

Research Review

Regulatory fit: A meta-analytic synthesis☆

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Abstract

Regulatory fit, or the match between an individual's regulatory orientation and the strategy used to sustain it, offers a pervasive predictor of customer behavior. Merely reaching a decision in a certain way influences the value of a decision or an outcome. In this research, we conduct a meta-analysis to more fully articulate the role of important conceptual moderators and demonstrate their differential effects on evaluation, behavioral intention, and behavior. In particular, we look at the source of regulatory focus (self-prime, situation-prime, chronic), the orientation (prevention, promotion), how fit is created (sustaining, matching), how fit is constructed (action, observation), and the scope of fit (incidental, integral). We also shed light on the role of several contextual factors.

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Contents

Regulatory fit: A meta-analytic synthesis	395
A conceptual framework	396
Regulatory focus	396
Source of focus (chronic, self-prime, situation prime)	396
Orientation (prevention, promotion)	397
Fit induction	397
Fit created (sustaining, matching)	397
Fit construction (action, observation)	398
Fit scope (incidental, integral)	398
Fit route	398

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Route (verbal, nonverbal)	398
Involvement (low, high)	398
Contextual variables	399
Evaluations, behavioral intention, and behavior	399
Method	399
Meta-analytic procedures	400
Data collection	400
Inclusion criteria	400
Calculation of effect size measure	400
Data coding	400
Data analysis	400
Results	401
Main effects of fit on evaluation, behavioral intention, and behavior	401
Role of moderators	401
Regulatory focus	401
Fit induction	402
Fit route	403
Contextual factors	403
General discussion	403
Further research directions	405
Appendix A. Technical appendix	405
Effect sizes	405
Correction for measurement error	406
Combining effect sizes	406
Heterogeneity of the effect sizes	406
File drawer N	406
Meta regression	406
Appendix B. Mean regulatory fit effect size within each level of the moderators	406
References	406

Regulatory fit: A meta-analytic synthesis

Regulatory fit theory has been widely investigated in relation to individuals' consumer and social behavior, in diverse areas such as marketing, psychology, sociology, economics, and organizational behavior during the past decade (e.g., [Haws, Dholakia, & Bearden, 2011](#); [Keller, 2006](#); [Werth & Foerster, 2007](#)). Across more than 120 articles, regulatory fit is found to have a pronounced impact on individuals' evaluations, behavioral intentions and behavior in areas such as persuasion ([Lee & Aaker, 2004](#)), consumer purchasing behavior ([Avnet & Higgins, 2003](#); [Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003](#)), social policy issues ([Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004](#)), and health issues ([Cesario et al., 2004](#); [Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, & Salovey, 2006](#); [Spiegel, Grant-Pillow, & Higgins, 2004](#)).

Regulatory fit is the match between a person's regulatory focus—either promotion (opportunity-seeking) or prevention (risk-avoiding)—and their strategy for pursuing goals or the consequences they focus on when making decisions. The relation between a person's goal pursuit orientation and the manner in which the goal is pursued should affect evaluations of a target and as a result, behavior. Merely reaching a decision in one way versus another should also influence its value ([Higgins, 2000](#)). When individuals reach a decision using a strategy that sustains (vs. disrupts) their current motivational orientation they experience regulatory fit, which in turn impacts their valuation of the decision ([Avnet & Higgins, 2006](#); [Higgins, 2000, 2006](#)).

Given the maturity of this domain and the number of excellent qualitative reviews (e.g., [Higgins, 2012](#)), it is important to quantitatively examine differences in the size and significance of the regulatory fit effects across the multitude of studies conducted in the past fifteen years in order to draw empirical generalizations. Toward this end, we conduct a meta-analytical integrative review. Such a review sheds insights into fit moderators: regulatory focus (source: self-prime, situation-prime, chronic; orientation: prevention, promotion), fit induction (fit creation: sustaining, matching; fit construction: action, observation; fit scope: incidental, integral), fit route (route: nonverbal, verbal; involvement: low, high) as well as several of contextual factors (type of participant: student, non-student; study environment: offline, online; type of fit: promotion, prevention). The impact of these fit moderators on evaluations, behavioral intentions, and behavior is examined.

Regulatory fit has been created using a number of different processes that have two key underlying regulatory focus differences. One, researchers studying regulatory fit research has relied on either chronic or momentarily primed regulatory focus. Chronic focus develops over time through socialization and is typically captured via standardized measures (e.g., RFQ; [Hong & Lee, 2008, Study 3](#)). Alternatively, regulatory focus can be momentarily primed using self-induced priming (imagining winning or losing a championship: [Aaker and Lee, Studies 2–4](#)) or situation-induced priming (e.g., completing a maze task: [Zhang & Mittal, 2007](#)). Second, regulatory focus has been assessed using two dominant regulatory orientations: promotion vs. prevention, fit

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