

Research Dialogue
Introduction to research dialogue

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Few psychological theories received as much attention in recent consumer research as Tory Higgins' work on self-regulatory focus (1998) and regulatory fit (2000, 2002), which identified two distinct self-regulatory foci and addressed their motivational consequences and downstream cognitive, emotional and behavioral effects. Further exploring the motivational determinants of valuation processes, Higgins' (2006) regulatory engagement theory drew attention to the role of engagement strength as a determinant of value intensity. In their target article, Higgins and Scholer (2009) advance the conceptual framework of regulatory engagement theory in novel ways, illuminate its relationship to earlier work, and apply regulatory engagement theory to core issues of consumer behavior. They identify different sources of engagement strength—like overcoming challenges and personal resistance, preparing for likely events, and using means of goal pursuit that fit the current regulatory focus—and illustrate how they affect the valuation processes, with downstream emotional and behavioral consequences. Their stimulating discussion of the interplay of these variables, and the “science and art” of combining them to influence consumers' valuation processes, provides an unusually rich set of hypotheses for future consumer research.

Four commentaries elaborate on different aspects of Higgins and Scholer's (2009) theorizing. Pham and Avnet (2009) emphasize the role of subjective experiences in the valuation process, drawing on a feelings-as-information framework (Pham, 2004; Schwarz, 1990), whereas Förster (2009) draws attention to related processes conceptualized in earlier self-regulation theories. Challenging the assumption that engagement determines value, Fishbach (2009) highlights the possibility that value may determine engagement and calls for research that illuminates the conditions under which different causal directions may hold. Finally, Lee (2009) applies regulatory engagement theory to regulatory nonfit effects and suggests that

“feeling wrong” may function as an obstacle that increases value when overcome. Scholer and Higgins' (2009) response to these wide ranging commentaries completes this Research Dialogue, which addresses core issues at the interface of motivation, cognition, and emotion in consumer decision making.

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