

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

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ABSTRACT

Although donation boxes are common in parks, museums, and historic sites, not much is known about how they influence visitor behavior. Perhaps some donation boxes are more efficient at generating revenue than others. The purpose of this study was to determine if social norms played a role in the donation behavior of visitors at state parks. This was accomplished by measuring the amounts of money received when the box was empty and when the box was “seeded” with a pre-determined amount of bills and coins. Next, the effects of a label placed on the donation box were tested to determine if visitor behavior could be influenced by using a persuasive message. Two conditions were tested: 1) Donation Box; and 2) WE APPRECIATE YOUR DONATION! *All revenue will be used for park improvements.* The last treatment measured the effect of box coloration (clear vs. smoky) to determine if visibility made a difference in donation behavior. This study was conducted during the summer of 2005 at 7 state parks and historic sites in Arkansas. Data was collected over a 16 week time period (8 trials at 2 weeks each). Results of this study showed a non-significant relationship between social norms and donation behavior. However, the literature and anecdotal evidence suggests that other factors such as park entrance fees, holidays, and days of the week may make a difference in donation behavior. More research is needed to understand this topic.