

Interpersonal communication



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Consumerism can be seen as a social order fostering of a desire to purchase goods and services in great amounts. It is considered a new way of interpersonal communication, because people begin to define themselves in relation to the objects surrounding them, which speak for them.

Regarding communication, there is a general tendency to disclose information just by dressing in a particular way or by eating in carefully selected restaurants. Media plays an important role in the development of consumerism: media promotes glamorous lifestyles, luxurious holidays or expensive houses. This is why people see this kinds of behaviours and feel the need to possess the same things; their aim in life begins to lean towards luxury and numerous bank accounts. In this way, consumerism becomes a part of everybody`s mundane reality.

Colin Campbell claims that: " Humanly conceived, therefore, consumption refers to the use of goods in the satisfaction of human wants, and is typically the outcome of consciously motivated behaviour" (Lee, 2000, 50) . As Colin Campbell states, consumerism is all about satisfaction of human wants, but what it is going to happen if they will never end? Maybe this is a part of humans' nature and during our whole existence we continuously ask for things to feel better but that is just a temporary feeling, because we always find enough reasons to feel depressed and only see the negative sides of life. Perhaps all the individuals should learn to give something back and try to be less selfish.

It needs to be emphasised the fact that, humans, by consuming, have a major negative impact on the environment, and because they waste too

much, we can say that people destroy and produce at the same time. By having a huge number of demands and by giving back so little, the Planet`s resources are diminishing day by day. Unfortunately, the number of people willing to do something and stop this from happening is much lower than the number of those who only care about themselves.

Terms of reference

This report aims to research interpersonal communication in a `dynamic` environment, in this case, West Quay, the biggest Mall in Southampton. Its purpose is to comment on some important aspects regarding consumerism and to analyse human behaviour under different circumstances trying to understand some habits, values or lifestyles.

The report is trying to raise some important questions regarding consumer culture, for example: Why do people buy more than they need? Why don't they ever get enough and always want more? How can be shopping perceived as a therapy? or Why is branding so important?

Research Methodology

In order to be able to write this report I used two books : " The Consumer Society: Myths & Structures" by Jean Baudrillard and " The Consumer Society Reader" by Lee, my own views on consumerism and some notes I wrote while trying to observe people`s behaviour in West Quay.

Findings and analysis

As an overall view, observing human behaviour in an environment such as The Mall, can be an exciting but also a very exhausting experience. Visitors do not seem to be bothered by the hustle and bustle of shopping life, on the contrary, they might enjoy it. One thing I noticed is that the percentage of women going shopping is higher than the percentage of men; this may be explained referring to the fact that, as we all know, women are the "goddesses of shopping". They are more patient and pay more attention to details. In 90% of the situations, if you ask a girl which are her hobbies, one of the key words will definitely be " Shopping". On the other side, men usually see shopping as a burden and as a weekly activity they have to face/survive financially and physically in order to make their wives/girlfriends happy.

Secondly, I observed that as a general truth, buyers come in with a preoccupied look on their faces and they come out happy, satisfied and relaxed. Thinking in a straightforward way, I guess that spending money is what makes them excited, ultimately.

Thirdly, all the conversations you can hear (not in a deliberate way) are about which clothes look the best and which cost the most, about which brand rocks, maybe where you can find the best food, or just common discussions that we all have in our daily routine, because The Mall is also a place where friends meet to catch up, gossip and talk nonsense.

Lastly, in the Mall, anywhere you look you can see two categories of people: those who are dressed in casual garment, having a relaxed attitude, maybe spending outdoors their free day, and the second category, those who are

there to show off, to 'impress' the others with their fancy clothing ready to wander around the stores and buy the most expensive products available on the market.

Consumerism

As everybody is aware of, consumerism is a huge problem that afflicts the 21st century. According to Baudrillard , " There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods , and this represents something of a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings , as they were in all previous ages, but by objects" (1998, 25). The idea of abundance, which is argued by Baudrillard, allows buyers to invest so much money in objects. Anywhere you go there is a huge variety of products, which give you the chance to purchase whatever you yearn for. The only impediment is money, whose importance is often neglected by major consumers, who don't have to worry about this aspect.

People buy goods just because of their impulsive need to consume, to spend money, not because they really need them. Sometimes they are attracted just by the packaging and the exteriors, the content being less important. We always say that we " need" something, or that a certain thing satisfies our " needs", but what does that actually mean? " Need is already given its object by the available goods; preferences are orientated by the particular

spread of products offered on the market: this is, basically, effective demand." (Baudrillard, 1998, 70).

Why everybody is a consuming addict and cannot help shopping? Maybe due to the fact that they determine their degree of happiness in regard with their belongings or how much they own.

As Baudrillard explains, " Happiness is the absolute reference of the consumer society: it is the strict equivalent of salvation and it is based on individualistic principles. Happiness has to be measurable. It has to be a well-being measurable in terms of objects and signs; it has to be 'comfort'."(1998, 49) . As Baudrillard states, happiness means comfort. Humans need to feel comfortable in order 'to function', to feel relieved and be able 'to survive' daily routine. They can overcome trouble more easily if they know that at home, their favourite TV programme and their fluffy couch is waiting for them.

Another argument is that human behaviour is strange and incomprehensible sometimes. People consume because they want to feel superior and show off in front of their friends, relatives or neighbours. Their status in the society is crucial for them and they crave for popularity and recognition. Being financially situated above the ones they know makes them feel accomplished and their lives seem worth living.

Therefore, I believe that people need objects (clothes, cars, accessories) just because they need to communicate something about them, who are they. An expensive car, a piece of brilliant jewellery and some Versace clothing may 'speak' for you: they communicate that you are a wealthy, successful ,
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important person and you don't have to say anything; the objects surrounding you define you as an individual. This argument is enforced by Mike Featherstone, who says: "The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste." (Lee, 2000, 95)

While I was sitting on one of the benches inside the mall, I witnessed a conversation between two girls, which was something like this : " Oh my god, I am so excited that I bought this amazing purse and it was a real bargain.. just 500 pounds" , " Good for you, but don't you have another one which looks almost the same?" , " Yea, but I got bored of it and I need to come up with something new in front of my peers" . This conversation shows another fact, also proved by research : consumers don't just buy things without needing them, but they also get bored very quickly . Similarly to humans, nowadays, objects are born, grow to maturity and die, whereas, in the past, all the objects were timeless. In addition, consumers feel the uncontrolled need to purchase something else, and the same situation repeats over and over again and seems to be ceaseless.

While I was sitting, making notes, a woman in her mid-thirties sat next to me; she looked quite friendly so I began talking to her, trying to get some additional information for my project. Fortunately, she was honest enough to confess the reasons she went to the Mall that day: she felt depressed and miserable and she usually used shopping as a therapy to make her feel better and overcome depression. In addition, she told me that what makes <https://assignbuster.com/interpersonal-communication-personal-essay-samples/>

her cheerful is having something new to wear, and not spending money.

After having this conversation I realised that shopping can become a therapy for those who aren't strong enough to solve their problems and instead they choose to occupy their minds with something else.

I have already stated that people's greed for possessions is a problem, but there is another issue, even more controversial: Why do individuals buy a product just because of its brand and not because of its quality? Of course, this is an action that only wealthy people afford doing; from what I have heard, it seems that people identify themselves with certain brands and in order to feel part of them, they keep buying products belonging to that brand, no matter the price.

Conclusions & Recommendations

To conclude, I need to state that researching this project was an enjoyable experience for me; I learnt more about human behaviour and interpersonal communication just by trying to observe an environment such as The Mall. In addition, I discovered the significant impact that consumers have on the environment and on the society and I looked at consumerism, for the first time, as a way of interpersonal communication. Furthermore, I became aware of its negative aspects but also of its ambiguity: we know that consumerism is based on needs, but as Baudrillard states, needs are never actually fulfilled, and this is why it seems that we are involved in vicious circle, which is not going to end:" The modern consumer is characterized by an insatiability which arises out of a basic inexhaustibility of wants themselves, which forever arise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of their

predecessors. Hence no sooner that one is satisfied than another is waiting in line clamouring to be satisfied; when this one is attended to, a third appears, then subsequently a fourth, and so on, apparently without end. The process is ceaseless and unbroken." (Lee, 2000, 49)

Anyway, what is going to happen in the future can not be predicted.

However, Baudrillard makes a statement will only be proved by time:" It is even possible that consumption will gradually concede to other criteria and other types of behaviour the preeminent role it currently plays in the variable geometry of status. Ultimately, it will become the prerogative of everyone when it no longer has any meaning." (1998, 57)