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**Suck It Up!**

A social marketing campaign encouraging the businesses of Ucluelet and Tofino BC to abandon plastic straws and offer alternatives upon customer request

Prepared for: Joan Wharf-Higgins & EPHE 454: Marketing for Health and Social Change (Spring 2017)

Prepared by: Brechan Bird

# Executive Summary

Since 2011, the town of Ucluelet has included emphasis on protecting the natural environment from hazardous material and plastic debris in their Official Community Plan (District of Ucluelet, 2011). As of 2013, Tofino has included goals to protect local ecosystems that are prone to harm over the next decade (District of Tofino). These are just the beginning changes to further protection of the rich biodiversity. This report focuses on a campaign to enhance the sustainability of resources and the protection of marine life on the West Coast of Vancouver Island through encouragement of plastic straw alternatives among local businesses. Through social marketing, we aim to address environmental concerns regarding plastic debris in our oceans and landfills by spreading awareness about this wicked problem.

There are many speculative reasons why restaurants use the default of plastic straws in beverages. It could be to allow the customer ease of consumption, appearance or presentation of a beverage, or simply because it was requested by a customer. Looking further into these reasons, we can assume that these common objects do not need to be of a certain material. With this in mind, we campaign to change local restaurants’ default plastic straw use by offering a certification of being plastic straw-free and tools to assist in making this environmentally friendly change. We support these businesses in making this small change that will positively effect the local environment and will bring awareness to residents and visitors of the communities. We offer a strategy where the benefits will outweigh the costs of adopting what we consider to be a desired behaviour. Social influence plays a vital role in this campaign because we aim to include all straw-using businesses of Ucluelet and Tofino to create an allied sub community of sustainable restaurant practices.

This campaign is related to social change because our actions and behaviours influence others. If we can make changes in our behaviours, attitudes, and actions while at a restaurant, we may help influence positive or sustainable choices. This campaign will use both injunctive norms and descriptive norms to influence behaviour. Injunctive norms are norms perpetuated by what others approve or disapprove of and descriptive norms are what others do behaviourally (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). As an example, the participating restaurants will not provide straws as their default, which is a descriptive norm, and when using a plastic straw they may be conscious of how others see their straw-using behaviour, an injunctive norm.

Overall, we hope that local straw-using businesses as our priority audience, and end consumers as our downstream audience, will benefit from adopting simple sustainable practices in their daily lives.

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# Target Market

The priority audiences are those businesses on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. They are a midstream market, with the downstream market being restaurant customers, and the upstream market being policy makers, provincial, and municipal governments. The group that benefits in the end will include the 5, 300 residents that live on the West Coast of Vancouver Island and others use the local beaches and restaurants there, such as tourists. The group we target is broad because of the variety of restaurants or other plastic straw using businesses. We target this market because of their proximity to the ocean and use plastics. Living Ocean reports that there is a strong correlation between the amount of tourism in an area and the richness of biodiversity (2014). These are areas especially harmed by polluted waters and more exposed than other areas to the potential littering of plastic and straws.

The communities of Ucluelet and Tofino are another midstream audience, although they are not the priority midstream audience. We will use these communities as social influencers to promote our campaign’s product. It is important to involve communities in social marketing campaigns because of the feeling of ownership required for the campaign to last after initial implementation (Andreasen, 2006).

# Segmentation Strategy

The audience that we are attempting to reach is anyone who may use a straw and not know the costs of such behaviour. Although the demographics of this market segmentation are varied, the common factor for the downstream audience is the connection to Ucluelet and Tofino and/or the beaches in the surrounding area. The Last Straw believes that those that are in Ucluelet and Tofino and enjoying the beaches and restaurants there appreciate the natural world. This appreciation may go as far to say they wish to protect the natural world. Local youth of this area report that they most enjoy the West Coast’s environment, many of whom chose beaches or oceans as their favourite local environment (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011). Although straws as garbage on beaches may not be in the forefront of the audience’s minds, Surfrider Foundation’s Tofino Chapter has brought awareness on the amount and impact that garbage has on local beaches through oceanography classes and monthly beach cleanups for the downstream audience. Because the downstream audience is not the target audience, it is important to bring awareness to both the midstream and upstream audiences. Similar to the locals, it is assumed that tourists have a respect for the environment they are exposed to due to the fact that they are choosing to visit. In July of 2015 Tofino’s Municipal Council rejected the request put forth by local businesses to ban straws (Bailey, 2016). This has motivated foundations that are passionate about the environmental state and the impact of plastic on beaches to rally together and raise awareness to find a collective solution. Suck It Up! aims to help local businesses find an alternative to plastic straws.

According to the local newspaper’s July 2016 article, eight of about 30 businesses did not commit to Surfrider’s pledge to ban straws from their establishment (Bailey, 2016). This shows that not all of the establishments on the West Coast are willing to give up plastic straws. It does, however, show that the thought of banning or decreasing plastic straw use is considered.

Greenpeace’s Plastic Debris in the World’s Oceans report (2007) noted that plastic in oceans might result in marine life harm by ingestion or entanglement. It would be beneficial to make users of plastics aware of the potential harm caused by these seemingly harmful items. There is evidence that suggests plastic may also be harmful if not disposed of properly with regards to the leaching of hazardous material into our oceans. It is important to note that youth of Ucluelet and Tofino report another of their favourite things about the West Coast to be the wildlife. With this in mind, we can make our initiative youth friendly to engage a variety of ages.

The priority audience is in need of help because they may not be aware of the impact that plastic straws have on our beaches, oceans, and environment. There is little known evidence on the audience’s knowledge about why plastic straws are of concern for beaches and marine life. This campaign hopes to address such gaps of knowledge for businesses in order to create change for the end downstream audience.

We chose to offer small menu sticker for placement on their menus or anywhere visible of their choosing. These restaurant signs will encourage restaurants to implement a “straws available upon request” approach to slowly eliminating straws from our landfills. It seems that restaurant users may not respond to the message unless it is emotionally connected to their hobbies or interests, therefore Suck It Up! has decided to use the message of fewer straws used overall, fewer straws polluting our beaches and oceans.

If anything, the social influences toward the usage of straws are negative when it comes to the communities of Ucluelet and Tofino. Locals that have adopted a plastic straw-free lifestyle, businesses that promote paper or biodegradable straws, and organizations that promote clean beaches can all influence the priority audience’s decision to use a plastic straw. Their customers may consider restaurants that have plastic straw awareness as progressive or environmentally friendly.

# Social Marketing Theories

This campaign uses a mix of Bandura’s Cognitive (or Social) Learning Theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action. Suck It Up! uses these specifically because we aim to change behaviour through bringing awareness to the issue and molding it into community norms.

Suck It Up! puts forth a new idea for the priority audience to adopt by allowing them to have power over their allocation of straws, therefore self-efficacy, that they can make a change to better their surroundings by supporting others to do so as well. This is the self- and external-efficacy of Bandura’s Cognitive Learning Theory. In Suck It Up!’s restaurant initiative, we offer participating restaurants stickers for their menu that say “offering plastic straw alternatives by request only.” This means that restaurants will not use straws as default, making it more difficult for the downstream audience to access the competition, which is using plastic straws. This is shaping the downstream audiences’ behaviour indirectly and reinforcing the behaviour product of the campaign. This is asking the midstream or target audience to change their behaviour directly because other businesses may be doing so as well. We aim to show the target market that they will be an early adopter if they choose to implement our campaign in their businesses.

Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations Theory allows Suck It Up! to be seen as an initiative that may take time to be implemented into the local businesses of the west coast. This means that businesses will be categorized into types of adopters: from innovators on the early end, to laggards who join last. The Suck It Up! campaign will use many communication channels to encourage endorsement of our campaign. For example, the early adopters will be recruited by awareness through social media and Surfrider’s partnerships; the laggards may be recruited through social influences from other competing businesses or community leader endorsement.

The Theory of Reasoned Action focuses on behaviours, attitudes, and intentions. This is fitting for The Suck It Up! because our campaign allows restaurant and business owners to have control over their customer’s use of plastic. We are unaware of the individual stances for each concept, however our campaign does not require the priority audience to have the same behaviours, intentions, and attitudes. The norm for business owners would be to use plastic straws because they are easily accessible. The behaviour change we would like them to change is the default of using plastic straws. They intend to act because of the social implications for businesses in a sustainable town that do not adopt eco-friendly practices through the eyes of the consumers and other businesses.

Finally, The Suck It Up! campaign encourages our priority audience (businesses of Ucluelet and Tofino) to use the concept of errorproofing. In this nudging behaviour tactic the competition (plastic straws) is more difficult to use. As mentioned previously, the competition is less accessible at a participating restaurant because the default is to use no straw and the available straws are encouraged to be paper or biodegradable.

# Competition Analysis

## Alternatives from Consumer’s Standpoint

The competition for our campaign of Suck It Up! is the ease for restaurants to use inexpensive plastic straws. Customers may expect straws in restaurants; we are raising awareness against our competition (plastic straws) through the menu sticker as promotion. The competition may be desirable because some individuals require straws for beverages because of their personal needs (limited fine motor skills, as an example) or because of the beverage’s viscosity. For these reasons, businesses that utilize this campaign still allow straws to be accessible in restaurants, however they will aim to be paper straws, instead of plastic. The costs for the priority audience to give up straws could include customer comfort or a change in restaurant expectations, which could result in a loss of potential customers and profit.

A potential cost that businesses may face when switching away from plastic straws to paper straws may be the loss of a relationship with their supplier of plastic straws. Restaurants or businesses that currently use plastic straws may be purchasing them through a retailer that has a package deal, therefore forcing the business to reassess their purchasing of products.

As mentioned in the social marketing theory section, Suck It Up! aims to increase the barriers to the competition for the end consumer by encouraging straw-using businesses to have a default of no straws with their beverages and utilize the “paper straws available upon request” as promotion for decreasing plastic straws in landfills and on beaches.

When considering similar efforts, Tofino’s 2016 denied request to ban plastic straws shows that there may be room for a less forceful approach to decreasing straws in landfills and on beaches. The request was denied due to the fact that there are already many bylaws in effect and enforcing the use of biodegradable straws was a low priority for the bylaw officers of the town. Suck It Up! takes a social approach and encourages businesses to rally together to make straw use socially undesirable. We can see here why plastic straw use is a social issue because of the inability to solve through one avenue or with one solution.

Many efforts across North America, such as the Be Straw Free campaign, use individuals as their priority audience. Suck It Up! takes a new perspective and aims to engage the midstream audience first, then the downstream audience through encouragement and role modeling.

# Marketing Mission

Suck It Up!’s mission is to encourage the distributers of plastic straws (to the end users of plastic straws) to change their default use of plastic straws in order to reduce waste in landfills and litter on local beaches. The use and overuse of plastic straws is varied throughout communities on the West Coast. For example, a request for a plastic straw ban was put forth in Tofino, however Ucluelet has not had similar efforts with regards to plastic straws. We aim to bring together businesses from each community and create a recognizable campaign that brings awareness and appreciation for eco-friendly straw options to the end consumer of plastic straws. The collective efforts of these participating businesses will empower individuals to consider alternative options for plastic straws, resulting in a positive change in attitude toward straw-free or paper straw behaviour.

Our initial goal upon implementation is to reach local straw-using businesses and gauge their interest in joining Suck It Up!. We understand that our menu sticker promotional tool is not the ideal fit for all businesses and remain open to suggestions or alterations for the businesses that express interest. We aim to have about 20 of the approximate 80 businesses in Ucluelet and Tofino agree to adopt this campaign’s request and change away from their plastic straw default. We leave the means in doing so up to them, but provide support and options. Although these early adopters account for only one-quarter of all the straw-using businesses, they will be the first to receive recognition for being a more sustainable business than others, influencing their own personal competition to join the campaign. We will evaluate the campaign each month with regards to number of businesses that take on a plastic straw-free approach. In tight-knit communities, we see that businesses are influenced by each other and it is our hope that Suck It Up! will be trendy enough to catch on.

Once the campaign is underway, we aim to raise awareness on the use of plastic straws and where plastic straws go after the consumer is finished with them. This, however, is more difficult to evaluate with regards to the effectiveness in the Suck It Up! campaign. Although we may not reach all consumers, we hope some consumers will bring their newfound knowledge from our menu sticker and slogan to other businesses through word-of-mouth and spread awareness. Not only will this campaign benefit the West Coast communities’ landfills, it may help their reputation as being environmentally conscious. Because the communities may see up to 22,000 visitors on a busy day, this campaign requires a recognizable emblem for those that do not reside on the West Coast to follow (Tourism Tofino, 2017). For this reason, we will be tracking the use of the hashtag #SuckItUpStrawCampaign on various forms of social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). We aim to evaluate the number of uses for this hashtag, the positive uses, and the negative uses to better our campaign.

Overall, Suck It Up! will monitor the monthly joining rates of businesses and uses of the hashtag as closely as possible. We hope that this campaign will be self-sustainable once the majority of the businesses have pledged to be plastic straw-free. This will be our main form of informal evaluation. Evaluation will continue with recommendations from business owners and workers, as well as surveys regarding the effectiveness of menu sticker from customers of these businesses. These evaluation methods will help the campaign monitor successes and shortcomings, ultimately reaching our objectives listed below.

The objectives for this campaign include:

* To “plastic straw-free certify” 50% of the West Coast businesses that currently distribute straws to customers after two months of implementation
* To increase self-reported knowledge about plastic in our environment by 25% in the first six months of the campaign
* To create five partnerships with local environmentally focused organizations in the first year of the campaign
* To obtain 1,000 mentions of the hashtag on social media in the first year of the campaign.

# Marketing Mix

## Product

Suck It Up! offers plastic straw-using businesses social and environmental recognition as a part of pledging to be plastic straw-free. The core product for the priority audience is that businesses will receive is the environmentally conscious reputation and acknowledgement of producing less waste for local landfills and beaches. The core product for the downstream audience is the knowledge and awareness of the impact of plastic straws on our environment, namely local beaches. The tangible products offered are the custom menu stickers Suck It Up! provides for each business that joins the campaign. Another tangible product for the priority audience of the West Coast businesses that currently use plastic straws is the credit as an environmentally conscious business that pledges to not use plastic straws under our campaign, such as a sticker or badge of recognition. The augmented product of this campaign is the community support and unity of tackling a collective social issue. Another augmented example is the easy accessibility to participating in the campaign.

The relative advantage for this product over the competition is small because of the low potential for lost customers due to having paper straws upon request only. Restaurants may use between 5,000 and 10,000 straws each month. That’s about $375 to $750 each month for plastic straws or about $450 to $1200 each month for paper straws. The competition poses little threat to the product if fewer straws are being used overall because participating businesses that do not give straws by default. Overall, restaurants may be spending a similar amount of their expenses on a change from plastic straws to paper ones.

This campaign does not directly compete with many groups. With regards to direct competition this campaign aims to partner with similar organizations or initiatives instead of setting apart from them. We would like to maintain an emphasis on the negative environmental impact plastic straws may have to set us apart from initiatives the downstream audience might be aware of already. The main competition is the plastic straw retailers that supply businesses of the West Coast.

### Positioning Statement:

Suck It Up! wants consumers and local businesses to notice the alternatives to using plastic straws and understand the environmental impact plastic can have on the local beaches and landfills through recognition and empowerment to make a community change. We will decrease the barriers to using more sustainable straws in restaurants by supporting the distribution of paper straws and make the competition more difficult by encouraging a “straws available upon request” policy. Our position is based on the points of parity because we focus on allying with potential partners.

The implications for the tactic of errorproofing relate most closely to the downstream audience because customers may feel dissatisfied by the restaurants or businesses that have changed from their default plastic straws. The cognitive learning theory was linked to the campaign because we structured the product around the understanding that social influences are important to businesses on the West Coast. These businesses will learn from the early adopters about the product and it will expand from the increasing social norm of excluding paper straws. The theory of reasoned action is applicable to our campaign because we focus on changing businesses’ views of plastic straws and the attitude behind phasing out unnecessary plastic.

## Price

The priority audience is seeking acknowledgement and appreciation for the adoption of the desired behaviour (switching away from plastic straws). The monetary cost for them is the difference between the cost of plastic straws and the cost of the alternative, i.e. paper straws or reusable straws. The nonmonetary costs include the time it takes to phase plastic straws out of circulation, the time it takes to explain this change to customers, and the loss of customers that are dissatisfied with plastic straw alternatives. The costs mentioned here are instrumental costs and associated with adoption of the new behaviour for a short-term. A type on nonmonetary benefit for participating businesses would be the pledge they take that allows them to gain social recognition and acknowledgement.

Terminal costs for the priority audience of this campaign are not extensive because once implemented, this behaviour change is easily followed. For businesses that do not buy into the campaign’s beliefs, the terminal costs will be greater. These businesses will require a change in beliefs and values with regards to unnecessary plastics. This is a barrier that Suck It Up! hopes to address through support and social pressure to adopt a similar value for the business from competing businesses.

The priority audience hopes to gain an environmentally conscious reputation for their business and a feeling of inclusion to be a part of this campaign. The downstream audience will gain knowledge and awareness about plastic pollution in exchange for the potential inconvenience of not having a straw or having a straw alternative.

The main exit cost for the priority audience is phasing out the current plastic straws and the main entry cost is making room for a more sustainable and environmentally friendly option.

Suck It Up! focuses on the costs associated with a current behaviour and the benefits of adopting a new behaviour. This strategy is mixture of a cost-based strategy and benefits-based strategy because we encourage environmentally conscious behaviour, but we associate straw use with negatively impacting the environment. We will demarket the competition by displaying images of artwork created by plastic straws found on local beaches. This is increasing the costs of the competition (using plastic straws) because the downstream audience may realize the impact they make on beaches by visualizing their litter in the displayed artwork.

## Place

Our priority audience spend their time in Ucluelet and Tofino, geographically, and promoting their business through social media. We can reach our priority audience initially through media such as newspapers, Twitter, or local bulletin boards. We are aware that many businesses monitor their online reputation, therefore we will partner with Yelp to create a badge reviewers may use for businesses that are plastic straw-free, a social aspect to our campaign’s place. By using a change of default away from plastic straws as our tool to change behaviour and social norms, we address the psychological barriers our downstream audience may face. For example, a psychological barrier to not using plastic straws might be the worry of an individual as seeming “picky” or “high maintenance” when asking for a beverage without a straw at a restaurant. Suck It Up! uses the tactic of making the product more accessible than the competition because we encourage businesses to simply change their default behaviour to influence the end consumer.

We begin with partnerships to align with and share ideas on how to engage our priority audience. This broadens our distribution of the product to a larger audience because of the existing relationships other organizations may have with local businesses. Selective distribution will be used to reach the priority audience effectively. We aim to only reach businesses that currently distribute straws to customers, plastic or otherwise. A more tangible product that is distributed is the hashtag used to track success and awareness. The Internet or other forms of media also distribute this awareness created by the hashtag.

Overall, the product is distributed to the end consumer through our priority audience through change of attitudes, increased levels of knowledge, and encouragement to be socially desired as a business. We position our product in the minds of businesses as progressive and environmentally conscious.

## Promotion

Suck It Up!’s first place of engagement is local and social media because we must spread awareness of our campaign to businesses of the West Coast, as mentioned above (see Appendix A: Creative Brief). We know that businesses of the West Coast have online presence and we are able to reach out to them or understand their perspectives on unnecessary plastics by examining their social media. We will use our partnership with online review forums to increase businesses’ desire to become a part of this campaign.

To set up our campaign as a noticeable and worthwhile cause, we will investigate the communication channels in which the priority audience, as well as the end consumer, will be receptive to our message.

Firstly, the core product for the businesses (our priority audience) will be introduced through media and cooperation with like organizations. Our messenger strategy of using organizations that are familiar with businesses will help increase the attractiveness of joining the campaign. We will utilize an updated website devoted to the campaign with links to Suck It Up! accounts on various social media platforms. We will pose a consistent theme throughout these platforms that tie into our menu sticker design. The slogan of “suck it up to save our sea” will be promoted with our menu stickers, bulletin board posters, on our webpage and the certification badge. This is our one-sided message design. It uses humor to evoke emotion about a relevant social issue, as well as an unexpected piece of promotion to stick with the consumer.

Secondly, the menu stickers will target the end consumers because the product is physically close to them. This will help embed the core product’s intention in the consumer’s mind. Due to the fact that the sticker is mobile and has the potential to be at multiple venues, it is repetitively exposed to the end consumer to stand out among the competition. Because we do not know all of the end consumers’ knowledge of plastic pollution, we use the positive words “save our seas” instead of negative words such as “end ocean pollution.”

Lastly, we will selectively distribute certain elements of our campaign through different communication channels. We will attempt to reach West Coast straw-using businesses through mass and selective media, whereas we will attempt to reach individual end consumers by promoting the idea of plastic straw alternatives through signs and the slogan.

Our “one size fits most” approach may leave out those that are unaware of the product because they are simply uninterested in participating or because our product platform is not consistent with their beliefs and values. We hope to address these issues as they arise.

# Partners

Suck It Up strives to cooperate with local organizations that we share values, beliefs, missions, and visions with. Some partnerships we aim for would be with the local newspaper, The Westerly News; the leaders in beach cleanups, Surfrider Foundation; the online resource for local learning experiences, West Coast N.E.S.T., and the supporters of community engagement, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust. Our intended partners will ideally be in the not for profit or public sectors that focus on community and sustainability with strong online and in-town presences. We intend to create a strong enough force against plastic straws that legislation does not need to be implemented banning straws. As previously mentioned, a similar campaign was declined a request to enforce a plastic straw ban in Tofino in 2016. With this in mind, we aim to show policy makers that we do not require bans on plastic straws, only awareness and education.

# Resources

Suck It Up requires human resources to launch and maintain this campaign. It will begin with media specialists to begin the communication with West Coast businesses. Distribution and formation of promotional material will require grants or funding, time, and production power. Overall, this requires an assortment of paid or volunteer staff.

We hope that paper straw distributing companies, such as Greenmunch sustainable products, will reach out as partners in order to have a suggestion for alternatives to plastic straws for participating businesses.

We hope to gain recognition through the visitor centres located in Ucluelet and Tofino as an initial form of promotion for tourists.

Clayoquot Biosphere Trust has funded hundreds of organizations, communities, neighbourhoods, workshops, initiatives, individuals and research projects since its conception 17 years ago. They remain the main supporter for social marketing campaigns on the West Coast and we hope to become a part of their vision (Clayoquot Biosphere Trust: Who We Are, 2017).

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# Appendix A: Creative Brief

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| **The Key Message** | We want to decrease the use of plastic straws in West Coast establishments by creating awareness and a sense of environmental friendliness. |
| **The Target Audience** | Our target audience includes all plastic and non-plastic straw using establishments in Ucluelet and Tofino. |
| **Communication Objectives** | We would like to communicate that local businesses can have positive influences on their customers to make social change and sustainable behaviour the norm. |
| **Benefits to Promise** | We promote sustainable behaviour and self-efficacy for end consumers to make positive behaviour changes to create a feeling of connectedness to the environment. |
| **Support for the Promise** | Additional benefits include support from other organizations, being active in the community, and straw-free certifications. |
| **Openings** | We promote our issue through media, online, and through word-of-mouth. We have bright and fun tools that are recognizable as a part of this campaign. |
| **Positioning Statement** | We will decrease the barriers to using more sustainable straws in restaurants by supporting the distribution of paper straws and make the competition more difficult by encouraging a “straws available upon request” policy. |

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# Appendix B: Sample Menu Sticker

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#SuckItUpCampaign