



Predicting green hotel behavioral intentions using a theory of environmental commitment and sacrifice for the environment



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ABSTRACT

This study developed a comprehensive model of consumers' behavioral decisions for or against staying at green hotels by employing environmental values in combination with interdependence theory and the commitment model. We examined the interplay between consumers' biospheric values, their willingness to sacrifice for the environment, and their behavioral intentions in the context of green hotels. Results from 375 completed responses to a survey instrument revealed that biospheric values influenced consumers' willingness to sacrifice for the environment, which in turn affected their green hotel visit intentions, their willingness to sacrifice to stay at a green hotel, and their willingness to pay more to stay at a green hotel. Moreover, consumers' willingness to sacrifice for the environment fully mediated the relationship between biospheric values and green hotel-specific behavioral intentions.

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1. Introduction

“Green consumption” refers to one of the many possible ways in which an individual can help reduce the negative impact of human activities on the natural environment (Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010). As early as 2012, a survey by Trip Advisor noted that the “green” travel trend was gaining momentum as evidenced by 71% of survey respondents who said they plan to make more eco-friendly choices in the next 12 months compared with 65% who did so in the past 12 months (TripAdvisor, 2012). A year later, as many as 79% of respondents indicated that implementing eco-friendly practices is important to their choice of lodging (TripAdvisor, 2013). These numbers make it apparent that green consumption in the lodging industry is on the rise.

The industry has responded fairly well to the increased demand for green hotels. For instance, LEED registrations of lodging properties—certification by the U.S. Green Building Council under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program—have increased significantly (U.S. Green Building Council, 2009). In 2007 almost four times as many hotels registered for LEED certification as in 2006, and in 2008 nearly as many new lodging properties reg-

istered as had in the previous eight years combined (U.S. Green Building Council, 2009). These numbers present an opportunity for better environmental management in the lodging industry. The industry has had its share of criticism on the grounds that a large discrepancy between attitude and action exists. Industry leaders acknowledge the importance of the environment but do not implement environmentally friendly practices accordingly (Iwanowski and Rushmore, 1994; Anguera et al., 2000; Pryce, 2001). This is often due to cost, complexity, varied organizational structures, information asymmetry, low regulatory pressure, a need to share best practices, and knowledge deficiency regarding the benefits of going green (Anguera et al., 2000; Graci, 2008; Graci and Dodds, 2008; Henderson, 2007; Pryce, 2001).

According to Rahman et al. (2012) and Bohdanowicz (2005), one of the most important reasons for going green is the customer, often touted as the central stakeholder in driving hotels to be environmentally friendly. Indeed, a growing consumer base exists who are attracted by the ecological appeal of lodging facilities (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Rahman et al., 2014b; Chan and Wong, 2006; Han and Kim, 2010; Han et al., 2011). Not only are consumers increasingly endorsing environment-friendly hotels, driving up the occupancy rates, but also are willing to pay more to stay at the green hotels, increasing the revenue (Lee et al., 2010). With the current upsurge in green consumption, customers expect hotels to be green, and if a property fails to adopt environmentally

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responsible practices or communicates such adoption ineffectively, it may lose customers to greener competition (Butler, 2008). Thus, there is a clear need for hotel managers to understand the dynamics of consumer behavior if they want to implement an efficient environmental management program. Research also seems to be somewhat lagging behind consumer trends in addressing green consumer behavior in the lodging industry. According to Myung et al. (2012), a major gap in the environment-related literature pertaining to hospitality is a lack of studies seeking to understand the deeper aspects of consumer behavior. Additionally, studies incorporating theoretical perspectives in this research stream have been limited (Myung et al., 2012). One or two major theories such as Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action have dominated the limited number of studies that embraced a theoretical lens (Myung et al., 2012). As such, there is a need to integrate novel theories or theoretical perspectives in this line of research.

This study addresses these gaps by developing a comprehensive model of consumers' green hotel behavioral decisions. In particular, this study examines how consumers' biospheric values, which emphasize the welfare of the environment and the biosphere as the most important principle driving behavioral intention, influence their willingness to sacrifice money and convenience for the sake of the environment and then connects the corresponding effects of willingness to sacrifice for the environment on green hotel visit intention, willingness to pay more to stay at a green hotel, and willingness to sacrifice to stay at a green hotel. Furthermore, this study looks into how these behavioral intentions are formed in terms of the mediating role of willingness to sacrifice for the environment. A combination of environmental values theory, interdependence theory, and environmental commitment model is applied as the underlying theoretical foundation of this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Understanding green hotels

The Green Hotels Association (2014) defines green hotels as "environmentally friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy, and reduce solid waste—while saving money—to help protect our one and only earth" (para. 8). Thus, green hotels diligently practice environmental management which refers to the procedures, practices, and initiatives that a business instigates with the goal of plummeting, eradicating, and preferably thwarting detrimental environmental impacts that result from its operations (Cooper, 1998). Examples of practices that green hotels implement include recycling waste, towel and linen reuse programs, low-flow faucets and showerheads, water-free urinals, refillable bathroom amenities, automatic climate control and light sensors, and natural ventilation. More often than not these practices entail consumers to sacrifice a certain degree of their comfort, convenience, and luxury (Butler, 2008; Clark et al., 2003). In many cases consumers are willing to make financial sacrifices for their environmental goals which represent a facet of environmentally significant behavior (Stern, 2000).

Rationales and benefits such as cost savings, competitive advantage, ecological responsibility, legitimization, media recognition, risk minimization, employee organizational commitment, public scrutiny, enhanced investor relations, social benefit, local community support, marketing benefits, and improved operational efficiency, justify a hotel's decision to embrace environmental management (Gan, 2006; Juholin, 2004; Rahman et al., 2012; Newman and Bredend, 1992; Kirk, 1995; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Park et al., 2014). Central to all these reasons are the customers, who generally acknowledge the green hotels' efforts by patronizing them and paying more for them, sacrificing their desired level of luxury,

convenience, and comfort in the process. According to Lee et al. (2010), consumers are motivated to endorse a green hotel primarily for the realization that their purchase decision plays a part in saving the planet and leaving a green environment future generations. Patronizing a green hotel, can thus be necessitated from a feeling associated with nature, for example, loving nature and having an emotional fondness for nature (Kals et al., 1999) such that consumers are willing to make a sacrifice for nature's sake. Thus willingness to sacrifice can be a general sacrifice for the environment and/or a more specific sacrifice associated with the product such as settling for a product with inferior attributes. We will elaborate on these concepts in later sections.

2.2. Theoretical foundation

2.2.1. Values theory

Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) state that consumer values and beliefs must be considered when examining the influences that affect purchasing decisions. Many scholars emphasize the importance of human values for explaining pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., Axelrod, 1994; Clark et al., 2003; Stern, 2000). The Schwartz Theory of Human Values defines values as, "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that [serve] as guiding principles in people's lives" (Schwartz, 1992). Values are considered important because they may affect various beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors simultaneously (Rohan, 2000; Rokeach, 1973). Various studies have attempted to identify values that provide a basis for environmental attitudes and behavior (e.g., Karp, 1996; McCarty and Shrum, 1994; Stern et al., 1999). Environmental values play a primary role in pro-environmental behavior: values affect people's beliefs, which then influence personal norms that lead to pro-environmental behaviors (Reser and Bentrupperbäumer, 2005; Stern, 2000). Similarly, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior posits that (environmental) beliefs shape attitudes toward behavior, which is then translated into behavioral intention.

Stern (2000) argues that three types of values (i.e., value orientations) are relevant when explaining pro-environmental behaviors: egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric (see also, De Groot and Steg, 2007, 2008; Steg et al., 2005; Stern et al., 1998). Egoistic values focus on maximizing individual outcomes based on self-interest, altruistic values reflect concern for the welfare of others, and biospheric values emphasize the welfare of the environment and the biosphere as the most important principle driving behavioral intention. Most studies related to environmental behavior have not distinguished biospheric from altruistic value orientations (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003; Corraliza and Berenguer, 2000; McCarty and Shrum, 1994; Nordlund and Garvill, 2002; Stern and Dietz, 1994; Stern et al., 1998), but Stern (2000), Stern and Dietz (1994) and Stern et al. (1993, 1998) have posited a basis for this distinction. We believe a biospheric value orientation explains the process of forming pro-environmental behavioral intentions better than an altruistic value orientation because of its emphasis on the environment. We are therefore primarily concerned with the role of biospheric values in the formation of pro-environmental behavioral intentions for the purpose of this study.

2.2.2. Commitment model

In order to explain the pro-environmental behavior-formation process, it is important that we explore another, seemingly more important, phenomenon—the person–environment relationship. Several models of the person–environment relationship are associated with environmental behaviors, including environmental identity (Clayton, 2003; Hinds and Sparks, 2008; Devine-Wright and Clayton, 2010), connectedness to nature (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Mayer et al., 2009; Schultz, 2002; Perrin and Benassi, 2009), and commitment to the natural environment (Davis et al., 2009;

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