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**The Impact of Brand Role on Advertising Effectiveness: The
Moderating Role of Message's Regulatory Focus**

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**The Impact of Brand Role on Advertising Effectiveness: The
Moderating Role of Message's Regulatory Focus**

by

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Dedication

I dedicate my masters' thesis to my family and my fiancé for all of their love, endless support, and encouragement.

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Abstract

Consumer-Brand Relationship and Regulatory Focus Message on Effectiveness in Advertising: An Exploration into the brand role as a partner and a servant

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While past research has revealed diverse forms of relationships between consumers and brands similar to those of interpersonal relationships, this research focuses on the perspective of the brand role in its relationship with consumer in an advertising context. Therefore, the present research examines the interactive effect of brand role (partner vs. servant) and regulatory focus message (promotion vs. prevention) on advertising effectiveness. The results show that interaction between brand role and regulatory focus message significantly influences advertising persuasiveness and consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement, but not consumer's advertising believability, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intention. To be specific, individuals are more persuaded and show more positive attitudes toward advertising when a partner brand is advertised with a promotion-focused message. In contrast, when a servant brand is advertised with a prevention-focused message, individuals are more persuaded and show more positive attitudes toward advertising.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in advertising research have come to view consumer brand relationships through an interpersonal perspective (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Kim and McGill 2011; Puzakovak, Kwak and Rocereto 2013). Starbucks tweets us occasionally with words of comfort; Disney characters can be our friends on Facebook; Red Bull sends us text messages inviting us to the parties, and iPhone now even speaks to us as if she's our assistant. Indeed, our engagements with brands and products are getting more and more life-like.

The importance of understanding the relationship between consumers and brands has been stressed in consumer psychology and marketing literature (Fournier 1998; Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Hutton and Fosdick 2011). Researchers have aimed to understand how consumers view brands as relational partners. For example, consumers may perceive a brand as a committed partner, casual friend, a secret sweetheart, and in still many other ways (Fournier 1998). In order to understand how a good relationship is developed and maintained, researchers must understand the characteristics of such a relationship. Likewise, it is important to understand the given respective roles of the brand and consumer, especially from the stance of a brand trying to form a good relationship with the consumer.

Well-developed consumer-brand relationships benefit the brand in various ways. Marketers are eager to form and maintain strong consumer-brand relationships because it results in consumers' brand loyalty, which guarantees financial benefits (Fournier,

Breaseale and Fetscherin 2012). Loyal consumers of a brand tend to buy more often and more of its products and are more willing to pay a higher price than other consumers (Keller 1993; Fournier, Breaseale and Fetscherin 2012). Additionally, they can be more receptive to new product introductions and promotional and other marketing activities (Keller 1993).

Among the many roles that can be assigned to a brand, Aggarwal and McGill (2012) distinguished two specific roles: the role of a partner (or the co-producer of the benefit) and that of servant (or the outsourced provider of the benefit). For example, ASICS, the international sportswear company, promoted their running shoes in “My Running Partner,” while the Scrubbing Bubbles, the bathroom cleaner manufacturer, positioned themselves as a servant for consumers in the tagline, “We work hard so you don’t have to.” Partner and servant brand roles are closely related to goal orientation and product category as well. When people partner with others or hire servants, they typically have certain goals they want to achieve. The goals shared between partners might be more related to a kind of ideal achievement; master-servant relationships might share a goal more associated with a certain task. In this manner, consumers share with ASICS the goal of winning a race or improving their performance. With Scrubbing Bubbles, they share the goal of reducing hard work. In most cases when they consume brands, consumers have certain goals. Also, partner and servant relationships are more closely related to consumers’ goal orientation than any other relationship form. Therefore, the partner and servant roles may be the most realistic of relationship forms.

Meanwhile, researchers have revealed that the efficacy of advertising may be influenced by their message framing (Lee and Aaker 2004; Kim 2006; Sung and Choi 2011). Based on the assumption of the human tendency of approaching pleasure and avoiding pain, Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins 1997) distinguishes two modes of goal orientation—“promotion-focused goals” and “prevention-focused goals.” The former are more related to the achievement of positive outcomes, while the latter are more related to the avoidance of negative outcomes. Further, it is known that individuals feel more comfortable about themselves when their goal pursuit strategies are compatible with their goal orientation (Higgins 2000, 2005).

The purpose of the current research is to examine the interaction effect between brand role (partner vs. servant) and message framing (promotion vs. prevention) on overall advertising effectiveness. Based on previous research, the current study proposes that the partner brand role is compatible with promotion goals, and the servant brand role is compatible with prevention goals. Also the efficacy of advertising and marketing communication is affected by the fit between the regulatory focus of a brand’s message and that of the consumer (Lee and Aaker 2004). Therefore, we expect that the interaction between brand role and regulatory focus message will eventually impact advertising effectiveness. Findings from this study should contribute not only to consumer-brand relationship theory by validating the concept of brand role but also to regulatory focus theory by identifying a new moderator. Further, this study offers several managerial implications for practitioners such as how their brands should frame their advertising message depending on their relationship with consumers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP

Consumer brand relationship refers to the idea that consumers can form with a brand a relationship, such as that of a close friend or business partner, in much the same way they do with one another in a social context (Fournier 1998; Aaker 1997; Aggarwal, 2004). Therefore, to be able to perceive brands as a relational partner for consumers, it is reasonable to assume that consumers are capable of thinking of inanimate objects as animated humanized objects—a way of thinking known as anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism is the act of assigning uniquely human features such as goals, beliefs, and emotions to nonhuman objects (Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo 2007). Researchers have held that people anthropomorphize a variety of things, ranging from geometric shapes (Heider and Simmel 1944) to moving plants and computer-animated blobs (Morewedge, Preston and Wegner 2007). Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo (2007) predicted that people are more likely to see the human in a non-human entity when anthropocentric knowledge is available, when there is motivation to be effective social agents, and when there is too little social connection with other people. Guthrie (1995) suggested three principles for human's tendency to anthropomorphize nonhuman creatures. First of all, people are comforted by the relationship or companionship created by anthropomorphizing. Second, anthropomorphizing helps people to better understand the things that they know less about. Lastly he explained that anthropomorphizing reinforces our belief that the world is human-like. Guthrie (1995) identified three forms of anthropomorphism: the partial, the literal, and the accidental. Partial anthropomorphizing represents seeing objects or events

as having some critical human characteristics but not seeing the object as a complete human. Falling into this category might be brand anthropomorphism.

Companies have marketed their brands to be perceived as having humanlike features (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Yoon et al. 2006). Notable examples include the Green Giant, Tony the Tiger, Geico Gecko. The marketing literature, having shown that consumers actually anthropomorphize brands and products (Fournier 1998; Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Tremoulet and Feldman 2000; Delbaere, McQuarrie, and Phillips 2011), defines anthropomorphized brands as “brands perceived by consumers as being human-like with various emotional states, mind, soul, and conscious behaviors that can act as prominent members of social ties” (Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto 2009).

The theory of anthropomorphism provides a solid foundation for two main streams of brand research. The first concerns brand personality and the second consumer-brand relationships. The concept of brand personality refers to the human personality traits associated with a certain brand (Belk 1988; Malhotra 1988; Kleine, Kleine and Keman 1993; Aaker 1997). Aaker (1997), among other researchers, developed a theoretical framework of the brand personality by identifying the distinct big-five dimensions of brand personality: (1) sincerity, (2) excitement, (3) competence, (4) sophistication, and (5) ruggedness. These brand personality dimensions have been examined by many researchers and validated in marketing literature (Caprara, Barbaranelli and Guido 2001; Sung and Tinkham, 2005; Freling, Crosno and Henard 2011).

A great advance in the area of consumer brand relationship was made by Susan Fournier (1994, 1998). Her research applied interpersonal relationship norms to consumer-brand relationships. Her qualitative research conceptualized a brand as a vital member of the relationship dyad like a typical relationship between two people. Based on consumers' descriptions of brand relationships, Fournier (1998) identified seven prominent dimensions of consumer-brand relationships: (1) voluntary vs. imposed, (2) positive vs. negative, (3) intense vs. superficial, (4) enduring vs. short-term, (5) public vs. private, (6) formal vs. informal, and (7) symmetric vs. asymmetric. She also suggested the following typology of metaphors to represent common consumer-brand relationships: (1) arranged marriages, (2) casual friends, (3) marriages of convenience, (4) committed partnerships, (5) best friendships, (6) compartmentalized friendships, (7) kinships, (8) rebounds, (9) childhood friendships, (10) courtships, (11) dependencies, (12) flings, (13) enmities, (14) secret affairs, (15) enslavements. For example, the participants in her research characterized their relationship with Ivory soap as that of best friends and with Gatorade as that of a committed partnership. Fournier's work showed that consumers form relationships with brands similar to those they have with people. Subsequent qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted to broaden the understanding of consumer-brand relationships, such as their different types, cross-cultural comparison of consumer-brand relationships, facilitators of consumer-brand relationships, disappearance of consumer-brand relationships, the consequence of strong brand relationships, and identity perspective of consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal 2004; Chang and Chieng

2006; Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Aaker et al. 2004; Wegner, Sawicki and Petty 2009; Lin and Sung 2014).

Among many other possible forms of relationships, Aggarwal (2004) focused on two specific types: exchange and communal relationships. He adopted these two relationship distinctions from Clark and Mills (1993), who formulated them in social psychology literature. According to them, an exchange relationship is based on economic factors, so a person in this relationship benefits the partner and expects a prompt reward in return. On the other hand, communal relationship is based more on social factors, so a person in this relationship benefits a partner without expecting any immediate reward. Aggarwal (2004) tested whether consumers' evaluations about a brand and its marketing action can be differentiated depending on the type of relationship the consumer forms with the brand. The results showed that when they were consistent with relationship norms the brand and its marketing actions were evaluated more positively. This study reinforced the notion that consumers utilize their norms of interpersonal relationships to evaluate brands.

PARTNER AND SERVANT BRAND ROLE

Recently, in their brand anthropomorphism research, Aggarwal and McGill (2012) suggested that consumers might think of brands as relational partners and assign particular roles to brands. They distinguished brands with two specific roles—that of a partner (or the co-producer of the benefit) and that of a servant (or the outsourced provider of the benefit). More specifically, the partner role is characterized as being like a

colleague or a friend working with the consumer and coproducing the benefit (Aggarwal and Macgill 2012). The servant role is more like an assistant or an outsourcer working for the consumer, carrying out delegated work. Aggarwal and McGill (2012) tested whether, when the brands are anthropomorphized, people assimilate or contrast their behavior to these brand roles—partner versus servant. The results showed that people, when they liked the anthropomorphized partner brand, tended to assimilate their behavior to the partner brand’s image. Assimilative behavior here represents the favor that draws the liked coproducer. On the other hand, when people disliked the anthropomorphized servant brand, they tended to assimilate their behavior to the servant brand’s image. Assimilative behavior here represents self-sufficiency, which pushes away the disliked helper. On the contrary, people tended to contrast their behavior with the disliked partner and the liked servant brands. Aggarwal and McGill (2012) explained that these responses result from different ways of achieving a successful interaction with each brand role.

The concept of “partner vs. servant” brand role might be seen as being similar to the aforementioned concept of “communal vs. exchange” relationship norms (Clark and Mills 1993). Indeed, both partner and communal relationships are more closely related to close and social interactions; servant and exchange relationships are more closely related to distant and work-oriented interactions. The concept of “communal vs. exchange” relationship norms distinguishes relationships based on whether the norms of giving benefits to the partner are based mainly on economic factors or social factors. However, the concept of the “partner vs. servant” brand role underscores the point of whether the brand works *with* a consumer as a coproducer of the benefit or whether it works *for* a

consumer as an outsourcing agent to provide a benefit. Therefore, the concept of “partner versus servant” is related to more complicated factors than those of economic versus social. Such factors may take shape as power symmetry, intensity, or formality. To further illuminate the concept of “partner vs. servant” brand role, we might scrutinize further the interpersonal relationship discipline.

Wish, Deutsh, and Kaplan (1976) identified four underlying dimensions of traditional interpersonal dyads: cooperative and friendly versus competitive and hostile, equal versus unequal, intense versus superficial, and socioemotional and informal versus task-oriented and formal. First, equal versus unequal represents the amount of power shared by two persons. Second, friendly versus hostile refers to the emotional value, ranging from positive to negative. Third, intense versus superficial indicates how deep the relationship is, such as its frequency and psychological distance. Lastly, informal versus formal can be determined based on whether the relationship is more social-based or work-based. Based on these four dimension, Wish, Deutsh, and Kaplan (1976) revealed the partner relationship as being more equal, friendly, informal, and intense, and the servant relationship as being unequal, competitive, superficial, and task-oriented.

Applying the four dimensions of interpersonal relationships above, Iacobucci and Ostrom (1996) examined how different levels of commercial dyads can be characterized by different dimensions. In doing so, they first categorized commercial dyads as individual-individual relationships (doctor-patient, consumer-flight attendant), individual-firm (consumer and small company, consumer and large Fortune 500 company), and firm-firm (business firm and consultancy agency, engineering and

marketing departments). The results showed that compared to individual-level dyads, individual-to-firm relationships are more likely to be short-term and less intense. Iacobucci and Ostrom (1996) stressed that these results supported marketing communication efforts to personify the organizations and, so as to get closer to consumers, justified the transforming of the individual-to-firm dyad to the individual-to-individual dyad.

Considering all the perspectives discussed so far, a partner-brand role may be characterized as a coproducer and friend, working with a consumer and be defined by the concepts of power symmetry, positive valence, high intensity, and informality. A servant brand role may be characterized as an assistant and an outsourcing agent who works for the consumer and be defined by the concepts of power asymmetry, positive valence, low intensity, and formality.

REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997) conceptualizes two distinct modes of goal orientation—“promotion-focused” and “prevention-focused”—under the fundamental assumption that people generally tend to approach pleasure and avoid pain. People with a promotion goal emphasize the presence of positive outcomes such as achievement, hope, and aspiration. In contrast, those with a prevention goal emphasize the avoidance of negative outcomes such as failure, threat, and obligation (Higgins 1997; Lee and Aaker 2004). In accordance with goal orientation, individuals utilize distinct goal-pursuit strategies to attain desired end states. Promotion-driven individuals are more likely to

apply eager strategies to approach positive outcomes; prevention-driven individuals tend to apply vigilant strategies to avoid negative outcomes (Higgins 2002; Liberman et al. 2001). It is true that any particular goal can be pursued with either an eager strategy or a vigilant strategy. Some goals, however, might be more naturally associated with a specific self-regulatory strategy (Higgins 2002).

Avnet and Higgins (2006) thus conceptualized the regulatory fit, which represents the state of “feeling right” when individuals’ goal pursuit strategies are consistent with their goal orientation (Higgins 2000, 2005). Regulatory fit substantially influences individuals’ processing fluency and persuasion (Lee and Aaker 2004). Along with the development of regulatory focus theory, it has been proposed that the efficacy of advertising and marketing communications may also be affected by their message’s either promotion-focused or prevention-focused benefits (Cesario, Grant and Higgins 2004; Higgins et al. 2003; Keller 2006; Kim 2006; Labroo and Lee 2006; Lee and Aaker 2004; Sung and Choi 2011; Kim and Sung 2013). The study from Aaker and Lee (2001) discovered that advertising was more effective in both persuasion and memory when there was a high level of regulatory fit between advertising message framing and consumer’s regulatory focus. Florack and Scarabis (2006) examined whether this regulatory fit between an advertising claim and consumer further expanded its impact on product preference. It has been proven that consumers are more likely to prefer products introduced in an advertisement when its claim is consistent with consumers regulatory focus orientation.

Although individuals might have a prevailing regulatory focus tendency, a specific regulatory focus can be temporally manifested more depending on the context and situation (e.g., Higgins et al. 2003; Higgins et al. 1994; Pham and Avnet 2004). Therefore, considerable advertising research has examined the interaction between an ad message's regulatory focus and other factors in advertising. Micu and Chowdhury (2010) investigated how product types moderate the impact of an ad message's regulatory focus on advertising effectiveness. The authors found that, for hedonic products, promotion-focus ad messages are more likely than prevention-focus messages are to generate positive feelings, greater recall, and more persuasiveness. For utilitarian products, in contrast, prevention-focus ad messages are more likely to generate the ad efficacy described above. Sung and Choi (2011) examined the role of individual's self-construal in persuasiveness of advertising depending on an individual's regulatory focus. The study proved that for individuals with independent self-construal, a promotion-focused advertising message was more effective in persuasion than was a prevention-focused one. On the other hand, the prevention-focused ad message was more effective for individuals with interdependent self-construal. Most recently, Kim and Sung (2014) investigated the interaction between brand personality and advertising message's regulatory focus. They found that for the exciting or sophisticated brand, a promotion-focused ad message was more persuasive, while for a competent or sincere brand a prevention-focused ad message was, in general, more persuasive.

CHAPTER3: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Numerous studies on regulatory focus theory have revealed that regulatory goals of individuals change depending on specific contexts (e.g., Higgins et al. 2003; Higgins et al. 1994; Pham and Avnet 2004). Accordingly, goal-pursuit strategies differ in terms of what is perceived as appropriate for reaching these goals. Regulatory focus theory has also been examined by researchers to assess advertising effectiveness (Cesario et al. 2004; Higgins et al. 2003; Keller 2006; Kim 2006; Labroo and Lee 2006; Lee and Aaker 2004; Sung and Choi 2011). However, there has been no research examining the relationship between brand role (partner vs. servant) and regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention).

This study then has two main interests: the compatibility between partner brand role and promotion-focused goal orientation and the compatibility between servant brand role and prevention-focused goal orientation. The central premise of this investigation is that a consumer's mindset (desire and need) toward a brand is determined by the brand's perceived role in a relationship. This is analogous to people tending to pursue different interpersonal goals within different types of relationships (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003). The various levels of a consumer's mindset will interact with his or her goal orientation in interacting with the brand. It is true that a partner relationship comes into existence based on a certain goal. Let us take some examples of typical partnerships in life. Business partners share the goal of making a profit; sport partners share the goal of winning a game or being healthy; romantic partners share the goal of building together a happy life and future. The interesting thing here is the fact that the goals shared between

partners are all related to a kind of ideal achievement. The construal of an accomplishment goal involves a promotion focus (Shah and Higgins 1997). Master-servant relationships also share a goal between two individuals. The goal, however, is more associated with a certain task. This security goal, which is doing what is necessary, involves a prevention focus (Shah and Higgins 1997). For instance, a mother and a babysitter share the goal of keeping the baby safe; a passenger and a taxi driver share the goal of getting to a destination; a car owner and a mechanic share the goal of repairing the owner's car.

Based on brand anthropomorphism, people might have mindsets toward a brand similar to those they have toward their interpersonal relationships. When a consumer considers a brand as a partner, the consumer might focus more on an ideal achievement by cooperating with the brand and consequently react more favorably to promotion stimulation than to prevention stimulation. On the other hand, when a consumer considers a brand as a servant, she might focus more on completing a mission given to the brand, give all the responsibility to the brand, avoid the responsibility herself, and consequently react more favorably to prevention stimulation.

Hedonic values are more compatible with promotion-focused goal orientation; utilitarian values are more compatible with prevention-focused goal orientation (Chernev 2004). It can be postulated that a partner relationship emphasizes hedonic values more than it does utilitarian values. Indeed, compared to servant relationship, a partner relationship is characterized as more affective, informal, social, and intense. On the other hand, a servant relationship might emphasize utilitarian values more than hedonic values

because a servant relationship is characterized as more task-oriented, formal, transactional, and superficial compared to a partner relationship (Wish, Deutsh, and Kaplan 1976; Iacobucci and Ostrom 1996). This utilitarian-hedonic perspective also supports the compatibility between partner role and promotion focus, and between servant role and prevention focus. On the basis of these associations between regulatory focus and the several factors mentioned above, it is hypothesized that the interaction between brand role and regulatory focus message in an advertisement influences the overall effectiveness of the advertising.

In sum, a promotion-focused message will be more beneficial for the partner-brand role than will a prevention-focused message. In contrast, for the servant-brand role, a prevention-focused message will be more effective than will a promotion-focused message. To assess the overall effectiveness of the advertising, this study makes use of five perspectives on advertising effectiveness—advertising persuasiveness, attitude toward the advertisement, advertising believability, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H1a: Consumers will show higher advertising persuasiveness toward an advertisement when a partner brand is advertised using a promotion-focused message (vs. a prevention-focused message).

H1b: Consumers will show a more positive attitude toward an advertisement when a partner brand is advertised using a promotion-focused message (vs. a prevention -focused message).

H1c: Consumers will show higher advertising believability toward an advertisement when a partner brand is advertised using a promotion-focused message (vs. a prevention -focused message).

H1d: Consumers will show a more positive attitude toward a partner brand when the brand is advertised using a promotion-focused message (vs. a prevention -focused message).

H1e: Consumers will show a stronger purchase intention when a partner brand is advertised using a promotion-focused message (vs. a prevention -focused message).

H2a: Consumers will show higher advertising persuasiveness toward an advertisement when a servant brand is advertised using a prevention-focused message (vs. a promotion -focused message).

H2b: Consumers will show a more positive attitude toward an advertisement when a servant brand is advertised using a prevention-focused message (vs. a promotion -focused message).

H2c: Consumers will show higher advertising believability toward an advertisement when a servant brand is advertised using a prevention-focused message (vs. a promotion -focused message).

H2d: Consumers will show a more positive attitude toward a servant brand when the brand is advertised using a prevention-focused message (vs. a promotion -focused message).

H2e: Consumers will show more positive purchase intention when a servant brand is advertised using a prevention-focused message (vs. a promotion -focused message).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The main objective of this study is to investigate how consumer response to an advertisement is influenced by brand role and the regulatory focus message contained in the advertisement. To test the proposed hypothesis, a 2 (brand role: partner vs. servant) × 2 (regulatory focus: promotion- vs. prevention-framed messages) between-subject design was employed. Both variables were manipulated in an experimental setting. The study design is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Study design*

		Brand Role	
		Partner	Servant
Regulatory Focus Ad Message	Promotion		
	Prevention		

STIMULUS DEVELOPMENT

Pilot study: Brand role and product category

To better understand the concept of partner and servant role, Aggarwal and McGill (2012) examined if there were certain interpersonal relationships that were more closely related to a partner relationship and others more closely related to a servant relationship. Through a pilot test, Aggarwal and McGill (2012) found that a partner relationship was more likely to be seen with the following professionals: a doctor, a

nutritionist, a tennis coach, a professor, priest, a lawyer, a tutor, a personal trainer, and a physiotherapist. More likely to be seen as servants were a taxi driver, a mechanic, a janitor, an airline hostess, and an electrician. If the relational role is applied to a brand, it may be postulated that, similarly, certain types of product category might be more related to a specific brand role. To test this postulation, a pilot study was conducted among 31 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin. The study examined whether, in fact, there are certain product categories that are more likely to be seen as a partner relationship and others more likely to be seen as a servant relationship. First, participants were given a description of a partner and a servant (Aggarwar 2012) and asked to indicate their perspectives on each of 22 product categories using a 7-point semantic differential scale (1 = absolutely partner; 7 absolutely servant). Results showed that product categories such as clothing ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.69$), cell phone ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.92$), computer ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.96$), and car ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.88$) were seen more as partners. Product categories such as cleaner and detergent ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.25$), home appliances ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.55$), headphones ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.52$), medicine ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.79$) were seen more as servants.

To portray the partner brand role, based on the results from the pilot study, the main study utilized the clothing product category. For the servant brand role, it employed the cleaner product category. While it is true that some of the product categories are naturally associated with a partner role and others with a servant role, this study was mainly interested in examining solely the brand. Consequently, even though different product categories were employed for each brand role to maximize the effect of brand

role perspective, involvement with product and involvement with product category was controlled as covariates in the main study.

Fictitious brand and advertisement

To represent the two brand roles (i.e., partner and servant), this study came up with two fictitious brands. To maximize the effect of brand role, two product categories were employed for the manipulation of brand role condition. The pilot test indicated that the apparel category was more naturally associated with the partner role, whereas the cleaning product category was more related to the servant role. Hence, for the manipulation of the partner brand role, the study employed the apparel category and for the servant brand role it employed the cleaning product category. Additionally, the intended brand role was endowed to the brand by advertising copy. In the partner brand condition, the ad copy read, “Your fashion partner, PAL, works with you.” In the servant brand role condition, the ad copy reads: “YESSIR, let your cleaning agent work for you.” (Both appear in the appendix.) Regarding the ads’ visual components, that of the partner brand role showed the bodies—from the neck down—of two models (male and female) wearing fashionable clothes, whereas that of the servant brand role showed a woman standing in a bathroom that she has apparently just cleaned.

At the same time, regulatory focus was also manipulated along with the brand role via advertising messages. Following the ad copy representing each brand role, participants saw two versions (promotion focus and prevention focus) of the advertising message. For the partner brand, participants saw, “To elevate your style” and for the

servant brand, “To make your toilet sparkle.” In the prevention version, participants saw, “No more colorless style” and “To remove all those tough stains.” Aside from the ad copy representing two messages (promotion and prevention), the other factors in the advertisement were identical within each version of regulatory focus. Thus, four versions of the advertisement were created. A simple pretest accomplished the manipulation check of the brand role and regulatory focus of messages. Recruited for the pretest were a total of 50 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin.

Participants were asked whether the brands in the advertisement were like a partner or a servant using the manipulation check scale from Aggarwal and McGill (2012).

Participants were also asked whether the advertising messages were oriented as promotion or prevention using the scale from Poels and Dewitte (2008). The results of the pretest indicated that both manipulations of brand role and regulatory focus message framing were successful.

SAMPLE

A total of 193 U.S. participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Subjects were composed of 61% (n = 117) males and 39% (n = 76) females. Subjects’ average age was 33 ranging from 19 to 73. Approximately 81% (n = 156) of subjects were White/Caucasian, 6.2% (n = 12) were Asian, 7.3% (n = 14) were African American, 4.7% (n = 9) were Hispanic, 0.5% (n = 1) were Native American, and 0.5% (n = 1) were Pacific Islander.

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted in an online setting. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. They were first informed that the objective of the study was to contribute to a better understanding of the consumer brand relationship and advertising. Next, subjects were asked to indicate their general opinion about advertising and their general involvement with a certain product and were then exposed to the advertisement. To ensure participants had enough time to navigate the advertisement, the screen did not advance for 15 seconds. After that, subjects answered a series of questions about the advertisement and brand. The approximate time to complete the study was 15~20 minutes. The entire data collection period was approximately two weeks from March 25 to April 8, 2014.

MEASURES

Independent variables

Two independent variables, brand role and regulatory focus message, were manipulated through exposure to the advertisement. Then, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the brand in the advertisement was perceived as a partner and a servant. Initially, the perception of the brand as a partner role was measured on a 7-point Likert scale using five statements—“The brand is like a partner;” “The brand works with the consumer;” “The brand is like a colleague;” “The brand is like a friend;” “The brand

coproduces the benefit” (Aggarwal 2012; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$). Subsequently, the perception of the brand as a servant role was measured on a 7-point Likert scale using five statements—“The brand is like a servant;” “The brand works for the consumer;” “The brand is like an assistant;” “The brand is like an outsource;” “The brand works on delegated matters” (Aggarwal 2012; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$). Regulatory focus message were measured with three statements on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Poels and Dewitte 2008; 1 = avoiding something negative, more ideas about prevention, more ideas about protection; 7 = attaining something positive, more ideas about promotion, more ideas about enhancement; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$)

Dependent variables

Five dependent variables were measured to assess the effectiveness of the advertisement: advertising persuasiveness (Kempf and Smith 1998; 2 items; 7-point semantic differential scale: 1 = unpersuasive, weak; 7 = persuasive, strong; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$), attitude towards advertisement (Aaker 2000b; 3 items; 7-point semantic differential scale: 1 = bad, unfavorable, unlikable; 7 = good, favorable, likeable; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$), advertising believability (Beltramini 1982; 10 items; 7-point semantic differential scale: 1 = unbelievable, untrustworthy, not convincing, not credible, unreasonable, dishonest, questionable, inconclusive, not authentic, unlikely; 7 = believable, trustworthy, convincing, credible, reasonable, honest, unquestionable, conclusive, authentic, likely; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$), attitude towards the brand (Lee and Aaker 2004; 3 items; 7-point semantic differential scale: 1 = bad, unfavorable, negative;

7 = good, favorable, positive; Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$), purchase intention (Baker and Churchill 1977; 4 items; 7-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; "Would you like to try this product?" "Would you buy this product?" "Would you actively seek out this product?" "I would patronize this product"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

Covariates

Before exposing students to the ad, the study measured as covariates attitude toward advertising in general, involvement with product, and involvement with product category. These factors, after all, could influence the interaction between the two independent variables. Attitude toward advertising in general was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (Mehta 2000; Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) using six statements—"Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have;" "Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim (r);" "Advertising is more manipulative than it is informative (r);" "Much advertising is way too annoying (r);" "I like to look at advertising;" "On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised." Involvement with product was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (Chandrasekaran 2004; Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$) using three statements—"I am particularly interested in the advertised product," "Given my personal interests, this product is not very relevant to me (r)", "Overall, I am quite involved when I am purchasing ___ for personal use." Involvement with product category was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (Coulter, Price and Feick 2003; Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) using nine statements—"___ are part of my self-image;" "are boring to me;" "___portray an image

of me to others;” “ ___ are fun to me;” “ ___ are fascinating to me;” “ ___ are important to me;” “ ___ are exciting to me;” “ ___ tell others about me;” “ ___ tell me about other people.”

Additional Measure

At the end, the study also collected demographic information, such as gender, age, ethnicity and house income.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

MANIPULATION CHECK

In order to check the efficacy of the manipulation of the two independent variables (brand role and regulatory focus), paired sample *t*-tests were conducted for the brand role variable and independent sample *t*-tests were conducted for the regulatory focus variable. Subjects were asked to answer a series of manipulation check questions and the results showed that the two independent variables were successfully manipulated in the study.

First, the manipulation checks for the brand role in advertisement were conducted. On a series of 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree), subjects were asked to indicate whether the brand in the advertisement related to a partner role or a servant role. As expected, subjects assigned to the partner brand role condition indicated that the brand in advertisement is more like a partner ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.25$) than a servant ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.15, t(98) = 3.03, p < .05$). Subjects assigned to the servant brand role condition indicated that the brand in advertisement was more like a servant ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.26$) than a partner ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.22, t(93) = -6.07, p < .05$).

Second, the study conducted manipulation checks for the regulatory focus of the message embodied in advertisement (Lee and Aaker 2004). On a series of Semantic differential scales rating from 1 (prevention) to 7 (promotion), subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which the message embodied in the advertisement related to promotion or prevention. As expected, subjects assigned to the promotion message

condition indicated the message in advertisement was more promotion oriented ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.03$), and subjects assigned to the prevention message condition indicated the message in advertisement was relatively more prevention oriented ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.41$, $t(191) = 3.29$, $p < .05$). The two independent variables were thus successfully manipulated in the study.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Because the dependent variables of advertising persuasiveness, attitude toward advertisement, advertising believability, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention were significantly correlated (all p values $< .05$), a MANCOVA, with univariate follow-ups and contrasts, where appropriate, was performed to test the hypotheses. Since the general attitude toward advertising, product involvement, and product category involvement may affect subject's responses to the advertisements, those three variables were used as covariates in the analysis. Consequently, the hypotheses were tested by means of a 2 (partner vs. servant brand role) x 2 (promotion vs. prevention ad message) MANCOVA. Wilks' lambda results indicated significant main effects for attitude toward advertising in general ($F = 7.25$, $p < .001$) and for product involvement ($F = 2.58$, $p < .05$) and brand role ($F = 2.92$, $p < .05$); not significant were the main effects for product category involvement ($F = 1.94$, $p = .09$) and regulatory focus ($F = .575$, $p = .72$; see Table 5.1). Further, the brand role by regulatory focus interaction was not significant ($F = 1.345$, $p = .25$). Subsequently, a series of univariate ANCOVAs was conducted (see Table 5.2).

Advertising persuasiveness

The result showed that brand role x regulatory focus interaction was significant ($F(1, 186) = 4.40, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). Neither the main effect of brand role ($F(1, 186) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta^2 = .01$) nor regulatory focus was significant ($F(1, 186) = 1.05, p = .31, \eta^2 = .01$). Results also indicated that attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category significantly influenced the interaction ($F_{\text{attitude toward advertising in general}}(1, 186) = 21.75, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11, F_{\text{involvement with product category}}(1, 186) = 4.32, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). However, involvement with the product did not significantly influence the interaction ($F_{\text{involvement with product}}(1, 186) = 1.06, p = .30, \eta^2 = .01$). To investigate the interaction effect more directly, the study operated planned one-tailed contrasts. For subjects who were in the partner brand role condition, the promotion-focused ad message significantly resulted in more favorable advertising persuasiveness than prevention focused message ($M = 5.0, SD = 1.49$ vs. $M = 4.27, SD = 1.74, F(1, 189) = 5.44, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). In contrast, for subjects in the servant brand role condition, although the prevention-focused ad message induced a higher mean value for advertising persuasiveness than did the promotion-focused message, they were not significantly different ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.41$ vs. $M = 4.35, SD = 1.60, F(1, 189) = 1.10, p = .29, \eta^2 = .01$). These results supported H1a, but not H2a (See Figure 5.1).

Attitude toward Advertisement

The result showed that brand role x regulatory focus interaction was also significant ($F(1, 186) = 6.17, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). Neither the main effect of brand role (F

(1, 186) = .10, $p = .75$, $\eta^2 = .00$) nor regulatory focus was significant ($F(1, 186) = 1.53$, $p = .22$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Results also indicated that attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category significantly influenced the interaction ($F_{\text{attitude toward advertising in general}}(1, 186) = 22.97$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$, $F_{\text{involvement with product category}}(1, 186) = 6.27$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). However, involvement with product did not significantly influence the interaction ($F_{\text{involvement with product}}(1, 186) = .04$, $p = .85$, $\eta^2 = .00$). To investigate the interaction effect more directly, the study operated planned one-tailed contrasts. For subjects who were in the partner brand role condition, the promotion-focused ad message significantly resulted in a more favorable attitude toward advertising than did the prevention-focused message ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.38$ vs. $M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.56$, $F(1, 189) = 6.92$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). For subjects in the servant brand role condition, although the prevention-focused ad message induced a higher mean value for advertising persuasiveness than did the promotion-focused message, they were not significantly different ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.45$ vs. $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.71$, $F(1, 189) = 1.36$, $p = .25$, $\eta^2 = .01$). These results supported H1b but not H2b (see Figure 5.2).

Advertising believability

The result showed that the brand role x regulatory focus interaction was not significant ($F(1, 186) = 3.50$, $p = .063$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Neither the main effect of brand role ($F(1, 186) = .03$, $p = .87$, $\eta^2 = .00$) nor the regulatory focus was significant ($F(1, 186) = 1.25$, $p = .27$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Results also indicated that the interaction was significantly influenced by attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product

category ($F_{\text{attitude toward advertising in general}} (1, 186) = 32.10, p < .05, \eta^2 = .15, F_{\text{involvement with product category}} (1, 186) = 6.86, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$). However, involvement with product did not significantly influence the interaction ($F_{\text{involvement with product}} (1, 186) = .52, p = .47, \eta^2 = .04$). These results failed to support H1c and H2c.

Attitude toward Brand

The result showed that the brand role x regulatory focus interaction was not significant ($F (1, 186) = 2.75, p = .10, \eta^2 = .02$). Neither the main effect of brand role ($F (1, 186) = .01, p = .91, \eta^2 = .00$) nor the regulatory focus was significant ($F (1, 186) = .94, p = .33, \eta^2 = .01$). Results also indicated that the interaction was significantly influenced by attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category ($F_{\text{attitude toward advertising in general}} (1, 186) = 19.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09, F_{\text{involvement with product category}} (1, 186) = 5.74, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). However, involvement with product did not significantly influence the interaction ($F_{\text{involvement with product}} (1, 186) = .02, p = .90, \eta^2 = .00$). These results failed to support H1d and H2d.

Purchase intention

The result showed that the brand role x regulatory focus interaction was not significant ($F (1, 186) = 1.23, p = .27, \eta^2 = .01$). Brand role had a significant main effect ($F (1, 186) = 6.35, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$), but regulatory focus did not ($F (1, 186) = .02, p = .90, \eta^2 = .00$). Results also indicated that attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category significantly influenced the interaction ($F_{\text{attitude toward$

advertising in general ($F_{(1, 186)} = 21.35, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$), involvement with product category ($F_{(1, 186)} = 7.98, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$). However, the interaction was not significantly influenced by involvement with product ($F_{(1, 186)} = 2.36, p = .13, \eta^2 = .01$). These results failed to support H1e and H2e.

Table 5.1 *Multivariate Analysis of Variance Results*

Source	MANOVA		
	Wilks' λ	η^2	F Value
<i>Covariate</i>			
Attitude toward			
Advertising in general	.83	.17	7.25 ^a
Involvement with product	.93	.07	2.58 ^a
Involvement with product category	.95	.05	1.94
<i>Main Effects</i>			
Brand Role	.93	.07	2.92 ^a
Regulatory focus message	.98	.02	.58
<i>Interactions</i>			
Brand role			
×			
Regulatory focus message	.96	.04	1.35

^a $p < .05$

Table 5.2 *Univariate Analysis of Variance Results*

Univariate F Values						
Source	D.F	Advertising Persuasiveness	Attitude toward Advertisement	Advertising Believability	Attitude toward Brand	Purchase Intention
<i>Covariate</i>						
Attitude toward						
Advertising in general	1	21.75 ^a (.11)	22.97 ^a (.11)	32.10 ^a (.15)	19.00 ^a (.09)	21.35 ^a (.10)
Involvement with product	1	1.06 (.06)	.04 (.00)	.52 (.03)	.02 (.00)	2.36 (.01)
Involvement with product category	1	4.32 ^a (.02)	6.27 ^a (.03)	6.86 ^a (.04)	5.74 ^a (.03)	8.00 ^a (.04)
<i>Main Effects</i>						
Brand Role	1	1.31 (.01)	.10 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.01 (.00)	6.35 ^a (.03)
Regulatory focus message	1	1.05 (.01)	1.53 (.01)	1.25 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.02 (.00)
<i>Interactions</i>						
Brand role ×						
Regulatory focus message	1	4.40 ^a (.02)	6.17 ^a (.03)	3.50 (.02)	2.75 (.02)	1.23 (.01)
Residual	186					

^ap < .05

Univariate effect sizes (η^2) are in parentheses.

Table 5.3 *Cell Means and Sample Sizes*

Dependent Variables	Partner Brand Role		Servant Brand Role	
	Promotion Message	Prevention Message	Promotion Message	Prevention Message
Advertising Persuasiveness	5.00	4.27	4.35	4.69
Attitude toward Advertisement	5.45	4.65	4.51	4.88
Advertising Believability	5.15	4.64	4.41	4.63
Attitude toward Brand	5.56	5.05	4.81	5.03
Purchase Intention	4.08	3.79	3.83	4.17
N	50	49	46	48

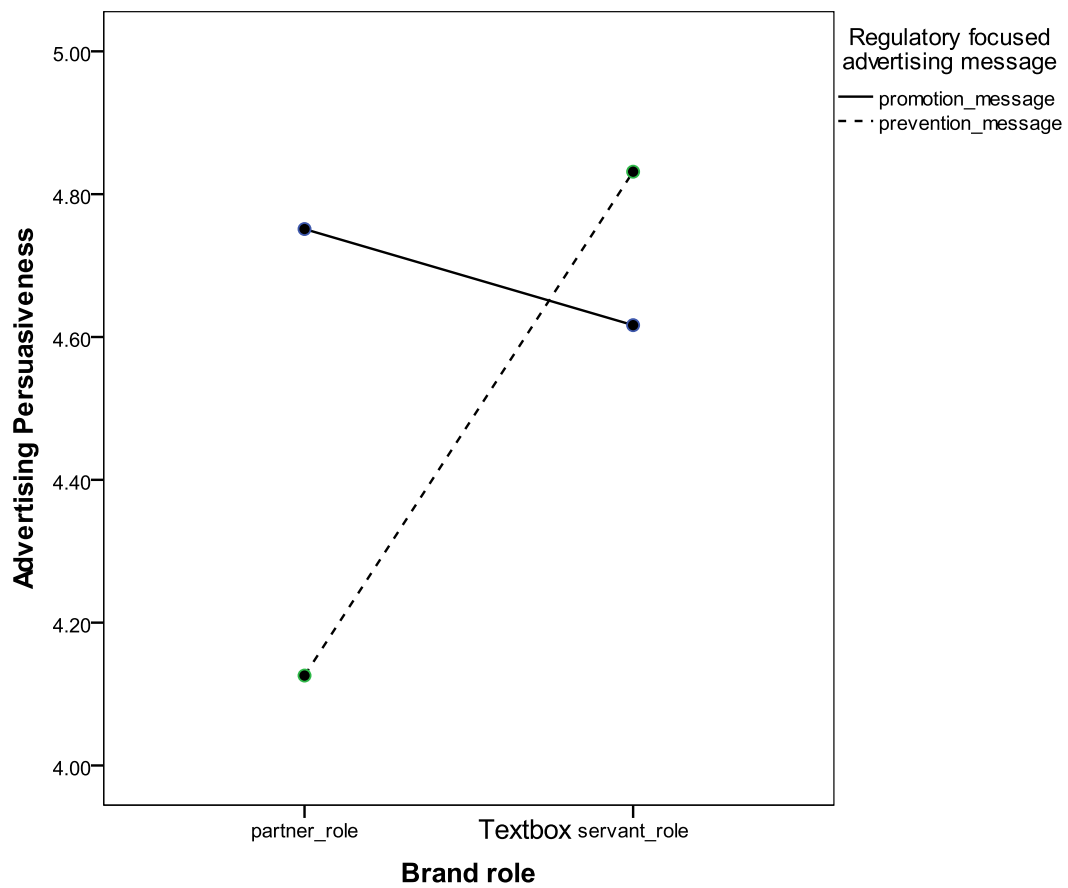


Figure 5.1. Mean Advertising Persuasiveness.

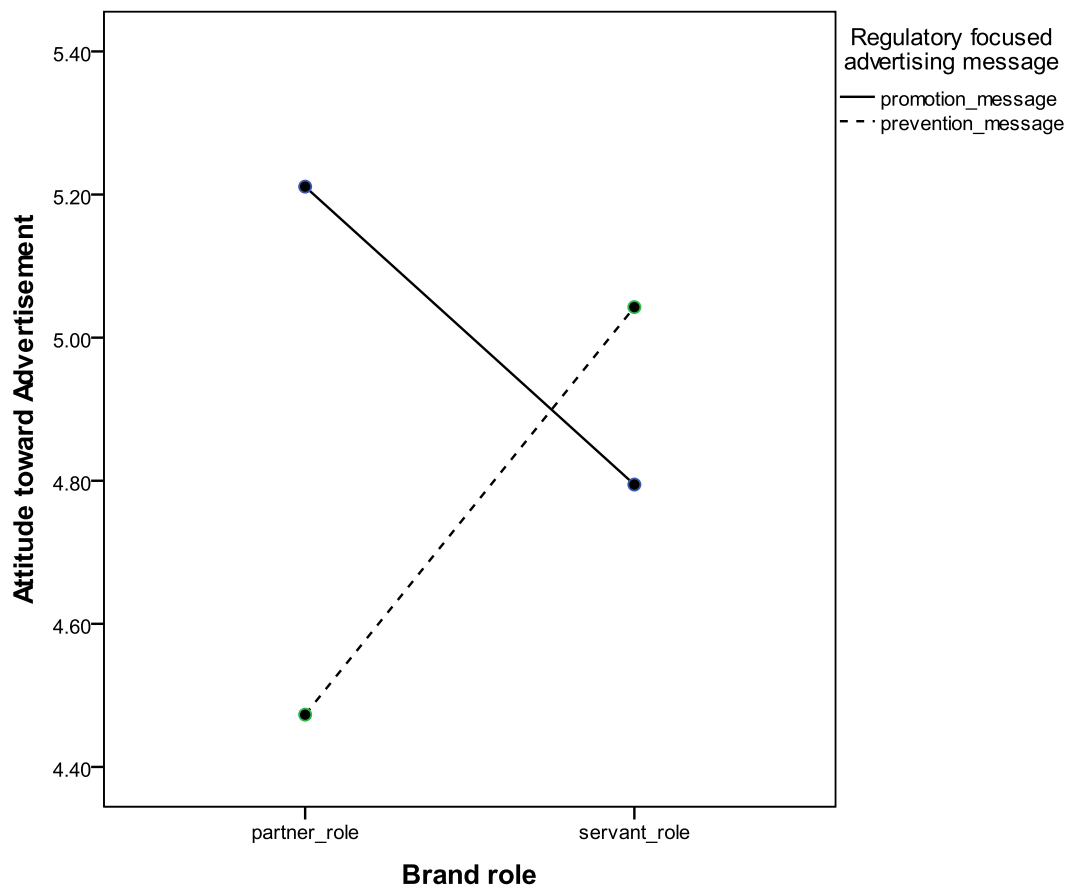


Figure 5.2. Mean Attitude toward Advertisement.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

DISCUSSION

New brands are endlessly introduced to the market. However, few of them survive for very long. Marketers and researchers have emphasized that one key to long-term survival is the consumer-brand relationship aspect. Moreover, along with the recent advance of social media, brands' attempts to engage with consumers have accelerated. Strong consumer-brand relationships indeed reward the brand not only with financial benefits but also with favorable attitudes towards the overall marketing activities of the brand. A good deal of research has identified what the consumer-brand relationship is and how it works, but few studies have regarded the role of the brand in a relationship with consumers and effective advertising message strategies.

Therefore, this study was designed to examine the perceived brand role (partner vs. servant) in a relationship with consumers and its effective persuasive message framed by regulatory focuses (promotion vs. prevention) in an advertising context. The current research proposed that the partner-brand role is compatible with promotion-focused goal orientation, whereas the servant-brand role is compatible with prevention-focused goal orientation. It is expected that the fit of brand role and regulatory focus message influences advertising effectiveness.

The results indicate that interaction between brand role and regulatory focus message influences the advertising persuasiveness and attitude toward advertisement under the control of attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category. Individuals were more persuaded and favored an advertisement when a partner

brand was presented with a promotion-focused ad message and when a servant brand was presented with a prevention-focused one. This might be a reflection of consumers having, depending on the characteristic of the relationship partner, different goal orientation within a relationship. However, interaction between brand role and regulatory focus message does not significantly influence either the advertising believability, attitude toward brand, or purchase intention under the control of attitude toward advertising in general and involvement with product category. Even though their mean values show a pattern similar to what we expected, the impact of an advertising message seems as though it might be insufficient to get individuals to transfer their favorable attitude toward the ad to the brand and, further, to purchase intention.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to the consumer-brand relationship theory by broadening the understanding of the brand-role perspective. Especially, two specific roles in the current study—partner and servant—were adopted from the brand anthropomorphism research of Aggarwal and McGill (2012) and from the notion that brand role has not been examined enough in either the advertising or marketing literature. This study not only validated the idea that a brand can actually be perceived as a partner and a servant in a relationship with the consumer, but also proposed effective advertising message strategies for respective brand roles. Additionally, the current study contributes to regulatory focus theory by identifying a new factor that moderates the influence of a regulatory focus-framed message on advertising effectiveness. Even though there have

been numerous attempts to identify the effect of regulatory focus within the context of advertising, little research has examined the regulatory focus principle from the relationship perspective. Particularly, the current study supported the idea that a specific relationship might affect an individual's goal orientation (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study also provides several important implications for practitioners in the advertising and marketing industries. Regulatory focus message, whether promotion or prevention, is quite often used as an advertising message strategy. However, this study suggests that advertisers consider carefully their brand's relationship with consumers so as to persuade them effectively with a regulatory focus message. Another implication is that advertising can be a means to forming a consumer-brand relationship. Therefore, advertisers, by considering product category, might be able to position their brand as a partner or a servant. Depending on regulatory focus message, the partner brand showed more variation than did the servant brand in the effectiveness of an advertisement. Thus, regarding the brand that is positioning itself as a partner among consumers, a brand must be even more cautious about choosing the right regulatory focus message.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research contributes by offering new conceptual insights, it has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. For example, the product categories used for the respective brand role differed from each other so as to maximize

the perception of the specific brand role in the experiment. Even though involvement with product category was controlled as a covariate, a variation in product category might in some way affect the result. Additional research is needed to determine whether the finding presented here may be equally applied to the brand roles manipulated with the same product category. Also, this research adopted a fictitious brand to manipulate the brand role, so individuals may lack a relationship with the brand and thus be less able to assign a specific role to it. Future research is needed to examine real brands with which consumers have a definite relationship. Another limitation of the study is that the overall perception of the advertisement message framed with regulatory focus tended to lean toward the promotion side. This might be explained by the promotional characteristic of advertising in general, but future research is needed to control this matter fairly. Other research questions include what a brand role concept consists of, what factors can moderate the interaction between the brand role and regulatory focus, and what other roles a brand can play in consumer-brand relationships.

APPENDICES: Stimulus for Experiment

(1) Partner/Promotion ad



(2) Partner/Prevention ad



(3) Servant/Promotion ad




TOILET BOWL CLEANER

“YESSIR”
Let your cleaning *agent*
work for you to make
your toilet sparkle!


www.yessircleaner.com

The advertisement is split into two vertical panels. The left panel has a light blue background and contains the YESSIR logo at the top, followed by the text 'TOILET BOWL CLEANER'. Below this is a horizontal line, then the headline '“YESSIR” Let your cleaning agent work for you to make your toilet sparkle!' in bold black text. Another horizontal line follows, then a product shot of a 'YESSIR Bleach + Blue 2-pack' and the website 'www.yessircleaner.com'. The right panel shows a woman in a yellow top and blue jeans standing in a bathroom, looking at her reflection in a mirror above a white sink. A white toilet is visible to the left of the sink.

(4) Servant/Prevention ad




TOILET BOWL CLEANER

“YESSIR”
Let your cleaning *agent*
work for you to remove
all those tough stains!


www.yessircleaner.com

This advertisement is identical in layout to the one above, but the headline text is different: '“YESSIR” Let your cleaning agent work for you to remove all those tough stains!'. The visual elements, including the logo, product shot, website, and bathroom scene, are the same.

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