

# Strong gap between motivation to act green and the impact of clothing consumption

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What psychological factors make us act green? Classic scientific models identified the psychological predictors of pro-environment behavior, like our attitudes and personal norms. A new study now questions the link

between these predictors and actual environmental impact for clothing. The study exposes a strong gap between our motivation to act green and the impact of our clothing consumption. This study could influence how we measure pro-environmental behavior and design communications and interventions. The results are published in *Nature Sustainability*.

How can we motivate far-reaching behavioral changes that are needed to meet global sustainability goals? Previous studies identified [psychological factors](#) that predict green behavior and turned these into models that help us understanding pro-environmental behavior. These models for example predict we act greener when we are more aware of [environmental consequences](#) and when we feel more responsible for our own actions. A new study now questions the real effect of these psychological factors and suggests they may be a poor predictor of actual [environmental impact](#).

## **Linking psychological factors to environmental impact**

Psychology researcher Cameron Brick of the University of Amsterdam studied with international colleagues the link between psychological factors that were taken from often used models and the environmental impact of clothing consumption in four countries. Clothing consumption is responsible for 2–3% of global emissions and severe, local environmental degradation. In their study they linked factors like awareness, attitudes and personal norms to environmental impact measured by self-reported number of clothing items purchased and greenhouse gas emissions induced by these items.

## **No strong link between psychological factors and environmental impact**

The authors find no strong link between psychological factors that predict green behavior and the actual impact on the environment. "We found that psychological factors like attitudes and personal norms strongly predicted a common self-reported behavior scale of clothing purchasing but only weakly predicted [clothing-related greenhouse gas emissions](#)," conclude the authors. The authors even found that the more people reported purchasing sustainably produced clothes, the more items they bought and the worse their environmental impact. The authors therefore question if models that have identified psychological predictors of green behavior can help us truly understanding what predicts individuals' environmental impact. "Taken together, this study indicates a strong motivation–impact gap and exposes the limitations of certain scales that aim to predict our green behavior and infer environmental impact," conclude the authors.

Brick calls the potential implications of this study quite serious for how we measure and understand pro-[environmental behavior](#), and how those choices drive the design of communications and interventions. "The findings suggest that the important factors that drive environmental impact are demographic such as [household income](#), and structural such as the type of energy mix in a national grid." For example, [natural gas](#) and oil are the most important fuels in the Dutch energy supply. "Citizens who want to reduce their impact might want to focus more on organizational and political changes rather than private pro-environmental behaviors."

**More information:** Kristian S. Nielsen et al, The motivation–impact gap in pro-environmental clothing consumption, *Nature Sustainability* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-022-00888-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00888-7)

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