STOPP PRACTICE ABSTRACT

ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO CHOOSE REUSABLE AND RECYCLABLE FOOD PACKAGING

PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED AND OBJECTIVE

Consumers often express support for sustainable packaging, but single-use food packaging remains the easiest and most familiar option in real purchase situations. Restaurants, retailers and food brands need simple ways to make reusable and recyclable alternatives more visible, understandable and attractive. The objective was to develop and test behaviour change strategies that use clear reasoning, emotional prompts and social cues to encourage consumers to choose reusable or recyclable food packaging instead of single-use packaging in everyday contexts.

MAIN RESULTS / OUTCOMES

STOPP developed six strategy contents: cognitive, positive affect, negative affect, social, cognitive-social and affective-social. These were tested online with 2,976 consumers in four countries and later validated in Swiss lunch restaurants through information materials, packaging stickers and activity tags. Online results showed a consistent preference for reusable and recyclable packaging. In the field experiment, single-use packaging still dominated, but information campaigns and packaging stickers with targeted reasoning increased reusable packaging choices in some settings.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Use short, visible messages at the exact point where packaging decisions are made, such as menus, counters, displays or packaging labels. Cognitive messages should explain the environmental benefit, while social-affective messages should make the choice feel positive and socially valued. Avoid relying on communication alone: combine campaigns with visible reusable containers, staff prompts, incentives, deposit systems or charges for single-use options. Test different messages locally, as customer groups and settings influence real behaviour.

Fig 1: Information-based campaign material based on cognitive (left side), social-affective (middle), and negative affect (right side) strategy content.

Further information

This information has been extracted from D7.2 and can be found here: STOPP REPORTS

About this abstract

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STOPP is a Horizon Europe project aiming to transform food plastic packaging through the "5 Rs": Refuse, Reduce, Redesign, Reuse, and Recycle. Aligned with the EU's Packaging Directive, it develops training materials and strategies to promote circular economy solutions. Engaging stakeholders, STOPP advances recycling, reusable packaging, and consumer awareness for sustainable food packaging.

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