



Guests' pro-environmental decision-making process: Broadening the norm activation framework in a lodging context

Heesup Han^{a,1}, Jinsoo Hwang^{b,*}, Joohyun Kim^{a,2}, Heekyoung Jung^{a,3}

^a College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Sejong University, 98 Gunja-Dong, Gwanjin-Gu, Seoul 143-747, Republic of Korea

^b Division of Tourism, Dongseo University, 47 Jurye-ro, Sasang-gu, Busan 617-716, Republic of Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to provide a clear understanding of hotel guests' post-purchase decision-making process, and whether it occurred in an environmentally responsible manner. Volitional, emotional, experiential, and habitual processes imperative in pro-social/pro-environmental consumer behavior were successfully integrated into the Norm Activation Model (NAM). Results of the structural model and metric-invariance test with 316 samples gathered via an online survey indicated that the extended norm activation framework comprising such important processes and interpretation of the NAM as a sequential model was more effective in predicting guests' pro-environmental intention than the original NAM and the rival model, which offered an alternative interpretation of the NAM (moderator model). Additionally, the prominent role of moral norm was evident; this personal obligation served to mediate the proposed theoretical framework. Our results also generally supported hypothesized associations among study constructs. Our theoretical model provided a sufficient level of prediction power for guests' pro-environmental intentions.

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1. Introduction

According to Han et al. (2010), an environmentally responsible hotel is “an environmentally friendly lodging property that institutes and follows ecologically sound programs/practices (e.g., water and energy savings, reduction of solid waste, and cost saving)” (p. 325). The terms environmentally responsible, ecological, eco-friendly, pro-environmental, environmentally friendly, and green are interchangeably used in the existing literature (Han et al., 2010; Kim and Han, 2010). Due to the diverse/potential benefits to operations (reduction of energy/water/waste consumption, decrease in operational costs, enhancement of brand image, etc.) and customers' increasing needs for green products, changing and improving a hotel operation to be more environmentally friendly is regarded as one of the most effective competitiveness strategies in the mature lodging market (Chen and Tung, 2014; Han et al., 2010; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82 51 320 2679.

E-mail addresses: heesup.han@gmail.com (H. Han), jinsoohwang@hanmail.net (J. Hwang), joohyunkim.art@gmail.com (J. Kim), hkjung@airbusan.com (H. Jung).

¹ Tel.: +82 2 3408 4462.

² Tel.: +82 2 10 9190 9005.

³ Tel.: +82 2 10 6660 0546.

Since the selection of an environmentally responsible hotel is a pro-social or pro-environmental decision-making, the present study employed the Norm Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977) as a theoretical foundation. This norm activation framework is one of the most influential models for predicting pro-social and pro-environmental intention/behavior. Indeed, in the domain of pro-environmental behavior, many researchers have taken the NAM as an imperative theoretical basis due to the theory's strong accountability for such behavior (e.g., Bamberg et al., 2007; Bamberg and Möser, 2007; De Groot and Steg, 2009; Han, 2014; Han and Hwang, 2015; Klöckner, 2013; Onwezen et al., 2013). Despite the NAM's general usefulness, these researchers also have asserted the need to improve this theory's explanatory ability by including some critical constructs in a particular context. The extant hospitality and tourism literature has long recognized the significance of volitional (attitude and subjective norm), affective (emotions), experiential (past behavior), and habitual (eco-friendly activities in everyday lives) processes on various pro-environmental behaviors (Chen and Tung, 2014; Han et al., 2010, 2014; Kim and Han, 2010; Kim et al., 2013; Song et al., 2012). Accordingly, recognizing such needs, in this study we sought to generate a more comprehensive version of the norm activation framework by broadening it to integrate these vital processes.

The NAM has been broadly used in various studies to explicate pro-social decision-making processes and behaviors. However, to

date, the ways in which the variables within the norm activation framework relate to each other are still unknown. In particular, when extending the NAM in previous studies, employment of the norm activation framework has been inconsistent. While some researchers have broadened the NAM by interpreting it as a sequential model (Hopper and Nielsen, 1991; Schultz and Zelezny, 1998; Vining and Ebreo, 1992), other researchers have attempted to expand it as a moderator model (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003; Han and Hwang, 2015; Nordlund and Garvill, 2003; Steg et al., 2005; Stern et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2013). That is, the interpretations of the NAM in the existing literature conflict. In addition, despite the frequent application of the norm activation framework for pro-social behavior, the theory's predictive ability, particularly for pro-environmental intention or behavior, has been repeatedly questioned (Oreg and Katz-Gerro, 2006; Stern, 2000; Stern et al., 1999; Van Riper and Kyle, 2014; Zhang et al., 2013). To gain a more comprehensive understanding of individuals' pro-environmental decision-making process, theory broadening/extension is necessary. Further, the importance of customers' attitudes, subjective norms, emotions, past experiences, and green activities in their everyday lives has been emphasized in previous hospitality studies (Chen and Tung, 2014; Han et al., 2010, 2014; Kim and Han, 2010; Kim et al., 2013). However, a careful review of the hospitality and tourism literature showed that little research effort has been expended on expanding the norm activation framework by involving these critical concepts and studying how such variables are associated with the original NAM variables. Given these, the present study was aimed at:

- (1) building a theoretical model of customers' pro-environmental purchase intention by integrating volitional, emotional, experiential, and habitual processes into the NAM in an environmentally responsible lodging context;
- (2) testing the applicability of the extended norm activation framework;
- (3) comparing the proposed model to the original NAM for the identification of its superiority in predicting hotel guests' pro-environmental intention;
- (4) uncovering the relative importance of study variables in determining intention;
- (5) evaluating the relative strength of two prevailing interpretations of the norm activation framework, namely the NAM as a sequential model and as a moderator model; and
- (6) testing the mediating impact of moral norm in the proposed theoretical framework.

To achieve these objectives, as our research samples, we used hotel customers from the USA, who were randomly chosen from an online survey company's database and had previous experience at an environmentally responsible hotel. In the next section, the norm activation theory and environmental studies are reviewed, and insights presented on hypotheses development. Descriptions of the methodology (i.e., measurement development, data collection, and sample characteristics) and results (i.e., measurement-quality testing, structural-model result, and test for metric invariance) are reported. Finally, theoretical and practical contributions and limitations that may inform future studies are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. Norm activation model

The Norm Activation Model (NAM) originally proposed by Schwartz (1977) in a pro-social context theorized that one's pro-social intention or behavior is influenced by his/her moral norm;

and the level of problem awareness and ascribed responsibility contribute to generating these norms (Schwartz, 1977; Steg and De Groot, 2010; Stern et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2013). That is, the NAM involves three major constructs for predicting pro-social intention or behavior, namely moral norm, problem awareness, and ascription of responsibility. Moral norm refers to the "moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific actions" (Schwartz and Howard, 1981, p. 191). This variable, which is alternatively called personal norm, is the most proximal variable of pro-social intention within the norm activation framework. Problem awareness indicates "whether someone is aware of the negative consequences for others or for other things one values when not acting pro-socially" (De Groot and Steg, 2009, p. 426). This concept is alternatively used with awareness of consequences. Ascription of responsibility is defined as "feelings of responsibility for the negative consequences of not acting pro-socially" (Steg and De Groot, 2010, p. 725).

Despite the frequent application of the NAM in diverse fields, the relationships among the NAM variables are still not clear. In fact, the relationships among variables within the NAM framework have been interpreted differently (De Groot and Steg, 2009; Han, 2014; Steg and De Groot, 2010). For instance, some researchers have interpreted the NAM to be a moderator model (Han and Hwang, 2015; Hopper and Nielsen, 1991; Schultz and Zelezny, 1998; Schwartz, 1977; Schwartz and Howard, 1980; Vining and Ebreo, 1992). These researchers have insisted that problem awareness and ascribed responsibility moderate the relationship between moral norm and pro-social intention, which contradicts researchers' assertions of the adequacy of the NAM's sequential model in predicting pro-social intention (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003; Nordlund and Garvill, 2003; Steg et al., 2005; Stern et al., 1999). However, Stern et al. (1999) and Stern (2000) employed the mediator interpretation of the NAM for their theory broadening, asserting that the mediator model is suitable especially in explicating pro-environmental behaviors. In examining one's eco-friendly behavior in tourism, Van Riper and Kyle (2014) and Klöckner and Matthies (2004) also found the mediator model (e.g., national park and travel-mode choice) adequate. Consistently, in expanding the mediator model of the NAM in an eco-friendly lodging setting, Han (2015) asserted that the mediator framework of the NAM is more adequate than the moderator model. These researchers all agree that utilizing problem awareness and ascription of responsibility as predictors of personal norm within the NAM framework rather than using them as moderators is feasible in environmentally responsible behaviors, particularly in hospitality and tourism. Accordingly, the mediator model of the norm activation process, wherein problem awareness and ascribed responsibility affect moral obligation, which in turn influences pro-environmental intention, was employed in our theoretical framework.

Empirically, a number of previous studies have found that moral norm is a positive and significant function of problem awareness and ascribed responsibility; and it is a vital driver of pro-social intention or behavior (Chen and Tung, 2014; De Groot and Steg, 2009; Zhang et al., 2013). For example, Zhang et al. (2013) indicated that awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility significantly affected personal norm; and this moral obligation played an important role in determining pro-environmental behavior (i.e., electricity saving behavior). Chen and Tung (2014) found that hotel guests' perceived moral obligation was stronger when they were highly concerned about the environment and its harmful impact. De Groot and Steg (2009) indicated that problem awareness and ascription of responsibility are vital in generating individuals' moral obligations, which trigger pro-social intention. Taken together, we posited that hotel guests' perceived level of problem awareness and ascribed responsibility increase their moral obligation; while personal norm enhances pro-environmental intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

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