Influencing sustainability behaviours from a social marketing perspective.

Educating the public about sustainable living poses major challenges to scientists and policy makers alike. Environmental issues can be considered complex and contain uncertainty, making decisions around mitigating behaviour more difficult. In response to these challenges, adopting a social marketing perspective and segmenting a target audience to develop more effective communication strategies, is proposed to increase sustainability behaviours.

The project focused on water sustainability behaviour within the Townsville region (North Queensland, Australia) whose water supply was under threat at the time of research. A survey was formulated based on the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), a well-established and successful health behaviour change model. A sample of 363 participants were recruited.

Three clusters representing different standings on EPPM factors (threat and efficacy), demographic variables and water related behaviours were generated from the data.

Cluster 1 (32%) had low threat and efficacy perceptions and were least likely to participate in sustainability behaviours. Cluster 2 (25%) had high threat perceptions but low efficacy perceptions. This group were long-term residents of the region. Cluster 3 (43%) had high threat and efficacy perceptions and were the most environmentally proactive. Additional analyses were conducted to explore how these clusters differed in their standing on other variables.

The approach could be used for all types of environmental threat communication and also assist campaign developers target specific messages to specific audiences.