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Title: The Time is Now! Best Practices for Conservation Marketing in Times of Crisis

Abstract: Conservation problems result from human activities and thus, rapid changes to human behavior are often the key to mitigating energy crises. "Conservation marketing" is a well-understood tool for encouraging conservation behavior change raise awareness of issues, shape attitudes, and ultimately inspire conservation actions. However, surprisingly little research has been done on the best practices for conservation marketing in times of crisis--pipeline ruptures, natural disasters, or the unexpected closure of a natural gas plant. When these crises occur, utilities need customers to act immediately and thus need to roll-out emergency marketing campaigns--grounded in research--to ensure they drive essential conservation behavior. Capturing customers' attention, building trust, and compelling them to act in times of crisis is currently a challenge in today's media environment that includes fake news events and alternative facts. While it's becoming harder to capture customers' attention and build trust, the ability to count on customers to act during times of crisis will become more critical in the coming years as climate change is predicted to increase the threat of scarcities and natural disasters that may lead to energy crises. Concurrently, our electricity supply resources are going through rapid transition with new grid requirements and DER adoption, unlocking new opportunities for customers to help support the stability of the grid. Drawing on research conducted in three jurisdictions, this paper will focus on the types of research needed to understand: (1) what marketing means in the context of conservation during a crisis, (2) how to assess different marketing and outreach strategies employed in different crisis situations--focusing on the effectiveness of these strategies in rising "above the noise" to capture customer attention, and (3) how strategies evolved after the crisis had passed. We will synthesize results from consumption analyses, panel surveys, surveys, focus groups, interviews, web usability studies, and web analytics to identify best practices and lessons learned to raise awareness, shape opinions, drive consumer action, and measure the effectiveness of utilized marketing strategies. This paper will provide marketing staff and evaluators with insights for using evidence-based market research to develop and assess campaigns to mobilize customers to play an active role in grid management, energy resilience, and reliability strategies in times of crisis.