

Home

Climate and Energy

Natural Capital

Social Equality

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Communications & Engagement

Ethics and Governance

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'Will we see revenge consumption or a new frugality post Covid19?'

< 1

By [Fabian Echegaray](#) on Sep 28, 2021

Analysis: In a new book, Fabián Echegaray and Philip Vergragt assess how pandemic-led changes to consumption and social behaviour will affect the transition to more sustainable lifestyles

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what a post-Covid future will look like. What awaits us once vaccination programmes have succeeded and mass immunity been achieved? Will societies revert to past behaviours and practices, or will the changes brought about by the pandemic continue to shape how we work and study, entertain ourselves and socialise? What role will homes and cities have after the significant changes in 2020?

As countries set about tackling the long-term economic and social fallout of Covid, a new book, [Sustainable Lifestyles after Covid-19](#), published by Routledge, addresses these questions.

Acknowledging that behind the immediate health and economic crises of Covid-19 looms the possibly much larger crisis of climate change and the need to achieve livelihoods within a 1.5C target, four experts in sustainable consumption draw perspectives from developed and emerging countries to provide answers as to which trends will sustain and what scenarios might arise.

The enforced 'stay at home' culture clashed with the fact that many found their residences inadequate for multiple conflicting activities

The pandemic has accelerated pro-sustainability trends such as digitalisation and mindful consumption. Digitalisation cuts across all domains of social practice: work, mobility, leisure, home provisioning. Mindful consumption goes beyond a preference for choosing green or ethical goods to embed consumption behaviour into a broader culture favoring health-centric, pro-social, locally grounded relationships with products and producers.

Alternatively, other trends were reversed by Covid-19 such as collaborative consumption, sharing economy practices and some initiatives towards a circular economy, all heavily based on recycling, reusing and repairing. Some developments were unexpected, such as the transformation of the home from the periphery to the centre of the multiple roles and activities of individuals and families. The enforced "stay at home" culture clashed with the fact that many found their residences unsuitable and inadequate for the multiple conflicting activities of their different members. Urban living presupposed using city public and private space to fulfill a plethora of personal needs and social practices. Covid radically challenged this model

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progress. Lifestyles scenarios are based upon the foreseeable reactions to consumption and social relationships, both sectors dramatically redefined by anti-virus countermeasures.



Covid-driven scarcity increased the perceived value of social relationships. (Credit: Body Stock/Shutterstock)

Harsh restrictions to consumption stimulate two types of reactions in individuals: a "revenge consumption" response to offset the experience and feelings of deprivation and delayed gratification or, alternatively, the naturalising of more frugal, self-sufficient, less materialistic lifestyles inherited from lockdown.

The former response type presupposes a return to conspicuous consumption habits and the accumulation of goods, an outcome easily connected to the "old normal" and privilege of those barely affected by the economic shutdown. Many governments through subsidies, flexible consumer credit and non-conditional tax exemptions heavily endorse this reaction as a comeback gambit to trick the economic crisis by restoring the all too familiar mantra "business as usual". This reaction excites the imagination of many people in the short

term but clashes with the medium-term post-pandemic agenda centred on addressing climate change through dematerialising

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Covid-driven scarcity also affected social relationships, which increased their perceived value. Consequently, we foresee two likely responses: a social immersion in in-person, social gatherings to counterbalance the experience of affective deprivation and the unmet need for social belonging or, contrarily, an acculturation to physical distancing and remote connection to others based on the perceived benefits of privacy, safety and comfort that offsets the cost of loneliness. The choice of response concerning sociability is conditioned more by generational profiles than by social class.

Individuals who embrace a 'revenge consumption' and 'social immersion' response embody the 'old normal' scenario

Four scenarios emerge when cross-reading those reactions. Individuals who embrace a "revenge consumption" and "social immersion" response embody the "old normal" scenario. They prioritise material incentives and mediations in their affective relationships, putting a premium on status and convenience, linking wellbeing to acquiring or consuming products and services. For this group, work and study should follow conventional offline modes, individual car-based mobility is the rule and they oppose, in principle, any further quarantine or restrictions to civil liberties and individual choice.

Those who combine revenge consumption behaviour with the assimilation of online life characterise their lifestyles by mixing materialistic and virtual preferences. They support social control through offline and online surveillance, they rely in e-commerce and delivery, ignore a notion of wellbeing that factors in physical and nutritional health, avoid out-of-home mobility be it for working, studying or having fun. This profile group is likely to spend hours tracking news and consuming social media with a poor work-life balance.

A third scenario includes those willing to be socially immersed while keeping a low profile in terms of consumption. We call them "gregarious simplifiers" as they engage in frugal consumption practices while resisting telework and tele-education. Rather than accepting commodified leisure in commercialised environments like in the "old normal" scenario, this profile connects wellbeing and entertainment to nature, family life and offline forms of interaction and social integration.

They reject status symbols and prioritise intellectual, social or sensorial self-realisation thus favouring their involvement in

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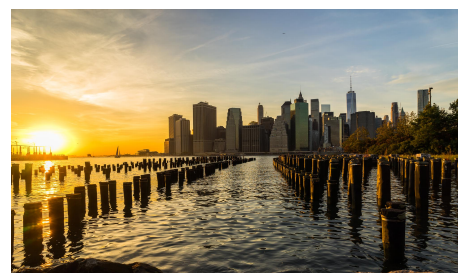
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'Click rebels' live frugally and rely heavily on the internet for work, leisure and study. (Credit: Rachata Teyparsit/Shutterstock)

Those dubbed as "click rebels", characterised by adopting a social life mediated by apps and computers while living frugally, compose a fourth profile. They are politically active, approach the online sphere as one of resistance and peer cooperation, and heavily rely on the internet for working, leisure or studying.

These four profiles represent and illustrate how post-pandemic times may affect individuals' quotidian practices, and how willing they will be to address the upcoming challenge of climate change, once Covid is in the past. Each scenario has different implications in terms of how people will uplift or downgrade urban life as well as the prospects for vibrant cities and the extent to which communities will be pivotal or overlooked within their members' emerging lifestyles – and what policy packages are more likely to catalyse sustainability change.

Sustainable Lifestyles after Covid-19 is co-authored by Echeagarav F Brachva V Veraraat P Zhana I and


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