

Soft Incentives and Energy Consumption

Overview

Research Question: How do soft (i.e. non-monetary) incentives such as social norms, changing default options and symbolic rewards encourage energy saving and green electricity use? Most research into environmental behaviour focuses on monetary incentives such as price effects, but little is known about the effect of soft incentives.



Social norms: Information about what is typically done in a situation, e.g. the energy demand of the majority of other households, is expected to affect household energy demand.

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Default options: Due to a status-quo bias in decision making, the demand for green electricity is expected to increase if green electricity is introduced as the standard or default option.

Symbolic rewards: Symbolic rewards are valued positively if they signal high social status. Such rewards are expected to have a positive effect on energy saving and the use of green electricity.

Methodological Approaches: (1) Swiss Environmental Survey: We conduct a national longitudinal survey (2007-2018, next panel wave in 2016) in German, French and Italian, including an intervention study as well as survey-based experiments (split-sample, stated choice). (2) We carry out field experiments in collaboration with energy suppliers. (3) Regarding behaviour we focus on households' cumulative energy demand, electricity consumption and (willingness to) use green electricity.

Project Highlights: (1) National panel survey, exclusively on environmental behavior and energy use, covering a time span of 11 years. (2) Test of social-norm effects based on tailored reference groups with information inferred from the survey. (3) Robustness check of findings on the role of soft incentives by comparing results from survey experiments and field experiments.

Partners and Collaboration

Implementation Partners:



"Energie Wasser Bern"



"Energie Thun AG"

Energy Turnaround

Project Significance: One of the goals of "Energy Strategy 2050" is to reduce energy consumption. This project analyses several measures to do so and to promote the use of green electricity: social norms, default options, and symbolic rewards. If these measures are effective, this is of great practical significance, in particular since they are comparatively inexpensive and easy to implement. The findings from this project may be useful to (political) decision-makers and entrepreneurs alike. Furthermore, the survey provides information on the determinants of energy consumption and the use of green electricity. The project will therefore facilitate the identification of target groups for future policy interventions.

Contact

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