

# Membership Benefits Matter

## EXPLORING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING MEMBERS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

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*Professional associations have provided various benefits to their members to bolster member retention and recruitment. This study explored factors that could influence members' behavioral intentions in professional membership associations by surveying 13,229 members from eighteen associations. More specifically, this analysis focused on the effects of members' perceptions of the personal and professional benefits offered by associations with which they are affiliated and their satisfaction with those benefits. Our results suggested that members' perceptions of personal and professional benefits positively correlated with their intentions to renew and recommend membership. If a member perceived a higher level of benefits, he or she would demonstrate a greater likelihood of satisfaction with the benefits and therefore be more likely to renew membership or recommend it to others. This study could advance understanding of the factors that influence members' behavioral intentions while also providing professional associations with strategies for retaining existing members.*

**Keywords:** *professional association, behavioral intention, membership benefit, satisfaction*

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS PLAY** a significant role in modern society and in individuals' lives, providing their members with access to desired products and services, a sense of belonging and identity, and the opportunity to network with others who share similar interests (Gruen 2000). The number of associations in the United States has increased from 10,000 in 1970 and 222,500 in 2000 to 333,600 in 2014 (Community Association Institute 2014). About one-fifth of the US population was involved in community associations in 2014.

Membership is defined as a sense of belonging to a group along with feelings of personal connectedness with others in the group (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Professional association managers have paid attention to the collective behaviors of their members, such as membership retention rates and the degree to which members engage in and utilize membership benefits (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000). Though a handful of studies have explored various

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member behaviors, few have focused on the factors that influence specific member behaviors (Markova et al. 2013).

Professional associations can provide their members with a variety of benefits. First, those associations can certify that their members have appropriate knowledge related to their professions (Greggs-McQuilkin 2005; Schein 1968). Second, associations provide direction for the use of this knowledge to serve the public good, establish a code of ethics (Bruhn 2001), and shape reasonable practices for their members (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinnings 2002). Third, professional associations fulfill a valuable social function for members who are like-minded and similarly employed (Markova et al. 2013).

A few scholars have investigated the motivations and factors contributing to members' behaviors. For instance, Knoke (1988) indicated that members' interests in incentives provided by collective-action organizations were predictors of member involvement based on a national survey of American associations. Gruen (1994) suggested five motivations for joining professional associations: social identification, exchange for benefits, desire for information, need for protection, and simplification of choice process. However, few studies have examined the effects of personal and professional benefits and members' satisfaction with those benefits on various behaviors, such as retaining membership and recommending it to others.

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that could influence members' behavioral intentions in professional membership associations. We used a survey of 13,229 members from eighteen associations with the sponsorship of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) to examine the effects of members' perceptions of the personal and professional benefits provided by their associations and their satisfaction with benefits on members' behavioral intentions. This study could advance the understanding of the factors influencing members' behavioral intentions by empirically examining the impacts of members' perceptions of benefits and satisfaction with benefits. Finally, this study could make several practical contributions by providing professional associations with strategies for retaining existing members and attracting potential members.

## Literature Review

Professional associations are defined as "identification and organizing bodies for fields of professional practice" (Hager 2014). Since their inception, professional associations have played a significant role in the development of any profession (Abbott 1988; Pemberton 1994). The establishment of an association fosters social recognition of an occupation as a profession in the public and legal realms (Abbott 1988). A professional association can assert the autonomy of a job (Alexander 1980) while also offering a support network for members engaged in their work (Hovekamp 1997).

Previous studies have focused on a variety of professional associations, such as public administration (Pugh 1989), information science (Fisher 1997), nursing (Greggs-McQuilkin 2005), and social movement associations (Cohn, Barkan, and Halteman 2003). For example, Inglis et al. (2011) indicated that professional accounting associations were perceived essentially to be collectives of professionals that provide common attributes to potential and existing members. Fisher (1997) suggested that librarians would feel isolated without the social aspect that association meetings offer. Grounded in previous research (Hager 2014; Markova

et al. 2013), we focused on members' behavioral intentions related to professional associations, such as membership renewal and recommendation.

### Members' Behavioral Intentions

According to the social identity theory, people with similar values, attitudes, preferences, and experiences are particularly drawn to one another (Baron and Byrne 1987; Berscheid 1985). Similarly, individuals with similar interests, professions, and experiences are drawn together and join the membership of a certain professional association. Membership is a sign of recognition by peers as well as a way to share opinions and attitudes about the profession (Messmer 2005). Individuals may consider themselves to be members if they invest their resources in or contribute to the community. Membership offers an approach for political empowerment (Hooghe 2003) and provides structural opportunities for members to contribute to the organization (Bhattacharya 1998), which may inspire members' intentions to join the or renew membership in professional associations.

Behavioral intentions could be conceptualized as "the intention to perform a particular behavior, a plan to put behavior into effect" (Perloff 2003). It was considered as an antecedent of actual behavior (Perloff 2003). Based on previous literature, we defined members' behavioral intentions as the extent to which a member intended to renew membership in a professional association or recommend it to others. Member retention has been a major challenge faced by nonprofit organizations (Bhattacharya 1998; Shehu et al. 2015), and membership renewal is a key indicator of the association's performance (Gruen et al. 2000). Additionally, member promotion via word of mouth was found to play an important role in an association's effectiveness (Gruen et al. 2000). Previous literature addressing various member behaviors called for exploring the motivations of those behaviors (Markova et al. 2013).

### Motivations of Member Behavior

Previous studies have identified various motivations of member behaviors. For example, sharing similar values and experiences may motivate professionals to congregate and constitute associations (Baron and Byrne 1987; Church and Burke 1993). Inglis et al. (2011) documented that reputation and international recognition of qualifications were major motivators for joining a professional accounting body. The survey results among members in the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association reported that professional identity and the desire to be a part of an organization motivated them to join (Peterson, Hautamaki, and Hershenson 2006). Wilderom and Miner (1991) argued that people join voluntary organizations to interact and build positive relationships with colleagues.

Previous literature has focused on motivations of member behavior such as professional identity, while other literature suggests that professional associations should provide value to attract and retain members (Markova et al. 2013). Most individuals join professional associations with the intention of taking advantage of all the benefits these associations can offer (Messmer 2005). Professional associations must therefore deliver valued benefits to facilitate members' satisfaction and continued membership (Markova et al. 2013). Similarly, Hager (2014) found that public incentives motivated member engagement in professional associations. Knoke (1988) also identified public and private benefits provided by collective-action organizations. In particular, we focused on two types of benefits offered by professional associations that might influence member behavioral intentions: personal benefits and professional benefits.

## Personal Benefits

Professional associations offer various benefits to members, such as access to professional knowledge and career development. Hager (2014) categorized personal benefits into informational incentive (that is, access to field information) and occupational incentive (that is, employment opportunities). The primary personal benefit provided by professional associations was information dissemination (Fisher 1997; Minter 2001). Markova et al. (2013) addressed access to professional knowledge as disseminated through publications, conferences, or seminars. Access to knowledge appeals to members' needs for professional development (Jackson and Alleyne 2004) and allows associations to cater to the educational needs of members (Markova et al. 2013).

Career development and advancement (Hahn and Raley 1998; Mata, Latham, and Ransome 2010) was identified as another personal benefit of joining professional associations. According to Messmer (2005), 86 percent of senior executives polled by Robert Half International reported that participating in professional associations was valuable for an employee's career. Organizations could help members seek employment opportunities and professional contacts (Knoke 1988). Members can advance their careers through the networks established within associations (Myers 1994; Schein 1968), thus providing an opportunity for members to build their professional contacts (Messmer 2005). Moreover, Messmer (2005) pointed out that professional membership allows senior executives to socialize, update their competencies, and obtain professional certification. Additionally, utilizing services offered by professional associations (Markova et al. 2013) and attending professional conferences (Cottrell, Girvan, and McKenzie 2009) were also critical elements for driving professional growth and bolstering career success.

Personal benefits offered by professional associations have been found to positively influence members' behaviors, such as renewing membership and donating to professional associations. Using a survey to query 237 management services specialists, Lansbury (1974) found that access to membership benefits was the primary motivator for joining professional associations. The opportunity to develop social networks might also influence a prospective member's decision to pay membership fees (Stryker 1980). Hager (2014) reported that members in engineering and health care professional associations who valued personal leadership experience were more likely to donate money to and volunteer for their professional associations. Markova et al. (2013) found that tangible benefits were major factors for membership sustainment. According to the utility theory, the expected outcomes of consumers' decisions (that is, benefits) determine their choices (Narang and Mishra 2014). Therefore, members' perceived importance of personal benefits may affect their behavioral intentions, such as renewing membership and recommending the association to others. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.* Members' perceptions of personal benefits provided by professional associations positively influence their behavioral intentions.

## Professional Benefits

In addition to personal benefits, researchers have focused on how professional associations benefit the field or profession, such as by establishing a community and profession. Markova et al. (2013) found that a majority of individuals sought the professional benefits of

paid membership. Gazley and Dignam (2010) addressed various professional benefits for members who opt to join professional associations, such as establishing a profession that members care about. Pemberton (1994) identified fifty characteristics of excellent professional associations, including establishing a learning community among members to support them in becoming more effective and knowledgeable in their professional capacity. Professional associations can promote continued membership and necessary financial support through serving the needs and aspirations of practitioners in a certain field (Markova et al. 2013). Following Hager (2014), we differentiate professional benefits from personal benefits to the extent that members value benefits to the field or profession over benefits to individual members.

One important professional benefit was the normative establishment of a field (Hager 2014; Knoke 1988). Professional associations played an important role in the legislation and regulations that influenced a field. They could contribute to transforming a field by legitimating changes and promoting innovations (Greenwood et al. 2002).

According to the customer decision theory, decision choice is influenced by the importance a consumer places on the perceived benefits and costs involved in acquiring a service or product (Inglis et al. 2011). Thus, we can infer that members' decisions to renew their membership in a professional association or recommend it to others may be influenced by the importance they place on the perceived membership benefits provided by the association. Members of professional associations that offered incentives and benefits were willing to contribute time and money and demonstrated greater commitment to their associations (Classes 2015; Knoke 1988). Hager (2014) reported that members who valued normative benefits (that is, promoting field appreciation and public awareness of contributions in the field) were more likely to express a higher level of commitment to the professional association. If members perceive a professional association's benefits to the field or profession as more important, they will be more likely to renew their membership or recommend it to others. Therefore, the following hypothesis was posed:

*Hypothesis 2.* Members' perceptions of professional benefits provided by professional associations positively affect their behavioral intentions.

## Members' Satisfaction

A member's satisfaction with a professional association indicates his or her overall positive attitude toward it (Markova et al. 2013). As suggested by the discrepancy theory (Lawler 1971), members' attitudes toward their professional association are shaped by their own expectations. When the association provides benefits that meet their expectations, members prefer to renew their memberships (Markova et al. 2013). In addition, professionals who are more engaged in the association are more likely to express satisfaction with it (Markova et al. 2013).

Membership value is derived from the benefits provided by professional associations and the extent to which these benefits satisfy the needs of members (Markova et al. 2013). The value an individual obtains from an organization is based on the time and effort he or she puts into it (Fisher 1997). Membership value can be created by disseminating important information about the profession and professional services, attracting potential members to

the profession, and retaining current members (Markova et al. 2013). Perceived membership value is critical for the survival of an association (Knoke 1981; Thompson 1976) and influences the perception of an association’s performance, which we defined as the achievement of an association’s goals for delivering benefits to its members or the field. If a member judges some benefits as being more important to her or his decision to join an association, she or he may demonstrate greater satisfaction with the association’s performance in delivering those benefits. Thus, we posed the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3a.* Members’ perceptions of the personal benefits provided by a professional association positively affect their level of satisfaction with the association’s performance in delivering personal benefits.

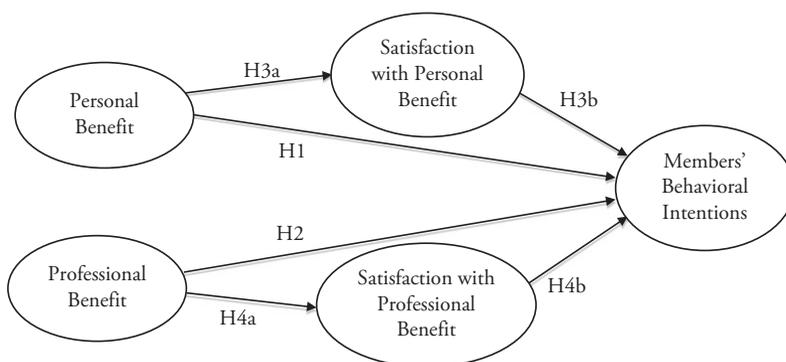
*Hypothesis 3b.* Members’ level of satisfaction with a professional association’s performance in delivering personal benefits positively affects their behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, members’ satisfaction with benefits offered by professional associations is a predictor of membership renewal (Markova et al. 2013). Members who are satisfied with various benefits may form a more favorable view of the association and thus be motivated to maintain membership (Markova et al. 2013). Drawing upon previous findings (Markova et al. 2013), we assumed that the level of members’ satisfaction might influence their intentions to renew and recommend the membership. Thus, the following hypotheses were posed and represented visually in Figure 1.

*Hypothesis 4a.* Members’ perceptions of the professional benefits provided by professional associations positively affect their level of satisfaction with the association’s performance in delivering professional benefits.

*Hypothesis 4b.* Members’ level of satisfaction with a professional association’s performance in delivering professional benefits positively affects their behavioral intentions.

**Figure 1.** Hypothesized Model of the Relationships among Benefit, Satisfaction with Benefit, and Members’ Behavioral Intentions



## Methodology

To test the proposed model, we used the dataset ASAE collected from October to December 2011. ASAE represents more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners from more than 10,000 organizations (ASAE 2015). ASAE contacted their member organizations to request participants for this research. Eighteen membership organizations agreed to provide access to their members. The information on the size and characteristics of these organizations is shown in Table 1. The population of this study was composed of existing members of these eighteen membership organizations who could provide meaningful answers pertaining to their decisions to join and/or renew their memberships in their respective organizations.

**Table 1.** Organization Information

<i>Association</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
American Chemical Society	158,000	The world's largest scientific society
American College of Healthcare Executives	46,455	An international professional association of health care executives
American Geophysical Union	63,000	A nonprofit organization of geophysicists
American Health Information Management Association	101,000	The premier association of health information management professionals worldwide
American Society for Quality	80,000	A knowledge-based global community of quality professionals
American Society of Civil Engineers	150,000	The oldest national engineering society in the United States
American Society of Mechanical Engineers	140,000	A professional association promoting multidisciplinary engineering and allied sciences
College of American Pathologists	18,100	The leading organization of board-certified pathologists
Credit Union Executives Society	10,000	An organization dedicated to serving credit union professionals, directors, and suppliers
Emergency Nurses Association	40,000	A worldwide leader in emergency nursing
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers	430,000	The world's largest professional association for the advancement of technology
Institute of Food Technologies	17,000	An international scientific society of professionals in food science, food technology, and related areas in academia, government, and industry
National Association of Secondary School Principals	27,000	The leading organization of middle-level and high school principals, assistant principals, and school leaders
National Athletic Trainers Association	35,000	The association for certified athletic trainers and others who support the athletic training profession
National Court Reporters Association	20,000	The premier educational and informational resource for its members and the public
National Society of Accountants	30,000	A professional association of professionals in accountancy and taxation
Project Management Institute	467,000	The world's leading professional association for the project, program, and portfolio management profession
School Nutrition Association	55,000	The national organization of school nutrition professionals

## Pretest

To ascertain the face validity of the questionnaire items, we followed two steps: first, the initial questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the area of organizational communication. Second, we tested the efficacy and clarity of questionnaire items with two people who belonged to a membership organization. Based on feedback from the experts and pretest respondents, the questionnaire was revised and refined.

## Sampling and Administration

Each of the eighteen organizations submitted a list of contact information for between 2,000 and 8,600 members who were randomly selected from their membership directories. A total of 120,540 individuals were invited to participate in the survey. Each selected individual was eligible to participate in this survey, given that he or she was a member of at least one professional organization.

The co-sponsoring organizations were given the option of either postal mail or electronic distribution of the questionnaire. The mail survey was offered as an option because it is accessible to those with limited computer literacy and/or access (Thompson et al. 2003). All but one organization selected electronic distribution. To increase the response rate, the data were collected using one email reminder and one postcard reminder for the online survey and two postcard reminders for the mail survey. The members whose organizations selected electronic distribution received a survey link embedded in an email that automatically transferred them to a survey site. One follow-up email was sent as a reminder to participate in the survey. After six weeks, a final follow-up reminder letter was sent to the samples from the organizations that had less than 300 respondents. A total of 34,050 reminder postcards were sent. The samples of the organization with the mail survey received a package containing a cover letter, survey questionnaire, and postage-paid return envelope. A follow-up reminder letter (one week later) and postcard reminder (six weeks later) were sent to all nonrespondents. The 16,994 responses from both electronic and mail surveys provided a 14 percent response rate. However, a total of 3,695 responses were removed because they were incomplete, inappropriate, or showed a response set. Therefore, a final sample of 13,299 was used for the data analysis.

To test a nonresponse bias, we compared the first-quarter responses with the last-quarter responses across all the variables. Twenty-four variables had statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups out of forty-six variables. In those variables with statistically significant differences, the first quarter of the responses consistently displayed higher scores than the other counterparts. This might imply that members who are satisfied with the various membership benefits completed the survey questionnaire early. The mean differences between the two groups in the twenty-four variables range from .022 to .602. It seems that response bias somewhat affected the result of the study.

## Measurements

To test the proposed model, we used the following four variables: personal benefit, professional benefit, membership satisfaction, and members' behavioral intention.

### **Personal Benefit**

This study defined personal benefit as the extent to which a member perceived the importance of benefits when determining whether or not to join a professional association. Drawing from previous research (Inglis et al. 2011; Knoke 1988), we used nine items to measure personal benefit: "access to career information and employment opportunities," "access to products, services, and suppliers," "a reference directory of members/practitioners," "certification/credentialing," "opportunities for you to network with other professionals in your field," "opportunities to gain leadership experience," "member discounts," "access to the most up-to-date information available in your field," and "professional development or educational program offerings."

### **Professional Benefit**

This variable was defined as the extent to which a member perceives the importance of benefits to his or her field or profession when deciding whether or not to join a professional association. The scale measuring professional benefits was adopted from Knoke (1988). We used twelve items: "the association's role in defining critical competencies/body of knowledge," "attracting competent people into the field," "certifying those who meet critical competency standards," "conducting research on significant issues affecting the field," "gathering, analyzing, and publishing data on trends in the field," "influencing legislation and regulations that affect the field," "maintaining a code of ethics for practice," "promoting a greater appreciation of the role and value of the field among practitioners," "promoting greater public awareness of contributions in the field," "providing standards or guidelines that support quality," "supporting student education and entry into the field," and "providing awards or recognition for excellence in the field."

### **Membership Satisfaction**

This variable referred to the degree of a member's satisfaction with his or her professional association's performance in delivering (1) personal benefits and (2) professional benefits. Respondents were asked to state how satisfied they were with the performance of their association in delivering (1) benefits and services in the nine areas (see "Personal Benefits") and (2) benefits to their field or profession in the twelve areas (see "Professional Benefits").

### **Members' Behavioral Intentions**

This variable referred to the degree to which a member is likely to (1) renew his or her membership and (2) recommend membership in this association to others. Drawing from previous measures (Gruen et al. 2000; Hager and Brudney 2015), we measured members' behavioral intentions with the following items: "renewing membership during the next renewal schedule" and "recommending membership to a friend or colleague."

All of the variables were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale with the exception of one item pertaining to members' behavioral intentions measures. The one measure used an eleven-point Likert-type scale.

We used expectation-maximization method to replace the missing values. Cronbach's alphas, a test of internal reliabilities for the measures, were as follows: personal benefits (9 items), .82; satisfaction with personal benefits (9 items), .91; professional benefits (11 items), .92; satisfaction with professional benefits (11 items), .95; members' behavioral intentions (2 items), .68.

## Demographics

Several demographic questions were asked, addressing gender, age, and ethnic identification. Among the 13,299 participants, gender was almost evenly split (about 53 percent [ $n=6,995$ ] were female and 47 percent [ $n=6,304$ ] were male). The gender composition of the sample deviated slightly from that of the total population (ASAE Market Research 2013), with the sample being skewed toward males. The mean age of participants was 48, with ages ranging from 11 to 101 ( $SD=12.77$ ).<sup>1</sup> Caucasians participated dominantly in the survey ( $n=8,273$ , 90.1%), followed by African Americans ( $n=348$ , 2.8%), Asians ( $n=341$ , 2.7%), multiracial participants ( $n=175$ , 1.9%), and others ( $n=49$ , .5%). As compared to the population of ASAE, a greater percentage of African American members participated in the study. In summary, the sample of the current study was skewed toward male African American individuals.

## Results

To test the hypotheses, we used correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM).

### Correlation Analysis

A correlation analysis was performed for two purposes: (1) to check the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and (2) to check discriminant validity of the variables used in the study. As displayed in Table 2, all of the independent variables were statistically significantly associated with the dependent variable. Interestingly, all of the independent variables displayed a higher magnitude of effect size regarding the first measure of behavioral intention—renewal intention of his or her membership—than the second behavioral intention—membership recommendation intention to others. Moreover, the correlation analysis demonstrated discriminant validity of a majority of the independent variables used in this study. The correlations provide some evidence that the associations of the four sets of the two variables (personal benefits [PB] and satisfaction with personal benefits [SPB]; PB- and professional benefits [PRB]; PRB- and -SPB]; PB and satisfaction with professional benefits [SPRB]) are discriminated from each other. Specifically, a majority of the correlation values of the two sets of the following variables are presented in Table 2: .30 (70% for PB\*SPB, 84% for PB\*PRB, 96% for PRB\*SPB, and 92% for PB\*SPRB, respectively). However, the two sets of the following variables—PB\*SPB and SPB\*SPRB—seem to be closely related with each other because a majority of the correlation values of these sets are higher than .31 (75% for PB\*SPB and 100% for SPB\*SPRB, respectively).

### Model Testing

To test the model proposed in Figure 1, we employed a two-step process: (1) evaluation of the construct validity of the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and (2) an evaluation of the structural model (structural equation analysis; SEM). Maximum likelihood method was used for model estimation, and several goodness-of-fit indices were used as suggested by Byrne (2001) and Kline (2005) through IBM SPSS AMOS version 21. These indices guided the following cut-off points as demonstrating adequate fit: comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq .90$ ; goodness-of-fit index (GFI)  $\geq .90$ ; normed fit index (NFI); root mean

<sup>1</sup>The population data collected age information as a range instead of asking an actual age. Therefore, the age information cannot be compared with the population.

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
1. PB1	1																						
2. PB2	.42**	1																					
3. PB3	.43**	.46**	1																				
4. PB4	.29**	.23**	.31**	1																			
5. PB5	.36**	.24**	.43**	.18**	1																		
6. PB6	.40**	.32**	.43**	.32**	.52**	1																	
7. PB7	.34**	.43**	.36**	.28**	.22**	.36**	1																
8. PB8	.29**	.35**	.29**	.19**	.34**	.28**	.31**	1															
9. PB9	.42**	.31**	.29**	.43**	.34**	.39**	.33**	.49**	1														
10. SPB1	.30**	.26**	.23**	.17**	.24**	.23**	.20**	.29**	.29**	1													
11. SPB2	.20**	.39**	.24**	.15**	.21**	.20**	.24**	.31**	.26**	.66**	1												
12. SPB3	.20**	.25**	.32**	.18**	.24**	.23**	.19**	.27**	.25**	.60**	.64**	1											
13. SPB4	.13**	.15**	.15**	.43**	.18**	.20**	.14**	.22**	.31**	.46**	.45**	.50**	1										
14. SPB5	.16**	.18**	.23**	.13**	.40**	.27**	.13**	.28**	.25**	.53**	.50**	.56**	.47**	1									
15. SPB6	.18**	.21**	.23**	.17**	.31**	.38**	.18**	.27**	.28**	.56**	.52**	.55**	.49**	.69**	1								
16. SPB7	.16**	.26**	.19**	.17**	.18**	.21**	.36**	.26**	.26**	.51**	.58**	.50**	.45**	.45**	.54**	1							
17. SPB8	.16**	.23**	.17**	.12**	.22**	.18**	.18**	.47**	.30**	.52**	.55**	.48**	.43**	.51**	.48**	.49**	1						
18. SPB9	.19**	.21**	.18**	.23**	.24**	.24**	.19**	.35**	.43**	.58**	.53**	.47**	.56**	.53**	.54**	.50**	.64**	1					
19. PRB1	.20**	.24**	.23**	.31**	.24**	.29**	.22**	.40**	.37**	.27**	.28**	.24**	.31**	.26**	.29**	.26**	.32**	.33**	1				
20. PRB2	.27**	.27**	.30**	.28**	.28**	.34**	.25**	.35**	.32**	.25**	.25**	.23**	.24**	.25**	.27**	.23**	.27**	.27**	.61**	1			
21. PRB3	.22**	.21**	.24**	.58**	.18**	.29**	.23**	.26**	.37**	.22**	.21**	.22**	.40**	.20**	.24**	.22**	.22**	.29**	.58**	.59**	1		
22. PRB4	.20**	.26**	.24**	.19**	.23**	.26**	.23**	.40**	.29**	.25**	.26**	.23**	.21**	.23**	.25**	.22**	.30**	.26**	.53**	.53**	.46**	1	
23. PRB5	.20**	.25**	.23**	.14**	.24**	.25**	.20**	.40**	.28**	.25**	.27**	.23**	.20**	.23**	.25**	.22**	.30**	.27**	.52**	.48**	.40**	.74**	
24. PRB6	.15**	.21**	.19**	.22**	.17**	.24**	.19**	.28**	.24**	.22**	.22**	.18**	.21**	.19**	.23**	.20**	.21**	.23**	.52**	.48**	.46**	.53**	
25. PRB7	.17**	.22**	.21**	.31**	.17**	.26**	.21**	.30**	.30**	.21**	.22**	.19**	.24**	.19**	.23**	.20**	.24**	.26**	.57**	.53**	.53**	.48**	
26. PRB8	.21**	.23**	.23**	.27**	.25**	.30**	.21**	.32**	.31**	.23**	.24**	.20**	.24**	.23**	.26**	.23**	.26**	.27**	.56**	.56**	.50**	.48**	
27. PRB9	.19**	.23**	.22**	.22**	.22**	.27**	.21**	.29**	.25**	.21**	.22**	.19**	.20**	.21**	.24**	.20**	.23**	.23**	.51**	.54**	.45**	.48**	
28. PRB10	.16**	.23**	.20**	.30**	.19**	.25**	.20**	.35**	.33**	.22**	.24**	.21**	.26**	.21**	.26**	.23**	.28**	.29**	.63**	.53**	.53**	.48**	
29. PRB11	.24**	.25**	.25**	.22**	.21**	.25**	.22**	.27**	.26**	.23**	.23**	.21**	.18**	.22**	.24**	.19**	.23**	.23**	.47**	.55**	.42**	.43**	
30. PRB12	.27**	.29**	.35**	.25**	.29**	.38**	.28**	.26**	.27**	.25**	.24**	.23**	.19**	.25**	.28**	.22**	.24**	.24**	.47**	.53**	.42**	.39**	
31. SPRB1	.16**	.19**	.18**	.27**	.21**	.23**	.18**	.31**	.32**	.43**	.42**	.40**	.47**	.40**	.45**	.40**	.46**	.48**	.45**	.35**	.39**	.33**	
32. SPRB2	.20**	.24**	.23**	.22**	.24**	.25**	.22**	.31**	.29**	.44**	.43**	.42**	.41**	.42**	.45**	.41**	.46**	.46**	.37**	.39**	.34**	.34**	
33. SPRB3	.15**	.17**	.16**	.34**	.20**	.21**	.16**	.26**	.31**	.40**	.38**	.38**	.58**	.38**	.41**	.38**	.41**	.46**	.40**	.33**	.46**	.30**	
32. SPRB4	.16**	.23**	.19**	.18**	.20**	.21**	.19**	.32**	.27**	.42**	.43**	.42**	.38**	.40**	.42**	.39**	.51**	.45**	.35**	.31**	.29**	.40**	
33. SPRB5	.16**	.22**	.17**	.14**	.21**	.19**	.17**	.33**	.26**	.42**	.43**	.40**	.37**	.41**	.41**	.38**	.52**	.45**	.35**	.30**	.26**	.37**	
34. SPRB6	.14**	.20**	.16**	.20**	.19**	.22**	.18**	.28**	.27**	.40**	.40**	.37**	.39**	.37**	.41**	.39**	.42**	.43**	.37**	.31**	.31**	.31**	
35. SPRB7	.13**	.17**	.13**	.23**	.16**	.19**	.15**	.27**	.27**	.37**	.38**	.35**	.40**	.34**	.38**	.34**	.40**	.41**	.40**	.33**	.35**	.30**	
36. SPRB8	.18**	.22**	.20**	.19**	.23**	.24**	.20**	.30**	.28**	.43**	.42**	.39**	.39**	.41**	.43**	.39**	.46**	.45**	.37**	.33**	.30**	.30**	
37. SPRB9	.16**	.22**	.20**	.17**	.20**	.23**	.20**	.27**	.25**	.42**	.42**	.39**	.36**	.38**	.42**	.39**	.42**	.42**	.33**	.30**	.27**	.28**	
38. SPRB10	.12**	.19**	.16**	.22**	.18**	.20**	.16**	.31**	.28**	.39**	.41**	.37**	.42**	.38**	.41**	.37**	.47**	.45**	.42**	.33**	.35**	.31**	
39. SPRB11	.18**	.21**	.19**	.16**	.20**	.19**	.17**	.28**	.26**	.42**	.41**	.40**	.36**	.40**	.41**	.37**	.43**	.43**	.33**	.32**	.27**	.30**	
40. SPRB12	.16**	.21**	.20**	.15**	.24**	.23**	.18**	.29**	.25**	.43**	.43**	.41**	.37**	.43**	.45**	.39**	.43**	.43**	.35**	.32**	.27**	.30**	
41. BE2	.16**	.22**	.22**	.21**	.32**	.28**	.16**	.36**	.31**	.37**	.37**	.35**	.39**	.43**	.41**	.36**	.44**	.44**	.39**	.35**	.32**	.32**	
42. BE3	.02**	.10**	.08**	.13**	.14**	.10**	.02**	.19**	.13**	.22**	.24**	.23**	.28**	.28**	.26**	.23**	.28**	.28**	.20**	.17**	.18**	.17**	

**Table 2. (Continued)**

	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	
1. PB1																							
2. PB2																							
3. PB3																							
4. PB4																							
5. PB5																							
6. PB6																							
7. PB7																							
8. PB8																							
9. PB9																							
10. SPB1																							
11. SPB2																							
12. SPB3																							
13. SPB4																							
14. SPB5																							
15. SPB6																							
16. SPB7																							
17. SPB8																							
18. SPB9																							
19. PRB1																							
20. PRB2																							
21. PRB3																							
22. PRB4																							
23. PRB5	1																						
24. PRB6	.57**	1																					
25. PRB7	.48**	.68**	1																				
26. PRB8	.48**	.61**	.68**	1																			
27. PRB9	.47**	.65**	.62**	.76**	1																		
28. PRB10	.48**	.58**	.69**	.65**	.63**	1																	
29. PRB11	.40**	.45**	.50**	.52**	.55**	.53**	1																
30. PRB12	.37**	.37**	.41**	.45**	.45**	.41**	.56**	1															
31. SPRB1	.33**	.33**	.37**	.36**	.31**	.40**	.29**	.29**	1														
32. SPRB2	.32**	.28**	.31**	.32**	.29**	.31**	.31**	.32**	.72**	1													
33. SPRB3	.29**	.29**	.33**	.32**	.27**	.35**	.26**	.26**	.74**	.67**	1												
32. SPRB4	.37**	.29**	.30**	.29**	.27**	.31**	.27**	.27**	.64**	.67**	.61**	1											
33. SPRB5	.40**	.30**	.30**	.30**	.28**	.32**	.27**	.26**	.63**	.62**	.57**	.81**	1										
34. SPRB6	.32**	.40**	.36**	.34**	.33**	.35**	.27**	.27**	.65**	.63**	.59**	.63**	.65**	1									
35. SPRB7	.30**	.38**	.47**	.39**	.36**	.42**	.31**	.26**	.66**	.57**	.62**	.57**	.58**	.68**	1								
36. SPRB8	.30**	.29**	.33**	.35**	.31**	.34**	.29**	.31**	.64**	.67**	.58**	.62**	.62**	.69**	.66**	1							
37. SPRB9	.28**	.28**	.29**	.31**	.30**	.30**	.27**	.30**	.61**	.65**	.54**	.60**	.59**	.70**	.57**	.78**	1						
38. SPRB10	.32**	.33**	.39**	.36**	.31**	.44**	.29**	.27**	.71**	.60**	.63**	.60**	.61**	.64**	.71**	.66**	.64**	1					
39. SPRB11	.29**	.27**	.29**	.30**	.28**	.30**	.39**	.30**	.61**	.66**	.55**	.58**	.57**	.56**	.57**	.62**	.60**	.62**	1				
40. SPRB12	.30**	.27**	.28**	.30**	.28**	.29**	.32**	.38**	.64**	.65**	.57**	.58**	.59**	.56**	.55**	.62**	.60**	.59**	.70**	1			
41. BE2	.32**	.31**	.33**	.35**	.32**	.35**	.30**	.30**	.45**	.42**	.43**	.40**	.41**	.42**	.41**	.43**	.38**	.42**	.39**	.41**	1		
42. BE3	.17**	.17**	.18**	.18**	.17**	.19**	.16**	.13**	.27**	.23**	.25**	.23**	.25**	.25**	.26**	.24**	.22**	.27**	.24**	.25**	.52**	1	

Note: PB = Personal Benefits; SPB = Satisfaction with Personal Benefits; PRB = Professional Benefits; SPRB = Satisfaction with Professional Benefits; MBI = Members' Behavioral Intentions.

\*\*Correlation is significant at  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq .08$ . To test the model, we specified PB, SPB, PRB, SPRB, and members' behavioral intentions (MBI) as latent variables with multiple measurement items.

### Measurement Model

The estimation and fit indices indicated that the initial measurement model was close to a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df=46.582$ , GFI = .881, CFI = .906, NFI = .905, RMSEA = .069). To modify the measurement model, we correlated some errors among the observed items within the same latent variable according to the modification indices, because Byrne (2001) asserted that "forcing large error terms to be uncorrelated is rarely appropriate with real data." Eleven error covariances were added. The modified measurement model was satisfactory for all of the fit indices except GFI, which is close to a good fit ( $\chi^2/df=52.978$ , GFI = .870, CFI = .904, NFI = .905, RMSEA = .061). The standardized factor loadings of the observed items on the latent variables ranged from .55 to .94, which indicates that the measurement model displayed reasonable validity. Thus, the revised CFA model retains.

### Structural Model

In this structural model, PB, SPB, PRB, and SPRB were assumed to affect MBI, while PB affect SPB, and PRB affect SPRB (see Figure 2). The tested model had two exogenous variables—PB and PRB—and three endogenous variables—SPB, SPRB, and MBI. In an effort to provide model validation, we ran three structural model analyses—first half of the sample, second half of the sample, and all of the sample. Table 3 demonstrates the results of the structural equation models for the relationships among the five variables across the three models. The three tested models displayed similar and consistent outcomes. All of the models indicated that personal benefit directly affected member satisfaction with personal benefits (H3a) ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $\beta = .41$ ,  $\beta = .41$ , respectively, for H3a,  $p < .001$ ), and professional benefits significantly affected member satisfaction with professional benefits (H4a) ( $\beta = .46$ ,  $\beta = .47$ ,  $\beta = .46$ , respectively,  $p < .001$ ). More important, personal benefits (H1) ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $\beta = .08$ , respectively,  $p < .001$ ) satisfaction with personal benefits (H3b) ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $\beta = .32$ ,

**Figure 2.** Results of the SEM Analysis for the Whole Sample



Notes: The error terms of indicators were omitted in this figure. The numbers in parentheses indicate standardized error. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Effect Sizes and Standardized Errors of Each Hypothesis

Paths	First Half Sample	Second Half Sample	All Sample
	$\beta$ (SE)	$\beta$ (SE)	$\beta$ (SE)
H1: PB $\rightarrow$ MBI	.12*** (.04)	.06*** (.04)	.08*** (.03)
H2: PROB $\rightarrow$ MBI	.21*** (.06)	.21*** (.04)	.22*** (.03)
H3a: PB $\rightarrow$ SPB	.45*** (.01)	.41*** (.01)	.42*** (.08)
H3b: SPB $\rightarrow$ MBI	.34*** (.06)	.30*** (.06)	.32*** (.04)
H4a: PROB $\rightarrow$ SPROB	.46*** (.01)	.47*** (.05)	.46*** (.06)
H4b: SPROB $\rightarrow$ MBI	.19*** (.04)	.19*** (.06)	.20*** (.04)

PB = Personal Benefits; SPB = Satisfaction with Personal Benefits; PRB = Professional Benefits; SPRB = Satisfaction with Professional Benefits; MBI = Members' Behavioral Intentions.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** Fit Measures of the Models tested

Fit Index	Criteria	Fit Statistics		
		First Half Sample	Second Half Sample	All Samples
Chi-square/df	$\leq 5$	25.657	23.239	46.582
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	$\geq .90$	.90	.91	.91
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	$\geq .90$	.87	.88	.88
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	$\geq .90$	.90	.91	.91
Root Mean Squared Error Residual (RMSEA)	$\leq .08$	.06	.06	.06

$p < .001$ ), professional benefits (H2) ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and satisfaction with professional benefits (H4b) ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $\beta = .20$ , respectively,  $p < .001$ ) all significantly and directly affected members' behavioral intentions. Therefore, all of the hypotheses were supported. We also analyzed total, direct, and indirect effects among the variables used in this study. The effect sizes of total effect and direct effects demonstrated similar results. Although the magnitude was small, personal benefits ( $\beta = .09$ ) and professional benefits ( $\beta = .07$ ) indirectly affected members' behavioral intentions. As shown in Table 4, according to the given fit indices, the fit of the model, including CFI, GFI, and NFI, met or was very close to the satisfaction level for all of the three tested models.

## Discussion

This study explored the factors that could influence members' behavioral intentions toward professional associations. More specifically, it examined the effects of members' perceptions of personal and professional benefits and satisfaction with those benefits on their behavioral intentions. We also tested how satisfaction with benefits related to perceived benefits and members' behavioral intentions. This study could advance understanding of the factors influencing members' behavioral intentions toward professional associations and provide guidance

for facilitating membership retention and recommendation, which could have great significance for professional associations.

One of the important findings of this study was that members' perceptions of personal and professional benefits were positively related with their behavioral intentions. Past studies also found that perceived benefits were a major factor for sustaining membership (Inglis et al. 2011; Markova et al. 2013), which was consistent with the findings of this study. Personal benefits were expected to motivate engagement in professional associations (DeLeskey 2003; Wilson 1997). Hager (2014) also found that public incentives played a role in members' engagement in professional associations but did not examine other member behaviors, such as membership renewal and recommendation, or other factors influencing behaviors, such as membership satisfaction. When considering a professional association, members might seek benefits both for themselves and for their field or profession. According to the customer decision theory, a consumer's perceived benefits can positively influence her or his purchase intentions (Kim, Ferrin, and Rao 2008). Similarly, members would be more likely to renew their membership or to recommend the association to others if they perceived these benefits to be important in their decision making regarding professional associations. Thus, professional associations should deliver valued benefits to ensure their members' continuing membership (Markova et al. 2013) and attract potential members.

This study also found that members' satisfaction with personal and professional benefits positively affected their intentions to renew and recommend membership. This finding also supported those of previous studies that showed that members' satisfaction with benefits could positively affect their renewal intention (Markova et al. 2013). When members felt satisfied with the benefits from their associations, they were more likely to renew and recommend membership in the association. Therefore, ensuring members' satisfaction with personal and professional benefits is vital for an association's success. Future research can further examine the effects of members' satisfaction with those same benefits on their commitment to and engagement with the professional association.

The results also illustrated that members' perceived personal and professional benefits positively influenced their satisfaction with those benefits, which further affected their behavioral intentions. If members perceived benefits as an important factor for joining a professional association, they would be more concerned about the benefits offered by that association, such as networking with other professionals. If members were satisfied with the performance of the association in delivering benefits, they would be more likely to renew their membership or recommend it to others. One possible explanation was that those members attached importance to benefits, and, therefore, their satisfaction with benefits offered by professional associations could motivate positive behavioral intentions. According to the theory of planned behavior, behavioral intention is an immediate predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen 2002). Therefore, members' behavioral intentions could predict their membership renewal and recommendation in the real world.

Based on the findings of this study, we provide some strategies for professional associations to retain current members and attract potential members. Professional associations should pay more attention to offering personal and professional benefits for their members, as these benefits are strongly connected with membership renewal and recommendation. Moreover, professional associations could promote their distinctive benefits to potential members through word of mouth while also enhancing existing benefits (Inglis et al. 2011). Furthermore,

management of professional associations must recognize which benefits will effectively satisfy members' needs (Markova et al. 2013), such as career development and professional certification, thereby facilitating membership retention and recommendation. Additionally, associations might organize conferences or seminars to gather members from different regions and host other activities or events (that is, training programs; Dong 2015) to further engage their current members and attract potential members.

## Limitations and Future Research

It is important to note that our research has some limitations. First, this study adopted cross-sectional data. Thus, our analysis could not exclude the possibility of reverse relationship (Hoffman and Eveland 2010) in the relationships among benefits, satisfaction, and members' behavioral intentions. Second, we examined merely positive behavioral intentions, including membership renewal and recommendation; however, we did not analyze negative behavioral intentions, such as dropping membership. Third, nonresponse bias test displayed respondents who submitted their response earlier tended to be more positive across a majority of the variables examined in this study. Fourth, the correlation analysis revealed that the following two sets of the variables of measurement items—personal benefits and satisfaction with personal benefits, and satisfaction with personal benefits and satisfaction with professional benefits—might be related. Although the study conceptually differentiated personal benefits from professional benefits, the sample might not be able to clearly distinguish them. Last, although this study included three structural models across the first half, the second half sample, and a total sample, very large sample size like the one in this study tends to increase the value of the power significantly.

Future research would benefit from collecting longitudinal data to examine how changes in benefits might influence members' behavioral intentions (Markova et al. 2013). Future studies could also compare the differences in motivations and behavioral intentions between members and nonmembers of professional associations. Second, researchers could test the proposed model for other types of organizations beyond professional associations (for example, political organizations) and compare the motivations and behavioral intentions in various organizations. Third, researchers might want to explore whether different types of membership organizations can be a factor for predicting members' behavioral intentions. Fourth, other researchers might need to consider a remedy to nonresponse bias. Last, researchers who intend to collect their own data might need to consider an appropriate sample size to validate the model tested in this study.

## Conclusion

This study shed light on the factors that influenced members' behavioral intentions in professional associations by surveying 13,229 members from eighteen associations with the sponsorship of ASAE. The findings from this study contributed to the growing literature on factors influencing members' behavioral intentions by empirically demonstrating the effects of benefits offered by professional associations on members' intentions to renew and recommend membership. It might be important for scholars to examine the proposed model in various organizations and contexts. We believe that professional associations could increase their member retention by providing personal and professional benefits.

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