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The role of environmental CSR practices on the formation of behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context

Exploring the moderating effect of customer involvement in the buying process

El papel de las prácticas medioambientales de RSC en la formación de intenciones comportamentales en un contexto hotelero certificado

Explorando el efecto moderador de la involucración del consumidor en el proceso de compra

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the relationships among green practices, environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) image, customers' trust and their behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context and examine the moderating effect of customers' involvement in the buying process.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was used to collect data from Spanish hotel customers. A structural equation model was developed to assess the research hypotheses.

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Findings – Consumers' trust on environmentally certified hotels has a direct effect on their behavioral intentions. Environmental CSR image has a direct effect on consumers' trust on environmentally certified hotels, but it does not exert significant influence on consumers' behavioral intentions. Additionally, the results support a positive and significant influence of consumers' perceptions of green practices on the environmental CSR image of hotels. Finally, there is not a moderating effect of consumers' involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image and of this variable on behavioral intentions.

Research limitations/implications – To cross validate the results of this study, it is recommended that the formation of behavioral intentions in various types of environmentally certified hotel settings be investigated in future research.

Practical implications – Hospitality managers should design strategies to raise the perception of the green-related features of environmentally certified companies.

Originality/value – No prior study investigates the relationship between green practices, customers' trust, their degree of involvement in the buying process and their behavioral intentions in relation to companies' environmental CSR image in the hotel sector.

Keywords Certified hotels, Hotel green practices, Environmental CSR image, Trust, Behavioral intentions

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Propósito – Este estudio explora las relaciones entre las prácticas medioambientales, la imagen de RSC medioambiental, la confianza de los consumidores y sus intenciones comportamentales en un contexto hotelero certificado examinando el efecto moderador de la involucración de los consumidores en el proceso de compra.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – En la recopilación de los datos se empleó una encuesta dirigida a clientes de establecimientos hoteles en España. Así mismo, se desarrolló un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales para evaluar las hipótesis de investigación.

Resultados – La confianza de los consumidores en hoteles certificados medioambientalmente tiene un efecto directo en sus intenciones comportamentales. La imagen de RSC medioambiental tiene un efecto directo en la confianza de los consumidores en dichos hoteles, a pesar de que no ejerce una influencia significativa en sus intenciones comportamentales. Además, los resultados respaldan una influencia positiva y significativa de las percepciones de los consumidores sobre las prácticas medioambientales en la imagen de RSC medioambiental de los hoteles certificados. Finalmente, no existe un efecto moderador de la involucración de los consumidores en los efectos de las prácticas medioambientales en la imagen de RSC y de esta variable en las intenciones comportamentales.

Limitaciones/implicaciones de la investigación – Para validar los resultados de este estudio, se recomienda investigar la formación de intenciones comportamentales en diversos tipos de entornos hoteleros certificados medioambientalmente.

Implicaciones prácticas – Los gerentes de establecimientos hoteleros deben diseñar estrategias para aumentar la percepción por parte de los consumidores de las características medioambientales de las empresas certificadas medioambientalmente.

Originalidad/valor – Ningún estudio previo analiza la relación entre las prácticas medioambientales, la confianza de los consumidores, su grado de involucración en el proceso de compra y sus intenciones comportamentales en relación con la imagen de RSC medioambiental en el sector hotelero.

Palabras clave – Hoteles certificados, Prácticas verdes hoteleras, Imagen de RSC medioambiental, Confianza, Intenciones comportamentales de los consumidores

Tipo de artículo – Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction

Certification is popular subject in tourism and hospitality. Certification is defined as a voluntary procedure that assesses audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards. Within the hospitality industry, quality

certifications (Iglesias *et al.*, 2018) and environmental schemes (Martínez *et al.*, 2018) have received the attention of academics and professionals. Given the ecological problems that plague the world (e.g. global warming, environmental degradation, habitat destruction, air and water pollution and resources depletion), environmental certifications have gained substantial popularity as a way to promote sustainable tourism. Growing environmental awareness has made customers change their attitudes and increasingly demand that the hospitality industry provides products and services that are ethically correct and environmentally friendly. This sector faces increasing pressure to operate in a more eco-friendly manner given its negative influence on the natural environment. This pressure does not come only from external imposed government regulations but also stakeholders' demands are becoming an important stimulator. The industry's impact on the natural environment includes habitat destruction and water and energy over-consumption, as well as soil, water and air contamination (Bohdanowicz, 2005). For these reasons, a number of stakeholders have called for the hospitality industry to actively engage in addressing environmental issues.

Hospitality managers need to find effective ways to respond to these demands since perceived deficiencies of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be damaging to corporate image and profitability (Benavides-Velasco *et al.*, 2014). CSR has transformed from an interesting ideology to a realistic necessity for modern business (Marín and Lindgreen, 2017). As environmental CSR is considered to be one of the most important aspects of a tourism company's responsible behavior, hospitality companies cannot afford the financial and reputational risks associated with lack of environmental commitment. With regard to this, previous scholars acknowledge that different dimensions of CSR can exist in the minds of consumers (Martínez *et al.*, 2013; López *et al.*, 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). In this study, the authors' purpose is to concentrate on the concept of environmental CSR image (as perceived by customers) as the expectations and opinions of this collective are considered to directly influence the design and effectiveness of corporate strategies (Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013).

To promote CSR and engage environmentally conscious consumers more and more hotels are implementing environmental schemes. Environmental certifications act as a means to promote the voluntary implementation of sustainability and CSR practices in hotels while distinguishing genuine eco-friendly companies from "green-washed" products and services (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016). Environmental certifications ensure that environmental sustainability criteria are satisfied by certified hotel businesses. For example, the Green Building Council offers an initiative called Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) which certifies resource-efficient constructions. Another environmental certification growing in importance is the environmental management system ISO 14001, which is an international standard for sustainable operation. Large tourism business, such as the Hilton group, has initiated their own environmental schemes (we care!). Similarly, large hotel groups such as the state-owned Paradores de Turismo (Spain) are part of the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS).

Environmental schemes have been the subject of many studies. Claims about environmental certifications' positive influence on financial performance, differentiation advantage achievement in green niche markets and improvement of green corporate image and reputation are well documented (Albertini, 2013; Heikkurinen, 2010). Other academics have also explored the motivations to put into practice these schemes (González-Benito and González-Benito, 2005) or even the cost of their implementation (Darnall and Edwards, 2006). Previous studies have also explored managers and operators' perceptions of these systems (Geerts, 2014). Despite all this research, there is insufficient evidence about

customers' perceptions regarding these schemes and how these certifications might relate to customers' behavior. For example, although many studies observe an increased understanding of environmental issues, confirmed by an increase of consumers' engagement in pro-environmental purchasing decisions (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2013; Chan, 2013; Han *et al.*, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2012; Millar *et al.*, 2012), others maintain that demand for environmentally certified hotels is limited and emphasize that little progress has been made in modifying consumer behavior (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Levy and Park, 2011; Line and Hanks, 2016). Such inconsistencies indicate a partial understanding on the aspects influencing green consumer behavior and emphasize the need for further research in this area. The authors suggest that these mixed findings may be partially ascribable to the mediating and moderating factors that significantly affect customers' decision processes regarding green products and services.

The present paper attempts to explore the conditions under which customer's perceptions about green practices lead to favorable behavioral intentions toward certified hotels by considering the influence of environmental CSR image and customers' trust and the moderating effect of customers' involvement in the buying process. Existing studies in environmental psychology and consumer behavior have shown that environmental CSR image, trust and customers' involvement in the buying process are fundamental concepts in explaining green consumer behavior (Chen, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2013; Huang *et al.*, 2014; Jeong *et al.*, 2014; Kim, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Martínez, 2015; Martínez *et al.*, 2018; Namkung and Jang, 2013; Wong *et al.*, 2015). However, previous research has had an inclination to investigate these variables separately. Therefore, it is obvious that hospitality theory and practice must include these essential factors as central constructs to explain customers' behavioral intentions regarding green lodging products to promote sustainable tourism and develop effective green marketing strategies in a hotel context. To conclude, this paper addresses the calls for green marketing issues to be incorporated into the hospitality marketing literature (Chan and Hsu, 2016) and for the analysis of the relationship between environmental activities and corporate image and its outcome variables in explaining customer behavioral intentions (Yadav *et al.*, 2016).

Section 2 provides an overview about the influence among green practices, environmental CSR image, customers' trust and their behavioral intentions. Section 3 describes the methodology, including measures of variables, data collection procedures and sample characteristics. The results are then presented in Section 4 followed by the discussion of theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, research limitations and future lines of research are outlined in Section 5.

2. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

Issues related to the environment and the term "green marketing" are currently one of the most commonly discussed topics in academic research. This concept comprises:

> All activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occur with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment (Polonsky, 1994, p. 2).

With environmental issues becoming of significant concern for society, the majority of firms all around the globe (and those in the hotel industry are no exception) are admitting their environmental responsibility and showing this by making a green commitment to adopt ecological initiatives voluntarily (Kim *et al.*, 2016). One of the main expressions of this commitment is through environmental certification programs. Environmental certifications are considered to improve environmental performance by helping firms to focus on

environmental management and also to enhance the internal supervision of environmental performance (Darnall and Sides, 2008). Environmental schemes also benefit consumers by providing a guarantee of quality and reliability (Esparon *et al.*, 2014). When adopting an official third party environmental certification, hotel companies obtain access to the knowledge of the certification institution, which provides them with personalized information about the implementation of environmental practices. Hoteliers reduce claims of "green-washing" in this way. Companies attempting to "green-wash" their corporate image selectively disclose favorable information about their environmental performance while omitting to make negative facts public (Rahman *et al.*, 2015). Certification bodies establish pre-defined rules and goals and assess whether an audited hotel complies with them (Font, 2002). Third-party environmental certification therefore gives credibility to claims about corporate environmental performance and sustainable practices adopted by hotel companies.

Although green marketing initiatives are gaining popularity as a strategic advantage in the hospitality industry, there is a lack of studies analyzing the effect of corporate images on consumer behavior from a green marketing perspective (Yadav *et al.*, 2016). As far as the authors know, no previous studies have explored the consequences of a hotel's environmental CSR image and its role in developing F behaviors in a certified hotel context. Consequently, this research bridges the gap by investigating how to develop favorable customer behavioral intentions toward an environmentally certified hotel, based on the hotel's environmental image, customer trust as well as their level of involvement.

2.1 Green practices and environmental corporate social responsibility image

Before explaining the notion of environmental CSR image and its link with green initiatives in a certified hotel context, it is necessary to briefly explain the concept of overall image. This notion is a multidimensional construct that refers to the perceptions a group of stakeholders has of a company (Fombrun, 1996). Keller (1993) defines this notion as a set of perceptions about a company reflected by firms' associations in consumers' memory. When it comes to understanding the dimensionality of this construct, researchers commonly differentiate between two main dimensions: corporate ability (CA) and CSR image (Brown and Dacin, 1997). CA refers to the perception of a company's expertise and skills in producing and delivering product and service offerings, whereas CSR image refers to the perception and knowledge of a company's activities and status relating to its societal and stakeholder obligations (He and Li, 2011).

The increasing academic interest in the concept of CSR has led to the proposition of several methodologies to measure stakeholder perceptions of this strategy. With regard to this, there is a growing interest of marketing academics within the hospitality field in studying CSR as perceived by customers (Martínez *et al.*, 2013; Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015). In this sense, CSR image is defined as stakeholder perceptions of corporate responses to the general social concerns of stakeholder groups (Lai *et al.*, 2010). Following this framework, previous scholars acknowledge that different dimensions of CSR can exist in the minds of consumers (Martínez *et al.*, 2013; López *et al.*, 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). One-dimensional proposal applied to the study of CSR image is the sustainable development approach (van Marrewijk, 2003). From this perspective, CSR image is composed of the environmental, economic and social dimension of companies perceived by their stakeholders. The special relevance that the environmental domain holds in this perspective makes its use more focused on the study of those industries that have a special impact on the physical surroundings of the companies, such as tourism.

As previously mentioned, CSR image has been conceptualized by considering multiple dimensions such as environmental, economic and social domains (Martínez *et al.*, 2013; López *et al.*, 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). Despite the attention to multiple dimensions of CSR image in the tourism and hospitality context, the need to address it has traditionally focused on each dimension separately. Environmental CSR image has become increasingly relevant since the 1980s when consumers become aware of environmental issues and their consequences for the planet. Accordingly, tourism companies are developing new corporate approaches such as green marketing strategies to please environmental requirements for customers (Polonsky, 1994). Green marketing literature remains focused on environmental concerns as well as consumer behavior. Based on the previous definition by Keller (1993) and considering a green marketing perspective, environmental CSR image is defined in this study as a set of perceptions of a firm in consumers' mind that is linked to environmental commitment and concerns.

Therefore, a company's environmental CSR image involves environmental or green-related attributes of the firm that its stakeholders come to perceive (Castro *et al.*, 2016). Specifically, a hotel's green image can be described as consumers' mental perceptions of the hotel company that are linked to environmental concerns, and it can be expressed as a function of the most important green attributes of the hotel (Jeong *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, customers' perceptions of the green image of a hotel can be measured by the function of green practices that are important for the evaluation of the greenness of the hotel. A good environmental CSR image acts as a clear signal of a firms' environmental commitment towards its key stakeholders and represents an effective means to improve not only environmental differentiation but also profitability (Heikkurinen, 2010). Hospitality companies promote their environmental CSR image to show their actual commitment towards sustainable issues, demonstrating to stakeholders their achievements in natural environmental protection.

Previous research indicates that the green initiatives of environmentally certified hotels can be a relevant factor to develop the green image of firms (Boiral, 2011; Heikkurinen, 2010; Jeong *et al.*, 2014; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). These studies propose that these practices make a company¨s products and services distinct, enhancing the firm¨s environmental CSR image. For instance, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) demonstrate how a positive environmental image can be created through the implementation of environmental systems. In a similar way, Boiral (2011) reports that the adoption of environmental certifications helps firms to build their environmentally friendly image. Consequently, it seems obvious that these ideas should be extrapolated, and to propose that green practices in the hospitality industry can influence a customer¨s environmental CSR image of a particular certified hotel. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Customer perceptions of green practices positively affect the environmental CSR image of environmentally certified hotels.

2.2 Environmental corporate social responsibility image and behavioral intentions

The concept of a company's image has been the focus of great interest among academics and practitioners because of its effects on customers' behavioral decisions (Lin *et al.*, 2007; Han *et al.*, 2009; Jeong *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Martínez, 2015; Martínez *et al.*, 2018). Building customers' positive intentions is an important goal for hospitality business since these intentions will ultimately increase customer retention rated and profits (Han *et al.*, 2009). Consumers' behavioral intentions represent the likelihood of consumer engagement in a specific behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Behavioral intentions are the

closest antecedents of actual behavior when examining individuals' decision making-processes. This implies that scholars are able to predict specific behaviors with considerable accuracy from intentions to engage in the behavior under consideration. Behavioral intentions have been studied by examining three key dimensions: willingness to repurchase products or services from a company, to pay a premium price for these products and to recommend the company or to say positive comments about the company's services (Zeithaml *et al.*1996; Gao *et al.*, 2016).

Previous studies in the tourism and hospitality context have traditionally devoted greater attention to exploring the influence of CA associations (quality service, professionalism of employees, etc.) on consumer behavior since these perceptions seem to have stronger connection with profitability and performance than CSR (Briggs *et al.*, 2007; Wu and Chen, 2015; Tung *et al.*, 2017). However, not only hospitality companies but also firms from other tourism subsectors are under increasing pressure to enhance their socially responsible behavior since CSR is an ethical standard for contemporary society and because it has implications for consumer behavior and corporate financial performance (Inoue and Lee, 2011). With regard to this, the authors have identified a growing interest of tourism and hospitality scholars in studying CSR as perceived by customers (e.g. CSR image) (Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015). These stakeholders have received special attention as their expectations and opinions are considered to have a direct impact on the design and effectiveness of corporate strategies. Focusing on the hospitality context, past researchers have found that customers' responses to CSR image influence not only their levels of satisfaction, trust and identification with the company but also their loyalty towards hotel companies (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013).

By concentrating our analysis on the environmental domain of CSR image, previous studies support the influence of environmental CSR image on customers' behavior. In the hospitality setting, Lee *et al.* (2010) support the relationship between a green cognitive and affective image and customers' behavioral intentions (in terms of intention to revisit, intention to offer positive recommendations and willingness to pay a premium). Liu *et al.* (2014) found that perceived environmental CSR can enhance perceived brand quality and brand preference. In the same vein, Martínez (2015) shows that green overall image has positive direct effect on customers' trust, satisfaction and loyalty. Kim (2017) demonstrated that environmental CSR programs perceived by restaurants' consumers generate favorable attitudes and intention to purchase from these companies. Therefore, this study proposed the next research hypothesis:

H2. Customers' perceptions of a hotel's environmental CSR image positively affect their behavioral intentions.

2.3 Environmental corporate social responsibility image and trust

Perceptions of CSR image can enhance trust on the part of customers (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2009; Lacey and Kennett-Hensel, 2010). Marketing academics suggest that CSR influences customer attitudes and behaviors through trust (Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). In this sense, trust is the "expectation by one person, group or firm of ethically behavior" (Hosmer, 1994, p. 399). Therefore, CSR should be closely related to develop moral capital "placing trust, a moral value construct, as central in evaluating the performance of CSR" (Vlachos *et al.*, 2009, p. 173). Previous research has demonstrated that trust mediates the effect of perceived CSR on customer behavioral intentions because perceived CSR send important signals to customers about a firm's ethical stance and moral values, and therefore the extent to which it can be trusted (Chen, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2013; Lin *et al.*, 2011). In line with these ideas,

marketing academics propose that stakeholders resolve to trust companies based upon their evaluation of those companies' values and ethics (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002). Extant research in the hospitality context supports this effect. For instance, Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) found that the perception of CSR initiatives build customer trust in a hotel company which in turn positively impacts customer loyalty. Focusing our attention of the environmental dimension of CSR, we propose that:

> *H3.* Customer perceptions of a hotel¨s environmental CSR image positively affect their trust.

2.4 Trust and behavioral intentions

Trust is considered by many scholars as the pillar of relationship marketing since this construct produces several outcomes that encourage productivity, efficiency and effectiveness (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Previous literature in the hospitality sector recognizes trust as the primary indicator of customer exchange relationships and consequently facilitating favorable customer behavioral intentions (Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22), trust is "central to successful relationships marketing because it encourages marketers to work at preserving relationships investments by cooperating with exchange partners". More specifically, Mouzas *et al.* (2007, p. 1016), in support of relationship marketing theory noted, "trust is perceived in the marketing literature as a significant, if not pivotal, aspect of business relationships". Within the context of this research, customer trust based on environmental aspects can be identified as the tendency of a customer to believe that a firm keeps its promises regarding green performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). If one party trusts the other, the intended behavior will be aligned positively. Previous studies have demonstrated that trust is an important mediator between corporate activities (e.g. CSR) and consumer behavior (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Pivato *et al.*, 2008; Lin *et al.*, 2011). The suggestion from the foregoing discussion is that customer behavioral intentions are influenced by customer trust. Then, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H4.* Customer trust positively affects their behavioral intentions.

2.5 The effect on customer involvement in the buying process on the relationship among green practices, environmental corporate social responsibility image and customer behavioral intentions

The information processing theory provides a theoretical foundation on which to explore the moderating effect of customer involvement on the relationship between green practices and a hotel's environmental CSR image and of this variable on customer behavioral intentions. One general model offered by social psychology literature which describes how information processing takes place is the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980). This framework suggests that individuals process new pieces of information either heuristically or systematically. Heuristic processing is based on shortcuts, clues or proxies to evaluate a situation, requiring less cognitive than deeper processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The disadvantage of using heuristic is that the process is less detailed and can result in less accurate conclusions, resulting in potentially incomplete gathering of information. On the other hand, systematic processing is a deeper and more cognitive processing of information (Chaiken, 1980). This kind of processing entails gathering a plethora of information, analyzing it, and using it to obtain a conclusion. This process is much more time-intensive,

effortful and cognitively demanding that heuristic processing, but the result often leads to a more accurate conclusion or evaluation.

Previous research supports the idea that systematic information processing is used by high involved individuals while heuristic processing strategy is used by low involved individuals (Chaiken, 1980). The concept of consumer involvement is "a person's perceived relevance of the consumption object based in inherent needs, values and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). It is worth noting that a widely used classification of involvement divides it into two types: product involvement and purchase-decision involvement. We are concerned with purchase-decision involvement in this study. Consumers are involved with the purchase process when they perceive the decision as corresponding to something of considerable value or fundamental importance in their lives. Consequently, a consumer's level of involvement depends on the degree of personal relevance that the purchase-decision holds for that consumer. When customer involvement in purchasing a certain product (e.g. hotels) is high, customers show much interest in their decision-making process and seek a lot of information on the product or service (e.g. characteristics of hotels including green-attributes). Therefore, as involvement increases consumers have greater motivation to comprehend and elaborate on information salient to the purchase, resulting in a greater depth of information processing and more extended decision making (systematic processing). Therefore, high involved customers will create more durable and resistant images and attitudes, less prone to change and more indicative of future behavior. Consequently, in the context of this research, for high involved hotel guests the influence of hotels' green practices on their environmental CSR image will be stronger that for less involved guests. Therefore, it is proposed:

H5. When customers have high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the relationship between green practices and the perception of a hotel's environmental CSR image will be stronger than for those customers with a low level of purchase-decision involvement.

In a similar way, research has shown that involvement plays an essential part in altering consumers' attitudes and purchase behaviors (Slama and Tashchian, 1985). So that, consumers who are more involved in the purchase-decision process of an environmentally certified hotel may be more likely to consider the environmental CSR image of the firm when they make a lodging decision than those who are low involved. Similarly, the influence of environmental CSR image on their behavioral intentions will be stronger. Accordingly, it is postulated that:

H6. When customers have high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the relationship between the perception of a hotel's environmental CSR image and their intentions will be stronger than for those customers with a low level of purchase-decision involvement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Measures

To fulfill our research objectives, one questionnaire was developed aimed at guests staying at Spanish environmentally certified hotels. For each item respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (or disagreement) using a seven-point Likert scale. Green practices were measured following Jeong *et al.* (2014). Four items based on Jeong *et al.* (2014) were used to measure hotels' environmental CSR image. To assess trust, four items based on the

study by Sirdeshmukh *et al.*(2002) were used. Behavioral intentions were measured with three items based on Gao *et al.* (2016). Finally, customer involvement was measured following Jung and Yoon (2012). The Appendix shows the scales used for each factor.

Participants were introduced with general information about environmental certifications and their goals to ensure that respondents were able to manifest their judgments about these schemes. In addition, the survey solicited information regarding respondents' demographic and traveling characteristics including gender, age, level of education, occupation, purpose of travel and previous experience with a certified hotel.

3.2 Data collection and sample profile
A sample of hotel customers in Spain was surveyed using a structured questionnaire to test the research hypotheses. Given that Spain has a substantial number of certified hotels and is a global leader as a tourist destination, and given also the international presence of Spanish hotel chains, this country can serve as an interesting context in which to test the research model. The sample used in the research was formed of consumers of hospitality services in general (hotel guests), and the survey did not refer to any specific level of hotels. This is justified for two main reasons. First of all, we intended to study the perception and dispositions towards environmentally certified hotels in general, avoiding the possible influence of linking the research to specific hotel categories (e.g. luxury, standard or comfort hotel companies). Additionally, we decided to study hotel guests to guarantee that the individuals interviewed have sufficient knowledge of hospitality services and are used to make-decisions on hotel booking, so that they can take into account (or not) the fact that a hotel is environmentally certified. Personal surveys were carried out in respondents' homes to ensure their comfort and make sure that they took time to answer the questions calmly and thoughtfully. The length of the interviews averaged 10-15 min to avoid fatigue in the respondents.

To design the research sample, a non-probability sampling procedure was chosen (Trespalacios *et al.*, 2005). Specifically, a convenience sample was used, as the researchers did not have access to a census of environmentally certified hotel guests in Spain, and it was not possible to determine the probability of any particular element of the population being chosen for the sample. Thus, to ensure a greater representation of the data, a multistage sampling by quotas was made by characterizing the population according to two criteria relevant to the investigation: the gender and the age of the respondents, which are included in the National Statistics Institute (2016). Thus, our sample replicates the real profile of the population. Table I displays the profile of the respondents.

To explore the issue of non-response bias, the authors tested for differences between early and late respondents. As recommended by Weiss and Heide (1993), early responses were defined as the first 75 per cent of returned questionnaires. The last 25 per cent were considered late respondents and representative of individuals that did not respond to the survey. Early and late respondents were compared on gender, age, education and occupation using a *t*-test and no significant differences were found suggesting that non-response bias was not an issue. Additionally, to control for social desirability bias anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized orally (Chung and Monroe, 2003). As well as anonymity and confidentiality, we emphasized that there is no right or wrong answers to further decrease social desirability bias.

4. Results
A covariance-based structural equations model (CB-SEM) approach is used to test the research hypotheses, using a robust maximum-likelihood estimation procedure, to avoid

Characteristic	n	(%)
Gender		
Male	233	46.41
Female	263	53.59
Age		
18-24	98	19.52
25-34	62	12.35
35-44	77	15.33
45-54	102	20.31
55-64	43	8.56
Over 65	120	23.90
Education		
No education	22	4.38
Basic	68	13.54
High school	156	31.07
University	191	38.04
Post-graduate degree	65	12.94
Occupation		
Student	117	23.30
Self-employed	79	15.73
Worker	152	30.28
Retired/pensioner	122	24.31
Unemployed	32	6.37
Travel purpose		
Leisure	359	71.51
Business	81	16.13
Other	62	12.35
Previous experience with a certified hotel		
Yes	227	45.22
No	275	54.78

Table I.
Sample
characteristics

problems of non-normality of the data. First, the measurement model was estimated with confirmatory factor analysis to test the psychometric properties of the measurement scales (reliability and validity). Next, the structural model was estimated to contrast the direct causal effects established in research hypotheses *H1* to *H4*. Finally, the moderating effect of customer involvement is tested through a multi-group analysis to check if the influence of green practices on environmental CSR image and of this variable on behavioral intentions is affected by the degree of consumers' involvement in the hotel purchasing process.

4.1 Estimation of the measurement model

The results obtained for the goodness-of-fit indexes show a correct specification for the measurement model. The results summarized in Table II confirm that the Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (BBNFI), Bentler-Bonett non-normed fit index (BBNNFI), incremental fit index (IFI) and Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI) statistics clearly exceed the recommended minimum value of 0.9. RMSEA is located within the maximum limit of 0.08, and normed χ^2 takes a value clearly under the recommended value of 3.0 (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The reliability of the measurement scales is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, compound reliability and AVE coefficients (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The values of these

Factor	Variable	Stand. Coeff.	R^2	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Goodness of fit indices
Behavioral intention (BI)	BI1	0.82	0.67	0.82	0.82	0.60	Normed $\chi^2 = 2.26$
	BI2	0.75	0.56				BBNFI = 0.93
	BI3	0.75	0.57				BBNNFI = 0.95
Trust (TRU)	TRU1	0.80	0.64	0.89	0.89	0.67	CFI = 0.96
	TRU2	0.88	0.77				IFI = 0.96
	TRU3	0.81	0.66				RMSEA = 0.05
	TRU4	0.79	0.62				
Environmental CSR image (ECI)	ECI1	0.84	0.70	0.88	0.84	0.66	
	ECI2	0.88	0.78				
	ECI3	0.83	0.69				
	ECI4	0.68	0.46				
Green practices (GPR)	GPR1	0.78	0.60	0.90	0.90	0.70	
	GPR2	0.85	0.73				
	GPR3	0.86	0.75				
	GPR4	0.85	0.73				
Involvement (INV)	INV1	0.75	0.57	0.91	0.91	0.63	
	INV2	0.84	0.70				
	INV3	0.82	0.67				
	INV4	0.82	0.67				
	INV5	0.80	0.64				
	INV6	0.74	0.54				

Table II.
Measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis)

statistics are, in every case, clearly above the required minimum values of 0.7 and 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), which supports the inner reliability of the proposed constructs (Table II). The convergent validity of the scales is also confirmed (Table II), as all items are significant to a confidence level of 95 per cent and their standardized lambda coefficients are higher than 0.5 (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991).

Discriminant validity of the scales is tested following the procedures proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), and Fornell and Larcker (1981). The approach proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) is based on the analysis of confidence intervals for the inter-construct correlations. According to this method, the discriminant validity of the measurement instruments used in this research is supported, given that none of the confidence intervals for the correlation among pairs of factors contains value 1.0 (Table III). The procedure proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) is based in the comparison of the variance extracted for each pair of constructs (AVE coefficient) with the squared correlation estimate between these two constructs. If the variances extracted are greater than the squared correlation, this is evidence of discriminant validity. Only one pair of constructs did not pass the test (environmental CSR image – Green Practices), although the difference

	Behavioral intention (BI)		Trust (TRU)		Environmental CSR image (ECI)		Green practices (GPR)	
Trust (TRU)	0.56	0.72						
Environmental CSR image (ECI)	0.37	0.53	0.57	0.71				
Green practices (GPR)	0.28	0.46	0.49	0.65	0.78	0.88		
Involvement (INV)	0.29	0.47	0.49	0.67	0.47	0.63	0.37	0.55

Table III.
Confidence intervals for the correlation among pairs of factors

between the AVE coefficient and the squared correlations in this case is very small
(Table IV). According to these results, there is reasonable support for the discriminant
validity of the scales used in this research.

4.2 Estimation of hypothesized structural model

Once the psychometric properties of the scales were tested in the previous stage, the
structural model formed by direct effects proposed in *H1* to *H4* was estimated, using Robust
Maximum Likelihood. The results obtained in the first estimation of the model support all
the causal effects proposed, except the influence of environmental CSR image on behavioral
intentions (*H2*). Therefore, and following the model development approach (Hair *et al.*, 2010),
the original model was reformulated to exclude the non-significant relationship. Figure 1
summarizes the results for the estimation of the revised model, including R^2 statistics for
each dependent variable, standardized coefficients for each relationship, and the statistical
significance of each effect. The goodness-of-fit indices support the correct definition of the
revised model (normed χ^2 = 2.2; BBNFI = 0.97; BBNNFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.99;
RMSEA = 0.05), and R^2 statistic takes values over 0.40 in all cases, which shows that the
theoretical model proposed provides a substantial explanation of the variance of the
dependent variables.

The empirical evidence obtained confirms that consumers' trust on environmentally
certified hotels has a direct effect on their behavioral intentions, thus supporting *H4*.
Regarding environmental CSR image, according to the results obtained, this variable has a
direct effect on consumers' trust on environmentally certified hotels (*H3* is supported), but
this variable does not exert significant influence on consumers' behavioral intentions (*H2* is
not supported). Therefore, the influence of environmental CSR image on consumers'

	Behavioral intention (BI)	Trust (TRU)	Environmental CSR image (ECI)	Green practices (GPR)	Involvement (INV)
Behavioral intention (BI)	*0.60*				
Trust (TRU)	0.41	*0.67*			
Environmental CSR image (ECI)	0.20	0.41	*0.66*		
Green practices (GPR)	0.14	0.32	0.69	*0.70*	
Involvement (INV)	0.14	0.34	0.30	0.21	*0.63*

Notes: a = AVE Coefficient for the construct. Off diagonal elements are the squared correlations among
constructs

Table IV.
Results for Fornell
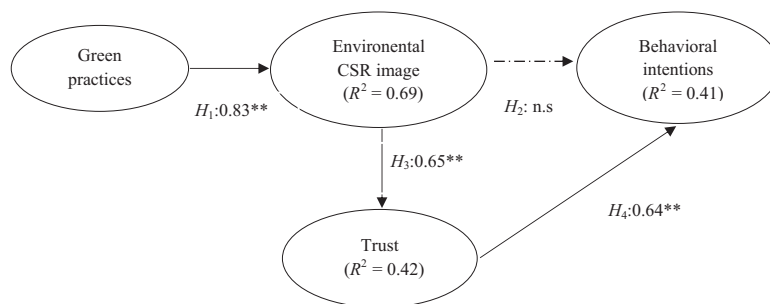and Larcker's
criterion for
discriminant validity

Figure 1.
Structural model
(causal effects)

behavioral intentions with regard to environmentally certified hotels is totally mediated by trust perceptions. Finally, the results obtained support a positive and significant influence of consumers' perceptions of green practices on the environmental CSR image of environmentally certified hotels (*H1* is supported).

4.3 Moderating effect of involvement: multi-group analysis

A multi-group model was developed to check if the influence of green practices on environmental CSR image and of this variable on behavioral intentions is affected by the degree of consumers' involvement in the hotel purchasing process (*H5* and *H6*). Specifically, the multi-group models allow analyzing the equality of the parameters considered in a structural model between different groups. Thus, the multi-group models allow evaluation of the structural parameters for each sub-group, as well as compare the obtained value for each causal relation using the LM test. In particular, the differences among groups using the statistics χ^2 with a degree of freedom are analyzed comparing the restricted and non-restricted models.

For the purpose of segmenting customers based on their involvement in the purchasing process, a K-means cluster analysis was carried out. Results showed that customers should be classified in two different subsamples depending on their Involvement in the purchasing process: high involvement (61.6 per cent) and low involvement (38.4 per cent). The results of the ANOVA test confirm the existence of significant differences between the two groups identified for all the items forming the scale used for the measurement of involvement in the purchasing process (p-valor < 0.05 in all cases). The results for the multi-group analysis developed based on customers' involvement in the purchasing process are summarized in Table V.

The goodness-of-fit indexes of the multi-group model are clearly within the recommended values, confirming the fit of the model to data (normed $\chi^2 = 2.3$; BBNFI = 0.91; BBNNFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.95; IFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.05). The results from the Lagrange Multiplier test (LM test) show that there are significant differences between the sub-groups of low involvement vs. high involvement in the purchasing process (*p*-values < 0.05) for the influence of environmental CSR image on behavioral intentions (*H5*). However, this direct effect is non-significant for both subsamples, so the moderating effect of Involvement is irrelevant in this case. Additionally, the results from the LM test show that there are no significant differences between the sub-groups of low involvement vs. high involvement in the purchasing process (*p*-values > 0.01) for the effect of green practices on environmental CSR image (*H6*). In consequence, according to the empirical evidence obtained, there is not an effective moderating effect of consumers' involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image and of this variable on behavioral intentions.

5. Conclusion

This research is interested in customers' responses toward environmental practices in a certified hotel context, which stakeholders consider to be the most important aspect of tourism companies' CSR image. As recent studies recognize a discrepancy between environmental perceptions and actual purchases of sustainable products and services, this research contributes to our understanding of the disconnect between environmental perceptions and behavior when it comes to the consumption of green hotel services by examining the alignment of customers' perceptions on the perceived performance of certified hotels.

This research makes theoretical contributions to the sustainable tourism literature in general and hospitality literature in particular through the convergence among different

research streams such as environmental psychology and consumer behavior. By considering the degree of customers' involvement in the buying process and their perceptions of green initiatives with the idea that hotels' environmental CSR image and customers' trust are important constructs for understanding green consumer behavior, this research suggests a research framework to delve into customers' behavioral intentions toward environmentally certified hotels. This study presents additional theoretical contributions to academic literature. First, no prior study investigates the relationship between green practices, customers' trust, their degree of involvement in the buying process and their behavioral intentions in relation to companies' environmental CSR image in the hotel sector. Our study enriches hospitality literature by integrating in the same proposal green practices, environmental CSR image and pro-environmental behaviors, in which customers' involvement in the buying process plays a moderation role for the linkage between environmental CSR image and customer's behavioral intentions.

Second, it demonstrates that environmental CSR image becomes a powerful tool for developing favorable pro-environmental behaviors. By implementing green practices, environmentally certified hotels can motivate customers to shape a mental image of a particular hotel's level of commitment toward environmental issues and the way in which the company presents itself with respect to its social responsible activities, which is consistent with previous research (Martínez *et al.*, 2018). In this sense, this research demonstrates that customers' perceptions of green practices act as a major driver when choosing a certified hotel. In addition, the environmental CSR image emphasized in this study facilitates an improvement in customers' perceptions regarding environmentally certified hotel attributes that serve to develop favorable customer responses. With regard to this, this study did not find empirical support for a direct effect of environmental CSR image on consumers' behavioral intentions. However, it is demonstrated that this influence is mediated by consumers' trust. According to this research, having a positive environmental CSR image is a clear incentive for consumers to believe that companies keep their promises regarding their green performance, but it does not necessarily determine their purchase decisions. The reason for this result may be the lack of communication regarding specific environmental initiatives from the hospitality industry to their consumers which may be preventing consumers from engaging actively in pro-environmental behaviors.

To conclude, there is not an effective moderating effect of consumers' involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image. For guests with high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the influence of hotels' green practices on their environmental CSR image is not stronger that for less involved guests. This may suggest that the information processing is similar for both types of individuals (high involved vs low involved guests). As noted in the previous literature, highly involved individuals tend to engage in extensive prior thinking through searching product relevant information. Nevertheless, our results show that the knowledge about green-related features of environmentally certified hotels is not as profound as we may expect from a systematic process of information. Thus, in this study, guests seem not to have developed sufficient knowledge and become highly familiar with environmentally certified hotels as the levels of involvement elevate.

	Standard. coef Low involvement	Standard. coef High involvement	LM test *p*-value
H5. Green practices → Environmental CSR image	0.79	0.80	0.19
H6. Environmental CSR image → Behavioral intentions	0.07	0.06	0.02

Table V.
Multi sample analysis (low involvement vs high involvement)

These findings have important managerial implications for hospitality companies. First, as not all customers are familiar with the advantages and operation mechanisms of environmentally certified hotels, strategies to popularize these firms and encourage consumers to visit them are important. Therefore, hospitality managers should design strategies to raise the perception of the green-related features of environmentally certified companies. Second, hoteliers should improve their hotel's environmental CSR image and increase the level of consumer trust. Our results show the importance of environmental certifications to do so and demonstrate that green issues are a key strategic tool for certified hotels to incorporate into their management strategies and policies. Several international organizations offer third-party environmental certifications, such as AENOR (The Spanish Association for Standardization and Certification) that offers the ISO 14001 certification helping hotel companies to evaluate, manage and improve their environmental performance. Hoteliers should also promote environmental campaigns to highlight the significance of ecological problems, which then may help to build up their hotels' environmental CSR image. Practitioners can use multiple channels to publicize the advantages of environmentally certified hotels and explain their goals to make the consumers understand the ideas behind operating certified hotels and trigger favorable behavioral responses. With regard to this, managers should emphasize the benefits of implementing these certifications and the achievements obtained after their implementation. For instance, advertising, public relations or social media should be valuable to increase the exposure of environmentally certified hotels and encourage customers to believe that these hotels make a difference in protecting and improving the environment. Possible channels through which managers may do this include media advertising, speeches, reports, press releases, Web pages, announcements, newsletters, articles and CSR reports. In addition, social media channels, notably, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, are increasingly popular. Managers may also easily add in information to their booking confirmation to interest and engage guests. Nevertheless, these communication techniques need to convince consumers that environmentally certified hotels make a difference in protecting the environment, in order that consumers do not become skeptical. Through effective communication strategies promoting the achievement of official third-party environmental certifications, hoteliers can show how they make a genuine commitment to the environment and reduce ambiguity. Consequently, hotel guests would not under-perceive the environmental CSR image of certified hotels, and would thereby develop positive behavioral intentions. Additionally, hoteliers should develop specific programs to increase customer and employees' knowledge about environmental issues to increase their trust.

To conclude, the results of this study have identified two types of consumers regarding their level of involvement with the purchasing process (low vs. high involvement). As previously explained, each group processes the information received in a different way (systematic vs heuristic processing). So that, professionals are recommended to design different communication messages considering this aspect. Therefore, for high involved consumers it is recommended to design communicative messages including detailed information about green-related aspects of environmentally certified hotels (e.g. benefits of implementing these certifications) in an attempt to uncover all of the reasons in support of the purchase decision (e.g. to stay in an environmentally certified hotel) and the merits of this decision (e.g. contribute to the reduction of environmental degradation). On the other hand, for low involved consumers, it is recommended to use simple cues. For instance, it would be interesting to make visible the logos of environmental certifications implemented by hotel companies in different displays (e.g. corporate webpages or information brochures) or considering additional aspects such as visual appeal to emphasize benefits of

environmentally certified hotels (e.g. photographs and images to increase perception of green practices).

The study is not without its limitations. First, it was performed in the Spanish hotel context, so that future lines of research could focus on other hospitality sectors (e.g. restaurants, managed food service, event planning, travel agents or tour operators) or other countries with a longer tradition in sustainable and green issues, to generalize the results presented here. In this sense, since this study focuses on customer behavior in a specific segment of the accommodation industry (e.g. hotels), the findings in other hotel contexts may be different. Therefore, future research should also examine the relationships among the study constructs in various types of hotel settings (e.g. suite hotels, resort hotels or casino hotels) to validate the current model. Third, a non-probability sampling procedure (e.g. a convenience sample) was used. Given the unavailability of a reliable hotel decision-maker profile, the sample obtained was distributed similarly to the Spanish population as potential decision-makers of hotel purchases. Fourth, this study was designed to examine general hotel customers' intention formation towards environmentally certified hotels. Different groups of customers may have different decision-making processes. For example, hotel guests in the economy segment of the hotel industry may not be consistent with luxury hotel customers' intentions. Thus, to cross validate the results of this study in each segment of hotels, it is strongly recommended that the formation of behavioral intentions in various types of environmentally certified hotel settings be investigated in future research. It should also be interesting to combine the use of traditional techniques to collect data (e.g. questionnaires) with neurophysiological tools to support a more holistic understanding of pro-environmental behavioral intentions.

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Appendix

Indicator	Construct/item
	Behavioral intentions (Adapted from Gao *et al.*, 2016)
BI1	I intend to stay in an environmentally certified hotel
BI2	It is acceptable to pay more to stay in an environmentally certified hotel
BI3	I often recommend environmentally certified hotels
	Trust (Adapted from Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002)
TRU1	I trust that environmentally certified hotels are competent at what they are doing
TRU2	I feel that environmentally certified hotels are trustworthy
TRU3	I feel that environmentally certified hotels are of very high integrity
TRU4	I feel that environmentally certified hotels are very responsive to customers
	Environmental CSR image (Adapted from Jeong *et al.*, 2014)
ECI1	Environmentally certified hotels behave in a socially responsible way
ECI2	I think that environmentally certified hotels are responsible regarding environmental issues
ECI3	I believe that environmentally certified hotels are concerned about environmental conservation
ECI4	I think that environmentally certified hotels not only care about generating profits but also about the environment and consumers
	Green practices (Adapted from Jeong *et al.*, 2014)
GPR1	I believe that environmentally certified hotels use recyclable disposable containers
GPR2	I believe that environmentally certified hotels recycle their waste
GPR3	I think that environmentally certified hotels have equipment to reduce water consumption
GPR4	I think that environmentally certified hotels have equipment to reduce energy consumption
	Involvement in the buying process (Adapted from Jung and Yoon, 2012)
INV1	I like being involved in making the decision of choosing a hotel
INV2	Purchases decisions for hotels are very important to me
INV3	I attach great importance to choosing a hotel
INV4	I place great value in making the right decision when it comes to hotels
INV5	Making purchase decisions for hotel selection is significant to me
INV6	I think a lot about my choices when it comes to hotel selection

Table AI.
Measurement scales

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