

Green Work Engagement and Green Competitive Advantage in Five-Star Hotels and Travel Agencies: The Role of Green Creativity

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Abstract

Organizations are shifting their strategies and priorities towards more green-oriented agendas. This study investigates the impact of green work engagement (GWE) on green competitive advantage (GCA) and the mediating role of green creativity (GC). This study surveyed five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt. 413 surveys were obtained and analyzed using the PLS-SEM technique by WarpPls statistical software. Results indicate that green work engagement positively impacts green creativity and green competitive advantage. In addition, GC positively impacts GCA and mediates the link between GWE and GCA. The research contributes to the existing literature by establishing the link between green work engagement and green competitive advantage in the tourism and hospitality industry, supporting the Componential Theory of Creativity.

Keywords: Green work engagement, green competitive advantage, green creativity, five-star hotels, travel agencies.

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry, a major economic sector, contributes to employment and growth but also negatively impacts the environment through resource overconsumption and waste disposal. Pressure on businesses to adopt sustainability and environmental orientation, particularly in hotels, is increasing due to international agreements and consumer pro-environmental behavior (Fatoki, 2021), particularly because hospitality and tourism companies are major energy and water users (Wang *et al.*, 2018). Tourism and hospitality organizations should prioritize greening and having green sustainable advantages to enhance their image, attract environmentally friendly customers, reduce costs, obtain environmental accreditations, and comply with government regulations (del Rosario Reyes-Santiago *et al.*, 2019). Green sustainable advantage refers to a firm's unique environmental management positions that competitors struggle to replicate, allowing them to capitalize on successful environmental strategies (Astuti and Datrini, 2021).

Employees are crucial in promoting environmental sustainability and greening efforts, as they are at the heart of promoting responsible behavior (Aboramadan and Karatepe, 2021). Therefore, a high level of green work engagement and green creativity among employees is an effective strategy for enhancing green sustainable advantage. Green

work engagement refers to employees' commitment to environmental and green tasks, fostering enthusiasm and pride (Aboramadan, 2022). High engagement contributes to environmentally responsible behaviors (Zhang and Huang, 2019), while green creativity, which involves developing innovative ideas for green products, services, processes, or practices (Chen and Chang, 2013, p. 109), is crucial for achieving green business goals and marketing green services (Kalyar *et al.*, 2021).

Loureiro *et al.* (2022) suggest that further exploration of employee engagement in pro-environmental behavior-related studies is necessary. However, the hospitality and tourism literature, despite its limited scope, provides evidence of employees' green creativity (Karatepe *et al.*, 2022). In addition, empirical studies on work engagement antecedents and consequences are extensive (Meira and Hancer, 2021), but there is limited evidence on factors influencing green work engagement and its potential outcomes (Bhutto *et al.*, 2021; Aboramadan, 2022; Karatepe *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate the effect of green work engagement on green competitive advantage. It also aims to explore the mediating impact of employees' green creativity in the relationship between GWE and GCA.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, involving employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical connection to their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Green work engagement (GWE) refers to an employee's energy, willingness to work at a green level, and absorption level in green work-related tasks (Aboramadan, 2022). On the other hand, creativity is crucial for improving an enterprise's competitive advantage, especially in the face of environmental protection laws (Zameer *et al.*, 2022). Green product and process creativity reduces environmental impact and enhances competitive advantage (Wang, 2019). Implementing green creativity leads to cost savings, improved efficiency, productivity, and product quality. It also enhances a firm's reputation, differentiates environmental protection, and opens new markets with green products (Zameer *et al.*, 2020). Green creativity is an original, environmentally-oriented idea developed to produce pro-environmentally friendly products and services (Li *et al.*, 2020).

Research shows that work engagement positively impacts creativity in organizations. Employees who are dedicated and engaged are more flexible and willing to invest effort in their work (Eldor and Harpaz, 2016; Koch *et al.*, 2015). High-engagement employees are more likely to be open to innovative ideas and perform work-related tasks creatively (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2013). This relationship is also supported by the Componential Theory of Creativity (CTC) developed by Amabile (1988). According to the theory, the work environment, whether encouraging initiative, freedom, or idea development can either hinder or stimulate employees' creativity. CTC is used to understand the connection between green work engagement and creativity. The theory suggests that creativity is influenced by cognitive processes, task motivation, and domain-relevant skills and that green work engagement can boost employee motivation and engagement in creative tasks (Awan *et al.*, 2019; Afridi *et al.*, 2023). Employees who

are green work-engaged are goal-oriented, energetic, and enthusiastic (Orlowski *et al.*, 2021), resulting in higher levels of green work outcomes, including increased creativity (Karatepe *et al.*, 2022). Bhutto *et al.* (2021) found that GWE significantly enhanced green creativity among hotel employees. GWE significantly improved hotel employees' green behaviors both in and outside their roles (Ababneh, 2021).

A green competitive advantage is a firm's unique position in environmental management and green innovation, which cannot be replicated by competitors, resulting in sustainable benefits (Muisyo *et al.*, 2022). Green strategies enhance a firm's competitive advantage, with employee green creativity driving sustainable development and achieving a competitive advantage (Kushwaha and Sharma, 2016; Saeed *et al.*, 2019). Higher levels of GWE among employees are linked to positive organizational interactions and green outcomes (Aboramadan, 2022). GWE motivates employees to participate in green practices, commit to initiatives, and promote sustainability (Luu, 2019). Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H₁: GWE positively impacts GC.

H₂: GWE positively impacts GCA.

A company's success in green creativity leads to increased company performance and competitive advantage. Green creativity involves developing innovative ideas about green products, services, processes, or practices (Chen and Chang, 2013). Creativity is a crucial element in organizations, influencing employee performance by reflecting their abilities and identifying problems dynamically. In situations where clear guidelines are lacking, creativity provides a foundation for idea generation and offers novel solutions (Kalyar *et al.*, 2021). Companies with high green creativity contribute to environmental preservation, and economic, and social performance (Muafi, 2015). High green creativity can significantly improve sustainable business performance and increase a company's competitive advantage (Baah *et al.*, 2023; Setyaningrum *et al.*, 2023). In addition, Zameer *et al.* (2020) explored the concept of green competitive advantage, highlighting its importance in fostering collective learning and innovation in environmentally sustainable products. This intangible strategic capability helps enterprises design green products and processes, improving their green image and competitive advantage (Zameer *et al.*, 2022). Further, green creativity enhances employees in performing pro-environmental tasks, leading to eco-friendly business practices, green product development, and sustainable environmental performance in organizations (Khatter *et al.*, 2019; Anser *et al.*, 2021; Tuan, 2020), consequently, achieving green competitive advantage. Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H₃: GC positively impacts GCA

H₄: GC positively mediates the relationship between GWE and GCA.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure (1) below.

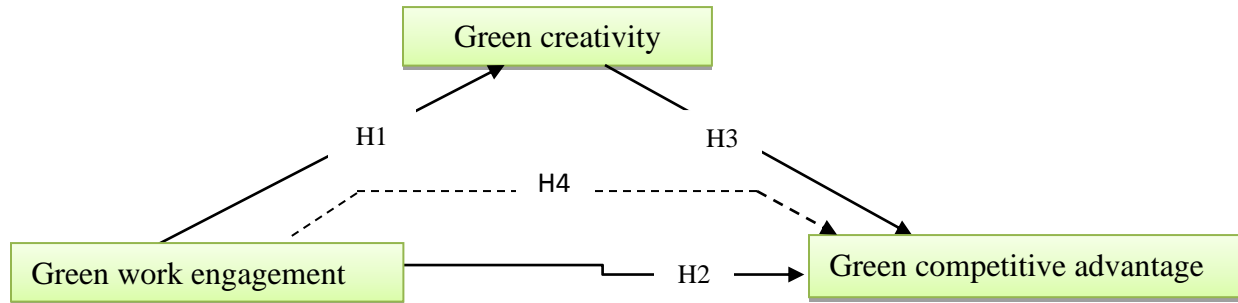


Figure (1). The conceptual framework

Methodology

Study design and measures

The study utilized a survey methodology to gather data on respondents' profiles and evaluations of three variables: green work engagement, green competitive advantage, and green creativity. The study utilized a 6-item scale adapted from Aboramadan (2022) to assess green work engagement. For example, “I am enthusiastic about my environmental tasks at my job” and “I feel happy when I am working intensely on environmental tasks”. In addition, the green competitive advantage was assessed using a 4-item scale, based on Lin and Chen's (2017) research. Sample items include: “The firm has greater capability than competitors regarding green management” and “The firm offers better quality green products in comparison with major competitors”. Furthermore, the study assessed green creativity using Chen and Chang's (2013) six-item scale, for example, “The members of the organization suggest new ways to achieve environmental goals” and “The members of the organization propose new green ideas to improve environmental performance”.

Population, sample, and data collection

Five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies focus on green initiatives and sustainability issues, therefore, these two organizations were chosen to be investigated in this study since they aim to examine three green issues, namely, green work engagement, green competitive advantage, and green creativity. This study surveyed five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt.

Out of the 30 five-star hotels and 1666 category-A travel agencies operating in Greater Cairo (the Ministry of Tourism, 2022) 25 hotels and 55 travel agencies were investigated. Due to the researchers' restricted resources, they adopted a convenience sample strategy. To get authorization to distribute the questionnaires inside their respective organizations, the human resources managers of the premises under investigation were contacted. Out of the 800 questionnaires distributed, 413 were deemed valid, representing a 51.6% response rate.

Participants' profile

Of the 413 participants in this study, 305 (73.85%) were males and 108 (26.15%) were women. There were 150 (36.32%) responders aged 18 to under 30, 136 (32.93%) between 30 and under 40, and 127 (30.75%) between 40 and above 50. Furthermore,

most of them (n=294, or 71.19%) possessed a bachelor's degree, while 83 (20.10%) and 36 (8.72%) earned high school and postgraduate degrees, respectively. Furthermore, all of the employees involved in the research had at least one year of work experience. Additionally, 168 (40.68%) of the respondents worked at travel agencies, while 245 (59.32%) were employed by five-star hotels.

Results

Reliability and validity

Table (1) indicates that item loadings are acceptable as long as they exceed 0.50, ranging from 0.717 to 0.891. It also indicates that Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values are strong, with values above 0.7(Hair *et al.*, 2010). The validity of the scales is confirmed by average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 and variance inflation factors (VIFs) ≤ 3.3 (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Kock, 2015).

Table 1. Factor loadings, CA, CR, AVE, and VIF

	Item loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Green work engagement (GWE)	-	0.921	0.896	0.662	1.190
GWE.1	0.737**				
GWE.2	0.891**				
GWE.3	0.838**				
GWE.4	0.717**				
GWE.5	0.874**				
GWE.6	0.809**				
Green competitive advantage (GCA)	-	0.895	0.843	0.681	1.438
GCA.1	0.824**				
GCA.2	0.810**				
GCA.3	0.871**				
GCA.4	0.794**				
Green Creativity (GC)	-	0.938	0.921	0.718	1.437
GC.1	0.888**				
GC.2	0.886**				
GC.3	0.856**				
GC.4	0.793**				
GC.5	0.869**				
GC.6	0.784**				
** P-value for item loading					

The discriminant validity is achieved when the correlation between two latent variables is less than unity and the AVE value is greater than the greatest common value. Therefore, the study model's discriminant validity has been achieved as per the results presented in Table (2).

Table 2. Discriminant validity results

	GWE	GCA	GC
Green work engagement (GWE)	0.814	0.349	0.348
Green competitive advantage (GCA)	0.349	0.825	0.522
Green creativity (GC)	0.348	0.522	0.847

Additionally, the HTMT for validity was computed (refer to Table 3), and all values were less than 0.85, indicating that this is the optimal outcome to verify validity.

Table 3. HTMT for validity

HTMT ratios (good if < 0.90, best if < 0.85)	GWE	GCA	GC
Green work engagement (GWE)			
Green competitive advantage (GCA)	0.398		
Green Creativity (GC)	0.386	0.588	
P values (one-tailed) for HTMT ratios (good if < 0.05)	GWE	GCA	GC
Green work engagement (GWE)			
Green competitive advantage (GCA)	<0.001		
Green creativity (GC)	<0.001	<0.001	

Model fit quality metrics

The study successfully met all ten of Kock's (2021) model fit and quality index criteria, as stated in Table (4).

Table 4. Model fit and quality indices

Indices	Assessment	Criterion
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.442, P<0.001	P<0.05
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.401, P<0.001	P<0.05
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.399, P<0.001	P<0.05
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.533	acceptable if ≤ 5, ideally ≤ 3.3
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.355	acceptable if ≤ 5, ideally ≤ 3.3
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.525	small ≥ 0.1, medium ≥ 0.25, large ≥ 0.36
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7, ideally = 1
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.9, ideally = 1
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7

Multi-Group Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, the Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was conducted to determine if there are significant differences in employees' responses due to workplace

differences. According to Table (5), the MGA found no significant differences in path coefficients between employees of five-star hotels and travel agencies.

Table 5. Multi-group analysis

Relationship	Path coeff. (Five-Star Hotel)	Path coef. (Travel Agency)	Absolute path coeff. Diff.	p-values
CWE→GCA	0.188	0.345	0.157	0.059
GC→GCA	0.564	0.470	0.094	0.162
CWE→GC	0.543	0.572	0.028	0.384

The structural model and hypotheses testing

Figure (2) indicates green work engagement (GWE) positively impacts green creativity (GC) ($\beta=0.55$, $P<0.01$), and green competitive advantage (GCA) ($\beta=0.23$, $P<0.01$). As GWE increases, GC and GCA tend to be high, supporting H1 and H2. In addition, GC positively impacts GCA ($\beta=0.54$, $P<0.01$). This indicates that higher GC levels tend to result in higher GCA, thus supporting the H3. Figure (2) also shows that GWE interpreted 31% of the variance in GC ($R^2=0.31$). Moreover, GWE and GC interpreted 50% of the variance in GCA ($R^2=0.50$).

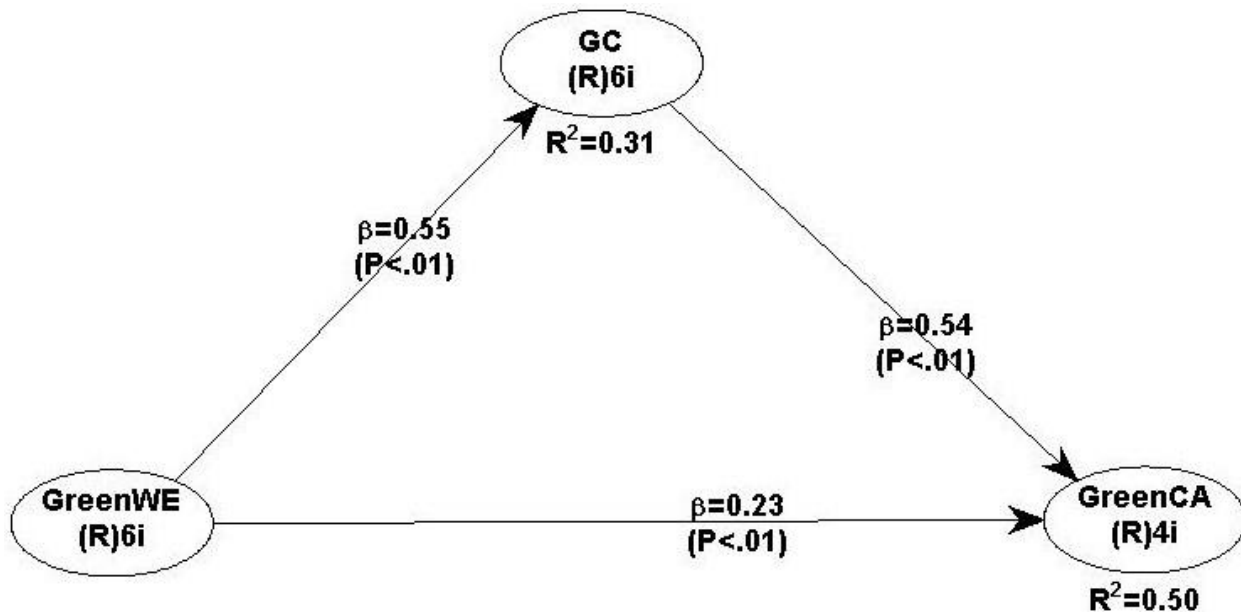


Figure 2. The final model of the study

Mediation analysis

The indirect effect of GC as a mediator was assessed through bootstrapping analysis, as shown in Table 6. The indirect effect was found to be significant (Std. $\beta=0.297$; 0.550×0.540 , p -value <0.05), with a t -value of 9.000 and a 95% confidence interval that did not cross a zero (LL= 0.232, UL= 0.362), confirming mediation. The evidence supports the mediation impact of GC in the link between GWE and GCA, indicating substantial statistical support for H4.

Table 6. The mediation analysis

Hypothesis 4	Path a GWE→G C	Path b GC→GC A	Indirect Effect	SE	t- value	Bootstrapped Confidence Interval		Decision
						95% LL	95% UL	
GWE→GC→G CA	0.550	0.540	0.297	0.033	9.000	0.232	0.362	Mediation

Discussion

The current study aims to investigate the effect of GWE on GCA, it also examines the mediating role of green creativity (GC) in the relationship between green work engagement and green competitive advantage. Findings revealed that GWE positively impacts GC (H1) and GCA (H2). These results are consistent with Bhutto *et al.* (2021) who discovered that GWE significantly enhanced green creativity, and consistent with Aboramadan (2022) and Luu (2019) who argued that higher levels of GWE among employees are linked to positive green outcomes and promote sustainability. The social exchange theory (Cook *et al.*, 2013) suggests that employees with higher engagement levels have better relationships with their organizations, leading to better job outcomes and encouraging voluntary activities beyond work (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement significantly predicts work performance and extra-role behaviors, such as creativity (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020; Rodwell *et al.*, 2017). In addition, GWE in tourism and hospitality is linked to GC, as employees who are highly engaged with green-related tasks are more likely to suggest innovative ways to mitigate environmental damage (Bhutto *et al.*, 2021). Tourism and hospitality employees are expected to exhibit service-oriented behavior, promoting individual excellence and customer experience improvement, leading to higher GC and commitment (Bhutto *et al.*, 2021).

Findings also revealed that GC positively impacts GCA (H3) and positively mediates the relationship between GWE and GCA (H4). These results are consistent with Baah *et al.* (2023) and Setyaningrum *et al.* (2023) who discovered that high green creativity can significantly enhance sustainable business performance and enhance a company's competitive edge. Green creativity enhances an enterprise's competitive advantage, particularly in environmental protection laws. It reduces environmental impact, improves efficiency, and opens new markets. This intangible strategic capability fosters collective learning and innovation in sustainable products, enhancing a firm's reputation and competitive advantage.

Theoretical and practical implications

The research contributes to the existing literature by establishing the link between green work engagement and green competitive advantage in the tourism and hospitality industry. The study investigated the correlation between green work engagement and green competitive advantage through green creativity. The findings imply that green work engagement provides greater attention toward the environment, which enhances tourism and hospitality service firms' employees' green creativity hence achieving a green competitive advantage. In addition, the study reveals that green work engagement

significantly influences employees' green creativity, suggesting it could be a significant factor in The Componential Theory of Creativity. The study utilized the Componential Theory of Creativity (CTC) to explore the impact of green work engagement on green creativity within the tourism and hospitality industry. This study, therefore, contributes to the empirical research supporting the Componential Theory of Creativity in the field of tourism and hospitality management.

Tourism and hospitality firms can help employees acquire essential skills and knowledge through human resource strategies like job rotation, enlargement, and enrichment. This expands experience and builds confidence in green creative activities, benefiting both personal reputation and firm image. These trained individuals are valuable assets in the eco-friendly industry, satisfying customers and improving service processes. In addition, in a company committed to environmental sustainability, employees display high levels of green work engagement, exhibiting increased creativity and gaining a competitive advantage. Management can leverage this by providing green training, empowerment, and rewards, encouraging employees to initiate green ideas, perform daily tasks in environmentally friendly ways, and go beyond their roles. For instance, emphasizing the importance of conserving materials, using recycled paper, and turning off electronic appliances or equipment when the room is unoccupied.

Limitations and further research

The study's limitations include its narrow focus on green creativity as a mediator in the relationship between green work engagement and competitive advantage, necessitating further research on other mediating factors such as green commitment and green knowledge sharing to ascertain if they result in different outcomes. Further, the study's findings should be applied to diverse cultural, tourism, and hospitality contexts, including Eastern and Western countries, restaurants, and airline companies, to confirm or challenge its conclusions. Moreover, longitudinal study designs can be utilized in future research to validate causation interactions between variables due to the change in human attitudes and behaviors over time.

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الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر والميزة التنافسية الخضراء في فنادق الخمس نجوم ووكالات السفر: دور الإبداع الأخضر

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⁴ قسم إدارة الفنادق، معهد الفراغة العالي للسياحة والفنادق، مصر

تقوم المنظمات بتحويل استراتيجياتها وأولوياتها نحو جداول أعمال أكثر توجهاً نحو البيئة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر على الميزة التنافسية الخضراء والدور الوسيط للإبداع الأخضر. شملت هذه الدراسة فنادق الخمس نجوم ووكالات السفر من الفئة (أ) في منطقة القاهرة الكبرى في مصر. تم الحصول على 413 استطلاعاً وتحليلها باستخدام تقنية PLS-SEM بواسطة برنامج WarpPls الإحصائي. تشير النتائج إلى أن الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر يؤثر بشكل إيجابي على الإبداع الأخضر والميزة التنافسية الخضراء. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يؤثر الإبداع الأخضر بشكل إيجابي على الميزة التنافسية الخضراء ويتوسط في العلاقة بين الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر والميزة التنافسية الخضراء. يساهم البحث في الأدبيات الموجودة من خلال إنشاء الرابط بين الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر والميزة التنافسية الخضراء في صناعة السياحة والضيافة، ودعم النظرية المكونة للإبداع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الارتباط بالعمل الأخضر، الميزة التنافسية الخضراء، الإبداع الأخضر، فنادق الخمس نجوم، وكالات السفر.