

The Impact of Community Involvement on Environmentally Friendly Behavior in Small Businesses

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Environmental friendliness by businesses has important impacts on society. Small businesses are a big part of that potential, comprising 99% of all firms, employing nearly half of the country's employees, and generating 60% of all new jobs (Babson, 2016). However, relatively little research has been done on what motivates small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. This paper addresses this research gap and finds that small businesses which value community involvement are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior, while small businesses which are politically active are neither more nor less likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Research Question

Collectively, small businesses have an important impact on the environment (Hillary, 2000). A number of scholars have researched this impact and its causes (see Leonidou, Christodoulides, & Thwaites, 2016 for a good overview). Less research has been done on what actually motivates small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. Therefore, this paper asks the question “what motivates small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior?”

What We Know

As noted, a number of scholars have researched environmental issues in small business. This includes a number of studies on environmental awareness (Revell & Blackburn, 2007; Revell, Stokes & Chen, 2010; Williamson & Lynch-Wood, 2001; Worthington & Patton, 2005), studies on factors that drive environmentally friendly behavior (Revell, Stokes and Chen, 2010; Worthington & Patton, 2005) and

studies on factors that detract from environmentally friendly behavior (Dean, Brown & Stango, 2000; Petts, Herd, Gerrard, & Horne, 1999; Williamson & Lynch-Wood, 2001). These studies show that small businesses, and the leaders who run them, are aware of environmental issues and engage in environmentally friendly behavior for both external and internal reasons.

The Gap in Understanding

There have been various studies of the predictors of environmentally friendly behavior at the individual level (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Hirsh, 2010), but less work on the predictors of such behavior at the organizational level. While there has been research on the general factors that drive environmentally friendly behavior in small businesses (e.g., Leonidou, Christodoulides, & Thwaites, 2016), less research has been done on specific internal reasons that motivate small business owners to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. Notable exceptions include Revell, Stokes and Chen (2010), who found owners evaluating the costs/benefits and accepting responsibility, and Worthington and Patton (2005), who found owners reacting to external influences, but on the whole, we still need to understand the precursors of environmental friendliness better.

How We Will Close the Gap

We address the gap above by proposing hypotheses and testing them in a sample of young small business professionals from California's Central Valley. Our hypotheses cover both community involvement and political activism and how each of these should drive small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. We use stepwise regression to test our hypotheses.

Our Contribution

Our sample of 202 young small business professionals in a rural western area of the United States provides evidence of the motivations for small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior in these areas. In addition, the high Hispanic concentration provides insights into likely behaviors for this growing community, the fastest growing of the ethnic business communities in the country (Babson, 2016). In particular, our data presents evidence that small businesses that are more involved with their communities are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. Our data also shows that politically active small businesses are neither more nor less likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social capital theory posits that the relationships between individuals reciprocally influence those individuals' actions (Coleman, 1990). In a given society, this leads, among other things, to leaders of the organizations in the society undertaking actions that benefit the society. Social capital theory also predicts that individuals in a society will act according to their political beliefs. In a given society, this leads, among other things, to the leaders of the organizations in the society taking actions with respect to the society that, on average, are consistent with the behavior of the median voter in that society. Maio, Olson, Bernard, and Luke (2003) posited that individuals act in accord with their ideologies, values, and attitudes, characterized by Meglino and Ravlin (1998) as 'desirable modes of behavior.' Brown and King (1982) found that individuals who lead small businesses tend to act in particular in response to social pressure from their community.

There have been a variety of authors who have addressed the predictors of environmentally friendly behavior. Some have examined this topic at the level of the individual (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Hirsh, 2010), while others have examined the topic at the level of the organization (Leonidou, Christodoulides, & Thwaites, 2016; Revell, Stokes & Chen, 2010; Worthington & Patton, 2005). Ashton and Lee (2007) found that openness to experience in individuals can have the possible side effect of negative impact on the natural environment. Hirsch (2010) found that the personality traits of agreeableness, openness,

neuroticism, and conscientiousness are positively related to attitudes about environmental friendliness in individuals.

At the organizational level, Leonidou, Christodoulides, and Thwaites (2016) found that environmental regulations, environmental public concern, competitive intensity, and market dynamism impact small manufacturing firms' adoption of an eco-friendly posture. Williamson and Lynch-Wood (2001) found that small firms are mainly 'reactive' in their environmental behavior. Worthington and Patton (2005) found that small firms responded mainly to legislation, while Revell, Stokes, and Chen (2010) found that small firms respond to both 'push' factors such as legislation and environmental concern in the public and 'pull' factors such as potential cost savings, new customers, higher staff retention, and good publicity. Revell and Blackburn (2007), as well as Dean, Brown, and Stango (2000), found that many small firms avoid environmentally friendly behavior because of cost concerns, while Petts, Herd, Gerrard, and Horne (1999) found that small businesses sometimes avoid environmentally friendly behavior for both capacity and feasibility reasons.

Dolcinar and Grun (2009) found that individuals tend to be more environmentally conscious in their own communities as opposed to when they're on vacation. Eom, Kim, Sherma, and Ishii (2016) found that individual concern about environmental issues predicted environmentally friendly behavior in individualist cultures, but concern for cultural norms about the environment predicted environmentally friendly behavior in collectivist cultures. Steg and de Groot (2012) found that within-country, environmental activism is associated with altruistic values. Both Erskine (1972) and Daniels, Krosnick, Tichy, and Tompson, (2012) have found that altruistic values specifically related to environmentalism have been increasing in the US since the 1960's, with Gallup recently finding that the median voter in the US, regardless of political party, is now concerned about environmental issues.

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

In small businesses, the owner/operator is the one who sets the "tone for how the business operates", a fact taught in any small business or entrepreneurial classes (e.g. Mariotti & Glacklin, 2015; p. 597). So, the values and desires of the owner provide a source for motivation and direction, and a place for this study to start in understanding what drives a small business to engage in any environmentally friendly activity.

Values are beliefs that "a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Maio, G.J., Olson, J.M., Bernard, M.M., & Luke, M.A. 2003). Their importance here is that values influence behaviors (Meglino, B.M., & Ravlin, E.C., 1998); thus the values that the small business owners have can influence the behavior of the organizations that they run.

One value of importance here is the value of community to the small business owner. We know that small businesses locate in areas that they know, and in areas with which they generally have a history (which increases their access to capital, workforce, special services, etc. –Babson, 2016). This connection provides a two-way relationship linkage. The small business owner hopes that the community will appreciate and support "one of their own" (a key driver in the numerous "buy local" campaigns run regularly by local chambers of commerce), and the community expects the small business owner to support the community and operate in a way that enhances the collective community. This symbiotic relationship creates both mutual benefit and pressure to conform. In fact, especially in small communities, small business professionals have reported that local peer pressure surpasses religious principles, expected gains, obeying the law, or fear of punishment in motivating ethical behavior (Brown and King, 1982). The key here is the relationship.

It has also, of course, been argued that "enlightened self-interest", ultimately the belief that being good is good business, creates positive small business connections with their communities (Besser, 1999). Here the point is that doing things that benefit the community in which one not only works, but also lives, is a multi-faceted positive motivator of good behavior. The driver here, then, is expected outcomes.

It may also be that small business owners operating in communities that they know will engage in the community to change things. In line with this possibility, Menzies, Filion, Brenner, and Elgie (2007) developed a scale for measuring ethnic community involvement. One of their findings was that people who are more pessimistic about being a business owner in an area were more likely to be involved in the community (p. 279). Therefore, the motive here was engagement to change.

Overall, the value of community is critical in each of these cases. Whether it is the ties of the relationships, the potential for enlightened gain, or a desire to improve things, small business owners are motivated to connect with their communities. This drive leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Small businesses that value community involvement will be more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior.

In addition to the value of community, studies have found that pro-environmental behavior is associated with being young, single, female, a home-owner, and politically liberal (Oskamp et al. 1991; Dolnicar & Grun, 2009). The saying goes that one should, “Think globally and act locally”. One might think that this dictum may apply to small business owners and their actions to protect the environment. In fact, Dolnicar and Grun (2009) found that people are more likely to participate in pro-environmental behavior when they are at home than when they vacation. The logical extension is that small business owners will behave in a more environmentally friendly way than those operating across continents.

As awareness of commerce’s role on the environment has increased, there is a growing need for small business’s to become active in environmental issues and conversations. Eom et. al (2016) found that environmental awareness led to pro-environment actions, but only in individualistic-oriented countries. Collectivist countries did not have the same connection between awareness and action. However, within countries, environmental activism was found to be associated with altruistic values (Steg and De Groot, 2012). Leonidou, Christodoulides, and Thwaites (2016) found that external forces, such as public concern and regulation, led to environmental friendly behavior in small businesses.

While the study of political involvement is long and complex, a few factors seem clear and cogent. One of these is that those who are involved are more likely to feel strongly about their beliefs (Judd, Krosnick, & Milburn, 1980). According to Erskine (1972) and Daniels et al. (2012) the public’s view on the importance of environmental issues has been increasing since at least the 1960’s. While environmental friendly behavior has been viewed as the position of the politically liberal, by 2010, Gallup was reporting that the majority of both parties (74% of Democrats and 51% of Republicans) were sympathetic with the environmental movement. This threshold becomes important when considering the median voter model, which essentially purports that there is a “median” voter who will drive political behavior. Thus, with the median voter of either party now being “green”, there is reason to believe that it will be politically effective to take a green position in business (Hays, 2000; Basu S. & Devaraj N., 2014).

Given that small business owners may be locally driven, that our study focuses on U.S. businesses that are found in an individualist culture where actions are associated to results, and that the so-called “median voter” in either dominate political party is now environmentally friendly, there is reason to test for a positive relationship between political activism and environmentally friendly behavior within small businesses. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Small businesses that value political activism will be more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior.

METHODS

Sample

This paper utilizes a sample of 202 small business professionals from the California Central Valley. Individual respondents in the sample were 51 percent male and had an average age of roughly 25 years old. Respondents were 46.5% Hispanic, 28.2% Caucasian, 8.9% Middle Eastern, 7.4% Asian, 5% African

American, and 1% Native American. 3% of respondents indicated an ethnic category of “other.” The majority of respondents were college educated, with 36.6% having some college credit, 26.2% having an associate’s degree, 20.8% having a bachelor’s degree, and 0.5% having a masters or professional degree. 15% of respondents had a high school education or less. Firms in the sample ranged in age from one year old to 137 years old, with an average age of 35.74 years old. The firms ranged in size from 1-2 employees to over 1,000 employees, with an average size of roughly six employees. The firms’ gross annual revenues ranged from less than \$50,000 to over \$100 million, with the average firm earning roughly \$140,000 in gross annual revenues. The firms were members of 20 different industries, with most falling under the hospitality/accommodation/food service industry (20.5%), retail trade industry (15.5%), agriculture industry (7.5%), construction industry (6.5%), and professional services industry (6.0%).

An independent samples t-test revealed no non-response bias. This sample is not representative of the entire US population of small business owners and managers. In particular, it is skewed toward younger respondents and is significantly more Hispanic than the overall US population. The results of the hypothesis tests below should be understood in the light of this limitation.

**TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE SMALL BUSINESSES AND OWNERS**

Statistic	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Respondent Age	25 years	< 24 years	45-54 years
Respondent Gender	51% male		
Respondent Ethnicity			
Hispanic	46.5%		
Caucasian	28.2%		
Middle Eastern	8.9%		
Asian	7.4%		
African American	5%		
Native American	1%		
Other	3%		
Respondent Education			
High school or below	15%		
Some college credit	36.6%		
Associate’s degree	26.2%		
Bachelor’s degree	20.8%		
Master’s degree	0.5%		
Firm Age	35.74 years	1 year	137 years
Firm Size (Employees)	6 employees	1-2 employees	> 1,000 employees
Firm Size (Revenues)	\$140,000	< \$50,000	> \$100 million
Number of Industries Represented	20		
Hospitality/Accommodation/ Food Service	20.5%		
Retail Trade	15.5%		
Agriculture	7.5%		
Construction	6.5%		
Professional Services	6.0%		
Other	44.0%		

Variables

Two independent variables were analyzed in this study: respondent firms' level of community involvement and their level of political activism. One dependent variable was analyzed: respondent firms' level of environmental activism. Control variables of interest include: respondent gender, respondent age, respondent ethnicity, respondent education level, firm size, firm age, industry, firm liquidity, and firm debt leverage. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the main variables are included in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS**

	Mean	S.D.	Community Involvement	Political Activism	Environmentally Friendly Behavior
Community Involvement	10.33	2.57	1	.334**	.403**
Political Activism	7.22	2.84	.334**	1	.217*
Environmentally Friendly Behavior	17.07	4.70	.403**	.217*	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Measurement of Main Variables – Community Involvement

Respondents were asked three questions designed to measure the importance of community involvement in their firms: the extent to which social events in the surrounding community were a priority, the extent to which gaining or maintaining influence in the surrounding community was a priority, and the extent to which philanthropy in the surrounding community was a priority (Appendix 1, Questions 1-3). Cronbach's alpha for the three questions was .701. Given this reliability score, an index variable (*community involvement*) was created by summing the scores of respondents' answers to the three questions.

Measurement of Main Variables – Political Activism

Respondents were asked three questions designed to measure the importance of political activism in their firms: the extent to which political involvement in the surrounding community was a priority, the extent to which partisan political campaign contributions were a priority, and the extent to which political involvement in the surrounding community was important to the business owner's identity (Appendix 1, Questions 4-6). Cronbach's alpha for the three questions was .790. Given this reliability score, an index variable (*political activism*) was created by summing the scores of respondents' answers to the three questions.

Measurement of Main Variables – Environmentally Friendly Behavior

Respondents were asked five questions designed to measure the importance of environmentally friendly behavior in their firms: the extent to which sustainable water usage was a priority, the extent to which renewable energy sources were a priority, the extent to which recycling efforts were a priority, the extent to which minimizing the company's carbon footprint was a priority, and the extent to which minimizing the company's impact on the natural environment was a priority (Appendix 1, Questions 7-11). Cronbach's alpha for the five questions was .876. Given this reliability score, an index variable (*environmentally friendly behavior*) was created by summing the scores of respondents' answers to the five questions.

RESULTS

Analysis Procedures

The data were modeled in a stepwise regression framework. Each independent variable and control variable was assessed using an independent t-test, and the variable with the lowest p-value in these tests was entered in the model first. This process was repeated until all variables with a p-value of less than .05 were included in the model. The process was then reversed, and any variable in the model with a p-value of greater than .10 after consideration in combination with the other variables in the model was removed. The results of the hypothesis tests are included in Table 3 below. The model that predicted environmentally friendly behavior contained *community involvement* in the first iteration. In the second iteration, this model contained *community involvement* and *membership in the retail industry* (change in adjusted R-square .025).

TABLE 3: REGRESSIONS

Model	Adjusted R Square	Sig. Model	Variable	β	Sig.
1	.162	.001	Community Involvement	.412	.001
2	.187	.001	Community Involvement	.412	.001
			Retail Industry	.180	.004

Results

Community involvement was positively predictive of *environmentally friendly behavior* ($\beta = .412, p < .001$). This seems to indicate that the greater involvement with a small business' community drives the leaders of these companies to also see the value of environmentally friendly behavior that positively impacts the community. It is confirmation of the reciprocal relationship between small business and community. It supports the idea that being good is good for business. These results provide support for hypothesis 1.

Political activism was not significantly predictive of environmentally friendly behavior. This was surprising and may be an indication that there is not widespread agreement on the need for environmentally friendly behavior on the part of small businesses, with left-leaning organizations valuing such behavior but right-leaning organizations not valuing such behavior, cancelling out what would otherwise be a significant positive or negative relationship. It seems to indicate that the median voter in California's Central Valley is not "green." These results fail to provide support for hypothesis 2.

DISCUSSION

Our paper began by examining the impact of values and beliefs on behavior in small businesses. Given the fact that the owner-managers of small businesses drive small business behavior, and these owner-managers' values in turn influence their decision-making, we examined the values of small business owner-managers as a possible driver of our research question, "what motivates small businesses to engage in environmentally friendly behavior?"

We went on to identify the fact that many small businesses tend to locate in communities with which they are familiar and have some sort of connection. This leads to an expectation of reciprocity, with the community supporting the business and the business supporting the community. This led us to hypothesize that small businesses which value community involvement will be more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. Our hypothesis tests supported this proposition, indicating that business leaders who value community involvement tend to make decisions with their businesses that lead to more environmentally friendly activity.

We continued the paper above by examining some of the factors that normally lead to environmentally friendly behavior. Among other factors, we explained that a politically liberal orientation

is often associated with environmentally friendly behavior on a personal level. We proposed by the same reasoning that small businesses located in their communities are likely to expect a reciprocal relationship from the community, and that politically liberal small business owners will be most likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior “at home,” in the communities where their businesses are located.

We then went on to examine the factors that lead businesses to be environmentally active in general, other than the political orientation (liberal) of their leaders. We found that awareness of environmental issues leads businesses in individualist cultures to behave in more environmentally friendly ways, and political activism (regardless of political orientation) encouraged environmentally friendly behavior in small businesses across different types of cultures.

Finally, we examined the fact that concern for environmental issues in the US population has been growing in general. The majority of both liberal and conservative voters now embrace support for environmentally friendly behavior. Given this fact, we hypothesized that small businesses in the US in which the owner-managers are more politically active will also be more likely to exhibit environmentally friendly behavior.

Surprisingly, our results did not support this hypothesis. Our results showed that small businesses in which the owner-managers are more politically active are neither more nor less likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. This may be an indication that the “median voter” in our sample was not sympathetic to environmental issues. This is perhaps not surprising, given the fact that our sample comes from California’s Central Valley. As opposed to other areas within California, the Central Valley has long been home to more conservative political viewpoints.

Limitations

In acting to advance the understanding of any link between community involvement and environmentally friendly behavior in small business owners, we recognize the many shortcomings and unanswered questions inherent within the present research. Many of the limitations are attributable to using a single source of survey data to study such a grand world of study. To start, there is always room to question the intent of participants when they complete a survey that may be seen as having morally better or worse answers. However, within the context of this study, there may be reason to believe that any subject driven to answer a confidential question in a way they feel is morally correct may also feel a need to act in that same way. Another limitation of this data is that there is clear determination of cause and effect. We posit that it is the endowed values of the small business owner that will lead to engagement with environmentally friendly behavior. It is also reasonable to assume other cause / effect relationships such as environmentalism leading to community involvement. Further, the current study is confined in its validity in respects to time, location, and industry. Finally, our sample is skewed toward younger respondents and is more Hispanic than the overall US population.

Future Research

The current study lays the groundwork for much further work on the relationships between small business owners, community involvement, and environmentally friendly behavior. This work could be advanced in three important directions. First, a richer source of data could be collected from a small subset of small business owners. Using interviews, this subset could be asked to provide specific examples with data for support of both the levels of community involvement and the ways in which they are environmentally motivated.

Secondly, to better understand the causal relationship between community involvement and environmentally friendly behavior, we recommend a time-series study. While collecting such data could be tenuous, it may be possible to make comparisons between the timing of a business joining community groups and environmental groups by studying the social media networks of small business owners. Finally, the current study could be replicated under different conditions such as in small vs. large cities to look for generalizable results.

CONCLUSION

The work done here is based upon two premises: that the values of small business owners will drive their behavior and that, more specifically, those values of the owners of small businesses which are associated with environmental conditions will affect their interest in community involvement. The results of our survey results find that small business owners who self-report greater interest in performing environmentally friendly actions on behalf of their business will also self-report a higher interest in community involvement. There was, however, no statistically significant relationship between political involvement and community involvement. While the results are inconclusive in their causal relationship, they are in any regards informative in understanding the important relationship between commitment to the environment and to the community. Given the important role small business owners play in community involvement and environmental action, we advocate more studies in these areas.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY

1. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that social events in the dominant family's surrounding community should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that pursuing social events at the community level is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
2. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that gaining or maintaining influence in the dominant family's surrounding community should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that gaining/maintaining influence at the community level is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
3. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that philanthropy (i.e. sponsoring local sports teams, community service, fundraisers, donations, etc.) in the dominant family's surrounding community should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that pursuing philanthropic activities at the community level is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
4. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that political involvement in the dominant family's surrounding community should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that pursuing political involvement at the community level is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
5. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that partisan political campaign contributions should be made to the family's preferred party and candidates no matter what, and 1 means that partisan political campaign contributions are not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
6. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that political activism is important to the identity of the dominant family and should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that continued involvement in the community as a source of identity is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
7. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that sustainable water usage should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that sustainable water usage is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
8. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that renewable energy sources should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that renewable energy sources are not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
9. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that recycling efforts should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that recycling is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
10. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that efforts at minimizing the company's carbon footprint should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that minimizing the company's carbon footprint is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?
11. Think of your business on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that efforts at minimizing the company's impact on the natural environment should be pursued no matter what, and 1 means that minimizing the company's impact on the natural environment is not a priority. Which number from 1 to 5 best describes your business?