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The authors focus on three critical areas of future research on regulatory fit. First, they focus on how regulatory orientation is sustained. The authors argue that there are two distinct approaches that bring about the “just-right feeling”: (1) a process-based approach that involves the interaction between regulatory orientation and decision-making processes and (2) an outcome-based approach that involves the interaction between regulatory orientation and the framed outcomes offered. Second, the authors discuss possible boundary conditions of regulatory fit effects, highlighting the apparent paradoxical role of involvement. They suggest that the antecedents that give rise to regulatory fit (e.g., lowered motivation) can differ from its consequences (e.g., increased motivation). Third, the authors discuss broader implications of regulatory fit, proposing three possible mechanisms by which regulatory fit can lead to improved physical health and discussing the degree to which the just-right feeling plays a role in goal-sustaining experiences related to subjective well-being (e.g., flow).

## Understanding Regulatory Fit

Regulatory fit is conceptualized as the increased motivational intensity that results when there is a match between the manner in which a person pursues a goal and his or her goal orientation. That is, people experience fit when they adopt goal pursuit strategies or engage in activities that sustain their regulatory orientation (Avnet and Higgins 2006). Notably, when actions sustain a person’s goal orientations, an “it-just-feels-right” experience results and, in turn, leads to more intense reactions to whatever the person is evaluating at the moment. Thus, the effect of regulatory fit has two components: “feeling right” and strength of engagement. Avnet and Higgins (2006) provide an interesting empirical demonstration, showing that people with distinct regulatory goals (i.e., promotion or prevention focus) are willing to pay more for a product when they choose the product in a manner that fits their regulatory orientation (on the basis of affect or cognition, respectively). Extant findings in the literature also show that when people experience regulatory fit, their attitude toward a product becomes more positive (or negative), confidence in their judgment strengthens, and their assessment of the product’s value increases (or decreases). As such, regulatory fit is an important phenome-

non to study, both for those attempting to understand people’s motivations and for those grappling with the fundamentals of consumer psychology.

Three key questions arise from this intriguing stream of research on regulatory fit and, in particular, Avnet and Higgins’s (2006) article. First, how is regulatory orientation sustained? Second, what are the boundary conditions for fit effects? Third, what are some broader implications of fit? These questions are raised in the spirit of better understanding regulatory fit and carving out directions for further research.

### *SUSTAINING REGULATORY ORIENTATION*

In investigations of the effects of regulatory focus, researchers have examined how people with distinct regulatory focus regulate their attitudes and behaviors toward the pursuit of their promotion goal of growth and advancement or their prevention goal of safety and security. Whereas people with promotion goals are sensitive to gains and nongains, people with prevention goals are sensitive to losses and non-losses. These distinct goals prompt people to selectively pay attention to and rely on information that helps them attain their goal. Furthermore, when they adopt strategies and engage in activities that are consistent with their regulatory orientation, they experience heightened motivation and an it-just-feels-right sensation. A review of the regulatory fit literature suggests that there are two different approaches to operationalize this feeling-right experience: One is a process-based approach, and the other is an outcome-based approach.

First, researchers can manipulate regulatory fit by prompting people to engage in decision-making processes

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that are either consistent or inconsistent with their regulatory orientation. For example, Avnet and Higgins (2006) gave participants two brands of correction fluid and instructed them to evaluate the brands on the basis of either their affective response or their cognitive response. This manipulation was based on previous findings that promotion-focused people are more likely to rely on affect when making judgments, whereas prevention-focused people are more likely to rely on arguments when making judgments (Pham and Avnet 2004). Indeed, promotion-focused participants were willing to pay more for their chosen correction fluid when they based their evaluations of the alternatives on feelings rather than on reasons, whereas prevention-focused participants were willing to pay more when they based their evaluations on reasons rather than on feelings. In another study, Avnet and Higgins (2003) found similar regulatory fit effects when participants with a locomotion orientation evaluated book lights in stages in which they eliminated underperforming book lights one by one, whereas participants with an assessment orientation evaluated book lights by comparing them with one another at one time. In both studies, Avnet and Higgins achieved regulatory fit by having people adopt specific strategies when they evaluated or chose a product.

Second, regulatory fit can be operationalized by leveraging the outcomes to which people with distinct regulatory goals are sensitive. Promotion-focused people are sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes, whereas prevention-focused people are sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes. Thus, prompting promotion-focused people to think about gains and nongains (versus losses and nonlosses) and prompting prevention-focused people to think about losses and nonlosses (versus gains and nongains) should bring about the just-right feeling. For example, Higgins and colleagues (2003) manipulated fit by instructing participants to choose between a pen and a mug by thinking about either what they would gain by choosing the pen or the mug (a fit strategy for the promotion-focused participants but a nonfit strategy for the prevention-focused participants) or what they would lose by not choosing the pen or the mug (a fit strategy for the prevention-focused participants but a nonfit strategy for the promotion-focused participants). In another study, Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000) manipulated fit by having people process a positive outcome as a gain rather than a nonloss (e.g., receiving a discount versus avoiding a penalty) or a negative outcome as a loss rather than a nongain (e.g., suffering a penalty versus giving up a discount). Similarly, Lee and Aaker (2004) manipulated fit by presenting participants with information that was consistent with either (1) a promotion goal in a gain (versus loss) frame or (2) a prevention goal in a loss (versus gain) frame. A slight variation of the same theme involves instructing promotion-focused people to list strategies they could use to ensure that everything goes right, thus helping them realize their hopes and aspirations, or instructing prevention-focused people to list strategies they could use to avoid anything from going wrong, thus helping them realize their duties and obligations (Freitas, Liberman, and Higgins 2002).

If regulatory fit is what people experience whenever they engage in actions or thought processes that are consistent with the natural tendencies of their regulatory orientation,

regulatory fit should be observed with more frequency and regularity than is currently reported. For example, promotion versus prevention focus is associated with distant versus proximal temporal perspective (Pennington and Roese 2003), abstract versus concrete mental representations (Keller, Lee, and Sternthal 2004), additive versus subtractive counterfactuals (Roese, Hur, and Pennington 1999), change versus stability (Liberman et al. 1999), creativity versus self-control (Freitas, Liberman, and Higgins 2002; Friedman and Förster 2001), fun and enjoyment versus safety and security (Aaker and Lee 2001), and dejection versus agitation emotions (Higgins 1997; Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000). Thus, these activities should either sustain or diminish a person's regulatory focus, depending on the fit or nonfit of these activities with the person's focus. Indeed, Roese, Hur, and Pennington (1999) present evidence that consequences of regulatory focus can prime and thus sustain regulatory focus. Specifically, participants who were promotion (prevention) focused were more likely to generate additive (subtractive) counterfactuals. In turn, prompting people to engage in additive (subtractive) counterfactual thinking led to their becoming promotion versus prevention focused. Further evidence of a regulatory fit type of effect is reported by Pennington, Aaker, and Mogilner (2005), who find that when people with a prevention focus are prompted to take on a proximal versus a distant temporal perspective, they evaluate the target product more favorably. Keller, Lee, and Sternthal (2004) show that participants with a promotion (prevention) focus are more positive toward products and product features described at an abstract (concrete) level of construal. These potential sources of regulatory fit suggest the need to investigate the antecedents and consequences of regulatory fit further and to develop methodologies that systematically assess how regulatory orientation can be sustained, enhanced, or diminished.

The broader concept of regulatory fit is also related to the issue of regulatory relevance. Avnet and Higgins (2006) argue that the two types of effects are distinct. In regulatory relevance effects, attitudes become more favorable when messages contain information that addresses a person's regulatory concerns. In contrast, in regulatory fit effects, attitudes become more polarized and intense when decision strategies are consistent with a person's regulatory orientation. Avnet and Higgins (2006) suggest that the reason regulatory fit effects occur is that a person feels right when his or her decision strategy is sustained rather than disrupted. In turn, the feeling-right experience intensifies whatever reaction the person may have at that time. Thus, positive evaluations become more positive, and negative evaluations become more negative. However, it is not clear whether a person also feels right in conditions of regulatory relevance and thus may experience enhanced negative and positive attitudes as well. Indeed, Aaker and Lee (2001, Study 3) offer some hints that regulatory relevance may reflect another source of fit. When participants were presented with weak arguments, their attitudes became *less* favorable in the relevant than in the irrelevant conditions. In this light, regulatory relevance appears to intensify participants' negative response in a manner similar to the effects of regulatory fit.

Further research is needed to determine whether and when regulatory relevance and regulatory fit effects are distinct and whether one subsumes the other.<sup>1</sup> For example, such work might attempt to determine whether relevance also sustains focus and whether people feel right in conditions of regulatory relevance. More broadly, given the many contexts that may sustain regulatory orientation, it is important to determine when fit effects are observed in decision making.

#### *BOUNDARY CONDITIONS FOR THE FIT EFFECT*

The work on regulatory fit to date suggests that the experience of feeling right leads to increased confidence, heightened importance of reactions, and increased engagement in reactions (e.g., Avnet and Higgins 2006; Higgins 2000). That is, people feel right about their response, and thus positive reactions become more positive, and negative reactions become more negative (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004). This effect of fit on judgment reflects a misattribution effect that stems from people confusing the source of their feeling right to characteristics of the target they are evaluating. The implication is that when people are made aware of how they feel about their reactions and believe that this feeling may potentially bias their judgments, they adjust their judgments to correct for the potential bias (Higgins et al. 2003). This reliance on the experience of regulatory fit as the basis of judgment raises an issue that warrants further investigation: Are the regulatory fit effects on persuasion indicative of heuristic or systematic processing?

Evidence of a source confusion account of regulatory fit is consistent with the notion that people who experience regulatory fit rely on heuristics as the basis of their judgments. To examine this possibility, Wang and Lee (2006) manipulated regulatory focus and involvement across a series of studies. In one study, for example, they presented participants in high- versus low-involvement conditions with product information that consisted of both promotion- and prevention-focused features. The results show that participants selectively searched for and spent more time processing features that fit their regulatory focus but only when they were not motivated to process the information. Furthermore, product evaluation was mediated by the perceived attractiveness of the product features, not by the extent of processing. In contrast, involved participants, who spent an equal amount of time processing fit versus nonfit product features, showed no sign of the regulatory focus effect in their product evaluations. Similarly, Briley and Aaker (in

press) demonstrate that participants who were culturally inclined to have a promotion or prevention focus held more favorable attitudes toward products that addressed their regulatory concerns but only when asked to provide their initial reactions or when their evaluation was made under cognitive load or under time pressure. The culturally induced regulatory relevance effect disappeared when participants were asked to make deliberated evaluations or when they were able to expend cognitive resources on the task.

Together, these results suggest that regulatory fit effects are more likely to occur when people are not motivated to process information carefully. However, such an implication seems to be contradictory to the finding that people are more motivated when they experience regulatory fit (e.g., Idson, Liberman, and Higgins 2000). For example, Aaker and Lee (2001) find that participants who were presented with information that fit their regulatory focus were better able to recall the information and were more discerning between strong and weak arguments. Furthermore, recent research presents evidence that regulatory fit enhances self-regulatory resource, whereas nonfit diminishes self-regulatory resource. Specifically, Hong and Lee (2005) show that people who experienced regulatory fit demonstrated greater physical endurance in a handgrip task, greater cognitive persistence in an anagram task, and better self-control when resisting temptation. These results provide convergent evidence that regulatory fit is associated with greater motivational intensity. Why, then, do people not use these resources to process information more systematically? In particular, Lee and Aaker (2004, Study 5) find that participants generated more support arguments in favor of the target under fit versus nonfit conditions; yet participants' evaluation of the product was mediated by their perceived effectiveness of the appeal rather than by the support arguments they generated.

Further research is needed to investigate the conditions under which people engage in systematic information processing when they make decisions involving product evaluations. Another promising avenue for further research would be a focused exploration of the role of motivation in regulatory fit effects. For example, are regulatory fit effects more likely to arise in conditions of lowered motivation, and when they occur, do they lead to increased motivational intensity?

#### *BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF REGULATORY FIT*

When broader implications of regulatory fit are considered, two domains of research seem particularly intriguing to explore: health and subjective well-being. First, could the subjective feeling of fit lead to improved physical health? There are at least three possible mechanisms that suggest such a link. One potential mechanism involves regulatory fit's impact on health outcomes through its influence on persuasion. That is, research on fit suggests that a key defining characteristic of regulatory fit is the experience of feeling right, which could correspond to more favorable attitudes toward persuasive appeals and compliance with advocated actions. For example, recent research shows that people presented with health-related information that fits their regulatory focus perceive the information as easier to process, the arguments as more valid (Lee and Aaker 2004), and the advocated cause as

<sup>1</sup>Two issues about regulatory fit versus relevance merit highlighting: First, attitudes are often the principal measures used to demonstrate regulatory relevance effects, whereas valuation is often the principal measure used to illustrate regulatory fit effects. Conceptually, the two measures are similar, but are they the same? Second, a difference between fit and relevance studies is that relevance studies often make a comparison between gains and/or nongains and losses and/or nonlosses (e.g., Aaker and Lee 2001), whereas fit studies often fine-tune the comparison conditions to gains versus nongains and losses versus nonlosses (e.g., Idson, Liberman, and Higgins 2000; Lee and Aaker 2004). This conceptual subtlety also merits exploration. Is there a theoretical difference in such contrasts? For example, Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000) distinguish between high- and low-level fit. Does such a qualitative distinction describe the variation in regulatory relevance versus regulatory fit effects?

more believable and worthy of pursuit (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004). Although the relationship between regulatory fit and increased persuasion is not necessarily unique to the domain of health marketing, this potential mechanism is important to examine, particularly in light of the significant challenge faced by health care professionals and public policy makers to increase the effectiveness of their communications (given that health-related information is often ignored because of self-positivity biases; Perloff and Fetzer 1986). Thus, any antecedent that motivates people to process health appeals carefully and to take preventative, proactive measures toward a healthy lifestyle (e.g., eating well, exercising frequently) merits greater understanding.

A second mechanism worthy of further exploration is the link between regulatory fit and resources. To the degree that regulatory fit enhances motivational intensity and self-confidence, people who experience regulatory fit may be more likely to expend resources on careful consideration of important but emotionally aversive information, which often forms the basis of preventative health messages (Agrawal, Menon, and Aaker 2005). People who experience regulatory fit may also be more willing to take early detection tests (e.g., mammograms, prostate-specific antigen tests); the cost of such action is potentially receiving bad news, but the benefit is being in a better position to prevent or proactively combat disease. In contrast, the feeling of nonfit may be comparable to a state of psychological discomfort or feeling wrong and thus may be resource depleting or constraining. Reduced resources as a result of regulatory nonfit may mitigate the effectiveness of appeals to get tested and may reduce intentions to comply with treatments or undergo subsequent tests (Kahn and Luce 2003).

A third mechanism by which regulatory fit may lead to improved physical health is related to the increase in willpower to exert self-control. For people who experience regulatory fit, behaviors that require significant willpower (e.g., dieting, exercising) may be easier to master. In support of this idea, Hong and Lee (2005) manipulated fit by asking participants in their studies to write about using eagerness or vigilance means to attain a promotion or prevention goal. In one study, participants were presented with a choice between an equally valued Snickers bar and an apple as a token of appreciation for participating in the study. In the fit condition, 80% of the participants chose the apple over the Snickers bar, demonstrating considerable self-control. In the nonfit condition, only 20% of the participants chose the apple. In this case, regulatory fit may not be the direct cause of improved health, but it may indirectly aid health outcomes through its impact on preventative testing and self-regulation (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999).

Note that the mechanisms described previously do not always presume that objects or events will be evaluated more positively simply as a result of regulatory fit *per se*. Rather, these mechanisms suggest that regulatory fit can contribute to physical health because of the heightened potential for people to (1) experience themselves in a suitable or appropriate manner and/or (2) experience stronger engagement or enjoy increased sources, thereby creating better coping mechanisms.

A second broad implication of regulatory fit involves its potential relationship to subjective well-being and happi-

ness. That is, to the degree that fit correlates with increased confidence and motivational intensity and because the concept of fit can be applied to other goal-directed strategies, not just regulatory goal-directed strategies, subjective well-being and happiness may also increase. For example, consider flow, which is defined as an effortless, enjoyable state in which a person's skills are well positioned to cope with the challenges at hand in a goal-directed action system, thus making the person feel good (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, p. 35). The empirical work on flow experiences suggests that every piece of information a person processes is evaluated on the basis of whether it threatens his or her goals, supports his or her goals, or is neutral. A flow experience may occur when information supports or sustains a person's goals. As such, the research on flow mirrors and supports the theorizing and findings on regulatory fit, and the flow experience of "it just feels good" may be similar to the regulatory fit experience of "it just feels right."

Moreover, this analogy broadens the focus on sustaining higher-order regulatory goals concerning growth and security to attaining more concrete goals, such as climbing a challenging mountain, mastering a chess game, or composing a piece of music. That is, an it-just-feels-right experience may occur when a person concentrates on and becomes absorbed in specific tasks that work toward whatever goal he or she has (not just regulatory goals). Furthermore, such an experience may occur when a person receives information or feedback that enables him or her to learn about his or her progress toward achieving that goal.<sup>2</sup> In these conditions, a person's confidence in achieving that goal grows along with a sense of control over his or her actions. Of potential interest are questions such as the following: To what degree does the it-just-feels-right fit experience map onto these lower-order functional goals, independent of regulatory focus? Relatedly, do regulatory fit effects increase the chance that flow experiences occur? More broadly, how does the it-just-feels-right experience affect general feelings of happiness, particularly in light of recent findings that suggest that happiness is more accurately construed as a process rather than an outcome (Diener and Oishi, *in press*)?

## CONCLUSION

Regulatory fit is an important phenomenon to understand and is particularly illuminating for researchers attempting to bridge consumer behavior and basic motivations. The work that Avnet and Higgins (2006) summarize and document is directly applicable and highly useful in understanding con-

<sup>2</sup>Notably, the feedback could be negative or positive for that goal; thus, the work on flow suggests that the kind of feedback a person receives does not matter. What makes feedback valuable is whether it provides information that gauges how a person is doing in relation to the goal. For example, an artist who enjoys painting must have some mechanism for judging whether a brush stroke helped or hurt the painting. Another point of potential distinction in the two literature streams is the construal of goals and the activities related to goals. The work on flow suggests that goals and activities are relatively malleable, shifting on the basis of a person's motivation or ability to actively shift his or her focus of attention. For example, a mundane or boring activity originally construed as goal neutral (e.g., mowing the lawn) can be reconstrued as goal supporting if the activity is redefined in terms of an important goal (e.g., being healthy).

sumer behavior principles. Yet the work on regulatory fit is still in nascent stages. Our view is that regulatory fit effects may be more pervasive than previously assumed. In this article, we present some ideas for further investigation that may help researchers better understand the construct of regulatory fit, its antecedents and consequences, and boundary conditions of the fit effect. We also discuss some of the broader implications of regulatory fit effects and suggest fruitful avenues for further research that could shed light on domains important to individual well-being (e.g., improving health) and provide a stronger theoretical grounding for extant work (e.g., flow experiences).

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