

Assessment of earthcheck certification and consumer choices: A guest perception study of five-star hotels in Newport city, Pasay, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability certification has emerged as a strategic mechanism through which hospitality organizations signal environmental responsibility, operational transparency, and long-term commitment to sustainable tourism. As global tourism continues to confront climate change, resource constraints, and shifting consumer values, third-party certification systems such as EarthCheck play an increasingly important role in legitimizing sustainability claims within the luxury hotel sector.

Despite the growing adoption of certification frameworks, empirical evidence examining their influence on consumer perception and behavioral intention remains limited, particularly in emerging tourism destinations such as the Philippines. In high-density hospitality clusters like Newport City, Pasay, where multiple five-star hotels operate within a competitive environment, certification may function as both a market signal and a brand differentiation mechanism.

Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Conner, 2020), this study examines how awareness of EarthCheck certification influences guest perceptions of environmental responsibility, perceived value, trust, and brand loyalty, as well as its role in shaping hotel selection decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable tourism literature highlights certification systems as mechanisms that enhance organizational legitimacy and consumer trust by reducing information asymmetry (Dodds & Joppe, 2005; Weaver & Lawton, 2019). Certifications such as EarthCheck provide standardized indicators of environmental performance, including energy efficiency, waste management, and community engagement.

Recent studies suggest that environmentally responsible practices significantly influence perceived service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty (Han et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018). However, the intention–behavior gap persists, wherein positive attitudes toward sustainability do not always translate into actual purchasing behavior.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains this gap by emphasizing that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively shape behavioral intention. Within hospitality settings, sustainability certification functions as a cognitive cue, influencing both perception and decision-making.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework

Construct	Description	Expected Role
Certification Awareness	Knowledge of EarthCheck certification	Influences perception
Environmental Responsibility	Perceived eco-performance of hotels	Builds trust
Perceived Value	Value for money relative to sustainability	Influences choice
Trust & Loyalty	Confidence in hotel brand	Drives repeat behavior
Consumer Choice	Booking and recommendation intention	Outcome variable

METHOD

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to evaluate how guest perception is influenced by their awareness of EarthCheck certification. To achieve this, the research focused on a specific group of respondents consisting of guests who had stayed in five-star hotels located in Newport

City. Using a purposive sampling technique, the study successfully gathered data from a total sample size of 76 participants, ensuring that the respondents met the specific criteria necessary for the research objectives.

The data collection process was carried out through the administration of a structured online survey. This instrument was designed to gather precise information regarding the guests' experiences and viewpoints. By using a digital format, the study was able to efficiently reach the target audience and collect standardized responses for further analysis.

The measurement instrument itself was organized into six key constructs to provide a comprehensive view of guest attitudes. These constructs included the guests' initial awareness of EarthCheck certification and how much that awareness influenced their hotel selection. Furthermore, the survey measured perceptions of the hotel's environmental responsibility, the perceived value for money, levels of trust and brand loyalty, and the guests' overall belief in their own contribution to sustainable tourism through their stay.

FINDINGS

Results indicate that while awareness of EarthCheck certification is moderate, guest perceptions toward certified hotels are strongly positive. The findings of this study reveal that guests perceive EarthCheck-certified hotels as significantly more environmentally responsible, credible, and trustworthy compared to non-certified establishments. There is also a strong perception that these hotels are more consistent in their service delivery, suggesting that sustainability is viewed as a marker of overall operational quality. However, despite these positive perceptions, guests' willingness to pay a premium for such accommodations remains moderate. This indicates that while sustainability enhances the brand's image, it does not yet serve as the sole or primary driver for economic decision-making among luxury hotel guests.

Table 2. Summary of Key Findings

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Environmental Responsibility	3.40	Strongly Agree
Hospitality Standards	3.37	Strongly Agree
Certification Credibility	3.35	Strongly Agree
Trust and Loyalty	3.33	Strongly Agree
Willingness to Pay Premium	3.10	Agree

From a theoretical standpoint, these results support the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The study suggests that when guests hold positive attitudes toward a hotel and perceive social approval for staying at an eco-friendly venue, they develop a much stronger behavioral intention to book or recommend that establishment. This research contributes to hospitality literature by providing empirical evidence of how certifications work within the Philippine luxury context. By incorporating sustainability certification as a cognitive signal, the study extends the TPB and demonstrates that the actual impact of certification on guest perception is even stronger than simple awareness of the program.

To address the practical needs of the industry, hotel managers are encouraged to make their EarthCheck credentials highly visible by displaying them at check-in counters, inside guest rooms, and across all digital booking platforms. Instead of relying on passive messaging, managers should translate sustainability into a lived experience through interactive eco-programs and guest participation initiatives. Furthermore, training frontline staff to act as "Sustainability Ambassadors" is essential, as it equips them to explain environmental practices and the value of certification directly to the guests.

Marketing teams should move away from simple "eco-friendly" claims and instead focus on "proven sustainability systems" by integrating certification into branding campaigns and social media storytelling. By making certification a key touchpoint in the guest journey, marketers can better validate the hotel's credibility. Finally, for policymakers, there is a clear need to standardize the visibility of

these certifications. By promoting awareness campaigns and providing incentives for certified establishments, the government can help create a more sustainable and competitive tourism landscape.

IMPLICATIONS OR CONCLUSION

The study concludes that EarthCheck certification functions as both a vital credibility signal and a powerful behavioral influence mechanism within the luxury hospitality market. Although general awareness of the certification among guests remains at a moderate level, its actual impact on how guests perceive a hotel's environmental responsibility, trust, and brand loyalty is significant. This suggests that once guests become aware of the rigorous standards required for such a credential, their confidence in the brand increases substantially.

The findings further indicate that certification should not be viewed merely as a technical compliance tool for internal management. Instead, it serves as a strategic branding asset that can enhance the overall competitiveness of a destination. By aligning operational performance with a globally recognized sustainability standard, hotels can differentiate themselves in a crowded market and signal a level of institutional readiness that appeals to the modern, eco-conscious traveler.

To build upon these insights, future research should aim for a more expansive scope by utilizing larger sample sizes to ensure greater data reliability. Scholars are encouraged to apply inferential statistics to move beyond description and establish more definitive causal relationships between certification and guest behavior. Finally, conducting cross-destination comparisons would be highly beneficial to determine how different regional contexts or cultural attitudes might influence the effectiveness of sustainability certifications in the tourism industry.

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