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Why Do I Forget to Recycle While on Vacation?

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INTRODUCTION

Whether it is forced or voluntary, recycling can often increase environmental awareness. Therefore, recycling represents a potential first step towards green behavior, including green buying behavior. This paper examines understudied attitudinal variables that may be related to recycling behavior. It captures both self-report data about recycling and opinions about environmental practices from both residents and people on vacation. People on vacation represent an interesting phenomenon, because they may engage in green practices at home, but may abandon green practices on vacation.

Green practices have become more relevant in everyday life (LaVecchia, 2008). Tourists are expecting green practices to be included within their vacation experience and a majority of tourists are interested in the social, cultural and environmental issues relevant to the destinations they visit (Chaf & Honey, 2005). A 2002 survey found German tourists expect environmental quality: 65% (39 million) want clean beaches and water, and 42% (25 million) “think that it is particularly important to find environmentally friendly accommodations” (Chaf & Honey, 2005).

Existing research examines some of the determinants of recycling behavior. For example, Hornik, Cherian, Madansky and Narayana (1995) highlighted support in the literature for the idea that noneconomic external incentives (e.g. actual and perceived social influence) stimulate recycling. They also noted that internal incentives such as satisfaction with conservation and frugality in consumption strongly influence recycling. Howenstine (1990) agreed that consumers must be sufficiently motivated and concerned with meeting social responsibility to recycle. Further, he suggests consumers are motivated by a desire to reduce pollution, avoid waste, conserve energy and improve the future.

For factors that are negatively related to recycling behavior, Hornik, Cherian, Madansky and Narayana (1995) concluded that the basic barriers to recycling behavior are consumer ignorance, misunderstanding, and confusion. They expressed that when recycling is viewed as primitive, time-consuming, and inconvenient, recycling seems improper in a technologically advanced society. Howenstine (1990) also suggested that inconvenience was a main barrier to recycling, noting collection, washing, sorting and storing as obstacles to recycling. The mess associated with recycling, along with the required time and effort, may prevent those who do not feel motivated by environmental ideals from recycling. Vining and Ebreo (1990) noted that people who choose not to recycle indicate time constraints, preparation trouble, storage, and transporting the materials are the main deterrents to recycling behavior. Meneses and Palacio (2005) characterize hard-core reluctant consumers, who are less educated, have low positive motivation toward recycling and the environment, and perceive barriers to recycling based on lifestyle and convenience.

LITERATURE

The existing literature on recycling behavior highlights social and convenience factors associated with recycling behavior. Less is known about how environmental values, environmental self-efficacy, attitudes toward recycling, and attitudes toward recycling effort affect recycling frequency and behavior. Environmental values, environmental self-efficacy, attitudes toward recycling and attitudes toward recycling effort may also affect knowledge of and attitudes toward recycling policy. Further, it is not clear how these factors affect recycling behavior on vacation. The research that indicates people are less likely to recycle on vacation

focuses on moral sentiments and social aspects (e.g. Dolcinar & Leisch, 2008). The current study attempts to address this gap in the literature. Each of these constructs' relationship to recycling and other pro-environmental actions are hypothesized.

We control for age, gender, education, and income as covariates. Vining and Ebreo (1990) note age, social class and income are related to recycling behavior. Howenstine (1990) suggests young, better educated, upper income are more likely to recycle. We also consider gender because although there are mixed results on the effect of gender, Lee (2009), among others, indicates gender can affect pro-environmental behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Two hundred respondents were surveyed at a tourist destination. An online survey was used and promoted by the local visitor's center. They were asked to rate how often they recycle at home on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). They were also asked to rate how often they recycle while on vacation on a scale that ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). They were also asked to indicate the amount of waste they recycle, and which items they recycled. We used existing scales to capture environmental values and environmental self-efficacy (Olive & Rosen, 2010). We also used items to measure perceptions of whether recycling is worth the effort and attitudes toward recycling. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the importance of having environmental practices in place at the location, and about their familiarity with three environmental practices at the location (banning plastic bags, requiring glass bottle recycling at all restaurants, utilization of a unique glass crusher), using dichotomous (yes/no) responses.

Respondents were asked to note whether the location was their home or they were there on vacation. If they were on vacation, they were asked where they were staying and whether the location had recycling bins and instructions for how to recycle. (This information was primarily collected for the organization that helped us facilitate data collection, so they could work with landlords and property managers.) People on vacation were also asked whether they recycled and, if not, why not. Finally, respondents were asked to report their demographics (age, gender, household income, highest level of education completed).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Dependent Variables	Predictors	Sig.	Supported?
H1: Recycling Frequency at Home	a. Environmental Values	> .10	No
	b. Environmental Self-Efficacy	.015	Yes
	c. Recycling Attitudes	>.10	No
	d. Recycling Worth Effort	<.001	Yes
H2: Items Recycled at Home	a. Environmental Values	>.10	No
	b. Environmental Self-Efficacy	.024	Yes
	c. Recycling Attitudes	>.10	No
	d. Recycling Worth Effort	<.001	Yes
H3: Familiarity with Policies	a. Environmental Values	>.10	No
	b. Environmental Self-Efficacy	>.10	No
	c. Recycling Attitudes	>.10	No
	d. Recycling Worth Effort	>.10	No
H4: Attitudes toward Green Practices	a. Environmental Values	>.10	No

	b. Environmental Self-Efficacy	<.001	Yes
	c. Recycling Attitudes	<.001	Yes
	d. Recycling Worth Effort	>.10	No
H5: Recycling Frequency on Vacation	a. Environmental Values	.001	Yes
	b. Environmental Self-Efficacy	>.10	No
	c. Recycling Attitudes	>.10	No
	d. Recycling Worth Effort	<.001	Yes
H6: Recycling Frequency	Vacation/Home	<.001	Yes

The results of the regressions are summarized in Table 1. Scales were reliable and valid. For H1, respondents concluded that environmental self-efficacy and perceptions regarding whether recycling is worth the effort had significant, positive relationships with respondents' ratings of recycling frequency at home. For H2, perceptions regarding whether recycling is worth the effort had a significant, positive relationship with respondents' ratings of the amount they recycle. For H3, residency at the location had the greatest influence on knowledge of the local environmental practices. Perceptions that recycling is worth the effort was a significant predictor of knowledge of one of the three policies. For H4, environmental self-efficacy, attitudes toward recycling and gender, (suggesting females gave higher ratings) had significant, positive relationships with the perceived importance of environmental practices at the location. Environmental values and attitudes toward recycling had significant, positive relationships with the tourist responsibility at the location. For H5, environmental values and perceptions that recycling is worth the effort had significant, positive relationships with recycling frequency on vacation. For H6, respondents were significantly more likely to recycle at home ($M = 4.367$) than they were to recycle while on vacation ($M = 3.296$). Both environmental values and attitudes toward recycling increased the likelihood that the respondent recycled on vacation.

DISCUSSION

Hornik, Cherian, Madansky and Narayana (1995) recommended increasing recycling education and improve the social image of recycling activities to promote recycling at home. They suggest policy makers highlight the importance and availability of recycling, or how to recycle quickly and conveniently. They also suggest that the social influence of neighbors, friends, and family members can extend the recycling behaviors. Similar efforts may promote recycling among consumers on vacation. We also echo past advice that suggests it is important to emphasize the collective importance of recycling (Meneses & Palacio, 2005). However, the current research indicates it is also important to communicate that the individual consumer can make a difference. Environmental self-efficacy was a significant predictor of recycling frequency at home and the number of different items recycled. It was also a significant predictor of perceptions that environmental policies and tourist recycling efforts were important. Therefore, education should go beyond the role of an individual as a member of society to emphasize the importance of contributions the individual can make on his/her own. Future research should explore the implications for the marketing of green products, which may be enhanced by increasing consumer perceptions that their efforts make a difference.

CONCLUSION

Since respondents were significantly more likely to recycle at home than they were to recycle while on vacation this leads us into future research looking into the social behaviors of tourists while on vacation. Although these respondents recycle at home, they seem to act differently when they are on “vacation mode.” Only a small percentage of tourists describe themselves as “ethical” or actually ask about hotel policies; even fewer report changing their plans due to responsible tourism issues (Chaf & Honey, 2005). Therefore, investigating why social behaviors change while on vacation can help in altering the current recycling methods at vacation destinations.

In a 2005 study from the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD) and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) at least a third of tourists surveyed say they are willing to pay more to companies that benefit local communities and conservation. Some tourists say they would also be willing to pay more for access to information about the environmental and social aspects of the destinations they visit (Chaf & Honey, 2005). Experiments where hospitality venues offer enticements towards their patrons for recycling could be explored. Would tourists be more likely to change their behavior if they were rewarded for recycling on vacation? How about an added cost to those who don’t participate in recycling within their hotel room?

If the spouse finds it necessary to recycle while on vacation, they will motivate and influence the rest of the family to change their behaviors. Therefore, according to the relative investment theory, within a family unit, the motivations and interests of the spouse creates the largest influence on the family thus influencing the children (Meneses & Palacio, 2005). Further research could be conducted to see whether this is valid in regards to recycling on vacation and if children are educated on the benefits on recycling perhaps they can influence their parents.

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