The following are general comments about the structure and contents of an academic essay written for university – they are not prescriptive and intended as an educational guide only.

Assignment 1- Essay

Date of Assignment

Q: Discuss the idea that 'overconsumption in both developed and developing nations' is a serious threat to true sustainability'.

It can be said that a growing trend of overconsumption, particularly in Western industrialised nations, is rising considerably. This phenomena extends to a wide range of goods and products which at one time were built to be repaired and reused, but now deemed too expensive to do so, are simply tossed aside to make way for a brand-new version of themselves. Additionally, it can be said that in particular developed nations, individuals consume and purchase far too many products which are all too quickly consumed and not reused, repaired or recycled; and after their usefulness has passed are simply discarded or sent to landfill refuse sites. The overconsumption of goods and products therefore is seen as a true threat to achieving sustainability in the 21st century and will continue to be ever more problematic until action is taken to curb this trend. As populations rise and become more affluent and developed, the overconsumption of goods and natural resources generally tends to grow exponentially, and in many cases, unsustainably leads to serious consequences. This essay will therefore discuss some of the main reasons why overconsumption has become a worrying issue and a detrimental trend in major industrialised nations. Furthermore, possible strategies in which to reduce this growing epidemic in the future will be outlined and explored.

The reasons for overconsumption in developed nations could be said to be somewhat complex and not only linked to many countries' greater affluence but also to the satisfaction of individual's personal needs. Bourdieu (1984) states that in modern society, consumer patterns and buying behaviour represent an individual's way of expressing the particular group to which they identify with in society. However, it could be stated that the main reasons for this increasing trend tend to be linked to industrially developed and developing nations generally becoming more affluent, as well as the rise of modern machinery which can produce goods more cheaply and efficiently than ever before. A further factor could also be outlined in that a globalised economy is helping to buy and exchange goods on an immense international scale which is further enhanced through global Internet trading and increased economies of scale in modern manufacturing. Consequently, it can be deduced that it is mainly these phenomena which are driving the overconsumption of goods in modern day society. Pape et al. (2011, p. 26) state that 'overconsumption in industrialised countries still presents major challenges to achieving sustainable development goals' and it is vital that governments begin to recognise this. The authors go on to state that increased household

Comment [A1]: There is no need to write the question at the top of your assignment. This is just for information purposes only. Your introduction should paraphrase the question, so that the reader understands.

Comment [A2]: The essay starts with some background information to set the scene and orientate the reader.

Comment [A3]: The introduction is also the perfect place to restate the question-so that the reader knows what it is you'll be discussing –see comment A1 above.

Comment [A4]: Here is the student's 'thesis statement' which is their main line of argument throughout the essay.

Comment [A5]: Towards the end of the introduction, the student signposts the main points of what the essay will discuss. This lets the reader know more about what is to come in the paper.

Comment [A6]: The paragraph starts with a topic sentence –which is the main controlling idea of what this particular paragraph will discuss/argue.

Comment [A7]: Here the student is using the literature to support their argument. Here it is paraphrased by the student from the original text.

Comment [A8]: The paragraph subsequently builds up with supporting points/arguments throughout the body of the paragraph.

Comment [A9]: Transition signals like 'consequently, however, therefore, moreover etc.) are good ways to link your sentences together to get better cohesion (smoothness) in your writing.

Comment [A10]: Here a direct quote is used from the literature. As it is a direct quote, the citation must show a page number. Also, because there are more than 3 authors, we abbreviate all but the first author to 'et al.'

consumption in richer nations has been identified as a 'key contributing factor to global problems such as climate change, depletion of energy resources and biodiversity loss' (Pape et al. 2011, p. 27). It should also be stated that this practice of overconsumption cannot be sustained in the long-term future and that the consumption of natural resources and fossil fuels for manufacturing at this present rate cannot continue either. It is clear then that action and 'mindfulness' regarding this trend of rapid consumption needs to be undertaken, as well as ensuring that 'emerging' developing countries and the increasing middle classes which inhabit them do not also follow similar unsustainable consumer practices that Western countries display.

There are several ways that industrialised nations at large could attempt to reduce individuals' consumption of too many products. Firstly perhaps, the importance of developing 'behavioural change' along with a possible return to the previous generations' days of fixing and repairing faulty or damaged goods would be one way of reducing the amount of electrical goods (so-called e-waste) that are often discarded (Gilleard & Higgs 2009; Pape et al. 2011). Furthermore, to increase and actively promote full recycling (as well as the government legislation to endorse it) within the home/organisation so as to more effectively reduce paper and energy misuse would be of immense added benefit. Schafer, Jaeger-Erben and Dos Santos (2011) and Seri (2009) all state that society needs to understand the dangers of producing and over-utilising too many precious resources in the needless overproduction of goods and the potential devastating environmental effects that will subsequently occur. This is further complemented by the idea from Mason (2004) who argues that:

> The consumerist lifestyle feeds itself through spiralling desire from material gratification that can never be stated and that attention should turn to opposing today's excessive consumerism by focusing on the benefits of a lifestyle of moderation and self-restraint. This should be of key focus to all. (p. 52).

This may be an idealist's viewpoint. However, its key message has some significant merit and certainly to address this problem a change in human behaviour and attitude must first be realised.

In conclusion therefore, the issue of overconsumption in industrialised nations and its link to sustainability is one which needs much debate. It also requires significant behavioural change coupled with government action and legislation. This essay has discussed some of the main reasons for overconsumption in these countries in the 21st century and as such, unless action is taken, the

Comment [A11]: Again a direct quote here is being used. It is a good idea to use both direct quotes as well as paraphrases in your work. Generally use paraphrased information more than direct quotes however.

Comment [A12]: The paragraph ends with a 'concluding sentence' which is trying to summarise the main points raised in the paragraph. It also rounds the paragraph off nicely.

Comment [A13]: Again, paragraphs need to start with a topic sentence which will outline and inform the reader what the paragraph will talk about.

Comment [A14]: Supporting sentences follow, which build on the idea outlined in the topic sentence.

Comment [A15]: Here the writer is using 2 references together (in alphabetical order) as they both share the same opinion. This is good to show that you have critically reflected on your background reading and noticed similarities.

Comment [A16]: Bringing authors together to strengthen the arguments being made. The authors share the same opinions so it is good to show that you have noticed this in your reading. The original information has been paraphrased into the student's own words.

Note: most references need to be paraphrased in your writing and try to keep 'direct quotes' to a minimum in your work as a general rule.

Comment [A17]: Here the student is using a longer quote (over 30 words). When using longer direct quotes- the writer must indent in a separate paragraph in a smaller font. Provide a reference along with a page number. Quote marks are not required.

Comment [A18]: The paragraph finishes with a concluding sentence which ties up and summarises the key points made within the paragraph. This obviously also links back to the topic sentence of the paragraph.

Comment [A19]: The essay conclusion has a few jobs to do as follows:

-Needs to generally restate the question again for the reader.

-Needs to briefly summarise the points made within the essay without being repetitive

-Finishes with some final comments to promote further thought for the reader.

effects on natural resources will take a devastating toll. Although the reasons for this trend can be described as somewhat complex, they are generally classified and linked to the development of richer, faster growing developed nations and societies with more disposable income to buy cheaper mass-produced items. Therefore, in terms of trying to reduce consumption rates within the growing worldwide population, it is strongly recommended that society in general and particularly richer countries move towards buying less, recycling more, increased repair of damaged/faulty goods and a general and significant move away from fast manufacturing and over-consuming types of behaviour. This is no 'easy task' to achieve of course and will take a significant change of thinking and action from every individual; but to fail to do so, will be ultimately devastating and have significant negative effects upon sustainable ways of living, Earth's precious natural resources and will intensify environmental problems (such as waste disposal and energy shortages) for the generations that follow.

Comment [A20]: Some general comments on academic writing at university.

Note how in this essay:
- -The paragraphs are very well structured.
- -The language and vocabulary are relatively formal.
- -No casual language or terms are used.
- -The grammar use is quite formal.
- -It sounds relatively professional and has a more 'formal' tone.
- -It is NOT written in the 1st person (no I, me, I think, I feel).

Do not worry if you feel like you cannot write like this at this stage; or if you find academic writing too hard. Just keep your writing:
- **Clear**
- **100% meaningful**
- **Relatively simple sentence structure that you understand**
- **Clear and professional tone**
- **Get some feedback on your work**

References:

Bourdieu, P. 1984, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Routledge Press, London.

Gilleard, C. & Higgs, P. 2009, 'The third age: field, habitus or identity?', in I.R. Jones, P. Higgs & D.J. Ekerdt (eds), *Consumption and generational change: the rise of consumer lifestyles*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J., pp. 23-36.

Mason, M. 2004, 'The end of over-consumption: towards a lifestyle of moderation and self-restraint', *European Environment: The Journal of European Environmental Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 52-3.

Pape, J., Rau, H., Fahy, F. & Davies, A. 2011, 'Developing policies and instruments for sustainable household consumption: Irish experiences and futures', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 25-42.

Schafer, M., Jaeger-Erben, M. & dos Santos, A. 2011, 'Leapfrogging to sustainable consumption? An explorative survey of consumption habits and orientations in Southern Brazil', *Journal of Consumer Policy,* vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 175-96.

SERI 2009, *Overconsumption? A report on European and global resource use by SERI, GLOBAL 2000 and Friends of the Earth*, viewed 11 November 2014, <http://seri.at/news/2009/09/24/overconsumption/>.

Comment [A21]: The reference list must be provided on a separate page at the end of your assignment.

Entries must be in alphabetically order no matter whether they are textbooks, journal articles or websites.

A reference list IS NOT a bibliography. They are different things and do different jobs.

A reference list is a full list of all the sources/references **WITHIN** the body of your assignment.

Ensure that you follow the UTS library referencing standard applicable for your discipline/faculty. You can find them on the UTS library website.

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