

THE DIDEROT EFFECT - NERDWRITER

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGLo_VTVv8

Do you sometimes go out and buy many new things at the same time? People do this because of something called "The Diderot Effect"

Introduction - Partly Adapted from Simple English Wikipedia

https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diderot_effect

The Diderot effect is a phenomenon from sociology, which was named after Denis Diderot, who first described it in an essay. In the essay, Diderot talked about a robe he used to wear in the bathroom: The old robe was a little shabby (worn out), but useful. When he was given a new robe, the new robe was more shiny, and nicer, but it did not fit well with the other clothes. Now he had to buy many new, expensive things to match his new robe.



So, the Diderot effect describes that people often show a tendency to buy more goods after they bought one item. You buy one nice new thing so then you go out and buy more nice new things. It is said that they do this to restore the general perception they had about their belongings - "I am a stylish person so I buy many stylish things or I am a sporty person so I buy many sporty things".

WARM UP QUESTIONS

Have you bought anything recently that you are really happy with?

How is your home decorated? Would you like to change it?

Are you the type to buy cheap or buy expensive?

Has society become more or less consumerist? Is that a positive or negative change?

Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save one item. What would it be? Why?

"Keeping up with the Joneses" is an idiom which means to try and have everything your neighbour has. For example, all your friends have new iPhones, so you go and buy one too. Do you think you try to 'Keep up with the Joneses'?

Do you try to keep up to date with new fashions and technologies?

LISTENING QUESTIONS

What are the examples of the Diderot effect the narrator gives?

What new item did Diderot get?

What happened after he got the new item?

Why does stuff come in sets?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Do you think you have suffered from this effect? How so?

Have you ever bought something despite not having the money?

What can you do to stop yourself falling into a spiral of consuming? What do you do to stop yourself spending money?

VOCABULARY

Find some example sentences for these words:

Ethos

Grab Feverishly

Cohesive

Laments

Salve

Namesake

TRANSCRIPT

Have you ever bought something nice for your apartment or your room put it in place and then had the thought “Jesus, my apartment is a piece of shit!”. Or maybe you bought a new shirt and suddenly you're grabbing for it all the time waiting for that day in the rotation when you can wear it again tired of everything you already own!

The name for this social consumerist phenomenon is called the Diderot Effect and it works on two principles.

Firstly, all the products purchased by a consumer aim to be cohesive with that consumer's identity.

All the products that they already own.

Second, that the introduction of a new, atypical product can trigger a process of spiralling consumption.

In other words, as much as we decry the dangers of a materialist society the things we own comprise a significant part of who we are. Our identities are tied up in our clothes and our gadgets and the Fuego Shui of our furniture.

More than anything else we try to find a unity in our possessions. And by extension try to convince ourselves that our identity itself is uniform. The effect was first identified by its namesake, french philosopher Denis Diderot, in an essay called Regrets On Parting With My Old Dressing Gown.

Don't know why I did an English accent there, he's French!

In the essay Diderot is given a brand new scarlet dressing gown to replace his worn out one. But he soon laments that his new item shames all his other possessions. So he goes on a rampage and replaces everything he owns with beautiful new things eventually putting himself in serious debt.

I was the absolute master of my old robe, he says. I have become the slave of my new one.

The Diderot effect is at the core of the materialist ethos. Proved by the family feeling of keeping up with the Joneses to either fit in or outclass those around us and in the media. We are not capable of stopping at simply upgrading or updating one corner of what we own. We grab feverishly at a better kind of unity. Even at the expense of our financial well being.

This poses a problem for companies that produce goods. This is why stuff usually comes in sets at a discount. That's why IKEA showcases full rooms in their Disneyland like tour of the kinds of people you can be. Can we be blamed for this a materialistic cravings in us? Well, the answer is definitely YES. But a soft yes. A soft yes for we who are pampered rats within the capitalist construct. Modern men and women labouring as Ross Cole says “under the illusion of having a self”. A cohesive uniform identity it seems to us might be some salve against the chaotic truth that reality is as fatuous and self constructed as we are. One day we will have strike out against this insane capitalist system. Until then the IKEA spring living room set is as good as crack!