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Today Is Just Not My Day: Bad Luck's Effect on Goal Pursuit

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Six experiments demonstrate the incidental effects of luck on global goal pursuit, showing that bad luck paralyzes goal pursuit and it is due to bad luck impairs consumers' global self-efficacy and determines their effort allocation subsequently. This work offers insight into how a ubiquitous variable could temporary shutdown goal pursuit.

[to cite]:

Cony M Ho, Daniel M Grossman, Anthony Salerno, and Joshua J. Clarkson (2019) , "Today Is Just Not My Day: Bad Luck's Effect on Goal Pursuit", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 47, eds. Rajesh Bagchi, Lauren Block, and Leonard Lee, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 625-626.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/2550845/volumes/v47/NA-47>

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers occasionally experience unlucky day in their daily life (i.e. Friday the 13th). The perception of having bad luck on these unlucky days has been shown to have a pervasive effect on consumer motivation. For instance, many consumers refuse to travel or to even leave their homes on Friday the 13th (Fidrmuc and Tena 2015). It is estimated that this lack of activity among consumers results in up to \$900 million lost in business sales and productivity (Davidson 2017). Why does this unlucky day seem to demotivate consumers despite having no normative relevance to their behavior?

The purpose of the current research is to examine the possibility that unluckiness could have a carryover influence on other aspects of consumer behavior (i.e., incidental luck). Specifically, we examine how luck might influence consumer goal pursuit. We hypothesize that incidental unluckiness will temporarily paralyze consumer goal pursuit. Furthermore, we predict that this effect occurs because unluckiness alters people's self-perceptions, which people use as an input to goal pursuit (Bandura and Schunk 1981). When people experience unluckiness, we expect that they will see themselves as less effective at successfully carrying out behaviors that can bring about positive outcomes (i.e., self-efficacy), which subsequently decreases the motivation for goal pursuit.

Experiment 1a sought to provide evidence that perceptions of luck impact global goal commitment. After reported 5 ongoing chronic goals, participants were told to participate in a card game to test how lucky they were and this game served as our luck manipulation. In the card game, they have to guess the color of a face-down card. Afterwards, participants reported their commitment to their goals. An independent-samples t-test showed that those in the bad luck condition ($M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.35$) reported lower goal commitment than those in the good luck condition ($M = 7.82$, $SD = .87$) ($t(94) = -2.31$, $p < .05$).

Experiment 1b tested the extent to which this effect held for novel goals. Following the luck manipulation, participants were told to participate an advertisement rating competition. Critically, if they won the competition, they would be entered into a gift card raffle. An independent-samples t-test revealed that those in the bad luck condition ($M = 10.26$, $SD = 10.99$) rated less advertisements than did those in the good luck condition ($M = 16.27$, $SD = 18.35$) ($t(123) = -2.20$, $p < .05$).

Experiment 1c tested the direction of this effect. We expected this effect is from decrease goal commitment of bad luck. This argument stems from research showing that people generally view themselves in a positive light (Dunning and Cohen 1992). To test our directionality hypothesis, we also included a control condition. Participants competed in a word scramble task. Goal commitment was assessed by the amount of time individuals' persisted on the task. An one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect ($F(2,238) = 3.39$, $p < .05$). In particular, those in the bad luck condition ($M = 83.02$, $SD = 50.26$) persisted less than those in the good luck condition ($M = 109.07$, $SD = 73.62$) ($t(157) = -2.61$, $p < .05$) whereas those in the good luck condition did not vary from the perceptions of those in the control condition ($M = 101.46$, $SD = 68.71$) ($F < 1$).

Experiment 2 tested our proposition of self-perception mechanism. Participants are dieters who are trying to lose weight. After

luck manipulation, participants indicated their goal commitment about dieting goals. Afterwards, they were asked to fill out self-efficacy scale (Chen, Gully, and Eden, 2001), a scale that taps into individuals' self-perception to bring out positive outcome in general. Participants then were asked to report their effort investment toward the dieting goal. We tested the serial mediation model of the prime on goal commitment through self-efficacy and effort investment (Model 6; Hayes, 2013). The pathway from prime to performance through self-efficacy and effort investment was significant (indirect effect = $-.43$; 95% CI: -1.10 to $-.11$).

Experiment 3 tested the moderating role of free will belief on goal paralysis effect. Participants were reported their five chronic goals that they are pursuing (same task as study 1a), and engage the luck manipulation as previous study. Afterwards, they were asked to participate a pretest for other study, which was actually our free will belief manipulation. In the manipulation, they read statement about high or low free will belief, and wrote a paragraph to support the idea (Vohs and Schooler, 2008). After the manipulation, they were asked to report commitment about five goals they reported. A two-way ANOVA revealed a luck X free will belief interaction, $F(1,197) = 10.81$, $p < .001$. Those who perceived themselves as having low in free will reported lower goal commitment in the bad luck (versus good luck) condition ($t(94) = -2.28$, $P = .025$).

Experiment 4 tested if the effect could be attenuated by raising the goal attainability. When attainability is high, experiencing bad luck should not decrease consumers' motivation to put effort. Participants were asked to engage a luck manipulation and task as study 1c. In addition, attainability was manipulated by providing different instructions. Participants were told their goal was achieved by 85% (15% in the low condition) participants in the high attainability condition. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant luck X goal attainability interaction on goal commitment ($F(2,254) = 3.13$, $p < .05$). Those in the low goal attainability condition reported significantly less goal commitment in the bad luck (versus good luck) condition ($t(84) = -2.93$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, there was no effect of luck on goal commitment for participants who were in the high goal attainability condition ($t(86) = .95$, $p = .ns$). Neither main effect was significant ($F_s < 1$).

These findings offer evidence of how incidental luck could influence on goal pursuit. Specifically, we proves that this effect is due to individuals' change in self-perception. This current paper not only offers a new ubiquitous variable (luck) could impact on goal commitment but also shows an effect that global goal system could be temporary paralyzed.

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