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English 101P – 031W

April 24, 2022

Major Essay 3

Buy! Buy! Buy!

As technology advances in our society so does the amount we are spending on useless items. This can be contributed to the vast availability of any type of online content as “It’s estimated that 65% of adults in the U.S. use social networks – a figure that spikes to an astonishing 90% for young adults” (Routley). With this recent rise we have started seeing some negative effects on the general public. One of which includes a new technique where businesses base their advertisements on personalized searches and interests for each individual. Social media algorithms that assist in providing personalized ads can be harmful because they create an almost insatiable need in some people to make that purchase and then compare their new item with others online and repeat, which can negatively impact one’s wellbeing.

While technology in the last 30 years has brought many changes to consumerism some positive and some negative; one negative effect is a more personalized way to advertise. All throughout my life I’ve heard the term ‘big data’ when people are referring to advertising techniques. Charlie Osborne mentions how this is used in her article, “How digital consumer empowerment changed the way we buy.” She states that, “...big data can be used to analyse the vast amounts of information now available through digital networks.” She then mentions how

due to the ‘big data,’ companies that were making, “...reactive changes in a product or service based on the consumer market can be changed into predictive action.” While some companies may use this information in a positive way; the majority are using it for their own personal gain with little to no regard for the general public. They create multiple personalized advertisements and then push them out to the public in whatever form they can and as fast as possible to boost their sales. As we are bombarded with all these advertisements it starts affecting our wellbeing. With all the technological advances we have made in the last 30 years we have witnessed the negative effects that can come from personalized advertisements.

One of the effects of personalized advertisements can be seen in the way we compare ourselves to others, which can start a viscous cycle that can be hard to break. This cycle is also known as Obsessive Comparison Disorder. Ilya Pozin mentions in his article, “The Secret to Happiness? Spend Money on Experiences, Not Things” that, “While buying a new gadget or the first drive in a new car may be satisfying or thrilling for a short while, the thrill always fades and we find ourselves back in the same place seeking the next purchase to keep the feeling going.” As we are presented with more personalized offers over and over, it gets harder to resist the temptation. However, if you make that purchase, it can start a cycle that will influence many other areas of your life, from personal relationships to how you view yourself. You will end up spending more time shopping and browsing for the newest and best products, which will create less time for activities and relationships that can benefit your overall wellbeing. Obsessive Comparison Disorder is just one of many effects that personalized advertisements can have on people.

To prevent the population from being further affected negatively by advertising, we can each start by spending more money on experiences instead of things. “Recent research from San

Francisco State University found that people who spent money on experiences rather than material items were happier and felt the money was better spent” (Pozin). Pozin then goes on to state that, “Size doesn't matter . . . in happiness. Most people equate large purchases with large amounts of happiness,” Therefore, people who spend their money on the experience of having ice cream with a friend or loved one instead of the newest car on the line. Will be happier in the long run as they can think back on their experience and still enjoy it, whereas the new car will quickly fade as the car becomes considered last year's model. The solution to spend more money on experiences instead of things will help with the negative impacts of personalized advertisements.

Good quality products can be hard to find these days and at times seems costly, however in the long run it could prove to be beneficial. David Cain mentions in his article, “We Are Not Materialistic Enough,” an idea that has been in the back of my mind for the last several years. He says, “Something happened at some point that left us preferring more things over better things, and acquiring over using or owning.” I remember when I went to buy my first vacuum, I wanted it to be like the one I grew up with. That one had lasted for at least 15 years if not more and the only thing repaired on it was the chord, which was done more near the end of the vacuum's lifespan. However, buying a vacuum similar in quality to the one I grew up with proved to be difficult. I still haven't found one but am still determined to. If I were to give up, I would end up buying cheaper vacuums as a result of not doing as much research before buying like I do now. This in turn would make me purchase more vacuums and pay closer attention to any vacuum advertisements. Cain says later in the same article, “Buy less, buy better. Notice the materiality of the things you use.” This quote is a nice reminder and will help us to remember to look at the quality of what we buy over the quantity. If we pay attention to the quality of the product, we are

purchasing it will prove to be beneficial as it will make us pause and actually think about what we are purchasing.

Another possible solution would be to stop shopping needlessly altogether and only purchase things when they are needed. Ann Patchett gives us a tip on how to help us do this in her article “My Year of No Shopping.” She states, “The trick of no shopping isn’t just that you don’t buy things. You don’t shop.” She then says how, “...the catalogs go into the recycle bin unopened on the theory that if I don’t see it, I don’t want it.” From utilizing this technique, we can start to see a different perspective on not only the value of our time but on the value of products as well. Throughout Patchett’s article she mentions the friend who inspired her to stop shopping, she relates her friend’s experience specifically with the value of time. She mentions how her friend gave up hours in her day to the people around her. “‘That,’ she told me, ‘turned out to be the hardest thing. Time is so valuable’” (Patchett). Patchett then mentions her own experience with the value of products, “Once I stopped looking for things to buy, I became tremendously grateful for the things I received.” By learning to better value our time and products we can greatly increase our overall wellbeing. As we will take more time to consider how and what we are spending our time on. Which in turn will make it so we aren’t seeing personalized advertisements as much and so will therefore not be as influenced by them. Only purchasing things that are necessary instead of shopping because we can, is a solid solution that should be explored.

Although some scholars and researchers claim money can buy happiness for some of our population, the majority needs less advertisements to make healthier decisions. Sandra C. Matz, Joe J. Gladstone, and David Stillwell state in their research paper “Money Buys Happiness When Spending Fits Our Personality.” that, “In the present research, we proposed that spending

provides the greatest increase in happiness and well-being when it is on goods and services that match consumers' personalities." They then go on to explain how they conducted a series of tests and researched their findings thoroughly. They summarize that "In a field study using more than 76,000 bank-transaction records, we found that individuals spend more on products that match their personality, and that people whose purchases better match their personality report higher levels of life satisfaction." While spending money on products that match your personality may increase your well-being. Not many people know their personality type or even what type of shopping makes them happiest. We also need to consider outside factors to why people spend the way they do, as there are many of them. While working through various jobs connected to consumerism, I've often heard the phrase "I only came in because I saw it in an ad." With this type of consumer mentality, we are left with many people being influenced by personalized ads and not making healthy decisions as scholars and researchers would suggest.

In order to start knowing when healthy choices are being offered and then making them, we should follow the solutions provided. This will make it, so the negative effects of personalized ads will not impact us as much. This in turn will help our mentality, especially when it comes to the quickly spreading problem of comparing oneself to others. Whether you decide to go to the extreme of not shopping all together or simply decide to be more mindful of what you are buying, both will change your perspective. Which then will change how many personalized ads you see as you start spending your time on other pursuits. Making healthy choices to better our wellbeing should be societies main goal in a strategy to combat the negativity of personalized ads.

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