

Study finds political ideology impacts decision-making regarding energy-efficient products

April 30 2013, by Bob Yirka

(Phys.org) —Two researchers from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania and another from Duke University in North Carolina together have found that a person's political ideology might impact his or her decision-making when purchasing products described as good for the environment, versus, money saving. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the team describes two field studies they conducted to better understand the issues involved and the results they found.

In the first study, 657 people (divided roughly in half by gender) were asked to fill out a questionnaire that was designed to reveal the person's political leanings as well as their energy-saving product purchasing habits. In analyzing the answers given by the participants, the researchers found a trend that suggested that the more conservative a person's [political views](#), the less favorably they saw products advertised as environmentally friendly. Those with such leanings tended to claim they were more likely to buy such products, however, if they were instead advertised as money saving investments. Conversely, those with more liberal leanings tended to be more receptive towards buying products solely because they believed they would help solve [environmental problems](#).

In the second study, 210 volunteers were interviewed and then given \$2 each to purchase a light bulb. The light bulbs offered for sale were either

"normal" or an energy efficient variety (with a higher price.) The higher priced bulbs were identical but were advertised in two different ways: one made claims about how the [light bulb](#) was good for the planet, the other claimed to save the buyer money by using less electricity. The researchers found those with more conservative views were less inclined to buy the special bulbs when the labeling touted its planet-saving features. When it was labeled as a money-saver however, conservatives were quite willing to buy them. Those with a more liberal view were found willing to buy the special bulb regardless of which advertising was used. In another variant of the study, the researchers found that both conservatives and liberals bought the special bulb over the "normal" bulb if they were priced the same.

The researchers suggest that those people in the study with conservative ideology were not necessarily against buying so-called green products, but have been conditioned to associate such terms with liberalism, and thus, shy away from products labeled as such. Because of this, the researchers suggest those that market such [products](#) look towards creating new phrases that aren't tied to one group or another when making their pitches.

More information: Political ideology affects energy-efficiency attitudes and choices, *PNAS*, Published online before print April 29, 2013, [doi: 10.1073/pnas.1218453110](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1218453110)

Abstract

This research demonstrates how promoting the environment can negatively affect adoption of energy efficiency in the United States because of the political polarization surrounding environmental issues. Study 1 demonstrated that more politically conservative individuals were less in favor of investment in energy-efficient technology than were those who were more politically liberal. This finding was driven primarily by the lessened psychological value that more conservative

individuals placed on reducing carbon emissions. Study 2 showed that this difference has consequences: In a real-choice context, more conservative individuals were less likely to purchase a more expensive energy-efficient light bulb when it was labeled with an environmental message than when it was unlabeled. These results highlight the importance of taking into account psychological value-based considerations in the individual adoption of energy-efficient technology in the United States and beyond.

[Press release](#)

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Citation: Study finds political ideology impacts decision-making regarding energy-efficient products (2013, April 30) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-04-political-ideology-impacts-decision-making-energy-efficient.html>

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