Consumerism

Consumerism is the idea that the consumption of goods is beneficial to society or its economy. In a consumer society people aspire to earn more money in order to buy better products, such as an expensive car, the latest phone or new clothes.

The problem with consumerism is that people become increasingly materialistic, which means that they care too much about material goods. We judge people based on what items and brands they can afford. Brands like 'Louis Vuitton' and 'Mercedes' are status symbols – they show us that someone has money.

There is also the problem of advertising, which creates new ideas and needs. It persuades us to buy the latest styles. This is a problem because people may be tricked and manipulated into buying things that they do not need.

Positives of Consumerism

Consumerism creates employment.

It helps to reduce poverty.

It encourages innovation and creativity in business.

We live in a global economy.

We have a better quality of life.

Summary

Consumerism creates more prosperous and advanced countries. Firstly, it helps to create employment because when people spend more money there is more demand for products and services. This increase in job opportunities helps to reduce poverty as more people will be able to find well-paying jobs.

Secondly, consumerism encourages innovation and creativity in business. In order to attract more customers, companies need to create new and better products. Furthermore, companies are driven to look for new customers in different countries. This is beneficial because it means that useful items are spread around the world, and to countries that could not produce them by themselves. Overall, consumerism can lead to us having a better quality of life.

Negatives of Consumerism

Consumerist societies create more waste.

Consumerism creates a 'throw-away' culture.

They use more natural resources.

They cause damage to the environment.

Advertisers tell us who we are and what we want.

Wealth does not lead to happiness.

We should return to traditional values like sharing.

Summary

Consumerism has many negative effects on society. First of all, consumerist societies create more waste because they have a 'throw-away' culture. This means that people buy more products rather than using the ones they already have. Therefore, these societies use more natural resources and cause damage to the environment.

Secondly, consumerism promotes the false idea that wealth leads to happiness. Advertisers persuade us to spend a lot of time and money to acquire an item which will not make us happier. For example, someone may spend a lot of money on the latest smart phone only to realise that it is very similar to the phone they already have. We should be less focused on material items and return to traditional values like sharing, because this will make us happier.

Practice Question

Many people say that we now live in 'consumer societies' where money and possessions are given too much importance. Others believe that consumer culture has played a vital role in improving our lives.
Discuss both views and give your opinion.