

Posts by Influencers Promoting Water Saving: The Impact of Distance and the Perception of Effectiveness on Behavior

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Abstract : Water scarcity is a reality that affects many regions of the world and is aggravated by climate change and population growth. Saving water has become an urgent need to ensure the sustainability of the planet and the survival of many communities, where youth and social networks play a key role in promoting responsible practices and adopting habits that contribute to environmental preservation. This study analyzes the persuasion capacity of messages designed to promote pro-environmental behaviors among youth. Specifically, it studies how the efficacy (effectiveness) of the response (personal response efficacy/effectiveness) and the perception of distance from the source of the message influence the water-saving behavior of the audience. To do so, two communication frameworks are combined. First, the Construal Level Theory, which is based on the concept of "psychological distance", that is, people, objects or events can be perceived as psychologically near or far, and this subjective distance (i.e., social, temporal, or spatial) determines their attitudes, emotions, and actions. This perceived distance can be social, temporal, or spatial. This research focuses on studying the spatial distance and social distance generated by cultural differences between influencers and their audience to understand how cultural distance can influence the persuasiveness of a message. Research on the effects of psychological distance between influencers-followers in the pro-environmental field is very limited, being relevant because people could learn specific behaviors suggested by opinion leaders such as influencers in social networks. Second, different approaches to behavioral change suggest that the perceived efficacy of a behavior can explain individual pro-environmental actions. People will be more likely to adopt a new behavior if they perceive that they are capable of performing it (efficacy belief) and that their behavior will effectively contribute to solving that problem (personal response efficacy). It is also important to study the different actors (social and individual) that are perceived as responsible for addressing environmental problems. Specifically, we analyze to what extent the belief individual's water-saving actions are effective in solving the problem can influence water-saving behavior since this individual effectiveness increases people's sense of obligation and responsibility with the problem. However, in this regard, empirical evidence presents mixed results. Our study addresses the call for experimental studies manipulating different subtypes of response effectiveness to generate robust causal evidence. Based on all the above, this research analyzes whether cultural distance (local vs. international influencer) and the perception of effectiveness of behavior (personal response efficacy) (personal/individual vs. collective) affect the actual behavior and the intention to conserve water of social network users. An experiment of 2 (local influencer vs. international influencer) x 2 (effectiveness of individual vs. collective response) is designed and estimated. The results show that a message from a local influencer appealing to individual responsibility exerts greater influence on intention and actual water-saving behavior, given the cultural closeness between influencer-follower, and the appeal to individual responsibility increases the feeling of obligation to participate in pro-environmental actions. These results offer important implications for social marketing campaigns that seek to promote water conservation.

Keywords : social marketing, influencer, message framing, experiment, personal response efficacy, water saving

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