

When wanting is more important than having: Will that new car really make you happy?

January 15 2013

Materialistic consumers may derive more pleasure from desiring products than they do from actually owning them, and are willing to overspend and go into debt because they believe that future purchases will transform their lives, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Thinking about acquisition provides momentary [happiness](#) boosts to [materialistic people](#), and because they tend to think about acquisition a lot, such thoughts have the potential to provide frequent mood boosts. But the positive emotions associated with acquisition are short-lived. Although materialists still experience positive emotions after making a purchase, these emotions are less intense than before they actually acquire a product," writes author Marsha L. Richins (University of Missouri).

Materialists tend to buy more than other consumers and are more willing to go into debt because they believe that buying things will make them happier. But does acquisition actually make them happier?

In three different studies, materialists (compared to other consumers) reported significantly stronger positive emotions when thinking about an important future purchase. This was true for both expensive items like automobiles and cheaper items like household electronics, and whether they anticipated making the purchase within a few weeks or a year or so

in the future.

Materialists were more likely than others to believe that an upcoming purchase would transform their lives in meaningful ways. For example, they tended to believe that an important new acquisition will improve their relationships with other people, enhance the way they feel about themselves, enable them to have more [pleasure](#) in life, and allow them to carry out life tasks more effectively. The [intensity](#) of the happiness boost a materialist experiences before a purchase is directly related to the extent to which they expect these transformations to occur.

"Materialists are more likely to overspend and have credit problems, possibly because they believe that acquisitions will increase their happiness and change their lives in meaningful ways. Learning that acquisition is less pleasurable than anticipating a purchase may help them delay purchases until they are better able to afford them," the author concludes.

More information: Marsha L. Richins. "When Wanting Is Better Than Having: Materialism, Transformation Expectations, and Product-Evoked Emotions in the Purchase Process." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: When wanting is more important than having: Will that new car really make you happy? (2013, January 15) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-important-car-happy.html>

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