

Economic Woes Seen Having Lasting Impact

By Dick Silverman

SHADES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

The economic calamity that engulfed the U.S. starting 80 years ago influenced a generation of consumers, and the current financial upheaval might also have a lasting impact, according to a new study.

The survey of 1,067 consumers ages 18 to 65 by Chicago-based market research firm Information Resources Inc. found:

- Seventy percent reduced clothing purchases, with 56 percent saying that "they will do so well into the future."
- Sixty percent wear clothing multiple times before washings to save on cleaning costs, and half of them said they will continue the practice. Almost 82 percent wash laundry only when they have full loads, and 60 percent plan to keep doing that.
- Fifty-one percent repair clothes by sewing and patching them.

The downturn is producing "a redefinition of shopping, a redefinition of eating and a redefinition of clothing purchases," said Thom Blischok, president of consulting and innovation at IRI.

"It will take significant convincing before the Downturn Generation believes it is safe to open their wallets and purses again," he said, adding the frugality will remain "long after the recession ends."

The study "Dissecting the Downturn," which was based on interviews done in March, said consumers are even doing some of their own cosmetic, hair and skin treatment at home to save money.

"Women will still be purchasing cosmetic products, but they'll now buy maybe just two varieties of lipstick instead of 10," Blischok said. In place of paying a professional salon, things like home pedicures are rising in vogue, "which we wouldn't have expected two years or even 18 months ago."

