

Sustainability | Individual communication

IC - (20825) - THE GRETA EFFECT: IS THERE MORE SUPPORT FOR CLIMATE PROTESTORS WHO ARE YOUNG AND FEMALE?

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Background and objectives

The media coverage of climate change has seen a significant increase in capturing images of climate protests (Hayes & O'Neill, 2021). Of particular interest are the youths who have recently started to take part in climate change protests, including "school strikes" initiated by the young Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg. Contrary to the norm, it has been argued that young people are particularly powerful climate advocates as they have a higher "moral standing" than adults (Bain, 2020). However, although images of protestors tend to elicit different, or even contradictory, responses from audiences (Chapman et al., 2016), no research has yet explored the impact of younger protestors, especially girls, on audience responses towards climate change protest; in particular, how engaged the audiences are with the issue, and how much they identify with the protestors.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

With the use of photo editing, we manipulated the gender of the main climate protestor as (a) male or female; and their age as (b) pre-teenager, teenager or adult. Moreover, we investigated whether the presence of police in the image had an effect. Audiences were also disaggregated by age and gender. Our dependent variables were climate change attitudes and intentions, and support for climate protests and protestors. In a pilot study, we pre-tested a battery of edited and non-edited images to identify a final image pool of eight images.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Our findings indicate that the age and gender of climate protestors were significant in shaping participants' engagement with the image itself and the issue of climate change.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

The current study is one of the first to investigate the efficacy of climate protest imagery to engage audiences. We find images of young female activists to be particularly engaging. Implications for theory and design of climate engagement campaigns will be discussed.

Palavras-chave : visual communication, climate change, protest, attitudes, intentions