End-user perspectives on environmental sustainability and communication - Case study on media use

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We wanted to find answers to these questions:

- What kinds of methods and approaches can be used for assessing the environmental impacts of digital service use?
- What kind of information is available for making environmentally aware decisions related to media consumption?
- What are the most significant actions a consumer can take in order to decrease the environmental load of his/her media use, and how to effectively communicate that?

Framework for evaluating the overall environmental impacts related to media production and use

Methods and approaches

- Qualitative study of the media use habits and environmental awareness of six Finnish families (media diaries and theme interviews)
- Extensive literature study for evaluating qualitatively the environmental impacts of different media distribution channels. Media platforms included in the study are printed media and digital media used via television, laptop, smart phone and tablet.
- A four-part framework that covers the life cycle of media products (see figure above)
- Stories based on the media use data and user profiles, and a video to enhance communication
- Collaboration and workshops with the stakeholders for data gathering, dissemination and co-development

Results and recommendations

- Comprehensive evaluation of the environmental impacts of media use is not possible based on publicly available research results. There are few studies that cover other impact categories than global warming.
- There are data gaps especially related to electronic media and issues related to networks and data transfer.
- Traditional media use studies can’t be used as a basis for communicating personally relevant information of the environmental impacts of media use.
- Consumers don’t generally pay attention to the consumption related to the media use, especially in the digital form. Nevertheless, the use phase seems to be a significant factor in the overall impacts of the life cycle.
- Minimizing the impacts of the production, delivery and use of the services should be considered already during the design process (based on realistic use scenarios).
- Values and strategic choices of companies as well as partnerships between responsible companies are expected to be of greater importance in the future.

More information:

- Video visualizing the value networks related to the media products and services (in Finnish) http://youtu.be/KYmIxAxIBWSs
- The publications of the project “Shaping Markets for Sustainability” http://virtual.vtt.fi/virtual/shape/