

Social Marketing and Water Conservation

Author: **Liam Hastings**

Faculty Supervisor: **Christy Tu**

City Supervisor: **Mark Svenson**

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Overview

Lethbridge uses a lot of water, and receives little rainfall compared to other parts of Alberta. Over the past 3 years, rainfall in the Oldman watershed has been insufficient to meet the demands of waterboards, businesses, and residents in the area. This raises the question: **How do we encourage residents to decrease their water consumption?** I approached this study from a social marketing perspective and found that providing accurate and meaningful information in a timely manner can help encourage conservation. I worked along side Mark Svenson to gather information on the issues affecting Lethbridge. I also worked with Dr. Christy Tu at University of Lethbridge, to understand how social marketing can encourage cooperation. This allowed me to understand issues impacting Lethbridge, and how to create salient information.

Public Resources and Interdependence

Water is considered a common-pool-resource, it is difficult and immoral to restrict access, yet faces rival consumption, where one person's use of water reduces availability for others. Common resources must be responsibly managed for sustainability. We cannot restrict access but we can highlight the interdependent nature of water conservation. Lethbridge relies on residents and businesses for success. Conservation goals can best be achieved through cooperation from everyone. Water conservation is a highly interdependent situation: success is found through City wide cooperation. An individuals actions are impacted by their perceptions of outcomes, risks, and the actions of others. Conflicting goals, unequal power dynamics and perceptions of community efforts may impact the desire to cooperate. Using social marketing techniques, it is possible to change perceptions. Highlighting benefits, norms and actions of the City can help encourage cooperation.

Social Marketing

Social marketing is the application of marketing principles to influence behavior change for the benefit of society. Using the interconnected nature of water, we can use information to encourage participation. **Social Norms** - Social norms describe what the acceptable behaviors are in situations. Communicating that “80% of individuals in Lethbridge have installed rain barrels” informs individuals of the behaviors of their neighbors. People want to fit in, and will adopt social norms to do so. **Equity Theory** - Individuals look to leaders in the community to understand expected behavior. In an interdependent scenarios, leaders demonstrate cooperation by communicating how they are conserving. **Social Identity** - Social Identity explains how people see themselves in comparison to others. Do we want a neighborhood, city or regional identity? With interdependence we want individuals to adopt the goals of a social group. Highlighting how conservation is a City effort can help. **Framing effect** - No one likes a loss, when we view an outcome as taking something away from us we are less likely to cooperate. Highlighting the benefits of conserving water can encourage cooperation.

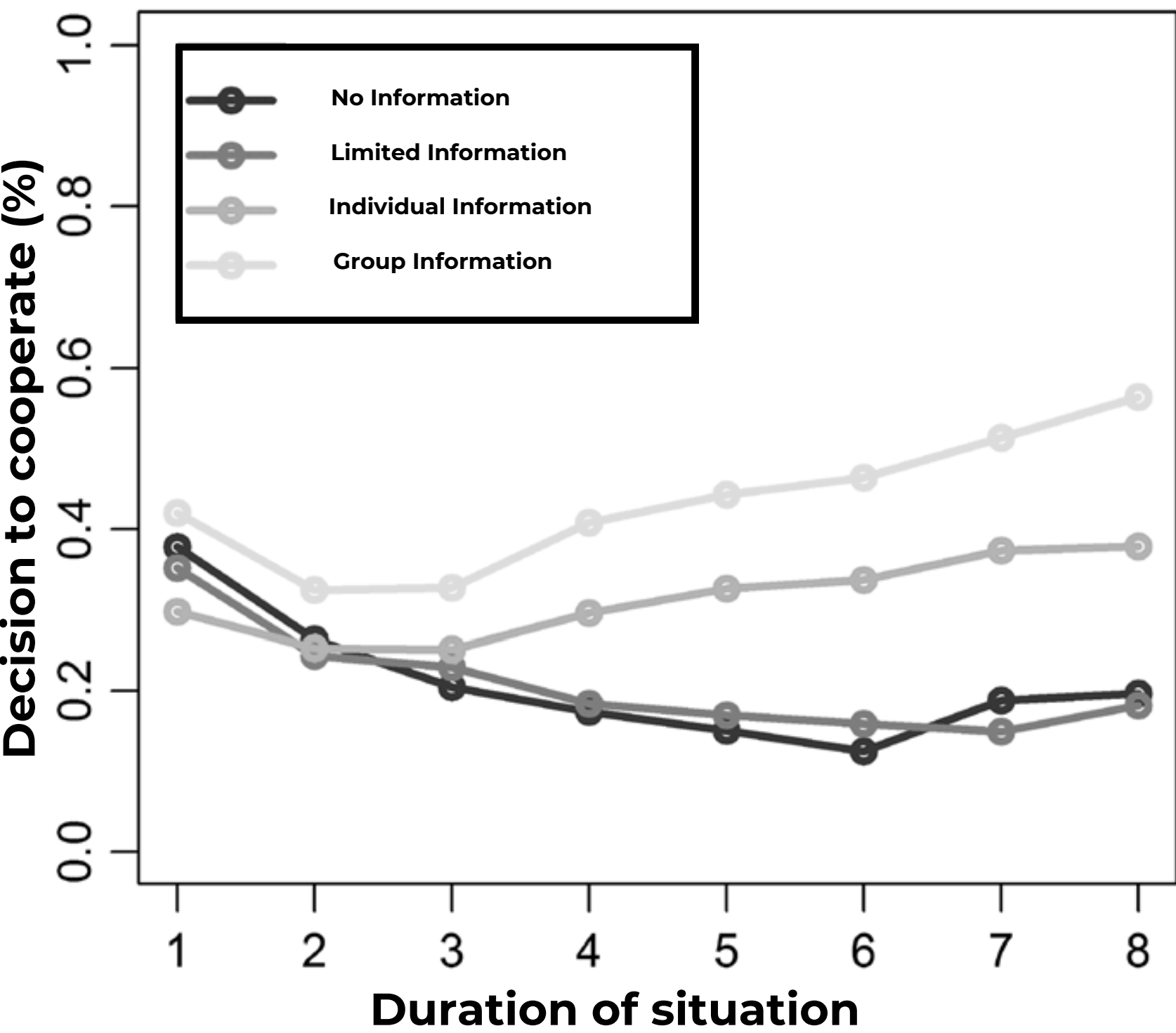
What are other cities doing?

It is beneficial to understand common approaches taken by cities in a broad range of scenarios. I looked at 12 cities, to discover how they were encouraging water conservation. Below is a list of common actions. **Social Norms** - Reno, Calgary, Phoenix and Vancouver inform the public of how many people are conserving. **Benefits** - Charlottetown, Copenhagen, Melbourne and San Diego have highlighted the economic and recreational benefits of conservation. **Actions** - Vancouver, Phoenix, and Calgary have all communicated the actions taken by City officials to reduce water. **Subsidizing** - An action undertaken by every City analyzed was the distribution of free, or inexpensive water conservation tools.

What can Lethbridge do?

- 1. Highlight their actions** - Communicating ways City and elected officials have conserved water
- 2. Communicate Benefits** - Fishing, energy savings, agriculture. Identifying how Lethbridge as a whole, and its citizens benefits.
- 3. Communicate Norms** - Letting people know how many residents have reduced their water consumption and by how much.

Impact of information on cooperation



Conclusion

Conserving water is a City wide effort, where everyone benefits. We can use social norms, positive framing, group identity and leadership to help encourage participation.

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