

Public Abstract

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Title:PENNIES FOR PARKS: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL NORM THEORY ON DONATION BEHAVIOR IN ARKANSAS STATE PARKS

Donation boxes are common in many public and private attractions. Many of these attractions experience budget shortfalls and are glad to get the extra money which a donation box can provide. This study was performed to see if there were certain factors that made one box more effective at generating revenue than another. The purpose of this study was to determine if social norms play a role in the donation behavior of visitors at state park sites.

Social norms are cues in the environment that denote that a certain type of behavior is acceptable or unacceptable. Two types of norms, descriptive and injunctive, were tested. Descriptive norms are physical traits in the environment which show evidence of past behavior. Injunctive norms are moral appeals between people.

This study looked at three factors: starting amount of money in the box (seeding), message and box coloration which tested the strength of the descriptive norm. This study was conducted during the summer of 2005 at selected Arkansas state parks. Results were based on a ratio of money donated per visitor to compare box conditions. Actual results of this study showed the connection between norms and donation amounts were non-significant. However, literature and anecdotal evidence suggests that other factors such as park entrance fees, holidays and day of the week may make a difference in donation patterns. More research is needed to understand this topic.