

DO THE PROSOCIAL EFFECTS OF WATCHING EYES EXTEND TO SHOPPING CART RETURN?

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BACKGROUND

Watching eyes are powerful stimuli—they quickly capture attention and evoke physiological arousal. Humans are particularly adept at perceiving another's gaze, and can even be affected by watching eyes that they are not consciously aware of. Recent research suggests that watching eye cues can promote a variety of low-cost prosocial behaviors, inside and outside lab settings^{1,2}. The presence of eye images may alter behavior by reducing feelings of anonymity and cueing reputation maintenance concerns³. The current study investigated whether the presence of watching-eye images affected how frequently shoppers returned carts to designated return areas.

PARTICIPANTS



869 total shoppers were recorded exiting the store (Grocery Outlet in Eureka, CA) pushing a shopping cart.

COVARIATES

Relevant covariates were recorded alongside the three image conditions to account for potential reductions of anonymity and differences in cost of behavior.



Distance Between Car and Cart Return



Shopping Alone or With Companion(s)

STIMULI



Control Image



Eye Image

The above images were placed in a sign holder directly outside of the store's doorway to ensure they were seen by all shoppers. Additionally, there was another condition where there was no sign present at all.

ANALYSIS

A recording of the 'yes' and 'no's' were counted; where 'yes' represents the participants that returned the shopping carts to the cart corrals and the 'no's' were the participants that did not return their carts. This data was then converted into percentages and compared across conditions using a chi square test.

RESULTS

The presence of watching eyes significantly predicted more shopping cart returns than both control conditions ($p = .002$).

STIMULUS

		STIMULUS			
CART RETURN		CONTROL	WATCHING EYES	NO SIGN	TOTAL
	No	117 (37.1%)	101 (26.0%)	58 (34.9%)	276 (31.8%)
	Yes	198 (62.9%)	287 (74.0%)	108 (65.1%)	593 (68.2%)

As for the covariates, shoppers demonstrated 32% lower odds of cart return when they were shopping alone, and 22% lower odds for every extra 10 feet between their car and the return area.

DISCUSSION

There was a significant difference in how many people returned their shopping carts in the eye image condition compared to both the control image and no sign conditions. These results support the external validity of watching-eye cues when applied to a commonplace behavior such as returning a shopping cart.