“Get Lucky, Get Punished”: the Effect of Serendipity on the Perception of Innovations.

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This work shows that, relative to intentionally developed products, people may have more negative evaluations of innovations that are accidentally discovered. Three studies demonstrate that merely framing an innovation as the result of serendipity leads to more negative evaluations. This effect may be driven by just-world beliefs.

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In the serendipity condition, we explained that the pulsating heat system driving this effect was discovered **totally by accident**. In the intention condition, participants were told that the pulsating heat system driving this effect was discovered by planning and theorizing about how frying could be made more healthy. To keep objective quality constant, one additional sentence (present in both conditions) stated that Consumer Reports gave the Actify a score of 7/10.

Afterwards, they were asked to rate the product attractiveness on a seven-point scale (1 = not attractive at all; 7 = very attractive), perceived effort and perceived luck. To check whether participants had read the product description, we asked participants to report the quality rating at the end of the experiment. Only participants (N = 71) who gave the correct quality rating were retained for analysis. One outlier was excluded (more than 3SD’s from the mean), leaving the final sample size at 70 participants.

As expected, relative to the intention condition, the company was seen as more lucky ($M_{\text{serendipity}} = 6.03$ vs. $M_{\text{intention}} = 4.26$; $t(68) = 5.41$, $p < .001$) but exerting less effort in the serendipity conditions ($M_{\text{serendipity}} = 3.57$ vs. $M_{\text{intention}} = 5.89$; $t(68) = -7.41$, $p < .001$). Further analysis of the results showed that, relative to those in the serendipity condition, participants in the intention condition thought the product was more attractive ($M_{\text{serendipity}} = 4.83$ vs. $M_{\text{intention}} = 5.46$; $t(68) = -2.17$, $p < .05$).

The aim of the second study was to provide insight in the process driving the effect. More specifically, people may defend their belief in a just world by punishing companies who gained from serendipity. Hence, consumers feel that these companies “deserve” it less to be successful compared to those who intentionally looked for an innovation.

**REFERENCES**
