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## **Customization Mode, Decision Outcome, and Task Enjoyment: the Role of Regulatory Focus**

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This research investigates the interaction effects between customization mode and regulatory focus on consumers' decision outcome and task enjoyment in customization service. Concerned with decision outcome, we posit that in subtractive customization prevention-focused consumers retain more options in the final customized offering than promotion-focused consumers, whereas such an effect is reduced in additive customization. Concerned with task enjoyment, we propose that promotion-focused consumers more enjoy additive customization than prevention-focused consumers, whereas prevention-focused consumers more enjoy subtractive customization than promotion-focused consumers. The current research both contributes to multi-option screening literature and extends regulatory fit theory into a customization service context.

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## Customization Mode, Decision Outcome, and Task Enjoyment: The Role of Regulatory Focus

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Mass-customization successfully balances between personalized products demanded by consumers and cost-efficiency pursued by firms (Franke and Schreier 2008). In particular, two customization modes are available for marketers and identified by consumer researchers from a perspective of option screening strategy (Levin et al. 2002; Park, Jun, and Macinnis 2000). Additive customization is to present consumers with a basic product and then invite them to add options to the product, which reflects a screening-in strategy. On the contrary, subtractive customization is to present a fully-loaded product and then invite consumers to delete options from the product, which reflects a screening-out strategy. The purpose of the current research is to investigate how the interplay between customization mode and regulatory focus (Higgins 1997) impacts decision outcome and task enjoyment when consumers participate in customization service.

### Conceptual Framework

*Customization Decision Outcome.* This research examines how customization mode and regulatory focus interactively influence customization decision outcome by drawing on the accessibility-diagnostics model (Feldman and Lynch 1988), which implies persuasiveness of information is determined by both accessibility and diagnosticity, and accessibility is a precondition for diagnosticity to influence people (Zhao and Pechmann 2007).

Consumers in additive customization regard the basic product as a reference point and perceive the added options as gains in utility, whereas those in subtractive customization take the fully-loaded product as a reference point and perceive the deleted options as losses in utility (Park, Jun, and Macinnis 2000). The loss aversion principle (Tversky and Kahneman 1991) points that a loss is perceived as more intense than a gain of the same objective magnitude (Park, Jun, and Macinnis 2000). This suggests that in subtractive customization the losses of utility due to option deletion are accessible to consumers, whereas in additive customization the gains of utility due to option addition may be not so much accessible to consumers.

Regulatory focus theory distinguishes two motivational orientations during goal pursuit: a promotion focus is oriented at accomplishing aspiration, which makes people assign more value to gains and nongains; a prevention focus is oriented at fulfilling responsibility, which makes people assign more value to losses and nonlosses (Higgins 1997). This implies that potential gains are more diagnostic to consumers with a promotion focus than those with a prevention focus, whereas potential losses are more diagnostic to consumers with a prevention focus than those with a promotion focus.

In subtractive customization, the loss of utility is accessible to both consumers with a prevention focus and those with a promotion focus, but more diagnostic to prevention-focused consumers. In contrast, the gain of utility in additive customization is not so much accessible as the loss in subtractive customization. Consequently, in additive customization the minimal level of accessibility of potential gains inhibits diagnosticity from influencing consumers' choice although potential gains are more diagnostic to promotion-focused consumers. Therefore, we hypothesize that in subtractive customization a prevention focus should propel consumers to delete fewer options and as a result retain more options in the final customized offering than a promotion focus, whereas in additive customization the effect of regulatory focus should disappear.

*Customization Task Enjoyment.* Based on regulatory fit theory (Higgins 2000), this research also addresses consumers' task enjoyment, another important aspect of customization performance. Regulatory fit is a condition when the strategic means people use to pursue goals fit their regulatory focus (Higgins 2000). An approach strategy (approaching positive outcomes) sustains a promotion focus, whereas an avoidance strategy (avoiding negative outcomes) sustains a prevention focus. When the strategic means for goal pursuit fits one's regulatory focus, people just "feel right" and then unconsciously attribute their feeling to the stimulus they focus on, leading to an even more favorable evaluation (Avent and Higgins 2006).

From a perspective of option screening strategy (Levin et al. 2002), additive customization makes consumers naturally screen in options with desirable attributes, whereas subtractive customization makes consumers naturally screen out options with undesirable attributes. Therefore, additive customization is consistent with an approach strategy, whereas subtractive customization is similar to an avoidance strategy. In correspondence with regulatory fit theory, we hypothesize that promotion-focused consumers should more enjoy additive customization than prevention-focused consumers, whereas prevention-focused consumers should more enjoy subtractive customization than promotion-focused consumers.

### Study 1

A group of Chinese students participated in a 2 X 2 between-subject experiment with both regulatory focus and customization mode manipulated, generating 92 valid responses. Participants in the additive customization condition were told that they could add ingredients to a basic pizza, whereas those in the subtractive customization condition were told that they could delete ingredients from a fully-loaded pizza (Levin et al. 2002). The number of options retained in the final customized offering was calculated to measure customization decision outcome. Participants also completed a scale of customization task enjoyment (Park, Jun, and Macinnis 2000).

The interaction effect between regulatory focus and customization mode on decision outcome was found significant ( $F(1, 88)=4.86, p<0.05$ ) and mainly driven by the effect of regulatory focus in subtractive customization. Moreover, there was a marginally significant interaction effect between those two factors on task enjoyment ( $F(1, 88)=3.77, p=0.055$ ). Further simple contrasts were also consistent with our predictions (detailed statistics provided upon request).

### Study 2

The characteristics of options retained in the final customized offering might influence consumers' task enjoyment. Study 2 will control the quantity and price of options retained in the final product to exclude this possibility and further test the robustness of the findings

of Study 1 in another scenario. Besides, the boundary condition for the interaction effect on consumers' customization evaluation will be addressed.

### Discussion

Theoretically, this research finds that the effect of regulatory focus on the number of options retained in the final customized offering is contingent on customization mode, which adds knowledge to the multi-option screening literature. Another contribution of the current research is to extend regulatory fit theory into a customization service context. Managerially, this research answers how to match customization mode with regulatory focus in order to accomplish superior customer value in customization service.

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## Becoming a Responsible Consumer: Using Narratives to Study the Development Paths and Goals

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The concept of a new consumer type, an alternative consumer, appeared as far back as the 1970's so the phenomenon itself is not very new. Characteristics like ethicality, green, fair trade and the concern toward developing countries became to define this new consumer type (Gabriel & Lang, 1995). This paper explores how the responsibility is constructed as a part of a consumer's life.

The theory is drawn here not only through the attitudinal dimensions, but especially through the personality indicators and the influence of the overall social structure. As Degevos (2005) states, the importance of socio-cultural and socio-psychological determinants should not be underestimated in the consumer studies.

The responsibility can be seen as a consequence led by the particular personality variables and the specific events in the socio-cultural environment. These personality variables include such inner entities as values, motives, moral conceptions and subjective norms. Especially the existence of certain nature related values have been found to have an influence to the responsible consumption behavior (e.g., Grunert & Juhl, 1995). Also, the change in a value system (e.g. anthropocentric values ? ecocentric values) is assumed to precede the behavioral change (see Rokeach, 1973). Besides the normative nature of subjective norms, the social norms often advise consumers to behave in a certain way. It depends on the nature of cultural and political environment how the sustainable consumption is adopted in a certain country. Both the person's subjective development processes as well as the influences outside are here assumed to be the principal factors explaining the process of growing as a responsible consumer.

Qualitative research was conducted to study respondents' subjective experiences about responsible consumption. Written biographies were chosen as a narrative research method (see Riessman, 1993). The written biographies are found to be appropriate in the identity development studies (e.g., Hole, 2007). Therefore, in this study, I used written truth based stories for finding out how responsibility has become an integral part of respondent's self-identity. The study was based on a sample of Finnish and French consumers at the age range from 24 to 63, with a bias toward the lower ages. There were a total of seventeen informants; four males and fourteen females. Four of the informants were French including two of them living in an autonomic eco-village. The sample choice was a convenience sample followed a snow-ball sampling. It was considered as crucial that the sample members were responsible consumers. In order to assure this, the respondents needed to meet at least one of the following criterions: 1) *Buying fair trade and/or organic products regularly* 2) *Boycotting products found being unethical* 3) *Collective activity, as a membership in associations.*