

Cultural studies – consumerism essay sample



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First things first, consumerism is not new; it may only be during the last decade that the PoundStore has become an everyday occurrence on our high street, raising awareness that things can be bought at a discount, thus uncovering the lust some of the population have to own something better than you do. It actually started as early as the first civilizations, the likes of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome; as there remains evidence that societies purchased things well in excess of their basic needs. That evidence can be found in remains and paintings that depict food staggered in bulk, slaves and servants surrounding those in power and control, marbles statues, exotic spices, silks and a world of varied philosophies, that all flowed to the mouth of the Tiber and up to the heart of Rome long before anything was mass produced. Consumerism has proved it can be beneficial to the economy, when there is a demand for things, of that there is no denying, If you fast forward to the industrial revolution, when products were produced upon a huge scale, and things became more affordable to the everyday civilian, mass production resulted in mass consumption, all of which aided the economy of the time. So as the demand increases so does production, which accordingly creates numerous jobs.

That said it creates a strong a negative opinion as it does positive. You, as the consumer, have now become more aware of the specification of a product long before you come to purchase it, as it is now that easy to find and access that information, whether this be done via the internet or in store, and you now have a higher demand on the quality of the things you purchase, the decision of “ which one do I get?” has now become more complex than ever. Today consumerism is as big an issue as ever, and one

that everyone talks about, whether it's realized or not, such is its scale. The main objective of me writing this essay is to identify what motivates consumers to make their purchase? We know that it's quality that is sought, but is the quality they seek, actually in the form or function of a product? Do they even want them for those reasons at all? Where does simply being a collector of things come in all this? I recently finished reading the autobiography of Corey Taylor, well, it took me nearly 6 months so I'm going to mention it one way or another, I was compelled to read this because he's one of the few people in the world who wouldn't cry bullshit if I told him things from my childhood. In his book Corey mentions his movie collection, "I have so many movies that many are still in the plastic.

I have so many I forget what movies I have and rebuy them and end up giving the old ones away. I have so many movies that I sometimes keep multiple copies because there are different versions. I have around 12 different versions of Reservoir Dogs: I have the regular one, all the different colour tenth anniversary editions, the special edition GasCan package that was released for the fifteenth anniversary, and the Blu-ray version. If I am anything, I am a collector and an enthusiast. But here is my question: What is the difference between greed and collecting? Where does fandom end and fanaticism begin?" (C. Taylor, p. 162) – I thought I had a lot of DVDs having nearly 300. Since consumerism originated, sections of the public have actively sought an alternative lifestyle, there are those who simply refuse to justify the 'form' when you can get the 'function' at a fraction of the cost. The commitment of the anti-consumer commitment can range in a scale from moderate "simple living" to "Freeganism".

However, at the same time, you have the “you get what you pay for” crowd, who will always pay more, believing they get more. This increased payment towards goods doesn't merely cover a person's desire to have a better item, or even a brand name item, as it is my belief that the purchase isn't actually for their own benefit, it's for yours. Some consumers derive pleasure through anticipating, acquiring and owning something that they desire to have. Most of the time they are influenced by the fantasy used in commercials and advertisements. To again reference that autobiography; “Commercials are romantic comedies designed to make the consumer envious of the people and the product – the prettier the person, the more you really need those pants. Billboards look like subliminal messages, your own personal covetous strobe light if you drive fast like me, and their sole purpose is to dose you with shit you do not have or have not seen. So you find yourself wanting stuff you never knew you wanted.” (C. Taylor, p. 136) – total advertising spend in the United States is around £111 billion every year

The consumerism engine isn't as basic owning something for its value, for every person who buys a product as a sign of wealth; there is another who wants their sign of stature to show that they are sophisticated, this can be achieved via clothing, or having a room full of books inside their home. If they do not want to appear wealthy or sophisticated, maybe they want to appear to be a fashion mogul, who will want to be seen as knowing what's trendy and what's not, where they will be wearing the exact same clothing as the display dummy in the window of the high street shops, irrelevant to whether they actually like it or not, simply because it's 'in'. Whether it is in the sense of wealth, fashion, or class, at the end of the day, anyone who

tries to be anything, will always being nothing more than part of a clique, or at least that's how I see it. I guess even if you're not buying it for yourself, there will always come a time when you fall victim to consumerism. Take this quote from *The Rebel Sell*; " Next year, everyone in the family may have to spend more on their gifts.

They do so not because they want to engage in in one-upmanship, but simply to regain the position they once had. It only takes one person, one act of ' offensive' consumption, to trigger such an episode. The other people in the family are not obsessed with status, they simply want to avoid seeming cheap." (J. Heath & A. Potter, p. 119). You may simply be forced into forking out more than you intended, but to almost disagree with the point made in the book, if you do not want to appear cheap, that means you want to appear something, which means you want to hold a status. The short version, you're still part of a clique. There are those who would completely disagree with me, but I have a hard time looking at a topic such as consumerism from an impartial angle when I do not believe in individuality, I fail to see how in a world that has just under 7 billion people living on it how you can be individual. You have to want something because you've seen it, I've never been in a position where I've bought something without first looking at it, as it's aesthetic value means something to me, even if it's nothing more buying a tin of beans in my local Morrisons, I will always buy the tin that doesn't have a dent in over the one that does, wouldn't you?

Lets look at something I've bought recently, my headphones, now out there in the big wide world there are literally hundreds of types to choose from, the majority of which are the same as far as the specifications go, but, in <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-studies-consumerism-essay-sample/>

case you haven't noticed, rapper Dr. Dre has his own line of headphones. They're called "Beats By Dre" and until now, they were made in partnership with the company Monster. Apparently that has changed now and Beats are their own thing now, and that's good. As I'm really not a fan of Monster products, however that's a story for another day.

These headphones I bought are piano black, with chrome accents, the red 'b' logo on each side, with a 1 metre red 3.5mm cable, they're exquisite and for £279 I'd expect them to be, but they're designed to produce noise, shouldn't the way they look be immaterial? Maybe I pigeonholed them prior to purchasing because of whose name is on them, and how much they cost, but I think I'm allowed too; I had very high expectations of them. I originally expected them to be excessively heavy on the low-end, that's not to say there's no bass, these headphones are nicely warm and balanced in the mids and really impressive in their delivery of high-end detail. So, they're worth the money in both the sense of form and function.

However, in the midst of being impartial while giving an opinion of whether I'm a "victim" of consumerism, I have to say I got the sort of vibe I'm used to getting when I buy an Apple product, as I genuinely think about £40 of the fee has gone on the packaging. Like the headphones themselves, the box is a work of art, but when you purchase something for yourself does the box really need to be? That moment when you receive a product as a gift the box makes the impact, but actually when you analyze it why would you want your money spent this way? Then there's the rather thick booklet it comes with, it looks nice, but open it up and you feel like you're getting every single language in the world with just a couple of pages of information that's so

generic (to the whole range) that it's incomplete, with not even a single explanation of why you get two different leads in the box, or even that the executive version actually requires a pair of batteries to function properly.

The pair they replace were a pair of old Sony MDR-ZX300, now by comparison, they are nowhere near as good looking, a very basic unpadded black headband, with shiny metallic dark red ear pieces, and that's about it, that said, they only cost me £29.99.

Even though they are now around 18 months old, they're still hitting all the right notes, and they have a few features you don't find on some of the most recent releases in this price bracket, swiveling earpieces for example, this is something I wouldn't usually expect to find on a set of headphones in this price range. The build quality isn't the best; mainly due to the fact the most of the headphone is made from a rather cheap plastic, although they don't feel cheap by any means. They do feel slightly flimsy and could probably benefit from a strip of metal in the headband to make them more durable, which the Beats have by the way. At this price, these headphones didn't come with noise cancelling ability, even though they are over ear headphones, they don't quite fit tight over your ears, but having said that the overall sound quality from highs, mid-tones and deep bass were astoundingly good, and they got their fair share of use going back and forth to class/work everyday.

I also didn't feel like I'd spent 20% of my purchase on the packaging, as I was a simple cut and chuck plastic mold with some basic technical specifications on the back. They displayed the headphones properly and I

bought them because I read those specifications and I knew they'd be loud and clear, and would hit with enough Bass to play my Metallica or Corey Taylor albums with decent force.

So they are over £250 less than the cost of my Beats Studio headphones, and give the same sound, well, to my untrained ear they do, I would go as far to say that they're more comfortable to wear, due to the swivel feature too. So why do I wear the Beats?

Well, the main reason is they retail at £279, so I'm hardly going to leave them on the side getting covered in dust, but the second reason, and a reason that I'm happy to admit is 90% of the technologically aware population know they cost £279, and that to me is as good a reason as any. They're in every magazine you open due to how many celebrities wear them, a quick Google search showed me Gwen Stefani, Ice Cube, Kate Holmes and even Dr. Dre himself, they also made a brief appearance in the video for Poker Face by Lady Gaga.

In reality I don't know why they cost so much, as with any other pair of headphones, I'm never, ever, going to use them to the fullest of their advanced capabilities, yes the noise cancelling feature is a big plus, and it's a huge benefit on the bus or train, if for no reason other than to simply drown out the annoying teenager who doesn't even buy a £1 pair of earphones and insists on playing his music out loud for all to hear, (his 'sign' being the style of music he listens too, he wants you to know what genre it is, he wants to look cool by having the most recent release blasting as loud as his phone will play it) I'll even admit I have no idea as to what I would

have to even consider playing to test the capabilities of the 20hz-20, 000hz frequency range, or the 115db dynamic range.

The Studio Beats come with a 40mm speaker, which in headphone terms is much larger than the 30mm in the MDR-ZX300s, but other than that, they're pretty evenly matched, at least in a technical comparison. It's only aesthetically that they're very different, the MDRs being very basic, and looking like a pair of headphones, the Beats looking like something from the future.

I guess it's hard for me to give a balanced view on consumerism, mainly because I am a victim of it, as we all are in one way or another, even if we try not to be. I openly admit that whenever I buy something I always take into consideration its aesthetic value, or what my friends will say, purely because the opinions of other people matter to me. I believe that we as a species will always try to justify what we purchase, using the function of an item as an excuse to enjoy its form, in my opinion we choose items that reflect our values and our aspirations, where we try to project how we see ourselves onto others, we want to fit a genre or to be part of a clique. Every time we categorize someone because of how we dress, and we form an opinion of them, we by pure coincidence categorize ourselves, thus we become part of a genre, you may have picked your trousers or jumper because you want to be warm, but there's more than one you could have chose, you may have needed that item because of it's function, but you made your decision based on it's style.

I'm exactly the same, as I chose my Beats in black, because I usually wear black... although, to summarize exactly how much of a consumerism victim I am, my Dr. Dre Beats aren't even the genuine article, they cost me £35 in Turkey, but to the passer by in the street, I'm wearing £279 headphones. That's how vain I am. That's how strong a hold consumerism has over me. I'm not going to sell a kidney to be seen in the top of the line clothes or to owning the latest tech', but I'll find a way around it.

My creative piece is rather self explanatory, I'm implying that I like many others are sheep who simply follow the herd.

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