

Department of Marketing



Research Seminars Series

Joseph Goodman,
The Ohio State University (US)

November 13, 2025 | 12:00 - 13:00 | AD.0.090 Sitzungssaal 6

Do Experiential Purchases Remedy Materialism? Decoupling Purchase Type and Purchase Goal

Abstract: Materialism and material values have been associated with lower subjective well-being, negative social perceptions, and greater loneliness. Experiential purchases seem to be a solution because they lead to more happiness compared to material goods, leading to a prevailing “experience recommendation” — the idea that consuming more experiences is the remedy to consumer well-being. Yet, this characterization oversimplifies the nature of materialism, which is not merely about the tangibility of goods but also reflects a personality trait and a motivational orientation. In this research, we propose that the goal underlying consumption — rather than whether the purchase is material or experiential — is what shapes consumer well-being and social perceptions. Drawing on the three subdimensions of material values, we recategorize materialism in terms of instrumental goals (e.g., fulfilling an intermediate goal such as signaling success, popularity, or status) and terminal goals (e.g., furthering one’s enjoyment and happiness). Across six studies, we find that while consumers’ lay theories associate material purchases with instrumental goals and experiential purchases with terminal goals (Study 1a and 1b). Using a novel experiential values scale, we find that consumers who value instrumental goals pursue them across both material and experiential domains, and it is associated with lower well-being (Study 2). Further, we find that purchases driven by instrumental goals — whether material or experiential — lead to lower happiness than those driven by terminal goals (Study 3). Importantly, instrumentally motivated experiences elicit negative social perceptions, while terminally motivated material purchases can lead to positive evaluations (Study 4). This pattern extends to a social media context: instrumentally motivated posts are judged negatively, whereas terminally motivated ones are perceived positively regardless of purchase type (Studies 5 and 6). Together, these findings suggest that materialistic consumption is not limited to material goods and consumers can consume in experientialist ways.