



Mains Practice Question

Q. The concept of 'ethical consumerism' places moral responsibility on individuals for their consumption choices. Discuss the potential and limitations of this approach in addressing global environmental challenges. **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Begin by defining ethical consumerism.
- Highlight the significance of ethical consumerism in promoting sustainability and fairness.
- Conclude by summarizing its impact on individuals, businesses, and society.

Introduction

Ethical consumerism, a concept that encourages individuals to make **conscious consumption choices based on ethical and environmental considerations**, has gained significant traction in recent years.

- While it offers potential benefits in addressing global environmental challenges, it is important to understand its limitations and the need for complementary approaches.

Potential of Ethical Consumerism:

- **Market influence:** Ethical consumers can exert significant influence on markets by **supporting companies that prioritize sustainability and social responsibility**.
 - By choosing products and services from ethical brands, consumers can send a powerful message to businesses, encouraging them to adopt more sustainable practices. **(Example: The rise of organic food markets in India, with companies like 24 Mantra Organic seeing increased demand]**)
- **Increased awareness:** Ethical consumerism can raise awareness about environmental issues and promote a sense of **personal responsibility for addressing them**.
 - By making informed choices, consumers can become more engaged in **environmental issues and advocate for change**. **(Example: The #PlasticFreeJuly campaign in India, encouraging consumers to reduce single-use plastics)**
- **Innovation and Sustainability:** Ethical consumerism can drive innovation and the development of sustainable products and services.
 - As consumers demand more environmentally friendly options, businesses are incentivized to invest in research and development to meet these needs. **(Example: GoodDot's plant-based meats in India)**

Limitations of Ethical Consumerism:

- **Individual Action:** While individual choices can make a difference, addressing global environmental challenges often requires **collective action and systemic changes**.
 - Relying solely on ethical consumerism may not be sufficient to address complex issues like

climate change and biodiversity loss.

- **Accessibility and Affordability:** Ethical products and services may not always be accessible or affordable to all consumers, **especially in developing countries.**
 - This can limit the impact of ethical consumerism and exacerbate social inequalities.
- **Greenwashing:** Some companies may engage in **greenwashing**, making misleading claims about the sustainability of their products or services.
 - This can **confuse consumers** and undermine the effectiveness of ethical consumerism. (**Example: Bournvita's misleading label as an energy drink**, which was later addressed by the FSSAI)
- **Behavioral Factors:** Habitual consumption patterns and limited information can make it challenging for individuals to make ethical choices consistently.
 - Factors such as **convenience and social pressure can influence consumer behavior.**

Conclusion

Ethical consumerism offers a **valuable tool for addressing global environmental challenges** by empowering individuals to make conscious choices and influencing market dynamics. However, it is essential to recognize its limitations and complement it with broader systemic changes and policy interventions. By **combining ethical consumerism with collective action, innovation, and policy support**, we can work towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

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