

Rivalry makes people more eco-conscious

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(Phys.org) —Want to encourage people to do the right thing for the environment? Tell them their rivals are going green, says a new marketing study from the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

The forthcoming *Journal of Marketing Research* paper found that when people see groups they consider competitors pursuing behaviours like

composting or recycling they're more likely to embrace the activities themselves. If their peers are doing it, they don't bother.

"Past research suggests that people tend to follow the herd, copying individuals they identify with—neighbours, colleagues, friends," says study co-author Katherine White, an associate professor at Sauder. "But when it comes to eco-conscious behaviour, we found the only way to get people to up their game was to tell them a rival group was doing better."

For the study, researchers assessed the composting behaviours of groups of business [students](#) in a crowded cafe. When they were told that fellow business students—people considered part of their own community—were composting, they didn't make any extra effort. But the group that composted coffee cups most often was the one told that rival computer [science students](#) were doing an exemplary job of composting on campus.

White says that informing the business students about the behaviour of computer science students created a sense of competition that inspired them to act. She suggests that this [behaviour](#) can be applied in a wider context.

"If a city, for instance, wants to motivate its constituents to act in a more sustainable way, they can promote one neighbourhood's green efforts over another, instilling a sense of rivalry," says White.

The study, "The Motivating Role of Dissociative Outgroups in Encouraging Positive Consumer Behaviors," was co-authored by White with University of Western Ontario Assistant Professor Bonnie Simpson, and University of Alberta Professor Jennifer J. Argo.

More information: Katherine White, Bonnie Simpson, and Jennifer J. Argo "The Motivating Role of Dissociative Outgroups in Encouraging Positive Consumer Behaviors." *Journal of Marketing Research* In-Press.

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