

An experience or a product: Which new purchase is more likely to elicit envy in other consumers?

June 13 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Imagine browsing through your social media feed and finding out about two purchases made by your friends. One friend went on a vacation to a tropical island. Another friend bought a new, top-of-the-line TV.

Which friend—the one who purchased an experience or the one who purchased a material product—are you more likely to [envy](#)?

The answer to this question wasn't clear from the previous studies as some researchers argued one way while others argued the other way. A new paper by researchers at the University of Utah reconciles these findings and suggests that who we envy more depends on what we focus on as observers. The research will be published in the October issue of the *Journal of Business Research*.

Joowon Park, lead author and an assistant professor of marketing at the University of Utah's David Eccles School of Business, said, "When we focus on the people who made the purchase and think of how happy they are, we tend to envy [experiential purchases](#) more. When we focus on the products that were purchased and think of how great the products are, we tend to envy material purchases more."

Why do people envy experiential purchases of others more when they focus on the people? Experiential purchases such as vacation trips, sporting events and concerts are more integral to one's identity and have been shown to bring more happiness than material purchases. Thus, when observers focus on the people and their happiness, they envy experiential purchases more for the greater happiness they bring.

Why do people envy material purchases of others more when they focus on the product? Material purchases such as electronics and clothes are easier to compare on an objective basis than [experiential purchases](#) that are more subjective. Thus, when observers focus on the products and superiority of the products to their own, they envy [material purchases](#) more as they are easily comparable.

The researchers argue that naturally we, as social beings, tend to focus on the people aspect more often than product aspect.

"People will naturally engage in person-to-person comparisons online unless they are prompted otherwise to think more specifically about the

purchase," said Tamara Masters, a co-author and professor at the David Eccles School of Business.

These findings have implications for businesses that try to build on the power of envy, a strong motivator of consumption.

"Envy is more likely to generate interest if your company sells experiences than materials," Park said. "See if you can highlight the experiential benefits your products bring to the consumers than merely listing the technical specs of your products in your marketing messaging."

More information: Joowon Park et al, Person vs. purchase comparison: how material and experiential purchases evoke consumption-related envy in others, *Journal of Business Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114014)

Provided by University of Utah

Citation: An experience or a product: Which new purchase is more likely to elicit envy in other consumers? (2023, June 13) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-product-elicite-envy-consumers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.