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# GREEN HOTELS AND GENERATION Y IN GREECE IS IT ON BOARD?

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Environmental awareness causes positive attitudes to the public towards eco-friendly activities, and engages people in ecological behaviours in their everyday lives. In this vein, hotel customers' are becoming more and more ecologically conscious and preferring eco-friendly products and services and firms that favour environmental practices. The paper aims at exploring eco-friendly decision-making processes and intentions to choose a green hotel.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A structured questionnaire has been used to investigate environmental concerns, eco-friendly attitudes and activities, awareness, overall image, intention to pay more and intention to visit a green hotel.

**Findings:** Findings reveal that even potential customers' are highly environmentally conscious, they are not fully aware about green hotels and do not always intent to visit a green hotel. Hotels should communicate more, green hotel practices.

**Originality/value:** Customers' attitudes towards intention to visit a green hotel are different among various geographic locations. Moreover, age plays a significant role. Thus, the study focuses on attitudes of generation Y in Greece. Hotels should be aware of customers buying behaviour towards green practices.

**Keywords:** green hotels; intention to visit; eco-friendly attitudes and activities; intention to pay more; awareness; overall image.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, as global environmental concerns are growing nearly every industry embraces sustainable business practices (Rahman et al., 2012). Compared to other industries, hospitality industry does not over-pollute the environment and does consume huge amounts of non-renewable resources, even if many of the services provided are highly resource intensive (Bohdanowicz and Martinac, 2003; Chan and Wong, 2006). Despite this fact, social responsibility has grown in the hotel sector dramatically (Han and Chan, 2013) and hotels have started to carry their environmental and social obligations and to incorporate sustainability efforts and practices into their daily operations (Smerecnik and Andersen, 2011). Sustainability efforts “refer to incorporating sustainability thinking into all its areas of discipline — supply chain, marketing, finance and product development — as well as devising new business models and strategy grounded in sustainability” (Kiron et al., 2013). Sustainability in hospitality industry involves wise use and conservation of resources in order to maintain their long-term viability, minimisation of negative impacts and maximisation of positive impact (Kapiki, 2012), demonstration of commitment to the community and support of social equality (Albert, 2014).

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). Going green is an attractive trait for companies. They go green for a variety of reasons additional to the protection of environment like legitimization, facing public scrutiny, improve public image, increase brand value, general social good, gain additional edge over competitors, improved investor relations, lowering operating costs, generating a profit, strengthening employee organisational commitment and pleasing the customer (Bansal and Roth, 2000; Choi et al., 2009; Gan, 2006; Graci and Kuehnel, 2010; Jhavar et al., 2012; Juholin, 2004; Roberts, 1996).

Thus, one important reason for a hotel to go green is the hotel guest. Guests’ environmental awareness and concerns have rapidly increased after 1990 (Lee et al., 2011) and they understand that their purchasing decisions influence the environment (Lee et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important for them to choose a hotel that integrates the principles of sustainable development and contribute to the preservation the environment (Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010).

Generation Y also known as Millennials, are people born between from 1980–1995 to 2000 according to another group of scientists (PwC, 2013). Generation Ys are civic-minded and socially conscious individuals, and consumers (Kim et al., 2011) want quality goods, are brand loyal and willing to pay more for brand names (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). A study conducted by Maritz Poll (2007) focusing on Generation Y consumers’ found that the majority (77%) of Generation Y claimed that they care about the environment.

The study aims at investigating consumers’ perceptions about green hotels and intentions to choose a green hotel. More specifically it examines environmental concerns, eco-friendly activities and attitudes, awareness, overall image, intention to pay more and intention to visit a green hotel. As age is an important determinant of buying behaviours (Han et al., 2009) and of the environmental purchasing process, it takes only into consideration Generation Y perceptions and attitudes.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Environmental concern*

In this date and time, it is evident that people concern about environmental problems (Takács-Sánta, 2007) and the majority of them have realised that their purchasing behaviour has a direct

impact on many ecological problems (Laroche et al., 2001). Environmental concern can be defined as “a general concept that can refer to feelings about many different green issues” (Zimmer et al., 1994, p.64) and according to Dunlap and Jones (2002, p.485) it indicates “the degree to which people are aware of problems regarding the environment and support efforts to solve them and/or indicate the willingness to contribute personally to their solution”. Previous studies have investigated the relation between environment concern and intention to buy green products. Laroche et al. (2001) claimed that consumers who are concerned about the environment are trying to purchase only eco-friendly products. Chan (1999) and Vining and Ebreo (1990) and found that knowledge about environmental issues is a significant predictor of environmentally friendly behaviour. Mostafa (2006) who investigated the influence of various attitudinal and psychographic factors on the green purchase behaviour found that environmental concern was positively related to consumers’ intention to purchase green products. A recent study conducted by Braga Junior et al. (2014) shown that consumers do not demonstrate a direct relationship between environmental concern and declared retail purchase of green products. Khaola et al. (2014) examined the relationships among customers’ environmental concern, attitudes towards green products and green purchase intentions. According to their findings environmental concern affects green purchase intentions indirectly through attitude towards green products, which in turn directly affects green purchase intentions. Consumers with high environmental concerns do not always buy green products, however they are more likely to make eco-friendly purchasing decisions (Kim and Han, 2010).

### *Eco-friendly activities and attitudes*

The last few decades, recognising the seriousness of environmental problems like environmental disasters, damage resulting from the use of various disposable products and environmental unfriendly production processes, an increasing numbers of individuals are engaging in eco-friendly activities (Han et al., 2009, 2010; Kalafatis et al., 1999). Eco-friendly activities or environmentally friendly activities, such as recycling activity or environmental purchasing are activities that are not harmful to the environment. Han et al. (2010) argued that hotel customers’ eco-friendly activities in everyday life did not have a significant impact on hotel customers’ decision-making process. However, customers that adopt eco-friendly activities in their everyday lives are more willing to make environmentally friendly purchasing decisions. Noor and Kumar (2014) who investigated impact of eco-friendly activities and eco-friendly attitudes on travellers’ intention to Choose Green Hotels in Malaysia, found a significant positive relationship of eco-friendly activities and intention to stay at a green hotel among tourists.

### *Overall image*

The creation of a positive green image is a necessity for firms operating in environmentally sensitive industries like hospitality industry (Amores-Salvado et al., 2014) as it may have impact on buying behaviours. Overall image is consumer’s sum of beliefs, thoughts and impressions and has an important role in predicting consumer’s favourable/unfavourable decisions (Han and Kim, 2010). Han et al. (2009, p.520) defined overall image as the “hotel customers’ overall perceptions of a green hotel, formed by processing information and by prior or vicarious knowledge about a green hotel and its attributes”. Han et al. (2009) found that the overall image of a green hotel is positively associated with intention to buy a green hotel product and Lee et al. (2010) that green hotel’s overall image, favourably enhances behavioural intentions, including willingness to pay

a premium, word-of-mouth and revisiting intentions. Overall image is less powerfully associated with willingness to pay a premium thus can be attributed to selfish altruism. Han and Kim (2010) also found that overall image has positive effect on revisiting intentions.

### *Willingness to pay more*

A positive relationship may also exist between customers' environmental concerns and willingness to pay more for companies' green initiatives (Kang et al., 2012). Laroche et al. (2001) claimed that consumers who consider that today's ecological problems are severe are willing to pay more for green products. Also Coddington (1990) and Suchard and Polonsky (1991) mentioned that environmentally conscious consumers are willing to pay more for ecologically compatible or green products. Regarding the hospitality industry, findings are contradictory. Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) found that the consumers would prefer to use lodgings that have adapted green practices but are not willing to pay extra for these services, while Han and Chan (2013) claimed in their study that the majority of responders are willing to pay more for green hotel rooms despite the fact that some of them did not understand why green hotels cost more.

### *Awareness*

A consumer must be aware of the existence of green hotels, their practices and services provided before the intention to visit a green hotel can arise. Measures for awareness have been extensively used to investigate advertising and marketing effectiveness (Yuan and Jang, 2008). If people do not know what are green hotels and what are the services provided there, they will not visit them nor have willingness to pay more. Awareness measures are powerful predictors of consumer choice behaviour (Holden, 1993), thus raising awareness about green hotels is crucial.

## **Methodology**

An empirical research study was conducted using an online survey. A link to facebook profiles of the researchers notified users about the online questionnaire website. Users willing to participate visited a tailor made website and responded to the questionnaire. Year of birth was recorded, as the study takes into consideration Generation Y perceptions and attitudes. From all questionnaires that were received, only those of responders in the age bracket of 1980–2000 were admitted. Finally, 159 completed and usable questionnaires were received.

The questionnaire used in this study was created by adopted or adapted constructs from previous studies. Seven point Likert scales are used ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and from very negative to very positive. The questionnaire consists of seven parts, usually called constructs or dimensions:

1. environmental concerns;
2. eco-friendly activities;
3. eco-friendly attitudes;
4. awareness;
5. overall image;
6. willingness to pay more and
7. intention to visit a green hotel.

Constructs and items used are presented at the appendix.

## FINDINGS

The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was tested by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The value of alpha for each dimension displayed in Table 1 is sufficiently high ( $>0.70$ ).

**Table 1 Cronbach's alphas for the questionnaire dimensions**

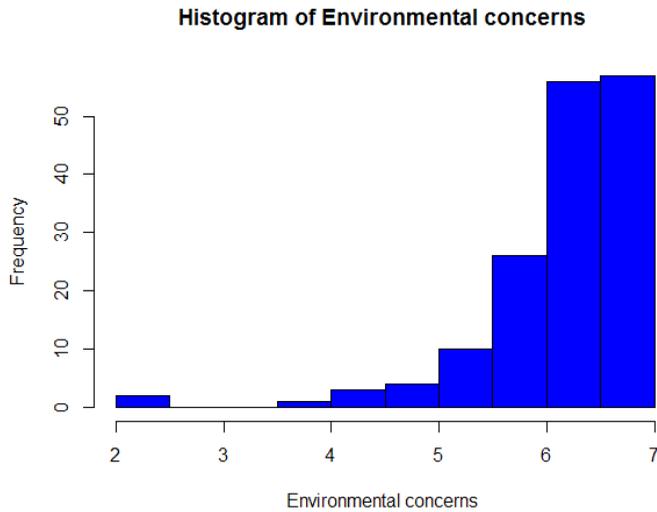
| Dimensions                       | Cronbach's alpha |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Environmental concerns           | 0.90             |
| Eco-friendly activities          | 0.87             |
| Eco-friendly attitudes           | 0.85             |
| Awareness                        | 0.97             |
| Overall image                    | 0.86             |
| Willingness to pay more          | 0.73             |
| Intention to visit a green hotel | 0.83             |

According to the findings participants are highly environmentally conscious as the mean values of questions that investigate environmental concerns are very high and mean values range from 5.71 to 6.49. The bigger score was recorded at the question 'Humans must live in harmony with nature in order to survive'. As time passes knowledge of individuals is enhanced, and made them more aware that life on planet is special and worthy of being conserved. Responders seem that they have a holistic worldview where all livings are vitally connected and the natural environment should be in balance in order to survive.

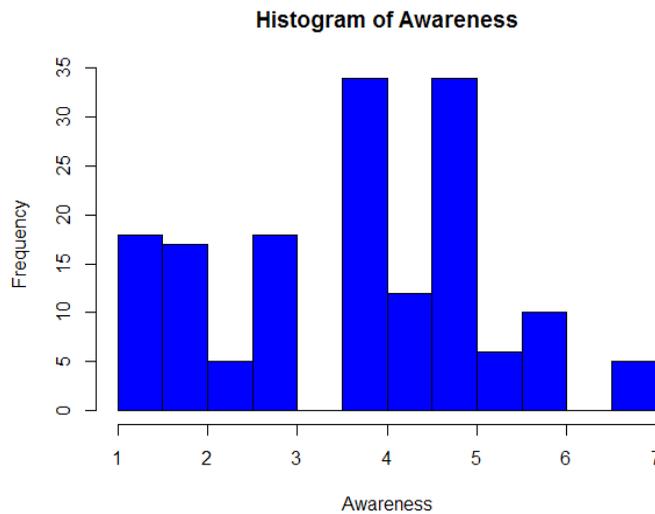
Regarding eco-friendly activities and attitudes participants have positive attitudes. They strongly believe that recycling will reduce pollution (mean 6.09) and that is important to save natural resources (mean 6.30). Their eco-friendly activities seen that are aligned with their attitudes. It can be claimed that responders do not believe that recycling is too much trouble for them and moreover they do not bother keeping separate piles of garbage for recycling, as mean value at these questions are 2.72 and 2.58, respectively (the questions were reverse coded).

Participants although have high environmental concerns (Figure 1), it seems that they are not aware about green hotels (average 3.76) and their answers have high variability with standard deviation 1.54. These results are demonstrated by the histogram of the Awareness dimension in Figure 2. Garlick (2007, p.8) defining the Generation Y customer wrote "Gen Y is a savvy generation who knows what they want and if not, can rapidly find the answer using technology". In this vein, green hotel marketers should communicate green campaigns to their potential customers and emphasise on the importance of various environmental issues. For green hotels, new technology and social media provide a compelling channel to communicate with generation Y consumers their practices as they are environmentalists and open-minded enough in order to listen. As a wide variety of social media sites exist, hoteliers may concentrate their attention and marketing efforts on vertically focused networks on social responsibility and the environment.

Furthermore, Willingness to pay has essentially lower average (3.85) than the intention to visit (5.13) a green hotel. This empirical finding is verified by a paired sample *t*-test which has *p*-value  $<2.2^{-16}$ . In order to enhance generation Y's intention to visit a green hotel property, hotel managers should pay more attention to find and use ways to increase positive attitude. Green properties should differentiate themselves from the similar non-green properties and promote their commitment to various ecologically practices. By doing so, customers would gain stronger beliefs that they can be more socially responsible for protecting the environment, if they choose to stay at a green hotel.



**Figure 1** Histogram of environmental concerns dimension



**Figure 2** Histogram of awareness dimension

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The primary aim of this paper was to examine the factors involved in eco-friendly decision-making processes and intentions to choose a green hotel. To enable further understanding within the green debate, a generational approach was undertaken, thus generation Y's attitudes towards green hotels were investigated. Although generation Y consumers are highly environmentally conscious a clear gap exists in awareness about green hotels. As young consumers are becoming more and more aware of environmental issues the hotel industry should not only adopt green practices but also to communicate them, create awareness and educate consumers for conservation of resources. Green marketing strategies should be adopted by green hotels in order to position them distinctly in the market place. The study points out that generation Y consumers are not willing to pay more for environmental friendly practices despite a positive disposition towards the environment. In this vein hotel industry should adapt pricing policies to customers' needs and wants and keep prices of green hotels at the same level with conventional-hotel prices.

In the future a Structural Equation Modelling approach should be used to investigate the relationship among the proposed constructs and the intention to visit a green hotel.

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## APPENDIX

### *Environmental concern (Adopted from Chen and Tang (2009))*

I am extremely worried about the state of the world's environment and what it will mean for my.  
 Mankind is severely abusing the environment.  
 When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.  
 The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.  
 Humans must live in harmony with nature in order to survive.  
 I think environmental problems are very important.  
 I think environmental problems cannot be ignored.  
 I think we should care about environmental problems.

### *Eco-friendly activities (Adopted from Han et al. (2011))*

Recycling is too much trouble.  
 Keeping separate piles of garbage for recycling is too much trouble.  
 Recycling will reduce pollution.  
 Recycling is important to save natural resources.

### *Overall image (Adopted from Han et al. (2009))*

Overall image for staying in a green hotel is  
 Overall image I have about a green hotel is  
 Overall, I have a good image about a green hotel to spend a night.

### *Awareness*

I am aware of green hotels.  
 I am aware of services provided at a green hotel.  
 I am aware of the practices that a green hotel adopts.

### *Willingness to pay more (Adopted from Han et al. (2009))*

It is acceptable to pay more for a hotel that engages in green practices.  
 I am willing to spend extra in order to stay at an environmentally friendly hotel.

### *Intention to visit a green hotel (Adopted from Han et al. (2010))*

I am willing to stay at a green hotel when travelling.  
 I plan to stay at a green hotel when travelling.  
 I will make an effort to stay at a green hotel when travelling.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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