

# **CATEGORIZING ‘OTHERS’: THE SEGMENTATION OF OTHER ACTORS FOR ‘FAITH IN OTHERS’ EFFICACY (FIO)’**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This conceptual paper provides an innovative categorization of ‘others’ for the variable of ‘faith in others (FIO)’. Adopted by pro-environmental and sustainability literature, FIO refers to faith in the efficacy of other actors. Examination and integration of theories on sustainable pro-environmental behavior leads to the proposition, that ‘others’ can be segmented into two main categories. The two main categories are biospheric, and non-biospheric others, with non-biospheric others including the sub-categories of independent, and organizational others. How an individual perceives the efficacy of ‘others’, and the influence which these perceptions may have upon an individual’s behavior, is also addressed. Thus, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the underlying influences of sustainable behavior, providing keys to improving business and policy strategies for sustainability and sustainable behavior.

## **KEYWORDS**

Faith in others, sustainable pro-environmental behavior, biospheric others, non-biospheric others, independent others, organizational others

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Introduced in 1992 by Berger and Corbin, faith in others (FIO) is a variable which refers to faith in others’ efficacy, that is, faith in the efficacy of other actors. FIO has since been increasingly adopted as a moderating variable for more specific pro-environmental behaviors, such as male eco-fashion, under the categories of green and pro-environmental behavior, and both of these categories can be recognized as being intricately involved in achieving global sustainability (D’Souza et al. 2015). Existing FIO literature currently describes ‘others’ as those who are not the self, and acknowledges only three categories of ‘others’; governments, scientists and future generations. Hence, there is a dearth of development on the categorization and identification of ‘others’. Such scarcity and lack of clarity in the categorization of ‘others’ creates limitations for research, as it would affect elements such as precision of research data and analysis. This paper focuses on achieving clarification of ‘others’ from the variable of FIO, by proposing a method of segmentation and developing categories for the segmentation of ‘others’. Examples of how these new categories may be applied in the context of FIO is provided, however, the proposed categories hold the potential for more flexible and broader application.

## **2. CATEGORIZING ‘OTHERS’**

The original idea proposed by Berger and Corbin (1992, p. 81), was that “individuals could engage in actions that induce governments, scientists, or future generations to solve environmental problems...if he or she had faith or trust in the efficacy of these other actors.” Appropriately, the study measured FIO through statements concerning participants’ dispositions on the capability of science/scientists, technology, the next generation and legislators, to solve environmental problems (Berger & Corbin, 1992). In conclusion, the results supported the study’s hypothesis that faith in the efficacy of others moderated both the degree and form of

the relationship between environmental attitudes and support for the regulatory actions of others, whilst also stating, that the moderation was “apparent even though the FIO items do not refer explicitly to regulators.” (Berger & Corbin 1992, p. 86) Seven years later, the paper was used for a replicative study by Lee and Holden (1999), who provided selective quotes from the original work produced by Berger and Corbin (1992), as definitions for the replicated variables. Despite Berger and Corbin’s (1992, p. 87) inference that “more conceptual development is need on the “faith in others” moderator construct”, neither the work by Lee and Holden (1999), nor any other study, has attempted to develop the variable of FIO. At present, both works by Berger and Corbin (1992), and Lee and Holden (1999), remain the core references for FIO research; the definitional quotes included by Lee and Holden (1999) have been maintained as the definition and descriptions for FIO, and the examples of governments, scientists, or future generations as other actors also remain unchanged.

The construct of FIO is more complex than what has been presented, and one of the most important yet under-examined elements of FIO, is the identification of ‘others’. FIO is included in the range of research encompassed within the topic of sustainable behavior. However, despite sustainability being a societal concern, and the fact that all individual actions involve some form of interdependence, there are limited constructs and studies which address the efficacy of others’ influence, on individuals’ behaviors, and there continues to be no identification of ‘others’, which span beyond the three categories of future generations, scientists and governments (Berger & Corbin 1992; Rogers 2003; Rotter & Stein 1971). Based upon the generalization that ‘others’ refers to something different or external to oneself, this paper will continue with the inauguration that ‘others’ may be segmented into two main categories, being biospheric and non-biospheric others. The following will detail the segmentation categories, definitions of these categories, and also provide justification for the proposed segmentation of ‘others’.

## 2.1 Biospheric Others

As one of the two main categories of segmentation, ‘biospheric others’ comprises of nonhuman species as well as the biosphere itself, making it a category which is inclusive of the biosphere, plants and animals. More technically, the biosphere is a complex adaptive system, inclusive of the atmosphere, which contains mechanisms that “allow life to persist” (Levin 1998, p. 434). A common construct in pro-environmental literature is altruism, also known as pure, exocentric, or social altruism, which is defined as the direct focus and concern for others (Monroe 1996; Schwartz & Howard 1984; Snelgar 2006; Straughan & Roberts 1999). The term ‘biospheric-altruism’ was initially used by Stern, Dietz and Kalof (1993), developed from Schwartz’s idea that environmentalism can be treated as a type of altruism. A biospheric value orientation is the foundation for biospheric-altruism, and encompasses the existence of concern and “value orientation toward the welfare of *nonhuman* species or the biosphere itself” (Stern, Dietz & Kalof 1993, p. 325). Thus, creating the basis for the term and definition of biospheric others, which acknowledges the biosphere, plants and animals as ‘others’ which play a massive role in our lives.

Faith in biospheric others efficacy is in reference to believing in the efficacy or actions, of the biosphere, plants and all other nonhuman animal species. Keeping in mind that nature has a way of sustaining itself when left un-interfered, this natural cycle can be considered an ‘action’ of biospheric others. That is, faith in biospheric others includes to a degree, believing in the natural cycle of life and our biosphere, a belief in letting nature do its work, and minimizing interference of this natural cycle. It may also be perceived that faith in biospheric others’ efficacy is the belief that the biosphere, plants and animals, are capable of improvement, as well as the belief that biospheric others have the potential of achieving health and sustainability again. Hence, individuals may choose pro-environmental products or not to eat meat, if they believe in the capabilities of the natural cycle of the biosphere, plants and animals, and is therefore displaying faith in biospheric others.

## 2.2 Non-biospheric Others

The other main segmentation category of ‘non-biospheric others’, incorporates the *homo sapiens* species, a species more commonly referred to as humans, and is segmented into the sub-categories of independent, and organizational others. The sub-categories are defined below, followed by a discussion which justifies the segmentation.

### **2.2.1 Independent Others**

Independent others refers to the specific individual/s with whom a person is holding the interpersonal communication with, inclusive of face to face, digital, and tele- communication. Independent others is applicable to specific friend and family members, but most importantly, it includes the specific individuals who are representing and communicating on behalf of an organization or company. The category of independent others acknowledges that despite working for an organization, each worker delivers an independent, and unique form of interaction with another individual. This interpersonal experience provides the basis for the assessment of that independent other's efficacy. That is, as someone interacts with a sales representative within a store, he or she will make an assessment of this sales representative (the independent other), which is based purely upon the interaction experienced with that sales representative (independent other). As a simple example, an individual would only have a regular gardener, if he or she believed in the capabilities of this gardener, and hence, is showing faith in independent others.

### **2.2.2 Organizational Others**

The other sub-category of non-biospheric others is organizational others, which refers to organizations as a whole, encompassing its goals, as well as matters of quality and processes which span beyond an individual, or independent others' control. Similar to the definition of a business market in marketing theory, organizational others, would include companies or brands, institutional and government, as well as their claims on the quality of service, and mission statements (Pride et al. 2015). Assessment of faith and efficacy would be based upon an organization's official claims and goals. These claims and goals may be decided upon by one or more persons, and would also most likely involve, more than one group and supply chain, but are provided in representation of the organization as a whole (Pride et al. 2015). An individual seeking a specific brand of organic products, would be an example of an individual who has faith in organizational others, inclusive of that organization's claims on organic processes and quality of produce.

### **2.2.3 Justification of segmentation**

The proposed method of segmentation of 'others' aims to cover all potential 'others' which one may encounter, and therefore, assimilates all actors who may have influence on an individual's decisions. Non-biospheric others has been divided into the sub-categories of independent and organizational others, in order to account for the possible incurrences of separate, yet concurrent evaluation of faith in independent, and organizational others' efficacy. The reason this scenario needs to be accounted for, is developed upon the basis that organizations are comprised of individuals. Although these individuals are working for and are representing, the larger organizations, their independent characteristics will be maintained, regardless of official organizational goals and images. Therefore, this specific individual will be given a unique assessment of efficacy, from those they interact with, as a personal impression of efficacy which is independent of that given to the organization for which they work for. That is, regardless of how poor an organization's image is, individuals can maintain a good personal image, from which faith in the efficacy of independent others may still be granted. The opposite may also be possible, where faith in the efficacy of the organization will remain strong, despite poor faith in the efficacy of one, if not multiple, independent others, within that organization. This leads us to an issue which is comparable to that found in co-branding, during which the brand image of one brand, may influence the brand image of the other brand involved in the co-branding (Pride et al. 2015). That is, it would be possible that an organization's image may influence an individual's image, and vice versa. Therefore, the level of faith in an organizational other may influence the level of faith in independent others, or the level of faith in an independent other may influence the level of faith in the organizational other, both of which may have an overall influence, on the individual's final behavior.

## **3. EXAMPLE TO ILLUSTRATE THE ROLE OF 'OTHERS'**

This section provides an example of a sustainable behavior to illustrate the application of the categorization of 'others'. The sustainable behavior chosen for the example is solar energy adoption, which provides a context to how the categories of 'others' may be applied, and how different FIO may influence and affect the behavioral choices of an individual. The example is given in order to increase the understanding of the complexity behind sustainable behavior, and the importance of considering the influence of 'others' on individuals' sustainable behavior.

### 3.1 Solar Energy Adoption

Details aside, solar energy and solar panels is a method of sustainability which involves individuals' existing environmental concerns, willingness to pay, strong interdependence, as well as complex information research and processing (Diaz-Rainey & Ashton 2008; Markard 1997; Roe et al. 2001; Sardianou & Genoudi 2013). The following provides a brief discussion which will refer to the basic scenario that an individual; goes online, finds a solar energy company, discovers the company goals and mission statement, calls for more information, and partakes in an exchange with one of the company's sales representatives.

If the individual had strong faith in biospheric others, they may or may not agree with the company's goals and mission statements. If they do agree, they may develop faith in the organizational other's efficacy, if they found the goals and mission statements too elaborate and unpractical, they have not have faith in the organization other, but may still call for more information, due to strong faith in biospheric others. As they call the organization to find out more, the sales representative assisting them fails to answer their questions, and does not sound at all interested in the conversation, resulting in a lack of faith in the independent other's efficacy. However, based upon the strong faith in biospheric others held by the individual, the positive general reviews on the company by previous customers (independent others) found online, and the overall mission statement of the organization (organizational others), despite this negative experience with the sales representative (independent other), the individual chooses to adopt solar energy with this organization.

This scenario may have resulted differently however, if the individual was very frustrated with the sales representative (independent other). The individual may choose instead, to give negative reviews of this company (organizational other), and stemming from their high level of faith in biospheric others, may seek another organization (organizational other) altogether for solar energy, as result of the poor experience with the independent other.

On the other hand, if the individual's faith in biospheric others was not as strong, and they were simply looking into the solar company due to a friend's recommendation (independent other), the company's goals and mission statements (organizational other) may not have had any influence at all, on their choice. However, if the sales representative was very helpful, resulting in strong faith in this independent other, the individual may also develop a sense of faith in the organizational other, and adopt the company's solar energy services. Either that, or despite a poor sales representative (independent other), weak faith in biospheric others, and no interest toward the company's goals (organizational other), due to strong faith in the friend who made the recommendation (independent other), that company's solar energy may still be adopted.

## 4. FURTHER RESEARCH

As seen in the example provided above, despite addressing just one sustainable behavior, the variety of outcomes depending on the types of others involved, and how others' actions influence the individual's final behavior, can be seen. The example also shows how individuals' final behaviors can be based upon the individual's degree of faith toward specific 'others'. We can also see that faith can be developed or lost, and how the assessment of one 'other' may influence the perception of faith in a different 'other'. Further research is in need to identify the degree and form of FIO, associated with more specific contexts, as well as the influence of these degrees and forms of FIO, on each other, and on an individual's behavior.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on providing a form of segmentation and categorization of other actors, stemming from the construct of FIO. Individual actions will always involve a form of biospheric and/or human interdependence, but the literature review on the development of FIO and 'others' shows there is a dearth of development in this area of sustainability. Hence, the analysis of existing theories and concepts within the literature has led to the proposition of a new method of segmentation of 'others'. It is proposed that 'others' can be segmented into two main categories, being biospheric or non-biospheric others. Biospheric others encompasses the biosphere and non-human species, inclusive of plants and animals. This category

incorporates that belief the biosphere is capable of a natural cycle of life and sustainability, and that human interference should be minimal. Non-biospheric others covers the homo sapien (human) species, and is sub-categorized into independent others, and organizational others. Independent others relates to humans as individuals, whereas organizational others incorporates human representation as a group. This modern approach to the segmentation of 'others' acknowledges that individuals are interdependent on each other, as well as the biosphere, while also acknowledging humans as independent individuals, despite working for, or within, a larger group or organization. The example given in context to the sustainable behavior of solar energy adoption, shows application of the proposed segmentation categories of 'others', and brings into view, that how an individual perceives the capability of others' actions, can influence an individual's own behavior, and also, that further research applying more refined contexts is needed. This paper's conceptual development of 'others', contributes to a better understanding of others' influence on personal sustainable behavior. The categories proposed can be perceived as foundations for further development, as limitations of the paper include that the categories are only generally described, and lacks proof of usefulness in actual application. Further research may be directed at applying these categories to assist in the identification of specific types of others, their role, as well as the various degrees of influence these specific others may have, on certain types of sustainable behavior. In light of these new categories of segmentation, the potential of application and analysis contributes toward, but is not limited to, understanding of the intricacy and complexity surrounding the issues related to sustainable behavior.

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