



# Word-of-mouth, buying, and sacrifice intentions for eco-cruises: Exploring the function of norm activation and value-attitude-behavior



Heesup Han<sup>a</sup>, Jinsoo Hwang<sup>a,\*</sup>, Myong Jae Lee<sup>b</sup>, Joohyun Kim<sup>a</sup>

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

<sup>b</sup> The Collins College of Hospitality Management, California State Polytechnic University Pomona, 3801 W. Temple Ave, CA, 91768, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Environmentally responsible cruise  
Norm activation process  
Value-attitude-behavior model  
Cruise travelers  
Emotions

## ABSTRACT

Our theoretical framework was designed to explain passengers' decision-making process for environmentally responsible cruise products. Specifically, the goals of this study were to investigate passengers' decision formation by employing the Norm Activation Model (NAM), to extend it by integrating the value-attitude-behavior cognitive hierarchy, emotional process, and normative procedure, and to test the moderating impact of non-green alternatives' attractiveness in a cruise context. The measurement quality was found to be adequate. The prediction power of the proposed framework was superior to the original NAM. Findings from the structural model revealed that the hypothesized associations relating study variables within our proposed theoretical framework were generally supported; personal norm acted as significant mediators; and the role of personal norm and social norm in building intentions was salient. Additionally, the hypothesized moderating impact of alternatives' attractiveness in determining intentions was supported.

## 1. Introduction

Customers are gradually recognizing the seriousness of environmental problems identified over the last few decades and are more increasingly aware of ecological issues overall (Han, 2015; Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010). These eco-conscious consumers, who are aware of the fact that the world is facing increasing environmental problems (e.g., water/air pollution, global warming), appear to be searching for and choosing products/services from environmentally friendly firms progressively, even paying more and willingly accepting some inconveniences (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; Lee et al., 2010). In line with this green phenomenon in the consumer market, firms in hospitality and tourism are active in greening their operations in various ways, such as initiating diverse eco-friendly programs, implementing environmentally-friendly technologies, encouraging eco-friendly practices among employees and customers, developing environmental policies and guidelines, and modifying operation processes (Chen & Tung, 2014; Han, 2015; Kim, Njite, & Hancer, 2013; Lee et al., 2010; Tang, 2015).

Particularly, the incorporation of pro-environmental business practices and technologies into products and services has become an important force in the cruise industry for the alleviation of its huge impacts on the environment (Ahmad, 2014; GTG, 2013; Klein, 2011). In order to be greener, the cruise industry is active in reducing three main

waste-streams such as air emissions from fuel/engine, solid wastes, and grey water (IGLU Cruise, 2016; Klein, 2011) and in increasing energy efficiency (GTG, 2013). This industry also invests extensively in creating and implementing new green technologies (e.g., solar panels on ships, wastewater treatment systems, efficient ship design, high-efficiency appliances and electronic devices) that decrease harmful factors posing an environmental threat (Ahmad, 2014; GTG, 2013).

Responsible cruise traveling emerges from the dynamic movement of eco-friendly tourism (Klein, 2011). Environmentally responsible cruises refer to eco-friendly sustainable cruises whose operators are eager to make positive contributions to the conservation of nature, minimizing the harmful impact on the environment. Due to the continuous environmental issues related to the cruise industry, which can cause ocean pollution, climate change, exhaustion of natural resources, and excessive demands for water and energy (Bonilla-Priego, Font, & Pacheco-Olivares, 2014; Kaldy, 2011), this industry is working hard to decrease its harmful environmental actions and become more environmentally friendly (Ahmad, 2014; Klein, 2011). With individuals' increasing green needs and growing environmental awareness in the consumer marketplace, such greening efforts can be considered to be an important way to enhance the competitiveness of cruise businesses.

Various theoretical approaches have been applied to understanding individuals' environmental intentions/behaviors within the domain of environmental psychology (Berenguer, 2010). Of all these, the Norm

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [heesup.han@gmail.com](mailto:heesup.han@gmail.com) (H. Han), [jhwang@sejong.ac.kr](mailto:jhwang@sejong.ac.kr) (J. Hwang), [mjlee@csp.edu](mailto:mjlee@csp.edu) (M.J. Lee), [joohyunkim.art@gmail.com](mailto:joohyunkim.art@gmail.com) (J. Kim).

Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977) is regarded as the most influential theory (Berenguer, 2010; Han, 2014; Hunecke, Blöbaum, Matthies, & Höger, 2001). In the present study, we employed the Norm Activation Model (NAM) as a theoretical basis. Research in the extant literature has shown the criticality of the awareness of problems, ascription of responsibility, and moral norm, which are vital constituents of Schwartz's (1977) norm activation process, in explanation of pro-environmental decision-making process and behavior (Berenguer, 2010; Han, 2014; Hunecke et al., 2001; Milfont, Duckitt, & Wagner, 2010; Steg & De Groot, 2010). Nevertheless, while this norm activation framework has been broadly utilized in pro-environmental behavior research (Milfont et al., 2010), its sufficiency is often questioned (Han, 2015; Matthies, Selge, & Klöckner, 2012; Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999; Zhang, Wang, & Zhou, 2013). These researchers asserted the need of broadening the original norm activation framework in order to more effectively account for individuals' pro-environmental intention and behavior.

There are indications that value and attitude are essential in explicating individuals' eco-friendly intention/behavior. Thus, as a form of the Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) hierarchy, the environmental value-attitude relationship has been often utilized to predict pro-environmental intention/behavior, and the importance of such a VAB process has been demonstrated in various environmental contexts (Hurst, Dittmar, Bond, & Kasser, 2013; Lee, 2011). However, despite its criticality, there is yet no conclusive finding regarding its relationship with the norm activation process, which is one of the most prominent theories in environmental behavior. In addition, there is evidence that emotions and social norm have an active and crucial role in the formation of pro-environmental intention (Bamberg, Hunecke, & Blobaum, 2007; Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Klöckner & Matthies, 2004; Onwezen et al., 2013). Yet, little research effort has been made to embrace these vital constructs in explaining one's environmentally responsible decision-making process when using the NAM. Moreover, the salience of alternatives' attractiveness has been repeatedly stressed by research on consumer decision-making and relationship quality (Han, 2015; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Samaha, Palmatier, & Dant, 2011; Yim, Chan, & Hung, 2007). These researchers assert that customers' intention formation is under the significant influence of their perceived level of the attractiveness of rival alternatives. Nevertheless, evidence to support the criticality of alternative attractiveness as a moderator in building pro-environmental intentions is rare.

In response to these research gaps, our purpose in this study was to develop a theoretical framework that clearly explains customers' pro-environmental intention formation in an environmentally responsible cruise context. Specifically, we aimed 1) to broaden the NAM by incorporating the VAB framework, emotional process, and normative process, 2) to deepen the norm activation framework by considering the moderating impact of non-green alternatives' attractiveness, 3) to identify the adequacy of the proposed model by conducting a modeling comparison, 4) to examine the relative importance among constructs in the model in building intentions, and 5) test the mediating impact of study variables.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. Norm activation model

Norm activation refers to “a process in which people construct self-expectations regarding pro-social behavior” (Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 2007, p. 323). The NAM comprises three major concepts, namely problem awareness, ascribed responsibility, and personal norm (Schwartz, 1977; Schwartz & Howard, 1981; Stern, 2000). The personal norm is considered to be the key variable within the norm activation process (Berenguer, 2010; De Groot & Steg, 2009; Hunecke et al., 2001). Berenguer (2010) described personal norm as “internalized rules of

conduct that are socially learned vary among individuals within the same society and direct behavior in particular situation” (p. 111). This definition is in line with Schwartz's (1977) early indication that it is a personal expectation of a particular action in a specific situation that is practiced as feelings of moral obligation. According to these descriptions, the core aspect of personal norm refers to individuals' sense of moral obligation to conduct a particular action (Han, 2014). Thus, the behavioral relevance of personal norm is limited to actions containing a moral dimension (Hunecke et al., 2001).

Problem awareness and ascribed responsibility are regarded as the activators of personal norm and are the central constructs within the norm activation framework (Harland et al., 2007; Milfont et al., 2010; Steg & De Groot, 2010). Steg and De Groot (2010) described problem awareness as “the extent to which someone is aware of the adverse consequences of not acting pro-socially for others or for other things one values” (p. 725) and defined ascribed responsibility as “feelings of responsibility for the negative consequences of not acting pro-socially” (p. 725). Problem awareness is also known as an awareness of consequences or an awareness of adverse consequences; and ascribed responsibility is alternatively used with the term, as a perceived ability to reduce threat.

The NAM assumes that one's pro-social/pro-environmental intention/behavior is a function of personal norm induced by the problem awareness and ascribed responsibility relationship (Liebe, Preisendörfer, & Meyerhoff, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). This theory has been frequently used in research of human behavior related to the environment (Milfont et al., 2010). Empirical studies in diverse fields demonstrated that problem awareness, ascribed responsibility, and personal norm play an essential role in explaining individuals' environmental behavior (Hunecke et al., 2001; Liebe et al., 2011; Milfont et al., 2010; Steg & De Groot, 2010; Vining & Ebreo, 1992). The question still remains whether this mediator model is a sequential mediator framework or a mediator model involving problem awareness and ascribed responsibility as direct antecedents of personal norm. However, in their recent study, De Groot and Steg (2009) empirically identified that interpreting the NAM as a sequential model is adequate. In addition, Steg and De Groot (2010) asserted that the sequential mediator model is theoretically the most conceivable because individuals are not likely to feel responsible for performing an action pro-socially/pro-environmentally or think about the efficacy of possible actions without recognizing whether or not behaving pro-socially/pro-environmentally is problematic. They also provided empirical evidence for the appropriateness of the sequential decision model. Given these above factors, we proposed that problem awareness affects the ascription of responsibility; and this feeling of responsibility influences personal norm; and that this moral obligation in turn affects pro-environmental intention.

**Hypothesis 1.** Problem awareness has a significant effect on ascribed responsibility.

**Hypothesis 2.** Ascription of responsibility has a significant effect on personal norm.

**Hypothesis 3.** Personal norm has a significant effect on word-of-mouth intention.

**Hypothesis 4.** Personal norm has a significant effect on buying intention.

**Hypothesis 5.** Personal norm has a significant effect on intention to sacrifice.

### 2.2. Emotional process

The function of anticipated emotional process is regarded to be essential in one's pro-social/pro-environmental decision-making process and behavior (Harth, Leach, & Kessler, 2013; Hunecke et al., 2001; Lewis, 1993). An individual is likely to expect certain feelings that he/

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