

CONSUMER CITIZENSHIP

Exercise 1

Read the following text carefully and answer the questions below.

a) Explain the term “consumer citizenship”.



Consumer Citizenship

Change is long overdue with ads no longer looking like ads and enterprises frequently ignoring consumer rights. Fortunately, consumers can now confront companies and politicians in several ways to voice their concerns.

If consumers want to improve society for consumer purposes, that is what we call Consumer Citizenship. In other words, every time we exercise our democratic rights and politically engage in consumer issues, we practice Consumer Citizenship.

The actions we take can be aimed at either politicians or the specific enterprise in question. Naturally, the whole point in taking action is to bring about a change in entrepreneurial behaviour, as well as the legal framework in which companies are acting. Due to the level of activity, Consumer Citizenship is often also referred to as “political consumerism”.

Our actions can fall in one of two categories: those explicitly related to purchasing goods (or services, of course) and those only indirectly related to it. One buying-related way to take action is to (call for) a boycott (of) certain products or brands. Boycotting a product means to stop buying

it for social, political or ethical reasons – whereas to call for boycott of a product means to urge others not to buy it anymore either. Boycotts are typically targeted at enterprises with the aim of changing their behaviour for public benefit.

Actions indirectly related to buying might be either confrontational or cooperative. Actions are considered confrontational if they criticise or caricature an enterprise in order to force a change in behaviour.

Satirically changing a brand's logo, name or slogan or creating a pun out of them are common examples and otherwise known as "Culture Jamming".

Alternatively, if you join forces with companies and politicians in an effort to change conditions for consumers, this is called cooperative action. Negotiations and talks with politicians and companies are typical forms of cooperative action.

Last but not least, consumers also have the option of turning to organisations which support consumer interests by acting on their behalf. Thanks to their legal knowledge and political influence as NGOs, consumer rights organisations are better equipped to step in and mediate with companies and politicians than individual members of the public. In the UK, the NGO "Citizens Advice" supports and advises consumers on everyday issues.

As you can see, consumers can exercise their rights in various ways. We can either encourage companies and politicians to cooperate with us or confront them directly with our interests if they prove inflexible and

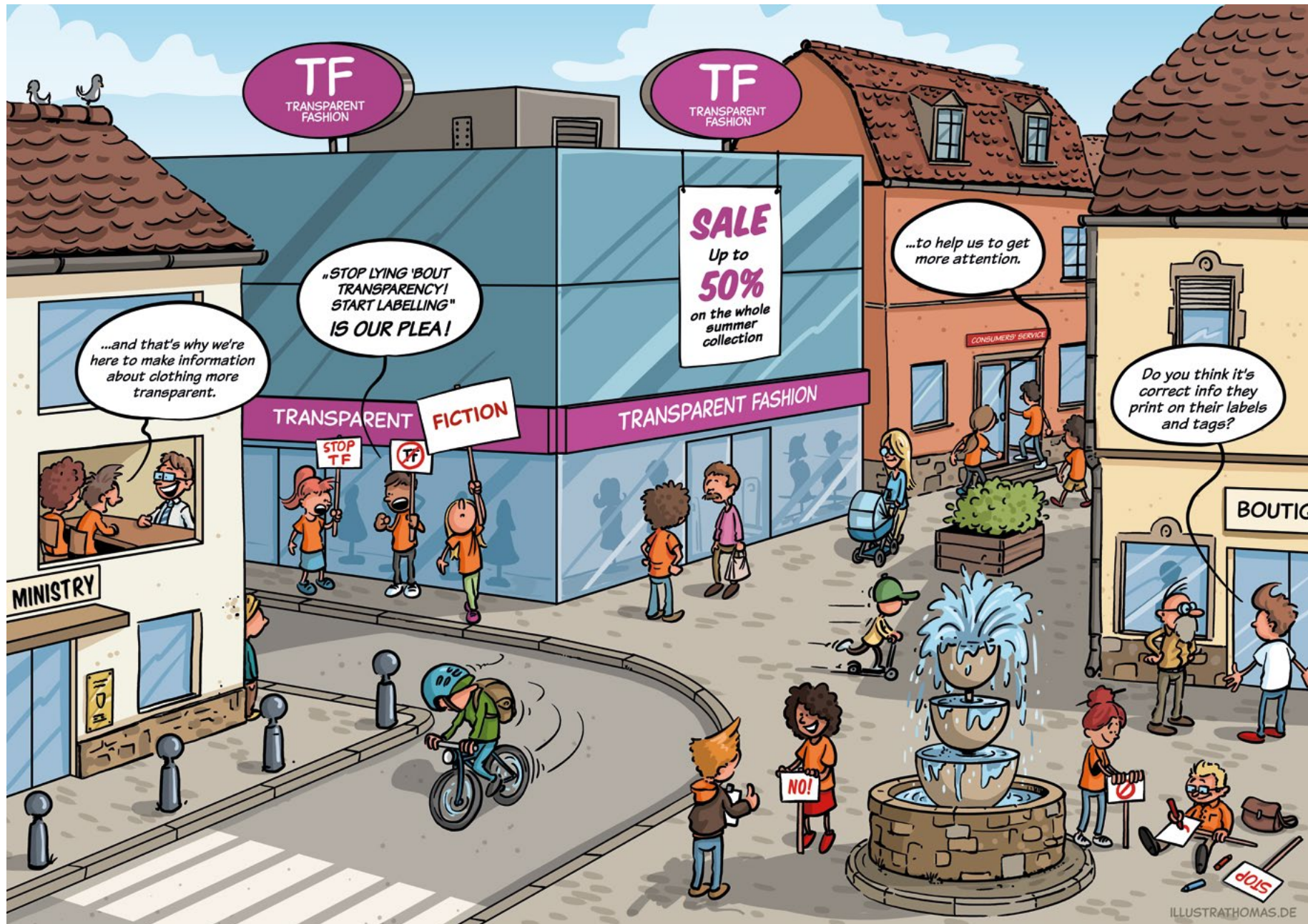
uncooperative. Furthermore, these actions do not have to be directly related to purchasing, as long as they represent the diverse interests of consumers. In short, whatever action we take as consumers is known as consumer citizenship.

Do bear in mind:

A one-off action might not be enough to achieve your initial goal. The key is persistence! So, it is important to plan and combine more than one type of action, either simultaneously or over a certain period of time to help you accomplish your aims.

b) Describe the various ways consumer influence can help change both the political framework and company behaviour.

c) Match each of these strategies to the relevant scenario in the image below.



d) List other examples of how these strategies can be implemented.

... Exercise 2

Think of an issue that concerns you as a consumer and consider what improvements you would like to make. What is your ultimate goal?

And what kind of action could you take to achieve your aims?