

When Words Save Watts: Government Communication and Household Electricity Use *

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Abstract

This paper examines whether government communication can shape household electricity consumption during periods of energy crisis. Leveraging a newly constructed corpus of over 12,000 public statements and narrative-specific measures of household attention derived from Google Trends, the study links real-time communication to shifts in residential electricity use during the 2022–2023 energy crisis in France. The results demonstrate that government communication effectively reduced electricity demand, but this effect was contingent upon specific narrative frameworks and contextual factors. Energy conservation messages significantly influenced consumption behaviour when integrated into broader crisis narratives. In contrast, crisis messages primarily drove demand reductions when accompanied by explicit warnings about potential supply disruptions. These effects are concentrated among households with flexible pricing contracts, whereas those on flat-rate tariffs responded primarily to price changes. The findings highlight the potential for targeted, crisis-framed communication to enhance demand-side flexibility and support energy policy goals during emergency periods.

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