



# Social marketing: approaches utilised to reduce consumer use of single-use plastics.

With emerging global trends in conscious consumer demand, ethical consumerism and mass-consumption (Bradu *et al.*, 2014), the following article utilises single-use plastic as a case study to critically evaluate the differential success of social marketing techniques for influencing consumers to reduce single-use plastic consumption; defining social marketing as commercial and social science principles employed to encourage prosocial behaviour (Andreasen, 2012), benefitting individuals and society through developing social and personal norms (Howie *et al.*, 2018), consequentially motivating change through perceived benefits, barrier reduction and costs pertinent to desirable replacement behaviours (Lu, 2013).

Magel (2019) highlights consumer behaviour is primarily psychological and often irrational. Therefore, Thaler and Sunstein (2009) identify nudging as an effective approach employed by businesses to incentivise desirable behaviour and reduce perceived cognitive effort, particularly amongst inner-directed consumers through positive reinforcement (Olingschlaeger, 2019). Thus, whilst arguably homogeneous time-restrained consumer segments may show disinterest (Mortimer, 2011), Homonoff (2018) emphasises nudging approaches could significantly influence ethical consumption amongst consumers in the future should incentives exceed perceived cost and sacrifice, developing long-term intrinsic benefit from the receipt of free goods (Shampanier *et al.*, 2007).

Meanwhile, resulting from increased dispositions of concern regarding mass-consumption amongst outer-directed individuals (Barbarossa and De Pelsmacker, 2016), Olingschlaeger (2019) highlights 75% of UK consumers consciously adopt more ethical behaviour. Thus, Fleming (2018) highlights supermarkets are increasingly employing reduction approaches to encourage altruistic behaviour from ethical consumers due to their pertinent role within business outcomes including participation within national initiatives such as the UK Plastics Pact, aiming to eliminate single-use plastic by 2025 (WRAP, 2019). Therefore, whilst Schaverien (2019) argues communicating pact signings could be perceived as a passive approach, EIA (2019) suggests more effective initiatives include active reduction commitments.

Consequently, Chua (2019) reinforces active zero-waste initiatives may more greatly influence consumer attitudes and intentions towards single-use plastic reduction. Thus, Meier (2018) argues urgent action including plastic-free packaging and aisles may be more effective long-term due to consumers becoming increasingly conscious regarding organisations actively engaging in corporate social responsibility (Martucci, 2019).

**Nudging influences ethical consumption.**

Homonoff (2018)

**75% of UK consumers consciously adopt more ethical behaviour.**

Olingschlaeger (2019)

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