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Apparel Product Attributes and Consumer Choice Decision: A Regulatory Focus Perspective

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Introduction. Owing to prior studies, it is now widely accepted in the field of clothing and textiles that preference towards different apparel product attributes vary by each individual consumer (between-consumer variance). Nonetheless, an area that remains under-researched is the within-consumer variance: no prior study investigated, for example, why a consumer may buy a trendy pair of jeans on one shopping trip and then buy a non-trendy one on another. This study attempts to address this research gap via the use of Kano's theory and regulatory focus theory. It is proposed that the consumers' regulatory focus can influence their preference towards different apparel product attributes as categorized by the Kano's theory.

Theoretical Framework. Recent study suggested that Kano's categorization of attributes can play an important role in consumer choice of apparel products (Jin and Bennur, 2015). Kano's theory classifies product attributes into three main categories: attractive attribute (AA) is neither demanded nor expected, thus fulfillment leads to satisfaction but non-fulfillment doesn't lead to dissatisfaction; performance attribute (PA) is demanded by consumers, thus fulfillment leads to satisfaction and non-fulfillment leads to dissatisfaction; must-be attribute (MA) is taken for granted, thus fulfillment doesn't lead to satisfaction but non-fulfillment leads to dissatisfaction. This study argues that Kano's categorization of attributes can be linked to the regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997). More specifically, it is proposed that because promotion-focused consumers tend to focus on achieving gains, they will also be more likely to seek satisfaction, thus more likely to focus on AA (if AA is absent, these consumers will be more likely to focus on PA rather than MA). Similarly, because prevention-focused consumers tend to focus on avoiding losses, they will also be more likely to avoid dissatisfaction, thus more likely to focus on MA (if MA is absent, these consumers will be more likely to focus on PA rather than AA).

Method. Prior to testing the influence of regulatory focus, a preliminary survey was conducted to identify the AAs, MAs, and PAs for jeans. Jean was selected as the context for this study because it was the product category used in a prior study that applied the Kano's theory to the field of clothing and textiles (Jin and Bennur, 2015). Following Jin and Bennur's procedure, this study identified two AAs, two PAs, and two MAs based on responses from 200 online consumer panels (see Table 1). For the main survey, 400 online consumer panels were randomly primed into either promotion or prevention state. Priming was done by combining two procedures that were verified in multiple prior studies: listing aspirations or obligations and completing a maze game. Upon completion of the priming tasks, participants were presented with a binary choice set involving two different attributes. These choice sets were developed so that one choice option is superior on one attribute and the other is superior on a different attribute. For example, in a choice set which involves AA and MA, the participant may be asked to choose between Jean A (retains color for several washes but doesn't fit comfortably around the waist) and Jean B (fits comfortably around the waist but cannot retain color for several washes). There

Table 1. Jean Choice by Regulatory Focus

Option superior on	pro	pre
Color retention (AA)	28%	12%
Fit around waist (MA)	72%	88%
Color retention (AA)	51%	41%
Reasonable price (MA)	49%	59%
Suitable for many occasions (AA)	24%	14%
Fit around waist (MA)	76%	86%
Suitable for many occasions (AA)	50%	38%
Reasonable price (MA)	50%	62%
Color retention (AA)	66%	57%
Reliable brand name (PA)	34%	43%
Color retention (AA)	25%	8%
Suitable for long-term use (PA)	75%	92%
Suitable for many occasions (AA)	78%	53%
Reliable brand name (PA)	22%	47%
Suitable for many occasions (AA)	63%	50%
Suitable for long-term use (PA)	37%	50%
Fit around waist (MA)	77%	88%
Reliable brand name (PA)	23%	12%
Fit around waist (MA)	69%	82%
Suitable for long-term use (PA)	31%	18%
Reasonable price (MA)	51%	62%
Reliable brand name (PA)	49%	38%
Reasonable price (MA)	37%	54%
Suitable for long-term use (PA)	63%	46%

Note. pro = promotion-focused, pre = prevention-focused

to investigate the within-consumer variance in consumer preference towards different apparel product attributes. Data showed that such variance can be caused by the consumers' regulatory focus. That is, when consumers are promotion-focused they are more likely to overweight AAs (and PAs in certain situations), and when prevention-focused, they are more likely to overweight MAs (and PAs in certain situations). This finding has some practical implications for fashion retailers. For instance, given that regulatory focus is a situationally induced state-of-mind, retailers could utilize various forms of communication (e.g., advertisement, sales conversation) to induce customers to focus on potential gains rather than losses, thus making them more likely to choose products that are superior on AAs rather than MAs.

References

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were three different choice sets: AA-MA, AA-PA, and MA-PA, and each choice set had four different variations.

Results. Results obtained from categorical analyses were consistent with the expectations of this study. For the AA-MA choice set, promotion-focused were more likely to choose the jean that was superior on AA compared to the prevention-focused ($\chi^2(1)=4.260, p=.042$). Similarly, for the AA-PA choice set, promotion-focused were more likely to choose the jean that was superior on AA compared to the prevention-focused ($\chi^2(1)=13.609, p<.001$). As for the MA-PA choice set, promotion-focused were more likely to choose the jean that was superior on PA compared to the prevention-focused ($\chi^2(1)=11.481, p=.001$). These results suggest that regulatory focus has a significant effect on consumer preference for AA, MA, and PA. Aside from the above, a follow-up analysis showed that the four choice set variations had a significant main effect as well. However, the interaction (choice set variation) x (regulatory focus) was not significant, thus implying that the effect of regulatory focus was not dependent upon the effect of the choice set variations.

Discussion. The purpose of this study was