

DECISION BETWEEN HEALTH AND TASTE- A REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: For consumers, the decision between non-organic and organic foods is essentially a decision between “gains of taste and losses of health” versus “nongain of taste and nonloss of health”. In this paper, we manipulate restaurant feature (organic food versus non-organic food) and subject’s regulatory focus (promotion focus versus prevention focus) through an experimental context. Results show that subjects with different regulatory focuses have different attitude and purchase intention toward restaurants with different appeals.

Keywords: Organic Foods, Regulatory Focus Theory, Promotion Focus, Prevention Focus, Motivation Systems

INTRODUCTION

With the rise of living quality and consumer awareness, people are driven by a growing desire to do more spending. In their spending, service employees’ professionalism, friendliness, and enthusiasm are important factors affecting their final purchase decision. As interpersonal contact is common in the service industry, the importance of this industry is also more emphasized. To cope with development of knowledge economy, change of the industry structure, and the demand for higher living quality, Council for Economic Planning and Development has worked with other affiliated departments of Executive Yuan to propose the “Guideline and Action Plans for Service Industry Development”, in hope of reviving our national economy by stimulating the development of the service industry first. According to Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics of Executive Yuan, the output value of the service industry accounts for 71.4% GDP as of 2008, and employees in this industry takes up 60% of the total working population. The large growth of this industry has also induced the development of agriculture and other industries, pushing the total economic

growth above 5%. This explains the great influence of the service industry in the present time. In a 2005 survey on the service value of food and beverage stores, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Economic Affairs, pointed out that there are more than 84,000 food and beverage stores in Taiwan, taking up nearly 10% of the entire service industry. Hence, this industry is undoubtedly important for people on this island. As to the population of consumers, a survey conducted by Taiwan Chain Stores and Franchise Association showed that 81% Taiwanese people eat out for breakfast, 84% for lunch, and 65% for dinner. This implies a high frequency of eating out among modern people. The cause of this tendency is that most modern people are too busy to prepare food themselves. From the above figures and discussion, we can see that the food and beverage industry is very important for consumers.

In recent years, consumers are paying more attention to their health. For them, the main problem with dining out is healthiness and cleanness of food. In addition to high salt content in food, they are also concerned about the quality of food ingredients. Thus, whether food ingredients are organic has become an important factor of their purchase decision. This factor has also contributed to the fast development of organic food restaurants. In practice, this kind of restaurant stresses use of organic food ingredients and light cooking methods (low oil and low sodium). Certainly, their food products are relatively more expensive. Cooking light usually means that consumers need to compromise some good taste for health. According to Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998), most consumers buy organic food in pursuit of health. Davies, Titterton, and Cochrane (1995) also mentioned that tastiness of food is an important factor of consumer purchase decision. Therefore, consumers' regulatory focus affects their choice between health and taste of food.

The regulatory focus theory proposed by Higgins (1997) has been commonly employed to explain this kind of decision-making with consideration of gains and losses. This theory describes that an individual has two motivations, namely promotion focus and prevention focus. A person with a stronger promotion focus cares more about how to attain expected goals, while a person with a stronger prevention focus pays more attention to how to avoid losing his possessions. Because their primary concerns are different, their final decisions may be different too. This study attempts to explore if consumers with different regulatory focuses have different attitude and behavior in the choice between organic and nonorganic food restaurants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organic Food

Organic food refers to foods grown in organic ways or processed foods entirely made of organic ingredients. According to Tregear, Dent, and McGregor (1994), organic agriculture started as early as 1920, but this term was not coined until 1940. Organic food means that food contains absolutely no herbicide, insecticide, hormone, fertilizer, fungicide, and other non-organic substances (Jones, Clarke-Hill, Shears, and Hiller, 2001). These substances, such as herbicide which is used to kill unwanted plants, may reside in grown food and cause burden on human body. The same phenomenon also occurs to animals. For instance, during the outbreak of bird flu (avian influenza), many farm owners injected antibody into the fowls they raised. However, the injected drug would reside in the animals' body, causing harms to their eaters. As revealed by International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), the total area of organic farming around the globe in 2003 has exceeded 15 million hectares. Australia has the largest size of organic farming (10.5 million hectares), followed by Argentina (3.192 million hectares), Italy (1.23 million hectares), and the US (0.95 million hectares). In terms of the ratio of organic farming area to the total farming area in the nation, Liechtenstein, a microstate in Mid Europe, has the highest ratio (17%), followed by Austria (11.3%), Switzerland (9.7%), and Italy (7.94%). According to International Trade Centre (ITC), the scale of organic food market in 2003 was close to US\$23~25 billion, with an annual growth of 5~15%.

In 2004, Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, mentioned that organic agriculture has widely developed in foreign nations, and the domestic organic farming area is also on the increase year by year. The current sales channels for organic produce include self-marketing, chain supermarket, supermarket inside farmer association, organic food store, collective purchase (such as collective purchase of Homemaker's Union and Foundation), door-to-door delivery (such as Takkyubin), grocery store inside hospital, religious group, farming experience activities, organic food exhibition, organic food restaurant, and etc. Domestically, organic foods can be sold via multiple channels. Thus, there is a potential market of organic foods around the nation. However, as pointed out by Chrysoschoydis (2000), some consumers have insufficient knowledge of organic food and thus scarcely buy products made of it. As sellers of organic food stress the importance of organic food for human body, they often neglect to explain why it is important. To expand this market, making consumers accept and understand knowledge related to organic food is essential. Besides, the purpose of promoting organic farming is to reduce the impact of imported goods on local agriculture and avoid idling of valuable farm lands. Hence, through proper utilization and maintenance of agricultural environments, we can ensure safety of agricultural produce, create

recreational functions of agriculture, and increase yield of organic foods.

With the social development, how to select organic products and where to buy them has become an issue that consumers are concerned about. As mentioned by Chinnici, D'Amico, and Percorino (2002), modern people are paying more attention to dietetic and hygienic issues and improvement of dietary quality. Therefore, organic foods have become increasingly important for them. Among consumers of organic foods, women are the majority. Consumers who have received higher education or are holding a higher job position also tend to purchase organic foods. However, organic foods are slightly more expensive than non-organic foods, so price is a barrier to some consumers. Jones and Hill (2001) thus urged retailers to lower the price of organic foods and increase inventory. They believed, by doing so, organic foods can be sold at a lower cost and at a lower price. Moreover, food safety indicators also affect consumer orientation in decision-making. According to Chinnici et al. (2002), British consumers are especially concerned about food safety and environmental protection, so organic foods have been widely promoted in the UK. Therefore, we saw a large growth of the organic food market and even a shortage of retail supplies in recent years.

Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) proposed that whether consumers buy organic foods to maintain or improve health, health is still their primary concern. To understand the development of this market and obtain some marketing strategies, Schifferstein and Ophuis conducted a survey on organic food stores. Their empirical finding showed that consumers of organic foods usually compromise on taste, and even if they need to change their ordinary diet habit, they still believe that health should be prioritized before taste. In addition to the health factor, Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) mentioned that there are four other factors that affect consumer purchase of organic foods. These factors are quality (organic foods are better than ordinary foods), price (organic foods are more expensive), price difference (the price difference between organic foods and non-organic foods), and fad (there is a trend of eating organic foods). Davies, Titterton, and Cochrane (1995) proposed that food taste also affects organic food consumption. Interestingly, consumers refuse to buy organic foods not because organic foods taste different. In fact, there is no significant taste difference between organic and non-organic foods. The price gap is what drives them to choose non-organic ones. From this finding and the result of Schifferstein and Ophuis's (1998) survey, we can make the following inference: Given a difference of taste, consumers of organic foods are willing to pay more and compromise on taste to avoid losing their health; consumers who are unwilling to purchase organic foods will refuse to pay more for organic foods even if they taste the same as non-organic ones. From the rational point of view, this is probably the result of varying levels of involvement in organic foods. Besides, Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) discovered that consumers who eat organic foods on a regular basis tend to be more optimistic and exposed to fewer risks of obesity or other health problems than those who do not. Hence, there is substantial potential for development of the organic food market. As to the misconception that organic foods are more nutritious than non-organic foods, Dowden (2000) argued that organic foods do not contain any extra nutrient and are simply less harmful to human health.

Hill & Lynchehaun (2002) mentioned that, in terms of the amount of organic products consumed in the UK during 2000, organic vegetables and fruits rank first, followed by yogurt, egg, and daily foods. In their case study of organic milk consumption, they found health was the main reason why consumers were using organic milk, followed by taste and environmental awareness. Their research result revealed that organic milk sales is affected by consumer's knowledge and education background. Consumers with more knowledge and better education are more likely to purchase organic milk; consumers with less knowledge and education are less likely to purchase organic milk. They concluded that increase of organic milk sales relies on accommodating consumer preference, lowering price of organic products, changing consumers' pursuit in life, broadening sales channels, and promoting milk for new-born babies. Thus, organic foods can help us maintain health and also reduce residual of chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides, in the soil, causing fewer burdens on the planet earth.

Regulatory Focus Theory

Regulatory focus theory is built on human's pursuit of hedonic goals to explain that individuals are essentially oriented to approach pleasure and avoid pains. This theory derives from the hedonic principle. The main difference between the regulatory focus theory and the hedonic principle is that the former discusses pursuit of happiness and avoidance of pains separately, while the latter discusses the two altogether. Specifically, the hedonic principle is to assess the consequence of a certain behavior. If a certain behavior leads to gains of pleasure and losses of pain, it should be conducted; if not, it should be avoided. For instance, if A discovers one of his colleagues stole a product of their company. Reporting this colleague's improper deed to the supervisor may bring A certain reward and pleasure. According to the hedonic principle, A should report it with no doubt. However, A also imagines the consequence of reporting the theft. His colleague may have unpleasant feeling, and he may be estranged by his peer fellows and thus feel discouraged. Meanwhile, the hedonic principle seems to tell A to conceal the theft. In this context, A may suffer from pains if he decides to seek pleasure. The hedonic principle cannot effectively explain what A's better decision is.

Thus, Higgins (1997) introduced the regulatory focus theory to address the above-mentioned issue. He mentioned that an

individual's pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pains are based on two different motivations. Approaching a match to a desired goal is a positive pursuit (promotion-focus), while avoiding a mismatch is a negative one (prevention-focus). However, the end states of the above two pursuits usually do not appear concurrently. That is to say, while one pursues pleasure, one also suffers increasing pains; while one tries to avoid pains, one is losing pleasure. An individual can only have one decision. If one believes he can gain maximum satisfaction by seeking pleasure (more promotion-focused), he will choose to pursue pleasure; on the contrary, if one believes he can gain a maximum sense of security by avoiding pains (more prevention-focused), he will choose to avoid pains. Thus, an individual is motivated by two different incentives to reach the expected end state. The promotion focus is to attain the desired end state through an approach goal, whereas the prevention focus is to attain it through an avoidance goal.

Crowe & Higgins (1997) investigated the difference in task performance between individuals with different regulatory focuses. In their experiment, subjects with experience of task failure were given another task that was similar to the previously failed one. Results showed that individuals with different regulatory focuses had different behavioral orientations. Subjects in a promotion focus desired to achieve success. Even if they experienced failure, they were still willing to try new ways to overcome difficult tasks. Those in a prevention focus saw prevention of failure as their common goal. Frustrated by experiences of failure, they were unwilling to try new ways to overcome difficult tasks. Therefore, individuals in a promotion focus were more likely to succeed than those in a prevention focus, mainly because promotion-focused individuals would try various ways to attain success and prevention-focused ones would only maintain the status quo to avoid repeating the same failure. In another experiment, Crown and Higgins (1997) tested the subjects' response to signals. They attempted to find out if subjects with different regulatory focuses would react to signals differently. Results showed a significant difference between the two types of individuals. Promotion-focused ones were brave to take challenges. They reacted immediately whenever they saw any sign of a signal. In contrast, prevention-focused ones were more afraid of failure. They did not immediately react to a signal until they had verified it as a correct one. The above findings manifest that individuals in a promotion focus tend to expect emergence of the target (i.e. signals can be readily detected), while those in a prevention focus tend to avoid emergence of the target (i.e. misjudgment of signals can be avoided).

The difference between the two regulatory focuses lies in match versus mismatch or fit versus not fit. Higgins (2000) argued that for individuals in a promotion focus, taking an approach strategy fits their regulatory focus, and taking an avoidance strategy does not fit their regulatory focus. Likewise, for individuals in a prevention focus, taking an avoidance strategy fits their regulatory focus, and taking an approach strategy does not fit their regulatory focus. According to Spiegel, Scott, Heidi Grant-pillow, & E. Tory Higgins (2004), if one's actual behavior fits his regulatory focus, there will be a greater incentive for him to accomplish a given task; in contrast, if one's actual behavior does not fit his regulatory focus, there will be less motivation for him to accomplish the task, and he will be less pleased to accomplish it. Spiegel et al. (2004) asked their respondents to write a report using two imagined writing strategies to explore the fit between their behavioral strategies and their regulatory focuses. There is fit if their behavioral strategies are similar to their regulatory focuses, and there is no fit if their behavioral strategies are dissimilar to their regulatory focuses. The final result revealed that respondents in a fit condition are more likely to turn in a persuasive report.

Aaker & Lee (2001, 2006) investigated the role of self-regulatory goals in persuasion to find out if consumers acceptance of an ad is consistent with the focus of the advertised information. For instance, the lottery ad conveys to audience that the chance of winning is higher if they buy more. For promotion-focused individuals who seek pleasure and satisfaction, this information is compatible with their self-regulatory goal, so there is regulatory fit. For prevention-focused individuals who seek avoidance of pains and failure, this information is incompatible with their self-regulatory goal, so there is no fit. If an ad conveys "buying less to lose less", promotion-focused individuals will consider it incompatible with their regulatory goal (no fit), but prevention-focused individuals will consider it compatible with their regulatory goal (fit). Thus, in the marketing of a product or a service, marketers should adopt two different strategies, one for promotion-focused consumers, and the other for prevention-focused consumers.

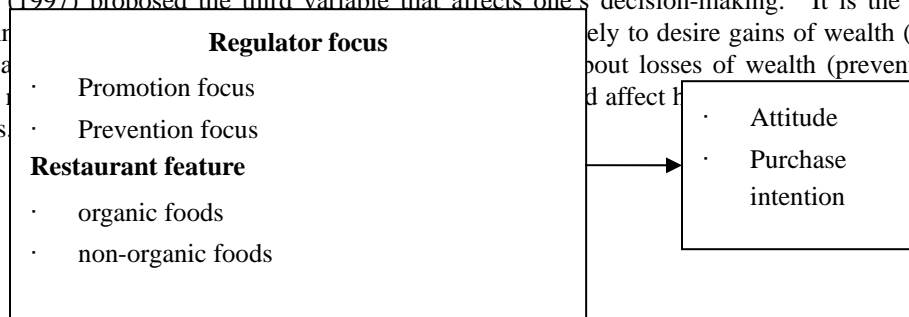
An individual's behavioral orientation which develops from his regulatory focus can be traced to his family education. Higgins (1997) investigated nurturance needs and security needs of individuals to explain that a child's behavioral orientation is affected by his interaction with nurturers. Gray (1982) proposed that "reward" and "nonpunishment" are two different incentives. A child is given rewards (such as food or toys) if he meets the nurturer's expectation and receives no more reward (no more food or toys) if he fails. There is a positive effect of the reward, which tells the child what he can do or what he cannot do in terms of "ideals". The other type of interaction is that the child can avoid being punished (castigated or physically punished) if he meets the nurturer's expectation and has to be punished (castigated or physically punished) if he fails. This type of interaction tells the child what he can do and what he cannot do on the basis of "oughts". Nurturance needs induce a child's behavior of seeking progress, growth, and achievement (promotion focus), while security needs motivate a child's behavior of seeking protection, security, and responsibility (prevention focus). The end state of promotion focus is that the child is given help, hope, and ambition (strong ideals), and that of prevention focus is that the child is given responsibility, obligation, and load (strong oughts). Pechmann et al. (2005) probed into the adolescence of teenagers. They found prevention-focused adolescents have more negative behaviors, such as being anxiety and doing bad things, and promotion-focused ones have more positive behaviors, such as having more confidence and ambition. The

adolescents' behaviors are mainly affected by their family education.

In an individual's journey of life, his behaviors may be constantly affected by his regulatory focuses. He may be affected by the desire and achievement (promotion focus) or responsibility and security (prevention focus) of himself or other roles, such as friends, spouse, colleagues, supervisors, and etc. Hence, family education and external stimuli or challenges are influential to an individual's motivation. Pame & Higgins (2005) explored the individual difference in acceptance of information. They found promotion-focused individuals pay more attention to positive information, while prevention-focused ones pay more attention to negative information. For instance, family education affects an individual's regulatory focus. One who was taught to proactively pursue pleasure is more inclined to accept positive information after he has grown up. One who was taught in the opposite way is more inclined to accept negative information. Kirmani & Zhu (2007) proposed that given an ad, promotion-focused individuals are more focused on the benefits conveyed by the ad (e.g. insecticide can eradicate mosquitoes and other insects), while prevention-focused ones are more focused on the drawbacks of the advertised commodity (e.g. insecticide causes environmental pollution).

In addition, Higgins (1997) proposed the third variable that affects one's decision-making. It is the external factor. Take money as an example. An individual may be more likely to desire gains of wealth (promotion focus). In contrast, an individual in a situation may be more likely to avoid losses of wealth (prevention focus). From an individual interaction with friends, spouse, colleagues, and supervisors, an individual's decision-making is affected.

METHODOLOGY



Research Framework

Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Hypotheses

In promotion-focused individuals, the approach motivation is stronger than the avoidance motivation. Hence, they pay more attention to gains and whether their actions can lead to the expected gains. In the research context, promotion-focused consumers have a more positive attitude and higher purchase intention toward non-organic foods, because they think they can get a better taste of the foods.

H1: Promotion-focused individuals tend to prefer non-organic foods.

H1a: Promotion-focused individuals have a more positive attitude toward non-organic foods than toward organic foods.

H1b: Prevention-focused individuals have higher intention to purchase non-organic foods than to purchase organic foods.

Influenced by a stronger avoidance motivation, prevention-focused individuals pay more attention to losses. They usually behave as expected by others to avoid disappointment and gain more rest of mind. Therefore, in our research context, they have a more positive attitude and higher purchase intention toward organic foods, because they think organic foods do not harm (can maintain) their health.

H2: Prevention-focused individuals tend to prefer organic foods.

H2a: Prevention-focused individuals have a more positive attitude toward organic foods than toward non-organic foods.

H2b: Prevention-focused individuals have higher intention to purchase organic foods than to purchase non-organic foods.

Pretest

To enhance the appropriateness of restaurant features, we conducted a pretest of catchphrases or slogans of 22 restaurants before designing the formal questionnaire. The pretest questionnaire was to test within-group difference. It was administered to 30 participants. It contained 10 slogans for organic foods and 12 slogans for non-organic foods, and all of which were mixed together. The respondents were required to evaluate the attractiveness of each item on a five-point scale. As there might be a gap of perceived attractiveness between slogans selected from the two groups, we selected slogans that were more appealing to the respondents and having a smaller gap of attractiveness. According to the pretest result, we selected “Our specially selected natural organic foods help maintain your health” as a slogan for organic foods and “The unique taste brings you happiness” as a slogan for non-organic foods. Both slogans had a perceived level of attractiveness of 3.600.

Experiment

The two-factor experiment design was adopted. The independent variables were respondent’s regulatory focuses and restaurant features. The respondent’s regulatory focuses included promotion focus and prevention focus, while the restaurant features included organic and non-organic appeals. Customer’s post-purchase attitude and purchase intention were set as the dependent variables. Therefore, this was a 2x2 between-group experiment design.

As to the manipulation of restaurant appeals, we created leaflets of off-campus restaurants. Ad of organic food restaurants stressed “no harm to health”, and ad of non-organic food restaurants stressed “great taste”. In the manipulation of regulatory focuses, we employed the method adopted by previous researchers (Freitas and Higgins, 2002; Hong and Lee, 2008). In the first section of the questionnaire, the promotion-focused group was asked to write down a recent wish and the prevention-focused group to write down a recent responsibility. Both groups were also required to write down five ways to fulfill the expected wish or responsibility in an open-ended question.

The close-ended questions could be divided into two sections. Those in the first section, as designed by Zhao and Pechmann (2007), asked respondents to evaluate their current state of emotions (happy/sad, relaxed/anxious) on a seven-point scale. When respondents tried to write down their wish, priming of their promotion focus would occur, and they would be more likely to express their true emotions. Therefore, they would tend to check an extreme value. In contrast, when respondents tried to write down their responsibility, the priming of their prevention focus would also occur, and they would be less likely to express their true emotions. Thus, they would tend to check a neutral value. Those in the second section were intended to evaluate the respondents’ attitude and purchase intention. The respondents needed to answer four items related to their attitude toward the slogans, including “very attractive”, “very interesting”, “very loveable”, and “highly expected” on a five-point scale. As to their purchase intention, they needed to answer another four items, including “when I am available”, “when I have not decided which restaurant to go”, “when my classmates propose a place to go”, and “when there is a group order in class” on a five-point scale.

RESULTS

A total of 128 students of a university in northern Taiwan participated in our experiment. The manipulation check was to examine the between-group difference (the wish group and the responsibility group) based on the distance between the value checked by respondents and 4 on the 7-point scale. Result showed that the difference between the two groups in the happy/sad item reached significance ($M_{hope}=1.292$ vs. $M_{responsibility}=0.810$, $p=0.003<0.01$), and the difference in the relaxed/anxious item also reached significance ($M_{hope}=1.369$ vs. $M_{responsibility}=0.889$, $p=0.004<0.01$). In other words, this manipulation check of regulatory focuses was successful.

SOURCE	DV	Type	SS	DF	MS	F	P-value
Regulatory	attitude		0.536	1	0.536	1.180	0.279
	intention		1.263	1	1.263	3.209	0.076

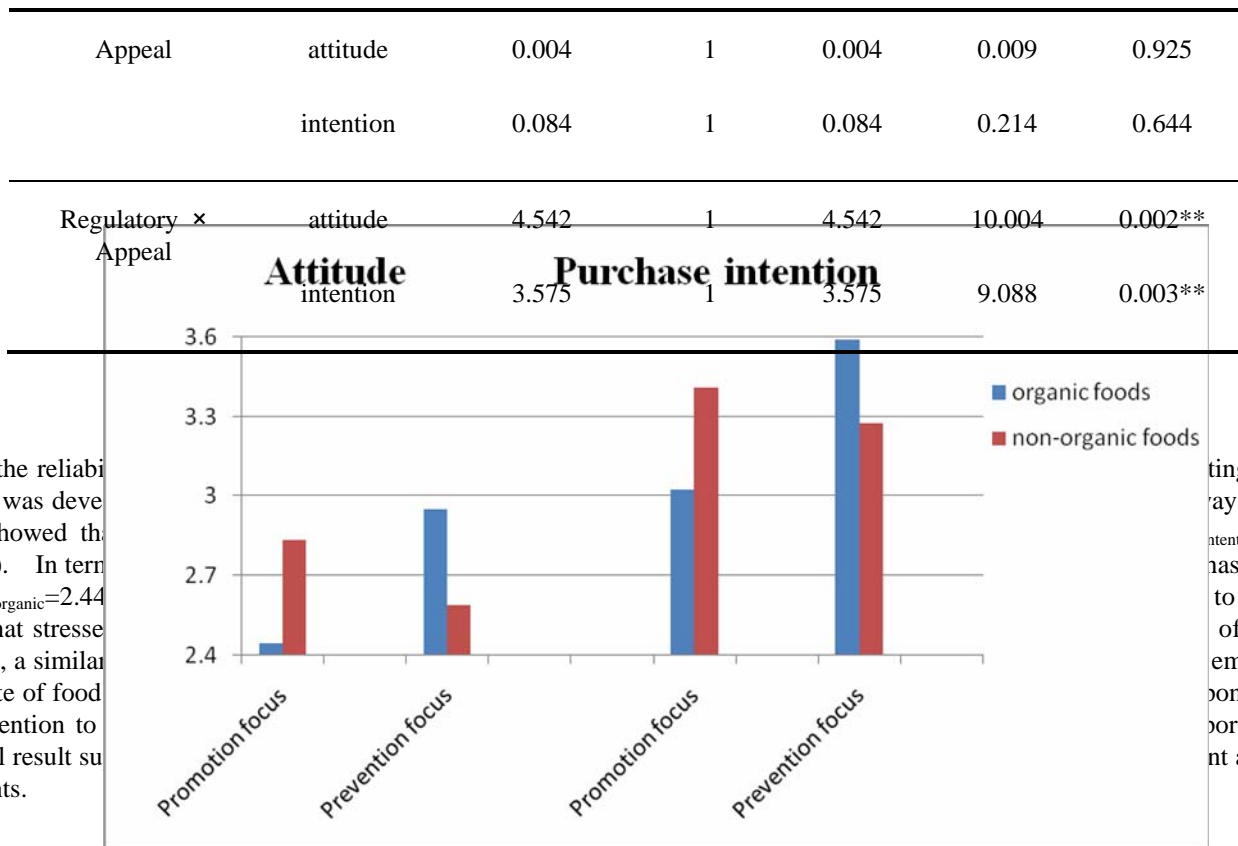


Figure 2 Table of means of attitude and purchase intention

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Through the pretest, we tried to select slogans from the two groups of slogans that were equally appealing to consumers. At last, “Our specially selected natural organic foods help maintain your health” was selected as a slogan for organic foods and “The unique taste brings you happiness” as a slogan for non-organic foods. The questionnaire for the formal experiment was specially designed according to Higgins (1997), Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000), and Lee, Aaker, and Gardner (2000) to induce respondents’ priming in a short time. Result showed that promotion-focused respondents tended to check extreme values, while prevention-focused ones tended to check neutral values. The t-test result also revealed a significant difference between respondents with different regulatory focuses in their self-evaluation of emotions. In other words, our manipulation was successful.

In the reliability analysis, we tested the consistency and stability of items within the same construct. Result showed our questionnaire had high reliability. Two-way ANOVA was adopted in this paper. The means of the two factors and the two dependent variables were tested. Result showed that promotion-focused respondents had a more positive attitude toward non-organic foods than toward organic foods, and prevention-focused ones had a more positive attitude toward organic foods than toward non-organic foods. Besides, promotion-focused respondents had more intention than prevention-focused one to purchase non-organic foods; prevention-focused respondents favored organic foods more than promotion-focused ones did. Therefore, we can conclude that consumers with different regulatory focuses have different attitude and purchase intention toward restaurants with different appeals.

Based on the research results, we suggested that restaurants design their menus according to customer needs and use organic and non-organic foods as their appeals. Our finding showed that promotion-focused consumers pay more attention to gains. Hence, if the restaurants use “great taste” as an appeal, they are more likely to attract consumers who seek great taste. In contrast,

prevention-focused consumers pay more attention to nonloss. If the restaurants use “healthy food” as their appeal, they can more easily attract consumers who expect to keep healthy.

It should be noted that there is certain difference between eastern and western thinking, so people are influenced by their traditional thinking in the choice of restaurant appeals. To be more precise, eastern people are influenced by Confucianism and are thus more concerned about stability. They are conservative, prudent, and reluctant to accept new ideas or new things. Western people are generally more ambitious and invasive. They welcome challenges and seek progress aggressively. Therefore, they can accept new ideas and new things easily. From this general analysis of people from two different cultural backgrounds, we can infer that eastern people pay more attention to losses, while western people care more about gains. In a further analysis of restaurant menus, we can also find that Chinese restaurants usually offer meals suitable for a group of people eating together. Even if all the people in a round table have ordered their favorite dishes, they still have the chance to eat the foods ordered by others. Thus, the menu items are more generally accepted. In contrast, western restaurants usually design their menus based on personal preferences. The choices of foods will be more individualized. Therefore, we suggest that restaurants design different menus according to consumer preferences.

Future Suggestions

Based on the psychological concept of priming and restaurant appeals, we designed a questionnaire to induce priming of subjects within a short time. The analysis of their responses revealed a significant difference between respondents with different regulatory focuses in their self-evaluation of emotions. This also implies that our manipulation was successful. Later, we used health and taste as restaurant appeals to find if individuals with different regulatory focuses would be affected by the appeals in the choice of a restaurant. The empirical result supported this hypothesis.

In the future, researchers can use various framing methods to investigate if messages of organic foods affect individual choice. In other words, we can test if an individual’s choice is affected by varying degrees of the stress on “maintaining health” (positive) or on “not losing health” (negative).

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