

Priming Social Value Orientations with Results Presentation

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### Abstract

A longstanding question in research on social decision making is how subjective utility depends jointly on objective payoffs to the decision-maker and to others. One formal framework for addressing this question is that of Social Value Orientation (SVO; Liebrand & McClintock, 1988), which models an individual's utility function in a two-player scenario as a linear combination of own and other's payoffs. Under this model, the space of possible SVOs forms a continuous spectrum, organized around four ideal types: Altruist (all weight on other's payoff), Prosocial (equal weight for self and other), Individualist (all weight on own payoff), and Competitive (difference between own and other's payoffs). The current study tested whether subjects' SVO in a resource-allocation task can change in response to manipulation of the presentation of outcomes from their previous decisions. Specifically, outcomes were presented in four different formats, modeled after the utility functions of the four main SVOs: other's payoff (Altruist), sum of both players' payoffs (Prosocial), own payoff (Individualist), and difference of payoffs (Competitive). Presenting results of prior decisions in these different formats was predicted to act as a goal prime for subsequent decisions, shifting the subject's SVO in the direction of the primed SVO. A significant effect of results presentation on SVO was found, thus demonstrating a novel manipulation of individuals' subjective utilities in social decision making. Implications and avenues for follow-up research are discussed.

Keywords: Social Value Orientation, Priming