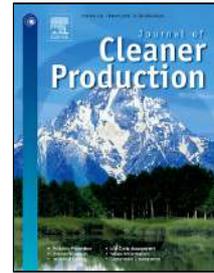


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Green image and consumers' word-of-mouth intention in the green hotel industry: The moderating effect of Millennials

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Abstract: Research on the word-of-mouth intention of consumers has received increasing attention in hospitality research. However, little research has explored the effect of green image on the word-of-mouth intention of consumers and how this effect was mediated by green satisfaction and green trust. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this research examined the relationship between green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the Chinese green hotel industry and explored the mediating effects of green satisfaction and green trust. Considering that Millennials (a large and influential generation born in the 1980s and late 1990s) are extremely concerned about green issues, more concerned about the environment than previous generations, and a powerful source of word-of-mouth about products and services, this research also examined the moderating effect of Millennials. The questionnaire survey method was used to collect data from 324 respondents with the help of travel agencies to test these relationships. The results indicated that the green image of green hotels strongly influences consumer green satisfaction and green trust, and consumer green satisfaction has a significant effect on green trust. The consumers' green satisfaction and green trust are positively related to their intention to recommend green hotels to individuals around them. Furthermore, significant moderating effects of Millennials were found in all paths between the investigated variables in the proposed model. The results also showed that female tourists are more likely than male tourists to recommend green hotels. The implications of these findings were discussed, and limitations and future research

directions were suggested.

Keywords: Green image; Word-of-mouth intention; Green hotels; Millennials

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1. Introduction

Hotels are a major energy- and water-intensive sector in the tourism and hospitality industries since they consume enormous amount of energy and resources (e.g. water, lighting, and many disposable products) in their daily operations, which has posed a great challenge to the environment (Verma and Chandra, 2017; Bohdanowicz, 2005). Recently, there has been increasing public concern about environmental issues and consumers are more environmentally conscious than in past decades (Han et al., 2009). Many consumers are in favor of green consumption and regard it as an effective way to protect the environment (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2017; Chen and Chang, 2012). Considering these phenomena, many hotels have been proactive in adopting green practices and developing environmental programs to green their hotels, resulting in so-called green hotels, to attract consumers and gain a competitive market position (Cerutti et al., 2016; Yadav and Pathak, 2016).

According to the Green Hotels Association (2015), green hotels are tagged with an eco-friendly label for saving water, saving energy, reducing solid waste, recycling, and reusing durable service items, all practices which aim to protect the one and only earth (Lee et al., 2010; Kushwaha and Sharma, 2016). Undeniably, green hotels are the future trend for consumers to reduce pollution emissions in the tourism and hospitality industries (Siti-Nabiha et al., 2014). However, it is worth noting that not all consumers are familiar with the advantages and the operation mechanisms of green hotels. Most consumers have only heard about the concept of “green hotels”. Traditional hotels are still their first choice when they are traveling because they are not familiar with green hotels (Choi et al., 2015). Thus, strategies to popularize green hotels and encourage consumers to visit green hotels are important.

Many scholars and practitioners have validated that consumers' behavioral decisions are significantly affected by a firm's image (Martínez, 2015; Ryu et al., 2012; Han et al., 2009). Many firms have developed image marketing strategies to obtain business goals and then set up a good corporate image to consolidate their favorable position among consumers (Marconi, 1996). Green image is a series of consumer perceptions that a firm is committed to environmental protection and this

image is an important element for firms such as green hotels to seize opportunities of promotion (Robin et al., 2017). Consumers who have faith in the green image of a hotel may show stronger loyalty to their admired green hotels and indicate a propensity to spread positive things about the green hotels (Yusof et al., 2012).

However, little research, has explored the relationship between the green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel industry. The present research attempted to use the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to explore the relationship between the green image of green hotels and consumers' word-of-mouth intention. The S-O-R framework is often used to understand the relationships between the stimuli individuals receive (S), the internal evaluations individuals generate (O), and their subsequent responses or attitudes (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). For example, Thang and Tan (2003) used the S-O-R framework to explore consumers' purchase intentions and regarded the store's image as the stimulus. Hu and Jasper (2010) expanded the S-O-R framework and validated its usefulness, and their research indicated that shopping intentions are strongly affected by the store image. Applying the S-O-R framework in the current research should yield a better understanding of the relationship between green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers.

An additional factor to consider is that Millennials are a large generation with a strong concern about green issues, more so than other generations (Muralidharan and Xue, 2016; Kim et al., 2016). Many firms focused on Millennials and regarded them as target consumers because they have substantial purchasing power and significantly affect the purchase decisions of individuals around them (Parment, 2016). Millennials are more concerned about image, ethos, and their experience and relationship with firms, as well as being more familiar with company images than previous generations (Merrill, 1999; McCormick, 2016). Examining the attitudes of Millennials about green image can be very beneficial to hoteliers in the green hotel industry who target these consumers. Unlike others, Millennials are likely to use social media and they are a powerful source of word-of-mouth about products and services (Lukovitz, 2009; Jang et al., 2011; Bolton et al., 2013). Understanding the difference between

Millennials and other consumers in their word-of-mouth intention may be useful and meaningful to develop green marketing strategies. Thus, in this research, we conducted a comparative analysis to investigate the moderating effect of Millennials in the proposed framework. Meanwhile, considering that gender is very important for decision making in the green accommodation sector, the moderating effect of gender was also examined.

Overall, the main aim of this research was to use the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to explore the relationship between green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers, and to test the potential moderating effects of Millennials and gender. The remainder of this research was organized as follows. The next section provided an overview of the S-O-R framework, the main concepts included in the research, and the developed hypotheses. This was followed by the methodology before the measures and data analyses were presented. Finally, a discussion of the results and implications was provided. Research limitations and further study directions were also offered.

2. Theoretical foundation and hypotheses

2.1. Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), assumed that the stimuli (as antecedents) affect the emotional states of consumers whose response may be observed in their behaviors such as environmental behavior (Robert and John, 1982). In the S-O-R framework, the stimuli given by the firms were characterized as a set of attributes that affect the perceptions of the consumers (Su et al., 2016). The organism refers to the intervening internal process between the stimuli and the response of consumers. Essentially, it is consist of “perceptual, physiological, feeling, and thinking activities” (Bagozzi, 1986). The response was the final outcome or final action toward the firm, or consumer reactions, including psychological reactions such as attitudes and/or behavioral intentions (Bagozzi, 1986). The S-O-R framework has demonstrated that individuals react to the environment by three steps: when an individual is exposed to an environmental

stimulus (S), he/she generates internal states/evaluations (O), which then initiate responses (R). Internal states/evaluations (O) can mediate the relationship between stimuli (S) to individuals and the responses (R) (Su and Swanson, 2017).

The S-O-R framework adopted in previous studies largely focused on exploring the relationships between the variables (Mazaheri et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2011; Kaur et al., 2017). This past research opened a different angle of inquiry in hospitality industry research: the linkage between the green image of green hotels and consumer intention to recommend the green hotel to significant people around them. Furthermore, satisfaction and trust have been accepted in the S-O-R framework by many scholars and practitioners and regarded as consumer emotional state variables (Chang, 2017; Parboteeah et al., 2016). For example, Mummalaneni (2005) considered satisfaction as an evaluation variable in the S-O-R paradigm and found that consumer satisfaction has a significant effect on responses to the websites of virtual stores. Jeon et al. (2017) selected online trust as an internal state variable in S-O-R to explore the relationship between website interactivity and consumer behavioral intention. In this research, green satisfaction and green trust were also chosen as consumer internal evaluation variables in the S-O-R framework. In summary, in the present research framework, the green image of the green hotel industry (Stimuli) elicits the consumers' intrinsic states/evaluations of green trust and green satisfaction (Organism), which then results in consumers' word-of-mouth intention about green hotels (Responses).

2.2. Stimulus: Green image

In recent years, a competitive atmosphere has surrounded the hotel industry because, basically, all hotels have provided homogeneous products and services (Xiang et al., 2015). Increasing the image of a hotel is a valid way to help that hotel stand out among its competitors (Bowen and Chen, 2001). The image of a firm is defined as "a series of perceptions about a firm as reflected by its associations in consumers' memories" (Keller, 1993; Kuo and Hsiao, 2008). Based on the previous definition of image by Keller (1993) and Chen (2010), the present research defined

green image as “a series of perceptions about a firm, each perception relating to environmental commitments and concerns, which results from the firm’s associations in consumers’ memories”. In consumer behavior research fields, many scholars emphasized the importance of image for firms and products. Jeong et al. (2014) conducted an investigation in the café setting to estimate the impacts of eco-friendly practices on green image and customer attitudes. The findings showed that green image is useful to assist consumers in forming a positive attitude towards the café, which eventually affects customers’ consumption decisions. In the green hotel setting, Han et al. (2009) tested the relationships between overall image and green behavioral intention in terms of word of mouth and suggested that enhancing the green image of hotels is significant for hoteliers in the green hotel industry.

2.3. Organism: Green satisfaction and green trust

Satisfaction is one of the most common concepts in the consumer behavior field (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Enhancing consumer satisfaction is widely regarded as a key factor leading to the success of hotels (Homburg et al., 2005). Satisfaction refers to “a delightful level of feeling arising from the ability of a product or service to satisfy consumers’ needs, wants, and desires” (Oliver, 1994; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Following this definition, green satisfaction refers to a pleasure level of feeling arising from the ability of a product or service to satisfy needs, wants, and desires in a manner that is environmentally sound, sustainable, and eco-friendly (Martínez, 2015). A positive image of a firm is a powerful tool to increase the level of consumer satisfaction (Prayag et al., 2017; Assaker and Hallak, 2013; Liu et al., 2015). In this line of thought, several academics considered that the image plays a significant role in satisfying consumers’ needs and desires (Martínez, 2015; Kandampully and Hu, 2007). Based on these studies, it can be predicted that the more favorable the green image, the more satisfaction consumers will have. Therefore, the present study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Green image in the green hotel industry is positively related to customer green satisfaction.

Trust is another important concept that has been discussed in the consumer behavior field over the past years (Park et al., 2014). Trust is an emotional variable defined as “willingness to rely on acquaintances that consumers are confident in” (Moorman et al., 1993). Based on this characterization, green trust refers to “willingness of an individual to rely on products or services which he or she is confident in because of their environmental performance” (Martínez, 2015; Chen, 2010). Some previous research showed that the level of trust among consumers was always positively affected by the image of a firm (Sallam, 2016; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). Within the hospitality industry, image has been identified as an essential element to influence consumer trust (Lien et al., 2015). In this sense, the more favorable the green image, the more confidence consumers have. Therefore, the present study proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: The green image of green hotels is positively related to consumer green trust.

Consumer satisfaction about excellent products or services would generally enhance their level of confidence about the provider’s reliability, and such satisfactory experience determines the degree of consumer trust (Lankton et al., 2010). For example, Han and Hyun (2015) designed a survey to examine consumers’ retention intention in the medical tourism industry and found that consumer satisfaction significantly affected how much consumers trust the medical staff providing the service. In green marketing fields, several studies suggested that there is a positive relationship between green satisfaction and green trust (Kang and Hur, 2012). For instance, Konuk et al. (2015) conducted international research in Turkey, Finland, and Pakistan to study the antecedents of green behavioral intentions towards green white goods. The findings showed that green satisfaction is positively related to green trust. According to the aforementioned literature, enhancing consumer green satisfaction about green hotels may increase consumer green trust. Thus, the following hypothesis was suggested:

H3: Consumer green satisfaction positively influences green trust.

2.4. Response: Word-of-mouth intention

Word-of-mouth intention in this research is defined as “the willingness of an individual to spread favorable environmental messages about products or services to his or her acquaintances” (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Söderlund, 1998). Satisfactory experience acted as a significant determinant of repeat behavior intentions such as word-of-mouth intention (Lankton et al., 2010). Previous researchers argued that consumer satisfaction leads to positive word-of-mouth intention (Bitner, 1990; Athanassopoulos et al., 2001). Ha and Im (2012) proposed a comprehensive model to explain how website design affects the consumers’ emotional and cognitive responses. The findings showed that consumer satisfaction does influence word-of-mouth intention positively. Based on this literature, it can be speculated that consumer green satisfaction about environmental commitments and considerations positively influences their word-of-mouth intention in the green hotel industry (Chen, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Consumer green satisfaction is positively related to word-of-mouth intention in the green hotel industry.

Reliability and integrity, which imply trustworthiness, arising from excellent products and services have a significant effect on consumer behavioral intentions and led to trust (Lankton et al., 2010). In the setting of greenness, studies have validated the significance of green trust in affecting behavioral intentions including the word-of-mouth intention. For example, Kang and Hur (2012) proposed several variables to investigate the antecedents of green brand equity in the context of electronics products in South Korea. The results suggested that green trust is positively associated with consumer repurchase intentions. Rahman et al. (2015) explored the consumers’ reactions to hotel green initiatives and showed that green trust positively influences the consumers’ revisit intention. Following this logic, it is expected that enhancing consumer green trust may increase the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel industry (Konuk et al., 2015). Hence, the following hypothesis was suggested:

H5: Consumer green trust is positively related to word-of-mouth intention in the green hotel industry.

2.5. The moderating effect of Millennials

In consumer behavior fields, many scholars have focused on Millennials in terms of demographics (Pate and Adams, 2013; Ryan, 2006). According to Parment (2016), Millennials accounted for more than 25 percent of the world's population. Millennials who were born between the 1980s and late 1990s are the greenest generation which actively focuses on environmental issues (Sheahan, 2005; Eisner, 2005; Ryan, 2006). They strongly advocated social responsibility and committed to caring about the environment and the world (Tulgan and Martin, 2001; Fernandez-Cruz, 2003; Barber et al., 2010). Previous research has demonstrated that Millennials are concerned about having an eco-friendly lifestyle and are serious about their own environmental practices (Furlow and Knott, 2009; Barber et al., 2010). Jang et al. (2011) investigated Millennials' attributes and behavioral intentions toward green restaurants, and their results showed that Millennials are likely to choose green restaurants to try their best to protect the environment. Anvar and Venter (2014) attempted to determine what factors influenced attitudes and purchase behavior in the setting of green products among Millennials in South Africa. The results showed that Millennials have a positive attitude towards green products.

Moreover, Millennials have grown up in a media-saturated environment and have more brand consciousness (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). They are more focused on satisfaction and trust in regard to products and services than other generations (Veloutsou, 2015). Millennials are more likely to share information and recommend the products and services that have satisfied them to their friends or relatives (Taken Smith, 2012). Several papers have suggested that Millennials concentrate on image and like to discuss information with individuals around them more than other generations (Mangold and Smith, 2012; Williams et al., 2012). For instance, Noble et al. (2009) explored the antecedents of the consumption behavior of Millennials and found that Millennials think more highly of image and values than do

other generations. Bakewell and Mitchell (2003) found that Millennials are quality seekers with the traits of hedonism, perfectionism, and brand awareness, and are willing to exchange the information with others. Based on the aforementioned literature, the green image of hotels should be important for Millennials in the green tourism management fields. If Millennials are satisfied with and trusted a hotel, they are more likely to recommend the hotel to their friends. The present study examines the potential moderating effect of Millennials between green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel industry. Based on above discussion, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H6: The effect of green image on green satisfaction is stronger for Millennials than others.

H7: The effect of green image on green trust is stronger for Millennials than others.

H8: The effect of green satisfaction on green trust is stronger for Millennials than others.

H9: The effect of green satisfaction on word-of-mouth intention is stronger for Millennials than others.

H10: The effect of green trust on word-of-mouth intention is stronger for Millennials than others.

Based on the above analysis, the research framework of this research was depicted in Fig.1.

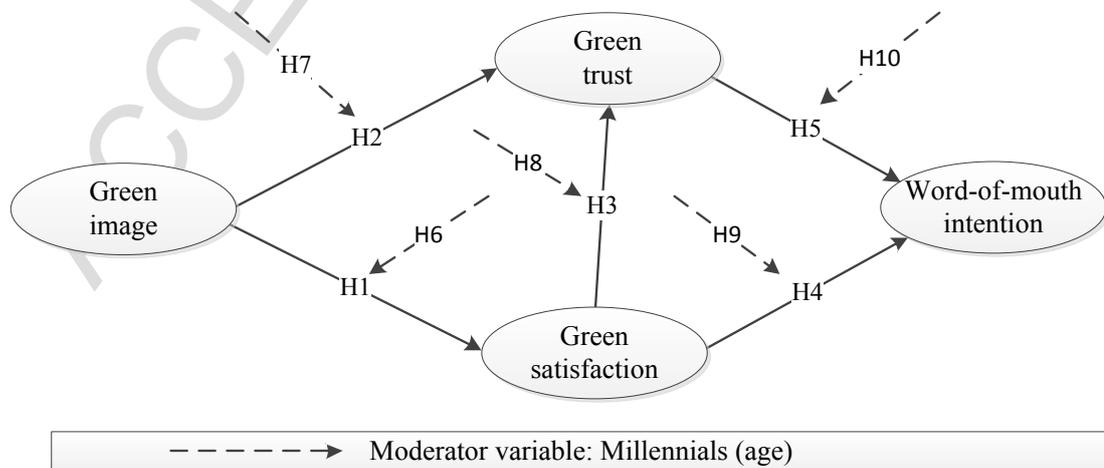


Fig.1. The research framework of the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel industry.

Previous studies showed that gender is very important for decision making in the green accommodation sector of the tourism and hospitality industry (Navrátil et al., 2016; Kostakis and Sardianou, 2012). It is often believed that females have a higher sense of environmental responsibility than males, and they are likely to display pro-environmental behavior during travel. For example, Dolnicar (2006) and Kim (2012) noted that females show a higher level of involvement with environmentally friendly accommodation than males. To date, however, the impact of gender on word-of-mouth intention in the green hotel industry has not been studied sufficiently in the literature (Del Mar Alonso-Almeida, 2013). Hence, the current paper attempted to narrow the research gap by examining the moderating effect of gender.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Participants and sampling design

The questionnaire survey method was used to collect data to test the research hypotheses. This survey focused on Chinese travelers who have stayed at a green hotel recently. As China is a big country, the research team strategically selected 10 cities, namely Beijing, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Xiamen, Xian, Chengdu, Suzhou, Kunming, Shenyang, and Qingdao, all of which are famous for tourism, for the survey. It is not easy to collect empirical data from respondents directly in China because many respondents refuse to cooperate with research teams (Liu et al., 2012). Hence, the research team sought help from travel agencies in these ten tourist cities. The research team selected a total of 33 travel agencies in these ten cities but only 20 agencies agreed to cooperate. The research team then asked each travel agency to distribute 40 questionnaires to their consumers. The survey data were collected from mid-July to mid-September of 2016.

During the data collection process, firstly, the investigators asked the participants whether they had stayed at a green hotel recently. Then the investigators asked the

potential participants whether they were willing to participate in a survey about their word-of-mouth intention related to green hotels. In carrying out the research, some gifts (e.g., USB flash drive) were provided as incentives to the participants so as to increase the response rate. In total, 800 questionnaires were distributed and 547 questionnaires were returned. After removing 136 incomplete questionnaires (e.g. some participants stated they were too busy to complete the questionnaire) and 87 questionnaires with extreme outliers (which means that all the answers were the same such as totally disagree or totally agree), a total of 324 useful questionnaires were obtained. The response rate was 40.5%, which is comparable to those of other surveys in the same industry (Canina and Kim, 2010). Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

In addition, considering that the data was collected from different cities, a Chi-square test was performed to test the differences among these samples (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The results suggest that there are no significant differences. Meanwhile, to test for potential non-response bias, T-tests were conducted to compare the early respondents (those who returned the completed questionnaires within 10 days) and late respondents (those who returned the completed questionnaires during the last 10 days) (Armstrong and Overton 1977). The results suggested that there are no significant differences between these samples regarding green image, green satisfaction, green trust, and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers. Thus, it can be concluded that non-response bias is not a major concern in this research.

3.2 Measures

All the constructs employed in this research were assessed with multi-item scales. Each of the items was measured by a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). All of the measurement items of the constructs were adapted from previous research. The four measurement items for green image were adapted from the work of Cretu and Brodey (2007). According to the works of Oliver (2014) and Chen (2010), three items were developed to measure green satisfaction. In line with the work of Chen (2010), four items were developed to

measure green trust. The four measurement items (two items were deleted, as mentioned in the following data analysis, due to the values of factor loading being lower than 0.60) for word-of-mouth intention were adapted from the works of Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Lee et al. (2010). The constructs and the measurement items are presented in Appendix 1.

In this research, we first developed an English questionnaire. Then we hired a professional translator who is good at English to translate the questionnaire into Chinese. Another professional translator translated the Chinese questionnaire back into English to make sure that there were no semantic discrepancies between the two English questionnaires. After the questionnaire preparation was finished, we distributed 20 questionnaires to research scholars and consumers to conduct a pilot survey. The pilot questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability. The validity of each construct was determined using average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings. The AVE values of the constructs ranged from 0.80 to 0.87. All the factor loadings of the items ranged from 0.84 to 0.98. The reliability for each construct was determined using Cronbach's alpha values and composite reliability values. The construct reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha values of the constructs ranged from 0.88 to 0.96 and the composite reliability values ranged from 0.92 to 0.97. Following the pilot study, the questionnaire was modified and refined based on the suggestions from the pilot survey to make the final version of the questionnaire easier for the respondents to understand.

4. Data analysis and results

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the samples. As shown in Table 1, among the 324 participants, nearly 55% of participants were younger than 40 years old. Most of them were aged between 20 and 29 years old (30.86%). Males (157) accounted for 48.46% and females (167) accounted for 51.54%. A majority of respondents had earned an associate degree or a bachelor degree (52.47%), followed in number by those holding Master degree or doctorate (34.88%), and those with high school education or below (12.65%). These results are in line with the report issued

by the State Tourism Administration of China (2015). According to the report, Chinese citizens with high educational level and aged between 20 and 35 years old are the major travelers.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the samples.

Items	Classification	Sample amounts	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	157	48.46
	Female	167	51.54
Educational level	High school or below	41	12.65
	Associate degree or bachelor degree	170	52.47
	Master degree or PhD	113	34.88
Age	Under 20	7	2.16
	20-29	100	30.86
	30-39	70	21.60
	40-49	110	33.95
	50 and over	37	11.42
Total		324	100.00

Considering the data were perceptual and were collected from a single source at the same point of time, common method bias might occur in this research, constituting a threat to the validity of the measurement items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Hence, before conducting the data analysis, we performed Harman's single factor test to examine the common method bias. The results suggest that common method bias was not a serious concern for the present research.

Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the present research used a two-step method to analyze the data. The first step was to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The second step was to conduct structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to test the relationships among the proposed constructs: green image, green satisfaction, green trust, and word-of-mouth intention. Meanwhile, a comparative analysis method was used to examine the moderating effects of Millennials and gender.

4.1. Measurement model analysis

The Amos 21.0 software package was used to conduct the confirmatory factor analysis. The indexes such as Chi-square/degree of freedom, goodness-of-fit index

(GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), normed fit index (NFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to measure the acceptability of fit between the measurement model and the data set. According to the results, the value of Chi-square/degree of freedom was less than 3 at 2.18. The RMSEA value was less than 0.008 at 0.006. The values of GFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI were all greater than 0.90. These figures mean that the measurement model was acceptable according to the criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999).

The reliability of the constructs was measured by Cronbach's alpha values and composite reliability values. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha values of the proposed constructs ranged from 0.95 to 0.97, which meets the criteria that the minimum value is 0.60 (Hair et al., 1998). Composite reliability was used to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items, and the values of the composite reliability should be greater than 0.70. The composite reliability values of this research met the threshold condition, ranging from 0.97 to 0.98.

Average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings were estimated to assess convergent validity. The AVE values of the four constructs (i.e. green image, green satisfaction, green trust, and word-of-mouth intention) all exceeded the minimum value and ranged from 0.90 to 0.95. All the factor loadings of the measurement items were also higher than the criteria of 0.70, ranging from 0.94 to 0.98. The square roots of AVE values and the correlations of constructs were compared to examine the discriminant validity of each construct. The threshold criterion was that the square roots of AVE values should be larger than the correlations of each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results in Table 3 showed that the discriminant validity in this research was acceptable.

Table 2 Results of the measurement model analysis.

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha value	Composite reliability	AVE
Green image	Image1	0.95	0.97	0.98	0.91
	Image2	0.95			
	Image3	0.96			
	Image4	0.95			

	SAT1	0.96			
Green satisfaction	SAT2	0.96	0.95	0.97	0.92
	SAT3	0.95			
	Trust1	0.95			
Green trust	Trust2	0.96	0.96	0.97	0.90
	Trust3	0.95			
	Trust4	0.94			
Word of mouth intention	WOM1	0.98	0.95	0.97	0.95
	WOM2	0.97			

Table3 Means, standard deviations and the correlations between the constructs.

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Green image	3.06	1.24	0.95			
2.Word of mouth intention	3.03	1.10	0.89**	0.97		
3.Green satisfaction	3.01	1.09	0.91**	0.87**	0.96	
4.Green trust	3.01	0.99	0.88**	0.82**	0.91**	0.95

Note: (1) The diagonal (bold) elements are the square roots of AVEs and the off-diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs.

(2) **shows significance at the 0.01 level.

4.2. Structural model testing

Before conducting the structural analysis, a multicollinearity test was needed. The results showed that all the variance inflation factors (VIFs) are in a range from 1.78 to 2.45, suggesting that multicollinearity did not present a significant challenge in the following structural analysis (James and Hatten, 1995). Moreover, to further eliminate the effect of multicollinearity, the variables are mean-centered before conducting the structural model testing analysis (Aguinis, 1995). According to Hu and Bentler (1999), the proposed structural model has an acceptable fit (Chi-square/degree of freedom=2.52, RMSEA=0.007, GFI=0.93, NFI=0.98, TLI=0.98, CFI=0.99). As shown in Fig.2, the results indicated that the path coefficients from green image to green satisfaction and green trust were all statistically significant and in the expected directions. Thus, H1 ($\beta=0.91$, $p<0.001$) and H2 ($\beta=0.34$, $p<0.001$) were supported. That is to say, green image exactly has a positive influence on consumers' green satisfaction and green trust. The path coefficient from green satisfaction to green trust was significant and in the expected direction, which supported H3 ($\beta=0.60$, $p<0.001$)

and suggested that if the consumers' green satisfaction is enhanced, then their green trust will also be increased. The path coefficients from green satisfaction and green trust to consumers' word-of-mouth intention about green hotels were all statistically significant and in the expected directions. Hence, H4 ($\beta=0.73$, $p<0.001$) and H5 ($\beta=0.15$, $p<0.05$) were supported. That is to say, the data showed that consumers' word-of-mouth intention was affected by their green satisfaction and green trust.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the green image and green satisfaction explained 84.00% of green trust ($R^2=0.84$) (see Fig.2). Green image explained 83.00% of green satisfaction ($R^2=0.83$) and both green trust and green satisfaction explained 76.00% of word-of-mouth intention ($R^2=0.76$). Chin et al. (2008) postulated the R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 can be employed as threshold values to classify the endogenous latent variables as substantial, moderate, or weak variables. Accordingly, green trust ($R^2=0.84$), green satisfaction ($R^2=0.83$), and word-of-mouth intention ($R^2=0.76$) can be all described as substantial variables.

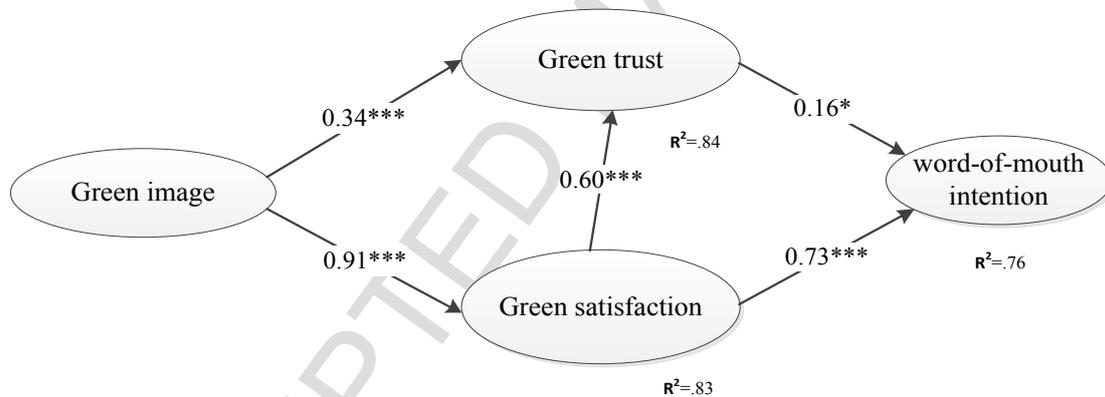


Fig.2. Results of the structural model analysis

4.3. The moderating effect analysis

A significant goal of the present research was to test the potential moderating effect of Millennials and gender. The total sample was divided into two groups: the Millennials group whose age is younger than 40 years old ($n=177$) and the non-Millennials group whose age is older than 40 years old ($n=147$). After that, the two groups were each divided into two sub-groups based on gender. The male:female ratios in the Millennials and non-Millennials groups were 82:94 and 75:73, respectively.

The Amos 21.0 software package was employed to conduct the multi-group comparative analysis to test the moderating effect. We imported the two age groups' data and set up different conditions (i.e. unconstrained model, measurement weights model, structural weights model, measurement residuals model, and structural residuals model) (Su and Swanson, 2017). Table 4 illustrates all the goodness of fit indices of the tested models. The differences between the unconstrained model and constrained models were also estimated. As shown in Table 5, the differences were all significant ($p < 0.01$), which indicated that a moderating effect of Millennials in the proposed model did exist. This result supported the findings of earlier studies (Navrátil et al., 2016; Kim, 2012).

Table 4 Goodness of fit indices for all tested models.

Model	Chi-square	Chi-square/f	GFI	TLI	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Unconstrained	255.12	2.13	0.89	0.94	0.96	0.96	0.006
Measurement weights	264.17	2.05	0.89	0.95	0.96	0.96	0.006
Structural weights	278.01	2.08	0.88	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.006
Structural residuals	282.71	2.06	0.88	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.006
Measurement residuals	304.39	2.05	0.88	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.006

Table 5 Significance of tested models compared with the unconstrained model.

Model	Chi-square	p	NFI Delta-1	IFI Delta-2	RFI rho-1	TLI rho2
Measurement weights	9.05	0.000	0.003	0.003	-0.004	-0.004
Structural weights	22.89	0.000	0.007	0.007	-0.003	-0.003
Structural residuals	27.60	0.000	0.009	0.009	-0.004	-0.004
Measurement residuals	49.27	0.000	0.015	0.016	-0.005	-0.006

Specifically, as depicted in Table 6, the findings suggested that compared with non-Millennials, the effects of green image on green satisfaction and green trust were stronger for Millennials ($CRD > 1.96$, $P < 0.05$). Thus, H6 ($CRD = 2.08$) and H7 ($CRD = 2.06$) were supported. The results also found that the effect of green satisfaction on green trust was significantly higher for Millennials. The CRD value is above the criterion of 1.96, with a p-value below 0.05. Thus, H8 ($CRD = 2.06$) was accepted. In addition, the effects of green satisfaction and green trust on the word-of-mouth intention of consumers were also higher for Millennials ($CRD > 1.96$, $P < 0.05$), which supported H9 ($CRD = 2.45$) and H10 ($CRD = 2.85$). Moreover, the moderating

effect of gender was stronger for females than for males both in Millennials and non-Millennials groups ($CRD > 1.96$, $P < 0.05$). The CRD value and p-value of each group are provided in Table 6.

Table 6 The results of the moderating effect analysis.

Hypotheses	CRD	p-value	Outcome
H6 Green image _{yes} →green satisfaction _{yes} Green image _{non} →green satisfaction _{non}	2.08	P=0.044	supported
H7 Green image _{yes} →green trust _{yes} Green image _{non} →green trust _{non}	2.06	P=0.046	supported
H8 Green satisfaction _{yes} →green trust _{yes} Green satisfaction _{non} →green trust _{non}	2.06	P=0.046	supported
H9 Green satisfaction _{yes} →WOM intention _{yes} Green satisfaction _{non} →WOM intention _{non}	2.45	P=0.014	supported
H10 Green trust _{yes} →WOM intention _{yes} Green trust _{non} →WOM intention _{non}	2.85	P=0.008	supported

Note: CRD means the critical radical ratio of differences.

4.4. The mediating effect analysis

To test the potential mediating effects of green satisfaction and green trust between green image and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers, AMOS 21.0 was employed to conduct the bootstrapping analysis suggested by Jose (2013). The number of bootstrap samples was set at 2000 with a confidence level of 95%. Following the research of Macho and Ledermann (2011), the indirect effects with corresponding p-values and confidence intervals were determined as presented in Table 7. Significant indirect effects were found from green image to the word-of-mouth intention of consumers through green satisfaction and green trust. Thus, it can be concluded that green satisfaction and green trust mediated the effect of green image on consumers' word-of-mouth intention. The results were in line with the research of Martínez (2015), Bailey et al. (2016), and Chen et al. (2015) who all highlighted the importance of green satisfaction and green trust in examining consumer response to environmental issues.

Table 7 The results of the mediating effect analysis.

Mediation paths	Indirect	Lower bound	Upper bound	P-value
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	effects	95% BC	95% BC	
Green image→green satisfaction→word of mouth intention	0.68	0.61	0.74	0.01
Green image→green trust→word of mouth intention	0.75	0.69	0.80	0.01

5. Conclusions and implications

Based on the S-O-R framework, this research proposed four variables (i.e. green image, green satisfaction, green trust, and word-of-mouth intention) and explored the relationships between them. In the research framework, the antecedent variable was green image and the consequent variable was the word-of-mouth intention of consumers. Green satisfaction and green trust were mediated variables and mediated the relationship between green image and the word-of-mouth intention. Additionally, the research also examined the moderating effect of Millennials and gender. The data analysis results revealed that all the hypotheses mentioned in the framework were supported. The intention to recommend green hotels to significant friends and acquaintances is generally higher for Millennials and female tourists.

There are several theoretical contributions of this research. Firstly, according to Gao et al. (2016), more than about 60% of the articles in the hospitality and tourism research field used the theory of planned behavior or the theory of reasoned action as a theoretical lens. Researchers were encouraged to either make significant improvements to existing models or look for new and more diverse theoretical frameworks in order to make meaningful theoretical contributions. The present research provided a framework for understanding the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel industry. This framework can help refine and strengthen future research on the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in this green industry by providing a sound theoretical foundation for investigations in tourism and hospitality contexts and enabling the identification of important research gaps in the literature. Meanwhile, while age and gender often moderate the relationships among the variables in the area of environment-friendly initiatives, the research findings in the literature are not always consistent. Considering that (1) Millennials are more

concerned about image and are more likely to recommend the products and services that satisfy them to people around them, and (2) gender is also very important for decision making in green accommodation sector in tourism and hospitality industry, this research examined the moderating effect of Millennials and gender in an effort to better understand these inconsistent findings. The results showed that Millennials and female tourists are more likely to recommend green hotels than non-Millennials and male tourists. Moreover, little research has investigated the relationship between green image and the word of mouth intention of consumers in the green hotel sector. The current paper made a contribution to S-O-R framework research by addressing some gaps in the literature regarding the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in China. The results demonstrated that green image not only positively affects the word-of-mouth intention of consumers about green hotels but also affects green trust and green satisfaction.

The above results have many important practical implications for green hotels. This research explored the factors that affect the word-of-mouth intention of consumers, and so the research findings have utility for governments and hotels to motivate consumers to produce positive word-of-mouth for green hotels. Increasing consumer perceptions about green image, green trust, and green satisfaction can help to raise the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in the hospitality industry. These results showed the importance of green issues and demonstrated that green issues are a key strategic tool for green hotels, a tool to incorporate into their management strategies and policies.

Hoteliers in the green hotel industry should improve their hotels' green image and increase the level of consumer green satisfaction and green trust. Green hotels should also set up waste management systems and develop recycling programs to achieve the goal of improving their green image. Hoteliers should promote green campaigns to highlight the significance of environmental problems, which then may help to build up their hotels' green image. Green hoteliers can also develop multiple channels to publicize the advantages of green hotels. For instance, taking part in eco-friendly forums and sponsoring environmental projects are two practical ways to

increase the exposure of green hotels and deepen the consumers' impression and understanding of green hotels.

Employees' knowledge about environmental issues is a major factor that affects consumer green satisfaction. As such, green hotels should perform specific programs to enrich the environmental knowledge of their employees. Moreover, the guests' experience at green hotels is also important to increase the level of consumer green satisfaction. Accordingly, green hoteliers should invest resources to increase guest satisfaction by building up their facilities and even offering free hotel stays. In terms of enhancing the level of consumer green trust, the green commitments and claims of green hotels should be real and reasonable. If consumer expectations about a green hotel's environmental performance are not met, they will probably switch to another hotel. In addition, hoteliers in green hotel industry can take measures to decrease the consumers' perceived risks, which then can increase the level of consumer green trust in green hotels.

For green hoteliers, identifying the appropriate consumer groups will help them to market their hotels more effectively. Millennials and female consumers are indeed influential demographic groups, and they have a great interest in green issues. Hence, Millennials and female consumers may be the best targets for green hotels. Millennials frequently use social media to share and exchange information, which makes them become a powerful source of word-of-mouth. Therefore, the perceptions of Millennials and female consumers about green hotels are particularly significant to hoteliers in the green hotel industry and they should get more attention. In summary, if hoteliers in the green hotel industry attempt to increase market shares and to obtain competitive advantages, they should try their best to improve hotels' green image, consumer green satisfaction, and green trust, doing so while concentrating on Millennials and female consumers as their targeted consumers.

6. Limitations and future research directions

There are several limitations of this research. Firstly, the data of this research is cross-sectional data so the dynamic changes in green image, green satisfaction, green

trust, and the word-of-mouth intention of consumers in green hotel industry cannot be observed. In follow-up research, a longitudinal design can be adopted. Secondly, the study was conducted in the context of China, in which the value of collectivism is high. Kim and Choi (2005) suggested that collectivistic values significantly influence environmental behaviors. The results of this research are most applicable in the Chinese cultural context. Future studies could be performed in other countries for further comparison. Thirdly, the present research is restricted to the S-O-R framework, without considering other antecedents, consequents, and mediators. Other variables such as perceived risk and perceived justice may also affect the intention to recommend green hotels. Hence, future studies should explore these variables about environmental issues. Finally, it is necessary for the reader to note that this research estimated the behavioral intention (i.e. word-of-mouth intention) rather than actual behavior. Although several scholars have verified that it is useful and appropriate to study behavioral intention (Han and Yoon, 2015; Beck and Ajzen, 1991), the consumers' actual behavior is not always consistent with their stated behavioral intentions (Belk, 1985). Therefore, future studies should attempt to narrow this gap by investigating consumers' actual word-of-mouth behavior.

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Appendix 1: Constructs and measurement items.

Constructs	Items	Sources
<i>Green image</i>		Cretu and Brodey (2007)
Image1	I think green hotels support sustainable development	
Image2	I think the image of green hotels is superior	
Image3	I think green hotels are great	
Image4	I will give positive feedback on green hotels	
<i>Green satisfaction</i>		Oliver (2014) and Chen (2010)
SAT1	Overall, I am glad about the decision to select green hotels because of their environmental image	
SAT2	Overall, I am happy to visit green hotels because they are environmental friendly	
SAT3	Overall, I am satisfied with green hotels because of their environmental performance	
<i>Green trust</i>		Chen (2010)
Trust1	I feel that green hotels' environmental functions are generally reliable	
Trust2	I feel that green hotels' environmental performance is generally dependable	
Trust3	I feel that green hotels' environmental argument is generally trustworthy	
Trust4	I feel that green hotels keep promises and commitments for environmental protection	
<i>Word-of-mouth intention</i>		Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Lee et al. (2010)
WOM1(deleted)	I will encourage my friends and relatives to stay at a green hotel when traveling	
WOM2	I will say positive things about an environmentally friendly hotel	
WOM3	I will speak favorably about the green hotels to others	
WOM4(deleted)	I am glad to recommend the green hotels to others	

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