

Fabio Zander

Climate Change Risk Perception and Pro-Environmental Behavior. Toward a Comprehensive Model

Master's Thesis

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DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY

***Climate Change Risk Perception and Pro-
Environmental Behavior – Toward a
Comprehensive Model***

Fabio Zander

Master's Thesis (30 hp)
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Abstract

Climate change has become one of the greatest concerns of the 21st century as its ramifications pose a major risk to all life on earth. However, not all individuals are aware of this risk and behavioral engagement to counteract the issue is often still lacking. This research examined the relationship between climate change risk perception and pro-environmental behavior. The aim of this cross-sectional study was twofold. First, studying specific pro-environmental behavior and second, using a methodological approach that addresses the measurement inconsistencies in the literature on how to define and operationalize climate change risk perception. The sample consisted of 141 young educated adults ($M = 25.67$, $SD = 2.93$) who responded to an online questionnaire. Results showed that climate change risk perception significantly predicted pro-environmental behavior. Comparing personal worry and general concern as two distinct indicators of climate change risk perception indicated that personal worry was stronger correlated to pro-environmental behavior. This relationship was found to be partially mediated by pro-environmental behavioral intentions. Results of a multiple hierarchical regression showed that including personal worry as an additional predictor variable did not significantly increase the explained variance in pro-environmental behavior, after having controlled for variables from the theory of planned behavior (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) and the norm-activation model (personal norms). The findings extend the current literature and contribute to a further understanding of why and how humans behave pro-environmentally. Future researchers are encouraged to study the individual drivers of climate change more closely.

Keywords: climate change, risk perception, pro-environmental behavior, personal worry, general concern, theory of planned behavior, norm-activation model, measurement correspondence

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Toward a Comprehensive Model

“We are in a new geological epoch. We are now the dominating force of change on planet Earth. We exceed the forces of the sun or of volcanic eruptions. We are in the driving seat.”

- Johan Rockström.

On November 13, 2017, over 15,000 scientists gave a public warning about the fate of humanity, yet again. In their letter *A Second Notice*, they predicted that ongoing unsustainable human actions pressuring Earth's systems could cause irreversible environmental change. This could lead to conditions on Earth which no longer support human development (Ripple, Wolf, Newsome, Galetti, Alamgir, Crist et al., 2017). Climate change has become one of the greatest concerns of the 21st century because its ramifications pose a major threat to life on Earth. Findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) state that climate change will result with a high probability (67 to 95 percent likelihood) in a rising global temperature, heat waves, more floodings and droughts, more extreme weather events, sea level rise and melting ice-caps as some examples. Many of those impacts are already evident today, and according to predictions, further impacts are inevitable.

Today, there is an overwhelming scientific agreement on climate largely changing due to anthropogenic greenhouse gases, particularly from our reliance on fossil fuels and industrialized forms of agriculture (IPCC, 2014). Another contribution of those emissions comes from specific lifestyle choices and behaviors that remain carbon-intensive and unsustainable (Gifford, 2008; Rockström, Steffen, Noone, Persson, Chapin, Lambin et al., 2009). In order to mitigate climate change, both individuals and corporations need to reduce their carbon footprint. Political steps toward a low-carbon world community have already been taken. As of June 2018, 195 countries have signed the Paris Agreement, a contract that aims to