

Triggering Sustainable Choices

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Synopsis

Focusing on consumers was not even on the agenda in Davos 5-6 years ago. Brand company dialogues shifted dramatically in 2011 – from focusing on supply chain to addressing consumer behaviour through brand marketing touch points.

Why? As living standards rise in the enormous emerging middle classes of China and India, we urgently need to decouple the image of success from Western “ conspicuous consumption ” lifestyles. Consumer attitudes towards use of planetary resources must be incorporated into mainstream social norms, not left at the fringe. This has the benefits of driving corporate innovation on new environmentally friendly products and services to capture this consumer demand.

Convincing brands to leverage their mainstream marketing campaigns to set more sustainable social norms is key to widespread consumer behaviour change.

The World Economic Forum Sustainable Consumption Global Agenda Council for 2012-14 addresses the question of how to make it easier for companies, consumers and other stakeholders to collaborate in creating a movement around social norm change. This session explored mechanisms to aid in this behaviour change collaboration.

Key Points

- Talk to the heart and not to the head by bringing to life an alternate, more attractive, aspirational lifestyle that is imbued with sustainable values.
- People are more motivated by love than guilt. Alienating sustainability jargon must be completely eradicated and replaced with the vocabulary of personal prosperity and national identity that makes people feel good about themselves and part of a community. For example in the China Dream initiative, “ sustainability ” is replaced with “ harmonious happy ” and complemented with words such as “ food safety ” and “ access to more public space ” .
- One should move from short-term events and campaigns to movements; movements allow people to connect with a higher purpose and give power back to the people.
- Multistakeholder movements need a trusted, regional convener. There is no lack of interest in collaborating, but a neutral convener can help brands collaborate rather than compete. This convener can help seamlessly leverage the platforms of brands and celebrities without creating distrust in consumers. A convener can also continue to build forward momentum as a group.
- Make it easy for people to engage. Brands can lower the bar for consumers ' first step by providing complementary services. Gaming mechanics can add excitement to buying sustainable products and empower people to improve the world together with their friends.
- Consumer decision-making dashboards that present lifestyle-relevant information in a timely way can change behaviour more effectively than general education on why sustainability is important. But information must be transparent and trusted.

Disclosures

The views expressed are those of certain participants in the discussion and do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants or of the World Economic Forum.