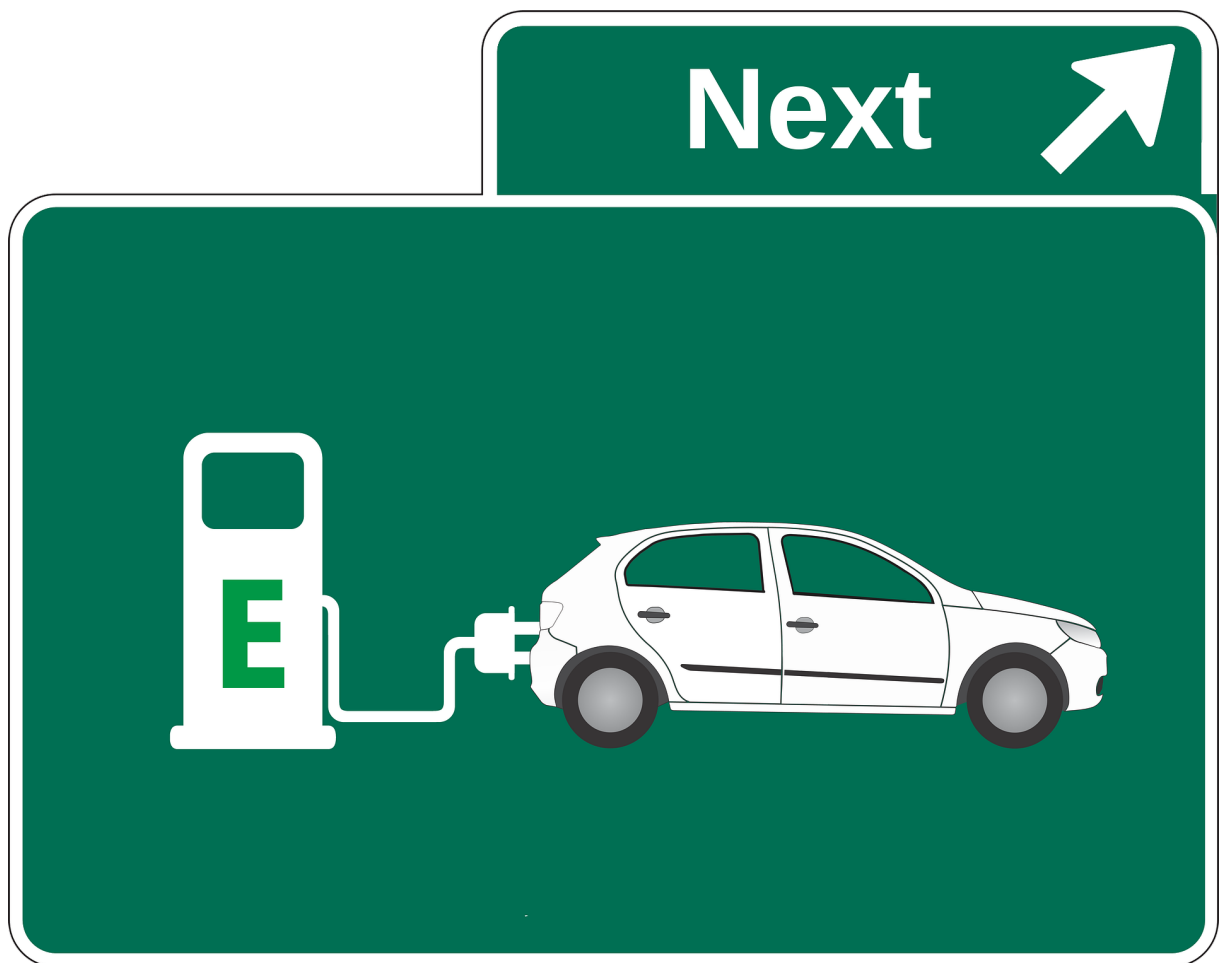




Annual report 2017

Applying nudging techniques to promote fuel efficient car purchases





University of St.Gallen



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Project goals

The project aims at developing effective low-invasive interventions (nudges) to motivate consumers to shift their preferences towards low carbon vehicles by combining theoretical knowledge with insights from practice. The project team will develop and test improved versions of existing nudges as well as new interventions. Implications for industry and policy will be derived on how to promote purchases of low carbon cars through low-invasive approaches.

Summary

The mobility sector is a main contributor to CO₂-emissions in Switzerland [1]. Shifting to more fuel-efficient vehicles is a promising strategy to reduce them, however, consumer adoption of these vehicles is still limited [2]. Soft and cost-effective nudging approaches to promote the adoption of low carbon cars are promising, because they do not restrict freedom of choice and are more likely to be socially accepted than traditional approaches (e.g. emission standards, fees, taxes) [3]. Nudges encompass “the use of reminders, warnings, defaults, informational tools, feedback, and other means by which marketers and policy makers can influence choices in accordance with a preferred option” ([4], p. 10). This research project will analyze existing best-practice examples from policy, industry, and the non-profit sector (bottom-up approach) and will carry out a theoretical analysis of the potential of nudging techniques in the transportation sector (top-down approach). This integrative strategy will result in improvements of existing nudges as well as in newly developed nudges for the car sector. Promising nudges will then be investigated and compared by a series of studies (laboratory, online, and field settings). After the conceptual and empirical analysis of promising nudging approaches, the project findings will be disseminated to practice and the scientific community. In particular, it is aimed to give precise suggestions for policy and industry in order to shift consumer preferences towards low carbon cars.

Work undertaken and findings obtained

With a project start date of October 2017, the activities have focused on setting up the team and work processes. Specifically, this has included the recruitment of the two PhD candidates at the University of St. Gallen and the University of Geneva and project planning meetings held between the two universities. The recruitment has been finalized in St. Gallen and is in the final stage in Geneva. Both candidates will have an official starting date in early 2018 to maximise collaboration between the two universities.

In addition, the present project as well as the funded research project “Fostering the transition toward more fuel-efficient cars” (PI: Prof. Dr. Bernauer, ETH Zurich) were formally launched with a Kick-off meeting held at the Swiss Federal Office of Energy at Bern. During this meeting, the objectives of the Federal Office of Energy were reviewed and both projects were presented and discussed. Presentations were followed by a discussion on potential cooperation opportunities between the two projects and networking.



National cooperation

The research project will be carried out in close collaboration between the University of Geneva's Department of Psychology *Consumer Decision and Sustainable Decision lab* and the University of St. Gallen's *Management of Renewable Energies Group*. In addition, cooperation opportunities have been further established by both groups' involvement in the *Competence Center for Research in Energy, Society and Transition* (SCCER-CREST) and the *Competence Center for Energy Research Efficient Technologies and Systems for Mobility* (SCCER-Mobility). Finally, opportunities for potential collaboration activities with the ETH group *International Relations* (PI: Prof. Dr. Bernauer) were discussed during the Kick-off meeting in October 2017.

Evaluation 2017 and outlook for 2018

The project has got off to a good start with the near finalization of the recruitment process with excellent candidates for both PhD positions. The positive collaboration between the two universities has been a determining factor in the successful launch of the project. In terms of outlook for 2018, activities will focus primarily on Phase 1 of the project with a goal to present the findings of this Phase to the federal office in November 2018. To achieve this, the PhD students will start during the first trimester of 2018 with the bottom-up analysis of existing best practices at the University of St. Gallen and the top-down theoretical analysis of potential nudging techniques at the University of Geneva. This will result in the presentation in November 2018 of existing and newly developed nudges for application in the car sector to be tested empirically in Phase 2 due to start in late 2018.

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