Changing Behavior of College Audiences Through Social Media

Presenter: Cara Payne*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington
Site Supervisor: Lynn Knapp, Cascadia Consulting Group
Faculty Advisor: Alexa Schreier, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

Background

- Everybody flushes, but the only products that should ever be flushed are the 3Ps. (Pee, Poop, toilet Paper).
- Even wipes labeled as flushable shouldn’t be flushed as these products cause clogs, backups, and overflows.
- These problems cost Seattle Public Utilities lots of time and money to fix.
- College audiences in Seattle are the biggest contributors to the flushing problem but this can be changed with an outreach campaign.

Results

- Explain that some items cannot be flushed.
- Distinguish what can and cannot be flushed.
- Explain the issue with ‘flushable’ wipes.
- Show the direct effects of incorrect flushing.
- Explain the indirect effects on the ecosystem.
- Why aren’t flushable wipes flushable?

Key Takeaways

- Social media is the best way to engage college audiences, specifically Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.
- College audiences respond well to messages that show the consequences of unwanted behavior (e.g., see Fig 3).
- Having minimal text and more visual representations will engage audiences more.
- Showing how a behavior effects people’s personal lives negatively is another effective way to change behavior. (e.g., see Fig 1).

Implications

- The broad steps in my methods can lead to a behavior change campaign for many different behaviors.
- Many unsustainable behaviors are habitual, behavior change campaigns can provide long term solutions.
- Doing diligent research on the audience will provide insight on the outreach sources/strategies needed for the best results (e.g., see Fig 5).

Research Question

What are the key elements of an outreach campaign that will result in effective behavior change in college audiences?

Internship & Methods

Last quarter I virtually interned with Cascadia Consulting Group, where I created an outreach campaign proposal for Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) to encourage behavioral changes in college students.

To do this, I:
- Analyzed baseline research
- Researched outreach strategies and preferences
- Outlined a campaign proposal
- Conducted a focus group for feedback
- Edited/finalized the proposal

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lynn Knapp, Alexa Schreier, and my family and friends for providing me support through my capstone experience.