



# The determinants of hospitality employees' pro-environmental behaviors: The moderating role of generational differences



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 3 March 2015

Received in revised form

16 September 2015

Accepted 23 September 2015

Available online 22 October 2015

### Keywords:

Motivation

Environmental concern

Self-efficacy

Pro-environmental behavior

## ABSTRACT

Seeking to build a deeper understanding of the determinants of hospitality employees' pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs), this study explored linkages between employees' autonomous and external motivations to perform PEBs, environmental concerns, self-efficacy, and employees' reported PEBs. Hospitality employees ( $n = 432$ ) indicated that autonomous motivation was associated with increases in employees' environmental concern, self-efficacy, and PEBs. External motivation was significantly related to employees' levels of environmental concern and PEBs. Employees' environmental concern levels had positive effects on self-efficacy and PEBs. Self-efficacy was, in turn, positively associated with PEBs. The relationships between these variables were moderated by generational differences (e.g., Gen X and Gen Y) because generational characteristics might lead to formulating distinct generational perceptions in an organizational context. There were significant differences in the effects of autonomous motivation on environmental concern levels and PEBs between Gen X and Gen Y. In addition, the differences in effects of external motivation on environmental concern and PEBs were statistically significant between the two generations. Lastly, the impacts of environmental concern and self-efficacy on PEBs were significantly different between the two generations as well. Overall, our results suggest that the interplay of autonomous motivation, external motivation, environmental concern, and self-efficacy is important to the process of influencing hospitality employees' PEBs.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

The last few decades have seen a growing emphasis on environmental protection and the implementation of environmental initiatives, such as environmental management systems (i.e., total quality environmental management, ISO 14001), green alliances, green purchasing, eco-design, eco-labels, recycling, and energy conservation worldwide (Dief and Font, 2010; Honey, 2002). There is also increasing attentiveness to environmental sustainability issues in societies and organizations in Eastern cultures. Although new technologies and processes are effective in promoting the initiation of environmental responsible actions in product-based industries (Daily et al., 2009), the willingness of individual employees in the hospitality industry to actively perform pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) is more important than for other sectors due to the importance of natural scenery

and settings inherent in many destinations' attractiveness to customers (e.g., beaches, golf courses, lakes, wildlife, mountains, etc.).

To date, however, the PEBs of hospitality sector employees have received limited research attention (Daily et al., 2009). Ones and Dilchert (2012) noted that "PEBs have been studied in both the public and private spheres, but rarely in work settings" (p. 452). In addition, scholars (Cronin et al., 2011; Rivera-Camino, 2007) have focused primarily on environmental strategies and performance, based on organizational-levels rather than employees' PEBs. Employees' PEBs can be defined as a broad set of eco-friendly activities in the workplace, such as learning and thinking about the environment, developing and applying ideas to reduce the company's negative effects on the physical environment, developing green products and processes, and recycling as well as reusing (Graves et al., 2013). Such PEBs not only contribute to the greening of hospitality organizations (Robertson and Barling, 2012), but will also positively influence climate change and reduce future environmental degradation (Becken and Hay, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand what characteristics support hospitality employees' activation of PEBs.

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The purpose of this study is to explore the roles of employee motivation, environmental concern, and self-efficacy in fostering PEBs. In particular, we focus on employee motivation as a potential key factor in fostering the PEBs of hospitality employees. It is believed that employee motivation is fundamental in stimulating employee behavior in the context of workplace settings (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Tsai et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of literature about employee motivation related to sustainability actions, and few studies have addressed the impact of employee motivation on PEBs. This study uses self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) as a framework for understanding hospitality employee motivations to engage in PEBs. Social psychologists have effectively used self-determination theory to explain PEBs in the general public (Darner, 2009). This is because frequency and variety of PEBs correlate most highly with self-determined motivation (Pelletier, 2002). Within workplace research, self-determination theory also has been used to study motivation (Gagné et al., 2010; Otis and Pelletier, 2005). When external forces (e.g., incentives, rewards, and punishment for performing PEBs) are removed, employee PEBs only continue if they are self-determined to perform PEBs (Darner, 2009; Pelletier, 2002). This study assumes that this approach can also be applied to PEBs in the hospitality industry.

This study also introduces environmental concern and self-efficacy as core mediators of the relationship between employee motivation and PEBs. Examining employees' levels of environmental concern and self-efficacy in PEBs is an important stream of eco-friendly behavior research. Environmental concern is defined as "the affect associated with beliefs about environmental problems (Schultz et al., 2004)." For example, Lee et al. (2014a,b) examined the role of environmental concern and found it has a significant mediating role between personal values and PEBs. Self-efficacy, defined as individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance (Bandura, 1997), also can help explain employees' decision making and behavior (Gong et al., 2009). Judge et al. (2007) found that the relationship between employees' personalities and behavior is stronger in the presence of high levels of self-efficacy. Therefore, the strength of a belief that one could achieve better performance is expected to significantly influence a hospitality employee's willingness to pursue a specific action (Lee et al., 2014a,b).

Both self-determination theory (Baard et al., 2004; Gagné and Deci, 2005; Van den Broeck et al., 2008) and PEB literature (Gong et al., 2009; Judge et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2014a,b) suggest that the interplay of employee motivation, environmental concern, and self-efficacy is likely to be critical in shaping hospitality employees' PEBs. This study posits that employee motivation, environmental concern, self-efficacy, and PEBs are linked in a predictive way.

Another objective of this study is to explore generational differences in hypothesized PEB contributory factor interactions because much attention has been paid to generational differences in workplace attitudes and behaviors (Chen and Choi, 2008; Park and Gursoy, 2012; Parry and Urwin, 2011). To be specific, the practical literature has suggested that employee generational differences influence many aspects of employee management, such as career development (McDonald and Hite, 2008) and rewards and working arrangements (Carlson, 2004). Many business managers believe that employees who comprise generation Y (years of birth: 1982–; also known as Millennials, Nexters, or Echo Boomers) are distinctly different from generation X (years of birth: 1961–1981; also known as Thirteenth, Baby Busters, or Lost Generation) (Valentine and Powers, 2013). The behavior of generation Y is certainly distinguishable and unique to the generation (Hershatler and Epstein, 2010). As a result of these asserted differences in experiences and preferences between the two generations, this study will attempt to offer suggestions on how best to manage generational differences in the workplace in predicting hospitality employees' PEB

tendencies. In the sections below, this study provides a theoretical background on PEBs, employee motivation, environmental concern, self-efficacy, and generational differences and then provides an overview of the research model, followed by a more detailed discussion of the proposed relationships.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Self-determination theory and PEBs (pro-environmental behaviors)

Within an organization, Ones and Dilchert (2012) defined employee's PEBs as 'scalable actions and behaviors that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with, and contribute to, environmental sustainability'. PEBs at work include a broad range of actions such as recycling paper, printing double-sided, and conserving resources such as water and electricity (Bissing-Olson et al., 2013). In addition, PEBs are exhibited by employees working sustainably (e.g., creating sustainable products and processes), avoiding harm (e.g., preventing pollution), conserving (e.g., reusing), influencing others (e.g., educating and training for sustainability), and taking initiative (e.g., lobbying and activism) (Paille and Boiral, 2013). PEBs can also be categorized as a helping behavior directed toward the environment, which is a public good (Griskevicius et al., 2010). This is an important class of employee behaviors, because it facilitates organizational efforts to preserve natural resources and the environment (Anderson and Bateman, 2000), and thus promotes corporate social responsibility (Garriga and Melé, 2004). While at work, employees might juggle their efficiency goals, their service and relationship goals, their family goals, their career ambition goals, and so forth (Unsworth et al., 2013), in addition to any green goals they might have. They might also actively work to initiate broader environmentally friendly changes in the policies and procedures of their workplace (Pichel, 2003).

Whereas a number of studies have examined the promotion of green behaviors (e.g., Lee et al., 2014a,b; Lucas et al., 2008; Young and Middlemiss, 2012), this study will focus on internally driven changes affecting behavior rather than externally driven interventions. Thus, this study is based on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), which posits that the type of motivation possessed by individuals is a significant determinant of behavior. Self-determination theory is also a broad theory of human growth and development, focusing on the interplay between the active, growth-oriented individual and the social environment (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory identifies several types of motivation, and groups the types into two categories: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2002; Sheldon and Elliot, 1999). According to self-determination theory, while the self-expressive or self-consistent nature of autonomous motivation facilitates employee performance, the feeling of being required to act, characterized by controlled motivation, is interpreted as inhibiting performance (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Judge et al., 2005). In order to examine employee motivations to engage in PEBs, this study focuses on autonomous motivation as well as the external motivation component of controlled motivation because autonomous motivation and controlled motivation likely co-occur (Graves et al., 2013).

Autonomous motivation can be vital for employee performance in organizations. The self-consistent, voluntary nature of autonomous motivation is likely to create feelings of personal engagement, which boost task effort and performance (Bono and Judge, 2003; Judge et al., 2005; Sheldon and Elliot, 1999). The positive outcomes of autonomous motivation have been presented in various work settings (Bono and Judge, 2003; Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

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