

## Consumerism and capitalism: dynamic evolution, economic benefits, and ethical challenges

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**Abstract.** *Consumerism and capitalism have played pivotal roles in shaping modern economies, driving industrialization, economic growth, and technological innovation. This paper examines the historical evolution of consumerism, from ancient trade economies to the industrial revolution and the rise of global consumer markets. It explores the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and consumer culture, highlighting both economic benefits – such as job creation, increased productivity, and social mobility – and ethical challenges, including environmental degradation, wage stagnation, and exploitative labour practices. The paper also discusses contemporary shifts in consumer behaviour, emphasizing ethical consumption, sustainability, and corporate responsibility. Ultimately, it argues for a balanced approach that preserves the economic advantages of consumerism while addressing its socio-environmental costs.*

**Keywords:** capitalism, economic growth, technological evolution, globalization, consumerism.

**JEL Classification:** D12, E21, O33.

## 1. Introduction

Consumerism, widely defined as the societal and economic framework in which the purchase of goods and services is prioritized and praised, is a phenomenon that is firmly rooted in today's capitalist world. While consumerism is most linked with twentieth-century industrial capitalism, its origins can be traced back to earlier periods in human history.

The ancient world's early trade-based economy laid the groundwork for consumerism. Luxury commodities became emblems of wealth and power among elites in societies like Mesopotamia, Egypt, and later Greece and Rome (Sassatelli, 2007). Spices, silk, and gold were often bought through long-distance trade, resulting in early consumer markets. Still, such consumption was confined to the elite, as most people lived on necessities.

During the medieval period in Europe, consumer behaviour was more restricted driven by feudal structures and the Church's moral teachings, which emphasized modesty and the spiritual perils of material excess (Campbell, 1987). However, the Renaissance brought about a cultural revolution, especially among the urban mercantile classes, as art, fashion, and literature celebrated individual expression and material acquisition. These changes paved the way for a more widespread cultural acceptance of consumerism.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries was instrumental in turning consumerism from an elite to a mass-market phenomenon. Mechanized production and technical innovation significantly reduced the cost of goods, making them attainable to a wider audience. For example, improvements in textile manufacturing permitted mass production of affordable apparel in the late 18th century, resulting in the first "consumer goods revolution" (McKendrick et al., 1982).

The rise of a capitalist market economy accentuated this trend. Consumerism became a symbol of social mobility and identity as cities expanded and the middle class grew. Department stores became temples of consumerism, providing not only goods but also a sensory experience that created aspirational purchasing (Miller, 1998).

Consumerism peaked during the twentieth century, particularly in Western cultures. Following World War II, economic prosperity and technological advances resulted in extraordinary levels of disposable income and leisure time. Governments, particularly in the United States, have emphasized consumer spending as a crucial driver of economic growth. The rise of mass media, particularly television, was essential in promoting consumer desires, with advertising creating societal ideals surrounding consumption (Ewen 1976).

The 20th century also saw the globalization of consumerism. Advances in transportation and communication have allowed multinational corporations to expand and grow their markets, bringing consumer goods to previously unreachable and inaccessible territories. Consumerism also became a cultural export, as Western-style malls, brands, and media began to influence lifestyle across the world (Ritzer, 1999).

From an economic standpoint, consumerism has been both beneficial and detrimental. On the bright side, it has been a big contributor to economic growth. High levels of consumer

spending increase demand, drive production, and create jobs. For example, the postwar economic boom in the United States in the 1950s was largely driven by a consumer-driven economy, as evidenced by the expansion of businesses such as automobiles, electronics, and household appliances (Galbraith, 1958).

Still, the reliance on consumer spending exposes economies to downturns. For example, the 2008 global financial crisis was caused in part by excessive consumer debt and easy credit. Additionally, consumerism often contributes to economic inequality, since those with higher salaries can afford services and goods that lower-income groups cannot.

Consumerism has had a significant impact on modern society, shaping cultural ideals, social conduct, and even individual identities. One of its most notable effects is the commodification of social status. In consumer societies, material items often serve as indicators of success, causing people to associate personal value with purchasing power (Baudrillard, 1998).

On a wider cultural level, consumerism has resulted in the standardization of lifestyle, as worldwide companies and media promote standardized ideals for beauty, wealth, and happiness. This has provoked criticism of cultural imperialism, particularly in areas where consumerist ideals have displaced traditional values and practices (Tomlinson, 1999).

The environmental effects of consumerism are likely its most important problem. High levels of consumption contribute to resource depletion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the fast fashion sector, a symbol of modern consumerism, is one of the world's major polluters, contributing to water waste and microplastic pollution (Fletcher, 2014).

Consumerism creates ethical concerns related to labour standards, as the demand for low-cost items frequently leads to exploitation in global supply chains. Efforts to address these challenges, such as the growth of ethical consumerism and sustainability movements, demonstrate an increasing understanding of the importance of responsible consumption.

## 2. Capitalist empowered consumerism

Capitalism created the ideal environment for consumerism to grow and flourish. At its heart, capitalism is based on private ownership of the means of production and market-driven economies, with profit as the primary motive. Consumerism adds to this system by producing constant demand for goods and services, thereby ensuring that production remains profitable.

The origins of capitalism can be traced back to the late medieval period in Europe. Feudal economies, which were primarily agrarian and subsistence-based, began to shift to market-oriented structures as commerce and urbanization increased in the 12th and 13th centuries (Braudel, 1982). The rise of merchant guilds and the spread of long-distance trade routes promoted the emergence of a money economy, which replaced barter systems.

The Renaissance (14th–17th centuries) was a watershed moment in the growth of capitalism. During this period, the rediscovery of classical knowledge and the growth of

humanism encouraged individual enterprise and inventiveness. Cities like Florence and Venice were banking and commerce hubs, promoting the development of financial institutions including banks, joint-stock companies, and credit systems (Arrighi, 2010). The Medici family of Florence, for example, played a critical role in early capitalist banking systems.

The 16th and 17th centuries saw the rise of early capitalist systems, fuelled by trade and colonization. The Age of Exploration enabled European nations to create colonial empires in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, resulting in broad networks of trade. The flood of precious metals from the New World, notably silver, drove economic expansion and inflation, resulting in the "Price Revolution" (Pomeranz, 2000).

Mercantilism, the main economic theory of the time, emphasized state control over trade to increase wealth and power. While not entirely capitalist, mercantilism paved the way for capitalism by encouraging market expansion and international competition (Smith, 1776). The formation of chartered trading firms, such as the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company, reinforced capitalist practices.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries constituted an important turning point in the capitalist age. Technological innovations such as the steam engine and automated textile manufacture shifted economies from agrarian to industrial (Landes, 1969). This transition coincided with the growth of factory systems, which concentrated labor and capital in urban areas.

During this time, some key aspects of modern capitalism emerged. Mechanized production improved productivity and reduced prices, allowing for mass production of commodities. An expanding urban workforce became wage-dependent, signalling a transition away from agrarian self-sufficiency. The concentration of wealth in the hands of industrialists and entrepreneurs boosted investment and innovation (Marx, 1867).

Adam Smith's foundational work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), outlined the foundations of free-market capitalism, emphasizing the importance of competition, self-interest, and minimal government involvement in promoting economic prosperity.

The 19th century saw the global growth of capitalism, fuelled by industrialization and imperialism. European nations expanded their capitalist economies through colonial conquests, exploiting resources and labour in colonized territories (Bodislav, 2011). This century also saw the emergence of financial capitalism, with stock markets, investment banks, and multinational companies becoming increasingly important (Hilferding, 1910).

In the twentieth century, capitalism evolved to meet new challenges as well as possibilities. The Great Depression of the 1930s showed the flaws in *laissez-faire* capitalism, resulting in an emergence of Keynesian economics, which pushed for government intervention to stabilize markets and promote social welfare. Following World War II, the Bretton Woods system created a framework for global capitalism, with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank promoting and supporting international trade and economic development.

Globalization shaped the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as capitalist economies grew integrated through trade, finance, and technology. Advances in communication and transportation supported worldwide market integration, while the growth of multinational firms resulted in complex supply chains spanning continents.

In the 1980s, politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher promoted free-market policies that minimized government regulation and privatized state-owned enterprises (Friedman, 1962).

The rise of technology corporations and the digital economy has altered capitalism, with companies such as Amazon, Apple, and Google exemplifying the concentration of wealth and influence in the tech industry.

The growing dominance of financial markets over productive industries has resulted in new opportunities and risks, as evidenced by the 2008 global financial crisis.

Capitalism has had profoundly and diverse impacts on society and the economy, influencing modern life in both positive and negative ways. Capitalism promotes innovation by rewarding entrepreneurs and businesses that create new technology and goods. Market competition encourages efficient resource allocation and production.

Capitalist economies have created unprecedented wealth, boosting living standards and lowering poverty in many areas (Pomeranz, 2000). Critics claim that capitalism positions earnings over people, resulting in labour exploitation and poor working conditions (Marx, 1867). Capitalist systems' quest of expansion and consumerism has contributed to climate change, deforestation, and resource depletion (Foster, 2000).

A fall in consumerism would have a large influence on GDP in economies where consuming accounts for most of the economic activity. For example, in the United States, consumer expenditure accounts for over 70% of GDP. A sudden drop in expenditure without a planned transition could result in economic collapse, job losses, and disruption in society (Galbraith, 1958). Careful policy planning, including investments in green jobs and social safety nets, would be required to reduce these risks.

Consumerism and capitalism, regardless of their drawbacks, have undoubtedly contributed to human progress. They have promoted innovation, enhanced global connectivity, and raised many people's living standards. However, there are major trade-offs to these gains.

The profit incentive has pushed advances in medicine, technology, and infrastructure. From vaccinations to cell phones, economic rivalry often stimulates speedy invention. Critics claim that this innovation is usually mismatched with societal demands, focusing on profit-generating advances rather than universally beneficial ones (Foster, 2000).

Capitalist economies have lifted millions of individuals out of poverty, especially in emerging markets such as China and India. Globalization of trade and manufacturing has led to unparalleled wealth growth (Pomeranz, 2000).

The ecological impact of consumption is enormous, contributing to climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss.

### 3. Modern societies and the healthy need to consume

The mindset of purchasing something to achieve happiness has its origins in the economic and cultural transformations that began with the Industrial Revolution and expanded throughout the twentieth century. While consumerism is not a new concept—humans have always traded and purchased goods—the connection of consumption to emotional fulfilment and identity is a relatively recent and modern phenomenon.

The Industrial Revolution (18th-19th centuries) represented the first significant shift toward a society based on work and consumption. Prior to this period, most individuals lived an agrarian lifestyle, producing only what they needed to survive and consuming sparingly. Nevertheless, industrialization created and introduced mass production, which significantly increased the availability of goods while decreasing their cost (Hobsbawm, 1962). Factories needed many workers, and the wages from these jobs formed a new class of people able to afford manufactured goods.

In the early twentieth century, consumerism evolved as a cultural force. Industrialists such as Henry Ford revolutionized manufacturing by introducing assembly-line production, making products like automobiles affordable to the average worker. Ford famously stated that he wanted his employees to be earning enough money to buy the products they produced, reflecting the emerging symbiosis between production and consumption (Galbraith, 1958).

As previously mentioned, consumerism has historically been instrumental in the improvement of living standards, technological advancements, and economic expansion. Nevertheless, ethical concerns regarding the ethical implications of global markets began to emerge as they developed. Over time, consumerism evolved from a force of progress to a system that was criticized for the propagation of environmental exploitation. In a similar direction, contemporary societies must deal with an increasing affordability crisis, as individuals are unable to preserve their purchasing power. This change raises critical issues regarding the origin of affordability challenges, which may be attributed to a cultural shift in financial motivation and work ethic or to the increasing costs of goods and services.

The emergence of planned obsolescence, a phenomenon in which products are intentionally designed with short lifespans to encourage repetitive purchases, has become a significant ethical issue. In the late 20th century, critics stated that consumerism had transformed into a system that prioritized corporate profits over sustainability and ethical responsibility, and that it was wasteful and manipulative (Packard, 1960).

In the early 2000s, the ethical decline of consumerism was further accelerated by the increase of rapid fashion, environmentally destructive production methods, and exploitative labour practices (Klein, 2000). Global supply chains generated substantial carbon emissions, while multinational corporations outsourced manufacturing to countries with weaker labour protections, resulting in worker exploitation in sweatshops.

*For what reason are individuals having trouble affording essential goods and services?*

Although consumerism initially supported greater affordability through mass production and economies of scale, present-day economic trends have reversed this effect, making

essential goods and services increasingly inaccessible. This transition is the result of a variety of interconnected factors:

- **Wage stagnation and inflation.** One of the most significant factors contributing to decreased affordability is inflation, which affects the purchasing power of money. In numerous countries, wages have failed to keep pace with the increasing cost of living, particularly in the areas of housing, healthcare, and education, over the past few decades (IMF, 2023). In contrast to previous generations, who were able to afford homes, vehicles, and other assets due to stable employment, the current workforce is confronted with higher living costs without proportional salary increases, resulting in financial strain (Piketty, 2014).
- **Market Consolidation and Corporate Pricing Strategies.** In numerous industries, large corporations possess pricing power, which enables them to establish exorbitant prices without concern for competition. This has been especially evident in the housing market, where corporate investment in real estate has resulted in a rise in property values and rental costs, leaving homeownership increasingly unattainable for younger generations (Milanovic, 2016). Similarly, industries such as pharmaceuticals, higher education, and even fundamental consumer goods have experienced price increases that exceed income growth, which has intensified financial hardships for ordinary consumers (Stiglitz, 2019).
- **Cultural shifts, social media, and changing work ethics.** Cultural changes, notably in attitudes toward work and financial ambition, have contributed to the affordability crisis in addition to economic factors. In recent years, the "bare minimum" work mentality, which has been promoted on social media, has impacted an increasing segment of the population, resulting in a disengagement from high-performance work culture (Newport, 2016). This change is partially a response to the increasing recognition that traditional employment structures no longer offer the same level of financial security as they once did, as well as to the culture of burnout.

Although it is crucial to promote work-life balance, the current trend of dismissing ambition and competitiveness entirely raises concerns regarding long-term economic mobility. When there is a decrease in the number of individuals who are willing to pursue specialized professions, entrepreneurship, or career advancement, the overall productivity decreases, which in turn restricts income growth and contributes to growing economic inequality (Bregman, 2017). This trend has resulted in a paradoxical situation in which individuals are less inclined to take the necessary measures to improve their financial situation, despite feeling dissatisfied with it.

Consumerism's change from an economic force to an ethical issue mirrors larger economic, environmental, and cultural shifts. Economic dissatisfaction has been accentuated by cultural shifts in work ethic and financial motivation, in addition to the increasing costs and corporate pricing strategies that have rendered essential products less affordable. Society must achieve a balance between fair economic policies that protect purchasing power and individual accountability in financial decision-making to address these challenges. While protecting the advantages that consumerism has historically offered, the restoration of economic equilibrium can be achieved by promoting ethical consumerism, cultivating a productive work environment, and guaranteeing fair market competition.

#### 4. The economic benefits of consumerism: global & historical analysis

The continuous acquisition of products and services, which is referred to as consumerism, has long been a driving force in the development of the global economy. Despite criticism for encouraging materialism and environmental concerns, consumerism has been a key factor in boosting employment, economic expansion, and technical advancement. Historically, the rise of consumer-driven marketplaces resulted in substantial economic transformations, and consumer spending remains a critical foundation of economic stability today. In this article, the economic benefits of consumerism are examined from both historical and contemporary global perspectives, with a particular emphasis on its ability to increase industrial production, boost competition, and stimulate economic growth.

##### *Consumerism's historical financial advantages*

Early 20th-century industrialization, mass production, and the expansion of consumer credit all contributed to the emergence of consumerism. The 1920s witnessed a dramatic change in economic systems in both the US and Europe as customers had easier access to fashion items, home appliances, and cars. Economic expansion was further reinforced by this spike in demand, which promoted large-scale manufacturing and created jobs (Lebergott, 1993). The cost of commodities was significantly reduced by mass production, as demonstrated by Henry Ford's automobile assembly lines. This made consumer products more accessible to the general population and improved overall living standards (Galbraith, 1958).

In Western Europe and Japan, consumerism was notably influential in the reconstruction of war-torn economies following World War II. High levels of consumer spending during the postwar economic boom, commonly referred to as the "Golden Age of Capitalism," fueled quick industrial growth and job creation (Marglin, Schor, 1990). Countries like Japan and West Germany implemented consumer-driven economic policies that prioritized the production of products for both domestic and international markets, resulting in unprecedented economic growth. Consumer lifestyles were revolutionized by the increasing availability and number of durable products, including automobiles and household appliances, which established robust industrial supply chains that facilitated and supported economic expansion (Cross, 2000).

Additionally, the economic development of emergent markets was facilitated by the globalization of consumerism in the late 20th century. Developing nations, including China and India, experienced substantial industrial expansion as Western consumer culture expanded globally (Stiglitz, 2002). This expansion was facilitated by an increase in domestic consumption and foreign investment. These nations were able to attain rapid urbanization, enhanced living standards, and elevated economic mobility because of the transition from subsistence economies to consumer-oriented markets.

##### *Consumerism's economic advantages and rewards in the present day*

In today's global economy, consumerism continues to be a significant factor in the acceleration of economic development. In developed countries, personal consumption expenditures account for a substantial portion of GDP, with consumer spending accounting



for nearly 68% of the U.S. economy and similarly large percentages in the European Union (Krugman, Wells, 2018). This trend is also prominent in emerging economies, where the expansion of the middle class has resulted in a heightened demand for consumer products and services.

The role of consumerism in generating employment is one of its most significant economic benefits. A substantial workforce is required in a variety of sectors, such as manufacturing, retail, logistics, and service industries, due to the substantial demand for products and services (Ritzer, 2019). The retail and e-commerce sectors have experienced rapid expansion, resulting in an abundance of employment opportunities on a global scale. For instance, the emergence of multinational retail corporations like Alibaba and Amazon has generated millions of employment opportunities, both directly in logistics and distribution and indirectly in technology and customer service (Kalleberg, 2011).

Innovation and competition among businesses are also driven by consumerism. Companies are perpetually aspiring to enhance and improve their existing products and introduce new ones to attract and retain consumers. The digital economy and green technology are among the new industries that have emerged because of the competitive environment that promotes technological advancements (Schumpeter, 1942). For instance, the automotive sector has experienced substantial improvements in energy efficiency and environmental sustainability because of the increasing demand for sustainable consumer choices (Christensen, 1997).

Also, consumerism provides economic diversification by promoting a diverse array of products and services that are customized to meet the unique requirements of consumers. Businesses are encouraged to accommodate a wide range of cultural preferences and lifestyle trends as global markets expand, which promotes a more dynamic and interconnected global economy (Brookings Institution, 2019). This diversification has been beneficial to the fashion, food, and entertainment sectors, as consumers are increasingly seeking personalized products that align with their social values and personal identities.

In both historical and contemporary contexts, consumerism has been a critical factor and an essential component in the advancement of economic development, the improvement of living standards, and the encouraging of innovation on a global scale. Consumer-driven markets have consistently generated employment, empowered competition, and expanded economic opportunities, from the industrial transformations of the early 20th century to the modern globalized economy. Although concerns regarding sustainability and ethical consumption persist, the economic benefits of consumerism—including the promotion of innovation, increased GDP, and job creation—have made a substantial contribution to the prosperity of contemporary economies. It will be essential to maintain long-term economic stability by balancing consumer-driven economic development with sustainable practices as the world keeps advancing and evolving.

## 5. Improving the quality of life through technological evolution

Accelerating technological innovation is one of the most significant ways in which consumerism has advanced the world. Businesses are encouraged to allocate resources toward research and development initiatives as consumers demand more sustainable, efficient, and superior products. This competition has resulted in significant improvements to living standards by developing advancements in industries such as transportation, healthcare, and communication. For instance, the demand for smartphones, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy solutions has resulted in rapid advancements that are beneficial to both individuals and industries (Christensen, 1997). The global transition to smart technology and automation, which is primarily motivated by consumer preferences, has improved productivity, safety, and convenience in a variety of industries (MasterClass, 2023).

In addition, the accessibility of essential products and services has been provided by consumerism. As a result of consumer demand, mass production has reduced the cost of commonplace necessities, rendering them more accessible to a broader population. The global health outcomes have been substantially improved by the increased availability of healthcare technology, pharmaceuticals, and nutrition-focused products (Stiglitz, 2002). Consumerism has raised the standard of living by promoting economies of scale. This is especially true in emerging economies where rapid urbanization has made it easier to access modern conveniences (Brookings Institution, 2019).

### *The new era of corporate responsibility and ethical consumerism*

In recent decades, consumerism has undergone a transformation that embraces ethical and sustainable consumption, which is suggestive of the increasing global consciousness of environmental and social concerns. Businesses are being prompted to implement more responsible practices as consumers are increasingly prioritizing products that are consistent with their values. This change has resulted in the growth of corporate social responsibility initiatives, eco-friendly production, and equitable trade. The power of consumer-driven change has been demonstrated by companies that prioritize ethical sourcing, sustainable packaging, and reduced carbon footprints, which have acquired competitive advantages (Kalleberg, 2011).

The advancement of environmental sustainability and labour rights has also been promoted by ethical consumerism. Responsible sourcing and transparent supply chains are implemented by brands to minimize negative environmental impacts and combat exploitative labour practices. Investopedia (2023) has found that consumers are more inclined to endorse businesses that prioritize eco-conscious manufacturing, safe working conditions, and equitable wages. This trend has had an impact on industries such as technology, food, and fashion, where sustainable alternatives are becoming increasingly popular.

### *Social progress and consumerism*

In addition to its economic influence, consumerism has been instrumental in advancing social progress by increasing accessibility to information and education. Educational

resources have become widely accessible because of the demand for digital technology and online services, which has enabled individuals to acquire knowledge and skills that were previously unreachable or limited. Platforms providing free and low-cost educational content are growing as customer engagement has expanded, opening new opportunities for learning and professional development around the world (Brookings Institution, 2019).

Global demand has driven media consumption, which has resulted in a more comprehensive representation of diverse cultures, identities, and perspectives. Streaming services, literature, and digital platforms have allowed for a greater degree of cultural exchange, thereby promoting inclusivity as well as understanding (Ritzer, 2019). The capacity to access a wide range of content has expanded societal awareness, thereby challenged conventional narratives and enabled progressive social change (Georgescu, 2023).

Although consumerism is often criticized for its detrimental effects, it has been an engine for positive improvements worldwide. In addition to its fundamental economic contributions, it has been instrumental in the advancement of technology, the enhancement of accessibility to products and services, advancing the adoption of ethical business practices, and the development of social progress. The transition to responsible and informed consumerism has illustrated that individuals possess the capacity to influence industries and cultivate sustainable growth. Businesses and governments must maintain a balance between economic expansion and ethical considerations to guarantee that consumerism continues to be a driving force for long-term global progress, as consumer demand continues to evolve.

## 6. Consumerism, Motivation, and the Psychological Effects of Anti-Materialistic Narratives

Although consumerism has been an engine for economic advancement, innovation, and an enhanced quality of life, its social perception has become increasingly complicated. In certain social and cultural contexts, individuals who pursue success and material rewards are subjected to criticism, which creates an environment that discourages ambition and competition. As a result of this change in attitudes, individuals may experience a decrease in motivation and determination, as they believe that the efforts they make to better their financial status or acquire consumer products are being criticized and attacked. This perspective can have long-term implications for both personal development and economic growth due to its psychological and societal consequences.

### *The social stigma associated with success and consumerism*

In numerous societies, an increasing ideological divide has emerged between those who build material success as a symbol of achievement and those who regard consumerism as excessive, wasteful, or morally questionable. The direct demonization of financial success and ambition will create an environment in which individuals are unmotivated to pursue and aim for excellence.

As shown by psychological research, human behaviour is significantly influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Personal fulfilment is the driving force behind intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation is characterized by external rewards, including

affluence, recognition, or material possessions (Deci, Ryan, 2000). Extrinsic motivation may be diminished because of societal judgment, which may discourage individuals from achieving financial success or material rewards, resulting in a decrease in performance, effort, and innovation (Dweck, 2006).

In economic and psychological studies, rewards are a primary motivator of human effort. Individuals might question the purpose of working harder or excelling in their field when financial rewards, status symbols, and material aspirations are criticized or devalued. The motivation to pursue high-paying careers, establish businesses, or innovate in competitive industries will be diminished and compromised if ambition is associated with greed or moral failure (Pink, 2009).

Moreover, broader economic stagnation can be worsened by social environments that discourage ambition and competitiveness. A culture that penalizes success rather than honours effort may result in a decrease in productivity, diminished risk-taking, and reduced advancements in industries that depend on high-performance individuals (Heath, Sitkin, 2001). Economic dynamism and progress are prominent in societies that prioritize ambition and competition, including those that value entrepreneurship and reward dedication and perseverance (Schumpeter, 1942).

#### *The psychological consequences of being criticized for aspiration, ambition and purpose*

Along with the detrimental impact on the economy, the social judgment connected to wanting to be prosperous and being successful can lead to depression, anxiety, and a lack of personal fulfilment. Individuals who want to be successful and financially independent may feel a sense of disconnect and dissatisfaction when their wants and needs clash with what a few groups of people thinks of them. This tension can lead to feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem, particularly when individuals are forced and face pressure to minimize and limit their aspirations to accommodate social norms (Festinger, 1957).

Research in the field of psychology indicates that self-determination and goal-setting are crucial and essential for maintaining mental health. People may experience a decrease in their sense of purpose and fulfilment when they are discouraged from pursuing material rewards that are consistent with their values or feel that they lack control over their aspirations (Sheldon, Elliot, 1999). Moreover, the absence of motivation to pursue personal or financial growth can result in heightened feelings of apathy, dissatisfaction, and disengagement from work and social life (Seligman, 2002).

Consumerism has always been a source of drive, pushing people to put their skills to use and come up with innovative and creative concepts that would help societies develop and evolve (Georgescu, 2020). Nevertheless, the increasing social stigma associated with financial success and ambition has resulted in a decrease in motivation, which has led to disengagement and a decrease in effort across a variety of areas. It is essential to establish a culture that maintains a balance between ethical responsibility and ambition to guarantee ongoing economic growth and personal fulfilment. Societies should cultivate environments that celebrate success in partnership with values such as sustainability and social contribution, rather than discouraging financial aspirations (Bodislav, Georgescu, 2023).

## 7. Conclusion

It is imperative to maintain a healthy, sustainable, and productive approach to financial motivation by balancing ambition with ethical consumerism. When individuals are motivated to pursue success and financial growth while also considering the broader implications of their consumption decisions, they are more likely to experience long-term fulfilment, economic stability, and psychological well-being. This approach confirms that ambition is perceived as a positive force rather than as vanity or greed.

Innovation, progress, and self-improvement are all powered by the fundamental human drive of ambition. Individuals strive for excellence in their professions, education, and business activities in societies that encourage ambition. This results in increased productivity, creating employment opportunities, and economic dynamism (Schumpeter, 1942). Nevertheless, the demotivation of individuals may result in economic stagnation and reduced innovation when ambition is discouraged or condemned (Dweck, 2006).

A culture that prioritizes ambition encourages:

- Entrepreneurship, competent labour, and competitive markets contribute to increased economic output.
- Elevated quality of life, as individuals aspire for personal and professional success.
- Increased advancement in society, which enables individuals to boost their financial status through education and dedication (Frankl, 1959).

Ethical consumerism guarantees that personal success and achievement does not compromise sustainability, social justice, or long-term well-being. Ethical consumerism implies mindful purchasing decisions that consider factors such as environmental sustainability, adequate labour practices, and responsible corporate behaviour (Goleman, 2009).

While maintaining an awareness of their influence on society and the environment, individuals are motivated to achieve success.

A culture that inspires ethical consumerism and encourages ambition must establish a balance between personal well-being, social responsibility, and financial success. Individuals can continue to pursue financial motivation without participating to negative social or environmental impacts by establishing a society that prioritizes innovation, dedication, and ethical decision-making. This approach can guarantee that consumerism is a constructive force, supporting sustainable development and economic growth, thus helping to create a more prosperous and beneficial future.

### *Consequences of the elimination of consumerism*

Completely eliminating consumerism would result in severe adverse consequences, including the disruption of economies, the reduction of employment, stagnation of technological advancements, and a decline of the overall quality of life, as following:

1. Economic Collapse and Job Loss. The complete elimination of consumerism would result in a severe contraction of economies worldwide, which would result in widespread job losses and financial instability. The absence of consumer spending

would lead to a decrease in industrial production, business closures, and diminished investments, as it is a significant component of economic activity (Piketty, 2014).

Consumer demand is a significant factor in the retail, entertainment, technology, and hospitality sectors, which would be particularly impacted. This would result in a rise in poverty rates, reduced social mobility, and economic stagnation, as millions of workers in these sectors would be unemployed (Stiglitz, 2019).

2. **Decline in Innovation and Advancement.** A world without consumerism would lack the competitive drive that stimulates invention. Industries would have minimal motivation to allocate resources to research and development if consumer demand did not motivate them to create new technologies and enhance existing products (Schumpeter, 1942). Revolutionary products, such as smartphones, modern medicine, and transportation advancements, have been historically driven by consumer needs (Christensen, 1997). The elimination of consumerism would hold back technological advancement, thereby inhibiting economic and scientific progress.
3. **Decline in Quality of Life.** The loss of consumerism would not only affect economies but also lead to a decrease in the overall quality of life. The availability of a wide range of products and services helped improve the well-being of individuals, increased convenience, and provided them with more options. Access to contemporary healthcare, entertainment, personal technology, and transportation would be severely limited in the absence of a robust consumer market (McDonough, Braungart, 2002). Additionally, the elimination of consumerism could result in a more restricted and controlled economic system, in which governments or a limited number of organizations determine the distribution of resources. This could potentially restrict financial independence, limit entrepreneurship, and reduce individual freedoms (Galbraith, 1958).

Despite the challenges that it faces, consumerism continues to be a critical component of global economic stability, innovation, and optimized living standards. It promotes technological advancements that benefit individuals and societies, supports job development, and drives economic growth. Although ethical consumerism and sustainable practices are necessary to address concerns about overconsumption and environmental impact, the complete eradication of consumerism would result in economic destruction, a loss of innovation, and a decrease in quality of life. Rather than entirely opposing consumerism, a more balanced approach that prioritizes corporate accountability, sustainability, and responsible consumption can guarantee ongoing advancement without excessive waste and exploitation.

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