



From Donation to Sharing, Experimental Study in Kanak Society

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Hypothesis

Volume 6 Issue 4

Received Date: November 24, 2021

Published Date: December 31, 2021

DOI: 10.23880/pprij-16000295

Abstract

We have chosen to conduct an experimental study on exchange and giving in Kanak country because social norms there are different from those in the West and Asia. Within this several-thousand-year-old holistic culture, social cohesion and the exchange of goods prevail within the framework of custom. Because of the French presence in New Caledonia for over one hundred and sixty years, the Kanak communities continue to live either in reserves on customary land or in urban areas in Noumea and in the communes of Grande Terre, sometimes even alternating between the tribe and the city. Kanak society has been unique in that it lives in two worlds: Western and tribal. With one foot in the Western world and the other in tradition, it is capable of making to make decisions by operationalizing the appropriate social norms according to the context.

Keywords: Society; Donation; Cohesion; Appropriate; Communities

Introduction

We believe that social norms have a major impact on cognition and pro-social behaviors. In this thesis, we seek to highlight the weight of Kanak social norms on the social cognition of children and adults, notably on the endowment effect and on this pro-social behavior qualified as altruistic in the Western World [1,2]. We will attempt to measure the effect of the social context on the learning of social norms related to giving and sharing throughout the development of the Kanak child, mirroring the social preferences of adults within the framework of a "life span" approach. We will highlight the modification of Kanak children's and adults' behaviors according to the social, tribal versus urban context.

Body of Paper

Our research will be based on two experimental paradigms essentially used in experimental economics and on European populations that are characterized, in particular, 1) by a very marked endowment effect and 2) by a

low degree of altruism.

The two paradigms used, considerably documented in the literature, concern the exchange of objects ("exchange paradigm", Knetsch, 1989) [3] and the unilateral sharing of an initial endowment based on the economic 'Dictator' game of the [4].

- 1) The exchange paradigm, developed by Knetsch [3], shows the endowment effect that manifests itself in an extremely precise environment: subjects simply decide whether they prefer to keep the item they have just been given or to exchange it for another item of the same monetary value.
- 2) The game called "Dictator" [4], makes it possible to determine whether individuals are motivated solely by self-interest or by other pro-social behaviors, such as altruism.

What do these two experimental paradigms, giving (1) and sharing (2), have in common?

In both experimental situations, the subject receives an initial endowment. In both cases, the endowment effect

is strongly induced since the appropriation time of several minutes and the discourse accompanying the handing over of the endowment reinforce the feeling of ownership.

What is the difference?

In the first experiment, the subject is faced with an exchange, in the second, with a sharing.

How complementary the two paradigms are?

From an initial endowment, the subject will decide either to keep or exchange (1), or to keep or share (2). Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis n°1

The human being is sufficiently mentally flexible to pass from one culture to another, and to activate the social norms of one or the other culture, depending on the situation. We will test this hypothesis using the two paradigms mentioned above.

Hypothesis n°2

Cognitive decision-making mechanisms are strengthened by the learning of two different cultures, and allow better adaptability to the social norms of both cultures. From an early age, tribal Kanak children, from an early age, are able to adapt not only to the proposed situation but also to the experimenter in a school context. We will test this hypothesis using the two paradigms mentioned above.

Hypothesis n°3

If the hypothesis of the influence of culture and social norms on the endowment effect is relevant [5,6], then 5-year-old Kanak children living in a tribal environment should exhibit a "reversed endowment effect". Indeed, Kanak social rules encourage the subject to pass on goods.

Hypothesis n°4

If the results of Harbaugh et al. [7] and the study by Saïbou-Dumont [8] showing that Saramaca children (in French Guyana) after three years of schooling exhibit an endowment effect, coincide, then 10-year-old Kanak children should exhibit the endowment effect, regardless of the environment in which they live.

Hypothesis n°5

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of altruistic behavior among humans, regardless of where they live on earth [4,9-21]. Since this behavior is influenced by culture, by the degree of integration into the market economy, and by the social norms in force in the Kanak culture, children aged between 3 and 10 and Kanak adults should exhibit, through the experimental economic game Dictator, an altruistic behavior close to equitable sharing

Hypothesis n°6

If norms are foundation for the social ties, if these social

cognitive tools are indicative of a collective cognitive order, then the results obtained using the two paradigms should reveal a major social fact of the Kanak culture.

Conclusion

This research, carried out in New-Caledonia, aims at studying the influence of Kanak social norms on a cognitive bias, the endowment effect, and on a prosocial behavior that the western world labels altruistic. We support a new explanatory mechanism which does not exclude the endowment effect. The endowment effect expresses the enforcement of social norms and manifests itself particularly in 3-to-5-year-old Kanak children by a reverse endowment effect. These results are entirely linked to the experimenter's status and the urban or tribal living environment; they are in line with the social norms prevailing in the Kanak culture. In accordance with the values advocated by the Kanak culture, the norm that the Loyalty Islands participants in the experimental economic game called "the dictator's" was sharing. The results reflect a marked altruistic behavior in very young children which becomes very widely rooted in adults. Considering the fact that in the West, Comte designed the very concept of altruism in 1851 in a society in which individualism prevailed (and is still prevailing), on the one hand, and that the Kanak social norms are directed at reinforcing social links, on the other hand, we wondered if altruism has a meaning in the Kanak culture. The results achieved tend to highlight the strength of social links which unites each subject to the community he belongs to... and not altruism. Altruism may exist in other respects, due, in particular, to Christianization, but it does not effectively explain social reality.

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