



# Environmental Claims in Advertising

## Qualitative Research Report

October 2022

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# 1. Executive Summary

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator of advertising. It applies the Advertising Codes written by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP). The ASA ensures ads across all media are legal, decent, honest and truthful, taking action where ads are misleading, harmful, offensive or otherwise irresponsible.

The ASA has been regulating environmental claims for many years to ensure consumers are not misled and that ads are responsible. As the government sets more ambitious targets to avoid catastrophic climate change, the ASA has been exploring how it can go further in its role to regulate misleading and socially irresponsible environmental claims. In [September 2021](#)<sup>i</sup>, the ASA set out key next steps following a review of its regulation in this area, including a commitment to undertake consumer research to inform its application of the rules.

An investigation into consumer understanding of environment-based terminology used in ads, focusing on Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims and sector-specific terminology used across the electric and hybrid motoring industry, was set as a priority for 2022.

The ASA commissioned a qualitative study, consisting of 75 in-depth interviews, conducted across the UK. The sample included participants from different demographic groups, locations, and varying levels of engagement with the subject matter.

- The study found that the use of environmentally themed terminology and claims is more likely to lead to misunderstanding in general advertising contexts, where terms such as Carbon Neutral and Net Zero are often used. As engagement is often low (relative to the automotive sector), claims made using these terms are less likely to be interrogated.
- Due to the size of the financial investment, consumer engagement has traditionally been high in the automotive market. This engagement is potentially growing in today's market, given the need to navigate the new technology and language emerging as the sector moves towards electric.

## Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims<sup>ii</sup>

- **A broad spectrum of environmental engagement levels emerged, influencing the understanding of, and reaction to, environmental claims** – at the least knowledgeable end of the spectrum, the *Detached* participants expressed little interest in, or understanding of, the claims. The *Mainstream* participants, occupying the middle territory, were better able to understand the role of carbon in climate change, and even sometimes felt that they personally should be doing more. The *Engaged* participants were personally committed to monitoring their own carbon footprint and were much more comfortable with the science and language of climate change.
- **The use of environmental claims in advertising was seen as potentially useful but in their current form they were regarded as making little or no contribution** – people felt that claims could play a constructive role in the future, enabling and encouraging environmentally responsible decision-making. However, several barriers were identified that currently limit the usefulness and value of these claims:
  - comprehension levels varied and were often too low to make sense of the terminology

<sup>i</sup> [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) - ASA statement on the regulation of environmental claims and advertising (23 September 2021)

<sup>ii</sup> See Appendix 7.4.1 for definitions of the terminology covered in this module.

- the range of seemingly overlapping terminology causes confusion
- the perceived prevalence of 'greenwashing' could diminish credibility

- **Carbon Neutral and Net Zero were the most familiar claims, but there was little consensus as to their meaning** - there was little awareness of the differences between Carbon Neutral and Net Zero, most feeling they were used interchangeably.

Offsetting is currently the primary source of confusion and misunderstanding. There was an assumption by some that the claims referred to a direct reduction of carbon emissions. People tended to feel misled when they learned that companies were often relying on offsetting, either partially or wholly, rather than directly reducing carbon emissions.

More engaged participants understood that the terms Carbon Neutral and Net Zero permitted offsetting as part of their approach. These participants understood the terms 'Net', and 'Neutral' to mean achieving a balance of carbon generated and absorbed. The less engaged still equated these terms with a direct reduction, sometimes unclear as to what the 'Net' or 'Neutral' contributed in terms of meaning.

- **There was a need identified for significant reform to be enacted and enforced by an official or government body** - the claims were largely expected to be officially defined and policed, although the exact process for this was not clear to participants.

There was consensus that standardising definitions was a key, first step, and for their usage to be policed by an independent body. The identity of the body did not evoke strong opinions but given the broad use of the terminology (and not just in advertising), there was an assumption it would be an international initiative or government linked.

- **While claims had little direct impact on purchases, they could have a favourable impact on brand reputation** – most participants admitted the claims had little or no direct impact on their purchases as they were not necessarily aware of them or interested in them and, in any case, they tended to prioritise other factors like cost and brand preference.

However, there were some signs that the claims could play a greater role in specific scenarios:

- for *Mainstream* participants, where there was no perceived cost or sacrifice, the feeling of 'doing the right thing' could tip the balance
- for the more *Engaged* participants, who are conscious of their own footprint, especially in high emitting sectors where the need for action is seen as greatest

There were also signs of brand image and reputational impact, which, arguably can be viewed as an indirect, longer-term influence on purchase decisions. The impact was often dependent on the size of the company more than any other factor. Smaller companies in lower emitting sectors could earn favourability because they were seen as acting voluntarily for good motives, whereas larger brands (especially in higher emitting sectors) were assumed to be simply complying with imposed rules or targets.

- **Varying creative approaches could also play a role in claim effectiveness** – portraying the brand as the hero in advertising was seen by participants as the most obvious route; but it was also the most likely route to be seen as boasting or even 'greenwashing'. Claims without supporting detail were particularly vulnerable to this interpretation.

Alternative approaches, such as focusing on employees or customers, tended to receive warmer responses.

- **People called for more transparency in the creative treatment of offsetting and target dates** – the role of offsetting was underestimated by most and there was a general assumption that the claims made were absolute and referred to a direct reduction of emissions. This was felt to be misleading.

There was a consensus that the best practice would be for all companies to be as transparent as possible, highlighting the reliance on offsetting in claims. It was felt this should also apply where Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims were used, as many *Detached* and *Mainstream* participants assumed these were absolute claims.

The most *Engaged* would also like the details of the form of offsetting being used to be available (at least online).

The use of target dates was seen as acceptable if there was accessible, supporting detail or a roadmap of action. Solely stating ‘Carbon Neutral by a certain date’ was felt to lack credibility.

- **Claims in air travel, energy and automotive advertising tended to attract more attention, and the role of offsetting, when revealed, could result in greater disappointment** – claims in these high emitting sectors were met with a range of responses. There was often disbelief or even incredulity, although others felt some optimism as claims suggested significant innovation. The more *Engaged* participants assumed a reliance on offsetting.

Given these claims seem to generate greater attention, participant reactions suggested the need for transparency is potentially greater than in other contexts.

### Terminology used in the Electric and Hybrid motoring sector<sup>iii</sup>

- **The move to electric vehicles has made the car purchasing process more complex and more challenging for consumers** – an already deliberative purchase had been further complicated by:
  - the need to navigate new technology and the language used to describe it
  - working out which of the new variants would suit individual needs and lifestyles
  - establishing the cost implications of different options given personal needs
  - the background anxiety some felt about ‘backing the wrong horse’
  - the sense that there was no straightforward source of information and guidance
- **The technology/descriptors were often understood in terms of a spectrum** – there was a tendency to see the different technologies as a spectrum, with diesel and petrol at one end and ‘full’ electric at the other. This spectrum was felt to reflect not only the level of technological progress, but also environmental progress:
  - the petrol or diesel option was the most familiar choice, but there was some concern about the social implications of owning such a car. The rising cost of fuel came through as a more practical concern
  - the hybrid option is often seen as the sensible first step into the ‘electric’ space, without the need to charge
  - the electric option is seen as the greenest option and the most progressive choice, but there were considerable concerns around range (‘range anxiety’) and charging options. Initial costs were also felt to be high

Awareness of mild hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEV) was much lower, and people struggled to make sense of the technology or where it fitted on this spectrum.

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<sup>iii</sup> See Appendix 7.4.2 for definitions of the terminology covered in this module.

- **Ads tended to target the emotional needs of car selection rather than answer technical questions** – the environmental aspects were regarded as the central thrust of some of the ads, but it was felt this had not significantly changed the overall tone and style of advertising. Image, status and performance were still central.

The ads were less successful at educating about new technologies, answering outstanding questions or providing information/reassurance about:

- range anxiety, charging confusion or the perceived lack of infrastructure
- relative economy/greenness
- concerns about potential obsolescence or being stuck with ‘the new diesel’
- how mild hybrids and PHEV were different from relatively better-known options

- **There were also areas in which advertising could mislead people about the descriptors/technology** – for example, in terms of:

- technical information, such as using unrealistic mileage per charge figures without appropriately prominent caveats
- creative imagery, such as the use of environmental symbols like marine life or certain phrasing that was felt to exaggerate the environmental benefits

While participants understood brands cannot be expected to provide all the necessary education around emerging technologies within their ads, they did feel advertisers had a role to play in providing certain information as clearly as possible, including:

- stating the type of car being advertised upfront
- ensuring transparency in mileage claims identified as ‘ideal’
- providing verified data on their website
- using new terminology as it becomes mainstream.

- **Exposure to advertising highlighted the need for a trustworthy source of information and guidance** – there was a desire for an independent and trustworthy source of guidance and advice, written in plain English, routinely updated and ideally accessible in one place, to clarify issues such as:

- total cost of ownership data, balancing initial investment, fuel costs and resale value
- actual-not-theoretical miles per gallon and miles per charge
- some sense of ‘green’ relativity, such as an “NCAP-style”<sup>iv</sup> ‘Green rating’
- range and charging information (length of charge at home not just fast chargers)

There was no consensus about who should undertake this role, but suggestions included a government body or motoring organisation (like the RAC or AA).

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<sup>iv</sup> European New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP) provides consumer information on the safety of new cars.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Research Background

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator of advertising. It applies the Advertising Codes written by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP). The ASA ensures ads across all media are legal, decent, honest, and truthful taking action where ads are misleading, harmful, offensive or otherwise irresponsible.

The conclusions of the 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [report](#)<sup>v</sup> highlighted the role of human activity in intensifying the pace of climate change and the need for a change in consumer behaviour if targets are to be met. Advertising plays an important part in reflecting and, potentially, endorsing and encouraging consumer behaviours and helping consumers make informed choices. At the end of 2020, [the ASA voiced its support](#)<sup>vi</sup> for the Advertising Association's announcement of its Ad Net Zero plan, committing the advertising industry to minimise its carbon footprint in the creation of ads and to influence the creative content of ads to promote more sustainable messages.

The ASA has been regulating environmental claims for many years to ensure consumers are not misled and that ads are responsible. As the government sets more ambitious targets to avoid catastrophic climate change, the ASA has been exploring how it can go further in its role in regulating misleading and socially irresponsible environmental claims. In [September 2021](#)<sup>vii</sup>, following a review of its regulation in this area, the ASA set out key next steps, including a commitment to undertake consumer research to inform its application of the rules. In June 2022 the ASA gave an interim update to the progress it was making in this [work](#)<sup>viii</sup>.

An investigation into consumer understanding of environment-based terminology used in ads, focusing on Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims and sector-specific terminology used in the electric and hybrid motoring sector, was set as a priority for 2021/2022.

Jigsaw Research was commissioned to conduct a qualitative study on behalf of the ASA to build a base of knowledge on consumer attitudes and understanding in these areas.

### 2.2. Research Objectives

The key objectives of the research were to investigate:

- Consumer understanding of key environmental claims made in ads
- How understanding of these terms applies or is dependent on the context of the ad or product sector
- If, and how, consumers' understanding of these terms influences their purchasing decisions

The study was designed to explore two key areas. The first module focused on broad Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims, and the second explored terminology used in the electric and hybrid motoring sector. The specific terms explored in these modules, within the context of a wide range of ad stimulus, are set out below.

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<sup>v</sup> [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch) – *Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying* (9 August 2021)

<sup>vi</sup> [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) – *Supporting Ad Net Zero* (18 November 2020)

<sup>vii</sup> [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) - *ASA statement on the regulation of environmental claims and advertising* (23 September 2021)

<sup>viii</sup> [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) – *ASA statement on World Environment Day* (6 June 2022)

#### Module 1: Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims

- Carbon Neutral
- Carbon Negative
- Carbon Capture
- Carbon Offsetting/Offsetting
- Carbon Reduction
- Climate Positive
- Zero Carbon/Zero CO<sub>2</sub>
- Net Zero
- Zero Emissions

There are currently no official definitions for terms such as Carbon Neutral or Net Zero and no fixed rules for how businesses should achieve these goals. There is concern that some methods of achieving carbon neutrality/Net Zero are more robust than others – the aim of the research was to gauge how consumers interpreted these terms.

#### Module 2: Electric and Hybrid motoring terminology

- Electric/EV
- Plug-in hybrid/PHEV
- Hybrid (also referred to as self-charging hybrid or full hybrid)
- Mild hybrid/MHEV

These terms are widely used within the motoring sector to describe the specific technology used within the vehicle – and therefore, have clear meanings. The aim of the research was to explore consumer understanding of these terms against the industry recognised definitions.

## 2.3. Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was felt to be the most appropriate given the objectives of the project. The discursive nature of qualitative research is better suited for exploratory studies where the goal is to understand behaviours and attitudes, rather than simply to describe them. It is also the only approach potentially sensitive enough to distinguish between idealised and real behaviours and motivations, which is important with subjects like the environment where social norms are strong.

The two most common methodologies in qualitative research are the group discussion and the one-to-one in-depth interview. The in-depth interview was selected for this study rather than the group discussion because it:

- Allows a greater sense of an individual's attitudes, motivations, and beliefs
- Is less likely to encourage posturing than the group environment
- Is a better vehicle to gauge comprehension of words and concepts

Given ongoing concerns over the Covid-19 pandemic, it was agreed that the interviews would be conducted online. The sessions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and followed a discussion guide agreed upon in advance with the ASA. Fieldwork was conducted between 15 February and 29 April 2022.

## 2.4. Research sample

The project comprised 75 in-depth interviews, split between the two modules, with 45 interviews conducted as part of Module 1 looking at Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims and 30 interviews conducted as part of Module 2 looking at terminology used in the motoring sector.



The structure of the sample was designed to mirror the UK demographic makeup, including an appropriate spread of socio-economic groups, life stages and family households. Additionally, the sample incorporated the following criteria:

- Locations – fieldwork was conducted across the four nations with the number of interviews broadly proportionate to the population and included a mix of urban and rural locations
- Ethnicity and gender – an even split of gender and an appropriate representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups were included
- Age range – while focusing on 18- to 65-year-olds, the sample also included a proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds
- Environmental engagement – a spectrum of more and less engaged participants were included. Engagement levels were determined through responses to a range of attitudinal statements at the recruitment stage. It is important to note here that references to the three engagement levels (*Detached*, *Mainstream* and *Engaged*) introduced in Section 4.1 are based on our assessments following the interviews and may differ from the engagement levels determined by responses to the recruitment survey
- Electric and Hybrid motoring sector – participants taking part in Module 2 discussions were all in the market for a new car in the next 12 months, currently owners of a petrol or diesel car and considering a ‘greener’ alternative

Full details of the sample achieved can be found in Appendix 7.5 and 7.6.

## 2.5. Interview structure

Interviews in both modules followed a similar structure and were designed to gain insight into participants’ understanding of and attitudes towards the claims. Descriptors were explored in the context of overall reactions to the ad stimulus used in the interviews.

Being qualitative in nature, the interviews were flexible, allowing the conversation to be sensitive and responsive to the priorities of the individual participant. However, a consistent outline flow was adopted, as follows:

### Module 1: Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims

- Following on from introductions, discussions started with initial exposure to the ad stimulus and exploration of general reactions with up to six ads, from a range of media, shared with each participant:
  - discussions allowed for any reaction to the term/descriptor to emerge at a spontaneous level
- We then explored the understanding of claims individually and overall attitudes to similar claims used in advertising
- As there are no official definitions for terms explored in this module or, where there may be an agreed general meaning but no agreement on how it is achieved, possible definitions of claims were then shared with participants and reactions to these definitions explored:
  - where necessary, ads were re-shared for further discussion on contextualised claims.

### Module 2: Electric and Hybrid motoring terminology

- Following on from introductions, interviews started with a general discussion of the car purchase decision-making process and attitudes towards the range of engine options available

- This was followed by initial exposure to the ad stimulus and exploration of general reactions with up to six ads, from a range of media, shared with each participant:
  - discussions allowed for any reaction to the term/descriptor to emerge at a spontaneous level.
- Participant understanding of descriptors was explored individually, in the form of a 'quiz'
- Definitions of the terminology were then shared with participants and reactions to these definitions explored:
  - where necessary, ads were re-shared for further discussion of contextualised terminology.

Appendix 7.4 sets out the definitions of the terminology presented to participants.

## 2.6. Stimulus material

The ASA provided a broad range of advertising examples for each module, covering:

- Different media (TV, press, radio, outdoor and digital)
- A range of sectors (including but not limited to energy, retail, travel and automotive)
- A variety of creative styles (for example, some more formal, others more playful)
- A broad range of brands, familiar and less well known (for example, British Gas versus Manx Gas)

Over 80 ads were used across the two modules and the primary use of the stimulus was to aide discussions in the interviews. A rotation was designed to ensure balanced coverage across the sample. Each ad was viewed approximately six times.

During the sessions, the stimulus was shared on screen. Participants were asked to join the interviews using a laptop so that they were able to see and hear clearly what was being shown.

The stimulus is referenced throughout, and a summary of each ad can be found in Appendix 7.3. References to specific ads are denoted by the brand name and a number corresponding to the relevant ad on the stimulus list e.g., Amazon1 refers to the Amazon ad listed as number 1 in the appendix.

## 3. Overall Context

### 3.1. General attitudes to the environment

Attitudes and feelings around climate change were not explored in detail, but emerged largely in reaction to the claims, descriptors and the advertising stimuli.

Environmental issues and debates were recognised as a feature of modern life by all, even if attitudes and engagement in the subject varied widely. Participants reported hearing about the climate crisis from multiple sources including media, government, campaigning organisations and brands.

Awareness and understanding of government's environmental targets varied. Awareness of plans to decarbonise all sectors of the UK economy to meet the 2050 Net Zero target was low, and rarely emerged in discussions. However, awareness of plans to transition to electric cars and vans was much greater, with almost universal awareness for those active in the car market.

There was a consensus that companies have a role to play in tackling the crisis, especially those in sectors such as energy, automotive and air travel, which were associated with high carbon emissions. However, the tendency for brands to declare their environmental achievements could elicit cynicism. Such statements were attributed to a range of motives: doing the right thing; compliance with rules or targets; or 'greenwashing'; and perceived 'virtue signalling'. There was little awareness of any specific governmental or organisational targets or requirements, but there was an assumption both existed.

The role of individuals was more open to debate and was largely dependent on political attitudes and beliefs, but most accepted the idea that 'everyone has a role to play'.



*"I've started paying a lot more attention recently, I've got a little boy, so I'm worried about how it's going to be when he grows up ... I'm obviously not a tree hugger, but I'm trying to do my bit and trying to be better, we're looking at getting solar panelling for the house."* **(Female, 30–39, Suburban)**

*"I was [anxious] when watching the David Attenborough documentary because it just felt like the world is on fire ... we need to start putting in a conscious effort to make a difference."* **(Female, 30–39, Urban)**

Individual contribution was often linked to personal sacrifice, such as: avoiding a certain product; paying more for an ethical option; or avoiding air travel. However, there was some awareness that certain behaviours or choices were incentivised by local or national governments, such as electric cars being exempt from congestion charges.

Levels of engagement and knowledge were closely linked and understanding environmental issues required investment, especially for older participants. The science behind climate change was acknowledged to be challenging for many.

While impossible to generalise completely, degrees of engagement seemed primarily driven by:

- Political beliefs – those with more progressive beliefs tended to be more engaged
- Age – younger people were more likely to be engaged
- Levels of education – those with a higher education were more likely to be engaged
- Parental status and the age of children – parents may have received some education from their children, but also felt a greater sense of future focus that came with raising a child



*“Leaning into electric because of the price of fuel and environmental considerations. We have to think about what we’re leaving behind for our kids and grandkids” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

It is also worth noting that carbon is the main element of the discussion; mention of other greenhouse gases was almost non-existent.

We look at the engagement spectrum in more detail in Section 4.

## 3.2. Engagement levels by Module

There were key differences in engagement patterns observed across the two modules.

Engagement levels were found to vary significantly in Module 1, which looked at Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims, and included ad stimulus from a wide range of sectors and a range of different claims. This was often dependent on the individual participant, but also sometimes the sector. Some participants showed little understanding or interest, whereas others were much more committed. We discuss this in more detail in the next section.

Engagement in Module 2, looking at the terminology used in the electric and hybrid motoring sector, was consistently high. The car purchase was seen as a significant investment and the sector was thought to be undergoing rapid and profound change. Many participants had undertaken research into the purchase, and most had expressed a need and desire to understand more about the range of descriptors that were being used to indicate the various technologies at play. The risks of ‘getting it wrong’ were seen as potentially significant. We explore this in more detail in Section 5.

## 4. Module 1: Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims

### 4.1. The Engagement spectrum

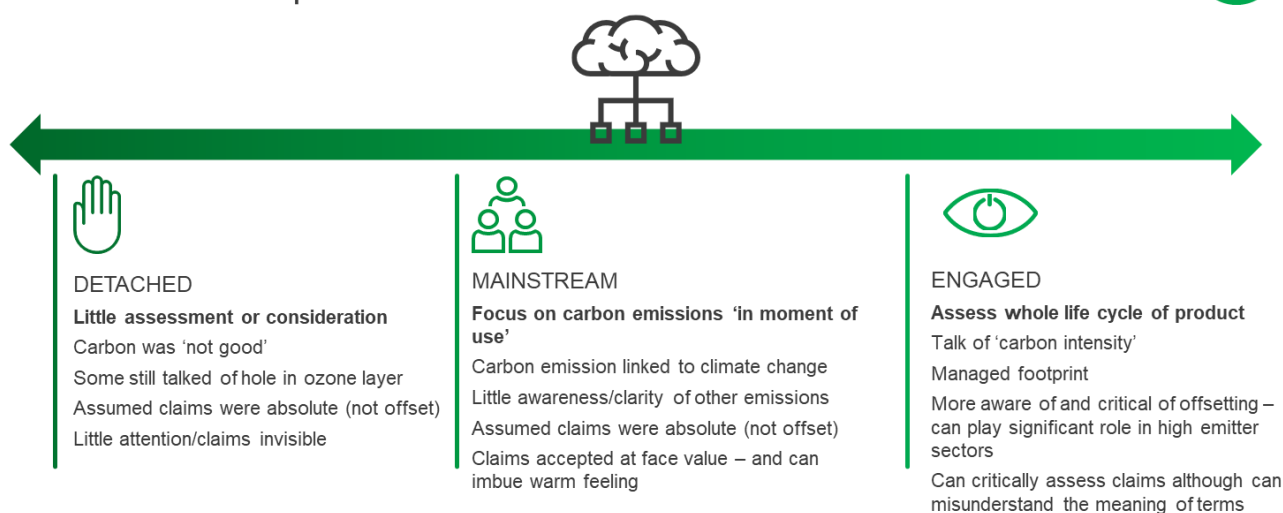
**Knowledge levels vary significantly and impact both comprehension of and attention paid to claims**

Across the sample, a wide range of knowledge and engagement levels were encountered. Figure 1 illustrates this spectrum. It is a diagrammatic approximation, not an exact or precise representation<sup>ix</sup>. This report references this spectrum on numerous occasions as the position an individual participant occupied on it was often a determinant of attitudes to, and understanding of, the claims.

The link between knowledge and engagement was clear throughout the spectrum.

Figure 1

Knowledge levels vary significantly and impact both comprehension of and attention paid to claims



At one end of the spectrum, *Detached* participants showed minimal interest in the environment and climate change. They were, of course, aware of the coverage in the media, but did not seem to feel any proximate sense of threat, or much sense of personal responsibility to change behaviour. This lack of engagement did not necessarily indicate a climate change sceptical position. Knowledge levels tended to be rudimentary and there was evidence of confusion. They were aware carbon was 'bad' (and lowering or cutting was 'good'), but not necessarily able to go beyond this. Participants closer to this end of the spectrum tended to ignore the claims and therefore were potentially less at risk from being misled by them.

Roughly occupying the middle area was the *Mainstream* audience. This comprised the majority of participants. This group tended to be aware that climate change was caused by increased carbon emissions and were conscious of the need for the world to reduce carbon emissions as a matter of urgency. There was some sense of guilt that they personally and individually were not committed enough. This sense of guilt often stemmed from interactions with their children. There was also a sense that it can be hard to 'do your bit' and that it can be expensive (for example, switching to renewable energy often costs more).

<sup>ix</sup> It is important to note here that references to the three engagement levels (*Detached*, *Mainstream* and *Engaged*) are based on our assessments following the interviews and may differ from the engagement levels determined by responses to the recruitment survey.

At the other end of the spectrum were the *Engaged* participants who placed a much greater emphasis on the environment and were often hyper-aware of the ‘climate emergency’. It is worth noting that this group represented a small proportion of the sample, with the majority of participants found in the *Detached* and *Mainstream* groups. They were often very conscious of their own role in tackling climate change, as well as the role of governments and business. They defined their own role in terms of management of their own carbon footprint through lifestyle and consumer choices. They were also conscious of the key role of business in reducing emissions, especially sectors such as energy, automotive and air travel. These participants tended to be comfortable using environmental language like ‘carbon intensity’ and were keen to understand overall life cycle footprints, not just ‘in the moment’ emission rates.

## 4.2. Overall Attitudes to use of claims

**Participants felt environmental claims seem like a good idea in theory – but the extent and variety of claims were felt to limit usefulness in practice. There was a call for reduction and standardisation of the claims used**

Most participants had given little or no thought towards the claims used in advertising. When asked about them, many were thinking about them consciously for the first time.

Participants exhibited varying perspectives towards the use of claims in advertising. On the one hand, some felt the use of such claims were a cause for encouragement, reflecting a broader societal commitment to tackling climate change. On the other hand, the danger here could be that they provided a slightly misleading sense of action, allowing people to feel ‘the issue was being dealt with’.



*“They all give me a general sense they are moving in the right direction but I’m not really sure what they mean beyond making me feel better and as if I’m doing my bit.” (Female, 50–59, Suburban)*

Some argued the claims were a good idea in theory. The terms could potentially be used to enable informed consumer choices that could make a difference on a societal and individual ‘footprint’ level.



*“If we educated people around these terms then people would be a lot more mindful of these topics – it can be a positive thing, but it needs to be made as simple as possible for people...” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

In practice, however, most agreed that the claims were making little contribution due to:

- Varying levels of engagement with environmental issues and the tendency for many to prioritise cost, brand preference, etc.
- Too many terms being used, creating confusion, and diminishing credibility



*“I’ve heard of most, if not, all of them.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“The onus is on the consumer to know what these terms mean. I hope that in schools kids are being taught about these terms.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“The different terms all having a similar meaning is confusing and can give you the wrong impression as to how much carbon you are using, they shouldn’t be able to use these terms interchangeably.” (Male, 40–49, Urban)*

- Dismissal as ‘greenwashing’ or ‘virtue signalling’ aimed at the general public, rather than information intended to empower the consumer



*“The advertising space has become so saturated with claims of carbon neutrality by X date, so these adverts don’t evoke major feelings of admiration anymore ...” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

*“A lot of these corporations are trying to greenwash – they are carbon intensive for the most part but now they are signalling carbon neutrality because they think that is going to win them over in the hearts of consumers.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“They want to use these terms to make a company seem like they are reducing emissions when they’re not – they are pretending to be something they are not but broadly it is good they are talking about it and getting people more aware and interested in it.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban,)*

- Engaged participants being conscious of claims in advertising being used for exploitative purposes, as well as confusion surrounding certain claims, despite a stronger awareness and expectation of distinction between claims



*“The worry is that some companies are just using these unestablished, unverified terms and saying they are balancing things out.” (Male, 30–39, Rural)*

*“Amazon still promotes the nature of buying too much and there is a culture of just buying and throwing away things and not buying things for longevity anymore. Amazon are causing a bigger issue in that ability to get things at a click of a button and the cheap nature of goods these days. It is the same with all big corporations, I am always a little bit dubious of these sorts of messages that they are putting out because they are probably doing more harm than good.” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

- Targets in themselves (vs actions or ‘evidence’) that can feel non-transparent and imprecise
- Partial appropriation by companies in slogans and campaigns, which could increase confusion

Despite professing cynicism towards the motives of companies in using these claims, participants often had an underlying sense that the use of these claims was ‘probably’ policed in some way and therefore had to be ‘true’. *Detached* and *Mainstream* participants were most likely to hold this view, tending to believe that advertising ‘couldn’t say something if untrue’ and that the content was monitored.



*“I would expect it’s true because they couldn’t be advertising it if it wasn’t.” (Female, 30–39, Suburban)*

Most were vague about the process or body responsible for this ‘monitoring’ and showed little curiosity. Some were aware of the ASA and assumed this might fall under their remit, but most were less specific, guessing at the involvement of ‘some sort of government body’.



*“Legally binding I would think. It would be serious if a company claimed one of these things and then found out that it was false.” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

In addition, the claims ‘sounded official’, even technical, and this implied that there would be a formal measurable or provable definition. Many were somewhat surprised to find that this is not the case. Agreeing to and standardising definitions was seen as the key first step, despite participants generally lacking a point of view on which organisation or body should undertake this task. Some felt that, given the global nature of the subject and the use of terminology more broadly (and not just in ads), an international initiative would be the best approach.

Some of the more *Engaged* participants felt the claims were not policed; hence the number of different and overlapping terminologies. They tended to argue the case for a more interventionist approach.



*“I think this raises a complicated debate – these claims need to be verified and governments need to step in and verify whether these claims are true, and carbon has been offset or removed, etc. At the moment there are no established standards, so people are making up the standards for themselves – therefore the term Carbon Neutral is open to exploitation and confusion.” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

**People felt that claims could play a constructive role in the future, enabling and encouraging environmentally responsible decisions. However, this was dependent upon significant reform enacted and enforced by an official or government body, specifically with regards to:**

- Rationalisation and standardisation of terms
- Greater clarity in terms used or investment in public education
- Policing of terms used

### 4.3. Understanding of individual claims<sup>x</sup>

**Carbon Neutral and Net Zero were the most familiar terms, but participants often assumed these claims were absolute and referred to the direct reduction of emissions. Participants felt misled when they learned they were often dependent on offsetting or a combination of approaches. Overall understanding of the individual terms was low.**

Due to the overwhelming focus on carbon, the role of other greenhouse gases seems to have slipped off the radar. Claims like Net Zero and Climate Positive might be assumed to relate only to carbon.

*Mainstream* and *Detached* participants were able to identify the terms as claims of positive behaviour, but many struggled to provide a more precise definition of individual claims, or to distinguish the meaning between one claim and another. Some were more familiar than others, but the meanings were often blurred. Many struggled to come up with specific definitions until pushed (by researchers) to make a ‘guess’. At this point some

<sup>x</sup> As there are no official definitions for terms explored in this module or, where they may be an agreed general meaning, but no agreement on how it is achieved, *possible* definitions of claims were shared with participants and reactions to these definitions explored. These definitions can be found in Appendix 7.4.1.



differences did emerge, most often literal ones based on relativity between the claims used. *Engaged* participants were better able to make some distinctions, but still struggled.

The key differences in comprehension seemed determined by engagement levels and related to the role of offsetting. Most participants assumed offsetting was *not* undertaken and the claims related to a direct reduction in emissions. It is worth noting that some did not know what the specific terms meant, including offsetting, and it had to be explained to them in the interview. Some still struggled to make sense of any definitions given.

**We will now look at the differences in meanings that emerged when participants were questioned and encouraged to think more deeply about the different claims. It is worth noting that some *Detached* and *Mainstream* participants struggled to articulate any differences at all.**

**Climate Positive** was upbeat in tone, but (on reflection) so imprecise as to be almost meaningless. It could be interpreted as referring to some sort of beneficial environmental impact (without providing any specifics) or simply a future intention of the brand to ‘make a difference’. Others assumed it was relating to carbon only/primarily – such was the dominance of the carbon story in the media.



*“Climate Positive – helps the climate?” (Female, 50–59, Rural)*

*“Climate Positive sounds a lot more positive than Carbon Neutral, because the word ‘neutral’ is sort of neither here nor there, and it allows me to make up my own mind as opposed to sort of telling me.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

*“Climate Positive sounds a bit wishy washy nowadays – surely, we are all Climate Positive now. I haven’t heard it as much – I would think that is nonsense – I can at least conceptualise some of other ones.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

**Carbon Zero** was generally interpreted to mean no carbon was produced by the production or process. It was understood as an absolute claim and to exclude offsetting. Some *Engaged* participants felt the claim should apply to the whole life cycle or footprint, not just one aspect of it.

**Carbon Negative** was understood in two different ways. The *Detached* and *Mainstream* might take the word ‘negative’ literally and feel it was the most profound claim, promising an absolute reduction in carbon. It could be interpreted then as a ‘bigger’ claim than ‘Neutral’ or ‘Zero’

The more *Engaged* tended to interpret the claim differently and less literally. In their minds no brand activity could accomplish a reduction in carbon and assumed the term ‘Negative’ was being used loosely to mean ‘Zero’



*“Carbon Negative is when you are putting out less carbon than you are taking in as an organisation.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

*“Carbon Negative sounds like it would have more of an effect than Carbon Neutral.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

**Zero Emissions** was assumed to be absolute and to include all greenhouse gases, not just carbon:



*“I definitely see Zero Emissions as much better than Carbon Neutral.” (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

**Carbon Capture** was rarely a familiar term, and did not feature much in the stimuli, but proved to be more intriguing than other terms. It was different enough to suggest a specific meaning. The phrase suggests carbon is (somehow) enclosed to prevent carbon damaging the environment. This raised questions:

- What happens to the carbon?
- Is it safely stored?
- Is it just a problem postponed?

Understanding of **offsetting** was again dependent on engagement levels. It is also a concept that impacts the whole area of environmental claims. The *Engaged* participants (and some of the *Mainstream*) were aware of the practice of brands or companies compensating for carbon emission through other activity. They often viewed the process cynically as a way of avoiding real change and ‘buying their way’ out of trouble.



*“A lot of people are paying for offsets which are just paying someone to NOT cut down a tree right, which is why it’s very hard to express that as taking CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

The *Detached* and some of the *Mainstream* participants were often unaware of the practice. It was often a surprise for them to learn about it, and sometimes a shock to discover that companies using the terms in their advertising were often using offsetting to achieve their reductions. This is discussed in more detail later in the report. Some *Mainstream* participants possessed a very basic understanding of offsetting and equated it simply with tree-planting.

**Carbon Neutral and Net Zero are the most familiar claims** and were noted as being used in official as well as corporate settings. This familiarity and these associations seem to engender an authority and gravitas. They are seen to be the terms with the most momentum. For some, Net Zero is specifically associated with the government:



*“Net Zero is probably the most familiar as you hear the government using it, but it is unclear what the government means when using this term.” (Male, 40–49, Urban)*

The two expressions were often felt to mean the same thing and regarded as being used interchangeably by media/advertising.



*“Aren’t Net Zero and Carbon Neutral the same thing?” (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

*“I’m a bit confused because they say that they are Carbon Neutral, but they’re aiming to be Net Zero. I thought that was the same thing.” (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

Both terms are also understood differently depending on where participants were on the knowledge spectrum. For the more *Engaged*, ‘Net’ and ‘Neutral’ implied offsetting was an option, whereas *Mainstream* and *Detached* participants assumed they could only be used as referring to actual reduction:



*“Carbon Neutral should really mean that you are cutting down emissions to zero.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“If [Net Zero] includes offsetting then they should be required to declare it.” (Male, 40–49, Urban)*

Some *Engaged* participants recognised that the terms ‘Net’ and ‘Neutral’ indicated a balance between carbon expenditure and carbon absorption had been achieved. Neither was felt to specify how such a balance is achieved. There was an assumption that it would include offsetting, completely so in sectors like air travel where they understood carbon emission was unavoidable. There was little awareness, even among the most engaged, that Net Zero *could* include more reduction strategies than just offsetting. Many companies may well be using it alongside actual reduction techniques, but this was not understood to be implicit in the terms. Some did feel ‘Zero’ might sound a more demanding standard than ‘Neutral’ but, in fact, they were seen as equal.

Net Zero was usually understood as referring only to carbon. This seems partly due to the overwhelming focus on carbon in the media/culture, sometimes to the extent that all environmental and climate change activity was assumed to be carbon-related unless clearly indicated otherwise. However, a minority felt it might include all greenhouse gases.

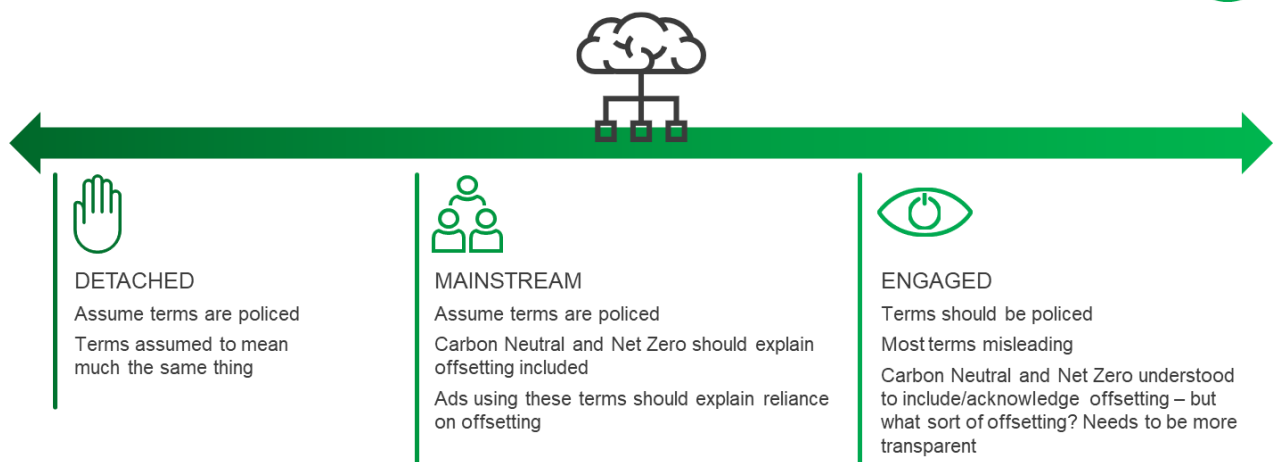
As mentioned above, understanding of terms varied according to the position participants occupied on the engagement spectrum. Figure 2 below summarises some of these differences.

The key points are that:

- *Detached* and *Mainstream* consumers tend to assume the claims are policed, whereas the *Engaged* believe they probably aren’t, but insist they should be
- While *Engaged* participants generally assumed Carbon Neutral and Net Zero specifically permitted offsetting, *Detached* and *Mainstream* did not

Figure 2

## Comprehension of terms: Differences according to engagement



Offsetting is currently the primary source of confusion and misunderstanding. Some people are unaware of the practice completely, and, when explained, many feel it is incompatible with the claims explored. The more engaged felt the terms Carbon Neutral and Net Zero could include offsetting, but most participants assumed otherwise, equating the terms with a direct reduction in emissions.

## 4.4. Claim impact

### Claims had little impact on purchase, but could have a favourable impact on brand reputation

There are two types of potential impact that claims made in ads *might* have on an advertiser or brand. The first is the impact on actual purchase behaviour and the second is the brand image.

#### 4.4.1. Purchase impact

There was little evidence that the claims would lead to changes in behaviour or increase the participant's propensity to purchase. There were no examples offered of past impact and few acknowledged potential impacts on future behaviour.

Most participants admitted, sometimes guiltily, that these claims had little or no impact on purchase, and other considerations, like cost and brand preference, were prioritised.



*“For me it’s more about the money saving side, and I know I should be thinking about the environment but live for the day. My mind’s just on how much it’s going to cost and can we afford it.” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

For some it was more of a ‘nice to have’ and could make them feel better about a brand they were going to choose anyway.



*“For me it’s an added bonus. I get the whole thing issue with the climate change and whatever, but I can’t say it’s my number one driver. It’s more going to be price and range for me ... whilst it eventually will help, at the moment China and India are pumping out more CO<sub>2</sub> than we can at the moment, and so until we get them on board, what we do is kind of negligible really.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

There were signs, however, that claims could potentially play a greater role in certain and limited circumstances.

- *Engaged* participants who monitored their carbon footprint felt claims in advertising could play a role in the future. These participants claimed that environmental considerations had impacted the choices they made in the past albeit driven by knowledge (avoiding excessive air travel due to its impact on the environment, for example) rather than claims in advertising. Yet they felt claims could affect their behaviour in the future, especially in higher emitting sectors.



*“This (sort of claim) could give people genuine alternatives ...” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

*“I am mindful of environmental issues, and I do my best to do the basic things as an individual that hopefully make a difference ... these statements could help with that.” (Female, 30–39, Urban)*

- Some mainstream participants felt they might select the brand making the claim in the future, if other things were equal – for example, no significant cost difference and no strong brand preference – but did not report having done this to date. Such claims could also have a more long-term impact as the next section discusses.



*“[With a hybrid] you can save [the] world without having to do anything! It usually costs too much to do the good things.” (Female, 30–39, Suburban)*

#### 4.4.2. Brand impact

Whilst claims don’t seem to make an immediate conscious impact on consumer purchases, they do seem to occasionally impact brand image – which can be seen as indirect influence on purchase.

It was possible to observe the impact on brand perceptions as the ads were viewed, although not to get a sense of how long lasting these impacts might be in a real-world setting.

This impact often seemed to depend on the size of the brand rather than the nature of the claim made or the terms used.

A smaller emitter (or just a smaller brand) was more likely to be congratulated on their claims than bigger brands, as they were perceived to be acting voluntarily, rather than simply complying to ‘rules or targets’. Their action was discretionary and therefore creditworthy. BrewDog and Sapling Spirits were seen to benefit from their claims in this way.



*“It is cool when a company like [Sapling Spirits<sup>41</sup>] go out of their way to do stuff like this ... They totally don’t have to.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

As a brewery, BrewDog<sup>3, 4</sup> was perceived to be a relatively low carbon emitter and so any environmental benefits created a sense of good will. Clear reference to the use of offsetting also helped create positivity towards the brand.



*“I would gravitate towards that beer.” (Female, 40–49, Urban)*

Nando’s<sup>28, 29</sup> was also given credit for ‘taking the lead’ by raising a subject when, it was suggested, there was no need to so. However, further evidence of people indicating they are more or less likely to engage with a brand based on brand perceptions was found when some participants criticised their use of the term ‘Carbon Neutral’ without declaring offsetting.



*“If anything, this has put me off Nando’s, I am starting to feel more cynical and that they are treating people like they are stupid.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

However bigger brands, especially those in high carbon emitting sectors, were expected to act, given the perceptions of increased ‘culpability’, and (it is assumed) that they had a greater number of regulations and targets with which to comply. They tended to earn little credit for doing what they are forced to do, or for merely making up for previous damage.



*“I have an expectation that companies are doing these things anyway ... Especially big companies. The responsibility falls on their shoulders ...” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

**While claims had little direct impact on purchases, they could have a favourable impact on brand reputation. Brands in low emitting sectors were most likely to benefit from this, where action was seen as voluntary not complied.**

## 4.5. The impact of the advertising context

### 4.5.1. Credit attribution in advertising

**Advertisers attributed credit for claims in varying directions, and this could influence responses to the advertising. Direct ‘boasts’ could earn criticism, whereas focusing on the employee or customer, seemed more likeable.**

Brands attributed credit in various ways as outlined below.

#### **Brand as hero**

This was the most frequent and expected use of claims, and reactions to these ads depended on the context.

It could evoke a sense of cynicism that the advertiser was ‘boasting to the world’ or ‘virtue signalling’. This response was most likely when the ad was grandiose and/or ‘pompous’ and/or lacked supporting detail. A good example of this was a Hyundai<sup>22</sup> ad which spoke in general terms about ‘Generation One’, without stating its own environmental credentials.

A tone of humility was possible even when signalling the brands’ own achievements. For example, the Sainsbury’s<sup>23, 24</sup> ads talked about how it had replaced lightbulbs in its stores. This was seen by some as ‘grounded and down to earth’ and in stark contrast to the generalities of the Hyundai<sup>22</sup> example. Others however felt the example was a little underwhelming.

The use of targets could also be seen as another ‘empty boast’, unless supported by detail. The subject of targets is discussed in more detail in the next section.

The perceived familiarity of the brand could also play a role. The claim of a well-known brand could add greater credibility because of that familiarity. For example, a brand like Ford seemed to generate more trust than an ‘unknown’ brand like Manx Energy. This is partly due to the trust that comes from familiarity, but there was also an element of reputational investment. Bigger brands were perceived to be more careful about their reputation and therefore less likely to make unsubstantiated claims.



*“It is a natural instinct to trust big brands ... the ones you grew up with!” (Female, 30–39, Rural)*

## Customer as hero

Advertisers could position themselves in a slightly different manner as enabling their customers to ‘do the right thing’. This could avoid any sense of bragging or boasting. The Worcester Bosch<sup>2</sup> ad adopted a light-hearted approach, labelling its customers as ‘Carbon fighting heroes’.



*“[Worcester Bosch<sup>2</sup>] was a lot more inclusive, it showed different people doing different things as they would day to day... it’s nice to be called a hero.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

## Employees as hero

Two ads, for Amazon<sup>1</sup> and Shell<sup>33</sup>, focused on employees rather than the company, with characters in the ad talking about their own environmental motivations. This was effective in introducing a more modest and likeable tone of voice.



*“I have actually seen this advert on the TV before. I do like it; I think it has a personal element to it. You feel like you’re hearing and speaking to an actual Amazon employee rather than just a faceless person. They have done that as a ploy to pull at people’s heartstrings.” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

These ads were generally well received. However, a small number of participants (often on second exposure) picked up that the commitment to electric vehicles Amazon<sup>1</sup> was making was not as impressive as first appeared. Many assumed they were talking about their whole fleet but on careful listening, it was unclear if all Amazon vehicles were included in the initiative or just a proportion.



*“Amazon<sup>1</sup> have got hundreds and thousands of vehicles driving round the roads and planes in the sky and they’re almost driving that repeat business. I don’t know if a few electric vehicles is going to solve the problem ...” (Male, 60–69, Urban)*

It may be the case that using a member of staff as the hero could potentially distract attention from the nature and detail of the claims being made.

### 4.5.2. Areas of confusion

Three areas of confusion emerged when assessing the ad stimulus.

#### Offsetting

**Most participants assumed claims made were absolute and could feel misled once the role of offsetting was revealed**

As discussed previously, offsetting was the most important source of confusion. Claims used were often taken at face value and generally assumed to be absolute and referring to a direct reduction in emissions.

Whether already aware of offsetting or having learned about it through their involvement in the research process, most participants agreed that offsetting was not the same as reducing emissions within their core

processes. It may be a necessary and important tool against climate change, but it was less deserving of merit than a brand or company making absolute reductions in emissions.

Some tended to feel that it was too often used by companies as a delay, an evasion, or even “*kicking the can down road*”.

There was a consensus that the best practice, when using the term, would be for all companies to be as transparent as possible and to highlight the reliance (either partially or wholly) on offsetting in concrete terms. This should also include when Carbon Neutral and Net Zero were used, as many *Detached* and *Mainstream* participants assumed even these were absolute claims.



*“Most people probably see it and think ‘Oh it’s Carbon Neutral!’ and that doesn’t really matter to me too much because I know it’s probably not entirely strictly true.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“I think that’s misleading. So, they don’t have to have actually done anything ... I assumed they wouldn’t be making an impact, period, not that they would be making an impact and then investing so to decrease it all – to offset it. They’re just sort of doing what they were doing anyway and rebranding it – we’re all knowledgeable of these things, we expect more.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

*“Offsetting sounds like a way of avoiding changing ... a customer has the right to know.” (Female, 30–39, Rural)*

*“Which is a bit of a cop-out really. They’re saying ‘yes, we generate emissions when we’re making the vehicle, but then we’re planting 50 million trees in the corner of Bavaria.’ It is a bit of a cop-out. I know in figures it probably works out, but it is a bit of a wishy-washy, headline-grabby thing isn’t it ... It doesn’t put me off, I’m just a bit cynical, and I understand what it means.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“It’s misleading in the sense that they can get people to do something they wouldn’t have done if they had all the facts ... I’m terribly surprised they’re allowed to do these things.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

*“I think if they do that, they should specify that so we’re not left to assume it’s Zero Carbon ... It would influence a decision we were making.” (Female, 20–29, Urban)*

There was a call from some more *Engaged* participants to go further and provide more details on what form the offsetting took. This does not necessarily need to be highlighted within the ad but should be accessible on a company website, with a reference or link in the qualifying text, where possible.

### **There were ‘good’ and bad’ examples of offsetting transparency within the stimulus**

The examples that were most approved were those that were most transparent and where the reliance on offsetting was clearly highlighted, including ads for:

- easyJet<sup>9</sup> – where offsetting was referenced in the headline
- Sapling Spirits<sup>41</sup> – which provides a detailed explanation of their offsetting activities
- Bulb<sup>6</sup> – where reliance on offsetting was clearly explained in the text.

In another Bulb<sup>7</sup> ad, a more detailed explanation of offsetting practices was provided, and this was particularly valued by the most *Engaged* participants. Its honesty in acknowledging the limitations of offsetting was also appreciated.



On the other hand, there were multiple examples of ads where the role of offsetting was not acknowledged, including:

- Jersey Gas<sup>26</sup>
- easyJet<sup>10</sup>
- Nando's<sup>28, 29</sup>

## Target dates

### Reaction to target dates depended on the degree of supporting detail provided and there was a sensitivity to 'empty promises'

Most participants were pragmatic about the use of targets, accepting the scale of change businesses face. However, some concerns emerged that the targets could be used to evade or delay action. They could be seen as a form of 'greenwashing', allowing companies to make claims without any immediate or specific change. Unless supported, the more distant the target the greater the cynicism evoked.

There is a desire for more detail to support the claims. Once again, the stimuli included examples of good and bad practice.

The Sainsbury<sup>23, 24</sup> ads in one context earned plaudits from some participants for the focus on lightbulbs rather than grandiose claims, but in the context of claims some were critical:



*"I am surprised they are going for Net Zero in 2035 – seems a hell of a long way away.... Especially when other organisations are there today or at least getting there." (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

*"Changing your lightbulbs to be Net Zero is, like, well-done, but I kind of will only care once they've actually done it. Right now, they are just signalling that they might do it one day. I will feel more confident in them when it's an actual Carbon Neutral company." (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

The Amazon<sup>1</sup> ad's use of target dates was also seen as somewhat hollow. Its claim 'Amazon are committed to be Net Carbon Zero by 2040' only appeared as a subtitle, and without supporting detail the 2040 target seemed distant:



*"Feels a bit cynical, like they are putting that upfront and you aren't hearing the whole story." (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*"I actually saw some small print in it that I didn't notice before that said, 'Net Carbon Neutral by 2040,' which is not a particularly ambitious goal. That's nearly two decades away. And Amazon is one of the most profitable companies in the world – it's not like they couldn't do it sooner. So, I actually got a pretty negative view of them from that ad ... The vehicles are a small part of Amazon's carbon footprint. A very, very small part. I still perceive this ad as greenwashing ... It shouldn't be small print. It should be nice and big." (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

*"I think companies need to be called out for if they aren't hitting targets because they won't expect people to go back and say, oh you said this in 2022." (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

The Tesco<sup>36</sup> and HS2<sup>18, 19</sup> ads were identified as examples where target dates were used in a credible way.

The Tesco<sup>36</sup> approach was seen as substantial and holistic. In differing between operations and supply chain, it was felt to address their broader footprint – an approach which was particularly welcomed by more *Engaged* participants:



*“They are focusing on a lot of things and steps they are taking; it’s not just changing light bulbs like in the Sainsbury’s<sup>23, 24</sup> one.” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

*“It is interesting to point out the link between less meat and climate change – I’m not sure if everyone connects the two.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

HS2<sup>18, 19</sup> conveyed a sense of commitment by enumerating on the targets they had already achieved in the past:



*“They set goals but show you what they have achieved in the past.” (Female, 20–29, Rural)*

### Definition of carbon footprint

The most *Engaged* asked for a more holistic approach that included the whole footprint of the company, but such an approach could confuse the *Mainstream* and *Detached*

This was a subject that engaged only the more knowledgeable participants as it was reliant on greater understanding of environmental issues. These participants sometimes questioned the extent of the claims and whether the entire carbon footprint was covered. They questioned what the claim does/should include: for example, just the companies’ physical territory or beyond; the emissions in the moment or the whole life cycle of product?



*“Sainsbury’s sell beef and that could be like 20 kg of carbon per fillet steak – if they stopped selling like palm oil and beef because they are so bad for the environment then I would think wow that is impressive.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

*“They [Sainsbury’s] tend to stick to just changing trucks and lightbulbs – not actually dealing with supply chain or big changes.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

The Tesco<sup>36</sup> ad identified in the previous section was seen as responding to their footprint in a more holistic way by talking about the changes they were making in several different areas. This included from their supply chain to the types of food they were selling.

However, this concern seemed to be one shared by only the most *Engaged* participants. Indeed, including such information could risk confusing the majority of the less engaged. This was demonstrated by the confusion expressed in the distinction made between operations and supply chain in the Tesco<sup>36</sup> example.

### 4.5.3. Sector impact in practice

#### Claims in energy, automotive and air travel advertising tended to attract more attention. Here, the role of offsetting, when revealed, could be a greater disappointment

As aforementioned, within the confines of this study, there were some observable sector differences. Claims made in large emitting sectors like energy, automotive and air travel garnered attention from participants.

To some of the *Detached* and *Mainstream*, claims in this context were interpreted as a hopeful sign in the fight against climate change, suggesting technology and innovation were developing at an encouraging pace. For some there was a commensurate level of disappointment when the researcher revealed the role offsetting played in these sectors.

The easyJet<sup>10</sup> “Destination: Zero Emissions” ad is one example of an initiative that met with this reaction, which suggested to few participants that a carbon reduction in air travel included offsetting:



*“This feels like they’ve got a mission, and this is the road they are on, and they are fighting climate change head on.” (Female, 30–39, Rural)*

*“Makes me think they are doing something bigger and looking at the overall problem.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“Great ... as a consumer you can take part in and make a positive environmental choice.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

When the role of offsetting was revealed, there was a sense of being misled:



*“Offsetting is just kicking the can down the road, whereas this suggests they’ve got a mission, and this is the road they are on, and they are fighting climate change head on.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

For others, claims from large emitters were met with scepticism if used in these sectors:



*“I’m a bit confused about how gas can be Carbon Neutral?” (Female, 40–49, Urban)*

*“I’d expect to see [this language] most from the biggest polluters. So, it’s not surprising that the car industry is the most conscious in the terms of their marketing and branding.” (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

The *Engaged* participants assumed the only way for some of these claims to be valid was through a reliance on offsetting:



*“The term Carbon Neutral is open to exploitation and confusion.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“These things sound sincere but I am super suspicious of this – especially when it comes to the energy sector – presumably all they’re doing is carbon offsetting or carbon storing ... but I know big companies just offset by paying people in South America to not cut down trees.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

**People called for more transparency in the creative treatment of offsetting and target dates by:**

- **Highlighting reliance on offsetting, even if using Carbon Neutral or Net Zero**
- **Providing support to add credibility to target dates**

**This was seen as particularly important in higher emitting sectors where the stakes were higher.**

#### 4.5.4. The use of qualifying text

**Participants expected claims to be backed up with detail but admitted they were unlikely to engage with it**

The term ‘small print’ was used as shorthand for qualifying text or any explanatory or supporting detail used in an offer or commercial. It was regarded as a truism that people rarely read the qualifying text unless on point of purchase (and often not even then). It could, however, play a reassurance role in ‘just being there’.

Some media differences emerged:

- Visibility of ‘small print’ in press or outdoor advertising could add legitimacy or authority
- There was an understanding it was often impractical for TV advertising to provide supporting detail within the execution itself, but it should be available online
- Radio ‘small print’ could be regarded as intrusive or difficult to understand

When asked, participants felt support or elaboration of the claims would probably be present in the qualifying text. Participants did not voluntarily read the text in the stimuli. When asked to do so there was a feeling that it was often too technical and not expressed in plain English, reinforcing the belief that the role it plays is chiefly symbolic.

#### 4.5.5. The impact of term customisation

**Customising terms in creative copy risked further confusion and could sometimes be viewed as exploitative**

A number of the ads shown had customised certain terminology to be utilised as slogans or straplines. There was no spontaneous comment about this, but it did seem to add to the overall sense of confusion in an environment already dogged by duplication and blurring.

On the one hand, in rare examples this practice could even be seen as exploitative, with brands appropriating the terminology for its own commercial advantage. The ‘easyJet<sup>10</sup> “Destination: Zero Emissions” was one example of this. It was interpreted by some as promising Net Zero travel was imminent. Renault’s<sup>74</sup> “Hybrid by Nature” proved another example of perceived exploitation:



*“Hybrid by design would be more appropriate. The use of ‘nature’ is a word that tries to drum up that eco side of things.” (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

On the other hand, responses to Toyota’s<sup>39</sup> “Beyond Zero” were divided. It was understood as the ‘hyperbole’ of advertising by some and not to be taken literally. Others disagreed and felt that advertisers should not devalue the terminology:



*“No manufacturer of any car should make a statement that is not factual. It’s misleading, misrepresentation if you like. So, to say, ‘go beyond zero’, what does that mean?” (Male, 60–69, Suburban)*

#### 4.5.6. The use of different tones

##### The use of humour or more informal tone of voice seemed to cut through

A number of ads adopted a more playful tone, and these seemed to attract more discussion and greater engagement.

As previously highlighted, smaller emitters like BrewDog and Nando’s were more likely to be praised for their environmental actions. This seemed at least partly related to the belief that their action was voluntary and unlikely to be based on mere compliance to imposed rules or targets. However, the more light-hearted tone may have also contributed to this:



*“I liked it [Nando’s<sup>28</sup>]. It is quite playful but very real about the stark reality of global warming.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

*“I’ve seen that they’re doing initiatives like planting trees and stuff. It feels like sustainability is right up there on their agenda. They shout about a lot of stuff and it’s always quite in your face, so it has come to be what I expect of them.” (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

*“They [BrewDog] like to break the mould ... They’re a bit of a disturber and went after household names when they launched.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

This tone also seemed appropriate to participants given that the brands were perceived to be lower emitters and therefore possessed more licence to use humour.

##### Varying creative approaches could also play a role in claim effectiveness:

- The customisation/appropriation of claim language could further blur meanings of the claims and could also be viewed as exploitative
- Advertising that focused on an employee or customer rather than brand directly were less likely to be seen as greenwashing or virtue-signalling

## 5. Module 2: Electric and Hybrid motoring terminology

### 5.1. Attitudes to Car Purchase

#### The move to electric has made car selection more complex and more challenging

Car purchase has always been seen to justify significant deliberation, but the availability of electric and hybrid options and the government 'ban' on petrol and diesel by 2030 appears to have added to the complexity and the stakes involved. There was very limited awareness of hybrid vehicles being phased out from 2035.

For our participants, often the first stage of the decision process is to determine the type of engine to buy, and other elements of the selection tend to be secondary.

There are emotional factors at play in this initial decision, with participants talking about:

- Trying to do the 'right thing'; but what is the 'right thing'?
- Being conscious of the statement a choice of engine can make to others; if they opt for petrol, will they be seen as selfish? If they go for electric, will they be admired?
- The fear of 'backing the wrong horse' and ending up with an expensive or impractical car. The example of diesel was in the forefront of some minds



*"It's interesting because years ago we were told to go out and buy diesel. And someone told me recently that years from now we'll find electric cars taboo and you'll be told to go out and buy a hydrogen car ..."* (Male, 60–69, Suburban)

The decision is also challenging from an intellectual perspective, as participants needed to gain sufficient understanding to make a meaningful decision:

- What are the options available and what are the differences between them?
- What is the meaning of the terminology (descriptors) used?
- What type of vehicle would suit their needs?
- What type of vehicle would be a sensible financial choice?



*"There's obviously a lot of other considerations to make while doing that, because I'd have to think about range, whether pure electric or hybrid is a better option, what charging facilities are available at work, what charging can be done at home. And then at the moment, because electricity is eye-wateringly expensive, I'm veering away from looking at it further, but it's still a cost consideration I'm willing to make."* (Male, 50–59, Suburban)

The decision was further complicated by two additional factors: the perception of constant technological evolution; and the perceived lack of reliable and straightforward information and guidance:



*"I almost bought [a PHEV], I was very close to buying one. But then when I weighed up the actual real-world conditions of driving, and how inefficient the petrol engine was, it was going to cost a lot more than just running a diesel ... I had to dig out quite a bit of information, sit down and plot it all on a file... Kind of put me off once I dug into the details."* (Male, 50–59, Suburban)

Given these complexities, most participants had, or intended to conduct some sort of research. This was generally seen as using the internet and/or seeking advice from friends. Some even visited car dealerships and asked for advice there.

Some participants really struggled with the technology, terminology and descriptors used, even after conducting their own research:



*“I don’t see the point in it. What’s the point in travelling a mile with the battery...? I don’t see the point; it doesn’t make any sense.” (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

The exceptions were the participants who were self-proclaimed ‘car buffs’ and naturally kept up with development and innovation in the automobile sector. Car selection for them remained a pleasure, rather than a chore or challenge.

**The challenges of modern car decision processes were increased by a lack of straightforward and practical guidance to help people navigate through the constant pace of technological change.**

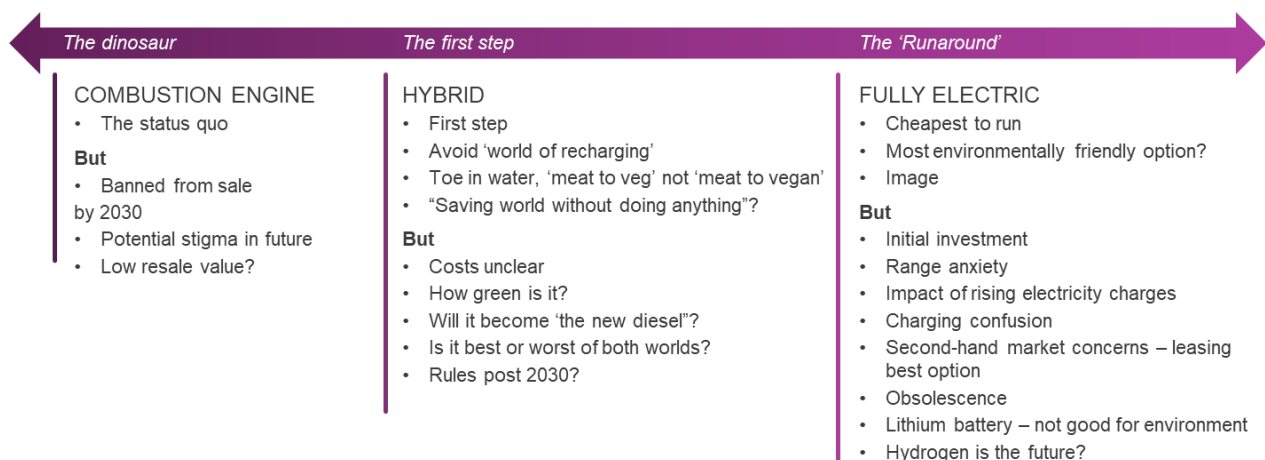
## 5.2. Understanding of descriptors<sup>xi</sup>

### The types of vehicles were often understood in terms of a spectrum

Most participants viewed the different options through a spectrum (see Figure 3), with diesel and petrol at one end and ‘full’ electric at the other. The spectrum reflected traditional to modern technology and least to most environmentally friendly.

Figure 3

### Understood range of vehicles as a spectrum



<sup>xi</sup> See Appendix 7.4.2 for definitions

As Figure 3 illustrates, there are pros and cons perceived across the spectrum that need to be weighed up and applied to consumer's own financial and driving needs.

The **petrol or diesel** option was seen as the status quo option and therefore the most comfortable choice. However, there is some concern that ownership will become stigmatised ahead of the official ban. Will diesel or petrol car ownership mark owners out as old fashioned or 'dinosaurs'? The rising cost of fuel was often a more practical concern.

The **hybrid** option is often seen as the sensible first step into the electric space. It is understood by most to include both combustion and battery engines and offer some of the environmental benefits of the electric approach but without entering the stressful world of charging. It thus seems like the pragmatic choice for most:



*"You don't go carnivore to vegan ... you become a vegetarian first." (Female, 30–39, Suburban)*

There was some concern that the hybrid model might become increasingly penalised by the government as the battle against climate change becomes more urgent. This concern existed even if most were unaware hybrid vehicles were to be phased out by 2035, five years after diesel and petrol.

For others, the compromise aspect was a downside; the hybrid was 'neither one thing nor another'.

The **electric** option is seen as the greenest and the most progressive choice, which can confer image benefits on the driver. It is also understood by some to be the most economical vehicle to run. However, there were considerable concerns around range ('range anxiety') and charging options. Initial vehicle costs were also perceived to be high:



*"If I pull up at a service station and the electric chargers aren't working, where am I going to go? I have got 4 or 5 miles and I can't go anywhere, and I have meetings to go to. What if there is no fast charger and I have got places to go and people to see. Until the infrastructure is fully there, I just can't commit to it." (Male, 20–27, Suburban)*

*"For me, in my head space, I think high risk. How many charging points are there, and depending on how far I'm going, will there be a charging station ... It'll get you through the day, but then what if you need to go off on something unplanned, then what happens? ... Electric is something I just wouldn't even go near for my day car." (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

*"I'm sceptical of the government's approach to the electric side of the business. They're pushing everyone to buy electric cars but then the price of electricity is going up ... personally I just go with what I feel happy with, I won't go with the crowd." (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

A minority of participants expressed concern about battery degradation:



*"My biggest fear with all these electric vehicles is, we've all got a mobile phone and we all use them for a year or two until our contract expires and by the time our contract expires, we're normally in the situation where the phone lasts half a day instead of the full day. To me, the battery technology in these cars is exactly the same. They're all running lithium-ion batteries which is the same as we use in our phones, just as a bigger size. So, there will be degradation in the batteries." (Male, 50–59, Urban)*



Due to range and charging limitations, the electric option was often seen as most suited for local use. For that reason, it was often considered to play the role of ‘the second car’ in a family context.

A minority were aware of rumours around ‘hidden negatives’, such as disposing of lithium batteries and overall carbon footprint, including production.

Some of the most technically aware felt the future of automotive belonged to the hydrogen engine, but that this was not currently a practical option. In one example, a participant talked about researching the Hyundai<sup>62</sup> model featured in the ad stimulus:



*“I’ve researched this model; I would love to have this car. I love the idea of hydrogen but unfortunately, I live in Reading and the closest fuel station to me is in Swindon. The infrastructure just isn’t there right now. I do believe that hydrogen is the way forward though.”*  
**(Male, 20–29, Suburban)**

### Understanding of less familiar descriptors

Awareness of mild hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEV) was much lower, and sometimes awareness of their existence was only raised by exposure to the stimuli. Their presence could confuse overall perceptions and ‘muddy the waters’ of the alternative vehicle spectrum.

The **mild hybrid** had the lowest awareness. The use of the word ‘mild’ was perplexing and seen as a strange word to use in a technical context:



*“I don’t like the word mild. Horrible word. I need things to be black or white, and mild is just a grey word ... That word alone would annoy me, I would switch the TV channel.”* **(Male, 30–39, Urban)**

*“You see it’s all very well that manufacturers come up with these terms, but do people understand them? I mean what’s a mild hybrid? ... [Moderator explains definition of mild hybrid] ... I can’t connect what you said to the word mild. I mean there’s got to be a better word than that.”* **(Male, 60–69, Suburban)**

The definition shared with participants was a challenging one. The clearest distinction from the standard hybrid was felt to be:

*“While the electric motor in a conventional hybrid can drive the car, the motor in a mild hybrid can’t – it just assists the engine.”*

For some this implied it was a less environmentally sound option than a regular hybrid.

The **PHEV** seemed to have greater, but still limited awareness. For some, the idea of a hybrid that you must charge was a little contradictory. Participants’ understanding of ‘hybrid’ was often based on *not* having to charge it. There was some assumption that this would be a more environmentally friendly option because it needed charging:



*“I didn’t know there were plug-in hybrids, I was aware electric cars were plug in.”* **(Male, 60–69, Suburban)**

The appeal of this option was highlighted for some when greater driver control was explained in the definition provided: *The vehicle will automatically switch between running directly from the engine or the electric motor, or this can be manually selected.*

Explaining that the car would switch automatically when it runs low on electricity also added a perceived benefit to the PHEV. It was often interpreted as meaning the economic benefits of electric could be accompanied by the reassurance of knowing users would not end up stranded, thus erasing range anxiety.

The distinction between the hybrid and PHEV is helped when the term ‘self-charging hybrid’ is used rather than just ‘hybrid’. There is a risk, however, that the phrase ‘self-charging’ may suggest a more environmental alternative than simple ‘hybrid’ or plug-in hybrid. This view came up very rarely but is a risk to consider. The phrase was reminiscent of dynamo batteries, which were seen as a completely clean energy source:



*“It is better for the environment if it is charging as the car goes ...like the lights on the bike you used to get ...dynamo?” (Female, 50–59, Suburban)*

There was also other brand specific terminology in play, and this could confuse things further:



*“I have eco-boost – it is 1 litre engine boosted to 1.3.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

**People see the different technologies as a spectrum, with diesel and petrol at one end and ‘full’ electric at the other. This spectrum was felt to reflect the level of technological progress, but also environmental progress. However, they often struggled to place new variants, like the mild hybrid, into this spectrum.**

## 5.3. Understanding of descriptors in advertising context

### 5.3.1. The advertising was viewed from multiple perspectives

It became clear that participants were watching the ads through a range of different lenses, which loosely mirrored their priorities in the car selection journey.

#### Identifying how the car is powered

Often the first question participants needed to ask was, what ‘kind’ of car was featured in the ad and where it fitted on the spectrum. This was not always clear from the ad and some signals could be misleading. For example, showing a car charging could be interpreted as meaning the car was (fully) electric, whereas it may be a PHEV model.

#### Answering specific questions

A number of unanswered questions remained, and some participants were hoping the advertising could help answer these, notably:

- Differences between types of cars, such as mild hybrid vs standard

- Range/mileage information and reassurance

### Enduring emotional aspects

Participant preoccupation with understanding the emerging technology does not mean the emotional aspects of car choice no longer mattered. Attitudes towards cars differ depending on the person. Whilst cost and practicality can be the primary concerns for some, for others the car will always be an expression of personality and status. Participants in the latter group were keen to ascertain how the car would look on the road and what it might signal about them as drivers.

For some, the move to electric cars can complicate this. Purchasing an electric car was associated by some with 'environmental status,' which may in some cases override status imbued by brand choice.

Brand remains important to people, with some participants reporting having a 'favourite brand'. But there was evidence that this preference can be overridden by the need to purchase the 'right' type of engine or technology. One traditional Ford buyer talked about considering Toyota due to their (reassuringly) innovative brand image:



*"I have bought Ford over the years but looking at Toyota (now) ... the Japanese are known for their innovation." (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

### Performance/drive experience

Participants who particularly enjoyed driving, were keen to know how the electric or hybrid driving experiences compared to traditional combustion engines and were mindful of any claims or signals in this context.

## 5.3.2. Overall reaction to advertising

### Car advertising focused on new technology had not changed the essentials

The environmental aspects were regarded as the central thrust of some ads, but this had not significantly changed the overall tone and style of car advertising. Image was still central to the ad, which reassured certain participants, especially those focused on image and status.

The continuing importance of status or the beauty of the image was demonstrated by the ads for Jaguar<sup>63, 64</sup>, Bentley<sup>46</sup> and Maserati<sup>69</sup>:



*"You're breaking the mould by driving this car – you're a leader if you're driving this car, you aren't following the crowds." (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

*"My primary draw is styling ... I'd rather see a car with all the doors and the boot open than a camera that spins around." (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

Participants were reassured when the ad suggested the core brand remains the same despite the new technology (for example, Audi's<sup>45</sup> strapline "Fully Electric. Fully Audi," or BMW's<sup>47</sup> "Sometimes Electric, Always BMW") and when the driving experience or performance was highlighted, especially by upmarket brands (such as the Lexus<sup>68</sup> ad's "How does it feel?" and Audi's<sup>44</sup> "Performance. Unplugged.").

### 5.3.3. The advertising raised new questions, rather than answering existing ones

#### The advertising was less reassuring when it came to clarifying existing questions about descriptors

Depending on the ads participants were shown, the breadth of the electric vehicle spectrum could be demonstrated as broader than the participant realised in a way that could further complicate the picture. Mild hybrids and PHEV were introduced without explaining what these descriptors meant.

Nor was the advertising felt to help with the confusion many expressed towards the descriptors. Pre-existing confusion and concern were not eased by the advertising:

- Range anxiety/charging confusion remained
- Relative economy/'greenness' remained unclear
- Help with concerns about obsolescence/bleeding edge was not forthcoming

Participants did not feel that the responsibility to educate the public about emerging technology and its impact fell on the automotive brands/advertisers, but they did feel it could be clearer in certain contexts by:

- Stating the type of vehicle clearly up front and being clear about the hybrid type being shown



*“That was much better. It gets the fact that it’s a self-charging hybrid across.” (Male, 60–69, Suburban)*

- Being aware that showing a charging visual was likely to be interpreted as the vehicle being ‘fully electric’

**Current car advertising continues to deliver using the enduring aspects of brand, style and status, but offers little guidance towards the pros and cons of emerging technological alternatives.**

## 5.4. Potentially misleading content

### There were also areas where advertising could actively mislead people about the descriptors/technology

Three areas of concern emerged.

#### The need for transparency in mileage and charging data

Data about mileage achieved on one charge was seen as a key metric for those purchasing or considering purchasing an electric vehicle. The term ‘WLTP’<sup>xii</sup> was familiar to those further down the selection process, but new to many others.

On the one hand some participants were aware that manufacturers were quoting WLTP figures based on very specific, ideal conditions, and it created some consternation:

<sup>xii</sup> Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure



*“I don’t want to know the range when it’s driven at 55mph on a motorway with no air conditioning, no heating on, driving steadily, no traffic or whatever. I want to know what it is when you’re driving around town, maybe an urban figure and a motorway figure. And a motorway figure based on 70mph ... I can’t have a car that only drives 60 mph on the motorway, stuck in the inside lane with lorries.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“I have friends who were told their cars could do 120 miles on electric but in reality, they can do 80 – that is a 40-mile difference – that is a big deal.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“I would always look into the claims that they are making. I’d do at least two or three test drives.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“Car manufacturers have gotten very good at writing figures where they get 100 miles a gallon because they drive 28 mph everywhere.” (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

*“A lot of these ads show cars driving on empty roads ... nothing like reality at all.” (Male, 50–59, Suburban)*

On the other hand, some participants were not concerned and didn’t question the figures.

Given the importance of the metric, there were strong feelings that complete transparency was required. This meant openly acknowledging that WLTP data did not necessarily reflect real driving conditions.

Transparency varied across the stimuli and sometimes the figure was quoted without any qualification, for example in the Citroen<sup>50, 51</sup> eC4 ad.

Using ‘up to’ was standard language and left most feeling clarification in qualifying text was required. The Jaguar<sup>63</sup> ad went further (in the qualifying text) pointing out, “Real world figures may differ,” while the Maserati<sup>69</sup> ad specified, “These figures may not reflect real driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load.”

Some argued that even this was not enough, and any caveats should be given equal prominence with the ‘theoretical figures’:



*“I’d like real world figures to be bigger. Don’t lie to customers. Tell them the truth.” (Male, 30–39, Rural)*

## Creative overclaim

Several ads were highlighted where the creative device or imagery could have a misleading impact.

- Use of images that were identified as ‘green’ symbols were noted, suggesting a general commitment to the environment without specific evidence or support backing it up. In the Hyundai<sup>22</sup> ad there were multiple images of pregnancy and the natural world (such as elephants and marine life), but little reference to actual action, just stating, “Hyundai is in progress to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045”. These could create overall feelings of greenness that may work on an almost subconscious level:



*“I felt like I didn’t really understand what Generation One was, although I understood the overall message was that for the sake of the next generation, we need to be Carbon Neutral to stop climate change.” (Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

*“I think they’re trying to say that we are part of the effort to be Carbon Neutral and our products are going to be Carbon Neutral – I noticed the date/target, but they all just melt into one for me.”  
(Male, 20–29, Suburban)*

- Images that mislead on charger availability – for example, the BMW<sup>49</sup> ad, which pictured a car being charged by a beach – were also highlighted. This was only noticed by a couple of participants, but was deeply irritating for them, as they felt the lack of charging points nationwide was well known and ‘range anxiety’ so prominent for many:



*“A charging station on a beach? Not any beach I have been to.” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

- One Hyundai<sup>62</sup> ad claimed their car, “purifies the air,” as it drives. This was interpreted as the car purchase, and its use, having a positive impact on the environment overall:



*“I like that, you’re purifying the air rather than putting toxins in it ... You’re actually doing something good for the environment, it’s going from one extreme of not doing anything or all negative to getting a car that’s not doing nothing – it’s actually helping – so that’s of interest.”  
(Female, 30–39, Suburban)*

### Glossing over whole life impact

The VW<sup>42</sup> ad was met with criticism from some of the more environmentally engaged participants. It mentioned it, “didn’t want to make an impact ... didn’t want to leave much of an impression at all”. This was seen as misleading as it excluded consideration of the life cycle footprint of the car. This was especially provocative given growing concerns about lithium batteries.



*“Leaving no impression but can see why people might complain ... what about the battery depleting? What about how you deal with lithium battery at end of life?” (Male, 50–59, Urban)*

*“... I’ve got mixed feelings about car companies pushing environmental messaging. In the larger respect I would welcome it because it’s better for the environment. But they also have contributed massively to the mess we’re in at the moment ... Probably one of the worst industries in terms of mining the components, manufacturing the cars, burning the fuel once they’re made. The carbon footprint of the car industry has got to be huge.” (Male, 30–39, Urban)*

Across several areas, advertising could further confuse and even mislead people, in terms of:

- technical information such as unrealistic mileage per charge figures
- creative imagery, such as the use of environmental symbols like marine life or certain phrasing that was felt to exaggerate the environmental benefits.

## 5.5. Need for trustworthy guidance

Participants were seeking an independent and trustworthy source of guidance and advice, written in an accessible and clear way, with timely updates to clarify:

- Total cost of ownership data – it was felt this should include information regarding the initial investment, fuel costs and resale value
- Actual not theoretical miles per gallon and miles per charge;
- Some sense of ‘green’ relativity:
  - most would be happy with broad guidance based on usage – perhaps in ‘spectrum form’ (akin to electricals)
  - the more engaged are looking for overall life cycle information
- One participant suggested a “NCAP-style”<sup>xiii</sup> ‘green rating’;
- Range and charging information (length of charge at home, not just fast chargers).

Participants were less clear about who should be behind that source. Some favoured government sources, or a source with government backing. Others felt the responsibility should fall to an international body that would formulate and coordinate global standards and consistent terminology. Consumer association Which?, was mentioned – with its reputation for supporting consumers with product data. Others felt motoring associations, such as the AA or RAC, were also trusted organisations, with the necessary expertise and credibility in the automotive sector.

However, participants felt advertisers still have a role to play in being as clear and direct as possible, by:

- Being clear about the hybrid type being shown and stating the vehicle type upfront to avoid the confusion caused by images, such as charging shots interpreted as fully electric
- Providing ‘one charge’ mileage information, but ensuring transparency in mileage claims clearly identified as ‘ideal’
- Not assuming the WLTP abbreviation is understood – it is not yet mainstream
- Ensuring model mileage and specific verified data is available on their website
- Using new terminology/data as it becomes mainstream, such as Green NCAPs, WLTP for ‘realistic’ mileage
- Using user-friendly language throughout

**Participants voiced the need for an independent and trustworthy source of guidance and advice, written in plain English, routinely updated and ideally accessible in one place.**

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<sup>xiii</sup> European New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP) provides consumer information on the safety of new cars.

## 6. Conclusions

Environmentally themed terminology is often challenging for people to understand, whether in the form of claims across advertising sectors or vehicle descriptors used specifically in car advertising.

### Carbon Neutral and Net Zero claims

- In terms of claims used in advertising, the situation is further frustrated by the range of terminology being used. If the claims are to be effective at enabling consumers to make environmentally responsible choices, then they should be as few, as straightforward and as consistent as possible.
- Whilst claims don't seem to make an immediate conscious impact on consumer purchases, they do seem to occasionally impact brand image – which can be seen as indirect influence on purchase.
- The current number of different claims – on top of low levels of understanding – risks increasing confusion, uncertainty and cynicism. Creative customisation of language can further muddy these waters.
- Participants were looking for definitions behind these terms to be standardised and for claims to be effectively policed.
- The most important area of confusion concerns offsetting. Many of the claims made rely, either partially or wholly, upon offsetting, though many consumers assume the claims are absolute – and sometimes don't even know what offsetting is.
- When the reality of offsetting is revealed, they can feel misled, especially with regards to higher emitting sectors.
- Carbon Neutral and Net Zero are the most familiar terms and, like the majority of claims, they are often assumed to mean approximately the same thing. However, most consumers still feel they are absolute terms that do not include offsetting.
- Information should be as clear and prominent as possible – especially given that qualifying text is rarely engaged with.
- The stimulus included examples where offsetting was highlighted, and these were seen as having the most transparent approach.
- Target dates without supporting detail, or a roadmap of action, could be seen as empty promises.
- Creative context could also influence responses to ads. Humour and/or humility seemed to be better received than overt 'virtue signalling'.

### Electric and Hybrid motoring

- The car purchase has become even harder as people try to understand the emerging technology and language – and apply that knowledge to choose the right car for their needs.
- The evolving technology and perceived dearth of straightforward information and guidance adds to this challenge.
- The traditional pulls of status and image continue to play a key role in car purchase.



- While advertisers cannot be expected to provide the necessary educative content within their commercials, they need to be transparent, and avoid misleading consumers in terms of technical information (such as unrealistic mileage per charge figures) and creative contexts (such as the use of symbols that were felt to exaggerate environmental benefits).
- There is therefore a desire for an independent one-stop source of advice and guidance that:
  - explains what different descriptors mean
  - compares the pros and cons of the different options
  - helps with understanding the total cost of ownership
  - enables comparisons of environmental claims.

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. Module 1 Case Studies

#### 7.1.1. Amazon<sup>1</sup>: Using staff can humanise (and distract)?



Summary: Amazon employee discusses being able to, “make a real difference,” with Amazon’s Zero Emissions goal beside a beach clean-up.

The ad’s focus on an employee was felt to make it more personal, even intimate.

However, there was some confusion about the actual scale of the change. Some assumed it was a claim about Amazon’s whole fleet (or at least the whole of the UK fleet), whereas others, often only on second viewing, started to believe it was simply referring to one unit within the fleet:

It is arguable that the use of an employee may have in some way distracted people from thinking more rationally about what exactly was being claimed.

It may also, potentially, deter more cynical questioning. Some cynicism did emerge, but only on reflection:



*“Amazon still promotes the nature of buying too much and there is a culture of just buying and throwing away things and not buying things for longevity anymore. Amazon<sup>1</sup> are causing a bigger issue in that ability to get things at a click of a button and the cheap nature of goods these days.” (Male, 60–69, Urban)*



### 7.1.2. Nando's<sup>29</sup>: Comedic approach could engage more



Nando's was a popular brand amongst younger participants. The restaurant category was not seen as a serious carbon emitter and was even perceived as 'a treat' – and participants felt they didn't necessarily want to think about the climate while eating out. The brand was given credit for 'taking the lead' by raising a subject when, it was felt, there was no need to so. Its motives were judged to be positive, and participants liked the light-hearted, non-pompous tone that didn't give a sense of 'virtue signalling'.



*"The language and the tone of the advert was more engaging." (Male, 20–29, Urban)*

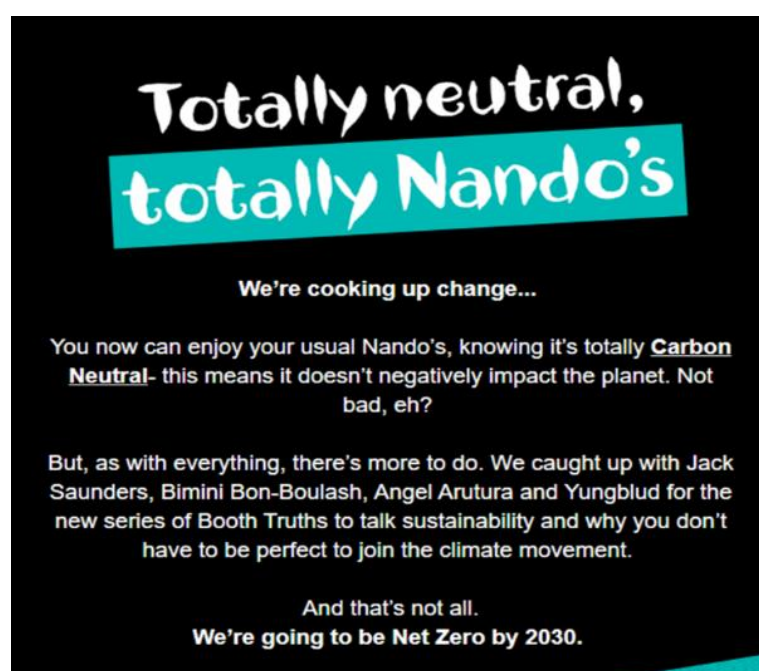
*"They were 5 years ahead [of Sainsbury's] on dates for Net Zero and they are already carbon free today. It feels like they are taking it a lot more seriously." (Male, 40–49, Suburban)*

*"It landed a much bigger message – the Sainsbury's<sup>23, 24</sup> one seemed very inward focused rather than thinking about the whole planet." (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

However, the ad was criticised amongst the more sophisticated for using the term 'Carbon Neutral' without declaring offsetting.



*"If anything, this has put me off Nando's, I am starting to feel more cynical and that they are treating people like they are stupid." (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*



### 7.1.3. Brewdog<sup>3</sup>: Comedic approach received warmer response



Summary: A humorous narrator states that BrewDog beer is, “for everyone,” and praises BrewDog for being “the world’s first Carbon Negative brewery and plant trees for every beer you drink”.

The irreverent tone of the ad was viewed as consistent with the brand voice and engagement with this ad was high.

The brand earned plaudits from participants as beer production was seen as a relatively low carbon emitter – and therefore any environmental benefits were seen as discretionary activity – creating a sense of good will.

With the ad referencing the brand as, “The world’s first Carbon Negative brewery,” that will, “plant trees for every beer you drink...,” there was no pushback over the use of offsetting. Offsetting activity was very clearly expressed, even without using the word.

Overall, the ad generated a sense of warmth towards brand.



*“I would gravitate towards that beer.” (Female, 40–49, Urban)*



### 7.1.4. EasyJet<sup>10</sup>: Creative customisation could be misleading

# easyJet

Most participants understood that airline travel could not deliver Zero Emissions, although the headline of the ad strongly suggested otherwise.

For some the claim was taken literally rather than being interpreted as ‘advertising hyperbole’. Some interpreted the claim as easyJet ‘leading’ this push and being (perhaps) close to achieving it. The ad also gave hope to some, suggesting air travel would not be a climate problem for long and the solution was in offsetting.

However, there was general agreement that this ad may mislead some – especially in a sector viewed as so central to the climate crisis.



*“People might think ‘It is OK to fly again.’ (Female, 30–39, Suburban)*



## 7.2. Module 2 Case Studies

### 7.2.1. VW<sup>42</sup>: Tone suggesting ‘no impact’ provoked more knowledgeable



Summary: A video of a car driving through forests and pastureland while a narrator describes Volkswagen's mission not to, “make an impact,” including a claim of the new model being Net Carbon Neutral.

The seemingly humble tone of the ad and the desire that they, “didn’t want to make an impact,” felt to be very different from the boastful tone of most car ads.



*“I think the language used is clever – it is not what you normally expect for a car ad.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“Clever, opposite of brash – talk about what we want not what we do – clever and a bit misleading.” (Female, 40–49, Urban)*

But some felt the overall sense was misleading, suggesting the vehicle would make little or no overall environmental impact through the course of its life. It was seen as clever in its approach to saying what they ‘didn’t want to do’ rather what they were actually doing.



*“I think they can make a lot of damage, extracting the minerals they need for batteries, etc. but it doesn’t spring to my mind when watching that ad, so it is interesting.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

*“They say ‘that they set out to’ or that ‘they didn’t mean to’ rather than they have or haven’t made an impact – that makes it worse, that is misleading – they know what they are doing.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*

The ad included subtitles explaining the role of offsetting and what is included in the claim, but was often missed and hard to understand, e.g., “life cycle post-handover”.



## 7.2.2. Hyundai<sup>22</sup>: Environmental imagery could create 'air of environmentalism'



Summary: Clips of pregnant women interchange with animals/marine life, while a narrator discusses how “Generation One” will live Carbon Neutral because of, “our efforts”. Text at the end reveals Hyundai’s target of carbon neutrality by 2045.

Some images used in the ad were recognised as symbols of environmental concern, including pregnant women, marine life and elephants. These could create an overall feeling of greenness that could operate on an almost unconscious level. The ad stated targets without giving any support beyond these visual and visceral symbols.



*“I felt like I didn’t really understand what Generation One was, although I understood the overall message was that for the sake of the next generation, we need to be Carbon Neutral to stop climate change.” (Female, 40–49, Suburban)*

*“I think they’re trying to say that we are part of the effort to be Carbon Neutral and our products are going to be Carbon Neutral – I noticed the date/target, but they all just melt into one for me.” (Female, 20–29, Suburban)*

*“Hyundai is trying to express themselves as part of the broader effort to be fighting climate change and being Carbon Neutral.” (Male, 30–39, Suburban)*



## 7.3. Stimulus Table

### 7.3.1. Module 1: Carbon Neutral and Net Zero Claims

Appendix No.	Advertiser	Media	Terms	Description
1	Amazon	Television	zero emissions	Amazon employee discusses being able to “make a real difference” with Amazon Zero Emissions goal beside a beach clean-up.
2	Bosch	Social Media (own site)	carbon reducing	Quotidian clips of individuals at home while a narrator praises “the carbon reducing heroes” for switching to a greener heating system.
3	BrewDog	Television	carbon negative	A humorous narrator states that BrewDog beer is “for everyone” and praises BrewDog for being “the world’s first Carbon Negative brewery and plant trees for every beer you drink”.
4	BrewDog	Website (own site), Social Media (own site)	carbon negative	(Website) Large text claiming BrewDog is Carbon Negative with a link to a sustainability report.  (Social Media) Instagram image of billboard that reads “F**K YOU CO <sub>2</sub> ” in large print with letters partially obscured by a BrewDog can, accompanied by small text claiming BrewDog is Carbon Negative.
5	British Gas	Television	zero carbon, sustainable	A woman turns on an electric kettle while music plays in background. Text on screen reads “this is what being more sustainable looks like” and claims “all our electricity is Zero Carbon.”
6	Bulb	Website (own site)	carbon neutral, offset, carbon reduction	Bulb describes their green energy practices, including renewables, carbon neutrality, and offsetting.
7	Bulb	Website (own site)	carbon offset	Bulb describes their offsetting programme.
8	Drax	National newspaper (paid ad)	carbon capture, low carbon generation	Large text claims, “Energy pioneers for 40 years” and directs the reader to search “Drax. Be future positive”
9	easyJet	National newspaper (paid ad)	offset	Large text reads “Set Off Having Offset” with small text describing an offsetting programme. Qualifying text accompanies the ad with mention of carbon credits and directs the reader to a website for more information on sustainability practices.
10	easyJet	Poster (digital static image)	zero emissions	An image of an airplane-shape cut out of clouds, accompanied by large text “Destination: Zero Emissions.”



				Below, text and qualifying text claim a championing of zero emissions.
11	EDF	Television	zero carbon	Clips of an EDF employee's day, including both mundane and technical tasks, while jaunty music plays in the background. A narrator claims EDF, "as Britain's biggest generator of Zero Carbon electricity", is helping to "cut UK carbon emissions".
12	EDF	Website (paid ad)	net zero, zero carbon	Large text reads "Helping Britain achieve Net Zero" with small text describing EDF's renewable energies, and a link to "Find out more".
13	Jeep	Radio	zero CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	Narrator describes environmental and servicing benefits to Jeep PHEV. Includes figures for miles/gallon in hybrid mode and catchphrases, "Lives off the beaten track," and, "Life without boundaries in a car without limits".
14	Firmus Energy	Website (own site)	net zero carbon	Text outlining Firmus's decarbonising plan over a thirty-year period.
15	Firmus Energy	Website (own site)	net zero, zero carbon	Firmus's "Purpose, Mission and Vision" outlined individually in single sentence descriptions.
16	Ford	National newspaper (paid ad)	zero emissions	Large text reads "All-Electric Ford Mustang Mach-E" over an image of a spotlighted red car. Smaller text describes "Zero emissions when you drive". Qualifying text sets out the environmental and automotive claims.
17	Ford	Radio	zero emissions	Song plays, fades as narrator discusses the Ford Cougar plug-in hybrid. Describes: switching from "petrol to electric at the touch of a button"; charging capabilities; "zero emissions whilst driving". Catchphrase "bring on tomorrow".
18	HS2	Website (own site)	net zero carbon	Image of escalators between two train platforms, one occupied by a high-speed train. Large text reads "High speed rail travel is low carbon" with a link to HS2 sustainability information.
19	HS2	Website (own site)	net zero, zero carbon	A video with upbeat orchestral music and icons describes HS2's history in sustainability, its Net Zero goals, and outlines the steps to those goals by year.
20	Hived	Website (own site)	zero emissions, offset	Two static ads claim to offer "Affordable Zero-Emission Parcel Delivery" with small text claiming more eco-friendly practices and a link to sign up to Hived.
21	Hived	Website (own site)	zero emission	Instagram post with text and captioning discussing zero emissions delivery and Hived's "push for change".
22	Hyundai	Television	carbon neutral	Clips of pregnant women interchange with animals/marine life, while a narrator discusses how "Generation one" will live Carbon Neutral because of "our efforts". Text at the end reveals Hyundai's target of carbon neutrality by 2045.

23	Sainsbury's	National newspaper (paid ad)	net zero	An image of a lightbulb is accompanied by text reading "We're putting our bulbs in the spotlight" with small text discussing how in-store lightbulb changes are contributing to its target of being Net Zero by 2040.
24	Sainsbury's	Radio	net zero	A narrator discusses how in-store light bulb changes are contributing to Net Zero targets with catchphrase "At Sainsbury's, we're putting our bulbs in the spotlight".
25	Jaguar	National newspaper (paid ad)	zero (tailpipe) emissions	An image of Jaguar 1-Pace plugged into a yellow charger with a lightning symbol. Text reads "Electric has never looked so good," while small text and qualifying text describe environmental and servicing claims, as well as terms and conditions.
26	Jersey Gas	Leaflet, Social Media (paid ad)	carbon neutral	Two images of jungle/forest, one obscured by green tint. Both read "Our gas is Carbon Neutral" from June 2021.
27	Manx Gas	Social Media (own site)	carbon neutral	Screen capture of video with image of jungle/forest with text reading "Our gas is Carbon Neutral" from June 2021. Post text talks about about carbon neutrality and includes a link to the Carbon Neutral project.
28	Nando's	Radio	carbon neutral, net zero	Narrator talks about the planet being "too hot", current carbon neutrality status and 2030 Net Zero target with catchphrase, "together, we can bring down the heat".
29	Nando's	Email	carbon neutral, net zero	Large text reads "Totally neutral, totally Nando's," while small text claims carbon neutrality, a Net Zero target of 2030, as well as a link to Nando's carbon neutrality report and an announcement of an upcoming vlog discussing sustainability with celebrities.
30	Nissan	National newspaper (paid ad)	carbon neutral	An image of a partially built car above large text "Introducing EV36Zero" and "The Pathway to a Carbon Neutral Future of Electric Car Production". Lengthy description of a new car's contribution to Nissan's carbon neutrality plan.
31	Petronas	Television	net zero	Clips of large urban environments, energy production facilities, large natural environments, and people of diverse races, ages, and cultures. A child's voice discusses various social, economic, and environmental energy missions, culminating in a goal of Net Zero by 2050 with the catchphrase, "So that our next generation will always have something to look forward to".
32	Shell	Website (own site)	carbon neutral	An image of a jungle/forest beneath large text that reads "Drive Carbon Neutral", and smaller text describing Shell's offsetting plan.
33	Shell	Video on demand	carbon neutral	An employee discusses enjoying her role in helping customers make clean energy choices over clips of her living in a rural environment. The video includes clips and

				voiceover from her farmer father, and a narrator praising the employee for her contribution to Carbon Neutral home energy.
34	Shell	Website (own site)	carbon neutral, offsetting	Large text reads “Drive Carbon Neutral” with small text directing customers to steps and reasons to sign up (via the Shell Card) for CO <sub>2</sub> offsetting. Includes pictures of cars driving through jungle/forests.
35	Southern Quarter	Website (own site), Social Media (own site)	carbon negative	Three static ads with catchphrases “We hit targets” and “about the build” talk about a Carbon Negative gym facility.
36	Tesco	National newspaper (paid ad)	net zero	Four images of Tesco facilities and products underlay text describing Tesco’s Net Zero targets in its own operations by 2035 and across their supply chain by 2050.
37	TIER	National newspaper (paid ad)	carbon neutral	An image of a scooter with mixed type-font and handwritten text reading “No emissions is our mission,” and “Whooooosh hour. Not rush hour,” with smaller text describing e-scooter capabilities.
38	Lexus	Website (own site)	zero emissions	Large text reads “Lexus Self-Charging Hybrid Cars” with description of number of self-charging hybrid cars “delivered”.
39	Toyota	Social Media (own site)	beyond zero	Upbeat music plays while a car drives through different portals made up of water, electricity, traffic lights lit up red, dust, and oil. A narrator lists diverse range of potential energy models with catchphrase “Let’s go beyond zero”.
40	Vauxhall	Website (own site)	zero emissions	Images of vehicles, technology, and open valleys with captions describing the vehicle’s zero emissions quality and other features, including choice of batteries, claim of being noise-free, regenerative braking, and charging data.
41	Sapling Spirits	Website (own site)	climate positive	Two images of branded vodka bottles with purchase description including flavour profile and a claim of being Climate Positive. The ad also discusses an initiative to plant a tree for every bottle sold, with instructions for the purchaser to learn more about the individual tree they contributed to, as well as the impact of the tree on the environment.
42	Volkswagen	Television	net carbon neutral	A video of a car driving through forests and pastureland while a narrator describes Volkswagen’s mission not to “make an impact,” including a claim of the new model being Net Carbon Neutral.

### 7.3.2. Module 2: Electric and Hybrid motoring claims

Appendix No.	Advertiser	Brand/ Model	Media	Vehicle type	Terms	Description
16	Ford	Mustang Mach E	Press	EV	All-electric; 100% electrifying; zero emissions when you drive	Large text reads “All-Electric Ford Mustang Mach-E” over an image of a spotlighted red car. Smaller text describes “Zero emissions when you drive”. Qualifying text sets out the environmental and automotive claims.
42	Volkswagen	ID.3	Television	EV	net carbon neutral	A video of a car driving through forest and pastureland while a narrator describes Volkswagen’s mission not to “make an impact,” including a claim of the new model being Net Carbon Neutral.
43	Audi (VW)	e-tron GT	Press	EV	Fully electric	A car is parked with a futuristic glass structure in the background. Large text reads “Passion creates progress” with small text introducing the EV.
44	Audi (VW)	e-tron GT	Press	EV	Performance, unplugged; fully electric	A car is parked with a futuristic glass structure in the background. Large text reads “Performance, unplugged.” with small text introducing the EV.
45	Audi (VW)	Q4 e-tron	Press	EV	Fully electric	A man charges his car in a spacious area, while a smiling woman and child walk around the side of the car. Large text reads “Fully electric. Fully Audi.” Small text introduces the model.
46	Bentley (VW)	Bentanga/ Flying Spur	Press	PHEV	Hybrids	Two cars are spotlighted in an otherwise empty room. Large text reads “Bentley Hybrids” with a company logo and “Discover More” beneath.
47	BMW	X PHEV	Television	PHEV	Petrol or electric; why choose;	A car driving on empty roads switches between normal colouration and bright

					sometimes electric	fluorescence as a narrator repeats the phrase “petrol or electric,” with a final catchphrase, “Sometimes electric, always BMW”.
48	BMW	i3S	Press	EV	*Advertorial*; The road to sustainability ; all-electric	An image of a parked car with open doors on a country road with a forest backdrop. Large text reads “The road to sustainability,” captioned with “Enjoy more from every journey with the all-electric BMW i3s”. Detailed text beneath describes the car’s features.
49	BMW	i4/iX	Television	EV	Electric in lyrics, explanation of charging on screen	Clips of a woman charging her car by the beach followed by images of the car itself, various drivers, and pedestrians wearing clothing with sustainability slogans (“Shape Your Future,” “Time For Change”). An upbeat song repeating the word “electric” plays in background. Text on screen reads “It’s not about the power of words. It’s about the power of action,” and introduces two EVs.
50	Citroen (Stellantis)	eC4	Press	EV	217 mile (WLTP) range	Text beside an image of the car names the vehicle and describes its capabilities (including “solid recharging capability”). A button options the customer to “Test Drive”.
51	Citroen (Stellantis)	eC4	Press	EV	100% electric, up to 217 miles (WLTP) on one charge)	Two ads, both with images of the same car. The first ad shows the car travelling on the street, with a caption introducing the car and a tagline “Up to 217 miles (WTP) on one charge” with a button to “find out more”. The second shows the car stagnant and plugged in, with a caption introducing the “100% electric” vehicle, with text beneath outlining the car’s

						capabilities and additional availability in petrol or diesel.
52	Cupra (VW)	Formentor PHEV	Television	PHEV	Visual of car being plugged in	A woman falls from space into an ocean, climbs onshore and into a car, drives briefly, and stops to plug her car in to an ocean-view charging station. A voice reads a poem about what “We don’t need” to live. Text reads “Drive another way”, “Live another way”, “Feel another way”, before introducing a hybrid car model.
53	Cupra (VW)	Formentor PHEV	Website display	PHEV	e-Hybrid; powered by petrol and electric	An image of a car plugged in to a charging station with text introducing the model and capabilities. A button below reads “Experience Now”.
54	Fiat (Stellantis)	500	Press	EV	Hybrid technology	An image of a car in an empty showroom with large text “Say Hello To Hybrid Technology”, and smaller text reading “Small Cars, Big Statement”. Qualifying text includes a table stating the car’s capabilities.
55	Ford	Fiesta	Press	MHEV	Ecoboost power; mild hybrid efficiency; 1 of 16 electrified vehicles	An image of a car in a sun-spotlight with a brightly coloured structure in the background. A man appears to walk in the direction of the car. Large text reads “Ford Fiesta Ecoboost Hybrid” with small text and qualifying text describing the car’s capabilities.
56	Ford	Kuga range	Television	petrol/ diesel/ MHEV /HEV/ PHEV	Why be one thing?; Full hybrid, plug in hybrid; 'All electric driving' on dashboard display	Individuals enter a room and place virtual reality headsets on while a voiceover announces “Welcome to the electrified experience”. The individuals then ‘virtually’ drive around unrealistic environments in various car models while text on screen describes the car’s charging capabilities and an upbeat song plays in the background.

57	Ford	Puma	Television	MHEV	Ecoboost mild hybrid	Clips of a car driving interposed with clips of urban extreme sports taking place in futuristic structures and environments. Text on screen refers to the car's use of space and ends with "Puma Ecoboost Mild Hybrid".
58	Ford	Kuga PHEV	Television	PHEV	Plug in hybrid; switch between petrol and electric; 'all electric driving' on dashboard display	Image of a car driving interposed with a woman doing ballet and martial arts. Text reads "Don't be just good at one thing. Switch." The ad ends with text reading "All-new Ford Kuga Plug-In Hybrid".
59	Ford	Puma	Press	MHEV	Mild hybrid; ecoboost mild hybrid	Large text reads "Ford Puma Mild Hybrid" over an image of the car in front of several other cars. Qualifying text sets out the environmental and automotive claims.
60	Honda	Jazz	Website display	HEV	Self charging hybrid, eHEV, efficient	Clips of a car driving interposed with a driver interacting with internal features while text reads "An advanced car," and then lists the car's capabilities while upbeat music plays in background.
61	Hyundai	i20	Website display	MHEV	48V mild hybrid	Image of a car in motion with text reading "The all-new i20 48V Mild Hybrid." With a button for "Discover more".
62	Hyundai	Nexo	Website (own site)	HY EV	It purifies the air	Large text reads "It purifies the air." A short caption describes the NEXO's air purifying qualities.
63	Jaguar (JLR)	F Pace PHEV	Press	PHEV	Image of car plugged in, 'plug in hybrid' below	An image of a car plugged into a yellow charger with a lightning symbol. Big text reads "Some of us weren't born to follow," while small text and qualifying text

						describe environmental and servicing claims, as well as terms and conditions.
64	Jaguar (JLR)	F Pace PHEV	Television	PHEV	Visual of renewable energy, car unplugged; 'eco' road sign, 'EV' button on console	A photographer takes pictures amid a backdrop of wind turbines, before experiencing flashbacks of his drive from home, including shots of the car charging, the interior amenities, an EV button, and "eco" signs along the highway. A voiceover reads a catchphrase at the end, "Hard to forget".
65	Kia	Kia electric/hybrid range	Television	MHEV/HEV/PHEV	Electrified, plug-in hybrid, fully electric, self-charging hybrid	A man has a comedic interaction with his pet parrot as he spots "A nice electrified Kia," and is then surprised to hear his parrot repeat the sentence twice as it sees (without the owner's presence) multiple cars driving below. A camera pans over three different cars as a voiceover describes the "Kia Electric and Hybrid Range".
66	Kia	Kia Niro	Television	HEV/PHEV/EV	Fully electric, hybrid, plug in hybrid, self-charging hybrid	Actor Robert De Niro has a comedic misunderstanding of the script for a Kia Niro car advert, and the director must explain to him that the script refers to the family of cars, pointing out the PHEV, EV, and Hybrid options available.
67	Kia	Niro electric and hybrid range	Website display	HEV/PHEV/EV	Eco electric badge	Three cars drive across a sandy environment, passing dynamic natural occurrences such as rain and blown dandelions. A voiceover says "Some things only come alive when they move," and then introduces the Hybrid and Electric Kia range.
68	Lexus (Toyota)	Lexus range	Television	HEV/EV	Electrified range of hybrid and all electric vehicles; self-charging	A car drives through and between large lit up barriers, followed by dynamic, red tinted clips, with upbeat music playing in the background. A narrator describes "crafting



					hybrid, electrified	the electrified range” of vehicles and focusing on sense/feeling.
69	Maserati (Stellantis)	Levante	Press	MHEV	Hybrid; performance charged	An image of a car driving down an urban street with large text reading “The New Maserati Levante Hybrid. Performance Charged” and qualifying text describing the car’s technical data.
70	MG (SAIC)	MG HS	Television	petrol/ PHEV	plug in hybrid options; visuals of charging	Clips of a car driving are interposed with individuals, families, and couples interacting with the car, while a voiceover says, “The SUV for everyone who enjoys getting more out of life”. The ad shows several faculties and mentions petrol and plug in options.
71	Nissan	Qashqai	Press	MHEV	Electrified; electrified with mild hybrid power	A car sits in the driveway behind a glass house. Large text reads “Proud. Thank You. Electrified.” Small text about winning the “Sun Car of the Year 2021”, and briefly discusses the car’s faculties.
72	Nissan	Qashqai	Press	MHEV	Electrified with mild hybrid power	A car sits in the driveway behind a glass house. Large text reads “All-New Nissan Qashqai” with caption, “Electrified with Mild Hybrid Power.”
73	Peugeot (Stellantis)	3008	Television	PHEV	Let’s adapt to the world; plug in hybrid; official CO <sub>2</sub> and range figures	A woman drives a car through several extreme environments, interposed with images of a rock climber, a glider plane, and a large forest scene, while showcasing the car’s adaptive qualities. A voiceover announces, “The world won’t adapt to us, so let’s adapt to the world,” before announcing a 3008 hybrid and ending with the catchphrase “Time to change”.

74	Renault	Arkana	Press	MHEV /HEV	Hybrid by nature	An image of a car in motion in an indoor facility. Large text introduces the car with a caption, "Hybrid by nature," and small text and qualifying text discuss the car's faculties.
75	Renault	Zoe	Press	EV	E-Tech; 100% electric	An image of a woman walking around a car, holding a home charging cable attached to a house. Large text introduces the car with small text, "100% electric", and small text advertising financial details. A button on the side offers, "Discover More".
76	SEAT (VW)	SEAT Leon	Press	PHEV	e-hybrid; electric mode, 41 miles on a single charge; 510 miles of total range	A black car is plugged in to a home charging port with large text reading "The best of both worlds," and small text describing the e-HYBRID's faculties.
77	Seat (VW)	Leon	Television	PHEV	Car unplugged, e-Hybrid, car plugged in again	With a "Little Red Riding Hood" theme throughout, a woman and man meet at a party and get in a car together (on charge, parked by the sea). They drive through neon-lit up streets, trees and wildlife as an upbeat pop song plays. The ad ends with a clip of the car plugged in outside an establishment.
78	Suzuki	Vitara	Press	MHEV	Hybrid; hybrid technology; hybrid fuel economy & lower emissions	An image of a red car with large text advertising a Hybrid model. Small text describes the car's faculties.
79	Toyota	Toyota range	Press	HEV	Let's go beyond zero and put emissions behind us for good	An image of four vehicles driving along a woodland highway with an electric circle (portal) in the background. Large text reads "Let's go beyond zero," with smaller text reading "and put emissions behind us for good." Smaller

						text discusses the company's zero emissions intentions, with qualifying text outlining the car's faculties.
80	Toyota	Yaris	Television	HEV	No need to plug in; image of energy use on display; hybrid; self-charging hybrid	Gymnast performs a floor routine through lanes of traffic while an upbeat song plays in background. As she lands her final move, she transforms into a car and a voiceover says, "When there's no need to plug in, why stop?" The ad ends by introducing the self-charging HEV.
81	Toyota	Yaris	Press	HEV	Self-charging hybrid	An image of a car driving along a road with large text introducing the model and small text reading "Self-Charging Hybrid". A link reads "Download a Brochure".
82	Volvo	XC90 Recharge PHEV	Television	PHEV	Visuals of renewable energy, car switched to Pure EV; plug in hybrid; drive the future	A child sits on the backseat of a car, marvelling at wind turbines outside while a soft acoustic song plays in background. The parent notices, and switches to pure EV. A voiceover and large text advertise the PHEV vehicle, ending on the catchphrase, "Drive the Future".
83	Volvo	XC60 Recharge	Press	PHEV	High-end, low impact; Recharge plug-in hybrid; Pure mode for zero emissions travel; a clear conscience really is the greatest luxury	An image of a car, with large text reading "High-end, low-impact." Smaller text describes the indulgence of the car, including the phrase, "This model proves a clean conscience really is the greatest luxury." Qualifying text discusses the car's faculties.

## 7.4. Terminology Definitions

### 7.4.1. Module 1

As there are no official definitions for terms explored in this module or, where they may be an agreed general meaning but no agreement on how it is achieved, possible definitions of claims were shared with participants and reactions to these definitions explored.

Term	Description
Carbon Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The marketer has measured carbon emissions and <u>offset</u> them by investing in official offsetting schemes using a variety of methods</li> <li>• The marketer has measured carbon emissions, <u>reduced some</u> of them and <u>offset what remains</u> with official schemes using a variety of methods</li> <li>• The marketer has measured carbon emissions, <u>reduced as many as possible</u> and <u>offset what remains</u> using a variety of methods</li> </ul>
Carbon Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to carbon neutral</li> <li>• The marketer has measured emissions and offset <u>more</u> than they emitted by investing in official offsetting schemes</li> <li>• The marketer has measured emissions, reduced <u>some</u> of them and <u>offset what remains plus more</u> so they have taken out more than they put in</li> <li>• The marketer has measured emissions, <u>reduced the vast majority of them</u> and <u>offset what remains plus more</u> so they have taken out more than they put in</li> </ul>
Carbon Capture & Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing carbon before it is emitted into the atmosphere and storing in the short term [5 -25 years]</li> <li>• Capturing carbon before it is emitted into the atmosphere and storing in the medium term [25 – 75 years]</li> <li>• Capturing carbon before it is emitted into the atmosphere and storing in the long term [75 +years]</li> <li>• Capturing carbon before it is emitted into the atmosphere and storing forever</li> </ul>
Offsetting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in current carbon capture schemes like new forests</li> <li>• Investment in new technology for long term removal and storage [not yet up and running]</li> <li>• Investment in the development of green technology to reduce emissions in the future</li> </ul>
Carbon Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing carbon emissions</li> <li>• Removing carbon from the atmosphere (such as through carbon capture and storage)</li> </ul>
Climate Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Carbon Negative</li> <li>• Having a positive impact on the environment by reducing carbon levels and taking out more than they have put in</li> <li>• Having a positive impact on carbon levels by reducing and removing carbon levels and taking out more than they have put in</li> </ul>

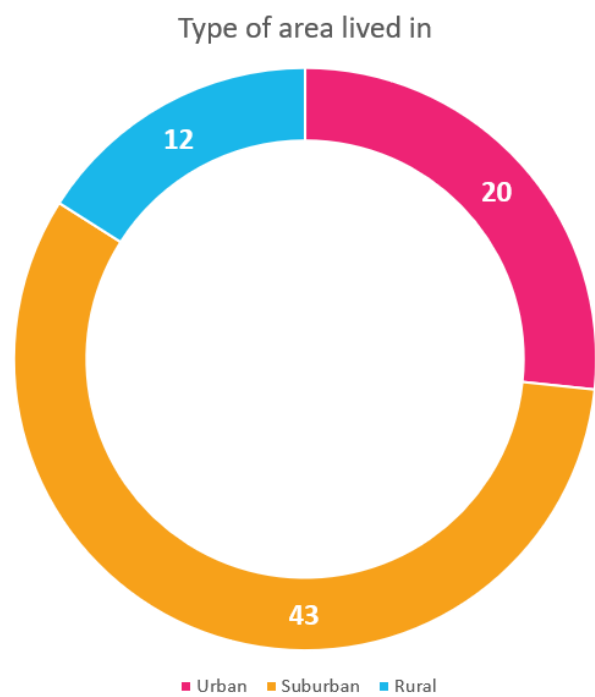
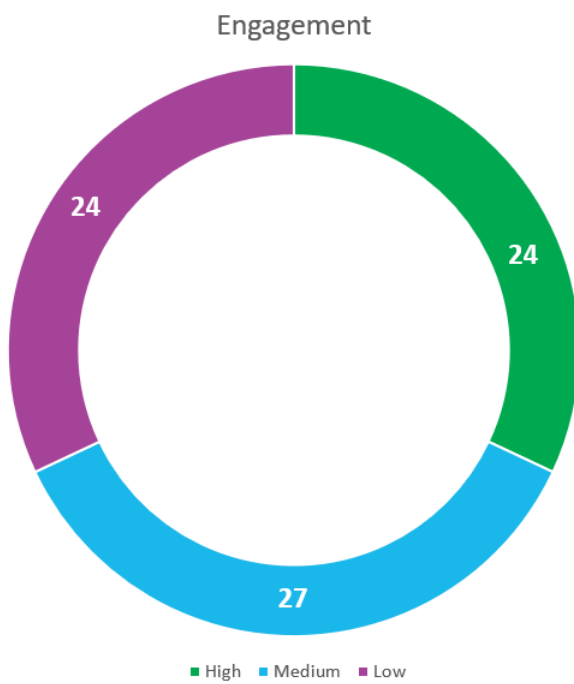
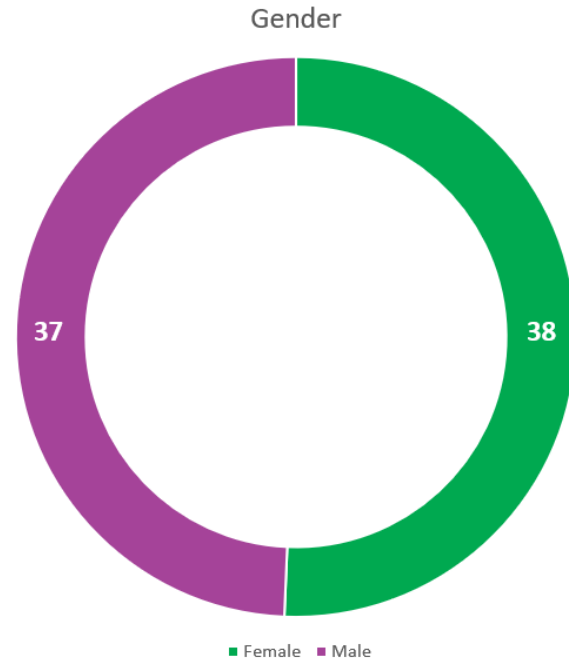
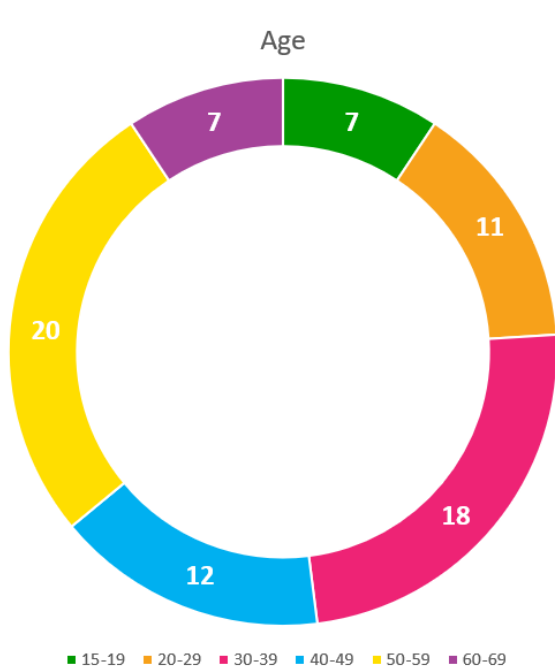
Zero Carbon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No carbon was emitted</li> <li>All carbon emitted was offset</li> </ul>
Zero CO <sub>2</sub>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No <u>carbon dioxide</u> was emitted</li> <li>All <u>carbon dioxide</u> emitted was offset</li> </ul>
Net Zero/Net Zero Emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as carbon neutral</li> <li>No carbon was released</li> <li><u>All emissions</u> were offset</li> </ul>
Zero Emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No emissions at all</li> <li>All emissions completely offset.</li> <li>All emissions reduced and what remains is offset</li> </ul>

## 7.4.2. Module 2

Full name	Acronyms	Alternative/ related terms	Description
Electric vehicle	EV, BEV	Battery electric vehicle	<p>Instead of a standard engine, an electric battery powers the vehicle. It can be charged directly from any external source. Charging technology is rapidly changing but is highly dependent on the available infrastructure.</p> <p>Charging a typical new electric car at home using a wall-mounted charger might allow you to add 30 miles of driving range for every hour the car is plugged in; you might do twice that range for every hour it is plugged into a more powerful public charger. However, the public chargers capable of delivering this are still rare.</p>
Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle	PHEV		<p>A vehicle with both standard petrol/diesel engine and electric battery.</p> <p>The battery is charged from an external electricity source AND from the petrol/diesel engine. The vehicle will automatically switch between running directly from the engine or the electric motor, or this can be manually selected.</p> <p>Most models are officially rated as being able to travel around 30 miles solely on electric power, which is generally thought to translate to around 20-25 miles in real-world conditions. Some larger models are now officially rated at around 60 miles, and this is likely to increase in future.</p>

Hybrid Electric vehicle	HEV	Self-charging hybrid, full hybrid	<p>A vehicle that uses both standard and battery power sources and shuffles between the two automatically. It never needs external plug-in charging</p> <p>The battery is charged by the petrol (or diesel) engine and, sometimes, other internal energy sources such as that recuperated from the car braking.</p> <p>The battery is used to directly power the vehicle for short distances (some are able to travel up to a mile solely powered directly by the battery) before automatically switching back to combustion engine.</p>
Mild hybrid electric vehicle	MHEV	Micro hybrid electric vehicle	<p>The big distinction is that, while the electric motor in a conventional hybrid can drive the car, the motor in a mild hybrid can't – it just assists the engine.</p> <p>The result is that this unit supplies power under certain conditions, like when you're pulling away, helping take a little load off the engine to help save fuel, boosting economy and lowering your running costs. There's a small benefit to acceleration as well. Some mild-hybrid electric vehicles have a function that allows the engine to turn itself off when coasting. But in any event, MHEV technology will restart the engine automatically when you're ready to set off or push the accelerator again.</p>

## 7.5. Sample Breakdown



Respondents were asked their level of engagement and interest in Energy and Climate Change during the screening process – this was therefore self-decided and chosen.

## 7.6. Sample achieved – Detailed breakdown

Age	SEG	Gender	Type of area lived in	Typology	Engagement
60-69	B	F	Urban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 8
30-39	C2	M	Rural	General	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 7
40-49	C1	F	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
15-19	D	F	Suburban	General	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 7
60-69	B	M	Suburban	Automotive	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8
50-59	C1	F	Rural	General	Low Energy: 4 Climate Change: 4
30-39	C1	M	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
20-29	C1	F	Rural	General	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 6
60-69	C1	F	Rural	Automotive	High Energy: 10 Climate Change: 8
30-39	B	F	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
30-39	C2	F	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 7
30-39	C1	F	Urban	General	Low Energy: 6 Climate Change: 5
40-49	C1	F	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 6
20-29	B	M	Suburban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
30-39	B	M	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 7



40-49	D	M	Suburban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
50-59	C1	F	Rural	Automotive	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 10
20-29	C1	M	Suburban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
30-39	D	M	Rural	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 6
20-29	B	F	Rural	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
40-49	C2	F	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 6 Climate Change: 5
20-29	C1	F	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 7
50-59	C1	M	Urban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 6
50-59	D	M	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 7
15-19	C1	M	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 5
50-59	C1	M	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 4 Climate Change: 5
30-39	C1	M	Urban	Automotive	Low Energy: 6 Climate Change: 5
15-19	C2	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 5
50-59	B	F	Urban	Automotive	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 10
40-49	C1	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 5
50-59	C1	F	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 4 Climate Change: 6
20-29	C2	F	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 6

30-39	B	F	Rural	Automotive	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 7
60-69	C1	M	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 6
50-59	C1	F	Rural	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 6
30-39	D	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 4 Climate Change: 6
50-59	C2	M	Urban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
30-39	B	M	Suburban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
50-59	C1	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 4
50-59	B	M	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 4
50-59	B	M	Suburban	General	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8
40-49	C2	M	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 4
20-29	D	M	Suburban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
40-49	D	F	Suburban	General	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8
50-59	C2	F	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 6 Climate Change: 5
30-39	B	M	Urban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
50-59	D	M	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
40-49	D	F	Suburban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
					High Energy: 8

30-39	C2	M	Suburban	Automotive	Climate Change: 9
15-19	C1	M	Suburban	General	Medium Energy: 8 Climate Change: 6
50-54	C1	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 4
20-29	B	F	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 7
60-69	C1	M	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 6
20-29	D	F	Urban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 10
50-59	C2	M	Urban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 6 Climate Change: 7
50-59	C2	M	Urban	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
40-49	C2	F	Urban	General	Low Energy: 2 Climate Change: 5
30-39	C1	M	Suburban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 7
30-39	C1	M	Rural	Automotive	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
20-29	C1	M	Rural	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
15-19	B	F	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 5
40-49	B	F	Suburban	General	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 10
60-69	C1	M	Urban	General	Low Energy: 5 Climate Change: 6
60-69	C1	M	Suburban	Automotive	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
50-59	C1	F	Suburban	Automotive	Low Energy: 6 Climate Change: 6
					High

40-49	B	M	Suburban	Automotive	Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
40-49	D	M	Urban	General	Medium Energy: 7 Climate Change: 8
30-39	B	F	Suburban	Automotive	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
50-59	B	F	Suburban	Automotive	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 9
15-19	B	M	Suburban	General	Low Energy: 3 Climate Change: 5
15-19	C1	F	Urban	General	Low Energy: 2 Climate Change: 3
50-59	B	F	Suburban	General	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8
30-39	C1	M	Rural	General	High Energy: 8 Climate Change: 8
30-39	C1	F	Suburban	Automotive	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8
20-29	C1	M	Suburban	Automotive	High Energy: 9 Climate Change: 8