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## Preferences towards Green Hotels: The Explanatory Power of TPB

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### Abstract:

*In Greece tourism is undeniably a sector, able to contribute into overcoming the current economic crisis. On the other hand, tourism has long been seen as an “unsustainable” sector as it puts too much stress on the physical environment of the destination countries. The concept of a Green Hotel has been suggested as a part of the solution towards sustainability and also as a potentially strategic advantage. In this study, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was employed in order to understand better customers’ intentions to stay a Green Hotel. The findings indicated a strong explanatory power ( $R^2=0.600$ ) of TPB with regards to Greeks’ intentions to choose a Green Hotel next time travelling. Intentions were found positively influenced mostly by important others’ abetment and their own perceptions about means and opportunities to stay at a Green Hotel; intentions are to a lesser extent influenced by customers’ attitudes towards Green Hotels. The marketing effort should promote important persons’ enjoyable stays at Green Hotels while the advertisement effort should target to persuade potential customers that “living the experience of a Green Hotel is completely up to you”, as there are no obstacles to do so.*

*Keywords: Theory of Planned Behaviour, Green Hotels, Ethical Tourism*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Greece has been suffering, for a considerable number of years, from a severe economic crisis, which has challenged the independence of the country and immersed the majority of people into poverty and unemployment. Within the frames of EU, Greece is not going to get out of this deadlock unless certain business fields become profitable enough to attract large scale investments (European Commission, 2013; Ministry of Development and Competitiveness, 2011). Tourism is promoted to be the major sector that falls into such a category (Kefalogianni, 2013).

Tourism is undeniably a major economic force and one of the most increasing sectors in the global economy (W.T.O., 2001; Weeden, 2002; Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Lansing and De Vries, 2007). Large numbers of people are being transported internationally bringing with them billions of Euros or dollars. On the other hand, tourists undeniably put too much stress on the physical and human environment of the destination countries. In this sense, tourism has long been seen as an “unsustainable” sector in its present development and practice (Weeden, 2002; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Han *et al*, 2010).

Nevertheless, increasing numbers of companies in tourism are adopting environmentally conscious practices in order to meet travellers’ environmental concerns and improve their competitiveness (Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Weeden, 2002). Particularly in the hotels’ sector, the concept of a Green Hotel has been suggested (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007) as a potentially strategic advantage. Green Hotels might hopefully attract quality tourism of those lodging customers, who are sensitive towards environmental damages caused by hotels operations and seek for places that are friendlier to the physical environment.

In Greece, although the number of hotels, which obtained the “green key” certificate, has doubled between 2009 (52) and 2012 (116), the relevant segment still represents just 1.2% of the total number of hotels in Greece (SETE, 2012).

In the English spoken literature, relevant consumer research focusing on Green Hotels has been rather marginal so far (Han *et al*, 2010) while in Greece just a few relevant exploratory efforts have been implemented recently.

With regards to the most appropriate theoretical framework for this topic of consumer research, Han *et al.* (2010) were the first to apply Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) among U.S. lodging customers.

Han's *et al.* (2010) suggestions, after some minor modifications, were followed in a different geographical area, that of Thessaloniki Greece. Therefore, the aim of this study was to apply TPB in order to examine Greeks' future lodging customers' intentions to choose a Green Hotel over a conventional one as well as to understand the factors that are able to formulate these intentions.

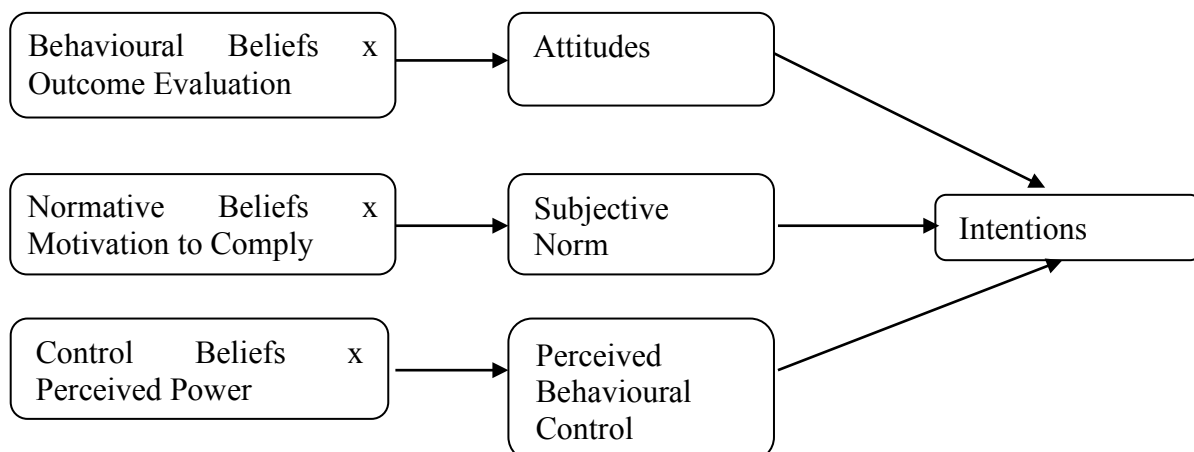
## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Green Hotels are environmentally friendly properties, whose managers are eager to institute programmes that save water, save energy and reduce solid waste in order to help protect our one and only earth, while saving money (Green Hotels Association, 2008). As mentioned above, the relevant consumer research is at a relatively early stage (Cleverdon and Kalisch, 2000; Tallontire *et al.*, 2001; Ritchie *et al.*, 2005, p. 189). With regards to early research evidence, it is to be noted that Jaffe *et al.* (1993) argued that customers would not have been willing to pay more just to fund hotels' environmental protection policies. Therefore, Green Hotels should be competitive in terms of price and convenience to the regular hotels. However, Watkins (1994) had found that the 54% of consumers in US declared to be "environmentally minded travellers", who would prefer to stay at Green Hotels. More recently, Gronau and Brohlburg (2011) searching 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 assuming Green Hotels 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 attitudes 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.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985 and 1991) represents an improved modification of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). According to TPB, the Behavioural Intentions of consumers are being formulated through a function of three predictor factors, namely Attitudes, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioural Control. These factors are preceded by three concepts of beliefs, namely Behavioural Beliefs, Normative Beliefs and Control Beliefs respectively. Also, it is to be noted that in TPB each variable in the axis of beliefs, when measured, should be calculated with one evaluation variable respectively. So, Behavioural Beliefs should be calculated with Outcome Evaluation, Normative Beliefs with Motivation to Comply and Control Beliefs with Perceived Power.

**Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**



In an effort to apply the TPB theoretical framework into the Green Hotels' field, it was assumed that future customers' intentions to choose a Green Hotel over a conventional one are formulated based on (a) their attitudes about whether staying at a Green Hotel is favourable, enjoyable, good etc or not, while these attitudes are in turn influenced by whether the respondents believed that staying at a Green Hotel would enable them to actively protect our environment while experiencing healthy for them accommodation (b) their subjective norms that concern whether others, important to them persons, would like them to stay at a Green Hotel, while these norms are influenced by what the respondent believe about what their close people (family, friends, colleagues) would like them to do with reference to Green Hotels and (c) their perceptions about their ability, resources and opportunities to stay at a Green Hotel when travelling, which in turn is influenced by whether they believe that staying at a Green Hotel is expensive, time and effort consuming and inconvenient.

#### 4. HYPOTHESES

Based on the above theoretical framework the following hypotheses were set:

1. Behavioural Beliefs have positive effects on Attitudes
2. Normative Beliefs have positive effects on Subjective Norms
3. Control Beliefs have positive effects on Perceived Behavioural Control
4. Attitudes have positive effects on Intentions
5. Subjective Norms have positive effects on Intentions
6. Perceived Behavioural Control have positive effects on Intentions

#### 5. METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted among the households of the urban area of Thessaloniki, Greece. The sample size was set up to 600 households and the procedure ended in 591 usable questionnaires. 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 & Hawkins, 1993, p. 544; Zikmund 1991, p. 471). In this study, the interviews were taken by trained marketing students and controlled by an experienced marketing academic researcher, who acted as a field manager.

The first part of the questionnaire included the beliefs constructs, namely (a) Behavioural Beliefs (BBi) of 7 items, measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree and the relevant Outcome Evaluation (OEi) measured on a 7-point importance scale from 1=Extremely unimportant 7=Extremely important, (b) Normative Beliefs (NBj) of 3 items measured on a True-False scale from 1= Very False to 7=Very True and the relevant Motivation to Copy (MCj) measured on a possibility scale from 1=Extremely unlikely to 7=Extremely likely and (c) Control Beliefs (CBk) of 4 items and the relevant Perceived Power (PPk) both measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree.

The second part included the predictors construct, namely (a) Attitudes (AT) of 7 items measured from 1= Extremely Negative to 7=Extremely Positive for each attribute of a Green Hotel (b) Subjective Norms (SN) of 3 items and (c) Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) of 3 items both measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree.

The third part included the dependent variable, namely Visit Intentions (VI) 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, all measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly 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., 2012).

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1. The measurement model

The collected data of 600 cases were tested for any extreme mistakes with relevance to the model assumptions. After excluding 9 cases, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for 591 cases (using maximum likelihood estimation) to assess for each construct unidimensionality, reliability and construct validity. All variables of the research design were entered in the analysis.

The results provided the following values:  $\chi^2=1730.652$ ,  $df=394$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $RMSEA=0.076$ ,  $CFI=0.891$ ,  $NFI=0.865$ . As CFI and NFI are not within the acceptable limits, it was judged that the model did not fit the data very well. A careful look at the standardized factor loadings indicated that in order to increase the constructs' reliability the items BB7 and CB4 should be eliminated as they both indicated loadings lower than 0.40 (Ford *et al.*, 1986).

Then CFA was applied again and the results indicated that the model fits the data better as the results provided the following values:  $\chi^2=1151.782$ ,  $df=315$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $RMSEA=0.065$ ,  $CFI=0.929$ ,  $NFI=0.905$ .

As all remaining items were significantly associated with their specified constructs Unidimensionality of each construct is assessed.

The results provided evidence of Composite Reliability as all estimates of Construct Reliability ranged from 0.752 to 0.926 according to Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Convergent Validity was also assessed as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated for each measure. All AVE values exceeded the recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) level of 0.50. In addition Discriminant Validity was assessed as the AVE value for each construct was greater than the squared correlation between the pairs of constructs.

**Table 1: Measurement results**

	Interconstruct Correlations (squared)							AVE
	BBiOEi	NBjMCj	CBkPPk	AT	SN	PBC	VI	
Behavioural Beliefs (BBiOEi)	1.000							0.576
Normative Beliefs (NBjMCj)	0.480 (0.230)	1.000						0.660
Control Beliefs (CBkPPk)	0.078 (0.006)	-0.017 (0.000)	1.000					0.516
Attitudes (AT)	0.510 (0.260)	0.426 (0.181)	0.008 (0.000)	1.000				0.629
Subjective Norms (SN)	0.320 (0.102)	0.712 (0.507)	-0.192 (0.037)	0.394 (0.155)	1.000			0.808
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	0.273 (0.075)	0.446 (0.199)	-0.238 (0.057)	0.135 (0.018)	0.499 (0.249)	1.000		0.582
Intentions (VI)	0.285 (0.081)	0.596 (0.355)	-0.309 (0.095)	0.334 (0.112)	0.666 (0.444)	0.643 (0.413)	1.000	0.703
<b>MEAN</b>	218.43	51.79	103.53	40.09	11.53	13.41	11.54	
<b>SD</b>	53.03	35.40	28.19	7.10	4.89	4.63	4.67	
<b>Composite Reliability</b>	0.890	0.853	0.752	0.922	0.926	0.802	0.874	

### 6.2. The structural model of TPB

In Table 2 the results of the examination of the structural model according to the TPB theoretical framework (see Figure 1) followed and provided satisfactory estimates as  $\chi^2=1059.678$ ,  $df=313$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $\chi^2/df=3.386$ ,  $RMSEA=0.064$ ,  $CFI=0.936$ ,  $NFI=0.913$  while the  $R^2=0.600$  with regards to consumers' Visit Intentions to stay at a Green Hotel.



**Table 2: Structural Results**

	<b>TPB</b>
$\chi^2$	1059.678
df	313
Sig.	0.000
$\chi^2/df$	3.386
RMSEA	0.064
CFI	0.936
NFI	0.913
$R^2$	
<i>Intentions</i>	0.600
<i>Attitudes</i>	0.628
<i>Subjective Norms</i>	0.717
<i>Perceived Behavioural Control</i>	1.157

### 6.3. Hypotheses Testing

In Table 3 the results of Hypotheses testing are presented. The standardized coefficients indicate that there are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and positive relationships between Behavioural Beliefs and Attitudes, between Normative Beliefs and Subjective Norms as well as between Control Beliefs and Perceived Behavioural Control. Therefore Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are supported. The standardized coefficients also indicated that there are statistically significant and positive relationships between Attitudes and Intentions, Subjective Norms and Intentions and Perceived Behavioural Control and Intentions. Therefore, Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were supported.

**Table 3: Structural equation modeling results**

<b>Path</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>
Behavioural Beliefs → Attitudes	0.792	H1: supported
Normative Beliefs → Subjective Norms	0.847	H2: supported
Control Beliefs → Perceived Behavioural Control	1.076	H3: supported
Attitudes → Intentions	0.118	H4: supported
Subjective Norms → Intentions	0.446	H5: supported
Perceived Behavioural Control → Intentions	0.431	H6: supported

## 7. DISCUSSION

The above presented results with reference to the first axis of the TPB model (Figure 1) indicate that lodging customers' attitudes towards Green Hotels are positively affected by their beliefs regarding the outcomes of their stay at a Green Hotel. Customers' perceptions about important others' incentives are positively affected by their perceived beliefs about family's, friends' and colleagues' pressure on them to stay at a Green Hotel. Customers' perceptions about their own ability and opportunities to stay at a Green Hotel are positively affected by their beliefs about objective obstacles for them to stay at a Green Hotel. These results verify the concept of TPB, as it seems that for the Greek hotel customers, attitudes, norms and control perceptions are based on the respondents' relevant beliefs. These findings are in line with Han's et al (2010) conclusions about Americans lodging customers.

With reference to the second axis (Figure 1) the above results indicate that subjective norms have the greater effect on intentions followed by perceived behavioural control, while attitudes seem to obtain the lower effect on customers' Intentions. These relationships indicate that customers' intentions to stay at a Green Hotel are mostly influenced by important others' incentives and by their own means and opportunities to stay at a Green Hotel. Positive or negative feelings about Green Hotels seem to be of less importance with regards to the formulation of visit intentions. These results are in contrast to Han's *et al* (2010) conclusions with regards to the American customers, for whom the Attitudes were found to play the most noticeable role.



## 8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This study added to our knowledge with relevance to the future lodging customers' preferences of a Green Hotel over a conventional one, as little was the content of our previous knowledge, at least with relevance to Greece. However, certain limitations came into sight upon discussing the results. The adoption of the particular, rather restrictive, attitudinal scale might be considered as a limitation of this research study. All the attitudinal items obtained almost equal Means, a finding that did not assist very much in a deeper understanding of the respondents' deeper feelings about Green Hotels. There is a need to develop a more reliable and valid instruments to investigate attitudes towards, probably not only green, but ethical hotels in the future.

As always, the choice to explore the future customers' intentions and not their actually performed behaviour might be considered as another limitation of this study, as it might seem like investigating an "idea" and not an actual product or service. Therefore, it is assumed that adding the respondents' past experiences in a Green Hotel (if any) in the TPB model might add to our understanding of the decision making procedure with relevance to preferences of Green Hotels.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study TPB was for the first time employed in Greece in order to examine future lodging customers' intentions to choose a Green Hotel over a conventional one. The results of this study verified the choice to adopt Han's *et al.* (2010) TPB design, as the data in Greece too fit well to the model, as they did with relevance to the US population. Data analysis indicated that customers' intentions are positively influenced mostly by important others' abetment and their own perceptions about means and opportunities to stay at a Green Hotel while intentions are also influenced - to a lesser extent - by customers' attitudes towards Green Hotels.

Hotel managers, who are interested to adopt and implement a pro-environmental strategy, are now able to understand that the intentions of lodging customers to visit a Green Hotel over a conventional one is a planned, structural behaviour, which follows a decision making procedure. Therefore, they need to build their communication strategy in a way that would increase people's beliefs about attempting an environmentally protective, healthy for them, great experience by choosing a Green Hotel in order to increase their attitudes that staying at a Green Hotel is enjoyable, favourable, good, positive etc. Further, managers should understand that consumers, who would enhance their intentions to stay at Green Hotels, are those for whom important persons' "likes" and "dislikes" matter a lot. Also, that these norms about important others are planted into those consumers' minds, who are individuals used to value what other people, essentially their close people, feel about them in relevance to their buying preferences.

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