Sustainability communication in Hospitality Firms: The effect of Argument quality and sponsorship status of Social Media Influencer Review

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Abstract

In recent years, the concept of Sustainability Communication is gaining importance for hospitality firms. The research presented is based on this interest. It analyses, by means of experimental between-subject design (Study 1 and Study 2), the influence of sustainability communication, in form of social media influencer (SMI) generated sustainability review, on consumer's intention to stay in the green hotel and their perceived environmental corporate social responsibility (PECSR). Study 1 (N= 116) investigates how the influence of SMI sustainability review varies between strong argument quality (attribute value review) versus weak argument quality (simple recommendation review). It also investigated the mediating effects of PECSR. Study 2 (N= 189) adds the disclosure of sponsorship status (sponsored or nonsponsored) as a moderator to the Study 1 to investigate whether the effects hypothesized are moderated by the consumers' knowledge of the sponsorship status. The findings of Study 1 revealed both stay intentions and PECSR vary based on the review's argument quality. The findings also established that PECSR mediates the association between review argument quality and stay intention, confirming that consumer's beliefs about the green hotels' environmental sustainability practices significantly influence the causal relation. Results of Study 2 confirms that the results established in Study 1 of the guest's stay intention and mediation of PECSR are significantly altered only for sponsored SMI review and not nonsponsored SMI review.

Finds of the study lend important implications for marketers in the hospitality industry. With the rising demand for sustainable travel services, current research brings to fore tactics on how to design effective sustainability messages.

Keywords- sustainability communication; social media influencer; argument quality; environmental corporate social responsibility

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1. Introduction

After the 1970s, the environmental movement is seeing renewed interest of the public in recent years. Depleting natural resources, climate change, rising sea levels, forest fires, etc. have occupied the center stage of the global discourse (Waring et al., 2016). In line with this trend, consumers in recent years display a greater inclination towards making pro-sustainable choices in tourism (Chan, 2018). The need for sustainable tourism is on a steady rise since consumers' knowledge and awareness of environmental sustainability is increasing. Consequently, the firms operating in the hospitality industry give greater importance to adopt environmentally sustainable practices (e.g.; use of renewable energy, water conservation, recycling, and waste reduction, etc) (Hassan, 2000; Yadav, Balaji & Jebarajakirthy, 2019). Though the hotels adopt these practices, they should effectively communicate the practices to customers to drive their decisions around sustainable travel and tourism. Therefore, *sustainability communication* that informs the customers of how the travel products and services provided by a hospitality firm comply with sustainability criteria, plays an important role in driving customer decisions around sustainable travel and tourism (Font & McCabe,2017; Toelkes, 2018). In the absence of focused and well-designed sustainability communication, despite the substantial amount of resources and efforts spent on sustainable practices, they remain invisible and unnoticed by customers. Hence, hospitality firms, among other things, publish sustainability reports about their environmental conservation practices and also highlight their *greenness* on various media platforms (Hartmann, Apaolaza & Forcada, 2005; Jameson & Brownell, 2012; Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017; Toelkes, 2018). Among various media used for sustainability communication, social media is gradually becoming a preferred platform for sustainability communication. Firms operating in the hospitality sector show a growing interest in sharing sustainability-related information via social media platforms (Jameson & Brownell, 2012).

While social media plays an important role in customers' decision to purchase products and services, the use of social media influencers (SMI) by marketers is on the rise. SMI are domain experts and have a strong base of followers. They influence other social media users, i.e., their followers through their "authenticity and connectedness" (Gretzel, 2018, p.). They share their own consumption experiences over social media, which in turn increases their followers' brand awareness and drives their decision to purchase (Ong & Ito,2019). In a recent study, 40% of respondents admitted that they had purchased something because of an influencer's tweet (Lou & Yuan, 2018). There is growing interest amongst hospitality firms in engaging SMIs for

sustainability communication. SMIs, along with sharing their travel-related stories, inspire their followers to make pro-sustainable choices[1].

According to prior research, pro-sustainable behaviors amongst consumers can be inculcated using message persuasion strategies. Prior research on persuasive message characteristics that inculcate pro-sustainable behaviors is extensive. Accordingly, researchers suggest that sustainability communication via social media also ought to follow message persuasion strategies. One key message persuasion character is argument quality, which indicates "an audience's subjective perceptions of the arguments in a persuasive message" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, p. 264). Argument quality can be either strong (attribute value-based message) or weak (simple-recommendation based message). While attribute value-based messages are rational and objective-oriented, simple-recommendation based messages, focus on the feeling of wellbeing, personal satisfaction, altruism, the love for environment etc. (Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017; Jacobson, Morales, Chen, Soodeen, Moulton & Jain, 2018). However, the effects of argument quality of SMI generated sustainability messages, i.e., the effects of attribute value-based SMI sustainability review of a green hotel versus simple-recommendation based SMI sustainability review of a green hotel; on customer responses to the green hotel have not yet been investigated. This is a gap in the literature. This gap is a problem for hospitality firms as well as other stakeholders who are interested in inculcating pro-sustainable travel and tourism-related choices in customers.

Therefore, the broader purpose of this study is to explore the effects of argument quality of SMI generated sustainability communication on the intention to stay in green hotels. Accordingly, two studies have been designed for this purpose. Study 1 investigates whether the intention to stay in green hotels varies between attribute value-based and simple-recommendation based SMI generated sustainability messages with the mediation effects of perceived environment corporate social responsibility (PECSR). Study 2 adds disclosure of sponsorship status (sponsored or nonsponsored) as a moderator to the Study 1's model and investigates whether the effects hypothesized in study-one are moderated by the consumers' knowledge of the sponsorship status of the SMI sustainability review

This study has both academic and practical significance. Academically, first, this study is the pioneer study to examine the role of SMI in sustainability communication in the hospitality industry, thereby unraveling a new array of future research on social media usage for

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[1] https://www.hostelworld.com/blog/sustainable-travel-instagrammers/ accessed on 7th June 2019

sustainability communication in the hospitality industry. Second, our study has shown that the effects of argument quality of SMIs' post on the intention to stay in green hotels are mediated by perceived environment corporate sustainable responsibility and moderated by sponsorship status. These mediation and moderation effects add to the online sustainability communication literature. Finally, this study applies accessibility- diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988) and persuasive knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) to articulate the effects of argument quality and sponsorship status of SMIs generated sustainability message on the intention to stay in green hotels, thus contributing to the better understanding of the theories in the context of SMIs generated sustainability communication. Overall, this study contributes to sustainability marketing literature, sustainability communication literature in particular and hospitality marketing literature.

Practically, the findings of this study are useful to firms operating in the hospitality industry, government authorities and public policymakers who are interested in inculcating pro-sustainable travel and tourism choices in people. Today, the world is grappling with the problems caused by unsustainable mass tourism and over-tourism (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019). The findings will be useful to these stakeholders in understanding in which specific contents of social media messages or those of SMI generated messages used for sustainability communication enhance customer intention to stay in green hotels. As a result, they can design effective social media communication strategies to enhance pro-sustainable travel and tourism choices.

2. Literature review
Sustainable tourism and sustainability communication
A sustainable natural and built environment is essential for human survival. However, the survival of natural and built environment depends largely on human behavior and action. Carbon emissions, deforestation, wasteful consumption, and depleting natural resources are some of the human actions that impact environmental sustainability. Sustainability means effort on preserving natural resources for the future human wellbeing (Clark and Dickson, 2003) by encouraging people to consume less or re-use more. Business can play an important role in preserving the environment by incorporating sustainability into business activities (Shrivastava, 1995).

Tourism is one of the primary sectors that endanger environmental sustainability. To support this claim, Nepal, Irsyad & Nepal (2019) indicate that tourism contributes significantly to the global greenhouse gas emission (Nepal, Irsyad & Nepal, 2019). Furthermore, tourist arrivals

globally have increased from 25 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion in 2018[2] leading to over-tourism. Continuous degradation of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, and a decline in the quality of life of locals are the few negative impacts of over-tourism (Font & McCabe, 2017; Seraphin, Sheeran & Pilato, 2018; Qian, Shen & Law, 2018). Therefore, stakeholders have realized the need for sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism refers to "tourism that is based on the principles of sustainable development" (UNEP & WTO, 2005, p. 11). These principles demand tourism operations be economically and environmentally sustainable. That is, sustainable tourism is maximizing the economic benefits while minimizing the related negative impacts on the environment and local population (Mihalic, 2016; Nepal, Irsyad & Nepal, 2019).

Sustainability practices and initiatives undertaken by hospitality firms tend to vary. For example, these initiatives could include programs and practices related to efficient utilization of natural resources, environment preservation, efficient waste management and waste reduction, water conservation, utilization of renewal energy, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, maximization of economic fairness and benefits to locals along with positive socio-cultural influence (Wehrli et al., 2014; Toelkes, 2018).

However, these practices will remain unnoticed and invisible for a large number of people unless they are effectively communicated. To support this claim, a recent study on German tourists demonstrated that 43% of respondents lacked awareness of sustainability practices carried out by hospitality firms, while 42% indicated that sustainability initiatives of the firms need to be more visible (Toelkes, 2018). Therefore, researchers have indicated that in the tourism sector, sustainability communication plays an important role in driving customers to make pro-sustainable choices for their travel and tour. Sustainability communication relating to tourism should make customers "aware of the pro-sustainable choices available for their travel and tour and inform them about how these offerings meet their expectations and comply with sustainability criteria" put forward by authorities (Belz & Peattie, 2012; Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017; Toelkes, 2018, p. 10).

Social media usage and SMI for sustainability communication
Organizations increasingly use social media for sustainability communication. A study carried out by Tillighast (2010) has shown that 74% of the organizations in the sample use social media for sustainability communication while only 50% use other forms of media for the same

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[2] https://www2.unwto.org/press-release/2019-01-21/international-tourist-arrivals-reach-14-billion-two-years-ahead-forecasts accessed on 15th June 2019

purpose (Minton et, al., 2012). Social media communication is cost-effective and enables asynchronous interaction and peer to peer communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Williams, Page & Petrosky, 2014; Dolan et al., 2019).

A widely used tactic in social media communication is the use of social media influencers (SMIs) (Hughes, Swaminathan & Brooks, 2019). SMI is an online personality with a sizeable number of followers, either across various social media platforms or a single social media platform. SMIs are different from celebrities (public figures); i.e., SMIs are ordinary regular people who have become online celebrities by creating and posting content on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p.). Social media followers trust them and are influenced by them since they possess the expertise, for example, expertise on food, beauty, fitness, technology, lifestyle, travel, etc. (Hughes, Swaminathan & Brooks, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). Research finds using SMI is more persuasive in marketing than traditional advertising, and as a result, organizations use them increasingly to recommend their brands to customers (Stubb & Colliander, 2019).

SMIs serve as opinion leaders in social media, and engaging them for sustainability communication is useful. To support this claim, Johnstone and Lindh (2018) indicate that influencers' and celebrities' views posted on social media generate more awareness of sustainability. That is, people who follow influencers and celebrities promoting pro-sustainable behavior on social media are likely to demonstrate greater concerns on sustainability and have a greater understanding of complex sustainability issues (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018; Keys, Thomsen & Smith,2010).

Message Persuasion in sustainability communication

The literature suggests that current sustainability communication adopted by firms lacks persuasiveness. Persuasion, defined as "communication designed to influence people by modifying their beliefs, values or attitudes," is important for inculcating pro-sustainable behaviors (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 2; Wehrli et al., 2014). Sustainability communication is often too complex and difficult to decipher; people are not very familiar with the terminologies used. For example, Hartikainen et al. (2014) showed that 90% of the respondents surveyed were unable to correctly describe the meaning of the term "product carbon footprint". Similarly, public awareness and knowledge of various ecolabels and certifications widely used in hospitality communication campaigns is poor (Gossling & Buckley, 2016, p. 9). Moreover, the positive outcomes of sustainability initiatives are not immediate and observed only over a time which further reduces the interests in sustainability communication (McCabe et al., 2016;

Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017). Therefore, how sustainability communication is written or displayed, i.e. message characteristics, play an important role in raising customer awareness and comprehension of hospitality institutions' sustainability practices and their responses to the practices (Font, Elgammal & Lamond, 2017).

Previous studies have investigated persuasive message characteristics of sustainability communication. Kronrod, Grinstein and Wathieu (2012) examined the persuasiveness of assertive language and showed that messages using less assertive language is more persuasive when engaging with general people, i.e., those who give low perceived importance to the environmental issues. Kim and Kim (2014) and Jacobson et, al. (2018) investigated the message framing of sustainability communication and showed that positively framed sustainability messages are more persuasive and generate stronger intention to revisit green hotels than negatively framed messages, i.e., messages demonstrating warnings.

Moreover, persuasion increases with an active dimension of messages; active participation-oriented messages, e.g. "reuse your towel", encourage customers to make pro-sustainable choices (Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017, p. ; Font, Elgammal & Lamond, 2017). Hatdeman, Font and Nawijn (2017) suggest sustainability messages focusing on benefits to self (personal benefits) are more persuasive than those focussing on benefits to others (societal benefits). Hence, previous studies have investigated various message persuasion characteristics of sustainability communication, such as assertive vs. unassertive, positively vs. negatively framed messages, active vs. passive, self-benefit vs. others-benefit based in the context of hospitality industry (Hardeman, Font & Nawijn, 2017; Font, Elgammal & Lamond, 2017; Jacobson et, al., 2018).

Argument quality in sustainability communication

One message persuasion characteristic that has been overlooked in previous sustainability communication studies carried out in the hospitality context is argument quality. Argument quality refers to "the audience's subjective perception of the arguments in the persuasive message as strong and cogent on the one hand versus weak and specious on the other" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, p. 264-5). In other words, argument quality varies as rational messages and emotional messages. In the hospitality industry, both emotional or rational messages are used for sustainability communication. For instance, brochures of tourism firms or advertisements for tourism destinations often use emotionally charged visuals and vocabularies to highlight sustainability issues. On the other side, the website contents of hospitality firms on sustainability initiatives are rational and factual (Font, Elgammal & Lamond, 2017).

Consistent with literature, the current research categorizes argument quality into attribute-value based messages, which are rational, objective, factual and focused on the specific details of sustainability practices, and simple-recommendation messages that are emotional and subjective (Park & Lee, 2008; Willemsen et al., 2011; Kapoor et al., 2019). As previously indicated under the section titled "**Social media usage and SMI for sustainability communication",** one recent trend of sustainability communication in the hospitality industry context is the use of SMI for communicating sustainability messages. Previous research on argument quality suggests that attribute value-based messages that are rational and objective are more persuasive than simple-recommendation messages that are emotional and subjective (Park & Lee, 2008). Accordingly, SMI generated messages with stronger attribute-value-based arguments are expected to yield greater intention to stay in green hotels than simple-recommendation.

The association between SMI sustainability review with strong argument quality and intention to stay in green hotels can be explained using the underpinnings of accessibility- diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). According to the accessibility-diagnosticity model, the probability that consumer judgment or choice will be based on the input derived from a piece of information depends on: (1) how accessible is the input; (2) how accessible are other alternative inputs are; and (3) how relevant is the input. Message argument quality that increases the accessibility of the input, such as sufficiency of reasons, factualness or objectivity, should also increase the diagnosticity of the message (Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991). Chua and Banerjee (2014) define the diagnosticity of an online review as the extent to which it helps consumers make informed judgments and choices. Consumers' perception of review diagnosticity could be associated with information depth, reliability, readability, and understandability of the review (Liu & Park, 2015). This indicates strong argument quality (attribute value) based as opposed to simple-recommendation SMI sustainability review may drive guests' intention to stay in green hotels. Based on the preceding discussion, we develop the following hypothesis;

H1: Intention to stay in green hotel is higher for attributes value based SMI sustainability reviews than simple-recommendation based sustainability reviews

Perceived environmental corporate responsibility
An important concept in the sustainable development domain is corporate social responsibility (CSR) which refers to "a firm's commitment to maximizing long-term economic, societal and environmental wellbeing through business practices, policies, and resources'' (Du et al. 2011,

p. 1). Particularly, environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) refers to a firm's specific focus on the preservation of the natural environment, compliance with environmental regulations and policies, and the production of eco-friendly products/services (Han, Yu & Kim, 2019). Accordingly, customers' perceived ECSR (PECSR) that specifically focuses on environment responsibility refers to customers' beliefs about a firm's practices and policies related to sustainable environmental protection (Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017; Sparks, Perkins & Buckley, 2013).

The literature suggests that while a well-designed sustainability communication campaign by green hotels strengthens their commitment to ECSR, its persuasiveness is a key stumbling block in positively influencing customer PECSR (Du, et al. 2010; Andreu, L., Casado-Díaz & Mattila, 2015). Lim, Sung, and Lee (2018) suggest that detailed, evidence-based sustainability messages that provide concrete rational information regarding a firm's ECSR initiatives are self-explanatory and more persuasive. Conversely, abstract, and emotional sustainability messages are ineffective in exhibiting a firm's ECSR initiatives. Thus, rational and objectively developed sustainability messages, with refined arguments and sound reasoning, predict message comprehension and influence consumer beliefs about ECSR (Kim, Malek & Roberts, 2019). Accordingly, the argument quality of sustainability messages, based on attribute-value versus simple-recommendation, is likely to influence consumers' beliefs about a firm's ECSR initiatives, i.e. PECSR.

The accessibility- diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988) can be used to further understand the influence of higher argument quality (attribute-value) sustainability message on customer's perceptions of firms' ECSR. Attribute-value based sustainability messages that have comprehensible arguments and contain sufficient reasons are likely to have a higher level of diagnosticity of the message than the simple-recommendation sustainability messages (Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991). Accordingly, the former is likely to have a greater influence on PECSR than the latter type of sustainability messages. This study posits that SMI generated messages with stronger attribute-value-based arguments are expected to yield higher PECSR than simple-recommendation. Based on the preceding discussion, we develop the following hypothesis;

H2: PECSR is higher for attributes value based SMI sustainability reviews than simple-recommendation based sustainability reviews

The literature suggests that consumers demonstrate a favorable response to the firms that are committed to social and environmental responsibility through their CSR initiatives. A study showed that when price, quality and other marketing mix elements are equal between two

brands, 87% of customers are willing to switch from their loyal brand to another brand that they perceived to have stronger CSR commitments (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Hence, empirical evidence supports the causal relationship between consumer beliefs about a firm's ECSR, and consumer responses to the firms or the brands belonging to the firm, such as purchase intention, satisfaction, brand image, brand preference and brand loyalty (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch & Murphy, 2013; Han, Yu & Kim, 2019). We have previously articulated that SMI generated sustainability messages that are high on attribute value increase customer intention to stay in green hotels and that the PECSR of those messages are also high. This indicates argument quality of SMI generated sustainability messages, based on attribute-value versus simple-recommendation, drive customer beliefs and perceptions about the ECSR initiatives, which in turn affect their intentions to stay in green hotels. We, therefore, believe PECSR might mediate the association between argument quality of SMI generated suitability messages and customer responses to green hotels. Based on the preceding discussion, we develop the following hypothesis;

H₃: PECSR mediates the association between argument quality (Attributes valued based Vs Simple-recommendation based message persuasion conditions) and intention to stay in green hotel

Moderation effects of sponsorship status

SMI generated reviews are perceived as native to the consumers and social media users since they appear in their social media feed as intimate personal opinions of SMI sharing their own consumption experiences (Johnson, Potocki, & Veldhuis, 2019). However, SMIs often receive either financial return or material return (e.g., receiving free products) to recommend brands and influence their followers' opinions (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). Therefore, SMI generated reviews combine aspects of both paid and earned media, that is, it could be a sponsored review where there may be a solicited commercial arrangement between the firm and the SMI or it could be a non-sponsored organic unsolicited review about the influencer's personal opinion and experience (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019). Most sponsored SMI reviews explicitly disclose the sponsored nature of the reviews, where the influencer prominently mention "in paid partnership with" or "PaidAd" or "Sponsored". On the other side, non-sponsored influencer reviews could choose to add a disclosure "this is not sponsored content" or "Not Sponsored" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Stubb & Colliander, 2019).

The persuasiveness of a message varies between sponsorship status, i.e., sponsored and non-sponsored status of a message. Sponsorship status acts as a message cue that makes an advertiser's persuasive motives highly salient (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). This can be explained

using the persuasive knowledge model proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994) that posits that the consumer knowledge of a marketer's persuasive motive moderates' consumers' evaluation and response to the persuasive message. *Persuasive knowledge* refers to the ability of a consumer to recognize a marketer's motives for message persuasion, i.e., a message designed with the intention of influencing a purchase. The model further suggests that people's persuasive knowledge is developmental and over time they gather further knowledge and understanding of various persuasive tactics employed by the marketer. Therefore, when consumers understand that a message is intentionally designed to persuade them, i.e. it is designed to influence their purchase intent, the message is no longer perceived as neutral. Previously gathered persuasion knowledge will be used to resist the persuasive attempts by the marketers (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Stubb & Colliander, 2019).

Prior research suggests that consumers tend to resist marketers' persuasive tactics and prefer to maintain their freedom of choice (Campbell & Marks 2015). Therefore, when consumers understand that a specific message is intentionally designed to be persuasive, for example, a sponsored SMI review that is a paid form of message designed to influence purchase intent, the message is no longer perceived neutral, thereby reducing consumer favorable response to the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Stubb & Colliander, 2019). In contrast, a nonsponsored SMI review suggests the absence of a marketer's persuasive intent. The preceding discussion indicates that customer response to a message, such as intention to purchase, is likely to vary depending on the sponsorship status of the message.

However, we have previously articulated (i.e., in *H1*) that guests' intention to stay in green hotels is likely to vary between attribute value based and simple-recommendation SMI generated reviews. Since the intention is also likely to vary depending on sponsorship status (i.e., sponsored or nonsponsored), it is plausible to assume that the effects of argument quality (i.e., attribute value-based and simple-recommendation SMI generated reviews) on intention to stay in green hotels is likely to be moderated by the sponsorship status of SMI generated reviews. More specifically, we believe that intention to stay in the green hotel is likely to significantly vary between attribute value-based and simple-recommendation SMI generated sustainability reviews only for non-sponsored SMI generated reviews not for sponsored SMI generated reviews. This is because sponsored SMI generated reviews may activate customers' persuasion knowledge, and customers are likely to resist the influence of the reviews. The guests are unlikely to view the reviews favorable and as a result, there is unlikely to be a

significant difference between attribute value-based and simple-recommendation based SMI generated sustainability reviews. Hence, based on the preceding discussion, we propose the following hypotheses;

H_{4a}: Intention to stay in green hotel is higher for attributes value based SMI sustainability reviews than simple-recommendation based sustainability reviews if the reviews are nonsponsored

H_{4b}: Intention to stay in green hotel is similar between attributes value based SMI sustainability reviews and simple-recommendation based sustainability reviews if the reviews are sponsored

The disclosure of sponsorship status of SMI generated sustainability reviews are also likely to moderate the effects of argument quality on PESR relating to green hotels. As previously indicated under section titled "**Perceived environmental corporate responsibility**", persuasive SMI generated sustainability reviews showcase a green hotel's sustainable practices, and its commitment to ECSR, thereby strengthening customers' beliefs and perceptions of the hotel's PECSR. However, customers' PECSR may be affected by the persuasion knowledge of the sponsorship status of the reviews. Persuasion knowledge, as mentioned in the previous section, refers to consumers' beliefs about a marketer's persuasion motives. Accordingly, sponsored SMI generated sustainability reviews will make the marketer's persuasion motives salient to customers which may interfere with their beliefs and the evaluation of the green hotel's sustainability practices (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007; Park & Yi, 2019). In contrast, no meaningful persuasion knowledge will be activated for non-sponsored SMI generated reviews, suggesting a favorable evaluation of green hotel's sustainability practices.

We have previously articulated (i.e.; for H_2) that customers PECSR of green hotels is likely to vary between attribute value based and simple-recommendation based SMI sustainability reviews. However, based on the above discussion, it is plausible to believe that customers' beliefs about a green hotel's commitment to ECSR is likely to vary based on the sponsorship status of the reviews. We therefore expect that the effects of argument quality (i.e., attribute value-based vs simple-recommendation SMI sustainability reviews) on PECSR is likely to be moderated by the sponsorship status of the reviews. As previously argued (i.e.; for H_{4a} and H_{4b}), we believe that PECSR is likely to significantly vary between attribute value based and

simple-recommendation based SMI sustainability reviews only for non-sponsored SMI reviews, not for sponsored SMI generated reviews. Based on the preceding discussion, we develop the following hypotheses;

H$_{5a}$: PECSR is higher for attributes value based SMI generated sustainability reviews than simple-recommendation based sustainability reviews if the reviews are nonsponsored

H$_{5b}$: PECSR is similar between attributes value based SMI generated sustainability reviews and simple-recommendation sustainability reviews if the reviews are sponsored

This paper has previously articulated that (i.e.; for **H$_3$**) PECSR mediates the association between argument quality (attribute value versus simple-recommendation based message persuasion) and intention to stay in green hotel. That is, customers' beliefs about green hotels sustainability practices (PECSR), triggered by SMI generated sustainability reviews, drive intention to stay in green hotels. However, these mediation effects are likely to vary depending on the sponsorship status of the reviews (sponsored reviews versus non-sponsored reviews). That is, the persuasion knowledge triggered by sponsored SMI generated sustainability reviews is likely to moderate the mediating influence of PECSR on the association of argument quality of the review and intention to stay (Jung & Heo, 2019). For example, PECSR is higher for attribute value-based reviews that lead to increased intention to stay in green hotel, however, the salience of the marketer's promotional motive of a sponsored review could lessen this mediation effects (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Stubb & Colliander, 2019). In contrast, no significant alteration to these mediation effects can be observed in case of non-sponsored reviews. That is, the consumers' knowledge of non-sponsored nature of review will not interfere with the mediating effect of PECSR. This discussion indicates the mediation effects of PECSR on the association between the argument quality and customers' intention to stay in green hotel tend to vary depending on the sponsorship status of the SMI generated sustainability reviews. Based on the preceding discussion, we develop the following hypotheses;

H$_{6a}$: The mediating effect of PECSR on the association between argument quality (Attributes valued based Vs Simple-recommendation based message persuasion conditions) and intention to stay in green hotel is significant if the SMI generated sustainability reviews are nonsponsored

H_{6b}*: The mediating effect of PECSR on the association between argument quality (Attributes valued based Vs Simple-recommendation based message persuasion conditions) and intention to stay in green hotel is not significant if the SMI generated sustainability reviews are sponsored*

3. Methodology

Two scenario based between-subjects experimental studies were conducted to test hypotheses. Study 1 examines the effects of argument quality of SMI sustainability reviews **(H₁- H₃)**, and Study 2 examines the moderation effects of the disclosure of sponsorship status **(H₄-H₆)**. Participants for both the studies were recruited from Prolific (www.prolific.ac), a commercial crowdsourcing platform. Prolific was used both because of its easy access to the study population and the rigorous policy and procedures it follows with its crowd workers.

To ensure that the respondents are appropriate to meet the objectives of our study, we asked six screening questions; "Do you have a social media account (Facebook/Instagram)?; "Do you access your social media account at least four times a week?" (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019); "Do you follow at least one Social Media Influencer on social media?" (Lou & Yuan, 2019); "Do you stay in a hotel at least once in six months?" (Yadav, Balaji, & Jebarajakirthy, 2019); and "Do you rely on online reviews when making a hotel booking?" (Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2013). Only the respondents who answered "yes" to all these screening questions were asked to proceed to the rest of the survey. Consistent with the previous studies, the first three screening questions enabled us to ensure that the respondents are active social media users and that they follow SMI. The remaining screening questions ensured that they stay in a hotel in a regular time interval and consider online reviews for hotel booking. The literature indicates that those traveling once in six months can be considered regular travelers (Yadav, Balaji, & Jebarajakirthy, 2019), and that traveling frequency has been used to shortlist people to investigate guests' behavior relating to hotels.

The respondents were recruited from the US because the country is ranked second-highest amongst countries whose people travel the most (Countries That Travel the Most, 2019). Moreover, according to a recent study by Weber (2019), approximately one-third of tourists surveyed from the US were interested in sustainable tourism. The study demonstrated a growing awareness and need amongst travelers towards sustainable travel (Weber, 2019). The studies are explained below;

4. Study 1

Design, sample, stimuli development and procedure

This study adopted a single factor (review argument quality: attribute value vs simple-recommendation) between-subject experimental design. The sample for the study 1 comprises 116 respondents ($\bar{X}_{age}$= 33.5 years, female 46%).

The experiment was conducted using a scenario where respondents were asked to assume that they have come across an Instagram posts of fictitious SMI (male or female SMI was assigned as per the gender of the respondent). They were also asked to assume that the SMI is an influencer they follow. The scenario further indicated the SMI (Sophie/Joe) is a sustainability travel influencer with more than one million followers. The SMI is popular among his or her followers for sharing environmentally responsible tourism experiences from around the globe. Following the description of SMI, the scenario continued and included SMI reviews (attribute value or simple recommendation). They were then asked to respond to the survey. A similar number of participants were allocated to each condition. The appendix presents the scenarios used in Study 1.

Mock Instagram posts contained influencer's review/recommendation of a fictitious green hotel for its green practices with varying argument quality (attribute value vs simple-recommendation). Of various forms of social media, Instagram was chosen for this study because it allows users to gather followers and connect with popular influencers with ease (Djafarova, & Rushworth, 2017). Furthermore, because of its visual aesthetics and storytelling capabilities, Instagram provides a more suitable ecosystem for travel and tourism-related content (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). The mock Instagram posts were created using Adobe Photoshop software. They were designed to bear resemblance to any authentic SMI generated Instagram post showing up in the news feed of followers. The post pictured a fictitious hotel property called 'Hotel Green Leaf' (Figure 2).

The argument quality of SMI sustainability review was manipulated in study 1. To manipulate the reviews on attribute values of green hotel practices, environmentally sustainable practices commonly followed by green hotels were identified from the literature (Fernández-Robin et al., 2019; Yi, Li, & Jai, 2018) and confirmed through pre-test with travel and hospitality professionals and frequent travellers.

A pre-test was conducted with a sample of 42 respondents ($\bar{X}_{age}$= 31.5 years, 45.2% female) where they were asked to respond to six items, seven-point scale measuring argument quality of SMI generated reviews for each of the argument quality conditions (attribute value vs simple-recommendation).. Respondents were recruited from Prolific (www.prolific.ac).The

findings from the paired sample t-tests confirmed that the respondents perceived argument quality of attribute value versus simple-recommendation based review significantly different (t (41) = 3.56, p<0.001, $\bar{X}$Attribute value = 5.28, SD= 1.10; $\bar{X}$Simple recommendation = 4.49, SD= 1.39). Thus, the pre-test confirmed that we have correctly chosen the stimuli and that the manipulation of attribute value versus simple recommendation SMI review performs as intended.

Measures

The survey instrument was designed using previously validated scales, and as already mentioned the respondents were recruited from Prolific. The questionnaire comprised of four sections. The first section comprised of the scenario of the mock Instagram post generated by fictitious SMI. This was evenly randomized between the two argument quality conditions (Attribute value and simple-recommendation based review). Respondents then answered six items to check manipulations of argument quality($\bar{X}$= 4.84 , SD= 1.20 , α = 0.908) and one item for review informativeness ($\bar{X}$= 4.99, SD= 1.48) adapted from Park, Lee, and Han (2007). In the second section, respondents answer items related to the dependent and mediating variables. PECSR ($\bar{X}$= 5.46, SD= 1.09, α = 0.906) was measured with four items adapted from Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley (2013), and intention to stay in the green hotel ($\bar{X}$= 4.55, SD= 1.34, α = 0.924) was measured with three items adapted from Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley (2013) and Park, Lee and Han (2007). In the next section, respondents answered five items related to environmental concern ($\bar{X}$= 5.73, SD= 1.17, α = 0.922) adapted from Kim and Choi (2005) and three items related to pro-environment self-identity($\bar{X}$= 5.19, SD= 1.19, α = 0.852) adapted from Arli, Tan, Tjiptono and Yang (2018). Environmental concern and pro-environment self-identity were included as covariates in the analysis. The final section asked the respondents to answer the six screener questions described earlier.

Analysis and discussion Study 1
 Manipulation Check
The findings from the independent sample t-tests confirmed that the respondents perceived argument quality of attribute value versus simple-recommendation based review significantly different (t (114) = 8.42, p<0.001, $\bar{X}$Attribute value = 5.58, SD= .81; $\bar{X}$Simple recommendation = 4.06, SD= 1.07). Further, a significant difference was observed for review informativeness between the two argument quality conditions (t (114) = 9.05, p<0.001, $\bar{X}$Attribute value = 5.90, SD= .88; $\bar{X}$Simple recommendation = 3.98, SD= 1.36). Thus, the pre-test confirmed that we have correctly chosen the stimuli and that the manipulation of attribute value versus simple recommendation SMI review performs as intended.

Hypotheses Testing

In order to test **H₁** and **H₂,** a one-way MANCOVA (Multivariate ANCOVA) was performed. The analysis examined whether PECSR and intention to stay in the green hotel varies based on argument quality of the SMI generated sustainability review. PECSR and intention to stay in the green hotel were the dependent variables, argument quality (simple recommendation; attribute-value) was fixed factor, and environmental concern and pro-environment self-identity were included as covariates in the analysis. The results presented in Table 1 showed that PECSR significantly differed between the two argument quality reviews (F $(1, 114) = 33.82$, $p = <0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 5.99$, SD= .74; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 4.48$, SD= 1.12).This confirms the acceptance of **H₁**. Similarly, intention to stay in the green hotel significantly differed across the two argument quality reviews (F $(1, 114) = 97.82$, $p = <0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 5.53$, SD= .66; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 3.46$, SD= 1.04), suggesting the acceptance of **H₂**.

Table 1

	Attribute Value (N=61) Mean (SD)	Simple Recommendation (N=55) Mean (SD)	ANCOVA f-value	P-value
PECSR	5.99(.74)	4.48 (1.12)	33.829	.000
Stay Intention	5.53 (.66)	3.46(1.04)	97.826	.000

To test the hypothesized mediating effect of PECSR on the association between argument quality and intention to stay in the green hotel (**H₃**) mediation procedures outlined by Hayes (2013) was used. The indirect effects were tested with the help of the regression bootstrapping procedure in the PROCESS module (Model 4) with 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% bootstrap confidence interval (Hayes, 2013). The findings revealed the indirect effect of PECSR on the intention to stay in the green hotel is significant (b=0.21, with confidence intervals varying between LLCI= .08 and ULCI=.35), suggesting the acceptance of **H₃**.

Discussion

As hypothesized, guests' intention to stay in green hotels is likely to differ based on varying argument quality, i.e., attribute value based and simple-recommendation SMI generated sustainability reviews. Correspondingly, our results confirm a significantly higher intention to

stay in the green hotel for attribute-value review. In other words, SMI generated attribute-value based reviews are perhaps perceived rational, objective, factual and focused on the specific details of sustainability practices, lead to significantly higher intention to stay in the green hotel than simple-recommendations based review that is emotional and subjective (Liu & Park, 2015). Also, PECSR is significantly higher for attribute value sustainability review than simple-recommendation based sustainability review. Therefore, perceived diagnosticity and reasoning of attribute value-based sustainability review influenced significantly higher consumer beliefs about the green hotel's ECSR (Kim, Malek & Roberts, 2019). The findings also established that PECSR mediates the association between review argument quality and stay intention. This indicates that the observed causal relation of argument quality on stay intention is significantly influenced by consumer's beliefs about the green hotel's environmental sustainability practices.

5. Study 2

Design, sample, stimuli development, and procedure

As previously discussed, the disclosure of sponsorship status of the SMI review may moderate the persuasiveness of the message and alter the results established in Study 1. Hence Study 2 adopted a 2 (review argument quality: attribute value vs simple-recommendation) X 2 (sponsorship status: sponsored vs non-sponsored) between-subject experimental design.

The sample for the study 2 comprises 189 respondents ($\bar{X}_{age}$= 34.7 years, female 52.3%). Survey instrument and procedure was the same as Study 1 except three items that were added to measure sponsorship status ($\bar{X}$= 4.97 , SD= 1.82 , $\alpha = 0.896$). The online survey instrument was randomized amongst the four scenario conditions with each cell size ranging between 43-52.

The design, stimuli and procedures of Study 2 were the same as in Study 1 except for sponsored condition "In paid partnership with Hotel Green Leaf", #PaidPartnership, #Sponsored and #SponsoredPost is mentioned. For nonsponsored condition #NotaPaidPartnership, #NotSponsored and #NonSponsoredPost is mentioned. The method of manipulating sponsorship status is consistent with previous studies (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017; Stubb & Colliander, 2019). The appendix presents the scenarios used in Study 2.

A pre-test with 97 respondents was conducted ($\bar{X}_{age}$= 32.5 years, 45.3% female) where they were asked to respond to six items, seven-point scale, measuring argument quality of SMI generated reviews for each of the argument quality conditions (attribute value vs simple-

recommendation), three items measuring sponsorship status and one item measuring perceived review informativeness. Respondents were recruited from Prolific (www.prolific.ac).The findings from One-way ANOVA confirmed that the respondents perceived argument quality of attribute value sustainability review versus simple-recommendation based sustainability review significantly different (t (96) = 14.52, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}}$ = 5.32, SD= .85; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}}$ = 4.44, SD= 1.33). Further, respondents perceived review informativeness between attribute value and simple-recommendation based review significantly different (t (96) = 18.09, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}}$ = 5.68, SD= 1.05; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}}$ = 4.34, SD= 1.86). Lastly, the test confirmed that the respondents perceived sponsorship status significantly different (t (96) = 53.88, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Sponsored}}$ = 6.15, SD= .98; $\bar{X}_{\text{Nonsponsored}}$ = 4.03, SD= 1.77). Thus, the pre-test confirmed that we have correctly chosen the stimuli and that the manipulation of argument quality and sponsorship status perform as intended.

Analysis and discussion Study 2
Manipulation Check

The findings from independent sample t-test showed that respondents who received "sponsored" review condition rated significantly higher than respondents who received "nonsponsored" review condition (t (187) = 56.07, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Sponsored}}$ = 6.21, SD= .87; $\bar{X}_{\text{Nonsponsored}}$ = 3.76, SD= 1.68). The findings further confirmed that the respondents perceived argument quality of attribute value versus simple-recommendation based review significantly different (t (187) = 7.48, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}}$ = 5.34, SD= .97; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}}$ = 4.01, SD= 1.23). Further, respondents perceived review informativeness between attribute value and simple-recommendation based review significantly different (t (187) = 20.81, $p<0.000$, $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}}$ = 5.60, SD= 1.18; $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}}$ = 3.70, SD= 1.62). These findings confirm that the manipulation of argument quality and sponsorship status conditions was successful.

Hypotheses testing

To test H_4 and H_5, a two-way MANCOVA was performed. The same procedure was followed as Study 1 except sponsorship status (sponsored vs. nonsponsored) was considered an additional fixed factor. The results of these tests are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.
Sponsorship Status Condition	Stay Intention	15.386	.000
	PECSR	4.431	.037

Argument Quality Condition	Stay Intention	38.020	.000
	PECSR	63.501	.000
Sponsorship * Argument Quality	Stay Intention	14.836	.000
	PECSR	3.323	.070

The results revealed that, even after controlling for the covariates (environmental concern and pro-environment self-identity) both sponsorship status ($F(1, 187) = 15.38$, $p<0.000$) and argument quality ($F(1, 187) = 38.02$, $p<0.000$) have significant main effect on stay intention. The results also revealed there is a significant interaction effect of sponsorship status and argument quality on stay intention ($F(1, 187) = 14.83$, $p<0.000$). With the significant result of the interaction effect, independent sample t-tests were performed to test H_{4a} and H_{4b}. Accordingly, as hypothesized, stay intention is significantly higher for nonsponsored condition ($t\,92) = 8.76$, $p>0.000$) between $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 5.59$, SD= .71 and $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 3.65$, SD= 1.37. Also, as hypothesized, stay intention is similar for sponsored condition (($t\,93) = .434$, $p>0.05$) between $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 3.9$, SD= 1.37 and $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 3.78$, SD= 1.41. Hence, both H_{4a} and H_{4b} are accepted.

Further, the results revealed, both sponsorship status ($F(1, 187) = 4.43$, $p<0.05$) and argument quality ($F(1, 187) = 63.50$, $p<0.000$) have significant main effect on PECSR. However, an insignificant interaction effect of sponsorship status and argument quality on PECSR was found ($F(1, 187) = 3.32$, $p<0.10$). Two independent sample t-tests were performed. Accordingly, as hypothesized, PECSR is significantly higher for nonsponsored condition ($t\,92) = 7.50$, $p<0.000$) between $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 6.23$, SD= .69 and $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 4.72$, SD= 1.21. Also, PECSR is significantly higher for sponsored condition (($t\,93) = .434$, $p<0.05$) between $\bar{X}_{\text{Attribute value}} = 5.56$, SD= .97 and $\bar{X}_{\text{Simple recommendation}} = 4.70$, SD= 1.14. While H_{5a} is significant, results revealed an insignificant interaction effect. H_{5b} is rejected. The results of these tests are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

	Non-sponsored	Sponsored

	Attribute Value - Mean (SD)	Simple Recommendation - Mean (SD)	Attribute Value - Mean (SD)	Simple Recommendation - Mean (SD)
Stay Intention	5.59 (.71)	3.65 (1.36)	3.9 (1.37)	3.78 (1.41)
PECSR	6.23 (0.69)	4.72 (1.21)	5.56 (.97)	4.70 (1.14)

To test the hypothesized mediating effect of **H₆ₐ** and **H₆ᵦ,** two separate mediation analysis were run, following the recommendation of Hayes (2013). The first mediation analysis was performed for the nonsponsored condition using the regression bootstrapping technique in the PROCESS (Model 4) module with 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% bootstrap confidence interval. The findings revealed that the indirect effect of PECSR on the association between argument quality and stay is significant (b=0.24, with confidence intervals varying between LLCI= .07 and ULCI=.42), suggesting the acceptance of *H₆ₐ*. The second mediation analysis was performed for the sponsored condition using the regression bootstrapping technique in the PROCESS (Model 4) module with 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% bootstrap confidence interval. Correspondingly, as hypothesized, the findings revealed that the indirect effect of PECSR on the association between argument quality and stay is not significant (b=0.15, with confidence intervals varying between LLCI= -0.05 and ULCI=.36), suggesting the acceptance of *H₆ᵦ*.

Discussion

Study 2 added the disclosure of the sponsorship status to the relations tested in Study 1. Stay intention and PECSR are both significantly influenced by the sponsorship conditions. Further, stay intention and PECSR are both significantly higher when the review argument quality is strong (attributes value) than weak (simple-recommendation) for nonsponsored reviews. Also, no significant difference is observed in stay intention when the review argument quality is strong (attributes value) than weak (simple-recommendation) for sponsored reviews. Results confirm that knowledge of the marketer's persuasive motive (sponsorship status) moderated consumers' evaluation and response to the persuasive message (Campbell & Marks 2015). However, contrary to our expectation, the interaction effect of sponsorship status and argument quality is insignificantly related to PECSR. Moreover, PECSR is significantly higher when the review argument quality is strong (attributes value) than weak (simple-recommendation) even for sponsored reviews. Perhaps the respondent's persuasive knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the

marketer's persuasive motive derived from the disclosure of sponsorship status, was less interfering and influential as the respondent formed her beliefs regarding the green hotel's environmentally sustainable practices. The same persuasive knowledge, based on our results, was influential on the intention to stay. Accordingly, it is likely, significantly higher PECSR is observed with strong argument quality even though it was perceived as a marketer promoted review.

The findings also established, as hypothesized, that PECSR significantly mediates the association between review argument quality and stay intention for nonsponsored review only. This further indicates that the respondent's persuasive knowledge (sponsorship status) perhaps interfered with their beliefs about the green hotel's environmental sustainability practices and altered the established indirect causal relationship of Study 1.

6. General Discussion and contribution to the literature

The environmental movement has seen tremendous public interest in recent times. The escalating environmental crisis and climate change are issues that have taken center stage of the global discourse. Sustainability communication, an emergent topic in sustainability research, is a way hospitality firms contribute positively to this global discourse. For this reason, sustainability communications about the firm's environmental sustainability practices have accelerated in the past decade. Our research investigated how consumers assess and respond to SMI generated sustainability post, a new and trending sustainability communication tactic used by green hotels. While Study 1, using the accessibility- diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988) investigated the persuasive SMI review characteristics, Study 2, using the persuasive knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), investigated the influence of disclosure of sponsorship status.

Specifically, Study 1 investigated the varying influence of strong argument quality (attribute-value review) versus weak argument quality (simple recommendation) on consumer's intention to stay in the green hotel and PECSR. The finds revealed, both stay intentions and PECSR vary based on the review's argument quality. Accordingly, significantly higher intention to stay and PECSR is observed for attribute-value SMI review. The attribute-value review was perceived as more diagnostic, rational, objective, factual, and focused on the specific details of sustainability practices, than simple-recommendation based review (Chua and Banerjee, 2014; Liu & Park, 2015). The findings also established that PECSR mediates the association between review argument quality and stay intention, confirming that consumer's beliefs about the green hotels' environmental sustainability practices (PECSR) significantly influence the causal

relation of argument quality on stay intentions. Given that, the results of Study 1 suggest, with the consumer need for sustainable tourism on the rise, carefully designed sustainability-focused SMI review, high on attribute-value, are more effective. They can strongly, distinctively, and meaningfully draw the attention of the consumer to the sustainability practices and policies of the green hotel. SMI review lacking attribute-value is ineffective in doing so; while it may generate consumer's interest towards the brand, it may not lead to purchase intention or increased awareness and beliefs regarding the green hotel's sustainability practices.

In Study 2 we investigated how the disclosure of the sponsorship status (sponsored versus nonsponsored) of the SMI review alters the results of Study 1. Accordingly, the results confirm that stay intention and PECSR are significantly higher for attribute value review than simple recommendation only for nonsponsored SMI review. No significant difference was found in stay intention for sponsored SMI reviews. Also, the mediating effect of PECSR was significant only for nonsponsored SMI review and not significant for sponsored SMI review. These results are supported by findings of previous studies (Carr & Hayes, 2014; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Stubb & Colliander, 2019) confirming that the disclosure of the sponsorship status alters consumer perception. Respondents became aware of the marketer's persuasive intent and the commercial arrangement between the green hotel and the SMI. Consequently, unlike Study 1, they display increased purchase intention for strong argument quality only for nonsponsored SMI review, albeit the goal was to promote green hotel's environmental conservation practices. However, contrary to our expectation, PECSR is significantly high (strong argument quality) for both nonsponsored as well as sponsored SMI review. Given that, disclosure of sponsorship status did not alter the results of Study 1 for this relationship. Respondent's beliefs regarding the green hotel's environmental conservation practices did not alter with the knowledge of the commercial arrangement between the green hotel and the SMI. To conclude, in comparison with traditional sustainability communication tactics, SMI generated sustainability communication, having strong argument quality, can generate greater awareness, and create a greater understanding of complex sustainability issues. However, disclosure of the sponsorship status may inhibit the same from happening. Consumer's persuasive knowledge may not interfere with their PECSR, but it will lead to decreased stay intention, even though the message is carefully designed with strong argument quality.

Our findings contribute to the literature in multiple ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, the literature has not yet examined the role of SMI in sustainability communication in the hospitality industry, thereby opening new avenues of future research. Moreover, theoretical

understanding of nontraditional promotional tactics used by marketers, such as influencer marketing, concerning its persuasiveness, communication effects, and consumers' information processing is still rather under-researched. Therefore, current studies add to the emergent literature of sustainability communication and influencer marketing literature. Also, given the contextual factors, the studies also add newer dimensions to the vast tourism and hospitality literature. Second, current studies have applied the following existing theories: accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 1988) and persuasive knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Study 1 extended the accessibility- diagnosticity model and hypothesized that the diagnosticity of attribute value SMI reviews will lead to significantly higher stay intention and PECSR than simple recommendation based review. Study 2 extended the persuasive knowledge model and hypothesized that consumer's persuasive knowledge, generated from the disclosure of sponsorship status, may moderate. The results show that these theories were well-suited to explain the hypothesized relations. Third, our findings corroborate with previous researches that have examined the impact of persuasive message characteristics and advertising disclosure, adding further evidence from an emergent context. Further, there exists somewhat limited academic research on consumer's beliefs and perceptions of environmental corporate responsibility in the hospitality context. The mediation analysis revealed the importance of PECSR on the relationship of argument quality and stay intentions, adding an interesting dimension to the variable that may be further explored.

7. Practical Implications

Our findings lend important implications for marketers in the hospitality industry. Consumers now pay greater attention to the values, goals, programs, and practices of hospitality firms regarding their environmental conservation practices. The results of our study also confirm the role of consumer's PECSR on stay intention, hence our study proposes to hospitality firms that they must promote their ECSR. Moreover, with the rising demand for sustainable travel services, it makes eminent sense for hospitality firms to engage frequently with focused and well-designed sustainability communication. Social media influencers are successful in simplifying complex sustainability issues because of which hospitality firms are increasingly hiring them for sustainability communication. Our research brings to fore tactics on how to design effective sustainability messages that motivate pro-sustainable consumer behavior. Accordingly, if an influencer is hired for this purpose, the argument quality of her post ought to be diagnostic, and our research confirms attribute-value reviews are significantly more

effective. Emotional and subjective posts may grab the attention; they render ineffective in reinforcing the sustainable practices of the hospitality firm and increasing their stay intention. Thus, activating perception of diagnosticity is crucial for SMI generated sustainability communication.

Influencer marketing is a growing marketing tactic, and our research also studied the role of the disclosure of the sponsorship status by the influencer. Results of sponsored posts varied from the results of nonsponsored posts indicating consumers' general suspicion towards sponsorship and advertising. According to guidelines of several social media sites and guidelines proposed by governmental authorities, to avoid potential confusion among consumers, any commercial arrangement between an SMI and a firm must always be fully disclosed (FTC, 2017; Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2013). Therefore, while not disclosing the sponsorship status is not an option if the post is sponsored, marketers may include additional expressions, such as "honest opinion," in the message to mitigate the negative and confounding impact as observed in our study (Stubb & Colliander, 2019, p. 219). Also, when there isn't a commercial arrangement, disclosure of the nonsponsored status of the post will add credibility and will be perceived more persuasive. Hence, as confirmed in our study, the message must include expressions that clarify that the post is not sponsored.

8. Limitations and Future Research

To conclude, our research had some limitations that may provide further directions for future research. First, our study was based on a single service type, which has limited the generalizability of the findings. Results may differ for other product types, especially those high on search or credence quality. Future research may examine how the results differ for different product types. Moreover, we have used a fictitious green hotel and SMI to avoid influences of consumers' familiarity. However, prior experience and consumers' familiarity affects intention to purchase significantly (Hong and Sternthal 2010). Therefore, future research must investigate how the results may differ for a familiar brand and SMI.

Second, our studies examined only one type of persuasive message characteristic, argument quality. Other persuasive message characteristics, like message sidedness, message assertiveness, valence, etc. were not studied. However, these could have had a significant influence on the causal relationship examined. Hence the results are limited, and future research may be done to investigate other persuasive message characteristics separately and simultaneously

Third, the disclosure of the sponsorship status altered the established results of Study 1. However, our research did not investigate what caused the difference. Consumer skepticism, an outcome of persuasive knowledge, may have been the reason why results were different for sponsored review. However, the current study does not investigate what caused the difference. At the same time, it is possible disclosure of nonsponsored status added credibility to the review, further influencing the outcome variables. which was not investigated in the current research. Hence further research may be done to investigate what is the outcome of consumer's persuasive knowledge and the absence of it, for SMI generated sustainability review.

Fourth, for our studies, we have used the interface of Instagram to develop our stimuli. While Instagram is a popular social media amongst users, and currently the most used site for the purpose of influencer marketing, only including Instagram interface in the stimuli limits the applicability of the study to other popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Further research may be done using stimuli based on the interface of other popular social media platforms.

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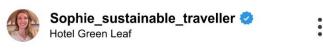
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10. Appendix

Study 1

Attribute- Value Review

Sophie_sustainable_traveller ✓
Hotel Green Leaf

209 likes

Sophie_sustainable_traveller Do you wish to live in a planet with burning forests, rampant heatwaves and rising sea level? Climate change is not a far-off problem. It is happening now and it is happening everywhere! It's about time we get into action. And making pro-environment choices even as we travel and holiday is a great start. This hotel runs on 100% renewable energy and the water it uses comes from its own rainwater harvesting. The hotel has a mandatory linen (towels and sheets) reuse program in all its room, helping them save tons of water. Even all the appliance used (guest rooms, kitchen and dining area) are Energy Star appliances. The coolest are Its lush gardens that are planted with drought resistant native plants which consume minimum water. Do come and stay in this hotel and do your bit for the planet #SaveEnvironment #GreenHotel #LoveurEarth #SustainableHotel
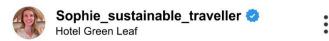
Simple Recommendation Review

Sophie_sustainable_traveller ✔
Hotel Green Leaf

209 likes

Sophie_sustainable_traveller Do you wish to live in a planet with burning forests, rampant heatwaves and rising sea level? Climate change is not a far-off problem. It is happening now and it is happening everywhere! It's about time we get into action. And making pro-environment choices even as we travel and holiday is a great start. I am so excited to stay in this environmentally sustainable beautiful hotel!! It is a sheer joy to observe all the very cool things this hotel is doing save our planet. By choosing to stay in this environment friendly hotel, there is an amazing feeling of satisfaction. It is my way of exhibiting that I love and care for the environment and I am doing my small bit. I feel so much closer to mother nature right now, almost becoming one with it. Come and stay in this hotel and feel the joy of nurturing and protecting nature. Do your bit for the planet #SaveEnvironment #GreenHotel #LoveurEarth #SustainableHotel

Study 2
Attribute Value X Nonsponsored Review

Sophie_sustainable_traveller ✔
Hotel Green Leaf

209 likes

Sophie_sustainable_traveller Do you wish to live in a planet with burning forests, rampant heatwaves and rising sea level? Climate change is not a far-off problem. It is happening now and it is happening everywhere! It's about time we get into action. And making pro-environment choices even as we travel and holiday is a great start. This hotel runs on 100% renewable energy and the water it uses comes from its own rainwater harvesting. The hotel has a mandatory linen (towels and sheets) reuse program in all its room, helping them save tons of water. Even all the appliance used (guest rooms, kitchen and dining area) are Energy Star appliances. The coolest are Its lush gardens that are planted with drought resistant native plants which consume minimum water. Do come and stay in this hotel and do your bit for the planet

#NotaPaidPartnership #NotSponsored #NonSponsoredPost #SaveEnvironment #GreenHotel #LoveurEarth #SustainableHotel

Attribute Value X Sponsored Review

Sophie_sustainable_traveller ✔
Paid partnership with **Hotel Green Leaf**

209 likes

Sophie_sustainable_traveller Do you wish to live in a planet with burning forests, rampant heatwaves and rising sea level? Climate change is not a far-off problem. It is happening now and it is happening everywhere! It's about time we get into action. And making pro-environment choices even as we travel and holiday is a great start.   This hotel runs on 100% renewable energy and the water it uses comes from its own rainwater harvesting. The hotel has a mandatory linen (towels and sheets) reuse program in all its room, helping them save tons of water.   Even all the appliance used (guest rooms, kitchen and dining area) are Energy Star appliances. The coolest are Its lush gardens that are planted with drought resistant native plants which consume minimum water. Do come and stay in this hotel and do your bit for the planet
#PaidPartnership #Sponsored #SponsoredPost #SustainableHotel #SaveEnvironment #GreenHotel #LoveurEarth