

Using water invoices to foster consumers' awareness

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1. Introduction –

Water invoices are a tool to communicate on a regular and universal basis with all customers, allowing the provision of information on quantities, prices and total amount due, as well as conveying other important messages. In the current study, the detailed invoice model proposed by the Portuguese regulator was used as an example of the recommendations that regulatory authorities in different countries are issuing to make water invoices clearer, more harmonised and, ultimately, capable of conveying the right signals to drive parsimonious water consumption behaviours. The purpose of this paper is to assess, according to the views of residential consumers, to what extent the Portuguese detailed invoice model conveys relevant and clear information to consumers and how it can be improved.

2. Experimental –

With such purpose in mind, a survey instrument was designed and administered to a sample of domestic consumers of the Centre region of Portugal. One hundred and fifty-nine questionnaires were successfully completed.

3. Results and Discussion –

In line with previous studies, such as [1] and [2], findings show that the consumers' level of knowledge regarding quantities consumed is low. Findings reveal that overall consumers positively evaluate the detailed invoice proposed by the regulator. Yet, a large proportion of participants, mainly the potentially most vulnerable ones, consider that the document is complex due to the kind of language used, extensive usage of acronyms and abbreviations that are difficult to understand. Findings have also shown that consumers greatly value graphics.

4. Conclusions –

Some recommendations are derived from the study. It is advisable to make changes in invoices to highlight quantities consumed and thus to foster consumers' awareness of the volume of water consumed, which is essential to promote saving behaviours. Plain language should be used in water invoices and graphics should be improved to turn invoices into more appealing documents.

References

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