



The Big Five personality traits as antecedents of eco-friendly tourist behavior



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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a study, conducted among 227 foreign tourists who visited Cyprus, that aimed to identify the relationships between the Big Five personality dimensions and tourists' environmentalism. Structural equation modeling revealed that Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism are positively associated with pro-environmental tourist behavior. In contrast, no significant relationship was observed between Openness and ecological action.

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1. Introduction

Eco-friendly tourist behavior (also referred to as pro-environmental or green behavior/action) occurs when an individual aims to minimize his/her detrimental impacts on the natural environment and otherwise contribute to environmental protection (Dolnicar, Crouch, & Long, 2008). For example, environmentally friendly tourists are ready to pay more for green hotels and engage in water/energy conservation, waste reduction, and recycling (Han, Hsu, Lee, & Sheu, 2011). In an attempt to understand how green behavior can be encouraged, over the last 40 years scholars have been exploring the drivers of pro-environmental action. In the tourism context, much of environmental research has focused on the role of values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms in shaping green behavior (e.g., Aipaniguly, Jacobson, & Flamm, 2003; Wurzing & Johansson, 2006). Meanwhile, just as the scholars have examined the relationships between the aforementioned concepts, simultaneous involvement of the trait theory revealed that another important psychographic predictor of human's behavior is personality (Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007).

Although some studies have recently examined environmental engagement from the personality perspective (e.g., Fraj & Martinez, 2006; Hirsh, 2010; Wiseman & Bogner, 2003), there is a scarcity of research on the associations between personality traits and environmentally responsible behavior in a tourism context. Meanwhile, eco-friendly behavior is not consistent across different settings, and individuals tend to display greater environmental

responsibility at home than on vacation (Miao & Wei, 2013). This difference implies that generalizations are not reliable and calls for an independent investigation of the personality determinants of environmental behavior in a tourism context. Besides, the absolute majority of the existing personality studies (with the exception of Markowitz, Goldberg, Ashton, & Lee, 2012) have examined non-behavioral environmentalism (beliefs, norms, attitudes, intentions), while there is evidence that despite declared positive attitudes towards eco-friendly tourism, only few tourists act upon them (Budeanu, 2007). This attitude-behavior gap implies that studies using non-behavioral constructs are limited in their ability to explain actual environmental behavior (Markowitz et al., 2012). Notably, one reason for the difference between stated environmental attitudes and behavior may be the social desirability bias (Leggett, Kleckner, Boyle, Dufield, & Mitchell, 2003), which often causes inaccurate reports on sensitive subjects such as eco-friendliness. Given this, ex post investigations of previous acts could yield more truthful answers and significantly increase the reliability of results (Kahneman, 2003), necessitating further research into behavioral environmentalism.

Finally, the findings of recent studies on the relationship between personality and environmentalism are inconsistent and contradictory (Markowitz et al., 2012; Milfont & Sibley, 2012). In light of these factors, the objective of the present research is to partially address the aforementioned gaps by identifying the relationships between personality and tourist environmentally conscious behavior. Specifically, personality traits will be operationalized using a well-validated 'Big Five' taxonomy, which enjoys the highest level of popularity in the relevant studies and comprises five broad dimensions of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness,

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Neuroticism, and Openness (also referred to as Openness to Experience or Intellect/Imagination) (McCrae & Costa, 1985).

2. Model and hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model which posits that Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness positively influence tourist eco-friendly behavior. Extraversion refers to the extent to which a person is social, talkative, assertive, energetic, and outgoing (McCrae & Costa, 1985). While some environmental studies did not find any links between Extroversion and environmental concerns (e.g. Hirsh, 2010; Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007), others (e.g., Fraj & Martinez, 2006; Markowitz et al., 2012) reported that individuals who score highly on Extraversion tend to show more environmental behaviors (this link was especially strong between the activity facet of Extraversion and pro-environmental action). Another interesting finding was provided by Milfont and Sibley (2012) whose study demonstrated that Extraversion had a significant effect on environmental engagement at the country level. Most importantly, past research indicated that Extraversion is positively associated with such post-materialistic values as self-expression and subjective well-being (McCrae, Terracciano, & 79 Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005), which have been previously related to higher levels of environmental concern (Inglehart, 1990). Based on the above, we can cautiously posit that:

Hypothesis 1: Tourists with a higher score on Extraversion are likely to exhibit more environmentally friendly behavior.

Agreeableness refers to the individual's level of empathy, compassion, warmth, and generosity (McCrae & John, 1992). Agreeable people are usually forgiving, softhearted, cooperative, trustful, sympathetic to others, and eager to help (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Thus, Agreeableness is associated with being a 'good citizen', and agreeable individuals may act in an environmentally friendly way because they believe that such behavior is socially acceptable and contributes to the well-being of society (Markowitz et al., 2012). Besides, past studies on the link between personality traits and values revealed that Agreeableness is associated with Schwartz's (1992) higher-order value of Self-transcendence (Luk & Bond, 1993; Olver & Mooradian, 2003), the universalism component of which has three pro-environmental items (protecting the environment, unity with nature, and a world of beauty) (Milfont & Sibley, 2012). In fact, the majority of recent environmental studies (with the exception of Markowitz et al., 2012) suggest that higher levels of Agreeableness are related to greater non-behavioral and behavioral environmentalism (Fraj & Martinez, 2006; Hirsh, 2010; Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007; Milfont & Sibley, 2012). Indeed, it is logical to expect that individuals

who are altruistic, empathetic, and compassionate would make more environmentally friendly tourists, and we therefore may hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Tourists with a higher score on Agreeableness are likely to exhibit more environmentally friendly behavior.

Conscientiousness is described as the tendency of an individual to be organized, responsible, thorough, show self-discipline, and adhere to rules and norms (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Conscientiousness has been also linked with higher future time perspective (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), which other research has shown is strongly associated with greater environmental engagement (Milfont, Wilson, & Diniz, 2012). Indeed, individuals with long-term orientation are usually concerned with the consequences of their actions and tend to plan for better future outcomes, including ecological ones (Milfont & Sibley, 2012). Besides, being orderly and responsible, conscientious individuals carefully follow social guidelines for any kind of action, and this urge 'to do the right thing' can be reflected in their environmental behavior as well (Hirsh, 2010). Interestingly, the relevant research produced contradictory findings: while some studies showed that Conscientiousness was not related or was inconsistently related to environmental engagement (e.g. Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007; Markowitz et al., 2012), others demonstrated that this personality trait is significantly associated with environmentalism (e.g. Fraj & Martinez, 2006; Milfont & Sibley, 2012). Thus, based on the above, we may posit that:

Hypothesis 3: Tourists with a higher score on Conscientiousness are likely to exhibit more environmentally friendly behavior.

Neuroticism is associated with the tendency to experience negative affects such as anxiety, anger, irritability, fear, sadness, and insecurity (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Individuals who score high on Neuroticism are less able to control impulses, hardly cope with stress, and respond emotionally to situations that would not influence most people (McCrae & John, 1992). Although Neuroticism was found to be positively associated with environmental preservation (Wiseman & Bogner, 2003) when measured with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), the studies on the link between this trait and environmentalism using the Big Five yielded mixed results. For instance, Hirsh and Dolderman (2007) and Fraj and Martinez (2006) did not find any relationship between Neuroticism and ecological concerns, while Milfont and Sibley (2012) reported some inconsistent associations (Neuroticism was both positively (Study 2) and negatively (Studies 1 and 3) related to environmental engagement). Still, in another study Hirsh (2010) found that more neurotic people demonstrate significantly higher levels of ecological concern. Despite these contradictory findings, it is still logical to expect that individuals who score higher on Neuroticism are more worried about any

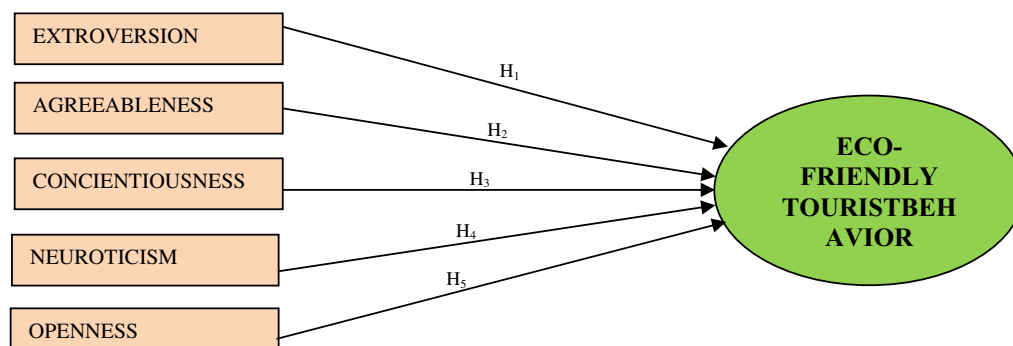


Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

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