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Corporate Social Responsibility in an Experimental Market

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Abstract : We present results from experimental price-setting oligopolies in which green firms undertake different levels of energy-saving investments motivated by public subsidies and demand-side advantages. We find that consumers reveal higher willingness to pay for greener sellers' products. This observation in conjunction to the fact that greener sellers set higher prices is compatible with the use and interpretation of energy-saving behaviour as a differentiation strategy. However, sellers do not exploit the resulting advantage through sufficiently high price-cost margins, because they seem trapped into "run to stay still" competition. Regarding the use of public subsidies to energy-saving sellers we uncover an undesirable crowding-out effect of consumers' intrinsic tendency to support green manufacturers. Namely, consumers may be less willing to support a green seller whose energy-saving strategy entails a direct financial benefit. Finally, we disentangle two alternative motivations for consumer's attractions to pro-social firms; first, the self-interested recognition of the firm's contribution to the public and private welfare and, second, the need to compensate a firm for the cost entailed in each pro-social action. Our results show the prevalence of the former over the latter.

Keywords : corporate social responsibility, energy savings, public good, experiments, vertical differentiation, altruism
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