

Research Project

Regulatorischer Fokus und Konsumverhalten

Third-party funded project

Project title Regulatorischer Fokus und Konsumverhalten

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Organisation / Research unit

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Department

Project Website http://www.werbepsychologie-online.de/html/snf_projekt.html

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The countless reasons people may have or name for doing the things they do can be sorted into two groups: To make something good happen, or to prevent something bad from happening. This is the basic notion of Regulatory Focus Theory and it is the most important dimension of our research. This distinction has far reaching consequences. For example, the joy that results from successfully achieving something we have long hoped for feels a lot different from the relief of successfully avoiding something we have been afraid of.

The same is true for us as consumers. We buy things out of some hope, but also out of fear or guilt. When you buy a health insurance, an alarm system, or vitamin pills, for example, it is to get rid of worries rather than to look forward on the great time you are going to have with it. This is also reflected in advertising. Advertising may promise you things like attractiveness and happiness, but it may just as well subtly threaten you and then offer you the product as a way around that threat. There are products for which advertising is almost only possible in a certain way. The ones mentioned above can hardly be advertised for by mere promises, since they are not bought out of some hope. On the other hand, a sports car, a fiction book, or a glass of mustard, for example, are not bought in order to get rid of some worries, but out of the expectation of something nice. This, therefore, is also the way they are going to be advertised.

In this project, we examine how exactly consumers are influenced by their ideas of how things should be and how they should not be. We look at what kind of outcomes, positive or negative, people are focusing on. We then study the consequences this has on emotions, memory, attention, attitudes and finally on behavior. The methods we employ are mainly those of contemporary social cognition research: The studies are strictly empirical and most often experimental. We use questionnaires, linguistic analysis and response time measures to assess attitudes and emotions our subjects experience during standardized procedures and situations. These situations are usually centered on some real or made-up product, advertising or company.

Our research is strongly focused on consumers and consumption behavior. Besides Regulatory Focus Theory, which is a central model for our research, our research often touches other topics of personality, development, cognition and affectivity. Our primary goal is to deepen the understanding of how consumers decide. We are doing basic research answering questions that are interesting for anyone involved with consumer behavior. Direct applications may be possible in marketing and advertising, in implementing public policies and identifying situations that may be prone to produce market failures. One of our central interests is how and when people use their intuition and when they do not, for example in deciding what they would like to eat. We found that focusing on possible undesired consequences

strongly discourages people from using this often powerful way of deciding, making them more susceptible to outside influences. One result of our work that is more directly useful for fellow researchers is the validation and enhancement of a questionnaire measure for chronic regulatory focus. While we do also publish our results in journals and on conferences dealing with marketing and consumer behavior, our research is psychological at core.

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