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## **The Impact of Regulatory Focus on the Effect of Two-sided Advertising**

Arnd Florack, University of Basel, Switzerland  
 Simon Ineichen, University of Basel, Switzerland  
 Rahel Bieri, University of Basel, Switzerland

Advertisers attempt to present products as positive as possible, praising the advantages of the advertised products. Sometimes, however, it is beneficial to rely on two-sidedly communicated-ads mentioning not only the benefits but also the shortcomings of a product

(Crowley and Hower 1994; Etgar and Goodwin 1982; Insko 1962; Kamins and Assael 1987; Lumsdaine and Janis 1953; Pechmann 1992). However, the persuasive effects of two-sided ads are limited and cannot be generalized (Belch 1981; Bohner et al. 2003; Golden and Alpert 1987; Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield 1949; for an overview see Crowley and Hower 1994). In this paper, we argue that the recipients' regulatory focus (e.g. Higgins 1997; Higgins et al. 1994) is an important factor that accounts for differential effects of two-sided advertising.

The regulatory focus influences to what extent individuals rely on substantial arguments of a message and/or on affective responses when forming judgments (Florack, Scarabis and Gosejohann 2005; Pham and Avnet 2004). Prevention-focused individuals rely more on the substance of a message than promotion-focused individuals, whereas promotion-focused individuals are more likely to rely on their affective responses toward an ad. The feeling of credibility elicited by an ad is an affective response, and this feeling is elicited to a greater extent by two-sided ads (Golden and Alpert 1987; Settle and Golden 1974; Smith and Hunt 1978; Sternthal, Phillips and Dholakia 1978). Therefore, we expect a generally higher credibility of the two-sided ads compared to the one-sided ads. We also expect participants with a promotion focus to more heavily rely on this positive cue. As for the substantial content, regulatory focus theory suggests that prevention-focused individuals are more sensitive to negative information (Higgins 1997, 1998, Higgins and Tykocinski 1992). Combined with the differential relevance of mentioned product shortcomings, the differences in reliance on affective responses and substantive arguments should lead to more positive effects of two-sided advertising for promotion-focused recipients than for prevention-focused recipients.

To test these hypotheses we conducted two experiments. In experiment one, we measured chronic regulatory focus and then presented to the participants a series of three ads, either one-sided or two-sided. For every product, there was a one-sided ad that mentioned only the product advantage, and a two-sided ad that mentioned both, the product advantage and the product disadvantage. After the presentation of each ad, participants rated the advertised product. We averaged the dependent measures for the three ads. All analyses were computed with the aggregated scores. Regression analysis revealed a significant interaction between ad type and regulatory focus on the evaluation of the products: The stronger the promotion focus was, the stronger the positive effect of the two-sided ads compared to the one-sided ads.

In experiment two, we applied a 2 X 2 Design, with the factors *regulatory focus* (promotion vs. prevention) and *ad-type* (one-sided vs. two-sided). Both factors were manipulated between participants. We measured the credibility of the ads and the evaluation of the products. Regulatory focus was primed with a modified version of the d2 attention test (Brickenkamp, 2002). The instruction was altered to either highlight loss- and non-loss feedback for priming a prevention focus or gain- and non-gain feedback for priming a promotion focus. Again, participants saw a series of three ads that were two-sided in one condition and one-sided in the other condition. After the presentation of each ad, participants judged the credibility of the ad and evaluated the product. As expected, participants rated the two-sided ads as more credible than the one-sided ads. An ANOVA with the factors ad-type (two-sided vs. one-sided) and regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention) and the evaluation of the product as dependent measure yielded a significant interaction between ad-type and regulatory focus. In the promotion focus condition, participants evaluated the products more positively when two-sided ads were presented than when one-sided ads were presented.

In order to investigate the underlying process of the effects of two-sided ads in the promotion focus condition, we tested whether the effects of the two-sided ads were mediated by the credibility of the ads in the promotion focus condition (Baron and Kenny, 1986). In line with the results of the ANOVAs, regression analyses showed that the type of the ad was significantly related to the product evaluation and the credibility of the ad. Furthermore, the effect of the ad-type on the product evaluation is no longer significant when credibility is also entered in the regression equation, while the effect of the credibility of the ad is significant. A subsequent *Sobel test* showed that the reduction of the effect of the ad-type on the product evaluation is significant.

Taken together, the analyses show that in the promotion focus condition, the effect of the ad-type on product evaluation is mediated by the credibility of the ad. Further, our results have implications for marketing managers and advertisers. They suggest that two-sided ads are more effective when consumers are in a promotion focus and, therefore, rely on their affective responses. In particular, two-sided advertising might be effective for products linked to a promotion focus. Recent research has found that a regulatory focus is associated with certain product categories or the framing of a product category (Florack and Scarabis 2006; Zhou and Pham 2004). For advertising in such categories, two-sided ads should be effective.

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