

Water bottle trends create waste, promote *consumerist* culture

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Customers dash desperately through the aisles of the bustling Target store, their eyes fixated on one destination: the gleaming rack of 40-ounce pink water tumblers. Their movements are frenzied as they elbow their way through the crowd, some nearly coming to blows on their way to obtain the coveted “Stanley” bottle.

Across the U.S., particularly in suburban pockets and college towns, a reusable water bottle known as the “Stanley cup” has become the accessory of the season.



What sets these bottles apart is their exceptional insulation capabilities along with the fact that they exist in every color imaginable.

According to The New York Times, customers have camped outside of retail stores for a chance to obtain limited-edition models. Others have taken to TikTok to boast extensive and colorful Stanley collections – some of which occupy entire kitchen shelves and “Stanley” dedicated cabinets.

Some enthusiasts, dubbed “Stanley Cup gurlies,” have even gone as far as to deck their water bottles

with charms, pom-poms and tiny backpacks.

However, this fervor for trendy water bottles comes with severe consequences as it not only harms the environment but perpetuates a culture of wasteful consumerism.

Each school year, there is a new over-hyped, highly sought after water bottle brand that every High School student must have. First, it was Hydro Flask, then Owala and now Stanley.

While the initial aim of popularizing reusable water bottles was to reduce single-use plastic, the current

reality falls short. Even though metal and ceramic water bottles are more eco-friendly, it is still just as – if not more – wasteful to have a collection of unused water bottles. According to the National Institute of Health, the manufacturing of metals stands for 40% of industrial greenhouse gas emissions. Most of the time, trending reusable bottles end up in the trash after a few years of use, according to The Guardian.

Influence of social media

Social media has undeniably transformed the

ways in which we hear about, purchase and promote products. According to Statista, 43% of consumers in the U.K. prefer to buy online rather than in-person. This has made us more susceptible to random buys.

Moreover, many popular social media platforms have incorporated features that facilitate interactions between consumers and brands, even enabling direct purchases within apps such as TikTok. According to the New Yorker, this increased accessibility to shopping has led to the rise of reusable water bottle trends such as the Stanley tumbler.

Furthermore, the endorsement of products by so-

cial media influencers plays a pivotal role in guiding users toward making purchases. It is nearly impossible to go online without seeing a Stanley Quencher H2.0 on your feed: pastel-colored and often nestled in a matching carry case.

Within the #StanleyCup hashtag, you will find videos of Generation Z influencers advertising how they pack their Stanley for the gym or for class. You will also find people left bruised after scrambling to add a limited edition release to their collection and preteen girls in tears after



unwrapping their very own Stanley at Christmas.

Even celebrities have joined in on these trends, influencing many young viewers to follow suit. Olivia Rodrigo, for instance, referred to the trend as a “subculture” in a video with GQ Magazine where she showed off her own Stanley – it is purple, of course. Needless to say, Stanley has become a pop-culture phenomenon.

The perceived scarcity of these products is often what

makes them so desirable. According to The New York Times, the 40-ounce Stanley generally costs between \$45-50, and some editions resell for over six times their retail value. Stanley’s now infamous pink tumblers, consigned by Starbucks, were briefly sold at Target for \$49.95 and now have a resale value of about \$300.

It is absolutely outrageous to be paying such exorbitant prices to acquire one of these bottles, let alone paying at a significantly higher resell price.

Environmental consequences

According to National Geographic, approximately eight million tons of plastic waste finds its way into the ocean annually. This is the equivalent of placing five garbage bags filled with trash along every foot of coastline globally.

While the move towards reusable water bottles is often hailed as a sustainable choice, it is essential to

recognize the broader environmental footprint associated with their production.

In 2009, The New York Times reported that, when compared to plastic, the production of stainless steel bottles requires seven times the amount of fossil fuel, emits 14 times more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere and requires hundreds of times more metal resources.

While the individual single-use plas-

tic bottle may take less energy to produce, the impact of plastic pollution is actually a far greater threat to not only marine environments but human health.

According to a study published by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a one-liter bottle of water contains nearly 250,000 pieces of nano-plastic. These minuscule particles have the ability to penetrate our intestinal barrier and enter our bloodstream, posing significant health implications, according to the National Library of Medicine.

Ultimately, we must critically evaluate our con-

sumption patterns and acknowledge the environmental and personal harm our spending can contribute to. It is time to rethink our obsession with trendy water bottles. Ask yourself: do I really need this bottle or will it become nothing more than another pastel-hued layer in the world’s landfills?



Illustration by Eva Marriott-Fabre