



Warm glow vs. altruistic values: How important is intrinsic emotional reward in proenvironmental behavior?



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 May 2016

Received in revised form

13 April 2017

Accepted 31 May 2017

Available online 1 June 2017

Keywords:

Warm glow

Altruistic values

Proenvironmental behavior

Climate protection

ABSTRACT

This research addresses the role of warm glow as an antecedent of proenvironmental behavior in a comparative study of the behavioral effects of warm glow and altruistic personality traits and values. So far the influences of altruism and warm glow have not been analyzed simultaneously. Two online surveys with representative population samples show that warm glow has a stronger influence on proenvironmental intentions than altruism. However, the study also provides a process explanation for the decreased influence of altruism when warm glow is introduced into the model. Results show that warm glow mediates the effects of altruism, but that introducing warm glow together with altruism also explains additional variance of proenvironmental behavior, apart from the indirect effect of altruism. Further findings support a reinforcing mechanism by which warm glow strengthens the effect of prior proenvironmental behavior on future intention. Implications for the promotion of proenvironmental behavior are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Do individuals behave prosocially because they are driven by selfless and altruistic values, or can prosocial behavior also be more instrumental and motivated by experiences of self-gratifying emotional reward? The current study tries to answer this question for the case of proenvironmental behavior.

Altruistic values have been conceptualized as part of a personal value structure or overall guiding principle that motivates individuals to contribute to the wellbeing of others or of society as a whole (Schwartz, 1972; Stern, Dietz, Kalof, & Guagnano, 1995). A stream of empirical evidence has supported altruistic values specifically as an antecedent of proenvironmental behavior (Bamberg, 2003; Berenguer, 2007; Stern & Dietz, 1994). Some researchers have however questioned the existence of 'true' altruism, that is,

behavior motivated by authentically selfless motives, and proposed alternative accounts for prosocial motivation (Batson, 1987; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010). Andreoni (1989, 1990) showed that individuals may experience psychological benefits from prosocial behavior, which he termed "warm glow of giving". Warm glow benefits have also been shown to motivate proenvironmental behavior, since individuals may experience a feeling of moral satisfaction derived from their contribution to the common good environment (Kahneman & Knetsch, 1992; Nunes & Schokkaert, 2003; Ritov & Kahneman, 1997).

However, so far, the effects of altruism and warm glow have not been assessed in the same study and analyzed simultaneously. The present research addresses this gap in the literature, while also making theoretical propositions with regard to the behavioral antecedents and consequences of warm glow. The contribution of this research is threefold. First, this research compares the effects of altruistic values and warm glow as drivers of environmental behavior. Second, a process explanation for altruism effects is proposed and tested, with warm glow mediating behavioral

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influences of altruism. Third, this research studies whether warm glow can both drive and reinforce proenvironmental behavior.

These contributions are based on robust findings across two field studies. The first study assessed the influence of altruism and warm glow on two environmental behaviors with 600 individuals drawn from a representative panel of the Australian population. The second study, in addition to reassessing the influences of altruism and warm glow, further addressed the reinforcing influence of warm glow by comparing 300 Australian residential customers of green electricity with a representative sample of 300 Australians with standard home electricity.

2. The role of altruism in proenvironmental behavior

Altruism involves acting to increase the welfare of others incurring personal costs but lacking personal gains (Batson, 1994). As with most prosocial behavior, proenvironmental behavior has inherent characteristics of altruism and can be construed as such (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Since the impact of an individual's proenvironmental behavior on its own marginal welfare is rather negligible, the individual acts for the benefit of the common good or future generations, incurring actual costs but lacking an increase in personal welfare.

Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) suggested a broad base for altruism derived from an "altruistic personality" and proposes the existence of altruistic personality traits. With the term "altruistic traits" these authors referred to enduring personality characteristics which are revealed in particular behavior patterns.

Altruism has also been addressed from a human values perspective. Personal values are conceptualized as desirable, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Schwartz, 1992). Behavioral research stretching over several decades has confirmed human values as important drivers of proenvironmental behaviors. Linking proenvironmental behavior to particular values, research has drawn on the value measures developed in cross-national research by Schwartz (1992), based in turn on Schwartz's (1972) norm-activation theory of altruism. Several studies have found that self-transcendence or altruistic values (i.e., universalism and benevolence in Schwartz's value classification scheme) are stronger among people who engage in proenvironmental activities (e.g., Schwartz, 1992; Stern et al., 1995). Proenvironmental attitudes and behaviors have been shown to be positively related to altruistic or self-transcendence values, while negatively related to egoistic or self-enhancement values (Gärling, Fujii, Gärling, & Jakobsson, 2003; Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson, & Gärling, 2008a; Kaiser, Hübner, & Bogner, 2005; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002; Stern & Dietz, 1994). Also the influences of environmental-altruistic values have been confirmed in several studies (Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993; Stern et al., 1995). Further research centered on climate protection and green energy consumption found that altruistic values contributed to explaining participation in a green energy program (Clark, Kotchen, & Moore, 2003) and that willingness to pay for green electricity related to self-transcendence value types (Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson, & Gärling, 2008b).

3. Is behavior ever truly altruistic?

Notwithstanding findings on the effects of altruistic values, there is still an ongoing scientific debate over whether individuals are ever truly altruistic (Batson, 1987). It has been suggested that prosocial motives are egoistic when the ultimate goal is to increase one's own welfare, and altruistic when it is to increase others' welfare (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987). A number of researchers, such as Cialdini et al. (1997), propose non-altruistic

accounts of prosocial motivation, questioning pure altruism. A common view is that human's behavioral motivations are essentially selfish. Behavior that appears to be altruistic can actually have egoistic motives such as reputation seeking or reduction of distress and aversive arousal, evoked as a consequence of being aware of other individuals' needs or suffering (Batson, 1987; Cialdini et al., 1987).

4. Warm glow and proenvironmental behavior

4.1. Operationalizing warm glow

Pleasure seeking and pursuing happiness may constitute important motives for prosocial and proenvironmental behavior. Isen (1970) found that the potential helper's positive affective state determines helpfulness ("people who feel good themselves are more likely to help others") and introduced the term "warm glow" to refer to the emotional experience involved. Warm glow may increase the probability of engaging in prosocial behavior. This "warm glow effect" has received broad empirical support. Research has shown that experiencing feelings of pleasure can significantly increase an individual's likelihood of engaging in charitable behavior (e.g., Isen & Levin, 1972; Levin & Isen, 1975) and can induce helping behavior (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980). Analyzing the case of blood donations, Allen, Machleit, and Schultz Kleine (1992) showed that emotional gratifications such as the feeling of joy accompanied donation behavior. Duclos and Barasch (2014) found that the belief that helping others contributed to personal happiness had a significant influence on prosocial behaviors.

A further development of warm glow theory has originated from an economic perspective of behavior. To account for the observed incongruence of donation behavior with classical economic theory, Andreoni (1989, 1990) suggested that when people make donations to public goods, instead of being motivated by the increase in value of the common good, they rather experience a direct, personal benefit arising from the contribution itself. This personal benefit, which Andreoni called the "warm glow of giving", is of purely psychological character and arises from the moral satisfaction that an individual derives from the act of giving.

Most previous empirical research has addressed warm glow indirectly as an additional component of an individual's utility function, without measuring it explicitly. Kahneman and Knetsch (1992) developed a first empirical approach to the direct measurement of warm glow, focusing, however, exclusively on the degree of satisfaction an individual would receive from contributing to environmental causes. In their experiment, the individual willingness to contribute was predicted by ratings of the moral satisfaction associated with the contribution. In fact, the measurement item used by Kahneman and Knetsch was nearly identical to post-consumption satisfaction measures commonly used in the customer satisfaction literature (e.g., Mano & Oliver, 1993; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Table 1 provides an overview over assessments and measures of warm glow in prior studies and their problems.

The warm glow operationalization proposed in the current study is in part based on Isen's (1970) and Isen and Levin's (1972) concept of warm glow as an affective-emotional state, and captures the feeling of wellbeing related to the contribution to a good cause. Following the cognitive appraisal perspective (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Roseman, 1991), warm glow feelings may result from the cognitive appraisal of the contribution of prosocial and proenvironmental behavior to the common good. Based on this argumentation, and adding to the perspective of Kahneman and Knetsch (1992), we propose assessing warm glow as a positive

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