

Essay on consumption and the environment

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



There is often a trade-off for our society between consumption and the environment. The faster the economy grows the more resources it needs for further development and hence the more stress it puts on the environment. Consumerism in the contemporary society is often blamed for continuous pressure to produce and for the wasteful use of resources for manufacturing unnecessary material goods. However, there are always numerous sides of the issue to consider and it is impossible to find a unique solution to the dilemma between consumption and environment.

The article “ The Consumer Culture. Are Americans becoming materialistic?” gives a comprehensive analysis of the problem of consumerism in the society and its implications for the future development. Firstly, the author suggests that materialistic culture does encourage excessive consumption. People spend long hours working in order to earn enough money to buy things that do not add much value and are not essential for their lives. Major industries are designed in a way to make people buy more than they actually consume and to address latent needs of the customers, or the needs that they have not even been aware of. Some people argue that such extreme focus on purchasing material things decreases the quality of life of an average American and harms spiritual values in favour of materialistic ones. Consumerism also contributes to the rising inequality in the world, as it is described by Juliet Schor in “ The New Politics of Consumption”. As people strive to receive social recognition by acquiring luxury items, they work longer hours and aim to gain more money from various sources. Credit cards often become an instrument to bridge the financial means of a person with his/her desire to purchase certain items. Unfortunately, consumers do not

always realize the implications of buying on credit and cannot repay their debts. This fact has already exacerbated the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 and continues to threaten the existence and stability of the contemporary financial system. At the same time the income gap between the rich and the poor widens due to capital accumulation and increasing barriers to entry into profitable professions and businesses. The income difference is becoming apparent also on the country level, with the USA by far exceeding any other country in the world by the level of consumption and spending.

More scientific evidence of the detrimental effect of consumerism is shown in the article “ Putting a Value on Nature’s “ Free” Services” by Janet Abramovitz. The author argues that human consumption patterns do not take into account the limited ability of the planet to mitigate the damage, therefore we might eventually find ourselves struggling to find resources even for the mere survival.

However, it is fundamentally wrong, in my opinion, to blame consumerism in all the problems and to advocate the abandonment of the materialistic culture. Consumption is a driving mechanism for our economy and it is an essential element for economic growth, employment and innovation. A decrease in consumption could trigger a sequence of events that would eventually increase unemployment, decelerate development and decrease the overall standards of living worldwide. Low economic growth will only contribute to the problem of environmental deterioration, since the process of population growth worldwide is inevitable and it is necessary to find

means to support this growth. Moreover, if people are not able to satisfy their basic needs, they are likely to forgo environmental sustainability in favour of higher production.

The trade-off between consumption and the environment is not an easy one. However, both elements are essential for human development and well-being. The only way to accommodate both the needs of consumers and the environmental concerns is by seeking new sustainable ways to develop global economy. Only by communicating the importance of resource scarcity and environmental vulnerability as well as by extensive investment in research and development of more efficient and environmentally friendly technologies it is possible to preserve our planet and to enhance the quality of living.