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**An ‘Airbnb’ for energy could help homes share spare power**

Could the future of energy lie in the sharing economy? Research shows energy sharing platforms may be key to supporting our transition to new tech and cleaner power, while delivering for consumers.

A new study reveals Australians eager to shift to clean technologies like solar are keen on platforms similar to Airbnb or Uber that would enable them to trade and share their excess power.

Households are adopting new energy technologies to help manage their electricity bills, reduce their environmental impact and help stabilise the grid, yet are often presented with overly complicated processes that can discourage them from pursuing opportunities to participate in the energy market.

Building on their previous research investigating the roles of households in Australia’s energy system, RMIT University and Monash University researchers have released a new **report** that finds energy sharing platforms may effectively assist the transition to new energy technologies, cleaner energy, and better consumer outcomes.

Interviewing households – both with and without home solar systems – across Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide, the researchers

sought to understand how they want to engage with the transformation of Australia’s electricity system in ways that help people and the grid.

Lead author Dr Larissa Nicholls from the RMIT Centre for Urban Research said people were widely enthusiastic about generating and storing their own energy, but complexity and distrust in the energy sector limited their potential as participants in an efficient electricity grid.

“In the age of the sharing economy, consumers’ relationships with the electricity system are changing,” she said.

“Early adopters of home battery energy storage are already looking to export their spare energy at peak times to help stabilise the grid in extreme weather, but opportunities are very limited and complicated.

“Our research participants, regardless of political or environmental persuasions, were keen to embrace new energy technologies and also want those who can’t afford solar, or aren’t allowed to install it themselves, to benefit.

“The concept of sharing or donating energy is appealing as a response to this widespread concern for vulnerable people, who may struggle with the cost of energy or be unable to access renewable power.

“It’s so easy to find a spare room to rent on Airbnb, or catch a ride in an Uber, and it could be just as easy for Australians to trade, share or even donate their spare energy.”

The research found that households already consider feeding electricity into the grid for collective use as a form of sharing energy with other households – but that they want to be confident their home-generated, clean electricity benefits people who need it, rather than boosting energy company profits.

Report co-author Associate Professor Yolande Strengers from Monash University says householders’ relationships with the electricity grid and market are changing.

“The energy sector expects households to become active participants in the energy system – shifting and shaving their energy use and navigating a complex energy market or agreeing to more automation of their home appliances,” she said.

“The types of engagement required to navigate this complex environment will need to evolve.

“Our research shows that householders are interested in participating in energy programs and initiatives when offered interesting and simple opportunities that are part of a larger and coordinated plan towards our energy future.”

The research team warns that energy sharing will need to be carefully introduced.

“As has been reported in cities with high uptake of Airbnb and other sharing platforms, there is potential for some people to miss out or be disadvantaged in the sharing economy,” Nicholls said.

“Programs and platforms need to ensure that consumers are the primary beneficiaries, and rules and regulations need to address equity concerns.”

The researchers will be releasing an engagement strategy for the sector later this year.

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***For general media enquiries: Chanel Bearder, +61 432 140 673 or chanel.bearder@rmit.edu.au***