

Authors

Alberto Chong
Georgia State University

Dean Karlan
Northwestern University

Jeremy Shapiro
Busara Center for Behavioral Economics

Jonathan Zinman
Dartmouth College

(Ineffective) Messages to Encourage Recycling: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Peru

*Alberto Chong, Dean Karlan, Jeremy Shapiro, and Jonathan Zinman**

May 2013

Abstract: There is growing interest in using messaging to drive pro-social behaviors, which contribute to investment in public goods. We worked with a leading NGO in Peru to randomize nine different pro-recycling messages that were crafted based on best practice, prior evidence, and theories of behavioral change. Different variants emphasized information on environmental or social benefits, social comparisons, social sanctions, authority, and/or reminders. None of the messages had significant effects on recycling behavior. However, reducing the cost of ongoing participation—by providing a recycling bin—significantly increased recycling among enrolled households.

Keywords: Behavioral Economics, Recycling, Peru, Field Experiment, Social Messaging
JEL Codes: D03, Q53, N56, C93

* Chong (Corresponding Author): achong@actaria.ca, School of International Development and Global Studies and Department of Economics, University of Ottawa; Karlan: dean.karlan@yale.edu, Department of Economics, Yale University and Innovations for Poverty Action; Shapiro: jshapiro@gsa.fsu.edu, GiveDirect; Zinman: jzinman@dartmouth.edu, Department of Economics, Dartmouth College and Innovations for Poverty Action. We would like to thank three anonymous referees and the editors, Elizabeth Sadoulet and Alain de Janvry, for comments and suggestions. Thanks to Laura Livione, Karthik Aikiolewa, Elana Sullivan, Rachel Sirofen, Beatriz Saravalia, Donghyuk Kim and Glynn Stutz for their outstanding research assistance and project management. Thanks to Diana Gil Ramirez, Jose Manuel Hernandez-Aguirre, Miguel Pinedo and the team of Innovations for Poverty Action for the excellent support during field work. Finally, a special thanks to PRISMA for their collaboration in the study. The standard disclaimer applies. A supplemental appendix to this article is available at <http://www.oxfordjournals.org>

Tried and True? The Contextual Specificity of “Proven” Approaches to Behavioral Change

There is growing interest in using messaging to drive pro-social behaviors, which contribute to investment in public goods. We worked with a leading NGO in Peru to randomize nine different prorecycling messages that were crafted based on best practice, prior evidence, and theories of behavioral change. Different variants emphasized information on environmental

or social benefits, social comparisons, social sanctions, authority, and/or reminders. None of the messages had significant effects on recycling behavior. However, reducing the cost of ongoing participation—by providing a recycling bin—significantly increased recycling among enrolled households.

May 01, 2013