Social Norms and Environmental Intentions: A Case Study of Ukhrul District, Manipur

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Abstract: The study explores the connection between social norms and the intention of the people to engage in environmentally friendly activities in the Ukhrul district of Manipur. The results showed that the relationship between subjective norms and intentions was moderate but statistically significant. Hence the hypothesis was confirmed that persons recognizing social expectations to be the most important issue are the ones to be involved in Pro environmental behaviour (H1). On the other hand, the results of the independent samples t-tests showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the impact of social norms on different age groups (H2) and on gender (H3). The average scores of adults and elderly, alongside men and women, were very similar, suggesting that societal norms are a stable source of Pro environmental intentions across various demographic groups. The findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior and highlight the role of social demand as one of the main aspects in the development of the environmental intentions.

Keywords: Social norms, intentions, Theory of Planned Behavior, Ukhrul district, Age, gender.

1. Introduction

The degradation of the natural environment is a vital challenge of the twenty-first century. Tanner and Wölfing Kast (2003) identify personal consumption, particularly overconsumption, as a major contributor to the problem. Overconsumption has a negative impact not just on the environment, but also on consumers' well-being and quality of life. Aside from the resource-intensive lifestyles of industrialised countries, growing economies such as China, India, and Brazil place additional strain on the ecosystem due to their large populations (Schäfer et al., 2011). As a result, society in both developed and emerging economies are under pressure to find solutions to reduce and potentially reverse the detrimental consequences of overconsumption by fostering pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling and purchasing ecologically friendly products.

Environmentalism in India is believed to have started in 1900's, during the British colonial period. However, the West, the environmental movement had arisen chiefly

out of a desire to protect endangered animal species and natural habitats. In India, it arose out of the imperative of human survival. This was an environmentalism of the poor, which married the concern of social justice on the one hand with sustainability on the other. It argued that present patterns of resource use disadvantaged local communities and devastated the natural environment.

The Northeast region of India receives the most rainfall in the country since itis rich in natural resources and highly forested. The region is home to a vast diversity of flora and animals, as well aslarge rivers (the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers). Several endangered species can be found in the area. Tribes who adhere to the region's environmental ethos live here. The survival of these woodlands has been defended and promoted by local tribes.

The Nagas one of the ethnic tribes in this region is found spread in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, assam and Arunachal. The Naga country is mountainous in every sense of the word, and, according to their oral tradition, Nagas were destined to live in the mountains Archaeological evidence is now beginning to shed light on their existence in the country where they have lived for more than 5000 years. The Nagas' attitudes towards their landscape have been formulated over many centuries, in fact, millennia. Their ancestral land—the Great Land of the Nagas (only a small portion of which has now come to be called Nagaland)—dates back to before 2000 BC (Nienu, 15823). The life of the Nagas is more heavily vested in the land For a Naga, on the other hand, owning land, defines who heis. His whole life is predicated upon a deep appreciation of the physical world and its myriad aspects. The indigenous Naga worldview is the conviction that the earth, vis-à-vis the land, is vital for his survival and that there is a spiritual dimension to it, an assurance of his rightful existence. Nagas take nature seriously. Earth is treated as mother, sky as father. This concept of the duality of nature, which is at the center of the Naga worldview, is fundamental to how the Nagas treat nature.

The traditional Nagas believed in the law of natural ethics, that there is an inherent connection between the moral qualities of the people and the stability of the ecology. Therefore, the harmony of the natural world depends on the continuation of the extension of the morality of humans to non-human lives. Thus, It is disheartening to witness how the quest for individual satisfaction and material comfort has eroded the moral fabric of our community. Our duty to preserve the earth's resources for future generations is now overshadowed by our greed for immediate gratification.

Reflecting this premise, this article emphasizes, not so much how the individual is in terms of their degree of environmental concern and behavior, but how they perceive the environmental behavior of "others." Social norms have long been considered as an important factor driving people's motivation and behavior (Reynolds et al., 2015; Schultz et al. 2007; Berkowitz, 2004). Therefore, the concept of social norms has been recognized as a key component behavior, as well as a critical factor in influencing and changing behavior (Reynolds et al., 2015). People tend to follow social norms to gain

social approval or avoid social sanctions (Keizer & Schultz, 2019). Social norms are what is commonly done or disapproved of; they refer to what other people think or do (Keizer & Schultz, 2019). Inferring that a behavior is frequently performed by a group of people is an important factor in deciding to carry it out.

2. Theoretical conceptualization

Why do people fail to practice what they preach? If we look around, it is easy to identify inconsistencies between attitudes and action. For example, one might ask whether changes in social attitudes towards men's house work have been accompanied by an equivalent change in the division of household labour. Or, to take a more recent and pressing example, why haven't people's pro-environmental attitudes translated into high levels of pro-environmental action? The question of why attitudes are not always translated into behaviour has been a critical question for social psychologists.

A widely accepted position regarding the role of psychology in the face of environmental issues is one that relates environmental problems to human behavior. It is assumed to the extent that when the individual behavior of people is modified to make it more pro-environmental, a more sustainable environment will be promoted (Schultz, 2011).

The theories of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 15825) propose the subjective norm as one of the factors that predict behavioural intention and thus behaviour. In these models, social influence is represented by the concept of subjective norm, which describes the amount of pressure that people perceive they are under from significant others to perform a specific behaviour.

2.1 Subjective norms and intentions

Subjective norms relate to the individual's perception of social pressure from others who are important to them (e.g. family, friends, colleagues, and others) to behave (or not) in a certain manner and their motivation to comply with those people's views. Individuals might observe and follow the environmental behaviors of their social members in order to be accepted. Studies such as form Latimer (2005), Vermeir and Verbeke (2006) and Chen (2007) Rivis & Sheeran (2003)found a significant positive relationship between subjective norms and a consumer's intention to buy sustainable and organic food. The study by Terry and Hogg (1996) proposed that subjective norms may be especially important in predicting health-related behaviors because they are behaviors that people are confident of what they believe their most important others think. Relatedly, Trafimow (1994) provided evidence that confidence in what important others think improves the prediction from subjective norms to intentions to use condoms.

However, recent studies have found that in collectivist societies, where communal values are deeply ingrained, the influence of social norms can be particularly pronounced (Chen, 2015; Han et al., 2017). This suggests that in regions like Ukhrul

district, where community identity and shared cultural practices are strong, subjective norms may play a critical role in shaping environmental intentions.

2.2 Age, Gender, and Social Norms

Demographic features like age and gender have been identified as moderators of the association between social norms and environmental intentions. According to Chen (2015), older people are usually seen as the ones who adhere to cultural traditions and community values, while younger adults may derive more influence from their peer groups and online platforms (Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006). Also, gender differences lead to women usually being more concerned about the environment and showing more responsiveness to the normative cues than men (Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000). It is very vital to comprehend these demographic differences for a proper understanding of the social norms in the Ukhrul district, where the impact of both the traditional authority and the change of the generation on environmental behavior may be significant.

3. Hypothesis

H1: People who believe that the social norms are strongly in favor of environmental protection will most likely show a stronger intention to behave in a manner that is consistent with the environment.

H2: The impact of social norms on environmental intentions will differ significantly among various age groups, such as adults and elderly individuals.

H3: The effect of social norms on environmental intentions is moderated by gender in a way that women who experience a positive social norm will have a stronger environmental intention than men.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The sample study was based on a usable data set of 582 participants from village of Ukhrul District, Manipur, located in the Northern east part of the state, approximately 97km from the Imphal the capital.

Participants were recruited using a a simple random sampling technique and asked for their participation in a study about the prevalent social norms and behaviors related to the natural environment.

4.2 Measures

The research was developed under a quantitative approach, Descriptive analyses were performed to obtain measures, such as frequency and percentage, for each variable. Spearman's correlation analysis was also used to examine the relationship between social norms and intentions. Finally, the linear regression technique was used to predict behaviour from intentions. Participants in the study responded to questions related to

social norms, intentions and environmental behavior. This design allowed for the examination of the association between variables and provided information on the magnitude and direction of the relationship. The central variables in this study are social norms and pro environmental behaviour.

4.3 Procedures

Ethical approval to carry out the research was given by the TNWL (Tangkhul Naga Wungnao Long)- Council of headmen from all the villages of Ukhrul District. Then data collection proceeded. Calls were made and contacts were created with in advance, explaining the objectives of the. Participants were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously, and that their participation was voluntary. Finally, clear instructions were provided on how to complete the questionnaire and a deadline was established for completion. Participants were reminded to respond honestly and thoughtfully.

5. Results

Table 1 Socio-Demographic profile of the Respondents

Sl. No		Age		Gender		Income					Occupation		
		Adults	Elderly	M	F	1	2	3	4	5	Unskilled	Skilled	Student
1	Frequency	502	80	354	228	351	133	56	24	18	272	234	76
2	Percentage	86.3	13.7	60.8	39.2	60.3	22.9	9.6	4.1	3.1	46.7	40.2	13.1

*Age (Adulr=16-60, Elderly >61)
*Gender (M= male, F= female)
*Income (1= <1 lakh, 2= >1lakh <2lakhs, 3= >2lakhs <3lakhs, 4= >3lakhs <4lakhs, 5= >4lakhs)

Demographic attributes

The description of the respondents' demographic data provides an insight into the composition of the study population.

Most of the 582 people who took part in the study (86.3%) are adults (16–60 years), whereas those over 61 years old make up only 13.7%. Thus, the research is essentially a representation of people of the working-age group, as the sample has limited elderly people. Information from the survey shows that male participation was higher than female with 60.8% and 39.2%, respectively.

The largest group of respondents (60.3%) are those with an annual income of less than one lakh, which indicates that the majority of the participants are from a low-income group. Those having one to two lakhs amount to 22.9%. The distribution of the higher income groups is as follows: those earning between two and three lakhs make up 9.6%, 4.1% between three and four lakhs, and only 3.1% earn above four lakhs. The trend mentioned above indicates that the sample is largely composed of households from the low and middle-income groups with a notable economic bias toward, while the richest are very underrepresented.

The data on occupational distribution is in line with the other information. The percentages of unskilled, skilled, and students were 46.7%, 40.2%, and 13.1%, respectively. Basically, the majority of the respondents work for a living, and the category of unskilled workers makes up the largest occupational group. The numbers are consistent with the same sample which is principally constituted by adults, females.

5.1 Testing hypothesis

H1: People who believe that the social norms are strongly in favor of environmental protection will most likely show a stronger intention to behave in a manner that is consistent with the environment.

Table 2 Correlation between Subjective Norms and Intentions

		Subjective Norms	Intentions
Subjective Norms	Pearson Correlation	1	.259**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	582	582
Intentions	Pearson Correlation	.259**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	582	582
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The correlation analysis (Table 2) indicates the presence of a positive and statistically significant association between subjective norms and intentions among the respondents. The value of the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.306 which gives a clue of the moderate positive connection between the variables. That is, when individuals recognize that others expect them to act in a certain way (subjective norms), then their own intentions are also likely to strengthen.

The level of significance ($p = 0.002$) is quite lower than 0.01, thus non-random and statistically reliable relationship. In other words, the given information implies that

social forces have a key role to play in setting up individual intentions. However, the relationship between the variables is not very strong at this stage. This would signify that people's intentions are only partially dependent on their perception of others' expectations, and there might be some other factors that influence their decisions besides subjective norms.

H2: The impact of social norms on environmental intentions will differ significantly among various age groups, such as adults and elderly individuals.

Table 3 Independent Samples Test (Age Group)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Subjective Norms	Equal variances assumed	7.762	.006	-.342	580	.732	-.02271	.06637	-.15307	.10765
	Equal variances not assumed			-.392	118.858	.696	-.02271	.05797	-.13750	.09209

The results of the independent samples (Table 3) t-test indicate that there is no significant difference in subjective norms between the two groups compared. Levene's test for equality of variances was found to be significant (F = 7.762, p = 0.006), which is a signal that the assumption of homogeneity of variances has been violated. Thus, the interpretation of the results is based on the "equal variances not assumed" row.

According to this row, the findings give t(118.86) = −0.392, p = 0.696, which is a long way from the threshold of 0.05. In other words, the difference that exists between the two groups is not statistically significant. The mean difference in subjective norms was just −0.02271, which shows that the two groups had almost the same scores. The 95% confidence interval (−0.1375 to 0.0921) that also includes zero is indicative, together with the mean difference, that there is no significant difference.

H3: The effect of social norms on environmental intentions is moderated by gender in a way that women who experience a positive social norm will have a stronger environmental intention than men

Table 4 Independent Samples Test (Gender)										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Subjective Norms	Equal variances assumed	.507	.477	1.409	580	.159	.06586	.04674	-.02594	.15767
	Equal variances not assumed			1.396	468.800	.163	.06586	.04719	-.02687	.15860

The independent samples (Table 4) t-test results show that no statistically significant difference exists between subjective norms for the two groups being compared. The test performed by Levene to check for the equality of variances was not significant ($F = 0.507$, $p = 0.477$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances has been met. On this basis, the t-test has determined that the difference in mean scores is not significant, $t(580) = 1.409$, $p = 0.159$. One of the groups had a slightly higher average score of subjective norms compared to the other (mean difference = 0.066); nevertheless, the difference is so small that it is located in the 95% confidence interval ranging from −0.026 to 0.158 that crosses zero. The latter means that the difference found here is most likely the result of randomness and not a reflection of a true difference between the groups.

6. Discussion

The research aimed to study the psychosocial influence of prevailing social-norms on environmental intention specifically in Ukhrul district, comprising three hypotheses about the linkage between subjective norms and intentions, age group differences, and gender-based moderation.

In connection with H1, the correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive association between subjective norms and environmental intentions ($r = 0.259$, $p < 0.01$). The evidence gathered here sets out to indicate that the social pressure is strongest in cases where individuals report the highest intentions of engaging in environmental protective routines. The findings also match the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), suggesting subjective norms as one of the main sources of behavioral intention. Despite the not so strong correlation, the moderate level suggests that social influence, while being pivotal, other psychological and situational

variables like attitudes, perceived behavioral control, or availability of resources may also significantly contribute to environmental decision-making.

Focusing on H2, the independent samples t-test which compared adults (16–60 years) and elderly respondents (>61 years) concluded no statistically significant difference between subjective norms of the two groups (t = –0.392, p = 0.696). The difference between the two groups' means was negligible (–0.0227), and the 95% confidence interval embraced zero, thus indicating that the difference found was not meaningful. Normative influence on the environmental intentions, therefore, appears to function in essentially the same manner in the different age groups in Ukhrul. It would be likely that older people would show the strongest influence of social norms since they are usually more rooted in cultural traditions, but the results convey the message that adults as well are equally responsive. This could be either the intense community orientation of the district where the collective expectations are promoting the influence of the individuals regardless of age, or the increasing awareness of environmental issues that is happening to both younger and older populations.

With this in mind, H3 checked for gender differences in the relationship between social norms and environmental intentions. Based on the independent samples t-test, there is no statistically significant difference between men and women in subjective norms (t = 1.409, p = 0.159). Although the average score for subjective norms was slightly higher for women than for men (mean difference = 0.066), this difference was too small and not significant enough statistically. This insight, thus, removes the support for the idea that women are more strongly influenced by social norms in the forming of environmental intentions. Rather, the results imply that within the Ukhrul context, both genders understand and accept the social pressures in a largely similar manner. This finding is at odds with the existing literature which posits that women are more sensitive environmentally due to the socialization process or their gendered roles (Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000). One of the possible reasons is that Ukhrul's environmental norms are deeply entrenched in the communal structures which not only have a strong influence on both male and female but also lower the differences between them.

7. Conclusion

In general, the evidence provided in the present study highlights the significance of social norms as an important factor in determining the intentions of the people to engage in environmentally friendly behavior but at the same time points out the relatively even impact that demographic variables have on them. The strong and significant positive correlation found between subjective norms and environmental intentions (H1) supports the view that individuals are more likely to practice environmentally friendly behavior if they feel the social approval or pressure from others. The results from the testing of H2 and H3, however, show that both age and gender have no significant effect on the degree of these influences i.e. in Ukhrul

district, social norms are present as a force that affects all the different groups of the population, regardless of the demographic characteristics.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this research extend the literature on the role of subjective norms in the Theory of Planned Behavior and, at the same time, argue for the cultural specificity of normative influence. On the practical side, these points would mean that in the case of Ukhrul, environmental clubs should work on the basis of local community support because the collective expectations seem to be one of the main factors which unite the individuals and influence them regardless their age and gender. Demographically oriented messages could be replaced by strategies embracing common community values and shared responsibility which might be more instrumental in binding pro-environmental intentions among the populace.

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