Research finds deep listening could help fight climate change

September 1 2020, by Vanessa Beasley

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Curtin University research has found deep listening or Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) could be used as an effective tool to encourage pro-environmental behavior and create social bonding

among young people.

ASMR is a spontaneous, calming, positive feeling that occurs in response to certain stimuli including whispering and brushing sounds. This exploratory study used similar stimuli in a purpose-made video to promote positive climate change messages to high school students, and then gaged their opinions on whether the approach could be effective.

Lead researcher, Curtin Adjunct Postdoctoral Fellow and University of Sydney researcher and Manager of the Center for Advanced Food Enginomics (CAFE) Diana Bogueva, who undertook the study while at Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute said the study was focused on whether ASMR can be used to communicate positively about climate change with young people.

"Young people are consistently bombarded with gloomy messages on climate change and the environment, including devastating pictures of bushfires and other extreme weather events. So we asked whether there were other, more optimistic ways, to talk about the issue to evoke positive feelings and empower young people to take action," Dr. Bogueva said.

"To do this, we employed the relatively new and unexplored concept of ASMR. We made a video featuring an anonymous 16-year-old girl talking about what positive climate change actions can be taken in everyday life. Her performance was based on the traditional soft whispering voice used for ASMR, with some sound effects, including tapping and noises, to grab the attention of the viewers. The majority (65 percent) of high school students who participated in the study found the video would be effective to communicate positively about climate change. Importantly, some of the participants who felt overwhelmed by climate change prior to watching the video, reported feeling 'confident' and 'encouraged' to act, after the viewing."

Co-author Professor Dora Marinova at the Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute said the findings from the exploratory study could now lead to a larger-scale survey on the impact of using ASMR with young people.

"Our study is just the beginning. We've shown that Generation Z is willing to be experimental, experience-focused and socially active in responding to climate change challenges, now more needs to be done on both ASMR (which is relatively untested) and the use of positive messaging, instead of focussing on the negative," Professor Marinova said.

"We know climate change is a major concern for young people in Australia and around the world, and causes a range of negative feelings including anger, pessimism, stress and despair, as well as mental health issues—so any methods we can use to change the narrative, could also change lives."

More information: Diana Bogueva et al. Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response for Responding to Climate Change, *Sustainability* (2020). DOI: 10.3390/su12176947

Provided by Curtin University