

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Is it a good idea to buy expensive clothes and shoes? Why or why not? Discuss with a partner.

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

accessible afford barrier bestseller brand demand
experiment logo manufacture popularity sold out stock

1. a symbol that represents a company _____
2. when there is no more of that product available _____
3. a test of a new idea, method, or activity to find out the results _____
4. products with their own name that are made by one particular company

5. the number of goods available to buy in a shop _____
6. how much of a product or service people want and how badly they want it

7. have enough money to pay for something _____
8. easy for anyone to obtain and use _____
9. something that stops people or things from entering somewhere or getting something

10. a situation in which many people really like or enjoy someone or something

11. something that many people buy _____
12. make goods in large quantities in a factory _____

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Level 2: Intermediate

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. This book is a _____! It seems like everyone is reading it.
2. I'm not familiar with this _____. Do they make good-quality products?
3. My son wanted that video game for his birthday, but it's _____ in every shop.
4. We want to go on a fancy holiday in Fiji, but I don't think we can _____ it.
5. Lots of people are familiar with Nike's _____.
6. Where does that company _____ their products?

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Level 2: Intermediate

Alaina Demopoulos

28 March, 2023

- 1 On 27 March, Demi Elder, a 31-year-old from Brooklyn, New York, added to her Telfar collection. Instead of bags, she wanted the latest clothing and found simple black T-shirts with the brand's logo for 50 dollars, short-length shirts for 65 dollars, and "gown-length basketball tops" at 150 dollars each. The majority of items had sold out within the hour.
- 2 Elder left Telfar.net feeling content with a pair of grey tracksuit bottoms for the price of 80 dollars. That was about 240 dollars less than the full price of the tracksuit bottoms because Elder was shopping Telfar's "live pricing" experiment.
- 3 The brand let customers decide the cost of 29 new items by listing them at reduced prices at noon on 27 March. As customers shopped, the price went up in small amounts until the stock sold out. The more people who added a piece to their cart, the more likely shoppers would get it at a discount. For example, the tracksuit bottoms Elder purchased would normally cost 320 dollars. The price set by customer demand would become the "forever price" for that item going forward. By early afternoon on the 27th, most of the stock had sold out.
- 4 Babak Radboy, creative director of Telfar, said that this shows just how flexible some prices are. Radboy and Telfar Clemens, the brand founder, had the idea while they were designing a hoodie and "realised the brand could charge 100 dollars or 600 dollars for it".
- 5 "If we charge 600 dollars for the hoodie, then only one class of person would buy it – the person who can afford it," Radboy said. So, they came up with a way to help keep items cheap enough to be accessible. "Many brands use price as a barrier to entry," Clemens said. "I never wanted that for my brand." In a way, this proves just how much the traditional fashion system increases the price of clothing.
- 6 Obviously, this goes against the fashion world's opinion that popular things need to cost lots of money. Louis Pisano, a fashion reporter, said that most brands use a product's popularity to increase prices and check clients' loyalty. "But those brands are not Telfar," he stated.
- 7 "Dynamic pricing is just cool," Rachel Tashjian, a fashion news director, said. She added that it questions capitalism in fashion and creates a system in which the bestsellers in a collection are the most affordable.
- 8 Radboy told the *Guardian* that Telfar "will probably try live pricing with our duffels and circle bags" in the future. "If you walk five blocks in any direction in New York, you will see a Telfar bag. We want to see the full look out here."
- 9 There are other business reasons for Telfar to let customers set their own prices. It will help the brand collect data about what pieces customers want the most. "This will give us information about how much of each product we should order in the future," Radboy said. "And the larger the order, the cheaper it is to manufacture."
- 10 Since 2005, Clemens has always rejected the idea that high fashion needed to be expensive. Clemens was born in Queens, New York, to Liberian immigrant parents. He's created uniforms for employees of White Castle, a fast-food chain, and held fashion week events at Rainbow Shops, an inexpensive retail chain. Fans often mention what the brand says about itself: "It's not for you; it's for everyone."

© Guardian News and Media 2023

First published in *The Guardian*, 28/03/2023

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Level 2: Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What accessory is Telfar famous for?
2. How much does Telfar's new black T-shirt cost?
3. How much did Demi Elder pay for the grey tracksuit bottoms?
4. How much do the tracksuit bottoms typically cost?
5. Who are Telfar Clemens and Babak Radboy?
6. What does the "live pricing" experiment do?
7. Why did Telfar try this experiment?
8. What is one of the business reasons for the experiment?
9. What does the company say about itself?

4 Key language

a. Use the same word from the wordpool in each pair of sentences. Forms may change to fit each one.

discount

price

demand

stock

cost

charge

1. The sign said there is a 20 per cent _____ on these shoes.
The manager _____ the item by 20 per cent.
2. What's the _____ of this duffel bag?
It's _____ at 40 dollars.
3. The customer _____ to speak to a manager.
There is a huge _____ for this new sports drink right.
4. The employees are still _____ the shelves.
How much _____ of those dresses is left?
5. What's the _____ of this belt?
It _____ 25 dollars.
6. I don't understand this _____ on my bill.
Oh no! I think they _____ my credit card twice.

b. Write whether each word in the task above is used as a noun or a verb.

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Level 2: Intermediate

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "If fashion is not expensive, it's not fashionable."
- "Fashion should be for everyone."

6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about fashion prices. Choose a piece of clothing you want, such as boots. Look for three items at three different prices: cheap, affordable, and expensive. Compare them. What's the same? What's different? Which would you buy?
- b. Report your findings to the class.