

Environmental Psychology – Psychological Motivation Towards Pro-Environmental Behavior

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Psychological motivation; Pro-environmental behavior; Sustainability</i>	<i>Climate change and environmental degradation require effective solutions to promote pro-environmental behavior. This kind of behavior tends to be caused by social norms, personal values, environmental awareness, and emotions. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, this paper analyzes seven articles to explore the role of psychological motivation in promoting sustainability. The findings suggest that social norms can stimulate collective action, while personal values and environmental awareness reinforce individual motivation. Positive emotions such as pride, and negative feelings such as guilt, help in the commitment to sustainability. In the Indonesian context, cultural practices such as "gotong royong" can be integrated into community-based policies and programs to increase community involvement in pro-environmental behavior. This paper concludes that a variety of strategies that leverage psychological motivations, local values, and emotions may be applicable in promoting sustainability with an emphasis on Indonesia.</i>



INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century and has a negative impact on the sustainability of the global ecosystem as a whole. Some of the consequences that require urgent attention include global warming, increased frequency of natural disasters, and biodiversity loss. As a result, radical changes in the lifestyle, way of working, and interacting with the surrounding environment are necessary. One of the strategies that exists and can be used as a solution is the need to promote pro-environmental behavior. These behaviors cover a wide range of energy consumption, conservation of natural resources through waste recycling, material conservation, and even the use of more environmentally friendly transportation. However, encouraging the adoption of these behaviors is not as easy as imagined because it involves a variety of complex factors (Gifford, 2014; Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Geiger et al., 2019; De Young, 2016).

Psychological, socio-cultural, and emotional factors are essential in motivating individuals to engage in pro-environmental behavior. Psychological motivation in particular is one of the core components that shape human behavior. Research by Molinario et al. (2020)

emphasizes that intrinsic values such as concern for biodiversity and awareness of responsibility to future generations significantly contribute to pro-environmental behavior. People who are aware of the consequences of their actions on the environment are more likely to take effective action (Steg & Vlek, 2009). In addition, social norms, as emphasized by Balunde et al. (2020), can also stimulate forms of collective action. Strong norms create positive pressure on people to follow the desired behavior in their social group (Cialdini et al., 1990; Truelove et al., 2016). Emotional factors also have the same importance. Emotions such as guilt over environmental destruction or simply empathy for affected living beings can encourage people to take proactive steps to correct the cause (Ardhiyansyah et al., 2023; van der Linden, 2015; Kals et al., 1999).

In general, psychological factors are seen as the main reason for sustainability in a global context, but in local contexts, social, cultural, and other dynamics also contribute. In Indonesia, local traditions such as *gotong royong* can be a means to develop collective behavior for the sake of sustainability. *Gotong royong*, which is based on the ideals of unity and cooperation, provides a social foundation for individuals and communities to engage in activities aimed at environmental protection. Initiatives such as waste banks, which implement a culture of mutual cooperation, have succeeded in increasing public awareness and involvement in waste management efforts (Sutrisno et al., 2022; Ramli et al., 2018; Agustina & Asyik, 2020).

This study introduces a novel perspective by integrating psychological motivation with culturally rooted behaviors such as *gotong royong* to enhance pro-environmental action in Indonesia. While previous research often isolates psychological or cultural aspects, this paper synthesizes both elements to propose a holistic framework relevant to developing countries. Furthermore, it highlights emotional triggers—both positive and negative—as underexplored yet powerful motivators of sustainable behavior, positioning emotions as central, not peripheral, in behavioral change models. By contextualizing international findings within Indonesian socio-cultural systems, this research offers a locally grounded yet globally informed contribution to sustainability studies.

The main objective of this research is to explore how psychological motivation including social norms, personal values, environmental awareness, and emotional responses affects pro-environmental behavior, particularly within the context of Indonesia's cultural and societal frameworks. Specifically, the study aims to identify actionable strategies that align with local traditions to foster sustainable practices. The benefits of this research are twofold: academically, it enriches the theoretical understanding of environmental psychology in non-Western settings; practically, it provides a foundation for policy recommendations and educational interventions that are culturally resonant and socially inclusive. These insights are intended to assist governments, educators, and community leaders in designing more effective environmental programs.

METHOD

This study uses a systematic review (SLR) approach in analyzing the relevant literature with an emphasis on psychological motivation related to pro-environmental behaviors. This strategy is particularly useful for determining or addressing such issues because it involves the design of a specific

task as well as the evaluation and synthesis of more than one previous study. The usefulness of SLR as a research method is that it provides insight into specific issues but also identifies areas for further research.

The literature screening process begins with a search for articles in the Google Scholar academic database. The keywords used include: "psychological motivation", "pro-environmental behaviour", "environmental awareness", and "social norms". The search also includes additional keywords such as: "intrinsic", "emotions", and "sustainable policy", where a combination of these additional keywords is used to ensure more coverage of the research topic. The retrieved articles are then further filtered through inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that they are relevant to the research topic.

The inclusion criteria are listed as follows:

1. Peer-reviewed *studies* published between 2020 and 2024.
2. Focus on the relationship between psychological motivation and pro-environmental behavior.

Empirical studies with clear quantitative or qualitative data.

Exclusion criteria include non-empirical articles, such as opinion or editorials, as well as literature that does not provide supporting data. Articles that relate to contexts or populations that are not related to pro-environmental behavior are also excluded.

From this process, seven articles have been filtered for further understanding. Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach that helped identify key themes, such as social norms, personal values, environmental awareness, and emotions. These results are then compared in various dimensions such as similarities, differences and relevance both at the local and global levels.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the patterns identified in the data are compared across articles. This includes identifying similarities, differences, and dependencies among several psychological factors reported in the study. In addition, the results of the thematic analysis are used to propose relevant conceptual frameworks that can be used in Indonesia taking into account typical social, cultural, and policy dynamics.

Using SLR as the primary approach, this paper not only reviews the existing literature, but also provides an interesting perspective on how findings from various studies can be synthesized to aid the formulation of local-level sustainability policies and programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Social Norms and Social Identity

Social norms are unwritten and widely accepted rules of behavior in the community. In the context of pro-environmental behavior, social norms act as a guide that encourages a person to behave in a way that is considered acceptable to the social group. Molinario et al. (2020) in their study showed that people are influenced by pro-environmental norms if they believe that doing such an action will earn rewards from social groups. The social norms here provide positive pressure that not only encourages people to adhere to the norms but also increases social cohesion within the group. For example, people who participate in recycling activities may do so because they want to be recognized or accepted by their community.

Balunde et al. (2020) focus on how social norms can provide reinforcement to individual social identity. They report that in Lithuania, people who consider themselves to belong to environmentally responsible communities are more likely to take pro-environmental measures, for example, recycling and waste management. A deep social identity allows individuals to believe that their participation is beneficial in a significant way both for the society in which they live and for the planet. This increase in social identity often appears to lead to behavioral consistency, where individuals have a greater tendency to continue their pro-environmental practices over time.

In Indonesia, social norms are deeply rooted in the culture of collectivism which includes mutual cooperation, which means community activism and cooperation. According to Mu'arif and Lekahena (2024), mutual cooperation can be used very effectively as a strategy in increasing community participation in sustainability programs. For example, waste bank programs not only encourage environmental sustainability but also provide economic benefits to local communities. Income earned from the sale of recycled materials is often used as capital for other community development activities, such as physical infrastructure development and social enterprises. Therefore, mutual cooperation helps to create a cycle of sustainability that benefits the environment and society in general.

However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of social norms in promoting pro-environmental behavior is influenced by the extent to which communication messages and support from institutions, including governments and the media, are appropriate. For Indonesia, any environmental policy that reinforces environmentally friendly norms such as reward systems for recycling can increase the effectiveness of social norms on individual behavior. In addition, public campaigns using mass media and new technologies can be beneficial in spreading pro-environmental messages.

B. Personal Values and Environmental Awareness

Personal values are core beliefs that are essential to guide individual actions. Barszcz et al. (2022) found that environmental values are related to pro-environmental behavior. People who value conservation are more likely to engage in sustainability promotion by using less single-use plastics or buying eco-friendly products. These values are often linked to the reasons for protecting future generations and the desire to preserve biodiversity. People are also more likely to hold these values when they realize that their actions have consequences for the future: they tend to form habits related to sustainability promotion.

Environmental awareness is awareness and other components that influence people's decisions. Silvi and Padilla (2021) prove that if a person is educated about how their actions affect the environment, that person will be more likely to engage in environmentally friendly actions. In Indonesia, the "Adi Wiyata" program is present in the form of an educational program that has emerged as an effective means of increasing environmental awareness in school children. The program targets not only theoretical vocabulary on environmental conservation, but also active involvement in environmental conservation practices such as tree planting, school garden management, waste recycling, and so on. Thus, if children participate in such practical activities, they are likely to develop habits that will last into adulthood.

But there is a gap in the level of environmental awareness between urban and rural communities. In rural areas, access to information and education is often inadequate, which can hinder efforts to raise environmental awareness. Further inclusion approaches are needed to ensure that information on environmental conservation needs is available to all categories of society. One way is to engage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry out training and campaigns in remote areas. In addition, digitized information can be used to disseminate information at a lower cost.

C. Emotion and Empathy

Emotions are one of the significant variables in human behavior, including pro-environmental behavior. Ardhiyansyah et al. (2023) explain that negative emotions such as guilt can motivate corrective actions that are harmful to the environment. For example, individuals who feel guilty for not recycling are more likely to change these behaviors in the future. In addition,

fear of the consequences arising from environmental damage, such as natural disasters, can also be a source of awareness and motivation to take preventive measures.

On the contrary, positive emotions result in a high commitment to actions that are pro-environmental. Successfully reducing the use of plastic and using new renewable energy can be seen considering the emotions I have felt. Tian and Liu (2022) also show well, that, if environmental campaigns use emotional elements, for example to positively portray the impact caused by pro-environmental actions, then the public is more willing to participate. For example, a video showing the changes that occur in the ecosystem after reforestation activities will have a deep emotional impact and the community will participate.

In addition, empathy as a form of emotion that brings people closer to others or establishes relationships with the surrounding environment also has a huge influence on the formation of collective awareness. Individuals who use empathy, who seek to connect with people who are directly related to environmental issues such as tribes who have lost land due to logging are more likely to take action. In Indonesia, the use of stories, one of which involves the local community, is needed. Like leaving a message to farmers about the consequences of climate change, these stories can evoke empathy and can also encourage people to act together.

In addition, the emotional aspect of environmental campaigns can be applied in environmental education activities in schools. As an illustration, students can be encouraged to engage in nature conservation activities that involve direct interaction with ecosystems. This approach not only serves to create an emotional bond with nature but also increases their appreciation of the responsibility of protecting the environment for future generations.

D. Social and Cultural Context

Socio-cultural context is highly relevant to the formation of individual motivations and behaviors. Indonesia's habit of 'gotong royong' or social cohesion is an exemplary characteristic that can be leveraged to initiate collective action aimed at sustainability. Mu'arif and Lekahena (2024) added that this Indonesian practice can be effectively used in community-based projects such as waste management or tree planting campaigns.

A practical example of the successful application of the principle of mutual cooperation in the deforestation process is the waste bank program. The program provides opportunities for the community to engage in an environmentally friendly way to manage household waste. In addition to the ecological benefits, the program provides economic incentives such as additional revenue from the sale of recycled materials. This shows that community-based approaches built on local traditions and values have the potential to be effective in promoting sustainability.

However, there are challenges associated with the wider application of this approach. The main limitation is the gap in the level of support from local governments. Some regions have made good efforts in terms of their commitment to sustainability, while others may have limited resource availability for or priority towards environmental programs. Therefore, a coherent national policy is needed that will facilitate the wider implementation of community-based initiatives across Indonesia.

Beyond formal programs, cultural values can be integrated into public policy. For example, offering incentives for people to engage in environmental activities, such as cash prizes for communities, i.e. groups that successfully reduce waste, can increase the motivation of individuals and groups to join conservation efforts. In addition, the role of public campaigns that emphasize the relevance of social efforts in environmental protection can help foster social norms that promote sustainability.

E. Comparative Analysis and Conceptual Integration

To deepen the understanding of psychological motivation in pro-environmental behavior, this study compares findings across the seven selected articles, revealing patterns and conceptual linkages that contribute to a broader theoretical framework. A comparative analysis shows that although the studies originate from diverse geographical and socio-cultural contexts ranging from Europe to Southeast Asia—the psychological constructs influencing environmental behavior exhibit notable consistency. For example, both Molinario et al. (2020) and Silvi & Padilla (2021) emphasize the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation and environmental awareness as stable predictors of sustainable actions. This is echoed in the Indonesian context, where local initiatives also demonstrate that internalized environmental values significantly influence community participation.

Moreover, while Western studies often isolate individual motivation in decision-making models, this paper integrates these findings with collective cultural dimensions, such as *gotong royong*, to illustrate how social cohesion can amplify psychological motivation. In effect, social identity and community engagement—particularly in Indonesia—function as cultural amplifiers of intrinsic motivation, bridging the gap between personal intent and collective action. This integrative view suggests that psychological motivation is not a fixed internal trait but can be culturally nurtured through collective norms, emotional bonding, and shared narratives.

The comparative synthesis also reveals that emotional triggers, such as guilt and pride, are universally influential but are activated differently across contexts. For instance, while Tian & Liu (2022) focus on visual storytelling and emotional media campaigns in China, similar emotional appeal in Indonesia is found through oral storytelling traditions and communal reflection. This highlights the importance of tailoring intervention strategies to cultural channels of influence.

By combining insights from diverse literature with Indonesian realities, the paper proposes a conceptual framework where psychological motivation is understood as a multidimensional construct, influenced by values, emotions, and social context. This integrated perspective supports the development of context-sensitive sustainability programs that are both psychologically compelling and culturally appropriate.

CONCLUSION

Psychological motivation is essential in driving pro-environmental action. Strong social norms can force people to act according to the group's expectations. There are also personal values and environmental awareness that can inspire individuals to act sustainably. In the case of Indonesia, for example, the local tradition of mutual cooperation is one aspect that can be used to support sustainability programs. However, to ensure that the findings are truly useful, it is necessary to involve a wide range of stakeholders such as governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities. Strong policy support along with community-based programs can help address issues such as limited access to information in rural areas and varying levels of support from local authorities. An emotional environmental campaign can also help strengthen the bond between people and environmental concerns. The establishment of community-based programs such as waste banks is a tactical step that can help mobilize communities directly in the quest for environmental conservation. To ensure the success of these programs, it is necessary to involve the participation of community leaders and educational institutions to help build the necessary support for sustainability. Training and incentives to community members can also further ensure the success of this program. The integration of local values in public policy is also necessary. Governments can reinforce social norms that support pro-environmental behavior through policies that reward people who innovate in waste reduction or even better, in recycling. Inclusivity in environmental education also helps because it targets many

people, especially in rural areas, who do not have adequate information. By integrating local values, using emotional appeal in campaigns, and being inclusive in environmental education, Indonesia has a lucrative opportunity to become one of the country's leading the world's efforts in combating climate change and environmental degradation. These sustainability efforts must include all elements in society and must be part of the way of life. Further research and evaluation of community-based programs implemented over time is also critical to developing more targeted and more sustainable policies

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