Shopping: America’s New Pastime

When some people have a little extra money or just get bored, the thought, “Let’s go shopping” pops into their head. Shopping can be used to paint a portrait of America since it is becoming the new favorite pastime. Even the government is trying to get people to go out and go shopping and is giving them the money to do so. The Internet has made shopping just that much easier and convenient since most stores have their own websites now. Not to mention the websites and channels on TV designed specifically for shopping. And the malls are no longer just for shopping. Most Americans believe that going out and playing a game of baseball is still the national pastime, but little do they know that they are wrong. Instead of going and playing baseball, people hop into the car and head down to the mall to do some shopping.

Today when people, especially teenagers, have some extra cash, the first thing they usually think of is, “What can I buy with this amount of money?” I know after I get my Christmas and Birthday money I want to hit the mall and check out the sales. Even when people have no money, they go window-shopping to look at the things they wish they could buy. There is actually a quiz you can take on the Internet that tell you whether or not you are a shopaholic (Bryner). Malls are becoming the new Disneyland, a place to just have a great time hanging out and to spend time with your friends, especially malls like the Mall of America near Minneapolis. The Mall of America has rides, a Hooters restaurant, a sports bar called Players, and over 350 stores to choose from. It’s definitely not your average mall, so it’s no wonder people love to
spend their whole day just hanging around the mall. In David Guterson’s essay, “Enclosed, Encyclopedic, Endured: One Week at the Mall of America”, a woman from Minnetonka named Kathleen, claims to have a serious shopping “thing” was quoted saying, “I can’t go a week without buying new clothes. I’m not fulfilled until I buy something new” (Guterson 560). I would definitely recommend this woman take the shopaholic quiz, even though it’s pretty obvious that she is one. Even the government is pushing people to go shopping.

The government has been encouraging people to go shopping to keep the economy from going into a recession. On February 13, 2008, President Bush signed the *Economic Stimulus Act of 2008*, which enabled the government to send out stimulus checks up to $600 for individuals and $1,200 for married couples (“Economic”). In addition to this, an additional $300 would be given for each eligible child (“Economic”). It makes me wonder, if the economy is in such bad shape, how can the government afford to just give money away to go shopping? There are also people who believe that “the value of Jones’s stimulus check is offset by the greater taxes paid by Smith” (“foolishness”). I don’t really think that giving one person a check to spend on whatever they want would raise another person’s taxes. Higher taxes won’t stop those people from going out and spending their stimulus check. And if they put that money toward their credit cards, they could use their cards to shop online.

Due to the invention of the World Wide Web, or more fondly known as the Internet, shopping has become infinitely more convenient. If you don’t want to actually leave your house to go to the mall, you can bring the mall to you by turning on the computer and bringing up your favorite store’s website. Most department stores now have their own websites and have more merchandise on the site than in the actual store. People are also more likely to find the sizes they are looking for on the website than in the store. I know that I shop online when I have no way of
getting over to the mall. Shopping on websites like Ebay.com or Amazon.com is great because you can buy things at discounted prices. A person could go to their school’s bookstore to buy the book *Convergences: Message, Method, Medium* for their English 155 class for about $65. Or you could visit Amazon.com where the book sells for $55.57. Then instead of standing in line at the bookstore for hours with everyone else, you just have to wait a couple of days to get the book in the mail. Be it by the click of your mouse or flipping on the TV, you don’t have to leave home to shop.

There are certain channels on TV that are dedicated entirely to selling a person something that they most likely do not need to buy. The Home Shopping Network is one of those channels. They tell you how many of something they have for sale, how much the item is, and how long you have to buy it. They always make it sound like you need that stained glass flamingo lamp when in reality it will most likely end up in a box in your garage awaiting the next garage sale the next time you rearrange your house. Plus, there are always those infomercials that are trying to sell you the latest vegetable dicer or exercise machine during your favorite TV show. They employ extensive demonstrations of the product along with celebrity testimonials to make it appear that you can’t live without this product. In every one of these, whether it is one of the 30-second sound bytes, or full production-quality paid program, you can expect “the hook.” The commercials always say, “But wait! Order in the next 30 minutes and you get this special price/offer.” Or, “Order now and we’ll double your order, for free!” Some are channels that dedicate entire time blocks to selling one specific product. The sole purpose of these commercials is to try and persuade the person who has too much money to buy things they will use once or twice and then throw in a box. Not to mention the fact they can begin to annoy pretty much everyone who watches TV with how frequently they run.
Some people may believe that malls are only for shopping, but that is definitely not the case. Most malls have food courts with only fast food, whereas others have places in the food court with actual china plates or restaurants like Claim Jumper or On the Border located on the outside of the mall. Certain malls also have hair salons, nail parlors, and play areas where you can take the kids as a reward for having to walk around the mall to go shopping along with you. And if you feel so inclined, you could go to Sears and have your own personal portrait taken or find one of the smaller photo studios that are usually hidden away in a corner of the mall. There are also a few malls that have those special massage tables where you lie down and the water moves back and forth over you. Or there are people with the massage chairs just waiting for a customer to come along and ask for a massage. The latest thing to do at the mall is for people to go to the mall and actually get their teeth whitened. Honestly, who would go and sit in the middle of the mall, where everyone can see them, and get their teeth whitened? Many people, including myself, would probably find it embarrassing to have your teeth whitened while sitting in front of one of the most popular stores, not to mention everyone else who decided to go shopping that day. You can pretty much find, get, or do anything and everything at the mall nowadays.

With the many malls, mini-malls, strip malls, shopping centers, mom and pop shops and just random stores in existence, now, shopping is one of the easiest things to do. Anyone can find a half decent excuse to shop, be it online, at the actual mall, or maybe at a swap meet. Playing or watching baseball is no longer the American pastime, it’s giving your checking account or credit card a nice workout. And apparently the country needs us to go shop to keep from going into another depression. Who knew? So next time you find yourself with a few extra bucks gathered together, help support your government and the economy by rushing to the
mall and spending it as fast as you possibly can. Spend it all in one place if you want. And remember that after Billy Mays has motivated you to whip out your credit card and you are hearing the announcer at the end of the commercial giving you all the details about ordering, the invitation to “call now” is the bugle call to support the American economy. Then follow the immortal words of Wilma Flintstone, and just “CHARGE IT!”
Work Cited


Guterson, David. “Enclosed, Encyclopedic, Endured: One Week at the Mall of America”.