

People would change their consumption habits to help the climate, study finds

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A new study has found that people would change their consumption

habits to help the climate—even if this would have implications for their personal lives and shopping habits—and that this could play a significant role in helping the UK to reduce its carbon emissions.

Government projections currently show that the UK will significantly exceed future legally binding carbon reduction targets. To date, climate policy has focused on the efficiency of vehicles and buildings, but how products are made and consumed also has a huge impact on emissions. Strategies that aim to reduce demand for materials and products will be essential to limiting rising global temperatures.

Dr. Kate Scott from The University of Manchester worked with Catherine Cherry and Nick Pidgeon from The University of Cardiff and John Barrett from the University of Leeds to combine a series of public workshops with the modelling of potential emissions savings.

They spoke to a wide range of people to explore their opinions on changes including using more sustainable packaging for products, sharing tools and other rarely-used products within communities, leasing products like washing machines instead of owning them, and getting electronic devices repaired rather than replacing them.

They found that people supported a shift towards resource efficiency, even if this impacted on their lives—but that this did not necessarily lead to them supporting specific strategies. For example, people were worried about using leasing and sharing schemes, as they feared they would need to return the goods they were using if they got into financial difficulties.

The researchers say that simply telling everyone to reduce their consumption is therefore unlikely to yield results—government and businesses will also need to play their part, and public engagement is essential to understand how to increase low material behaviours.

"As George Monbiot recently wrote, we won't save the Earth by using a better kind of disposable coffee cup. Despite raising awareness surrounding issues of waste and resource use, incremental consumer changes will only lead to small emissions savings. Instead, we need to challenge the wider system in which we operate, and shift away from the status quo towards a more resource efficient, low carbon society.

"By talking to people about how their everyday lives might change under these different futures, we can gain a better understanding of what kind of changes people want to see, as well as explore the reasons that lead to wider rejection of specific strategies," says Dr. Kate Scott.

Provided by University of Manchester

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