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Recommending green hotels to travel agencies' customers



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Introduction

This research note examines travel agency salespeople's environmentally-friendly behavior (i.e., recommending environmentally-friendly hotels to travel agency's customers) in a business-to-consumer context. In tourism and hospitality industries, the impact of hotels on the environment has attracted the attention of scholars (Chan & Wong, 2006; Chen & Peng, 2012; Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010; Kim & Han, 2010). Scholars have generally agreed that consumers' understanding of the importance of environmental issues is an important factor that can affect their behavior (Chen & Peng, 2012; Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2009; Ong & Musa, 2012). Nevertheless, the current tourism literature has mainly focused on tourists' own environmentally-friendly behavior. The influence of tourism service providers is still under-explored. In particular, travel agency salespeople may have an influential role, especially when customers search for and evaluate tourism product information (Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010).

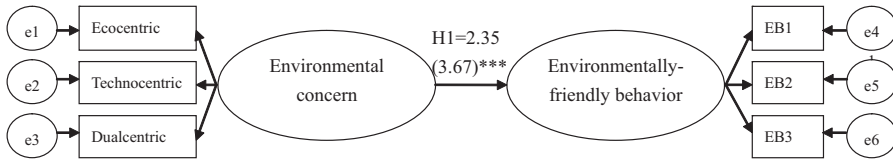
Up to date, the factors that contribute to salespeople's environmentally-friendly behaviors still need further investigation. To narrow the gaps in the tourism literature, this study analyzes how salespeople's environmental concern's influences on their environmentally-friendly behavior, which is to recommend green hotels to potential customers. Moreover, the moderating effect of green hotel knowledge will be investigated. A green hotel is an environmentally-friendly lodging property that follows ecologically sound programs / practices (Han et al., 2010 cited in Chen & Peng, 2012).

Research framework and hypotheses

Fig. 1 shows this research's proposed framework. The first relationship that will be examined is the impact of environmental concern on salespeople's environmentally-friendly behavior. According to

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Number on path: standardized parameter estimation, Number in parentheses: T-Value.
 Remark: *Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.01$; ***Significant at $p < 0.001$.
 Model fit: $\chi^2/df=2.196, p < 0.001, RMSEA=0.08, CFI=0.976, NFI=0.957$

Fig. 1. Research Framework- Main Model (N = 118).

Dunlap and Jones (2002, p. 485), environmental concern refers to “the degree to which people are aware of problems regarding the environment and support efforts to solve them and/or indicate a willingness to contribute personally to their solution.” Environmental concern was widely used by scholars who studied environmental issues (e.g., Hawcroft & Milfont, 2011; Thapa, Graefe, & Meyers, 2006) and in tourism studies (e.g., Luo & Deng, 2008; Ong & Musa, 2012). For environmentally-friendly behavior, Kollmuss and Agyeman’s (2002, p. 240) define it as “behavior that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one’s actions on natural and build world.” In this current study, environmentally-friendly behavior refers to salespeople’s act of recommending green hotels to their customers, such as encouraging customers to stay at green hotels when traveling. Nisbet et al. (2009) and Ong and Musa (2012) hypothesized and confirmed environmental concern’s influence on tourists’ own environmentally-friendly behavior in the context of scuba diving and conservation behavior. Derived from the discussion above, the following hypothesis will be examined:

H1. Salespeople’s environmental concern has a positive influence on their recommendation of green hotels to customers.

The second hypothesis that will be examined in this research is green hotel knowledge’s moderating effect on the relationship between environmental concern and environmentally-friendly behavior. Thøgersen and Ölander (2003) suggest relevant knowledge is essential for an individual to behave in an environmentally-friendly manner. In the context of this current study, green hotel knowledge is defined as general knowledge of facts, concepts, and relationships concerning the impact of hotels on the natural environment (Chen & Peng, 2012). Wong and Yeh’s (2009) research confirmed that tourists’ knowledge can significantly moderate tourists’ decision-making processes. Chen and Peng (2012) further confirmed green hotel knowledge can moderate lodgers’ green hotel staying behavior. Although this variable’s moderating effect has been examined before; nevertheless, this research aims to further investigate how it moderates salespeople’s selling behavior. Based on the above-mentioned literature, this study examines the following hypothesis:

H2. Environmental concern has a stronger positive relationship with environmentally-friendly behavior for salespeople with higher green hotel knowledge versus salespeople with lower green hotel knowledge.

Methodology

Business students were recruited to gather data from respondents working for travel agencies in Taiwan between November and December 2013. Agencies in Taipei City, Taichung City, and Kaohsiung City that had environmentally-friendly hotels in their product range were considered eligible to participate in the study. To verify the status of the hotels, the researchers determined whether these

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