

# Context

## Ethical Consumerism

### 1. Websearch

**Research** supermarkets and hypermarkets as agents of :

- **Globalisation:** Try to make a list of products from other countries that you can buy in your largest local supermarket
- **Fair Trade:** What is fair trade and which countries does it involve? How many fair trade products can you think of?
- **Consumerism:** What is consumerism?
- **Ethical consumerism:** What is ethical consumerism about and how can consumerism be ethical?
- **Environmental friendliness:** Are supermarkets helping popularise environmental friendliness? How and why? Can you give some examples?
- **Free Range :** What is 'free range' and how many free range products can you think of?
- **Green politics:** What are 'green politics' all about? Are some countries greener than others?
- **Globalised News:** How does globalisation happen through 'the news'?
- **Supermarkets Multicultural:** How are supermarkets multicultural? Does supermarket shopping promote and develop multiculturalism?

## 2. 21st Century Consumer's Quiz

*How should we think about the consumer? As a god-like figure, before whom markets and politicians bow? A weak and malleable creature - a mere pawn in corporate games played in invisible boardrooms? A political trendsetter with the power to save the planet? In reality, despite huge efforts to constrain, control and manipulate them, consumers themselves can and do act in ways that are unpredictable, inconsistent and contrary.....*

### **What's your consumer style?**

***Take our quiz and see!***

Choose the answers that best reflect how you feel about shopping. Based on your results, you'll get tips that our expert customized specifically for you. Answer these questions to discover your strengths and weaknesses and learn how you can use to your advantage.

1. When you go to a shopping center which shop do you visit most, a) the supermarket  
b) the music/hifi/books store? c) the boutique? d) the health store?
2. Do you go shopping a) out of necessity, b) with purpose, c) for fun? d) healthily
3. Which are the categories of goods that you buy more often – a) convenience food?  
b) DVD's c) gifts and accessories d) natural items ?
4. If your purpose is to buy clothes, what influences your choice? a) Cost? b) individual style? c) Friends & fashion? d) Natural fibres?
5. Do you try to find out how the clothes or other goods you buy are produced?  
a) sometimes b) often c) occasionally d) always ?
6. Do you a) buy according to convenience b) buy for choice, c) fashion or  
d) buy for idealism?
7. Are you interested in sending a message about yourself through the good you choose? Do you dress a) for practicalities b) a) for individual image c) for fashion  
d) for message ?

### 3. Greens Backs

Read the following article about trends in ethical spending and then do the activities which follow.

#### **Green backs**

By Sean Coughlan  
BBC News Magazine

#### **Ethical spending has out-stripped retail sales of booze and cigarettes for the first time. What's driving this green spending spree?**

The words "ethical" and "consumerism" would once have looked like an unlikely pairing.

Consumers wanted to consume stuff. They wanted to get exactly what they wanted at the best price. Ethical shopping was strictly on the green fringes, where a small band of enthusiasts banged on about animal rights and fair trade.

But in the past decade, the concept of shoppers exercising an ethical choice has become part of the mainstream. Supermarket aisles are devoted to organic products, energy companies promise greener power, banks advertise their ethical investment policies.

Free-range eggs used to be a niche market - now there are supermarkets that sell no other variety. Fair-trade drinks were once marginal - now if you have a coffee in Marks and Spencer, it's the only type they serve.

#### **Eco-awareness**

The annual survey of ethical spending in the UK, compiled by the Co-operative Bank, shows a record level of £29.4bn. This means that green spending has overtaken the £28bn spent on alcohol and cigarettes (excluding pubs).

This increase, 11% on the previous year, has been driven by growth in areas such as organic food, fair trade products, green energy deals and ethical financial products.

And shoppers are also getting tougher on where they take their custom. In the same survey two years ago, shoppers said they were withholding £2.58bn worth of business from firms with which they disagreed.

But what has been pushing this growth in ethical sales?

"It's something of a triumph for consumer power," says Fairtrade Foundation spokeswoman, Barbara Crowther.

"In the past three or four years, businesses have really woken up to the demand, making a much wider range of goods available."

## Trade, not aid

The more that people have ready access to fair trade and organic products, the more likely they are to put them into their shopping baskets, she says.

"Global communications have given us a window on the world," she says, adding that as people become more concerned about climate change, food production or poverty, they want their shopping to reflect their values.

"It's not a charity relationship," she says. "They see they can tackle poverty through trade and not just aid."

It's not just food that has gone green. The overlap of fashion and eco-awareness means that you can buy environmentally-friendly clothes in Top Shop, Marks and Spencer and Monsoon. There are fair-trade footballs, toys made with sustainable wood and holidays are sold with built-in carbon off-sets.

And financial services have a widening range of conscience-driven products. The Co-operative Bank sells itself on its ethical investment policy, and there are various types of green insurance and mortgages and investments.

But even though there has been a huge expansion in ethical shopping, the Co-op's Craig Shannon says it still represents only about 5% of total spending.

This will grow further as more products offer a fair trade alternative, says Barbara Crowther. "If people have the option - and it's good value - they'll make the choice."

## Some comments by readers:

I am glad to see that ethical and environmentally sound produce is now more popular, but I think the old saying about voting with your feet holds true. I think people are more aware of how their actions affect those in countries around the world now. If only those other big companies and the political leaders were also able to see this. Maybe it will not be very long before people will protest with more than their consumer choice.

**Heather, Wolverhampton**

It is just labelling. If anything is labelled 'fair trade' or 'organic', people buy it to make themselves feel better even though they have no idea whether the farmer is getting a penny more or whether the 'organic' product actually is organic. The manufacturers are laughing at them all the way to the bank. Labelling anything with these words guarantees that you can charge several times the price for the same product.

**Martin, London**

I have to admit that I'm not a consciously ethical shopper. More often than not if I buy a 'green' product it's because it's all there is - unbleached cotton baby clothes are often only available in ethical versions. My favourite sweets are only available in a Fair Trade packet. When my supermarket has only organic produce available I buy it.

**Jennifer, Netherlands**

I now do this instead of giving to charity. I would rather make sure that the third world gets a fair price for their produce than give my money to a charity with dubious religious goals who will probably spend half of it on advertising.

**Francesca, Belfast**

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/6187338.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6187338.stm)

## Check your understanding by doing these activities

1. How has ethical consumerism been changing over the past few years?
2. What changes have been experienced in the market?
3. What and why is making consumers change their choices to ethical products?
4. Was it only food that went green or have other markets also changed? Which ones?
5. Do you think that ethical consumerism is going to keep increasing? Why?

## Complete the following by filling the gaps form the words in the box

The words “ethical” and “consumerism” would once have \_\_\_\_\_ an unlikely pairing.

In the past \_\_\_\_\_, the concept of shoppers exercising an \_\_\_\_\_ choice has become part of the mainstream. Supermarket \_\_\_\_\_ are devoted to organic products, energy companies promise \_\_\_\_\_ power, banks advertise their ethical investment policies.

The more that people have ready access to fair trade and organic products, the more likely they are to put them into their shopping baskets, says Barbara Crowther.

“It’s not a charity relationship,” she says. “They see they can \_\_\_\_\_ through trade and not just aid.”

“If people have the option – and it’s \_\_\_\_\_ – they’ll make the choice.”

“I now do this instead of giving to \_\_\_\_\_. I would rather make sure that the \_\_\_\_\_ world gets a fair price for their produce then give my money to a charity with dubious religious goals who will probably spend half of it on \_\_\_\_\_” says Franchesca from Belfast.

- third
- looked like
- decade
- greener
- advertising
- aisles
- good value
- charity
- ethical

## Test your vocabulary

Match each of the words in column A with their synonyms in column B:

Column A	Column B
Out-stripped	Outer edges
Booze	Separating rows of shelves
Fringes	Able to continue over a period of time
Aisles	Over-taken
Niche	Money borrowed under an agreement
Mortgages	Colloquial name for alcohol
Sustainable	Gap

Find the correct endings of the phrases of column A in column B:

Column A	Column B
Global communications have given	<i>that you can buy environmentally-friendly clothes</i>
energy companies promise	<i>us a window on the world</i>
banks advertise	<i>to reflect their values</i>
green spending has overtaken	<i>of conscience-driven products</i>
shoppers are also getting tougher	<i>through trade and not just aid</i>
they want their shopping	<i>with built-in carbon off-sets</i>
financial services have a widening range	<i>on where they take their custom</i>
They see they can tackle poverty	<i>their ethical investment policies</i>
The overlap of fashion and eco-awareness means	<i>greener power</i>
holidays are sold	<i>the £28bn spent on alcohol and cigarettes</i>

## 4. Is it possible to be an ethical consumer?

Read the following article and then answer the questions that follow it.

### Journalist doubts whether or not it is possible to be an ethical consumer

May 20, 2007

[Sunday Age \(Melbourne, Australia\)](#)

Christopher Bantick

Q: Can we ever be ethical consumers?

I BLAME Al Gore. In our house we have adopted a policy of one light on per room. We have tried to reduce greenhouse gases by going through cupboards, tossing out aerosols in an attempt to reduce household emissions.

But can we as consumers ever be completely ethical?

While under the shower - as the four-minute timer reminds us to save water - do we check the labels on the shampoo to see if it is chemically acceptable, biodegradable and not tested on animals?

Let's forget about free range eggs for a minute and the conscience-pricking miasmas of battery hens stuffed in cages measuring out their days in quotas of artificially induced brown-shelled eggs.

As much as supermarkets strive to be clean and green, they are cornucopias of additives and pesticide residues, artificial colouring and food harvested under slave labour conditions that sit beside environmentally friendly ungenetically modified products.

Take coffee for example.

Ethically sourced coffee is gaining traction with consumers. Fair trade coffee sounds ethically acceptable.

In principle, fair trade coffee works on that little thing called ethical consumer guilt. According to fair trade coffee advocates, as coffee is grown in the sub-tropical and tropical regions of the world, 25 million people depend on it for their livelihoods. Under fair trade, those who harvest the coffee beans are paid a fair wage. Moreover, sales of fair trade products account for about \$8 million in Australia.

Then there is chocolate. Consumers concerned with the ethics of how cocoa beans are harvested might have to reconsider whether eating chocolate is ethical. According to the British charity, Stop the Traffic, 240,000 children are in forced labour on Africa's Ivory Coast. The beans grown there are bought by big chocolate companies and account for about half of the world's chocolate.

If consumers want to check out whether what they are buying is ethically sound, they can look at the label and do some research of their own. While the intention to shop

ethically is laudable, it is often hard to fill a supermarket trolley with ethically acceptable items.

So what do shoppers who want to buy ethically need to consider and how can they be sure they are acting in the best interests of the environment or people such as coffee harvesters?

The Sustainable Living Foundation, a national organisation based in Melbourne, has data bases on which consumers can check out companies. The SLF grades the companies according to ethical considerations such as their position on environmental and social matters including investment in weapons and tobacco, animal treatment and business ethics.

Ethical consumerism, frustratingly difficult to wholly achieve, is still perhaps more subtle than putting a packet of fair trade coffee in your basket. Ethical shopping is about more than just thinking in the here and now. People want to be sure their choices will not adversely affect the less fortunate.

Small decisions can have a big impact, so Steve Carey, head of public affairs at World Vision says.

But while consumers may want to buy ethical as well as green and pesticide-free products, it is doubtful whether this is possible. That Australian icon, Vegemite would seem to be ethically acceptable.

Well, maybe not to some. It is owned by Kraft foods. Kraft's parent company is Altria, which also owns Phillip Morris. And Phillip Morris is one of the world's largest cigarette manufacturers.

The problem with ethical consumerism is that it is a multi-layered activity. It is not just as simple as buying free range eggs or fair trade coffee. While these may salve a troubled conscience, digging to find the ethical pay dirt usually reveals strata after strata of businesses and not all of them are necessarily ethically motivated.

*Christopher Bantick is a Melbourne writer  
Posted in [Fair Trade Editorials and Debate](#)*

## A. Now answer these questions about the article

1. Why is Al Gore blamed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How have we tried to reduce greenhouse gases?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the conditions for battery hens?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. With what are battery hens contrasted?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What do supermarkets strive to be?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the problem with supermarket products?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What kind of coffee is acceptable?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How can coffee work on consumer guilt?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What ethical concerns are there with chocolate?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What is ethical consumerism?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How do you know you are being ethical?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Is it easy to be ethical?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Who can people's choices affect?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What are fair trade deals?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Is it possible to be ethical as well as green?  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. What can digging to find the ethical pay dirt reveal?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Connect these words from the article to their *synonyms* or *meanings***

1. Strive	a) <i>Discreet</i>
2. Harvest	b) <i>Socially Benefitting</i>
3. Subtle	c) <i>a large amount of something</i>
4. Strata	d) <i>To put in a lot of effort</i>
5. Aerosol	e) <i>Naturally coloured</i>
6. Biodegradable	f) <i>An unwholesome Atmosphere</i>
7. Miasma	g) <i>Small metal pressurised can</i>
8. Brown-shelled	h) <i>Collecting crops</i>
9. Cornucopias	i) <i>Capable of being decomposed</i>
10. Fair trade	j) <i>Layers</i>