Life Transitions and Circular Choices

Communicating the Circular Economy Through Moments of Change

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Authors
Samuel Perpétuo, Niall Brennan,
Adam Boland, Jenni Quinn,
Rebecca Wilson, Claire Downey

Rialtas na hÉireann
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1. Executive Summary

This report examines how circular economy communication can be made more effective by aligning it with the major transitions and life events that shape people's everyday lives. Drawing on a targeted rapid scoping review of sixty academic and practice-based sources together with qualitative research conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of the Rediscovery Centre, the study explores how moments such as moving home, becoming a parent, starting a new job, changing household circumstances and entering retirement influence consumption patterns, routines and decision-making.
The report argues that these life transitions provide important opportunities for engagement, not because they automatically produce sustainable behaviour, but because they temporarily unsettle established habits and create periods in which people are actively rethinking their needs, priorities and practices. However, these periods are also characterised by competing pressures including financial constraints, time scarcity, uncertainty, emotional stress and changing responsibilities. As a result, transitions should not be understood as simple "windows of opportunity" but rather as periods of heightened behavioural openness whose outcomes depend on the availability of practical support,

trusted information and accessible alternatives.

The literature consistently demonstrates that sustainable and circular behaviours emerge not simply from awareness or environmental concern, but through the interaction between individual motivations and the wider systems that enable or constrain action. Communication alone is therefore insufficient. Successful engagement depends on communication being accompanied by practical infrastructures and services that make repair, reuse, sharing, borrowing, resale and waste prevention easy, convenient and socially acceptable.

Across the evidence base, several life transitions emerge as particularly significant. Relocation and moving home, parenthood and family formation, retirement and changing household structures were among the most frequently identified contexts in which consumption practices are reorganised. Qualitative findings reinforce these patterns, showing that transitions often involve heightened purchasing, renegotiation of routines and increased pressure on time and finances. Yet they also reveal that many circular practices are already embedded within everyday life. Participants frequently described behaviours such as repairing, reusing, sharing, donating and buying second-hand not as explicitly environmental actions, but as practical, sensible and economically beneficial choices.

The findings suggest that the language and framing traditionally associated with the circular economy have limited resonance with the public. Abstract concepts and technical terminology can create distance and confusion, whereas messages that emphasise affordability, quality, trust, convenience and resourcefulness are more likely to connect with lived experience. Circularity becomes meaningful when framed around tangible benefits rather than environmental obligations alone.

The review of communication strategies further demonstrates that effective circular economy engagement requires multiple and complementary approaches. Digital platforms and technologies, strategic message framing, educational resources, transparent information, labelling systems and behavioural supports all contribute to creating enabling environments for change. Communication is most effective when it combines clear and credible information with practical mechanisms that reduce barriers and make circular options visible, accessible and easy to adopt.

A central finding of this report is that people should not be expected to step outside their lives in order to engage with circularity. Rather, circular economy communication should be embedded within the transitions people are already navigating. Individuals are not embarking on “circular economy

journeys"; they are moving home, raising children, starting new careers, managing changing family circumstances or entering retirement. Circular behaviours are most likely to be adopted when they are presented as solutions to the challenges and decisions people are already facing. The evidence therefore points towards a shift away from static demographic segmentation and generic awareness campaigns towards a more contextual, life-course approach to communication. Such an approach recognises that receptiveness to change varies across different moments in people's lives and that interventions must respond to the realities of those moments. Communications that are timely, trusted, practical and supported by accessible services are more likely to succeed than messages based primarily on abstract environmental values.

These findings have significant strategic implications for the communications sector. Future communications should focus on embedding circular messages within key life transitions and designing interventions around the practical concerns that dominate those moments. Campaigns should emphasise saving money, reducing hassle, accessing quality, building trust and making better use of resources rather than relying solely on environmental narratives. Communication should be accompanied by visible pathways to action, linking people directly to repair services, sharing initiatives, second-hand markets, donation opportunities and waste prevention supports. Ultimately, the report concludes that circular economy communication is most effective when it starts not with circularity itself, but with people's lives. By recognising life transitions as moments of reorganisation and possibility, circular communications can move beyond awareness raising towards a more human-centred and practice-oriented model of engagement. In doing so, it can help translate the circular economy from an abstract policy ambition into a set of meaningful, trusted and achievable everyday choices, making circularity more visible, accessible and possible for individuals and communities across Ireland.

2. Introduction

This synthesis report details work carried out as part of the Circular.ie Communications Project, led by the Rediscovery Centre and funded by the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. The report contributes to the ongoing evidence base for the communications sector by examining how circular economy communication can be more effectively designed around life events and life transitions. It builds on the findings and recommendations of the previous synthesis report (2025), which identified the need for deeper understanding of the cultural acceptability of circular behaviours, including repair, reuse and renting, as well as the need for more contextual and qualitative evidence on how people engage with circular practices in everyday life.

The starting point for this report is that circular behaviours are not shaped only by broad demographic characteristics such as age, income or household type. They are also shaped by the moments people are living through. Moving out of the parental home, buying or moving house, becoming a parent, starting a new job or entering retirement can all change routines, responsibilities, priorities, social networks and material needs. These transitions can create moments

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When established habits are disrupted and new practices become possible. However, they can also be moments of pressure, uncertainty and constraint, where time, attention, money and emotional capacity are limited.

For this reason, the report moves beyond a static demographic approach and adopts a life-events and life-transitions perspective. This approach treats transitions not simply as personal milestones, but as moments in which everyday consumption is reorganised. The literature reviewed in this report suggests that such moments may create periods of behavioural openness, particularly when routines are unsettled and people are actively making decisions about homes, work, family life, mobility, products and services. However, the evidence also cautions that these moments are not guaranteed opportunities for sustainable change. Whether circular behaviours are adopted or sustained depends on how well communication is timed, framed and supported by practical systems of provision.
To explore this issue, the report brings together two main strands of evidence. The first is a targeted rapid scoping review of academic and practice-based literature. This review was organised into two connected blocks: the first examined life events, moments of change and sustainable or pro-environmental behaviour, while the second examined circular economy communication, campaigns and behaviour-change interventions, with a focus on practices such as repair, reuse, sharing and waste prevention. These two blocks reflect the central purpose of the report: to understand both when people may be more receptive to circular behaviours during periods of transition, and how communication can be designed to support those behaviours in practical and credible ways. The second strand is qualitative research conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of the Rediscovery Centre as part of Circular.ie. This research explored five life transition moments through six online focus groups, examining how people describe their experiences, consumption behaviours, attitudes toward circular practices and responses to circular economy communication.

Together, these two strands allow the report to connect conceptual evidence with lived experience. The literature explains why life transitions may matter for circular economy communication: they disrupt routines and can create temporary openings for new behaviours. The qualitative research shows how these transitions are experienced: as moments of heightened consumption, emotional adjustment, financial pressure, decision-making and practical constraint. It also shows that circular behaviours are often already present in people's lives, but are more likely to be described as practical, thrifty,

sensible or good value than as explicitly “sustainable”.
A central argument of this report is therefore that circular economy communication should not ask people to step outside their lives in order to engage with circularity. Instead, it should meet people within the transitions they are already navigating. This means recognising that people are already on a moving home journey, a new parent journey, a new job journey, or a retirement journey. Circular behaviours are more likely to resonate when they are embedded within these existing journeys and framed as ways to save money, reduce hassle, access quality, build trust, make better use of resources and support more meaningful choices.

The purpose of this report is to support the development of circular communication that is evidence-informed, practical and grounded in peoples lived realities.
It aims to identify when circular economy communication may be most relevant, what barriers and motivations shape engagement during life transitions, and how messages can be designed to feel credible, useful and actionable. In doing so, the report supports the Rediscovery Centre’s wider mission to make the circular economy visible, accessible and possible in everyday life, helping to translate circularity from an abstract policy concept into practical choices that people and communities across Ireland can recognise, trust and use.

Circular behaviours are more likely to resonate when they are embedded within these existing journeys and framed as ways to save money, reduce hassle, access quality, build trust, make better use of resources and support more meaningful choices

3. Literature Review

Building on the 2025 report, which focused on the role of sociodemographic in circular communications, this review adopts a life-stage and life-events perspective. It examines how Circular Economy (CE) communication strategies are designed, adapted, or used in relation to transitions across an individual's life course. The review is structured around the following central research question:

How can circular communication be designed around life events and life transitions, in order *to be more effective for behaviour change?*

In line with this research question, a scoping review was selected as the core methodological approach (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This approach facilitates the systematic mapping and synthesis of relevant scholarship across multiple disciplines, rather than an exhaustive appraisal of a narrowly defined body of literature. This is consistent with the methodological tendencies observed in CE communication research more generally, where evidence is dispersed across marketing, sustainability studies and social sciences. Within this scoping framework, a thematic analytical strategy

was employed to organise and interpret insights from this diverse literature. The review was initially conceived as being structured around communication strategies linked to distinct "*life stages*".

However, during the early phases of scoping, it became apparent that conventional developmental categories such as childhood, adolescence, early adulthood and later life were of limited analytical value for understanding changes in consumption, maintenance or disposal practices relevant to CE interventions. Instead, as highlighted in practice-based CE research, greater insight is gained by focusing on biographical transitions and household configurations rather than age-defined life stages (Greene, 2024).

While such age-based categories are commonly used in demographic and marketing analyses, they tend to be relatively static and risk obscuring the dynamic changes in routines, responsibilities and social roles that shape behavioural adaptability. Emerging evidence instead points to the importance of life events, rather than fixed age stages, as more meaningful entry points for behaviour-change interventions (Burningham & Venn, 2024; Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021). A life-events/transitions perspective therefore provides a more appropriate analytical lens for the purposes of this review. Rather than conceptualising individuals as stable demographic groups, this perspective foregrounds biographical transitions including but not limited to moving home, forming or reconfiguring a household, becoming a parent, entering or leaving education, changing employment, retiring, or downsizing.

These transitions frequently disrupt established practices and routines, thereby creating periods in which every day behaviours related to consumption, use, repair, and disposal, may be more open to change (Georgantzis Garcia et al., 2021; Muranko et al., 2018). As highlighted in existing CE-related behaviour-change research and reviews, such moments of disruption can be strategically leveraged to encourage engagement with circular practices when accompanied by clear, targeted and contextually salient communication (Camacho-Otero et al., 2018; Muranko et al., 2018).

A clarification of terminology is therefore warranted. While "*life stages*" are widely used in marketing and demographic segmentation, these categories remain closely anchored in age, and often as a result, fail to capture the turning points that precipitate shifts in everyday practices (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In contrast, life events refer to identifiable transitions which

directly reconfigure daily routines, constraints and expectations. Therefore, they offer a more analytically useful lens for identifying when behaviour-change and CE communication interventions are most likely to be effective (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Georgantzis Garcia et al., 2021).

The broader life-events perspective integrates these events and views them as cumulative processes through which practices evolve over time. This distinction mirrors similar differentiations in CE communication scholarship between static consumer typologies, behavioural triggers, and the contextual determinants of practice change. Guided by this conceptual framework, the present review employs a targeted rapid scoping methodology to identify and synthesise academic studies addressing two interrelated questions: Firstly, how life events and life-course transitions function as opportunities for shifts in consumption, resource use and everyday practices; and secondly, how communication, engagement and behaviour-change interventions can be designed to support CE behaviours at these moments of transition.

A thematic synthesis was applied to structure the evidence across two intersecting dimensions: 1. Types of life events, including relocation, household formation, parenting transitions and educational transitions; and 2. Types of communication approaches, including informational, normative, values-based and identity-focused strategies, reflecting categories commonly used in CE communication research, for example, those drawing on frameworks such as SHIFT (Social influence, Habit formation, Individual self, Feelings and cognition, and Tangibility) (White et al, 2019). Structuring the findings across these dimensions enables the identification of recurring patterns, conceptual gaps, and emerging examples of effective practice in tailoring CE communications to moments of transition. This organisational approach helps to develop practical implications for the communications sector, especially by identifying points in people's lives when everyday practices are unsettled and communication strategies are more likely to influence change.

4. Methodology

4.1. Literature Identification and Search Strategy

This review employed a targeted rapid scoping methodology to identify and synthesise literature relevant to the role of life events and communication strategies in shaping sustainable and CE behaviours. A scoping approach was selected in recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of the research question, along with the diverse terminology used across environmental psychology, sustainability studies, marketing, social sciences, and policy-oriented research. The objective was to map key concepts, approaches, and evidence, rather than to conduct an exhaustive systematic review.

All searches were conducted using Google Scholar, reflecting its suitability for capturing a broad range of academic and practice-oriented literature. Searches were limited to publications from 2015 to 2025 in order to capture contemporary research relevant to current CE communication and engagement practice. Only open access papers were considered to ensure that all included studies could be reviewed in full. For each search string, the abstracts of all results appearing on the first two pages of Google Scholar were screened for relevance. This boundary was applied consistently across searches to maintain a manageable and

transparent scope, in line with the methodological approach adopted in previous synthesis work. Where the total number of results was low, all available abstracts were reviewed. Because the review examines circular economy communication through life events and moments of change, the search strategy included both circular economy terminology and broader sustainability or pro-environmental behaviour terms. This was necessary because not all relevant studies use the language of circular economy directly, even when they examine behaviours that are relevant to circular practices, such as reduced consumption, repair, reuse, sharing, household resource use or waste prevention. The review therefore treated sustainability-framed studies as relevant where they provided transferable insights into behaviours, communication approaches or transition moments that could inform circular economy communication. This approach allowed the review to maintain a clear focus on circular economy while also drawing on adjacent evidence from the wider sustainability and behaviour-change literature.

The literature search was organised into two thematic blocks reflecting the dual focus of this targeted rapid scoping approach: Block 1 focused on life events, moments of change, and sustainable or pro-environmental behaviour, examining how transitions such as moving home, becoming a parent, changing employment, entering retirement or reconfiguring household routines may disrupt established practices and create conditions for behavioural change. Block 2 focused on circular economy communication, campaigns, and behaviour-change interventions, with particular attention to repair, reuse, sharing, waste prevention, and other circular practices. These two blocks were included because the review addresses both a timing question and a communication question: when people may be more receptive to change, and how circular economy communication can support circular behaviours during these moments. The search strings applied across both blocks are summarised in the following tables.

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Table 1 — Block 1: Life events / moments of change & sustainable behaviour (Google Scholar screening)

Search string	Results	Search date
"life events" AND "sustainable consumption"	1,580	27/11/2025
"moments of change" AND "pro-environmental behaviour	11	27/11/2025
"habit discontinuity" AND "sustainable behaviour"	9	28/11/2025
"first-time homebuyer" AND "residential property" AND "sustainable behaviour"	0	28/11/2025
("first-time buyer" OR "first-time homebuyer") AND ("comparison" OR "demographic") AND ("green home" OR "sustainable")	22	01/12/2025
"life-events" AND "sustainable behaviour"	22	01/12/2025
"becoming a parent" AND "environmental behaviour" OR "consumption	153	01/12/2025

The first round of searches sought to identify literature which examines how life events, transitions, or disruptions to routine, influence sustainable consumption and pro-environmental behaviour. Search strings combined terms relating to life events, habit disruption, and specific transitions (such as parenthood or first-time homeownership), with terms relating to sustainable or environmental behaviour. Across this block, several searches returned a large volume of results using broad terminology (e.g. "*life events*" or "*becoming a parent.*"). While more specific combinations (e.g. "first-time homebuyer" and "sustainable behaviour"), returned few or no results. Where no results were identified, this was interpreted as indicative of either a genuine research gap or the use of alternative terminology within the literature, rather than an absence of relevant phenomena.

In total, 28 papers were provisionally selected from Block 1 following abstract screening. After full-text review and assessment of relevance to the review's research questions, 17 papers were retained for final inclusion.

Table 2 — Block 2: Circular economy / repair / reuse communication and campaigns

Search string	Results	Search date
"circular economy" AND "behaviour change" AND "communication"	438	03/12/2025
"repair" AND "behaviour change" AND "campaign"	187	03/12/2025
"circularity" OR "second-hand" AND "social marketing" OR "communication"	10,200	04/12/2025
"circular economy" AND "behaviour change" AND "campaign"	167	04/12/2025

The second block of searches focused on identifying literature addressing communication, engagement, and behaviour-change interventions, in relation to CE practices. Search strings combined CE-related terminology (e.g. circular economy, circularity, second-hand), with terms relating to communication, social marketing, campaigns and behaviour change. Given the large number of results returned by some searches, abstract screening was again limited to the first two pages of results. Studies were excluded where they focused exclusively on industrial processes, supply-chain optimisation, or macro-level policy, without explicit consideration of behaviour change or communication at the citizen or consumer level. Across Block 2, 28 papers were initially selected following abstract screening. After full-text assessment, 23 papers were retained for inclusion in the final synthesis. (See Table 4)

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Table 4– flowchart of the papers searched

Review Stage	Block 1: Life events / moments of change	Block 2: Circular economy communication / campaigns	Total
Search results identified	1,797	10,992	12,789
Abstracts screened	First two pages of Google Scholar results for each search string	First two pages of Google Scholar results for each search string	—
Papers provisionally selected after abstract screening	28	28	56
Papers retained after full-text review	17	23	40

The flowchart summarises the process used to identify, screen and retain studies for inclusion in the review. As this was a targeted rapid scoping approach, the aim was not to provide an exhaustive account of all available literature, but to identify a focused and policy-relevant body of evidence across two connected areas: life events and moments of change, and circular economy communication and behaviour-change interventions. Studies were retained where they contributed directly to understanding either how life transitions may create conditions for behavioural change, or how communication can support circular practices such as repair, reuse, sharing, waste prevention and product life extension.

4.2. Inclusion Criteria and Synthesis

Across both thematic blocks, studies were included in the review where they met one or more of the following criteria: (1) Explicit engagement with life events, life transitions, or disruptions to routine; (2) Analysis of behaviour change or practice change relevant to circular economy strategies; and/or (3) Examination of communication, engagement, or campaign-based interventions, aimed at supporting sustainable or circular behaviours. The final corpus of included literature formed the basis for a thematic synthesis. This synthesis was structured around two core analytical dimensions: 1. Types of life events and, 2. Types of communication or engagement approaches.

These dimensions provided a coherent framework for organising findings and identifying patterns across diverse study designs and contexts, as outlined in subsequent sections of the report. To supplement the academic literature identified through the two main database search blocks, additional sources were identified through Perplexity-assisted supplementary searching and through targeted searches for grey literature and practice-based guidance. In total, 40 sources were retained from the two main review blocks: 17 from Block 1, focused on life events, moments of change and sustainable behaviour, and 23 from Block 2, focused on circular economy communication, repair, reuse and behaviour-change campaigns. A further 20 supporting sources were included outside these two blocks: 13 additional academic sources were identified through Perplexity-assisted supplementary searching, 5 were grey literature or practice-based sources, and 2 were methodological or background references. All supplementary sources were screened for relevance to the review's aims and were retained only where they provided empirical, conceptual or practical insight into life transitions, circular economy communication, behaviour change or campaign design. This combined approach broadened the evidence base by incorporating both peer-reviewed and practice-based sources relevant to the aims of the review.

Building on this structured and inclusive approach to literature selection, the next stage of the review focused on systematically organising and interrogating the final body of evidence. To ensure consistency, comparability, and analytical depth across a diverse set of studies, a formal thematic analysis framework was applied to all included papers. This approach enabled the synthesis of findings across methodologies, sectors, and disciplinary perspectives, while retaining sensitivity to differences in study design and scope.

4.3. General Information

A total of 40 articles were selected for inclusion in the literature review conducted for this report. These articles span a ten-year publication period, reflecting both the emergence and recent acceleration of research interest in CE–related behaviours and attitudes. An overview of the distribution of publications by year (see Figure 1), illustrates a relatively modest and steady output prior to 2020. This is followed by a marked increase from 2021 onwards.

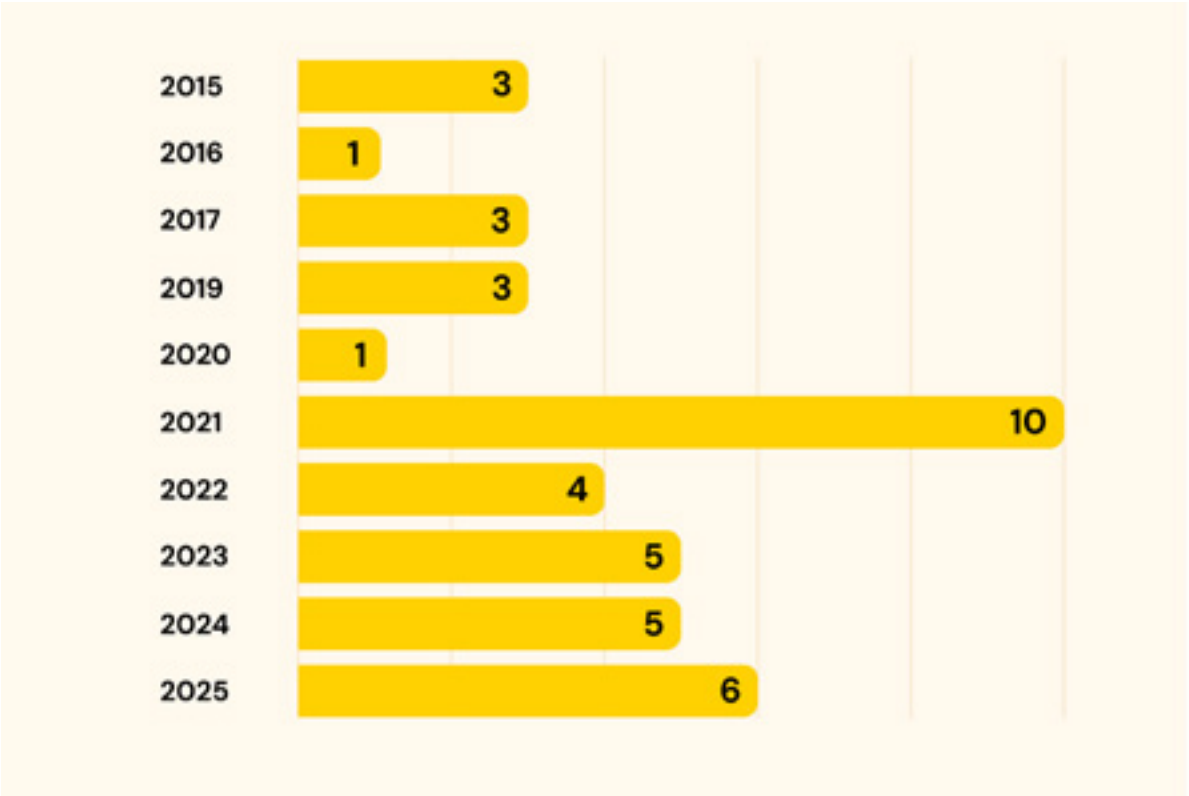

Figure 1: Distribution of publications across the years

This pattern suggests growing academic, policy, and practitioner attention to CE themes, particularly in the context of climate action, resource efficiency, and behavioural change. The spike observed in 2021 may partly reflect delayed publication activity or renewed research attention following the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pattern should not be interpreted only as a one-off increase, as the reviewed literature also shows a relatively steady rise from 2022 onwards. This upward trend provides important context for the subsequent analysis. It indicates not only an expanding evidence base, but also increasing diversification in research focus, methodological approaches, and sectoral coverage.

Unlike the first Circular.ie synthesis report, *Understanding Sociodemographic Differences Among the Irish Audience in Relation to Circular Economy Behaviours and Attitudes* (Boland et al., 2025), which focused explicitly on studies examining Irish society and the Irish population, the present review did not apply a geographic restriction at the point of literature selection. Instead, studies were identified based on their relevance to CE–related behaviours, attitudes, and engagement, across a

global context, regardless of country of origin. This broader scope was adopted to capture a wider range of conceptual, methodological, and empirical insights relevant to the themes under investigation. At the same time, findings drawn from international studies should be interpreted with some caution in relation to the Irish context, as differences in policy, market condition, and social norms may shape how far they are transferable.

Before examining geographical focus, the included studies were first classified according to study type, distinguishing between conceptual or review-based papers and empirical studies. This distribution is presented in Figure 2. The geographical focus of the empirical studies was then analysed separately by classifying them according to their primary country or regional scope. The results of this geographical classification are presented in Figure 2. (See Figure 2).

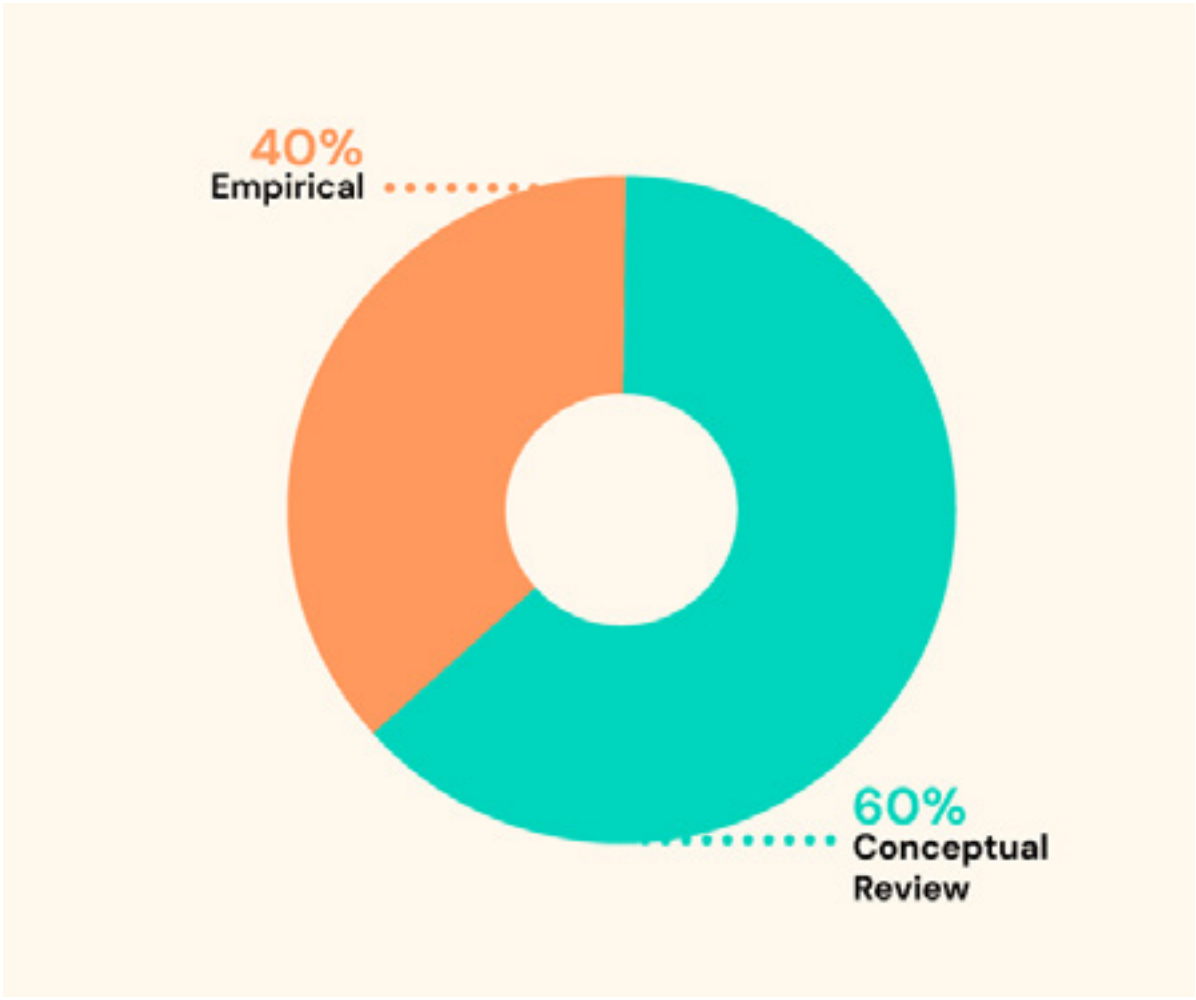

Figure 2: Distribution of studies divided into empirical and reviews

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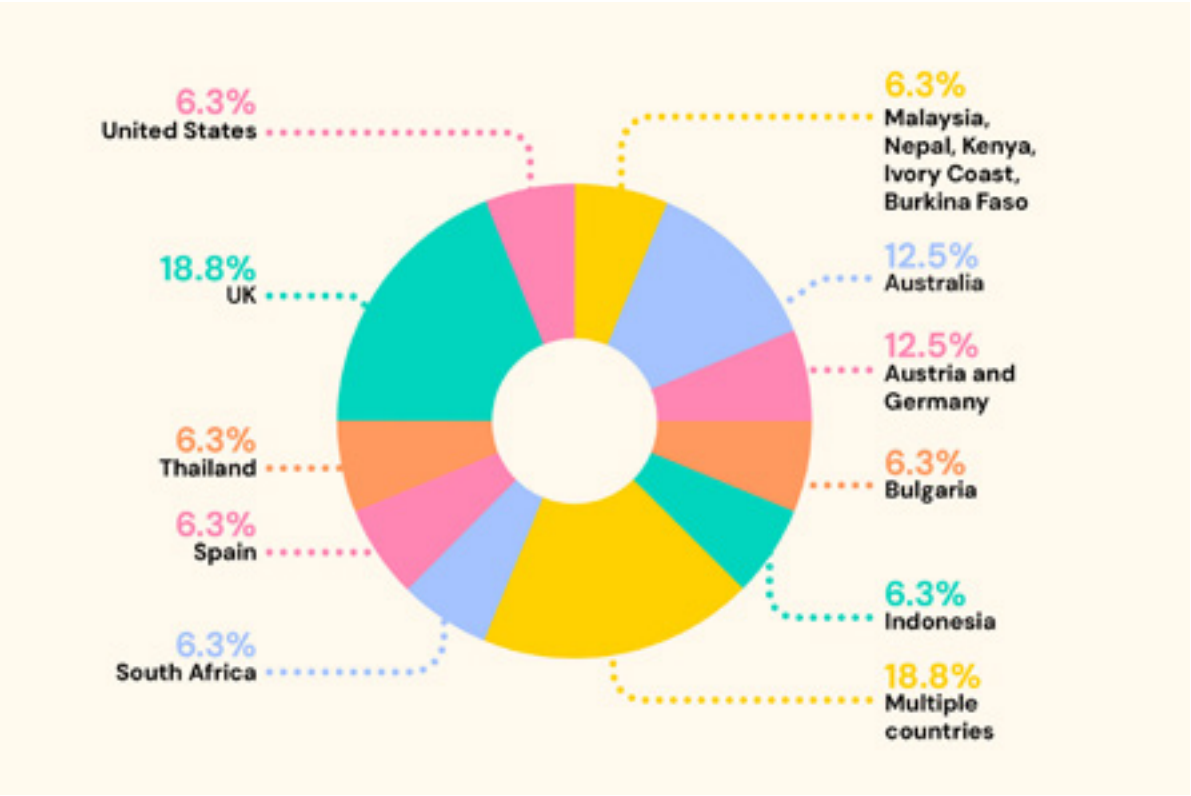

Figure 3: Distribution of studies across countries and regions

The figure 2 shows a clear tilt toward conceptual work: 60% (24 papers) are conceptual reviews, while 40% (16 papers) are empirical studies.
This indicates that a substantial share of the evidence base is theoretical, methodological, or framework-driven in nature, rather than grounded in geographically specific empirical research. These papers typically synthesise existing research, develop conceptual models, or explore methodological approaches intended to be applicable across multiple contexts.

Figure 3 represents the 16 empirical papers, suggesting that the empirical evidence is quite concentrated.
The UK and multi-country studies are the biggest groups (18.8%, 3 studies each), with Australia next (12.5%, 2 studies). Everything else appears as single studies spread across different countries/regions. This pattern suggests that the empirical evidence base is not dominated by one single national context, but it is also not evenly developed across many settings. Instead, the available evidence is relatively thin and fragmented, with a small number of studies spread across multiple contexts. This limits the extent to which findings can be generalised and points to the need for further empirical research in underrepresented regions, including research that tests whether findings travel across different cultural, policy,

market and infrastructure conditions.

Having outlined the scope and geographical orientation of the literature included in this review, the analysis now turns to the thematic structure used to organise and interrogate the evidence base. The purpose of this next stage was to move beyond descriptive classification and to systematically examine how key concepts, behaviours, and analytical perspectives are addressed across the selected studies.

4.4. Thematic Analyses

Across both thematic blocks, papers were examined using a consistent analytical framework designed to support systematic comparison across diverse study designs, disciplines, and contexts. This framework captured the following elements: Publication characteristics, methodological approaches, any explicitly stated life event(s) or transition(s), behavioural domain(s), circular economy strategies (mapped across levels of the "Rs"), and the form(s) of communication or engagement examined. Block 1: Life Events / Moments of Change and Sustainable Behaviour focused specifically on how included papers explicitly reference life events or transition points in relation to sustainable behaviour. The two thematic blocks were defined at the outset of the review, based on the report's dual focus and the search terms used. Block 1 was designed to capture literature on life events, moments of change and sustainable or pro-environmental behaviour. Block 2 was designed to capture literature on circular economy communication, campaigns and behaviour-change interventions, particularly in relation to repair, reuse, sharing and waste prevention. During screening, the wording of the block titles was refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the papers retained for inclusion, but the distinction between the two blocks was established before the search and screening process.

Across both thematic blocks, papers were examined using a consistent analytical framework. In this context, "framework" refers to the specific coding elements listed above (publication characteristics, methodological approach, life events/transitions, behavioural domain, circular economy strategies mapped across the "Rs", and the communication or engagement approach under investigation). These elements were selected to align directly with the review aim, understanding how communication strategies for circular economy are designed or adapted across life stages and life events, and to enable consistent comparison across a diverse evidence base. In practice, this structure allowed each paper to be described on a common set of dimensions (what was studied, who/when it relates to, which behaviours or CE strategies it connects to, and

how communication/engagement was framed), supporting synthesis across both blocks.

For Block 1, each paper was coded using the extracted content recorded in the evidence table, with particular attention paid to the "Life event / transition" field. Themes were applied only where a life event or transition was explicitly described in the extracted text. Papers could be assigned multiple theme tags where more than one life event or transition was referenced. Papers that did not analyse life events or transitions as an explicit focus were not included in the life-event thematic coding, although they were retained in the wider review where they provided broader contextual insight into sustainable behaviour or circular economy communication.

Based on the Block 1 studies that explicitly engaged with life events or transitions, nine life-event and transition themes were identified and

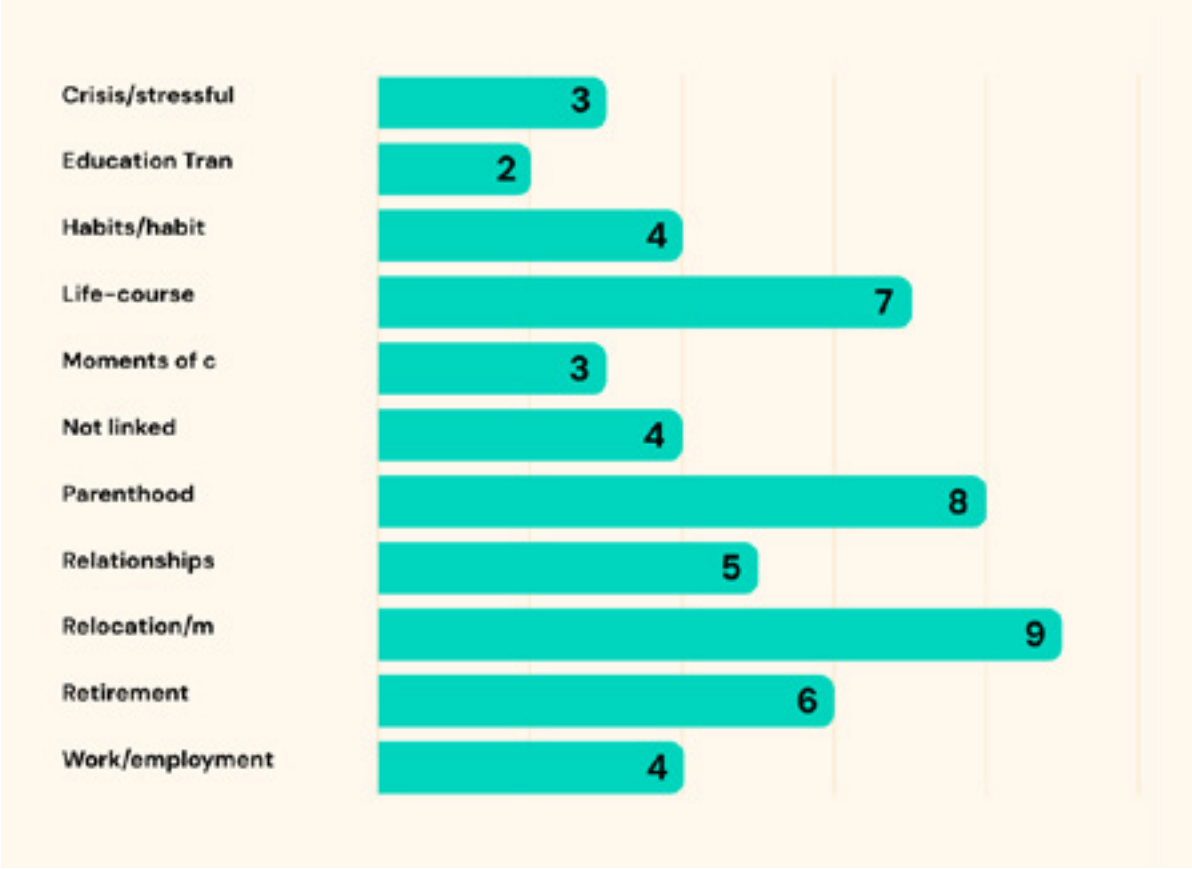

Figure 4: Distribution of the themes. The category "Not linked / life events not analysed" is shown in the figure as part of the original coding audit trail. However, these papers were not included in the interpretation of life-event themes, as they did not analyse life events or transitions as an explicit focus.

Table 3: Themes with the numbers each one-off was found across the papers

Theme	Count
Relocation / moving home / immigration	9
Parenthood / childbirth / raising children	8
Life-course / household lifecycle framing	7
Retirement / ageing / later life	6
Relationships / partnership / bereavement	5
Work / employment transitions	4
Habits / habit discontinuity / contextual cues	4
Crisis / stressful time events	3
Moments of change / turning points / critical moments	3
Education transitions	2

interpreted. The frequency with which each theme appeared across the literature is presented in Figure 4, with corresponding counts summarised in Table 3.

Count represents the number of studies in which a given theme was explicitly referenced, rather than the number of mentions within individual papers. As multi-coding was permitted, totals exceeded the number of studies included in Block 1. Within the reviewed corpus, the most frequently coded theme was relocation / moving home / immigration (n = 9), followed by parenthood / childbirth / raising children (n = 8), and life-course / household lifecycle framing (n = 7). These patterns suggest that, among the studies retained for this review, changes in residence, family formation and broader household transitions were commonly discussed in relation to shifts in behaviour, routines or decision-making processes. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as some search strings explicitly targeted transitions such as moving home and becoming a parent. The frequency of these themes therefore reflects both their relevance within the reviewed literature and the focus of the search strategy, rather than providing a definitive indication of their prominence across the wider evidence base.

Later-life transitions also featured within the reviewed studies, with retirement / ageing / later life identified in six papers. Relationships / partnership / bereavement appeared in five studies, capturing changes in household composition and social roles that may influence sustainable behaviours. A smaller number of studies examined work / employment transitions (n = 4), habits / habit discontinuity / contextual cues (n = 4), crisis / stressful time events (n = 3), moments of change / turning points / critical moments (n = 3), and education transitions (n = 2). Four papers initially identified in Block 1 were found, during full-text review, not to analyse life events or transitions as an explicit focus. These papers were therefore excluded from the life-event thematic coding, although they were considered where they provided broader contextual insight into sustainable behaviour or circular economy communication. The thematic analysis presented here is therefore based only on papers that are explicitly engaged with life events, transitions, habit disruption or moments of change.

Finally, crisis / stressful time events (n = 3) and moments of change / turning points / critical moments (n = 3) were less frequently represented within the reviewed corpus. However, this pattern should be interpreted cautiously, as the search strategy included terms that specifically targeted some structural and longer-term transitions, such as moving home, parenthood and retirement, while other short-term or episodic moments of disruption may have been less directly captured by the search strings. As a result, the distribution of theme tags is best understood as describing the evidence identified through this targeted rapid scoping approach, rather than as a definitive indication of the wider literature's emphasis. Nevertheless, the pattern is useful for contextualising the findings and highlights the need for further research on how different types of life events, including shorter-term or less predictable disruptions, may act as leverage points for sustainable behaviour change.

5. Life Events, Moments of Change, and Sustainable Consumption: Implications for Circular Economy Transitions

This section synthesises findings from the reviewed literature, which examine how life events, life-course transitions, and moments of disruption, relate to changes in consumption practices. While the majority of studies reviewed do not explicitly reference the CE, they provide relevant insights into how everyday routines, habits, and decision-making contexts shift over time. In this report, these insights are interpreted through a CE lens to assess whether, and under what conditions, life events may represent opportunities for more sustainable patterns of consumption. Across the literature, life events are consistently described as circumstances that disrupt established routines and priorities.

Yap and Kapitan (2017), for example, define life events as experiences that "*dramatically influence one's daily routines and priorities*," while other authors refer to them as "*moments*

of change" (Whitmarsh et al., 2025), "life transitions" (e.g. relocation, becoming a parent, starting university, retiring), or as disruptions that can trigger habit discontinuity by destabilising previously stable behavioural contexts (Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021). Commonly examined events include relocation, parenthood, retirement, changes in employment, relationship transitions, and leaving the parental home.

A central finding across this body of work is that such transitions can increase behavioural openness, as disrupted contexts make habitual practices more visible, and therefore, more open to reconsideration. Habit-focused research suggests that when contextual cues change, such as when moving home or changing daily schedules, individuals may be more receptive to altering established behaviours. These broadly include behaviours related to transport, food, energy use, and consumption (Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021). From a CE perspective, these periods may therefore represent points at which repair, reuse, reduced consumption, or alternative provisioning models, could become more salient. However, the literature also consistently cautions against treating life events as simple or discrete "*windows of opportunity*" for sustainable change.

A qualitative longitudinal study by Burningham and Venn (2017) shows that transitions such as first-time parenthood and retirement involve ongoing, uneven and overlapping processes of change, shaped by time pressure, health, care responsibilities, financial constraints, infrastructure and household negotiations. Practices that initially appear to support lower-impact consumption, such as more local routines or increased time for repair, may later be revised or abandoned as new routines stabilise and constraints intensify. As a result, framing life events as singular moments for intervention risks oversimplifying how consumption evolves over time.

Yap and Kapitan (2017) highlights that life events often generate stress and identity disruption, leading to "*consumption coping*" responses which are not inherently sustainable. These responses may include avoidance, compensatory consumption, or increased purchasing. Similarly, Whitmarsh et al. (2025) explain that evidence of sustained low-carbon behaviour, evolves during moments of change, is inconsistent, and highly dependent on contextual and socio-demographic factors. This is particularly true in regard to infrastructure and wider economic conditions. Much of this literature is also concentrated in the geographic Global North and focuses primarily on mobility and housing-related behaviours.

Taken together, the reviewed studies suggest that life events can coincide with changes in consumption, but

do not automatically lead to more sustainable outcomes. From a CE perspective, this implies that life transitions may best be understood not as guaranteed leverage points, but as periods of heightened malleability, where outcomes depend heavily on the surrounding material, social, and institutional conditions. Enabling circular practices during these periods therefore requires more than information or individual motivation; it depends on supportive infrastructures, accessible services, and systems that make lower-impact options feasible and durable over time.

Overall, the 17 studies included in Block 1 suggest that life events and transitions can influence sustainable behaviour by disrupting established routines, changing household roles, altering priorities and creating new decision-making contexts. Relocation, parenthood, retirement, changes in employment and shifts in household composition were the most visible transitions within the reviewed corpus. Across these studies, sustainable behaviours were most commonly discussed in relation to consumption, mobility, household practices, energy use, repair, reuse and broader pro-environmental routines. However, the evidence also shows that transitions do not automatically lead to more sustainable outcomes. Instead, behavioural change depends on the interaction between individual motivation, available time, financial resources, social expectations, infrastructure and access to practical alternatives. This means that life events are best understood as moments of possible behavioural openness, rather than guaranteed windows for sustainable change.

Having examined how life events and moments of change are addressed in relation to sustainable consumption, the analysis now turns to how CE–related behaviours are communicated and promoted within the reviewed literature. This second thematic block (Block 2) shifts the focus from when change may occur, to how communication strategies are designed to encourage circular practices.

5.1 Communication Approaches for Promoting Circular Economy Practices

A second thematic analysis was conducted to examine communication approaches and campaign strategies which are used to promote CE practices. This block aimed to both identify recurring communication themes, and to understand how different forms of engagement are used to support awareness, uptake, and sustained participation, in circular behaviours. Across the studies included in Block 2, six key communication themes were identified. As with Block 1, themes were recorded only where they were explicitly referenced in the extracted material, and therefore papers could be assigned multiple

5. Life Events, Moments of Change, and Sustainable Consumption: Implications for Circular Economy Transitions

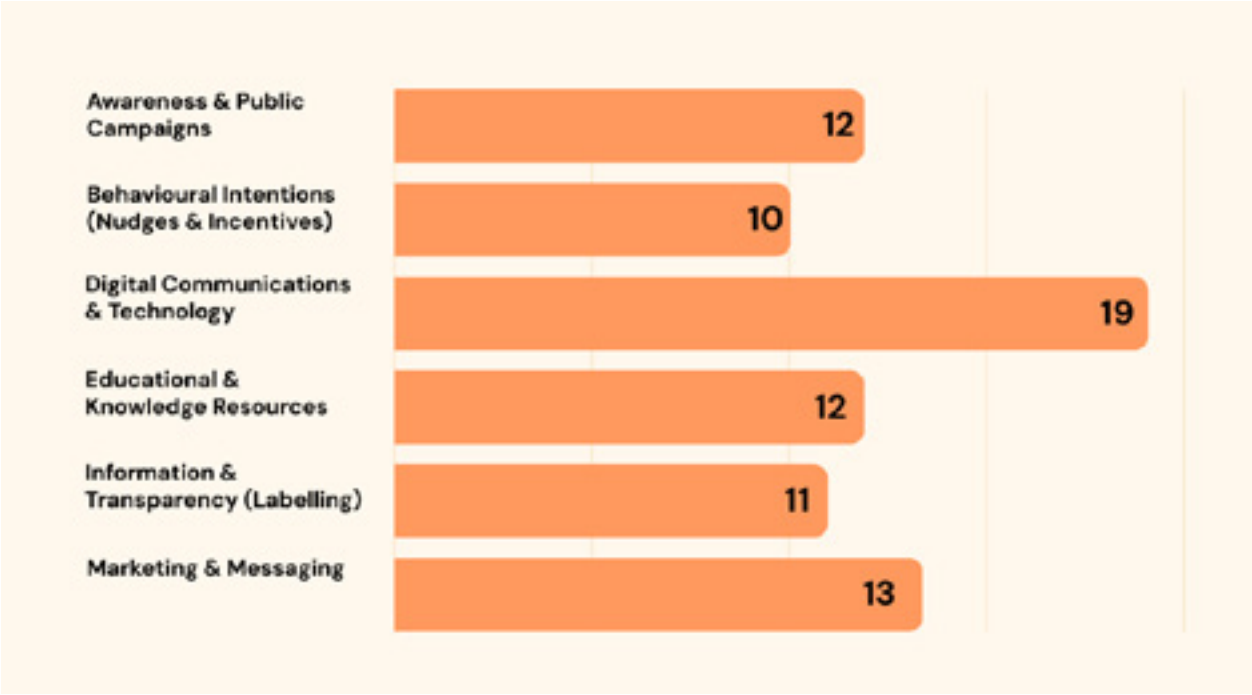

Figure 4: Main commons themes across studies

theme tags. As a result, the total number of theme occurrences exceeds the number of papers included in this block. The frequency of each theme is presented in Figure 4. (See Figure 4).

The most frequently identified theme was Digital Communication and Technology (n = 19). This theme encompasses the use of digital platforms and tools to support CE communication, including online media, social platforms, and emerging technologies such as digital product passports, traceability systems, and data-driven transparency tools. Several studies highlight the role of digitalisation in enhancing credibility, accessibility, and scalability of CE messaging. This was followed by Marketing and Messaging (n = 13), which captures how CE narratives are framed and communicated. This includes sustainability storytelling, message framing to avoid greenwashing, transparent branding, and the use of influencers or persuasive communication techniques to normalise circular practices.

Awareness and Public Campaigns (n = 12) and Educational and Knowledge Resources (n = 12) were also prominent, reflecting a strong emphasis on foundational awareness-raising and capacity-building. These ranged from mass public campaigns to formal education and informal learning resources aimed at developing skills and confidence for repair, reuse, and other circular behaviours. The theme Information

and Transparency (Labelling) (n = 11) relate to the provision of clear and accessible information at the point of decision-making. Examples include repairability or durability indices, eco-labels, and product-level information designed to support informed consumer choices. Finally, Behavioural Supports and Enabling Mechanisms (n = 10) is an analytical coding heading used in this review to group studies describing approaches that support or enable circular behaviours beyond communication alone. These include nudges, choice architecture, behavioural framing, repair vouchers, trade-in schemes, financial rewards, and other mechanisms designed to reduce friction or make circular options more attractive and accessible. This category should not be interpreted as a comprehensive review of behavioural economics or incentive-based interventions. Rather, it captures the way such mechanisms appeared within the circular economy communication and engagement literature reviewed here, where communication was often discussed alongside practical supports, economic incentives or service-based interventions.

Overall, the thematic distribution suggests that communication strategies in the CE literature rely on a combination of informational, motivational, and enabling approaches, with particular emphasis on digital channels and strategic messaging. Rather than privileging a single communication model, the literature points towards the use of layered and complementary strategies to support engagement with repair, reuse, and other circular practices over time.

5.2 Evidence on Effective Communication for Circular Economy Practices

This section synthesises findings from a subset of studies that explicitly examine how CE related behaviours, (particularly repair, reuse, and reduced consumption), are communicated and promoted. While these studies vary in scope, method, and sectoral focus, they converge on several consistent insights regarding what supports effective and credible CE communication. Across the literature, a recurring theme is the importance of clarity, credibility, and practical relevance. Reviews of CE marketing and communication emphasise that abstract or technical framing can undermine engagement, whereas simple, concrete narratives and clear explanations of circular practices are more likely to build understanding and trust (Paiva, 2025). Transparency, supported by verifiable information, standardised data, and traceability tools, is repeatedly identified as critical for avoiding greenwashing while maintaining credibility, particularly in consumer-facing communication (Paiva, 2025; Faludi, 2025; Purkiss et al., 2024;).

Several studies highlight that communication alone is insufficient

to drive sustained behavioural change. Evidence from repair and reuse systems suggests that information-based measures (such as messaging, signage, and labelling) tend to work best as enablers, helping people act on an intention, rather than as standalone motivators. For example, Purkiss et al. (2024) show that signage, labelling, and repairability information can support repair decisions, but only where enabling conditions are also in place, including accessible repair infrastructure, access to spare parts, and cost considerations. Similarly, reviews of behavioural nudges find that while framing, defaults, feedback, and social norms can influence circular behaviours, their effects are highly context-dependent and often diminish without supporting policies, infrastructure, and incentives (Munonye et al., 2025).

Digital technologies feature prominently across the literature, particularly as tools for improving information access and trust. In his state-of-the-art review of Internet of Things (IoT) and circular economy, Gheorghe (2023) highlights how IoT-enabled tracking and tracing can increase lifecycle visibility and supply-chain transparency, supporting more informed decisions across production, use, and end-of-life stages. However, this potential is contingent on user-centred design: Gheorghe (2023) notes that enabling behaviour change via real-time feedback depends on making information understandable, actionable, and engaging for consumers, otherwise it risks becoming a barrier rather than a support.

Public-sector and sector-specific studies further caution against performative or one-way communication. Pozzetto and Leoni (2025) explain that centralised, compliance-driven CE communication risks remaining marginal unless it is sustained, audience-specific, and dialogic. Likewise, sectoral reviews in fashion and furniture argue for systems-oriented communication approaches that align messaging with business models, social norms, and community networks, rather than relying on isolated campaigns or product-level claims (Faludi, 2025; Bolzan et al., 2024).

Taken together, this body of evidence suggests that effective CE communication is multidimensional. It combines the following elements: Clear and transparent information, appropriate framing and storytelling, behavioural supports, and digital tools. However, it is most effective when embedded within wider systems that reduce practical barriers and support long-term change. As with the life-events literature, the findings caution against treating communication as a standalone solution. It instead points to its role

as one component within broader structural and institutional conditions that shape circular behaviours.

5.2.1. Circular Strategies Across the Literature

To further refine the analysis, the two initial analytical blocks were merged to examine how circular strategies were articulated across the reviewed papers. Rather than assessing whether circularity was present or absent in binary terms, studies were coded according to the degree of explicitness with which circular strategies were referenced. This approach captures the variations in conceptual clarity and allows for the cross comparison of studies that engage with circular economy.
Four categories were identified: 1. Explicit R-strategy. 2. General CE framing. 3. Implicit circular practice. 4. No circular reference. Studies coded as *Explicit R-strategy* demonstrate the strongest conceptual alignment with circular economy theory. These papers explicitly situate behaviours or interventions within recognised R-frameworks, enabling direct comparison of circular strategies across studies. This level of specificity facilitates synthesis and supports clearer interpretation of how different circular strategies are being addressed within the literature.

The *General CE framing* category captures studies that reference the CE as a broad concept without specifying individual strategies. While these papers signal engagement with CE discourse, the lack of operational detail limits further analytical comparability. Circularity in this category functions primarily as contextual framing rather than as a clearly defined analytical construct.

Studies classified as Implicit circular practice describe behaviours or practices that align with circular strategies without explicitly framing them as such. This category highlights a disconnect between practice and terminology, indicating that circular behaviours may be studied and promoted without being recognised or communicated as part of the circular economy framework. Analytically, this required additional interpretive coding where needed, with circularity inferred from the behaviour or intervention described rather than directly assessed from the study's framing.

Finally, papers coded as No circular reference did not explicitly engage with circular economy concepts and did not describe practices that could be directly mapped onto circular strategies such as repair, reuse, sharing, waste prevention or product life extension. These papers were retained in the wider review because they provided relevant insights into life events, sustainable behaviour, behaviour change or communication, but they were not treated as circular economy studies. The presence of this category is therefore useful for

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Figure 5: Distribution of Circular Strategy Coding Across Reviewed Studies

distinguishing between studies that explicitly address circular economy, studies that discuss practices aligned with circularity without using CE terminology, and studies that offer broader behavioural or sustainability insights without a direct circular economy focus.

Figure 5 presents the distribution of circular strategy coding across the reviewed studies, showing the extent to which circular economy concepts or circular practices were explicitly, implicitly or not directly represented in the evidence base. Studies most frequently employed an Explicit R-strategy framing (n = 22), indicating direct alignment with established circular economy frameworks and enabling clear comparison of circular strategies across papers. A substantial proportion of studies were coded as Implicit circular practice (n = 11), reflecting engagement with behaviours consistent with circularity without explicit CE terminology.

General CE framing was rare (n = 2), suggesting limited use of circular economy concepts at an abstract or contextual level without

operationalisation. A smaller number of studies contained no circular reference (n = 5), highlighting areas of relevant behavioural research where circular economy perspectives were not integrated. Overall, the distribution illustrates considerable variation in how circularity is conceptualised and communicated across the literature, with implications for synthesis and comparability.

5.2.2. Circular economy and sustainability - The paradigm

Across the reviewed evidence base, the concept of the CE appears explicitly in a substantial proportion of studies, particularly those identified through CE-specific search strings. In contrast, research captured through broader search strategies more frequently adopts adjacent framings, most notably sustainability and related environmental concepts. This distinction is analytically important. As Geissdoerfer et al. (2017) note, while both CE and sustainability have achieved prominence across academia, industry, and policymaking, the relationship between the two is often left implicit. The absence of conceptual clarity can blur boundaries between the concepts and, in turn, limit their effective operationalisation in both research and practice.

To address this issue within the present synthesis, sustainability-framed studies are treated as relevant where they examine behavioural, attitudinal, or communication mechanisms that can reasonably inform circular practices, even where the term "circular economy" is not explicitly used (Boland et al., 2025). This approach reflects the position advanced by Geissdoerfer et al (2017), who argue for the analytical distinction between CE and sustainability, while simultaneously acknowledging their significant areas of overlap. Both are positioned as global, system-level agendas that involve multiple stakeholders and emphasise the integration of environmental and social considerations with economic development (p. 761).

By adopting this inclusive but conceptually attentive approach, the synthesis maintains clarity around CE as a distinct framework, while also drawing on the broader sustainability literature where it provides transferable insights relevant to circular economy communication and behavioural change.

5.3. Key insights for circular economy communication around life events

Building on this conceptual framing, the synthesis now turns to evidence relating specifically to communication opportunities associated with life-events/transitions. Unlike the preceding sections, a thematic synthesis was not the most appropriate analytical approach for

this material. This is the result of a limited subset of studies explicitly addressing communication strategies linked to life-events transitions, rather than behavioural patterns or attitudes alone.

Instead, the analysis involved a more targeted review of studies in which communication implications for life events were made explicit. During the screening and reading process, all identified papers were classified according to their relevance to this objective using three categories: High, medium, and low. Studies were rated as high relevance where communication insights related directly to life events (e.g. moving home, becoming a parent, retirement), formed a central focus, or where circular economy communication was not addressed explicitly but the analytical framework nevertheless suggested clear and potentially transferable insights relevant to life-event-based communication, rather than these insights appearing only as ancillary findings.

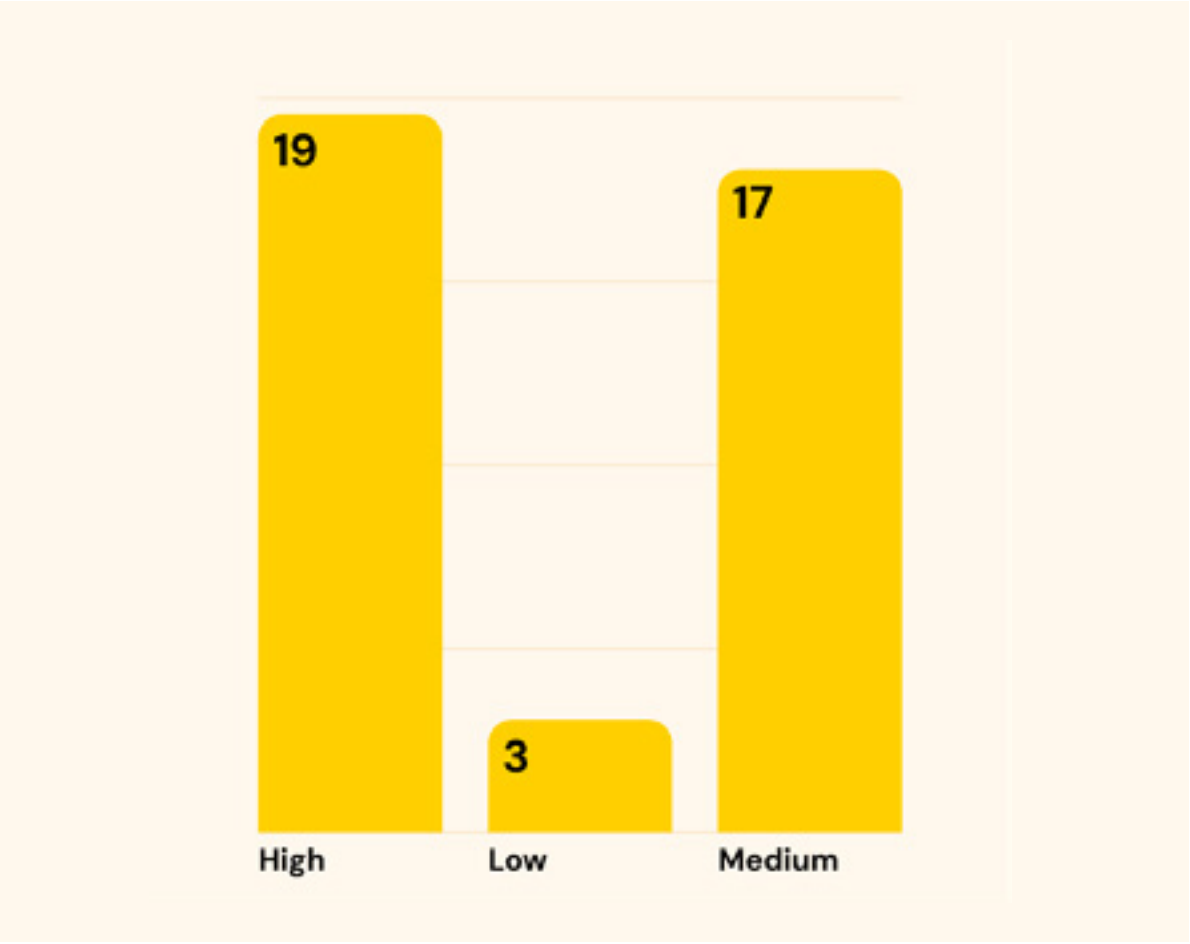

Figure 6: Relevance of studies for this review

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On this basis, the synthesis that follows focuses exclusively on those studies classified as high relevance. By examining this subset in depth key insights for CE communication strategies are distilled which are tailored to different life events, highlighting the moments of transition which may offer particular leverage for engagement, learning, and behavioural change.

Across this literature, a strong convergence emerges around the idea that life events constitute periods of disruption in which routines, roles, identities, and consumption practices are reconfigured. Yap and Kapitan (2017) conceptualise life transitions as episodes of "consumption coping." They argue that events such as marriage, parenthood, relocation, or retirement, temporarily destabilise habitual practices and create heightened openness to new information and guidance. Crucially, they identify a preparation phase preceding many transitions, during which individuals actively seek information and plan future behaviours. This phase is particularly salient from a communication perspective, as it shapes downstream consumption trajectories and establishes new norms that may persist long after the transition itself, a finding that is highly relevant to the CE sector.

The importance of timing is reinforced by studies on "moments of change" (MoCs). In a multidisciplinary systematic review, Whitmarsh et al. (2025) conclude that interventions aligned with MoCs are consistently more effective than those delivered during periods of behavioural stability. This is when habits tend to dominate decision-making. Importantly, they caution that the critical window for influence may precede the observable life event itself, as key decisions are often made in advance. This finding resonates strongly with Yap and Kapitan's (2017) emphasis on anticipatory planning and suggests that CE communication should not only respond to transitions after they occur, but should also engage individuals upstream, when options are still being evaluated.

Habit-focused research provides some of the clearest empirical support for this position. Verplanken and Whitmarsh (2021) argue that transitions such as moving house, starting a family, or retiring disrupt existing habits and temporarily increase reliance on attitudes and values to guide behaviour. Field experimental evidence cited by the authors indicates that interventions delivered within approximately three months of relocation are significantly more effective than those delivered later, when new habits have begun to solidify. Similarly, Whitmarsh,

Poortinga, and Capstick (2021) highlight that low-cost behavioural interventions are most effective in the first 12 weeks following relocation. They also note that wider structural or crisis-driven disruptions (e.g. economic shocks or extreme weather events), can generate comparable, albeit shorter-lived, windows of malleability.

Taken together, this body of work points to a consistent implication for CE communication: Life transitions create time-bound windows of heightened receptivity, but these windows are neither uniform nor guaranteed. Responses to MoCs vary widely across sociodemographic groups, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach (Whitmarsh et al., 2025). This reinforces the need for communication strategies that are not only temporally aligned with life events, but are also sensitive to differences in resources, values, and constraints.

The literature on parenthood offers a more nuanced illustration of these dynamics. Shrum et al (2023), in their scoping review of the "green parenthood effect," find that becoming a parent can increase environmental concern and support for climate action. This is particularly when communication activates legacy motives, generativity, and responsibility toward future generations. However, they emphasise that such effects are conditional: Messages focusing on children's safety and future wellbeing are most effective among parents who already hold some degree of climate concern. This aligns with findings from stress-focused research, which suggest that heightened emotional states can increase receptivity to social and informational influence, but only when individuals retain a sense of self-efficacy (Penz & Drewes, 2022).

At the same time, qualitative studies caution against overly instrumental readings of life events as straightforward "opportunities" for behavioural change. Burningham and Venn (2017) argue that transitions are often messy, prolonged, and characterised by constraint rather than choice. Their analysis shows that new parents frequently experience time scarcity, exhaustion, and identity pressure, while retirees may face health issues, caregiving responsibilities, or financial uncertainty. In such contexts, assumptions about available cognitive or emotional "bandwidth" can undermine the effectiveness of communication. From this perspective, CE communication around life events must be empathetic and realistic, avoiding moralising or burdensome calls to action that fail to account for lived constraints.

A further recurring insight concerns the interaction between communication and systems of

provision. That is, using a life-course approach, which considers how consumption practices are involved over the time in relation to life stages transitions and the wider social and material and material context. Rezaie et al (2024) argue that sustainable consumption is shaped by the interplay between life events and provisions systems (e.g. infrastructure, technology and social support) available to people. They show that life events such as marriage, childbirth, employment change, retirement, and relocation can coincide with shifts in practices, but that these shifts are strongly mediated by factors such as accessibility, convenience, cost, and service availability within the provisioning system. They also note that participants were often unaware that a life event had influenced their consumption behaviours until the research prompted reflection. This is a key finding for the sector as it implies that CE communication should help make these links visible while simultaneously aligning messages with accessible options (e.g., repair services, reuse networks, rental schemes, transport alternatives). Without such alignment, communication risks raising awareness without enabling action.

Finally, several authors converge on the limits of information-only approaches. In the sustainable consumption literature, Burningham and Venn (2017) note that behaviour change initiatives are more effective when they go beyond informational campaigns to include mechanisms that intervene in the social and material contexts of practice, including "pressure points" in infrastructure systems. Similarly, in a systematic review focused on consumers' roles in the circular economy, Keshavarz et al. (2025) argue that while awareness campaigns and value-driven approaches play an important role, they may not be sufficient on their own to generate significant behavioural change, and they emphasise the need to combine education and awareness with other enabling measures such as incentives and infrastructure improvements. In the CE communication literature, Pozzetto and Leoni (2025) offer a complementary critique, finding that CE discourse can become fragmented and performative, prioritising institutional visibility over genuine engagement, and they recommend more decentralised, audience-specific narratives that link long-term environmental objectives with short-term motivational incentives, such as financial savings, convenience, social recognition, or access to repair and reuse services, to support participatory implementation.

In summary, the highly relevant literature suggests several robust implications for CE communication

around life events. Life transitions can create periods of heightened openness, particularly during anticipatory and early post-transition phases. However, these periods are often short, uneven, and shaped by stress, resources, and social context. Effective CE communication should therefore be timed, targeted, and empathetic, while also integrated

Table 4: Key Insights for Circular Economy Communication Around Life Events

Key Insights	Conceptual basis/ Source	Implication for CE Communication
Life Events Create Disruption and Malleability	Life events (e.g., relocation, parenthood, retirement) disrupt established routines and habits, temporarily increasing reliance on attitudes and values to guide behaviour. These are "moments of change" (MoCs) or "consumption coping" episodes.	Life transitions are periods of heightened receptivity where individuals are more open to adopting new, circular practices. Communication is most effective when routines are unsettled.
Importance of the Preparation Phase	Many major transitions include an anticipatory phase where individuals actively seek information and plan future behaviours, thereby shaping downstream consumption trajectories and new norms. (Yap and Kapitan, 2017)	Timing is critical. CE communication should engage individuals upstream (before the event is observable) when key decisions are being evaluated, as well as during the early post-transition phase.
Critical Window for Intervention	Interventions are significantly more effective when aligned with MoCs. For example, interventions delivered within the first 3 months (12 weeks) following a major context change, like relocation, outperform later delivery. (Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021)	Interventions must be temporally aligned and short-lived. They need to be delivered early enough to help individuals stabilize new, lower-impact practices before habitual patterns re-emerge.

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Key Insights	Conceptual basis/ Source	Implication for CE Communication
Change is Conditional and Not Guaranteed	Transitions are often messy, prolonged processes characterized by stress, time scarcity, exhaustion, identity pressure, and financial constraints, not simple "windows of opportunity." Responses vary widely across sociodemographic groups. (Burningham and Venn, 2017; Whitmarsh et al., 2025).	Communication must be empathetic and realistic, avoiding moralizing or burdensome calls to action that fail to account for lived constraints. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach.
Alignment with Systems of Provision	Sustainable consumption is shaped by the interplay between life events and the available provision systems (e.g., infrastructure, services). Participants are often unaware a life event influenced their behaviour until prompted. (Rezaie et al, 2024).	CE communication must help make these links visible (e.g., show how a move can link to local repair services) while simultaneously aligning messages with accessible, convenient options (repair services, reuse networks). Without alignment, communication risks raising awareness without enabling action.
Beyond Information-Only Approaches	Information and messaging alone rarely sustain circular behaviour change. Behavioural nudges and campaigns are highly context-dependent and diminish without structural support. (Keshavarz et al., 2025; Burningham and Venn, 2017).	Communication must be integrated with supportive systems and enabling conditions (e.g., incentives, accessible infrastructure, social support) to reduce practical barriers and support long-term behavioural change.

Effective CE communication should therefore be timed, targeted, and empathetic.

in supportive systems and infrastructures, which are designed to help individuals stabilise new, lower-impact practices before habitual patterns re-emerge.

The following table consolidates these findings into a practical overview of the key insights and their implications for CE communication (see Table 4)

5.3.1. Marketing perspectives on life transitions and communication receptiveness

Traditional marketing research has approached life events and transitions primarily through lenses of market behaviour, segmentation and consumer adjustment, rather than through sustainability or behaviour-change concerns. In this section, life events are treated as commercially significant as they may coincide with changes in needs, routines, stress, and patterns of consumption. The studies reviewed in this section illustrate this perspective from different perspectives.
Mathur et al. (2003) examines the relationship between life events, stress, lifestyle change and brand preference change. While in a later study, Mathur et al. (2006) consider life-changing events more broadly as a basis for market segmentation. They argue that such events may provide a more informative way of understanding consumer behaviour than traditional age- or cohort-based approaches alone.

Yet, more specifically, both studies suggest that life transitions matter not simply because they coincide with demographic change, but because they may alter how people orient themselves to consumption. In the study by Mathur et al. (2003), the central argument is that life events, (or role transitions), may create stress and a generalised demand for readjustment. As a result, individuals respond by making changes to their lifestyles which in turn influences brand preferences. Their findings support the view that brand preference changes may be understood as part of a broader process of adapting to new life conditions while coping with stressful change, rather than as a purely product-specific response (Mathur et al., 2003).

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Mathur et al. (2006) extend this line of thinking by arguing that life-changing events may provide a viable basis for segmentation. This may be due to behaviour at a given point in time reflecting responses to changing life conditions and adaptation to new social and environmental circumstances. They further suggest that the inclusion of life events in segmentation models can improve explanatory power beyond age- or cohort-based approaches alone. This reinforces the idea that transitions may be especially relevant for understanding changing patterns of market behaviour.

More recent studies have extended this strand of traditional marketing research by shifting attention from brand or store preference change to the consumer's response to marketing activities themselves. Hopkins et al. (2014) provides an important development to this line of thinking by examining how life transitions shape responses to marketing across different transition stages. Rather than treating transitions as singular events, they distinguish between anticipatory, liminal, and re-established phases. They argue that consumer appraisal of the transition and the reallocation of resources are central to understanding response to advertising and role-related products, such as baby equipment during the transition to parenthood, furniture and household goods during a move, or work clothing and equipment when starting a new job. Their findings show that appraisal is a key predictor of responses to marketing activities, and that attitudes toward role-related advertising are highest during the liminal stage, when individuals have left an old role but have not yet fully established a new one (Hopkins et al., 2014). This adds a more process-oriented understanding to the literature by suggesting that responsiveness to marketing may vary across the course of a transition rather than remaining constant throughout.

A related but distinct contribution is made by Su et al. (2021), who examine how life-role transitions shape consumer responses to brand extensions. Across six studies, they find that consumers undergoing life-role transitions tend to respond more favourably to distant, low- or moderate-fit brand extensions than consumers not undergoing transition. They explain this effect through self-concept ambiguity and dialectical thinking. The authors argue that life-role transitions can create ambiguity in the individual's concept of self, as they are separating from a previous role while a new role is not yet fully established. This dialectical thinking helps individuals reconcile inconsistency and contradiction during this period. Su et al. (2021) also show that this effect is attenuated under certain conditions. In their study, the negative impact

of life transitions on consumer responses became weaker when the product or offer was perceived as closely aligned with the consumer's needs, when it was linked to an established and familiar parent brand through a sub-brand structure, or when some form of support was available to help people manage the uncertainty associated with the transition. This indicates that the effects of transition depend on the context in which consumption decisions are made.

More recently, Borenstein et al. (2025) extended the literature into the specific domain of advertising repetition. In contrast to earlier work which focused on segmentation, adaptation, or brand extension evaluation, this study examines how life transitions influence responses to repeated exposure to advertising. Across four experiments, the authors find that consumers in a life transition, (compared with those who are not), had a more sustained interest in advertisements and more favourable brand attitudes following repeated exposure to the same advertisement. The results also show those consumers are more likely to choose the same advertisement again rather than a new one). Borenstein et al. (2025) explain this finding by suggesting that life transitions involve uncertainty and discontinuity, which can increase preferences for predictable advertising experiences over novel ones.

This finding is particularly relevant to the current work at Circular. ie, where paid campaigns seek to raise awareness of circularity and to encourage more circular forms of behaviour. Although the study by Borenstein et al. (2025) does not include sustainability or circular economy elements, their results offer a useful basis for campaign performance in this context. Specifically, their evidence suggests that repeated advertising may not necessarily diminish effectiveness when audiences are navigating periods of change or uncertainty. It may instead support more favourable responses through familiarity and predictability. In this sense, the study enables the discussion to take place beyond sustainable consumption research itself. It does this by offering a communication-based explanation for how repeated paid messaging might contribute to improved campaign outcomes.

An additional study by De Caigny et al. (2025), brings the discussion from explanation toward prediction and providing a managerial application. Whereas earlier studies mainly examined how life events relate to changing preferences or responsiveness to marketing, De Caigny et al. (2025) focuses on whether firms can identify life events in advance and use that information to manage customer relationships more effectively. The authors argue that life events are commercially significant as they affect customer

needs and behaviour over time. They show, using data from the financial services sector, that life events have a significant impact on both product possession and customer value.

De Caigny et al. (2025) also distinguish between reactive approaches, in which firms respond after a life event has occurred, and proactive approaches, in which predictive models are used to identify likely life events in advance. In this sense, the study extends traditional marketing research by framing life transitions not only as analytically important moments of change, but also as opportunities for prediction, targeted intervention and profit-oriented campaign design.

To clarify the empirical scope of this strand of literature in this section, Figure 9 summarises the main life events or transitions explicitly described across the traditional marketing studies discussed above. As the figure shows, the literature covers a broad range of transitions including; family formation and dissolution, work and education changes, residential mobility, retirement, bereavement, and health-related events. At the same time, the level of specificity varies across studies. Some papers examine a defined set of named life events, whereas others discuss life transitions more broadly or focus on particular transition processes rather than presenting an exhaustive event list. Taken together, this body of traditional marketing research suggests that life transitions are important not only because they coincide with changing needs or demographic shifts, but because they can disrupt routines, reshape

Table 5: Traditional marketing studies on life transitions and communication receptiveness

Shared transition Families	**Core shift over time**	**Most repeated themes**
Family and household change; edication and career entry or disruption; health and ageing; relocation; finances, and crisis.	Early studies emphasize broad event lists, later work focuses more on mechanisms, targeting, advertising response, and prediction.	Marriage, parenthood, relocation, career change, retirement, illness, caregiving, and bereavement recur most often.

Study	Event Scope	Main life events/transitions described	Analytical Emphasis
Mathur et al. (2003)	Broad event inventory	Relocation; marriage; child birth/ adoption; divorce; empty nest; death of spouse or parent; first grandchild; family conflict; retirement; job loss or forced retirement; starting work; reduced work; job change; financial improvement or decline; caregiving; weight gain; chronic illness; injury; illness or surgery; crisis/disaster; pet loss; stopped smoking	Connects broad stress_ related life events list to lifestyle adjustment and brand preference change
Mathur et al. (2006)	Broad event inventory	Similar broad list including relocation; marriage; child birth/adoption; divorce; empty nest; bereavement; first grandchild; retirement; job loss; work re-entry; reduced employment; job change; financial decline; caregiving; chronic illness; injury or surgery; crisis disaster; pet loss; smoking cessation. Also notes examples such as graduation and onset health problems.	Uses life events for segmentation and compares life–event models with age- and cohort-based approaches
Hopkins et al. (2014)	Transition process focus	Newlywed transition; empty nest transition; career entry after college. Also discusses wider examples such as marriage, parenthood, divorce, retirement, starting college, academic transitions, and household move.	Highlights anticipatory, liminal and re-established stages rather than compiling a complete event checklist
Su et al. (2021)	Life-role transition examples	Adolescence; marriage; parenthood; starting college; career changes; divorce	Frames transitions as life-role changes that a self-concept and shape responses to brand extensions
Bornstein et al. (2025)	Broad transition category	Available extract does not provide one consolidate event list; explicitly mentions online job seekers, relocators, and new parents	Focus is on how life transitions afffect reponses to repeated advertising rather than on detailed event cataloguing.
De Caigney et al. (2025)	Single focal event	Birth of a child	Narrowest event scope in the set: uses one transition to examine prediction, product possession, customer value, and campaign profitability

an individual's concept of self, alter responsiveness to marketing, and create moments of greater behavioural fluidity. Across the studies included in this review, the literature moves from broad inventories of life events and their links to stress, lifestyle adjustment and segmentation; Toward more process-oriented and communication-focused accounts of how consumers respond during periods of transition. More recent work also shows a stronger managerial orientation, examining how such moments can be anticipated, targeted and incorporated into a marketing strategy. Although this literature does not address circular economy communication directly, it provides a useful conceptual and practical foundation for understanding why life transitions may matter for communication design, audience receptiveness, and behaviour change interventions more broadly.

Taken together, the marketing literature adds an important communication-focused layer to the sustainability and circular economy evidence reviewed above. It suggests that life transitions may matter not only because they disrupt routines and create opportunities for new behaviours, but also because they can alter how people respond to information, repetition, timing and practical offers. This provides a useful bridge into the integrated synthesis, which brings together the evidence on life events, circular economy communication and marketing receptiveness to identify implications for life-event-based circular economy communication.

5.4 Integrated synthesis: towards life-event-based circular economy communication

This section brings together the two strands of evidence reviewed above: life events and moments of change, and circular economy communication and behaviour-change approaches. Rather than restating the findings from each block separately, it focuses on their combined implication for communicators: life transitions may create periods of behavioural openness, but this openness only becomes meaningful for circular economy communication when messages are well timed, clearly framed and connected to practical systems of provision.

The evidence from Block 1 indicates that transitions such as moving home, becoming a parent, changing work patterns or entering retirement can disrupt routines and make existing consumption practices more visible. The evidence from Block 2 shows that communication is more likely to support circular behaviours when it is concrete, credible, audience-relevant and linked to enabling conditions such as accessible repair, reuse, sharing or waste prevention options. Read together, these findings suggest that life-event-based circular economy communication should not

be understood simply as message tailoring. It should be understood as the alignment of communication with moments when people are reorganising routines, making decisions and seeking practical support.

The central implication is therefore that circular economy communication should engage people before, during and shortly after major transitions, while decisions are still being made and new routines are being formed. However, the reviewed evidence also cautions that transitions are not automatic windows of opportunity. They are often shaped by stress, time pressure, financial constraints, social expectations and uneven access to services. For this reason, communication around life events needs to be empathetic, practical and materially actionable, helping people connect circular behaviours with the real decisions and constraints they are already navigating.

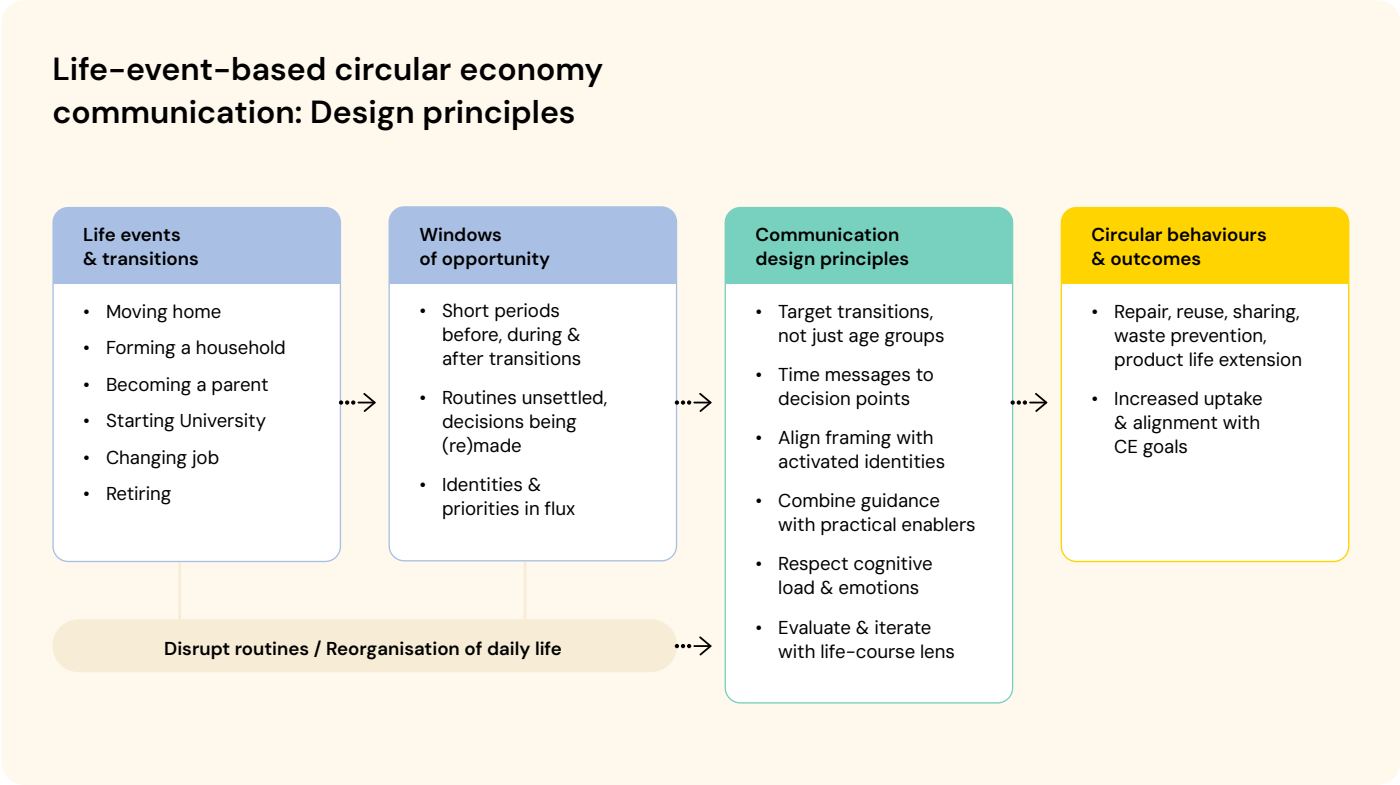

Figure 7. Conceptual model for designing circular economy communications around life events and life-course transitions.

Table 6: CE Communication Design Principles and Supporting References

Strategic focus	**Communication logic**	**Implementation implication**
Target transition moments rather than static demographic categories.	Match messages to decision windows, identity shifts, and cognitive load.	Communication is strongest when paired with enabling services, infrastructure, and follow-through evaluation.

Recommendation	Design Rationale	Supporting References
Target transitions rather than static demographic groups	Focus on transitional turning points that reconfigure routines, not fixed age stages.	Gresko (2024)
Time messages to decision points, including anticipatory phases	Engage people upfront, when they are planning, seeking information, and evaluating options for the transition.	Yap & Kapitan (2017); Whitmarsh et al. (2025); Verplanken & Whitmarsh (2021)
Align framing with activated identities, emotions, and bandwidth	Be specific and realistic; avoid burdensome or moralising messages that ignore constraints such as stress and competing priorities.	Burningham & Venn (2017); Park & Duwez (2022); Straus et al. (2023)
Combine communication with practical enablement	Communication works best as an enabler when paired with supportive services, cost conditions, and accessible infrastructure such as repair or reuse networks.	Ricca et al. (2024); Keshavarz et al. (2025); Burningham & Venn (2017)
Prioritise clarity, credibility, and transparency	Use simple, concrete narratives and verifiable information to support trust and decision-making during periods of high cognitive load.	Pavlis (2025); Fallu (2025); Parkis et al. (2024)
Evaluate with a life-course lens	Measure effectiveness not only by short-term uptake, but also by whether circular practices are sustained after new routines re-form.	Burningham & Venn (2017); Ricca et al. (2024)

5.4.1. Communication design principles supported by the reviewed evidence

Building directly on the synthesized evidence, the review translates the key implications into a set of practical design principles for future CE communication. These principles, which focus on timing, context, and structural alignment, are summarized in the figure 8 with their supporting references. (See Figure 8).

5.4.2. Implications for CE communication and Public Engagement

Taken together, the evidence suggests that a life-event-based approach should not be interpreted as simply "tailoring messages by age group" or "running campaigns at life stages." Rather, it implies designing transition-aware communication packages that: (1) Identify the relevant decision points across an event journey (including anticipatory phases). (2) Frame messages in ways which align with transition priorities and constraints, and (3) Connect audiences directly to enabling services and infrastructures that make circular choices feasible.

This approach is consistent with the report's broader shift away from static segmentation and towards a life-events/transitions framework oriented to practical communication planning needs.

5.5. Limitations

This review employed a targeted rapid scoping methodology intended to map key concepts, approaches, and evidence across an interdisciplinary field, rather than conducting an exhaustive systematic review.
As such, the findings should be interpreted as a structured synthesis of an accessible and policy-relevant evidence base, rather than as a comprehensive assessment of all available literature on life events and CE communication. Firstly, the search strategy applied pragmatic boundaries. Searches were limited to publications from 2015–2025 and to freely accessible papers, and abstract screening was restricted to the first two pages of Google Scholar results for each search string. While this improves transparency and feasibility, it increases the likelihood that additionally relevant studies may have been outside the screened range, behind paywalls, or indexed differently in Google Scholar.

The search process also produced uneven coverage across topic intersections. For some highly specific combinations, no results were identified, which may reflect either a genuine research gap or the use of alternative terminology in the literature. Secondly, the included evidence base is weighted towards conceptual and non-place-based work. The report notes that conceptual review papers account for the largest share of the corpus, with

fewer studies adopting geographically specific empirical designs. This limits the extent to which findings can be translated directly into context-specific claims (including for Ireland).

This is particularly true where local infrastructure and service provision shape feasibility for repair, reuse, and other circular practices.

Thirdly, only a limited subset of studies explicitly links communication strategies to life events and transitions. For this reason, this study adopted a relevance-rating approach (high/medium/low) and conducted a more targeted synthesis of those studies where life-event communication implications were made explicit.

This strengthens analytical focus, but it also means that event-specific communication recommendations rest on a narrower base than the wider thematic findings on life events and on CE communication separately. Finally, the life-events literature itself cautions that transitions are not uniform leverage points. Evidence suggests that outcomes vary widely across contexts and groups and are strongly shaped by structural conditions. Transitions can increase behavioural openness, but they do not automatically generate sustainable or circular outcomes.

It is therefore useful to extend the discussion beyond sustainability-oriented literature and consider how life transitions have been addressed in traditional marketing research. This body of work does not begin from circular economy or pro-environmental concerns, but it provides an important additional perspective on how transitions are associated with changing needs, priorities, and receptiveness. In doing so, it offers a broader conceptual basis for understanding why such moments may also matter for communication.

5.6 Bridging sustainability and traditional marketing perspectives on communication during life transitions

Taken together, the sustainability-oriented communication literature and the traditional marketing literature point in the same broad direction: Life transitions matter for communication not simply because they mark a demographic change, but because they reorganise the contexts of routines, priorities, identities, and decisions for individuals. Sustainability literature frames this in terms of moments when circular or lower-impact practices may become more feasible or more thinkable. In comparison traditional marketing literature frames it in terms of changing needs, stress, receptiveness, and responsiveness to marketing activity. Read together, however, these are not competing interpretations. Rather, they describe different dimensions of the same underlying process: Transitions unsettle established patterns and

can therefore alter both what people need and how they respond to communication.

From the sustainability marketing and CE communication perspective, a strong emphasis falls on credibility, clarity and practical relevance. Across this literature, communication is more effective when circular practices are explained in simple and concrete ways, when circular claims are supported by transparent and verifiable information, and when messaging is connected to enabling conditions such as repair infrastructure, access to services, incentives and other forms of material support (Paiva, 2025; Faludi, 2025; Purkiss et al., 2024; Munonye et al., 2025). This body of work therefore treats communication less as a persuasive end in itself, and more as one component within a wider system that helps people act on intentions and stabilise more circular practices over time.

Traditional marketing research adds a complementary layer by showing more explicitly how transitions reshape communicative receptiveness itself. Mathur et al. (2003) and Mathur et al. (2006) suggest that life events matter because they are associated with stress, readjustment, and changing orientations to consumption. This makes them analytically useful not only for segmentation, but for understanding how people adapt under changing life conditions. Hopkins et al. (2014) deepen this perspective by showing that response to marketing varies across transition stages, with appraisal playing a key role and receptiveness peaking particularly in liminal periods. Su et al. (2021) similarly show that transition periods can involve self-concept ambiguity, which changes how consumers evaluate marketing offerings. Borenstein et al. (2025) in fact extend this logic to advertising repetition, by showing that uncertainty and discontinuity can increase preference for familiar and repeated advertising experiences. In this respect, traditional marketing research helps explain why the timing, format, and repetition of communication may matter so much during periods of transition.

This comparison also clarifies an important overlap between the two perspectives. In the sustainability literature, communication is repeatedly shown to work best when it is aligned with concrete decision contexts and supported by systems of provision. In the traditional marketing literature, communication is shown to become more salient when consumers are navigating uncertainty, reassessing routines, or reallocating resources. These are closely related insights. One explains the conditions under which circular action becomes feasible, while the other explains the heightened responsiveness that may emerge while people are reorienting

themselves. Together, they suggest that effective communication around life events and transitions should not be understood only as message tailoring, but as the alignment of communicative strategy with both psychological openness and practical possibility.

At the same time, both literatures place limits on simplistic interpretations of transition moments. The sustainability-oriented work cautions against treating life events as automatic "windows of opportunity," stressing that outcomes remain conditional on infrastructure, cost, time, social context, and other structural constraints. Traditional marketing research reaches a parallel conclusion from a different angle: Transition effects are not uniform, but vary according to transition stage, self-concept processes, coping resources, and the nature of the marketing stimulus itself. The significance of this convergence is substantial. It suggests that neither circular communication nor commercial communication can assume a stable or universal transition effect. In both cases, responsiveness is conditional, uneven, and shaped by context.

Seen in this light, the traditional marketing perspective does not weaken the sustainability argument but strengthens it by providing a more finely grained account of how communication may operate during periods of change. The sustainability literature is especially useful for identifying what good CE communication should look like: Clear, trustworthy, audience-relevant, and embedded in enabling systems. The traditional marketing literature, by contrast, is especially useful for understanding when and why audiences may be more receptive to that communication, and how transition-related stress, liminality, familiarity, and anticipation shape response. Their integration therefore produces a more complete framework: Life transitions can create heightened communicative receptiveness, but whether that receptiveness translates into circular behaviour depends on the quality, timing, framing, and practical embeddedness of the communication itself.

For the purposes of this review, this synthesis helps bridge two adjacent but too-often separated conversations. Sustainability and CE communication research explains how to communicate circular practices credibly and constructively, while traditional marketing research explains how life transitions alter responsiveness to communication more broadly. When read together, they support the same broader implication: Communication around life transitions is likely to be most effective when it recognises that people are not simply changing status, but renegotiating routines,

● Communication around life transitions is likely to be most effective when it recognises that people are not simply changing status, but renegotiating routines, meanings, and priorities under conditions of uncertainty.

meanings, and priorities under conditions of uncertainty. At such moments, communication may matter more than usual, but only when it is both psychologically attuned and materially actionable. Building on this synthesis, the next step is to move from the question of why life transitions matter for communication, to the question of what communication needs to do if it is to support change in practice. The previous sections shows that communication is most likely to matter when it is both psychologically attuned and materially actionable, while the final section develops this point further by drawing on a smaller body of behaviour change communication literature. This includes both peer-reviewed studies and selected grey literature. The inclusion of grey literature is important here as it enables the connection between the academic discussion and the practical design, implementation and assessment of real-world campaigns. In this way, the focus shifts from receptiveness to intervention, by asking how communication can be designed not only to resonate with people during periods of transition, but also to help translate intention into specific, feasible and sustained circular behaviours.

5.7 Behaviour change communication: practical implications for circular economy campaigns

Building on the preceding synthesis, this section turns from evidence on receptiveness during life transitions to the practical design of behaviour change communication. Its purpose is not to introduce a separate literature review, but to draw out communication principles that can help translate life-event-based circular economy messaging into specific, feasible and actionable behaviours. The sources considered here, including peer-reviewed studies and selected grey literature, are used to connect the academic evidence

with practical campaign design, implementation and evaluation.

A particularly useful point of departure is the Theory of Planned Behaviour as it appears in the Instagram campaign study by Varni et al. (2024). This study suggests that communication can strengthen sustainable behavioural intentions most clearly by increasing knowledge and by making the behaviour appear more socially normal and socially supported. This matters for the present review as it implies that campaigns should not focus only on abstract environmental concerns but should also show what the behaviour looks like in practice, by signalling that it is something that peers and communities already value and perform. The same study also suggests that perceived behavioural control shifted less strongly, indicating that "easy and quick" framing on its own may be insufficient, unless it is accompanied by clearer guidance and stronger normative support (Varni et al., 2024).

This emphasis on social norms and concrete behavioural guidance aligns closely with Parajuly et al.'s (2020) review of behaviour change for the circular economy. They argue that broad awareness campaigns often fail due to the persistent gap between what people say they intend to do and what they do in practice. Their review therefore shifts attention from general pro-circular messaging and to one clearly specified behaviour located at a particular stage of the product lifecycle, such as purchase, repair, reuse, or end-of-life return. This is a significant point as it suggests that communication is more likely to be effective when it is tied to a concrete action rather than to an abstract appeal to be "more circular" (Parajuly et al., 2020).

Parajuly et al. (2020) also reinforce the importance of designing communication around real barriers, rather than stated intentions alone. In the case of electronic waste, the material highlights inconvenience and limited flexibility as key obstacles to formal return and collection practices. The implication is that communication should reduce friction by clarifying exactly what to do, where to go, and how the process works. The same review also highlights that behaviour is shaped by both intrinsic factors (such as knowledge, habits, values and motivation), and extrinsic factors, (such as social norms, money, infrastructure and institutional constraints). In relation to the wider literature review, this strengthens the earlier argument that communication alone is rarely sufficient: It is more likely to support behavioural change when it is aligned with practical enabling conditions and service design (Parajuly et al., 2020).

This practical emphasis is also evident in the grey literature, particularly in The Principles of

Behaviour Change Communications produced by the UK Government Communication Service (2021). As reflected in the material, the report argues that behaviour happens when people can do it, want to do it, and have the chance to do it. It further stresses that campaigns fail when they attempt to motivate people towards a behaviour that remains expensive, confusing, inconvenient, or unavailable in practice. This makes the report especially useful for here, as it gives explicit communication form to a theme already visible across the academic literature: Effective communication depends not only on persuasive framing, but also on whether the surrounding system makes the promoted action realistic (UK Government Communication Service, 2021; Parajuly et al., 2020).

The UK Government Communication Service (2021) material is also valuable as it sets out a more disciplined logic for campaign design. Rather than starting with a vague communication goal, it recommends beginning with one clear behaviour, identifying the main barrier through a capability, opportunity and motivation lens, designing a message that is clear about what to do and why it matters, and supporting repetition through cues, routines and habits. This is particularly relevant to the argument of the wider review. If life transitions are periods when routines are already being reorganised, then communication informed by this perspective may be especially useful as it focuses not only on encouraging one-off action, but also on enabling new practices to become embedded before older habits reassert themselves (UK Government Communication Service, 2021).

A further nuance is added by Nova and Lades' (2022) discussion of nudges and other behavioural public policy instruments. Nova and Lades (2022) caution against treating nudging as a universal solution and instead argue that different behavioural instruments may be appropriate in different contexts. In some cases, the key issue may be default choice. In others, it may be friction, capability, or the need for more reflective and transparent forms of support. For communication practice, the implication is that campaign design should not assume that one behavioural tool will work across all settings but should instead be tailored to the specific problem and evaluated case by case. This adds an important layer to the discussion as it suggests that behaviour change communication is not only about persuasive content, but also about choosing the right intervention logic for the behavioural challenge at hand (Nova and Lades, 2022).

In an ethical consumption study by Manuti (2013), a further important qualification is addressed. As presented in the study,

participants responded positively to sustainability-oriented messages, yet continued to frame action in terms of convenience, low effort and immediate personal usefulness, especially where saving money or avoiding hassle were involved. This is particularly valuable for the present review as it underlines the limits of moral agreement as a predictor of action. Communication may secure approval without changing practice if the behaviour remains too effortful, unclear, or demanding. The implication is not that ethical framing is irrelevant, but that it is more likely to be effective when paired with low-friction actions, concrete benefits, and opportunities for repetition and habit formation (Manuti, 2013).

An important addition to this discussion concerns the question of measurement. If behaviour change is the objective, then evaluation should be aligned with behaviour rather than with proxy indicators of visibility or engagement. The material from Perfect Circle (2025) is especially useful in this respect as it argues that campaigns should define the target behaviour clearly before launch, establish a baseline, and assess change in relation to that baseline rather than relying on impressions, clicks or likes. This is consistent with the wider logic of this section. If communication is being treated as behavioural support rather than awareness-raising, then its effectiveness must be judged by whether people actually perform the behaviour, whether they repeat it over time, and whether the change generates wider practical effects. The emphasis on combining quantitative indicators with qualitative feedback is also significant, since it allows the evaluation not only of whether a change occurred, but of why it did or did not occur, and finally, how audiences experienced the intervention (Perfect Circle, 2025).

This measurement perspective also strengthens the relevance of Varni et al.'s (2024) Instagram study, which, according to the authors, did not stop at attitudinal shifts but also reported a rise in logged sustainable actions during the campaign period. Read alongside Perfect Circle (2025), this suggests that behaviour change communication should ideally incorporate a clear call to action and a mechanism for observing or recording behavioural uptake. More broadly, it reinforces the point that communication should be assessed in relation to specific behavioural outcomes rather than broad assumptions about awareness or sentiment (Varni et al., 2024; Perfect Circle, 2025).

Taken together, these studies point towards a consistent conclusion. Effective behaviour change communication for circular economy practice is not primarily about strengthening pro-environmental attitudes in the abstract. Rather,

it is about identifying one specific behaviour, understanding the practical and social conditions surrounding it, and designing communication that makes the action clear, credible, socially supported, and realistically achievable. Across these studies, social norms emerge as particularly important in Varni et al. (2024), while awareness on its own appears insufficient in Parajuly et al. (2020). Then according to the UK Government Communication Service (2021) the need to match communication to capability, opportunity and motivation is made explicit. While the need to select behavioural tools carefully is stressed by Nova and Lades (2022), the importance of low-friction and personally worthwhile action is reinforced by Manuti (2013), and finally the need to evaluate campaigns against observable behavioural outcomes is foregrounded by Perfect Circle (2025).

The literature reviewed in this section indicates that life events and life transitions can create periods of disruption in which routines, responsibilities, identities and consumption practices are reconfigured. However, it also cautions against treating these moments as simple or guaranteed opportunities for behaviour change. Rather, the evidence suggests that transitions are shaped by practical constraints, emotional pressures, household circumstances, available infrastructure, and the wider systems of provision that make circular behaviours either easier or more difficult to adopt. This creates an important need for empirical insight into how these dynamics are experienced in everyday life. While the literature provides a conceptual basis for understanding life transitions as moments of potential behavioural malleability, further qualitative evidence is required to understand how people themselves describe these moments, what kinds of consumption decisions arise during them, and how circular practices such as reuse, repair, second hand purchasing, sharing or reduced consumption are perceived within specific transition contexts.

To address this, the next section presents findings from qualitative research conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of the Rediscovery Centre. The research explored five life transition moments: *moving out of the parental home for the first time, buying or moving house, becoming a first-time parent, starting a new job, and entering retirement*. These transitions were selected because they involve changes in routines, responsibilities, social networks, financial priorities and material needs, making them relevant contexts for examining how circular economy communication may be more effectively timed, framed and supported.

5. Life Events, Moments of Change, and Sustainable Consumption: Implications for Circular Economy Transitions

The qualitative study therefore builds directly on the literature review by moving from the conceptual question of why life transitions may matter, to the empirical question of how they are experienced in practice. It provides contextual detail on the pressures, motivations, barriers and decision-making processes that shape consumption during these moments, and helps identify where circular economy communication may support, enable or fail to connect with peoples' lived realities.

6. Primary Qualitative Research

Building on the literature review, this qualitative research was designed to explore how key life transitions shape consumption behaviours, attitudes toward circular practices, and openness to circular economy communication. The study focused on lived experience, examining how people describe the practical, emotional and financial changes associated with major transitions, and how these changes influence decisions around buying, reusing, repairing, sharing, disposing of, or passing on goods. The purpose of this stage was not to test the literature quantitatively, but to add contextual depth to the evidence base. In particular, the research sought to understand how circular behaviours are perceived during moments of transition, what barriers shape their acceptability, and what kinds of communication may feel relevant, credible and useful to people at these points in their lives.

6.1. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, using online focus groups to explore behaviours, attitudes, and decision-making at key life transition points.
The design focuses on capturing lived experiences across a range of milestones that are likely to trigger shifts in habits,

priorities, and perceptions. This structure ensured coverage of both trigger moments (e.g. becoming a parent, buying a home) and adjustment phases (e.g. retirement, moving out), while maintaining variation across socio-economic groups, gender, and geography.

Six online focus groups were carried out between 21st and 27th April 2026. Each group lasted 90 minutes and all moderation and analysis was completed by Ipsos B&A. The focus groups were structured around five key life transition moments, with variation across gender, location and social class. Table … provides an overview of the focus group structure.

**Recently: defined as within the last 6 months*

Table 7: Overview of qualitative focus groups by life transition, gender, location and social class

Group	Life Milestone	Gender	Location	Social Class
1	Recently moved out of parent's home (must be young adults under 30 years old)	Mix	Mix	BC1
2	Recently became a parent (must be a first-time parent)	Female	Mix	C2D
3	Recently became a parent (must be a first-time parent)	Male	Mix	BC1
4	Recent work or employment transition (must have changed company not role within a company)	Mix	Mix	C2D
5	Recent bought a home (must be a FTB or mover – split of each)	Mix	Mix	BC1
6	Recent retirement (must have recently retired from the workforce)	Mix	Mix	BC1

6.2 — Moved out of parent's home for the first time

Category	Key Findings
Life Transition	- About redistribution, of time, of responsibility, of identity - With more control comes more responsibility - Different people react differently to the shift
Influencing Networks	- People spend more time with friends/romantic partners - Time with family becomes more intentional and sporadic
Consumption Behaviour	- Consumption takes on a new, more deliberate role - Cost becomes more visible, and needs to be justified
The Circular Economy	- Attitudes to the circular economy are not oppositional, but nor are they instinctive - Strong attitude / behaviour gap - idea needs to be activated - Newness signals cleanliness, ownership, and certainty
Attitudes to Second Hand	- People draw boundaries around second hand products, rooted in proximity, hygiene, and perceived permanence - No problem with purchasing items second hand if seen as durable, cleanable, and ultimately impersonal (e.g. furniture) - Mattresses, bedding, and certain kitchenware become psychologically charged (cannot separate from idea of previous use) - Trust in source is important - family and friends vs strangers - Cost benefits can overcome lack of trust
Key Concepts/Considerations	Responsibility, identity, control, active/passive, structure, intentionality
Key Messaging Approach	Practical guidance around low-cost, trusted and space-efficient ways to set up a home

6.2.1. Life Transition

Moving out their parent's home for the first time is less about departure and more about redistribution, of time, of responsibility, of identity. For people in this transition moment, their lives become more consciously assembled. There is a shift from being passively held within a structure to actively maintaining one. That shift is felt in the quiet accumulation of small, repetitive acts, tasks that were once

invisible and are now unavoidable. As one participant put it, *"everything's by yourself [...] even simple things like shopping - that's an hour or two gone out of your day"*. These mundane responsibilities, newly surfaced, begin to define the rhythm of everyday life.

It is striking how quickly the novelty of independence is tempered by its demands. Responsibility becomes the This responsibility is deeply embedded in the awareness that everything, from the condition of the home to the management of bills, now depends on personal action. As one participant explained, "it's my responsibility to kind of take care of it and make sure that it's... functioning in some way".

Emotionally, the experience resists simplification. It is, at once, expansive and contracting. There is a palpable sense of autonomy, of having space, both physical and psychological, to shape one's own routine. For some, this manifests as a more balanced life, where *"the balance is just a lot nicer... I really do get, like, a full evening"*. For others, it introduces a low-level cognitive load, a sense that the day never quite resolves itself because there is always something else to be done, *"I feel like my brain is always on; it's like a never-ending list of things to do"*.

6.2.2. Influencing Networks

While independence is reconfigured, relationships undergo a quiet recalibration. Proximity to friends or romantic partners often increases, sometimes intensifying spontaneity and shared routines, while time with family becomes less ambient, and more intentional. The familiar and familial scaffolding of home does not disappear entirely; it lingers in habits, 'In *my family home, I'd cook dinner for [my parents] because they both work full-time [...] and now I'm living with friends, we'd all try and have dinner together, so it's nice*." As time with family is no longer the default setting, the former ease of co-presence is replaced by effortful connection, and this shift is felt in small, telling ways*, "I've only actually seen them... once since I moved [...] but we text"*. It is not necessarily experienced as loss, but it does register as change.

6.2.3. Consumption Behaviour

It is within the context of reconsidered socialising, that consumption takes on a new, more deliberate role. There is a clear movement from discretionary spending, on socialising, convenience, impulse purchases, to a more structured, needs-based model. Therefore, spending is often conceptualised as trade-off. Participants describe actively reworking their financial behaviours, whether by *"putting money away for the internet bill"*, "*running back to turn lights off when you wouldn't be in the [home] house",* or mentally categorising funds as already spent: *"I don't view the money for*

rent or electricity as my money, like, it's already gone". The act of buying becomes entangled with a sudden, heightened awareness of consequence: financial, practical, and even emotional. What was once incidental (salt, oil, detergent) becomes visible, even burdensome: *"you don't realise... your shop for the week could be €50... and the next week it's €100... it just stacks up quick without you realising it"*.

And yet, consumption is not purely functional. It also becomes a site of negotiation between necessity and the evolving-self. Small indulgences, whether a night out or a personal purchase, carry more weight, not less, precisely because they must now be justified. The shift is not simply towards restriction, but towards intentionality. In this sense, consumption mirrors the broader experience of the life stage: more effortful, more considered, but also more meaningful. It is less about what is bought, and more about what each purchase represents within a finite system of time, money, and energy, where even the smallest decisions are newly visible, and therefore newly significant; "*I bought curtains, which I never thought I would have had to do, but I just... we really hated the ones in the living room and it made the room look so much brighter and nicer.*"

6.2.4. The Circular Economy

What is immediately apparent is that attitudes to the circular economy are not oppositional, but nor are they instinctive. There is a kind of latent openness, an intellectual agreement with the premise, that hasn't yet fully translated into habitual behaviour. When prompted, participants recognise its value quite readily; when shown stimulus material, a participant said it *"would definitely make me be like, oh yeah, I should drop that into a charity shop or maybe try to sell that on"*. As such, the idea itself lands. But what is more revealing is that, for many, it remains just that, an idea, something that requires activation rather than something already embedded. As one participant admits, *"I don't really think it would have kind of crossed my mind... I wouldn't have even really thought about it being a concept"*.

This gap between principle and practice is where the nuance lies. The circular economy is not rejected; it is simply not yet completely intuitive within this life stage. This appears as partly because moving out is, in itself, a moment of heightened vulnerability. In a context defined by new responsibility, limited budgets, and a desire to establish control, "newness" carries symbolic weight. It signals cleanliness, ownership, and certainty. Even when second hand options are objectively rational, there is an emotional residue attached to buying new, *"it's just... in your mind... it just feels nicer in a way"*.

6.2.5. Attitudes to Second Hand

Where this becomes most visible is in the boundaries participants draw around second-hand purchases. These boundaries are not arbitrary; they follow a fairly consistent internal logic, rooted in proximity, hygiene, and perceived permanence. Items that are structural or external, (furniture, desks, tables) sit comfortably within the realm of second hand. They are seen as durable, cleanable, and ultimately impersonal. As one participant notes, *"stuff like chairs or furniture, I can have no problem buying"*, while another actively seeks them out, recognising the price differential and durability: *"there's no point in spending... when there can be a substantial difference in price"*.

But the line is drawn sharply once items move closer to the body. Mattresses, bedding, and certain kitchenware become psychologically charged. They carry an imprint of previous ownership that cannot be fully erased, regardless of practical cleanliness. A second-hand mattress, for instance, is rejected: *"it just feels a bit gross... I'd much rather... not feel like you're sleeping on someone's old bed"*. The same logic extends to smaller items (cutlery, pots, even everyday glassware) where the barrier is less about risk and more about an inability to detach from the idea of prior use: *"no matter how many times I cleaned it, I would just never not think of it [being used by someone else]"*.

Trust becomes a critical mediator in this equation. The acceptability of second hand is not fixed; it shifts depending on source. Items from friends or family carry an implicit guarantee, they are *"kept... clean and... in a decent enough condition*", while those from strangers introduce uncertainty. This is less about objective risk and more about perceived transparency. Knowing the provenance of an item mitigates discomfort; anonymity amplifies it.

At the same time, cost introduces a countervailing force. For some, second hand becomes not just acceptable but necessary, a pragmatic response to constrained budgets. There is a willingness to compromise when the financial logic is compelling: *"I'd rather buy something new, but you just don't have the money... so I'll... buy it second hand, really deep clean it, and then it feels like new to me"*. Here, we see a kind of reframing at work, where cleaning becomes a ritual of reclamation, transforming the second hand into something psychologically closer to new.

6.3 — Bought first home/Moved house

Category	Key Findings
Life Transition	- Emotionally volatile before sale agreed, relief after - Decision fatigue pushes people towards services and products that remove steps. - Moment when people are financially stretched - Differences when people move urban to rural or vice versa
The Effects of Ownership and Re-Engineering of the Home	- Often need to sort what to keep or discard from previous owners' belongings - People buy and have items in their home that "fit" with who they are or who they want to be - Congruency in style is highly important to homeowners
Motivators and Sources of Influence	- People lean hardest on those who have just been through the process - Sale-agreed is the tipping point - Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit threads, and knowledgeable shop staff all have influences
Consumption Behaviour	- Period of time with significant consumption and re-evaluation of ownership - Purchasing of big-ticket items are typically delayed until moving in - Need to engage in process of 'triage' with already owned items - Once a skip is on the drive, people become bolder and enter a mindset of decluttering - Big-ticket purchases such as large furniture are emotionally charged - Spend is prioritised by room and by visibility, and by whether an item will be durable and regularly used
Attitudes to Second Hand	- 'New' versus 'second hand' is governed by a clear set of rules anchored in hygiene, trust and aesthetics - Across categories, known history beats unknown, and a visible refurb process with guarantees can move an item from "no" to "maybe." - Expectation that refurbed appliances may be less efficient to run - Lawnmowers/power tools may be bought new for safety/warranty - Second hand wooden and vintage furniture is attractive
Attitudes Towards Sustainability	- People will choose options that reduce waste and save money or result in higher quality, but not if they add friction in a life already full of decisions - Lack of infrastructure can be a barrier - Items that are safety-critical, intimate, or highly visible skew new unless from trusted source - Items that are robust, hard-wearing, and improve with age can be embraced second hand
Communications implications	- The financial squeeze that many feel at this stage presents potential to increase motivation to engage with more sustainable product choices.

6.3.1. Life Transition

Moving home is a long, high-stakes transition that starts well before a van pulls up outside. It stretches from the emotional whiplash of bidding to the first night on a new sofa months later.

Before sale-agreed is the most emotionally volatile. The market is thin and viewings mix hope with forensic appraisal of properties and learning curves are steep. Many learn the hard way to stop *"dreaming"* too early after being outbid repeatedly, with visualising layouts and what they will fill the property with becoming something people only allow themselves at sale-agreed.

Relief arrives with completion. However, it is quickly followed by the reality of the dozens of micro-decisions that turn a house into a home.

Like other transition moments in life, this moment compresses attention into near-term tasks and exposes every weak point in time. Anything that removes steps, adds certainty, or carries trusted advice cuts through. Decision fatigue pushes people towards services and products that remove steps. In addition, the experience of moving home stretches people to the absolute boundaries of their financial capabilities – meaning many purchase in a staged manner piece by piece, when they move in rather than having the capability to purchase everything at once.

Home ownership changes daily life in both obvious and subtle ways. People moving from shared rentals talk about a sudden freedom to use the whole home on their own terms. No rotas, no negotiating shower times, no tip-toeing around a sitting room occupied by housemates' friends. For some, moving urban buys back time such as having access to the nearest shop (becomes a "*400-metre stroll rather than a 20-minute drive*"). Rural moves invert this convenience, with the simple act of running out of toilet paper becomes a small crisis unless you plan shopping around commutes.

6.3.2. The effects of Ownership and Re-Engineering of the Home

In the initial move in period 'set-piece purchases' land (sofas with 12–16-week lead times are ordered first, along with kitchen tables), utilities and insurance are set up, and evenings turn into planning sessions for fitting out the house over TV time.

There is also an initial negotiation that they must encounter – with the house often coming with some previous owners' contents. This results in a process of sorting what to keep and what to request is discarded before they enter the home. Inherited items are rarely considered for long-term ownership – and instead are viewed as short-term 'stopgap' they can extract utility from until they can decide or afford something that is uniquely 'theirs'.

Consumers appear to want products they own to be cohesive with their sense of identity – they buy and have items in their home that "fit" with who they are or who they want to be.

Inside the home, rooms are reimagined in waves. Public spaces receive attention first, followed by areas that visitors do not usually see. Rather than doing everything in one major renovation, most participants described upgrading their homes gradually, attaining items "piece by piece" to keep costs under control.

Decision fatigue shows up in small ways, "*we'll live with that tile for now*" can result in some items being used longer than initially intended. There can also be 'decision paralysis', an inability or difficulty to make a decision – driven by both the cost of the item (e.g. a new bed, new table and chairs) and also the desire to ensure that there is congruency between the different items for their home.

Congruency in style is highly important to homeowners; the purchase of one item needs to fit the design of another. In behavioural economics this is called the 'Diderot effect' – a social phenomenon related to consumer behaviour that describes how obtaining a new possession often creates a spiral of consumption that leads to additional purchases. The introduction of a new possession that deviates from their current "consumption constellation" can create dissatisfaction with existing possessions, triggering a cascade of new purchases to create congruency.

Despite trying to be frugal with spending, many still pay the local premium for service and hassle-free recourse. There can be the fear that if something arrives scratched or smashed – it is potentially another job to add to the list. However, there is a cohort out there who are willing to search far and wide, using techniques such as 'reverse image search' on google to identify a desired piece of furniture for a better price, regardless of where it is coming from in the world, *"I found my kitchen table on AliExpress for €250; it was €1,800 in Ireland"*.

6.3.3 Motivators and Sources of Influence

Through the search, bidding and mortgage stages, people lean hardest on those who have just been through the process. Recent, lived experience beats distant authority or advice from parents. Word-of-mouth fills the gaps the process leaves, which auctioneers to trust, how to pace bids, what to watch for on title and planning, how to keep a sale moving. Practical, phase-matched tips are actively sought, for example, what to bring to viewings, how to read BERs, the order to line up solicitor, surveyor and bank, because they shorten the learning curve and reduce costly missteps.

Recent, lived experience beats distant authority or advice from parents.

Sale-agreed is the tipping point. It unlocks practical planning and purchasing at a new level of fidelity. Measurements become real, door widths and stair turn dictate what can physically get in, and lead times start to matter. It also marks a shift from crowd counsel to self-authored taste. Opinions still register, but the person to satisfy is the owner themselves. Aesthetics are not decoration at the margins; they are the mechanism of psychological ownership. Visible appliances are chosen to complete a scheme. For example, black washers and dryers cost more but "disappear" into dark kitchens - because congruency across the set matters. This is the Diderot effect in action, with people solving for "my place, my way" ahead of practical utility.

Instagram and Pinterest supply the visual grammar of styles, colourways and mood boards that become the planning language until the tape measure comes out. For audio and tech, Reddit threads and knowledgeable shop staff are trusted, with in-store demos settling final choices. Showrooms still matter where touch and finish decide outcomes such as for the bathrooms, tiles and tables. When it comes to second hand there is sources such as Adverts.ie, FB Marketplace, and Freecycle that are used as well as some WhatsApp groups in which people can trade items them no longer see use for. That being said, there can be some frustration of lowball offers, no-shows and time-wasters through these channels.

6.3.4. Consumption Behaviour

Moving homes is a period of time with significant consumption and re-evaluation of ownership. It is a time of consumers wanting/needing to buy big ticket items, from, couches, beds, as well as smaller ticket items, that are important to the day-to-day functioning of the household. The purchasing of big-ticket items is typically delayed until moving in so that measurements are certain and access is guaranteed. Purchasing big ticket items before the move is halted and people will prefer to sit on a make do couch or mattress for a couple of weeks rather than making a significant purchase that they will later regret.

Those living in rented accommodation need to 'triage' what they take with them to their new property and what perhaps is not kept. Those moving from one owned home to another face a more significant challenge – often having accumulated more products that need to be triaged before the move. Attics disgorge years of "we might need that again" into garages that become halfway houses until a trigger point is reached and a skip is ordered, *"We filled the attic with stuff we might need again but never did"*. Use of skips is tactical. In some areas they must be filled the day they land to prevent neighbours adding their own mattresses at night. Once a skip is on the drive, people become bolder and enter a mindset of decluttering, "*we've paid for it, so let us fill it*."

The big-ticket purchases are emotionally charged. Sofas, kitchens, beds, mattresses are treated as 'investments' because they carry comfort and identity. One participant noted wanting to buy new and be willing to invest in *"things that keep you off the ground"*. They are worth lead times, money and are felt worth to 'buy new' as the expectation is that these items will be kept for years to come. They are items people want to show off, invite complements about their personal touch is important.

Spend is prioritised by room and by visibility. Areas of the home which will have higher footfall of visitors (kitchen, bathroom, sitting room) or that will have higher time dwelling (E.g. main bedroom) are the areas that consumers are most willing to invest. Many decide to spend less and look for cheaper options for rooms with less significance in the household (e.g. spare bedroom). Financing splits opinion. Some spread the cost of a sofa over 36 months without blinking. Others avoid BNPL entirely and make do with gifted pieces until they can afford what they really want. The logic is consistent. Invest properly where it will endure and be used daily, accept "good enough" elsewhere else – especially in the early days of home ownership.

6.3.5. Attitudes Towards Second Hand

Despite the sheer volume of consumption of 'new' items, there is some evidence of reuse, and sharing occurring with those at this moment of life transition. Families pass on kitchen tables, chairs and dressers that bridge the gap until permanent choices are made. Sometimes it is felt that the quality of older solid wood pieces outclasses anything new within budget.

That being said, 'new' versus 'second hand' is governed by a clear set of rules anchored in hygiene, trust and aesthetics.

6.3.5.1. Hygiene

Mattresses are almost always new unless the provenance is family and the condition is impeccable. Fabric

sofas from strangers are a hard sell unless professionally re-upholstered and cleaned, with explicit pet- and smoke-free assurances, whereas the same sofa gifted by a sibling feels acceptable. Curtains, if sealed and unopened, are fair game but overall opened textiles are scrutinised. Across categories, "known history" beats unknown, and a visible refurb process with guarantees can move an item from "no" to "maybe."

6.3.5.2. Trust

Refurbished appliances can land well when they come with a real warranty. However, many are averse to using refurbed appliances as there is an expectation that they may be less efficient – undermining any sustainability benefits and/or risk of getting less time out of them, forcing the purchase or a new item closer down the line. "*Second hand can be cheaper now, but if it's older and less efficient, you'll spend more on electricity*". In contrast, ex-display stock from trusted local shops is particularly attractive, because it combines price, warranty and immediate availability. Garden and outdoor kit splits by risk. Reclaimed pavers and second-hand furniture are welcomed but lawnmowers and power tools skew new for warranty and perceptions of safety.

6.3.5.3. Aesthetics

Wooden and vintage furniture are where second hand really feels like a great option, and in fact, some people actively hunt for mid-century pieces that can be sanded and resealed and relish the story behind reclaimed items. However, outside high-quality items, people can be averse to buying older style items that lack congruency with the aesthetic identity that they are aiming to achieve.

6.3.6. Attitudes Towards Sustainability

Sustainability runs as a practical thread rather than an ideology. People will choose options that reduce waste and save money or result in higher quality, but not if they add friction in a life already full of decisions. Refill habits can flourish where infrastructure exists, but some note a lack of this infrastructure when living in Ireland. One participant who moved from New Zealand to rural Ireland exposed gaps in our infrastructure in Ireland that make previous zero-waste routines harder to sustain, *"In New Zealand I used the same washing liquid bottle for nine years, I just refilled it. The infrastructure isn't here"*.

There is a consistent logic under the surface. Items that are safety-critical, intimate, or highly visible skew new unless they come from a source with known history or a credible refurbisher who stands behind the product. Items that are robust, hard-wearing, and improve with age such as solid wood cabinets, reclaimed timbers, pavers can be

embraced second hand. Appliances sit in the middle. Many will accept refurbished if warranty and energy costs are transparent, and delivery and installation are handled. For visible appliances, aesthetics carry unexpected weight to ensure they fit with their broader design scheme.

6.3.7. Communications implications

The financial squeeze that many feel at this stage presents potential to increase motivation to engage with more sustainable product choices.

6.4 — First Time Parents

Category	Key Findings
Life Transition	- Experienced as a whirlwind that is amazing, hectic, overwhelming and deeply rewarding - Radical compression of both time and space - Due to the volume of change, habits and routines are exceptionally malleable - Solutions that promise ease and that are framed as solutions over additions to a to-do list are key - Triggers a wholesale re-evaluation of how the home is used and what's inside it, resulting in a sharp spike in consumption
A Significant Shock to Existing Habits and Routines	- Full-body jolt to the everyday. Old patterns collapse and new ones are assembled quickly around whatever anchors can be relied on - Significantly more planning time is required before anything can be done - The home is re-engineered at speed - Anything that saves time, simplifies hygiene or stabilises sleep is trialled quickly and, if effective, made permanent.
Influencing Networks	- Recency and proximity of experience trump distant authority when it comes to trusted sources of information - WhatsApp/Facebook threads enable rapid Q&A, swap/sell leads and "guinea-pig" diffusion on product choices - Fathers typically play a less significant role in the search and selection process for products compared to mothers
Consumption Behaviour	- Significant spike in consumption of stuff from both purchasing and gifts - Key values are safety, hygiene, speed, simplicity and above all, friction removed from the day - Parents feel pressure to purchase items to signal competence and care - Big-ticket decisions land early and skew new - Considerations such as cost, sustainability, effort to buy second hand are blinkered by the significance of the purchase - Travel systems/buggies and car seats sit firmly in the "buy new" camp - After birth, demand becomes phase-driven, with each phase bringing a fresh promise from targeted marketing to solve the new problem - Parents happily accept and pass on boxes of newborn outfits
Attitudes to Second Hand	- Safety-critical and daily-use items (buggies, car seats) are mostly bought new, or accepted second hand only from trusted sources - The source of an item strongly shapes comfort. "Known history" (friend/family) overrides many second hand concerns

Attitudes Towards Sustainability	- Sustainability threads through consumption choices – but only when it aligns with money and effort - Some accidental circularity takes place - Cloth nappies are consistently rejected as they are felt to add work, are awkward when out, and some question whether they're meaningfully greener once washing/ detergent/electricity are counted

6.4.1. Life Transition

Becoming a first-time parent is experienced as a whirlwind that is amazing, hectic, overwhelming and deeply rewarding, often all in the same day. The defining feature of this moment is the radical compression of both time and space. Days shrink to the present tense, anchored to feeds, naps and bedtime. Planning beyond "today" feels unrealistic, with attention narrowing to getting through the here and now, *"You're kind of very much stuck in that one day... you have no time to think about the next day or the day after. You're very much in the present"*.

Due to the volume of change, habits and routines are exceptionally malleable, which presents opportunities with adoption of better circular behaviour. However, on the other side, time and effort are an increasingly scarce resource. Therefore, solutions that promise ease and that are framed as solutions over additions to a to-do list are key to engagement with this cohort.

This compression of time triggers a wholesale re-evaluation of how the home is used and what's inside it. Tables become changing stations, spare rooms turn into laundry zones, cots migrate downstairs, storage proliferates; *"My spare room now is our laundry room", "My kitchen table is now my changing station."* It also pulls forward decisions on money, work and identity (e.g., new work routines, pension/insurance reviews, reclaiming small pockets of "self"). The result is a sharp spike in consumption – a blend of both practically focused and highly emotional driven purchases that are either self-initiated, via gifts from friends and family and dreaded "drop-offs" from others who are trying to lighten their own ships at home.

6.4.2. A Significant Shock to Existing Habits and Routines

The arrival lands as a full-body jolt to the everyday. Old patterns collapse and new ones are assembled quickly around whatever anchors can be relied on. Time compresses to "today." The day is carved by feeds, naps and bedtime, with the hours in between being reactive. Simple errands become multi-step missions.

"Nipping to the shop" becomes a negotiated exit in which they need to build the kit, check the nap window, align the feed, watch the weather, then go, *"I drove to my mom's house last week on my own, which was, like, a... I felt like I climbed Mount Everest..."*. Punctuality yields to "baby time." Leisure is re-priced too. A match on TV, a night out or coffee with friends now requires weeks of planning and backup at home.

Anchors shift rather than disappear. Mornings and bedtime become stable bookends with the middle of the day is the "chaos zone." Many mothers stabilise the bookends (predictable wake-ups, a dependable first nap, early evening bath/white noise) to regain a sense of control and buy usable adult time. Fathers often inject structure via work. Incorporating earlier starts, hard stops ("can't work late anymore"), leveraging hybrid routines, or a deliberate return to the office for more focused workdays.

The home is re-engineered at speed. Kitchen tables become changing stations because they're the right height. Spare rooms turn into laundry and drying zones. Strollers and cots displace other furniture. Winter births intensified the sense of living "manic within 20 square meters." Fathers, in particular, add shelving, hooks and storage, with some even change cars to fit prams and seats. Heating bills spike in older houses as warmth and comfort become non-negotiables.

Tools that remove steps become "survival gear." Products that reliably reduce friction stick, for example, white-noise machines in each sleep space, bottle makers or rapid cooling methods for safe temps fast (especially for reflux), antibacterial wipes for one-handed nappy changes, portable rockers to move the buggy, small movable storage (e.g., IKEA trolleys) at changing height. These purchases illustrate how the shock to routine drives consumption. Anything that saves time, simplifies hygiene or stabilises sleep is trialled quickly and, if effective, made permanent.

6.4.3. Influencing Networks

Parents are most receptive to advice that matches their baby's exact phase (e.g., "two months," "five months"). Recency and proximity of experience trump distant authority. Mothers lean on small, in-person mom groups for weekly camaraderie and hyper-practical tips. However, it is noted that large mixed-age groups can overwhelm early on and feed comparison.

WhatsApp/Facebook threads enable rapid Q&A, swap/sell leads and "guinea-pig" diffusion on product choices (i.e. one tries, the rest follow). Instagram/TikTok provide weaning recipes and hacks but also curate an effortlessness that can raise anxiety and lead to overbuying. Fathers draw on a tight circle of friends a few months/years ahead. They contribute

to the purchasing process but typically play a less significant role in the search and selection process for products compared to mothers. Dads are more likely to do in-store comparisons and, in some cases, to use AI for budgeting and scenario planning (childcare, pensions) rather than product search and selection.

6.4.4. Consumption Behaviour

This life transition point represents a significant spike in consumption of "stuff" – contributed to both from personal purchases but also from gifting or "drop off" from friends, family and extended network. Underneath the itemised choices sit clear rules of value, including Safety, hygiene, speed, simplicity and above all, friction removed from the day. It is also a time of immense pressure to be seen to be buying products to signal competent parenting and love to their child. For example, many default to buying new as a way of expressing love, care and parental competence. The idea of buying second new in some categories can be viewed as showing a lack of care, love, interest – a strong taboo that most express a strong desire to distance themselves from.

Big-ticket decisions land early and skew new. In the final trimester, the nesting impulse and a surge of anticipatory excitement pull forward the "set-piece" buys, including travel system, car seat, cot, changing station, nursery fit-out. It is important for us to note that these are not ordinary transactions. They are rites of passage that make the impending arrival tangible and help parents rehearse their new roles. Buying the buggy or assembling the cot signals, to themselves and to others, "we are now Mom and Dad." These purchases reflect a profound transition moment in the life of these individuals – as such, considerations such as cost, sustainability, effort to buy second hand can be suppressed. They are blinkered by the significance of the purchase.

Buying the buggy or assembling the cot signals, to themselves and to others, "we are now Mom and Dad."

Travel systems/buggies and car seats sit firmly in the “buy new” camp, justified by safety history, the wear and tear of daily use (often on rough roads), and the expectation of reuse for a second child. The long-use horizon reframes these as ‘investments’. Some will consider a high-spec buggy second hand (after a test push and deep clean), especially as a spare for grandparents, but most reject the idea on hygiene grounds, “*We were offered a second hand one, and I was so adamant from the start that I wanted a new one… I’m glad now that I bought my own [buggy]*”

After birth, demand becomes phase-driven. In the first months, sleep and soothing dominate and drive a cluster of quick, high-utility purchases (white noise, bottle-prep/ cooling, rockers, reachable storage). Parents don’t describe these as “nice to have” but as “lifesavers.” The “lifesaver” label is how products that work spread peer-to-peer, moving a product from “optional” to “must have” in group discourse. As phases change, the basket evolves (e.g., water mats unlock tummy time; by 5–6 months, weaning equipment and easy-clean kit come into view). Each phase brings a fresh promise from targeted marketing to solve the new problem.

Home and hardware spend rises quietly. Reconfiguring rooms and storage triggers DIY and hardware purchases - a few families switch cars for practicality. Coffee machines at home and more fruit are typical small changes to sustain energy while controlling spend. Short bursts of meal-delivery services often bridge the most chaotic month, then parents return to home cooking.

Clothing is where second hand wins. Value is defined by speed of outgrowth. Parents happily accept and pass on boxes of newborn and 0–3-month outfits. with many noting that there’s so much in circulation that it can be hard to give away. Some mothers often use Vinted for some items. However, items worn against the skin overnight are more often bought new – for hygiene reasons. Trust in an item’s history is decisive. Borrowing from someone you know is categorically different to buying from a stranger online.

This period sees the widest ‘gift net’. Immediate family, extended family, friends and even friends of parents. The inflow can be hard to control, and its value is uneven, *“My house is overflowing… teddies and the comforters… if I never see another one again, I’d be happy!”*

‘Gift gold’ comes in the form of practical support. Meal vouchers, batches of dinners, a one-off cleaning session or laundry pickup are remembered months later. Cash or store credit targeted to essentials is also valued.

'Gift glut' comes in the form of teddies and comforters. Most homes of first-time parents appear to accumulate boxes of pristine soft toys, even bouncers, that never get used, with parents often pass them on quietly. "Dump-offs" from friends can be more of a hindrance rather than something that is genuinely useful for them.

6.4.5. Attitudes Towards Second Hand

New versus second hand settle into clear boundaries. Safety-critical and daily-use items (buggies, car seats) are mostly bought new or accepted second hand only from someone known and trusted.
Category rules exist. Short-phase, low-risk items (spare buggy for grandparents, jumperoos, play mats) are borrowed, bought second hand or sourced from charity shops.
Timing arcs exist. Pre-birth is for set-piece purchases (nursery, travel system) and carries excitement and a "do our best" mindset, with even self-described frugal parents loosen budgets here. Early weeks bring ad-hoc problem-solving buys and later months shift spend to weaning and play.

Trust gradients exist. The source of an item strongly shapes comfort. "Known history" (friend/family) overrides many second-hand concerns. "Unknown history" (marketplace seller) elevates hygiene and durability worries. Some fathers framed the trade-off as "high-spec" used vs mid-tier new.

6.4.6. Attitudes Towards Sustainability

Sustainability, while not the headline driver, threads through consumption choices – but only when it aligns with money and effort.

There is some 'accidental circularity'. Most already participate in circular behaviours through clothing hand-downs, Vinted and borrowing short-phase gear. Parents notice the bin weight increase (nappies/ wipes) and, in a few cases, make small switches (e.g., cotton wool and water at home) when convenient.
There are some non-starters. Cloth nappies are consistently rejected as they are felt to add work, are awkward when out, and some question whether they're meaningfully greener once washing/detergent/ electricity are counted. Refill ideas gain interest where they're effortless and one-hand compatible, but bulky or fussy systems won't land in homes optimised for reach and speed.

6.5 — Recently retired

Category	Key Findings
Life Transition	- Days are reorganised around choice rather than necessity - Life takes on a more episodic quality. Plans remain, but they are more fluid and contingent - Retirement introduces an ongoing negotiation with the self, with identity becoming more internally defined
Evolution of Routines	- Retirement creates disruption to long-established routines - Retirement removes framework of extrnally imposed structures almost immediately, creating both liberation and uncertainty. - Decisions are less reactive and less compressed; there is greater space to consider, defer, and prioritise differently - Different people react differently to this transition - Life becomes less about keeping up and more about choosing carefully what to do, what to value, and what to maintain.
Influencing Networks	- Socially, retirement involves both continuity and recalibration - The presence of children and grandchildren introduce a longer temporal horizon extending thinking beyond immediate concerns and into questions of legacy, stewardship, and future generations - Connection remains central, but it is less incidental and more intentional than before. - Community-based interactions become increasingly important, particularly within hyper-local networks
Consumption Behaviour	- Consumption during retirement is shaped by a balance of pragmatism and perspective. - There is less emphasis on accumulation and more focus on making use of what already exists - Reduced or fixed incomes often create a heightened attentiveness to value and a corresponding reluctance to spend unnecessarily - Grandchildren, in particular, shape how many retirees think about consumption, waste, and responsibility
Circular Economy	- Circularity is not experienced as something entirely new to adopt, but something already embedded within existing routines and values. - Circularity can become embedded within systems of familiarity and mutual support (e.g. estate group chat)

Attitudes Towards Second Hand	- Attitudes towards second hand are defined by the surrounding conditions, trust, visibility, familiarity, and perceived purpose - Functional and higher-value items are frequently viewed as sensible second hand purchases - Platforms that provide transparency around sellers help reduce uncertainty and create reassurance around quality and legitimacy - The strongest examples of second hand engagement often occur within local, community-based exchanges - informal sharing systems create environments where reuse feels socially embedded and low risk
Attitudes Towards Sustainability	- For many, sustainability aligns naturally with existing habits of thrift, reuse, and careful consumption. - Intention changes - practices that may once have been motivated primarily by necessity become consciously valued as meaningful or responsible ways of living. - The influence of future generations is important in sustainability framing - Sustainability resonates most strongly when connected to practicality, moderation, and existing values around making things last, avoiding waste, and consuming thoughtfully

6.5.1. Life Transition

Retirement, as it is lived rather than imagined, feels less like an ending and more like an opening of time, of possibility, of deferred intention. For much of adult life, time has been externally structured by work, obligation, and routine. In its absence, what emerges is not simply "free time," but an entirely different temporal landscape. Days are no longer segmented in the same way; they stretch, contract, and reorganise themselves around choice rather than necessity. There is a quiet liberation in that, an ability to move at one's own pace, to linger, to decide that something can wait. Yet alongside this freedom sits a more complex awareness: that time, while now more abundant, is also more finite.

This tension between expansiveness and finitude shapes the emotional texture of the life stage. Retirement often carries with it a catalogue of intentions accumulated over decades, places to visit, projects to begin, alternative versions of life deferred in favour of immediate responsibilities. Initially, there is a sense that these plans will now unfold naturally, that time will accommodate them. In reality, the process is more uneven. What becomes particularly striking is how full retirement can feel, even

in the absence of formal structure. Time rarely sits empty. Instead, it becomes populated with smaller, self-directed activities, errands that take longer, conversations that stretch, routines that evolve without urgency. Life takes on a more episodic quality, where meaning is distributed across everyday moments rather than concentrated in milestones. Plans remain, but they are more fluid and contingent.

At the same time, retirement introduces an ongoing negotiation with the self. Without the external validation or routine of work, identity becomes more internally defined. This can feel grounding, but it can also create moments of ambiguity around productivity, usefulness, or whether time is being "well spent." The idea of making the most of retirement sits quietly in the background, shaping decisions without always resolving them. Unfulfilled plans become less a source of regret than a gentle awareness that not everything will be realised, and that part of this life stage involves learning to sit comfortably within those limitations; *"You don't feel that you have to do everything straight away, you don't have to do everything today, you have the freedom of saying, well, if I don't get something done today, I know that I can try to get it done tomorrow"*.

6.5.2. Evolution of Routines

One of the most defining aspects of retirement is the disruption it creates to long-established routines. For decades, daily life has often been governed by schedules, responsibilities, and externally imposed structures. Retirement removes that framework almost immediately, creating both liberation and uncertainty.

Where time was once scarce and tightly managed, it becomes more abundant and self-directed. Decisions are less reactive and less compressed; there is greater space to consider, defer, and prioritise differently. For some, this creates a sense of ease, time reclaimed after years of constraint. For others, the absence of structure requires adjustment and even discipline, to avoid a drift into formlessness.

The transition is therefore not simply practical, but psychological. Habits built around productivity, routine, and obligation no longer operate in the same way. Activities that may once have been peripheral begin to take on greater significance, while traditional markers of achievement become less central. The challenge becomes not how to stay busy, but how to create a sustainable and meaningful rhythm in the absence of externally imposed structure.

Across these experiences, there is a shared movement toward

intentionality. Life becomes less about keeping up and more about choosing carefully what to do, what to value, and what to maintain.

6.5.3. Influencing Networks

Socially, retirement involves both continuity and recalibration. Established relationships often deepen, particularly within local and community networks, while family relationships take on a slightly different texture. The presence of children and, increasingly, grandchildren introduce a longer temporal horizon, extending thinking beyond immediate concerns and into questions of legacy, stewardship, and future generations.

Connection remains central, but it is less incidental than before. Without workplaces acting as automatic social environments, relationships are maintained more intentionally through routine, proximity, and shared environments. Community-based interactions become increasingly important, particularly within hyper-local networks where trust and reciprocity are embedded, "*I joined a choir*" and "*we set up a men's shed locally*".

6.5.4. Consumption Behaviour

Consumption during retirement is shaped by a balance of pragmatism and perspective. Importantly, retirement does not diminish engagement with consumption but rather refines it. There is less emphasis on accumulation and more focus on making use of what already exists. Everyday consumption becomes grounded in sufficiency rather than excess. Websites like Freecycle, Adverts.ie, and Done Deal, combined with the community boards and WhatsApp groups offer an accessible way to engage with both disposing of and acquiring items/materials.

Reduced or fixed incomes often create a heightened attentiveness to value and a corresponding reluctance to spend unnecessarily. As one participant explains, "I've stopped working… I've no income coming in". This financial shift manifests not necessarily as restriction, but as discernment. Spending becomes slower and more considered: "*it takes a lot for me to spend money*".

Within this headspace, there is also evidence of a broader reframing of value itself. Grandchildren, in particular, shape how many participants think about consumption, waste, and responsibility. Concerns about "*we have to leave some kind of a world that they can live in… to try and make some kind of an effort to pull back from the waste*" introduce a moral dimension to everyday decisions, reinforcing behaviours that prioritise longevity, utility, and reduced waste. One participant describes deliberately resisting material gifts for their grandchild altogether: "*I've never… bought her*

anything. Anything material". Instead, value is redirected into future experiences and long-term meaning rather than accumulation.

6.5.5. Circular Economy

Many behaviours framed within the "circular economy" are understood by this group as long-standing habits rather than new practices. As one participant reflects, *"some of the things... we've been doing ourselves for years, like, even bringing our stuff to the charity shops"*. Circularity, therefore, is not experienced as something entirely new to adopt, but something already embedded within existing routines and values.

As their social circle evolves, newly found trusted networks also shape everyday behaviours, including participation in circular or second-hand practices. For many, one of the most straightforward and unproblematic examples of circular behaviour occur within these local systems of exchange: *"the estate group chat... has become really good for that kind of circular economy... I just got lucky with two good car seats"*. In these contexts, second hand becomes less anonymous and more relational, embedded within systems of familiarity and mutual support.

6.5.6. Attitudes Towards Second Hand

Attitudes towards second hand are defined by the surrounding conditions, trust, visibility, familiarity, and perceived purpose. Where these conditions are met, second hand is not only accepted, but often preferred. Functional and higher-value items, particularly tools, furniture, or home improvement materials, are frequently viewed as sensible second-hand purchases. In these cases, second hand is not framed as compromise, but as a smart and economically rational alternative. As one participant explains: "I knew they [vanity basin for a bathroom] were probably around €400, and I ended up getting a very good one for €100".

● Second hand is not framed as compromise, but as a smart and economically rational alternative.

Where they are absent, hesitation emerges, not as outright rejection, but as a desire for reassurance and confidence in the exchange.

Platforms that provide transparency around sellers help reduce uncertainty and create reassurance around quality and legitimacy. One participant highlighted that "you're able to go back and see the history of the person selling... if they're genuine or not". Transparency becomes more important than novelty.

The strongest examples of second-hand engagement often occur within local, community-based exchanges. Neighbourhood networks and informal sharing systems create environments where reuse feels socially embedded and low risk. As one participant notes, "the estate group chat... has become really good for that kind of circular economy... I just got lucky with two good car seats". Within these trusted spaces, second hand items lose much of the ambiguity that can exist in anonymous marketplaces.

6.5.7. Attitudes Towards Sustainability

For many, sustainability aligns naturally with existing habits of thrift, reuse, and careful consumption. Behaviours associated with the circular economy are often viewed not as ethical innovations, but as common-sense practices that have existed for years. What changes in retirement is the level of intentionality attached to these behaviours.

Practices that may once have been motivated primarily by necessity become consciously valued as meaningful or responsible ways of living.

Sustainability within retirement is often framed less as an abstract environmental issue and more as a question of responsibility, stewardship, and legacy. The influence of future generations is important. The presence of grandchildren introduces a broader temporal perspective, prompting reflection on environmental impact and responsibility. One participant expresses this directly: *"we have to leave some kind of a world that they can live in... to try and make some kind of an effort to pull back from the waste"*.

At the same time, there is little appetite for sustainability framed in overtly performative or ideological terms. Instead, it resonates most strongly when connected to practicality, moderation, and existing values around making things last, avoiding waste, and consuming thoughtfully. The opportunity, therefore, is not to position sustainable behaviour as radically new, but to recognise, validate, and elevate practices that are already deeply embedded within everyday life.

6.6.1. Life Transition

Starting a new job feels like a classic now-or-never moment. In

6.6 — Started a new job

Category	Key Findings
Life Transition	- Feels like a classic now-or-never moment. Excitement and fear of stepping into the unknown - People get a burst of motivation from fresh targets and learning curves - Day to day, the job change remaps routines, includng commuting practices
New Job Resolutions	- People strive to make “new job resolutions” in those first weeks, better morning routines, more exercise, tighter organisation - Consumption during the transition is focused and functional - puchasing workwear or tools - If there’s no canteen, you add lunchboxes, water bottles, travel mugs, and a fresh diary to the basket - Food consumption patterns also change - grocery shops get bigger to cover breakfasts and packed lunches
Attitudes Towards Second Hand	- ‘First-day feeling’ is about freshness and confidence, leading some to prioritise purchasing new - Openness rises when you can inspect items in a good charity shop and spot quality brands in excellent condition - When it comes to furniture, the biggest barrier isn’t attitude so much as logistics: arranging a van or transporter can kill a bargain.
Circumstantial Sustainability	- Sustainability sits in a pragmatic place rather than an ideological one - people adopt the greener option when it saves money or removes friction - Motivation fades when when a step depends on skills many no longer have, like mending clothes - Compared with moving house or welcoming a first child, the new-job transition triggers less outright buying and more targeted kitting-out. However, it remains a powerful reset moment

the run-up, people sit with a real blend of excitement and fear: you leave a secure place, often step into probation, and face a roomful of new faces. That spike of anxiety usually softens quickly into contentment and energy once they settle.

There is relief and pride in landing somewhere that fits better, security when a permanent contract replaces rolling gigs, and a burst of motivation from fresh targets and learning curves. The reset even shows up in self-presentation, “you look good, you feel good”—as confidence builds in the new role.

Day to day, the job change remaps routines. A predictable Monday–Friday makes mornings sharper: people get up earlier, eat breakfast at home, and arrive feeling more "on the ball," especially in care roles where you can't wander off for a coffee. Evenings and weekends open up, so there's more time to cook, hike, and see family and friends. Stress also shifts form. Some who were mentally drained by desk work now prefer physical tiredness from hands-on jobs, because they don't bring work home. Commutes also change. For those working in city-centre roles, public transport often becomes part of the new routine. Some participants described enjoying the walk connected to the commute, while also expressing frustration with overcrowded buses and busy peak-time services.

6.6.2. New Job Resolutions

People strive to make "new job resolutions" in those first weeks, better morning routines, more exercise, tighter organisation. The ambitious meal prep and perfect bedtime stick if the structure supports them and are pared back when reality sets in. Some mornings remain a scramble, especially with school runs and small kids, but many find their evenings noticeably calmer than before.

Consumption during the transition is focused and functional. Most start with a workwear reset that fits the role: smart-casual polos, shirts, and light jackets for offices; trainers and durable layers you can run and bend in for education and care; boots, heavy-duty clothes, and a few personal tools for trades. Good footwear becomes a non-negotiable because you're on your feet. A lot of shopping happens right before day one, panic trips to Penneys/Primark, Screwfix, or Harvey Norman, sometimes financed weekly, and then small online top-ups once the dress code "feels" clearer. There's also the treat-yourself purchase after months of subbing and interviews, like a really good coat for yard duty in West of Ireland weather. Others rebuild basics cheaply because paint, play, and wear will destroy them anyway.

The kit expands beyond clothes. If there's no canteen, you add lunchboxes, water bottles, travel mugs, and a fresh diary to the basket, while employers usually supply the tech and most trade tools. Grocery shops get bigger to cover breakfasts and packed lunches. Many begin with ambitious batch-cooking, then settle into a realistic rhythm: leftovers and solid ready-meals for variety, healthy Monday to Thursday and a chicken roll on Friday.

6.6.3. Attitudes towards Second hand

Attitudes to second hand at this moment are mixed. For the job itself, people usually want new: that first-day feeling is about freshness and confidence, and there are hygiene worries and the sheer effort

of rummaging. Openness rises when you can inspect items in a good charity shop and spot quality brands in excellent condition, but beds and mattresses stay off-limits. In trades, second hand clothes don't make sense because they tear and burn quickly; tools, when not supplied, last well, but many employers provide the essentials anyway. Outside the work kit, second hand becomes an easy yes. Moving into a first home often means a Marketplace or DoneDeal couch or kitchen table, ideally nearly new, with a receipt, from someone moving abroad, and family hand-me-downs fill gaps. The biggest barrier isn't attitude so much as logistics: arranging a van or transporter can kill a bargain. For kids, second hand clothes are normal because they outgrow everything in a blink; once first-time nerves fade, even a buggy might be bought used, while sleep items are usually bought new.

6.6.4. Circumstantial Sustainability

Sustainability sits in a pragmatic place rather than an ideological one. People adopt the greener option when it saves money or removes friction. That can look like considering an EV because of fuel prices, retrofitting and adding solar because grants help and the house stays warmer, refilling bottles because the workplace has fountains that even tally bottles "saved," or using a keep-cup when a campus bans disposables. Public transport is embraced when parking disappears, a train-plus-bike beats gridlock, and home delivery reclaims precious family time. Motivation fades when buses are overcrowded and unreliable or when a step depends on skills many no longer have, like mending clothes. Campaigns that quantify savings, make steps feel small and doable, and show exactly how to act outperform abstract appeals to "be sustainable."

Compared with moving house or welcoming a first child, the new-job transition triggers less outright buying and more targeted kitting-out. It is still a powerful reset, though, of routines, energy, identity, and all the small purchases that help the new rhythm stick. When brands, employers, or public campaigns meet people in that moment with convenience, clarity, and credible savings, the habits people build at the start are far more likely to last.

6.6.5. Implications for communications

Across all moments of transition, the analysis reveals that sustainability messaging should be reframed as a secondary benefit rather than the primary value proposition. Participants across all five life transitions consistently prioritise and resonate far more strongly with financial savings, convenience, quality, and trust above environmental considerations.

The research demonstrates that a shift is required in how frames its messaging. Language that feels instructive or paternalistic such as “repair your items,” “reuse instead of throwing away,” or “your circular journey” can feel distant and risks alienating audiences who already feel overwhelmed by the demands of their life transitions.

We need to understand that the demands of life mean customers are already on a journey: a new family journey, a moving home journey, a new job journey. There is little room for a parallel “circular journey” running alongside these already consuming life transitions. Instead, circular behaviours must be seamlessly embedded within the transitions people are already navigating, presented as tools that serve their existing goals rather than a separate agenda requiring additional attention.

Although well-intentioned, framing circular behaviours in this way positions them as an additional obligation rather than something from which consumers derive tangible benefit or perceived utility.

In contrast, language that emphasises agency, intelligence, community, and even enjoyment, such as “share,” “trade,” “find a bargain,” or “buy smarter”, aligns more naturally with how participants already describe their own behaviour and with the journey they are already on. This approach avoids the implication that they need to be taught or corrected. These terms position circular behaviours as savvy, social, positive choices rather than moral obligations or chores. While this distinction is subtle, it fundamentally reframes the perceived utility consumers feel they will gain from their actions. Based on the consumer feedback, we feel this communication shift is needed to boost engagement with the circular economy.

Rather than leading with “repair” or “reuse”, terms that can eel parental in tone and be interpreted as directives (“you must repair, you must reuse”), communications should meet customers on their level and frame messaging in ways that emphasise the benefits consumers will receive. Communications should reflect the finding that participants do not describe themselves as “*being sustainable*,” even when actively engaging in circular behaviours. Instead, they describe themselves as practical, thrifty, or sensible. Messaging that mirrors this self-perception, rather than imposing an environmental identity is more likely to resonate authentically and drive engagement. The circular economy does not need to be sold as a movement to join. Instead, it needs to be recognised as a set of smart, practical choices that people are already making, and that circular communications, such as Circular.ie can make even easier.

Beyond communications, it is crucial that the building of an infrastructure is developed to encourage behaviour change. Using COM-B analysis, there needs to be capability and opportunity to engage in the behaviour change. While refined and optimised messaging can address motivation, the research reveals significant gaps in capability and opportunity that must be addressed through structural and systemic interventions.

These implications should therefore be treated as evidence-informed design principles rather than as confirmed behavioural effects. Future campaigns should validate message framing, timing, targeting and calls to action through experimental or quasi-experimental testing where possible, such as A/B testing, pilot campaigns or field trials. This is important because self-reported attitudes and intentions do not always predict actual behaviour, and campaign effectiveness depends on whether communication can translate interest into practical action.

7. From Evidence to Practice: Synthesising the Literature and Qualitative Findings

This report aimed to examine how circular economy communication can be designed around life events and life transitions in order to be more effective for behaviour change. Taken together, the literature review and qualitative research provide a coherent answer to this question. Life transitions matter because they disrupt routines, responsibilities, identities and consumption practices. However, they do not automatically produce circular or sustainable outcomes. Rather, they create moments of potential openness in which people may be more receptive to new behaviours, but only where those behaviours are practical, trusted, affordable, socially acceptable and supported by the surrounding systems of provision.

The literature review establishes the conceptual basis for this argument. Across the reviewed evidence, life events are understood as moments in which established habits and contextual cues are unsettled. Transitions such as moving home, becoming a parent, changing employment or retiring can make everyday practices more visible and

more open to reconsideration. This provides a useful lens for circular economy communication because many circular behaviours, including repair, reuse, sharing, second hand purchasing, product maintenance and waste prevention, are embedded in everyday routines. When those routines are disrupted, there may be an opportunity to shape how new practices are formed.

However, the literature also cautions against treating life transitions as simple or guaranteed "windows of opportunity". Transitions are often messy, prolonged and shaped by constraint. They can involve stress, time pressure, financial uncertainty, care responsibilities, changes in identity, and dependence on available infrastructure and services. For this reason, the review argues that life events should be understood as periods of heightened malleability rather than automatic leverage points. Communication may matter more during these periods, but its effectiveness depends on timing, framing, audience relevance and the practical feasibility of the behaviour being promoted.

The qualitative research strongly supports this interpretation, across the five transition moments examined: moving out of the parental home for the first time, buying or moving house, becoming a first-time parent, starting a new job and entering retirement. Participants described periods in which routines, priorities and material needs were actively being reorganised. These were not abstract life stages but lived moments of adjustment. People were making decisions about homes, belongings, transport, food, work routines, childcare, money, gifts, storage, disposal and social networks. In this sense, the qualitative findings confirm the literature's core claim that transitions are moments when consumption practices become unsettled and can be reconfigured.

At the same time, the qualitative research also shows why transition moments should not be treated too simplistically. The very moments in which people may be most open to change are also the moments in which they may have the least capacity to engage with additional demands. The qualitative research found that life transitions trigger heightened consumption alongside exceptionally malleable habits, but that time, cognitive load and financial pressures are also at their peak. This creates a central tension for circular economy communication: people may be more receptive to new behaviours, but they are also more likely to reject anything that feels complicated, risky, moralising or burdensome.

This finding is particularly important for CE communication. It suggests that the communication opportunity does not lie in asking people to step

outside their life transition in order to think about the circular economy. Rather, it lies in embedding circular behaviours within the transition people are already navigating. People are already on a moving home journey, a new parent journey, a new job journey or a retirement journey. A separate "circular journey" risks feeling like an additional responsibility. Circular communication is therefore more likely to resonate when it is presented as a practical support within these existing transitions.

Across both the literature and the qualitative research, one of the strongest recurring themes is that communication must be concrete and behaviour specific. The literature shows that broad awareness campaigns are unlikely to be sufficient if they are not connected to specific behaviours and enabling conditions. Similarly, the qualitative research shows that participants rarely respond to circularity as an abstract concept. Instead, they respond to specific actions when those actions solve a real problem: finding affordable furniture, passing on baby clothes, sourcing good-quality second hand tools, reducing waste after moving house, using refill systems where infrastructure exists, or using public transport when it is convenient and reliable.

This means that the circular economy does not need to be communicated only as a large systemic concept. While that broader framing remains important, the behavioural entry point is often much more immediate. For audiences in transition, circular behaviours are more persuasive when framed around practical benefits: saving money, reducing

● Circular communication is therefore more likely to resonate when it is presented as a practical support within these existing transitions.

hassle, accessing quality, making space, avoiding waste, trusting the source, or making a good decision at a pressured time. The qualitative findings are especially clear on this point. Participants often practised circular behaviours without describing themselves as "sustainable". They were more likely to frame their choices as practical, thrifty, sensible, good value or common sense.

This finding extends the literature in an important way. The literature identifies clarity, credibility, transparency and practical relevance as features of effective circular economy communication. The qualitative research adds that the language of circularity must also match how people understand themselves. If people do not see themselves as "sustainable consumers", then communication that asks them to adopt that identity may feel distant or imposed. By contrast, language that reflects agency and intelligence, such as "buy smarter", "share", "trade", "find a bargain", "buy well", "keep longer" or "make more of what you buy", is more closely aligned with how participants already describe their behaviour. This shifts circular communication away from instruction and towards recognition.

A second major point of integration concerns trust. The literature review highlights the importance of credible communication, transparent information and verifiable claims. The qualitative research provides detailed evidence of how trust operates in practice. Across the transition groups, the acceptability of circular behaviours, particularly second-hand purchasing, was strongly shaped by source, provenance, hygiene, warranty, visibility and perceived risk. Items from family, friends, neighbours or trusted local networks were categorically different from anonymous marketplace purchases. The same type of item could be acceptable or unacceptable depending on whether its history was known.

This trust logic was especially visible in attitudes toward second hand goods. The qualitative findings show that participants do not reject second hand items in principle. Rather, they apply a consistent set of rules. Furniture, tools, home improvement materials and durable structural items are often acceptable because they are seen as cleanable, impersonal and long-lasting. Items close to the body, such as mattresses, bedding and some textiles, are much more likely to be rejected because they carry a sense of previous ownership that cannot easily be removed. Appliances occupy a middle ground: they may be acceptable where warranty, energy efficiency, delivery and installation are clear, but they become risky where people fear hidden costs or shorter product life.

This finding directly addresses one of the evidence gaps identified in the previous report: the need for greater understanding of the cultural acceptability of circular behaviours such as repair, reuse and renting. It shows that acceptability is not determined by environmental attitude alone. It is shaped by everyday judgements about cleanliness, safety, quality, identity, convenience and trust. For CE communication, this means that communication should not simply tell people that second hand or refurbished options are better. It should help reduce uncertainty by making trust cues visible. This may include highlighting warranty, condition, quality checks, seller transparency, cleaning processes, repair history, energy performance, local availability and trusted routes for exchange.

A third point of synthesis concerns the emotional and identity dimensions of consumption. The literature shows that life transitions can involve identity change, role adjustment and periods of uncertainty. The qualitative findings show how this plays out in concrete consumption decisions. For first-time parents, some purchases are not merely functional; they are tied to care, competence, safety and the emotional preparation for becoming a parent. For new homeowners, furniture and appliances are not only practical items; they help create

Table 12: Emotional dimensions of purchasing decisions by life stage

Life Stage	Key decision	Emotional Dimension
First time Parents	Purchasing goods for the new child	Products represent level of care, competence and safety, and are tied to emotional preparation for parenthood
New homeowners	Purchasing furniture and appliances	Purchases help to create a sense of ownership, and shape/reinforce ideas of taste and identity.
People leaving their parental home	Purchasing goods	Purchasing for people in this transition can be tied to ideas of independence and control.
Retirees	Circular behaviours such as repair and reuse	Behaviours are emotionally linked to habits of thrift, stewardship, community exchange and responsibility to future generations.

a sense of ownership, taste and identity. For those moving out of the parental home, buying new can symbolise independence, cleanliness and control. For retirees, circular behaviours may connect with long-standing habits of thrift, stewardship, community exchange and responsibility to future generations.

This complicates a purely rational view of circular behaviour. Cost matters, but it is not the only factor. People may pay more for new items where those items carry emotional, symbolic or safety-related meaning. Equally, they may embrace second hand items where those items feel high quality, trusted, socially embedded or aligned with their identity. Circular economy communication therefore needs to account for both functional and emotional value. It should not assume that lower cost alone will be enough, nor that sustainability alone will be persuasive. The more effective framing is likely to combine practical value with reassurance, identity fit and reduced risk.

A fourth point of integration is the role of systems and infrastructure. The literature repeatedly shows that communication alone is unlikely to sustain behaviour change unless the surrounding system makes the behaviour feasible. Repair, reuse, refill, sharing and public transport depend not only on motivation, but on capability and opportunity. The qualitative findings strongly reinforce this. Participants were more willing to engage in circular behaviours where services were convenient, trusted and easy to access. Refill habits depended on infrastructure. Public transport depended on reliability. Second hand purchases depended on logistics such as collection, transport and delivery. Refurbished products depended on warranty and transparency. Local exchange depended on social networks and community trust.

This has a clear implication: circular economy communication must be connected to enabling pathways. It is not enough to make people aware of a circular option; the communication must also show how to act, where to go, what to expect, and why the option is safe, worthwhile and manageable. In behavioural terms, communication can support motivation, but it also needs to connect people to capability and opportunity. The qualitative report makes this explicit through its use of COM-B, noting that refined messaging can address motivation, but capability and opportunity require structural and systemic support.
The combined evidence also suggests that different life transitions require different communication emphases. Moving out of the parental home may be a moment for practical guidance around low-cost, trusted and space-efficient ways to set up a home.

7. From Evidence to Practice: Synthesising the Literature and Qualitative Findings

Moving house may be a moment for communications around staged purchasing, reuse, furniture quality, decluttering, repair, refurbishment and trusted second hand routes. First-time parenthood may require careful messaging that recognises safety, hygiene, exhaustion and the emotional importance of care, while promoting low-risk circular behaviours such as hand-me-down clothes, borrowing short-use items, passing on unused gifts, and using trusted networks. Starting a new job may be a moment to shape commuting, clothing, lunch, equipment and energy routines before they settle. Retirement may be a moment to build on existing values around thrift, stewardship, community exchange and long-term responsibility.

However, while the specific emphasis may differ by transition, the underlying communication principle remains consistent. Circular behaviours should be framed as helping people manage the transition they are already experiencing. This is the key bridge between the literature review and the qualitative research. The literature explains why transitions may create openness: routines are disrupted, identities are shifting and decisions are being made. The qualitative research explains what communication must do within that openness: reduce friction, build trust, respect emotional realities, reflect people's own language, and connect circular behaviours to immediate benefits.

The qualitative research also extends the literature by showing that circularity is often already present in everyday life, but under different names. People pass on baby clothes, use charity shops, buy second hand furniture, repair items, use local group chats, accept hand-me-downs, refill where possible, avoid waste, and make products last longer. Yet these actions are not always understood as part of the circular economy. This creates both a communication challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that circular economy terminology may not be intuitive. The opportunity is that circular communications does not always need to create entirely new behaviours from scratch. In many cases, it can recognise, connect and strengthen behaviours that people already perform.

This point is important for the overall direction of CE communication. Rather than positioning the circular economy as a new movement that people must join, the evidence suggests that it may be more effective to present it as a way of naming and supporting smart, practical choices that people already value. This approach can make circularity feel less abstract and more socially familiar. It can also avoid the risk of moralising communication, which the qualitative findings suggest may alienate audiences already under pressure.

8. Recommendations

Taken together, the literature review and qualitative research support a life-event-based model of circular economy communication built around five principles.

- First, communication should be timed around moments when routines are being disrupted and decisions are being made. This includes anticipatory phases before the transition is complete, as well as the early adjustment period when new habits are forming. In practical terms, this means identifying transition-related touchpoints where people are already seeking information or support. For example, moving-home communication could be linked to tenancy, utility, local authority or home-renovation channels; new-parent messaging could work through parenting groups, childcare networks or family-support services; and retirement-related communication could connect with community organisations or trusted public information channels. Digital targeting may also be useful where based on contextual signals, such as searches for moving, decluttering, baby equipment or retirement planning. However, targeting should remain ethical and non-intrusive, prioritising voluntary, contextual and

partnership-based routes rather than sensitive personal profiling.

- Second, communication should be specific to the transition context. The message should respond to the practical and emotional priorities of the moment, rather than applying generic sustainability messaging across all audiences.

- Third, communication should lead with tangible benefits. Financial savings, convenience, quality, trust, durability, reduced hassle and better use of resources are often more motivating than abstract environmental appeals.

- Fourth, communication should build trust and reduce perceived risk. This is especially important for second hand, refurbished, repaired or shared goods, where acceptability depends on source, provenance, hygiene, warranty and transparency.

- Fifth, communication should be linked to enabling systems. People need more than motivation; they need accessible services, infrastructure, information, logistics and social support that make circular choices feasible.

The overall synthesis is therefore clear. Life transitions create meaningful opportunities for circular economy communication, but these opportunities are conditional. They depend on whether communication is well-timed, emotionally realistic, practically useful, trustworthy and connected to systems that enable action. The evidence does not support a model in which people are simply persuaded into circular behaviour through awareness-raising. Instead, it supports a model in which Circular.ie helps people make better decisions during moments when they are already reorganising their lives.

In this sense, the most important contribution of this report is the shift from demographic communication to transition-aware communication. The focus is not simply on who people are, but on what they are going through, what decisions they are making, what pressures they face, what forms of support they trust, and what routines are about to become normal. By aligning circular economy communication with these moments, CE communication can move beyond general awareness and towards more targeted, practical and behaviourally informed engagement.

8. Recommendations

Ultimately, the combined evidence suggests that circular economy communication is most likely to be effective when it does not ask people to add circularity to their lives as an extra concern. Instead, it should show how circular choices can help people navigate the life changes already in front of them. This is where the literature and qualitative research most strongly converge: behaviour change is not only about changing attitudes, but about supporting people at the moment when routines are being rebuilt, decisions are being made, and new patterns of consumption are taking shape.

9. Research Gaps and Future Directions

While the literature review and qualitative research provide a strong basis for life-event-based circular economy communication, several areas would benefit from further investigation. The evidence suggests that life transitions can create moments of openness, but more research is needed to understand how these moments operate in practice, particularly in the Irish context. One important gap is the limited amount of empirical research directly linking life events with circular economy communication. The literature provides useful insight into behaviour change during transitions, and the qualitative research adds depth by showing how people experience these moments. However, future work could test more directly how people respond to circular economy messages before, during and after specific transitions such as moving home, becoming a parent, starting a new job or retiring.

Further research is also needed on timing. The findings suggest that communication may be most effective when it reaches people during anticipatory or early adjustment phases, before new routines become fixed. However, different transitions involve different decision points. Future research

could map these moments more clearly and identify when circular economy communication is most likely to be useful, noticed and acted upon. The acceptability of circular behaviours also requires further exploration. The qualitative research shows that trust, hygiene, source, warranty, quality and proximity to the body strongly shape whether people feel comfortable with second hand, repaired or refurbished items.

Future studies could examine these factors across a wider range of behaviours, including renting, sharing, refill, repair, product maintenance and peer-to-peer exchange. There is also a need to move beyond attitudes and self-reported intentions. People may support circular behaviours in principle, but actual decisions are shaped by cost, convenience, time pressure, emotional meaning and available infrastructure. Future research should therefore examine what people do in real decision-making contexts, and test which barriers prevent circular behaviours from becoming normal practice.

Communication frames should also be tested in practice. The qualitative findings suggest that people may respond more strongly to language around saving money, reducing hassle, finding quality, buying smarter and making more of what they already have, rather than to abstract sustainability language. Future campaign research could compare different message frames and assess which are most effective for different life transitions and behaviours. Finally, future work should give more attention to the relationship between communication and enabling systems. The evidence is clear that communication alone is unlikely to produce sustained behaviour change where circular options are expensive, inconvenient, unavailable or difficult to trust. Further research should therefore examine how communication works when combined with practical supports such as repair services, reuse networks, warranties, refill infrastructure, collection systems, local directories or incentives.

Overall, future research should focus on testing how circular economy communication can become more behaviour-specific, transition-aware and practically useful. This would help CE communication move beyond general awareness-raising and build a stronger evidence base for communication that supports real circular action during moments when people are already reorganising their routines, priorities and consumption habits.

10. Limitations

This report should be interpreted considering several limitations. The literature review used a targeted scoping approach rather than a full systematic review, meaning that the aim was to map relevant concepts, themes and evidence rather than capture every available study. The reviewed literature also included a substantial proportion of conceptual and international research, which limits the extent to which all findings can be directly transferred to the Irish context. In addition, the qualitative research provides rich insight into lived experiences across five life transitions, but it is based on a limited number of focus groups and should not be treated as statistically representative of the wider population. As with all qualitative research, the findings are designed to deepen understanding of motivations, barriers and meanings, rather than quantify the prevalence of behaviours. Finally, because life transitions are shaped by personal circumstances, infrastructure, income, geography and social networks, the findings should be understood as indicative of key patterns and communication opportunities, rather than as universal conclusions for all audiences.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, this report shows that circular economy communication is most powerful when it begins with people's real lives. Life transitions are moments of pressure, uncertainty and change, but they are also moments when new routines, values and choices can take shape. This reinforces a wider mission for CE communications: to make circular living not only visible, but practical, trusted and possible for communities across Ireland. The task is not simply to tell people why the circular economy matters, but to support them at the moments when they are already rethinking how they live, buy, use, repair, share and let go. In doing so, CE communication can help move circularity from an abstract policy ambition into everyday practice, connecting evidence, communication and lived experience in ways that support a more resourceful, inclusive and sustainable society.

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