Social Identity, Pro-Environmental Action, Culture, and Social Contexts: A Cross-Country Perspective

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Abstract

Environmental crises that are on a large scale are undeniably collective phenomena, occurring because of collective behaviour rather than personal motives. Social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) enables people to think and act as part of a collective; people think in terms of "who we are" and "what we stand for" as they seek to protect the interests of group members. Fritsche et al. (2018) also highlight the need for a collective dimension of pro-environmental action via their Social Identity Model of Pro-Environmental Action (SIMPEA). This model considers the fact that people's appraisals of environmental crises are shaped by collective factors and that environmental goals are collective can be successfully achieved when pursued collectively. This project aims to explore this model in detail across the cultural contexts of various countries seeking to situate the interrelationships within a specific local context. A social identity perspective on collective action might prove crucial in helping to appropriately appraise and effectively address environmental crises. This project specifically proposes to examine how processes such as ingroup identification, collective efficacy beliefs, and ingroup norms can impact environmental outcomes by exploring how social identities direct people to behave in increasing or decreasing pro-environmental ways. This is also examined across different cultural contexts and values as specific cultural context can shape the nature of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. This study will be completed using surveys and questionnaires (aiming to have a minimum n of 100 per country) and analysed using the appropriate statistical techniques.

Keywords: social identity, pro-environmental attitudes, pro-environmental behaviour, collective action, intergroup relations

Overview

Environmental crises that are on a large scale are undeniably collective phenomena, occurring as a result of collective behaviour rather than personal motives. Social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the capacity to define the self in terms of "we" instead of "I", enables people to think and act as part of a collective, operating from a collective sense of self. People think in terms of "who we are" and "what we stand for" as they seek to protect the interests of group members. Fritsche et al. (2018) also highlight the need for a collective dimension of pro-environmental action via their Social Identity Model of Pro-Environmental Action (SIMPEA). This model considers the fact that people's appraisals of environmental crises are shaped by various ideologies, collective risk, or group norms. Importantly, they assert that environmental goals are frequently collective rather than personal and can only be achieved when pursued collectively. According to this model, ingroup identification, collective efficacy beliefs, ingroup behaviour, and emotions interact in affecting the appraisal of environmental crises as well as people's responses. Environmental challenges are also significantly impacted by intergroup tensions. Political orientations, the presence of local communities, socio-economic statuses, and the influence of the local context all play a significant role in how a particular environmental challenge is addressed.

The social identity approach (Reicher et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) can play a significant role in understanding these inter-relationships, particularly in the examination of how individuals are influenced by their group memberships and social contexts, and how this can impact the attitudes they hold towards the environment (e.g., Colvin et al., 2015; Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). This social identity perspective on collective action might prove crucial in helping to appropriately appraise and effectively address environmental crises. The dual chamber model (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021) also provides keen insights into collective behaviour as a whole, suggesting a bridge between cultural psychology and collective action.

Thus, this project proposes to examine how processes such as ingroup identification, collective efficacy beliefs, and ingroup norms can affect environmental outcomes by exploring how social identities direct people to behave in increasing or decreasing pro-environmental ways. This research also aims to examine how this may vary across different cultural contexts and values as specific cultural context can shape the nature of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. It is crucial to examine what strategies might foster more sustainable and positive attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, and social identity-based strategies might provide long-lasting solutions here.

Research Questions

1. How does the interaction between ingroup identification, collective efficacy beliefs, ingroup behaviour, and collective emotions predict pro-environmental action?
2. How does the specific local context of study influence the nature of these inter-relationships?

Proposed Methodology

Data will be collected from a representative sample of at least 100 individuals per country (this can be revisited with the group and after the appropriate power analyses). Descriptive analyses, multiple linear regression, and path analysis using structural equation modelling will be conducted in order to address the aforementioned questions.

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