The Impact of Normative Feedback on Pro-Environmental Intentions and Behaviour

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Introduction

- Perceived social norms act as powerful tools in shaping attitudes and behaviour
  - people behave based on what they perceive to be the ‘correct’ behaviour, or on what they think other people are doing

- Power conservation (Allcott, 2009; Ayres et al., 2009; Schultz et al., 2007)
  - gave people information about average energy consumption rates in their local neighborhood
  - people reduced their personal gas and electricity usage by 1-3% in response to feedback
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Consensus biases

- Sometimes our perceptions of how other people think and behave are inaccurate

- We may have a misrepresentation of the degree of consensus with our own beliefs and behaviour

- Biases in estimating consensus:
  - *false consensus effect* (Ross et al., 1977)
  - *false uniqueness effect* (Goethals et al., 1991; Suls & Wan, 1987)

- Evidence of these biases with regards people’s beliefs about climate change...
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Asked people their beliefs about climate change:

- I don’t think climate change is happening
- I have no idea whether climate change is happening or not
- I think that climate change is happening, but it’s just a natural fluctuation in Earth’s temperatures
- I think that climate change is happening and humans are largely causing it

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- respondents asked the % of Australians that would agree with the four above statements
CSIRO: Survey of Australian Attitudes to Climate Change (Leviston & Walker, 2011)

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  - False consensus effect
    - climate change ‘deniers’ and ‘don’t knowers’ considerably overestimated support for their own belief
  - False uniqueness effect
    - ‘happening-human’ and ‘happening-natural’ climate change believers underestimated degree of support for their own belief
  - False uniqueness bias for ‘happening-human’ climate change believers is a particular concern
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- *False uniqueness bias for ‘happening-human’ climate change believers is a particular concern*
Aims

- Explore link between the ‘false uniqueness effect’ and pro-environmental intentions and behaviours
  - focus on ‘happening-human’ and ‘happening-natural’ climate change believers

Questions:

- Q1: does the false uniqueness effect for climate change beliefs extend to behaviour?
- Q2: does corrective normative feedback about beliefs and actions increase pro-environmental intentions and behaviour?
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Methodological approach

- **Phase I:**
  - establish perceived descriptive and injunctive norms

- **Phase II:**
  - provide ‘normative feedback’ about community beliefs and pro-environmental actions
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- Phase I:
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- Phase II:
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Phase I: Establish perceived descriptive and injunctive norms

- Ask people their beliefs about climate change using CSIRO statements
  - ask people what they think others think about climate change
- Ask people what pro-environmental behaviours they engage in
  - ask people what pro-environmental behaviours they think others engage in
Phase I: Establish perceived descriptive and injunctive norms

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  - ask people what they *think others think* about climate change

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Phase I: Pro-environmental behaviour example questions

- I switch lights off around the house whenever possible
- I have reduced the amount of water I use around the house and garden
- I have reduced the amount of gas and/or electricity I use around the house
- I usually walk/cycle/carpool/take public transport
- Where possible, I buy products that are locally made
- Plus others...
Phase I: Compare perceived and actual beliefs/behaviours

- Compare each group’s ‘actual beliefs’ with their ‘estimated beliefs’ about climate change
  - ‘false uniqueness effect’ anticipated

- Compare each group’s ‘actual pro-environmental actions’ with their ‘estimated pro-environmental actions’
  - ‘false uniqueness effect’ anticipated
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False uniqueness effects

Beliefs

Climate Change Belief

Behaviour

Climate Change Belief

Mean % Belief

Happening–Human  Happening–Natural

Actual  Estimated

Mean Frequency Pro–Environmental Actions

Happening–Human  Happening–Natural

Actual  Estimated

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Phase I: Replicate Consensus Biases
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Provide corrective normative feedback

- Examine impact of normative feedback on climate change beliefs and pro-environmental intentions and behaviour
  - Sub-set of respondents invited back for a second survey
  - Manipulate climate change belief:
    - Happening-Human vs. Happening-Natural
  - Manipulate normative feedback:
    - No Feedback vs. Beliefs vs. Behaviour vs. Beliefs+Behaviour
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Evaluating beliefs and pro-environmental intentions / behaviour

- Assessing beliefs:
  - ask people their beliefs about climate change using original CSIRO statements

- Assessing pro-social intentions / actions:
  - re-administer pro-environmental behaviours questionnaire
  - assess people’s willingness to donate a % of their honorarium to an environmental cause
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Predictions: Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Happening-Human</th>
<th>Happening-Natural</th>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Beliefs</td>
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Mean Frequency Pro-Environmental Actions
Normative Feedback and Pro-Environmental Behaviour

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Predictions

Intentions Behaviour

Summary

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- Provision of accurate normative feedback about beliefs and behaviour may mitigate the effects of such biases
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Thanks for your attention!

- Financial support:

[Image of NCCARF logo]
References I


References II

