

TEXTE

Delivery disaster: the hidden environmental cost of your online shopping

We love ordering goods and food at a click – but this creates mountains of packaging waste and millions of transport miles

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10 There's still something magical about the idea of browsing a world of goods online, choosing what you want and having it delivered to your door, sometimes within hours. You may give a fleeting thought to the environmental impact when you are drowning in excess packaging (nearly a third of solid waste in the US comes from e-commerce packaging) but it's easy to ignore the rest of it. Such as the fact that Amazon, in figures released last year, emits nearly as much carbon dioxide as a small country. We are buying more online than ever – and younger age groups are less likely to shop locally than people over 55, according to a new survey.

15 Our rapidly growing delivery culture is a challenge, says Tim Anderson, head of transport at the Energy Saving Trust. "It's easy to go online and buy things cheaply. They might have been shipped from far off countries, manufactured from raw materials and they arrive at our homes at little or no cost."

20 (...) Online retailers don't encourage us to behave – in a sensible way, says Julian Allen, researcher at the transport studies department at the University of Westminster.

25 Once, we were prepared to wait, but now we want same-day delivery. That, says Allen, "tends to mean stuff gets moved in smaller and smaller quantities. We have vehicles shooting all over the place making single deliveries. We have the concept of 'free' delivery, which is a selling point for retailers, but it's not really free in the sense of what it costs them and what it costs in environmental terms."

People also buy things, particularly clothes, with the intention of returning much of the order, resulting in more carriage and mileage. "They are not being penalised financially for doing that," says Allen.

30 The growth in hot-food delivery services, such as Deliveroo and Uber Eats, has been enormous. "It's sheer inefficiency to move a single meal in a car or motorbike," says Allen. "Bicycles would help in terms of pollution, but the trend has been to move away from bikes as these firms expand their networks, and it's not viable."

35 So what should we do? "Shop locally, [especially] if you can use sustainable transport," is Anderson's advice.

And Allen thinks we should be more patient and consolidate orders into one delivery at a time. "Rather than having them delivered to your home, choose to pick them up at a nearby collection point. [Couriers] can bring a lot of stuff to one place."

Don't then make a special trip by car to collect it, says Allen: "Work it into your daily commute."

40 Perhaps best of all would be to think before you click.

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