From Alarm to Action: Narrowing the Belief-Behavior Gap Regarding Climate Change

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“Political leaders will not take risks if the people do not demand that they do. You must create the change that you want to see”
(March 31, 2013, The Telegraph).

http://www.whitehouse.gov/
Adoption of future climate policies may be unlikely without public demand; climate activism is critical (Skocpol, 2013).

**What prompts climate activism?**
- Contact government officials
- Donate time/money
- Sign petitions

**How can these actions be encouraged?**

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**What drives climate activism?**

People are more inclined to engage if they...

- feel capable of acting
- believe their individual and collective efforts will be effective
- think similar others are participating.

Results can inform communication and education strategies.
29% of Alarmed contacted government officials
34% donated money to organizations
34% “occasionally” or “often” signed petitions

Methods

- Created behavior model [based on value belief norm theory (Stern et al., 1999)]
- Electronic survey
- Targeted Alarmed Vermonters, N=702
- Structural Equation Modeling
  - Tests ability of model to explain data
  - Identifies most influential variables and relationships
- Compared Alarmed actors and Alarmed non-actors
Bandura (1986)

**Individual**

**Capability**
- Self-efficacy
  - “I can do it.”

**Impact**
- Personal response efficacy
  - “My behavior will be effective”

**Group**

**Capability**
- Collective efficacy
  - “We can do it.”

**Impact**
- Collective response efficacy
  - “Our behavior will be effective.”

Model of Climate Activism

Social Cognitive Theory/Efficacy
Efficacy Beliefs are Key Drivers

I CAN DO IT
MY ACTION IS EFFECTIVE
OUR ACTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE

CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Descriptive Social Norms

Perceptions of what others commonly do in similar situations (Schultz et al., 2007).
Descriptive Social Norms are Key Drivers

SIMILAR OTHERS ACTING = CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Summary of Results

I CAN DO IT MY ACTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE OUR ACTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE SIMILAR OTHERS ACTING = CLIMATE ACTIVISM
### Implication and Application of Results

Strengthening efficacy beliefs and beliefs that similar others are acting should help increase climate activism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible communication strategies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong> about action strategies (representatives, voting, organizations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invoke descriptive social norms</strong> - Messages or experiences demonstrating similar others acting, opinion leadership, messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convince</strong> - Importance of involvement, effectiveness of individual and collective actions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong> about personal and group action</td>
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### Personal Application of Results

- Professionally, use communication and education strategies to increase efficacy and descriptive social norms.

- Personally, let others know what you are doing, that their actions are important and can make a difference too.

**THANK YOU!**
References


