How should brands promote social sustainability online? The role of regulatory focus and political ideology

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of regulatory focus in message framing—prevention-focused language (e.g., protect and fear) versus promotion-focused language (e.g., improve and attain) on consumer engagement with socially sustainable brand posts and its interaction with political ideology. We further show that social and economic conservatism do not have the same impact on engagement with posts. Based on analysis of field data from Facebook we reveal that prevention-focused messages generate higher social sustainability engagement (likes, shares, and comments) for brands with predominantly Republican audiences. In an experimental online study, we further demonstrate that prevention (vs. promotion) message framing enhances social sustainability engagement among social conservatives but diminishes it for economic conservatives. Our findings provide insights into the role of regulatory focus and ideological subdimensions in pro-social social media marketing.

Keyword: *political ideology, regulatory focus, social sustainability*

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