The Effect of Lucky Feeling on Preference For Effort-Related Products and Activities

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The present research examines how incidental feeling of luck influences consumers’ preference for effort-related products and activities. Five experiments provide converging evidence that the feeling of luck leads consumers to prefer high-effort products and activities over those involving less effort. This effect is mediated by consumers’ tendency to take action.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

While some products are advertised to make life easier, many other products request consumers to exert more efforts during the consumption process (e.g., IKEA lets customers assemble furniture themselves; Norton, Mochon, and Ariely 2012). However, when and why consumers may prefer high-effort products and activities over low-effort ones are still largely unknown. Taking a novel perspective, the current research proposes that incidental feeling of personal luck may lead to such preferences and investigates the underlying mechanism.

The feeling of luck can substantially bias behaviors (Hamerman and Johar 2013; Jiang, Cho, and Adaval 2009). Luck has been shown to make people overestimate their success (Wohl and Enzle 2002). When people believe that they can successfully achieve the expected outcomes, they will tend to take action for the events (Eccles and Wigfield 2002). Thus, the feeling of luck increases peoples’ tendency to take actions in order to get successful outcomes, e.g., gambling to win money.

However, it may be less obvious that the feeling of luck can also exert similar influences on people’s action tendency out of the range of outcome-oriented events. We predict that the feeling of luck may increase people’s propensity toward action in general (i.e., regardless of whether the activities involve any outcome-relevant components), due to the repeatedly strengthening of the link between luck and action-taking. Such a heightened action tendency, in turn, leads to the enhanced preference for high-effort products, as the relationship between high effort and action-progression is shown to be strong and bi-directional (Dewey 1897; Albarracin, Hepler, and Tannenbaum 2011). Five experiments tested these possibilities.

Experiment 1 tested the basic effect using a two-condition (lucky vs. control) between-subjects design (N = 83). Specifically, participants were first asked to recall a lucky experience (vs. a typical day) as a manipulation of lucky feeling. All participants then received three scenarios and were asked to choose what they would do in each scenario. There were two options in each scenario—one option was high-effort (e.g., leaving positive comments on Facebook) whereas the other was low-effort (e.g., only clicking the “Like” button). We found that for all the three scenarios, participants in the lucky condition were more willing to choose the effortful option than those in the control condition.

Experiment 2 replicated the effect with real behavior (N = 68). In the lucky condition, participants were told that they won a lucky draw, and thus had the chance to choose a puzzle toy as a reward. In the control condition, participants were asked to directly choose a puzzle toy as a reward for participation. There were seven similar puzzle options varying only on their level of difficulties. After selecting a puzzle, participants’ action tendency was also measured (Jiang, Zhan, and Rucker 2014). As expected, participants in the lucky condition chose more difficult puzzles than those in the control condition. Mediation analyses confirmed that action tendency elicited by lucky feeling was the driving force of the effect.

To rule out the alternative explanation of positive affect and to explore the influence of unlucky feeling, experiment 3 adopted a four-condition (lucky vs. control vs. happy vs. unlucky) between-subjects design (N = 137). Participants first imagined a lucky (vs. neutral vs. happy vs. unlucky) situation. They were then shown a scenario about an IKEA promotion activity in which customers were invited to design products themselves, and were asked about their willingness to participate in such an activity, the number of items they planned to design, and the time they planned to spend on it. Participants’ action tendency was also measured. As expected, participants in the lucky condition were more willing to participate, planned to design more items, and planned to spend more time on it, than those in the other three conditions. The effect was again mediated by action tendency.

We hypothesized that consumers’ preference for high-effort activities is driven by greater action tendency triggered by lucky feeling. If this is the case, this effect should be mitigated when these high-effort activities are no longer considered as involving concrete actions, e.g., the activities will be held in a relatively distant future. In experiment 4, we tested this possibility using a 2 (lucky feeling: lucky vs. control) × 2 (activity schedule: close vs. distant) between-subjects design (N = 134). Similar to experiment 1, participants first recalled either a lucky day or a typical day. They were then presented with a NIKE running event scenario, which was described to be held either tomorrow (close condition) or the next Friday (distant condition), and were asked to indicate their willingness to participate and their planned running distances. Replicating previous findings, when the activity was scheduled tomorrow, participants in the lucky condition were more likely to participate in the activity and planned to run longer distances than their control condition counterparts. However, when the activity was scheduled the next Friday, the effect disappeared.

The previous experiments confirmed that lucky feeling can lead consumers to prefer high-effort products and activities over low-effort ones. However, it was still unclear whether the observed results were driven by increased evaluation for high-effort options or by decreased evaluation for low-effort ones. Experiment 5 addressed this question using a 2 (lucky feeling: lucky vs. control) × 2 (product description: high-effort vs. low-effort) between-subjects design (N = 209). Similar to previous experiments, participants first recalled either a lucky day or a typical day. Then, participants were presented with a health tracker advertisement which was described as involving high or low effort when using it, and were asked to evaluate the tracker. As expected, for the product that needed high-effort, participants in the lucky condition evaluated the product more favourably than those in the control condition. However, for the low-effort one, the effect became non-significant, showing that the effect of lucky feeling was due to increased evaluation for high-effort options.

This research contributes to the existing luck research by documenting how feeling of personal luck alters individuals’ perception and attitude toward actions. It also extends our understanding of the role of consumer effort in the consumption process.

REFERENCES


