

Into the mainstream!

Influencing factors and framework conditions for campaigns to promote sustainable products

Summary

The last decades have shown that many conventional products are associated with severe negative social and environmental impacts. In contrast, sustainable products have the potential to minimize such damages. Still, they are unsuccessful at establishing themselves as mainstream choices. The use of Carsharing for example can lead to a reduction of private vehicles, which is connected to advantages for land use in cities as well as lower CO₂ emissions and more environmentally conscious mobility behavior. Compared to the total German vehicle stock, cars used for carsharing only make up below 0.1 percent (Esche et al. 2021). Campaigns such as "Greenfreeze" from the early 1990s have shown, that they can enhance the diffusion of sustainable products and establish them as an alternative to conventional products in the market. "Greenfreeze" for example triggered the transformation of the domestic refrigerator segment. Instead of using cooling agents that not only have significant greenhouse gas potential but also accelerate the ozone layer depletion, more environmentally friendly alternatives were established in the market. Since then, a variety of campaigns has contributed towards the diffusion of key-products for sustainable consumption into the mainstream.

The project "**Bringing sustainable consumption to the mass market: Identifying and promoting key products with high diffusion potential**" addresses precisely this issue. The aim is to identify key products for sustainable consumption and to develop campaigns that aid their diffusion into the mainstream. Key products of sustainable consumption are existing products that remain in niches. They can diffuse into the mainstream with relatively little effort as they do not require a change in behaviour. Furthermore, they are characterized by great potentials for environmental relief and minimize negative social impacts along their entire life-cycle. Among others, the products in Figure 1 have been identified as key products. This report analyses promoting or inhibiting framework conditions that influence the choice of sustainable products and factors that contribute to the success or failure of campaigns. A review was carried out for three different types of sources:

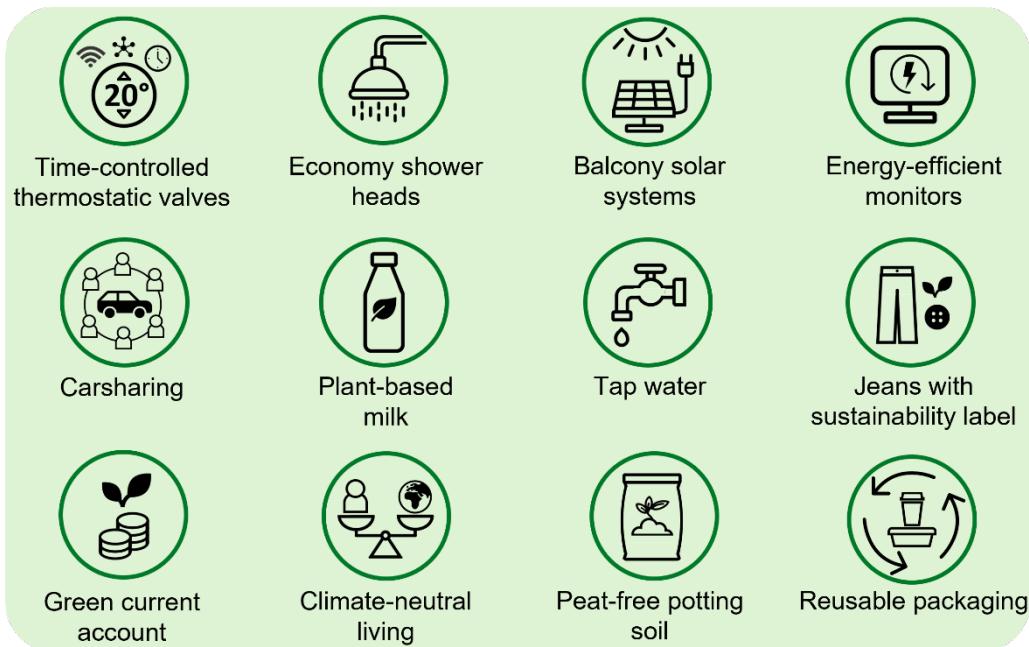
- ▶ Literature from intervention and communication research, psychology, sustainability marketing and behavioural economics as well as other relevant fields,
- ▶ 75 existing campaigns, especially with reference to the above-mentioned or very similar key products, and
- ▶ interviews with practitioners in the field of marketing or campaign design which contribute further insights.

In the following the results of the analysis will be presented. The report includes...

- ▶ an overview of motives for choosing sustainable products,
- ▶ insights into the design of a successful campaign, and

- outcomes of the campaign analysis.

Figure 1: Overview of identified key products



Source: own illustration, Institute for Ecological Economy Research

Why and when do people choose sustainable products?

The decision-making process of consumers is influenced by personal influencing factors as well as structural influencing factors. **Personal influencing factors** refer to characteristics, attitudes, values, motives, resources, and competences. **Structural influencing factors** influence the users' psychological processes such as the social environment, product properties, and the characteristics of the advertising company see Figure 2.

The first personal influencing factor are the **motives of consumers**. They determine how consumers perceive a product and whether they are motivated to buy it. These include:

- Attitudes towards sustainability, public welfare and product properties.
(Regardless of the exact attitude that influences the consideration in the purchase situation, it must be positive.)
- Personal values and moral concepts.
(Consumers with a strong sense of responsibility and environmental awareness are more likely to choose sustainable products.)
- Self-related motives.
(Usually the result of concerns and fears, such as worries about the quality of life or health concerns.)

Personal **resources and competences of the consumer** to evaluate the product are an additional factor. This includes time, mental and emotional capacities, possibilities, experiences, knowledge, and tangible resources (finances).

To what extent consumers possess these is an individual assessment. Accordingly, it is not only the resources themselves but mostly the **perception of resource availability** that matters in

choosing sustainable products. Furthermore, it is necessary that consumers assume that their sustainable product choice will lead to the **desired outcome** such as environmental relief. In the case of establishing a habit of choosing a sustainable product over a prolonged period of time, resources, competences and perceived behavioral control become increasingly important.

In choosing a product, consumers consciously or unconsciously consider trends, lifestyle, attitudes, and behavior of their **social environment**. The social environment is thus an important framework for campaigns. Important factors to consider are

- ▶ What other people think about a behaviour, and
- ▶ What many other people do.

Whether a norm is obeyed depends on whether it is currently "activated" - salient.

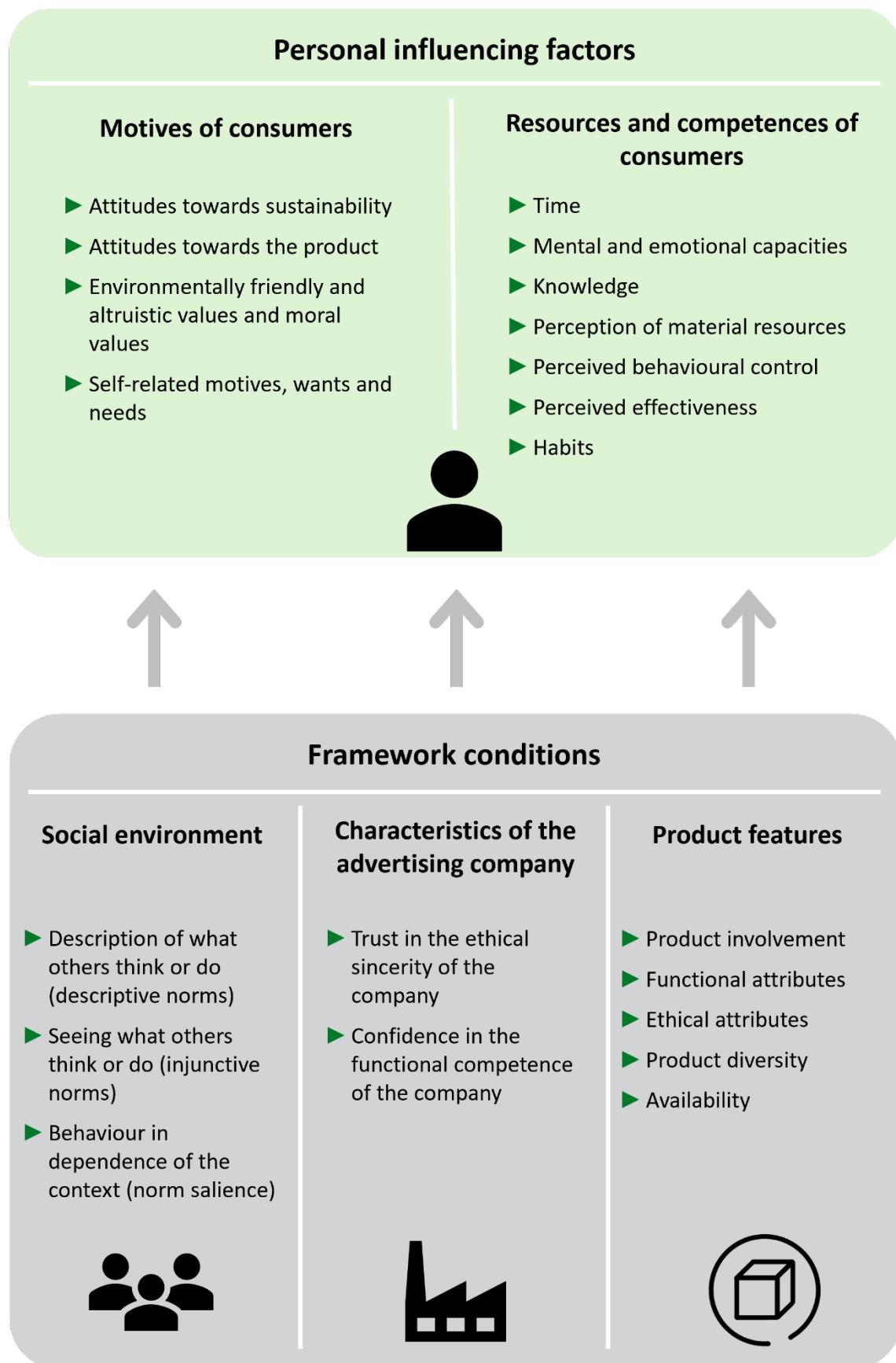
Another framework condition that influences the mental decision-making process are the **product's properties**:

- ▶ Functional attributes
 - (... such as quality, reliability and durability, describe why products are suitable for fulfilling functional needs. For durable products perceived product lifetime costs play a separate role.)
- ▶ Ethical attributes
 - (... such as fair wages for producers or the environmental relief potential. For example, consumers perceive ethical standards as fulfilled if the products are certified.)
- ▶ Characteristics of the buying situation
 - (... such as availability, variety of products and product placement at the point of sale.)

A third framework condition is the **characteristics of the advertising company**. In this context special importance is attributed to:

- ▶ the perceived competence of the company to fulfil functional requirements of the product, and
- ▶ the trustworthiness and authenticity of the company to meet ethical requirements.

Figure 2: Influencing factors for the purchase of a (sustainable) product



Source: own illustration, Institute for Ecological Economy Research

Insights into the design of campaigns for sustainable products

To analyze factors that contribute to a successful campaign design, marketing literature was reviewed. This revealed that the advertisement of sustainable products does not significantly differ from conventional product advertisement. Both conventional and sustainable marketing use **consumer needs analysis** as a basic tool. In addition, sustainability marketing uses the **analysis of external social and environmental impacts** of the product. Accordingly, the conventional marketing-mix consists of the four aspects price, product, place and promotion. The **sustainability marketing-mix** however, addresses:

- ▶ Consumer costs
(Describing the fulfilment of ethical and functional needs such as low environmental and social impacts, animal welfare and health.)
- ▶ Customer solutions
(Which take into account both the needs of consumers and socio-ecological challenges.)
- ▶ Convenience
(This includes the demand for easy product access or services that make things easier for the consumer.)
- ▶ Communication
(Which counteracts the perceived psychological distance of consumers to ecological and social problems and consequently to the benefits of the sustainable products.)

Interviews have shown that the design of a successful campaign follows a process. Apart from the definition of targets, it also includes a definition of relevant target groups and an analysis of socio-ecological problems. Two different strategies for sustainable product campaigns were identified. On the one hand, structural strategies, such as changes in product price or availability, can change the framework conditions of product consumption. On the other hand, campaigns for sustainable products in particular usually use informative strategies that aim to strengthen personal influencing factors, promote knowledge and skills, and activate eco-friendly values and norms of the consumers. For a maximum effectiveness, informative strategies should be aligned with existing structural framework conditions.

For a successful communication within a sustainable product campaign various **communication tools** were identified from the literature (such as humor, interactive means, or confrontation). For this the Stoknes-model for climate communication offers valuable insights (Table 1).

Analysing the most successful **channels** demonstrates that there is no general recommendation for choosing online-, offline-, or multimedia-campaigns. Instead – similar to the **visualisation** – an individual analysis for the product as well as the target group should be conducted. An overview of relevant influencing factors for the design of a campaign can be found in Figure 3.

Table 1: Stoknes Climate Communication Model

| Barrier | Communication solution |
|--|---|
| Distance- Perceived distance towards the sustainability issue | Communicate personal relevance and refer to social environment |
| Doom - Feeling paralysed or desensitised by disaster communication | Offer positive, solution-oriented responses ("three positive information for every threatening one") |
| Cognitive dissonance - Knowledge contradicts own actions | Demonstrate easy access / use of products |
| Denial - As a method of dealing with cognitive dissonance | Verständliche Signale (Indikatoren) verbreiten, die Auswirkungen auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene zeigen. |
| (Conservative) Identity | Use the impact of stories that illustrate an identity in a positive future |

Source: Own representation according to Stoknes (2015)

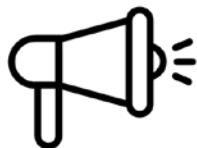
Outcomes of the campaign analysis

During the campaign analysis a total of 75 **product-related campaigns** with special reference to key products for sustainable consumption were reviewed. It became apparent that:

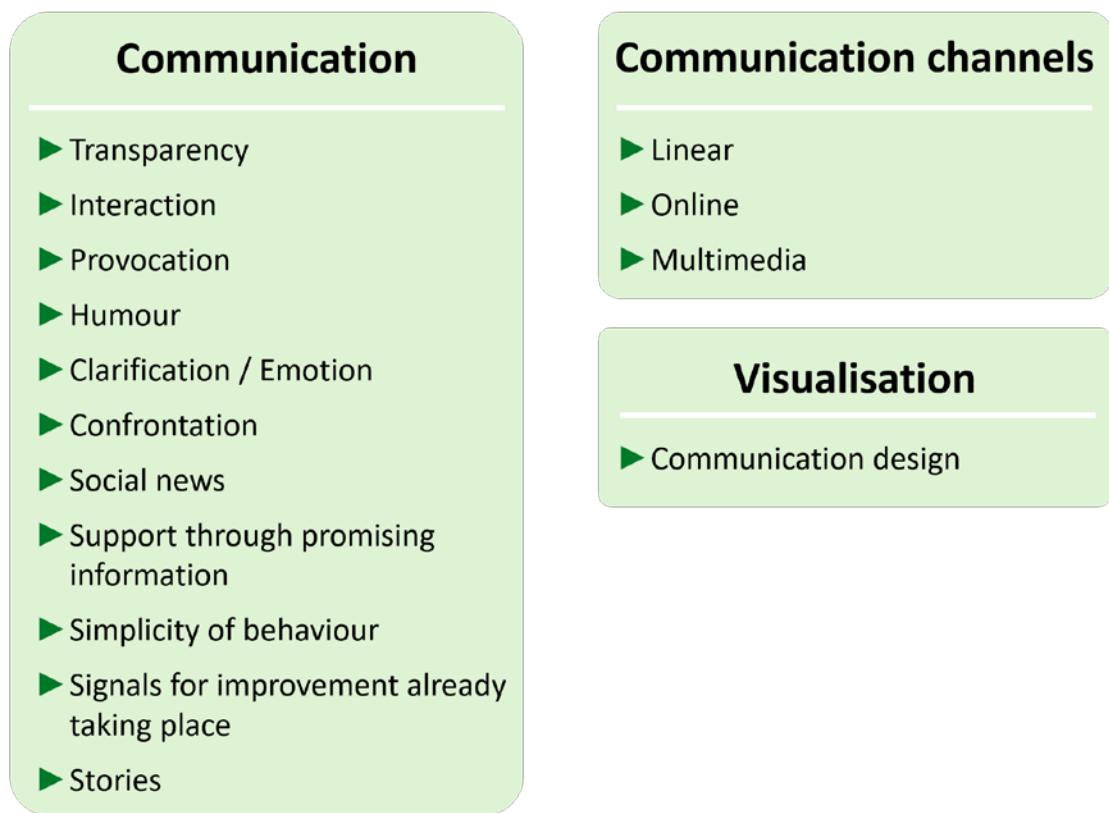
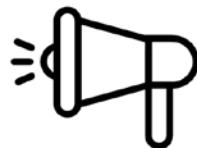
- ▶ the criteria that were previously considered success factors such as "product-related", "cross-stakeholder", "focused", "monothematic" can be the basis of a successful campaign but are not a prerequisite for success.
- ▶ most of the reviewed campaigns address products that are already in the stage of diffusion.
- ▶ most campaigns use multimedia channels or exclusively online-channels.
- ▶ campaigns for knowledge-transfer almost exclusively rely on confrontative designs.
- ▶ apart from that no clear preference for certain communication instruments was found.
- ▶ many campaigns focus on financial (structural) incentives like cost coverage, free consultations and sweepstakes, or functional-informative contents
- ▶ alternatively, they often focus on Quality, Health, data protection or comfort.
- ▶ despite the diverse range of target groups, four in particular came into focus: youth, region-specific target groups, professionals and people with pronounced environmental awareness
- ▶ few campaigns were evaluated.

To address some campaigns in more detail despite missing evaluation, a variety of campaigns will be introduced in factsheets.

Figure 3: Influencing factors and strategies for designing campaigns for sustainable products



Influencing factors for campaigns for sustainable products



Source: own illustration, Institute for Ecological Economy Research

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