



George Mason University
Center for Climate Change Communication

What the Audience Research Tells us About how to Build Consumer Demand for Clean Energy

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Road Map

Language “Clean vs. Renewable”

Policy Support Role of Knowledge

Consumer Support Role of Norms



“Clean Energy” may be preferable to *“Renewable Energy”*

“Clean”



“Clean Energy” may be preferable to
“Renewable Energy”

“Renewable”



Two Questions:

What Determines *Strong*
Policy Support?

What Makes People Willing to
Pay for Renewable Energy?

Policy Support for Clean Energy Policies

**What Factors Influence that
Support?**

Attitude Support for Wind is *Weak* Because it is Based on Limited Knowledge

“The public’s understanding of wind power is relatively poor.”

–Klick & Smith, 2010

Knowledge about wind power.

	Percent correct	Sample n
Wind turbines pollute less	87	601
Wind electricity costs more	18	598
Electricity flow is not stable	59	600
Wind is alternative energy	80	596

**Bottom line: People don't appreciate the
*Downsides of Wind***

Experiment

Ask about RE support *before* and *after* exposure to more arguments

Result

After reading arguments for and against wind, wind *lost* support

Analysis

Concerns about cost, property values crowded out climate change as a gender gap opened

**Bottom line: A little knowledge
is a dangerous thing**

(Klick & Smith, 2010)

What's a Possible Solution?

Inoculation Theory

Present your audience with a
weakened version of
counterarguments



Show them refutations, or help them
come up with their own

(McGuire, 1964)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide publics with the basics on RE
2. Engage the opposition. Coach people through.

Consumer Support: Willingness to Pay

**What Makes People Put their
Money where their Mouths Are?**

**Americans admit they won't
volunteer to pay for their own
green energy**

Surveys of ratepayers
consistently show they prefer
collective, mandatory
payment schemes for RE

**Which makes sense in an
odd way...**

(Farhar, 1999; Decision Research, 1992; Farhar & Coburn, 1999; Guild et al., 2003; Sloan & Taddune, 1999; ECAP, 1998; Ferguson, 1999)

The Free Rider Problem

We benefit from clean air,
even if we drive a Hummer

**This could be why there is a
general gap between attitudes
and what people *actually*
contribute**

Experiment

Presented four RE surcharge options
(government? X Voluntary?)

Result

The private, mandatory policy was most “purchased”

Analysis

Collective preference (“participation expectations”);
Dislike of government

Bottom line: People don't like to go it alone

(Wiser, 2007)

The Study's Options

Table 1 – Four contingent valuation scenarios		
Voluntary or collective payment		
Degree of gov't involvement	Scenario 2, voluntary payment, government provision (somewhat consistent with green power sales from a government-owned utility)	Scenario 1, collective payment, government provision (consistent with a system benefits charge)
	Scenario 3, voluntary payment, private provision (consistent with competitive green power marketing)	Scenario 4, collective payment, private provision (consistent with a renewables portfolio standard)

(Wiser, 2007)

What are Possible Solutions?

Carefully target policies to publics

Leverage Social Influence in
Messages

(Moscovici, 1976)

Social Influence

Fostering participation expectations

Social Norms “It’s expected for everyone to do it.”

Social Proof “Everyone is doing it.”

*And these arguments help
to counter perceptions of a
free-rider problem*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Push policies such as Renewable Portfolio Standards; or others as appropriate to audience
2. Integrate social influence into messages.
Emphasize the growth.

Simple clear messages,
repeated often,
by a variety of trusted sources.

Maibach's formula for communication impact



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Thank You!

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Climatechangecommunication.org



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