



REDUCING
PLASTIC WASTE
IN CANADA



Funded by
the European Union



Sustainable Consumption Campaigns

Lessons in Shaping Sustainable Consumers



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Background: Reducing Plastic Waste in Canada Project

As part of the European Union's (EU) "**Reducing Plastic Waste in Canada**" project, the EU is collaborating with leading organisations in Canada to share best practices and talk about solutions to achieving zero plastic waste. The two-year project which was launched in 2021 is part of the Circular Plastics in the Americas Program addressing the issue of plastic waste as part of the EU commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The collaborative activities it undertakes aim to support the transition toward more sustainable production and consumption and, boost ongoing national processes to create opportunities for a sustainable and circular plastics economy.

Reducing Plastic Waste in Canada aims to deepen knowledge, strengthen approaches, and accelerate the implementation of solutions through a series of targeted activities such as peer-to-peer exchanges, workshops, knowledge development reports, study tour and, dissemination activities. The project recognizes the complex backdrop of actors and commitments leading actions in Canada and focused its activities to collaborate with key influencers in advancing solutions to broader audiences in support of Canada's National Strategy and Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste.

This Highlights Report represents one of several reports in a series of knowledge dissemination activities. The report presents diverse experiences in the field of consumer education and key elements for successful consumer-driven campaigns to reduce plastic waste both in Europe and elsewhere.

Introduction to the Highlights Report

Consumers play a central and active role in circularity and sustainability: their choices can influence product design and supply; their values and actions can shape policies and orient public and private investments. How consumers react to information and uptake new practices is essential to the transformation of economies and social norms towards more sustainable systems. Well informed consumers can translate this knowledge to their professional and work environment and vice versa.

Some will argue that today's consumers have a fairly limited set of sustainable choices, hence the majority of the responsibility to drive change lies with other stakeholders. However, circularity for plastics demands consumer acceptance of new products, a shift towards more durable items, integration of more reuse practices in daily life, and active participation in recyclables sorting and collection. Facilitating and enabling such consumer behaviors, in turn, needs coordinated government policy, education initiatives, and industry provision of accessible new systems, products, and services.

Creating awareness and informing individuals of the impacts of plastic waste is known to be important, however, motivation and the creation of opportunities are the elements that can help individuals move from being aware and informed to taking action. In the past decade, several public education campaigns on plastic waste have been deployed worldwide, especially in Europe, each with its own tactics, messages and imagery. Some have gained global prominence while others targeted unique local issues. While their impact and

influence may not be well documented or measured, there is much to learn from these campaigns to understand how best to change personal and community behaviors to reduce plastic waste.

This report reviewed literature and selected public education campaigns focused on plastics to identify leading practices and tools in Europe and useful lessons in their application. The important potential of behavior change and the central role of consumers in the circular economy make it worth investing time and effort in well planned public education efforts.

Key Messages Explored in this Highlights Report:

- 1) Consumers can drive change if they are motivated to do so
- 2) Communications play many roles none as complex and important as shaping consumer behaviour
- 3) Lesson learned and six key attributes for effective campaigns
- 4) Successful European campaigns are multi-faceted, multi-sector, and integrated

Key Message 1: Consumers can drive change if they are motivated to do so

Steps towards more sustainable management of materials require consideration of public acceptance of diverse alternatives and adaptation by the consumer. For example, users of plastic products make decisions at various stages of the product's life-cycle that will have direct implications in the achievement of sustainable consumption goals. It is the consumer that selects products or services with sustainability goals in mind, and manages the product or package at end of life in a way that will support sustainable consumption goals – for example:

- Refusing single-use plastic products
- Refusing to purchase a product with plastic packaging
- Opting for reusable shopping bags, water bottles, food ware, or packaging
- Buying products with high recycled content
- Selecting reusable or recyclable instead of disposable products and packaging.
- Choosing reuse services
- Repairing products where feasible; and
- Sorting properly for recycling or seeking recycling infrastructure if out of home.

Consumers' ability to transition towards sustainable consumption goals depend on many factors: values and attitudes, awareness of the environmental impact of their choices, motivation, access to information, and the opportunity to reuse, repair or recycle. Motivation will support their ability to take action, especially faced with the prevalence of plastics in all the spheres of consumption and scarcity or higher cost of alternatives. Table 1 describes the driving factors that can support plastic avoidance and plastic waste recycling.

Table 1 Driving Factors for Consumer Engagement in Sustainable Consumption Goals

Driving Factors for action	Plastic Avoidance	Plastic Waste Recycling
Awareness Understanding the implication of plastic pollution and available solutions, at individual, community, regional scale, and implications at global scale.	Awareness of the consequences of overconsumption of plastics on the environment and for human health.	Awareness of littering consequences. Awareness of recycling options and modalities.
Information Accessible, relevant, comparable, and timely information about the sustainability of plastic products and packaging, their recyclability and recycling rules and, the products' life and options for extending its life is essential to enabling sustainable consumption.	Knowledge of plastic types and their environmental impact. Communication of information on functions and environmental consequences of packaging material.	Relevance of sorting in the recycling process. Knowledge and information of how to recycle correctly.
Motivation Beyond simply being aware of the problem, individuals need to feel that the plastic problem is relevant to them, understand specifically what they can do about it, and be prepared to make different choices in their plastic consumption.	Perceptions and preferences for alternative packaging solutions. General environmental attitude and social norms with respect to plastics and single-use items. Trust in collective actions ("Just me" want to make a difference).	Perception of recycling convenience. Environmental concerns and attitudes. Trust in the other actors in the system.
Opportunity Individuals cannot shift toward sustainable consumption of plastic when they do not have sustainable options. Governments and businesses play key roles in enabling the market to provide those choices.	Availability of alternatives. Policies in terms of ban or fee for items. Consumer engagement and challenges with uptake of new practices. Socio-economic status limitations.	Waste sorting/collection systems related to convenience (eg, time, effort, and accessibility) and storage places. Socio-economic factors limiting participation. Social capital.

Various studies and surveys about consumer behaviour towards plastic show that there is a general awareness of the impact of plastics in the environment, however the willingness to reduce plastic use isn't as high for the general population. Awareness and knowledge of the impact of plastics on the environment are not sufficient to translate to a consistent adoption of new practices that will result in societal or economy-wide changes. While some plastic avoidance choices are already mainstream, others are only being undertaken by a small proportion of European and Canadian citizens. Some behaviours (e.g., reusable drink bottles and shopping bags) are now common, whereas others (e.g., in-store refill) are undertaken by relatively small segment of the population.

A 2021 study¹ to better understand behaviours with respect to plastics in action on plastic among European consumers shows that there are differences between awareness and motivation to reduce plastic waste: 61% of

¹ Barbir, J.; Leal Filho, W.; Salvia, A.L.; Fendt, M.T.C.; Babaganov, R.; Albertini, M.C.; Bonoli, A.; Lackner, M.; Müller de Quevedo, D. Assessing the Levels of Awareness among European Citizens about the Direct and Indirect Impacts of Plastics on Human Health. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2021, 18, 3116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18063116>

participants surveyed stated that they are actively reducing their usage of plastic on a daily basis, and 35% are aware of the problem and try to reduce plastic consumption, but they find it difficult or inconvenient to be motivated to do so.

A 2019 study² of European attitudes reveal that when offered a choice between two packaging options for the same quality of product, a huge majority across Europe, 91.5% – said they would choose the packaging with less plastic. When asked if they would pay a 12% premium for this reduced-plastic packaging option, only 62% of respondents said they were willing to do so. The findings are the outcome of a specially-commissioned survey of 3,395 respondents across key markets of Belgium, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom in 2019.

Respondents in Belgium were most price sensitive, where just over half (54%) said they'd be willing to pay more, whereas citizens of Poland were most willing (72%) to pay more for less plastic in their packaging. The British and German respondents were closer to the European average, with 60 and 63% respectively.

In 2020, a Canada-wide study by Statistics Canada³ of 1014 consumers and their willingness to pay premiums for sustainable food packaging alternatives to reduce single-use plastic waste. Most (93.7%) respondents were personally motivated to reduce consumption of single-use packaging, but less willing to pay for sustainable alternatives.

The discrepancy between what consumers say and do is arguably the biggest challenge in any campaign aiming to promote sustainable consumption behaviour change. While awareness about plastic pollution and overconsumption maybe high, behavior changes do not follow automatically, mainly because of the following obstacles⁴:

- ✓ perceived practicability / convenience / opportunities to change
- ✓ lack of knowledge on how to implement alternatives
- ✓ level of household income, lack of resources to invest in more sustainable products
- ✓ strong habits, and
- ✓ shift of responsibility from society to the individual.

When consumers are engaged to express views and commit to reducing plastic, they can influence product design and production methods, investments in public and private infrastructure investments and policies to bring the entire community along in new practices. **Motivation to adopt new practices or take steps to seek a new sustainable product, service or solution is central to creating the necessary market signals and for supporting the development of new policies that will sustain and inspire wider sustainable options. Campaigns needs to understand well their target audience's environment and mindset in order to create strategic approaches and messages that will create a motivating setting to overcome the challenges of moving from awareness to sustained action.**

² DS Smith, 2019. Media Release. <https://www.dssmith.com/packaging/about/media/news-press-releases/2019/11/six-in-ten-europeans-willing-to-pay-more-for-reduced-plastic-packaging>

³ Statistics Canada, 2022. Table 38-10-0023-01 Environmental engagement, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/3810002301-eng>

⁴ White, K., Habib, R. and Hardisty, D.J., 2019. How to SHIFT consumer behaviors to be more sustainable: A literature review and guiding framework. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(3), pp.22-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022242919825649>

Key Messages from this Section:

- Consumers can drive change if they are motivated to do so.
- Individuals can shift toward sustainable consumption of plastic if they have options;
- There are key obstacles to be overcome to drive systemic change: knowledge, convenience, opportunity, income, habits, personal responsibility.

Key Message 2: Communications play many roles none as complex and important as shaping consumer behaviour

Information and awareness-raising of consumers through public communications campaigns are commonly used to promote sustainable consumption. In the 1990's, general campaigns aimed to promote environment-friendly purchases led by governments and advocacy groups were found to be largely ineffective in achieving behavior change towards sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles.⁵ These campaigns have been replaced by more sophisticated and focussed communications efforts, most targeting single issues with advice on practical actions and using multi-media tools including social media as an influential vehicle for change.

Influencing consumer behavior is no small task. Behaviors are rooted in values, beliefs and attitudes and motivated by many other socio-economic factors. To change consumption practices and societal norms takes time, as public education campaigns face tough competition for consumer attention. Consumers are looking for greater significance, transparency and ethics to be motivated to change, and this must be delivered in a way that quickly grabs consumer's attention.

Consumers have different needs with respect to information and their potential to be influenced by instruments and tools varies. Most consumers have a positive but passive view of sustainable consumption. Today's consumers are savvy with a multitude of information sources from the global marketplace at their fingertips. Many variables should be taken into account, including income, age, biases, attitudes and gender. Yet overall, there is a common need for information and transparency not to overshadow convenience and simplicity.

With consuming lifestyles at their peak, transforming the consumption mindset towards a sustainable one is a complex but necessary task for any actor in the circular economy. To succeed in driving sustainable consumption behaviour, a campaign requires a good understanding of the factors that motivate individual choices and learn from other campaigns to design appropriate tools and chose messages that will resonate with its audience.

Consumer surveys have tried to isolate the factors influencing purchasing behaviour, such as price, quality, and sustainability, however results show that factors are variable. For example, in the United Kingdom, only 5% of the public places ethical or social considerations above all others in purchasing decisions; most food shoppers base their decisions on price, taste and sell-by-date, while German consumers rank quality first, then price, followed by look and design, brand, and environmental-friendliness. In the context of sustainable consumption intrinsic behavior attributes include knowledge, motivation, beliefs, habits, values, attitudes, intentions, and

⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 2022. Global Plastics Outlook: Economic Drivers, Environmental Impacts and Policy Options.

other psychological variables, whereas extrinsic attributes include social and cultural norms, monetary implications, and contextual variables such as infrastructure and institutional constraints.⁶ The design of environmental campaigns and actions like nudging and community-based social marketing has recently benefitted from behavioral change theories to make the design of environmental messages more compelling and effective.

Perhaps unique to this topic, campaigns for preventing plastic pollution have been used at every stage of the plastic value chain with diverse focal points or reasons for motivating consumers or individuals to adopt new practices:

- ✓ Some plastic campaigns focused on the production component, tackling the environmental impacts of plastic production (*Toxic Tours*), and the impact of plastic composition on the environment (*Beat The Microbead*), or on human health (*Think Before You Buy*).
- ✓ Campaigns aimed at plastic consumption promoted individual plastic reduction commitments or advocated the avoidance of single products (*Stop Sucking, Switch the Stick, Embarrassing Bags*), and use or reuse behaviours (*BePlasticWise, Be Ready to Change, Break Up with Plastics, Ending Single-use Plastic, Plastic Free July*).
- ✓ The recently launched campaign Get Back promoted the good reuse practices that preceded the boom of single-use plastics and demanded institutional changes.
- ✓ Waste campaigns encourage consumers to recycle more in various settings by using different incentives (*FostPlus, Yoyo*). Littering, waste and plastic mismanagement and their impacts on the environment provide compelling purposes for many campaigns that focus on the cleanup of beaches, lakes, rivers, and neighbourhoods (*Oceana, Let's Clean Up Europe*).
- ✓ Citizens-science campaigns involving citizens in collecting and classifying waste promote understanding of plastic debris composition (*Break Free from Plastic - Brand Audit Toolkit*), and the impact of microplastics in nature (*CleanSeas*). These provide important motivations to gather more information that will provide insights about our behaviours and their impact.

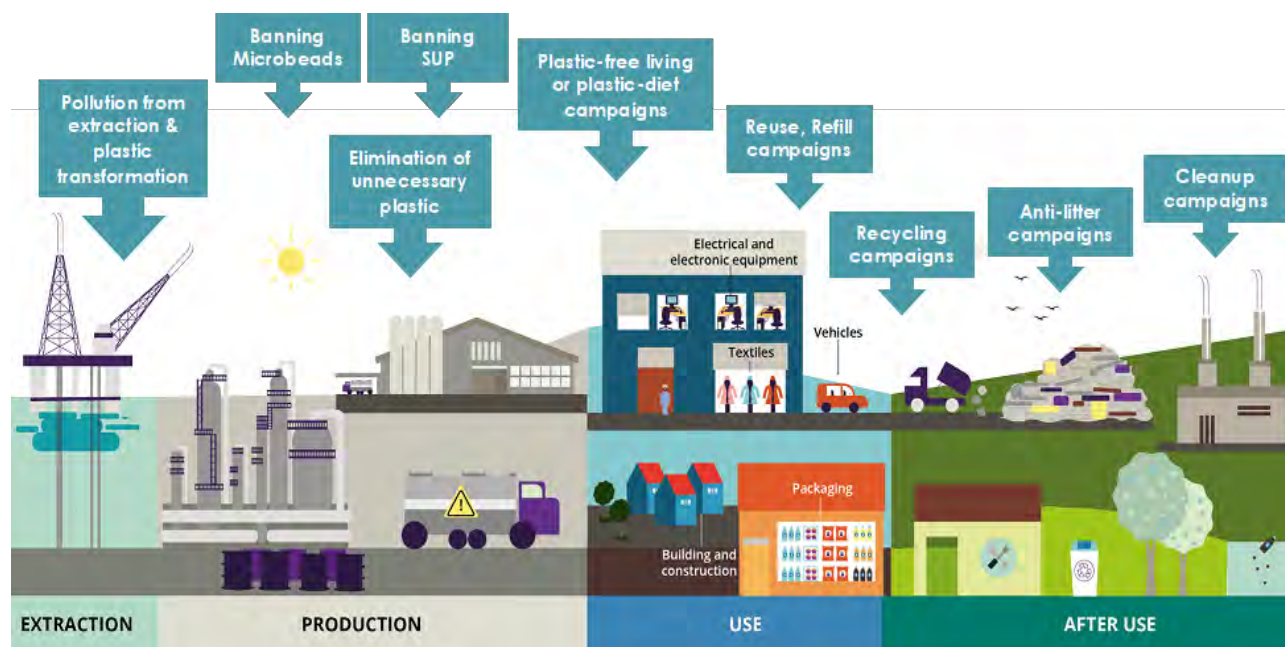
Such sustained and diverse campaigns and messaging could well be accepted as having played a part in influencing several outcomes:

- Higher public awareness of the prevalence, impact of or alternatives to plastics;
- New policies to reduce unnecessary uses of plastics or supporting options for more durable, circular or sustainable options;
- Driving design, production and procurement changes in products and services of many sectors of the economy.

⁶ Heidbreder, L.M., Tröger, J. and Schmitt, M., 2022. Exploring the psychological antecedents of private and public sphere behaviours to reduce household plastic consumption. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, pp.1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-022-02186-w>

Figure 1 shows how plastic campaigns evolve across the entire the plastic value chain and tackle the many facets of the impact of plastics on the environment in a way that contributes to possibly changing societal perspectives, values and eventually norms.

Figure 1 Types of Plastic Campaigns Along the Life Cycle⁷



Government agencies, policymakers or intergovernmental organizations launch campaigns as part of efforts to align behaviour with a new regulation or initiative, to generate momentum for a new strategy, or simply to promote sustainable behaviour. This is a common approach in the EU.

To mark World Environment Day in 2018 which had the theme *"Beat Plastic Pollution"*, the European Commission launched a major single-use-plastics focussed campaign. It was a public awareness-raising campaign to highlight citizens' role in combatting plastic pollution and marine litter. The campaign used the slogan: *"Single-use plastics: are you #ReadyToChange?"*⁸ The campaign stressed the importance of sustainable consumption, and the impact that personal choices can make in the effort to reduce plastic waste in the EU. The campaign launch also supported the EU's 2018 *Plastic Strategy*, and proposed legislation (subsequently enacted in 2021) on banning the ten single use plastic items most commonly found in marine litter: cotton bud sticks,

⁷ Fogh Mortensen, L., Tange, I., Stenmarck, Å., Fråne, A., Nielsen, T., Boberg, N. and Bauer, F., 2021. Plastics, the circular economy and Europe's environment-A priority for action. EEA Report, (18/2020). <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/plastics-the-circular-economy-and/download>

⁸ European Commission website https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/single-use-plastics-are-you-readytochange-2018-jun-05_en

cutlery, plates, straws, stirrers, sticks for balloons, as well as cups, food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene and on all products made of oxo-degradable plastic.

Figure 2 presents the key campaign photo used, which gave the public the specific visual of the key single use plastics they should avoid using. The campaign also used a video which was viewed more than 5.5 million times in two years.⁹ The campaign also included sharable social media content to drive momentum, and an informative web platform with details on EU actions and initiatives that address plastics.

Figure 2 European Commission's Single-use plastics: are you #ReadyToChange Campaign in 2018



Campaigns promoted by foundations or non-profit organizations look to influence individuals to adopt sustainable behaviour, aggregating and elevating individual voices demanding changes from government or companies, or rallying support for new policies. Several non-profit associations have plastics as their main scope and develop new campaigns on annual basis, for example Zero Waste Europe, UNEP, Plastic Free Foundation, Plastic Pollution Coalition, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Break Free from Plastic, and Plastic Oceans.

Key Messages from this Section:

- Environmental campaigns have benefitted from behavioral change theories to make the design of environmental messages more focused, compelling and effective.
- Consumers are looking for greater significance, transparency and ethics to be motivated to take action as a result of a communications or outreach campaign.
- Campaigns to prevent plastic pollution by governments, advocacy groups, and businesses have targeted all stages of the plastics life-cycle to engage consumers and individuals to take action.

⁹ Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021 Reducing plastic pollution: campaigns that work. <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210216-caldwell-sle-plastics-report-with-annex-210211.pdf>

Key Message 3: Lessons Learned and Six Key Elements for Effective Campaigns

An environmental campaign is a tool to strengthen the perspectives on various issues through direct actions, public engagement and carrying a community's perspective to influence policy. A campaign is described as an organized course of actions 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, art, crowdfunding, meme, infographics, etc. Campaigns can contribute to build and increase awareness, share information, provide motivation, and create opportunities.

Campaigns can be designed to influence individual behaviour or to aggregate individuals' voices to communicate new perspectives to businesses and governments. Today's plastics campaigns have taken many shapes—from a simple action promoted by an individual via twitter, to several communication tools aimed at various stakeholder groups to well-planned multi-media efforts. A campaign can be the sharing of a single image in an intentional way, or an integrated plan that includes diverse campaign elements, and all the combinations in between.

Here are a few attributes of recent plastic campaigns:

- ✓ Websites are a common campaign element, supported with sharable posts on social media and some kind of video contents or graphic image.
- ✓ Email lists or newsletters are used to keep people engaged. In some cases, campaigns include a pledge, a petition, signs or posters, on-package language (i.e., plastic packaging that is advertised as 'sustainable' in some way), blogs, or guides on reducing plastics.
- ✓ Some campaigns are highly creative and aim to gamify their campaigns in various ways (e.g., Trash Fish);
- ✓ Campaigns effectively relative a local circumstance or threat to engagement its community in action.
- ✓ Others have used phone applications to empower individual commitments and track collective actions; Packet In Walkers chose to engage people by posting unrecyclable crisp packets back to the manufacturer through the mail.
- ✓ Physical objects can be associated to campaigns like reusable bags, bottles, food containers or other gadgets made of recycled plastics.

Few public outreach / education initiatives track or measure their results or even publish lessons learned. A recent report from the Stockholm Environmental Institute conducted for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) presented a useful analysis of campaigns from across the world that address plastic waste. The *Reducing plastic pollution: campaigns that work study*¹⁰ identifies how plastic campaigns can make use of effective behaviour change strategies to influence individuals' sustainable use of plastic. The combined approach of literature review and analysis of 50 campaigns across the world provides valuable recommendations and insights on universal norms and values that can help in the design of campaigns to effectively increase awareness and information but also motivate changes and instill new behaviors.

¹⁰ Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021 Reducing plastic pollution: campaigns that work. <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210216-caldwell-sle-plastics-report-with-annex-210211.pdf>

The campaigns reviewed cover different facets of the plastic life cycle, with an emphasis on those delivered in recent years, since 2017. Their effectiveness in motivating individuals towards sustainable plastic consumption patterns and circularity was analysed through the lens of behavioural science. Findings show that campaigns can be successful by employing good practices like providing tips and solutions to avoid plastics in everyday life, through customizing messages considering age, sex, and creating incentives. Aligning with moral and social norms were identified as an important element. Findings indicated that campaigns that intend to evoke feelings of guilt or humour are to be used with caution, as they don't always resonate with the majority of the population. Six key elements evident in the most successful campaigns include:

1. *Customizing the approach to target various audiences*
2. *Using good social norms to shape behaviour*
3. *Specifying action with clear direction*
4. *Catalyzing commitments with a challenge*
5. *Tapping into positive emotions like pride or optimism*
6. *Showing it matters, even individual action.*

The European Commission's campaign referenced in the previous section, "*Single-use plastics: are you #ReadyToChange?*"¹¹ included four of these six elements. The approach was customized to target various audiences, focussed on good social norms to shape behaviour, provided direction for individuals to take specific action with visual cues, and commitments were catalyzed with a challenge feature.

Further detail on these six elements of success, along with common mistakes to avoid in campaigns is presented in Figure 3, overleaf.

Key Messages from this Section:

- There are many tools at one's disposal to devise and implement a successful communications or education campaign.
- Planning can benefit from many existing examples and lessons from past and existing campaigns.
- Sustained communications efforts, diversity of messengers, well-planned approaches and evaluation of results can lead to positive changes in sustainable consumption and new norms.

¹¹ European Commission website https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/single-use-plastics-are-you-readytochange-2018-jun-05_en

Figure 3 Plastic Campaigns: Effective Elements, Watch-Outs, and Common Mistakes¹²

Effective Strategy



#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 doesn't matter. Show people that they do.

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.

Common Mistake



#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.

¹² Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021 Reducing plastic pollution: campaigns that work. <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210216-caldwell-sle-plastics-report-with-annex-210211.pdf>

Key Message 4: Successful European campaigns are multi-faceted, multi-sector, and integrated

One of the most striking observations in the review of global plastic campaigns is that in the EU, many plastics reduction and sustainable consumption campaigns are complementary across sectors (government, advocacy organizations, industry and businesses). In addition, many EU campaigns build on each other, and are integrated in their messaging or dissemination approaches.

The 2018 European Commission *Plastic Strategy* started a dialogue with not only the awareness campaign for consumers to encourage sustainable consumption choices noted in the previous sections of this report, but it also engaged the private sector to commit to action. This Strategy was the catalyst for other plastic campaigns driven by the business community, as well as the non-governmental sector.

An important element of the EU Environment Ministry's *Plastics Strategy* is an outreach initiative to call on the business community operating within the plastics value chain to make voluntary pledges to use or produce more recycled plastics by a specified date. By the end of 2018, the year the *Plastics Strategy* was launched, the campaign had voluntary pledges submitted by 70 companies and business. This outreach initiative to publicly commit to more sustainable consumption practices was so successful that the EU Commission launched the *Circular Plastics Alliance* – a more broad-based alliance open to more than just the business community including academia and public authorities. This Alliance is organized under the umbrella of the EU Ministry of Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). To date, over 300 organisations have committed through a public pledge or goal to reduce plastic waste, encourage a circular economy, improve rates of recycled plastics in their product or package, and help drive sustainable consumption change to boost the EU market for recycled plastics. Most pledges are publicly available, and the EU Commission monitors and reports on progress of the pledges in this Alliance.¹³

Another important campaign being led by the European private sector is the European Plastics Pact¹⁴, a frontrunner campaign across Europe, bringing together leading countries and private organisations from the entire plastics value chain and from across Europe. The European Plastics Pact set ambitious targets and aims to encourage cross-border connection, cooperation, innovation, and harmonization at the European level to accelerate a circular plastics economy in Europe. Initially led by France, the Netherlands and Denmark, the European Plastic Pact is a public-private coalition that forms a European network of companies, EU member countries and other organisations such as non-governmental organizations to encourage cooperation, innovation and harmonisation at the European level and reduce single-use plastic products and packaging.¹⁵

The European Pact relies on industry members in the plastics value chain and on committed governments to create a bold movement. The Pact works on all levels to reduce the release of plastics into the environment: by improving the recyclability and reusability of products by design, by shifting to a more responsible use of plastics, by increasing collection, sorting and recycling, and by incorporating more recycled materials into new products and packaging. The Pact takes in the entire value chain and all stages of the plastics life cycle:

¹³ Circular Plastic Alliance https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/industrial-alliances/circular-plastics-alliance_en

¹⁴ The European Plastic Pact website <https://europeanplasticspact.org/>

¹⁵ The European Plastic Pact Annual Report 2020-2021. <https://europeanplasticspact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/the-european-plastics-pact-annual-report-2020-2021.pdf>

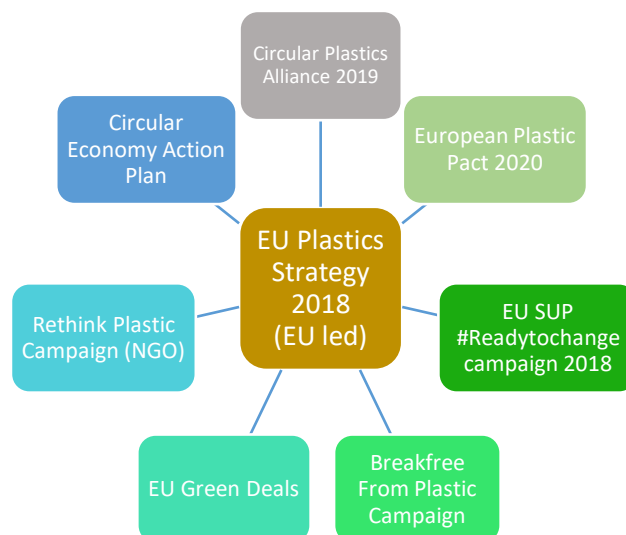
production, conversion, distribution, use and waste management. It aims to be complementary to existing initiatives, including:

- The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF); the EMF has been a major contributor to the European Plastics Pact and the vision of the Pact is aligned with the Global Commitment.
- The Circular Plastics Alliance led by the European Commission; the Commission supports the work on the European Plastics Pact and follows it closely as an observer.
- National plastic pacts in Europe (there are national plastic pacts in France, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom). The European Pact was built on existing national pacts with the aim to add European cooperation and exchange, not to duplicate national work.

The European Plastics Pact aims to build greater momentum and change on the topics that go beyond what individual countries, sectors or businesses can achieve on their own. By collaborating and sharing best practice, whether it be on design, business models, policy, innovation or citizen engagement, the goal is to deliver a greater impact and bring about a truly circular economy for plastics in Europe. As of 2021 the Pact had 147 European signatories, including: national governments, packaging manufacturers, waste management businesses, plastics manufacturers, brand-owners and retailers.¹⁶

Figure 4 presents a number of integrated plastics campaigns and strategies across sectors in the EU, including government, non-government, and business campaigns that are complementary. Many of these were implemented in response to the EU led Plastics Strategy.

Figure 4 Integrated EU Plastic Campaigns, Strategies, Action Plans, by Government, Business, and NGOs¹⁷



¹⁶ The European Plastic Pact Annual Report 2020-2021. <https://europeanplasticspact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/the-european-plastics-pact-annual-report-2020-2021.pdf>

¹⁷ Original Figure, developed by the Reducing Plastic Waste in Canada project team.

There are leading European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are helping to drive campaigns targeting plastics in Europe as well, which are complementary to EU commission and European country campaigns. For example, Zero Waste Europe is a member of the global #breakfreefromplastic (BFFP) movement that envisions a future free from plastic pollution. BFFP member organisations and individuals share the common values of environmental protection and social justice, and work together through to bring about systemic change across the whole plastics value chain – from extraction to disposal – focusing on prevention and advocating for effective solutions. Zero Waste Europe hosts the coordination of the European chapter of the movement. As well, acting as the EU policy arm of BFFP, Rethink Plastic alliance (RPa) is an alliance of leading European NGOs, with thousands of supporters in every EU Member State. RPa works with EU policy-makers to design and deliver policy solutions for a future that is free from plastic pollution. Zero Waste Europe is a member of the RPa and hosts its coordination. Local chapters of Zero Waste Europe can be found in many European countries including Belgium, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Switzerland, Romania, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Key Messages from this Section:

- In the EU, many plastic waste reduction and sustainable consumption campaigns are complementary across sectors.
- Many European plastic campaigns also aim to make global change, build greater momentum together and go beyond what individual countries or businesses can achieve.
- Within the EU, sustainable consumption is driven as a cross-sector policy goal with notable efforts to integrate initiatives and implement strategies between ministries of Environment, and other ministries such as Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs.

Conclusions

Consumers and individuals can play an important role in influencing the marketplace and government policies. Increasing public awareness and changing consuming behaviour should be considered as an integral part of the transformation of the plastic value chain towards circularity. Facilitating and enabling sustainable consumption behaviour change needs coordinated government policy, education, and industry provision of accessible programming, or alternative products and services.

Surveys and research about consumers' awareness and motivation to take action and the factors that influence consumption behaviours reveal a complex set of circumstances at play in shaping society's consumption practices. Communication and education campaigns are one component of a system (government regulations & policies, infrastructure, business offerings, etc.) that needs to work in tandem, if we are to change habits around plastic use and encourage sustainable consumption. Complexity of the choices and information to be conveyed about circularity and sustainability should not be underestimated. Long-lasting, credible and successful communications efforts should be based on rigorous evidence.

While consumers should be supported and enabled to be part of the solution, plastic campaigns can play an important role in make citizens more active in the public sphere and demand e.g., for the elimination of unnecessary plastic, reuse systems, and other new delivery models more accessible and affordable¹⁸. Campaigns to reduce plastic waste have already showed significant diversity in their approaches, focus and messaging targeting different aspects of the plastic life-cycle.

Successful plastic waste reduction and sustainable consumption campaigns have been carried out all over the world. In Europe, campaigns focused on sustainable consumption practices as being the responsibility of not only the individual but also all the players in the plastics value chain have gained strong momentum as a result of leading EU strategies and plans. Highlights and learnings from European as well as other campaigns can provide useful insights for future communications and education efforts and in Canada's journey towards more sustainable consumption practices.

¹⁸ A recent EU study (SYSTEMIQ, 2022) estimates that the elimination of unnecessary plastic, reuse, and other new delivery models have the potential to reduce almost 5 Mt of plastic waste per year by 2030 (current commitments and regulations reduce plastic waste by only 1.5 Mt by 2030). See ReShaping Plastics – Pathways to a Circular, Climate Neutral Plastics System in Europe" https://www.systemiq.earth/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/SYSTEMIQ-Reshaping_Plastics-Media-Release-28032022-ENGLISH.pdf