

The Upside of Imagining Unattainable Purchases

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Abstract

Imagination is typically conceptualized as a pre-purchase activity aiding in consumption preparation (Fournier & Guiry, 1993; MacInnis & Price, 1990). However, recent research suggests consumers can engage in imagination as an autotelic activity (Mosher & Dacin, 2016). We explore the positive “upsides” consumers gain by imagining unattainable purchases—dream purchases attainable only through extraordinary circumstances, like winning the lottery. Results of two experimental studies suggest that, compared to a control group, consumers who simply spent time imagining an unattainable desired object reported higher overall well-being and enthusiasm. Those who engaged in an extended imagination task, compared to a short one, did not evidence this higher well-being or increased enthusiasm. This suggests the higher cognitive elaboration required in the extended imagination task acts as a reality check, diminishing overall well-being. These findings suggest initial evidence for an important effect of the imagination for overall consumer well-being and effective advertising appeals.

Keywords: *imagination; well-being; unattainable*

Track: Consumer Behaviour