

The Invisible Option: Awareness Deficits of Synthetic Fuels

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Abstract:

Public awareness is widely regarded as a precondition for the diffusion of alternative energy technologies. This paper focuses on societal awareness of synthetic fuels and examines how responsibility for existing awareness deficits is perceived. Based on survey data collected in Germany, the study investigates both general environmental awareness and specific awareness of synthetic fuels to identify possible disconnects between these dimensions. The results show that respondents exhibit a high degree of environmental awareness and a strong sense of moral and social responsibility. Participants largely agree that individual actions contribute to environmental outcomes and express concern for broader societal and planetary well-being. However, this normative awareness does not translate into a comparable level of awareness regarding synthetic fuels. Most respondents report limited familiarity with synthetic fuels and consider their presence in public discourse to be insufficient. A pronounced consensus emerges regarding responsibility for this awareness gap. Political institutions, particularly at the national and European levels, are identified as the most critical actors in failing to promote awareness of synthetic fuels. In contrast, science and society are generally perceived as less responsible, while the economy occupies an intermediate position. These attributions remain relatively stable across demographic subgroups, indicating a structurally rooted perception rather than isolated individual criticism. The findings suggest that synthetic fuels currently suffer from an “invisibility problem” within dominant narratives of the energy transition, which tend to focus strongly on electrification. This lack of visibility limits informed public debate and reinforces uncertainty and skepticism. The study concludes that improving awareness requires integrating synthetic fuels more explicitly into energy transition communication strategies and policy discourses, thereby enabling citizens to consider them as part of a broader portfolio of sustainable solutions.

Keywords:

Environmental awareness, social responsibility, alternative fuels.