



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE RISE OF ETHICAL CONSUMERISM

Ethical consumerism refers to purchasing decisions shaped not only by price and quality but also by concerns about labour rights, animal welfare, environmental impact, and corporate conduct. What began as a niche practice—buying Fairtrade coffee, choosing cage-free eggs, or avoiding a brand implicated in abuse—has become a mainstream expectation in many markets. Labels, online information, and social media campaigns have made it easier to associate everyday products with distant consequences. At the same time, ethical consumption has become a form of signalling: what a person buys can communicate values as clearly as what they say.

Several forces pushed this shift. Global supply chains, once largely invisible to consumers, have been exposed by investigative journalism, NGO reporting, and viral documentary clips. In the fashion sector, the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh became a widely cited catalyst, not because it created the first labour scandal, but because it concentrated public attention on factory safety, subcontracting, and the speed of “fast fashion” cycles. Retailers and manufacturers recognised that reputational risk had become a commercial variable: a damaging story could spread rapidly, prompting boycotts, negative reviews, or shareholder questions. Younger consumers, in particular, often report stronger preferences for purpose-driven brands, and companies have responded with “ethical” product lines and sustainability messaging intended to reassure rather than merely inform.

However, the growth of ethical consumerism collides with a persistent economic problem: information asymmetry. Consumers rarely observe production conditions directly, while firms have incentives to disclose selectively. Certification labels attempt to reduce this gap, but they introduce new complexity. Standards differ across certifiers, auditing quality varies, and a label can represent a minimum threshold rather than best practice. Companies may highlight one improvement—such as recycled packaging—while remaining silent about other harms, such as wage violations or deforestation risks upstream. As a result, consumers may misunderstand what a certification guarantees or overestimate the impact of small substitutions, treating a “better” choice as a comprehensive solution.

A second limitation is the attitude–behaviour gap. Surveys often show people claiming they want to buy ethically, yet real purchasing is constrained by time, income, and availability. Ethical products can cost more, and in many neighbourhoods—especially where competition is low—choice is limited. Even motivated consumers may prioritise



convenience when the ethical difference between two options is unclear or when a decision must be made quickly. Psychologists sometimes interpret this gap through cognitive dissonance: people manage discomfort between values and behaviour by lowering attention to ethical information, rationalising trade-offs, or choosing one “good” purchase to offset less ethical habits elsewhere.

Companies have adapted to ethical demand in different ways. Some invest in supply-chain audits, wage programs, traceability tools, or lower-impact materials, treating ethics as a management problem. Others focus on communication: sustainability reports, carbon claims, and brand storytelling designed to shape perception. Critics argue that this environment encourages greenwashing, in which selective improvements are publicised while high-volume, harmful business models remain intact. The difficulty is not only deception; it is also framing. If consumers cannot easily compare claims across products, marketing language can substitute for evidence, and firms may compete on narratives rather than outcomes.

Policy can strengthen or weaken ethical markets. When governments require corporate disclosures, ban certain practices, or set minimum standards, ethical choices become easier because the worst options are removed or clearly flagged. Regulation can also standardise reporting, reducing confusion created by inconsistent labels. Conversely, when regulation is weak, responsibility shifts onto individuals. Shoppers are then expected to compare competing claims across complex supply chains with limited time and expertise, effectively performing private auditing at the checkout. In such contexts, ethical consumerism can become a substitute for governance rather than a complement to it.

Ethical consumerism may also produce unintended effects. Boycotts can harm workers if brands withdraw suddenly from factories without providing transition support, leaving employees with lost wages but little leverage over the conditions that prompted the boycott. “Boycott” campaigns—encouraging purchases from approved brands—can concentrate power in large companies that can afford certification, marketing, and compliance staff. Small producers may struggle with the cost of audits or paperwork even when their practices are responsible. Ethical markets therefore do not automatically reward the most just outcomes; they reward what can be demonstrated, packaged, and trusted under prevailing systems of verification.

In response, many scholars argue that ethical consumerism should be treated as a complement to regulation rather than a replacement. Individual choices can create signals, fund alternatives, and normalise expectations, but large-scale change typically requires policy, collective action, and business models that reward durability and lower consumption. Overall, ethical consumerism has grown because people increasingly



connect consumption to consequences. Its promise lies in making markets more accountable. Its limitation is that shopping alone cannot solve structural problems unless supported by trustworthy information, fair access, and effective regulation.

Questions 1–5

Select the correct answer.

1 Ethical consumerism is described as purchasing that takes account of

- A** personal wellbeing alongside price and quality only
- B** legal compliance as the main determinant of choice
- C** social and environmental considerations as well as price and quality
- D** domestic production as a priority over imports

2 Which factor is presented as helping ethical consumerism move into the mainstream?

- A** Supply-chain visibility and rapid online reputational effects
- B** Universal agreement among certifiers on identical global standards
- C** A steady decline in ethical product prices until they match all alternatives
- D** Government bans removing unethical products in most markets

3 What problem is highlighted about labels and certification?

- A** They are accurate but too difficult for consumers to understand
- B** Differences in standards can lead to misunderstanding of what is guaranteed
- C** They prevent firms from reporting any positive initiatives
- D** They make ethical choices independent of supply-chain information

4 The passage implies the attitude–behaviour gap is largely explained by

- A** the disappearance of social media campaigns over time
- B** consumers' refusal to use online information when it is available
- C** the belief that certifications always represent best practice
- D** practical constraints and psychological strategies for managing value conflicts

5 Critics argue greenwashing is encouraged because some firms

- A** stop publishing sustainability reports to avoid scrutiny
- B** reduce production volumes when consumers request ethical alternatives
- C** publicise selective improvements while maintaining harmful high-volume models
- D** replace all audits with informal statements on social media

Questions 6–9



Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

6 The passage suggests that consumers may misunderstand certification labels and overestimate what small ethical choices achieve.

7 The passage states that European consumers purchase ethical goods at a higher rate than consumers in Asia.

8 The passage indicates that weak regulation can shift the burden of assessing supply-chain claims onto individual shoppers.

9 The passage suggests that boycotts can sometimes damage workers' livelihoods if companies withdraw without support.

Questions 10–13

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

10 Labels, online information, and social media help connect everyday products with distant consequences.

11 Limited time and income are not the only barriers; the of ethical products can also restrict actual purchasing.

12 Boycotts can harm employees if brands leave factories without

13 Some scholars argue ethical consumerism should complement rather than replace

Answer Key

1. C
2. A
3. B
4. D
5. C
6. TRUE
7. NOT GIVEN



8. TRUE

9. TRUE

10. campaigns

11. availability

12. transition support

13. regulation