

I Haul, Therefore I Am

By Vanessa Friedman, *The New York Times*, November 27th, 2024

In mid-November Amazon introduced a new storefront. Known as Amazon Haul, it promises “a place to discover even more affordable fashion, home, lifestyle, electronics and other products with ultralow prices.” Everything on the site is \$20 or less. The offerings all come from third-party sellers and take two or so weeks for delivery.

5 Is it about something more complicated and potentially insidious than just saving? Maria Boschetti, a spokeswoman for Amazon, said that the company was simply giving customers more of what they wanted. They declined to comment on the inspiration behind the “Haul” moniker, but presumably that’s the whole point of the concept.

10 The term “haul” became popular on YouTube in the early 2000s as a reference to fashion and beauty buying sprees. Vloggers would share their purchases with their followers, tapping into the growing sense of shopping as vicarious thrill. Facilitated by the dual rise of fast fashion with its emphasis on novelty for all and the explosion of social media and influencer culture, hauls became a form of performance art and shared practice, a cultural phenomenon. You can spend hours staring avidly at strangers surrounded by veritable mountains of new things.

15 “It became almost a human right to participate in consumer culture,” said Lucie Greene, the founder of the trend forecasting firm Light Years. “We’ve gotten to the point where you feel left out of society if you are not part of the shopping cycle.” And the shopping cycle is now less a cycle than a constant stream, a fire hose of product.

20 To be sure, there is nothing wrong with shopping, nothing wrong with the concept of treats and extras. But hauls are the shopping equivalent of a dopamine-chasing overdose, which is less about any one thing than about the sheer number of things. It’s the elevation of quantity over quality, muchness as an end in itself.

“It accelerates the consumption addiction,” Ms. Greene said. That addiction isn’t officially a part of the DSM-5, the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, but it is recognized by the journal *World Psychiatry*, among other official bodies.

25 By embracing hauls, we are training ourselves, in a Pavlovian way, to chase the thrill of delivery, the joy of unboxing. By sharing endless haul videos, we are seducing other people into sharing our compulsion for more and more and more. But by focusing on the stuff — on the pleasure of piles, the allure of excess — each thing becomes less important, which means it is even more disposable.

There’s no question it is an issue: in terms of the human labor that almost always bears the brunt of low-cost production, the chemicals and waste and carbon emissions involved, and the piles of disposable stuff that ends up in landfill.

35 “It’s the privatization of profit and the socialization of cost,” said Ken Pucker, an adjunct professor at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth.

Not surprisingly, an anti-haul movement has grown in response, at least in a limited way. The hashtag #antihaul has almost 3,000 posts on TikTok; #deinfluence, about 4,500. There are even #thrifthauls, which is somewhat confusing, since they celebrate getting a lot of new old stuff, which may be better than a lot of *new* new stuff but still puts the emphasis on “a lot.”

40 Treats are treats precisely because they aren’t available all the time. Shopping sprees used to be exciting because they were rare. Haul may be a good name for a store — it may even be the store we not just want, but deserve. But it’s also a “Black Mirror” episode waiting to happen.