



AT WHAT COST?

The impacts of advertising and consumerism on human, community and planetary well-being

How to use international law to challenge human rights violations and climate impacts, caused by excessive consumption and advertising

Adfree Cities
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Summary of report

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Executive Summary

“You forced your civilisation upon us and now look where we are: global pandemic, climate crisis, species extinction and, driving it all, widespread spiritual poverty.”

Nemonte Nenquimo, cofounder of the Indigenous-led non-profit organisation Ceibo Alliance, Ecuador¹

In 2020, advertisers globally were on course (despite a downward trend due to COVID-19) to spend \$557.3 billion, largely promoting consumption². To put this into context, this is 14 times the \$40 billion needed in 2020 to support record levels of global humanitarian assistance³.

Advertising is not just in our pockets via a mobile phone and in our homes in magazines and on screens. It is pervasive in our communities through grotesquely enlarged Costa coffee cups outside village shops, and through billboards that crowd out trees and gardens in our field of vision, that use over four times the electricity required to run four households⁴. These deny communities the right to create pleasant, inclusive outdoor spaces and to be considered citizens, not consumers. Advertising is the mantra puncturing our day by latching onto our psychological deficits to say that “if only we had product x” then everything would be OK.

The irony is that it is unbridled consumer culture – driven by the advertising industry and its increasingly sophisticated and unethical targeting mechanisms –

¹ Guardian, Nemonte Nenquimo, Opinion, This is my message to the western world – your civilisation is killing life on Earth, 12 Oct 2020 <https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/12/western-worldyour-civilisation-killing-life-on-earth-indigenous-amazon-planet>

² Mobile Marketing, COVID-19 hit the global ad market for more than \$63bn in 2020, 30 November 2020 <https://mobilemarketingmagazine.com/global-ad-market-2020-covid-19-coronavirus-warc>

³ At the beginning of 2020, global humanitarian requirements were already close to \$30 billion, with 168 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; this rose to a record \$40 billion due to COVID-19. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19, United Nations Coordinated Appeal April – December 2020 www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP-COVID19_July_update.pdf

⁴ A double-sided digital bus stop advert screen uses more electricity for a full year than 4 homes (average domestic electricity consumption in the UK). Adblock Bristol, The electricity cost of digital adverts, 28 November 2019 <http://adblockbristol.org.uk/2019/11/the-electricity-cost-of-digital-adverts/>

that will guarantee that nothing will ever be OK again. The haemorrhaging of waste, the depletion of nature's resources, the violation of the rights of humans and animals, as the world seeks to satiate itself through faster, cheaper and lower quality disposable products: that is our world.



'Waste World', an unauthorised billboard installation by Bill Posters for Black Friday, November 2018

Mass media, mass consumption, mass misery

Our current lifestyles are not only unsustainable, they do not even make us happy. Criticisms of mass media and its ability to maintain inequity and to numb social change are well embedded in philosophy. In the 1940s, Theodore Adorno proposed that 'the culture industry' of mass consumerism and entertainment, is in fact a source of domination within complex, capitalist societies. According to Adorno, the very areas of life within which many people believe they are genuinely free – e.g., the use of leisure time – actually perpetuate domination by denying real choice and freedom and obstructing the development of a critical consciousness⁵.

This proposition is endorsed today by the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights who observes that the dominance of specific narratives and world views – promoted through commercial advertising and marketing in public spaces, the family and private spheres – combined with an increased deployment of techniques that may influence people at a subconscious level, are challenges to the rights to freedom of thought, opinion and, more widely, cultural freedom⁶.

Advertising invites us to solve non-financial problems financially. For example, diamonds became the symbol of wealth, power, and romance as a result of a

⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944 https://monoskop.org/images/2/27/Horkheimer_Max_Adorno_Theodor_W_Dialectic_of_Enlightenment_Philosophical_Fragments.pdf and IEP, Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) <https://iep.utm.edu/adorno/>

⁶ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on the impact of commercial advertising and marketing on the enjoyment of cultural rights, A/69/286, 8 August 2014 <https://undocs.org/en/A/69/286>

marketing strategy executed for De Beers by an ad agency in the early 1900s⁷. However, research shows that marriage duration is actually inversely associated with spending on the engagement ring and wedding ceremony. So, in other words, the more you spend, the more likely you are to divorce⁸.

There is also a significant negative relationship between a country's advertising spend and its citizens' happiness. When advertisers pour money into a country, the result is diminished well-being for the people living there⁹. The more people ingest advertising, the higher their levels of materialism¹⁰. Yet ironically, when materialistic values increase, work centrality declines, creating a discrepancy between the desire for material rewards and the willingness to do the work usually required to earn them¹¹.

Multiple studies have shown that the more that people prioritise materialistic values, the less happy they are, the less satisfied they are with their lives, the less vital and energetic they feel, the more depressed and anxious they are, and the more likely they are to engage in substances use¹². This connection is especially pertinent for children, such that media exposure leads to increased materialism in children which in turn leads to lower levels of well-being. As Professor Tim Kasser says: "If what we care about is children's well-being then we should end advertising to children"¹³.

In three decades, the average age for the first onset of depression has reduced from 30 to 14 years. Culturally generated demoralisation is seemingly inevitable for today's consumer, who is unable to locate meaning, purpose or sources of need fulfilment¹⁴. The solution we are given is more consumption – including of antidepressants. Added to that, a child's excessive focus on consumerism may lead to poor financial habits at an early age that can be difficult to change as an adult¹⁵.

⁷ Lindsay Kolowich Cox, *The Engagement Ring Story: How De Beers Created a Multi-Billion Dollar Industry From the Ground Up*
<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/diamond-de-beers-marketing-campaign>

⁸ Francis-Tan, Andrew and Mialon, Hugo M., 'A Diamond is Forever' and Other Fairy Tales: The Relationship between Wedding Expenses and Marriage Duration (September 15, 2014). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2501480> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2501480>

⁹ Harvard Business Review, Advertising Makes Us Unhappy, January–February 2020 Issue
<https://hbr.org/2020/01/advertising-makes-us-unhappy>

¹⁰ Financial Wellbeing Podcast, Episode 42 – Hyper Capitalism with Professor Tim Kasser, 2018
www.financialwell-being.co.uk/2018/10/21/episode-42-hyper-capitalism-with-professor-tim-kasser/

¹¹ Jean M. Twenge, Tim Kasser, Generational Changes in Materialism and Work Centrality, 1976-2007: Associations With Temporal Changes in Societal Insecurity and Materialistic Role Modeling, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Volume 39 Issue 7, July 2013
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213484586>

¹² Professor Tim Kasser in *Behavioural Scientist*, Materially False: Q&A with Tim Kasser about the Pursuit of the Good through Goods, 2014
<https://behavioralscientist.org/materially-false-ga-tim-kasser-pursuit-good-goods/>

¹³ Financial Wellbeing Podcast, Episode 42 – Hyper Capitalism with Professor Tim Kasser, 2018

¹⁴ New Internationalist, *The Demoralized Mind*, 2016
<https://newint.org/columns/essays/2016/04/01/psycho-spiritual-crisis>

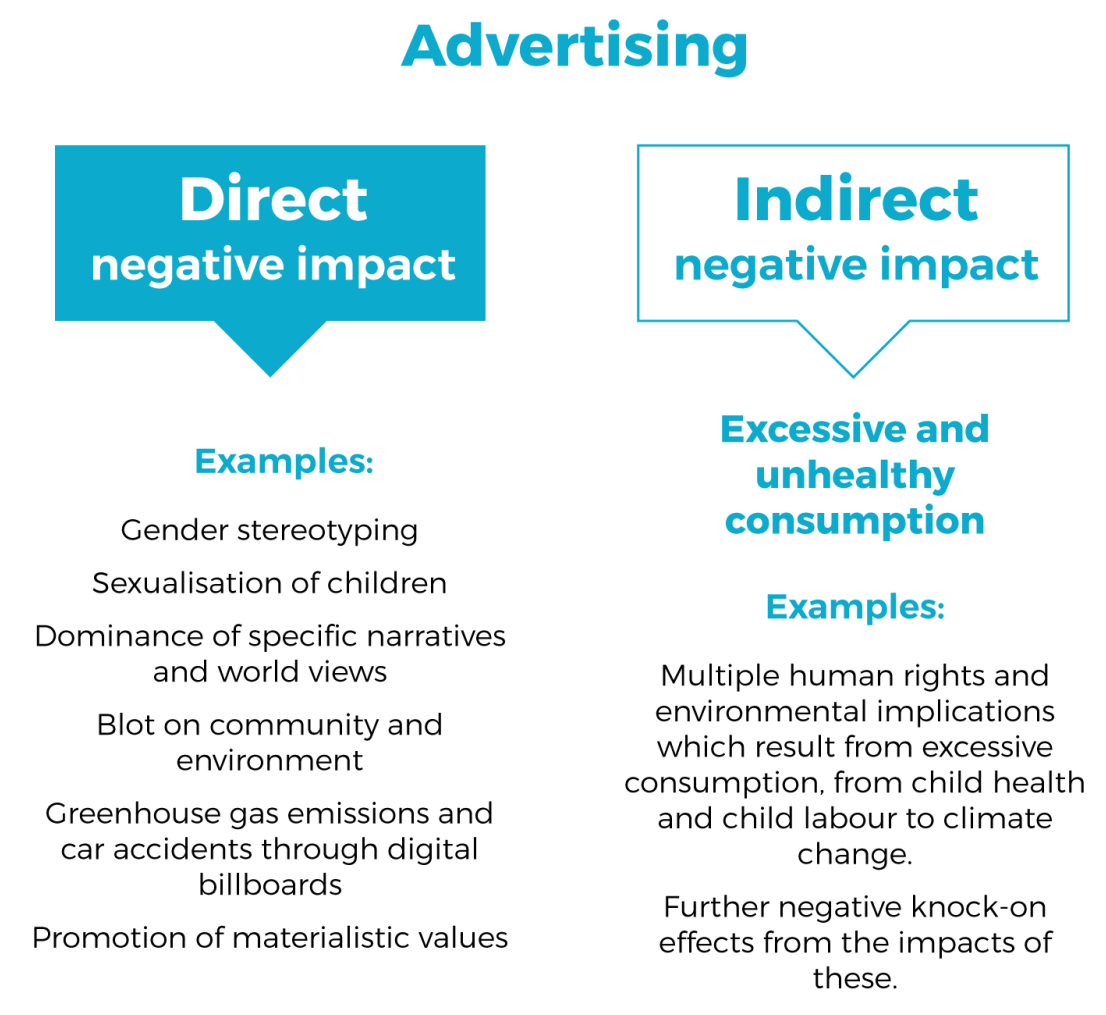
¹⁵ UNICEF, *Children are Everyone's Business: Workbook 2.0 A guide for integrating children's rights into policies, impact assessments and sustainability reporting*, 2014
www.unicef.org/csr/css/Workbook_2.0_Second_Edition_29092014_LR.pdf

The consumer values of our Western world (which we are eagerly importing to “less developed”¹⁶ countries in the name of progress) have left us in a never-ending cycle of gorging on consumer goods, to fill a spiritual void which is ever-hungry.

International law and the multiple human rights and environmental implications of advertising and consumerism

Human rights and the environment are negatively impacted by advertising and consumerism in multiple direct and indirect ways (Figure 1). Furthermore, environmental impacts are closely linked to human rights impacts.

Figure 1: The direct and indirect impacts of advertising on human rights and the environment.



¹⁶ Decolonizing international development challenges the use of such terms. See for example ODI Bites: decolonizing international development, 15 October 2020 www.odi.org/events/17431-odi-bites-decolonising-international-development

Multiple articles in human rights treaties provide protection to children and adults against the harms from advertising. These can be leveraged to advocate against unethical advertising and consumerism (Table 1).

Table 1: International human rights treaty articles and examples of rights violated by advertising and consumerism.

	Right and relevant international human rights treaties	Examples of how advertising, advertising's promotion of unhealthy products, and consumerism deny this right
1.	<p>Freedom of information and expression</p> <p>Freedom of expression African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) Article 7; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 12 and 13; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 19</p> <p>Freedom of information CRC Article 13 and Article 17 (access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources; protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being); ICCPR Article 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misleading advertising undermines freedom of information¹⁷. • Dominance of specific narratives and world views promoted through commercial advertising and marketing in public spaces, the family and private spheres¹⁸. • Younger children lack the critical awareness to evaluate advertising messages, and accept them as truthful, accurate and unbiased, which can distort their view of the world¹⁹.
2.	<p>Freedom of thought, conscience and religion</p> <p>ACRWC Article 9; CRC Article 14; ICCPR Articles 18 and 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased deployment of techniques that may influence people at a subconscious level, which raises particular concerns in terms of the rights to freedom of thought, opinion and, more widely, cultural freedom²⁰. • Techniques, such as extreme repetition of the same commercial message on multiple media, also raise concerns regarding the right to freedom of thought and opinion²¹.
3.	<p>Freedom from discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Billboards advertising unhealthy food are concentrated in poorer areas and areas with a higher proportion of

¹⁷ UK CAP Code 3: Misleading Advertising www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/03.html

¹⁸ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights A/69/286 op. cit.

¹⁹ UNICEF, Children are Everyone's Business: Workbook 2.0 op.cit.

²⁰ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights A/69/286 op. cit.

²¹ Ibid

	ACRWC Article 3; CRC Article 2; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – multiple articles embody this; ICCPR Article 26; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 3	<p>overweight children²², and the higher the percentage of outdoor advertisements promoting high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) foods, the greater the likelihood of obesity in the area²³. Children in the most deprived areas of the UK are approximately twice as likely to be obese²⁴.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air pollution contributes to widening health inequalities as levels of emissions are higher on roads with the heaviest traffic which are used more by disadvantaged people as places where they live, work and shop²⁵. • People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise marginalised are especially vulnerable to climate change²⁶.
4.	Elimination of prejudices and practices based on stereotyped roles for men and women CEDAW Articles 5 and 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcing of negative gender stereotypes by advertising²⁷.
5.	Best Interests of the Child ACRWC Article 4; CRC Article 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under this right, States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. There are multiple instances where the impact of advertising and consumerism mean this is clearly not the case, such as with marketing of HFSS.
6.	Right to life, survival and development The right to health ACRWC Article 14; CEDAW Article 12; CRC Article 24, ICESCR Article 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing to children that is not carefully deliberated can normalise violence, sexualised behaviour or unrealistic body-image ideals²⁸ which are a causal risk factor for the onset of eating disorders²⁹. • Health effects of HFSS foods: Childhood obesity is associated with a higher chance of premature death and disability in adulthood³⁰. • Deaths from alcohol consumption (3 million per annum globally)³¹.

²² Study in Liverpool, UK, New Scientist, Ads for junk food in the UK seem to be concentrated in poorer areas, 22 July 2020
www.newscientist.com/article/2249417-ads-for-junk-food-in-the-uk-seem-to-be-concentrated-in-poorer-areas/

²³ Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, Taking down junk food ads, How local areas are taking action on outdoor advertising, April 2019
www.sustainweb.org/publications/taking_down_junk_food_ads/

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Mayor of London and Transport for London, Residential Car Parking Part of the London Plan evidence base, December 2017
www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_plan_evidence_base_-_residential_car_parking.pdf

²⁶ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report (2 November 2014), www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full.pdf

²⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 30 July 2013
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fGBR%2fCO%2f7&Lang=en

²⁸ UNICEF, Children are Everyone's Business: Workbook 2.0 op.cit.

²⁹ Thompson, J. K., & Stice, E. (2001) Thin-ideal internalization: Mounting evidence for a new risk factor for body-image disturbance and eating pathology. Current Directions in Psychological Science
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.471.271&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

³⁰ WHO, Why does childhood overweight and obesity matter?
www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood_consequences/en/

³¹ WHO, Alcohol 2018 www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol

	<p>The right to life ACRWC Article 5; CRC Article 6, ICCPR Article 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of air pollution from industrial processes and vehicles including as cause of death³². • Climate change is known to trigger or exacerbate armed conflict³³.
7.	<p>Right to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child</p> <p>ACRWC Article 12; CRC Article 31</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are pressured to purchase a growing number of products which may be harmful to their children's development³⁴. • The commercialisation of toys and games to children, including through children's television programmes and directly related advertisements, are of concern, especially those promoting violence, girls or boys in a sexual way and which reinforce gender and disability stereotypes³⁵.
8.	<p>Right to be free from violence and abuse, including sexual abuse and exploitation</p> <p>ACRWC Article 16 and 27; CEDAW Article 6; CRC Article 19 and 34</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link between alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence³⁶. • The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women explicitly links gender stereotypes of women in advertising and gender-based violence (GBV)³⁷. • Sexualised images of children in advertising fosters an enabling environment for child sexual exploitation³⁸. • Prevailing standards and peer pressure have led adolescents to share sexualised images of themselves, making them vulnerable to abuse and potentially redefining some of the social limits around the unacceptability of child sexual abuse imagery^{39,40}. • Toxic masculinities can lead to unequitable, risky and abusive behaviour⁴¹.

³² New Scientist, Landmark ruling says air pollution contributed to death of 9-year-old, 16 December 2020
www.newscientist.com/article/2263165-landmark-ruling-says-air-pollution-contributed-to-death-of-9-year-old/

³³ Nhial Tiitmamer, Resolving climate change-induced migration and conflict in South Sudan, Africa Portal, 24 May 2020
www.africaportal.org/features/resolving-climate-change-induced-migration-and-conflict-south-sudan/

³⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31) <https://undocs.org/CRC/C/GC/17>

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ WHO, Intimate partner violence and alcohol
www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/fs_intimate.pdf

³⁷ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, 2017
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf

³⁸ Australia Senate Inquiry into The Sexualisation Of Children in The Contemporary Media Environment, Submission from Victoria's Child Safety Commissioner, 2008
www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/1893/submission_senateinquiry_media_sexn_of_kids.pdf and Harrop, E., Stepping up the fight against childhood sexualisation, Online Opinion 19 February 2010
www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=10064&page=0

³⁹ Human Rights Council, report of UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, A/HRC/25/48, 23 December 2013
www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-48_en.doc

⁴⁰ In this report we have used the term 'child sexual abuse' where previously the term 'child pornography' may have been used, in line with a current move away from this term (see <https://www.iwf.org.uk/nosuchthing>) unless used in the official title of a document.

⁴¹ World Federation of Advertisers, A guide to progressive gender portrayals in advertising, 2018
<https://www.annons.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EN-WFA-Guide-to-Progressive-Gender-Portrayals-in>

<p>9.</p>	<p>Protection from slavery and economic exploitation including child labour</p> <p>ACRWC Articles 15 and 29; CEDAW Article 6; CRC Articles 32 and 35; ICCPR Article 8; ICESCR Article 7; ILO Conventions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our desire for fast fashion – which exploits cheap labour and vulnerable workers – is fuelled by advertising, social media and a supply of cheap garments⁴². • 51 countries use child labour in at least one part of their garment or jewellery supply chains⁴³. • There are 1.5 million children in hazardous child labour in cocoa production, an increase despite 20 years of promised corporate reforms⁴⁴.
<p>10.</p>	<p>Child's protection from drug abuse</p> <p>ACRWC Article 28; CRC Article 33</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialism and teen peer pressure from group standards are both linked to increased cigarette and alcohol consumption⁴⁵. • Youth exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with the initiation of alcohol consumption by youth, the amount of alcohol consumed per drinking occasion, and/or adverse health consequences⁴⁶.
<p>11.</p>	<p>Right to privacy</p> <p>ICCPR Article 17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted online advertising; normalising privacy breaches through pervasive tracking and data-mining⁴⁷.
<p>12.</p>	<p>Cultural rights</p> <p>Relates to multiple rights including e.g., freedom of information and expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Plus:</p> <p>Right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts - ACRWC Article 12;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While most human rights are affected by climate change, cultural rights are particularly drastically affected, in that they risk being simply wiped out in many cases. This reality has not been adequately acknowledged in current climate change initiatives⁴⁸. • Global advertising campaigns promoting one single advertising message for all countries have a detrimental impact on cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity⁴⁹. • The growing commercialisation and privatisation of public spaces pose significant challenges to the realisation of the right to participate in cultural life and

[-Advertising-komprimerad.pdf](#) and Working With Men, Future Men 2018 Survey, November 2018
<https://futuremen.org/future-men-2018-survey/>

⁴² Environmental Audit Committee, Fixing fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19, UK Parliament, 19 February 2019
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvaud/1952/full-report.html>

⁴³ Common Objective, Child Labour in the Fashion Industry
www.commonobjective.co/article/child-labour-in-the-fashion-industry

⁴⁴ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, Africa: Child labour remains a major concern in the chocolate industry 20 years after promises were made, 3 Dec 2020
www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/africa-child-labour-remains-a-major-concern-in-the-chocolate-industry-20-years-after-promises-were-made/

⁴⁵ Professor Tim Kasser in Behavioural Scientist, Materially False: Q&A with Tim Kasser about the Pursuit of the Good through Goods, 2014 and UNICEF, Children are Everyone's Business: Workbook 2.0 op.cit.

⁴⁶ The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Alcohol Advertising Compliance on Cable Television, July–December (Q3–Q4), 2018, July 2019
www.camy.org/docs/resources/reports/alcohol-advertising-monitoring/CAMY_CableTV_2018_Q3-Q4_3.ppt

⁴⁷ Guardian, Targeted ads are one of the world's most destructive trends. Here's why, 5 November 2019
www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/05/targeted-ads-fake-news-clickbait-surveillance-capitalism-data-mining-democracy

⁴⁸ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on climate change, culture and cultural rights, A/75/298, 10 August 2020
www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/ClimateChange.aspx

⁴⁹ UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights A/69/286 op. cit.

	<p>CEDAW Article 13; CRC Article 31; ICESCR Article 15</p> <p>CRC Article 30 and ICCPR Article 27 on the right to culture for ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin.</p>	<p>to the protection of public spaces reflecting cultural diversity⁵⁰.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising can weaken children's participation in the traditional cultural and artistic life of their community⁵¹.
<p>13.</p>	<p>Right to a sustainable environment</p> <p>Relates to multiple rights including the right to health.</p> <p>Plus: CRC Article 29: the education of the child shall be directed to ... the development of respect for the natural environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising contributes to the social modelling of extrinsic values, and eroding motivation to help address environmental and social problems⁵². • Advertising drives increased consumption, and therefore increases a society's aggregate environmental footprint⁵³. • Advertising ultimately impacts the severity of climate change.

In such a context, the advertising and marketing industries have a responsibility to market ethical choices, or to withdraw from marketing unethical goods, i.e., those which have potentially devastating implications for human health as well as the environment and other rights. Meanwhile governments have a responsibility to uphold their commitments to international human rights law.

Stakeholders of all kinds are invited to draw on this rich report – from NGOs concerned with the environment, community and social justice, to Government, industry and marketeers – in order to help challenge the toxic conventions and norms around consumerism, by pinning these to a human rights framework. Five recommendations below offer guidance on how to make change happen.

This way of living is destroying our world, is destroying us. The fight-back has been long upon us, and continues with this new advocacy tool in its armoury.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 17 (2013) op. cit.

⁵² Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC), WWF-UK, Think of Me as Evil? Opening the Ethical Debates in Advertising, 2011 https://valuesandframes.org/resources/CCF_report_think_of_me_as_evil.pdf

⁵³ Ibid

Key messages

1. Advertising promotes excessive and unhealthy consumption, indirectly causes climate and ecological degradation, and directly and indirectly impacts human rights. Furthermore, environmental impacts are closely linked to human rights impacts.
2. The international human rights framework can be used to advocate against advertising and consumerism.
3. The advertising and marketing industries have a responsibility to market ethical choices, or to withdraw from marketing unethical goods, i.e., those which have potentially devastating implications for human health as well as the environment and other rights. Meanwhile governments have a responsibility to uphold their commitments to international human rights law.
4. Advertising undermines environmental and social issues when promoting consumerism by appealing to extrinsic values (such as material wealth, power and social status). The impact is twofold: driving increased consumption which increases environmental footprint and has a negative impact on human rights; contributing to the social modelling of extrinsic values, and eroding motivation to help address environmental and social problems.
5. We can all take responsibility by putting pressure on decision makers, through highlighting commitments and standards in our campaigning, and through complaints to the various human rights committees detailed in the full report.

Advertising revenue dwarfs resources for human rights.

In 2020, advertisers globally spent \$557.3 billion, largely promoting consumption⁵⁴. This is 14 times the \$40 billion needed in 2020 to support record levels of global humanitarian assistance⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Mobile Marketing, COVID-19 hit the global ad market for more than \$63bn in 2020, 30 November 2020 <https://mobilemarketingmagazine.com/global-ad-market-2020-covid-19-coronavirus-war-c>

⁵⁵ At the beginning of 2020, global humanitarian requirements were already close to \$30 billion, with 168 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; this rose to a record \$40 billion due to COVID-19. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19, United Nations Coordinated Appeal April – December 2020 www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP-COVID19_July_update.pdf

Conclusions and recommendations

“The Earth does not expect you to save her, she expects you to respect her.”

Nemonte Nenquimo, cofounder of the Indigenous-led non-profit organisation Ceibo Alliance

Over-production and the over-consumption encouraged by the advertising industry, have to stop.

Our planet cannot support the scale of plundering of the earth, the scale of waste, the scale of reckless spending on stuff-we-don't-need, and the mismanagement of the world's resources. We are part of nature, so as we destroy it and exploit it, we destroy and exploit ourselves.

Individuals and communities are reclaiming their right to health, to culture, to self-determination. No one can afford to step back and say “you can't expect me to be responsible for all that”. The “all” is all of us. Take responsibility for what you can, and take it now.

This report has the following five key recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Reframe human beings as citizens and as caretakers of each other and the natural world, instead of as consumers. This applies to multiple spheres of life, from media and advertising messages, to education curricula and social norms. Individuals and communities can start this reconceptualisation by asking themselves: what values have I ingested from consumer culture which I am now free to reject?

Recommendation 2: Boycott advertisers who fail to respect human rights and the environment. This means products and brands which threaten our children's health; which stereotype and sexualise; which contaminate our communities through billboards; and which sell us stuff-we-don't-need and unhealthy products, in order to profiteer from the impoverishment of our mental, physical and environmental wellbeing.

Recommendation 3: Frame consumerism as a human rights and environmental issue. Consumerism is not a trend or a way of life, it is a

fundamental violation of multiple human and environmental rights and needs to be named as such.

Recommendation 4: Utilise the human rights treaties and commitments outlined in this report to campaign against advertising and consumerism and to hold government and corporations to account. This can be done through government advocacy, through highlighting commitments and standards in campaigning, and through complaints to the various human rights committees.

Recommendation 5: Celebrate the progress being made and maintain momentum and action. The examples of progress in Section 9 have taken commitment, effort and original ideas. Communities of inspired people make a difference. Be a part of it.

Download the full report at www.adfreecities.org.uk/at-what-cost



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Adfree Cities is a network of groups across the UK who are concerned about how corporate advertising affects our health, wellbeing, environment, climate, communities and local economies. We work towards policy change, showcase alternatives, organise locally to stop new advertising sites in UK cities, and produce resources to raise awareness about the impacts of commercial advertising.

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