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# Information alone doesn't change our water usage behaviors

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“The memos are done, but we need to listen to the four reps!”

—In “Rules”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]

[SCICOMM]

Water scarcity is an escalating global crisis driven by population growth, climate change, and resource-intensive economic activities like tourism [2]. Hotels, in particular, play a crucial role in water conservation, as tourist water usage often far exceeds that of local residents, especially in water-stressed regions such as the Mediterranean [2,3].

Many hotels attempt to mitigate excessive water consumption by providing informational messages encouraging guests to conserve water. However, recent research conducted in Mallorca challenges the effectiveness of this approach. A study assessing the impact of informational leaflets on hotel guests' water use found that providing detailed explanations about water scarcity and conservation methods had little to no effect on actual consumption [2]. While guests acknowledged the issue, their behaviors remained unchanged, underscoring the limitations of purely informational campaigns.



This finding contrasts with behavioral interventions such as “nudges” and “boosts.” Nudges subtly shape choices by altering the decision-making environment without restricting options [4] while boosting focus on enhancing individuals’ competencies to make better decisions independently [5]. Despite their potential, López-Rodríguez et al. [2] found that even boost interventions, which emphasize informed decision-making, may be insufficient if they do not directly influence immediate actions or provide meaningful incentives.

A key reason for this ineffectiveness is cognitive inertia—people tend to rely on established habits rather than actively process new information [2,5]. Informational campaigns assume that individuals make rational, deliberate choices when, in reality, most decisions are automatic and shaped by routine behaviors. To foster meaningful change, interventions must not only provide information but also integrate real-time feedback, personal incentives, and social norms that encourage water-saving habits.

A more effective approach to water conservation should blend informative strategies with structural interventions [5]. Future policies should incorporate direct incentives, such as discounts or rewards for reduced water usage, along with real-time data displays showing

guests their consumption levels. Social norm strategies—such as highlighting that most guests in a hotel use less water—could also be powerful motivators for behavioral change.

Ultimately, addressing the global water crisis requires more than just informing people; it demands active engagement and well-designed behavioral strategies. Purely informational efforts, while well-intended, may result in superficial commitments rather than substantive conservation actions, potentially amounting to little more than greenwashing [2,6].

## References

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