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How Advertising Claims Affect Brand Preferences and Category-Brand Associations:
The Role of Regulatory Fit

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Abstract

Two experiments examined whether self-regulatory goals addressed in advertising claims influence product preferences and category-brand associations. Experiment 1 provided evidence for the hypothesis that the fit between an advertising claim and consumers' regulatory focus has an impact on product preferences. Participants were more likely to prefer products presented in an advertisement with a claim compatible with the experimentally induced focus. Experiment 2 demonstrated that regulatory focus also has an impact on category-brand associations. Category-brand associations were stronger when the claim of a target brand was compatible with the regulatory focus at the time category-brand associations were measured.

How Advertising Claims Affect Brand Preferences and Category-Brand Associations: The Role of Regulatory Fit

Consumers make different decisions, depending on their specific wishes and needs. For one consumer, a product has to be very reliable, while for another consumer, it has to be well designed. Recent research has demonstrated that such decision criteria are affected by basic orientations and motivations related to hedonic goals of avoiding an undesired state and approaching a desired state. A very sophisticated framework for studying the impact of these basic motivations was provided by Higgins (1997). His regulatory focus theory posits two different self-regulatory strategies: the regulation of behavior according to ideals, hopes, and aspirations, termed promotion focus, and the regulation of behavior according to responsibilities, duties, and security, termed prevention focus. Promotion focus emphasizes the pursuit of positive outcomes; prevention focus is related to the avoidance of negative outcomes. A basic prediction of regulatory focus theory is that individuals are more concerned with information that is relevant for the activated regulatory focus and that they weigh attributes compatible with this focus more carefully (cf. Higgins, 2002).

Chernev (2004) examined the implications of this hypothesis for consumer choice. He assumed that people prefer products when the attributes of the products are superior on a dimension that is relevant to their regulatory focus. In three experiments, he found that prevention-focused participants gave more weight to utilitarian and reliability-related attributes, whereas promotion-focused participants were more likely to consider hedonic, performance-related, and attractive attributes. Also, participants chose options that were superior on the dimensions of higher relevance to their regulatory goals. Chernev argued that performance-related

attributes are more relevant for people in a promotion focus because these features can be seen as a means for reaching the regulatory goal of maximizing positive outcomes. Similarly, hedonic and attractive features are directly related to positive outcomes of a choice. Chernev applied a similar logic to the relationship between a prevention focus and reliability and utilitarian features, which serve the prevention goal of safety and security. The assumption that the compatibility of attributes to current regulatory goals has an impact on consumer behavior was also supported in a study by Paulssen and Bagozzi (2005). They found that self-regulatory goals determined which brands consumers considered as relevant choice options.

Other research has shown that the impact of regulatory focus is not limited to attributes of choice options, but is also effective in advertising campaigns (e.g., Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Evans & Petty, 2003; Florack, Scarabis, & Gosejohann, 2005; Pham & Avnet, 2004). Cesario et al. (2004) reported evidence that advertisements which stress means that are compatible with the regulatory focus of the recipients are more effective. In detail, they found that promotion-focused participants were more likely than prevention-focused participants to be persuaded by a message that stressed eager means to reach a goal. By contrast, a message that entailed the use of vigilant means was more effective when participants were in a prevention focus than when they were in a promotion focus. Since eager means are compatible with a promotion focus and vigilant means are compatible with a prevention focus, it seems reasonable that fit between the content of a message and the regulatory focus of recipients enhances the persuasive impact of a message. Furthermore, research by Evans and Petty (2003) has shown that people are more likely to elaborate message content that is compatible with the activated regulatory focus.

A key element of advertising is the claims used in print or TV ads. Even if advertising claims are irrelevant according to the regulatory focus, the content of advertising claims may be directly related to a promotion or prevention focus. Until now, studies that applied regulatory focus theory to advertising have been concerned with specific information about product attributes (e.g., Chernev, 2004) or with rather complex advertising messages that differed in regulatory focus (e.g., Evans & Petty, 2003; Lee & Aaker, 2004). The present studies examined the effects of the regulatory focus of advertising claims without presenting additional information about the products. It was assumed that the fit between consumers' regulatory focus and the focus that is addressed in advertising claims has an impact on product preferences and on the strength of the memory connection between the product category and the advertised brand.

These assumptions about the impact of regulatory fit on product preferences are in line with previous approaches (Cesario et al., 2004; Chernev, 2004; Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000) and should complement these studies. There is evidence that advertising appeals congruent with goals or self-concept are more effective than those that are incongruent (Bettman & Sujan, 1987; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Snyder & DeBono, 1985). Snyder and DeBono (1985, Study 3), for example, reported that participants were more likely to prefer a product when it possessed attributes that corresponded to the participants' level of self-monitoring. In a survey, they asked people which of two shampoos they would prefer. One product was described as better at how it made the hair look, and the other as better at cleaning the hair. In line with the assumption that image aspects are more relevant for high self-monitoring individuals, whereas product utility is more relevant for low self-monitoring individuals, participants high in self-monitoring preferred the product that was

described as better at how it made the hair look, whereas participants low in self-monitoring preferred the shampoo with the cleaning ability. Bettman and Sujan (1987) also showed such congruency effects by applying a priming procedure that is conceptually similar to the activation of a regulatory focus. They primed either a reliability orientation or a creativity orientation and asked participants to evaluate two products and to choose one. As expected, participants were more likely to prefer the product that was superior on the primed orientation.

However, brand preference is only one important component that has an impact on brand purchase. Especially in memory-based choice contexts, where brands are not displayed (e.g., in a pharmacy where you have to ask at the counter for a specific brand of sun lotion), it is important that consumers recall a brand from memory. Prior studies have shown considerable effects on choice from the alteration of memory structures and accessibility (Nedungadi, 1990). When product alternatives are present in the context of the consumer decision, the likelihood that a brand is present in the consideration set and eventually chosen depends on the association of the brand with the product category (Posavac, Sanbonmatsu, & Fazio, 1997; Posavac, Sanbonmatsu, Cronley, & Kardes, 2001). Posavac et al. (2001), for instance, demonstrated this effect of category-brand associations. They had participants rehearse certain category-brand associations to manipulate the strength of the link between a product category and a number of brands. They found that in a memory-based choice, brands were much more likely to be considered and chosen when the category-brand associations were strengthened.

It was assumed that the regulatory focus of consumers not only determines the relevance of specific product attributes, but also has an impact on the strength of brand-category associations in a specific context. It was proposed that consumers

are more likely to associate brands with a product category if the brand image is compatible with their regulatory focus. For example, for someone who would like to buy a sun lotion with the goal of avoiding a sunburn (prevention focus), sun lotion brands that are related to this focus should be associated more strongly with the category than sun lotion brands not related to this focus. However, it is important to note that it was also supposed that even if this influence is based on chronic differences between people, it should vary with the situation, as well. Thus, a person who has a prevention focus in one context might have a promotion focus in another context. For the sun lotion example, this means that the prevention focus of people in one context may change to a promotion focus in other contexts, and it can be assumed that the category-brand associations would also be altered: brands with a promotion-focused advertising strategy should now have an advantage.

Context of the Present Studies

Two experiments tested the assumptions about the impact of the regulatory focus of participants on brand choice and category-brand associations. Both experiments were concerned with products from the category of sun lotions. The goal of Experiment 1 was to show that the regulatory focus of consumers has an impact on preferences for products depending on the claims used for the product advertisements. Based on the above reasoning two hypotheses were tested:

H1: When comparing a sun lotion brand with a prevention-focused claim and one with a promotion-focused claim, consumers with a prevention focus will be more likely than those with a promotion focus to prefer the brand with the prevention-focused claim.

Since it was supposed that the main reason for buying a sun lotion has to do with the prevention of skin damage and is therefore related to a prevention focus, it

was further hypothesized that people in general will be more likely to prefer a sun lotion with a prevention claim over a sun lotion with a promotion claim.

H2: People will prefer a sun lotion with a prevention-focused claim to a sun lotion with a promotion-focused claim.

Experiment 2 was designed to examine the impact of the regulatory focus on category-brand associations. In this experiment, participants were exposed to an advertising claim that varied in regulatory content. Afterwards, a procedure was applied to manipulate the regulatory focus of participants. The following hypotheses were tested in this experiment:

H3: For promotion-focused people, the target brand will be associated more strongly with the product category when a promotion claim is used than when a prevention claim is used for the brand.

H4: For prevention-focused people, the target brand will be associated more strongly with the product category when a prevention claim is used than when a promotion claim is used for the brand.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants. Participants were recruited on the basis of an email list and, additionally, through posted announcements. To increase the motivation to participate, 4 x 20 Euro were raffled off (approximately 4 x US\$ 20) among all participants who completed the experiment. To start the experiment, participants had to visit a website that was also publicly available at <http://www.werbepsychologie-online.ch>. Of 422 participants who started the experiment after providing their demographic data, 415 participants (118 men; 296 women; one person did not

indicate sex) completed the experiment and were considered in the statistical analyses. They were between 17 and 77 years of age.

Design and Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (focus of participants: promotion focus vs. prevention focus) x 2 (focus of the claim: brand A promotion focus vs. brand B prevention focus; brand A prevention focus vs. brand B promotion focus) experimental design. Participants first received some general information about the topic (survey about holidays at the sea) and the duration of the experiment and filled out several questions about their demographic data. Subsequently they worked on a task with which the regulatory focus of participants was manipulated. In the promotion focus condition, participants were provided with a list of positive things that could happen during their holidays (e.g., meeting nice people, fun with sports) and they were asked to indicate which of these things they would actively pursue. In the prevention focus condition, participants were provided with a list of negative incidents that could happen during holidays and were asked to indicate those they would actively try to avoid (e.g., trouble with customs, risk of terrorist attacks). Next, participants read that two brands of sun lotion would be presented and that they should think about which of these two sun lotions they would buy for holidays at the sea. They also read that they would probably not know the brands but that they should imagine that they were in a shop where only these two brands were available. After that, pictures of two brands with a claim for each were presented. For one brand a claim with a promotion focus was used (“Give sunburn no chance. Brand X provides safe protection. Brand X – The double protection.”), whereas for the other a claim with a prevention focus was displayed (“Enjoy the warm rays of the sun. Brand X for healthy tan. Brand X – Enjoy the sun”). It was varied which brand used which claim. Then participants indicated on a 7 point scale (1 =

brand A; 7 = brand B) whether they would rather buy brand A or brand B, whether brand A or brand B fit their needs better, and whether they perceived brand A or brand B as of high quality. Taking the claim-brand combinations into account, the items were pooled and averaged so that high values indicate the preference for a brand with a promotion claim, while low values indicate the preference for a brand with a prevention claim (Cronbach alpha = .85). At the end of the experiment participants were thanked for their participation and asked whether they wished to take part in the lottery.

Results

To test the hypotheses, an ANOVA was computed with the focus priming (promotion focus vs. prevention focus) and the brand – claim combination (brand A promotion focus / brand B prevention focus vs. brand A prevention focus / brand B promotion focus) as independent variables and the preference for the brand with a promotion-focused or a prevention-focused claim as dependent measure. As expected, a main effect of the focus priming was obtained, $F(1, 411) = 5.53, p < .05$. Participants preferred a brand with a prevention-focused claim compared to a brand with a promotion-focused claim more when a prevention focus was induced ($M = 3.19, SD = 1.58$) than when a promotion focus was induced ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.78$). Furthermore, the mean values differed in both conditions significantly from the scale mean, indicating that prevention-focused participants, $t(194) = 7.18, p < .001$, and promotion-focused participants, $t(219) = 3.40, p < .01$, preferred the brand with the prevention-focused claim more than the brand with the promotion-focused claim. Thus, the results of the study support Hypotheses 1 and 2. However, there was also an unexpected result. The main effect of the priming manipulation was moderated by the type of brand that was used in combination with the promotion or prevention

claim, $F(1, 411) = 5.29, p < .05$. When brand A was combined with the promotion claim and brand B was combined with the prevention claim, an effect of the priming manipulation was obtained that was congruent with the main effect reported above, $t(214) = 3.41, p < .01$. Participants with a prevention focus ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.51$) were more likely than participants with a promotion focus ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.77$) to prefer the brand with the prevention-focused claim. When brand A was presented with the prevention-focused claim and brand B was presented with the promotion-focused claim, this effect was not significant, $t(197) < 1, ns$.

Discussion

The data of Experiment 1 supported the prediction that the effect of advertising claims on brand preference depends on the regulatory focus of the recipients. Participants who were previously asked to think about negative things they try to avoid during holidays showed a stronger preference for a brand with a prevention-focused claim compared to a brand with a promotion-focused claim than did participants who were asked to think about positive goals they try to pursue during holidays. This result is congruent with the findings by Chernev (2004) that regulatory goal orientations moderated the evaluation of product attributes that were related to regulatory focus. Extending the results of Chernev, Experiment 1 demonstrated that a variation of an advertising claim might also elicit such effects. Thus, the results show that individuals' regulatory focus, which drives behavior, may vary, depending on the context of a judgment, and may therefore have varying effects on product preferences. However, the results also suggest that the product category of sun lotions is strongly related to a prevention focus. Participants with a prevention focus as well as participants with a promotion focus were more likely to prefer the sun lotion

with the prevention-focused claim, even if this tendency was stronger for participants with an induced prevention focus.

It was not expected that the brand – claim combination would have an impact on the reported effects. However, some comments by participants pointed to a possible explanation. They mentioned that they perceived the package of brand B as being more in tune with the prevention-focused claim. It seems reasonable to assume that the product package provides consumers with important information when additional information is not available, and that the fit between the package and the product claim has to be taken into consideration. In Experiment 1 the two packages were very similar in shape and color, differing only in the logo, the font, and in a little flower that was depicted on the package of brand B, but not on the package of brand A. It is possible that the depicted flower led people to infer that this product is more health-related and, thus, has a better fit with the prevention claim.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, the question was tested whether a manipulation of consumers' regulatory focus also influences the association between a brand and a product category (hypotheses 3 and 4).

Method

Participants. Seventy-two female students of the University of Münster took part in the experiment for course credit. They were recruited for a marketing study. Because of computer errors the data of four participants was excluded from the statistical analyses.

Design and Procedure. On arrival, participants were seated in front of a computer screen and the experimenter told them that all instructions would be displayed on the screen and that they should use the mouse and the keyboard as

instructed. The experiment consisted of three main parts. In the first part, participants saw advertising claims for some distractor brands of different product categories (e.g., furniture, food, cosmetics) and for the target sun lotion. They saw three blocks of advertising claims, each claim for six seconds. After a block of three claims, they were provided with three brand names and asked to complete the claims. The target brand claim was presented in the second block. One condition used a promotion-focused claim ("Brand X: For an intensive tan.") for the target brand, the other condition used a prevention-focused claim ("Brand X: The best protection for your skin."). This procedure was applied to ensure that participants would elaborate on the target claim, while at the same time not focusing solely on sun lotions.

In the second part of the experiment, a procedure of Pham and Avnet (2004) was applied to induce either a promotion or a prevention focus. In the promotion focus condition, participants read that the researchers were interested in their hopes and goals and asked them to list at least two present and two past hopes and goals. In the prevention focus condition, participants read that the researchers were interested in their responsibilities and duties and asked them to list at least two of their present and two of their past responsibilities and duties.

In the third part of the experiment, the category-brand associations were measured with an adapted procedure from Fazio, Herr, and Powell (1992). Participants were instructed that they would see names of product categories and names of brands on a screen and that they should decide as fast as possible whether the presented brand belonged to the presented product category. Next, a total of 60 category-brand pairs were presented on the screen. The target brand was presented five times in the correct category-brand pair. All pairs were presented as follows: First, the name of a product category (e.g., electronics) was presented for 750 ms.

Then, the category label disappeared and the brand name was presented together with the signs “yes” and “no,” which required participants to respond by using a key on the keyboard, where the key “a” was labeled with a button indicating “no” and the key “l” was labeled with a button indicating “yes”. The response times were recorded. To prepare the data for analyses that require a normal distribution, the procedure recommended by Fazio (1990) was applied and all reaction times were log-transformed before averaging them. Since the use of penalty scores for error responses has been shown to improve the psychometric qualities of response time measures (e.g., Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003), response latencies were replaced for false responses with an individualized penalty score. The penalty score was computed by the response time plus two standard deviations from all trials in which the target brand was not presented. Low values indicate stronger category-brand associations.

Results and Discussion

To test the predictions, an ANOVA was computed with the focus priming and the focus of the claims as independent factors and the category-brand associations as dependent measure. This analysis yielded a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 64) = 6.47, p < .05$. The pattern of this interaction is depicted in Figure 1. In line with hypothesis H3, participants with a promotion focus showed stronger category-brand associations when they previously saw a promotion-focused claim for the target brand ($M = 7.14, SD = .46$) as compared to when they saw a prevention-focused claim ($M = 7.52, SD = .63$), $t(64) = 2.26, p < .05$. The reversed pattern was predicted for participants with a prevention focus (hypothesis H4). And in fact, participants with a prevention focus tended to show stronger category-brand associations when they previously saw a prevention-focused claim for the target brand ($M = 7.25, SD = .40$)

compared to when they saw a promotion-focused claim ($M = 7.51$, $SD = .48$). However, this effect was not significant, $t(64) = 1.39$, $p < .09$, one-tailed.

The results of Experiment 2 complement those of Experiment 1 in several respects. First, Experiment 2 demonstrated that the fit between a short claim and the consumers' momentary motivational orientation has an impact not only on choice tasks that are fulfilled directly after the presentation of an ad, but also on memory. This complementary finding is important, because traditional advertising normally works this way. The consumer "learns" something about a product or brand (e.g., to which product category a brand belongs) by being confronted with advertising claims in situations that are locally and temporary distant from the point of sale. In the moment of choice, strong associations in memory are activated and used for the decision process. Second, the measure used in Experiment 2 is a performance-based or "operative" (Bassili, 1996) one. People do not have to make hypothetical choices or try to imagine how they would behave in a buying situation. This type of measure does not require any self-insight, and it is also less obtrusive than usual self-report scales.

General Discussion

There is no doubt that advertisement claims are a key element in advertising. Brand associations and the recall of brand names are often closely related to the strength and uniqueness of claims. Therefore, claims have to be carefully developed and often accompany the brands' advertisements for years. In this paper, it is argued that is not only important for a claim to be clear, unique, and memorable, it must also speak to the consumers' motivation in the context of purchase. Indeed, the data provided support for this assumption. In Experiment 1, participants were more likely to prefer a sun lotion when the advertising claim used for the brand was compatible

with regulatory goals salient in the context of judgment. Furthermore, the results of Experiment 2 suggest that the view of a product category varies for consumers with different regulatory foci, and that the consumers associate a brand more strongly with a product category when the regulatory focus active in the context of judgment fits with the regulatory goals that are addressed in the advertising claim.

This research complements previous research on regulatory focus theory by showing that the fit between advertising messages and the regulatory focus of recipients has an impact on persuasion. For example, Cesario et al. (2004) found in four studies strong effects of regulatory fit on perceived persuasiveness of a message and on participants' attitudes towards the object of a message. However, these as well as other studies (e.g., Evans & Petty, 2003; Lee & Aaker, 2004) tested effects of messages that consisted of long texts and several sentences. The present studies showed that differences in short advertising claims related to regulatory goals lead to similar effects. This point is important, since the vast majority of advertisements rely on short and simple claims rather than on long messages or extended product descriptions. From a marketing perspective the findings are relevant since the claim, alongside visual elements, has a good chance of being recognized even by relatively low-involved customers (Kroeber-Riel & Esch, 2000).

Consumers often possess only limited information about product attributes, and even if they have this information, they are often unable to evaluate products properly. Therefore, an advertising claim may provide consumers with associations they can easily use for their purchase decisions. As in the present studies, claims may vary in the degree to which they are related to certain goals or means to reach these goals. Since people are more likely to take actions that are related to the realization of a salient goal, they may choose or prefer brands with claims that fit their

goal orientation. Moreover, even if all consumers are motivated to reach a pleasant outcome, they may differ in their strategy of how to pursue this goal. Applied to the example used in the studies, all consumers may be happy to get a nice, but healthy tan during summer holidays, and none would be pleased to get a sunburn. However, some consumers may apply means in order to approach the first goal, while others may be more likely to apply means in order to avoid the second. Thus, the choice of a brand can be seen as the choice of a means to regulate behavior according to a salient goal. A brand claim may provide consumers with information whether the advertised brand is an adequate means for reaching their regulatory goal. Indeed, there is some evidence that individuals derive additional utility from the degree to which the means to pursue a goal fit the regulatory focus of these individuals (Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003).

A lot of studies on regulatory focus theory also suggest that regulatory goals of individuals vary between different contexts (e.g., Higgins et al., 2003; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Pham & Avnet, 2004), and consequently the means that are perceived as adequate tools for reaching these goals differ, depending on the specific regulatory focus that is active in the context of judgment. Thus, if a brand is considered as a means to reach a regulatory goal, the association of the brand with a specific operation that is reflected in a product category should increase. Indeed, the results of Experiment 2 support this assumption. Stronger category-brand associations were found when the brand claim to which participants were exposed previously was compatible with the regulatory focus of participants at the time when the category-brand associations were measured. This finding is important, because it implies that advertising claims may not only have an immediate effect on the judgment at the time the ad is perceived, but may also affect judgments at the point

of purchase. Especially in memory-based choice contexts, where brands are not displayed, it is important that a brand is strongly associated with a product category. In these contexts, the category-brand association is related to the probability that a consumer recalls a brand from memory and, consequently, a brand with strong associations to the category is more likely to be added to the set of alternatives that are considered as possible options (Posavac et al., 2001).

In particular, two other processes are also likely to be important at the time brand claims are perceived. Evans and Petty (2003) demonstrated that people elaborate a message more when the message frame matches their regulatory focus. Indeed, it seems reasonable that people are motivated to spend more time processing information that is relevant for their regulatory goals. As regards the effects of claims, it may be possible that people study the ads and a product more carefully when the claim fits their regulatory focus. If people find out more about the product's advantages, this should lead to more positive attitudes. Beside this effect of increased motivation as a consequence of goal compatibility, it can also be assumed that, in case of regulatory fit, the processing of a claim results in positive feelings that will be transferred to the product attitude. Regulatory fit may cause positive affective responses because of two reasons. First, people may find it easier to process a claim that fits their focus (Lee & Aaker, 2004). Second, regulatory fit may lead to a feeling of 'rightness' (Cesario et al., 2004). Both of these regulatory fit effects were shown to be related to positive affective responses that can be perceived as one's gut reaction to an attitude object. Thus, resulting affective responses can be perceived as positive feelings about a product even if the source of these feelings is not the product itself, but the ease of message processing or the experience of feeling right, with the latter more closely related to the product than the former. Although we are not aware of

any studies relating processing ease or feeling-right effects to category-brand associations, these processes might also have an effect on typicality judgments and category-brand associations.

Since consumers' regulatory focus a) varies between different product categories, b) is linked to the context of purchase, and c) differs between specific segments of consumers, the results have important implications for marketing. It is obvious that some product categories may be more related to a promotion or prevention focus than others. Zhou and Pham (2004), for instance, found that certain investment products (e.g., retirement funds vs. speculative investments) can induce a specific regulatory orientation and may also affect risk behavior. To categorize products according to their promotion- or prevention-relatedness, practitioners could rely on product typologies like the "product color matrix" (PCM; e.g., Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997). This matrix categorizes products into quadrants on the basis of two dimensions: (1) risk of purchase (high vs. low); (2) the consumer's objective (functional tools vs. expressive toys). Probably, products categorized as "big toys" (expressive products with a high purchase risk, e.g., sports cars) are more promotion-connected, while "little tools" (functional products with a low risk, e.g., detergents and household cleaners) are more prevention-connected. In a similar way, other authors distinguish between informational or functional and transformational or symbolic purchase and usage motives (e.g., Ligas, 2000; Rossiter & Percy, 1997).

Furthermore, the context of purchase may influence the regulatory focus. For example, individuals will be more likely to be prevention focused when buying a sun lotion in a pharmacy compared to a shop where they also could buy fun equipment for their holidays. Also, the marketer may possess data about the profile of their

customers which may be related to regulatory focus. For instance, often marketers know that some groups of customers are more risk averse than others and are therefore more likely to be prevention focused. It is known, for example, that people in individualistic cultures (e.g., United States) are more promotion focused compared to people in collectivistic cultures (e.g., China). Aaker and Lee (2001) demonstrated the influence of cultural background and regulatory fit on memory and persuasion. This has clear implications for the question of advertising standardization in global marketing. The focus of ads has to be tailored to the cultural background of the customers.

In sum, the present experiments suggest that it is important to consider consumers' regulatory focus when developing an advertising claim. The experiments demonstrated that fit between advertising claims and consumers' regulatory focus may affect brand preferences and category-brand associations, both of which are important determinants of product choice. Knowledge about the product category, the context of purchase, and the characteristics of the customer may help marketers to formulate a claim that fits the specific regulatory focus at the time people perceive advertisements and the time they purchase the product.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1: Category-brand associations as a function of the induced regulatory focus of participants and the regulatory focus of the advertising claim for the target brand. Low values indicate high associative strength.

