



ECO-CONSCIOUS CHOICES: AGE-DRIVEN GREEN TRUST AND PURCHASING PATTERNS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Abstract

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Purpose – The hospitality industry faces mounting regulatory and consumer pressures to adopt sustainable practices amid global climate change and resource depletion concerns. While hotels increasingly implement green practices (e.g., energy conservation, waste reduction), their impact on consumer behavior remains understudied across age groups. This research investigates how green practices (GP) influence green trust (GT) and green purchasing behavior (GPB), with a focus on age as a critical moderator.

Methodology/Design/Approach – Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, we analyzed survey data from 318 hotel consumers in Hainan, China, via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), supplemented by thematic analysis of focus group discussions (15 participants).

Findings – Results demonstrate that GP significantly enhances both GT and GPB. However, age reveals a paradoxical moderating effect: while older consumers strengthen the GP→GPB relationship, younger consumers exhibit an inverse effect—contrary to assumptions that eco-conscious youth readily translate beliefs into action. Qualitative insights identify three barriers for younger consumers: (1) price sensitivity to green premiums, (2) disposable income constraints, and (3) intention-behavior gaps.

Originality of the research – These findings challenge conventional generational stereotypes and offer actionable insights for tailoring green marketing strategies. For practitioners, we highlight the need to address affordability barriers for younger demographics while leveraging older consumers' trust in sustainability initiatives.

Keywords Green practice (GP), Green Trust (GT), Green purchasing behavior (GPB), Belief-Attitude-Behavior (BAB) model

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INTRODUCTION

Hainan Province, known as the “Hawaii of China”, is a prominent tourist destination with a rapidly growing hospitality industry. Hainan provincial government has made substantial investments in promoting sustainable tourism. This growing demand for eco-friendly accommodation pushes the industry to significantly invest in sustainable tourism practices—such as energy-saving initiatives, waste management systems, and Eco-certifications—resulting in relatively higher hotel rates in the region. Seasonal peaks further amplify this effect, making Hainan an ideal setting for exploring the relationship between green practices and consumer behavior. From a global perspective, green economy and sustainable development have become the focus of governments and enterprises worldwide. They not only promote economic growth but also improve living standards in a manner consistent with environmental and social well-being (Söderholm, 2020). As environmental issues intensify and resources deplete, sustainable development has emerged as a primary goal for enterprises globally (Reddy et al., 2023).

The hospitality industry, as a key component of the service sector, has a significant impact on resource consumption and the environment (Perramon et al., 2022). In recent years, many hotels have adopted green practices such as energy conservation, recycling, and the use of eco-friendly materials to enhance their corporate image, reduce costs, and meet consumer demand for sustainable tourism (Abdou et al., 2020). Research highlights that consumers' green values strongly influence their hotel purchasing decisions (Chen & Peng, 2023). Additionally, the “2023 Sustainable Travel Report” indicates that most travelers (76%) wish to travel sustainably and are willing to pay a premium to protect the planet, suggesting a growing market for sustainable services.

Despite the increasing emphasis on sustainability, comprehensive research exploring how green practices directly affect consumer trust and purchasing behavior—especially through demographic factors such as age—remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of green practices on consumer behavior and trust, with a focus on age as a key moderating variable. One of the essential moderating factors is age since this is an indicator of the underlying nature of life stage and socioeconomic variations (Biswas et al., 2020). One of the questions that this study aims to answer is the age-based differences. To take an example, does the general stability of values and financial condition of older consumers versus the current ideological motivations and economic limitations of young consumers affect the translation of green trust to a purchasing action? Thus, the analysis of the age will provide certain obstacles and motivators in the consumer life cycle.

Considering the above research intention and conceptual framework, a particular study will answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do hotel green practices directly influence consumers' green trust and green purchasing behavior?

RQ2: How does green trust directly affect green purchasing behavior?

RQ3: How does consumer age moderate the relationships between green practices, green trust, and green purchasing behavior?

This study aims to systematically examine the relationships among green practices, green trust, and green purchasing behavior, emphasizing the moderating role of age. Green practices refer to environmentally sustainable initiatives implemented by hotels, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing. Green trust represents consumers' confidence in the credibility and authenticity of a hotel's environmental efforts. Green purchasing behavior describes the consumers' actions of choosing eco-friendly hotels over conventional alternatives. The findings provide empirical evidence and practical insights for developing targeted marketing strategies and enhancing the effectiveness of green practices in fostering eco-friendly consumer behavior.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Theoretical Foundation: The Belief-Attitude-Behavior (BAB) Model

This study is grounded in the Belief-Attitude-Behavior (BAB) model, a well-established framework from attitude-behavior literature that elucidates the sequential interplay between beliefs, attitudes, and consequent behaviors (Stern et al., 1995). The model addresses the critical challenge of how object-based beliefs translate into attitudes and subsequently drive behavior (Zhang et al., 2016). In the context of this research, the BAB model provides a robust theoretical lens to explain the psychological process through which consumers' beliefs about a hotel's environmental practices (green practices) shape their evaluative judgment (green trust), which in turn drives their actions (green purchasing behavior). The following sections develop the hypotheses within this overarching theoretical framework.

1.2 Conceptual Foundation: Green Practices in Hospitality

Green practices (GP) is an invitation to the hospitality industry not only to generally protect the environment but also to focus on certain operational projects in terms of reducing wastes, conserving resources, and reduced impact on nature (Wang et al., 2013). They are essential practices that would ensure that the business would be developed sustainably and competitive over the long term (Abdelrazaq et al., 2021). Practically, GP can be observed in various activities such as the realization of energy and water conservation programs, a holistic waste management and recycling system, the use of eco-friendly cleaning products and building materials, and the acquisition of the eco-certification of the third party. These initiatives themselves, including communication by hotel websites, are an essential practice, since it has proven to capture more customers, as well as indicate seriousness in commitment (Sun et al., 2022). Finally, the strategic importance of GP implementation is that it is directly related to the increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty; just dwell further on the strong psychological processes of how operational decisions influence consumer reactions (Zareh et al., 2023). The conceptualization of GP in this paper is viewed as the grouping of such physical and communicated environmental activities as done by hotels.

1.3 From Green Practices to Green Trust

Green trust (GT) indicates the trust of consumers in the credibility of environmental performance of a hotel (Chen, 2010). It has been found out that eco-friendly efforts greatly contribute to this trust (Chen et al., 2015). This trust is a powerful driver of consumer choice across diverse industries, from energy-efficient appliances to sustainable banking (Waris & Ahmed, 2020; Muflih et al., 2023), and it serves as a critical catalyst for green purchase intentions and subsequent behavior (Wang et al., 2019). In the hospitality sector, environmental commitments are particularly effective in building green trust (Brito et al., 2023), leading to the following hypothesis: H1. Hotel green practices have a significant positive impact on consumers' green trust.

1.4 Antecedents of Green Purchasing Behavior

Green purchasing behavior (GPB) is defined by the readiness to pay a premium, a common use of making green purchases and also the enjoyment acquired as a result of green purchasing behavior (Dangelico et al., 2021). It is formed in a complicated way, with the contribution of both external factors and internal psyche processes. On one hand, the literature consistently identifies a company's green practices as a fundamental external driver that directly shapes customer behavior and purchase decisions (Sharma & Foroapon, 2019; Fitriani et al., 2021). This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, in which the attitudes and perceived behavioral control can be transformed by external factors as a catalyst to behavior (Maichum et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2018). Conversely, the trust of consumers towards the environmental assertions of a brand (green trust) is an important internal psychological process, that directly supports the provision of purchase intentions into actual behaviour (Wang et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2022). Thus, this paper assumes that both the green practices and the green trust are direct antecedents of GPB that result in the subsequent hypotheses:

- H2.** A higher level of hotel green practice leads to significantly more positive green purchase behavior.
- H3.** A higher level of green trust leads to significantly more positive green purchase behavior.

1.5 The Moderating Role of Age

In addition to the psychographic factors, numerous studies highlight the strong role played by the demographic variables on green consumption behavior (Abeliotis et al., 2010). The need to demystify the predictive role of demographics in consumer decisions in various scenarios has been an issue of early demands, including that by Ebrashi et al. (2017). This relationship is often understood through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that demographic factors, such as age, gender, and income, can shape the underlying attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that ultimately drive green consumption intentions and behaviors (Wei & Wang, 2019).

One of them is age, which is one of the most critical and multifaceted demographic variables. According to the life course theory, older consumers, having all their life experience and eventually a more stable financial position, are more prone to the development of strong and stable environmental values. This makes them more likely to respond positively to sustainability initiatives and translate positive attitudes into actual purchasing behavior (Ji et al., 2022; Kim & Jin, 2019). Contrastingly, the younger customers may display a long-established intention-behavior gap, in which high levels of environmental awareness do not always equate to green purchases, often as a result of limited access to the green offer or a shift in drinking patterns.

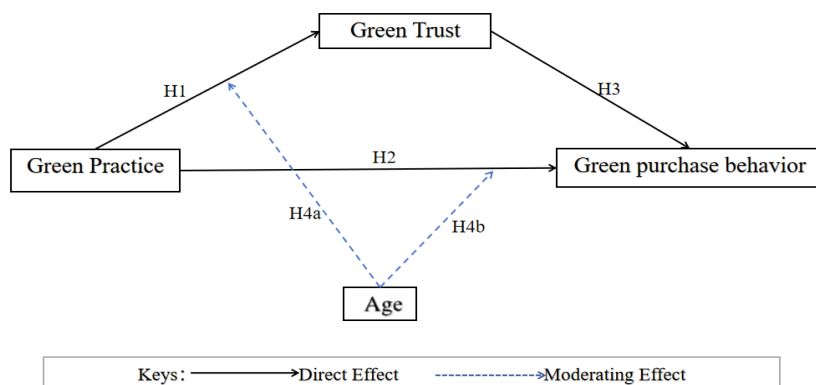
It is important to clarify that in positing age as a moderator, this study conceptualizes it not merely as a demographic proxy for a single factor like income, but as a composite variable representing a constellation of life-stage characteristics. These may include, but are not limited to, economic stability, established consumption values, long-term environmental worldviews, and shifting life priorities. While economic capacity may be one channel through which age exerts its influence, the moderating hypothesis tests the net effect of this composite life stage. This approach aligns with research that treats age as a marker of broader psychosocial and economic transitions that systematically shape consumer behavior.

This is a strong indication that age is not only an independent variable that correlates with the level of green consumption but can also adjust in a systematic manner the intensity of the psychological processes, which culminate in the same. Thus, the hypothesis of this particular study is that age is one of the moderators in our conceptual model. Our hypothesis is that the correlation between the issue of green practices, green trust, and green purchasing behavior is not homogenous but depends upon the age of the consumer. This gives us the following final hypotheses:

- H4a.** The relationship between Green Practices and Green Trust is subject to moderation by customer age.
- H4b.** The relationship between Green Practices and Green Purchasing Behavior is subject to moderation by customer age.

Drawing upon the theoretical foundations and the literature review, this research proposes the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

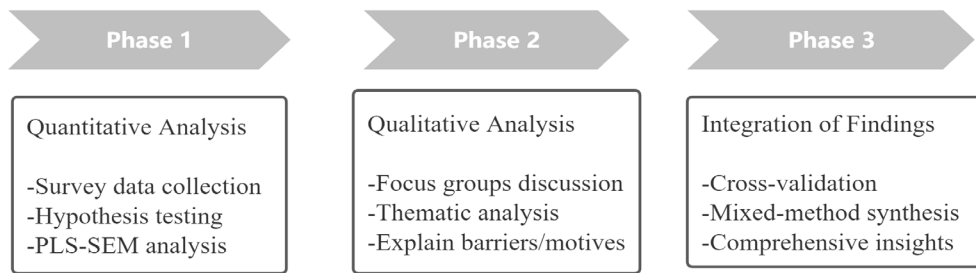
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which is ideally suited to the research objectives. The research is performed in three stages which include; phase 1 (Quantitative) that entails structural equation modelling of questionnaire data in order to test the hypotheses that have been put forward, thereby effectively establishing and quantifying the generalizable statistical associations, both direct and the paradoxical mediating role of age. However, as quantitative data alone cannot fully explain the underlying reasons for these patterns, Phase 2 (Qualitative) utilizes focus group discussions to delve into the lived experiences and subjective motivations of different age groups, providing rich, contextual insights into the “why” behind the numbers, such as the price sensitivity and financial constraints faced by younger consumers. Finally, Phase 3 (Integration) synthesizes findings from both methods, allowing qualitative data to directly explain and contextualize the quantitative results, thereby yielding a more nuanced and complete understanding of the research problem than either approach could achieve in isolation. The overall design is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Explanatory Mixed-Method Research Design



Source: Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018

Phase 1: Quantitative study

2.1 Data collection

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design with a non-probability purposive sampling strategy (Palinkas et al., 2015). Though the approach narrows the possibility of generalizing the findings to the overall population, the research determines that it was suitable in terms of reaching people with the recent experience of staying in a hotel in Hainan, which corresponds with the objectives of the research. The criteria used to select the samples was that of Chinese residents who had been at a three-star hotel or higher hotel in Hainan Province within the last 12 months and this was on either a leisure or business trip. Calculation of sample size based on a priori; this involved a confidence level of 90, margin of error of 5 percent and the proportions of the population (respondents) of 50 percent; this showed that the minimum needed sample population was 273 respondents. The survey was sent to more effective pool in order to make sure that the statistical power of the survey was reached, and that possible invalid answers would be considered, leading to the final analysis of 318 valid answers.

The data was investigated with the help of an online questionnaire filled in by professional survey panels and social media communities that impart interest towards the topic of travelling and tourism in China. In order to guarantee the quality of data and the compliance with the sampling frame, a screening question was applied at the commencement of the survey that required them to confirm that they have a recent visit to a hotel included into the sampling frame. Only the respondents who met this requirement were allowed to fill the complete questionnaire and therefore all the results analyzed were filled by the target population with experience in the hotel service.

2.2 Measurement Items

The research tool had three parts: demographic data, Likert-scale questions addressing the essential constructs, and open-ended questions to obtain some extra observations. In order to have content validity, all scale items were modified from available literature sources. More precisely, the Green Practice (GP) scale completely adopted Gonzalez-Viralta et al. (2023) and Kim and Cha (2002) to assess the perceptions of environmental, social, and economic activities of the hotel in the eyes of consumers using 6 items. The Green Trust (GT) scale was obtained through Chen (2010) where 5 items measured the confidence of the consumers based on the credibility and reliability of the environmental claims made by a hotel. Green Purchasing Behavior (GPB) scale is based on the adaptation of Gonzalez-Viralta et al. (2023) 6 items on willing to pay a premium green hotels, loyalty, and satisfaction. All questions that were Likert-scale were measured on a 5-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and the original wording was adjusted to the context of the Hainan hospitality. To check grammatical and operational clarity, a pre-test was conducted with academic experts and to check the validation of the model structure, a pilot test was conducted prior to the main one.

2.3 Data Analysis

Preliminary data processing, including coding and descriptive statistical analysis, was conducted using SPSS. Measurement and structural model evaluation, including reliability and validity analysis and hypothesis testing, were done using Smart PLS software. The moderating effect of age was performed in two phases. To test the importance of the moderation effect, first was formed an interaction term (Age x GP) where the age was used as a continuous variable. In order to verify the meaningful impact, a multi-group analysis (MGA) has been conducted, dividing age into two groups. The age grouping was operationalized based on established generational cohorts in consumer research, specifically aligning with the widely cited categorization by NielsenIQ, which segments Chinese consumers into Baby Boomers (≥ 60), Generation X (45–59), Millennials (29–44), and Generation Z (18–28) Luo, T. (2025, December 11). To ensure sufficient sample size for robust group comparison while reflecting key generational divides, we consolidated these into two groups: younger consumers (≤ 44 years, encompassing Millennials and Generation Z) and older consumers (≥ 45 years, encompassing Generation X and Baby Boomers): the path

coefficients were compared in detail in the two different cohorts. The findings were complemented by SPSS correlation analysis.

The study incorporates both a quantitative and a qualitative approach and so offers a solid analysis of the linkage between green practices and consumer trust and consumer buying behavior, especially between various categories of people.

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study provides a robust analysis of how green practices influence consumer trust and purchasing behavior, particularly among different age groups.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

In general, the sample of this study showed a certain degree of diversity and representativeness in terms of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, work experience and income level, which helped to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the research results.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Description

Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	166	52.2
	Female	152	47.8
Age	Under 18 years old	26	8.2
	18 - 34 years old	46	14.5
	35 - 44 years old	51	16
	45 - 59 years old	114	35.8
	60 years old and above	81	25.5
Educational Level	High school or below	13	4.1
	Diploma	140	44
	Bachelor degree	124	39
	Master degree	22	6.9
	Doctorate degree	19	6
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	15	4.7
	1 - 5 years	60	18.9
	6 - 10 years	102	32.1
	11 - 15 years	85	26.7
	16 years and above	56	17.6
Income Level	0 - 5000	14	4.4
	5001 - 8000	116	36.5
	8001 - 10000	112	35.2
	10001 - 15000	40	12.6
	More then 15000	36	11.3
	Total	318	100

Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants. The sample includes diverse age groups, educational levels, work experiences, and income levels, ensuring representativeness and external validity. Key findings indicate that the majority of participants are aged 45 to 59, the sample is skewed towards participants aged 45 and older, reflecting the typical demographic of high-star hotel consumers. Although the sample distribution is unbalanced, parametric statistical methods were deemed appropriate as the sample size is sufficiently large, mitigating potential biases. Non-parametric methods were not employed since the focus is on analyzing relationships across the full sample rather than comparing specific age groups. And most holding a diploma or bachelor's degree, and a significant portion earning between 5,001 and 10,000 yuan per month.

3.2 Measurement and Structural Model Results

To evaluate the research model, this study followed the two-step approach recommended for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), consisting of measurement model assessment and structural model assessment.

3.2.1 Measurement Model Assessment

To evaluate the robustness of the measurement model, two distinct forms of validity were examined: convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is typically determined in a measurement model through the examination of outer loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) (Matthews et al., 2018). In order to validate convergence, it is important for the loadings to exceed 0.5, while the CR and AVE values need to be above 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. Discriminant validity is assessed through the HTMT ratio method. The results of the measurement model are presented in Figure 3 and Tables 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Measurement Model Assessment

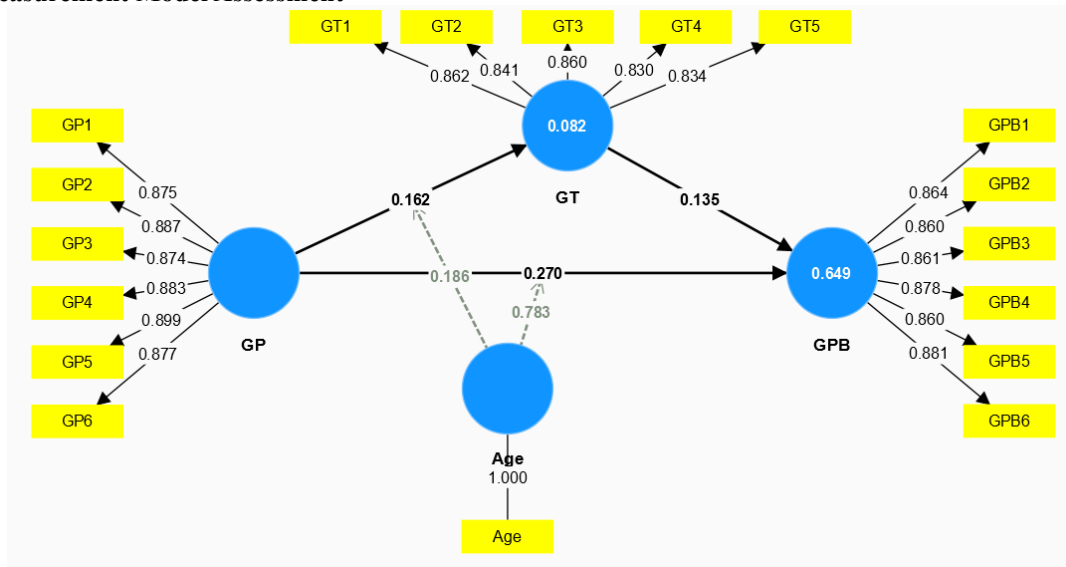


Table 3: Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity, Composite Reliability and AVE

Construct	Indicators	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Green practice	GP1	0.875	0.943	0.955	0.779
	GP2	0.887			
	GP3	0.874			
	GP4	0.883			
	GP5	0.899			
	GP6	0.877			
Green Trust	GT1	0.866	0.9	0.926	0.715
	GT2	0.839			
	GT3	0.856			
	GT4	0.826			
	GT5	0.839			
Green purchasing behavior	GPB1	0.863	0.934	0.948	0.752
	GPB2	0.86			
	GPB3	0.861			
	GPB4	0.878			
	GPB5	0.861			
	GPB6	0.881			

Table 3 presents the results of the measurement model assessment, demonstrating strong psychometric properties for all three constructs: Green practice, Green Trust, and Green purchasing behavior. The high factor loadings (ranging from 0.826 to 0.899) indicate robust item reliability and convergent validity. Internal consistency is excellent across all constructs, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values (0.900 to 0.943) and composite reliability scores (0.926 to 0.955) well above the recommended threshold of 0.7. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values (0.714 to 0.779) surpass the 0.5 benchmark, confirming strong convergent validity. These results collectively affirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model, providing a solid foundation for subsequent structural equation modeling analyses in the context of green practices, trust, and purchasing behavior.

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Age	GP	GPB	GT	Age x GP
Age					
GP	0.355				
GPB	0.026	0.231			
GT	0.185	0.211	0.311		
Age x GP	0.122	0.085	0.769	0.152	

Table 4 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio analysis, a crucial method for assessing discriminant validity in partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The HTMT approach compares the average correlations between indicators across different constructs to those within the same construct, with values below 0.85 or 0.90 generally indicating good discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). In this study, most HTMT ratios are well below the conservative threshold of 0.85, with many falling under 0.30, providing strong evidence for the distinctiveness of the constructs. Notably, the highest HTMT value (0.85) is observed between the “Age x GP” interaction term and itself, which, while approaching the threshold, still falls within acceptable limits. The second highest value (0.769) is between “Age x GP” and GPB. The consistently low HTMT values between the main constructs (GP, GPB, GT) and moderator variables (Age) further underscore the uniqueness of each factor in the research framework. These results collectively affirm the robust discriminant validity of the measurement model, enhancing the credibility of subsequent structural analyses and hypothesis testing. The HTMT analysis thus reinforces the overall methodological rigor of the study, ensuring that each construct captures a unique aspect of the phenomena under investigation. The analysis confirms that the measures employed in this investigation demonstrate satisfactory levels of both convergent and discriminant validity.

3.2.2 Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to determine the significance of path coefficients. Table 5 summarizes the direct and moderating effects:

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing Results of the Structural Model

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STD	T value	P values	Result
H1	GP → GT	0.162	0.061	2.637	0.008	Supported
H2	GP → GPB	0.27	0.057	4.718	0	Supported
H3	GT → GPB	0.135	0.036	3.742	0	Supported
H4a	Age x GP → GT	0.186	0.068	2.741	0.006	Supported
H4b	Age x GP → GPB	0.783	0.03	26.253	0	Supported

The structural model assessment examined the hypothesized relationships between green practices (GP), green trust (GT), and green purchase behavior (GPB), along with the moderating role of age. The results demonstrate that all proposed hypotheses are statistically supported ($p < 0.01$), indicating a robust model fit (see Table 5).

First, the direct effects reveal that GP exerts a significant positive influence on both GT ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.008$) and GPB ($\beta = 0.270$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that firms’ adoption of sustainable practices not only enhances consumer trust but also directly encourages eco-friendly purchasing decisions. Additionally, GT itself positively affects GPB ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its mediating role in translating GP into actual consumer behavior.

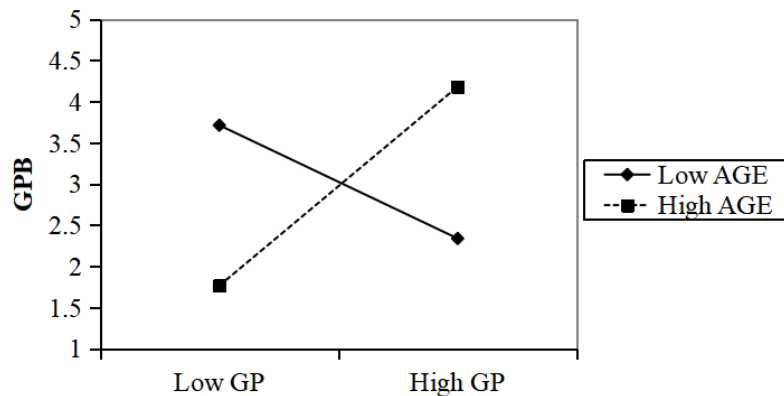
Notably, age serves as a critical moderator in this framework. The interaction effect between age and GP is significant for both GT ($\beta = 0.186$, $p = 0.006$) and GPB ($\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.001$). The particularly strong moderating effect on the GP→GPB path ($t = 26.253$) implies that older consumers exhibit a substantially stronger positive response to green practices when making purchase decisions compared to younger demographics. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that environmental consciousness and brand loyalty tend to increase with age.

In summary, the structural model highlights a dual-pathway mechanism where GP influences GPB both directly and indirectly through GT, with age amplifying these relationships. The results underscore the importance of tailoring sustainability initiatives to different demographic segments, particularly focusing on older consumers who demonstrate higher sensitivity to corporate green practices. Further discussion on theoretical and managerial implications will be elaborated in subsequent sections.

3.3 Regression Analysis and Interaction Effects

To better understand the role of age in moderating the relationship between green practices and green purchasing behavior, this study conducted an interaction effect analysis. Interaction effects are critical in exploring how the strength of these relationships varies across different demographic groups, providing deeper insights into the moderating influence of age. Figure 4 illustrates the interaction effect of age, showing how the relationship between green practices and green purchasing behavior changes across age groups.

Figure 4: Interaction Effect of Age on the Relationship Between Green Practices and Green Purchasing Behavior



The results indicate that age significantly moderates the relationship between green practices and green purchasing behavior. As shown in Figure 4, older consumers exhibit a stronger relationship, suggesting that they are more likely to translate green practices into purchasing decisions compared to younger consumers. This finding warrants a comprehensive explanation as it sheds light on a critical aspect of sustainable consumer behavior.

While the quantitative analysis demonstrates the significant moderating effect of age on the relationship between green practices and green purchasing behavior, it does not fully explain the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. Is the difference in behavior attributed to price sensitivity, personal economics, or environmental attitude. To better understand and confirm these findings, the qualitative phase of this study aims to explain the intricate relationship between price sensitivity, consumption capacity, and consumer behavior in the context of green hotels. By examining these factors, would provide deeper insights into the barriers and motivations faced by different age groups, thereby complementing and enriching the quantitative results.

Phase 2: Qualitative study

3.4 Qualitative Research Findings and Results

Phase 2 of this study focuses on understanding the peculiar moderation effect of age identified in Phase 1. While quantitative results showed older consumers positively moderate the relationship between green practices and purchasing behavior and younger consumers exhibit a reverse effect, the qualitative findings delve into the reasons behind these differences. Key themes such as financial constraints, price sensitivity, and life stage differences were identified, providing deeper insights into the barriers younger consumers face and the drivers of older consumers' positive responses.

3.4.1 Research methods and objectives

A semi-structured focus group design was used in this section to investigate the cognitive and behavioral barriers affecting green hotel selection between various groups of consumers. Due to the explanatory nature rather than broad exploration of the focus groups, each group is ideally made up of between 4 and 6 participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Fifteen participants were selected and grouped into 3 focus groups comprised of Young consumer (ages 18–44, n=5), Senior (older) consumer (ages ≥ 45 , n=5), and Hotel manager (n=5) (Table 6). This composition has been consciously developed to tackle a range of opinions: the younger and older customers represented the generational differences as identified in the quantitative stage, whereas the hotel representatives contributed to supply-side perspectives. These voices, combined, allowed for a multi-dimensional conception of the perceptions, attitudes, and decisions regarding green hotels.

It is also necessary that this qualitative phase be placed in the greater account of the sequential design of explanation. Its main objective was not to reach theoretical saturation when developing individual theory but to offer explanatory richness insofar as the definite paradoxical pattern, the reverse moderating effect of age, detected in the prior quantitative analysis, is concerned. The respondents were thus chosen purposely in regard to highlighting this specific phenomenon. Although the sample size is small, it was considered to be the needed size to achieve this narrow, contextual explanatory goal.

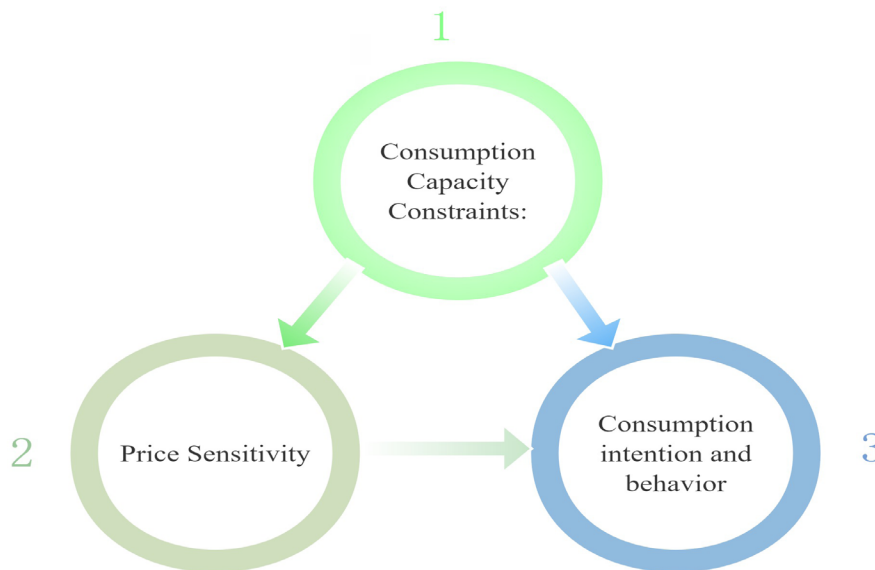
Table 6: Revised Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Group	No.	Gender	Age	Professional status	Average monthly income (RMB)	Education level
Young consumers	P1	Female	26	IT Professional	8,000	Bachelor's Degree
	P2	Male	22	Fresh Graduate	5,500	Bachelor's Degree
	P3	Female	24	Marketing Expert	7,000	Bachelor's Degree
	P4	Male	35	High school teacher	6800	Master's Degree
	P5	Female	40	Driver	6200	Diploma
Old consumers	P6	Male	58	Retired Engineer	6,500	Master's Degree
	P7	Female	65	Retired Teacher	4,500	Bachelor's Degree
	P8	Male	52	Small Business Owner	10,000	Diploma
	P9	Female	66	Government retirees	11000	Bachelor's Degree
	P10	Male	46	University teachers	12500	PhD Degree
Hotel manager	P11	Female	30	Hotel Manager	12,000	Master's Degree
	P12	Male	45	Hotel Manager	14,000	Bachelor's Degree
	P13	Female	48	Hotel Manager	16000	Bachelor's Degree
	P14	Female	50	Hotel Manager	20000	Bachelor's Degree
	P15	Male	30	Hotel Manager	11,000	Bachelor's Degree

Conceptual Framework for Qualitative Insight

The qualitative conceptual framework guiding this phase integrates key barriers and their relationships (see Figure 5):

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework for Qualitative



Consumption Capacity Constraints: Limited disposable income restricts young consumers' ability to afford the premium prices of green hotels.

Price Sensitivity: Consumers exhibit heightened sensitivity to price differences between green and regular hotels.
Consumption intention and behavior: While many consumers support environmental protection ideologically, this does not consistently translate into actual purchasing decisions.

These elements are interconnected, with economic constraints and price sensitivity influencing the behavioral intention-action gap, collectively contributing to the barriers in green hotel selection.

Interview Design

To ensure focus and depth, the interview questions covered three questions in three main aspects (see Table 7):

Table 7: Interview Questions Categorized by Key Aspects

Aspect	Interview Questions
Price Sensitivity	1. What do you think of the price of green hotels? Does the price difference affect your choice?
Impact of Income	2. Does your income affect your choice of green hotels? If the price is close to that of ordinary hotels, will you choose them?
Future Behavioral Intentions	3. If your income increases or the price of green hotels decreases in the future, will you be more willing to choose them?

By centering on these key themes, the study aims to uncover the nuanced challenges faced by consumers and their underlying motivations, while also integrating insights from industry professionals to provide a foundation for practical recommendations in subsequent sections.

3.4.2 Category and theme analysis

The systematic thematic analysis procedure was used in the analysis of the qualitative data to provide methodological rigor. The coding procedure was performed in three main phases, with the initial stage being the word-to-word transcription of the discussions during the focus group session. Open coding of the transcripts was conducted on a set of transcripts by two researchers separately to determine preliminary concepts and prominent phrases. At the second stage, the original codes were summarized and clustered around possible themes, which went through revising and refining with assessing their consistency in the entire dataset. At last, the initial thematic framework was debated and solidified by the recurrent research team debates. This structured analytical process yielded the insights presented in this section, which are organized through two levels to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing green hotel choices: (1) the organization of responses into key questions, labels, and categories; and (2) the broader consolidation of dimensions, categories, and themes. As summarized in Table 8, the focus group discussions, which revolved around three primary questions (price sensitivity, the impact of income, and future behavioral intentions), revealed several key themes.

Price Sensitivity emerged as a recurring theme, with participants highlighting the high costs of green hotels as a significant barrier. While younger consumers emphasized the need for discounts or promotions, older participants considered environmental contributions as a justification for higher prices.

Income Impact revealed clear generational differences, with younger consumers expressing financial limitations and older consumers exhibiting a greater willingness to allocate resources for environmentally friendly choices.

Future Behavioral Intention demonstrated optimism across all groups, with most participants indicating they would support green hotels if prices became more competitive or their income increased.

The qualitative findings provide valuable insights into the reasons behind the observed differences in green purchasing behavior across age groups, particularly highlighting factors such as price sensitivity, financial constraints, and value alignment. However, to ensure a comprehensive understanding, it is necessary to integrate these qualitative insights with the quantitative results. Phase 3 focuses on this integration, aiming to validate and enrich the overall findings through a mixed-methods approach.

Table 8: Focus Group Analysis – Key Questions and Themes

Questions	Key Labels			Categories			Theme
	Younger consumer	Older consumer	Hotel manager	Younger consumer	Older consumer	Hotel manager	
What do you think of the price of green hotels? Does the price difference affect your choice?	Expensive, financial limits	Affordable, accept higher price	Environmental benefits justify premium	Perceived cost barriers	Value-driven purchasing behavior	Alignment with sustainability values	Price Sensitivity
	Discount, promotions needed	Environmental contribution as value	Transparent communication helps	Pricing flexibility	Environmental value recognition	Strategic communication	
	10-20% premium acceptable	Long-term benefits valued	Dynamic pricing strategies	Acceptable premium range	Long-term perspective	Revenue management	
Does your income affect your choice of green hotels? If the price is close to that of ordinary hotels, will you choose them?	Income constraints limit choice	Financial stability enables choice	Need subsidies/ tax incentives	Budget constraints	Economic freedom to act	Policy support needed	Consumption Capacity Constraints
	Would choose if price parity	Definitely choose at similar price	Price parity increases competitiveness	Price sensitivity	Strong preference for green	Market positioning	
	Environmental intent vs. economic reality	Values align with purchasing power	Balance cost and sustainability	Intention-behavior gap	Value-action consistency	Operational feasibility	
If your income increases or the price of green hotels decreases in the future, will you be more willing to choose them?	Higher income = more likely	Continued support regardless	Expect market growth with affordability	Income dependency	Stable commitment	Market development	Consumption intention and behavior
	Price reduction encourages support	Price still matters but less critical	Need strategic pricing models	Price elasticity	Moderate price sensitivity	Strategic planning	
	Collective environmental belief	Established environmental values	Industry sustainability commitment	Shared values	Deep-seated beliefs	Corporate responsibility	

Phase 3: **Explanatory mixed method interpretation stage**

3.4.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative insights were utilized to explain and contextualize the observed patterns and relationships identified in the quantitative findings, particularly in consumer behavior towards green hotels. By integrating quantitative results with qualitative explanations, this explanatory mixed-methods approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of consumer behavior. This integration enhances the validity, reliability, and comprehensiveness of the research outcomes.

Divergent Moderating Effects of Age on Green Hotel Choice Intention:

Quantitative findings demonstrated that age significantly moderates green hotel choice intention. Younger consumers are more price-sensitive and have limited purchasing power, while older consumers can more easily support green hotels due to higher income levels. This was confirmed by qualitative interviews, where younger participants (e.g., P1 and P3) frequently mentioned budget constraints as a key factor, whereas older participants (e.g., P6 and P8) emphasized their financial stability as an enabler for green consumption.

Price Sensitivity and Green Purchasing Behavior:

While quantitative research indirectly hinted at price sensitivity through the age moderation, qualitative research further revealed that transparent communication of environmental benefits can mitigate consumers' resistance to price premiums for green hotels.

Trade-offs Between Economic Ability and Environmental Awareness:

Beyond immediate price sensitivity, qualitative findings highlighted a broader economic trade-off process. Consumers often balance limited financial resources with their willingness to support green initiatives, indicating that income growth could positively influence future green hotel choices. This complements the quantitative findings by providing a long-term perspective on economic constraints and behavior.

The core finding of the quantitative study is the significant moderating effect of age. The results reveal a striking contrast in the strength of effect: the positive relationship between green practices and purchase intention is substantially stronger for older consumers than for younger ones. This pattern indicates that while younger consumers may have the intention, their translation of green trust into actual purchase behavior is markedly weaker, primarily due to higher price sensitivity and financial constraints, as uncovered qualitatively. In contrast, older consumers with greater financial stability demonstrate a much stronger propensity to act on their green trust.

Qualitative research further explained the reasons behind this moderation effect, emphasizing the critical role of economic factors in consumer decision-making processes, as shown in Table 9:

Table 9: **Integrated Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings on Core Themes**

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Finding	Interpretation
Age significantly affects the willingness to choose green hotels, and the older the age, the higher the willingness to choose.	Due to income constraints, young people tend to choose lower-priced hotels, and it is difficult for them to put their environmental protection intentions into action.	Younger consumers face financial barriers, while older consumers are more willing to pay a premium.
Consumers are sensitive to the price premium of green hotels, and a price increase of more than 20% significantly reduces their willingness to choose them.	Transparent display of environmental protection results can increase premium acceptance, and 10%-20% is the ideal range.	Pricing transparency and moderate premiums enhance consumer trust and willingness to choose green hotels.
There is a significant gap between environmental attitudes and actual behavior.	Consumers want to clearly see environmental contributions and personal benefits, but price is still the primary factor.	Bridging the attitude-behavior gap requires demonstrating tangible environmental impacts and benefits.
Consumption behavior intentions are influenced by multiple factors, including economic conditions, environmental awareness, and future expectations.	It reveals the participants' trade-off process between economic ability and environmental awareness.	Consumer decisions reflect a balance between financial capacity and environmental values.

This section successfully integrates quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a holistic view of consumer behavior towards green hotels. It highlights key themes such as price sensitivity, income influence, and future behavior intentions. The qualitative insights not only validate the statistical results but also add depth by revealing the underlying motivations and barriers faced by different consumer groups.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Building on the quantitative results, this discussion synthesizes the key insights and addresses the core paradox revealed by our study. While green practices universally enhance trust and purchase intentions, their translation into actual purchasing behavior is powerfully contingent on consumer age. This finding challenges the prevalent assumption that younger, presumably more eco-conscious generations are the primary drivers of green consumption. Instead, our data indicate that older consumers exhibit a markedly stronger propensity to act upon their green trust, thereby presenting a significant and counterintuitive moderator in the belief-attitude-behavior chain.

This paradoxical moderating effect of age necessitates moving beyond merely stating its statistical significance to exploring the underlying “why.” The qualitative phase of our research was specifically designed to unpack this puzzle. Therefore, the following discussion will integrate the mixed-methods findings to elucidate the distinct psychological and economic mechanisms that characterize younger versus older consumer cohorts, with a particular focus on explaining the pronounced attitude-behavior gap observed among the younger group.

It leads to the following discoveries:

Reverse Moderation Effect of Age: Older consumers enhance the impact of green practices on trust and behavior, while younger consumers show a reverse moderation effect, primarily due to price sensitivity and economic constraints.

Behavioral Gap Among Younger Consumers: Younger consumers face barriers in translating environmental awareness into green purchasing behavior, highlighting a significant attitude-behavior gap. Two-way interaction analysis highlights the contrasting psychological and economic drivers influencing different age groups’ green purchasing behaviors. Younger generations exhibit relatively higher psychological motivation to embrace sustainable development, driven by idealism and strong environmental convictions. However, this idealism is often challenged by the realities of personal economic constraints, such as limited disposable income and the higher cost of green alternatives. These certainties force a recalibration of their sustainability convictions, as they struggle to balance their aspirations for a sustainable future with the practicalities of financial limitations. In contrast, older consumers, benefiting from greater financial stability, are more likely to align their purchasing decisions with their environmental values. This nuanced understanding underscores the necessity of designing targeted green marketing strategies that not only appeal to the environmental ideals of younger consumers but also address their economic constraints through pricing flexibility and value-driven incentives. Such strategies can enhance inclusivity and encourage sustainable behavior across all age groups, ultimately advancing the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contribution of this research is twofold. First, it identifies and specifies a critical boundary condition for the Belief-Attitude-Behavior (BAB) model in the context of sustainable consumption. Our discovery is not that the BAB sequence fails for younger consumers, but that its final link from attitude (green trust) to behavior (purchase) is severely attenuated by economic feasibility constraints, which are disproportionately prevalent in younger life stages.

Second, and more importantly, this study offers a nuanced interpretation of the ‘age’ moderator that precludes its conflation with economic capacity. This study theorizes that age acts as a macro-level moderator representing divergent life-stage contexts. Within these contexts, distinct mechanisms operate: for younger consumers, the qualitative data clearly pinpoint price sensitivity and disposable income constraints as the immediate micro-level mechanisms that disrupt the attitude-behavior link. For older consumers, greater economic freedom likely interacts with more stable values and a longer-term orientation to strengthen the GP-GPB link. Thus, this study interprets the age moderator not as a direct proxy for economic capacity, but as a higher-order variable that encapsulates a set of socio-economic and psychological conditions, of which economic capacity is one salient component for the younger cohort.

This integrated perspective moves beyond simply noting an intention-behavior gap. It refines the BAB model by introducing and unpacking a key moderator, life stage, operationalized as age, and specifying one of its core underlying mechanisms, economic feasibility. This provides a more delicate, context-specific view of how sustainable consumption decisions are made, advancing theory on the intention-behavior gap by highlighting the conditional role of economic reality.

4.2 Practical Contributions

This study offers significant practical contributions for policymakers and industry stakeholders in promoting green practices within the hospitality industry, particularly in Hainan Province. The results demand a more radical change in green marketing policy, whereby a one-shoe-fits-all policy is replaced by a segmented model that recognizes the unique psychological and economic characteristics of the various types of age.

To hotel managers, this would translate to coming up with dual-pathway programs. In the case of the older consumers, the marketing communications must utilize the trust and financial stability they have attained by focusing on the visible results and added value of green products and services, and the marketing communication must therefore strengthen the consistency of value and action in older consumers. Conversely, targeting the younger group based on the accessibility-first approach would entail a mechanistic process of gradually reducing economic and perceptual barriers. This is possible by making clear communication about environmental value, incorporating green alternatives into the default package and not making it a

costly add-on, and using micro-deliveries such as minor discounts or loyalty points as an incentive to engage in sustainability behaviors. This makes green consumption a rebranded luxury and an affordable and clever option.

Furthermore, government interventions are crucial in addressing the additional costs associated with green hotel practices. Corporate tax incentives and subsidies can help alleviate the financial burden on hotel operators, encouraging broader adoption of eco-friendly initiatives such as energy-efficient technologies, sustainable sourcing, and waste management systems. Additionally, price controls on green materials can reduce the operational costs of green hotels, making them more accessible to operators and affordable for consumers.

Thirdly, the findings align with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, and Goal 13: Climate Action. By fostering green trust and encouraging sustainable consumption, the hospitality industry can reduce its environmental footprint, promote resource efficiency, and generate green employment opportunities, contributing to Hainan's eco-tourism ambitions.

Finally, this study highlights practical strategies for hotel managers to address consumer price sensitivity, particularly among younger demographics. The qualitative findings suggest that a small price premium for green hotels is most acceptable, providing practical pricing insights for the hotel industry. Measures such as dynamic pricing models during off-peak seasons, clear communication of environmental benefits, and partnerships with the government for green certifications and financial incentives can enhance the appeal of green hotels. These strategies not only reduce the financial barriers consumers face but also strengthen the industry's alignment with global sustainability initiatives.

4.3 Broader Implications

The insights derived from this study offer a roadmap for integrating green practices into the hospitality industry's operational framework. By addressing cost barriers, fostering consumer trust, and aligning with global sustainability goals, stakeholders can drive meaningful progress toward a sustainable future. These practical contributions not only support the development of eco-friendly tourism in Hainan but also provide a scalable model for other regions aiming to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility.

4.4 Study Limitations

This study has a number of limitations, which are worth considering. To begin with, the use of self-reported data can lead to social desirability bias since the respondents can exaggerate the environmental intentions or purchasing behaviors. The potential of SAPS could be overcome in future studies by conducting experiments or observations (pursuing the actual booking patterns of green hotels). Second, the cross-sectional design would have restricted the ability to infer causally because it measures relationships at one instance. It is advisable that longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine how green trust and buying behaviors change with time. Third, the qualitative element has drawbacks of generalizability. The conclusions were made out of one focus group with a few respondents (n=8). Although such a strategy was appropriate to offer preliminary explanatory background in the context of the mixed method, the results are not the totality of consumer perceptions. Theoretical saturation and taking more solid claims of the differences in age cohorts would require more focus groups separated by age and on a larger scale. Fourth, findings can be limited in generalizability by the geographic region of the sample, which is limited to Hainan Province. Consumers within this leading destination of ecotourism might react to green practices in different ways than consumers within other parts of the world with very different economic systems or cultural backgrounds. To manage this, the next studies ought to include those of various regions with different economic, cultural, and environmental backgrounds so as to prove the findings over a wider scope. Lastly, another point should be addressed concerning the implication of the demographic composition of the sample. We also had a skewed sample towards the old, but that, although it reflects the demographic character of high-star hotel guests in the area, might make comparisons among age groups less precise. The use of a stratified sampling approach to give more balanced representation of the ages would have been useful in the future because it will allow a more in-depth analysis of the generational differences observed in this study.

4.5 Future Research Directions

Building on the current study's gaps, future research can move forward in several key directions. First, to move beyond surveys, new studies could run real-world experiments on travel sites or examine actual booking records, giving a clearer view of eco-friendly choices. Second, instead of one-off surveys, tracking how people's attitudes and behaviors change over time would show how trust in green tourism evolves and shapes decisions. Third, to make qualitative insights richer, researchers might use multi-stage designs—like running larger focus groups for different age brackets and mixing group discussions with one-on-one interviews for deeper perspective. Fourth, expanding this work to other regions and cultures—such as different parts of China or countries with varying ecotourism maturity—would test the model's wider relevance and uncover local influences. Finally, using age-stratified sampling can ensure all groups are fairly represented, helping compare generations clearly and zoom in on what drives or holds back younger groups like students and working youth.

CONCLUSION

This research explores the connection between eco-friendly initiatives in the hotel sector and consumers' trust and booking decisions, paying special attention to how age influences these relationships. Using a mixed-methods approach that blends quantitative and qualitative insights, the study reveals meaningful demographic variations in responses to sustainability efforts. Results show that green practices generally strengthen both trust and purchasing behavior, but age plays a defining role: older adults tend to respond more positively, whereas younger consumers—often held back by budget limits and lower income—show a weaker or even reversed response. These findings complicate common generational stereotypes about environmental awareness.

By combining the Belief-Attitude-Behavior framework with economic concepts like the “lipstick effect” and being “priced out,” the study presents a more layered view of what drives green choices. It suggests that tailored initiatives—such as tax breaks for businesses and subsidies for sustainable materials—could help lower cost barriers and encourage greener guest behavior. This work supports global sustainability targets, including responsible consumption and climate action, emphasizing that narrowing the divide between green intent and actual booking behavior is essential to progress in hospitality sustainability.

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