ECO Friendly ‘Activities’ VS ECO Friendly ‘Attitude’: Travelers Intention to Choose Green Hotels in Malaysia

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Abstract: The hospitality industry as a whole is being pressured by many parties to become more environmentally friendly. Hotels are becoming more aware of their impact and participating in green initiatives. As more and more tourists are becoming increasingly concerned about the environment and environmentally products, it is crucial for the hotel industry to explore this concept of green hotels in more detail. In the hotel industry, green hotels are defined as lodging establishments that have made a commitment to diverse ecologically sound practices such as saving water, energy and reducing solid waste. This study examines the influence of ecofriendly attitudes and environmentally friendly activities on tourists’ intention to choose green hotels as their preferred accommodation. By using the intercept survey method, data were collected from tourists at the international airport in Malaysia. The present study confirms previous findings on the relationship between attitudes towards the environment and environment-friendly behavior, that is, tourists with high environmental attitudes are more willing to stay in a green hotel. The present study also found a positive and significant relationship of environmentally friendly activities and intention to stay at a green hotel among tourists. This implies that tourists who have greater involvement in environmentally friendly activities in their daily life are more likely to choose green hotels as their choice. The theoretical implications and managerial implications of these findings are discussed.

Key words: Green · Green Tourists · Eco Friendly Attitude · Environmentally Friendly Activities · Hotels

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has its impacts on a significant amount of people each day. It is a big industry worldwide and many countries have already cashed in on its potential. Tourism industry encompasses many industries such as lodging, airlines, cruise lines and food and beverage businesses. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) forecast that international tourist arrivals will reach 1.8 billion by 2030, with the Asia and Pacific areas gaining most of the new arrivals. This indicates that the tourism industry plays a vital role global in general and Asian region in particular.

Tourism, being a main source of income and employment in many countries highly depends on environmental resources that include pristine beaches, warm climate, clean air, landscape formation and others [1]. Among the various components of tourism, the hotel industry is an industry of which activities constitute a threat to the environment due to its high consumption in energy, water and non-durable goods [2]. Although the hotel industry, which is key of tourism business may not be the only one that creates substantial environmental pollution and consumes large amount of global resources; but because of its primary purposes of providing comfortable services/supplies (hot water, food, drinks, linens, towels, lighting, air conditioning, limousines, water, swimming pools), hotels clearly consume gross amounts of water, energy, non-recyclable, goods and natural resources, thus directly or indirectly harming the environment [3]. Hotels are major consumers of water and energy as one large hotel goes through several million liters of water annually, not to mention all the detergents and chemicals the hotels uses for laundry services [4].
Hotels also spend a substantial amount of waste disposal. It has found that some large hotels incur a USD2250, 000 or more expense from waste disposal alone, but many hotels are trying to find new ways to reduce the amount of waste they have by becoming greener and more environmentally friendly [5].

In general, due to the substantial amount of pollution created by the daily hotel operations of the hotel, the hospitality industry as a whole is being pressured by many forces, namely consumers, environmental regulators and non-profit organization to become more environmentally friendly [5]. Therefore, hotels are becoming more aware of the environmental impact of their activities and thus are taking initiatives and participating in green initiatives. In fact, the majority of hotel employees in some countries, such as Sweden and Poland report having serious environmental concern regarding how the hotel affects the environment [7]. Mindful of these concerns, hoteliers recognizing the green shifts in consumer behaviors and the importance of promoting environmentally responsible products/services and proactive management and implementing environmentally conscious practices to improve their competitiveness. As environmental concerns about tourism impacts have increased, the tourist accommodation sector has recognized the need to improve its sustainable management and operation [8].

Nowadays, as more environmental rules/regulation appear and environmental awareness increases, tourists are increasingly searching for eco-friendly hotels over conventional hotels. Consequently, many hotels are beginning to implement various innovative methods to increase the “greenness” of their operations [9, 10]. As noted by [11], tourist expects that the hotel industry to pay attention to environmental concerns and to operate in a sustainable way. Mindful of these concerns, hoteliers recognizing the green shifts in consumer behaviors and the importance of promoting environmentally responsible products/services and proactive management and implementing environmentally conscious practices to improve their competitiveness. The term “green” refers to actions that reduce the impact on the environment, such as eco-purchasing or recycling [3]. In a similar manner, “green hotel” is defined as an eco-friendly hotel operation that performs various environmental friendly practices such as saving water/energy, using eco-friendly purchasing policies and reducing emission/waste disposals to protect the natural environment and reduce operational costs [12]. The “green” hotel business are terms that refer to a lodging establishment that has made a commitment to various ecologically sound practices such as saving water, saving energy and reducing solid waste [10].

However, despite of the increasing concern on green accommodation, with reference to the hotel industry, there is little research conducted about environmentally friendly hotels [13]. In other words, little management theory or empirical results exist to guide hotels in maximizing their efforts to successfully implement environmentally friendly programs. In fact, some hoteliers remain hesitant to invest in green initiatives because they do not convince whether or not such investments will be valued by customers. Hence, there is a profound need to understand how the efforts to become green are perceived by the hotel customers in order to develop appropriate marketing strategies for the future. Furthermore, determining the factors that may influence tourists intention to choose a green hotel is also have of paramount importance in order for the green hoteliers can plan their efforts for targeting the right potential customers.

Literature Review: As mentioned earlier, unlike conventional hotels, green hotel establishments actively follow eco friendly guidelines and practice environmental management; they commit themselves to carrying out environmental improvements, demonstrating such efforts through eco-labels or the green globe logo and acquiring techniques related to the best practices in environmental management with experts’ help [3]. It is generally agreed that turning a lodging property green not only fulfills environmentally cautious customers’ green needs and assumes the responsibility of performing environmental duties, but also results in substantial cost saving through various environmental benefits [10].

Apart from the cost efficiency of practicing green practices, green management has enhanced customer satisfaction and market demand [10] and corporate image [14]. It was discovered that firms with their green products can strengthen their eco-friendly image to attract more customers’ attention [3]. In the same vein, Mensah revealed that 90 percent of hotel guests would prefer to stay in a hotel that implements green management. Butler also reported that 16 percent of the guests will stay in the hotels because of the eco-friendly practices [15]. In general, it could be concluded that green management in the hotel industry has now played a critical role in marketing and operational building [16].
In the hospitality industry, hotels have been interested in the reduction of solid waste, water consumption, energy consumption and air pollution for environmentally friendly efforts [17]. An environmentally sensitive hotel is one that has altered its equipment, policies and practices to minimize its damage on the environment [18]. In addition, it is stated that a careful examination of existing systems and operating procedures, especially in the areas of energy management, solid-waste management and water conservation, reveal an abundance of possible modifications that cost nothing or will pay for themselves in a few years [18].

According to Ng and Paladino behavioral intentions are a measure of a person’s relative strength of purpose to execute certain behavior. In the context of green marketing [19]. Rashid defined green purchase intention as the probability and willingness of an individual to give preference to green product over conventional products in their purchase considerations [20]. However, several others referred green purchase intention as a determination to act in a certain way [21]. Within the hospitality industry, [3] defined green behavioral intention as the likelihood of the hotel consumers of visiting a green hotel, engage in a positive word of mouth behavior and willingness to pay more for the green hotel. Over the past several decades, environmentalism has been an important issue because of the damage resulting from the use of various disposable products, environmentally unfriendly product processes and environmental disasters [22]. People have become aware of the fragility of our environment and the need for preservation of natural resources. Thus, in recent years, increasing numbers of individuals with environmental concerns, identify themselves as an environmentalist engaging in environmentally friendly activities (EFA) [3, 10].

While people identify the personal inconvenience of EFA (e.g. Recycling activity or environmental purchasing), individuals who perceive the importance of EFA concerning ecological issues actively engage in those types of behaviors [23, 24]. These categories of consumers are willing to change their buying behavior in a more ecologically favorable way (avoidance of disposable products) and behave in an environmentally friendly fashion in their everyday lives (e.g. recycling activity), thus sacrificing friendly products and even paying extra for the products [10]. On the other hand, consumers who do not engage in EFA tend to feel environmental problems will resolve themselves, those who are engaged as eco-friendly customers frequently believe our ecological situation faces serious problems that need corrective action and strongly feel that they should do something for the protection of the environment [3]. Given their perceptions about rigorousness of the environmental problem, such individuals’ EFA affects their purchasing behavior [24]. Therefore, in the context of the tourism industry, we could expect that the formation of intentions to stay at green hotel can differ between tourists often engaging in EFA and tourists infrequently engaging in EFA. In particular, to gain a better understanding of the linkages, we posit that the higher the EFA of the tourists, the higher the intention to visit green hotel.

**H1:** The higher the environmentally friendly activities (EFA) of the tourist, the higher the intention to choose green hotel.

According to Ajzen an individual is more likely to undertake a certain behavior if he/she has a positive attitude toward undertaking the behavior [25]. Eco-friendly attitudes refers to the individual value judgement of environmental protection [26]. In other words, eco-friendly attitude taps the individuals’ cognitive assessment of the value of environmental protection. In 2010, Han, Hsu and Sheu defined attitudes of environmental concern as rooted in a person’s concept of self and it is the degree to which an individual perceives him or herself to be an integral part of the natural environment.

Attitude represents what consumers like and dislike [27] and consumer product purchasing decisions are often based on their environmental attitudes [28]. Eco-friendly attitude is commonly understood as a cognitive judgement towards the value of environmental protection [26].

Theory in the area of consumer attitude argues that individuals behave in ways consistent with their attitudes [25]. However, research in environmental consumerism has produced inconclusive evidence in support of the consumer attitude theory with mixed results that support both a positive relationship between attitude toward the environment and behaviour [29, 10].

Despite the contrasting results found between eco-friendly attitude and behaviour, attitudes are regarded as the most consistent explanatory behaviour in predicting consumers’ willingness to pay for green products [30]. Tanner and Kast discovered that green food purchases are strongly facilitated by the positive attitude of consumers towards environmental protection.
In his study, Balderjahn concluded that individuals who had a positive attitude towards the environment participated more in the buying and consumption of green products [32]. Examining consumer eco-friendly attitudes toward hotel s’ green practices and behavior, researchers [10] concluded that customers who are aware of a hotel’s eco-friendly practices show preference to patronize a green lodging property. Further, Roberts indicated that consumer attitudes are significantly predictors of ecologically conscious consumer behavior [33]. His findings revealed that environmentally conscious people are likely to engage in eco-friendly consumer behavior and individuals who believe their specific ecological activities can cause positive change are more likely to display green consumer behavior. Similarly, a recent study by Han and other researcher revealed that hotel customer’s eco-friendly attitudes positively affect their expressed intention [3]. Specifically, while some researchers have claimed a positive correlation between eco-friendly attitude and behavior [34], others have concluded that the relationship is either moderate or tenuous [35]. It is found that Hong Kong adolescents’ eco-friendly attitudes have weak associations with the green purchasing intention compared with the impact of environmental concern; which suggests that adolescent consumers green purchasing intention behaviour is governed more by emotions than by rationality [36]. This is consistent with the argument by Kim that adolescence is a stage particularly susceptible to emotional appeals [37]. Mei, Ling and Piew perceived that consumers do not always base their buying decisions on their attitudes towards the environment, even though these attitudes can have a fairly strong influence on their purchases [38]. The contradictory results in studies of the relationship between environmental attitude and behavior challenge the previous assumption that an individual’s cognized (attitude) will alter their behavior and these results suggest that further studies are needed to confirm the relationship between environmental attitude and behavior. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H2:** The more positive the eco friendly attitude of the tourist, the higher will be the intention to choose green hotel.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study is correlational in nature where data was gathered once, to answer the study’s research questions. The study was conducted with the intention to obtain a good grasp of the factors influencing tourist intention to choose green hotels. A survey method was employed because this study strongly believes that survey research is best adapted to obtain personal and social facts, beliefs and attitudes [39].

The unit of analysis for this study was tourists who visited Malaysia. This study treats each tourist’s response as an individual data source. For the purpose to measure tourist intention to choose green hotel, a scale adopted from Han consisting of 3 items was used [3]. Environmentally friendly activities were measured using the scale from Kreidler [40]. It consists of twelve items that requires respondents to assess the extent to which they engage in environmental activities. Eco-friendly attitude was measured using the scale developed by [26]. It requires respondents to assess the extent to which they perceive the value of environmental protection. To ensure consistency among variables and to avoid confusion among respondents, all the items were measured using one to five-point Likert scale.

Table 1 summarizes the reliability test of the measures. As shown, the Cronbach Alphas of the measures were all comfortably above the lower limit of acceptability that is $\alpha > 0.60$ [41]. Hence, all the measures were highly reliable.

The sampling procedure used for the present study was intercepted survey whereby respondents were intercepted at the airport. In the present study, the survey was conducted at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). The KLIA International Airport was chosen since it is the main entrance for visitors to Malaysia. For data collection purposes, 300 questionnaires were distributed to tourists at KLIA airport. Out of this number, 84 were excluded because they were incomplete. Thus, a total of 216 responses were usable and used for subsequent analysis, giving a response rate of 72 percent.

Regarding the profile of the respondents, 56.9% of them are males and 43.1% are females. With regards to the age of the respondents, the majority of the respondents (90.8%) is at the ages of 26 to 40 years old. Respondents under 20 years old constitute 7.4%, followed by respondents of ages 21-25 (1.9%). Regarding the marital status of the respondents, the majority of the respondents (67.6%) is married. Those who are single constitutes 19% and a minimal 13.4 % are divorced. With regards to the country of origin of the respondents, 38% come from Asia regions, followed by 27.8% from Europe and 12.5% from the Middle East. Tourists come from United States/Canada are 11.6%, followed by 13% from African countries.
Table 1: Reliabilities of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to choose green hotel</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly activities (EFA)</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-friendly attitudes</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to choose green hotel</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly activities (EFA)</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-friendly attitudes</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Relationships between Dependent and Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intention to choose green hotel</th>
<th>Environmentally friendly activities (EFA)</th>
<th>Eco-friendly attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to choose green hotel</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly activities (EFA)</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-friendly attitudes</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Intention to Choose Green Hotel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>ß</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly activities (EFA)</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-friendly attitudes</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.45**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: R²=.23; F=13.80; Sig. F=.00; **p<.01
B=Unstandardized Coefficient; SE B=Standard error of coefficient; ß=Beta coefficient

For ease of interpretation, the range of five point Likert-scales was categorized into equal sized categories of low, moderate and high. Therefore, scores of less than 2.33 [4/3 + lowest values (1)] is considered as low; scores of 3.67 [highest value (5) – 4/3] is considered high and those in between considered moderate.

As shown in Table 2, the mean value for intention to choose green hotel falls is 2.43 (based on 5-point Likert scale); indicating that respondents tend to have a moderate level of intention to choose green hotel. Similarly, with the mean value of 2.73 and 2.41, respondents generally have moderate level of involvement in environmentally friendly activities and eco-friendly attitudes.

Table 3 provides results of the correlation analysis. The computation of the Pearson correlation coefficients was performed to obtain an understanding of the relationship between all the variables in the study. The values of the correlation coefficients (r) indicate the strength of the relationship between variables. The overall correlation values of the variables showed correlation coefficients with values below 0.5 indicate weak associations between variables.

Table 4 provides evidence of the influence of eco-friendly activities and eco-friendly attitudes on intention to choose green hotel. The F-statistic (F=13. 8, p<.01) Indicates that the relationships between independent variables and dependent variables are significant. The R² obtained indicates that environmental friendly activities (EFA) and eco-friendly attitudes account for 23 percent of the variation in intention to choose green hotel. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported.

DISCUSSION

Necessity is the mother of invention. As the amount of green products continues to increase in the marketplace worldwide, understanding the factors influencing tourist intention to choose green hotel become more important to both academics and practitioners.

This study demonstrated that level of intention to choose green hotels among tourist is at a moderate level. Consistent with definition of green purchase behavior, it can be interpreted that, tourists tend to have a moderate level of intention to stay at a green hotel as their preferred hotel choice. This result is similar to [3] who found a good response among customers who expressed their willingness to visit green hotel. Researchers have indicated that realizing the seriousness of environmental problem increases demand for eco-friendly products/services [24, 10].

This study proposed that environmentally friendly activities (EFA) of the tourists influence them to choose green hotel. On one hand, we discovered the positive relationship between these two factors. Environmentally friendly activities of the respondents have a significant influence on intention to choose green hotel. In other words, tourists who frequently practice environmentally friendly activities show a greater intention to stay at a green hotel as compared to those with low involvement in environmentally friendly activities. This implied that such environmental friendly behaviours as recycling and buying eco-friendly products as everyday habits are associated with the intention to stay at green hotel when travelling. This finding is consistent with the findings of Laroche and Manaktola and Jauhari [24, 10] but inconsistent with Han et al. (2010) [3] who found that
consumer who frequently engages in recycling activities would not be the same one who is willing to pay more for purchases of an eco-friendly product.

On the other hand, despite some mixed results regarding the attitude - behavior relationship, the present study shows that environmental attitude is an important factor influencing tourist intention to choose green hotel. The present study confirms previous findings on the relationship between attitude towards the environment and green purchase behavior, that is, tourists with high environmental attitudes are more willing to stay at a green hotel. This result is in line with the earlier studies; for instance, Han et al. (2010) [3] who found that hotel customers’ eco-friendly attitudes positively expressed their expressed intention. In a similar vein, Chen and Chai and Laroche et al. who, upon studying antecedents to new product purchasing behavior, found that attitudes had a significant effect on behavioral purchase behavior among innovative Indian consumers [30, 24]. This is consistent with the argument of Tsen et al. that attitudes have a consistent explanatory factor in predicting consumers’ willingness to pay for green products [42]. This finding also confirms many previous studies which found that environmental attitudes positively affect pro-environmental behavior [27]. Since an attitude is an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes with respect to any aspect of our environment, people who have strong environmental attitudes take responsibility in protecting the environment [10]. Therefore, tourists with positive environmental attitudes tend to choose green hotels.

**Implications:** This study provides managerial implications for comprehending the influencing factors of tourists’ intentions to visit green hotel. In view of the growing trend of higher environmental awareness among Asian countries, environmentally related products pose both threats and opportunities. The closer the move to understand what causes individuals to pay for green products, the more able marketers will be to develop strategies specifically targeted at this particular group. Recognizing the underlying factors that influence tourists to choose a green hotel as their preferred accommodation allow them to develop strategies specifically targeted to this segment.

The analysis shows that environmentally friendly activities of the tourists give significant influence on their intention to choose green hotel. When applied in practice within the hotel industry, the findings of this study should encourage green hotel operators to consider their green initiatives as part of guests’ experiences. As the study shows, those who are actively involved in environmentally friendly activities seem to seek deeper interactions with green hotels. That is, guests who frequently involve with environmental activities may be viewed as visitors who are seeking for green attributes provided by the hotels. Therefore, it is of primary importance for green hotel operators to continuously educate the guests about the importance of being environmentally friendly and the environmental impacts of their behaviour. The way green hoteliers should produce and promote their green product lines and policies should sufficiently attract the tourists who look forward of being green.

Since attitude towards the environment is found to be an important factor that influences the intention to choose green hotels among the tourists, hoteliers should convince consumers that the protection and preservation of the environment is not the sole responsibility of business entities and that each individual can also make a difference. In view of this, green hoteliers should cautiously work out a proper communication plan that enables to assist favorable attitudinal changes of their target audiences. For instance, since tourists’ attitude towards green hotel is strongly affected by salient attitudinal beliefs such as “safer” and “healthier”, green hoteliers in their communication campaigns should point out clearly how their hotels help bring safe and healthy lifestyle and exactly what advantages or values their hotels deliver to consumers and the environment.

As the findings imply, the green hoteliers have to work on improving green tourists’ attitudes, which may differ and need to be observed over time. The government and other parties involved in the environmental awareness campaign should always track and monitor the level of the environmental concern among the public as a whole. Depending on the outcome, they should find the most effective and efficient marketing strategies are to be developed and implemented as necessary. Unless this is done, we are going to waste millions of dollars on unsuccessful campaigns because they basically “don’t work”.

Last but not the least, to elicit tourists’ behavioural intention, green hotel operators should focus on enhancing the hotel image to portray that the hotel cares about the environment. This goal can be accomplished by adopting tangible and intangible observable green practices in the hotel properties. On top of that, maximizing hotel guests’ involvement in executing green practices can be the key strategy to improve the green
image of the hotel, which in the long–run improves the guests’ behavioral intention to the hotel. Thus, managers should establish green attributes to offer direct experience opportunities to the guests.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions: Despite the fact that hotels have begun incorporating green policies into their management practices and despite the belief that hotel guests seek such policies, there is a dearth of research about this subject. This study was based on a cross-sectional perspective, which limits the knowledge of the long-term impact of the factors in our model. A longitudinal future research in this area is needed to unveil with clarity and greater certainty, the relationship between tourists’ behavior towards green hotels over time. As with any other studies using a consumer sample, the findings of this study might not represent tourists at large. A replication of this study with more general tourists of a wider range in their characteristics might be necessary to attest the applicability of the model to the broader public.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is funded by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia.

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