

Minimalism Is Gaining Momentum, but Brands Shouldn't Fret Just Yet

The movement is more aspirational than practiced right now

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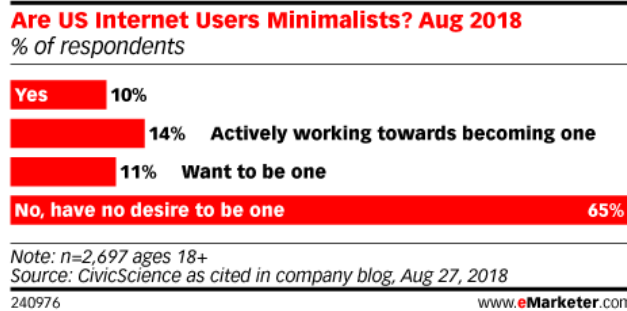
The trend toward minimalism in the US has been years in the making, but it has broken into the mainstream over the past few years.

It's not easy to quantify if consumers are spending more on minimalist lifestyles or just becoming more discerning about the things they do spend money on. The [rise of private labels and consumers caring less about specific brands](#) of household goods, food and clothing speaks to a shift in values.

Consumers have been fueled by Marie Kondo's best-selling "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up," fascinated by tiny houses (at least nine TV shows about tiny houses have debuted since 2014) and enthralled with paring down their possessions, whether to rid themselves of mental clutter or living simply enough to be free of a 9-to-5 existence.

It's not a coincidence that minimalism has been embraced during a time of economic uncertainty, especially for younger consumers saddled with student loan debt and getting by in the gig economy.

CivicScience polled US adults in August 2018 and found that minimalism isn't necessarily commonplace but more of an aspirational lifestyle. Fully 65% of respondents had no desire to become a minimalist. Only 10% consider themselves minimalists, while 11% want to be one and 14% are actively working toward this goal.



Those who aspire to be a minimalist did share some traits in common. Women; those concerned about the environment, the economy and jobs; and Gen Xers (though millennials are slightly more likely to already be a minimalist) had more interest in becoming a minimalist one day.

How do brands and retailers market to these consumers who've consciously decided to consume less?

Appeals can take different forms. They range from the functional basics of Japan-based brand Muji and Everlane's production of simple quality clothing with **transparency about sourcing and pricing** to **the rise of the resale market** with companies like thredUp and Poshmark facilitating buying and selling online to Rent the Runway and Gwynnie Bee essentially leasing clothing with the option to buy.

Outdoors outfitter REI took its in-store "garage sales" online in October 2017 and last week relaunched its site for secondhand gear and apparel with better usability and more product categories.

Competitor Patagonia launched its Worn Wear program in 2005 where the company repairs items even bought decades ago and teaches classes on fixing zippers and patching holes in gear. Similarly, Eileen

Fisher buys back clothing for \$5 and uses the material in its Renew brand to reduce waste.

Subscription services are also replacing owning music, books, movies and software and illustrates how eschewing physical objects isn't always the economical choice in the long run.

Ikea, however, recently took the opposite tack, thumbing its nose at the popularity of decluttering (and its own minimalism site tutorial published last year) with the 2019 catalog launched in August. The **Sammanhang** line designed for "embracing and displaying your belongings" and to tap into the "emotional side of storage" debuted accompanied by four videos about collectors and is a celebration of maximalism.