

A Norm Approach to Changing Consumer Behaviors to Reduce Harmful Environmental Impacts

Sara Lieber, Doctoral Student
Cultural and Moral Personology Lab
University of Oregon, Psychology Department

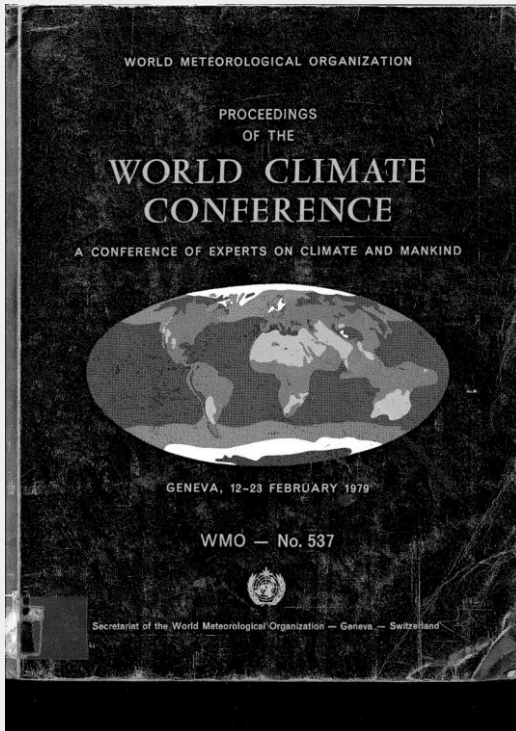


A Call to Action on Environmental Issues

World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency

WILLIAM J. RIPPLE, CHRISTOPHER WOLF, THOMAS M. NEWSOME, PHOEBE BARNARD, WILLIAM R. MOOMAW,
AND 11,258 SCIENTIST SIGNATORIES FROM 153 COUNTRIES (LIST IN SUPPLEMENTAL FILE S1)

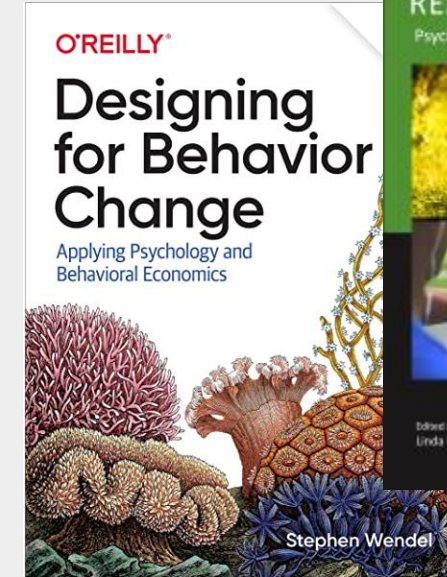
Scientists have a moral obligation to clearly warn humanity of any catastrophic threat and to “tell it like it is.” On the basis of this obligation and the graphical indicators presented below, we declare, with more than 11,000 scientist signatories from around the world, clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency.



- The First World Climate Conference took place in 1979
 - Rise in human activities associated with environmental issues
 - E.g., energy & meat consumption
 - Increase in measurements of ongoing climate change processes
 - E.g., carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

A Call to Action on Environmental Issues

- Social psychologists uniquely positioned to help address humanity's impact on the environment
 - Research how to change people's behaviors



Individual-level behavior with harmful environmental consequences:

Unsustainable consumption: The acquisition and use of goods and services that produce negative environmental impacts at levels not sustainable long-term by the planet.

Unsustainable Consumption

Basic Causes and Implications for Policy

John Thøgersen





School of Business and Social Sciences, Department of Business Administration,
Aarhus University, Denmark

The Physical and Social Threat of Environmental Issues

- **Physical Threat:**
Increased natural disasters, sea-level rise, increased global temperature
 - Property loss & damage
 - Threaten access to basic resources
 - Forced relocation

Social threat: people with the fewest financial resources will also be least able to avoid and recover from catastrophic environmental disasters (Islam & Winkel, 2017)

Scientists' warning on affluence

Thomas Wiedmann ¹✉, Manfred Lenzen ², Lorenz T. Keyßer ³ & Julia K. Steinberger ⁴

Environmental impacts especially driven by world's most wealthy individuals and countries.

- Environmental impact highest among people with the most resources
 - Consequences will be experienced most intensely by people with the least
- Serious threat to social equity

Addressing Unsustainable Consumption

International Journal of **Consumer Studies**

'Blame it on marketing': consumers' views on unsustainable consumption

M. Teresa Pereira Heath✉, Andreas Chatzidakis

Consumers may perceive the producers of goods and services as holding responsibility for the consequences of unsustainable consumption.

Worth addressing humans' environmental impact at multiple levels

- Individuals can be proactive by reducing demand via reduced consumption
- Producers may have monetary incentives to not make changes for sustainability

The Current Approach in Social Psychology

Norm interventions to promote pro-environmental outcomes

- Experimentally manipulate people's perception of existing norms
- Measure the influence on pro-environmental outcomes

Rationale for norms' effectiveness at changing behavior (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004):

- Informational motivation
- Normative motivation

Most commonly manipulated norms and definitions:

- **Descriptive norms:** People's perception of the behaviors most people engage in
- **Injunctive norms:** People's perception of the behaviors most people think others *should* engage in

The Purpose of the Current Project

- Review the literature on norm interventions used for promoting pro-environmental outcomes
- Analyze strengths and areas for potential progress in previous studies' methodologies
- Propose directions for future studies

Four Areas for Potential Progress:

Currently used norm interventions...

- 1) Restrict the range of types of norms
- 2) Fail to address motivations
- 3) Conflict with self-interest
- 4) Assume pro-environmental values and worldviews

Area 1: Restricted Range of Types of Norms

Social Norms and Pro-environmental Behavior: A Review of the Evidence

Katherine Farrow ^a  , Gilles Grolleau ^{a, b}, Lisette Ibanez ^a

- Mixed evidence for the overall effectiveness of norm interventions
 - 31 of 39 studies that manipulated descriptive norms produced significant improvements in pro-environmental outcomes
 - 12 of 28 studies that manipulated injunctive norms did the same
 - Typically small effect sizes

Does the Impact of Norms Vary by Type of Norm and Type of Conservation Behavior? A Meta-Analysis

Rebecca M. Niemiec , Veronica Champine, Jerry J. Vaske & Andrew Mertens

- Variation in association between norms and pro-environmental behaviors depending on type of norm.
 - Personal norms was a significant, positive predictor in 81% of studies
 - Descriptive norms – 69%
 - Injunctive norms – 50%

Area 1: Restricted Range of Types of Norms

Suggestion 1: Investigate effectiveness of a broader range of norms with more nuanced and precise definitions.

- **Personal Norm** – an **idiosyncratic rule** for behavior that one sets for oneself, unrelated to what others do
- **Descriptive Norm** – a **widely shared behavior** that people adopt because they see others engaging in it, but is **not long-lasting** (fashion trends)
- **Convention** – a **widely shared behavior** that people adopt to coordinate their behavior with others; mutual expectations of compliance (driving on the right side of the road); **long-lasting**
- **Social Norm** – a rule for behavior that **goes against one's self-interest** and for which there are **social consequences** (i.e., social) for failing to abide by the rule (dinner table manners)
- **Legal Norm** – a codified rule for behavior for which there are **legal consequences** for people who fail to follow it
- **Moral Norm** – a rule for behavior that is **followed unconditionally** across all circumstances (not killing others)

Area 2: Fail to address psychological motivations to engage in non-environmentally friendly behaviors

Using normative social influence to promote conservation among hotel guests

Wesley P. Schultz ✉, Azar M. Khazian & Adam C. Zaleski

Pages 4-23 | Received 04 Jul 2006, Accepted 16 Oct 2007, Published online: 19 Feb 2008

- **Injunctive Norm:** “Many of our guests have expressed to us their approval of conserving energy. Because so many guests value conservation and are in the habit of conserving, this hotel has initiated a conservation program.”
- **Descriptive Norm:** “Nearly 75% of hotel guests choose to reuse their towels each day. To support our guests who want to conserve, this hotel has initiated a conservation program.”
 - Beneath all messages it said, “Washing towels every day uses a lot of energy, so reusing towels is one way you can conserve. If you would like your towels replaced, please leave your used towels in the basket on the bathroom floor. Towels left hanging on the towel rack tell us that you want to reuse them.”

The Persistence of Treatment Effects with Norm-Based Policy Instruments: Evidence from a Randomized Environmental Policy Experiment

By PAUL J. FERRARO, JUAN JOSE MIRANDA, AND MICHAEL K. PRICE✉

- **Weak Injunctive Norm:** “Cobb County residents consume almost one out of every ten gallons of Georgia's public water supply. We need your help. Act on the tips listed in the enclosed tip sheet. We all have to do our part to protect Cobb County's precious water resources. Reducing our water consumption today is important for preserving our environment and our economy for future generations. Please don't waste water. Remember: every drop counts!”
- **Strong Injunctive Norm:** augmented the weak injunctive norm message with a comparison of the household's water use to the median county household use (i.e., “You consumed more water than 73% of your Cobb County neighbors”)

Congruent or conflicted? The impact of injunctive and descriptive norms on environmental intentions

Joanne R. Smith ^{a,*,1}, Winnifred R. Louis ^a,
Miranda R. Clarke ^b, Xiaoliang Cheng ^a

Descriptive Norm: “82% of fellow students engage in energy conservation.”
Injunctive Norm: “85% of fellow students approve of other students who engage in energy conservation.”

Area 2: Fail to address psychological motivations to engage in non-environmentally friendly behaviors

People presented with normative messages could be struggling with competing motivations:

1. Socially compelled to adopt sustainable behaviors
 - “Do the right thing”
2. Simultaneously still susceptible to factors that motivated the non-sustainable behavior
 - What motivates people to consume to begin with?

Suggestion 2:

With regards reducing unsustainable consumption, develop norm interventions that target the motivations to engage in unsustainable consumption.

Predictors of Consumption & Materialism:

- Peer rejection
- Self-Doubt
- Aspiration level & Social comparison
- Status concern
- Perceived cultural pressure
- Keeping up with trends

Individual Differences in Children's Materialism: The Role of Peer Relations

Robin Banerjee
University of Pittsburgh

Materialism as an Attempt to Cope with Uncertainty

LinChiat Chang and Robert E. Rittenburg
The Ohio State University

Household consumption: Influences of aspiration level, social comparison, and money management

Niklas Karlsson ^{a,*} Peter Dellarsson ^b Birgitta Klingander ^c,
a

Consumer Preference for Status Symbolism of Clothing: The Case of the Czech Republic

Exploration of the perpetuating fast fashion consumption cycle: Young women's experiences in pursuit of an ideal self-image

Leslie H. Simpson
Iowa State University

Area 3: Conflict with People's Self-Interest

Currently used norm interventions may rely on compelling people to be pro-environmental at the expense of their own self-interest.

“The choice between acting to protect the environment or not has often been defined as a social dilemma because pro-environmental behavior may require the individual to restrain egoistic tendencies for the benefit of others.”
(Nordlund & Garvill, 2003)

Framing norm interventions to conflict with self-interest creates competing motives:

1. Be altruistic / “Do their part”
2. Act in one's own self-interest

- Egoistic values negatively predicted willingness to adopt pro-environmental behaviors (Poortinga, Steg, & Vlek, 2004)
- Willingness to engage in pro-environmental behaviors predicted by self-transcendent values (Nordlund & Garvill, 2003)

Area 3: Conflict with People's Self-Interest

Suggestion 3:

Frame norm interventions to be aligned with people's self-interests.

Pairs with previous suggestion to word norm interventions to undermine motivations for unsustainable consumption.

- Create normative messages that suggest how social goals can be met using sustainable means.

Predictors of Consumption & Materialism:

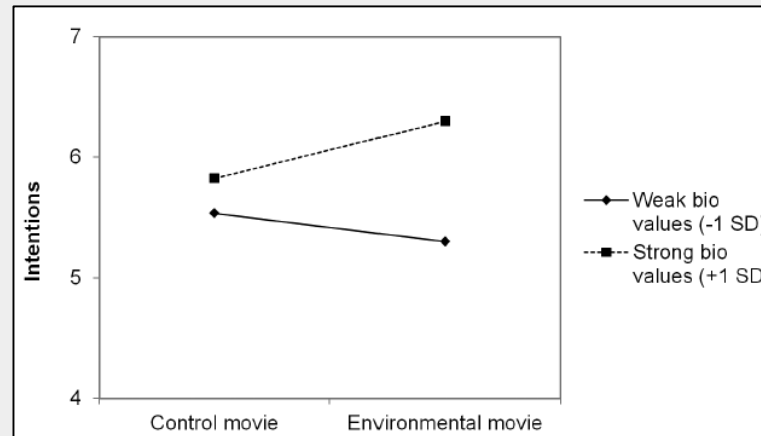
- Peer rejection
- Self-Doubt
- Aspiration level & Social comparison
- Status concern
- Perceived cultural pressure
- Keeping up with trends

Area 4: May assume that people have pro-environmental values and worldviews

Currently used norm interventions may appeal mostly to people who already endorse pro-environmental values and worldviews.

- Less effective among those who do not

- Bolderdijk et al. (2013) implemented environmental awareness campaigns to reduce intentions to use water bottles
 - Ineffective among people who did not endorse environmental values



People may readily adopt new behaviors when those behaviors are aligned with their values (Berkman, Livingston, & Kahn, 2017)

Suggestion 4: Frame norm interventions to be aligned with people's values and worldviews.

Proposed Future Directions

Develop norm interventions for reducing unsustainable consumption by addressing the above suggestions:

Suggestion 1: Investigate effectiveness of a broader range of norms.

Suggestion 2: Develop norm interventions that target the motivations to engage in unsustainable consumption.

Suggestion 3: Frame norm interventions to be aligned with people's self-interests.

Suggestion 4: Frame norm interventions to be aligned with people's values and worldviews.