Purchasing Happiness; It’s Written All Over Your Face
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Introduction

❖ Experiential Advantage: Discretionary income spent on experiential purchases, such as concerts and dining, have been shown to bring people more enduring happiness than material purchases, such as clothing and jewelry (Carter & Gilovich, 2014; Kumar, Killingsworth, & Gilovich, 2014).
❖ Self-reports of happiness, much like self-assessments of other valued characteristics, are susceptible to self-enhancing distortions (Wojcik, 2015).
❖ Facial behaviours appear to reliably indicate the valence of a person’s emotional state (Russell, 1994).
❖ Facial Electromyography (fEMG) can measure facial activity too subtle to observe visually and may also be able to index aspects of emotional experiences that may not be reflected in self-reports (Johnson, Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2010).

The goal of this study is to assess behavioral methods for positive affect (language, video, facial behavior) not used before to investigate convergence of the experiential advantage.

Hypotheses

Four measures will converge to show greater happiness with an experiential purchase over a material purchase.
❖ Self-report; Participants will indicate being happier with their experiential purchase.
❖ Behavioral (Writing); Language analysis of writing will evidence more positive language when describing the experiential purchase.
❖ Behavioral (Video); Judges coding will evidence more positive affect facial expressivity when participants are talking about their experiential purchase.
❖ Behavioral (fEMG); Facial muscle activation of smiling will be expressed more when participants relive (imagine) their experiential purchase.

Methods

SFSU Undergraduate Psychology Students.
Within-subjects design.
❖ Write a vivid and descriptive narrative about the best material and experiential purchase in the last three months.
❖ Record a video describing your favorite aspect of these two purchases.
❖ Read and vividly relive these two memories.

Measures:
1) Self-report
2) Language
3) Judges rating
4) Facial muscle activation

Results

Convergence

Measure Type
Material
Experiential

Non-Convergence

Behavioral Measure: Writing

Participants used more positive language when writing about a prior experiential purchase ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.79$) than a prior material purchase ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.31$), $t(9) = 2.15, p = .06$. This difference is marginally significant.

Future Directions

❖ Experiential products present a third category to investigate with behavioral methods.
❖ The use of physiological measures (e.g. EEG, GSR, HRV, fEMG) are invaluable tools in helping to understand the body’s response to different types of purchases.
❖ Investigate self-enhancement tendencies as a false presentation or potentially adaptive (i.e. facilitating psychological adjustment).

References

➢ Gilovich, T., & Kumar, A. We’ll always have Paris: The hedonic payoff from experiential and material investments. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.
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Measurements across a variety of methods (e.g. subjective, behavioral and physiological) is necessary to understanding happiness as a multi-faceted construct.
❖ Convergence: If the experiential advantage exists, support for this effect should be evidenced outside of subjective self-report measures.
❖ Non-Convergence: Behavioral measures supporting a material advantage may reflect the tendency toward self-enhancement bias and/or a beneficial consequences to material purchases.