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ENGL 1302-section#

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Issue Proposal: Consumer Minimalism

Introduction: What is consumer minimalism? Consumer minimalism means people choosing to buy, use, and live with less material things. Supporters of this lifestyle approach say that it solves the problem of overconsumption and the stress of “keeping up with the Joneses.” Opponents of this approach say that it goes too far, overpromises solutions, and produces other problems. I say that before we pick a side, we should explore both the pros and cons of consumer minimalism. Since we are all consumers, especially in consumer-driven societies like modern America, then knowing about these different sides will help us make informed choices for how we spend our time and money. That’s why I propose “consumer minimalism” for my ENGL 1302 research topic.

Overview: Here's what I currently know about consumer minimalism. First, we’ve likely seen the popularity of consumer minimalism in social media. Content creators either tour or are the owners of tiny homes. Others go without stable houses and apartments altogether and embrace van life or nomad life. Entire videos explain how to downsize homes and declutter living spaces. Even fashion gets the consumer minimalist treatment, with capsule wardrobes, rejection of fast fashion, and simple, monochromatic colors. So, I had learned about these different approaches of consumer minimalism from content creators on social media like Instagram and long-form platforms like YouTube. But as a child of Filipino immigrants in a family of six members, I also grew up an unintentional minimalist, as my family worked with

what we had when our household income needed to stretch to the next paycheck. We learned to reuse things even before “reduce, reuse, recycle” was even a thing, when outgrown clothes got handed down to the younger kids, empty Cool Whip and margarine tubs became food storage containers for leftovers, and we called what we did “being frugal.” However, as my family improved economically over the years, I also saw my family start to buy more than we really needed: one car became four cars, cell phones were upgraded even though the older models were still fine, and impulse shopping from places like Amazon increased because it’s a good deal or it’s popular.

Research Plan: Despite my own knowledge of and experience with consumer minimalism, there is much I don’t know. For instance, when did “consumer minimalism” as an intentional lifestyle approach begin? Who chooses this approach, and why? How long do consumer minimalists stick to this lifestyle choice? Is consumer minimalism a spectrum – meaning there are extreme minimalists, while others are minimalist in some consumer choices but not in others, and why? (Maybe that’s why there are these different approaches to consumer minimalism.) Also, what are the problems in consumer minimalism, and are there any “former” consumer minimalists who return to what we see as “normal” American consumption? I don’t have specific answers to these questions, but I speculate that many folks who chose consumer minimalism did so to simplify their finances and their life, perhaps to lower the stress of affording a lifestyle of overconsumption. But maybe it’s not only about money, as some proponents of consumer minimalism may have less stuff but what they do have is of higher value and/or they have more time to spend on non-material things, like experiences. So, my possible sources to find those answers (and answers to questions that may come up in my research) would

be from experts, witnesses, and participants from reputable content creators, academic and industry journals, and current news sources.

People: For my audience, they would be proponents of consumer minimalism, opponents, and those who are in the middle. Specifically, I am trying to reach consumers who have the means to support themselves – food, shelter, clothes, basic utilities, debt management if applicable – and have enough income leftover for “extra” goods and services, perhaps even luxuries to the extent that they have overconsumed and have made overconsumption a habit. Having the freedom to consider or critique consumer minimalism is also a luxury, as those who are still struggling economically would think this issue as not relevant to them. So, I imagine that proponents (my “allies”) would be those already in the consumer minimalist movement – tiny house owners, van lifers, and so on – and opponents would be those who participate in the typical outward show of material success: big house, new car, large wardrobe of nice clothes, and so on. Both allies and opponents are either working still-young adults who are building their future or older adults who are at a crossroad in their working life (like retirement), so the age range is 20s to 60s.

Conclusion: As mentioned earlier, we are all consumers of goods and services, and once we have risen high enough in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, we can make choices about how we consume those goods and services. However, in consumer-driven modern societies, some of those choices can lead to overconsumption, leading to unintended problems. Whether consumer minimalism is the answer to prevent or solve those unintended problems is worth my time to research and explore for ENGL 1302, and I recommend to my audience to make the decision that makes the most sense in their situation.