



BRIDGING THE GREEN GAP

A BEHAVIOURAL TOOLKIT FOR BRANDS

Truth.

WHAT DID WE DO?

Over the last three years, Truth has conducted quantitative research studies exploring consumer attitudes and behaviours associated with climate change. For this study, we conducted a 15-minute survey with just over 2000 people in the UK.

It's within this context we see that climate change is still considered increasingly urgent. Most people want to do more but we find there are significant barriers to people taking action - also known as the 'Green Gap'. The Green Gap highlights the gap between our intentions and actions on sustainability-related issues.

Using this data, we've identified four key barriers that prevent consumers from taking action. More importantly, we've been able to apply Behavioural Science Theory to help inform a 'toolkit' of ways to overcome these barriers.

We hope you find this toolkit useful - if you have any questions or would like to discuss any of this in more depth, don't hesitate to get in touch!



OVERVIEW

OUR FINDINGS POINT TO FOUR BEHAVIOURALLY-INSPIRED TACTICS TO HELP BRANDS ADDRESS THE GREEN GAP

01. DIAL UP THE BENEFITS OF CLIMATE-POSITIVE ACTIONS SO THEY FEEL CO-BENEFICIAL

Reframe communications/offers to highlight benefits that feel personal to the consumer e.g. via an ability to increase efficiency and reduce waste.

02. IMPROVE HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS COMMUNICATED SO IT FEELS MANAGEABLE AND RELEVANT FOR EVERYONE

Reduce cognitive strain by chunking climate change communications/offers so they are easy to process and remember.

03. COMMUNICATE CLIMATE CHANGE WITH AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Avoid communications which are akin to 'greenwashing' and demonstrate credibility by choosing messengers who offer authority in climate change.

04. HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION NOW

Offset the impact of present bias by demonstrating the value of individual actions and the impact they can have in the short-term.



INTRODUCING THE *GREEN GAP*

CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN URGENT ISSUE

Our research shows that almost **4 in 5** believe in the urgency of tackling climate change and many people (up to 82%) say they are behaving more sustainably by increasing the average number of green actions they do compared to 2021.

However, when you explore these behaviours more deeply, we see that the most common actions are unlikely to have the biggest impact on climate change. Perhaps understandably people prefer to take easier, less disruptive steps such as carrying a reusable bag or recycling rather than always offsetting their carbon emissions.

82% say they regularly recycle their waste; in comparison, **35%** of people regularly/always offset their carbon emissions.

FIGHT TODAY

THIS IS *DUE* TO THE 'GREEN GAP'

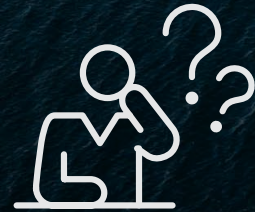
The Green Gap highlights the gap between our intentions and actions on sustainability-related issues, i.e. what people say about climate change and what they do to reduce its impact, are very different things. Brands and companies can play a key role in bridging the 'say-do' green gap.

However, there are many barriers that consumers face in acting on their intentions.



COST:

Despite strong intentions, cost remains a top barrier for people to make sustainable choices.



CONFUSING INFORMATION:

People are bombarded with information, paradoxically leaving them feeling overwhelmed.



TRUST:

People's trust in brands is low when it comes down to them being more sustainable.



CLIMATE DOOMERISM:

A looming sense of pessimism and loss of faith in individual action to overcome climate change.



**APPLYING A
BEHAVIOURAL
SCIENCE LENS
HELPS IDENTIFY
BIASES AND
HEURISTICS
TO MITIGATE
THESE
BEHAVIOURAL
BARRIERS**



A background image showing a hand in a red sweater dropping a coin into a pink piggy bank. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark overlay to make the text stand out.

COST IS THE *TOP* *REASON* GIVEN FOR NOT MAKING MORE *SUSTAINABLE* *CHOICES*



Despite strong intentions, cost remains a top barrier for people to make sustainable choices.

BY REDUCING THE COST CONSIDERATION IN CONSUMERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, BRANDS CAN NUDGE THEM TO TAKE MORE SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, **46%** cited cost as the most common reason for not being able to make more sustainable or climate-friendly choices.

It is an even bigger challenge for lower-income households as financial spending becomes a key barrier to making sustainable choices. The number of actions carried out increases as household income increases. Households earning less than £20k take only **6.3** actions often compared to **8.5** actions for households with an income of £75k or more.

More than **65%** in the younger age group (21-34) are not willing to pay more for sustainable products (possibly due to financial constraints) compared to the older age group (55+) where only **35%** are likely to cite financial constraints as a barrier to making sustainable choices.

The younger population also represent the demographic which has the bigger 'say-do' gap.

SOLUTION 01: **SHOW THE IMPACT OF ACTION**

Leverage Feedback Loop

We are motivated when we see how our actions modify subsequent results.

Brands which highlight the impact of consumers' sustainable choices are likely to get consumers to make those choices. Allowing consumers to see the impacts of how their choices have both short-term and long-term positive impact in the future can be a motivating factor in reducing cost considerations.

Providing consumers with a means to evaluate their behaviour (and subsequent changes they want/need to make) can lead to a greater likelihood of them changing their behaviour. Feedback can be quick, in the moment, or sent later to keep the engagement going.



Example: Smol & the Feedback Loop

Smol leverages the feedback loop by visualising the impact buying a certain product has on the environment.

It also provides a calculator at the end to allow consumers to evaluate their personal impact.

This provides immediate feedback to the consumers on how their actions can make a difference and the wider impact they will have on the environment.

SOLUTION 02: CHANGE THE CONTEXT IN WHICH DECISIONS ARE MADE

Use Framing Effect

The framing effect is when our decisions are influenced by the way information is presented - equivalent information can be more or less attractive depending on what features are highlighted.

Brands can reduce negative cost associations by highlighting the aspect of choice which is more desirable or valuable to the consumer. This will make cost less of a consideration during purchase decisions. A great example of this is re-framing the reduction in waste and increased efficiency that sustainable choices bring so that they feel co-beneficial to the consumer.

Example: Carlsberg & Oddbox Framing Effect

Carlsberg and Oddbox's communications have re-framed desirable attributes through sustainability benefits. This enables them to make the product offering stand out from the rest of the category.





COGNITIVE STRAIN WITH CONFUSING INFORMATION IS OUR SECOND BIGGEST BARRIER



Consumers are bombarded with information, paradoxically leaving them uncertain about how they can take action.

UNPACKING AND SIMPLIFYING ACTIONS PEOPLE CAN TAKE WILL HELP IN REDUCING CONFUSION AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO MAKE MORE SUSTAINABLE CHOICES.

The second biggest barrier to making sustainable choices is that consumers find the information available difficult to understand; with **35%** of people finding information to be confusing which hinders sustainable choices.

This is particularly true for the older age-group (55+) where a staggering **46%** find information hard to understand. Whereas **63%** of young consumers (21-34) are more likely to cite 'lack of time' to search for information on how sustainable something is.

Alongside confusion, overall, **19%** of consumers also don't understand where to start or what more can they do. Younger consumers are more willing to make more sustainable choices, but **33%** don't know where to start and **76%** find it hard to understand what to do.

SOLUTION 01: MAKING IT EASY TO DO

Example: Bulb leveraging Simplicity Bias

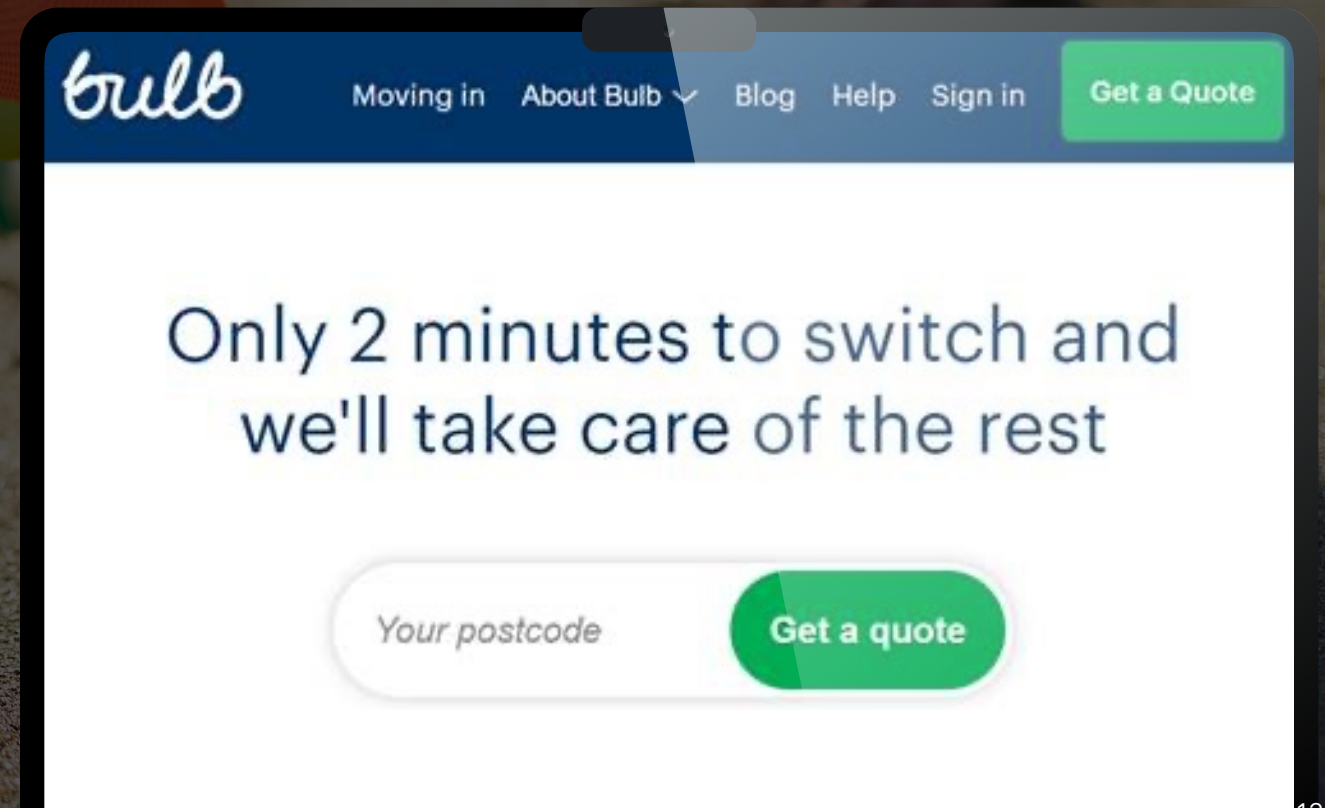
In this example, Bulb showcases how easy it is to switch from a current energy provider. Taking away the confusion associated with changing providers makes the action of switching more desirable.

Leverage Simplicity Bias

To start something new, or to reduce complex behaviour, start with the simplest form of the behaviour.

To enable consumers to take more sustainable actions, brands need to ensure that their 'offer' is easy to do. It is because people tend to follow the path of least resistance. They are likely to take actions which require low cognitive or behavioural effort.

Reducing the number of actions needed, or simplifying the choice for consumers, ultimately reduces confusion and makes the action more desirable.



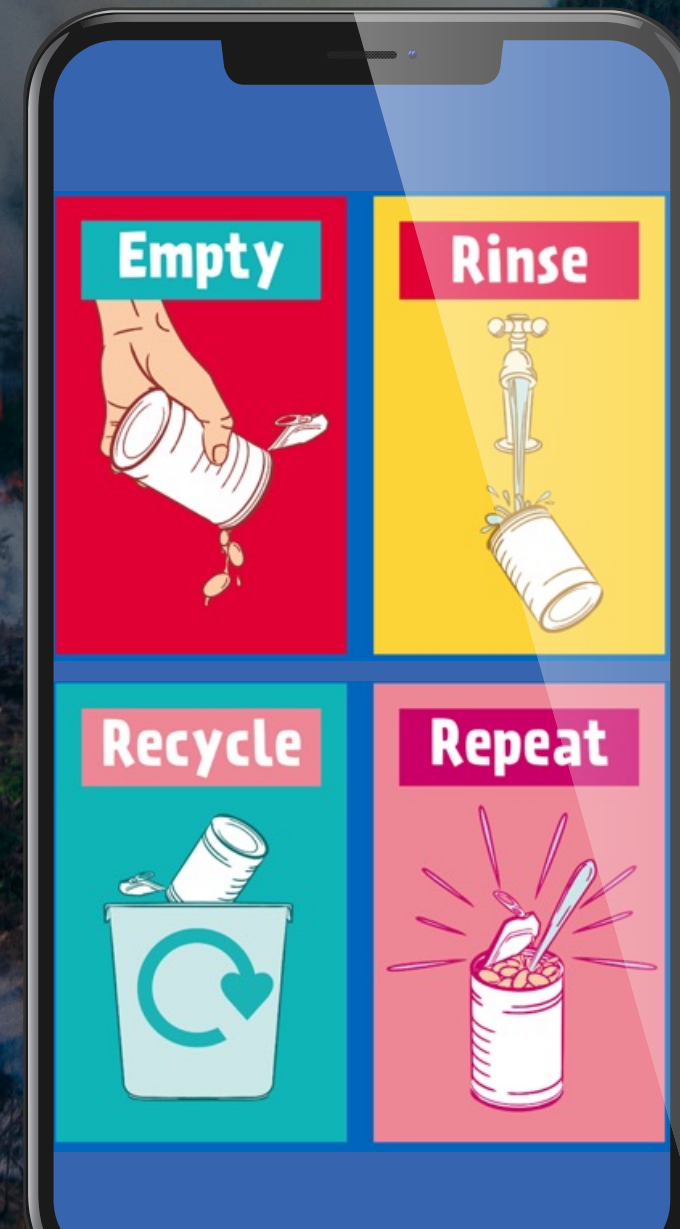
SOLUTION 02: BREAK THINGS DOWN SO *THEY* ARE EASIER

Apply Chunking of information

When complex information is broken down into small sections, it's easier to understand what to do.

Brands can empower consumers by breaking down sustainability actions into small actions/information, so that it is easily processed and remembered.

Breaking the overarching climate change challenge down into smaller parts reduces information overload and empowers people with a starting point in their sustainability journey.



Example: Recycling using Chunking

Recycling can be daunting. Breaking down the steps/actions needed into small chunks ensures people remember what to do and are encouraged to participate.

LACK OF CONFIDENCE STEMS FROM LOW **TRUST** IN WHAT COMPANIES SAY THEY ARE DOING

BUILDING TRUST IS CRUCIAL IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH BRANDS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Overall, people don't believe that the government and businesses take sufficient steps to address the climate crisis. Only **33%** have confidence in the government and only **30%** have confidence in companies that they are taking sufficient steps.

This lack of confidence stems from a lack of trust in what companies say they are doing to tackle climate change. Only **29%** have some trust in the companies (up from 23% in 2021).

Unless we are able to gain the trust of consumers, we are unlikely to get them to engage with brands which truly stand for change.



Consumer trust in brands is low when it comes to sustainability efforts.

SOLUTION 01: BOOK-END IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Leverage the Primacy & Recency Effect

Consumers' memory (recall and recognition) is impacted by how messages are positioned in communications.

To ensure sustainability messages are remembered, understood and have a long-lasting impact, the most important piece of information should be placed either the first or the last, and the least important information should be mentioned in the middle.



Example: Primacy and Recency Effect

In this example, key information is presented at the top (Earth Day is on April 22, 2020) and the call to action is presented at the end (Stand Up, Speak Up, Show Up). This successfully leverages the primacy and recency effect – the information is likely to be remembered better (and actioned) later on.

SOLUTION 02: **INSTIL CREDIBILITY**

Leverage Authority Bias & Messenger Effect

We have a strong tendency to follow the advice of an authority figure and get influenced by those whom we deem trustworthy or attractive.

The presence of a formal authority figure or a relatable messenger provides reassurance and credibility. Ensuring brands find the right 'messengers' for their sustainability communications can have a huge impact on the level of consumers' trust.

We often make decisions based on influence or persuasion from different sources. This could be someone we trust or expect to have the correct knowledge.



Example: Authority Bias and Messenger Effect

Choosing the right celebrity (messenger) who is credible in their stance on sustainability will back-up the brand's claims and intentions. Inversely, choosing someone who is not considered credible can lead to backlash.

Angelina Jolie's dedication to humanitarian causes and charities has made her a credible figure to many causes she supports, which instils trust in audiences. On the other hand, the Kardashians are seen as anything but sustainable and often come under public scrutiny for their jet-setter lifestyle, water limit violations, etc., which invariably makes a brand's stand on sustainability questionable.



DOOMERISM, EVEN AFTER LIFTING *ALL* *COVID* RESTRICTIONS, PEOPLE FEEL MORE PESSIMISTIC IN 2022...



A looming sense of pessimism and loss of faith in individual action to overcome climate change.

CONSUMERS DISCOUNT THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THEIR ACTIONS, WHICH WITHHOLDS THEM FROM MAKING BIGGER CHANGES

Despite the majority of COVID-related restrictions being lifted in early 2021, **67%** of people feel the world is getting worse at the moment, with climate doomerism being a big obstacle holding people back from doing more.

Moreover, **33%** believe that individual actions are not enough to make the change needed to tackle the climate crisis.

SOLUTION 01: FOCUS ON THE 'NOW'

Tap into Present Bias

As primitive humans, we needed to focus on survival and food, hence, evolutionarily, we have been more focused on immediate needs than future goals. We have a preference to live for today at the expense of tomorrow, as the impact of our present actions is not immediately tangible.

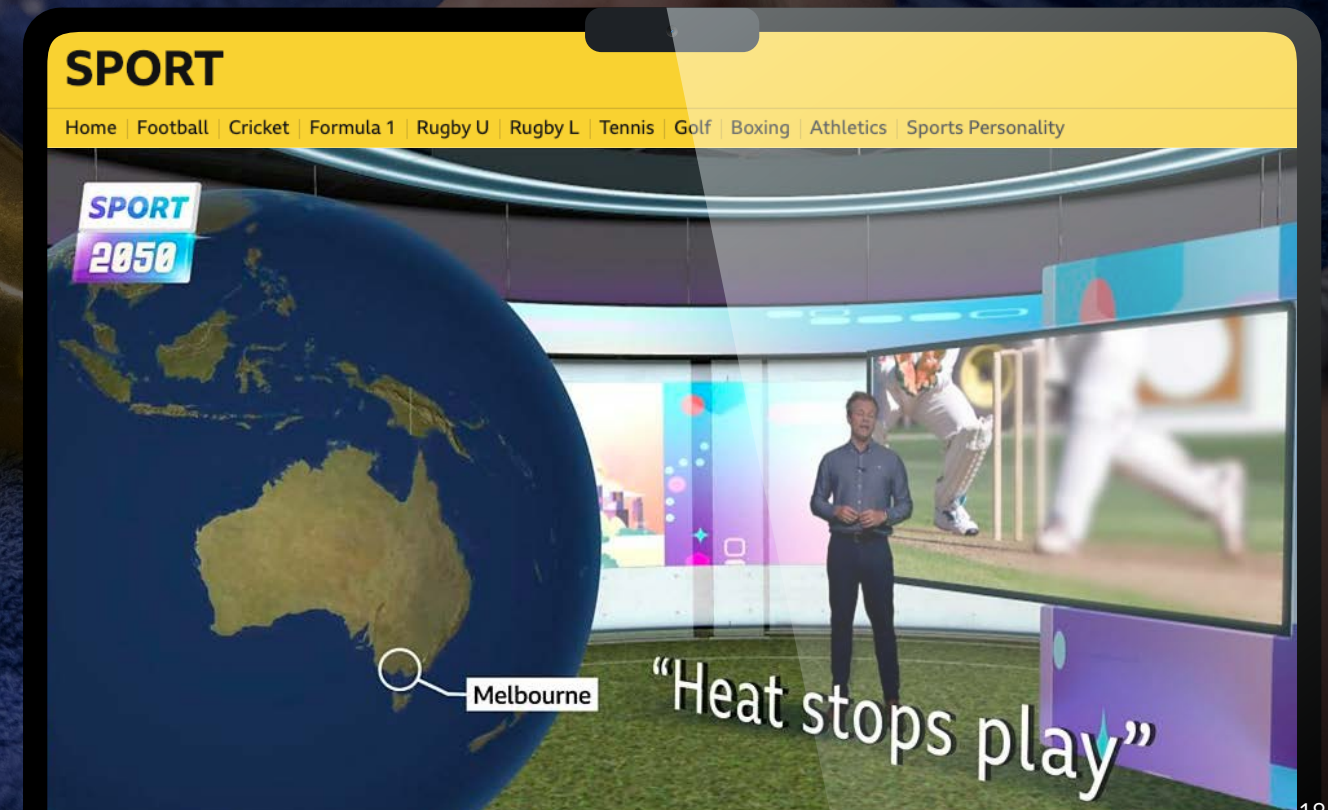
Brands can offset the impact of present bias by showcasing the impact of the future in the present. Ensuring that consumers are aware of the consequences of unsustainable choices in the present, and not only focus on the long-term impact of their choices, highlights the urgency to act now.

Making the threat of the future more tangible in the present can encourage consumers to change their behaviour and choices.

Behavioural Science Barrier: *Climate doomerism*

Example: BBC utilising Present Bias

BBC Sport set up an initiative creating fake news articles from 2050, to encourage fans to imagine how climate change would inevitably end up impacting their favourite pastimes, and therefore cause them to act in the present.



SOLUTION 02: IMPROVE RECALL OF CONSEQUENCES

Behavioural Science Barrier: *Climate doomerism*

Example: Availability Bias

Post-WWI when people started to sell off their diamonds due to the economic crisis, a now very famous De Beers campaign repositioned them as a symbol of wealth and romance. Such campaigns have been repeated over decades making the phrase 'a diamond is forever' very salient in our memory.

Leverage Availability Bias

People tend to overestimate threats that are less likely but easier to remember based on what comes to mind quickly, such as a plane hijack (less likely) than the consequences of climate change.

Brands should actively increase awareness and engage with consumers so that they remain in people's short-term memory and can be recalled easily when making purchase decisions.

Brands that want to encourage people to purchase their product or service must think of ways in which the brand or product can be recalled easily.



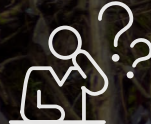
THE *FOUR BIGGEST* **BEHAVIOURAL BARRIERS** AND HOW *BRANDS* CAN *RESPOND* TO THEM



COST:

Cost is top of mind, especially in the current climate. Brands will need to work harder to encourage customers to see the value in more expensive sustainable offers.

This can be done by reducing the focus on cost and reframing the offer to highlight the benefits that feel personally co-beneficial to the consumer, e.g. via an ability to increase efficiency/reduce waste.



CONFUSING INFORMATION:

Life is complicated enough. Ensuring brands and their sustainability benefits are simple and easy to recall during decision-making points will increase the likelihood of consumers changing their behaviour as a result.

This can be done by chunking information so that the key offering is easy to process and remember.



TRUST:

Consumers are increasingly savvy about insincerity. Conscious consumers will choose brands which are committed to reducing their environmental impact not just in their product offering, but in their brand ethos as a whole.

Avoid communications which are akin to 'greenwashing', and demonstrate credibility by choosing messengers who offer authority in sustainability.



CLIMATE DOOMERISM:

The impact of climate change feels too far in the future. Consumers don't think their actions or inactions directly influence climate change.

Offset the impact of present bias by demonstrating the value of individual actions and the impact they can have in the short-term, through positive feedback and encouragement.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOUR BRAND *TACKLE* THE CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUE?

Come and talk to us about the Green Gap challenges you have and how we can apply our thinking to help solve them. We look forward to hearing from you!

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