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What motivates pro-social behaviour? A study of private hospital patients in Indonesia

What moves us to do good to other people? Consumer psychologist Felix Septianto explores this question in a recent article.** As donating to charities and volunteering for social causes play a greater role in consumer life, consumer researchers and firms need to understand what drives such 'pro-social' behaviour. So far research has mostly focused on Western countries.

In Indonesia, medical service providers such as large hospitals commonly collaborate with non-profits and even set up their own charities. Septianto and co-author, Dr Bambang Soegianto, studied 140 patients at Ridogalih private hospital located in Sukabumi, a city of 300,000 people in Indonesia's West Java province. Ridogalih already focuses on helping local communities (so that the pro-social behaviour under the microscope is among an 'in-group' of fellow Indonesians) and is looking at exploring these donating and volunteering options. Dr Soegianto is the Director of Ridogalih private hospital.

The study assessed three known drivers of pro-social behaviour: Moral judgment, moral emotion and moral identity. Moral judgments are our cognitive evaluations of whether something is good or bad, as measured here by two contrasting frameworks, consequentialism and formalism. While consequentialism defines moral acts by their outcomes, whatever yields greatest benefit, formalism says a moral act is one that discharges our ethical duty.

Under the heading of moral emotion, the authors have measured how far the moral emotion of compassion motivated pro-social behaviour.

The study measured moral identity using scales for how strongly participants agreed with statements representing 'internalisation' and 'symbolisation'. Internalisation inquires how central moral traits are to an individual's self-concept, with statements like "I would feel good to be a person who is caring, fair, friendly, generous [etc.]". Symbolisation asks how far our actions display these moral traits publicly, e.g. "I often wear clothes that identify me as having these characteristics."

Recent research has cast the net beyond moral judgment to include moral emotion and/or moral identity in explaining pro-social motivation. Septianto and Soegianto advance this research agenda by investigating how different configurations of these three drivers can be combined and lead to given outcomes.

In an empirical first, the study finds that multiple configurations could all kindle high consumer intention to engage in pro-social behaviour. Of the many possible 'recipes' of measures, four quite different combinations achieved this effect in the Ridogalih sample:

- Compassion, consequentialism and formalism
- Consequentialism and symbolisation alone
- Compassion, formalism and symbolisation
- Compassion and internalisation alone

Thus, although each recipe requires measures representing at least one of moral judgment, moral emotion and moral identity, any of these three could be absent given other conditions.

Based on the findings, Septianto and Soegianto helpfully recommend Ridogalih make online video ads following the four recipes. With compassion being integral to three out of four, ads should, for instance, show children with sad faces or identifiable single victims. Moreover, the hospital should consider collaborating with religious organisations to promote its charitable projects by strengthening consumers' moral judgment and moral identity, since 95 percent of Indonesians report religion as highly important to them. This underlines the role of cultural context in understanding not only pro-social motivations but consumer behaviour at large.

**The full study results are available in an article authored by Felix Septianto and Bambang Soegianto: "Being moral and doing good to others: Re-examining the role of emotion, judgment, and identity on prosocial behavior". *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol 35(2), pp. 181-91 (2017).

