

How Salient Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motives in an Actor's Prosocial Behavior Inspire Observers' Altruism

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Abstract

This research examines a mechanism through which perceived motives behind an individual's prosocial act shape observers' altruistic behavior. We propose that salient intrinsic motives in others' prosocial behavior can heighten observers' feelings of moral inspiration – such as feeling uplifted and motivated to help others – which in turn can predict observers' altruistic behavior. In three preregistered experiments ($N = 2,087$), salient intrinsic motives from a prosocial actor increased observers' moral inspiration, and this inspiration indirectly increased observers' altruism, even when the actor also exhibited salient extrinsic motives. Although salient intrinsic motives did not exert a total effect on altruistic behavior, they consistently had a positive indirect impact through moral inspiration. We also show that moral inspiration can occur across different prosocial domains, where one type of prosocial act can inspire a different type of prosocial act.

Track: Consumer Behaviour