The Role of Regulatory Focus and Fit in Attribute-Based Evaluation of Apparel Products

Jonghan Hyun, Kent State University, USA

Keywords: apparel product attribute, regulatory fit

Introduction. It is widely accepted in the field of clothing and textiles that each individual focuses on different apparel product attributes when determining the value of apparel products for purchase (between-consumer variance). However, a relatively under-researched area is the within-consumer variance. For example, no study has investigated why a single individual may focus on the color when purchasing one pair of jeans, and then focus on a different attribute when purchasing the next pair. We attempt to address this research gap via the use of Kano's theory and the concept of regulatory fit. Specifically, we propose that an individual's evaluation of apparel products bearing a certain attribute may be dependent upon the presence or absence of regulatory fit.

Theoretical Framework. The Kano's theory classifies product attributes into three main categories based on how the attribute influences customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Matzler and Hinterhuber, 1998). Must-be attributes (MA) are basic criteria of a product that customers take for granted. Thus, the presence of such attributes do not lead to satisfaction, however, the absence causes dissatisfaction. One-dimensional attributes (OA) have a proportional impact on customer satisfaction. That is, the presence of such attributes leads to satisfaction, and absence leads to dissatisfaction. Attractive attributes (AA) are surprise elements that exceed the customers' expectations. The presence of such attributes lead to customer satisfaction, however, the absence does not cause dissatisfaction.

The concept of regulatory fit proposes that individuals perceive goal objects as more valuable when the goal pursuit strategy is consistent with their regulatory focus (Higgins, 2000). Regulatory focus is an individual's motivational orientation adopted during goal pursuit: promotion-focused individuals tend to choose options that ensure successes and focus on the presence of positive outcomes; prevention-focused individuals tend to choose options that help avoid failures and focus on the absence of negative outcomes.

Given that satisfaction is a positive outcome, the concept of regulatory fit suggests that promotion-focused individuals will attach more value to their choice if the choice is made by focusing on the presence of satisfaction. Thus, it is predicted that promotion-focused individuals, compared to prevention-focused, will attach more value to apparel products bearing AA. If the choice only involves OA and MA, promotion-focused individuals will attach more value to apparel products bearing OA since the presence of MA does not involve satisfaction. Similarly, we assume prevention-focused individuals will attach more value to their choice if the choice is made by focusing on the absence of dissatisfaction. Thus, it is predicted that prevention-focused individuals, compared to promotion-focused, will attach more value to apparel products bearing MA. In addition, if the choice only involves AA and OA, prevention-focused individuals will attach more value to apparel products bearing OA since the absence of AA does not involve dissatisfaction. These predictions are tested in the following experiment.

© 2017, International Textile and Apparel Association, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Method. We utilized jeans as the context for testing the predictions. Procedure from Matzler and Hinterhuber (1998) was adopted to identify the MA (price is worth the quality), OA (makes you look good), and AA (suitable for many occasions) for jeans. For the survey, 592 online consumer panels were randomly primed into either promotion-focus or prevention-focus. Priming was done by combining two traditionally utilized procedures: listing hopes-aspirations or duties-obligations and completing a maze game. Next, participants were told to imagine that they've entered a store in which jeans are sold at $50 each, then were assigned to the conditions of a 3 (binary choice sets) X 2 (promotion vs. prevention) between subjects design. The three binary choice sets were: jeans bearing MA vs AA, MA vs. OA, and OA vs. AA. Each binary set was designed so that one option was superior on one attribute (e.g. the price is worth the quality, but doesn't make you look good) and another option was superior on a different attribute (e.g. makes you look good, but the price is not worth the quality). To measure the amount of value each participant is willing to attach to each jeans, participants were asked to state how much they would be willing to pay for each jeans had its price not been set already.

Result. Manipulation check results supported the appropriateness of the regulatory focus priming procedure. Specifically, promotion-primed individuals, compared to prevention-primed, assigned more weight to what they want to do, rather than what they ought to do ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = 4.44 (SD = 1.862), $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = 3.70 (SD = 1.829), $t(590) = 4.84$, $p < .01$). The ANOVA results were in line with the predictions. In the MA vs. AA choice situation, prevention-primed participants were willing to pay significantly more for jeans bearing MA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$34.76, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$41.28, $F(1, 191) = 8.66$, $p < .01$), and promotion-primed participants for jeans bearing AA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$34.00, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$29.52, $F(1, 191) = 4.03$, $p < .05$). In the MA vs. OA choice situation, prevention-primed participants were willing to pay significantly more for jeans bearing MA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$23.69, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$28.61, $F(1, 193) = 4.42$, $p < .05$), and promotion-primed participants for jeans bearing OA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$38.03, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$33.95, $F(1, 193) = 4.48$, $p < .05$). In the OA vs. AA choice situation, prevention-primed participants were willing to pay significantly more for jeans bearing OA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$35.49, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$41.61, $F(1, 202) = 6.46$, $p < .05$), and promotion-primed participants for jeans bearing AA ($M_{\text{promotion}}$ = \$27.35, $M_{\text{prevention}}$ = \$22.92, $F(1, 202) = 4.35$, $p < .05$).

Discussion. Our findings suggest that promotion-focused consumers attach more value to products bearing AA (and OA rather than MA) whereas prevention-focused consumers attach more value to product bearing MA (and OA rather than AA). This result has some obvious implications for retailers. For example, given that regulatory focus can be manipulated, retailers could potentially utilize various strategies (e.g., advertisement, sales conversation) to induce promotion-focus, thus making them attach more value to apparel products bearing AAs or OAs rather than MAs.

Reference

Higgins, E. T. (2000). Making a good decision: value from fit. American psychologist, 55(11), 1217-1230.

Matzler, K., & Hinterhuber, H. H. (1998). How to make product development projects more successful by integrating Kano's model of customer satisfaction into quality function deployment. Technovation, 18(1), 25-38.

© 2017, International Textile and Apparel Association, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
ITAA Proceedings, #74 – www.itaaonline.org