

'Demarketing': What makes consumers more or less materialistic?

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If you read a report whose message was that people consume too much, would you then be likely to curb your own consumption? In some cases yes, says a new study in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*. According to the study, people who place a high value on materialism are likely to reduce their consumption after reading such a report.

"In contrast, people who are fairly anti-materialistic may actually consume more after getting the message that most people overconsume," write the authors of the study, Nadav Yakobovitch and Amir Grinstein (Northeastern University and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). "That's because they want to conform more to the social norm, so they 'allow' themselves to increase their consumption."

What the authors wanted to determine is if "demarketing"—in this case, establishing a norm that might discourage consumption—is an effective way to reduce our carbon footprint. They set up an online study and a laboratory study, and, after presenting study participants with a [report](#) that argued that people consume too much, asked them to make consumption choices in a variety of contexts. The choices were correlated with the participants' degree of materialism, which the authors also measured.

The authors found that participants who were highly materialistic were motivated to decrease their consumption, whereas participants who were not very materialistic were actually motivated to boost their consumption. The latter effect—a "boomerang" effect—was offset when the low-materialistic participants were informed of the ecological consequences of their choices.

"Our study makes the connection between values—in this case, materialism—and behavior that affects the environment. Materialistic values are at the heart of [consumption](#) decisions in the modern world, and studying ways to modify that value system may be an important step in lowering our carbon footprint," the authors write.

More information: Nadav Yakobovitch and Amir Grinstein.

"Materialism and the Boomerang Effect of Descriptive Norm Demarketing: Extension and Remedy in an Environmental Context." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

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