



REDUCING PLASTIC POLLUTION:

CAMPAIGNS THAT WORK

Insights and examples to maximize the effectiveness
of campaigns for sustainable plastic consumption



One planet
live with care



**Stockholm
Environment
Institute**

About the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme

This publication is an output of the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme of the One Planet network. The One Planet network is the network of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production which supports the global shift to sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12). The Sustainable Lifestyles and Education (SLE) Programme aims to foster the uptake of sustainable lifestyles as the common norm. Through a global network of experts, practitioners and learners, the SLE Programme develops tools and resources that allow policymakers, businesses and civil society to build sustainable systems of living. Through

the application of these resources and the uptake of sustainable lifestyles, the SLE Programme aims to address global challenges such as biodiversity conservation, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation, poverty reduction and social well-being.

The SLE Programme is co-led by Japan's Ministry of the Environment represented by Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and the Government of Sweden represented by Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI).

More information, including ways to participate, can be found at: www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sustainable-lifestyles-and-education

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Foreword

As this report nears publication (February 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic is still taking an enormous toll on people, health systems and economies worldwide. But there are realistic hopes that many of us will see the situation improving in 2021, and we now have a window of opportunity to consider how we rebuild our markets and our habits in a way that respects our environment and human rights.

The problems related to our reliance on plastic are well known, ranging from particulate pollution to marine waste. This is why the One Planet Network has adopted plastics as its theme for 2020–2021, and the 4th UN Environment Assembly has passed Resolution 6 on marine litter and microplastics, calling on governments to deliver the “information tools and incentives to foster sustainable consumption and production.”

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) supports the One Planet Plastics Initiative, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other partners to change the agenda on plastic use. We are also proud to be working closely with the Swedish Government on its **move to a circular economy** as part of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 12. The aim is to radically alter patterns of consumption and production so that Sweden becomes the world’s first fossil-fuel-free welfare state. The use of plastic will play an important part in the strategy.

This report exemplifies SEI’s approach to building the evidence base on plastic use, and bridging the gap between science and policy. It examines the relevant literature on behaviour change, psychology and

environmental issues to learn which strategies can be effective – and which might be counterproductive – when it comes to shifting people’s actions around plastic. We know that the ‘use’ phase of the plastic lifecycle is hugely important but – crucially – this report finds that individuals are not able to make a real difference through their actions. Even when there is awareness of the problem and motivation to change, the opportunity to do so is too often lacking – companies do not offer enough sustainable options, for example, and governments do not require circularity between production and disposal.

From the review of scholarly articles, media reports and surveys of the public, emerges a number of recommendations that can be put to use by anyone creating a campaign concerned with plastic use. The report also makes recommendations for governments, businesses and individual consumers. To have real impact on plastic use, we need to see sustained, long-term efforts from all of these groups, with changes in behaviour, policy and practice. This report helps to make sure those efforts are properly directed.



Måns Nilsson
Executive Director, SEI



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can campaigns from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), companies and government use more effective behaviour change strategies to influence individuals' sustainable use of plastic?

To address this question, this report draws on:

- a literature review of 65 papers, articles and surveys;
- analysis from 50 real-life plastics campaigns; and
- insights from available campaign results.

Key Findings

This analysis suggests that there are three necessary elements to effectively shift individuals toward sustainable consumption of plastic:

1

Information

Accessible, relevant, comparable and timely information about the sustainability of plastic products and packaging is essential to enabling sustainable consumption.

This report further considers the role of campaigns as sources of information that can influence individual decisions. On-package communications are addressed in detail in “Can I Recycle This?” A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging, published in May 2020 by Consumers International and UNEP. Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information, from UNEP in 2017, is also a valuable reference for relevant, accessible sustainability information.

2

Motivation

Beyond simply being aware of the problem, individuals need to feel that the plastic waste problem is relevant to them, understand specifically what they can do about it, and be prepared to make different choices in their plastic consumption.

This report focuses on the role campaigns can play in shifting mindsets and behaviours, identifying the specific strategies that recent research has shown are effective.

3

Opportunity

Individuals cannot shift toward sustainable consumption of plastic when they do not have sustainable options. Companies can enable sustainable consumption of plastic by designing products and packages to maximize circularity. Governments can also use policy to ban or tax unsustainable items and require a minimum level of sustainability or circularity in others.

This report reinforces the finding from other research that opportunity is a significant barrier to the adoption of sustainable consumption of plastic, and highlights the importance of campaigns that aggregate and amplify the voices of individuals asking companies for more sustainable options and governments for policies that facilitate sustainable consumption.

Insights from the Literature

There are a set of effective strategies, ‘watch-outs’ (things to be careful of) and common mistakes that campaign designers should consider as they craft campaigns for influencing individuals’ consumption of plastic.

Six Effective Strategies

Summary of the Six Effective Strategies, the Four Watch-Outs, and the Four Common Mistakes



#1 Customizing Recognize that different approaches will work for different people (e.g. introverts vs extroverts), and that major life transitions, such as moving home and becoming a parent, are opportunities to change habits.



#2 Using Good Norms Use social norms to shape behaviour. People imitate others, especially those with recognized status such as celebrities, and they respond to norm-based cues about what is acceptable and expected.



#3 Specifying Action Be specific about what to do. Especially when it comes to plastic, where people can feel disempowered, provide clear direction on what meaningful actions people can take.



#4 Catalyzing Commitments Challenge people to make a public or private commitment to do something specific. Once people make that commitment, they are more likely to follow through and even shift habits over time.



#5 Tapping Positive Emotions Tap into pride, hope and optimism. People who experience pride, hope and optimism as part of their pro-environmental behaviours tend to stick with them.



#6 Showing it Matters Show that the results – even for just one person’s actions – matter. In the face of a global crisis, it is easy to believe that a bottle here or a candy wrapper there don’t matter. Show people that they do.

Four Watch-Outs

#1 Fear Fear is most productive when there is something effective that a person can do to alleviate the threat. When the threat is existential or there is no immediate remedy, it just leads to anxiety and passivity.



#2 Incentives Incentives work – but the behaviour goes away when the incentive goes away. Worse, intrinsic motivation can be eroded through incentives.



#3 Humour People enjoy funny or clever campaigns and they can be more memorable. However, they do not necessarily translate into the desired behaviour change, and sometimes they do the opposite.



#4 Altruism While altruistic claims resonate with some, in general, people make behavioural choices that prioritize their present needs and wants over the good of the group, and even over meeting their own future needs.



#1 Stopping at Awareness Assuming that making people aware of the problem will lead to behaviour change. Awareness can be a first step on the path to action, but the journey is not inevitable.



#2 Using Guilt Using guilt to try to change behaviour. Appeals to guilt will create resistance in many people. For the rest, their guilt cup is already overflowing, reducing potential effectiveness.



#3 Reinforcing Bad Norms Showing the regrettable frequency of undesirable behaviours. Social norms are effective at shaping behaviour – so showing the prevalence of bad behaviour backfires.



#4 Allowing Distance Allowing the problem to feel distant or intangible, and relying more on statistics than images and stories. People are more moved to action by problems that are local, urgent and tangible. Physical, temporal or psychological distance all undermine our motivation to act.



Four Common Mistakes

Observations from the Campaign Analysis

- An analysis of campaign objectives showed that the most common ‘ask’ from campaigns, at 72 per cent of those reviewed (36 out of 50), was simply to refuse single-use plastic products and packaging. However, only just over half of campaigns emphasized choosing reusable solutions specifically – illustrating **that many campaigns are telling people what not to do, but not always telling them what a better choice would be.**
- The strategy of **Using Good Norms, one of the most promising effective strategies, was used in just over half of campaigns,** though with different approaches or levels of emphasis. Campaigns designed to establish or reinforce positive social norms related to sustainable use of plastic – when done well – have been shown to be very effective.
- **Just under half of campaigns (24 out of 50) tapped into positive emotions,** which has been shown to be more effective at influencing behaviour than evoking negative emotions.
- **Similarly, just under half of campaigns illustrated the importance of individual actions in the context of an ‘overwhelming’ systemic challenge,** which can also help motivate individual action.
- **About a third of campaigns, in particular those by governments and non-profits, rely on ‘for the greater good’ as a rationale for individual action.** However, evidence shows that people are more likely to make and maintain behavioural changes when they perceive a benefit (or threat reduction) for themselves or their closely identified group.
- **About a third of the campaigns reviewed asked people to either make a pledge or sign a petition,** which can reinforce the intention to change a behaviour.
- **There appears to be untapped potential in customizing strategies by audience, personality type, values profile, or phase of life,** as targeting was only apparent in about a quarter of campaigns analyzed.
- The number of campaigns using humour (14 out of 50) just barely topped the number of campaigns using fear (11 out of 50). While both are watch-outs, **humour is seen as having untapped potential for impact.**
- One barrier to evaluating the effectiveness of campaigns is the **lack of data and research available,** in all but a few cases, to provide information about the campaign’s outcomes.



Just under half of the 50 real-life campaigns analyzed tapped into positive emotions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this report, there are four key recommendations for NGOs, governments, companies and others designing campaigns to influence sustainable consumption behaviour:

1

Use strategies shown to be effective

- Customize campaigns based on psychographic as well as demographic characteristics, and consider phase-of-life-specific messaging as well.
- Use positive social norms to establish or reinforce sustainable use of plastic as a social norm.
- Be specific about what people can do so that they know what positive choices they can make, not just what not to do.
- Challenge people to make a commitment to a new behaviour, especially publicly, as this increases the likelihood that they will stick with it.
- Tap into positive emotions such as hope, optimism, pride and love as these emotions are associated with enduring behaviour change.
- Show that the results – even of individual actions – matter, to counteract the sense that people may have of feeling insignificant or overwhelmed by the scope of the problem.

2

Use watch-outs with care

- Tread carefully when using an approach that may evoke fear. Fear, without offering any meaningful action that can be taken to reduce the threat, creates anxiety rather than action.
- Use incentives to build new habits, but avoid undermining intrinsic motivation.
- Use humour when it can be done in line with the campaign objectives, in particular with younger audiences. Humour can provide a social critique in a way that doesn't make people defensive, and humorous campaigns tend to be more memorable.
- Combine appeals to the greater good or the future with messages about benefits to individuals and communities in the present to ensure resonance with the broadest possible audience.

3

Avoid the common mistakes

- Don't assume that awareness of the problem will lead to behaviour change, as this has been shown not to be the case. Campaigns that do not provide a specific rationale for behaviour change are unlikely to influence behaviour.
- Don't use guilt to try to change behaviour; while it works for some, those people are already struggling with an excess of environmental guilt and for everyone else it triggers resistance.
- When tapping into social norms, be careful not to inadvertently emphasize the regrettable frequency of undesirable behaviour, as this effectively tells people that the 'wrong' behaviour is actually the norm.
- Frame the problem and solutions as 'close' – in terms of time, space, personal impacts and geography.

4

Evaluate and share

- Measure and share the outcomes of campaign strategies to enable further research and learning.

Trash found on a beach in Spain.
© Photo by Angela Compagnone/Unsplash



These additional actions are needed to enable true progress on this problem:

Companies

Companies must act with urgency to provide sustainable plastic product and packaging options and information to individuals to enable them to make sustainable choices. Specifically, companies must take these actions to enable their customers to make better choices:

- Take action to eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging.
- Take action to move from single use toward reuse models.
- 100 per cent of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- Set an ambitious recycled content target.

Governments

Governments must enact policies to create the conditions for sustainable consumption, to reduce the barriers for individuals to make sustainable choices. Specifically, governments must take these actions to support the adoption and scaling of solutions:

- Ban, restrict, or place a tax/fee on single-use plastic products and unnecessary or excessive packaging.
- Implement incentives for reuse and ensure that policy enables/ allows reuse.
- Contract with reusables services (e.g. caterers that use reusable foodware or cups for events or cafeterias).
- Require plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- Align procurement policies for government purchases with requirements for recyclability, reusability or compostability. Include requirements for a minimum percentage of recycled content.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Foreword 3

Executive Summary 4

Key Findings 5

Insights from the Literature 6

Observations from
the Campaign Analysis 8

Recommendations 9

Context and Purpose
of this Report 13

The Role of Individuals
in Addressing
Plastic Pollution 14

Scope and Definitions 17

Methodology 19

Insights from Research 21

What Works –
and What Doesn't 22

Six Strategies that
Work to Influence
Individual Behaviour 24

#1 Customizing 24

#2 Using Good Norms 25

#3 Specifying Action 26

#4 Catalyzing
Commitments 27

#5 Tapping Positive
Emotions 28

#6 Showing it Matters 29

Four 'Watch-Outs' to be
Used with Care 31

#1 Fear 31

#2 Incentives 32

#3 Humour 33

#4 Altruism 34

Four Common Mistakes
made by Campaigns
Targeting Plastic Pollution 35

#1 Stopping at Awareness 35

#2 Using Guilt 36

#3 Reinforcing Bad Norms 37

#4 Allowing Distance 38

What Strategies are Real- Life Campaigns Using? 40

What can We Tell About
What is Working? 48

Recommendations 49

Conclusion 52

References 53

Appendix:
Campaign Examples 59

Context and Purpose of this Report

In December 2017, the final episode of the BBC's *Blue Planet II* dedicated six minutes to the impact of plastic on marine life. As reported by *The Guardian*,



“It was the biggest reaction to anything in the whole series,’ Tom McDonald, head of commissioning at the BBC, told me. ‘People didn’t just want to talk about the episode – which is the usual – they were asking us how to fix things.’”

– (Buranyi 2018)

The final episode of the BBC's *Blue Planet II* dedicated six minutes to the impact of plastic on sea life.

Another video recognized as causing a decisive shift in public consciousness about marine plastic showed marine biologists removing a straw from the nose of a sea turtle. The video, which went viral in spring 2018, has now been seen nearly 40 million times on YouTube alone. The public outcry it sparked is often cited as a key driver of the bans on plastic bags and straws that followed soon after in several countries, as well as Starbucks' decision to phase out plastic straws worldwide.

These are just two examples of the now many media ‘moments’ that have garnered massive public attention and led to calls for changes in the use of plastic by individuals, companies, governments and civil society. While these were not campaigns in the traditional sense, each of these examples demonstrates the potential for change that exists when individuals become mobilized around solving a problem.



91 per cent of consumers in Southeast Asia were concerned about plastic waste issues.

Plastic pollution has become a well-recognized problem around the world over the last several years. In the US, 65 per cent of people said they were concerned about ocean plastic and 80 per cent had heard about bans on single-use plastic (Shelton Group 2019). In Southeast Asia 91 per cent of consumers stated that they were concerned about plastic waste issues (SEA circular 2020).

Campaigns by governments and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-profit groups, foundations and companies have contributed to increased awareness and action on plastic pollution – but have they effectively shifted people toward more sustainable consumption choices? Not as much as they could have, based on the latest research on influencing sustainable behaviour.

Indeed – even of the 91 per cent of people in Southeast Asia expressing concern, less than half said they would be more likely to buy a product from recycled material. This exemplifies the challenge at hand: turning awareness and concern into behaviour change.

What can people designing campaigns to tackle plastic pollution learn from moments and campaigns that have worked and those that haven't? How can campaigns be crafted to drive the shifts in behaviour needed to address plastic waste?

This report provides tangible guidance to align campaign development with behavioural psychology – for policymakers or government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-profits, and companies. Our findings and recommendations can help inform the underlying mechanics of a campaign to shape behaviour by providing insight into effective strategies and common mistakes. However, it does not provide guidance on how to do the creative work of designing an eye-catching concept.

This report aims to answer three specific questions:

- 1 What does the academic and business literature tell us about which campaign strategies are most, or least, effective at influencing sustainable choices on plastic by individuals?
- 2 How do real-life campaigns targeting plastic pollution use these strategies?
- 3 What can we tell about how effective they have been?

The Role of Individuals in Addressing Plastic Pollution

The One Planet network initiative draws on the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, (which is led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with UNEP), as well as evidence developed by UNEP, to frame the opportunities for action on plastic waste.

The terms of the Global Commitment are designed for companies, but in [Table 1](#) we have extrapolated them out to suggest actions that individuals and policymakers can take. This report focuses on what individuals can do, though of course any strategy will be more effective if multiple stakeholder groups align on it.

This report focuses on what actions individuals and policymakers can take on plastic waste.

Table 1: Actions That Companies, Individuals and Policymakers Can Take – Based on the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment

What companies can do – guidance from the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment	What individuals can do	What policymakers can do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take action to eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Refuse single-use plastic products (foodware, bags, other single-use plastic products) – Refuse plastic packaging (when possible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ban, restrict, or place a tax/fee on single-use plastic products and unnecessary or excessive packaging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take action to move from single-use toward reuse models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use a reusable option for bags, water bottles, foodware, or packaging, either by bringing one's own or by using a service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Implement incentives for reuse – Ensure that policy enables/allows reuse – Contract with reusables services (e.g. caterers that use reusable cups or foodware)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Whenever you can, choose products and/or packaging that are reusable, recyclable or compostable, made from recycled plastic or other sustainably-sourced feedstock – Communicate demands for sustainable packaging to companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Require plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable – Align procurement policies for government purchases with these requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Set an ambitious recycled content target 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Choose products and packaging with recycled content over those without, and prefer higher percentages of recycled content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Require packaging to have a minimum percentage of recycled content – Align procurement policies for government purchases with these requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advocate for policy aligned with these actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Propose policies that align with these actions – Talk about the issue and express support for solutions

The ability of individuals to make decisions about plastic products or packaging that take into account characteristics such as reusability, recyclability, compostability, or use of recycled plastic or other sustainably-sourced feedstock is completely dependent on the individual's access to information. The current state of, and need for improvements in, on-package labels and claims on plastic packaging is addressed in detail in "Can I Recycle This?" A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging, published in May 2020 by Consumers International and UNEP.



This meme sums up the 'vote with your dollars' approach to reducing plastic consumption and production.

The power of individuals may be summed up best in a meme which circulated on social media but does not appear to be part of an organized campaign: "Stop buying crap and companies will stop making crap". While it is not elegantly phrased, it neatly states the inherent supply-and-demand dynamic that drives the market-based consumer economy. This 'vote with your dollars' system is effective when it comes to selling products. Given sufficient information and transparency, individuals can choose a more sustainable product over a less sustainable one, and this market signal shifts what companies produce to meet that demand.

However, this supply–demand feedback loop is not as effective when it comes to packaging. Individuals can express packaging preferences through purchases, but packaging sustainability is rarely the primary purchase criteria, so the feedback loop to companies is not as direct. A focus-group-based study from Thailand that examined the importance of different packaging design elements in influencing purchase decisions for food products found that visual elements such as colour, graphics and size/shape are primary factors, with informational elements and newer technology playing a secondary but still influential role. Other than mothers noting a desire for snack-packaging to be non-toxic, sustainability did not come up (Silayoi and Speece 2004).

In order to communicate their preference for sustainable plastic products or packaging back to companies, individuals either need to find an equally appealing product in better packaging and purchase that instead, or they need to communicate their request for change directly to companies.

This is also consistent with the research: the only predictive variables of plastic use were situational, meaning 'if plastic is available, plastic will be used'. **Environmental concern, reuse intention, personal norms, or attitudes could not – on their own – overcome the sheer ubiquity of plastic.** One study summarized: "Even when participants were willing to reduce their plastic consumption, they partly failed because they were not able to apply new habits." (Heidbreder et al. 2019). This highlights the fact that systemic change is needed, in tandem with behavioural change, if we are to alter habits around plastic use.

This analysis suggests that there are three necessary enabling conditions to advance a shift toward sustainable consumption:

1 Information

Accessible, relevant, comparable and timely information about the sustainability of plastic products and packaging is essential to enabling sustainable consumption.

This report further considers the role of campaigns as sources of information that can influence individual decisions. On-package communications are addressed in detail in “Can I Recycle This?” A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging, published in May 2020 by Consumers International and UNEP. *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, from UNEP in 2017, is also a valuable reference for relevant, accessible sustainability information.

2 Motivation

Beyond simply being aware of the problem, individuals need to feel that the plastic waste problem is relevant to them, understand specifically what they can do about it, and be prepared to make different choices in their plastic consumption.

This report focuses on the role campaigns can play in shifting mindsets and behaviours, identifying the specific strategies that recent research has shown are effective.

3 Opportunity

Individuals cannot shift toward sustainable consumption of plastic when they do not have sustainable options. Companies can enable sustainable consumption of plastic by designing products and packages to maximize circularity. Governments can also use policy to ban or tax unsustainable items and require a minimum level of sustainability or circularity in others.

This report reinforces the finding from other research that opportunity is a significant barrier to the adoption of sustainable consumption of plastic, and highlights the importance of campaigns that aggregate and amplify the voices of individuals asking companies for more sustainable options and governments for policies that facilitate sustainable consumption.

Scope and Definitions

This report focuses on campaigns as a mechanism for influencing individual choice and behaviour. Campaigns can contribute to the three necessary elements, identified above, for shifting behaviour to sustainable consumption: information, motivation and opportunity. Campaigns influence individual behaviour; they aggregate individuals’ voices to communicate to companies and government; and they can generate momentum that gives them an outsized impact.

This report helps identify strategies that research has shown are effective.

For the purpose of this report, a campaign is defined as:

an organized course of action formulated to achieve a particular result that may be executed through one or more communications channels, including TV, radio, print media, social media, events, face-to-face, websites, apps, print mailings or email.

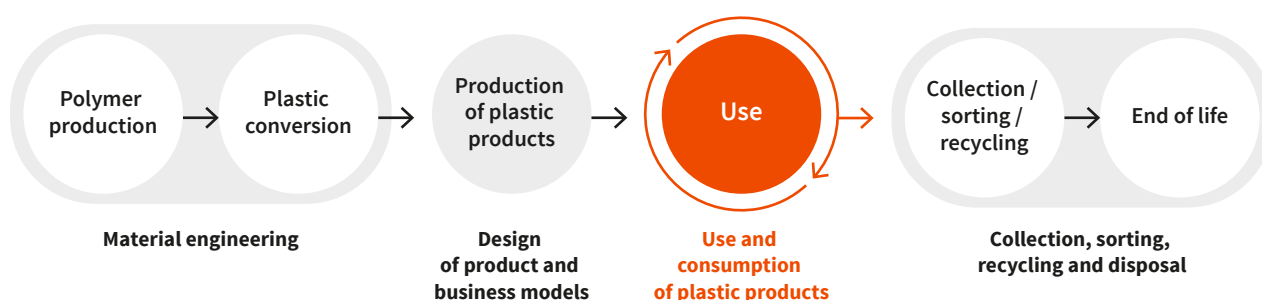
A campaign can be the sharing of a single image in an intentional way, or an integrated plan that includes every potential campaign element, and all the combinations in between. Examples provided throughout this report span this range, and the specific scope of each campaign is included in the Appendix.

Campaigns may be created and run by:

- **government agencies, policymakers or intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)** as part of efforts to align behaviour with new regulation or simply to promote sustainable behaviour as part of their mission.
- **companies** as advertisements to promote the sustainability of their products and packaging.
- **foundations or non-profits** who are working to influence individuals to adopt sustainable behaviour, aggregating and elevating individual voices demanding changes from government or companies, or rallying support for new policies.

While there are effective and necessary solutions for preventing plastic pollution at every stage of the plastic value chain, the focus for this study is on use, which includes individual plastic reduction or avoidance, purchasing decisions, and use or reuse behaviours. Campaigns around other parts of the value chain – for instance, those encouraging consumers to recycle more, or informing them about recycling correctly – are not included in this study. The ‘use’ phase is of particular importance because research has shown that this is the point where a significant amount of plastic enters the marine environment. For this reason, the One Planet Network has identified the use stage of the plastics value chain as the key intervention point in its collective response (One Planet Network 2020).

Figure 1: Systemic Actions Along the Plastics Value Chain



This report focuses on campaigns that aim to directly influence consumer decisions and behaviour: campaigns targeted at individuals as their primary audience. Campaigns that target other audiences, such as corporate board members or elected officials, are excluded.

This study focuses on the types of plastic items most commonly found in marine litter, especially single-use products and packaging – a particularly problematic category of waste.

These include:

- **plastic packaging** for fast-moving consumer goods, personal and home care products, and food and beverage products. This category represents the largest single application of plastic at 30 per cent of all plastic use (One Planet network 2020).
- **disposable plastic foodware** (plates, bowls, cups, lids, clamshells/containers, cutlery, straws and stirrers); and
- **single-use plastic bags.**

This study focuses on single-use plastic products and packaging, commonly found in marine litter.

This report is global in scope and attempts to bring examples and insights from a broad range of cultures and countries.

This report has been created following the publication of “Can I Recycle This?” A Global Mapping and Assessment of Standards, Labels and Claims on Plastic Packaging to provide the larger context around individuals’ purchase decisions beyond just on-package communications. That report considered labels for recycled content or bio-based plastics, recycling guidance, recycling finance, and compostability and biodegradability, and claims for each of those topics as well as the use of ocean plastic in the package. This report builds on that analysis to show the full set of messages that individuals may be seeing that inform their choices of products and packaging.

Methodology

The aim of this report is to use the best available research on human behaviour and psychology as it relates to sustainable consumption and to questions of plastic use specifically, to develop a set of actionable recommendations for campaign strategies that work.

To develop an understanding of the findings from academic and business literature about which campaign strategies are most, or least, effective at influencing sustainable choices on plastic by individuals, a literature review of 65 published papers, journalistic articles, and surveys was conducted. The literature review prioritized research from 2015–2020 to emphasize more recent insights into how campaigns can affect behaviour.

Real campaign examples are used to illustrate the key concepts within the three categories: effective strategies, 'watch-outs,' and common mistakes.

The insights from the literature are presented in three categories: effective strategies, 'watch-outs,' and common mistakes. Real campaign examples are used to illustrate the key concepts within these categories and, wherever possible, research specific to plastic use has been referenced. However, as behaviour around plastic has been shown to be consistent with other pro-environmental behaviours, relevant insights from other key environmental behaviour studies have been incorporated as well.

To illustrate how these strategies are used (and the mistakes that are made) in real-life campaigns targeting plastic pollution, a set of 50 case studies was compiled. They are presented in an appendix to this report, and categorized by objective, use of strategy/watch-out/mistake, relevant geography, language(s), and campaign elements, making it easy to find the most relevant ones. These 50 case studies informed the observations about how the different strategies and mistakes appear in real-world campaigns.

A long list of campaigns was compiled from the following sources:

- campaigns associated with the organizations identified among the top 25 brands in [Tackling Plastic Pollution: Top 100 Influencers, Brands and Publications from Onalytica](#);
- a request for relevant campaigns was circulated to several international email lists and newsletters, asking in particular for non-English language campaigns; and
- Google and Google Image searches, targeting non-English language campaigns in particular.

Fifty campaigns were selected from the long list, based on:

- a roughly representative mix of campaigns by governments/IGOs, companies, and non-profits/foundations, based on the number of campaigns identified overall;
- at least 12 campaigns that illustrate each of the four campaign objectives identified in this paper (see [What Strategies Are Real-Life Campaigns Using?](#));
- at least 3 examples of each mistake/strategy/watch-out; and
- a mix of languages and countries. It is acknowledged that English is over-represented in spite of best efforts within the constraints of this project.

To connect the research evidence to the real world, any available data on campaign effectiveness and outcomes is reviewed in the section [What Can We Tell About What is Working?](#)



At least 12 of the 50 campaigns illustrate each of the four objectives identified in this paper (see pages [40](#) and [42](#)).



INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

The literature review included 65 scientific papers, media articles and surveys.

The analysis revealed important findings about strategies that work for plastic campaigns, strategies that *can* work if used carefully, and others that should be avoided.

What Works – and What Doesn't



Positive social norms were among the most effective strategies for shaping behaviour.



Humour can make a campaign more memorable but can also cause individuals to take the message less seriously.

A review of the scientific literature, journalistic articles and surveys examining what can effectively shift people's behaviour revealed three important findings. Campaigns targeting plastic pollution:

- are making mistakes based on outdated beliefs about what works;
- are leveraging several strategies that work but could do more to maximize effectiveness; and
- must be careful in their use of strategies that could backfire, or prove to be double-edged swords – four strategies in particular.















The literature review provided examples of strategies that have worked, at least in the context of the research that was conducted (i.e. not all strategies found in the literature have been successfully replicated in real-world campaigns). Campaigns that targeted specific demographic or psychographic groups were typically more effective than those that didn't. Positive social norms were among the most effective strategies for shaping behaviour, when used properly, including the use of celebrity endorsers or role models. Being specific, prompting commitments and showing people that their choices mattered were also shown to positively influence behaviour.

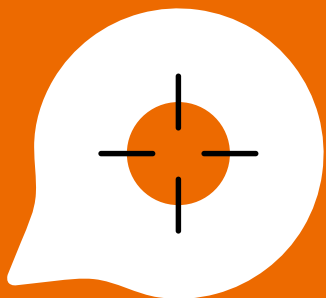
Some campaign strategies must be deployed with care. Use of positive incentives, whether financial or 'points', are effective at shaping behaviour but can undermine intrinsic motivation and must be ongoing to maintain effectiveness. Use of humour can make a campaign more memorable but can also cause individuals to take the message less seriously. Appealing to altruistic motivations will work for a segment of the population, but should not be the default messaging strategy for behaviour change related to plastic.

The review also debunked some conventional wisdom about the elements and messaging of an effective campaign. While awareness raising may be an important step on the way to action, it is ineffective by itself, and when focused on eliciting fear, guilt or other negative emotions, there is a risk that it will backfire. Appeals that reduce the geographic, temporal or psychological distance of a problem, making it relevant to individuals here and now, can be effective, while campaigns that call attention to bad behaviour can inadvertently normalize that bad behaviour, achieving the opposite of their intended result.

Table 2 provides a summary of the six effective strategies, the four watch-outs, and the four common mistakes, and provides an icon and a short name for each. The icons and names are used in the assessments of each of the campaigns reviewed in this section.

Table 2: Summary of the Six Effective Strategies, the Four Watch-outs, and the Four Common Mistakes

Effective Strategy	
 <p>#1 Customizing Recognize that different approaches will work for different people (e.g. introverts vs extroverts), and that major life transitions such as moving home and becoming a parent are opportunities to change habits.</p>	 <p>#2 Using Good Norms Use social norms to shape behaviour. People imitate others, especially those with recognized status such as celebrities, and they respond to norm-based cues about what is acceptable and expected.</p>
 <p>#3 Specifying Action Be specific about what to do. Especially when it comes to plastic, where people can feel disempowered, provide clear direction on what meaningful actions people can take.</p>	 <p>#4 Catalyzing Commitments Challenge people to make a public or private commitment to do something specific. Once people make that commitment, they are more likely to follow through and even shift habits over time.</p>
 <p>#5 Tapping Positive Emotions Tap into pride, hope and optimism. People who experience pride, hope and optimism as part of their pro-environmental behaviours tend to stick with them.</p>	 <p>#6 Showing it Matters Show that the results – even for just one person's actions – matter. In the face of a global crisis, it is easy to believe that a bottle here or a candy wrapper there doesn't matter. Show people that they do.</p>
Watch-outs	
 <p>#1 Fear Fear is most productive when there is something effective that a person can do to alleviate the threat. When the threat is existential or there is no immediate remedy, it just leads to anxiety and passivity.</p>	 <p>#2 Incentives Incentives work – but the behaviour goes away when the incentive goes away. Worse, intrinsic motivation can be eroded through incentives.</p>
 <p>#3 Humour People enjoy funny or clever campaigns and they can be more memorable. However, they do not necessarily translate into the desired behaviour change, and sometimes they do the opposite.</p>	 <p>#4 Altruism While altruistic claims resonate with some, in general, people make behavioural choices that prioritize their present needs and wants over the good of the group and even over meeting their own future needs.</p>
Common Mistake	
 <p>#1 Stopping at Awareness Assuming that making people aware of the problem will lead to behaviour change. Awareness can be a first step on the path to action, but the journey is not inevitable.</p>	 <p>#2 Using Guilt Using guilt to try to change behaviour. Appeals to guilt will create resistance in many people. For the rest, their guilt cup is already overflowing, reducing potential effectiveness.</p>
 <p>#3 Reinforcing Bad Norms Showing the regrettable frequency of undesirable behaviours. Social norms are effective at shaping behaviour – so showing the prevalence of bad behaviour backfires.</p>	 <p>#4 Allowing Distance Allowing the problem to feel distant or intangible, and relying more on statistics than images and stories. People are more moved to action by problems that are local, urgent and tangible. Physical, temporal or psychological distance all undermine our motivation to act.</p>



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

With some notable exceptions, plastic-focused campaigns were not clearly customized to particular audiences based on demographic or psychographic differences, or life stages. Only 13 out of the 50 case studies were observed to have been customized in some way. Other examples of customization (some suggestions from the literature; some from campaigns *outside* the 50 case studies) include a focus on women/mothers for sustainable shopping behaviours, activation campaigns for university students, educational campaigns for kids, and tips to go plastic free in preparation for a new baby.

The research suggests that targeting campaigns more precisely at a particular group can increase the effectiveness of that campaign for that group. Campaigners should consider designing multiple campaigns with distinct target audiences to increase impact and effectiveness.

CASE STUDIES

Clean Seas

Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent

Plastic Free July

#1 Customizing

Recognize that different approaches will work for different people – and at different times in their lives

People respond differently to campaigns and environmental messages based on gender, age, education level, values and political identity, and at different life stages. While individual studies have been conducted, the results are not consistent or coherent; it is not possible to draw clear guidelines from them for how sociodemographic variables may be best used to segment different population groups (Heidbreder et al. 2019).

That said, one theme that did emerge was that women were, in general, more likely than men to accept and use alternatives to plastic bags, and to reduce, reuse and recycle plastics in general. The downside of targeting women as primary household shoppers (Girlpower Marketing) with sustainability messages is that it has ‘feminized’ sustainability in a way that can deter men from making eco-friendly choices. One study determined that “Men’s willingness to engage in green behaviours can be influenced by threatening or affirming their masculinity, as well as by using masculine rather than conventional green branding” (Brough et al. 2016).

A number of studies have showed that life transitions are correlated with significant shifts in habits and consumption patterns – for example, going to university, becoming a parent, moving house or retiring. These are also often stressful moments in people’s lives where taking on ‘one more thing’, even with good intentions, can be challenging, though with appropriate support they can present an opening for changing habits (Thompson et al. 2011). Some of the changes that people make during life transitions may relate to the changing social norms of those life stages and the influence of a new set of peers and ‘expected’ behaviours (more on this in the next strategy: [#2, Using Good Norms](#)) (Thompson et al. 2011).

Encouragement to change works best when the new habits are aligned with the commitments and priorities of certain groups. For example, recent retirees’ decisions may be based on what is more cost effective (Bunningham and Venn 2017) and new mothers may make more sustainable consumption decisions when they align with healthier choices (Ha and Williams 2013).

People’s values, psychological profiles and existing attitudes can also be important. People who prioritize intrinsic values such as universalism and benevolence are more likely to act out of concern for others and the environment, while people who endorse extrinsic values such as wealth and power require more self-interested messaging (Blackmore et al. 2013). Other relevant divisions that can affect people’s receptiveness to sustainability messaging include: whether people accept, reject or are neutral to the idea of responsibility for their environmental impacts (Bedford et al. 2011); people’s likelihood to personify or anthropomorphize nature (Tam 2019); and their degree of extroversion vs introversion (Wang, Mukhopadhyay and Patrick 2017).



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Use of positive social norms is one of the more common effective strategies in the plastic-focused campaigns that were reviewed, though in some cases it could have been as minor as showing how many people had also signed a pledge or petition. Of the 50 case studies, 29 used social norms in some way. While it is not possible to measure the effectiveness of one strategy against another, the breadth and depth of the literature on social norms is considerably larger than that on many of the other strategies, and social norms appear to be one of the underlying mechanisms by which other strategies work (for example, common mistake #3, Reinforcing Bad Norms, is the unintentional reinforcement of undesired norms; effective strategy #4, Catalyzing Commitments, uses public pressure; watch-out #3, Humour, can act as a critique of social norms; and watch-out #2, Incentives, especially penalties, may work in part because they signal violation of a social norm). Social norms are a powerful force shaping individual behaviour and campaigners should find ways to shape and reinforce social norms to drive sustainable consumption behaviour.

CASE STUDIES

Break up with Plastic
Bye Plastic Bags
One Bag Habit

#2 Using Good Norms

Use social norms to shape behaviour

Social norms have been shown to be an effective way for campaigns to influence behaviour (Heidbreder et al. 2019).

Social norms can take different forms. Descriptive norms are simply stating what everyone else is doing, while injunctive norms signal to people about what behaviours will be approved or disapproved of by a given group.

Injunctive norms are effective at shaping behaviour by indicating what people 'should' do. For example, one study showed that the injunctive normative message, "Shoppers in this store believe that re-using shopping bags is a worthwhile way to help the environment", resulted in fewer free plastic bags being used than the traditional environmental language, "Caring for the environment. Re-use your bags" (de Groot, Abrahamse and Jones 2013).

Social norms are believed to be effective because humans are motivated to 'fit in' by doing what others are doing. People also tend to mimic, either consciously or unconsciously, what other people are doing, especially people with high status in society.

The tendency toward mimicry is one reason why the use of celebrities or other 'credible advocates' can also be effective in shifting behaviour, though it has to be genuine. "Advocates are most compelling when they themselves have undertaken the behaviour. One study found that when an advocate related why he or she had installed residential solar panels, 63 per cent more people followed suit than when the advocate had not actually installed panels" (White, Hardisty and Habib 2019; Kraft-Todd et al. 2018).

Interestingly, in studies of university students, interventions led by the students' union were more effective at promoting adoption of pro-environmental behaviours than those led by university authorities, reinforcing the importance of the credibility of the advocate (Thompson et al. 2011).

Celebrity endorsers and other 'influencers' can, in some ways, be seen as 'super normers' by demonstrating that they have adopted a sustainable behaviour. It should be noted though, that, as with advocates, if they do not have a real or sustained commitment, the behavioural uptake by the public is undermined, and can even create a backlash (Jordan et al. 2017).

Attempts to use social norms to influence behaviour do not work when people sense or believe that they are untruthful or that they are based on false pretences.



#3 Specifying Action

Be specific about what to do

Campaigns that raise awareness of the problem and tell people to ‘Say No to Plastic’, but then stop there, can leave people unsure about what to do. While in some cases a phrase like ‘Skip the Straw’ may be sufficient instruction, when it comes to declining a single-use plastic item many people require more specific instruction on what to replace it with.

In research about motivating action on climate change, it was found that providing simple, achievable tasks was effective at driving action, even in the face of a challenge with the magnitude of climate change (Stoknes 2015). Adherence to energy-saving behaviours was even higher when prompts, such as stickers on light switches, were used.

Prompts can also be effective in changing behaviour on plastics. Prompts work best when they are “large, clear, easy to follow, and placed in proximity to where the behaviour will be performed” (White, Habib and Hardisty 2019). For example, a voice prompt over the public address system in a Japanese supermarket increased the number of people declining free plastic bags by 23 per cent (Ohtomo and Ohnuma 2014). Other examples of prompts include signs at grocery stores reminding people to bring their reusable bags, signs on restaurant tables encouraging people to only ask for a straw if they really need one, and signs at food take-out premises indicating that single-use plastic foodware is only available on request, and discouraged.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Specifying an action or actions to be taken was the most common effective strategy among the 50 case studies, being used in 36 campaigns. As noted in the observations on common mistake #1, [Stopping at Awareness](#), plastic-focused campaigns have shifted over time to ensure there is a specific call to action that tells individuals what they can do, though some calls to action are more actionable than others.

There is also a tension between how many specific things to recommend. Some campaigns pick a single action – refuse a straw, use a reusable water bottle, support a plastic bag ban – whereas others call for 5, 7, 10, 12 or more actions. As seen in the research on prompts, the number of actions is probably less important than the *salience* of the message in the decision moment.

CASE STUDIES

Nix the 6
Plastic Bag Diet
Say No to Plastic



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Of the 50 campaigns included in this review, nearly half (24) included a pledge or petition of some kind. Some pledges were very discrete and narrow, whereas others were much more ambitious, and some allowed the pledger to customize the commitment. About half of the pledges were time-bound (a week, a month, etc.) presumably with the intention to make the change feel manageable and to be in place long enough that they could cause a change of habit. While pledges made on the internet are technically public, the use of public commitments in a real-life community scenario will more directly activate the reputation-preservation instincts that partly drive the effectiveness of commitments.

CASE STUDIES

Clean Seas
Planet or Plastic
Stop Sucking

#4

Catalyzing Commitments

Challenge people to make a commitment

The next step beyond providing recommendations for specific actions is asking people to commit to taking those actions, which raises the stakes and can further motivate behaviour. Commitments that disrupt bad habits or encourage formation of positive habits can help ensure lasting behaviour change (White, Habib and Hardisty 2019).

The literature shows that having people make a commitment to do something specific can be effective at shifting behaviour, provided that the commitment is active, public, requires effort, and is voluntary. Further research has shown that there are additional ways to increase the effectiveness of commitments, including keeping the commitment salient through feedback or engaging others, increasing the specificity of a commitment, and making it fun (Lokhorst et al. 2011).

Commitments are believed to work because they tap into one or more of three underlying psychological processes. Social norms (discussed in effective strategy #2, [Using Good Norms](#)) can be activated by the public nature of the commitment and the desire to maintain one's reputation. However researchers have shown that personal norms, or feelings of internalized moral obligation, can also be activated, motivating people to keep their commitments in private as well. Another process is attitudinal alignment, in which people bring their attitudes in line with their commitments essentially by convincing themselves that they must feel a certain way or they wouldn't have made the commitment. And third, some people feel a strong need for consistency in their actions and beliefs, and will adapt their self-concept to achieve consistency (Lokhorst et al. 2011).

There can also be a spillover effect for people who like to be consistent, where if they adopt one sustainable behaviour, they are more likely to make other positive changes in the future (White, Hardisty and Habib 2019). Unfortunately, the reverse of this is also true: people who are unsuccessful in their attempts to adopt a new sustainability behaviour may discard previously adopted behaviours to get back to 'alignment'.



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Just under half of the campaigns profiled here (24 out of 50) used positive emotions. Notably, a larger share of company-run campaigns used positive emotions than those by government or NGOs. Campaigns or advertisements by companies all used positive framing and tapped into positive emotions, while campaigns by governments or IGOs were split. Campaigns by NGOs were less likely to tap into positive emotions and more likely to call on guilt, fear or shock. Campaigners working with non-profit organizations should consider embracing campaign designs that rely more on triggering feelings of pride, hope, optimism and love to improve campaign effectiveness.

CASE STUDIES

Plastic Bag Diet

Recycled Ocean Plastic

Windex Bottle

Trash Free Seas

#5

Tapping Positive Emotions

Pride, hope, optimism, love

While some studies have shown that guilt, shame, fear, loss and warning can be effective at influencing pro-environmental behaviour under some circumstances, there are significant caveats as to the applicability of those studies to the real world (these are described in common mistake [#2, Using Guilt](#) and watch-out [#1, Fear](#)).

A number of studies that are more recent and more likely to translate to actual behaviour have disputed this conclusion, demonstrating that evoking positive emotions is more effective at motivating behaviour change over time. Emotions that have been studied specifically include pride, hope, optimism and love.

Pride: Pride has been shown to be effective in driving sustainable consumption, even more so than financial rewards in some cases. “When people in one study were publicly praised each week for their energy-efficiency efforts, thus engendering pride, they saved more energy than a group that was given small (up to €5) weekly financial rewards” (White, Hardisty and Habib 2019). One study tested pride against guilt and found that not only were pro-environmental behaviours positively correlated with pride and negatively correlated with guilt, but those who experienced pride were more likely to keep up their environmental behaviours (Bissing-Olson, Fielding and Iyer 2016).

Hope: In the context of climate change, ‘constructive’ hope worked to motivate environmental behaviours, but hope based on denial had the opposite effect (Ojala 2012). In a study looking at hope and climate change, the most commonly stated reasons for feeling hopeful were personal actions and perceived changes in social awareness and norms (Marlon et al. 2019).

Optimism: Optimism has also been identified as an effective trigger for wanting to reduce disposable water bottle consumption. Notably, while pride and hope were most relevant in the initial stages of change, it was optimism that motivated people to adopt and maintain the behaviour over time (Peter and Honea 2012).

Love: In a study focused on biodiversity conservation, participants were “willing to donate more money and time to organizations associated with positively framed videos” focused on love and benefits than they were to those with negatively framed videos focused on loss and warning. Importantly, these results did not vary significantly by gender or by level of environmental concern (Jacobson et al. 2018).



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Companies selling sustainable products or promoting sustainable packaging often emphasized the importance of small actions and how they can add up to a big difference. Government or IGO campaigns were less likely to use this appeal, though nearly half of the 50 case-study campaigns did use it in some form. The non-profit-run campaigns that tapped into this strategy tended to be the ones that used social media, such as Ridiculous Packaging, or even regular mail, in the case of PacketInWalkers, to create a crowd-based activation. Other campaigns that demonstrated the significance of individual actions adapted statistics about the unfortunate and excessive use of plastic into numbers that showed how much an individual can avoid by stopping their use of plastic.

CASE STUDIES

#CrushPlastic

Fairy Concentrated

Dishwashing Liquid

PacketInWalkers

#6

Showing it Matters

Show that the results – even for just one person’s actions – matter

People asked to give up a straw or switch to a disposable water bottle may struggle with how much that action will ultimately amount to. “Overwhelmed by choices, disgusted by corporate hype and living with the fear their efforts will never be enough, people are tuning out” (Maxwell-Muir 2008).

Overwhelming, systemic, global problems like plastic pollution can feel too big for individuals to impact. And it is true that individual actions will not solve these problems single-handedly, but there is still value in individuals taking responsibility for what they can do. Campaigns that remind individuals of this can be effective at prompting positive action on an individual level.

One area of psychology – the ‘psychology of small wins’ – has studied exactly this question and has found that “a series of concrete, complete outcomes of moderate importance” can overcome barriers to action given the massive scale of social problems (Weick 1984).

Social media can be a powerful tool for both recognizing and visualizing the multiplier effect that small actions can have: for example, one person sharing his or her small action on social media can motivate many more people to take the same action, and this can be tracked in a tangible way.

Providing visualizations of the impact of small actions can be effective at encouraging behaviour change.

EXAMPLE

The difficulty of applying effective strategy
#6, Showing it Matters

The Onion, a satirical newspaper in the US, ran this story in 2010, and it speaks to the challenge of people seeing their small actions as adding up to a significant impact over time. As the article states:

“According to the inner monologue of millions upon millions of citizens, while not necessarily ideal, throwing away one empty bottle probably wouldn’t make that much of a difference, and could even be forgiven, considering how long they had been carrying it around with them, the time that could be saved by just tossing it out right there, and the fact that they had bicycled to work once last July.”



NEWS

'How Bad For The Environment Can Throwing Away One Plastic Bottle Be?' 30 Million People Wonder

1/19/10 5:00PM • SEE MORE: SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



A local resident discards a plastic bottle—just as he has done his whole life—with no perceivable effect on the environment.

WASHINGTON—Wishing to dispose of the empty plastic container, and failing to spot a recycling bin nearby, an estimated 30 million Americans asked themselves Monday how bad throwing away a single bottle of water could really be.

Source: <https://www.theonion.com/how-bad-for-the-environment-can-throwing-away-one-plast-1819571260>



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Only 11 campaigns used fear: two by governments and nine by NGOs. Companies preferred to emphasize positive emotions in their campaigns instead. Plastic campaigns use fear at two levels: at the broader level, they evoke fear of the damage to ecosystems and wildlife and the loss (to humanity) that this represents; at the personal scale, they trigger fear of the individual health impacts that plastic can have.

The challenge with using fear in this context is that individual actions do not lead to individual protection. Even in the most extreme examples of people entirely giving up personal use of plastic, they will still be exposed to the continued harms of plastic: giving up plastic foodware, for example, will not limit the amount of plastic an individual will ingest, and airborne plastic dust will still be unavoidable. Given the limitations on individuals' ability to protect themselves, it is not clear if the use of fear is productive. Campaigns whose goal is to revoke the social licence for plastic's use overall may find fear to be effective, but only if they can link the fear response to large-scale government or consumer action.

CASE STUDIES

Little Monsters

Stop Coca-Cola

Trashing Australia

Your Plastic Diet

FOUR 'WATCH-OUTS' TO BE USED WITH CARE

#1

Fear

Fear is commonly used by advertisers and campaigners as an effective way to get people's attention and motivate shifts in behaviour. But is it *effective*? The answer is... it depends.

One meta-analysis that synthesized over 120 studies with over 27,000 datapoints concluded that fear works to change attitudes, intentions and behaviours, with very few exceptions or undesirable outcomes (Tannenbaum et al. 2015).

However, flaws have been identified in the typical methods for conducting such studies, including overdependence on student subjects, forced exposure to stimuli, and short-term measurement of outcomes. There is very little field research on appealing to people's fears but what there is shows that fear has weak effects and unintended consequences. The research also shows that the use of fear in messaging strategies raises significant ethical concerns. These include the potential for chronic heightened anxiety among those most at risk and, paradoxically, complacency among those not directly targeted. There is also a risk of increased social inequity between those who respond to fear campaigns, who tend to be better off, and those who do not, who tend to be the less educated and poorer members of society (Witte and Allen 2000).

Another consideration with the use of fear is what the individual can do to respond in a way that alleviates the fear. When the individual isn't able to take action to address the threat, then the campaign is less effective, and may contribute to anxiety. "Fear appears to be a great motivator as long as individuals believe they are able to protect themselves" (Witte and Allen 2000).

"Alternatives to fear appeals are the use of positive reinforcement appeals aimed at the good behavior, the use of humor, and, for younger audiences, the use of postmodern irony." (Webb 2004)

#2

Incentives

Do incentives work to change behaviour? The short answer appears to be that sticks are more effective than carrots when it comes to influencing behaviour, but rewards (especially monetary) *can* work. The main challenge with using rewards to incentivize behaviour is that they run the risk of eroding intrinsic motivation to do the right thing, and the behaviour typically only continues so long as the reward is in place (unless the behaviour becomes a habit or inspires a mindset shift).

Research has shown that humans respond differently to positive and negative incentives, which is important for the design of these programmes. For example, studies have shown that people will do more to avoid a 10 cent surcharge than they will to earn a 10 cent discount due to a greater instinct for loss avoidance than profit seeking (Wikipedia 2020). This means that a coffee chain that gives customers a 10 cent discount for bringing a reusable mug could significantly change customer behaviour by lowering all of their prices ten cents and charging ten cents for a disposable cup, even though the net result is economically neutral for both the customer and the company.

Incentives and penalties for plastic bags show the same pattern. One study examined two policies: a 5 cent per bag fee and a 5 cent discount per reusable bag. The fee resulted in a reduction of over 40 per cent, while the discount had no discernable effect (Homonoff 2018).

A recent study shows that the effectiveness of surcharges is also due to the signal that they send about social norms. “Whereas offering a monetary incentive (including a discount) may indeed encourage one-time behaviors, our research suggests that framing that incentive as a surcharge can have longer-term effects on behavior because it signals a social norm” (Lieberman and Duke 2020).

There are efforts ongoing to demonstrate that positive incentives can be effective at influencing behaviour as well. For example, the PIPs (Personal Impact Points) rewards app, currently being piloted at the University of Colorado, awards students points for sustainable behaviours such as riding a bike or refilling a water bottle. Points can then be exchanged for up to \$500 in scholarship money.

Economic incentives are most effective with people who simply won't take up a sustainable behaviour otherwise, either because it feels like too much trouble or because they have no interest in it. For this group, external motivations and particularly financial incentives are an effective way to encourage sustainable behaviours (Barnosky, Delmas and Huysentruyt 2019).

The challenge with using financial incentives to motivate behaviour is that the behaviour stays linked with the incentive, and when the incentive goes away, so does the behaviour, unless there has been additional work done to further influence attitudes or establish the behaviour as a habit. “In order to make lasting change, systems must inspire a long-term commitment from individuals” (Barnosky, Delmas and Huysentruyt 2019). Another study cautioned that, for people with intrinsic motivation, introduction of extrinsic motivations such as financial incentives can ‘crowd out’ the intrinsic desires (White, Hardisty and Habib 2019; Frey and Oberholzer-Gee 1997).



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Only six of the campaigns profiled used incentives, either positive or negative, as part of the campaign itself. Reusable bag usage was incentivized through a discount by one retailer (Unforgettable Bag from Tesco) but another caused an outcry among customers by *requiring* their use, and charging for reusable bags automatically (Woolworths). The Positive Impact Points (PIPs) app is being piloted to determine if sustainable consumption behaviours can be positively incentivized through points that can be redeemed for cash. Companies could do more with incentives, in particular shifting from positive incentives (e.g. a small discount) or negative ones (e.g. charging a small fee for a disposable cup) to maximize the impact on behaviour change.

CASE STUDIES

Positive Impact Points

Unforgettable Bag

Woolworths Reusable Bags



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Fourteen of the campaigns reviewed used humour, and overall they did it well, with just two exceptions where it backfired. Humour is likely an underexplored area for sustainable behaviour change on plastic use. As noted above, humour can be effective at pointing out the absurdity of something that has become normalized, such as the use of plastic water bottles in parts of the world with clean, safe drinking water, in a way that doesn't make people defensive, and can lead to shifts in social norms over time.

CASE STUDIES

**April Fools/April's Fish
(Le Poisson d'avril)
Be Ready to Change
Embarrassing Bags**

#3

Humour

Using humour in campaigns can soften a negative message and make it easier to hear, or it can reflect reality's absurdity in a way that gets people's attention. "Funny ads are easier to recall and can increase awareness, knowledge and actions," according to an article that reviewed the latest literature on the subject (Borg and Goodwin 2018).

Another study concluded that humour has untapped potential for use in environmentally friendly advertising – especially as a way to move away from guilt, fear and altruism. In that study, subjects in China, Germany and the US responded to humorous adverts with a more positive attitude and greater engagement than non-humorous adverts (Griese et al. 2018).

Humour may also be particularly effective with younger people. For example, humour was cited as a success factor in a programme engaging Indonesian high school students in an environmental club (Tanu and Parker 2018).

Humour can also be a powerful reflection of social norms; funny messaging often includes a social critique and people typically do not want to be in the group being mocked (Borg and Goodwin 2018).

The challenge with humorous ads is that they may not translate into the desired behaviour change and, in fact, they can backfire and achieve the opposite if they are seen as 'making light' of the topic or are too silly (Borg and Goodwin 2018). With this caveat, the literature is very positive on the potential for humour to shape behaviour.

#4

Altruism

Many environmental campaigns plead with viewers to consider the impacts of plastic pollution on those less fortunate, on 'the earth', on the environment and wildlife, or on children and future generations, and implore them to act in the common good. What is not clear is when or if this messaging actually motivates behaviour change.

Effective strategy [#1 Customizing](#) noted that messages resonate differently for different people, and as with fear, guilt and incentives, an altruism-based strategy that can be effective for one group can have the opposite of the intended effect with another.

Studies have shown that public appeals to consider the future consequences of poor environmental practices are generally ineffective in producing behaviour change (Gardner and Stern 2002; Goldstein and Cialdini 2007). Human behaviour, according to another study, is rooted in evolved traits such as self-interest (over group welfare) and future discounting (valuing present needs over future needs). These traits can cause altruistic or long-term sustainability-based appeals to backfire (Griskevicius, Cantu and van Vugt 2012). However, appeals to pure self-interest have their drawbacks, as they can undermine the intrinsic motivation for pro-environmental behaviour, just as was noted for watch-out [#2 Incentives](#).

There is evidence that a 'both/and' strategy may be effective. Framing pro-environmental behaviours as 'win-win' – better for the consumer and better for the world – removes the implicit assumption of a trade-off or sacrifice, emphasizes the self-interested *and* altruistic benefits of the behaviour, and accommodates those who are sensitive to reputational considerations. For example, campaigns can combine altruistic appeals to action with messages about the benefits of giving up single-use plastic, such as saving money, reduced litter or reduced local flood risks.

Research shows that appeals to self-interest can motivate pro-environmental behaviour, and can help overcome barriers such as the belief that sustainable attributes can mean items are lower quality or have worse aesthetics. Appeals to self-interest are more effective in a private decision-making context than a public one, likely due to social pressures not to appear overly self-interested (White, Habib and Hardisty 2019).

Related research on saving for retirement illuminates a similar decision-making tension: the trade-off between meeting the needs of 'present self' versus the 'future self'. One study found that people treat their 'future self' essentially as a complete stranger when it comes to deciding whether to spend money now (Goldstein 2011; McGonigal 2017). The implication of people prioritizing 'current self' needs over 'future self' needs is that people need reasons *that are relevant now* to support pro-environmental decisions; messages cannot only speak to future benefits, even for their own children. This aligns with the finding that problems perceived to be at a distance – including distance over time – are less effective at motivating behaviour change. This is addressed in more detail in common mistake [#4, Allowing Distance](#).



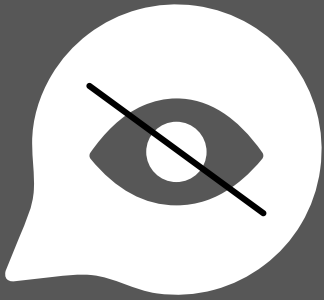
OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

The rationale for action in many plastic-focused campaigns is essentially altruistic: 'for the ocean', 'for the wildlife', 'for our children' or 'for the future'. Of the 50 campaigns profiled, 17 included an appeal to altruism as the rationale for action.

Campaigns that state the problem in more concrete terms – for instance, by talking about 'plastic waste' or 'plastic pollution' – help to reframe the problem in ways that are more relevant, personal and immediate. And campaigns that tie the problem to personal impacts – like the cost of bottled water, or litter causing local flooding – are likely to be even more effective. National or global campaigns that are not able to tailor their messages to local contexts can still highlight the benefits of immediate action for individuals and their communities, such as the improved aesthetics and functionality of reusable alternatives to plastic packaging and foodware. They can also focus on using positive social norms, to show people what 'good' looks like, without having to rely on altruistic motivations.

CASE STUDIES

Be Plastic Wise
Ending Single-use Plastic
Question How You Hydrate



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Plastic pollution campaigns prior to 2015 tended to be more problem-focused than solution-focused, but campaigns since 2015 have been more likely to include a positive call to action. While progress has been made, there are still campaigns today that present viewers with shocking facts about plastic pollution and simply leave it at that. About 20 per cent (8 out of 50) of the campaigns profiled lacked specific next steps or paths to action. There are a handful of alarming images (e.g. bird corpses with bellies full of plastic) and statistics (e.g. that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean) that are prolific in plastic campaigns and have come to be widely recognized – but that on their own are not likely to shift behaviour.

CASE STUDIES

London Fashion Week
Refuse Disposable Plastics
Trash Fish

#1

Stopping at Awareness

Assuming that making people aware of the problem will lead to behaviour change

Models of pro-environmental behaviour developed in the 1970s proposed that Environmental Knowledge led to Environmental Attitude which led to Pro-Environmental Behaviour. This concept persists today, though it has been debunked (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Studies that have looked at the relationship between awareness of the problem and its impact on behaviour have found no causal connection. As one study found, “awareness of harmful effects of plastic had no effect on usage behavior” (Heidbreder et al. 2019). In another study, even among respondents who reported caring about the environment – 86 per cent saying they believe it is important to take environmentally friendly actions on a day-to-day basis and 61 per cent saying they are very concerned about keeping the oceans clean – only 30 per cent avoided using plastic water bottles or plastic straws (WasteAdvantage 2019). Caitie Nigrelli, an environmental social scientist at Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, explained: “Research shows that knowledge isn’t the only thing that will change behavior. You usually need much more. The benefits have to be tangible and the behavior needs to be feasible and within their abilities” (Smith 2018).

A 2019 literature review on the topic of behaviour change and plastic pollution came to similar conclusions. Its findings were summarized as follows:

“Although problem awareness is high, behavior change does not follow automatically, mainly because of the following obstacles:

- 1) perceived practicability and convenience in the consumption context,**
- 2) lack of knowledge on how to implement alternatives or lack of opportunities,**
- 3) strong habits, and**
- 4) shift of responsibility.**

Therefore, behavior-based solutions need to approach these issues.”
 (Heidbreder et al. 2019)

It should be noted that studies of educational programmes, such as a college course, have shown that increased knowledge *can* translate to changes in environmental intentions and behaviours (Mohd-Yusof et al. 2015). However, campaigns tend to involve shorter periods of engagement with individuals, and on a less-intense level; therefore campaign appeals that are purely educational or informational, while necessary, are unlikely to change behaviour on their own.



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Plastic pollution campaigns seeking to make the connection between personal behaviour and the accumulating plastic in the environment and landfills have to walk a fine line between shaming people for their plastic use and making the case to do something different. Only seven of the plastic campaigns reviewed still relied on negative framing messages, focusing on guilt and shame. Encouragingly, there were also a notable number of campaigns (24 out of 50) focused on empowerment and other positive framing rather than guilt (see effective strategy #5, [Tapping Positive Emotions](#)). For longer-format videos, a common approach was to spend the first part of the video inducing guilt and horror at the scope and scale of the problem and then to pivot at the end of the video to what people can do help. This approach has its challenges: it relies on people making it to the end of the video; and in many cases the actions an individual can take seem quite small in comparison to the magnitude of the problem.

CASE STUDIES

Act on Plastic
Question How You Hydrate
Stop Coca-Cola
Trashing Australia

#2 Using Guilt

Using guilt to try to change behaviour

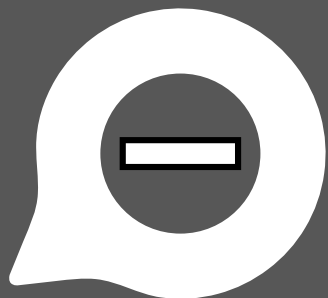
Studies have shown that, for a large portion of the population, overtly manipulative guilt appeals create resistance, rather than a desire to address the problem (Cotte, Coulter and Moore 2005). This means that campaigns that try to evoke guilt as a means of behaviour change may in fact elicit the opposite behaviour (Wonneberger 2018). In particular, using ‘existential guilt’ – when the individual is unable to address the enormity of the problem – actually results in negative attitudes (Cotte, Coulter and Moore 2005).

There is a segment of the population for which guilt works – but even here it can have unintended consequences. The Greendex consumer insights survey showed that roughly one-third of people experience “environmental guilt,” (this is the group most likely to be reached by appeals to guilt) one-third are opposed to it (i.e. they “refuse” to experience it), and one-third are neutral (National Geographic and GlobeScan 2014).

Several studies have tried to better understand why people might fall into one group versus another. One study showed that people who have accepted responsibility for their environmental impacts are vulnerable to appeals to their guilt to change their behaviour (Bedford et al. 2011). Another study showed that people who project human traits and emotions onto nature are more likely to feel guilty about negative impacts and be motivated to adopt pro-environmental behaviours (Tam 2019).

Whatever the reason, people who experience environmental guilt are also likely to become overwhelmed and discouraged by how little they are able to change as individuals, a phenomenon that has been called Environmental Guilt Syndrome, Eco Anxiety or Green Guilt. When it comes to plastic pollution, challenges like Go Plastic Free or Plastic Free Week have served to highlight just how hard, if not impossible, it is for people to make daily life choices to avoid plastic, reinforcing the impotence of the individual beyond things like bags, cups and plastic water bottles. In fact, there are a host of articles and blogs online with headlines like “Plastic pollution is not your fault”, “Why guilt has no place in the zero waste lifestyle”, “How to cope with environmental guilt syndrome”, and “Feeling the green guilt? You’re not the only one.” The list goes on.

In essence, the people who are influenced by guilt are likely already feeling acutely guilty, and many find the guilt combined with the limitations of making better choices as individuals to be deeply discouraging, while people who are neutral or opposed are unlikely to be influenced by guilt appeals.



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Many plastic pollution campaigns use statistics to show how widely used, widely littered, and infrequently recycled single-use plastic items are. While this has become a very common way for campaigns to highlight the magnitude of the problem, the research suggests that highlighting these statistics about the enormous use of plastic bags and water bottles may actually signal to people that this is 'normal' and work against messages to reduce use of single-use plastic products and packaging. Similarly, highlighting that the items most commonly found on beaches are single-use plastic products and packaging could be seen as establishing that these items are routinely littered, effectively norming littering behaviour for those items. While only 4 of the 50 campaigns profiled were seen as reinforcing undesirable behaviour, this is still a pattern observed in many other campaigns and other communications on ocean plastic pollution.

CASE STUDIES

Beat Plastic Pollution
#CrushPlastic
Woolworths Reusable Bags

#3

Reinforcing Bad Norms

Showing the regrettable frequency of undesirable behaviours

While using social norms can be a way to influence behaviour positively (more on that below, and in effective strategy #2, [Using Good Norms](#)), showing the prevalence of the undesired behaviour can backfire by showing people that the bad behaviour is actually the norm, effectively reinforcing the wrong message.

“If a program conveys a practice like littering, drug use, or corruption as widespread in an effort to educate the public about its deleterious effects, the program may actually result in an increase of the negative behavior... This means that awareness-raising campaigns that are meant to inform or shock the public by how bad the situation is in the hopes of reducing the behavior can actually increase that behavior.”
 (Scharbatke-Church and Hathaway 2017)

Other studies have shown this same dynamic with behaviours such as collecting protected wood in national parks (Cialdini et al. 2006), failing to prepare for disasters (Ozaki and Nakayachi 2020), and going off the path in a national park (American Psychological Association).



OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PLASTIC-FOCUSED CAMPAIGNS

Many plastic waste campaigns use images of marine wildlife impacted by plastic waste, which is heart-wrenching but, with the exception of people living with the problem, will not feel to most people like a problem that they are contributing to or have to worry about – it is far away and happening to somebody else. While only 4 of the 50 campaigns profiled fell into this trap, it is an easy trap for plastic campaigners to fall into, in spite of the near universal relevance of plastic to people around the world. Campaigners should continue to improve the effectiveness of their campaigns by framing the problem and desired action as locally and personally relevant.

CASE STUDIES

Ending Single-use Plastic Planet or Plastic
#UnplasticthePlanet

#4 Allowing Distance

Allowing the problem to feel distant or intangible, and relying more on statistics than images and stories

Much of the recent attention to plastic waste and plastic pollution has focused on ocean plastic: the large amounts of plastic waste accumulating in the oceans. While photos of plastic in the ocean can be very evocative, only people who live directly on the coast may imagine that their litter could end up there if not properly disposed of.

People have a tendency to discount or disregard problems that feel distant or intangible – so-called ‘psychological distance’. Psychological distance increases with physical distance, social distance (the degree to which someone is ‘like you’ or not), distance across time, and hypothetical distance (i.e. probability, where things perceived as ‘likely’ are felt to be ‘closer’). This dynamic is often cited as a reason why people don’t take more urgent action on climate change (Gardner 2018). And while ocean plastic pollution is more tangible, for most people it is still not visible in their day-to-day lives. Even though the average person generates over 100 grams of plastic waste per day (Jambeck et al. 2015), very few people connect their own waste to the plastic in the ocean.

It is worth noting that the relatively recent rise in awareness and concern for ocean plastic was not because it was a newly discovered problem – scientists had been documenting ocean plastic since 1972 (Carpenter and Smith 1972). The recent surge in interest corresponded with three things that culminated in 2015 that made the problem less distant:

- 1 A scientific paper was published estimating that 80 per cent of ocean plastic is coming from land (Jambeck et al. 2015).
- 2 Policies were passed in the US, Canada, France, New Zealand, Sweden, the UK and other countries banning plastic microbeads from cosmetics. The legislation followed the growing scientific consensus and heightened public awareness of the problem: microbeads were washing down drains and into the ocean, where they were hurting marine life (Food and Drug Administration 2017).
- 3 New and graphic images from a range of sources brought the problem ‘closer’, and showed how much the problem had grown since it was first identified.

EXAMPLE

The tension in solving common mistake #4, Allowing Distance:
Human-centred framing vs Environment-centred framing

In this review of campaigns, it was clear that plastic-pollution-focused campaigns overwhelmingly show the victims of plastic pollution to be wildlife and the ocean itself. They very rarely show the effects that plastic consumption and waste are having on people in the developing world, yet *No Time To Waste* reports that “Dumped and burned rubbish, especially plastic waste, is responsible for the death of one person every 30 seconds in developing countries.”

Would it be more effective to focus campaigns on the human toll of plastic pollution, in addition to or instead of the environmental toll? The research does not provide a clear answer, but this question can be analyzed in the context of the effective strategies, watch-outs and common mistakes discussed here.

Showing people in developed countries that their plastic waste was being transported to developing countries where it posed threats to human and environmental health could trigger a range of responses. It would be easy to slip into a guilt appeal, without working carefully to avoid it, and, as shown in common mistake #2, Using Guilt is only an effective motivator of action for a minority of the population and can create an oppositional reaction in the rest. It should also be recognized that there is a long history of guilt-based appeals for people in developed countries to help those in developing countries, through charitable giving in many forms. It could be hard for a guilt-based appeal to take action on plastic pollution to break through.

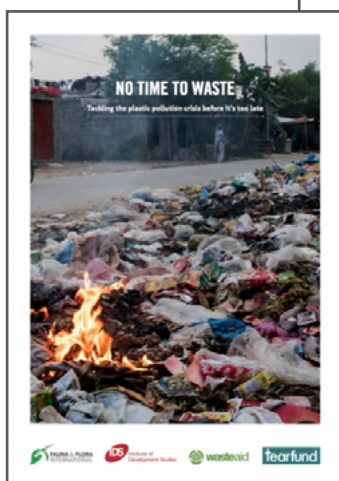
There is also the challenge of distance: the people being impacted by the plastic waste are geographically and psychologically distant from the likely viewers of the campaign. This real and perceived distance makes it more challenging to translate the problem into behaviour change.

The call to individual action for a human-centred campaign also presents a challenge: if the plastic exported to these countries is plastic that was meant to be recycled, then is it better to put plastic waste in the trash? What about the informal sector workers relying on the plastic for their income? Does declining single-use plastic have a negative impact on them?

The human toll of plastic pollution cannot be denied, and urgent action is needed by governments and companies to address it. That said, it is not clear that human-centred appeals to individuals in developed countries for action on plastic pollution will effectively translate into behaviour change for sustainable consumption.

Source (above): <https://zerowasteurope.eu/2019/04/discarded-communities-on-the-frontlines-of-the-global-plastic-crisis/>

Source (below): <https://resource.co/article/plastic-pollution-causing-health-crisis-poorer-countries-says-report>



What Strategies are Real-Life Campaigns Using?

The 50 case-study campaigns were catalogued based on a range of characteristics, summarized in Tables 3–8, on the following pages. The key insights from each characteristic are presented below.

Objectives and Type of Organization ([Table 3](#))

The most common campaign objective was ‘refuse single-use plastic products and packaging’, with 36 out of 50. Next, with 27 out of 50, was ‘choose reusable packaging and foodware’, then ‘choose – and demand – sustainable packaging and products’ with 19. ‘Support policy solutions’ was an objective for 15 of the 50 campaigns, disproportionately government campaigns; this was not an objective in any company campaigns.



16 of the 50 campaigns relied on altruism as a rationale for action.

Use of Effective Strategies ([Table 4](#)),

Watch-Outs and Common Mistakes ([Table 5](#))

Many campaigns (16 of 50), in particular those by governments and non-profits, still rely on altruism as a rationale for action, in spite of evidence that people are more likely to make and maintain behavioural changes when they perceive a benefit (or threat reduction) for themselves or their closely identified group.

The most commonly used effective strategies in the campaigns are Specifying Action (36 out of 50 campaigns) and Using Good Norms (29 of 50). More campaigns used Humour (14 of 50) than Fear (11 of 50) and only 6 used Incentives, either negative or positive, with five of those being companies. There is untapped potential in strategies such as Customizing by audience or phase of life (13 of 50), Tapping Positive Emotions (24 of 50), and showing that small actions matter (24 of 50).



A third of the campaigns asked people to make a pledge or sign a petition.

About a third of the campaigns reviewed asked people to either make a pledge or sign a petition (9 pledges; 7 petitions). About 20 per cent of campaigns made use of physical bags as part of the campaign in a variety of ways, for instance by selling or giving away reusable bags, putting embarrassing messages on disposable bags, mailing unrecyclable bags in protest, and using fees or incentives on bags.

The six highlighted rows in [Table 4](#) call out the campaigns that used the most effective strategies and avoided the common mistakes. These can be looked at as examples of highly effective campaigns from a behavioural influence perspective.



23 of the 50 campaigns profiled were relevant at the global or multi-country level.

Geography ([Table 6](#)) and Language Mix ([Table 7](#))

Twenty-three of the campaigns profiled were relevant at the global or multi-country level, and another five were regional. While a global search was conducted and requests were sent to colleagues all over the world to refer campaigns, the examples come predominantly from Europe and English-speaking countries (another 19, after the 23 globally relevant campaigns).

All but one of the campaigns was available in English, though many were also available in other languages. There were 11 in Spanish, 9 in French, 7 in German and 5 in Portuguese, and campaigns were available in other European, Asian and other languages in smaller numbers.

Campaign Elements ([Table 8](#))

Websites were the most common campaign element, with 44 out of 50 using a website, followed closely by social media with 43. Video content was used by just over half of the campaigns, with 27 out of 50, and 17 had email lists or newsletters to keep people engaged. In some cases campaigns included a pledge, a physical bag (i.e. a reusable bag), a petition, signs or posters, on-package language (i.e. plastic packaging that is advertised as 'sustainable' in some way) and TV advertisements. Some campaigns were highly creative: several were able to gamify their campaigns in various ways, including [Trash Fish](#), which had a game on its website; [London Fashion Week](#) set up a ball pit to highlight microplastic pollution; and [PacketInWalkers](#) chose to engage people by posting unrecyclable crisp packets back to the manufacturer through the mail.



27 out of the 50 campaigns used video content as a campaign element.



The [PacketInWalkers](#) campaign in the UK engaged people by posting unrecyclable crisp packets back to the manufacturer through the mail.

Table 3: Summary of Campaigns by Type of Organization Creating it and Objectives

Campaign Name	Objective			
	Refuse single-use plastic products and packaging	Choose reusable packaging and foodware	Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging and products ^a	Support policy solutions
Government or IGO				
Be Ready to Change	•	•		
Beat Plastic Pollution	•	•	•	•
Bye Plastic Bags	•	•		•
Clean Seas	•	•	•	
Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags	•			•
Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic				•
Keep Plastics Off Our Parks	•			•
Plastic Free Jamaica	•	•		•
Company				
Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle			•	
Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent			•	
Embarrassing Bags	•	•		
Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid			•	
One Bag Habit ^b		•		
Pass on Plastic	•	•	•	
Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards	•	•		
Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle		•	•	
Too Cool for Plastic		•	•	
Unforgettable Bag		•	•	
Woolworths Reusable Bags		•	•	
Non-profit				
A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future	•	•		•
Act on Plastic				•
April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)	•			
Bahamas Plastic Movement	•	•		•
Be Plastic Wise	•	•		
Break Up with Plastic	•	•	•	
#CrushPlastic				
Drink Tahoe Tap	•	•		
Ending Single-use Plastic	•			•
#ISupportBanPlasticsKE ^c	•			•
Little Monsters	•			
London Fashion Week 2019	•			
Message in a Bottle	•			•
Nix the 6	•	•		
Open Your Eyes	•			
PacketInWalkers			•	
Planet or Plastic	•	•		
Plastic Bag Diet	•	•		•
Plastic Free July	•	•	•	
Question How You Hydrate	•	•		
Refuse Disposable Plastics	•			
Ridiculous Packaging			•	
Say No to Plastic	•	•	•	
Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia	•		•	
Stop Sucking	•			
Stop the Flood of Plastic	•		•	
Trash Fish	•			
Trash Free Seas	•	•	•	
#UnplasticthePlanet	•	•	•	
Vote with Your Tote	•	•		•
Your Plastic Diet				•
TOTAL	36	27	19	15

Notes: ^a Includes packaging and products made with recycled content. ^b Industry initiative. ^c Individual person-run campaign.

Table 4: Summary of Campaigns' Use of Effective Strategies

Campaign Name	Effective Strategy					
	#1: Customizing	#2: Using Good Norms	#3: Specifying Action	#4: Catalyzing Commitments	#5: Tapping Posi- tive Emotions	#6: Showing it Matters
Government or IGO						
Be Ready to Change	•	•	•	•		
Beat Plastic Pollution		•	•	•	•	•
Bye Plastic Bags		•	•		•	•
Clean Seas	•	•	•	•	•	
Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags		•	•		•	
Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic		•	•			
Keep Plastics Off Our Parks	•		•			•
Plastic Free Jamaica			•	•	•	
Company						
Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle		•			•	•
Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent	•	•			•	
Embarrassing Bags						
Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid	•	•			•	•
One Bag Habit	•	•	•			
Pass on Plastic		•	•			•
Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards	•	•	•	•	•	•
Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle			•		•	•
Too Cool for Plastic		•		•	•	•
Unforgettable Bag		•	•	•	•	•
Woolworths Reusable Bags			•		•	
Non-profit						
A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future	•	•	•	•		•
Act On Plastic			•		•	•
April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)		•	•			•
Bahamas Plastic Movement	•		•		•	•
Be Plastic Wise			•	•	•	
Break Up with Plastic	•	•	•	•	•	
#CrushPlastic			•			•
Drink Tahoe Tap		•	•		•	•
Ending Single-use Plastic				•		
#ISupportBanPlasticsKE		•		•	•	•
Little Monsters						
London Fashion Week 2019		•				
Message in a Bottle	•		•	•		
Nix the 6	•		•	•	•	•
Open Your Eyes		•	•			
PacketInWalkers		•	•			•
Planet or Plastic		•	•	•		
Plastic Bag Diet		•	•	•	•	•
Plastic Free July	•	•	•	•	•	•
Question How You Hydrate		•		•		
Refuse Disposable Plastics				•		
Ridiculous Packaging		•	•	•		•
Say No to Plastic			•			
Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia						
Stop Sucking		•	•	•		
Stop the Flood of Plastic			•			
Trash Fish						
Trash Free Seas			•	•	•	•
#UnplasticthePlanet			•	•		
Vote with Your Tote		•	•	•	•	•
Your Plastic Diet						
TOTAL	13	29	36	24	24	24

Notes: The six highlighted rows call out the campaigns that used the most effective strategies and avoided the common mistakes. These can be looked at as examples of highly effective campaigns from a behavioural influence perspective.

Table 5: Summary of Campaigns' Use of Watch-Outs and Common Mistakes

Campaign Name	Watch-Outs				Common Mistake			
	#1: Fear	#2: Incentives	#3: Humour	#4: Altruism	#1: Stopping at Awareness	#2: Using Guilt	#3: Reinforcing Bad norms	#4: Allowing Distance
Government or IGO								
Be Ready to Change			•					
Beat Plastic Pollution	•			•			•	
Bye Plastic Bags			•					
Clean Seas				•				
Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags				•				
Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic								
Keep Plastics Off Our Parks				•				
Plastic Free Jamaica	•	•						
Company								
Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle				•				
Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent								
Embarrassing Bags			•			•		
Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid		•						
One Bag Habit		•						
Pass on Plastic								
Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards		•						
Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle								
Too Cool for Plastic			•					
Unforgettable Bag		•						
Woolworths Reusable Bags		•					•	
Non-profit								
A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future				•				
Act on Plastic	•					•		
April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)	•		•					
Bahamas Plastic Movement			•	•				
Be Plastic Wise				•				
Break Up with Plastic			•					
#CrushPlastic				•			•	
Drink Tahoe Tap			•					
Ending Single-use Plastic				•	•	•		•
#ISupportBanPlasticsKE								
Little Monsters	•				•			
London Fashion Week 2019				•	•			
Message in a Bottle								
Nix the 6	•							
Open Your Eyes	•			•				
PacketInWalkers								
Planet or Plastic			•					•
Plastic Bag Diet						•		
Plastic Free July								
Question How You Hydrate	•		•	•		•	•	•
Refuse Disposable Plastics	•			•	•			
Ridiculous Packaging			•					
Say No to Plastic								
Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia	•			•	•	•		
Stop Sucking			•					
Stop the Flood of Plastic			•					
Trash Fish			•		•			
Trash Free Seas								
#UnplasticthePlanet				•		•		•
Vote with Your Tote								
Your Plastic Diet	•				•			
TOTAL	11	6	14	16	7	7	4	4

Table 6: Campaign Examples by Geography

Scale	Geography/Location	Campaign Name	
Global	Global /	A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future	
	Multi-country	Be Plastic Wise Beat Plastic Pollution Break Up with Plastic Clean Seas #CrushPlastic Ending Single-use Plastic Little Monsters Nix the 6 Open Your Eyes Pass on Plastic Planet or Plastic Plastic Free July Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle Refuse Disposable Plastics Ridiculous Packaging Stop Sucking Trash Fish Trash Free Seas Unforgettable Bag #UnplasticthePlanet Your Plastic Diet	
	Region	Europe	Be Ready to Change Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid
		Mediterranean countries	Stop the Flood of Plastic
		Caribbean Small Island Developing States	Bahamas Plastic Movement Plastic Free Jamaica Break Up with Plastics – Caribbean
	Country	Australia	Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia Woolworths Reusable Bags
		Canada	Embarrassing Bags
		Chile	Bye Plastic Bags
		Colombia	Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent
		France	April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)
		India	Say No to Plastic Break Up with Plastics – India
		Indonesia	Plastic Bag Diet
		Kenya	#ISupportBanPlasticsKE Keep Plastics Off Our Parks
		Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland	One Bag Habit
		Thailand	Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags
		UK	London Fashion Week 2019 Message in a Bottle PacketInWalkers Too Cool for Plastic
		US	Act On Plastic Drink Tahoe Tap Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards Question How You Hydrate Vote with Your Tote

Table 7: Summary of Campaigns by Language

Campaign Name	English	Spanish	French	German	Portuguese	Italian	Finnish	Swedish	Hungarian	Russian	Chinese	Arabic	Hindi
Government / IGO													
Be Ready to Change ^{a, d}	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•				
Beat Plastic Pollution	•	•	•		•					•	•	•	•
Bye Plastic Bags	•	•											
Clean Seas ^{b, h}	•	•			•					•	•	•	•
Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags ^b	•												
Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic	•												
Keep Plastics Off Our Parks	•												
Plastic Free Jamaica	•												
Company													
Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle	•												
Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent	•	•											
Embarrassing Bags	•												
Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid ^{a, d}	•	•	•	•	•	•			•				
One Bag Habit ^{c, d}	•						•	•					
Pass on Plastic	•			•		•							
Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards	•												
Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle	•	•	•										
Too Cool for Plastic	•												
Unforgettable Bag	•												
Woolworths Reusable Bags	•												
Non-profit													
A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future	•												
Act on Plastic	•												
April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)			•										
Bahamas Plastic Movement	•												
Be Plastic Wise	•		•										
Break Up with Plastic	•												
#CrushPlastic	•												
Drink Tahoe Tap	•												
Ending Single-use Plastic	•												
#ISupportBanPlasticsKE	•												
Little Monsters	•		•										
London Fashion Week 2019	•												
Message in a Bottle	•												
Nix the 6	•												
Open Your Eyes	•												
PacketInWalkers	•												
Planet or Plastic	•												
Plastic Bag Diet ^e	•												
Plastic Free July	•												
Question How You Hydrate	•												
Refuse Disposable Plastics ^f	•	•	•	•	•					•	•	•	
Ridiculous Packaging ^g	•	•											
Say No to Plastic	•												•
Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia	•												
Stop Sucking	•												
Stop the Flood of Plastic	•			•									
Trash Fish	•						•	•					
Trash Free Seas	•												
#UnplasticthePlanet	•	•	•	•									
Vote with Your Tote	•												
Your Plastic Diet ^g	•	•		•									
TOTAL	49	11	9	7	5	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3

Notes: ^a Also available in Danish, Czech, Dutch, Croatian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Estonian, Bulgarian, Greek, Maltese (2). ^b Also available in Thai (2). ^c Also available in Norwegian (1). ^d Also available in Polish (3). ^e Also available in Indonesian (1). ^f Also available in Ukrainian and Greek. ^g Also available in Japanese. ^h Also available in Korean. ⁱ Social media posts were in many languages.

Table 8: Summary of Campaigns by Element

Campaign Name	Campaign Element									
	Website	Social Media Posts/Kit	Video	Email/Newsletter	Pledge	Bags	Petition	Signs/Posters	On-package	TV Advert
Government or IGO										
Be Ready to Change	•	•	•							
Beat Plastic Pollution ^h	•	•	•		•					
Bye Plastic Bags ^a	•	•	•							
Clean Seas ^d	•	•	•	•	•					
Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags	•	•	•			•				
Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic	•	•		•						
Keep Plastics Off Our Parks	•	•								
Plastic Free Jamaica		•				•				
Company										
Coca-Cola 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle			•						•	•
Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent	•	•							•	•
Embarrassing Bags						•				
Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid ^d	•		•						•	
One Bag Habit	•	•						•		
Pass on Plastic ^m	•	•	•	•	•	•				
Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards	•									
Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle	•	•	•						•	•
Too Cool for Plastic ^j	•	•	•							
Unforgettable Bag	•	•				•		•		
Woolworths Reusable Bags	•	•				•		•		
Non-profit										
A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future ^l	•	•	•	•						
Act on Plastic	•	•	•				•			
April Fools/April's Fish (<i>Le Poisson d'avril</i>)	•	•	•							
Bahamas Plastic Movement ^d	•	•	•	•						
Be Plastic Wise	•	•	•	•	•					
Break Up with Plastic	•	•	•							
#CrushPlastic	•	•								
Drink Tahoe Tap ^m	•							•		
Ending Single-use Plastic ^f	•	•	•	•			•			
#ISupportBanPlasticsKE		•								
Little Monsters	•									
London Fashion Week 2019 ^g		•								
Message in a Bottle	•	•	•				•			
Nix the 6 ^d	•	•	•	•	•					
Open Your Eyes	•	•								
PacketInWalkers ^b	•	•				•	•			
Planet or Plastic ^g	•	•		•	•					
Plastic Bag Diet	•	•	•			•	•			
Plastic Free July ^{c,k}	•	•	•	•	•			•		
Question How You Hydrate	•	•	•	•	•					
Refuse Disposable Plastics ^e	•	•		•	•					
Ridiculous Packaging	•	•					•			
Say No to Plastic	•	•						•		
Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia			•							•
Stop Sucking	•	•	•	•						
Stop the Flood of Plastic	•	•		•			•			
Trash Fish ^h	•	•	•					•	•	
Trash Free Seas	•	•		•						
#UnplasticthePlanet	•	•	•							
Vote with Your Tote	•	•	•	•		•				
Your Plastic Diet ⁱ	•	•		•						
TOTAL	44	43	27	17	9	9	7	7	5	4

Notes: ^a Survey (1). ^b Send crisp packets through the Royal Mail (1). ^c Infosheets (3). ^d Infographic (4). ^e Ball pit representing microplastics (1). ^f Billboards (2). ^g Magazine (1). ^h Game (2). ⁱ Teaching toolkit and online store/shopping resources (3). ^j PR strategy (1). ^k Other assets (badges, etc.) (1). ^l Calculator to determine how much plastic you are consuming (1). ^m Branded reusable bottles (2).

What can We Tell About What is Working?

While it is relatively straightforward to track views or likes or other engagement via social media, determining the true impact that a campaign has had on individual behaviour is complex and costly. Campaigns that do measure it do not typically share it, though a great deal could likely be learned if all campaign outcomes data were available in an open source format. For this report, any measurement or effectiveness data that could be found is shared or referenced in that campaign's profile in the Appendix, along with observations based on that data.



9 out of 10 people who participated in the [Plastic Free July](#) campaign made changes that have become habits/a way of life.

Only a handful of campaigns have true results to share. One metric is whether the policy they were advocating for passed or not. In the case of [Help Colorado Break Free From Plastic](#), the proposed policy was defeated; however the [Message in a Bottle](#) campaign in the UK was successful. In several cases, the policies are still pending – neither passed nor defeated as yet.

[PacketInWalkers](#) was a notable success, with Walkers agreeing to set up collection bins to collect crisp wrappers for recycling. However this didn't address the underlying issue, which remains unresolved.

The most direct indication we have of the possible impact of campaigns on individual behaviour change comes from the [Plastic Free July](#) campaign. They reported that “9 out of 10 people (who participated in Plastic Free July) made changes that have become habits/a way of life.” This campaign uses all six effective strategies and none of the watch-outs or common mistakes.

The two notable failures both involved bags. In the case of [Embarrassing Bags](#), the result was the opposite of what had been intended: people wanted more bags, not less. In the [Woolworths](#) example, the reusable bag programme received pushback because of the way the incentive was implemented, which was a setback for what otherwise might have been a tidy victory.

It is clear that with more data shared more freely, further insights could be found to inform future campaigns and more effectively drive behaviour toward sustainable consumption.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this report, there are four key recommendations for NGOs, governments, companies and others designing campaigns to influence sustainable consumption behaviour:



Use watch-outs with care



#1 Fear Tread carefully when using an approach that may evoke fear. Fear, without offering any meaningful action that can be taken to reduce the threat, creates anxiety rather than action.



#2 Incentives Use incentives to build new habits, but avoid undermining intrinsic motivation.



#3 Humour Use humour when it can be done in line with the campaign objectives, in particular with younger audiences. Humour can provide a social critique in a way that doesn't make people defensive, and humorous campaigns tend to be more memorable.



#4 Altruism Combine appeals to the greater good or the future with messages about benefits to individuals and communities in the present to ensure resonance with the broadest possible audience.

#1 Stopping at Awareness Don't assume that awareness of the problem will lead to behaviour change, as this has been shown not to be the case. Campaigns that do not provide a specific rationale for behaviour change are unlikely to influence behaviour.



#2 Using Guilt Don't use guilt to try to change behaviour; while it works for some, those people are already struggling with an excess of environmental guilt, and for everyone else it triggers resistance.



#3 Reinforcing Bad Norms When tapping into social norms, be careful not to inadvertently emphasize the regrettable frequency of undesirable behaviour, as this effectively tells people that the 'wrong' behaviour is actually the norm.



#4 Allowing Distance Frame the problem and solutions as 'close' – in terms of time, space, personal impacts and geography. Measure and share the outcomes of campaign strategies to enable further research and learning.



Avoid the common mistakes

Evaluate and share



Measure and share the outcomes of campaign strategies to enable further research and learning.

Further, these additional actions are needed to enable true progress on this problem:

Companies

Companies must act with urgency to provide sustainable plastic product and packaging options and information to individuals to enable them to make sustainable choices. Specifically, companies must take these actions to enable their customers to make better choices:

- Take action to eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging.
- Take action to move from single use toward reuse models.
- 100 per cent of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- Set an ambitious recycled content target.

Governments

Governments must enact policies to create the conditions for sustainable consumption, to reduce the barriers for individuals to make sustainable choices. Specifically, governments must take these actions to support the adoption and scaling of solutions:

- Ban, restrict, or place a tax/fee on single-use plastic products and unnecessary or excessive packaging.
- Implement incentives for reuse and ensure that policy enables/ allows reuse.
- Contract with reusables services (e.g. caterers that use reusable foodware or cups for events or cafeterias).
- Require plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.
- Align procurement policies for government purchases with requirements for recyclability, reusability or compostability. Include requirements for a minimum percentage of recycled content.

Conclusion

The campaigns profiled in this report reflect a mere sample of the campaigns that have been run globally since 2015 to encourage, catalyze, coerce, challenge and scare people into changing how they consume single-use plastics. Examining them in the context of the findings from recent literature about common mistakes campaigns make, effective strategies, and tactics to employ with caution, was intended to provide tangible examples to learn from so that governments, companies, foundations and non-profits can design campaigns for maximum effectiveness.

Campaigns can direct purchasing behaviour, shape reuse behaviour, and/or can be used in conjunction with policy to drive societal shift toward more sustainable plastic consumption.

While the literature referenced here provides needed insights, it also has limitations. Much of the research is done in a laboratory setting rather than in the real world. More work is needed to understand how people respond to campaigns in real-world settings, and what works best to influence sustainable consumption choices in enduring ways.

Finally, those designing campaigns can only ask people to take actions that they have the opportunity to take. Individuals seeking to change their consumption patterns for plastic have more options than in recent years, but sustainable plastic packaging is still the exception rather than the rule. Sustainable consumption is not possible without sustainable options or credible sustainability information to compare available options. Campaigns can elevate individuals' voices to demand that companies change, and can call companies out for their poor sustainability performance, but until sustainable alternatives are prevalent, it is very difficult for individuals to live their values through their purchasing decisions.

Well-designed campaigns can have a clear and sustained impact on consumption behaviour. Campaigns can direct purchasing behaviour, shape reuse behaviour, and/or can be used in conjunction with policy to drive societal shift toward more sustainable plastic consumption. The more effective these campaigns are, the faster society can shift toward sustainable consumption and production.

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CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES

Campaigns are presented in alphabetical order by name.

Please see the previous section, What Strategies Are Real-Life Campaigns Using?, to identify campaigns based on their different characteristics.



A Million Acts of Blue for a Plastic-Free Future

Organization

Greenpeace International

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts, social media group page, videos, toolkit, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English, with social media posts in many languages

Description

Building on the million actions of Greenpeace change agents over the past year (as of April 2018) calling on corporations to stop producing single-use plastics, the campaign calls on local people everywhere to be part of continuing to turn the tide to stop plastic pollution at its source.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/toolkit-plastic-free-future

www.facebook.com/groups/plasticfreefuture/about

www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/learn-about-plastic-pollution

www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/challenge-local-restaurant

Results

More than 10,000 people had viewed the A Million Acts of Blue video on YouTube as of 13 July 2020.

Assessment

Overall

The focus of the campaign is on empowering people all over the world to take action in their own communities, which leverages many of the effective strategies. The campaign does rely on some altruistic messages to make the case for action overall.

Observations

- The campaign is meant to be customized to address local communities and support local action, which also has the benefit of reducing distance between people and the problem.
- The campaign provides many specific actions people can take to implement a variety of different solutions.
- The campaign elevates and amplifies the impact of individual actions.
- The campaign does use some images of people living with plastic waste, emphasizing the human element of the challenge.
- The overall tone of the campaign is that of positivity and empowerment, even having set the grim reality as context.



Act on Plastic

Organization

Plastic Oceans International in partnership with Kolossal

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts, 15-min video, petition

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2019

Geography

US – California

Languages

English

Description

Campaign to rally support for two bills being considered by the California state legislature.

Objectives

Support policy solutions.

Results

Legislation is still pending.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign seeks to tap into a range of emotions, both negative – fear, hopelessness, guilt – and positive – hope, inspiration, and personal significance. It isn't clear what the net effect will be on viewers (especially for those who may stop the video after the negative first part and not get to the positive second part). The call to action is clear and well supported.

Observations

- The video makes a case for action beyond altruism, talking about why humans need the ocean to be healthy, impacts on human health (e.g. the fact that we are eating much more plastic than people realize), and economic impacts (e.g. litter clean-up, waste management) – and some of the way this is talked about gets into the fear/guilt lane, evoking negative emotions. “There will be no escape from this.”
- The video then pivots to the policy solution that they are building support for and the message becomes much more hopeful and positive, emphasizing the changes that are possible.
- The specific instructions actually tell people to sign the petition and contact legislators before learning more about the proposed legislation, which places the highest priority actions first but assumes people are ready to act before hearing the case for action.

plasticoceans.org/act-on-plastic



April Fools/April's Fish (*Le Poisson d'avril*)

Organization

Sea Shepherd

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Video, social media posts, webpages

Channels

YouTube, website, social media

Year

2019

Geography

France

Languages

French

Description

This ad adapts the traditional April Fool's Day joke in France of affixing a paper fish to someone's back to instead pin a plastic bottle to someone's back. The campaign cites a number of the commonly used discouraging statistics before pivoting to the proposed 'hack' of the French way of celebrating April Fool's Day. The last line of the video brings back the seriousness, reminding viewers that plastic pollution is not a joke.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products and packaging.

twitter.com/culturepub/status/1112689232383016960/photo/1

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOPgNsj1m3Y

twitter.com/SeaShepherdFran/status/1112592566912978944

twitter.com/SeaShepherdFran/status/1112737096123457548

seashepherd.fr/index.php/actu-editos/actualites/146-pollution-d-avril

Results

The video on YouTube had nearly 10,000 views as of 12 July 2020. Social media posts had engagement levels in the hundreds.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign is a clever play on a common tradition and effectively uses humour to engage audiences in taking new action, even if it is doing something silly.

Observations

- The funny call to action is an effective use of humour to bring awareness to a serious problem.
- The use of some alarming statistics drifts into using fear as a call to action, but this is balanced out somewhat by the use of humour as well.
- The campaign gives participants a specific task that represents something tangible that people can do. Even though hanging a bottle on someone's back isn't going to directly solve plastic pollution, it taps into the idea that each person's actions are significant, and even small actions can be meaningful.
- The website provides specific actions to take, beyond handing a bottle on a friend's back.
- The participatory and visible nature of the challenge also taps into social norms, which can be positively reinforced as people see others taking on this challenge and seeing the momentum that builds.



Bahamas Plastic Movement

Organization

Bahamas Plastic Movement

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, videos, social media posts, infographic, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email, in-person events

Year

2015

Geography

Bahamas

Languages

English

Description

The campaign has a dedicated website that provides problem statement, solutions, engagement opportunities, and videos. The campaign is largely focused on the Bahamas but also indicates it wants to address plastic pollution globally.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

Engagement on social media posts is typically below 100. Facebook page has a few thousand followers. Website traffic and participation in workshops is unknown.


Assessment

Overall

The campaign is grounded in a compelling local context but leans on altruism more than it probably needs to. Videos and engagement opportunities are likely effective at driving individual action.

Observations

- In a few places the impacts of plastic waste on the Bahamas are called out, but could do more to emphasize the local relevance of the problem to reduce distance and increase customization and specificity of messaging.
- Uses positive language around the vision for a plastic-free Bahamas and expresses optimism and pride.
- Local interest is sometimes cited, but more often the rationale for action is altruistic (damage to marine life globally).
- Lengthy infographic provides specific recommendations for action at home, at the office, and while shopping.
- Bahamas Plastic Movement supports the ban of four specific items through social media.
- The campaign uses humour well, for example, in the ‘funeral’ for banned plastic items with a video of people paying their last respects.
- Specific opportunities and information are created for different groups, such as students and educators.



86% of plastic packaging is used once and thrown away.

Be Plastic Wise

Organization

Ocean Wise

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, pledge, videos, social media posts, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English, French

Description

This campaign's premise is "Single-use plastic waste is harming ocean life. Ocean Wise® created the Plastic Wise initiative to raise awareness and share solutions to address the crisis of ocean plastic. Join us. #BePlasticWise." The 12 Plastic Wise challenges are all available on the website with supporting data and videos, and can be taken on one month at a time (as prompted by email following signing on to the pledge).

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

The YouTube video "Take the Pledge" had more than 17,000 views as of 28 June 2020. The pledge does not provide the total number of signatories when you sign up.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign does a good job of using effective strategies such as specific calls to action, use of commitment, and tapping into positive emotions. The rationale for action, however, is centred on an altruistic appeal to stop plastic waste from harming ocean life, which may not be as effective with all people as alternate framing.

Observations

- The rationale provided is that plastic waste is harming ocean life, which is an altruistic appeal.
- The 12 elements of the pledge are specific and actionable.
- While there is a pledge, which taps into the use of commitments to drive behaviour change, the option to not have one's name displayed on the pledge roll may reduce the effectiveness of the pledge, as public pledges are more likely to be adhered to than private ones.
- Language like "We applaud you for taking the initiative to reduce single-use plastic" taps into positive emotions such as pride.



Be Ready to Change

Organization

European Commission

Organization type

Government

Elements

A video, sharable social media content, and an informative web platform, which includes details on EU actions and initiatives that address plastics

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Europe

Languages

English, Spanish, German, French, Polish, Danish, Czech, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Croatian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Swedish, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Greek, Maltese

Description

In the video, the shopper chooses the disposable foodware and then we see how single-use plastic products and packaging fail people again and again: fork breaks leading to embarrassment at party, slice of cake falls off flimsy plate leading to more embarrassment, and person falls off treadmill trying to open plastic water bottle.

www.bereadytochange.eu/en/campaign

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

The video has been seen nearly 5.5 million times on Youtube as of 15 June 2020.

Assessment

Overall

Engaging and relatable, this campaign uses social norms (and humour) very effectively to show that single-use plastic products and packaging are no longer acceptable, all framed in the moment of individual choice.

Observations

- Placing a man in the central role may be based on research that shows men are more likely to choose disposable foodware, though this is not confirmed.
- Effective use of humour.
- Brings viewer into the moment of consumption choice and clearly demonstrates the right vs wrong choice.
- Does not acknowledge the price difference, though low price is often a rationale for choosing single-use plastic products and packaging.



Beat Plastic Pollution

Organization

UNEP, with World Environment Day, India 2018
(host of World Environment Day 2018)

Organization type

Intergovernmental organization

Elements

Website, video, social media posts, game of 'tag' via social media (challenging others to action), pledge

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi

Description

This campaign for World Environment Day 2018 catalyzed posts from around the world: groups shared what they had done and challenged others to do the same.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

4.2 million people had watched the music video (in Hindi) as of 25 June 2020.

Assessment

Overall

Assets provided are a mix of positive messaging and discouraging data. Social media posts sharing what different groups are doing bring inspiration and hope as well as suggesting new social norms.

Observations

- The website provides high-impact data in a powerfully visual form: can be a strong call to action, but can risk triggering feelings of fear or of being overwhelmed. "Things you can do" is just one sentence at the bottom of the page.
- The statistic at the bottom of the English image promoting reusable water bottles risks reinforcing the bad norm of people using disposable water bottles' by showing how widespread it is.
- The 'tag' game is also a form of social norming, promoting positive behaviour and challenging others to follow the same example.
- The commitment statement provided in these and many other social media posts may help catalyze action. The public commitments made by organizations and individuals stating the action they will take are more likely to be effective than people making personal commitments.
- The video uses celebrities supporting the cause, which is a way of using social norms in a positive way.

www.pinterest.com/pin/411305378466433459

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JENHhWeHtk

twitter.com/UNDPMaldives/status/1003898125969321985



Break Up with Plastic

Organization

Global Environment Facility-funded Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (GEF IWEco) Project

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Videos

Channels

Youtube, social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Caribbean, India, Singapore, Canada, Europe, Global

Languages

English, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Russian, Thai

Description

A music video telling the story of a girl who ends a toxic relationship – with plastic. “Break up with plastic” was a meme around Valentine’s Day 2018, and several other non-profits and even companies created their own #breakupwithplastics videos. Note: The UNEP video is part of the Clean Seas campaign which is profiled separately.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0FHWQSAP1M
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oyO4eofJrY
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWMIZY6tgFK

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

The Caribbean video has been seen more than 3,000 times on Youtube as of 15 June 2020. The Spanish language version of the video has been seen nearly 50,000 times. Most others have been viewed hundreds of times.

Assessment

Overall

Draws on multiple effective strategies and is fun to watch, too. Makes the point clearly and in a way that is likely to resonate with the target audience.

Observations

- Cultural relevance with target audience (Caribbean states, young people).
- Uses storytelling effectively to demonstrate shifting social norms in a fun and engaging way.
- Encourages people to take a specific action and to commit to doing so.
- May resonate particularly well with those who tend to personify objects.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrzc4tYgZ1o
www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbDYdzsxJt4
www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2cxofcp6_k



Bye Plastic Bags and Bye Straws

Organization

Government of Chile, Ministry of Environment

Organization type

Government

Elements

Website, short video, survey results, social media posts, social media kit

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Chile

Languages

English, Spanish

Description

This campaign includes a short video with a child's voice describing the world we want (pure, clean nature, not fouled by plastic bags), saying that 95 per cent of Chileans support this vision, as well as a website with information about the law and the government officials involved with it, the results from a national survey, and 30 social media images. There is a sister campaign Bye Straws which takes a similar approach. The Bye Straws video uses the same concept as Stop Sucking with people using straws getting whacked by a large flipper.

<http://chaobolsasplasticas.cl/en/>
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggnm0PQB0pM

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

The video on YouTube has been seen 2,900 times as of 25 June 2020.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is specific and action-oriented and generally positive in its approach, which should be effective.

Observations

- The use of the survey results showing broad agreement on actions needed should be an effective form of social norming for positive impacts.
- The short video brings a feeling of optimism even in the face of a significant challenge.
- The campaign gives people the specific action of bringing reusable bags to support this change.
- The campaign calls on the pride of Chileans in that they are the first country in Latin America that has taken this action.
- “It’s just one straw” which then goes on to become many straws demonstrates the significance of small actions.



Clean Seas

Organization

UNEP

Organization type

Intergovernmental organization

Elements

Website, videos, social media assets, pledge, interactive infographic, email newsletter

Channels

Web, YouTube, social media, email

Year

2017

Geography

English, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Russian, Thai

Languages

English, Spanish

Description

This campaign features an interactive infographic aimed at helping people tackle 'hidden' plastics in their bathrooms, and raise awareness both to make different purchase choices as well as to encourage recycling. There is also a pledge, a student handbook and several videos.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

www.cleanses.org/features/whats-your-bathroom
www.cleanses.org/pledge
www.cleanses.org/resources

Results

More than 100,000 people had taken the pledge as of 13 July 2020. The Clean Seas launch video has been seen more than 8,000 times.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign brings together five of the six elements of strategies that work, and avoids the watch-outs and common mistakes.

Observations

- The Back to School Plastics Challenge uses a life transition to support a change in habits.
- Sharing how many people have already taken the pledge is a form of using social norms to shape behaviour, as is the use of celebrities in the launch video.
- The infographic provides very specific actions that individuals can take for more sustainable consumption of plastic in personal care categories.
- The confirmation message for signing up for the pledge is very upbeat and optimistic – very encouraging indeed.
- The rationale for action is focused on marine life and ecosystems, rather than making the problem feel more immediately relevant to individuals.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=faweESvAzC8
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Coa8jTdfyA



Coca-Cola: 100% Recycled Plastic Bottle

Organization

Coca-Cola Australia

Organization type

Company

Elements

TV commercial, messaging on package

Channels

TV

Year

2019

Geography

Australia

Languages

English

Description

A ladybug and ants work together to recycle an empty Coke bottle, which is promoted saying “I’m now made from 100% recycled plastic.” The tag line “With a little help, we can make a big change” encourages people to recycle to provide recycled plastic for Coke bottles.

Objectives

Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging and products.

Results

The video has been seen more than 33,000 times on YouTube as of 15 June 2020.

Assessment

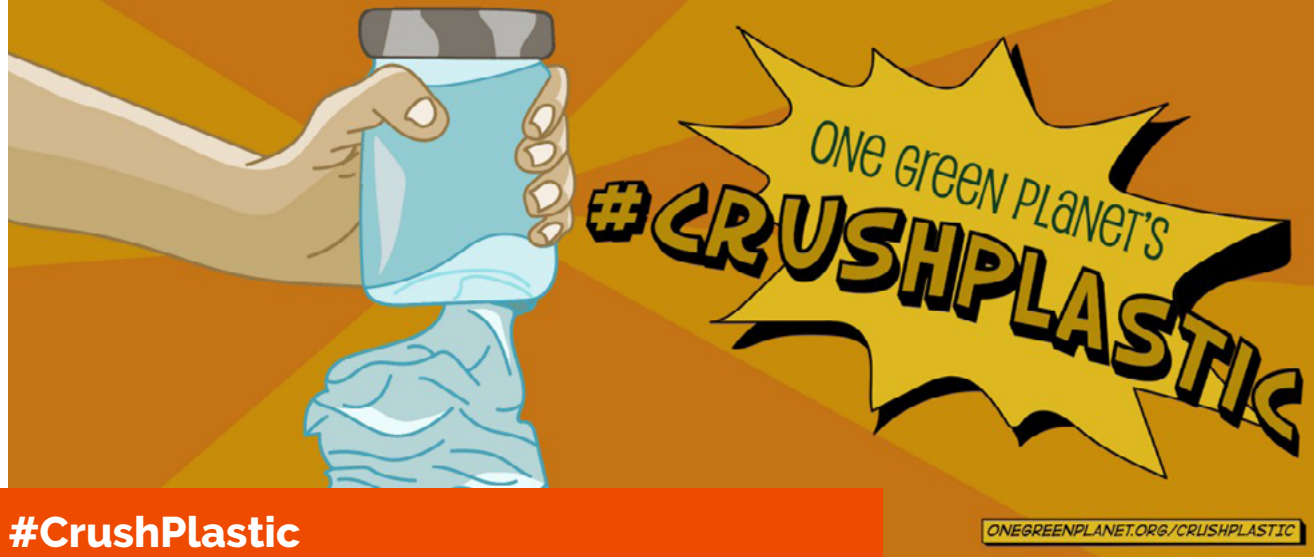
Overall

Sweet message of working together to recycle (which risks drifting into an altruistic appeal), that promotes the 100% recycled content packaging and connects it to the act of recycling to support two pro-environmental behaviours.

Observations

- While the commercial is more focused on encouraging recycling than promoting recycled packaging, it does present the 100% recycled plastic bottle as a selling point for the product (in fact, it doesn’t even mention any other product characteristics). You could even say that this commercial is entirely about the packaging, and not the product itself.
- The commercial and tagline emphasize the importance of working together toward the greater good – which could be seen as an appeal to altruism.
- “We can make a big change” connects the idea that, even though it is just one bottle, the impact of each person recycling is quite significant.
- Showing insects recycling is a form of using social norms to reinforce a positive behaviour.
- The personification of nature primes people to take pro-environmental actions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Crpab4WWic&feature=emb_logo
www.brandinginasia.com/the-insects-are-recycling-its-the-least-you-could-do-to-pitch-in-too



#CrushPlastic

Organization

One Green Planet

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Social media posts, webpage

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

The campaign includes several images and cartoons based on the same idea: the specific and significant impact of one person's actions giving up plastic.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products and packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

www.onegreenplanet.org/crushplastic

Results

No results could be found for this campaign.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign does a good job of focusing on the importance of individual actions and the potential significance that this can have, though it also at times falls into the trap of demonstrating the significant levels of bad behaviour and unsustainable consumption.

Observations

- Good use of numbers to show the significance of an individual's actions.
- The website provides a set of specific actions that people can take to avoid plastic packaging.
- This campaign does a good job of reducing distance with the problem and connecting the actions of individuals to plastic in the ocean.
- While the campaign highlights the relevance of individual actions, the only rationale for why people should make these changes is an altruistic 'save the earth' case for action.

Drink Tahoe Tap

Organization

Take Care Tahoe

Organization type

Non-profit, with some company partners
(e.g. Raley's)

Elements

Social media posts, webpage, in-store signage, toolkit, water bottles, mascot (Take Care Bear)

Channels

Social media, website, public locations
around Tahoe

Year

2015

Geography

Lake Tahoe, California, US

Languages

English

Description

The campaign is run by a coalition of 40 organizations and is focused specifically on keeping Lake Tahoe clean and free of plastic. The campaign focuses on asking people to drink tap water rather than bottled water and includes a range of digital images which can be shared in different formats and printed and placed around the area.

www.facebook.com/raleysinclinevillage/photos/pcb.1683029968533399/1683029585200104
takecaretahoe.org/take-action/tahoe-tap

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

No results could be found for this campaign.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is able to make a personally and locally relevant case for action and uses engaging messaging that taps into humour and positive emotions.

Observations

- Avoids altruism, making locally relevant arguments about how tap water is better and cleaner and asking people to protect a shared, and treasured, local resource.
- The campaign addresses the plastic pollution issue at a local level, avoiding challenges of distance.
- Uses humour and cuteness, and evokes positive emotions such as pride.
- The branded bottles and signs you can put in your car or home window leverage good norms in a local context, where they are particularly effective.





Eco Bottle for FAB Detergent

Organization

Unilever

Organization type

Company

Elements

TV commercial, article on website, social media posts, messaging on package

Channels

TV, social media, website

Year

2019

Geography

Colombia

Languages

English, Spanish

Description

Advertisement featuring a mother and daughter talking about ocean plastic pollution, which then highlights that FAB bottles are now made from 100% recycled plastic – other bottles that could have otherwise become pollution.

Objectives

Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

Not reported.

Assessment

Overall

The commercial is targeted at women, presumably as the primary purchasers of laundry detergent, taps into the social norm of wanting to take care of your family and the environment, and is solution-oriented.

Observations

- The commercial is targeted at women, as the key decision-makers in this situation, and has been designed with the ‘mother’ customer archetype in mind.
- By using the child as the voice of concern about ocean pollution, there is an acknowledgement of the need to act on behalf of future generations, but it isn’t an explicit call for altruistic action, and it puts it into a personal, family context which is likely to be well-received.
- The commercial implicitly suggests that if you buy this package, you don’t have to feel guilty about plastic pollution because the package is made of bottles that would otherwise have become pollution. So, while it is not a guilt appeal, it presumes a feeling of guilt and aims to solve it.

www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2019/we-have-launched-our-first-100-recycled-plastic-bottle-in-colombia.html



Embarrassing Bags

Organization

East West Market

Organization type

Company

Elements

Plastic bags

Channels

Media

Year

2019

Geography

Canada

Languages

English

Description

A store in Vancouver, Canada tried to shame customers into bringing their own bags by giving out plastic bags printed with embarrassing text, but it backfired and people started demanding the bags because they thought it was funny.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

The store's attempt to minimize plastic bag use inadvertently increased the bag use by making the 'embarrassing' bags appealing, which drove an increase in the bags instead. The secondary effect of the media coverage of the story and the awareness or behaviour change that this may have influenced is unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign's attempt to use humour had the opposite of the intended effect.

Observations

- The campaign used humour in a way that inadvertently minimized the problem and created a demand for bags, thereby increasing plastic bag usage.
- The campaign's attempted use of guilt backfired, where people rejected the idea that they should feel guilty and instead embraced it.

www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/world/canada/plastic-bags-embarrassing-messages.html

22 MILLION KILOGRAMS OF PLASTIC LEAKS INTO THE OCEAN EVERY DAY

IT'S TIME TO END THE PLASTIC DISASTER

Ending Single-use Plastic

Organization

Oceana

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, fact sheet, social media posts, videos, petition, billboard ads, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2020

Geography

US, Canada

Languages

English

Description

This campaign includes a number of elements and different framing across them. This is one of only a few campaigns that highlights the impact of plastic pollution on humans who are living with it (the image of the child in the water full of plastic waste).

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Support policy solutions.

behance.net/gallery/11233259/Oceana-Billboard-Ad
oceana.org/sites/default/files/109290/fact_sheet_final.pdf
twitter.com/oceana/status/1273398770999259136
twitter.com/oceana/status/1272673240226332672

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign illustrates several of the common mistakes seen in plastic pollution campaigns. The campaign is focused more on awareness-raising than on implementing solutions, and it taps into negative emotions such as guilt and shame while using an altruistic call to action. The campaign also does not effectively minimize the distance between the audience and the problem.

Observations

- The fact sheet is entirely focused on the problem and devotes only a few words at the end to what needs to be done.
- The billboard implicitly uses both guilt and altruism.
- The social media posts and other elements tend to focus on repeating grim statistics about ocean plastic pollution but do very little to explicitly empower people to take action.
- The use of the human-centred framing can be compelling when combined with clear action, but can also contribute to distance if the campaign viewers perceive the people impacted by the problem as 'other.'

twitter.com/oceana/status/1271510077099425793
www.change.org/p/justin-trudeau-help-end-the-plastic-disaster



Everyday Say No to Plastic Bags

Organization

Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (including the Department for Pollution Control and the Department for Environmental Quality), with PR Thai Government

Organization type

Government

Elements

Website, social media posts, videos, signs, bags

Channels

Website, social media, in-store displays

Year

2019

Geography

Thailand

Languages

English, Thai

Description

In phase one, 75 retailers came together and agreed to stop giving out single-use plastic bags. The second phase was supposed to see no businesses handing out plastic bags. The campaign supported both phases, with an emphasis on preparing people for the transition to reusable bags. Many retailers promoted their own participation in the campaign on social media, on their own websites and through news media.

www.centralgroup.com/en/updates/corporate-news/289/central-retail-thailands-leading-retailer-announces-a-commitment-to-become-the-first-plastic-bag-free-operator-from-june-5th-onward-with-an-aim-to-reduce-more-than-150-million-plastic-ba

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

In spite of the communications prior to 1 January 2020, to prepare people for the fact that stores would no longer be handing out plastic bags, there were media articles indicating that there was confusion and frustration by some at the start of the policy.

Assessment

Overall

While the campaign does rely on altruism to motivate the behaviour, it also provides specific actions and taps into positive emotions.

Observations

- The campaign uses messages like “Love the Earth” which does evoke a positive feeling but also relies on altruism as the basis for action.
- Many of the pictures used on social media and by the retailers show large groups of people standing together to support the cause, which is one way of signalling a social norm.
- The campaign framing of “Say No To Plastic Bags” (as opposed to ‘Use Reusable Bags’) created the opportunity for many silly posts shared on social media (not as part of the official campaign) of people carrying their shopping in other items.

www.bangkokpost.com/business/1707118/plastic-not-so-fantastic
www.pattayamail.com/news/pattaya-left-hanging-by-plastic-bag-ban-283422
www.dailynews.co.th/politics/749270
www.facebook.com/ONRePhatthalung/videos



Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid

Organization

Procter & Gamble

Organization type

Company

Elements

Website, videos, infographic, on package

Channels

Web, YouTube, on package

Year

2017

Geography

Europe

Languages

English, Spanish, German, French, Polish, Danish, Czech, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Croatian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Swedish, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Greek, Maltese

Description

Fairy Concentrated Dishwashing Liquid is advertised as saving plastic by being so concentrated that one bottle of Fairy is equal to two bottles of other dishwashing liquids. Fairy also advertises that the bottle is made from recycled ocean plastic.

Objectives

Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

twitter.com/PGUK/status/915893935070941184

Results

The results of this campaign are unknown.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is positive and empowering, using information and data in ways that emphasize the significance of individual and collective actions.

Observations

- Statistics emphasize the savings based on the action taken, rather than the grim statistics of the problem.
- The product is being advertised through the packaging as well as through the product attributes.
- The campaign calls on positive emotions of pride and optimism
- The campaign implicitly provides an incentive – the efficiency and lower cost of concentrated dishwashing liquid compared to competing products.



HELP COLORADO BREAK FREE FROM PLASTIC

Help Colorado Break Free from Plastic

Organization

Eco-Cycle

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website page, automated message to legislators, social media posts, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2019

Geography

US

Languages

English

Description

This campaign asks people to tell their state senator to support Colorado SB20-010 to repeal the plastics preemption (legislation that prevents banning plastics).

Objectives

Support policy solutions.

ecocycle.org/take-action/preemption

Results

The bill was defeated (Colorado General Assembly 2020).

Assessment

Overall

The appeal to action was quite short and, while specific and providing positive norming, may not have given enough information or emotion to motivate people to action.

Observations

- Saying “You’ll be joining...” is a subtle social norm suggesting that this is what others are already doing.
- The call to action – contact your state legislators – is very direct and clear.
- The text does not provide a personal rationale for action, which could be seen as defaulting to an altruistic appeal of needing to do this for the greater good.



#ISupportBanPlasticsKE

Organization

Individual

Organization type

Not applicable

Elements

Social media posts

Channels

Social media, real life

Year

2015

Geography

Kenya

Languages

English

Description

James Wakibia, a photojournalist, created the campaign calling on the Kenyan government to ban plastic bags, first on social media, which resulted in a tweeted response from Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources expressing her support. He then took a banner with the hashtag “#ISupportBanPlasticsKE” printed on it to the streets of Nakuru and took photos of people holding it, which he then tweeted on social media.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

The plastic bag ban was passed in 2017.

Assessment

Overall

This grass-roots campaign is simple and uses several effective strategies while avoiding pitfalls. The campaign is positive and action-oriented, and likely built support for its own success by shifting the social norm around plastic bag usage.

Observations

- The campaign is grounded in a positive social norm and includes a statement of commitment, tapping into positive emotions (“I support”).
- The significance of each individual in taking this action is clear for participants, but there is an extra layer of relevance here as well, as this campaign was initiated and executed by one person.



KEEP PLASTICS OFF OUR PARKS

Keep Plastics Off Our Parks

Organization

Kenya Wildlife Service

Organization type

Government

Elements

Website, social media posts

Channels

Website, social media

Year

2019

Geography

Kenya

Languages

English

Description

This campaign asks visitors to Kenya's national parks to 'keep plastics off our parks' and uses images of wild animals in the parks with plastic. The campaign highlights different kinds of animals, including primates and birds, as being injured by plastic litter. The campaign uses a hashtag referencing Kenya's plastic bag ban as well.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Support policy solutions.

twitter.com/kwskenya/status/1179748195506761728

Results

The social media posts each appear to have received only low engagement, but the website may have a broader reach (traffic is unknown).

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is specific and emphasizes the importance of individual decisions, but it does not provide much rationale or detail to further motivate action.

Observations

- The campaign targets people visiting parks (minimizes distance, emphasizes personal relevance) with an actionable request, which should be effective.
- The campaign does rely on altruism, implicitly, as the motivation for action – protecting the wildlife in the parks.
- The campaign asks people to support the plastic bag ban, which went into effect on 5 June 2020.



My name is 7.

I'm in all other plastics, you'll find me in baby bottles, water bottles, microwave receivers, all appliances and your nylon or polyester clothes.

I am super strong and resistant.

Little Monsters

Organization

No More Plastic – Kids

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Web content

Channels

Website

Year

Unknown

Geography

Global

Languages

English, French

Description

This website has 'monster' versions of each plastic, 1–7, with descriptions of the impact that some of the plastics have in the natural environment, and also has a version of each plastic once they have become microplastics.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

www.nomoreplastickids.com/the-little-monsters

www.nomoreplastickids.com/microplastic-monsters

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

While children are the intended audience, this campaign is too scary for most kids and is likely to create anxiety rather than productive action.

Observations

- This concept seems intended to raise awareness among children about the problems of plastic waste, but it highlights the dangers of plastics without offering kids anything constructive that they can do about the problem.
- The solution presented by the site is “Green-Bio” representing a bioplastic. Not only is this not an actionable choice children can make, unfortunately, there is growing consensus that, while bio-benign plastics may play a role in replacing plastic, swapping one plastic for another is not a real solution.
- Telling children that there are microplastics in their food and water – when they can't do anything to avoid eating microplastics – is not productive and may cause anxiety.



London Fashion Week 2019

Organization

British Fashion Council

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Ball pit, social media posts

Channels

Media

Year

2019

Geography

UK

Languages

English

Description

In addition to messages about climate change and waste, London Fashion Week featured a 'Pearl Pit' in which each 'pearl' represented the microplastics being shed from synthetic clothing and ultimately polluting waterways and oceans. Designers and other fashion influencers jumped into the pit to demonstrate their commitment to addressing the environmental challenges of the fashion industry, including plastic waste.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

The 'Pearl Pit' at London Fashion Week may have raised awareness of the problem of microplastic, but it did not provide any specific actions for people to take or highlight solutions to this problem, nor did it provide people with a motivation for action other than altruism.

Observations

- The coolness effect of having celebrities jump into a ball pit to bring attention to an issue can be seen as using celebrities to reinforce good norms about avoidance of microplastics.
- While the stunt itself is visually impressive, the lack of additional information or call to action for how to address the problem undermines the potential effectiveness of the campaign.

SAY NO TO SINGLE USE



Message in a Bottle

Organization

Surfers Against Sewage

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Videos, petition, website, social media posts

Channels

Website, social media

Year

2016

Geography

UK

Languages

English

Description

This campaign mobilized UK citizens to send their Members of Parliament the message that they want a deposit return scheme on bottles in the UK.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Support policy solutions.

twitter.com/sascampaigns/status/771039613045575680
www.sas.org.uk/campaign/message-in-a-bottle

Results

“2017 saw the Scottish Parliament back deposit return. SAS also led a delegation of cross-party MPs and charities to deliver 270,000 signatures from the petition to the Prime Minister. With more than 300,000 signatures, your support has made this the UK’s largest petition calling for the introduction of deposit return schemes!”

Assessment

Overall

The campaign used a petition, supported by social media engagement, to aggregate the voice of citizens for change, which was effective.

Observations

- The campaign had a specific solution and action that it asked people to take and facilitated – signing the petition.
- While the campaign used negative images and statistics, they were balanced against the specific action that was being enabled.
- The campaign was effective at minimizing the distance between the campaign audience and the problem, supporting greater action.



Nix the 6

Organization

5 Gyres

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts, pledge, video, infographic, email newsletter

Channels

Website, YouTube, social media, email

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

Nix the 6 targets the use of polystyrene and asks people to stop using it, to ask their local businesses to stop using it, and to support action to reduce plastic waste.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

www.5gyres.org/polystyrene

www.instagram.com/p/BeWcZ6JHale/?taken-by=5gyres

Results

Social media posts received a little over 1,000 engagements. The pledge had 5,195 signatories as of 12 July 2020. Results/traffic of other assets is unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign uses many effective strategies which should lead to effectiveness. The only watch-out is the use of fear as a motivator in the messaging.

Observations

- Nix the 6 Campus Guide provides customized actions and motivation.
- Nix the 6 cartoon infographic provides a positive and empowering way for people to take action, with specific actions and language presented in an engaging format.
- The campaign provides a pledge for people to show their commitment.



One Bag Habit

Organization

One Bag Habit Initiative – an industry initiative started by Lindex, KappAhl, and H&M and now consisting of around 20 companies in the apparel and footwear industries.

Organization type

Industry initiative

Elements

Website, signs, social media posts

Channels

Website, social media, in-store displays

Year

2017

Geography

Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland

Languages

English, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian, Polish

Description

The One Bag Habit campaign promotes reusable bags and charges shoppers for single-use plastic bags to encourage them to use reusable bags. The money from the bag charges is donated to organizations that work locally to address plastic pollution.

Objectives

Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

The profits from the 2017/2018 business year came to SEK 2.1 million (USD 230,000). The reduction in plastic bags used over time is not known.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is solution-focused and uses incentives effectively, while targeting a specific group to take a specific action.

Observations

- The campaign leverages customization (targeting specific shoppers, and in particular women) and specificity (calling for a specific action).
- The use of a fee is in line with best practices for limited consumption of plastic bags through incentives.
- The donation of the funds to local organizations addressing plastic pollution provides further opportunity to raise awareness and provide information on further actions people can take.

eprretailnews.com/2018/01/18/lindex-donates-280-000-euro-to-steps-and-wateraid-through-the-one-bag-habit-initiative-9632966153413

www.kappahl.com/en-US/campaign/one-bag-habit



Open Your Eyes

Organization

Plastic Pollution Coalition

Organization type

Non-profit (global alliance of more than 1,200 organizations, businesses, and thought leaders in 75 countries)

Elements

Website, social media

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2016

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

A video features Jeff Bridges describing and questioning how we have become a plastic society, and shares shocking facts about plastic usage and end of life for plastics. It also describes risks to human health as well as risks to environmental and animal health. The campaign provides specific actions that people can take, such as refusing straws and seeking to buy products in sustainable packaging.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/the-coalition
www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzvnvqIkIM-A
www.facebook.com/PlasticPollution

Results

The video on YouTube has been seen more than 267,000 times, and the same video on the Plastic Pollution Coalition's Facebook page has been viewed 1.2 million times between 2016 and 2020.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign uses a celebrity spokesperson to deliver a message of both fear and hope, asking people to allow themselves to become aware of something they assume is normal. Specific opportunities for action are mentioned but not emphasized.

Observations

- The use of a celebrity narrator for the video can have positive 'super-norm' effects if the person is credible as a voice for change and seen as illustrating new expectations or a new normal.
- The video emphasizes many of the dangers and damage of plastic waste, including impacts on human health, which can be alarming.
- The video does provide specific actions that individuals can take, such as refusing straws and seeking out products in sustainable packaging.



PacketInWalkers

Organization

38 Degrees

Organization type

Non-profit (global alliance of more than 1,200 organizations, businesses, and thought leaders in 75 countries)

Elements

Website, petition, social media, crisp packets

Channels

Social media, website, mail

Year

2018

Geography

UK

Languages

English

Description

The #PacketInWalkers campaign asked people to mail their crisp packets back to Walkers to demand that the packaging be made recyclable or be changed to a different material altogether.

Objectives

Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

The campaign received lots of media attention and received a response from the Royal Mail ‘begging’ protesters to put the crisp bags in envelopes before posting them. While the article on 26 September 2018 noted that only about 30 crisp bags had been posted so far, the social media post from 27 September claims ‘hundreds of thousands’ were participating. In December 2018, Walkers committed to recover and recycle crisp packets via thousands of public collection points and to invest in further improving the end-of-life options for the packets. The back of the package now says “Find out how you can recycle it at walkers.co.uk/recycle”.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign effectively captured people’s imaginations with a tangible way to pressure a company into providing more sustainable packaging options through specific action and an emphasis on the power of individuals, together, to make a difference.

Observations

- The tangible specific action of mailing a crisp packet back to the manufacturer as a protest is both very manageable as an individual and demonstrates the power of collective action in a visible way.
- The media coverage of this campaign was essential to its success as it increased the visibility of the effort and provided positive social norm reinforcement.

www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/26/dont-post-crisp-packets-royal-mail-begs-packaging-protesters

www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/10/walkers-recycle-crisp-packets-postal-protest

twitter.com/38_degrees/status/1045249939310350336



Pass on Plastic

Organization

Sky Ocean Rescue

Organization type

Company

Elements

Website, video, social media posts, online store selling reusables, teaching toolkit, email sign-up (links to World Wide Fund for Nature pledge)

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English, German, Italian

Description

The #PassOnPlastic campaign.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

www.skyoceanrescue.com/how-to-passonplastic

Results

47.8 million people were made aware of the campaign to #PassOnPlastic.

Assessment

Overall

The idea of inspiring people to make everyday changes is aligned with best practices, as is the use of celebrities to reinforce social norms and the specific actions recommended.

Observations

- Measurements demonstrated the impact and provide individuals with the sense that their small actions matter.
- The email sign-up is referred to as a pledge but there is no actual commitment component, rather people can sign up to receive an email with tips and updates.
- Use of celebrities to design the reusable items that are offered for sale in the shop is a form of social norming, assuming the celebrities have credibility in the commitment to reduce plastic waste.



Planet or Plastic

Organization

National Geographic

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, image, pledge, email newsletter

Channels

Social media, website, magazine, email

Year

2019

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

Planet or Plastic is National Geographic's effort to raise awareness about the global plastic trash crisis. Visitors can learn more, find out what they can do to reduce single-use plastics and take a pledge.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/planetorplastic

Results

As of 5 June 2020, commitments had been made to avoid using more than 333 million pieces of plastic (National Geographic 2020).

Assessment

Overall

Uses social norms, clear call to action, and a commitment, all effective strategies, and brings in humour to make it memorable without being silly.

Observations

- Specific action defined – though it can be interpreted either as do not use a plastic fork or properly dispose of it if you do. For people who don't live near water, there is a risk that this feels distant and not relevant to them.
- The associated Pledge further clarifies the action and brings the element of commitment.
- Language evokes personal ("my ocean") rather than the greater good ("our ocean") and is in an imperative form, which is an effective form of messaging for social norms and avoids the trap of appealing to altruism.
- The phrasing evokes a common impolite phrase which is funny and a little edgy, and should make it memorable. Unlikely to backfire.



Plastic Bag Diet

Organization

Gerakan Indonesia Diet Kantong Plastik (GIDKP)

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, petitions, videos, social media posts, in-person action

Channels

Web, social media, events, in-person events

Year

2018

Geography

Indonesia

Languages

English, Indonesian

Description

The Plastic Bag Diet includes many sub-campaigns, including Plastic Tourism, Plastic Robber, #pay4plastic and others. The campaigns include videos, in-person action and petitions, among other things.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

dietkantongplastik.info

dietkantongplastik.info/kantong-plastik-tidak-gratis

sdsnyouth.org/blog-posts/13/06/tiza-mafira-our-ocean-hero-optimistic-that-indonesia-could-reduce-plastic-pollution-in-the-ocean

Results

The #pay4plastic petition in 2015 reached 70,000 signatures and was followed up with a paid plastic bag policy from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign uses local, on-the-ground engagement effectively and shares it via social media to amplify the impact. In general, the campaign is positive and engaging, tapping into positive emotions.

Observations

- The campaign provides many opportunities for specific action to be part of the solution and features videos that are positive and reinforce positive social norms, either through critique or modelling.
- The Plastic Tourism campaign takes people to see the impacts of plastic in the rivers to give a first-hand experience of the problem and motivate action, which reduces distance.
- The Plastic Robber campaign involved activists approaching people using plastic bags and giving them reusable bags instead.
- The language on the website includes phrases such as “We are shamed in the eyes of the world with images of rivers and seas filled with plastic waste as if we are not doing anything.” While this can trigger a feeling of guilt, it is also a call to pride to drive action.

REASONS TO BE

FOAM FREE

Plastic Free Jamaica

Organization

National Environment and Planning Agency, Jamaica

Organization type

Government

Elements

Social media posts

Channels

Social media

Year

2019

Geography

Jamaica

Languages

English

Description

This campaign uses social media to engage people to support a ban on single-use plastics in Jamaica, use reusable bags, and imagine a Jamaica free of expanded polystyrene foam (styrofoam).

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

www.instagram.com/p/CCL7LUHjfPk

www.instagram.com/p/CCEEwfDhSZ-

twitter.com/PlasticFreeJA/status/1197546629693358080

twitter.com/PlasticFreeJA/status/1191401407418687493

Results

The social media posts do not show large numbers of engagement, but it is unknown if there are other ways that people are engaging with this campaign, potentially through signs or posters in Jamaica.

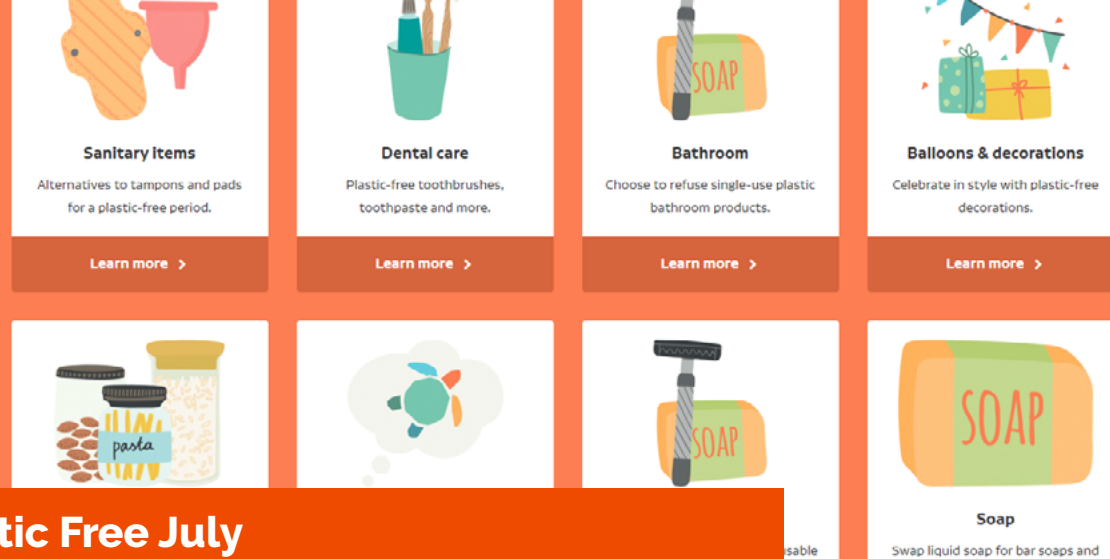
Assessment

Overall

Uses the effective strategies of specificity, a commitment and positive emotions, while balancing the fear elements and the use of incentives.

Observations

- The campaign uses statistics about how styrofoam is toxic to your health, which is scary, but also effective at motivating behaviour if styrofoam can then be avoided. It also reduces the distance between the person and the problem.
- The campaign uses incentives such as giveaways to get people engaged.
- The campaign often uses a positive tone of optimism and inspiration – e.g. “We can imagine...” that taps into positive emotions.



Plastic Free July

Organization

Plastic Free Foundation

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Social media posts, pledge, videos, posters, website, shopping resources, email newsletter, other assets (badges, etc.)

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

Started 2011

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

Plastic Free July is a global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution. It provides resources and ideas to help reduce single-use plastic waste every day at home, work, school, and at cafés.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

In July 2019, an estimated 250 million people, in 177 countries, took part in the challenge: 29 per cent of people were aware of the campaign; almost half of those took part in 2018; and 90 per cent of participants made changes that have become habits or a way of life.

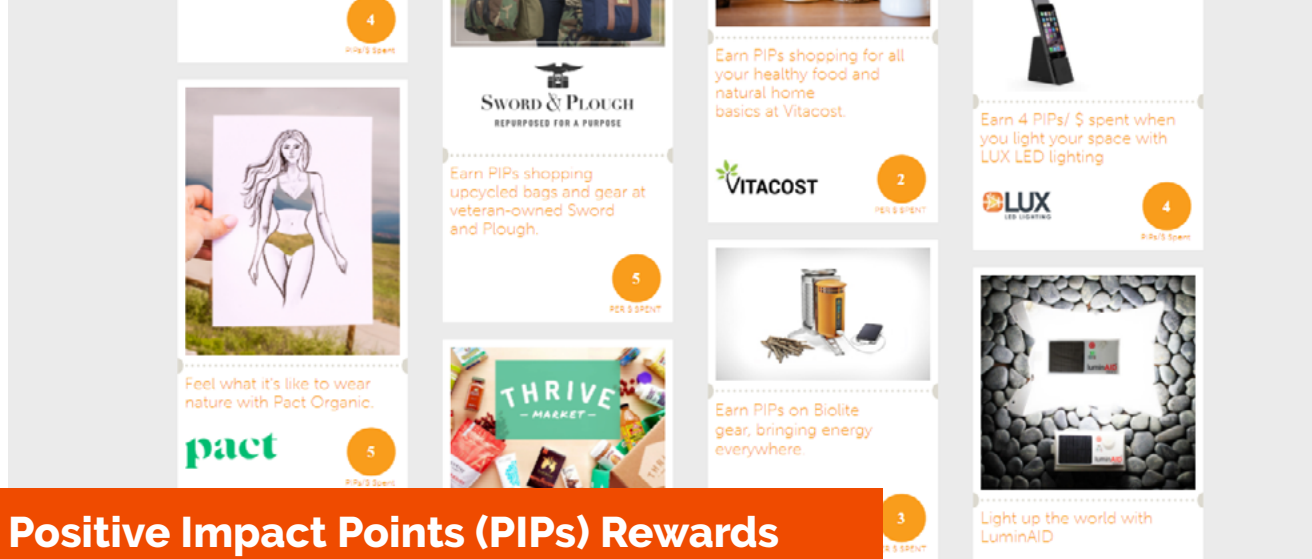
Assessment

Overall

This campaign integrates all six effective strategies and avoids all four common mistakes. It is an excellent example of an effective campaign, and the results confirm it.

Observations

- Effective use of social norms, both through reporting participation in the pledge and with the “What Others Do” page on their website, which reinforces new social norms while also providing practical advice.
- Commitment is very specific – specific actions, time-bound, placed in context of daily decisions.
- “My Challenge Choices” shows the relative impact that different commitments have, connecting the action to a real outcome in the world.
- Taps into positive emotions – language and focus is action-oriented and positive. Plastic pollution is identified as the problem to solve but little time or space is spent on the problem itself. The focus is on equipping people to be part of the solution, and it emphasizes the collective impact of many individuals’ actions.
- Benefits for the actions are personal and local (clean streets, beautiful communities).



Positive Impact Points (PIPs) Rewards

Organization

3P Partners

Organization type

Company (B-Corporation)

Elements

Website, online store

Channels

Website

Year

2016

Geography

US

Languages

English

Description

This programme allows people who have created an online account to earn rewards for completing sustainable behaviours such as purchasing reusable foodware or products. Rewards can be redeemed for discounts on products and even for cash in some situations (in pilot phase).

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

www.pipsrewards.com/login

www.pipsrewards.com/earn

Results

Results are not known at this time.

Assessment

Overall

The programme uses all of the effective strategies and also uses positive incentives to reward positive behaviours, which can be effective, though could potentially undermine intrinsic motivation for action.

Observations

- The programme uses positive framing and taps into positive emotions and the significance of individual actions as motivation for action.
- The programme enables customization based on particular interests and types of people.
- By giving people specific, verifiable actions to take, people are able to support the fulfillment of commitments and support positive norms.
- The use of incentives to motivate positive behaviour may be effective, though it has the potential to result in people choosing not to make sustainable choices when they won't get 'credit' for them.

THIS IS A PLASTIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT



Question How You Hydrate

Organization

Lonely Whale, Point Break Foundation

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, videos, social media assets, email newsletters, pledge, Museum of Plastic

Channels

Social media, website, email, event

Year

2019

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

This campaign asks people to re-examine their use of plastic water bottles and to make a different choice, prompting them to “hydrate like a...” and then suggesting role models such as types of people, specific people, animals, and more. The campaign also included a physical space – the Museum of Plastic – where people could have an in-person experience of learning about plastic waste as a problem, and potential solutions.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products and packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware.

Results

The Plastic Service Announcement video had nearly 20,000 views on YouTube as of 13 July 2020. Other results were not available.

Assessment

Overall

The #StopSucking campaign from Lonely Whale received a lot of attention; this campaign has not achieved the same level of success, perhaps because it has fallen into some common traps.

Observations

- Uses guilt in framing and messaging (“why do we continue to choose convenience over caring?”).
- Uses humour as a social critique in an effective way in the Plastic Service Announcement video.
- Calls on altruism (“#hydratelike the ocean, the planet and future generations depend on it, because they do”).
- Museum of Plastic experience focuses on the magnitude of the problem, which can be demotivating. Some exhibits also abstract the problem in ways that can make it feel distant.
- Uses social norms (#HydrateLike explicitly calls out certain norms) though it isn’t clear that the norms will fully resonate (what does it mean to hydrate like a mother or a boss?). Uses celebrities to enhance impact of social norms.
- There is a commitment element where people can pledge to change their behaviour.
- Use of statistics showing the massive usage of plastic today may inadvertently reinforce that they are the norm.

HELP SEAS SPARKLE

In 2020, Windex® has plans to recycle 1400 metric tons of ocean bound plastic for our new line of Windex® bottles, helping stop more plastic from reaching our seas.



Recycled Ocean Plastic Windex Bottle

Organization

S.C. Johnson

Organization type

Company

Elements

TV commercial, video, website page, social media assets, messaging on package

Channels

TV, social media, website

Year

2019

Geography

Global

Languages

English, French, Spanish

Description

The campaign focuses on a new recycled ocean plastic bottle, in the context of the problem of marine plastic debris, and also promotes recycled plastic bottles and refills to reuse the spray bottles, all to help address the plastic waste problem.

Objectives

- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

Results are not available for this campaign.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign provides individuals with a specific action that they can take and feel good about, while showing that even this small action matters and is part of a larger effort that the company is undertaking.

Observations

- The commercial connects the idea of cleaning with Windex (getting glass clean and sparkling) with the idea of cleaning and ‘resparkling’ the ocean, and suggests that purchasing Windex in its new 100 per cent recycled ocean plastic bottle is being part of the solution, providing people with a specific action they can take.
- The simultaneous promotion of reuse/refill solutions further provides individuals with ways to take tangible action toward the problem.
- The commercial is advertising the packaging as much as the product and emphasizing the importance of sustainable packaging.

www.packagingnews.co.uk/news/environment/recycling/sc-johnson-launches-100-recycled-ocean-plastic-bottle-windex-28-02-2019

www.windex.com/en-us/help-seas-sparkle

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7JGCjv8AZw

JOIN THE MOVEMENT
TO STOP
PLASTIC POLLUTION



plasticpollutioncoalition.org

Refuse Disposable Plastics

Organization

Plastic Pollution Coalition

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Infosheets, website, social assets, pledge, videos, email newsletter

Channels

Social media, website, email

Year

Started 2010

Geography

Global

Languages

English, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian

Description

This campaign asks people to refuse disposable plastics and provides reasons for doing so.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

Results

The celebrity videos on YouTube have received engagement of around 10,000 views at the top end. Other results are not known.

Assessment

Overall

While there are some actions suggested, this campaign doesn't get too far beyond awareness-raising. Some facts presented are alarming, which may or may not be effective at changing behaviour.

Observations

- Infosheet content is 90 per cent information about the problem, with only one vague sentence about the solution and what people can do.
- While the rationale for refusing disposable plastics is effective in that it is centred on how it impacts the individual (rather than a more diffuse or abstract impact), it leans somewhat on fear in a way that could be motivating.
- The pledge is not as detailed or engaging as many other pledges, which typically provide a calculation of your personal impact or the collective impact of all who have pledged.
- Calling out the limitations of recycling to make the case for reusables is unique and helpful.
- Celebrity videos are an effective tool for social norming, if the celebrities are sharing a credible message.



Ridiculous Packaging

Organization

Greenpeace International

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Social media posts, participation from individuals, petition, website

Channels

Social media, website

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English prompt, with responses in many languages and from many countries

Description

Greenpeace invited people to take a picture when they see an example of ridiculous packaging and share it on social media, tagging the company as well. There is also a link to a petition to tell top polluting brands to stop producing single-use plastic products and packaging.

Objectives

Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

1,868,122 people had signed the petition as of 15 June 2020. Many people had posted using the hashtag #ridiculouspackaging and #breakfreefromplastic but it was difficult to ascertain a number.

Assessment

Overall

Giving people a specific way to react to seeing excessive or unnecessary packaging and take action is motivating and increases awareness of packaging sustainability at the moment of purchase decision.

Observations

- Use of specific action and social norms to drive awareness in the moment and trigger a different decision based on packaging.
- The participation in the social media campaign as well as the petition escalates the sense of commitment for the individual in a way that should translate into behaviour change over time.
- The framing “ridiculous packaging” uses humour to highlight an absurdity that many have become blind to in modern society.
- The campaign targets companies and provides a way for individuals’ voices to be heard and amplified for large companies. Showing that nearly 2 million people are doing this has a positive social norm effect and shows the significance of individual action at scale.

www.greenpeace.org/international/story/15938/24-photos-of-ridiculous-plastic-packaging-that-will-make-you-scream-then-take-action
act.greenpeace.org/page/39417/petition/1

AVOID



Avoid buying produce in plastic bags and purchase in loose at your local vegetable market/ sandhai.



Avoid buying heavily packaged items and instead consume fresh produce like tender coconut, etc.



Avoid ordering food from restaurants that pack them in plastic containers.



Avoid using plastic straws. Lift your drink and tilt your head back.

Say No to Plastic

Organization

Zero Waste Chennai (ZWC) and Civic Action Group (CAG), Kuppai Matters

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Social media posts, website, posters, infographics

Channels

Web, social media

Year

2017

Geography

India

Languages

English, Hindi

Description

The campaign includes posters and social media posts with details on how to say no to plastic, and what to use instead.

www.zerowastechennai.in

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign is very limited in scope, but it does provide an effective message about how to live with less plastic.

Observations

This campaign provides good specific details to help people focus on solutions.



Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia

Organization

Greenpeace Australia Pacific

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Video/commercial

Channels

TV, YouTube

Year

2013

Geography

Australia

Languages

English

Description

Stop Coca-Cola Trashing Australia is a 45-second commercial from 2013 that starts with a girl drinking a Coke from a plastic bottle on a beach and quickly escalates to birds dropping dead from the sky (including the blur of a falling bird next to the girl's arm in the image above). The dead birds are visually linked to the bottles, suggesting they are the reason for the birds' deaths. While the ad is calling for people to speak out on Coca-Cola's attempts to block a recycling scheme, it is also calling people out for littering plastic bottles and caps on the beach and for drinking out of plastic bottles in the first place.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7Uxaw6YoRw

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

This video led into a bottle deposit return scheme petition for Australia, which has gained some momentum but no policy has been passed.

Assessment

Overall

The video is very effective at getting attention and raising awareness, though leaves the viewer to figure out what to do.

Observations

- The video evokes fear and guilt, with the birds unexpectedly dropping dead from the sky.
- The motivation for action leans on altruism in addition to the fear and guilt.
- The video does not provide further instructions or information for people to know how to take action.



Stop Sucking

Organization

Lonely Whale

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, videos, social media posts, email newsletter

Channels

Web, social media, email

Year

2017

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

Lonely Whale's Stop Sucking campaign featured a video of celebrities, including Adrian Grenier of "Entourage" fame, *Sports Illustrated* model Brooklyn Decker and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, among others, talking about how "they suck" and then pledging to "stop sucking – on straws". Another video showed celebrities getting "sucker punched" in the face by a beefy-looking octopus tentacle while sucking on plastic straws.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfFpz8KM-gE

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg1-23B8yCg

shortyawards.com/10th/strawless-ocean-campaign

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

Results

"Our organic #StopSucking content saw a social reach of 74 million with an equivalent media spend of \$515k... We saw commitment from people too: the #StopSucking work earned over 50,000 pledges from people across the country to stop using plastic straws. These pledges resulted in 29.21 million plastic straws kept out of the waste stream based on average use."

Assessment

Overall

The campaign effectively uses humour and good norms, including celebrities, to drive people to make a commitment.

Observations

- This campaign draws on celebrity, a form of social norm, very effectively to spread the message and influence behaviour.
- The campaign provides an opportunity to make an official commitment, and also is clear about the specific action that viewers are supposed to take.
- The campaign uses humour in an effective way – making the message memorable and providing a powerful social critique.

Wir haben die Schnauze voll.



Hilf unseren Meeren mit deiner Spende:
www.wwf.de/plastikflut



Stop the Flood of Plastic

Organization

World Wide Fund for Nature

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, billboards, social media posts, email newsletter

Channels

Web, social media, billboards, email

Year

2018

Geography

Mediterranean countries, specifically targeting France, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, Croatia, Turkey. Plastic Flood campaign also included other countries in Europe such as Germany and Belgium.

Languages

English, German

Description

WWF released a report called *Stop the Flood of Plastic: How Mediterranean countries can save their sea* in 2019. One example billboard in Germany shows a dolphin with its mouth full of single-use plastic products and packaging, with the main text “We are fed up” (literal translation: “our snout is full”) and “Stop the plastic flood”.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products;
- Support policy solutions.

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign’s focus on a single region united by a shared sea is an effective frame to drive action and leverage effective strategies.

Observations

- The report, and social media posts drawn from the information in it, connect plastic pollution to impacts on Mediterranean economies and quality of life in addition to impacts on wildlife, which is effective at making the problem local and relevant to individuals.
- Specific recommendations are provided for individuals, for countries and for companies, though the actions for individuals are somewhat limited (emphasis is more on other actors).
- In the dolphin ads, clever play on words along with the image is memorable.

www.pr-inside.com/berliner-stadtreinigung-und-wwf-gehen-gemeinsam-du-r4772897.htm
www.wwf.de/aktiv-werden/downloads/freianzeigen/freianzeigen-stopp-die-plastikflut



Too Cool for Plastic

Organization

Iceland Foods

Organization type

Company

Elements

Website, videos, social media posts, PR strategy

Channels

Website, social media, in-store displays, media (PR)

Year

2018

Geography

UK

Languages

English

Description

Supermarket chain Iceland declared a goal to be “plastic free by 2023” in 2018 and promoted the commitment, including through a PR strategy around the announcement.

Objectives

- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

Weber Shandwick reports that the pledge by Iceland received 156 pieces of press coverage alone, including a *Daily Mail* front cover (PR Week Awards 2018), which indicates that it was likely seen by many people. Impact on mindsets or behaviour is unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign has particular potential because it couples awareness with the enabling of new and meaningful action – shopping choices without plastic.

Observations

- The messaging includes a sense of pride (“Another UK 1st!”) and optimism around hitting the ambitious target that Iceland has set.
- While the grim plastic pollution statistics are still present, there is a lightness and go-get-it feeling to the campaign which evokes positive feelings and even uses humour in an engaging way.
- The messaging makes a point about the large impact of small changes across many products.
- Iceland’s messaging is around their commitment, and the commitment they (implicitly) ask for from the shopper is to support them in this journey.

about.iceland.co.uk/plastic-free-by-2023

twitter.com/icelandrichard/status/1039773295896395776

www.instagram.com/p/BeNt_RGAnlC



Trash Fish

Organization

Keep the Archipelago Tidy Association

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, game, videos, posters, social media posts

Channels

Web, social media

Year

2018

Geography

Finland, Sweden

Languages

Finnish, Swedish, English

Description

The campaign consists of posters that have turned common litter items into new species of fish. There is also a game you can play on the website where you catch the litter fish and are prompted to become a member to catch more fish.

Objectives

Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging.

Results

Unknown.

kuismavaananen.myportfolio.com/pida-saaristo-siistina-ry
www.pidasaaristosiiistina.fi/en
vimeo.com/321047863

Assessment

Overall

The campaign is artful and creative, and somewhat funny in visualizing the new species of fish, but not very informative in terms of motivating action.

Observations

- The campaign is eye-catching and engaging, and the drawings and animations of the fish are clever and likely to catch people's attention.
- This campaign does not go further than awareness raising, leaving it up to the viewer to seek out further information about what to do or how serious a problem this is.
- There is no explicit ask of the viewer or any prompt of motivation for action.
- As 'wrong' as people will recognize that this is, the way that humour is used may serve as a social critique, or it may be seen as inadvertently normalizing the sad state of affairs.



Trash Free Seas

Organization

Ocean Conservancy

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts, email newsletter

Channels

Website, social media, email

Year

2018

Geography

Global

Languages

English

Description

The Trash Free Seas campaign includes a website which links to the International Coastal Cleanup, with supporting material shared on social media.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas

twitter.com/OurOcean/status/1276332536034140160

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign taps into positive emotions and messages and avoids the common mistakes.

Observations

- “There’s hope!” is declared in large print on the website. Additionally, the #HopeInOcean/#HopeEnOcean was used in parts of the campaign, which draws on positive emotions.
- Framing goes beyond impacts on wildlife to impacts on people and local economies.
- Connecting the 400,000 straws that volunteers have picked up on beaches to the Skip the Straw campaign is effective at reducing the distance between individuals and the problem.
- Showing the millions of volunteers who have participated and the total amount of trash that they have picked up shows the significance of small actions when many people carry them out.
- The messaging does a good job of framing ‘scary’ statistics about impacts on humans and on the environment with messages of empowerment and optimism, reducing the chances of triggering a fear response.




Unforgettable Bag

Organization

Tesco

Organization type

Company

Elements

Bags, social media posts, website

Channels

Web, in-store displays

Year

2018

Geography

First launched in Malaysia, the bag is now available in all 11 countries where Tesco operates – UK, Ireland, India, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Malaysia, Thailand, UAE, Poland, Japan.

Languages

English

Description

The “Unforgettable Bag” is a reusable bag that itself includes messaging and images related to marine plastic pollution, and that gives shoppers a discount on their shopping when they use it, through a discount barcode embedded in the design.

Objectives

- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

As of November 2018, more than one million unforgettable bags have been sold, and customers on average have reused their bags up to four times since the beginning of the campaign.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign uses nearly all of the effective strategies in communication, and further adds a positive incentive to reward people for remembering their reusable bags.

Observations

- The campaign language is solution-oriented and empowering, evoking positive emotions.
- Campaign imagery and social media posts highlight the significance of even the small action of using a reusable bag.
- The incentive – built into the bag – should be an effective motivator to help people remember to bring their bags and skip using single-use bags. That said, plastic bag fees have been shown to be more effective than incentives.
- Campaign materials include information about the percentage of shoppers who reuse bags, which uses social norms to signal acceptable behaviour.



#UnplasticthePlanet

Organization

Global Citizen

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts, videos, pledge

Channels

Website, social media

Year

2019

Geography

Global

Languages

English, German, French, Spanish

Description

This one-minute video from Global Citizen provides a series of statistics scrolling vertically as though descending through the water column.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

www.globalcitizen.org/en/action/take-the-pledge-unplastic-the-planet
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQgQ_kQZ_-I

Results

The campaign website indicates that nearly 100,000 actions have been taken for this campaign between 2019 and 2020.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign falls into several common traps, such as guilt, altruism and distance, and even though it also taps into some effective strategies, it has likely not been as effective as it might have been.

Observations

- The pledge asks people to take specific actions, but even in the pledge the language is very dramatic and could be seen as guilt-inducing.
- The rationale provided through the campaign materials is largely altruistic, and while it speaks to the harmful impact each person has on the planet, the problem framing still feels distant.



Vote with Your Tote

Organization

PlasticBagLaws.org

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, videos, bags, social media posts, email list, in-person engagement

Channels

Web, social media, in-store displays, email

Year

2018

Geography

New York, US

Languages

English

Description

This campaign enlists bodega owners in New York City to hand out reusable bags and talk to their customers about supporting a 5 cent plastic bag ban in the city. The five-minute video on the website shows the progression from people initially saying it is a bad idea to coming around to support the idea. The reusable bags were designed by different local designers.

Objectives

- Refuse single-use plastic products & packaging;
- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Support policy solutions.

www.plasticbaglaws.org/votewithyourtote

Results

Single-use plastic bags were banned (with some exemptions) across New York State in 2019. New York City Council then proceeded with a five-cent charge on most single-use paper bags.

Assessment

Overall

The campaign taps into many of the effective strategies and is a positive and solution-focused campaign.

Observations

- The use of a visible physical item like a bag reinforces the social norm of using reusable bags.
- The fact that the bags are similar enough to be recognizably part of the same set, but different enough to have their own personality and story, is engaging and memorable.
- The campaign's ask is specific – use the reusable bag, and support the ban. People are asked to commit to bringing the bag back – both to make a future purchase at the bodega, and to avoid using a plastic bag in future shopping trips.
- The campaign is empowering and emphasizes the importance of each person's actions in making a change.



Woolworths Reusable Bags

Organization

Woolworths (Australia)

Organization type

Company

Elements

Website page, posters in stores, social media posts

Channels

Website, in-store displays, social media

Year

2018

Geography

Australia

Languages

English

Description

Woolworths decided to ban the use of single-use plastic bags in their stores, both for in-store and online orders. The campaign was run in advance of the switch, alerting shoppers to prepare for it.

Objectives

- Choose reusable packaging & foodware;
- Choose – and demand – sustainable packaging & products.

Results

While well-intentioned, the ban ended up receiving more negative press than positive: customers revolted at the charge and then derided Woolworths for flipping on the policy (allowing single-use bags during a transition period). Customers also called the action hypocritical, posting images of excessive packaging of fresh produce and other products. The ban is still in place (per Woolworths website).

Assessment

Overall

While the campaign was specific about the need for shoppers to bring reusable bags, the company's inability to stick to the change ultimately reinforced a bad norm, that it is too difficult to use reusable bags. The fee for reusable bags ended up acting as a negative incentive as well.

Observations

- The campaign was clear and specific about what customers needed to do, including dates.
- The use of the word 'proud' in some signage and social media posts taps into positive emotions.
- Charging customers automatically for the reusable bags acts like a fee, even though the customer receives the bag to bring back next time. This creates the experience of a penalty, rather than an incentive.
- Backtracking on the commitment after initial backlash can be perceived as acknowledging that this is too much to ask of people, and effectively reinforced an unfortunate norm.

twitter.com/plasticfreejuly/status/93135028035989504

www.thehindu.com/news/international/customers-attack-supermarket-staff-in-australia-over-plastic-bag-ban/article24309609.ece

www.bdtimes.com.au/news/busselton-dunsborough-times/confusion-around-bag-ban-ng-b88873739z

YOUR PLASTIC DIET

Your Plastic Diet

Organization

World Wide Fund for Nature

Organization type

Non-profit

Elements

Website, social media posts,
email newsletter, calculator

Channels

Web, social media, email

Year

2019

Geography

English, German, Spanish, Japanese

Languages

English

Description

This campaign calculates how much plastic people eat on average and then presents it in the form of something of equivalent weight – a credit card, a pen, etc. The campaign then calls for policy advocacy to get governments to “sign a legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution”.

Objectives

Support policy solutions.

yourplasticdiet.org

Results

Unknown.

Assessment

Overall

This campaign is alarming and will likely cause some people to act with urgency and cause others to shut it out and dismiss it because it is too difficult to deal with.

Observations

As horrifying as it is to think that everyone is consuming a credit card or a pen’s worth of plastic each week, there is literally nothing an individual can do to prevent it, as microplastics are in bottled and tap water, many foods, and in the air, where they settle out onto your food and get eaten. Fear can be very effective at motivating action. The action that is prompted on the Your Plastic Diet website is “Make sure your voice is heard. Tell everyone from your government leaders to the owners of the businesses you frequent that you want them to solve this.” While this advocacy is of course essential, it is not likely to satisfy the ‘threat mitigation’ instinct that the ad triggers, and risks causing unproductive anxiety.



Campaigns to reduce single-use plastic consumption are increasingly common. But how can governments, companies NGOs and others make sure their campaigns are truly effective – so their efforts lead to positive change and don't make matters worse?

Our review of the latest science, journalistic articles and public surveys reveals ways in which campaigns can have impact, and highlights mistakes that should be avoided. And we have examined 50 real-world plastics campaigns from across the globe, to illustrate how these strategies are being used in practice.



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