

Towards Sustainable Laundry Behaviour: Results from a UK Innovative Project for Achieving Pro-Environmental Behaviours

M. Stalmans, K. Jack, P. White, E. Blair and L. Davies

P & G, Belgium, Eco Concierge, UK, The Social Marketing Practice, UK and Defra, UK

With the increasing concerns around climate change and resource scarcity, there is a need for sustainable product design and more sustainable consumption patterns. Realising more sustainable consumer lifestyles requires a deep understanding of individual behaviour, in particular how consumer habits can be influenced. Specific to the laundry area, sustainable washing behaviours offer an excellent opportunity for individual change, with new technology and product innovation making it possible to maintain high performance. Doing their laundry at low wash temperatures will help consumers to reduce their household energy consumption. In recent years, brand and governmental education campaigns have increased consumer awareness which has helped to promote washing at lower temperatures. However, in order to achieve the potential energy savings from low temperature washing, additional and more innovative approaches will be needed to influence consumer wash behaviour. The results, insights and recommendations of a UK DEFRA-supported consumer habit conversion project on washing behaviour (Summer 2012) will be reported. The goal of the qualitative project was to examine how consumers could be engaged to adopt more sustainable behaviour across a range of habitual domestic activities including conversion to a 30°C wash temperature. The study showed that a high degree of habit conversion can be achieved. The majority of participants changed their behaviour to washing a significant number of loads at 30°C while some participants have made a total conversion, washing all of their laundry at 30°C. The factors most critical to a successful habit conversion programme will be reviewed, including the use of habit plans and social media engagement. Each of project partners had ambitious objectives and contributed in a unique way to the project. DEFRA was the catalyst behind this research project, with their experience in embedding new habits and their objective to encourage business intermediaries to drive pro-environmental behaviour among mainstream consumers. One of P&G's major challenges as a consumer goods producer is to drive sustainable use of its laundry products, specifically engaging consumers to lower the wash temperature. P&G provided expertise on laundry products and consumer habits and the P&G team interacted directly with the consumers. Eco Concierge's work on encouraging sustainable lifestyles enabled insights on driving actual change, making sustainable behaviour enjoyable and lasting. The Social Marketing Practice designed and led the project providing their social science expertise on habit conversion, amply supported by academic experts in the field. The insights and recommendations from this project will be incorporated in projects and initiatives at a larger scale. This innovative collaboration model has shown how sustainability challenges can be jointly addressed by investigating consumer behaviour with the ambition to create more sustainable lifestyles.