It’S Not You, It’S Me: Consequences of Charitable Support Allocation on Consumer Prosocial Identity and Subsequent Support Behaviors

Donna Hoffman, George Washington University, USA
Tom Novak, George Washington University, USA

The identity of a consumer Internet of Things (IoT) assemblage emerges through a historical process of ongoing interactions among consumers, smart devices, and digital information. Topological Data Analysis (TDA), consistent with mathematical aspects of assemblage theory, is used to visualize the underlying possibility space from which individual IoT assemblages emerge.

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It’s Not You, It’s Me: Consequences of Charitable Support Allocation on Consumer Prosocial Identity and Subsequent Support Behaviors

Kirk Kristofferson, Arizona State University, USA
Katherine White, University of British Columbia, Canada
Darren W. Dahl, University of British Columbia, Canada
Cait Lamberton, University of Pittsburgh, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The debate regarding non-profit fiscal practices continues to grow. Difficult economic conditions have prompted charitable organizations to implement large-scale marketing programs and attract highly skilled leaders. Whether salient to consumers or not, the funds to support these initiatives come from consumer support. The current research examines what happens to consumers’ own prosocial identity and to their subsequent charitable contributions when they realize that less of their initial donation than expected has gone to the recipients of a charitable cause. While some research suggests that consumers might protect their identities by giving themselves credit for intending to act prosocially (Kruger and Gilovich 2004), we make the novel proposition that learning that support allocation (i.e., the amount of donation going to the charitable cause) was lower than expected can lead consumers to see themselves as less prosocial which also leads to decreased future prosocial action.

We define prosocial identity as the perception of how prosocial one perceives him/herself to be. On the one hand, research suggests that low support allocation information may not affect prosocial identity or future support due to the motivation to protect the self from ego or identity threats. For example, research finds that consumers judge their actions based on the impact they intended to make rather than actual performance (Kruger and Gilovich 2004). Alternatively, research also suggests that consumers may internalize this prosocial identity threat and reduce subsequent support. For example, research has shown that situational factors may positively or negatively impact prosocial identity and subsequent behavior (Aquino et al. 2009; Bandura 1991).

We make the novel prediction that after providing meaningful support for a charitable organization, consumers will perceive themselves to be less prosocial upon learning that less of their support went to cause recipients. We propose this novel process occurs because low allocation information reduces the positive benefits received from believing one’s support made an impact in the lives of others (Aknin et al. 2014). Moreover, we propose this decreased prosocial identity process will reduce subsequent support not only for the supported organization, but also future support behavior. Thus, managerial decisions made by one organization may have detrimental effects on the success of others.

Study 1 documented our proposed model. After imagining supporting a charity, participants (n = 101) read one of two versions of a press release that outlined how funds were allocated between cause recipients (High = 91%, Low = 31%) and costs. Participants exposed to the low (vs. high) allocation information showed a decreased prosocial identity (p < .05), as well as lower likelihood of future support (p < .05, significant mediation).

Study 2 showed support for our decreased prosocial identity prediction by introducing an expectations moderator designed to elicit external attributions (Design: 2 (Allocation: Low, High) x 2 (Expectations: Control, High). Participants (n = 266) followed the procedure of study 1 but received an expectations manipulation prior to the allocation information. Participants in the control (high) condition read that similar charities allocated between 30-50% (90-100%) of support to recipients. Results revealed the predicted interaction.

Low (vs. high) allocation participants showed a reduced prosocial identity in the control condition which reduced support for both the previously supported and unrelated charities; no differences emerged when expectations were high (significant conditional indirect effect).

Study 3 introduced a task to bolster prosocial identity and used a (Design: 2 (Allocation: Low, High) x 2 (Bolster: Present, Absent). Participants (n = 170) first completed an effortful charitable volunteer task for a real charity for 20 minutes. Participants next read the press release manipulation, then performed the bolster essay task in which they wrote about a time they performed a charitable act (Present) or what they ate for lunch yesterday (Absent). Finally, participants completed prosocial identity and subsequent support measures. The predicted interaction emerged. Participants in the bolster absent condition exhibited the identity consequence (Low < High), which predicted a reduced support when allocation, but no differences emerged among bolstered participants.

Study 4 provided direct evidence for reduced prosocial identity using a repeated-measures design. Further, we ruled out deception as an alternative explanation (Darke and Ritchie 2007). Prosocial identity data was collected in two phases: first (via pre-survey) and last (lab experiment) weeks of the semester, resulting in a 2 (Allocation: Low, High) x 2 (Prosocial Identity: Pre-, Post-Support) mixed design. Participants (n = 135) completed the real volunteer task from study 3, read one of the two press releases, then completed post-support identity measures. Participants also indicated feelings deception and betrayal. At the end of the session, participants received a support request from a different non-profit. A significant interaction emerged (p < .05). Participants exposed to the low allocation information showed a direct reduction in prosocial identity (p < .05), but no difference emerged when allocation was high. Reduced prosocial identity then predicted lower agreement to help the unrelated organization (p < .05). Support allocation had no effect on feelings of deception or betrayal.

Study 5 reconciled our framework with action and intention research by introducing a novel moderator: support success. We predicted that when participants failed to meet their intended support, they give themselves credit for their intentions. However, after successfully supporting, we expected our prosocial identity consequence. Participants (n = 124) completed a modified form of the cold pressor task in which they submerged their arms in freezing water for 10 minutes to earn $10 for a charity. A separate group watched videos of participants completing the task, resulting in a 2 (Allocation: Low, High) x 2 (Support Success: Success, Failure) x 1 (Observer) design. After the support task, participants completed prosocial identity items. As expected, participants succeeding in supporting the organization showed a lower prosocial identity after exposure to low (vs. high) allocation information (p < .05), but failing participants showed no differences (p > .05). Analysis of observer ratings showed that participants who failed (succeeded) gave themselves credit for intentions and rated their identities as higher (lower) than observers judged them to be, thus rectifying our novel process with previous work.
REFERENCES


