



Exploring pro-environmental behaviors of consumers: An analysis of contextual factors, attitude, and behaviors



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ABSTRACT

By including the context within which consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors are formed, this research provides a comprehensive delineation of the process that leads from context to behavior. This is the first study to examine context factors as subjective perceptions made by consumers about aspects of their own situation, specifically the extent to which they perceive having more or less time, money, and power available. In contrast to previous research considering one type of behavior (such as recycling), this study recognizes pro-environmental behavior as a heterogeneous, multi-dimensional construct, and includes both public and private sphere behaviors. Pro-environmental business managers and policy-makers may not be in a position to impact objective contextual factors that consumers face, however, they may influence perceptions and attitudes. This study identifies specifically which variables may be of more interest to modulate, so as to increase pro-environmental behavior.

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1. Introduction

Pro-environmental behavior (PEB) refers to “behavior that harms the environment as little as possible, or even benefits the environment” (Steg & Vlek, 2009, p.309). Past research noted that contextual factors might impede PEB (Stern, 1999, 2000). Specifically, the lack of time, cost, and actual effort that the consumer is capable of performing, may be crucial hindrances to pro-environmental consumption choices (Grimmer, Kilburn, & Miles, 2015; Young, Hwang, McDonald, & Oates, 2010). Furthermore, Steg and Vlek (2009) postulated that the relationship between contextual factors and PEB might be mediated by intrapsychic factors such as attitudes, values, or beliefs.

This study answers calls in the literature for research on the impact of contextual factors on PEB (e.g., Steg & Vlek, 2009; Steg, Bolderdijk, Keizer, & Perlaviciute, 2014; Grimmer et al., 2015). Specifically, we set out with two goals: our first goal is to investigate the factors that underlie attitude toward PEB and determine the antecedents and impacts of attitude on PEB. Our second goal is to examine the direct effect of contextual factors on PEB, as well as their indirect effects through attitude variables. We provide empirical support to the proposition of a

mediational mechanism between contextual factors and PEB, which could further explain the attitude-behavior gap or values-action gap.

This study contributes to the literature on PEB in three ways. First, by including the context within which pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors are formed, we provide a comprehensive delineation of the process that leads from context to behavior. For the first time, we examine context factors as subjective perceptions made by consumers about aspects of their own situation, specifically the extent to which they perceive themselves as having more or less time, money, and power (control). Second, in contrast to past research, which has generally considered one type of behavior (e.g., recycling), this research recognizes PEB as a heterogeneous, multi-dimensional construct including both public and private sphere behaviors. Private sphere PEB refers to “the purchase, use, and disposal of personal and household products that have environmental impact” (Stern, 2000, p. 409–410) such as using automobiles, public transportation, or recycling. Conversely, public sphere PEB is defined as behavior that affects the environment directly through committed environmental activism (e.g. active involvement in environmental organizations and demonstrations) or indirectly by influencing public policies (e.g. petitioning on environmental issues) (Stern, 2000, p.409). Third, we employ structural equation modeling (SEM) which permits simultaneous analysis of all the variables in the model and measurement of direct and indirect effects. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that considers both private and public PEB, as well as perceived context based on aspects of consumer's

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Table 1

Prior research on the effect of causal variables on pro-environmental behavior.

Study	Method	Causal variables	Pro-environmental behavior of interest	Guiding theory/theories	Research question(s) and key findings
Intra-psychic variables only					
Bamberg and Schmidt (2003)	Survey	Beliefs, intention, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, habit, ascription of consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norm,	Pro-environmental behavior	Norm-activation model, Theory of Planned Behavior, theory of interpersonal behavior	Role beliefs and use habit from the theory of interpersonal behavior increase, respectively, the explanatory power and the predictive power offered by the TPB, whereas the personal norm variable of the norm-activation model exerts no significant effect either on intention or on behavior.
Poortinga et al. (2004)	Survey	Quality Of Life (QOL) values, New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) concerns, concern about global warming	Policy support, acceptability of energy-saving measures, and energy use	Value-Belief-Norm theory	Values, as well as general and specific environmental concern explain well policy support and acceptability of energy-saving measures, whereas actual energy use is related to sociodemographic variables, stressing the need to not only focus on attitudinal variables such as values to explain all types of environmental behavior.
Bamberg and Möser (2007)	Archival datasets	Problem awareness, internal attribution, social norm, feelings of guilt, PBC, attitude, moral norms, intentions	Pro-environmental behavior	Norm-activation model, Theory of Planned Behavior	Pro-environmental behavioral intention mediates the impact of psycho-social variables on pro-environmental behavior. In addition, besides attitude and behavioral control, personal moral norm is a third predictor of pro-environmental behavioral intention. Problem awareness is an important but indirect determinant of pro-environmental intention. Its impact seems to be mediated by moral and social norms, guilt and attribution processes.
Klößner (2013)	Archival TPB data	Perceived behavioral control, habits, attitudes, personal norms, social norms, intentions, awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, ecological worldview, self-transcendence values, and self-efficacy	Individual environmentally relevant behavior	Theory of Planned Behavior	Intentions to act, perceived behavioral control and habits were identified as direct predictors of behavior. Intentions are predicted by attitudes, personal and social norms, and perceived behavioral control. Personal norms are predicted by social norms, perceived behavioral control, awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, an ecological world view and self-transcendence values. Self-enhancement values have a negative impact on personal norms.
Noppers et al. (2014)	Survey	Instrumental, symbolic and environmental attributes	Adoption of sustainable innovation	Theory of innovations adoption	The adoption of sustainable innovations depends not only on instrumental or environmental attributes but also on symbolic ones especially for interest in, the acceptability of, and the intention to adopt the sustainable innovation
De Leeuw, Valois, Ajzen, & Schmidt (2015)	Survey	Beliefs, attitudes, subjective injunctive norm, subjective descriptive norm, perceived behavioral control and intentions	Eco-friendly behaviors	Theory of Planned Behavior	The TPB framework may more accurately predict pro-environmental behavior when complemented with variables such as descriptive norms, moral norms, sex, and empathic concern
Contextual variables only					
Vining and Ebreo (1992)	Longitudinal survey	Voluntary curbside recycling program	Environmental concern, attitudes toward recycling, recycling behavior	Norm-activation model	The implementation of a voluntary curbside recycling program increases consumers' propensity to recycle, the actual volume of materials recycled, but also environmental concern and specific attitudes regarding recycling.
Derksen and Gartrell (1993)		Social context	Recycling behavior		Consumers with access to a structured recycling program have much higher levels of recycling than do people lacking such access. Attitudes toward environment affect recycling only among consumers with easy access to the recycling program, whereas individual concern about the environment enhances the effect of the recycling program, but does not overcome the lack of access to the recycling program.

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