Lots to Do Or Lots of Ways to Do It? the Role of Mood and Mindset on Goal Motivation

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The present research investigates the interactive effects of mood and mindset on motivation in consumers’ goal striving. In three studies, we find that for those in a positive (vs. neutral) mood, an outcome mindset increases motivation. Conversely, being in a positive (vs. neutral) mood decreases motivation for those in a process mindset. The reason for this is rooted in the mood-creativity link, which leads individuals to generate more goal attainment means when in a positive mood. However, mindset influences construal of these means. So having more available goal attainment means in an outcome mindset increases motivation because they are seen as more opportunities to achieve the goal. Having more available means in a process mindset decreases motivation because they are seen as more work that must be completed to achieve the goal.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
This research is an exploration of the relationship between mood and mindset on motivation to pursue goals. Mood is omnipresent, and thus, it may affect consumers as they adopt, plan, execute, and evaluate progress toward goals. Recent work has shown that one’s mindset, whether one is focused on the process or the outcome of a goal, can influence motivation. This work has found that the effects of mindset depend on factors that include performance feedback, goal stages, and the number of goals being simultaneously pursued (Dalton and Spiller 2012; Townsend and Liu 2012). However, little attention has been given to the role of mood as a moderator of mindset on motivation. As consumers are always affected by moods, it is important to understand how mood and mindset influence motivation, in order to help consumers stay motivated to work toward goals.

Three studies provided evidence that when individuals are in a positive (vs. neutral) mood, an outcome mindset increases motivation to work toward a goal. Conversely, in a positive (vs. neutral) mood, a process mindset decreases motivation in goal striving. The research makes a unique contribution to the literature by examining the mood effect on creativity, or cognitive fluency, as the process for this interaction. According to mood-creativity research, a positive (vs. neutral) mood enhances creativity by promoting cognitive fluency, which refers to one’s ability to generate a large number of non-redundant problem solutions (Baas, De Dreu, and Nijstad 2008; Fredrickson 2008). Building on this, we found that those in a positive (vs. neutral) mood generated more potential solutions to serve as means to attaining a goal. The larger number of available goal attainment means led to increased motivation for those in an outcome mindset because the greater number of means was perceived as offering more opportunities for goal accomplishment. However having a larger number of means led to decreased motivation for those in a process mindset because the greater number of means was perceived as requiring more effort.

Study 1 (N=151) provided initial evidence for our hypotheses. This study was a 2 X 2 (Mood: Positive vs. Neutral) X 2 (Mindset: Outcome vs. Process) between-subjects design. All participants were told about a credit card offer and promotion based on an actual college student credit card. The promotion offered 10,000 points if one used the card for $650 in purchases in the first 3 months. Next, mood was manipulated by having participants watch an unrelated advertisement. Participants were then asked to generate a list of activities that they could do in order to earn 10,000 reward points. Subsequently, goal-oriented mindset was manipulated; half of the participants were asked to describe the outcome of executing the self-generated activities. The other half was asked to make implemental plans of execution. Lastly, participants indicated their willingness to sign up for this new credit card. An ANOVA revealed a significant mood by mindset interaction on motivation. Also, people in a positive (vs. neutral) mood listed more activities to achieve the reward earning goal (M = 9.17 vs. 8.05). When we regressed participants’ motivation on the number of activities, mindset, and an interaction term, there was a significant effect of the interaction between mindset and the number of activities on motivation, F(1, 146) = 10.39, p < .01.

Study 2 (N=160) aimed to extend the findings of Study 1 by exploring the underlying mechanisms that involve the two mediators. This study was a 2 (Mood) X 2 (Mindset) between-subjects design. The procedure was similar to Study 1, but participants created their own goal in the fitness goal domain. At the end of the procedure, we measured how participants construed the self-generated activities (i.e., mere tasks vs. opportunities). We replicated the findings of Study 1. Also, the mediation analyses revealed that the number of goal attainment activities, [.03, .41], and activity construal, [.23, .14], mediated the proposed relationship.

Study 3 (N=313) aimed to corroborate the argument that the proposed relationship between mood and mindset on motivation is initially driven by creativity, or cognitive fluency. To this end, we allowed half of our participants to freely generate activities as in Studies 1 and 2, while enforcing 10 activities to be generated by the other half. This study was a 2 (Mood) X 2 (Activity generation: Free generation vs. 10 activity items) X 2 (Mindset) between-subjects design. We activated a goal of learning Korean language and followed the procedure similar to Studies 1 and 2. At the end of procedure, participants were presented with a chance to actually learn 8 Korean words. As a behavioral measure of motivation, the amount of time that participants spent learning was captured as an indicator of motivation. Prior to analyses, 23 participants were eliminated because they failed to generate the 10 activity items as instructed. A 2 (Mood) X 2 (Activity generation) X 2 (Mindset) ANOVA with participants’ learning time as the dependent variable yielded a significant three-way interaction, F(1, 282) = 3.67, p = .05. Of note, when participants were free to generate as many or as few activities to their goal attainment activity lists, the results replicated those of Studies 1 and 2. Examining participants who were required to generate exactly 10 activity items, the analysis revealed a main effect of mindset only.

This research addresses the role of mood in goal striving and motivation. Our findings show that the effects of mood on motivation vary depending on mindset. By investigating the mood-creativity link as the process for the interaction, our discussion can be expanded into the motivational effects of creativity. Intuitively, one may expect that creativity always enhances motivation. However, we demonstrate that this intuition may not be correct. Creative performance is a multifaceted concept. When it leads to cognitive fluency and the generation of a large number of goal attainment means, the enhanced creativity may decrease motivation when the mindset leads to a focus on detailed steps that must be taken to accomplish tasks.

REFERENCES