

Ethics

After the binge, the hangover

RecyCOOL Lessons

Disclaimer

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After the binge, the hangover

Description of the lesson

Firstly we define what impulse buying means and how it works by shopping for fashion items and what it causes. Then the side effects of impulse shopping.

Objective

Objective of this lesson is to describe a purchasing habit called impulse buying and what mechanisms stand behind that.

After this lesson you will be able to

– describe how impulse buying makes you purchase more, and you'll learn techniques on how to avoid impulse buying

Tools and materials:

your closet, pen and paper

IMPULSE BUYING:

The act of purchasing an item on a whim, without giving much thought to the decision.



How long do you think about purchasing any clothing item?

Do you think it is ok to visit fashion stores often and always come back home with a bag full of new clothing items? That is close to a bad shopping habit called impulse buying. Let's go to that topic and learn more about it.

For many of us even just the thought of shopping can send our brains into pleasantry overdrive! The neurotransmitter dopamine is released when we re just considering shopping. Some research shows that anticipation has a higher level of dopamine release than reward itself. This part of our brain is called the nucleus accumbens or pleasure centre.

When we get to the shops, all dopamine driven and looking for rewards, something even more interesting happens. When we see a price tag, a different part of our brain kicks in; the prefrontal cortex associated with decision making. This area is implicated in processing pain.

So to put it simply, if the pleasure of the purchase outweighs the pain of the payment, then 'retail therapy' wins!

Fast fashion has made it possible for shoppers to experience this dopamine high more frequently than ever before.

It used to be that fashion outlets' stock changed every season. Our need for variety has seen that cycle reducing. Fashion brands can get a product from production order to retail sale in as little as 36 hours.

Stores, fashion houses and magazines telling us what's trending fulfils our need for certainty, consistency and belonging. Whilst we still want variety, we also want to belong. So wearing the latest 'on-trend' thing fulfils the need for variety and for certainty.



IMPULSE BUYING

[noun]

The act of purchasing an item on a whim, without giving much thought to the decision.

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**entry
level
activist**

example:

“Impulse buying happens when we are distracted, disengaged or are looking for a dose of instant gratification. While these purchases can lift our mood temporarily, the feeling is often followed by regret in a continued cycle of mindless consumption.”

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Photo credit: [Fashion Revolution](#)

According to UCLA neuropsychologist Robert Bilder, PhD, excessive shopping was recognised as compulsion. It's now argued by Bilder that it's actually an addiction. Bilder explains that to call something an addiction suggests it's possible to "develop a tolerance" to it, saying "it requires a larger dose to get the same effect.

Often you will find yourself needing more and more.

It has been suggested that a dopamine high can be equivalent to the high felt whilst gambling or drinking alcohol. These addictions have strict rules and regulations around them for consumer safety.

Yet shopping addiction seems to be an acceptable addiction.

The survey by Greenpeace called "After the Binge, the Hangover" revealed how many people all over the world consume far more clothes than they actually need and use. It's not just a western problem; it's an international phenomenon. The survey included at least 1000 people aged 20 to 45 in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Italy and Germany.

The side effect of binge shopping

While people seek happiness and self-worth by shopping, the survey results show that they are deeply ambivalent about their behaviour.

Around 50 percent report that their shopping excitement wears off within a day - the binge is followed by a hangover.

Excessive shoppers experience emptiness and boredom in between shopping periods, with feelings of restlessness and dissatisfaction fuelling their desire for further shopping experiences.

Young, high income women are the most vulnerable.

The spread of online shopping and social media makes people even more susceptible to overconsumption. People around the world have already reached the point where closets are cluttered with cheap trends from yesterday and that are no longer wanted or used. American and European markets are saturated. Secondhand shops and markets are overflowing with unwanted clothes.

Reevaluating why we shop

On the bright side, some people are questioning the consequences of their own consumption habits and reevaluating materialistic values. Not only are many people well aware that planetary boundaries and unfair working conditions in the industry mean that we cannot continue business as usual, they are increasingly seeking meaning and happiness in experiences and relationships rather than the consumption of material goods.

Shifting our values towards better quality and care

Fashion industry leaders and social media influencers need to stop promoting the wasteful and broken narratives of micro trends and consumerism, and instead, offer more alternatives that incorporate and emphasise values such as caring, sharing and repairing our clothes.

Fashion companies should shift the focus of their dominant marketing narratives from convenience and short-lived trends to aesthetics of durability, longevity and quality.

The business models of the future should aim to foster a deeper and longer lasting connection to fewer and better clothes, which will engage their consumers in a sustainable, valuable relationship.

Task:

Pick ten random pieces of your wardrobe and describe how you bought it and for what reason you purchased it.

How long did you plan to buy it?

Was that an impulse purchase?

Do you like to wear that item often, or do you actually not wear it so much?



How to stop impulse buying?

1 Give Yourself a Waiting Period for Impulse Purchases

Because you can regret in a few days purchasing an item that you simply have not worn, you bought an item you just can't wear, let's say wait for 24 hours before making a decision to buy (or 2 weeks if you are online shopping). Often, you'll completely forget about whatever it is you didn't buy if you decided not to buy it.

2 Get to Know Your Impulse Patterns

Is that item you are looking for for a long time? Take a minute to see if there's a trend behind what you gravitate towards when you impulse shop. Maybe you saw that often on social media last week but that is not really your style. Maybe you are just angry, bored or sad and need to do something for fun.

3 Think About What You Could Do With The Money Instead

It can be helpful to pause and ask yourself if the money you're about to spend on an impulse item could be better spent elsewhere. Money saved for a trip can make you much happier in the long term perspective than a dress bought by a binge shopping session.



4 Ask Yourself if You Really Need It

Maybe you just can't use that item in three different combinations. It can also be helpful to set a limit on how many of the same thing you can buy if you tend to be drawn to similar things over and over. If you already have five baby blue dresses for the summer, you probably don't need another, no matter how cute it is.

5 Explore Why You Want This Particular Thing

If you know what triggers you, you'll be able to proactively get ahead of yourself and stop the impulse buy. **Find out. be curious. Do something.**



Resources

Fashion Revolution. Loved clothes last. 2017.

Available at: <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/resources/fanzine2/>

Devin Cleary Gooden. 5 Ways to Stop An Impulse Buy (Without Depriving Yourself Of All Joy). 2022.

Available at <https://theeverygirl.com/stop-impulse-buying>

Further reading:

Disconnecting ourselves from hype Inside

Aja Barber



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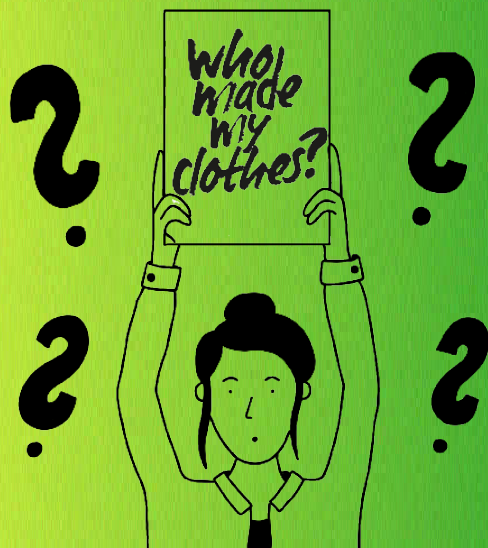
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