



## 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)**

19 Sep, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

### 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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