

Social Identity Appeals as an Avenue to Promote Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Charles R. Seger, University of East Anglia, School of Psychology, Centre for Behavioural and Economic Social Science

Ellin Lede, University of East Anglia, School of Environmental Sciences; Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

Rose Meleady, University of East Anglia, School of Psychology

Increasing knowledge through education, whether in the environment, health, or safety domains, often does not lead to a change in behaviour. Instead, behavioural and social scientists argue that motivation is the driving force behind behaviour change. One of the major motivators of behaviour is social identity, or a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership.

When an in-group identity is salient, people's attitudes and behaviours converge towards those that are perceived as typical for that group. When pro-environmental behaviour is seen as normative for an individual's in-group, he or she should be more likely to view the environment as important and in to engage in conservation behaviours.

Three studies examined how appealing to an individual's in-group identity can motivate behaviour change in a water-conservation context, beyond what would be seen through information alone.

In an initial online study with university students, those provided with social identity appeals (e.g., UEA students care about conserving water) showed increased water-saving intentions compared to those not given an identity appeal.

In study 2, Participants from Norwich were provided with a social identity appeal, or an information only condition. They then completed a number of items measuring their behavioural intentions for water conservation. People in the identity appeal condition showed increased intentions; this effect was more pronounced for those who were higher in in-group identification.

Study 3 focused on actual behaviour and showed that people who were provided with a social identity appeal were more likely take information about a water conservation programme and to sign-up for this programme

These studies provide evidence that social identity appeals are effective at motivating pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. We will discuss how this can be applied to the climate change domain and how social identity may promote or inhibit attitude and behaviour change in the real world.