

Reasons and Attitudes towards Behavior: A Case of Cafeteria Tray Return Habits

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between reasons and attitudes towards a particular behavior, in this case, the behavior of returning trays in cafeterias at James Cook University Singapore (JCU). Findings from the study showed that reasons related to self-responsibility and consideration for others had a strong influence on an individual's attitude towards returning trays. However, reasons related to social identity showed no relationship with an individual's attitude towards returning trays.

Keywords: reasons, attitudes towards behavior, self-responsibility, social, consideration for others, behavioral reasoning theory (BRT)

1. Introduction

The Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT) model indicates that there are relationships between reasons and attitudes. While research on BRT model have proven to be successful on the areas regarding volunteerism, little has been done to carry out tests using the BRT in the area of tray-returning habits. In 2005, Westaby claimed that reasons have a key role in decision-making and the current behavioral intention models did not "theoretically address" how reasons are important in motivational mechanisms [1]. Despite numerous marketing efforts to encourage people to return trays, observations show that some people are still not returning trays. Hence, understanding what reasons motivating this behavior would be valuable in the application of social marketing in the future.

1.1 Reasons for returning trays

The reasons for returning trays were derived from an in-depth interview session and results allowed the study to categorized the reasons under three main components. The three components included in this research are:

1. *Self-Responsibility.* Respondents felt it was their duty to return their own trays.
2. *Social Identity.* Respondents return their trays to project a positive image of themselves.
3. *Consideration for Others.* Respondents felt bad seeing cleaners clearing their trays and they return their trays so that the others can have clean tables to eat at.

1.2 Attitudes towards returning trays

An attitude refers to the group of beliefs, feelings and behavioral tendencies towards an object, group or an event [2]. Based on the BRT model, reasons are "importance antecedents" of attitudes [1]. Replicating a similar research method as Briggs, Peterson and Gregory in 2009, this paper will replace the attitude towards helping others (AHO) with attitudes towards returning trays using similar structure [3]. Table 1 shows the variables used for attitudes towards returning trays.

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Table 1: Attitude towards Returning Trays Variables

Index	Attitudes
1	People should have the responsibility to return their own trays after eating.
2	It is important that I return my own trays, as it is my responsibility and job.
3	People should return their own trays because it is considerate for others who are looking for a table to sit.
4	People should help ease the jobs of the cleaners by clearing their own trays.

Reasons affect attitudes because it targets the various components of attitudes in forms of “readiness” both mentally and emotionally [4]. This study hypothesizes that the reasons of *self-responsibility*, *social identity* and *consideration for others* affect people’s attitudes towards returning trays.

2. Method

Quantitative analysis was used in this research design. Overall, a sample size of one hundred and fifty JCU students was approached at random to serve as participants for the survey. The sampling was carried out during school hours (9.00 am to 6.00pm) over a three-day period. Participants were randomly selected at various locations of the school, especially the school’s canteen.

3. Analysis

Factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the results. The results are shown in Table 2 and were generally consistent with expectations. Based on the results, factor analysis on reasons resulted in three factors while attitudes resulted in one factor. However, there was only one exception where *Consideration for Others 1* was loaded under *Self-Responsibility*.

Table 2: Factor Analysis and Reliability analysis for Reasons and Attitudes

Factor	Example	Factors Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha
Self-Responsibility	I return my trays because it is my responsibility to do it since I was the one eating.	0.732	0.825
Consideration for Others	I return my trays because I feel bad seeing cleaners clearing our trays. I return my trays so that others have clean tables to eat at.		0.709
Social Identity	I do not want others to think badly of me if I do not return my trays.		0.804
Attitude Towards Returning Trays	It is important that I return my own trays, as it is my responsibility and job.	0.781	0.800

Regression analysis was conducted to analyze the relationship between reasons and attitudes towards returning trays and test the predicted hypothesis. Table 3 provides the results of the regression analysis.

Table 3: Regression of Attitudes and Reasons – Standardized Beta Coefficients and R Square* $p < 0.05$

Independent Variable	Attitudes Towards Returning Trays
Self-Responsibility	0.651*
Social Identity	-0.031
Consideration for Others	0.341*
Adjusted R Square	0.532

Based on the results from Table 3, reasons have a relatively strong influence on attitudes towards returning trays with 53.2 percent of the variance being accounted for. Therefore, proving the hypothesis. However, according to the t-test, only the reasons related to *Self-Responsibility* and *Consideration for Others* with reasons pertaining to *Self-Responsibility* having the strongest association with attitudes towards returning trays.

4. Discussion

Based on the interpretations of this relationship, the research was able to prove the hypothesis that reasons influence attitudes. However, while the reasons of *Self-responsibility* and *Consideration for Others* affect people's attitudes towards returning trays. *Social Identity* does not have any forms of relationship with people's attitudes towards returning trays.

One of the theories that *Social Identity* does not have any correlations with attitudes would be due to the motivations behind those actions. Even if this group of individuals exhibit positive attitudes towards returning trays, this group of individuals is more likely to return their trays to "fit in" rather than having sincere attitudes towards returning trays. Thus, it is predicted that "fitting in" is the primary motive while the motive of returning trays is secondary. This can be further reiterated with the response from the qualitative research. Out of the four participants who mentioned they only started returning their trays in Singapore, two male participants responded that they would not begin returning their trays even if they go back to their home country.

Additionally, traditional *Theory of Planned Behavior* model states that people with higher levels of self-identity perceptions have more potential to develop personal beliefs and attitudes towards a given behavior whereas, those who are more oriented towards social identity are more likely to use others' beliefs when forming intentions [5]. Therefore, according to the *Theory of Planned Behavior*, the reasons relating to *Social Identity* are more likely to be affected in the generation of subjective norms as shown in Figure 1 [6].

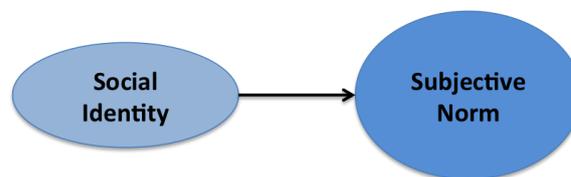


Fig. 1: Social Identity and Subjective Norms

*Subjective Norm: Perceived social pressure to engage in a particular behavior

This further proves that reasons related to *Social Identity* are usually temporary and holds no relations with attitudes but rather form relationships with the category of subjective norms in global motives.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research proved that reasons do indeed influence attitudes towards returning trays. The results proved that reasons have a strong influence on people's attitudes towards returning trays. However, only the variable, *Social Identity* does not have any forms of relationship with people's attitudes towards returning trays as compared to *Self-Responsibility* and *Consideration for Others*.

While the results of the research allowed us to gain further insights on the relationship between reasons and attitudes towards behavior of returning trays, there were some limitations in the research. Firstly, since the research was only carried out amongst the JCU students, the results of the research were mainly applicable to only the young adults between the ages 18 to 32. Therefore, the findings from the research may not be applicable to the other age groups since there could be different findings (reasons) for each age group.

Additionally, the research only focused on the attitude component in the BRT's global motives. While results proved that attitudes influence behavior, we neglected other factors that may contribute to behavior

since the research did not include the other components such as subjective norms and perceived control as mentioned in the BRT model. Therefore, limiting the study to only one component.

Lastly, variables were limited to those in the BRT model. While findings proved that reasons do indeed influence attitude and behavior, there may be other unidentified factors that may contribute to tray returning behaviors that were not considered in the BRT.

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