

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM

CREATING CHANGE BY SPENDING WISELY



CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM



You must have observed the trend already: environmentally friendly products, alternative energy cars, fair trade coffee, etc. Consumers world-wide are becoming increasingly conscious of what they buy and from where. They are starting to pick brands that they are comfortable with what they produce and how. As a consumer, it's of great importance that you are aware of where your money goes and the impact it has.

As consumers, consumption takes up most of our daily lives, from what we eat, drink, or wear, to where and how we choose to spend our funds. At the end of it all someone out there is profiting, but what we are interested in is who? And are they profiting at the expense of another?

It's essential for you to be aware of where your money goes and the impact it has. This is what conscious consumerism is all about.

"What consumerism really is, at its worst, is getting people to buy things that don't actually improve their lives."

- Jeff Bezos

WHAT IS CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM?

Knowing the meaning of what a conscious consumer is will help you understand the term. A conscious consumer is not that easy to classify on its own, as they grossly span across ethnicity, age, gender, or any other socioeconomic status. What is most visible about them is that they are not as focused on price. Instead of focusing on price, they are focused on how their everyday purchases affect the larger political and environmental landscape. Conscious consumers are the *label-readers and fact-checkers*. They are the real and active everyday *brand-ambassadors* or irate and radical *brand-trashers*. They are the bloggers and the sharers on the social media.

Conscious consumerism is a practice of intentionally spending one's resources on products and brands produced by companies that have supply chains free of labour exploitation. These products must be naturally non-harmful to us and to our environment.

Being a conscious consumer means asking questions such as – how was this product produced? Where? By Who? Were the workers treated well? Were the materials ethically sourced?

Conscious consumerism takes into account the impact that our purchases will have on other people and as well as the environment. The most part of being a conscious consumer is learning and investigating the hidden real costs behind the things we buy. Most importantly, it helps us understand how our purchases can help and design a more sustainable business practice in our society and ensure a more responsible economy as a result.

In its simplest form, conscious consumerism is the practice of being very mindful about the products we buy, the brands we choose and the companies we buy from. The socially conscious consumer is an individual who takes into account the prevalent public consequence of his/her spending mannerism. It can be used to refer to a person who understands and utilizes his or her purchasing power to influence social change.



TRUE COST

Many products that consumers patronise because of price are a result of forced labour and worker mistreatment. This is particularly more prevalent if it is outsourced to the developing countries. Most consumers are unaware of this. Massive and unsustainable factories and machineries are utilized for this purpose which leads to unhealthy environmental pollution and destruction. This takes its toll on the lives of the inhabitants and workers.

It is important to educate oneself on the source of goods we purchase and do our best to support those businesses that value and follow ethical practices.

Being a conscious consumer can translate to spending a little extra on a course you believe in, knowing that it is completely worth it.

Living minimally is another tip on conscious consumerism. This will make you to be aware of where, what and why you spend your money. The trade in is to go for quality over quantity. Instead of having large amount of mostly unneeded mass-produced items, we can just get a few high-quality ones.

FOR INSTANCE

You don't have to look far to see things and companies that has been shaped by conscious consumerism. Look down this list and comment on how many you can relate to:

DAVE'S KILLER BREAD, based in Oregon, helps to reduce recidivism rates for people who have been incarcerated by providing them with meaningful jobs.

EYEWEAR maker Warby Parker helps to restore eyesight and provide jobs to people in the developing world.

GRAMEEN DANONE —a social-impact collaboration between Danone and Grameen Bank — makes a nutritious yogurt packed with nutrients to combat malnutrition in the developing world.

G-STAR RAW sells jeans made out of plastic removed from the oceans, while Levi's has revolutionized "water>less jeans" that reduce water consumption at every step of the production process.

IMPOSSIBLE FOODS serves a delicious hamburger made from plants, revolutionizing the impact of cattle on our personal health and that of the planet.

TESLA is inspiring a new generation of electric vehicles buyers while helping to reduce the impact of CO₂ emissions.

UNCHARTED PLAY has developed a soccer ball called the Soccket that generates electricity while playing it, helping to provide light to families in refugee camps.

And Toronto-based footwear brand **ALICE & WHITTLES** has created a fashionable, high-end, ethically sourced rubber boot that has significantly improved the entire supply chain, improving lives for the workers and the planet.

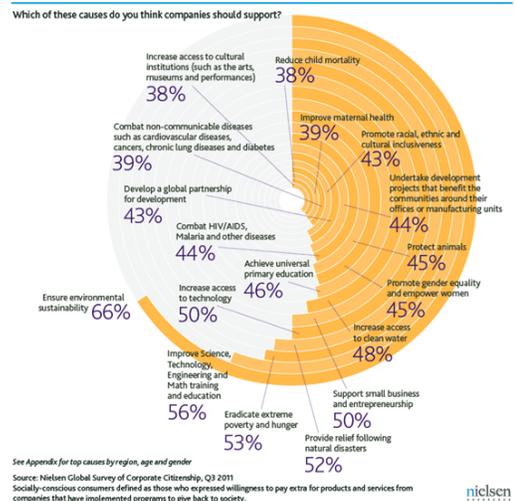
ITS NOW A TREND



It is common practice for new brand campaigns to utilize social purpose to advance the sale of their products. They can choose to come in form of promoting gender equality or whole food. Other times they claim their product is 200% more eco-friendly than is even possible.

This is all part of what we now call Conscious Consumerism as shoppers here mostly seek to support by purchasing goods that are more environmentally friendly and/or healthy. They like the product more if it has a community impact on a society. This goes well with the millennial shoppers that somehow believe that when you shop you are casting a vote for the kind of world you want.

Percent of socially conscious consumers who think companies should support these specific causes



Trends in society through research have been found to support these notions:

1. Consumers will support more by purchasing products that are made in an ethical fashion.

2. Consumers will go more for products that create some positive social and environmental benefit. As a matter a fact, Nielsen's Global Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility pointed out that about 55% of all global online consumers were more than willing to pay a higher price for products and services as long as they are provided by companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact.

Furthermore, the result of the experiments made by Cone Communication states that 89% of U.S consumers in addition to this will even likely switch brands to one with a cause, given comparable price and quality. The catch here is that people's purported behaviour doesn't always match their actual acts all the time, in fact they rarely do. Consumers always first go for favourable price and higher quality, not social impact.

For a company, the implication is this. For them to dominate and make larger sales, they must have to produce great products. When there is a tick on that, the social component is a bonus that will glue customers to the brand. Quality always wins over social purpose.

3. Conscious consumers believe that they can create social change by buying only ethically good products.

People against this notion always argue that the best way to create a social impact is to support charity not purchasing a product. This is flawed and untrue. It stems from an outdated mindset that cherishes charity, believing erroneously that business and social impact objectives cannot be mutually satisfied together.

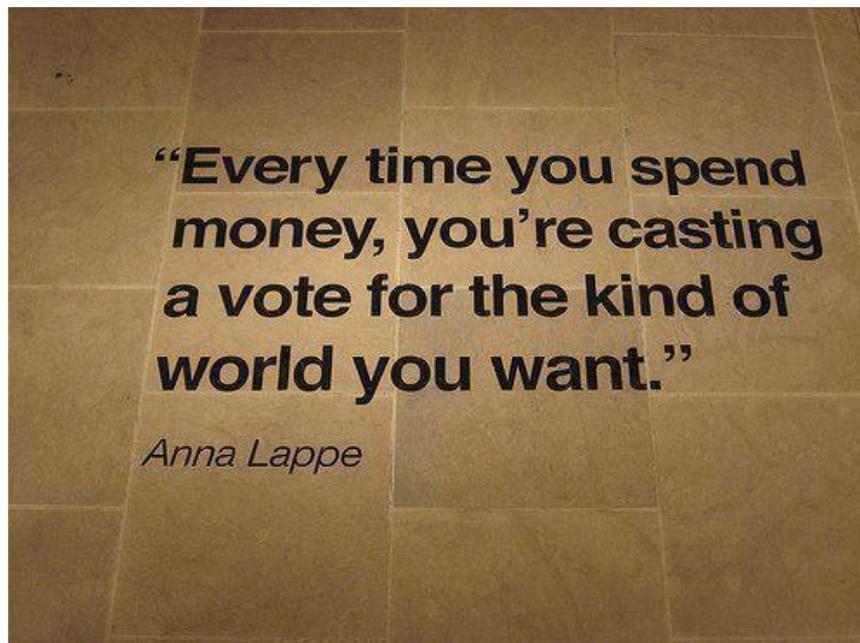
So many global companies today have proven this wrong. Just a few of them is listed on the For Instance section. These are but just a few businesses that generate profit and purpose.

POWER OF CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM



You might have noticed the oil giant BP. This is just a case-in-point example. BP back then in 2000, launched a \$200 million campaign to seemingly buy the heart of consumers and establish themselves as "a clean, green brand that considered alternatives beyond petroleum". All this was because of a \$45 million acquisition of Solarex, a solar energy company. The conscious consumers instead of going with the flow rather only saw that BP spent \$200 million in order to tell the world of their \$45 million "green" investment. This campaign backfired in an unlikely way as conscious consumers were enraged, and they took to blogging and trashing BP. It was this community that boycotted BP even long before the Gulf of Mexico fiasco. The disaster, combined with conscious consumer disgust, further led to BP's removal from the Dow Jones Sustainability Index.

Conscious consumerism is a powerful concept, and the trend will continue to grow more especially as brands and consumers recognize that businesses and social objectives can be mutually beneficial.



If you still just prefer to enjoy that anxiety releasing experience of satisfaction that comes only when you spend, use services, and invest your money, it pays more when you actually take some time to understand the full implication of what happens as a result of YOU being a consumer. Conscience consumerism simply brings to your attention/ knowledge of the power you wield of being able to decide how you rationally spend your money in such a way that help not just the environment, but the world at large.

At the end of the day, the goal here is for you to:

1. Be more conscious as to how, why, what and where you spend your money on. It pays to do that little research,
2. Get educated on where that dollar goes,
3. Do your best to support companies that provide ethically made and meaningful products.

So, have fun with this. Don't just consume, investigate your products. Inform others and enjoy your new found power. You have the power to create a better world, just by choosing what you spend on. DO the world a favor simply by making your consumption a conscious one. Be a conscious consumer for the greater good.