

MARKETPLACE SOLUTIONS TO MOTIVATIONAL THREATS: HELPING CONSUMERS WITH FOUR DISTINCT TYPES OF VULNERABILITY*

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ABSTRACT

How can we better help consumers deal with threats to satisfying their basic motivational needs? When people fail to meet their fundamental needs for value, truth, and control effectiveness, they feel threatened. Are there products and services that can help consumers with these vulnerabilities? Based on a new 2 (prevention value vs. promotion value) \times 2 (truth vs. control) motivated activity framework, we argue that different types of motivational threats produce distinct experiences of vulnerability, each of which can be resolved by engaging in unique compensatory activities. This proposal is especially relevant to marketers because brands can use this knowledge to create and promote product and service offerings that directly address these distinct kinds of vulnerability. In this review, we discuss four specific types of consumer threats and examples of branded solutions. We also suggest implications for marketers and open questions that warrant future research.

Keywords: Motivation; needs; threat; vulnerability; promotion; prevention; truth; control

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States and elsewhere, recent years have seemed to present an especially broad range of threats to people's ability to satisfy their fundamental motivational needs. Some of these threats relate to the basic need of individuals to feel effective in understanding the world around them. For instance, political polarization in the United States has progressively increased over the past 50 years (Desilver, 2022), and as a result, people have needed to make sense of competing narratives about both what is right (e.g., when considering "culture war" issues from abortion rights to classroom curricula) and even what is true or real (e.g., when deciding if election results can be trusted). Other threats relate to individuals' basic need to feel effective in exerting control over their lives and livelihoods. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic hampered people's ability to effectively manage what happened in their lives, both by threatening their baseline state of health (e.g., when encountering the virus) and by limiting their ability to make progress in their social lives and careers (e.g., when facing government-imposed lockdown restrictions). How can we understand such diverse motivational threats? And how might marketers use such an understanding to help consumers address these threats and, in doing so, satisfy their fundamental needs?

Our view is that people experience vulnerability when the satisfaction of their basic motivational needs has been threatened. While different sets of needs have been proposed in the literature (e.g., Bagheri & Milyavskaya, 2019; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1943; McClelland, 1985; Murray, 1938), we draw from Higgins' (2012) theory of motivational effectiveness and posit that people fundamentally need to feel effective in three different aspects of their life pursuits: value, truth, and control. The need for value effectiveness can be satisfied by experiencing oneself as having desired results and not having undesired results; the need for truth effectiveness can be satisfied by experiencing oneself as establishing what is real or right; the need for control effectiveness can be satisfied by experiencing oneself as managing what happens in one's life. As we describe further in the sections that follow, fundamental needs to feel effective in these three domains work in combination to motivate distinct activities that facilitate their satisfaction. We propose that when individuals fail to effectively engage in such activities, they experience a motivational threat that manifests as feelings of vulnerability. These specific feelings will differ based on the type of motivational failure and may range from confusion to incompetence, insecurity, or the sense of being "stuck" in an undesirable status quo. More importantly, because these experiences of vulnerability result from distinct combinations of unsatisfied needs, each can be resolved in unique ways. Therefore, understanding which of these basic needs drive different types of everyday activities should provide insight into both why people feel vulnerable when these efforts are thwarted and how marketplace solutions might help consumers to remedy motivational threats (i.e., through targeted compensatory activity facilitated by products and services). This proposal is especially relevant to consumer psychologists and marketers because brands can use this knowledge to develop and promote offerings that

help consumers to directly address these distinct kinds of vulnerability. In this article, we focus on four specific types of consumer threats and marketplace solutions.

A 2 × 2 FRAMEWORK OF MOTIVATED ACTIVITY

A new framework of motivated activity (Nakkawita & Higgins, 2021) provides novel insight into four unique ways in which consumers might feel vulnerable. This framework comprises two dimensions, each of which captures a fundamental motivational distinction.

Dimension 1: Prevention Versus Promotion Value

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) describes two fundamental motivational systems that are both aimed at satisfying the fundamental need for value effectiveness, but in different ways. The *prevention* system aims to meet the value-related need for security. Given this focus, prevention motivation seeks to approach nonloss (“0”) states and avoid loss (“−1”) states (Higgins, 2018b). In contrast, the *promotion* system aims to meet the value-related need for growth. As a result, promotion motivation seeks to approach gain (“+1”) states and avoid nongain (“0”) states. Furthermore, research on regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000) reveals that unique goal pursuit strategies align with and sustain each of these systems: vigilant avoidance-oriented strategies fit a prevention focus, whereas eager approach-oriented strategies fit a promotion focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins et al., 1994). The motivated activity framework builds on this prior research, which had highlighted the broad strategic preferences of each regulatory focus, by identifying distinct goal pursuit *activities* that facilitate satisfaction of the basic needs that underlie each system.

Dimension 2: Control Versus Truth

As noted above, Higgins’ (2012) theory of motivational effectiveness posits that in addition to value, people possess fundamental needs in the domains of truth (i.e., to feel effective in establishing what is real or right) and control (i.e., to feel effective in managing what happens in one’s life). Similar to promotion and prevention value, the motivated activity framework identifies distinct goal pursuit activities relevant to these basic needs for truth effectiveness and control effectiveness.

Four Domains of Motivated Activity

Combined, these two dimensions produce four domains of motivated activity (Nakkawita & Higgins, 2021). Two of these domains encompass *truth-oriented* activities. In line with the prevention system’s focus on vigilantly avoiding “−1” loss states and maintaining satisfactory “0” nonloss states, prevention-truth activities involve scrutiny and verification, such as assessing, reviewing, and

verifying. These activities enable individuals to avoid mistakes and incorrect knowledge (“−1” truth states) and to approach certainty and accuracy (“0” truth states). The promotion system is motivated to satisfy the need for truth effectiveness in different ways. Given its focus on eagerly approaching “+1” gain states and avoiding “0” nongain states, promotion-truth activities involve knowledge growth and generation, such as imagining, discovering, and wondering. These activities enable individuals to expand their understanding of the world (“+1” truth states) and to avoid feeling a sense of mental stagnation (“0” truth states).

Prior research provides some initial evidence for these distinctions in the domain of truth. For instance, a prevention focus is associated with analytical problem-solving, such as accurately determining the answers to standardized testing questions involving logical reasoning (Friedman & Förster, 2005). Additionally, prevention motivates the use of deliberative reasoning in the process of making judgments (Avnet & Higgins, 2006; Cornwell & Higgins, 2016) and concerns with accuracy in tasks ranging from carefully connecting numbered dots to identifying errors while proofreading (Förster et al., 2003), all of which involve thoughtfully assessing information and ensuring that it is appropriate or correct (i.e., scrutiny and verification activities). In contrast, a promotion focus is associated with curiosity (Wytykowska & Gabińska, 2015). Promotion also motivates creative problem-solving, such as imagining possible solutions to scenarios during a sports game (Memmert et al., 2013) and generating new uses for objects (Friedman & Förster, 2005). Promotion-focused people demonstrate this kind of divergent thinking both in terms of the number of ideas they generate and in the breadth of such ideas (Beuk & Basadur, 2016), all of which involve expanding one’s knowledge through learning and/or ideation (i.e., knowledge growth and generation activities).

The framework posits that a similar distinction between prevention- and promotion-focused goal pursuit activities emerges in the domain of *control-oriented* activities. Consistent with a prevention-focused concern with avoiding “−1” losses and maintaining “0” nonlosses, prevention-control activities involve status quo preservation, such as defending, protecting, and maintaining. These activities enable individuals to avoid states involving the absence or loss of a satisfactory status quo (“−1” control states) and to approach the maintenance of such states (“0” control states). In contrast, the promotion system motivates engagement in different types of control-oriented activities. Given its focus on eagerly approaching “+1” gains and avoiding “0” nongains, promotion-control activities involve movement and change, such as launching, accelerating, and progressing. These activities enable individuals to experience themselves as advancing and as efficiently effecting change (“+1” control states) and to avoid feeling mired in their current status quo (“0” control states).

Past research also provides initial evidence for these distinctions in the domain of control. For example, a prevention focus is associated with stability-oriented decisions to continue ongoing tasks rather than change-oriented decisions to switch to new tasks, whereas a promotion focus is associated with the opposite (Liberman et al., 1999). Additionally, a prevention focus predicts conservative

political ideology as measured via self-reports (Cornwell & Higgins, 2013) and voting decisions for economic policies (Boldero & Higgins, 2011), as well as the preservation of interpersonal norms in the workplace (Zhang et al., 2011), all of which involve ensuring that current conditions persist (i.e., status quo preservation activities). In contrast, a promotion focus is associated with self-reported locomotion, which is the motivation to engage in movement and change (Higgins et al., 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2000), and with preferences for political change (Boldero & Higgins, 2011). The promotion system has also been shown to motivate speedy action that accelerates as the individual approaches their goal (Förster et al., 2003). This research indicates that the promotion system motivates individuals to advance quickly in their goal pursuits and to enact change (i.e., movement and change activities).

Beyond the prior work reviewed above, recent research by Nakkawita and Higgins (2021) that directly tested the motivated activity framework found that people share a common understanding of which truth- and control-oriented activities reflect a focus on prevention value versus promotion value. This research also found that activities that fit (vs. do not fit) an individual’s regulatory focus are more accessible to them, both when regulatory focus is measured as a chronic individual difference factor and when it is induced within the course of a study. For a summary of the four activity domains within the motivated activity framework, as well as specific activities tested within this research, see Table 1.

MOTIVATED ACTIVITY, THREATS,
AND VULNERABILITY

By advancing the field’s knowledge of the specific activities that satisfy different combinations of unmet fundamental needs, this framework offers consumer psychologists and brand marketers a new lens through which they can conceptualize consumers’ motivational threats and resulting experiences of vulnerability. More specifically, understanding the activities in which vulnerable consumers are motivated to engage allows marketers to offer tailored product- and service-based

Table 1. Motivated Activity Framework.

Prevention Value	Promotion Value
<i>Truth-Oriented Activities</i>	
Scrutiny and verification <i>assess, examine, judge, review, scrutinize, verify</i>	Knowledge growth and generation <i>discover, explore, imagine, invent, seek, wonder</i>
<i>Control-Oriented Activities</i>	
Status-quo preservation <i>defend, guard, maintain, preserve, protect, resist</i>	Movement and change <i>accelerate, elevate, launch, lead, progress, propel</i>

Source: Adapted from Nakkawita and Higgins (2021).

solutions that aid consumers in precisely addressing the distinct ways in which they feel threatened. In addition, this framework offers useful insight into how to frame both new and existing offerings most effectively within marketing communications.

It is worth noting that when thinking about vulnerability in the context of the basic needs represented in the framework, the prevention system may stand out as being particularly relevant as it is frequently the threat of a “−1” reference point (i.e., a loss) that motivates people to pursue prevention-focused goals. With this said, it is useful to distinguish between prevention failures in the domains of control versus truth because different kinds of marketplace solutions are needed to help consumers remedy their vulnerability in each domain. Furthermore, marketers should also consider consumers’ experiences of vulnerability that emerge due to promotion-related failures (i.e., “0” nongain reference points in the domains of truth and control). In fact, the original paper introducing regulatory focus theory explicitly emphasized that both systems allow for the experience of threat: “the threat of nonfulfillment (promotion threat) and the threat of committing mistakes (prevention threat)” (Higgins, 1997). In the following sections, we explore how consumers may experience vulnerability in each of the four domains due to the threat that results from failing to satisfy the underlying combinations of motivational needs, and we provide examples of relevant marketplace solutions.

Solutions for Prevention-Truth Threats

As noted above, one kind of threat to individuals’ truth effectiveness is a “−1” loss state involving incorrect, mistaken, or uncertain knowledge, which produces an experience of vulnerability that can manifest as feelings of confusion or uncertainty. According to the framework, consumers who find themselves in such a threatening scenario will be motivated to engage in prevention-truth activities involving scrutiny and verification, such as reviewing, assessing, and judging. As a result, products and services that help individuals to validate and/or disconfirm their existing knowledge, and to reduce uncertainty regarding an issue, will support consumers in satisfying this combination of needs for prevention value and truth.

One source of prevention-truth ineffectiveness is the threat that results from making the wrong choice in the product or service decision-making process itself. Consumers who feel that they are vulnerable to making mistakes in this process may appreciate guidance in constructing their consideration set and in narrowing down their choices to determine which is right. For example, consider Wirecutter, the New York Times’ product recommendation platform. Wirecutter provides subscribers with curated guides to product selection in a wide range of consumer domains, from robot vacuum cleaners to carry-on suitcases (New York Times, 2022). After a thorough testing and consumer interview process, Wirecutter editors create a short-list of products in the category of interest that are recommended at various price points (e.g., best overall; runner-up; budget and upgrade options). These top-level recommendations allow individuals

lacking certainty (a “-1” truth state) about which option is most appropriate for them to make an informed judgment. Furthermore, for consumers interested in independently assessing their choice options even further, article footnotes provide detailed information comparing and contrasting the products that the Wirecutter team considered. By facilitating activities such as assessment and judgment, Wirecutter provides consumers with a solution for the threat they experience by failing to meet their needs for effectiveness in terms of both prevention value and truth.

Beyond services like Wirecutter that are expressly designed to help consumers avoid making the wrong choice in their decision-making processes, online retailers can help ease the same kind of prevention-truth threat by offering digital comparison tools within their e-commerce experiences. Such tools give vulnerable consumers the opportunity to easily review product or service options and avoid any incorrect decisions by carefully confirming which is most appropriate for them. For instance, Carnival Cruise Line’s comparison tool provides consumers with a detailed overview of up to three of their ships across a variety of criteria, such as dining options, spa facilities, and entertainment schedules ([Carnival Corporation, 2022](#)). By facilitating such a careful examination of their offerings, Carnival helps their consumers to reduce their vulnerability in the domain of prevention-truth. Importantly, this kind of solution is not limited to the digital realm; brick-and-mortar retailers have long provided a similar service through expert sales representatives who can help shoppers to review product options in store.

Furthermore, people may also experience prevention-truth ineffectiveness in their life more broadly – outside of the consumer decision-making process – and savvy brands can directly provide remedies that help consumers to mitigate such threats and, thus, eliminate this feeling of vulnerability. For instance, consider the baby sleep product domain. For new parents interested in helping their children to sleep through the night, the range of potential solutions can be bewildering, and evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of each method can be a stressful, time-consuming process. Mistakes are particularly important to avoid for these parents, as the wrong decision can have deleterious consequences ranging from sleep deprivation to unsafe sleep situations for their babies. For these reasons, the creators of the SNOO smart bassinet offer customers one-on-one consultations with their team of baby sleep experts ([Happiest Baby, 2022](#)). These experts work with parents to review their current practices and determine the right way to help their children maintain a satisfactory sleep schedule. They also allow nervous new parents to verify that they are using the product correctly, thus helping them to satisfy their needs for prevention value and truth effectiveness.

Solutions for Promotion-Truth Threats

Although the solutions reviewed above help consumers to address threats that result from failures to satisfy needs related to truth and prevention value, different remedies are needed for consumers experiencing threats that result from failures to satisfy needs for truth and promotion value. More specifically, in this case, the threat is a “0” nongain state, which produces an experience of

vulnerability that manifests as feeling of mental stagnation. Given this reference point, consumers who find themselves in such a threatening scenario will be motivated to engage in promotion-truth activities involving knowledge growth and generation, such as discovering, inventing, and seeking. As a result, product and services that help individuals to engage in curious exploration and imagination, and to avoid feeling mentally “stuck,” will support these consumers in satisfying this combination of needs for promotion value and truth.

As in the domain of prevention-truth activities, one source of promotion-truth ineffectiveness is the consumer decision-making process itself. However, in the domain of promotion-truth, we suggest that individuals who experience a sense of promotion-truth vulnerability may be especially interested in discovering new products that spark their fancy. For this reason, product and services that facilitate this exploratory process should be especially appealing to these consumers. For instance, consider Pinterest, a social media platform that markets itself as being centered around “visual discovery” and that highlights to consumers that “you’ll always find ideas to spark inspiration” (Pinterest, 2022). On Pinterest, people can explore beautiful images that other users have curated, and they can save these images to their own digital collections. By facilitating this process of discovery, Pinterest allows consumers who are bored with their current possessions but unsure of what to purchase next (a promotion threat nongain “0” truth state) to discover new fashions and home goods to add to their shopping list. In doing so, this platform provides consumers with a solution for the threat they experience by failing to meet their needs for effectiveness in terms of both promotion value and truth.

On a smaller scale, subscription services allow for a similar process of product exploration. For instance, the Brews Less Traveled Beer Club from Brewvana facilitates promotion-truth activities through subscribers’ “discovering hand-selected beers from a new undiscovered beer city each month” (Brewvana, 2022). Similarly, beauty subscription service Birchbox helps consumers to learn about new hair and skin care products through a monthly package featuring a range of product samples (Birchbox, 2022). These kinds of subscription services have rapidly grown in popularity over the last decade (Emarsys, 2021), demonstrating strong consumer interest in this type of promotion-truth consumer experience.

Additionally, in recent years, brands have begun to help consumers to feel more effective in meeting their promotion value and truth needs by creating new digital tools that allow for imagination and invention. For instance, consider the IKEA Place augmented reality app (IKEA, 2022). This app enables consumers to bring their imagination to life by using their smartphone’s camera to visualize what their home would look like with a piece of the brand’s furniture in it. As another example, the Nike By You service allows consumers to create their ideal sneakers by exploring options, inventing custom designs, and ordering the unique pair of shoes that they created (Nike, 2022). By facilitating promotion-truth activities including ideation and invention, these branded experiences help consumers to move from the threat of remaining stuck in their “0” status quo to

“+1” truth states in which they have learned or created something new, thus satisfying their needs for both promotion value and truth effectiveness.

Solutions for Prevention-Control Threats

Just as in the domain of truth, consumers experience threat when they fail to satisfy their needs for control effectiveness in combination with different types of value. One such type of threat emerges when individuals’ prevention value and control effectiveness are jeopardized by the potential or actual loss of a satisfactory current state, which would involve changing to a “-1” reference point. Such a threat would produce an experience of vulnerability that manifests as a concern about one’s ability to effectively resolve such a state of insecurity. In response, according to the framework, consumers will be motivated to engage in prevention-control activities involving status quo preservation such as defending, preserving, and protecting. As a result, products and services that help individuals to actively secure and guard what they already have will help these consumers to satisfy this combination of needs for prevention value and control effectiveness.

Some brands provide consumers with prevention-control solutions pertaining to the purchase process itself. For instance, services like PayPal help consumers to ensure the security of their personal data (a satisfactory “0” control state) by handling payment transactions on third-party websites (PayPal, 2022). By using PayPal to complete their online purchases, consumers no longer need to feel uneasy about whether individual companies can safely manage their credit card or banking details; instead, PayPal is the only company that has access to this sensitive information. Fraud protection services provided by traditional credit card companies serve a similar purpose for consumer purchases conducted both on and offline. By facilitating activities such as securing and protecting, these services provide consumers with solutions to threats they experience by failing to meet their needs for effectiveness in terms of both prevention value and control.

Outside of the purchase process, a wide range of products and services help consumers engage in activities that mitigate prevention-control threats. One pervasive example of such a solution is insurance. Insurance companies offer consumers the ability to limit significant financial risks across a variety of domains ranging from their travel to their homes to their health through relatively smaller plan contributions. By allowing people to protect themselves from large to potentially catastrophic expenses, insurance plans offer a broader sense of security to consumers. For instance, State Farm describes that they enable individuals to “help safeguard the people and possessions that matter most” (State Farm, 2022). Home security systems serve a similar protective function. In doing so, these consumer goods serve as remedies to consumers’ prevention-control threats and minimize their resulting experience of vulnerability.

Furthermore, a wide range of consumer offerings are aimed at facilitating the restoration or preservation of individuals’ physical appearance. Both drugstore solutions like RoC anti-wrinkle creams and medical-grade cosmetic procedures like Botox injections help consumers to resist common signs of aging and to maintain their current looks (BOTOX Cosmetic, 2022; RoC Skincare, 2022).

Similarly, many weight loss products and fitness centers promise consumers to restore their bodies to a state of satisfactory wellness. For instance, the Back To You app claims to help postpartum mothers recover in order to “feel good in your own skin (again)” ([The Wonder Weeks, 2022](#)). By providing tools to preserve or recover a “0” status quo state, such offerings give consumers the chance to directly address threats to meeting their needs for prevention value and control effectiveness.

Solutions for Promotion-Control Threats

Finally, as in the domain of truth, a distinct set of solutions are needed for threats that consumers experience when they fail to satisfy needs related to control and promotion (vs. prevention) value. In this scenario, the threat to individuals’ control effectiveness is a “0” nongain state that produces an experience of vulnerability that manifests as a sense of languishing. Given this reference point, consumers who find themselves in such a threatening scenario will be motivated to engage in promotion-control activities involving movement and change. As a result, products and services that initiate or accelerate progress toward some desirable “+1” end-state will help these consumers meet their combined promotion value and control effectiveness needs.

As in the domain of prevention-control, one source of promotion-control ineffectiveness can be the purchase process itself. Individuals who experience a sense of vulnerability in this domain may be especially interested in speedy, streamlined experiences. As a result, these consumers will likely find brands that offer a fast and easy shopping process to be particularly attractive. For example, Amazon offers an express purchasing option called Buy Now ordering, which enables consumers to purchase a product with a single click ([Amazon, 2022](#)). Furthermore, retailers that offer quick delivery options, such as same-day shipping, serve a similar motivational concern. By allowing consumers to accelerate the speed at which they can get a desired product into their hands, brands can help those frustrated by the typical purchase process (a threatening “0” control state) to satisfy their needs for effectiveness in terms of both promotion value and control.

Beyond the purchase process, branded offerings that facilitate physical movement and change will also help consumers to feel less vulnerable due to promotion-control threats, from fast cars to amusement parks offering rollercoaster rides. Additionally, products and services that help consumers to launch a new creative or business endeavor should also help consumers to meet their needs for promotion value and control effectiveness. For instance, the platform Squarespace enables people to quickly design and launch professional websites without needing to resort to a lengthy and potentially frustrating process working with a web developer. Squarespace’s marketing clearly embodies promotion-control principles, describing that the platform allows individuals to elevate their website experiences by “build[ing] the ideal” and to propel their businesses forward by “learn[ing] fast, act[ing] fast” ([Squarespace, 2022](#)). Similarly, the online design tool Canva allows everyday consumers to quickly create

attractive visual designs that can be used on a wide range of custom items for their personal lives and businesses, from event invitations and T-shirts to business cards and menus (Canva, 2022). By helping consumers to engage in promotion-control activities including elevating and launching, these products facilitate movement from the “0” status quo to “+1” control states in which they have taken positive and effective action, and thus satisfy both promotion value and control effectiveness needs.

IMPLICATIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

This new framework has important implications for consumer psychologists and brand marketers as it builds on the established distinction between prevention-focused strategic vigilance and promotion-focused strategic eagerness (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins et al., 1994) to identify specific goal pursuit activities that are particularly useful for consumers who seek to address different combinations of unmet motivational needs. Much of what is known about these prevention- and promotion-specific strategic preferences has emerged through research testing regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 2000). For instance, this work has shown that when people experience a fit (vs. nonfit) with their regulatory focus, their interest in product features increases (Werth & Foerster, 2007), they are willing to pay more for a product (e.g., Conley & Higgins, 2018), and they evaluate brands and advertising messages more positively (e.g., Lee & Aaker, 2004; Lee et al., 2010; Pham & Avnet, 2004). Furthermore, these kinds of effects emerge when examining the fit between individuals’ motives and a range of consumer-relevant targets, including the decision-making process (Pham & Higgins, 2005), the retail environment (Conley & Higgins, 2018), and the product itself (Werth & Foerster, 2007). (For more thorough reviews of regulatory fit research that is relevant to consumer goal pursuit processes, see Higgins et al., 2020; Lee & Higgins, 2009.)

The multidimensional nature of the 2×2 motivated activity framework raises the intriguing possibility that people who simultaneously experience regulatory fit (vs. nonfit) on more than one motivational dimension might show stronger regulatory fit effects. In particular, each of the four cells represents a combination of two basic motivational needs with respect to which a person can experience regulatory fit: promotion value and truth, promotion value and control, prevention value and truth, or prevention value and control. Because representations are theorized to more strongly influence cognition and action when they have greater motivational relevance (Eitam & Higgins, 2010), we expect that consumer offerings and marketing messages that precisely fit individuals’ areas of vulnerability on *both* of the framework’s motivational dimensions (e.g., featuring the prevention-control activities that a service facilitates when advertising to people experiencing unmet prevention value and control needs) will be more compelling than offerings that only fit a single dimension (e.g., using messaging only featuring prevention value for people experiencing the same set of motivational threats). Similarly, rather than simply highlighting a product’s general

truth-oriented benefits (e.g., for business accounting software, as offering more effective financial oversight), marketers should consider framing it as delivering benefits related to either prevention-truth activities (e.g., as offering deeper scrutiny into financial records) or promotion-truth activities (e.g., as offering fascinating new insights from their financial records). We predict that this kind of precise-targeting messaging that addresses both motivational dimensions (promotion-prevention *and* truth-control) will be more effective in driving purchase decisions. Future research is still needed to test this hypothesis; with this said, such a finding would be highly relevant to marketers as it would indicate how they can more effectively impact consumers' interest in and willingness to pay for their products and services.

How might brands take advantage of this kind of multidimensional fit? Marketers will first need to determine which combination of motivational needs (i.e., which of the four cells in the 2×2 framework) their product or service helps consumers to satisfy. Some products and services may naturally function as a solution for just one of these four different types of multidimensional consumer threats. For instance, as described above, Amazon's Buy Now ordering option facilitates the activity of progressing, which satisfies unmet needs for promotion value and control, but it likely does not satisfy other combinations of needs (e.g., it doesn't allow for promotion-truth-oriented discovering, prevention-control-oriented defending, or prevention-truth-oriented scrutinizing). For these types of "single cell" offerings, brands will likely benefit from ensuring that their marketing communications clearly demonstrate to consumers its ability to help consumers meet their basic needs at that particular intersection of promotion versus prevention value *and* truth versus control.

Beyond marketing a product as meeting a *single* set of motivational threats (i.e., one multidimensional cell from the 2×2 framework as noted above), other brands may offer consumers the possibility of addressing *multiple* combinations of motivational threats (i.e., two or more multidimensional cells from the 2×2 framework). But is it possible to successfully market a product as simultaneously meeting more than one combination of unsatisfied motivational needs without diluting the effectiveness of the messaging? Although additional research is needed to test this proposition, we suggest that the implications for such brands may depend on whether these offerings help consumers to satisfy (a) both truth and control needs for a particular type of value, or (b) both promotion and prevention value needs for either truth or control. In the former case, because truth and control motives naturally work together to facilitate "going in the right direction" in the process of goal pursuit (Higgins, 2018a), one might expect that truth and control activities are less likely to be experienced by consumers as conflicting. In such a case, a mixed-messaging approach may allow consumers experiencing distinct motivational threats to each see their own needs addressed in the communications, without being negatively affected by the portion of the messaging that addresses the other kind of threat. For instance, while the consultations provided by makers of the SNOO bassinet address failures to satisfy needs for prevention value and *truth* as noted earlier, the bassinet itself may help consumers to dutifully maintain a healthy sleep schedule for their child, thus

satisfying their needs for prevention value and *control*. For this reason, SNOO's marketing messaging might highlight to consumers that the brand helps them to both assess (prevention-truth) which sleep solutions are right for their family *and* preserve (prevention-control) their family's health and well-being through such solutions.

Would the same kind of "mixed messaging" approach work when the two cells include both promotion value and prevention value? We suggest that this scenario may play out differently. In contrast to the prior case involving truth and control threats for a single regulatory focus, we posit that brands that help consumers satisfy needs for both promotion *and* prevention value, along with either truth or control, may benefit from focusing on only a single cell within any given piece of marketing communications, as promotion value and prevention value motivate distinct, and frequently conflicting, eager versus vigilant goal pursuit strategies. For instance, consider the online course provider industry. One company, Coursera, markets their offerings using only promotion-truth messaging: "learn without limits" (i.e., indicating an opportunity to move from a "0" to "+1" state; [Coursera, 2022](#)). In contrast, competitor Khan Academy markets their offerings using both prevention-truth messaging ("fill gaps in their understanding": "-1" to "0") and promotion-truth messaging ("accelerate their learning": "0" to "+1" messaging; [Khan Academy, 2022](#)). We would suggest that the combined approach found within Khan Academy's messaging may in fact dilute its strength, although additional research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Furthermore, the motivated activity framework suggests that when companies consider their product development pipelines, they may benefit from ensuring that new brand and line extensions fall within the activity domains that are different from their original offerings – especially across the promotion versus prevention value dimension. In doing so, brands may be able to more effectively increase their market share as such products will appeal to distinct groups of consumers experiencing different types of motivational threats.

CONCLUSION

This review primarily focused on products and services that address consumer needs induced by specific threats in each of the 2×2 activity domains. However, it remains an open question whether these offerings will be just as appealing to people with a chronic prevention or promotion focus, even when not precipitated by a specific truth or control need. We would expect that without an inciting threat, consumers will find offerings from domains reflecting their chronic regulatory focus to be more attractive than offerings reflecting the opposing focus. For instance, we predict that chronically promotion-focused consumers will find both promotion-truth and promotion-control offerings to be more appealing than prevention-truth and prevention-control offerings. However, we also expect these promotion-focused consumers with a particular truth or control need will experience the strongest pull toward a product or service from the motivationally relevant domain. More research will be needed to investigate how these chronic

and induced motives interact to influence the motivational relevance of these four domains, particularly when they are conflicting. We look forward to the results of this future work, as it should provide additional valuable insight to consumer psychologists and marketing practitioners as to how these distinct motives work together.

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