

# Does entering the lottery affect consumers' self-control?

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A simple action like buying a lottery ticket can trigger materialistic thoughts, which cause consumers to lose self-control, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Materialism, a set of beliefs about the importance of [possessions](#) in a consumer's life, is associated with a host of negative outcomes," writes author Hyeongmin (Christian) Kim (Johns Hopkins University). "Some examples include impulsive buying and excessive debt, both of which can be viewed as manifestations of poor self-control."

The author investigated why [materialism](#) leads to poor self-control and found that materialistic thoughts are specific and concrete, and that the more materialistic thoughts a consumer has, the more likely he or she is to demonstrate a lack of self-control. Prior research has shown that when people's minds are occupied with concrete thoughts, they tend to seek immediate gratification.

In one study, researchers instructed one group of participants to buy a lottery ticket with a [jackpot](#) of \$1 million, while a second group of [consumers](#) did not. Participants in both groups wrote down their thoughts and indicated how much they preferred a small, immediate reward to a large, delayed reward. The consumers who bought a [lottery ticket](#) wrote down more materialistic thoughts and showed stronger preferences for a small, immediate reward.

In another study, participants received lottery tickets and were prompted

to write either about products they would buy or trips they would take if they won. "The consumers who were asked to write about products or brands that they would like to buy with a possible windfall indicated stronger preference for a small, immediate reward than did those who wrote about travel," the author explains.

Understanding what triggers a loss of self-control is key to many consumers' happiness, Kim writes. "It is well-documented that materialistic consumers struggle with their materialistic longings and sometimes show poor self-control. Self-control is perhaps one of the most important attributes that a person needs to have a successful life," the author concludes.

**More information:** Hyeongmin (Christian) Kim. "Situational Materialism: How Entering Lotteries May Undermine Self-Control." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2013.

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