

A room with a viewpoint: conservation messages and motivation

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People are more likely to reuse hotel towels if they know other guests are doing it too. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* examined participation rates in a towel re-use program designed to reduce unnecessary laundering.

Authors Noah J. Goldstein (University of Chicago), Robert B. Cialdini, and Vidas Griskevicius (both Arizona State University) found that the types of signs posted in hotel bathrooms had different effects. Signs that focused on the environmental benefits were less effective than signs that pointed out the level of participation of other guests.

"These experiments are aimed at better understanding the factors that motivate consumers to engage in actions for the benefit of the environment. This important topic, along with pro-social behavior in general, is a severely understudied area of consumer research," explain the authors.

In the study, researchers set out to boost participation in the towel re-use program of a major hotel chain. The hotel's manager and staff allowed the researchers to create a series of different towel re-use cards, which were placed in the hotel's bathrooms. Some cards read "Help Save the Environment" and others read "Join Your Fellow Guests in Helping to Save the Environment." Both provided information on how resources are preserved when guests re-use towels. Room attendants recorded reuse rates. Cards that focused on the level of participation of other guests, which essentially conveyed that it is normal to participate, increased the

percentage of participation from 35.1 percent to 44.1 percent.

In a second study, the researchers were able to boost towel re-use even further by placing a sign in the room that said 75 percent of guests in that specific room re-used their towels.

"The results of our studies have clear implications for marketers, managers, and policymakers," write the authors. "It is worth noting that the normative messages, which were messages that we have never seen utilized by hotel chains, fared significantly better at spurring participation in the hotel's environmental conservation program than did the type of message most commonly utilized by hotel chains—messages that focus on the importance of environmental protection."

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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