

Technical sheet

REUSE & CONSUMER ACCEPTANCE



This technical data sheet addresses issues relating to consumer acceptance of reuse solutions, including both deposit-refund schemes and refills. It is intended for professionals working within and with companies in the agri-food and cosmetics industries.

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INTRODUCTION

Plastic pollution is still largely perceived by citizens as a waste management issue. 71% of them consider eco-friendly packaging to be recyclable packaging¹, ahead of reusable packaging. In France, these responses can largely be explained by 20 years of education and awareness-raising among the population about recycling at home and outside the home. It would seem that the environmental benefits of reusable packaging are not yet sufficiently known to citizens.

However, the shift from a recycling mindset to a reuse mindset requires more than just a technical change, as it involves a real transformation in consumption patterns and habits.

The impact of an innovation on consumption habits and practices will vary depending on the type of innovation proposed.

- A. Optimisation innovation:** reducing the impact of packaging by reducing its weight, without impacting behaviour.
- B. Redesign innovation:** changing the formula of the cream, which will impact its texture and therefore the packaging used.
- C. Procedural eco-solution:** fair trade initiatives that do not impact usage or behaviour (e.g. green energy suppliers, etc.).
- D. Behavioural eco-solution:** the sale of bulk products, the deployment of

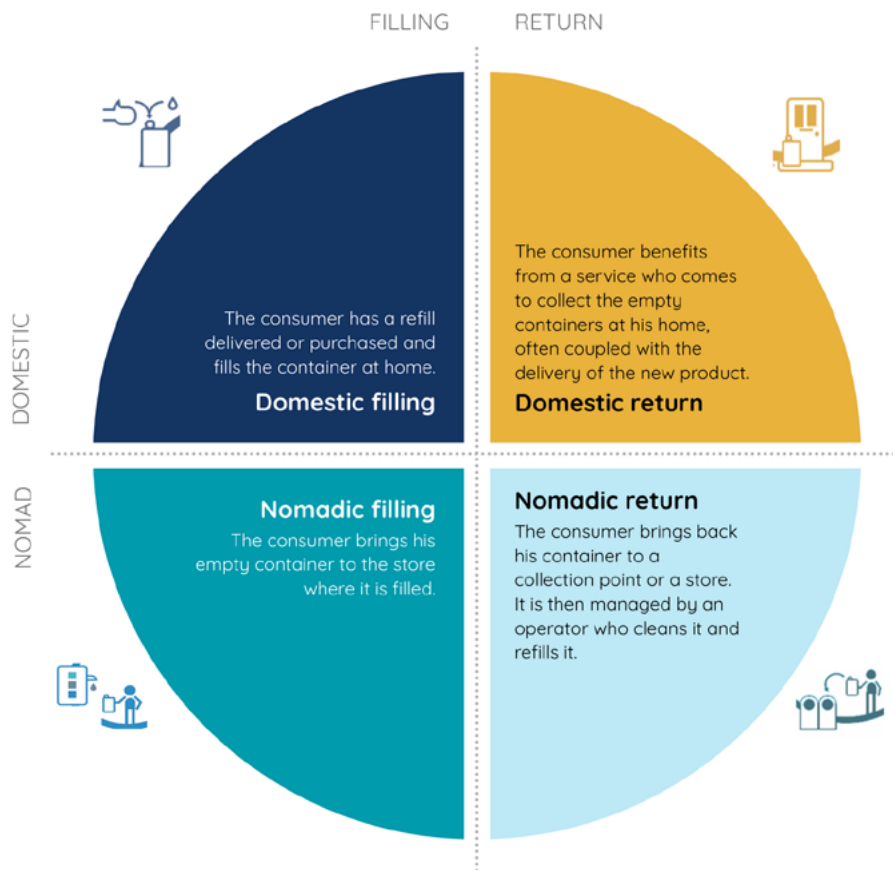
returnable containers that involve changes in usage and behaviour for consumers.

Conventional reuse (understood as *réemploi* in French) is defined as «*any operation by which substances, materials or products that are not waste are used again for the same purpose for which they were designed*». It is essential to distinguish this from the term creative reuse (*réutilisation* in French), which refers to «*any operation by which substances, materials or products that have become waste are used again, generally for a purpose other than that for which they were designed*». Although in everyday language the term reuse is used interchangeably, it refers to two different realities in the French environmental code. In English, the distinction between these two words is not commonly used and they are both expressed by the same term. In this technical data sheet, the word “reuse” refers to “conventional reuse”.

Reuse solutions reduce the production and use of single-use packaging, and therefore plastic pollution. Reuse can take different forms, depending on how the reused packaging is distributed and collected. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation classifies these models (see diagram below) according to: a) whether the packaging is refilled or returned to the producer, and b) where the operation takes place.

¹Adelphé, Citéo (2021) «The environmental perception of packaging – Shopper Studies».

Technical sheet - Reuse and consumer acceptance



When French people are asked about reuse, particularly the deposit return scheme, the majority are in favour². Although there is enthusiasm for the idea, translating it into new consumption habits requires many adjustments, both structurally and individually.

In response to this enthusiasm and under the impetus of public authorities, numerous initiatives have been launched. The projects are still in the experimental phase. While there is no magic formula for getting consumers to embrace reuse solutions, certain lessons are already emerging.

² 92% of consumers indicate their support for the introduction of deposits in France» – Reloop x Ipsos (2023)



Understanding consumers and their different facets

A consumer is defined as «a person who performs a series of actions in relation to a service or product from the moment of purchase to its ultimate use, with a view to satisfying their expectations as fully as possible throughout the normal expected period of use»³.

As seen previously, French consumers are largely in favour of the deposit return scheme. However, initial tests show that this favourable position does not automatically translate into adoption of the solutions proposed by these pilot projects. Several factors explain this discrepancy and should be taken into account when implementing a solution.

A. Differences between consumers

Consumers react differently to sustainability issues, and among committed consumers, three levels of commitment can be distinguished⁴:

1. **Those who incorporate sustainability principles into all aspects of their daily lives** (purchasing, usage and sharing concerns in private and public spheres). While some unsustainable practices remain, these are considered difficult to avoid.
2. **Those who adopt sustainable practices occasionally and randomly** in response to a stimulus such as advertising or in

a particular context. For example, only in the workplace.

3. **Those who adopt a sustainable practice to compensate for an unsustainable practice.** For example, consumers will compensate for not consuming environmentally friendly products by sorting their waste.

The way in which reuse solutions are communicated must be adapted to these different types of consumers in order to encourage their acceptance.

Those with a positive attitude towards the environment will need help and support in reusing items. Those who do not have a favourable attitude towards the environment will need more personalised and reasoned support to encourage them to reuse items.

These differences may also require **adapting the offering to meet the varied needs of customers.** Indeed, a one-size-fits-all approach could exclude certain consumers. That is why, when a reuse system is designed to be «easy to use», we need to ask ourselves what this simplicity means. It will not mean the same thing to everyone and will require customisation according to usage and profiles.

To successfully adapt the system, it is necessary to conduct local assessments and test different methods.

³ Definition of « Consumer »

⁴ S. Dekhili, A. Merle, A. Ochs, « Sustainable Marketing » (2021)

B. Balancing benefits and costs

When an individual consumes a product or service, they are not only seeking to satisfy a functional need. Consumers weigh up the benefits they expect to receive against the costs they perceive.

When the benefits outweigh the costs, consumers are more likely to adopt the product or service. It is this trade-off that occurs between a consumer's motivation to consume reusable products and the barriers that dissuade them from doing so.

The types of benefits that consumers seek include:

- **Economic benefits** that allow consumers to optimise the cost/value ratio;
- **Utility benefits**, when the product or service effectively meets a specific need;
- **Identity benefits**, which allow consumers to enhance their self-image or strengthen their sense of belonging to a group;
- **The spiritual benefit** that provides a sense of alignment with consumer values;
- **The hedonic benefit** that generates immediate pleasure;
- **The eudaimonic benefit** that promotes a sense of lasting well-being and personal fulfilment. These benefits require effort, as they necessitate understanding the system or acquiring a new skill.

These benefits can serve the consumer themselves, others or the environment. They can be repositioned according to the consumer's deep motivations⁴. The following priorities can be identified:

- **Priority n°1 – Self-centered benefits** (e.g. *economic, utilitarian, hedonic, eudaimonic benefits*): These benefits are close to home and directly experienced. They are considered the dominant motivation for human behaviour, as individuals ensure that they derive personal benefit from their actions. This is therefore where the greatest levers and most important values for an individual lie.
- **Priority n°2 – Altruistic-social benefits, environmental-biospheric benefits** (e.g. *identity and spiritual benefits*): These are future benefits that are distant from oneself and difficult to feel. They do not constitute the primary motivation, as they are more closely linked to concern for the well-being of other people or species.



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⁴ S. Dekhili, A. Merle, A. Ochs, « Sustainable Marketing » (2021)

Opposite these benefits are experiential, social and knowledge costs. These are obstacles perceived by consumers when using products:

- **Experiential costs**, i.e. the effort required;
- **Social costs**, i.e. the opinions of others;
- **Knowledge or cognitive costs**, i.e. lack of information or understanding about how the product works.

For example, in the case of deposit schemes, cognitive costs may arise as consumers question where to return reusable containers, how the system operates, etc.

In the context of reuse, the challenge is to reinforce the perception of benefits while reducing costs or barriers. It is therefore necessary to highlight the advantages of use and any savings made, the positive impacts on the environment, and belonging to a sustainable and social movement, while ensuring the visibility of the system, simplifying returns, promoting ease of use, and implementing economic incentives.

C. A gap between intention and action

1. How can we create intention?

To create intention, we must first consider **the consumer's personal attitudes and values**, i.e. whether they feel concerned about plastic-related issues, whether they think their plastic consumption has an impact, and whether they believe that switching to reuse will have a positive impact. Indeed, each person is influenced by different factors⁴:

- **Social factors :**

- ◇ **Social norms** : Rules or criteria governing behaviour in society or used to assess whether behaviour complies with customs, morals and laws⁵.
- ◇ **Social identities**,
- ◇ **Social desirability**: An individual tends to conform to the values, beliefs and opinions generally accepted in the social group to which they belong or, at least, to express themselves and give answers in line with these values so as not to lose the group's esteem⁶.

- **Individual factors**

- ◇ **Sociodemographic**,
- ◇ **Psychological**,
- ◇ **Behavioral**,

- **Contextual factors**

- ◇ **Physical environment**,
- ◇ **Time horizon** : Past or future perspective to which an individual's present behaviour refers⁷.
- ◇ **Social environment**.

It should be noted that this motivation is not only found among those who are most committed to the environment. Several segments of the population are willing to make an effort if they understand the ecological benefits of the action.

Then there is also the **perception of what others are doing**, i.e. whether the behaviour is normalised, socially valued or whether the person feels they are going against the grain. **The desire to be part of a group that «does the right thing»** is an important lever in pushing consumers to take action. When the image conveyed is positive, it can create a positive dynamic and generate a snowball effect, with more and more consumers joining in by imitation.

⁴ S. Dekhili, A. Merle, A. Ochs, « Sustainable Marketing » (2021)

⁵ Definition of « Social norm »

⁶ Definition of « Social desirability »

⁷ Definition of « Time horizon »

Finally, there is the **feeling of competence**, i.e. whether the person understands what is required of them, whether they know how to do it and whether the reuse service is accessible to them in practice.

These various factors will combine and impact an individual's commitment, creating a gap between their values and their intention to take action—therefore affecting their willingness to consider adopting reuse practices.

Citeo's ReUse project⁸ is a good indicator, as it aims to scale up deposit schemes to a national level. Initial public data shows that of the 100,000 packages put on sale, 82,000 have already been purchased, reflecting a social movement that is taking shape. It should be noted that, in parallel with the roll-out of returnable products and the installation of **reverse vending machines** (RVM), multiple multi-channel communication campaigns have been launched nationwide.

2. Barriers to adoption

Although consumers are in favour of reuse and intend to adopt this new behaviour, it can be difficult to take action. Indeed, intentions only come to fruition if certain conditions are met.

Once the intention has been formed, there may be obstacles to acting: the effort and sacrifice required, lack of skills or knowledge, procrastination, actual or perceived cost, lack of alternatives and limited availability of the products they usually consume.

In 2025, consumers who are committed to becoming more responsible consumers

or to changing their habits ranked the obstacles they encounter as follows⁹:

1. **Perception that the price is too high.**
2. **Lack of responsible products in shops and supermarkets.**
3. **Feeling that there is no point in making an effort since the majority of people do not want to change their consumption habits.**
4. Unwillingness to give up pleasures.
5. Feeling that so-called sustainable products are inferior and less effective. This obstacle has increased significantly compared to the 2024 results.
6. Too time-consuming.
7. Difficulty resisting commercial incentives.
8. Lack of knowledge about the steps to take.
9. Fear of how others will perceive them.

For those who are not involved, if price is the main obstacle, **the perception of collective inaction plays a greater role than for those who are involved**, as this is the second obstacle highlighted by the latter⁹.

⁸ The ReUse project rolled out in four French regions (Brittany, Hauts-de-France, Normandy and Pays de la Loire)

⁹ GreenFlex-Ademe, «Responsible Consumption Barometer – 2025 Results»

Consumers and reuse: moving from intention to action

The adoption of reuse solutions by consumers is a complex process that requires **support at every stage of the purchase and return journey**.

If consumers are unaware of the offer or do not understand how it works, they will not be able to embrace the reuse solution on offer.

Consumers may also drop out at the return stage, for example if the return machine (RVM) is not working or is not compatible. **The failure of the return process** has emerged as a key issue in the literature and field tests, both when consumers try it for the first time and when they try to maintain this behaviour over time.

It is also possible **that they may drop out if their first experience was not satisfactory**. For example, if they waste time at the checkout due to a problem or if the staff have not been sufficiently trained.

This is why it is essential to **consider the entire journey** and identify all potential break points. Switching from disposable to reusable products requires a whole host of changes in consumer behaviour and habits. In order to support consumers through these changes, it is essential that companies optimise the consumer journey, ensuring its visibility and ease of use.

A. Enhancing the visibility of the system – recommendations and advice

Communicating about reuse requires companies to adapt their communication practices, both in terms of the messages to be conveyed and the channels to be used.

To increase the adoption rate of initiatives, particularly in projects related to reuse, several levers have been identified:

- **Raise public awareness**
- **Improve the visibility of point-of-sale displays,**
- **Expand the offering to meet a variety of expectations.**

These actions are essential to remove barriers and encourage the gradual adoption of the systems.

1. Adapting corporate communication

To avoid the main pitfalls associated with environmental communication and promote the sustainable adoption of new systems, several recommendations can be made.

Firstly, **transparency and access to clear information** are essential levers for establishing a relationship of trust with consumers. Messages must be consistent with the brand's actual actions. It is better to refrain from communicating than to disseminate a message that is disconnected from the company's practices, at the risk of arousing mistrust.

With this in mind, it is recommended **to prioritise individual, concrete and immediate benefits for the user**, followed by **environmental or societal benefits**. This approach facilitates acceptance by first showing what the consumer has to gain personally.

In addition, rather than on isolated campaigns, brands should focus on

continuous, multi-channel communication, which is essential for embedding behaviours over the long term.

Another challenge concerns the relevance of messages. **Communication must be tailored to different targets, their practices and their level of awareness.** Audiences who are already convinced expect more specific information and concrete proposals for progress, while those who are less committed require more education.

It should be noted that it will be more difficult to convince people who are resistant to environmental issues, so it is preferable to focus communication efforts on customer segments that are most mobilised or sensitive to these issues.



Focus on the dual-system theory developed by Kahneman and Tversky

In this theory, decisions can be made in two different ways:

The rational cognitive path

This is the longer path, in which we use our knowledge, beliefs and information. It requires mental effort because we use the information we already have, acquire new information, compare it, etc. This path is slower because it allows us to increase our knowledge. However, this is not necessarily the route we use on a daily basis when shopping, for example.

The automatic and emotional fast track

This is the path we use when we go shopping. This path uses decision-making shortcuts, known as decision-making heuristics. For example, if we want to buy an organic product, we will look for green packaging because this colour is associated with natural and organic farming. You don't need a lot of knowledge to use this fast track. However, we can be misled, as green packaging is not always associated with organic products. Furthermore, we will always tend to prioritise our short-term interests, even if this is to the detriment of the collective long-term interest.



Moreover the effectiveness of traditional media is declining. It is becoming essential to opt for simple, clear messages, while incorporating new communication channels or unconventional media to maintain attention.

2. Ensuring the visibility of the offer

Distributors play a key role in ensuring the visibility of the offer to consumers. To trigger a change in behaviour, it is important to communicate effectively. Practitioners in the field and the literature have shown that it is not enough to inform customers once at the entrance to the shop or in an advertisement. **Consumers must be informed throughout the entire process: before, during and after the purchase, and when returning the packaging.** It is essential to set up multiple points of contact and provide constant reminders through signage or explanations from staff.

Beyond alerting consumers to the availability of the offer, communication must also serve to maintain their attention. These efforts are all the more important when these actions are new to many users and take time to become ingrained. This is particularly true for products with a relatively long shelf life, such as cosmetics. Customers must be able to remember the availability of reuse options several months after purchase.

If communication is not maintained over time, the practice may not continue and may be abandoned.

A study conducted in 2024 identified the sources of awareness of the reuse deposit scheme in a shop¹⁰.

- 45% of customers discovered the initiative through the visibility of the machine in the shop (RVM);

- 27% of customers discovered it through information on the shelves;
- 22% via the store entrance;
- 18% via bottle collars;
- 12% via word of mouth;
- 12% via a promotion before the day of the study;
- 8% via shop staff
- And 4% via the internet.

Reverse Vending Machines

Reverse Vending Machines (RVM) play a dual role: they make the system visible and reassure customers. Seeing the return point at the time of purchase lets customers know where to deposit their containers to get their deposit back.

Furthermore, customers at a Leclerc store in the Nantes region shared that the colourful RVM located at the store entrance had piqued their curiosity, which helped to lend credibility to the initiative and anchor the possibility of testing and adopting reuse in the minds of consumers.



¹⁰ Study conducted by Système U in October 2024

In-store signage

Beyond the machine itself, it is essential to put **signage** in place **to enable customers to distinguish between reusable and single-use containers**, as well as to quickly identify the deposit amount. This is achieved through labels on the containers and in-store POS (point-of-sale) advertising.

Shops are places that are overloaded with information. It is difficult for consumers to take in all the messages that companies and distributors are trying to convey to them. Numerous field tests have highlighted the lack of visibility of the offer, as consumers do not see the POS advertising and therefore do not see the offer at all.

In light of this observation, the deployment of **POS advertising with brighter colours and styles** has had a positive impact on consumer engagement. By standing out more from the crowd, they make information more visible to consumers. This is why the colour purple is used in the ReUse project led by Citeo.

Packaging

The Réseau Vrac et Réemploi association has developed a pictogram to enable distributors and consumers to quickly identify reusable containers.



Réseau Vrac et Réemploi



Info-Réemploi



Projet ReUse

More and more QR codes are being incorporated into packaging or signage to provide consumers with additional information about both the product and the return points. However, it seems that they are not widely used and that a simple «Bring me back» message is sufficient. It should be noted that it is mandatory to include information on the packaging about where to return the product.

It is also possible to make the offer visible by offering a different container for the returnable product than for the single-use product. This is the test carried out by Système U and its own brand with aperitif products sold in reusable jars rather than single-use bags.

B. Optimising the consumer journey

1. Rethinking the consumer journey

The architecture of choices

Another lever that companies can use is to change the «default options». Currently, reuse requires an active choice.

There are a few initiatives that attempt to reverse this logic by making the reusable option the default. This is particularly the case at IKEA and certain bakery brands in Germany. They have found that reuse adoption rates have increased rapidly. At IKEA, they have seen a 40% reduction in the use of disposable cups. However, it is important to note that data on the proper use of reusable items has not yet been released. There is a risk of a rebound effect if reusable cups are thrown away or misused.

It is also possible to eliminate single-use packaging entirely. This is the case with Drive tout nu, which specialises in reusable packaging. They have extremely high return rates, as the drive-through format allows customers to return all their containers at once. Furthermore, they only sell reusable products, so there is no confusion on the part of consumers, either about the concept or how it works.

Simplicity

When designing a deposit system for reuse, the simplicity of the action inevitably becomes a key consideration. However, what may seem straightforward to one customer segment might not be for another. It is therefore essential to explore a range of scenarios.

For example, in Canada, the deposit operator ConsigneAction has considered several return methods to make the system as attractive as possible to as many consumers as possible. Some customers prefer to deposit their returnable containers in a machine where they can immediately collect their deposit, while others prefer to deposit an entire bag identified by a QR code so that someone else can sort it and the deposit amount can be credited to their account later.

It is therefore necessary **to offer a variety of solutions and never assume what is universally perceived as «simple»**. This adaptation is a key point: it is necessary to assess the situation locally and test different methods.

2. The case of deposits

Deposits: striking a balance

A deposit refers to an additional sum of money (a few pence) paid when purchasing a packaged product at the point of sale, which is then recovered when the packaging is returned¹¹.

Although it is possible to deploy a reuse system without a financial deposit, in practice most trials use the deposit as a financial incentive for consumers to return the container. It is important that the deposit price is visible so that it can be separated from the product price.

There is an issue surrounding the amount of the deposit, both in terms of not discouraging consumers from participating in the system and in terms of financing the investments made by companies.

A study conducted for ADEME on a panel of 7,000 French consumers showed that **the higher the deposit amount, the greater the willingness to return the container, but at the same time, if the deposit amount is too high, it discourages the initial purchase**. It is therefore necessary to find the right balance between a deposit that is sufficient to encourage return, without discouraging the initial purchase. It should be noted that this will also depend on the type of consumer.

Currently, reusable food packaging is generally sold at the same price as its single-use equivalents, with the addition of a deposit. This deposit may vary depending on the type of packaging. It can therefore give consumers the impression of a price penalty.

In the case of cosmetics, reuse tests have been carried out with a deposit ranging from €1 to €2. This amount is justified by the fact that the type of use is different, turnover is lower and consumers seem to find a higher deposit on cosmetic products more acceptable.

¹¹ *Zero Waste France (2024) «Deposit for reuse: bringing it back (at last)!»*

Focus on the MaConsigne system deployed in Monaco

To reduce disposable packaging consumption, the Principality of Monaco introduced a reusable deposit scheme in 2022. The unique feature of the system lies in how it works: customers do not pay the deposit at the time of purchase. Instead, they must create an account on an app. At the time of purchase, the deposit container is linked to their account through the app, and if the customer does not return the container within 14 days, a deposit of €7 is charged.

Summary of the customer journey

1. **The customer downloads the MaConsigne app.**
2. **The customer creates an account and enters their bank details.** Their customer QR code is then generated, and they can use the app to find participating retailers and the location of return points.
3. **When purchasing a returnable product, the customer presents their customer QR code** to the retailer at the checkout. The retailer scans the QR code and the container to link them. No upfront deposit is charged.
4. The customer can consume their product and has **14 days to return the container** to one of the scheme's return points.
5. If the container is not returned within 14 days, **a deposit of €7 is charged.**

System logistics

An external service provider (Lemniscate) has taken charge of the system's logistics, which involves the following steps:

1. Interested retailers order the desired number of containers, which are delivered daily by the service provider.
2. Customers return their containers to one of the return points located throughout

the area (23 points covering an area of 2 km).

3. The service provider empties and cleans the stations daily.
4. The service provider transports the dirty containers to the washing facility, checks their quality and returns the clean containers to the circuit.

This system had the advantage of removing the additional cost barrier that deposits can represent at the time of purchase. The system had a particularly high return rate (over 99%) and by the end of the test period, around 500 deposit containers were being sold per day.

The system was offered at 23 points of sale, including Carrefour stores for takeaway salads and poké bowls, in the deli and rotisserie sections, and also for certain red fruits at the assisted point of sale for fruit and vegetables. However, the system struggled to gain acceptance among customers. They said they were **reluctant to register their bank details in an app**, that the system seemed too complex, and that the dedicated checkouts at Carrefour stores wasted their time.

Although the system was discontinued at the end of 2025, the number of customers using MaConsigne had grown steadily throughout the trial period.



Reuse without deposit, some feedback

The deposit is not an end in itself; it encourages consumers to return their containers and ensures a return rate. However, it can be a double-edged sword, as it may discourage some consumers from purchasing reusable packaging. Consumers may fear losing money if they forget to return the container or do not know where to return it. These situations can cause stress or even prevent them from making a purchase if they perceive the system to be complex.

However, a few tests have been carried out without a deposit system. But this option requires investment on the part of the supplier.

This is the case, for example, with Carrefour and Drive tout nu, which have launched “*Corners tout nus*” (or “*Naked corners*”). There are no instructions at the time of purchase. If consumers return their empty containers, they receive a 10-cent voucher for each container returned. This is a positive incentive that helps consumers establish this habit, while alleviating any fear of penalties or loss.

In the cosmetics sector, this approach has also been tried by Yves Rocher as part of the Circul’R coalition. Consumers could receive €1 credit for each container they returned. The trial was launched only in stores in Paris and Rennes, where footfall is high and the public is aware of the issue.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the reuse system in France is emerging from its infancy and trials are gaining momentum, involving a pool of 16 million consumers.

However, the roll-out and ramp-up of reuse systems requires a period of adaptation to allow behaviours to take root.

We still lack the perspective to identify the optimal test duration for assessing consumer acceptance of a solution, i.e. the viability of a solution. Current experiments are still too recent, having been in place for only one to two years, and are not deployed on a national scale.

Nevertheless, some projects have set ambitious targets, aiming for a 90% return rate after one year of testing in already mature contexts. Acceleration is possible through training, regular communication and simplification of the user journey. However, it remains essential to give consumers the time they need to integrate these new habits into their daily lives on a long-term basis.



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