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Article

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International Tourists' Awareness and Attitude about Environmental Responsibility and Sustainable Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study explored tourists' attitude towards the environmental practices of hotels and tourist organizations in South Korea. Specifically this study investigated their knowledge of green hotels' environmental programs and how this knowledge influences their decision to purchase green accommodations. This study also investigated the impact of nationality on the attitude of international tourists towards environmentally friendly practices of the hotel and tourism industry in South Korea. In order to capture public perceptions, this study used focus group interviews that can provide deeper meaning in an interactive manner. The interview session for this study included six interviews of small groups of five people in each. Three major groups of international visitors to Korea from CIS countries (such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan), the United States of America and China were included in this study.

Results show that environmental awareness of the tourists is a predictor for changing their attitude and consequently their purchasing behavior. Respondents who showed a high level of awareness expressed their willingness and readiness to participate in the green practices of the hotel and tourism industries. With regard to the impact of nationality on tourists' attitude, the results from this study do not support the findings from earlier studies. No differences were discovered in the environmental attitude of international tourists to South Korea. These findings say that it is important for hotels and tourism organizations to provide information about their environmental policies and practices in order to raise tourists' awareness of environmental issues.

Keywords: Green Hotels; Environmental Awareness; Sustainable Practices; Nationality

1. Introduction

A. Background of the study

In some way or form, almost all cultures have recognized the importance of nature and its biological

variety for their societies and have realized the need to maintain it in a sustainable way. Consumers around the world are becoming more sensitive to environmental issues and prefer to purchase environmentally friendly products, which in turn encourage industries to consider such products and services from a marketing and sales perspective (Foster et al., 2000).

There is evidence that customers' decision to purchase environmentally friendly products and

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services is influencing tourism and hotel operators to become more responsible and implement programs aimed at reducing the negative impact on the environment (Han & Yoon, 2015; Verma & Chandra, 2016). There are several articles which have discussed the tourism industry's applications of sustainable tourism, particularly with respect to environmental guidelines, accreditation schemes, codes of conduct, ecolabels, awards and green alliances (Font & Buckley, 2001; Honey, 2002; Bendell & Font, 2004; Bohdanowicz, 2006).

Tourism and lodging industries possess the high potential to contribute towards job creation and economic development, especially in rural areas and small islands. Sustainable development of such areas, appropriate involvement in tourism and hospitality businesses which is often desired by local people, will bring changes in uses and values of resources and activities and, therefore, become more attractive for inbound tourists.

B. Problem Statement

In spite of the attempts to apply sustainable tourism using various accreditation schemes and ecolabels, the problem is that tourists have difficulty in recognizing such ecolabels, certifications and programs. The research conducted by Park & Boo (2010) discovered that many environmental certification schemes are not well known in the tourism industry. For example, the most popular tourism-certification program, Green Globe, was recognized by less than 5% of the total respondents, and 15% of respondents did not know about green certification generally. Mair & Jago (2010), however, believe that the media coverage of environmental issues and promotion of the existing environmental schemes, ecolabels and certifications will influence public opinion towards the need for sustainability, and that the operators in the tourism industry will receive more pressure to become more sustainable. To reiterate, there have been increased efforts in recent years by organizations to educate people about the

environment, and in the tourism industry there exist numerous programs designed to raise awareness with the public and with service providers about sustainable practices that are friendly to the environment. Yet the evidence shows that the message has not fully registered with the public, and the public appears unaware of the tourism industry's efforts. This apparent disconnect between the tourism industry and the travelling public is the current problem for the industry requiring a solution. Therefore, the following observation was presented:

The positive attitude of tourists towards environmental programs can be improved if the hotel and tourism industry provides appropriate, easily accessible information concerning these programs to their customers.

Additionally, there is evidence that the level of environmental awareness varies depending on the country and culture. Bohdanowicz (2006) found that Swedish hoteliers were more environmentally aware than Polish hoteliers. Ayuso's (2006) work concluded similarly that customers' environmental concerns depend to a great extent on their nationality, with Western Europeans being more willing to cooperate on environmental initiatives. Tsai & Tsai (2008) found that Taiwanese customers do not show consumption behaviors when buying environmentally friendly products and services. Furthermore, Niyaz & Storey (2011) conducted a case study focused on environmental management in the Maldives and concluded that the environmental decision-making there suffered from lack of awareness and adequate information. Erdogan & Baris (2007) found that most hotels in Ankara (Turkey) have little or no interest in environmental issues, policies, and activities. These findings support the above-mentioned idea that environmental ignorance leads to inappropriate behavior of both visitors and accommodation providers resulting in the degradation of a particular destination. As a result the second observation was presented:

Nationality might influence tourists' attitude about the

environmentally friendly practices implemented in the hotel and tourism industry.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore tourists' attitude towards the environmental practices of hotels and tourist organizations. This research also investigates tourists' knowledge of green hotels, eco-tourism, ecolabels and environmental programs. The findings from this study will serve as part of the strategy that the green hotel industry in Korea can use to target better its potential environmental friendly customers. This study also determines the relationship between environmental awareness and nationality. In doing so, three representative groups of growing inbound tourism markets for Korea were selected: people from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), The United States of America (USA), and China.

II. Literature Review

A. Sustainable development of tourism and lodging industries

Tourism and lodging industries traditionally have been considered relatively "green" with the exception of their transportation and land development issues (Font & Tribe, 2001). A clean environment is a major component of quality service and thus it is important for the development of tourism and hotels (Erdogan & Baris, 2007). A growing social concern for the environmental situation was found among the motivations of tourists (Claver-Cortés et al., 2007). Environmental issues are beginning to have an influence on people's vacation and accommodation preferences; tourists demand some evidence of environmental concern in the hotels and tourist destinations (Miller, 2003). It is believed that when hotels or tourism providers show greater concern for environment preservation, they enhance the destination residents' quality of life, improving things in such a way that the host communities' are more

inclined to accept tourism-related initiatives (Bestard & Nadal, 2007).

B. Environmentally friendly products and services

People who identify themselves as green customers always actively engage in so-called environmentally friendly activities and these people are willing to change their purchase behavior in a more eco-friendly way (e.g. avoidance of buying disposable products, recycling activities, reducing water and energy consumption, etc.), sacrificing convenience and sometimes paying extra for the products (Laroche et al., 2001; Law & Cheung, 2007; Dodds et al, 2010). Table 1 shows some studies from different countries on green consumers.

Other researchers, however, have also observed that although consumers express concerns about the environment, these concerns are not always translated into purchase or consumption of green products and services (Peattie, 1999; Crane, 2000). The suggested reason for this is that customers are often skeptical about claims of environmentally friendly products and services and are very suspicious about companies which advertise themselves as "green industry" (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Hartman & Ibaner, 2006). Ottman (1992) believed that consumers accept green products after their primary need for performance, quality, convenience, and accessibility are met, and when they understand how a green product helps to solve environmental problems. Furthermore, Manatkola & Jauhari (2007) doubted that there is a hospitality product or service which is completely environmentally friendly, especially, if the tourist's conception and expectation for such products and services differ from accepted ones. The knowledge gap on the uses and value of green products prevents consumers in committing themselves to any purchase decisions (Chen & Chai, 2010). Those consumers who purchase green or environmentally friendly products and services have to be assured that the products are equal or higher in quality than the

Table 1. Studies on consumers who are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products and services (updated from Mostafa, 2007)

Author	Findings
Prothero (1990)	In Britain, 27% were prepared to pay up to 25% more for green products.
Suchard and Polonsky (1991)	In Australia, 61.5% of the respondents would pay more for environmentally safe products; they are willing to pay between 15% and 20% more.
Myburgh - Louw & O'Shaughnessy (1994)	In UK, 79% of female consumers agreed to pay up to 40% more for environmentally friendly clothes detergent.
Phillips (1999)	In America, 50% claim to look for environmental labels and to switch brands based on environmental friendliness.
Curlo (1999)	In UK, 10% were recognized as being hardcore green consumers.
Starch (1999)	There were an estimated 15% green consumers worldwide.
Laroche et al. (2001)	13.1% of respondents indicated that they were willing to pay a higher price for green products.
Baysan (2001)	In Turkey, 85.1% of Turks, 78.2% of Russians and 73.5% of Germans were willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly services.
Law and Cheung (2007)	Visitors in Hong Kong were willing to pay additional tax to improve air quality in the city.
Dodds et al. (2010)	25% of visitors in Koh Phi Phi, Thailand and 42% of visitors in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia were ready to pay over US\$10 for sustainability practices and green products.

traditional non-green ones. This is important because the customers are not willing to pay a premium for expensive green products and services (D'Souza et al, 2006). However, there is evidence showing that the value of these products and services are significant to the customers who are prepared to pay a premium (Menges, 2003).

C. Environmental awareness

The term “environmental awareness” includes factual environmental knowledge, affective and behavior attitudes towards environmental problems, and values related to the environment (Arcury & Johnson, 1987; Szagun & Pavlov, 1995).

Environmental awareness has led to a rising number of individuals that engage in environmentally-friendly behavior in their daily lives (Kalafatis et al., 1999; Laroche et al., 2001). Huang et al. (2006) consider such awareness an important indicator that measures “ecological civilization”, illustrating the degree of attention, recognition, and acceptance. The investigation of the level of environmental awareness is an important contributor to making environmental

policy and implementing environmental practices, and therefore promoting regional and national sustainable development (Ozil et al., 2008).

In China, Wong (2010) conducted two public environmental awareness surveys in 1998 and 2007 respectively, which revealed that the level of environmental awareness changed with time, location, and shifting environmental conditions. He considered people's environmental awareness as the perception representing the sum of the changes in environmental and socio-economic dimensions of a nation in a given location and time. Mihanyar et al. (2015) found out that environmental awareness is a one of important factors that is related to consumers' beliefs and emotions towards experiences.

The development of better environmental awareness and practices is the responsibility of every interested party, including policy-makers (Font and Tribe, 2001), academics, researchers (Scerri, 2009), the media (Erdogan & Baris, 2007; Öztürk & Çitak, 2010; Mair & Jago, 2010), and related industries.

D. Environmental attitude

Blackwell et al. (2006) believed that attitude represents what consumers like or dislike and consumers' purchasing decisions are often based on their environmental attitudes. In other words, a person's positive attitude towards certain behavior reinforces his or her intention to perform that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). With respect to tourism specifically, a few researchers have noted a relationship between tourists' behavior and their environmental attitudes. Roberts & Bacon (1997), for example, found that environmental values linked positively with environmentally conscious behavior. More recently, Kim et al. (2006) found a relationship between environmental values and motives for attending an environmentally oriented festival.

German researchers Kaiser, Wölfling & Fuhrer (1999) considered environmental attitude as a dominant predictor of ecological behavior, which determines "actions which contribute towards environmental preservation and/or conservation". They strongly believe that individuals, who obtain even a little knowledge about the environment, become environmentally concerned and their attitude to environmentally friendly products and services change because of that knowledge. This is supported by Li et al. (2009), who claimed that education and promotion of environmental knowledge elevates the environmental awareness of the public. Dodds et al. (2010) demonstrated the fact that tourists do care about the environment and expect that managers and tourism destination stakeholders would realize that sustainable practices, such as water, waste, energy management, are important factors in the visitor experience.

E. Nationality and Environmental Awareness

The differences between the degree of environmental awareness and nationality have already been studied for several years (Baysan, 2001; Kozak, 2002; Bohdanowicz, 2006). Some researchers (Kozak, 2002;

Lee et al., 2004) investigated nationality as a tool for market segmentation in the international tourism market. Mykletun et al. (2001), for example, stated that nationality can be used as a predictor for a range of tourism variables including preferences for a destination, perceptions of value, and amount of money spent at a destination.

Uysal et al. (1994, p.291) pointed out that nationality played a significant role in prediction of behavior and perceptions of customers, as well as education, where "the level of environmental knowledge is consistently and positively related to environmental activities". This statement is supported by the results of a comparative study aimed at investigating the attitudes of German, Russian and Turkish visitors conducted by Baysan (2001). The outcomes of that study confirmed that differences in environmental awareness were related to differences in nationality. The study showed that Germans appeared to be more aware of the environmental issues than Russians or Turks. The study explained that Germans showed a high degree of awareness in comparison with Russians and Turks because environmental issues in Germany had greater media attention and the government there was stricter in implementation of environmental laws (Baysan, 2001).

Considering the above mentioned findings, the current study is supposed to help Korean tourism providers in establishing their policy with respect of market segmentation and environmental outcomes.

F. Research Propositions

The following propositions were formulated:

1. The amount of knowledge people have concerning environmental issues influences their attitude towards ecolabels and environmental practices and, as a result, their purchasing decision.
2. There are significant differences in attitudes towards environmental issues among nationalities.

III. Methodology

A. Method

This study used qualitative methodology, in particular, focus group interviews. This approach was selected because the Korean tourism industry has had little prior research conducted about environmental issues, and a qualitative approach, like focus group interviews, is an appropriate method to capture public perceptions and to accomplish it in an interactive manner that can provide deeper meaning. The focus group method is an interview style designed for small groups of strangers, brought together by a researcher, and led in a group discussion on some particular topic (Barbour, 2008; Schutt, 2003; Berg, 2009).

The interview session for this study included six interviews of small groups of five people in each. Hence, the total number of participants was 30. Each interview session lasted for one-half to two hours; it allowed the interviewer to obtain as much information as possible without making people feel tired and losing interest in the discussion. The interviews were conducted in a conference room where background noises were minimized, and the participants were relaxed and comfortable. Barbour (2008) acknowledged that the location of the interview is important and it can have influence on discussions, thus, building a variety of settings into the research design can strengthen the focus group experience.

B. Sampling

As it was mentioned earlier, three groups of participants were involved in the focus group interviews. They included persons from CIS countries (such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan), the United States of America and China. These three groups were selected for a variety of reasons including the following. First, they represent different cultures, political views, and religions. Participants, however, were not identified by their

ethnic or religious characteristics because this study focused on national origin. Second, these three groups represent three different regions in the world with different incomes and levels of development. Third, practicality: representatives of these three groups were relatively easy to bring to the study because they are major groups of international visitors to Korea. The citizens of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) were chosen because they are all former Soviet Union republics, thus the influence of 70 years of “Soviet ideology” would equip them with a common historical perspective. The next group from the USA represented the developed western world believed to be more environmentally aware (Dodds et al., 2010). The last group from China people represented one of the economically fast-growing countries in the world. Chinese visitors are also the second largest group of tourists to Korea after Japanese visitors.

C. Data Analysis

Each interview session was recorded with recording devices and then transcribed into text for analysis. After transcribing all recordings into text format, and after the transcriptions were complete they were shared with the participants for confirmation and approval. Validation of the information by a participant is an important aspect of confirming the accuracy of data collected through the interviews.

The next step in the analysis was the process of coding which was done using Strauss and Corbin’s three stage procedure (Gibbs, 2007, p.50):

1. Open coding;
2. Axial coding;
3. Selective coding.

The computer program CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) - NVivo 9 was used to identify the themes and classify the responses. This software helps to organize and classify a large amount of data in short periods of time. Figure 1 demonstrates the process of coding.

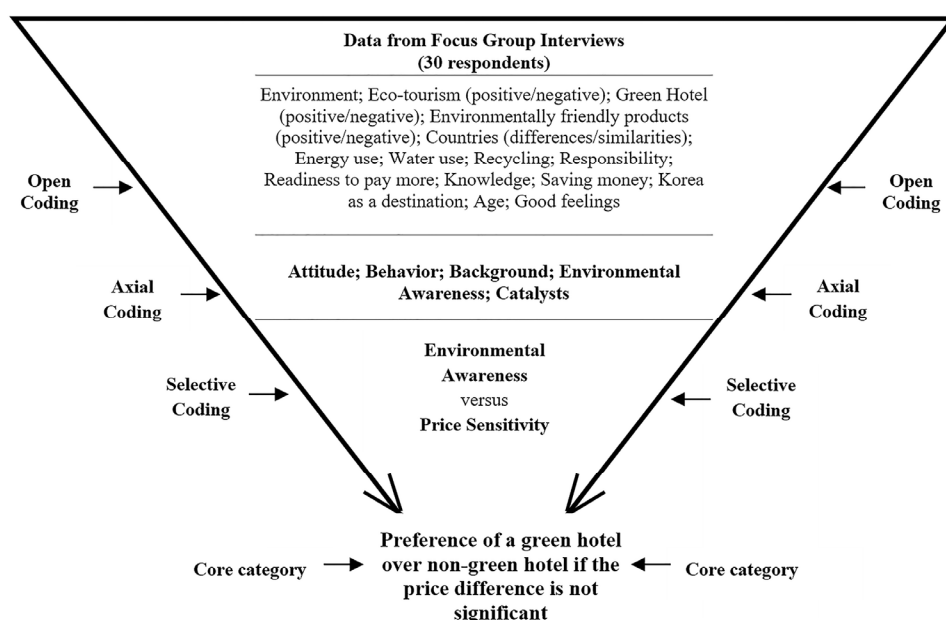


Figure 1. Coding process leading to core finding of the study

IV. Findings and Discussion

The framework (Figure 2) developed as a result of open and axial coding detects the key themes that emerged during the data collection stage reflecting the relationship between tourists' environmental awareness and their attitude and behavior.

The model was partially adapted from Baysan (2001) who studied the attitudes of German, Russian and Turkish tourists and from Mair & Jago (2010) who developed a framework for greening in the business events tourism. The framework is specific to environmentally friendly services and products provided by Korean tourism and hospitality industry to tourists, it also explains how the level of the environmental awareness of people is correlated to their attitude to eco-tourism and green hotels, and eventually leads to their behavior.

A. Background

The age and occupation of the participants is

strongly believed to be predictors of their behavior. The occupation of the potential tourists has to be recognized as a trigger for their willingness and readiness towards environmental behavior. Early research identified that the impact of the consumers' background on their environmentally conscious behavior are conflicting, thus for example, some researchers claimed that customers with high income would be more pro-active towards environmental issues (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). However, other authors found that the environmentally aware person was less educated and had a lower income than a non-aware person (Sandahl & Robertson, 1989). The findings of this study revealed that the background characteristics such as age and occupation are important predictors to environmentally conscious behavior.

B. Catalysts

As has been mentioned in the literature review, media is one of the important vehicles for creating environmental awareness. The media, as a part of

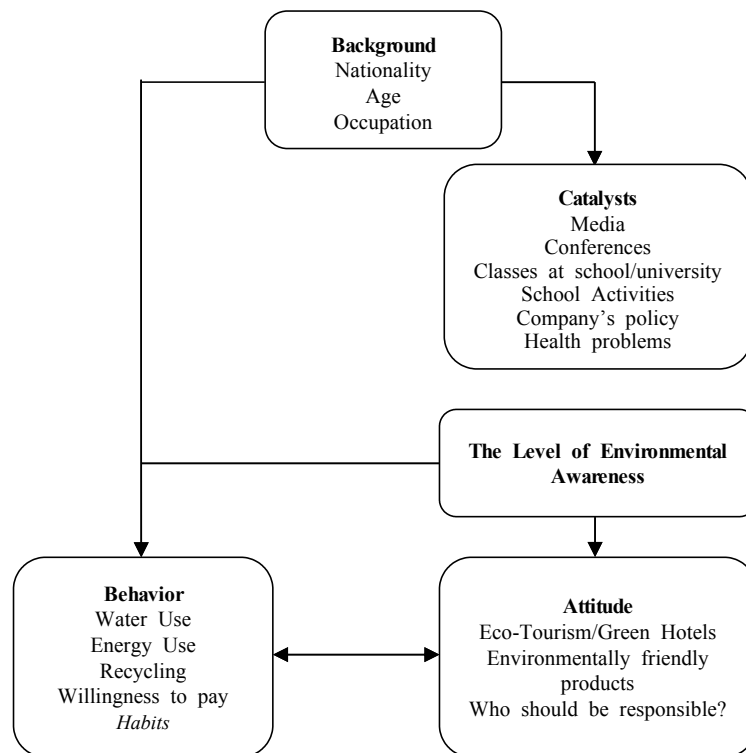


Figure 2. International Tourists' Environmental Awareness in context of Attitude and Behavior. Source: Adapted from Baysan (2001), Mair and Jago (2010)

public education, plays a significant role in transferring the idea of environmentally friendly products and services to customers. The internet was also identified as a source of information about new green products and services. Conferences, classes at school or university, school activities were also mentioned as catalysts for environmental awareness. Participants of the focus groups also observed that when a company engages in dialogue with its stakeholders (suppliers, employees, investors and customers) about its environmental initiatives, it offers an avenue for these stakeholders to provide feedback and ideas for solutions to the environmental issues. Therefore a company's engagement with its stakeholders about its policies and initiatives will lead to more rewards to the company while serving as a catalyst for change. For example, in a recent study by Bedard & Kuhn (2013) they reported that when customers at Burgerville restaurants received

their sales receipts with targeted suggestions about how their orders could have been healthier, the informational and motivational messages changed customers' behavior leading to a 2.1% average drop in cholesterol per transaction. Similar results can be achieved with hotel guests at green hotels.

However, it is noteworthy that not only media, policy and classes raise people's awareness towards environmental issues; health was another topic that was discussed in one of the groups.

Allergy has generally been accepted as one of the main reasons for people preferring to purchase environmentally friendly products. According to statistics¹⁾ more than 50 million Americans suffer from allergic diseases, the worldwide number is much bigger. Therefore, managers in the hospitality industry also should consider allergy as a relevant criterion

1) <http://medicineworld.org/medicine/allergy/allergy-statistics.html>

for customers to preferring an environmentally friendly hotel which not only reduces its environmental impact but also makes sure that all guests would be safe with regard to their health.

The participants pointed out that the lack of knowledge is a main barrier preventing people from being aware of the environmental problems around them and choosing environmentally friendly destinations when they travel. Therefore, education is an essential part of environmental awareness and this fact is supported by the findings made earlier by the other researchers (Niyaz & Storey, 2011; Erdogan & Baris, 2007). In summary, the participants identified the following as important catalysts for raising public awareness of the environment, and these catalysts should be prominent in tourism strategies designed to attract potential customers: media, university and school activities, conferences, the internet, company policies, and health.

C. Attitude towards Eco-tourism and Green Hotels

The whole picture about the attitude of the participants to the eco-tourism and green hotels was positive and the participants showed genuine interest in experiencing them. Earlier research about tourism on organic farms as a new form of ecotourism revealed that this new tourism type can be used as a strategy for developing agriculture in a sustainable way while promoting socio-cultural and environmental conservation (Choo & Jamal, 2009). Moreover, the respondents discussed ecotourism as one of the ways to educate people and to make them think more about their actions and the consequences of human activity.

The feedback from the participants about the green hotels was also mostly positive. The following statement captures how the study participants viewed the role of green hotels, "hotels promote that every action of each person has an impact on the environment and they try to implement eco-friendly policies such as recycling goods, purchasing eco-friendly products, and reducing consumption

levels". Based on the suggestions from the study participants, their opinion about eco-tourism and essentially their willingness to take such tours or stay in the hotels with environmental programs will bring changes in the Korean tourism industry in general and tour operators in particular.

1. *Environmentally friendly products*

The data collected from the focus group interviews showed that the attitude of the participants to environmentally friendly products actually impacts their decision making to behave in more environmentally conscious manner. It was an essential part of the interviews to reveal what people think about the eco-friendly products and how this attitude reflects their awareness of environmental issues. It became apparent from the discussions that in general participants preferred environmentally friendly products because they were less harmful to the environment.

Another reason why people prefer the environmentally friendly products is that such products have long-term profitability. In other words, purchasing environmentally friendly products which are generally more expensive may actually help to save money.

However, even though the attitude to environmentally friendly products was generally positive, many of the study participants were hesitant about whether the products were truly environmentally friendly or the claims were simply marketing gimmicks by the companies that were selling them. This doubt might be a reason for refusing to purchase environmentally-friendly products. Therefore, it is important for managers to pick the right strategy for marketing their products.

An unexpected finding from the study was that being a green customer in fact made people feel good about themselves. The psychological aspect of the "green" behavior has received little attention in the literature on sustainability. This study revealed that the study participants, who participate in various environmental activities and prefer to use

environmentally friendly products, do it because they feel good about their actions. The good feeling was specified as a significant predictor for environmentally friendly behavior and purchasing eco-friendly products. Thus, positive feedback from green hotel managers or any providers of green products through various media would encourage customers to continue to do the right thing and that they are being responsible in protecting the environment.

Being exploratory, the other purpose of this study was to reveal differences in the attitudes among nationalities. The analysis of the interviews showed that there were no significant differences among respondents when the attitude to environmentally friendly products was discussed. This might be explained by the fact that these participants consume environmentally friendly products in their everyday lives and so they exhibited consistent attitudes across nationalities about these products as opposed to eco-tours or green accommodations. Thus, it is recommended to study this aspect more thoroughly in the future to get more detailed picture of the similar or different attitudes toward eco-tourism and psychological self-satisfaction.

2. Who should be responsible?

The last important attitude is the perceived level of responsibility of corporations, government and people themselves. The study participants were of the opinion that the most responsible group was government of the countries. The corruption in the government was mentioned as one of the reasons why the environmental problems still have no solutions and the level of environmental degradation is increasing even though green movements in many countries are strong and show significant results in raising public awareness. Results from the analysis revealed that corporations and companies are also responsible as well as people themselves. As one participant from the CIS group mentioned the government makes laws and regulations, companies follow them, but all these organizations consists of people who are ultimately potential customers.

Therefore, to put all the responsibility on government would be a mistake. As a result, attitude of the international visitors to environmentally friendly products, eco-tourism, green hotels and any environmentally friendly program, was determined to be the most important predictor for environmentally friendly behavior of visitors.

D. Behavior

The criterion "Behavior" in the proposed framework includes five different variables which were determined to be crucial for visitors who identify themselves as green customers. These variables are water use, energy use, recycling, willingness to pay, and habits. The last was determined to be an important criterion for environmentally friendly behavior as many people, for example, already used to separate garbage and recycle it, save water and energy.

E. Korea as an environmentally friendly destination

Most of the study participants agreed that Korea is a good example of a country, which makes the effort to become more environmentally friendly. It is important for managers to know that visitors already consider Korea as an environmentally friendly destination and that further development of this image will help them to attract more tourists from different parts of the world. More people select countries to visit based on their environmental safety practices and that places Korea as a good destination with strong environmentally friendly programs and policies in the minds of tourists. Therefore, managers in the tourism and hospitality area should invest more effort in improving this green image.

F. Core finding: Price sensitivity and Environmental Awareness of tourists

The core finding identified during the final stage

of the coding was that tourists who are environmentally pro-active customers in their everyday life are not prepared to pay more for green hotel accommodations. This tendency was established earlier by Laroche et al. (2001), and Han et al. (2010). They stated that a customer who frequently engages in recycling glass or paper might not be the same person who would pay more for purchases of eco-friendly products, such as an eco-friendly hotel room. Such customers by nature are frugal and are not in the habit of splurging, and as such they tend to be very price sensitive. Therefore, to be successful at attracting this market segment, hotel managers must focus on strategies that provide added value to these customers, including price, in order to attract their business. Visiting another country for most tourists is a chance of a lifetime or a once a year opportunity and they prefer to spend this time in a useful and pleasant manner as possible, thus, they would choose accommodations according to their personal preferences and their financial circumstances. This study shows that tourists are ready to pay if the difference in room prices is not big. However, if the room price at a green hotel is much higher than in a non-green hotel with similar facilities and amenities then they are not willing to pay the premium.

Swarsbrooke & Horner in their book "Consumer Behavior in Tourism" (2007) claimed that a tourist, as a consumer making a purchasing decision, will be affected by the following factors: personal, psychological and social. Therefore, when the price is affordable for the customers their purchasing decision depends on other aspects such as motives, attitudes, knowledge, personal preferences and lifestyle. In the case of green hotels, environmentally friendly policies and practices are believed to be a strong catalyst in the purchasing decision. The ecolabel as a distinguishing mark for greening of the accommodation assures visitors that the chosen hotel engages in sustainable practices and management cares about guests and employees' health and well-being.

The participants in this study also pointed out that the green aspect of the accommodation is one of

the consistent determinants of their purchasing behavior. Most of the respondents, who seemed to be aware of environmental issues and who have a positive attitude towards any environmental practice, answered that they would like to stay at accommodations which demonstrate a concern for environmental issues and try to reduce their negative impact on the environment.

Han et al. (2010) found that simply emphasizing to hotel guests the importance of protecting the environment is not enough to attract more visitors to their green lodging property. Customers should be educated about why it is healthier to select the green accommodation. For example, it is recommended to educate potential customers about the health aspect of the environment in a hotel such as fresh air, availability of organic food, eco-friendly products used for laundry or cleaning the rooms.

Following from prior research and feedback from participants of this study, it is recommended that green hotel providers in Korea should make room prices affordable for the customers not only with high incomes but more importantly to attract customers from the middle-income class. Recent research of the Korean market revealed positive correlation between incomes and purchasing of environmentally friendly products. Thus, according to the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (KCCI) survey 52% of people earning less than two million won (approximately US\$1600) per month purchase expensive eco-friendly products and organic food, and this pattern is expected to continue into the future (Kim & Ahn, 2010). This information can be strategically used by the managers of green hotels and the tourism industry. To become attractive to middle-income customers they should set room rates to be comparable to rates at non-green hotels. Additional capital investments are often required in green hotels, consequently their fixed costs are higher than in non-green hotels, and , therefore, in the short run there may not be immediate financial rewards and in some cases the hotel may suffer operating losses but in the long run the hotels bottom line will improve significantly. Therefore, the price

differentiation should become a part of the revenue management strategy of the hotels.

V. Conclusion

The core finding of this research is the idea that price differentiation among green and non-green hotels is the main barrier for tourists in the purchasing decision and that removal of this barrier will make hotels with green practices more attractive for tourists with high environmental awareness and positive environmental attitude. The framework made as a result of open and axial coding of the data provides more detailed picture of how the background, environmental awareness, attitude and behavior of the tourists are interconnected with each other.

The findings of this study also address the two questions posed in the beginning of the research. The first question was about whether the environmental awareness of international tourists in Korea influences their purchasing decision of green hotel or green tourism. In this study environmental awareness of the tourists was identified as a predictor for changing their attitude and consequently their purchasing behavior. Many respondents who showed a high level of awareness expressed their willingness and readiness to participate in the green practices of the hotel and tourism industries. It is important to mention that providing information about environmental policies and practices is crucial to raising tourists' awareness of environmental issues. Participants in the study acknowledged Korea as a desired destination for tourists, therefore Korean tourism and hotel providers should consider that the growing demand for green accommodation and sustainable tourism will inevitably affect their businesses sooner than they expect. Finally, tourists' environmental awareness as a strong motivator for purchasing green lodging and green tourism should become a part of management strategies for future development.

The second question was about whether there were

differences in environmental attitude among tourists from the three different countries, and the results from this study do not support the findings from earlier studies. No differences were discovered in the environmental attitude of the international tourists. All three groups of participants showed similar attitudes towards environmental issues and environmentally friendly products and services. The reason for this might be the fact that environmental problems affect everyone regardless of country of origin. Despite the fact that the USA is considered a country with a more developed economy than countries from the CIS and China, they face the same environmental issues as other countries do. However, it should be mentioned that these three groups represent only a small sample of the world population and more tourists from other countries need to be sampled as well in future studies.

In conclusion, the findings of this qualitative study are important for the managers of hotels who are considering whether to embark upon green management or not. The pursuit of green initiatives is believed to have many advantages including marketing benefits and cost savings. Whether the cost savings focus on water, waste or electricity, environmental management is aimed to measure these, before, during and after steps are taken to reduce the associated environmental impact. The most important measurement is believed to be the cost savings that accrue to the hotel or tourism operator. Hoteliers who refuse to make any efforts to demonstrate environmental responsibility to their guests will be the first to lose business and they will also miss the opportunity to enjoy cost savings as well as marketing and revenue benefits.

A. Practical implications

There is ample evidence that environmental awareness of tourists has been growing rapidly for the last decade, therefore Korean hotel and tourism industries should embrace this fact. The study also found that it is important for tourism and hotel

managers to provide full information about the green practices in their organizations in order to raise public awareness towards environmental issues. In doing so, the managers should continuously make guests aware and educate them about the environmental issues and train employees about their solutions. Managers can devise less intrusive ways of communicating information, for example, on guests' invoices at check-out motivating and congratulating them on the savings they have made on their utilities consumption and waste production during their stay. The results of this research show that tourists do care about the environment and prefer companies who demonstrate the same concern. Therefore, implementing environmentally friendly practices should be effective in attracting customers who share similar concerns about the environment.

B. Suggestions for future research

This study focused on environmental awareness and attitude of three groups of international tourists in Korea. For future research it is important to sample tourists from other countries in order to facilitate generalizability of the results. There is also a need for more detailed research using other demographic variables such as income, education and marital status, in order to find their influence on the environmental attitude of the tourists. It is also recommended to study emotional and psychological aspects of being environmentally aware as the predictors for purchasing behavior. Using quantitative methods in researching this phenomenon in the future will also further strengthen the findings.

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