From Communication to Action

How to communicate to motivate women to act pro-environmentally?

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Introduction

Climate change represents one of the main issues of today. Proven to be anthropogenic, mainly caused by extraction and burning of fossil fuels, there is an urgent need to act to limit its underlying causes. Despite increasing efforts by private and public actors alike, only a limited change in human behavior has been registered so far. One of the main reasons for this has concluded to be the faulty climate change communication. Based on erroneous assumptions about the nature of human behavior as fully rational and ineffectively set up (being rather abstract, talking about the global implications of climate change and its catastrophic futures without providing any solutions and positive outlook), it freezes people in inaction rather than motivating them toward pro-environmental engagement.

Experimental questions:

1. Is a complex or a concise strategy more effective to motivate intentions to act pro-environmentally?
2. If a more concise strategy proves more effective to motivate pro-environmental intentions, which of the two tested versions, a peer effects-based or a local aspects-based one?

3-stage experiment was conducted:

- Pre-test Questionnaire
- Experimental Group “Peer” Group “Local” Group “Mixed” Group “Control”
- Post-test Questionnaire

Variables chosen:

IV: Communication strategy
DV1: Intentions to shift to renewable energy mix
DV2: Intentions to shift to clean transport options
DV3: Voting intentions within the Referendum on Energy Strategy 2050, held in Switzerland on 21 May 2017

Results

The differentiated impact of the strategies was tested by comparing the answers related to dependent variables between the pre- and post-experimental questionnaires across time and experimental groups. To complete thus obtained data, an eye tracking software was implemented while exposing selected participants to the experimental strategies.

Reasons for the effectiveness of the peer-effects-based strategy proved to be the most effective across all tested variables and for female target group in particular, followed by local aspects-based-strategy, mixed strategy and the control group. Consequently, it can be concluded that concise communication strategies are more effective than complex ones, with peer effects having the largest impact overall.

Repeatability

1. Conciseness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Time (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer effects</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local aspects</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>8.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Corresponding to female values and worldviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic value</th>
<th>Presence of environment is important because:</th>
<th>Is important for me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Gov/ Prevent harm</td>
<td>1. Trees and animal species are protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Fragility/ Responsibility</td>
<td>1. Trees and animal species are protected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Predominance of pictures and statements relative to people

- Predominance of pictures
- Predominance of statements

Frequency of gaze of a female (left) and male (right) participants; Advantages of Energy Strategy 2050, local aspects-based strategy [https://ikkm10.webnode.com/sorteles2010/, last access 03 October 2018].

Conclusions and further research

The present research contributes to the ongoing scientific debate on how exactly to set-up communication strategies to motivate pro-environmental behavior. Its results show that concise, namely peer effects-based strategies, are the most successful in motivating people’s intentions to act pro-environmentally and vote in favor of pro-environmental initiatives. The peer effects-based strategies were the most effective in general and in particular in regard to women since they correspond to their deeply held values and worldviews.

These findings open-up for further research. Firstly, the role of differentiated framing within peer effects-based communication strategies and its impacts on additional target groups (such as men and non-students) could be analyzed. Secondly, the results generated could and should be implemented in practice, for example within one of the upcoming votes relative to pro-environmental initiative. This would bring additional insights as well as represent an ultimate proof of the relevance and applicability of presented results.

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References


