

## THE ROMANIAN YOUNG GENERATION'S WILLINGNESS TO CONSUME GREEN HOSPITALITY PRODUCTS

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### **Abstract**

*The hospitality industry generates environmental degradation through the construction of buildings, waste disposal, and water usage. Nowadays, a large number of customers show increased environmental awareness, being willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products/services. In Romania institutional arrangements to generate awareness of the necessity of sustainable development were numerous, exemplifying in this respect the actions carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development for introducing the european eco-label for tourist accommodation services and the camping services, as well as for promoting the use of the eco-label in Romania among interested hotels and guesthouses. Based on these aspects, the article presents the results of a quantitative marketing research conducted among the young generation from Brașov county. The main objectives of the research consist in identifying the level of information among Romanian young consumers of accommodation services from Brasov county regarding the eco-certification and environmental management systems applied in the Romanian hospitality industry and, also, to identify their intentions to consume the green accommodation products.*

**Keywords:** Environmental awarness, hospitality industry, green accommodation units, young generation, quantitative marketing research.

**Clasificare JEL:** M31, Q50, Z32

### **1. Introduction**

Hospitality industry, as a major component of the tourism sector, is well-known for the water and electricity consumptions, as well as for the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and waste production. The level of responsibility of business corporations played the strongest role in driving customer's intentions to pay more for a green hotel [10, 15]. At the same time, customers' intentions and willingness to consume green tourism and hospitality products is a very important issue which influences the tourism sustainable development. In this respect, numerous analyses pointed out that public concern about environmental issues has been on the increase [7]. Previous studies carried out at national level highlighted the low number of eco-certified accommodation units which operate in Romania [3], and also the fact that the eco-certification for tourist accommodation services seems to be favourable especially in the Romanian rural context [1].

This article presents the results of a quantitative marketing research among young consumers of green hospitality products and its main objectives are the following:

- Identifying young generation's concerns regarding the consumption of green hospitality products;
- The ranking of the most important environmental practices in the hospitality industry;
- Identifying the young generation's intentions to consume green hospitality products.

### **2. Literature review**

Hotel businesses affect the sustainability of the destination in which they are developed and operated by the consumption of significant amounts of natural resources [18]. The hotel industry is one of the major contributors of organic/wet waste in landfills, which is the main cause of

greenhouse gas emission [19]. It has been estimated that 75 per cent of all environmental impacts created by the hotel industry can be attributed to the excessive consumption of local and imported non-durable goods, energy and water, followed by emissions released to air, water and soil [20].

The “green hotel” is defined as an eco-friendly hotel operation that performs/follows various environmentally friendly practices/programs such as saving water/energy, using eco-friendly purchasing policies, and reducing emission/waste disposals to protect the natural environment and reduce operational costs [22].

At international level, the most encountered environment tools used by hotels are the codes of conduct, good practice examples in that area, ecolabels, environment management systems (EMSs), and the ecologic performance indicators [14]. Many hotels have adopted a formal environmental management system (EMS) for the sake of the environment, for economic reasons, and/or to achieve a positive image [5]. An EMS is very different from other business strategies and can be a bridge to good teamwork [6]. Another environmental tool which was adopted in the hospitality industry was the eco-label [2]. Environmental certifications offer hotels an opportunity to showcase their environmental commitments, and communicate their status as ‘frontrunners’ of the hospitality industry [4].

At the same time, an increasing number of consumers express increased environmental awareness and a preference for green products [11, 15-16]. Moreover, consumers show positive attitudes towards the companies that are sensitive on environmental matters [8, 10]. Tourists have become increasingly demanding about the hospitality products and thus force hoteliers to adapt to their new tastes and preferences, including greater respect in environmental issues [17]. Consequently, many hotels are beginning to implement various innovative methods to increase the “greenness” of their operations [9, 15].

Although consumers are generally receptive to and concerned about environmental issues [23], reports indicate that consumers are not always adjusting their behaviors to the challenges posed by sustainable consumption [13] and sometimes express unwillingness to pay extra despite their consciousness about environmental practices and preferences to stay in environmentally friendly hotel [15]. It seems that customers see environmental practices as an obligation and the cost should not be added to hotel price [12]. However, eco-friendly labels, product certifications and chain-stores increase the chances that consumers will gain favorable feedback on the greenness of their shopping choices [13] and attitude toward green behaviors positively affects the overall image, as well as the overall image positively affects visit intention, word of mouth intention, and willingness to pay more [12].

### **3. Research methodology**

The research method chosen was the survey based on questionnaires, and the sample included 264 students and master students from the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration of Braşov, all of them attending the two following study programmes: "Economics of Trade, Tourism and Services", both full-time education and distance-learning, and the master degree "Business Administration in Tourism", full-time education. The selection of these two study programmes was motivated by the fact that the respondents are familiar with the content and specificity of the tourism activities and, in particular, the green tourism, thus being more interesting to assess the behavior of future tourism managers, which are trained to implement measures of environmental protection, when they are usual clients.

The research was conducted during the winter session, respectively between 21.01-19.02. 2017. The period was chosen intentionally, as during the sessions' time there are registered high attendances. The questionnaire underlying the research includes a number of 13 questions, and the content of the questionnaire is presented in Annex 1.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

The majority, respectively 95,5% out of the respondents consider themselves as being concerned with the environmental issues. Another objective followed was to assess six of the main environmental issues considered important for the units management: energy consumption, gas consumption, water consumption, wood heating consumptions, waste problem and pollution, and to grant them values from 1 (the most important) to 6 (the most unimportant). Weighted average values obtained for these six activities are presented in figure no. 1.

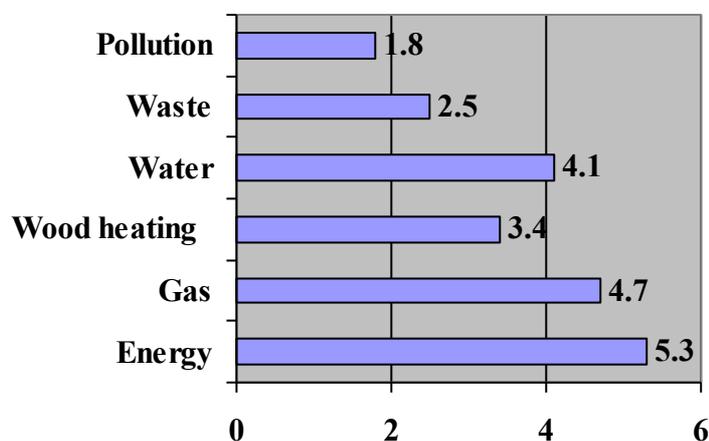


Figure No. 1. Weighted average values granted to the environmental practices within accommodation units

This analysis was conducted only among those who said they were concerned about environmental issues. The most relevant issue is considered to be the pollution, which registered an average rating of 1.8, followed by the waste problem (2.5), wood heating consumptions (3.4), water consumption (4.1), gas consumption (4.7) and the most unimportant aspect of environmental practices was considered the energy consumption, with an average value of 5.3.

A percentage of 54,5% of the subjects is informed about the presence of green hotels on the Romanian market, while only 2,3% out of them had the experience of consuming accommodation services in an eco-certified lodging unit in Romania. Another question revealed the fact that 78% out of the respondents consider that by using renewable energy resources lodging units' management underly commitment towards environmental protection.

An important aspect regarding Romanian young generation's consumption habits for green hospitality products is highlighted by the features considered important for green lodging units' operation (fig. no. 2).

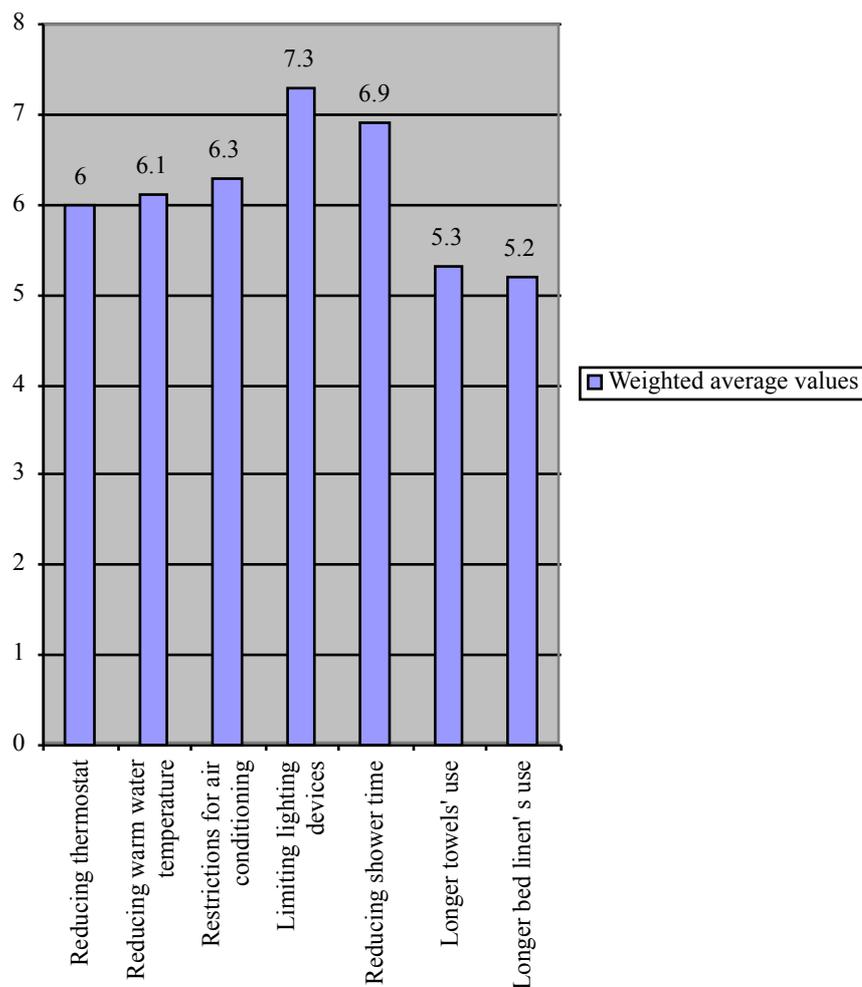


Figure No. 2. Weighted average values granted to green practices within lodging units

The respondents assessed the main practices within a lodging units with values from 1 (totally unimportant) to 10 (extremely important), and the results reveal that "limiting the number of lighting devices in use at the same time" is considered the most important, with the weighted average value 7.7, followed in order by "reducing shower time to save water" with 6.9, "restrictions of air conditioning operation" with 6.3, "reducing the warm water temperature" with 6.1 and "reducing the temperature of the thermostat /radiator" with 6.0. The lowest values were recorded by the "use of towels for a longer period" with 5.3 and "use of bed linen for a longer period" with 5.2.

Regarding the willingness to pay more for green hospitality products, 47,7% out of the respondents chosed the positive answer.

There were further analyzed the intentions to consume green hospitality products (fig. no. 3).

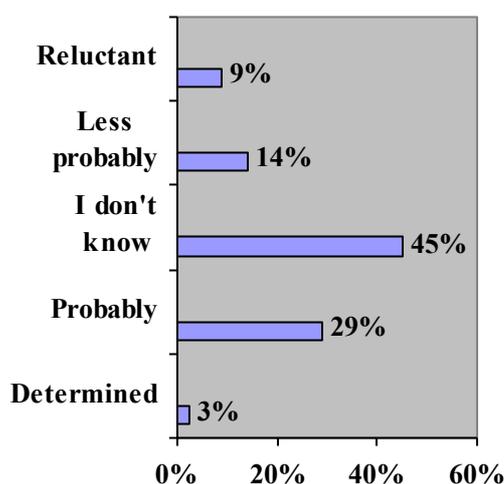


Figure No. 3. Respondents' intentions to consume green hospitality products

The results reveal that 45% of the respondents selected the "I don't know" option, 29% said that they will "probably" purchase these services, 3% are determined to look for green hotels, 14% of the subjects selected the "less probably" answer option, while 9% are reluctant with the services offered by the green units.

As regarding the identification questions, 81% out of the respondents are female and 19% are male respondents, while 69% out of the respondents come from urban places, and 31% of the respondents come from rural places.

## 5. Conclusions

The young generation behavior influences the perspective of sustainable development in tourism and hospitality. Although the respondents appreciate responsible behavior they are not equally willing to pay more to get green hotel services and this conclusion which resulted from the research is consistent with previous assessments from other countries [15].

In Romania, the number of hospitality companies that voluntarily chose to focus on sustainable development is very low, namely there are two hotels, one which operates in Bucharest, and the second one is a hotel in Saturn resort on the Black Sea coast [21]. The governmental institutions due to their specific competencies, out of which educating the hoteliers is a very important one, and by specific measures can generate a significant contribution to encouraging hospitality firms to scale-up their green management systems and to offer green products. The promotion of specific projects sustained financially by the Romanian state would be an encouraging solution for green tourism development in our country.

At the same time, it is certain that the future in hospitality will focus on introducing environmental protection measures as a response to the spreading of responsible tourism. In this context, increasing the impact of educational activities as well as technological advancement that allows managers not to raise prices in order to support additional expenses related to the implementation of environmental protection measures are the pillars of future actions.

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ANNEX 1

Questionnaire

In order to identify the young generation's behavior regarding the consumption of green hospitality products, please answer the following questions:

1. Do you consider yourself a consumer concerned with the environmental protection?
  - Yes
  - No (skip to question no. 3)
2. Please rank the main environmental protection issues which you consider important for the hotels management, by granting values from 1 (to the issue you consider as the most important) to 6 (the most unimportant) to the following environmental protection issues:
  - Energy consumption
  - Gas consumption
  - Water consumption
  - Wood heating consumptions
  - Waste problem
  - Pollution
3. Do you know about the existence of green hotels (accommodation units) in Romania?
  - Yes
  - No
4. Have you ever stayed in a green hotel?
  - Yes
  - No (skip to question no. 6)
5. Please describe in a few words the experience of staying in a green hotel:  

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6. Do you consider the use of renewable energy sources as an important management issue regarding green hotels?
  - Yes
  - No
7. How do you rate each of the following features of a green lodging units on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 - totally unimportant, ... 10 extremely important):
  - Reducing the temperature of the thermostat /radiator
  - Reducing the warm water temperature
  - Restrictions of air conditioning operation
  - Limiting the number of lighting devices in use at the same time
  - Reducing shower time to save water
  - Use of towels for a longer period
  - Use of bed linen for a longer period
8. Would you be willing to pay a bigger price to consume green hospitality products?
  - Yes
  - No
9. For the near future, please evaluate, by the following scale, the probability to consume green hospitality products:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Reluctant      Less probably      I don't know      Probably      Determined

10. Your age \_\_\_\_\_
11. The county where you graduated high school \_\_\_\_\_
12. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
13. The place you come from is:
- Urban
  - Rural