

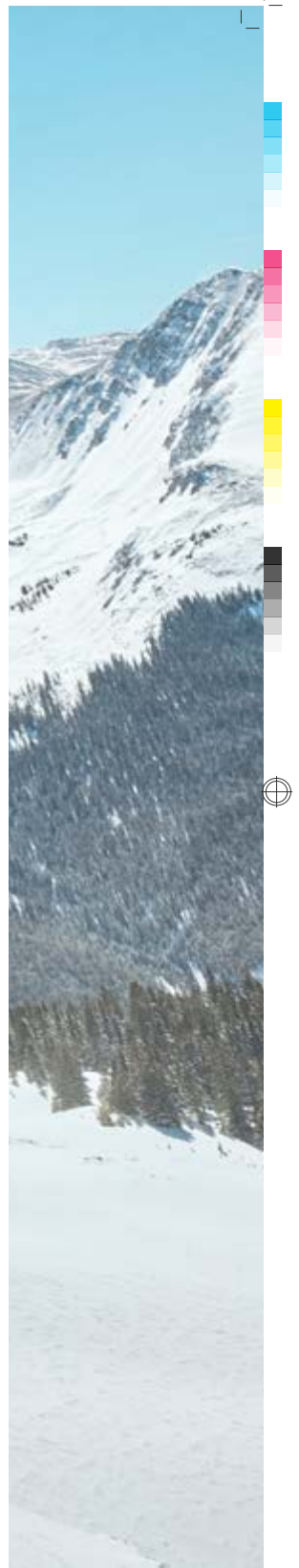


WALDEN HYDE

# 10 HOT TIPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY NERDS

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# Picture This

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You're happily rolling along with your brand. Your audience feels seen, excited to hear from you, and connected to what you say and what you sell.

Then you tell them all about what you're doing for climate change, the environment, and your supply chain, and it lands like a ton of bricks.

Your consumers who are overwhelmed with bad news feel a little blah and scroll past, opting for a TikTok about a cat instead.

Everyone in your company freaks out a little.

The sales team wants you to get back to only talking about the latest colors. The marketing department is confused ... showing that you are a good company is supposed to be super important, right?

Leadership wonders if it's even worth it.

It's worth it. And there's a better way.

# A Better User Experience

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People are busy, habits are ingrained, and information is overwhelming.

Our ongoing research combines hundreds of consumer interviews with the latest studies in behavioral research and sustainability communication.

Use this guide of our top 10 tips to create a better sustainability user experience in storytelling and design.

# 10 Key Insights



#### INSIGHT 01

People do what is easy, obvious, and convenient.

“

If it's easy for me, I'll do it. Otherwise, I'll file it under 'get to it later.'”



## INSIGHT 02

The top 3 barriers to behavior change are time, cost, and lack of convenience.



“

Between work, helping my kids with homework, and getting dinner on the table, I don't have the time or energy to think about anything else, much less worry if it'll cost more.”

INSIGHT 03

People are  
tired of  
guilt, fear,  
platitudes,  
and shame.

“

I think that climate change is important,  
but I'm just so tired of feeling afraid.”



“

I am mostly concerned  
about the health and safety  
of my family right now.”



#### INSIGHT 04

“Save the planet”  
messages are too  
big, abstract, and  
impersonal. Make  
messaging relevant and  
actionable to fit into  
folks’ everyday lives.



“

The research shows that self-efficacy—  
one's confidence in doing a behavior—  
is a great predictor of an individual's  
likelihood of adopting [the behavior].”

Source: Rare

#### INSIGHT 05

Peer pressure doesn't stop in your teens. People's attitudes and behaviors are largely based on what others are caring about and doing.



“

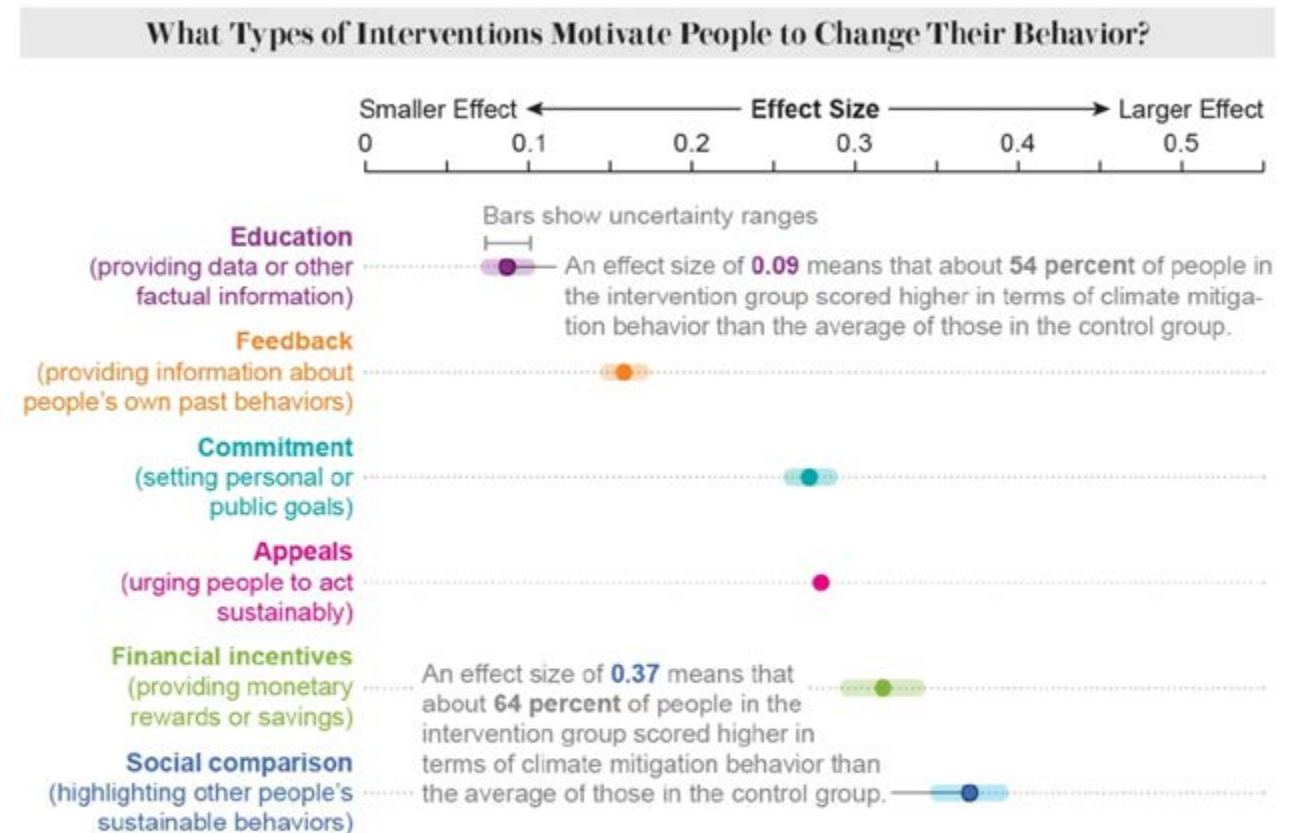
I look online for trusted 'round-ups' of sustainable products or ask my sister when I'm looking to buy something new.”

**Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA pooled the results of 430 individual studies that examined environment-related behaviors.**

“

Financial incentives and social pressure worked better at changing behaviors than did education or feedback.”

Source: [Scientific American](#)



Credit: Amanda Montañez; Source: "Field Interventions for Climate Change Mitigation Behaviors: A Second-Order Meta-Analysis," by Magnus Bergquist et al., in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, Vol. 120, No. 13, Article No. e2214851120. Published online March 21, 2023



#### INSIGHT 06

"Once people know better they do better" is not always true. Support, don't educate.

“

I know, I know. I should be riding my bike instead of driving. But it's just easier to drive when I have to run errands all around town.”

“

There's a huge amount of research that shows just giving people information by itself does very little to change behavior ...

But it often doesn't actually turn into behavior change because there will be barriers like cost and convenience. Those barriers tend to be reduced by policy action like incentives and disincentives, regulations, as well as what businesses can do to make products attractive and cheaper.”

—LORRAINE WHITMARSH, UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Source: [Vox](#)



INSIGHT 07

Sustainability  
can be framed  
to meet specific  
consumer values  
and worldviews.

“

I buy local produce because the vegetables are fresher,  
and I like supporting independent farmers.”





“

My daughter's skin is sensitive, so I try to buy 'natural' products, even if they cost more.”

#### INSIGHT 08

Health and wellness are common entry points to sustainable living.



## INSIGHT 09

# People respond to innovation, value, and opportunity.



“

I bought my electric car because  
I got a tax credit and it's fun to  
drive ... it also makes me feel like  
I'm doing something good.”

## INSIGHT 10

Consumers expect companies to address environmental and social impact.



“

It's table stakes for a company to do something these days.”

# What Now?

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1. Just as you would with any brand or product campaign, bring specific, true, and compelling storytelling and design into the mix.
2. Lower barriers by making the choice as easy, obvious, and convenient as possible.
3. Break up the feeling of doom and gloom with humor and examples of positive action.
4. Align your actions with your brand purpose—your focus should be a natural extension of who you are.
5. Want to dive deeper? Check out the guiding theories on the following slides.



# Guiding Theories

# Empowered Refusal Motivates Goal-Directed Behavior

A volume of behavioral research exists around the idea that the words we use to motivate ourselves to change behavior can either enhance or impede the behavior. Simply put, it's the difference between telling yourself or others that you/they don't do a particular behavior versus you/they can't do the behavior.

Those who use words like "don't" are much more likely to adopt the changed behavior than those who use words like "can't." The rationale is that "can't" is an external limit that people end up resisting, whereas "don't" is an internal parameter that a person can own. In a nutshell, we are much more likely to stick with (or change) a behavior if it is internally motivated rather than externally forced upon us.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Typically, when talking about climate change, the onus to change behavior is placed on the consumer—Drive less! Don't buy that! But most people either consciously or unconsciously resist messages that tell them they can't or shouldn't do something.

By introducing a socially normative concept that "people who are like this, do this," the change in behavior becomes something to identify with rather than something difficult to live up to.

# Innate Emotions

Psychology theorists suggest that there is only a small set of basic or innate emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy. These are innate emotions because they are hardwired into human genes or develop early due to their survival values. Human facial expressions of emotion are also innate and are hardwired into human genes.

Human emotions that appear to be learned or secondary are love, guilt, shame, embarrassment, helplessness, boredom, distraction, apprehension, acceptance, serenity, interest, and annoyance. These are learned emotions because they are learned through experience, family expressiveness, and over time in the environment, because of certain reactions toward environmental stimuli.

Learned emotions seem to be blends of innate emotions. Fear is

frequently related to the specific behaviors of escape and avoidance, whereas anxiety is the result of threats, which are perceived to be uncontrollable or unavoidable. It is worth noting that fear almost always relates to future events, such as worsening of a situation, or continuation of a situation that is unacceptable.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Climate change itself is admittedly an alarming reality, and much of the messaging around it to date has attempted to use fear to drive behavior change. But the research tells us that while fear and anxiety can be motivators, they are just as likely to engender patterns of avoidance and feelings of hopelessness and indifference. By positioning climate change and sustainability in a way that taps into more favorable emotions, such as joy and love, you lower barriers and find new avenues for engagement.

# Psychic Numbing

Psychic numbing is about the way a culture or society withdraws from issues that would otherwise be too overwhelming for the human mind to comprehend. In this respect, psychic numbing is a societal reaction to impending doom, chaos, and ultimately mankind's extinction (Lifton, Robert Jay (October 1982).

According to the American Journal of Orthopsychiatrics, "Sustained or prolonged exposure to negative stimuli has a numbing affect that allows the stimuli to become unnoticeable over time." Avoidance and denial are typical tendencies of psychic numbing.

Similarly psychologist and Princeton University professor Elke Weber's 2006 theory on the "Finite pool of worry" states that "people can only handle so many negative events at a time. So when public concern about one issue rises, another concern should fall." (Leber,

2023) However, research by Yale University and George Mason University shows that despite fears of Covid and other cultural concerns, "public understanding of the science that human activity is warming the planet increased in 2020, and has roughly maintained those levels since." (Leber, 2023) Recent research suggests that this is in part due to climate change moving from a peripheral worry to a core worry.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Psychic numbing is particularly common with messaging around climate change; the impact on our day-to-day lives is hard to gauge and feels like a looming presence that is predicted to be catastrophic ... someday.

# Hope and Self-Efficacy

When faced with dire news of the climate or other environmental or social crises, people need to feel a sense of hope paired with self-efficacy—the feeling that they can do something about the problem—to take action. Moreover, this approach is most successful when paired with examples of other people making changes and incentives to lower the barriers to action.

A 2023 study by the organization rare Rare found that self-efficacy is key for increasing behavior change. Moreover, it's most effective when paired with social norming: "Two ways to increase self-efficacy are providing successful experiences of others who have adopted a behavior and giving people the opportunity to learn that others like them are able to adopt a particular behavior." ([Rare, 2023](#))

## WHY THIS MATTERS

People need to feel that all is not lost and that acting will make a difference to avoid the psychic numbing. When paired with social pressure and influence, people feel motivated to take action or hear about your work.



# Group Polarization

Social science group theories tell us that once people are in a certain group, especially a group that is polarized from another group, the process of converting them is difficult. Instead of fighting the other side's ideas, you can gain more momentum by digging in deeper with the people who are already supportive of your view, the people on the fence, and the people who have no idea what's going on.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Targeting a more mainstream, moderate audience, and finding new ways to position sustainability messaging that doesn't exacerbate the existing traditional arguments will make this project more accessible to a wider segment.

# Emotional Correctness

Emotional correctness is a concept developed by Sally Kohn, a liberal who worked at Fox News as a commentator. It's the tone, feeling, respect, and compassion we show one another—how we say what we say. It's based on her realization that political persuasion doesn't begin with ideas or facts or data, it begins with being emotionally correct.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

The roots of emotional correctness actually go all the way back to Aristotle's "On Rhetoric." By properly weaving together the three components of persuasion—ethos, pathos, and logos—a more persuasive appeal can be created.

Traditionally, climate change messaging depends heavily on complex facts and data. But backing up and starting with pathos—an emotional argument made with the knowledge of where the audience is coming from—creates a much more strategic foundation on which to build an argument.

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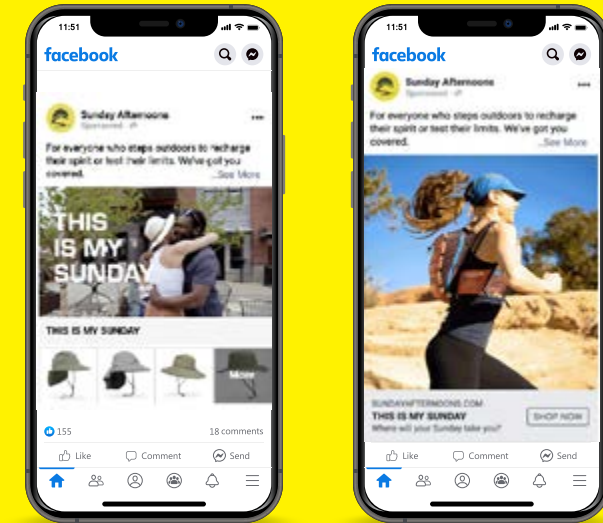




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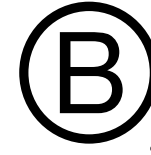


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