



		<p>different countries working together to produce the film or CD. Instead of measuring food miles, here we can study a product's carbon footprint. A carbon footprint is a measure of how much carbon dioxide is used in the production of a product, for example in its manufacture or by transporting it from one place to another. Carbon dioxide is released when fuel is burned and for this reason it is better for the environment if we avoid consuming food and goods with a high carbon footprint. This is because too much carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere is causing the planet to slowly heat up.</p>
<p>Lesson 2: Why can people buy more stuff than they used to?</p>	<p>Societies are continually changing and the average level of wealth in the UK has grown considerably over time.</p> <p>Much of this wealth is now spent on consumer goods and leisure time pursuits.</p>	<p>Before the 1970s, household incomes were not high enough for families to buy as much food and as many consumer goods as they do today. Society has become richer as more people have moved out of low-paid factory and farming occupations and into well-paid office jobs. People now have more disposable income to spend on consumer goods and leisure pursuits, and this is also reflected in the average amount of pocket money that UK teenagers receive, especially in comparison with teenagers in other countries of the world. Whereas in the 1970s a teenager might have been content with a bicycle and a radio, in the 2000s the range of products that a teenager may own has expanded dramatically to include iPods, lap tops, mobile phones and DVD players – amongst many other things.</p> <p>As well as a rise in average incomes, another reason we are able to consume more is that the relative prices of many of the goods that we buy have fallen. This is particularly the case for manufactured electrical and hi-tech products, and is related to the emergence of cheaper producer nations overseas as well as improvements in the technologies of production.</p> <p>When they were first made available a few years ago, set top (Freeview) boxes cost over £100. In 2007, however, Tesco launched a digital set top box which cost just £10. Chris Price from consumer electronics website TechDigest claims that the low prices are the result of an extremely competitive market for these products. There used to be just a few retail outlets selling electrical products, but now that it is possible to buy them in so many different places, including online and in the supermarket, retailers are cutting prices to attract customers.</p> <p>Other products that have seen dramatic price decreases over the past ten years include powerful computers (a drop of 90% from £2500 to £250), DVD players (90% from £300 to £30), small TVs (76% from £400 to £100) and CDs and DVDs (50% from £16 to £8). Clothes have also seen a fall in price – the average price has dropped 36% since 1996 and it is now possible to buy a pair of jeans for £4.</p> <p>However, there are some negative impacts of these price drops. Product quality is often sacrificed, and people come to see such items as 'disposable' – it is cheaper to replace them than fix them. This has implications for the amount of waste we dispose of, much of which in the case of electrical items may be toxic to the environment. Importing products from cheaper factories overseas has further environmental impacts, and there are social implications both for the low paid overseas workers, and</p>



		<p>UK workers who may have been made redundant with the closure of factories here.</p> <p>Further information can be found in the following article: "Consumers enjoy falling prices"</p>
<p>Lesson 3: Where do we go to buy our stuff?</p>	<p>Different types of retail land use exist.</p>	<p>Types of retailing:</p> <p>Convenience store: local store such as a newsagent or small grocer. Usually sells only cheap everyday items (called 'low-order' goods) to small numbers of people from perhaps just a few local streets.</p> <p>Comparison store: store found in the Central Business District (CBD) of a town, usually selling more expensive ('high-order' goods) that are not required every day. Includes book shops, shoe shops and electrical shops. Often, comparison stores are 'chain stores', e.g. Woolworths.</p> <p>Street market: in some places, vegetables and other foods can be bought from street markets on some days of the week. Other goods, such as clothes, are also sold this way. Street markets are common in older parts of large cities and are sometimes targeted at up-market consumers (e.g. organic farmers' markets).</p> <p>Out-of-town superstore: a very large branch of a retail chain, often found at the edge of a town or city in a 'retail park'. The largest stores (over 2500 m²) are called hypermarkets.</p> <p>Retail park: an area that has been set aside at or near the edge of a town or city where out-of-town stores can group together. Sometimes large structures such as the Bluewater shopping centre are built, where retailers can be housed.</p> <p>'Metro' store: this is the latest trend in retailing and comprises a scaled-down inner city supermarket, often attached to a petrol station. These stores are accessible and encourage people to shop while they refuel or pick up some items on the way home from work.</p> <p>The rise in disposable incomes has generated a demand for goods which could not be met by existing shops in town centres. This is because of the shortage of land in the CBD, and the high land values. As a result, chain brands such as Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks and Spencer and Ikea – along with others – sought planning permission to build large new stores on the edges of towns and cities.</p> <p>The growth of out-of-town stores has been helped by other factors. Unlike in the past, the majority of the public now have access to a car, while roads have been improved and widened in many towns and cities over the last thirty years. This has helped to make shopping sites at the edges of settlements very easily accessible for most people. There are now over 1000 supermarkets, hypermarkets and retail shopping centres in the UK. Ikea has only three stores in the south east, but it hopes to cater for all London homes with these, suggesting that all Londoners are within reach of one of the stores. Huge warehouses at each site allow a diverse range of goods to be stocked in bulk.</p>



	<p>These sites of consumption bring a range of social and environmental impacts.</p>	<p>Each of the retail types mentioned has its advantages and disadvantages, and a range of social and environmental impacts. The local high street may be accessible and beneficial for community cohesion, but land values are high and there may be traffic congestion and a lack of parking. On the other hand, out of town retail parks may provide a wide range of shops and ample parking, but their construction may have environmental implications (perhaps being built on green space), and they may not be accessible to some sectors of the community, for example the elderly. The local convenience store may be accessible, but it won't stock a wide range of products and will be in direct competition with the new metro supermarkets. Will it take enough revenue to survive, and if it doesn't, what are the implications again for less mobile members of the community?</p>
<p>Lesson 4: Virtual stuff</p>	<p>The geography of consumption increasingly has an online dimension to it.</p> <p>The growth of online shopping has an impact on shops and societies back in the 'real' world. There are also implications for the environment.</p>	<p>Britain is Europe's number one online shopping nation. By August 2008, Britain was spending a total of £4.6 billion online per year, which amounts to an average of £79 per person. Even though the economy slowed in 2008, online sales rose by 11.3%. The online retailer Amazon made a profit of \$158 million in the three months to June 2008. Online shopping is successful because it is quick and easy, 57% of UK homes now have the Internet, you can shop at any time of day or night – and even if it's bad weather – and all the big high street stores now have websites so you can still buy from your favourite shop. At times during December 2007, Amazon received 11 orders per second! Analysts have suggested that the recent rise in petrol prices is another reason that people are more likely to shop from home.</p> <p>Of course, the rise in online shopping has implications for shops back in the 'real world'. Many high street shops are suffering from declining sales, and this is especially the case for music and DVD stores as more and more people are downloading music and films from the Internet onto their computers and iPods.</p> <p>You can buy music legally on the Internet from sources such as iTunes. However, some people also share CDs by copying them and some music files are posted on the Internet where others can gain access to them. If music is downloaded illegally from unofficial sources like these, this is called piracy. The Internet is having a major effect on the music industry and how it is run. If people do not pay for music, then record companies have less money to invest in future bands. The Internet means that CD sales have fallen, and as a result, so have profits for the performers, the songwriters and the record companies.</p> <p>When it comes to the environment, online shopping has both positive and negative implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper purchasing online means even more products are being manufactured and sold – all of which requires energy and is responsible for more carbon dioxide being emitted. • Some online purchases are delivered in vans and lorries meaning that there are more large vehicles on our roads. • More and more people are using computers to download and listen to music and films. This leads to computers being left on all day (and all night sometimes) which uses a lot of energy.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firms like Google have offices containing tens of thousands of computers to help people to search for products online. This uses up enormous amounts of energy. <p>However...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people are downloading music, books and newspapers onto their i-Pods and computers. Fewer CDs, books and newspapers are made which saves paper – and trees. • Some shops are shutting down (e.g. DVD hire shops, electrical and book shops) as people are buying online. This means less people travel into town centres, causing less pollution and congestion. • Many online purchases are delivered in the normal way by Royal Mail, so there is no increase in transport and pollution. <p>With the rise in the number of people shopping online, the potential for net crime increases. 86% of targeted attacks on computers are aimed at home users. Attacks include hacking, viruses, spam and phishing. Many people still don't take basic steps to protect themselves from net crime, with 17% with no virus software and 22% with no firewall. The Get Safe Online website provides people with information about how they can protect themselves online. Read this article from the BBC website.</p>
<p>Lesson 5: The kids who make our stuff</p>	<p>Our own lives (as consumers) connect with those of children living in poorer nations (as producers) through the geography of consumption.</p>	<p>Child labour is the employment of children at regular and sustained work. Many countries consider this exploitative, and in many countries there is a minimum legal age for work. In the UK, it is 16 years. Other countries have different age limits, for example in Germany and Japan it is 15, in India and Egypt it is 14 and in Trinidad it is 12. However, some countries have no legal minimum working age for children, including Congo, Malawi and Papua New Guinea.</p> <p>According to UNICEF, there are 250 million children aged between 2 and 17 working worldwide. Most child labour occurs in African and Southern Asian countries, with Mali having the highest proportion at 805 child labourers per 10,000 people. Children may be employed in a wide range of jobs, including factory work, mining, quarrying, agriculture, helping in their parents' business, selling, acting as guides for tourists, polishing shoes and cleaning. In some cases, they may be forced into prostitution or military activity.</p> <p>This section previously contained text and a related web link to the BBC's <i>Panorama</i> programme of 23 June 2008 'Primark – On the Rack' which the Society has removed from its own website. On 16 June 2011 the BBC Trust's Editorial Standards Committee (ESC) concluded that it was more likely than not that certain footage in the programme was not genuine, and that the <i>Panorama</i> programme committed serious breaches of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines on accuracy and fairness. The ESC directed the BBC to issue on-air and web-based apologies to Primark and not to sell or repeat the programme.</p>



<p>Lesson 6: Global impacts and possible actions</p>	<p>The demand for consumer items in the UK has impacts which are spread across the globe.</p> <p>Our consumption has impacts on a range of different societies and environments.</p> <p>How can we help to reduce the damage caused by runaway consumerism?</p>	<p>Consumerism is linked with issues on a range of scales that have been covered in this unit so far:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive food miles and climate change • Loss of green belt land • Child labour and labour exploitation • Depletion of resources • Online fraud • Changes to our communities <p>In the UK we consume a lot. As a result, we throw away a lot of rubbish. Currently, levels of household waste in the UK are increasing at a rate of 3% each year. This equates to a doubling of levels every twenty years. Waste levels spike during Christmas and New Year, with about one-tenth of our annual rubbish (three million tonnes) being generated over the festive period. The government sponsored organisation Recycle Now estimates that we throw away one billion Christmas cards, eight million Christmas trees and 750 million bottles every year. Turkey foil alone creates 3,000 tonnes of waste and 83 million km² of wrapping paper are used. This creates a huge impact on the environment. Currently, 75% of our waste ends up in landfill, although new laws are being introduced in the UK that will impose taxes on local councils if more materials are not recycled instead. But waste isn't the only environmental problem created by the Christmas festival. According to scientists at the Institute of Physics, the UK generates 2 million tonnes of extra greenhouse gases at this time of year roasting turkeys, watching extra TV and lighting up houses with Christmas lights.</p> <p>In the UK we have also increased our consumption of bottled water at the fastest rate of any country in Europe over the last five years. This is strange, considering that we have some of the best quality tap water in the world. The impact of these plastic bottles – which take hundreds of years to decompose – is huge as the vast majority of plastic bottles are neither reused nor recycled.</p> <p>But it is not just our own land fill sites that are suffering. Much of our waste is shipped 5000 miles for recycling in China. In 2006, China exported £12.6 billion worth of manufactured goods to the UK, and received 1.9 million tonnes of rubbish in return. It is illegal for EU countries to export waste for disposal, but it can be shipped out for recycling. Unfortunately, many of the recycling plants it is sent to are unregulated, creating pollution and health risks. You can read more about the recycling of UK waste in China in these two articles from the Guardian online website: Waste land and British waste adds to environmental crisis across China.</p> <p>There are four actions (the four Rs) that can help us use less of the earth's natural resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycle – waste products are broken down and used to make another product, for example plastic bottles are melted down and used to make new bottles, or in some cases, fleeces! Paper can be pulped and used to make new paper, meaning that fewer trees need to be cut down. • Reuse – many items can be reused several times before they are thrown away, for example plastic bags or plastic bottles, which can be refilled from the tap. Reusing items means that fewer need to
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be manufactured in the first place, saving valuable resources.

- **Refuse** – before buying something new, ask yourself whether you really need it. Consider refusing to buy excessively packaged goods – this type of consumer boycott puts pressure on manufacturers to reduce their packaging. Take your own bag to the supermarket and refuse a plastic carrier bag.
- **Repair** – before throwing away a broken object consider whether it can be repaired – either by yourself or by a professional. Torn clothes can be stitched, broken toys glued, even computers can be fixed. Getting something repaired rather than buying a replacement again saves resources and prevents more and more waste being sent to landfill.