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The impact of egoistic and social-altruistic values on consumers' intention to stay at safe hotels in the COVID-19 era: a study in Spain

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Currently, many individuals are willing to travel depending on the safety and hygiene measures against COVID-19 that exist throughout the trip, including the hotel stay. This is an example of the COVID-19 awareness of individuals. This COVID-19 awareness forces tourism service companies to implement increased health and safety measures, and also motivates academicians and managers to improve their understanding of the customers' safe buying behavior in a pandemic context. Egoistic and social-altruistic values are key factors in determining pro-social behaviors, such as safe buying behaviors, however, no study examines the importance of these values in influencing such behaviors. This research aims to develop and test a model to analyze the impact of egoistic and social-altruistic values on the guests' intentions to stay at safe hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic, integrating Theory of Planned Behavior and Value-Belief-Norm Theory. COVID-19 concern was oriented towards value, considering egoistic and social-altruistic concerns. Data were collected from 521 potential guests residing in Spain. The findings reveal that both egoistic and social-altruistic values influence the intention. However, egoistic values have a stronger impact than social-altruistic values.

Keywords: theory of planned behavior; value-belief-norm theory; egoistic concern; social-altruistic concern; COVID-19; safe hotels

Introduction

Tourism service companies have had to introduce preventive measures against COVID-19 in most of their operations and processes (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). These prevention measures are crucial not only to help curb the pandemic, but also to make many customers feel comfortable and safe when consuming these services (Bonfanti et al., 2021). Currently, many individuals are willing to travel depending on the safety and hygiene measures against COVID-19 that exist throughout the trip, including the hotel stay (Gursoy et al., 2021). This is an example of the COVID-19 awareness of individuals. This COVID-19 awareness forces tourism service companies to implement

increased health and safety measures, and also motivates academicians and managers to improve their understanding of the customers' safe service buying behaviour during pandemic times.

Literature considers safety and hygiene as critical attributes for guests' hotel booking behaviors (Chan & Lam, 2013; Ghazi, 2016). However, the literature on safe service buying behaviour in a pandemic context is scarce. Only Atadil & Lu (2021) empirically examine guests' future booking behaviors in relation to safe hotels, exploring the effect of the underlying dimensions of a safe hotel image.

The consumption of safe services can be considered as a socially responsible or ethical behavior that can be stimulated by egoistic values or social-altruistic values. Egoistic and social-altruistic values are key factors in determining ethical behavior (Yadav, 2016). Egoistic values predispose customers to act in their own benefit, for example, protecting themselves or not from the contagion of COVID-19 when it affects them personally or when they perceive high costs at a personal level, respectively; while social-altruistic values lead customers to act without any kind of self-interest, so that the concern about the contagion or spread of the disease is generated from the benefits and costs for others (Stern and Dietz, 1994; Yadav, 2016).

These two types of values are different concepts and are negatively correlated (Stern et al., 1995; Hansla et al., 2008), however, egoistic and social-altruistic concerns can exist together and can have an impact on purchase intention (Prakash et al., 2019; Yadav, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the impact of these values to gain further understanding of the determinants of the consumption of safe services. To our knowledge, no study analyzes the types of values underlying the decisions to consume safe services, such as staying at safe hotels, in a pandemic context. To fill this gap, this

research examines the importance of egoistic and social-altruistic values in influencing the intention to stay at safe hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies considering that a certain behavior is stimulated by self-interest motives usually use rational choice models, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). However, studies considering that a behavior is stimulated by pro-social motives usually use Norm Activation Theory (NAT) (Schwartz, 1977) or Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory (Stern et al., 1999).

TPB affirms that behavior is determined by intention, which in turn is determined by attitude (evaluation of a certain behavior), subjective norm (perceived social pressure to engage or not in a given behavior) and perceived behavioral control (PBC, perceived availability of opportunities, capacities and resources to participate in a given behavior) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986).

NAT and VBN theory assume that personal norms are direct and important determinants of intentions towards pro-social behaviors (Berenguer, 2010; Zhang et al., 2013). Personal norms refer to feelings of moral obligation experienced by individuals to perform a specific behavior (Schwartz, 1977), and one of the triggers to be activated is the concern for the corresponding social issue (Han et al., 2017), that is, the apprehension that individuals have about the different problems related to that issue (Kim & Han, 2010). In the case of COVID-19 concern it would be the apprehension about diverse COVID-19 problems (e.g. physical and psychological health, change in the lifestyle, etc.).

VBN theory, an extended version of NAT, assumes that individuals are concerned about the consequences of certain social problems for themselves (egoistic concerns) and for other people (social-altruistic concerns) (González-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Therefore, the concern towards a particular social issue in this theory reflects

tourists' opinions based on their value orientations (Hansla et al., 2008). More specifically, this theory allows to explain the role played by social concerns oriented towards (egoistic and social-altruistic) value in the intention to perform pro-social behaviors (González-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Prior research compares TPB and VBN theory (Han, 2015). While TPB neglects the role of personal norms, VBN theory underestimates the role of attitudes. TPB and VBN theory are two complementary theoretical frameworks (Woosnam et al., 2021). Variables from both models are important predictors of intentions. So, combining both theories provides a better prediction of customers' behavioral intentions (e.g. Han, 2015).

This research aims to propose and test a model, integrating TPB and VBN theory, to analyze the impact of COVID-19 concerns based on guests' values (egoistic and social-altruistic concerns) on their intention to stay at safe hotels, also evaluating the mediating effect of attitude, subjective norm, PBC, and personal norm. The combination of both research frameworks allows to understand comprehensively customers' behaviors to stay at safe hotels from psychological and social perspectives.

Literature confirms the validity of TPB (Han et al., 2010) and some studies find that TPB variables mediate the relationship between concern and intention (Bang et al., 2000; Cheng & Tung, 2014; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Likewise, since concern is a component of attitude, different studies determine that concern has a direct influence on intention (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Paul et al., 2016). Furthermore, some studies (Chen & Tung, 2014; Choe et al., 2020; Han et al., 2017) confirmed that concern has a positive impact on personal norm, which affects intention, as assumed by VBN theory.

Based on the prior theoretical and empirical discussion, a research model is proposed (see Figure 1) with the following hypotheses (H):

H1: (Egoistic/social-altruistic) COVID-19 concern has a positive impact on the attitude towards staying at safe hotels.

H2: (Egoistic/social-altruistic) COVID-19 concern has a positive impact on the PBC over staying at safe hotels.

H3: (Egoistic/social-altruistic) COVID-19 concern has a positive impact on the subjective norm of staying at safe hotels.

H4: (Egoistic/social-altruistic) COVID-19 concern has a positive impact on the personal norm of staying at safe hotels.

H5: (Egoistic/social-altruistic) COVID-19 concern has a positive impact on the intention to stay at safe hotels.

H6: Attitude has a positive impact on the intention.

H7: PBC has a positive impact on the intention.

H8: Subjective norm has a positive impact on the intention.

H9: Personal norm has a positive impact on the intention.

Take-in-Figure-1

This research is one of the initial attempts to understand the importance of values in consumption of safe services in a pandemic context. Identifying whether safe behavior is motivated by egoistic or social-altruistic values would aid hotel managers' decision-making in many ways (positioning, advertising, etc.). Given the current crisis in the lodging sector, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, any

recommendation that can help hoteliers is relevant, especially in countries like Spain where tourism is an important economic sector (OECD, 2020).

Methods

This research was conducted with potential guests residing in Spain. Considering that tourism has been one of the sectors hardest hit by COVID-19 (United Nations, 2020), the effects of this pandemic in Spain have been especially relevant, since tourism is one of the most important economic sectors in this country (OECD, 2020).

The measurement scales of the constructs, validated in previous studies, were adapted to the context of safe hotels (see Table 1). All the constructs were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale (1="totally disagree"; 5="totally agree"), except for attitude, measured through a 5-point semantic differential scale.

A pre-test was carried out with 30 surveys to target respondents. The final questionnaire included screening questions (adults who had stayed at a hotel in the last two years) and questions about demographic data.

Using a convenience sampling method, the questionnaire was administered online through social networks and travel forums in the first week of January 2021, just as the promising vaccination process against COVID-19 started in several countries, including Spain, but also when a new strain of the virus appeared in the United Kingdom and a third wave of contagions appeared in Spain. Finally, 521 valid questionnaires were collected.

Most of the respondents were women (53.7%), with age ranges of 35 to 49 (44.1%) and over 50 years old (38.6%), with university degrees (52.0%) or postgraduate studies (29.9%). A large percentage of the respondents were employees (48.2%), with a lower percentage of entrepreneurs or freelancers (20.2%), with a monthly income

ranging between €1501-€3000 (27.3%) and €3001-€6000 (27.1%). All respondents lived in Spain.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to explore the data, employing XLSTAT/PLSPM statistical software. PLS-SEM, unlike the covariance-based approach (CB-SEM), does not require data normality, handles complex models, and is more appropriate when research is exploratory rather than confirmatory (Hair et al., 2017).

Results

Model Estimation

A two-step procedure was used to test the model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Measurement Model

As shown in Table 1, the psychometric properties of the scales used to measure the constructs were adequate. Moreover, the discriminant validity of these constructs was confirmed, since the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the inter-construct correlations.

Take-in-Table-1

Structural Model

Figure 2 presents the results of the PLS analysis. The predictive power of the model is acceptable as R^2 values exceed the recommended value of 0.1 (Falk & Miller, 1992). In particular, the model explains 60.5% of the variance of the guests' intention to stay at

safe hotels. In addition, the model exhibits predictive relevance for endogenous constructs as Stone-Geisser Q^2 values are larger than 0 (Hair et al., 2017).

Take-in-Figure-2

Except for H5b, all the hypotheses are confirmed, as all the paths are positive and significant. To test the mediating effects, the sampling distribution of the indirect effect was bootstrapped. Bootstrapping results reveal that all indirect effects are significant. Therefore, egoistic concern has a positive effect on intention, both directly (direct effect: 0.182) and indirectly (indirect effect: 0.212), partially mediated by all the four variables (attitude, PBC, subjective norm and personal norm). However, the positive impact of social-altruistic concern on intention is only indirect (indirect effect: 0.239), fully mediated by all the four variables. Thus, in line with previous studies on pro-social behavior (Birch et al., 2018; Yadav, 2016), our findings reveal that safe consumption decisions during a pandemic are based on both egoistic and social-altruistic concerns, with egoistic reasons having a stronger impact on purchase than social-altruistic reasons. Although consumers are considering the social-altruistic concerns while selecting safe hotels, still their egoistic concerns are most important to them. Nevertheless, these results contradict the findings by other authors (Durham & Andrade, 2005; Prakash et al., 2019) which underline that altruistic motives play a more significant role in influencing the intention to consume in comparison to egoistic motives. But these authors focused on the consumption of eco-friendly packaged products (Prakash et al., 2019) and organic fruit and vegetables (Durham & Andrade, 2005). Safe products and services, such as safe hotels, during a pandemic, are expected to

have an effect on people (their health, lifestyle, etc.) in a bigger way than eco-friendly packaged products or organic fruit and vegetables consumed in everyday life.

Conclusions

This research contributes to advance knowledge about consumers' safe service buying behavior in a pandemic context, as it identifies the types of values underlying the intentions to consume safe services, and in particular the impact of egoistic and social-altruistic values on the intention to stay at safe hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, although previous studies have tested models combining TPB and VBN Theory to understand how concern towards a social issue affects pro-social behaviors (Choe et al., 2020), none of these studies considers concerns in relation to customers' value orientations. This study extends the existing theory by distinguishing between egoistic and social-altruistic concerns.

As practical implications, practitioners should underline the egoistic and social-altruistic benefits of safe hotels to impact on mediators and intentions to stay in this type of hotels. Moreover, they should develop promotional strategies to highlight the communication of egoistic benefits, as this will attract to guests' egoistic values and motivate them to stay in safe hotels. In addition, safe services can be used for market positioning and differentiation from competitors.

The main limitation of this study is to analyze customers' intentions instead of considering their real behavior. Moreover, this research was carried out only in Spain, and data analysis was cross-sectional. Further research should replicate this study in other countries as well as examine multiple periods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Table 1. Assessment of the measurement model.

	Mean	Standard deviation	Loading	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE
Egoistic concern towards COVID-19 (Schultz, 2001)				0.936	0.954	0.843
I am concerned about COVID-19 problems because of the consequences for						
Me	4.499	0.966	0.922			
My lifestyle	4.384	0.977	0.905			
My health	4.536	0.935	0.923			
My future	4.528	0.944	0.923			
Social-altruistic concern towards COVID-19 (Schultz, 2001)				0.953	0.969	0.915
I am concerned about COVID-19 problems because of the consequences for						
People in my country	4.526	0.910	0.965			
All people	4.553	0.903	0.971			
Children	4.518	0.919	0.935			
Attitude (Han, Hsu & Sheu, 2010)				0.964	0.970	0.829
For me, staying at safe hotels is						
Extremely bad/Extremely good	4.432	1.053	0.932			
Extremely unpleasant/Extremely pleasant	4.192	1.135	0.874			
Extremely foolish/Extremely wise	4.345	1.082	0.909			
Extremely unfavorable/Extremely favorable	4.357	1.091	0.945			
Extremely unenjoyable/Extremely enjoyable	4.040	1.197	0.840			
Extremely undesirable/Extremely desirable	4.324	1.100	0.935			
Extremely negative/Extremely positive	4.451	1.036	0.933			
Subjective Norm (Han et al., 2010)				0.945	0.960	0.861
Most of the people who are important to me think I should stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.175	1.092	0.902			
Most of the people who are important to me would want me to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.319	1.025	0.917			
People whose opinions I value would prefer that I stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.455	0.957	0.950			
Perceived behavioral control (Han et al., 2010)				0.866	0.917	0.789
Whether or not I stay at safe hotels when traveling is completely up to me	4.263	1.023	0.860			
I have resources, time and opportunities to stay at safe hotels when traveling	3.981	1.161	0.898			
I am confident that if I want, I can stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.184	1.061	0.905			
Personal norm (Bosnjak, Tuten & Wittmann, 2005)				0.943	0.963	0.900
My conscience calls me to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.334	1.048	0.933			
Staying at safe hotels is in line with my moral conviction	4.207	1.115	0.957			
I feel morally obligated to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.154	1.137	0.956			
Behavioral intention (Han et al., 2010)				0.911	0.944	0.851
I am willing to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.549	0.949	0.931			
I plan to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.470	1.044	0.941			
I will make an effort to stay at safe hotels when traveling	4.359	1.101	0.895			

Figure 1. Proposed research model.

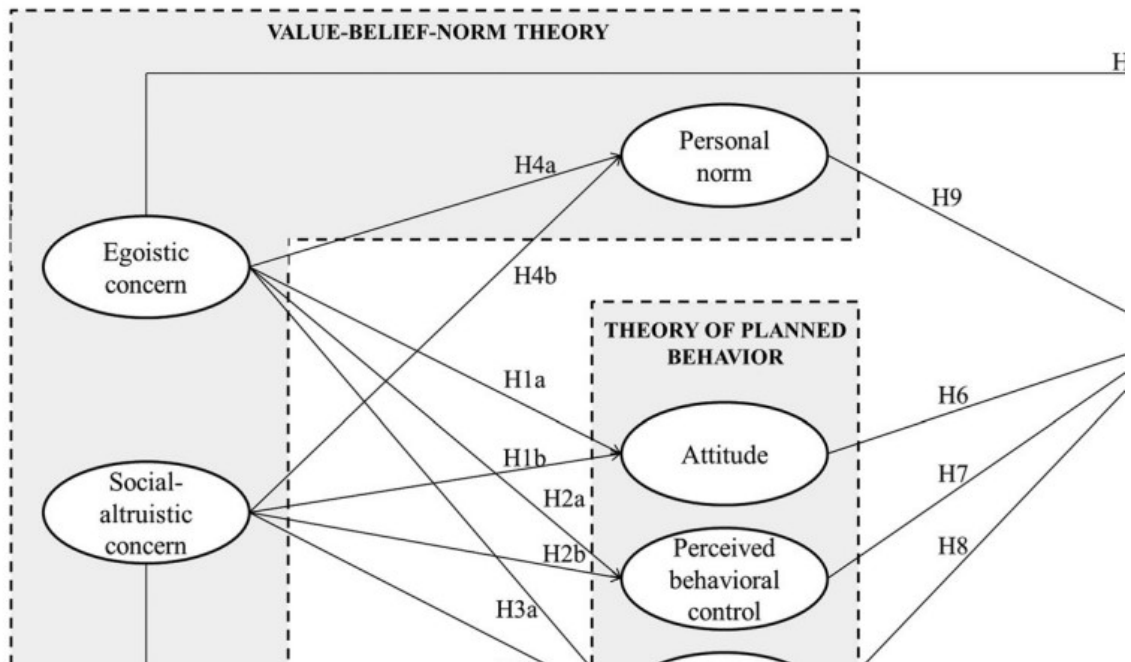


Figure 2. Results of the PLS analysis.

