

## SLAVES OF HABITS: TRUTH FOR PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

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### Abstract:

*Habits as basics to all the individual's actions. As per Psychological theories, when strong habits are formed through behaviour repetition, it can trigger behaviour automatically in the same environment. With regard to our pro-environmental behaviour, habits can be a barrier. Many times, habits are more powerful than the knowledge and intentions to act. Here the role of habits will be discussed regarding pro-environmental behaviour to occur automatically. In this article the role of environmental conditions to initiate specific response will also be discussed. Here, the development of pro-environmental habits can result in more sustainable behaviours.*

**Keywords:** *Behaviour change, Habit, Pro-environmental behaviour, urban sustainability.*

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### Introduction:

The impact of habits is occasionally accounted for in studies on pro-environmental behaviour, which instead often emphasise the role of values, norms, attitudes, intentions, and motivation for pro-environmental behaviour (Schultz and Kaiser 2012; Soerqvist 2016). Accordingly, most interventions aiming to focus sustainable transformations are emphasising on building intrinsic motivation through rational processes like knowledge building, feedback, and monitoring—which are likely not powerful enough to break habits and create long-term behavioural change (Verplanken 2018). Habits seem to be largely neglected within the field of sustainability science, even though they have been highlighted as a potential barrier for aligning intrinsic motivation with sustainable behaviour changes (Verplanken et al. 1998; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Jackson 2004). There are very few articles focusing on the role of habits for sustainability transformation.

This paper aims to discover the possible habits may have for igniting (or hindering) transformations towards maintainable behaviours. We define Pro-Environmental Habits (PEH) as “habits that either benefit the environment or harm it as little as possible” (based on the Steg and Vlek (2009) definition of pro-environmental behaviour). Here the current research on habits are focused. In a specific context if a behaviour is repeated again and again, it results in habit. This results in an automatic response without any specific thought or deliberate efforts. Our reliance on habits is not that surprising considering how they free up working memory and enable us to save time and multi-task (Wood and Rünger 2016).

**Initiating pro-environmental habits:** Can the old habits be broken? Answer to this question is ‘Yes’. There are ways to break unwanted habits and help establish personal control over behaviour. Given below are the ways:

**Intention of implementation:** The goal of implementation intention is to close the gap between intention and behaviour. It is a methodical way to carrying out predetermined, goal-directed tasks. Adhering to an if-then

framework, such as "When situation X arises, I will perform response Y," is how an implementation-intention technique is employed (Gollwitzer and Sheeran 2006). Having an automated behavioural response triggered by contextual stimuli is the aim of the method. If successful, in a predefined scenario, the intended behaviour will manifest itself without hesitation or thought. After the behaviour is established via sufficient repetition, it can carry on as a new, desired habit. Implementation intention has been helpful in encouraging new behaviours and breaking old ones, such as increasing the use of environment friendly material.

#### **Self-observation and cue recognition:**

Given that behavioural responses are involuntarily triggered by contextual stimuli, vigilant self-observation and deliberate inhibition of the action when it is recalled might be quite important when attempting to kick bad habits. Quinn et al. (2010) demonstrated that strong habit control required thinking phrases like "don't do it" while an unpleasant action reaction was about to happen. It has been demonstrated that "cue monitoring," which involves thinking back on the circumstances in which habits arise and figuring out what internal and external elements trigger the behaviour, is useful in breaking bad habits. Undesirable behaviours as binge eating (Verhoeven et al. 2014). Similarly, identifying the cue—that is, the sensation that appears just after the habit is formed—is the main goal of habit reversal training, a clinical behavioural treatment for negative habits (following the cue's activation) and substituting a different behavioural response for the cue-behaviour link. Changing the habit loop and associating a more desirable behaviour with the previously established signal is the aim of the treatment. Numerous harmful behaviours, including tic disorders and Tourette syndrome, have been effectively treated with this approach (Piacentini and Chang 2005; Fru'ndt et al. 2017).

#### **Habit discontinuity hypothesis:**

According to the habit discontinuity hypothesis, when people are freed from one circumstance and placed in another, they might break old habits and form new ones (Verplanken et al. 2008). Significant disruptions may include moving to a new stage of life (such as leaving school to start a career), changing one's physical or geographic location (such as moving for employment or to move into a new home), or altering the setting in which one does daily activities (such as changing the infrastructure).

This theory is supported by preliminary empirical research, which also suggests that when habits temporarily "un-freeze," relocation increases the effectiveness of change interventions (Verplanken and Roy 2016).

The literature available regarding habit, made it clear that our former behaviour is a predictor of upcoming behaviour. To ensure a sustainable future, we need to better understand the process of our past decisions and explore the role of habits within research on sustainability transformations. This means both understanding how to break out of environmentally damaging behaviour patterns and how to establish new PEH. We must investigate the influence of our previous choices and the part habits play in research on sustainability transitions if we are to secure a sustainable future. This entails knowing how to create new PEH as well as how to break out from behavioural patterns that harm the environment. Three reasons that highlight the significance of viewing sustainable behaviours through the glass of habit are presented below.

**The habit theory emphasizes how behaviour depends largely on automatic mechanisms:**

Habit theory emphasizes how much of our behaviour is dependent on automatic processes, which is something that is frequently omitted from pro-environmental studies. Research and interventions could go beyond concentrating just on reasoned behaviour and intrinsic motivation by adopting a habit approach that places sustainable behaviours within a broader range of instinctive behaviours and ideas.

Interventions that tap into our impulsive, automatic mechanism can effectively promote lasting behaviours. This The behavioural economics literature on 'nudges' is an example of this perspective. This research examines how automatic processes, such as heuristics, norms, information framing, loss aversion, and social pressure, shape our behaviour. It proposes interventions that align with automatic responses to encourage specific behaviours (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

**The surrounding environment establishes limits on behaviour and moulds habits:**

Environmental factors, both social and physical, influence behaviour by allowing and enabling a variety of behaviours. Any habit needs the opportunity to form in the context of its surroundings in order to thrive. This spectrum of potential behaviours is characterised in ecological psychology as relationships between the agent's skills and environmental traits, or "affordances."

As a result, achieving sustainability goals might be difficult when confronted with everyday settings that naturally trigger old unsustainable behaviours. This is demonstrated by the aforementioned habit discontinuity concept, and accumulating data supports it in terms of pro-environmental behaviour. For example, university employees concerned about the environment who had recently moved house were commuting more sustainably than those who were equally concerned but had not relocated (Verplanken et al. 2008), and interventions to promote sustainable behaviour were more effective among newly moved participants (Verplanken and Roy 2016)

Looking at sustainable behaviours through a habit perspective. Linking behaviour to the physical environment is crucial for understanding how sustainable behaviours emerge and are influenced.

**Our beliefs and sense of self are shaped by our prior actions and behaviours:**

Our habits could influence how we perceive ourselves, our values, beliefs and self-identity.

In addition to being a useful strategy for encouraging behaviour modification, a PEH method may also be an efficient means of advancing pro-environmental identities, attitudes, and culture.

Giusti et al.'s (2014) investigation focused on how having physical access to outdoor experiences guaranteed a regular connection with the natural world, which has been linked to environmental sensitivity and awareness. According to Giusti et al. (2018), nature routines are crucial for cultivating a meaningful engagement with the natural world. This holds true for both planned and unplanned nature experiences (Beery et al. 2017). Also, research has demonstrated that an individual's personal experience with climate change heightens their intentions to take pro-environmental action (Broomell et al. 2015). Additionally, a long-term study with 10-year-old kids involved in a conservation initiative for the environment revealed that actively preserving endangered species can influence kids' sense of connection to nature.

Other factors, such as socialisation (Klo'ckner and Matthies 2012) and social influence (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004), may also play a role in shaping our identity. However, they demonstrate how our past behaviours and routines might contribute to the formation of lasting values and identities. A PEH approach could help investigate the link between past behaviour, experiences, and habits and long-term attitudes, values, and self-identity. Future research should explore how therapies used to break unhealthy habits, such as tobacco smoking, unhealthy diets, and gambling, can also be used to break repeated environmentally harmful behaviours. To design for PEH, it's important to include sustainable behaviours that are easy to perform (Kaaronen 2017; Rosenthal and Linder 2021). Additional research is needed to ensure that pro-environmental motivations and attitudes are not overshadowed by repressive environmental features.

#### **Conclusion:**

Habits form automatic responses of individual. Habits shall be focused on with respect to individual's pro-environmental behavior. Pro-environmental habits can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable behaviors and complement current dominant practices.

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