The role of emotions in public acceptance
the case of the Irish water charges

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in collaboration with Carla Rodríguez Sánchez and Marius Claudy

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Short historical context

- '62: local-authority domestic-service levy
- '78: abolition direct water charges
- '85: water charges partially restored; public opposition stopped full restoration
- '97: abolition water charges after 2 years public protest
- '08: financial crisis/bailout EU
- Jan '15: reintroductions water charges
- Jan '16: abolition water charges part of election campaigns & promises
- July '16: abolition water charges after elections
- 1994-1996 heavy public protest/boycotts
- 2014-... nationally organised protests

Reintroduction of the Water Charges
Public resistance peaks end of 2014

Attendance nationally organized demonstrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Estimated Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-Oct-14</td>
<td>90000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-Nov-14</td>
<td>120000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-Dec-14</td>
<td>100000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Mar-15</td>
<td>80000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-Aug-15</td>
<td>60000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-Jan-16</td>
<td>160000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-Feb-16</td>
<td>10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Sep-16</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08-Apr-17</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reintroduction of the Water Charges

% of people who paid

- 1st billing cycle: ~46%
- 2nd billing cycle: ~55%
- 3rd billing cycle: ~61%
- 4th billing cycle: ~49%
- 5th billing cycle: ~27%
**Perceived benefits**

- Water infrastructure may improve
- Drinking water may become safer
- Water consumption may go down
- People may realise that water is scarce

**Perceived costs**

- Water prices may increase
- The poor are negatively affected
- This is unnecessary bureaucracy
- This is bad for the Irish economy
benefits

Public acceptance

costs

benefits
NO MEANS FECKIN NO
Model Fit: RMSEA = 0.057 [90% CI = 0.051-0.062]; SB- $\chi^2 = 677.53$, df = 261; p < .001; Normed $\chi^2 = 2.59$ NFI = 0.920; CFI = 0.941

Variance explained: $R^2$ acceptance = .82

Full mediation: trust on acceptance by emotions and costs and benefit perceptions
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceived</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritated</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reporting linear regression using (positive and negative) emotions to predict acceptance
\( R^2 = 67\% \)
*p<.01; ** p<.001; ns = not significant
Summary & conclusion

• Emotions strongest direct and indirect effect on acceptance
• Perceived costs & benefits little influence on acceptance
• Emotions influence perceived costs & benefits

➢ *Important for communication strategies*

• Trust in government *crucial* indirect factor for policy acceptance

➢ *Important for timing public involvement*
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Presentation based on