

# **Ethical Consumerism (Text 1)**

By A. Watson (2020)

Due to the growing global concern about climate change, environmental destruction and the increasing number of endangered species, ethical consumerism has become an extremely prominent topic. Bertrand and Regan (2008) describe ethical consumption as consciously identifying the links between a product, its origins and the context in which it has been produced. They define the term as awareness of how a consumer's lifestyle affects people, communities and the environment, and claim that "[an] ethically-informed consumer realises that when they buy something, they are not only buying the product". Hussain (2012, p112) outlines an example: "...when you walk into Starbucks and face an array of coffee choices, one of them might be fair trade. If you base your decision to buy the fair trade coffee at least partly on the fact that the growers were treated fairly in the manufacturing process, you engage in ethical consumerism". This definition and example are relevant, as they place the responsibility of ethical consumerism on the end user, the customer, which is an accurate depiction of the term. However, to understand ethical consumerism, it is important to identify what constitutes unethical consumerism.

Unethical consumerism is a challenging term to define due to the subjective nature of what constitutes 'unethical'. However, Hunt (2018) highlights certain factors as being key ethical indicators consumers should consider when deciding whether to purchase from a company: adherence to tax laws, treatment of workers, environmental considerations and sustainability. If a company performs poorly in any of these areas, the consumer should carefully consider whether purchasing from that company is 'unethical consumerism'. For example, Hunt (2018) highlights delivery giant Amazon's poor treatment of workers at their distribution centres as an example of unethical practice as well as the much publicised tax avoidance accusations (Fuller, 2012). Other companies have also come under scrutiny for worker's rights abuses: ASDA and Tesco have been accused of paying unfair wages as well as showing discrimination towards staff (Tatum, 2020). Other company's ethics have been questioned for environmental reasons, with Coca-Cola being accused of hoarding water supplies in rural communities (Vos et al., 2018).

The growing number of reports of unethical practices by large companies has led many shoppers to consider what they can do as individuals to become more ethical consumers. This has resulted in a significant rise in the practice, with the Co-op Ethical Consumer Report (2018) reporting a 400% increase in ethical consumerism since 1999. When compared against the fact that the average UK household expenditure has grown by only 2% over the same period, this represents a significant increase in the practice. The biggest rises have been in ethical food and drink consumption, which could include such practices as buying Fairtrade or more local products as well as green home expenditure. This includes trying to be more efficient with energy and installing solar panels amongst other initiatives. The large and continuously expanding range of methods of ethical consumption has led to discussion of what type of consumer is choosing to become more ethical. Park (2018) argues that the range of people who may become ethical consumers has grown due to an expanding range of factors. She argues that female consumers respond to 'ethical narratives', where a product is sold based on an emotional appeal. This sort of marketing has become much more achievable in recent years due to the rise in social media advertising. Park (2018) also argues that younger people may value ethical goods more highly due to an increased awareness of the damage unethical consumption can do to the planet and the potential long-term ramifications this could have.

It is important to question whether the rise in ethical consumerism will continue. It could revert to a marginal social movement, or it could become a mainstream movement, replacing price, speed and convenience as the main factors behind consumption. In 2007 Thompson and Coskuner-Balli argued that the emotional engagement and moral responsibility of the public as well as the rising awareness of our environment would lead to continuous growth in ethical consumerism. Thirteen years on this observation has proved to be correct, and the rise in ethical consumerism looks set to be a trend that will continue.

## **References**

Bertrand, B. and Regan, C. (2008) *What is Ethical Consumption?*, Development Education.ie [Online] [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020] <https://developmenteducation.ie/feature/ethical-consumption/>

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Park, K (2018) Understanding Ethical consumers: Willingness-to-pay by moral Cause, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35 (2). p.157-168

Tatum, M (2020) *Why the Modern Slavery Act hasn't Worked: the Complex Food and Drink Supply Chain is an Easy Target for Human Traffickers*, Grocer [Online] [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020] <https://link-gale-com.mmu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A618123391/ITOF?u=mmucal5&sid=ITOF&xid=8a7c04b3>

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Vos, D. Rosanne. Kohne, M and Roth, D. (2018) We'll Turn Your Water into Coca-Cola: the Atomising Practices of Oil Palm Plantation Development in Indonesia, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 18 (2). p. 385-405

## Ethical Consumerism (Text 2)

By A Watson (2020)

1. Due to the growing global concern about climate change, environmental destruction and the increasing number of endangered species, ethical consumerism has become an extremely prominent topic. Bertrand and Regan (2008) describe ethical consumption as consciously identifying the links between a product, its origins and the context in which it has been produced. They define the term as awareness of how a consumer's lifestyle affects people, communities and the environment, and claim that "[an] ethically-informed consumer realises that when they buy something, they are not only buying the product". Hussain (2012, p112) outlines an example: "...when you walk into Starbucks and face an array of coffee choices, one of them might be fair trade. If you base your decision to buy the fair trade coffee at least partly on the fact that the growers were treated fairly in the manufacturing process, you engage in ethical consumerism". This definition and example are relevant, as they place the responsibility of ethical consumerism on the end user, the customer, which is an accurate depiction of the term. However, to understand ethical consumerism, it is important to identify what constitutes unethical consumerism.

2. Unethical consumerism is a challenging term to define due to the subjective nature of what constitutes 'unethical'. However, Hunt (2018) highlights certain factors as being key ethical indicators consumers should consider when deciding whether to purchase from a company: adherence to tax laws, treatment of workers, environmental considerations and sustainability. If a company performs poorly in any of these areas, the consumer should carefully consider whether purchasing from that company is 'unethical consumerism'. For example, Hunt (2018) highlights delivery giant Amazon's poor treatment of workers at their distribution centres as an example of unethical practice as well as the much publicised tax avoidance accusations (Fuller, 2012). Other companies have also come under scrutiny for worker's rights abuses: ASDA and Tesco have been accused of paying unfair wages as well as showing discrimination towards staff (Tatum, 2020). Other company's ethics have been questioned for environmental reasons, with Coca-Cola being accused of hoarding water supplies in rural communities (Vos et al., 2018).

3. The growing number of reports of unethical practices by large companies has led many shoppers to consider what they can do as individuals to become more ethical consumers. This has resulted in a significant rise in the practice, with the Co-op Ethical Consumer Report (2018) reporting a 400% increase in ethical consumerism since 1999. When compared against the fact that the average UK household expenditure has grown by only 2% over the same period, this represents a significant increase in the practice. The biggest rises have been in ethical food and drink consumption, which could include such practices as buying Fairtrade or more local products as well as green home expenditure. This includes trying to be more efficient with energy and installing solar panels amongst other initiatives. The large and continuously expanding range of methods of ethical consumption has led to discussion of what type of consumer is choosing to become more ethical. Park (2018) argues that the range of people who may become ethical consumers has grown due to an expanding range of factors. She argues that female consumers respond to 'ethical narratives', where a product is sold based on an emotional appeal. This sort of marketing has become much more achievable in recent years due to the rise in social media advertising. Park (2018) also argues that younger people may value ethical goods more highly due to an increased awareness of the damage unethical consumption can do to the planet and the potential long-term ramifications this could have.

4. It is important to question whether the rise in ethical consumerism will continue. It could revert to a marginal social movement, or it could become a mainstream movement, replacing price, speed and convenience as the main factors behind consumption. In 2007 Thompson and Coskuner-Balli argued that the emotional engagement and moral responsibility of the public as well as the rising awareness of our environment would lead to continuous growth in ethical consumerism. Thirteen years on this observation has proved to be correct, and the rise in ethical consumerism looks set to be a trend that will continue.

## **References**

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## Comprehension Questions

**1. Headings:** Choose a subheading for each paragraph. One title is not needed.

1	<i>E (Example)</i>	A	Unscrupulous behaviour
2	<i>B</i>	B	Measuring ethical consumption
3	<i>A</i>	C	A tendency to continue along a more moral path
4	<i>C</i>	D	Ethical consumption in emerging nations
		E	<del>Definition of ethical consumption</del>

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**2. True / False / Not Given:** One question per paragraph.

		T / F / NG
<b>Paragraph 1</b>		
i.	Ethical consumers are usually unaware their choice is ethical.	<i>F</i>
<b>Paragraph 2</b>		
ii.	Some supermarkets were accused of unethical environmental practises.	<i>F</i>
<b>Paragraph 3</b>		
iii.	Spending on ethical consumerism has increased more than the household income over the last twenty years.	<i>T</i>
<b>Paragraph 4</b>		
iv.	Thompson and Coskuner-Balli are ethical consumers.	<i>NG</i>

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**3. Open answer questions.**

Paragraph 1

**What is ethical consumption consciously identifying connections between?**

i)	<i>A product (Example).</i>
ii)	<i>A product's origins</i>
iii)	<i>The context in which a product has been produced</i>

\_\_\_ / 2

Paragraph 2

**Name three types of company the author highlights as unethical.**

i)	<i>A delivery company</i>
ii)	<i>Supermarkets</i>
iii)	<i>A soft drink company</i>

\_\_\_ / 3

Paragraph 3

Which two types of people does the author say are likely to be ethical consumers?

i)	Women
ii)	Young people

\_\_\_ / 2

Paragraph 3

What reasons are given that the above people might choose to be ethical consumers?

i)	Marketing
ii)	Environmental concerns.

\_\_\_ / 2

Paragraph 4

What do Thompson and Coskuner-Balli argue are the two reasons ethical consumption will continue to grow?

i)	Emotional engagement and moral responsibility of the public
ii)	Rising awareness of the environment

\_\_\_ / 2

4. Sources: Match the source to the function in the text.

	Source		Function
i.	Hunt (2018) (Example)	a	Argument that ethical consumerism will continue to rise.
ii.	Bertrand and Regan (2008)	b	Discussion of types of ethical consumer.
iii.	Tatum (2020)	c	Key ethical indicators
iv.	Park (2018)	d	Example of supermarkets' unethical practices
v.	Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007)	e	Definition of ethical consumerism

i.	C	ii.	E	iii.	D	iv.	B	v.	A
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5. Author's stance?

Does the author think ethical consumerism will continue to grow? Why?	
For	Against (choose one)
Why?	Because the author states the rise in ethical consumerism looks set to be a trend that will continue.

\_\_\_ / 2

6. **Reference words:** Explain what these words connect to (underlined in the text).

Paragraph	Word	Connection
1	<u>it</u>	<i>a product (Example)</i>
1	<u>them</u>	<i>Coffee choices</i>
1	<u>they</u>	<i>Definition and example</i>
2	<u>their</u>	<i>Amazon</i>
3	<u>this</u>	<i>Shoppers' consideration of how to become more ethical consumers.</i>
3	<u>this</u>	<i>Damage to the planet and long-term ramifications.</i>
4	<u>it</u>	<i>Ethical consumerism</i>

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7. **Vocabulary:** Search for a word in the paragraph that means:

Paragraph	Explanation	Word
1	The action causing so much damage to something that it no longer exists or cannot be repaired.	<i>Destruction (Example)</i>
1	Something that is noticeable or well-known.	<i>prominent</i>
1	Closely connected or appropriate to what is being done or considered.	<i>Relevant</i>
2	Based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions.	<i>Subjective</i>
2	The sharing out of something among a group or over an area.	<i>Distribution</i>
2	The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, on the grounds of some kind of difference.	<i>Discrimination</i>
3	The use of energy, time or other resources.	<i>Expenditure</i>
3	An action taken to improve something, in this case ethical consumerism.	<i>Initiatives</i>
3	Achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense.	<i>Efficient</i>
4	Minor or not important. Not central in a society	<i>Marginal</i>
4	The ideas, attitudes or activities shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional.	<i>Mainstream</i>

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Overall Total: \_\_\_ / 40