

Impact of hotels' sustainability practices on guest attitudinal loyalty: Application of loyalty chain stages theory

ABSTRACT

Considering the significance of the term “green” in the hotel industry, relatively little is known about hotels' performances of conservation management and its impact on guest eco-friendly decision formation. This research was conducted to explicate guests' attitudinal loyalty formation, by developing a sturdy theoretical framework encompassing their perceived hotel performances of green management (recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation) and Oliver's (1999, 2010) loyalty chain stages theory (cognitive, affective, and conative stages). A total of twelve attributes of hotel performances were identified through a qualitative approach. Our results from the structural analysis revealed that guests' perceived hotel performances of water saving and energy conservation significantly influenced their attitudinal loyalty formation for green hotels. In addition, the significant mediating role of cognitive and affective stages was uncovered. Moreover, the effectiveness of loyalty chain stages theory was demonstrated. Our theoretical framework sufficiently accounted for the variance in conative loyalty.

KEYWORDS: Conservation management, recycling and waste reduction, water saving, energy conservation, attitudinal loyalty, green hotels

INTRODUCTION

While many conventional hotels are still not active in engaging in green business practices (Han & Yoon, 2015), recently greening hotels are becoming a more and more important trend and issue in hotel management, increasingly earning huge interest not only from the industry but

from the public (Kang et al., 2012; Masau & Prideaux, 2003; Singh et al., 2014). The term “green hotel” refers to an eco-friendly lodging operation that tries to minimize its negative influences on the natural environment and ecosystem, and that actively encourages employees and guests to engage in green practices (Han, 2015). According to Erdogan and Baris (2007), a green hotel decreases the harmful impacts on the environment and assesses surrounding environmental conditions prior to starting construction/operation. The term of green hotel is alternatively used with environmentally responsible hotels, eco-friendly hotels, and sustainable hotels (Han, 2015; Han & Yoon, 2015). Green hotels are increasingly responding to the environmental issue in a positive way by integrating sustainability into their management, operations, facilities, designs, buildings, and programs (Chan, 2013; Jiang & Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2010; Li et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2016).

The issue of green/sustainability has been receiving increasing attention in the global hotel industry as an emerging phenomenon (Li et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2016). Specifically, Marriott International is leading green policies by introducing the “green our supply chain” annual program (e.g., greener key cards, eco-pillow, earth-friendly towels, recycled pens, low-VOC paint, biodegradable laundry bags, laundry detergent). Hilton is acting as a pioneer of green policies by introducing the “we care!” program to improve environmental performance and undertake continuous efforts such as reducing energy and water consumption, waste generation, and chemical usage in order to improve the environment (Hu, 2012). It is indisputable that an increasing number of environmentally conscious individuals in the consumer marketplace have made the issue even bigger. Operators in green hotels, therefore, have long been active in developing an enduring and valuable relationship with such eco-conscious patrons (Han, 2015; Kang et al., 2012). Improving the level of guest loyalty is undeniably one of the most efficient

ways to build long-term relationships with guests in the hotel industry (Liu et al., 2015; Qiu et al., 2015). With a growing emphasis on the importance of loyalty, the paradigm of customer satisfaction has shifted to loyalty, and the subdivided developmental stage used to measure loyalty has become increasingly important (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Oliver, 1999). This paradigmatic change is a development from the past fragmentary analysis of loyalty to a stage in which there is more divided analysis because customer loyalty is not something that appears simultaneously, but an outcome of sequential development over time (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the cognitive-affective-conative loyalty development phases (loyalty chain stages theory) on a continuum of attitudinal loyalty, instead of understanding only behavioral loyalty. According to the loyalty chain stages theory (Oliver, 1999, 2010), cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty are vital concepts for explicating patrons' loyalty generation processes. Consistently, researchers in consumer behavior, marketing, and tourism generally consider that cognition, affect, and commitment/intention are also believed to be important triggers of customers' environmentally responsible post-purchase behaviors (Han et al., 2011; Jiang & Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2010). Within this text, it is believed that the loyalty chain stages theory is ideal for explaining customer behavior and the loyalty formation process for management performance of green hotels, as suggested in this research.

Green management is one of the essential aspects of environmentally responsible development in the hotel industry (Chan, 2013); yet little research has examined the role of guests' perceptions regarding hotel performances of green management. In addition, waste reduction (or recycling), water saving, and energy conservation are important sustainable practices for hotels (Han & Hyun, 2018; Singh et al., 2014; Wyngaard & de Lange, 2013). Nevertheless, these variables together have hardly been utilized as main constituents of hotels'

green management. Moreover, in eco-friendly hotel management, increasing guest loyalty is indisputably of essence for the long-term success of hotel companies (Jiang & Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2016). Nonetheless, very little is known about how hotels' performances of green management (recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation) shape guests' attitudinal loyalty. Further, the existing loyalty studies in environmental behavior and marketing mostly utilized repurchase and word-of-mouth intentions/decisions to assess attitudinal loyalty (e.g., Liu et al., 2015; Qiu et al., 2015; Zeithaml et al., 1996). However, the employment of the sequential phases (cognitive – affective – conative) of the attitudinal loyalty generation process within the loyalty chain stages theory is not abundant. This paper is expected to fill the gap in the previous research and provide a complement of both practical and academic implications by exploring the management performance of green hotels, hotel applications of green management factors, customer loyalty through eco-friendly management, and the loyalty chain stages theory, all of which have been virtually ignored by researchers the past. It is believed that the results of this research will demonstrate the outcome and prove necessity of ecofriendly management of hotel enterprises, including showing how such practices provide an engine for the sustainable growth of hotels. Given the above research need discussed, the present research aimed to achieve the research objectives as follows:

- 1) The first research objective was to develop a strong conceptual framework explaining the formation of guest attitudinal loyalty for green hotels by extending the loyalty chain stages theory.

- 2) The second research objective was to identify the attributes of the perceived hotel performances of green management (i.e., [a] recycling and waste reduction, [b] water saving, and [c] energy conservation)
- 3) The third research objective was to examine the complicated associations between the dimensions of the perceived hotel performances of green management and attitudinal loyalty phases ([a] cognitive loyalty, [b] affective loyalty, and [c] conative loyalty).
- 4) The fourth research objective was to unearth the comparative criticality of research constructs in determining conative loyalty.
- 5) The fifth research objective was to uncover the mediating role of cognitive and affective loyalty.

With a lack of empirical research about guests' perception of hotels' green management and its impact on pro-environmental behaviors, the present study was an endeavor to fill this void. This research was the first empirical effort to theorize that guests' complicated attitudinal loyalty generation process is dependent on guests' perceptions of hotels' conservation management within the green hotel context, extending the existing loyalty chain stages theory. In the following section, the review of the literature is provided. Next, methodology and results are presented. Then, discussions and implications are stated. Lastly, the conclusion of this research is provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green management of hotel operations

Due to the rapid urbanization and the increase of individuals' business activities, solid waste generation has been rapidly enlarged. Individuals' activities generate diverse types of wastes, and the way these wastes are collected, stored, and disposed of, increases risks to the natural environment as well as the health of citizens (Zhu et al., 2008). Inappropriate management of such waste brings various hazards for humans, society; the ecosystem, and whole environment (Singh et al., 2014). The key aspects of solid waste management comprise "reduce" and "reuse" (Memon, 2010). The hotel industry is considered as a huge contributor of wet and dry waste (e.g., food waste, garden waste, cans/metal, linens/towels, plastics) in landfills that ultimately triggers global warming (Singh et al., 2014; Wyngaard & de Lange, 2013).

Similarly, increases in human activities leads to a huge amount of water and energy consumption, which creates risks to the planet (Dimara et al., 2017; Goldstein, 2009; Wyngaard & de Lange, 2013). Existing studies indicated that individuals' water and energy consumption while traveling is often higher than corresponding water use in their daily life (Garcia & Severa, 2003; Gössling, 2001; Han & Hyun, 2018). In addition, according to recent studies (Barberán et al., 2013; Gössling et al., 2012; Han & Hyun, 2018), hotels with higher ratings (upscale/luxury) tend to consume a greater amount of water and energy than those with lower ratings (budget/hostel). Guests' water and energy consumption for occupied guestrooms is not ignorable as the consumption amount steadily increases (Chan & Lam, 2001; Han & Hyun, 2018). Undeniably, solid waste management (e.g., waste reduction and recycling) and natural resource conservation (e.g., water and energy conservation) are major aspects of hotels' environmentally responsible management (Singh et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2012; Wyngaard and de Lange, 2013). In this regard, waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation managements have largely been employed as crucial pro-environmental management strategies in the lodging industry

across the globe (Goldstein, 2009; Han & Hyun, 2018; Singh et al., 2014; Wyngaard & de Lange, 2013).

Hotels' performances of recycling and waste reduction management encompass such green activities as using recycled materials (e.g., paper, plastic, furniture), using refillable dispensers (e.g., soap, shampoo, location), placing recycling containers/bins in both guest rooms and lobbies, using durable items, and avoiding using disposable products (e.g., paper napkins, paper towels, disposable cups) (Baker et al., 2014; Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Verma & Chandra, 2016). In addition, hotels' practices of water saving management comprise such eco-friendly performances as using low flow toilets, low flow sinks, low flow/intelligent showerheads, reusing grey water, using water efficient appliances, and engaging in good sanitation practices (Han & Chan, 2013; Han & Hyun, 2018; Mensah & Mensah, 2013). Moreover, hotels' performances of energy conservation management include such green practices as using occupancy sensors to control lighting, using key cards to turn power in rooms on and off, setting hallway/room temperatures properly, and using renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind, wave, rain) (Baker et al., 2014; Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Millar et al., 2012).

As such, green management and green marketing are necessary to reduce environmental issues caused by waste. Green management can be a strategy to improve corporate competitiveness in industries such as hotels that produce a large amount of waste (Hart, 1995). Furthermore, organizational green management should go beyond legal compliance to include conceptual tools such as pollution prevention, product liability, and corporate social responsibility (Hart, 2005). Green marketing began with the concept that human needs should be met with minimal negative impact on the natural environment while conducting exchange and promotion activities intended to satisfy human needs (Polonsky, 1994). The reasons that hotels

develop green marketing include achieving corporate goals (Shearer, 1990), ethical/moral obligations, competitive or governmental pressure (Delmas & Toffel, 2008), costs associated with reducing waste disposal, favorable corporate image and reputation (Lee et al., 2010), and provision of opportunities to search for new markets and improve product value (Chen, 2010). Undertaking such green management efforts can positively influence hotels' customer behavior. Environmentally responsible management can be a good opportunity to raise the customer retention rate and foster a positive attitude by customers toward the corporation (Ha, 2017; Lee et al., 2013). Customers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the environment (Mustonen et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2017). In addition, they want to buy products or services from environmentally responsible companies (Ha, 2017; Rivera et al., 2016). Green management of hotels can have very positive effects by creating new environmentally conscious customers, enhancing the loyalty of existing customers, and changing the way customers choose a hotel in which to stay (e.g., based on price, location, and brand, among others).

Cognitive, affective, and conative phases of the loyalty chain stages theory

Loyalty is an important decision factor necessary to achieving an ultimate financial success by maintaining existing customers, instead of simply creating new customers (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Due to such importance, many researchers have discussed the concept of loyalty, but its definition, varying from researcher to researcher, is never complete (Oliver, 1999). Inevitably, there has been a substantial amount of controversy over the concept of loyalty with numerous attempts to define and measure loyalty. Since the 1960s, loyalty has been measured by behavioral features, such as purchase rate, purchase probability, purchase frequency, repurchase rate, or purchase behavior (Kumar & Shah, 2004). This implies that

loyalty is represented by the purchase behavior of customers. However, it has been pointed out that behavioral loyalty has its limits in measuring true customer loyalty, and the concept of attitudinal loyalty emerged to overcome this limitation (Reinartz & Kumar, 2002). Against this backdrop, this paper will present attitudinal loyalty, which represents a more long-term and emotional commitment by the customers (Shanker et al., 2003) and strongly suggests a preference by a certain customer to buy a certain product in the future (Reichheld, 2003).

Consumer attitude/attitudinal loyalty is one of the most frequently researched topics in consumer behavior and marketing (Han et al., 2011; Millar et al., 2012; Oliver, 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010). According to Zikmund (2003), attitude is an individual's enduring disposition to respond to diverse facets of the world consistently in a given manner, and is composed of cognitive, affective, and action components. Attitudinal loyalty encompassing the core aspect of attitude refers to "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Similar to attitude, According to the loyalty chain stages theory (Oliver, 1999, 2010), this attitudinal loyalty comprises cognition, affect, and conation as its constituents (Oliver, 1999; Yuksel et al., 2010). Attitudinal loyalty signifies individuals' ideas, knowledge, convictions, liking/disliking, and commitment with regard to a particular object (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). The premise of the loyalty chain stages theory is that attitudinal loyalty develops through cognitive, affective, and conative phases in a consecutive manner (Back, 2005; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011; Yuksel et al., 2010). According to the loyalty chain stages theory, three different stages of attitudinal loyalty emerge sequentially rather than simultaneously (Han et al., 2011; Yuksel et al., 2010).

The first attitudinal loyalty phase is cognitive loyalty. This loyalty forms through value comparison between the product/service they are interested in and its alternatives, explicit knowledge, information, and image (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Yuksel et al., 2010). Many researchers therefore indicated that individuals' value perceptions, benefit comparisons, and price perceptions are the important components of the cognitive loyalty phase (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Lee et al., 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010). This indication is in line with Millar et al.'s (2012) and Lee et al.'s (2010) assertion that the cognitive facet of attitude represents individuals' value/comparison/knowledge-based appraisals of the object. Loyalty at a cognitive stage is quite shallow (Oliver, 1999). Thus, Oliver (2010) indicated that in order to make loyalty level deeper, eliciting affective loyalty is of essence. Affective loyalty is the second phase of attitudinal loyalty. This stage is associated with individuals' positive emotional evaluation with their product/service experience and pleasurable fulfillment from the experience (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011). Given this, many previous studies indicated that the affective stage mainly entails emotions and satisfaction as its constituents (Han et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010; Oliver, 1999, 2010). This indication is coherent with Miller et al.'s (2012) and Han et al.'s (2011) assertion that the affective aspect of attitude represents individuals' feeling-based appraisals of the object.

Nevertheless, at this affective stage, loyalty is not utterly guaranteed as it is still vulnerable to rivals' attractive offerings (Oliver, 1999, 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010). Therefore, Oliver (2010) asserted that triggering conative loyalty is the vital process to make loyalty stronger. This conative loyalty is the last attitudinal loyalty phase. The term "conation" represents one's behavioral intention, willingness, or commitment (Oliver, 1999, 2010). Similarly, Choi et al. (2015) indicated that conative loyalty is the notion of one's behavioral

intention, which is a significant determinant of actual behavior. Conative loyalty encompasses individuals' powerful intention/willingness to purchase the product/service of a specific company/brand (Han et al., 2011). While the gap exists between intention/willingness and behavior (Choi et al., 2015; Han et al., 2011), it is indisputable that one's strong intention/willingness is likely to result in actual purchase behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Han et al., 2011). Accordingly, the criticality of conative loyalty has long been stressed in diverse consumer behavior, marketing, and tourism studies (Choi et al., 2015; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011; Yuksel et al., 2010).

Impact of hotel performances of green management on cognitive loyalty

According to Oliver (1999, 2010), cognition/cognitive loyalty for a product/service often forms based on the performance/quality of the product/service and its attributes. Consistently, researchers in previous studies made a general agreement that product/service performance is the essential driver of cognitive loyalty that leads to the increased affect and intentions (Back, 2005; Han et al., 2011). Evidence in existing studies pertinent to hotel guest pro-environmental decision-making process and behaviors also indicated that guests often have favorable perceptions about a company when its performances of socially responsible activities such as environmentally responsible management are active and excellent, and such guests' perceptions ultimately influence the guests' favorable value/cognitive assessment on the company's product/service (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Han, 2015; Han & Yoon, 2015).

Guests frequently show a strong willingness to visit (or pay for) an eco-friendly hotel that actively engages in sustainable practices (Chan, 2013; Kang et al., 2012; Masau & Prideaux, 2003; Millar et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2014). Practicing environmentally responsible

management and developing green policies/rules/regulations that eventually bring favorable guest responses and positive guest cognitive evaluation regarding hotel stay is therefore of utmost importance for every lodging operators (Han & Yoon, 2015; Singh et al., 2014).

In the lodging context, Lee et al. (2010) attempted to identify the diverse eco-friendly quality attributes of hotels (e.g., hygienic and attractive dining areas, organic foods, eco-friendly amenities, healthy guest rooms, clean environment) and assess the impact of such attributes. Their empirical finding revealed that the identified eco-friendly quality attributes exerted a significant impact on the cognitive and affective evaluations of guest hotel experiences, and that this association contributed to generating a favorable overall image of the hotel and forming positive behavioral intentions. If guests prefer eco-friendly guest rooms encompassing diverse hotel practices of green management (e.g., live plants, recycling bins, no chemical smell, water-efficient appliances, towel/linen reuse card), they tend to be more inclined to stay in such rooms evaluating their hotel value/cognitive experiences positively than if the guests did not like it (Millar et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2010). Given the evidence discussed above, it can be posited that patrons who perceive a hotel's performances of green management to be appropriate are likely to build strong cognitive loyalty for the hotel.

Relationships among cognitive, affective, conative loyalty, and research hypotheses

Many existing studies in a variety of contexts have explored the associations among cognition, affect, and conation/intention (Back, 2005; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010). In the hotel context, Back (2005) examined the formation of patrons' attitudinal loyalty. His finding revealed that cognitive loyalty significantly increased affective loyalty, which in turn significantly enhanced conative loyalty. In his research, cognitive

loyalty encompassed value and benefits as its components, and affective loyalty entailed emotion and satisfaction as its constituents. In addition, the major aspect of conative loyalty was intention and willingness. Consistently, in the tourism sector, Yuksel et al. (2010) found that travelers' affective loyalty was a positive function of cognitive loyalty, and that their conative loyalty was under the positive influence of affective loyalty. Their finding was in line with Evanschitzky and Wunderlich's (2006) empirical research, which demonstrated that attitudinal loyalty develops through cognitive – affective – conative stages in sequence. When examining hotel customers' pro-environmental decision-making processes, Lee et al. (2010) also verified that customers' cognitive evaluations of eco-friendly hotel experiences significantly induced their favorable affective evaluations, and that their affective evaluations significantly triggered their positive behavioral intentions for the hotel. More recently, in the hotel sector, Han et al. (2011) provided empirical evidence that guests' cognitive loyalty had a significant influence on affective loyalty, and had a positive indirect impact on conative loyalty. Affective loyalty whose constituents are positive/negative emotions and satisfaction evaluation in such relationships acted as a significant mediator. That is, their finding verified the attitudinal loyalty development formation consecutively through cognitive, affective, and conative processes. Based on the empirical evidence discussed above, the causal chain of attitudinal loyalty (i.e., cognitive – affective – conative) was posited.

The proposed theoretical framework seeks to account for six research constructs and their intricate inter-relationships known to operate guests' conative attitudinal loyalty in the green hotel context. Our conceptual framework encompasses (a) recycling and waste reduction, (b) water saving, and (c) energy conservation as perceived hotel performances of green management; and the framework also comprises cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty as

attitudinal loyalty factors. In addition, it includes nine research hypotheses linking these variables.

H1: Perceived hotel performance of recycling and waste reduction has a positive impact on cognitive loyalty.

H2: Perceived hotel performance of water saving has a positive impact on cognitive loyalty.

H3: Perceived hotel performance of energy conservation has a positive impact on cognitive loyalty.

H4: Cognitive loyalty has a positive impact on affective loyalty.

H5: Affective loyalty has a positive impact on conative loyalty.

H6a-b: Recycling and waste reduction have an indirect (mediation) impact on affective/conative loyalty.

H7a-b: Water saving has an indirect (mediation) impact on affective/conative loyalty.

H8a-b: Energy conservation has an indirect (mediation) impact on affective/conative loyalty.

H9: Cognitive loyalty has an indirect (mediation) impact on conative loyalty.

METHODS

Qualitative approach (measures for hotel performances of green management)

For the identification of the attributes pertinent to the perceived hotel performances of green management (i.e., recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation) and the development of the associated measures, a series of in-depth interviews with actual green hotel guests were conducted. The interviewees were requested to answer “what common words/attributes come to mind when you think of an eco-friendly/green hotel’s recycling and

waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation efforts/managements?”. Moreover, the existing attributes associated with firms’ green management were employed from previous studies (Baker et al., 2014; Han & Chan, 2013; Mensah & Mensah, 2013; Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Millar et al., 2012; Verma & Chandra, 2016). A total of twelve key attributes for the perceived hotel performances of recycling and waste reduction ([a] recycled materials, [b] refillable shampoo dispensers, [c] recycling containers/bins, and [d] use of durable items), water saving ([a] low flow toilets and good sanitation practices, [b] low flow sinks, [c] low flow/intelligent showerheads, and [d] water-efficient appliances), and energy conservation ([a] occupancy sensors, [b] keycards, [c] temperature setting, and [d] renewable energy) from hotel guests’ perspectives were identified through this process. The measures for the twelve attributes were then developed based on the above mentioned studies. Further, interviews with ten hotel academics and industry experts were then conducted to refine these measurement items.

Measures for the variables within loyalty chain stages theory and survey questionnaire

In order to evaluate cognitive loyalty, three items were borrowed from Babin et al. (1994) and Lee et al. (2010) (e.g., “This green hotel and its green attributes offer good benefits that I enjoy”). A total of four items were employed from Lee et al. (2010) and Oliver (1999) in order to measure affective loyalty (e.g., “As a whole, I am happy with this green hotel”). Lastly, four items adopted from Oliver (1999), Hwang and Park (2018), and Hwang and Lee (2018) were utilized to measure conative loyalty (e.g., “When I travel to this location in the near future, I will make an effort to stay at this green hotel”). All measurement items were evaluated with a seven-point scale from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (7). The survey questionnaire comprising these measures was pre-tested with thirty hotel customers. The survey questionnaire

was then refined and finalized based on their opinions. Moreover, to revise and improve the questionnaire, a pretest was performed with a group of experts with knowledge and experience in the green hotel sector (e.g., green hotel managers, academic institutions, government officials) to revise the wording, expressions, and typos in the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire contained a research description and questions for the assessment of research constructs and the participants' personal characteristics.

Data collection procedure and sample characteristics

A survey methodology was used to collect the data in the present study. To collect the data for the positive analysis in this research, Vietnamese cities, where a number of hotels—especially, green hotels certified the Vietnamese government—are located, were selected. As a result, four cities in Vietnam have been selected. A field survey was performed at hotels located in well-known tourist cities in Vietnam, namely Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang, and Can Tho. The potential participants (Customers who have experience with the hotels located in the four selected cities in Vietnam) received a list of green hotels certified by the government of Vietnam. Considering the distinct characteristics of green hotels, survey respondents are limited to those who have stayed in a green hotel at least once. Those participants who stay at a hotel at least once per year and who had previously spent at least one night at a green hotel within the last five years were eligible as the samples of this research. These respondents were asked to state the name of the green hotel that they stayed in at the beginning of the survey, and were requested to answer the questions based on their experiences with the hotel that they had indicated. The survey was conducted in green hotels, as certified by the Vietnamese government that showed an understanding and willingness to participate in the research after being briefed on the purpose of

this study and the importance of green hotels. The survey questionnaire was delivered to the qualified guests (customers who have stayed in a green hotel) during their hotel check-in process, and the filled questionnaire was returned when they checked out. Through this process, we obtained 289 usable and valid cases. These cases were used for data analysis. The data used in this research was collected from customers who have stayed in green hotels certified by the Vietnamese government, and, thus, can be considered appropriate for the positive analysis in this research.

Of the 289 survey respondents, a total of 157 individuals were female guests, and 132 individuals were male guests. Among them, about 63.7% indicated that they were married, followed by single (31.1%) and divorced (5.2%). The participants' education level was relatively high. Many participants indicated that they had a bachelor's degree (36.7%), followed by masters' degree (24.9%), high school diploma (21.1%), 2-year college/vocational school degree (12.1%), and PhD degree (5.2%). Regarding the participants' age, 53.6% indicated that their age was between 21 years old and 40 years old. In addition, about 23.8% indicated that their age was over 51 years old, and about 2.8% indicated that their age was 20 years old or less. Among the participants, about 47.1% reported that they stay at a hotel between 2 – 5 times a year, followed by once a year (27.3%), between 6 – 10 times a year (15.6%), and 10 times or more per year (10.0%). A majority of the participants indicated that their purpose of travel was for pleasure (55.0%) followed by business (25.5%) and other (19.5%). The participants' nationality was diverse (Australians = 23.9%, Vietnamese = 19.0%, British = 13.8%, New Zealanders = 8.3%, Americans = 6.2%, German = 3.8%, Norwegians = 3.1%, South Africans = 3.1%, French = 2.4%, Italians = 2.4%, etc.).

RESULTS

Reliability and validity assessment

A measurement model was generated by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis with a maximum likelihood estimation method. AMOS 20 and SPSS 20 were used as analysis tools. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the model contained an appropriate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 586.474$, $df = 211$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.779$, RMSEA = .079, CFI = .919, IFI = .920, TLI = .903). All loading (standardized) values between observed factors and latent variable were significant ($p < .01$). Composite reliability was tested. Our findings showed that all values of composite reliability were above the suggested cutoff of 600 (recycling and waste reduction = .936, water saving = .882, energy conservation = .818, cognitive loyalty = .871, affective loyalty = .811, conative loyalty = .837), providing the evidence of the internal consistency among observed items for each latent variable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Average variance extracted was used to calculate the assessment of construct validity. According to the AVE value to verify convergent validity of 0.5 or more and the C.R. value to verify internal validity of 0.7 or more, we can argue that convergent validity exists (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Our results indicated that all values were above the suggested cutoff of .500 (recycling and waste reduction = .786, water saving = .654, energy conservation = .531, cognitive loyalty = .692, affective loyalty = .535, conative loyalty = .563), supporting convergent validity of the measures for each construct (Hair et al., 1998). The average variance extracted values were then compared to the between-construct correlations (squared). As shown in Table 1, the correlations did not exceed the average variance extracted values. In the results, every correlation value was .8 or less, and the AVE values exceeded the squared correlation values between variables. Therefore,

we found no problem with discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Accordingly, discriminant validity of the measures was evident.

(Insert Table 1)

Structural model assessment and hypotheses testing

The proposed theoretical framework was evaluated by using a structural equation modeling with a maximum likelihood estimation method. Its goodness-of-fit statistics were found to be adequate ($\chi^2 = 623.107$, $df = 218$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.858$, RMSEA = .080, CFI = .913, IFI = .913, TLI = .898). Table 2 and Figure 1 encompassed all details pertinent to the structural model assessment results. The proposed conceptual framework contained a satisfactory level of prediction ability for conative loyalty. It accounted for about 42.9% of the total variance in guests' conative loyalty for green hotels ($R^2 = .794$). In addition, the model explained about 57.3% and 15.9% of the total variance in cognitive and affective loyalty, respectively.

(Insert Table 2)

(Insert Figure 1)

The proposed impact of the perceived hotel performances of green management was assessed (Hypotheses 1 – 3). As reported in Table 2 and Figure 2, the results of the structural equation modeling showed that perceived hotel performances of water saving ($\beta = .447$, $p < .01$) and energy conservation ($\beta = .374$, $p < .01$) had a significant and positive influence on guests' cognitive loyalty for green hotels; yet the impact of the perceived hotel performance of recycling

and waste reduction ($\beta = -.003, p > .05$) on cognitive loyalty was not significant. Therefore, while Hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The hypothesized impact of cognitive loyalty was evaluated (Hypothesis 4). As expected, cognitive loyalty exerted a significant and positive influence on affective loyalty ($\beta = .399, p < .01$). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was supported. The proposed impact of affective loyalty was evaluated (Hypothesis 5). Our results revealed that cognitive loyalty was a significant and positive function of affective loyalty ($\beta = .655, p < .01$). This result supported Hypothesis 5.

Indirect and total impact assessment

The indirect influence of research constructs within the proposed conceptual framework was investigated. The details are exhibited in Figure 2. The results of the bootstrap analysis revealed that perceived hotel performance of water saving ($\beta = .117, p < .01$), perceived hotel performance of energy conservation ($\beta = .098, p < .05$), and cognitive loyalty ($\beta = .261, p < .01$) had a significant and positive indirect impact on cognitive loyalty. In addition, our results showed that perceived hotel performances of water saving ($\beta = .178, p < .01$) and energy conservation ($\beta = .149, p < .05$) significantly influenced affective loyalty indirectly through cognitive loyalty. This finding implies that both cognitive and affective loyalty acted as important mediators within the proposed theoretical framework. Based on the results, hypotheses 7a-b, 8a-b, and 9 were supported while hypothesis 6a-b was not supported. Lastly, the total impact of the study variables was examined. As depicted in Table 2. Affective loyalty included the greatest total influence on cognitive loyalty ($\beta = .655, p < .01$), followed by cognitive loyalty ($\beta = .261, p < .01$) and perceived hotel performance of water saving ($\beta = .117, p < .05$), and energy conservation ($\beta = .098, p < .05$).

(Insert Figure 2)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

General discussions

The aim of the hypothesized theoretical framework was to provide a better comprehension of guests' attitudinal loyalty formation for green hotels. The hotels' green management performances (recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation) and variables within the loyalty chain stages theory (cognitive, affective, and conative) were utilized as main research concepts. Our results revealed that guest perception of hotels' water saving and energy conservation performances increased cognitive loyalty, which in turn elicited affective loyalty. In addition, affective loyalty enhanced conative loyalty. Both cognitive and affective phases of attitudinal loyalty played an important mediating role. The present research successfully tested and demonstrated the applicability of Oliver's (1999, 2010) loyalty chain stages theory in that the causal chain of attitudinal loyalty composed by cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, and conative loyalty was empirically demonstrated. Moving one step forward, this study successfully developed a sturdy theoretical model that clearly explicates hotel guests' attitudinal loyalty generation process by extending Oliver's (1999, 2010) loyalty chain stages theory with an integration of perceived hotel performances of green management (recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation).

Practical implications

The qualitative approach of the present research identified twelve common attributes for guests' perceived hotel performances of green management pertinent to waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation. Specifically, our results identified (1) recycled materials, (2) refillable shampoo dispensers, (3) recycling containers/bins, (4) use of durable items, (5) low flow toilets and good sanitation practices, (6) low flow sinks, (7) low flow/intelligent showerheads, (8) water-efficient appliances, (9) occupancy sensors, (10) keycards, (11) temperature setting, and (12) renewable energy as attributes that guests are likely to perceive as hotels' green performances. Based on this result, researchers and practitioners in the hotel industry should understand that these common attributes/words come to mind when guests think of green hotels' conservation management efforts. For hotel practitioners, the improvement of the identified attributes pertinent to the hotel performance of green management is also highly encouraged in that, as our empirical results demonstrated, such attributes are strongly linked to guest post-purchase behaviors that are favorable for hotel firms.

The present research demonstrated that guest perception/assessment on hotels' performance of water saving and energy conservation plays a vital role in inducing cognitive loyalty for the green hotel. In existing studies in the extant literature, guests' perceptions/assessments of hotels' performances of water saving and energy conservation and its role in guests' environmentally responsible post-purchase decision-making processes have hardly been unearthed. Accordingly, this research included an important theoretical meaning as it empirically relates the causal chain of attitudinal loyalty to the dimensions of hotels' green management performances. To the best of our knowledge, this research was the first to inform that guests' cognitive evaluation forms based on their perception/assessment regarding hotels' performances of green managements in the green hotel context. From a practical point of view, it

is necessary for hotel operators to inform their guests that their hotel is working hard on the effective green management of water saving and energy conservation, meeting the various criteria of the green management guidelines through many communication channels. Specifically, it is possible to obtain certification from international institutions such as “ISO 14001,” which is an international standard for environmental management systems established by the technical committee (TC 207) of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). In addition, SNS marketing activities can promote efforts for green environmental to customers, thereby creating a positive word of mouth effect and improving brand image and reputation.

Academic implications

The present study provided empirical evidence that cognitive loyalty significantly provoked affective loyalty, which significantly generated conative loyalty. This result is coherent with Oliver’s (1999, 2010) original loyalty chain stages theory and empirical findings in consumer behavior and tourism studies (e.g., Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011; Yuksel et al., 2010). Based on this evidence, it is clear that guests’ pro-environmental intentions/willingness that are positive for a green hotel, are dependent on the degree of their affective experiences (emotions and satisfaction) with the hotel elicited by their cognitive appraisals of the green hotel stay (value and benefit assessment). To increase the impact of cognitive and affective factors, hotel operators need to direct their service strategies toward soaring guests’ value/benefit perception and provide them with emotional/satisfactory experiences while staying at the green hotel.

Affective loyalty was identified to have a relative importance in determining conative loyalty. As compared to other study variables, it had the greatest total impact. This finding is in line with previous studies that stressed the criticality of affect in triggering customer post-

purchase behavior (Back, 2005; Han et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010). This result implied that guests deeply care about emotional experiences with a green hotel when making a positive eco-friendly decision for the hotel. Given our evidence regarding the criticality of affective loyalty, green hotel practitioners should center more on product attributes that increase guests' emotional experiences (e.g., comfortable ambient conditions, quality green foods, live plants, fresh air, enjoyable amenities, and pleasant healthy physical environments).

A close examination of the indirect effect of study constructs demonstrated the significant indirect influence of water saving and energy conservation on both affective and conative loyalty and verified the significant indirect influence of cognitive loyalty on conative loyalty. In other words, both cognitive and affective factors significantly mediated the effect of its antecedent(s) on its outcome variable(s). Our finding was in line with previous research that asserted the mediating nature of cognitive and affective loyalty (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Han et al., 2011; Oliver, 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010). This result implied that improving both cognitive and affective experiences with a green hotel is essential for the increase in guest conative loyalty for the hotel. That is, the conative loyalty of hotel guests can be maximized when they perceive an improvement in cognitive and affective loyalty for green hotels. We require a close and detailed analysis of personal characteristics to enhance the level of cognitive and emotional loyalty to environmentally friendly hotels. Evanschitzky and Wunderlich (2006) observed that the process of forming emotional loyalty from cognitive loyalty among older respondents with a higher level of income. Moreover, there is a need to consider the differences in the situational characteristics of individual people, including price orientation and knowledge level, and we can explain such differences with the gap model for different consumption patterns, cultures, purchase experiences, and so on, for different countries (Zeithaml et al., 1988). We require a

close and detailed analysis of the personal characteristics to enhance the level of cognitive and emotional loyalty to environmentally friendly hotels. Evanschitzky & Wunderlich (2006) observed that the process of forming emotional loyalty from cognitive loyalty among older respondents with a higher level of income. Moreover, there is a need to consider the differences in the situational characteristics of individual people, including price orientation and knowledge level, and we can explain such differences with the gap model for different consumption patterns, cultures, purchase experiences, and so on, for different countries (Zeithaml et al., 1988). Recognizing the significant mediating nature of these attitudinal loyalty phases, hotel researchers need to use these constructs when developing any research model (or theory) for guest pro-environmental decision/behavior in a careful manner.

Limitations and future research

The present research is not free from limitations that eventually give future research opportunity. First, in this study, a field survey was conducted at tourist cities in only one country. Hence, generalizing the findings to other cultures needs caution. For future research, including a broader sampling range encompassing samples from diverse cultures/countries is recommended. In addition, it would be true that cultural/cross-national differences in hotel guests' eco-friendly decision-making process and behavior can exist. Thus, future research should conduct a cross-cultural/cross-national comparison to gain more in-depth knowledge regarding guests' loyalty generation process for green hotels. Second, according to Ajzen (1991), and Perugini and Bagozzi (2001), any socio-psychological theory/model is basically open to extension/modification for the enhancement of its capability. The extension/modification of socio-psychological theories is particularly useful in consumer pro-environmental behavior, as a

patron's decision formation for such environmentally responsible behavior often involves intricate psychological and emotional processes (Han & Yoon, 2015). Thus, the proposed theoretical framework can be further broadened and deepened by involving constructs that contribute to increasing its explanatory power. Lastly, without a doubt, guests' eco-friendly decision-making and loyalty formation differ based on hotel size, hotel types, and service level (Aragón-Correa et al., 2008; Buffa et al., 2018; Chan & Hawkins, 2010). Investigating such difference would be an interesting extension of this research.

CONCLUSION

The study successfully investigated hotel guests' intricate decision-making process by considering the role of hotels' conservation efforts (recycling and waste reduction, water saving, and energy conservation) and by applying the loyalty chain stages theory encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty phases. Improving guest loyalty is a critical challenge for every hotel practitioner, in that such enhancement is directly associated with the firm's profit increase. The present research wholly uncovered the formation of guests' attitudinal loyalty for green hotel products. The findings of this study informed that in order to be effective, the loyalty enhancement strategies should be related to the increase of the perceived hotel performances of eco-friendly management and should be associated with the improvement of cognitive, affective, and conative experiences. Overall, the topic of the present study deals with the contemporary issue of guest loyalty in the green hotel sector with the empirical findings providing researchers and practitioners with crucial guidelines for boosting attitudinal loyalty.

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