



CANADA

2030

SUSTAINABILITY

WHAT IF...

CONSUMERS TOOK MORE EXTREME MEASURES
TO HELP DRIVE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR?



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CANADA 2030 SERIES

Canada is experiencing significant social and technological changes that could disrupt many aspects of society. In this context, the next 10 to 15 years could be a transformative period for the relationship between Canada's government and broader society. This Insight is part of a series developed by Policy Horizons Canada on a variety of topics.

WHO WE ARE

Policy Horizons Canada (Horizons) is a strategic foresight organization within the Public Service of Canada with a mandate to help anticipate emerging policy challenges and opportunities and to experiment with methods and technologies to support resilient policy development. Horizons is exploring plausible futures for Canada over the next 10 to 15 years in the areas of governance, sustainability, infrastructure, and the digital economy. With the active participation of experts from governmental and other organizations, Horizons identifies the key factors driving change, looks for potential surprises, explores plausible futures in the form of scenarios, and surfaces key emerging policy challenges and opportunities.

VISUAL CONCEPT

The *Canada 2030* visual concept juxtaposes the past and the future in a subtle mix of colours, fonts, and imagery. The vibrant colour palette creates a safe space for the reader to open his or her mind. The main imagery found throughout the suite of products is rooted with the leaf of the sugar maple. The maple fruits, the samaras, gracefully fall throughout the Canadian landscape. They hold the potential of growing into trees and forever leaving their mark from coast-to-coast. Just like the Insights surfaced through the foresight methodology, they may one day be part of our reality. The traditional style of ink hatching accentuates the ribs of the leaves and evokes the system maps used in foresight. As we embark on Canada's 150th year, let us embrace our past and consider our plausible futures.

This document does not attempt to predict the future. The purpose is to stimulate reflection and dialogue and support the development of public policy that is more robust and resilient across a range of plausible futures. The views contained in this document do not necessarily represent the views of Horizons, the Government of Canada or participating departments and agencies.

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WHAT IF...

... CONSUMERS TOOK MORE EXTREME MEASURES TO HELP DRIVE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR?

Consumers are gaining more power in driving sustainable behaviours. They are using social media, applications, and globalization to get organizations and governments to take action.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

Use of the Internet is creating a new generation of discerning consumers who are using their power to push businesses towards deliberate sustainable options. Businesses are not only competing with other businesses, but also with the changing perceptions of consumers fuelled by social media and other online feedback mechanisms. This consumer power could become a driving force behind major product and service decisions, affecting design, production, marketing, sales, purchasing and recycling processes.



Social media has allowed consumer groups to reach more people and solicit greater responses



THE ONLINE "INFLUENCERS" FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Online Influencers are individuals or groups on social media sites like YouTube, Twitter, Vine, Instagram and Facebook that have a substantial following. They are often considered experts in a distinct area. A 2015 [survey](#) by Nielsen stated that an [influencer's recommendation](#) is comparable to that of a friend or family member. With two-thirds of consumers trusting other consumers' opinions, comments posted online are the third most-trusted source of feedback for

shoppers. Influencers can directly shape the behaviour of businesses. Small businesses now look to sites like [FameBit](#) to connect them with small to mid-size social media stars that can promote their products or services. Some YouTube stars, such as [Jacksgap](#), with over four million subscribers, use their channel to share views on climate change and get millennials talking about global sustainability. In 2015, YouTube stars from around the world joined together to get the world to act on climate change with the [#OursToLose](#) video, which has over 3 million views. The organizers created a playlist of inspiring and informative YouTube videos that provide an overview of the dangerous consequences of climate inaction.

Social media has allowed [consumer groups](#) to reach more people, spark debates, get consumers to rethink their choices and solicit greater responses from organizations. Groups such as [Greenpeace](#) and [SumOfUs](#) have taken to YouTube to slam unsustainable company practices. A Greenpeace campaign lobbied Lego to cut ties with Shell over the company's plans to drill under the Arctic. The [Lego: Everything is NOT awesome](#) film received over 7 million views on YouTube and influenced Lego's decision not to renew the contract with Shell. SumOfUs launched their campaign criticizing Doritos and parent company PepsiCo for the 'destruction of the rainforest' and an 'unsustainable use of palm oil'.

The [video](#) received over two million views on YouTube and led PepsiCo to reaffirm its commitment to 100% sustainable palm oil and zero-deforestation. Other groups such as [350.org](#) and [Break Free](#) use their online platforms to organize large-scale actions worldwide. In 2016, Break Free hosted a two-week “Break Free from Fossil Fuel” campaign on six continents with 30,000 plus participants protesting while posting their experience online.

TAKING CONTROL THROUGH EDUCATION AND APPS

The network effect of the Internet is resulting in largely bottom-up ways of educating consumers about sustainability. Individuals and groups are proposing complete consumption changes not merely by talk alone, but also action. [Buy Me Once](#) and [Mental Floss](#) are consumer-run web sites that allow sustainability-conscious customers to find products, from cutlery and clothing to luggage and children’s toys, that have a lifetime guarantee. These sites promote repairs over replacement and offer tips to those wanting to make lasting behavioural changes.

Consumers are also choosing wisely with the help of eco-labelling services. Eco-labelling is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification and labelling practiced around the world. It identifies products or services produced in an environmentally friendly way. Apps such as [HowGood](#) and [GoodGuide](#) offer a platform for consumers to identify and rate sustainable products and companies based on health, environmental and social impacts. Other apps offer unique approaches to develop and maintain sustainable behaviour, while tracking users’ [impact on the environment](#). Some apps apply [gamification](#) techniques, create a sense of community for users to encourage behavioural change and offer avenues to save and earn money when users reach, sustainability milestones.



POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

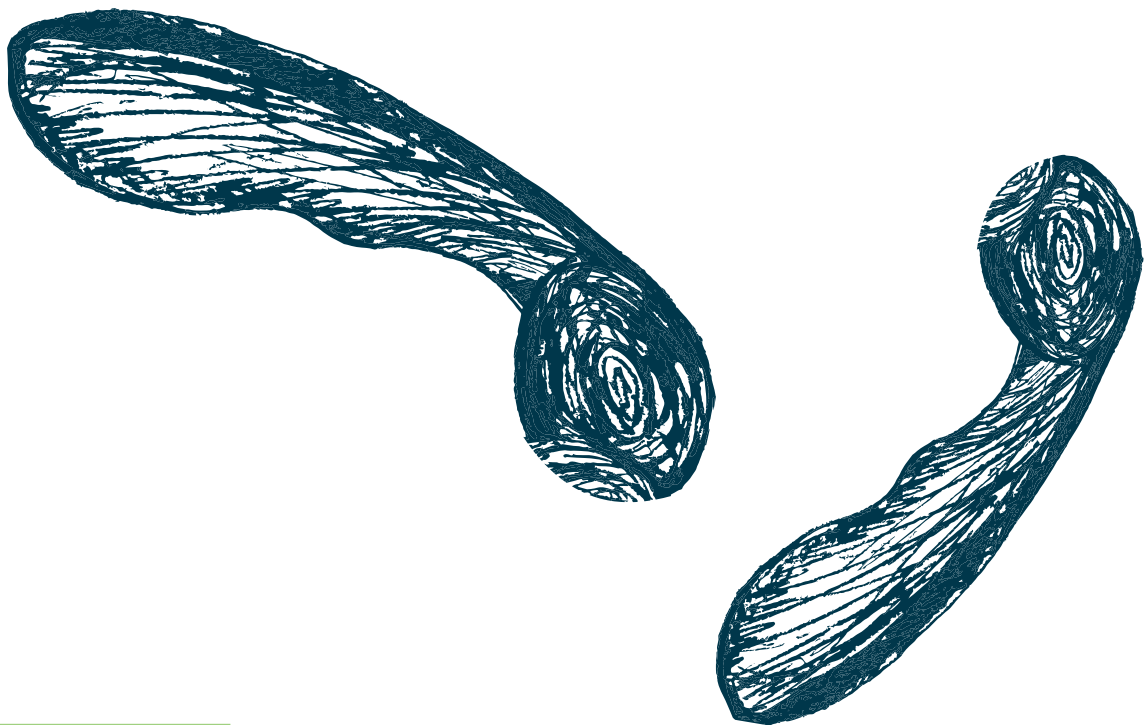
While a consumer approach to sustainable development may be disorganized and may not allow to completely change the system, the connecting power of the Internet has provided new avenues of coordination. These new means could influence a faster move to more sustainable processes. Possible implications of consumers taking sustainable matters into their own hands are included below.

Business models may evolve to include sustainable practices. Business models could be adapted to incorporate “products as services.” In this model, a system of products, services, supporting networks and infrastructure are designed to be competitive, satisfy customers’ needs, and have a lower environmental impact. This transformation would not only improve businesses’ public image but also reduce operating costs, resource shortages, and prices. Businesses could incorporate sustainability analytics in order to collect and analyze data on a wide range of sustainability-related factors—including energy and resource use, greenhouse gas emissions, consumer usage, and supply chain performance. This information could be used to generate insights businesses need to guide their sustainability-related initiatives and improve their overall resource efficiency.

Educational systems may change to instill sustainable behaviour. There may be a greater push for educational systems to incorporate [sustainable practices into curriculums](#). As the need grows, classrooms and campuses may transform into “living laboratories” and serve as examples of efficient systems that would not deplete or exploit resources or people. This could result in a growing culture of inquiry that combines current best practices of teaching and learning with the content, core competencies, technologies, and habits required for students to actively participate in creating a sustainable future.¹

Governments may adopt new policy tools to promote sustainable citizen behaviour. Traditionally, governments have used the policy levers of legislation, regulation and taxation to change citizen behaviour and deliver policy outcomes. As citizens become more environmentally conscious, it is unlikely that these levers alone can address problems that require mass citizen mobilisation and long-term sustainable behaviour change. Governments may apply lessons learned from behavioural sciences and new policy tools. For example, policymakers could develop policies through the use of an influence model, which includes educational elements, campaigns, social movements, citizen participation, and co-creation.²

Self-monitoring and consumer monitoring may inspire behavioural change. Through artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and big data, individuals and businesses could monitor their own sustainable behaviours, as well as those of others. Praises, nudges, and the influence of others could help improve sustainable behaviours.



1 Bergstrom, K. 2009. Education for a Green Economy. A keynote address at the Michigan Science Teachers Association Annual Conference.
Cloud, J.P. (2010). Educating for a sustainable future. Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World, Chapter 10. Washington, DC: ASCD.
Ecological Society of America (ESA) Earth Stewardship.
2 WPP. 2016. Integrate Communication Campaigns to support citizen behaviour change: A practical guide. Retrieved from <http://www.wpp.com/govtpractice/>