



An investigation of green hotel customers' decision formation: Developing an extended model of the theory of planned behavior

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ABSTRACT

The current study sought to extend the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which is rooted in the theory of reasoned action (TRA), to more comprehensively explain the formation of customers' intention to revisit a green hotel. In particular, the extended TPB incorporates the critical constructs in the consumer behavior and marketing literature (i.e., service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and frequency of past behavior) into the original TPB model. Results of a structural analysis revealed that the new model provides a better fit with the data, and explains significantly greater amounts of variance in revisit intention in comparison to the TRA and TPB. Added constructs in the new model considerably contribute to improve our understanding of the complicated process of green hotel customers' decision-making. In this study, all relationships appeared to be significant as conceptualized according to the theory. In addition, a mediating effect of satisfaction and attitude was found. The article includes discussions on theoretical and managerial implications.

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1. Introduction

For the last few decades, the public has been recognizing the seriousness of environmental problems/disasters, causing their concerns for the environment to become broader (Kirk, 1995; Roberts, 1996). Such environmental concerns and awareness have led to great changes in consumer buying behaviors and attitudes toward eco-friendly business establishments (Environmentally Friendly Hotels, 2008; D'Souza and Taghian, 2005). More and more customers prefer green products/services and environmentally responsible companies that meet customers' green needs, as exemplified, for example, in their willingness to pay for eco-friendly products/services (Roberts, 1996; Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). This green consumerism has brought about modifications in purchasing methods, manufacturing processes, and operation procedures, including ecologically conscious decisions in various business segments (D'Souza and Taghian, 2005; Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001). In particular, in the hotel industry, recognizing the green shifts in consumer behaviors and the importance of promoting environmentally responsible products/services, increasing numbers of hotel companies are adopting proactive environmental management, and implementing environmentally conscious practices to improve their competitiveness (Claver-Cortes et al., 2007). Such

greening efforts by eco-friendly hotels not only contribute to fulfill customers' needs in the marketplace, but lower operational costs by reducing the significant extent of solid waste and energy/water consumption (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Accordingly, in recent years many hotels have been proactive in advancing their environmental performance in order to position themselves distinctively in the increasingly competitive lodging market, searching for effective ways to become "green" (Chan and Wong, 2006; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001). Specifically, marketers in the hotel industry are striving to increase their firms' competitiveness (e.g., earning recognition and increasing customer retention) through the greening of their firms, thereby eventually enhancing their hotel firms' profits (Chan and Wong, 2006; Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), 2001; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007).

Many hospitality and marketing researchers agree that increasing customers' positive pre/post-purchasing decisions is the key to firms' long-term success (e.g., Han and Back, 2008; Lewis and Chambers, 2000; Yesawich, 1997). An understanding of green hotel marketers' decision-making process is essential in developing effective marketing and service strategies that induce positive purchasing decisions (Han et al., 2010). While customers' decision-making process is very intricate, it is generally believed that their decision formation can be a clue in comprehending this process (Lam and Hsu, 2006; Han et al., 2010). Specifically, an investigation of the underlying volitional and non-volitional factors affecting customers' decisions may provide important insights into their purchasing decision-making process (Ajzen, 1991; Lam and Hsu,

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2006; Han et al., 2010). Given this, the current study employed the theory of planned behavior (TPB), an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), in order to gain a better understanding of green hotel customers' post-purchasing decision-making formation.

According to Ajzen (1991) and Perugini and Bagozzi (2001), modifying the TPB model by altering paths and including additional critical constructs in a certain context often contribute to enhancing our understanding of the theoretical mechanism of the model and increasing the prediction power for individuals' intention/behavior in that specific context. That is, the theory can be broadened and deepened through such a process (Ajzen, 1991; Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001). There is growing empirical evidence that service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and frequency of past behavior are critical to the decision-making process and powerful predictors of post-purchasing decisions (e.g., Barsky, 1992; Han and Ryu, 2006; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Oh and Hsu, 2001). These studies stressed the significance of the variables in explaining customer post-purchase behaviors. Thus, the current study also attempted to extend the TPB model by including such constructs, which are important in a hospitality context, as service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and frequency of past behavior, and by altering the path in the model to improve our ability to predict intention and understanding of green hotel customers' decision formation.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The TPB has been applied in various contexts, but little research has employed the TPB to explain hotel customers' decision-making process. In addition, no research has yet compared the predictive abilities of the TRA, TPB, and extended TPB, including additional constructs in a hotel setting, particularly in a green hotel context. Further, while the significance of service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and past behavior in explaining post-purchasing behaviors have been stressed in various contexts, to the best of our knowledge no research has integrated these variables into the TPB model to predict customer intentions/behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop an extended TPB model by taking such variables as service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and frequency of past behavior into account in order to better predict green hotel customers' revisit intention. The specific objectives were to compare the predictive ability of the TRA, TPB, and modified TPB models, to investigate the relationships among the proposed study constructs, and to examine the mediating role of customer satisfaction, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

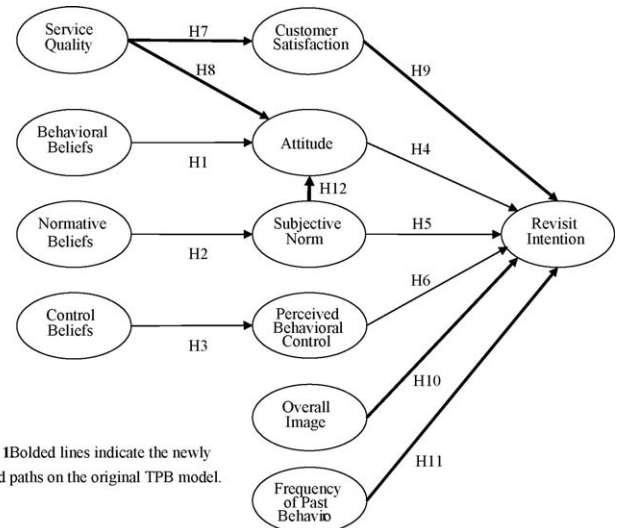
1.2. Proposed research model

The modified TPB model is presented in Fig. 1. The model includes the original variables in the TPB and new constructs (i.e., service quality, customer satisfaction, overall image, and frequency of past behavior). The bold lines indicate the newly added paths on the original TPB model.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Green hotels

Environmental protection continually attracts public attention (Chan and Wong, 2006). Individuals are becoming more and more aware of the environmental damage caused by various business activities (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). This increasing public concern is stimulating the implementation of environmentally responsible management in the hotel industry (Manaktola and



Note 1 Bolded lines indicate the newly added paths on the original TPB model.

Fig. 1. Proposed extended TPB model for green hotel repurchasing behavior.

Jauhari, 2007; Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001). That is, a growing number of hotels are joining the green movement to reduce harmful impacts on the environment, and thereby in doing so eventually increasing their profitability (e.g., cost savings and customer attraction/retention) (Pizam, 2009; Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001). The term “green” is alternatively known as “eco-friendly”, “environmentally friendly”, or “sustainable” (Han et al., 2009; Pizam, 2009). Wolfe and Shanklin (2001) indicated that “green” refers to actions that decrease negative impacts on our environment (e.g., recycling, eco-purchasing). Similarly, according to the Green Hotel Associations (GHA) (2009) and DEP (2001), a green hotel is an eco-friendly lodging property that has implemented various green practices and institutes sound and environmentally friendly programs to protect the environment and reduce operational costs. In particular, in green hotels, the following are quite commonly used, practiced, and served: durable service items, cotton towels and linens for air quality, donations to charity, well-educated staff about green practices, energy conservation, environmental cleaning, eco-friendly/organic foods, fresh air, water recycling/conservation, recycling bins, towel re-use program, etc. (GHA, 2009; DEP, 2001).

2.2. Theory of planned behavior

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), across a number of publications, developed and explicated the TRA in order to account for mechanisms of human behaviors in decision processes (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The TRA was specifically designed to predict human behaviors under complete volitional control. That is, this theory assumed that most of individuals' decisions/behaviors are derived from the intensity of volitional efforts for the specific decisions/behaviors. According to this theory, individuals are rational and motivation-based in their decision-making processes, and make a reasoned choice among various alternatives (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In their investigation of the effectiveness of TRA, which involved use of a meta-analysis, Sheppard et al. (1988) verified the predictive power of TRA. Their findings indicated that the model accurately predicted individuals' decisions and behaviors when applied in any situation or to any activity. Because of its accuracy in predicting human behaviors and effectiveness in explaining psychological processes in decision-making, the TRA is widely utilized in comprehending customers' decision-making processes in various contexts.

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