
American Consumer Behavior: What Consumerism Really Is And How It Affects Society

The average American sees or hears 4,000-plus ads per day” (Sanders). Every day millions of people are on some form of social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, and they often see advertisements that typically persuade that person to buy one of the latest gadgets. Little do they know that they are being exposed to a form of consumerism, and this could constantly affect their lives every day. Consumerism displays itself in many forms, but by knowing what consumerism really is, how it enters daily lives, and how it affects society, one could potentially figure out a permanent solution to this societal plague.

Consumerism is an obsession that involves attempts to satisfy one’s higher needs for consumption. These higher needs go beyond the basic human necessities, which consist of shelter, food, and water. This constant urge to consume leads people to purchase expensive items that they necessarily do not need at all to survive in life, but they ‘need’ it in order to fit in with societal expectations. In the article “The Crisis of American Consumerism,” from Huffington Post, the author describes the relationship between consumption and consumerism: “[O]n attempts to satisfy these higher needs through the simple acquisition of goods and services, consumption turns into consumerism — and consumerism becomes a social disease” (Etzioni). Etzioni describes consumerism as a “disease,” which explains that humans go out of their way to pleasure their ‘needs’ that do not exactly correlate with their survival demands. Consumerism controls a human’s mind to make them believe that they need the newest iPhone out there, no matter what the price is. This is the point where consumerism turns into an obsession. Humans have the need to live the “American Dream,” which is where consumerism hits society like a bag of bricks, which leads into the constant urges to satisfy higher needs and to blend in with the upper class.

In the article “The Crisis of American Consumerism” from Huffington Post, the author describes how society consumes: “A culture in which the urge to consume dominates the psychology of citizens is a culture in which people will do most anything to acquire the means to consume — working slavish hours, behaving rapaciously in their business pursuits, and even bending the rules in order to maximize their earnings” (Etzioni). Etzioni explains well that consumerism controls a person’s mind to the point where one would do anything to be able to consume in large amounts. The items that these people end up purchasing are unnecessary and in a few weeks these people will not want anything to do with the newly purchased products. In the article “The Crisis of American Consumerism” from Huffington Post, the author explains what consumerism is not: “As long as consumption is focused on satisfying basic human needs — safety, shelter, food, clothing, health care, education — it is not consumerism” (Etzioni). Etzioni explains that consumption of things that humans need to buy is perfectly healthy, but once humans become involved with consumption of things they do not need, that is when consumerism occurs. Consumerism and consumption are normal human habits, and it enters lives in many forms.

Consumerism enters people’s lives in so many ways that they hardly notice it invading their privacy. One way that consumerism enters lives is through social media. When people go on Facebook or Instagram, they may see a friend of theirs bought a brand new eighty inch flat

screen television. This automatically makes them think that they need a brand new television if even they do not. In the article “The Problem with Consumerism,” from LifeSquared, the author states: “[I]magine yourself as the recipient of ‘mental inputs’, the messages that enter your brain from the outside world. They could include the opinions of your friends, images from TV news programmes, advertisements on the internet and things you have learned from books or your education” (Docwra). Docwra explains that influence from a friend, or just by seeing they bought a new flat screen television, could influence a person to spend an outrageous amount of money on something that they could live without. A main way that consumerism invades lives is through advertisements. In today’s world, advertisements are almost everywhere, and it has gotten to the point where society simply cannot escape from them.

They appear on social media, public transportation systems, on television, and many more resources that humans use in their everyday lives. In the article “What’s behind American consumerism?” from the American Psychological Association, goes on to explain how often advertisements appear: “[W]hile advertisements used to appear exclusively in magazines and newspapers, today they are everywhere: on bathroom stall doors, airplane tray tables and even laser-etched on the shells of eggs” (Novotney). Novotney describes common places that advertisements may appear in today’s world. Advertisements could be the factor that triggers the obsessive urge to impulsively shop because they have a way of showing something in a new and exciting way. For example, when an advertisement appears on television, it may contain a catchy jingle, which could persuade the viewer to buy the product. Another way consumerism enters lives is through television shows and movies. When a person watches a movie, they may notice that the star actor has a fancy new car, so that person may think they need to ‘live-up’ to that kind of lifestyle. In the article “The problem with consumerism” from LifeSquared, explains how an obsession with celebrities affects lives: “Our modern obsession with celebrities also means that newspapers and magazines publish stories about glamorous people we might aspire to copy, and much of this aspiration is to consume the same things as they do – from designer clothes to private jets” (Docwra). Docwra explains how humans are consumed by living the best life possible, and influence from celebrities play a huge role. Consumerism has a way of weaving itself into lives, but little do people know about the nasty side effects it can cause.

Consumerism is a part of people’s daily lives, but people do not know how it affects them. When consumerism enters a life, humans automatically think they need to purchase items to satisfy their needs, which could lead them to go into a great amount of debt. In the article “What’s behind American consumerism,” the author explains the effects of advertisements: “[P]erhaps advertising’s most worrisome effect is that it works, and all this purchasing could be driving us into debt and unhappiness. Financial difficulties are the leading cause of marital problems among Americans today, and a 2001 Social Science and Medicine study (Vol. 53, No. 4) suggests that worry about debt can lead to stress and depression” (Novotney). Novotney explains that debt is a problem with many underlying issues, but one of those issues is from consumerism itself. Some people feel the need to purchase everything that they see, and that alone can cause debt and depression. Another effect is that people may think that they need to purchase these items to be happy with their lives. In the article “The problem with consumerism” from LifeSquared, the author explains how consumerism affects one’s self esteem: “Our modern obsession with celebrities also means that newspapers and magazines publish stories about glamorous people we might aspire to copy, and much of this aspiration is to consume the same things as they do – from designer clothes to private jets” (Docwra). Docwra explains that if a person is never happy with their purchase, or even their living

situation, this could potentially lead them to being in a deep state of depression with lifelong effects. Consumerism has a lot of effects that the human population goes through, but for every problem there tends to be a solution.

The plague of consumerism has consumed most of society, but there are ways to work towards a solution for this epidemic. One solution could be to establish an entirely new economics system. For years, consumerism has found its way of making a move in society, and as humans, if we want to fix this problem, we would need to challenge our current economics system. In the article "The problem with consumerism" from LifeSquared, the author proposes how we should challenge our economics system: "To move away from a culture of consumerism, we will therefore need to challenge the philosophy and values of this current economic system. Essentially, we need a cultural shift in our society and its values" (Docwra). Docwra explains that as humans we need to exercise our values, and society needs to seek economic growth.

Consumerism easily has a role in economic growth, but this could have negative effects. As a society, people do not only have to solve the plague of consumerism together, but there are ways to work at this issue individually. In the article "The problem with consumerism" from LifeSquared, the author states: "Many of us will find that reducing our levels of consumption, caring less about materialism and refocusing our attention and time towards things that really matter to us will eliminate a lot of problems in our lives and give us a great deal more satisfaction, whilst also leading to a more sustainable and fair future for all" (Docwra). Docwra explains that by working at lessening consumption could lead society to step away from advertisements for a day and focus on what really matters in life. There are unlimited amounts of solutions to stop the plague of consumerism, but society needs to challenge their values and beliefs when it comes to create a new system to lessen the effects of consumerism.

Consumerism is an obsession that has taken over most of society's lives. It enters their lives without them realizing, and leaves them with the aftermath, but as a society, or even as an individual, people can lessen consumerism and live happier lives. As a human, everyone has their own needs, but that does not mean we need to buy our happiness to fuel this epidemic.