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Debates and Dilemmas: Exploring the Dynamics of Pro-Environmental Behavior in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Pro-environmental behaviors (PEB) refer to actions and practices aimed at minimizing negative impacts on the natural environmental and promoting sustainable practices for ecological well-being. In this paper, we develop a comprehensive framework through an extensive review of over 300 papers, covering antecedents, moderators, and methodologies, drawing from prevalent theoretical frameworks such as the theory of planned behavior and norm activation theory in prior research. Through the analysis of various case studies, we highlight both successful and unsuccessful findings for implementations of PEBs, revealing nuanced variations (e.g., region, culture). Notably, the interplay between digital technology and cultural contexts emerged as a critical yet underexplored moderator, with social media platforms amplifying both pro-environmental advocacy and counterproductive consumption patterns. Moreover, controversial findings and theories in literature are identified through analysis, and their criticisms to the application of existing methodologies with measurements in PEB are summarized. The review further underscores methodological tensions, particularly the overreliance on self-reported data in surveys versus experimental designs that better isolate causal mechanisms but lack ecological validity. By synthesizing consensus and debates surrounding PEB, we present valuable insights for governments and corporations as carriers, which play significant roles in driving behavioral changes towards sustainability. The framework advocates for adaptive policy interventions that balance economic incentives with intrinsic motivators, tailored to regional socio-cultural dynamics and leveraging technology-mediated behavioral nudges. These findings advance theoretical integration across disciplines while offering actionable pathways for scalable, context-sensitive sustainability initiatives.

Keywords: Pro-environmental Behaviors, Sustainability, Consensus and Debates