

Close to me in space or time? Climate change awareness and worry predicts pro-environmental behavior through the mediation of temporal, but not spatial, psychological distance

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In line with the Construal Level Theory, in recent years psychological distance (PD) from climate change have been appointed as one of the most relevant barriers to risk perception of climate change and motivation toward sustainable behaviors, thus suggesting that changing PD may play a critical role in determining individuals engagement in pro-environmental actions. Despite growing research, there is still conflicting opinion regarding how PD may exert its effects, since mixed results have been reported. In this study we investigated two main ideas: at first, the hypothesis that the complex relationship between PD and pro-environmental behaviors is modulated by both cognitive and affective information processing and that lacking one component may lead to reduced influence of PD on pro-environmental behaviors; secondly, different dimensions of PD may exert different influence on pro-environmental behaviors. To this purpose, participants completed a survey investigating their perceived PD from climate change on temporal and spatial levels, awareness of climate change (cognitive factor), worry about climate change (affective factor) and engagement with sustainable behaviors. Results highlighted that awareness of climate change (cognitive factor) do not directly predict pro-environmental behavior, but through the serial indirect effects of temporal perceived psychological distance and climate change worry (affective factor). This relationship is not significant when considering spatial perceived distance. These results may contribute to the literature investigating the effect of PD on sustainable behavior, by also informing policy making. Moreover, our results may contribute to the debate on the relationship between mental construals of temporal and spatial distance.

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