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THE IMPACT OF TRUST AND DEMOGRAPHIC VALUES ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS TOWARDS GREEN HOTELS

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Abstract:

Green hotels are eco-friendly hotels that implement environmental protection measures to protect nature. These hotels apply practices that are considered as environmentally friendly initiatives that aim to eliminate the negative impact on the environment. Although protecting the environment has become increasingly discussed, adopting environmentally friendly behaviours still poses a challenge to most people due to issues like lack of interest. This study explores how trust and demographic variables affect customer purchase intentions towards green hotels in Sabah, Malaysia. A quantitative survey with 329 respondents, which consist of domestic travellers in Sabah was undertaken. Empirical analysis using SPSS was utilised to examine the identified relationships among the variables. The result showed that there is a significant relationship between trust and customer purchase intentions based on the outcomes from the linear regression analyses done. Furthermore, the study showed that age, income and education positively influenced customer purchase intentions, while gender demonstrated a negative impact. These findings will be enlightening to the hotel industry players by giving insightful data that will assist them in developing effective marketing techniques personalised to customer profiles and levels of trust, consequently fulfilling the ever-changing wants of domestic travellers.

Keywords:

Green Hotel, Purchase Intention, Trust, Demographic, Green Hotel Knowledge

Introduction

Green hotels are any hotel or resort that commits to environmentally-friendly practices (Bradley, 2019). In particular, green hotels are committed to meeting energy efficiency standards, water conservation, the use of environmentally friendly products, waste management, air quality management, noise pollution regulation, toxic waste management, human resource management, collaborating with community organisations, and environmental policies that are relevant to the operation of hotels (Dogru et al., 2020; Ongan et al., 2020; Işık et al., 2019).

Green hotels advocate safety, environmental protection, and health concept. However, there are still a series of issues and obstacles in having people stay at green hotels. One of the issues is because of lack of interest towards being greener. Even though there are various environmental campaigns and the Internet is available to be used for finding information regarding environmental awareness, most people are not interested in committing to green practices, even after they know about the advantages, such as it is good for the environment. To combat this problem, governmental and non-governmental organisations should be proactive and encouraging, for example, by giving incentive to people who recycle a certain number of items. This can also be seen as an issue of lacking enforcement and regulation by the government.

Another issue that may hinder individuals to stay at green hotels is the price. Usually, the price of staying at a green hotel is higher than the price of staying at a regular hotel. There are a few reasons why staying at green hotels can be costly. Setting up green, sustainable practices is expensive; adequate employee training is required and can be time-consuming; and the location of the green hotel can have a major impact on the overall cost of the hotel operations, especially when the hotel is built somewhere rural and far away from important partners, like suppliers. However, if done appropriately, a green hotel may save money in general, as well as being able to position itself as a community, environmental, and guest connector (Joshi, 2022).

Looking at these issues, to increase people's interest in staying at green hotels, certain determinants should be considered. This study would like to investigate related factor determinants that influence customer to stay at green hotel. These determinants are trust, gender, age, income, and education. This study is an opportunity to examine and analyse the customer purchase intention towards green hotels. Thus, the study aims to determine whether these 5 determinants positively influence customer purchase intention towards green hotels. The studied phenomena are significant since the findings will provide new information about the current situation and add to the existing body of knowledge, both in general and in the context of green hotels in Sabah. Lastly, this study is important as it will provide valuable insight to relevant organisations and their personnel regarding new knowledge and perspectives on this topic.

Literature Review

Trust

Trust has received a great deal of attention from scholars in several disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and economics, as well as in more applied areas, such as management and marketing (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005). Trust in a brand can promote subsequent behavioural intentions toward the brand, such as repurchase behaviour, premium

purchase intention, and brand loyalty behaviour (Dang, Nguyen & Pervan, 2020; Upamannyu & Mathur, 2013; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002; Homer & Kahle, 1988).

In this study, trust refers to customers' trust towards a green hotel. Trust in green hotel brands promotes green hotel visit intention (Jian, Yu, Yang & Zeng, 2020). Jian et al. (2020) also stated that consumers with high levels of brand trust in green hotels would be willing to pay more and sacrifice other positive hotel attributes to stay at a green hotel, as compared to consumers with low levels of brand trust in green hotels.

Furthermore, trust in green hotel brands has been found to significantly influence guests' overall satisfaction with their stay experience (Jian, Yu, Yang & Zeng, 2020). Research indicates that customers who perceive green hotels as trustworthy are more likely to have positive perceptions of various aspects of their visit, such as service quality, cleanliness, and amenities. This suggests that fostering trust in the environmental commitment of a hotel can lead to enhanced guest satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of green hospitality initiatives.

Trust towards green hotels evolves from past experience and prior interaction (Sultana & Islam, 2022; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999) because its development is often portrayed as an individual's experiential learning process over time. Therefore, it summarises the consumers' knowledge and experiences with the brand. As an experience attribute, it is influenced by the consumer's evaluation of any direct and indirect contact, which includes advertising and word of mouth, with the brand (Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996). Therefore, it is assumed that a green hotel that is credible could increase the domestic travellers' perception of trust, increasing the chances of customers' purchase intention towards green hotels. Given this argument, this shows that there is a positive relationship between trust and customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Hypothesis 1: Trust will positively affect the customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Demographic

Demographics remains one of the most popular approaches for examining green purchase behaviour of consumers when compared to other segmentation metrics (Albayrak et al., 2011). Demographics such as gender, age, income, and education are easier to acquire, comprehend, and applied to segmentation challenges (Albayrak et al., 2011). For gender, consumers who are female and who would like access to more information on green hotels tend to act more frequently in a pro-environmental manner than males. For example, Fisher et al. (2012) found that in the United States, there is a positive link between the variable "gender" and environmentally friendly purchasing behaviour. Similarly, a study by Han et al. (2009) found that compared to male consumers, female hotel consumers in the United States display a more favourable overall image in terms of visit intention, word-of-mouth intention, and readiness to pay extra for green hotels.

A study by Kim et al. (2012) looked into the demographics of online travellers and the impact of environmentally friendly programs on their choice to stay in environmentally friendly hotels. According to the study, green hotels should be marketed to younger consumers, especially those between the ages of 25 and 35, who are more likely to stay at green hotels than those over the age of 55. Aside from that, a study by Sinnappan and Rahman (2011) show that when compared to adults, younger consumers under the age of 20, have a greater outlook concerning

environmental issues. However, results obtained in relation to age have not always generated the above trend.

Han et al. (2009) study showed that the impact of green hotel image on people's willingness to pay more for such hotels was stronger in the older age group than in the younger age group. A study by Rezai et al. (2012) showed that income has a significant impact on consumers' awareness and intention to consume green foods. Consumers with a higher income are more likely to purchase green foods because the prices of green foods are typically 10-50% pricier than traditional foods. Aside from that, the results of Fisher et al. (2012) showed that there is a correlation between income and the use of green goods.

Consumers with a higher level of education are more likely to have a stronger association between their awareness and perception of green food intake (Wang et al., 2019). Rezai et al. (2012) found that the variable "education level" and consumer GPA have a positive link with understanding the concepts of green foods, green society, food safety, environmental friendliness, and animal welfare. However, consumer green purchasing behaviour was not demonstrated to be consistent across all research related to the "education" variable.

Fisher et al. (2012) gave empirical support for the educational impact on consumer green purchase behaviour among American consumers by claiming that their level of education has little to do with using green products such as recyclable bags, trash separation for recycling, turning off lights when leaving a room, and using energy-efficient light bulbs. Therefore, according to the above argument, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 2: Gender will positively affect the customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Hypothesis 3: Age will positively affect the customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Hypothesis 4: Income will positively affect the customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Hypothesis 5: Education will positively affect the customers' green hotel purchase intention.

Based on the hypotheses mentioned above, this study proposes a framework shown below in Figure 1.

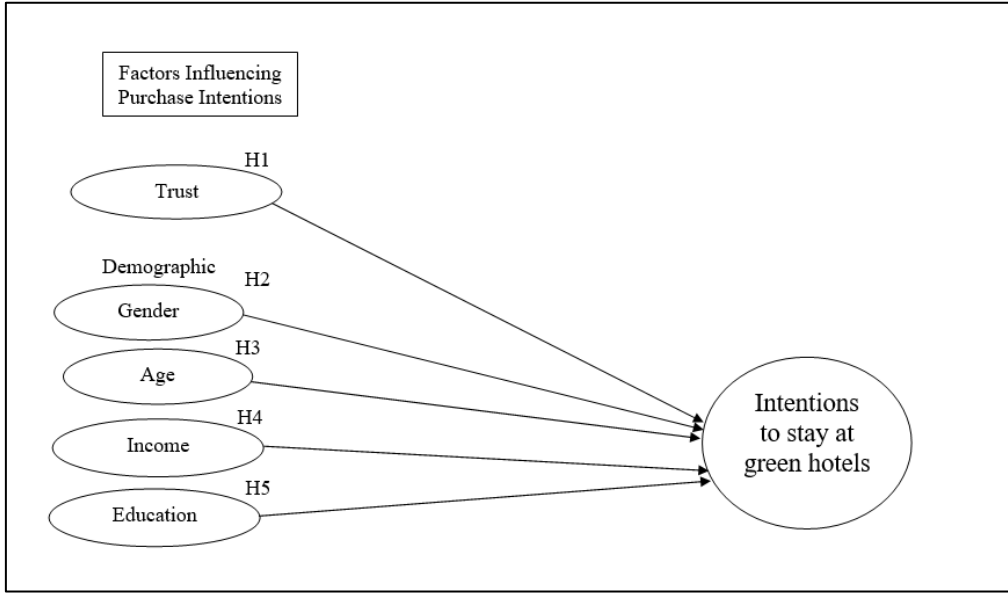


Figure 1: Framework Of The Study

Methodology

The selection of a quantitative research method for data collection in this study was driven by its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to swiftly gather a large volume of data. The 5-point Likert Scale was employed as a reliable and widely accepted tool for measuring respondents' levels of agreement with various items related to green hotels. This scale provides a structured approach to assess opinions and preferences, offering a quantitative measure that facilitates statistical analysis. The decision to utilize a Likert Scale allows for a systematic evaluation of the participants' perspectives, aiding in the identification of patterns and trends within the dataset.

In addition to the research method, the study employed a convenience sampling approach to collect information from the respondents. The choice of convenience sampling was influenced by its practicality and feasibility, especially in terms of accessibility to the target population within the constraints of time and resources. While convenience sampling enhances the ease of data collection, it is essential to acknowledge its potential limitations, such as sample bias. Despite these considerations, the combination of a quantitative approach and convenience sampling enables the study to efficiently explore the targeted research questions while acknowledging the practical constraints inherent in the research process.

Sampling and Data Collection

The researcher chose to use the questionnaire method as it is inexpensive and takes less time compared to the other data collection methods. The data was collected using Google Forms starting from June 2023 to October 2023 which is 4 months from a sample of domestic travellers who have visited a green hotel in Sabah. There is an explanation of what the research is about included in the questionnaire, elaborating on its aims and goals.

In the data collection process, initially, the researcher shared the questionnaire with family and friends that are known to have stayed in green hotels in Sabah. The researcher also contacted the green hotels in Sabah and attached the questionnaire QR code/link via e-mail. Upon agreeing to print out the QR code and putting it in the vicinity of the hotel, the guests staying

in the green hotels were able to scan the QR code and answer the questionnaire. Other than that, the researcher printed out the QR code and then physically handed it over to the hotel. The participant's responses were strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes, which were also mentioned in the questionnaire. Using the questionnaire method ensure that valid and reliable data will be collected.

The exact population for the study is unknown, therefore to determine the number of respondents, this study used a sample-to-variable ratio to determine the sample size. Based on Hair et al. (2013), ratios of 20:1 are preferred. In other words, to explain this method, the study requires only twenty respondents per independent variable in the model. Thus, if the 20:1 ratio is applied to the current study, which has seven independent variables (trust, gender, age, race, occupation, income, education), the minimum sample size will be 140 respondents. The total number of people who had answered the online questionnaire was 366, but 37 of the responses did not pass the screening question, thus they are not qualified to answer the full questionnaire. All 329 questionnaires were put into the data analysis process the data cleaning process. This study uses SPSS to analyse the data.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 shows the demographics of the 329 respondents who took part in the study. The demographics of the sample clearly illustrates the analysis procedure for the study. Upon comprehensive analysis of potential deviations, the overall sample size for locals who had stayed at green hotels in Sabah is 329. In this sample set, 35.3% comprised of males, and 64.7% comprised of females.

The table shows that individuals aged 31-40 make up most of the sample, equalling to 31.6%. 28% of the respondents has a monthly income of over RM5,000, while 20.7% of respondents earn RM3,501-RM4,500 monthly. Aside from that, more than half (59.6%) of the respondents has put bachelors' degree as their highest education level. Respondents who have a doctorate degree as their highest education level has the lowest participation rate.

Table 1. Respondent Profile (N=329)

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	116	35.3
Female	213	64.7
TOTAL	329	100
Age		
18-30	89	27.1
31-40	104	31.6
41-50	62	18.8
≥ 51	74	22.5
TOTAL	329	100
Income		
< RM1,500	28	8.5
RM1,500 - RM2,500	33	10.0
RM2,501 - RM3,500	50	15.2

RM3,501 - RM4,500	68	20.7
RM4,501 - RM5,000	58	17.6
> RM5,000	92	28.0
TOTAL	329	100
Education		
SPM	13	4.0
STPM / Diploma	63	19.1
Degree	196	59.6
Master Degree	50	15.2
Doctorate Degree	7	2.1
Others	0	0
TOTAL	329	100

Source: Author's Calculations

Regression Analysis

In this study, regression analysis was used to analyse the data in order to explain the response between variables as well as how each variable such as trust, gender, age, income, and education (independent variables) influence customer purchase intention towards green hotels (dependent variable).

Table 2: Model Summary For Trust And Demographic Variables Towards Customer Purchase Intention
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.696 ^a	.485	.477	.56603

a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust, Gender, Age, Education, Income

b: Dependent variable: Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Based on Table 2, the model summary showed R2 value was 0.485. This indicated that 48.5% of the variation in the dependent variables (customer purchase intention), could be explained by the independent variables (trust, gender, age, income, education). To put it simply, trust and demographic variables account for over 40% of the variance in customer purchase intention. Other than that, trust and demographic variables explains a significant amount of variance in the value of customer purchase intention towards green hotels, $F(5, 323) = 60.82, p < .001, R^2 = .485$.

Table 3: Regression Analysis For Trust And Demographic Variables Towards Customer Purchase Intention

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.964	.219		4.397	<.001
	Trust	.684	.045	.644	15.225	<.001
	Gender	-.037	.066	-.022	-.557	.578
	Age	.007	.039	.010	.179	.858
	Income	.062	.028	.128	2.188	.029
	Education	.030	.045	.029	.661	.509

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Purchase Intentions

Hypotheses Results

The study seeks to investigate the effect of trust, gender, age, income, and education on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. The following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: There is significant positive impact of trust on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

H2: There is insignificant negative impact of gender on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

H3: There is insignificant positive impact of age on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

H4: There is significant positive impact of income on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

H5: There is insignificant positive impact of education on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

The dependent variable, which is customer purchase intentions, was regressed on predictors such as trust and demographic variables like gender, age, income and education. The independent variables significantly predict customer purchase intentions, $F(5, 323) = 60.82$, $p < .001$. This shows that the five factors have a significant influence on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. Other than that, the $R^2 = 0.485$ shows that the model explains 48.5% of the variances in customer purchase intentions.

To determine the impact of each factor on the creation variable (customer purchase intentions), the coefficient was further evaluated. H1 assesses whether trust significantly and positively affect customer purchase intentions. The result showed that trust has a significant and positive impact on customer purchase intentions ($B = 0.684$, $t = 15.225$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H1 is supported. H2 evaluates whether gender has a significant positive impact on customer purchase intentions. The results show that gender has an insignificant negative impact on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels ($B = -0.037$, $t = -0.557$, $p = 0.578$). As such, H2 was not supported.

H3 evaluates whether age has a significantly positive impact on customer purchase intentions. The result shows that age has an insignificant positive impact on customer purchase intentions ($B = 0.007$, $t = 0.179$, $p = 0.858$). Hence, H3 was not supported. H4 evaluates whether income has a significantly positive impact on customer purchase intentions. The result shows income has a significant positive impact on customer purchase intentions ($B = 0.062$, $t = 2.188$, $p = 0.029$).

Therefore, H4 was supported. Lastly, H5 evaluates whether education has a significantly positive impact on customer purchase intentions. The result shows there is an insignificantly positive impact of education on customer purchase intentions ($B = 0.030$, $t = 0.029$, $p = 0.661$). Thus, H5 was not supported. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Regression Weights	B	t	p-value	Results
H1	T → CPI	0.684	15.225	<0.001	Supported
H2	DG → CPI	-0.037	-0.557	0.578	Not supported
H3	DA → CPI	0.007	0.179	0.858	Not supported
H4	DI → CPI	0.062	2.188	0.029	Supported
H5	DE → CPI	0.030	0.661	0.509	Not supported
R	0.485				
F (5, 323)	60.82				

Conclusion and Recommendations

The objective of the study was to investigate related factor determinants that influence customer to stay at green hotel and to examine if demographic factors influence customer purchase intention towards green hotel. Accordingly, the study confirmed that trust influence customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. The study revealed that customers who are willing to stay at a green hotel has a high level of trust towards green hotels. This is in the same vein as the previous study by Jian et al. (2020), which stated that consumers with high levels of brand trust in green hotels would be willing to pay more and sacrifice other positive hotel attributes to stay at a green hotel, as compared to consumers with low levels of brand trust in green hotels. As such, the study showed that customers' trust towards green hotels play a role in their purchase intentions towards green hotels. It is also supported by the study by Hashish, Abdou, Mohamed, Elenain, and Salama (2022) that trust plays a crucial role in driving customers' green behavioral intentions towards eco-friendly hotels. Specifically, the study reveals that trust significantly mediates the relationship between perceived quality and green satisfaction, ultimately influencing customers' green behavioral intentions.

Additionally, Majeed, Kim, and Kim (2023) found that perceived green psychological benefits—such as the positive feelings and satisfaction customers derive from engaging in environmentally friendly behavior—have a significant impact on their pro-environment behavior.

Aside from that, the results from regression analysis indicated that demographic variables can also influence customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. However, the results vary among the four different demographic groups, which are gender, age, income, and education.

The results showed that gender does not have an influence on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. The study reveals that being a male or a female makes no difference in exploring customer purchase intentions. This finding does not align with the previous finding by Fisher et al. (2012), who found that there is a positive link between the variable "gender" and environmentally friendly purchasing behaviour.

Next, the findings reveal that age does not play a significant role in customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. This is in contradiction with a study done by Sinnappan and Rahman (2011), whose findings show that when compared to adults, younger consumers under the age of 20 have a greater outlook concerning environmental issues. Thus, being young or old does not influence customer purchase intentions towards green hotels.

For income, there is a positive impact on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. This study also shows that customers' income contributes to their decision to stay at green hotels, which align with a previous study done by Rezai et al. (2012) in which income is shown to have a significant impact on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. People with a higher level of income will be more willing to stay at a green hotel despite the high cost associated with it.

Last but not least, the findings show that education does not have much impact on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. In a study by Fisher et al. (2012), one's level of education has little to do with being environmentally friendly. To conclude, only one demographic variables (ie. income) significantly influence customer purchase intentions.

Expanding on the implications of these findings, it is crucial for the green hotel industry to recognize and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly. Understanding that gender and age do not significantly sway customer purchase intentions towards green hotels challenges previous assumptions and emphasizes the need for nuanced marketing approaches. While these demographic factors might not be the primary drivers, the industry should explore other avenues to communicate the environmental benefits of their establishments. This could include highlighting specific features or initiatives that appeal to a broader audience, irrespective of gender or age, fostering a more inclusive and effective marketing strategy.

Additionally, acknowledging the role of income in influencing customer decisions to stay at green hotels, it becomes imperative for these establishments to strike a balance between sustainability and affordability. Developing cost-effective green practices or offering incentives for eco-conscious choices could attract a wider range of customers across various income levels. This insight aligns with the growing trend of consumers seeking sustainable options without compromising their financial constraints. As the study suggests, income is a crucial determinant, and understanding how it interacts with environmental concerns can guide the industry towards more accessible and economically sustainable green hospitality practices.

In conclusion, this research not only highlights the impact of income on customer purchase intentions but also challenges preconceived notions about the roles of gender, age, and education in this context. The understanding of these demographic influences provides valuable insights for the green hotel industry, allowing for more targeted and effective marketing strategies that cater to a diverse range of potential customers.

Limitations

When it comes to this study's limitations, it has only examined the impact of trust on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. Therefore, it is recommended that future research explore additional variables such as objective knowledge and subjective norms. Moreover, it is suggested that future studies should narrow down their focus to more specific demographic groups, such as university students in the same campus, to receive deeper insights into their purchase intentions towards green hotels.

Lastly, the study lacks diversity, as it primarily concentrates on Sabah only. It is proposed that future research endeavours include other locations to assess customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. The results may vary if conducted in a different location. For instance, if the green hotel is situated in an urban area, the customers may be composed of individuals more exposed to the green hotel environment in urban settings, and the customers are also likely to be more educated.

Considering the study's limitations, it is important to note that it solely focused on examining the impact of trust on customer purchase intentions towards green hotels. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing these intentions, future research could delve into additional variables, such as objective knowledge and subjective norms. By incorporating these elements, researchers can offer a more analysis of the complexities surrounding customers' decision-making processes in choosing green hotels.

Furthermore, to enhance the study's applicability, future investigations may benefit from narrowing their focus to specific demographic groups, such as university students within the same campus, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of their unique purchase intentions regarding green hotels. These adjustments would contribute to a richer and more context-specific understanding of the dynamics at play in the realm of sustainable hospitality choices.

In addition, the study's limited geographical scope, concentrating predominantly on Sabah, suggests the need for broader research efforts. To capture a more diverse range of perspectives and behaviors, future studies should extend their reach to encompass various locations. Different regions may present distinct cultural, economic, and environmental contexts that influence customer attitudes towards green hotels. Expanding the study's geographical scope will provide a more comprehensive and nuanced view of the factors shaping customer purchase intentions across diverse settings, thus enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated into the dynamics influencing customer purchase intentions towards green hotels in Sabah, Malaysia. Employing a quantitative research method facilitated the collection of extensive data efficiently, with the 5-point Likert Scale serving as a robust tool to gauge respondents' agreement levels. The research highlighted the significant impact of income on customer preferences for green hotels, emphasizing the pivotal role financial considerations play in sustainable accommodation choices. Furthermore, the analysis of demographic variables revealed that neither gender nor age significantly influences customer decisions, challenging conventional assumptions in the industry.

However, acknowledging the study's limitations, it focused solely on trust as a determinant, leaving room for future research to explore additional factors like objective knowledge and

subjective norms. The application of convenience sampling, while practical, calls for caution in generalizing findings beyond the sampled population. To enhance the study's robustness, future research should consider narrowing down to specific demographic groups and expanding the geographical scope beyond Sabah to capture a more diverse range of perspectives.

Despite these considerations, the study provides valuable insights for the green hotel industry, informing targeted marketing strategies and sustainable practices that resonate with the evolving preferences of domestic travelers. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on environmentally conscious consumer behavior and sets the stage for further exploration into the multifaceted factors influencing sustainable hospitality choices.

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