The Role of Goal Orientations on Pro-Social vs. Pro-Self Spending Choices

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Description: Two experimental studies show that inducing an extrinsic goal focus influence consumers towards less pro-social spending choices.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question
The present research examines the role of goal orientations (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) on consumer’s pro-social vs. pro-self spending choices. We hypothesize that priming an intrinsic goal focus will influence consumers towards pro-social spending choices while inducing an extrinsic goal focus will increase the likelihood of making pro-self spending choices.

Methods and Data
Study 1 was an experimental survey collecting data from 211 university students. Participants were randomly allocated to an extrinsic or an intrinsic goal writing induction. Then, they were presented with a windfall scenario and were asked to freely describe how they would spend the money given. A researcher blinded to the hypothesis coded the descriptions as pro-social or pro-self. Forty-eight participants’ descriptions (24%) were coded as pro-social spending choices. A chi-square test comparing the extrinsic vs. intrinsic manipulation with their pro-social vs. pro-self spending choice indicated that there were significant differences between the groups, $\chi^2 (1) = 6.10,$ $p = .014.$ Participants that completed the intrinsic manipulation (107 out of 201) were more likely to choose to spend money on someone else ($n = 33$) than participants in the extrinsic manipulation ($n = 15$).

Study 2 ($N = 297$) was an experimental survey with three conditions. We used visual stimuli and reading materials that replicated content from popular magazines, to induce an intrinsic, extrinsic, or neutral goal orientation (control condition) on a general population sample. After the manipulation, participants were presented with a windfall scenario were asked to freely allocate the money into a purchase and indicate whether they selected to spend money on themselves or on someone else. A chi-square test showed significant differences between the conditions, $\chi^2 (2) = 8.00,$ $p = .018.$ Participants that completed the extrinsic manipulation were less likely to make a pro-social spending choice ($n = 22$) than participants in the intrinsic ($n = 43$) and control ($n = 41$) groups.

Summary of the Findings
Participants primed with an extrinsic goal focus were less likely to make pro-social spending choices. These results show a causal link between an extrinsic goal focus and pro-self spending choices.

Key Contributions
Environmental cues portraying extrinsic goals, such as fashion magazines or advertisement, nudge consumers towards less pro-social spending choices, which have been found in past research to provide higher levels of well-being.

References are available on request.