

Pleasure Revenge - Hedonism Fighting Back

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Prescription, prohibition, protection from the seductions of a no-holds-barred modern lifestyle – today's European consumer is exposed to a bewildering mix of messages and can react with disobedience, rebellion and sedition.

Key trends

Smoking/non-smoking;
How green is my car?
Small indulgences;
Sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll.

Commercial opportunities

An entrepreneur can come into a trend several years after it started and still do very well - if he or she has good ideas and executes them inventively. You don't want to get in too late, of course. But waiting until the second or third year of a trend can be smart. You'll see if it is in fact a trend or merely a fad. If you decide it's a trend, then look for creative ways to work within the trend;

As fast food companies are likely to be subject to increased regulatory control in the future, they could increase their efforts to make consumers feel that they are having a self-indulgent time, but without increasing their weight. Offer delicious food – but with reduced portion sizes, low-calorie and reduced-fat ingredients, and without making it into an educational exercise;

Greener cars! Cars are important status symbols and seem to be tied up with a person's identity and private space. They will be the last thing people will do without, long after they have stopped smoking and drinking;

The hedonistic trend – both in food consumption and car use – will not be bucked purely with moral arguments. Real and fun alternatives must be offered. Where the quality of public spaces improve, people are more likely to walk or cycle – this is borne out in countries like the Netherlands and Germany where cycle lanes, lighting and cleanliness in the streets have been consistently improved. Increasing sports and dance facilities and affordable public transport will be an incentive for people to exercise more and use their cars less.

Background

It is well known that we live in a media age where celebrity-inspired fads and trends quickly take over whole strata of society. In their wake, attempts at –everybody beautiful–, dieting and glowing health leave untold failures, frustrations and heartbreak. Warnings directed at young people in advertising and from teachers to keep sex safe and eschew drugs and alcohol are contrasted with the reality of seduction and peer pressure. As a reaction to all the restrictions and prescriptions, Faith Popcorn has introduced the concept of Pleasure Revenge or, amusingly, Detox Retox. Taking their cue from celebrity culture, people will rid themselves of the ills of over-indulgence, only to binge again, with all such cures having a transient character. Health care systems in Europe, panicking about the high cost of all the hedonism, become the new Big Brother, and undesirable – lifestyles are highly monitored. "Only the rich will afford to binge," noted Popcorn, as they are the only ones who are able to bear the consequences from their own fortunes.

Smoking/non-smoking

While the Italians, the British, the Irish and the Spanish – notorious smoking nations – have largely accepted – and what is more, seen the sense of smoking bans, these have caused a wave of rebellion among the otherwise obedient German citizens. It spawned an endless number of websites, pressure groups and smokers' clubs. The notion of pleasure revenge (Genuss ohne Reue) seems to rule, causing German bloggers to call those who would impose such a ban –"Gesundheitsfaschisten" - Health Fascists. Obviously there is pleasure to be found in choosing your own way of dying! The Berlin Genussinitiative internet site alone has links to over a dozen websites united in smoking rebellion. The growing hedonist rebellion is not limited to the great unwashed. In Bavaria the head of a local hunting club, a pillar of society, was reported to be in court for disregarding the smoking ban in the clubhouse. Most recently, the German Supreme Court had to rule the hastily established small –smokers' clubs– as legal. In the wake of the smoking debate, the hoary old chestnut of legalizing cannabis was re-introduced – just as unlikely to become reality as a reversal of the European ban on public smoking. At the bottom of it all seems to be a feeling of –enough nannying already–, expressed in the blog of Swiss-German politician, Claudio Zanetti, who is outraged about the trimming of personal freedom and responsibility. Interestingly, he has never smoked in his life.

How green is my car?

One of the most amusing pleasure revenges is the motor car. It inspires people to heights of self deception that are lacking in other consumer areas. While most sensible Europeans now subscribe to the notion of reducing their carbon footprint, they cling to their cars like life rafts. The question is now how to make the car greener. Once it became clear that so-called bio-fuels were using up the dinner of someone in a developing country, hope is now pinned on the electric engine. The website BigGreenSwitch predicts that "in the future, when the combustion engine has finally been assigned to the history books, you may well find yourself travelling to your nearest shopping centre by electric car. When you park, you'll plug in your car, do your shopping and find your car charged and ready for your return trip." In the meantime, green beauty contests for cars have resulted in Toyota's Yaris model being elected the Green Car of the Year 2008 by the Environmental Transport Association (ETA), with the Honda Civic Hybrid as runner-up, and the Dodge SRT-10 sports car criticised as the least green car.

Small indulgences

Small indulgences are what Faith Popcorn has identified as the compromise a human being needs to function. Small indulgences mean that even if we can't afford a Porsche, maybe we can afford a Porsche watch. Stressed-out consumers are rewarding themselves with countless little, affordable treats - from a good cigar to Godiva chocolates. Or they may go out and jog for an hour, then go home and eat a tub of ice cream or indulge in a roast pork meal - fitness and fatness united in one person. This attitude says 'to hell with it, I'm wearing my mink coat,' according to Popcorn. A German futurologist has his own definition for a rebel state of mind he calls soft individualism: not quite as radical and egotistic as Popcorn's pleasure revenge, but rather a passive rebellion against diets, health prescriptions and general "good sense".

Sex and drugs

and rock'n'roll are the main weapons the thirties-and-under generations use to put excitement into their lives regimented by pressure from school, pressure to have a career and pressure to invest for their old age. Harking back to the much freer hippy and baby boom generations, rock and pop festivals such as the Danish Roskilde festival, the German Chiemsee Reggae Fest or the UK Glastonbury Festival remain one of the last refuges for hedonists. In most European countries "with the UK leading the way" youth binge drinking has become a major problem that expresses young people's own form of pleasure revenge. More broadly speaking, "pleasure revenge means consumers are tired of the rules that restrain them and they are enjoying forbidden pleasures", according to guru Popcorn. It finds its expression in smoking or overeating despite health warnings, but also "and more riskily" in having unprotected sex in the face of a thousand condom recommendations, or in taking drugs which are forbidden yet glamorously endorsed by a range of icons, from the old pot-smoking hippy rock star to the Wall Street coke addicts of 1980s films to Amy Winehouse.

Outlook

In her Brain Reserve Forecast for 2008, Faith Popcorn uses the concept of "Mafia Brands" to predict that consumers who take the Pleasure Revenge route will "plunge headlong into the din of the brandscape", using their brands for "protection". She sees brands progressing from ad buyers to content providers, and consumers expecting them to keep out competing sources of noise, making 'Shelter from the Storm' an important functional brand benefit. Brands will provide the certainty that a particular soft drink tastes way better than alcohol as long as it is organic, a particular burger is scrumptious and also good for you and that it is quite all right to drive your car because it will actually lessen your carbon footprint.

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