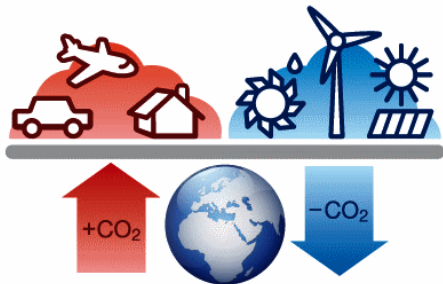




Doing Good or Undoing Harm - Framing Voluntary Contributions to Climate Change Mitigation

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Voluntary offsets to mitigate climate change



Voluntary carbon offsets...

- are a contribution to a (global) public good.
- are meant to neutralize the adverse effects of a public bad.

The Research Question

Does it make a difference for the willingness to contribute to a climate change mitigation project whether individuals are asked...

- to **donate** to a climate change mitigation project or
- to **offset** own CO_2 emissions in the same project?

Both decision situations are **structurally identical**: individuals give up money that is forwarded to a climate change mitigation project.

Yet, the two framings imply a **change in the reference point** of the decision situation:

- Donation framing: contribution is "doing good".
- Offset framing: contribution is "undoing harm".

Framing Theory

Framing (Tversky and Kahneman 1981)

The framing of a decision situation determines an individual's conception of "the acts, outcomes, and contingencies associated with a particular choice".

Goal framing (Levin et al. 1998)

Presenting the consequences of a choice or action as either positive or negative outcomes

- by stressing either the *positive consequences* (potential gain) of performing an act
- or the *negative consequences* (potential loss) of *not* performing the act.

The Experimental Setting

- Online survey conducted in German speaking part of Switzerland
- N = 537
- Participants were remunerated with 6 CHF (approx. 6 USD)
- Participants were asked whether they would like to give up to 6 CHF to a climate change mitigation project
- Random attribution to the two framing conditions

Establishing the framing

'Donation framing' condition

"With your donation for this climate protection project, you help to reduce CO₂ emissions and make a meaningful contribution to mitigating global climate change with all its adverse effects on humans, animals and the natural environment."

'Offset framing' condition

"Many of your everyday consumption activities cause CO₂ emissions and increase your carbon footprint. Supporting this project reduces CO₂ emissions and helps mitigate global climate change, thus it allows you to neutralize part of your emissions from consumption."

Results

Framing has no significant effect on average contributions, but matters for specific types of individuals:

The **offset framing** increases the likelihood of high contributions for individuals

- that experience a strong "cold prickle of not contributing" relative to the "warm glow of contributing" (high loss aversion in terms of altruistic utility)
- that hardly paid attention to the text that established the framing (low attention)
- that never offset own CO_2 emissions before the survey (low experience)

For more details...

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