UK Consumers' Ethical Beliefs Towards Dining at Green Restaurants: A Qualitative Evaluation

Abstract

This study explores consumers' intrinsic ethical beliefs across the UK and how these contribute to their intention to dine at green restaurants. A series of four semi-structured focus groups were conducted to elicit ethical beliefs relative to the consumers' decision-making concerning dining at green restaurants. The in-depth qualitative data was examined through the lens of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics (H-V model), which has been rarely used in the hospitality domain. The data showed that 45% of the participants had dined at a green restaurant, and 37% had difficulty defining the term. The results also revealed diagnostic information concerning British consumers' salient ethical beliefs relating to dining at green restaurants, such as perceived personal and environmental benefits, concerns, reference groups, facilitators, and barriers. There was substantial ambiguity regarding the knowledge of green restaurant initiatives amongst consumers. Increasing knowledge by promoting informative and educative green initiatives could be employed by restaurants to raise the general public's awareness of ethical approaches adopted. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: green restaurants; ethical beliefs; consumer behaviour; Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics; qualitative research
1. Introduction

In light of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and increasing stakeholder and consumer pressure, there is a growing public awareness and demand for green practices. Over recent decades, this dramatic upsurge in environmental awareness triggered the emergence of "green" consumerism (Kim & Hall, 2020). According to McEachern and Carrigan (2012), green consumerism has been associated with sustainable marketing and ethical consumption. Crane et al. (2008) defined ethical/green consumerism as a "conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values". Since then, several calls have been made to explore ethical issues, encompassing environmental concerns and beliefs (Chatzidakis et al., 2012; McEachern & Carrigan, 2012; Lim, 2016, 2017).

Notwithstanding the rising concern for green/ethical research, studies have tended to neglect consumer's ethical considerations. In addition, the existing body of research has not considered other dimensions of consumer ethics, namely, issues of environmental beliefs (Lim, 2016; Nimri et al., 2020). Addressing such matters should be shifted towards a systematic and more inclusive level, despite the recent recognition of consumers' preferences, lifestyles, actions, and consumption decisions, which significantly impact sustainable development (Lim, 2017). Besides, an understanding of the motivations of ethical consumers is predominantly essential as the purchases of ethical goods and services in the UK have grown by nearly tenfold in 20 years (Ethical Consumer, 2020). The rise in ethical sales has been attributed to UK consumers considering sustainability (Ethical Consumer, 2020). This phenomenon undoubtedly reveals the continual development of environmental considerations, motivated by increased application of ethical beliefs to the environment, which indicates that more
consumers are searching for means to protect the environment. Therefore, this paper is concerned with consumer beliefs, especially the role and impact of these beliefs in consumer green/ethical decision making in the green restaurant choice in the UK.

Foodservice operations can be detrimental to the environment and community in terms of energy and water use, waste, and carbon footprint (Filimonau et al., 2020). Among the operational hospitality sectors, hotels' and restaurants' use of resources and waste generation are becoming key concerns (Dhir et al., 2020). Specifically, a significant portion of restaurant waste is generated from consumers' plates, thus highlighting the imperative for mitigation strategies in adjusting consumer behaviour (Filimonau et al., 2020).

In order to minimize the environmental destruction and the exhaustion of natural resources, the hospitality industry has engaged with the concept of environmental responsibility by adopting effective pro-environmental initiatives (D'Souza et al., 2020; Gössling & Buckley, 2016; Shin et al., 2018). This trend has been embraced by hospitality managers, who are expected to integrate environmental responsibility into operational practice to accommodate environmentally minded consumers' needs while also endeavouring to improve corporate performance (Baker et al., 2014; Okumus et al., 2019). Many restaurants are attempting to decrease their negative impacts on the environment, resulting in green restaurants' development (DiPietro et al., 2013). The industry defines green restaurants as food establishments committed to minimizing negative environmental impacts throughout their operation (Liu et al., 2020). Many green restaurants have widely adopted green initiatives, such as reducing energy use, reducing water consumption, increasing recycling behaviour, and using sustainable and fresh produce (Namkung & Jang, 2017).
In contrary to traditional restaurants, green restaurants focus on the two 'Es' (energy and efficiency) and the three 'Rs' (reduce, reuse, and recycle) (Namkung & Jang, 2013). Several associations have been established to foster environmental praxis to facilitate proper industry operations, such as the Sustainable Restaurant Association in the UK, the Green Restaurant Association in the USA, and the Green Table Program in Australia (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2017). These associations support and guide restaurants on becoming more environmentally responsible and integrating environmental programs and staff training. For example, the Green Restaurant Association (n.d.) provides practical advice on implementing green practices, including maximizing water efficiency, waste reduction, increased recycling, using sustainable fixtures and fittings, and utilizing food products from sustainable sources. Restaurant sustainability certification programs such as the Green Dining Alliance (2016) also promote environmental sustainability in restaurants by providing tailored resource use strategies and sustainable collaborations that encourage restaurants of all sizes and styles to engage in green initiatives.

Research into the benefits of engaging in green initiatives in the hospitality industry is limited, mainly focusing on hotels (Huang & Lee, 2019). Many studies in the green restaurants' domain have explored management's perspective and praxis, overlooking consumer aspects and intentions (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2017; Hwang & Lee, 2019). Further literature analysis has shown a paucity of research on consumers' perceptions of green dining, with quantitative methodologies being dominant (Kim & Hall, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Park et al., 2020).

Ethical beliefs are salient factors driving green behaviours (Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014; Lu et al., 2015). However, although previous studies have explored the antecedents of green purchase intention, only a few have successfully examined the role
of ethical beliefs in the general green purchase context (e.g. Lu et al., 2015). Further, though some hospitality studies have examined the impacts of beliefs (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Nimri et al., 2017), the existing models of consumer decision making are only partially adequate, as they tend to focus on hedonistic, self-interested factors, in contrast to the more societal-centred perspective of ethical consumers (Chatzidakis, 2012; Lim, 2017). For instance, the UK government is committed to the Climate Change Act to reduce the country's carbon emissions to 80% by 2050, and the government relied on consumer behaviour change to assist dramatically in achieving this reduction (Rettie et al., 2014). Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Deloitte (2021), ethical and sustainability issues remain a crucial consideration for UK consumers in 2021, with 32% of consumers highly engaged with embracing a more sustainable lifestyle. Furthermore, the study revealed that almost one in three consumers have stopped dealing with certain brands if they had ethical and sustainability-related concerns regarding these brands. In addition, the 2021 edition of the Michelin Guide in the UK mentioned the launch of a new award: the Michelin Green Star, which indicates that restaurants are following a sustainable path to show their ethical commitment and, in turn, relying on the consumers to sustain their businesses for going green (Michelin Guide, 2021). Therefore, more substantial work on the theoretical-based understanding of the beliefs that impact ethical-pro-environmental consumption is warranted.

Most green consumption research adopted a positivistic approach employing direct measures (i.e., attitude, social norms, and green awareness) whilst ignoring the beliefs' effect on intention and behaviour (Chung, 2016; Jang et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2013). Regardless, beliefs are deemed as crucial psychological components of behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Millar et al., 2012). To activate a behaviour or the intention to undertake that behaviour, one needs to explore and comprehend those
beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). As consumers are gaining awareness of the negative impacts of their purchasing behaviour on the environment, it is essential to explore beliefs that directly relate to behaviours (Fornara et al., 2016). Therefore, this paper responds to the literature gap by exploring the beliefs that influence consumers' ethical decisions to dine at green restaurants.

This study addresses the shortfall in identifying ethical consumer choice by providing an improved model of ethical decision making in the green restaurants' context through employing the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics (H-V model) (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006), which has been rarely used in hospitality studies. The H-V model suggests that ethical behaviour is influenced by several background factors, including personal beliefs and characteristics. Exploring more rooted beliefs through this model will deepen our understanding of ethical behaviour (Lim, 2017).

The study enriches the extant literature by offering a set of green/ethical beliefs that can be utilized as a potential instrument to explain restaurant consumers' green behaviours. This research contributes to the literature by utilizing the H-V model to elicit consumers' salient ethical beliefs in their green behaviour decisions. Practically, the findings may help the restaurant industry address a growing demand for green practices effectively and encourage and help create effective and sustainable marketing strategies for the restaurant industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ethical Pro-Environmental Beliefs

Consumer ethics, including the perception of ethical beliefs, is one of the antecedents of green buying behaviour (Lu et al., 2015). Previous studies focused on the nature of beliefs (Line & Hanks, 2016). The belief concept infers that individuals hold evidence
or parts of information about something to be correct to the best of their knowledge, irrespective of that knowledge level (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Line & Hanks, 2016). The existence of a belief is not conditional upon the underlying information being correct, nor is it subject to the conviction of the individual holding the belief (De Leeuw et al., 2015). Ajzen (2019) argued that human behaviour follows the beliefs that individuals hold about a certain behaviour. Theorized as such, beliefs provide a framework for subsequent behaviour, including ethical-pro-environmental responses. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) presumed that human behaviour is based on rational decision-making processes grounded in beliefs, which people have towards a specific behaviour.

In the pro-environmental context, beliefs related to green consumption have been identified in the pursuit of environmental protection, social responsibility, a desire to perform green practices, and the knowledge of using environmentally friendly products (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Nimri et al., 2017). With a perception among consumers that their purchasing decisions involving green products positively influences themselves, others, and the environment, there is a greater intention to act in a pro-environmental manner (Line & Hanks, 2016; Teng et al., 2015). Lee and Oh (2014) argued that beliefs linked to environmental responsibility significantly influence an individuals' decision to stay at a green hotel. As for social influence, it is mainly related to the perception of what is generally supported by others important to the individual (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), such as when significant others regard dining at a green restaurant as an appropriate act, perceived social pressure would increase the motivation to comply with this behaviour. In the green behaviour context, studies have revealed the most salient referents as relatives, friends, and colleagues (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Nimri et al., 2017). The facilitators and barriers
of green consumption within pro-environmental research identified price, time, convenience, eco-labelling, and effort as influencing factors (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Park & Millar, 2016). These beliefs are associated with the factors that would ease or hinder pro-environmental behaviour and are considered imperative in consumers' decisions.

2.2 Theoretical Approach

Human behaviour is complex and challenging (Ajzen, 2019). Previous research has revealed the importance of ethical beliefs in the sustainable behaviour decision-making process (Astrachan et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of literature on sustainable/ethical behaviour, there is a need to incorporate theoretical views that offer further ethical/environmental consumption insights. Some scholars have delved into issues of ethical beliefs within the context of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics ("H-V model") (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006). This theory is a comprehensive framework that investigates an individual's ethical decision-making behaviour. This theory has been applied in green consumption research, such as Lu et al. (2015) in exploring consumer ethical beliefs related to the purchase of green products, Chan et al. (2008) in investigating consumers' intention to bring their own shopping bags, and recently, Zou and Chan (2019) in examining consumers' engagement in green behaviours.

The H-V model provides a framework for understanding the ethical decision-making processes, including the decision to dine at green restaurants. This theory proposes an individual's ethical philosophy as a critical factor in explaining the individual's ethical judgements, leading to ethical behaviour. Further, Hunt and Vitell (1986, 1993) noted that several factors influence ethical decisions, including personal beliefs and characteristics.
Consumers may face an ethical dilemma when choosing to dine at a green restaurant or at a mainstream restaurant. The H-V model suggests two approaches to explain consumer's ethical consumption, namely deontological and teleological evaluations (Figure 1). The difference between deontological and teleological evaluations relies on whether the individual concentrates on the behaviour or the behaviour outcomes (Cole et al., 2000). Deontological evaluation involves personal values and the inherent rightness or wrongness of the behaviour itself, including general beliefs and situation-specific beliefs, whilst teleological evaluation relates to the consequences of the behaviour (Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Vitell et al., 2001). This model's primary tenet is that the individual would reach an ethical verdict through a combination of both evaluations (Cole et al., 2000). What triggers the process is recognizing a situation that contains some ethical problems (e.g., environmental deterioration). The individual will then generate several alternatives to react to this situation. Those alternatives may be assessed directly in terms of their deontological norms (e.g., it is good to save the environment). In the deontological evaluation, the individual attempts to evaluate the inherent rightness versus wrongness of the alternatives. This assessment involves the individual's personal values, including general beliefs and situation-specific beliefs (Vitell et al., 2001). For example, individuals use their own bags when shopping because they believe that this behaviour is morally right (Chan et al., 2008).

In the teleological evaluation, the individual estimates how many good versus bad outcomes will result from the decision. The teleological evaluation consists of four major constructs: (1) the perceived consequences of each alternative for various stakeholder groups, (2) the probability that each consequence will occur to each stakeholder group, (3) the desirability or lack of desirability of each consequence, and (4) the importance of each stakeholder group (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). The more
significant the consequences of a specific behaviour and the higher the desirability and probability of these consequences for the decision-maker, the more constructive the teleological evaluation is for that behaviour. The stakeholder's status, which is defined as the relative salience the individual holds towards a specific important referent or group, plays an essential part in forming these evaluations (Cole et al., 2000). To generate a teleological evaluation, individuals must consider the anticipated consequences of each alternate behaviour (e.g. an individual anticipates the consequence that they will help save the environment and community if they choose to recycle their rubbish). Finally, this teleological evaluation will result in consumers' beliefs about the relative good versus bad outcomes from each possible alternative (Vitell et al., 2001). Therefore, in the context of dining, teleological evaluations will be associated with the act of deciding to dine at a green restaurant over a traditional restaurant by linking the consequences of environmental problems with their dining choices.

From the H-V model, the decision to perform ethical behaviour involves one's perceptions of the views of individuals or groups that form personal values of a behaviour and the perceived outcomes of individual behaviour and the perceived factors that may facilitate or obstruct the performance of that behaviour. Together, it is essential to elicit the deontological and teleological evaluations in order to understand ethical consumption behaviour (i.e., dining at a green restaurant).

3. Research Method

The H-V model suggests that external (i.e. social and cultural) and personal factors (i.e. beliefs) generate the primary considerations that stimulate behaviours (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993). An elicitation study can be employed with a small sample of individuals
representing the broader research population, followed by a content analysis of responses to explore ethical decisions within a population. Focus group sessions and open-ended questionnaires were used to gather data to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the ethical beliefs forming consumers' dining decisions at green restaurants.

The focus group method is a well-developed research technique to gather information during empirical group interaction (Patton, 2014). This method offers the opportunity to simultaneously bring together several research participants and collect data by understanding how the group feels or thinks about a particular issue (Krueger & Casey, 2014). According to Threlfall (1999), a focus group methodology allows insights into unexplored or new topic areas, providing the researcher with a clear sense of the particular phenomenon and gathering valuable information on terminology and vocabulary in the language of the target research population.

Several scholars further identified the focus group technique's advantages as eliciting accessible beliefs through a free-response format. Individuals can list their interest in a particular behaviour, the likely outcomes of that behaviour, important referents, and facilitators and barriers (Ajzen, 2019; De Leeuw et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2016). In response to these suggestions, an open-ended questionnaire was used in conjunction with the focus groups.

Four focus group sessions were conducted in a local city hall in London, UK and the discussion sessions varied between 40 and 60 minutes. Participants were allocated to these sessions based on their availability. As the study aimed to gather in-depth data about green restaurants' beliefs, maximum variation sampling with information-rich participants to uncover a wide range of perspectives about green restaurants was employed (Patton, 2014). The sampling frame encompassed a relatively homogenous
group by using active British diners who are 18 years and older who had dined in any restaurant at least once in the last six months with the sample, including a wide range of job positions, age, gender to ensure various answers perspectives (Patton, 2014). Thus, the socio-professional composition of the study sample was representative of the general population. Furthermore, four focus groups were considered sufficient as no new themes were identified in the fourth focus group, indicating that response consensus was attained.

Participants in the four group sessions were informed about the study's objectives, and participants signed a consent form prior to the start of each focus group session. Participants were provided with a definition of green restaurants to ensure a shared understanding of the discussion topic. A semi-structured guide of key issues was developed according to the H-V model (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006) to inform discussion (Table 1). The guide was meant to facilitate the discussions and was pretested with the researchers. Participants were asked if they consider dining at a green restaurant an ethical behaviour and what attributes they may consider when choosing to dine at a green restaurant. The focus group instrument also included a series of questions, which were intended to ask participants to consider the positive and negative evaluations about dining at a green restaurant and social pressure from different aspects and the perceptions of facilitators or inhibitors that would impact choosing this ethical decision. Several questions were posed per belief item to ensure full consideration of participants. Follow-up questions were raised for elaboration or clarification when needed (Thal & Hudson, 2019). One researcher led the focus group discussions, and they were audio recorded. At the finalization of each discussion, open-ended questionnaires were handed to the participants to obtain their beliefs in a free-response
format (Ajzen, 2019), and participants were allowed 10 minutes to list their thoughts about dining at green restaurants.

Verbatim transcripts were made immediately after each focus group session from the recordings of participants' responses. Using NVivo 10 software, thematic content analysis techniques were then employed. These techniques were implemented due to their robust, logical, and complex analysis of the responses to the open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions (Lim, 2019a). The researchers followed the process of data analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Lim (2019b), starting with transcribing and reading data from the qualitative data (familiarizing with data), followed by generating initial codes through coding interesting features of the open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions, searching for themes (arranging codes into potential themes), reviewing themes (examining if the themes align with the codes and entire data set), defining and naming themes (ongoing analysis of refining the specifics of each theme and generating clear definitions and names for each theme -e.g., personal evaluations of the outcomes of dining at a green restaurant, perceived influencers (social pressure), and perceptions of control they had in relation to dining at green restaurants (facilitators and barriers), and finally, reporting the results.

To develop trustworthiness (reliability and validity), the researchers followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was developed through using a research method well established in the form of thematic analysis, using multiple sources of qualitative data (i.e., open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions on examining the extent to which participants elaborated on each belief item in their discussion), using independent coders to investigate the conduct and interpretation of the thematic analysis.
Transferability was attained through acknowledging the limited generalizability and need for further research that extends or tests the accuracy and usefulness of the research findings. Dependability was achieved by explaining the procedures of the data collection and thematic analysis used in this study. Finally, confirmability was reached by arriving at saturation in the thematic analysis of multiple qualitative data sources and acknowledging the limited generalizability of the findings (Lim, 2019 a,b).

4. Findings

Four focus groups were developed from a sample of 32 participants over 18 years of age from the UK population. Each group comprised seven to nine invited participants and the principal investigator (facilitator), who posed several questions to generate discussion and probe answers. Focus group participants were predominantly female (55%). Most of the participants had a university or postgraduate degree (56%), and 44% had less than a university degree. The majority of participants were married. The largest occupational response was professional at 25% (See Table 2).

All participants confirmed that choosing to dine at a green restaurant over a traditional one would be an ethical behaviour that would reduce the negative impacts of human consumption on the environment. The deontological and teleological evaluations of this behaviour were shown in their responses. According to the participants, approximately 45% indicated that they had dined at a green restaurant, around 37% had difficulty distinguishing the term and were not entirely certain if they had dined at a green restaurant, and 18% indicated that they had never dined at a green restaurant.
Participants in the four sessions indicated that there is a need to shift their behaviour toward environment-friendly/ethical actions, and the ethical choice of dining at a green restaurant would be one of these actions. Notwithstanding, participants stated that they were still unfamiliar with the operational details of being a green restaurant, including those who had experience in dining at one in the past. However, within the groups, there was a broad consensus to support green restaurants as a mean of ethical behaviour. For example, Participant 3 (Group 3), who had never been to a green restaurant before, stated: “I always considered the option of dining at one of those green restaurants one day in the coming months to show my environmental commitment”. Also, Participant 4 (Group 1), who had a previous experience in green restaurants, stated: “I would always prefer to go to green restaurant.”

The deontological evaluation involves the participants' inherited beliefs and personal values. As for the teleological evaluation, the content analysis identified three major antecedents, which were: (1) benefits and concerns aligned with performing the behaviour, (2) social referent identification, and (3) enablers or impediments, which affect consumers' decisions to dine at green restaurants (Figure 2).

4.1 Personal Evaluations

The first ethical belief that emerged was environment centred acting in an environmentally responsible manner. Nearly all participants claimed that they had adopted greener behaviour recently to show their contribution to the environment. They further indicated their environmental responsibility through their purchasing behaviour, and one aspect of that would be dining at green restaurants.
The next ethical belief was 'altruism'. Discussions were related to altruism, as stated by Participant 1 (Group 3): "I want to see myself helping my community and being the good one". Altruism encompasses the act of doing something positive for others without expecting any return (Rushton, 1980). Most participants indicated that dining at a green restaurant would secure a positive future for future generations.

The third dominant belief was 'consuming fresh ingredients', which related more to personal benefits. Interestingly, several participants expressed that one of the major benefits of dining at green restaurants was linked to healthy eating and consuming fresh and locally grown produce. For example, Participant 3 (Group 1) stated: "I frankly enjoy eating fresh meals in green restaurants which would also support the local farmers". Also, 26 participants indicated that they would be 'dining in a healthy environment' by choosing a green restaurant. Both these personal beliefs reflect some of the positive feelings exhibited by participants who reported their personal benefits when dining at green restaurants.

Notwithstanding these positive consequences of dining at a green restaurant, the lack of awareness and visibility of green practices in green restaurants and greenwashing were primary concerns. In the four focus groups, 24 of the 32 participants reacted cynically to most green marketing practices and indicated that the lack of visibility of the restaurants' environmental practices may impair their decision to dine at green restaurants. Participant 4 (Group 1) stated: "For me, the lack of information is stopping me from choosing these restaurants even if they state they are green". Also, Participant 6 (Group 2) indicated: "We are required to be ethical, and what about these restaurants not sharing enough information? They need to promote their green initiatives better". Most green practices implemented in restaurants are conducted back-of-house and may not be apparent to restaurant customers (Jeong, Jang, Day, & Ha,
As restaurants implement green practices to meet consumer demand, it is vital to be transparent and to make the consumers aware of those practices and adopt ethical decisions.

More than half of the participants expressed significant concerns about greenwashing as they were not convinced that green restaurants were as green as they state. Participant 4 (Group 4) stated: "I want to do more to be an ethical consumer, but I also want the restaurant to be transparent about the green programs they implement, for instance, their recycling program and the sourcing of their products". Greenwashing is a negative term that infers business deceit by the misleading representation of operational practices. Greenwashing refers to the act of informing consumers of false environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product or service which conceal the negative or not engaging in claimed environmental practices. These activities mislead consumers about the business's environmental performance (Rahman et al., 2015). For example, some firms may claim to be environmentally friendly in the hotel industry by hanging a green sign and using 'green' as a marketing ploy (Pizam, 2009). Therefore, restaurant managers need to be mindful of the concept of greenwashing by not overstating their green practices (DiPietro et al., 2013). Participant 5 (Group 3) commented: "Why am I supposed to be ethical when I think that these restaurants use green for marketing and they are not really implemented".

4.2 Social Influence

Regarding social pressure, participants discussed green restaurant choices regarding their perceptions of what they believed others do and what is 'ethical'. This is frequently framed with what significant others do and expect them to do. For instance, Participant 1 stated (Group 4): "my family are showing their environmental commitment by dining in a green restaurant" or in terms of what is expected by
everyone "Yes, I care about the environment, but now I am more concerned because of people expect me to do." (Participant 6, Group 2). Participants expressed a consistent perception that family and relatives might act as an influential social source that would positively impact their decision to dine at a green restaurant. Participant 5 (Group 1) stated: "My family members would encourage me to visit a green restaurant, as they consider this as a good act and they do that themselves". Friends were cited as another source of social influence by 15 participants.

4.3 Facilitators and Barriers

Though certain behaviour might be regarded as ethical, the perception that the behaviour is convenient seems to encourage adoption of the ethical behaviour. In other words, consumers may not consider choosing a green restaurant, which they regard as ethical, until they perceive green restaurant as convenient. Facilitators to dining at a green restaurant included convenience, with Participant 4 (Group 3) stating: "I do not want to spend time and effort to reach a great restaurant just to have a meal". Participants also indicated that the location of the restaurant was another vital facilitator. Participant 8 (Group 1) confirmed: "The convenience and proximity would be another issue I would consider when I want to dine in at a green restaurant".

Conversely, 22 participants did not consider choosing a green restaurant, which they regard as ethical action, due to paying a premium at such restaurants. According to most participants, green restaurants might increase prices to cover the extra cost of implementing green practices. For instance, Participant 6 (Group 4) explained, "I am ethical in my choices, but I do not agree with paying extra just because a restaurant decided to implement a green initiative". Participant 1 (Group 4) also said: "I want to be green, but I always think of green programs in restaurants as ways to save money, and
they make us pay even more for that”. Thus, most participants confirmed that price was the primary inhibitor for their ethical decision to dining at green restaurants.

5. Discussion

Given a lack of research on consumer behaviour and green restaurants, this study has provided an understanding of consumer ethical beliefs through a qualitative approach (Figure 2). Based on personal evaluations, participants recognized that dining at a green restaurant was environmentally responsible. Following the H-V model (Hunt and Vitell, 1986, 1993, 2006), participants implemented deontological and teleological evaluations upon their decision to dine in a green restaurant. Both personal beliefs (deontological) on environmental wellbeing and the beliefs concerning the impact of their decision (teleological evaluation) appear in their responses. The deontological evaluation is seen in the participants' beliefs that they are responsible for keeping the environmental wellbeing and thus doing the right thing by selecting green restaurant options. Participants also attempted to perform teleological evaluation by considering the consequences of their choice on various stakeholders, such as their body, their family members, the community, the physical environment, and the future generations. These environmental beliefs have previously been identified as aspects that impact on pro-environmental consumer behaviour in multiple settings (De Leeuw et al., 2015; Teng et al., 2015). Consumers generally link the outcomes of environmental issues with their own behaviour (De Groot & Steg, 2007) and believe that green action contributes to environmental protection (Lee et al., 2010; Nimri et al., 2020). The Green Restaurant Association (n.d.) has also confirmed that consumers are likely to select a restaurant based on how green it is perceived.
Most study participants believed that dining at green restaurants was affected by altruism. Furthermore, several empirical studies have shown that altruism is a crucial motivator for consumers to engage in pro-environmental behaviour (Jeong et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2015). This suggests that advertising aimed at raising consumers' environmental behaviour aims to match altruistic beliefs with environmental beliefs. For instance, communicating the benefits of pro-environmental purchase behaviour might lead to a change in beliefs and thereby change consumer decisions. Specifically, marketers and policymakers may be encouraged to use communication messages that develop a link between consumers' green choices and community life's betterment.

In terms of personal benefits, participants related dining at a green restaurant to healthy eating and fresh ingredients. This finding supports a previous study by Dewald et al. (2014). When selecting a green restaurant, consumers considered using fresh ingredients as an essential factor combined with health aspects. Sourcing and using locally produced and fresh ingredients have been identified by the Green Restaurant Association (n.d.) as one of the critical elements of environmental sustainability in restaurants. Participants also indicated a healthy environment as the other personal benefit of dining at a green restaurant, and the green hospitality literature supports this finding (Jang et al., 2015; Nimri et al., 2017). Studies have indicated that consumers perceive a healthy and environmentally friendly atmosphere may be obtained by dining at a green restaurant or staying at a green hotel (Lo et al., 2017). Therefore, restaurant managers should promote efforts to support the use of local produce and fresh food and focus on a healthy and environmentally friendly atmosphere in their marketing.

Results obtained from the participants indicated that green practices' lack of visibility might impede dining decisions at green restaurants. Dewald et al. (2014) examined consumers' perceptions towards green restaurants in the US, and
approximately 90% of the 327 participants were unaware of green restaurants or the practices implemented. Green restaurants could benefit by improving marketing strategies to highlight green initiatives and promote any green certification the restaurant has been awarded. These efforts may help consumers become better acquainted with green restaurants’ green practices, which will help them make better-informed purchasing decisions. Further, this would encourage restaurants to establish a niche that appeals to environmentally responsible consumers and potentially facilitate long-term profits.

Participants voiced concerns about greenwashing by the green restaurants. Greenwashing is considered problematic for consumer decision-making. This concern aligns with previous studies where consumers were found to be sceptical of environmental claims in the hospitality sector (Baker et al., 2014; Pizam, 2009). Consumers often criticize green firms for the superficial execution of pro-environmental programs, with practices primarily aimed at decreasing costs, usually at the consumers' expense (Rahman et al., 2015). Greenwashing is a central issue in the hospitality sector as consumers may identify that green restaurants and hotels execute green initiatives only as a public relation exercise without positive environmental outcomes (Rahman et al., 2015). Subsequently, restaurant managers need to be transparent about their green claims and create marketing messages that explain their green initiatives' objectives to allow diners to grasp the notions behind applying such programmes and shape green restaurants' reputation and business profile (Park & Miller, 2016).

Several reference groups were identified as being influential in the choice of green restaurants. Similar findings have been reported in previous green consumption studies in the hospitality sector (Kim et al., 2013; Nimri et al., 2017). Consumers' intentions to act pro-environmentally (i.e., select a green restaurant) depend on the
influence of important referents and how they perceive green restaurants (Kim et al., 2013). Consumers unfamiliar with green restaurants may lack awareness and seek guidance from friends and relatives. Consumers may also be sensitive to social influence because of the uncertainty of pro-environmental considerations (Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, restaurant marketers should seek new ways to influence social referents to develop their restaurants' favourable perceptions to enhance market reach.

Participants also stated that a convenient location and ease of access to green restaurants were vital in their dining decision. This is consistent with previous hospitality studies' findings (Dewald et al., 2014; Nimri et al., 2017). According to Vermeir and Verbeke (2006), green consumption can be related to the perceived availability of resources. Using the context of green restaurants, diners who are willing to choose a green restaurant may not consider doing so because of the low availability of such restaurants. This issue may contribute to the broadening of the intention–behaviour gap. Therefore, restaurant marketers should consider this when they formulate promotional messages that impact the visibility of their venues and focus on forming conditions that facilitate choices to dine at a green restaurant.

The main barrier to dining at a green restaurant relates to an expectation of higher prices, a common finding in prior green hospitality studies (Millar et al., 2012; Namkung & Jang, 2017). The findings in relation to consumers' willingness to pay more for green products have returned mixed results. DiPietro et al. (2013) reported that consumers who patronize fast-food restaurants believed restaurants should use more green practices. However, they were unwilling to pay extra for those practices, believing the restaurant should bear the additional costs for implementing environmental practices (DiPietro et al., 2013). Other studies suggest that consumers were willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly products and services (Namkung
This is crucial for restaurant managers to understand as consumers generally have the perception that green restaurants cost more than traditional restaurants. Therefore, pricing menus competitively is important as price may be driving consumers away from green restaurants. Hopefully, with several means of information dissemination, diners' environmental concerns will be elevated, eventually leading them to select to dine at green restaurants.

Interestingly, though only some of the participants indicated that they dined at a green restaurant, there was a consensus regarding the real meaning of a green restaurant. This was supported by Shin et al. (2018), who indicated that environmental knowledge played a significant role in consumers' decision-making to patronize a green restaurant. Therefore, enhancing knowledge by presenting information about how green restaurants operate and contribute to protecting the environment enhances consumers' ethical behaviour towards choosing these restaurants. Also, positive changes resulting from diners' green actions should be highlighted, focusing on the ability of consumers to decrease environmental degradation (Nimri et al., 2017).

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study explored consumers' ethical beliefs in the context of green restaurants, with the findings to be employed in a larger scale quantitative study. This research delivered a theoretical contribution to sustainability studies in the restaurant industry by utilizing the H-V model to elicit green restaurants consumers' salient ethical beliefs. Beliefs are considered essential determinants for understanding consumer behaviour. Besides the deontological belief of dining at a green restaurant as environmentally responsible behaviour, this study obtained a new set of items for teleological evaluations that can be utilized as a potential tool to explain restaurant consumers' green actions. The findings
also provide additional perspectives on developing effective interventions.

In terms of practical implications, the results will help restaurant marketers build effective marketing strategies based on consumer's salient beliefs, particularly in the UK. For instance, the findings indicated that participants viewed personal and environmental benefits as mutually important in their decision to visit a green restaurant. Therefore, to effectively promote green restaurants, marketers should align environmental messages with other personal drivers for consumers, such as enjoyment, to encourage greater consumer participation (Villarino & Font, 2015). Thus, restaurant patrons may build stronger beliefs that they will fulfil environmental responsibilities and attain personal benefits (i.e. being an ethical customer) if they choose to dine at a green restaurant.

This study also indicated that the lack of visibility of green practices by consumers was a primary concern. Green restaurant managers need to actively promote their restaurants' engagement in green practices, specifically in less noticeable areas to the consumer. Informing consumers about back-of-house green practices may be one way to address this issue. Restaurants could highlight sustainably sourced menu items such as locally sourced and fresh produce (Lo et al., 2017; Namkung & Jang, 2013). Certification that highlights specific standards may also help confirm the restaurant's environmental credibility (Namkung & Jang, 2013; Park & Millar, 2016). Managers need to be careful not to overstate engagement in green programs or greenwash, focusing only on genuine green initiatives (DiPietro et al., 2013; Pizam, 2009). This clarity of involvement in green initiatives will enlighten consumers and enable them to make better-informed decisions.

The results also highlighted the significance of targeting social referents who influence consumers' green dining choices. Consumers' intention to choose a green restaurant largely depends on salient referents' perceptions (i.e., family, relatives, or
friends) regarding dining at these restaurants. Therefore, restaurant marketers should seek different approaches to influence these referents and create positive experiences within their restaurants (Kim et al., 2013). Finally, while most participants were positive towards green restaurants, some voiced their concerns about incurring extra costs when dining. According to Lim and Weissmann (2021), behavioural control should be further investigated to drive the desired behaviour, including ethical and sustainable consumption. Educating consumers about green practices and transparency about prices may positively affect sustainability and encourage sustainable ethical behaviour (Lim, 2016a).

Some limitations were encountered in this exploratory study, particularly the small sample groups. It is, therefore, crucial to consider how future studies can build on our current understanding. As literature posits achievement of sustainability through economic, environmental, social, ethical, and technological dimensions (Lim, 2017), future studies could explore the possible links between these dimensions, focusing on the relevance of social aspects in ethical consumption settings in green restaurants. For instance, future research may focus on restaurants that adopt a "social" approach toward their operations by investigating innovative ways for these restaurants to dispose of food waste that assists local farmers or compost makers. As further considerations in this context may additionally be enhanced by investigating the role of creativity in developing sustainability aspects and seeking solutions in an innovative manner or 'outside the box' in addition to usual considerations (Lim, 2016b). This would assist in the alleviation of the economic challenges being experienced in global economic settings amid the novel coronavirus. In seeking sustainability, restaurants will also contribute to the UN's sustainable development goal for responsible consumption and production (Lim, 2017). Finally, though consumers might be highly motivated to
consume sustainably, the low availability of sustainable products hampers their choices (Witek, 2019). Further research may also consider the impact of insufficient advertising and sustainability visibility, scarcity of green products and services, and the impact of regulations on diners' choice. These future research areas can assist in overcoming behavioural control issues and undesired behaviour among diners (Lim & Weissmann, 2021).

References


doi:10.1080/09669582.2015.1091467


doi:10.1177/1356766715585904

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). California:
Sage Publications Ltd.

Hospitality Management, 1*(28), 1.

reactions to hotels' green initiatives. *International Journal of Contemporary
Hospitality Management, 27*(6), 1054-1081.


Shin, Y., Im, J., Jung, S., & Severt, K. (2018). The theory of planned behavior and the
norm activation model approach to consumer behavior regarding organic menus.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.10.011

Siu, G., Lee, L., & Leung, D. (2013). Residents' perceptions toward the "chinese
tourists' wave" in Hong Kong: An exploratory study. *Asia Pacific Journal of
Tourism Research, 18*(5), 446-463.

Tan, L. P., Johnstone, M. L., & Yang, L. (2016). Barriers to green consumption
behaviours: The roles of consumers' green perceptions. *Australasian Marketing

behavior to predict patronage intention of a green hotel. *Journal of Hospitality


