

新英文外刊

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精选

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Life

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Baby names: why we all choose the same ones

Young parents often look for the name that will be as unique as their kid



You might be one of those people who, since their own childhood, has curated lists of potential names for any children you might have. Or your interest in names might only have emerged because you're actually expecting your first child. Suddenly, you've started noticing first names everywhere.

Your thoughts might travel back to older relatives. In the UK, names like Evelyn or Arthur used to feel dated, but somehow they now feel fresh and beautiful. Parents-to-be might not tell their friends about their favourites: this is their special name, and they don't want to risk someone stealing it.

However, it is often the case that when little Arthur or Evelyn goes to nursery or school, their name doesn't seem so original anymore. It turns out, there are in fact three Evelyns in the class, and several Arthurs in the playground, despite the fact that the children's parents might have never met any Evelyns or Arthurs before having their own.

American sociologist Stanley Lieberman shows in his 2000 book, *A Matter of Taste: How Names, Fashions, and Culture Change* that parents-to-be like the same names at the same time for a variety of reasons – from generational preferences to societal changes and cultural influences – but mostly because since the late 19th century, it has become a matter not of custom, but of taste. As such, it follows the same gradual shifts and reversals as other expressions of fashion.



Societal shifts and cultural influences both shape naming trends.

How names can feel overused

When you think about the names that you find attractive, it is interesting to consider whether any of them are common in your own generation, or in your parents' generation. The answer to both these questions is probably "no". Names that we associate with our peers or our teachers often feel too "used" to seem attractive and fitting for a chubby infant.

By contrast, names from our grandparents' or even great-grandparents' generation appear more attractive. Research in Denmark shows that two-syllable girls names ending in "a" (like Alma or Clara) have gained in popularity since 2000 – a century after the last time such names peaked.

That 100-year pattern makes sense because you don't have nearly as many experiences with names from these generations. And though, as young parents, we think that we have hit the jackpot by finding a name that is just as unique as our precious newborn, our tastes are often actually aligned with the tastes of others from our generation. Just like there are generational preferences in furniture, music and hairstyles, so it is with baby names.

Of course, not all popular first names can be traced back to older generations. Sometimes, parents are inspired by popular culture. In Denmark, Liam had never been a common name until the 2000s when it started topping lists of boys names. This must at least in part have to do with the Danish rapper and TV host LOC, AKA Liam O'Connor's rise to fame. In 1991, meanwhile, 14,087 Kévins were reportedly born in France due largely to two film releases the year before: Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves*, and *Home Alone*, whose main protagonist is called Kevin McCallister.

Broader cultural changes also impact name popularity. After the second world war, Denmark was no longer cut off from cultural influences from the US and the UK. As a result, English names such as John and Tommy became extremely fashionable. The civil rights movement in the US, meanwhile, saw popularity in African-American naming patterns shift from biblical options like Elijah and Isaac to names such as Kareem after basketballer and activist Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Further, as more of us live in super-diverse societies, parents from different backgrounds are choosing names that can work across cultures. Here, names are often as much about personal taste as they are a means of passing on cultural heritage.

How naming trends can cross borders

As with any trend, name fashions vary from country to country – and within linguistic

contexts too. Alfie is one of the most popular boys names in England and Wales, but almost entirely overlooked in the US.

Sometimes, however, a trend can cross borders. Noah and Ella are in every top names list from Denmark, Norway and Sweden to the UK. And chances are that you probably know several Emmas, because this is a name that has taken almost the entire Western world by storm since the late 1900s.

More recently, research shows that the past few years have seen changes in the traditional perceptions of boys' names and girls' names. A growing focus on names that can be used regardless of gender has emerged.

Data from birth registrations in England and Wales for 2020 shows that Ivy-Rose was the most highly ranked hyphenated forename for girls (at number 229, with 202 babies so-named). Tommy-Lee was the most highly ranked hyphenated forename for boys (at number 454, with just 87 babies called this). If you really want your future child's name to be more distinctive among their peers, a two-part moniker might be the way to go. ■



The Guardian view

21 Aug 2022 | 570 words | ★★☆☆☆ >

Earth-friendly diets: cooking animals is cooking the planet

Eating less meat will help, but governments remain indispensable actors in solving the climate crisis



‘Animal-based foods account for 57% of agricultural greenhouse gases, versus 29% for food from plants.’

The Ministry for the Future is a sci-fi novel in which the climate crisis is an emergency so dire that it forces humankind to shift course. In the book, a catastrophic Indian heatwave in the near future causes the death of more than 20 million people. Climate activism turns to terrorism, and the author, Kim Stanley Robinson, writes about how panic induces behavioural change. To rid people of their addiction to beef – responsible for 8.5% of human-induced climate emissions in 2015 – mad cow disease is cultured by climate

terrorists and injected by drones into millions of herds all over the world. Cows die off and beef, now too risky to eat, quickly comes off the menu.

Nothing so drastic has been advocated by the UK government's food tsar, Henry Dimbleby. He sensibly favours public messaging based on persuasion rather than fear. The science is clear: animal-based foods account for 57% of agricultural greenhouse gases versus 29% for food from plants. By cooking meat, people are cooking themselves. That explains why Mr Dimbleby is in a hurry. Ministers, he told the Guardian, need to warn the public that they have to stop eating meat to save the planet.

Mr Dimbleby believes that a 30% meat reduction over 10 years is required for land to be used sustainably in England. Currently, 85% of agricultural land in England is used for pasture for grazing animals such as cows or to grow food that is then fed to livestock. Despite polls conducted for the government showing support for some meat reduction measures – such as setting targets for supermarkets – none were included in the food strategy white paper released this June. Mr Dimbleby understands that the public won't be easily moved. Meat-eating is sold as necessary, even though red and processed meats have been linked to cancer and heart disease. Early humans mostly ate vegetables. But eating meat was long seen as something to aspire to – and peer pressure makes it harder to change habits.

Perhaps the answer is to shame the public into action over its gluttony. To eat within our planetary boundaries – that is, with no net environmental damage – it has been estimated that we should consume no more than 98g of red meat, 203g of poultry and 196g of fish a week. However, in high-income countries such as Britain, households are currently consuming double this. Putting one's needs ahead of others' is not only unfair but also dangerous for the planet. Thankfully the mood is shifting. The rise in vegetarian and vegan diets reveals a conscious effort to reduce meat intake.

Different diets will shift the industry slowly, but may not transform food production systems quickly enough. That will need governments to act – and to treat eating meat like

burning coal. Greener alternatives such as precision fermentation can produce animal-free eggs, milk and meat. Bill McKibben, writing about *The Ministry of the Future*, noted that in the book it is legislation that creates “a new legal regime that is fair, just, sustainable, and secure” to solve the climate crisis. Developed countries ought to think hard about the UN message last year that they should reconsider their support “for an outsized meat and dairy industry, which accounts for 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions”. This is not a call to end rich-world farming, but rather to end a form of farming that risks costing the planet. Mr Dimbleby deserves to be heard. ■



Graphic detail

Aug 23rd 2022 | 447 words | ★★☆☆☆ >

Daily chart

In rich countries, working women and more babies go hand in hand

The opposite used to be true



It is well known that fertility rates have declined as women's labour-force participation has increased. Handling a career as well as juggling childcare appeared to leave little room for big families. But new research now helps to explain a striking reversal of that trend in rich countries: higher female participation rates are associated with more babies.

In 1980 rich countries with high numbers of female workers had lower fertility rates than poorer ones with more jobless women. Traditional economic models explained this well. Wealthy parents spent more money on their children and therefore wanted fewer, and

working mothers faced higher opportunity costs from child-rearing. By this reasoning, as more women joined the labour force, birth rates should have fallen. But by 2000, after the share of working women had increased by 17% in places such as America and Britain, that trend had reversed. Among rich countries fertility rates were highest in those where the most women worked (see chart). Demographers were puzzled. What had changed?

A new working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research argues that the reversal was driven by both cultural and policy changes. In countries such as America and Norway it became economically and socially easier to hold down a job and be a mother. As a result, the birth rate increased. But in places where the two remained in conflict, for example in Italy and Spain, women still worked less and had fewer babies (see chart).

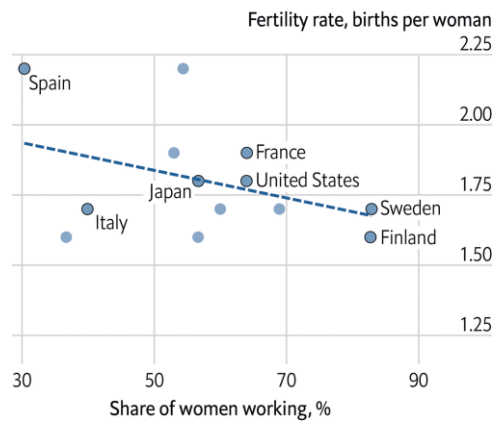
The authors find that four main factors lead to higher fertility rates: flexible labour markets, co-operative fathers, favourable social norms, and good family policies. In Norway, for example, where childcare is highly subsidised—in 2021 the government spent \$29,726 per toddler—both the female employment rate and the fertility rate are among the highest in the OECD, a club of mostly rich countries. No doubt 49 weeks of parental leave helps too.

Public spending, however, does not solely determine child-rearing decisions. Social factors

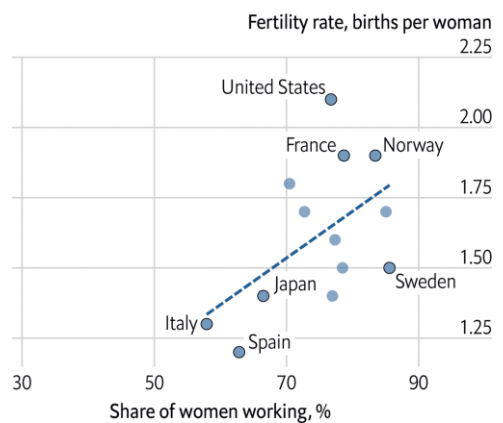
A striking reversal

Selected OECD countries, fertility trends

1980



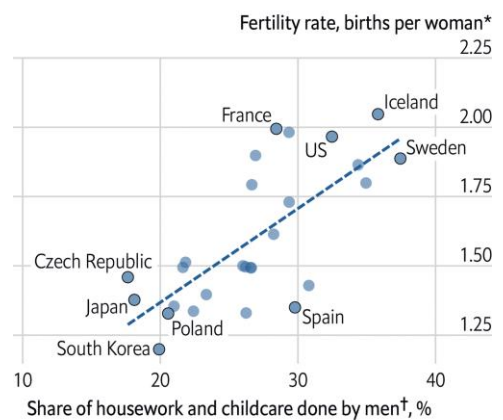
2000



Source: "The Economics of Fertility: A New Era",
by Doepke et al., NBER working paper, 2022

I don't cook, I don't clean

Selected OECD countries, fertility trends



*2005-15 average †2012

Source: "The Economics of Fertility: A New Era",
by Doepke et al., NBER working paper, 2022

also play a role. America ranks near the bottom of the OECD on childcare spending, dishing out just \$500 per child each year. It is also the only country without national paid maternity leave. But men in America do more housework and take on more child care than in most OECD countries.

Getting men to do their share of the household work may not be simple for governments—or women. Shifting social norms takes time and increasing spending on child care or improving parental-leave policies—as Democrats in America have tried to do—can be politically fraught. But the trend is clear: making it easier for mothers in rich countries to work is a good way to help bump fertility rates. ■



Leaders

Aug 25th 2022 | 673 words | ★★☆☆☆

Genetic modification

Realising the revolution

Science has made a new genetic era possible. Now let it flourish



Luca D'Urbino

Thanks to great strides in fundamental research, biology is becoming ever more programmable. Two recent scientific advances show just how powerful the possibilities could be. The genetic modification of plants is allowing the mechanism of photosynthesis to be tinkered with, as research published in *Science* on August 18th sets out. This could lead to dramatic improvements in the productivity of plants, and eventually to a second green revolution. Tweaking the genes of people who suffer from fatal incurable diseases, meanwhile, has also had remarkable results. A series of genetic therapies has arrived, or is arriving, in clinics to treat blood cancers, spinal muscular atrophy, haemophilia and sickle-

cell disease. The task now is to spread these gains far and wide.

The consequences of both advances could be momentous. The genetic modification of crops promises cheaper, more nutritious and more climate-resilient food for a hungry planet. Genetic therapies offer the hope of curing devastating diseases. They also allow for one-time treatments that can be transported to the four corners of the Earth, bringing years, decades or a lifetime of benefits to the seriously and incurably ill. Imagine a cure for AIDs or sickle-cell disease that could be taken to the continent of Africa or across the Middle East. The accompanying benefits would be similar to the eradication of smallpox.

This tantalising promise has been made possible by a prodigious investment in fundamental research over the years. Basic knowledge of genetics and the functions and structures of proteins has proved to be a motor for discovery across medicine and agriculture. The private sector, to be sure, plays an essential role in the cycle of innovation. But these advances are a reminder that investment by governments and charities is crucial in areas that offer little commercial benefit in the short term, but which in the long term promise to greatly advance well-being. Much of the success in treating rare diseases is a consequence of the efforts of charities, often thanks to fundraising by patients and their families. Research that benefits low-income countries frequently relies on philanthropic donors with deep pockets, such as the Gates Foundation. The investments made in fundamental science today yield the productivity gains of tomorrow.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that these gains will be realised. Gene therapies are a remarkable technical accomplishment. But their current enormous cost—often well over \$1m to treat a single person—makes them hard for health-care systems to afford, even when they are reserved for fatal rare genetic diseases. The idea of using them to treat more prevalent conditions looks prohibitively pricey.

In the past, novel medicines that started out extremely costly have become cheaper. Monoclonal antibodies, useful laboratory-made proteins, were expensive when they first arrived, before a decade of advances brought them down in price 50-fold, according to

Boston Consulting Group. If gene therapy is to live up to its promise, it will need to do even better than this. More efficient photosynthesis, too, will need further investment if it is to be commercialised.

The long-term manufacturing costs of a new green revolution will, thankfully, be low; plants make more plants in a way that treatments never can. Gene therapies, however, need innovation to reduce the cost of making them, whether this is in bioreactors or some completely novel way. If they are to become more affordable, new therapies also need to experiment with payment mechanisms, such as charging in instalments or by results. Pooling demand internationally to purchase therapies could help lower prices, too. Here governments, charities and the private sector could usefully work together.

Last, regulators also need to be quicker and more understanding of the gains to society from helping these technologies reach their potential. Innovations can languish without appropriate or timely rule-making. The regulation of genetically modified crops has been held back by misinformation campaigns, delaying benefits and raising costs. Likewise, although experimental drugs obviously need scrutiny, regulators should remember that the alternative in otherwise untreatable genetic diseases is often death. Science has made a genetic revolution possible. Now that revolution must flourish. ■



United States

Aug 25th 2022 | 778 words | ★★★★★ >

Education policy

The Inflation Acceleration Action

With a stroke of his pen, Joe Biden spends hundreds of billions on reducing student-loan debt



Getty Images

Reforming the costly financing of higher education in America would require Congress to agree on a redesign, which would be an arduous and tiresome process. Joe Biden has instead decided to go it alone. On August 24th the president announced a sweeping debt-forgiveness plan through executive order. The federal government will remove up to \$10,000 from the balances of individuals earning less than \$125,000 a year (as 95% of Americans do), and \$20,000 for those who received Pell grants, which are mostly awarded to university students from poor families. Yet despite Mr Biden's effort to cut the Gordian

knot of student debt, America will be tangled up in it again soon enough.

Assuming the inevitable legal challenges fail, there will be many happy immediate beneficiaries. Progressives in the Democratic Party, who had been campaigning for years for either complete cancellation of \$1.6trn held in student debt or wiping out as much as \$50,000 per borrower, can cheer their victory after months of watching Senator Joe Manchin slowly asphyxiate their dreams. Even Mr Biden's Solomonic compromise, which he had committed to as a presidential candidate, will completely wipe out existing debt for perhaps half of today's borrowers.

But all that good will come at a dear price. Calculations are preliminary, but Marc Goldwein of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), a think-tank, reckons Mr Biden's pen stroke will cost between \$400bn and \$600bn. Having just dubbed its recently enacted climate-change and tax plan the Inflation Reduction Act—because it would reduce net federal expenditures by \$300bn over the next decade—the White House might as well call this effort the Inflation Acceleration Action. Whereas most pandemic-relief programmes lapsed months ago, everyone holding student loans, rich or poor, has not had to make payments since March 2020. That has cost the federal government an estimated \$60bn a year, making it twice as expensive as the mortgage-interest deduction afforded to homeowners (which now costs \$30bn annually).

The analogy to the mortgage-interest deduction is apt in another way. It is hardly progressive. Owners of houses have higher incomes and wealth. Those with college and graduate degrees may start their working careers in greater debt, but command significantly higher wages later in life. According to the Bureau of Labour Statistics, the wage premium for a worker with some college education relative to one with just a high-school diploma is 11%; for a completed bachelor's degree it is 65%; for a professional degree it is 138%.

When researchers at the Penn Wharton Budget Model, an academic costing outfit, evaluated the impact of a blanket forgiveness of \$10,000 (even with a qualifying income cap of

\$125,000), they found that 69% of benefits accrued to those in the top 60% of the income distribution. The extra boost to Pell-grant recipients, which was a surprise, will make the move a bit less regressive. But the final verdict is unlikely to be a coup for the proletariat.

The deeper difficulty, however, is that partial debt cancellation is an expensive kludge atop a broken financing scheme that will not be repaired. Many European welfare states generously fund higher education for all. But in America, pairing universal financing with little cost discipline has created a moral hazard for colleges to increase prices. Despite the largesse displayed, the CRFB estimates that aggregate debt loads will return to their present levels in five years.

“The problem is that the laws that have allowed this crisis to occur—this disaster to unfold—are still on the books,” says Adam Looney, a senior tax-policy adviser in Barack Obama’s administration and a professor at the University of Utah. “Every year, American students borrow \$100bn in additional student loans. And they have the same terrible outcomes as borrowers who took out a loan ten years ago.”

Both parties think the political consequences are in their favour. Progressives hope that the policy will boost enthusiasm among disaffected youths. When Mr Biden, in remarks at the White House, said “this means people can start finally [to] climb out from under that mountain of debt,” he probably hoped that they would also make their way to the polls. (The pause on all student-debt payments was extended again until December, one month after the mid-term elections.) Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader in the Senate, prefers to term it “student-loan socialism”—a large redistribution from the working class to elites, and an inflationary one, to boot.

It will not be the last fight. One less-noticed change proposed by Mr Biden would reduce the amount directly paid by future borrowers—with the federal government picking up the rest of the tab. The problem’s ugly head will rear again shortly. ■



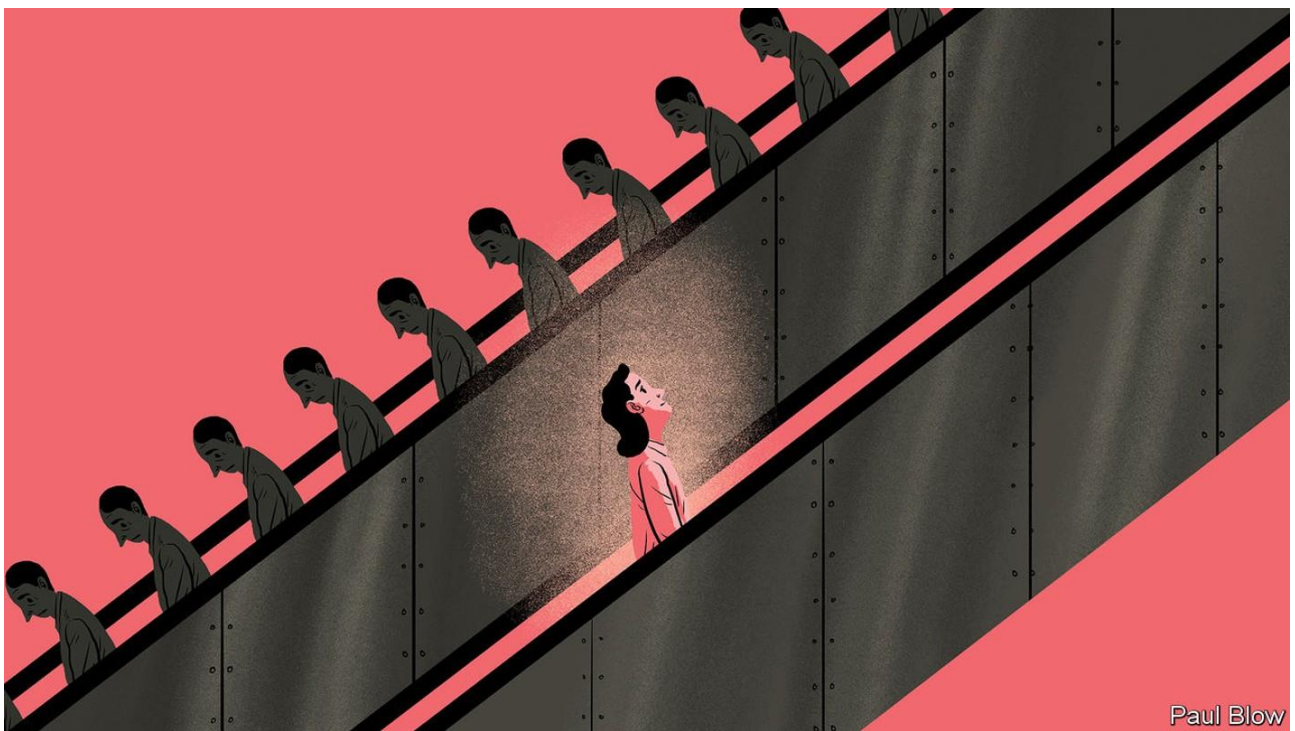
Business

Aug 25th 2022 | 779 words | ★★☆☆☆ >

Bartleby

In defence of commuting

Travelling to work is not always a waste of time



Americans are “always in a hurry”, wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in “Democracy in America”, his opus published in 1835. Until the covid-19 pandemic, nowhere was this more evident in recent decades than in packed trains at peak times as people commuted to work.

Almost 75% of professionals in America say the journey is what they dread most about going back to the office. Working remotely a few days a week is here to stay. Rush-hour traffic, overcrowded trains and transport strikes (like those on London’s tube in the past week) all argue for working from home. Across America and Europe rising fares eat into

people's salaries. The outcry for lower carbon emissions adds additional weight to the argument for millions of employees not undertaking unnecessary journeys. In some emerging cities, getting to work involves honks and epic gridlock as well as accidents.

Every now and again, most people will nevertheless need to make the trip to the office and back. Whether you are walking, cycling, on a Vespa, taking the bus, the tram or the subway, the range of options is wide, and rich in texture and colour. Some people will insist that no commute is ever worth the trouble. With the right attitude, though, it does not have to feel like temporary brain damage. This guest Bartleby, who takes the underground to The Economist's London office three times a week, finds it both useful and oddly fulfilling.

Just how useful and fulfilling will depend on what exactly your commute looks like. But unless you hop into your car on your driveway and hop out at your company car park, it will involve at least some physical activity. If you are cycling, or just picking up your walking pace to catch that bus or train, you combine being outdoors with an element of struggle—a healthy amount of which can be invigorating, not draining. And if you don't catch it, don't worry. Your hours have almost certainly become more flexible than the previous nine-to-five routine. That next train may anyway be less like a cattle car.

Like all dislocations, even regular and predictable ones, the daily commute is also a time and place where you are more exposed to physical and psychological elements from which you are shielded at home or at work. In "Falling in Love" a film released in 1984, Meryl Streep and Robert De Niro meet as they commute on the same train month after month from the suburbs to New York City, until, one day, they embark on an emotional affair. The plot is banal and the dialogue dim but the idea that a journey injects a sense of risk and possibility is both deep and real.

Public transport, which a lot of commuting involves, remains the most democratic way of going to work. As chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1979 to 1987, Paul Volcker travelled coach class on the shuttle from New York to Washington, DC, and took the bus in both cities. As a public servant embodying civic duty, the central banker was known for his

financial discipline in personal affairs, as well as monetary policy. At a time when greed was good, and limos, helicopters and private jets were great, frugality from “the custodian of the nation’s money” sent a strong message. As companies bracing for a recession tighten their belts, Volcker’s example seems particularly relevant.

Perhaps most important of all in an era of remote work, the commute helps mark out the mental distance between home and the office, which disappears when the kitchen table has become your work station. It offers a useful buffer—a liminal space separating the personal and the professional.

Getting ready to leave for work in the morning involves an element of planning—sometimes even anticipation. Stepping out of your home, and your comfort zone, you feel more alive by default. When walking to the train station, purpose is externalised and compressed. In the afternoon, you can use that time as a curtain to separate the day from the rest of the evening, probe into those pieces of inner life that nag and still feel connected to the world. Bartleby lets her thoughts meander while on the move. Time wasted is time gained.

Few people relish holing up in one place for ever. Working remotely from a secluded village in Italy may sound like a treat for a while. Yet like all sameness, it soon begins to feel stifling. In a modern world where de Tocqueville’s words ring true of everyone everywhere, it may seem strange to add to the hurriedness. But not if you think of the commute as punctuation in the larger tale. ■



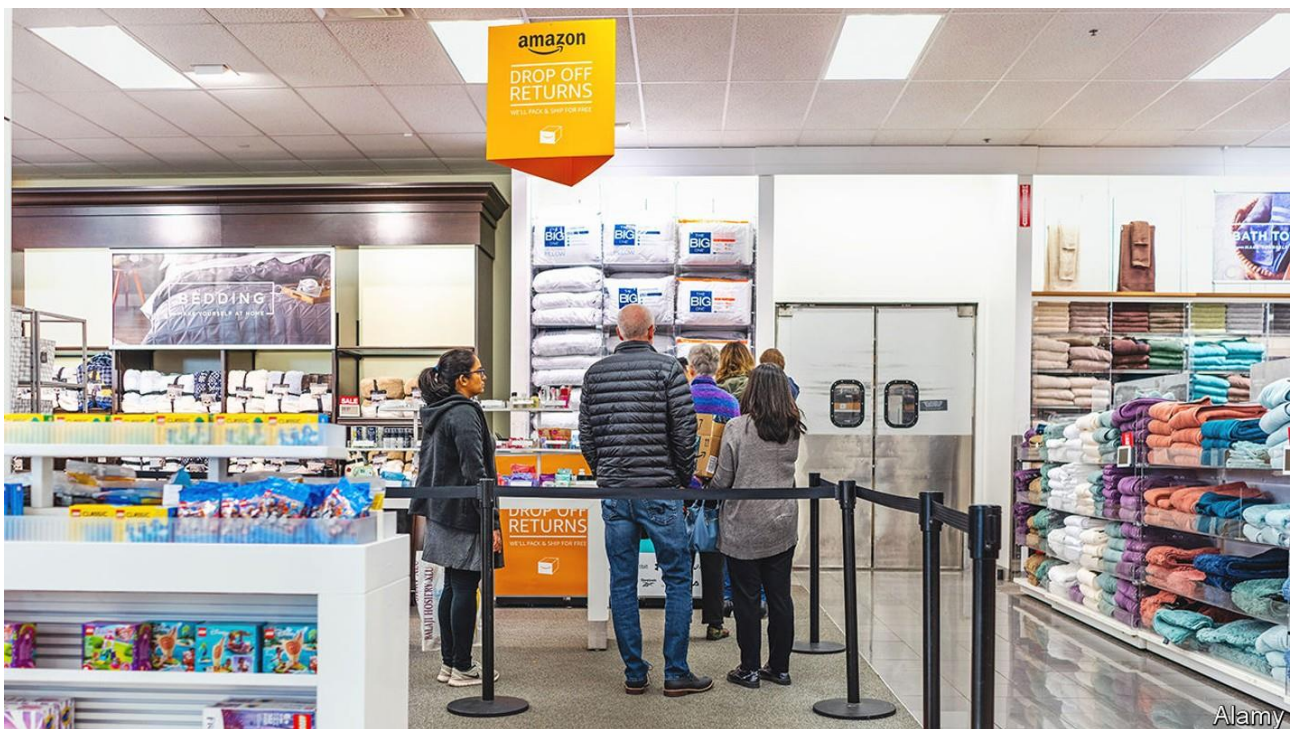
Business

Aug 25th 2022 | 551 words | ★★☆☆☆ >

E-commerce

Sending it back

A tidal wave of returns hits the e-commerce industry



Getting a package delivered is easy. Sending it back is not. Repacking, printing labels and shipping it back up to the seller is an increasingly familiar experience for online shoppers. In America 21% of online orders, worth some \$218bn, were returned in 2021, according to the National Retail Federation, up from 18% in 2020. For clothing and shoes it can reach around 40%. It is a headache for retailers.

The problem has its roots in the birth of e-commerce. To compete with bricks-and-mortar sellers and make consumers comfortable with ordering online, e-commerce firms offered

free returns. Consumers came to expect it. The scale of returns has been amplified by the covid-induced boom. In America online-shopping now makes up 15% of retail sales by value, up from 10% at the start of 2019.

Returns could grow as nervous consumers cut spending. In May, Boohoo, a British online fashion firm, forecast lower profits for the year, in part because of a higher return rate. In June, Asos, a rival, did the same. Overstocking, as retailers miscalculate changing demand, adds to the problem. Steve Rop of goTRG, a startup which helps retailers sort returns, notes an uptick in returns of discounted goods as consumers realise they don't want them.

Each step of the process is costly. Retailers have to pay for goods to be picked up or posted. Processing returns is labour-intensive, explains Zac Rogers who worked as a returns manager at Amazon and is now at Colorado State University. The outbound system is highly automated and streamlined; a return must be opened and someone has to decide what to do with it. "A worker in an Amazon warehouse can pick 30 items in a minute, but a return can take ten minutes to process," says Mr Rogers.

Once processed, only 5% of returned goods can be resold immediately by retailers. Most go to liquidators at knock-down prices or are thrown away. Retailers typically recoup about a third on a \$50 item, says Optoro, a firm that helps with returns.

One solution involves adding friction. Last year Uniqlo, a Japanese fashion brand, became one of the first retailers to levy a small fee for posted returns. Zara, a rival, followed suit in May. Other firms, including Amazon, are selling more refurbished goods as a way to cut losses.

Startups are getting in on the action. Using artificial intelligence to help retailers decide what to do with the returned goods, taking into account factors such as price trends in second-hand markets, is the brainchild of goTRG. Happy Returns, another startup bought last year by PayPal, a fintech firm, helps with logistics. It has 5,000 drop-off points for returns across America, mostly in chain stores. The returns are aggregated and sent back to

retailers all at once, saving up to 40% of postage costs, says David Sobie, the firm's boss.

Some are experimenting with virtual reality (VR). Over half of items are returned because they are the wrong size. In June Walmart said it will buy Memomi, an augmented-reality (AR) startup that lets shoppers virtually try on glasses. Walmart also offers ways to try on clothes and arrange furniture in rooms using AR. Amazon recently launched a VR feature that lets users try on shoes. Retailers will now try virtually anything to cut down on returns.

