

Do beliefs affect customers' intentions to choose green hotels?

Tilikidou E.^{1,a}, Delistavrou A.¹

¹*Department of Business Administration, Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece*

^a*Corresponding author: irene.tilikidou@gmail.com*

Abstract: Presents an effort to understand the formulation of future lodging customers' intentions to choose Green Hotels. The study focused on the examination of beliefs' impact on intentions. Results might be found useful among managers of green hotels or hotels, which would decide to "go green". Future lodging customers were found to believe that staying at a Green Hotel makes them more environmentally scrupulous and socially responsible while enjoying healthy hotel premises and food. On the other hand, respondents seem rather cautious whether they would be able to find easily a Green Hotel at a convenient location and price. In overall, specific beliefs concerning green hotels were found to be able to influence travellers' intentions to stay at a Green Hotel, at a moderate level, while beliefs are able to predict 21.9% of the variance in intentions. Better educated consumers expressed the highest level of intentions. Clustering indicated three segments of customers. The most promising one was named "Willing" and counted for 34.19% of the sample.

Keywords: Green hotels, ethical behaviour

1. Introduction

In the hotel industry, increasing numbers of hotel companies are adopting proactive environmental management recognizing the green shifts in consumer concerns and the importance of promoting environmentally responsible services. The main relevant strategy is the adoption of the Green Hotel concept. "Green Hotels are 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!" (Green Hotels Association, 2008). In recent years, many hotels are searching for effective ways to become "green" in order to position themselves distinctively in the competitive lodging market (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Han et al., 2011). Claver-Cortés et al. (2007) argue that hotel size, stars as well as the number of quality and environmental certificates positively affect its environmental commitment and the development of its environmental strategies. Such "greening" hotel efforts not only contribute to fulfil customers' concerns, but also aim to lower operational costs by reducing solid waste and energy/water consumption (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). In Greece, the number of hotels which

obtained the “green key” certificate had doubled between 2009 (52) and 2012 (116) representing, however, just 1.2% of the total number of hotels in Greece (SETE, 2013). The relevant consumer research has been rather marginal so far.

With regards to the antecedents of this type of ethical behaviour, Bohdanowicz (2005) had suggested that the increase of the customers' environmental awareness will force the hoteliers to develop and implement better green practices. Hospitality and marketing researchers agree, so far, that increasing customers' positive pre/post-purchasing decisions as well as their preceding attitudes are the key to increase future lodging customers' preference towards green hotels (Tilikidou et al., 2014; Han et al., 2010).

However, there have been some noticeable arguments with relevance to the existing gaps among positive attitudes, intentions and actual purchasing behaviour, particularly in the cases of socially desirable behaviours, such as pro-environmental or ethical behaviours (see among others: McGuinness et al., 1977; Kallgren and Wood 1986; Hines et al., 1987; McCarty and Shrum, 2001). As Jackson (2005, p. 46) wrote “having pro-social or pro-environmental values or attitudes is not the same thing as engaging in pro-social or pro-environmental behaviour”. In fact, anyone familiar with consumer behaviour would agree that deeper understanding of every link in the sequence of the chain in the decision making process does require specific research effort. Probably, we should not expect fruitful enough results by examining merely attitudes, such as whether people think that staying at a green hotel is bad or good, favourable or unfavourable, desirable or undesirable etc. (Tilikidou et al., 2014). It could be argued that the examination of deeper beliefs - regarding several specific aspects of staying at a green hotel - might contribute better to our so far, rather shallow, knowledge regarding this type of ethical behaviour.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the influence of beliefs and demographics on Greek customers' intentions to choose a green hotel over a conventional one next time travelling.

Managerial and academic benefits might hopefully be expected by this research effort. Marketing management strategies of green hotels or hotels, which would decide to “go green” in the future, might make productive use of the results in terms of designing their communicative campaigns. Also, a deeper understanding of the influential role of beliefs might serve to more integrated research designs in the future.

2. Relevant Literature

Choosing a green hotel should be understood as a part of the so-called ethical behaviour in tourism. Ethical tourism is nowadays an established term having its roots within the sustainable tourism development (Weeden, 2002). The WTO (2002) has defined sustainable tourism as a form of tourism that leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity together with life support systems. Also, it describes the development of sustainable tourism as a process that meets the needs of present tourists and host

communities while protecting and enhancing the requirements of the future generation. Although it is rather difficult to distinguish clearly between sustainable tourism and ethical tourism, it is to be clarified that ethical tourism is a concept that goes beyond the environmentally friendly tourism (Weeden, 2002). Ethical tourism should include consideration and responsibility not only towards the physical environment but also towards the human environment and the cultural heritage of the destination countries (Lansing and De Vries, 2007).

Specific examination of ethical consumer behaviour regarding tourism is at a relatively early stage (Cleverdon and Kalisch, 2000; Tallontire et al., 2001; Ritchie et al., 2005, p. 189). With reference to previous research data that concern tourists' ethical choices, Jaffe et al. (1993) two decades ago argued that customers would not have been willing to pay more just to fund green hotel policies. Watkins (1994) found that the 54% of consumers in US declared to be "environmentally minded travellers", who would prefer to stay at green hotels.

Later, Gronau and Brohlburg (2011) investigating the Cyprus' travellers found that although price remains the ultimate criterion when booking a hotel room, the majority of the customers are willing to pay a price premium for green accommodation, as green hotels are perceived to be of better quality. Lee et al. (2010) explored how to develop the image and branding of a green hotel using the concepts of cognitive, affective and overall images. Han et al. (2010) employed a refined TPB model and found that attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control positively affected intentions to stay at a green hotel, while intentions did not statistically differ between eco-friendly or eco-indifferent customers. A year later, Han et al. (2011) found that female customers of older age, who have favourable beliefs towards eco-friendly behaviours and positive images of green hotels, were more willing to stay at a green hotel, to recommend it and to pay more for it.

In Greece, there has been scant consumer research on the ethical tourism topic. The relevant efforts initially focused on the negative type of ethical tourism, i.e. boycotting unethical hotels (Tilikidou and Delitavrou, 2011; Tilikidou et al., 2013). There has also been a recent attempt (Tilikidou et al., 2014) to explore the role of attitudes and demographics simultaneously on the three types of customers' ethical behaviour in the hotel sector. Discussing upon their own findings Tilikidou et al., (2014) commented that the adoption of Han's et al. (2010) measure of attitudes might be considered as a limitation of their study. In that study, the attitudes were measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale. The respondents were asked to choose between two opposite positions with regards to their perceptions about staying at a green hotel, such as bad-good, favourable-unfavourable, positive-negative etc. The results indicated almost equal Means of all the attitudinal items. That approach was not able to add anything significant with relevance to the nature, the role and the impact of attitudes on consumers' intentions to visit green hotels. Therefore, it was considered to be interesting to get engaged in exploring specifically designed statements measured on the well known Likert scale and expressing more detailed consumers' feelings, beliefs or even constraints towards staying at a green hotel.

3. Research Objectives

- To explore Greek potential lodging customers' intentions to visit green hotels and estimate the assumed differences among general willingness to visit a green hotel, or planning to stay at a green hotel, or even more actually book a room at a green hotel when travelling.

- To examine the impact of beliefs and demographics on consumers' intentions to visit green hotels, assuming that specific beliefs towards green hotels might provide better evidence of impact on intentions to visit green hotels than previous research efforts managed to do.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sampling

A survey was conducted in the urban area of Thessaloniki, Greece during the autumn of 2012. The population was the households of the selected geographical area. The instrument was a structured questionnaire and respondents were approached through personal interviews. The sampling method was a combination of the two-stage area sampling and the systematic sampling (Tull and Hawkins, 1993, p. 544; Zikmund 1991, p. 471). The sampling target was set up to 450 households according to EL.STAT. (2012a).

4.2. Variables Measurement

Consumers' intentions to choose green hotels were measured by the variable Intentions to visit green hotels, which is a Guttman type variable of three items in a sequence: 1=I am willing to visit a green hotel when travelling, 2=I plan to stay at a green hotel when travelling, 3= I will book a green hotel to stay at, next time travelling. The Beliefs towards green hotels scale was originally developed for the requirements of this study. Fourteen (14) items, gathered by literature search, were entered into the scale after minor editing changes. A particular effort was made to select items that cover as many aspects as possible with reference to consumers' perceptions about staying at a green hotel.

The above presented variables were both measured on 7-point Likert type scales form 1=Very Much Disagree to 7=Very Much Agree.

Five demographical variables were added in the investigation, namely gender, age, education, income and occupation. The relevant scales were adopted from the EL.STAT. (EL. STAT., 2012b).

4.3. Data Analysis

The SPSS statistical package was employed to calculate descriptive statistics, to conduct bivariate analysis (One-Way ANOVA, Pearson's parametric correlations and Simple Regression) while the K-means Cluster Analysis was employed to explore the market segments of future lodging customers of green hotels.

5. Results

According to the Descriptive Statistics (Table 1) the dependent variable, namely Intentions to visit green hotels (Cronbach's alpha value $\alpha=0.838$) takes theoretical values from 3 to 21 and with a Mean of 13.89 indicated a rather moderate to high overall intentions of customers to visit a green hotel. The Beliefs towards green

hotels ($\alpha=0.775$) takes theoretical values from 14 to 98 and with a Mean of 60.42 indicated clearly positive beliefs towards green hotels.

The ONE-WAY ANOVAs indicated that there is a statistically significant ($p<0.005$) positive, linear relationship between Education and Intentions. No other demographic variable indicated a statistically significant relationship with the intentions of behaviour. Pearson's parametric correlations were then applied. Intentions to visit green hotels were found to be statistically significantly ($p<0.001$) and positively correlated with Beliefs towards green hotels at a moderate level ($r=0.470$). The regression analysis revealed that Beliefs towards green hotels can explain the 21.9% (adjusted R square) of the variance in Intentions to visit green hotels. The resulting equation is:

$$\text{Intentions} = 2.904 + 0.470 \text{ Beliefs}$$

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and clusters of "Intentions & Beliefs"

		Whole	Cluster centres		
		Sample	Cluster	Cluster	Cluster
		Items	1	2	3
		Means	26.04%	34.19%	39.77%
Intentions to visit green hotels ($\alpha=0.838$, Mean=13.89, Std. dev.= 4.303)					
VI1	I am willing to visit a green hotel when travelling	5.19	3.89	6.24	5.13
VI2	I plan to stay at a green hotel when travelling	4.35	2.96	5.22	4.50
VI3	I will book a green hotel to stay at, next time travelling	4.36	2.85	5.25	4.58
Beliefs towards green hotels ($\alpha=0.775$, Mean=60.42, Std. dev.=11.124)					
B 01	Staying at a green hotel makes me believe that I protect our environment	5.54	4.51	6.27	5.60
B 02	Staying at a green hotel makes me more socially responsible	5.43	4.32	6.38	5.33
B 03	Staying at a green hotel offers experience of a healthy, environmentally friendly guestroom	5.48	4.54	6.16	5.51
B 04	I perform environmentally friendly practices by staying at a green hotel	5.57	4.46	6.46	5.53
B 05	I enjoy environmentally friendly products and healthy amenities by staying at a green hotel	5.51	4.51	6.35	5.43
B 06	I eat fresh and healthy food by staying at a green hotel	5.38	4.31	6.38	5.23
B 07	I have reduced expenses by staying at a green hotel	3.59	2.72	4.53	3.35
B 08	My family (or relatives) think (s) I should stay at a green hotel when travelling	4.45	2.46	6.00	4.42
B 09	My friends think I should stay at a	4.35	2.22	5.95	4.36

B 10	green hotel when travelling My colleagues (or co-workers) think I should stay at a green hotel when travelling	4.13	2.15	5.80	4.00
B 11*	Staying at a green hotel is expensive	2.76	2.28	3.17	2.72
B 12*	Finding a green hotel when travelling takes time and effort	2.37	2.26	2.39	2.43
B 13*	Location of a green hotel needs to be convenient	1.88	2.02	1.72	1.93
B 14*	My company/school/others that pay for travel expenses make me stay at a certain hotel	3.98	4.08	3.09	4.68

*reverse coded items

In an effort to obtain more detailed information with reference to the green hotel customers' segment in the Greek market, the K-Means cluster analysis (Ward and Euclidean distance) was utilized; this technique classifies cases into relatively homogeneous groups, indicating distinct for each group degree of involvement in the behaviour under examination (Malhotra, 1999, p. 610). All items of the multi-item variables of Intentions and Beliefs were entered in the analysis. Using iterations, a number of defective cases were eliminated and the most interpretable solution indicated three clusters (Table 1). The first cluster gathered 112 cases (26.04%) indicating low scores in all items and thus it was named Reluctant; the second one joined 147 cases (34.19%) indicating higher than their counterparts scores and thus it was named Willing; and the third one joined 171 cases (39.77%) indicating medium scores and thus it was named Hesitant.

Of course, the most promising cluster is the second one, which represents the market segment of those consumers that are more likely (than their counterparts) to search, find and book a room at a green hotel. Taking a closer look at the Means of each item in the second cluster, it is observed that: with reference to their behavioural intentions to visit green hotels, these future customers almost absolutely agree that they are willing to visit green hotels (VI1) while they just agree that they would plan (VI2) and then actually book a room at a green hotel (VI3). With reference to their beliefs, these consumers were found to be almost certain that when staying at a green hotel they perform environmentally friendly practices (B04), they eat fresh and healthy food (B06), feel more socially responsible (B02), enjoy environmentally friendly products and healthy amenities (B05) and protect the environment in overall (B01). It is to be mentioned that the items B 11, 12, 13 and 14 in the scale are reversed coded as expressing rather negative beliefs towards green hotels (Table 1). A close look at their cluster centres indicates some fruitful points. It seems that the main respondents' constrain is the location of a green hotel, which needs to be convenient (see B13, Cluster 2, Table 1). Also, these future guests believe that green hotels are more expensive than conventional hotels and that it takes time and effort to find them (B11 and B12). Further, respondents seem

rather indecisive whether their employer (company/school), in case he paid for their expenses, would prefer them to stay at certain hotels (B14). However, this last item certainly needs improvement in further editing the phrasing.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this study indicated that future hotel customers seem more ready to express their willingness to visit a green hotel than to plan or make an actual effort to book a room at it. Three clusters of potential customers of green hotels were indicated through K-means clustering, namely Reluctant (26.04%), Willing (34.19%) and Hesitant (39.77%). The expected gap in the research of socially desirable behaviours between beliefs and behavioural intentions was verified in this study.

With regards to beliefs, the idea to develop a specific scale of beliefs towards green hotels seems appropriate enough to be further advanced. So far, the respondents' beliefs were found positive with regards to the environmental, social and health benefits of a green hotel. However, the location of a green hotel is one of the most strong concerns while people seem to believe that green hotels are difficult to find and more expensive than the conventional hotels.

It was also found that the education level relates positively and linearly with intentions to visit a green hotel. These findings are totally in line with evidence of studies in the same geographical area that concern ecologically conscious consumer behaviours of all types (see Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2008 and 2012; Tilikidou, 2012) as well as with one study that concerns ethical consumer behaviour towards hotels (Tilikidou et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the above mentioned studies also indicated a certain positive link between income and Greek pro-environmental consumers. In the results of this study no clear evidence of a statistically significant relationship between income and intentions was found, although respondents were found to believe that green hotels are rather expensive. Also, it is not safe to conclude that Greeks would be ready to pay more in order to stay at a green hotel like Cyprians in Gronau and Brohlburg's (2011) study were found to be. Further, no evidence was found with relevance to the age and gender of consumers in the "Willing" cluster like that in Han's et al. (2011) study.

7. Limitations and Implications

There are of course some sound limitations in this study, which has been exploratory in nature. Firstly, we should be careful with the generalization of the results to other populations, as this survey was conducted in the Thessaloniki urban area. Secondly, the Beliefs' scale is still at the early development stages; it does need improvement in phrasing as well as in reliability and validity assessment. Thirdly, we had better take into consideration a social desirability effect in the results, especially in the size of the "Willing" cluster. Last but not least, it is to be underlined that exploring future customers' intentions (not their actually performed past behaviour) confined our understanding of the insights of this type of ethical consumption. Although Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) keep suggesting that studying behavioural intentions might lead to behaviour itself, the absence of the actual behavioural variables in this study restricts the explanatory power of the results. Further research is needed in order to understand better the linkages between knowledge, beliefs and behaviour towards green hotels. The employment of Ajzen (1985) TPB might be a very inspiring path to follow if past behavioural experiences were added to the model.

As any other consumer research study, this study too aimed to provide further, hopefully innovative suggestions to the host communities. Indeed, the outcomes provided some evidence, which although preliminary, if studied carefully, might highlight useful information and guidelines to the green hotels' managers. Certain implications should be taken into consideration, similar to those that have been many times suggested in ecological marketing with reference to the same geographical area (Tilikidou, 2012). In line to the ecological products and services that should be competitive in terms of price and quality to the conventional ones in order to be successful in the market, a green hotel too should be located at a convenient place, should be reasonably priced and adequately promoted. It is also suggested that the Green Key attribute should be added to the searching criteria of the travel internet searching engines. The Green Hotel Association should take care of this input.

Further, this study indicated that examining specific beliefs towards staying at a green hotel provided more fruitful results in comparison to previous research results, for example those published by Tiliakidou et al., (2014) or by Han et al. (2010). Green hotel managers should utilize these present findings in an integrated and creative promotional mix to maximize the green image as a competitive advantage. Although, as mentioned above, the Beliefs' scale needs improvement, it is already clear that certain implications can be extracted even by its present, exploratory examination. For example, it was highlighted that the communication campaigns of green hotels should target to maximize travellers' positive beliefs towards the environmentally protective results of a green hotel function on the environment as well as on people's health; at the same time creative messages should minimize negative perceptions that a green hotel is usually inconveniently located, difficult to find and expensive. On the opposite, potential customers should be properly informed by creative advertisement messages that visiting a green hotel is easy-to-find and book, very competitive in terms of pricing, an extraordinarily fabulous experience in terms of a healthy, ecologically friendly guestroom, amenities and food, when at the same time it does offer to its customers the opportunity of making a difference towards social responsibility.

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