

How Non-Profit Marketing Can Use the Self-Protection Motive to Induce Sustainable Behavior

Tobias Hinze

University of Cologne

Magdalena Bekk

University of Cologne

Franziska Völckner

University of Cologne

Valentyna Melnyk

Massey University

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Abstract

While most people agree that consequences of e.g., water pollution are health threatening, they are surprisingly apathetic when it comes to actually performing sustainable behavior. Thus, one major challenge NGOs and public policy advocates face is how to activate those consumers and induce more sustainable behavior. The authors propose that activating the evolutionary self-protection motive triggers a set of functionally relevant responses, which in turn induce sustainable behavior. In two experimental studies, the authors test the two core factors, which trigger self-protection, namely avoidability of the threat and distance to the threat as well as related sustainable behavior. The results suggest that activating the self-protection motive by communicating threats as being close and unavoidable induces both short-term sustainable behavior (such as one-off donation), as well as behavior with long-term consequences (boycotting, and especially switching behavior).

Keywords: *self-protection; sustainable behavior; evolutionary psychology*

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