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Tips for effective communication of sustainable tourism offers

Including findings and case examples from the Futouris projects implemented with Tourism Ireland Germany and Visit Finland.

Background information

Type of tourists – Approach to sustainability

- Emotional, simplified, local
- Seek different experiences
- Aware of the issue but not interested in acting if too much effort
- Willing to "buy" sustainability if there is a clear personal benefit

- Irrelevant, local, cynical
- Wanting to forget daily lives and responsibilities
- Expectations: Basics are covered
- Not willing to pay more

Not bothered
30%

Seeking personal benefits
60%

Caring for planet and society
10%

- Knowledgeable, international and loyal
- Seeking sustainable holiday experiences
- Wanting to know what company is doing
- Willing to pay more

Reasons for unsustainable tourist behaviour

Limited time of holiday periods, avoiding responsibility

Not enough efforts and/or sacrifice from businesses

Finances

Globalisation and its resulting consumption patterns

Anonymity at the destination

Lack of information and education

Tips for successful nudging
including case examples of two Futouris projects implemented with Tourism Ireland Germany and Visit Finland

Using nudges can encourage more sustainable behaviour

- Nudges are communication methods that aim to influence human decision-making without restricting or prescribing certain behaviour.

- By using nudges people can be encouraged towards a more sustainable travel behaviour.

- Nudging for "good" is important.

- Nudges are successful if the context and the initial intention of the guest are considered.

- Implementing nudges thoughtfully can effectively promote sustainable behaviours among tourists, contributing to more responsible and eco-friendly tourism practices.

Types of nudges

Type of nudge	Definition	Example
Social norms / role models	Informing people about the behaviour of others encourage them to conform to perceived social standards.	Communicating with focus that most customers are doing a certain activity (e.g. 90% of visitors are cycling).
Gamification / challenges	People like to compete; using gamification (or challenges) can help to increase engagement.	Tourists can receive stamps for completing certain hiking routes.
Creating personal benefits	Highlighting personal benefits (health, financial, convenience).	Promoting cycling tours by emphasizing health benefits or exploring the landscape in-depth.
Facts	Providing clear, factual information to influence decision-making based on a rational choice. Plays with the curiosity of humans, them wanting to increase their knowledge.	Showing the environmental impact of different travel options.
Changing the standard	Setting a pre-selected (the sustainable) choice as standard, customers must actively opt-out if they prefer the (non-sustainable) alternative.	Setting eco-friendly transportation methods (e.g. train) as default option for travel packages.

Types of nudges

Type of nudge	Definition	Example
Simplifying processes and creating convenience	Making processes easier to understand and follow to encourage desired (sustainable) behaviour. People tend to choose the simplest and most intuitive option.	Providing easy-to-follow tips for cycling holidays or giving travellers the option to off-set their carbon emissions with one click during the booking process.
Framing	Making certain information more noticeable or presenting information in a way that influences decision-making.	Framing tour options with positive environmental impacts, making sustainability labels of accommodations more visible to guests or describing the entire destination as striving for sustainability.
Disclosure	Disclosure involves providing transparent, clear and accessible information, enabling people to make more informed decisions. Important: How, when and were information is disclosed.	Disclosing the real-time density of visitors at popular sights can nudges people to visit less crowded areas or off-peak times.
Giving incentives	Offering rewards or benefits to encourage a more sustainable behaviour.	Offering discounts to tourists who choose eco-friendly activities or accommodations.

Case example "Social Norms"

- As part of the project with Tourism Ireland existing newsletter texts were slightly altered by incorporating nudges (e.g. social norms or role models).

- When presenting insider tips that are based recommendation of Irish colleague **the click rate is 1.5% higher** compared to tips based on research.

Have you ever wondered where Tourism Ireland employees prefer to spend their holidays in Ireland? **We asked our colleagues** and present you with a small selection here. Follow our insider tips and experience some truly "wow" experiences!

Have you ever wondered which destinations in Ireland are particularly impressive but often overlooked? **We've done some research** and present you with a small selection. Follow our insider tips and experience true "wow" experiences!

Case example: "Social norms" nudge

Value the environment – please reuse your towel

OK!

75 % of hotel guests re-use their towel

Good!

75 % of guests in this room re-use their towel

Very good!

You are more likely to do as others do if you can identify with them

Our guided tours

Canoe Safari to the beaver lodge – **OUR MOST POPULAR TOUR!**

Hike with mushroom picking and outdoor cooking

Moose Safari at dusk

White Water Rafting for the whole family – **THE CHILDREN'S FAVORITE!**

Horse Back Riding with lunch at the water fall

By highlighting two tours with a special note people are nudged to book these tours primarily.

Case example: "Social norms" nudge

As part of the project with Visit Finland the two nudges „Social Norms" and „Storytelling" with regards to participants' likelihood of using the available Shuttle Bus for the full price were tested within a survey.

People are more willing to use the Shuttle Bus when receiving information and knowing that others use the bus too.

Case example: „Gamification" nudge

People like to compete; using gamification (or challenges) can help to increase engagement.

Picture: Prof. Dr. Christian Baumgartner

The electricity consumption if hotel each room is shown in the lobby, encouraging guests to switch of air-conditioning or lights.

Case example: "Gamification" and "Social norms" nudge

As part of the project with Visit Finland the two nudges „Gamification" and „ Social Norms" were tested within a survey. People were encouraged to follow the Outdoor-Etiquette of Ruka-Kuusamo's National Parks in order to preserve the destination's nature and wildlife.

Etiquette: Comparison: Social Norm vs. Gamification Nudge

	very unlikely	unlikely	likely	very likely
Social Norm Nudge	24	85	116	55
Gamification Nudge	16	40	115	109

People are more willing to follow more sustainable behaviour patterns when being challenged or invited to play.

Case example: Creating personal benefits

- As part of the project with Tourism Ireland existing newsletter texts were slightly altered, avoiding the word "sustainability" but emphasizing the personal benefits (without any specific incentives).

- By inviting visitors to explore Ireland and being rewarded with authentic holiday experiences, increased the click rate by 0,1%.

Personal Benefits:
- Exploring Belfast by tandem bicycle
- Enjoying local delicacies
- Unexpected experiences

Case example: Creating personal benefits

Altruistic engagement

If guests waive housekeeping the day, the hotel donates 1€ to an NGO.

Personal benefit

If guests waive housekeeping by hanging their bag outside the door, they receive a sweet in their bag.

Case example: "Facts" nudge

Using facts as nudges can foster behavioural change as it plays with the curiosity of people, them wanting to increase their knowledge.

Sustainability Facts

77% of consumers believe sustainability is important when deciding what products to buy

Up **8** points since 2021

Sustainably marketed products grew **2.7x** faster than their categories

93% of consumers have maintained or increased their sustainable purchase habits in the past year

Source: IRI Omni-Consumer™ Survey Solutions, 2022

Facts are often linked with social norms and work even better if connected with emotions.

Case example "Facts" and "Social Norms"

- As part of the project with Tourism Ireland existing newsletter texts were slightly altered by incorporating nudges (e.g. "facts" and "social norms").

- By stating the fact that every 8th traveller is coming to Ireland to explore the island by bike **increased the click rate by 3%.**

A detour to historical sights, a trip along the well-developed former railway lines "Greenways" or always close to the water along the Wild Atlantic Way: bike tours are as varied as Ireland and a pleasure for anyone who likes to get on the saddle. Cycling sharpens your eye for nature, is healthy and there are many places to stop for a break.

One in eight people come to Ireland to cycle during their holidays. Along the former railway lines "Greenways" or always close to the water along the Wild Atlantic Way - cycling in Ireland is as diverse as Ireland, it sharpens your eye for nature, is healthy and there are many places to stop for a break.

Case example "Changing the Standard"

Individuals tend to go with the default option. Setting the sustainable option as the standard option nudges people to a more sustainable behaviour.

The trip to London is offered by train. People who want to go there by plane need to actively select the alternative.

Source: Manon Nijhuis (2020): The application of nudging within tourism to achieve sustainable travelling. University of Twente, Enschede, Netherlands

Case example: "Disclosure" nudge

As part of the project with Visit Finland the two nudges „Disclosure" and „Incentive" were tested in a survey, fostering year-round tourism and encouraging people to visit the winter-destination Ruka-Kuusamo also during summer season.

People are more willing to visit in summer when then benefits of a summer holiday (compared to winter) are being disclosed.

Tips for using nudges successfully

Tips for successful communication and using nudges effectively.

Tips for successful communication

- Use self-explanatory terms instead of wording that needs explanation first (e.g. sustainability, sustainable tourism)

- Be consistent in your communication (e.g. text-picture linkages), pay attention to details.

- Understand the behaviour of people for tailored communication.

- Emphasize the added value for customers and destination that sustainability entails.

- Communicate with a clear message and not because you feel you have to.

Tips for using nudges

- Nudges should be transparent and never misleading.

- It should be easy to decide against (to opt out).

- Make sure that nudges are neither too subtle nor too obvious.

- Define the goal (What do you want to achieve?).

- Understand your audience for more effective, tailored nudges.

- Choose the most suitable nudge based on your objective and audience.

- Test nudge first on smaller scale and monitor outcome.

Further resources

- [Futouris Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Communication](#)

- Manon Nijhuis (2020): [Nudging tourists: The application of nudging within tourism to achieve sustainable traveling](#)

- Gaurav Rawat (2024): [Overview of different types of nudges](#)

- Free course on "Strategic Communication for Tourism" by UNWTO with Module 3 on Nature and Community-based Tourism: https://www.unwto-tourismacademy.ie.edu/product/strategic-communication-for-tourism