

Who Puts the Most Energy into Energy Conservation?

B. Sütterlin, T. A. Brunner, & M. Siegrist

Institute for Environmental Decisions (IED), Consumer Behavior, ETH Zurich, Switzerland

Introduction

Young, female, well-educated, and wealthy: This is how the energy conserver could be described. Is it appropriate, however, to classify energy consumers based on their sociodemographics? The contrasting results of studies basing the characterizations on sociodemographics suggest that it is not (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). Assuming that behavioral data are more suitable when it comes to classifying energy consumers, this study used energy-related behavioral characteristics as a segmentation basis. To assure a highly comprehensive behavioral basis, direct energy-related behavior was included along with acceptance of political measures and energy-related attitudes. Furthermore, it is crucial to differentiate between conservation in terms of curtailment and in terms of energy efficiency investments (Stern & Gardner, 1981). Therefore, these two types of conservation behaviors were considered separately in the segmentation.

Method

Data were collected through a mail-in survey sent out to a random sample of Swiss households. The response rate was 43.3%. Due to missing values, 214 participants had to be excluded, resulting in a final sample size of 1,292. Consumers' energy-friendly behavior in terms of curtailment, energy efficiency investment, and acceptance of political measures was assessed. Furthermore, the survey included various questions about energy-related attitudes and beliefs. Together, these variables formed the basis for segmentation and were subjected to cluster analysis.

Results

Six consumer types were identified:

The *idealistic* conserver (15.6%) does not mind financial efforts or restrictions in convenience, and shows the most energy-friendly behavior in all domains.

The *selfless inconsequent* conserver (26.4%) is quite willing to make sacrifices, since he takes a positive stance on political sales and use regulations. However, curtailment behavior in the food domain and energy efficiency efforts are rather limited.

The *thrifty* conserver (14%) highly engages in conservation efforts in terms of curtailment and energy efficiency due to financial considerations.

The *materialistic* consumer (25.1%) merely pursues substantial energy efficiency measures, since they provide financial benefits without restrictions in convenience.

The *convenience-oriented indifferent* consumer (5.3%) wants to enjoy life without wasting a thought on energy conservation. He shows no energy-friendly efforts, since they entail too-high losses of comfort.

The *problem-aware well-being oriented* consumer (13.6%) is aware of the problems related to energy consumption, but does not engage in energy-friendly actions, as luxury and convenience considerations prevail.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on energy-related behavioral characteristics, six energy consumer types are identified and described, providing a valuable basis for the development of tailored interventions. Furthermore, the distinction between energy efficiency and curtailment is underlined, since the study identifies segments that engage very well in one conservation type but not in the other.

References

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