The Ultimate Quick Fix

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

When people have a little extra money the first thing they think of is go shopping. Thanks to our culture of compulsive consumerism, shopping is in fact number one on the list of pleasurable activities. When people are depressed often they fight the blues by browsing around the mall and buying a load of unnecessary things. When this goes out of hand, shopping becomes an addiction and people become a little insane buying all sorts of rubbish and getting into debt, which of course, puts them back into another depression.



Not all shoppers buy for pleasure, though. Sometimes they get sucked into the vortex of a shop and then just don't know how to get out. This is facilitated by the over-solicitous salesperson who will follow and hover offering their unsolicited opinion: "Ma'am this is the latest design, everyone is buying it; this is hundred percent foreign made." For the discerning customer the idea that all and sundry is wearing a particular design may be a turn off. But the sense of obligation has been created and the shopper feels compelled to buy at least a scarf or a tie pin from that shop just in order not to hurt the salesperson's feelings. Individuals in this category often come back home with arms full of clothes and accessories that will eventually be shoved into the dungeons of the wardrobe, never to be seen for the next fifteen years.

Grocery shopping may be defined as shopping for essentials but many a market-goer has come back with inordinate amounts of say, red spinach and shorputi fish (items outside the list) only to be greeted with murderous looks from whoever is in charge at home. After the inevitable inquisition it will be established that the persuasiveness of the salesman was just irresistible – *how can you say no to fresh fish and veggies?*

Seasoned shoppers, however, are quite good at resisting the overtures of persistent salespeople. Professional sari shoppers for instance, will go from shop after shop making the salesmen take out a hundred saris, only to reject them all and cruelly go to the shop next door. All this despite the salesmen's efforts - draping the feminine garment on and offering cold Fanta, hot coffee, even chotpoti, to the ladies. While it may be mortifying for the non-professional shopper (read anguished husband) accompanying these individuals, one cannot help but feel a certain admiration for these militant shoppers for their ability to resist the most compelling of sales pitches.

The happiest equation is between shopaholics who have access to endless funds and the salespersons who will be in seventh heaven when these customers walk into the shop. Some of these individuals will just point at the items and ask for ten of each, flashing their gold or platinum credit cards or just handing in the wad of cash at the counter.

There are shoppers who are brand-obsessed and those who will buy things that are only outrageously priced and therefore have high snob value. These are of course the salespeople's most favourite people.

Signs that say 'SALE' or '50% off' have a hypnotic effect on shoppers. Like crazed bees to the honeycomb they will swoop on the shops and buzz around in a frenzy, shoving away contenders and snatching all the goods they can lay their hands on. Why? Because they're on *sale* silly.

The bane of shopping assistants is the indecisive shopper. These individuals will spend an hour trying on two outfits, almost buy the first one, then hanker for the second one, go back to the first one and finally reject both because something else has caught their eye.

So why do people like to shop? Shopping gives instant gratification, a sense of power, confidence and the idea that those shiny new things will somehow bring significant improvements in one's life.

In the film 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' based on Sophie Kinsella's novel, the protagonist, a hardened shopping addict sums it all up:

"When I shop, the world gets better, and the world is better, but then it's not, and I need to do it again."