



The Influence of Hotel Greenwashing on Visit Intentions: The Mediating Role of Green Skepticism

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Abstract – In recent decades, with the increasingly serious environmental problems, more and more companies and consumers pay attention to practice green consumption. Based on the cognition-affect-behavior (C-A-B) theory, this study is intended to examine if cognition in the form of greenwashing, affect in the form of perceived green skepticism and behavior in the form of visiting the hotel. Through a survey-based approach and analysis, it has been found that greenwashing and green skepticism are important factors in predicting consumer visit intention. The positive influence of greenwashing cognition flows through green skepticism. Additionally, green skepticism mediates the relationship between greenwashing and green visit intention. The findings of this research contribute to the study of greenwashing in hospitality industry in the concept of sustainability.

Keywords – greenwashing, green skepticism, visit intentions.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, with the increasingly serious environmental problems, more and more companies and consumers pay attention to practice green consumption. Consumers are interest in purchasing green products and services that are environmentally friendly due to environmental considerations [1, 2]. As a result, green marketing has become an essential strategy for appealing to environmentally conscious customers, many businesses are attempting to show consumers their good corporate image and social responsibility [3]. However, some corporates have adjusted their green business strategies to pretend to be green by greenwashing that is only about talking and not doing [4-6]. Aji & Sutikno indicated that the deceptive use of marketing to promote the perception of environmental-friendly image is called to as greenwashing [7]. This practice has given some consumers the negative intent to purchase these products or services, and has also increased consumer

confusion when it comes to purchasing products with environmental features [7, 8].

Hotels across the globe are increasingly embracing green practices. Signs accompanying a cue for environmental concern that remind guests to turn off the lights, reuse towels or linen and use water more conservatively have become commonplace in hotels [9]. Statistics reveal eighty-five percent of U.S. hotels have some form of green practice, at the same time, seventy-nine percent of consumers found eco-friendly practices to be important. However, only fifty-six percent of hotel consumers are very skeptical about whether hotels are truly ecofriendly [10]. Obviously, Consumers' have become aware of hotels' greenwashing propensities. According to [9], hotels take to dishonest tactics to attract customers by falsely portraying themselves as environmentally friendly [11]. This perception results from the difference between hotel eco-friendly declarations and their real environmental effect by reducing green initiatives [12].

This gap can partly be explained by skepticism [13].

There is growing consumer skepticism towards companies that take opportunistic advantage of the green movement. As a result, the customers may become skeptical whether to keep on purchasing or change their behavior [14]. At times, these tactics may cause customers to have negative impact on customers' green purchase intentions [15]. Mohr, Eroğlu, & Ellen had suggested that consumers' environmental knowledge and concern can be significant triggers in generating skepticism about green marketing [16]. In fact, although many marketing and psychology researchers [17, 18] have uncovered influential factors on consumer skepticism such as their level of environmental knowledge, cynicism, and self-esteem, the hospitality literature has been tardy in examining the significance of those factors on customer attitudes and behavioral intentions [9].

In the previous literature, there have been many studies concerning causes, taxonomy and consequences of greenwashing behaviors in hospitality industry. However, the most of past research has been conducted in Western countries, specifically in the United States [9, 11, 19]. There are only few studies on greenwash behavior in the hospitality industry, particularly in developing countries. Recently several researches have targeted on developing countries such as Aintrama that explored purposely greenwashing tactics influenced customers' green purchases decision in Thailand's hospitality industry [12]. Comparing to developing countries, it exists a research gap regarding the consequence of greenwashing in developing countries, especially in hospitality industry. As a result, our study efforts to fill this gap partly fill this gap.

Furthermore, most research regards environmental concern as a direct or indirect antecedent of consumers' green purchasing intentions [1, 20], but seldom does any study explore its moderating role between corporate misconduct and consumers' purchasing intentions [3]. According [21], consumers with a high degree of environmental concern are more likely to have a strong sense of environmental responsibility and practice environmentally-friendly behaviors, such as energy-saving, recycling, and buying environmentally-friendly products [3]. As a result, this study also

explores the moderating role of environmental concern on consumers' greenwashing perceptions and green visit intentions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Cognition-affect-behavior theory and consumer green behaviors

Several researchers employed the C-A-B scheme to develop systematic models of consumers' decision making [22, 23]. The C-A-B paradigm suggests that cognition (C) determines affect (A) which influences behavior (B). For instance, beliefs about health and ecological welfare benefits have been shown to enhance affects in the form of hedonic attitudes and then improve attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty to organic food [24].

Based on the cognition-affect-behavior (C-A-B) theory, this study addresses consumers' reactions to the phenomenon of "greenwashing" in the hospitality industry. We proposed and tested a theoretical model that examined whether recognizing the perceived greenwashing caused consumer skepticism about hotel environmental claims, which in turn influenced consumer intention to visit the hotel. Additionally, the moderating effects of ecological concern on the relationship between skepticism and intention to participate and between skepticism and intention, and perceived consumer efficiency and intention to visit were examined. Rahman et al. applied C-A-B paradigm to explore consumers' reactions to the phenomenon of greenwashing in the lodging industry [9]. Similarly, Nguyen et al. employed the same paradigm to examine a model linking greenwash and green skepticism with green purchase intention [4]. This study will explore consumers' cognitive knowledge is being influenced with the greenwashing actions in the hospitality industry, which brings about their skepticism of the green hotel's claims. As a result, it affects the green visit intentions. The present study model, on the base of C-A-B paradigm, explores the mediating role of green skepticism, and the moderating role of environmental concern in the relationship between greenwashing and the visit hotel intentions.

2.2 Greenwashing and Green Skepticism

Skepticism refers to an individual's overall tendency to distrust or doubt the claims of others [18]. In

business management, this concept has been extensively examined across various contexts, including advertising, organic products, corporate social responsibility, environmental claims, and cause-related marketing [25, 26]. Consumers with high levels of skepticism tend to respond less favorably to advertisements [27]. Previous studies have found a positive association between greenwashing and green consumer skepticism [4, 7]. As Pomeroy and Johnson [28] indicated, skeptical individuals are more likely to critically evaluate advertising claims rather than accepting them at face value [7]. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis H1: Greenwashing is positively related to green skepticism.

2.3 Greenwashing and Green Visit Intention

If companies use greenwashing to deceive consumers, it can damage trust and hinder the establishment of long-term relationships, ultimately reducing purchase intentions [29, 30]. Polonsky et al. showed that greenwashing introduces false environmental claims into the market, which lessens the credibility and popularity of genuinely green products [31]. Similarly, research has demonstrated that greenwashing negatively impacts word-of-mouth, green perceived quality, and green satisfaction, thereby eroding consumer trust [11, 32]. Furthermore, Nyilasy et al. [33] emphasized that greenwashing is not only an ethical failure but also severely damages consumer perception and trust. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis H2: Greenwashing is negatively related to green visit intentions.

2.4 Green Skepticism and Green Visit Intention

Han, Hsu, and Sheu [34] examined customers' visit intention, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth intention as primary behavioral intentions in the hotel context. Previous studies have suggested that skepticism can negatively impact brand beliefs, brand attitudes, reliance on ads, and behavioral intentions [18], [35]. Goh and Balaji [2] revealed that green skepticism negatively influenced consumers' purchase intentions for green products in Malaysia. Similarly, Nguyen et al. [4] demonstrated that green skepticism has a negative effect on Vietnamese consumers who purchase green vegetables. Furthermore, Yoon and Chen [19] found that

skepticism negatively influences customers' visit intentions in the hotel industry. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis H3: Green Skepticism is negatively related to Green Visit Intention.

2.5 The mediating effect of Green Skepticism

Based on foregoing exploration of cognition – affect – behavior (C-A-B) paradigm, the premise of the C-A-B paradigm is that cognition (C) determines affect (A) which, in turn, results in behavior (B) [9]. Nguyen et al. [4] indicated green skepticism mediated the relationship between greenwash and green purchase intentions. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis H4: Green skepticism mediates the relationship between greenwash and green visit intention

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 conceptual framework

The full conceptual framework is presented in the following Figure 1.

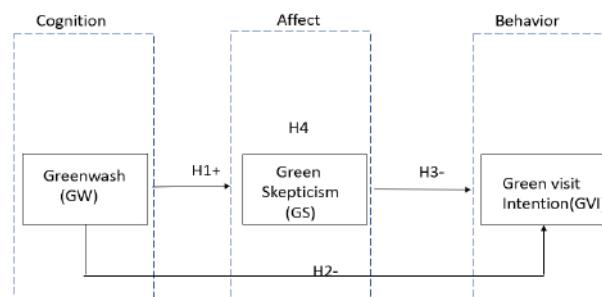


Fig. 1: The full conceptual framework

3.2 Stimulus, Data and Sampling

The target population of this study were Taiwan consumers who plan the visit hotel in the future six months. A self-report online survey was prepared using Google Form platform ensuring a diverse representation of the target population. In order to select a hotel's actual green initiatives for presenting as the survey stimulus in this study, the actual green marketing initiative of hotel reservation website in Taichung will be collected. The reason we survey the website of Taichung hospitality industry is Taichung government is promoting "Green Hotel" certification Plan. The evaluation of the certification included not offering bottle water. As a result, real-life scenario –

not offering bottle water was used. First, participants were introduced to the concept of green hotel. Participants were instructed to imagine themselves in a scenario. The scenario was a description on a hotel website that claims to be environmental-friendly by not offering bottle water. After reading the scenario, the subjects were asked to respond to questions about

Table 1. Measures, list of Items and source

Variables	Items	Source
Greenwashing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This hotel misleads with words in its environmental features. 2. This hotel misleads with visual or graphics in its environmental features. 3. This hotel has a green claim that is vague or seemingly unprovable. 4. This hotel overstates or exaggerates how its green functionality actually. 5. This hotel leaves out or masks important information, making the green claim sound better than it is. 	[11, 36]
Green Skepticism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I can depend on getting the truth in this environmental claim. 2. I believe this environmental claim is informative. 3. This environmental claim is generally truthful. 4. This environmental claim is a reliable source of information about the green value of the hotel. 5. This environmental claim is truth well told. 6. This environmental claim presents a true picture of the hotel. 7. I feel I've been accurately informed after reading this environmental claim. 8. This environmental claim provides customers with essential information. 	[2, 19]
Green visit intention	<p>I intend to be a customer of this hotel in the future.</p> <p>I am willing to stay at this hotel using the claim when traveling.</p> <p>I will make an effort to stay at this hotel using the claim when traveling</p>	[9, 34]

The questionnaire was designed to assess consumers' response regarding hotel's greenwash behavior under the mediating role of green skepticism. Additionally, the study explores the moderating effect of environment concern. A questionnaire was used to collect responses in this study. Before conducting the main survey, two experts (one marketing professor, the other hotel manager) will be invited to assess the measurement items and survey instrument. The questionnaire begins with a short description of the definition of green hotels, the hotel's green initiatives, and suggested that now many hotels seem to present themselves as green hotels despite not being really green. All variables were measured by a five-point

greenwashing, green skepticism and visit intention. Participants were also asked to fill out demographical information that included age, gender, sex, education, income, and previous experience with green hotels.

3.3 Research Measures

Likert scale (anchored at 1 indicates "strongly disagree", 2 "disagree", 3 "neutral", 4 "agree", and 5 "strongly agree"). First, a five-item measurement scale for greenwash was adopted from Chen et al. [11] and Laufer [36]. Then, an eight-item green skepticism scale was adapted from Goh and Balaji [2] and Yoon and Chen [19]. Finally, a three-item scale for green visit intention was adopted from Han et al. [34] and Rahman et al. [9]. All measures and items are showed in Table 1.

IV. RESULTS

To test the relationships in the proposed model, we conducted a survey using the purposive sampling

technique. The online questionnaires were collected from students at universities in Taichung, Taiwan. Some lecturer-partners who have classes at several of these universities were asked to help answer the online questionnaires. In total, there were 201 questionnaires with qualified and usable data.

Psychometrics properties of the scales Cronbach's is considered an adequate index of the inter-item consistency of independent and dependent variables. The Cronbach's value for the dimensions of this study's scales was greater than 0.7, indicating a high reliability [37]. The Cronbach's value came to 0.894, 0.724, 0.903, for greenwashing, green skepticism and green visit intention respectively.

This study applied a hierarchical regression analysis to validate Hypotheses 1 to 4. We followed the four steps of hierarchical regression analysis to conduct mediating effect validations [38]. Hierarchical regression analysis includes three models. First, the independent variables must produce an effect on the intervening variables. As shown in Table 2, Model M1 simulates the green skepticism regression analysis results. The results of adding the independent variable of greenwashing into Model M1 show that the independent variable produced a significant positive effect on the intervening variable of green skepticism ($\beta = 0.451$; $t = 7.124^{***}$), fulfilling the first condition of the mediating effect analysis step and supporting Hypothesis 1. Second, the independent variables must affect the dependent variables. Model M2 illustrates the green visit intention regression analysis results. The results of adding the greenwashing independent variable into M2 show that greenwashing has a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.154$, $t = -2.993^{**}$) on the dependent variable of green visit intention, supporting Hypothesis 2. Finally, we added the intervening variable of green skepticism into M3, where the intervening variable must affect the dependent variable, and the independent variable's effect on the dependent variable decreases. As Model M3 shows, the intervening variable of green skepticism had a significant negative affect ($\beta = 0.632$; $t = 9.939^{***}$) on the dependent variable of green visit intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported. When validating the mediating effects, greenwashing

had no effect on green visit intention ($\beta = -0.077$, $t = 1.217$) after green skepticism was added as an intervening variable. Consequently, the condition of Step 3 was obtained, Hypothesis 4. Was fully supported.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results

	M1: dependent variable = GS ⁺			M2: dependent variable = GVI ⁺			M3: dependent variable = GVI ⁺		
	B ⁺	Standardized β ⁺	t ⁺	B ⁺	Standardized β ⁺	t ⁺	未標準化 係數 B ⁺	Standardized β ⁺	t ⁺
constant ⁺	4.088 ⁺		29.347*** ⁺	3.718 ⁺			22.969*** ⁺	0.977 ⁺	
GW ⁺	0.316 ⁺	0.451 ⁺	7.124*** ⁺	-0.154 ⁺	-0.208 ⁺	-2.993** ⁺	-0.058 ⁺	-0.077 ⁺	-1.217 ⁺
GS ⁺							-0.670 ⁺	-0.632 ⁺	-9.939*** ⁺

GW-greenwashing⁺
GS- green skepticism⁺
GVI-green visit intention⁺
M1: adjusted R² = 0.199 $F=50.750^{***}$ β ⁺
M2: adjusted R² = 0.038 $F=8.959^{**}$ β ⁺
M3: adjusted R² = 0.355 $F=56.074^{***}$ β ⁺
*** significant at p<0.001⁺

This study examined how greenwashing influence visit intention and, additionally, investigated the mediating role of green skepticism. It also used the Cognition-Affect-Behavior theory to conduct the research. It was used as a way to examine how consumers' cognitive knowledge is affected by greenwashing actions in the current field. The findings of this research contribute to the study of greenwashing in hospitality industry in the concept of developing country.

As a result, all four hypotheses have been supported. First, greenwashing has shown a positive relation to green skepticism of the customers. Which means customers tend to be more critical to environmental claims and companies positioning them as environmentally friendly. Secondly, this study has revealed negative influence of greenwashing on green visit intention. It was shown in the analysis that green visit intention regresses with the influence of greenwashing. Thirdly, the study examined the relationship between green skepticism and green visit intention. Hypothesis 3, which stated that green skepticism is negatively related to green visit intention, was also supported. Customers' skepticism towards the brand leads to the lack of green visit intention. Lastly, the mediating effect of green skepticism between greenwash and green visit intention was also supported.

This study contributed to the understanding of customers perception on greenwashing propensities. However, it faced several limitations. As for data collection, the responses of students in universities of Taichung have been used as a sample, future researches can use broader the group of people to expand this study. More well-off customers can be interviewed for data collection and analysis. Additional studies can also consider researching other developing countries as the results might differ from Taiwan. Furthermore, this research specifically considered greenwashing behaviors in hospitality industry, which puts limitations on the research. Future studies should explore other fields that also have greenwashing propensities.

In conclusion, this study has emphasised the influence of hotel greenwashing on customers visit intentions and explored the mediating role of green skepticism. Companies can use the results of the research in building their image and applying green marketing strategies.

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