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# ACADEMIC WEEKLY DIGEST

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management

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## THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY CANNOT DECARBONIZE WITH TODAY'S VOLUNTARY CARBON OFFSETTING

SHTM's PhD graduate **Mireia Guix**, masters graduate **Clàudia Ollé** and **Prof Xavier Font** investigated how the airline industry conveys voluntary carbon offsetting to its customers. The low quantity and quality of offsetting offer suggests that the airline industry cannot claim this to be a viable part of their decarbonisation plans.

# TRUSTWORTHY OR MISLEADING COMMUNICATION OF VOLUNTARY CARBON OFFSETS IN THE AVIATION INDUSTRY?

## PROF XAVIER FONT

Only 37 out of 116 airlines provide voluntary carbon offsetting (VCO), and nearly 50% of the messages used to communicate about it are misleading. The number of airlines providing voluntary carbon offsetting has not changed fundamentally since 2016.

We benchmark and compare the communication practices of all 37 airlines in relation to: i) the type of claim (product, process, fact or image), and ii) the nature of the claim (fibbing, hidden trade-off, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, lesser of two evils or worshipping false labels). We identify the various factors that affect the

pattern of 56% of claims being trustworthy and 44% being misleading. We demonstrate how a combined study of the trustworthy or misleading characteristics of communications provides more learning opportunities than studying either individually.

We find that: 1) text length, timing of adoption and country of origin affect VCO trustworthiness; 2) third party VCO certification does not affect the quality of the communication; and 3) that providing VCO information before a flight purchase increases trustworthiness.



### **FURTHER READING:**

Guix, M., Ollé, C., & Font, X. (2022). Trustworthy or misleading communication of voluntary carbon offsets in the aviation industry. *Tourism Management*.

Link: [bit.ly/3FoOr3v](https://bit.ly/3FoOr3v)

Based on our evidence, we can only conclude that VCO is not a viable instrument to decarbonise air travel. Providing a poor product and then passing the responsibility to consumers for not showing interest is not the answer.