

## EDITORIAL REVIEW ESSAY

# Emotions in Prosocial Decision Making: An Editorial Essay

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The world is confronted with immense problems, including extreme poverty in developing countries, aging populations in industrialized countries, armed conflicts, environmental pollution, and global warming. During various financial and economic crises, nations and supranational organizations appear to be overwhelmed by the process of seeking solutions to these problems. Civil society and, thus, the prosocial commitment of individual citizens or groups of citizens, must be regarded as decisive in addressing these global problems. Within this context, nonprofit and voluntary organizations play an important role as coordinators and catalyzers of social innovation and change. Because of resource dependency (Helmig, Jegers, & Lapsley, 2004), nonprofit organizations fundamentally depend on individual charitable contributions such as donations, endowments, and volunteering. Similarly, segments of the population have critical attitudes toward the prevailing economic and social system. As a result, protests against the state (Fitzgibbon, 2013), as well as against multinational corporations (e.g., Tyler, 2013; Lindenmeier, Schleier, & Pricl, 2012) have flared up on a regular basis in recent years. The individual decision to participate in these protest actions (e.g., consumer boycotts, sit-ins, or protest marches) could be analyzed within the prosocial behavior framework (e.g., Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Finally, the prosocial behavior perspective is highly relevant in health care contexts. This is because health services are frequently provided by nonprofit and public organizations (e.g., Dreves, Tscheulin, & Lindenmeier, 2014), and these organizations and their patients depend on individual willingness to donate blood, organs, or bone marrow.

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The importance of prosocial behavior for society as a whole as well as for nonprofit and public sector marketing is obvious. According to Eisenberg et al. (1996, p. 974), prosocial behavior could be defined as “voluntary behavior intended to benefit another,” and all types of helping behavior, sharing behavior, cooperative behavior, and donation behavior could be classified as prosocial (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Donation behavior is of particular relevance with regard to nonprofit organizations and includes the donation of health-related objects (e.g., blood), of time (i.e., volunteering), or of money or tangible assets (Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009).

Two major streams of research address prosocial behavior from the perspective of nonprofit and public sector marketing, and the first of these streams is rooted in economic theory. In line with authors such as Shang and Croson (2009), the decision to behave in a prosocial manner could be regarded as voluntary provision of public goods. Standard game-theoretical modeling predicts that no individual should be willing to provide these public goods on a voluntary basis, and social cooperation should, hence, not occur. Individual self-interest in conjunction with individual free-ride incentives represents the theoretical rationale supporting this prediction. A factual collapse of social cooperation could not be observed in reality. Approximately a third of the German population is engaged in volunteerism (Gensicke & Geiss, 2010), and the behavioral evidence contradicts the propositions of theoretical predictions. As a consequence, standard economic theory was modified and enhanced, and three major categories of model enhancement and modification could be distinguished (Meier, 2006), reciprocity and conditional cooperation, self-identity and human behavior, and outcome-based preferences. The conceptual starting point of economic models, which consider outcome-based preferences, is the hypothesis that individuals care about the well-being of other persons. In particular, warm-glow feelings represent an important category of outcome-based preferences regarding this special issue.

The second important stream of research on prosocial behavior could be found in social psychology. Kin selection (e.g., Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005), as well as reciprocity norms (e.g., Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006) represent approaches from the evolutionary perspective that help psychologists to explain prosocial behavior. In addition, the social exchange theory contributes to psychological research on prosocial behavior (e.g., Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). That is, prosocial decision making is contingent on a cost–reward calculus, which comprises monetary as well as nonmonetary components, and people only act prosocially when they perceive a favorable cost–benefit ratio of helping others. Finally, according to authors such as Aronson, Wilson, & Akert (2013), individual (e.g., personality traits or gender differences) and situational (e.g., bystanding persons) factors might have a significant effect on prosocial behavioral tendencies. The empathy-altruism hypothesis that assumes an increase in the willingness to help other

persons when empathic emotions are experienced represents a prominent approach to the explanation of prosocial behavior from the perspective of social psychology (Barnett, Howard, King, & Dino, 1981).

This special issue examines the importance of emotional constructs in prosocial decision making. An emotion could be defined as “a complex set of interactions among subjective and objective factors, mediated by neural-hormonal systems, which could (a) give rise to affective experiences such as feelings of arousal and pleasure/displeasure; (b) generate cognitive processes such as emotionally relevant perceptual effects, appraisals, and labeling processes; (c) activate widespread physiological adjustments to the arousing conditions; and (d) lead to behavior that is frequently, but not always, expressive, goal-directed, and adaptive” (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981, p. 355). In consideration of this broad definition, it is obvious that a wide range of emotional states could be summarized under this umbrella term. Emotions must be distinguished from, in particular, preferences, attitudes, or affect dispositions (Scherer, 2005).

According to Izard (2007), emotions could be grouped into basic and secondary emotions. Basic emotions are biologically primitive constructs (e.g., fear and happiness), which are genetically determined. By contrast, secondary emotions are more complex and are frequently regarded as an amalgam of multiple basic emotions or a result of cognitive processes. Several theoretical approaches conceptualize how emotion formation takes place (e.g., James-Lange theory or Schachter-Singer theory), and these approaches differ in their proposition of the share of the physiological or cognitive substrate, respectively, included in the explained emotional experiences. Supporters of cognitive emotion theories, such as Ortony and Turner (1990), state that no such thing as basic emotions exist, and that, instead, all emotions are cognitively driven. More precisely, it is assumed that all emotions require interpretation and appraisal before they can be elicited. However, it is questionable whether all emotions that drive prosocial behavior could be regarded as pure cognitive emotions. It is doubtful whether empathic emotions that trigger impulsive prosocial behavior (e.g., helping a drowning person) could be assigned to the category of pure cognitive emotions. It is perceivable that the emotion (e.g., gratitude) is the driver; for example, philanthropic giving comprises a more cognitive substrate. In particular, moral emotions are relevant in the context of cognitive emotions' relevance. Haidt (2003, p. 853) regarded moral emotions as psychological constructs that are “linked to the interests or welfare of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” and states that disinterested elicitors and behavioral drives toward prosocial action constitute them.

Emotions have several functions. Emotions serve a communication function, in that they signal that the individual who experiences an emotion (e.g., fear) must adjust to changed environmental conditions (e.g., try to escape). Specific emotions (e.g., happiness) are associated with typical facial

expressions (e.g., laughing), and these communicate human feelings to other persons (Ekman, 1993). However, and relating to point (d) of Kleinginna & Kleinginna's (1981) definition, emotions have the potential to trigger prosocial behavior or influence prosocial decision-making processes (e.g., Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988). According to Baumeister, DeWall, Vohs, & Alquist (2010), emotions translate into behavior in a direct or indirect way. In particular, Fridja (1986) is a prominent proponent of the first theory, and empirical studies have proved a direct link between emotions and prosocial behavior (e.g., Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003). The negative-state-relief hypothesis, for instance, represents a conceptual approach alluding to the notion of an indirect effect of emotions on prosocial behavior, and empirical research complies with this theoretical rationale (e.g., Schaller & Cialdini, 1988). Last, emotions are considered to be moderating or interaction variables (e.g., Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001) and mediators (e.g., Lindenmeier et al., 2012) in models of prosocial behavior.

It follows from the above that emotions have a decisive role in prosocial decision making, and this special issue of the *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* comprises five articles that break fresh ground relating to this field of research. The first article of the special issue is entitled "The Role of Moral Emotions and Consumer Values and Traits in the Decision to Support Nonprofits" and relates to the field of cognitive emotions. In this article, Xie and Bagozzi investigate the effects of ethical vs. unethical corporate conduct of for-profit institutions on the inclination of consumers to support nonprofit organizations. The authors propose that unfavorable and favorable conduct of profit-seeking cooperation could affect the image of nonprofits that are associated with those corporations. For-profit organizations and nonprofits could be associated because (a) a profit-oriented company supports a nonprofit organization (e.g., sponsoring or cause-related marketing) or (b) a nonprofit (e.g., environmental group) is known as a major opponent of a for-profit company. The study is based on between-subject experimental designs. Considering moderated-mediation procedures, Xie and Bagozzi reveal that individual traits (e.g., consumers' moral identities) moderate the effect of ethical or unethical corporate conduct on moral emotions. It is shown that the "traits x corporate conduct" interaction effect on behavioral intentions is, in turn, mediated by moral emotions (i.e., contempt, anger, and disgust or gratitude, respectively). Xie and Bagozzi's article elaborates on a very interesting and under-researched topic, and the study results might help managers of nonprofits in their decision to cooperate with for-profit organizations.

The second article, entitled "Not All Empathy Is Equal: How Dispositional Empathy Affects Charitable Giving," by Kim and Kou, analyzes how three dimensions of dispositional empathy (i.e., empathic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress) impact the probability of giving and

the total amount of charitable giving. In addition, a construct named “principle of care” is considered a mediating variable. Considering probit and tobit regression procedures and based on the 2008–2009 wave of American election studies data, the authors validate the hypothesis of their model. Kim and Kou’s study distinguishes between charitable causes relating to basic needs, education, environmental issues, and health. The study results indicate varying effects of the three dimensions of dispositional empathy on charitable giving. However, the effect of empathic concern appears to be relatively stable across charitable causes. Moreover, “principle of care” does not appear to be a distinct mediator of the relationship between dispositional empathy and charitable giving. It is important to note that neither situational nor dispositional empathy represent an emotion. Instead, empathy relates to (a) the individual’s knowledge about another person’s feelings, (b) the individual’s ability to feel what another person is feeling, and (c) the individual’s inclination to act sympathetically to persons in need (Levenson & Ruef, 1992). Therefore, Kim & Kou’s study reveals how the distress of others impacts individual prosocial behavior indirectly through dispositional empathy. The study results could be considered within the scope of the design of appeals for donation for different charitable causes and with regard to the targeting of donor segments, which distinguish themselves by different levels of dispositional empathy.

The third article, entitled “Millennials, Social Media, Prosocial Emotions, and Charitable Causes: The Paradox of Gender Differences,” by Paulin, Ferguson, Schattke, and Jost, investigates how exposure to “other-benefit causes” or “self-benefit causes,” empathy identification, and gender affect Millennials’ inclination to support charitable causes. The authors consider online and offline helping intentions as dependent variables, and the study considers factorial experimental designs. Consistent with the results of Lindenmeier (2008), Paulin and colleagues’ research reveals that male persons could be pushed to behave prosocially; for example, by means of emotional-laden charitable appeals. In contrast, female respondents did not considerably react to the communication appeals considered by the experimental designs. Fundraising managers could consider these gender-specific findings when they think about whether and how to target the male and female donor market segments by different means of persuasive communication.

The fourth article, entitled “Using Eye Tracking to Assess the Impact of Advertising Appeals on Donor Behavior,” by Bebkö, Sciulli, and Bhagat, investigates the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations’ print advertisements that aim at promoting donor behavior by the means of eye-tracking technologies. Therefore, Bebkö and colleagues’ work could be classified as an article on nonprofit marketing performance measurement and controlling. The authors correlate eye-tracking metrics and emotional reactions to donor appeals and conclude from their results that eye-tracking metrics could be

considered an appropriate measure of a nonprofit advertisement's effectiveness. Moreover, the study reveals that donor appeals are especially effective in terms of the eye-tracking logic when faces of, for example, people in need are considered as a design element of charity fundraising appeals. Finally, the eye-tracking study demonstrates that the advertising effectiveness significantly depends on the emotional valence and intensity evoked by the print advertisement. Taken altogether, Bebkö and colleagues' article could be regarded as an initial impetus for nonprofit and public sector marketing management to reflect on the application of technical equipment to more rigorously assess, for example, fundraising campaigns' effectiveness.

The final article of the special issue was written by Lwin, Phau, and Lim and is entitled "An Investigation of the Characteristics of Australian Charitable Donors." The authors analyze whether demographics, psychographics, and perceptual variables affect individual inclinations to donate. Lwin and colleagues demonstrate that gender and education have a positive effect on people's inclination to donate, based on a representative sample of Australian citizens, and nonprofit organizations might consider these results within the scope of their targeting and budgeting decision-making processes. Religiosity appears to be a subordinate predictor of Australian citizens' donation inclination. The authors note that the comparatively low importance of religion in Australia might have led to this finding. Therefore, church organizations and religiously affiliated organizations should carefully consider whether they should accentuate, for example, religious values in their fund-collecting campaigns. The use of emotional donation appeals (e.g., Renner, Lindenmeier, Tscheulin, & Drevs, 2013) should be reconsidered. Finally, the study reveals that Australian donors are more strongly attached to international charitable organizations than to their domestic charities. This represents a promising finding for international charitable organizations in particular because Australia is one of the more prosperous countries in the world.

This special issue brings together five articles that analyze how emotions or emotions-related constructs influence prosocial behavior. Herein, it is notable that all of the articles are based on either representative survey data or on experimental designs; elaborate techniques (e.g., conditional process analyses or probit and tobit regression approaches) are used for empirical analyses. Furthermore, the considered articles might initiate further research, and Lwin and colleagues and Paulin and colleagues, for example, call for articles investigating the intercultural effects on and gender-specific differences in emotions' effects on prosocial behavior. Relating to Xie and Bagozzi's work, it would be interesting to know if the observed image transfer could be of relevance in collaborations of two or more nonprofit organizations or in public-nonprofit partnerships. With regard to Kim and Kou's article, research could consider generalization issues. For example, future research could analyze in more detail why the effect of the different dimensions of dispositional empathy varies across charitable causes. Finally,

relating to Bebkco and colleagues' article, future research should increasingly attempt to incorporate technical equipment (e.g., scanner panel data or Internet tagging and tracking techniques) to assess the efficiency of, for example, cause-related marketing, donor recruitment, or fundraising campaigns in a more rigorous manner. I hope that the current special issue might provide some scholars an impetus to conduct research investigating the described directions.

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