

Product carbon footprint labelling



Consumer research 2020

Who we are

Established in 2001, the Carbon Trust works with businesses, governments and institutions around the world, helping them contribute to, and benefit from, a more sustainable future through carbon reduction, resource efficiency strategies, and commercialising low carbon businesses, systems and technologies.

The Carbon Trust:

- works with corporates and governments, helping them to align their strategies with climate science and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement;
- provides expert advice and assurance, giving investors and financial institutions the confidence that green finance will have genuinely green outcomes; and
- supports the development of low carbon technologies and solutions, building the foundations for the energy system of the future.

Headquartered in London, the Carbon Trust has a global team of over 200 staff, representing over 30 nationalities, based across five continents.

Contents

Introduction	1
Summary of results	2
The research	2
2020 results	3
How important to consumers is corporate action to reduce product carbon footprints?	4
Do consumers think carbon labelling is a good idea?	5
Are the carbon emissions of a product a factor in consumers' purchasing decisions?	6
If a company has reduced the carbon footprint of a product, how does it change consumers' brand perception?	7
Year-on-year comparisons	8
Notes on research	9
International results	10
France	11
Germany	12
Italy	13
Spain	14
Sweden	15
The Netherlands	16
UK	17
US	18

Introduction

During the last few years the climate crisis has become ever more present in the public consciousness. Unprecedented natural disasters such as the bushfires in Australia and flooding in Indonesia and the UK has coincided with an increased level of climate activism. In 2019, parts of major cities were repeatedly brought to a standstill by the Extinction Rebellion protests, and around the world school children have led mass walk outs, leaving their classrooms to demand climate action for their future.

An increasingly climate-aware and educated public are collectively demanding change, but are they backing this sentiment with their wallets? Consumer purchasing power could be one lever to drive decarbonisation, but to be truly effective, consumers must be able to readily access information on the true climate change impacts of products and services.

To understand if access to this information could empower consumers to shift markets towards more sustainable practices, it is critical to understand how they view low carbon alternatives, or companies who are able to demonstrate efforts to reduce the climate impacts of their products.

Summary of results

The research shows continued levels of support for carbon labelling on products across all countries, with two-thirds of consumers saying they thought it was a good idea.

The brand benefit of sharing information on the carbon footprint of products was also consistent with previous results. Two-thirds of consumers of all markets surveyed said they are more likely to think positively about a brand that could demonstrate it had lowered the carbon footprint of its products.

France, Italy and Spain are the countries with the highest levels of support for labelling with 80, 82 and 79 per cent of consumers respectively saying they think labelling is a good idea. Sweden has seen the highest increase in support for labelling compared to previous years, though interest in labelling is still relatively modest when compared to France, Italy and Spain.

The research

The findings in this report are from three separate surveys all of which were undertaken by YouGov.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults (aged 18+) in each market. Percentages and totals have been rounded for reporting purposes.

In 2020, the total sample size was 10,540 adults – 1,008 in France, 2,149 in Germany, 1,031 in Italy, 1,030 in the Netherlands, 1,058 in Spain, 1,031 in Sweden, 2,071 in the UK and 1,159 in the US. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25 February-2 March 2020. The survey was conducted online.

In 2019, the total sample size was 9,037 adults – comprising 1,001 in Canada, 1,004 in Italy, 1,004 in Netherlands, 1,664 in Spain, 1,034 in Sweden, 2,078 in the UK and 1,251 in the US. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11-22 February 2019. The survey was conducted online.

In 2016, the total sample size was 5,271 adults – comprising 1,001 in France, 2,095 in Germany and 2,157 in the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12-13th October 2016. The survey was conducted online.

2020 results



How important to consumers is corporate action to reduce product carbon footprints?

A key driver for corporates to reduce the carbon footprint of their products is consumer attitudes towards climate action.

Question:

“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

Response	Country (%)								Total
	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	US	
Strongly agree	24	10	24	24	10	12	9	13	15%
Tend to agree	41	23	35	29	22	30	27	24	28%
Neither agree not disagree	23	30	26	30	25	29	36	31	30%
Tend to disagree	8	18	9	7	13	13	16	12	13%
Strongly disagree	3	13	3	6	25	11	9	14	11%
Don't know	2	6	3	3	4	4	3	6	4%
Net: agree	65	33	59	53	32	43	36	37	42%
Net: disagree	10	31	12	14	38	24	25	26	24%

Key takeaways:

- In every country except Sweden, more respondents agree than disagree that it is important for them to know that the company they are purchasing from is acting to reduce its product's carbon footprints.
- On average over two-fifths agree that it is important to them, while almost one quarter disagrees, and nearly a third neither agrees nor disagrees.
- France, Italy and Spain are the countries that have the highest percentage of people who agreed with this statement.

Do consumers think carbon labelling is a good idea?

If consumers are looking to select products based on their carbon footprints, then labelling is an effective way for companies to communicate with their customers – but do consumers agree?

Question:

“ It’s a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

Response	Country (%)								Total
	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	US	
Strongly agree	38	30	43	56	27	26	23	26	32%
Tend to agree	43	36	39	23	26	37	40	31	35%
Neither agree not disagree	15	19	11	14	22	22	25	26	20%
Tend to disagree	3	5	4	2	7	5	5	3	4%
Strongly disagree	1	4	2	3	11	6	4	9	5%
Don't know	1	5	2	3	7	4	4	6	4%
Net: agree	80	66	82	79	53	63	63	56	67%
Net: disagree	4	10	5	5	18	11	8	12	9%

Key takeaways:

- Over two-thirds of consumers think that it is a good idea to feature carbon labels on products.
- Four in five people in France and Italy think that it is a good idea.
- In Spain 56% of consumers said they ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.

Are the carbon emissions of a product a factor in consumers’ purchasing decisions?

Consumers may think that companies’ efforts to decarbonise products and services are important and that communicating that information through labelling is a good idea – but in an environment where labelling is not mandatory, how many are purchasing products with carbon emissions in mind?

Question:

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product’s carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

Response	Country (%)								Total
	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	US	
Strongly agree	15	20	18	16	31	27	16	26	21%
Tend to agree	32	30	30	24	19	32	36	28	30%
Neither agree not disagree	27	22	28	28	19	23	23	22	24%
Tend to disagree	16	17	15	18	13	11	17	12	15%
Strongly disagree	8	6	6	11	13	4	6	7	7%
Don't know	2	4	3	4	4	3	3	5	3%
Net: agree	47	50	48	40	50	59	51	54	50%
Net: disagree	24	23	21	28	26	16	23	18	23%

Key takeaways:

- On average, half of people agree that the carbon footprint of a product is not something that they think of when selecting a product to buy.
- The countries with the highest amount of respondents disagreeing are Spain and Sweden, at 28% and 26% respectively, suggesting that these consumers are considering the carbon emissions of products when purchasing.

If a company has reduced the carbon footprint of a product, how does it change consumers' brand perception?

Companies who are able to differentiate and market their products on having a reduced carbon footprint do so for a number of reasons, both ethical and financial, but how does it benefit their brand reputation?

Question:

“Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product...Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference?”

Response	Country (%)								Total
	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	US	
Much more positive	29	22	45	36	16	16	22	17	25%
Slightly more positive	47	37	36	42	37	42	42	34	40%
No difference	17	27	12	13	31	29	29	35	25%
Slightly less positive	2	5	3	3	3	6	2	3	3%
Much less positive	1	3	2	2	3	2	1	3	2%
Don't know	4	7	3	4	10	5	5	8	6%
Net: more positive	77	59	81	79	53	58	64	51	64%
Net: less positive	2	7	5	4	6	8	3	6	5%

Key takeaways:

- Almost two-thirds of consumers say they would feel more positive towards companies that that have reduced the carbon impacts of their products.
- France, Italy and Spain are again the markets with the highest number of consumers who say that they would feel more positive about a company/brand.

Year-on-year comparisons



Notes on research

The Carbon Trust commissioned YouGov to undertake international consumer research on carbon labelling in 2016, 2019 and 2020. Consumers were surveyed in different countries for each survey, and in 2019 and 2020 the weighted average across countries was calculated as international results.



International results

“ Before purchasing a product, it’s important for me to know that the company I’m purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product’s carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	43%	22%
2020	42%	24%

“ It’s a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	67%	10%
2020	67%	9%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product’s carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	52%	21%
2020	50%	23%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	66%	5%
2020	64%	5%



“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	49%	16%
2020	65%	10%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	73%	6%
2020	80%	4%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	52%	19%
2020	47%	24%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2016	76%	3%
2020	77%	2%



“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	39%	26%
2020	33%	31%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	66%	10%
2020	66%	10%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	55%	22%
2020	50%	23%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2016	50%	9%
2020	59%	7%



Italy

“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	60%	11%
2020	59%	12%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	85%	4%
2020	82%	5%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	55%	18%
2020	48%	21%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	84%	5%
2020	81%	5%



Spain

“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	56%	14%
2020	53%	14%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	80%	6%
2020	79%	5%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	43%	26%
2020	40%	28%

“ Please now imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	78%	4%
2020	79%	4%



“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	30%	34%
2020	32%	38%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	49%	18%
2020	53%	18%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	53%	18%
2020	50%	26%

“ Please now imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product...Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	51%	6%
2020	53%	6%



“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	38%	25%
2020	43%	24%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	60%	11%
2020	63%	11%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	58%	16%
2020	59%	16%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	54%	7%
2020	58%	8%



UK

“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	24%	36%
2019	35%	25%
2020	35%	25%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	56%	12%
2019	65%	8%
2020	63%	8%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2016	57%	18%
2019	51%	25%
2020	51%	23%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2016	55%	3%
2019	67%	2%
2020	64%	3%



US

“ Before purchasing a product, it's important for me to know that the company I'm purchasing it from is taking action to reduce the product's carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	39%	26%
2020	37%	26%

“ It's a good idea to use a recognisable label on products that have been made with a commitment to measuring and reducing their carbon footprint. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	57%	16%
2020	56%	12%

“ When I am choosing a product to buy, the product's carbon footprint is not generally something that I think about. ”

	Agree	Disagree
2019	54%	20%
2020	54%	18%

“ Imagine that you were considering purchasing a product, and you discovered that one of the companies selling it had reduced the carbon footprint of that product... Knowing this, to what extent would it make you feel more or less positive towards this company, or would it make no difference? ”

	More	Less
2019	57%	7%
2020	51%	6%

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