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A profile of travelers who are willing to stay in environmentally friendly hotel

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe travelers that have indicated they are willing to stay in green hotel in order to better understand the market segment. There is very little knowledge about these types of travelers, thus making it difficult for hoteliers to know how to create marketing campaigns that target them. Data were collected via an online survey company. Behavior characteristics provided a more distinguishing profile of the traveler than did demographics or psychographics. Most travelers were willing to pay the same amount for a green hotel as a traditional hotel. Implications, future research, and limitations are discussed.

Keywords

Green hotels, market segmentation, green consumer, environment, demographics

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By Michelle Millar and Karl Mayer

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe travelers that have indicated they are willing to stay in green hotel in order to better understand the market segment. There is very little knowledge about these types of travelers, thus making it difficult for hoteliers to know how to create marketing campaigns that target them. Data were collected via an online survey company. Behavior characteristics provided a more distinguishing profile of the traveler than did demographics or psychographics. Most travelers were willing to pay the same amount for a green hotel as a traditional hotel. Implications, future research, and limitations are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Green consumers are typically referred to as consumers who seek products that have been created with the environment in mind (Webster, 1975). In the realm of travel and tourism, they are either referred to as green or environmentally friendly tourists, or ecotourists. There has been extensive research about the characteristics of ecotourists when they are engaged in ecotourism, but not for green tourists in a more general tourism context, or in relation to hotels (Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008). In the lodging industry, studies that segment green tourists and try to understand their demographics, along with other psychographic characteristics, are very limited (Dolnicar, Crouch, & Long, 2008; Formica & Uysal, 2002; Kasim, 2004; Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007), thus making it difficult for hoteliers to know how to differentiate these travelers from other travelers, or to create marketing campaigns that target them specifically. Understanding the green consumer and who they are in the hospitality arena, despite the current popularity of the green consumer in the general marketing arena, is still relatively new (Kasim, 2004). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to describe, socio-demographically, psychographically, and behaviorally, travelers that have indicated that they are willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel.

The specific research questions are:

1. What are the age, income, education, gender, and marital status characteristics of travelers willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel?
2. What are the behavioral characteristics of travelers willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel?
3. What are the environmental attitudes of travelers willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel?

According to the United States Green Building Council, there are approximately 450 hotels online in the United States to receive their certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), with approximately 80 already certified. Hotels that have received LEED certification are examples of environmentally friendly hotels, and hotel guests are now seeking such accommodations when they travel (Clausing, 2008). It is unclear, however, who these travelers are. Characteristics of travelers willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel such as a LEED hotel will provide more insight about what may constitute a green consumer in the lodging industry.

Hotel owners or managers consciously position their hotel product in the marketplace in order to attract the clientele that is most appropriate for their hotel. They identify their clientele by segmenting their potential customers into groups based upon certain predetermined characteristics, such as the aforementioned demographics, behaviors, or attitudes. Marketing research in general has placed a particularly heavy emphasis on trying to understand the socio and psycho demographic characteristics of green consumers (Peattie, 2001), and to use those characteristics as segmentation tools. Hoteliers may use these segmentation tools to focus on guests they believe will find their product most suitable, and then create appropriate marketing campaigns to attract them. With increasing competition in the hotel marketplace in terms of creating products that cater to specific hotel guests (e.g., lifestyle hotels, boutique hotels), and with more hotels online to receive green certifications such as LEED, it becomes increasingly important for hoteliers to identify the segment of travelers that will be most attracted to their product versus other's products.

Trying to understand the green consumer is a means to understanding marketing efforts that may be used to attract such consumers, and is an area of focus that has been very popular in the marketing literature (Peattie, 2001). Understanding these characteristics of travelers in the lodging industry may help hotel marketers to better identify the segment they wish to target. In addition to addressing the paucity of research in relation to environmentally friendly travelers, the results of this study, using different traveler characteristics as segmentation tools, will provide hotel marketers with a profile of a specific market segment, namely that of environmentally friendly travelers, to which they can cater the marketing efforts of their green hotel product.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the literature relating to market segmentation research, in addition to different elements that may be used to segment a market; namely, behavior characteristics, such as involvement, and psychographics, such as attitude. Finally, a discussion about green consumerism is presented.

MARKET SEGMENTATION

Smith (1956) first introduced market segmentation as a strategy in the 1950's. He defined it as a strategy that "consists of viewing a heterogeneous market (one characterized by divergent demand) as a number of smaller homogeneous markets" (Smith, 1956, p. 6). Market segmentation enables one to better identify those smaller homogeneous markets. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2011), companies "divide large, heterogeneous markets into smaller segments that can be reached more efficiently and effectively with products and services that match their unique needs" (p. 190). This idea of segmentation is based on the assumption that all people are different and thus they have different needs and wants (Pulido-Fernandez and Sanchez-Rivero, 2010). It also helps a company answer the question: What customers will we serve? (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011).

Today, market segmentation in tourism has become a common practice for marketing strategy (Pulido-Fernandez and Sanchez-Rivero, 2010). Segmentation of tourists enables, for example, hoteliers to identify a particular type of tourist and design products and services that meet that tourist's particular needs (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Snepenger, 1987); it also helps hotel marketers create more effective marketing campaigns, and competitive advantage (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997). Tourists have traditionally been segmented in a variety of ways. Most studies in the literature have used either socio-demographic criteria for segmentation (Beatty, Kahle, Homer, & Misra, 1985; Crossley and Lee, 1994; Gitelson and Kerstetter, 1990; Hsieh, Leary, & Morrison, 1994; Legohérel, 1998; Mak and Moncur, 1980; Mok and Iverson 2000; Quiroga, 1990; Ross, 1997; Seaton, 1996; Spotts and Mahoney, 1991) or psychographic criteria (Gunter and Furnham, 1992; Lee and Sparks, 2007; Madrigal, 1995; Silverberg, Backman, and Backman, 1996). Kotler (1991) and Dolnicar and Matus (2008), however, identified four major categories into which tourists have been clustered: socio-demographic (age, gender, education, life cycle); psychographic (personality, life-style, values, motives); geographic (trip origin, trip destination); and, behavioral (user status, usage rates, tourist activities/experiences, willingness to pay). In general, socio-demographics are certainly the easiest and the most common way to segment tourists (Inbakaran & Jackson, 2005; Jackson, Inbakaran, & Schmierer, 2003). Other studies most often found, though, that other segmentation categories (i.e., geographic, psychographic, and behavior) were better tools for distinguishing one type of tourist from another (Inbakaran & Jackson, 2005). In the lodging sector of the tourism industry, segmenting tourists in any capacity, and trying to understand their demographics, along with other

psychographic characteristics, is very limited (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Kasim, 2004).

INVOLVEMENT

Sherif and Cantril (1947) first introduced involvement theory as a concept that has now been extensively studied and adopted in the marketing arena (Park & Kim, 2010). The theory has been used to understand consumer behavior by way of segmenting groups (Wu, 2001), understanding the decision making process (Bunn, 1993; Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1994), and creating an awareness of how information is processed (Lee, Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1999). Involvement is most often defined as a person's perceived personal relevance "of an object based on her or her needs, values and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). A consumer's involvement with a product or service may affect the consumer's evaluation of that product or service (Lee & Lou, 1995). In this case, a hotel guest's involvement with the product (environmentally friendly hotel room) will depend upon how important the guest perceives the room to be to him or her personally. Essentially, they assess whether the product will benefit them in some way, or help them to achieve their personal goals in life (Celsi & Olson, 1988). As applied to this study, if the environmentally friendly hotel room is important to a hotel guest because the guest feels the room is similar to his or her personal goals or beliefs, then involvement with the room will be high.

One often-discussed type of involvement is enduring involvement, which occurs when a consumer has a high level of expertise about a product category (Lee & Lou, 1995). For example, if a potential hotel guest performs activities at home that are directly related to protecting the environment (i.e., recycling, use of energy efficient appliances), their level of enduring involvement with the environmentally friendly hotel room would be high because they have knowledge of the hotel room's attributes (they are familiar with them at their home). Thus, high enduring involvement, measured by the guest's involvement with protecting the environment at home, in theory, would lead to greater importance for a green hotel room.

Tourism researchers have used involvement theory in a limited capacity to study travel motivation (Clements and Josiam, 1995), leisure activities (Dimanche et al., 1994), and leisure product purchases (Celsi and Olson, 1988; Reid and Crompton, 1993). Amendah and Park (2008) found that consumers that were more involved with the environment were willing to pay more to travel to an eco-friendly travel destination. Others have used involvement as a behavioral segmentation strategy for tourists (e.g., Cai, Feng & Breiter, 2004; Fesenmaier and Johnson, 1989; Park & Kim, 2010). Park and Kim (2010) found involvement a better differentiator of a traveler's destination information search behavior on the Internet. Cai et al. (2004) found tourist's preferences for destination information varied depending upon their level of involvement with the destination. Involvement theory as a basis for segmentation of green travelers in the hotel sector appears relatively untouched.

ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES

Understanding the general public's attitude towards the environment became prominent in the 1970's when air and water pollution became national concerns (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig & Jones, 2000). It has also become more prominent in recent travel and tourism literature (Formica & Uysal, 2002). One of the first studies assessing environmental attitude in a tourism context was that of Uysal, Jurowski, Noe, and McDonald (1994), while one of the first related to leisure activity was a study conducted by Noe and Snow (1990). The results of Uysal et al. (1994) indicated that concern for the environment was influenced by trip behavior, but not by the demographic characteristics of tourists. Dunlap and Van Liere (1984) found similar results. Formica and Uysal (2002) used environmental attitudes as a segmentation tool of travelers to Virginia; they determined that attitudes were a better segmentation tool than demographic characteristics of travelers.

Other studies have assessed ecotourist's attitudes towards the environment (Fennell & Nowaczek, 2003; Wurzinger & Johannson, 2006); hoteliers attitudes toward the environment (Bohdanowicz, 2005; 2006); hotel guests' attitudes towards a green lodging property's overall environmental policy (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007); attitudes influence on leisure time (Bjerke, Thrane, & Kleiven, 2006; Wolch, 2004); resident attitude toward tourism development (Jones, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2000; Kaltenborn, Andersen, Neillemann, Bjerke, & Thrane, 2008), and recreational behavior's affect on environmental attitude (Jackson, 1987; Tarrant & Green, 1999).

GREEN CONSUMERISM

Many consumers realize that their purchases of products or services may have an impact on the environment (i.e., strong environmental attitude); thus, they are making purchasing decisions with this in mind. Known as green consumers, they are typically "female, pre-middle aged, with a high level of education (finished high school) and above average socioeconomic status" (Laroche, et al., 2001, p. 504). Specifically, a green consumer can be thought of as anyone whose purchase behavior is influenced by environmental concerns (Shrum, et al., 1995). The green consumer also recognizes that his or her consumption behavior has the power to change society (Webster, 1975).

In a tourism context, a green consumer is often referred to either as a green tourist or an ecotourist. Dolnicar and Matus (2008) distinguish between the two:

Green tourists are defined as tourists who behave in a wide range of tourism contexts, whereas ecotourists behave in an environmentally friendly manner on vacation in the context of nature-based tourism. Ecotourists thus represent a subset of green tourists. (p. 320)

Dolnicar (2004) found "environmentally caring tourists" to be distinctly different socio-demographically and behaviorally from typical tourists.

Fairweather, Maslin, & Simmons (2005) also found socio-demographics a distinguishing characteristic of environmentally friendly tourists along with high pro-environmental attitudes and a willingness to pay a premium for green accommodations. Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo (2001) found that many authors (e.g., Banerjee & McKeage, 1994; Brooker, 1976; Webster, 1975) agree that socio-demographics are less important than knowledge, values and/or attitude in explaining green behavior.

In a seminal study, Dolnicar et al. (2008) tried to determine who the green travelers were within the general tourist population. Based primarily on ecotourists, they identified 14 characteristics of environmentally friendly travelers from previous research that were grouped into four categories. The four categories were socio-demographic factors, behavioral characteristics, travel motivations, and other characteristics. Overall, they found that environmentally friendly travelers are generally defined as well educated with high-income levels, and have a desire to learn. They also found that gender was not a distinguishing characteristic, and further, that gender has not been extensively analyzed in other studies. The overall conclusion provided by Dolnicar et al. (2008) was that virtually no information exists in relation to environmentally friendly tourists in a more general tourism population context.

In summary, hotel marketers use segmentation strategy to identify target markets, which in turn helps them create a competitive advantage, and appropriate marketing campaigns for their target. Tourists that are green, with strong psychographic characteristics (attitude) and who exhibit behavior characteristics that are friendly to the environment (involvement) may prove distinctive and attractive target markets for marketers.

Method

The sampling frame for this study was travelers who had spent at least one night in a hotel in the previous 12 months, and who were willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel. An environmentally friendly hotel was defined as one that has policies in place that help reduce the harmful impact the property might have on the environment. Data were collected via an online survey company called Qualtrics in the Spring of 2009. Potential participants were recruited for this survey from the database of nearly 4 million consumers and business panels that are representative of the U. S. population. Members of its panels had already agreed to be contacted for survey participation. An introductory email was sent to the panel members in search of people that have stayed in hotels while traveling for either business or leisure purposes.

The survey asked respondents about their demographic characteristics, specifically age, gender, income, education, and marital status. Behavioral characteristics were determined by asking respondents how many nights they had spent in a hotel in the past year, the type of hotel they typically accommodate, and their willingness (or not) to spend more for an environmentally friendly hotel.

To determine how involved (another behavior characteristic) the travelers were with the green hotel, the respondents to the survey were asked how many green activities they performed at home. They were given a list of seven activities (recycle cans and bottles; use energy efficient light bulbs; re-use plastic bags; recycle paper and cardboard; use low-flow water fixtures; use cloth grocery bags; and buy organic groceries) from which they could select all that applied to their behavior. Psychographic characteristics (attitudes towards the environment) were assessed using the revised New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale

The scale, redeveloped in 2000 as the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale, has been used by a number of researchers and has been proven a valid (e.g., construct validity, content validity, predictive validity, and known-group validity) measurement tool (Dunlap et al., 2000). It consists of fifteen statements about the environment that focus on attitudes about “reality of limits to growth, anti-anthropocentrism, the fragility of nature’s balance, rejection of exemptionalism and the possibility of an ecocrisis” (Dunlap et al., 2000, p. 432). The statements relating to the limits of growth recognize that there are limits in the ecosystem to growth. The traditional view of anthropocentrism claims that man is “above” nature, and that nature is there specifically for man’s use and exploitation (Weaver, 2001). Anti-anthropocentrism goes against this view. Statements in the NEP also cover issues that put man and nature in balance and on an equal playing field. The rejection of exemptionalism refers to the fact that people no longer believe that humans are “exempt from the constraints of nature” (Dunlap et al., 2000, p. 432). Finally, some NEP statements recognize that the notion of an ecocrisis, such as climate change, is prominent today. Respondents rated their level of agreement with each of the 15 statements using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly agree, 3 = unsure, and 5 = strongly disagree.

Results

Of the 571 responses received 282 (49.4%) of them were from women (Table 1). Twenty one percent of the respondents were 29 years old or younger, 23% were 30-39 years old, 27% were 40-49 years old, and 28% were 50 or older. Half of the respondents earned an income of \$55,000 or less, with the most (28%) earning between \$35,001 and \$55,000. Eighteen percent of the respondents had a high school education or less. Thirty three percent had some college (took college classes but did not earn a degree), while 13% had earned an associates degree, 24% a bachelors degree, and 10% a graduate degree or higher. Over half (59%) of the travelers indicated that they were married.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Travelers

Demographic		N = 571	
Category		Number	Percent
Age	29 or younger	120	21.0
	30-39 years old	133	23.3
	40-49 years old	155	27.1
	50 or older	<u>163</u>	<u>28.6</u>
	Total	571	100.0
Gender	Male	289	50.6
	Female	<u>282</u>	<u>49.4</u>
	Total	571	100.0
Education Level	High School or less	105	18.4
	Some college*	189	33.1
	Associates degree	79	13.8
	Bachelors degree	141	24.7
	Graduate degree or higher	<u>57</u>	<u>10.0</u>
	Total	571	100.0
Household Income	<\$35,000	129	22.6
	\$35,001 - \$55,000	160	28.0
	\$55,001 - \$75,000	130	22.8
	\$75,001 - \$95,000	76	13.3
	> \$95,000	<u>76</u>	<u>13.3</u>
	Total	571	100.0
Marital Status	Married	342	59.9
	Single	129	22.6
	Widowed, divorced, separated	<u>100</u>	<u>17.5</u>
	Total	571	100.0

Note. *Took college classes but did not earn a degree

Table 2 presents a behavioral profile of the travelers who responded to the survey. More than half (60%) of the travelers indicated that they had spent one to five nights in a lodging facility within the past 12 months. When thinking about the type of lodging facility they had typically stayed in, they indicated a mid-priced lodging facility most often (43%). Twenty two percent indicated full service properties while 21% typically stayed at economy service hotels. All but seven of the respondents performed at least one environmentally friendly activity at home. The most popular activities were recycling cans and bottles (84%),

using energy efficient light bulbs (82%) and re-using plastic bags (84%). The activities with the fewest responses were using cloth grocery bags (36%) and buying organic groceries (22%). Several participants also indicated, in response to an open-ended question, that they perform other environmentally friendly activities at home. The most often cited activity was unplugging appliances when not in use, followed by composting, using energy saving appliances, turning air conditioning up or heating down, and reusing items, such as paper, water, or towels.

Table 2
Behavior Profile of Travelers

Characteristic	N = 571	
	Number	%
Number of nights spent in a lodging facility in past 12 months		
1-5 nights	343	60.1
6-10 nights	140	24.5
11-15 nights	46	8.0
16-19 nights	17	3.0
> 19 nights	<u>25</u>	<u>4.4</u>
Total	571	100.0
Type of lodging facility typically stayed in		
Economy	120	21.0
Mid-Priced	244	42.7
Full service	127	22.2
Luxury/Resort	73	12.8
Other	<u>7</u>	<u>1.2</u>
Total	571	100.0
Environmentally Friendly Activity – Home *		
Recycle cans and bottles	481	84.2
Use energy efficient light bulbs	467	82.0
Re-use plastic bags	478	83.7
Recycle paper and cardboard	396	69.4
Use low-flow water fixtures	209	36.6
Use cloth grocery bags	204	35.7
Buy organic groceries	128	22.4

Note. *Totals under environmentally friendly – home are the number of respondents who indicated they performed each activity. Respondents could select more than one activity.

The respondents could also indicate that they were willing to pay either less, the same, or more for an environmentally friendly hotel room (Table 3). If they were willing to pay less or more, they were then asked how much less or more, either 5%, 10%, or 15%. Eighty percent of the respondents indicated that they were willing to pay the same. Almost 14% said they would be willing to pay more, while 5% indicated that they would want to pay less for an environmentally friendly hotel room. Of those willing to pay more, most were willing to pay up to 10% more, while of those who wanted to pay less, they wanted to pay up to 15% less.

Table 3
Travelers Willing to Pay for an Environmentally Friendly Hotel Room

		Frequency	Percent
Willing To Pay	Less	31	5.4
	Same	461	80.7
	More	79	13.8
	Total	571	100.0
How Much Less *	5%	6	1.1
	10%	9	1.6
	15%	16	2.8
How Much More**	5%	27	4.7
	10%	40	7.0
	15%	12	2.1

Note. * Shows only those respondents who selected “how much less”.

**Shows only those respondents who selected “how much more”.

In the NEP scale, eight of the environmental attitude questions are structured so that agreement to the statements represents a pro-ecological viewpoint, while seven questions are structured so that a pro-ecological viewpoint is represented by disagreement with the statement. Therefore, in order to assess internal consistency of these responses, the values were re-coded so that all high scores have the same meaning (Norusis, 2005). In this case, the higher mean value represents a higher pro-ecological attitude. The possible range of responses was from 1 - 5, with 3 representing a neutral viewpoint (i.e., “neither agree nor disagree”). A mean score greater than four would represent a strong pro-ecological view. In this study, the overall mean for the 15-item scale was 3.42. A summary of the travelers’ environmental attitude scores, based on the NEP scale is presented in Table 4.

Reliability for the NEP scale was analyzed by assessing Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient on all 15 statements for each traveler. The alpha result was

0.84, which points to both the unidimensionality and reliability of the scale. Since the NEP scale is a unidimensional scale (Dunlap, 2008), convergent and discriminant validity cannot be assessed.

Table 4
Travelers' Mean Values for the Revised NEP Scale (5-Point Scale)

Ecological Statement	N = 571	
	Mean	SD
We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support	3.13	1.08
Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs*	3.24	1.05
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences	3.80	0.92
Human ingenuity will insure that we do NOT make the earth unlivable*	2.94	0.97
Humans are severely abusing the environment	3.86	0.98
The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them*	2.24	0.97
Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist	4.11	0.94
The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations*	3.56	0.95
Despite our special abilities humans are still subject to the laws of nature	4.10	0.71
The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated*	3.37	1.08
The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources	3.31	1.00
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature*	3.17	1.17
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset	3.65	0.93
Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it*	3.24	1.03
If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe	3.62	1.01
Overall Mean	3.42	0.55

Note. *Items were reverse-coded for analysis. SD = Standard Deviation

Discussion

The results of this study, although not generalizable to all green travelers or to the entire hotel industry, nevertheless offer some interesting findings for hotel marketers. In this particular case, managers may segment their market based on travelers that are willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel, and further refine that segment using other traveler characteristics. For example, the respondents indicated that they partake in a number of

environmentally friendly activities at home. It may be that the respondents in this study were more familiar with (i.e., had a high level of enduring involvement) the green hotel room because they incorporated some of those same attributes into their daily lives. If a potential hotel guest performs activities at home that are directly related to protecting the environment (i.e., recycling, use of energy efficient appliances), their level of enduring involvement with the environmentally friendly hotel room, and with the hotel product in general, would thus be high because they have knowledge of such a hotel room/product (they have something similar at their home).

This level of involvement may provide an insight into travelers, in particular the green traveler, that has been relatively untouched in the hospitality arena. This applies to the segmentation of travelers by hotel management. Instead of focusing on socio-demographics such as gender or income, managers have the opportunity to tap into other qualities and characteristics that their hotel guests possess. As the hotel market becomes increasingly competitive, management must not only try to differentiate its product, but also try to attract new and different segments of the traveling population. Building a green hotel, or incorporating green practices into existing operations, is one way a hotel can do so. Understanding involvement enables hoteliers to identify the different segments that may or may not be interested in their green hotel product. Identifying different segments, in turn, enables targeted marketing strategies.

Another behavior characteristic that may help hotel management is that of the travelers' willingness to pay for a green hotel. Contrary to results of previous research (e.g., Clausing 2008; Responsible Travel, 2007) respondents in this study believed a green hotel room should not be priced differently than one that is not green. This is important for hoteliers to understand, regardless of the travelers' reason for traveling (business vs. leisure). There is a perception that a green hotel costs more to stay at than a non-green hotel. That perception may be driving potential guests away from a green hotel. A successful green hotelier will recognize this and price rooms accordingly and competitively.

In addition, when talking with industry experts, some claim that their guests wish to pay less for a green hotel room because the guest knows the hotel is saving money by not washing, for example, everyone's sheets everyday. Such guests feel that any savings should be passed on to them in a reduced room price. In addition, some guests believe a green hotel should be less expensive because they have the preconceived notion that green hotels do not have the amenities and services that guests are used to receiving in a traditional hotel. Conversely, there are those that are willing to pay more for a green hotel room because there is a preconceived notion that green hotels cost more than traditional hotels. This belief may stem from the fact that some products, such as organic foods, are considerably more expensive than their traditional counterpart. As the results of this study indicate, however, the travelers just want to pay the same amount. This is also important for the hotel industry to understand because it must be

careful not to alienate guests by charging too much, as has happened in the organic food industry, or charge too little and give the impression that the hotel does not offer all of the amenities of other “non-green” hotels.

Attitudes are one type of psychographic variable that gets at the heart of describing who a person is, and what they think, as opposed to socio-demographic variables that essentially describe physical characteristics of people. It is often said that understanding psychographic characteristics of customers leads to the ability to predict the behavior of said customer. If managers can predict how guests will react to certain marketing campaigns, for example, based on their attitudes, the managers would be able to create the ideal campaign for the ideal customer. What is interesting in this study, however, is that although the respondents indicated that they were willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel, their environmental attitudes were very indifferent. The mean pro-environmental attitude score was 3.42 (using a scale of 1 – 5, 3 being neutral), which, based on comparisons to previous studies utilizing the NEP scale, is considered low (Lück, 2003). This could be good news for hoteliers in that it may mean that they do not necessarily need to target just people with a strong attitude about protecting the environment. Instead, they could focus primarily on behavior characteristics, such as the aforementioned level of involvement, which may broaden their target market.

Finally, the collected socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are not very similar to characteristics of the green consumers provided earlier, and do not provide a completely distinguishing profile of who an environmentally friendly tourist might be. Most of the respondents were not highly educated, nor did they have very high incomes. They were split equally between men and women and no age group dominated the results. The fact that these respondents did not meet the “standards” for being a typical green consumer may be good news for hoteliers, however. Hotel managers with an environmentally friendly hotel may not need to narrow down their market to find only those travelers that are typified as a green tourist. Instead they have a much broader market to target. In addition, focusing just on the green tourist as typically profiled may not be a segment of the travel population that is actually large enough to generate decent revenue (Dolnicar & Matus, 2008).

Conclusion

In summary, there were four major findings in this study regarding environmentally friendly travelers. One, socio-demographics are not a distinguishing characteristic for them. Two, psychographic characteristics also were not distinguishing because the overall environmental attitude score was neutral. Three, behavior characteristics were distinguishing; and four, the travelers were not willing to pay more for a green hotel.

Although demographic and psychographic characteristics were not very distinguishing in this study, the behavioral characteristics (involvement and willingness to pay) may provide information to hotel marketers that can help

them target these guests. Future research could delve into this particular behavior, involvement, to understand how it may impact a guest's decision to stay in a hotel. The same may be said of other psychographic characteristics such as values or beliefs. Another area of inquiry would be to study the effectiveness of targeted marketing campaigns (aimed at groups with enduring involvement with a hotel product), when compared to campaigns targeted at customers in general.

Although this study was a start, there is still much to be learned about environmentally friendly travelers in order to meet their needs and expectations. Despite the growing popularity of going green in the hotel industry, there is a dearth of information about the profile of an environmentally friendly tourist. However, the results of this study offer some behavioral insight into the type of traveler who is willing to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel.

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