



# NUDGES VS. INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

## PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR AND HABIT FORMATION

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*Course: Sociology, Places and Cultures of Sustainability*

# WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS ?

- Climate change is not just a technological crisis — it is a **behavioural one**.
  - Yet awareness remains high, **action remains low**.
  - Why do people know, but **still not act**?
- This is where **Information, Nudges**, and a **Relational Turn enter**.



# RESEARCH QUESTION

- Which approach most effectively changes sustainable behaviour  
**Information campaigns?** or **Nudges?**
- **The hypothesis:** Nudges produce stronger and more durable effects by aligning with contextual and habitual processes
- Is there **a third, overlooked dimension** beyond the individual?

# THE ABC MODEL (FRAMEWORK)

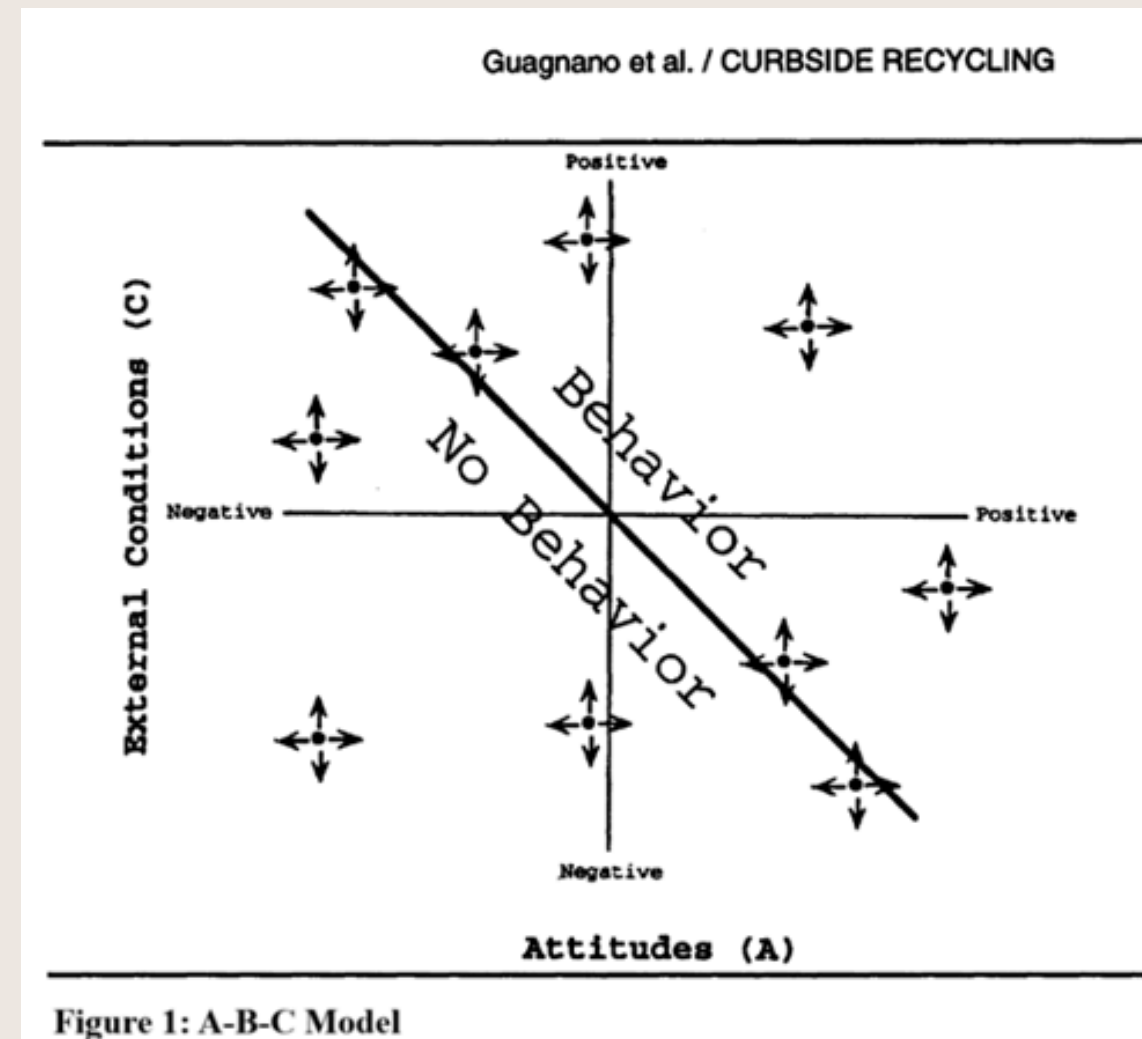
## Attitude – Behaviour – Context (Guagnano et al., 1995)

Environmental psychology explains how beliefs, attitudes, and contextual factors shape sustainable behaviour. ABC Model holds that attitudes predict behaviour only when situational barriers are weak. Contextual and habitual influences often outweigh intentions, pointing to the persistence of the attitude–behaviour gap.

Information → targets **Attitudes**

Nudges → target **Context**

What about **Behaviour** as relational?



# INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Informational strategies, leaflets, awareness campaigns, and education to promote change

## **Strengths**

✓ Raise awareness, shape attitudes

## **Limitations**

- ✗ Behaviour change is weak
- ✗ Effects quickly decay
- ✗ Assumes people act rationally

→ **Awareness ≠ Action**



# THE NUDGE APPROACH

- **Defaults** (e.g., automatic green energy enrolment)
- **Feedback** (e.g., energy consumption reports)
- **Social norms** (e.g., towel reuse in hotels).

Altering the decision environment rather than changing attitudes directly.

## Strengths

- ✓ Works on automatic behaviour
- ✓ Makes the sustainable choice easy / default
- ✓ Strong measurable results

## Limitations

- ✗ Still individualistic
- ✗ Does not explain social diffusion

→ **Better action, but still behaviour in isolation**



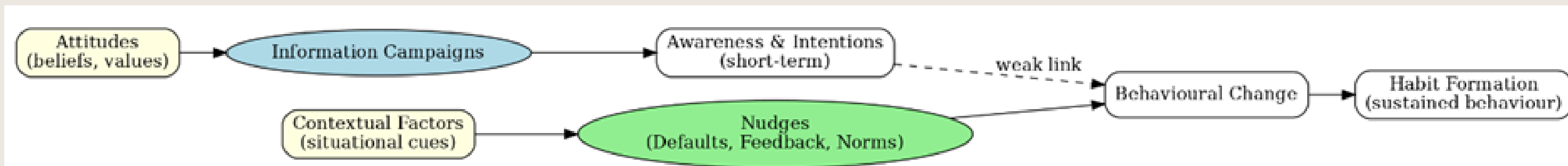
# EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT

Intervention Type	Relation to Habits	Long-Term Impact	Key Sources
Information Campaigns	Limited effect on habits – focus on conscious attitudes and intentions	Behaviour often decays after campaign ends; weak habit persistence	Abrahamse et al. (2005); Bamberg & Möser (2007)
Nudges – Defaults / Contextual Cues	Strongly support <b>automatic routines</b> by embedding sustainable behaviour in daily contexts	High persistence (e.g., staying with default green energy plan); can lock in habits	Pichert & Katsikopoulos (2008); Osbaldiston & Schott (2012)
Nudges – Feedback & Norms	Reinforce behaviour through <b>repeated cues</b> and social reinforcement	Can gradually build new routines (e.g., energy-saving, recycling) if consistently applied	Allcott (2011); Goldstein et al. (2008)
Habit Formation Opportunity	Nudges create “ <b>windows</b> ” for habit change, especially during contextual disruptions (habit discontinuity)	Habits may persist even after initial nudge is removed	Verplanken & Roy (2016)

Table 1: Role of Nudges vs. Information in Habit Formation

- Informational strategies → weak influence on actual household energy-saving behaviours (Abrahamse et al.)
- Defaults → >80% adoption vs <30% opt-in (Pichert & Katsikopoulos).
- Feedback → 2–3% energy reduction (Allcott).
- Norms → 26% towel reuse increase (Goldstein et al.).

# RELATIONAL DIAGRAM



**Figure 2:** Summary of the central argument of this essay, contrasting the weak link between information and behaviour with the stronger pathway from nudges to habit formation.

# HABIT FORMATION (THE BRIDGE)

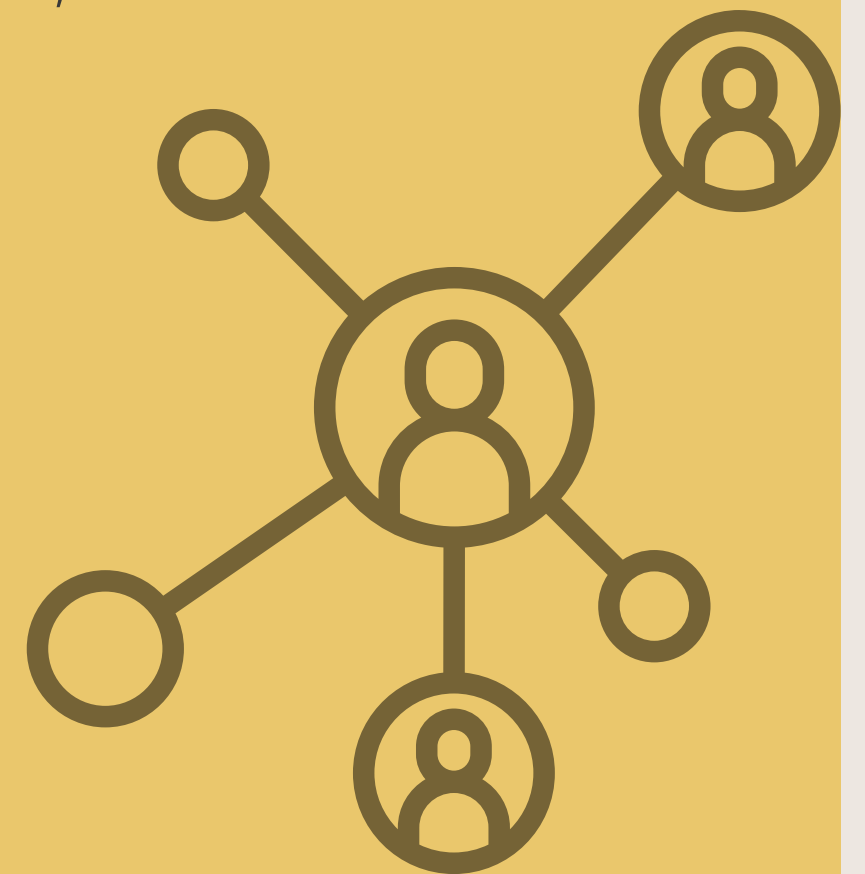
- Most environmental behaviour is **habitual**, not rational.
- Nudges succeed by **embedding action into routine**.
- BUT — **habits often formed in social contexts**.

→ **Transition to Sociological Relational Turn**



# THE RELATIONAL APPROACH

- **Key shift:** Behaviour is co-produced through social relationships
  - Practices spread through networks, neighbours, workplaces, families.
  - Sustainability is socially contagious.
- **Third model:** Behaviour as relational, not individual



## Recycling example

Not just “Is the bin there?” (nudge)

But “Do people around me recycle?”

**Neighbourhood norms**



**Shared routines**



**Collective habit**



# THREE-LEVEL INTEGRATION

Model	Strength	Limitation
Information	Awareness (mind)	No action
Nudges	Behaviour trigger (environment)	Individual only
Relational	Collective diffusion & maintenance	Requires community structures

→ **True change = layering all three**

Information changes minds.

Nudges change actions.

Relations sustain and spread behaviour socially.

# POLICY IMPLICATIONS

**Do not choose — integrate:**

- Information = consciousness
- Nudges = behavioural infrastructure
- Relational approach = social embedding over time
- Nudges offer low-cost, scalable interventions but should not replace regulation or education.
- This is not just behavioural economics — it is environmental sociology which **moves beyond individual behaviour.**
- These 3 models must be integrated → **multi-layer strategy**

# FINAL TAKEAWAYS

- Nudges outperform information campaigns. But we should **contribute a model**, not just a comparison.
- **Durable behaviour is relational**, not individual.
- The future of sustainability is **socially co-constructed**.



# Q&A REFLECTION

“If behaviour is relational, can sustainability be designed bottom-up rather than imposed top-down?”

A collage of various environmental and sustainability-themed icons is scattered around the central text. At the top left is a stylized Earth globe. Next to it is a blue leaf icon. Further right are several green leaves of different shapes. A wooden spoon is positioned at the top right. On the far right, a hand is shown holding a brown paper bag with a green recycling symbol. On the left side, there is a yellow lightbulb with a green plant growing inside. At the bottom left, there is a white plastic bottle and a blue plastic bag. In the bottom center, there are some green and brown leaves. At the bottom right, there is a yellow recycling bin and some green leaves.

# THANK YOU

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