

Young travelers' intention to behave pro-environmentally: Merging the value-belief-norm theory and the expectancy theory



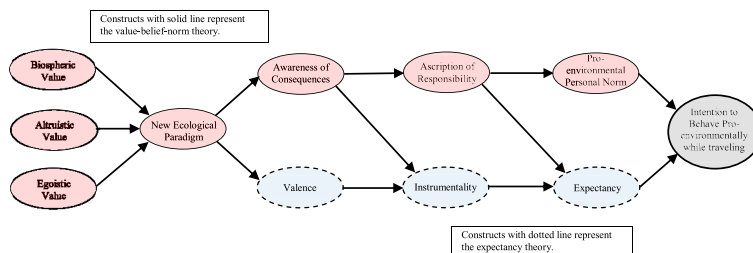
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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined young travelers' pro-environmental behaviors.
- The value-belief-norm theory and the expectancy theory were merged.
- Our unified model included a strong prediction power.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

This research examined the intention to behave pro-environmentally while traveling amongst young group tour travelers by adopting an empirically validated value-belief-norm theory and merging it with Vroom's expectancy theory. The aim is to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding the formation of environmentally friendly behaviors. The sample data of 538 responses were from young group travelers. The responses were subjected to structural equation modeling. The results showed that the combined model has a 12.8% stronger predictive power of pro-environmental intention than the original theory alone. It was also discovered from the results that the variables of the expectancy theory strongly influence pro-environmental personal norms, which in turn influences pro-environmental intentions. The discussions covered both theoretical and practical implications of this research as well as recommendations for further studies.

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1. Introduction

Many tourist destinations depend on the attractiveness of their environment to attract visitors (Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013). The relationship between tourism and its environmental quality have often been discussed among both academics and practitioners (Budeanu, 2007). Tourism competitiveness researches

have shown the significant role of environmental quality and tourist satisfaction (Kim, 2014; Ramkissoon et al., 2013). While the effort to mitigate negative effects of tourism has come from both private and public sectors, cooperation from consumers is still needed in the success of utilizing the nature sustainably (Halpenny, 2010). Santana-Jimenez and Hernandez (2011) found that tourists generally focus on their own activities and experience while traveling and give less consideration to the local environment. The challenge of this present study is to find a robust framework explaining pro-environmental behaviors while traveling, taking existing theories that have been developed for various settings into

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account.

In hospitality and tourism research, a large number of studies have focused on eco-friendly products and service offerings, such as green hotels, eco-tourism, and volunteer tourism (Choi & Parsa, 2006; Han, 2015; Han, Hsu, & Lee, 2009; Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010; Hu, Parsa, & Self, 2010; Lee, Lawton, & Weaver, 2012; Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010; Weaver, 2012). On the other hand, ecology studies often emphasized the aggregate power of public behaviors (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000; Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Stern, 2010; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999). Because the majority of tourists still visit urban cities (Miller, Merrilees, & Coghlan, 2015), the overall view of sustainable tourism should also take into consideration the daily practices of tourists. Stern (2000) underlined the aggregate impact of public actions, specifically day-to-day green actions. Tourists in group tours represented the mainstream tourism population in this research. Empirical studies found general tourists tend to exhibit less responsibility towards the environment during their holiday than at home (Budeanu, 2007; Dolnicar & Grun, 2009; Miller et al., 2015). This study focuses on green behavior on a broader scale. Environmentally responsible behaviors do not need to be tied to specific tourism products or services. Green behaviors of tourists in an urban environment can contribute significantly to the overall environmental quality of a destination.

In early pro-environmental behavior studies, models based on knowledge and attitude towards the environment have been prevalent (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). This led to many public campaigns aiming to increase public knowledge on environmental issues. Later, researchers found this approach to be ineffective (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Eco-friendly behavior research has been approached via two main avenues, altruism and self-interests (Bamberg & Moser, 2007). Researchers who view environmentally responsible behaviors to be pro-socially motivated usually adopted moral norm based theories such as the Norm-Activation Model (NAM) by Schwartz (1977) or a more recently introduced Value-Believe-Norm (VBN) theory by Stern et al. (1999). On the other hand, there are researchers who view eco-friendly behavior to be motivated by self-interests. Self-interest theories are based on the assumption that actions are motivated by rewards or outcomes (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Kaiser, Hubner, & Bogner, 2005). Bamberg and Moser (2007) further suggested a mixture of both views is probably the best approach.

Gronhoj and Thøgersen (2009) as well as Johnson, Bowker, and Cordell (2004) identified the attitude-action gap among young and old populations. Young people showed higher knowledge towards environmental issues. However, they were less inclined to follow up with actions compared to their older counterparts. In general, young people, the highly educated, and women were found to exhibit positive attitude towards the environment (Autio & Heinonen, 2004; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Pinto, Nique, Anana, & Herter, 2011; Yu, 2014). Therefore, this study confines the sample to only young university students and should theoretically show significant and strong attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviors. Another benefit of regulating sample population is that the present study concentrates on the development of a theoretical framework, and a homogeneous sample can help diminish potential errors caused by other mediators. Lee, Wilkins, and Lee (2011) stated that in general Korean travelers tend to choose mass organized tours. This research specifically samples those who previously participated in group tours to represent the young Korean travelers.

This research acknowledges the theoretical gap and aims to fulfill the gap by investigating university students' intentions to behave pro-environmentally while they are traveling with group tours using the VBN theory and Vroom's expectancy theory.

Particularly, we attempt 1) to develop a robust model that provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intentions to behave pro-environmentally of young travelers in group tours by merging two major theories (i.e., VBN and expectancy theory) in behavior studies and 2) to identify the superiority of the proposed theoretical framework compared to the original VBN framework by surveying university students in group travels.

2. Literature review

2.1. Pro-environmental behaviors of young tourists

The term pro-environmental behavior entails a broad range of actions and is interchangeably used with other words such as environmentally responsible behavior, environmentally friendly behavior, green behavior, and eco-friendly behavior (Guagnano, Stern, & Dietz, 1995; Miller et al., 2015). This research adopted the definition of pro-environmental behavior by Miller et al. (2015, pp. 28): "any actions that protect the environment or minimize the negative impacts of human activity on the environment in either general daily practice or specific outdoor settings". General daily practices include water and electricity consumption, use of public transportation, littering, recycling waste, reusing plastic bottles and more (Caruana, Glozer, Crane, & McCabe, 2014). This study measured common pro-environmental behaviors of tourists while traveling. Behavioral intention, measured by the final construct was adopted from previous studies (Miller et al., 2015; Dolnicar & Grun, 2009; Stern et al., 1999). They include a preference to buy local and organic products, avoid plastic shopping bags, reuse plastic bottles, save water and electricity, sort and recycle waste, and avoid disturbing wildlife.

Previous researches found that factors such as age, income level, gender, education level, and social background influence one's pro-environmental attitude and behaviors (Budeanu, 2007; Han et al., 2009; Ostman & Parker, 1987; Pinto et al., 2011). As stated earlier, young people empirically showed a higher level of positive environmental attitude. The theory adopted by this research measures environmental knowledge because it is found to be the predictor of beliefs and personal norms. The level of participation can differ because of the emotional bond between people and their environment. Halpenny (2010) and Anton and Lawrence (2014) found that people tend to exhibit a higher level of environmentally responsible actions if they feel a closer bond to the place. In a research on national park visits, Ramkissoon et al. (2013) found that people who showed a strong sense of belonging to the park were more willing to engage in eco-friendly behaviors. A study on hotel guests' energy conservation behavior revealed lower energy saving commitment during their holidays than at home, where they pay the bills directly (Chang, Huh, & Lee, 2015). Juvan and Dolnicar (2014) reported the attitude and behavior gap between home and vacation settings. Some interviewees associated conservation behaviors with higher costs and time constraints, though most showed high environmental knowledge and positive attitudes towards environmental conservation. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) also pointed out the barriers to pro-environmental behaviors including monetary costs, emotional involvement, and prioritization of responsibilities. Given the research context of this present study, monetary costs and prioritization of responsibilities could potentially explain young travelers' green intentions. Behaviors that involve higher costs such as buying organic products could receive less attention by young people. Environmental conservation may not appear to be high on university students' priority list while traveling (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Lopez-Mosquera, Garcia, & Barrena, 2014).

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