

# The Interplay of Mood and Regulatory Focus in Influencing Altruistic Behavior

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## ABSTRACT

**Using the context of print advertising, this research examines how the effects of mood on altruistic behavior vary as a function of whether a promotion or prevention focus is involved in messaging for child sponsorship. The findings reveal that when an ad message is framed in promotion focus, a happy mood fosters more favorable attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor than a sad mood. In contrast, the effects of mood on attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor are attenuated when an ad message is framed in prevention focus. Further, the results shed light on the process underlying the interactive impact of mood and regulatory focus by demonstrating the mediating role of perceived elaboration and goal commitment in advertising persuasion. © 2013 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.**

Advertising has long been used as a communication tool to tackle society's many social problems (Drumwright, 1996; Earle, 2000). Ever since World War II (McDonough, 2002), both donated (e.g., public service announcements or PSAs) and "paid for" advertising have been used to attack such social dangers as drug abuse, alcoholism, violence, smoking, gambling, domestic violence, family degeneration, littering, wildlife and habitat preservation, obesity, AIDS, breast cancer, rape prevention, gay rights, race relations, public literacy, and poverty (e.g., Baek, Shen, & Reid, 2013; Drumwright, 1996; Earle, 2000; Nan & Heo, 2007). Using the context of print advertising, this research examines how the effects of mood on altruistic behavior vary as a function of whether a promotion or prevention focus is involved in messaging for child sponsorship.

The poverty epidemic is a major global problem. It poses a serious threat to the well-being of many of the world's children. It is widely acknowledged that poverty among children has a profound impact not only on the quality of their lives, but it also exacerbates inequality in society and affects the health and well-being of future generations (Barrientos & DeJong, 2006). By recent estimates, more than 600 million of children living in developing countries struggle to survive on less than US \$1 a day and every 3.6 seconds one person dies of starvation (UNICEF, 2012).

To tackle the childhood poverty epidemic, numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and gov-

ernmental organizations (e.g., Canada's "Make Poverty History" campaign) have mounted child sponsorship campaigns to increase public awareness of the problem and to persuade citizens to support these programs through monetary donations and pledges. The basic goal of childhood sponsorship is to transcend economic disparity through building and sustaining personal relationships between individuals in developed countries and children in less-developed countries (Bornstein, 2001). For instance, the Thomas Kinkadee campaign "Sharing the Light with One More Child" has successfully sponsored more than 52,000 children through World Vision (Art Business News, 2002). Other organizations that have mounted campaigns to encourage child sponsorship include ChildFund International (formerly the Christian Children's Fund), Children Incorporated, Christian Foundation for Children and Aging, Compassion International, Pearl S. Buck International, Save the Children, and World Vision (CharityWatch, 2012). Despite the importance of child sponsorship in the fight against childhood poverty, little direct research exists on how affective and motivational factors might influence the persuasiveness of child sponsorship campaign messaging.

Extant literature in psychology indicates that affective states provide a useful source of information, signals, and motives that are fundamental to helping behaviors of individuals (e.g., Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988). In particular,

it has been shown that a primary motive for an individual's willingness to engage in helping others is to enhance one's own mood (Bless & Fiedler, 2006).

The current research draws specifically on the constructs of mood and regulatory focus to examine the critical role affective state plays in influencing the self-regulation of information processing underlying approach-avoidance motivation (Bless & Fiedler, 2006), recognizing that individual mood states reflect a wide spectrum of regulatory processes and behaviors (e.g., regulatory focus). In advertising persuasion research, regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) has been widely used as a theoretical framework for predicting how ad-persuasiveness might depend on a message characteristic called "regulatory focus framing"; that is, whether a message is oriented toward the promotion of desired, positive outcomes to achieve success or toward the prevention of undesired, negative outcomes to avoid failure (Lee & Aaker, 2004; Zhao & Pechmann, 2007). By testing the interactive effect of mood and regulatory focus on responses to child sponsorship messaging and adherence to the advocated altruistic goal, the current research seeks to provide insight into the underlying mechanisms that may explain why persuasion is enhanced when these two factors work together synergistically. The specific practical and theoretical contributions of the study's results are threefold.

First, the current research will suggest practical message guidelines to communicators involved in the development and production of child sponsorship campaigns. This study takes the strategic position that it is important for campaign planners to understand how specific factors can be used to design and influence information processing strategies for encouraging child sponsorship. Such information will serve to enhance the potential success of ad-messaging efforts. Second, the results of this study will add to a growing body of literature suggesting that affective states have an impact on helping and altruism (e.g., Salovey & Rosenhan, 1989). Specifically, this research will address the important moderating influence of whether a promotion or prevention focus is activated. Third, this study will highlight a novel mechanism underlying the interactive pattern by showing that perceived message elaboration and goal commitment mediate these effects. This builds on prior work by elucidating the impact of mood and regulatory focus on persuasion (e.g., Mackie & Worth, 1989; Trope, Igou, & Burke, 2006).

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### Mood and Regulatory Focus

Mood—conceptualized as an individual's affective state representing positive or negative feelings that occur in a specific time or situation (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Gardner, 1985)—can potentially play a significant

role in influencing people's judgments, decisions, and information processing (Aspinwall, 1998; Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, & Strack, 1990; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Worth & Mackie, 1987). As opposed to emotion that is more short-lived, conscious, and intense (e.g., disgust, anger, or fear), mood is low-intensity, diffuse, subconscious, and an enduring affective state that has no salient antecedent cause and thus little cognitive content (Forgas, Wyland, & Laham, 2006; Shen & Bigsby, 2010).

Much of the research has suggested that mood is closely related to goal-directed behavior (e.g., Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Trope, Igou, & Burke, 2006). First, mood provides critical information about whether additional effort is needed to reach a particular goal (Aspinwall, 1998). To illustrate, happiness signals that a goal has been achieved, while sadness signals that attempts to attain or maintain a goal have failed (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Higgins, 1987). Second, the maintenance of positive affect is the primary goal of self-regulation among people in a positive mood. Under some conditions, positive mood seems to foster careful processing of goal-relevant information, even negative information (Aspinwall, 1998).

Higgins's (1997) regulatory focus theory provides an advanced understanding of self-regulatory goals that underlie approach-avoidance motivation. Higgins' theory distinguishes between two basic types of self-regulatory orientation that adhere to goal pursuits: *promotion focus* and *prevention focus*. People with a survival need for nurturance (i.e., promotion focus) tend to regulate their attention, perceptions, attitude, and behaviors toward approaching gains and avoiding non-gains, whereas those with a survival need for security (i.e., prevention focus) tend to regulate their attention, perceptions, attitude, and behaviors toward avoiding losses and approaching nonlosses (Higgins, 1997, 2002; Lee & Higgins, 2009). Regardless of whether their regulatory orientation can be chronically accessible or situationally primed, promotion-focused people tend to be more sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes whereas prevention-focused people tend to be more sensitive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Lee & Higgins, 2009).

Consistent with this view, prior work has created persuasive messages with different regulatory foci by varying featured product attributes (e.g., Aaker & Lee, 2001) or health/social consequences (e.g., Kim, 2006; Zhao & Pechmann, 2007). Practically, a promotion-focused message can be used to address people's interests in hopes and advancement in order to boost their behavioral approach tendency as the strategic "eager" means to goal attainment. On the other hand, a prevention-focused message can be used to address people's concerns about obligations and safety in order to elicit their behavioral approach tendency as the strategic "vigilant" means to goal attainment (Kees, Burton, & Tangari, 2010; Kim, 2006; Lee & Aaker, 2004).

Importantly, the two basic types of self-regulatory goals are tied to different sets of affective dimensions

that range from valence to activation (Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Higgins, 1987). It has been argued that people with a promotion focus may place more weight on their cheerfulness-related positive moods (e.g., happy, upbeat, satisfied) and dejection-related negative moods (e.g., sad, disappointed, angry), whereas those with a prevention focus may place more weight on their quiescence-related positive moods (e.g., relaxed, calm, serene) and agitation-related negative moods (e.g., fearful, tense, worried; Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Carver, 2006; Higgins, 1997, 2002). Supporting the compatibility effect between individuals' incidental emotions and goals, Bosmans and Baumgartner (2005) demonstrated that consumers tend to perceive achievement-related emotions (e.g., cheerfulness and dejection) as more informative for product evaluations than protection-related emotion (e.g., quiescence and agitation) when achievement goals are activated, and the opposite effect is observed when protection goals are activated.

### Mood-Management Perspectives

A great deal of research on the influence of affective states on altruism has demonstrated that positive affect leads consistently to "helping others" engagement, while in some cases negative affect may also enhance helping behaviors (e.g., Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988, Salovey & Rosenhan, 1989). The available evidence is consistent with the general assumption of the mood-maintenance/mood-repair framework, which posits that individuals are motivated to maintain their positive moods and repair their negative moods by engaging in various activities (Bless & Fiedler, 2006; Isen, 1984). For example, Schaller and Cialdini (1988) found that people are more likely to help others in need in order to relieve their negative affect when they experience negative feelings (e.g., "if you feel bad, do good things"). This tendency is exhibited because engaging in helping behavior will lead to self-rewards that will wipe out negative feelings (Batson & Powell, 2003).

In addition to demonstrating the mood-maintenance/mood-repair framework, the hedonic contingency theory (Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995) postulates that people in a happy mood are motivated to scrutinize the hedonic consequences of actions (i.e., their affective costs and benefits) more carefully than those in neutral or sad moods and thereby engage in actions that will maintain or improve their positive mood as a means of mood management. However, individuals in a sad or neutral mood do not need to scrutinize hedonic consequences to actions because there are many more activities that will maintain or improve their mood (Hirt, Devers, & McCrea, 2008; Wegener & Petty, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). Namely, when people are in a negative mood, the existence of more behavioral options will result in a better mood (Trope, Igou, & Burke, 2006).

Hedonic contingency theory also suggests that people in a positive mood tend to process uplifting messages and avoid depressing messages (Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). People in a positive mood are more sensitive to the mood-changing outcomes of their actions than those in a negative or neutral mood. However, the theory has not been supported in the negative mood condition (Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994).

Compared with people in a positive mood, those in a negative mood do not care as much about persuasive messages spoiling mood because they are already in a negative mood (Keller, Lipkus, & Rimer, 2003). In support of the hedonic contingency view of mood, Chang (2007) confirmed a significant interaction effect between mood and message framing in the context of advertising for healthcare products. Specifically, it was found that in the positive mood condition, positive framing leads to greater advertising effectiveness than negative framing. Nevertheless, no effects of positive vs. negative framing were observed in the negative mood condition.

Similar to the conceptualization of message framing (i.e., gains and losses), a promotion-focused strategy is believed to emphasize the pursuit of gains associated with positive consequences and a prevention-focused strategy is argued to emphasize the avoidance of losses associated with negative consequences (Lee & Aaker, 2004). With this mind, it is expected that individuals in a happy mood should be more responsive to a promotion-focused message compared to those in a sad mood. However, mood effects are expected to become weaker in a prevention-focused message. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

- H1a:** When exposed to a promotion-focused advertising frame, participants in a happy mood will show more favorable attitude toward child sponsorship and greater willingness to sponsor than those in a sad mood.
- H1b:** When exposed to a prevention-focused advertising frame, lesser mood effects on attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor will be observed.

### The Mediating Role of Perceived Elaboration and Goal Commitment

Research has addressed the question of how mood might influence evaluative processing and provided rival explanations about the precise nature of its influence. One view holds that being in a happy mood interferes with an individual's capacity to scrutinize persuasive messages (e.g., Mackie & Worth, 1989; Worth & Mackie, 1987). In other words, positive affect is more related to heuristic processing and negative affect is more linked to systematic processing (e.g.,

Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). As suggested by Herr, Page, Pfeiffer, and Davis (2011), positive affect (associated with decreased information processing) is believed to diminish reasoning and decision making, whereas negative affect (associated with enhanced information processing) is believed to lead to increased cognitive thinking and elaboration. Conversely, others contend that positive affect actually improve processing efficiency and quality for persuasive messages (Hullett, 2005; Isen, 1984). To illustrate, Wegener, Petty, and Smith (1995) demonstrated that a happy mood can lead people to engage in greater message processing than a sad mood when an uplifting message signaling positive outcomes is encountered, but less message processing when a depressing message is encountered.

In light of the conflicting perspectives, existing literature has suggested a more complex view of the impact of mood on information processing that may vary on the basis of the content of information (Forgas & Bower, 1987; Herr et al., 2011). From the preceding discussion, it is postulated that the interaction effect between mood and regulatory focus will lead to greater perceived message elaboration, which refers to the “subjective assessment of how carefully the person has processed information” (Wan, Rucker, Tormala, & Clarkson, 2010, p. 532). This study further extends prior research by making the prediction that perceived message elaboration will enhance one’s goal commitment. Previous research suggests that perceived elaboration has a powerful impact on commitment (e.g., Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1996). In psychology, commitment refers to “the pledging or binding of an individual to behavioral actions” (Kiesler, 1971, p. 30). Similarly, goal commitment can be conceptualized as an individual’s attachment to reach a goal (Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1988).

Commitment to a goal can also be a critical factor for understanding the underlying mechanism through which the persuasive impact of mood and regulatory focus operate. Goal commitment has been shown to be a key determinant of goal-directed behavior (e.g., Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987; Wofford, Goodwin, & Premack, 1992) because people tend to represent their goal actions in terms of commitment to the desirable end state (Fishbach & Zhang, 2009). For example, a dieter may experience greater commitment to healthful eating or physical activity when they set a goal to lose weight. Taken together, it is expected that combining individual mood states with regulatory focus leads to greater perceived elaboration, which translates into greater goal commitment. Such a sequential pathway will result in more positive willingness to sponsor. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

- H2:** The interactive effect of mood and regulatory focus on willingness to sponsor will be mediated by the pathway from perceived elaboration to goal commitment.

## METHOD

### Research Design

A 2 (mood: happy vs. sad)  $\times$  2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) between-subjects design was used to test the hypotheses. The experiment was executed online.

Participants were provided with a URL, which they used to access and complete the online experimental tasks. Using the Random Link Generator (Baek, Kim, & Yu, 2010; Baek, Shen, & Reid, 2013), they were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Although the degree of control over Web-based studies is lower than for studies conducted in a lab environment (Baek, Shen, & Reid, 2013), prior research has reported a close comparative match between the results of psychological research in lab situations and over the Internet (Krantz & Dalal, 2000).

Experimental induction of mood was manipulated by combining two frequently used procedures: autobiographical recall and story-induced tasks. In their meta-analysis of mood-induction procedures, Westermann, Spies, Stahl, and Hesse (1996) reported that combining different types of mood-induction procedures is an often used technique in previous research (e.g., Mayer, Allen, & Beaugard, 1995) to increase the effectiveness of the induction.

In the happy mood condition, participants were asked to recall and describe a specific life event that had made them very happy, and also instructed to read brief stories that would induce a happy mood. The happy mood-induction story (*The Metal Box*) was about a special metal box to save money for a 50th wedding anniversary trip in Hawaii. Similarly, in the sad mood condition, participants were asked to recall and describe a specific life event that had made them very sad, and also instructed to read brief stories that would induce a sad mood. The sad mood-induction story (*The Perfect Angel*) was about the death of a best friend. Excerpted from the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series published more than 10 years ago, these mood-induction stories were slightly modified and presented in the format of newspaper articles.

In order to ensure whether or not the induction procedures generated the desired mood state, a pretest using 32 college students was conducted. The manipulation check was measured by three, 7-point semantic differential items anchored by “sad/happy,” “gloomy/cheerful,” and “negative/positive” (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Egidi & Gerrig, 2009). The item scores were averaged to form an overall mood index ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ). A significant difference between the two conditions was found ( $t = 9.38, p < 0.05$ ). Specifically, participants in the happy mood condition felt happier than those in the sad mood condition ( $M$  happy = 5.93 vs.  $M$  sad = 3.71). Accordingly, the manipulation was deemed successful for the mood-induction experimental task. This manipulation check was repeated in the

main experiment to verify the significant difference between happy and sad mood inductions.

In order to manipulate regulatory focus types, two versions of a newspaper advertisement advocating child sponsorship were designed. To increase external validity, each target ad was embedded within the context of two small ads and several classified ads in a newspaper page. The target ad consisted of headline copy, an image of impoverished children, and a paragraph describing the benefits of child sponsorship as well as a societal need related to the altruistic behavior. The regulatory focus message was manipulated in terms of either a promotion focus or a prevention focus. Specifically, the promotion-framed ad message emphasized ideas about attaining positive outcomes (e.g., *enhancing access to primary resources including clean water and nutritious food, promoting literacy for children in need, and improving the health and well-being of children in need*). The prevention-framed ad message highlighted the idea of avoiding the negative outcomes (e.g., *protecting those suffering from dirty water and malnutrition, preventing illiteracy for children in need, and reducing the health risks of Malaria and HIV/AIDS of children in need*). Except for the two regulatory focus frame manipulations, all other aspects of the ad stimuli were invariant with respect to size, layout, and background. A set of ad stimuli is provided in the Appendix.

## Participants and Procedure

A total of 217 undergraduate students (35.5% male and 64.5% female) recruited from a major southeastern US university participated in the main experiment in exchange for extra credit. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 ( $M = 20.2$ ). Fewer than 14% (13.4%) of these participants had past experience sponsoring a child and 3.7% reported that they were currently sponsoring a child. The possibility of demand artifacts was minimized by providing a cover story which asked participants to take part in two unrelated studies (Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007) and using a between-subjects design in which an individual participant is exposed to only one treatment level (Sawyer, 1975). It is important to note that a within-subjects design would have raised concerns that the more treatment conditions to which participants are exposed, the more likely they are to infer the purpose of the experiment (Sawyer, 1975). More specifically, participants were told that they would be participating in a series of short, unrelated research studies. The first study included the priming manipulations of mood state using both recall and story-induced tasks. The second study was introduced as a survey seeking consumer evaluations of advertising strategy for nonprofit organizations. Participants were asked to view either a promotion-framed or a prevention-framed ad message. After reading each ad message, they completed a self-administered questionnaire, which included the dependent variables, manipulation checks, and demographic questions. The entire process took approximately 30 minutes.

## Dependent Measures

The dependent variables of interest included attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor. Attitude toward child sponsorship was measured using five, 7-point semantic differential items (i.e., “bad/good,” “foolish/wise,” “undesirable/desirable,” “unfavorable/favorable,” and “unnecessary/necessary”) adopted from Blankenship and Wegener (2008). Coefficient alpha for these five items was 0.92. The five items were averaged to form an index for attitude toward child sponsorship.

Willingness to sponsor was measured by four items adopted from Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each of the following statements on a 1–7 scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree): “I intend to sponsor a child,” “I will consider sponsoring a child in the future,” “I would recommend sponsoring a child to my friends or relatives,” and “I am likely to make a charitable donation in order to help a child in need.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.88. The four items were averaged to form an index for willingness to sponsor.

Perceived elaboration was measured by three items adopted from prior research (Barden & Petty, 2008; Wan et al., 2010). Participants were asked to indicate their opinion on each of the following questions: “How thorough were you in processing the ad message about sponsoring a child?” “How careful were you in processing the ad message about sponsoring a child?” and “How much attention did you pay to the ad message about sponsoring a child?” The questions were anchored on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all and 7 = very much). The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.91. The three items were averaged to form an index for perceived elaboration.

Additionally, goal commitment to child sponsorship was measured using a scale adopted from Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, Wright, and Deshon (2001): “It’s hard to take the goal of child sponsorship seriously (R),” “Quite frankly, I do not care if I achieve the goal of child sponsorship or not (R),” “I am strongly committed to pursuing the goal of child sponsorship,” “It would not take much to make me abandon the goal of child sponsorship (R),” “I think this is a good goal of child sponsorship to shoot for.” (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.) Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.82. The five items were averaged to form an index for goal commitment.

## RESULTS

### Manipulation Checks

To verify manipulation of mood induction, participants rated how they felt immediately after completing the recall and story-induced tasks. The three, 7-point semantic differential items from the pretest were

used to confirm the mood-induction check (sad/happy, gloomy/cheerful, and negative/positive,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ; Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Egidi & Gerrig, 2009). The manipulation check data revealed that the difference between the two mood conditions was statistically significant ( $t = 18.62, p < 0.05$ ). As expected, participants in the happy mood condition felt happier than those in the sad mood condition ( $M$  happy = 5.87 vs.  $M$  sad = 3.11). Thus, the mood manipulation was successful.

As a check on regulatory framing manipulation, a 7-point scale was used with three anchors adopted from Poels and Dewitte (2008): whether the ad message emphasized (1) avoiding something negative or (7) attaining something positive; (1) more ideas about prevention or (7) more ideas about promotion; and (1) more ideas about protection or (7) more ideas about enhancement ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). The mean score for the promotion-framed message was greater than the mean score for the prevention-framed message ( $M$  promotion = 5.01 vs.  $M$  prevention = 3.56,  $t = 8.38, p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the regulatory framing manipulation was successful.

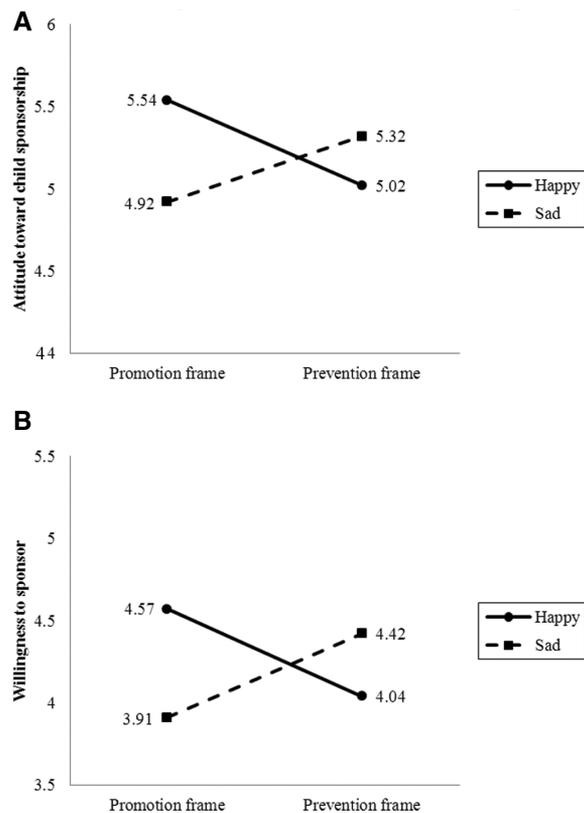
## Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypotheses simultaneously, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with univariate follow-up tests of simple effects were performed. Following Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) recommendation, a series of underlying assumptions for MANOVA was checked. First, Box's  $M$  test for homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices revealed no significant differences across treatment groups (Box's  $M = 5.49, p = 0.79$ ). In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was performed to test the correlation of both dependent variables. There was a significance level of intercorrelation between the two dependent variables ( $r = 0.66, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the basic assumptions of MANOVA were considered satisfactory.

As predicted, there was a significant interaction between mood and regulatory focus for both dependent measures (Wilks's  $\lambda = 0.96, F(2, 212) = 4.54, p < 0.05$ ). The significant multivariate interaction effect was attributable to attitude toward child sponsorship ( $F(1, 213) = 8.06, p < 0.05$ ) and willingness to sponsor ( $F(1, 213) = 6.88, p < 0.05$ ). No main effects were significant.

As is evident from Figure 1, planned contrasts revealed that when the ad message was framed in promotion focus, participants in the happy mood reported more favorable attitude toward child sponsorship compared with those in a sad mood ( $M$  happy = 5.54 vs.  $M$  sad = 4.92,  $t = 2.71, p < 0.05$ ). Similar results were found for willingness to sponsor ( $M$  happy = 4.57 vs.  $M$  sad = 3.91,  $t = 2.37, p < 0.05$ ). Thus, H1a was strongly supported.

When the ad message was framed in prevention focus, there was no significant difference between participants in a happy and sad mood for both favorable attitude toward child sponsorship ( $M$  happy = 5.02 vs.  $M$  sad = 5.32,  $t = 1.30, p = 0.19$ ) and willingness to

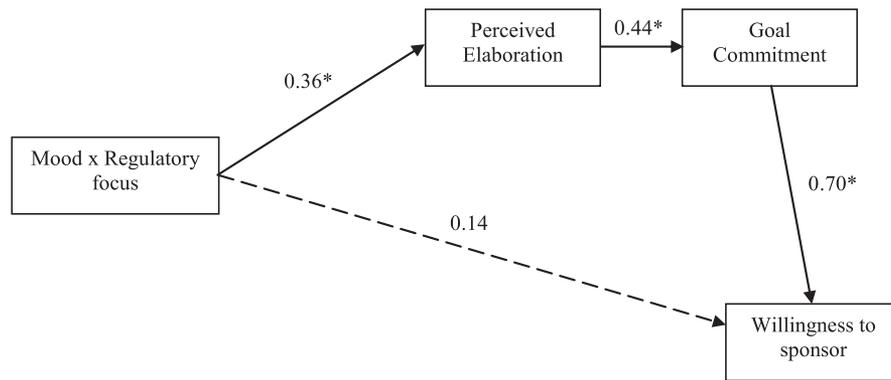


**Figure 1.** (A) Effects of mood and regulatory focus on attitude toward child sponsorship. (B) Effects of mood and regulatory focus on willingness to sponsor.

sponsor ( $M$  happy = 4.04 vs.  $M$  sad = 4.42,  $t = 1.34, p = 0.18$ ).

## Mechanism Underlying the Interactive Effect of Mood and Regulatory Focus

The current research proposed that the interaction between mood and regulatory focus is mediated by perceived elaboration to anticipate goal commitment, which in turn leads to increased willingness to sponsor. As recommended by Wu and Zumbo (2007) and White and Willness (2009), structural equation modeling was used to test for the mediated moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Each structural path coefficient was examined with fit indices of the model. Overall, the goodness-of-fit indices were satisfactory:  $\chi^2(4) = 22.0$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), GFI (goodness-of-fit index) = 0.97, RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) = 0.07, NFI (normed fit index) = 0.95, CFI (comparative fit index) = 0.96, and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) = 0.047. As shown in Figure 2, when the mediators were included in the model, the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction significantly predicted perceived elaboration (*standardized coefficient* = 0.36,  $p < 0.01$ ), which in turn predicted goal commitment (*standardized coefficient* = 44,  $p < 0.01$ ),



**Figure 2.** Mediated moderation model.

*Notes:* In estimating the model, we tested a mediated moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). All path estimates are standardized; path estimates not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) are indicated with dashed lines. \*The path is statistically significant at  $p = 0.05$  level.

which predicted willingness to sponsor (*standardized coefficient* = 0.70,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, the direct relationship between the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction and willingness to sponsor was not significant (*standardized coefficient* = 0.14,  $p > 0.10$ ). Without the inclusion of the mediators, the relationship between the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction and willingness to sponsor was statistically significant (*standardized coefficient* = 0.31,  $p < 0.01$ ).

This study also tested the significance of indirect impact by using the bootstrapping method with Amos 17.0 following the advice of Cheung and Lau (2008). In this model, 5000 bootstrapped samples were used to estimate the bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Because the confidence interval did not contain zero, the indirect effect of the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction on willingness to sponsor through perceived elaboration was significant (95% CI = 0.22–0.44;  $p < 0.01$ ) as was the indirect effect of perceived elaboration on willingness to sponsor through goal commitment (95% CI = 0.06–0.28;  $p < 0.01$ ). However, the direct path from the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction to willingness to sponsor was not significant (95% CI = –0.02–0.29;  $p > 0.11$ ). This pattern of results indicates indirect-only mediation (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). In sum, the findings suggest that the effect of the mood  $\times$  regulatory focus interaction on willingness to sponsor is fully mediated by perceived elaboration and, in turn, goal commitment. Therefore, H2 was supported.

## DISCUSSION

The overarching objective of this research was to investigate how the effects of mood vary as a function of whether a promotion or prevention focus is activated in fostering the altruistic behavior of child sponsorship. The findings indicate that people's mood states interact with regulatory focus in fundamental ways in the studied advertising messaging context. The research

provides support for the overall prediction that when an ad-based message is framed in promotion focus, a happy mood fosters more favorable attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor than a sad mood. Accordingly, the indication is persuasion for child sponsorship campaign persuasion is enhanced when happy moods and promotion-focused ad messages are associated.

The results are consistent with prior research and provide clear support for mood congruency effects. There is reason to believe mood activates valence-congruent material in memory and functions as retrieval cues for previously acquired knowledge (Bower, 1981; Bower, Gilligan, & Monteiro, 1981). It is noteworthy that the mood congruency effects can be explained within an associative network model of memory (Bower, 1981), which assumes that an affective state primes and makes more accessible past memories and knowledge structures associated with the affective valence of material stored in memory. In support of this notion, a substantial stream of research has indicated that positive moods lead to more favorable evaluations, whereas negative moods elicit more negative evaluations (Forgas, 1995; Gardner, 1985; Martin, 2003). In a related but different vein, Yan, Dillard, and Shen (2010) suggested that happy moods coupled with gain framing are more persuasive than happy moods coupled with loss framing in the context of health-directed behaviors. These research results extend the aforementioned past observations by showing the mood congruency effect of happiness and promotion-focused message in affecting altruistic behavior.

The findings also seem to mirror the hedonic contingency framework, which holds that people in a happy mood will be motivated to process uplifting/positive messages and avoid depressing/negative messages (Wegener & Petty, 1994). Consistent with Bosmans and Baumgartner (2005), who demonstrated the importance of the correspondence between discrete emotions and consumers' salient goals, the results of this study advance understanding of the interplay of mood

and motivational goal orientation in determining the message persuasiveness in the advertising messaging context of child sponsorship.

On the other hand, the results indicate that happy and sad people had equally favorable attitude toward child sponsorship and behavioral intention to sponsor a child when the ad-based message was perceived as a means to avoid negative outcomes (i.e., prevention-focused frame). This is consistent with Gardner and Wilhelm's (1987) study, which found when consumers are exposed to a negative advertising appeal, there is no difference in attitudes toward the ad and brand between those in positive and negative moods.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results shed light on the process underlying the interactive effect of mood and regulatory focus. The findings suggest that perceived elaboration and goal commitment are dominant key mediators underlying the interactive impact of mood and regulatory focus on child sponsorship attitude and behavior. That is, a combination of mood and regulatory focus would appear to lead to enhanced perceptions of elaboration, which in turn predicts goal commitment and subsequent increases in positive willingness to sponsor children. Taken together, the findings highlight a novel mechanism underlying the interplay between mood and regulatory focus by showing perceived elaboration and goal commitment motivate people to engage in altruistic behavior.

Furthermore, the research extends the literature on mood and self-regulation. Prior work has examined how mood influences different regulatory motivation dimensions, such as BIS/BAS (behavioral inhibition system vs. behavioral activation system), temporal distance (proximal vs. distant), or self-construal (abstract vs. concrete; Bless & Fiedler, 2006). Despite the theoretical plausibility, there is little empirical evidence for the influence of mood on regulatory focus. In this research, the interaction between mood and the message's regulatory focus was investigated. The findings thus broaden understanding of the linkages of mood with self-regulatory goals.

Several practical implications for effective child sponsorship advertising strategies are offered. First, the study's findings shed light on some of the strategic ways charity fundraisers might use appropriate advertising message strategies to persuade people to contribute to child sponsorship campaigns. Based on these findings, advertising messages should be created with an eye toward behavioral consequences that are relevant to viewers' regulatory focus. Most importantly, the development of child sponsorship messaging needs to take into account target audiences' affect and motivation, which may determine the basis for their regulatory focus in information processing and persuasion. The implication of these findings, therefore, is child sponsorship campaign messages could be more effectively created and deployed if communicators were more mindful of the interplay of mood and regulatory focus-framed messages when advocating helping behavior.

Second, charity fundraisers need to consider using contextual cues which induce either a happy or sad mood when developing child sponsorship campaigns using regulatory focus message-framed messages. For instance, child sponsorship ad-based messages are typically embedded in television programs, editorial content, and various other media contexts. These external contexts are likely to influence individuals' mood states (Baek, Shen, & Reid, 2013). Research has confirmed that context-induced moods ultimately influence consumer responses to embedded advertising messages (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998; Kamins, Marks, & Skinner, 1991; Shapiro, MacInnis, & Park, 2002). In light of these findings, selecting an appropriate context that is intended to induce either a happy or sad mood is important to the success of child sponsorship campaigns. For example, an advertising message for child sponsorship using a promotion-focused frame would likely be more effective if run in television shows (e.g., situation comedies, comedy movies) that most likely induce happy mood states. On the other hand, when they doubt target audiences are likely to be in a happy mood state, they should emphasize a prevention-focused frame in an attempt to exert weak mood effects on attitude toward child sponsorship and willingness to sponsor. Simply put, charity fundraisers for child sponsorship need to plan for context effects through reasoning and strategic research.

Finally, international charity fundraisers who execute child sponsorship programs across countries, such as World Vision and Compassion International, should be careful when adopting the findings of this study. Prior work has suggested that people in Eastern cultures (i.e., possessing a more interdependent self-view) tend to focus on their obligations and responsibilities to others by favoring prevention over promotion strategies, whereas people in Western cultures (i.e., possessing a more independent self-view) tend to emphasize their personal achievements and aspirations by preferring promotion over prevention strategies (e.g., Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Uskul, Sherman, & Fitzgibbon, 2009). Given that cross-cultural differences may alter the role of regulatory focus strategy in persuasive communication, international charity fundraisers should fine-tune their child sponsorship message strategies by further examining how the interactive effects of mood and regulatory focus-framed messages on altruistic behavior might be enhanced or suppressed depending on cultural differences.

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the insights suggested by this research, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the experiment used newspaper advertisements embedded

within the context of small display and classified ads in order to enhance realism and naturalistic settings. Although the experiment was controlled to maximize internal validity, specific characteristics of the filler ads in conjunction with the experimental stimuli might have caused potential confounding effects, despite the merits of realism and naturalism. Future research is required to replicate these findings through the use of ad stimuli in isolation and in other media contexts.

Second, the findings are limited to the altruistic behavior of child sponsorship. Future research should investigate whether similar effects will occur across different types of behavioral advocacies (e.g., joining and volunteering; specific conservation behaviors, such as recycling and energy saving; social activism for a social cause; organ donation).

Finally, the use of student samples in this research is an obvious limitation. Even though this study attempted to match cause/person relevancy, students are not a primary target segment for child sponsorship campaigns. While student samples provide an appropriate population for testing theory, their homogeneous characteristics limit generalizability (Amos & Spears, 2010; Lynch, 1999). To enhance external validity, future research is warranted to test the interactive patterns of mood and regulatory focus across more representative samples of different audience populations.

Several intriguing avenues that deserve further exploration are suggested by this research. From a methodological perspective, this study used the autobiographical recall and story-induced tasks to examine the impact of context-induced moods. Researchers could consider other ways to induce mood states more realistically. For example, it would be interesting to explore the potential influence of ad-induced moods by incorporating audio-visual cues (evoking intended mood states) into regulatory focus-framed messaging to more realistically simulate how mood induction may occur in real-world situations. Another area for future research is the direct assessment of actual behavior, in addition to attitudes and behavioral intentions, the outcomes measured here. Future research is also needed to explore whether other individual difference (e.g., cause involvement and personality trait) factors simultaneously influence the interaction effects of mood and regulatory focus-framed messaging on altruistic behavior. At the very least, this research should serve as an empirical foundation for other investigations of mood, regulatory focus, and persuasive communication settings.

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# APPENDIX

## Ad Stimuli

### Promotion Frame

1BR APT WITH carpet. Partially furnished. Includes some utilities. Near campus. \$410/mo. Call John 404-368-1741 or john.chandler@legblat.com.

1BR APTS W/ 1 MONTH FREE & NO PET FEE! Close to Campus & Downtown from \$380-\$425 NO SD w/ acceptable credit. That's only \$350-\$390 w/ special. www.ambrosepropertiesposflets.com 706-549-2500

1BR AVAILABLE IN 3BR 3BA. Rates starting at \$365/mo. W/D, cable tv, 24 hour maintenance, trash service and pest control included. Contact us at 706-548-0600 for leasing information. Unique Townhome Living. www.riverwalktownhomes.com

1BR IN 4BR 4BA townhouse starting at \$355/mo. W/D, cable tv, 24 hour maintenance, trash service and pest control included. Contact us at 706-548-0600 for leasing information. Athens Best Student Living. www.riverwalktownhomes.com

2BR 2.5BA The Summit of Athens spacious townhouse. All appliances. W/D. State of the art clubhouse, pool, work-out room. Great, safe. Close to campus. \$950/mo. 770-891-8255 greterot@acsl.com. Available 8/1

2BR 2BA CONDO for rent. Off S. Lumpkin, 1 mile from campus. Carpet and tile one year old, new paint, fireplace, storage area. W/D. Pets welcome. \$675/mo. Owner/agent Michele 404-281-6273 sc10211975@gmail.com

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### Sponsor a Child. You Can Make a Difference.



More than 600 million children live on less than a dollar a day. Poverty and hunger rob them of hope and threatens to steal their future.

You can make a difference in a child's life. Sponsor a child. Your dollars will help improve the quality of life for those living in poverty.

Your support will ...

- Enhance access to basic resources, such as clean water and nutritious food.
- Promote literacy for children in need.
- Improve the health and well-being of impoverished children.
- Provide them with vocational training opportunities.

To more information on sponsoring a child, call 1-800-755-2531 or visit www.ngoproject.org



### Prevention Frame

1BR APT WITH carpet. Partially furnished. Includes some utilities. Near campus. \$410/mo. Call John 404-368-1741 or john.chandler@legblat.com.

1BR APTS W/ 1 MONTH FREE & NO PET FEE! Close to Campus & Downtown from \$380-\$425 NO SD w/ acceptable credit. That's only \$350-\$390 w/ special. www.ambrosepropertiesposflets.com 706-549-2500

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2BR 2.5BA The Summit of Athens spacious townhouse. All appliances. W/D. State of the art clubhouse, pool, work-out room. Great, safe. Close to campus. \$950/mo. 770-891-8255 greterot@acsl.com. Available 8/1

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More than 600 million children live on less than a dollar a day. Poverty and hunger rob them of hope and threatens to steal their future.

You can make a difference in a child's life. Sponsor a child. Your dollars will help protect those living in poverty from hunger and preventable diseases.

Your support will ...

- Protect children suffering from dirty water and malnutrition.
- Prevent illiteracy for children in need.
- Reduce the health risks of Malaria and HIV/AIDS.
- Keep them safe from cruel and harmful child labor.

To more information on sponsoring a child, call 1-800-755-2531 or visit www.ngoproject.org

