

Short-term lover or love of your life?

An in-depth look at the emotional connection between shoes and people

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the emotional connections we make with shoes and other products. It goes in depth into the nature of emotion, how it forms our choices and how it shapes our personal and social identity. It also looks into our base needs and discovers how shoes cover these. Next it dives into desire and love, and how these factors affect our purchases and the post purchase feelings. The article finds that products make a narrative to the canvas that is our “self”. It also finds how connecting to products is important for the feeling of security and wellbeing. To make an emotional product, the product needs to cover as many basic needs as possible, differentiate you from a group of people and at the same time make you happy and appraised by members in your group.

KEYWORDS : Emotions, human needs, QOL, human behavior, love, desire, self, post-purchase, trends, TPD4505

1. INTRODUCTION

*The eyes can mislead, a smile can lie,
but the shoes always tell the truth*

Greg House

Where did you buy those shoes? Human fascination for shoes seems to be never-ending. The objects you cover your feet with apparently show who you are, where you come from and all your opinions: they are like a speed train into your brain. But are they really? And why did you buy exactly those shoes? It seems like everyone nowadays can mention one specific pair of shoes that really blew them of their feet, and they just had to have them. And they most probably got them too! Why on Earth do we feel this emotional connection to our shoes and go to such lengths to get them?

This article takes a closer look at the connections we have, and make, to shoes and other products. People seem to connect emotionally to some of the objects they purchase. The big question is how this connection is made, and why doesn't it happen to all the products we buy? To understand this, we need to go deep into the physical construction of man. Here we will find where emotions stem from, and how they affect the choices we make. In addition human psychology has to be investigated, to understand the overall composition of the emotional purchasing cycle. It seems like shoe pairs are often changed out relatively fast by the consumer, and other pairs are bought. Some are so loved by the consumer that they are worn to pieces. Many experience a sense of loss as the shoes flake of their feet, but why? Shoes are just shoes after all, aren't they?

In short the main focus of this article is to answer the question: "What makes a shoe pair "the love of your life", what needs are covered by these that the "short-term" ones don't?

Thus, we first look at the basic construction of human choices and how emotions affect these. Second, we take a closer look at human needs, how they are fulfilled and why this is particularly important for the wellbeing of man. We then piece together human identity, on both a personal and a social basis before taking a closer look at impulse buying. To understand what makes a product attractive, we look into what attracts our senses, from appearance of objects. Finally, we have a discussion where we compare and clarify gaps and overlaps through all the information we have found. This will help us get a better understanding of how to make the products of the future: emotional products.

This paper is an introduction to the large field of emotional aspects of human purchases, with design students as the target group.

1.2 Research methodology

The information behind this article was found mainly through the library at NTNU and Scopus, which is an internet based search engine for scientific reports.

2. Human behavior and needs

2.1 Emotions and cognition: the why and the how!

Cognition is that way humans process information, impulses and takes action and make decisions based on these. In addition cognition deals with attention, perception, learning, recognition, problem solving and language processing. [31] In other words cognition is our way of processing the outer world and react or stimuli that we absorb. So where do emotions come into the picture?

One way of thinking of emotions are that they are fired up by our awareness of ourselves,

feelings and outer sensory images [6] Recent studies shows that emotions play a bigger role in decision making than previously thought. Logic and rationality has until recently been thought of as the proper, and only, way to decision making. Philosophers like Descartes, who severed the link between mind and body, and earlier philosophers stopped the research within the emotional field for around 300 hundred years. Later emotions were looked upon as after-effects of decisions taken by the subject [5] Study done in recent times however object to this and give empirical data based on tests that this is not so. Emotions take an active part in how we act, actually being the driving force behind decisions. [2 & 3] Emotions thereby affect the mood were in, also when we're shopping, leading to mood-influenced signals sent to our cognitive centers.

The physical connection between these factors lies within the brain. They take place in different sectors of the brain, but are in contact through a system of nerves. Emotions evaluate the urgency of stimulus, both from within our self, in the way of thoughts/images, and also from the outer world. The emotional system processes this information subconsciously, and not in all situations. It's believed that through a series of networks in the brain, going through an area called the amygdala, emotions affect cognition, and may also work the other way around. [2 & 3]

A scenario that most people probably can relate to is the moment when you see a shoe or other products you like. You might feel a bubbly feeling in your stomach, if you like the shoe. No matter what the feeling you have, chemicals are released in your brains imposing an emotional response. The amygdala, which is area in our brain buried beneath the temporal lobes, both sends signals to the decision making parts of our brain, give us emotions during experiences and provides the rest of the brain with signals as well.[2 & 3] Linquist et al also states that the amygdala has a direct connection to our relevance detection[3]. Emotion affects our perceptions and memories. Memories you have can be triggered by having the same feelings at a

point later in life. Also, when you think of a memory, the emotion you felt at the point you experienced it, can be felt anew. Thus you relive previous moments from your life more clearly [4].

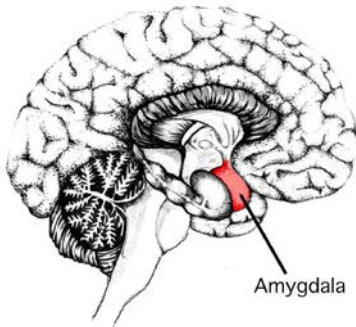


Figure 1: Where it all happens

There has also been found that there are different types of emotions: biological, social, cognitive and moral. As stated by Buck [5] they configure like this:

- Biological emotions: such as arousal, reward-punishment, fear and anger, and love and bonding: based on specific neuro-chemical systems.
- Social emotions: such as pride and guilt: based biologically on attachment.
- Cognitive emotions: such as interest, boredom, and curiosity: based biologically on expectancy.
- Moral emotions: based on a combination of social attachment and expectancy.

This makes up a complex emotional system, that has to be further research.

2.2 Human needs

To be able to understand how and why people get so emotionally attached to a certain pair of shoes or things, we need to take a closer look at our ground needs. Generally, human needs are commonly defined as QOL, quality of life. QOL is meant as an indicator on how well human needs are met, and also how satisfied or dissatisfied a person is in their life domains. [16] Recently

there has been several suggestions of how the needs cycle looks, as the previous way of calculating this was by separating quantifiable social economic indicators (QOL) and the “subjective well-being” (SWB), which are self-reported levels of happiness, pleasure and fulfillment.[17 & 18] The new alternative way of measuring QOL also includes identity issues and psychological *security*. [16]

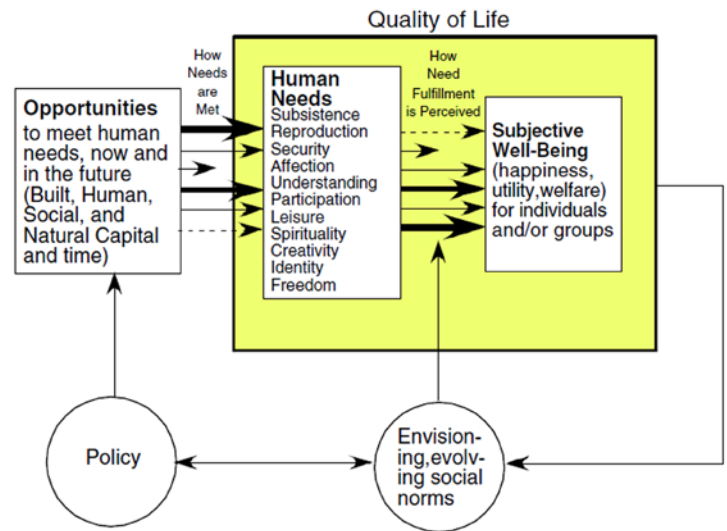


Figure 2: The new QOL cycle

The newly defined QOL cycle also has new definition of the needs. They are explained in table 1 on page 4.

As we can see human needs are quite extensive. Taking a closer look at table 1, needs of affection includes being attached to people and *things*. Thus two of our basic needs are people and things we surround ourselves with. Also identity, recognition and creativity are needs that all humans possess.

Table 1 – List of human needs (*denotes the most important input)

| Human needs | Descriptors (direct satisfiers) |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Subsistence | Food, shelter, vital ecological services (clean air and water, etc...) healthcare, rest |
| Reproduction | Nurturing of children, pregnant women Transmission of the culture Homemaking |
| Security | Enforced predictable rules of conduct Safety from violence at home and in public Security of subsistence into the future Maintain safe distance from crossing critical ecological thresholds Stewardship of nature to ensure subsistence into the future Care for the sick and elderly |
| Affection | *Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence." (Nussbaum) Solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, passion, receptiveness |
| Understanding | Access to information Intuition and rationality |
| Participation | To act meaningfully in the world Contribute to and have some control over political, community, and social life Being heard Meaningful employment Citizenship |
| Leisure | Recreation, relaxation, tranquility, access to nature, travel |
| Spirituality | Engaging in transcendent experiences Access to nature Participation in a community of faith |
| Creativity/emotional Identity | Play, imagination, inventiveness, artistic expression Status, recognition, sense of belonging, differentiation, sense of place |

So what happens when your needs are not satisfied in some way? Research has found that there are psychological costs, even though the people strive to achieve it. [1] When not fulfilling needs, a subject might become depressed and/or experience bad health.

2.3 Identity

Humans are highly complex creatures in the way they view the world. They are highly sociable, wanting to be part of a group they feel accepted and respected in. At the same time they want to be different. So in what way do shoes affect this ambiguous situation?

Several theories believe that humans actually have two forms of selves: one social self and one personal. The social self is defined by the similarities to other group members of a person's circle, community and the like. Personal identity

on the other hand is what makes a person unique and differentiated from other people. To belong to a group though, you can still be slightly different, for example in the way a person dresses or thinks, but have to be closer to the group they are in, than to other groups with other styles and ways of being. [19] An example is to look at a group of grungy hipsters contra suit clad office workers: they just don't fit in a room together. The office workers are one group and the hipsters are another. Some of the men might think alike, have the same set of values, but look totally different. If you base the differentiation on looks, they don't seem any way alike. On the other hand, if you surround these men by several hundreds of older ladies, they would feel closer to each other than to the rest of the collective group. [18.] Personal identity as defined by Belk , is a person's "feeling of self" excluding all "self" based traits that can be applied by other persons and can be seen in cultures. The subjective self-changes over time and experiences you go through, even though you have a core self. [25] Attaining objects are added to the core self, and become part of an extended self.

2.4 The story of my life: who's the author?

In the face of history, we make our own stories. Objects are part of the story, and help form the individual's character and identity [7] The items show others and also yourself who you are: in other words shoes are one of the objects that convey and extend our self-concepts [8]

One person , one canvas. The story that has been written on the canvas reflects who you are, your identity. All the memories and key episodes in a person life are included on this canvas, and make a story. The continuous "story" is who you are, connecting one's self to the past, present and into an imagined future. [26] All the things you surround yourself with are added to this canvas, and become part of your "self". These are used to strengthen, expand and widen their sens of self. [25]

The expansion of self, and the dependency of physical things start early in a person's life.

In the United States there was a survey done about six-month infants attachment to security blankets. There was found a clear preference amongst the infants, where the babies had strong emotional ties to one of their security blankets. This was amongst more than 70% of the babies. They found that the blanket gave a mental feeling of comfort that helped the infant to handle the transgression away from their parents and into the outer world. [9]

Wallendorf states in her article that people also attach to objects as *symbols* of security later in life. The objects also project ones connection and disconnection to certain groups in society, and expresses the persons "self" [10] The concept of stating the "self" through objects is universal.[11] Objects stores meanings, losing them implies a loss of social standing/status as you lose a part that stated who you are[8]

Consumerism

3.1 Consumer behaviour

So what actually makes people use their hard earned money, a limited resource, on products and other needs they have to prioritize? A poor student holds up a pair of high-heeled shoes, considering spending half her income on them. She dreams about the day she wears them, dreading the shortcomings of food the rest of the month. She buys them anyways. She dreamt about those shoes for months.

To understand this situation, and the reasons behind her choice, you have to look at the *ultimate function* of this purchase: proximate and ultimate causes.[20]

A proximate cause is here an immediate feeling or thought. If you would ask her why she bought them, she would probably answer: "They are pretty, and I need new shoes"

An ultimate reason is here defined as the underlying evolutionary needs. In this case they might be making friends, attaining status, acquiring a mate or keeping a mate. [21]

Consumer research today mostly focus on the

proxy needs, which in short leads to fast purchase, as the goal of consumerism is to make people feel good [21]

3.2 Impulsive purchases and desire

Desire in consumerism theories, is defined as a passion born between consumption fantasies and social situational contexts.[23]

As you stand outside the window, drooling, just seeing the perfect pair of shoes, you're actively making a dream world in your mind. The use, feeling, comfort, sexiness, is all part of the illusion, and you slowly transform the shoes into something totally different. As your fantasies plunge further, people and situations are added. Thus they become a dream; a dream you want to take part in. [23] Desire thus transforms the objects, giving them mystery and attraction.

When it comes to the ground reasons of desire, studies show that the underlying goals are connected to otherness. Otherness as in differentiating from others and at them same time going through a transformation by purchasing the object. Another ground desire is the wish to get responses and acceptance from other people. The responses from people stems in the wish to be noticed and thus achieve feelings of support, sexual arousal, admiration, love and comfort amongst others. The object, by making people respond to you, makes you part of the others social group. Anticipated feelings that the consumer has to the product also include joy, comfort, relaxation, harmony and the like, so the person-object expectations end in use of the products.

Sometimes the desire leads to impulse purchases, where you just "have to have it, now!" You're looking for instant satisfaction. There is a breach in resolve and you buy the product, with pure desire. But what do you actually feel after such moments of breach in resolve? Research show that most often than not, the feeling after this is lowered life satisfaction [24], and angst-ridden agitation. [23]

A study has been done by Baumeister and his team, about the factors that lead up to impulsive purchases. Even though the customer has long term goals about saving money, he or she might get a breach in self-control, and buy the item no matter what. His study showed that control over impulses, like buying the first and the best dress, was noticeably lower if the subject was under emotional distress. To feel better the customer bought an item, thus heightening his/her spirits. The study also showed that self-control deteriorated, if the customer had had several lapses during the day. The customer lost count over how many times he elapsed, and self-control was drastically lowered.[22]

Often a purchase of goods is guilty pleasure. The guilty part is based on the expectations to morality, and the fact that you are doing something socially despicable by giving in to the desirable emotions. These emotions stem in primal emotions, connecting you to the animal world [24]. The animal world and human connection to this, is disdained in several cultures. Giving in to pleasure is animalistic, a social sin.

3.3 Love

“I love to play basketball” and “I love my bike” are terms that most people have probably heard. “Love” is present in our language on many levels, and is actually a common consumption-related feeling/emotion as well as interpersonal [27]. When a person loves another, there is a fusion with identities, and one’s “self” grows to include the other persons self. [28] This means that one’s identity absorbs and expands to include both. Study has shown that special possessions also take a part here, and the love the consumer feels for this object has certain similarities to the interpersonal type of love.[29]

3.4 Post purchase feelings

Herein lays the big deciding factor: is my shoe purchase a one-of a kind or will these shoes be forgotten? After purchasing your shoe pair, the expectations are ever prevalent. What will the

others say? Are these shoes sturdy enough? Will they last or did I make a bad decision?

Based on the research of Wetbrook, there are three possible outcomes of purchase that can be conducted by a customer: satisfaction appraisal, seller directed complaint actions and word of mouth transmissions. There can be both good and bad reactions in all fields, at the same time. This means that even if you like the shoes, what you say and ultimately feel might be differing. Satisfaction appraisal is expressed if the post experience of the product is as good or better, than your expectations were. The result can both be good, neutral or negative.

Seller directed complaint is experienced when the product is not as expected, after positive stimuli from the seller at the time of purchase. Your expectations are higher than the satisfaction you feel using the item, post-purchase. [22]

Word of mouth is the informal communication between the consumer and other consumers. Here the main consumer has three possible ways of communication:

- product involvement- talks about the purchase and tells everyone what pleasure the consumer gets
- self-involvement- the consumer looks for positive feedback, attention, recognition or status amongst her/his peers
- other-involvement- the consumer shares her/his experience with the product, when in contact with others

The outcome of a purchase is thus fragments, depending on fulfilled needs and expectations.

An interesting further point of research here is to go further into understanding how much needs to be covered before the product is defined as “love for life”.

4. Appearance of items

4.1 The six roles of appearances

The way a product looks will most probably decide if you buy it or not. If a shoe looks like

something you wouldn't touch with a pair of pliers, you won't buy them for yourself. Belk mention that items you don't feel attachment to, will not be added into your "self", your canvas. [25]

As described by Creusen et al. product appearance has six different roles

1. communication of aesthetics
2. symbolic
3. functional
4. ergonomic information
5. attention drawing
6. categorization

They further describe the roles like this: Aesthetics is the pleasure you feel seeing a product, without thinking about practical use. This feature is connected to feelings: you can like the looks of something even if it's useless in all other ways than being attractive. Unity, symmetry and proportions are important when it comes to aesthetics. This trinity is also affected by color, as color changes the impression of form. The way a shoe looks might place it in a group, which is called prototypically. This has large social connections, as you can connect to a larger group by purchasing products that are used by these.

The symbolic value of a product is conveyed by appearance. The appearance expresses certain feelings, like cheap, friendly, rough and the like. A lot of the symbolic meanings are also placed upon products by the outer world: media, country of origin and the type of people who are known to use them. The symbolism behind color can mean different things in different countries, and is also applied to understanding products. Symbolic values change over time, as trends in consumer preferences change over time. A shirt from the 80's might not be as "hot" now as it was 30 years ago.

The functional value is communicated in an instant, conveying to the user how the product can be used. It also reflects what quality the item

possesses, leaving an impression that has to be tested through use and over time.

Ergonomic information slightly in the same way as the functional value, but refers more to how well a product is adapted to the use by humans, and how easy the usage experience is. A shoe might look good to walk in, which is subconsciously noticed by the consumer.

Attention drawing is the products ability to stand out from the surrounding products. Even if you're in a store, just for a second, subconsciously you might notice a specific product, even if you have multitudes of other products around it. A good example for this is going into a phone store, just breezing through, not really noticing the products displayed. Subconsciously your mind is collecting data, and you have already chosen your next telephone, for further purchase.

If you're able to place a shoe in a specific category after a first glance, for example sneakers, the designers have done something right. The sneakers resemble other sneakers, and are placed in the same category. Brand differentiating, and association, is when you can discern that the sneaker has similarities to the specific brand that has produced them. [30]

The six roles can be prevalent in a product at the same time, and conveys the whole impression a consumer gets when facing a product.

4.2 Trends

Trends are behavioral consumer patterns, that change over time.[32] For an new object to be accepted by the consumers it has to have some cultural and historical continuity. This means that consumers have to recognize the products pasts, as in be able to categorize it. In fashion for example, this result in new products that are a step beyond what was previously accepted, but at the same time it is recognizable as part of a group, or a differentiation of one. Successful new styles are rarely majorly different from what was popular before the time of

release, instead they are an “evolutionary outgrowth and elaboration of previously existing fashions” [33, p.32]

The evolution of new styles in products, have a similar growth pattern as human uniqueness seeking. People don't like to feel similar, neither too dissimilar to others, to feel socially satisfied.[34]

Shoes follow trends as all the garments other we dress in. Trends manifest in fashion, which in itself is an adaptation of style over a certain period of time [33].

New products that are released follow the “spirit of the times”, zeitgeist. Zeitgeist is a definition for the type aesthetics that are in the wind at any given time.[14 & 15] As a consumer you subconsciously understand and react to zeitgeist, in reality you react to commerce, who is the makers of zeitgeist. [13]

Discussion

The main goal of this article was to answer the question:

“What makes a shoe pair “the love of your life”, what needs are covered by these that the “short-term” ones don't?

This article was also a quest to find the products of the future: emotional products.

Through this research article we have touched several aspects concerning human needs, both physical and emotional. We ultimately wanted to find an answer to what made one product a long lasting and loved companion. What exactly did these shoes have or cover that other shoes didn't have?

There seems to be many reasons and most of all many combinations. There are three major actors that we have seen again and again, and these are emotions, needs and identity. Peoples search for their own “self” start as fast as they start connecting to objects, which was at the age of 6 months. Maybe this connection starts earlier,

there might more research on this field, but I didn't feel there was any need to look into infants, as they are not prime consumers yet. On the other hand, the reason they connect to things like pieces of cloth, is the feeling of security. As we grow we also feel safety by having products. Objects physically help us, at the same time they are extensions of our “self” and they give us a social group identity.

Emotions are at the center of it all, as they take part in all our choices. Whatever you do it's emotional, and the happier the emotions, the stronger the memories. Memories are our “self” canvas, so they are important. The ultimate reason for buying something, at least the proxy reason, is happiness. We reach for a goal and go through great lengths to manage to reach them: spend our most valuable asset: time. Time to work so that we can satisfy our needs. All this to buy another pair of shoes. Based on the research about post effects of buying, most consumers say they don't feel happy or satisfied about their purchases. A possible solution to this is to make a continuation to the dreams and fantasies the customer has from before. This continues the travel and doesn't let go of desirable emotions the consumer has during the purchasing period.

Seduction seems to be a great ultimate reason for buying shoes: they convey parts of ourselves, and even if I didn't find any research on this, I suspect that shoes are extra important, as we are culturally taught by our parents and peers that “shoes make the man”. Having this over focus on what covers the feet of our peers, makes these the highways to the brain of the other person, as it is culturally expected. On the other hand a person might ignore the fact that everyone else follows this, and buy shoes that only shows his spite to the culture of shoes. There needs to be more research done in this field.

Looking at needs, they ultimately want us to be satisfied. Three cornerstones that we have touched upon in this article are the purchase of products, the making of our own identity and our relation to others. Even after purchasing shoes,

the main thing that pushed up the value for us, was the word of mouth from others. To be seen, appraised, desired. It seems that we need to cover our basic needs, if we don't we get mentally ill in the process of trying, and not managing to get there. [1]

Through purchases we want to differentiate ourselves from others. At the same time an underlying factor is that we want to belong to a group.

When it comes to identity, this is where all our values are put together, and we make our personal identity what we want. We do this by surrounding ourselves with certain kinds of people, by buying products that speak our values, or just look aesthetically pleasing. Or both. In the end it's the story we want our lives to be that are important. The dreams, as they lead us with and through desire. Interestingly we seem to lose interest in our dream objects after we get them. Research done by Haytko and Murray, finds that young adults experience a tension in their sense of identity. They strive to fit their view of themselves as unique beings, to their need to be in groups. This often leads into buying fashion apparel. [23] Maybe they continuously strive to re-make themselves as the tension doesn't disappear, and the only way they can please their eternal restlessness, is by changing their identity over and over again. Seeing that group members often are quite similar, one person trying to differentiate, creates a ripple in the group. This leads to the rest of the group purchasing products that are similar or slightly different from the one who started, or rather continued the cycle. As this seems to be a never-ending circle, the tension is constant.

The appearance of shoes awakes feelings in us, as that's what they are designed to do. As mentioned previously in the article objects store meanings, losing them implies a loss of social standing/status as you lose a part that states who you are [8]. If you look at it from a more personal perspective, it seems that our ability to form a sort of love with the special objects,

makes the loss even greater. You not only lose an object that is special to you in your group, but you actually lose a part of what you have made an extension of your personal self. If designers manage to make objects that are this heart wrenching, they have managed to make *the* products of someone's lives. A part of another person. The loss seems to be greater, if a person has a lot of needs covered by the product. There might be the social status, sexual attraction; it reflects your identity, gives you a feeling of security, in the case of shoes feel good to walk in. In addition customers probably had a phase before the purchase that was very memorable and desire filled, they hunted for the shoe. The loss of interest that sometimes comes after this phase was probably washed away by the collective need-filling properties of the shoes.

If we sum up the values and reasons for buying, and reflect upon shoes:

Short term shoes:

You didn't dream about them, didn't take time to purchase it in any special way, a lot of people might have these shoes, as they are trendy, and thus they don't differentiate you from others. On the other hand they make you part of a group, but people don't want to be too similar to each other. Might have been bought as a guilty pleasure, so sin and impulse are connected here.

The surprise here might be that: The shoes are more comfy than you expected. You had no specific needs you dreamt about, you didn't fantasize them into your narrative. So when there also seems to be a lot of people who tell you have nice shoes, you are surprised, and make up a story as you have them on your feet. After all it's your emotions that made this choice for you, desire, and maybe it was your inner "self" calling out to your universal needs. The shoes looked attractive in appearance, and might get you a mate in the long run. So the shoes have become long-term lovers.

Long-term shoes:

Your needs are fulfilled, you got a lot of praise, they are comfy, they are nice looking, the seller didn't heighten your expectations out of proportion and neither did you. These shoes have become a part of your canvas, and say everything about your values and you love them. They are differentiated just enough, but you're still part of a group. You felt great buying them, you heightened your social status, and have a girlfriend now.

Going short-term:

The shoes go to pieces or someone, or rather a lot of people start picking on you for your shoes, they are too far off. So you leave them in your closet.

Conclusion:

Long term shoes and other products:

- Have to have emotional value: either satisfy you and make you happy or that you make memorable connections to previous products and transfer these to the next product.
- Be differentiated, but not too much
- Must give you some sort of appraisal and thus status amongst others you consider part of your group or a group you want to be part of
- The customer must like the way they look
- Both the proxy and the underlying causes must be fulfilled
- They must give security or a feeling of safety
- They must fit the customer's identity

- Must satisfy as many basic QOL needs as possible

Emotional products have come to stay. We make decisions based on emotions, emotions form our memories, and our memories are our personal "self". Thus emotion-based products are the future of product design.

This article has not focused on gender or different age groups. In future articles this might be reasonable to look into, as there are a lot of clues towards purchasing differences between people and what they value in products, both based on gender and age.

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Figures:

Fig.1 & Fig.2. are taken from reference [16]

Table 1. is taken from reference [16], and shortened a bit