

Abstract title: Energy Cultures and Social Networks - influences on energy behaviour change in households

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Abstract title: Energy Cultures and Social Networks - influences on energy behaviour change in households

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Abstract:

The Energy Cultures research programme is an interdisciplinary study that uses multiple methods to examine aspects of energy behavior in households. We are interested in the interactions between people's material culture, practices and social norms, and what influences are most effective in supporting change in one or more of these elements towards greater energy efficiency and social wellbeing.

When people make a change in their household energy use, they are often prompted or influenced by other agents such as media, social marketing, energy companies, councils, local action groups, and family and friends. We explored the relative strength of these influences in a study within a suburb of Dunedin, New Zealand. We surveyed 383 households (25% of total households in the suburb) and used the Synergia Network Analytic to identify patterns of influence. The software produced a highly informative visual display of the relative influence of different organizations, information sources and social networks, and how these differ across demographic groupings. The findings were reinforced by focus groups in which people discussed their energy changes and the key influences on their decisions. Family and friends provide trusted advice, recommendations of trustworthy brands and suppliers, practical assistance, and opportunities for a kinaesthetic experience of a house with the change.

The findings raise questions about where effort should best be placed in achieving behavior change in households. Government expenditure on general media campaigns might be better spent supporting the positive influences from peoples' close social networks.

Keywords: behavior change, social networks, households