

FLEXIBLE USERS, WHERE ARE YOU? RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES TO FLEXIBILITY-EXPERIMENTS

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Growing use of renewable energy sources demand strategies for flexibilizing users' demand (Sloot et al., 2021). This flexibilization entails a major change in users' role and several barriers have been already noted for such shift (Parrish et al., 2020; Schuitema et al., 2017). Experimental approaches in the form of sand-boxes or pilot projects (Mlecnik et al., 2020) are being implemented to test and measure behavioural approaches that can counteract these barriers and, eventually, enable flexible demand. These experiments are fundamental as regulation, policy-making, and business model developments are based upon their results. Whereas much research has examined how consumers behave once they have been engaged in one of these experiments the problem of how to recruit users to participate in these experiments is usually glossed over, despite the importance of recruitment in the engagement journey (Darby, 2020; Parrish et al., 2019). Recruitment also conditions the generalizability of results, since the recruitment strategy affects users' behaviour in the experiment results (Parrish et al., 2019). Recruitment is especially difficult in the case of flexibility-focused experiments, since only users with flexible equipment are entitled to participate (Darby, 2020). Use of algorithms to identify the best prospects is a sound strategy (Martinez-Pabon et al., 2017), but not feasible for those stakeholders lacking users' smart meter data. To identify and classify recruitment strategies, we conducted four participatory, co-creation-based workshops with 23 experts in demand-response and electricity markets from different European countries, as part of the EU funded project ReDream. As a result of these sessions, a recruitment strategy was inductively identified. The strategy particularly focused on how to identify participants with flexible equipment and how to build motivation to entice participation. The results of this study are particularly relevant for researchers and organizations targeting users to participate in flexibility programs.

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