Why Consumers Buy Lottery Tickets When the Sun Goes Down on Them. The Depleting Nature of Weather Induced Bad Moods.

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We propose that weather conditions can influence consumers’ engagement in lottery play. A longitudinal study on the extent of lottery play in Belgium shows that lottery expenditures are indeed higher after reduced exposure to sunshine, even after controlling for people’s inertia, time-varying characteristics of the game, and deterministic seasonal components. The results of a first laboratory study are consistent with these findings, and establish a link between lottery play and negative mood. Subsequent experiments provide evidence that depletion due to active mood regulation attempts, rather than mood repair, is the underlying process for the link between bad weather and lottery play.

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The Depleting Nature of Weather-Induced Bad Moods

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Lottery play is a phenomenon of all times that occurs around the world (Garrett 2001). In the present paper we investigate whether lottery play is linked to the amount of sunshine that consumers are exposed to. Earlier, it has been argued that certain consumer behaviors reflect adaptations to variations in the duration and intensity of sunlight (Parker and Tavassoli 2000). We conducted a longitudinal study in which we analyzed over eight years of semweekly Belgian lottery-expenditure data. A seasonal time-series model showed that as the number of hours of sunshine decreased, the level of engagement in lottery play increased, even after controlling for other relevant drivers such as people’s inertia, time-varying characteristics of the game, and deterministic seasonal components.

In subsequent laboratory studies, we investigated why this link between a reduction in sunlight and an increased engagement in lottery play takes place. We propose that a reduced exposure to sunshine leads to negative mood, which in turn leads to an increased engagement in lottery play. In a second study, we provide correlational evidence for the link between bad mood and lottery play. In addition, we test in a sequence of studies (2, 3, and 4) two alternative hypotheses of how lottery play is related to bad mood. A first hypothesis (i.e., the mood repair hypothesis) states that negative moods prime a mood repair goal (Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister 2001), which may be realized through lottery play (Pezza Leith and Baumeister 1996). In this model, lottery play serves as a means to repair one’s bad mood. It predicts that lottery play will be related to people’s mood at the moment they are given the opportunity to buy lottery tickets. A second hypothesis (i.e., the depletion hypothesis) builds on the theory of self-control depletion (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice 1998; Muraven, Tice, and Baumeister 1998), which states that all acts of self-control draw on a common limited resource that is akin to energy or strength. Hence, exertion of self-control is followed by a period of diminished capacity to exert self-control (i.e., self-control depletion). One factor that weakens self-control is active mood regulation (Baumeister and Heatherton 1996; Voloh and Baumeister 2000). Attempts to regulate emotions deplete the same limited resource that is needed to resist temptations as lottery (Voloh and Baumeister 2000). In this model, lottery play reflects a reduced resistance to temptation after engagement in active mood regulation attempts. It predicts that lottery play will be related to people’s mood some time before they are given the opportunity to buy lottery tickets. Indeed, people need a time lag of several minutes to engage in active mood regulation attempts (e.g., Baumeister et al. 1998).

Study 2 was a laboratory study that was correlational in nature. Participants filled out a PANAS (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988), engaged in a creativity task during which they were given the opportunity to regulate their mood, and filled out another PANAS. Subsequently, they were given the opportunity to buy lottery tickets. Our dependent variable was each participant’s amount of lottery expenditures. We found that the worse participants felt upon entering the laboratory, the higher their lottery expenditures were later. This provided support for the hypothesis that lottery play is related to negative mood. In addition, as lottery expenditures were related to the extent to which people felt bad some time before they were given the opportunity to buy tickets, this finding was consistent with the depletion explanation. The depletion hypothesis was further supported by the finding that negative mood had decreased during the creativity task. In addition, we found that the bigger the reduction in negative mood was, the higher lottery expenditures were.

Study 3 aimed at experimentally manipulating mood and finding further evidence for the depletion hypothesis. Participants filled out the PANAS, were assigned to a bad or a good mood condition (i.e., by reading a description of a character walking around in cloudy or sunny weather conditions, respectively; Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister 2001), filled out the PANAS again, were assigned to a depleting or a non-depleting condition (i.e., by engaging in a Stroop color-naming task in which colors and color names were mismatched or matched, respectively; Wallace and Baumeister 2002), and were given the opportunity to buy lottery tickets. The mood manipulation was crossed with the depletion manipulation, resulting in four experimental conditions. We found that lottery expenditures were higher for depleted than non-depleted participants, irrespective of their mood states. Although this finding seemed to rule out the mood repair explanation, one could argue that the mood repair explanation was not tested fairly, because of the lag between the mood induction and lottery play in our design. We conducted a follow-up experiment in which we removed the lag. We found that lottery expenditures were as high for participants in a good mood as for participants in a bad mood. Overall, the results of study 3 provided support for the depletion hypothesis for lottery play.

We conducted a fourth study in which we manipulated depletion due to engagement in active mood regulation attempts. A bad mood was induced for all participants in the same way as in study 3. Before and after the mood manipulation, participants were asked to fill out a PANAS. Subsequently, participants engaged in depleting mood regulation attempts or received a non-depleting good mood induction (i.e., by writing down their stream of consciousness or hand-copying a description of tranquility, respectively). Afterwards, participants were given the opportunity to buy lottery tickets. We found that lottery expenditures were significantly higher for participants who engaged in depleting attempts to regulate their bad moods than for participants whose mood was regulated by means of the mood induction procedure.

Overall, our studies showed that lottery play is linked to bad weather and weather-induced bad moods. Depleting mood regulation seems to be the underlying process for this link.

REFERENCES


