

# MARKETING A DIFFERENCE:

## A BRAND OWNER'S GUIDE TO MOTIVATING SUSTAINABLE CHOICES



## THE PLANET IS CLOSE TO BREAKING POINT...

It is undeniable that consumerism has played a big part in the climate crisis that we are now facing, and so it must also be a significant part of any solution

Encouraging buyers to make better and more sustainable choices has never been more important and there are clear signs that more people are more motivated to buy with sustainability in mind.<sup>1</sup>

To address this motivation, marketers often use the various 'green nudge' guides that are available for promoting sustainable behaviour.<sup>2</sup>



## ... UNLESS WE CAN CHANGE OUR BEHAVIOR

However, it is difficult to build a strategy or campaign on a 'nudge' because they do little to address the 'attitude-behaviour' gap between the sustainable options that consumers say they want, and what they actually buy<sup>3</sup>

This report instead gives marketers 12 motivations to tap into with their products and services – with the aim of shifting buyers from sustainable intention to meaningful action!

It is a proven path to success, with those that unlock sustainable motivation proving both a moral and business imperative.

# THE SCIENCE OF CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

Motivations move people. Our motivation for doing something is one of the three variables that drive our behaviour, according to the highly-respected and scientifically-validated 'COM-B' model of behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

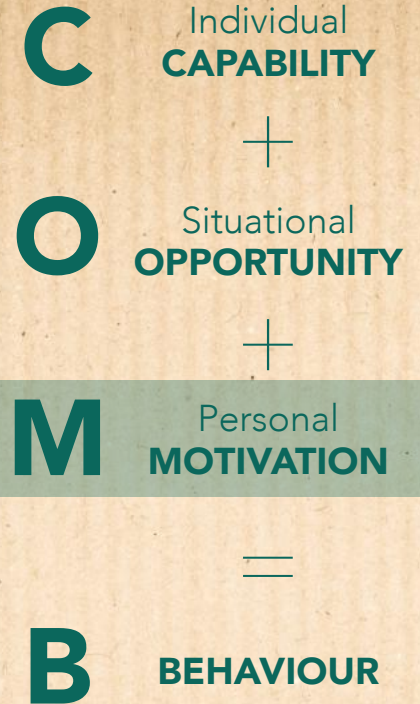
The COM-B model explains behaviour (B) as the simple output of personal motivation (M), situational opportunity (O), and individual capability (C).<sup>a</sup>

It's the same logic that detectives and lawyers use to ascertain the innocence or guilt of suspects. Did they have the means (capability), opportunity and critically, motive to commit the crime?

COM-B is useful for marketers because it provides **three simple, levers to influence sustainable consumption**. Improve people's capability to buy better by offering knowledge, tools and skills. Enhance situational opportunities to buy better by increasing the physical and mental availability (salience) of sustainable choices. And/or appeal to the motivations that drive sustainable behaviour, such as personal gain, pleasure, and social norms.<sup>5</sup>

Of course marketers can use all three levers, but **this guide focuses on harnessing the motivational M of the COM-B model**.

## COM-B FRAMEWORK



### WHAT IS MOTIVATION?

Motivation is what drives behaviour.<sup>6</sup> According to the APA (American Psychological Association) definition, motivated behaviour is goal-directed action that has energy, direction and purpose, such as when we are motivated to satisfy a need or a want or to secure a reward. The motivations that lie behind our behaviour can be conscious or unconscious, overt or hidden, and intrinsic or extrinsic.



# CONSUMERS WANT BRANDS TO TAKE ACTION ...

Products with sustainability claims now account for **50% of all growth in FMCG** <sup>8</sup>

**47%** of people would stop using a brands products & services that violated their personal values. Sustainability topped the list<sup>9</sup>

Over **50%** of people now want to buy brands which are more sustainable <sup>10</sup>



**81%** of people feel strongly that companies should help to improve the environment<sup>11</sup>

**80%** want Brands to tackle societies problems <sup>12</sup>

**90%** of people feel brands and companies have a responsibility to take care of the planet and its people<sup>13</sup>

Products with sustainability claims **grow 6X faster** on average than competitors<sup>8</sup>

# THE 12 MOTIVATIONS ON A PAGE

When looking to motivate behaviour, businesses and brands can either highlight drivers (most important for accelerating preference) or address sustainability barriers (most important for convincing sceptics) we have explored 6 of each to make up our 12 key motivations for sustainable behaviour.

## DRIVERS TO PUSH



**1 ALTRUISM**  
Motivated by desire to help



**4 FAIRNESS**  
Motivated by sense of justice



**2 NEWNESS**  
Motivated by innovation



**5 BELONGING**  
Motivated by affiliation



**3 STATUS**  
Motivated by esteem and rank



**6 HEDONIA**  
Motivated by pleasure

## BARRIERS TO ADDRESS



**7 REACTANCE**  
Motivated by freedom



**10 DENIAL**  
Motivated by making a difference



**8 VALUE**  
Motivated by value (benefits – costs)



**11 TRADITION**  
Motivated by heritage and nostalgia



**9 PATRIOTISM**  
Motivated by national pride



**12 DISGUST**  
Motivated by purity



# 6 MOTIVATIONAL DRIVERS

FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

By appealing to these motivations in a distinctive way, brands can win preference among sustainability-minded consumers.





## ALTRUISM

Sustainability-minded consumers can be motivated by altruism, the unselfish and benevolent desire to help others.

Through mirror neurons, we are all hardwired to feel the pain of others, and this creates visceral empathy, which can motivate an altruistic response focused on helping others.

Research shows that sustainability-minded consumers can index highly on empathy,<sup>14</sup> and view morality in terms of altruistic care and harm reduction.<sup>15</sup>

For example, one study found that people donated 34% more money in response to an empathy-focused

message when they were asked to imagine how a polar bear would feel about the effects of climate change.<sup>16</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands can win over sustainably-minded consumers by fostering empathy and appealing to altruistic motivations.

For example, fashion brand Fazl's fair trade branding emphasises that its socks are handmade by Himalayan women in need, and that 50% of its profits go to local orphanages.







## NEWNESS

Sustainability-minded consumers can be future-focused and motivated by the new and different.

Chemically, we are all motivated by novelty because newness produces a dopamine response in the brain, and this prompts us to explore new and better ways of doing things.

Research suggests sustainability-minded consumers are particularly open to innovative new ideas, products and experiences.<sup>17</sup>

For example, one study found that

people who score highly on 'novelty-seeking' and related traits are significantly more likely to be concerned about the environment, and to engage in responsible buying.<sup>18</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainably-minded shoppers by emphasising newness and focusing on the future. Coca-Cola, for example, promotes its innovative sustainable packaging initiatives, like PlantBottle and Paper Bottle, and advertises its goal to be 100% recyclable by 2025.



The Paper Bottle by Coca-Cola





## STATUS

Sustainability-minded consumers can be motivated by status and recognition.

All consumers are status-seeking to some degree, but a number of studies have linked sustainable consumption to status (or 'virtue') signalling in particular.<sup>19</sup> It appears that status-signalling around sustainability may boost self-esteem through a sense of moral superiority, pride and value-expression.

In one study, when participants were made to think about status (by reading a story about getting a high status job), the proportion choosing a sustainable

soap over a non-sustainable luxury alternative rose from 26% to 42%; this effect was amplified by a conspicuous consumption environment (shopping in a store rather than online).<sup>21</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainability-minded consumers by giving them a conspicuous signal they can use to identify as 'in the know' or morally superior. For example, sustainable fashion brand People Tree encourages customers to share pictures of their products on social media to receive more information about provenance.





## FAIRNESS

Sustainability-minded consumers can be motivated by fairness, the belief that people should be treated justly, equally and without bias.

Humans are social animals, and positive social interactions require justice and reciprocity in order to thrive.

Research indicates that sustainability is associated with people who view morality in terms of equality<sup>20</sup> and have an egalitarian personality.<sup>21</sup>

For example, one study found strong, positive correlations between purchase intentions in sustainable consumption

and perceptions of distributive justice (rewarding producers fairly), procedural justice (having fair procedures) and interactional justice (treating people with respect).<sup>22</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainably-minded shoppers by correcting injustices. For example, Patagonia's branding has a strong social justice slant, uplifting victims and bringing down oppressors, whilst Everlane offers consumers the opportunity to see fair business practices with their own eyes with digital tours of their factories.







## BELONGING

Sustainability-minded consumers can be motivated by a sense of belonging and relatedness.

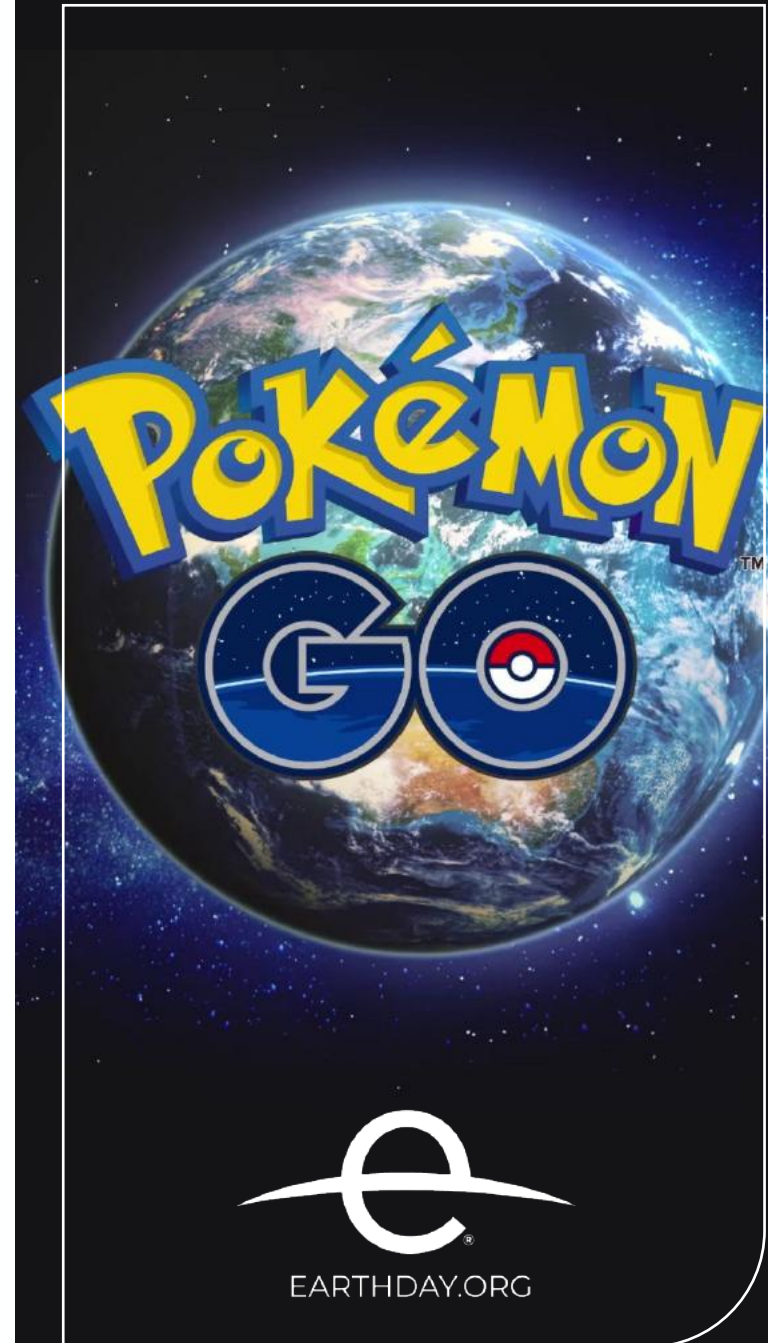
Whilst all humans are motivated to satisfy the universal need for belonging, connection and affiliation, this motivation seems particularly acute in those concerned about the environment.

Research shows that sustainability-minded consumers tend to be more cooperative and have a greater sense of shared social identity, and this can make them more likely to follow social norms.<sup>23</sup>

For example, in one US study, the proportion of diners who ordered a meat-free lunch increased from 21% to 34% when they were told that almost a third of Americans had started to limit their meat consumption.<sup>24</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainability-minded consumers by giving them a route to social interaction and expressing group identity. For instance, Pokémon Go runs Earth Day clean-up campaigns encouraging users to be part of a social movement and meet up with others in their area.





## HEDONIA

Sustainability-minded consumers can be motivated by pleasure and enjoyment.

As humans we are motivated by the expectation of rewards, including the emotional reward of feeling good about a purchase.

Research shows that sustainability-minded consumers are motivated by the hedonic 'warm glow' of ethical purchases.<sup>25</sup>

In one study, participants were asked to rate a woody perfume on various dimensions. When the perfume was

labelled as having "100% natural ingredients", ratings of the hedonic experience (e.g. "enjoyable") were 124% higher, and purchase intentions were 170%.<sup>26</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainably-minded shoppers by focusing on the positive emotional benefits, like pleasurable feelings of quality or luxury. For example, Lush has produced a series of How It's Made clips and images for social media using rich sensorial imagery, combined with narratives of luxury and sustainability.



**LUSH**

*HOW IT'S MADE*



# 6 MOTIVATIONAL BARRIERS

*TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION*

By dealing with these barriers, brands will be well placed to recruit sustainability-sceptics into buying sustainable products and services.







# REACTANCE

**Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by personal autonomy and freedom.**

According to reactance theory, people need to feel free to make their own choices, and may consequently 'rebel' when they feel coerced or manipulated into doing something. For example, adolescents may begin smoking in part because they are told not to.

Psychologists have identified reactance as one of the key barriers to sustainability.<sup>27</sup> In particular, climate change messaging induces reactance among people who are already sceptical.

Reactance to environmental messaging can be significantly reduced by being less 'confrontational' - for example, by presenting information as facts rather than directives. One study found that removing directives reduced anger by 25% and reactance by 47%.<sup>28</sup>

## SO WHAT?

**Brands will win over sustainability-sceptics by being more subtle in their branding and respecting consumers' right to choose. For example, H&M integrates the option, but not the obligation, to make more sustainable choices through its Conscious and Conscious Exclusive ranges.**







## VALUE

Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by value and price.

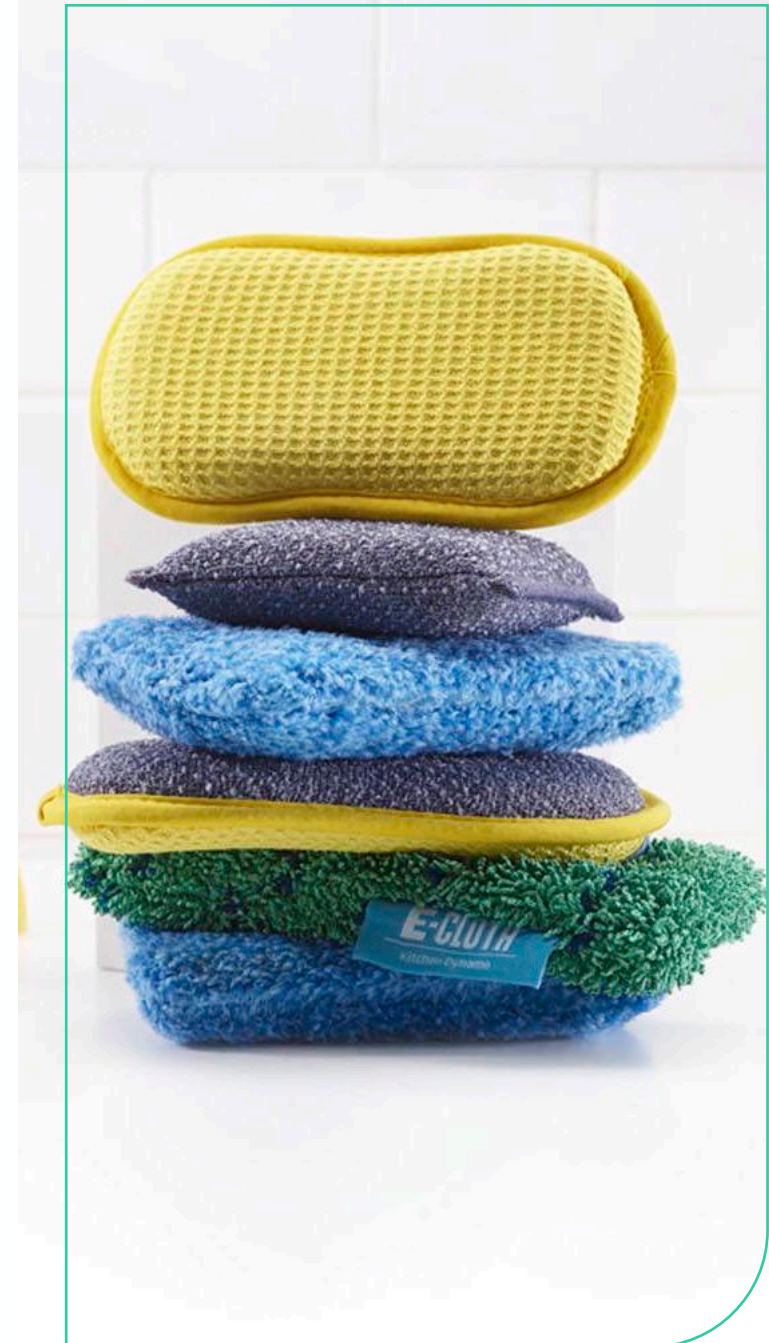
Most consumers are motivated by value, in terms of maximising the benefits they get for the price paid. When it comes to sustainable consumption, a review of the research shows that consumers tend to be particularly price-sensitive and most are unwilling to pay any sustainability premium.<sup>29</sup>

However, research does show that price-sensitivity can be reduced if additional benefits are emphasised. For example, one study found that price sensitivity towards a green brand was

reduced by making clear claims about the benefits, particularly (in this case) using organic fibres and donating to environmental causes.<sup>30</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainability-sceptics by increasing the (perceived) benefits of buying while decreasing the (perceived) costs. For example, E-Cloth clearly explains the benefits of the product, including saving consumer time, effort and money, as well as 3,000 sheets of paper towels per year that would have been destined for landfill.





## PATRIOTISM

Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by patriotism and group loyalty.

We are all motivated to feel loyal to our own tribe ('in-group') and to some degree to be antagonistic to 'out-groups' that challenge our beliefs, values and way of life. Research shows that sustainability-sceptics can index highly on group loyalty, including national identity.<sup>31</sup>

Research also shows that when patriotic appeals to national identity are used to promote sustainability, they can be more effective. For example, the likelihood of signing a pro-environment petition in America increased from 29%

to 68% via a note stating that environmentalism helps protect and preserve the American way of life.<sup>32</sup> Eco-nationalism, and in some cases eco-localism, can warm sceptics to sustainability.

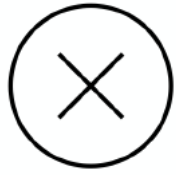
### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainability-sceptics by appealing to patriotism, localism and national identity. For example, Slane Whiskey deftly links its traditional Irish brand to sustainability - such as via its use of collected rainwater and its support for local farmers.



LEAVE A LEGACY.  
NOT A FOOTPRINT





## DENIAL

Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by the coping mechanism of denial.

Denial has been identified as a major factor in scepticism over sustainability concerns.<sup>33</sup> Denial is the refusal to accept reality or fact, and it is also a coping mechanism that we use when we are faced with fear-inducing information. Protection motivation theory in psychology suggests denial is particularly acute when we feel powerless to do anything about the threat.

One study found that intentions to engage in climate activism were increased through the use of 'self-

efficacy' messages that increase confidence that their actions will have a meaningful impact.<sup>34</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over sustainability-sceptics with positive messaging that reinforces the impression that their purchase really will make an effective difference. For example, the Buy a Shoe, Plant a Tree campaign by skater brand Etnies made shoppers feel that their purchase made a tangible contribution.





## TRADITION

Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by tradition and nostalgia.

Tradition, habit and heritage provide a psychological buffer against uncertainty and anxiety. Research shows that sustainability-sceptics can be more traditional and conservative and less open to change and innovation.<sup>35</sup>

In a series of experiments with conservative consumers who were less likely to be sustainability-minded, participants were more likely to endorse an environmental message if it focused on the past rather than the future.<sup>36</sup>

Brands will win over eco-sceptical shoppers by recalling nostalgia, promising conservation (rather than progress), and appealing to tradition.

### SO WHAT?

Many luxury brands tap into this conservation aesthetic using heritage and traditional craftsmanship. Louis Vuitton, for example, was awarded the positive luxury Butterfly Mark mark for its sustainability practices in 2018.







## DISGUST

Sustainability-sceptics can be motivated by disgust avoidance.

After fear, disgust is one of our strongest emotions in terms of activating the emotion centre of the brain, the amygdala. There is, of course, a strong adaptive value to disgust, keeping people clear of pathogens and disease.

Research shows that the 'yuck factor' is a significant barrier to sustainable consumption, especially if it involves using reclaimed, recycled, impure or imperfect ingredients.<sup>37</sup> This 'yuck-factor' can be particularly pronounced among consumers with high disgust

sensitivity.

However, research also shows that sustainability messages can be effective if they are switched to promote purity.<sup>38</sup>

### SO WHAT?

Brands will win over eco-sceptical shoppers by tapping into their deep-seated need for purity and cleanliness. For example, water filter brand Brita's [#NoFilterNoFuture](#) campaign had Instagram influencers post images of themselves in stunning natural landscapes.



# SUMMARY

## SUSTAINABILITY DRIVERS

Appeal to these motivations to drive preference and share among consumers who already buy sustainably



**1 ALTRUISM**  
Motivated by desire to help



**4 FAIRNESS**  
Motivated by sense of justice



**2 NEWNESS**  
Motivated by innovation



**5 BELONGING**  
Motivated by affiliation



**3 STATUS**  
Motivated by esteem and rank



**6 HEDONIA**  
Motivated by pleasure

## SUSTAINABILITY BARRIERS

Appeal to these motivations to grow the market by recruiting more consumers to start buying sustainably



**7 REACTANCE**  
Motivated by freedom



**8 VALUE**  
Motivated by value (benefits – costs)



**9 PATRIOTISM**  
Motivated by national pride



**10 DENIAL**  
Motivated by making a difference



**11 TRADITION**  
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Motivated by purity



# LET'S TALK: WE'RE MOTIVATED TO HELP

At Brand Genetics, we believe in the power and promise of human motivation to change the world for good.

And when it comes to sustainability, we're motivated to be part of the change.

We'd be delighted to help you put motivation back into the marketing mix.



Unlocking growth  
by thinking human first



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## WANT MORE?

There are plenty more ways marketers can better tap into human nature and help shape consumer behaviour.

Humans are hardwired to pay attention to the new, the different or the unusual, so in turbulent times it's tempting to focus on what's changing in the world. However, by following this path you and your businesses may be leaving the bigger opportunities on the table ....

Our last report focuses on **the 7 key laws of Human Nature** every Brand manager should know. We also break down examples of how these insights can be applied to the world of marketing, innovation and strategy to inspire new thinking in your organisation.

[Click HERE to find out more](#)





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