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The norm activation model and theory-broadening: Individuals' decision-making on environmentally-responsible convention attendance

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ABSTRACT

Our research framework is built on the Norm Activation Model (NAM) in order to propose and test a model that predicts intentions to attend an environmentally responsible convention. We made two major revisions to improve the NAM. Specifically, we incorporated attitude and social norm as antecedents of intention and we also integrated the anticipated feeling of pride and guilt into this norm-based theoretical framework. Results of the structural model with 340 samples of convention travelers obtained from an online survey distribution provided excellent empirical support for the proposed model. Our model included greater sufficiency and accuracy than the original NAM and other competing models. Findings also showed that the interpretation of the NAM as a sequential model was more adequate; the hypothesized relationships among the eight constructs were all supported; ascribed responsibility, anticipated emotions, and the personal norm had a significant mediating impact had a prominent role. The implications regarding these findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

"Going green" is a key issue in the convention/meeting industry today (Boo & Park, 2013; Whitfield, Dioko, & Webber, 2014). Convention tourism, including resource-intensive processes such as transportation, energy use at convention facilities, printed materials, and overnight accommodations, is widely believed to exert negative impacts on the host community and wider environment (Hischier & Hilty, 2002; Mair & Jago, 2010). Attendees' rising recognition of the huge impact of conventions on the environment further boosts the need for green thinking and activities in the convention industry. For these reasons, implementing environmentally responsible practices and developing effective green strategies are becoming essential considerations in planning successful and competitive conventions/events (Laing & Frost, 2010). In addition, understanding such convention travelers' pro-environmental decision-making processes toward attending an eco-friendly convention is becoming increasingly important in the convention industry.

The present study employed a Norm Activation Model (NAM) to look at this phenomenon. The adequacy of employing the NAM in the context of pro-environmental decisions/behaviors has been repeatedly asserted by researchers (e.g., Bamberg, Hunecke, & Blobaum, 2007; Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Cordano, Welcomer, Scherer, Pradenas, & Parada, 2011; De Groot & Steg, 2009; Klöckner, 2013; Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013; Zhang, Wang, & Zhou, 2013). These researchers have indicated that such decisions/behaviors are chiefly motivated by pro-social motives.

There is sturdy support for the NAM in the environmental/social domain. However, the intricate associations among key variables within the NAM framework are not wholly clear, due in large part to the inconsistent interpretations of it in previous literature. In addition, although research on pro-social/pro-environmental behavior indicates that attitude toward the behavior, social norm, and anticipated emotions can be related to the NAM (e.g., Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Bamberg et al., 2007; Han, 2015; Klöckner & Matthies, 2004; Matthies, Selge, & Klöckner, 2012; Onwezen et al., 2013), these relationships are not fully understood in a comprehensive or simultaneous manner. Moreover, while the sufficiency of the NAM has been repeatedly questioned, previous research underscores the importance of these variables in the formation of pro-environmental decisions. Furthermore, the employment of expectancy-value theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is abundant in eco-friendly hospitality/tourism contexts. On the other hand, a NAM based on pro-social motives to explain individuals'

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environmentally responsible decision making/behavior has rarely been applied in hospitality and tourism studies. To the best of our knowledge, the NAM's applicability in these contexts has not been estimated, and efforts to expand it have not occurred in a green convention context.

This study aimed to fill these research gaps. The objectives were to: 1) extend the NAM by integrating attitude toward the behavior, social norm, anticipated emotions (i.e., anticipated feeling of pride and guilt) in order to better predict convention travelers' pro-environmental decision-making process toward attending an environmentally responsible convention; 2) conduct a series of modeling comparisons between the proposed model and other models (i.e., the original NAM, TRA, NAM with an alternative interpretation, the NAM with anticipated emotions, and the research model involving a different interpretation of the NAM) in order to determine the superiority of the proposed conceptual model in predicting intentions; 3) test the mediating impact of ascription of responsibility, anticipated emotions, and personal norms; and 4) identify the relative importance among constructs within the proposed theoretical framework in determining pro-environmental intentions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Environmentally responsible conventions

The convention industry has rapidly grown over the past few decades. Convention travelers tend to stay in the host city longer, spending money on travel activities (e.g., accommodations, transportation, leisure pursuits, shopping, foods and beverages), and also tend to revisit the destination in the future (Oppermann, 1996; Park & Boo, 2010; Spiller, 2002). The positive economic impacts of conventions on the host community have led many destinations throughout the world to seek conventions and invest in convention facilities, convention centers, and related transportation (Lee & Min, 2012; Weber & Ladkin, 2003). However, it is not surprising that given the industry's significant demand for resources, contemporary concern and considerable attention have been focused on environmental issues relating to this sector. This industry has a substantial impact on the environment and the host city (Mair & Jago, 2010). Environmentally detrimental convention activities have increased public ecological awareness and efforts to identify efficient ways to minimize the severity of conventions' harmful impacts on the environment (Park & Boo, 2010). Environmentally responsible convention planning is today considered an established trend in the global tourism industry.

2.2. Norm activation model

The NAM, which was developed by Schwartz (1977) in the context of altruistic behavior, was designed to examine individuals' pro-environmental behavior/intentions (Cordano et al., 2011; Onwezen et al., 2013). According to Schwartz (1977), the NAM poses three types of antecedents to predict pro-social behavior (i.e., awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, and personal norm). In this theory, norm activation begins with an individual's awareness of conceivably detrimental consequences and his/her ascription of responsibility for not acting pro-environmentally. This awareness activates a personal norm that determines whether he/she should perform a particular action that prevents a harmful outcome (Cordano et al., 2011; De Groot & Steg, 2009). In this model, awareness of consequences deals with whether an individual is aware of the harmful consequences/outcomes for others or other things one values when not conducting a specific action pro-socially or pro-environmentally (De Groot & Steg, 2009; Schwartz, 1977); ascription of responsibility refers to "feelings of responsibility for the negative consequences of not acting pro-socially" (De Groot & Steg, 2009, p. 426); and personal norm indicates "moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific actions" (Schwartz & Howard, 1981, p. 191).

The NAM is often interpreted in two general ways (Steg & De Groot, 2010). First, the NAM is a sequential model where problem awareness affects a personal norm that directly influences pro-social intention/behavior via ascription of responsibility without a direct relationship between problem awareness and personal norm (i.e., problem awareness → ascription of responsibility → personal norm → pro-social intention/behavior) (Onwezen et al., 2013; Steg & De Groot, 2010). The second interpretation implies a model in which both problem awareness and ascription of responsibility directly impact a personal norm, which is an immediate predictor of pro-social intention/behavior (Steg & De Groot, 2010). In this alternative interpretation, the direct relationship between problem awareness and ascription of responsibility is not involved (i.e., problem awareness & ascription of responsibility → personal norm → pro-social intention/behavior). The first interpretation is in line with Schwartz and Howard's (1981) original proposition. Moreover, De Groot and Steg (2009) and Steg and De Groot (2010) in their studies showed that a person tends to be aware of the negative consequences of his/her behavior prior to feeling responsible for it; and such responsibility activates personal norms that provoke his/her pro-social decision/behavior. Consistently, in their recent empirical study, Onwezen et al. (2013) verified the adequacy of the sequential model, particularly when self-conscious emotions, which are elicited by appraisals of an individual's self after following or failing to following social/personal standards, are involved. Given this, we employed a model related to the first interpretation (i.e., sequential model) as our basic framework to develop a broadened version of the theory.

2.3. Revision of the norm activation model

One's pro-environmental behavior is in general precisely explicated when viewing it as a mixture of pro-social motives and self-interest (Bamberg & Möser, 2007). It is frequently suggested that combining both conceptual frameworks is essential to achieve a greater sufficiency for norm-based behaviors (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Han, 2015; Onwezen et al., 2013; Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006). Reflecting such a mixture in one comprehensive theoretical model often leads to greater predictive power of pro-environmental decisions and behaviors (Bamberg et al., 2007; Onwezen et al., 2013; Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006). Thus, numerous researchers have insisted on the need to integrate the attitude toward the behavior and the social/subjective norm as additional predictors of pro-environmental/pro-social intentions into norm-based theoretical framework besides the variables originally established in the NAM (Klöckner, 2013; Matthies et al., 2012; Onwezen et al., 2013; Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006). Consistent with this assertion, attitudes toward the behavior and social norm were involved in our proposed theoretical model.

Effortful decision-making comprises emotional processes and evokes forward-looking affective responses (Perugini & Conner, 2000). During the behavior-selection process in such cases, the evaluation of the specific behavior involves an appraisal of the prospects of both success on conducting the behavior or failing to do so, which in turn elicits emotional reactions (Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Pieters, 1998). When the prospects of success and failure on performing that behavior are considered, the resulting emotional responses or feelings is believed to be predicated upon a category of thought processes referred to as prefactual appraisals

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