

TRAFFIC

the wildlife trade monitoring network



THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

June 2019

REDUCING DEMAND FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MESSENGER



JOINT REPORT

REDUCING DEMAND FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE

Choosing the right messenger

TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is a global social purpose company that applies behavioural insights to inform policy, improve services, and help people to make better choices for themselves.

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Published by:
TRAFFIC International, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

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ISBN no: 978-1-911646-06-8

UK Registered Charity No. 1076722

Suggested citation: TRAFFIC and the Behavioural Insights Team (2018). *Reducing Demand for Illegal Wildlife: Choosing the Right Messenger*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These Good Practice Guidelines have been prepared following discussion at an “Expert Roundtable on Effective Messengers and Messaging, to Reduce Demand for Illegal Wildlife Products”.

The Expert Roundtable was one of a series convened by TRAFFIC, as part of its work supporting the Social and Behavioural Change Communications Community of Practice, working to reduce the demand for illegal wildlife products. The event was held in Bangkok, Thailand, August 2018 and attended by around 40 representatives of diverse institutions with relevant professional perspectives, experience or a mandate around demand reduction issues. Find out more here: www.traffic.org/news/mitigating-the-markets-for-illegal-wildlife-products-experts-review-effective-demand-reduction-messengers-and-messaging/

The Guidelines aim to synthesise the key elements of Roundtable discussion, and are intended to sit alongside an associated resource, focused on Messages. Both documents will be made available for all through the Wildlife Consumer Behaviour Change Toolkit: www.changewildlifeconsumers.org

Further information regarding the Community of Practice is available from TRAFFIC Behaviour Change Coordinator, Gayle Burgess (gayle.burgess@traffic.org).

These Guidelines have been produced through the generous support of USAID, through the Wildlife Trafficking Response, Assessment and Priority Setting (Wildlife TRAPS) project, with a contribution from the German Polifund project, implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).

The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of TRAFFIC and do not necessarily reflect the views of donors or any donor countries.



1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

We are surrounded by new information every day. When deciding how much weight to give to a new piece of information, we consider not only what is being said, but who is saying it. For example, one study found that patients' level of trust and confidence varied depending on what the doctor was wearing (professional attire with a white coat, surgical scrubs, business dress, or casual dress).¹ This finding suggests that it is important to consider how people will perceive the messenger chosen to champion the message or more simply, convey information.

These Good Practice Guidelines identify principles for choosing the right messenger for communications aimed at reducing demand for illegal wildlife products.

Two types of messengers have been found to be particularly effective:



PERSONS OF **AUTHORITY**

- ✓ Authority may be exerted through **knowledge, popularity, or influence**
- ✓ Authority may be **undermined if the audience does not like, relate to, or believe the messenger**



PEERS

- ✓ Peers can be effective messengers because someone the audience can relate to is signalling social norms about a behaviour
- ✓ Audiences' perceptions of the messenger may affect how much they like or believe the messenger

¹ Rehman, S. U., Nietert, P. J., Cope, D. W., & Kilpatrick, A. O. (2005). What to wear today? Effect of doctor's attire on the trust and confidence of patients. *The American journal of medicine*, 118(11), 1279-1286.

Foundations for Good Messenger Selection

To implement the suggestions in this Guidance, an initiative first requires two things:

1

A specific and SMART objective for the behaviour it intends to change

A lack of clarity around what the desired behaviour is may increase the chance of mixed messages -- or lead to overly ambitious/ optimistic aims. The demand for illegal wildlife products spans many thousands of taxa, and many different behaviours and motivations for consumption -- from the illegal pet trade, to gifting and bribes, to inclusion in some types of traditional medicinal treatments to treat illness and promote wellness, to investment, and beyond. Within each of these behaviours exist many different segments of consumers, each with differing motivations and barriers to change.

Objectives should be as specific as possible so that messaging can be tailored to these specific factors. Objectives should also be realistic. For example, a generic initiative to protect tigers may be overly ambitious and span too many forms of consumption. However messaging specifically designed to reduce tourist purchases of tiger bone in local markets among Chinese visitors to Myanmar, or specifically targeting young Vietnamese men who buy tooth and claw jewellery, can benefit from being tailored to those groups' specific motivations.



Tiger bone medicine seized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2017

2

An understanding of who is currently performing the behaviour

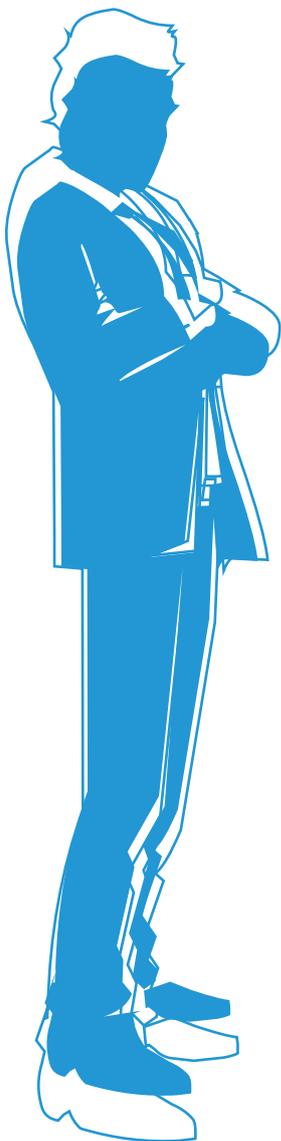
This is more than simply audience segmentation, although that is the first step. Whilst all of us exhibit behavioural biases, their relative strength may differ across individuals and groups. For example, in groups where it is important to conform to group norms, individual behaviours may be more likely to be influenced by those around them than in a group where standing out from the crowd is seen as desirable.² The recommendations applied in these Guidelines should be combined with a clear understanding of your audience and how they react to certain messages.

² Mori, K., & Arai, M. (2010). No need to fake it: Reproduction of the Asch experiment without confederates. *International Journal of Psychology*, 45(5), 390-397.

Fundamentally, the initiative needs to know who it is speaking to, and what you want them to do.

This will help you to choose the right messenger for that particular group and behaviour.

section summary



2

TYPES of messenger

- PERSONS OF AUTHORITY
- PEERS

2

foundations for messenger SELECTION

- SPECIFIC SMART OBJECTIVES
- ANALYSIS OF TARGET AUDIENCE

2 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MESSENGER EFFECTS

Much evidence is available to demonstrate that the person who sends a given communication can affect how it is received. For example, studies show that messages from well-known and well-regarded people are perceived to be particularly credible and that this perception leads to increased levels of engagement with those messages.³

This can mean celebrities, but it can just as much mean a prominent businesswoman, a politician or a popular academic. Increased levels of engagement are evident when communications are sent from people with some specific expertise – whether that means scientific knowledge, or personal experience.⁴ These are collectively referred to as “messenger effects” or “source effects” – to describe how we interpret and react to the same message differently depending on the message source.

Two main findings from large reviews in this area are:

1

Credibility matters

A meta-analysis of 114 studies published from 1950-1990 found that messenger effects, on average, made people modestly more likely to agree with the messenger’s statement. These effects were stronger when people were given information by experts (e.g. people with degrees or a high-ranking position). Experts are likely to be considered more credible: that is, they possess expertise, and they are trustworthy. One limitation of this review is that the vast majority (94%) of studies examined people’s attitudes as an outcome measure – only a small number (6%) examined people’s actual behaviour.⁵

³ Hallsworth, M., Chadborn, T., Sallis, A., Sanders, M., Berry, D., Greaves, F., Clements, L., and Davies, S. (2016). Provision of social norm feedback to high prescribers of antibiotics in general practice: A pragmatic national randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 387(10029): 1743-1752.

⁴ Durantini, M. R., Albarracin, D., Mitchell, A. L., Earl, A. N., & Gillette, J. C. (2006). Conceptualizing the influence of social agents of behavior change: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of HIV-prevention interventionists for different groups. *Psychological bulletin*, 132(2), 212.

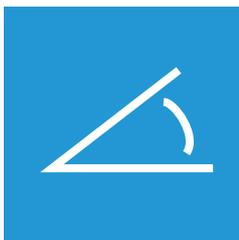
⁵ Wilson, E. J., & Sherrell, D. L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21(2), 101.

2

Perceived credibility varies depending on the context

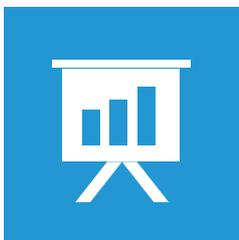
A review of almost 200 studies published from 1950-2000 found that highly-credible messengers were generally more effective than low-credibility messengers at changing attitudes and behaviours. However, what may be a credible messenger for one audience, may be not be appropriate for another.⁶

How, then, to choose a credible messenger? A third meta-analysis, this time from social marketing, reviewed a range of measures and suggested three characteristics:⁷



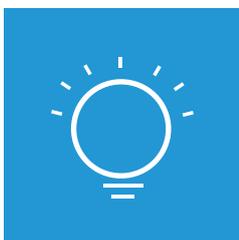
INCLINATION TOWARDS TRUTH

your audience might ask,
"are they trustworthy?"



PRESENTATION OF TRUTH

your audience might ask,
"is their presentation salient, relevant, and attractive to me?"



POTENTIAL OF TRUTH

your audience might ask,
"do they understand what they're talking about?"

⁶ Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades' evidence. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 34(2), 243-281.

⁷ Eisend, M. (2006). Source credibility dimensions in marketing communication—A generalized solution. *Journal of Empirical Generalisations in Marketing Science*, 10(2).



Will your audience **trust their motives?**

The audience's perception of the messenger affects how they feel about the message – does the audience believe that the messenger is unbiased? Messengers who are perceived to be "more credible" do not have to rely on evidence as much as those less well known by the target audience.⁸

Audiences may dismiss messengers who they believe to be extreme or have a vested interest or natural bias towards a particular outcome.⁹ For example, conservation NGOs have predictably strong views about wildlife conservation. It may therefore be helpful to exclude/ minimise the size of the logo of a conservation group from messages, because consumers who hold preconceived beliefs about conservation groups' ideologies may dismiss the message before even engaging with it, once they find out who the messenger is.

Going against preconceptions about messengers' motives can therefore be effective. For example, BIT found that energy companies are more effective messengers to get their own customers to switch suppliers than the UK energy market regulator Ofgem. This is perhaps because a trusted relationship exists, but also because energy companies are clearly losing profit by directing their customers towards their competitors, thus removing any concern among consumers of an ulterior motive.¹⁰

In building trust, it is also useful to think about "convert communicators" – people who used to act in the same way as the target audience (e.g. they used to consume tiger bone wine) but who have now converted.¹¹ This increases credibility, since these people are not just promoting a change in behaviour, but actually underwent it themselves. This also makes them more relatable. For example, when a set of community organizers across 58 towns in the US were asked to encourage the installation of solar panels, those who themselves owned solar panels recruited 63% more households to install solar panels, as compared to community organizers who did not themselves install panels.¹² It is likely that their own adoption of the technology signalled credibility in their messages to the community.

⁸ Silk, K.J., Atkin, C.K. & Salmon, C.T. (2011). Developing effective media campaigns for health promotion. In T.L. Thompson, R. Parrott & J.F. Nussbaum (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Health Communication*. New York: Routledge (pp. 203-219).

⁹ Chase, C., & Do, Q. T. (2012). Handwashing behavior change at scale: evidence from a randomized evaluation in Vietnam. The World Bank.

¹⁰ The Behavioural Insights Team. (2018). One letter that triples energy switching. Retrieved from <https://www.bi.team/blogs/one-letter-that-triples-energy-switching/>

¹¹ Who Are Convert Communicators, And When And Why Are They Especially Persuasive? (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.researchomatic.com/who-are-convert-communicators-and-when-and-why-are-they-especially-persuasive-174765.html>

¹² Kraft-Todd, G. T., Bollinger, B., Gillingham, K., Lamp, S., & Rand, D. G. (2018). Credibility-enhancing displays promote the provision of non-normative public goods. *Nature*, 563(7730), 245.

CONVERT COMMUNICATORS MASTER CARVERS IN CHINA



Under a suite of initiatives developed to reduce the motivations behind the sale, trade, purchase, and consumption of ivory in China, TRAFFIC, together with partners, has convened events aimed at the traditional ivory carving sector to encourage the promotion of sustainable alternatives.

Numerous "Master Carvers" have been successfully engaged as Convert Communicators to promote the use of materials such as fruit-pits to replace elephant ivory. Through exhibitions and industry events, these messengers are promoting the uptake of sustainable alternatives among their peers and the sector at large.

Does your audience **like them**?

How the audience feels about the messenger also matters: for example, we sometimes irrationally discard advice given by someone we dislike.¹³

Feelings of this kind may override other factors, so that someone who has developed a dislike of government interventions may be less likely to listen to messages that they perceived to come from "the government".¹⁴ In such cases, the most effective strategy for changing behaviour may be to use third parties or downplay the disliked-party's involvement in a campaign or intervention.

¹³ Cialdini, R. B. (2007). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. New York: HarperBusiness, Revised Edition.

¹⁴ The Behavioural Insights Team. (2010). *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy*.

Will your audience believe that the messenger understands?

Fundamentally, it is important that your audience believes that the messenger knows what he or she is talking about. This might mean being knowledgeable about the topic, or it might mean being knowledgeable about the situation or experiences of the audience.

Ideally, it is both: as in one trial in the UK where doctors were sent a letter encouraging them to reduce their prescription of antibiotics. This was signed off by the England's Chief Medical Officer -- a person with detailed knowledge of the effect of over-prescribing antibiotics on drug-resistance in bacteria, as well as being someone with experience of working as a doctor.¹⁵ This messenger was chosen in particular because the audience would recognise that they knew about the topic, and they understood the challenges that the recipient faced when trying to reduce prescription volumes. This is discussed further in the Messages Good Practice Guidelines.

Case studies

Below are case studies in which BIT chose to use a specific messenger as part of a behaviour change intervention. Both followed the same basic model for selecting and engaging a messenger:



Identify the target behaviour, and the relevant "audience"



Based on that "audience", **asses what messenger would have the greatest credibility** - considered trustworthy; liked; and with some understanding of the audience's situation



Design the intervention, in the case studies below this was in each case a targeted message to the audience



Present the intervention to the messenger and enlist their help in delivering it



Robustly **evaluate the effects** of the messenger/message intervention, so as to generate evidence on what works

¹⁵ Hallsworth, M., Chadborn, T., Sallis, A., Sanders, M., Berry, D., Greaves, F.,... & Davies, S. C. (2016). Provision of social norm feedback to high prescribers of antibiotics in general practice: a pragmatic national randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 387(10029), 1743-1752.



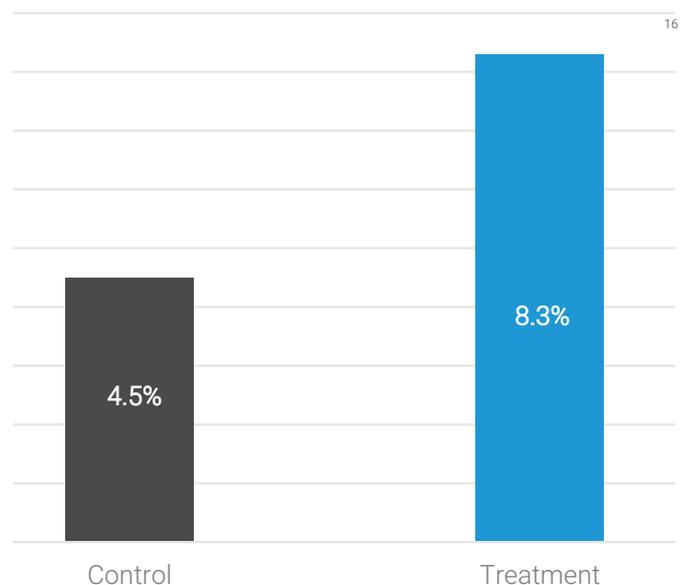
An authoritative messenger for **army recruitment**

The British Army Reserve provides highly trained soldiers who can work alongside the Regulars on missions in the UK and overseas. BIT was asked to identify why there were large numbers of "dropouts" between the initial expressions of interest and those who eventually signed up.

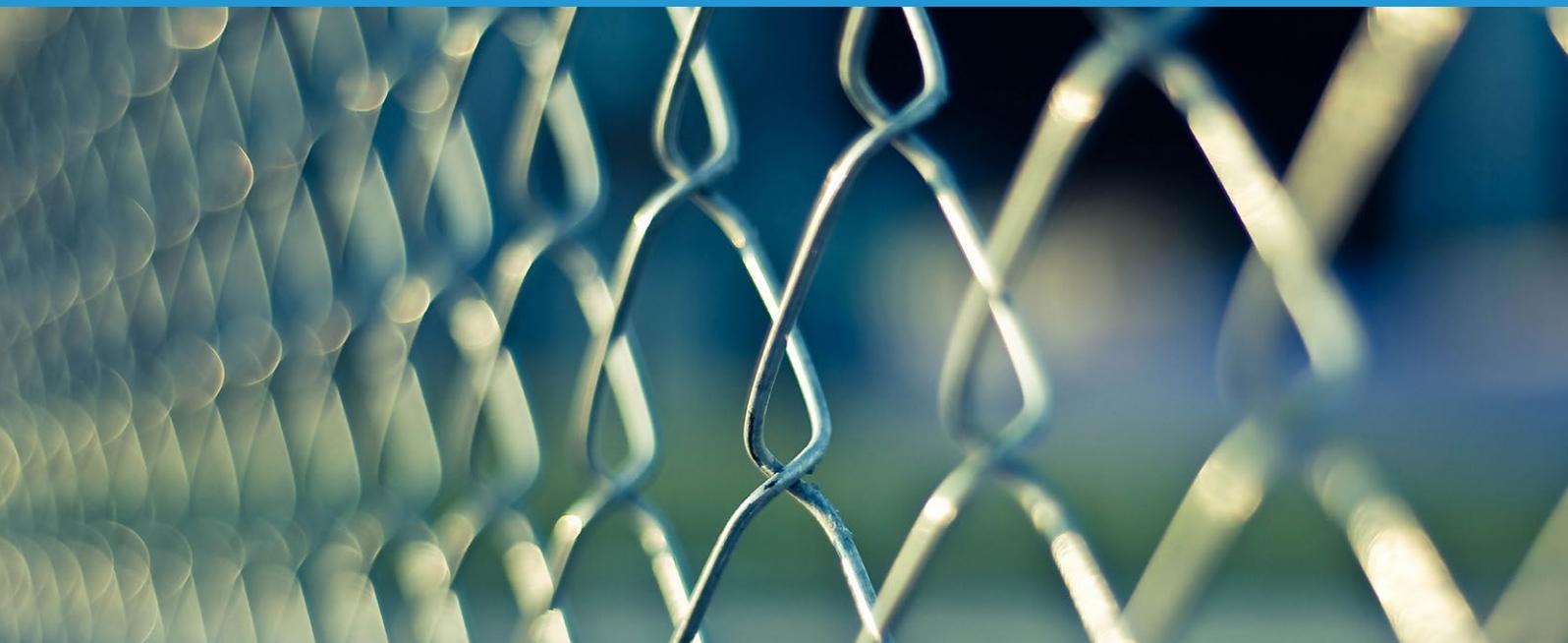
Following a short piece of work focused on understanding potential Reservists' use of the online sign-up process, BIT designed a trial to test different ways of encouraging people to complete their application. BIT tested, over a five-month period, the impact of additional emails to candidates who had declared an interest in joining the Reserves.

These "treatment" emails were sent from the account of a real and named Reservist ("Captain Damien Thursby") in the Army Reserve. BIT would write the main structure of the email, and then give a space for our officer messenger to detail some of his actual experiences. In fact we used two messengers, both real soldiers: an officer for officer training applicants, a cadet for infantry applicants.

Turning the reminder emails from an automated message, into a message from a real Reservist about their experiences, almost doubled the number of people completing their applications.



¹⁶ Paraphrased from BIT's Annual Update Report 2013-2015: <https://www.bi.team/publications/the-behavioural-insights-team-update-report-2013-2015/>

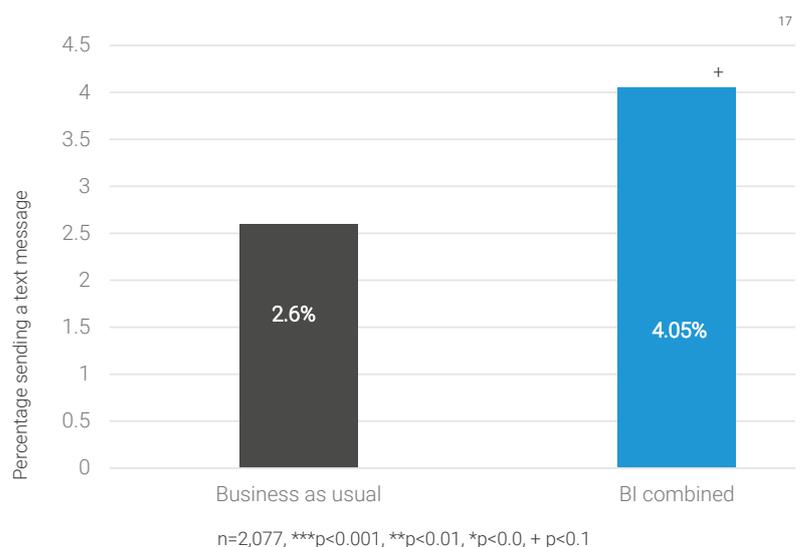


A peer messenger **for offenders**

It can be very challenging for offenders to change their behaviour - driven by context, contacts and experiences. Support services, where available, are not always taken up. BIT looked at how to encourage known offenders to reach out to a support service, to help them to make a change.

In partnership with the West Midlands Police and the Dawes Trust, which funds research in criminal justice, BIT asked former offenders to write birthday cards to known prolific offenders in the West Midlands. These cards highlighted this birthday as a chance for a fresh start away from crime, and invited recipients to text a phone number for support.

This was run as a randomised controlled experiment, with the "business as usual" intervention the normal messaging that was distributed to advertise the support service, and the "BI combined" intervention the handwritten card. The latter led to a 56% rise in take-up, although this result is not statistically significant.



More significantly, BIT will also measure the impact of the fresh start message on future criminal behaviour and will report those results in 2019.

¹⁷ Paraphrased from BIT's Annual Update Report 2017-2018: <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Annual-update-report-BIT-2017-2018.pdf>

3 USING PERSONS OF AUTHORITY AS MESSENGERS

Persons of authority are some of the most common messengers used, and with good reason -- the perceived authority of the messenger (whether formal or informal) has an impact on how we evaluate the information they are delivering.¹⁸ Equally, authorities are often recognised figures with access to diverse audiences, that make them very practical as messengers.



When the term "authority" is used here, it is to signify expertise or experience that endows credibility, associated with that person in sufficient strength as to be recognised immediately. As such there are many different types of authority, and we would choose different messengers depending on the kind of authority we hope to leverage. We highlight three types of messengers that possess different forms of authority:

EXPERTS

These messengers gain authority by possessing **expertise knowledge** (e.g. medical practitioners).

CELEBRITIES

These messengers gain authority by having **mass appeal and popularity** (e.g. actors/ actresses, music artistes, sportspeople).

COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS

Where "community" refers to a formal or informal group

These messengers gain authority by exerting **personal influence** and being someone whom audiences feel pressured to obey, to avoid potential social/ reputational costs (e.g. bosses, children [of parents], religious leaders).

¹⁸ Rehman, S. U., Nietert, P. J., Cope, D. W., & Kilpatrick, A. O. (2005). What to wear today? Effect of doctor's attire on the trust and confidence of patients. *The American journal of medicine*, 118(11), 1279-1286.

Experts – authority through knowledge

Research on effective messengers shows information delivered by experts is often better received than the same information delivered by non-experts.¹⁹

For example, a meta-analysis of HIV interventions found that expert messengers were more effective than community members in producing behaviour change.²⁰ This was especially true when they were demographically and behaviourally similar to the intervention target audience.²¹

It is worth noting that who consumers perceive as an “expert” may not necessarily be the individual/organisation who knows the most about illegal wildlife trade (i.e. conservation groups). Rather, someone who possesses knowledge about the item being purchased. For example, if a consumer wishes to purchase an illegal wildlife product for medicinal purposes, a traditional medicine practitioner who challenges certain medicinal properties of the product may be an effective expert messenger. An academic who studies wildlife trafficking, will be too far removed from the audience to be an effective messenger.

Celebrities – authority through popularity

Celebrities such as actors/ actresses, music artists, businesspersons and athletes can all help to set the tone around what is “trendy” and grab attention among their audiences. Celebrity endorsements are often used in commercial advertisements, and for good reason – the more people like a celebrity and believe that the celebrity truly supports what they are endorsing, the more audience attitudes align with the endorsement.²²

In part this is a process of conformity through identification²³ – we adopt behaviours and attitudes as a process of self-expression, and thus mimic those who we aspire to be like. Celebrities can also increase the number of people who see the message, as they are targets of our curiosity and interest. Getting the message seen by as many people as possible is clearly an important step, though this does not speak to the celebrity's effectiveness as a messenger per se, when considering an outcome of changed behaviour.

¹⁹ Wilson, E. J., & Sherrell, D. L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21(2), 101.

²⁰ Durantini, M. R., Albarracin, D., Mitchell, A. L., Earl, A. N., & Gillette, J. C. (2006). Conceptualizing the influence of social agents of behavior change: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of HIV-prevention interventionists for different groups. *Psychological bulletin*, 132(2), 212.

²¹ The Behavioural Insights Team. (2010). MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy.

²² Silvera, D. H., & Austad, B. (2004). Factors predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement advertisements. *European Journal of marketing*, 38(11/12), 1509-1526.

²³ Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 2(1), 51-60

Thus, employing a celebrity to be the face of your campaign is not a surefire way to achieve success. For example, one study in the U.S. found that having a celebrity endorse an invitation letter for women to attend cervical cancer screenings was no more effective than alternative invitation methods (telephone call, letter endorsed by the Cervical Screening Commissioner, or no intervention).²⁴

Moreover, celebrities can be effective as they often represent an ideal that people aspire towards – but only when people believe this aspirational identity is accessible to them. Simply having celebrities represent an aspirational identity that audience deem inaccessible may have a backfire effect of alienating the audience.²⁵

As such, much care should be taken if you choose a celebrity to be the messenger for your campaign – some factors to consider may include how well-known and well-liked the celebrity is amongst your target audience, how accessible people perceive the celebrity to be, the relevance of the celebrity to the cause, and the consistency of the messages that the celebrity endorses. If a celebrity helps you achieve ‘reach’, only to alienate or raise the ire of your audience through their lack of credibility, the cost of engagement may seem all the more painful.

²⁴ Stein, K., Lewendon, G., Jenkins, R., & Davis, C. (2005). Improving uptake of cervical cancer screening in women with prolonged history of non-attendance for screening: a randomized trial of enhanced invitation methods. *Journal of medical Screening*, 12(4), 185-189.

²⁵ Dimofte, C. V., Goodstein, R. C., & Brumbaugh, A. M. (2015). A social identity perspective on aspirational advertising: Implicit threats to collective self-esteem and strategies to overcome them. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(3), 416-430.



"Community influencers" – authority through personal influence

We use the term "community" to refer to members of an organised group (e.g. religious congregation, grassroots organisation, workplace). The term could also however refer to more informal groupings such as family units and friend circles. As such, when referring to 'community leaders' as effective messengers, these refer to individuals who are able to exert authority and personal influence over those in their respective communities, such that members of the community feel compelled to follow their instruction in order to avoid potential social or reputational repercussions.

For example, we found that while 7% of investment bankers chose to donate a day of their salary to charity after a visit from a celebrity, almost twice as many (12%) chose to make the same donation after receiving a personalised email from their bank's CEO.²⁶ We hypothesise that while the celebrity may have appealed to a particular subset of the population of bankers (e.g. those who were familiar with/ liked the celebrity), all the bankers would definitely know who the CEO was, some (presumably) would look up to the CEO as a role model, and those who had closer contact with the CEO might even be concerned about whether their donation (or lack thereof) would be known to the CEO and have impacts on their reputation in the eyes of the CEO. As such, in situations where your target audience are all from the same community, it may be worthwhile to use a figure who holds authority within the community, rather than a celebrity who is more famous generally.

²⁶ The Behavioural Insights Team. (2015). *The Behavioural Insights Team Annual Update Report 2013-15*.

In many countries the most authoritative messenger in a community will be the government. It is important to recognise that ineffective law enforcement might well be interpreted as a message from the government that this activity is not important, this sends a strong message that it is not wrong to engage in related behaviours.

However, those who have large personal influence may not always be the ones we traditionally think of as community leaders. A study of Costa Rican children who were in an environmental education course demonstrated that parents' knowledge of conservation increased after one month, compared to a control group of adults whose children were not part of the education course.²⁷ In the context of the illegal wildlife trade, having your own child ask you not to eat shark's fin soup may be more powerful than any ad campaign.


Do's

Action steps

- *Use relevant experts as messengers*

A traditional Chinese medicine practitioner debunking the purported medicinal properties of wildlife products.
- *Use celebrities as messengers*
(but choose with care)

A well-known and well-liked local celebrity who has consistently supported environmental and wildlife causes.
- *Use 'community' leaders as messengers, especially when targeting a specific group*

A CEO of an organisation appealing to his employees.
- *Choose celebrities whose image is consistent with the message you want to send*

²⁷ Vaughan, C., Gack, J., Solorazano, H., & Ray, R. (2003). The effect of environmental education on schoolchildren, their parents, and community members: A study of intergenerational and intercommunity learning. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 34(3), 12-21.

3 USING PEERS AS MESSENGERS

Effective messengers need not be celebrities on a billboard or experts on a television talk show – they can also be people who are personally known to members of the target audience and who belong to the same community. Examples of such ‘peer’ messengers include colleagues, friends, and family members.



Below are some of the reasons why peers can act as effective messengers:

INFLUENTIAL

Peers, especially those who have a strong existing presence and relationships in a particular community, can exert a large influence on the attitudes and behaviours of members in a group. Many behaviours, from smoking and obesity, to laughter and panic, are socially contagious as we adopt the attitudes and actions of our peers.

RELATABLE

People often desire to fit in with groups they can relate to and feel a sense of belonging towards.

CLOSE PROXIMITY

Peers are in a better position to deliver personalised and targeted messages given their close proximity to audience members. Peers also act as observers of our behaviour. Whilst it is easy to ignore a distant celebrity's calls to stop buying wildlife products, ignoring our friend's appeals brings a social cost of disapproval.

Peers can leverage on their existing relationship with members of the target audience to influence behaviours

The channels open to peer messengers to reach the target audience can be more direct and personal than general media campaigns. For example, various trials have demonstrated the efficacy of the ‘Study Supporter’ text message intervention. In this program, students nominate a “study supporter” to receive personalised information about homework, upcoming exams, and even just information about what they learned that week. By providing people in a student’s social network with personalised

information about the student's learning, the messages help to prompt conversations between the students and their 'supporters'. This intervention has led to improvements in a range of outcomes such as increased class attendance and better exam results.²⁸

That said, peer messengers can still feature in more traditional mass-media campaigns. For example, one study explored highlighting the identity and values held by individuals in a community known for alternative lifestyles, to encourage more members of the community to vaccinate their children. This 'I Immunise' campaign was executed via posters, billboards, newspaper advertisements, and a website. Initial evaluations suggested that the campaign was well-received by members of the community.²⁹

Peers are more relatable

It is not uncommon to use community leaders as messengers, particularly in development contexts. Often, this can be an effective way to leverage on the authority of local leaders.

However, in some cases, peer effects can be stronger than authority effects. One study found a 1,000% increase in smoking amongst teenagers if two of their peers smoke, compared to a 26% increase if a parent does.³⁰ This may occur when behaviours are driven more by accepted social practices (such as buying business gifts) or attitudes and identity (such as wearing tiger-claw jewellery) and rely less on esoteric knowledge (such as health benefits derived from informal medicinal tonics).

Similarly, a randomised controlled trial that tested different strategies for promoting technology adoption - using a single "lead farmer" community leader with a large incentive to act as a messenger for the village, versus five "peer farmers" with more modest incentives - saw that the peers were more effective.³¹ This may be because the peers who adopted the new behaviours were more relatable, and more likely to be perceived as understanding.

Peers are in close proximity to your target audience, and can change behaviour through network nudging

Peers are in constant contact with your target audience – this is a platform that you can use to reach people. "Network nudges" are a kind of social contagion, where behaviour is spread through a person's social network.

In one trial with a bank,³² mid-ranking managers in an investment bank who had previously donated to the bank's fundraising campaign were emailed, and either 1) thanked for their prior donation; 2) asked to reach out to colleagues in their team; or 3) asked to reach out and remind their colleagues about the impact of their donations. The proportion of bankers donating to charity significantly increased when existing donors were asked to reach out, and even more when they were reminded of their impact.

²⁸ Chande, R., Luca, M., Sanders, M., Soon, X. Z., Borcan, O., Barak Corren, N., ... & Robinson, S. (2015). *Curbing adult student attrition: Evidence from a field experiment*.

²⁹ Attwell, K., & Freeman, M. (2015). I Immunise: An evaluation of a values-based campaign to change attitudes and beliefs. *Vaccine*, 33(46), 6235-6240.

³⁰ Duncan, O. D., Haller, A. O., & Portes, A. (1968). Peer influences on aspirations: A reinterpretation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 74(2), 119-137.

³¹ BenYishay, A., & Mobarak, A. M. (2018). Social Learning and Incentives for Experimentation and Communication. *The Review of Economic Studies*

³² The Behavioural Insights Team. (2015). *The Behavioural Insights Team Annual Update Report 2013-15*.

Peers are in constant contact with your target audience – this is a platform that you can use to reach people. "Network nudges" are a kind of social contagion, where we try get people to spread a behaviour through their social network.

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Thus, peers can be particularly powerful in changing behaviours -- it is easier to follow someone else's behaviour than to start doing something on your own.³³ For example, one study looked at encouraging people to vote in the US by allowing them to register their positive action on Facebook, and reporting how many of their "Friends" had already done so. This led to significantly more people registering that they had voted, and through a separate validation, implied significantly more people actually voting.³⁴



Action steps

Do's

- *Identify who can act as peer messengers to your audience*

————— If you are reaching out to businesspeople, is there an association that they all belong to?

- *Provide avenues and opportunities for peers to spread the message amongst themselves*

————— What channels do your audience use to communicate with each other -- Email? Social media? Face to face?

Final notes

The above guidelines have brought together some of the literature from the field of behavioural science and applied them to choosing effective messengers to communicate information aimed at reducing demand for the illegal wildlife trade. Messengers chosen in accordance to these guidelines should be perceived as credible by your audience, either because they wield authority (via expert knowledge, popularity, or personal influence) or because they are peers whose behaviour your audience desires to emulate. It is also worth noting that even the best messengers will require well-crafted messages to deliver if the campaign is to be successful. See our "**DESIGNING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES**" Guidelines for more details and other material on the Wildlife Consumer Behaviour Change Toolkit www.changewildlifeconsumers.org.

³² The Behavioural Insights Team. (2015). The Behavioural Insights Team Annual Update Report 2013-15.

³³ Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). *Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance*.

³⁴ Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489(7415), 295.



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