

Turning Users into Allies: How ‘We’-Framing Shapes Circular Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

Voluntary take-back programs are crucial for circular economy progress, yet participation remains low. This research tests whether shifting from ‘you’ framing to ‘we’ framing can strengthen return behaviour by presenting circular action as a shared responsibility. Across multiple studies conducted online and offline, ‘we’ framing reliably increased take-back participation by roughly 10-35 percent, demonstrating its ability to drive real circular action. The results also show that perceptions of fairness, reciprocity, collective efficacy and individual agency influence how strongly consumers respond to sustainability initiatives. Together, the findings reveal that a subtle linguistic shift can reshape how consumers understand their role, build trust in company intentions and enable the collaborative dynamics required for scalable circular business models. The work advances theory by showing how relational language shapes moral responsibility and cooperative behaviour.

Track: Consumer Behaviour