

# The Use Of Green Star Certificates As A Marketing Tool On Hotel Websites

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## Abstract

Environmental sensitivity is one of the main expectations of customers. Increase in the awareness of customers causes companies to become more sensitive. Green star certification for hotels is one of the many applications of this understanding. In this study, websites of all green star hotels in Turkey were evaluated for content. Furthermore, this study tried to find out the usefulness of green star certification as a marketing tool. The main aim of the study is to research the visibility of green star certificates on websites in terms of attracting potential environment sensitive customers. The data obtained was evaluated by SPSS statistical programme, and frequency tables and cross tables (according to company type and class) were drawn out. Based on the findings of this study, hotel establishments do not use green star certificates as a marketing tool on their websites. It was suggested that hotels should use green star certificates more efficiently by putting them on their websites so as to attract potential environment sensitive customers.

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**Keywords:** Green star, eco-friendly, website, internet, tourism

## Introduction

Increase in environment sensitive customers causes companies to be sensitive as well. The pressure on non-governmental organizations and the resulting competition (Claver et al., 2007) is also important in this situation. This concept implies more environment centred practises, making companies plan as such. Hence, hotel management practises must embrace sustainable tourism and protect the so called green hoteliers. Also, hotel establishments must show concern for green practises and label themselves as green hotels so as to attract potential customers. Green marketing practises help hotels to save energy and reduce solid waste. Therefore green hotels contribute to sustainability.

The use of green marketing concept started in the late 1980's (Pattie & Crane, 2005; Chen, 2010). Green Hotels Association was founded in 1993 in order to spread environmental awareness to all hotels worldwide. Hotels such as Hilton, Marriott, IHG, Accor, Wyndham, and Sheraton invest in "green" certificated products aiming to reduce energy and water consumption. For example, Hilton management's aim is to reduce carbon emission, energy consumption, and solid waste by 20% by investing in terms of "sustainability". This hotel management emphasizes that the use of renewable energy will be the main subject in the different premises. Marriot International Hotel chain aims to reduce energy consumption by 25% per room by 2017 in Marriot, Renaissance, Courtyard, and Residence Inn hotels. Chain hotels worldwide aiming to have green certificated hotels has accelerated green transformation in the accommodation sector.

Patricia Griffin, head of Green Hotelier Association, stated that green hotel practises is not only applicable to hotel establishments business. She emphasized that raising customers' awareness of "green travel" is also essential (Tsai & Tsai, 2008; <http://www.dhdanismanlik.com/blog-detail.asp?tid=53#.VP8HbeFDFZ8>). Culture and Tourism Ministry of Turkish Republic has formed a rating system based on international criteria. Thus, the Green Star Certification System has been in use since 1993 (<http://www.dhdanismanlik.com/blog-detail.asp?tid=53#.VP8HbeFDFZ8>). There are 8 basic criteria in the classification form, which have to be fulfilled by accommodation establishments who request certification. The criteria involves having an action plan and environment policy, existence of a duty member to implement action plan or contract with a professional, increase in environment awareness, educating staff on action plan, having waste water plan, having registries of installations and equipment as well as periodic maintenance and reparation, measurement of water consumption, energy consumption on heating and cooling, observing chemicals and amount of waste, and collecting the data. Green Star certificate is given with an evaluation of 122 criteria having different points. Hotels will be awarded a Green Star as long as they maintain a minimum point varying according to the number of stars. This is also based on whether it is a beach or city hotel. The hotels awarded with Green Star certificates can have a green painted star plate in front of their hotels engraved with "Environment Friendly" (Kofteoglu, 2014).

The research related to green hoteliers show that it empowers corporate image and increases "preferability." Consequently, this study aims to determine if hotels in Turkey use green star certification as an efficient marketing tool on their websites.

## Literature

Some of the researches on green hotels is related to pricing green hotel practises (Kasim, 2004; Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Han et al., 2009; Kim & Han, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2012; Lita et al., 2014; Shamsuddin, Abdullah & Wahab, 2014; Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). Lita et al. (2014) studied local tourists' attitudes towards green practises in hotels and restaurants in Indonesia-West Sumatra. They stated that these attitudes towards green behaviour affect the images of hotels and restaurants. They also stated that it affects revisiting intentions, positive word of mouth communication, and willingness to pay more on environment friendly practises. Shamsuddin, Abdullah & Wahab (2014) carried out a research titled "the influence of eco-friendly attitudes on the intention of customers from a certified green hotel." The findings indicated that the green hotel customer's eco-friendly attitudes toward green behaviour (ATGB) model are significantly associated with their expressed eco-friendly intentions to visit and pay more for a green hotel.

Environmental awareness, knowledge, and the positive attitudes of tourists are important factors in consuming green products (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; Yeh et al., 2003; Bohdanowicz, 2005; Bohdanowicz, 2006; Mostafa, 2006; D'Souza, Taghian, & Khosla, 2007; D'Souza, Taghian & Khosla, 2007; Tsai & Tsai, 2008; Do Paço, Raposo & Filho, 2009; Mehmetoglu, 2010; Chen & Peng, 2012; Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014).

According to Laroche, Bergeron & Barbaro-Forleo (2001), information affects customers' behavioural intention at all levels. Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun (2014) carried out a research titled "preferences and willingness to pay for green hotel attributes in tourist choice behaviour in Taiwan." In the course of the study, they found out that while tourists prefer luxury rooms and the provision of personal toiletries, they are also willing to accept reduced service quality. Chen & Peng (2012) carried out a research on green hotel knowledge and tourist staying behaviour. However, the findings showed that tourists with high knowledge (if they can afford to buy and if they have positive attitude about green hotels) tend to stay at green hotels if they have the ability and confidence. Apart from this fact, tourists who seem to have sufficient knowledge stated that green hotels offers more practical benefits than traditional hotels.

Some of the researches above and many more explains complex processes of purchasing green hotels' services (Han et al., 2009; Han & Kim, 2010; Lee, Han & Willson, 2011). Han et al. (2009) carried out a research on whether hotels customers' environment friendly decision is tied to age, gender, overall image, and green behaviours. They determined that overall image is a positive function of attitudes towards green behaviours and that

overall image significantly affects revisiting intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, and willingness to pay more. Similar to the study of Han et al. (2009), Martinez (2015) findings showed that a green overall image has a positively direct effect on green trust, green satisfaction, and green loyalty.

In another research about understanding the decision process, Han & Kim (2010) stated that revisiting intentions of green hotels' customers are affected by subjective norms. Subsequently, the revisiting intentions of tourists depend on positive or negative attitudes of the people around. Lee, Han & Willson (2011), with a view of green hotel customers, studied on defining expected results of accommodation and the relationship between defined factors and behavioural intention. They stated that the expected outputs of green hotel customers have positive effects on behavioural intention.

Chan (2013) carried out a research on the differences between hotel manager and customer perception of the relative importance of green marketing related activities. They found out that there are differences in perception of hotel managers and customers. In addition, they agreed on two subjects: internet is an important tool for green hotels to reach out directly to customers, and green hotels can elevate industry members' images and reputation to attract green tourists who demand green accommodation.

In a research on green marketing, Rosenbaum & Wong (2015) stated that green equity plays a significant role in customers' overall assessment of a hotel's marketing programs. However, the effect is weaker when compared with the other indicators, including a hotel's value proposition, brand image, and loyalty programs. Furthermore, the results reveal that tourists are willing to pay a price premium for a hotel's green marketing programs. Another research by Tanford & Malek (2015) relating to green marketing was carried out based on the reward programmes of green hotels. They concluded that green hotel customers' can be classified as low loyalty, spurious loyalty, eco-spurious loyalty, eco-latent loyalty, true loyalty, and eco-true loyalty. Furthermore, they suggested that green hotels should develop reward programs according to the above classification.

Literature in Turkey relates to green star practices (Seyhan & Yilmaz 2010; Giritlioglu & Guzel, 2015). Furthermore, green star practices has effects on revisiting intentions (Ozer, Kement & Gultekin, 2015), effects on perceived dignity (Aykan & Sevim, 2013), economic contributions (Mesci, 2014), perspectives according to demographic variables (Altunoz, Arslan & Hassan, 2014), and dimensions (Akbas, 2015). Thus, some of these researches evaluated green hotel practises via hotel's webpages.

Atay & Dilek (2013) inspected Ibis hotels green practises on their website, relating to green marketing and green hoteliers in tourism. Dogancili & Akbulut (2015) carried out a research titled "use of green

marketing on websites of hotels with green star.” They stated that hotels use their opening webpage to inform customers about environmental related subjects and present their certificates under the “rewards and certificates” page. However, they stated that many hotels that possess green star certification have no information about their certificates on their webpage.

## **Research**

### **Content, Importance, and Aim of the Research**

This research aims at determining whether green star certified hotels in Turkey use their green star certification on their webpages as a marketing tool. The expected benefits of this research include elucidating the importance of green star information on companies’ websites as a marketing tool. Another benefit is setting out the current status of green star hotels’ websites related use of it. As websites are prior information sources and customers’ environmental awareness increase, websites are important. Researches stating customers’ positive image on eco-friendly companies also emphasize the importance of the subject.

### **Method**

The population of the research is all companies with green star certified under the Turkish Republic Culture and Tourism Ministry (<http://yigm.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,9579/turizm-tesisleri.html>). Therefore, the number is 204 as of 2015. All the 204 websites evaluated cost no time and cost limitations. Content analysis was done with the criteria determined.

Content analysis is a qualitative method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying items or patterns. Therefore, content in the text or image was coded, classified, and summarized.

The criteria which were used in the content analysis are determined by researchers using other websites content analysis researches in literature. Evaluating six items (popup existence, existence on main page, position on main page, existence on subpages, information about green star, and green star links) is basically the only location of green star certification on the websites as well as the information provided. The obtained data was evaluated by SPSS 16.00 statistical program. A frequency analysis was done and is presented below. Tables below were designed based on criteria existence with yes/no options. Also, cross tables which is related to the type and classification of the company formed was presented in table 2 and 3.

## Findings

Table 1. Frequency Analysis

1. Type	N	%	2. Category	N	%
Boutique hotel	3	1,5	1.Class	1	0,5
Apart hotel	4	2	3 stars	4	2
Hotel	165	80,9	4 stars	39	19,1
Hotel and golf resort	2	1	5 stars	153	75
Special accommodation	2	1	Apart hotel	4	2
Holiday village	19	9,3	Boutique hotel	1	0,5
Thermal hotel	9	4,4	Special accommodation	2	1
Total	204	100	Total	204	100
3. Green star label			4. Pop up existence		
Yes	204	100	Yes	23	11,3
No	0	0	No	181	88,7
Total	204	100	Total	204	100
5. Existence on main page			6. Position on main page		
Yes	21	10,3	Top	11	52
No	183	89,7	Bottom	10	48
Total	204	100	Total	21	100
7. Existence on subpages			8. Information about green star		
Yes	1	0,5	Yes	21	10,3
No	203	99,5	No	183	89,7
Total	204	100	Total	204	100
9. Green star linkage					
Yes	1	0,5			
No	203	99,5			
Total	204	100			

As seen in table 1, 3 boutique hotels, 4 apart hotels, 165 hotels, 2 hotel and golf resorts, 2 special accommodation establishments, 19 holiday villages, and 9 thermal hotels websites were evaluated. As a result, most of the green star establishments were hotels (80.9%). When the classification of green star hotels was evaluated, it was found that 19.1 % were 4 star hotels, while 75 % were 5 star hotels. It was also determined that 204 hotels have green star certificates. When the presence of green star certification on the website homepage was assessed, it was seen that only 10.3 % of accommodation establishments had green star labels on their homepage, while 89.7 % of hotels had no green star label on their homepage. The existence of green star related popups on the websites was assessed and it was found that 11.3 % of establishments have popups, while 88.7 % of companies do not have. The position of green star labels on the websites was also inspected and it was found that 52 % were at the top of the page and 48 % were located at the bottom of the page. When subpages were inspected in terms of green star presence, it was found that it existed in only 1 hotel's webpage. It was observed that green star presence generally occurs in

“quality policy” with other certificates. In 89.7 % of hotels’ websites, no information concerning green star certification could be found. External links concerning green star certification on websites was also assessed. Thus, only 0.5 % of hotels’ websites had these links, whereas 99.5 % of hotels’ pages do not have.

Table 2. Type of Company and Green Star Relationship

Type of company	Apart hotel		Hotel		Holiday village		Thermal hotel		Special accommodation establishment		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pop up existence	1	0,5	14	6,9	2	1	6	2,9			23	11,3
Green star existence on main page	1	0,5	12	5,9	2	1	6	2,9			21	10,3
Green star existence on subpages			1	0,5							1	0,5
Green star information			19	9,3	1	0,5			1	0,5	21	10,3
Green star linkage			1	0,5							1	0,5

Table 2 shows the relationship between the type of company and green star. As it is shown in the table, hotels are the types that have most popup applications with 6.9 %. Also, it was determined that only 11.3 % of all companies have popup applications. Green star labels on homepages were determined in 1 apart hotel, 12 hotels, 2 holiday villages, and 6 thermal hotels. 10.3 % of all companies have green star labels on their homepages. The presence of green star labels on website subpages was evaluated. Therefore, it was found that it existed in only one hotel. Information relating to green star was also assessed, and it was found in 19 hotels, 1 holiday village, and 1 special accommodation establishment. Hence, only 10.3 % of companies had information about green star. Only one hotel had green star links on its website which was 0.5 % of all companies.

Table 3. Classification of Company and Green Star Relation

Classification of company	3 stars		4 stars		5 stars		Apart hotel		Special accommodation establishment		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pop up existence			5	2,5	17	8,3	1	0,5			23	11,3
Green star existence on main page			4	2	16	7,8	1	0,5			21	10,3
Green star existence on subpages			1	0,5							1	0,5
Green star information	1	0,5	3	1,5	16	7,8	1	0,5			21	10,3
Green star linkage					1	0,5					1	0,5

Table 3 shows the relationship between the classification of the company and green star practises. As seen in the table, 5 4 star hotels, 17 5 star hotels, and 1 apart hotel have popup applications on their websites. 5 star hotels are the main group (8.3 %), having popup applications. When the existence of green star labels on the homepage was evaluated, it was found that 4 4 star hotels, 16 5 star hotels, and 1 apart hotel had green star labels on their homepage. According to the table, 5 star hotels are the main group, having green star labels on their homepages (7.8 %). Green star labels on subpages was found in only 1 4 star hotel. When green star information on websites were evaluated, it was found that 1 3 star hotel, 3 4 star hotels, 16 5 star hotels, and 1 special accommodation establishment had information about green star. Hence, 5 star hotels are the main group, having green star information on their websites (7.8 %). Only 1 5 star hotel had green star links, and it was 0.5 % of all companies.

### Conclusion and Suggestion

Companies look for different practises due to changes in customers' expectations. Thus, environmental awareness is one of these. As a result, companies adopt eco-friendly practises due to customers' expectations. Green star practises are one of the practices used by hoteliers. Green star practises have the advantage of reducing cost and, more importantly, positioning the company as environmentally friendly in the market.

Websites are the main information sources used to broadcast green star practises to customers. Today's customers greatly benefit from internet in everyday life and use internet as a source of information in decision making processes. Hence, websites are the main sources in terms of reaching customers. To attract potential environment sensitive customers, it is

necessary to make environment friendly practises more visible on websites. This is because hotel websites are primary information sources for customers.

This study focuses on green star certified accommodation establishments in Turkey in terms of marketing. Green star labels and similar information were evaluated on companies' websites. The study was carried out in May 2015, and all green star hotels' websites (204) were evaluated. A content analysis was done to evaluate green star labels and related information on websites using SPSS. Findings of frequency analysis and cross comparisons are as follows:

Mainly, hotels had green star certification when all accommodation establishments were compared. It was determined that mostly 5 star hotels had green star certification. Only 10 % of accommodation establishments had popup or green star label on their homepage. It was also determined that most of the accommodation establishments do not have any information about green star certification and external links relating to it. Due to this, in both frequency tables and cross tables, 5 star hotels are said to give more importance to green star practises. Generally, 20 % of all details relating to green star (green star label, information, position, etc.) was found on websites. Besides, it was observed that green star existence generally occur in "quality policy" with other certificates. Subsequently, a potential customer should do a detailed search to find it. This is because it is difficult to discover.

Hence, it can be said that green star certified accommodation establishments do not use green star label as a marketing tool efficiently. Therefore, websites must manage it more professionally. Many hypotheses can be produced: being unaware of the importance of environment friendly practises in marketing, being unaware of the importance of websites in terms of information search, willingness to have the only advantage of cost reduction of green star practises, etc. To expose these hypotheses, a new research related to not presenting green star practises on websites can be carried out.

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