PROJECT TITLE: Consumers’ Perceptions of Sustainable Practices in a Luxury Accommodation Context

FIELD OF RESEARCH CODE: 1505; 1506

PROJECT SYNOPSIS:
Sustainable luxury was long considered an oxymoron, until recent shifts in the hospitality industry responding to trends in luxury took sustainable travel from niche to necessary. However, with the luxury industry expanding into new markets that include the affluent and socially-conscious millennial generation, sustainable luxury propositions are becoming the norm (Positive Luxury, 2016). According to literature (e.g., Kathuria, 2013; Torelli et al., 2012; Wong and Dhanesh, 2016), maintaining an elite market presence and exclusive branding while staying socially and environmentally responsible creates uncomfortable tensions for luxury brands. This is because sustainability entails self-transcendent values such as equality, moderation, and universalism, while luxury brands relate to self-enhancement values such as elitism, hedonism, and extravagance (Wong and Dhanesh, 2016; 2017).
The luxury hotel industry is no exception to the shift to more sustainable luxury, with hotels increasingly promoting environmentally sustainable product developments and service practices (e.g. organic soaps, reducing energy usage, reusing towels) as well as socially responsible activities (e.g. charitable donations, supporting NGOs, development opportunities for underprivileged individuals) (Eom, Park and Jin, 2019). There currently is a dearth of research on consumer perceptions of sustainability practices in hotels (often in the context of green hotels) (e.g. Lee et al, 2010, Han and Kim, 2010, Wu et al, 2016). Such studies have highlighted the importance of sustainability practices in the hotel industry and the widely beneficial contributions of such practices to the economy (e.g. Dos Santos et al, 2017; Jurigova et al, 2016, environment (e.g. Dos Santos et al, 2017; Horng et al, 2017) and society (e.g. Ghaderi et al, 2019; Singal and Rhou, 2017; Yim et al, 2019). Sustainability has generally also been perceived favourably by potential and existing patrons of hotels. Sustainable hotels have been found to be perceived as of high quality (e.g. Aznar et al., 2016; Verma and Chandra, 2018), elicit more positive attitudes (e.g. Hall et al, 2016; Line et al, 2016) and intentions (e.g. Cozzio et al, 2018; Hall et al, 2016).

However, to date, only few studies have been conducted in the context of luxury hotels (e.g. Peng and Chen, 2019). In the luxury context, there are mixed positions on how sustainability practices impact on quality perceptions. In fact, studies such as Dekhili and Achabou (2016), Beckham and Voyer (2014), and Cervellon and Shammas (2013) have indicated that consumers could associate the notion of sustainable luxury with lower quality. This is especially true when sustainable practices involve the most important intrinsic cues for judging quality, such as the materials used to make the product (Dekhili and Achabou, 2016). Furthermore, consumers are increasingly aware of ‘greenwashing’ practices and have begun to regard sustainability practices, particularly that of luxury corporations, with a greater degree of scepticism (Chen and Chang, 2013; Ponnapureddy et al., 2017), and see sustainable luxury accommodation as no longer being superior to their non-luxury counterparts, unable to evoke the image of exclusivity and compromising of the indulgences normally associated with luxury hotels (e.g. Peng and Chen, 2019). Nevertheless, the importance of sustainability practices in the luxury hotel industry is irrefutable and the benefits to the economy, environment and society are profound. Therefore, it is imperative that more studies are conducted to better understand consumer perceptions of sustainable luxury hotels to provide an impetus to the industry to develop their sustainability strategies.

The current project aims to understand consumer perception of sustainability and how it impacts consumers’ behaviour in the context of luxury hotel. In particular, the study aims to investigate the impact of sustainable practices (green practices and community causes) on customers’ perceived sustainability, perceived quality, attitudes and behavioural intentions as well as willingness to pay a premium. This experimental study will comprise self-report measure, paired with a biometric (facial electromyography) is crucial to mitigate the effects of social desirability bias.

FEASIBILITY AND RESOURCING – DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT THIS PROJECT WILL RECEIVE:

The current project spans across two of the School of Marketing’s key research strengths: tourism and luxury marketing. The successful candidate will not only have access to the supervisory team who are members of the Luxury Branding Research Cluster and/or Tourism Research Cluster but also have the opportunity to interact with other academics within the research groups. This will also give them access to the regular seminars and workshops that the clusters organise as well as their extensive industry networks.

CRICOS Provider Code: 00301J
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT/ PROGRAM FOR THE ENROLLING SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION:

The current project will contribute to the research output which falls under the Faculty of Business and Law’s “The sustainable development of tourism in Australia and around the world” as well as the “Understanding how brands can better engage with consumers” programs of research. It also extends on the current research on tourism and luxury marketing, conducted by members of the Luxury Branding Research Cluster and the Tourism Research Cluster. In the long run, this project has potential to yield high quality publications falling under both the 1505 and 1506 FoR codes and contribute to the submission for the aforementioned FoR codes in the upcoming ERA. The topic of this project further aligns with Curtin’s vision of a future-focused university with sustainability featuring as one of its key pillars in its strategic plan.

Students must express interest in this scholarship opportunity by emailing the Project Lead listed below. Please provide a copy of your current curriculum vitae and detail your suitability to be involved in this strategic project.

PROJECT LEAD CONTACT:

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