

Philip Ball's book "Critical Mass"¹ posited interesting theories around a "physics of society", arguing that mass social movements arise when individuals behave in a manner akin to particles in physics. The book was clever in its conceptual origin and thought provoking in its analysis yet challenging to interpret as a source of inspiration for the design of approaches to mobilise the masses. Nevertheless, it went on to win the 2005 Royal Society Award for Books in Science, and some 15 years

EDITORIAL

later the principles explored are partially exemplified through current social narratives around the Climate Strikes and Extinction Rebellion (ER) protests. Insights such as this from behavioural science are increasingly recognised as relevant to wildlife trade.

Recent media coverage celebrating Nobel-nominated Greta Thunberg's powers of persuasion sits in sharp relief when juxtaposed against public interest in e.g. the fire at Paris's Notre Dame cathedral, or the release of Marvel's *Avengers: Endgame*². Using finance as a proxy for this interest, during the five days following each incident, USD1bn was raised to rebuild the Paris landmark and USD1.2bn taken in sales at the global box office. Why do headlines heralding "climate catastrophe"; "insect Armageddon"; "more plastic in the oceans than fish by 2050"; "the sixth mass extinction"; "more than 60% of the Earth's vertebrate species already lost"; and, the "impending collapse of life's natural systems" not provoke a similar public response? What inspires such interest and action requires scrutiny, as those seeking to promote the sustainable consumption of flora and fauna and other environmental causes have to "compete" for attention within this context and reality.

Conservation headlines and campaign slogans can be depressing, numbing and disabling—is this pushing people further away from solutions, rather than inspiring them to move from simply voicing their values, towards actually making transformative changes in lifestyle choice and consumption habits? To answer such questions conservationists are increasingly exploring behavioural science.

Campaigns invoking "people power" use social mobilisation strategies within a Social and Behavioural Change Communications (SBCC³) framework. Tactics thus tend towards those affecting the community and environmental realms of the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM⁴). Both SBCC and SEM crucially also demonstrate the importance of behaviour change communications, which aim to shift knowledge at interpersonal and individual levels, as well as shape attitudes, skills and practices.

Such topics formed part of the discussion at the 2nd International Conference on Behaviour Change in Conservation, convened by TRAFFIC in Bangkok,

November 2018. Around 100 members of the SBCC Community of Practice⁵, representing 21 countries and 60 organisations, considered common social science concepts such as the Value-Action Gap and Catalyst and Gateway Behaviours. Participants examined the disconnect between what people say and do, as well as the entry-points from relatively benign buyer behaviour to actions which would be more damaging to species in trade. Case studies were shared and lines of research enquiry identified for future investigation.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is also increasing its emphasis on consumer behaviour change, but not in isolation from other complementary efforts. TRAFFIC's review of current practice, pursuant to Decision 17.48, revealed that CITES Parties most requested support was for expertise in relation to behavioural change.

In the preamble for TRAFFIC's final "Consultant's Report" (CITES CoP18 Working Document 4⁶), the CITES Secretariat noted: "*It is critical that Parties understand the difference between well-targeted demand reduction strategies through behaviour change, and mass campaigns to raise awareness of the plight of endangered species and the various negative impacts of poaching and wildlife trafficking. Although both approaches have their merits, the former is more imperative in order to address the urgent needs.*" The preparation of guidance in line with this will be considered by the Parties during the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (recently postponed due to the tragic events in Sri Lanka).

Additional examples of increasing emphasis on mobilising behavioural science for conservation action abound. In the past two months alone, the UK government convened the first meeting of its "Global Consortium of [Demand Reduction] Specialists" in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, orienting ca. 50 participants around subjects such as behavioural economics and environmental education. The Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science subsequently convened an Expert Workshop in Oxford, UK, focused on "Taking Behaviour Change to Scale in Conservation". Two weeks later, the Behavioural Insights Team and Rare published an 84-page report on "Behaviour Change for Nature"⁷. Meanwhile the most recent edition of "Social Marketing Quarterly", published in March, focused entirely on biodiversity conservation⁸.

Each of these represent promise for nature conservation. But more must be done to apply behavioural insight and inspire people. Those familiar with the Marvel storyline will know that it features a loss of 50% of all life in the universe. While fiction of course, we are increasingly at risk of this becoming a reality unless "people power" can be converted from angry voices to action. TRAFFIC will continue to champion the best of behavioural science evidence and practice accordingly.

Gayle Burgess, Behavioural Change Co-ordinator, TRAFFIC
E-mail: gayle.burgess@traffic.org

¹Ball, P. (2004). *Critical Mass. How One Thing Leads to Another*. Arrow Books; ²<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-48084977>;

³<https://c-change.program.org/focus-areas/capacity-strengthening/sbcc-modules>; ⁴Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development. Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press; ⁵www.changewildlifeconsumers.org; ⁶<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/inf/E-CoP18-Inf-004.pdf>;

⁷<https://www.bi.team/publications/behavior-change-for-nature-a-behavioral-science-toolkit-for-practitioners/>; ⁸<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/smqa/25/1>