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調節焦點對消費者從眾行為影響

The Effect of Regulatory Focus on Conformity Behavior

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摘 要

本研究主要在驗證調節焦點對消費者從眾行為之影響。實驗 1 研究影響當消費者處於預防焦點的情況下，將比處於促進焦點的情況下產生更明顯的從眾行為。進一步，實驗 2 發現調節焦點對消費者從眾行為之影響是由資訊及規範常模中介所造成的。最後，實驗 3 發現節焦點對消費者從眾行為之影響在高認知負載下將會消失。

【關鍵字】調節焦點、從眾行為、認知負載

Abstract

This article examines the influence of regulatory focus on conformity. Three experimental situations are developed to examine the effect. Experiment 1 reveals that regulatory focus influences conformity, with the effect being more obvious under a prevention-focused condition, in which people conform more strongly with others, than under a promotion-focused condition. In Experiment 2, the effect of regulatory focus on conformity is mediated by informational influences and normative influences. The results of Experiment 3 show that under a high cognitive load, the effect of regulatory focus on conformity disappears.

【Keywords】conformity, regulatory focus, cognitive load

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1. Introduction

In the past, consumer decision-making was understood chiefly through the lenses of information-processing theory and behavioral decision research. These two lenses aid the comprehension of the role of consumers' cognitive processes in decision-making. However, there are many types of consumer decision-making, and it is thus necessary to also understand the motivational dimension of consumer decision-making (Pham & Higgins, 2005). More recently, interest in consumer decision-making has shifted to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Higgins, Friedman, Robert, Lorraine, Ozlem, & Amy, 2001), which is a theory of motivation and self-regulation that is commonly used to explain various consumer decision-making situations (Pham & Avnet, 2004).

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) explains how people's motivation alters the way in which they attain positive goals and avoid negative outcomes. It proposes that individuals display one of two orientations toward goals. The first is a promotion focus, which is oriented toward attainment and aspiration and in which desired goals are framed as a set of gains or non-gains. The second is a prevention focus, which is oriented toward safety and responsibility and in which goals are framed as a set of losses and non-losses.

The features of a promotion focus and prevention focus are associated with another type of consumer decision-making: conformity. Consumers often conform with others because they want to attain a desired goal (e.g., buying the right product) and prevent the achievement of a non-desired goal (e.g., group identification). In other words, they conform because they require accuracy. However, people also conform with others to achieve a sense of belonging.

Pressure to conform with a group or other individuals has been widely discussed for many decades (Hung & Plott, 2001). Previous research has proposed several factors that influence conformity (Pool & Schwegler, 2007), such as public self-consciousness (Bearden & Rose, 1990). People with a high level of public self-consciousness tend to concentrate on the views of others and their responses to behavior. Lascu and Zinkhan (1999) also identified some external factors, such as task or situation characteristics and brand characteristics, that influence conformity. However, few studies consider individual motivation (Regulatory Focus) to be an important factor influencing conformity

This study thus attempts to determine whether regulatory focus and conformity are closely related. It is proposed that a prevention focus has a strong influence on conformity, because prevention-focused people concerned about losses and nonlosses and the avoidance

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of negative outcomes are more likely to conform than people who are promotion focused. The results of this study should provide a new perspective on consumer decision-making. In addition, tracing the relationship between consumer approaches and avoidance motivation, or regulatory focus and conformity, will also help to identify the motivations (e.g., nourishment, growth, development, shelter, and safety) behind conformity (Molden, Lee, & Higgins, 2008).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Regulatory Focus

Regulatory focus is driven by motivations that center on approach and avoidance (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009). This distinctive principle of motivation helps people to consider the implications of their decisions (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) identifies two motivational systems: a promotion focus and a prevention focus. The promotion focus is concerned with gaining positive outcomes and accomplishing goals, and leads people to adopt strategies to pursue these objectives (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). In contrast, the prevention focus is concerned with avoiding losses and preventing negative outcomes, and leads people to use strategies to pursue goals related to duty and security.

For instance, a promotion-focused employee may consider a high level of work efficiency as an accomplishment, and will pursue this desired end-state by making plans and working efficiently. Conversely, a prevention-focused employee may consider a high level of work efficiency to be a duty, and will seek to avoid missing the desired end-state by avoiding making mistakes (Higgins et al., 2001).

A critical assumption of regulatory focus theory is that people simultaneously possess both systems of self-regulation (promotion focus and prevention focus), and can activate each separately depending on their need in a given situation (Higgins, 1997).

Due to the heightened importance of goals and motives in recent consumer research (Ratneshwar & Mick, 2003), regulatory focus has increasingly been an object of study, and a considerable amount of empirical evidence has been generated in support of the theory (Pham & Higgins, 2005). For example, Pham and Higgins (2005) highlighted that regulatory focus theory can be used in consumer research to analyze consumer decision making and to develop theories on the influences of regulatory focus in this domain. In consumer behavior theory, these influences are categorized into problem recognition, information search, and consideration set formation.

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Regulatory focus theory is not only applicable to consumer research, but also finds extensive application in research on cognition, emotion, and persuasion (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins, 1997).

2.2 Conformity Behavior

The theory of conformity has its roots in the field of social psychology. Jenness (1932) was the first psychologist to study conformity. In an experiment, he gave a jar of beans to participants and asked them to estimate the number of beans inside. He then asked the participants to discuss their estimates with the group, and recorded the estimated numbers to determine whether the participants were influenced by the group to change their estimates (Jenness, 1932).

The most representative study of conformity was that of Asch (1951), who found that an individual within a group displays conformity behavior even when the opinions of the group members are actually incorrect. Since Asch's research, many studies have investigated conformity. In the field of social psychology, researchers have found that conformity is a strong social influence, and that people are frequently influenced by other people in a group (Allen, 1967). In the marketing field, Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975) pointed out that a group's opinions become an established norm with which individual members comply. Hence, people take the product evaluation of others as a basis for determining a product's value (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Lascu and Zinkhan (1999) defined conformity as consumers taking others' product choices as reference and conforming with a group's directions to gain group acceptance (Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999).

According to social psychology studies, there are many factors that influence conformity (Baron, Vandello, & Brunsman, 1996), including group cohesiveness (Back, 1951), group size (Asch, 1956; Wilder, 1977), unanimity (Asch, 1956; Wilder, 1977), ethnicity (Malof & Lott, 1962), fear (Darley, 1966), status in the group (Berkowitz & Macaulay, 1961), judgment difficulty (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), and task importance (Baron et al., 1996). Bond and Smith (1996) identified other important factors to be type of group pressure (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), gender (Becker, 1986), anonymity of responses (Abrams, Wetherell, Hogg, & Turner, 1990), and relationship between an individual and the majority (Allen, 1967).

The causes of conformity can be divided into two categories: informational influences and normative influences (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Informational influences occur when people accept information obtained from others as reality and use it to determine a product's

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quality. Normative influences occur when an individual conforms to the expectations of another to gain identification and a sense of belonging.

The aforementioned research has identified that conformity occurs for many reasons. However, this study focuses exclusively on the relationship between informational influences and normative influences, which are positioned as mediator variables, and conformity.

2.3 Regulatory Focus and Conformity

Building on the concepts of goal orientation and consumer preference for the status quo, which hold that people will change their choice according to their proximity to the status quo, it is proposed that promotion-focused and prevention-focused consumers will make different choices and adopt different strategies (Chernev, 2004). It is further suggested that, according to regulatory focus theory, people with a promotion focus who are concerned with achievement and pleasure will choose an aggressive means to pursue their goals, as their main consideration is gain and non-gain. In contrast, consumers with a prevention focus who are concerned with duties and responsibilities will choose a more cautious means to attain their goals, as they care most about loss and non-loss (Higgins et al., 2001). Previous conformity experiments indicate that people will conform with others under normative and informational influences because they either fear losing a sense of belonging or the right information (Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006).

It is thus proposed that people will conform more in a prevention-focused situation than in a promotion-focused situation. Because prevention-focused people are more cautious than promotion-focused people in terms of their risk preference, in situations of uncertainty or incomplete information they will listen to others' opinions to obtain the desired outcome and prevent undesired outcomes, and will conform with others to avoid losing a sense of belonging or making an incorrect decision.

Although it is possible that promotion-focused consumers will also pursue the gain of belongingness, many studies have demonstrated, in support of Kahneman and Tversky (1979) Prospect Theory, that the influence of loss is much larger than that of gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kermer, Driver-Linn, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2006). In other words, the impact of losing belongingness is stronger among prevention-focused people than the impact of gaining belongingness is among promotion-focused people. It is thus reasonable to propose that people will conform more in a prevention-focused situation than in a promotion-focused situation.

This discussion leads to the following hypotheses.

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H1: Conformity will be stronger in a prevention-focused situation than in a promotion-focused situation.

H2: The effect of regulatory focus on conformity is mediated by informational influences.

H3: The effect of regulatory focus on conformity is mediated by normative influences.

3. Experiment 1

Experiment 1 involved an orange juice choice study. The aim was to identify the effect of regulatory focus on conformity, and to identify whether conformity behavior is more prevalent in a prevention-focused situation then in a promotion-focused situation (H1).

A pretest was run with three types of orange juice. One juice was then selected as the target item according to the pretest scores for use in the full experiment to ascertain whether the participants would select the target juice in accordance with the opinion of others.

3.1 Pretest

First, five brands of orange juice were randomly selected and 35 participants were asked to compare their taste but were not told the brand of the juices. The opinions of the participants were analyzed. Many stated that the juices tasted too sour or contained too many artificial ingredients, which would influence their choice.

Second, one type of orange juice was selected from the five for use in the experiment. Two cups of juice were prepared for the pretest. The first cup of juice was mixed with water in a ratio of 1:4 and the second cup was pure orange juice. Twenty participants tasted the two cups of juice and rated them on a seven-point scale (1 = “not at all delicious” and 7 = “very delicious”). After the pretest experiment, the average scores for each cup of orange juice were calculated. The first cup scored a mean of 3.35, the second a mean of 4.05, and the second juice was delicious than the first juice ($t = 3.11$, $p < 0.01$). However, to better test the conformity effect, the second popular juice was not chosen as the target item for the main experiment. It was inferred that if the participants chose the second popular juice it would not be possible to confirm the reason for their choice; that is, whether they really liked the product or because they had listened to others’ views. Hence, the second cup of juice was chosen as the target item.

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3.2 Main Experiment

3.2.1 Participants and Design

Fifty-one participants joined the experiment. The average age of the participants was 28 years, and 43% were men. Twenty-six were undergraduate students and 25 graduate students. Almost all of the participants joined the experiment in exchange for course credits. They were randomly assigned to a group with confederates or another with no confederates. The confederates were tasked with influencing the participants in the experimental process.

3.2.2 Situation Design

A new orange juice arrival survey was designed. The participants were asked to imagine themselves as salespeople tasked with choosing a juice that matched consumer tastes. This design was used because if the participants were not asked to choose the juice for others, then they would simply choose the juice that they liked best, whereas in choosing for other it was assumed that the participants would consult others to select the correct product.

3.2.3 Procedure

Experiment 1 consisted of two parts: a new orange juice arrival survey and a Regulatory Focus Questionnaire.

As mentioned previously, the participants were divided into two groups: a confederate group and a non-confederate group. A similar overall experimental procedure was used for the two groups, but there was some difference in the details.

The experimental procedure for the confederate group was as follows. Two graduate students, one man and one woman, acted as confederates. The two confederates conducted the experiment with one participant at a time. First, a room was selected as the laboratory. The two confederates waited for the participant at the door, and entered the laboratory with the participant. Before the experiment, the experimenter explained that the purpose of the experiment was to conduct a new orange juice arrival survey, and asked the participant and confederates to imagine themselves to be salespeople who would evaluate the two cups of juice based on consumer tastes and choose a suitable one to launch on the market. They were then asked to taste the juice. It was expected that the participants would compare the taste of each cup with the confederates (Raghunathan & Irwin, 2001). They had to drink the two cups in a set sequence: first the juice mixed with water in a ratio of 1:4 and then the second was the pure juice. After tasting, they were asked to rate each cup on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “not at all suitable” and 7 = “very suitable”), write it down on the form, and then select the most suitable. The experimenter then stated that they must select the juice that would best fit the tastes of the public, and asked them to taste the juices again but to vocalize

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their choice after taking a sip. The confederates and participants tasted the two cups of juice in the same sequence. After taking a sip from each cup, one confederate expressed their judgment of the juice (e.g., "the taste is too sour, consumers may not like this one"), and the other confederate agreed with the opinion (e.g., "Yes! I think so too, it's too sour"). If the participant did not agree, then they would stick to their original view. However, it was expected that the participants would be affected by this verbal persuasion.

After tasting all of the juices, the experimenter asked the confederates to formally state their choice, and they both selected the second one as instructed. The experimenter then asked for the participant's choice. Finally, they were asked to give a score for each cup and to write it down on the form (1 = "not at all suitable" and 7 = "very suitable"), and then to select the most suitable.

In the second part of the experiment, the participants were asked to complete the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire developed by Harlow, Friedman, and Higgins (1997). The scale contains 11 items – six promotion scale items and five prevention scale items – rated on a five-point Likert scale. The Promotion subscale measures individuals' subjective experiences of promotion success with items such as "Do you often do well at different things that you try?" and "When it comes to achieving things that are important to me, I find that I don't perform as well as I ideally would like to do." The Prevention subscale measures individuals' subjective experiences of prevention success with items such as "How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?" and " Growing up, did you ever act in ways that your parents thought were objectionable?" Higher scores on either the Promotion or Prevention subscale reflect the respondent's experience of promotion or prevention success in goal attainment, respectively.

After completing the questionnaire, the confederates left with the participant and waited for the next participant.

The experimental procedure for the non-confederate group was similar to that of the confederate group. A room was arranged before the experiment and the experimental materials set out. However, the experiment was conducted with three participants at a time. When the participants entered the laboratory, the experimenter first briefly introduced the purpose of the experiment, and then asked them to judge the two cups of juice in sequence. Finally, they were asked to give a the score for each cup and to write it down on the form (1 = "not at all suitable" and 7 = "very suitable"), and to select the most suitable. In the second part, the participants completed the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire.

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3.3 Results

The data from the two confederates was omitted from the analysis, leaving data from 51 participants. The Regulatory Focus Questionnaires were analyzed first according to the scoring instructions developed by Harlow et al. (1997). Items 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, and 11 were Promotion scale items, and items 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 were Prevention scale items. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.726. The average scores for the promotion subscale and the prevention subscale were then compared for each participant. If the former were higher than the latter, then the participant was deemed to be promotion focused, and if former were lower than the latter, then the participant was deemed to be prevention focused. The percentage conformity (a participant selecting the second cup of orange juice, or target item) in each group was then calculated, and the results are given in Table 1. The overall model with a 2 (promotion focus or prevention)×2 (confederate group or non-confederate group) design was significant (χ^2 (1, N = 51) = 3.834, $p < 0.05$). This demonstrates that regulatory focus (whether promotion focused or prevention focused) has an influence on conformity. To determine which focus type (promotion or prevention) influenced conformity the most, the relationship between the two was compared. In the prevention-focused condition, conformity increased from 26.09% in the non-confederate group to 76.92% in the confederate group (ΔP = 50.83%), whereas in the promotion focus, the conformity increased from 28.57% in the non-confederate group to only 62.5% in the confederate group (ΔP = 33.93%). The total difference between the promotion-focused and prevention-focused conditions was 16.9%, and the results indicate that within the confederate group, a prevention focus induced greater conformity. Clearly, the effect of a prevention focus on conformity is stronger than the effect of a promotion focus. Overall, the results support H1 that regulatory focus affects conformity, and that the conformity effect is greater in a prevention-focused situation.

Table 1 The Perceptage of Conformity on Experiment 1

	Promotion Focus	Prevention Focus
Confederate Group	62.50%	76.92%
Non-confederate Group	28.57%	26.09%

3.4 Discussion

The results of Experiment 1 show that regulatory focus is linked with conformity, and influences conformity behavior. Further, the prevention focus was found to have a greater influence on conformity when the participants were influenced by the confederates. This is

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because they sought to prevent the loss of a sense of belonging or avoid making the wrong decision, and thus chose the same orange juice as the two confederates. These results confirms the proposal of regulatory focus theory that prevention-focused people are concerned with normative and information accuracy and about the loss and non-loss of a decision outcome, and will thus use a cautious approach to attain goals (Higgins, 1997, 1998; Higgins et al., 2001).

To summarize, the results of Experiment 1 support the hypothesis that the conformity effect is a function of regulatory focus, and that prevention-focused consumers show stronger conformity than promotion-focused consumers. However, although the results of Experiment 1 were as predicted, it suffers from a limitation not considered in past studies. In previous research and Experiment 1, the measure of regulatory focus was treated as a dispositional variable (Higgins & Spiegel, 2004), and it is thus unknown what effect regulatory focus would have on conformity behavior if the manipulation of a regulatory scale were used instead of measurement.

4. Experiment 2

Experiment 2 had three purposes. The first was to demonstrate that informational influences (H2) and normative influences (H3) play the role of mediator variables in the effect of regulatory focus on conformity. The second was to improve the generalizability of the results by testing the predictions using an experience context. The third was to consider the role of regulatory focus as a dispositional variable by operationalizing it through manipulation. Experiment 2 thus involved the manipulation of regulatory focus rather than the measurement of regulatory focus to replicate the results of Experiment 1.

4.1 Participants and Design

Eighty undergraduate students (23 men and 57 women) participated in the experiment in exchange for course credits. They were randomly assigned to groups in a 2 (promotion focus or prevention focus)×2 (confederate group or non-confederate group) design. The participants were blinded to the condition that they were in. In the confederate group condition, two confederates (a man and a woman) and one participant underwent the experiment at a time. In the non-confederate group, the experiment was conducted with five to six participants at a time.

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4.2 Experiment Situation Design

The experiment involved a clothing choice situation that was modified from the regulatory focus manipulation of Freitas and Higgins (2002). In each group, the participants were asked to imagine that they were a sales executive and to list three sales strategies and then select the correct item to sell. The detailed experimental situation for each group is given presently.

Three items of clothing of the same type were used as the materials in the experiment. The same type of clothing was used because participants might otherwise select according to their personal preference for size, quality, and color. The first item of clothing was set as the target item, and if a participant selected it due to the influence of the two confederates, then this was deemed to be an instance of conformity.

4.3 Procedure

Experiment 2 consisted of four parts: regulatory focus manipulation, manipulation check, clothing choice, and completing a susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale.

The process for the confederate groups was as follows. Before the experiment, the two confederates waited for the participant and they all entered the laboratory together. The experimenter explained the purpose of the experiment and gave the participants and confederates a form that detailed the experimental situation. In the promotion group, the regulatory focus manipulation was “Try to imagine you are a sales executive. Think how you could improve your sales and increase customer purchase intention when selling products. List three strategies that you would employ, and fill in the blanks.” In the prevention group, the manipulation was “Try to imagine that you are a sales executive. Think how you could prevent customers from complaining and adversely influencing your sales results when you sell products. Please list three strategies that you would employ, and fill in the blanks.” In both cases, the experimenter asked the group members (one participant and two confederates) to write down three strategies to manipulate them into a promotion-focused or prevention-focused situation.

Upon completing the task, the utility of the manipulation procedures was checked by asking the participants to answer two questions: “To what extent did you focus on avoiding negative outcomes in developing your marketing strategies?” and “To what extent did you focus on achieving a positive outcome in developing your marketing strategies?” Both questions were measured on a nine-point scale, and reflected a prevention focus and a promotion focus, respectively (Wan, Hong, & Sternthal, 2008).

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Next, the participants were asked to compare the quality of the three items of clothing, choose one to sell. When comparing the clothing, the two confederates expressed that they preferred the first item to try to influence the choice of the participant. The experimenter asked the group members to vocalize their choice after comparing the three items. It was assumed that if a participant was influenced by the confederates, then he or she would choose the first item of clothing.

In the final step, the participants were requested to complete the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale developed by Bearden, Richard, and Jesse (1989) to test the reasons (informational influences or normative influences) for their conformity. The scale contains four items on informational influences (items 1, 4, 7, and 10), including "I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class," and eight items on normative influences (items 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 12), including "I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others" (Bearden et al., 1989).

The procedure for the non-confederate group involved the same steps as that for the confederate group: regulatory focus manipulation, manipulation check, clothing choice, and completing the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale. However, it involved five to six participants at a time, and in the clothing choice step the experimenter did not ask the participants to discuss the quality of clothing: they were simply asked to select an item based on their own judgment.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Manipulation Check

A one-way ANOVA indicated that the prevention-focused participants were more concerned with avoiding negative outcomes (*Mean* = 6.92, *SD* = 1.47435) than attaining positive outcomes (*Mean* = 2.87, *SD* = 1.3; $F = 169.28$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the promotion-focused participants were more concerned with achieving positive outcomes (*Mean* = 7.27, *SD* = 0.98) than avoiding negative outcomes (*Mean* = 3.82, *SD* = 1.90663; F = 103.29, $p < 0.001$). These results demonstrate that the manipulation of regulatory focus was successful.

4.4.2 Evaluation

First, the 2 (promotion focus or prevention)×2 (confederate group or non-confederate group) model was examined to confirm whether the groups were influenced to conform. The results (χ^2 (1) = 3.86; $p < 0.05$) confirm the model. In the prevention-focused condition, conformity increased from 20% in the non-confederate group to 50% in the confederate

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group (ΔP = 30%), whereas in the promotion-focused condition conformity increased from 15% in the non-confederate group to just 25% in the confederate group (ΔP = 10%). The total difference between the promotion-focused and prevention-focused groups was 20%. Hence, for the two confederate groups, the prevention-focused group displayed more conformity, which is consistent with the results of Experiment 1.

To analyze whether informational influences and normative influences mediate the effect of regulatory focus on conformity, the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale was used. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.818. The average scores for informational influences and normative influences were calculated, and a mediator variable analysis was conducted according to the procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986). The confederate group data was adopted for the analysis.

The results of the analysis of informational influences showed the independent variable (regulatory focus) to have a significant impact on conformity (β = 0.151, p = 0.05). Regression analysis showed that regulatory focus had a significant effect on informational influences (β = 0.198, $p < 0.05$). When conformity was regressed on regulatory focus and informational influences, the regression coefficient of the independent variable (regulatory focus) decreased from 0.151 (p = 0.05) to 0.131 (p = 0.05), and the correlation between informational influences and conformity was $\beta = 0.098$ ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that informational influences partial mediate the relationship between regulatory focus and conformity, which provides support for H2.

The results of the analysis of normative influences showed that the independent variable (regulatory focus) had a significant impact on conformity (β = 0.404, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis further showed that regulatory focus had a significant effect on normative influences (β = 0.331, $p < 0.01$). When conformity was regressed on regulatory focus and normative influences, the regression coefficient of the independent variable decreased from 0.404 ($p <$ 0.001) to 0.391 ($p < 0.001$), and the correlation between normative influences and conformity was β = 0.040 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that normative influences also partially mediate the relationship between regulatory focus and conformity, thus providing support for H3.

4.5 Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 indicate that the manipulation of regulatory focus influences conformity behavior. Unlike in Experiment 1, in this experiment the participants were induced to adopt a different regulatory focus. Those in the prevention-focused

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condition were more likely to conform than those in the promotion-focused condition. The effect of regulatory focus on conformity was mediated by both informational influences and normative influences. After the participants had been manipulated into the promotion-focused or prevention focused condition, they heard the opinions of others. Those looking to gain positive outcomes or avoid making the wrong decision were subject to informational influences. However, they were likely to have been subject to normative influences also, because when many people choose the same target item, the unanimous majority effect occurs (Asch, 1956). People do not like to be criticized or rejected by others, and so conform with others' opinions to avoid negative outcomes and to achieve a sense of belonging. These results support H2 and H3.

5. Experiment 3

5.1 Cognitive Load

Cognitive load is a multidimensional concept that comprises mental load and mental effort. When the content of individual learning is more difficult or an individual needs to use more mental effort, then the cognitive load increases (van Merriënboer, Schuurman, de Croock, & Paas, 2002) . Although prior research has not identified the moderating effects of cognitive loads resource on the influence of regulatory focus for the conformity behavior, the basic idea of the availability of cognitive loads has been examined under other contexts (Pelham, Sumarta, & Myaskovsky, 1994; Roehm & Sternthal, 2001). Several prior studies focuses on how consumers deal with information on products in terms of cognitive load and have found high levels of cognitive loads force people to rely on intuitive rather than analytical information processing (Pelham et al., 1994; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). For example, Pelham et al. (1994) found when people's cognitive demands are high (by giving participants difficult tasks), they are unable to make use of higher-order inferential rules and rely disproportionately on heuristics to make judgments. Specifically, they found that cognitively loaded participants are especially likely to engage in heuristic processing (Biswas & Grau, 2008).

It can thus be inferred that under a high cognitive load, regulatory focus would not exert an effect on conformity. This is because when people have to make an effort to employ complex cognition, they will not adopt strategies to achieve their desired goal, and thus the conformity effect disappears. Conversely, under a low cognitive load, people make less effort in the cognitive process to select a product, and thus adopt strategies to achieve their desired goal, one of which may be to rely on others' opinions to make choices. In this case,

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regulatory focus affects conformity.

This discussion leads to the following hypothesis.

H4: Under a low cognitive load (but not a high cognitive load), conformity will be stronger in a prevention-focused situation than in a promotion-focused situation.

5.2 Main Experiment

Conformity is strongly related to decision making. People often take others' opinions as reference to acquire accuracy or a sense of belonging. Although past research has not identified cognitive load as a mechanism that affects the influence of regulatory focus, some studies have found that dual processing or complex tasks sometimes force people to rely on intuition (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). It is thus posited that in a situation involving a complex or dual task, people will rely on intuition rather than the opinion of others.

To test this inference, Experiment 3 aimed to determine whether cognitive load would weaken the effect of regulatory focus on conformity (H4).

5.2.1 Participants and Design

One hundred and sixty students (58 men and 102 women), a mixture of graduate and undergraduate students, participated in the experiment in exchange for course credits. The experimental procedures were similar to those in Experiment 2, except that participants were randomly assigned to groups in a 2 (confederate group, non-confederate group)×2 (promotion focus or prevention focus)×2 (low cognitive load or high cognitive load) design. As in Experiment 2, the confederate groups comprised one participant and two confederates at a time, whereas the non-confederate groups comprised five to six participants.

5.2.2 Procedure

Experiment 3 consisted of five parts: availability of cognitive load manipulation, regulatory focus manipulation, manipulation check, clothing choice, and filling in the memorized numbers.

At the beginning of the experiment, the participants were asked to memorize a two-digit (low cognitive load) or a six-digit (high cognitive load) number to manipulate the availability of cognitive load. They were told that they would have to recall the number at the end of the experiment. The participants were also told not to write the number down anywhere (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999).

The participants were then required to complete the modified regulatory focus manipulation based on that of Freitas and Higgins (2002), as in Experiment 2. They then answered two questions: "To what extent did you focus on avoiding a negative outcome

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when developing your marketing strategies?" and "To what extent did you focus on achieving a positive outcome when developing your marketing strategies?" to check the efficacy of the manipulation of regulatory focus (Wan et al., 2008). Both questions were measured on a nine-point scale.

As in Experiment 2, the participants were then required to compare the quality of the three items of clothing of the same type and to select one. In the confederate groups, the two confederates expressed the verbal cue that they preferred the first clothing to influence the participant. After comparing the clothing, the experimenter asked the two confederates to vocalize their choice and then asked for the participant's choice, and then asked everyone to write down their choice on the form provided. In the non-confederate groups, in contrast, the participants simply compared the quality of the clothing items and wrote down their choice.

In the last step of the experiment, the participants were asked to recall the number memorized at the beginning of experiment, and to write it down on the form.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Manipulation Check of Regulatory Focus

A one-way ANOVA was used to examine the regulatory focus manipulation. The result indicates that participants with a prevention focus were more concerned about avoiding negative outcomes (*Mean* = 7.1625, *SD* = 1.43592) than attaining positive outcomes (Mean = 3.3875, *SD* = 1.61867; $F = 243.498$, $p < 0.001$), and that participants with a promotion focus were more concerned with achieving positive outcomes (*Mean* = 7.325, *SD* = 1.0765) than avoiding negative outcomes (*Mean* = 4.65, *SD* = 2.02578; $F = 108.776$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipulation of regulatory focus was successful.

5.3.2 Evaluation

To determine whether an increased cognitive load would weaken the effect of regulatory focus on conformity, the 2 (low level of cognitive load and high level of cognitive load)×2 (promotion focus and prevention focus)×2 (confederate group and non-confederate group)×2 (conformity and non-conformity) model was analyzed. The results indicate a significant interaction (χ^2 (1, $N = 160$) = 13.631, $p < 0.001$) among cognitive load, regulatory focus, and conformity. Furthermore, a comparison of the percentage of conformity for each group revealed a difference between the promotion-focused group (17.50%) and the prevention-focused group (32.50%) of 15%. These results support those from Experiments 1 and 2. The results are shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 The Perceptage of Conformity on Experiment 3

	2-digit		6-digit	
	Promotion focus	Prevention focus	Promotion focus	Prevention focus
Confederate group	40%	55%	40%	50%
Non-confederate group	25%	15%	20%	30%

Further analysis revealed an interaction effect of low cognitive load on the relationship between regulatory focus and conformity ($\chi^2(1) = 23.601$; $p < 0.001$). In the prevention-focused condition, the conformity increased from 25% in the non-confederate group to 40% in the confederate group ($\Delta P = 15\%$), whereas in the promotion-focused condition, it increased from 15% in the non-confederate group to only 55% in the confederate group ($\Delta P = 40\%$). The total difference between the conformity in the promotion-focused and prevention-focused conditions was 25%, and in the confederate group, a prevention focus induced greater conformity. However, a high cognitive load appeared to have no significant effect on the relationship between regulatory focus and conformity ($\chi^2(1) = 0.070$; $p = 0.79$), as the former had no effect on the latter. Overall, the results support H4.

5.4 Discussion

Analysis of the results of Experiment 3 indicates that cognitive load influences the effect of regulatory focus on conformity, that is, the level of cognitive load affects consumer decision-making. When the participants were subject to a high cognitive load, they did not conform with each other, probably because they had to make a greater effort to remember the six-digit number. Clearly, for some of the participants the seemingly irrelevant task interfered with their cognitive resources, and they did not adopt strategies (e.g., listening to others' opinions) to select the right clothing, and thus regulatory focus had no effect on conformity.

This matches the finding of previous studies that when people are occupied with a dual processing or complex task, their cognitive load increases, which forces them to rely on intuition (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999).

6. General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether regulatory focus is a salient factor that influences people to conform. To achieve this goal, four hypotheses were proposed and three experimental studies conducted.

Experiment 1 examined whether conformity is stronger among people who are

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prevention focused. The results show that people conform with others regardless of whether they tend to be promotion focused or prevention focused. To better understand the relationship between a promotion focus, a prevention focus, and conformity, the percentage of conformity under the two focus conditions was compared. The results show that conformity was stronger among the prevention-focused participants, as hypothesized. A possible explanation for this result is that promotion-focused consumers are generally primed by their innate needs, desirables, and gain-related situations, whereas prevention-focused consumers tend to be primed by their security needs, responsibilities, and loss-related situations. The two goal orientations also have different consequences, with promotion-focused people being more sensitive to positive outcomes and prevention-focused people tending to respond to negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997; Aaker & Lee, 2001). Goal orientation also influences product judgments (Chernev, 2004; Pham & Avnet, 2004). Prevention-focused people may fear losing a sense of belonging or making the wrong decision, and may be more likely to conform with others than prevention-focused people.

Experiment 2 revealed that the participants in both the promotion-focused and prevention-focused conditions were affected by informational influences and normative influences in their tendency to conform. People require accuracy in selecting products and need to have a sense of belonging, so they may listen to the decisions of others and conform with them.

Experiment 3 revealed that although past research has not identified cognitive load as a mechanism that affects the influence of regulatory focus, a high cognitive load decreases the use of strategies to attain a desired goal, and thus reduces the extent of conformity. Experiment 3 lasted 5 to 10 minute, and although over this long period some of the participants may have been easily able to recall the numbers after selecting a product, it may have been difficult for others and they were forced to rely on their instinct.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Previous consumer decision-making research posits that when consumers make decisions between alternative items, they are affected by their proximity to the status quo, and that their decision strategies will ultimately vary depending on whether they are promotion focused and prevention focused (Chernev, 2004). Consumers' sensitivity will also be influenced by their goal orientation, in that those who are prevention focused will be concerned with potential loss, whereas those who are promotion focused will be concerned with potential gain (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988).

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Numerous other studies have pointed out that differences in regulatory focus lead to the adoption of differences strategies, which affects other decision-making processes, such as categorization, expectancy valuation, affective responses, and willingness to consider new options and multiple options (Pham & Higgins, 2005).

This study provides a new perspective on the influence of regulatory focus on consumer decision-making by positing that regulatory focus affects conformity through informational and normative influences. In examining informational influences more deeply, this study finds that the informational influences differ in promotion-focused and prevention-focused situations. Further, if regulatory focus affects conformity through informational influences, then this will affect the means of collecting information. For example, people may collect product information from others. The process of decision making used will also be affected, in that people may not only rely on processing thinking, but will also use intuition and adopt the opinions of others. If regulatory focus affects conformity through normative influences, then this will alter group thinking. For example, group members may make their own point of view consistent with that of the group (Baron, 2005). It may also affect self-confidence, as greater self-confidence leads to greater conformity (Allen, 1967).

6.2 Marketing Implications

Regulatory focus has been researched for a long time, and has been applied in numerous fields, including cognition, emotion, and decision-making (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003). Recent consumer research has shown that regulatory goal influences consumer evaluations of products and brand choice decisions (Higgins, 2002). When the product benefits fit consumers' regulatory goal, then their attitude toward the product is more favorable. However, past research does not determine whether regulatory focus is an essential factor that influences consumer conformity in product choice decisions. Hence, this study makes some contribution to the understanding of consumer evaluation of products and the way in which consumers make product choice decisions. The results indicate that the effect of regulatory focus on conformity occurs through both informational and normative influences. Identifying the factors that influence consumers to conform should allow marketing managers to develop appropriate marketing strategies to increase the consumer purchase rate. For example, when consumers have incomplete information about a product, marketers could first determine what needs consumers are worried that they will not fulfill, and then provide recommendations from other consumers about the product in verbal prompts or written articles to increase the informational and

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normative influences. Marketing managers should also refrain from providing too much unrelated information to consumers, which decreases the effect of regulatory focus on conformity. Such measures will motivate consumers to conform with each other and thus increase the purchasing rate.

6.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research offers a valuable new perspective on regulatory focus and conformity, it has some limitations. Because the experiments took some time and the students were constrained by their timetables, the available sample pool was limited. Further, only students were used in the experiments, and they may not fully represent the general population. Future studies should be alert to the limitations of this study and use larger samples that include both members of the general public and students.

Another limitation is that only low-involvement products (orange juice, clothing) were used in the experiments. In future studies, high-involvement products should be used to verify the results. For example, mobile phones are a high-involvement product (Hupfer & Gardner, 1971), and consumers are thus more likely to take the initiative to collect product information. This will give them greater product knowledge, which will help them to identify the right product to reduce their uncertainty and risk (Miquel, Caplliure, & Aldas-Manzano, 2002). It may also increase their level of conformity.

In future research, the model presented here could also be applied to online marketing. The online environment is different from the general environment, and consumers may be concerned with different factors, such as perceived Web quality and perceived risk (Garretson & Clow, 1999). The model could thus be useful in identifying the factors related to conformity that might potentially benefit consumer decision-making. Additionally, previous research show that people make decisions for others in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from medical treatment decisions (Raymark, 2000) and business decisions (Borresen, 1987) to providing advice or making choices for others regarding relationships (Beisswanger, Stone, Hupp, & Allgaier, 2003), it is important to understand how decision making for others differs from decision making for oneself. When deciding for others, decision makers may believe that the person for whom they are making the decision has different desires and attitudes from their own (Stone, Yates, & Caruthers, 2002). Presumably, one is more personally involved when making decisions for oneself than when doing so for another person (Levin, Schnittjer, & Thee, 1988). Thus, future research should consider how these different in self-other influence the effect of regulatory focus on conformity behavior.

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