

It takes a village: Why do consumers participate in wind energy programs?

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Why do people participate in programs that benefit the environment, even when there seems to be no direct personal benefit in taking part? More specifically, why would consumers pay good money for wind energy when it is not at all clear that they are benefiting from that energy? The answer may lie in a psychological sense of community with other wind-energy customers, according to a new study in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

The authors interviewed participants in a wind power program in the western United States. The goal was to understand in depth what it meant for them to engage in environmentally friendly or socially conscious consumption. Why did they participate in the program? How did it benefit them? Did they value their consumer choices in their own right, or did they value them as expressions of membership in a community?

"The [wind-energy](#) customers we interviewed believed that the planet was at risk from human consumption practices," write authors Marie Hafey DeVincenzo (Francis Marion University) and Debra Scammon (University of Utah). "This sense of shared risk translated into a feeling of shared responsibility and an emotional connection to others who were living an environmentally conscious life."

As the authors discovered, participants in the program constituted, through their consumer choices, a principle-based community, unified by a belief in the interdependence of human beings when it came to

protecting the natural [environment](#). Participants saw themselves as different from those whom they regarded as less environmentally conscious. Participants also felt a shared emotional connection with each other, and they believe that they are having an influence in the world. As one man reported, after he ripped out his lawn and replaced it with drought-resistant plants, one of his neighbors soon did the same.

DeVincenzo and Scammon's study reveals that the choices people make as [consumers](#) may be guided by community-based principles. That insight can be used by policy makers, environmental activists, and marketers to promote behaviors in individuals that benefit society as a whole. Policy makers might provide public recycling containers, for example, as a communal talking point and to increase feelings of community when neighbors see others participating.

"A sense of moral responsibility and of belonging to a community can strengthen commitment to individual action that both defines this community, and helps it reach common moral goals," conclude the authors.

More information: Marie Hafey DeVincenzo and Debra Scammon. "Principle Based Consumption Communities: Exploring the Meanings Derived from Socially Conscious Consumption Practices." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

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