

# Having and doing contribute equally to happiness: Symmetrizing self-expression across material and experiential purchases

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## Abstract

Extant literature suggests that material possessions have a disadvantage compared to experiences in making people happy and, to increase happiness, one should generally invest on experiences rather than material objects. The present talk challenges this proposition and argues that the happiness advantage of experiences observed in the literature is largely attributed to an asymmetry that has been neglected by prior empirical studies: individuals tend to intuitively recall more self-expressive experiential than material purchases. In four experiments, we provide correlational and causal evidence supporting this notion and show that (a) the self-expressive nature of a purchase generates more happiness and (b) to the extent that purchases are symmetrically self-expressive, the happiness advantage of experiences over material objects is eliminated. We also find a compensatory mechanism between self-expression and social relatedness, indicating that self-expression has diminishing benefits on happiness, the more purchases enable social relatedness among individuals and vice versa. Our findings challenge conventional thinking on the dichotomy between experiential-material purchases, suggesting that people should not disregard material purchases altogether. Instead, they should be more conscientious when making purchase decisions and opt for those that are instrumental in expressing their self.

## Person

Georgios Halkias is Associate Professor (Priv.-Doz.) at the Chair of International Marketing, University of Vienna. He holds a Habilitation degree in Business (BWL) from the University of Vienna, a PhD in Marketing from the Athens University of Economics and Business and an MSc in Marketing and Strategy from the University of Warwick, Warwick Business School. In the past, Georgios has worked at the Athens University of Economics and Business and has gained industry experience with multinational firms, such as Société Générale and Procter & Gamble, in Greece and the United Kingdom.