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The impact of green practices in coastal tourism: An empirical investigation on an eco-labelled beach club

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ABSTRACT

The environmental impact of marine and coastal tourism is gaining the attention of firms, scholars and institutions. Coastal tourism facilities play a crucial role in the sustainable management of coastal tourism areas in Mediterranean countries. One way by which tourism facilities can preserve these resources is to adopt on a voluntary basis the ecolabels, which ensure compliance with specific environmental performance criteria. The research presents the results of a survey addressed to the guests of an ecolabel-awarded Italian Beach Club. In order to reduce a research gap in the context of coastal tourism, the aim is to evaluate how guests perceive the green practices implemented by the Beach Club and to test if they significantly influence guests' satisfaction and loyalty. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) was employed to test a series of research hypotheses. Findings show that (a) guest environmental concern positively influences guest attitude toward green practices and guests' evaluation of green practices; (b) guest environmental concern isn't a significant antecedent of guest satisfaction; (c) guest attitude toward green practices positively influences the evaluation of green practices; (d) guest attitude towards green practices doesn't influence guest satisfaction and loyalty; (e) the performance of Beach Club green practices positively influences guest satisfaction and loyalty toward the Beach Club; (f) customer satisfaction is a significant antecedent of guest loyalty. Research findings are relevant for practitioners, as beach club green practices are positively recognized by guests that consider them as part of the service quality, showing that environmental commitment plays a significant role in generating added value for coastal tourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a significant contributor to environmental degradation and to greenhouse gases emissions (Pang et al., 2013). This industry is also one of the most exposed to the negative consequences of climate change (Gossling and Peeters, 2015; Smith, 1990). This is particularly relevant in the fast-growing coastal tourism industry, considering that many of the tourist activities are based on the availability of natural ecosystems in good condition and accessible to tourists (Hall, 2001; Luo and Deng, 2008; Phillips and House, 2009). In Mediterranean countries, tourism is closely related to the "Sun, Sea and Sand" (3S) model (Aguiló et al., 2005; Semeoshenkova and Newton, 2015). Coastal tourism is a leading sector for Italian tourism (European Commission, 2006), contributing to 3% of national economy and to 3.5% of employment (Unioncamere, 2015). Italy represents a specificity in the international scene as in many cases the beaches are not free, but are given under concession to private companies through temporary licenses. These concessions allow companies to occupy them with bathing establishments and related services, configuring beach clubs as part of hospitality services in seaside areas. Therefore, these actors play a crucial role in the sustainable management of coastal tourism areas (Aguiló et al., 2005; Roca and Villares, 2008).

In coastal tourism, the environmental quality and its preservation are critical factors of success, as a preserved coastal ecosystem provides open spaces and opportunities for tourism and recreation activities (Kenchington, 1993). In this context, beaches are valuable resources that, if properly protected, can contribute to a sustainable development of the industry (Semeoshenkova and Newton, 2015). However, as a consequence of beaches mass tourism, the industry has started to suffer from environmental degradation, compromising both the ecological status and tourist perceptions (Roca and Villares, 2008). Therefore, to ensure coastal tourism long-term existence, a balance between

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economic advantages and environmental sustainability is needed (Ghosh and Datta, 2012; Mustapha et al., 2018).

In this context, the implementation of good environmental practices has become crucial into tourism facilities operations management (Erdogan and Baris, 2007; Mensah, 2006). These good practices are often referred in literature as green practices defined by Kim et al. (2017a, b) as *"a value-added business strategy that benefits a hospitality operation that engages in environmental protection initiatives"*. In fact, despite it is often considered as unsustainable, the hospitality industry has been a pioneer in implementing sustainability practices, introducing environmental accreditations and ecolabels. To gain success, green practices should reduce operational cost for tourism facilities (e.g. through water and energy savings) and, concurrently, create value for customers (Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010a). "Going green" in this industry is becoming an effective strategy to gain competitiveness (Han et al., 2009) pulled by a growing attention of consumers toward sustainability (Cronin et al., 2011; Dodds and Holmes, 2016; Zielinski and Botero, 2015). This attention for sustainable practices is driven by customers environmental concern that influence their pro-environmental decision making process (Han et al., 2018, 2015; Han and Yoon, 2015). Additionally, scholars have established a positive relationship between guest perceptions of green practices and behavioral intentions (Gao et al., 2016; Han et al., 2018). Specifically, several studies indicate that green practices are significant determinants of guest satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2013a; Gao and Mattila, 2014; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2015), loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price (Lee et al., 2010; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Teng et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the link between stated intentions and actual behavior is not always confirmed (Kim et al., 2017a, b; Miao and Wei, 2013; Susskind and Verma, 2011).

When contextualizing green practices implemented by tourism facilities an important differentiator factor is the adoption of environmental certifications, such as ecolabels (Esparon et al., 2014). The third-party certified ecolabels support the voluntary implementation of green practices, avoiding green-washing (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2015; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). Ecolabels stand out for their capacity to communicate directly with costumers influencing their choices, and for the credibility ensured by external certification (Geerts, 2014; Penz et al., 2017).

Considering coastal touristic facilities, the first tourism ecolabel is a beach certification, the Blue Flag Campaign (Zielinski and Botero, 2015). However, over the years, other quality awards and other European environmental certifications for beaches were released (e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001, European Ecolabel) (Fraguell et al., 2016; Semeoshenkova and Newton, 2015; Zielinski and Botero, 2015). When considering the Italian coastal tourism activities, there are several examples of beach clubs that have decided to invest in environmental sustainability practices. Legambiente, which is one of the most influential Italian environmentalist NGOs, has issued a disciplinary dedicated to beach clubs (Legambiente, 2017). According to it, beach clubs that implement a list of specific green practices are awarded with the Legambiente Turismo Ecolabel. At the moment, nearly 20 beach clubs are awarded with this Ecolabel, (Cesab - Center for Research in Environmental and Biotechnology, 2017; Legambiente, 2017).

Over the years, many studies focusing on the impact of green practices on guest satisfaction and behavioral intentions in hospitality and tourism research have been conducted, especially in the hotel industry (e.g. Chen and Tung, 2014; Gao and Mattila, 2014; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2015; Kim et al., 2017a, b). Even though these relationships have been widely studied in tourism research, there is a gap in literature in the context of beach clubs. Considering coastal management, over the last years the need to better understand consumer' behaviors and preferences has emerged. Different studies have explored guest perception of beach quality. Some of these have focused on the analysis of their physical characteristics such as water quality and beach cleanliness (Ariza et al., 2014; Hassan and Shahnewaz, 2014; Lucrezi et al., 2016; Maguire et al., 2011). Others have explored the community or stakeholders perceptions of the natural ecosystem (Ghosh and Datta, 2012; Pereira et al., 2003) and the carrying capacity of beaches (Alipour et al., 2007). Additionally, Lucrezi et al., 2016 elaborated a Beach Evaluation Index which includes environmental, social and economic assessments. Marin et al. (2009), have investigated end users' perception on beaches management and environmental certifications in Italy. However, these studies do not provide a solid theoretical background in determining if green practices have a significant and positive influence on guest satisfaction and behavioral intentions in beach clubs. To try to reduce this gap, the article presents the results of a survey targeted to the guests of an Italian beach club certified with the Legambiente Turismo Ecolabel. The hypothesis were tested with Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

The main goals of this study are (1) to test the role of environmental concern in determining guest attitude toward beach club green practices; (2) to investigate the role of guest attitude toward green practices on green practices performance evaluation and satisfaction; (3) to test the direct influence of guest attitude toward green practices on guest behavioral intentions; (4) to evaluate if green practices performances are significant determinants of guest satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. Finally, (5) to confirm satisfaction as significant antecedent of loyalty toward the ecolabel beach club.

The research thus offers interesting findings both to hospitality researchers and industry practitioners. Providing for the first time an overview of guest behavior in relationship with beach club sustainable management, which may support beach managers to improve the quality of green practices implemented. Additionally, the results may support ecolabel authorities to promote the instrument as a solid environmental and market tool. From a theoretical viewpoint, it contributes to enrich the knowledge on green practices in the hospitality industry, evaluating if a positive guest attitude for green practices is enough to determine satisfaction and behavioral intentions or, on the contrary, this relationship has significance only if the actual performance of the facility on green practices is considered. For coastal tourism researchers, the study offers an innovative viewpoint on the role of ecolabel beach club as a tool to improve destination sustainability.

We structured the paper as follows. Following this introduction, Section 2 presents the theoretical background and develops the research hypotheses. Next, Section 3 describes the survey design and the measurement scales development, data collection and data analysis methods. Section 4 presents the study results. Finally, discussion of results implications, limitations and lines for future research are proposed.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

The growth of scholars' interest for green practices into the hospitality testifies that the industry is undergoing a process of transition toward a more sustainable approach to its operations (Bruns-smith et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017a, b). This transition involves all the activities that compose the hospitality industry as for example hotels, golf clubs (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Minoli et al., 2015), spas and wellness facilities (Bastič and Gojčič, 2012), resorts (Reid et al., 2017; Yusof et al., 2015), beach facilities (Chen and Bau, 2016; Marin et al., 2009; Mustapha and Awang, 2018; Roca and Villares, 2008) and restaurants (Kim et al., 2013; Sarmiento and El Hanandeh, 2018; Yu et al., 2018). However, excluding the hotel industry, there is a gap in literature and the need to better understand if green practices influence consumers' choices and behavioral intentions emerges. Additionally, Myung et al. (2012) conducted a comprehensive review of environmentally related research articles published in major hospitality journals addressing the need for "deeper looks into consumer behavior of going green". Even if a lot of research focuses on consumers' behavior in the hospitality industry, these studies often found contradictory results. Thus, the need

to further explore pro-environmental behavior in tourism facilities. This section develops a series of hypotheses, which aim at reducing this gap employing previous literature dealing with the application of green practices and consumers' behavioral intentions in different tourism facilities. Employing previous studies on consumers' behavior in hospitality as theoretical background of the study, the Section provides the foundation for the formulation of the structural model that was employed to test hypothesis in the specific context of beach clubs. Model constructs were then adapted from hospitality literature dealing with guest environmental concern, guest eco-friendly attitude, guest satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

2.1. Environmental concern

Mat Said et al. (2003) define environmental concern as a belief, stance and the degree of concern an individual hold towards the environment. Environmental concern has been defined also as the degree of emotionality a person is attached to environmental issues (Chan and Lau, 2000). Additionally, concern about environmental issue has been found as pivotal in consumers decision to support efforts to solve them and/or indicate the willingness to contribute personally to their solution (Dunlap and Jones, 2002). Previous research has identified environmental concern as significant in predicting environmental friendly behavior (Choi et al., 2009; do Paço and Raposo, 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). and as a major factor in consumers pro-environmental decision-making process (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Han et al., 2018; Han and Hwang, 2015; Han and Yoon, 2015; Hu et al., 2010). Moreover, Hedlund (2011) study shows that consumers environmental concern has a positive effect on the stated willingness to accept economic sacrifices to protect the environment.

This connection is also established in tourism research, as to a greater environmental concern corresponds a positive attitude toward facilities committed to sustainability, expressed by an higher importance allocated to green practices (Chen and Tung, 2014; Wearing et al., 2002; Yusof et al., 2015). Additionally, research has shown that environmental concern has a significant influence on the way customers evaluate green practices implemented in the hospitality industry (Yusof et al., 2015). Finally, in the context of hospitality, environmental concern is often considered as an indirect determinant of consumers' satisfaction (Bamberg, 2003; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). However, the relationship between environmental concern and consumers purchasing behavior is not so clear (Bohdanowicz, 2006). Some researcher suggests that environmental concern does not always translate into environmentally responsible behavior. Environmental concern often has been criticized of not being perfectly correlated with actual behavior (Hedlund, 2011).

Bearing in mind these considerations and since environmental concern has been found as an important antecedent of an individual's eco-friendly purchasing behavior, we hypothesize that the level of guest environmental concern has a significant impact on guest positive attitude toward green practices(H1), on green practices performances evaluation (H2), and on guest satisfaction (H3).

H1. Guest environmental concern influences their positive attitude toward green practices.

H2. Guest environmental concern influences their performance evaluation of green practices.

H3. Guest environmental concern influences their satisfaction with the Beach Club.

2.2. Guest attitude towards beach club green practices

In the context of service industry there is general consensus in considering guest attitude and perceived performance of service attributes as crucial in the formation of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Boulding et al., 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Considering tourism facilities, this link is well established (Albayrak and Caber, 2015; Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Baker and Crompton, 2000). Attitude can be defined as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen 1991, p. 188), and its analysis is crucial as it guides consumer behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975, p. 7). In the hospitality industry, guest attitude toward green practices is the "predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner towards green efforts by suppliers" (Hashim et al., 2013). In the specific context of this work, attitude is expressed as the importance assigned by beach club guests to the green practices implemented by the hotel (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Green practices are those implemented to reduce the environmental impact of the service provided, and mainly refer to energy, water, waste, and resources management (Ham and Han, 2013; Kim et al., 2017a, b). Considering this relationship, we test weather a positive attitude is significant in defining attributes performance.

H4. Guest attitude towards beach club green practices influences guest evaluation of their performances

Customer satisfaction, defined as the cognitive difference between expectations and actual performance after experiencing the service, is crucial for a successful delivery of a service (Chiu et al., 2014; Oliver, 1977). It is a function of both expectations related to certain important attributes and evaluation of attributes performance (Kano et al., 1984; Kuo et al., 2010; Oliver, 1993). The identification of areas that are important for customers and poorly implemented by firms are crucial for service improvement (Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004; Martilla and James, 1977) and, as a consequence, to deliver a successful service. Previous research has suggested that the positive attitude toward green practices such as the use of energy savings lights or of local and eco suppliers, is significant in contributing to overall satisfaction (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Prud'homme and Raymond, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2017). Environmental practices are then considered as excitement attributes that may contribute to hospitality industries competitiveness (Slevitch et al., 2013). When considering a beach club awarded with the ecolabel, we might expect guest with a stronger attitude toward green practices that may contribute to a greater satisfaction with the service provided. For this reason, we test the following hypothesis:

H5. Guest attitude toward beach club green practices influences guest satisfaction with the beachclub

Guest eco-friendly attitude has been identified as significantly associated with their positive behavioral intentions for green tourism facilities (Han et al., 2011). Also when considering green practices, guest expectations for staying in a green facility (Lee et al., 2011) and guest attitude toward eco-friendly practices have been often shown as significant in determining guest loyalty with the facility (Baker et al., 2013; Chen and Tung, 2014; Han et al., 2010; Han and Kim, 2010). However, other scholars have suggested that a positive attitude is not always enough to determine guest willingness to pay a premium price (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Guest attitude has also been identified as a significant moderator in the relationship between green practices and loyalty (Yusof et al., 2015). To better understand the nature of this relationship we test if guest attitude toward green practices has a significant relationship with guest loyalty with the beach club. The following hypothesis is tested:

H6. Guest attitude toward beach club green practices influences guest loyalty with the beach club

2.3. Beach club green practices performance

Scholars have widely debated on the relationship between service attributes and customer satisfaction in lodging industries (Albayrak and

Caber, 2015;Anderson and Mittal, 2000), but little research exists dealing specifically on the relation between sustainable attributes and guests' satisfaction (Han et al., 2011; Yusof et al., 2017). Green attributes have been identified as facilitating attributes and influential in the formation of guests' satisfaction. Environmental practices are then considered as excitement attributes that may contribute to tourism firms competitiveness (Slevitch et al., 2013). When the service is delivered successfully, guests are more satisfied with green than non-green tourism facilities. Thus, green practices have a positive effect on satisfaction as long as there is no service failure (Gao and Mattila, 2014; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010a, b). This thesis has been supported also by Kassinis and Soteriou (2015), suggesting that a higher level of customer satisfaction is reached when service quality and environmental practices are delivered jointly (Kassinis and Soteriou, 2015). Customer satisfaction was also identified as partially mediating between corporate social responsibility activities and firms performances (Lee and Heo, 2009). The level of implementation of environmental management practices in the hospitality industry has been proven to enhance market performances, thanks to the positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty, in contexts were consumers are always demanding more corporate social responsibility initiatives (Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003). Other studies have proved that the vast majority of green practices, such as the use of energy savings lights or of local and eco suppliers, were tested to have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, results suggest that a positive impact on satisfaction does not necessarily lead to a higher revisit intention, and that consumers' preferences may vary significantly according to nationalities (Berezan et al., 2013a, b). Also other studies provide findings that green practices are particularly appreciated by tourists (Oroian et al., 2014), enhancing customer satisfaction (Han and Kim, 2010). Other authors suggest a positive relationship between the introduction of an environmentally sustainable supply chain management and customer satisfactions in the hospitality sector (Bruns-smith et al., 2015; Xu and Gursoy, 2015). As their findings suggest, the implementation of good environmental practices in the hospitality industry may increase firms' competitiveness through a higher customer satisfaction. This paper examines whether the use of environmental good practices lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction in beach clubs.

Considering tourism facilities' green attributes, scholars suggest that, without service failures, they positively contribute to enhance customer satisfaction (Gao and Mattila, 2014; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003; Kim et al., 2017a, b; Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010a). Therefore, together with the other service attributes, the implementation of green practices in the tourism industry has been identified as significant in improving guest experience and, as a consequence, the level of satisfaction with the service (Berezan et al., 2013a; Bruns-smith et al., 2015; Gao and Mattila, 2014; Han and Kim, 2010; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2015, 2003; Lee and Heo, 2009; Oroian et al., 2014; Verma and Chandra, 2017, 2016; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2015, 2017). Therefore, the paper hypothesizes that green practices performance has a significant impact on guest overall satisfaction:

H7. Green practices performance influences guest satisfaction with the beach club

As for customer satisfaction, environmental practices in hospitality industries are a mean to improve customer loyalty (Gao et al., 2016), and therefore a main driver of profitability and revenues growth (Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003). Some scholars suggest that guests are more likely to patronize when facilities adopt environmentally responsible practices, pointing a positive relationship between green facilities and customer loyalty (Choi et al., 2009; Yusof et al., 2015). Expected outcome of staying in green facilities was also find to have a positive influence on both revisit intention and word of mouth (Lee et al., 2010, 2011). Other studies reinforce the hypothesis that green practices positively contribute to revisit intention (Berezan et al., 2013a, b) and more generically to guest loyalty (Xu and Gursoy, 2015). Recent studies have identified a positive link between green practices and guest loyalty, suggesting that firms' environmental commitment has a positive influence on both revisit intention and positive word of mouth (Berezan et al., 2013a; Gao et al., 2016; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2015, 2017).

Considering the previous discussion, beach club with a higher rate of commitment toward green practices will experience greater customer willingness to return and positive word of mouth. Thus, the paper tests the following hypothesis:

H8. Green practices performance influences guest loyalty with the beach club

2.4. Guest satisfaction as a significant antecedent of guest loyalty

Customer satisfaction is considered as a significant antecedent of customer loyalty (Boulding et al., 1993). This link is also highlighted in tourism research (Chi and Qu, 2008; Gallarza and Saura, 2006; Kandampully et al., 2003; Lee and Heo, 2009; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Also when dealing specifically with sustainability in hospitality, recent studies point out that a greater satisfaction with tourism facilities implementing green practices generates greater guest loyalty (Gao et al., 2016; Gao and Mattila, 2014; Han and Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2017a, b; Lee and Heo, 2009; Martínez García de Leaniz, 2015; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Prud'homme and Raymond, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2017). Therefore, the paper hypothesizes that customer satisfaction with the beach club is a significant antecedent of guest loyalty:

H9. Guest satisfaction is a significant antecedent of guest loyalty with the beach club

Fig. 1 provides a graphical description of the hypotheses tested in the model.

3. Research methods

3.1. Measures and questionnaire

The questionnaire was built through a three-step procedure. First, we identified measurement scales after an in-depth literature review. Items were adapted both from hospitality studies measuring guest evaluation green practices in both the lodging industry (Bastič and Gojčič, 2012; Hsiao et al., 2014; Robinot and Giannelloni, 2010b; Yusof et al., 2014) and other tourism facilities (Chen and Teng, 2016; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Lucrezi et al., 2016; Minoli et al., 2015). Measures of satisfaction and loyalty were collected from studies dealing with consumers' behavior in hospitality (Han and Yoon, 2015; Lee et al., 2010; Minoli et al., 2015; Xu and Gursoy, 2015). Additionally, considering the specificity of the beach club ecolabel, items were integrated with the specific requirements of the ecolabel criteria. Once prepared the first version of the measurement scales, a semi-structured interviews with the beach club manager and Legambiente Turismo (the NGO that release the ecolabel) were conducted. The aim of the interviews was twofold: the first one was to leveraging on the expertise of the management to provide a measurement scale well-suited to the context of the beach club; next was to allow both the management and the NGO to get insights on the research and to get involved on it (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004). Finally, the questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 30 Beach club guests (Castellanos-Verdugo et al., 2015). Only minor changes to clarify the wording of sentences were made. The final questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first measures guests' level of environmental concern. The second and the third sections aimed at measuring guests' attitude and performance evaluation towards beach club green practices. The fourth section

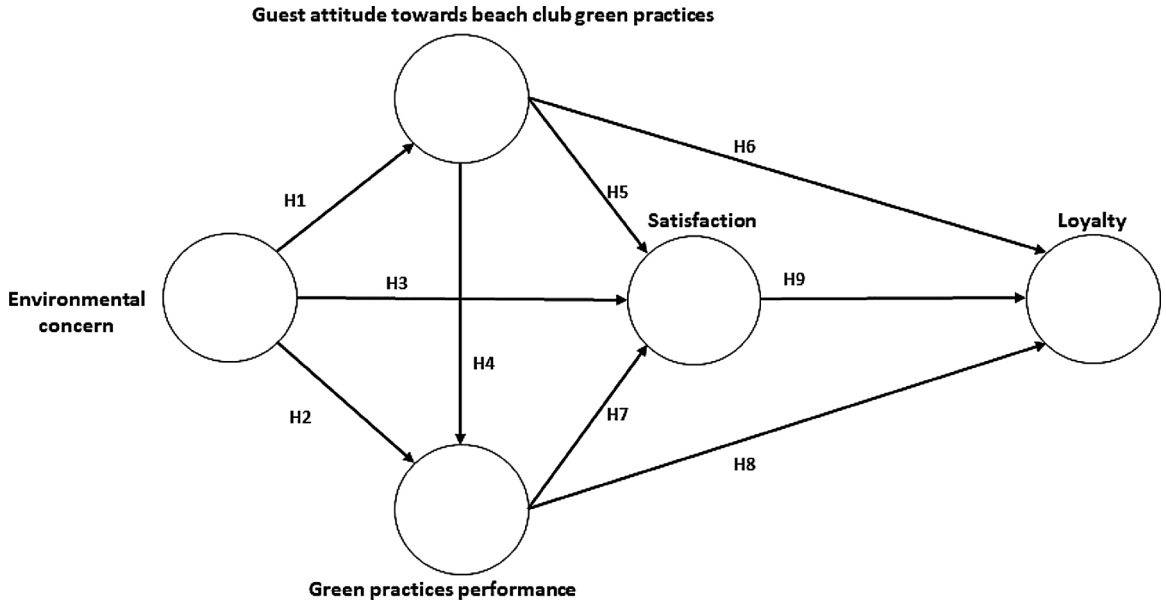

Fig. 1. Theoretical model and hypotheses.

consisted of four items to measure the overall satisfaction and loyalty. Items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The final section included guests' general information (age, gender, duration of the stay, type of trip) and their level of concern with respect to environmental issues. Table 2 lists the items employed in the measurement scales (constructs) and their respective mean values.

3.2. Data collection and data analysis

The survey was conducted during June 2017, in a beach club awarded with the Legambiente Turismo Ecolabel located in the Italian region of Lazio. After the deletion of 10 responses because of incomplete data, we obtained 150 usable responses that were employed for the subsequent analysis. PLS-SEM modeling was chosen to estimate the structural equation models and to test the hypotheses. SmartPLS (V.3.2.6) software was employed to build models and assess their validity (Ringle et al., 2015). This particular method has been used to analyze structural research models in recent studies in the field of hospitality and tourism (Ali et al., 2018). As suggested by Hair et al. (2017) the multivariate skewness and kurtosis was assessed using the software available at: https://webpower.psychstat.org/models/kurtosis. The results showed that the data was not multivariate normal, Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 2.945$, $p < 0.01$) and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis ($\beta = 33.507$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, SmartPLS was used as the analysis method.

Reasons to use PLS-SEM include its ability to test complex models under conditions of non-normality and smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2014).

4. Results

Table 1 provides the main characteristics of respondents. About 54% of respondents were females, while males were 46%. Most respondents are in the age range 30–39 (22.7%) and 50–59 (22.7%), and only 5.3% aged over 70. The composition of the sample per level of education shows that there is a high proportion of clients interviewed with a high school education level (42%), 43.3% of university graduates, followed by 8% of postgraduate courses and 6.7% consisting of primary school. The large majority were in couple (39%), 27.5% with friends, 14.7% with children, 14.2% indicated the other option and only 4.6% is represented by individual customers.

Table 1
Characteristics of respondents, type of traveler and purpose of stay.

Variable	Range	Percentage
Gender	*Female*	54%
	Male	46%
Age	*18–29*	19.3%
	30–39	22.7%
	40–49	19.3%
	50–59	22.7%
	60–69	10.7%
	Over 70	5.3%
Type of customer	*Single*	4.6%
	Couple	39%
	Family	14.7%
	Friends	27.5%
	Other	14.2%
Education level	*Primary school*	6.7%
	High school	42%
	University	43.3%
	Master or PhD	8%
Number of visits in the last year	*First time*	17.3%
	2–3 times	20.7%
	4–10 times	35.3%
	> 10	26.7%

Subsequently, the number of visits to the "Grotta dei Delfini" in the last 12 months has been analyzed. The 35.3% of the respondents visited between 4 and 10 times the beach club in the last year, 26.7% more than 10 times, 20.7% 2–3 times, and 17.3% one time.

4.1. Assessment of the measurement model

Before proceeding with the measurement model evaluation, the relationship between constructs and indicators has been analyzed, in order to evaluate if the construct in the measurement model should be reflective or formative (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2006; Hair et al., 2014; Stacie et al., 2007). In this study, we followed the guidelines of Hair et al. (2014) as well as Jarvis et al. (2003), suggesting the choice of reflective constructs. The PLS-SEM evaluation consisted of a two-step procedure: the measurement model assessment followed by the structural model assessment. Table 2 shows the indicators outer loadings for

Table 2
Evaluation of items, constructs and measurement model.

Constructs/Indicators	Mean value	Loading
Environmental concerns - α = 0.833; CR = 0.923; AVE = 0.856		
Environmental sustainability is one of the main problems for today's society	6.43	0.914
Environmental sustainability is crucial for the long-term success of coastal and maritime tourism	6.37	0.937
Guest attitude towards beach club green practices - α = 0.807; CR = 0.859; AVE = 0.506		
It is important that the beach club is committed to the reduction and proper management of waste (e.g. separate waste collection, waste on the beach)	6.50	0.726
It is important that the beach club adopts water-saving practices (e.g. timing devices in showers)	6.18	0.773
It is important that the beach club adopts energy-saving practices (e.g. automatic switching-off of lights, LED lamps)	6.12	0.660
It is important that the beach club provides organic or seasonal food are available	5.54	0.613
It is important that the beach club is committed to reducing noise	6.14	0.683
It is important that the beach club is committed to the protection of the surrounding natural environment (marine and coastal ecosystems)	6.24	0.796
Beach club green practices performance - α = 0.782; CR = 0.840; AVE = 0.513		
The beach club is committed to the reduction and proper management of waste (e.g. separate waste collection, waste on the beach)	5.83	0.716
The beach club adopts water-saving practices (e.g. timing devices in showers)	5.81	0.741
The beach club adopts energy-saving practices (e.g. automatic switching-off of lights, LED lamps)	5.52	0.695
Organic or seasonal food are available	5.25	0.727
The beach club is committed to the protection of the surrounding natural environment (marine and coastal ecosystems)	5.46	0.701
Overall satisfaction - α = 0.916; CR = 0.960; AVE = 0.923		
I am satisfied with my experience in this Beach club	5.61	0.960
My expectations have been satisfied	5.35	0.961
Loyalty - α = 0.828; CR = 0.921; AVE = 0.853		
I would come back again in this Beach Club	5.54	0.929
I would recommend this Beach Club	5.12	0.918

the reflective constructs. Internal consistency reliability for all constructs is satisfactory, well above the suggested threshold of 0.7 for both Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. For all constructs, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the threshold value of 0.5, suggesting adequate convergent validity.

Next, discriminant validity was assessed. Table 3 shows that the square root of each AVE (shown on the diagonal) is greater than the related inter-construct correlations in the construct correlation matrix, indicating adequate discriminant validity for all the reflective constructs. In addition, Table 4 presents the recently introduced heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2016), as a better mean to assess the discriminant validity. If the HTMT value is greater than $HTMT_{.90}$ value of 0.90, there is a problem of discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4 all the values passed the $HTMT_{.90}$ indicating that discriminant validity is not an issue.

4.2. Assessment of the structural model

SmartPLS version 3.0 was used to test the structural model and hypotheses. A bootstrapping procedure with 5.000 iterations was performed to examine the statistical significance of the path coefficients. As PLS does not generate overall goodness-of-fit indices, a diagnostic tool – GoF measure – can be applied. The reported cut-off values for assessing the results of the GoF analysis include GoFsmall = 0.1; GoFmedium = 0.25; and GoFlarge = 0.36. For the model used in this study, a GoF value of 0.485 was calculated, indicating a very good model fit. However, it is noteworthy that GoF is not a validity tool; it is a diagnostic tool to indicate how well the collected data fits the proposed model (Henseler et al., 2016). Recently, Henseler et al., (2016) recommended applying the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as the only approximate model fit criterion. A value of 0 for SRMR would indicate a perfect fit and generally, an SRMR value less than 0.08 is recommended to be adequate for PLS path models. For this study the SRMR = 0.079 was observed, indicating an adequate model fit. Moreover, results of the hypotheses testing are shown in Fig. 2. The corrected R^2s refer to the explanatory power of the predictor variables on the respective construct. The model presents a weak accuracy, as it explains only 21.9% of the guest attitude toward green practices. The model has similar predictive accuracy (25.5%) in assessing guest evaluation of green practices performances. Considering Satisfaction and Loyalty the model has a greater accuracy, explaining roughly a half of the first construct variance (49.6%) and 65.9% of Loyalty variance.

The bootstrapping procedure indicates that six path coefficients are significant with a confidence interval of 95%. Considering Environmental Concern, it has a positive influence on both guest attitude towards beach club green practices and guests' evaluation of beach club green practices performance (H1 and H2). On the other hand, it has not a significant influence on guest satisfaction (H3). Guest attitude towards beach club green practices has a positive influence on the way they evaluate these practices (H4), but it has not a significant influence on satisfaction (H5) and loyalty (H7). When considering guest satisfaction and loyalty, the model shows that only performance evaluation is significantly contributing to their formation (H6 and H8). Finally, satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty (H9) (Table 5 and Fig. 2).

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity criteria.

	Environmental Concern	Guest attitude towards beach club green practices	Loyalty	Green practices performance	Satisfaction
Environmental Concern	**0.925**				
Guest attitude towards beach club green practices	0.468	**0.711**			
Loyalty	0.272	0.259	**0.924**		
Green practices performance	0.386	0.469	0.685	**0.678**	
Satisfaction	0.340	0.362	0.783	0.700	**0.961**

Table 4
HTMT discriminant validity criteria.

	Environmental Concern	*Guest attitude towards beach club green practices*	Loyalty	Green practices performance	Satisfaction
Environmental Concern					
Guest attitude towards beach club green practices	0.556				
Loyalty	0.320	0.288			
Green practices performance	0.485	0.562	0.850		
Satisfaction	0.385	0.380	0.898	0.832	

5. Discussion and implications

The study proposed a PLS-SEM model to explore the impact of green initiatives in a beach club awarded with a third party certified ecolabel. Based on previous research the paper tested the connections between guest environmental concern and attitude toward green practices, green practices performance evaluation, guest satisfaction and loyalty. Results provide theoretical and practical implications for understanding the determinants of behavioral intentions in ecolabel beach club. First, only a few studies have been conducted on these relationships, especially in the context of beach clubs. The study has significant implications for the beach club industry as it underlines that through high quality environmental performances it is possible to increase competitiveness thanks to a greater guests' delightment. Additionally, the study suggests to the organizations involved in the diffusion of Ecolabels that this tool is valuable in supporting a more sustainable coastal management. Our conceptual model successfully addresses these gaps and provide theoretical contribution to the environmentally related hospitality research, extending the previous research on the effects of environmental practices on customer satisfaction and loyalty and contributing to understanding the role of environmental concern and attitudes toward visiting ecolabel beach club.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Six out of the nine hypothesis presented were accepted, showing (H1) that guest concern toward environmental sustainability has a significant role in generating a positive attitude towards beach club green practices. These findings are consistent with previous researches (Chen and Tung, 2014; Jin and Lee, 2015; Lee et al., 2011; Yusof et al., 2015) that found environmental concern positively related to guest attitude toward visiting green hotels. In fact, Chen and Tung (2014) argue that: "as long as a consumer perceives a higher degree of environmental concern, he/she will take a more positive attitude toward visiting green hotels and behave accordingly". Additionally, research has shown that (H2) environmental concern has a significant influence on the way guest evaluate green practices implemented in the hospitality industry (Yusof et al., 2015). Thus, a higher level of environmental concern lead to positive evaluation of green practices implemented by tourism facilities (Rahman and Reynolds, 2017).

The third hypothesis, which proposes that (H3) guest environmental concern influences guest satisfaction with the beach club, was not supported. Thus, environmental concern alone does not directly influence guest satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of other behavioral studies that consider this construct as indirectly related to consumer satisfaction (Bamberg, 2003; Lee et al., 2010; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). Results also shows, that (H4) guest attitude towards hotel green practices has positive influence on the evaluation of their performances. Thus, it confirms that customers' perceptions of a service are a direct consequence of customers' attitudes (Boulding et al., 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Grönroos, 1984). Therefore, a greater importance allocated to green practices lead guests to better appreciate the beach club effort to reduce its impact on the surrounding ecosystem (Gao et al., 2016). The fifth hypothesis (H5) - Guest attitude towards hotel green practices influences guest satisfaction with the beach club –was not supported. This result probably arose because customer satisfaction is a function of both expectations related to certain attributes and evaluation of their performance (Kano et al.,

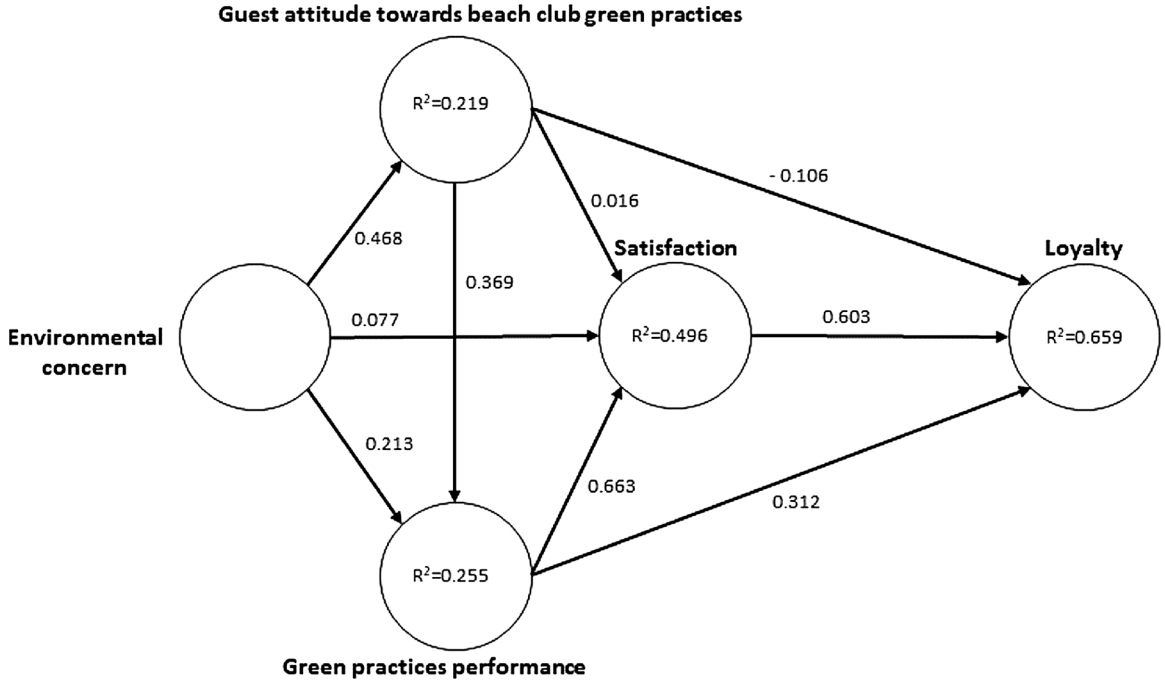

Fig. 2. Model with β for path coefficients and R^2 for the exogenous constructs.

Table 5
Model hypotheses statistics (bootstrapping) and endogenous constructs assessment (R2 and Q2).

Path coefficients and bootstrapping

Hypothesis		Original Sample	T Statistics	P-Values
H1	*Environmental Concern → Guest attitude towards beach club green practices*	0.468	6.098	0.000***
H2	*Environmental Concern → Green practices performance*	0.213	2.506	0.012**
H3	*Environmental Concern → Satisfaction*	0.077	1.004	0.315
H4	*Guest attitude towards beach club green practices → Green practices performance*	0.369	4.868	0.000***
H5	*Guest attitude towards beach club green practices → Satisfaction*	0.016	0.179	0.858
H6	*Guest attitude towards beach club green practices → Loyalty*	0.106	1.902	0.057
H7	*Green practices performance → Satisfaction*	0.663	9.763	0.000***
H8	*Green practices performance → Loyalty*	0.312	4.433	0.000***
H9	*Satisfaction → Loyalty*	0.603	8.102	0.000***

Endogenous constructs assessment

	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2
Guest attitude towards beach club green practices	0.219	0.214	0.098
Green practices performance	0.255	0.245	0.107
Satisfaction	0.496	0.485	0.429
Loyalty	0.659	0.652	0.531

*$p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.001$.
** $p < 0.01$.

1984; Kuo et al., 2010; Oliver, 1993). For this reason, positive attitudes alone are not able to significantly influence guest overall satisfaction that is also related to the actual experience in the beach club and so to the green practices performance. Results also lead to reject the hypothesis that (H6) guest attitude toward green practices is significant in determining guest loyalty with the facility. This finding is in contrast with previous scholars' findings that investigated this relationship in the context of the hotel industry (Baker et al., 2013; Chen and Tung, 2014; Han et al., 2010; Han and Kim, 2010). This may be because this relationship is influenced by the performance on green attributes, that in other studies was not considered.

In the context of tourism hospitality, previous studies have shown that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (Lee and Heo, 2009; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015). The study confirms that environmental-related practices have a significant role in contributing to satisfy beach club guests. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted in the hospitality industries, indicating that (H7) green practices have a significant influence on guest satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2013a; Bruns-smith et al., 2015; Gao and Mattila, 2014; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2015, 2003; Oroian et al., 2014; Verma and Chandra, 2017) and that green practices are part of service quality attributes in ecolabelled certified facilities (Han and Kim, 2010).

As well as for satisfaction, environmental-related activities are considered as antecedents of loyalty (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015). Survey findings confirm that (H8) beach club green practices have a significant effect on tourist loyalty (word of mouth and revisit intentions), which is coherent with scholars' findings in which consumers were more likely to patronize and demonstrate a strong loyalty for hotels that implement green practices (Berezan et al., 2013b; Choi et al., 2009; Kassinis and Soteriou, 2003; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2015, 2017).

The causal relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions was confirmed by the model assessment, validating previous research that revealed how (H9) customer satisfaction generated by green initiatives has a positive impact on revisit intentions and positive word of mouth (Gao and Mattila, 2014; Han and Kim, 2010; Lee and Heo, 2009; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Prud'homme and Raymond, 2013; Xu and Gursoy, 2015; Yusof et al., 2017).

5.2. Practical and managerial implications

Over the years, more and more tourism facilities are developing sustainability practices in managing their operations, not only to develop a more eco-friendly business environment but also to reduce their operating costs (Yi et al., 2018). Moreover, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of hospitality environmental impact and seems to appreciate green practices (Oroian et al., 2014) that enhance customer satisfaction (Han and Kim, 2010) and indirectly increase firms' competitiveness. Considering these phenomena, many tourism facilities have been proactive in adopting green practices to attract eco-consciousness consumers (Wang et al., 2018). Results suggest that green practices are recognized by guest as a specific dimension of service. Tourism facilities managers should consider this aspect when decide whether to implement or not green practices, as integrating them is seen by customers as an integral part of the service provided.

When applied practically within the tourism sector, the findings of the research should encourage tourism operators to consider their green initiatives as part of guests' experiences. Firstly, the study provides managers with guests' evaluation of green practices importance and performance, which may support them in allocating resources successfully. Results show that all green attributes are relatively important with scores over 6.00. Moreover, the performance evaluation of green practices is positive, even if with lower scores than those attributed to the importance, suggesting that the beach club could invest more in these practices. According to other studies investigating guest perceptions of green practices in tourism hospitality, consumers demand no longer basic eco-friendly practices but expected more from ecolabel tourism facilities and required their practices to be even more socio-environmentally responsible (Ogbeide, 2012). As Robinot and Giannelloni (2010a, b) pointed out, some environmental attributes are evaluated as "basic" and are seen as an integral part of the service offer, rather than as differentiating criteria. So practitioners have to look forward to innovative green practices as most of these practices are increasingly becoming commonplace (Rahman and Reynolds, 2016). This is notable for coastal tourism related facilities, which are more sensitive to environmental issues and are thus innovative adopters of sustainable practices (Reid et al., 2017).

Secondly, considering consumers' increasing attention to environmental sustainability associated with tourism activities, this study allows to estimate the role played by guest environmental concern and

attitudes towards green beach club in guests' purchase decisions-process. This aspect has important implications for the sustainable management of the beach club, because results confirm that consumers with a high level of environmental concern will be more likely to have a positive attitude towards green practices that can facilitate the choice of ecolabel facilities as opposed to regular one (Han et al., 2009; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007) and the development of positive behavioral intentions (Lee et al., 2011). It results the identification of a niche market that can be fostered by increasing customers' environmental concerns (Ham and Han, 2013) and by communicating to uninformed customers the negative impacts that non- environmentally certified hotel companies have on the environment (Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). The strategy for undertaking this path is to engage in environmental campaigns and green marketing (Dodds and Holmes, 2016), but also invest in advertisement on existing sustainability programs (Ham and Han, 2013), such has the ecolabels ones. Managers may also collaborate with governments or local authorities to raise tourists' awareness by informing and educating them on the environmental impact of the tourism sector (Chen and Tung, 2014; Yusof et al., 2017). Nevertheless, our findings suggest that the relationship between environmental concern and guest attitudes with satisfaction and loyalty needs to be mediated by the actual experience of beach club green practices in order to be significant. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting an inconsistency between guest environmental attitudes and their actual behavior (Baker et al., 2013).

Thirdly, while the relationships among green practices importance, performance, satisfaction and behavioral intentions have been widely analyzed in hotels' studies (Berezan et al., 2014), similar research is missing in the field of sustainable beach club. Our results suggest that beach club green practices performance influence satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. Additionally, guest satisfaction has been identified as a significant antecedent of loyalty towards the beach club that implements sustainable practices. These findings are consistent with Kassinis and Soteriou (2015), indicating that when green practices are integrated within the service they contribute to increase customer satisfaction, and with Berezan et al. (2013a, b) suggesting that green attributes enhance guests' intention to return.

From a practical standpoint, green beach club managers should pursue the excellence in green management shaping customers' positive evaluations (Han and Kim, 2010). The effect of sustainability practices on guest loyalty implies that tourist facilities that implement environmental practices can benefit from a competitive advantage over the conventional one (Han et al., 2009). In literature, it has also been stated that customers, concerned about environmental issues, show a greater degree of willingness to pay for the additional costs of green practices (Choi et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2017a, b). This aspect is still debated in literature, as other researchers (Chia-Jung and Pei-Chun, 2014; Kim and Han, 2010; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007) argue that customers may not be always ready to pay more for green facilities.

However, environmentally friendly practices are not a sufficient condition to generate satisfaction, as guests are not prepared to experience lower level of service quality for stay in green facilities (Han and Kim, 2010). Also Tsai and Tsai (2008) stated that even eco-friendly consumers in actual purchase situations mainly consider the price, appearance, and functionality before checking the environmental status of a product. Nonetheless, Chia-Jung and Pei-Chun (2014) have pointed out that guest can accept, in some circumstances, a compromise when service quality is impacted to mitigate the environmental impact. In this regard, practitioner should promote the green image of the facilities (Gao and Mattila, 2014; Han et al., 2011; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017), to support, in their choices, environmentally conscious tourists (Han et al., 2009). Additionally, they should concentrate their efforts in finding innovative ways to involve consumers in green programs as discounts and frequent guest points (Berezan et al., 2014). In this context, certifications, as the one considered in this study (Legambiente Turismo), can be effective ways to design a green image and to assure customers on the efforts made toward environmental sustainability (Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2017). These efforts can help to reassure customers that the premium price they pay is justified by the true value of the green product or service (Kim and Han, 2010).

6. Limitations and future research

The study presents some limitations to be pointed out. First, data were obtained from a beach club, which is a peculiar tourism facility, typical of Mediterranean countries, that has not been widely investigated by scholars. Other limitations relate to sample size and convenience sampling, as we have selected only one beach club, analyzing 150 questionnaires, which is a small sample, so scholars need to be careful in generalizing the results. Thus, the hypotheses were developed mainly from studies that investigated other types of accommodations, like i.e. hotels. Nevertheless, the common nexus of green practices in the hospitality industry has led to develop a solid theoretical background to contextualize the research. Secondly, the respondents to the survey questionnaires are Italian beach club guests, and thus generalizing the findings to other geographic locations may be difficult. Future studies might consider how people having different demographic characteristics perceive green practices and their effect on satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Additionally, the measure for behavioral intention in this study is only related to word of mouth (WOM) and intentions to revisit, so willingness to pay (WTP) may be considered in next researches. In order to obtain more generalizable considerations, the scope of the research may be extended to other beach clubs with similar certifications or to non-certified beach clubs. This may represent a starting point to better understand how guests react to sustainable activities implemented in beach clubs and, more in general, in coastal tourism destinations. Next, as service quality is a multi-attribute construct, the scope of the survey should be extended to the other beach club service attributes together with those linked to environmental sustainability. This would support both researchers and practitioners to better understand the simultaneous effect of green attributes, together with other service quality attributes, in the formation of customers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Finally, further research may investigate if and how the ecolabel certification represents an added value for beach club guests, contributing to stimulate positive behavioral intentions and a positive attitude toward ecolabel tourism facilities.

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