Washing Away Your (Good Or Bad) Luck: Superstition, Embodiment, and Gambling Behavior

Alison Jing Xu, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Rami Zwick, University of California at Riverside, USA
Norbert Schwarz, University of Michigan, USA

Observations of superstitious behavior suggest that gamblers and athletes change their physical appearance after a streak of bad luck, but avoid doing so after a streak of good luck. We test the metaphorical link between changes in physical status and changes in luck in a gambling situation, using hand washing as a manipulation of physical status. Participants who encountered a winning streak bet less in a subsequent round after having than after not having washed their hands. Conversely, participants who encountered a losing streak bet more in a subsequent round after having than after not having washed their hands. Like other superstitious behaviors, these effects are limited to participants who see luck as fickle.

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=12.31 vs. 21.87; \( F(1, 95)=18.81, p<.01 \) when anxiety levels were high. Differences in the actual brand chosen, however, failed to reach significance.

Study 2: Ninety-two students participated in a study identical to Study 1 except that we also measured differences in individuals’ confidence in their abilities as they pertained to the product at hand (adapted from Bearden et al.’s self-confidence measure; 2001). We predicted that individuals high in self-confidence would be less likely to rely on the trivial attribute as a means to reduce goal-related anxiety. Results replicated findings from Study 1: there was a significant main effect of the anxiety manipulation on perceived importance of the trivial attribute (\( F(1, 88)=3.84, p<.059 \)). This effect was further replicated on the overall evaluation of brand–consumers evaluated the brand with the higher level of the trivial attribute (counterbalanced across brands) more positively when anxiety was high (\( F(1, 88)=7.36, p=.01 \)). Although the predicted interaction did not reach significance in either case, the direction of means did suggest that the effect was primarily driven by consumers low in self-confidence (ps=.057 and .045 vs. ps>.50 and .08 for high self-confidence). It is important to note that high self-confidence participants did not experience less anxiety as a result of the manipulation. In other words, the effects of self-confidence were not caused through a reduction in anxiety, but rather perceptions of consumers’ ability to fulfill their goals.

To summarize, existing work on trivial attributes has highlighted a number of ways in which such attributes can influence product evaluation. Our research contributes to this literature by demonstrating that the role of trivial attributes is importantly influenced by contextually activated goals—goals that are not related to the core functions of a product but nevertheless can exert an important influence on the way in which consumers interpret the products’ attributes. More generally, this suggests that the specific goals activated in any particular product evaluation context are likely to exert an important influence on how each attribute is interpreted and its influence on overall product evaluation and choice.

References

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**The Effect of Product Familiarity on Price Discount Framing**

Ya-Chung Sun, Vanung University, Taiwan
Chiu-Chiao Chang, Vanung University, Taiwan
Shih-Chieh Chuang, National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan
Yin-Hui Cheng, National Taichung University, Taiwan

Consumer knowledge of prices plays an important role in price management since it not only determines how prices are perceived and valued but also influences consumers’ purchase decisions (Binkely and Beijnarowicz, 2003; Monroe, 1973, 1992; Simon, 1989; Turley and Cabaniss, 1995). Consumer response to price stimuli may involve cognitive processes such as attention, comprehension, retention and recall, as well as behavioral processes such as the formation of purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviors (Olson and Jacoby 1977).