

THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS GREEN, SUBJECTIVE NORMS, PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL, AND PERCEIVED VALUE ON BEHAVIORAL INTENTION AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY MORE TOWARDS THAI GREEN HOTELS

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Abstract

This paper aimed to examine Thai consumers' attitudes towards green hotels and the effect of these attitudes on their behavioral intention including visit intentions (VI), word of mouth intention (WOMI), and willingness to pay more (WPM). To complete this study, a quantitatively led mixed methods research was employed. Target respondents were Thai customers aged 18 or over having stayed in green hotels in Thailand. A questionnaire was collected from 385 customers nationwide and 5 of them were then interviewed. The quantitative data were analyzed by using structured equation model (SEM) while the data from the interview were analyzed by using qualitative content analysis (QCA). The result from the questionnaire showed that green attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived value all had a positive effect on behavioral intention towards green hotels. Similarly, subjective norms did have a positive effect on willingness to pay more for green hotels. However, green attitudes and perceived value did not have any significant effect on willingness to pay more for green hotels. Surprisingly, perceived behavioral control had a significantly negative effect on both behavioral intention towards green hotels and willingness to pay more for green hotels. Moreover, the result from the interview supported the quantitative findings. Although consumers were willing to stay in green hotels, environmental impact was not a major factor in their choice of hotel. Hence, they were not willing to pay more for green hotels.

Keywords : Attitudes towards green, Willingness to pay more, Perceive value, Green hotels

Introduction

This study is particularly concerned with green hotels in Thailand. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) announced a sustainable tourism policy in 2010 called the 7 Greens, in which one element was promotion of green hotels (TAT, 2010). This plan promoted the Green Leaf Certification, an ASEAN-wide classification system designed to communicate about the

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hotel's green practices. Hotels could earn between one and five green leaves depending on their extent of green operations and practices; for example, a hotel with a basic linen reuse program and water-saving faucets may earn one green leaf, while a purpose-built green hotel utilizing energy savings and generation and employing other methods of reducing environmental impact may earn five leaves (TAT, 2010). Very few studies have assessed the responses of Thai consumers to green hotels, although some studies have been conducted in Thailand. One such study used a 360° assessment to examine the viewpoints of key stakeholders, including visitors, in the 7 Greens sustainable tourism policy (Muangasame & McKercher, 2015). The authors' research included a survey of hotel visitors, one of the main stakeholder groups, along with other assessments of the program based on the viewpoints of hoteliers, policymakers, and others. The hotel visitor group was primarily international, but about 9% of respondents were Thai domestic tourists. They found that from the visitor perspective, the sustainable tourism activities, including green hotel initiatives, had a powerful theoretical attraction and the ideals and goals of the programs received high levels of support. However, in practice, the authors stated, there was not as strong a support for the specific measures and practices that were put into place. Instead, these policies did not seem to have a clear connection to the goals (Muangasame & McKercher, 2015). While this difference in support for the principles and lack of support for the implementation could explain an attitude-behavior gap (Ha-Brookshire & Norum, 2011), the authors did not explain the actual consumer responses or focus on the Thai visitors. This makes it difficult to draw any conclusions specifically about consumer behavioral responses from this study, although it does provide support for the emotional and cognitive responses. Since this is the only study that could be found that addressed Thai domestic tourism in the context of green hotels, there is a significant gap in the research, particularly given the importance of domestic tourism in Thailand.

There are two types of research benefits that could result from this study. One of these benefits is academic. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a longstanding model that has been used in many hospitality and tourism studies, including several that have specifically addressed green hotel behavior (e.g. Han & Kim, 2010; Han, 2015). Other authors have also extended the model in various ways in order to accommodate the unusual situation of green hotels (Chen & Tung, 2014). At the same time, the TPB has been increasingly called into question as a useful model for decision making, especially in some contexts where there is not much evidence that it is effective (such as private decisions) (Sniehotta, Pousseau, & Araújo-Soares, 2014). Thus, this research has an important theoretical role to play, by considering the effects of extending the TPB to include context-specific factors. This research can be considered in context both as a further contribution to the literature on green hotels and the body of evidence for application of TPB in the tourism industry. In both cases, the research findings will provide evidence for future researchers in this area. The research also has a potential practical

implication. Thailand is one of the world's top tourism economies, and domestic tourism accounts for about 30% of the sector's GDP contribution (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). However, domestic tourism and domestic tourist preferences are poorly understood in Thailand, with most government efforts and even academic research focusing on international tourists. This research will provide Thai hoteliers with more information about their domestic hotel guests, such as their perceptions of green hotels and attitudes toward them, and the influence these attitudes have on their consumer responses. This information could be used to refine green hotel features and services to improve Thai hotel guest response.

Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine Thai consumer attitudes toward green hotels and the effect of these attitudes on their consumer behavioral intention, including visit intentions (VI), word of mouth intention (WOMI), and willingness to pay more (WPM). The preliminary research established a theoretical framework based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, initially proposed by Ajzen (1991), and extended based on findings regarding perceived hedonic and utilitarian value (hotel values). The aims and objectives are oriented toward describing and explaining characteristics of Thai consumers with hotel experience. Based on this aim and the research problem, there have been several objectives established. The objectives are oriented toward describing and explaining characteristics of Thai consumers with hotel experience. These objectives will be accomplished through a combination of theoretical review (Literature Review) and primary research (consumer survey). Researchers set the following objectives:

1. To examine Thai consumer perceptions and attitudes toward green hotels.
2. To examine existing consumer behaviors toward green hotels.
3. To determine the impact of an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (including green attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and hotel perceived value) on behavioral intention (VI, WOMI), and willingness to pay more (WPM).
4. To provide recommendations based on the primary study and literature review to improve green hotel services in Thailand.

Research Methodology

This study was a mixed methods, which qualitative research was conducted after the quantitative research and used to support and explain the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The focus of the qualitative research was explaining consumer intentions and perceptions for green hotels in Thailand, expanding on the quantitative study's findings. The target population of the quantitative and qualitative research were Thai consumers (age 18 and over) who have experience staying in a green hotel at least once. For quantitative of this

study, a convenience sampling technique was used to select a sample of at least 400 hotel consumers. The questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part gathers demographic information of the respondents such as age, gender, education level, personal income and marital status. The second part asks about consumer behavior in hotel sector such as frequency of traveling per year, companion for traveling, information channels about a green hotel and willingness to stay at a green hotel. The third and fourth parts ask questions related to all variables of an extended TPB and consumer response toward a green hotel mentioned above. The questions used in these parts were adopted from previous studies that investigated consumer behavior in a green hotel, which include Han, et al. (2009), Han, et al. (2010), Han and Chan (2013). The qualitative study was to provide more detailed information about the quantitative findings. Data was collected from participants using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews use an interview guide, with questions typically selected from the literature or based on the specific questions of the research (Galletta, 2013). The data analysis technique chosen for the interviews was qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is a flexible analytical technique that systematically extracts and explains meaning from the content of narratives, texts, or images (Schreier, 2012).

Results

The quantitative result, there were eight hypotheses that were proposed for testing with the research model. The final goal of the quantitative research was to examine the evidence for each of the hypotheses and to accept or reject the hypotheses based on the evidence. Hypotheses are accepted based on the significance ($p < 0.05$), with the estimated regression coefficients evaluated for their relative contribution, but not being significant for the regression acceptance. Coefficients used for acceptance are those from the modification index-adjusted model, which as discussed above was the best fitted of the three models tested showed in Figure 1.

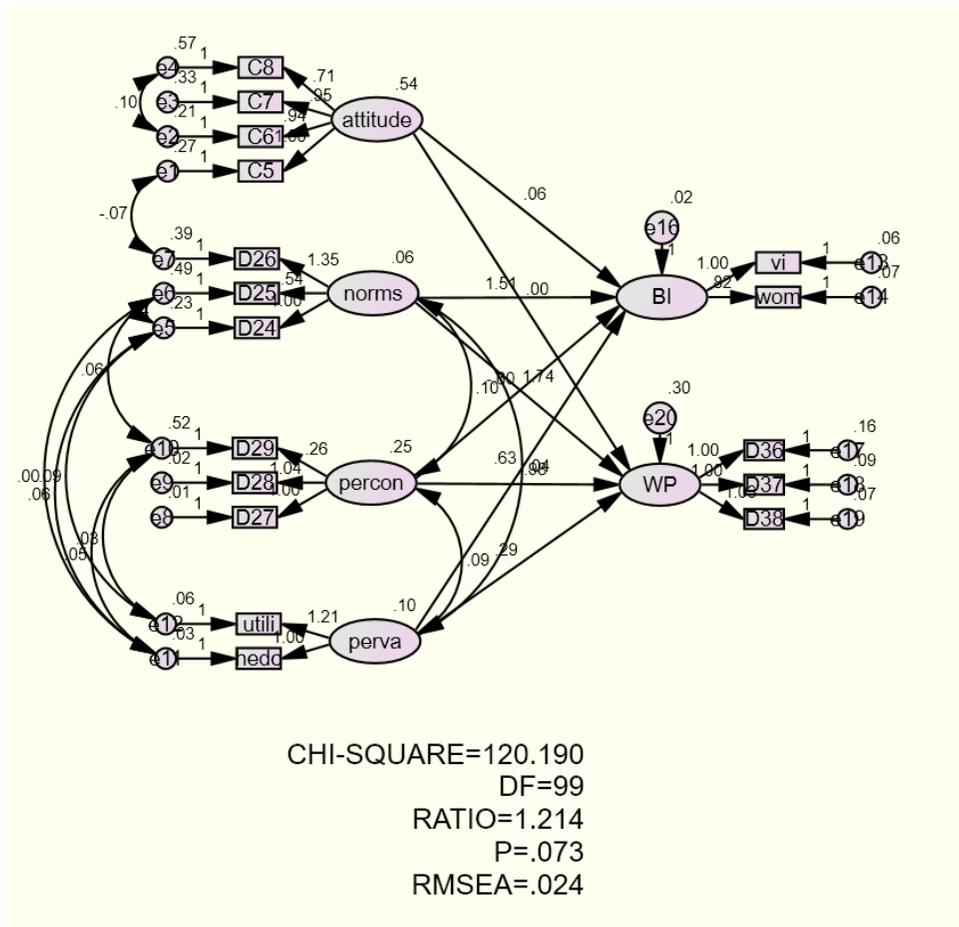


Figure 1: Modification index-adjusted research WP model

In summary, significant positive effects on behavioral intentions toward green hotels included green attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived value. Consumer perceived behavioral control did have a significant effect on behavioral intentions, but this effect was negative rather than positive, leading to the rejection of H5. There were significant positive effects of subjective norms on willingness to pay more for green hotels. However, other hypotheses regarding willingness to pay more were not accepted. Green attitudes and perceived value did not have a significant effect on willingness to pay more. Finally, consumer perceived behavioral control had a significant relationship, but this relationship was negative. These results show that the research model was a better predictor of behavioral intentions than willingness to pay more.

The qualitative result, respondents were asked to identify their attitudes toward environmental conservation. In general, participants had a high level of awareness toward the

environment and environmental problems such as pollution, global warming, and excess waste and water usage. Next, respondents were asked how they select hotels and whether they choose to stay in a green hotel, and what conditions might determine this choice, including who makes the decision. And then respondents were also asked whether if green hotel request you to pay more in order to environment protection, would you like to stay at the green hotel? This question represents willingness to pay more (WPM) for a green hotel.

In summary, participants had high levels of environmental concern and positive attitudes to green hotels, and they generally indicated they were willing to stay in green hotels. Some of the respondents were highly likely to stay in a green hotel, while other stated that they might, depending on their travel companions' preferences. However, they were much less willing to pay more for a green hotel than an equivalent conventional hotel. This strongly supports the quantitative finding, which indicated that consumers' attitudes had a much stronger effect on the consumer's behavioral intentions than their willingness to pay more.

Conclusions and Discussion

This research was focused on consumer behavioral responses to green hotels. By using the TPB and perceived value in a single framework, it incorporated different cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the consumer behavioral intention. It also examined several different consumer behaviors, including visit intentions, word of mouth intentions, and willingness to pay more. The empirical findings showed that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived value had a significant, positive effect on behavioral intentions (visit intentions and word of mouth intentions). Surprisingly, perceived behavioral control had a negative effect on behavioral intentions toward the green hotel, which was contrary to the standard behavioral model (TPB). The only factor of the four studied that had a significant effect on willingness to pay more was perceived behavioral control. Once again, this effect was negative. The results of this study, which seemed straightforward from the literature review, turned out to be more complicated than expected, especially with regard to perceived behavioral control. It is possible that green hotels, which are perceived as both less comfortable (delivering lower hedonic value) and potentially misleading (using green washing as a marketing technique) are considered by consumers as an inferior good compared to conventional hotels. Therefore, consumers that do not have a high level of environmental concern may not prefer green hotels, and consumers are not willing to pay more for these green hotels. Thus, it seems that recreating a green hotel experience for mass tourism, where tourists would have varying levels of environmental concern but uniformly high levels of concern for comfort and hedonic experience, would require improving the hotels to compete with conventional hotels experientially.

In conclusion, the consumer decision for green hotels is a complex decision that depends on the social environment, perceived value (especially hedonic value), and behavioral

control among other factors. In fact, the consumer's own attitude toward green hotels had the lowest effect on the choice of a green hotel and their willingness to pay more for that hotel.

Suggestion

The most important implications of this research for practice are for green hotel managers and owners and tourism policymakers in Thailand. There are two key implications for both these groups, which need to be addressed.

The first implication is that consumers do not have a high willingness to pay more for green hotels than for the equivalent quality conventional hotel. This unwillingness to pay a price premium was reinforced both through the quantitative results, which showed that only subjective norms (social pressure) created such a willingness, and through the qualitative results, which showed that in general consumers were not willing to pay more. This strongly suggests that if green hotels are to become a mass market offering rather than a niche tourism activity, it is essential that they either can be provided at prices close to conventional hotels of the same grade, or that such hotels offer enhanced quality, comfort, or other hedonic or utilitarian value to make them more attractive than equivalent conventional hotels. Changing consumer attitudes or offering greater choice of green hotels is not likely to make a difference, since consumer attitudes were not associated with willingness to pay more and perceived behavioral control had a negative effect. Thus, the hotel offering itself must be modified to increase consumer willingness to pay more.

The second implication relates to tourism policymaking and marketing. The consumer descriptive statistics showed that social media, followed by company websites and travel websites, were the most important sources of information about green hotels. This is consistent with the green hotel's current position as a niche market, and it offers insights into how marketing can be most effectively accomplished. Thus, policymakers and marketers should focus on online marketing as a means of communicating effectively with potential tourists.

While the discussion above identified some specific questions that could be explored in further research, the literature also turned up two broad areas where there are gaps in the academic understanding of green hotels and consumer choice. Surprisingly, one of the most underdeveloped areas of the tourism literature is on domestic travel, especially in Thailand but also more generally. This limitation applies to previous research on green hotels; for example, some of the few studies on green hotels in Thailand only included about 9% Thai domestic tourists in their samples (Muangasame & McKercher, 2015; Plangpramool, 2012). While other studies, such as the study by Pianroj (2012) examined regional tourism and included other Asian tourists, as this study took place in Thailand it still constituted international tourism. Thus, there is very little evidence for domestic tourism or the response of domestic tourists to green hotels, either in Thailand or elsewhere. This is highly important because of the potential cultural

differences that could lead, for example, to varying importance of individual attitudes and subjective norms. This study has begun to fill this gap by focusing on domestic tourists, but there is still much more information to be collected before the domestic tourist can truly be understood. In particular, it is not always clear how domestic and international tourists may vary in their preferences and decision bases. This could be an opportunity for comparative research, either in Thailand or elsewhere that examines differences between domestic and international tourists.

Another area where there is a noticeable void in the literature that remains after this study is a comprehensive explanation for the attitude-behavioral gap in relation to green hotels and other sustainable tourism activities, or indeed to other environmentally influenced decisions. There have been scattered attempts to explain this gap, for example because the sustainable tourism activity is too expensive or does not pay enough attention to the hedonic aspects of the experience (Antimova, et al., 2012). However, despite the fact that this gap is routinely observed (Ha-Brookshire & Norum, 2011), it has overall been inadequately explained. The qualitative findings of this research have pointed to a possible reason, which is that consumers are not willing to pay more for the green hotel because it does not offer an enhanced perceived value. The quantitative findings went further, suggesting that perceptions of behavioral control could influence the consumer's choice. However, there is still no definitive answer. Thus, focusing on the attitude-behavioral gap in sustainable tourism activities such as choice of green hotels could be a valuable way to develop the literature.

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