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Factors that Affect Consumers for Choosing Positive and Negative Lucky Products

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Abstract: Superstitious beliefs are prevalent even in modern lives, especially in Asia. Many marketers utilize lucky appeals to promote their products. Usually the lucky appeals include the claims that either bringing good lucks for people (positive lucky products) or preventing bad lucks (negative lucky products). This article uses two studies to discuss the factors that affect consumers when choosing positive and negative lucky products. In study1, a survey of 292 participants in Taiwan showed that attitude superstitious belief related positively to both positive and negative lucky products. Attitude for positive lucky products was also positively related to belief in being personally lucky. Attitude for negative lucky products was negatively related to subjective well-being, and positively related to belief in being unlucky. In study 2, an experiment of 161 participants showed that most people prefer positive lucky products, but difficult situation would increase the likelihood of choosing negative lucky products. Past research has discussed many psychological factors that affect the belief in luck. However, little research focused on the discussion of attitude for lucky products in commercial markets. This research tries to fill the academic research gap and to provide some implications for managers who want to use lucky appeals for promoting products.

Keywords: Superstition, Lucky product, Belief in luck, Subjective well-being.

Introduction

Superstitious beliefs are prevalent in our daily lives. People use superstitious ways to search for good lucks and prevent bad lucks. Many marketers use lucky appeals to promote their products. The lucky appeals can be positive or negative, claiming that the goods can bring good fortune (positive lucky product) or prevent bad lucks (negative lucky product). This study tries to identify the factors that affect consumers for evaluating positive and negative lucky products. Previous studies about superstitious beliefs majorly appeared in psychological research and most studies focused on personalities that related to superstition (Mowen & Carlson, 2003; Tobacyk & Milford, 1983). In recent decade, superstition has extended to consumer studies (Kramer & Block, 2008) but studies about

lucky products are still rare. This study reviewed from superstition literature and selected some personalities that may related to the attitude toward positive and negative lucky products. These personalities include positive and negative superstitious beliefs, belief in being personally lucky and unlucky, and subjective well-being. In study 1, a survey was conducted and the result suggested that belief in being unlucky and low subjective well-being were related to attitude toward negative lucky products. Then in study 2, an experiment was conducted to test whether a difficult situation would lead consumers to choose negative lucky products. The studies may provide some managerial implications for managers when applying lucky appeals.

Literature and Hypotheses

This study classifies lucky products as bringing good lucks and preventing bad lucks. Previous literature rarely discussed lucky products but the studies of superstition and belief in luck are abundant. Reviewing from psychological literature about superstition and belief in luck, we select the factors that may relate to the attitude of positive or negative lucky products. The belief of superstition and the belief of luck can also be classified as positive or negative, thus these beliefs are included. Besides, subjective well-being is also included because it is the combination of life satisfaction and the relative frequency of positive and negative affect. These factors are discussed specifically as follows.

Positive and Negative Superstition

Superstition is the belief that some acts can directly influence the occurrence of good or bad things without scientific or rational reasons (Carlson, Mowen, & Fang, 2009; Vyse, 1997). Superstitious beliefs can be further classified as positive and negative (Wiseman & Watt, 2004). Positive superstitious beliefs are based on the motives of chasing good fortune, such as knocking woods or crossing fingers can bring good luck in some Western countries (Damisch, Stoberock, & Mussweiler, 2010; Keinan, 2002). The red color and number eight have the meanings of bringing good luck in Chinese culture (Simmons & Schindler, 2003). Positive lucky products use positive phrases to attract consumers, satisfying consumers' needs of pursuing good fortune. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

***H1:** Positive superstitious beliefs relate positively to the attitude toward positive lucky products.*

Negative superstitious beliefs are based on the motives of preventing bad lucks and removing bad things. For example, black cat and black Friday are bad omens in some Western countries. In Chinese culture, number four is not auspicious and many people would prevent number four when choosing telephone number or car plate. When people have negative superstitious beliefs, they may believe that some traditional rituals or superstitious ways may help them prevent bad things. Negative lucky products use the phrases of preventing bad fortune and satisfy consumers' need of avoiding the fear of bad things. Therefore, negative superstitious beliefs result in the need for negative lucky products. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

***H2:** Negative superstitious beliefs relate positively to the attitude toward negative lucky*

products.

Belief in Being Personally Lucky and Unlucky

Maltby et al. (2008) classified belief around luck as four dimensions: belief in being personally lucky, belief in being personally unlucky, general belief in luck, and rejection of belief in luck. Among the four dimensions, we think that general belief in luck and rejection of belief in luck would have correlations with the acceptance and rejection of all lucky products, but would not have different effects on positive and negative products. We select the belief in being personally lucky and unlucky because they may have different influences on positive and negative lucky products. Positive lucky products can satisfy consumers who believe that lucky things would stand by their side. The products can help them keep optimistic toward the future. Negative lucky products would attract consumers who believe that bad fortune would easily happen to them. The products can help them avoid bad lucks. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: *The belief in being personally lucky relates positively to the attitude toward positive lucky products.*

H4: *The belief in being personally unlucky relates positively to the attitude toward negative lucky products.*

Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being refers to how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments. (Diener, 1984). It includes the relative frequency of positive moods over negative ones (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984). Although subjective well-being is positively correlated with the belief of being lucky (Maltby et al., 2008), the concepts of the two constructs are still different. A person who has high subjective well-being may think his/her good life is due to his/her personal efforts instead of luck. Thus we take subjective well-being as different from belief of being lucky or unlucky and must be included in the analysis.

Positive lucky products appeal to consumers' needs for good luck. When people have high subjective well-being, they may want to extend the good fortune and thus have good attitude toward positive lucky products. Negative lucky products help people prevent bad fortune, satisfying consumers who have low subjective well-being and want to avoid or eliminate difficulties in their lives. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: *Subjective well-being relates positively to positive lucky products.*

H6: *Subjective well-being relates negatively to negative lucky products.*

Study 1

The purpose of study 1 is to verify the factors that affect consumers' attitude toward positive and negative lucky products. A survey was conducted to test hypotheses H1 to H6. All items are Likert seven point scale, with one representing strongly disagree and seven representing strongly agree. Positive superstitious belief includes three items such as I think number eight symbolizes good omen. Negative superstitious belief includes three items such as I think number four is unfortunate. Belief of being personally lucky

contains five items such as I consider myself as a lucky person. Belief of being personally unlucky consists of five items such as I think bad things always happen to me. Subjective well-being comprises five items such as my life is almost the same with my ideal life. Attitude toward positive and negative lucky products respectively includes three items, such as I have good impression toward the products that can bring me good fortune (or preventing bad fortune). All items were modified from literature (Darke & Freedman, 1997; Diener et al., 1985; Hernandez et al., 2008; Huang & Teng, 2009) and all the values of Cronbach's α are above .7, suggesting good reliability.

Results

The survey was conducted in Taiwan. Among the 292 effective samples, 62.0% were female, 38.4% were 21 to 25 years old, 27.4% were 26 to 40 years old, and 34.2% were above 41 years old. We conducted multiple linear regression for positive and negative lucky products separately. For both regression analyses, the F values were significant. All the values VIF were below 2, suggesting no multicollinearity. The regression analyses were listed in Table 1. The results indicated that both positive and negative superstitious beliefs related positively to both positive and negative lucky products. H1 and H2 were supported, but positive (negative) superstitious belief also correlated positively with negative (positive) lucky products. The possible reason is that superstitious beliefs focus on the irrational causality, no matter the belief was positive or negative. A superstitious person believes the supernatural causality, instead of believing that good or bad fortune would happen to him or her. Superstitious people believe the magical power of lucky products, no matter the products are positive or negative appeals.

Belief in being lucky had significant positive correlation with positive lucky products, thus H3 was supported. Belief in being unlucky related positively to negative lucky products, so H4 was supported. Subjective well-being was not positively related to positive lucky products, thus H5 was not supported. A person who has high subjective well-being is living well and therefore may not need lucky products. Subjective well-being had significant negative correlation with negative lucky products, thus H6 was supported.

Table 1: Results of Multiple Regression for Study 1

	Positive lucky products		Negative lucky products	
	coefficient ¹	t value	coefficient	t value
Constant	1.566	4.353**	0.881	2.229*
Positive superstitious belief	0.402	7.277**	0.361	5.952**
Negative superstitious belief	0.247	4.971**	0.205	3.744**
Belief in being lucky	0.142	2.164*	0.117	1.617
Belief in being unlucky	0.003	.051	0.210	3.436**
Subjective well-being	-0.102	-1.812	-0.125	-2.014*
R², adjusted R²	.384, .373		.327, .315	
F value	35.629**		27.809**	

¹All the coefficients are unstandardized.

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Study 2

The Influence of Difficult Situation

From study 1, we found that the major different antecedents of positive and negative lucky products were belief in being lucky or unlucky and subjective well-being. Summarized from the findings, we conjecture that when people have difficult situation, they may prefer negative lucky products to positive ones. Reviewing from literature, many scholars have found that when people face risky events or uncertainty, they would rely on superstitious methods (Felson & Gmelch, 1979). When people have difficult situation, they would like to reduce the pressure and avoid any bad things. Negative lucky products can satisfy the needs of preventing bad fortune. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H7: Compared with easy situation, when people are in difficult situation, their preference for negative lucky products would be higher.

Method

We conducted an experiment to test the hypothesis. We manipulated the situation as easy or difficult by scenario description. We used projective method and asked subjects to imagine that they were the person in the scenario. For easy situation, the scenario stated that the person's life and job were smooth going. Everything was fine for the person. For the difficult situation, we described the person as facing difficult tasks in life and job. For the lucky product, we used potted plant as example and framed it as positive and negative. The description of the positive lucky potted plant stated that: "*Greening in your office. It can enhance your luck. It will improve your interpersonal relationships with your colleague. The plant brings you vitality, positive energy and good luck. It will enhance your wealth and relationships with others.*" The description of the negative lucky potted plant was that: "*Greening in your office. It can expel bad fortune take away a bad mood. It will remove negative energy, and is effective in anti-villain. It increases your self-defense capability by cleaning the air. It makes you stay away from the intrigues of bad things.*" Subjects are asked to select one from the two products.

Results

The experiment was conducted in Taiwan with undergraduate students as samples. Among the 161 effective participants, 55.9% were female, 71.4% aged from 20 to 22 years old. Subjects in the difficult situation agreed that the situation was difficult (Likert seven point scale, $M_{\text{difficult}} = 5.843$, significantly greater than number 4, $t(82) = 12.901$, $p < .01$). Those who were in the easy situation agreed that the situation was easy ($M_{\text{easy}} = 5.141$, significantly greater than 4, $t(77) = 5.889$, $p < .01$). Manipulation checks were successful.

Under easy situation, 91.0% of the subjects selected positive lucky products and only 9.0% selected negative ones. When the situation was difficult, 73.5% of the subjects selected positive lucky products and 26.5% selected negative ones. Although most people still preferred positive lucky products under difficult situation, the difference of the percentage between the two situations was significant $\chi^2(1) = 8.369$, $p < .01$. Compared with the easy situation, those who were in the difficult situation had higher preference for negative lucky products. H7 was supported.

Discussion

Conclusion, Contribution, and Implication

This article conducts explores the factors that affect consumers when selecting positive or negative lucky products and also verifies that difficult situation may increase the likelihood of choosing negative lucky products. Specifically, both positive and negative superstitious beliefs positively affect the attitude for lucky products, no matter the lucky appeals are positive or negative. Superstition is the belief in supernatural causality. Both positive and negative superstitious beliefs focus on the irrational beliefs -- that one event causes another without rational reasons. Superstitious consumers would have good attitude toward both positive and negative lucky products. Belief in being personally lucky (unlucky) related positively to positive (negative) lucky products. Subjective well-being related negatively to negative lucky products. Our experiment also found that people always prefer positive lucky products although the preference for negative lucky products would increase under difficult situations. We asked subjects to provide reason for their choice in study 2. Some participants who selected positive lucky products under difficult situation answered that as the positive lucky product brings good fortune to them, it also implies that the difficult situation has changed. Most people like to chase good luck (in a better state) instead of just preventing bad luck (in a normal state). This study analyses the antecedents of evaluating positive and negative lucky products. The study extends the discussion of superstition and luck to commercial products. For marketing managers who want to promote lucky products, positive appeals are better than negative ones. But for those who believe they are unlucky or have low subjective well-being, negative appeals still work. For example, negative lucky products could target at people whose horoscope forecast expects bad lucks. Besides, positive negative appeals are not mutually exclusive. Marketers could also apply both appeals to promote their lucky products.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Future research may compare the differences toward lucky products across different demographic or geographic variables. The characteristics of different products and different situations may also influence consumer evaluation. Future research can discuss these issues.

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