Shifting Environmentally Responsible Behavioural Tendencies through Social Media: The Role of Content Strategy

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Abstract

Destination brands increasingly use social media to encourage sustainable tourism, yet it remains unclear which message orientations generate measurable change in environmentally responsible behavioural tendencies (ERBT) over time. Building on goal-framing and signalling perspectives, we compare environment-oriented (duty and responsibility) versus person-oriented (personal benefit and well-being) destination posts and examine whether verifiable green credentials strengthen effects. Across a goal-frame activation pretest and two two-wave online experiments using sponsored destination posts on Instagram and Facebook, we capture within-person change in ERBT between baseline and follow-up and test moral elevation and environmental commitment as explanatory mechanisms. Environment-oriented content produces larger positive change in ERBT than person-oriented content. In the moderated design, green credentials amplify the effect of environment-oriented content and shape the emotional-motivational pathway: moral elevation explains change primarily when credentials accompany environment-oriented content, while environmental commitment provides a broader mechanism across conditions. The findings clarify how digital sustainability cues can translate into sustained shifts in ERBT.

Keywords: social media; content strategy; moral elevation; commitment; behavioural change

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* The data collection expenses of this study were covered by University of Portsmouth, The Faculty of Business and Law (Project No:23-1).