

Buying life experiences to impress others removes happiness boost

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Spending money on activities and events, such as concert tickets or exotic vacations, won't make you happier if you're doing it to impress others, according to findings published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Research has shown that consumers gain greater happiness from buying [life experiences](#) rather than material possessions, but only if they choose experiences for the right reasons says the new study.

"Why you buy is just as important as what you buy," said Ryan Howell, assistant professor of [psychology](#) at San Francisco State University.

"When people buy life experiences to impress others, it wipes out the well-being they receive from the purchase. That extrinsic motivation appears to undermine how the experiential purchase meets their key psychological needs."

The study builds on Howell's previous findings, which suggest that people who buy life experiences are happier because experiential purchasing helps fulfill psychological needs that are vital for human growth and well-being. These include the need to feel competent, autonomous -- or self-directed -- and connected to others.

For the present study, Howell and colleagues surveyed 241 participants and found that a person's motivation for making a purchase predicts whether these needs will be met. Howell conducted the research with Jia Wei Zhang, a student in his lab, and University of Rochester researcher

Peter Caprariello.

They found that people who choose to buy life experiences because it is in line with their [desires](#), interests and values reported a greater sense of fulfillment and well-being. They felt more autonomous, competent and connected to others, less [loneliness](#) and a greater sense of vitality.

Individuals who choose life experiences to gain recognition from others reported feeling less autonomous, competent and connected to others.

"The biggest question you have to ask yourself is why you are buying something," Howell said. "[Motivation](#) appears to amplify or eliminate the happiness effect of a purchase."

As part of the study, the researchers developed and validated a new survey to measure individuals' motivations for experiential buying. Members of the public can take the survey by visiting the "Beyond the Purchase" website. Howell and colleagues launched the website to collect data for academic studies and allow members of the public to take free psychology quizzes to find out what kind of shopper they are and how their spending choices affect them. Visit the Beyond the Purchase website at www.beyondthepurchase.org

"Buying Life Experiences for the "Right" Reasons: a Validation of the Motivations for Experiential Buying Scale" was published online on June 13, 2012 in the Journal of [Happiness Studies](#). Co-author Jia Wei Zhang is a former SF State undergraduate who graduated in 2011.

Provided by San Francisco State University

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