

Why Australians are caught up in consumerism



Australia is a nation of consumers. Our consumption habits are impacting our physical and emotional lives with four in five Australians (80%) believing they consume significantly or much more than what they need. Are we consuming to distract ourselves from life's stresses and if so, what can we do about it?

Comfort consumers are the new comfort eaters

Just like we all need food to eat, we all need to spend money to provide for our daily needs. But when emotion and comfort is attached to them, eating and shopping becomes a habit that is relied on to feel good and combat feelings of stress and anxiety. Those who use food for this purpose are comfort eaters and those who use materialism are comfort consumers.

Three in five Australians (60%) believe the nation's consumption habits are having a negative impact on Australian society. But that doesn't seem to be stopping us as almost half of Australians (48%) still feel the need to buy new things. That addictive high we get from buying something new keeps us going back for more. More than four in five Australians (82%) report feeling good when they buy something new. It's called retail therapy for a reason!

Fuzzy feelings are fleeting when they're self-serving

This feeling is fleeting, however, lasting only a few days before the need to feel the buzz strikes again. These types of shoppers we've called Buzzed Buyers - Australians who often feel the need to buy something new and feel good because of it. These emotional buyers 45% of Australians fall into this category. Considered Consumers - those who do not often feel the need to buy something new but still feel good when they do - make up 37% of Australians.

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%). As a result, they 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 daily lives.

Considered Consumers, on the other hand, are more likely to experience contentment (48% cf. 37%), hope (48% cf. 38%) and happiness (60% cf. 50%) at least daily.

"The research shows there are positives for considered consumption. While we are all susceptible to the fleeting high of consumerism it is about making conscious choices of 'is this a need or a want' and asking ourselves the question 'why do I feel the need to purchase this' prior to doing so." - Social Researcher, Sophie Renton

It's not just shopping that's got Australians hooked

[Australians are spending more time on a screen than interacting with others.](#) More than a third of Australians (35%) spend 10 or more hours in an average week on screen time compared to less than a quarter (23%) who spend the same amount of time hanging out with friends or family. Prioritising screen time over family and friends reflects that Australians live a lifestyle of consumption, going beyond the tap of a credit card.

Translating belief into behaviour

However, when asked, more than half (54%) said they want to change their consumption habits, suggesting that Australians are aware that their consumer lifestyle is not good for them. The challenge is translating this belief into behaviour as only 31% said they are extremely or very likely to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months.

“The real challenge for Australians is translating the belief to behaviour. Not just in consumption habits but in many areas of life there is a disparity between intent and behaviour. Australians desire to live for the greater good and make a positive impact but struggle to make the change to live it out in their lives.” - Social Researcher, Sophie Renton

Even more noteworthy is that while 57% of Australians believe in the importance of fair wages for workers, only 9% have chosen not to purchase an item that would have contributed to unfair wages in the last month. In addition, only one in ten (10%) have purchased an ethical item of clothing in the same time period.

“Poor wages and poverty are significant global problems. The research shows that Australians are concerned, and that they want the people that make their stuff to be treated fairly. Translating this belief into action appears to be a challenge though. Less than 10% of Australians- in the last month at least - reported purchasing an ethical clothing item or avoiding a product that contributed to unfair wages.” - Consumed Campaign Director, Gershon Nimbalker

What will it take for Australians to change their ways?

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 loved ones.

Less than a third (27%) would change if it had a negative impact on the broader community. This flies in the face of a movement towards ethical and environmentally sustainable consumption.

“Australians may need to start paying closer attention to the way they consume. They say they will change their ways if their consumption is having a negative impact on them, the research, however, suggests this may already be happening. Those that report the urge to

often buy new things are more likely to experience higher levels of daily anxiety, stress and loneliness.” - Consumed Campaign Director, Gershon Nimbalker

A search for meaning

What would change their habits is a sense of meaning. The research shows that Australians without a sense of meaning in 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 who report having a sense of meaning. They are also 2.8 times as likely as those with a sense of meaning to consume to distract themselves from their current experience (25% cf. 9%).

In addition, they 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.

Conversely, those 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. Having a sense of meaning, therefore, acts as an antidote to consumerism.

Real contentment can't be found in consumption. It's like a leaky bucket that constantly needs to be filled. Instead of getting a 'high' on spending money on ourselves, we should find meaning and get that 'high' from [being generous to others](#).

CONSUMERISM IN AUSTRALIA

The challenge of consumerism



80%

believe Australians consume significantly/much more than what they need



60%

believe consumerism is having a negative impact on Australian society

Australians own more than they need, but still want more



71%

agree they own more than they need



48%

often feel the need to buy new things (definitely/somewhat)

Consuming brings a fleeting high



82%

feel good when they buy something new (definitely/somewhat)



42%

only feel good for a few days

Consumerism is driven by emotional, not just rational factors

Buzzed Buyers

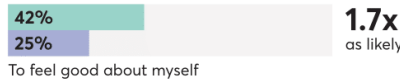
Make up 45% of Australians. They often feel the need to buy new things.



To treat myself

Considered Consumers

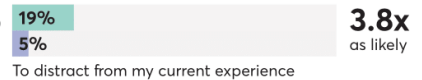
Make up 37% of Australians. They do not often feel the need to buy new things.



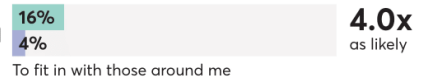
To feel good about myself



To express myself and my tastes



To distract from my current experience



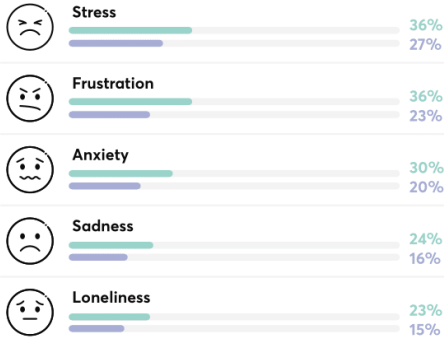
To fit in with those around me

Consumerism is impacting Australian lives

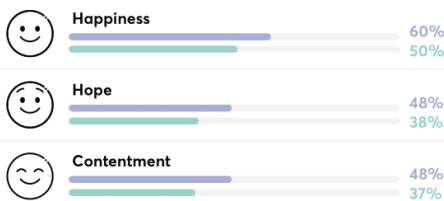
Buzzed Buyers are feeling the pain of their consumption habits in their daily lives.

Buzzed Buyers **Considered Consumers**

At least daily, Buzzed Buyers experience...



At least daily, Considered Consumers experience...



Challenge from belief to behaviour



BELIEF
54% of Australians want to change their consumption habits (definitely/somewhat)



BEHAVIOUR
Just 31% are extremely or very likely to change their consumption habits in the next 12 months



BELIEF
57% of Australians believe it is extremely/very important to have fair wages for workers making their goods



BEHAVIOUR
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

Consumption habits change when negative impacts are personal

Australians are open to changing their consumption habits if their habits have...



54% A negative impact on themselves



34% If they enter a life crisis



46% A negative impact on those they love



27% A negative impact on the broader community



36% A negative impact on the environment

Methodology

Research and infographic by McCrindle — mccrindle.com.au. ©© McCrindle 2019. Nationally representative survey of Australians (n=1001) in field May 30th – Jun 7th 2019. This research was conducted in partnership with Consumed — consumed.org.au.

Download the full [Consumed Report here](#).

For more information.

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For media commentary contact us on 02 8824 3422 or at info@mccrindle.com.au

Contact

Shalom Pillay: shalom@mccrindle.com.au