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**HOW DOES POST-PURCHASE REGRET INFLUENCE CONSUMERS'  
PURCHASE INTENTION FOR THE ALMOST-CHOSEN BRAND IN  
ONLINE SHOPPING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-BRAND  
CONNECTION**

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**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

**Department of Management and Marketing**

**How Does Post-Purchase Regret Influence Consumers' Purchase Intention for  
The Almost-Chosen Brand in Online Shopping: The Mediating Role of Self-  
Brand Connection**

**SUYUE WANG**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy**

**May 2023**

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WANG Suyue

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between post-purchase regret and consumers' purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand and the mediating role of Self-Brand Connection through two experiments. The results provide evidence for the potent impact of post-decisional regret on enhancing consumers' self-brand connections with the almost-chosen brand and subsequent purchase intention, particularly in the context of a wider choice set. The findings will give brand marketers insights into the importance of consumer regret and its previously less-noticed consequences related to SBC.

**Keywords:** post-decision regret, self-brand connection, purchase intention, purchase motivation

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



In this picture, I provided an example of post-purchase regret from the real world. This post comes from Little Red Book, one of China's largest UGC content-sharing communities. In the post, the author called for consumers' experience of post-purchase regret for makeup products and received over 16,000 responses in a short time, proving that post-purchase regret is a widespread phenomenon, especially in online shopping. This scenario will often occur in markets with a lot of competition for similar products



and where consumers have a continuous demand for the product, such as consumer electronics, cosmetics, daily necessities, etc.

Nowadays, online shopping venues have expanded from traditional computer-based transactions to transactions based on mobile applications and social media links with the rapid development of e-commerce (Park & Hill, 2018). Increasingly diverse online shopping methods provide convenience for consumers and shape new consumer behavior because of their differences from offline shopping forms. Still, the research on understanding consumer behavior in the online shopping environment is relatively lagging behind (Sarwar et al., 2019). Compared to offline shopping, a limitation of online shopping is that consumers cannot physically compare the stuff and material, which leads to a higher regret generated by online shopping than by traditional offline shopping (Sarwar et al. 2019). At the same time, consumers are more likely to have access to a wide range of brands and products in the e-commerce environment. Therefore, consumers' post-decision regret after online shopping has become a widespread phenomenon. In recent years, the number of studies on online shopping regret has gradually increased (Dhir et al., 2016), but previous research mainly focused on the consequences of consumer regret for purchase decisions when the results of unselected options are revealed, and primarily for brands that have already been selected. Few studies have focused on how consumers' attitudes have changed toward brands that once appeared on their choice lists but were ultimately not chosen, while I believe that regret is a potential catalyst for the relationship between consumers and the brands they almost choose. The result of a recent study in psychology provides theoretical support for my conjecture, in which researchers found that in the presence of larger choice sets and uncertainty, participants will experience more intense regret when not informed of the outcome of the unchosen option. Because the perceived attractiveness of the forgone alternative will outweigh its reality, people's idealization of the unchosen alternatives becomes the standard of comparison with the chosen one, which leads to stronger regret (Feiler & Muller, 2022). I believe a similar process occurs in the online shopping environment, as consumers are exposed to the same extensive

set of choices and uncertainties. However, the advantages gained by the almost chosen brands as a result of consumer regret are not fully exploited and utilized, partly due to the neglect of previous research on the objects affected by consumer regret when the results of the discarded option are not revealed.

Therefore, I propose that post-purchase regret will enhance consumers' purchase intention for their almost-chosen brand through self-brand connection. I choose purchase intention as the downstream result of SBC and the dependent variable because it is commonly used as a predictor of subsequent purchase behavior in consumer behavior research and serves as a clear sign of the consumer-brand relationship. I also introduced an essential mediating variable, consumer-brand connection, to explore the mechanism behind the effect of post-purchase regret on consumers' purchase intentions for the almost-chosen brand. Two self-motives, self-enhancement and self-verification, are also discussed as the potential pathways for enhancing the self-brand connection with an almost-chosen brand caused by regret.

I intend to examine the relationship between post-purchase regret and customers' purchase intentions for the almost-chosen brand and the mediating role of SBC through two studies. A pilot study is conducted to initially explore the main effect and the mediating mechanism of self-brand connection; Study 1 will further demonstrate the main effect and test the mediating effect of self-brand connection and the moderating effect of motivation for purchase. In the two studies, I adopt the scenario methodology (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999) used in brand choice and regret-related studies. I designed a scenario of a smartphone selection experience to explore the impact of regret on consumers' self-brand connection with almost chosen brands and subsequent purchase intentions by manipulating consumers' post-purchase regret. The most important contribution of this research is that it further explores an important emotion affecting consumer post-purchase behavior, regret, building on existing research and presenting the first association between regret and consumers' enhanced self-brand association with almost-chosen brands. My findings will give brand marketers insights into the

importance of consumer regret and its previously less-noticed consequences related to SBC.

## **CHAPTER 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

As an essential predictor of consumers' future behavior, emotions are the cause of a large part of purchase choices (Flavion-Blanco et al., 2011). Among the numerous emotions, regret is recognized to create one of the most intense emotional reactions (Saffrey et al., 2008). Previous research has defined the concept of regret as a negative feeling when comparing or visualizing future possibilities and recognizing that one may have been in a better circumstance if one chose a different option (Bell, 1982; Zeelenberg, 1999). In the post-purchase evaluation process for the consumer, any alternative appraisal is based on its relative comparison to the foregone option(s) as well as its comparison to an internal expectation level. (Boles & Messick 1995). Consumer purchase regret often comes right after consumer dissatisfaction; the greater the gap between consumer expectations and actual product performance, the less likely it is that the product will be positively evaluated (Anderson, 1973); and a regret component in post-purchase evaluation lowers pleasure when better-forgone options that could have been (but ultimately weren't) chosen are present (Tsiros 1998). Additionally, research has shown that the regret caused by an unsatisfactory choice will be stronger as the number of options available increases and the options become more diverse (Sagi, 2007).

#### **2.1.1 Consequences of Regret**

Regret creates a strong sense of self-blame and puts consumers in a negative emotional state where their self-esteem is hurt (Lee & Cotte, 2009). Previous research proves that consumers who experience unsatisfactory consumption and regret it are more likely to engage in brand-damaging behaviors such as complaining and seeking refunds and are more likely to turn to competing brands (Keaveney et al., 2007). Based on previous

research on regret, Zeelenberg (2007) proposed a theory of regret regulation, stating that people are driven to regulate their regret by utilizing a single regret-coping strategy or a combination of regret-coping strategies to optimize the results. And the regret-coping strategies are generally classified as decision-focused, alternative-focused, and feeling-focused. In both decision-focused and alternative-focused strategies, consumers will take positive action to compensate as much as possible for irrational decisions to the extent that conditions allow. In a feeling-focused strategy, consumers can regulate their regret through psychological repair or suppression of the regret by improving the attractiveness of their choice or, conversely, decreasing the attraction of the alternatives they forewent. In this research, I mainly focus on the feeling-focused strategy because the psychological changes in consumer response to regret embodied in this strategy will provide the theoretical support for my subsequent arguments on the relationship between consumers' regret and their connections with the almost-chosen brand. The hypothesis of this study should be more valid for products that consumers constantly have a demand for. Consumers will have to refocus on the same product category and make a choice again; in this case, the strategy of avoiding focusing on the unchosen path will fail.

But the effect of this psychological repair varies by product type. For hedonic products, the psychological repair is relatively simple because consumers engage in the compulsive emotional arousal caused by hedonic consumption (Ding & Tseng, 2015), while a greater sensation of regret may be felt for utilitarian products than for hedonic products because psychological repair or suppression of regret is challenging for task-oriented items (Sameeni, 2022). Also, results of previous research prove that longer periods of conscious thought (Dijksterhuis & van Olden, 2006) and higher cognitive effort (Park & Hill, 2018) tend to decrease the level of consumer purchase regret. The attractiveness of substitutes can indirectly affect consumer satisfaction and willingness to repurchase through consumer regret, but cognitive effort can reduce the degree of regret (Liao et al., 2017).

A substantial number of research has been done on the antecedents and consequences of regret toward an unsatisfied brand, but few studies have focused on how consumers' attitudes have changed toward brands that once appeared on their choice lists but were ultimately not chosen. Especially in e-commerce and online shopping, consumers have more opportunities to come into frequent contact with these brands and switch among different brands. Following the 25-year-meteoric rise of e-commerce, the diverse venues of e-commerce now include transactions based not only on the traditional computer but also on mobile phones and social media links (Park & Hill, 2018), but the research on understanding consumer behavior in the online shopping environment is relatively lagging behind (Sarwar et al., 2019). Online purchase regret has been the subject of more research in recent years (Dhir et al., 2016). Compared to offline shopping, a limitation of online shopping is that consumers cannot physically compare the stuff and material, which leads to a higher regret generated by online shopping than by traditional offline shopping (Sarwar et al. 2019). I believe that as part of the emotional activity of consumer regret, consumer attitudes toward brands that were abandoned in the decision-making process will also be influenced by feelings of regret and change after this process. I wonder what happens between consumers actually switching to other brands and how regret for the last choice will influence consumers' second choice. The underlying psychological mechanisms behind this can be exploited by marketers who are facing intense competition with similar products when consumers have a demand for the same type of products and are again faced with a choice.

Previous research on regret has generally identified the observed outcomes of unchosen alternatives as an essential factor contributing to post-decisional regret (e.g., Coricelli et al., 2005; Zeelenberg et al., 1996). However, recent studies have found that in the presence of larger choice sets and uncertainty, participants will experience more intense regret when not informed of the outcome of the unchosen option (Feiler & Muller, 2022); the result of an experiment to select more attractive people through dating apps shows that in a more complex choice environment, the perceived

attractiveness of the almost chosen option will outweigh its reality, people's idealization of the unchosen alternatives becomes the standard of comparison with the chosen one, which leads to stronger regret.

### **2.1.2 Self-Brand Connection**

As the global marketplace becomes increasingly borderless, the intensity of market competition has reached unprecedented levels. In this context, it has become imperative for companies to cultivate and sustain a meaningful relationship with their customers to survive (Seminari et al., 2022). Building an emotional connection with customers based on the brand is a crucial step toward achieving this goal. By doing so, companies can establish a sustainable bond with consumers, which can serve as a powerful tool in the face of intense market competition (Gronroos, 1995). To this end, branding has emerged as a critical tool for cultivating and nurturing this bond. By effectively leveraging the power of branding, companies can position themselves as the preferred choice for consumers when making purchasing decisions (Aaker, 1991).

The relationships between a brand and its customers are shaped by a common background of narratives from experiences, orders, events, points of view, and evaluations (Bruner, 1990). According to Pennington and Hastie (1986), narratives are components of life that come together to explain goals, assess the activities taken to achieve the goals and interpret results. By utilizing narrative processing maps, and memories of previously stored stories, customers form an interpretation of a brand based on the story created, which includes principles, suggestions for action, and outcomes and often elicits a sense of self-connection in the memory (Shank & Abelson, 1995). The subjective nature of the interpersonal interaction between customer and brand is derived from the consumer's self-concept linked to the brand because, through consumption, consumers seek to define and express who they are (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Previous research has reached a general consensus on the point that brands are frequently used by consumers as instruments for developing and maintaining their sense of self (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The formal definition of self-brand

connection that has been widely adopted by researchers comes from the classic study by Escalas & Bettman (2003), in which self-brand connection is defined as "the degree to which consumers incorporate the brand into their self-concept". Self-concept refers to "the completeness of the individual's opinions and feelings having reference to him or herself as an object" (Rosenzweig & Murray, 1938). Through consumption, customers frequently participate in the process of outlining their self-identities and ideal selves (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), where products and brands play a crucial role in creating a meaningful self-identity that represents their self-image to both themselves and others (Escalas, 2004). In the Emotional Brand Attachment construct, Self-brand connection is a conceptual framework that captures the interplay between cognitive and affective dimensions within the consumer mindset and serves to bind brand meaning to consumer concepts; specifically, SBC represents a state of a cognitive mechanism that ties brand meaning to consumer conceptions (Park et al., 2006).

Previous research on SBC looks into many context-specific consequences of consumers' self-brand connections. According to Ren et al. (2012), Self-brand connections are closely related to customer brand involvement through cognitive processes and predict higher purchase intentions. Bowden (2020) uses consumers' self-brand connection as a precursor to participation in cognition, emotion, behavior, and social interaction, to capture the full spectrum of consumer engagement with brands. Brand self-connections, functioning as a key antecedent of affective engagement, reflect the extent of consumers' favorable brand-related relationships and emotions (Hollebeek et al., 2014), such as enthusiasm, passion, and positive affect. This affective engagement has been found to be strongly linked to favorable evaluations of brands (Naumann et al., 2020).

Before finding a brand that matches their self-image, a person may go through the process of choosing a suitable one (Hankinson, 2004). When brands create strong, positive associations through meeting consumers' psychological needs, people can create a self-brand to help them connect with others and develop their sense of identity (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). The fulfillment of psychological needs can be achieved

by strengthening and expressing one's self-identity. (Fournier, 1998). Research on SBC focuses on two types of self-motivation, including self-enhancement and self-verification, to explore how brand connection helps consumers achieve their intrinsically driven goals (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). A bias formed by the self-enhancement tendency for the received information is that people tend to ascribe positive outcomes to internal factors of the self while attributing negative outcomes to external circumstances that lie beyond the scope of self-control, which is in line with the findings of attribution research (Miller & Ross, 1975). The pursuit of consistency is a prominent manifestation in the realm of self-verifying strategies, providing individuals with a sense of order and manageability in a world that can feel chaotic and unpredictable; by seeing more self-confirming evidence than actually exists, consumers can gain this consistency (Swann, 1990).

## **2.2 Statement of Hypotheses**

As previous research on regret has acknowledged, there is a part of regret that cannot be psychologically repaired or suppressed; people need to spend more effort suppressing the feeling of regret. However, thought suppression is proved to be counterproductive sometimes; when the controlled distracter search is voluntarily abandoned or rendered ineffective by other resource-intensive tasks, the automatic and the therefore less resource-dependent monitoring persists, making the target thought more accessible (Wegner, 1994; Najmi & Wegner, 2008). A study of older adults demonstrated that thought control strategies were positively associated with the frequency of regret and that cognitive control to suppress regret was counterproductive (Schmidt et al., 2011). Repeated thought intrusions and suppression can lead to obsessive attention to the target object (Wegner et al., 1987). I proposed that consumers' post-purchase regret will lead to self-blame and obsessive preoccupation, thus increasing their thinking of the forgone alternative. More thought about an object, according to an earlier study, causes attitudes toward that object to become more polarized (Tesser & Conlee, 1975).



Theorists of consumer-brand relationships have demonstrated that consumers can form connections with brands that parallel interpersonal connections (Fournier, 1998). I proposed that a similar process occurs when consumers shop online and regret their purchase decision among different brands. Consumers' self-brand connections will be enhanced as a result of the biased idealization of the forgone alternative since self-brand connections represent the extent to which consumers have incorporated brands into their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Previous research on SBC has revealed that increased thinking about the brand is an essential contributor to increased SBC, including some interactive activities that require emotional engagement and cognitive effort (Shah et al., 2016). For example, recalling experiences with the brand (Kessous, 2015), establishing a link between brands and satisfying customer experiences (Moore & Homer, 2008), and keeping brand consumption a secret (Thomas & Jewell, 2019). By affecting the cognitive process, a stronger SBC also improves consumer brand engagement and leads to higher purchase intentions (Ren et al., 2012). In the field of consumer behavior research, purchase intention is widely used as a predictor of subsequent purchase behavior (Grewal et al., 1998).

Research on regret suggests a strengthened connection between the consumer and the almost-chosen brand because of the characteristics of effortful thinking with high emotional involvement. As Feiler & Muller (2022) used the term *forgone alternative* to refer to the final contender that was ultimately rejected and the second-most preferred choice from the broad consideration group, I use the term *almost-chosen brand* in this context to refer to the brand that was second-most preferred brand from a large selection set but finally rejected. Consumers' self-brand connections with the almost-chosen brand may be enhanced as a result of not only the idealization and overestimation of forgone brands but also increased thinking about the brand caused by consumers' post-purchase regret.

From the perspective of self-motives, I posit that following post-decisional regret, consumers' inclination towards self-enhancement may prompt them to reinforce their initial decisions made during the expansive choice stage while assigning responsibility

to outsiders for their eventual choice failures. Furthermore, consumers may attribute the potential benefits of the almost-chosen brand to their own. When a shopping decision is completed, the always unrevealed, forgone alternative is like being covered with a veil of mystery. After the already-revealed choice presents a disappointing outcome, I hypothesize that by enhancing the psychological connection to this almost-chosen brand, consumers can envision seeing potential self-confirming evidence. Although it is intuitive that post-purchase regret for one brand increases consumers' willingness to purchase its competing brands, current research lacks a complete knowledge of the mechanisms behind this effect. In addition to consumers' elevated perceived quality of competing brands, there is also an irrational factor at the psychological level of the consumer that differentiates the almost-chosen brand from others, making it necessary to introduce the mediating variable of self-brand connection in my theoretical model. Previous research also proved that higher consumer brand connection is strongly associated with higher purchase intention. Thus, I propose that post-purchase regret indirectly affects consumers' purchase intention through consumers' self-brand connections. Then I come to my hypothesis 1&2:

**Hypothesis 1:** Post-purchase regret will enhance consumers' purchase intention for the almost chosen brand (main effect).

**Hypothesis 2:** Consumers' self-brand connection with the almost-chosen brand will mediate the relationship between post-purchase regret and consumers' purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand (mediating effect).

As defined by Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000), a category that places a strong emphasis on usefulness, practicality, intellect, and instrumental orientation is called utilitarian. Examples of utilitarian categories include computing equipment, consumer electronics, household appliances, and garden equipment. Unlike utilitarian products that can be simply compared and evaluated based on multiple criteria, hedonic products are dominated by qualities like experiential benefits, affect, enjoyment, sustained engagement, intrinsic motivation, and aesthetics. Hedonistic categories include things

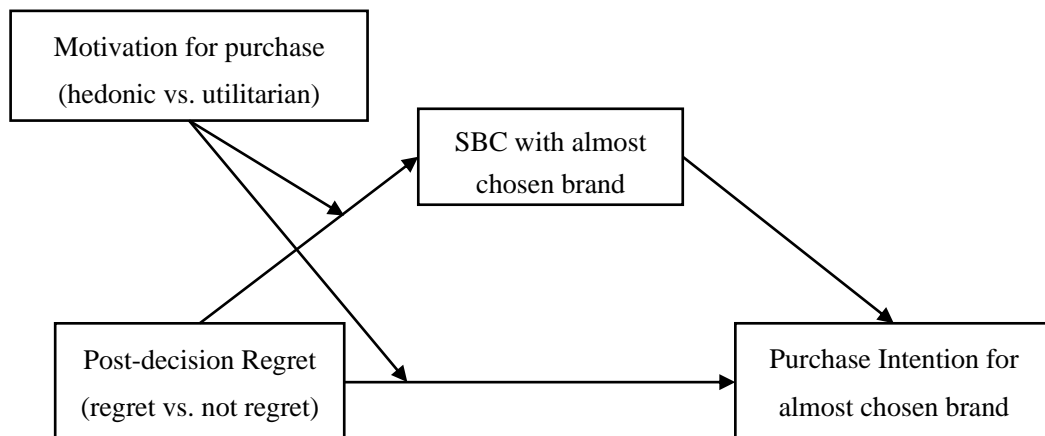
like CDs, DVDs, antiques, and clothing. Since the consequences of regret and the effects of regulation strategies vary depending on the product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian), according to Ding & Tseng (2015) and Sameeni (2022), a stronger sense of regret may be experienced for utilitarian products than for hedonic ones because psychological healing or suppression of regret for task-oriented goods is more difficult. This is because customers engage in the compulsive emotional stimulation brought on by hedonic consumption.

While the marketplace often presents a dichotomy between hedonic and utilitarian products, it is noteworthy that most products boast a combination of hedonic and utilitarian attributes (Batra & Ahtola, 1991) and can cater to either purpose depending on the consumer's underlying motivation for the purchase (Sarah et al., 2018). There are several dimensions on which hedonic and utilitarian purchase motives diverge (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Pham, 1998; Khan et al., 2005; Trudel and Murray, 2011), including the overarching objective of the purchase, the internal and external factors that prompt the purchasing behavior, and the method by which the potential options are evaluated. In terms of the overall goal of the purchase, consumers indulge in hedonic consumption to attain a desired affective state (Dhar & Wertenbroch 2000), while utilitarian consumption is motivated by the desire to fulfill a specific need or accomplish a task (Strahilevitz & Myers 1998). In terms of the internal and external drivers of purchasing behavior, previous research has generally concluded that hedonic consumption is inherently driven by the pursuit of pleasure as the ultimate goal, seeing emotional satisfaction as an intrinsic reward (Botti & McGill, 2011). In contrast, utilitarian consumption is driven extrinsically by the utilitarian purpose of achieving higher-level goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Botti & McGill, 2011). In terms of the evaluation process of potential options, In hedonic consumption, the evaluation process is highly subjective and personally unique (Carter & Gilovich, 2010) because consumers rely primarily on emotions and empirical feelings to assess whether a potential choice will satisfy their needs (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), while in utilitarian consumption, consumers are more rational and objective because they

evaluate based on objective external functional measures (Babin et al., 1994; Batra & Ahtola, 1991). In conjunction with the impact of product type on post-decisional regret and its repair mechanisms revealed by studies on regret, I posit that different purchase motives will moderate the impact of post-purchase decision regret on consumers' self-brand associations and purchase intentions for almost chosen brands. Therefore, I propose the third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** Consumers' motivation for purchase will moderate the relationship between post-purchase regret and consumers' SBC with the almost-chosen brand. Further, the main effect will be stronger under utilitarian motivation than hedonic motivation (moderating effect).

### 2.3 Research Model



## CHAPTER 3 THE CURRENT RESEARCH

### 3.1 Overview of Studies

A pilot study is designed to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the research design and methodology before conducting a larger investigation. I initially explore the main effect (Hypothesis 1) between post-decision regret and purchase intention for the

almost-chosen brand and the mediating mechanism of self-brand connection (Hypothesis 2); based on the results of the Pilot Study, Study 1 introduces the moderator of purchase motivation to test Hypothesis 3 and provided more evidence for the main effect and the mediating effect with a larger sample size.

## **3.2 Pilot Study**

### **3.2.1 Method**

The pilot Study is designed to initially test the main effect and the mediating mechanism of self-brand connection by providing evidence of a correlation between consumer post-purchase regret and their purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand. The mediating effect of self-brand connection with the almost-chosen brand is also tested. I adopt the scenario methodology (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999) used in brand choice and regret-related studies.

114 participants recruited from Prolific participated in the online experiment in exchange for a £0.75 payment. They are randomly assigned to two conditions through Qualtrics Web Forms. Before being presented with the scenario, participants are asked to list two smartphone brands that they have a relatively good impression of. Then the names of these two brands (Brand A and Brand B) are used to construct a predesigned scenario about the purchase experience of a smartphone, in which I manipulated the post-decision regret of a smartphone purchase decision. In the regret condition, participants will be given a scenario:

"Imagine that you are going to buy a smartphone. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

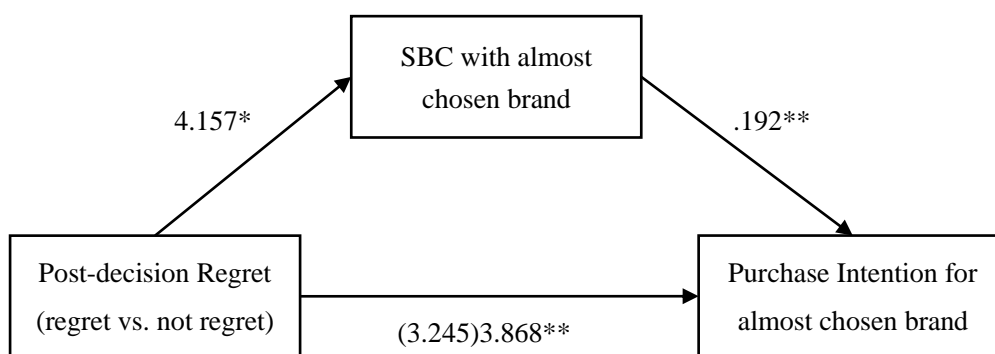
Three months after using the smartphone, you are not satisfied with the one you purchased. It doesn't quite fulfill your needs and meets your expectations. And you have heard that a smartphone with better performance is likely available on the market within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?"

In contrast, participants in the not-regret condition will be presented with a scenario where they are satisfied with their purchase decision:

"Imagine that you are going to buy a smartphone. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are generally satisfied with the one you purchased. It basically fulfills your needs and meets your expectations. And you have not heard of a smartphone that performs better than the one you chose within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?"

Then, participants in both conditions are requested to answer questions concerning their purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand's smartphone and their self-brand connection with the almost-chosen brand. As a manipulation check, I measure their regret level with a three-item scale. I also collected their demographic information such as age, gender, and smartphone usage habits. Post-purchase regret is measured using a three-item scale from Tsiros and Mittal (2000). Purchase intention is measured using three items adopted from Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991). SBC uses six items from Escalas and Bettman (2003). All items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale.



**Figure 1.** Mediation Model in Pilot Study

**Note:** The path coefficients are unstandardized betas. Values in parentheses indicate the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable after controlling for the mediator. 95% CI for the indirect effect = [.009, .0145].

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 3.2.2 Results and Discussion

The results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate that participants in the regret condition report higher regret level ( $M = 5.66$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) than those in the not-regret condition ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ;  $F(1, 114) = 116.361$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that my manipulation is effective. Furthermore, a separate ANOVA analysis revealed a significant main effect, as participants in the regret condition exhibited stronger purchase intentions for the almost-chosen brand ( $M = 23.72$ ,  $SD = 4.02$ ) than those in the not-regret condition ( $M = 19.66$ ,  $SD = 6.18$ ;  $F(1, 114) = 17.442$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, participants in the regret condition also reported stronger SBCs ( $M = 28.37$ ,  $SD = 10.74$ ) than those in the not-regret condition ( $M = 24.19$ ,  $SD = 10.07$ ;  $F(1, 114) = 4.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the results support Hypothesis 1.

I posit that regret will enhance consumers' purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand because their self-brand connections with the almost-chosen brand are strengthened by the regret of a sub-optimal decision. Consistent with this prediction, the results of a mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap resamples assessing self-brand

connection as a mediator between post-decision regret and purchase intention confirm the mediation effect (95% confidence level [CI] for the indirect effect = [.009, .0145], see figure 1). Therefore, the results support Hypothesis 2.

To summarize, Pilot Study sheds light on the potent impact of post-decisional regret on consumers' self-brand connections with the almost-chosen brand, particularly in the context of a wider choice set. Additionally, the study demonstrates that this impact translates into a significant increase in consumers' purchase intentions for the almost-chosen brand. As the stimulus product is a smartphone that boasts both hedonic and utilitarian attributes, we introduced a crucial moderating variable of purchase motivation in Study 1 to further explore whether post-decisional regret arising from different purchase motivations affects consumers' attitudes towards the nearly chosen brand.

### **3.3 Study 1**

#### **3.3.1 Method**

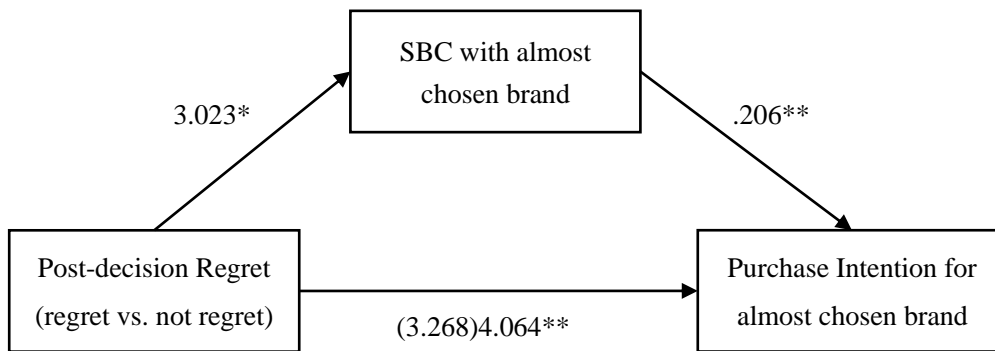
Given that Pilot Study successfully demonstrated the scenario approach's efficacy in manipulating consumers' post-decision regret, Study 1 is conducted to further demonstrate the main effect and test the mediating mechanism of self-brand connection as well as the moderating effect of purchase motivation using the same method of a scenario approach in Pilot Study, which is widely employed in consumer research on post-decisional regret. Study 1 employed a 2 (regret vs. not regret) x 2 (motivation for purchase: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subject design. 238 participants recruited from Prolific participated in the online experiment in exchange for a £0.75 payment. They are randomly assigned to one of four scenarios that manipulated their post-decision regret and purchase motivation. The manipulation of purchase motivation, adapted from Sarah et al.'s (2018) experiment examining the effect of purchase motivation on assortment size choice, has been established as a valid method in prior research and is employed in the present study to investigate its role as a moderator of



the effect of post-decision regret on consumers' self-brand connection with their almost-chosen brand.

Through Qualtrics Web forms, subjects are given a predesigned scenario of the shopping experience of a smartphone, and each scenario presents participants with a situation in which they make a purchase decision of a smartphone for either work-related tasks or relaxation and leisure activities. Participants in two utilitarian motivations are told that they are going to buy a smartphone to use exclusively for work-related tasks and activities, while in two hedonic conditions, subjects are told the smartphone is used exclusively for relaxation and entertainment during their leisure time. As for the results of the purchase, participants in two regret conditions are asked to imagine that they are not satisfied with the smartphone they purchased because it does not fulfill their needs and meet expectations and that they have heard that a smartphone with better performance is likely available on the market within the same price range. In two not-regret conditions, participants are asked to imagine that they are generally satisfied with the one they purchased because it basically fulfills their needs and meets their expectations. And they have not heard of a smartphone that performs better than the one you chose within the same price range.

Then, participants in both conditions are requested to answer questions concerning their regret level, purchase intention for the almost-chosen restaurant, and their self-brand connection with the almost-chosen restaurant. Demographic information is also collected.



**Figure 2.** Mediation model in Study 1

**Note:** The path coefficients are unstandardized betas. Values in parentheses indicate the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable after controlling for the mediator. 95% CI for the indirect effect = [.007, .0112].

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 3.3.2 Results and Discussion

As we predicted, the findings from a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrate that regretful participants reported significantly higher levels of regret ( $M = 5.58$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) compared to those in the non-regret condition ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ;  $F(1, 236) = 116.361$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating the success of my manipulation. A separate ANOVA analysis revealed a significant main effect, wherein participants in the regret condition reported greater purchase intentions for the almost-chosen brand ( $M = 24.01$ ,  $SD = 4.01$ ) in contrast to those in the non-regret condition ( $M = 20.13$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ ;  $F(1, 236) = 36.087$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, regretful participants exhibited stronger self-brand connections ( $M = 29.30$ ,  $SD = 11.35$ ), compared to their non-regret counterparts ( $M = 25.68$ ,  $SD = 10.18$ ;  $F(1, 236) = 6.689$ ,  $p < .05$ ), lending support to the first hypothesis.

Along with Pilot Study, Study 1 also provides evidence for the mediating effect of consumers' self-brand connection. The results of a mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap resamples assessing self-brand connection as mediator between post-decision regret and purchase intention confirm the mediation effect (95% confidence

level [CI] for the indirect effect = [.007, .0112], see figure 2). Therefore, the results also support Hypothesis 2.

However, the sample doesn't exhibit a significant moderating effect of purchase motivation on the relationship between post-decision regret and self-brand connection. I conduct a Two-Way ANOVA analysis to examine whether purchase motivation moderates the effect of post-decisional regret on consumers' purchase intention and self-brand association with the almost-chosen brand. Results show that purchase motivation does not have a differential relationship to self-brand connection with the almost-chosen brand ( $F=1.597$ ,  $p=0.208>0.05$ ) and purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand ( $F=0.050$ ,  $p=0.823>0.05$ ). Based on my analysis, it appears that the scenario script necessitates greater imagination on the part of the subjects, potentially overshadowing manipulations related to purchase motivation, which is an inherent limitation of the scenario approach. To address this limitation, I will explore the possibility of utilizing a more realistic experimental design of simulated shopping choices in future experiments, as this approach may offer a more realistic and accurate depiction of the main effects under varying shopping motivations.

#### **CHAPTER 4 GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This research investigates the influence of post-decision regret on consumers' self-brand connection with and purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand, which they picked from a large assortment set as the second-preferred choice but forgone at the final selection stage. Results of two studies both support Hypothesis 1 of the main effect between post-decision regret and purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand and Hypothesis 2 of the mediating effect of self-brand connection. These two online experiments provide compelling evidence that post-decisional regret significantly heightens consumers' self-brand connections with nearly chosen options, ultimately resulting in a marked increase in purchase intentions for these brands. Moreover, I investigate the moderating effect of purchase motivation. Though the current studies

don't provide evidence for my hypotheses, different conclusions may be obtained in future studies by improving the methodology.

#### **4.1 Theoretical Contribution**

This research notes that an important antecedent of self-brand connection, regret, has not been studied and discussed in the field of consumer-brand relationship research. However, in reality, there is a continuum behind many shopping decisions in which consumers learn from the experience of previous shopping decisions; a satisfying purchase decision will enhance consumers' favorable feelings towards a brand, which will translate into more positive consumer-brand relationships, such as higher customer loyalty and better word-of-mouth. Conversely, an unsatisfactory purchase decision can trigger negative emotions of disappointment and regret, potentially leading to brand-damaging behavior or signaling a need for future brand switching. In many cases, consumers are confronted with repeated choices, and it is difficult to avoid being confronted again with brands that were once included in the selection set but were ultimately not chosen. In such instances, the once almost-chosen brand has a great advantage over other brands that consumers are not familiar with or have not even heard of. In other words, the important process underlying the transformation of regret into observable actions remains under-researched.

Therefore, this study's crucial contribution lies in establishing a link between the common consumer emotion of "post-decisional regret" and the critical construct of "self-brand connection," adding an important antecedent of SBC, thus filling an important gap in the SBC literature. It also demonstrates that post-decisional regret leads to an increase in consumers' willingness to purchase almost-chosen brands and that this increased willingness to purchase is at least partially caused by consumers' self-brand connections with almost-chosen brands. In the future, I may have the opportunity to provide further evidence for the moderating effect of purchase motivation on this effect.

## **4.2 Limitations and Direction for Future Research**

This research has many limitations in model construction and research methodology, which have opportunities to be improved and enhanced in the future. Through refinement of the research model, it is possible to delve deeper into the various causes and targets of regret, strengthen the theoretical foundations and bolster the internal validity of this study. Meanwhile, by enhancing the research methodology, it is possible to more faithfully capture the psychological shifts that consumers undergo during the decision-making process in a more realistic virtual shopping experiment, thus bolstering the external validity of this study and enabling the generalization of research findings to more natural settings.

Specifically, I will introduce the source of regret in my research model. In the conceptual model by Das & Kerr (2010), they divide the sources of regret into regret from the product purchased and regret from the decision process. I will also consider two key moderators in this model, the need for cognition and regulatory fit, that are likely to have impacts on the cognitive recognition and evaluative processes of regret's sources and also the resulting attitudinal effects on post-purchase behavioral outcomes. Other moderators I will also consider in the future revision include the initial decision difficulty and voluntary. By distinguishing the sources of regret, we may get closer to the real mechanism by which consumer regret causes elevated self-brand connections with almost chosen brands while also defining more clearly the boundary conditions of this effect, making a higher theoretical contribution to this study.

In terms of research methodology, I acknowledge the limitations of using the situational approach, which requires participants to imagine a purchase experience, and that there may be differences in the intensity of emotions and related associations triggered by the imagined regret compared to the real regret triggered by a specific event. Besides, the length and complexity of what subjects were asked to imagine under the scenario approach are strictly limited, making it difficult to capture the effects of other moderating variables that I wanted to manipulate. Also choosing smartphone as the

stimuli in this scenario-based experiment makes it easy for participants to recall their own experience in the real world, it also presents some limitations to this study because the use of smartphones may be too complex, and the frequency of use varies from person to person. This may result in participants being more emotionally engaged with smartphones than with other products, which in turn affects the generalization of the study's findings to a wider range of products and brands. In the future, I will broaden the product types used in this scenario-based experiment, and I will also consider using an online shopping experiment that more closely resembles the reality of the online shopping experience, allowing consumers to go through the complete selection process. I also consider conducting a field experiment based on an online shopping platform to explore the impact of post-decisional regret on consumers' self-brand connection with and purchase intention for the almost-chosen brand in a real-world decision-making process to improve the external validity and generalizability of this study.

### **4.3 Practical Implications**

The findings of this research will give brand marketers insights into the importance of consumer regret and its previously less-noticed consequences related to SBC. The significance of this study does not rest in the means of inducing post-decisional regret among consumers but rather in the identification and utilization of the favorable outcomes resulting from such regret. Actions that brand marketers can take include pushing ads to customers who have purchased similar products from different brands over time, as well as targeting consumers who have viewed the brand's products with other measures that can enhance the consumer-brand relationship to facilitate those consumers' purchase decisions. These findings also help consumers to realize that their favorable opinion of certain brands does not come solely from the objective attributes of the brand's products. Regrets from past decisions may also cause them to have a certain bias toward the brand they almost chose, which helps them to make more rational decisions.

## **Appendix**

### **Pilot Study**

Imagine that you are going to buy a smartphone. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are generally satisfied with the one you purchased. It basically fulfills your needs and meets your expectations. And you have not heard of a smartphone that performs better than the one you chose within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?" (Regret condition)

[ Imagine that you are going to buy a smartphone. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are not satisfied with the one you purchased. It doesn't quite fulfill your needs and meets your expectations. And you have heard that a smartphone with better performance is likely available on the market within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?] (Not-regret condition)

### **Main Study**

Imagine that you already have a smartphone, and now you are going to buy a smartphone to use exclusively for work-related tasks and activities. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are not satisfied with the one you purchased. It doesn't quite fulfill your needs and meets your expectations. And you have heard that a smartphone with better performance is likely available on the market within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose? (Regret, utilitarian motivation)

[Imagine that you already have a smartphone, and now you are going to buy a smartphone to use exclusively for work-related tasks and activities. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are generally satisfied with the one you purchased. It basically fulfills your needs and meets your expectations. And you have not heard of a smartphone that performs better than the one you chose within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?] (Not regret, utilitarian motivation)

[Imagine that you already have a smartphone, and now you are going to buy a smartphone to use exclusively for relaxation and entertainment during your leisure time. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have



different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are not satisfied with the one you purchased. It doesn't quite fulfill your needs and meets your expectations. And you have heard that a smartphone with better performance is likely available on the market within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?] (Regret, hedonic motivation)

[Imagine that you already have a smartphone, and now you are going to buy a smartphone to use exclusively for relaxation and entertainment during your leisure time. After comparing the product information of five popular brands of smartphones of similar price, you narrow it down to two (Brand A and Brand B), between which you hesitate to make an immediate decision because these two smartphones each have different advantages that appeal to you, and both have received a lot of good reviews. Ultimately, you purchase one of the smartphones (Brand B).

Three months after using the smartphone, you are generally satisfied with the one you purchased. It basically fulfills your needs and meets your expectations. And you have not heard of a smartphone that performs better than the one you chose within the same price range. How would you feel about your purchase decision and the other smartphone brand (Brand A) you almost chose?] (Not regret, hedonic motivation)

**Items measuring regret:** (7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

I feel sorry for choosing Brand B (regret 1)

I regret choosing Brand B (regret 2)

I should have chosen Brand A (regret 3)

**Items measuring purchase intention:**

The likelihood of purchasing Brand A's smartphone (7 = very high, 1 = very low)

The probability that I would consider purchasing Brand A's smartphone (7 = very high, 1 = very low)

I intend to purchase Brand A's smartphone. (7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

At the constant price, I would consider purchasing Brand A's smartphone. (7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

**Items measuring SBC:**

Brand A reflects who I am (not at all/extremely well)

I can identify with Brand A (not at all/extremely well)

I feel a personal connection to Brand A. (not at all/very much so)

I can use Brand A to communicate who I am to other people.

I think Brand A (could) help me become the type of person I want to be.

I consider Brand A to be "me". (not me/me)

Brand A suits me well (not at all/extremely well)

(1=not at all, 7=extremely well)

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