

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIORAL INTENTION: A CONDITION FOR COMPETITIVENESS OF THE TOURIST ENTERPRISE EMPIRICAL STUDY IN BULGARIA**

**Rositsa Manzurova<sup>1</sup>, Rayna Pashova<sup>2</sup>**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper aims to present the results from an empirical study and to assess the impact of external factors on the competitiveness of the tourism business - such as green and environmentally sustainable hotels, as well as to analyze ecologically responsible behavioral intent of tourists as a condition for the competitiveness of the tourist enterprise.*

*The current research sheds light on some important issues such as the fact that socially-minded consumers look for deeper interactions with hotels as well as their willingness to pay more for the use of green hotels and green practices and the analysis of ecologically responsible behavioral intent of tourists as a condition for the competitiveness of the tourist enterprise. This investigation may enable operators to gain a better insight for determining strategies that could be adopted or developed to improve consumers' positive attitude and interest towards green hotels and services.*

***Keywords:*** competitiveness, tourism, environmentally behavioral

***JEL Codes:*** M14, Z32

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### **Introduction - Analysis of Recent Research and Publication**

The consequences of global warming are already a fact that mankind faces on a daily basis. This leads to growing global environmental concerns. Due to increasing environmental awareness and the trend to reduce carbon emissions, green hotels have become an alternative business direction in the hospitality industry. Hotels that take an environmental direction of development and offer green products and services, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Economics, SWU "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, PhD candidate, [renypashova@yahoo.com](mailto:renypashova@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Economics, SWU "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, PhD candidate, [renypashova@yahoo.com](mailto:renypashova@yahoo.com)

purchasing green goods and conservation of water and energy are considered green hotels.

According to UNWTO, tourism in the green economy refers to tourism activities that can be maintained, or sustained, regardless of their social, economic, cultural, and environmental contexts: “sustainable tourism”. Sustainable tourism is tourism that takes full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. It is not a special form of tourism; rather, all forms of tourism may strive to be more sustainable (UNEP, UNWTO 2005).

A clear distinction should be made between the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable tourism:

“The term ecotourism itself refers to a segment within the tourism sector with focus on environmental sustainability, while the sustainability principles should apply to all types of tourism activities, operations, establishments and projects, including conventional and alternative forms” (International Year of Ecotourism, 2002).

There are differences in principles, scope and definition when it comes to concepts such as "ecotourism", "sustainable tourism", "responsible tourism", "green tourism", etc. "Green travel" is increasingly used, but it is a very generic term and should be used more precisely.

Ecotourism is a particular kind of alternative tourism closely associated with areas that are environmentally and culturally sensitive. It was developed in an endeavor to prevent the problems and repercussions resulting from traditional mass tourism (Pipinos and Fokiali, 2009). Since ecotourism contributes to both environmental conservation and the economy (Ross and Wall, 1999), it has become a significant topic in the tourism field (Weaver and Lawton, 2007). Several studies have examined the factors that could influence tourists' visitation intention and willingness to pay more for ecotourism products, such as tourists' ecotourism attitude and interest (e.g., Lai and Nepal, 2006; Singh, Slotkin, and Vamosi, 2007). While the evaluation of tourists' ecotourism attitude and interest is no doubt a basic prerequisite for successful implementation of ecotourism ventures, an investigation of the antecedents of individuals' ecotourism attitude and interest could even be more meaningful for ecotourism operators. This investigation may enable operators to gain a better insight for determining strategies that could be adopted or developed to improve consumers' positive attitude and interest toward ecotourism.

In this connection, it should be noted that the Green hotels are defined as ‘environmentally-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy and reduce solid waste, while saving money, to protect our one and only earth’ (Green Hotel Association, 2017). However, while this kind of definition is common in the literature and widely-accepted, there is still no specific universal standard with which to measure whether or not a hotel is to be considered a green hotel (Huang, 2016). There are, in fact, more than 800 different green certifications available

with which to judge if a hotel merits being labeled as such (Green Hotel Association, 2017).

The hotel industry pursues green practices since the 1990s due to changing economic levels and a strong focus on customer service (Claver-Cortes et al., 2007). A number of enterprises offering tourism services are involved in corporate social responsibility to expand brand awareness across different audiences, gain retention of employees and improve their competitive advantage (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008).

With regard to clarifying the essence of competitive advantages, the issue of their sources is also important. A source of competitive advantage is understood to be the factors of the internal and external environment of the compared subjects and objects that give real or potential opportunities for success in competitive struggle. Keeping the sustainability of competitive advantages over a long period of time requires the improvement of their sources.

Numerous studies have shown that economic benefits can be gained in hotels through the implementation of environmental and social initiatives. In order to achieve a competitive advantage, the hotel has to practice those things that competitors cannot copy or those that are difficult to follow. Companies can build a competitive advantage from many sources, such as superiority in quality, speed, security, design and reliability, along with lower costs, lower prizes, etc. On one hand „in terms of competitiveness abstractions are unacceptable" (Stankova, 2007).

Stankova points out that competitiveness has as a meaningful content the ability to satisfy certain and imagined but still well-defined in the context of green tourism needs. On the other hand, a good study of these needs is an important prerequisite for ensuring competitive advantages in the tourist markets.

The study of the competitiveness of the product in terms of its cost and price limits the factors into two groups: production and consumption, according to the value of the product and its value. Consequently, the concrete manifestation of the competitiveness of the product is limited to the ratio between its quality and price, which is considered to be the most important characteristics of the products. (Dimitrova, 2014) According to Velev and Dimitrova, external factors of competitiveness are: macroeconomic; natural-climatic; availability of capital, labor market of the necessary manpower, research resources; demand conditions; competition; commitment and support with local competitive enterprises and those of the supporting industries including intermediaries and distributors (Velev, 2004).

An important focus in the context of the influence of environmental factors is put by Hammer and Champy, for whom if an activity is to be competitive, it must be optimized in response to dynamic environment, while recognizing that the available resources are limited (Hammer and Champy, 2001).

In this context, the purpose of the study is to conduct an empirical study and assess the impact of external factors on the competitiveness of the tourism business - such as

green and environmentally sustainable hotels, and to analyze the ecologically responsible behavioral intent of tourists as a condition for the competitiveness of the tourist enterprise.

To achieve the objective of the survey, an approach and a methodology for statistical characterization of the impact of external factors on the competitiveness of enterprises based on survey data are applied.

## Methodology

The current study developed a survey instrument which included two major parts. The first section of the survey queries the type of hotel that a respondent most frequently uses, the respondent's attitude to conduct eco-friendly travel and the willingness to the use of green hotels as well as willingness to pay for these services at a higher price. The second section of the survey consists of inquiries to accumulate the respondents' demographic characteristics. Questions include gender, age, education level, profession, marital status, number of children, and income level. The questionnaire used in conducting the empirical survey is composed of questions that responders respond to by evaluating their level of perception on each of the indicators for analyzing and assessing the impact of external factors on enterprise competitiveness. For this purpose is attached five-grade scale to assess, as the grade on each of the indicators is determined in the range of 1 to 6.

The data was collected via an online survey using Google Forms in March 2019. The survey was distributed via social media and gathered 83 responses for a period of 2 months. 11 participants' responses were disqualified because those surveys were not complete. As a result, 72 responses remained for the main analysis. The processing of the data from the study and the analysis was done through SPSS.

## Analysis and discussion

Out of 72 participants, 15 were male and 57 were female. The mean age was 40.5 years with a median of 41 years.

Tourists find it hard to evaluate the advantages of a sustainable hotel, while others may be even sceptical about sustainable tourism altogether.

*Table 1: Data distribution by gender*

Q 5. GENDER				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	female	57	79,2	79,2
	male	15	20,8	20,8
	Total	72	100,0	100,0

*Source: own table by data of own survey*

Among the participants, 12.5 % had secondary education degree or are university student, and the majority of respondents have higher than secondary education distributed as follows: 4.2 % Bachelor’s degree, 62.5 % Master's degree and 20.9% PhD- doctorate - postdoc degree (Table 2). About 20.8 % of the respondents’ annual household income was under 600 EUR; 45.8% was between 600.01 and 1000 EUR; 33.3% was over 1000.01 EUR.

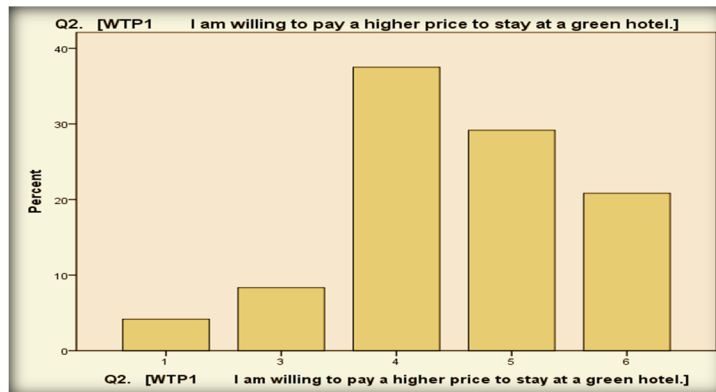
Table 2: Distribution of data by education feature - Q 10. Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2. secondary education (College and Lycee)	3	4,2	12,5	4,2
	3. university student	6	8,3	12,5	12,5
	4. bachelor’s degree	3	4,2	12,5	16,7
	5. master's degree	45	62,5	12,5	79,2
	6. phd- doctorate - postdoc	15	20,9	12,5	100,0
	Total	72	100,0	100,0	

Source: own table by data of own survey

A total of 15 respondents indicated that they will pay a higher price to stay at a green hotel; only 3 of the participants reported that they don’t want to pay more for staying at a green hotel.

Figure no. 1 Ratio of respondents that they would pay more for green service



Source: authors’ own survey

For the purposes of the present study, a correlation analysis was made because correlation describes the relationship between two variables. Although there are a number of different correlation statistics, the one that is used here is the Spearman's correlation coefficient. This statistic describes the size and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables (generically represented by X and Y), and ranges in value from  $-1.0$  (perfect negative relationship) to  $+1.0$  (perfect positive relationship); if no relationship exists between the two variables, the value of the correlation is zero.

The correlation analysis of the data shows that there is a significant correlation between the variables „willingness of people to travel in an environmentally friendly way“ and the variable „personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as staying at a green hotel room“ is significant with correlation coefficient  $.257^*$ . Table 3 shows the correlation.

*Table no. 3*

			Q2. [WTP3 I would be willing to spend extra money for an eco-friendly trip.]	Q2. [SO2. I feel personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as by staying at a green hotel room]
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	Q2. [WTP3 I would be willing to spend extra money for an eco-friendly trip.]	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	1,000  72	,257  72
	Q2. [SO2. I feel personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as by staying at a green hotel room]	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	,257* ,029 72	1,000  72
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: authors' own survey

For the subsequent analysis of correlation between the variables “I feel personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as by staying at a green hotel room” and “I am willing to pay a higher price to stay at a green hotel room” the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient is used here. It shows that the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) is  $.522^{**}$ .

Table no. 4 - A correlation between the variables on the obligation to travel on an ecological basis and the willingness to pay a higher price

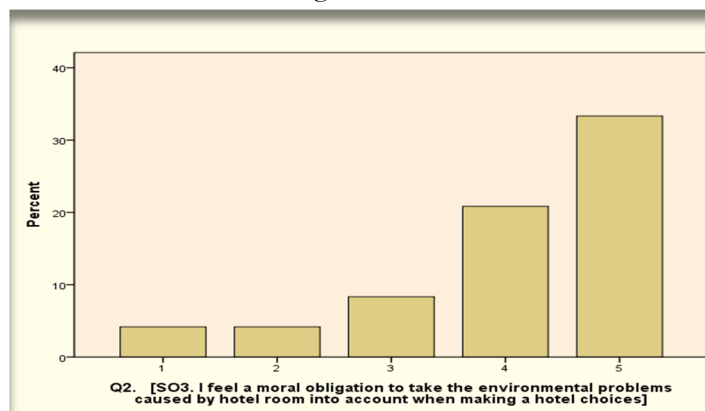
		Q2. [SO2. I feel personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as by staying at a green hotel room]	Q2. [WTP1 I am willing to pay a higher price to stay at a green hotel room.]
Q2. [SO2. I feel personally obliged to travel in an environmentally sound way, such as by staying at a green hotel room]	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1  72	,522**  ,000 72
Q2. [WTP1 I am willing to pay a higher price to stay at a green hotel room.]	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	,522**  ,000 72	1  1 72

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: authors' own survey

Researchers have indicated that realizing the seriousness of environmental problems increases the demand on eco-friendly products / services (e.g., Laroche et al., 2001; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007).

Figure no. 2



Source: authors' own survey

Given this, it can be inferred that many individuals lack information / knowledge about green hotels or not even know of the existence of green lodging establishments. Of course, marketers in various types of green hotel operations should be more proactive in

informing current and potential customers of their green facilities, practices, and programs. Additionally, in the current study, interesting differences were found when comparing respondents who have stayed at a green hotel versus those who have never stayed at a green lodging operation. The experienced group of customers scored significantly higher on intentions to visit and to pay more. Therefore, marketers should reinforce their customer retention strategies with the realization that once hotel customers experience the favorable green attributes of a hotel. They are likely to develop positive attitudes toward green accommodation establishments. When individuals have a more positive attitude, it follows that their behavioral intention will be more positive (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Chen & Tung, 2014). In other words, an individual's positive attitude towards a certain behavior strengthens his/her intention to perform that behavior (Han et al., 2010).

While the current research has shed some lights on several significant issues, there are some limitations that reveal opportunities for future studies. First, the current study did not classify the customer groups in accordance with the types of hotels (eg, economy, mid-scale, upscale, or luxury) when examining attitudes, demographics, and intentions. Future studies should investigate whether similarities / differences in eco-friendly intentions / behaviors exist among groups of customers in various segments of green hotels. Second, this study used a Web-based survey method to collect data. Thus, samples were limited to those with access to a computer and online network.

Another finding is that the respondents with a higher educational degree have more awareness to the environment, use often green hotels and are willing to pay more for it. In support of this statement an example from another survey conducted from The World Values Survey can be given, which is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life. The collected data show that the higher a person's level of education is, the more likely he/she is to express concern for the environment. Furthermore in the 2010-2012 World Values Survey, when forced to choose between protecting the environment versus boosting the economy, those respondents with secondary education favored the environment more than those with less than secondary education.

The completion of higher levels of education does not automatically translate into more responsible behaviour towards the environment. Data from the International Social Survey Programme on 29 mostly high income countries similarly showed that the share of those disagreeing that people worry too much about the environment rose from 25% of those with less than secondary education to 46% of people with tertiary education ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)).



## **Conclusion**

Today, companies are assessed based on business ethics, social responsibility and socio-economic information as their stakeholders are increasingly interested in climate change. This global trend encourages hotels to turn to green practices. However, more efforts should be made to inform the public about green hotel practices, helping to choose green hotels and more engaging in green consumption. We claim that the successful management of green hotels would not be possible if the benefits of green products / services can not be effectively communicated (Pickett et al., 1995).

When the results of this survey are applied in the practice of the hotel industry, hoteliers should be encouraged to look at their green initiatives as part of the guest experience. Hotel owners can expand their traditional analyses on the target market by including the level of environmental concerns of guests and using this information to justify investing in green practices.

As the study shows, socially conscious consumers seem to seek deeper interactions with hotels. These are guests who frequently visit middle-class hotels and above average and can no longer be seen as passive visitors who only need to sleep somewhere but rather as conscious consumers looking for emotional satisfaction from the contribution to protecting the environment. Hotel owners can expand their traditional analyses on the target market by including the level of environmental concerns of guests and use this information to motivate green investment.

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