

mccrindle

Consumed

The state of Australian
consumerism



September 2019



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Research objectives

McCrindle partnered with Consumed to prepare the *Consumed* report in April 2019. The report explores Consumerism in Australia and its implications for society. The purpose of this

research is to understand attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards consumerism and its impacts on individuals and society.

Research methodology

The *Consumed* report is the collation of data obtained through a quantitative survey conducted through an online panel.

Online survey

The survey was in field from the 30th of May to the 7th of June 2019. The survey was completed by a nationally representative sample of 1,001 Australians.

Terminology

Throughout this report the nationally representative sample (1,001) are referred to as Australians.

Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded for simplicity. Some graphs may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points are added are based on raw data, not the rounded data labels on the graph, which are then rounded once combined.

Where no sample size has been specified in the report for graphs, the responses represent the total survey sample (n=1,001).

Executive summary

Consumerism is alive and well in Australia

Australia is a nation of consumers. Four in five Australians (80%) believe Australians consume significantly or much more than what they need. Three in five Australians (60%) believe the nation's consumption habits are having a negative impact on Australian society.

Despite this negative impact, Australians still feel the need to buy new things (48% yes, definitely/somewhat). This is unsurprising, given more than four in five Australians (82%) feel good when they buy something new. This feeling is only fleeting, however, with two in five Australian consumers (42%) suggesting the feeling only lasts for a few days.

Sharing is caring

Although Australians consume a lot, they are altruistic at heart, with almost four in five (79%) feeling a responsibility to share what they have with others (strongly/somewhat/slightly agree). More than four in five Australians (85%) agree that, if shared evenly, there are enough resources in the world for everyone to live 'the good life'.

Australians are not just consuming material goods

The way Australians are consuming is reflected in how they use their time. In an average week, Australians are spending more time on a screen than interacting with others. More than a third of Australians (35%) spend ten or more hours in an average week on screen time for entertainment/shopping/social media. Less than a quarter of Australians (23%) spend the same amount of time investing into their relationships by hanging out with friends/family.

Emotional factors drive consumption

Australia has two core consumers: Buzzed Buyers (45% of Australians who often feel the need to buy something new and feel good because of it) and Considered Consumers (37% of Australians who do not often feel the need to buy something new but still feel good when they buy something new). Buzzed Buyers are driven by emotional not just rational factors to consume, being four times as likely to consume to fit in with those around them (16% cf. 4% Considered Consumers) and 3.8 times as likely to consume to distract from their current experience (19% cf. 5%).

Consumption habits are impacting Australians physical and emotional lives. Buzzed Buyers are particularly experiencing the negative impacts of consumerism. Buzzed Buyers are more likely than Considered Consumers to experience anxiety (30% cf. 20%), loneliness (23% cf. 15%), sadness (24% cf. 16%), frustration (36% cf. 23%) and stress (36% cf. 27%) in their lives daily. Considered Consumers, however, are more likely to experience contentment (48% cf. 37%), hope (48% cf. 38%) and happiness (60% cf. 50%) in their lives at least daily.

The challenge of translating belief to behaviour

While 54% of Australians want to change their consumption habits, just 31% are extremely or very likely to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months.

When it comes to fair wages for those making their goods, Australians are caught in the challenge of being equally likely to want to get a bargain (58%), as wanting fair wages for those making their goods (57%). This epitomises the challenge of translating belief to behaviour.

While 57% of Australians believe it is important to have fair wages for workers, only 9% have chosen not to purchase an item that would have contributed to unfair wages of those making their goods in the last month. Only one in ten (10%) have purchased an ethical item of clothing in the same time period.

Personal impacts are more likely to bring about change

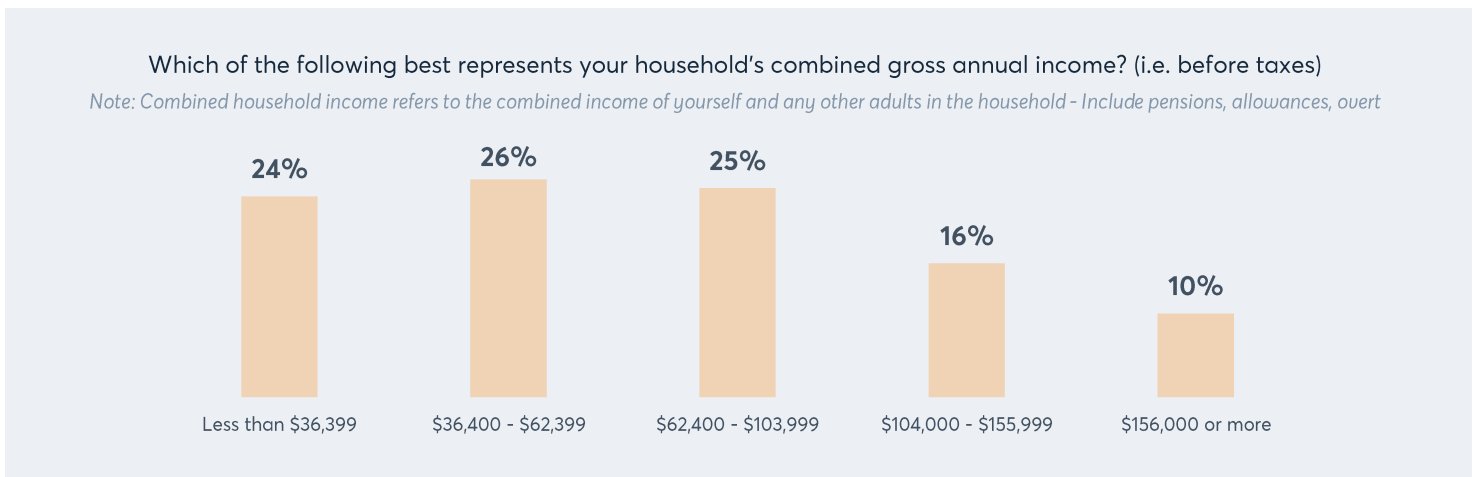
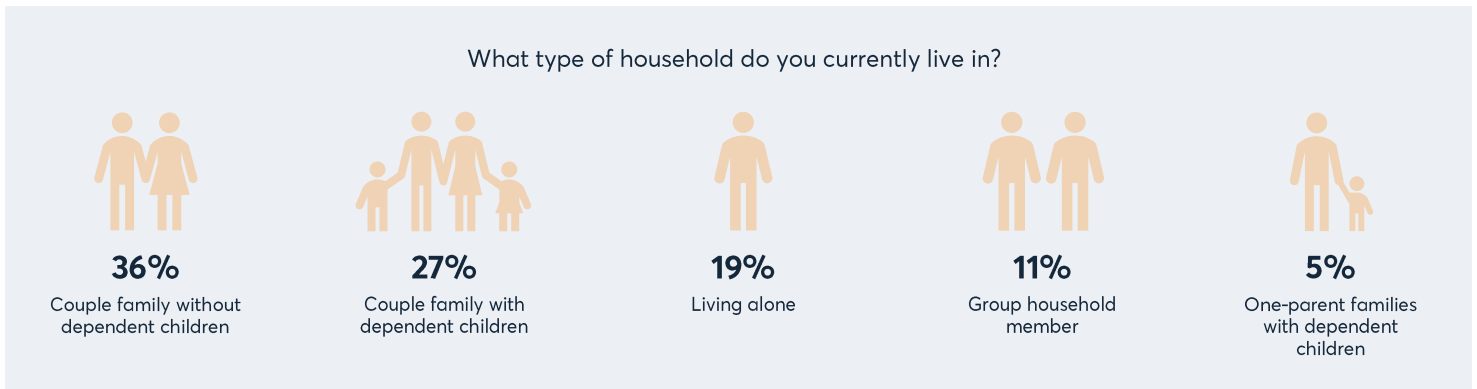
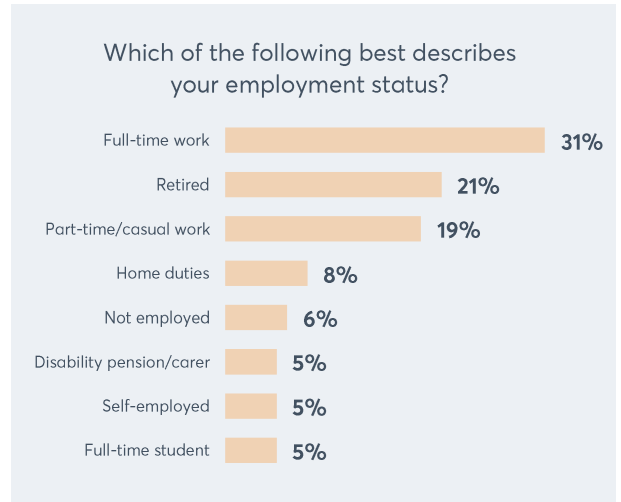
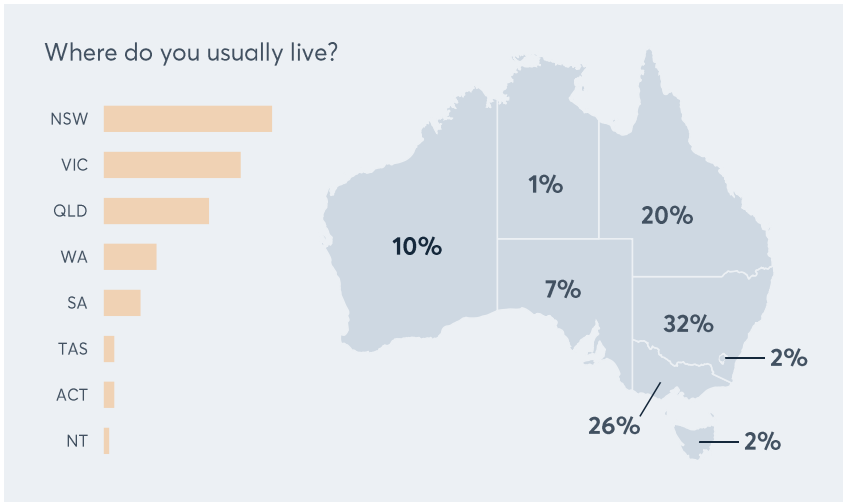
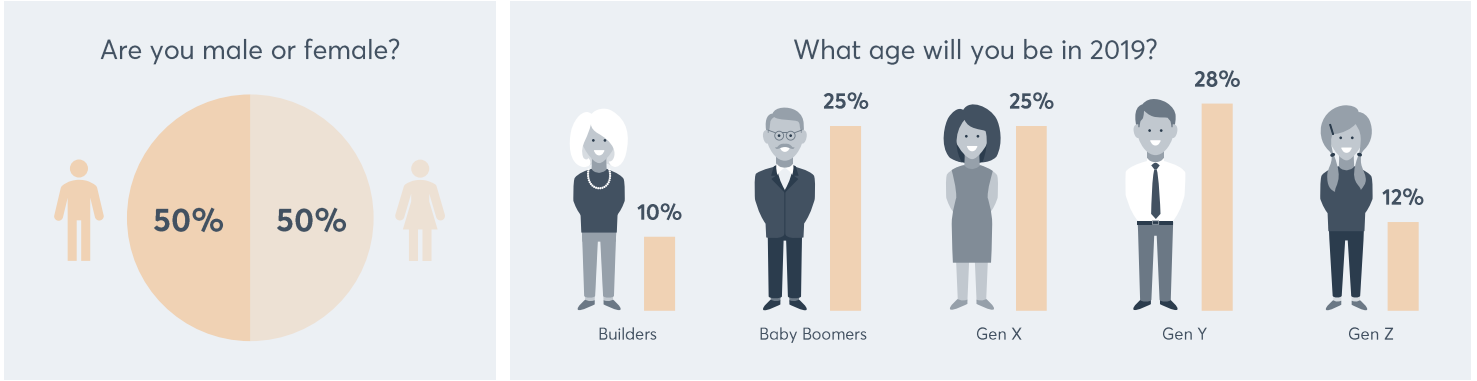
For Australians to make a change in their consumption habits they need to experience the negative impact personally, not just the negative societal impact. More than half of Australians (54%) would change their consumption habits if it had a negative impact on them, while more than two in five (46%) would change if it had a negative impact on those they love. Only 27% would change if it had a negative impact on the broader community.

A sense of meaning is an antidote to consumerism

Australians without a sense of meaning in their life are more likely to experience the negative impacts of consumerism. For almost three in five Australians who do not have a sense of meaning (58%) the good feeling they get from buying something new lasts only a few days compared to 37% of Australians with a sense of meaning.

Australians without a sense of meaning are 2.8 times as likely as those with a sense of meaning to consume to distract themselves from their current experience (25% cf. 9%). They are also 1.4 times as likely to consume to feel good about themselves (39% cf. 29%). Australians without a sense of meaning are more likely to experience anxiety (46% cf. 19%), loneliness (41% cf. 13%), sadness (41% cf. 14%), frustration (48% cf. 24%) and stress (52% cf. 25%) at least daily. While Australians with a sense of meaning are more likely to experience happiness (63% cf. 21%), contentment (48% cf. 15%) and hope (48% cf. 16%) at least daily.

Demographic summary



Australian consumerism: the state of play

Consumerism is alive and well in Australia.

Four in five Australians (80%) believe Australians consume significantly or much more than what they need. While overall, they may enjoy their own consumption habits, three in five Australians (60%) believe consumerism is having a negative impact on Australian society.

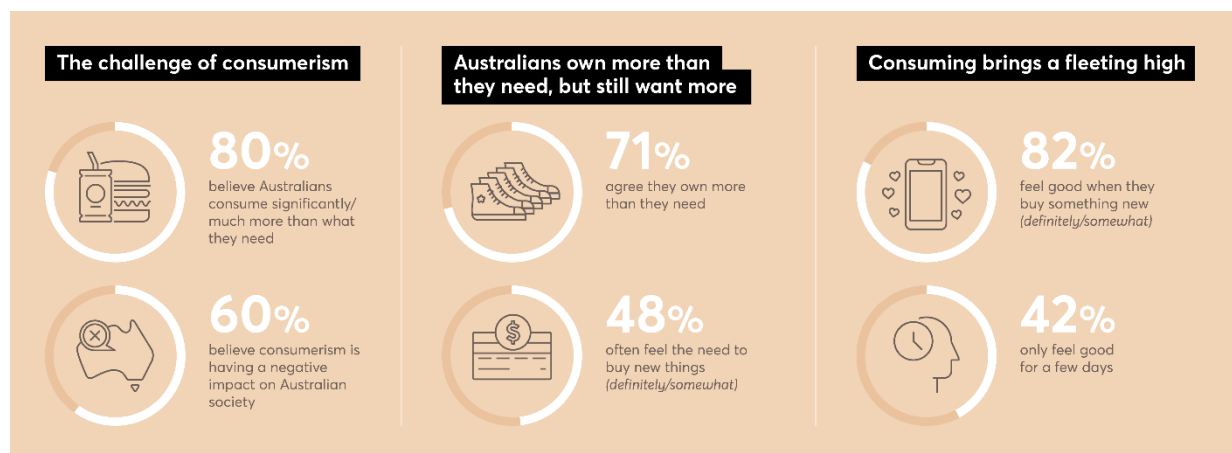
Most Australians own more than enough

Australia is indeed a lucky country with more than seven in ten Australians (71%) agreeing they own more than they need. Interestingly, even though many Australians own more than what they need, they don't necessarily think it is good for them. Just over a third of Australians (35%) agree it is

good for them to acquire more than what they need (strongly/somewhat/slightly agree) while almost twice as many (65%) disagree (strongly/somewhat/slightly disagree). This disagreement, however, has not necessarily curbed the desire to consume.

Consuming brings a fleeting high

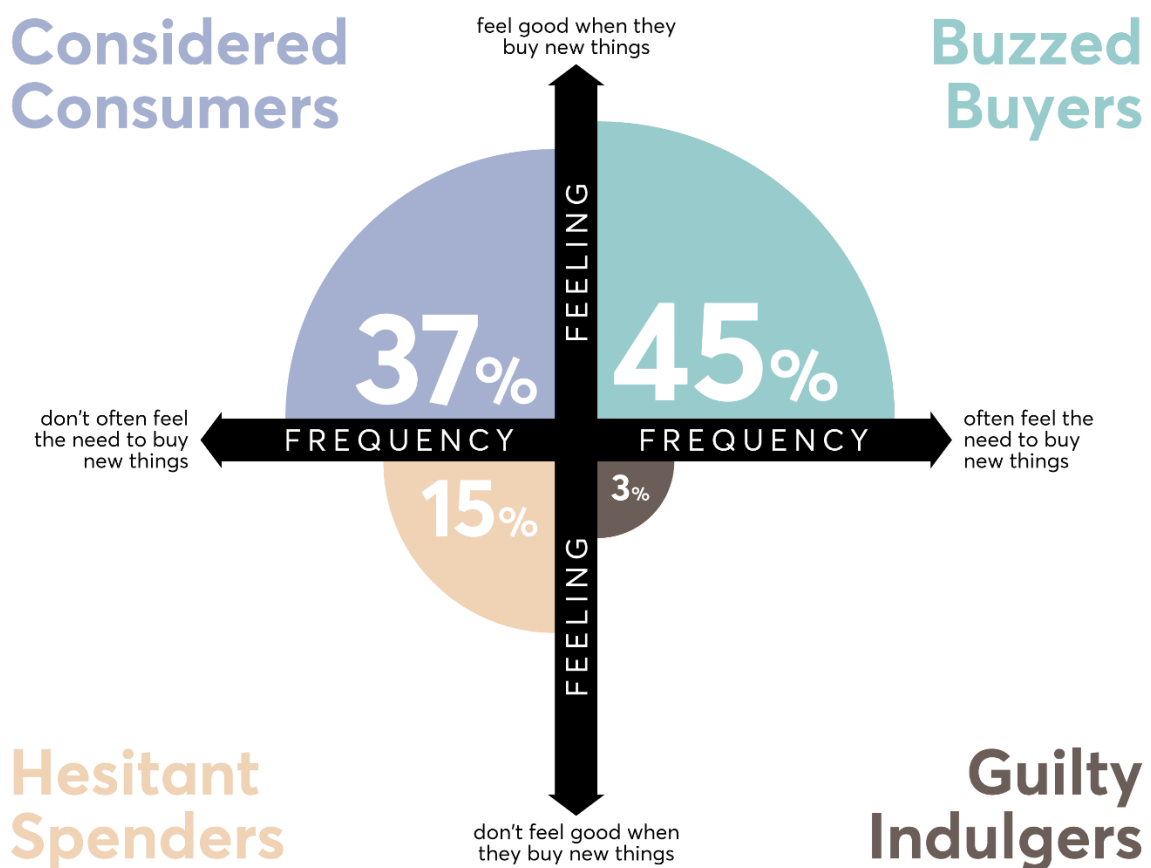
Almost half of Australians often feel the need to buy new things (48% yes definitely/somewhat). This may be fuelled by the good vibes more than four in five Australians (82%) feel with a new purchase. Buying new things, however, is not necessarily the whole issue. The challenge for Australian consumers is that for two in five Australians (42%) that good feeling only lasts for a few days.



Almost half of Australians are Buzzed Buyers

There are four key types of consumers within Australian society. Buzzed Buyers are the largest group, making up 45% of Australians. These consumers often feel the need to buy new things and feel good when they do. More than a third of Australians (37%) are Considered Consumers who don't often feel the need to buy new things but feel good when they do. One in seven Australians (15%)

are Hesitant Spenders not often buying new things and not experiencing the good vibes a new purchase can bring. The smallest group of consumers is the Guilty Indulgers making up just 3% of the population. These consumers often feel the need to buy new things but don't feel good when they make that purchase.



**Due to the small sample size of Hesitant Spenders and Guilty Indulgers, only Buzzed Buyers' and Considered Consumers' consumptions habits are highlighted throughout this report.*

Australians at heart are altruistic

Almost four in five Australians (79%) agree they feel a responsibility to share what they have with others (strongly/somewhat/slightly agree).

More than four in five (85%) agree that, if shared evenly, there are enough resources in the world for everyone to live 'the good life'

Australians are not just consuming material goods.

The way Australians are consuming is reflected in how they use their time. Many know the feeling of getting home after a long day at work and the initial desire to relax and unwind. Interestingly, Australians are likely to relax through consuming content. If Australians were given the gift of a few hours to spare, an equal proportion (15%) would watch Netflix/Stan/TV/YouTube/Movies as would get outside in the fresh air. Australians are more likely to do this than hang out with friends/family (10%), exercise (8%) or do something creative (7%).

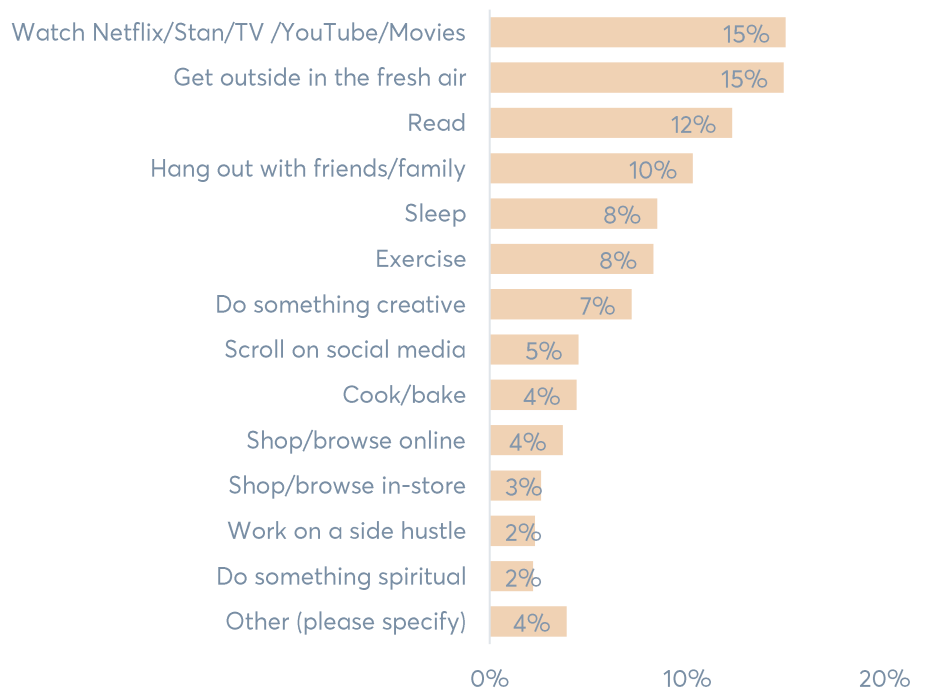
Australians are spending more time in an average week on a screen than interacting with others.

More than a third of Australians (35%) spend ten or more hours in an average week on screen time for entertainment/shopping/social media compared to less than a quarter of Australians (23%) who spend ten or more hours a week investing into their relationships by hanging out with friends/family.

It is not all doom and gloom for Australians, however, with one in six setting aside up to four hours in their week to read (45%), do something creative (43%) and nearly one third make time to volunteer or help others (32%).



What are you most likely to do if you suddenly had a few hours to spare?



Australia's idea of the 'good life' doesn't necessarily align with its consumption habits.

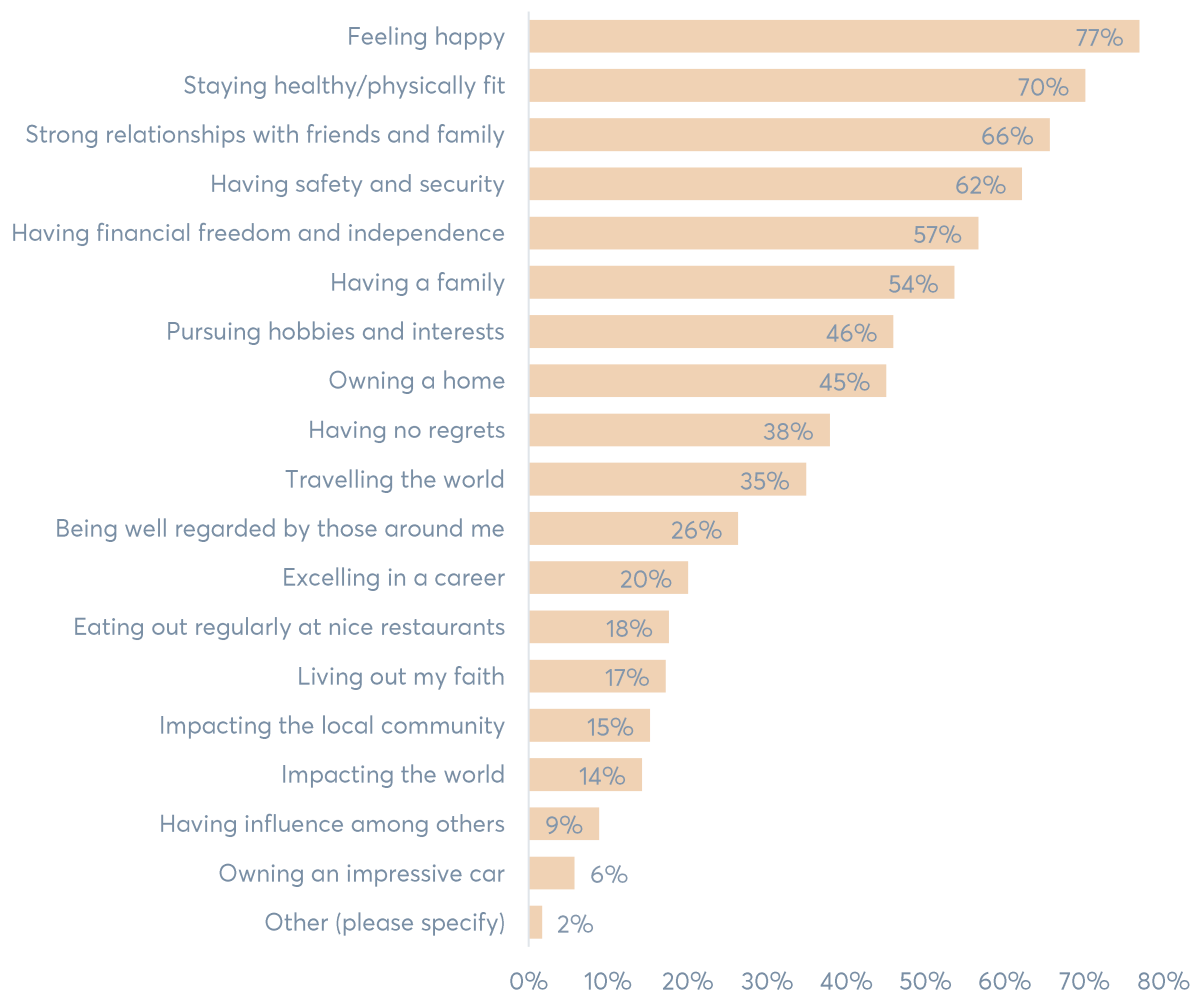
Australians see the good life as:

- Feeling happy (77%)
- Staying healthy/physically fit (70%)
- Strong relationships with friends and family (66%)
- Having safety and security (62%)
- Having financial freedom and independence (57%)

While Australians value health and relationships, they are less likely to allocate time in their weeks to investing in these areas (pg. 10).

Australians' perception of the 'good life' is focused more on the individual than the collective. They are less likely to see the 'good life' as impacting society, with just one in seven suggesting the good life means impacting the local community (15%) or impacting the world (14%).

What does 'the good life' mean to you?



Australians consume because they can

Australians believe Australian society consumes the way it does because consuming is easy and accessible. Many believe Australians consume simply because they can afford to. It has become part of the culture and fabric of society; "Australians have got into the habit of consumerism, without questioning it". While others believe that Australians are greedy and want to keep up their image. A commonly held belief is that:

'Australians haven't worked out the difference between a need and a want & consumers are spoilt for choice nowadays.'

Some Australians believe Australia has 'become a society of must haves now' while others believe Australians are 'unfulfilled in other ways and think they can buy happiness'. These responses paint a negative picture of Australia's need to consume.

Meeting 'needs' drives consumption

Although Australians are quick to point the finger when discussing why Australians consume the way they do, they are kinder to themselves when commenting on their own consumption habits. The main reason Australians say they purchase and consume the way they do is to meet their needs (66%). Half of Australians (50%) suggest they consume the way they do to treat themselves, while 31% consume to feel good about themselves.

Although Australians say they feel a responsibility to share what they have with others, they are unlikely to consume the way they do to be generous to those around them (20%). This is less likely to be a reason than to experience life to the full (22%) or express themselves and their tastes (22%).



The why behind the buy

More than a third of Australians (35%) believe it is extremely or very important for them to buy things that make them feel good about themselves.

Buzzed Buyers are driven by emotional, not just rational factors

The belief that is important to buy things that make them feel good about themselves is reflected in how Buzzed Buyers consume.

Influence is linked to proximity

Close friends/family have the greatest influence on Australian consumption habits (36% a great deal/a lot), followed by social media (19%) and advertising (19%). One in six Australians (17%) suggest their broader social network has a great deal or a lot of influence on their consumption habits.

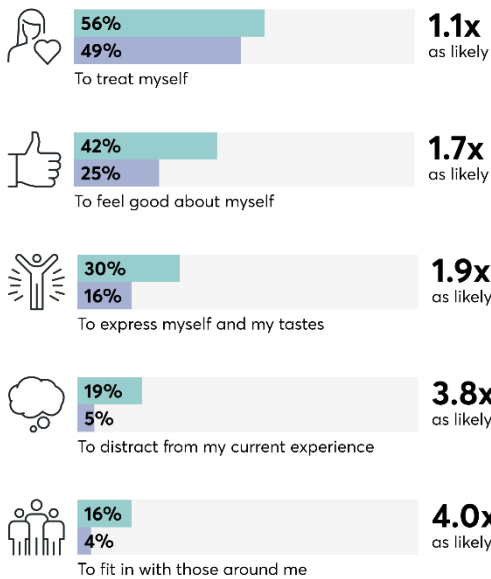
Consumerism is driven by emotional, not just rational factors

Buzzed Buyers

Make up **45%** of Australians. They often feel the need to buy new things.

Considered Consumers

Make up **37%** of Australians. They do not often feel the need to buy new things.



Buzzed Buyers are three times as likely as Considered Consumers to be influenced by advertising (30% cf. 10% a great deal/a lot) and social media (32% cf. 8%).

*Australians consume
the way they do
because people always
want to be one step
ahead of others. It's like
a symbol of status.*

The impacts of consumerism reach far and wide

More than two in five Australians (45%) have gone into debt in the past two years. Australians are most likely to go into debt to buy a car (11%), a house (11%) or travel (10%). Online shopping is a factor for some, with 1.3 million Australians going into debt for online shopping (7%).

Considered Consumers are much more likely than Buzzed Buyers to have not been in debt in the past two years (65% cf. 44% Buzzed Buyers).

Australians are feeling the pain of their consumption habits in their daily lives.

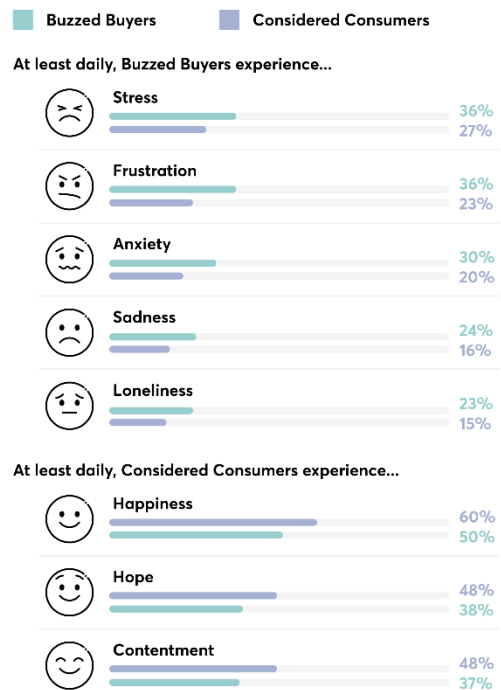
Consumption habits are not just impacting Australians' financial situations but their physical and emotional lives too. Buzzed Buyers in particular are experiencing the negative impacts of consumerism. They are more likely than Considered Consumers to be extremely or very stressed in their relationships both with friends (12% cf. 5%) and family (17% cf. 6%) and in their finances (30% cf. 20%), work (21% cf. 10%) and health and fitness (20% cf. 10%).

Emotional wellbeing is also affected by consumption habits. Buzzed Buyers are more likely to daily experience anxiety (30% cf. 20%), loneliness (23% cf. 15%), sadness (24% cf. 16%),

frustration (36% cf. 23%) and stress (36% cf. 27%) in their lives. Considered Consumers, however, are more likely to experience contentment (48% cf. 37%) hope (48% cf. 38%) and happiness (60% cf. 50%) at least daily in their lives.

Consumerism is impacting Australian lives

Buzzed Buyers are feeling the pain of their consumption habits in their daily lives.



The challenge of translating belief to behaviour

While 54% of Australians want to change their consumption habits, just 31% are extremely or very likely to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months.

Australians believe it's extremely or very important to have less food waste (62%), fair wages for those making their goods (57%), and less packaging waste (54%). The challenge comes when they have to balance these beliefs with their desire to get a bargain (58% extremely/very important).

Positively, the belief that having less food waste and less packaging waste is important is reflected in Australians' behaviour. In the last month, three in five Australians have minimised their food waste (60%) or said no to a plastic bag (58%), while two in five (40%) have purchased food with less plastic packaging.

To grab a bargain or support fair wages?

When it comes to fair wages for those making their goods Australians are caught in the challenge of being equally likely to want to get a bargain (58%), as wanting fair wages for those making their goods (57%).

This epitomises the challenge of translating belief into behaviour. While 57% of Australians believe it is important to have fair wages for workers in the last month, only 9% have chosen not to purchase an item that would have contributed to unfair wages of those making their goods and only one in ten (10%) have purchased an ethical item of clothing. This 10% is not insignificant, however, as it equates to 1.9 million Australian consumers who have purchased an ethical item of clothing in the past month. This suggests there may be slow and steady steps to change.

Almost half of Australians (49%) think it is extremely or very important to be generous to those around them and, positively, 47% of Australians have shared what they have with others in the past month.

*54% of Australians
would change their
consumption habits if it
had a negative impact
on them.*



Consumptions habits change when negative impacts are personal

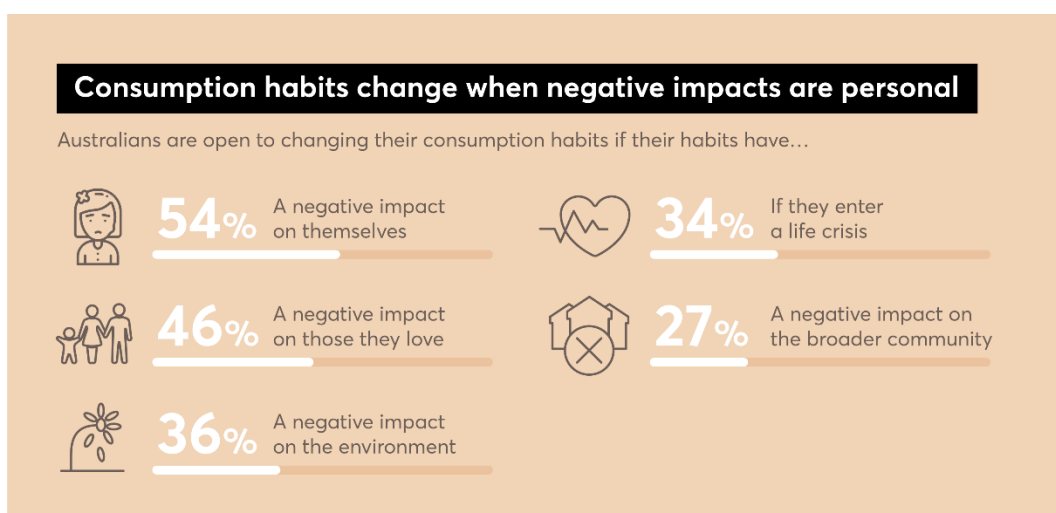
The negative impact of consumerism needs to be personally felt before change occurs. Although three in five Australians (60%) believe consumerism is having a negative impact on Australian society, only half of Australians (54%) want to change their consumption habits (yes definitely/somewhat).

For Australians to make a change in their consumption habits they need to experience the negative impact personally rather than just the negative societal impact. More than half of Australians (54%) would change their consumption habits if it had a negative impact on them, while more than two in five (46%) would change if it had a negative impact on those they love. More than a third (36%) would change their consumption

habits if it had a negative impact on the environment, while just over a quarter (27%) would change if it had a negative impact on the broader community.

Almost seven in ten Buzzed Buyers (68%) want to change their consumption habits compared to just over two in five Considered Consumers (43%). Positively almost two in five Buzzed Buyers (38%) are extremely or very likely to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months.

Buzzed Buyers are more likely than Considered Consumers to change their consumption habits if those around them are changing their consumption habits (23% cf. 10%) and if the pathway to change is clear (26% cf. 18%).



A desire for contentment

In the next 12 months Australians are most likely to change their consumption habits through:

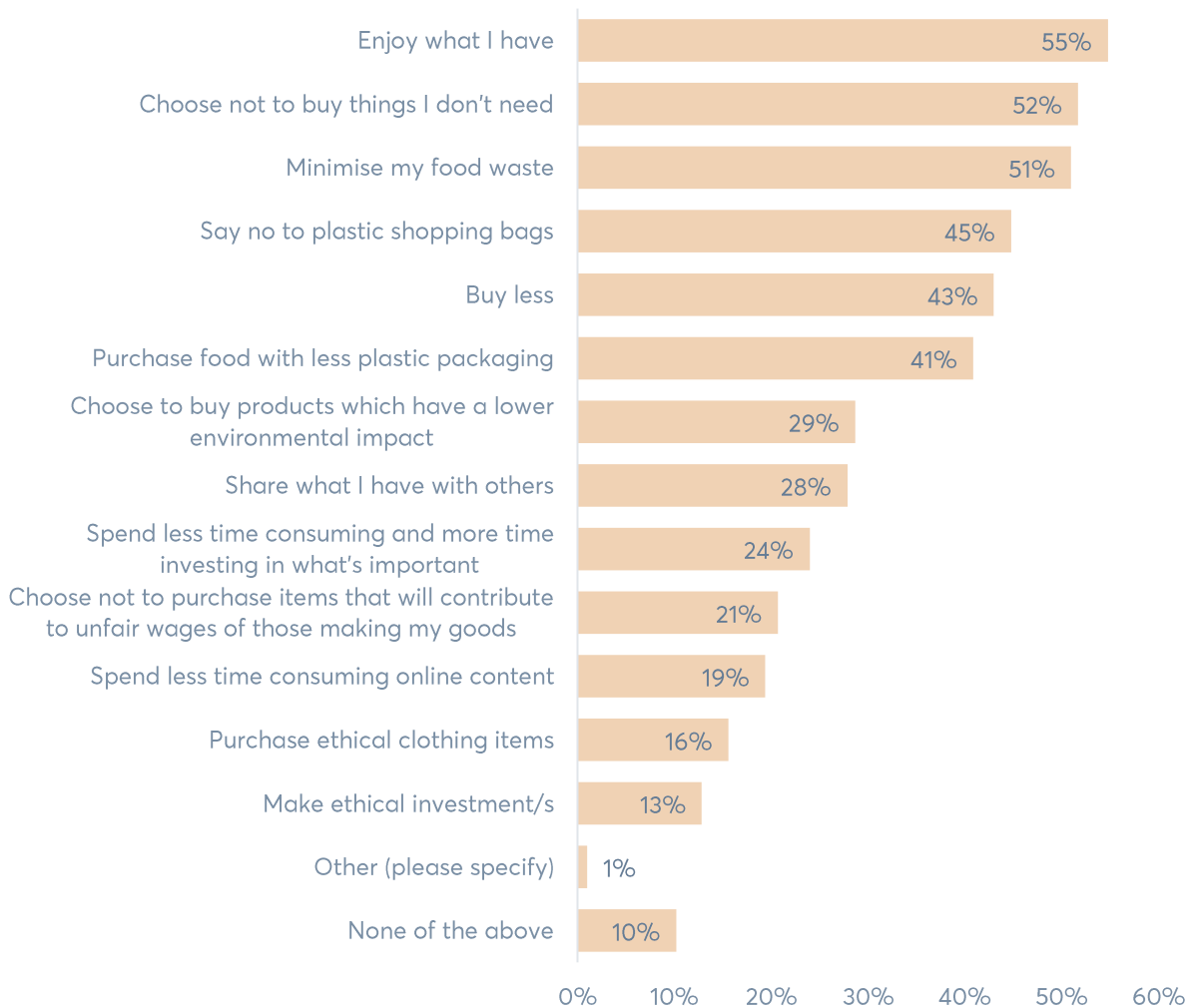
- Enjoying what they have (55%)
- Choosing not to buy things they don't need (52%)
- Minimising their food waste (51%)
- Saying no to plastic bags (45%)
- Buying less (43%)

Buzzed Buyers are more likely than Considered Consumers to want to change their consumption habits through spending less time consuming online content (24% cf. 15%), making ethical investments (18% cf. 11%) and purchasing ethical clothing items (19% cf. 13%).

Considered Consumers, however, are more likely to want to change by enjoying what they have (62% cf. 52%), purchasing food with less plastic packaging (48% cf. 38%) and choosing not to buy things they don't need (59% cf. 47%).

How do you want to change your consumption habits in the next 12 months?

Please select all that apply.



A sense of meaning is an antidote to consumerism

Three quarters of Australians (76%) say they feel as though their life has a sense of meaning (yes definitely/somewhat). This sense of meaning has a positive impact on their life experience. Yet for almost a quarter of Australians they do not feel as though their life has a sense of meaning and this has negative impacts on their life experience (24% no not really/no not at all).

Living with a sense of meaning can soften the effects of consumerism.

Australians with and without a sense of meaning often feel the need to buy new things (48%, 47% respectively). The difference is that those with a sense of meaning are more likely to get a good feeling from buying something new (85%) and this feeling is likely to last longer. Although Australians without a sense of meaning do feel good when they buy something new (71%), for almost three in five (58%) this good feeling only lasts a few days.

Consuming for distraction

Australians without a sense of meaning are 2.8 times as likely than those with a sense of meaning to consume to distract themselves from their current experience (25% cf. 9%). They are also 1.4 times as likely to consume to feel good about themselves (39% cf. 29%).

Australians without a sense of meaning are more likely to believe consumerism is having a negative

impact on Australian society (71% cf. 56% Australians with a sense of meaning).

Australians without a sense of meaning are less likely to be extremely/very satisfied in all areas of their lives

- Physical wellbeing/health (10% cf. 39%)
- Relationships (23% cf. 58%)
- Making a difference in the world around them (5% cf. 23%)
- Work (9% cf. 35%)
- Financial situation (8% cf. 29%)
- Life overall (8% cf. 51%)

They are also more likely to experience anxiety (46% cf. 19%), loneliness (41% cf. 13%), sadness (41% cf. 14%), frustration (48% cf. 24%) and stress (52% cf. 25%) at least daily. Meanwhile, Australians with a sense of meaning are more likely to experience happiness (63% cf. 21%), contentment (48% cf. 15%) and hope (48% cf. 16%) at least daily.

Australians both with and without a sense of meaning are equally likely to want to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months (54%, 52%). Australians with a sense of meaning, however, are more likely (extremely/very) to follow through and change their consumption habits in the next 12 months than those without (33% cf. 21%).

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