

Theorizing Event Attendees' Behavior to Increase the Demand for Sustainable Events

¹Nor Lela Ahmad, ¹Noor Azlina Mohd. Yunus, ¹Wan Edura Wan Rashid,
¹Norol Hamiza Zamzuri, ²Nik Hasnaa Nik Mahmood and ²Shuhana Shamsuddin
¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Selangor, Malaysia
²Razak School of Engineering and Advanced Technology,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (KL), 54100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: Efforts to include sustainable elements to produce green events are deemed critical in recent development of the event management field. However, there are challenges to plan and implement an event that depicts the essential elements that could be characterized as a green event. Basically, the idea of an event with sustainable elements need to integrate the three most important concerns regarding the environment, economic and social issues in the process of creating the event. The attendees of event must be educated and nurtured on the importance of having a green event. In the education process of the human element, it is fundamental to look at two important aspects of behavior and belief of individuals, their perception and attitude towards the concept of a green event. Therefore, this study used Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in theorizing and developing a new model so as to understand the antecedents that focuses on the behavior of attendees. This model is unique in a sense that it represents the new dimensions of awareness both from the perspective of ecological and environmental which will result in and understanding of the individual behavior and their perception towards sustainable events. As a result of this research, effective strategies could be developed, training and seminars designed to educate the attendees so that this could influence their behavior to positively support events with green credentials. This could also be a contribution to the government in fulfilling the objective of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) to create more green events using sustainability issues as an attraction in event tourism. The main objective of this study is to identify the attendees' behavior towards green events to determine the demand for sustainable events. The methodology used is a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. The findings of this research will help to discover extensive event management knowledge with the key result area of application in sustainability and green technology initiatives.

Key words: Attendees' behavior, demand for sustainable events, green events, sustainability, positively

INTRODUCTION

In the early days, the term sustainability was originally referring to the forest production process which forbids over-harvesting of the natural produce or resources before the forest could experience a new cycle of growth (Wiersum, 1995). The scarcity of resources is a concern among economists who have been studying sustainability topics. Hotelling (1931) an economist from America formulated the theory of optimal rate of exploitation of non-renewable resources. This theory is very much still applicable in the current situation

regarding sustainability issues. Some of his views will be discussed later in this study. According to Meadows, many natural resources will be exhausted within only one to two generations as reported by the Club of Rome. This measurement is a key indicator towards our survival in this environment. This has captured the attention of global public policy on sustainability. This negative sentiment is unusual in public policy since the objective of the policies should be focused on improvement and not criticism. In order to counter this subject, the Brundtland Report was done to offer a solution to the concern over these issues

(Brundtland, 1985). The report was named after the chairperson of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development. The concept of sustainability was adopted and recognized worldwide due to this report.

The Brundtland Report that was created in 1987 has introduced the concept of sustainability. The report covered the concern on the conflict between human ambitions for an improved lifestyle with the limitations from natural resources available in the world. As time goes by, many interpretations of the concept has been done. The term sustainability covers 3 major substance namely economic, environmental and social aspects of mankind. There are many definitions of “sustainability”. From the social aspect, the term focuses on decisions on the usage of natural resources which is decided by certain human interest groups and how these decisions affect humans in their day-to-day activities and lifestyle.

According to Mair and Jago (2010), very few academicians have ventured into the study on how to create efforts towards event greening in the Meetings, Conventions, Incentives and Exhibitions (MICE) industry. However, there are many references examining industrial and corporate efforts towards greening issues. In the early years, these studies focused more on the industries considered as “dirty” such as automotive and petrochemical. Compared to the heavy industry directly related to production, there is lack of literature on the issue of greening in the service industry. Therefore, there is a significant absence in the research specifically addressing the greening issues in event management. In order to understand the reason for investment in sustainable practices and facilities by business event operators, a model was proposed by Maio *et al.* (2007). The implementation of a corporate social responsibility policy, a desire for image enhancement, perceived competitive advantage and customer demand were among the internal and external elements identified in the research. In addition, an “eco champion” is also one of the important drivers for the outcome that functions as the one to promote the justification of applying sustainable practices and creating sustainable facilities in the business. The term “green” or “sustainability” will become a hygiene factor as organizers and delegates would simply be expecting these dimensions when attending events.

The Malaysian public has yet to embrace the green concept regardless of the countless efforts done to promote and educate on this new idea. Not many researchers have dwelled into how consumers perceive

the green concept and the going green lifestyle in Malaysia. Despite the efforts by the government and the NGOs, questions have been raised regarding how knowledgeable are the consumers and how consumers perceive on going green which is still inconclusive. The level of impact for the green concept and going green depends on the consumers’ perception. The rationale for this is when the concept has been understood, consumers with green behavior are prone to look for products that are friendly to the environment and will not have a negative effect to the environment. Nevertheless, consumer’s perception towards going green and their knowledge on the positive impacts of this concept needs to be determined. In addition, the Malaysian consumer’s level of awareness needs to be investigated with regards to the green concept. Thus, this study focuses on event attendees’ behavior towards the demand for green events to find out whether their awareness can influence event organizers to implement more event greening initiatives and support policy makers in putting the legislations into practice since there are a large concentration of population at any event or gathering. This would be an effective platform to send the message across to the event attendees.

Literature review: Event management organizers need to include elements of sustainability combining approaches such as environmental stewardship, economic efficiency and social and cultural responsibility to justify the existence of sustainable practices. Events also contribute to a huge wastage of water, energy and materials and emission of greenhouse gases (Seers and Mair, 2009). Many event organizers and venue managers have realized that they need to encourage the efforts to minimize the impacts of event on the environment when an event is being hosted. According to Getz (1991), to ensure that an event is hosted in a responsible manner, all levels of event organization must be involved to target and focus on implementing sustainable development principles and practices. There is a need for integration of the total package that will have an impact to infuse change and convert it into an environmentally viable event (Hede, 2007). Multiple stakeholders needs to be involved such as clients, organizers, venues, sub-contractors and suppliers. Their involvement must be included from the start of the planning stage of an event until completion, so as to ensure that the elements of event greening are addressed as part of their concerns.

Behavior: Schmuck and coauthors found that there is a close association between individual environmental

concern and people who are concerned about our planet's future. These individuals are more likely to get involved with pro-environmental behaviors. A broad base of personal beliefs about the natural environment have used The New Ecological Paradigm scale as a measurement. Correlations have supported and predicted a variety of different pro-environmental behaviors and intentions as discovered by Steg and Vlek (2009). While Chen (2013) indicated that there have been associations between personal environmental beliefs and other factors such as activism of individual towards the environment, public policy for things related to the environmental is supported, the way waste is disposed by household, green consumerism and the level of influence of the environmental actions of organizations to which they belong to.

Pro-environmental behaviors are practiced by a person that chooses to implement behaviors that will have a positive effect for the environment in comparison to others. Similarly, they also are referred to as conservation behaviors, environmentally friendly behaviors, environmentally significant behaviors, environmentally sustainable behaviors and responsible environmental behaviors. Since most people do not have no power to influence the government directly or influence the corporate policy, daily consumers of materials and energy can choose to make a change by influencing the society to be more environmentally conscious (Greaves *et al.*, 2013). Tonglet *et al.* (2004) argued that the feeling of obligation for the motivation of more pro-environmental behaviors engagement are carried out by applied psychologists and practitioners of the environmental movement. These groups of people include researchers, teachers, government employees, leaders of non-profit environmental organizations or other concerned advocates. This is due to the ignorance of a majority of people that doesn't care less about the environment.

Therefore, new pro-environmental behaviors should be started to reduce the impact on the environment. Currently, no comprehensive review is available to compare the various techniques that can provide practitioners with the guidelines on the most effective techniques are for which behaviors regardless of the many various techniques to engage people in more pro-environmental behaviors that can be utilised. Actions such as providing information or instruction, creating incentives, facilitating to make it easier or more convenient, giving feedback and so on would be among the techniques included.

Intention towards green products/services: Evidences show that consumers purchase decisions are being incorporated with issues on sustainability (Chib *et al.*, 2009). While other researchers such as Seers and Mair (2009) and also Dolnicar and Leisch (2008) found that consumers are constantly growing more interested in issues relating to the environment and this has influenced their holiday purchase decisions. On the other hand, this research also found that consumers are still reluctant to pay for sustainability. Thus, there is a crucial need to focus on the interest or level of awareness on the environment or consumers' elements of sustainability in the business events context (the attendees or delegates).

Related theory:

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB): According to Steg and Vleg (2009), human actions are guided by behavioral beliefs (his/her action's possible consequences from a person's beliefs), normative beliefs (the others' normative expectations on a behavior from a person beliefs) and perceived control beliefs (the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior from a person's beliefs). A combination of behavioral attitude, subjective norm and behavioral control perception leads the intention of behaviors. The presumptions of TPB is that when there is a favorable attitude towards a behavior and the subjective norms relating to that behavior being performed, the intention to perform a behavior by an individual will be present. This is even more supported by the perceived behavioral control. There is proof that TPB has been able to explain pro-environmental actions in different types. Some of them include purchasing products that are friendly to the environment, choosing a more sustainable mode of travel, use of water, recycling of house hold items and making a compost out of waste. Bamberg and Moser (2007) also included some other behaviors categorized as being sensitive to the environment in general.

Attitudes toward a behavior: The level of importance when a person gives value to performing a certain behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Subjective norms: The determinants of a person's decision to perform a particular behavior heavily depends on an individual's beliefs and also include the approval or disapproval from people in their social circle such as family and friends (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Perceived behavioral control: The extent to which a person perceives ease or difficulty of implementing an intended behavior.

Intention: The circumstances that influence an individuals' willingness to perform a certain behavior (e.g., buying eco-friendly products, recycling, taking a public transportation).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research will adopt a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. The study will be using quantitative study as the main tool to obtain data and supported by interviews with the event organizer from a qualitative perspective. The preliminary theoretical framework used as the basis for the development of questionnaire is done through a review of the literature. The instrument to be used in this study will be a self-administered questionnaire, using items derived from the Mair and Jago (2010) model of greening, from the work of Rittichainuwat and Mair (2012) and Draper *et al.* (2011). This research also combined theories and practices that provide guidance for organisers on how to be greener from other academic publications and resources.

The researchers have chosen specified venues of domestic and international environmentally related event attendees as the target population. Events on specified dates have been selected to distribute the questionnaires to obtain the feedback from the event attendees. The framework of this research focuses on the demand for green event which is the intention of event attendees towards green products or services. The findings of this research will contribute to the body of knowledge in event management with the key result area of application especially in the issue of sustainability and initiatives using green technology.

The conceptual framework further elaborates the theories sustaining the model. To test whether the new conceptualization of the demand for green events is a valid way to understand the role of attendees' behaviour, the study applies an Explanatory Mixed-Method (EMM) research. This methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Business research particularly in event management have always been dominated by the quantitative paradigm. Therefore this method will address issues that have not been investigated before related to the event management field of study. This is supported by Koller (2008) and Smith *et al.* (1991). They have identified that this recent trend of using mixed method approach as a technique has been found to be more effective and appropriate to capture the multi facets of the real life situations that are more complex.

According to Creswell (2005), EMM is considered appropriate for a research that requires quantitative model validation and qualitative support in-depth explanation. A follow-up qualitative technique is applied to provide a better explanation to the findings after the quantitative analysis have been administered first and analyzed. This discussion will further justify and explain the application of this methodology. A significant method in the research will also utilize the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) procedures to analyse the quantitative data, particularly to confirm the validity and to measure the model fit. Although, SEM is widely applied in business research of western countries due to its robust and comprehensive fit measures, it is still regarded as new in Malaysia for a response-based research. A combination of factor analysis and multiple regressions to simultaneously examine a series of relationships in a model and test the model fit is also another feature available in SEM which makes it a comprehensive multivariate technique (Hair *et al.*, 2006). This method will be used to obtain an in-depth comprehension of how the event organizers implement the important sustainable practices and to refine the quantitative findings, the qualitative in-depth interviews will be conducted on selected event attendees. The qualitative part adopts a rigorous content analysis technique in processing the interview data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual framework: In this study, attendees' behavior is served as the independent variable or input which comprises of seven major constructs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, control beliefs, attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Whereas, the dependent variable are labelled as intention towards green products/services. Therefore, this study proposes the following framework as illustrated in Fig. 1.

The impact of attendees' behaviour towards the demand for green events: Based on the definition given by Steg *et al.* (2001), behavior that is sensitive to the environment is defined as "behavior that harms the environment as little as possible or even benefits the environment". The commonly adopted approach uses a list of behavior that is sensitive to the environment which has been developed by the researcher as the basis in the environmental psychology literature (Greaves *et al.*, 2013). Alternatively, some studies in the literature as observed by Tonglet *et al.* (2004) only focus on one type of behavior, for example, recycling.

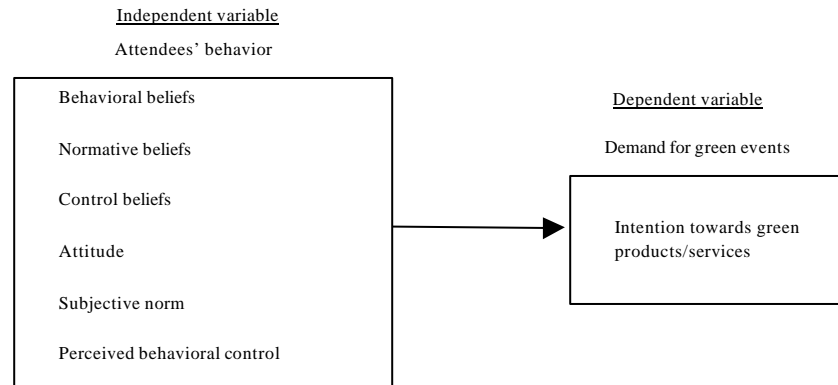


Fig. 1: Proposed conceptual framework

Other scholars have developed various scales that combine various types of behaviors that are eco-sensitive (Stern, 2000; Greaves *et al.*, 2013). While countless studies on the impacts to the environment only focused on a relatively limited set of behaviors. The concentration of study on certain considerations on certain stages of the consumer behavior processes have been identified as the main cause of their limited scopes and associated results. Thus, in order to reduce the significant contribution to the environmental problems, there is a need to look at how the behaviors eventually impact our surroundings. It is utmost important to address the different stages of consumer behavior processes and focus on a wide variety of consumer behaviors.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable practices have begun to get noticed at events. These elements are beginning to be considered as important in the industry. Despite the rapid growth of the event sector, factors such as the financial costs, time constraint, loss of control over venues and suppliers or supplies that are difficult to find have been identified to be the elements that hinder the greening of events. A major event would be a mean for attracting tourists to destinations when it is held. Therefore, the emphasis on achieving sustainability in event management should be increased as well (Mair, 2011). Organizing events are very challenging. There so many facets of events that need to be considered. It is even more challenging to the organizers to consider adding greening issues to the equation. Events have the potential to boost tourism from a societal and cultural perspective. The ubiquitous nature of events will result in a significant global importance. Thus, events and tourism are often very closely linked to one another.

Getz (1991) described events as “one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business and tourism-related phenomena. A significant perspective of this research is the effort to understand the role of sustainability within the event management field of study. The size of this industry and the popularity of events across a broad coverage of the population will limit the findings and thus provide an avenue for future research. Events also have the potential to have a negative effect on communities and the environment if no action is taken towards the issues of sustainability in events (Laing and Frost, 2010).

Indications that events can raise awareness of and be a leading example for environmentally sustainable behaviour will contribute to the implications for sustainable tourism development and the view of some festival managers by looking at the developing nature of this global industry. Greening issues have become an important aspect as a research focus in an events setting. An event involves various elements which includes sourcing for materials and to deliver a specific activity for a certain population. While attending an event, the event attendees will have personal interaction with the event brand which brings a brand to life. This provides a unique experience for the attendees and their perception can be influenced towards green events if the organizer succeeded to instill the awareness on sustainability issues among the attendees during the event. Beyond the control of the event organizer, an event can reach people in various countries, at different times and in countless number of ways. Beyond the main event activity itself, an event can have its own legacy and hopefully green events will be able to leave a significant mark in the industry. Thus, greening of events would increase the triple bottom line effect which is increase the economic value, instill the environmental consciousness and provide an

unforgettable social experience. Events also provide the social interaction to further increase the triple bottom line dimension of sustainability.

A big investment is required to adopt greening practices. However, green practices has proven to save money in the long run. For example, to save the cost for the next event, name badge holders are collected to be reused at another event at the end of the current event which will contribute to saving a portion of the cost. Green events can save resource. On top of that, it can also save money. A significant impact can be seen from minimizing the environmental consequences of an event by using recycled materials, reusing items and reducing materials used. Consequently, it is also noted that tonnes of wastage could be prevented from going into the landfill by using biodegradable cups and plates instead of using Styrofoam or plastic at an event. A conference could save a large amount of money through green practice such as providing pitches to serve water instead of individual bottled water in plastic containers. Green practices would also provide new experience to the attendees as they become part of a sustainable solution from the production of a feature event with sustainable credentials.

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