

Meet the startup making ethical electronics mainstream

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With ethical consumers increasingly concerned with the origin of their purchases, almost every industry, from fashion to food to diamonds, has been held to account over the ethics of its supply chain.

Bar a small number in the tech community, the ethical implications of the electronics industry has gone largely unnoticed by many consumers. However, the smartphone many have in their pocket may have a questionable past.

The average smartphone contains over 60 different metals, so tracking the supply chain of each component is complex. The mining and processing of many of these metals contributes to environmental damage and poor working conditions for those involved.

For example, cobalt, found in lithium-ion rechargeable batteries, is commonly sourced from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it is frequently mined by child labourers. Last year, Bloomberg reported that factory workers making the casing for iPhones were working long hours in hazardous conditions. According to a study from 2014, 97% of the 39 electronics companies studied did not pay factory workers a living wage.

[...]

The concept of ethical electronics is not a new one. Although a fairtrade certification does not yet exist for electronics, some people within the tech community have been aware of the ethical implications of the electronics industry for a number of years with software movement activist Richard Stallman, for example, only running Linux software on fairtrade laptops.

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