attention on activities that are conducive to the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities as well as their own safety (so-called duty goals). When making a purchase decision such a consumer would endeavor to buy a particularly *safe and reliable* product.

EMERGENCE OF THE REGULATORY FOCUS

Fundamentally, a person's differing focus can be seen either as a dispositional or situational feature. The RF can represent a personality feature, i.e., an individual's enduring approach (so-called chronic focus of a person). According to Higgins (1989, 1998), differences in the chronic focus are attributable to the lasting effect of different learning styles and standard values in the course of socialization.

In another instance, the RF can be determined by the situation in which an individual finds him or herself, such as the possibility of having to buy a reliable household product versus wanting to purchase a representative status object (so-called situational focus: Förster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994): In the pursuit of a duty goal, e.g., the goal of *buying a detergent that reliably gets rid of stains*, a person shows a prevention focus, while in the pursuit of an ideal goal, e.g., *purchasing a luxury perfume*, a person is in a promotion focus. Simply through the situation, a strategic inclination for promotion or prevention is triggered. Situations that lead to a promotion or prevention focus can be structured deliberately and therefore also used experimentally. The generation of situational foci in the laboratory context ensues in a rather 'artificial' manipulation, in which a focus is produced by having subjects process seemingly independent priming or framing tasks, such as motor tasks (e.g., Friedman & Förster, 2000, 2002; Werth & Förster, 2005a) or by having subjects think about desires versus responsibilities (e.g., Higgins et al., 1994).

EFFECTS OF THE REGULATORY FOCUS

An individual's regulatory focus determines which aspects of a situation are particularly important; in this way RF influences which information an individual deliberately seeks out or which information attracts particular attention. When an individual's focus and the information to be processed are compatible, described as 'regulatory fit,' an increase in processing capacity can be observed (Higgins, 2000). Thus an individual's regulatory focus particularly influences their motivation and information processing, which are decisive determinants of consumer behavior. For this reason the motivation that determines the readiness to consume (purchase motivation), and the information processing that influences product evaluation will be looked at more closely.

In the promotion focus individuals concentrate on product aspects that relate to their desires, ideals and hopes (so-called ideal goals). In the context of advertising, for example, these product aspects would be those that 'give a product a positive edge over others.' The cognitive performance of individuals in promotion focus shows that they have broader thought structures, are quicker, more persistent and more creative (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Friedman & Förster, 2000, 2001; in the context of organizations see Werth & Förster, 2005a). Memory is also influenced by RF, individuals in promotion focus (which was induced by positive stereotypical performance expectations, see Seibt & Förster, 2004) are better at remembering promotion-related statements and positive biographical events that occurred to a fictitious person (Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992). Furthermore, depending on their focus, people are more or less prepared to take risks. In the promotion focus individuals show a more risky approach than in the prevention focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Förster, Grant, Idson, & Higgins, 2001; Förster, Higgins, & Bianco, 2003; Liberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999; Werth & Förster, 2005b).

On the other hand, individuals in the prevention focus direct their attention to product aspects that are conducive to the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities, as well as, those aspects that address their own safety (so-called duty goals). Their motto would be along the lines of 'not taking too much risk with a product.' The cognitive performance of individuals in prevention focus proves to be more precise and careful than that of individuals in promotion focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Friedman & Förster, 2000, 2001; in the context of organizations see Werth & Förster, 2005a,b).

In addition, the different RF a person uses has effects on their motivation. In particular, in a decision situation—such as the choice between two products—individuals should evaluate alternatives differently depending on whether they are in prevention or promotion orientation. Individuals in promotion focus are particularly receptive to the presence and absence of positive events; therefore, allowing themselves to be motivated by that which promises them success and gain, i.e., products that extend gain or are related to comfort. On the other hand, individuals in prevention focus are particularly sensitive to the presence and absence of negative events, and to that which allows the avoidance of loss, i.e., safety products. Therefore negative events or failures have a motivating effect on them (Förster et al., 2001; Werth & Förster, 2005a). In the present paper we will attempt to transfer the enhanced processing due to regulatory fit (regulatory fit enhances the perceived persuasiveness and option ratings of a speech, see Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Pham & Avnet, 2004) to the context of consumer behavior, focusing on the features of a product that lead to compatibility effects and thus influence product evaluations and subsequent consumer behavior.

RELATION BETWEEN THE REGULATORY FOCUS AND CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

Recently studies showed the influence of 'regulatory fit' (see also Higgins, 2000) on the *price estimation* of a product (Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003).

Camacho et al. (2003, Studies 1–2) asked their participants to decide between a cup and a pen, with the instructions for this decision being varied by the experimenters. In the instructions participants were required either to consider what they would gain with the choice of the pen or the cup (promotion framing) or what they would lose (prevention framing). The products were designed in such a way that all participants ultimately chose the cup, as this was the better product. Following this, participants were required to estimate the price of the cup (Study 1) or give a price offer for the cup (Study 2). Although all participants evaluated the same cup, the price they stated differed depending on whether the preceding decision situation matched the focus or not. Price estimations and offers were highest if the participants were chronic promotion focus and a promotion framing had led to their decision, i.e., they had considered what they would *gain* with the choice of the pen or the cup, or else if they were chronic prevention and in a prevention framing, having thought about what they could *lose* with the choice of a product. Therefore the fit between the RF and the framing of the decision situation resulted in a transfer effect on the judged product (product was independent of the decision situation, see Study 4). In short, if the purchase decision role matches the focus, price and personal importance run high (Study 5).

Finally, it was possible to prove that people with a chronic promotion orientation are more strongly *convinced* by promotion-oriented information, while people with a chronic prevention orientation or more strongly convinced by prevention-oriented information (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Evans & Petty, 2003). A mediating process is the increased *processing* fluency brought about by a regulatory fit and the more positive evaluation linked to this (Lee & Aaker, 2004).

The self-regulatory theory opens up a new perspective, as these studies have shown, for the prediction and influencing of consumer behavior. It is therefore important to pay attention to a person's focus during a product evaluation or a purchase decision. The following studies argue that the purchase motivation can be clearly influenced by the type and focus compatibility of the product (see also for a related manipulation with approach vs. avoidance expression patterns, Förster, 2003, 2004). In particular, the aim of these studies is to prove that it is sufficient if the product matches the focus to influence consumer behavior. This will be shown by analyzing: the product features called upon by consumers for their purchase decision (Study 1), the focus compatibility of the product category (Study 2), as well as, the focus compatibility of the advertising text describing the product (Study 3). While Study 1 ascertains which characteristics (chronic) prevention versus promotion consumers pay attention to in a product. Study 2 looks at how a typical promotion and prevention-related product are compared with each other. While in the first two studies the *chronic* regulatory focus is examined in the sense of a personality variable of the consumer, in Study 3 the *situational* regulatory focus is implemented. By inducing the situational RF in a subtle manner the effect of situational influences can be evaluated in the context of advertising.

STUDY 1

In the following study the aim was to examine whether consumers prefer different product features of one and the same product dependent on their RF. Focus compatible features should be weighted/preferred more strongly.

Method

Participants and Design

This study used a 2 (between-factor focus: promotion focus vs. prevention focus; Median split) $\times$ 2 (within-factor product feature: promotion vs. prevention) factorial design, which enabled

a comparison of the product evaluation depending on the consumer focus and the product features.

Forty-two psychology students in their first semester took part in this 'study on consumer psychology.' The participation took place individually with small groups of up to three participants taking part at any one time. Participants were remunerated with a credit as an experimentee. No participant had any suspicions with regard to the experimental hypothesis.

Materials and Procedure

At the beginning, the participants were informed that in this study on consumer psychology, the authors were concerned, on the one hand, with learning about consumers and, on the other hand, with obtaining evaluations about product features. In the first part of the study, which was entitled 'consumer questionnaire,' participants were asked to describe themselves in the framework of a computer program. This measure, developed by Higgins, Shah, and Friedman (1997), was used to ascertain individual differences in promotion and prevention concerns. Based on the concept that goal strength is reflected in the accessibility of a goal (cf., Clore, 1994; Frijda, 1996), in this computerized 'strength of guide' measure, the time it takes participants to enter a set of three promotion goals (i.e., ideals: hopes or aspirations, concerns with accomplishments) and a set of three prevention goals (i.e., oughts: duties or obligations, concerns with security) is recorded. Increased accessibility is reflected by faster entry times (Fazio, 1986) and, is caused by increased strength of concern. In theory, as the accessibility of promotion or prevention goals increases, so too does their importance in self-regulation.

In the second part of the survey, 'the evaluation of the product features,' participants received an instruction sheet and an evaluation sheet for each of the products with 8 items for the sunglasses and 12 items for the wristwatch product category. The evaluations requested for each product feature were stated as follows: 'Please indicate to what extent you are interested in the following product features when buying a wristwatch/sunglasses' (scale anchored at 1 (not at all) to 7 (very)). The scores for each feature type were averaged (half of the items were prevention or promotion-related), so that mean values resulted for both the prevention-related features and the promotion-related features for each product category. This was based on the logic, that in the prevention focus, safety aspects are in the foreground, i.e., minimal goals, essentials (Maslow, 1943). Whereas in the promotion focus aspects and ideals of the product that go beyond the essentials become relevant (e.g., comfort), i.e., maximal goals. The questionnaires contained an equal number of prevention and promotion-oriented product features. The items were classified in a pretest in which they were judged in terms of the extent to which their features served purposes of safety (=typical for prevention; e.g., 'long guarantee period,' 'secure buckle') or were extras/features that served purposes of comfort (=typical for promotion; e.g., 'fashionable ear piece,' 'time zone setting')¹ and subsequently grouped via a factor analysis (main component analysis) (see Appendices A and B).

Completion of the study took an average of approximately 15 minutes.

Results and Discussion (Study 1)

Through data coding the individual reaction times of the regulatory focus questionnaire (see Higgins et al., 1997; see also Evans & Petty, 2003; Förster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998), an index of 'regulatory

¹Because we were not interested in the absolute values in the strength measure, we used the difference score, so that the general differences in reaction time with which a participant responded was controlled for.

Table 1. Overview of the results of study 1

Mean values of the product feature interest depending on the product feature type and the chronic focus of the person				
Chronic focus	Promotion product feature type		Prevention product feature type	
	Promotion $N = 22$	Prevention $N = 21$	Promotion $N = 22$	Prevention $N = 21$
	2.82 (1.12)	2.52 (0.90)	4.79 (1.15)	5.55 (0.64)

Note: Judgments were made on 7-point scales (scale anchored at 1 (not at all) to 7 (very)) (Standard deviations in parentheses).

focus strength' emerges. The higher the value, the stronger the importance of promotion concerns, and the lower the value, the stronger the importance of prevention concerns. With a median split a dichotomous characterization of the regulatory focus strength was achieved divided between a predominantly promotion focus versus a predominantly prevention focus.

The mean values of the interest evaluation of the prevention versus promotion-related product features were statistically tested through a repeated measure Analyses of Variance with Focus serving as between subject factor and Product Features serving as within subject factor (MANOVA). We expected that individuals would indicate a greater interest for the product features compatible with the relevant focus. As can be seen from Table 1, this compatibility was confirmed for both product categories: The interest in promotion product features was evaluated as greater by chronic promotion consumers ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.12$) than by prevention consumers ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.90$). Whereas the interest in prevention product features, was assessed as greater by prevention consumers ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 0.64$) than by promotion consumers ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(1,41) = 12.43$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.233$, for the interaction between the two factors. In addition, a main effect of the product feature was apparent such that consumers indicated fundamentally more interest in prevention-related product features ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 0.99$) than in promotion-related features ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.01$, $F(1,41) = 283.64$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.874$ (further effects were not recorded, all $F_s < 1$; the contrast results for 'promotion features versus prevention features' were significant within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(20) = 9.36$, $p < 0.001$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(21) = 14.50$, $p < 0.001$).

While the first analyses employ the regulatory focus as a median split, in the following a further analysis is carried out that uses it as a continuous variable and can therefore provide more detailed information. For this purpose a measurement of difference was formed from the mean values of the total prevention product features and the mean values of the total promotion product features so that higher values of the difference measures signified higher values for the prevention product features.² The mean judgments were the dependent variables in the Multiple Regression Analysis. As predicted, chronic promotion consumers showed more interest in promotion product features, while prevention consumers indicated greater interest in prevention-related product features ($\beta = -0.24$), $t(41) = -3.70$, $p < 0.001$.

Although viewed as a whole there was a greater interest in prevention-related features, this study nevertheless shows that consumers differ in terms of their interest in certain product features, of one and the same product, depending on their chronic focus. In sum consumers showed greater interest in the product features compatible with their focus. The fact that prevention-related product features were

²Items were only picked if at least 70% of participants had classified them as prevention or promotion (scale from 1 'comfortable' to 5 'safe'). Between the wristwatch items there was a contrast in prevention and promotion items: $M_{\text{prev}} = 3.93$, $SD = 0.71$; $M_{\text{prom}} = 1.77$, $SD = 0.57$), $t(14) = 13.15$, $p < 0.001$. A contrast also showed between the promotion and prevention sunglass items: $M_{\text{prev}} = 3.85$, $SD = 1.06$; $M_{\text{prom}} = 1.94$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(12) = 5.40$, $p < 0.001$.

judged more interesting can most likely be attributed to the fact that the products evaluated are highly attractive and frequently costly accessories, for which prevention-related aspects are more relevant than with other products, such as deodorants or candy. Furthermore, according to Safer (1998), consumers in a promotion focus reported that differences in luxuriousness between products were more important in their purchasing decision than differences in the product's protectiveness. As one would expect, consumers in a prevention focus reported that the protective factors of products held more weight in their decision. Therefore, it is to be assumed that minimal goals are more important than maximum goals for everybody, but that the luxury aspects receive more attention when in a promotion focus. This implies that safety aspects are important for all consumers, while luxury aspects are not of such fundamental importance.

STUDY 2

After the first study showed that consumers can weight the features of one and the same product differently depending on their RF, the following study aims to examine whether this also applies on a more general level for the product (and not only for its features). This should mean for example that promotion-related products such as lipstick versus prevention-related products such as condoms should be evaluated differently according to the chronic focus of the consumer. Once again, this should result in focus compatible products (the pairs would be: chronic prevention and condom; chronic promotion and lipstick) being evaluated more positively than products incompatible with a consumer's focus.

Method

Participants and Design

Study 2 was therefore based on a 2 (between-factor focus: promotion focus vs. prevention focus; Median split) $\times$ 2 (within-factor product type: promotion vs. prevention) factorial design, which enabled a product evaluation that was dependant on the consumer's RF and the product type.

Thirty-nine female students in their first semester of their psychology degree took part in this 'study on consumer psychology.' Participation took place in small groups of up to three people (each working independently) and participants were remunerated with a credit as an experimentee. None of the participants had any suspicions regarding the hypothesis of the investigation.

Materials and Procedure

At the beginning of the experiment, the participants were informed that the authors' concern with this study on consumer psychology was on the one hand to learn something about consumers and on the other to obtain product evaluations. In the first part of the study, which was described as a 'consumer survey,' participants were asked to describe themselves in the framework of a computer program (The chronic focus was recorded as in Study 1).

For the second part of the survey, 'the product evaluation,' each participant answered several questions on each of two product types: the product type 'lipstick' as a promotion product and the

product type 'condom' as a prevention product. (Pretests had revealed that these product types were typical promotion or prevention products for the current group of consumers.)³

Five different evaluation items were used. First, the frequency that participants used the product type was recorded ('frequency': 'how frequently do you use condoms/lipstick?' scale anchored at 1 (several times a year) to 5 (daily) as well as the option (not at all)). Expectations were that people would indicate more frequent use for the product compatible with their focus. In addition, there was the item concerning the price that the consumer would be prepared to pay for this type of product ('price': 'what price are you prepared to pay for condoms (pack of 10)/lipstick?' scale anchored at 1–7 reflects the typical price range for this product category). It was expected that participants would be prepared to spend more money for the product category compatible with their focus. Furthermore, the importance of the availability of the product in everyday life was measured ('importance of availability': 'how important is it to you to have condoms/lipstick available in everyday life?' scale anchored at 1 (not at all) to 7 (very)). Expectations were that people would indicate the importance of the availability of the product category compatible with their focus as higher. Next, the readiness to do without the product type in everyday life was represented in a dependent variable ('doing without': 'how reluctant would you be to do without condoms/lipstick in everyday life?' scale anchored at 1 (I would be very reluctant do without it/them) to 7 (I could easily do without it/ them); this scale was recoded such that lower values corresponded to a higher readiness to do without the product and therefore a lower attachment to the product). It was expected that persons would be less willing to do without the product category compatible with their focus in everyday life. Finally, the attachment to brand was recorded ('brand purchase': 'what would you rather buy?' scale anchored at 1 (a cheaper no-name product) to 2 (a more expensive brand-name product)). The expectation was that within the category compatible with their focus, consumers would rather choose the brand-name product due to its higher persuasiveness.

At the end of the questionnaire there were several control questions (including a question to ascertain whether participants suspected the true purpose of the experiment) and demographic information was asked for. Working through the entire study took an average of 20 minutes.

Results and Discussion (Study 2)

Similar to Study 1, the *regulatory focus strength* was calculated as a continuous variable, and participants were categorized as chronic promotion-oriented or prevention-oriented by the use of a median split.

Dependent Variable 'frequency'

Each of the mean values of the frequency evaluation of product use was statistically tested using repeated measure Analysis of Variance with Focus as between subject factor and Product Type as within subject factor (MANOVA). As can be seen from Table 2, the use of a promotion product was judged more frequent ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.80$) by chronic promotion consumers, than by prevention consumers ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.75$). Conversely, the use of a prevention product was rated as more frequent by prevention consumers ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.26$) than by promotion consumers ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 1.20$), $F(1,32) = 5.25$, $p < 0.029$, $\eta^2 = 0.141$ (further effects were not recorded, all $F < 1$; the

³In pretests participants were asked whether they associated a product with comfort/luxury or with dependability/safety. On the basis of this evaluation the lipstick was classified as a more comfort related product $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.26$, than the safety product was, $M = 1.52$, $SD = 0.80$, $t(26) = -6.32$, $p < 0.001$. Whereas the condom was rated as a safety related product $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.09$, but not as a comfort related product $M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.97$; $t(26) = 9.01$, $p < 0.001$ (all contrasts $p < 0.001$) (scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very).

Table 2. Overview of the results of study 2

Mean values of the product evaluations depending on product category and the chronic focus of the person				
Chronic focus	Promotion product category (lipstick)		Prevention product category (condom)	
	Promotion $N = 18$	Prevention $N = 16$	Promotion $N = 18$	Prevention $N = 16$
Frequency	1.94 (1.80)	1.38 (1.75)	0.83 (1.20)	2.00 (1.26)
Price (€ as z-value)	1.74 (0.41)	1.50 (0.49)	1.79 (0.34)	1.86 (0.32)
Availability	2.89 (1.94)	2.38 (2.03)	4.22 (2.39)	5.38 (1.31)
Doing without	2.72 (2.08)	2.44 (2.13)	3.78 (2.39)	5.50 (1.63)
Scale-score	2.52 (1.82)	2.06 (1.91)	2.94 (1.73)	4.29 (1.18)
Brand-name purchase	1.67 (0.49)	1.31 (0.48)	1.94 (0.24)	1.94 (0.25)
Brand product*	12	5	16	17
Noname product*	6	11	1	1

Note: Judgments were made on 7-point scales (the higher the value, the higher the evaluation), with the exception of brand-name purchase, here scale anchored at 1 (a cheaper no-name product) to 2 (a more expensive brand-name product) (Standard deviations in parentheses).

*= frequencies.

contrast results for ‘promotion product versus prevention product’ within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = 2.20$, $p < 0.042$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = -1.10$, $p < 0.289$).

Dependent Variable ‘price’

The price evaluations were logarithmized and statistically tested using repeated measure Analysis of Variance with Focus as between subject factor and Product Type as within subject factor (MANOVA). Table 2 shows that higher prices were cited for the prevention product ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 0.33$) than for the promotion product ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 0.46$), $F(1,32) = 9.71$, $p < 0.004$, $\text{Eta} = 0.233$. Moreover, as predicted, for a promotion product higher prices were cited by chronic promotion people ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.41$) than by chronic prevention consumers ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.49$). Conversely, prevention consumers indicated being prepared to pay higher prices for prevention products ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.32$) than promotion consumers ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.34$), $F(1,32) = 5.51$, $p < 0.025$, $\text{Eta} = 0.147$ (further effects were not recorded, all $F_s < 1$; the contrast results for ‘promotion product vs. prevention product’ within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = 1.10$, $p < 0.286$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = -1.49$, $p < 0.158$.)

Dependent Variable ‘importance of availability’

Each of the mean values of the importance of the availability of the product in everyday life was statistically tested using repeated measure Analysis of Variance with Focus as between subject factor and Product Type as within subject factor (MANOVA). As can be seen from Table 2, chronic promotion consumers assess the availability of a promotion product as more important to them ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.94$) than prevention consumers do ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 2.03$). Conversely, prevention consumers

indicate that they ascribe greater importance to the availability of a prevention product ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.31$) than promotion consumers report ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.39$), $F(1,32) = 3.92$, $p < 0.056$, $Eta = 0.109$. Overall, the availability of the promotion product was assessed as fundamentally less important ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.97$) than that of the prevention product ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 2.02$), $F(1,32) = 26.51$, $p < 0.001$, $Eta = 0.453$ (further effects were not recorded, all $F < 1$; the contrast results for 'promotion product versus prevention product' were significant within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = -2.13$, $p < 0.048$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = -5.47$, $p < 0.001$.)

Dependent Variable 'doing without'

Each of the recoded mean values for doing without the product category was statistically tested with a repeated measure Analysis of Variance with Focus as between subject factor and Product Type as within subject factor (MANOVA). As can be seen from Table 2, chronic promotion consumers find it harder to do without a promotion product ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 2.08$) than prevention consumers do ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 2.13$). Conversely, prevention consumers believe that they would find it harder to do without a prevention product in everyday life ($M = 5.5$, $SD = 1.63$) than promotion consumers find ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 2.39$), $F(1,32) = 3.82$, $p < 0.059$, $Eta = 0.107$. Furthermore, doing without the promotion product was judged as being easier ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 2.08$) than doing without the prevention product ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 2.22$), $F(1,32) = 16.08$, $p < 0.001$, $Eta = 0.334$. (Further effects were not recorded, all F s < 2.06) (the contrast results for 'promotion product vs. prevention product' within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = -1.29$, $p < 0.214$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = -5.27$, $p < 0.001$.)

Dependent Variable 'scale'

The above described dependent variables were also treated as scale items and after testing for reliability (cronbachs alpha: 0.95 for the promotion product scale and 0.82 for the prevention product scale) formed into a single measure, which was then statistically tested with repeated measure Analysis of Variance with Focus as between subject factor and Product Type as within subject factor (MANOVA). Table 2 shows that chronic promotion consumers evaluate a promotion product more positively ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.82$) than prevention consumers do ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.91$). Conversely, prevention consumers evaluate a prevention product more positively ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.18$) than promotion consumers did ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.73$), $F(1,32) = 5.40$, $p < 0.027$, $Eta = 0.144$. Overall, the prevention product was charged with higher evaluations ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.63$) than the promotion product ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.85$), $F(1,32) = 11.71$, $p < 0.002$, $Eta = 0.268$. (Further effects were not recorded, all $F < 1$; the contrast results for 'promotion product vs. prevention product' within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = 4.28$, $p < 0.001$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(17) = -0.75$, $p < 0.462$.)

Dependent Variable 'brand purchase'

The frequency with which consumers choose between a no-name product and a brand-name product for the relevant product category was statistically tested via χ^2 . As can be seen from Table 2, in reference to a promotion product, chronic promotion consumers prefer the brand-name product ($M_{\text{brand}} = 12$; $M_{\text{noname}} = 6$) more than prevention consumers do ($M_{\text{brand}} = 5$, $M_{\text{noname}} = 11$), $\chi^2(1,34) = 4.25$, $p < 0.039$. Whereas in reference to a prevention product prevention consumers choose the brand-name with equal frequency ($M_{\text{brand}} = 16$; $M_{\text{noname}} = 1$) to promotion consumers

($M_{\text{brand}} = 17$; $M_{\text{noname}} = 1$), $\chi^2 < 0$. (The contrast results for 'promotion product versus prevention product' within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(17) = -2.56, p < 0.020$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = -5.00, p < 0.001$.)

Again these results show that safety is important as a minimal goal for both groups of consumers, prevention and promotion consumers do not differ in their rating of the prevention product type. In reference to the promotion product type, differences in consumer's focus occur—prevention consumers choose the less expensive no-name product, while promotion consumers choose the more expensive brand-name product.

In addition, a measure of difference was taken between the mean values of the *Dependent Variables* for the prevention product and the promotion product—now higher values assigned to the product measure of difference signifies higher values for the prevention product. The mean judgments of the dependent variables were taken in a Multiple Regression Analysis.

As predicted, for a promotion product, chronic promotion consumers were prepared to pay higher prices. Whereas in reference to prevention products, prevention consumers indicated a readiness to pay more ($\beta = -0.44$), $t(32) = -2.75, p < 0.010$. Chronic promotion consumers assessed the availability of a promotion product to be more important to them, while chronic prevention consumers evaluated the availability of a prevention product as more important ($\beta = -0.39$), $t(32) = -2.41, p < 0.022$. Participants with a stronger prevention focus were less able to do without a prevention product, while participants with a stronger promotion focus were less able to do without the promotion product ($\beta = -0.33$), $t(32) = -2.00, p < 0.054$. Chronic promotion consumers tend to prefer the brand-name promotion product, while prevention consumers show the tendency to more often choose the brand-name prevention product ($\beta = -0.30$), $t(32) = -1.78, p < 0.085$.

In conclusion this study shows that consumers differ with regard to their product evaluation and their consumer behavior depending on their chronic RF. Products that are compatible with the consumer's focus are evaluated more positively than products that are incompatible with their focus.

STUDY 3

The aim of the following study is to examine whether the evaluation of one and the same product can be influenced by the focus compatibility of the advertising text. If the advertising slogan matches the focus and therefore the need of the consumer, e.g., products with safety aspects for the prevention focus and products with luxury aspects (or that go beyond safety, and address desires) for the promotion focus, a more favorable evaluation of a product should result.

Method

Participants and Design

The study was based on a 2 (between-factor focus: promotion vs. prevention) $\times$ 2 (between-factor advertising slogan: promotion framed vs. prevention framed) factorial design, which enables a comparison of the product evaluation between the participants depending on participant's RF and the product's advertising slogan.

Forty-five psychology students (35 women, 10 men) in their first semester took part, in the framework of a seminar, in this 'study on consumer psychology.' The participation took place individually in two group sessions and participants were rewarded with a bar of chocolate. Only those participants who had not expressed any suspicion with regard to the experimental hypothesis (due to their previous participation in a lesson on regulatory focus) were entered into the analysis ($N = 35$; 28 women, 7 men).

Materials and Procedure

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were informed that the authors of this study on consumer psychology wished, on the one hand, to learn something about consumers and on the other to obtain product evaluations. In the first part, which was described as a 'consumer survey,' participants were given the task of describing in their own words and for a total of 5 minutes 'what they would like to achieve generally in everyday life' as well as 'what desires and ideals they have' (= promotion focus) versus 'what they generally should do in everyday life' as well as 'what responsibilities and duties they have' (= prevention focus). In this way either a promotion or a prevention focus was induced (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Liberman et al., 1999).

In the subsequent second part of the survey, 'the product evaluation,' they received one page (= product sheet) with the illustration of a washing machine⁴ and below this the relevant technical data (such as number of spins, water consumption, capacity etc.). This was identical for both experimental conditions. Depending on the experimental condition, the illustration of the washing machine was equipped with the headline 'The newest technology available' and the advertising text 'Lots of new functions. The most modern LCD display makes washing child's play.' (= promotion slogan) or else with the headline 'Established for many years' and the advertising text 'Consumer tests prove: safe and reliable. LCD display leads you through all programs safely and easily' (= prevention slogan).

Pretests confirm that in the first case the maximal goals of a person in the promotion focus were targeted (lots of functions = lots of opportunities and possibilities) and in the second case the minimal goals of a prevention-oriented consumer (safety, avoiding errors) were addressed.⁵

These slogans are based on findings by Liberman et al. (1999), according to whom people in the promotion focus rather change tasks, i.e., want new things and test more hypotheses than people in the prevention focus. In short, the given slogans serve the desire of promotion consumers for multitude and selection (Liberman et al., 1999), as well as the preference for stability and safety of prevention consumers (in the context of job ads see Thorsteinson & Highhouse, 2003).

All participants were required to evaluate the washing machine on the dimensions 'quality' of the product ('How do you rate the quality of the product?' scale from 1 = very poor to 7 = very good), and the expected satisfaction with the product in everyday life 'How satisfied do you think you would be with this product in everyday life?' scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = very). It was expected that individuals would indicate a higher satisfaction and higher quality for the product compatible with their focus.

Following this there were several control questions (including a question on suspicion of the purpose of the experiment) and participants were asked to provide demographic information. The amount of time required to work through the complete set of questionnaires was on average 10 minutes.

Results and Discussion

The control questions yielded no significant effects (all $F < 1$) and are therefore not reported. The mean values of the quality assessment and the satisfaction with the product were each statistically tested using Analysis of Variance with Focus and Slogan as between subject factors (ANOVA).

Qualitatively speaking, it was expected that participants would judge the product compatible with their focus as being of greater quality. As can be seen in Table 3, this was (with marginal significance) the case. In

⁴According to a preliminary survey, for the current target group a washing machine represents a neutral product without any strong promotion or prevention preconceptions.

⁵In a pretest participants rated the washing machine advertised with a prevention slogan as safer $M_{\text{prom slogan}} = 3.44$, $SD = 0.88$; $M_{\text{prev slogan}} = 4.11$, $SD = 0.93$, $t(16) = 1.56$, $p < 0.066$ (1-sided); the washing machine with the promotion slogan was rated as more comfort related: $M_{\text{prev slogan}} = 3.22$, $SD = 0.83$; $M_{\text{prom slogan}} = 4.00$, $SD = 0.86$, $t(16) = 1.94$, $p < 0.035$ (1-sided) (scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very).

Table 3. Overview of the results of study 3

Slogan	Promotion focus		Prevention focus	
	Promotion $N = 9$	Prevention $N = 9$	Promotion $N = 8$	Prevention $N = 9$
DV 'quality.' Mean values of the quality evaluations of the product depending on the induced focus of the person and the advertising slogan	5.44 (1.24)	4.78 (1.09)	4.38 (1.10)	5.00 (0.71)
DV 'satisfaction.' Mean values of the hypothetical satisfaction with the product depending on the induced focus of the person and the advertising slogan	5.78 (1.09)	5.11 (0.60)	4.75 (0.88)	5.33 (0.87)

Note: Judgments were made on 7-point scales (scale anchored at 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) (Standard deviations in parentheses).

the promotion focus, consumers judged a product with a promotion slogan as qualitatively better ($M = 5.44$) than the product with a prevention slogan ($M = 4.78$). For consumers in the prevention focus, a prevention slogan led to greater judgments of quality ($M = 5.00$) than a promotion slogan ($M = 4.38$), $F(1,34) = 3.35$, $p < 0.077$, $\eta^2 = 0.098$. (Further effects were not recorded, all $F < 1.44$) (the contrast results for 'promotion slogan versus prevention slogan' within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(16) = -1.21$, $p < 0.120$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = 1.45$, $p < 0.085$, one-sided.)

Expectations were that individuals would indicate a higher satisfaction for the product compatible with their focus. Table 3 shows that the hypothesis was indeed confirmed: In the promotion focus, participants indicated a higher level of satisfaction for a product with a promotion slogan ($M = 5.78$) than for a product with a prevention slogan ($M = 5.11$). In the prevention focus a prevention slogan resulted in higher satisfaction judgments ($M = 5.33$) than a promotion slogan ($M = 4.75$), $F(1,34) = 4.14$, $p < 0.044$, $\eta^2 = 0.125$. (Further effects were not recorded, all $F < 1.83$). (The contrast results for 'promotion slogan versus prevention slogan' within promotion consumers: $t_{\text{prom}}(16) = -1.60$, $p < 0.064$ and within prevention consumers: $t_{\text{prev}}(15) = 1.37$, $p < 0.095$, one-sided.)

In conclusion this study shows that it is possible to make one and the same product attractive for both prevention and promotion consumers by means of focus compatible slogans. However, it appears that the promotion slogan was particularly effective. This could be attributed to the fact that the prevention slogan, which contained safety needs, addressed basic needs (= minimal goals) upon which consumers agree, so that there are no differences in this regard. Though as soon as the concern shifts to aspects that go beyond this, the promotion focus plays a role in the area of aspects of luxury (cf. Study 2).

DISCUSSION

As these studies show, the self-regulatory theory opens up a broad perspective on its predictability and influence on consumer behavior. Therefore new importance should be placed on considering a consumer's regulatory focus during product evaluation or purchase decision. Previous research showed that a promotion focus facilitates consumer behavior and increases consumption, while a prevention focus hinders consumer behavior reducing consumption (see Förster, 2003, 2004). The current findings extend this perspective by showing that—as an important pre-set process of consumer behavior—the product evaluation already differs according to the consumer's focus. Different aspects of one and the same product can have the final convincing effect, different motivations to purchase a product come into play when buying, and products advertised in a manner compatible with the consumer's focus are ultimately judged more positively. Factors like product features, a product's importance, as well as,

the framing of the product are all influenced to different degrees by the consumer's RF and thus carry varying weight in consumer behavior. Accordingly, the amount that consumers are prepared to invest, from a monetary/financial point-of-view, is also influenced by the compatibility of a product's characteristics with a consumer's regulatory focus. Furthermore, it became apparent that minimal goals play a role for both prevention and promotion consumers, while maximal goals are valued only by promotion consumers.

Both on a theoretical and a practical level, these findings offer implications for the effectiveness of advertising. In the following, corresponding theoretical and practical implications for the psychology of advertising and other areas of economic psychology will be discussed.

Theoretical Implications

The most important innovation is the self-regulatory component, which provides both motivational, as well as, cognitive and behavioral approaches for explaining consumer behavior. In this way, the theory of regulatory focus offers a versatile approach to explaining the emergence of product evaluations, purchase decisions and consumer behavior.

For further studies it would be interesting to take into account how the regulatory focus affects people's emotional experience in relation to a product. For instance, individuals in promotion focus show behavior that is marked by eagerness and optimism (for an overview see Higgins, 2000). If promotion activities are successfully concluded (positive event occurs; i.e., the desired product is in one's possession), satisfaction and enthusiasm result with a simultaneous increase in motivation (next time, purchases will be made following the same strategy). On the other hand, following an unsuccessful activity disappointment and sadness arise, tension decreases and with this the motivation also abates (Förster et al., 1998; Higgins, Grant, & Shah, 1999). Individuals in the prevention focus are very attentive and show careful prevention behavior to avoid undesired states (they are anxious not to make mistakes). In the case of a successful action (negative events do not occur; e.g., the product is not sold out) relief and calm arise, and tension and consequently also motivation decrease. After an unsuccessful activity (the product is no longer available), tension and anxiety emerge and the motivation of the person continues to increase in accordance with this increase in tension (Förster et al., 2001; Friedman, 1999; Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Straumann, 1986; Higgins et al., 1999 among others). To cite an example from the marketplace: A consumer in promotion focus, who wants to purchase a product, will be pleased if (s)he gets it and disappointed if (s)he does not get it. Somebody in the prevention focus who wants to purchase a product will, by contrast, be relieved if (s)he gets it and anxious if (s)he does not get it. This also corresponds to findings by Förster et al. (1998, 2001), where with increasing proximity to the goal (and with this increasing motivation) individuals in promotion focus showed more promotion behavior, while individuals in prevention focus showed more prevention behavior. Thus the prediction is that the effects of an individual's RF are pronounced the closer the individual is to the goal of getting the product.

For the area of consumer psychology new insights could be gathered if marketing strategies and paths were combined with the increases and decreases in motivation described here. Moreover, the influences on purchase behavior mentioned at the start of this paper, such as, habits, decision rules, availability etc. can be integrated into the self-regulatory model presented here. Due to chronic consumer needs, different decision rules or heuristics are brought into play corresponding (purchasing) habits in turn establish themselves from these and accordingly will be available to differing degrees. These links between influenced decision making and purchase behavior should be examined in further research.

Finally, the current findings are also relevant to other areas of economic psychology, such as person judgments (Förster, 1998), the effect on evaluations of media topics (Förster & Werth, 2001),

recognition of danger in traffic (Werth & Förster, 2005a) or negotiations (Werth, Mayer, & Mussweiler, 2006). For instance, negotiation partners have different preferences regarding the target to be negotiated about according to their regulatory focus (Werth et al., 2006). In integrative negotiations (negotiations in which there are both prevention and promotion-related targets to be negotiated) this can lead to better results being achieved in general for all those involved. Persons with a promotion focus achieve greater results with promotion-related targets, while people with a prevention focus negotiate more prevention-related targets (Werth et al., 2006). In this way, the consideration of the regulatory focus in the context of negotiations has led to a deeper understanding of the materialization of negotiation results. Future research could consequently be devoted to similar fields of application, in which the inclusion of the regulatory focus can increase the effectiveness of one's own actions, e.g., in the area of investor behavior, project planning or pension plans.

Practical Implications

In terms of the practical implications for consumer psychology, the current studies show that the type of advertising texts, films or pictures influence the evaluation and also the consumption of products by consumers.

First, having knowledge about the target group is—as was shown here—particularly important from the point of view of chronic focus. If an advertiser is aware of the needs of the target group, he or she can serve the minimal versus maximal goals of this group more precisely and in this way shape advertising more effectively.

Second, not only the chronic focus but also the situational focus can be implemented through advertising or the purchasing situation; thus influencing the consumer's focus at the time of purchase. Helpful implications for this situational activation of focus can be derived from studies in which the promotion and prevention behavior was actively manipulated. As Study 3 clearly shows, the direction of advertisements has a considerable influence on products evaluation and therefore also on their consumption (for animated pictures or products see also Förster, 2004, Study 1). New media/advertising films should therefore profit greatly from this information and accordingly advertise their products in a targeted way/place them in an animated or static fashion, dependant upon which speaks more directly to consumers in a promotion or prevention focus. In future research the examination of whether in the case of anti-aids campaigns, in which the aim is to increase the rate of condom use, it would be more efficient to present condoms in an animated fashion in order to increase the promotion effect or else whether it would be better to strive for a 'fit effect' by showing condoms (= prevention product) in a prevention movement and in this way achieve a more positive evaluation. Furthermore, studies on bodyfeedback (e.g., Förster & Strack, 1996) suggest that the placement of consumer products in the supermarket could be relevant for a consumer's acceptance, as the observation and reaching for/removing of products commands different postures. Products that require the customer to bend down to remove them from the shelf (a prevention posture) should be judged more negatively, while products that are placed higher up on the shelf determine an upright posture (a promotion posture) and should lead to more positive evaluations.

Not least, the current studies also contribute to differential consumer psychology through the fact that the *fit of advertising texts and target groups* takes on a new importance. First, if an advertiser knows the preferences (chronic prevention or promotion-oriented) of his target group, he or she can advertise in a considerably more effective fashion, i.e., compatible with the relevant focus. Second, in the framework of 'sales pitches' it is important which arguments or aspects are addressed—as was described here, aspects compatible with the focus are more convincing or more relevant for consumers. For instance, findings suggest that if an advertiser wants to cover both target groups (or (s)he does not know the foci of the consumers), (s)he should implement different types of advertising/arguments in

order to include both foci preferences. For example, an anti-aids campaign could in one commercial, declare condom use as a safety measure ('Condoms are safe'), and in another promote it as a sign of a cool image ('Condoms are cool'). The current studies also show that RF can also be determined situationally, i.e., it would be perfectly conceivable for trained salespeople to generate the focus in their potential consumers that matches the product within the sales pitch (for example 'In a position like yours, you have duties and responsibilities that have to be fulfilled...') is an example of a successful focus induction from Werth et al., 2006).

However, with regard to the generalizability of the findings on the *chronic* focus on product evaluation and comparable advertisement, the occurrence of *cultural differences* needs to be taken into account (due to the emergence of the chronic characterization depending on socialization). For instance, in Eastern cultures, a predominantly interdependent self-construct exists, that places value on information about the presence or absence of potential losses (prevention-framed). Whereas in Western cultures, a predominantly independent self-construct exists, and information about the presence or absence of potential gains (promotion-framed) are seen as more significant (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000).

Finally, it is also conceivable that advertising measures that address the self-regulation system of the consumers could have both a more intense and a longer-lasting effect on consumer behavior. If this were the case, advertising effectiveness could be increased—and the total expenditure reduced. However, the extent to which this is an achievable goal or mere speculation is a matter for further research.

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APPENDIX A

Product category ‘wristwatch’

Product category	Focus
Impact resistance	prevention
ID memory function (storage for data, e.g., ID card number)	promotion
Long guarantee	prevention
Leather strap	promotion
Stopwatch	promotion
Automatically illuminated clockface	promotion
Stable buckle	prevention
Digital time display	promotion
Easily deliverable replacement parts	prevention
Robust strap	prevention
Time zone setting	promotion
Good rating from Stiftung Warentest (German consumer magazine)	prevention

Note: The indication of prevention or promotion product is only provided here to aid the reader's understanding. This was naturally not included in the experimental material.

APPENDIX B

Product Category 'sunglasses'

Product category	Focus
UV protection (UVA or UVB filter)	prevention
Fashionable straight side-piece form	promotion
Safety against breakage	prevention
Compact folding format	promotion
Good rating from Stiftung Warentest (German consumer magazine)	prevention
Replaceable lenses	promotion
Stable side piece	prevention
Light reflection	promotion

Note: The indication of prevention or promotion product is only provided here to aid the reader's understanding. This was naturally not included in the experimental material.

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