Factors of adoption of eco-labelling in hotel industry

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to understand the reasons why hoteliers adopt an eco-label, but also to identify the factors that may call into question this choice in a context where the environmental pressures are multiple and strong. The article analyzes the whole process of adopting an eco-label from the knowledge phase to the confirmation phase to a posteriori. By integrating different diffusion, neo-institutional and entrepreneurial approaches, the model makes it possible to identify all the motives, attitudes, norms and mechanisms of adoption and factors that can reverse this choice. Using a non-parametric quantitative methodology on a sample of 182 French hotels, we can explain the probability of adopting an eco-label and reversing its decision. The choice of adoption is explained by attitude towards risk, and ability to enact eco-label, two dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, but also by mimetic institutional pressure. For institutions that have not yet adopted the certification, the intention to change its choice depends on normative and mimetic pressures, and entrepreneurial characteristics (like risk-taking, fear of bureaucracy). For certificated hotels, the complexity of the certification system is decisive in the choice of abandoning the certification while positive attitude towards environmental logic and pressures of the reference group help maintain the previous adoption.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s and the Rio conference it has been recognized that the production and consumption patterns of so-called developed countries are responsible for pollution and depletion of natural resources. This mode of development is unsustainable. As a result, environmental policies have gradually shifted towards product and consumption-oriented policies, primarily targeting the use and garbage phases towards preventive solutions. The policies should more aim to modify the consumption choices. Within this framework, information to consumers is very important and eco-labels are a type of information that can influence consumer choices. Established in 1992 by the European Commission, the European Ecolabel or Ecolabel aims to encourage producers to market products that are more environmentally friendly.

Tourism, more than any other activity, demands a preserved environment. Consumers, in search of ecological holidays, are increasingly demanding. In December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2017 the International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development and UNWTO was designated to lead its implementation. According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism is: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, responding to the needs of visitors, professionals, the environment and host communities.". Taking the opportunity of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017, the Government of the Philippines and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) organized the 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics in Manila from 21 to 24 June 2017 with the issue of measuring sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism is becoming increasingly relevant in national agendas for promoting economic growth, social inclusion and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. Indeed, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted several resolutions recognizing the role of tourism in sustainable development, including the Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The question of sustainable tourism is fundamental; this sector is in full growth and attractive. There are different forms of sustainable tourism: ecotourism, fair tourism, solidarity tourism, responsible tourism and solidarity tourism. This development is in line with the changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the various players in the tourism sector and, in the first place, of tourists (Diallo et al., 2015).

The principle of labeling, promoted in Europe by the public authorities in order to structure and promote an environmentally friendly offer is spreading in the tourism sector. In Europe, hotels, campsites, bed & breakfasts, guesthouses, holiday villages are increasingly adopting an Ecolabel; Over the last ten years, the number of members...
has increased by more than 15% per year for the green keys label and by more than 25% for the European Ecolabel of tourist accommodation and camping services created in 2003. These labels take into account the environmental impacts of the establishments and aim at reducing energy and water consumption and waste.

Many researchers define a tourism eco-label as “any form of certiﬁcation giving assurance that the transaction or tourist activity is conducted according to a known standard that improves the environment or at least minimizes environmental impacts”.

Font (2005) defines eco-labels as “methods to standardize the promotion of environmental claims by following compliance to set criteria generally based on third party, impartial veriﬁcation usually by governments or non-proﬁt organizations”. The OECD (1991, p. 12) deﬁned ‘environmental labelling as “the voluntary granting of labels by a private or public body in order to inform consumers and thereby promote consumer products which are determined to be environmentally more friendly than other functionally and competitively similar products.” This deﬁnition positions the tourism eco-labels such as environmental management tools and quality control. They offer marketing beneﬁts to certiﬁed ﬁrms by helping consumers distinguish between sustainable tourism businesses and non-sustainable businesses through the eco-label.

A wide range of tourism producers or destinations can adopt Eco-labels if they want to deliver friendly environmental products and services, are committed to adopting sustainable practices and are able to mobilize resources needed to obtain eco-label certiﬁcation. This choice is strategic for tourism providers. It can even be a key factor for success, by enhancing the image of the service provider (Gountas et al., 2007; Khan and Khan, 2009), but also by improving these internal processes in terms of quality and efﬁciency (De Jorge and Suárez, 2014; Molina Azorín et al., 2014). It is a way to signal its responsible commitment and to induce virtuous behaviors among actors, customers or suppliers.

Eco-labelling is an instrument to increasing demand for environmentally preferable goods, which leads to a reduction of the environmental impacts of tourism. Eco-labels, is a type of eco-innovation marketing, are complementary to eco-innovative products, since they offer information on products’ quality and performance with respect to their environmental impacts. It is important to analyse the motives of adoption or abandon of eco label. Kijek (2015) citing Popp et al. 2010, pp. 899–910 noted that “the diffusion of eco-labelling programs has received much less attention compared to the diffusion of environmental technologies” and he also noted “if it exists a few papers that concerns the adoption of ecolabelling schemes by countries (Horne, 2009, pp. 175–182), the ﬁrm level analyses is forgotten”. We want to reduce this gap by explaining why a ﬁrm will adopt but also will abandon eco-label certiﬁcation. This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature by providing a theoretical and empirical analysis of the process of eco-labels’ adoption by accommodation establishments.

In this context, where the question of the safeguard of environment is crucial for the development of tourism activity, it is imperative to understand why tourism actors adopt these new practices or not.

We examine the adoption of ecolabel as eco-innovation. Rogers (2003) deﬁnes an innovation as “an idea, practice or objective that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” and diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system”. The article analyzes completely the process of adopting an eco-label from the knowledge phase of this certiﬁcation to the conﬁrmation phase a posteriori. By integrating diffusionist and neo-institutional and entrepreneurial approaches, we propose a model that makes possible to identify all the motives, attitudes, norms and mechanisms of adoption. Using, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) we are able to explain why ﬁrms can change of mind on this question of adoption. Why institutions that have not yet adopted the certiﬁcation, will intend to adopt this innovation? Why certiﬁcated hotels want to abandon? This intention will depend of norms, attitudes and entrepreneurial orientation.

It is a real improvement to identify motives for adoption of an environmental certiﬁcation and the factors explaining the intention to change of mind. Previous studies often focus only on advantages and disadvantages associated with ecolabels but do not explain individual choices that are also largely shaped by attitudes and norms facing the environmental issue. This study will make possible to understand the reasons for such a choice and the weight of environmentalist attitudes and norms in this choice. This study will also analyze the conﬁrmation phase of the choice, which is never studied. Why does a ﬁrm maintain or question its choices.

We use a sample of French ﬁrms to test our model, because France is one of the most important tourist destination. It is indeed one of the ﬁrst destinations in the world. France was visited by 83 million foreign tourists in 2016, making it the most popular tourist destination in the world. France ranks fourth in tourist spending behind the United States, China and Spain. Paris is one of the largest hotel complexes in the world, with 116,000 rooms, all of them standardized. For example 5 new luxury hotels were built in 2016 Roch Hotel, Renaissance Paris République. Adèle & Jules, Square Louvois et la Comtesse Tour Eiffel.

This model allows us to understand why and how fast hotels in France decide to adopt an eco-label. The entrepreneurial attitude is an important factor because French accommodation establishments are often managed by owners-directors.

This study was conducted by questionnaires sent to 7,000 French hoteliers. Using a non-parametric quantitative methodology, we can explain the likelihood of adopting an eco-label and changing its mind. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the ﬁrst part, we discuss individual and organizational determinants of eco-label certiﬁcation adoption and propose a synthetic model of adoption and intent. The second part is dedicated to the analysis of adoption patterns in the case of French Hotels with the presentation of results followed by a discussion.

2. Individual and organizational determinants for the adoption of eco-label certiﬁcation

We present individual and organizational determinants of eco-label certiﬁcation adoption and we build a synthetic model of adoption and intent to adopt. This section recalls the different theoretical approaches used to explain the phenomenon of adoption of an eco-label, both from an individual (2.1) and organizational (2.2) perspective.

2.1. Attitude and individual determinants for the adoption with the innovation diffusion model

The diffusion innovation model (DI) Rogers (1983, 1995) can explain the phenomena of the adoption and dissemination of various innovations. This model includes five phases: (1) the increasing knowledge about the innovation (its existence, how and why it is used), (2) the formation of an attitude towards innovation, (3) the choice to adopt it or not, (4) the implementation of innovation (5) conﬁrmation of the adoption decision (particularly by seeking information conﬁrming the position). Norms and values that promote innovation as well as the cohesion of the social group will also have a positive inﬂuence on the innovation’s adoption.

Le et al. (2006) use this model to explain the adoption of tourism ecocertiﬁcates by tourism businesses (Fig. 1).

We will retain our study phases (1), becoming aware of that newness and (2) the formation of an attitude towards innovation, especially from its perceived technological features.
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