

# When Does a Virtual Brand Community Matter? The Effect of Regulatory Focus on Customer Citizenship Behavior

**Li Wang**  
Tongji University  
**Mototaka Sakashita**  
Keio University

Cite as:

Wang Li, Sakashita Mototaka (2019), When Does a Virtual Brand Community Matter? The Effect of Regulatory Focus on Customer Citizenship Behavior. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (7979)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.



## **When Does a Virtual Brand Community Matter?**

### **The Effect of Regulatory Focus on Customer Citizenship Behavior**

Customer citizenship behavior (CCB) in virtual brand communities has become a popular issue in recent years, because such behavior can help enterprises improve their marketing abilities. Prior research on this topic, however, has primarily explored the influence of the external environment while ignoring the impact of customers' internal regulation. Drawing on self-presentation theory and regulatory fit theory, we show how regulatory focus influences CCB, and how this relationship is mediated by the desire for online self-presentation. The empirical results of our experimental study (N=175) show: (1) a promotion focus exerts a positive influence on CCB, while a prevention focus exerts a negative influence; (2) the desire for online self-presentation has a complete mediating influence between promotion focus and CCB, as well as between prevention focus and CCB. The research enriches the CCB theory providing important implications for practitioners.

*Keywords: regulatory focus, customer citizenship behavior, online self-presentation*

*Track: Product and Brand Management*

## 1. Introduction

A number of companies are building and facilitating virtual brand communities, such as the Harley Owners Group, NikeTalk forums, and Haier's online club, in order to capitalize on their marketing performances. In such environments, customers have the opportunity to interact in virtual brand communities. Customers not only gain social support when encountering product problems in these communities, they can also share shopping experiences, provide valuable feedback, and recommend suitable products (Johnson and Lowe, 2015). This type of active, voluntary, and discretionary (extra-role) behavior is called customer citizenship behavior (CCB) (Groth, 2005). As a form of consumer engagement, CCB reduces consumer service costs and strengthens the consumer-brand relationship by providing extraordinary value to companies. For example, such feedback can provide information for product innovation, reduce the cost of after-sales service, and replace some work of the marketing department through word-of-mouth communication (Groth, 2005).

CCB is garnering increased research attention. Prior research has linked CCB to many antecedents in both the information systems and marketing fields and can be classified into two categories. The first category pertains to the marketing field, which includes individual demographic and psychographic variables (such as extraversion and agreeableness) (Anaza, 2014; Yi & Gong, 2008), product and brand aspects (such as product knowledge, brand commitment) (Aishah & Shaari, 2017), and other customers' CCB (Yi, Gong & Lee, 2013). The second category pertains to the field of information systems in a community context, such as community social support (Zhu, Sun & Chang, 2016), community exchange (Chen & Farn, 2010), and encounter-oriented e-retailing environments (Anaza & Zhao, 2013). Because CCB is voluntary, Anaza (2014) reported that psychological antecedents deserve more attention in future research. In this regard, prior research has ignored the influence of a comparatively under-investigated but potentially significant psychological variable—regulatory focus—on CCB.

Regulatory focus theory, first proposed by Higgins (1997), suggested that the reason behind differences in individuals' goal-oriented behavior patterns is due to two fundamental and discrete motivational systems—the promotion system versus the prevention system. Those who are promotion-focused set hopes and desires as their goals and regulate their behavior toward positive outcomes, while those who are prevention-focused set responsibilities and obligations as goals, regulating their behavior away from negative results. In other words, individuals with different regulatory focuses may have different behaviors. Previous studies have revealed the effect of regulatory focus on organizational citizenship

behavior (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Koopman, Lanaj & Scott, 2016; Van Dijk & Kluger, 2011; Yao, Hua-Wei & Yue, 2010) or on consumers' in-role behavior, both of which are necessary for transactions (Werth & Foerster, 2007). This influence has generally been understated in investigating how regulatory focus shapes CCB. Because individual behavior in the organization and consumption contexts differs, and consumers' extra-role and in-role behavior also differs, the connection between a regulatory focus and CCB deserves more scrutiny.

We concentrate on probing the mechanisms connecting regulatory focus and CCB. In exploring the relationship of such mechanisms, this paper draws from the information systems literature to find a mediating variable, namely the desire for online self-presentation, to illustrate the relationship. This relationship can be understood by the theory of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959), which answers the question of why people engage in presenting a desired figure of themselves to others (Goffman 1959, Leary 1996). Self-presentation plays an important role in making customers' desirable impression in an online community (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), and their desirable form of online self-presentation differs depending on their motives (Canary & Cody, 1994; Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012). Thus, CCB is reflected from customers' degree of desire to present in a certain way (Schlenker, 2003). More important, self-presentation has been an important variable in citizenship behavior research (Wagner & Rush, 2000). As such, this research assumes that the desire for online self-presentation plays a mediating role between regulatory focus and CCB.

In this study, we examine the question of why and in which context regulatory focus effects CCB. We find that promotion focus increases the likelihood of CCB while prevention focus decreases the likelihood of CCB. This desire for online self-presentation encourages customers with a promotion focus to act on CCB and discourages customers with prevention focus from acting on CCB.

Our study makes an important theoretical contribution. While prior research has mainly concentrated on external antecedents as the primary CCB causes, we extend the influence of intrinsic psychological antecedents and explain how CCB can also be influenced by regulatory focus. In this way, we move scholars toward a more extensive understanding of the conditions under which the desire for online self-presentation most likely occurs. Therefore, our research not only contributes to the understanding of CCB antecedents, but also allows us to provide advice on how an enterprise's marketing department might improve its performance by strengthening CCB in its brand community.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis**

### *2.1 Customer Citizenship Behavior*

Customer citizenship behavior (CCB) is derived from the field of organizational citizenship behavior, which refers to voluntary or discretionary behavior not directly or explicitly expected by the organization's reward system of increasing organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988). Current scholars have extended citizenship behaviors to the customer domain and formally proposed the concept of CCB (Gruen, 1995; Yi & Gong, 2013). CCB is defined as "customers' voluntary (extra-role) behaviors that are not directly or explicitly rewarded, but lead to higher quality of service and provide extraordinary value to the firm" (Gruen, 1995, p.461). Although such voluntary (extra-role) behaviors are valuable to companies, they are dispensable in terms of transactions (Bove et al., 2009; Revilla-Camacho, Vega-Vázquez, Cossó-Silva, 2015). As previously shown, CCB may not only reduce the costs of consumer service, but also strengthen the consumer-brand relationship (Groth, 2005).

Because of the importance of CCB, researchers have explored its antecedents. Most researchers have paid attention to external factors (Zhu, Sun & Chang, 2016; Chen & Farn, 2010; Anaza & Zhao, 2013) while ignoring internal factors (Anaza, 2014). Although prior research has suggested that individuals' regulatory focus affects a wide range of consumer behavior (e.g., Higgins et al. 1997, 2001), most studies have barely paid attention to the relationship between consumers' regulatory focus and CCB. Therefore, in this paper, we examine the influence of regulatory focus on CCB.

### *2.2 Regulation Focus and Customer Citizenship Behavior*

Regulation focus theory has been presented as two distinct self-regulation systems of prevention and promotion, which follow the basic hedonistic principles of approaching pleasure and avoiding pain, and lead to regulating individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Higgins, 1997). In order to diminish the gap between current and future states, promotion- and prevention-focused individuals take various behavioral strategies. Specifically, promotion-focused individuals are inclined to follow their hopes and aspirations and be more sensitive to the presence and absence of positive results (gains and non-gains). Thus, such individuals pursue behaviors that conform to their ideal selves, thereby increasing the significance of the attained goal. In contrast, prevention-focused individuals are motivated by safety and security needs and thus more sensitive to minimizing losses or avoiding potential loss (losses and non-losses) (Shah et al., 1998); therefore, they are prone to aligning themselves with a sense of responsibility. For example, when choosing a facial cream,

promotion-focused customers prefer a more attractive appearance that would lead to gaining praise in social occasions, whereas prevention-focused customers are attracted to the product's claim of avoiding skin wrinkles.

Previous research has shown that regulatory focus has a prominent effect on judgment and decision making (Arnold et al., 2014; De Bock & Van Kenhove, 2010; Florack & Scarabis, 2006), especially in the context of consumer behavior (Aaker & Lee, 2001). According to regulatory focus theory, the reason promotion-focused individuals use behavioral strategies is to attain a positive result in achieving ideals, growth, and advancement (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). They are more likely to take a risky action, which means making a decision even if the outcome is unsure (Arnold et al., 2014; Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Prior literature has suggested that expressing an opinion or giving feedback risks disapproval (Podsakoff et al., 2000) while advocating participation or offering recommendations is also associated with risk because of the possibility of refusal by other customers (van Dyne et al., 1994). Moreover, helping others means that knowledge transfer, which has the risk of knowledge loss (Calo, 2008). Therefore, one can conclude that promotion-focused customers are motivated by a desire to offer guidance and suggestions to other clients and companies, recommend suitable products or services, and spread empathy through assistive behaviors, as these risky actions could help them gain pleasure and a sense of achievement (Lieberman et al., 1999). Hence, we propose:

*Hypothesis 1: Customers' promotion focus is positively related to CCB.*

A prevention focus is steered by the aspiration to avoid falling short of one's obligations or duties. Therefore, the possibility that prevention-focused individuals consider riskier and unproven solutions is lower, and thus they are more likely to adopt a conservative bias. This means that such individuals make decisions only when they believe they can be absolutely certain (Lieberman et al., 1999). Their strength lies in repetition, stability, and error avoidance using strategies of conservation, goal maintenance, and maintaining the status quo (Van dijk & Kluger, 2011). Because helping customers, providing feedback, and offering recommendations all involve some risk, prevention-focused individuals are not willing to engage in CCB. Hence, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2: Customers' prevention focus is negatively related to CCB.*

### *2.3 The Mediating Effect of the Desire for Online Self-presentation*

Self-presentation is derived from symbolic interactionism and illustrates the reason people seek to form a desired image to show to others (Goffman 1959, Leary 1996). Self-

presentation is defined as a continuous process of information management, whereby individuals are frequently trying to influence the image they present (Goffman, 1959). Extending the definition of off-line self-presentation, Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli (2012) conceptualized the desire for online self-presentation as “the extent to which an individual wants to present his or her preferred image in a virtual community of interest” (p. 1235). This study proposes that the desire for online self-presentation is a useful intervening construct to understand how regulatory focus influences CCB in a virtual brand community. The mediation effects can be explained by the theory of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). According to this theory, members of brand communities ask for various socio-discursive needs—expressive, communicative or promotional—in order to control what others see or know about them. These needs reflect different regulatory foci and lead to different behaviors (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Kacmar & Tucker, 2016). Based on regulatory focus theory, promotion-focused customers pursuing growth, accomplishments, and aspirations are predisposed to adopt strategies that emphasize more self-presentation, as self-presentation validates their existence, proves their value, and allows them to project their performance towards their ideal selves (Goffman, 1959; Chua & Chang, 2016). On the other hand, because engaging in self-presentation facilitates the communication of information and enhances an individual’s self-image (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987), social interactions can occur when customers have the desire to construct and present themselves (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli (2012) illustrate that online self-presentation is a critical motive in virtual community participation and can enhance or magnify customers’ citizenship behaviors, such as eagerness to provide feedback. Therefore, we propose:

*Hypothesis 3: The desire for online self-presentation mediates the relationship between promotion focus and CCB. That is, customers with a promotion focus have a stronger desire for self-presentation and are more likely to engage in CCB.*

As for prevention-focused customers, they are prone to adopt vigilant strategies and avoid risks when making decisions (Pham & Avnet, 2004). In a virtual brand community, such individuals are worried more about the negativity of their self-presentation; for example, redundant and/or inappropriate self-presentation may incur resentment. In other words, they do not want to put forth more effort to build their online identity and therefore will not engage in more CCB. Therefore, we propose:

*Hypothesis 4: The desire for online self-presentation mediates the relationship between prevention focus and CCB. That is, customers with a prevention focus have a weaker desire for self-presentation and are less likely to engage in CCB.*

### 3. Method

One hundred and seventy-five undergraduate students (53.1% female) at a well-known university in China took part in our study in exchange for extra course credit. We first manipulated respondents' regulatory focus and randomly assigned them to a promotion- or prevention-focus condition. Respondents were then asked to rate their desire for online self-presentation and CCB.

Following the explicit procedure of priming manipulation developed by Pham & Avnet (1994), we manipulated regulatory focus by priming promotion or prevention. In the promotion (prevention) focus condition, we asked respondents to think about their past aspirations, hopes, and dreams (duties, obligations, and responsibilities) and to list two of them. In addition, we asked them to think about their current aspirations, hopes, and dreams (duties, obligations, and responsibilities) and to list two. This manipulation has been proven to be effective in previous studies (e.g., Pham & Avnet, 1994; Kirmani & Zhu, 2007).

*Mediating variable:* Desire for online self-presentation. A four-item scale developed by Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli (2012) was used to measure the desire for online self-presentation. Sample items included: "I want to establish a preferred image for myself in this brand community." The Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.88.

*Dependent variables:* Customer citizenship behavior (CCB). The CCB scales were adapted based on Anaza's (2014) studies. The scale consisted of ten items that specified three dimensions—recommendation, helping behaviors, and service firm facilitation. Sample items included: "Recommend this brand community to my family," and "Fill out a customer satisfaction survey." The Cronbach's alpha for CCB was 0.92.

### 4. Analysis and Results

#### 4.1 Main effects of regulatory focus

A one-way ANOVA displayed a significant influence of regulatory focus on CCB ( $F(1, 173) = 4.47, p < 0.05$ ). The solutions generated in the promotion-focus condition were rated as higher CCB ( $M = 5.16, SD = 0.97$ ) when compared with those produced in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 4.85, SD = 0.94; t(173) = -2.11, p < 0.05$ ). As summarized in Figure 1, the main effects are consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2.





Figure 1 Effect of Regulatory Focus on CCB

#### 4.2 Mediating effects of desire for online self-presentation

In order to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, which propose that desire for online self-presentation mediates the relationships between regulatory focus and CCB, a mediation analysis was conducted with Mplus 7 (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). We created an overall prevention-promotion-focus index, such that 0 represents prevention focus and 1 represents promotion focus. The results indicate that desire for online self-presentation is positively related to the prevention-promotion-focus index ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $t = 5.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and positively associated with CCB ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $t = 2.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the indirect effect of the prevention-promotion-focus index on CCB via the desire for online self-presentation is significantly positive ( $\rho = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, the indirect effect of the promotion-prevention-focus index on CCB via the desire for online self-presentation is significantly positive ( $\rho = -0.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus Hypotheses 3 and 4 are both supported.

### 5. Discussion and Implications

Our research has at least two important theoretical implications. First, it enriches the theory of CCB in virtual brand communities. Much prior research has examined the antecedents of CCB from the categories of demographic and psychographic variables, product and brand variables, and community context variables in the marketing and the information systems fields (e.g., Aishah & Shaari, 2017; Anaza, 2014; Zhu, Sun & Chang, 2016). Considering that regulatory focus is an under-examined but potentially important psychological variable in CCB research, we extend research on the CCB antecedents by arguing and finding that regulatory focus as customers' intrinsic idiosyncrasies has a significant impact on CCB—that is, promotion focus increases CCB (Hypothesis 1) while prevention focus decreases CCB (Hypothesis 2). Although prior regulatory focus research has

shown how regulatory focus influences organizational citizenship behavior in a workplace context (Dewett & Denisi, 2007; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Van Dijk & Kluger, 2011; Yao, Hua-Wei & Yue, 2010) or consumer behavior in an in-role (Werth & Foerster, 2007), the relationship between regulatory focus and CCB in an extra-role in a non-workplace context is less understood. Psychological antecedents, especially regulatory focus, have rarely been studied as a source of CCB. Regulatory focus is a kind of psychological variable that is not only theoretically relevant, but also practically significant, as it is extremely critical in predicting individual behaviors. By establishing that regulatory focus influences CCB, the current study broadens the knowledge of the implications of CCB.

Second, based on the self-presentation theory, our study suggests that desire for online self-presentation is an important explanatory mechanism for the relationship between regulatory focus and CCB (Hypotheses 3 and 4)—a relationship that has not seen much study (Anaza, 2014). Only limited research is available to examine the desire or intention through which intrinsic traits can impact CCB. This study offers the desire for online self-presentation as a powerful mechanism, and our results extend research on the desire for online self-presentation. Although prior studies have concentrated on personal control—a perception produced by contextual conditions—as predictors of the desire for online self-presentation (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012), the present study suggests that an individual's psychological makeup, such as regulatory focus, can also influence the desire for online self-presentation. While previous work has concentrated on in-role consumer behavior as a consequence (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012), the present study shows that extra-role CCB can be influenced by the desire for online self-presentation. Thus, we promote a more contextualized appreciation of the causes and outcomes of the desire for online self-presentation than have been evident in prior work.

This study also provides relevant insights for practice. It suggests that managers can make efforts to stimulate customers' desire to present themselves, because customers' desire for self-presentation drives CCB. As such, managers should develop easy tools for online self-presentation and provide assistance or direction for improving their online presentation skills. Managers should also consider organizing community events; for example, a design competition for an enhanced personal online presentation (Kim, Chan & Kankanhalli, 2012).

### **Key References**

Anaza N. A. (2014). Personality antecedents of customer citizenship behaviors in online shopping situations. *Psychology and Marketing*, 31 (4), 251–263.

- Brockner, J. and Higgins, E. T. (2001). Regulatory focus theory implications for the study of emotions at work. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86 (1), 35-66.
- Crowe E., Higgins E. T. (1997). Regulatory focus and strategic inclinations: promotion and prevention in decision-making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 69 (2), 117-132.
- De Bock T. and Van Kenhove P. (2010). Consumer ethics: The role of self-regulatory focus. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 97 (2), 241-255.
- Goffman E. (1959). *Presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Overlook Press.
- Groth M. (2005). Customers as good soldiers: examining citizenship behaviors in internet service deliveries. *Journal of Management*, 31(1), 7-27.
- Higgins E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. *The American Psychologist*, 52 (12), 1280–1300.
- Higgins, E. T. (2000). Making a good decision: value from fit. *The American Psychologist*, 55 (11), 1217–1230.
- Kirmani, A., & Zhu, R. (2007). Vigilant against manipulation: The effect of regulatory focus on the use of persuasion knowledge. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 44 (4), 688-701.
- Koopman, J., Lanaj, K., & Scott, B. A. (2016). Integrating the bright and dark sides of OCB: A daily investigation of the benefits and costs of helping others. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(2), 414-435.
- Leary M. R. (1996). *Self-presentation: Impression Management and Interpersonal Behavior*. Westview Press, Madison, WI.
- Pham, M. T. and Avnet, T. (2004). Ideals and oughts and the reliance on affect versus substance in persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30, 503–518.
- Revilla-Camacho M. A., Vega-Vázquez M. and Cossó-Silva F. J. (2015). Customer participation and citizenship behavior effects on turnover intention. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(7), 1607-1611.
- Schlenker B. R. (2003). Self-presentation. In M. R. Leary and J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity*. New York: Guilford, pp.492-518.
- Van Dyne L. and LePine J. A. (1998). Helping and voice extra-role behaviors: Evidence of construct and predictive validity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41, 108–119.
- Yi Y. and Gong T. (2013). Customer value co-creation behavior: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66, 1279-1284.