

# The Struggle is Real: Motivating Goal Pursuit by Normalizing Difficulty

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Zoom link: <https://wustl.zoom.us/j/91280954456>

## Background

- When consumers struggle during goal pursuit, they lose motivation and disengage from products that help with their goal pursuit.
- Then, how can marketers help struggling consumers with their goal re-engagement?
- Drawing from the goal pursuit<sup>1</sup>, social norms<sup>2</sup>, attribution<sup>3</sup>, and self-attainability<sup>4</sup> literature, we hypothesize:
- Effect Hypothesis:** Setting a difficult (vs. easy or no) goal pursuit norm will increase goal re-engagement.
- Mechanism Hypothesis:** A difficult (vs. easy or no) goal pursuit norm will increase consumers' perceived self-attainability of the goal, which increases goal re-engagement.

## Study 1: Main Effect

### 3-cell design (Norm setting: Control, Easy, Difficult)

N = 903, MTurk

<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=gz7jm6>

Participants imagined struggling to reach a health goal, and they have temporarily stopped using an app called Cronometer.

Then, participants received an email from Cronometer that differed on the goal pursuit norm:

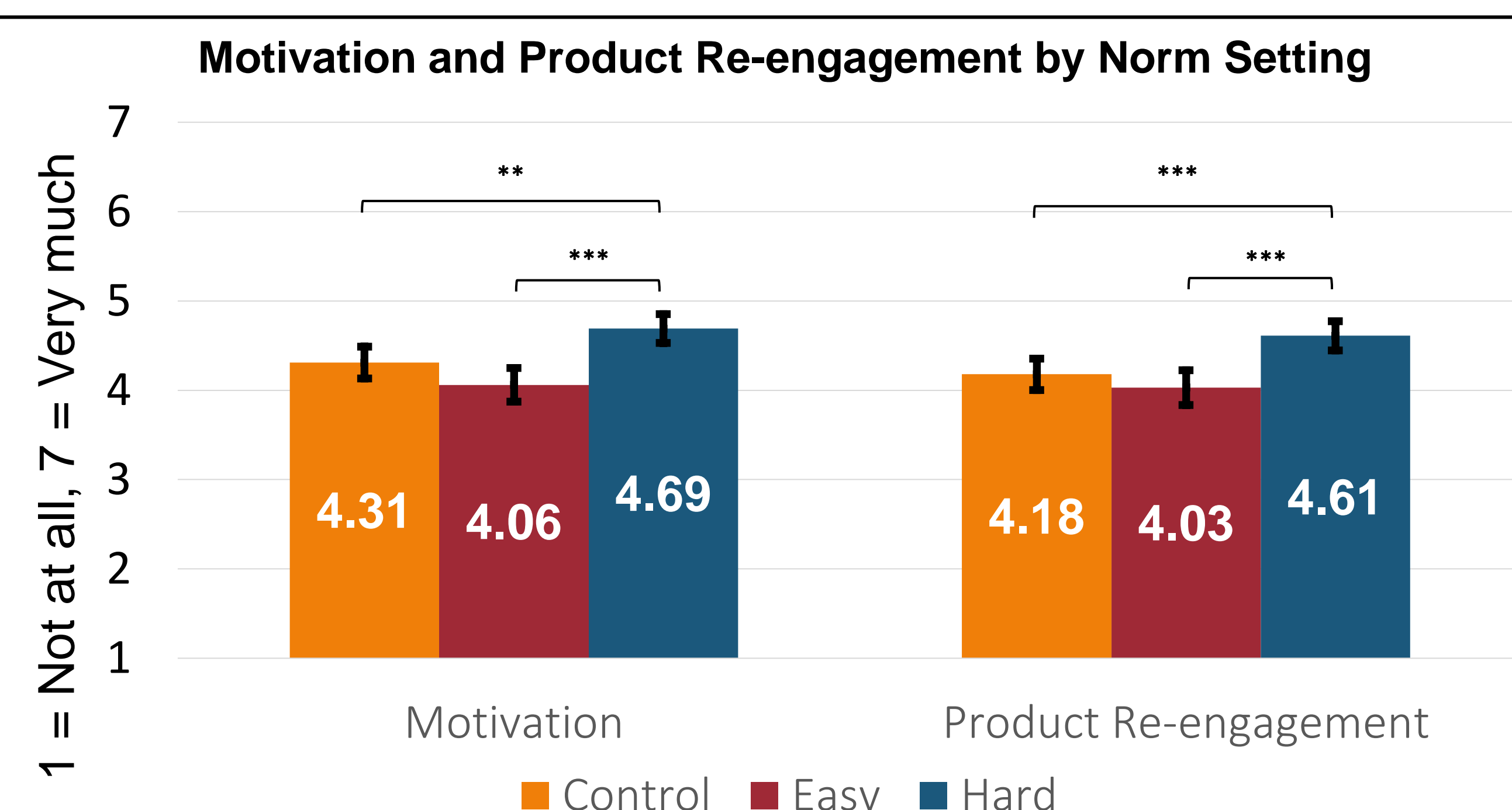
- Easy condition:** "Maintaining a health diet can be an easy process for many people..."
- Difficult condition:** "Maintaining a health diet can be a difficult process for many people..."
- Control condition:** "Let us help you keep working towards your goal."

**Motivation DV:** "After reading the email, how motivated would you be to continue pursuing your health goal?"

- 1 = Not at all motivated, 7 = Very motivated

**Product re-engagement DV:** "After reading the email, how likely would you be to start using the Cronometer app again?"

- 1 = Not at all likely, 7 = Very likely



**Summary:** Setting a difficult goal pursuit norm for struggling consumers increases motivation and product re-engagement.

## Study 2: Replication and Mechanism

### 3-cell design (Norm setting: Control, Easy, Difficult)

N = 896, Prolific

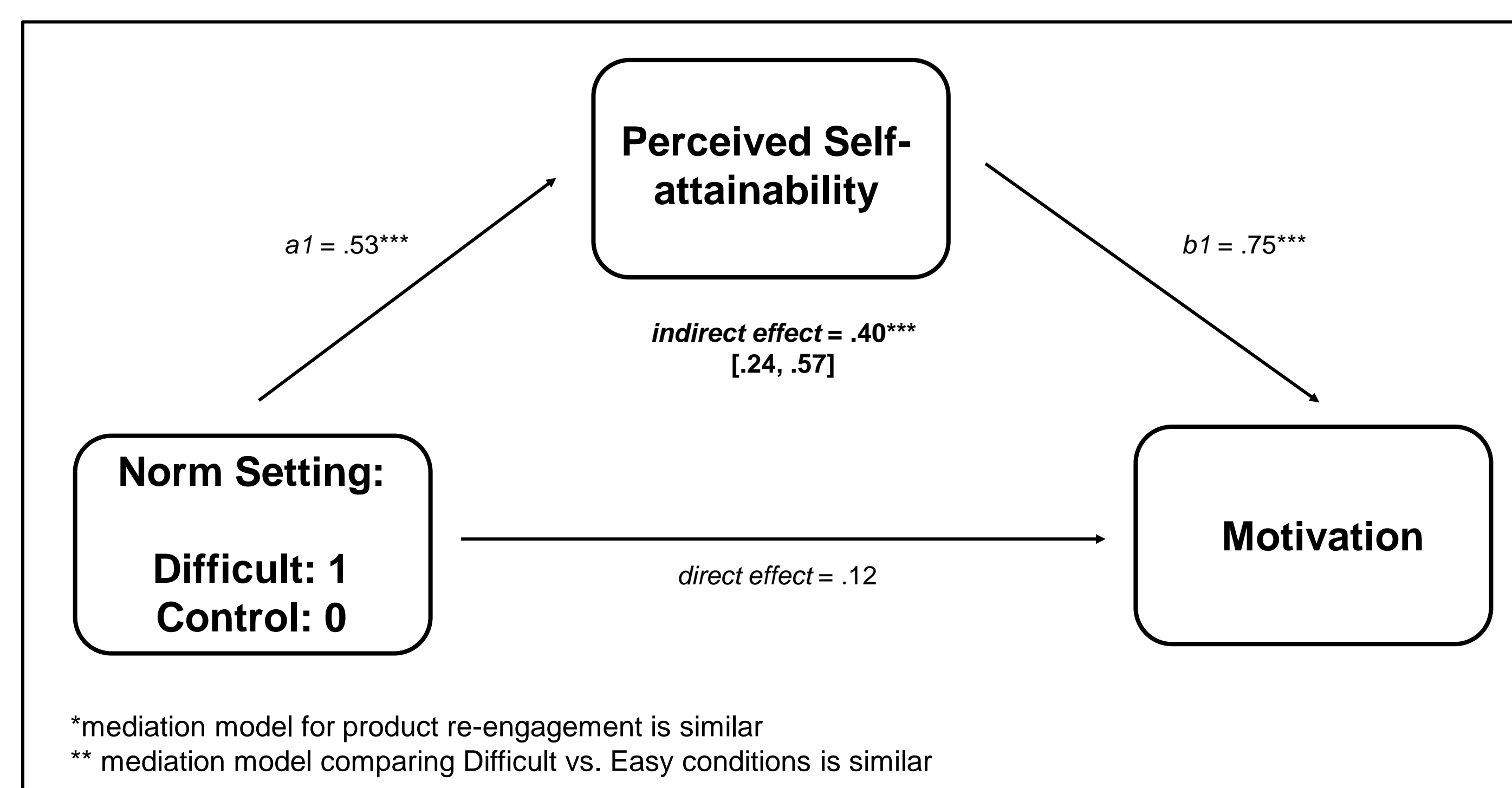
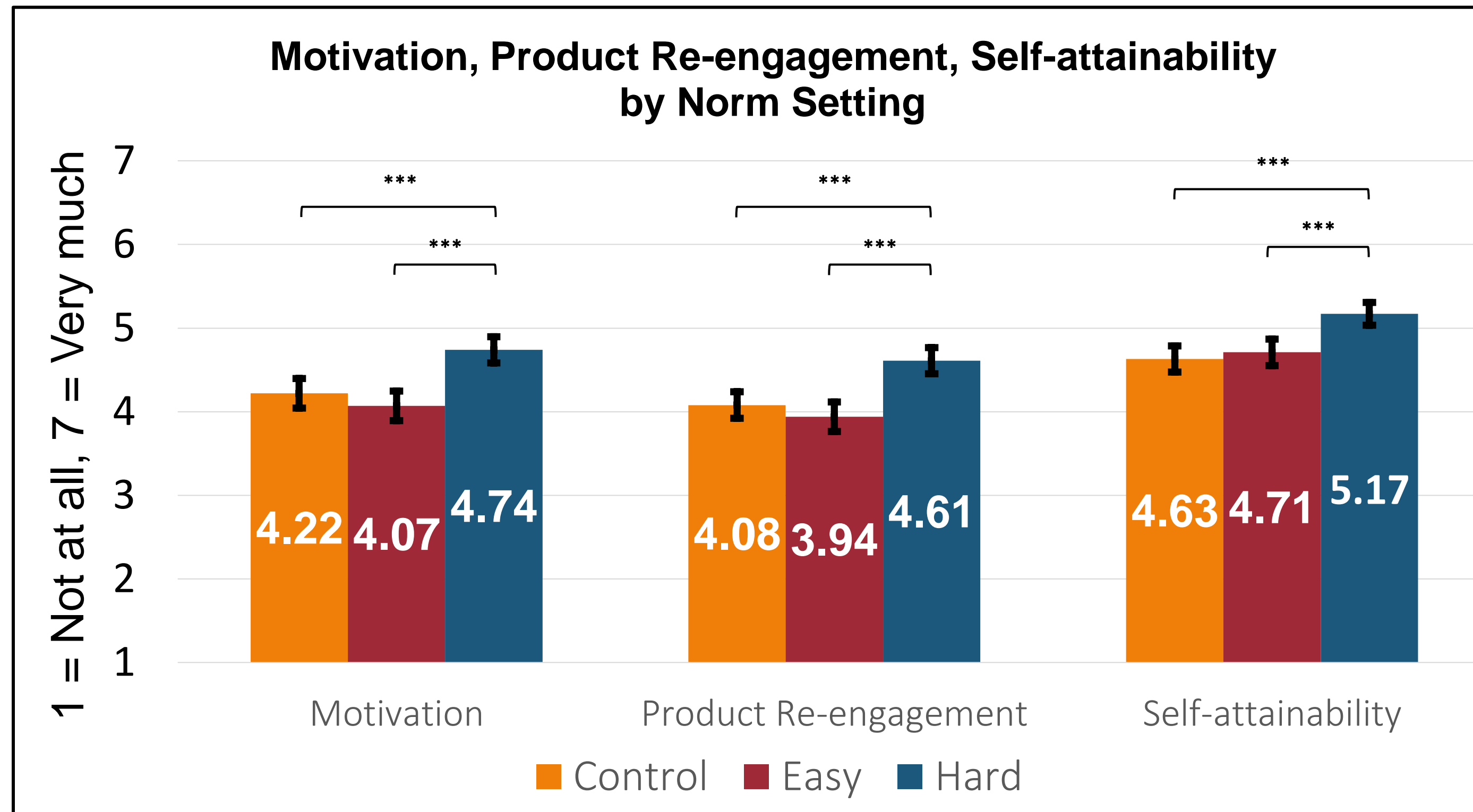
<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=rq2xv9>

Similar scenario as Study 1, however, we specified what goal they were struggling with (i.e., struggling to walk 3,000 steps per day).

Then, participants answered our key DVs (motivation and product re-engagement likelihood) and proposed mechanism, perceived self-attainability.

**Self-attainability DV:** "After reading this email, to what extent would you believe your health goal is achievable for you?"

- 1 = Not at all achievable, 7 = Very much achievable



\*mediation model for product re-engagement is similar  
\*\* mediation model comparing Difficult vs. Easy conditions is similar

**Summary:** Setting a difficult goal pursuit norm increases perceived self-attainability, which in turn increases motivation and product re-engagement for struggling consumers.

## Study 3: Moderation by Attainability

### 2 (Norm setting: Easy vs. Difficult) x 2 (Achievement: Struggle vs. Success)

N = 1795, Prolific

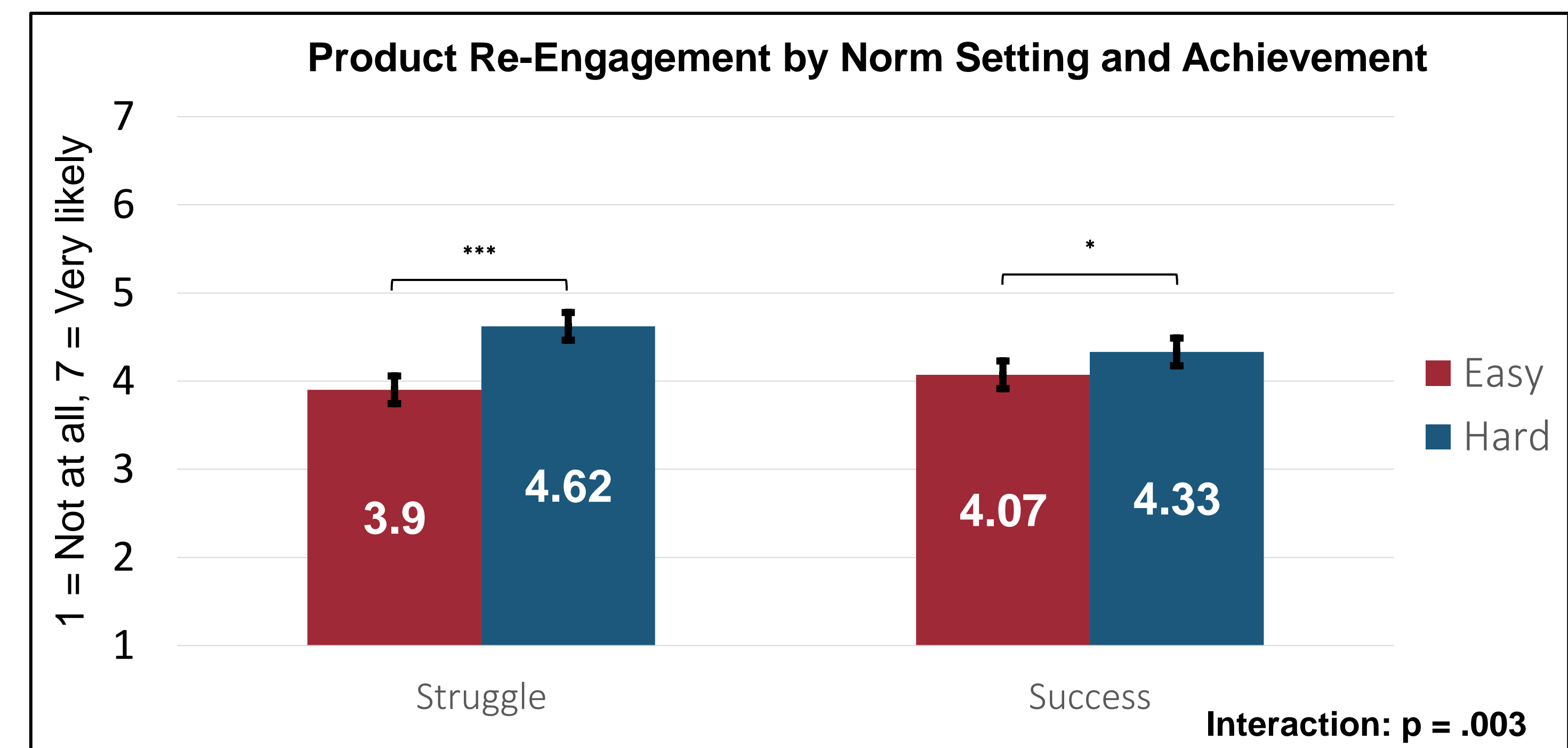
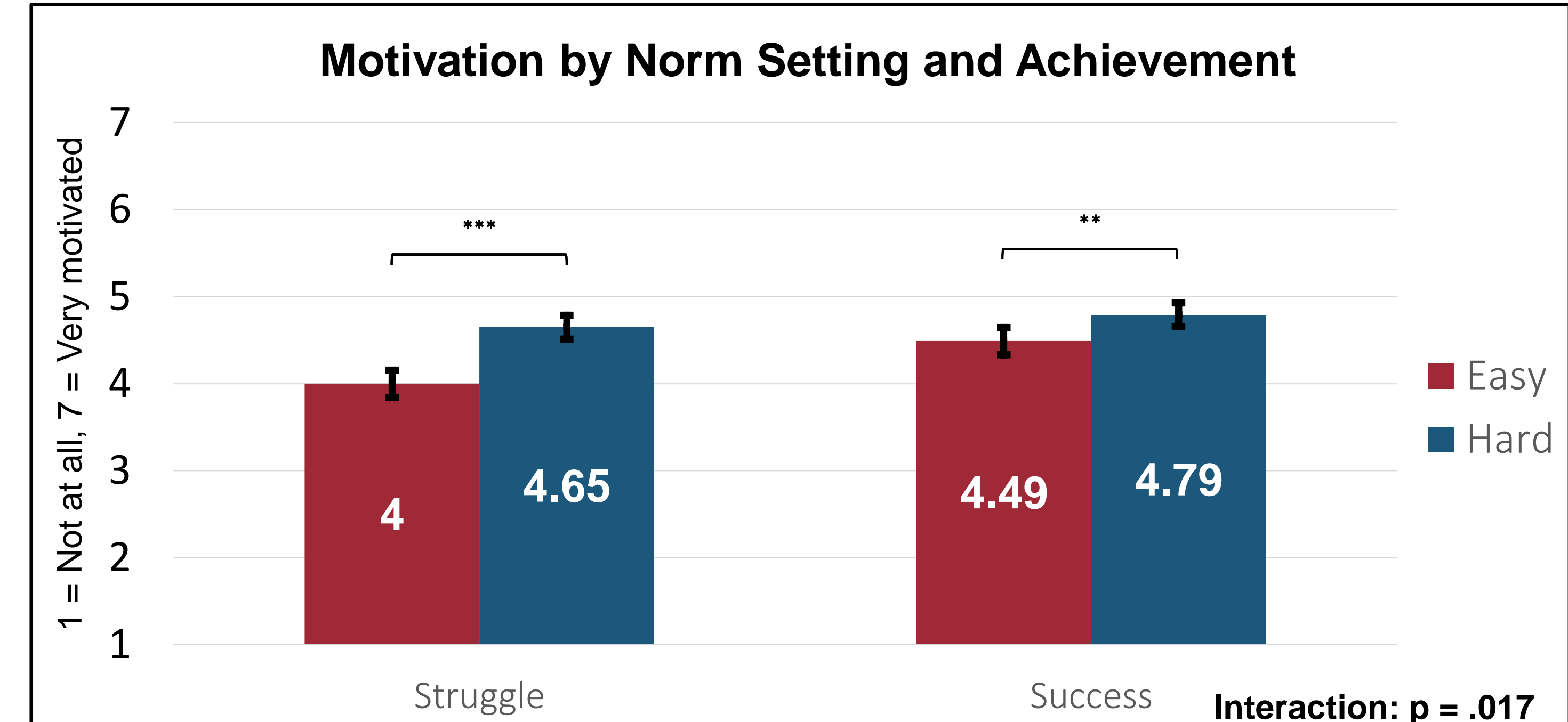
<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=wh8ke3>

**Struggle Condition:** asked to write about a time they struggled to achieve their health goals, and imagined they were struggling to reach their health goals.

**Success Condition:** asked to write about a time they succeeded to achieve their health goals, and imagined they were succeeding to reach their health goals.

Then, similar to Study 1, participants received an email from Cronometer that differed on the norm of the goal pursuit process.

Answered motivation and product re-engagement DVs.



**Summary:** If the difficult (vs. easy) norm setting increases perceived self-attainability for struggling consumers, then the norm setting should have a weaker effect when consumers are succeeding. Thus, an attenuated interaction.

## Summary

- How can marketers help consumers who are struggling with their goal pursuit? The current research found that setting a difficult goal pursuit norm can increase people's goal re-engagement behaviors (**Study 1**).
- We found that the effect occurs because a difficult goal pursuit norm increases people's perceived self-attainability of the goal (**Study 2 & 3**).
- We test our proposed mechanism via moderation (**Study 3**). The motivational impact of a difficult (vs. easy) goal pursuit norm depends on people's prior goal success, such that it is less motivating for those who are already succeeding at their goal.
- The current research extends the literature on social norms, goal pursuit, and self-attainability, while providing important marketing implications marketers and companies can adapt.
- <sup>1</sup>Heath, Larrick, and Wu (1999); <sup>2</sup>Huang and Aaker (2019); <sup>3</sup>Goldstein, Cialdini, Griskevicius (2008); <sup>4</sup>Bandura (1977)