



Consumers' pro-environmental behavior and the underlying motivations: A comparison between household and hotel settings

Li Miao^{a,*}, Wei Wei^{b,1}

^a School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Purdue University, Marriott Hall, Room 247, 900 West State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059, United States

^b School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Purdue University, Marriott Hall, Room 206, 900 West State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-0327, United States

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ABSTRACT

The present study made a comparison of pro-environmental behavior and the underlying motivations between household and hotel settings. Results of a survey research among 1185 participants showed a behavioral inconsistency between the two settings – participants reported a significantly higher level of pro-environmental behavior in a household setting. Furthermore, the study revealed that while normative motives are the dominant determinant of pro-environmental behavior in a household setting, hedonic motives are the strongest predictor of such behavior in a hotel setting. Theoretical and managerial implications of the inconsistencies in pro-environmental behavior and underlying motivations between the two settings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Sustainability of hotel operations has become a strategic imperative as consumers and government policies increasingly favor a balanced approach by business to the environment. Many hotels have been implementing pro-environmental programs as hotels become more aware of the impact of their operations on the environment and the costs associated with such impact. Examples of pro-environmental programs include development of green hotels (Butler, 2008), on-site wastewater treatment at tourist resorts (Antakyali et al., 2008), collaborations and partnerships for sustainability (Blanco et al., 2009), and conservation of water, energy, local/durable goods and other resources (Alvarez et al., 2001; Han et al., 2009; Priego and Palacios, 2008). While environmental stewardship is gaining momentum among hotel firms, consumers' participation in environmental practices appears relatively passive in hospitality settings (Bader, 2005). According to a consumer survey conducted by the U.S. Travel Association (2009), although 78% of American travelers reported that they were concerned about the environment, only 9% were willing to pay higher fares for environmentally sound services and 3% selected a "carbon offset" in their travel reservations. It is, therefore, critical to mobilize consumers' environmental concern and transform it to actual action in tourism settings (Bohdanowicz, 2006).

The attitude–behavior gap led some researchers to speculate that the commonly assumed moral beliefs alone are not sufficient to predict pro-environmental behavior in hospitality settings (Han et al., 2009; Harland et al., 2007). Findings from prior studies suggested that pro-environmental behavior is not consistent across different settings (Gatersleben et al., 2002; Green-Demers et al., 1997). For example, Muller and Sonnenmoser (1998) found that pro-environmental behavior was most pervasive in private lifestyle and household activities. In addition to the situational nature of pro-environmental behavior, motivations driving such pro-environmental behavior also can be dynamic and situated (e.g., Vining and Ebreo, 2002; Volet, 2001). People may feel morally obligated to contribute to a better environment (Kahneman and Knetsch, 1992) or individuals can be motivated by economic incentives to act in a pro-environmental manner (Von Weizaecker and Jesinghaus, 1992).

Given the contextual nature of both pro-environmental behavior and underlying motivations, it is important to ascertain whether consumers display similar pro-environmental behavior in hospitality settings as they do in everyday household activities. It is also necessary to understand whether the underlying motivations driving the pro-environmental behavior differ in the two settings. To that end, the present study aimed to empirically test whether there is an inconsistency in pro-environmental behavior between household and hospitality settings. Another important objective of the present research was to examine whether the dominant motivational factors in hospitality and household settings differ and, if so, what are those differences. While hotels' organizational behavior in environmental initiatives (e.g., Enz and Siguaw, 1999; Khatri, 1996) and hoteliers' environmental attitudes (e.g., Bohdanowicz,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 765 494 8031; fax: +1 765 494 0327.
E-mail addresses: lmiao@purdue.edu (L. Miao), wwei@purdue.edu (W. Wei).

¹ Tel.: +1 765 491 3920; fax: +1 765 494 0327.

2005) are well documented, consumers' pro-environmental behavior in the hospitality setting is less understood. Findings from current research will provide hospitality researchers and practitioners a better understanding of consumers' pro-environmental behavior in the hospitality setting and offer guidelines about how to encourage active and meaningful consumer engagement in pro-environmental initiatives.

In the following section, the theoretical background of this research is reviewed and research hypotheses presented. This article then presents an empirical study that tested the hypotheses. The theoretical and practical implications of the results are also discussed.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Pro-environmental behavior in household and hotel settings

Pro-environmental behavior refers to behavior that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). Examples of pro-environmental behavior include minimizing resource and energy consumption, using non-toxic substances and reducing waste production. Homburg and Stolberg (2006) divided pro-environmental behavior into four categories including environmental activism (e.g., active involvement in environmental organizations), non-activist behavior in the public sphere (e.g., petitioning on environmental issues), private sphere environmentalism (e.g., saving energy and purchasing recycled goods) and behavior in organizations (Stern, 2000). Similarly, Rice (2006) identified three types of pro-environmental behavior consisting of the public sphere, the private sphere, and activist behavior. The present research focuses on the private sphere of pro-environmental behavior. The private sphere of pro-environmental behavior refers to behavior that is voluntary (Rice, 2006). For example, in a hotel setting, the private sphere of pro-environmental behavior can include switching off lights whenever possible or reducing the frequency of baths (Fujii, 2006).

Research in social psychology suggested that behavior is dynamic and situated (Roeser and Galloway, 2002; Volet, 2001). People tend to display certain behavior in a specific setting due to the influence of the circumstance on their behavior (Beltman and Voet, 2007; Kaplan, 2000). Given the contextual nature of behavior, pro-environmental behavior may differ across settings. A sizable number of previous studies in pro-environmental behavior was conducted in household settings (e.g., Chu and Chiu, 2003; Clark and Finley, 2007; Gregory and Di Leo, 2003). These studies found that factors activating an individual's concerns with the environment significantly encouraged one's engagement in pro-environmental behavior. For example, Clark and Finley (2007) found that self-perceived knowledge of climate change, environmental attitudes and concern over future shortages showed positive and significant correlations with the intention to implement a set of specific water conservation practices at home among surveyed residents. Gregory and Di Leo (2003) suggested that environmental awareness, personal involvement, habits and situational factors (e.g., income) were significant indicators for water consumption behavior in household settings. Similarly, Chu and Chiu (2003) found that perceived moral obligation improved the predictability of people's intention to recycle household waste.

While pro-environmental behavior in household settings has been studied extensively, research in hospitality settings is limited. The most commonly studied pro-environmental behavior in hotel settings is the reuse of towels or linens (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2007, 2008; Shang et al., 2010). Emphasis on the exchange between firms and consumers was found critical for hotel guests to reuse

linens (Goldstein et al., 2007). A survey among hotel guests in Iberotel showed that 99% of participants accepted the reuse of treated wastewater for toilet flushing as long as no esthetical influence would occur (Antakyali et al., 2008). In studies of consumers' attitude toward green practices, participants reported a preference for environmentally friendly hotels (Han and Kim, 2010), yet were unwilling to pay extra for the preference (Li and Ouyang, 2009; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Prior research and anecdotal evidence seem to suggest that pro-environmental behavior is more pervasive in household activities while such behavior in a hotel setting is contingent on factors such as personal comfort, convenience and/or cost. However, the evidence of the discrepancy in pro-environmental behavior between the household setting and hotel setting in the extant literature is largely observational and anecdotal. To the best of our knowledge, no study has empirically tested the proposition that individuals display a greater level of pro-environmental behavior in a household setting than in a hotel setting. In this study, we empirically test the behavioral discrepancy hypothesis. We predict that people will display a greater level of pro-environmental behavior in a household setting than in a hotel setting on the theoretical premise that people generally behave differently during travel. Previous research (Leontido, 1994) suggested that how people behave during travel can be quite different from those of their home environment. Dann and Cohen (1991) claimed that the responsibility normally linked to home environment is placed in abeyance or suspended. People tend to behave in a more liberated and less restrained manner than they are in their home environment (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). The behavioral difference is especially salient for leisure travelers because the person sees "oneself as a different kind of person when on holiday, less constrained by normal role demands and interpersonal obligations" (Eiser and Ford, 1995, pp. 326–327). Given that pro-environmental behavior is a behavioral manifestation of social responsibilities and interpersonal obligations, it is expected that people will demonstrate less pro-environmental behavior during travel when they are less constrained by such obligations. The hypothesis is summarized below:

Hypothesis 1. Individuals display a greater level of pro-environmental behavior in a household setting than in a hotel setting.

2.2. Determinants of pro-environmental behavior

Over the last 30 years, researchers have explored the question of what shapes pro-environmental behavior. Prior research has identified a variety of factors that influence pro-environmental behavior. Factors include demographic variables such as age, gender and educational background (Fliegeschnee and Schelakovsky, 1998; Ye et al., 2003), internal factors such as responsibilities, motives, pro-environmental knowledge, values, attitudes, and locus of control (Han et al., 2011; Hines et al., 1986–87; Stern et al., 1993), and external factors such as institutional, economic, social incentives and constraints (Blake, 1999; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). Despite the number of factors identified, large variances in pro-environmental behavior can be attributed to internal factors (Fliegeschnee and Schelakovsky, 1998). As such, the present research focuses on internal factors, specifically, motives to examine the pro-environmental behavior in the hospitality setting.

2.2.1. Multiple motives

Motives are defined as forces that drive an individual's reaction to a given situation (Gollwitzer and Bargh, 1996). Research showed that people have multiple motives for any given situation, which may (or may not) be compatible with each other (Frederick et al., 2002). The decision about what to do in a particular situation

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