

How far is modern consumerism a threat to the environment?

***Note: This essay is reproduced from the original script written under exam conditions. Errors and awkward phrasing have been retained for authenticity.*

Intro

Man has long disputed what exactly it is that has led our beleaguered environment to the brink of exhaustion. Some say it is the rise of the industrial age, where factories began sprouting up worldwide. Some say fault lies with the irresponsible behavior of the multinational corporations, who place profits over conservation. Yet others point fingers at governments who are uncooperative when a global agreement is trying to be reached at summits like the one most recently held in Copenhagen. Perhaps some are more accurate than others in their accusations. However, the modern man often forgets to review himself of the impact that his lifestyle has on the environment. In a consumeristic, materialistic community such as ours, I am of the opinion that our consumptive lifestyle indeed poses a significant threat to the environment.

Para 1

Definitely, those who benefit from our habit of excessive consumption would say that they have done considerably much to reduce the impact of our consumeristic ways. We have heard of companies continually improving their products to reduce carbon emissions. An oft-cited example of how consuming can still exist harmoniously with our environment is the shift of complete dependency on petroleum to drive cars to electricity which can also power vehicles. We cannot discount that there are companies and industries that invest heavily in research programs to discover more eco-friendly ways of catering to our wants. Consumers themselves have even often expressed a more favorable impression on products that are produced with more environmentally friendly methods. Unfortunately, these preferences are also often not acted upon. The truth is, until the hybrid car can promise as much power or status as the as-of-now more powerful petroleum-powered vehicles, modern consumerism will not welcome it with open arms.



The high demands of our consumerism must first be met by these eco-friendly alternatives since it will not settle for anything less.

Para 2

Similarly, modern consumerism demands, first and foremost, convenience. In modern society, where there is a more convenient way, others pale in comparison. It is unfortunate that this convenience is paid for with a large carbon footprint that consumers cannot even see. Take a commonly sighted product for example– bottled water. In a society of rising affluence, it has long been forgotten that water was a commodity that need not be paid for. The popularity now turned necessity of bottled water has been encouraged because in the name of convenience, reaching for a faucet or the nearby watercooler has become an unacceptable hassle. The impact of possessing such convenience has definitely been tracked. Bottled water is often made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), a plastic derived from crude oil. Additionally, it takes three times as much water to manufacture and produce each bottle of water as there is inside it. This is an unacceptable statistic when only 1% of water on earth is accessible. Not to mention that the plastic bottles take millions of years to biodegrade, and because not enough empty bottles are recycled worldwide, manufacturers of bottles simply use more unrecycled plastic for each batch of goods. Bottled water is only one example of the production that modern consumerism drives and it is cause for concern to simply imagine the footprint we leave due to collective emissions and waste of all other products which of become necessity in our daily lives.

Para 3

Modern consumerism also demands that the natural barriers of the past– seasonal change for geographical distances – be surpassed to bring us the luxuries that we want. In our globalized world, this is now possible. Global food trade has grown to become a significant portion of all air freight. It has been estimated that to fly a kiwifruit from UK to Asia produces as much as 50 times the weight of the fruit in carbon emissions. This accounts for a hefty amount of



emissions considering our demand for luxuries does not stop at out-of-season fruits. Even before being shipped or flown for export, beef in the UK covers a considerable amount of mileage as it can be grown on one farm, fattened on the next and sent away to be slaughtered efficiently at a slaughterhouse located somewhere else. Evidently, our tastes and preferences have forced us to be ever reliant on the fuel it takes to satisfy our inclination towards luxuries.

Para 4

Yet, what is more deplorable is perhaps not modern consumerism itself, for that, with sufficient will and urgency, even mandate, would be corrected. But rather it is our unrelenting attachment, even addiction, to the good life that poses the greatest threat to the environment. It is the fact that the modern consumer has grown so attached to his comforts that when push comes to shove, we are unable to do away with the comforts that have long become necessity in the developed world. Take air conditioning for instance. Only imagine the fuss that would kick in if all air conditioning systems in a country like Singapore were stopped for a day. Students taking examinations would complain, shoppers at megamalls along Orchard Road would protest, perhaps even the toddler sitting at home watching television would be uncomfortable. When even avid environmental enthusiasts are known to live in lavish houses that consume gargantuan amounts of energy a day, how much willpower and sacrifice can we expect from the average man? Our consumptive lifestyles have become so intricately meshed into our cultures that it would seem difficult to cure ourselves from this plague, and this attachment is what makes our lifestyle such a threat to the future of the environment.

Conclusion

Though slowly but surely felt, the carbon footprint of our consumption largely remains an unseen one. The unseen effects and intrinsically consumeristic ideals of the modern man is definitely a cause for concern when pit against the frailty of our environment.



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School Examiner Comments: A rather persuasive argument that is couched on the basis of a polar view against avid consumerism. Rather one-sided it appears. Could possibly develop a little on the possible defense against consumerism (i.e., how consumerism in today's society, going by global rising consumerist pattern of buying behavior is partial towards ethical/sustainable consumerism, can attenuate environmental problems brought on by excessive and compulsory buying consumption to bring on a needed balance). That, however, should not contradict your final analysis of the impact of consumerism on environment.