The Impact of Destination Image, Environmental Beliefs on Attitude and Willingness to Pay for Green Hotel

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Abstract: There is increasing public concern about the environment and associated protection issues that have occurred over the past decades. The purpose of this study is to propose a framework to explore the effect of destination image, environmental beliefs on willingness to pay for the green hotel, and the mediating role of attitude to a green hotel in these relationships. Convenience sampling method was used to develop a research sample. The research sample includes visitors at three ecotourism destinations in Vietnam who were randomly approached. The data set consists of 479 valid responses. A multivariate analysis method was used to analyze the data. This study finds significant and positive effects of destination image, environmental beliefs and attitude to a green hotel on the willingness to pay for the green hotel. In addition, attitude toward green hotels plays a mediating role in the nexus between destination image, environmental beliefs, and willingness to pay for green hotels. This study suggests policymakers in an emerging economy such as Vietnam use efficient regulations to enhance green initiatives and practices in tourism while tourism providers and marketers should invest in building the image of travel locations. This study also recommends authorities encourage greater awareness of the importance of environmental protection through education, propaganda, and media as this will raise the green attitude.

Keywords: destination image, environmental beliefs, willingness to pay, green hotel

1. Introduction

In recent years, there is increasing public concern about the environment and associated protection issues (Han & Kim, 2010, Ha & Nguyen, 2022). Many consumers are more environmentally conscious than in the past, as shown by their active participation in environmental protection issues (Lee et al., 2010). Despite such growing interests, there is limited consumer understanding of green initiatives and their effects (Heung et al., 2006). This lack of understanding influences consumer attitudes and behaviors toward green practices (Chen & Peng, 2012).

Green hotels may be defined as environmentally friendly properties that implement programs to reduce solid waste and save water, as well as energy (GHA, 2015). With the growing number of customers seeking green operations, being a green hotel can provide a basis for good marketing strategies in that its environmentally friendly practices may help position it differently in the competitive arena (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). Thus, the green hotel business is believed to be a growing niche in the current competitive lodging industry (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007).

Various studies have investigated individual attitudes and behaviors toward green hotels (Han et al., 2010; Tang & Lam, 2017). This study applies the theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to propose a research framework. The TPB suggests that, while attitudes are relatively stable (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991, 2011; So & Kim, 2020), contextual and environmental factors can significantly affect the evaluation of an object (Sussman & Unel, 2000; Zang & Kim, 2022). Accordingly, the purpose of the present research is to explore the role of destination image, and environmental beliefs as essential contextual conditions that determine the consumer's attitude toward green hotel patronage. We suggest that perceptions of a hotel's destination, and environmental beliefs can influence the extent to which consumers' beliefs about sustainable hospitality consumption impact attitudes and behaviors toward green hotels. Nevertheless, the empirical research on the relationships among destination image, environmental beliefs, and attitude to green hotels in conjunction with ecotourism intention is scarce. To bridge these gaps within the ecotourism literature, this research investigates the impacts of travelers' environmental beliefs and destination image on the travelers' willingness to pay for the green hotel, taking into account the mediating role of attitude toward green hotel.

Vietnam was selected as an empirical context to test the proposed theoretical model. Vietnam has also experienced a boom in both inbound and domestic tourism over the past decade. However, Vietnam is an emerging market economy where regulations, especially concerning environmental protection, have not been well enforced; thereby the environmental sustainability of the destination is declining. Together with the trend of eco-friendly management in the hotel industry, the model of green hotels has appeared more and more especially in famous tourist destinations,

including national parks, natural reserves, and landscape protection. Recently, before choosing a tour in Vietnam, many tourists were quite interested in the eco-friendly standard, minimizing the negative impact on the surroundings. A study using the Vietnamese context provides a relevant setting for the development of effective strategies for promoting ecotourism in Vietnam and other developing countries where the ecotourism sector has been underdeveloped.

This study further contributes to the ecotourism literature by highlighting two decisive factors driving travelers' intention to pay for green hotels that have been overlooked in the current literature. These are destination images and environmental beliefs. Moreover, this paper offers an improved understanding of the role of travelers' attitude to green hotels in ecotourism literature by showing that travelers' attitude to green hotels partially transfers the effects of their environmental beliefs and destination image on their willingness to pay green hotels. Although previous research suggests that attitude to green hotels is one of the key antecedents of willingness to pay, its mediating role is not explored in the extant literature. Finally, this study adds to ecotourism literature the knowledge about the factors influencing ecotourism behaviors in Vietnam, a contextless known in the extant literature.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review and hypothesis development, resulting in the development of a research model and the proposal of hypotheses. Next, Section 3 highlights the research methodology. Section 4 reports the empirical results while Section 5 identifies the discussion as well as the limitations and future research.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Willingness to pay

Willingness to pay refers to the maximum monetary value that consumers are willing to spend on a product or service (Namkung & Jang, 2017). It implies favorable future behavior towards the product or service (Homburg et al., 2005) because it reflects the intention of consumers and their conscious predisposition towards paying a certain amount in the future. Willingness to pay has been studied in the literature as a key indicator of intentions and intentions are central to the theory of planned behavior (Martínez García et al., 2018; Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014), wherein intentions are understood as antecedents of behavior in the process of individual decision-making (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

2.2. Attitude toward green hotel

Attitude is "*a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor*" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). Attitude has been identified as a predictor of behavior. Green attitude concentrates precisely on an individual's attitude as regards the environment, which contributes to

conserving the environment, protecting natural resources, or minimizing environmental degradation (Casalo & Escario, 2018). Environmental degradation is usually connected to the behavior of humans (Indriani et al., 2019). Subsequently, an attitude has been identified as a significant predictor of environmental behavior (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Ojo et al., 2019). Some studies reveal that green attitudes do not necessarily lead to eco-friendly actions (Casalo & Escario, 2018; Laroche et al., 2001). Han et al. (2010) found that product attitudes were a significant predictor of a customer's willingness to pay for a green hotel, while Kang et al. (2012) examined attitudes about the environment and found a similar relationship concerning consumers' willingness to pay a premium to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel. Based on the foregoing discussion, we postulate that the more favorable consumers' green attitudes are, the higher the likelihood for them to buy green products. Hence, the hypothesis posited is that:

H1: Attitude toward green hotel is positively related to willingness to pay for green hotel.

2.3. Destination image

The image is an essential element in the promotion of tourist destinations since what makes differences one destination from another is a key to success (Alcocer & Ruiz, 2020). Destination image is widely recognized as a powerful tool in today's competitive global environment. Thus, many tourist destinations attempt to gain the advantages of resource endowment and improve destination management effectiveness to become competitive destinations (Wang et al., 2013; Tavitiyaman et al., 2021).

The importance of the image in determining the success of a given tourism destination has been investigated in the literature, with the first introduction in the tourism industry by Gunn (1972), and Hunt (1971). Destination image is defined as a subjective interpretation of a place held in a tourist's mind, which impacts the tourist's behavior during three stages piori, loco, and posteriori (Agapito et al., 2013). Chiu et al. (2016) argue destination image is the sum of beliefs, knowledge, affective feeling, and the total impression that a visitor holds about a particular destination.

The image a tourist may have of a destination can be quite personal, as it depends on each tourist's perceptions of the place (San Martin & Del Bosque, 2008). Typically, these perceptions are primarily influenced by the physical characteristics of the destination in question (Obenour et el., 2006), although purposeful marketing and advertising can also shape the destination image in the mind of the consumer (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Meng & Uysal, 2008).

A destination's image evokes thoughts and feelings about the destination in question, and as such, is generally thought to consist of both a cognitive and affective component (San Martin & del Bosque, 2008). Prior research has examined the effect of destination image on perceived value (Kim et al., 2013), satisfaction (Prayag &

Ryan, 2012), and behavioral intention (Chen & Tsai, 2007). When a traveler has a positive image of a location, the possibility that they visit that location increases. Extant empirical studies (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Huang & Liu, 2017) report the positive effect of destination image on willingness to pay. In sum, if a green hotel looks appealing to tourists, the chance of them paying to stay in becomes greater. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed that:

Hypothesis 2a: Destination image is positively related to willingness to pay for green hotel

Although individuals' environmental attitudes are often a relatively stable construct (Allport, 1954), they can be affected by other factors. Hines et al. (1987), in their literature review, report that environmentally responsible behaviors are associated with knowledge of issues that can arise from factors such as education and experiences. For instance, positive feelings obtained through experiences in the natural environment can stimulate pro-environmental orientation (Orams, 1995). Likewise, the condition of the physical surroundings can influence customer cognitions and emotions towards the environment. Puhakka (2011) suggests that environmentally responsible behavior results when tourists recognize the impact of their actions on the environment. The image of the destination can create more respect for the environment and finally be reflected in tourists' attitudes toward green hotels (Chiu et al., 2014a). The image of an environmentally friendly destination may also engender attitudes toward green hotel. To sum up, the destination image can induce travelers' attitudes toward green hotel. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2b: Destination image is positively related to customer attitudes toward green hotel.

2.4. Environmental beliefs

In social psychology, belief is considered the enduring organization of an individual's perceptions and cognitions of the personal world (Fishbein, 1963). Environmental belief relates to the awareness of the conservation of natural and cultural assets (Huang & Liu, 2017). Environmental beliefs are regarded as a system of attitudes and beliefs that determine people's environmental behavior; they are, thus, a form of behavioral beliefs. Empirically, environmental belief is considered a significant predictor of many tourists' attitudes and behaviors (Wurzinger & Johansson, 2006).

As consumers become more aware of contemporary ecological issues, their environmental beliefs and their ability to influence the environment through consumption decisions have an important impact on their attitudes and behavior (Young et al., 2010). Kang & Moscardo (2006) argue that environmentally responsible behaviors as outcomes of environmental attitudes. Holden (2019) emphasizes the important role of environmental ethics in the development of

sustainable tourism. People with strong environmental beliefs may be expected to have a more positive attitude toward consumption and activities that can promote conservation of natural assets. When it comes to travel intention, such people tend to choose green hotels instead of other types of hotel since green hotels contribute to the sustainable development by minimizing the negative impacts on the environment. Based on the above discussion, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3a: Environmental beliefs are positively related to attitude toward green hotel.

Environmentally responsible behavior includes actions that actively benefit the environment, as well as more neutral activities that simply do not harm the environment. By this definition, staying at a green hotel can be considered environmentally responsible behavior. Thus, within the context of the attitude-based framework discussed above, we suggest that when a consumer believes that his actions can have a positive impact on the environment, he is more likely to have a positive attitude toward green hotels, more disposed to choose hotels that demonstrate a similar concern for the planet, and more willing to pay stay at green hotel. Hultman et al. (2015) points out the strong impact of tourists' environmental belief on the intention to visit a green hotel. In line with the extant literature, the next hypothesis is presented as follows:

Hypothesis 3b: Environmental beliefs are positively related to willingness to pay for green hotel.

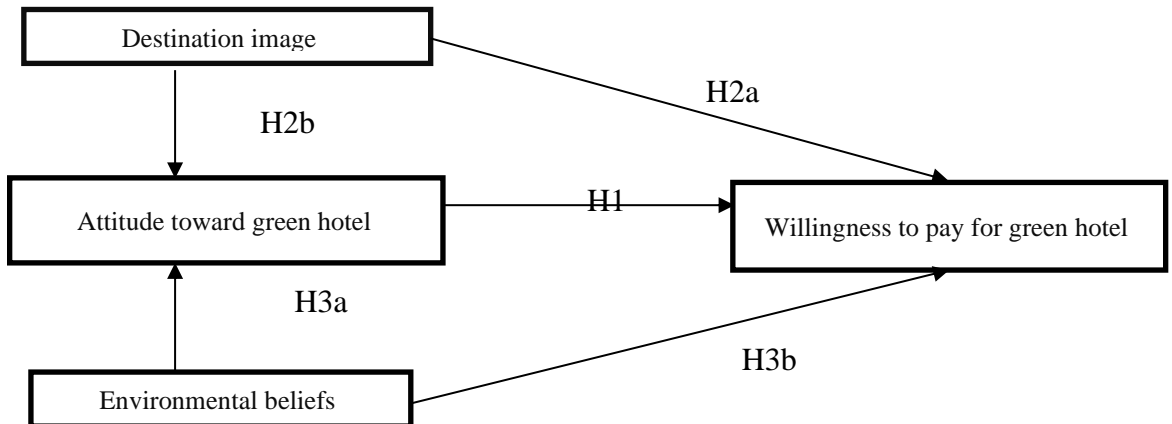The relationships hypothesized above are summarized in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Research model

3. Methodology

3.1. Variables and measures

A structured questionnaire was applied to collect the information for this study. The questionnaire items are drawn from relevant literature in the tourism field and adapted to accommodate the characteristics of the surveyed region. A self-administrated questionnaire was designed consisting of two sections; socio-demographic, and the four main variables, including destination image, attitude to green hotel, environmental beliefs, and willingness to pay for green hotel.

The indicators to measure those variables were adapted from previous studies. Each item was measured by 5-point Likert - type (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The destination image scale is adapted from Line & Hanks (2016) with four items. To measure the level of attitude to green hotel, seven items are collected from Han & Kim (2010). Environmental beliefs variable is measured using five items from Han et al. (2010). Finally, willingness to pay for green hotel is measured by a six-item scale of Dwivedi et al. (2018). We adopted these scales because they are widely used in previous studies in various contexts with a high-reliability value. The questionnaire was translated from English into Vietnamese by two researchers who were fluent in both English and Vietnamese. The final questionnaire for the current study includes 22 items.

3.2. Data collection

In order to effectively measure the tourist willingness to pay for green hotel, we chose Nam Cat Tien National Parks, Phu Quoc island for selecting study participants. The reason for choosing three tourist sites is that ecotourism and eco-services in these sites are developed. Furthermore, these sites are popular destinations among ecotourism site in South of Vietnam. The sample unit in this study was a visitor at green hotels. This study used convenience sampling method to develop a research sample because of its feasibility to approach visitors at ecotourism sites. Tourists were directly and kindly requested to involve in answering the survey. Before launching the large-scale survey, a pilot study was conducted with 15 tourists at green hotel in Phu Quoc Island, Vietnam to ensure the clarity of the questions. After that, the questionnaire was revised and pretested to 50 people.

Then, the large-scale survey was launched from February to Apirl 2022. Of 500 distributed questionnaires, 487 questionnaires were returned, illustrating the response rate 97.4%. To ensure the validity of the data, we conduct the cleanness and screening of data. Finally, 479 useful answers have been applied for the final test. Table 1 presents the demographics of respondents. With the respect to the sample characteristics, 53.02% of informants were female, 45.92% were aged between 25 and 44. For the frequency of travelling per year, 47.81% were below 2 times per year.

The highest proportion, 28.18% of our respondents are staff, 24.43% public servants, while 20.25% are students.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of customers

Criteria	Detail	Percentage
Age	<=24 years old	15.03 %
	25 - 44 years old	45.92 %
	45 – 64 years old	29.85 %
	>64 years old	9.2 %
Gender	Male	46.98 %
	Female	53.02 %
Purpose of the trip	Tour	74.94 %
	Business	23.13 %
	Others	1.93 %
Frequency	Below 2 times	47.81%
	2-4 times	44.67%
	Above 4 times	7.52%
Job	Student	20.25%
	Staff	28.18%
	Public servant	24.43%
	Business	11.69%
	Freelance	6.68%
	Homemaker/Retired	4.80%
	Others	3.97%

4. Results

4.1. Common method variance

Common method variance is considered as a variance attributable to the method of measurement rather than to the constructs represented by the measures (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Common method variance creates a false internal consistency, that is, a direct correlation between variables created by their common source. Thus, Harman's single factor test was adopted to find out the problem (Podsakoff et al., 2003). By analyzing the result, we found that the data is free from common method bias because the total variance for a single factor is 48%, which is under the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4.2. Measurement model

The study used factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha to test construct validity and reliability respectively. The instrument was deemed valid if the factor loading of each indicator was above 0.5, the KMO of the variables was higher than 0.5 and the value of Barlett's test was lower than 5% (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, the instrument was

reliable only when the Cronbach's alpha value stands on or above 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010). All measures' values are higher than the threshold. This means that the measurement indicators can reflect the characteristics to be measured with good convergent validity and reliability. The results of construct validity and reliability analysis are illustrated in Table 2. The overall fitness indices indicate a good fit for the measurement model (Chi-square/df =2.643; CFI = 0.911; TLI = 0.918; GFI = 0.914 and RMSEA = 0.068).

Table 2: The results of construct validity and reliability analysis of measurement scales

Construct	Item code	Bartlett's test of sphericity	Factor loadings loading	Cronbach'Alpha	AVE	Composite reliability
Destination image	IM3	.000	0.641	0.814	0.57	0.793
	IM2		0.607			
	IM4		0.594			
	IM1		0.536			
Environmental beliefs	EN1	.000	0.739	0.930	0.63	0.853
	EN5		0.734			
	EN4		0.725			
	EN3		0.723			
	EN2		0.719			
Attitude to green hotel	AT1	.000	0.693	0.868	0.65	0.862
	AT4		0.691			
	AT5		0.656			
	AT7		0.642			
	AT6		0.633			
	AT2		0.628			
	AT3		0.621			
Willingness to pay for green hotel	WP2	.000	0.702	0.855	0.72	0.883
	WP3		0.672			
	WP4		0.664			
	WP5		0.657			
	WP6		0.652			
	WP1		0.644			
Notes: Chi-square/df =2.643; CFI = 0.911; TLI = 0.918; GFI = 0.914 and RMSEA =						

Convergent validity is also evident because standardized loading for each the items and the average variance extracted (AVE) both exceed the 0.5 thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2010). The internal consistency of the measurement scales is considered satisfactory as all the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are greater than the 0.7 benchmarks suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Discriminant validity matrix presented in Table 3 indicates discriminant validity.

Table 3: The results of discriminant validity

Constructs	IM	EN	AT	WP
Destination image (IM)	0.741			
Environmental beliefs (EN)	0.662	0.673		
Attitude to green hotel (AT)	0.561	0.472	0.725	
Willingness to pay for green hotel (WP)	0.482	0.445	0.502	0.721

4.3. Hypothesis testing results

Structural equation model (SEM) is used to evaluate the suitability of the theoretical model under analysis with respect to the empirical data, and examine the significance of hypotheses. As can be seen from Table 4, the baseline model has a good fit (Chi-square/df =2.657; CFI = 0.918; TLI = 0.914; GFI = 0.916 and RMSEA = 0.067) and the hypothesized relationships are all statically significant and positive. Therefore, all of the hypotheses proposed in this study are accepted.

Table 4: The result of testing hypothesis

Relationships			Path coefficient	p
Destination image	→	Attitude toward green hotel	0.369	***
Environmental beliefs	→	Attitude toward green hotel	0.225	***
Destination image	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.486	***
Environmental beliefs	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.519	***
Attitude toward green hotel	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.148	***
Notes: Chi-square/df =2.657; CFI = 0.918; TLI = 0.914; GFI = 0.916 and RMSEA = 0.067				

In order to assess the total impact of all factors in the model about the visitors' attitude toward green hotel to willingness to pay for green hotel, we used direct, indirect and total effect analysis. The direct and indirect effects of all variables on willingness to pay for green hotel are shown in Table 5. Both destination image, environmental beliefs, and destination image have significant direct effects on willingness to pay for green hotel.

Table 5: Direct, indirect and total effect coefficients

Relationships			Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Destination image	→	Attitude toward green hotel	0.369	0.000	0.369
Environmental beliefs	→	Attitude toward green hotel	0.225	0.000	0.225
Destination image	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.486	0.034	0.52
Environmental beliefs	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.519	0.053	0.572
Attitude toward green hotel	→	Willingness to pay for green hotel	0.148	0.000	0.148
Notes: Chi-square/df =2.657; CFI = 0.918; TLI = 0.914; GFI = 0.916 and RMSEA = 0.067					

The total effect of destination image on willingness to pay for green hotel (sum of direct and indirect effect through attitude to green hotel) is 0.52. Similarly, the total effect of environmental beliefs on willingness to pay for green hotel is 0.572. Meanwhile, the total effect of attitude to green hotel is 0.148 which is lowest among the three predictors.

First, the results show that the attitude toward green hotel has significantly positive impact on willingness to pay for green hotel. This finding is consistent with previous research (Han et al., 2010; Hultman et al., 2015), which argue that pro-environment attitude is a driver of environmental behavior.

Second, regarding the evidence about the significant effect of destination image on willingness to pay for green hotel, this finding is in line with Chen & Tsai (2007), Chiu et al. (2014b) and Huang & Liu (2017). However, different from the previous studies, this study's finding provides more insight into the role of destination image. In particular, the path of destination image → attitudes toward green hotel → willingness to pay appears evident in this study. Destination image influences the willingness to pay for green hotel and also contributes to the development of tourists' positive attitude towards green hotel, which in turn strengthens their choice of eco-tourism. Hence, endeavors to build or improve the image of a destination facilitate the development of sustainable tourism.

Third, environmental beliefs have a positive effect on attitudes toward green hotel, these results are in line with previous studies such as (Hughes, 2013; Chiu et al., 2014a). These studies argued that people having awareness of the natural environment can evoke positive emotions, which in turn can enhance their positive attitude towards the environment (Chiu et al., 2014; Pham & Khanh, 2021). Moreover, it is also found in this study that environmental beliefs have a significant impact on willingness to pay for green hotel. This result is in line with Young et al. (2010),

Doran et al. (2015). This finding contributes to the current movement in the tourism literature which calls for a shift to environmental beliefs as critical driving factor for sustainable tourism. Specifically, by providing an improved understanding about the role of individuals' environmental beliefs in their ecotourism travel decision, our finding advocates the view put forward by Bertella (2019) about the importance of environmental beliefs in the development of sustainable tourism. Indeed, individuals' environmental belief is an abstract concept which is reflected by their environmental concern for which this study confirms as a critical factor contributing to willingness to pay for green hotel and other eco-friendly behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the direct and indirect relationship between destination image, attitude toward green hotel, environmental beliefs, and willingness to pay for green hotel. Based on the empirical analysis of a random sample of 479 valid responses by tourists, the study found that attitudes toward green hotel impact positively on willingness to pay for green hotel. Destination image, environmental belief are found to have statistically significant effects both direct and indirect on willingness to pay for green hotel; its indirect effect is transmitted through environmental beliefs.

This study provides theoretical implications to the literature on ecotourism literature. How to understand tourists green initiatives and behaviors is an issue that attracts the attention of the ecotourism industry. Based on the results, the study states the importance of destination image and environmental belief in exploring the attitude engaging in using green hotel.   Specifically, our findings conclude that tourists are mainly attracted by destination image and that tourists having environmental beliefs are more likely to pay for the green hotel than other types of tourism by first influencing their attitude. This helps developing countries like Vietnam understand how images can be utilized to develop local entrepreneurship and contribute to economic development. Our findings could be further used in different ecotourism sites in other developing countries in the Southeast Asia region to enhance the environmental awareness of tourists.

This study provides useful practical implications, contributing to the development of sustainable tourism in emerging economies. Because of the economic growth, an emerging country like Vietnam has experienced a boom in tourism which, without appropriate management policy, could lead to over-exploitation of nature and a bad influence on the environment. For the development of green initiatives and practices in such a country, maintaining and improving the environmental friendly images of tourism locations are of great importance. To do this, this study suggests policymakers in an emerging economy like Vietnam to use efficient regulations on protecting the natural environment in tourism locations while tourism providers and marketers should invest in building eco-image of travel locations. This study also recommends authorities to encourage greater awareness of the importance of

environmental protection through education, propaganda and media, as this will foster the demand for ecotourism. As an example, primary schools can incorporate in their training programs the content about the importance of environment protection. Moreover, ecotourism operators should develop marketing strategies to increase traditional and natural values and promote eco-friendly social standards for fostering demand. Any promotion or advertising, which focusses on environmental belief as a marketing message, may be an effective tool.

Although the present research provides some insights into the literature of green hotels, still it is not beyond limitations, which furnishes chances for future researches. First, convenience sampling and cross-sectional data were analyzed due to limited resources including manpower, financial resources, and time. In follow-up studies, other sampling methods, such as quota sampling or random sampling, and longitudinal research could be adopted. Secondly, this study relied on respondents' self-rating of their activities, which could bias the results, as participants may overstate or understate their activities. Future research could be benefit from integrating more objective data. For instance, we would recommend including managers' or colleagues' opinions about individuals' employability. Furthermore, the survey is conducted in one specific ecotourism nation like Vietnam, and thus the findings must also be explained in this case. Future research is encouraged to use data collected in other countries.

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