

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Changing norms is not enough

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Information about the behaviour of others is effective at promoting pro-environmental behaviours, including reducing household energy consumption. Unlike home energy use, one's vehicle choice relative to others is visible. Thus, electric vehicle (EV) purchase decisions may be even more sensitive to social norms, because they are based on what one sees (that is, other cars on the road), not just what one thinks or believes. Nives DellaValle and Alyona Zubaryeva from the Eurac Research Institute for Renewable Energy conducted a survey experiment in South Tyrol, Italy, to evaluate whether a norm-based intervention would increase consumer interest in EVs.

Respondents were asked to choose between an EV and a conventional vehicle based on technical characteristics. Compared to a baseline condition, respondents that were provided with additional information about the estimated future cost savings of an EV were more likely to choose the EV. However, providing respondents with information about the growth in EV registrations in the region from 2010 to 2017 — an intervention that speaks to changes in vehicle purchase norms — did not lead to greater selection of the EV over the alternative vehicle. The authors speculate that the norm-based intervention was not effective because the absolute number of purchases in 2017 was not sufficiently high to change expectations, suggesting that a critical threshold may need to be reached before norm interventions are implemented in this domain.

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