



How do incidental emotions impact pro-environmental behavior? Evidence from the dictator game



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 April 2014

Revised 11 August 2015

Accepted 11 April 2016

Available online 30 April 2016

JEL classification:

C91

D03

Q50

Keywords:

Behavioral economics

Dictator game

Emotions

Environment

Donation

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to study the impact of emotions on monetary donations to pro-environmental causes. We design a three-stage laboratory experiment. In the first stage, participants have the possibility to receive an endowment from an effort game. In the second stage, emotions are induced in the participants. Finally, participants play a dictator game in which the recipient is an environmental Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). We show that incidental emotions do not prompt donations themselves, but that certain emotional states (“Awe”) can increase the amount donated.

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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that they are generally smaller and younger than their counterparts in the humanitarian and the charitable fields, environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been expanding in recent decades. While some charitable NGOs are more than a century old, most environmental NGOs emerged in the 1970s.

List (2011) reports that environmental organizations account for 2% of U.S. household giving in 2006 by recipient status (according to the Giving USA Foundation and the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (2010)). In France, public generosity to environmental NGO's grew by 14.8% between 2008 and 2009, while giving to NGOs as a whole grew by only 2% (Gaillard and Sermier, 2011). As pointed out by van Leeuwen and Wiepking (2012) people “may give to national campaigns because it is a pleasurable experience, which in addition makes us feel good about ourselves and to confirm or create a positive self-image of helpfulness, being a good citizen, an influential person, or a righteous believer” and the success of

fundraising is highly dependent on media interest and coverage, as well as the proximity (both cultural and geographical) of potential donors to the cause (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011). The success of advertising campaigns like the legendary “Crying Indian” launched by the *Keep America Beautiful* NGO in the United States in the 1970s is one illustration of this. The campaign features an Indian's cheerless face with a single tear rolling down his cheek as he looks on while pollution and litter damage his homeland. This campaign, which sought to lower pollution, led to increases in community involvement and a reduction of litter by 88% across 38 US states. Anecdotal evidence such as this suggests that emotions may be an important driver of prosocial behavior and voluntary giving.

This paper seeks to study how emotions impact donation behavior with respect to environmental NGOs. We use a modified version of the dictator game with emotional induction wherein the recipient is an environmental NGO. Four different types of emotions are considered: amusement and awe (positive valence), as well as fear and sadness (negative valence). Results demonstrate that emotional states do not prompt donations but can positively impact donation levels among those who do donate.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we provide a literature review on the impact of emotions on generosity, and we state our motivations. In Section 3, we present our experimental protocol. In Section 4, we present our

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results, and in Section 5 we offer a discussion and concluding remarks.

2. Literature review and motivations

The role of emotions in decision-making has received increasing attention in the economic literature (Elster, 1996, 1998; Rick and Loewenstein, 2008). Emotions are considered to enter into the decision-making process in three different ways (Rick and Loewenstein, 2008). First, emotions intervene through anticipation. In this case, economic agents do not feel the emotion (e.g., pleasure or pain) at the time of their decision; rather, they anticipate that it will occur as a result of the future course of action (Loewenstein, 1987). Second, economic agents may experience emotions at the time of the decision. This situation refers to what is known as integral emotion (Bosman et al., 2005). A third case occurs when emotions are experienced at the time of the decision, but are caused by situational and dispositional sources unrelated to the task at hand (Andrade and Ariely, 2009). This latter situation refers to what are called incidental emotions. The first and the second cases are not problematic for economic theory. These cases fit within the utility maximizing framework and the consequentialist perspective in that utility increases (respectively decreases) when these emotions cause people to be happier (respectively sadder) (Rick and Loewenstein, 2008). The third case is more problematic from the perspective of traditional economic theory. Fewer studies have attempted to incorporate incidental emotions into an economic framework (Loewenstein 1996, 2000; Gneezy et al., 2014). The research of Gneezy et al. (2014) is especially interesting, as they study how incidental emotions may impact prosocial behavior. Prior work in psychology has shown that positive emotions are associated to some degree with prosocial behavior (Isen and Levin, 1972; Carlson et al., 1988; Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006). The novelty of Gneezy et al. (2014) is the introduction of the concept of balance accounting, a framework in which emotions triggered by past decisions induce a temporal shift in preferences. In this framework, prosocial behavior is increased after individuals endure feelings of guilt. This approach complements classical economic theories in which prosocial behavior was considered as, among others things, the consequence of altruism (Bekkers, 2007), warm-glow feelings (Andreoni, 1990), reciprocity (Fehr and Schmidt, 1999), or conformity to social norms (Nyborg et al., 2006).

In our framework, we aim to analyse the interplay between emotions and pro-environmental behaviors.¹ We rely on an experimental approach based on the dictator game to test individual generosity (Kahneman et al., 1986; Forsythe et al., 1994; List, 2007). This game is a particularly interesting way to test generosity and prosocial behavior because it is an asymmetric game in which the recipient is obliged to accept the sum offered by the dictator. Because the dictator does not have to fear the rejection of its proposal, as in the ultimatum game, the motivations behind a dictator's behavior are assumed to be free of strategic considerations. We choose two positive emotions, "Amusement" and "Awe", and two negative emotions, "Fear" and "Sadness". The choice of these emotions was motivated by the differences they are likely to induce in terms of behavior and generosity. According to Keltner and Lerner (2010), emotions affect behavior in different ways based on their appraisal-tendency. Amusement, for example, can lead individuals to engage in playful behavior (Pelligrini, 1992). Moreover, individuals in this mindset also tend to adopt riskier behaviors, as they feel fewer time constraints and external threats (Smith, 1982;

Griskevicius et al., 2010). Awe has been shown to induce devotion and reverence (Woodruff, 2002). Awe also has the capacity to increase one's perception of available time (Keltner and Haidt, 2003), which alters consumption preferences and could make individuals more altruistic (e.g., more prone to volunteering activity) (Rudd et al., 2012). Fear drives individuals to protect themselves in a variety of ways (e.g., escape) and tends to reduce subjective estimations of uncertainty (Raghunathan and Pham, 1999; Tiedens and Linton, 2001). Finally, sadness drives individuals to acquire new goods in order make up for irrevocable losses (Lerner et al., 2004; Cryder et al., 2008). Other authors argue that sadness can help to facilitate the cohesion of social groups (Averill, 1968). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that fear, which is associated with a conservative attitude, should lead to low levels of generosity, while sadness should lead to higher levels of generosity.

Our study appears to complement those of Capra (2004) and Tan and Forgas (2010), as these authors have also used a dictator game to study the impact of induced emotions on generosity. While Capra (2004), shows that positive emotions increase generosity, Tan and Forgas (2010) show that generosity increases by means of negative emotions.² In addition, several studies have shown that changes in framing and the activation of various social norms may significantly affect altruistic behaviors.³ Rousu and Baublitz (2011) have shown, for example, that participants who were in an environment in which everyone faced the same challenge to earn money – i.e., the first stage of our dictator game – were less generous than those who played in a context of unequal earning power. In our experimental design we also rely on the dictator game, yet in our setting the recipient is an environmental NGO rather than an individual. Note that it has been shown in the literature that a framework inducing a social link between the dictator and the recipient increases the incentive to donate (Engel, 2011). More specifically, Eckel and Grossman (1996) showed that dictator generosity is higher when the recipient is the Red Cross.⁴

3. Methodology and experimental design

The experiment was conducted between November 2012 and February 2013 at the Montpellier Laboratory for Experimental Economics (LEEM). Two hundred participants were recruited randomly from the LEEM database on the condition that they had never previously participated in a dictator game. The experiments were single blind. In our framework, we induce participant emotions before asking them to make a monetary donation in a dictator game. In psychology, different techniques are used to induce and measure emotional states (Jallais and Gilet, 2010). We opted for a method utilizing slideshow pictures. Five treatments with 40 participants each took place: a control treatment "Without emotion induction" (TC); two experimental treatments with a positive valence, i.e. "Amusement" (Treatment T1) and "Awe" (Treatment T2), and two experimental treatments with a negative valence, i.e. "Fear" (Treatment T3) and "Sadness" (Treatment T4).

² We also note the contribution of Bosman et al. (2005) who studied integral emotions as immediate emotions through a « power-to-take game ». In their experiment, participants make an effort to obtain an initial endowment, and emotions were not induced (although it can be assumed that success in the initial task may provide a positive affect). Participants are then asked to describe the integral emotions felt (irritation, anger, surprise, shame, etc.) during the game and to evaluate their intensity, which differs from the procedure we employ in our study.

³ We note that many studies have demonstrated the significant role of emotions on individual generosity in the ultimatum game (e.g., Sanfey, 2003). Emotions are often investigated in this framework.

⁴ Note that the nature of the NGO itself can influence generosity through social distance, time horizon, etc. These factors are likely to result in differences in donation amounts. Several studies have shown the effects of social distance on individual generosity, including Kogut and Ritov (2005) and Loewenstein et al. (2006).

¹ In the literature, emotions are distinguished from moods and affects, in terms of latency and therefore with regards to the duration of the emotional state. Because emotional states are felt in our experiment for only a short time, throughout this paper we use the term emotion following Andrade and Ariely (2009).

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