



DOI 10.2478/sbe-2025-0033

SBE no. 20(2) 2025

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN GREEN HOTELS: INSIGHTS FROM A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This bibliometric analysis explores the intersection of sustainability and consumer behavior in the context of green hotels, highlighting how environmental concerns are reshaping tourist preferences and influencing hospitality strategies. Although the implementation of eco-friendly practices in hotels is associated with higher operational costs, consumers tend to value such initiatives for their contribution to environmental protection. Using data from the Web of Science database, covering the period from January 2000 to May 2025, and analytical tools such as VOSviewer, this study conducts citation, co-citation, and co-occurrence analyses to map key research trends. The findings identify the main attributes that shape travelers' decisions regarding green hotels, as well as hoteliers' interest in adopting sustainable strategies, particularly in relation to their impact on economic and competitive performance.

Key words: consumer behavior; green hotels; bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction and Background

In recent years, bibliometric analysis has become an essential method for understanding research trends in sustainability and green hotels (Liu et al., 2024; Haq, 2025; Fauzi et al., 2025; Kharasne et al., 2025)

The hotel industry drives environmental harm due to greenhouse gas emissions, waste generation, substantial water and energy consumption.

For this reason, sustainability in the hotel industry has emerged as a central topic among researchers amid growing awareness of environmental issues and changes in consumer preferences.

Green hotels can be defined as lodging properties that adopt several green business strategies such as energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction and recycling to reduce their environmental footprint (Hsiao et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2021).

Pro-environmental lodging properties are not only improving their financial performance, by streamlining operating costs, reducing reliance on non-renewable resources and promote sustainability, but are also attracting eco-conscious travelers and gaining greater market share.

Consequently, along with increased competitiveness, consumers' ecological preferences and behavior drive the adoption of green practices within hotels. Many studies have found that visitors are increasingly willing to pay extra for stays in green-certified accommodations (Kang et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2021; Özkan et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2023).

Other researchers have focused on using the theory of planned behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) to investigate guest' intention to stay and return to green hotels (Kim and Han, 2010; Han et.al, 2010; Chen and Tung, 2014; Han, 2015; Fauzi et.al., 2024; Mohammed et.al., 2024). In this context it should be highlighted that *attitude* – reflected in consumers perception' that green hotels aim to reduce their impact on environment; *subjective norms* – referring to the influence of public opinion to making eco-friendly choice; and *perceived behavioral control* – namely travelers' belief that booking green accommodations is affordable, are the main factors explaining the behavioral intention of sustainability-minded consumers in the context of green hotels.

Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to provide a structured understanding of the multidimensional nature of sustainability and consumer behavior in the context of green hotels, supporting both theoretical development and practical implications.

2. Methodology

This study adopts an integrative bibliometric approach to systematically examine the expanding literature on sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels.

Bibliometric techniques, through various forms of visual mapping, help clarify the interconnections among key academic contributions, thematic clusters, and research patterns within the defined domain. The methodology includes all relevant studies indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database. WoS was chosen due to its high-quality standards, broad subject coverage and accurate citation tracking, making it a trusted source for academic literature analysis (Yan and Zhiping, 2023).

For the bibliometric analysis and science mapping, specialized software tools were applied to organize and visualize the data. VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) was used to create bibliometric maps, including citation, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks. The software also supports cluster identification, density visualization, and overlay maps, which help illustrate the main research themes and the structure of the academic field (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010).

Citation analysis was used to identify the studies that have had a significant impact on shaping current research directions in sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels, while keyword co-occurrence analysis aimed to cluster the most frequent and interconnected terms, revealing the main thematic areas of inquiry (Donthu et al., 2021).

Other bibliometric techniques include co-authorship analysis, which explores patterns of global scientific collaboration, and an assessment of the most influential journals based on average citations per publication.

The search was limited to publications from January 2000 to May 2025, using the query TS = (sustainability AND consumer behavior AND green hotels) to ensure coverage of both foundational studies and recent developments in the field.

In order to refine the search three filters were applied: (1) Language – to ensure consistency and broader accessibility only publications in English were considered; (2) Document type – to assess the quality and relevance of the study, the analysis was limited to articles; (3) Subject category – to ensure thematic alignment with sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels, only articles classified under Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism were taken into consideration.

Therefore, after refining the results using the aforementioned filters and removing duplicates or irrelevant items, a total of 389 documents were included in the final dataset.

3. Results/ findings

The Web of Science database yielded 10,715 citing articles for the selected papers (N = 389), of which 10,368 were without self-citations. With an H-index of 81, the average citation count per article was 57.8. Table 1 presents the annual evolution of publications and citations related to sustainability and consumer intentions in green hotels over the past ten years.

Table 1 Number of publications and citations per year (last 10 years)

Year	Number of publications	Number of citations
May 2025	30	1,957
2024	53	3,842
2023	41	3,405
2022	35	3,259
2021	26	2,594
2020	39	2,175
2019	38	1,711
2018	21	1,041
2017	11	734
2016	11	663
2015	15	455

Source: Author's compilation based on data extracted from the Web of Science

According to the data, the year 2024 recorded the highest scholarly activity, with a peak of 53 publications and 3,842 citations. This was followed closely by 2023, which also showed substantial levels of academic output and impact.

The preliminary data from early 2025 (up to May) already indicate 30 publications and 1,957 citations, suggesting that research interest in this topic remains consistently high and is likely to exceed previous years by the end of the year.

Notably, over 82% of the total 389 analyzed documents were published during the last decade (2015–2025), reflecting a significant and growing focus on green hotels within the broader sustainability and hospitality literature. The steady rise in citations — especially from 2020 onward — highlights the increasing academic relevance and practical applicability of this field.

Based on data from the Web of Science, Table 2 highlights the most cited articles in the field.

Table 2. Most cited articles

Article	Authors	SOURCE	Number citations
Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to green hotel choice: Testing the effect of environmental friendly activities	Han, H; Hsu, LT & Sheu, C (2010)	TOURISM MANAGEMENT	1.198
Developing an extended Theory of Planned Behavior model to predict consumers' intention to visit green hotels	Chen, MF & Tung, PJ (2014)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	959
Travelers' pro-environmental behavior in a green lodging context: Converging value-belief-norm theory and the theory of planned behavior	Han, H (2015)	TOURISM MANAGEMENT	789
Understanding how consumers view green hotels: how a hotel's green image can influence behavioural intentions	Lee, J. S., Hsu, L. T. (Jane), Han, H., & Kim, Y. (2010).	JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM	582
Empirical investigation of the roles of attitudes toward green behaviors, overall image, gender, and age in hotel customers' eco-friendly decision-making process	Han, H; Hsu, LT & Lee, JS (2009)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	493
Consumers' willingness to pay for green initiatives of the hotel industry	Kang, KH; Stein, L; Heo, CY & Lee, S (2012)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	467
Intention to pay conventional-hotel prices at a green hotel - a modification of the theory of planned behavior	Kim, Y and Han, H (2010)	JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM	448
Are lodging customers ready to go green? An examination of attitudes, demographics, and eco-friendly intentions	Han, H; Hsu, LTJ; Lee, JS & Sheu, C (2011)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	407
Hotel customers' environmentally responsible behavioral intention: Impact of key constructs on decision in green consumerism	Han, H and Yoon, HJ (2015)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	366
An investigation of green hotel customers' decision formation: Developing an extended model of the theory of planned behavior	Han, H and Kim, Y (2010)	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT	324

Source: Author's compilation based on data extracted from the Web of Science

The most cited article, with 1,198 citations, belongs to Han, Heesup, Hsu, Li-Tzang & Sheu, Chwen (2010). Titled "*Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to green hotel choice: Testing the effect of environmental friendly activities*" and published in *Tourism Management*, the study applies Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model to examine customers' intentions to visit a green hotel. The findings indicate that perceived behavioral control significantly influences the intention to stay at an environmentally friendly accommodations.

The second most cited paper, with 959 citations, was written by Chen, Mei-Fang and Tung, Pei-Ju (2014), with the title "*Developing an extended Theory of Planned Behavior model to predict consumers' intention to visit green hotels*". This study proposes an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model that incorporates the environmental concern as a key determinant of consumer behavior in the context of green hotel selection.

Ranking third, with 789 citations, is Han, Heesup's 2015 article "*Travelers' pro-environmental behavior in a green lodging context: Converging value-belief-norm theory and the theory of planned behavior*". This research integrates value-belief-norm theory with the theory of planned behavior to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding travelers' pro-environmental intentions within a green lodging environment.

In order to have a broad perspective on the concepts and research focus within the green hotel domain, the overall keyword co-occurrence map was computed, with a total of 1,785 initially identified. Applying a minimum threshold of ten occurrence per item, the analysis yielded 82 occurrences distributed across four thematic clusters, namely (see Figure 1):

- *sustainable organizational performance* – reflects academic interest in integrating sustainable strategies into hotel management structures, analyzing their impact on economic and competitive performance;
- *consumer behavior and eco-intentions* – captures research examining the psychological and motivational factors influencing green hotel choices;
- *perceptions, satisfaction, and service quality* – illustrates how service quality and customer experience in green hotels shape satisfaction and post-visit behaviors;
- *ethics, motivation, and social responsibility* – explores the role of moral and social factors in both individual and organizational decision-making.

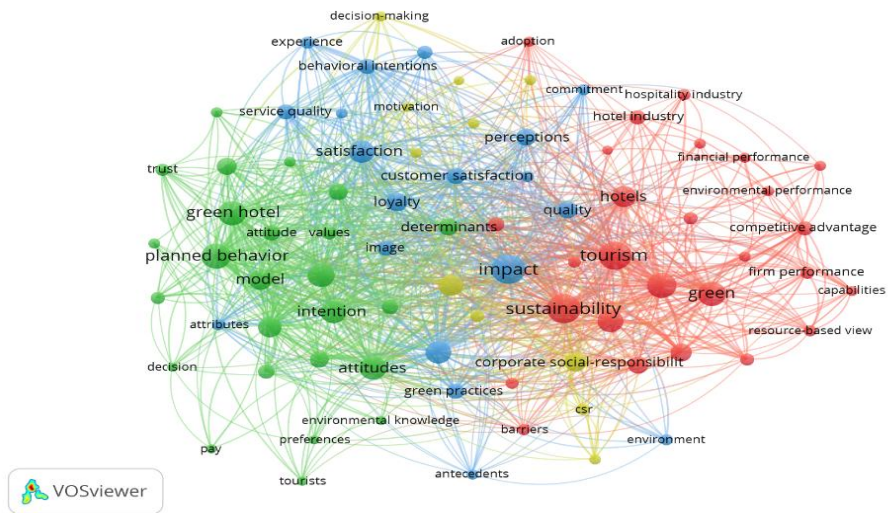


Figure 1. Overall keyword co-occurrence map

Source: Author's visualization based on Web of Science data (processed using VOSviewer)

Cluster 1 – Red (27 items) – centers on the relationship between sustainability, management, and organizational performance within the hotel industry. The core keywords are: sustainability (477 total link strength), performance (345), green (298), management (279), hotels (228), competitive advantage (132).

Cluster 2 - Green (25 items) – focuses on consumer behavior and the psychological drivers behind the choice of green hotels, with key terms like planned behavior (355 total link strength), attitudes (328), green hotel (307), pro-environmental behavior (153), intentions (151), values (107).

Cluster 3 - Blue (19 items) – concentrated on customer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty toward green hotels, including keywords such as impact (516 total link strength), loyalty (220), customer satisfaction (194), service quality (165), green practices (163), perceived value (122).

Cluster 4 - Yellow (11 items) – includes concepts related to corporate social responsibility (CSR), personal engagement, and moral decision-making. Notable terms include: corporate social-responsibility (233 total link strength), go green (100), involvement (66), decision-making (77).

Furthermore, the co-occurrence map of author keywords (see Figure 2) complements and reinforces the broader thematic structure on sustainability and consumer intentions in the context of green hotels, identified in the overall keyword co-occurrence map.

The mapping calculated the strength of the associations among the 1,213 keywords based on their frequency of co-occurrence across the literature. A minimum occurrence threshold of five was applied to filter out low-frequency or isolated terms, thereby improving the precision and interpretability of the resulting eight thematic clusters

citation performance, in order to ensure the relevance and significance of the results. Out of the initial 61 sources, 24 met these thresholds.

This dual-perspective visualization enables a more comprehensive understanding of the journals' role in shaping the literature on sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels.

Table 3. Most influential journals

Journal	Total publications	Total citations	Average citations per publication
Tourism Management	11	3,686	335
International Journal of Hospitality Management	53	6,723	127
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	11	1,009	92
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	43	2,913	68
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	36	2,245	62
Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	12	616	53
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	12	500	42
Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	21	863	41
Current Issues in Tourism	11	304	28
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights	21	258	12

Source: Author's compilation based on Web of Science data (processed using VOSviewer)

Different methods can be used to identify the most influential journals in a research field. Counting only publications or total citations may not accurately reflect a journal's impact. To offer a more balanced perspective, average citations per publication were used as a key metric. Based on this criterion, Tourism Management and International Journal of Hospitality Management emerged as the most influential journals in this research area, with average citations rates of 335 and 127 per publication, respectively (see Table 3).

Regarding the authors with a significant contribution to shaping the intellectual structure of sustainability and consumer behavior in the context of green hotels, the co-authorship network (Figure 3) reveals that Han (Han et al., 2009; Han and Kim, , 2010; Han et al., 2010; Han et al., 2011; Han and Yoon, 2015; Han, 2015; Han, 2020) stands out with the highest number of citations (5,598) and the greatest total link strength (35), suggesting that he is a central and highly influential author in the researched field. Furthermore, Han (Han et al., 2009; Han and Kim, 2010; Han et al., 2010; Han et al., 2011; Han and Yoon, 2015; Han, 2015; Han, 2020) has a total of 26 articles included in the analysis and is the co-author of the most cited paper (1,198 citations), *"Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to green hotel choice: Testing the effect of environmental friendly activities"* and the sole author of the third most cited article (789 citations), *"Travelers' pro-environmental behavior in a green lodging context: Converging value-belief-norm theory and the theory of planned behavior"*.

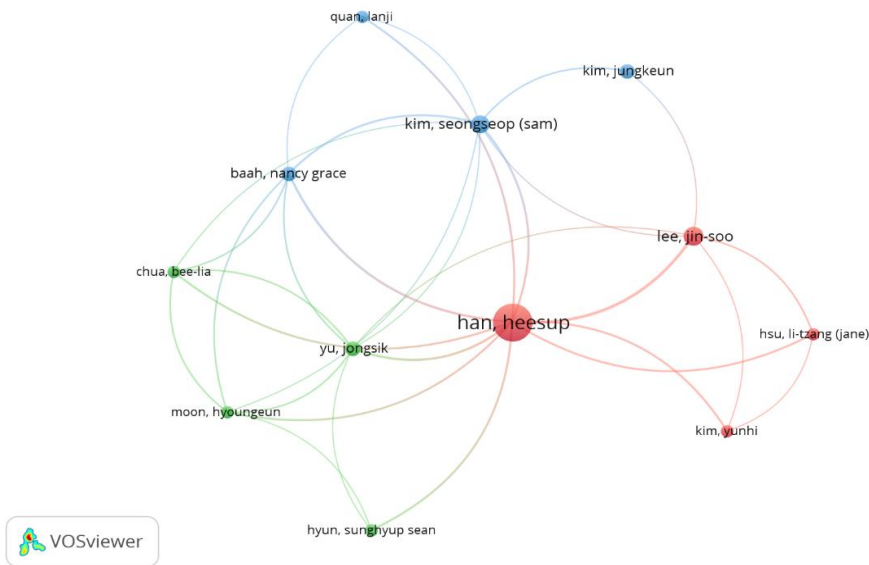


Figure 3. Network visualization of co-authorship

Source: Author's visualization based on Web of Science data (processed using VOSviewer)

Finally, to provide an analytical depth and visual coherence to the study, supporting the quantitative findings, a country-level co-authorship network was generated using VOSviewer, highlighting international research collaborations in the domain of sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels (see Figure 4). To ensure robustness and thematic consistency, the analysis included only countries with a minimum of five publications, thereby focusing on meaningful and sustained research activity.

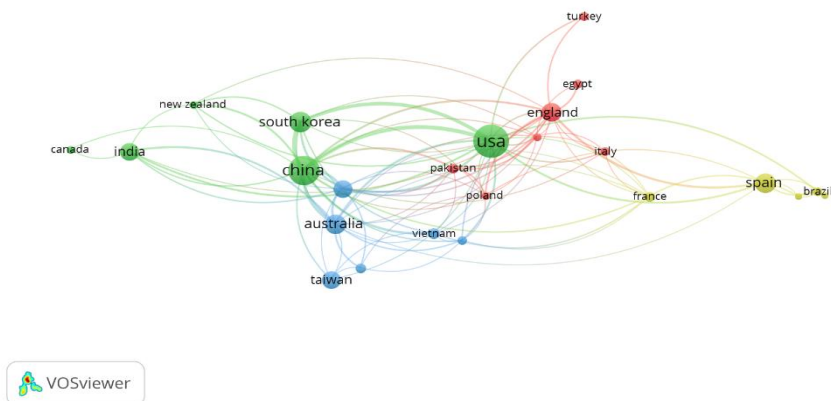


Figure 4. Network visualization of global research collaboration

Source: Author's visualization based on Web of Science data (processed using VOSviewer)

The network visualization reveals four distinct regional and thematic groupings, suggesting differentiated collaboration dynamics and research focuses within the field of sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels.

The United States (103 articles) leads in both the volume and influence of research on green consumer behavior in hospitality, reflecting its central role in shaping academic discussions on the topic. Other key contributors are China (78 articles), South Korea (39 articles), Australia (32 articles), Spain (32 articles) and England (30 articles), each showing a high level of research activity, as indicated by their publication volume.

In contrast, countries such as Saudi Arabia (6 articles), New Zealand (6 articles), Poland (6 articles), Portugal (5 articles) and Mexico (5 articles), show a relatively lower volume of research on green consumer behavior in the hospitality sector. Although their scholarly contribution is more limited compared to leading nations, their presence within the collaboration network reflects a growing academic interest.

Thus, the network visualization of global research collaboration underscores not only the dominance of certain countries in advancing scholarship on green consumer behavior in hospitality but also the potential for increased international cooperation, particularly involving emerging contributors whose integration into collaborative networks could enrich the field with more diverse perspectives and contextual insights.

4. Discussions

The results of this bibliometric study highlight the evolution of research at the intersection of sustainability and consumer behavior, with a specific focus on green hotels, over the period 2010 – May 2025. The findings indicate that sustainability has grown in importance, shaping not only hotel operations but also guest perceptions and behaviors.

One of the key insights emerging from this study is the dual impact of environmental practices: they serve both ecological purposes while also contributing to business performance. The results are supported by the findings of López-Gamero et al. (2023), who reveal the mutual reinforcement between environmental sustainability efforts and hotel performance. Similarly, Momayez et al. (2023) illustrate how hotels with strong environmental capabilities can generate improved outcomes, with green innovation mediating the relationship between green entrepreneurship orientation and both environmental and organizational performance.

From the consumer perspective, the analysis reveals a consistent focus on behavioral models that explain guests' sustainable choices. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) remains one of the most widely applied models in understanding why travelers choose green accommodations, with attitudes, perceived social pressure, and perceived control shaping guests' behavior (Yeh et al., 2021). These findings are further reinforced by perspectives drawn from the Value-Belief-Norm theory (Choi et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2024) and the Theory of Green Purchase Behavior (Han, 2020), both of which emphasize the significance of personal values, responsibility, and environmental beliefs.

Another key result revealed in this analysis is that guest perceptions are influenced not only by green branding but also by service quality and emotional engagement. Prior studies have established a clear link between the perceived quality of accommodation services and guest satisfaction and favorable behavior intentions (Wu et al., 2018; Hashish

et al., 2022). Others, such as Kim et al. (2017) and Astuti & Ermawati (2020), demonstrate that thoughtfully designed green hotel experiences can enhance perceived value and motivate return visits or recommendations.

At the same time, the findings reflect a growing emphasis in recent literature on emotional and ethical factors, such as trust, responsibility, and involvement. In this sense, Raza et al. (2023) provide empirical validation by showing that guests respond more positively to transparent sustainability efforts, while Liu et al. (2025) highlight the role of perceived social responsibility in shaping guest responses to environmental initiatives.

Apart from the thematic insights, this study also highlights a clear methodological progression. Whereas earlier research (Choi et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2014; Miao and Wei, 2016) primarily relied on survey data, recent studies have increasingly adopted digital methodologies that allow large-scale analysis. D'Acunto et al. (2020), illustrate this evolution by analyzing online hotel reviews to explore how sustainability is evaluated in real time. In a similar vein, studies conducted by Leyva and Parra (2021), Shen et al. (2021), and Chang et al., (2022), apply text mining and clustering techniques to uncover patterns in consumer sentiment that traditional tools might miss.

5. Conclusions

The results of this bibliometric analysis provide practical insights for hoteliers, policymakers, and researchers, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-life implications in sustainability and consumer behavior.

The mapping of keyword co-occurrence indicates four subject groupings within the research: (1) *sustainable organizational performance* – with sustainability and performance emerging as the keywords that recorded the highest link strength; (2) *consumer behavior and eco-intentions* – including planned behavior, attitudes and green hotel as dominant keywords; (3) *perceptions, satisfaction, and service quality* – with impact, loyalty and customer satisfaction demonstrating the highest link strength; (4) *ethics, motivation, and social responsibility* – where corporate social-responsibility and go green appear as the the most strongly connected keywords.

The network visualization of global research collaboration reveals how researchers from different nations collaborate, forming transnational networks that shape the field, with United States (26% from total publication included in the analysis) and China (20%) having a crucial contribution to the development of academic thought in the field.

In this context, it should be noted that Heesup Han (Han et al., 2009; Han and Kim, 2010; Han et al., 2010; Han et al., 2011; Han and Yoon, 2015; Han, 2015; Han, 2020) is the most cited author (5,598 citations), holding a pivotal role in the development of research on sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels.

Regarding the most influential journal in the domain, Tourism Management recorded the highest average number of citations per publication (335), followed by the International Journal of Hospitality Management and Cornell Hospitality Quarterly.

The analysis offers a clear representation of thematic trends in sustainability and consumer behavior in green hotels. However, this study is limited by the fact that it includes only journal articles indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database, excluding other forms of scholarly work (e.g., book chapters, conference proceedings, reports) and

publications from other databases, such as Scopus, which could also provide valuable perspectives on sustainability and consumer behavior in pro-environmental lodgings. In this context, future research should use multiple databases, consider a broader range of document types, and integrate qualitative approaches (e.g., expert interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis) in order to explore the multifaceted pro-environmental behavior of guests.

While the current study presents relevant findings, several important areas remain underexplored. *Future studies* could focus on emerging themes such as: the role of smart technologies and green innovation on shaping consumer behavior in eco-friendly hotels; gamification to encourage pro-environmental behavior in hotels; intergenerational differences in guests' sustainability perceptions within green hotels.

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