

Abstract

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The point of departure for this dissertation is the expectation that information regarding the environmental effects of driving will lead to decreased automobile usage by citizens and to an increasing acceptance for political initiatives regarding transportation policies. This expectation reveals an assumption of a causal relationship between peoples' beliefs on the one hand and their transportation policy attitudes and transportation behavior on the other.

This assumption is tested against survey data collected during 1996. The survey was sent to a representative sample of the Swedish population (n=2000) between the ages of 18 and 80 years old. The response-rate was 61 percent.

Considering attitudes, the results show that the "greener" a person is, i.e. the more importance he/she places on car usage as a cause of environmental problems, the more positive he/she is to political initiatives (for example road tolls and emissions taxes). The results also indicate that there is an effect of these "green" beliefs on choice of mode of transportation.

However, a complete evaluation of the results does not provide support for the "information expectation". First, there is a fairly large number of the Swedish population whose beliefs can not be substantially more green than they already are. Second, not even the people who have the greenest beliefs are especially positive to transportation policy initiatives nor do they refrain from car driving to any substantial extent.

To be a green car driver, i. e. to not chose to refrain from using one's car even though one believes that driving leads to serious environmental problems, can be assumed to provide a feeling of cognitive dissonance. But green drivers are able to reduce this dissonance by focusing on conditions which they think justify their driving. In the second part of this dissertation the question concerns these conditions: how do green drivers defend their car usage? Based on deep interviews with 15 green drivers, various defenses for driving are identified and a division of these defenses into conceptual categories is presented.

A main type of defense expressed by the green car drivers is that they consider themselves to have good reasons to take the car. They point out that a car is totally necessary in order to access certain places and they emphasize that the car is better than the alternatives. The other primary type of defense is related to the idea that there are circumstances which excuse travel by car (even if these circumstances are not the reason behind one's choosing to take the car). There is for example a presumption that one single individual's behavior has a negligible impact on the overall environment (the social dilemma defense).

If one would like the Swedish people to travel less by car, there are a number of "road-blocks" which must be passed. It is not just an issue of improving the possibilities to travel by other modes of transportation than the car. It is also an issue of equalizing the "balance of benefits" between different types of transportation, and not least of all, to influence the beliefs that there are circumstances which can excuse one's travel by car. As long as Swedes feel that they can excuse their travel by car, it will be difficult, if not even impossible, to get them to freely decrease their car usage.

Key words: car driving, transportation policy, environmental problems, environmental awareness, information, green car drivers, cognitive dissonance, social dilemma.

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