

# Considerations and Confusions about the Regulatory Focus Theory and a Future Agenda for Researchers in Marketing

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## Abstract

The regulatory focus theory is the mark of a paradigm shift away from a unidimensional hedonism towards a multiplicity of regulatory foci. It possesses great explanatory power; however a lot remains unresolved despite a promising body of empirical work. This paper highlights various considerations concerning the conceptual and comparative qualities of the regulatory focus theory. The discussion moves into the intersection of regulatory focus and consumer behavior literature, briefly summarizing the findings and followed by a number of propositions to be tested for future research.

*Keywords: consumer psychology, regulatory focus, regulatory fit, motivational psychology, area assessment.*

*JEL Classification: M31*

## Düzenleyici Odaklar Teorisi Üzerine Saptamalar ve Pazarlama Alanında Çalışan Araştırmacılara Öneriler

### Özet

Düzenleyici odaklar teorisi hedonizm gibi tek odaklılık yerine birden fazla düzenleyici odağın varlığını kabul eder. Sahip olduğu açıklayıcı güce ve çok sayıda ampirik çalışmaya rağmen hala araştırılmayan ve gözardı edilen noktaları bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada kavramsal ve kıyaslayıcı bir analiz ile bu teori üzerine bazı düşünceler belirtilmektedir. Ardından bu önemli noktalarda ihtiyaç duyulabilecek gelecek bilimsel çalışma konuları listelenmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: tüketici psikolojisi, düzenleyici odaklar, motivasyon, alan yazın taraması.*

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Originated by E. Tory Higgins from Columbia University, the regulatory focus is a fundamental motivational theory. It is applicable to many areas due to its wide research and theory development potential. The regulatory focus theory, namely the promotion versus prevention focus, aims to explain the attitudinal as well as the strategically different inclinations of individuals.

The starting point of the regulatory focus are the basic human needs, similar to the Maslow needs pyramid (1955). The fundamental needs of security versus nurturance make up the first conceptual difference of different regulatory bases. The security need resembles protection from something undesired, not being left in the cold or not causing harm to the body unity, and therefore signifies prevention. The nurturance needs are desired needs, including the need for nourishment or for getting a desired hug. They therefore signify promotion. From one perspective, a chronic promotion or prevention focus is thought to be largely influenced by parental raising and childhood experiences (Higgins and Silberman, 1998). Not only chronic but also dynamic perspectives towards a promotion versus a prevention focus have been conceptualized as well. Two types of foci have been called “motivational subsystems” (Florack et al., 2005), “strategic inclinations,” “motivational regulation,” “motivational processes” (Summerville and Roese, 2008) or “motivational orientations” (Ku et al., 2012). Being a fundamental part of the human motivation and thus all actions, the regulatory focus of the individual is linked to many other psychological variables, including consumption-related behavior and persuasion.

### **Consideration 1: Regulatory focus possesses a distinct place among the totality of different mindsets.**

Imagine that Jen and Jack are two students in the same PhD program and they both have an appointment with the head of the department for Monday morning. Both of them are good students, hardworking, bright and responsible. They both marked their calendar and arrived on time at the professor’s office. There, Jack saw that Jen had brought the print-outs of her transcript, academic CV and the most recent research proposal. For one moment, Jack tried to remember if they had to do some preparations or bring anything. Then he shrugged and said to Jen: “I didn’t bring anything. I remember very clearly that she didn’t ask for anything.” Jen approved and replied “Yes, we didn’t have to and she will not be angry because you didn’t. I just wanted to print them and have them with me to show her.”

This scenario and many similar others are observable in almost every domain, from shopping to investment and from studying to child rearing. People may be of one kind or another and in some domains we can be Jacks or Jens sometimes. The contextuality and the amount of possibilities are related to the notion of multiple mindsets. The literature hosts a number of mindsets such as the power mindset (Rucker and Galinsky, 2008; 2009), locomotion versus assessment mindsets (Avnet and Higgins, 2003), or abstract versus concrete mindsets (Trope and Liberman, 2010). However, recent discussions

highlight the distinction that specific situations may call for specific mindset effects since behavior is jointly affected by the actor and the situation (Rucker and Galinsky, 2016). Or the same situation may evoke a multiplicity of unrelated mindsets. Therefore a brief theoretical exercise may be necessary at this point to signify the distinctiveness of the regulatory focus theory.

For example, Maslow (1955) distinguished deficiency motivation versus growth motivation. Two motivational mindsets influence people to satisfy their “must needs” like safety and only then move onto their “growth needs”, like self-actualization. This hierarchical approach needs a lot of adaptation to fully explain the case of Jack and Jen, unless one concludes that Jack is far down the needs triangle of Maslow and only desires to get rid of punishment for the ultimate aim of social acceptance or lack of pain.

In a similar vein, if we consider McClelland’s motivation theory (1951/1961), people with a high need for achievement seek to excel and thrive; they perform well on challenging tasks and seek feedback. Unlike a need for affiliation or power, people with a high need for achievement request frequent feedback and they are mainly driven by individual rewards apart from money or prize. However, the difference between Jack and Jen’s behaviors are still not enlightened because Jack is not missing any prize and Jen is not receiving one by doing so.

Broadening the scope towards risk theories, it could be argued that Jen has a risk-averse personality and Jack simply could risk not bringing any additional material. According to Menezes and Hanson (1970), risk averse people calculate the expected value of the risk versus the risk-free situation for any arbitrary risk. Transferring this to the initial case of Jen and Jack, it could be argued that because Jen is risk-averse, she paid the effort to prepare and print the extra documents against any risk she perceived about the professor requesting them in the meeting. In this case, Jack is a risk-taker and relied on chance instead of bearing the cost of preparation. But still, given that we have all the information about the scenario, the professor has no intention to ask for any of these documents or think Jack is inferior if he did not show them. Besides, Jack’s conversation may have gone much better than Jen’s in achieving a better outcome at the end. Jen also accepts that she visualized no risk associated with her action but rather it was just a complementary move and she had the habit of carrying her transcripts or hard data.

As a recently found mediator of any decision, mood may also be relevant in this scenario. Overweighting effects of mood have largely been discussed in the literature with the main effect generally being a more positive evaluation of the perceived object or a better evaluation of a certain experience. So one can argue that Jen was in a good mood and had the energy and courage to make some extra preparation to represent the feeling that she was a better or a higher-performer. And conversely, Jack may have been in a bad mood and didn’t attempt any extra preparation other than being there on time, which could have affected his mood more. But what if Jen’s good mood was instrumental for being more optimistic than Jack and inhibited any efforts to make her meeting better because it would go well anyway. In a similar fashion, Avnet and Higgins (2006) also argue that a positive mood or arousal have direct effects on the outcome (like exagger-

ated rating) whereas a negative regulatory fit has an indirect effect on the outcomes by increasing decision-maker engagement and confidence in whatever reaction they show. Moreover, Arnold and Reynolds (2009) demonstrate that a promotion-focus lifts the mood upwards, but prevention-focus does not.

A logical approach would be to use the theories of goal attainment and relevancy (Brendl and Higgins, 1996). It can be argued that Jack's and Jen's goals were different and this difference explains the different behaviors of the two. Impressing the department could be one of Jen's top priorities, and the meeting could be relevant to such a goal. Whereas Jack is aiming at succeeding in his final exam which is occurring right after the meeting and he has transferred his resources that end. He may have the same goal of impressing the department, but the short meeting with the head didn't seem relevant or he took its outcome for granted. Both ways, goal literature would be silent if we assume that the meeting carries the same importance for both students and their goals. The difference in the means they employ signals a need for a distinction in the theories employed.

A motivational theory from the economics and finance domain may be utilized to explain the initial example of behavioral differences; this is the prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). In behavioral terms, the prospect theory asserts that there is high risk-seeking in the pursuit of gains (such as a lottery) but more risk-aversion in the pursuit of losses (such as insurance) as a result of overweighting small probabilities (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Avnet and Higgins (2006) also discussed the regulatory fit theory from the perspective of the prospect theory. Förster et al. (2001) conclude that promotion-orientation is related to sensitivity to success, gain or prize, whereas prevention-orientation is related to sensitivity to failure, loss or punishment. However, the authors also cautioned that the expected outcome of any such situation would be shaped by the person's regulatory focus, so it is not useful to apply the prospect theory to everyone (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). Besides, comparisons in the prospect theory literature are either between two positives (gain or averted loss) both of which would be favorable, or between two negatives (loss or foregone gain) both of which would be unfavorable (Idson et al., 2000). Whereas, with the regulatory theory it is possible to make the discrimination even if the two outcomes represent the same valence end-states (Idson et al., 2004).

Finally, the approach – avoidance models assume that human beings are directed towards desired states where the discrepancies are resolved through seeking match situations while escaping mismatches (Higgins, 1997). However, these models focus on prevention or neglecting promotion because the discrepancy that motivates people can stem from getting rid of inconsistency and imbalance. Nevertheless, there is another type of discrepancy that motivates human beings, stemming from a lack of desired success or accomplishment. The hedonic principle of attaining pleasure or avoiding pain had largely been silent on the exact ways of attaining these states and ultimately influencing motivation. The hedonism principle also largely neglected various types of

pleasure and pain. One reason for this neglect is the emphasis of the hedonic principle on the outcomes, rather than on the decision making or the process itself (Higgins et al., 2001). In terms of different strategic inclinations, experimental studies show that the promotion mindset is associated with a strategy towards the desired state of being whereas the prevention mindset is associated with a strategic avoidance of mismatch with the desired state of being (e.g. Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Higgins et al., 1994; Shah and Higgins, 2001). The ubiquitous explanatory power comes from the fact that both are strategies towards desired end-states but with different orientations. Overall, what the regulatory focus theorists argue is not a simple rejection of the hedonic principle but rather a digging deeper into the concept to explain fully many different paths to reach similar end-states, and also the nature of these different paths determined by the strategic tools and perceptions of the individual.

**Proposition 1: There are certain marketing contexts where regulatory foci can be differentiated from different domains of the self.**

There are basically three domains of the self: the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self (Higgins, 1987). The crucial difference between the ideal self and the ought self has been a matter of extensive discussion (Colby, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Schafer, 1967). The ideal self is a collection of attributes perceived as socially desirable for every individual, namely a collection of individual hopes, aspirations, and wishes. The ought self is a collection of attributes perceived as necessary to possess, namely duties, obligations and responsibilities (Higgins, 1987). These self-guides are relevant only personally, and the basic motivation of the self is to reach whichever self-guide we possess by removing the distance between the actual self and the ideal self.

Methodologically the two concepts have crossed onto each other's domain as well. The regulatory focus can be assessed through response latency measures. The promotion focus is measured as the response latency to themes of personal hopes and aspirations whereas the prevention focus can be measured against themes of personal responsibilities and obligations (Higgins, 2002). The core of this measurement is the self-guide accessibility which is the extent of the attention to desires versus obligations when setting up a goal (Higgins et al., 2001). The reaction times are actually measures of reacting to the ideal versus the ought selves of the individual. Idson et al. (2000) used the Self-Guide Strength Measure to assess the regulatory focus of the participants. Apart from response latencies, two psychometrically different subscales for promotion and prevention (Higgins et al., 2001) are related to the self-guide definition of regulatory focus; these are the ideal versus the ought self.

As a suggested empirical setting, imagine two video-games with different finals. When the two games are differentiated with their final prize, a promotion-oriented ending would provide a huge prize like a trophy for the finale. But with a prevention-oriented ending, the prize would be escape from death. Empirical research in the video-game context manipulated the self-construal of the gamer, the self-concept of the avatar that

the gamers chose (Jin, 2009; 2010) or the regulatory focus of the gamers. However, manipulating the game itself by putting different final prizes would show a different interaction with ideal versus actual-self representing avatars. Such a design would enable researchers to single out the effect of the regulatory framing of the experience itself under different self-domains. Therefore, future research should delineate the two processes and highlight different contexts, conditions and various moderators for the correlation between regulatory foci and domains of the self as previous theories like the prospect theory had done.

### **Consideration 2: The boundaries between regulatory focus and regulatory fit have been blurred, making it harder to delineate two different levels.**

The chronic regulatory focus of the individual is thought to be a function of the person's socialization process, including interaction with caretakers in childhood and friends, spouses, coworkers, employers or significant others in adulthood (Higgins, 2002). The parental raising style has been an important element in assessing chronic regulatory focus: nurturing parenting that focuses on desired end-states is capable of leading to promotion focus; whereas security parenting that focuses on criticism when desired ends are not met can lead to prevention focus (Higgins, 2002). In addition, regulatory focus can also be a situational construct in the form of different strategic inclinations.

Regulatory foci differ in terms of performance, persistence, information recall or information processing, creativity, expectations, emotions, information processing, judgment, decision-making, problem solving and performance. For example, prevention-focus leads to extreme simplification and thinking in a very few number of dimensions or categories whereas promotion focus enables using various criteria (Crowe and Higgins, 1997), and therefore is linked with creativity (Baas et al., 2008), relational thinking and integration (Zhu and Meyers-Levy, 2007). Zhou and Pham (2004) conclude that a risky investment situation evokes promotion focus whereas secure investment situations evoke prevention focus. Crowe and Higgins (1997) revealed that promotion-focus leads to a more risky bias of claiming to remember, and prevention-focus leads to the opposite conservative bias of claiming not to remember.

Also, the texts of promotion- and prevention-focus individuals were extensively analyzed as to content with the conclusion that promotion-focus linguistic signature is abstract whereas prevention-focus language is predominantly concrete (Semin et al., 2005). Emotions are also specific to certain regulatory foci. Promotion success generates joy whereas prevention success generates calmness (Idson et al., 2000). Another stream of research, perhaps yet to be developed, looks at the psychophysiology of the regulatory focus in which the EEGs revealed greater left frontal activity for promotion focus and greater right frontal activity for a prevention focus (Amodio et al., 2004). This is neuro-scientific evidence showing two distinct processes instead of a single focus.

A comprehensive list of regulatory foci-related variables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
A List of Variables Associated with Promotion versus Prevention Focus

| PROMOTION FOCUS                                    | PREVENTION FOCUS                                    | SOURCE                     |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| nurturance needs                                   | security needs                                      | Higgins, 1997              |
| ideals   | oughts  |                            |
| gain vs. non-gain contexts                         | non-loss vs. loss contexts                          |                            |
| evaluating the existence of positive outcomes only | evaluating the existence of negative outcomes only  |                            |
| approach as strategic means                        | avoidance as strategic means                        |                            |
| guaranteeing hits and avoiding omission            | insure correct rejections against commission errors |                            |
| cheerfulness - dejection emotions                  | quiescence - agitation emotions                     |                            |
| risky bias   | conservative bias                                   | Crowe and Higgins, 1997    |
| change   | stability   | Liberman et al., 1999      |
| additive counterfactuals                           | subtractive counterfactuals                         | Roese et al., 1999         |
| more accessible independent self                   | more accessible interdependent self                 | Aaker and Lee, 2001        |
| fun and enjoyment                                  | safety and security                                 |                            |
| ideal self   | ought self  | Higgins, 2002              |
| earning extra                                      | avoiding loss                                       |                            |
| approaching matches                                | avoiding mismatches                                 |                            |
| eager means  | vigilant means                                      |                            |
| advancement, aspirations, accomplishments          | protection, safety and responsibilities             |                            |
| creativity   | self-control  | Freitas et al., 2002       |
| temporal distance                                  | temporal proximity                                  | Pennington and Roese, 2003 |
| abstract mental representations                    | concrete mental representations                     | Keller et al., 2004        |
| left frontal activity                              | right frontal activity                              | Amodio et al., 2004        |
| abstract linguistic signature                      | concrete linguistic signature                       | Semin et al., 2005         |
| global - elaborative processing                    | local processing                                    | Grimm et al., 2008         |
| relational elaboration                             | item-specific elaboration                           | Zhu and Myers-Levy, 2007   |

The regulatory fit, on the other hand, happens at a totally distinct level other than the regulatory focus of an individual. The value from regulatory fit, which is predominantly discussed and used in the literature, is actually only one of the three distinct values derived as a result of the regulatory focus of the individual. Higgins (2002) systematically proposed three distinct types of value created by self-regulation: the outcome value, the value from fit, and the value from proper means.

The outcome value concept asserts that promotion-focused individuals treat promotion-oriented outcomes as more important, and the same is valid for prevention-focused

individuals and outcomes. The relatively higher importance that promotion-focused individuals give to luxury related attributes of products and the relatively higher importance that prevention-focused individuals give to reliability related attributes (Safer, 1998) are exemplary of this type of value.

The regulatory fit is a state of increased motivational intensity resulting from a match between a goal pursuit manner and a goal orientation (Aaker and Lee, 2006). In other words, it is the match between current concerns and interests with the manner of acting upon reaching them (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). When a person's current goal orientation is sustained by the means of goal pursuit, rather than being disrupted by them, there is a regulatory fit (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). Apart from the specific outcomes of certain regulatory foci, one specific outcome of regulatory fit is "feeling right" (Higgins, 2002; Camacho et al., 2003; Cesario et al., 2004). In case of regulatory fit, the goal pursuit makes the individual feel right, and an experience of correctness arises from using the strategy that the individual's orientation is prone to (Camacho et al., 2003).

For example, performance is increased in times of regulatory fit on certain laboratory tasks (Shah et al. 1998). Giving bogus success feedback to promotion-oriented individuals increased their expected performance while giving failure feedback to prevention-oriented individuals decreased their expected performance, not vice versa, due to feeling right about the feedback (Förster et al., 2001). Predictably, when there is not a fit but rather a fit violation with the regulatory orientation of the individual and the manner presented, individuals expressed more guilt (Camacho et al., 2003). The fit condition also triggers learning complex strategies faster (Grimm et al., 2008).

In most of the studies the stimuli and the regulatory foci are separately manipulated in order to create fit versus non-fit situations. But some studies (e.g. Cesario et al., 2004) used the Regulatory Fit Questionnaire (Freitas et al., 2002) in order to assess fit or non-fit directly.

The third value concept of Higgins (2002) is the value from proper means. Much less elaborated than his second postulate, the value from proper means is about justification of the means by the individual due to his regulatory orientation. This perceived difference in value is also called value from justification (Higgins, 2002). It is yet another but weakly researched transfer of value to the real outcome value. There is a lack of empirical data and careful conceptualization on this concept within the regulatory framework.

**Proposition 2: There are certain contexts where the regulatory focus leads not to value from fit but value from proper means or value from outcomes.**

To our knowledge, the only empirical study conducted to assess not regulatory fit but value from outcomes revealed a value called justification value (Idson et al., 2000). Presented with two gift options, one of which definitely cost more than the other, a pen and a mug were evaluated by the respondents under different situations. The assessed price of a coffee mug was found 30% higher when asked pre-decision rather than post-decision. Therefore, further research creating justification for why a certain

decision is made is expected to create different and probably counterintuitive findings against regulatory fit studies. We'd like to propose the context of purchase since it has the potential to interact with regulatory focus and to create not value from fit but value from means. When a product or a brand choice is made in public, the consumers may search for justifications for such choice and develop more brand loyalty in return (Chatterjee et al. 2011). From a similar logic, brand choices that are made privately or on branded private products such as condoms category or a choice situation in front of a condom shelf, would be more open to value from fit or outcomes compared to value from proper means.

**Consideration 3: It is crucial to delineate which consumer behaviors are related to the regulatory focus of the individual, and which behaviors are the results of regulatory fit as well as non-fit.**

Regulatory focus directly affects consumer characteristics in realms of cognition and decision-making. For example, consumers selectively attend to product information designed to fit a certain regulatory focus (Wang and Lee, 2006; Yoon et al., 2012) where the regulatory focus of the individual is acting like an information filter that transmits only matching information. Promotion-focused individuals show a greater intention of using self-service technologies compared to prevention-focus due to their low technological anxiety (Jia et al., 2012). On the basis of the finding that promotion-focused individuals are more willing to exchange their own objects for alternatives (Liberman et al., 1999), they are expected to be less brand loyal, whereas prevention-focused individuals show more brand loyalty due to low risk (Florack et al., 2005). Promotion-focus leads to automatic product preference when forming impressions of the product whereas prevention-focus enables the consideration of other information from other sources for more reliability (Scarabis et al., 2006). As Aaker and Lee (2001) suggest, the post purchase consumer satisfaction can be analyzed in terms of a feeling of relief (prevention emotion) or in terms of pleasure (promotion emotion). This leads to useful subcategories of the construct of customer satisfaction, rather than a unidimensional view.

On another level, the 'feeling right' concept emerging from the regulatory fit found many applicable areas in consumer behavior. One reason for that is the prominent place of affect in consumer behavior and its relations with cognition and actual behavior. For example, the fit between individuals' chronic promotion and prevention focus and the manner of their choice lead to a higher willingness to pay for the same correction fluid product (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). In another experiment, after the regulatory focus is manipulated, the participants were told that the minimum limit of five correct trials would be increased by one in every incorrect trial (Grimm et al., 2008). In this scenario, the outcome was manipulated so as to create a fit for only prevention-primed participants due to the loss-framed structure. A very differently positioned study found that there was also a moral rightness transfer from the regulatory fit itself (Camacho et al., 2003). People experience more guilt if their manner created a fit violation whereas people in

the fit condition experienced more rightness to their choice and actions. These findings can as well be related to satisfaction and post purchase guilt with further research.

The regulatory fit concept is especially important for advertising research. One reason for that is the variety of elements present in an advertisement. The price, the function, the framing and in some cases the design are all elements that need to address the same regulatory focus and thus create a regulatory fit in the intended target. Creating regulatory fit through these elements increases attitude confidence and leads to more persuasive marketing communication efforts (Florack et al., 2005). For example, promotion-focus is associated with eager framing and positive framing in advertising whereas prevention-focus is more prone to be fit with vigilant framing and negative framing (Cesario et al. 2004; Zhao and Pechmann, 2007). This fit situation, in return, generates increased message elaboration (Evans and Petty, 2003). These findings are also valid for social marketing campaigns and advertising such as antismoking campaigns (Zhao and Pechmann, 2007).

In a goal-related study of regulatory focus, Lee and Aaker (2004) created grape juice ads announcing the goal of 'increasing energy' versus 'preventing diseases.' Moreover, the customer goals were also manipulated as 'getting energy' versus 'preventing clogged arteries.' Any fit situation in this marketing communication relationship was observed to generate high persuasion compared to non-fit situations. After this seminal study, the manipulation of advertisements, brochures or any type of marketing communication for the same product have been welcome and used commonly through altering the message, slogan or even the images employed (for different brand claims (see Florack and Scarabis, 2006; for manipulated ads see Zhao and Pechmann, 2007; and Merdin and Seraj, 2013).

Apart from individual consumer's selective attention to information or any framing, certain product types may associate with certain type of foci chronically, too. Werth and Forster (2007) used condom and lipstick products with a similar assumption. In these experiments, the condom product is able to create a fit with the prevention focus whereas lipstick is associated with promotion to create the regulatory fit and lead to more positive product evaluations. Florack et al. (2005) hypothesized that 'big toys', that is, products involving greater purchase risk like racing cars, are promotion-focused whereas utilitarian, functional products like detergents are prevention-focused.

The regulatory focus and regulatory fit concepts together act synergistically and give way to complex research. For example in a series of experiments, Ku et al. (2012) primed and measured the regulatory focus as an individual variable; then manipulated the nature of the product used in the experiment as the independent variable (perfume vs. sun screener) and manipulated the regulatory framing of the message in their last study. Together they showed asymmetric reactions to scarcity in the form of product adoption. All these techniques are parts of the greater puzzle of the regulatory focus and fit theory which is still under-researched compared to its potential explaining power.

Table 2 presents some select but distinct consumer behavior outcomes of regulatory focus and its fit with marketing stimuli.

Table 2  
**Important Consumer-Related Outcomes Associated with Regulatory Focus and Regulatory Fit**

| REGULATORY FOCUS                           | SOURCE                     | REGULATORY FIT   | SOURCE                  |
|--|----------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Selective attention to product information | Wang and Lee, 2006         | Monetary value assigned                                  | Higgins et al., 2001    |
| Risky v. secure investment choice          | Florack and Hartmann, 2003 | Willingness to pay                                       | Avnet and Higgins, 2006 |
| Intention to use self-service technologies | Jia et al., 2012           | Assigned rightness to choice                             | Camacho et al., 2003    |
| Exchanging objects for alternatives        | Lieberman et al., 1999     | Confidence in attitudes                                  | Cesario et al., 2004    |
| Brand loyalty                              | Florack et al., 2005       | Perceived persuasiveness of a communication or agreement |                         |
| Automatic v. considered product preference | Scarabis et al., 2006      | Persuasion of a communication piece                      | Lee and Aaker, 2004     |
| Post-purchase consumer satisfaction        | Aaker and Lee, 2001        |  |                         |

**Proposition 3: There are moderators of the relationship between regulatory fit and positive outcomes, where non-match rather than match situations are more favorable to marketers. When product category is used as a moderator, products with very low involvement, such as radical innovations, are expected to benefit from non-match situations.**

Feeling right from fit is not always the most favorable outcome for either marketers or consumers. Even though the literature predominantly deals with regulatory fit situations, recent work has begun to question the moments of non-fit. To give one example, Cesario et al. (2004) demonstrated that the regulatory fit of the message frame decreased the persuasiveness of the message if the message was intended for negative reactions. Another exception would be situations requiring high elaborateness. For example, Koenig et al. (2009) report that non-fit situations evoke a feeling-wrong state and thus motivate high elaboration processing. High elaboration is required for judging argument quality, and therefore messages differentiated by quality (not quantity) would require a non-fit situation to be more persuasive to arrive at favorable outcomes. Cesario et al. (2008) report more examples of non-fit favorability with a cautionary note that these situations do not necessarily generalize the value of fit in other domains or contexts.

In the case of new-to-the-world products, companies should spread information and messages rich in quality but not necessarily in quantity. Therefore, such situations and

marketing niche innovations may benefit from non-fit between the regulatory focus of the audience, the product category and the message framing.

**Proposition 4: The regulatory focus of the individual affects impulse buying differentially by interacting with the dominant regulatory focus associated with certain product / service categories.**

Unlike contemplative and rational buying assumptions, impulse buying represents sudden and immediate purchases stemming from a powerful and persistent urge to buy (Rook, 1987). In the literature, the hedonic aspects of impulse purchasing were highlighted by the authors (Rook, 1987; Asugman and Cote, 1993) and incorporated into the definition and operationalization of the concept. Similarly, Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) defined impulse buying as feeling without thinking. Impulse buying is conceptualized as a very emotion-intense type of shopping behavior and also carries a mood-enhancing function. In many impulse buying tendency scales, there were temporary joy-affect references such as the way of feeling at the moment (Rook and Fisher, 1995), enjoying spending (Puri, 1996) or fun in buying spontaneously (Weun et al., 1997).

Therefore, impulsive purchasing behavior is thought to have the function of providing joy of buying and thus stimulating a positive effect and mood uplift during the purchase. This euphoric moment then gives way to feelings of guilt or shame due to lack of deliberation. Thus, it is a temporary state. A more promising research question would be whether the regulatory focus of the person (promotion versus prevention) helped make the difference between two different types of impulsive purchase or the dual effect of impulsive purchase on hedonic joy. Namely, promotion focus was related to feelings of eagerness and enthusiasm thus was related to joy giving and positive-mood increasing consumption behavior. Whereas, prevention focus was related to vigilance and quiescence feelings that lead to mood-repairing consumption behavior that is like a tool for getting rid of negative feelings and mood. Likewise, the same method can be used to analyze hedonic consumption behavior and contribute to the buying as an 'experience' literature.

Impulsivity and its relationship to regulatory focus have been empirically analyzed to a limited degree. In a study about impulsive eaters and food choice, Sengupta and Zhou (2007) used impulsivity as an antecedent for choosing the hedonic intense food (cake over apple) only when it is moderated by the promotion focus. They proposed and showed that those who react impulsively associate hedonically appealing foods like chocolate strongly with a promotion focus. In addition, the authors found that inducing a prevention focus helps in the struggle with impulsivity and reduces the choice of hedonically appealing food. Even though this study used an impulsivity index customized for eating behavior, related studies using impulsive buying tendency will contribute to both impulsive buying and also regulatory focus literature.

## Conclusion

In this conceptual paper, we have discussed the regulatory focus theory critically under the categories of present considerations and propositions for future research. Rather than being a comprehensive review, confusions and under researched areas within the regulatory focus theory have been emphasized. The first conceptual consideration was a comparing and contrast exercise of regulatory focus with other mindsets. The theory of various domains of the self was by far the closest rival explanation and was also discussed by founders of the theory. We have called for further research to empirically document such differences. Second, we have delved into the almost synonymous use and thought of regulatory focus with regulatory fit. By theoretically presenting two more values as possible outcomes of various interactions of regulatory foci with other elements, we have called for future research on the other value domains. Lastly, by deriving exceptions to the regulatory fit, we focused on the concept of non-fit and called for future research analyzing situations where non-fit and wrong feeling prompts favorable outcomes.

Even though the concept is new and here the attempt is to cover as many works as possible, there are also some limitations in the current review such as unmentioned research. The regulatory fit has many unexplored areas that, if studied, will shed light on earlier works as well. First of all, the operationalization and measurement of the concept is not yet fully mature. Apart from the existing two scales, which are also shown to be conceptually measuring different constructs, there are not enough tools. In addition, it is argued that the promotion- or prevention-foci differ in terms of strength. So a “regulatory focus strength” concept is yet to be explored, defined and measured. This investigation would also contribute to the chronic versus situational discussion, with a stronger focus being more persistent in the individual and a weaker focus being more open to contextual changes.

With respect to the unmet full potential of the regulatory focus theory, various domains from leadership to organizational behavior may be of benefit to the extensive empirical findings. Apart from promotion- versus prevention-focus briefly reviewed in this paper, the concepts and theories are also expandable for various other regulatory foci, such as locomotion versus assessment mindsets.

From a cross cultural perspective also, the issue is significant and needs further investigation. Aaker and Lee (2006) slightly mentioned that people can be culturally inclined to have a promotion or prevention focus. Taken together with previously found cultural dimensions, the regulatory focus should also be analyzed in terms of whether or not it is a societal tendency.

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The headings should not be numbered or preceded by letters. Main headings should start flush at the left margin and be written in small letters with major words capitalized. Secondary headings should be indented and written in smaller letters with major words capitalized. Lower level leads should be in the form of paragraph headings with only the initial word capitalized followed by a period and then the text on the same line. Lower level headings should be underlined. Dividing manuscripts into more than three levels of subheadings should be avoided.

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Footnotes should not be used to cite references (see References below). Any notes to supplement discussion in the text should be placed at the bottom of the page and consecutively numbered throughout the text. Appendices, tables and figures should be numbered and placed at the end following “References.” The positioning of the tables and figures in the paper should be indicated in the text as follows.

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Reference to a publication should be made in the text by citing the name of the author(s) and the year of publication, observing the following convention:

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